

MEXICAN MIGRANTS AND THE RISE OF THE DEPORTATION REGIME,
1942-2014

Adam S.I. Goodman

A DISSERTATION

in

History

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015

Supervisor of Dissertation

Thomas J. Sugrue, David Boies Professor of History and Sociology

Graduate Group Chairperson

Benjamin Nathans, Ronald S. Lauder Endowed Term Associate Professor of History

Dissertation Committee

Michael B. Katz, Walter H. Annenberg Professor of History Emeritus

Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Associate Professor of History

Eiichiro Azuma, Alan Charles Kors Term Associate Professor of History

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In honor of

Michael B. Katz (1939-2014)

and

Gerald R. Gill (1948-2007)

My mentors, role models, and friends

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gerald R. Gill and Michael B. Katz started out as my undergraduate and graduate advisors, and became my mentors and friends over time. Both gave so much to me, to their students, to the profession, and to the world. And both died too soon. They understood history's power and the impact historians can have on policy and people beyond the academy. They used history to shed light on injustice and inequality, and sought to eradicate both through their teaching and writing. Gerry and Michael went out of their way to support me on numerous occasions and their confidence in me gave me confidence in myself. I am the historian and person I am today because of them, and I will do my best to carry their legacy forward. This dissertation is dedicated to them and their memory.

At Penn, I was fortunate to find a collegial and intellectually stimulating home in the Department of History. This dissertation clearly reflects the complimentary interests of my committee members and the important ways that each of them has influenced my work and thinking. Eiichiro Azuma's expertise in migration history and willingness to hear out my half-baked ideas proved critical to formulating this project and others. His good nature and sense of humor ("Aren't you done yet?") pushed me to plow ahead toward the end. Eiichiro, I owe you a dinner. Ann Farnsworth-Alvear generously took me on when I decided to do a field in Latin American history during my second year. Her passion, political engagement, and general brilliance have inspired me since. Ann taught me most everything I know about oral history and I also learned a tremendous amount while serving as her teaching assistant. My dissertation clearly bears her imprint, and is significantly better as a result. (Thanks to Ann, as well, for helping me navigate the IRB process and gain approval under Protocol #818075.) Tom Sugrue has been a constant source of energy and encouragement. Coming to Penn to work with Michael and Tom has proven to be one of the best decisions I've made in my life. Tom always valued my ideas and made them better (in part thanks to his encyclopedic historiographical knowledge). I never felt smarter or more excited about my work than when I walked out of a meeting with him. His constant cheerleading connected me with scholars and editors, and his expert editorial advice made me a better writer and historian. After Michael died, Tom stepped in as my primary advisor, for which I am grateful.

Many others at Penn shaped this project in ways large and small. Steve Hahn has been a source of support and inspiration. He took me seriously, treated me as a valued colleague, and taught me the importance of reading widely and thinking big. Joan Plonski always had my back. Thank you, Joan, for all that you do for the department and history

graduate students at Penn. I am also deeply indebted to Antonio Feros and Ben Nathans, who consistently went above and beyond the call of duty of graduate chair on my behalf. Amy Offner came on the scene just as I was leaving Philly, but, over the last few years, has offered camaraderie, indispensable advice, and even a place to crash. She also patiently helped me navigate the ins and outs of the job market. A number of additional faculty and staff at Penn offered assistance and guidance along the way. Thank you to Nari Baughman, Kathy Brown, Octavia Carr, Migdalia Carrasquillo, Lee Cassanelli, Sally Gordon, Sheldon Hackney, Johnny Irizarry, David Kazanjian, Sophia Lee, Walter Licht, Stephanie McCurry, Vanessa Ogle, Emilio Parrado, Kathy Peiss, Eve Troutt Powell, Bekah Rosenberg, Elaine Simon, Rogers Smith, Dominic Vitiello, and Tamara Walker.

The friends I met at Penn made Philadelphia a wonderful place to be. Daniel Amsterdam has been one of my closest confidants since the day I arrived. I am grateful for his constant support and for all of the sage advice he has given me—on matters big and small, personal and professional. I also feel fortunate to count Peter Pihos and Stefania Heim as dear friends. Peter has been my best and most consistent reader, offering astute comments and spot-on critiques of anything I have written. One of the best parts of the last seven years has been getting to know them and their families. (And not just because I have greatly benefitted from their Michelin star quality culinary skills.) Lina Martínez Hernández has been a true friend and offered unfailing support. She inspired me to branch out beyond history and to turn a critical eye on US higher education from the outside looking in. Lina, Seulki Choi Lee, Helena de Llanos, Philippe Jacquart, and Andrew Crocco helped me remember that there's much more to life than academia. Anne Fleming modeled what it means to be a productive and humane scholar. Sean Dempsey's historical insights and breadth of knowledge never ceased to amaze me, and were only matched by his kindness. Merlin Chowkwanyun has been one of my most important intellectual interlocutors over the years. Ceyda Karamursel pushed me to think more deeply about the craft of history and taught me the importance of having an historical imagination. Some of my fondest memories from Philadelphia are of the many conversations, laughs, and meals we shared together as neighbors in Grad Hospital. Freddie LaFemina kept me grounded and offered crucial comic relief. Other friends from my cohort—Abby Cooper, Dani Holtz, Nikki Kalbing, Erika Kitzmiller, Sidney Xu Lu, Jennifer Rodgers, and Noor Zaidi—have been there since day one to celebrate and commiserate alike. Thanks are due, as well, to Başak Can, Kate Christman, Julie Davidow and Victor Balta, Rosanna Dent, Jeremy Dell, Julia Gunn and Nikolaj Christensen, Matt Karp and Katherine Hill, Will Kuby, Lída León-Blázquez, Hope McGrath, Alex Ponsen, Roberto and Livia Saba, Debbie Sanford and Greg Schirm of House of Our Own, Justin Simard, Daniel Stedman Jones, Sofie Talbott, Karen Tani, Laura Torres, and Tim Weaver.

I am also fortunate to have met so many wonderful people beyond Penn. Shane Dillingham, Christy Thornton, and Stuart Schrader showed me what it means to be a

politically engaged scholar. Shane also read drafts, retrieved archival materials for me, and acted as an important sounding board. Christy and Stuart opened their home to me on many occasions and reminded me that academia can—and should—be humane. My work has greatly benefitted from the numerous conversations C.J. Álvarez, Sarah Lopez, and I have had about migration, borders, and US-Mexico relations. I look forward to many more in the future. Many thanks, as well, to Sarah and her partner, Chesney Floyd, and the family of Andria Pihos and John Vatianou, for offering me places to stay during a research trip to Chicago. I am also appreciative of Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz and Arturo Carrillo, Jr.'s assistance in arranging oral histories with migrants in Chicago. I'd be remiss not to thank friends and colleagues Daniel Bessner, Jennifer Boles, Benji Cohen, Max Felker-Kantor, Vanessa Freije, Carly Goodman, Hidetaka Hirota, Ana Minian, Monika Navarro, Gabriella Navarro-Busch, Israel Pastrana, Yuridia Ramírez, Elena Schneider, Diana Schwartz, Julie Weise, and the many others not mentioned here who I have had the good fortune of getting to know. I would also like to thank all of the editors with whom I have worked over the last four years. They forced me to think seriously about the art of writing and made me a better writer. I hope that comes through in the pages that follow.

I wrote this dissertation while living in Mexico City for the last three years. My old friend Vanessa Salcido generously offered me a place to land when I first arrived. The Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México provided with an institutional affiliation during my first year. Celeste González helped set up oral histories with migrants and migrants' families in Jalisco. Special thanks to all of the people who took the time to share their life histories and stories with me. I am grateful. Leo Hernández López, Fredy González, Valeria Rojas and Memo Torres, and Romeo Guzmán and Carribean Fragoza made el DF feel like home and have been valued friends since the day we met. Bruno H. Piché, Richard Fausset, Daniel Barrón, Alfredo Corchado, and Sergio González Rodríguez took an interest in my work and believed in my writing. A number of other friends and colleagues shared drinks, food, ideas, and music. Thank you Jill Anderson, Levi Bridges, Froylán Enciso and Roberto Mercadillo, Celeste González de Bustamente, Tracy Goode, Laura Gutiérrez, Andalusia Knoll, Nina Lakhani, Sharon Lean and Greg Fox, Daniel Morales, Kim Nolan García, Ragini Shah, Daniela María Ugaz and John Washington, Arturo Valentino Ramírez and Camille Herfray, Catherine Vézina, Matthew Vitz, Lizzie Wade, Verónica Zapata Rivera, and Lizbeth Zavala.

A number of established scholars connected me with people in the field and offered advice and encouragement, in addition to useful critiques. Special thanks to María Cristina García, Roger Waldinger, Gary Gerstle, Lorrin Thomas, Gerry Cadava, Sarah Igo, Brian Balogh, and Patrick Weil for their generosity and for believing in me. Thanks, as well, to John M. Ackerman, Tyler Anbinder, Deborah Cohen, Nathan Connolly, Greg Downs, Jorge Durand, Leon Fink, James O. Freedman, Donna Gabaccia, Matt García, Tanya Golash-Boza, Julie Greene, David Gutiérrez, Cindy Hahamovitch, Will Hitchcock,

Kelly Lytle Hernández, Madeline Hsu, Danny James, Mike Innis-Jiménez, Alan Kraut, Erika Lee, Doug Massey, Guian McKee, Hiroshi Motomura, Mae Ngai, Rachel O'Toole, Jocelyn Olcott, Tanalís Padilla, Jaime Pensado, David Sartorius, Michael Snodgrass, Allison Brownell Tirres, Elliott Young, and Jon Zimmerman. And, thank you to Andreas Feldmann, Xóchitl Bada, Chris Boyer, and Amalia Pallares of the University of Illinois at Chicago, and William Deverell and the Provost's Postdoctoral Program in the Humanities at the University of Southern California, for providing me with extra incentive to finish.

I probably never would have gone down this path to begin with if not for Steve Cohen, Jeanne Penvenne, Marty Sherwin, Virginia Drachman, Jim Glaser, Sol Gittleman, Sherman Teichman, and Heather Barry, all of who—along with Gerald R. Gill—fostered my intellectual development as an undergraduate at Tufts University and have remained supportive ever since. Dave Patterson, Anna Serafini, and Thomas Shiland were important influences on me during high school, and Lee Coffin, Darryl Tiggie, Claire Dennison, Lana Asfour, Victoria George, Kathy Cho, Denny Paredes, Angelo Malfatti, and Dianne Allen all offered friendship, good humor, and guidance during my pre-grad school professional career.

Archivists, historians, and librarians in the United States and Mexico provided invaluable assistance in identifying sources and navigating collections. I'd especially like to thank Zack Wilske and Marian L. Smith of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Historical Reference Library; Bill Creech, Lynn Goodsell, and Jessie Kratz at the Nationals Archives; Nick Okrent, Mitch Fraas, and Joe Holub at Penn; Jesús García of the Centro de Estudios Migratorios in Mexico City; Donald Davis of the American Friends Service Committee Archive in Philadelphia; Dan Kesselbrenner of the National Lawyers Guild National Immigration Project; and the staffs of the Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración, Acervo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, and Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico; and the Chicago History Museum and Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Illinois at Chicago, National Border Patrol Museum in El Paso, Special Collections at the University of Texas-El Paso, Special Collections at University of Texas-Pan American, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, and Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas-Austin, and Special Collections Library at the University of Michigan, Ann-Arbor in the United States.

Over the last four years I have presented portions of my dissertation at a number of different conferences, workshops, and seminars, where I have received incisive comments and critiques. Special thanks to the organizers, commentators, and participants of the fall 2011 Penn Democracy, Citizenship, and Constitutionalism Graduate Workshop series at the University of Pennsylvania; 2012 "Fractures: Defining and Redefining The Twentieth-Century United States" transatlantic conference, and 2013 "Memory, Oral History, and Documentary Filmmaking in Latin America" symposium at the University of Pennsylvania; 2013 conference on return migration at the Centro de Investigaciones

sobre América del Norte at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; 2013 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians; 2013 annual meeting of the Social Science History Association; 2014 annual meeting of the American Historical Association; 2014 “Aquí y Allá: Migrations in Latin American Labor History” conference at Duke; 2015 Great Issues Series at the Miller Center at the University of Virginia; and 2015 III Coloquio Bracero in Mexico City.

Funding from a number of key sources facilitated the research and writing that appears in the following pages. A Hopkinson Fellowship, Faye Rattner Fellowship, and SAS Dissertation Research Fellowship from the University of Pennsylvania provided funds for exploratory archival research in the United States and Mexico. I fleshed out some of the project’s broad strokes and received astute feedback during a National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminar on “Rethinking International Migration” at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Immigration and Ethnic History Society’s George E. Pozzetta Dissertation Award helped fund an essential trip to a number of archives in El Paso and the Lower Rio Grande Valley. A Fulbright-García Robles fellowship allowed me to conduct in-depth archival research and oral histories in Mexico. The Organization of American Historians-Immigration Ethnic History Society John Higham Travel Grant, Social Science History Association Tilly Graduate Student Travel Award, Organization of American Historians Merrill Graduate Student Travel Grant, and President’s Award from the Graduate and Professional Student Association at the University of Pennsylvania enabled me to present and receive feedback on parts of my dissertation at conferences. A Dean’s Scholar award from the University of Pennsylvania gave me the confidence to keep going, and a National Fellowship from the Miller Center provided the funding necessary to finish.

None of this would have been possible without the love, support, and understanding of my friends and family. I am fortunate that so many people have helped shape the person I am today. Special thanks to Barbara Glaser and Paul Zachos, the Rotheim family, Eric Ruben, Tim Brown, Steve Krubiner, Patrick Tuck, Kate Elder, Jaime Rebollo Alcántara, James Nicholson, Oliver Wise, Dan Kalik, and the Ross family. Although my grandparents are no longer alive, they continue to influence me today. I appreciate all that they and the rest of my extended family have done for me over the last thirty-four years. In Mexico, Andrés Vázquez Sosa, Hilda Medina Jiménez, and Claudia and Leszek Vázquez Medina welcomed me into their family and have been nothing but supportive. My sister Alyssa has always been one of my biggest fans, just as I have always been one of hers. I am proud to be her brother and feel fortunate that we have only grown closer over the years. I am also lucky to have her husband, Jake Lappi, as a brother-in-law and friend. I am eternally grateful to Margie Ingram and Joel Goodman for allowing me to find my own path and place in the world, and for providing the love and support I needed to do so. The example they have set as people, partners, and parents is something to aspire to. Thank you, Mom and Dad. Hilda Vázquez Medina, my partner-in-crime y mi pareja de la vida: gracias, por todo. El futuro es nuestro.

ABSTRACT

MEXICAN MIGRANTS AND THE RISE OF THE DEPORTATION REGIME, 1942-2014

Adam Goodman

Thomas J. Sugrue

This dissertation traces the rise of the deportation regime in the United States from 1942 to the present. It reveals that the origins of the regime are inextricably intertwined with the history of Mexican migration. It uses a diverse array of English- and Spanish-language archival sources from the United States and Mexico, more than twenty oral histories, and materials obtained through the Freedom of Information Act to show how deportation has changed—qualitatively and quantitatively—over the last seventy-two years.

This dissertation sheds light on deportation’s magnitude, both past and present. It interrogates the inaccurate and inconsistent ways that scholars, journalists, and government agencies have defined deportation and puts forth a definition that incorporates the variety of methods immigration authorities have employed to effect expulsions—from formal deportations and “voluntary” departures to scare tactic-driven publicity campaigns meant to encourage people to “self-deport.” This, in turn, forces us

to reassess our understanding of immigration policy and “the immigrant experience” in US history.

This dissertation also offers a fine-grained social history of deportation, showing how individuals, communities, and organizations on both sides of the border shaped—and were shaped by—US and Mexican state policies. It argues that we must go beyond the gendered history that paints migrants and deportees as one-dimensional, temporary male laborers, and instead examine deportation’s impact on men, women, and children who belonged to familial, local, national, and transnational networks. An analysis of the political economy of deportation reveals that, in some cases, expulsion resulted not only from negotiations between two states, but also from interpenetrating and corrupt public-private relations. This dissertation shows how deportation and the possibility of being deported became a quotidian part of Mexican migrants’ lives. It shows how immigration raids created ever-present internal borders, and it examines how migrants and activists took to the streets and the courts in response. Finally, it lays bare the connection between the deportation regime’s punitive turn and the growth of the carceral state in recent decades.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States has deported more than fifty-four million people since 1892.¹ Among those deported were thirty-two-year-old Rafael Santos, who, in search of work, purchased false documents from a man in a cowboy hat in a Mexico City park, traveled by bus to the border, and gained temporary entry in July 1955. Four months later, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) deported Santos after apprehending him during a surprise raid on the factory where he worked. Twenty-three-year-old Ana María Perales had been in the US for more than five years when the INS ordered her deportation for entering the country without authorization. Fearing that she would be separated from her two US-citizen babies, Perales wrote to the Mexican Consul in Detroit asking that the government grant them travel visas, which it did. Antonio Rodríguez, a mentally ill man born in the central Mexican state of Zacatecas, crossed the Río Bravo at the age of six and lived in the United States for forty-five years before he found himself trapped in

¹ Department of Homeland Security (hereafter, DHS), Office of Immigration Statistics (hereafter, OIS), Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2012. I define deportation as the sum of “removals” and “returns,” which is discussed at length below. It should be noted that the number of unique individuals deported is fewer since some were deported multiple times. A further note on language: Throughout the project I use “deportation” and “expulsion” interchangeably. I use “Mexican migrant” to refer to short-term migrants, people who have recently migrated or frequently migrate, and people who plan on returning to Mexico regardless of how long they have lived in the United States. I use “Mexican immigrant,” albeit sparingly, to refer to people who have settled in the US for an extended period and self-identify as such. Following the work of scholars such as David Gutiérrez, I use “ethnic Mexican” to refer to people of Mexican origin, regardless of citizenship. I use the terms “undocumented” or “unauthorized” to refer to people in the United States without the permission of the federal government. I only use “illegal immigrant,” “illegal alien,” or derogatory terms like “wetback” when quoting directly from sources or referring to INS operations. I discussed some of the points made in this introduction in Adam Goodman, “A Nation of (Deported) Immigrants,” *Dissent* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 2011): 64-68.

deportation limbo in a Stockton, California mental hospital from 1958 to 1964 as the US and Mexican federal migration bureaucracies tried to establish his place of birth.²

This dissertation traces the rise of the deportation regime from the 1940s to the present. The regime developed in response to a number of different political, social, and cultural pressures, combined with bureaucratic self-interest and the influence of private, for-profit third parties. While immigration officials targeted a variety of groups for expulsion or exclusion, the vast majority of deportees—like Santos, Perales, and Rodríguez—were Mexicans deported after 1942. In fact, more than ninety-eight percent of all the deportations throughout United States history have occurred since then, and Mexicans make up around ninety percent of all deportees. Like Santos, some were only in the US a short time before being apprehended. Others, like Perales and Rodríguez, had been in the country for years.³

² Files 4-356-1955-5303, 4-356-1956-5308, and 4-357-1960-4393, Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración (hereafter, AHINM), Mexico City, Mexico. All names from the AHINM are pseudonyms.

³ The federal government started recording deportation statistics in 1892. Immigration and Naturalization Services (hereafter, INS) Annual Reports, 1946-1986; INS Statistical Yearbooks and DHS OIS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 1978-2013. Other examples of the United States targeting other groups—usually during periods of intense nativism—include the exclusion of Chinese starting in the late nineteenth century; the Palmer Raids in the wake of World War I and the Russian Revolution; the targeting of Japanese during World War II; the persecution of Communists and alleged Communists during the McCarthy Era; and, most recently, the scrutiny placed on Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians since September 11, 2001. Even though they fall outside of the time period covered in this project, the Mexican repatriation and deportation drives in the late 1920s and early 1930s represent an important precedent of what was to come on a much larger scale after 1942. See, for example, Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993); Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994); Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico Press, 2006); Fernando Alanís, *Que se queden allá: El gobierno de México y la repatriación de mexicanos en Estados Unidos (1934-1940)* (San Luis: El Colegio de San Luis, 2007); Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: NYU Press, 2008); Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 2012). For

Whereas most studies of immigration history focus on immigration policy or “the immigrant experience,” this dissertation bridges the two, showing that they can only be understood when considered together. An in-depth exploration of the institutional history of deportation is a key component of the chapters that follow. But it is important to remember that the government officials and businesspeople most responsible for creating and perpetuating the deportation regime never had a monopoly on power. This project recognizes migrants and deportees as political actors, emphasizing the essential role that they—along with their families and allies—played in shaping the deportation regime and, in turn, US and Mexican history. Far from being powerless subjects of a state-disciplining machine, migrants were proactive, adaptive, and resilient, constantly challenging what they felt were unjust laws and unfair treatment. The ways they did so varied over time, depending on personal circumstances, prevailing policies, and historical context.

In contrast to immigration, assimilation, and community formation, the history of deportation is understudied. The few historians who have examined deportation have mainly focused on the evolution of immigration law in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that laid the legal framework for the modern deportation regime, the creation of the US Border Patrol, and the deportation of anarchists, communists, and people thought to be political subversives. Historians have yet to closely examine the history of deportation in the postwar period, and especially since the 1960s—the period

more on the repatriation and deportation of Mexicans prior to the Great Depression, see José Angel Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century: A History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012); Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009).

during which nearly all expulsions have occurred.⁴ This is partially due to source limitations, since INS records dry up after 1957. But it also reflects a disciplinary limitation, since historians are generally wary of being accused of “presentism.”⁵

Anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and legal scholars have recently made important contributions to the study of deportation, but their work primarily addresses the contemporary period. Historians were notably absent from the edited volume *The Deportation Regime*, perhaps the most sophisticated work to date on the subject.⁶ The significant gap between the focus of historians’ work and the period in which the vast majority of deportations have taken place has resulted in an incomplete understanding of the history of deportation, and the isolation of historians from other scholars studying deportation. By expanding the chronological and thematic scope, my dissertation bridges

⁴ DHS OIS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2010, Enforcement Data Table 36; Even recent scholarship has neglected the postwar period. For example, in his history of deportation throughout US history Daniel Kanstroom dedicates only 28 of 246 pages to the post-1950 period, and only one page to Operation Wetback. See Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007); Kelly Lytle Hernández’s history of the Border Patrol dedicates only one, thinly-sourced chapter to enforcement in the 1955-1974 period. See Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2010). Dorothee Schneider and Deirdre Moloney ostensibly offer a history of migration, citizenship, and deportation throughout the twentieth century, but mostly focus on the first few decades. See Dorothee Schneider, *Crossing Borders: Migration and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011); Deirdre M. Moloney, *National Insecurities: Immigrants and U.S. Deportation Policy since 1882* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012). Mae Ngai’s important book offers a brief discussion of the post-1965 period in the epilogue, but isn’t primarily focused on deportation or on Mexicans. See Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004).

⁵ It is only in the last decade or so that historians have begun to examine the 1970s and 1980s. See, for example, Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010); and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2011), in addition to a number of forthcoming works.

⁶ Nicholas De Genova and Nathalie Peutz, eds. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010). For more on the state of the field of “deportation studies,” see Susan Bibler Coutin, “Deportation Studies: Origins, Themes and Directions,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2014): 1-11.

the historical and social science literature, shedding light on deportation, past and present, and how it has changed over time.

Contextualizing and Defining Deportation

As lawyer Daniel Kanstroom has pointed out, the expulsion impulse has existed since the days of the Founding Fathers.⁷ However, it is only in the last 120 years that modern deportation, as we know it, has come into being. Deportation, as political theorist William Walters has noted, is but one of many forms of expulsion throughout history. Others include exile, the expulsion of the poor in early modern Europe, “corporate” expulsion (of collective groups rather than individuals), “transportation” (which he links to punishment, forced exile, and colonial expansion), and population transfer (which could include genocide, or the “forced” or “voluntary” movements of entire groups). As he notes, we often “fail to appreciate that for many centuries the expulsion of people has played out not across space of states but rather within empires, out of parishes and cities, from estates and commons.” What distinguishes modern deportation is that it emerged in the late-nineteenth century and is “both a product of the state system and ... one of a number of techniques for the ongoing management of a world population that is divided into states.” Related to this, and something else that might be taken for granted, is that modern deportation is “a form of treatment reserved for aliens.” In a world divided into nation-states,

⁷ Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation* (2007).

deportation represents the compulsory allocation of subjects to their proper sovereigns or, in many instances of statelessness, to other surrogate sovereigns (e.g., ... returning certain asylum seekers to ‘safe third countries’). In the face of patterns of international migration, deportation serves to sustain the image of a world divided into ‘national’ populations and territories, domiciled in terms of state membership.⁸

Deportation serves as a way to maintain and legitimize state sovereignty, understandings of citizenship, and historically contingent international borders. As Walters concludes, “deportation is actively involved in *making* this world.”⁹

Over the last 125 years deportation has shaped the United States in important ways. The Immigration Act of 1891 centralized migration control under the federal government and, for the first time, gave it the power to deport individuals already living in the country.¹⁰ Within a few decades, however, the growing number of unauthorized migrants forced the immigration bureaucracy to establish new means by which to effect expulsions. So, while immigration officials classified all deportations under the single category between 1892 and 1926, starting in 1927 they created the process of “voluntary return,” which allowed for deportation—primarily of Mexican and Canadian nationals—

⁸ William Walters, “Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens,” in De Genova and Peutz, eds. *The Deportation Regime*, 90.

⁹ Walters, “Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens,” 72-98. Emphasis in the original. See also, Richard Bessel and Claudia B. Haake, eds. *Removing Peoples: Forced Removal in the Modern World* (London: The GHI and Oxford University Press, 2009). For more on deportation as but one of many types of expulsion, see Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Under the 1891 act, immigrants already living in the US could be deported within one year of their arrival. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 99-100; Lucy E. Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1995), 131-2; Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 70.

based on administrative, rather than judicial procedure. Since then the federal government has differentiated between deportations that resulted from the forcible removal of an individual by the order of an immigration judge, and deportations classified as “voluntary returns.” But a brief genealogy of how the immigration bureaucracy has referred to these two types of deportation reveals tremendous change over time. (See Table 0.1)¹¹

TABLE 0.1. Genealogy of “deportation,” as defined by federal immigration bureaucracy

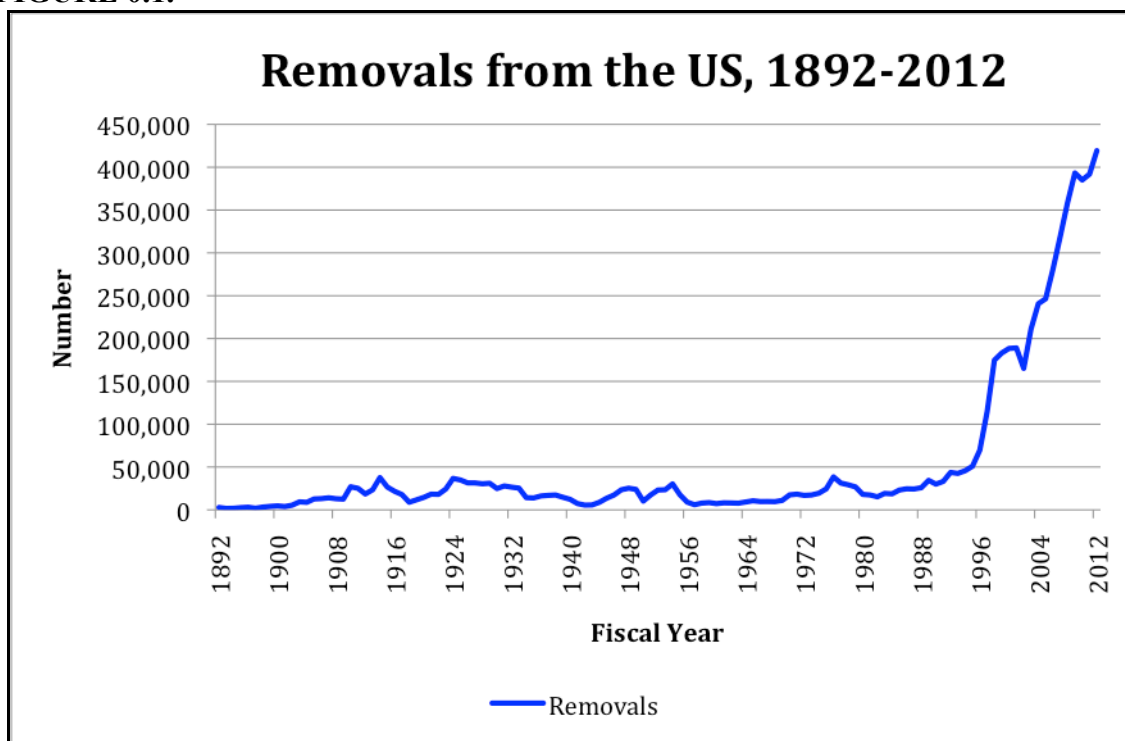
Year	Removals	Returns
1892-1926	Deportations	--
1927-early 1960s	Deportations	Voluntary return
Early 1960s-1978	Required to depart	Departing voluntarily
1978-1985	Aliens deported	Aliens required to depart
1986-1994	Deported	Required to depart
1995-1996	Split into “deported” & “excluded”	Voluntary departures
1997-2005	Formal removals	Voluntary departures
2006-present	Removals	Returns

It might be said that the immigration bureaucracy has sanitized the terminology to portray the agency in a benevolent light. Indeed, since 2006 the word deportation—with all of its negative connotations of state coercion and power—does not appear at all in the Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Moreover, as one scholar noted as early as 1966, the use of a term like “departing voluntarily” (and we could add “voluntary departure” and “returns”) is “highly ambiguous since it obscures the difference between aliens who

¹¹ INS Statistical Yearbook, 1978-2001; DHS OIS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2002-2012. It should be noted that some Chinese were deported under the Geary Act of 1892 (which extended the Chinese Exclusion Act and required a judicial hearing), while others, after 1908, were deported under the general immigration laws, which did not require formal hearings.

depart entirely on their own volition and those who do so under the threat of deportation.”¹² The ambiguity of the terms, in addition to the number of times they have changed, has only created confusion. One has to wonder whether INS officials realized that while “required to depart” referred to “removals” in the 1960s and for most of the 1970s, by the mid-1980s it referred to “returns.”

FIGURE 0.1.



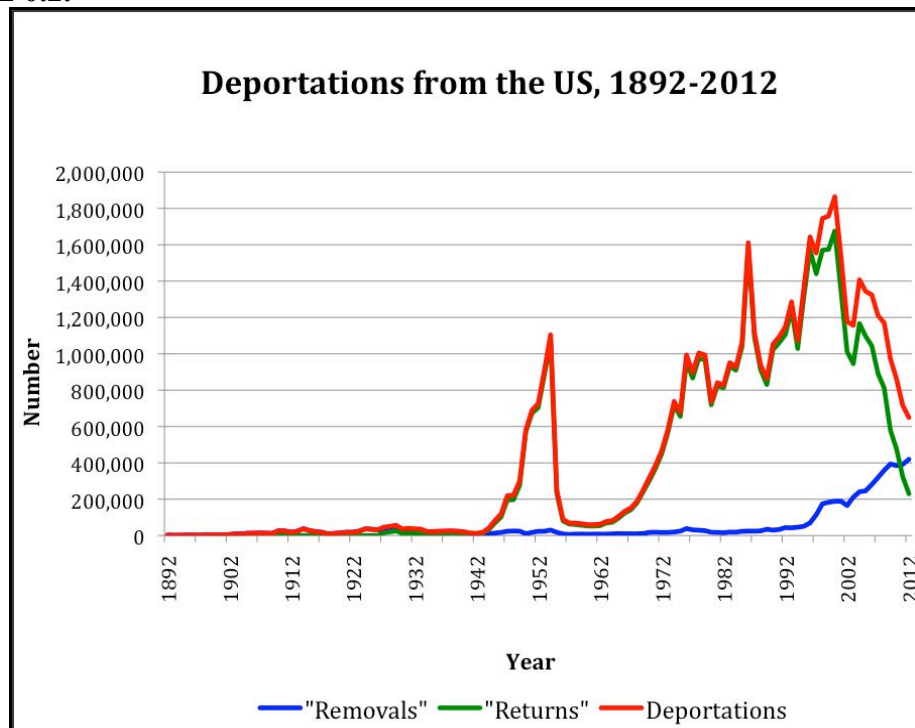
Source: Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2012. (Graph by AG)

Today, in the United States, the number of people deported each year is commonly equated with the number of “removals.” According to the 2009 Office of

¹² Leo Grebler, “Mexican Immigration to the United States: The Record and Its Implications,” *Mexican-American Study Project*, Advance Report 2 (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1966), 28.

Immigration Statistics Yearbook, removals are “the compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal. An alien who is removed has administrative or criminal consequences placed on subsequent reentry...”¹³ Using this widely accepted definition, the number of deportations since 1892 exceeds five million, nearly all of which have occurred during the last two decades. (See Figure 0.1) Yet, we must question this definition—put forth by the government, media, and many scholars—because it drastically undercounts the number of individuals who have been required to leave the country and conceals the longer history of deportation in the United States.

FIGURE 0.2.



Source: Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2012. (Graph by AG)

¹³ DHS OIS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2009: 95.

A more accurate definition is the sum total of removals and returns. (See Figure 0.2) Put another way, a deportee is anyone who has been forced to leave the country by order of the state, be it an administrative or judicial order. The existing scholarship has done a poor job of addressing this question—when it has at all—and, currently, no consensus exists as to how deportation should be defined. A small number of leading works contend that an inclusive definition should be used.¹⁴ Some fail to address the question of how deportation should be defined but still rely, even if implicitly, on an inclusive definition.¹⁵ Others rely on a limited definition,¹⁶ are inconsistent in how they

¹⁴ By an “inclusive” definition I mean that the authors define deportations as the sum of removals *and* returns. I should also note that exclusions—when authorities stop or prevent someone from entering the country—are closely related to expulsions and authorities have sometimes folded them into deportation statistics. See Walters, “Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens,” 72-91; William Walters, “Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens,” *Citizenship Studies* Vol. 6, No. 3 (2002): 256-292; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects* (2004); Nicholas De Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419-47; David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1995); Grebler, “Mexican Immigration to the United States (1966); Torrie Hester, “Protection, Not Punishment: Legislative and Judicial Formation of U.S. Deportation Policy, 1882-1904,” *JAEH* 30:1 (Fall 2010): 11-36; Torrie Hester, “Deportation: Origins of a National and International Power,” (Ph.D., Diss., University of Oregon, 2008); Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnoldo De León, *North to Aztlán: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996). Griswold del Castillo and De León also distinguish between deportations and repatriations.

¹⁵ Hernández, *Migra!* (2010); Kelly Lytle Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (Winter 2006): 421-444; Peter Andreas’s *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, & Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989); Juan Ramon García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (1949; repr., Westport: Greenwood Press, 1968); Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1990); Julian Samora, *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story* (Notre Dame: UND Press, 1971); Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (1955); Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011); Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011).

¹⁶ By a limited definition I mean that the authors equate deportations and removals. See Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America Through Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2004); Bill Ong Hing, *Deporting Our Souls: Values, Morality, and Immigration Policy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006); Peter

define deportation,¹⁷ or ignore the question altogether.¹⁸ The result is analytic confusion that makes it difficult to put different texts that are ostensibly addressing the same topic in dialogue with one another. Finding some consensus, or at least explicitly stating how one is defining deportation, should be a priority for scholars across disciplines. In arguing for an inclusive definition it is first necessary to justify why returns must be counted.

“Return” is “the confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States not based on an order of removal. Most of the voluntary returns are of Mexican nationals who have been apprehended by the US Border Patrol ...”¹⁹ Rather than being understood for what they really are, “returns” are described as “a form of relief from formal removal, under which an alien is permitted to depart the United States

H. Schuck, *Citizens, Strangers, and In-Betweens* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Douglas S. Massey and Magaly Sánchez R. *Brokered Boundaries: Creating Immigrant Identity in Anti-Immigrant Times* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010); Susan Bibler Coutin, “Exiled by Law: Deportation and the Inviability of Life,” in *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, eds. Nicholas De Genova and Nathalie Peutz (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 351-70; Nathalie Peutz, “‘Criminal Alien’ Deportees in Somaliland: An Ethnography of Removal,” in *The Deportation Regime*, 371-409; Jacqueline Hagan and Scott Phillips, “Border Blunders: The Unanticipated Human and Economic Costs of the U.S. Approach to Immigration Control, 1986-2007,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 7, no. 1 (2008): 83-94. Hagan and Phillips describe the difference between formal removals and “voluntary” departures, but their focus is on the former. Although this is important, they equate deportations and removals throughout the article.

¹⁷ By inconsistent I mean they incorporate an inclusive definition in some instances and a limited definition in others, without ever distinguishing between the two. See Nicholas De Genova and Nathalie Peutz, “Introduction,” in De Genova and Peutz, eds. *The Deportation Regime*: 1 and 29 fn6; Schneider, *Crossing Borders*, 121, 134-47, and 246-7; Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation*, 3 and 222; Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage, 2002), 33-34 and 98; Robert Lee Maril, *The Fence: National Security, Public Safety, and Illegal Immigration along the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011); Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (1990; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

¹⁸ Rachel Ida Buff, “The Deportation Terror,” *American Quarterly* 60:3 (September 2008): 523-551; Natalia Molina, “Constructing Mexicans as Deportable Immigrants: Race, Disease, and the Meaning of ‘Public Charge,’” *Identities* 17:6 (2010): 641-66; Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003); Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers* (1995); Tichenor, *Dividing Lines* (2002); Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans* (2009).

¹⁹ DHS OIS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2009: 95.

voluntarily.”²⁰ But, regardless of what they are called, it is important to keep in mind, as the Department of Homeland Security itself noted in 2003, that “[a]lthough such departures are called ‘voluntary departures,’ they are required and verified.”²¹ Thus, any definition of deportation that excludes returns is inaccurate, not to mention misleading.

The immigration bureaucracy created “voluntary” returns as a cost-saving measure in the late 1920s. But, in both absolute and relative terms, the INS did not heavily rely on them until after 1942, when the Bracero Program, a twenty-two-year agreement that brought millions of Mexicans to the United States as temporary workers, led to a rapid growth of both documented and undocumented migration. The expiration of the Bracero Program at the end of 1964 and the cap placed on Western Hemisphere immigration under the 1965 Hart-Celler Act resulted in an increase in the number of Mexican migrants considered to be deportable. The number of people the INS apprehended quickly exceeded the number of spaces available in federal and local detention facilities. And, as a result, as the Service stated in December 1968, “in order to reduce costs, policy and procedural changes were made to utilize informal deportations [returns] in lieu of formal deportations [removals] in the rising number of Mexican cases.”²² One year later, an INS official testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor confirmed this.

²⁰ DHS OIS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2005: 95. Another telling example can be found in the 2010 Annual Report: Immigration Enforcement Actions, 2-3: “In some cases, apprehended aliens may be *offered* [emphasis added] the opportunity to return to their home countries without being placed in immigration proceedings.

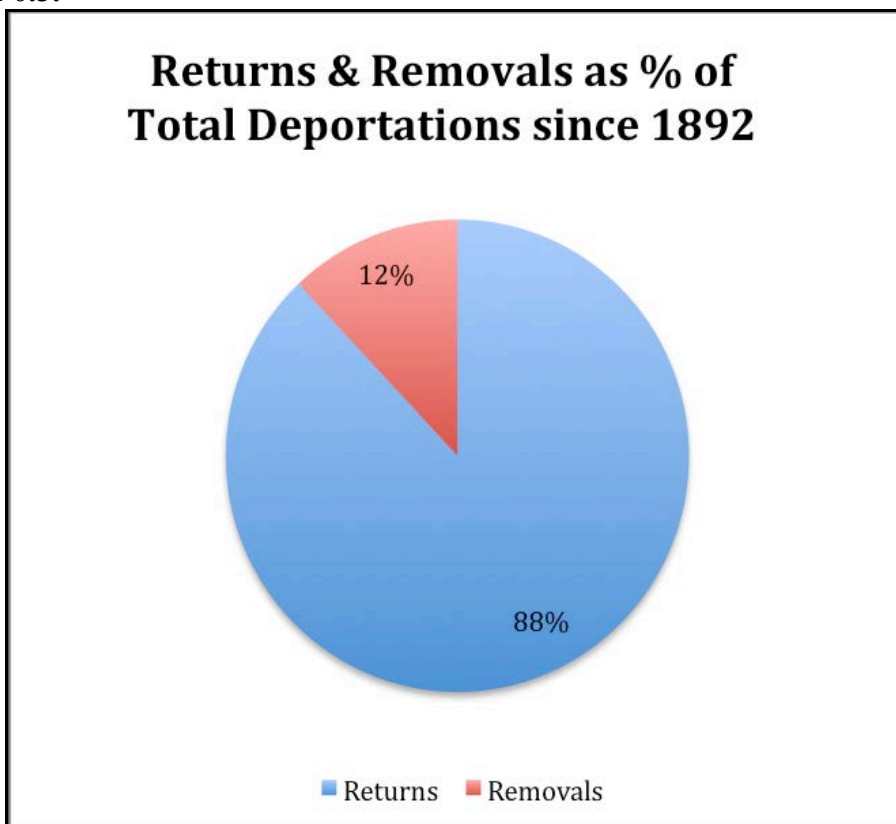
²¹ DHS OIS Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2003: 146.

²² “INS Program Justification,” December 1968: 39, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Historical Reference Library, Washington, D.C.

Taking into account the large volume of illegal entrants across the Mexican border, the Service policy is to grant voluntary departure in these cases. Some 161,000 Mexican aliens were apprehended in fiscal year 1969 after having entered the United States without inspection. It would have been physically impossible to conduct formal deportation proceedings for each such illegal entrants. Therefore, except in aggravated cases, voluntary departure is the only practicable and effective remedy to remove such illegal entrants.²³

The INS relied on returns out of necessity until the last years of the twentieth century. The Service incentivized them, as well, so that most people facing deportation saw voluntary return as the better of two unattractive options. First, it meant that migrants would not have to spend as much, if any, time in detention because there would be no deportation hearing. Second, there were fewer restrictions placed on re-migrating and less severe consequences for those apprehended again. However, there were drawbacks as well. By accepting voluntary departure, people gave up the right to fight their deportation order in court, and they often had to pay for their own transportation. Additionally, given agency priorities and budgetary constraints, federal officials encouraged, coerced, and, in some cases, forced migrants into accepting return. The line between forced and “voluntary” departures was often times anything but clear.

²³ Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 1969-1970. “Migrant and Seasonal Farmwork Powerlessness.” Citation from the Hearings of The Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 90th Congress, 1st and 2nd Sessions, Part V, Border Commuter Labor Problems. As copied in the appendix to Samora, *Los Mojados*, 189.

FIGURE 0.3.

Source: DHS OIS, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2012. (Graph and calculations by AG)

Although at first this might seem like a minor quibble, the way that deportation is defined significantly affects our understanding of how immigration policy and “the immigrant experience” are understood. When understood as the total number of times that someone has been required to leave the United States, the number of deportations since 1892 exceeds fifty-four million, representing a tenfold increase compared to the number of removals alone. Indeed, returns make up nearly ninety percent of all deportations throughout US history. (See Figure 0.3) Rather than emerging after 1986,

the contemporary deportation regime dates back to the middle of the twentieth century and has always been inextricably intertwined with Mexican migration to the United States. It has disproportionately targeted Mexicans and helped solidify the stereotype of them as prototypical “illegal aliens.” More generally, using an inclusive definition of deportation calls into question the reputation of the United States as a nation that has welcomed immigrants throughout its history. The statistics reinforce this point. Since 1942, more than fifty-three million people have been removed or returned, while around forty million have obtained permanent resident status. The total number of deportations is striking, regardless of the fact that it includes some people who may have been deported multiple times. With approximately thirteen million more people deported over the last seventy-two years than have been granted permanent residency, postwar America can more accurately be described as a nation that deports migrants than as one that welcomes them. And that, of course, is truer for Mexican migrants than any other group.

The Rise of the Deportation Regime

The five chapters that follow offer a transnational history of the deportation of Mexicans from the United States since 1942. They use underutilized Spanish- and English-language archival sources, more than twenty oral histories and informal conversations conducted in Mexico and the US, and materials obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests to shed light on both the institutional history of deportation and the social history of deportees. I rely on quantitative and qualitative analysis to reveal

(1) deportation's magnitude, both past and present; (2) how deportation and the consequences of being deported have changed over time; (3) the fact that deportation has disproportionately targeted and affected Mexican migrants; and (4) the gendered history of deportation and immigration policy. Moreover, my project helps us better understand contemporary expulsion by exploring the deportation regime's origins and three distinct phases over the last seventy-two years.

During the first phase, from 1942 to 1964 (covered in Chapters 1, 2, and 3), the INS established the means and methods and created the tactics and policies that enabled it to carry out large-scale expulsions in the decades to come. The first chapter, "Beyond Braceros: Deportation's Broad Reach," examines the gendered history of deportation and immigration policy in the middle of the twentieth century. I show that even though male laborers represented the majority of deportees, deportation also targeted women, children, and families. Sex and age sometimes made a difference in terms of how the INS deported people, but officials also treated gender as a normative category, distinguishing between "good" and "bad" men and women to determine how each would be removed. I also use migrant correspondence and information obtained through the Freedom of Information Act to uncover Cold War immigration policies' devastating consequences for Mexicans who had lived in the US for extended periods of time and suddenly found themselves separated from their families, communities, jobs, and material possessions. Finally, this chapter makes clear that deportation affected people even when they themselves were not deported. While expulsion had an impact on deportees and those connected to them, in some cases, family members of deportees—mostly mothers and wives in Mexico—

played active roles in shaping deportation's history by advocating on behalf of their relatives or, on occasion, calling for their deportation. All together, this chapter examines how deportation shaped—and was shaped by—the lives and experiences of Mexican men, women, and children from 1942 to 1964. It is only by doing so that we can understand the history of deportation and its far-reaching impact on individuals, families, communities, and nations.

Chapter 2, “‘Operation Wetback’ and the Origins of the Modern Deportation Regime,” offers a re-assessment of what was supposedly the largest deportation drive in US history. An examination of Operation Wetback sheds light on the variety of methods immigration authorities have employed to effect expulsions over the last sixty years—from formal deportations and “voluntary” departures to scare tactic-driven publicity campaigns meant to encourage people to “self-deport.” The vast majority of expulsions carried out during the drive, and since, can best be described as falling into the “huge twilight zone between voluntary and forced migration.”²⁴ Rather than being concentrated solely in the border region, Operation Wetback targeted people living in established communities in the interior of the country, as well. It provides insights into the distinct challenges of interior enforcement and raises important questions about the politics of how and why government statistics are produced. It also reflects both the limits of state power and the federal immigration bureaucracy's efforts to push at and exceed those limits, by whatever means necessary. This chapter reveals that many of the policies,

²⁴ Grebler, “Mexican Immigration to the United States,” 25. Grebler was referring to the nature of returns and repatriations to Mexico in the 1930s, but the point is no less valid for the 1950s, or beyond. Also see Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 72-73.

tactics, and means of deportation that are still in use today have their roots in the middle of the twentieth century.

The third chapter, “Bananas North, Deportees South: The Boatlift and the Business of Deportation,” explores the final aspect of the first phase: the way in which the INS physically removed people from the United States. It reveals that rather than simply being a product of domestic policy decisions or negotiations between nation-states, deportation sometimes resulted from interpenetrating and corrupt public-private relations. As early as the 1950s, US and Mexican migration officials began using buses, trains, planes, and boats to deport people deep into the Mexican interior as a way of discouraging repeat migration. These efforts were an attempt by the United States to assert sovereignty over its borders and citizenry at a time when heightened levels of Mexican migration called that sovereignty into question. This chapter offers a fine-grained social history of the boatlift of the mid-to-late 1950s. It lays bare the human costs of the political economy of deportation by showing how national imperatives, fiscal demands, and private self-interest interacted to create a mode of deportation that was cruel, unsafe, and meant to discourage future migration. For the INS, *how* people were deported was as important as the fact that they were deported at all.

During the second phase, discussed in Chapter 4, “Internal Borders and the Quotidian Nature of Deportation, 1965-1985,” the deportation regime underwent significant quantitative and qualitative transformations. The Bracero Program’s termination at the end of 1964 and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act’s cap on Western Hemisphere immigration led to record levels of unauthorized Mexican migration

and, as a result, unprecedented numbers of deportations. Enforcement efforts increasingly and disproportionately targeted Mexicans, reifying the perception of them as “illegal immigrants.” Overwhelmed and understaffed, the INS relied more than ever on voluntary departures, which served the needs of both the United States and Mexico. The Service also implemented a variety of tactics to apprehend undocumented migrants, from putting more Border Patrol agents on the line, to having investigators carry out neighborhood and workplace raids. Over the course of the 1970s immigration authorities’ increasing dependence on immigration raids in established ethnic Mexican communities created ever-present internal borders. Oral histories with former undocumented migrants reveal that interactions or the possibility of an interaction with an immigration officer became a quotidian part of many people’s lives, in some cases circumscribing the physical spaces they inhabited. In response, activists and advocates took to the streets and the courts to fight against deportations and INS raids in Mexican and Mexican-American communities. More than anything, however, this second phase can be characterized as the period during which the fear of being apprehended and deported became pervasive, especially among long-term residents.

The third and final phase, covered in the fifth chapter, “The Deportation Regime’s Punitive Turn,” examines the post-1986 period and how changes in immigration law, combined with the militarization of the US-Mexico border, free trade agreements, local and national political and economic pressures, and the events of September 11, 2001 drastically altered how the United States deported people. Most notably, the immigration enforcement budget ballooned and the number of removals grew from around 24,600 in

fiscal year 1986 to 438,000 in 2013, as the number of returns dropped. At the same time, the carceral state expanded and the number of immigrants held in detention and the average time detained increased. These changes had severe consequences for deportees and their families, marking a punitive turn in the deportation regime that persists to the present.

Lastly, a brief epilogue imagines the possibilities of change for the future. But first, we must return to the middle of the twentieth century, when the contemporary deportation regime emerged.

CHAPTER 1

BEYOND BRACEROS: DEPORTATION'S BROAD REACH

Between 1942 and 1964 the Bracero Program, a series of binational contract labor agreements, regularized the flow of Mexican labor migration to the United States. The contracts were limited to male laborers, most of whom worked in agriculture, industry, and on railroads. Although initially a bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico, it became less so over time, as the US government and growers gained increasing control over the program's terms and conditions with each successive renegotiation and extension.²⁵

²⁵ For classic accounts of the bracero program, most of which are place-specific, see Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Worker in California 1942-1960* (San Jose: Rosicrucian Press, 1964); Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Barbara A Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II* (Austin: CMAS Books, UT Press, 1999). For accounts that argue against seeing the program as entirely exploitative see Jorge Durand, "¿Un acuerdo bilateral o un convenio obrero patronal?," in *Braceros: Las miradas mexicanas y estadounidense*, ed. Jorge Durand (Zacatecas: Universidad de Zacatecas, 2007), 11-29; Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," in *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, ed. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 79-102; and Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011). On the politics of the bracero program and role of the state see Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and Manuel García y Griego, "The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964," in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez (Wilmington: Jaguar Books, 1996), 45-85; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Chapter 4; and David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Chapter 4. For new and productive directions in the field focusing on gender, women, and children, see Ana E. Rosas, "Flexible Families: Bracero Families' Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Southern California, 2006); Ana E. Rosas, "Breaking the Silence: Mexican

The history of mass deportation from the United States is inextricably intertwined with the history of Bracero Program. As contract labor migration spiked, so did unauthorized migration and, as a result, deportation. During the same twenty-two year period that the United States issued an estimated 4.6 million bracero contracts, it carried out nearly 6 million deportations—almost all to Mexico, and roughly six times as many as in the half-century before the program commenced.²⁶ It was not easy to distinguish between the documented and unauthorized migrants: “Braceros and ‘wetbacks’ [a derogatory name for unauthorized migrants] were sometimes members of the same family,” Mae Ngai has noted. “Some illegal migrants were male relatives whom braceros recruited for their employers.”²⁷ In fact, many men migrated on multiple occasions, sometimes with contracts, sometimes without.²⁸ As a result, in a number of cases the same person could be counted in each group. It was common for men to migrate as

Children and Women’s Confrontation of *Bracero* Family Separation, 1942-64,” *Gender & History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (August 2011): 382-400; Ana E. Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront The US-Mexico Border* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2014); Cohen, *Braceros* (2011); Matt García, *A World Of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001); Mireya Loza, “Braceros on the Boundaries: Activism, Race, Masculinity, and the Legacies of the Bracero Program,” (Ph.D. Diss., Brown University, 2011). For forthcoming work, see Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexico and Mexicans in the U.S. South since 1910* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, forthcoming 2015); Lori Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming 2016); Chantel Rodríguez, “Health on the Line: The Politics of Citizenship and the Railroad Bracero Program of World War II” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Minnesota, 2013); Israel Pastrana, “Arms of Gold: Bracero Programs and Undocumented Migration” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California-San Diego, forthcoming).

²⁶ Snodgrass, “The Bracero Program, 1942-1964,” 2011; Durand, “¿Un acuerdo bilateral o un convenio obrero patronal?,” 2007; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 147-52; Deborah Cohen estimates that 2 million men participated in the program, with many going on more than one occasion. Cohen, *Braceros*, 2; INS Annual Reports and OIS Statistical Yearbooks. It should be noted, however, that these statistics, like all immigration and immigration enforcement statistics, must be taken with a grain of salt. See Chapter 2.

²⁷ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 150-1.

²⁸ See, for example, my oral histories with Beto Salgado and Rafael Cepeda, among others, and oral histories with José Torres Gracian, Juan Tapete, Gustavo Juarez, and Justino Morales in the Bracero Oral History Archive, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

braceros and then overstay or “skip” out on their contract. Others decided to enter as undocumented workers, either due to the limited number of contracts (in the historic migration states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato there were twenty men for every contract) or in hopes of avoiding the long, costly, and humiliating formal contracting process.²⁹

Men were not the only ones to migrate though, whether within Mexico or to the United States. The Bracero Program’s exclusion of women meant that the only way they could reach the US, whether in search of work or in order to reunite with family, was to enter surreptitiously. The same was true for children, who in many instances were not accompanied by a parent.³⁰ As Ana Rosas has shown, even when women did not migrate, “[t]he expectation that women would stay behind in Mexico to labour and care for their children and elderly dependents while men worked in the United States made them indispensable to the implementation of the Bracero Program.”³¹ She reframes the Bracero Program as a “transnational immigrant family experience,” arguing that US and Mexican policy sanctioned and forced family separation and forced Mexicans to lead transnational lives, upon which both societies and economies came to rely and depend (the US in the form of agricultural labor, and Mexico in the form of remittances and alleviating rampant rural poverty and unemployment).³²

²⁹ David FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages Its Migration* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2009), 51.

³⁰ Rosas, “Flexible Families” (2006); Loza, “Braceros on the Boundaries” (2011).

³¹ Rosas, “Breaking the Silence,” 385.

³² Rosas, “Flexible Families” (2006); Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu* (2014); Loza, “Braceros on the Boundaries,” (2011) also pushes the scholarship in new directions along similar lines.

To date scholars have not examined the history of deportation in a similar fashion. But historians must go beyond the gendered history that paints deportation as being limited to one-dimensional, temporary male laborers. Instead, we must examine deportation's impact on men, women, and children on both sides of the border, each of whom belonged to familial, local, national, and transnational networks. This chapter shows that (1) although male laborers represented the majority of deportees, deportation also targeted women, children, and families. Sex and age sometimes made a difference in terms of how the INS deported people, but officials also treated gender as a normative category, distinguishing between "good" and "bad" women to determine how the Service removed them; (2) Cold War immigration policies had devastating consequences for Mexicans who had lived in the US for extended periods of time and suddenly found themselves separated from their families, communities, jobs, and material possessions; and (3) deportation affected people even when they themselves were not deported. While deportation had an impact on deportees and those connected to them, in some cases, family members of deportees—mostly mothers and wives in Mexico—played active roles in shaping deportation's history by advocating on behalf of their relatives or, on occasion, calling for their deportation. All together, this chapter examines how deportation shaped—and was shaped by—the lives and experiences of Mexican men, women, and children from 1942 to 1964. It is only by doing so that can we understand the history of deportation and its far-reaching impact on individuals, families, communities, and nations.

Although men have always made up the majority of deportees from the United States, immigration authorities have consistently deported many women and children as well. The very fact that the Bracero Program excluded women and children forced them to migrate without authorization, which, in turn, made them deportable. Like men, the majority of children and minors were deported for immigration violations, although the process differed from that of adults. After US officials deported 12-year-old Jaime López Wrona in November 1947 for entering without authorization, Mexican officials were unsure what to do with the boy. Originally from Tuxán, Michoacán, López claimed to be an orphan and said his only family was his grandmother, who lived in Wisconsin. Not wanting to put him into the general prison population, and “out of consideration and humanitarianism,” a Mexican officer brought López home and his wife fed the boy. But after eating López went out onto the patio and slipped away. This incident prompted the Mexican official to inquire what the standard protocol should be for cases involving deported minors. The vague response sent by his superior was that their Mexican citizenship should be established and they should be returned to their families. For cases in which minors had no family or family could not be located, the local authorities should take “corresponding measures of prevention” and advise the central office, which would handle it on a case-by-case basis.³³ The following year immigration officials deported

³³ M. García Rocha, El Canciller, B.O. del Cónsul, McAllen, Texas al C. Jefe de Población, Reynosa, Tamps., 3 noviembre 1947; Andrés Guerra G. al Jefe del Depto. de Migración, Secretaría de Gobernación. México, D.F., 5 noviembre 1947; Arcadio Ojeda Garcia, El Jefe del Departamento, México, D.F., al C. Jefe de Población, Reynosa, Tamps., 19 diciembre 1947, Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración

sisters Rebeca and Sagrario Álvarez Domínguez, 24 and 13, respectively. In this instance their parents had given them permission to go to the US to work, and the sisters had paid \$25.00 to be snuck across the border. But Border Patrol officers apprehended them in Pharr, Texas and turned them over to Mexican officials, who subsequently released them after they stated their intention to return to their parents' home in Monterrey.³⁴ In 1949, officials deported Patricia Zapata Muñoz, 16, and her sister Alicia, 14, from Hidalgo, Texas to Reynosa. But like López Wrona, they were orphans. They lived with an aunt in the US for a decade, but she died the year before, leaving them with no family in either country. After the US deported them Mexican officials sought to place the sisters in the care of the Catholic Women's Society.³⁵

Many Mexican women were also deported for immigration violations. In 1952 INS officials in El Paso, Texas deported 36-year-old widow Consuela Sánchez for entering the country without permission and for trying to use a falsified US Passport, which she had rented for ten pesos from a US citizen and paid someone to alter. She had been deported on four other occasions and spent over a month in an El Paso jail before being deported a fifth time.³⁶ In that same year officials in Tucson, Arizona deported 33-year-old Diana Hernández for not having a valid visa and for misrepresenting herself at

(hereafter, AHINM), Mexico City, Mexico, 4-356-1947-4952. All names taken from the AHINM are pseudonyms.

³⁴ Andrés Guerra G. al C. Jefe de la Oficina Subalterna Federal de Hacienda en Funciones de Agente del Ministerio Público Federal, 18 mayo 1948, AHINM, 4-356-1948-4986.

³⁵ Andres Guerra G., Ciudad Reynosa, Tamps, to C. Presidente Municipal, 16 junio 1949, AHINM, 4-356-1949-5042.

³⁶ Lázaro Maldonado, El Subjefe del Servicio de Población, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, to C. Agente del Ministerio Público Federal, 29 enero 1952; Deposition of Consuela Sánchez, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, 29 enero 1952, AHINM, 4-356-1952-5170.

the time of entry. She had been deported on at least two previous occasions, each time using a different identity and changing her physical appearance. When apprehended in 1946 Hernández gave the name Diana Ramírez, and stated she was a single cook from Tampico, Tamaulipas. It was noted that she had two moles, one on each side of her mouth. Four years later, in 1950, she went by Alicia Jiménez, a widow who had three moles on her right cheek. Finally, in 1952, she gave her place of birth as Nacozari, Sonora, indicated that she was a waitress and a widow, and records noted that she had two moles on her right temple.³⁷

But women's deportation cases often differed from those of men and children. If the deportation of men was about the regulation of exploitable labor, in some instances the deportation of women was about the regulation of morality and social boundaries. Deborah Cohen and Ana Rosas have argued that traditional gender roles and Mexican societal norms dictated that while men could migrate in search of work in order to provide for their family, husbands and communities expected women to stay at home and care for their children. Women's migration was discouraged, treated with suspicion, and viewed as a personal, familial, and communal failure. Instead of pointing out the Mexican government and men's failure to provide for families, many people used unaccompanied female migrants as scapegoats, and believed them to be prostitutes and criminal in nature. According to Rosas, "Migrant women were not treated as mothers, daughters, or wives, but as expendable immoral women." Their decision "to work on their own and among

³⁷ Reynaldo González Badilla, Agente del Servicio de Población, Naco, Son. to C. Secretario de Gobernación, Direc. Gral. de Población, Departamento de Migración, México, D.F. 3 julio 1952, AHINM, 4-356-1952-5182.

displaced Mexican women and strange men cast doubt on their sexual virtue, as well as their commitment to family values.” Many women that did work in the sex trade did so out of desperation and as a means of survival rather than because of some imagined natural proclivity. “Impoverished migrant women who did not secure lawful employment in the line or marketplace sectors were left with few choices,” Rosas notes. But general suspicion that female migrants were prostitutes led Mexican government officials to conduct humiliating physical examinations and venereal disease tests on all women in working in the general vicinity of bracero selection centers.³⁸

US officials held similar stereotypes about Mexican migrant women. As the district attorney of Imperial Valley, California, stated, “wetbacks” were “‘criminal types from Mexico,’ including ‘destitute females from Mexico [who] cross the line and are transported by wildcat taxis and trucks to the various ranches ... for purposes of prostitution.’”³⁹ Despite the fact that such stereotypes may have been baseless or incomplete, US authorities deported women for prostitution, as in December 1944 when immigration officials at Douglas, Arizona deported two twenty-two-year-old women and a sixteen-year-old girl for being in the country illegally and for “being prostitute[s] by occupation.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Cohen, *Braceros*, 67-86; Rosas, “Flexible Families,” 180-4, 213-7, 221-6; Loza, “Braceros on the Boundaries,” 125-37; Mae Ngai also notes that the association that female migrants were criminals and prostitutes “constituted an erasure of the wives of illegal migrant farm laborers, who often worked as domestics, out of public view.” Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 147-52.

³⁹ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 149.

⁴⁰ Arturo M. Elías, El Cónsul, Douglas, Arizona, 2 diciembre 1944, to C. Jefe de Población, Agua Prieta, Sonora, México, AHNM, 4-356-1944-4523 and -4524.

The Border Patrol also policed women's (and men's) sexuality. When Sara Hart Quiroz tried to cross from Juárez to El Paso in January 1960 US officials excluded her based on her appearance and their claim that she was a lesbian. As Margot Canaday has shown, the policing of sexuality at the border dates back to the early twentieth century and intensified after the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act.⁴¹ Two years prior, in 1950, the Senate recommended that “classes of mental defectives [who are excludable] should be enlarged to include homosexuals and other sex perverts.” Although the final wording of the McCarran-Walter Act did not make explicit reference to “homosexuals,” they were banned under the umbrella category of “psychopathic personalities” and excluded after 1965 along with other “sexual deviants.” It was only in 1990 that lesbians were no longer excludable or deportable under U.S. law.⁴²

In some cases, Mexican authorities continued to regulate female deportees' actions when they arrived in Mexico. In 1948 a Mexican official in Matamoros wrote the chair of the Civil Service Board to inform him that two young, recently deported women had returned “without resources or any kind of protection.” Moreover, he asked the chair to “have the goodness to intervene” on behalf of the women on their trip home to ensure that “they don't take the wrong path, and do honorable work, so that they can return to their mother's side.”⁴³ Whereas officials did little for male deportees, they viewed

⁴¹ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009).

⁴² Eithne Luibhéid. *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2002), 77-102. For more on sexuality and deportation, see Marc Stein, *Sexual Injustice: Supreme Court Decisions from Griswold to Roe* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010).

⁴³ Celestino Aleman Carvajal, Jefe de Servicio Int., Matamoros, Tamps., to C. Presidente de la H. Junta de Admin. Civil, 20 agosto 1948, AHINM, 4-356-1948-5010.

females as vulnerable, in need of assistance, and perhaps prone to behavior officials classified as immoral.

Differential treatment based on US and Mexican immigration officials' preconceived notions about women extended to the way in which they were deported as well. Aboard the airplanes used to physically remove deportees in the 1950s INS policy required a matron to travel alongside any female deportees, "[i]n order to forestall any incident which might tend to embarrass the Service."⁴⁴ Women made up as much as ten percent of deportees onboard some of the boatlifts across the Gulf of Mexico and trainlifts across the border. Officials often separated women and children from men during these trips.⁴⁵

The INS also used different methods to deport men, women, children, and families over land. A June 1953 article in *The Laredo Times* revealed that the Border Patrol had adopted a policy of dumping male deportees over the border in the depopulated Zapata, Texas area, forty-five miles away from the closest Mexican city, in hopes of discouraging future unauthorized re-entry. Those with enough money could buy a bus ticket, but a considerable number of deportees could not afford transportation. Despite claims by Ed Idar, the head of the American GI Forum, that deportees' rights and

⁴⁴ Exceptions were made for female deportees "accompanied by an adult male member of their immediate family." Internal INS documents indicate that this remained the policy until at least 1969, and possibly later. Harlon B. Carter, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Enforcement Division, to Regional Commissioners, San Pedro, St. Paul, Burlington and Richmond. 15 March 1956, "Alien Airlift," National Border Patrol Museum (hereafter, NBPM), El Paso, Texas.

⁴⁵ Bernardo Alderete, Jr., Detention Officer, El Paso, Texas, to Marcus T. Neelly, District Director, El Paso, Texas, 22 November 1954, 56364/43SW4 BP Ops SW pt 4 1954-7, RG85, National Archives and Records Administration 1 (hereafter, NARA1), Washington, D.C.; Marshall to Partridge, 8 October 1954, HQ History Publicity, NBPM. See Chapter 3 for an in depth discussion of the history of the boatlift.

human dignity had never been violated, independent investigations by *The Laredo Times* and the Mexican government found that an average of thirty-to-thirty-six men and boys were forced to make the march, in 100 to 110 degree heat with no food, water, or shelter along the way.⁴⁶ “They call it the ‘hot-foot lift’ today,” the author of *The Laredo Times* article wrote. “Tomorrow it may carry the sinister brand of ‘The Death March of Zapata.’”⁴⁷ Responding to what it called the INS’s “truly inhumane” policy, the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations received approval from President Adolfo Ruíz Cortínes to provide transportation and assistance to destitute deportees at Zapata.⁴⁸

In some cases, deportation forced families to endure long desert treks as well. The family shown in this August 25, 1953 photo had just been deported from McAllen, Texas across the border to Reynosa. (See Figure 1.1) They only spent four days picking cotton before they were apprehended and deported without being able to collect the wages due to them. The family, whose possessions fit into two sacks, had just embarked on a 400 mile trip, including a “desert march” of 150 miles, to their home in San Luis Potosí in central Mexico.⁴⁹ A woman selling food twelve miles south of Reynosa along the Monterrey highway reported four families—three mothers carrying babies and the fourth pregnant—stopping at her stand two days into their trip, ““with many more ahead.”” In

⁴⁶ Jack Yeaman, “Wetback Trek May Become Death March,” *The Laredo Times*, 5 June 1953; “‘Hot Foot’ Desert Trek Continues,” *The Laredo Times*, 7 June 1953; Hilo Direcoto, “Arrojan Tierra al Maltrato a los Mojados,” *El Mañana de Reynosa*, 12 junio 1953; Ernesto Zorrilla Herrera, Cónsul, Laredo, Texas, a C. Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, 11 Junio 1953. Found in the Trabajadores Migratorios (hereafter, TM)-27-29 files of the Acervo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter, SRE), México, D.F.

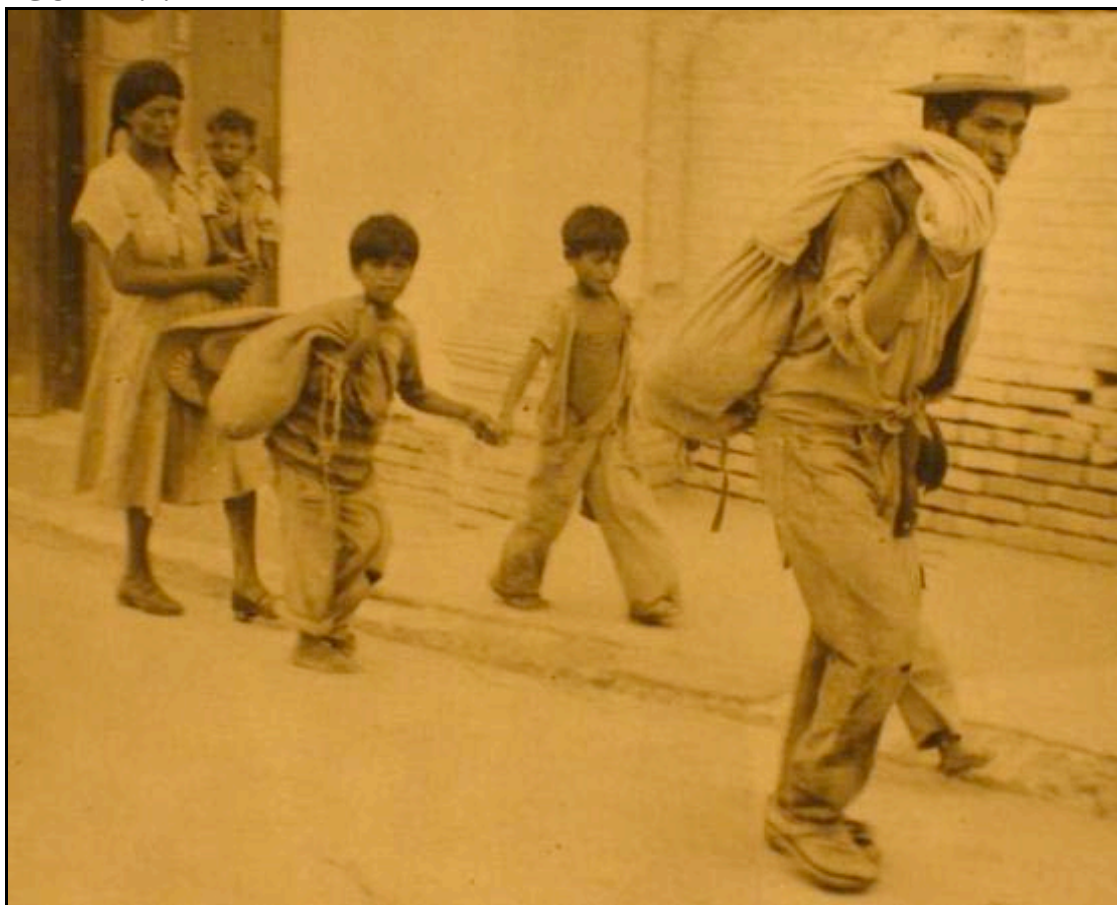
⁴⁷ Yeaman, “Wetback Trek May Become Death March,” TM-27-29, SRE.

⁴⁸ Sr. Director de Asuntos de Trabajadores Migratorios al Sr. Presidente de la República, 18 junio 1953, TM-94-1, SRE.

⁴⁹ Frank Ferree to Border Patrol/INS, 29 August 1953, 56364/47, Corresp re clippings on wetback situation, RG85, NARA1.

another instance, Frank Ferree, a south Texas resident who operated a makeshift medical clinic out of a bus on both sides of the border, found “a nine year old girl lying prostrate beside the highway.” Her parents told Ferree that the family had not eaten for three days.⁵⁰

FIGURE 1.1.



Family deported from McAllen, TX to Reynosa, Tamps. Beginning 400-mile trek home, 1953.
Source: 56364/47, Corresp re clippings on wetback situation, RG85, NARA1.

⁵⁰ Frank Ferree, Letter to the editor, “Need For Aid,” *The Valley Morning Star*, undated, TM-94-1, SRE. In addition to running his makeshift medical clinic, Ferree, known by residents on both sides of the border as “the Samaritan of Texas,” also distributed candy and nuts to children at Christmas time, donated food, clothing, and blankets to families. “It is obvious,” Ferree wrote, “that much of the need for aid of those families occurs along the Mexican border after they are deported,” and Ferree argued that “it takes us all, including the American and Mexican governments to provide a chance to live for these neglected families.”

The INS's decision to buslift people to places like Zapata and Laredo for deportation was part of a larger policy of moving deportees laterally along the border in hopes of deterring repeat unauthorized migration. The Service, however, initially excluded families from these buslifts, perhaps based on its belief that "more humane care could be afforded to alien women and small children."⁵¹ But the INS did not exempt all women from the buslift. In a February 1953 memo announcing the establishment of the McAllen-to-Laredo buslift the Border Patrol's San Antonio District Director stated that "[i]t [was] not desired at this time that any family groups containing women (*except prostitutes*) or children be included in the groups of aliens conveyed to Laredo."⁵² Deportees' sex was not the only thing that mattered in determining how the Service deported them; the INS also made normative judgments about women's behavior to distinguish between "good" women and "bad" women, and then implemented policies that only offered relief, albeit limited, to the former.

Some Border Patrol agents argued against the policy of excluding any women and families from the buslift. In April 1953, an agent in the Rio Grande Valley reported that his colleagues "consider the bus lift operation as a joke inasmuch as the officers take only single men to be returned voluntarily at Laredo." At the time women comprised an

⁵¹ Or perhaps the INS believed women and children were more deserving of compassion and/or posed less of a threat male deportees. Carter to Kelley, 30 January 1953, "HQ History BP Story File," NBPM.

⁵² H.P. Brady, Chief, Border Patrol Section, San Antonio, Texas, to Chief Patrol Inspectors, Laredo and McAllen, Texas, 3 February 1953, 56364/43SW3 BP Ops SW pt 3 1953 pt2, RG85, NARA1. Emphasis added. For more on gender as a normative field, see Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).

estimated sixty percent of all apprehensions in the Valley and a consensus existed that “a recent increase in the number of alien families entering the United States is hampering the effectiveness of the bus lift.” The fact that migrants were well aware of the differences in INS policy for deporting single men and families further undermined the buslift. Officials reported picking up many repeat migrants who began to claim they were with their families and thus had to be granted voluntarily departure near the point of apprehension rather than moved laterally. Officers in the Valley believed that including women and children in the buslift would significantly improve enforcement in the sector. A week later the Assistant Commissioner of the INS instructed officers in the Valley “not to hesitate to move families to Laredo, if that will discourage this traffic.”⁵³

Some people believed dividing families was bad immigration policy. In an August 1953 letter to Attorney General Herbert Brownell, a Brownsville described Texas as being in a state of anarchy, with a constant influx of migrants. “I have seen mothers deport (sic) and leave on this side their nursing babies. What is the matter with this country [the US] any way?,” he wrote. For him, policies that separated people from their loved ones were not only inhumane; they were counterproductive and led to further unauthorized migration.⁵⁴ But deportation often meant family separation, even if supposedly for humanitarian reasons. The policy of including women on the buslift changed in the lead up to Operation Wetback. After being held together at the McAllen

⁵³ Samuel A. McKone, Jr., Patrol Inspector in Charge, McAllen, Texas, to Chief Patrol Inspector, McAllen, Texas, 3 April 1953; J.W. Holland, District Director, San Antonio, Texas, to W.F. Kelly, Assistant Commissioner, Central Office, 9 April 1953, 56364/43SW3, BP Ops SW pt3 1953 pt2, RG85, NARA1.

⁵⁴ J Jones to Attorney General Brownell, 19 August 1953, Corresp re clippings on wetback situation, 56364/47, RG85, NARA1.

Detention Camp (See Figures 1.2 and 1.3), families were separated: men were transported twenty-two hours via bus to El Paso for deportation, while women, children under the age of sixteen, and the “aged, infirm or crippled” were explicitly excluded from this buslift. Instead, these “compassionate cases,” including families, were handled separately and granted voluntary departure at the nearest border port.⁵⁵ As the *McAllen Valley Evening Monitor* reported in August 1954, in some cases this led to the separation of families. “[M]en, women and children [were] being crowded into trucks and buses and then forced to sit for hours in the hot sun while the patrol unit completes a load.” Then they were separated. “In numerous cases, after a husband and father has been hauled away for his long ride to El Paso, his wife and children have been given two hours to be on their way across the border.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Carter to All Officers, Special Mobile Force, San Antonio District, 13 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 5, RG85, NARA1; Acting Chief Enforcement Officer Southwest Region to Chief Patrol Inspectors, Southwest Region, 13 September 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Bill Burrus, “Alien Family Drive Slated,” *San Antonio Express*, 29 July 1954, Page 1A, “HQ History Publicity,” NBPM.

⁵⁶ “New Definition,” *Valley Evening Monitor*, 16 August 1954, page 4, “HQ History Publicity,” NBPM; In other cases, such as the California to Nogales, Arizona buslift, the INS made clear that “family groups will not be divided.” While they exempted the same groups as on the El Paso buslift, the Service made exceptions for women and children “when in a completed family group,” and children under age 16 “if accompanied by one or more parents.” Carter to All Patrol Inspectors, El Centro, Chula Vista, and San Francisco Sectors, 9 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 6, RG85, NARA1.

FIGURE 1.2.

Families held at McAllen Detention Camp, June 1953. *Source:* TM-27-29, SRE.

FIGURE 1.3.

Mother with two children held at McAllen Detention Camp, June 1953. *Source:* TM-27-29, SRE.

The practice of excluding women and children from the buslift soon led to problems from the INS' perspective. One week into Operation Wetback Border Patrol Chief Harlon B. Carter noted that twenty-two families, "all of them with small children and babies," had been apprehended the night before and granted immediate voluntary departure. "This problem presents pathetic consequences of information disseminated by certain local people to the effect that we are not picking up illegal alien families," Carter wrote. In response, he made two recommendations: that authorization be given for "the removal of completed illegal alien families," and that the US push the Mexican government to reestablish the Mexican Border Patrol in order "to prevent such departures in violation of Mexican law." Carter added that "such a force would be particularly effective against the illegal entry into the United States of families inasmuch as they must move slowly with children and babies."⁵⁷

The following week, at the end of July 1954, the INS announced a new phase of Operation Wetback that specifically targeted families and those "employed in business, industry, and as domestic servants" in the Rio Grande Valley. Additional officers were sent to carry out the drive, and the Mexican government agreed to assist by providing transportation into the interior for 1,000 deportees per day. Instead of buslifting families

⁵⁷ Carter also listed the steps that had already been taken: strengthening of enforcement along the border, a census of families living on farms, and name of farms; and an information dissemination campaign—via U.S. and Mexican radio and planes carrying loudspeakers—informing families that they would be eligible for bracero recruitment if they left voluntarily. He later said thousands of families left voluntarily upon learning that those who did so "will find themselves able to return under procedures for legal admission, but if they stay and require formal deportation proceedings authorization for legal return is granted only in rare cases." The veracity of this statement must be questioned, although there is no way to check it. Carter to Partridge, 22 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol. 9, 7/54-9/54, RG85, NARA1; Bill Burrus, "Alien Family Drive Slated," San Antonio Express, 29 July 1954, Page 1A, "HQ History Publicity," NBPM.

to El Paso, the INS removed them across the border at Reynosa and transferred them to Mexican authorities who put them on trains headed south. The drive's impact was immediate. Over an eight-day period in August 8,876 people, or 700 per day, were apprehended in family groups in the Rio Grande Valley, and trainlifted from Reynosa. A few weeks later, during four days in early September, the INS apprehended 289 people in family groups at roadblocks and stops, and on farms and ranches; 237 people in family groups walking or crossing the river; and 163 from places of employment in trades, crafts, and industry. In total, the 689 people apprehended in family groups represented 62% of all apprehensions during those four days.⁵⁸

Similar to migrants in previous years, some Mexican men understood that being deported as a family group could help them avoid lateral deportation. As an INS officer noted, interviews with recently deported families indicated "that many male members had been previously bus lifted to El Paso and upon reentering brought their families because it is becoming well known that only unattached males are sent to El Paso while families

⁵⁸ Eleanor Mortensen, "Alien Families Being Deported," *Corpus Christi Caller*, 29 July 1954; and Bill Burrus, "Alien Family Drive Slated," *San Antonio Express*, 29 July 1954, Page 1A, "HQ History Publicity," NBPM; "800 Aliens Held Here for Start of Boat-Lift," *Valley Evening Monitor*, 13 August 1954, "Headquarters History," NBPM; Kirk to CO, 5 and 6 September 1954, 56321/448f, Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG85, NARA1; The INS reported an increase in "wives and children" entering the country without authorization around the same time. As the Chief Patrol Inspector at El Centro wrote to the District director, "Since this form of illegal entry is on the increase and will probably pose a serious problem in the near future." Thus, he "suggested that steps be taken at once to halt the practice" and urged the District Director to write a letter to the farm associations reminding them that contract laborers found guilty of encouraging the illegal entry of or harboring wives or children will be subject to deportation and cancellation of contracts. John P. Swanson, Chief Patrol Inspector, El Centro, CA, to District Director, LA, CA, 29 July 29 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol. 4, RG85, NARA1.

are only sent via train from Reynosa and a considerable number of these are able to leave the train at points not too distant from the border.”⁵⁹

The deportation of families also brings to light the fact that the INS targeted more than short-term, temporary migrants. Some Mexicans were only in the US for a period of days or weeks before being apprehended, but others had lived in the country for years, establishing themselves in their communities and accumulating material possessions. David Calles Puerto had lived in the US for three years when authorities deported him in March 1948 for entering without authorization. He returned to his home in San Luis Potosí with a 1936 Plymouth, a bicycle, a double bed, bundles of men’s and women’s clothes, a gas stove, and boxes full of kitchen items, among other things.⁶⁰ Like Calles, other migrants returned—either as deportees or by choice—with a considerable number of possessions. One family carried with them a double bed, single bed, children’s bed, porcelain dinner set, two wooden tables, three wooden chairs, and a slew of name-brand appliances: “a ‘Norge’ electric refrigerator. A ‘Maytag’ gas stove. A ‘Bendix’ electric washer. A ‘Southeastern’ gas heater. A ‘Zenith’ radio and record player. A ‘Hallicrafter’ table radio. A ‘Singer’ sewing machine. A breakfast set with a table with a plastic cover and six chairs. A ‘Speed O Matic’ electric toaster. A ‘General Electric’ coffee pot. An

⁵⁹ Kirk to CO, 5 and 6 September 1954, 56321/448f, Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG85, NARA1.

⁶⁰ Andrés Guerra G. al C. Administrador de la Aduana, 4 marzo 1948, 4-356-1948-4971, AHINM.

‘Osterizer’ blender. A ‘General Electric’ electric iron. ... A ‘Presto’ pressure cooker. A ‘Sunbeam’ mixer.’⁶¹

According to Deborah Cohen, the fact that people returned to Mexico with material possessions was, at least in part, by design. For the Mexican government, the Bracero Program and migration to the US were a way to shape migrants into modern citizens. They hoped earning higher wages and accumulating consumer products would allow migrants to bring both back to Mexico, in turn elevating their economic and social standing, expanding Mexican markets, and helping to modernize the nation. However, the Mexican government’s failure to provide adequate employment opportunities impaired the country’s ability to fulfill returned migrants’ newfound consumer desires and, ultimately, modernize. Instead, it fueled further migration and ultimately, Cohen argues, helped turn Mexican migrants into transnational subjects.⁶² Making people dependent on circular migration, whether documented or undocumented, contributed to a growing number of deportable Mexicans in the US—a population that increased exponentially after the termination of the Bracero Program.

How one returned to Mexico mattered when it came to material possessions. In an effort to encourage migrants to return, the Mexican government incentivized official repatriation by not taxing them on the items they brought back. This did not apply to

⁶¹ It is unclear whether this family was deported or chose to repatriate. Lauro Izaguirre, El Cónsul de México en McAllen, Texas, 8 febrero 1952, 4-356-1952-5173, AHINM.

⁶² Cohen, *Braceros*, 113-144, 201-221; See also Douglas Massey et al in regards to “cumulative causation,” and how migration leads to income and wealth inequality, thus spurring future repeat and new migration. Douglas S. Massey, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, and J. Edward Taylor. *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 100-6.

everyone, however, and as a result many migrants wrote to the Mexican government in hopes it would waive the taxes on their possessions. Victoria Martínez de Mora and her spouse wrote such a letter in March 1955. They had spent two years in the US as contracted workers and had accumulated various kitchen wares, a sewing machine, and they were considering buying a car or small truck to move their possessions from Kansas City, Missouri back to Mexico when their contract expired in December. “[W]e are poor workers my husband and I, and with much sacrifice we have bought these things,” she wrote, in hopes that the Secretary of the Interior would exempt them from paying taxes on the goods.⁶³

The US deported other people before they could gather their possessions or liquidate their assets. Durango native Elena Gómez, her husband, and their five children entered the US without authorization in 1944. Her husband died shortly after they arrived, and for the next five years Gómez had worked hard to provide for her school-aged children and buy and furnish a humble home in Edinburg, Texas. When US immigration officials deported her on October 5, 1949 while her children were at school, Gómez found herself separated from them and her possessions. She wrote to Mexican migration officials in Reynosa seeking the return of her children and “demanding [their] help in seeing if it is possible to sell a property that she claims to own in Edinburg, Tex.” After the Chief Mexican migration official at Reynosa asked the Mexican Consul in

⁶³ Victoria Martínez de Mora to Secretario de Gobernación, 26 marzo 1955, 4-356-1955-5288, AHINM. In addition to asking the government to allow them back into Mexico without paying taxes on material possessions, some asked the government for a land subsidy. See, for example, Ricardo Alves to Señor Angel Caravajal, Secretaría de Gobernación, México, D.F., 22 marzo 1955, 4-356-1955-5288, AHINM.

McAllen to intervene on her behalf, the Consul asked US officials if Gómez could be granted permission to re-enter the country “to fix the issues she left pending.”⁶⁴

Verónica Ordoñez Castillo lived in the US for fourteen years before officials deported her in 1953. Border Patrol officers detained her as she was getting off a train and brought her to her Kingsville, Texas home, where they detained her granddaughter as well. Like Gómez, immigration officials deported them without allowing them to get their possessions or dispose of their house. Ordoñez, whom Mexican officials described as a woman “of humble background,” wrote to authorities in hopes of being granted permission to cross the border and recover “what is legitimately hers and what she acquired only with great effort.”⁶⁵

That same year, South Texas authorities detained Juan Manuel Arroyo Z. for six weeks in the Edinburg jail. He made various requests to speak with the Mexican Consul in McAllen in hopes of being able to recover his “work tools, household goods, two radios and two record players,” before being deported. Arroyo also wanted to pay off the remaining debt he had on a \$800 “Kaiser” automobile, so that he could bring the car back to Mexico. But authorities repeatedly denied his request to speak with the Consul and deported him without any of his possessions on May 16.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Andres Guerra G. al H. Consul de México, McAllen, Tex., 6 octubre 1949; Sworn statement by Gómez, en Reynosa, Tamaulipas, 5 octubre 1949; Lazaro Izaguirre, Consul de McAllen, to C. jefe de la Oficina de Población, Reynosa, Tamps, 20 octubre 1949, 4-356-1949-5051, AHINM.

⁶⁵ Andrés Guerra G. al Cónsul de México en McAllen, Tex., 3 junio 1953, 4-356-1953-5242, AHINM.

⁶⁶ Andrés Guerra G. al H. Cónsul de México, McAllen, Tex., 19 mayo 1953, 4-356-1953-5239, AHINM. Upon arriving in Mexico Arroyo went to authorities and asked if they could help him recover his possessions. A letter from a Mexico City official in mid August left doubt as to whether his case had been resolved three months later.

Deportees sent deep into the Mexican interior sometimes had difficulty recovering their possessions as well. Thirty-year-old Rocio Juárez Bravo was airlifted from New York City to Mexico City on an Air France flight in January 1957. Friends in New York sent clothes and other small items she left behind, but Mexican customs officials would not release them without a copy of her entry form that confirmed her deportation. Juárez wrote to Mexican officials, who provided her with the necessary documentation to retrieve her belongings.⁶⁷ In 1959, Carlos Peña wrote to the Mexican consul in Sacramento, California asking that his modest possessions and back pay be sent to him in Oaxaca. Peña had not had a chance to collect either after local police arrested him for public drunkenness, detained him for twenty days, and then deported him without allowing him to return to his employer's camp.⁶⁸

In addition to separating people from material possessions, deportation and exclusion sometimes divided families, affecting not only deportees but also the many people connected to them. Family separation was a growing problem at the time, in no small part because of the increasing number of families separated by bracero and unauthorized migration to the US. Ana Rosas shows that separation became more common over time and took an increasingly heavy toll on men, women, children, families, and communities. She notes that “[b]y August 22, 1948 an estimated 194,568

⁶⁷ Certificado de entrar, F.M. 11, de la OFICINA DE POBLACION EN EL PUERTO CENTRAL AEREO, DE MEXICO, D.F., 11 julio 1957; Rocio Juarez Bravo al C. Jefe de Inmigración en el Distrito Federal, 11 julio 1957, 4-356-1957-5329, AHINM.

⁶⁸ Alvaro Domínguez V., Cónsul de México, Sacramento, Cal., al Sr. Carlos Peña (pseudonym), 18 junio 1959, TM-93-6, SRE.

Mexican men had not returned upon their contracts' expiration.”⁶⁹ María Concepción Rosales, whose husband left for the US with four other men from their Zacatecas town, wrote to President Miguel Alemán Valdés that although the “wetback passes” (bracero contracts) “are beneficial they also ruin homes for many[.] [I]n the community where I live we are 5 women that cry oceans of tears because of our abandonment and the lack of bread for our children.”⁷⁰

Deportation furthered family separation, but for people on the other side of the border. Forty-two-year-old Lorenzo Cordero Carranza, originally from Irapuato, Guanajuato, was separated from his five children after being deported.⁷¹ When María Fernanda Prieto was deported in February 1942 her three-year-old daughter remained in the US. While she was detained in a Brownsville jail she tried to arrange for the return of her daughter, who was in the care of her mother-in-law, and of some of her clothes—all she had to her name. If authorities could not arrange for that, Prieto asked if she could be released just long enough to get her daughter and possessions, “a request that honestly I never thought they were going to reject on humanitarian grounds,” she wrote. Instead, immigration officials deported her. A month later, she wrote to the top Mexican migration official in Matamoros:

“[S]eeing as neither my first efforts, nor my begging after, nor prayers while they carried out my deportation had the slightest echo in those authorities, it is now that I write to you with the plea that I hope will

⁶⁹ Rosas, “Flexible Families,” 194.

⁷⁰ Loza, “Braceros on the Boundaries,” 113-4.

⁷¹ File on Lorenzo Cordero Carranza, 1943, 4-356-1943-4304, AHINM.

result, either directly or through the Mexican Consulate at Brownsville or McAllen, in the return of my daughter and my clothes.”⁷²

In response to her request, the Mexican migration official wrote to the Consul in McAllen, sharing Prieto’s letter and describing “the anguish and despair afflicting this poor woman.” He called on the Consul to rely on his sense of humanity, justice, and patriotism to offer official assistance to “our abandoned compatriot who lacks all of the necessary resources to help herself.”⁷³

In other cases parents were reunited with their children or able to arrange for their return to Mexico. Twenty-three-year-old Ana María Perales, originally from Veracruz, had lived in the US for more than five years and had two boys with Alejandro Benítez Alvarado, a US citizen who worked at a General Motors plant in Ohio. In September 1955 Perales wrote to the Mexican Consul in Detroit, asking the Mexican government for permission to bring her two US-citizen boys, aged 2 and 1, with her in the event she was deported. When US immigration authorities served her with a deportation order nine months later, Mexican authorities granted the boys one-year visas.⁷⁴

But a parent’s deportation sometimes left children in limbo and subject to both countries’ inefficient migration bureaucracies. Twelve-year-old Yxari Mondragón Nuñez’s future was unclear for a period of months in the summer and fall of 1960. After

⁷² It should be noted that at the end of her letter Prieto indicated that she was separated from her husband and in the process of finalizing their divorce. She also claimed that he took their daughter from her ten months prior. María Fernanda Prieto, Matamoros, Tamps., to Sr. Jefe de Migración, Ciudad Matamoros, Tamps., 20 de marzo de 1942, 4-356-1942-4150, AHINM.

⁷³ Andrés Guerra G al C. Consul de México, McAllen, Tex., 21 marzo 1942, 4-356-1942-4150, AHINM.

⁷⁴ Ana María Perales to Alberto Becerra Sierra, Cónsul de Mexico, Detroit, MI, 21 September 1955; Consulado Mexicano, Detroit, MI al Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, DF, 3 mayo 1956; Depto. De Migración al Consul de Mexico, Detroit, Mich, E.U.A., no date, 4-356-1956-5308, AHINM.

US officials stated that her mentally ill, widowed mother would be deported, the Mexican Consul in Los Angeles sought her repatriation and inquired if a Mexico City social services institution could care for her. Mexican officials exchanged correspondence over a period of six months, requesting more information and additional documentation in order to figure out whether she could qualify for the foster system or for adoption. All the while, Mondragón “remained helpless” in Los Angeles, according to the Consul, until, finally, officials located other relatives who took her in.⁷⁵

The case of Rodolfo Lozoya offers important insights into what family separation meant for husbands and wives, parents and children. It also sheds light on how Cold War politics affected immigration policy and, as a result, individuals and families. Born in Durango, Mexico on May 18, 1908, Rodolfo Lozoya first went to the US in 1928 in search of work. Lozoya, a 5’10” man of medium build with black hair, a dark complexion, and pockmarked cheeks, later enlisted in the army and served three years in the US Air Force during World War II. During the war immigration officials concluded “that Mr. Lozoya is in this country illegally and is subject to deportation,” but decided to wait until he was no longer a member of the armed forces to deport him.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Dr. Francisco Villagrán al Direc. Gral. Del Serv. Consular. Departamento de Protección, 20 septiembre 1960; Edmundo González, El Consul General de Los Angeles, al C. Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, DIRECCION GENERAL DEL SERVICIO CONSULAR, México, D.F., 25 agosto 1960; Lic. Carlos Díaz de León al Srio. De Salubridad y Asistencia, Direccion de Asistencia Materno Infantil, 6 diciembre 1960; Dr. Manuel Mateos Fournier, Direccion de Asistencia Materno Infantil al Sr. Lic. Carlos Díaz de León, Sub-Jefe del Departamento Demográfico, Secretaria de Gobernación, 12 enero 1961; Lic. Carlos Díaz de León to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Departamento de Protección, 27 enero 1961; Dr. Francisco Villagrán al Secretario de Gobernación, Departamento Demográfico, México, D.F., 24 noviembre 1960, 4-356-1960-5377, AHINM.

⁷⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice arrest record for expulsion hearing, 11 February 1957, file in possession of author, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (hereafter, FOIA); “Questionnaire,” Midwest Committee for Protection of Foreign Born (hereafter, MCPFB), Box 7,

FIGURE 1.4.

Rodolfo Lozoya (left), and Consuelo Lozoya and seven kids (right).
Source: MCPFB/Lozoya, Rodolfo, Box 7, Folder 13, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

For whatever reason, officials did not deport Lozoya after the war and four years later he married his wife, Consuelo, who had three children from a former marriage. The couple went on to have four more kids and lived in Chicago, where Lozoya worked as a sheet metal worker and shop steward at Grand Sheet Metal Products Co. It was not uncommon for him to miss a few months of work each year because “chemical burns suffered in the Air Force cause a rash to break out on his body at frequent intervals.” An active trade-unionist and member of the Local 1150, United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers, Lozoya’s labor activism and past membership in the Communist Party

Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” Chicago History Museum (hereafter, CHM), Chicago, Illinois; Earl G. Harrison, Commissioner INS, to The Adjutant General, War Department, Washington, D.C., 15 June 1943, file in possession of author, obtained through FOIA.

eventually led to his exclusion from the US and separation from his US-citizen wife and seven children. He had lived in the country for twenty-eight years.⁷⁷ (See Figure 1.4)

In January 1957 Lozoya learned that his mother was seriously ill and he decided to travel to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua to be with her. Just over a week later, after it became clear that his mother would survive, Lozoya tried to cross the border to make train reservations for his return trip to Chicago. But INS officials at El Paso served him with a temporary exclusion order under Section 235(c) of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act, which called for the “Removal of Aliens Inadmissible on Security and Related Grounds.” Moreover, officials informed him he could face deportation and possible criminal charges if he attempted to re-enter.⁷⁸

As Carl Bon Tempo has observed, the McCarran-Walter Act “revealed the centrality of Cold War national security concerns ... and the importance of anticommunism to the politics of immigration policy.” Even though it conflicted with the US’s self-professed ideals of civil liberties and freedom of expression, by the early 1950s anticommunism “had become a central aspect of national identity, national politics, and partisan electoral strategies, which, in turn, made it central to the immigration issue.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Although in this case Lozoya’s politics played a significant role in the U.S.’s decision to exclude him, it should be noted that politics played little-to-no role in the vast majority deportation and exclusion cases. They may have received a disproportionate amount of attention, however, if taken up by liberal-left organizations. “Questionnaire.”; MCPFB Press Release, undated; Rodolfo Lozoya to Carl Braden, 2 May 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM.

⁷⁸ “Questionnaire.”; Ruth Heit, Executive Secretary Chicago MCPFB, to Rose, 7 February 1957; B.R. Oates, Acting Chief, Entry & Departure Section, Excluding Officer, to Rodolfo Lozoya-Castaneda, 21 January 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM.

⁷⁹ Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), 8, 30-32. For more on immigration policy and deportation during the McCarthy era see Ellen Schrecker, “Immigration and Internal Security: Political Deportation during the McCarthy Era,” *Science and Society* 60.4 (Winter 1996–1997): 393–426.

The Lozoyas' case offers a window into the tension in mid-century immigration policy between anticommunism at all costs, on the one hand, and the defense of human rights and core postwar values like family unity and service to one's country, on the other.

On January 26, Consuelo wrote to the acting chief of the INS at El Paso, imploring him to allow her husband to re-enter the United States. "I only want you to know that I have no means of support. I or shall I say my husband + I have seven (7) children. One is constantly sick and if my husband does not return home soon he will lose his job here," she wrote. "In the mean time my children are here suffering because we need him very much. ... Again I am pleading with you, please let me husband return to his family. I assure you he is a good man." She appended a P.S. to the end of the letter stating that she and her seven children were all US citizens.⁸⁰

The Midwest Committee for Protection of Foreign Born (MCPFB) took on Lozoya's case and attempted to win popular support by focusing on the family separation angle. Like its parent organization, the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born, the MCPFB, founded in 1936, aided immigrants and fought for the constitutional rights of foreign-born people. In the 1950s, the organization dedicated much of its work toward defending alleged Communists and people targeted for deportation or denaturalization under the McCarran-Walter Act. The MCPFB helped the Lozoyas find and pay for legal representation, organized benefit events to raise money for the family, and got Herbert Biberman, producer of the film "Salt of the Earth," to write a letter on the

⁸⁰ Consuelo Lozoya to B.R. Oates, Acting Chief, INS, El Paso, Texas, 26 January 1957, file in possession of author, obtained through FOIA. It should be noted that the USCIS FOIA office censored part of Consuelo's "P.S.," omitting the line where she states she is a U.S. citizen, which can clearly be inferred from what was left uncensored: "+ so are my children. All from Chicago, Ill."

family's behalf. "Mr. and Mrs. Lozoya are the kind of Americans upon whom all that is glorious in our country is built, is being built and will be built," Biberman wrote. "Their separation under the conditions you describe will hurt our country and our people — we need every loving, decent, whole family we have bred."⁸¹

The MCPFB also published articles and pamphlets criticizing the draconian and arbitrary nature of the McCarran-Walter Act. According to the MCPFB, under the McCarran-Walter Act "a Mexican-American is deprived of his rights as a resident of the United States. No matter how long he has lived here, it is classified as a new entry every time a Mexican-American re-enters the United States." The MCPFB later called for the McCarran-Walter Act to be revised so that anyone who had been in the country for five years or longer was exempted from exclusion, deportation, or denaturalization. This would eliminate cases like Lozoya's, which, in the Committee's opinion, represented the "meanness and cruelty of the whole witch hunt in America, especially as it applies to Mexican-Americans."⁸²

Lozoya expressed bewilderment as to why US immigration officials excluded him since he had traveled to Mexico in 1952 and 1956 as well, the second time with his family.

⁸¹ Cena Pro-Defense de Rodolfo Lozoya, Club Lazaro Cardenas, 9 March 1957; Memorandum on Lozoya Case, MCPFB, 2 May 1957; Ruth Heit, Executive Secretary Chicago MCPFB, to Rose, 7 February 1957; Heit to Joseph A. Calamia, Esq., 19 February 1957; Statement by Herbert Biberman, 22 April 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, "Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958]," CHM. Biberman had heard Lozoya speak in El Paso a few years before and had almost cast him as one of the leads in his movie.

⁸² MCPFB Press Release, undated; MCPFB Press Release, September 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, "Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958]," CHM. In a press release months later the MCPFB expressed a statement akin to this one. "The persecution of the Lozoya family proves in the crassest way that the foreign born worker under the Walter McCarran law can be called before the Immigration Department at any time. He can be bullied into becoming a stool pigeon under the threat of deportation, denaturalization or both."

“I can’t help but to come myself with this question: If they knew that I was a real dangerous man, why didn’t they call my attention in Chicago? They would find me in my house or at the shop where I have been working for more than seven years. Every January I miss half a day’s work in order to go and register as an alien. I file my income tax every year. ... I have never been jailed nor convicted of anything. My record is clear as an alien and worker, and an active union member I always will be.”⁸³

When the US did exclude Lozoya in January 1957, the fact that he told authorities he had once belonged to the Communist Party complicated his case. Given that, Lozoya’s lawyer felt that naming names was the only chance he had at being readmitted. “I know that there are many Mexican people who will be put in jail. Some of them you know they have large families,” Lozoya wrote to his wife. “These agents want to convert me into a finger man, like the famous Matusso [almost certainly Harvey Matusow] who landed in jail anyways ... But I do not and will not point out any of my friends just because this lawyer wants me to or says that I should. I know better.”⁸⁴

In the same letter, Lozoya offered a strong critique of the lack of freedom of expression and political opinion in the McCarthy-era United States.

“It is known that in a democratic Republic like the United States there is always and there should be some members of such families that do not agree with the majority and their opinion of minority should be respected by the majority. In democracy there is and there should always be tolerance and respect in the family that composes it, but if this is eliminated by force on the minority without discussion, then this is no democracy.

⁸³ Rodolfo Lozoya to Carl Braden, 2 May 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM. (Translated by MCPFB)

⁸⁴ MCPFB to Rodolfo Lozoya, 7 May 1957; Rodolfo Lozoya to Mrs. Rodolfo Lozoya, no date, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM. (Translated by MCPFB.)

Speaking of the family that forms this great Republic, I am tempted to ask Sen. McCarran and Sen. Walters and all those Senators that approve this 'law' what would they do if one of their children does not agree on something that the majority agree on? Would they wait until they leave their home (on an errand) and then send them a note telling them they are 'Excluded from their families' home' on charges of not agreeing with the majority of the family? ... I am very much tempted to ask these men of politics if this is what they would do to their children, without an open discussion, with the necessity to make 'laws' that cut their speech and leave their mouths open for not agreeing with the majority?

That type of law does not belong to a democracy, those laws are for nations with dictators."⁸⁵

Lozoya's exclusion had a significant material impact on his family. "A woman and seven children have been forced onto the relief rolls in this city because their breadwinner is barred from re-entering the United States," a MCPFB press release noted. When Consuelo Lozoya first applied for aid multiple people recommended she take the children to Mexico instead, but, she declared, "'I made it plain that I would do no such thing.'" The first monthly relief payment was for \$89, hardly adequate for a mother and seven children who regularly spent \$50 per month on milk alone. Each week Rodolfo and his extended family in Juárez sent Consuelo and the children the most they could, but it did not amount to much. As the months passed the family's situation did not improve. In September 1957, eight months into the family's separation, Consuelo wrote to Patricia

⁸⁵ Rodolfo Lozoya to Mrs. Rodolfo Lozoya, no date, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, "Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958]," CHM. (Translated by MCPFB. I corrected a few typos in the MCPFB's translation.)

Ellis, Secretary of the MCPFB: “Hi Pat, Here’s wishing and hoping everything is fine. So am I. But I need some money. How about it. Thanks lots. Consuelo. P.S. Send it now.”⁸⁶

The physical and psychological effects and impact on Rodolfo and Consuelo, and on their relationship, were also considerable. In mid-February Rodolfo wrote to the El Paso INS office notifying them that he had to miss his scheduled hearing due to “a chronic skin condition.” “Perhaps,” he wrote, “it’s a result of what’s worrying me—my family ... I’m the only one that provides for everyone.”⁸⁷ And after four months of being apart, Consuelo wrote to Rodolfo to let him know she was nervous and not well, and had started going to a doctor.⁸⁸ Rodolfo’s response a couple of weeks later indicated the psychological toll the situation had taken on him, as well.

“Well, negra, you should know that I’m a bit desperate since I haven’t received a letter from you since May 30th and I cannot help but think—not wanting to, that you aren’t well, that you’ll be nervous from thinking a lot about something that thinking will not be able to resolve. Well, the more one thinks and rehashes the issue, the more tense and hopeless one sees the situation. There’s no point in thinking about it, because they have forced us to live in this situation that we didn’t seek out, we haven’t wanted nor want, but that for ‘virtue’ of the ‘law’ we have to swallow this bitter pill in our life that is no life at all.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Consuelo and the children may have been visiting Rodolfo, since they did so for the first time sometime in the fall and the letter is postmarked from El Paso. MCPFB Press Release, undated; Rodolfo Lozoya to Consuelo Lozoya, 14 Julio 1957; Consuelo Lozoya to Pat Ellis, 5 September 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM.

⁸⁷ Rodolfo Lozoya to INS, El Paso, Texas, 14 February 1957, file in possession of author, obtained through FOIA. (Translated by AG)

⁸⁸ Rodolfo Lozoya to Consuelo Lozoya, 20 junio 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM. (Translated by AG)

⁸⁹ Rodolfo Lozoya to Consuelo Lozoya, 10 Junio 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM. (Translated by AG)

When Consuelo still had not responded to him a week and a half later, and three weeks since her last letter, Rodolfo wrote her again in a state of desperation.

“I continue to wait for some news from you to know how all of you are— what’s happening, why you don’t write. If you’re sick and can’t write, I think the least you could do would be ask someone for a favor to write a few lines. ... You should understand that after long weeks in which you haven’t written me, it makes me think things that perhaps I shouldn’t think. Your silence has made me so nervous to the point that I read the newspaper and have no clue what the articles I read are about — I’m thinking about, about what will happen to you — about what will happen to one of the kids or what will happen to everyone. In the end I think about the beginning and development of the older ones — the impulses that they may not be able to control, in the young ones who always learn from the older ones, who also will feel nervous and confused. I especially think about Angela [their epileptic daughter], la pobrecita, seeing the folly and chaos of everyone else will have a greater affect on her epileptic suffering ... and you dealing with all of this mess that your silence has made me think about.”⁹⁰

Consuelo’s June 18th response must have put Rodolfo somewhat at ease, since his next letter included descriptions of the hot weather in Juárez and fact he heard that a recent rainstorm in Chicago had brought traffic to a halt. Still, her not writing for a few weeks left tension between them, and Rodolfo let her know that “[h]ere everyone asks me why you don’t write and I have tried to excuse you, telling them that you’ve been sick and hungry.” He closed the letter by telling her that although he could not force her to write, “There’s one thing that you should remember and that’s that the longer you go without

⁹⁰ Rodolfo Lozoya to Consuelo Lozoya, 20 junio 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM. (Translated by AG)

writing the worse the situation will be for everyone. If you're sick, somebody can write for you if you ask a favor.”⁹¹

As the Lozoya case makes clear, deportation and exclusion affected the many people connected to deportees in addition to deportees themselves. In some instances, deportees' family members played an active role in their relatives' cases, such as when Mexican men and women, exercising what Jocelyn Olcott has referred to as “revolutionary citizenship,” called on the Mexican state to intervene on behalf of loved ones in the United States.⁹² More generally, this mirrored a broader trend of Mexican women writing to government officials in hopes of locating family members who had migrated internally or to the US. One woman argued that ““asserting their right to demand government support was critical to defining their membership in Mexican society and protecting their extended immigrant families' interests.””⁹³ According to Ana Rosas, an estimated 859,219 people traveled to bracero selection centers to personally deliver letters inquiring about their family members' whereabouts, and around 3,500,000

⁹¹ In Consuelo's June 18 letter to Rodolfo she told him that she and the kids had been ““sick with sore throats and hungry but still alive.”” Rodolfo Lozoya to Consuelo Lozoya, 14 Julio 1957, MCPFB, Box 7, Folder 13, “Lozoya, Rodolfo (Deportation Case File) 1957 [1958],” CHM. (Translated by AG) Lozoya eventually returned or was readmitted to the U.S. and died in April 1984. But it is unclear how his case was resolved. “U.S., Social Security Death Index, 1935-Current,” Ancestry.com. In future iterations of this chapter I plan to include more information about the Lozoya case, as it becomes available.

⁹² Olcott describes revolutionary Mexican citizenship as less a collection of laws than “a set of social, cultural, and political processes that both shaped and refracted contemporary political discourses and practices.” She argues that men and women exercised their citizenship in collective, public, and deliberative ways, and emphasizes that women activists insisted on being recognized as political, “public” actors. Moreover, by fulfilling their obligations as revolutionary citizens—in this case as braceros and braceros' family members—men and women expected the Mexican state to fulfill its revolutionary commitments of ensuring citizens' well being. See Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); See also, Cohen, *Braceros*, (2011).

⁹³ Adela Hernandez, quoted in Rosas, “Flexible Families,” 394; On Mexican women petitioning President to help locate husbands see also Loza, “Braceros on the Boundaries,” 113.

submitted letters between July 1954 and December 1956 (during and in the aftermath of “Operation Wetback”). As one woman noted, more than a decade of family separation had taken its toll: ““All of us wanted the government to do something for our immigrant relatives and us on the other side, so that we did not feel so vulnerable and willing to continue working and living with so much uncertainty. Being a ‘wetback’ or bracero was not fair to our families.””⁹⁴

In addition to people calling on the Mexican government to help locate migrant relatives, parents—mothers in particular—sometimes sought the release and return of detained and deported family members. The subjective and performative nature of these women’s claims reflected their use of gender as part of their repertoire of citizenship. When fifty-eight-year-old Elise Gamez found out her nineteen-year-old son Guillermo was being detained in Edinburg, Texas for crossing without authorization she traveled to the border to seek his release. The head of Mexican migration at Reynosa noted that Gamez, who he described as “very poor,” asked the Mexican Cónsul in McAllen to intervene on her son’s behalf and planned on returning to the Reynosa migration office daily. “She will wait here until his return so that they can go back to Monterrey together and be with their family.”⁹⁵ Francisca Rojas also went to Reynosa migration officials asking for their help in securing the release of her daughter Diana, who had been in the Edinburg prison for two months.⁹⁶ On the same day, Alma Mendoza de González, “a

⁹⁴ Rosas, “Flexible Families,” 400-4.

⁹⁵ Andrés Guerra G., El Jefe de Servicio de Población, C. Reynosa, Tamps., to Consul de México, McAllen, Texas, 14 Abril 1953; Guerra G. to Consul de México, McAllen, Texas, 16 Abril 1953, 4-356-1953-5214, AHINM.

⁹⁶ Guerra G. to Cónsul de México, McAllen, Tex., 6 mayo 1953, 4-356-1953-5228, AHINM.

most humble woman,” showed up in the Reynosa office with her eight-month-old malnourished granddaughter. Her daughter, Guadalupe, had crossed into the US a month earlier and she had not heard from her since. Mendoza pleaded with Mexican officials to help find her daughter, asking them to contact the Edinburg prison and other immigration detention centers.⁹⁷ Cecilia Velázquez, who had lived with her three sons in Mission, Texas for nine years before being deported, hoped Mexican officials would be able to help her locate her oldest son, Juan, who was detained in Edinburg for an immigration violation. She also went to Mexican migration officials every day in hopes of receiving news. Nearly three months later officials indicated that he had been serving a ninety-day sentence and would be released in a few days.⁹⁸ In another case two mothers contacted Mexican migration officials in Nogales, Sonora, desperate for news about their sons, Benito Prieto Palomo and Rafael Martínez Prieto. The boys, who were minors, were deported from the US for entering without authorization and were held in the custody of Mexican police. It was not until two months later, when their mothers found out they were in jail and called for their immediate release, that the authorities set the boys free.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Guerra G. to Cónsul de México, McAllen, Tex., 6 mayo 1953, 4-356-1953-5227, AHINM.

⁹⁸ It is unclear whether Velázquez was still around to receive this news, but it seems unlikely since a month after his supposed release another memo was sent to the McAllen Cónsul asking if Juan had been deported. Guerra G. to Cónsul de México, McAllen, Tex., 30 abril 1953; Guerra G. to Cónsul de México, McAllen, Tex., 6 mayo 1953; Manuel Aguilar, P.O. del Secretario, El Director General, to Secretario de Gobernación, Direc. Gral. De Población. Departamento de Migración. México, D.F. 23 Julio 1953; Prof. Jorge Del Río Calderón, El Jefe de Servicio de Población, to Cónsul General de México, McAllen, 2 septiembre 1953, 4-356-1953-5226, AHINM.

⁹⁹ Jose Maria Soto Lopez, El Jefe Del Servicio de Población, Nogales, Son., al C. Andres Landa y Piña, Director General de Población, Secretaría de Gobernación, México, D.F., 13 julio 1953; Soto Lopez al Gobernación, Jefatura Servicios Inspección, México, D.F., 22 julio 1953; Lince Medellín, Jefe Servicios Inspección de la Secretaría de Gobernación, Dir. Gral. De Población, Depto. de Migración, México, D.F., al Inspección, Migración, Nogales, Son., 28 julio 1953; Soto Lopez al Gobernación, Jefe Servicios Inspección, México, D.F., 30 julio 1953, 4-356-1953-5238, AHINM.

In other instances, Mexicans called for the apprehension and deportation of their family members rather than advocating on their behalf. This was most often the case with wives who discovered that their husbands had found new partners in the US, and pointed to the fact that, in some cases, people used deportation in unexpected ways. In 1947 INS officials deported Ariel Zambrano Otero after “his legitimate wife,” Adriana Robredo de Zambrano, accused him of bigamy. He had also entered the country without authorization.¹⁰⁰ In another case, US authorities turned Pancho Villalobos Samora over to Mexican officials at Reynosa, where they also provided a warrant from a judge in Jalisco that called for his deportation—at his wife’s request—for having abandoned his home and committed adultery.¹⁰¹ In 1948, Juana Estévez de Llano, of Monterrey, Nuevo León, wrote to Mexican officials asking them to have her husband deported from Harlingen, Texas, where she said he was living illegally. He initially went in search of work, she wrote, “[b]ut what he earns is for him and he doesn’t send anything, because according to him he lives with a woman he says passes for his wife but that’s not true.” She continued, “Knowing that he has good work and doesn’t send us anything I don’t think it’s right that that woman is stealing food from my children.” Estévez asked that authorities return her husband so he could provide for his family and “not laugh in the face of the law.” In

¹⁰⁰ Alfonso Guerra, El Oficial Mayor, México, D.F., al C. Secretario de Gobernación, 26 agosto 1947, 4-356-1947-4939, AHINM.

¹⁰¹ Andrés Guerra G., El Jefe de Servicio de Población, C. Reynosa, Tamps., to Agente del Ministerio Público del Fuero Común, Palacio Municipal, D.F., 16 abril 1953, 4-356-1953-5216, AHINM.

hopes of expediting the matter, she sent authorities a photo and the exact address where they could find him.¹⁰²

Tania Bernal called for the deportation of her husband as a way of protecting herself. In March 1953 she wrote to Mexican president Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and asked him to push the US to deport her abusive husband, Gerónimo, who was working at the American Crystal Sugar Company in Oxnard, California and in the process of fixing his legal status. “He abandoned me six years ago in the most dreadful misery with my three little children,” Bernal explained. He also threatened to kill her if she said anything to authorities about him being in the US illegally. When she ignored her husband’s threats and said she was going to report him, he and his brother threw her into a car with California license plates, took her to a deserted place, and beat her. “While one held my arms behind my back Gerónimo tried to suffocate me and he would have succeeded if not for the timely appearance of three passersby that saved me, causing them to flee and leave me there alone.” Bernal told the President that her husband and his brother should be put in the infamous Islas Mariás prison, and closed the letter saying, “I hope to God and you Mr. President that I get justice.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Andres Guerra G., Jefe de Servicio de Población, Reynosa, Tamps., al Consul de México, McAllen, Texas, 6 septiembre 1948; Juana Estévez de Llano to Jefe de Aduana, no date, 4-356-1948-5013, AHINM. For an example of a woman in the United States calling for the deportation of her husband’s girlfriend, see Oral history with Bertha A. Martínez, 14 April 1996, Louise Kerr Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

¹⁰³ Ten days later an official from Relaciones Exteriores responded to Bernal and told her she should write them instead to call for extradition of her husband. Tania Bernal al Presidente de la República, Sr. Don Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Palacio Nacional, México, D.F., 21 de marzo de 1953; Lic. Gilberto Suarez Arvizo, SRE, to Tania Bernal, 31 marzo 1953, 4-356-1953-5211, AHINM.

Despite the fact that scholars often treat migration and deportation as phenomena limited to men, this chapter shows that their reach has been much broader. The history of Mexican migration and deportation during this period is not just the history of braceros, or even of temporary, male agricultural laborers regardless of status. Men, women, children, and entire families migrated and were deported. This sometimes meant the division of families or the uprooting of people from their communities and social networks. And, in some cases immigration officials' normative judgments about women shaped how the INS deported them. Moreover, migration and deportation not only affected migrants and deportees, but also the many people connected to them. Cold War immigration policies sometimes led to family separation and had real economic and psychological effects on husbands and wives, parents and children. In addition, as this chapter has shown, women in Mexico, often from modest economic backgrounds, were political actors who called on the Mexican state to secure the release of their children in some cases, and effect the deportation of their husbands in others. Migrants and their families accurately perceived the heterogeneity of the US and Mexican federal governments and recognized that while one bureaucracy was executing deportations another could be appealed to for assistance.

All together, the evidence presented points to the need to rethink deportation's gendered history and historians' understanding of Mexican migration to the US between 1942 and 1964. Referring to it as the "bracero era," a period of documented, male labor migration that some scholars have described as the precursor to the "undocumented era"

(1965 to 1986), distorts and elides the dynamics and realities of the period, as well as the historical import. Instead, we should understand these years as the period in which migration flows—whether authorized or unauthorized, male or female, young or old—increased and regularized, in turn leading to the growth of the federal immigration bureaucracy and an unprecedented number of deportations. Indeed, this twenty-two year span laid the foundation for migration patterns, cross-border connections, and immigration enforcement practices that continued long after the Bracero Program's end.

CHAPTER 2

“OPERATION WETBACK” AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MODERN DEPORTATION REGIME

From 1943 to 1954 the number of apprehensions the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) made ballooned from 11,000 to more than one million.¹⁰⁴ According to the Service, this 100-fold increase—which could be attributed to the concurrent growth of documented and undocumented migration during the first twelve years of the Bracero Program—culminated in “Operation Wetback.” Launched in the summer of 1954 under the direction of newly appointed Commissioner Joseph M. Swing, Operation Wetback sought to regulate the flow of agricultural laborers by reducing the number of unauthorized migrants and increasing the number of braceros. Although it is commonly remembered as the largest deportation campaign in United States history, scholars such as Juan Ramon García have pointed out that the vast majority of the one million-plus deportations in fiscal year 1954 actually occurred *before* the INS had even announced the special operation.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 91. Statistics by Fiscal Year (FY), which ran from July 1-June 30: for 1943: 11,175; 1950: 468,339; 1954: 1,089,583.

¹⁰⁵ Juan Ramon García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 227-232; See also Manuel García y Griego, “The Bracero Policy Experiment: U.S.-Mexican Responses to Mexican Labor Migration, 1942-1955” (Ph.D. Diss., UCLA,

But Operation Wetback, more than any other incident or event, offers important insights into the origins of the modern deportation regime. Rather than just a deportation drive along the US-Mexico border, Operation Wetback targeted people living in established communities in the interior of the country, as well. An examination of the campaign sheds light on the distinct challenges of interior enforcement and the variety of methods—from formal deportations (removals), to “voluntary” departures (returns), to scare tactic-driven publicity campaigns meant to encourage people to “self-deport”—immigration authorities have employed to effect expulsions over the last sixty years. It also raises important questions about the politics of how and why government statistics are produced, and reflects both the limits of state power and the federal immigration bureaucracy’s efforts to push at and exceed those limits, by whatever means necessary. This chapter reveals that many of the policies, tactics, and means of deportation that are still in use today have their roots in the middle of the twentieth century, when the contemporary deportation regime emerged.

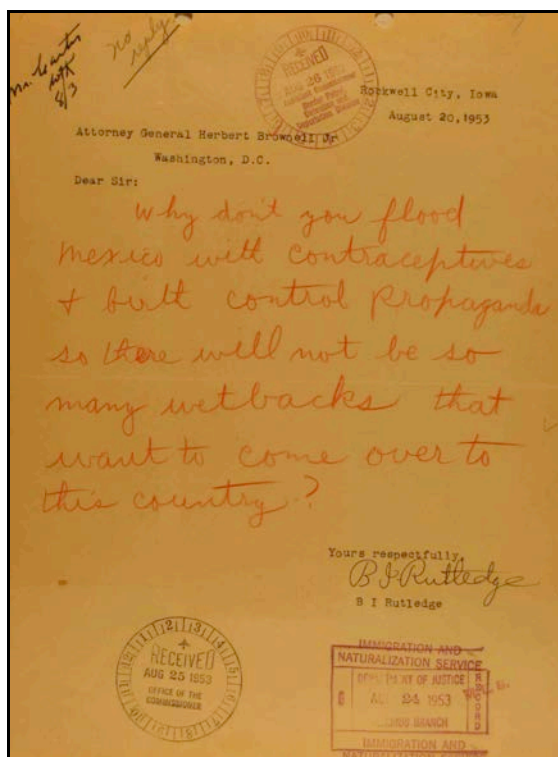
1988), 794-796; Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2010), 171-173; Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Indeed, most apprehensions resulting from Operation Wetback counted toward FY 1955, during which the INS apprehended less than 222,000 Mexicans for the entire year. (The exact figure was 221,674. Of course, it is impossible to say how many of these apprehensions resulted from, and how many were independent of, Operation Wetback.) According to Commissioner Swing, this drop in apprehensions reflected the Service’s strength and Operation Wetback’s success. Writing in the 1955 Annual Report, he declared, “The so-called ‘wetback’ problem no longer exists. ... The border has been secured.” See Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Annual Report, 1955, 15 and 91.

In the postwar years, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans, both with and without contracts (and sometimes in response to active labor recruitment from north of the border), migrated to the United States in search of work. The “wetback crisis” arose out of this context and came to define immigration policy in the early 1950s. The 1954 INS Annual Report described unauthorized migration as if it was a natural disaster that required immediate attention: “the influx of aliens illegally entered from Mexico appear[ed] like an incoming tide, with mounting waves of people entering the country, and being sent back, and returning again but in ever greater volume, and always reaching further inland with each incoming wave.”¹⁰⁶ News outlets disparaged unauthorized migrants, referring to them as “wetbacks” and essentializing their physical and psychological beings. A May 1951 *LIFE* magazine article titled “Wetbacks Swarm In” noted the supposed “inexhaustible perseverance of the wetback” and concluded that because of “the patient invasion force” even the Border Patrol’s “most valiant efforts” would prove to be “exasperatingly futile.” The “wetback,” the article continued, undercut domestic wages and would never be unemployed, “because he can weed a 1,000-foot furrow without once straightening up, and he willingly works with the short-handled hoe which, so much more efficient around delicate plants, tortures American spines.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ INS Annual Report, 1954, 2.

¹⁰⁷ “Wetbacks Swarm In,” *LIFE*, 21 May 1951, *Trabajadores Migratorios* hereafter, TM), “Trabajadores ilegales-CA,” Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter, SRE), México, D.F.

FIGURE 2.1.



Source: 56364/47, Corresp re clippings on wetback situation, RG 85, NARA1.

Organizations and private citizens also scapegoated unauthorized migrants. Dr. Hector P. Garcia, founder of the American GI Forum, a Mexican American veterans' organization, wrote to Attorney General Herbert Brownell in August 1953 to "urge that whole border from California to Texas be effectively patrolled and closed to wetback invasion which is undermining our American standard of living."¹⁰⁸ Others wrote to Brownell with specific ideas for how to address the problem. A Phoenix man suggested offering "a \$50.00 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons illegally in this country." He recommended placing those apprehended in "two very large

¹⁰⁸ Garcia to Brownell, 15 August 1953, 56364/47, Corresp re clippings on wetback situation, Record Group (RG) 85, National Archives and Records Administration 1 (hereafter, NARA1), Washington, D.C.

Prisoner of War camps in Arizona” (with a total capacity of around 50,000), and then sentencing them to hard labor. “If these ‘Wet-backs’ had to work one year at hard labor without being paid for it, I am quite certain that this would be a deterrent (sic) in so far as any new arrivals are concerned.”¹⁰⁹ And, in a handwritten note to the Attorney General, an Iowa man asked, “Why don’t you flood Mexico with contraceptives + birth control propaganda so there will not be so many wetbacks that want to come over to this country?”¹¹⁰ (See Figure 2.1)

Operation Wetback built on previous deportation efforts. As Kelly Lytle Hernández has noted, the Border Patrol organized “Special Mexican Deportation Parties” as early as 1944. In February and March 1950 the INS carried out “Operations ‘Wetback’” in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. During this initiative, groups of twenty officers from different Border Patrol stations formed and, with the help of “busses, trucks, radio equipment, cars and typewriters,” surrounded “a pre-determined area at about daybreak.” Half of the task force “block[ed] all roads leading into and out of the area and then the border patrol plane [was] sent in over the area and the remaining half of the task force move[d] into the area and with the help of the airplane, commence[d] rounding up all wetbacks they [could] find.” According to the local Border Patrol chief, the task force and tactics employed throughout the district “represent[ed] a new type of patrol operation,” which was then replicated throughout the US-Mexico

¹⁰⁹ Albert B. Colby to Brownell, 20 August 1953, 56364/47, Corresp re clippings on wetback situation, RG 85, NARA1.

¹¹⁰ B.I. Rutledge to Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr, 20 August 1953, 56364/47, Corresp re clippings on wetback situation, RG 85, NARA1.

border region.¹¹¹ Two years later, the INS executed a concerted deportation drive in the Chicago area, apprehending 1,220 people (1,202 of them Mexican) from January to mid March 1952.¹¹² In some cases, US and Mexican migration officials collaborated in campaigns that not only removed people from the United States, but relocated them deep into the Mexican interior.¹¹³

Growing concern about “wetbacks” led federal officials to consider a sweeping border militarization and deportation campaign in the summer of 1953. In July INS officials met with Army personnel in San Francisco to discuss “Operation Cloudburst,” a classified plan to use as many as 3,500-4,000 Army troops to execute deportation drives and patrol the California portion of the US-Mexico border twenty-four-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week for three-to-six months. Attorney General Brownell, who made a special trip to California in August 1953 to assess the situation, considered “the flow of illegal aliens into California from Mexico as critical and endangering the national security.” According to him, “[t]he most serious aspect of the situation” was that it “provide[d] an easy avenue of entrance of aliens of the most dangerous subversive classes, not only from Mexico but from any part of the world.” Brownell was “convinced that

¹¹¹ Kelly Lytle Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration: A Cross-Border Examination of Operation Wetback, 1943 to 1954,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 37:4 (Winter 2006): 428, 441; Wm. A. Whalen, District Director, San Antonio, Texas, to Commissioner, Washington, D.C., 2 March 1950, 56364/43SW2 BP Ops SW pt 2 1950-52, RG 85, NARA1.

¹¹² J.A. Cushman, District Enforcement Officer, Chicago, IL, to Commissioner, 21 March 1952, 56364/43 BP Ops NW, RG 85, NARA1. It is interesting to note that of the 1,202 people apprehended the INS classified nearly half as “absconders from labor contracts” (470) or “others” (87).

¹¹³ Hernández, *Migra!*, 125-150; I also discuss removal to the Mexican interior at length in Chapter 3 on the boatlift and the business of deportation.

an emergency of national importance existed,” and called on the Army to assist the Border Patrol ““until such time as the situation [could] be brought under control.””¹¹⁴

The proposal for Operation Cloudburst consisted of three parts: first, an “anti-infiltration operation on and near the border” to stop Mexican migration into the country; second, a “containment operation roughly blocking off San Diego and Imperial Counties to prevent flight into the interior of the United States”; and third, a “mopping up” operation in northern areas, including San Francisco and parts of the Los Angeles district. While the first two stages of the operation would commence immediately the secret report noted, in World War II-era military language, that the last stage “should begin about D-Day plus 15.”¹¹⁵ Upon being apprised of the proposed special operation, the US Ambassador to Mexico wrote a forceful letter to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, warning of the potential harm ““to our relations with Mexico, to our relations with Latin America as a whole, and to the Republican Party.”” Still operating under the guise of the non-interventionist Good Neighbor Policy—which dated back some twenty years, but would begin to come undone the following year after the CIA-orchestrated coup d’état in Guatemala—the Ambassador expressed concern that US troops would open fire on Mexican migrants crossing the border and warned the Secretary of State ““that [i]ncidents

¹¹⁴ Declassified Memo on “Operation Cloud Burst,” 29 July 1953; and Declassified Draft Press Release, 1953, 56363/299, Operation Cloud Burst, RG 85, NARA1; Hernández, *Migra!*, 183.

¹¹⁵ Declassified Memo on “Operation Cloud Burst,” 29 July 1953, 56363/299, Operation Cloud Burst, RG 85, NARA1.

will inevitably happen.”¹¹⁶ In the end, neither Congress nor the president approved Operation Cloudburst.¹¹⁷

Less than a year later, in April 1954, President Eisenhower nominated Lieutenant General Joseph M. Swing, his former West Point classmate and the Army’s primary representative at the 1953 Operation Cloudburst meetings in San Francisco, to be the new Commissioner of the INS. Swing had just retired from the Army after serving for more than forty-four years. During his career he took part in the 1916 Pershing Expedition that set out to capture Pancho Villa in northern Mexico, served as a field artillery officer in France during World War I, and commanded troops in World War II and the Korean War.¹¹⁸ Swing officially became Commissioner on May 15, 1954. Nine days later he received a copy of the secret memo detailing the original plans for Operation Cloudburst.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ García y Griego, “The Bracero Policy Experiment,” 524-525.

¹¹⁷ Hernández, *Migra!*, 183. Operation Cloudburst required Congressional approval or special presidential proclamation because it involved the Army, not just the INS.

¹¹⁸ Interview with General Joseph Swing, by Ed Edwin, 21 June 1967, 1-2, 55. Columbia University, Oral History Research Office, Eisenhower Administration Project, copy held at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (hereafter, USAHEC), Carlisle, Pennsylvania; “Dear General: World War II Letters, 1944-1945,” 8, USAHEC; “Ike Classmate is Named Chief of Immigration,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 April 1954, 3.

¹¹⁹ J. Lee Rankin, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legal Counsel, to Swing, 24 May 1954, 56363/299, Operation Cloud Burst, RG 85, NARA1. Rankin sent three documents to Swing: (1) an original copy of the secret memo on Operation Cloud Burst; (2) a copy of secret itinerary for Attorney General Brownell’s August 1953 trip to California; and (3) the draft of a press release with confidential security information. It is unclear whether or not Swing requested these documents. Initially, he expressed “enthusiastic interest” in Operation Cloud Burst, arguing that it would be the best training possible for troops preparing to head off to Korea. Years later, with the passage of time and influence of memory, he expressed skepticism. In an oral history conducted almost a decade after he left the INS he claimed that the idea of Operation Cloud Burst—of putting armed troops on the border—left him “horror-struck,” fearing that “after they’d killed a few hundred Mexicans” a second Mexican-American War would result. See Hernández, *Migra!*, 183; Interview with General Joseph Swing, by Ed Edwin, 21 June 1967, 2-3. Columbia University, Oral History Research Office, Eisenhower Administration Project, copy held at USAHEC.

“Operation Wetback”

Operation Cloudburst may have served as a basic blueprint for Operation Wetback, but the latter differed in important ways. For one, its geographic scope set it apart from all previous deportation campaigns. Whereas earlier drives focused on one city, area, or state, Operation Wetback began in June in California, moved to South Texas in mid July, and spread to Midwest industrial centers by September. The campaign depended not only on hundreds of Border Patrol agents organized in “Special Mobile Task Forces,” but also on local and state authorities and law enforcement officers, farmers and ranchers, the media. It stoked public fears that “wetbacks” propagated disease, committed crimes, drained the tax base, and degraded the labor standards and living conditions of domestic workers.¹²⁰ Whereas the Service relied on hundreds of Border Patrol officers and the use of light planes to locate large numbers of immigrants and jeeps and buses to apprehend them in the southwestern border region, in midwestern metropolitan areas a relatively small number of agents conducted investigations and relied on tips from citizens and informants to carry out piecemeal deportation campaigns.

By the time of Operation Wetback the INS had long relied on “voluntary” departures and, to a lesser extent, formal deportations to remove Mexican migrants.¹²¹

Despite their euphemistic name, voluntary departures were—and are—coercive.

¹²⁰ Calavita, *Inside the State*, 55 and 145; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 163-5; Manuel García y Griego, “The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964,” in David G. Gutiérrez, ed. *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 58-9; Grebler, “Mexican Immigration to the United States,” 33-4; See also García, *Operation Wetback*.

¹²¹ The long history of voluntary departures is discussed at length in the Introduction.

Government officials, scholars, and the media have usually excluded them from total deportation statistics, but this too is misleading. Like formal deportations, voluntary departures often involved the INS apprehending migrants, transporting them to the border, and, in some cases, relocating them deep into the Mexican interior with the help of Mexican officials. The system required apprehended migrants to leave the United States.

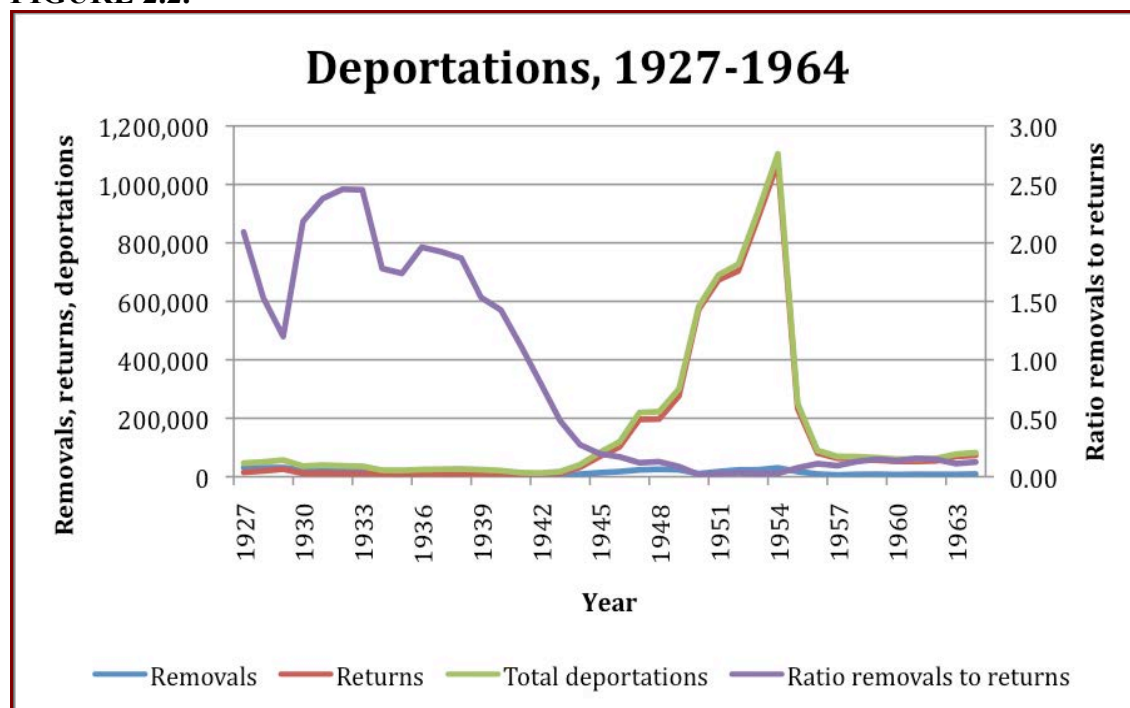
More than anything, voluntary departures were a cost saving measure—the INS’s attempt to make the most of its limited personnel and budget at a time when the number of deportable Mexican migrants dramatically increased. It is no coincidence that voluntary departures first outnumbered formal deportations in fiscal year 1942, the year the Bracero Program commenced. By 1945 they outnumbered formal deportations five-to-one, and by 1950 the ratio had increased to fifty-six-to-one. The one million-plus voluntary departures during 1954 dwarfed the slightly more than 30,000 formal deportations recorded during the same period.¹²² (See Figure 2.2) Voluntary departures played an integral role during Operation Wetback as well. Indeed, as a July 1954 INS press release noted, voluntary departures “were a planned part of the overall purpose of the Operation.”¹²³ The US federal government’s inability to carry out formal deportations should not be mistaken for a lack of power, however. It may have been indicative of a

¹²² DHS, OIS, 2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 103. The exact statistics were 1,074,277 voluntary departures and 30,264 formal deportations.

¹²³ INS Press Release on Operation Wetback, 29 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 9, 7/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

weak bureaucratic apparatus, but the Service's reliance on voluntary departure revealed the power of the federal state to effect expulsion through other means.¹²⁴

FIGURE 2.2.



Removals (formal deportations), returns (voluntary departures), total deportations, and the ratio of removals to returns, 1927-1964. The rise in deportations coincided with the start of the bracero program in 1942. The INS, limited by resources and manpower, relied almost exclusively on voluntary departures to carry out deportations during this period—and for the remainder of the twentieth century, as well. *Source*: DHS, OIS, 2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 103.

Unlike people removed through formal deportation, for which the US government paid, migrants deported via voluntary departure usually paid their own way. Even though migrants had to subsidize their own deportation, voluntary departure carried lesser

¹²⁴ For more on weak bureaucracies not necessarily reflecting the real power of the federal state, see Quinn Mulroy, "Public Regulation through Private Litigation: The Regulatory Power of Private Lawsuits and the American Bureaucracy," (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 2012); Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001).

consequences than formal deportations, left open the possibility of returning to the United States in the future, and meant migrants did not have to be detained for an undetermined amount of time while awaiting trial. This reduced the INS's deportation-related expenses by keeping detention and the number of removal hearings to a minimum. Voluntary departures did not just save the INS money though; under voluntary departure procedures, migrants agreed not to challenge their removal, thus curtailing any due process rights they had and creating a system in which immigration authorities could carry out large numbers of expedited deportations with little-to-no oversight. The Service continued this policy forward in the years to come. As the 1956 Annual Report noted, "The policy of granting voluntary departure whenever possible prior to an issuance of an order to show cause or subsequent thereto but prior to an administrative hearing, will be continued during the coming year. Formal deportation cases will be held to a minimum, with resultant savings in time and effort."¹²⁵ Given the INS's limited resources, it would have been impossible to carry out mass deportations without heavily relying on voluntary departures.

But during Operation Wetback, the INS's inability to remove all unauthorized Mexican migrants via formal deportations and voluntary departure led the Service to employ an additional cost-saving enforcement tactic: an unprecedented publicity

¹²⁵ INS Annual Report, 1956, 15; Immigration authorities recognized detention costs and deportation hearings as costs it could not bear. As early as 1951 the INS noted that "if the Service is forced to go through deportation proceedings in the case of every Mexican who has entered the country illegally, the procedure will take 'some time!'" As a result, the federal government agreed to pay the way for people offered voluntary departure who could not pay their own way. It saw this as "an expense that is 'necessary for the administration and enforcement of the laws relating to immigration.'" Albert E. Reitzel, Acting General Counsel, to Argyle R. Mackey, Commissioner, INS, and L. Paul Winings(?), General Counsel INS, 12 July 1951, "MxAirlift 1951," NBPM.

campaign meant to (1) induce fear in migrants and scare them into preemptively returning to Mexico in order to avoid apprehension, and (2) draw attention to the INS's accomplishments and raise the Service's public profile at a time when it was seen as weak. If formal deportations and voluntary departure constituted forced migration, the INS's self-deportation campaign resulted in a form of highly coercive migration—a critical component on the spectrum of means the Service used to deport people. The following section offers a detailed history of Operation Wetback, highlighting differences between the border region and interior, and examining the multiple forms of forced and coerced migration upon which the INS relied to carry out what Attorney General Brownell later hyperbolically described as “the greatest migration of people ever witnessed on this continent, at least in modern times.”¹²⁶

Operation Wetback began weeks before the immigration officers started apprehending or deporting anyone as part of the official drive. The agenda for a preliminary meeting to discuss the “Special Patrol Force” listed publicity as the first item on the “Advance plan.”¹²⁷ The INS's carefully planned, large-scale publicity campaign led an undetermined number of Mexicans (and possibly Mexican Americans) to leave the United States. On June 10, the Border Patrol sent a press release announcing the operation to 150 newspapers in Southern California. Los Angeles officials stated that the

¹²⁶ “Wetback Roundup Termed Greatest Modern Migration,” *San Antonio Express*, 30 July 1954, HQ History Publicity, National Border Patrol Museum (hereafter, NBPM), El Paso, Texas.

¹²⁷ “Outline for Discussion: Special Patrol Force,” 19 May 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 7, RG 85, NARA1.

news “was carried by practically every radio station” and they also prepared “special announcements” for local television stations, and arranged “to have releases published in the newspapers of Baja California and the communities along the border.” The LA District Director reached out to the national media and reported to Commissioner Swing that NBC and other major media outlets planned to cover “the activities of the 17th and propose[d] to arrive at El Centro on the evening of the 16th.” He added that he had informed the head of the Border Patrol “of the desired coverage and [was] certain that it [would] be arranged so that very favorable publicity will be attained, not only on the local but national level.”¹²⁸

In some cases, US officials did not have to seek out news outlets to publicize Operation Wetback. On June 21, the Director of News & Public Affairs at a San Jose radio station contacted Brownell and informed him that the station’s two daily Spanish-language programs had the widest reach in the area. “Is it possible you may wish to send us a statement of instructions to be read by our Spanish-speaking announcer to direct Mexican Nationals on ways and means of co-operating at this time?” He continued, “If you believe a statement of this sort will help your Department in its work, we will be most happy to broadcast it as a public service.”¹²⁹

United States authorities waged a simultaneous public and private campaign in Mexico. Border Patrol officials proposed a number of ways to inform the Mexican public and potential unauthorized migrants of the forthcoming campaign. Marcus T. Neelly,

¹²⁸ H.R. Landon, District Director, Los Angeles, to J.M. Swing, Commissioner, 11 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1.

¹²⁹ Gordon B. Greb, Director, News & Public Affairs, KSJO, San Jose, to Attorney General Herbert Brownell, 21 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1.

District Director at El Paso, recommended giving deportees handbills and putting up large signs at points of expulsion that read, in Spanish and English:

“NOTICE

THE UNITED STATES NEEDS LEGAL FARM WORKERS!

THE MAYOR OF YOUR TOWN CAN ARRANGE FOR YOUR CONTRACTING.

WARNING

THE ERA OF THE WETBACK AND THE WIRE CUTTER HAD ENDED!
FROM THIS DAY FORWARD ANY PERSON FOUND IN THE UNITED STATES ILLEGALLY WILL BE PUNISHED BY IMPRISONMENT.”

Neelly added that he would contact Mexican authorities “for the purpose of making such ‘propaganda’ arrangements.” The INS also tried to reach Mexicans other than deportees. After officials decided to buslift people from California to Arizona for removal at Nogales, Sonora, the INS planned to give local radio stations in Nogales “a short news release they can, and we think perhaps they will, use as a spot announcement.” Moreover, Neelly suggested a “plan to use the Cessna aircraft from Marfa, Texas, with an observer who speaks and understands the Spanish language fluently and who will be able to talk over the plane’s loudspeaker, for such other ‘propaganda’ purposes we may work out.”¹³⁰

US officials noted that Mexican support was key to Operation Wetback’s success and strategized about how to win over Mexican officials and the public. One strategy the INS employed was distinguishing “braceros” from “wetbacks,” and encouraging the

¹³⁰ Marcus T. Neelly, District Director, El Paso, to The Commissioner, 1 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1.

continued migration of the former.¹³¹ On May 20, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles wrote that the US Information Agency in Mexico should “initiate [a] campaign immediately on difference between braceros and wetbacks and on United States problems with wetbacks in order to lay [a] basis for rebuttal of anti-United States propaganda which can be expected when mass movement starts.”¹³² State Department officials ensured that the US Information Agency would be “thoroughly briefed at the appropriate time concerning the program so as to disseminate information to offset any adverse propaganda in Mexican papers.”¹³³ According to US officials in Mexico City, the Mexican press was willing to “carry quotes of US officials” about the differences between “braceros” and “wetbacks,” but was “reluctant [to] handle much other material.”¹³⁴ The day before the US officially announced Operation Wetback, a confidential internal memo reasserted the importance of Mexican support and stressed that the emphasis on more braceros and fewer unauthorized laborers “[m]ust be

¹³¹ Stressing the differences between “braceros” and “wetbacks” was also was key to Operation Wetback’s success since, in addition to being a mass deportation campaign, its other primary goal was to convince—or force—employers to hire workers through the Bracero Program. When Attorney General Brownell first announced the drive, he described braceros as “a welcome and appreciated addition to our work force,” and “wetbacks” as “caus[ing] serious social and economic problems for the United States.” The Department of Justice pushed Congress to enact legislation preventing employers from hiring unauthorized migrants and allowing the INS to seize “any vehicle or vessel used to transport aliens in violation of the immigration laws”—thus providing “much needed weapons to assist in bringing to a halt the increasing illegal crossings of the borders by the so-called ‘wetbacks.’” At the same time, to put US growers at ease, the Department of Labor promised it “would cooperate to the fullest extent in giving the program considerable advanced publicity in order that employers of wet labor would have ample opportunity to recruit legal labor” and “continue to have legal Mexican laborers available to meet all requests.” See A.C. Devaney, Assistant Commissioner, Inspections & Examinations Division, Memorandum for File, 20 May 1954; Department of Justice Press Release, 9 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1.

¹³² Dulles to American Embassy, Mexico, D.F., 20 May 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 6, RG 85, NARA1.

¹³³ A.C. Devaney, Assistant Commissioner, Inspections & Examinations Division, Memorandum for File, 20 May 1954, 56364/45.6 Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1.

¹³⁴ US Embassy, Mexico City, to USIA, 28 May 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 6, RG 85, NARA1.

accomplished through expression this idea by Mexicans themselves,” which “will require fullest use personal contact for discreet placement materials and to stimulate useful Mexican commentary.”¹³⁵ The US cared about Mexican support, but only so far as the lack of it threatened Operation Wetback’s overall effectiveness.

With the end of fiscal year 1954 fast approaching, US officials wanted to start the drive “as early as possible to use this year’s funds.” Authorities proposed June 1 as a start date. Even though it was eventually pushed back a couple of weeks, as soon as Brownell announced the operation on June 9, the 240-man southern California Border Patrol force, joined by 491 officers sent from around the country, in addition to local law enforcement officials, began setting up roadblocks and started apprehending migrants the following morning.¹³⁶

On June 17, Operation Wetback officially began. The Special Task Forces raided agricultural fields and industrial places of employment, in addition to private homes and public areas. The INS leased the Elysian Playground Recreation Center from the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks for \$125.00 per day and converted it into a makeshift, open-air detention center for people awaiting deportation.¹³⁷ Within a week

¹³⁵ Joint USIA-State Message (Confidential), 8 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 6, RG 85, NARA1.

¹³⁶ The start date was delayed because of upcoming California primary elections and the fact that the Mexican government needed more time to prepare to receive the deportees. Department of Justice Press Release, 9 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1; “Outline for Discussion: Special Patrol Force,” 19 May 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 7, RG 85, NARA1; A.C. Devaney, Memorandum for File, 27 May 1954, 56364/45.6 Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1; District Director, Los Angeles, California, to Commissioner, Washington, D.C., 26 August 1954, 56321/448f Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹³⁷ District Director, LA, to Commissioner, accepted bid and contract with LA Department of Recreation and Parks attached, 18 June 1954, 56310/918 Op Wetback transport for San Fran, 5/54-7/54, RG 85, NARA1. The INS contracted a local catering company to supply packaged lunches consisting of one meat sandwich, one cheese sandwich, and one hard boiled egg, at a cost of \$0.40 per lunch. Correspondence

the operation had expanded to northern California, where members of the Special Task Force were supposed to take people to their homes or places of employment to collect their wages and belongings before being processed for deportation. The INS, however, deported “a number of aliens” without doing so.¹³⁸ By the beginning of July Commissioner Swing observed that the results “show that splendid headway is being made to rid [the Los Angeles] area of illegal entrants. But,” he added, “lasting benefits can only be derived in this work by continuing to seal the border so that it can’t be penetrated beyond a mere trickle.” Swing stressed that “illegal crossings ... must be held in check at all costs,” and recommended that Border Patrol officers work nights and off hours to ensure they were.¹³⁹

The INS was well aware of its own limitations. Although Brownell stressed in his initial press release that the operation “[would] not be a hit and run project,” that same day he wrote a letter admitting that it was merely “a temporary expedient” that “must be limited to a brief period because of a lack of funds and the need to return the personnel to their regular posts.”¹⁴⁰ In hopes of discouraging re-entry into the United States, the INS planned to buslift up to 1,000 deportees per day (which would drop to 500 per day over

between the INS and Fisher Catering, Inc., 8-23 June 1954, 56310/918 Op Wetback transport for San Fran, 5/54-7/54, RG 85, NARA1. For first-hand accounts of people apprehended during Operation Wetback, see Ralph Guzmán, “La repatriación forzosa como solución política concluyente al problema de la emigración ilegal. Una perspectiva histórica,” in *Indocumentados: mitos y realidades* (México, DF: El Colegio de México, 1979), 137-163. For context, it should be noted that the day after the INS launched Operation Wetback, the CIA-orchestrated Guatemalan coup d’état commenced, marking an important turning point in US-Latin American relations.

¹³⁸ Harlan B. Carter to Bruce G. Barber, 11 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 7, RG 85, NARA1; E.B. Topmiller, Chief Patrol Inspector, Sacramento, Calif., to All Officers, Task Force “A,” 30 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 4, RG 85, NARA1.

¹³⁹ Swing, Memo, 2 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 4, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁴⁰ Department of Justice Press Release, 9 June 1954; Brownell to Senator Thomas H. Kuchel, California, 9 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1.

time) from California to Nogales, Arizona. The Service contracted Pacific Greyhound to carry out the lift. Greyhound used thirty-six- and forty-person passenger buses to transport deportees from various parts of California to Nogales, charging the INS a rate of \$0.56-\$0.64 per-mile (\$4.95-\$5.66 in 2015 dollars), plus an additional \$35-\$40 (\$309-\$354 in 2015 dollars) to provide at least one guard to “maintain the aliens in custody while enroute.”¹⁴¹ Deporting the vast majority of people via voluntary departure helped the INS reduce the overall cost of the drive. From June 10 to July 14 buslift expenses totaled nearly \$378,000, but Greyhound and the INS collected more than \$157,000 from deportees, defraying 42 percent of the cost, with the US government covering the difference. During that five-week period the Special Task Force apprehended 44,876 Mexicans in California, and buslifted 37,170 for deportation—including more than 33,000 to Nogales, where US officials transferred them to their Mexican counterparts for removal into the Mexican interior.¹⁴²

What happened once deportees arrived back in Mexico is less clear. Recent work by scholars like Kelly Lytle Hernández has reframed Operation Wetback as one of many collaborative, binational drives to deport Mexicans from the United States during the

¹⁴¹ Carter to All Stations in Los Angeles District, 10 June 1954; INS Appropriation Request, 14 June 1954; Charter Agreement Between Pacific Greyhound Lines and INS, San Francisco, 5 June 1954. 56310/918 Op Wetback transport for San Fran, 5/54-7/54, RG 85, NARA1. The INS solicited bids from a handful of companies and seriously considered offers from Allen Transportation and Orange Belt bus company, but neither had interstate licenses to remove deportees to Arizona, so the Service decided to go with Greyhound. US officials also buslifted a small percentage of deportees locally through Calexico. Carter to Barber, 11 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 7, RG 85, NARA1; Barber to Commissioner, 2 June 1954, 56310/918 Op Wetback transport for San Fran, 5/54-7/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁴² Statistics of Special Border Patrol Task Force Operations, 56364/45.2, RG 85, NARA1. The exact figures were \$377,912.91 and \$157,316.51, respectively. The overall cost of the California operation from June 10 - July 14 came to more than \$430,000, including \$13,700+ for detention, \$10,200+ for lunches, and \$30,000+ in “other expenses.” From June 10 - December 3 deportees paid \$290,276.62, or 46 percent, of the \$628,069.63 total cost of the California buslift.

1940s and 1950s. And, indeed, the day the campaign officially began *The Nogales Herald* published an article claiming that the US and Mexico were “team[ing] together” in the deportation campaign, and a US immigration officer praised the contributions of Mexican officials and described the operation as a “magnificent thing ... in keeping with the traditional friendliness between the two nations.”¹⁴³ Situating Operation Wetback in a broader, binational perspective is useful, but the extent to which it was a collaborative effort, and Hernández’s claim that the Mexican government made “critical contributions” to the 1954 drive (and, in turn, previous campaigns), deserve closer scrutiny.¹⁴⁴

In January 1953, more than a year before Operation Wetback, US officials had expressed frustration with the Mexican government’s unwillingness to stop the northward migration of Mexicans to the border. Based on their calculation that 70 percent of Mexican migrants came from interior states such as San Luis Potosí, Michoacán, Durango, Guanajuato, and Jalisco, or from the south, US officials came to the conclusion that “[a] regular and efficient inspection of all north-bound trains and buses ... removing passengers who obviously are going northward to leave the country without proper documentation, would service to terminate a large percent of this illegal emigration in a short while.” But, to their dismay, the Mexican government met their repeated requests “with the usual response” that “it [was] unconstitutional to restrict travel of Mexican citizens within national territory.” Even if Mexico had agreed to try to stop emigration it is unlikely to have succeeded. At the time there were “no Mexican officials assigned to

¹⁴³ “U.S. And Mexico Team Together,” *The Nogales Herald*, 17 June 1954, TM-94-1, SRE.

¹⁴⁴ Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration,” 443.

patrol duty, for the purpose of preventing the illegal exodus of Mexican nationals, at any point along the 2,000 mile frontier.”¹⁴⁵ And although Mexico established a border patrol a few months later, its size (twenty-five men), lack of funding, and narrow geographic scope (the Reynosa-Matamoros area) limited its effectiveness and impact.¹⁴⁶

During Operation Wetback the United States continued its attempts to enlist Mexico’s assistance in impeding internal migration to the border. This time, however, instead of encouraging the “use of force in control of travel,” E. DeWitt Marshall, the INS attaché in Mexico City, suggested “that the Mexican Government’s cooperation be solicited in use of moral persuasion, appeals to patriotism, warnings of hardships and dangers suffered by illegal emigrants, etc.” He added that “[s]uch warnings and appeals should be made in person by agents of the Mexican Government at reference interior

¹⁴⁵ US Embassy, Mexico, to SRE, 28 January 1953; E. DeWitt Marshall, Immigration Attaché, Mexico City, to A.C. Devaney, Assistant Commissioner, Inspections & Examinations Division, 18 August 1954, 56321/448f Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. Article 11 of the Mexican Constitution stated that “Everyone has the right to enter and leave the Republic, to travel around its territory and change his residence without necessity of a letter of security, passport, safe-conduct or any other similar requirement.”

¹⁴⁶ W.F. Kelly, Memorandum for file, 7 May 1953, 56364/43SW3, BP Ops SW pt 3 1953 pt2, RG 85, NARA1; Kelly to Belton, 19 October 1953; Rawls to Kelly, 12 September 1953; Rawls to Carter, 26 October 1953, 56364/43SW3 BP Ops SW pt 3 1953 pt1, RG 85, NARA1. US Border Patrol officers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley lauded the Mexican Border Patrol for its collaborative efforts and expressed optimism about the potential reduction in future unauthorized migration in the sector. But no significant or lasting changes resulted from the establishment of the Mexican Border Patrol. On two previous occasions, once in 1949 and again in 1953, Mexico did take pro-active steps to temporarily prevent migration into the US after stoppages in the bracero program led to increased unauthorized migration and, in turn, severe labor shortages in Tamaulipas cotton fields. On each occasion the Mexican government put 5,000 troops on the border that turned migrants back and even detained them until they agreed to sign contracts to work in northern Mexico. These, however, were unilateral decisions made with domestic concerns in mind. See Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration,” 434-436.

transportation focal points” since [p]ast similar appeals made through Mexican Government press releases ha[d] not been effective.”¹⁴⁷

In addition to stopping northward migration, US officials believed the Mexican government’s cooperation in transporting deportees away from the border was essential to Operation Wetback’s success (especially since the INS did not have money to re-initiate an airlift into the Mexican interior). But Mexican government officials were skeptical of the plan and wondered why, if the US’s ultimate goal was to increase the number of braceros, unauthorized workers could not be deported to Mexicali, where a contracting center had just been established. They also argued that the influx of deportees would “constitute a grave problem for Mexican authorities” and communities along the northern border. Moreover, they told US State Department officials that the Government of Mexico did not have funds either and would need “a minimum of 2 1/2 million pesos to cover cost of transportation alone and must obtain additional funds for subsistence of deportees, employment of additional personnel, guards, et cetera.” Attempting to adopt a practice long employed by the United States, Mexican Secretaría de Gobernación official Gustavo Díaz Ordaz—who later became infamous when, in 1968, as president of Mexico, he ordered a crackdown on student protestors that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people at the hands of the army and law enforcement officials—tried to put the cost of removing people to the interior onto the deportees themselves. He told the INS that Mexico’s “money problem [would] be relieved considerably” if US officials could

¹⁴⁷ E. DeWitt Marshall, Immigration Attaché, Mexico City, to A.C. Devaney, Assistant Commissioner, Inspections & Examinations Division, 18 August 1954, 56321/448f Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

“note down on voluntary return papers of each deportee the amount in his possession when apprehended so that those who can afford it will be made to pay their own fares.”¹⁴⁸ US Border Patrol officers complied, and agreed to report deportees’ names, age, sex, the amount deportees paid the bus company, and the money they had left when transferred to Mexican officials at Nogales.¹⁴⁹ Eventually, the Mexican government offered “the utmost cooperation” in receiving up to 1,000 deportees per day at Nogales and transporting them away from the border via bus or train. During the week before Operation Wetback officially began the Special Task Force in California apprehended more than 12,300 people; by June 17 the INS had already buslifted some 7,000 deportations to Nogales.¹⁵⁰

However, when evaluating the extent to which Operation Wetback was a collaborative effort it is important to distinguish between the Mexican government’s rhetoric and actions. While Mexico eventually agreed to move deportees away from the border, less than a month into Operation Wetback the Border Patrol’s Acting Chief Patrol Inspector at Tucson raised questions about the sustainability of the Nogales lifts. “It has been our observation,” he wrote, “that certain Mexican officials are becoming tired of

¹⁴⁸ Dulles to American Embassy, Mexico, D.F., 20 May 1954; Dulles to American Embassy, Mexico, D.F., 24 May 1954; Carter, Memorandum for the file, 1 June 1954; White, US Embassy, Mexico City, to Secretary of State, 3 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 6, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁴⁹ H.B. Carter to All Stations in Los Angeles District, 10 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 7, RG 85, NARA1; INS Appropriation Request, 14 June 1954; Charter Agreement Between Pacific Greyhound Lines and INS, San Francisco, 5 June 1954, 56310/918 Op Wetback transport for San Fran, 5/54-7/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁵⁰ Lic. Pablo Campos Ortíz a C. Secretario de Gobernación, 22 mayo 1954; Lic. Miguel G. Calderón, Opinion, 21 mayo 1954; Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to C. Oficial Mayor de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 31 mayo 1954, TM-94-1, SRE; Memo from Carter, 10 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1; INS Annual Report, 1954, p. 31-32; “7,280 Wetbacks Deported At Nogales Past Week,” *Nogales International* (AZ), 18 June 1954, TM-94-1, SRE. With detention costs at Nogales running \$1.30 per night per person the INS tried to expedite the transfer of deportees to Mexican officials. Memo to Officer in Charge, El Centro, 14 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 7, RG 85, NARA1.

this operation and are showing increasing signs of disinterest. It is possible that if the buslift from California is continued, the situation at Nogales may change over night.”¹⁵¹

Moreover, even though Mexican authorities agreed assist the US by providing trainlifts and buslifts, reports indicated that, at least in some cases, deportees never made it very far into the interior. At the end of July 1954, Yellow Line, a Mexican bus company, stated that desertions from the trainlifts “occurred in large numbers, a few bribing the train guards to turn their backs and many disembarking.” According to a company representative, “there was little or [no] attempt to prevent the men from leaving the train either before or after they left Benjamin Hill, Sonora.” Yellow Line, for its part, “believed that such aliens should be permitted to go where they chose” and told a Border Patrol official that “the bus lines in Mexico would transport them where they wished to go at reduced rates if necessary to secure the business.” On one occasion the company sent at least six buses, each with a fifty-person capacity, to San Luis, Sonora to transport deportees who had left the trainlift back to Mexicali and Tijuana.¹⁵²

A few months later, the INS came to similar conclusions when it sent Border Patrol Inspector Gilbert P. Trujillo undercover in Tucson. After being apprehended and held at Border Patrol headquarters along with seventy other deportees, officials transported Trujillo and twenty-four others to Nogales and detained them overnight at the

¹⁵¹ Gordon R. Pettingill, Actg. Chief Patrol Inspector, Tucson, Arizona, to District Director, El Paso, Texas, 8 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 9, 7/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁵² C.D. Sprigg, Sr. Patrol Officer, Chula Vista, Calif., to Chief Patrol Inspector, Chula Vista, California (Memo 1), 28 July 1954; Sprigg to Chief Patrol Inspector, Chula Vista (Memo 2), 28 July 1954, 56321/448f Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

County Jail, where they slept on the floor. The next morning, at 8:30am, US Border Patrol officers transferred Trujillo to Mexican officials at Nogales, Sonora.

“It was not much of a turn over — they just got off the bus there, and there was one soldier. He was not too concerned, he was just there for appearances. The one Mexican government official — probably Mexican immigration — that was there just asked the ones that had money to buy tickets to wherever they wanted to go — no specific point was designated. They weren’t asked if they wanted to buy their tickets to home — they just wanted them to get out of town. The ones that had no money were loaded on a box car.”

Half an hour later, Trujillo and fifty-nine others boarded a southbound train that also carried ticketed passengers. Shortly after the train departed, five of the deportees jumped off, without any resistance from the Mexican soldier accompanying them. “Several of the deportees who were making their first trip asked the others if it were possible to get off wherever they wanted to,” Trujillo reported. Those that had been trainlifted before said yes; that “there was no interference at all ... they could drop off at any point.” From that point on one or two deportees left the train at every stop.

“Six dropped off at Magdalena, Sonora, Mexico, and at that point 44 of us remained. At Santa Ana, Sonora, Mexico, which is the bus terminal for traffic to Baja California, 14 more dropped off leaving 30 aboard. At Benjamin Hill, the train terminal for Baja California, 22 left the train. Eight, including myself, remained aboard the train at that time. All 52 who had left knew exactly where they were going — most of them planned to head for California from there. Several stated that they had clothing, money or a woman — or other personal belongings in or around Los Angeles. They stated they had too much at stake to return to their homes in Mexico.”

Trujillo noted that the seven people who remained on the train with him after Benjamin Hill had all served six months in federal prison and felt that the risk associated with crossing back into the US and being arrested again was too high. Three left the train at Hermosillo, and when Trujillo and another man hopped off at Culiacan only two of the original sixty deportees from Nogales remained on the train. From Culiacan, Trujillo took a bus north to the border, and reported that Mexican officials did not question him while en route.¹⁵³

Even though Operation Wetback may not have been the binational drive some have made it out to be, it offers important insights into the postwar US immigration bureaucracy and the making of deportation policy. On the one hand, the INS's reliance on voluntary departure and scare tactics meant to spur self-deportation reflected the limits of the Service's power and its inability to remove everyone who was deportable. On the other hand, it represented the Service's determination to deport Mexicans by whatever means necessary and its ability to shape people's behavior beyond its limited fiscal resources. Although it is impossible to say how many Mexicans left the US in response to the INS's scare tactics and self-deportation campaign, officials and some southern California residents celebrated its supposed success. "It would be, of course, premature at this time to pass judgment upon the success of this operation," Border Patrol Chief Harlan B. Carter wrote the day before Operation Wetback officially started. "I should say, however, that since the Attorney General's announcement, followed as it has been by

¹⁵³ Gilbert P. Trujillo, Immigration Patrol Inspector, El Paso, Texas, to A.S. Hudson, Chief, Border Patrol Branch, El Paso, Texas, 17 November 1954, 56364/43SW4, BP Ops SW pt 4 1954-7, RG 85, NARA1. To my knowledge Trujillo's story has not appeared elsewhere.

the physical show of force here, illegal aliens by the hundreds are beginning to sneak southward.”¹⁵⁴ A man from Brawley, California, a town located twenty-five miles north of the Calexico-Mexicali border, wrote a six-page, handwritten letter lauding the INS for its fear-driven publicity campaign.

“Whoever originated the idea is a ‘psycohistorologist (sic) of the first magnitude.’ You have not only save (sic) the Government of the expenses involve (sic) in the apprehension, the ill feelings created on the side of the ‘wets’ but educated them to obey the Law voluntarily. For the first time in the History of these wetbacks in a grove of date trees across other side of the canal east of the place where I live for over a quarter century — the ‘Place’ becomes a ‘Ghost Town.’”

Referring to the drive as “‘head work’ rather than ‘hard work,’” he then related the following metaphor:

“I used to live in the State of Ohio and in Winter we hunt rabbits. It was very easy and very sporty. We always see the rabbits at the end of the trails in snow. So Mr. and/or Mrs. Rabbit sitting pretty looking at us. We can not shoot them as they are (it is like murder) so we throw clods(?) and if one is to (sic) lazy to stay so we shouts (sic) or stump (sic) our feet on the ground so the creatures have a chance to run. So there we are as ‘the Omnipotent Judge.’ ‘Shoot or not to shoot?’

These are the conclusion (sic): You scared [them] and they did run to save yourselves the trouble of enforcing and the cash for our Government.”¹⁵⁵

The INS concurred with this assessment. An *INS Information Bulletin* article at the end of June celebrated the California operation and claimed that “[a]n indication of the

¹⁵⁴ Carter to Partridge, 16 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Vol1 Op Wt Spec Task Force, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁵⁵ B.D. Diaz, Inventor, to Edmund H. Gies, Officer in Charge, US INS, El Centro, California, 17 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 4, RG 85, NARA1.

success of the program is that ‘wetbacks’ laden down with their belongings are heading south across the border on their own initiative in many instances, rather than waiting to be apprehended by the Border Patrol.” As it also pointed out, “This is saving the Government money for it means we do not have to bear the cost of gathering them and then transporting them to the border.”¹⁵⁶ A month into the drive the INS claimed—without providing any evidence—that total apprehensions, “slightly lower than the apprehension rate in California in recent months, reflect[ed] the voluntary exodus of thousands of ‘wetbacks’ to Mexico when the campaign was announced June 10, and an apparent cessation in the traffic northward.”¹⁵⁷

The INS’s publicity onslaught continued as Operation Wetback shifted to Texas. Despite receiving the full support of local law enforcement, the Special Task Force sent to implement the drive in South Texas faced considerable resistance from ranchers and other residents of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.¹⁵⁸ Similar to the California operation, the Department of Justice tried to stem some of the blowback by putting out a press release two weeks ahead of time. In a July 2 statement Swing declared that the Texas

¹⁵⁶ “Report on the New ‘Wetback’ Program,” *INS Information Bulletin* Vol IV, No. 25, 30 June 1954, US Citizenship and Immigration Services Historic Research Library (hereafter, USCISHRL).

¹⁵⁷ “New Phase of ‘Wetback’ Drive to Begin This Week,” *INS Information Bulletin* Vol IV, No. 26, 7 July 1954, USCISHRL. A little over a month later the LA District Director made a similar assertion. “The operation, heralded by a wide publicity program, caused thousands of ‘wetbacks’ to flee to Mexico and elsewhere to escape apprehension.” District Director, Los Angeles, California, to Commissioner, Washington, D.C. 26 August 1954, 56321/448f Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁵⁸ Gus O. Krausse, Brownsville Chief of Police, to Fletcher Rawls, 16 July 1954; John L. Guseman, Chief of Police, Harlingen, to Rawls, 13 July 1954; Mayfield to Rawls, July 1954; Assistant Commissioner, Border Patrol, Detention and Deportation Division, to Harlon B. Carter, 26 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 5, RG 85, NARA1.

operation would start around July 15 and “[a]n advance party to man rail and road blocks [would] arrive in McAllen, Texas, about July 6.” He also reiterated the Department of Labor’s promise to “insure (sic) the availability of legal labor,” and added that he was “hopeful that out of this effort the illegal entry and subsequent employment of these aliens [would] be discouraged.”¹⁵⁹ The Service also stressed that the Rio Grande Valley drive would no be “a hit and run affair, but on the contrary ... a feature of the new but continuing policy for effective law enforcement marked by new methods and a bolder concept in regard to public relations.”¹⁶⁰

The INS made a concerted effort to enlist the aid and support of influential Mexican American organizations in South Texas, including the American GI Forum (AGIF) and League of United Latin American Citizens. A week before the Rio Grande Valley operation launched the INS asked the President of the AGIF in Del Rio, Texas to bring the upcoming drive to the attention of his members and friends, “in order that they will know that we are working in their behalf, and if they are questioned regarding their citizenship, they will understand the motive behind our actions.”¹⁶¹ Ed Idar, Jr., leader of the Texas AGIF, spoke highly of the Service and Swing’s work in ridding the country of “illegal resident aliens.” According to the INS, Idar “was working on press and radio releases,” in both English and Spanish, to be distributed and aired in areas “where our

¹⁵⁹ Press Release, Department of Justice, 2 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 5, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁶⁰ Memo to D.R. Kelley for presentation by him to General Swing, July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 3, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁶¹ Holland to Chris Aldrete, President, AGIF, Del Rio, Texas, 7 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 3, RG 85, NARA1.

operation will be most intensive.” Officials “believed that information released in this manner will materially hold down some complaints against this Service.”¹⁶²

But it was not easy to win over growers in the area who had long relied on undocumented workers to maintain their cotton fields and feared that the crack down would jeopardize their crops. While the INS tried to use local media to its benefit as the drive neared, officials worried that many newspapers in the Rio Grande Valley would not support Operation Wetback since their owner “ha[d] a reputation of fighting against all law enforcement agencies.”¹⁶³ Their fears proved prescient: a week before Operation Wetback commenced one newspaper offered a tongue-in-cheek solution to potential labor shortages: “putting 700-800 invading Border patrolmen into the cotton fields, picking.”¹⁶⁴ Another ran an editorial that referred to Border Patrol officers as “Armed Young Gringos with full bellies and tin badges.” Many local residents and establishments were less than welcoming as well. A candy store in Harlingen put up a sign stating, “Prices Double To Border Patrolmen Until Cotton is Picked”; some officers found that people would not rent them rooms, and a number stated that locals made snide remarks about them at cafes and banks.¹⁶⁵

Men and women across the Lower Rio Grande Valley wrote letters to President Eisenhower and his wife Mamie that used Cold War-era language to convey their

¹⁶² Holland to Swing, 22 July 1954; Holland to Swing, 13 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 5, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁶³ Press Release on Operation Wetback, 29 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 9, 7/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1; Illegible title, *San Antonio Express*, 7 July 1954; Holland to Swing, 4 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 5, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁶⁴ Untitled, *San Benito News*, 8 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 5, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁶⁵ E.R. Decker to Carter, 21 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 5, RG 85, NARA1.

displeasure and disgust with Operation Wetback. "If all the other countries, where American officials have been sent, are being treated like the poor innocent wetback is being treated it is no wonder they have turned against the Western Power and are looking towards the Iron Curtain," the head of a farmers association in Mercedes, Texas wrote to the President.¹⁶⁶ Another man who feared that Operation Wetback would push Mexicans toward communism pleaded, "Above all PLEASE DO SOMETHING TO ERASE FROM THE MINDS OF THE POOR MEXICANS THAT WE ARE WORSE THAN THE RUSSIANS, WHICH THEY NOW MAY WELL BELIEVE."¹⁶⁷ A Brownsville woman stated that the "bracero thing" would not help the thousands of small farmers in the Rio Grande Valley, and ended her letter asking Eisenhower, "Did you ever try to pick cotton? Well, I have since you have taken my labor and it is quite hopeless!"¹⁶⁸ A Harlingen woman asked the President the same question and suggested that he "should try it sometime," adding "perhaps you would know then how hard these people work; and then they are robbed of it at gun point, the gun being held by the immigration officer, who is no better than Hitler's gestapo." She concluded, "Americans fought and died to stay such precautions in foreign countries, yet it happens here, is even supported by the Federal government. How inhuman can the U.S. be? I hope that you, in common decency

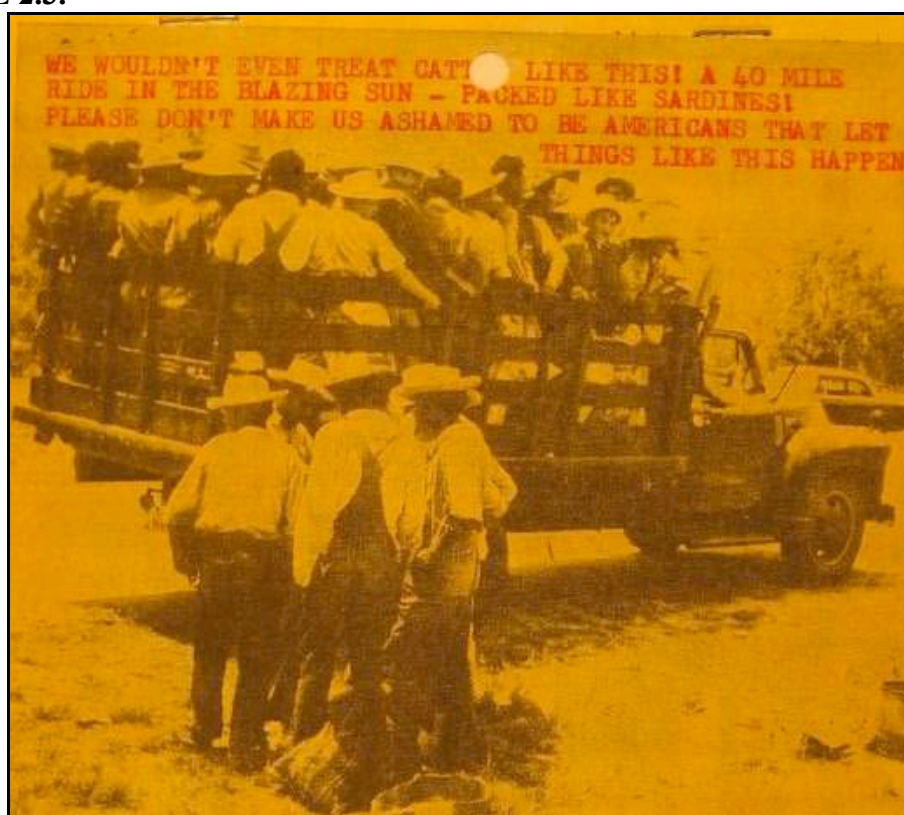
¹⁶⁶ James Mulkey, Jr., Past President of Area X Future Farmers, Mercedes, Texas, to President Eisenhower, 3 August 1954, 56364/45 Complaints-BP Special Force Operation in CA and TX, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁶⁷ Geo. W. Hackney, Weslaco, Texas, to The President of the United States, 4 August 1954, 56364/45 Complaints-BP Special Force Operation in CA and TX, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁶⁸ Mrs. JB Kee, Brownsville, Texas, to President Eisenhower, July 1954, 56364/45 Complaints-BP Special Force Operation in CA and TX, RG 85, NARA1.

can stop these terrible happenings.”¹⁶⁹ In hopes of combating such negative opinions the INS conducted its own surveys and interviewed “persons believed to be favorable towards the wetback drive for the purpose of securing written comment relative thereto.”¹⁷⁰ But, by and large, this did little to change the widespread sentiments of Lower Rio Grande Valley residents.

FIGURE 2.3.



Operation Wetback Roundup in Texas, Summer 1954.

Source: 563644/45, Complaints-BP Special Force Operation in CA and TX, RG85, NARA1.

¹⁶⁹ Mrs. Cecil (illegible), Harlingen, Texas, to President Eisenhower, 20 July 1954, 56364/45 Complaints-BP Special Force Operation in CA and TX, RG 85, NARA1. For more on race relations and rights during the Cold War see Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ Lowell C. Martindale and Harold W. Lauver, Investigators, to Chief Patrol Inspector Charles E. Kirk, 31 August 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 9, 7/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

Despite public opinion, Operation Wetback forged ahead in south Texas nonetheless. During the first two weeks US officials claimed that the Special Task Force apprehended over 44,000 Mexicans. (See Figure 2.3) Similar to California, nearly all of these apprehensions resulted in voluntary departures rather than formal deportations. As the District Director reported to the Central Office on August 6, “[i]t is not believe[d] that formal deportation proceedings can be further accelerated.”¹⁷¹ The INS claimed that its scare tactics and publicity campaign had resulted in more than 60,000 people returning to Mexico to avoid arrest during the first thirty days of the Texas drive, while “others simply fled across the Rio Grande River.” (Again, US officials presented no evidence to back up these assertions.)¹⁷² The Service detained most of the people it apprehended at the McAllen Detention Center (which had a capacity of 625 but was sometimes stuffed with ten-times as many people), before moving them to El Paso or Presidio for deportation. The Mexican government agreed to receive between 500 and 1,000 deportees per day at El Paso-Juárez, and another 1,200 to 1,500 per week at Presidio-Ojinaga. The INS contracted Valley Transit Company and Union Bus Company to execute the Texas buslift, at rates of \$9.78 per person for the 752-mile trip to El Paso and \$8.09 per person for the 622-mile trip to Presidio, with a maximum of fifty deportees per bus. As in California, US officials initially made deportees cover the cost of their ticket if they had money. However, a week into the lift the INS stated it would pay for the entire

¹⁷¹ Press Release, Department of Justice, 29 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 9, 7/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1; Holland to A.C. Devaney, Assistant Commissioner, Inspections & Examinations Division, Central Office, 6 August 1954, 56321/448f, Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁷² INS Annual Report, 1955, 14-15. The exact figure was 60,456.

operation as a result of “distortion and misrepresentation” of buslift policy, “together with the fact the vast majority already were being transported at Government expense.”¹⁷³ While the Mexican government agreed to then trainlift deportees to the interior, it also planned to transport thousands back to Reynosa, Matamoros, and Valle Hermoso in order to work 250,000 hectares of cotton, worth more than 520 million pesos, that needed tending.¹⁷⁴

When the Texas campaign wound down in September, Swing offered an assessment of Operation Wetback up until that point in a report to The American Section of the Joint Commission on Mexican Migrant Labor. He described it as “a well-planned, large-scale, and energetic campaign ... to stamp out the wetback practice and all its attendant evils,” and added that “sight was not lost of the need of protecting the interests of the employers and workers and the national interests of the two Republics.” The work of some 750 INS and Border Patrol officers, using 300 cars and buses, and seven planes, had supposedly “netted over 140,000 wetbacks” during the previous three months. The Commissioner asserted that “every effort was made to make the drive as humane as possible,” adding that “[f]amilies were not separated” and “[a]liens with long residence in the United States who had established roots were not molested.” These claims, however,

¹⁷³ It should be noted that Bernardo Blanco, Mexican Consul in McAllen, visited the camp and approved of its use. US Border Patrol officials reported that Blanco did not see the processing of any Mexicans and did not seem to take the inspection very seriously. The INS claimed it was able to keep detention expenses to a minimum at McAllen because of the “extremely low-cost Mexican ‘pinto bean and chili’ diet.” “Aliens Buslifted from McAllen as of 8:00 A.M., July 17th”; Clayton to Rawls, 19 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 3, RG 85, NARA1; “No se Comprueban Malos Tratos a Nuestros Braceros,” *Excelsior*, 21 July 1954, 1, NBPM, HQ History Publicity; Hudson to Kelley, 8 July 1954; Partridge to Swing, 8 July 1954; Unsigned memo, 21 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 5, RG 85, NARA1; INS Annual Report, 1954, 36-38.

¹⁷⁴ “No se Comprueban Malos Tratos a Nuestros Braceros,” *Excelsior*, 21 July 1954, 1, NBPM, HQ History Publicity.

were false, and would become more so in the coming weeks and months as Operation Wetback moved to the interior of the country.¹⁷⁵

Chicago and the history of interior enforcement

Scholars have largely ignored the Chicago phase of Operation Wetback, but it offers important insights into the history of interior enforcement, the limits of the INS's power, and the variety of means the Service used to deport people.¹⁷⁶ The 1954 campaign was not the first INS deportation drive against Mexicans in Chicago. Mexicans started migrating to the area in large numbers in the early-to-mid twentieth century, drawn by high wages in agriculture and industry, and on railroads, and later by a combination of job opportunities and social networks. Some reached Chicago by riding freight trains north through the Mississippi Valley, while others paid smugglers \$50 to \$150 to transport them from the Texas-Mexico border. Immigration officials estimated that 75,000 Mexicans, including 10,000 in who were in the country without authorization, lived in Chicago in 1951. In response, the INS opened a five-person Border Patrol station in the city in February 1952 "for the express purpose of apprehending Mexicans and

¹⁷⁵ Swing, "Report to The American Section of Joint Commission on Mexican Migrant Labor," 3 September 1954, 56321/448f Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. Swing also falsely stated that "Opportunity was given to all to collect wages due and gather personal belongings and other property before being returned to Mexico."

¹⁷⁶ Most historians who have written about Operation Wetback mention the INS's Chicago/Midwest campaign briefly, if at all. See, for example, Hernández, *Migra!*; García y Griego, "The Bracero Policy Experiment"; García, *Operation Wetback*; and Calavita, *Inside the State*. For scholarship that examines Mexicans in Chicago in the postwar period see Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2012); Mike Amezcua, "The Second City Anew: Mexicans, Urban Culture, and Migration in the Transformation of Chicago, 1940-1965" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2011).

smugglers of Mexicans.” The inauguration of the new station coincided with a nationwide campaign “against aliens in large populated centers,” for which the Service sent twenty Spanish-speaking officers to Chicago. The six-week 1952 Chicago drive resulted in more than 1,200 apprehensions and deportations to Mexico, but “made no appreciable hole in the numbers present in the city, in spite of the fact that great numbers fled the city to escape apprehension during the period.” By 1954, the INS estimated that Chicago’s Mexican population had grown to 125,000, including some 20,000 to 40,000 unauthorized migrants.¹⁷⁷

Even though the INS did not launch Operation Wetback’s interior phase until the fall, the Service began planning for it before the California operation even began. In mid June the Central Office asked District Director Walter A. Sahli to submit a confidential “plan of operation, to rid the Chicago area of Mexican aliens, utilizing a special mobile force of 100 men.”¹⁷⁸ Before the month ended Commissioner Swing had made the informal announcement that starting in the fall “Chicago, Illinois, would be the first major United States city to be cleaned out.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ John P. Swanson, Chief Patrol Inspector, Grand Forks, North Dakota, to District Director, Chicago, Illinois, 18 March 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1; Interview with General Joseph Swing, by Ed Edwin, 21 June 1967, 15-16, Columbia University, Oral History Research Office, Eisenhower Administration Project, copy held at USAHEC. For examples of Mexicans hiring smugglers to transport them to Chicago, see “Gets 4 Year Term for Harboring of Mexican Aliens,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 March 1954, B9; and “Convicted Aid of ‘Wetbacks’ on Probation,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 November 1955, B5. The INS carried out deportation drives in Chicago in the late 1920s and early 1930s as well. This represented the largest Mexican population in any non-border state.

¹⁷⁸ Robinson to District Director, Chicago, Illinois, 14 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁷⁹ Ralph W. Dusha, Investigator, to Irving I. Freedman, Chief, Investigations Branch, Chicago, Illinois, 13 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. This quote is Dusha’s recounting of what Swing said.

In a letter to Sahli at the end of July, General Frank H. Partridge, an Army buddy of Swing's whom the Commissioner had appointed as his Special Assistant (despite considerable public and Congressional criticism), stated that the Service's "experience in California and the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas ha[d] shown that an intensive information campaign [was] an effective means of causing voluntary departure at no expense to the Government." According to Partridge, "[l]atest reports indicate[d] that those departing of their own accord as a result of the news of the drive, ha[d] exceeded those arrested by officers nearly three times." Thus, he recommended that Chicago officials solicit the help of Chicago-area media outlets, organizations, Mexican social clubs, and the Catholic Church in Chicago, to advertise the upcoming drive. "By such methods many hundreds of aliens would no doubt choose to return to Mexico of their own accord rather than to await their eventual arrest and removal by this Service," Partridge concluded, adding that "it would be well to encourage voluntary departures now rather than at a later date."¹⁸⁰

On July 30 US officials doubled down on the advanced publicity campaign when Attorney General Brownell announced "that Chicago would be a focal point of a federal immigration service drive to return 'wetbacks' to Mexico."¹⁸¹ Yet, local officials would not provide details about the operation or even corroborate its existence. In hopes that rumors of a possible drive would scare people into leaving regardless if it ever

¹⁸⁰ Frank H. Partridge to District Director, Chicago, 27 July 1954; D.R. Kelley, Memorandum for General Partridge, 14 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. Partridge's memo is mostly based on the D.R. Kelley's recommendations to him. Kelley stated that if the INS implemented such measures he "[felt] certain that many hundreds of the Mexicans would choose to return to Mexico on their own, thereby saving the Government many thousands of dollars."

¹⁸¹ "Federal Drive on 'Wetbacks' to Center Here," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 July 1954, 12.

materialized, Sahli put out a press release: “Without confirming or denying the possibility of any drive, I should like to offer advice to all aliens illegally in the United States ... obviously the simplest way to avoid formal deportation is for the individual to depart from the United States on his own accord.” The statement continued, “This he is permitted to do and even encouraged to do. In fact, we offer our assistance to enable such departing aliens to return without difficulty.” Sahli concluded with the following lines:

“I cannot stress too highly the importance of aliens leaving the United States of their own accord rather than await deportation, particularly in the case of any individual who hopes some day to return to the United States legally for permanent residence. Those who depart by themselves are virtually in as good as position as though they had never entered illegally and have an excellent opportunity of returning some day, but in the case of an alien who is formally deported, the law requires that before he is permitted to apply to enter, he must first obtain special permission from the Attorney General, and I can assure you this permission is sparingly given. Once an individual is formally deported, he has an obstacle to overcome which will prevent him from ever entering the United States again.

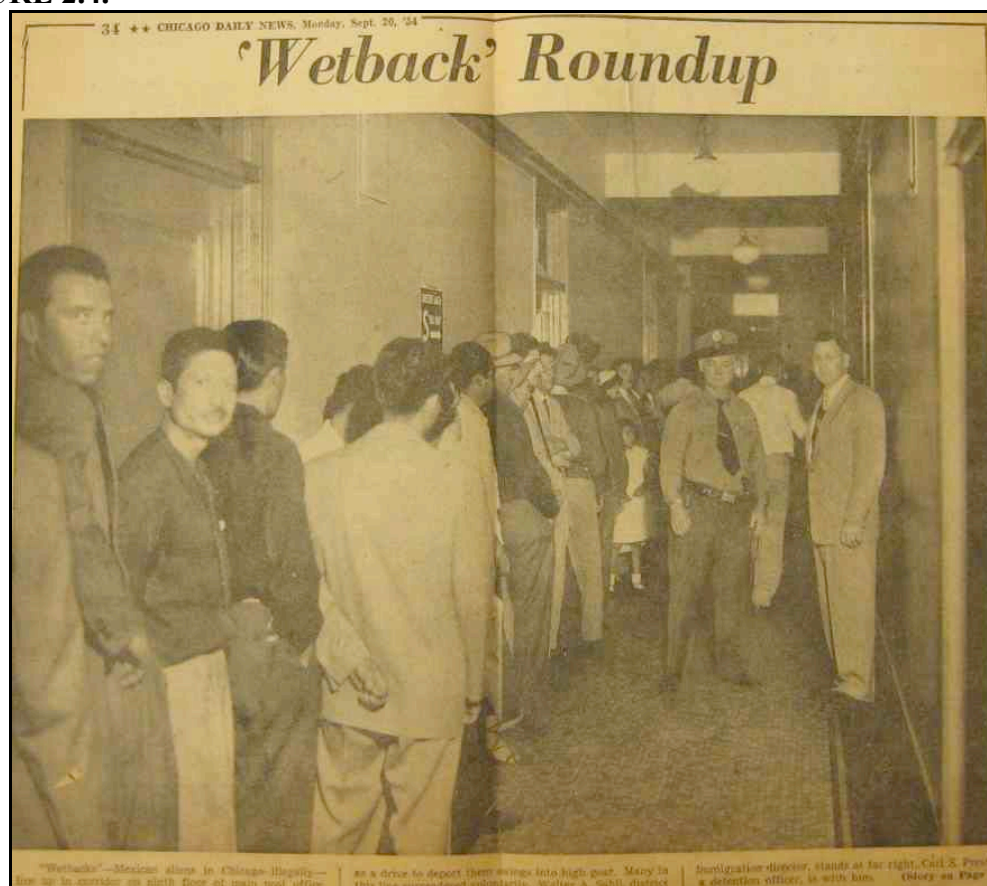
Hence, I whole-heartedly and sincerely suggest to all aliens illegally in the United States to think in terms of leaving the United States voluntarily before any formal action is commenced against them.”¹⁸²

The *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Daily News* picked up the story, reporting that Mexicans could avoid apprehension, detention, prosecution, and deportation if they agreed to depart “on their own accord.” They also noted that Sahli recommended that before leaving people should stop by the Chicago Border Patrol office to pick up letters

¹⁸² Press Release, INS, Chicago, Illinois, 2 August 1954; Sahli to Partridge, 3 August 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. As of early August it seems as if the INS had not decided whether the drive would actually happen. Sahli told Partridge that if it did they would have to give “serious consideration ... to the handling of aliens” since many were well established in Chicago and could not be processed as quickly as people on the southwestern border.

that “would guarantee the safe passage of the bearer to Mexico and explain that he was doing so voluntarily.”¹⁸³ (See Figure 2.4)

FIGURE 2.4.



Waiting for voluntary departure letters at the Chicago Border Patrol Office. *Source*: “‘Wetback’ Roundup,” *Chicago Daily News*, 20 September 1954, MCPFB, Box 10, Folder 8, CHM.

¹⁸³ The Chicago Border Patrol Office was located on the ninth floor of the Post Office building. “Wetbacks Get Help in Returning,” *Chicago Daily News*, 2 August 1954, Midwest Committee for Protection of Foreign Born (hereafter, MCPFB) 10.8, Chicago History Museum (hereafter, CHM), Chicago, Illinois; “Illegal Aliens Who Surrender Will Benefit,” *Chicago Tribune*, 3 August 1954, 14; Press Release, INS, Chicago, Illinois, 2 August 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

During Operation Wetback INS officials across the interior of the United States strategized about how to convince migrants to accept voluntary departure. As the Seattle District Director told his subordinates, “Aliens are more likely to accept [voluntary departure] if the matter is broached at the time of apprehension rather than some days later. Therefore, they should be interrogated regarding voluntary departure immediately a prima facie case of deportability is established.” Moreover, “[t]he advantages of voluntary departure may be explained to them clearly and forcibly; for example, probable shorter detention and avoidance of having a deportation against their record.” And, he continued, if the person accepted voluntary departure the apprehending officer should have him or her sign the required forms—“particularly the portion authorizing use of their funds in Service possession for purchase of transportation to the appropriate Mexican border port or for any stage of the journey that they are able to pay.”¹⁸⁴

In the early planning stages of the Chicago operation, however, Sahli had actually recommended holding removal hearings, even if that meant paying for an extra day or two of detention, and then deportation. He reasoned that holding hearings would “[place] the Service in a much stronger position to deal with that individual should he again enter the United States illegally,” and reported to central office officials that the Chicago

¹⁸⁴ John P. Boyd, Seattle District Director, to All Officers in Charge, District No. 12, Chief Patrol Inspectors at Blaine, Spokane and Havre, 8 October 1954, 56364/43, BP Ops NW, RG 85, NARA1. In hopes of minimizing overall expenses Boyd added that the INS could grant people voluntary departure even if they could not pay, or were unwilling to pay for their own transportation. This contradicted statements Sahli made less than two weeks earlier, although it is unclear whether the policy changed or whether it simply differed by district or region. Sahli wrote in a letter to Harlan B. Carter that “an alien being granted voluntary departure must be both willing and able to depart and if he were able but not willing, that we had no alternative but to institute deportation proceedings.” See Sahli to Carter, 27 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

district had “been most successful in obtaining convictions and actually sentences for a year and a day and these cases have been given considerable publicity.” Formal deportation accompanied by an extended prison sentences would send a message, Sahli argued. “Those who know Mexicans clearly concede that a sentence of two to three months means nothing to the Mexican but where he is given a sentence of a year, then it does begin to mean something.”¹⁸⁵

Whereas Sahli had the long term in mind, Central Office officials focused on the short term rejected his suggestion and argued that formal deportation proceedings did not align with the goals of Operation Wetback. In the margin of Sahli’s memo an official commented, “Costly detention point not necessary if processing is streamlined,” and later added, “Hearings not necessary if idea is to clean out volume — not make records.”¹⁸⁶ The Acting Chief of the Border Patrol weighed in on Sahli’s proposal in a letter to Partridge: “I feel that this plan would be too slow and cumbersome to be effective. That part of the plan which deals with according hearings to all aliens apprehended, I feel, in such an operation, would be out of place.”¹⁸⁷ Operation Wetback was not a campaign grounded in hearings, formal proceedings, and the airing of Mexicans’ cases and rights; it was mass deportation on the cheap, by whatever means necessary, in hopes of

¹⁸⁵ Sahli to R.H. Robinson, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Border Patrol, Detention & Deportation Branch, 21 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. A month later Sahli suggested that holding hearings in Chicago might be more practical, since it was “a well known fact that all unlawful entry cases cannot be presented to the Courts in the districts where such entries occur.” Sahli to E.A. Loughran, Ass’t. Commissioner, Administrative Div., Central Office, 26 July 1954, 56364/43, BP Ops NW, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁸⁶ Sahli to R.H. Robinson, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Border Patrol, Detention & Deportation Branch, 21 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁸⁷ Kelley to Partridge, 28 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

establishing the INS's authority and pushing unauthorized laborers into the Bracero Program.

Throughout July and into August rumors about the potential deportation campaign in Chicago led some organizations to contact the INS with concerns about how such an operation would affect Mexicans and Mexican Americans' rights. The Director of the Council Against Discrimination of Greater Chicago wrote to INS officials in early July, noting that "an operation of this size, announced as it was in *The Daily News*, can lead to panic and unreasoned action." When he asked how his organization could help immigration officials "in making an orderly deportation," the Central Office suggested that Sahli ask the Council Against Discrimination and its 143 affiliates "to urge ... all illegal aliens in the area return at this time to Mexico on their own accord."¹⁸⁸ The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) also contacted INS officials and, as a result of its concerns about the impact of a potential deportation campaign, came to the conclusion "that all illegal aliens in the area should be advised that it would be to their best interest to return to Mexico voluntarily rather than to await any drive such as the Union anticipates." While the ACLU published "Latin Americans and the Immigration Service," a brochure meant to inform people of their rights, it also told Mexicans to leave the US in order to avoid deportation. Despite whatever intentions it might have had, by sending a press release about the brochure to all Illinois newspapers and promising to "give

¹⁸⁸ Robert C.L. George to Walter Sahli, 6 July 1954; Frank H. Partridge to District Director, Chicago, 27 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

considerable publicity” to the deportation drive, the ACLU helped propagate the INS’s fear campaign.¹⁸⁹

The combination of INS press releases, media coverage, and the assistance of local organizations in spreading the word had the effect the INS desired, at least by some accounts. The ACLU stated that news of the operation had “created the anxiety primarily among the Spanish-American population in Chicago.”¹⁹⁰ An Information Officer in the Illinois State Department of Labor’s Employment Service “report[ed] that about 50% of their Mexican help had left the area when the Wetback Drive was first publicized” and “stated that he had been advised that the number which had departed from the area under these conditions amounted to about 4,000.” Romana R. Fierro, Acting Director of the Mexican American Consul of Chicago, told an INS investigator that “when publicity concerning the proposed wetback program was first given out that many wives and other relatives of illegally resident Mexicans started coming to see her for advice on how to legalize the status of such illegal aliens.” Fierro also mentioned “that all such persons who came to talk to her told her that their husbands or other relatives illegally in the United States sent them to talk to her because they were afraid to be on the street for fear of being apprehended by Immigration Officers.” In her opinion, “undoubtedly a great number of illegal Mexicans [had] left the area to evade apprehension,” not counting those

¹⁸⁹ Sahli to Partridge, 3 August 1954; “Latin Americans and the Immigration Service,” pamphlet published by American Civil Liberties Union, Chicago; Press Release, ACLU, Illinois Division, to All Illinois Newspapers, 3 August 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁹⁰ Henry Heineman, Chairman, Committee on Nationality and Loyalty Matters, ACLU, to General J.M. Swing, 30 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

that left under voluntary departure. The INS investigator noted that Fierro and a Puerto Rican social worker at the Hull House informed him “that there [had] been a marked increase in the number of marriages between Mexican men who are here illegally and Puerto Rican woman (sic).” The director of the Hull House also related to the Service that the number of Mexicans asking about legalizing or naturalizing had increased in recent months, “coincid[ing] with the publicity given to the wetback program and the beginning of the drive in this area.”¹⁹¹

While the advanced publicity in Chicago was similar to the strategy the INS had adopted in California and Texas, officials pointed out that the Chicago operation would differ from the previous campaigns in important ways. It “[would] not be a blitzkrieg but an infiltration,” one official declared.¹⁹² (See Figure 2.5) This was partially because the extended advanced publicity campaign had pushed some people into hiding, but also because many Mexicans in Chicago were established members of the community, rather than recent arrivals or seasonal labor migrants. Indeed, the long history and recent growth of Chicago’s Mexican community had caused friction in some parts of the city and led citizens to contact the INS and urge it “to correct the situation as it is seen by them in their own neighborhoods.” A March 1954 report on the history of Mexicans in Chicago noted that most of these complaints “reflect[ed] the growing competition for jobs, for living space and for women” and a growing resentment of an “alien group—almost entirely a youthful male group—swaggering in gangs through the streets and openly

¹⁹¹ Emmett D. Helliher, Investigator, Chicago, to Harold E. Hulsing, Chief, Inspections and Examinations Branch, Chicago, 7 October 1954, 56364/45.3 Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁹² Notes on Meeting about “Mexican Laborers,” 13 August 1954, 56321/448f Bracero program, gen file, 8/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

contemptuous of the laws of our country.”¹⁹³ However, some Chicago-area residents complained about Mexicans decreasing neighborhood property values and Democrats winning Chicago ward elections by “buying votes from Spanish speaking people.”¹⁹⁴

FIGURE 2.5.



INS investigators in Chicago apprehending a young Mexican man during Operation Wetback.
Source: Bus Bergen, “Deport Wetbacks in Roundup Here,” *The Cleveland Press*, 20 July 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG85, NARA1.

The INS also noted that the Mexican community’s deep roots in Chicago meant that Mexicans were “no longer easily rounded up in large gangs, nor [were] they

¹⁹³ John P. Swanson, Chief Patrol Inspector, Grand Forks, North Dakota, to District Director, Chicago, Illinois, 18 March 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁹⁴ Mary M. Oddson to Sahli, 22 September 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1; Ralph W. Dusha, Investigator, to Irving I. Freedman, Chief, Investigations Branch, Chicago, Illinois, 13 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

concentrated in definite areas for housing purposes.” Moreover, according to Sahli, many Mexicans “[had] been here a sufficient length of time to have become economically involved in the neighborhood, thereby complicating immensely the process of removal after apprehension.” He continued:

“Many have purchased household furnishings, automobiles, appliances and clothing on extended payments, have established bank accounts, postal savings accounts, public utility contracts and, in short, become involved in all the complexities of the average city dweller. They have gained employment with large corporations, making difficult the arranging of expeditious payment of wages due. In addition, and perhaps more important from our standpoint, they have acquired associations with citizens and resident aliens which results in demands for release on bond, representation by counsel and in many cases applications for discretionary relief.”¹⁹⁵

In hopes of avoiding such problems, the Chief Patrol Inspector in New Orleans suggested the INS heighten enforcement efforts in the South to stop migrants from reaching Chicago in the first place, thus preventing their integration into established communities and the Service’s subsequent costly efforts to deport them. “If these aliens are apprehended immediately, while still in the New Orleans Sector and in transit, they can be expelled from the United States at a minimum cost in both money and manpower, since they are handled in the same manner as if they had been caught within a few miles of the border,” he wrote to the Chief of the Border Patrol.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Sahli to E.A. Loughran, Ass’t. Commissioner, Administrative Div., Central Office, 26 July 1954, 56364/43, BP Ops NW, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁹⁶ Edwin B. Topmiller, Chief Patrol Inspector, to H.B. Carter, Chief, Border Patrol Branch, 10 August 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 9, 7/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

Even if the INS had acted on the recommendation to crack down on northward migration within the US, it would not have resolved the issue of deporting the estimated 20,000-plus Mexicans already living in Chicago without authorization. In Sahli's opinion, a "'dragnet' type of operation" would only result in a small number of apprehensions and might lead some thousands to "temporarily leave the area." But, he went on, "no great percentage would voluntarily depart the United States." And after the first days of any comprehensive drive "the sources which usually provide group apprehensions would be exhausted and the operation would necessarily revert to a process of combing literally thousands of small factories, nurseries, golf courses, restaurants and small rooming houses."¹⁹⁷ When the INS finally decided to go ahead with the Chicago drive, it discovered that many of the potential problems it had envisioned were real.

In early September the INS recalled all Chicago Border Patrol agents that had been detailed to California and South Texas. Less than two weeks later, on September 17, District Director Sahli notified officers that the "accelerated program of removing Mexicans illegally in the United States from Chicago area and vicinity" had commenced.¹⁹⁸ Before the campaign started the INS had indicated that it hoped to deport 100 Mexicans per day during the first week, seventy per day during the second week, fifty per day during week three, and then forty per day thereafter for a period of six

¹⁹⁷ Sahli to E.A. Loughran, Ass't. Commissioner, Administrative Div., Central Office, 26 July 1954, 56364/43, BP Ops NW, RG 85, NARA1.

¹⁹⁸ Partridge to District Directors, San Antonio and Los Angeles, 7 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 6, RG 85, NARA1; Walter A. Sahli, District Director, Chicago, to All Officers, 17 September 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

months. The Service estimated that it would need all Chicago officers, plus fifty extra officers for the drive, which would target Chicago in addition to parts of Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan.¹⁹⁹ When the campaign officially began, the *Chicago Daily News* reported that “[a] small army of immigration officers searched throughout the city for offenders.”²⁰⁰ By the end of the first week it became clear that the INS would come nowhere near meeting its apprehension goals: the Service had apprehended fewer than 150 people. By the end of the month apprehensions only totaled 510, compared to 625 “voluntary surrenders,” for 1,135 deportations in all.²⁰¹

Still, on October 6, a few weeks into the official Chicago campaign, Sahli wrote to Swing that the number of “aliens” in Chicago “[had] decreased substantially. The distribution ha[d] become more diffuse.” Furthermore, he continued, “[t]here [was] strong evidence of a general exodus of Mexican aliens during recent months,” which Sahli attributed to the publicity campaign, the accelerated program itself, and the “moderate decline” in job opportunities. The priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe in south Chicago, the city’s oldest Mexican parish, reinforced Sahli’s assertion when he told INS officials that attendance had been down since the last week of July. Moreover, traffic

¹⁹⁹ “Chicago Operation,” 9 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

²⁰⁰ “‘Wetback’ Roundup in High Gear,” *Chicago Daily News*, 20 September 1954, CHM MCPFB 10.8.

²⁰¹ Sahli to James L. Hennessy, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, 27 September 1954; Harold E. Hulsing, Chief, Inspections and Examinations Branch, Chicago, Ill., to Sahli, 30 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1; Harold E. Hulsing, Chief, Inspections and Examinations Branch, Chicago, Ill., to Sahli, 3 December 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1. Before the drive started officials had decided, largely for budgetary reasons, not to patrol on weekends. Nearly half of all the people apprehended were working in manufacturing, while another third worked in railroads, hotels and restaurants, or metal industries. Less than two percent gave “housewife” as an occupation, leading the INS to conclude that few Mexican men brought their families to Chicago.

checks at Chicago-area bus terminals indicated a “substantial Southward movement of Mexican aliens,” including many with voluntary departure letters. “Many Mexican aliens are apparently under cover,” Sahli told the Commissioner, and “[s]everal ... who surrendered voluntarily said that they failed to report to work over a period of several days in an effort to avoid deportation.” He also made a point of stating that the advanced publicity campaign “produced several positive results,” including that the number of “voluntary surrenders” (1,246) still exceeded apprehensions (1,193). Sahli added that the publicity had caused “large numbers of Mexican aliens” to leave “without voluntary departure letters.”²⁰²

But, unlike in the border region, the INS faced several challenges when deporting people from the interior. In addition to the difficulty in making apprehensions in northern urban centers, the distance from the border meant that the process of deporting people from the interior took longer and cost more. In Chicago, the Service had trouble securing a detention space to hold apprehended Mexicans awaiting removal. After scouting for a suitable site at military camps in Indiana and Wisconsin and failing to convince the Studebaker-Packard Corporation to allow the INS to use one of its storage facilities in Chicago (conveniently located next to Midway Airport), the Service was forced to lease a 4,000-square foot temporary detention facility (the entire second floor of 1241-45 South

²⁰² Sahli to Commissioner, 7 October 1954; Sahli to Partridge, 22 October 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

State Street) from the State Street Industrial Corporation for \$250.00 per month, for a period of six months. It also held some deportees in the Cook County Jail.²⁰³

The INS tried to expedite deportations from Chicago in order to minimize the overall cost of the campaign. To avoid drawn out deportations the Service enacted a policy of bringing people to their homes to collect their possessions and settle their affairs before putting them in detention. However, this process, known as “cleaning up,” did not include going to apprehended Mexicans’ places of employment to collect salary or wages. As a result, Sahli suggested that individuals arrange to be paid by check, which could be forwarded to Mexico. After receiving confirmation that the Mexican Consul in Chicago would help in such cases, as well as in those in which people could not collect or disburse their possessions before being deported, the INS reported that “[a]ll ordinary red tape ha[d] been eliminated.”²⁰⁴

Transporting apprehended Mexicans some 1,400 miles or more from Chicago to South Texas for deportation presented another obstacle. Until late March 1954 the Border Patrol used trains to move Mexicans from Chicago to San Antonio, where they then took the deportees to Laredo by bus. The trip took five-to-seven days and required three

²⁰³ Sahli to Partridge, 15 October 1954, 56364/45.3 Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1; Cushman to Sahli, 10 June 1954; Cushman to Sahli, 15 June 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1; James J. Nance, President, Studebaker-Packard Corporation, to Swing, 15 October 1954, 56364/45.3 Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1; Swing to Nance, 29 September 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1; Sahli to E.A. Loughran, Assistant Commissioner, Administrative Division, Central Office, including signed lease agreement, 22 October 1954, 56310/923 Bus Transport CA & Detention Cntr Lease IL, RG 85, NARA1. After the INS’s State Street lease expired at the end of March 1955 it tried to rent another temporary space in a commercial zone at 2335 Indiana Avenue. “Study Plea for Detention of ‘Wetbacks,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 April 1955, S1.

²⁰⁴ Sahli to All Officers, 17 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1; “Chicago Operation,” 9 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

officers to serve as guards. But starting March 25, to the railroad companies' dismay, the Service started using commercial airplanes to transport deportees from the interior to the border. In an attempt to win back the removal contract, railroad officials made a counteroffer: "We are very anxious to again participate in the handling of this Mexican deport business, and hope that with the reduced rate we are quoting, and the furnishing of guards to relieve your man-power situation, that we will again be privileged to participate in this very nice business." In the end, the INS decided to continue using the airlift since it streamlined the process by taking deportees directly to the border without any intermediary stops.²⁰⁵

Aboard the planes an INS officer armed with a pistol guarded the deportees, who were given an in-flight meal. As a reporter who accompanied a July 1954 airlift noted, "[i]t's not filet mignon but every returning wetback being flown back to Mexico was given a box lunch by the plane stewardess." (See Figure 2.6) Sometimes the planes stopped along the way to pick up deportees from Kansas City and other intermediate points. While the airlift helped the INS deport Mexicans from the interior of the country, it raised questions for others, including one of the pilots for the contract transportation company: "[T]his Mexican business mystifies me. We just hauled a load of contract

²⁰⁵ Sahli to R. H. Robinson, Actg. Assistant Commissioner, 30 June 1954; E.F. McWilliams, Missouri-Kansas-Texas Lines, S.W. Chilton, Frisco Lines, W.R. Godley, GM&O RR, C.T. McEvelly, I.C. RR, and G.G. Kottenstette, Wabash RR, to Sahli, 28 June 1954, 56364/45.6 Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. For more on the business of deportation see Chapter 3.

laborers from Mexico to Michigan. Now we're hauling a load of other Mexicans back to Mexico. Well, I just fly the plane."²⁰⁶

FIGURE 2.6.



Source: Bus Bergen, "Wetbacks Shrug, Relax for Long Trip Home," *The Cleveland Press*, 21 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

During Operation Wetback, as a result of the increased volume and frequency of flights, the INS decided to use three government-owned C-46-D airplanes (on loan from the Air Force) to convey people from Chicago to Brownsville, where they would then be

²⁰⁶ Bus Bergen, "Wetbacks Shrug, Relax for Long Trip Home," *The Cleveland Press*, 21 July 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1.

deported via boatlift to Veracruz, Mexico. The Service limited deportees “to not in excess of forty pounds of baggage” and forced them to ship anything beyond that to a customs broker at Laredo, who would then send their belongings to an address they provided in Mexico.²⁰⁷ The airlifts, operated by six Border Patrol pilots, ran as soon as the INS had apprehended fifty (or close to fifty) eligible deportees. At least on some occasions the INS took advantage of the decision to use government planes to transport supplies and equipment. After pilots left the first load of deportees in South Texas, Central Office officials instructed them to return with 200 cots and 200 new blankets from McAllen to be used in the temporary detention facility in Chicago. Men made up the vast majority of deportees taken from Chicago to the border, but the INS airlifted women as well. The September 27 flight, for example, included forty-five men and four women.²⁰⁸

As in previous phases of Operation Wetback, the INS’s reliance on voluntary departure helped defray a considerable portion of the cost of the Chicago airlift. Those who had lived and worked in the city for years or decades often returned to Mexico with

²⁰⁷ Roger Lewis, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force to Swing, 2 September 1954, 56364/43.19, Airlift, AlienAirlift, RG 85, NARA1; “Commercial airlift fares”; Burwell to Brownell, 22 September 1954; Sahli to All Officers, 17 September 1954; “Spanish language INS document informing/advising deportees of customs agents in Laredo, Texas,” 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. The Air Force told the INS that the planes were not certified for passenger service and understood that the Service would make sure the CAA cleared them. The INS fielded offers from private carriers but decided to use the government planes to save money. The Service estimated each flight using Air Force planes to cost around \$1,125, whereas the lowest commercial bid it received was \$1,750, and most were closer to \$4,000. The INS’s decision angered Flying Tiger Line, Inc., which accused the government of engaging in competition with private airlines. “As a corporate citizen in the United States business community we are appalled by this usurpation of our right to do business,” the president of the company wrote to the Attorney General. For more on the boatlift and the business of deportation see Chapter 3.

²⁰⁸ Partridge to District Director, Chicago, 14 September 1954, 56364/43.19, Airlift, AlienAirlift, RG 85, NARA1; Partridge to Swing, 27 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. The Border Patrol’s lead pilot for the Operation was Alva L. Pilliod, whose wife sometimes accompanied him onboard as the stewardess.

considerable sums of money. The forty-six people onboard the first deportation flight during Operation Wetback, for example, carried more than \$10,000 in cash, including one person who had \$3,000. In this sense, the Service benefitted from the fact that many of the people deported from Chicago had been well established community members. According to immigration officials, as of October 6, more than 70 percent (268 of 375) of the Mexicans airlifted from Chicago covered the full cost of their deportation (\$31.45 for the flight to Brownsville, and then \$9 for the boatlift to Veracruz, or a total of \$40.45 per person), and all others covered part of their deportation costs.²⁰⁹

Some Mexicans facing deportation from Chicago rejected voluntary departure and fought their cases. At least sixteen people requested hearings during the first ten days of the Chicago operation. In some instances lawyers served as counsel for people facing deportation—although having legal representation did not guarantee anything. A lawyer for the Midwest Committee for Protection of Foreign Born opined that many defense attorneys felt that “any Mexican person arrested for ‘illegal entry’ must automatically be returned to Mexico even though we fight for due process in the arrest procedure and hearings. This in itself may be diluting all our efforts to halt mass deportations and the

²⁰⁹ Joseph A. Cushman to Commissioner, 6 October 1954, 56364/45.3 Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1; Sahli to All Officers, 17 September 1954, 56364/45.6, Op Wetback Vol 8 Spec Taskforce 1954, Chicago, 5/54-9/54, RG 85, NARA1. During the 1952 deportation drive in Chicago officials collected \$24,214 from 90 Mexican deportees on one occasion and \$15,925 from 455 others on another. Reporting about the first group, Joseph A. Cushman, a Chicago Enforcement Officer wrote, “Many of the Mexican nationals apprehended have rather large bank accounts and are the owners of automobiles, radios, television sets, tools, etc.” And, in regards to the second group, Cushman noted, “We were somewhat amazed at the amount of money in the possession of the Mexican aliens at the time of departure from the United States. On one occasion, a party which included 134 Mexicans processed through the Chicago office, carried back more than \$43,000.00 in cash, in addition to several thousand dollars in certified checks and other negotiable paper.” Cushman to Commissioner, 19 February 1952; Cushman to Commissioner, 21 March 1952, 56364/43 BP Ops NW, RG 85, NARA1.

accompanying terror,” he lamented. Moreover, over time he became “more convinced that [lawyers] must not stipulate this point, particularly when realizing that the majority of so-called illegal entrants arrive in the U.S. With the open connivance of the INS — or at the least through a look the other way.”²¹⁰

But the majority of Mexicans facing deportation did not fight their cases in court and the INS’s failure to apprehend people limited the number who did. One month into the Chicago campaign, with apprehensions well below the INS’s target goals, officials concluded that while there may have been 20,000 Mexicans living in the area without authorization in the past, “no such number was present at the beginning of the drive in September of this year.” During the two years preceding Operation Wetback the INS claimed that “many hundreds of Mexican aliens from this area voluntarily returned to Mexico, obtained visas and entered for permanent residence.” An investigating officer in Chicago stated that the proportion of Mexicans with legal status increased “to an amazing degree since last winter.”²¹¹ When INS officials did apprehend Mexicans in Chicago, it was only after “[p]ainstaking questioning” to establish deportability since “[m]any of the aliens now being apprehended have a thorough knowledge of the English language.” Moreover, officials claimed that Mexicans’ integration “into Negro and Porto Rican

²¹⁰ “Drive on Aliens by U.S. Brings 320 Detentions,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 September 1954, 23; Nathan Caldwell, Jr., Executive Secretary, to Rose Chernin, LA Committee PFB, 20 September 1954, CHM MCPFB 10.8. In another instance Caldwell noted that an attorney for the packinghouse worker’s union was going to let a man be deported “without even trying to obtain his release and a stay of deportation on a writ of habeas corpus.” This shocked Caldwell, who wrote, “It didn’t occur to him to demand that a hearing be held. Good God!” Caldwell to Josefina Yanez, 5 October 1954, CHM MCPFB 10.8. Unfortunately, I have yet to come across detailed information about specific hearings or cases that were heard by immigration judges or officials.

²¹¹ Sahli to Partridge, 22 October 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

social circles” and the fact that “[s]ome Mexicans have married Negroes” made it more difficult to deport them.²¹²

The INS believed that the advanced publicity in the lead up to the Chicago operation may have led other Mexicans to relocate. Based on the belief that some people may have settled in surrounding suburban communities and smaller industrial centers, the Service sent officers to St. Louis, Kansas City, Omaha, Milwaukee, Duluth, and the St. Paul-Minneapolis area “to prevent the wetbacks [from] finding a haven anywhere in this section of the country.”²¹³ But investigations turned up “[n]o evidence of any significant movement of Mexican aliens from Chicago to other communities.”²¹⁴ From September 23 to October 6 two officers in Minnesota and Wisconsin checked “celery and cauliflower farms, packing companies, food processing plants, county agents, employment offices, mining companies, Sheriff’s offices, canning factories and cheese factories,” but were “unable to apprehend any Mexican aliens who were illegally in the United States.”²¹⁵ Officials described apprehensions outside of Chicago as being “extremely low,” and noted that Omaha’s eighty-one apprehensions by the last week of November was more than two-times as many as any other sub-office.²¹⁶

Even though apprehensions lagged in Chicago and were near non-existent in the rest of the district, intelligence reports indicated that “a considerable number” of

²¹² Joseph A. Cushman, Acting District Director, Chicago, to Commissioner, 24 November 1954; Sahli to Commissioner, 7 October 1954, 56364/45.3 Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

²¹³ Sahli to Partridge, 22 October 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

²¹⁴ Cushman to Commissioner, 24 November 1954, 56364/45.3 Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

²¹⁵ Harry Gordon to Sahli, 11 October 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

²¹⁶ Cushman to Commissioner, 24 November 1954, 56364/45.3 Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

Mexicans still lived in the city. Many of them, according to the Service, claimed to be US citizens and were “in possession of false documents.”²¹⁷ In December the INS decided to extend the Chicago operation, but reduced the force to ten teams of two officers working seven days-a-week (based on its finding that “apprehensions ha[d] been more successful during the early morning hours and the late evening hours and on weekends, particularly on Sundays”). The Service scheduled airlifts to Brownsville as needed, whenever the detention population reached fifty-to-sixty people. But the INS’s inability to find a permanent detention facility, and the fact it could not keep more than twenty-five migrants in the overflowing Cook County Jail, led officials to conclude that it was “therefore obviously impossible to maintain our present schedule of operations in connection with the wetback drive.”²¹⁸

In January 1955 INS investigators in Chicago took over the direction of Operation Wetback from the Border Patrol. Four months later officials estimated that 2,500 to 5,000 Mexicans still lived in Chicago without authorization, but there were “only two Patrol Inspectors engaged in full time wetback work,” in addition to a handful of officers

²¹⁷ Cushman to Sahli, 27 October 1954; Sahli to Partridge, 22 October 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1. Apprehensions rose to 921 in October, but then dropped down to 445 in November. During the first three months of the campaign the INS found that around one-third of all Mexicans apprehended in Chicago had entered as braceros or non-immigrants. Harold E. Hulsing, Chief, Inspections and Examinations Branch, Chicago, Ill., to Sahli, 3 December 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1. Cushman, Acting District Director, Chicago, to Commissioner, 24 November 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1. Two months into the Chicago operation Cushman reported that “[t]he program of voluntary surrenders and departure unescorted has produced excellent results. Through November 17, 1954, a total of 1427 letters granting voluntary departure unescorted were issued in the Chicago office. Through the same date a total of 1216 such departures had been verified.” An investigation found seventy-three others—fifty of whom had left for Mexico without turning in their voluntary departure letter; sixteen who could not be located; and seven that had not departed but moved to new residences.

²¹⁸ Sahli to Partridge, 6 December 1954, 56364/45.3, Task Force-BP-Chicago (1954), RG 85, NARA1.

overseeing detention, deportation, and parole. During the last months of the drive investigators targeted “firmly entrenched individual aliens,” turned to confidential informants for tips, and offered rewards for information leading to the apprehension of unauthorized immigrants. The Service also conducted “a very comprehensive investigation looking toward the prosecution of persons who have been supplying the wetbacks with fraudulent identification documents, such as draft cards, voter’s registration cards, and birth certificates.” By late July 1955, claiming—without any evidence—that the number of unauthorized Mexicans in Chicago had dropped to 600, officials announced that the Midwest campaign had ended.²¹⁹ In contrast to earlier phases of Operation Wetback, the Chicago drive was slow, drawn out, and required considerable resources dedicated to investigation, apprehension, detention, and deportation. It offered a glimpse into some of the challenges related to interior enforcement that the INS would face in the decades to come.

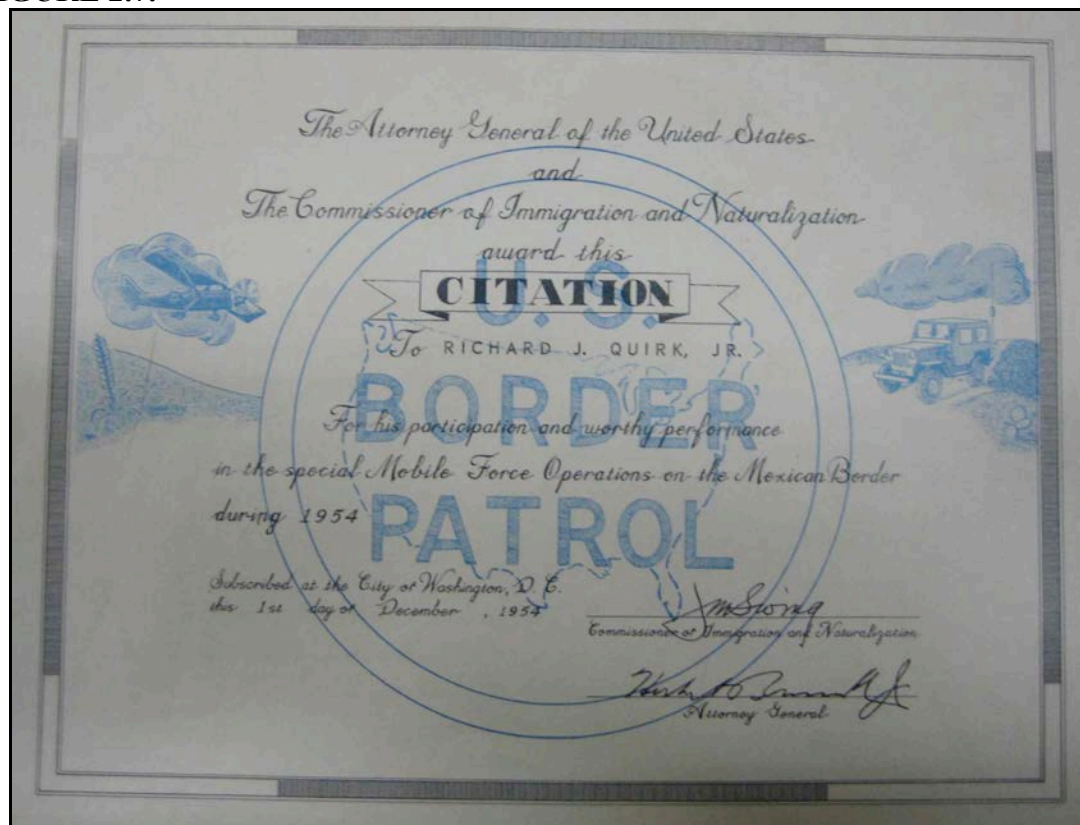
Operation Wetback’s Legacy

Today, many scholars, journalists, and immigration officials still refer to Operation Wetback as a record-breaking deportation drive campaign that resulted in the expulsion of more than one million Mexicans from the border region. But it began as a plan to deport around 25,000 Mexicans from California over the course of thirty-to-forty-five days, and even though the INS eventually expanded it to include South Texas and

²¹⁹ Ralph H. Holton, Chicago District Director, to Commissioner, 17 May 1955, 56364/43, BP Ops NW, RG 85, NARA1; “End Campaign for Deporting Wetbacks Here,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 July 1955, 16.

Chicago, the total number of people deported was but a fraction of what the Service later claimed and celebrated.²²⁰

FIGURE 2.7.



Citation for participation in Operation Wetback, given to Border Patrol Officers by Attorney General Brownell and Commissioner Swing. *Source:* Border Patrol file, NBPM

More than anything, Operation Wetback was a massive INS self-promotion campaign in hopes of improving its reputation, building morale amongst its officers, and

²²⁰ Lic. Pablo Campos Ortíz a C. Secretario de Gobernación, 22 mayo 1954; Lic. Miguel G. Calderón, Opinion, 21 mayo 1954; Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to C. Oficial Mayor de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 31 mayo 1954, TM-94-1, SRE. Swing stated that by early October some 163,000 had been deported to Mexico, adding “I feel we are over the hump in mass apprehensions.” Swing to William R. Sabin, Sr. Patrol Inspector, McAllen, Texas, 30 November 1954, Border Patrol file, NBPM.

solidifying its place within the federal bureaucracy.²²¹ Commissioner Swing touted the Service's achievements in INS Annual Reports and sent out certificates recognizing and congratulating officers' participation in the "historic" campaign. (See Figure 2.7) The operation's symbolic importance outweighed the actual number of people deported though, and the prevailing view of Operation Wetback as the largest deportation campaign in US history reminds us of the importance of interrogating government immigration statistics and the politics behind their production.

While Operation Wetback's success as a mass deportation campaign has been exaggerated, it was somewhat more effective in temporarily achieving another goal: the expansion of authorized contract labor migration and, in turn, the reduction of unauthorized migration.²²² It is impossible to say how many unauthorized migrants evaded INS detection, and how the probability of being caught might have changed over time, but total apprehensions dropped dramatically, to an average of just over 78,000 per year during the final decade of the Bracero Program.²²³ At the same time, the number of bracero contracts rose from some 309,000 in 1954 to 398,650 the following year, and a record high of more than 445,000 in 1956. This was in part due to the expulsion of unauthorized migrants, but also a result of the INS and Department of Labor's promise to southwestern growers to provide them with a sufficient number of braceros to replace the unauthorized labor force. The number of contract laborers the US admitted remained

²²¹ For more on Operation Wetback as a publicity campaign, see García, *Operation Wetback*; Calavita, *Inside the State*; and Hernández, *Migra!*.

²²² Calavita, *Inside the State* and García y Griego, "The Bracero Policy Experiment."

²²³ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 91.

above 400,000 per year until the end of the 1950s, and averaged more than 330,000 in the ten years after Operation Wetback. Not surprisingly, the largest increases in bracero contracts occurred in Texas and California, the two states with the highest demand for agricultural labor, and the two states Operation Wetback targeted above all others. However, after the Bracero Program drew to a close in the mid 1960s unauthorized migration spiked; whatever control the INS had managed to achieve proved fleeting.²²⁴

Rather than a record-breaking deportation campaign or binational effort to regulate labor by removing Mexicans from the United States, Operation Wetback—and the INS’s efforts to exaggerate its effectiveness—reflected the US’s inability to control migration at the border *and* in the interior. Unable to formally deport every Mexican in the United States without authorization, the Service relied on voluntary departure and scare tactic-driven publicity campaigns meant to encourage people to return to Mexico “on their own.” The use of such tactics showed the extent to which the INS tried to shape people’s behavior beyond its limited resources. Despite the euphemistic ways in which immigration officials referred to these alternate means of deportation, both resulted in people leaving the country in response to government force or coercion. Indeed, they became the primary methods US immigration officials used to deport people for the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond.

²²⁴ It should be noted that Operation Wetback cannot be entirely credited for the increasing number of braceros. The number of labor contracts started rising in the early 1950s, going from 67,500 in 1950 to 192,000 in 1951, before reaching 309,033 in 1954 and 445,197 in 1956. Calavita, *Inside the State*, Appendix B, 218, and García y Griego, “The Bracero Policy Experiment,” 846-848.

CHAPTER 3

BANANAS NORTH, DEPORTEES SOUTH: THE BOATLIFT AND THE BUSINESS OF DEPORTATION

While the exact number of people the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) deported during Operation Wetback is unclear, there is no doubt that deportations reached record numbers during the Bracero Program, and especially in the 1950s. But how did the US physically remove millions of Mexicans? Unlike historians of other forced movements—most notably those who have studied slave ships and the transportation of African slaves to the Americas—historians of migration have largely ignored the physical process of deportation.²²⁵ Yet, as William Walters has noted, examining transportation networks and the removal of people from one country to another provides “a more grounded and materialist account of a global phenomena like migration” and offers important insights into the nexus of “states and markets, peoples and territories, [and] public and private” interests that have shaped deportation.²²⁶

Deportation often entailed both internal and international forced migration via multiple modes of publicly- and privately-owned transportation. In the second half of the

²²⁵ See, among others, Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin, 2007); Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007).

²²⁶ William Walters, “The Flight of the Deported: Deportation, Aviation & Politics,” paper presented at “The Margins of Citizenship: ‘Deportability,’ Illegality and Statelessness in the 20th Century,” July 22-25, 2013.

twentieth century the INS and Mexican immigration officials used buses to convey deportees short distances and relied on trains, planes, and boats to cover longer distances. When, where, and how one was deported not only depended on unforeseen transportation delays and changing migration patterns, but also on factors like gender and economic standing.

In the 1950s, heightened levels of unauthorized migration led the INS to adopt a policy of deporting people deep into the interior of Mexico in hopes of deterring future migration. Its preferred method of doing so was the boatlift. Mexicans apprehended along the border and in the interior of the country were transported by chartered trains or Service-owned planes to south Texas and held at the McAllen Detention Camp for as short as a few hours or as long as a week or more. From there Service-owned buses transported them to Port Isabel, where they were loaded onto privately-owned Mexican vessels for the treacherous 36-to-50 hour trip to Veracruz. Upon arrival they were then taken to Mexico City, at which point some continued to their homes by bus, train, or foot, while others made their way back to the northern border in hopes of crossing again.

The boatlift offers important insights into the making of immigration policy. As this chapter shows, rather than being a product of domestic policy decisions or negotiations between nation-states, deportation sometimes resulted from interpenetrating and corrupt public-private relations in both Mexico and the United States. In the 1950s, the US and Mexican governments sought out private third parties to execute the boatlift, turning deportation into a profit-making venture with real human costs for migrants. National imperatives, fiscal demands, and private self-interest interacted to create a mode

of deportation that was cruel, unsafe, and meant to discourage future migration. The reliance on for-profit Mexican shipping companies also led to corruption within the Mexican government and abysmal onboard conditions, both of which the INS ignored in order to extend the boatlift.

Additionally, the boatlift shows that deportation was about the regulation of bodies and borders. Aboard the ships officials sorted deportees, regulated their actions and contact between men and women, and administered vaccinations. For the INS, *how* people were deported was as important as the fact that they were deported at all. But who was deported also mattered. With the boatlift the United States attempted to assert sovereignty over its borders and citizenry at a time when heightened levels of unauthorized Mexican migration called both into question. Those involved, both US and Mexican, made assumptions about “wetbacks” that justified migrants’ expulsion and the miserable conditions deportees experienced on board.

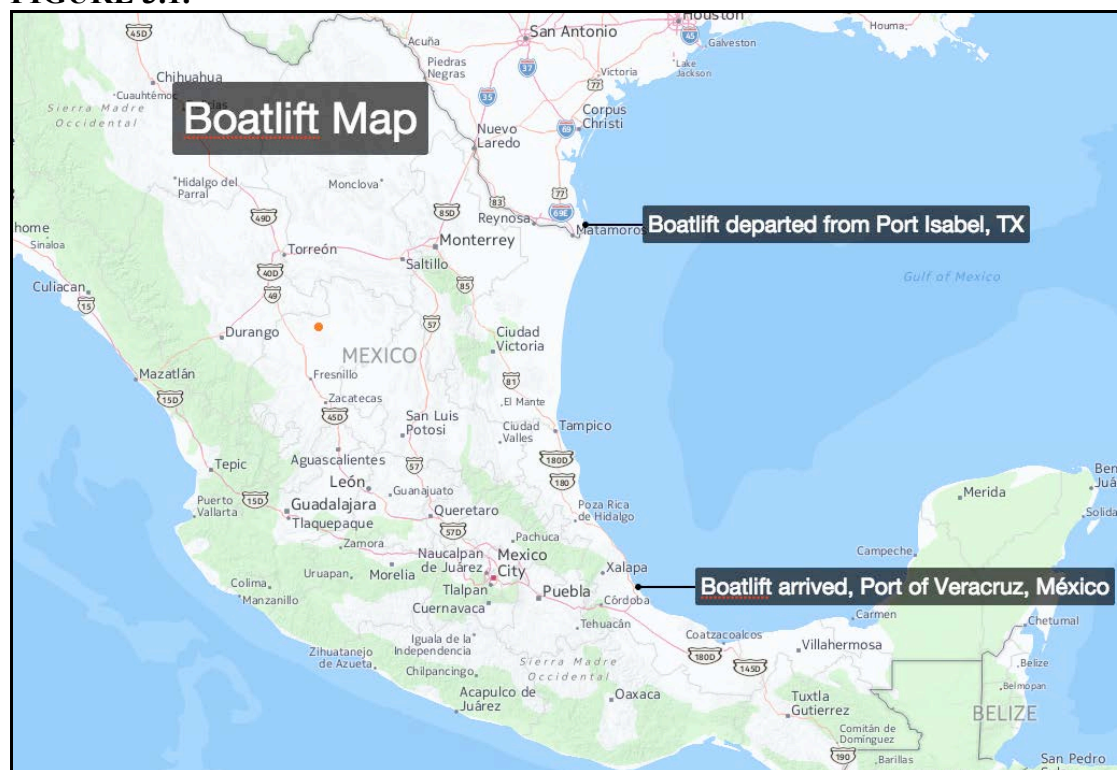
This chapter first analyzes the creation of the boatlift and the contracting of private Mexican transportation companies to carry it out. It then turns to the ships themselves, offering a fine-grained social history of the boatlift and its impact on migrants. All together, the chapter offers an overview of the political economy of deportation and an anatomy of deportation itself—from who was deported, to how and why certain methods of deportation were used, to the public and private actors and interests driving the process, to how deportees experienced the physical process of removal.

Bananas North, Deportees South

From September 3, 1954 thru August 24, 1956 the INS contracted two Mexican companies, Transportes Marítimos y Fluviales (TMyF) and Transportes Marítimos Refrigerados, S.A. (TMR), to boatlift nearly 50,000 of their compatriots 550 miles south, from Port Isabel, Texas to Veracruz, Mexico. (See Figure 3.1) In July 1954, Attorney General Herbert Brownell recommended the use of US Naval ships. However, concerns about the Mexican public's potential reaction to "the arrival in Mexican port of a United States warship discharging Mexican nationals" led officials in both countries to use privately-contracted Mexican flag vessels instead.²²⁷ Up until that point the Service had primarily relied on buses and trains to deport people across the border into northern Mexico. The INS saw the boatlift as an economical way to discourage repeat migration by deporting Mexicans deep into the interior of Mexico, where they would be farther from the US and supposedly closer to their homes. Although the impetus for the boatlift came from the US, the Mexican government collaborated on the selection and inspection of vessels, shared responsibility for the custody of deportees, and contributed to the cost of the operation.²²⁸

²²⁷ See Brownell to Secretary of the Navy, 13 July 1954; Rogers to Mollohan, 23 August 1956, 56364/36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter, NARA) 1, Washington, D.C.

²²⁸ For more on immigration policy as a matter of foreign, as opposed to domestic, relations, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012).

FIGURE 3.1.

Boatlift map, Port Isabel, Texas to Veracruz, Veracruz. (Made by author using CartoDB)

Upon hearing the INS was in the business of deporting Mexicans via sea other transportation and shipping companies, including one from the Caribbean, offered their services in hopes of undercutting the competition.²²⁹ These for-profit shipping companies, already hauling bananas, cement, and other cargo from Mexico to the US, viewed deportees as a potential moneymaking opportunity for the return trip south. To win the boatlift contract TMyF, and later TMR, had to make offers to transport as many people as possible at as low a cost as possible. In doing so, they created conditions

²²⁹ Warren to Chief, US Immigration Service, San Antonio, 12 May 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

onboard that, although approved by the US and Mexican governments, led some to refer to them as “hell ships,” comparable to “black slavers.”²³⁰

The first ship to be used in the boatlift was the *Emancipación*, an “1800-ton riveted steel construction passenger-cargo vessel” owned by TMyF. The US and Mexican governments approved the ship to carry up to 800 deportees per trip, in addition to the crew. By early 1955 increasing demand and delays resulting from weather conditions and mechanical problems led the INS to inquire about the use of an additional ship.²³¹ When the Service received word on March 9, 1955 that the *Emancipación* was “delayed [an] undetermined length of time,” it contacted TMyF about possible use of the SS Veracruz.²³² After necessary repairs were made the Veracruz made its first trip on June 11th, arriving two days later with 800 Mexican nationals aboard.²³³

²³⁰ “Rep. Molloy Orders Probe of ‘Hell Ship’,” *Washington Daily News*, 28 August, 1956; Redding, “Deported Wetbacks Call Mercurio ‘Black Slaver,’” *Houston Chronicle*, 14 September 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1.

²³¹ Letter from Commissioner to Representative Kilgore, 31 March 1955, and Letter from E. DeWitt Marshall to General Partridge, 30 March 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Memo E. DeWitt Marshall to E.A. Loughran, 10 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift2, RG85, NARA1. Such delays created a backup in the deportation pipeline, causing the number of detainees being held at McAllen to balloon, forcing the Service to reroute the lateral movement of deportees along the border, which ultimately led to more deportations by land just across the border.

²³² Memo from Commander Military Sea Transportation Service to E. DeWitt Marshall, 9 March 1955, and Note for file, E. DeWitt Marshall, 15 April 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1. It is actually unclear whether the INS first contacted TMyF, or vice versa. After the *Emancipación*’s indefinite delay TMyF asked the INS whether they were interested in the Veracruz, if so, when, and by when would they be able to guarantee four trips. It is possible that TMyF grounded the *Emancipación* on purpose in order to get an additional contract for the Veracruz. See Memo from Commander Military Sea Transportation Service to E. DeWitt Marshall, 11 March 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1. The original September 1954 contract between the INS and TMyF was actually for use of the Veracruz, but when it failed inspection the *Emancipación* was approved as a suitable alternative. See Telegram from Commander Military Sea Transportation Service to INS, 21 August 1954, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1.

²³³ In March, inspectors came to the same conclusion when they had reviewed the ship six months earlier: the Veracruz was “not acceptable,” “many major repairs [were] necessary,” and “[f]uture charter ... will depend on need for its services but no consideration will be given to such employment unless repairs satisfactory to MSTTS are accomplished.” Two months later the Veracruz was dry-docked at Galveston, Texas, for a more thorough inspection, necessary repairs were made, and the MSTTS pronounced it

From June thru December of 1955 the INS contracted both the *Emancipación* and Veracruz to make deportation runs on a weekly basis.²³⁴ Even with two boats in operation unexpected delays in service continued to disrupt the lift. After fifty to sixty people drowned on August 8, 1955 when a hurricane struck and the Mexican passenger vessel *La Flecha* sank, the Secretary of the Mexican Navy called for the inspection of all Mexican flagships. The Mexican government had received numerous complaints about the poor conditions aboard the *Emancipación* as early as January 1955 and became “increasingly concerned about [its] continued use” and the “possibility of a disaster.” In response, it sent José T. Rocha, the Ministry of the Interior official in charge of the Bracero Program, to inspect the ship at Brownsville. Rocha found the concerns to be justified and reported back to Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Secretary of the Interior, that it would be dangerous to use the *Emancipación* in bad weather.²³⁵ Officials also expressed serious doubts about the Veracruz. On the eve of its first trip, the Mexican Ambassador to the US sent a cautionary letter to the US Secretary of State warning against integrating the Veracruz into the boatlift. Citing the “bad conditions and small dimensions ... which must inevitably occasion crowding and unjustified inconveniences,” the Ambassador described the boat as “unsafe” and the conditions as “inhumane.” He made it clear that

seaworthy. Memo from Commander Military Sea Transportation Service to INS, 17 March 1955, and Memo from Commander Military Sea Transportation Service to TMyF, 18 March 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1. Commissioner Swing to The Secretary of State, 21 June 1955; Memo Marshall to E.A. Loughran, 10 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift2, RG85, NARA1.

²³⁴ The ships were of similar size and dimensions, although the latter had more deck space per passenger and significantly more cargo tonnage. Letter from Commissioner Swing to The Secretary of State, 21 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift2, RG85, NARA1.

²³⁵ Swing to Assistant Secretary of State Holland, 30 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Marshall to Carter, 3 January 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1.

the Mexican government would not take responsibility in the event of an accident and, moreover, “such responsibility would fall upon the American authorities that ordered this form of deportation.”²³⁶

Critiques of the Emancipación and Veracruz in the Mexican press became more biting and more frequent during the summer of 1955. A July 25th article in *La Prensa*, “Tremendous Tragedy of 800 Braceros,” described the trip aboard the Emancipación as “painful and inhuman,” adding that the deportees are treated like prisoners, “transported like cattle, and in addition receive very bad treatment from the crew.” The article concluded by implying that it is possible that the boatlift will result in tragedy similar to that of La Flecha.²³⁷

The Mexican government soon decided to act. In explaining the decision, Rocha remarked that the “press criticism ... has reached the extent that the Mexican Government can no longer continue to cooperate with us in the use of the S.S. Vera Cruz and the S.S. Emancipacion.”²³⁸ It is notable that Rocha only called for an end to the use of the TMyF’s ships rather than an end to the boatlift all together. As INS Commissioner Joseph Swing noted in September, “Insofar as I am aware the Mexican Government has made no indication that it is opposed to the general principle of repatriating Mexican nationals via steamship.” As a possible replacement, Rocha suggested Transportes Marítimos Refrigerados (TMR). What he had not mentioned, but the INS soon learned,

²³⁶ Letter from the Mexican Ambassador to Secretary of State (translation), 9 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

²³⁷ “Tremendous Tragedy of 800 Braceros,” *La Prensa*, 25 July 1955, page 2 (translation), 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

²³⁸ Marshall for file, 26 July 1955; Swing to Holland, 30 September 1955; Beechie to Asst. Commissioner, Enforcement Division 3 August 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

was that “Mr. José T. Rocha [was] a member and stock-holder of the firm Transportes Marítimos Refrigerados, S.A.”²³⁹

On August 29, 1955 the Mexican government, whether concerned about the safety of its citizens, pressured by negative publicity, influenced by Rocha’s personal financial interests, or some combination thereof, refused to clear the Emancipación and Veracruz for passenger transport. Neither ship made any trips for the next six weeks, forcing the INS to rely on other, less efficient methods to deport thousands of people. Detainees who had been transported to McAllen from El Paso were sent back to El Paso, and the INS had little choice but to deport people across the immediate border or by trainlift to Monterrey. Ultimately, such delays resulted in “decreased efficiency of the operation, unusual costs to the government and in general, defeat the aim of the program to effect departure of the aliens to Vera Cruz rather than to points near the border.”²⁴⁰ The Mexican government may have had less power than its US counterparts, but the boatlift was a binational agreement that required the approval of both governments, in addition to the cooperation of the private Mexican shipping company.

During this extended stoppage Swing urged the Department of State “that a firmer commitment be sought in continuing the Mexican Government’s cooperation in

²³⁹ Underline in original. Marshall for file, 26 July 1955; Swing to Holland, 30 September 1955; Beechie to Assistant Commissioner, Enforcement Division, 3 August 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Swing to Holland, 30 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; “The Merchant Ship Veracruz Will Leave to Bring 800 Braceros,” *El Mundo*, 16 August 1955 (transl); and “The Incompact Steamer Veracruz Leaves for Port Isabel for 800 Ex-Braceros,” *El Mundo*, 16 August 1955 (transl), 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴⁰ Owens to Sahli, 18 October 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 1, RG85, NARA1.

repatriating illegal Mexican nationals via maritime transportation.”²⁴¹ He went further, too, suggesting that Recommendation V of the Joint Migratory Labor Commission, agreed to by both countries on April 14, 1955, obliged them to comply. Recommendation V read: “Mexico should continue to transport to the interior from mutually agreed upon land border points and Mexican seaports, its citizens being returned from the United States.”²⁴² For Swing, the boatlift was indispensable, based on the INS’s firm belief that deporting Mexicans “to points distant from their place of employment and apprehension in the United States is the most effective means of preventing their unlawful return to this country.”²⁴³

In late September the Mexican Navy finally cleared the Emancipación and Veracruz. The boatlift resumed on October 16th, with TMyF still as the provider, but just over a week later Swing expressed his desire to utilize the SS Mercurio and SS Frida, owned by TMR, for future boatlifts. The official reason he gave was because the ships were “smaller and better conditioned,” but the six-week hiatus, ongoing negative press in Mexico, and pressure from the Mexican government to change providers also pushed the INS to act. “The Mexican Ministry of the Interior has assured us that it desires and endorses the change,” Swing noted.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Swing to Holland, 30 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴² Holland to Swing, 23 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴³ Swing to Holland, 8 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; The INS and another Mexican shipping company discussed a West Coast boatlift, but it never materialized. Marshall to file, 27 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴⁴ Letter from Swing to Rear Admiral Neil K. Dietrich, Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff, Military Sea Transportation Service, 25 October 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 1, RG85, NARA1. The INS knew that the temporary stoppage of the boatlift was the Mexican government’s attempt to pressure the US into considering other private contractors (namely, TMR). In a September 8th memo Harlon B. Carter, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Enforcement Division, wrote, “It is suspected that our ships are now getting a

By the end of the year TMR had prevailed. The INS was fully aware of Rocha's conflict of interest and the corruption involved in pushing for the INS to drop TMyF in favor of TMR. But that did not seem to matter: the Service cared much more about the continuation of the boatlift and buy-in from the Mexican government than about which contractor carried it out, or that an official stood to financially benefit. The Emancipación and Veracruz made a total of 41 trips, deporting 32,797 people. On New Year's Eve 1955, the Mercurio left Port Isabel bound for Veracruz with 450 deportees onboard.²⁴⁵

Built in Collingswood, Ontario, Canada, in 1941 for use by the Canadian Navy in World War II, the Mercurio was later acquired by TMR in 1950.²⁴⁶ (See Figure 3.2) The

rigorous inspection, there being some elements in the Mexican government who would apparently like to get their ships in business." But the INS fielded other offers and negotiated with other Mexican companies as well. Mexico City-based Transportes Marítimos Mexicanos (TMM) offered to deport 700 people per trip aboard the Santa María or 1,000 per trip on the Presidente Alemán from Brownsville to Veracruz at \$8 per head. The INS had also agreed in principle to a contract with TMM to initiate a West Coast boatlift from San Diego to Manzanillo, Colima. Barring delays, the 1,136 mile trip would have taken five days to complete and under the terms of the agreement TMM would have made two trips per month for a period of three months, deporting 700 people each trip at a cost of \$20 per person. In their proposals and communications the company treated deportees like any other type of cargo, and reserved the right to transport additional cargo "either or both ways" as long as it didn't interfere with their boatlift contract. Specifically, after completing each deportation run TMM planned on hauling cement on the return trip north, and the INS did not object. Díaz Ordaz, the Mexican Secretary of the Interior, indicated that as long as they were given advance notice the Mexican government could receive the deportees at Manzanillo and make arrangements to transport them as far as Guadalajara. Although the INS was ready to enter into a contract with TMM, the West Coast boatlift never materialized due to the company's inability to secure an adequate vessel. See Harlon B. Carter, memo for file, 8 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Fernando Tirado, Transportes Marítimos Mexicanos, to Beechie, 10 November 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 1, RG85, NARA1; Memo Harlon B. Carter to file, 7 September 1955; Letter TMM to Beechie, 14 September 1955; Letter from Beechie to Julio Serrano Piedecabras, TMM, 20 September 1955; Marshall note for the file, 7 September 1955; Marshall, note for the file, 9 September 1955; Unsigned memo, 27 September 1955; Memo Marshall to files, 27 September 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴⁵ Gonzalo Montalvo Salazar to TMR, 22 diciembre 1955; Marshall to file, 23 December 1955; Beechie to Carter, 30 December 1955; Boatlift - Port Isabel to Veracruz, FY 1955 and 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴⁶ Letter from Edgardo Rodríguez L., TMR, to Ing. Alfonso Poire Ruelas, C. Secretario de Marina, 28 October 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; *Tiempo*, 3 de septiembre de 1956, page 17, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 6, RG85, NARA1; "Immigration, Navy Men Arrive to Start Probe of Wetback

INS's contract with TMR stipulated that "No member of or delegate to Congress, or resident Commissioner, shall be admitted to any share or part of this contract, or to any benefit that may arise therefrom," although this seems to have only applied to US officials.²⁴⁷ The INS and TMR agreed that the *Mercurio* would carry a minimum of 400 and maximum of 450 deportees per voyage, but after the first trip the maximum number of deportees per trip was increased to 500. Seeing as that meant more profits for TMR and more deportations for the INS both parties were amenable to the modification. By guaranteeing to provide a minimum of five trips per month with at least 400 deportees per trip, the INS set a quota of boatlifting 2,000 people per month, regardless of need.²⁴⁸

FIGURE 3.2.



Mercurio, 1956. Source: 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt 2, RG85, NARA1.

'Hell Ship,'" *The Valley Morning Star* (hereafter, *VMS*), 24 August 1956, p. 1, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 4, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴⁷ US Department of the Navy, Military Sea Transportation Service, Contract with TMR, 23 December 1955; Letter Ledesma, TMR, to MSTs, 3 January 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁴⁸ US DoN, MSTs, Contract with TMR, 23 December 1955; Letter Ledesma to MSTs, 3 January 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

Hoping to avoid delays similar to those encountered with the Emancipación and Veracruz, the INS insisted that it be given exclusive use of the Mercurio. Prior to entering into an agreement with the INS, TMR had dedicated its ships to transporting bananas from the Mexican state of Tabasco. But when tropical storms devastated Tabasco's banana plantations in 1955 the company's only source of income disappeared. TMR saw the boatlift as a stopgap while banana production recovered and as an opportunity to diversify and expand its business. Even though TMR's vessels were cargo ships not conditioned or approved for passenger transport, the company hoped to transport bananas north and deportees south.²⁴⁹

TMR may have initially agreed to enter into an exclusive contract with the INS because there were no bananas to transport, but when the banana business picked up again the company promised to use two ships to make eight trips per month for the Service while also fulfilling the needs of its "steady banana customers." As way of explanation, a TMR representative told Beechie that the Mercurio and Frida had long been used to haul bananas and he did not want to "neglect his former customers completely for a short term contract [with the INS]." Although it was not the INS's

²⁴⁹ Rodríguez L. to Poire Ruelas, 28 October 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1. Commercial ties between the United States and Latin America via shipping were not new. During the last few decades of the nineteenth century companies like W.R. Grace & Co. ran ships throughout the Americas. For more on the connection between banana production in Latin America and banana consumption in the United States, see John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, & Environmental Change in Honduras & the United States* (Austin: UT Press, 2005).

preference, its overriding desire to maintain uninterrupted boatlift service and TMR's assurance eventually led them to agree to a non-exclusive contract.²⁵⁰

After the INS and TMR entered into a non-exclusive contract the *Mercurio* routinely hauled bananas on its trips north. Air-conditioning was installed in the between deck to ensure the bananas (rather than the deportees) arrived in good condition. After unloading the fruit in the US the ship was scrubbed down and sprayed with commercial disinfectant before boarding deportees for the return trip to Mexico. INS officials claimed the *Mercurio* was hosed down and cleaned at both Port Isabel and Veracruz, "after unloading bananas and after unloading *gente*."²⁵¹ On multiple occasions making detours to pick up bananas in Tabasco meant taking a few days longer to return to Port Isabel. But the INS never terminated TMR's contract, thanks in large part to the fact that the boatlift was a matter of international relations, shaped by the interests of nation-states, government officials, and private third parties. The US government's desire to continue the boatlift at all costs, Rocha's personal financial interest, and TMR's goal of maximizing profits by hauling human cargo resulted in the company maintaining its contract with the INS until the boatlift's termination. From December 31, 1955 until August 24, 1956 the *Mercurio* made 35 trips, deporting 16,706 people in total.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Beechie to Acting Assistant Commissioner, Enforcement Division, 10 and 29 January 1956; Report by PI Moskolenko, 29 April 1956; Ledesma to INS, January 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

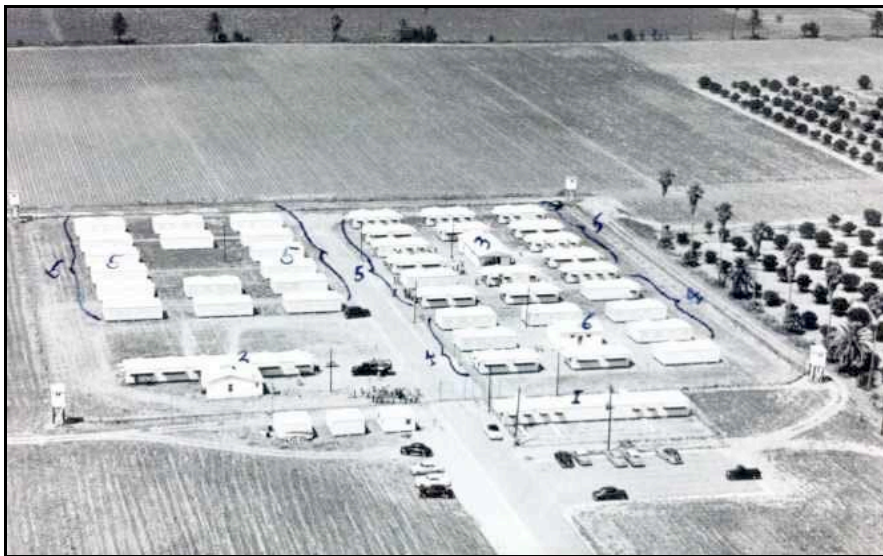
²⁵¹ "Conditions 'Good' on Wetback Ship," *I/M*, 25 August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 4, RG85, NARA1; Beechie to Marshall, 16 August 1956; Commissioner to AG, August/September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1. TMR's second ship, the *Frida*, was never used because it failed inspection.

²⁵² Report by PI Mix, 21 June 1956; Report by Patrol Inspector (PI) Corenflos, 3 July 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Clay, 17 July 1956; Boatlift - Port Isabel to Veracruz, Fiscal year 1956; Beechie to Assistant Commissioner, Enforcement Division, 29 February 1956.; Swanson to

Regulating bodies and borders

Historians have primarily focused on how migration affects the sending and receiving societies, while giving scant attention to the physical process of migration. This section turns to the ships themselves and offers a fine-grained social history of the boatlift from deportees' perspective. The boatlift's for-profit nature and the way US and Mexican officials viewed deportees created and justified miserable conditions onboard. Moreover, the regulation of bodies on the ships was closely tied to the regulation of citizenship and the boundaries of legality, all of which had devastating consequences for Mexican migrants.

FIGURE 3.3.



Partridge, 24 April 1956.; Swanson to Partridge, 14 June 1956.; Swanson to Carter, 24 January 1956, 56364/43.36 pt 1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1.

FIGURE 3.4.

Aerial shot of McAllen Detention Camp (above); Cafeteria at McAllen Detention Camp (below), 1953.
Source: TM-27-29, Acervo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, México, D.F.

After being apprehended, migrants slated for the boatlift were transported to the McAllen Detention Camp in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. (See Figures 3.3 and 3.4) The Camp had an official capacity of 500, but was often filled to more than twice its capacity: during the six-week stoppage in August and September 1955 the number of detainees reached 1,715.²⁵³ Approximately two hours before the scheduled departure of the Emancipación, Veracruz, or Mercurio, INS officials loaded detainees onto as many as ten or twenty buses, while their baggage and personal effects were loaded onto separate baggage trucks for transfer to Port Isabel. When a bus broke down the INS forced

²⁵³ Carter to Kelley, 30 January 1953, "HQ History Border Patrol Story File," National Border Patrol Museum (hereafter, NBPM), El Paso, Texas; Marshall for file, 8 August 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

deportees to “double up.” Crowding twice the number of people onto a bus as were meant to fit violated laws and regulations, but was a common practice. On an inspection trip to McAllen in 1953 Harlon B. Carter noted, “Our officers call this the ‘Border Patrol Pack,’ and comment facetiously upon the extent they have improved upon the sardine canning industry.” Despite being aware that it was unsafe, the Border Patrol preferred to overload buses instead of cutting back on apprehensions, releasing detainees, or spending more money.²⁵⁴

FIGURE 3.5.



Transferring deportees from buses to Mercurio, 1956. *Source:* 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt 2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁵⁴ Report by PI Mix, 21 June 1956; Report by Captain Reese, USN, to Commander MSTs, 31 August 1956; Report by PI Young, 22 July 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt 2, RG85, NARA1; Carter to Kelly, 26 February 1953, “HQ History Border Patrol Story File,” NBPM. In February 1953 the Border Patrol used Ford and Mack buses to transport deportees. Carter noted that even though the Ford was listed as having a capacity of thirty, and the Mack supposedly held fifty-four, their real capacities were twenty and thirty-six, respectively. But that did not stop officers from crowding as many as forty deportees onto the Ford buses and fifty-six onto the Macks.

FIGURE 3.6.

Deportees in the hold of the Mercurio, 1956. *Source:* 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt 2, RG85, NARA1.

Upon arriving at Port Isabel deportees were loaded onto the boat and forced to descend into the forward below deck, where they were confined until the ship departed. (See Figures 3.5 and 3.6) As soon as it did most, if not all, deportees returned to the top deck. It was “not at all unusual” for some to jump overboard. Indeed, during the first month of the boatlift two deportees did so. “Two wetbacks lived up to their name,” read the lede to a *Harlingen Star* story about the incident, which facetiously added, “It also was unreported whether the men left the boat in a swan dive or half-gainer, or whether they used the Australian crawl or a free-style stroke to reach shore.” Despite an extensive

search by Border Patrol boats and observations airplanes the men were never found, which “threw the Border Patrol in a tizzy, although one high B.P. Official said the US Government’s responsibilities ended when the wetbacks were loaded aboard.” To prevent such an event from recurring in the future a Border Patrol boat was tasked to follow the boatlift ship until it cleared the channel.²⁵⁵ (See Figure 3.7)

FIGURE 3.7.



Border Patrol boat following the Emancipación. *Source:* Book #2.4, Item #66BOP, US Citizenship & Immigration Service Historic Reference Library, Washington, D.C.

²⁵⁵ Report by Reese, 31 August 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt 2, RG85, NARA1; “Two Wetbacks ‘Jump’ Patrol’s Veracruz Trip,” *Harlingen Star*, 17 September 1954, p. 1, “HQ History Publicity,” NBPM.

The boatlift was a profit-making venture and immigration officials and private third parties treated it as a financial transaction and deportees as cargo. The INS paid TMyF and TMR \$8 or \$9 per deportee (\$71-\$80 in 2015 dollars), although starting in November 1955 the Service defrayed the cost by collecting money from deportees that it deemed able to pay.²⁵⁶ Some people described being “forced to pay,” but the INS disputed that claim. Not all who were able to pay did. Deportees on the *Emancipación* in December 1954 told immigration officer Albert Conway that while they had paid a fare “others who had plenty money concealed it and did not pay their transportation.” Although the INS collected \$217 from deportees aboard the *Emancipación*’s March 28, 1955 boatlift, it did not regularly collect fares until November 10, 1955. In total, the INS paid TMyF and TMR nearly \$400,000 over the course of seventy-five boatlifts. At the same time, they collected \$32,850 from boatlifted deportees on forty trips, defraying 8 percent of the overall cost, and nearly 20 percent of the cost of the trips in which money was collected.²⁵⁷ Having migrants subsidize their own deportation enabled the INS to dedicate its limited fiscal resources to other enforcement activities. By paying for their own removal deportees allowed the INS to apprehend, detain, and deport more migrants.

US and Mexican immigration officials and Mexican shipping company representatives cooperated in the administration of the boatlift onboard the ships. On

²⁵⁶ US Naval Attaché, Mexico City, to Commander MSTS, 4 April 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift3, RG85, NARA1.

²⁵⁷ “Boatlift Protest Costs Five Lives,” *VMS*, 28 August 1956, p. 1, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Conway, 22 December 1954, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Boatlift - Port Isabel to Veracruz, Fiscal Year 1955 and 1956, and telegrams re: stats from Mercurio, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

most, if not all, trips an INS officer, Mexican immigration official, and Mexican doctor joined the captain, crew, and deportees onboard. The doctor vaccinated all deportees and tended to any sick or injured passengers, and the US and Mexican immigration officials were responsible for maintaining general order, breaking up fights, mediating accusations of theft, and stopping illicit gambling and dice games. However, as much as anything else, INS officers acted as intelligence gatherers who questioned deportees about their experiences and future plans.²⁵⁸

Despite claims by the Justice Department that the boatlift “wasn’t punishment for the wetbacks but only served to teach them a lesson,” Commissioner Swing’s testimony before the House Appropriations Committee in February 1955 left little doubt about the boatlift’s punitive nature: “‘They (the Mexicans) hate the boat trip like a devil hates holy water. They get out and they get seasick and the boat lift is the most salutary thing that we have hit on yet.’”²⁵⁹ Indeed, overcrowding and abysmal onboard conditions, rough waters, and removal to points not only far from the border but also far from deportees’ homes were not coincidental; they were by design. *How* the INS deported people mattered, and officials hoped the conditions aboard the boatlift, along with deporting people deep into the Mexican interior, would act as a deterrent to future unauthorized migration. With the boatlift, the US attempted to assert sovereignty over its borders and citizenry.

²⁵⁸ Report by PI Leach, 21 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Hjelle, 21 May 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; “Conditions ‘Good’ on Wetback Ship,” *VMS*, 25 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 4, RG85, NARA1.

²⁵⁹ Mollohan to Brownell, 10 August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1.

The boatlift removed Mexican men, women, and children being “formally” deported as well as those being deported under “voluntary” return. Aboard the ships officials made no distinctions between deportees, regardless of the judicial or administrative procedure used to deport them. A Patrol Inspector described the Emancipación’s December 22, 1954 trip as “V/R’ing 800 Mexican nationals,” and on some trips voluntary returns did make up the vast majority of the boatlift population. On August 24, 1956—the last trip in the boatlift’s history—the INS classified 434 of the 500 deportees aboard the Mercurio, or 87 percent, as voluntarily returns.²⁶⁰

Onboard the ships the experience did, in many cases, differ by gender and economic status. Reporting on the second ever boatlift on September 9, 1954, a US newspaper noted, “In contrast with the first cruise, which was strictly stag, the trip of the S.S Emancipacion which began today was co-educational.”²⁶¹ Adult men comprised the vast majority of boatlifts, but the Emancipación and Veracruz also deported a considerable number of women and children, who at times represented more than 10 percent of the 800 deportees. In some cases, “entire families” were boatlifted.²⁶²

Women and children boatlifted on the Emancipación and Veracruz usually stayed in the passenger-class cabins. When cabins were not available they were provided with

²⁶⁰ Although it is important to distinguish between the two because they carried different consequences for re-entry, both “formal” deportations by judicial order and “voluntary” deportations by administrative order forced migrants to leave the US Report by Patrol Inspector Albert C. Conway, 2 January 1955; Report by Patrol Inspector Herbert L. Leach, 23 February 1955; Report by Thomas J. Brady, 15 March 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; See also Report by Patrol Inspector Bruce C. Hjelle, 21 May 1956, which states boatlift of 500 voluntary returns on the Mercurio; US DOJ, INS, Manifest of Out Bound Passengers (Aliens), Sailing from Port Isabel, Texas, August 24, 1956, S.S. Mercurio Bound for Veracruz, Veracruz, Mexico, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁶¹ “Border Patrol’s Initial Co-Educational Cruise Pulls Out for Veracruz,” unspecified US newspaper, 9 September 1954, “HQ History Publicity,” NBPM.

²⁶² Marshall to Partridge, 8 October 1954, “HQ History Publicity,” NBPM.

reclining canvas deck chairs and cots on a separate deck of the ship. As far as the archives indicate, TMR did not boatlift women and children aboard the *Mercurio*, and one Patrol Inspector attributed deportees' good behavior to this fact. The women and children's quarters were almost always off-limits to men, with the exception of some of the early boatlifts on the *Emancipación*. In some instances the crew took extensive measures to regulate contact between the sexes, as on the August 11, 1955 boatlift aboard the *Veracruz* when the crew roped off all points leading to the women's deck and then stood guard around it. The Patrol Inspector who accompanied the *Veracruz* on that trip reported that "[t]hese steps proved very effective and as a result, indications of prostitution were not present."²⁶³

Business interests and socioeconomic status also shaped policy aboard the ships and the experiences of male and female deportees. Whereas cabins on the *Emancipación* and *Veracruz* were initially reserved for women and children, TMyF's desire to maximize profits led them to start renting cabins for \$5 to \$10 per night to male "aliens having the necessary funds." In theory this was only supposed to happen if extra cabins were available once all of the women and children were accommodated. However, that was not always the case. After accompanying the December 6, 1954 boatlift, with sixty-three women and twenty-two children aboard, Patrol Inspector J.E. Fortner stated, "I spoke to several women and was told that to a cabin that normally accommodates four (4) people, in some instances there were as many as six (6) grown women occupying the

²⁶³ Swing to Secretary of State, 21 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Hjelle, 21 May 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Leach, 19 February 1955; Report by PI Sutehall, 30 November 1954; Report by PI Pugh, 27 October 1954, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Lacy, August 19, 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

cabin.” TMyF’s desire to increase its profit margin was greater than its desire to provide comfortable facilities for deportees; if male deportees were willing to pay for a cabin TMyF was willing to pack women’s cabins to 150 percent their normal capacity.²⁶⁴

Male deportees were relegated to the hold and the open deck, where tarps were used to block the sun and rain. Deportees often had to contend with inclement weather. Passengers on the January 2, 1955 boatlift complained about not being issued blankets and said they were “too cold to sleep at night.” Patrol Inspector Marvin L. Butler, Jr., who accompanied the *Emancipación* on that trip, largely dismissed deportees’ complaints. “While cool nights, and in some cases, insufficient clothing did serve to make them more or less uncomfortable, I do not believe there was any real suffering from the cold.” But deportees who stayed on the open deck did have to contend with the adverse climactic conditions. According to Patrol Inspector Herbert L. Leach’s report of his June 1955 trip aboard the *Veracruz*, those that chose to stay on the open deck and “were not able to place themselves in the lee of the superstructure appeared to suffer somewhat from the chill wind at night.” When the *Mercurio* encountered rough waters

²⁶⁴ Wahl to Partridge, 14 January 1955; Report by PI Fortner, 10 January 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1. Deportees’ economic status varied depending on what type of job they had, where they lived in the US, and how long they had been in the country. Those that had lived in the country longer or worked industrial jobs in the north tended to return with more resources. The October 12 and October 18, 1954 boatlift included many who had been apprehended in Chicago during Operation Wetback. When the first of these two boatlifts arrived the Mexican newspaper *El Dictamen* stated that “[t]he prosperity of this group could be seen in the amount of baggage, weighing ten tons, and in the good clothes they were wearing.” Upon arriving deportees on that trip exchanged \$17,500 to pesos and kept more money in dollars. Their financial status, according to *El Dictamen*, could be attributed to the fact that “nearly all of them had lived in the central part of the United States, working not only in agricultural work, but also in industry.” Of course, a considerable percentage of deportees “arrived in poor financial condition, and had only the clothes which they were wearing. Some of them didn’t have as much as twenty cents in their pocket.” “Much Money Brought By the Last 800 Workers,” *El Dictamen*, 12 October 1954; “The Last Workers Brought Many Dollars,” *El Dictamen*, 22 October 1954; “Sixth Group of Workers Arrived,” *El Dictamen*, 21 October 1954.; Report by PI Pugh, 27 October 1954, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1.

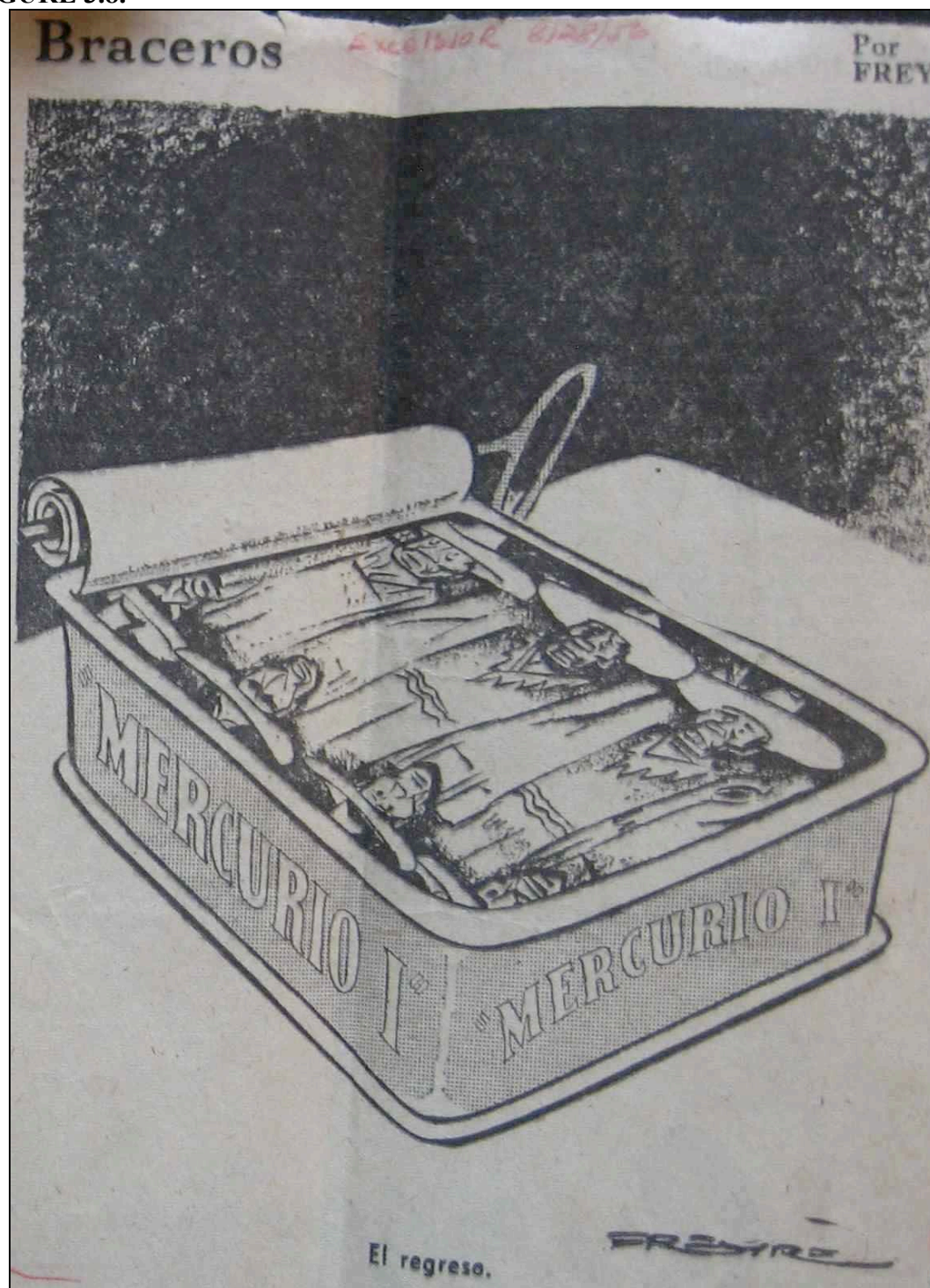
soon after leaving Port Isabel on March 19, 1956 “[t]he bow-splash kept those who stayed on deck wet and cold.” Still, most stayed on the open deck because the hold was “very filthy and foul-smelling.”²⁶⁵

The below deck area contained no accommodations and was often “hot and crowded.” A South Texas newspaper noted that even the *Mercurio*, whose hold was air-conditioned for the transport of bananas, “is undoubtedly messy and must be crowded when from 400 to 500 wetbacks pile aboard.” A political cartoon that ran in the government-aligned *Excelsior*, one of Mexico’s two major national daily newspapers at the time, critiqued the boatlift by depicting Mexican laborers as sardines packed into a tin labeled “*Mercurio I.*” (See Figure 3.8) While one government inspection found that several overhead floodlights illuminated the *Mercurio*’s hold around the clock, another claimed there were only two lights, one forward and one aft, and darkness “for over 170 feet amidships.” A couple of small barrels of potable water were placed at each end of the hold. Although the INS’s contracts with TMyF and TMR stipulated that the Service had the right to provide mattresses or install bunks, that implied additional costs, and it never did. On the *Mercurio* deportees used lifejackets as pillows and bedding.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Report by PI Butler, Jr., 21 January 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Leach, 21 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Journ, 25 March 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁶⁶ Report by PI Lacy, 19 August 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; “Conditions ‘Good’ on Wetback Ship,” *VMS*, 25 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 4, RG85, NARA1; Mollohan to Brownell, 10 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; US DoN, MSTs, Contract with TMR, 23 December 1955, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

FIGURE 3.8.



Source: Freyre, "Braceros: El regreso" ("Braceros: The return"),
Excelsior, 28 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift5, RG85, NARA1.

In addition to the sparse conditions onboard, the boatlift offers insights into the intersection of social control, public health, and the state's coercive efforts to regulate "others" it deemed to be dangerous.²⁶⁷ Soon after leaving Port Isabel the ship's doctor began administering smallpox vaccinations to deportees. On some trips deportees had to be vaccinated in order to eat. Meal tickets were stamped as proof of vaccination and deportees were then marked off the ship's manifest in hopes of preventing people from receiving more than one portion. If someone was caught trying to do so they were denied another meal as punishment. Feeding was done in shifts since only thirty people could be accommodated at once on the *Mercurio*, and fifty on *Emancipación* and *Veracruz*. Long lines were common; on some trips the crew served food all day and night, save for a few hours. Gabriel Esquivel, a 26-year-old apprehended in California, flown to Brownsville, and boatlifted in 1955, said he became desperate because he was hungry but had to wait until night to eat because there were so many people in line ahead of him. During the *Veracruz*'s first boatlift on June 11, 1955, a bottleneck occurred when men began crowding to the front of the line. According to the Patrol Inspector onboard, "This situation was alleviated and corrected for subsequent meals by the rigging of firehoses and threatening to turn them on the aliens in a state of semi-riot."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ For other examples see Michael Willrich, *Pox: An American History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011); Natalia Molina, *Fit To Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2006); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2001).

²⁶⁸ Report by PI Lacy, August 19, 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Leach, 19 February 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; "Typical Menu of Food Provided the Crew and Passengers – MV MERCURIO," 31 March 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Captain

Many deportees despised the food. As one man told a Mexican newspaper, “The food is the worst. Poorly done and undercooked rice, beans without salt, and watery coffee.” On the May 1, 1956 boatlift deportees complained that ““the beans were spoiled and the rice was sour”” and deportees “seemed to think that they were sick from the food rather than being seasick.”²⁶⁹

Seasickness, however, was a very real problem. On almost every boatlift a considerable number of deportees became seasick. Rough seas caused an estimated three-quarters of the 500 deportees on the Mercurio’s May 1, 1956 run to fall ill. On another trip the Patrol Inspector reported that “seasickness was prevalent,” adding that “[m]ost cases were not serious, however a few appeared desperately ill.” From March to August 1956 the Mercurio’s ship logs indicated that, depending on the conditions, anywhere from 5 to 60 percent of all passengers were seasick. Twenty-five-year-old Michoacán native Jesús Arana Bernal recounted, “I was seasick the entire voyage and decided that I would not return to the United States illegally because I never wanted to get on another ship.” Even if a deportee did not become seasick, the seasickness of others affected the conditions of all onboard. Commenting on the relative cleanliness of the Veracruz

Jorge Noval E., Menu for Mercurio, 24-26 August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 6, RG85, NARA1; See also meals and menus from the Mercurio, March-August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Zisik, 22 January 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Oral history by author with Gabriel Esquivel (pseudonym), Mexico City, 30 April 2013; Report by PI Leach, 21 June 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Sutehall, 30 November 1954, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1.

²⁶⁹ Beechie to Marshall, 16 August 1956; “Relata un Deportado el Infierno Vivido,” *Ultimas Noticias*, 28 agosto 1956, page 7, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Lewis, 11 May 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

compared to the *Emancipación*, a Patrol Inspector pointed out that much of it “may be attributed to the lack of sea sickness and its resulting mess” on that particular trip.²⁷⁰

The US and Mexican governments and private Mexican contractors did not prioritize onboard safety. The US’s contract with TMyF specified that the *Emancipación* and Veracruz, which transported 800 deportees plus the crew, should carry “four (4) seaworthy lifeboats each with a capacity of thirty-seven (37) adult passengers.” It did call for 800 lifejackets, but even that would not have been enough for the captain, crew, doctor, and migration officials aboard the ships. Upon inspecting the *Mercurio* prior to its enlistment in the boatlift a Mexican Naval official called on TMR to place an adequate number of life rafts onboard in addition to lifeboats to account for the total number of crew and passengers. The Mexican government later approved the ship for use provided that it carry an additional ten to fifteen life rafts. However, it seems that TMR never complied. TMR’s contract with the US government required the *Mercurio* to carry only two lifeboats, each with a twenty-four-person capacity. The Patrol Inspector who accompanied the *Mercurio* on April 11, 1956 reported that vessel carried two lifeboats and five rubber rafts, in addition to “an undetermined amount of life jackets which, considering the amount of passengers, seemed hardly adequate in case of an emergency.” An official inspection of the *Mercurio* later determined that the total capacity of the

²⁷⁰ Report by PI Sutehall, 30 November 1954; Report by PI Lewis, 11 May 1956; Report by PI Zisik, 27 January 1956; Report by PI Hjelle, 21 May 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Meals and menus from the *Mercurio*, March-August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; Affidavit, Jesús Arana Bernal, 23 September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Lacy, August 19, 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1.

lifeboats and rafts was 356. But US and Mexican officials repeatedly approved the *Mercurio* to carry up to 500 passengers, in addition to twenty-six crewmembers.²⁷¹

The INS also attempted to evade US safety inspection laws in hopes of expediting deportations and continuing the boatlift. Although its initial petition to the Secretary of Defense to waive “safety-of-life at sea requirements” for the *Mercurio* was unsuccessful, it seems as if it was later approved. The US argued that waiving inspection requirements was “in the interest of national defense” because the “constant presence of such a large number of [Mexican] aliens whose loyalty could not be determined constituted an ever present and serious security threat.” By waiving US inspection requirements the *Mercurio* only had to comply with Mexican standards. As a US official pointed out in a draft of a letter that was later amended to omit this section, “Mexico is not a signatory nation to the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea, 1948, and while its vessels are adequate for its own standards, they do not generally conform to the United States inspection requirements.”²⁷² In financial terms, adhering to lesser safety requirements meant deporting more people at a lower cost.

Most boatlifted deportees arrived safely in Veracruz, but on at least two occasions deportees aboard the *Emancipación* died of heart attacks. After the first death, which occurred on January 31, 1955, General Partridge—most likely in hopes of avoiding

²⁷¹ US DoN, MSTs, Contract with TMyF, June 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 1, RG85, NARA1; Poiré R. to TMR, 9 November 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; Gonzalo Montalvo Salazar to TMR, 22 December 1955; US DoN, MSTs, Contract with TMR, 23 December 1955; Reese to Commander MSTs, 31 August 1956; Report by PI Lacy, 20 April 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁷² Marshall, memo for file, 9 January 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt 2, RG85, NARA1; Carter for file, 17 September 1956; Unsigned letter to Molloy, 14 September 1956; Unsigned draft of letter, September 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt 3, RG85, NARA1.

negative press for the boatlift—inquired whether the US was “bound to acknowledge [the death] with Mex. Govt.” The second man, Manuel Arroyo Hernández, died of a heart attack at 3:30am on August 23, 1955, and was “buried at sea as per instructions” of the Public Health Office at Veracruz. It is unclear whether either man’s family was contacted by US or Mexican officials, or if legal action was taken against either government.²⁷³

Upon arriving at Veracruz Mexican migration officials met the boatlift and transferred deportees to a large warehouse near the dock, where they were processed, examined by a doctor, fed sandwiches and fruit, and given the chance to exchange dollars to pesos if they had any. There were usually between a dozen to twenty “repeaters”—deportees who had been deported before—on each trip, although one Patrol Inspector estimated that an additional twenty-five were onboard that had avoided detection by using false names or other means. Repeaters were separated from other deportees, lectured by Mexican authorities, and taken off to Allende Prison, in hopes that a short jail stint would discourage future migration. According to a Veracruz newspaper, on one occasion the chief of the Mexican Immigration Service told repeaters “that they had committed a grave offense in their absurd attempt to return to the United States, when they have seen that they are not able to elude the vigilance of the law.” He urged those that wanted to return to the US to do so legally, through the Bracero Program, and

²⁷³ Sahli to Asst Commissioner, Border Patrol, Detention and Deportation Division, 31 January 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Beechie to Marshall, 23 August 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1.

concluded by telling them “before all that they ought to remember that they are Mexican and for the dignity of their country they ought to keep their problems in our country.”²⁷⁴

In some instances, rumors spread about repeaters receiving harsh prison sentences, but in reality repeaters served short sentences ranging from a few days to a couple of weeks. Mexican immigration officials sometimes released repeaters without making them spend any time in jail. This was sometimes the result of a bribe or simply because they took pity on them, such as when Mexican authorities did not imprison any of the seventeen repeaters who arrived on December 24, 1954 because it was Christmas Eve.²⁷⁵

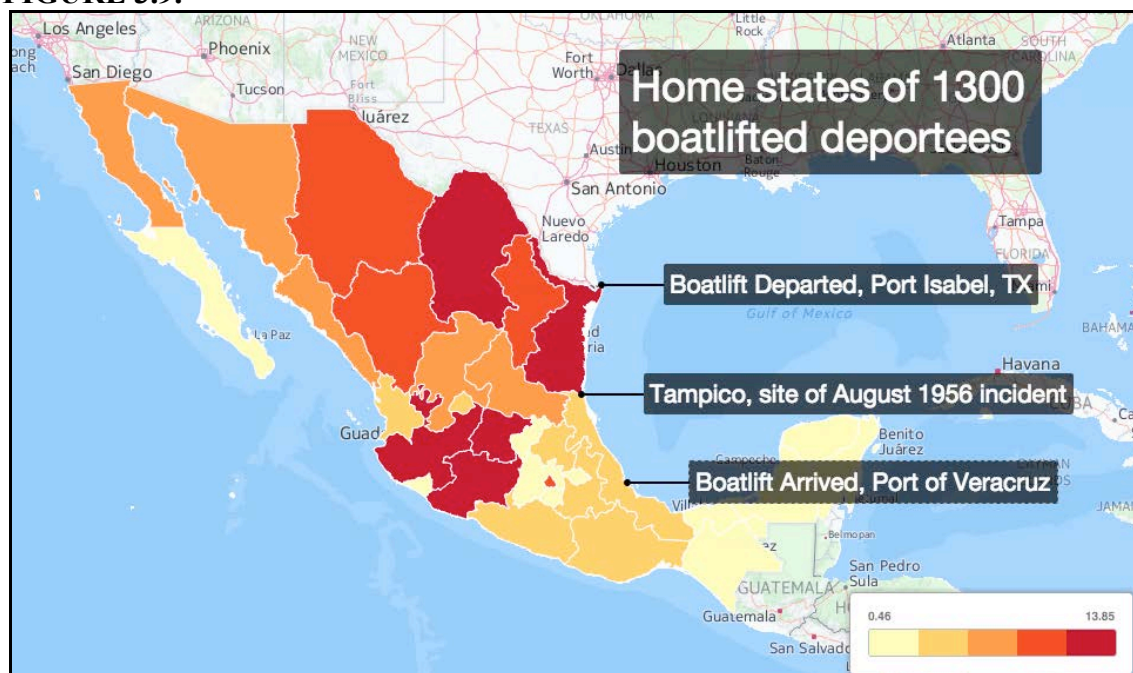
For the vast majority, arriving at Veracruz was an intermediate, rather than terminal, point of their deportation. Indeed, despite the US government’s claim that deporting people to Veracruz would put them closer to their homes, the vast majority of

²⁷⁴ Report by PI Hjelle, 21 May 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Leach, 21 June 1955; Report by PI Lacy, August 19, 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Brady, 15 March 1955; Report by PI Goff, 8 October 1954.; Report by PI Hensley, 26 November 1954.; Report by PI Sutehall, 30 November 1954.; Report by PI Butler, 21 January 1955.; Untitled article (translated), *El Dictamen*, 10 December 1954, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1.

²⁷⁵ Patrol Inspector Oran G. Pugh, who accompanied the *Emancipación* in October 1954, reported that “[a]ccording to information I received, they will be sentenced to confinement in the federal prison for terms ranging (sic) from 6 months to 5 years,” adding that “formal deportees and the voluntary returns were treated exactly alike.” Fifteen months later Mexican migration officials at Veracruz told Patrol Inspector Edward Zisik that although most deportees would be set free in Mexico City, but repeaters could receive up to a six months in jail. When Beechie followed up on Zisik’s claim with Díaz Ordaz, the Mexican official told him that repeaters did not receive harsh sentences and, although it had been considered, the idea “has met with such opposition that it has been abandoned.” Díaz-Ordaz “stated, however, with a mischievous smile, ‘It might be well if the passengers continue to believe that’.” Report by Patrol Inspector Oran G. Pugh, 27 October 1954, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Report by Patrol Inspector Edward J. Zisik, 27 January 1956.; Swanson to Carter, 24 February 1956.; Beechie to Swanson, 21 February 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; On one trip the accompanying Patrol Inspector made a distinction in the treatment of “formal deportees” and voluntary returnees, stating that the former were “kept under heavier guard and in a separate group to proceed to serve their jail sentences.” No other report made such a distinction. Report by Patrol Inspector Herbert L. Leach, 19 February 1955.; Report by Patrol Inspector Albert C. Conway, 2 January 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1.

deportees came from the historic migration region in central-western Mexico or from the border region. (See Figure 3.9) From Veracruz most deportees were sent to Mexico City. Those who had money could pay for a ticket aboard chartered buses run by Mexican companies. Some deportees with money were allowed to stay in Veracruz or paid Mexican officials a bribe to do so. Deportees who could not afford a bus ticket were herded onto boxcars aboard freight trains paid for by the Mexican government. By slow freight train the trip to the capital took forty hours, considerably longer than by buses or the twelve-hour trip on the first-class pullman trains. Upon arriving in Mexico City deportees continued by bus, train, or on foot to their homes. Eustacio Maldonado Martinez, who arrived without any money, described the difficult journey home to the northern state of Tamaulipas. “The trip was very hard since I had to walk a long distance each time in order to reach my home. ... I wore out my shoes and had to walk from Mexico, D.F. to Mantes without shoes.” Leopoldo Belmontes Ramos, from the central-western state of Michoacán, had a similarly trying experience the last time he was boatlifted. “I had no money for transportation and had to walk all the way to my home. I begged for food from houses along the way and did whatever work I could find to do.” Others returned directly to the northern border to try their luck again.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ Report by PI Young, 22 July 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Fortner, 10 January 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Report by PI Lacy, 19 August 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 2, RG85, NARA1; Translation, *El Dictamen*, 10 December 1954, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1; Affidavit, Maldonado Martinez, 21 September 1956; Affidavit Belmonte Ramos, 28 September 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt 3, RG85, NARA1.

FIGURE 3.9.

Home states of 1,300 deportees from two separate boatlifts (November 10, 1955 and August 24, 1956). Of the 1,300 people deported more than 85% came from historic sending states like Jalisco (13.85%), Michoacán (11%), Guanajuato (8%), Durango (5.62%), and Zacatecas (4.54%) or from northern border states like Coahuila (11.62%), Tamaulipas (7.15%), Chihuahua (5.46%), and Nuevo León (4.92%), among others. (Made by author using CartoDB, available online here: <http://cdb.io/1HaVZhN>.)

In early August 1956 Representative Robert W. Mollohan (D-WV) called for an investigation into whether the *Mercurio* met the US Coast Guard's safety and sanitation standards. He found it reprehensible that the US and Mexican governments had approved the vessel's use, and compared the *Mercurio* to an 18th century slave ship, opining that it "seems shameful to subject these aliens to penal conditions and practices that Western civilization abandoned over a century ago." In addition, Mollohan wondered how 500 deportees could be stuffed onto the *Mercurio*, a ship that previously carried seventy to ninety people. "I am sure that the people of this Nation will not countenance the

transportation of human beings on a standard which appears to be below that required for the hauling of livestock.”²⁷⁷

In response to growing criticism and pressure resulting from Mollohan’s investigation, Navy Captain John D. Reese, Jr., was called upon to inspect the *Mercurio*. Despite such strong accusations, Beechie, for one, felt as if the INS was on firm ground. “I’m not *preocupado* ... about the inspection,” Beechie wrote to Marshall on August 16th. “We can’t (and shouldn’t try) to make a luxury liner out of a ship that has been operating out of Mexico with a Mex crew for years, but I think she’ll be plenty presentable.” Moreover, he concluded, “[n]ow that I have learned that the hold IS air-conditioned, I’m convinced that we couldn’t do better. Sure hope we come out on top.” Reese inspected the ship on August 24, 1956, accompanied by other INS officials, the local Mexican Consul, and other Mexican immigration officials. Responding to Mollohan’s accusations of overcrowding, Reese explained that although the *Mercurio* had held ninety to 100 people during its use by the Canadian Navy, TMR converted the ship after purchasing it. “The wetbacks now are berthed in the ’tween decks which periodically are used as cargo space for bananas,” he stated. In other words, 500 people were not occupying the same space that ninety did before; they were being transported in the cargo hold, just like bananas. Echoing Beechie, Reese told reporters, “It is no luxury liner, but it appears to do the job.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Mollohan to Brownell, 10 August 1956; Mollohan to Richmond, 10 August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; “Immigration, Navy Men Arrive to Start Probe of Wetback ‘Hell Ship,’” *VMS*, 24 August 1956, page 1, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 4, RG85, NARA1.

²⁷⁸ Reese to Commander MSTs, 31 August 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; “Conditions ‘Good’ on Wetback Ship.” *VMS*, 25 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 4, RG85, NARA1.

Reese and other migration officials' perceptions of Mexican migrants shaped the process of deportation and inhumane treatment of deportees. As Reese explained in an attempt to justify onboard conditions, the boatlift's accommodations "must take into consideration the character and type of individual being transported." He then proceeded to describe the "character of the wetback." His conclusions, among others, included:

"The wetback, by and large, has never been accustomed to the necessities of life, much less luxuries."

"Most wetbacks have never known what it is like to sleep in a modern bed, most of them living in the open, sleeping on the ground and living in general not much better than animals."

"Many of the wetbacks are not used to such modern conveniences as wash basins and toilet facilities. ... It was explained by the officer in charge of the [McAllen] camp that the wetbacks frequently make their toilet in the wash basins, and wash their hands and face in the toilet bowls."

"Many wetbacks do not sleep in the same position as the average American, but squat on their haunches and bury their heads in their arms."

"During 1951, the Immigration and Naturalization Service weighed approximately 10,000 wetbacks to determine an average weight. The figure, complete with personal belongings, was 110 pounds."²⁷⁹

Reese used these generalizations of a "prototypical wetback" to justify the conditions of the Mercurio (and implicitly, the Emancipación and Veracruz before it). His finding echoed Patrol Inspector Albert C. Conway's earlier assertion that the "[c]onditions on the [Emancipación] were reasonably good *considering the type of persons being handled*."²⁸⁰

At the end of his inspection Reese and Mexican migration officials concluded that the

²⁷⁹ Reese to Commander MSTs, 31 August 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁸⁰ Report by PI Conway, 2 January 1955, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 3, RG85, NARA1. Emphasis added.

Mercurio was in compliance with its contract and announced that the ship would sail that same day, August 24, 1956, with a full load of deportees.²⁸¹ It would be the Mercurio's final trip, and the last boatlift ever.

The end of the boatlift

Exactly what happened on the Mercurio's final voyage is unclear. What is known is that instead of going directly to Veracruz Captain Jorge Noval Espinosa rerouted the vessel to Tampico, arriving in the early hours of August 26th. The US and Mexican governments and press, deportees aboard the ship, and the captain himself gave contradictory explanations as to why he did so. Most government accounts stated he directed the vessel to Tampico because one of the deportees was seriously ill. Some reports related that problems with the ship's boiler forced Noval to head to Tampico for repairs. Others, however, attributed the change in course to a mutinous riot aboard the Mercurio led by deportees upset about their treatment and the boatlift's conditions. As a man who had been apprehended eleven times and boatlifted four times told INS officials, even before the August 24th trip deportees felt that "the Mercurio was not fit to haul human beings, that it was alright for cargo, but not for human beings."²⁸²

²⁸¹ "Conditions 'Good' on Wetback Ship," *VMS*, 25 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 4, RG85, NARA1.

²⁸² "Llegó el 'Mercurio' sin Trabajadores a Veracruz," *Excelsior*, 28 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; "El Caso del 'Mercurio I'," *Tiempo*, 3 septiembre 1956, page 17; Affidavit, Jorge Rodriguez-Garcia, 5 September 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 6, RG85, NARA1; "Mexico To Probe Ship Riot," *VMS*, 28 August 1956, p. 1; "Boatlift Protest Costs Five Lives," *VMS*, 28 August 1956, p. 1, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; "Mexico: Mutiny on the *Mercurio*," *Time*, 10 September 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; Affidavit, Pedro Garcia-Velazquez, 7 September 1956.;

Regardless of disputes over why the *Mercurio* went to Tampico, all accounts agreed that once the ship was anchored near the dock around forty deportees jumped overboard. Those that did may have done so in hopes that reaching Mexican soil would void any jurisdiction or power boatlift officials had over them. Some insisted that they jumped after the Captain refused to accede to their demand to be let off at Tampico instead of Veracruz. A written petition was later circulated and supposedly signed by more than three hundred deportees who insisted on being let off at Tampico. After making it to shore a few deportees contacted the Mexican press and encouraged others to describe the boatlift's conditions and how they were treated. In the end, for whatever reason, Captain Noval did dock the *Mercurio* at Tampico and most, if not all, deportees left the ship.²⁸³

At least three deportees who jumped overboard never made it ashore. Reports in the press varied, claiming either four or five had drowned, and at least for a while the INS denied that any had drowned. However, a couple of days later three bodies were found. A *Noticias de Tampico* article that conjectured that the men were “probably devoured by sharks that abound in these waters” proved to be somewhat prophetic. When the US Vice Consul at Tampico and a local clerk went to identify the bodies they could only take

Affidavit, Jorge Rodríguez García, 5 September 1956; Affidavit, Jorge Rodríguez García, 6 September 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 6, RG85, NARA1.

²⁸³ “Mexico To Probe Ship Riot,” *VMS*, 28 August 1956, page 1.; “Boatlift Protest Costs Five Lives,” *VMS*, 28 August 1956, page 1; “Llegó el ‘Mercurio’ sin Trabajadores a Veracruz,” *Excelsior*, 28 August 1956; “EP Immigration Chief Discounts Reports of Wetback Boat Mishap,” unnamed US newspaper, August or September 1956; “Very Shocking,” US Newspaper article, unnamed US newspaper, August or September 1956; “Deported Wetbacks Call *Mercurio* ‘Black Slaver,’” *Houston Chronicle*, 14 September 1956, p. 24, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; Affidavit, Felix Gudino Quevas, 31 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1.

thumb prints because of their “rapid decomposition.” The following was noted about the first man, a twenty-five-year-old with black, thinning hair and a muscular build: “Missing from the body – forehead, eyes, mouth and both ears, fingers of the left hand, gnawed throat and both feet.” The second and third men were discovered only slightly more intact. Despite the physical state in which they were found, two of the men were wearing Levi’s pants and George Whittinghill, the US Consul at Tampico, reported that “there is no doubt that all articles of wearing apparel are American.” Thus, he concluded “that the three men were very possibly ‘wetbacks’ who were traveling aboard the SS MERCURIO.”²⁸⁴

The incident at Tampico resulted in INS investigations and denunciations in the US and Mexican press. A US newspaper editorial stated that the conditions aboard the Mercurio “ought to be made the object of an investigation by an international tribunal.” The Mexico City-based *Zócalo* placed the blame on Mexico. “We should be ashamed that we do nothing effective to prevent them from going to provide their services elsewhere.” The *Excelsior* described the Mercurio as “old and unsafe” and opined that the conditions were worse than those endured by Chinese “culíes.” Another *Excelsior* article lamented that “not a single Mexican voice protested, until now, that 500 Mexicans were treated like animals.”²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Whittinghill to Officer in Charge, INS, Brownsville, 29 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; “5 Braceros Ahogados en Aguas del Pánuco,” *Noticias de Tampico*, 28 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; Whittinghill to Secretary of State, 29 August 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt3, RG85, NARA1.

²⁸⁵ “Very Shocking,” newspaper article, unnamed US newspaper, August or September 1956; “Vil Patrioterismo En La Alharaca Por el ‘Mercurio’,” *Zócalo*, 28 agosto 1956 (Translated by AG); “La

In the wake of the incident members of the Mexican Congress voiced strong opinions and called for an investigation. “It’s inhuman what happened. Extremely unfortunate. Necessary steps should be taken so that it doesn’t happen again,” Diputado Joaquin Bates Caparroso said. His colleague Diputado David Pérez Rulfo described the incident as “profoundly painful for Mexico,” and Diputado Emiliano Corella noted that although the US had the right to deport people, “the deportations should be humane. Our emigrants are men, not animals.”²⁸⁶

Yet in the weeks leading up to the Tampico incident Mexican officials defended the conditions onboard the *Mercurio*. In mid August Gilberto Schleske, Acting Consul of Mexico in Brownsville, said the Mexican government would not allow the ship to sail if they deemed it to be unsafe. Mexican migration officer J. Guadalupe Cervantes, reported that the food, safety and sanitary conditions, medical attention, and treatment of deportees were all satisfactory. Like their US counterparts, Mexican officials also used degrading stereotypes to describe deportees. After the Tampico incident, Carlos Cruz Lara, the Mexican migration chief at Matamoros, dismissed deportees’ complaints as “typical.” “All the time these people (wetbacks deported) complain ... They will never be satisfied, with any food or any treatment.” Cruz continued, “As for not having beds, they would have torn them apart. I tell you, you don’t know these people. They are my

Tragedia del ‘Mercurio’,” *Excelsior*, 28 agosto 1956; Carlos Denegri, article title illegible, ending with “El Luto,” *Excelsior*, 28 agosto 1956 (Translated by AG), 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1.

²⁸⁶ “Los Diputados Piden Una Investigación,” *Excelsior*, 28 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1; US newspaper article, “Hell Ship,” either August or September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt 3, RG85, NARA1.

people, but they are bad some of them, and they would complain if you fed them a banquet.”²⁸⁷

Other Mexican government officials felt that the bad press surrounding the Tampico incident was politically motivated since it fell less than a week before the president’s state of the nation address. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the ruling party, was “extremely embarrassed and upset.” The opposition Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) seized the opportunity: “The events in Tampico constitute a national embarrassment,” the PAN proclaimed, and went on to lay the blame on the PRI for ignoring the inhumane treatment of Mexican migrants.²⁸⁸ But like migration officials from both countries, Captain Noval harbored stereotypes about deportees and used them to discredit critics and clear himself—and in turn the PRI—of any wrongdoing. He slandered the deportees in the press, asserting that among those aboard the *Mercurio* during the Tampico incident “were numerous bad actors, thieves, homosexuals, escaped prisoners from Mexico and agitators that dedicated themselves to provoke discontent that ended in the uprising...” Elsewhere he claimed that the group also included many thugs, delinquents, and drug traffickers.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Schleske to Ball, Acting Chief PI, Brownsville, 17 August 1956; Cervantes to Beechie, 15 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; “Deported Wetbacks Call *Mercurio* ‘Black Slaver,’” *Houston Chronicle*, 14 September 1956, p. 24, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1.

²⁸⁸ Handwritten note by INS official, untitled and no author, August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; “Culpan al gobierno de la tragedia de los braceros del barco *Mercurio*,” *El Norte*, 28 August 1956, p. 1, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1.

²⁸⁹ Untitled article (translated), *El Heraldo*, 30 August 1956, p. 1, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; “El Caso del ‘*Mercurio* I,’” *Tiempo*, 3 septiembre 1956, p. 17, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 6, RG85, NARA1; “Llegó el ‘*Mercurio*’ sin Trabajadores a Veracruz,” *Excelsior*, 28 August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1.

But these characterizations did not accurately describe the vast majority of Mexicans aboard the last boatlift. Only seventy-nine prior arrests for criminal offenses had been made. Although it is unlikely that this was the case, even if seventy-nine unique individuals were arrested they would have represented 16.1 percent of the 500 men onboard. Regardless, the vast majority of these prior arrests were for minor crimes, and less than 5 percent could be classified as “serious.” Many more deportees—61.8 percent—had prior immigration violations. Statistics from 1955 and 1956 indicate that boatlifted deportees were generally not criminals. During the first six months of 1956 only 6.2 percent of Mexicans apprehended in the southwest region and boatlifted had criminal records.²⁹⁰

By describing deportees as criminals US and Mexican government officials and TMR representatives attempted to justify their treatment of migrants and deflect blame from themselves in hopes of continuing the boatlift. Their efforts were unsuccessful: at the end of August the Mexican government terminated the boatlift in response to Mollohan’s investigation and growing criticism in the US and Mexican press, as well as throughout the Mexican government and society. The following week a Mexican official announced that Mexican migrants “will never again be transported like beasts.”²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ For example, off all arrests there was one for murder; nineteen for robbery, burglary, theft, or breaking and entering; one for a sex crime; and three for hit and run. The remaining fifty-five offenses included swindling, moral codes, trespass, narcotics violations, and crimes falling into the generic category of “all others.” “SS MERCURIO, Data Concerning Alien Passengers Sailing From Port Isabel, Texas on August 24, 1956,” 24 August 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Regional Commissioner, SW Region, to Commissioner, 31 August 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1.

²⁹¹ “El Siniestro ‘Mercurio’ no Transportará más Mojados,” *El Fronterizo*, 31 August 1956, page 1; “The Braceros Will Be Repatriated By Other Means In The Future,” (translated) *Noticias*, 7 September 1956; Ledesma Ramirez to Beechie, 10 September 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 6, RG85, NARA1; Veracruz

Conclusion

The boatlift's end forced the INS to deport more Mexicans over land via voluntary departure. INS moles placed in detention centers and aboard buslifts and trainlifts revealed that deportees were "quite elated" about the boatlift's termination, and hoped it would be permanent.²⁹² Some US and Mexican border community officials felt differently, however. Soon after the implementation of this new policy the US Deputy Attorney General warned that in addition to being "totally ineffective," deportation into northern Mexico over land had "the added disadvantage of causing considerable difficulty for the local Mexican authorities who cooperated so splendidly with us in the past."²⁹³ Indeed, tensions did rise in communities on both sides of the border. A new Border Patrol task force was sent to the lower Rio Grande Valley to strengthen the "line of defense" in anticipation of increased repeat migration. The *Associated Press* reported that Mexican border communities were "bitterly condemning the return to the former method of deporting wetbacks by dumping them across the border."²⁹⁴ Matamoros Mayor Augusto Cardenas Montmayor lamented that "that penniless wetbacks who were dumped on the border city of Matamoros from Brownsville were causing problems and were

Port Captain Bidart to Ruiz y Garcia, Sucesores, Veracruz, 31 August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1.

²⁹² Chief Enforcement Officer, SW Region, to Assistant Commissioner, Enforcement Division, 25 and 28 September 1956; Taylor, Acting Chief PI, El Centro, California, to Regional Commissioner, SW Region, 2 October 1956; Report from four informants in El Centro detention center, 25 September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt3, RG85, NARA1.

²⁹³ Deputy AG to Molloyhan, undated, September 1956, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 6, RG85, NARA1.

²⁹⁴ Eleanor Mortensen, "[illegible]...Patrolmen Increased," *Corpus Christi Caller*, 14 September 1956, p. 1, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1.

costing the city money” because they needed to be fed and provided transportation home. When asked his opinion about the boatlift Cardenas stated that he supported it, and that if the Mercurio was unsuitable then the INS should contract another ship.²⁹⁵

On the other side of the border the Brownsville Chief of Police was primarily concerned with how the new policy—under which he believed “illegal returns to the United States is invited”—affected law enforcement and crime. In a draft of a letter to Congress he claimed that “[w]ith the disappearance of the wetback during the past two (2) years, crime in Brownsville has declined by ____%.” His failure to include an actual number raises doubts about any causal connection, not to mention whether crime dropped at all. The Chief made other unsubstantiated statements as well, stating that if the INS did not resume interior removals “we will again be overrun with wetbacks in a few months,” leading unemployment, disease, and welfare and relief demands to rise.²⁹⁶

The INS, for its part, made multiple attempts to reinitiate the boatlift. As Deputy Attorney General William P. Rogers had expressed on the eve of the last trip, deporting Mexicans into the interior of the country “has proved to be an effective weapon in our all-out campaign to rid the country of the wetback menace.”²⁹⁷ In hopes of reversing the short-term impact and out of fear of the long-term implications, Swing wrote to the Deputy Under Secretary of State, warning him that “[i]n order to maintain continued

²⁹⁵ “Mexican Mayor Hits Wetback Treatment,” *San Antonio Express*, 13 September 1956, p. 8A, 56364/43.36 pt1 Boatlift 5, RG85, NARA1.

²⁹⁶ Brownsville Chief of Police to Congressman William L. Dawson, Chairman, House Government Operations Committee (draft), 20 September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt3, RG85, NARA1.

²⁹⁷ Rogers to Mollohan, 23 August 1956, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 7, RG85, NARA1; On a related note, Attorney General Herbert Brownell stated, “removal by sea to a distant Mexican port is a positive, strong deterrent to illegal entry.” Brownell to Charles E. Wilson, Secretary of Defense, 11 December 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

control of the border, steps should be taken immediately to resume the repatriation of wetbacks by sea,” and urged him to pressure the Mexican government to act.²⁹⁸ Despite the INS and TMR’s desire to extend the boatlift, it required the approval of all involved parties, and in the aftermath of the Tampico incident the Mexican government was no longer willing to do so.

Whether or not the boatlift was an effective deterrent is unclear, although the affidavits of more than one hundred apprehended Mexicans indicate that in some cases it was. As twenty-four-year-old Mexico City native Alejandro Salazar Sánchez told the INS, “I was afraid all of the way because I had never been on the water before.” Prior experiences on the boatlift discouraged some from returning to the US David Flores Samorra noted that “[t]he boat trip was very bad for me and if I ever got on land again I would never get on another boat or take the chance of being sent to Veracruz again.”²⁹⁹

When boatlifted Mexicans shared their harrowing experiences with family, friends, and acquaintances it discouraged others from migrating north. Twenty-three-year-old Apolinar Pérez, of Guanajuato, had been deported fourteen times but decided to stay in Mexico upon learning of the boatlift. Sixteen-year-old Alejandro Sánchez Canales noted that he would have gone to the US earlier “but many people in Mexico had told me that I would be sent to Vera Cruz in a boat and that the trip was very hard. I had been told

²⁹⁸ Swing to Robert Murphy, 14 September 1956, 56364/43.36 Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

²⁹⁹ Affidavit, Alejandro Salazar Sánchez, 28 September 1956; Affidavit, David Flores Samorra, 25 September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt3, RG85, NARA1.

that almost everyone that made the trip became seasick and that after leaving the boat at Vera Cruz, they had a very hard time reaching their homes.”³⁰⁰

When Mexicans learned of the boatlift’s cessation—on the radio, in the newspaper, through rumors, or from recently deported or returned friends, family, or passersby—some decided to migrate north. Those subsequently apprehended by the INS offered statements similar to that of Domingo Vásquez Yañez: “I would never have come back if I had not heard about them stopping the boat. Many people are talking about the same thing and want to come again to the United States.”³⁰¹

Although the boatlift discouraged some Mexicans from migrating, its effectiveness as a deterrent deserves closer scrutiny. The affidavits included in the archive are selective in the sense that the INS was gathering information on the boatlift’s effectiveness at a time when the Service wanted to reinstate it. It is difficult to say whether these affidavits reflect the opinions and experiences of all apprehended migrants – let alone those that were not apprehended – during this period. Moreover, INS stenographers recorded migrants’ statements and the fact that migrants gave them in the presence of INS officials most likely affected what they said.

Migrants often censored their comments to INS and Border Patrol officials. In some cases immigration officials knew this was happening and became aware of migrants’ true opinions and plans. Patrol Inspector J.E. Fortner reported that many deportees aboard the December 5, 1954 boatlift “asked the procedure for returning

³⁰⁰ Affidavit, Apolinar Pérez Juárez, 28 September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1; Affidavit, Alejandro Sanchez Canales, 30 September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt3, RG85, NARA1.

³⁰¹ Affidavit, Domingo Vásquez Yañez, 21 September 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

legally with regard to how much money it would cost and how soon they could return. However, I believe this was largely for my benefit as they knew I was of the United States Immigration Service.” Upon arriving in Veracruz, Fortner observed that deportees “were quite outspoken and freely stated that they intended to return to the United States illegally within two or three months.” In the spring of 1956 deportees told Patrol Inspector Anatole J. Moskolenko they would only return to the US with the proper documents, but then he overheard a few claiming they would be back in California within fifteen days, although, he noted, “[t]hey would not say this to me personally.” In one instance a deportee on the *Mercurio* mistook the immigration official for the ship’s doctor. He “confided that he would have better luck next time in crossing the border and staying in the Salinas Valley in Northern Calif[ornia]. When realizing that I was an Immigration Officer he had no more to say.”³⁰² Mexican migrants may have despised the boatlift, but for many—and perhaps the majority—it did not deter them from returning to the US. Indeed, a number of individuals were boatlifted multiple times, including one man claimed to have been deported by boat on eight occasions.³⁰³

Regardless of the boatlift’s actual effectiveness and relative short duration, its historical significance should not be overlooked.³⁰⁴ It offers insights into the roots of the carceral state by showing how corrupt public-private relations and profit motives shaped

³⁰² Report by J.E. Fortner, 10 January, 1955, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt3, RG85, NARA1; Report by Anatole J. Moskolenko, 29 April 1956; Report by Gunnar I. Journ, 25 March 1956, 56364/43.36, Boatlift pt2, RG85, NARA1.

³⁰³ Lacy to Harrison, 17 October 1955, 56364/43.36, pt1 Boatlift 1, RG85, NARA1.

³⁰⁴ The boatlift speaks to broader trends in the privatization of immigration enforcement from the middle of the twentieth century on. For the book version of my project I hope to incorporate a discussion of the airlifts the INS has used periodically since the early 1950s.

immigration policy and migrants' lives. It also reveals that the way in which people were deported mattered. Rather than simply removing Mexicans from the US or acting as a humane measure to return migrants closer to their homes, the boatlift was meant to discourage future migration by deporting people deep into the Mexican interior and subjecting them to harsh conditions aboard the vessels. It drew sharp boundaries around belonging and justified the inhumane treatment of those deemed to be outsiders or "others." The US and Mexican migration bureaucracies and contracted Mexican shipping companies cared little if the boatlift violated basic safety standards. While the INS only was concerned about maximizing the number and efficacy of deportations at as low a cost as possible, the Mexican companies—and some corrupt Mexican government officials—saw the boatlift as a business opportunity and treated deportees as human cargo. This combination proved to be devastating for migrants, an early manifestation of the problems inherent to the business of deportation.

CHAPTER 4

INTERNAL BORDERS AND THE QUOTIDIAN NATURE OF DEPORTATION, 1965-1985

Between 1965 and 1985 changes in policy and the political economies of the United States and Mexico resulted in significant transformations to the deportation regime. The expiration of the Bracero Program on December 31, 1964 had an immediate impact on immigration enforcement practices and migrants' lives. As INS Commissioner Raymond Farrell noted, "Mexican workers, cut off from the legal avenues of obtaining a livelihood which they had become accustomed to over the years, sought to enter illegally and thus obtain work."³⁰⁵ Over the course of the next fiscal year the number of Mexicans apprehended increased by more than twenty-six percent and total apprehensions topped 100,000 for the first time in a decade.³⁰⁶

Even though a 1966 INS intelligence report noted that "border pressures can be expected to continue heavy" for at least a decade, the Service had no real sense of what was to come.³⁰⁷ Population pressures and limited economic opportunities in Mexico and the demand for cheap and exploitable labor in the United States, combined with the end of the Bracero Program, the passage of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Immigration Act (which put

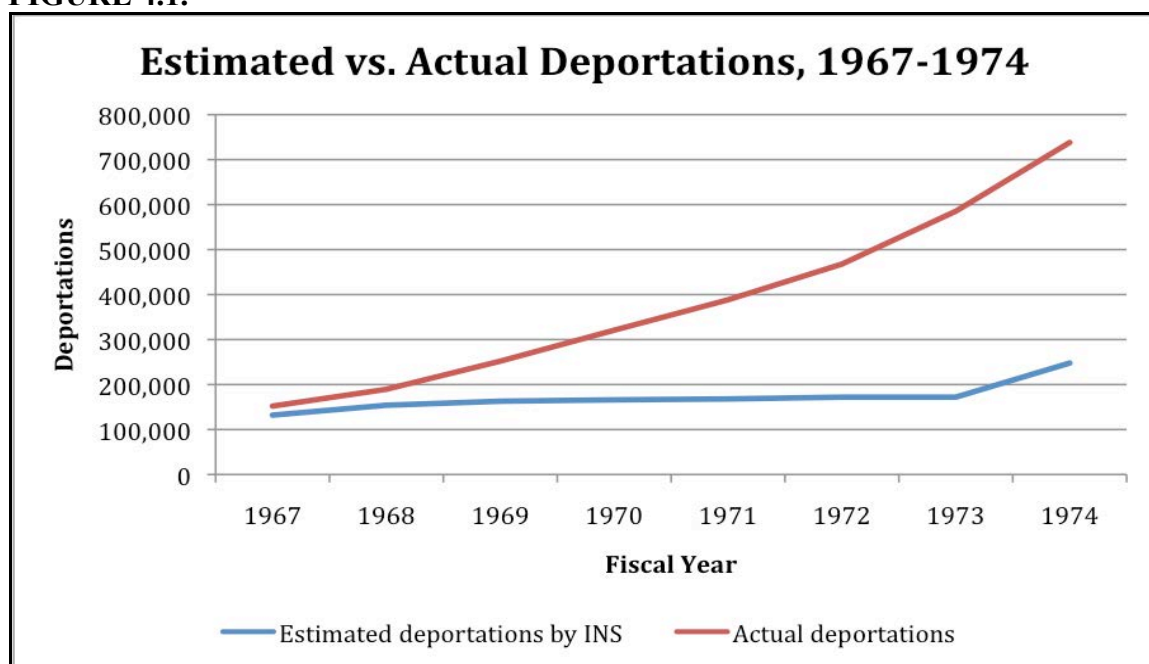
³⁰⁵ Annual Report of the INS, 1966, p. 1, US Citizenship and Immigration Services Historical Reference Library (USCISHRL), Washington, D.C.

³⁰⁶ Annual Report of the INS, 1965, p. 8, UCSICHRL.

³⁰⁷ Program Memorandum, Immigration and Naturalization, September 1966, pp. 23-25, UCSICHRL.

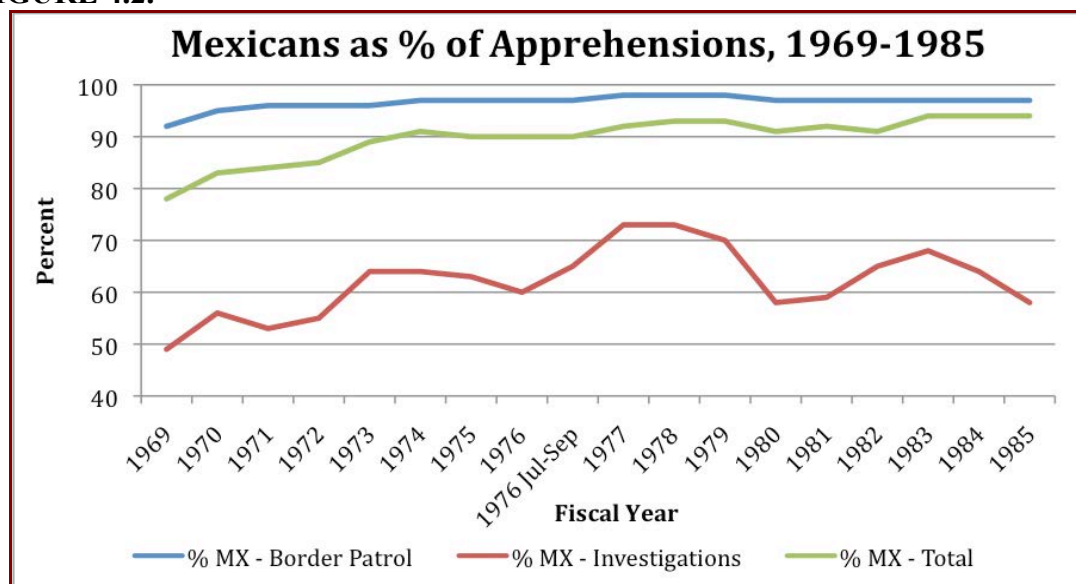
the first-ever cap on immigration from the Western Hemisphere), and Congress's approval of a 20,000 immigrants per-country cap in 1976, resulted in unprecedented levels of undocumented migration that far exceeded the INS's expectations.³⁰⁸ Whereas in 1968 the Service projected 247,800 deportations for fiscal year 1974, six years later the actual number was more than 738,000, nearly three-times the anticipated total. (See Figure 4.1)

FIGURE 4.1.



Source: INS Program Memos, 1966-1968, USCIS/SHRL; DHS OIS 2012 Statistical Yearbook.
(Graph by AG)

³⁰⁸ The 1965 Act, which went into effect in 1968, put a cap on the Western Hemisphere of 120,000 immigrants per year. See Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004). For more on the controversial passage of the 1976 Act see Robert Scheer, "Law Part of Problem," *LAT*, 12 November 1979, p. B1. For more on undocumented migration during this period, see Ana Raquel Minian Andjel, "Undocumented Lives: A History of Mexico-U.S. Migration from 1965-1986" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2012).

FIGURE 4.2.

“% MX – Border Patrol” refers to Mexicans as a percent of all people the Border Patrol apprehended; “% MX – Investigations” refers to Mexicans as a percent of all people INS investigators apprehended; “% MX – Total” refers to Mexicans as a percent of total apprehensions by Border Patrol and INS investigators.

Source: INS Statistics, 1969-1986, USCISHRL. (Calculations and graph by AG)³⁰⁹

In the fall of 1975, General Leonard F. Chapman Jr., then Commissioner of the INS, declared that “the problem has grown rapidly to the point where it is now completely out of control.” The number of expulsions continued to rise in the years to come, averaging more than 920,000 per year from 1976 to 1985, and topping one million in both 1978 and 1985. Moreover, immigration enforcement increasingly targeted Mexicans during this period: Whereas the just over 200,000 Mexicans apprehended in 1969 represented seventy-eight percent of all apprehensions, the 1.2 million Mexicans

³⁰⁹ To make the graphs for this chapter I entered seventeen years worth of detailed, disaggregated apprehension data—broken down by a variety of factors, including sex, how long someone had been in the US at the time of apprehension, city/region where apprehended, type of INS official responsible for apprehension, apprehension of Mexicans vs. total apprehensions, type of employment (if any) at time of apprehension, etc—into an Excel spreadsheet.

apprehended in 1985 made up ninety-four percent of all apprehensions that year. (See Figure 4.2) This disproportionate targeting of a single group reified racialized stereotypes from earlier decades that treated ethnic Mexicans as prototypical “illegal aliens.”³¹⁰

While the number of deportations increased by a factor of ten between 1965 and 1985, the number of Border Patrol agents and line-watch hours only doubled, and the overall Border Patrol and INS budgets just experienced a three-fold increase.³¹¹ Many Border Patrol agents quickly became frustrated by the immigration service’s stagnant budget and limited personnel. The year after the Bracero Program ended, an anonymous officer (or officers) went as far as to pen a satirical memo on official INS stationary describing “Operation RAPE” (“Re-assignment, Attrition and Personnel Elimination”). The memo went on to describe “Operation SCREW” (“Survey of Capabilities for Re-assignment of Eliminated Workers”) and “Operation SHAFT” (“Study by a High Authority Following Transfer”), as well. It concluded: “Employees who are RAPED may apply for only one additional SCREWING but may request the SHAFT as many times as they desire.”³¹² Morale remained low in the years to come, as corruption and manpower

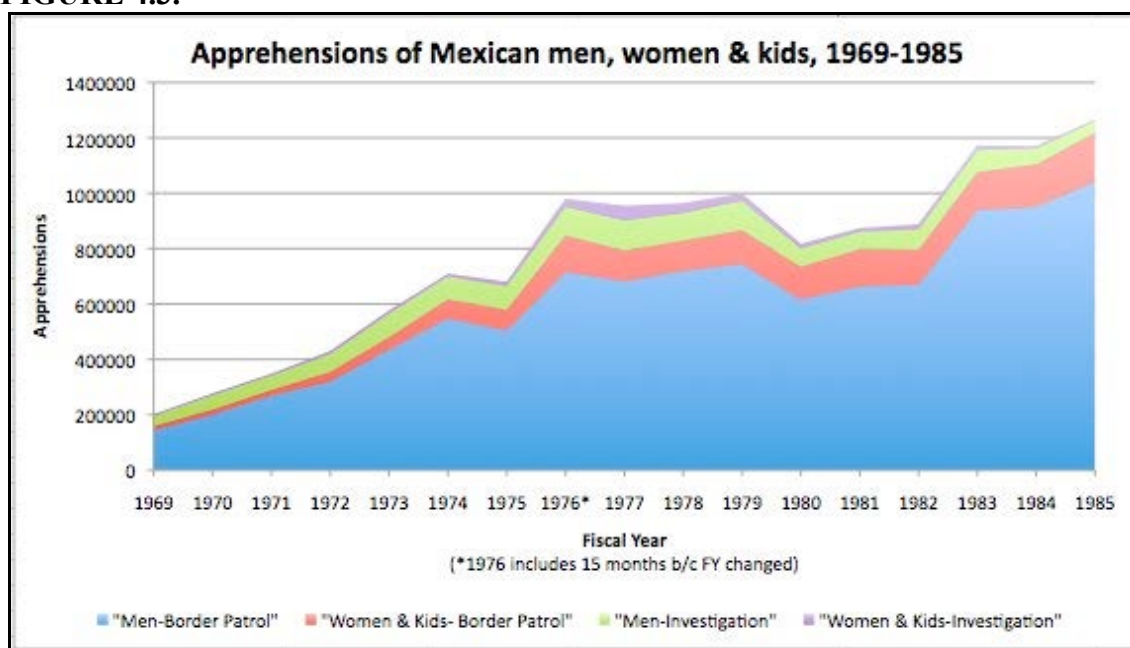
³¹⁰ Program Justification, Immigration and Naturalization, December 1968, p. 11, USCISHRL; Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., “Illegal Aliens - A Growing Population,” Fall 1975, pp. 15-18; INS Statistics 1969-1986, USCISHRL; DHS/OIS 2012 Statistical Yearbook. For more on the laws and policies from the early-to-mid twentieth century that created the notion of Mexicans as “illegal aliens,” see Ngai, *Impossible Subjects* (2004); Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2006); Natalia Molina, “Constructing Mexicans as Deportable Immigrants: Race, Disease, and the Meaning of ‘Public Charge’,” *Identities* 17:6 (2010): 641-666. For a comparative example about the racial formation and production of difference of Chinese immigrants, see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2001).

³¹¹ Data from The Mexican Migration Project, a collaborative research project based at Princeton University and the University of Guadalajara. Available at <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu>.

³¹² Satirical Memo, 1 December 1965, “Airlift” folder, National Border Patrol Museum (NBPM), El Paso, Texas.

shortages continued to plague the Service.³¹³ By 1980, the INS was known “as a bureaucratic stepchild beset by political interference and official indifference, an agency mired in mountains of unsorted paper and hampered by lost and misplaced files, and with a record of selective enforcement, brutality and other wrongdoing possibly unmatched by any other Federal agency.”³¹⁴

FIGURE 4.3.



Source: INS Statistics, 1969-1986, USCISHRL. (Graph by AG)

Despite the INS’s limited and inadequate resources, record-breaking levels of unauthorized migration led to enhanced enforcement at the border and in the interior of the country. (See Figure 4.3) Both expanded from 1965 to 1985, as the INS relied on a

³¹³ Lee Dye, “Corruption Plagues U.S. Along Mexican Border,” *LAT*, 17 December 1972; Denny Walsh, “G.A.O. Finds Illegal-Aliens Problem Worsened by Lax Enforcement,” *NYT*, 25 June 1973, p. 28.

³¹⁴ John M. Crewdson, “U.S. Immigration Service Hampered by Corruption,” *NYT*, 13 January 1980, p. 1.

variety of tactics to effect expulsions, from putting more Border Patrol agents on the line, to having investigators carry out neighborhood and workplace raids. When migrants entered the United States from Mexico without authorization they risked apprehension and deportation, but crossing the geopolitical border was a single event or moment. The INS's increasing reliance on raids in established ethnic Mexican communities created ever-present internal borders. Indeed, the fear of being apprehended, deported, and separated from one's family became prevalent during this period, especially among long-term residents.³¹⁵ And interactions or the possibility of an interaction with an immigration officer became a quotidian part of many undocumented migrants' lives, in some cases circumscribing the physical spaces they inhabited. Starting in the early-to-mid 1970s, Chicano activists, religious leaders, labor unions, and legal aid groups organized and fought against deportations, INS abuse, and the targeting of ethnic Mexicans, regardless of citizenship. Aside from the fact that the vast majority were Mexicans, a considerable amount of diversity—based on sex, length of time in the United States, place of apprehension, and other factors—existed among deportees. While most may have been men, the INS also deported many women and children who, on average, had lived in the United States longer than deported men. This chapter uses INS records, US State Department foreign policy files on Mexico, oral histories with migrants, and newspaper articles to show how deportation changed both quantitatively and qualitatively during the period in which expulsion became pervasive. It focuses specifically on California, the

³¹⁵ During this period, the INS recorded how long people had been living in the United States at the time of apprehension. The Service broke down this data into the following categories: "At entry," "Within 72 hours," "4-30 days," "1-6 months," "7 months-1 year," and "Over 1 year." I define long-term residents as people who had been living in the United States for over a year when officials apprehended them.

destination of around seventy percent of all Mexican migrants from 1965 to 1985.³¹⁶

Internal Borders and the Quotidian Nature of Deportation

Juan Olivarez was twenty-four when he first went to the United States in 1966. He entered as a tourist, but really went to work. After returning to his small town in the central-western Mexican state of Jalisco the following year, he headed north again, and found work picking beets, tomatoes, and cherries in California. Four months later, he and a few friends went to Oregon, where they repaired train tracks until one night after a dinner an immigration officer knocked on their door and asked to see their papers. “We told him, almost in unison, ‘We don’t have any,’” Olivarez recounted. So the agent took them to the county jail, where they spent three days before being flown to Santa Rita, California. After four days in a large detention center there, the INS flew the men to El Paso, Texas, where Olivarez described the jail as “deplorable,” with “bad barracks, lots of disorder, ... [and] horrible food.” Then, three days later, the Service flew them back to California. Olivarez and his friends spent less than an hour at the El Centro detention center before the INS transported them to Calexico, had them sign voluntary departure slips, and deported them to Mexicali. “[W]e went to eat Chinese food, we went to shower, and then I came [home], promising not to return to the United States,” Olivarez

³¹⁶ Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage, 2002), 59-60. As an agency report noted, the geography of crossing shifted during the 1960s. While only nineteen percent of Mexicans crossed the California-Arizona border in calendar year 1963, more than half (fifty-two percent) did in 1967. Robert L. Stewart, “Cooperation with Mexican Government in Reducing Illegal Entry of Mexican Nationals,” NBPM.

remembered. “But a year later I went back.”³¹⁷

Like Olivarez, the INS deported nearly all apprehended Mexican migrants via voluntary departure in the years following the Bracero Program. As an internal 1968 agency document explicitly stated, “In order to reduce costs, policy and procedural changes were made to utilize informal deportations in lieu of formal deportations in the rising number of Mexican cases.”³¹⁸ The Service usually paid for deportees’ transportation within the United States, but, as in the past, it pushed the cost of transportation away from the border onto the deportees: From fiscal year 1969 through the first half of fiscal year 1971, the US and Mexican governments removed 280,000 people into the Mexican interior via bus, plane, or train. More than two-thirds of those people covered seventy-two percent of the overall cost, with the US government making up the difference.³¹⁹ Soon thereafter, in hopes of further minimizing costs to the Service, an INS report recommended, “[i]f a financially able alien refused to pay for his transportation, he could be held for a deportation hearing.” Although this was little more than a threat, since the “INS [did] not have the authority to force aliens to pay,” nor did it have the resources to pay for hearings or the resultant increase in man-days in detention, which more than doubled between fiscal years 1965 and 1970, overwhelming the Service

³¹⁷ Oral history with Juan Olivarez, conducted by author, Jalisco, México, 12 October 2012. Original quotes: “Le dijimos, casi en coro, ‘No tenemos.’”; “La cárcel de Texas, deplorable, mala las barracas, mucho desorden, no había limpieza, la comida malísima.”; “Y ya en Mexicali, nos fuimos a comer comida China, nos fuimos a bañarnos, y yo me vine a [mi pueblo], prometiendo no volver a los Estados Unidos. Pero como al año volví a ir.” (Translation by AG)

³¹⁸ “Program Justification, Immigration and Naturalization,” December 1968, p. 16, USCISHRL.

³¹⁹ From FY1969-first half of FY1971, 190,612 of 280,250 deportees removed into the Mexican interior paid \$1,715,329 of the \$2,368,177 total cost of deportation. INS Budget, Fiscal Year 1972, USCISHRL.

and forcing it to increasingly rely on contract detention facilities.³²⁰ In 1973 the Service's General Counsel reaffirmed the agency's stance that "[f]ormal deportation proceedings are brought only in aggravated cases since they involve considerable expense and delay, and voluntary return is usually the most satisfactory way of dealing with this enormous volume of cases."³²¹ Overall, voluntary departures made up ninety-seven percent of the 13,250,000 deportations between 1965 and 1985. Even though they carried lesser consequences than formal deportations, they still took a physical and financial toll on migrants by creating a climate of fear and helping give rise to a boom in industries based on migrant exploitation.

Mexico also depended on voluntary departures in a sense, since they were not as permanent as formal deportations. Whether documented or undocumented, migration to the US alleviated unemployment and economic underdevelopment in Mexico, especially in rural areas. By the early-to-mid 1970s the United States Ambassador to Mexico told Mexican Foreign Minister Emilio Rabasa that the situation "ha[d] almost reached 'mass population transfer'" and urged the Government of Mexico (GOM) to "attempt to do its share to impede access of illegal migrants."³²² The GOM had supposedly "undertaken a permanent campaign along its northern frontier" to stop unauthorized migration and the smuggling of migrants, but this was little more than empty rhetoric; Mexican officials did

³²⁰ "Opportunities For The Immigration And Naturalization Service To Reduce Costs of Returning Aliens to Mexico," August 1971, "Airlift" folder, NBPM; From FY1965-1970 the total number of man-days in detention increased from 430,120 to 914,117, and the percentage of days in contract (as opposed to INS) facilities increased from thirty to forty-four percent. INS Budget, Fiscal Year 1972, USCISHRL.

³²¹ Charles Gordon, "The Problem of Illegal Entries From Mexico," *I & N Reporter*, Spring 1973, pp 43-48, USCISHRL.

³²² AmEmbassy Mexico to SecState WashDC, 26 July 1974, Department of State Files, RG59, National Archives and Records Administration 2 (hereafter, NARA2), College Park, Maryland.

little to stem migration to the US.³²³ In fact, they most feared the prospect of a mass deportation drive. As a columnist in a Mexican daily newspaper put it, ““What would we do with this excess manpower, where would they live, where would they work, what would they eat? We cannot imagine the latent danger entailed in such a massive deportation.””³²⁴ Voluntary departures suited the needs of both countries in the sense that they allowed the United States to continue deporting people, while leaving open the possibility of re-entry in the future, thus easing economic and population pressures in Mexico.

While enforcement at the border continued to make up the vast majority of deportations during the 1970s, the INS also ramped up immigration raids in ethnic Mexican neighborhoods. In 1970, some thirty percent of American families lived in poverty, with another thirty percent living just above the poverty income of \$7,000. A recession in 1970-1971, followed by the tripling of oil prices and the subsequent drop in the value of the stock market a few years later, heightened feelings of economic

³²³ AmEmbassy Mexico to SecState WashDC, 11 July 1973, Department of State Files. Although the GOM publicly pushed for a new bracero program (until the end of 1974), Rabasa confided that it “was personally embarrassing for him as a Mexican to have to plead that [the US] accept Mexican laborers who were eager to leave their own country.” The United States, for its part, had no intention of reinitiating any kind of guest worker program given domestic political pressures, and especially organized labor’s ongoing staunch opposition to it. Speaking confidentially, Rabasa admitted that the “illegal immigration” problem “had been studied to death and he questioned whether it was solvable,” and Mexican President Luis Echeverría allowed that “he really had no idea on a solution except the long-term one ... of raising the standard of living in Mexico to decrease the temptation for illegal immigration.” AmEmbassy Mexico to SecState WashDC, 3 August 1974; AmEmbassy Mexico to SecState WashDC, 2 November 1974; AmConsul Rio de Janeiro to SecState WashDC, 19 May 1973; AmEmbassy Mexico to SecState WashDC, 5 October 1973; AmEmbassy Mexico to SecState WashDC, 18 June 1973, Department of State Files.

³²⁴ AmEmbassy Mexico to SecState WashDC, 25 July 1974, Department of State Files.

insecurity and uncertainty across the country.³²⁵ Throughout the decade, widespread mainstream media coverage referred to undocumented migration as “a human flood or silent invasion,” which, as historian David Gutiérrez has noted, “rekindl[ed] concern that Mexicans were stealing jobs from American citizens.”³²⁶ The INS responded with force. In late May and early June of 1973, for example, the Service carried out a series of raids in Los Angeles, which were begun, according to an official, “because of a steady increase in the number of aliens in the Los Angeles area which ‘normal INS operations simply could not handle.’”³²⁷ The Acting INS District Director in Los Angeles justified the raids by describing undocumented Mexican immigrants as a drain on the US economy and society: “‘They attend schools at taxpayers’ expense, they take jobs that normally would go to Americans, and many of them go on welfare and use other public social services.’” As a result, officials announced that “the mass crackdown will continue indefinitely.”³²⁸ On May 23 and 29 two “unusually large” garment factory raids alone resulted in the apprehension of 2,000 Mexicans, and a week or so later forty immigration officers apprehended 400 Mexicans (including twenty women) in a three-hour pre-dawn raid on factories, bus stops, and city streets in Huntington Park. Over the course of eleven days the raids led to the apprehension of at least 7,100 Mexicans.³²⁹

³²⁵ Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), Chapters 1-4.

³²⁶ David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1995), 18. For more on Mexicans and Latinos being seen as outsiders and/or as a threat, see Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2008); Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014).

³²⁷ Frank Del Olmo, “600 More Aliens Rounded Up in Continuing L.A.-Area Raids,” *LAT*, 30 May 1973, p. D1.

³²⁸ Associated Press, “Raids grab Mexican illegal aliens,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 June 1973, p. 11.

³²⁹ Betty Liddick, “A Critical Game of Hide and Seek,” *LAT*, 8 June 1973, 11; “400 Illegal Aliens Seized

After the May 29 raid more than 200 Chicano activists, organized by El Centro de Acción Social Autónoma, Hermandad General de Trabajadores (CASA), picketed the federal building in downtown Los Angeles, “demanding and end to the raids.” Labor organizer and CASA co-founder Bert Corona described the raids as “dragnets designed to stir up an antialien hysteria,” and said that INS investigators “[were] harassing everybody with brown skin.” Moreover, he pointed out that many of the people apprehended in the raids had families in the United States, and some had US-citizen children.³³⁰

Immigration raids and heightened levels of INS surveillance effectively established internal borders that created a climate of fear in Mexican American and immigrant communities and made many undocumented Mexicans more aware of their “deportability.”³³¹ During the May-June raids a twenty-two-year-old Mexican woman

As Coast Roundup Goes on,” *NYT*, 10 June 1973, p. 21. These raids were supposedly the largest since 1970, when the INS apprehended some 10,000 people over a six-week period. See Frank Del Olmo, “600 More Aliens Rounded Up in Continuing L.A.-Area Raids,” *LAT*, 30 May 1973, p. D1.

³³⁰ Frank Del Olmo, “600 More Aliens Rounded Up in Continuing L.A.-Area Raids,” *LAT*, 30 May 1973, p. D1. Founded in 1968 in Los Angeles by Corona and Soledad “Chole” Alatorre as a “voluntary, democratic mutual assistance social welfare organization,” CASA provided assistance and services to undocumented Mexican workers. By 1970 autonomous local affiliates existed in other cities in California in addition to parts Texas, Colorado, Washington, and Illinois. In 1973 CASA reported having 20,000 members, half of them women and children. David G. Gutiérrez, “*Sin Fronteras?: Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and the Emergence of the Contemporary Mexican Immigration Debate, 1968-1978*,” in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 187; Betty Liddick, “A Critical Game of Hide and Seek,” *LAT*, 8 June 1973, 11. For more on the Chicana/o movement in Southern California during this period, and the movement’s activism and support of undocumented migrants, see Ernesto Chávez, “*¡Mi Raza Primero!*”: *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002); Jimmy C. Patiño, Jr., “A Time for Resistance”: Globalization, Undocumented Immigration, and the Chicana/o Movement in the San Diego Borderlands” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California-San Diego, 2010).

³³¹ Nicholas De Genova defines “deportability” as “the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state.” By examining deportability, as opposed to the act of deportation, we can gain insight into how the threat of deportation affected undocumented migrants’ lives in the United States. See Nicholas P. De Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419-447. In her work on Salvadorans in the United States in the late twentieth century, anthropologist and criminologist Susan Coutin asserts that undocumented people

said, “Every time I see a man in a suit, I’m afraid.”³³² A local migrant-aid social agency “reported that its staff was besieged by phone calls and requests for assistance from aliens who have heard news reports of the raids.”³³³ Just three months earlier, Alicia, a thirty-two-year-old single mother who had lived in California for eight years and had two US-born children, told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter how her fear of deportation affected her life: “I sit at home a lot because I’m afraid to go out without my children for fear the authorities will pick me up and leave them at home alone ... Who would take care of them?” She also added, “I can’t afford to make many friends because I’m afraid they would turn me in if they got angry with me.” Her undocumented status even prevented her from receiving child support from the father of her one-year-old daughter. “He said just last week that if I took him to court, I would only get one week of child support because one way or another he’d get me across the border. I know he wants to take me out so he can keep on driving to Tijuana ... and how would I get back?” Despite living in fear and barely being able to make ends meet most months, Alicia planned on staying in the United States to give her kids “the education [she] never had.”³³⁴ As another undocumented Mexican migrant put it a few years later, “Being here is like a prison, a

live in “spaces of nonexistence,” which can be subversive, but are “largely sites of subjugation.” See Susan Bibler Coutin, *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants’ Struggle for U.S. Residency* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

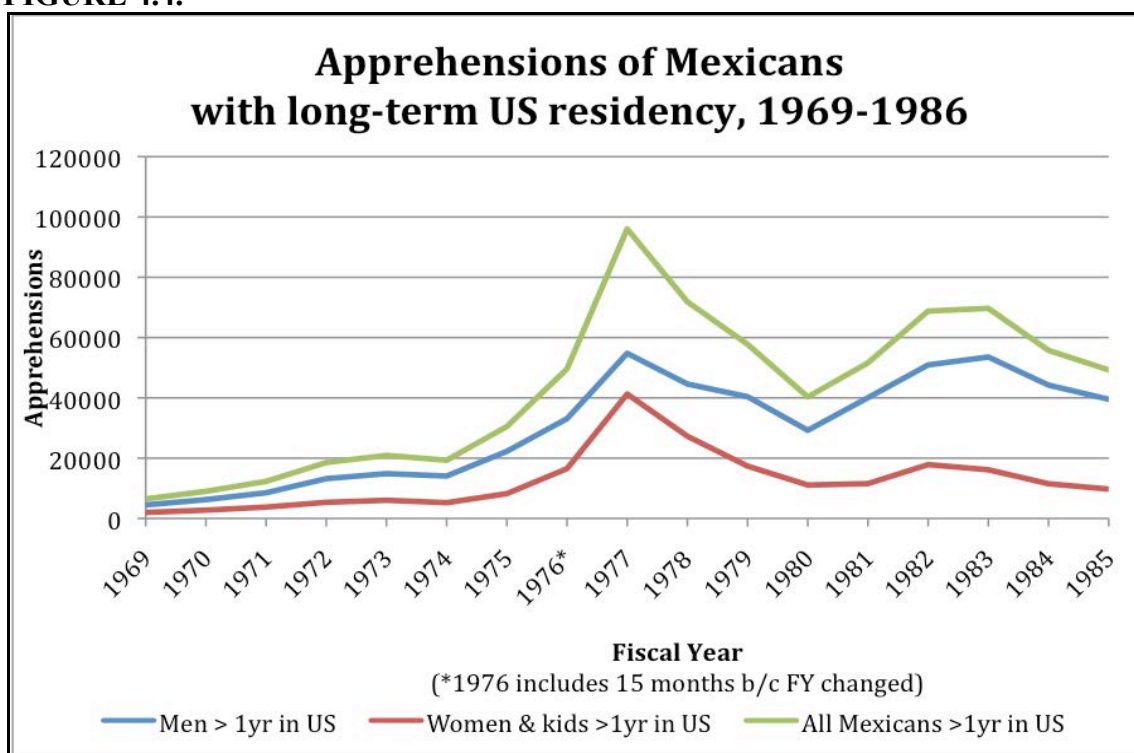
³³² Betty Liddick, “A Critical Game of Hide and Seek,” *LAT*, 8 June 1973, I1. I recognize that the politics of representation and an individual journalist or particular publication’s politics shape what is reported (and the production of knowledge in general). But the consistency across sources—newspaper articles, oral histories, archival materials, and secondary literature—was striking and led me to conclude that the quotes included in this chapter are representative of the impact immigration raids had on migrants and migrant communities.

³³³ Frank Del Olmo, “600 More Aliens Rounded Up in Continuing L.A.-Area Raids,” *LAT*, 30 May 1973, p. D1.

³³⁴ Jane Leek, “Hopes for New Life Outweigh Aliens’ Fears,” *LAT*, 8 January 1973, D1.

beautiful golden prison. You have everything, but at the same time you have nothing.”³³⁵

FIGURE 4.4.



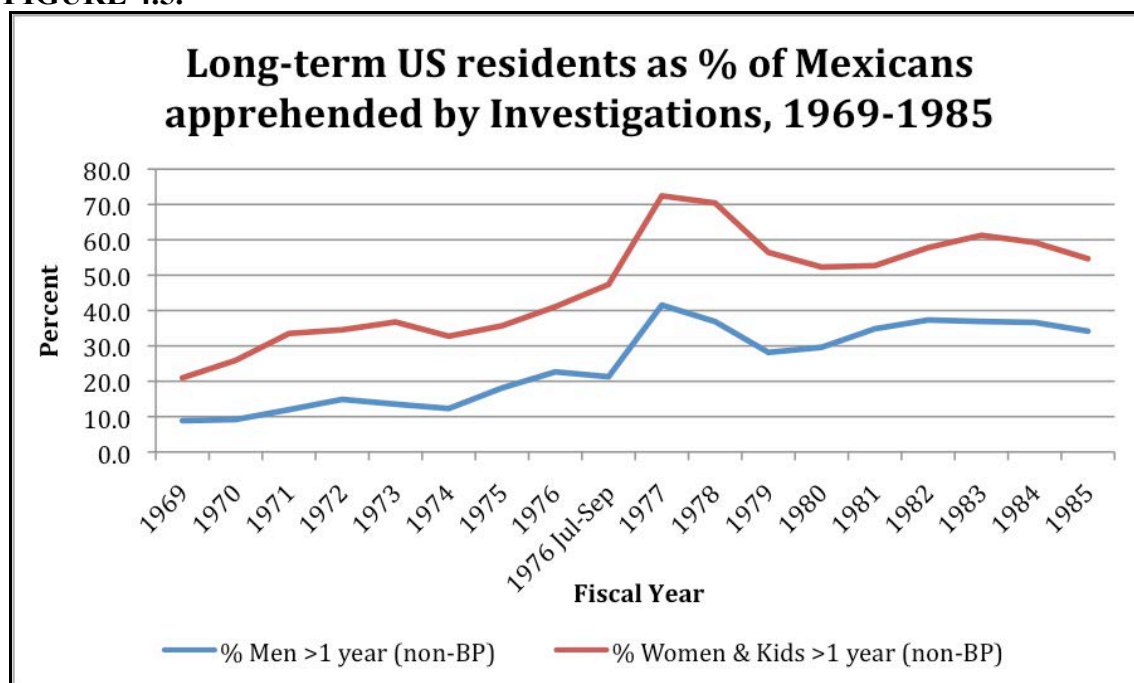
Source: INS Statistics, 1969-1986, USCISHRL. (Calculations and graph by AG)

Fear in the Mexican migrant community was understandable given the trends in immigration enforcement from 1969 to 1977. Even though Border Patrol agents accounted for the vast majority of total apprehensions, INS investigators apprehended more than 1.5 million Mexicans between 1969 and 1985. Investigators usually carried out workplace and neighborhood raids, which led to an increase in the apprehensions of Mexicans with long-term residency in the US: In 1969 the Service apprehended less than 6,500 Mexicans who had lived in the US for over a year; by 1973 that number had grown

³³⁵ Patt Morrison, “Good Wages, Bad Jobs, Constant Fear,” *LAT*, 22 January 1977, p. 3.

to nearly 21,000, and in 1977 reached a high of more than 96,000.³³⁶ (See Figure 4.4)

FIGURE 4.5.



Source: INS Statistics, 1969-1986, USCISHRL. (Calculations and graph by AG)

The proportion of long-term US residents among those Mexicans apprehended by investigators increased over time as well. (See Figure 4.5) Whereas eleven percent of the more than 42,000 Mexicans investigators apprehended in 1969 had lived in the US for over a year, an average of forty-one percent had from 1977 to 1985. In 1977 alone investigators apprehended more than 83,000 Mexicans with long-term residence (more than half of all apprehensions by investigators), including more than 37,600 women and children. Whereas, in 1969, one out of every five women and children apprehended by

³³⁶ INS Statistics 1969-1986, USCISHRL. Calculations by AG.

investigators had lived in the US for more than one year, nearly three out of four had in 1977, and an average of sixty percent had between 1978 and 1985.³³⁷

While it is important to highlight the different ways immigration enforcement policies affected men, women and children, fear of deportation cannot be explained by supposed innate differences between the sexes. Rather, deportability tended to have a greater impact on people who had lived in the United States longer, whether man, woman, or child. During this period, Mexican women and children were generally two-to-three times more likely than men to be long-term residents at the time of apprehension.³³⁸ This was, at least in part, a product of the fact that undocumented Mexican women were more likely than undocumented Mexican men to settle in the United States after arriving.³³⁹ In addition to there being a higher probability that men would return to Mexico, the Border Patrol deported around six times as many men as women and children at entry or within a few days of entering the US.³⁴⁰ These two factors combined meant that men were less likely than women and children to be long-term residents and more likely to engage in circular migration patterns. But, as the following poem, “Al Estilo Americano” (The American Way), by community organizer Salvador Reza made clear, raids and deportation affected all Mexicans with long-term residence in the US, irrespective of sex.

³³⁷ INS Statistics 1969-1986, USCISHRL. Calculations by AG.

³³⁸ INS Statistics 1969-1986, USCISHRL. Calculations by AG.

³³⁹ According to The Mexican Migration Project, from 1965 to 1985 the probability that an undocumented man would return to Mexico within two years of entering the United States was generally between .55 and .60, while the probability that a woman would do so was generally between .30 and .40. Massey, Durand, and Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*, 62-64.

³⁴⁰ INS Statistics 1969-1986, USCISHRL. Calculations by AG.

Immigration officials nabbed me, the American way
 And although I'm not a criminal
 That's the way they treated me.
 And although I'm not a criminal, that's the way they treated me.

I worked in a factory in Los Angeles, hermano,
 And right on payday they threw down a raid.
 With pistol in hand to the wall they ordered me,
 With pistol in hand to the wall they threw me.
 Since I didn't know English they slapped handcuffs on me,
 And with all of my friends on a plane they kicked us out
 And with all of my friends on a plane they kicked us out.

I'm off to Mexico, to see what awaits me there.
 I'm off to Mexico, to see what awaits me there.
 Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, my family is left alone.
 Does God know what they will do?

I don't say goodbye because I have to go back,
 To reunite with my family and collect my check.
 I don't say goodbye, because I have to go back.³⁴¹

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s deportation or the possibility of being deported became a quotidian part of some migrants' lives. Even though the probability of being apprehended did not increase, the realities of circular migration meant that

³⁴¹ Salvador Reza, "Al Estilo Americano," *Voz Fronteriza*, November 1976, p. 13, Special Collections, University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas. (Translation by AG) Original in Spanish: "Al Estilo Americano," por Salvador Reza // "Me agarró la inmigración (sic), al estilo Americano / Y aunque no soy criminal / De ese modo me han tratado. / Y aunque no soy criminal, de ese modo me han tratado. // Trabajaba en una fábrica de Los Angeles, hermano, / Y en el mero día de pago una redada tiraron. / Con la pistola en la mano a la pared me ordenaron, / Con la pistola en la mano a la pared me aventaron. / Como no sabía el inglés las esposas me ajustaron, / Y con todos mis amigos en un avión nos echaron / Y con todos mis amigos en un avión nos echaron. // Rumbo a México ya voy, a ver que me espera allá. / Rumbo a México ya voy, a ver que me espera allá. / Mientras tanto, allá en los Angeles, queda mi familia sola. / ¿Sabe Dios como le harán? // Despedida no les doy porque tengo que volver, / A mi familia reunirme y una cuenta cobraré. / Despedida no les doy, porque tengo que volver." The *Voz Fronteriza* was founded at the University of California-San Diego in 1975. Reza and his parents came to the US as undocumented immigrants in 1961, when he was still a child. He later served in the Air Force and became a citizen. Today he continues to work as an activist and organizer in Phoenix, Arizona. See Ted Robbins, "Community Organizer Fights for Immigrants," *NPR*, 11 March 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88083529>.

migrants were likely to be apprehended, on average, around two out of every five times they crossed the border.³⁴² The INS's reliance on voluntary departure and the fact that the border was still relatively porous resulted in many Mexican migrants—and especially men—being deported multiple times. Alfonso, a twenty-seven-year-old man who migrated to the US in 1968, was deported seven times during his first five years in the country.³⁴³ In 1977 officials in El Paso apprehended Laura Mendarez-Perez, who had forty-eight prior deportations.³⁴⁴ On some occasions, immigration authorities deported migrants multiple times during a single attempt to cross into the United States. Although memory may have resulted in some creative authorship, Gustavo Ramírez recalled being deported him ten times during a twenty-two day period:

“I went from [my pueblo in Jalisco] to Tijuana, and they caught me and threw me back to Tijuana. I tried to cross the next day and they caught me and back to Tijuana I went again. Ten times! And in those ten tries I think I lost some thirty pounds. I was skinny all right! And the next day I finally crossed.”³⁴⁵

Ramírez estimated that immigration officials deported him a total of seventy times between 1972 and 1982. Each time he gave a different name, so that he would not have

³⁴² During this period the probability of being apprehended hovered between .35 and .45. Massey, Durand, and Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 55-58. For a comparative, contemporary example of deportation's quotidian nature, see Treasa M. Galvin, “‘We Deport Them but They Keep Coming Back’: The Normalcy of Deportation in the Daily Life of ‘Undocumented’ Zimbabwean Migrant Workers in Botswana,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 4 (2015): 617-634.

³⁴³ Jane Leek, “Hopes for New Life Outweigh Aliens’ Fears,” *LAT*, 8 January 1973, D1.

³⁴⁴ The outcome of Mendarez-Perez's case is unclear, but it is likely that she was given a short prison sentence since the INS formally deported her after apprehending her for the forty-eighth time. Clarence H. Russell, “Even Chicanos want to halt tide of illegal aliens,” *CSM*, 15 August 1977, p. 16.

³⁴⁵ Oral history with Gustavo Ramírez, by author, conducted 20 January 2013, Jalisco, México. Original in Spanish: “Me fui de aquí a Tijuana, me agarraron. Me echaron a Tijuana otra vez. Me volví a meter otro día y me volvieron a agarrar y pa’ Tijuana otra vez. ¡Diez veces! Y estos diez veces, pues, yo creo que debí haber bajado unos catorce kilos. ¡Estaba flaquito ya! Y al siguiente día ya pasé.” (Translation by AG)

problems if apprehended again.³⁴⁶ In all, the number of people deported who had at least one previous expulsion went from less than 14,000 in 1965 (thirteen percent of all deportees), to over 152,000 in 1973 (a quarter of all deportees), to more than 372,000 in 1985 (thirty-five percent of all deportees).³⁴⁷

For some Mexican migrants, deportability and deportation became such a part of everyday life that they no longer thought of interactions with immigration officials as notable or memorable. Alberto Hernández was five-years-old when he began working, bringing tortillas to his brothers who worked in the fields of their pueblo in Jalisco. Today, he is sixty-three-years-old and for the last forty years he has lived in the US. He migrated for the first time in 1972 when he was nineteen, without documents. For three years he worked cleaning horses and doing odd jobs on a ranch, and then he returned home, where he married his wife Raquel. The couple then returned to California together. For the last thirty-three years he has worked on the same ranch and he plans on continuing to do so until he retires. Since 1988, when they became US citizens, he, Raquel, and their kids have returned to Mexico twice a year to see family and work on improving their house.³⁴⁸

I decided to do an oral history with Alberto after interviewing his wife, Raquel. For almost the first hour of my discussion with Raquel she said they had never had any problems with immigration officials. But then, she told me the following, which made me want to speak with Alberto as well.

³⁴⁶ Oral history with Gustavo Ramírez, conducted by author, 20 January 2013, Jalisco, México.

³⁴⁷ Calculations by AG based on data from INS Annual Reports and DHS/OIS Statistical Yearbooks.

³⁴⁸ Oral history with Alberto Hernández, conducted by author, 20 January 2013, Jalisco, México.

Raquel: “Mi esposo platica una historia que cuando él estaba de muchacho. Lo siguió la migración y lo agarró.”

Adam: “¿Tu esposo?”

Raquel: “Sí. Y lo pusieron ... Lo mandaron a Tijuana. Y se echó cinco días en Tijuana, no se cruzó, se lo pasó bailando en Tijuana. Y allí comió ... allí bailó en Tijuana cinco días. [*Empieza a reírse.*] Y hasta que se acabó de bailar na’ más dejó pa’ cruzar la frontera y se volvió a pasar. Así se cruzaban. No se venían pa’ sus casas.”³⁴⁹

Raquel: “My husband talks about a time when he was young. Immigration officials followed him and they caught him.”

Adam: “Your husband?”

Raquel: “Yes. And they put him ... they sent him to Tijuana. He spent five days in Tijuana, he didn’t cross back, he spent them dancing in Tijuana. And there he ate ... there he danced in Tijuana for five days. [*Begins to laugh.*] And until he finished dancing, he only stopped to cross the border and then he crossed again. That’s how they crossed the border. They didn’t go back to their houses [in Mexico].”

I wanted to hear this story from Alberto’s perspective, and talk to him about his other experiences migrating as well. We spoke on the patio behind his house, and after asking him about his childhood, family, and decision to migrate, I asked him if he had had any experiences, interactions, or problems with the migra.

Alberto: “Bueno, yo no los tuve. Duré como cuatro años y pues, pasó un accidente de mi hermano, se mató allá y vinimos y tuve que regresar otra vez por el cerro.”

Adam: “Y cuando usted regresó o, como, migró otra vez por el cerro tampoco encontró la migra?”

Alberto: “Well, I didn’t have any problems. I spent four years there [in the US] and well, my brother had an accident, he got killed there [in Mexico] and we came and I had to cross again through the hills.”^{2.75}

Adam: “And when you returned or, migrated another time through the hills you didn’t run into the migra

³⁴⁹ Oral history with Raquel Medina Olivarez, conducted by author, 17 January 2013, Jalisco, México. (Translation by AG)

either?"

Alberto: "No, no. Nunca me tocó. Tuve suerte. Nunca me la encontré."

Alberto: "No, no. They never got me. I was lucky. They never found me."

Adam: "Entonces ... ¿nunca le detuvieron o tenía problema?"

Adam: "So ... they never detained you or you never had a problem?"

Alberto: "No, no. Yo no tuve problemas."

Alberto: "No, no. I never had problems."

Adam: "Y, ¿usted conoció a otras personas que sí tenían problemas o si la migra les detuvieron?"

Adam: "And did you know other people that did have problems or that immigrations officials detained?"

Alberto: "Sí, conocí muchas personas que, pues, le detenían de la frontera. O se agarraban les echan pa' fuera, otros los detenían allí."

Alberto: "Yeah, I knew many people that, well, they detained on the border. Or they apprehended them and threw them out, others they detained there."

A few minutes later, when I realized that Alberto didn't remember or wasn't going to share the story Raquel had told me, I asked him directly.

Adam: "... su esposa me contó una historia, no sé si usted también se acuerda de la misma historia pero ella me contó que antes de que se casaron ustedes la migra le encontró una vez y le echaron a ..."

Adam: "... your wife told me a story, I don't know if you also remember the same story but she told me that before you married la migra found you one time and threw you out to ..."

Alberto: "O, sí, sí, sí."

Alberto: "Oh, yes, yes, yes."

Adam: "... Tijuana. Para unos días de bailar o algo, en sus palabras."

Adam: "... Tijuana. For some days of dancing or something, in her words."

When Alberto began to tell me the following story I realized that he hadn't heard the last part of what I had said. Perhaps because he was already thinking about this other

memory.

Alberto: “Esa vez, sí, me tocó. O sea, me agarraron junto con otros pero o sea con la bola. Pero nosotros en realidad no íbamos con ellos. Y este, nos detuvieron allí como testigos pa’ joder al coyote, pero en realidad nosotros no lo conocíamos. Y de ese modo, pos, estuve como unas tres semanas detenido.”

Adam [voz sorprendida]: “Tres semanas detenido dónde?”

Alberto: “Allí en San Diego. Pero este, lo que pasó es que el patrón mío me necesitaban allá en el rancho y él pagó una fianza. Cuando ya después regresé a la corte allí me echaron pa’ fuera. Y ya después me volví atrás, yo solo.”

Adam: “Y usted en ese momento tenía la opción de quedarse allá y luchar por sus derechos para quedarse en el país o le echaron pa’ fuera sin firmar nada?”

Alberto: “No, sin firmar nada. Yo no salí deportado de nada. Yo salí bien. Y pos, me volví a meter. Y ya no. Desde entonces no hemos tenido problemas. Duremos unos siete ocho años que no regresamos pa’ acá, pa’ México, hasta que arreglamos papeles.”

Adam: “Y, ¿dónde se quedó usted en estos días de—no sé si era detención pero, en esas tres semanas como usted

Alberto: “This time, yes, they got me. Or, they apprehended me along with others but or with the ‘bola.’ But in reality we weren’t with them. And this, they detained us there as witnesses to screw over the coyote, but in reality we didn’t know him. And so, well, I was detained for some three weeks.”³⁵⁰

Adam [surprised voice]: “Where were you detained for three weeks?”

Alberto: “There is San Diego. But this, what happened is that my boss needed me on the ranch and he paid my bail. When I later returned to court they threw me out [of the country]. And later I came back in, alone.”

Adam: “And in this moment did you have the option to stay and fight for your right to stay in the country or did they throw you out without signing anything?”

Alberto: “No, without signing anything. I didn’t leave deported for anything. I left on good terms. And well, I returned again. And from then no. Since then we haven’t had problems. We spent some seven-eight years during which we didn’t return here, to Mexico, until we got our papers.”

Adam: “And where did you stay during these days—I don’t know if it was detention but, during these three

dijo, en un centro de detención o era una cárcel del pueblo?”

Alberto: “Era un, una, como un building, que rentaba la migración para tener allí la gente ese como testigos. O sea, había diferentes pisos en unos tenían los más peligrosos, los que eran coyotes, en otros nada más los detenidos, y ya.”

Adam: “Había muchas otras personas allí con usted?”

Alberto: “Sí, había muchas. Eran cuatros secciones. Eran como en las esquinas, había una sección de unos o otros pertenecían a otros. Y cuando salíamos a comer, ya nombraban la sección y ya bajábamos hacia los ... Así estuvimos por tres semanas.”

Adam: “¿Y dónde le agarraron?”

Alberto: “Me agarraron allí en la frontera en Tijuana. Sí, eso fue la única vez que me detuvieron.”

Adam: “Y después de regresar a Tijuana, o cuando, después de salir, ¿usted tenía unos pensamientos de regresar a [tu pueblo] o ya había decidido quedarse allá?”

Alberto: “No, no. Es que allá estaba mi esposa con mis hijos. Entonces los pensamientos míos fueron regresar todo el tiempo.”

weeks like you said, in a detention center or was it a town jail?”

Alberto: “It was a, a, like a building, that the migration officials rented to keep the witnesses. Or, there were different floors and on some they had the most dangerous people, those that were coyotes, on others nobody more than the detainees, and that’s it.”

Adam: “Were there many other people there with you?”

Alberto: “Yes, there were a lot. There were four sections. They were like in the corners, there was a section belonging to some or others pertaining to others. And when we went out to eat, they had already called the section and we had already gone down ... That’s how we were for three weeks.”

Adam: “And where did they apprehend you?”

Alberto: “They apprehended me there on the border by Tijuana. Yeah, that was the only time they detained me.”

Adam: “And after returning to Tijuana, or when... after leaving, did you have thoughts about returning to [your pueblo] or had you already decided to stay there [in the US]?”

Alberto: “No, no. It’s that my wife and my kids were already there [in the US]. So I always thought of returning.”

Adam: “Ah, entonces, su esposa ya estaba allá?”

Alberto: “Sí.”

Adam: “Eso pasó cuando ustedes ya estaban juntos en los Estados Unidos.”

Alberto: “Sí. O sea ... Yo me vine primero. Me detuvieron, y después se vino mi esposa. Pero yo ya había salido fianza. Entonces ya vivimos allá juntos. Cuando regresé a la corte ya fue cuando me echaron pa’ fuera. Pero entonces, fue a los dos, tres días, regresé pa’ atrás. No duré mucho tiempo.”

Adam: “So, then, your wife was already there?”

Alberto: “Yes.”

Adam: “This happened when you two were already together in the US.”

Alberto: “Yes. Or ... I came first. They detained me, and then my wife came later. But I had already been let out on bail. So we already lived there together. When I returned to the court is when they threw me out. But then, after two or three days I returned again. I didn’t last very long.”³⁵¹

How was it possible that Alberto had spent *three weeks* in detention but told me that he never had problems with migration officials and, moreover, that his family had been lucky? Perhaps because these three weeks in detention don’t define the forty years he has lived in the United States. Or, possibly, it is related to the stigma that is attached to deportees today, with which Alberto clearly does not identify. Maybe it is because he doesn’t define—and doesn’t want others to define—his experience as a failure. Is that why he said that he did not leave deported, that he left on good terms?

The truth is that in general terms Alberto’s story is one of success. Yes, he and Raquel have worked incredibly hard for the last four decades and today Raquel suffers

³⁵⁰ In the mid-1970s, the INS began holding migrants in detention so that they could testify against coyotes. See, for example, Robert Rawitch, “Alien Witnesses—Many Go to Jail,” *LAT*, 27 May 1974, p. B1. This was part of the Service’s (largely unsuccessful) efforts to combat skyrocketing smuggling rates. Whereas the INS only apprehended 525 smugglers and 1,730 smuggled migrants in fiscal year 1965, by 1978 those numbers had shot up to nearly 17,000 and over 193,000. INS Annual Reports, 1965-1978, USCIS/HR.

³⁵¹ Oral history with Alberto Hernández, conducted by author, 20 January 2013, Jalisco, México. (Translation by AG)

from diabetes. But they became citizens in 1988, their three kids are citizens, they have earned and saved money, they have a house in California and a house in their town in Mexico that is remodeled and now has a second floor. In Mexico alone Alberto, who loves anything with a motor, has a number of trucks—including one that is elevated that he calls “my toy”—some motorcycles, a golf cart, and an all-terrain vehicle.

The oral history I did with Alberto, among other people, indicates that interactions—or the possibility of an interaction—with migration officials became a part of everyday life for many undocumented Mexicans in the US in the 1970s. Alberto told me that he and his friends were all very conscious of the fact that when they left for work there was always the possibility that they wouldn’t return home. For that reason, every day they were sure to carry twenty dollars with them, hidden somewhere on themselves, to ensure that they would have a little bit of money if immigration officials came, apprehended them, and then deported them to Tijuana. Alberto also described many occasions in which the migra came to his work and they had to flee, including one time he had to climb a tree and spend a couple of hours hidden there waiting for them to leave. Considering all of this, we can at least begin to understand why someone would say that he had not had any problems with migration officials even though he had spent three weeks in detention and been deported on multiple occasions.³⁵²

³⁵² Oral history with Alberto Hernández, conducted by author, 20 January 2013, Jalisco, México. Oral histories are crucial to understanding the history of deportation. Just like any other source, they do not provide a complete, or more accurate, record of the past. They depend on the interview setting and how well the interviewer and interviewee know one another. Additionally, the stories included in oral histories always pass through the filter of memory and are sometimes consciously withheld or altered. This is clear from the contradictions between Raquel and Alberto’s accounts. The fact that spouses of more than thirty-five years have distinct memories of when and how Alberto was deported raises many questions. The truth

Fighting Against Raids in the Streets and in the Courts

By the late 1970s protests against INS raids and the fear they instilled in Mexican American and migrant communities became more frequent and better organized. In addition to Chicano activists and religious leaders' presence in the streets, undocumented migrants, labor unions, rights groups, and legal aid organizations took to the courts in hopes of protecting all people. No union was more active in organizing undocumented workers in Southern California than the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). In the words of the union's executive vice president, "'We're trying to organize all unorganized workers. It's not of interest to us what their status is except their status as exploited workers.'" When the ILGWU shifted its policy in 1975 to include undocumented workers, it was largely out of necessity. In the middle of the twentieth century the union had a membership of around 20,000; by the end of the 1970s it hovered somewhere between 7,000 and 8,000. The \$3 billion California garment industry (second only to New York City) employed around 100,000 workers, nearly eighty percent of

is that we don't know how many times he was deported, and we don't know whether or not the story Raquel told me about spending five days dancing in Tijuana is true. Ultimately, the histories we write are based on limited sources, even if they are numerous or seemingly exhaustive. How would my interpretation have changed if it had been possible to do ten, fifty, or one hundred more oral histories? It is impossible to say, just as it is impossible to conduct oral histories with the millions of Mexicans who have been deported in the last seventy-two years. We have to accept that there will always be more sources to consult and more people to interview. But at the same time, we should not forget the importance of relying on a diverse source base. We should use the oral history not as the only source or as a better or more reliable source, but as a source that complements what we find in the archives. It is only by using a combination of the two that we can better understand and appreciate the complexity of the past, and, in this case, how we think about, talk about, and understand the history of deportation. For more on oral history methodology, see Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001); Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).

whom worked for the more than 3,000 firms in the Los Angeles area. Latinos and undocumented immigrants made up more than three-quarters of all California garment industry workers. (At the time, an INS spokesperson estimated that forty percent of all undocumented workers labored in industry rather than agriculture.) As a result, according to ILGWU spokesman Mario Vasquez, “[t]he union [was] simply adapting to new conditions.” He also added that “[t]he ILG was built by immigrants and really could not get away from it. The only difference now is it’s not legal to immigrate, but it’s all the same thing.”³⁵³

INS raids threatened undocumented workers and broader unionization efforts. The ILGWU claimed that many employers used the immigration service to block unionizing efforts. “I first realized what was happening in 1975, when we had a strike with 20 people on the picket line and pretty soon an I.N.S. van appeared and took away 17 of our members,” Philip Russo, the ILGWU’s chief organizer said.³⁵⁴ The fact that the majority of garment industry workers were both undocumented and not unionized made it easier for employers to exploit them. Whereas a union shop provided benefits, some protections, and an hourly wage rate of \$3.00 to \$3.60 (roughly \$11.00 to \$13.00 in 2015 dollars), workers at non-union shops often times worked ten-to-twelve hours each day for only \$1.00 to \$1.50-an-hour (\$3.66 to \$5.49 in 2015 dollars). Moreover, the ILGWU received numerous complaints of people being locked in the factory all night and other documented abuses, including “unsanitary conditions, lack of bathroom facilities and

³⁵³ Joel Kotkin, “2 Labor Unions Aid, Organize Illegal Aliens,” *WaPo*, 11 September 1978, p. 1; Lisa Schlein, “Los Angeles’ Garment District Sews a Cloak of Shame,” *LAT*, 5 March 1978, p. E3; Robert Lindsey, “Unions Move to Organize Illegal Aliens in the West,” *NYT*, 3 June 1979, p. 1.

³⁵⁴ Robert Lindsey, “Unions Move to Organize Illegal Aliens in the West,” *NYT*, 3 June 1979, p. 1.

drinking water, overheating, sexual abuses of female workers, blackmail by employers of ‘illegal aliens,’ physical beatings, fake payroll deductions and lack of ventilation that results in a high concentration of cotton dust particles in the air.” Being exposed to those particles could cause “byssinosis” (brown lung disease), which “‘c[ould] give rise to an asthma-like syndrome and over many years of exposure c[ould] chronically give rise to [irreversible] lung damage.’” A 1976 investigation by the California State Labor Commission found that 98.5 percent of all garment firms were “‘either in violation of the labor code or the industrial welfare commission orders.’” But the state only brought “token” criminal charges against fifteen firms, resulting in ten convictions over a two-year period.³⁵⁵

In hopes of protecting undocumented workers’ rights and reviving its membership rolls, the ILGWU sued the INS in February 1978. The suit, filed in Federal District Court, called into question the constitutionality of the INS’s practice of raiding factories in LA’s garment district “with or without search warrants” and questioning all people who appeared to be Latino. This, the ILGWU claimed, led to the harassment of US citizens and violated due process rights and “guarantees of privacy and protection against unreasonable search and seizure.” The union’s lawyer noted that the suit challenged immigration authorities’ practice of “‘barging in,’ sealing off the exits of a factory, and ‘holding them in what is essentially custody and questioning them when they haven’t done anything wrong.’” He added that the Service “‘[was] riding roughshod over the rights of these workers’” and “‘[it] shouldn’t be allowed to stop someone anywhere

³⁵⁵ Lisa Schlein, “Los Angeles’ Garment District Sews a Cloak of Shame,” *LAT*, 5 March 1978, p. E3.

simply because they're Latino or Mexican.”³⁵⁶

A few months later the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California and Legal Services Aliens' Rights Program brought another suit against the INS after a May 17 raid on the Sbicca shoe factory in South El Monte in suburban Los Angeles. The raid, which resulted in the apprehension of 120 of the factory's 750 workers, occurred the day after a hotly contested union election. Even though the INS and the company denied that the raid was a union-busting attempt, lawyers for the workers said there was evidence showing that Sbicca had initiated it. An INS spokesman later stated that it was “extremely rare” for the Service to carry out a raid “without permission of the employer.” Fifty-nine of the apprehended workers were already aboard two buses on their way to Mexico when they were forced to turn around after lawyers filed the suit in haste and a federal judge ordered hearings “on whether [the undocumented workers] were adequately advised of their right to legal counsel prior to agreeing to voluntary departure.” In all, some sixty-five people decided to stay and fight their case. The court set bail at \$500-\$2,000, and at least a handful of workers posted bond and were released.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Robert Rawitch, “Union Sues to Curb Raids on Garment District Aliens,” *LAT*, 25 February 1978, p. B12; Mark Stevens, “A union view of illegal aliens holding jobs in U.S.,” *CSM*, 5 September 1978, p. 7.

³⁵⁷ Sbicca Legal Defense Team, “INS Raids Sbicca Shoes — Mass Defense and Action Center Organized,” Immigration Newsletter of the National Lawyers Guild National Immigration Project (NIP), Vol. 7, No. 3 (September-October 1978): 1, 13-15. Founded in 1937 by a group of progressive lawyers and jurists, the National Lawyers Guild was later active in the civil rights, anti-war, and immigrants' rights movements. Thanks to NIP Executive Director Dan Kesselbrenner for generously sharing his organization's Sbicca records with me; Robert Rawitch, “59 Aliens on Way to Border Returned by Judge's Order,” *LAT*, 18 May 1978, p. D1; Jerry Ruhlow, “Unionist Promises to Assist Illegal Aliens,” *LAT*, 11 March 1979, p. C6; Joel Kotkin, “2 Labor Unions Aid, Organize Illegal Aliens,” *WaPo*, 11 September 1978, p. 1; “Arrested Aliens Offered Counsel,” *LAT*, 20 May 1978, p. 20; Bill Blum and Gina Lobaco, “Labor Has Joined Campaign to Eliminate Immigrant Sweeps,” *LAT* 26 November 1978, J3.

Activists responded quickly in the immediate aftermath of the Sbicca raid. At the urging of legal advocates, the Mexican Consul in Los Angeles advised workers of their rights and helped arrange free legal counsel for them. (It should be noted that all of the women detained in the raid asked for legal representation, and those that had signed voluntary departure forms did so because they believed—or had been led to believe—that their failure to do so would have resulted in long-term detention.) Within a week activists had formed the Labor & Immigration Action Center, with the goal of organizing the unorganized and fighting against all INS factory raids. It included representatives from at least a dozen different organizations, including the ILGWU, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Committee Against Police Abuse, Comité de Igualdad, National Lawyers Guild, ACLU, Retail Clerks' Union, and CASA. Among other activities, the Center established a twenty-four-hour hotline to collect and disseminate information about raids.³⁵⁸

Activists and legal advocates' efforts paid off. After a federal judge refused to dismiss the case in late December 1978, an attorney on the Sbicca defense team stated, “[f]or the first time a court has recognized that undocumented workers have constitutional rights like anybody else.”³⁵⁹ As a commentator later added, the Sbicca workers’ “unprecedented action ... to insist upon the fullest possible exercise of their rights [was] a very significant, organized form of resistance,” with far-reaching implications “for all undocumented workers who are fighting for their rights.”³⁶⁰ Indeed,

³⁵⁸ Sbicca Legal Defense Team, “INS Raids Sbicca Shoes — Mass Defense and Action Center Organized,” 1, 13-15.

³⁵⁹ Bruce Bowman, “New Court Order in Sbicca,” *Immigration Newsletter of the National Lawyers Guild National Immigration Project*, Vol. 7, No. 4 & Vol. 8, No. 1 (November 1978-February 1979): 1, 5.

³⁶⁰ Jane Armbruster, “‘Illegals’ and the Courts,” *NACLA*, Vol. XII, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1978): 45-47.

the Sbicca case in particular posed a serious threat to the INS, which had long relied on voluntary departures as the primary means of deportation. As a *Wall Street Journal* editorial pointed out six years later, “The great nightmare of the Border Patrol is that some part of a million aliens a year will suddenly stop agreeing to ‘accept voluntary departure.’”³⁶¹ (A lawyer working on the case estimated that, if forced to follow legal procedures, the INS might not be able to determine the deportability of half of all the people it apprehended.)³⁶² The undocumented workers who fought their deportation after the Sbicca raid set an important precedent, since at the time “no one had ever heard of a suspected ‘illegal alien’ arrested in a factory raid winning a deportation hearing.”³⁶³ By claiming that the INS unconstitutionally obtained their confessions, some twenty migrants won their cases because of lack of evidence and/or the INS’s inability to prove either their Mexican citizenship or illegal entry into the United States. (Six months after the initial suit at least a dozen other cases were still under appeal, while some had been dismissed.) As an attorney for the LA Legal Aid Foundation put it, “‘What the hearings have proven is that the INS does not follow the law. Some of those arrested were threatened with long jail terms if they didn’t agree to leave the country voluntarily,’” adding that “‘many people with legal documents were arbitrarily arrested and held, and

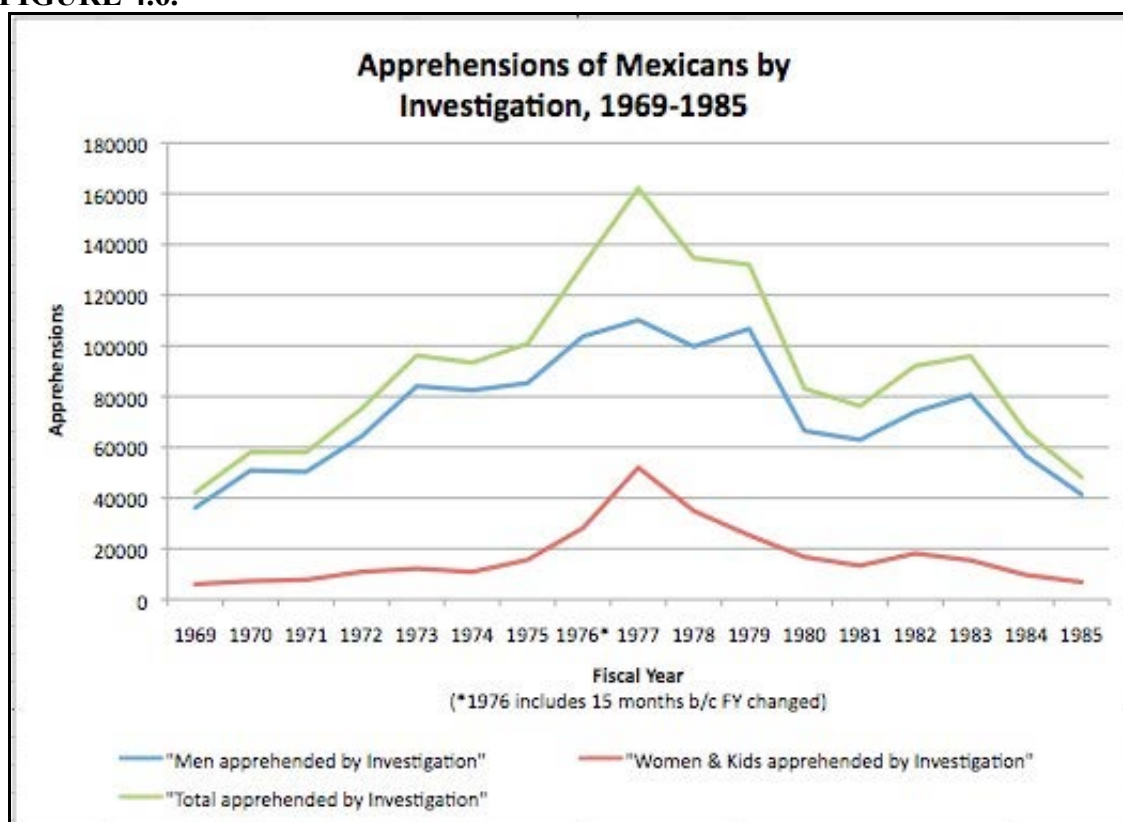
³⁶¹ “Defending the Tortilla Curtain,” *WSJ*, 24 September 1984, p. 32. CASA had encouraged people not to accept voluntary departure and to demand “full INS hearings” as early as 1973, claiming that it violated people’s due process rights. Frank Del Olmo, “600 More Aliens Rounded Up in Continuing L.A.-Area Raids,” *LAT*, 30 May 1973, p. D1.

³⁶² Bruce Bowman, “Sbicca Workers Winning — I.N.S. Reshuffling Deck,” *Immigration Newsletter of the National Lawyers Guild National Immigration Project*, Vol. 7, No. 4 & Vol. 8, No. 1 (November 1978-February 1979): 5-7.

³⁶³ Bill Blum and Gina Lobaco, “Labor Has Joined Campaign to Eliminate Immigrant Sweeps,” *LAT* 26 November 1978, J3.

they were held in facilities without adequate sleeping, sanitary or eating facilities.”³⁶⁴

FIGURE 4.6.



Source: INS Statistics, 1969-1986, USCISHRL. (Calculations and graph by AG)

The ILGWU and Sbicca cases, combined with continued protests and pressure from activists and religious leaders, resulted in some victories for undocumented people. In the fall of 1978 the INS announced it was halting most factory raids because of the pending lawsuits against the agency and “a growing tendency of people seized by INS officers to fight deportation.” The US Attorney’s office’s decision to stop granting search

³⁶⁴ Jerry Ruhlow, “Unionist Promises to Assist Illegal Aliens,” *LAT*, 11 March 1979, p. C6.

warrants until the ILGWU case was resolved may have forced the Service's hand, as well. The policy change (along with the cutting the number of area control investigators by half) caused apprehensions to drop seventy percent in Los Angeles and Orange counties, in addition to “significant decrease[s]” in large cities across the country.³⁶⁵ While the INS apprehended a record 96,000-plus Mexicans with long-term US residence in fiscal year 1977, the following year the number fell to just under 72,000, before dropping off even more to around 58,000 in 1979 and slightly over 40,000 in 1980. (See Figure 4.4) And, overall apprehensions by investigators decreased by around half during that four-year period, going from around 162,000 to 83,000.³⁶⁶ (See Figure 4.6)

The reduction in raids and gains made by migrants and activists were short-lived, however. In August of 1979 the INS began raiding residential neighborhoods and business districts in and around Los Angeles, “despite angry criticism from Hispanic leaders.” As Joe Howerton, the Service's new LA District Director, told reporters, “We are trying to spread out and to touch everything ... We will work all kinds of business and will respond to whatever kind of information we receive that undocumented aliens are present.” A fifty percent increase in apprehensions (to 865-per-week) during a six-week trial period encouraged the INS, but also led to strong backlash from the Latino

³⁶⁵ Bill Blum and Gina Lobaco, “Labor Has Joined Campaign to Eliminate Immigrant Sweeps,” *LAT* 26 November 1978, J3; Harry Bernstein and Robert Williams, “INS Halts Almost All Factory Raids for Illegal Aliens,” *LAT*, 11 October 1978, p. A12; Harry Bernstein and Robert Williams, “Director of INS Denies Deemphasis on Arrests of Illegal Aliens in Southland,” *LAT*, 12 October 1978, p. E5. Officials stated that increased apprehensions at the border as a result of “intensified” anti-smuggling activities made up for the reduction in apprehensions from raids.

³⁶⁶ INS Statistics 1969-1986, USCISHRL. Calculations by AG. The drop in apprehensions of Mexicans with long-term residence was even more pronounced in limited to those made investigators: from 83,000-plus in 1977, to just over 61,000 in 1978, around 44,000 in 1979, and some 28,000 in 1980.

community. Louis Velasquez, the mayor of Fullerton, witnessed a September 14 raid and reported being “‘deeply concerned about sloppy enforcement of the law’ by officers who allegedly violated the rights of both U.S. citizens and undocumented Mexicans.” David Lizarrga, president of the East LA Community Union and national director of Hispanic-American Democrats, said, “‘I want to know why this is being done. It is not the policy in other parts of the Southwest. These indiscriminate sweeps are nothing more than a dragnet and I think those tactics are highly uncalled for.’”³⁶⁷

Although District Director Howerton claimed that the INS was “not merely sweeping everyone off the streets or kicking down doors,” residential raids had a devastating effect on Mexican American and immigrant communities.³⁶⁸ In the eyes of Ruben Bonilla Jr., national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the raids “‘[were] an act of reprisal and will result in deportation of illegal immigrants, the uprooting of legal resident aliens and discrimination against native-born Mexican-Americans.’” A US-born Latino Senate aide told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, “‘You have no idea, unless you have brown skin, of how unsettling these raids can be ... It isn’t a matter of the numbers of officers involved ... It is the whole idea. You only need to have one man in a green INS uniform walk through the mercado (market) and a shiver of fear runs through all of East Los Angeles.’”³⁶⁹ An Eastside City Councilman concurred, referring to raids as “‘haphazard and capricious methods of law enforcement that inflict cruel hardships, split families, violate rights, inconvenience the innocent and

³⁶⁷ Evan Maxwell, “Neighborhood Raids for Illegal Aliens Resumed,” *LAT*, 10 October 1979, p. A18.

³⁶⁸ Evan Maxwell, “Neighborhood Raids for Illegal Aliens Resumed,” *LAT*, 10 October 1979, p. A18.

³⁶⁹ Evan Maxwell, “INS Reexamines Plan for Raids,” *LAT*, 26 October 1979.

blanket the Hispanic community in a cloud of fear.”³⁷⁰

Mexican Americans’ fears were not unfounded. Neighborhood sweeps and expedited deportations periodically resulted in the expulsion of US citizens and permanent residents. In 1975, after a raid on a Santa Monica house, the INS deported Salvador Sierra, a fifteen-year-old with permanent residency, and Roberto, his thirteen-year-old US-citizen brother. Authorities removed them to Tijuana, from where Mexican officials then transported them to Mexicali. The following day, 400 miles away from their home in Venice, the boys made a collect call to their parents, who had to borrow a car and some money so that they could go pick up their sons. The family later sued the INS for \$2.1 million in damages.³⁷¹

In some cases local police helped the INS carry out residential raids. At 8:00am on August 26, 1979, uniformed and plainclothes cops surrounded two Huntington Park apartment complexes and arrested eighty people. “Half-prepared morning meals were left on kitchen stoves; radios were still turned to Spanish language stations; beds were left unmade and bathtubs were still filled with water.” After Fernando Artunez, a thirteen-year legal resident, showed police his documents they “shoved him aside and barged into [his] apartment,” where they took both of his roommates away, including one in handcuffs. Artunez then watched as officers took one of his neighbors out wearing only his underwear, and another who they “dragged out by the hair.” “‘It’s the first time I’ve

³⁷⁰ “The Raids Are Wrong,” *LAT*, 30 October 1979, p. C4.

³⁷¹ Jack Jones, “Deported as Illegal Aliens, 2 U.S. Youths Claim,” *LAT*, 7 June 1975, p. A25; Gerald Faris, “\$2.1 Million Sought in Deportation Case,” *LAT*, 2 September 1975, p. WS1. There are many other cases of the INS deporting US citizens and permanent residents, as well. See, for example, Evan Maxwell, “U.S. Citizen Mistakenly Deported as Illegal Alien,” *LAT*, 10 March 1981, p. A7; and H.G. Reza, “U.S. Deports Youth, 14, by ‘Mistake’,” *LAT*, 19 February 1984, p. A3.

ever seen anything like this,” Artunez said. “It made me feel so bad the I got sick. ... I love this country. It has been very good to me,” he added. “And I understand the law is the law, but what happened that day was a gross trampling of people’s dignity.”³⁷²

Despite District Director Howerton’s disbelief about “a revolving door,” many of the people deported that morning returned to Los Angeles within days or weeks, at great financial cost—including paying smugglers and, in many cases, moving out of the building because they feared another raid. “But the worst part was the humiliation,” according to twenty-nine-year-old Socorro Ramirez, who was allowed to stay to care for her three-year-old daughter. “You feel humiliated because you realize you have no security in your own home ... because they step on all your rights and there’s nothing you can do about it,” she said. “I don’t understand,” she said, shaking her head, her voice rising and finally betraying the anger inside. “Why do they do this? I don’t feel I do any harm to anyone by working. We don’t come here to take anything from anyone. On the contrary, we leave them all our taxes. And who else is going to work for \$2.90 an hour?”³⁷³

Within the INS, some officers recognized that raids did “irreparable damage” to communities and thought of them as “a public relations disaster.” In the opinion of Michael Harpold, a seventeen-year veteran of the Border Patrol, “The saddest part of an INS raid is that it often disrupts the lives of decent people and drives home the fact that the main activity of these aliens is not the illegal crossing of the border, which occurs

³⁷² Marita Hernandez, “Deportation Didn’t Last Long,” *LAT*, 28 October 1979, p. SE1.

³⁷³ Marita Hernandez, “Deportation Didn’t Last Long,” *LAT*, 28 October 1979, p. SE1.

within a relatively small time frame. The main activity is working, which is why some prefer the description ‘undocumented workers’ to illegal alien.” Another agent, who graduated from the University of California, Berkeley before joining the Border Patrol two years earlier, said, ““You can’t help but think you’re arresting the wrong people. They’re not the lawbreaker types. They’re some of the yes people you’ll meet—hardworking, loyal to their families. Sometimes you think, ‘Why don’t we arrest the bums that don’t work and just steal?’ But these people have violated the immigration law and we have to arrest them.””³⁷⁴

Many other immigration officers believed “that ‘the home is not a sanctuary’ if it is the home of illegals” and supported raids since they led to a bump in apprehensions. As one INS official put it, raids were ““well within the law and our people are treating the aliens decently.”” However, he also acknowledged that “the ‘symbolic content of the actions is very high, sort of like showing a swastika in a synagogue. And there is no way of countering that impact, for most people.”” Ultimately, he deflected any responsibility, stating that people should blame Congress for making the laws, rather than the INS and Border Patrol for enforcing them.³⁷⁵

By the early-to-mid 1980s many of the gains migrants, activists, and unions won had been reversed. The Sbicca cases did not spark a larger movement of Mexicans

³⁷⁴ “The Raids Are Wrong,” *LAT*, 30 October 1979, p. C4; Robert Scheer, “Illegal Aliens: Endless Cycle of Insecurity,” *LAT*, 11 November 1979, p. A1; Evan Maxwell, “INS Reexamines Plan for Raids,” *LAT*, 26 October 1979. In my oral history with INS and Border Patrol veteran Memo Rojas, he expressed a similar sentiment, mentioning that even though an immigration official might not always agree with the law, it was his or her job to enforce it. Oral history with Memo Rojas, conducted by author, 9 August 2012, National Border Patrol Museum, El Paso, Texas.

³⁷⁵ Evan Maxwell, “INS Reexamines Plan for Raids,” *LAT*, 26 October 1979.

rejecting voluntary departure and demanding hearings before immigration judges. And even though the Ninth Circuit ruled in favor of the ILGWU in *INS v. Sureck* in 1982, the Supreme Court overturned the decision two years later in *INS v. Delgado*, ruling that the Service's practice of sealing off factory exits during a raid was an interrogation device, rather than detention.³⁷⁶ Immigration officials continued to employ raids, as well, including a nationwide workplace campaign dubbed "Operation Jobs," which led to around 6,000 apprehensions in one week in the spring of 1982.³⁷⁷ The Operation Jobs raids "created an atmosphere of terror in our communities," Bert Corona said, and often resulted in "extensive drops" in business and church and school attendance. A Huntington Park business owner reported a fifty percent decline in business, adding that "[t]he fear will hurt us for another couple of weeks ... The sweeps will continue and people are still afraid."³⁷⁸ Two years later, after raids in March 1984, Mexican citizen Maria Martínez stated that she tried not to leave her Santa Ana apartment during the day and only shopped at night, since immigration agents were less likely to be around then. She was not the only one to do so: She described the places Mexicans usually gathered as

³⁷⁶ Sidney Weintraub, Francisco Alba, Rafael Fernández de Castro & Manual García y Griego, "Responses to Migration Issues," in *The Binational Study on Migration Between Mexico and the United States*, Volume 1 (Mexico City and Washington, D.C.: Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs and U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, 1998), 479.

³⁷⁷ Larry Stammer, "INS Ends Raids on Illegal Aliens; 6,000 Seized in Week-Long Project," *LAT*, 1 May 1982, p. A30; Ronald Sullivan, "Nearly 1,000 Are Seized In a Job Sweep of Aliens," *NYT*, 27 April 1982, p. A14. Some protesters had signs saying "No firme. Pida Abogado." (Don't sign. Ask for a lawyer.), in hopes of that apprehended people would reject voluntary departure and fight their cases. It is unclear how many, if any, did. It should also be noted that the INS had no evidence that such raids created jobs for unemployed US citizens. In this case, as in others, many workers crossed the border again to reunite with their families and resume their old jobs. See, for example, Jack Jones, "Cranston Demands Immediate End to INS Raids," *LAT*, 30 April 1982, p. A3; and Victor M. Valle, "Many Aliens Back on Jobs After Raids," *LAT*, 6 May 1982, p. SG1.

³⁷⁸ Virginia Escalante, "Latinos Join to Condemn Raids," *LAT*, 9 May 1982, LB1.

being like “ghost towns.”³⁷⁹

People with whom I conducted oral histories also described in great detail how the INS’s tactics, the million-plus yearly deportations, and migrants’ own deportability shaped their lives and circumscribed the spaces they inhabited on a daily basis. Alvaro Núñez and María de la Cruz Vela left their small Jalisco pueblo for California in 1981, soon after marrying. He was twenty-two at the time and she was eighteen. After Border Patrol agents apprehended and deported them to Tijuana on their first attempt at crossing the border, they tried again the next day and made it in without problem. But they spent a grueling week with some thirty people, crammed into a small room in a San Clemente safe house, before finally heading to northern California, where Alvaro’s brother lived. Their first years in the United States were not easy, largely because of their undocumented status and heavy INS presence in the community.

Alvaro: “Había unas ocasiones que teníamos hasta temor salir a la casa. Por la razón de que la migra andaba hasta los domingos ... chequeando las tiendas a ver si hay mexicanos. Y pues, había veces que no salíamos. Tratábamos de salir en la noche ... decíamos nosotros que a lo mejor en la noche ya no trabajaban ellos. Entonces tratábamos de salir lo más oculto, como si eras un delincuente—y no éramos delincuentes. Simplemente porque no teníamos papeles.”

María: “Yo iba a las citas de mi doctor y las pedía en la tarde, lo más

Alvaro: “There were some times when we even afraid to leave the house, because la migra even patrolled on Sundays ... checking the stores to see if there are Mexicans. And well, there were times that we didn’t go out. We tried to go out at night ... we said that they’re probably not working at night. Then we tried to be as hidden as possible, as if you were a delinquent—and we weren’t delinquents. We simply didn’t have our papers.”

María: I went to my doctor’s appointments and I asked for them to

³⁷⁹ David Reyes, “Immigration Raids Spark Mixed Emotions,” *LAT*, 4 March 1984, p. OC_A1.

tarde que pudieran. Yo no le explicaba la razón. Nada más yo decía que mi esposo trabajaba y para ya en la tarde que me llevara. ... [S]iempre migración andaba como, por parte de la mañana y en la hora del lunch. ... Entonces, era un peligro salir. Y salíamos por parte de la tarde ... Y si no teníamos a que salir, no salíamos de la casa.”

Alvaro: “Estábamos tan escondidos, tan asustados, como ... si éramos realmente unos delincuentes ... Pero al raíz, estábamos en países ajenos, teníamos que tratar de sobrevivir.”

María: “Sí, como sufrimos mucho para cruzar, no nos queríamos arriesgar a salir. Salíamos por parte de la tarde, cuando se había que tener que salir ... y si no, no. Si no, comimos lo que hubiera ... lo que tuviéramos en la casa. Y ya, salíamos hasta el domingo que íbamos a misa. ...”

Alvaro: “Cuando tenemos chance, vamos a misa porque somos una familia Católica, gracias a Dios. ... Hubo ocasiones que sí, no la miramos cortito la migración, creíamos que nos iban agarrar. Pero, gracias a Dios, siempre salíamos juntos para decir, me agarraban a mí, yo me llevaba a ella, o ...”

María: “Es que, en una ocasión salimos a la tienda. Y cuando ya íbamos saliendo mira un migración que iba llegando. Y nos regresábamos pa’ entrar a la tienda. Y ya nos

be as late as possible. I didn’t explain why. I just said that my husband worked and later would be better so that he could take me. ... La migra was always around in the morning and during lunch. So it was dangerous to go out. We went out late ... and if we didn’t have to leave, we didn’t leave the house.”

Alvaro: “We were so hidden, so afraid, like ... as if we really were two delinquents. ... But when it came down to it, we were in foreign countries and we had to try to survive.”

María: “Yeah, since we suffered so much to cross, we didn’t want to risk getting kicked out. We went out in the evenings, when we had to go out, and if we didn’t, we didn’t. If we didn’t, we ate whatever there was ... whatever we had in the house. And then we didn’t go out until Sunday when we went to mass. ...”

Alvaro: “When we are able to we go to mass because we are a Catholic family, thank God. ... There were times when yeah, la migra was really close and we thought they were going to apprehend us. But, thank God, we always made it out together to say, if they took me, I would take her with me, or ...”

María: “It’s that, one time we went out to the store. And when we were on our way out we saw that an immigration agent was arriving. We went back into the store. And once we

metimos y migración se metió dentro de la tienda. Es que nos miraron. Entraron más mexicanos. Y allí, la migración dentro de la tienda y nosotros detrás de las ropas ... allí escondidos detrás de las ropas, y migración allí, allí vuelta y vuelta, sí. Y yo lo miraba.”

Alvaro: “Gracias a Dios nos tocó suerte que no nos agarró.”

María: “Y yo traía mi niño chiquito de brazos. Y él me dijo, dice éste, ‘Tú vete pa’ allá y me voy pa’ acá.’ Para no andar los ... que nos miraron muchos. Y yo me fui por un lado y él se fue por otro. Y allí migración. Yo lo divisaba así. Sus pies, que allí venía, buscándonos ... Y allí dando vuelta y vuelta. ... [A]garró uno. Y es que miró que entraron. Y yo con el niño ... yo tem[í] si nos agarraban nos iba a meter al cero otra vez por Tijuana. ¿Y con niño? ...”

Alvaro: “Con niño, y sin alimento para el niño, y ...”

María: “Y sin nada. No traíamos una bolsa. Nada, nada, no traíamos nada. Y eso era mi temor: si nos agarran, otra vez a Tijuana, con niño ... hijole. Y yo aquí, ‘Ay, Señor [Santo de mi pueblo]’ ...”

Alvaro: “Gracias a Dios no pasó nada en esta ocasión. No nos agarraron.”

Adam: “¿Pero agarraron a otra

were in the agent came inside the store. It’s that, they saw us. More Mexicans entered, too. And there we were, with the immigration officer inside the store and us behind the clothes ... hidden behind the clothes, and the agent right there, going around and around. And I saw him.”

Alvaro: “Thank God we were lucky that he didn’t catch us.”

María: “And I had my little boy in my arms. And he [Alvaro] said to me, he said, ‘You, go over there and I’ll go here.’ So that we weren’t together ... many looked at us. I went one way and he went the other. And there was the immigration agent. That’s what I saw. His feet, here they came, looking for us ... going around and around. ... He caught one person. He saw them come in. And me with my son ... I feared that if they caught us we were going to cross the Tijuana desert again. And with my son? ...”

Alvaro: “ ... With a child, and without food for the child and ...”

María: “Without anything. We didn’t even have a bag. Nothing, nothing, we didn’t have anything with us. And that was my fear: if they catch us, to Tijuana again, with my child ... hijole. And I’m here, ‘Ay, Señor [Saint of their pueblo]’ ...”

Alvaro: “Thank God nothing happened that time. They didn’t catch us.”

Adam: “But they caught someone

persona?”

Alvaro: “Agarraron a más personas.”

María: “Sí. A su primo.”

Alvaro: “Agarraron a un primo mío y lo agarraron y ...

María: Iba con nosotros el primo.

Adam: ¿En esta misma ocasión?

Alvaro: “Sí, en esta ocasión iba con nosotros y ...

María: “Fuéramos los tres.”

Alvaro: “... a él fue que agarraron. Y, pues, ni modo, no le dieron chancee ni oportunidad a ir a su casa a traer una poca de ropa o algo ... No. Lo agarraron y lo aventaron al carro ...”

María: “A una ‘van.’ Es que se parqueó migración en la pura puerta de la tienda.”

Alvaro: “Para no dejar salir.”

María: “Se metió uno y el otro quedó afuera. Había dos [agentes]. Uno se metió y el otro quedó en la puerta. Y él que se metió era él que andaba revisando todos los espacios libres. Así, así. Espacio por espacio. Y yo lo miraba porque yo estaba en la esquina, y detrás de la ropa yo me escondía. ... yo cuando ya miré llevaba su primo con las manos así ...”

Alvaro: “Lo esposaron. Lo

else?”

Alvaro: “They got other people.”

María: “Yes. His cousin.”

Alvaro: “They caught one of my cousins and they caught him and ...”

María: “He was with us, the cousin.”

Adam: “This same time?”

Alvaro: “Yes, on that occasion he was with us and ...”

María: “It was the three of us.”

Alvaro: “... they caught him. And, well, either way, they didn’t give him the chance nor the opportunity to go to his house to get the little clothes or something ... No. They apprehended him and threw him in the car.”

María: “Into a van. It’s that, la migra parked right in front of the door to the store.”

Alvaro: “So that nobody could leave.”

María: “One agent came in and the other stayed outside. There were two. One came in and the other stayed by the door. And the one that entered was going through all of the empty spaces. Like so, like so. And I saw him because I was in the corner, hidden behind some clothes. ... When I looked out the agent was taking away his cousin with his hands like this ...”

Alvaro: “They handcuffed him. They

esposaron.”

María: “... ya llevaba las manos así y cuando salí lo miré así ...”

Alvaro: “Da tristeza porque fuimos a compras a la tienda ... que íbamos a comprar ropa y cosas que necesitábamos, entonces, de allí me dio tristeza porque lo agarraron como un delincuente, lo esposaron y nada más lo aventaron al carro, ¿me entiende? Y eso no miro que esté bien eso.”

María: “Y allí estaba con nosotros su primo. Allí vivía con nosotros. Y allí se lo llevaron a él. ...”

Alvaro: “Sin ropa, sin dinero ...”

María: “Nada, nada traía, nada.”

Alvaro: “... Es muy triste. Sufre uno mucho y a raíz de que se va uno a la aventura, sufre uno bastante. Y eso, pues, desgraciadamente son cosas que tienes que pasar por salirte a buscar la vida a otro país. ...”

handcuffed him.”

María: “...and he had his hands like this and when I came out I saw him like that ...”

Alvaro: “It’s said that we went to the store to shop ... we were going to buy clothes and things we needed, and, that there makes me sad because they took him away as if he were a delinquent. They handcuffed him and just threw him in the car, you know? And that I didn’t see as being okay.”

María: “He was with us, his cousin. He lived with us there. And they took him away. ...”

Alvaro: “Without clothes, without money ...”

María: “Nothing, he didn’t have anything, nothing.”

Alvaro: “... It’s very sad. One suffers a lot, as a result of heading off on an adventure, one suffers a lot. And that, well, unfortunately those are things that have to happen if you leave to make a life in another country. ...”

The conversation then shifted and we began discussing how one of Alvaro’s employers helped them buy a car and how undocumented people could get driver’s licenses in those days. But, a few minutes later, María circled back to la migra’s ubiquitous presence in the community.

María: “Duró un tiempo de migración tan dura que de misa empezaron a agarrar personas, del cine y dejamos de ir a eso ... Migración en ese tiempo, no sé qué pasaba que iba a misa y allí agarraban las personas de la iglesia, de las tiendas y del cine. Y nosotros era el único lugar donde íbamos.”

Alvaro: “No podíamos ir a otros lugares.”

María: “¿A dónde íbamos más? No conocíamos nada. Íbamos a misa, de misa íbamos a comer a un restaurante ...”

Alvaro: “Un restaurante mexicano para recordar uno de sus tradiciones.”
[*Se ríe*]

María: “... y eso era el domingo. Y cuando ya empezó migración andar a hacer redadas, dejamos de ir, que nos dio miedo. Ya no íbamos a misa tanto, ni a las tiendas, nada. Al cine menos. Porque en el cine era donde agarraban más ... Se ponía migración en la pura iglesia. Y ya vámonos. Los que tenían papeles se quedaban y los que no, vámonos.”

María: “There was a time when the crackdowns were so hard that they began apprehending people from [Sunday] mass, and from movie theaters, and we stopped going. ... La migra, at that time, I don’t know what happened that they were going to mass and taking people from church, from stores and from movie theaters. And that was the only place we went.”

Alvaro: “We couldn’t go anywhere else.”

María: “Where else were we going to go? We didn’t know anything. We went to mass, from mass we went to eat at a restaurant ...”

Alvaro: “A Mexican restaurant to remind one’s self of their traditions.”
[*Laughs*]

María: “... and that was Sunday. And when la migra began going around doing the raids, we stopped going, because they made us afraid. We didn’t go to mass that much, nor to the stores, nothing. To the movies even less. Because the movie theater was where they caught the most people ... La migra went into the sacred church. And we left. Those that had papers stayed and those that didn’t, we left.”³⁸⁰

Internal borders had a significant impact on Alvaro and María’s lives, as evidenced by their vivid memories and the fact that their constant fear of deportation

³⁸⁰ Oral history with Alvaro Núñez and María de la Cruz Vela, conducted by author, 19 January 2013, Jalisco, México. (Translation by AG)

came up multiple times during our conversation. Their story is not unique. While the number of apprehensions by investigators and apprehensions of Mexicans with long-term residence dropped from 1977 to 1985, more than a decade of home and workplace raids—and the possibility of raids—had the cumulative effect of creating visceral fear in Mexican migrant and Mexican American communities.

During the twenty years after the Bracero Program ended unauthorized Mexican migration increased dramatically and, in turn, so did apprehensions and deportations. Over time, immigration enforcement efforts targeted Mexicans with greater intensity, and the INS's limited funding forced it to rely on voluntary departures to affect the expulsion of nearly all apprehended Mexicans. This, along with the relatively porous US-Mexico border, allowed people—and especially men—to engage in circular migration patterns in which they migrated back and forth between the Mexico and United States, sometimes by choice, sometimes by force. Immigration authorities' reliance on neighborhood and workplace raids created ever-present internal borders, which engendered fear among ethnic Mexicans, heightened people's sense of deportability, and had a significant negative effect on people's everyday lives. Between 1965 and 1985 deportation became quotidian, but the consequences of being deported were not as harsh as they would become in the decades to follow, when changes in law and policy made deportation more punitive than ever.

CHAPTER 5

THE DEPORTATION REGIME'S PUNITIVE TURN, 1986-2014

After 1986, changes in immigration law, free trade agreements, the militarization of the United States-Mexico border, and the events of September 11, 2001, drastically altered the deportation regime. Immigration authorities and policy makers increasingly treated unauthorized migration as a criminal act, and migrants themselves as criminals. Most notably, the number of removals grew from around 24,600 in fiscal year 1986 to 438,000 in 2013, as the number of returns dropped. In 2011 removals outnumbered returns for the first time since before the Bracero Program began.³⁸¹

Immigration authorities' growing reliance on removals was part of the carceral state's expansion over the last few decades. During this time, the number of immigrants held in detention and the average time detained increased. The federal government also came to rely more heavily on private, multi-billion dollar prison companies to detain migrants. In turn, these companies came to play an influential role in lobbying for harsher immigration policies and practices. Immigrant activists, advocates, and allies employed an array of protest strategies in response, including mass marches, protests, sit-ins, and sophisticated social media campaigns. They won important gains in many cases, stopping

³⁸¹ Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) Statistical Yearbook and Enforcement Reports, 2012-2013.

deportations for some and winning temporary legal status for hundreds of thousands of others. But the criminalization of migration and growth of the carceral state have had serious consequences for migrants, marking a punitive shift in US deportation policy that persists to this day.

In October 1986 a “new era of Mexican migration” began after Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The Act is generally remembered for two things: It implemented sanctions on employers who hired unauthorized workers, including fines of up to \$10,000 and possible criminal prosecution; and it provided legal status to anyone who could prove continuous residency in the United States since January 1, 1982. While the employer sanctions proved to be ineffective and were not enforced evenly or with regularity, IRCA did result in the legalization of approximately three million people—some 1.7 million of whom regularized their status by proving long-term residency, and another 1.3 million who did so through a “Special Agricultural Workers” program meant to appease growers. In all, Mexicans made up 2.3 million, or seventy-five percent, of the total. As a result, IRCA is commonly thought of as a generous and liberal act, which political scientist Daniel Tichenor has described as “the largest amnesty program for undocumented aliens of any country to date.”³⁸²

³⁸² It was later found that widespread fraud most likely occurred in many of the 1.3 million “Special Agricultural Workers” cases. Some have argued that IRCA should be understood in the context of other liberal immigration laws of the time, such as the Refugee Act of 1980. Douglass S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage, 2002), 89-91; Daniel Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration*

But IRCA also ramped up immigration enforcement and marked the beginning of the punitive turn in the deportation regime. In the lead up to its passage, and in the context of the Cold War, President Ronald Reagan scapegoated immigrants for the nation's economic woes and painted them as potential terrorists and as a threat to national security. Playing on such fears, Congress included provisions in IRCA to stop future unauthorized migration—or, the “invasion,” as many politicians and media outlets put it. The new law gave the Border Patrol \$400 million to hire more agents in 1987 and 1988, provided the Department of Labor with new funds to carry out workplace inspections, and authorized the President to use \$35 million for any future “immigration emergencies.”³⁸³ More than anything, however, IRCA “emphasiz[ed] the appearance of control while in fact failing to stop substantial undocumented flows,” a reflection of the “curiously contradictory character” of US immigration policy toward unauthorized Mexican migration.³⁸⁴

In regards to deportation, specifically, beginning with IRCA the laws became “harsher, less forgiving, and more insulated from judicial review.” The result, according to legal scholar Daniel Kanstroom, was the creation of “an exceptionally rigid legal regime ... riven with discretionary executive authority, and increasingly immune from meaningful oversight.” Internal pressure within the INS led to increased attention on deporting “criminal aliens,” and a provision within IRCA called on them to do so “as

Control in America (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), 243-244.

³⁸³ Massey, et al., 87-91.

³⁸⁴ Gay P. Freeman and Frank D. Bean, “Mexico and U.S. Worldwide Immigration Policy,” in *At the Crossroads: Mexico and U.S. Immigration Policy*, ed. Frank D. Bean, et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 1997), 34. Cited by Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (New York: Russell Sage, 2006), 375.

expeditiously as possible.” To facilitate this the Service used funds allocated by the law to implement, and then expand, the Alien Criminal Apprehension Program.³⁸⁵

The INS’s efforts to deport “criminals” became more intense in the years following IRCA. In 1988 the Anti-Drug Abuse Act created the legal category of “aggravated felony,” under which a person convicted of such a crime would be formally deported and would face “severe criminal sanctions” if apprehended again after re-entering the United States without authorization. While murder, drug trafficking, and illicit trafficking in firearms were the only offenses that counted as aggravated felonies at first, the category expanded over time, resulting in stiffer penal consequences for an increasing number of unauthorized migrants. The 1990 Immigration Act made money laundering and “(nonpolitical) ‘crimes of violence’” aggravated felonies. Immigration authorities deemed people convicted of such crimes to be ineligible for asylum and lacking “‘good moral character,’” which meant they could not receive discretionary relief. The Act also retroactively eliminated judges’ ability to halt deportations through “‘Judicial Recommendations against Deportation,’” thus further reducing the possibility of relief from removal. Moreover, anyone convicted of an aggravated felony and deported faced an automatic twenty-year bar to re-entering the US.³⁸⁶

Regardless of the measures Congress and the INS implemented, unauthorized

³⁸⁵ Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007), 226-228; Ryan D. King, Michael Massoglia, and Christopher Uggen, “Employment and Exile: U.S. Criminal Deportations, 1908-2005,” *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 117, No. 6 (May 2012): 1797; Jonathan Xavier Inda, “Subject to deportation: IRCA, ‘criminal aliens’, and the policing of immigration,” *Migration Studies* (2013): 1-19.

³⁸⁶ Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation*, 226-228; The Immigration Act of 1990 increased legal immigration levels, but it also increased border enforcement and provided funds to hire an additional 1,000 agents. See Tichenor, *Dividing Lines*, 244-246; Massey, et al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 91-93.

migration from Mexico continued—and even increased—in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This trend affected few, if any, places more than Southern California, which remained the primary crossing point for most migrants. Between 1960 and 1990 California's foreign-born population increased from 1.3 million (nine percent of the state's population) to 6.5 million (twenty-two percent of the state's population). Even though San Diego remained majority white until 2000, the rising number of immigrants, both documented and undocumented, and growing ethnic Mexican population created heightened tensions in the city in the last decades of the twentieth century. To deflect blame and win votes, politicians adopted the time-tested tactic of scapegoating immigrants and blaming them for the state's financial woes. Nobody did so more than Pete Wilson, the Republican Governor and former San Diego mayor, who pinned California's \$12.6 billion budget shortfall on unauthorized migrants that supposedly drained the state's welfare coffers. Wilson and other local and state politicians also blamed the federal government for its inaction and inability to control the US-Mexico border.³⁸⁷

The expansion of liberal trade policies and integration of the North American economies fueled the growth in undocumented Mexican migration to the United States. Mexico's entrance into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986 and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) six years later had serious negative repercussions on ordinary Mexicans and the Mexican economy as a

³⁸⁷ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on "Illegals" and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 95-110; Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 402-410.

whole. NAFTA, which went into effect on January 1, 1994, integrated all economic factors but one: labor. As some scholars have put it, after NAFTA the US “pursue[d] a politics of contradiction—simultaneously moving toward integration while insisting on separation.”³⁸⁸ Without protectionist agricultural policies, Mexicans who made their living from agriculture could not compete with US-based companies and began emigrating north in large numbers. From 1994 to 2000 the number of Mexicans leaving for the United States increased by nearly eighty percent, going from 430,000 to 770,000. And between 1990 and 2000 Mexican-born residents living in the US more than doubled, going from 4.5 million to 9.4 million. NAFTA actually helped to halt Mexican economic growth. In December 1994, the value of the peso fell by almost half and Mexico lost nearly ten percent of its Gross Domestic Product over the course of the next six months. Moreover, on a smaller scale, the adoption of free trade policies did nothing to improve individual Mexicans’ economic well-being. In fact, poverty rates rose in the two years following NAFTA, and nearly two decades later had not changed from pre-NAFTA levels.³⁸⁹

Heightened levels of unauthorized Mexican migration and US domestic economic woes contributed to anti-immigrant sentiment peaking in the lead up to the 1994 mid-

³⁸⁸ Massey, et al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 73.

³⁸⁹ In 1992, 53.1 percent of Mexicans could not afford housing, clothing, transportation, healthcare, education, and food. Two decades later 52.3 percent could not afford those basic necessities. But, due to population growth, that meant that an additional 14 million-plus Mexicans lived in poverty in 2012 than had in 1992. Between 1991 and 2007 Mexico lost nearly 2 million agricultural jobs, spurring heightened levels of unauthorized migration. Mark Weisbrot, Stephan Lefebvre, and Joseph Sammut, “Did NAFTA Help Mexico? An Assessment After 20 Years,” Center for Economic and Policy Research (February 2014): 1-21; Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, 383-384. For more on NAFTA’s impact on Mexico, the US, and migration, see Bill Ong Hing, *Ethical Borders: NAFTA, Globalization, and Mexican Migration* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2010).

term elections. In hopes of garnering more votes, Governor Wilson focused his campaign around Proposition 187. Known as the “Save Our State” initiative, Proposition 187 excluded unauthorized immigrants from social services and benefits, including non-emergency health care and education.³⁹⁰ But the Governor also demanded that the federal government act. What Wilson had in mind was something like “Operation Hold-the-Line.” Launched in the fall of 1993 by El Paso Border Patrol Chief Silvestre Reyes (and originally named “Operation Blockade”), Operation Hold-the-Line was meant to stop migrants from crossing into the United States near the city. Some 400 Border Patrol agents patrolled a twenty-mile section of the border with Ciudad Juárez, resulting in a dramatic drop in apprehensions. The Operation received national attention and, hoping that a similar strategy could be applied in other populated, urban border areas, Wilson and other Southern Californian politicians pushed the federal government to implement a version of it in the San Diego sector. In the summer of 1994, in large part in response to public pressure, the Border Patrol’s strategic plan announced the new strategy of “prevention through deterrence,” and stated that the agency would “control the borders of the United States between the ports of entry, restoring our Nation’s confidence in the integrity of the border.” It also stressed that “[a] well-managed border will enhance national security and safeguard our immigration heritage.” A few months later, on October 1, 1994, immigration authorities implemented “Operation Gatekeeper” along the

³⁹⁰ Tichenor, *Dividing Lines*, 244-46; Massey, et al, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 93-95.

San Diego border.³⁹¹

Under Operation Gatekeeper the federal government began an unprecedented militarization campaign of the US-Mexico border that continues today. Whereas the San Diego sector had only nineteen miles of border wall before the operation commenced, some five years later fifty-two miles of walls demarcated the divide, including fourteen miles of ten-feet-high primary walls (made from steel landing mats from the Vietnam War) and two, fifteen-feet-tall back-up walls—the first made of concrete pillars, the second of wire mesh and support beams, and both topped with barbed wire. Immigration authorities installed high-intensity stadium lights, surveillance cameras, and high-tech motion sensors, as well. Meanwhile, the number of Border Patrol agents stationed in the San Diego sector increased from 980 before Operation Gatekeeper to more than 2,250 in June 1998. The result, according to geographer Joseph Nevins, was that “a semblance of control and order ... replaced the image of chaos that once seemed to reign in the urbanized border region of the San Diego sector.”³⁹²

³⁹¹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 2-4, 111-114; Bill Ong Hing, “Operation Gatekeeper: The War against the *Alambristas* of the 1990s,” in *Alambrista and the U.S.-Mexico Border: Film, Music and Stories of Undocumented Immigrants*, eds. Nicholas J. Cull and David Carrasco (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2004), 80-81. For a comparative discussion of deportation, immigration control, and immigration’s impact on “receiving” societies see Jeannette Money, *Fences and Neighbors: The Political Geography of Immigration Control* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999); Antje Ellermann, *States Against Migrants: Deportation in Germany and the United States* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009).

³⁹² Hing, “Operation Gatekeeper,” 82; Massey, et al, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 93-95; Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 6-7. For more on the militarization of the border before 1994, see Timothy J. Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992* (Austin: UT Press, 1996). For a longer history of the making of the border, see Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border: The State, Capitalism, and Society in Nuevo León, 1848-1910* (Austin: UT Press, 2001); C.J. Álvarez, “The Shape of the Border: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide, 1848-2010” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2014); S. Deborah Kang, “The Legal Construction of the Borderlands: The INS, Immigration Law, and Immigrant Rights on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1917-1954” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2005). On how militarization and NAFTA have affected people living on the border, see Gilberto Rosas, *Barrio*

But, as in the past, the INS's "control" of the border was more symbolic than real. As political theorist Wendy Brown has argued, the construction of border walls reflected the erosion, rather than affirmation, of nation-state sovereignty. In the case of the United States and Mexico, the rapid erection of border walls in the post-NAFTA era was a response to the increased flow of consumer goods, capital, illegal drugs, and people, and the realization that the US could not fully regulate these flows. Indeed, according to Brown, walls "often function theatrically, projecting power and efficaciousness that they do not and cannot actually exercise and that they also performatively contradict."³⁹³ Yet, borders and walls do not need to act as impenetrable physical barriers in order to be effective. As political scientist Peter Andreas has noted, "[b]order control efforts are not only *actions* (a means to a stated instrumental end) but also *gestures* that communicate meaning." So, while US immigration enforcement "has failed to deter illegal border crossings significantly, it has nevertheless succeeded in reaffirming the importance of the border."³⁹⁴

The policies and laws implemented in the 1980s and 1990s increased the INS's importance within the federal bureaucracy. Whereas the Service's budget was around \$474 million in 1986, a decade later it had shot up to nearly \$2.6 billion (some \$1.8 billion controlling for inflation), and \$4.2 billion (\$2.7 billion controlling for inflation) by the year 2000. Meanwhile, the Border Patrol went from "a backwater agency with a budget smaller than that of many municipal police departments ... to a large and

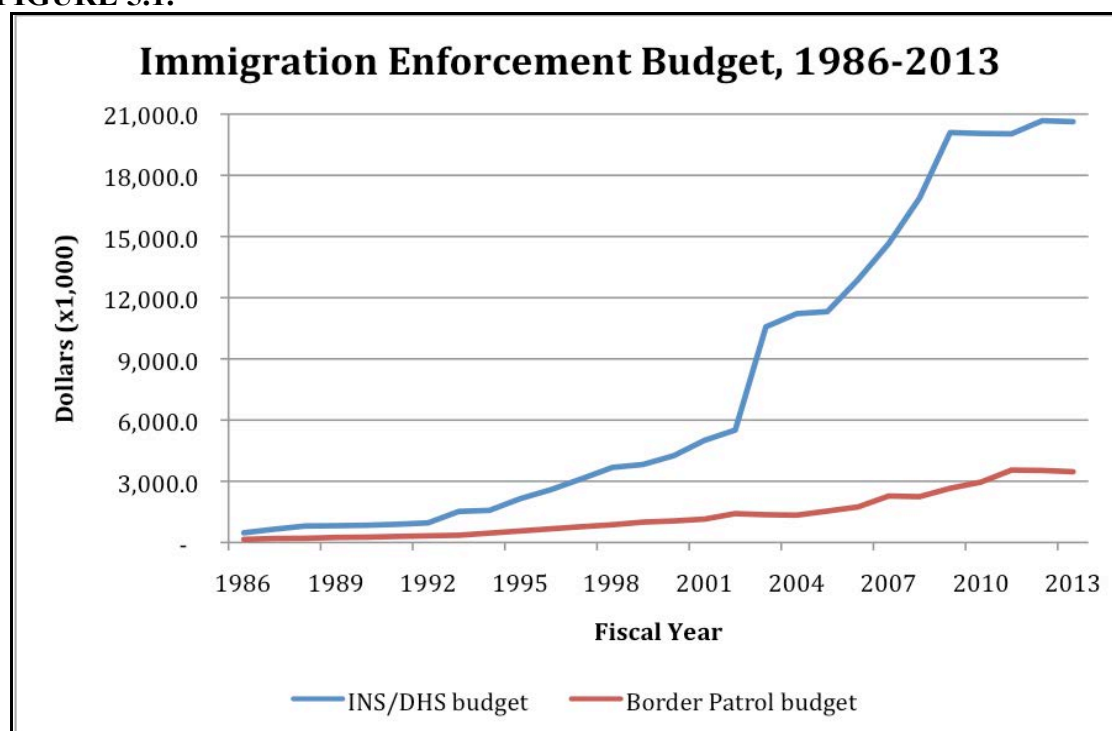
Libre: Criminalizing States and Delinquent Refusals of the New Frontier (Durham: Duke UP, 2012).

³⁹³ Wendy Brown. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 24-25.

³⁹⁴ Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009), 11. Emphasis in the original.

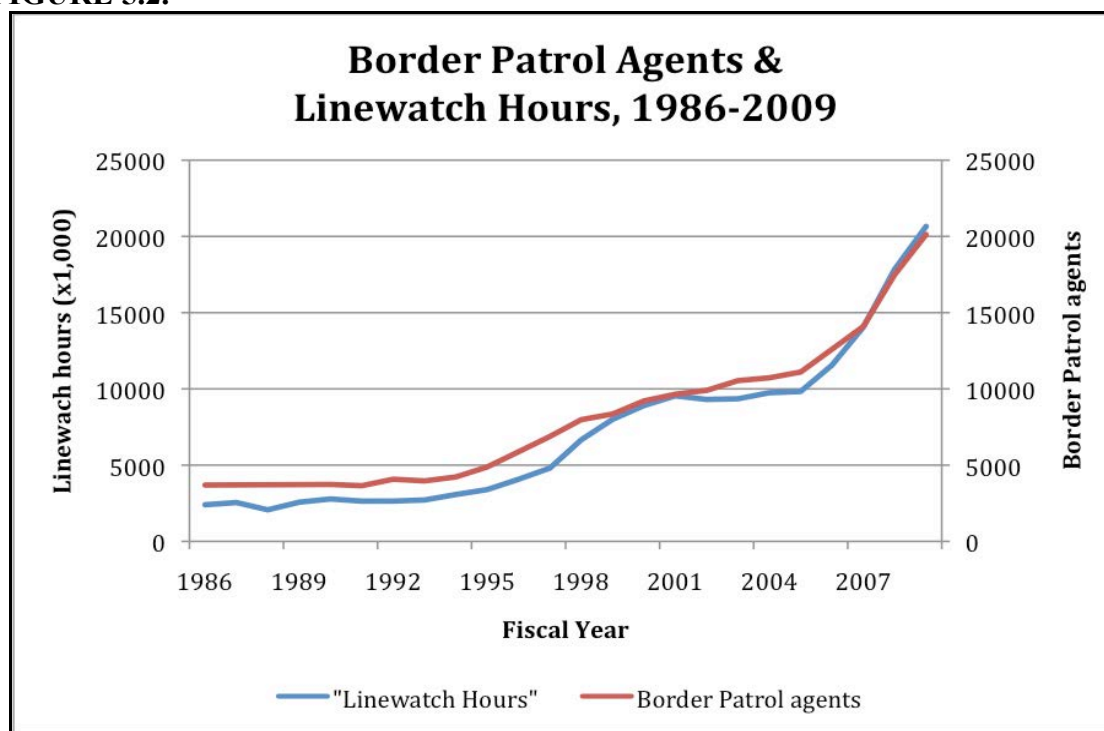
powerful organization with more officers licensed to carry weapons than any other branch of the federal government save the military.” From 1986 to 2000 the Border Patrol’s budget increased by a factor of seven, going from \$151 million to more than \$1 billion. (See Figure 5.1) During that same period the number of Border Patrol officers spiked from under 3,700 to more than 9,200, and the number of linewatch hours more than tripled.³⁹⁵ (See Figure 5.2)

FIGURE 5.1.



Source: Mexican Migration Project data (Graph by AG)

³⁹⁵ From 1986 to 2000 linewatch hours increased from 2.4 million to 8.9 million. In addition to unauthorized migrants, the INS also focused its efforts and resources on controlling the movement of illicit drugs from Mexico to the US. Statistics compiled by The Mexican Migration Project; Massey, et al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 87-89, 96-98, 101-104. It should also be noted that while the Border Patrol expanded, the overall federal government workforce shrank by over ten percent from 1985 to 2002. See Ellermann, *States Against Migrants*, 2-3.

FIGURE 5.2.

Source: Mexican Migration Project data. (Graph by AG)

The ramping up of border and immigration enforcement did not stop unauthorized migration to the United States. It did, however, make migrating more costly, in both physical and financial terms. Enhanced enforcement near urban centers forced migrants to cross the border in more desolate and dangerous areas. So while apprehensions dropped in the Chula Vista/San Diego (from around 532,000 in 1993 to 248,000 in 1998) and El Paso sectors, they rose sharply in the El Centro, California sector (30,000 to 227,000) and the Tucson (93,000 to 387,000) and Yuma (23,500 to 76,000), Arizona sectors.³⁹⁶ (See Figure 5.3)

³⁹⁶ Hing, "Operation Gatekeeper," 82-86

FIGURE 5.3.



Source: INS Annual Report, 1982, 13, USCISHRL.

Instead of stopping undocumented migration, Operation Hold-the-Line and Operation Gatekeeper just moved it “out of the public eye.” These policy changes had a devastating impact on migrants. First, they forced migrants to rely more heavily on coyotes, or migrant smugglers, who doubled or tripled their fees in accordance with the newfound demand. Second, they increased the amount of time it took to cross. While entering near San Diego might have only taken ten or fifteen minutes, traversing deserts, mountains, and canyons generally took at least twelve hours and as many as four days. Ultimately, the US’s “prevention through deterrence” strategy resulted in more migrant

deaths than ever before. In 1994 officials recovered the remains of twenty-three people along the California-Mexico border. Two had died of hypothermia or heatstroke and nine of drowning. Just four years later authorities recorded 145 deaths—including sixty-eight of hypothermia or heatstroke and fifty-two of drowning—along that same stretch, although the actual number was certainly higher, since some of the dead were never found.³⁹⁷

The year 1994 ended up marking an important shift in the history of US-Mexico relations, Mexican migration, and US immigration enforcement. Eleven months after NAFTA was implemented Governor Pete Wilson handily won re-election in California and Proposition 187 passed with fifty-nine percent of the vote. Even though a Federal District Court later struck down Proposition 187 for being unconstitutional, its passage and Wilson's victory foreshadowed local and state politicians' efforts to take federal immigration policy into their own hands in the years to come.³⁹⁸ Furthermore, Operation Gatekeeper proved to be the beginning of what has become an intractable campaign to "secure" the US-Mexico border. These developments, combined with the passage of a series of draconian laws two years later, created a more punitive deportation regime that has grown exponentially over the last three decades.

³⁹⁷ Hing, "Operation Gatekeeper," 82-86; See also, Karl Eschbach, Jacqueline Hagan, Nestor Rodríguez, Ruben Hernandez-Leon, and Stanley Bailey, "Death at the Border," *International Migration Review* Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer, 1999): 430-454; Massey, et al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 93-95, 112-136. For more on the US's "prevention through deterrence" strategy see Timothy J. Dunn, *Blockading the Border and Human Rights: The El Paso Operation that Remade Immigration Enforcement* (Austin: UT Press, 2009). For a narrative account of the many dangers migrants face, see Luis Alberto Urrea, *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004).

³⁹⁸ Zolbeg, *A Nation by Design*, 402-410.

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996, has done more to shape the deportation regime than any other law in United States history. Referred to by some as the “Mexican Exclusion Act” because it allocated money to build border walls and hire 1,000 Border Patrol agents a year over a five-year period, the law broadened the scope of who the United States could formally deport; made it easier for authorities to apprehend, detain, and deport people; and rolled back the rights of individuals facing deportation. IIRIRA expanded the number of “aggravated felonies” resulting in mandatory detention and formal deportation to twenty-eight, including any offense that carried at least a one-year prison sentence—even if it were as insignificant as shoplifting or low-level drug possession, or as vague as a crime of “moral turpitude” or any “crime of violence.” It also applied retroactively, which meant that post-IIRIRA someone could be removed for a crime that was a deportable offense under the new law, but not at the time of conviction.³⁹⁹

The passage of two other laws that same year magnified IIRIRA’s severe impact on unauthorized migrants. Along with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity

³⁹⁹ Nancy Morawetz, “Understanding the Impact of the 1996 Deportation Laws and the Limited Scope of Proposed Reforms,” *Harvard Law Review* Vol. 113, No. 8 (Jun., 2000): 1939-1940; Jacqueline Hagan and Scott Phillips, “Border Blunders: The Unanticipated Human and Economic Costs of the U.S. Approach to Immigration Control, 1986-2007,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 7, no. 1 (2008): 86-87; Massey, et al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 95; Nestor Rodríguez and Jacqueline Hagan, “Fractured Families and Communities: Effects of Immigration Reform in Texas, Mexico, and El Salvador,” *Latino Studies* Vol. 2, No. 3 (2004): 329. For more on general trends in deportation since 1996 see Marc R. Rosenblum and Doris Meissner with Claire Bergeron and Faye Hipsman, “The Deportation Dilemma: Reconciling Tough and Humane Enforcement,” Migration Policy Institute (April 2014): 1-66.

Reconciliation Act—the “end welfare as we know it” act, which barred undocumented migrants from access to public services and most federal, state, and local benefits—IIRIRA effectively implemented Proposition 187 on a national scale. It required the INS to verify individuals’ legal status before granting them federal benefits and, at the same time, it gave states more power to determine eligibility rules. The law also included Section 287(g), which allowed local and state law enforcement officers to carry out immigration enforcement in collaboration with the INS. Moreover, IIRIRA combined with the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act to eliminate undocumented migrants’ due process rights and any chance of judicial review in deportation cases. This led one scholar to describe 1996 as “the year in which the rule of deportation law died.”⁴⁰⁰

IIRIRA resulted in a spike in formal deportations for *all* non-citizens, including many long-term, legal permanent residents. The law’s elimination of relief hearings prevented immigration judges from considering family circumstances, including the best interests of US-citizen children. As a result, it led to the separation of many families, which stood in opposition to long-standing values undergirding US immigration policies and “general values that permeate our legal system.”⁴⁰¹

Family separation became more permanent over time, in part because the

⁴⁰⁰ The language of “responsibility” included in the names of these laws is important. Indeed, it shaped how people in the United States conceptualized immigrants, citizens, and the state, in addition to who is “deserving” and who is “undeserving.” Massey, et al., *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 95-96; Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation*, 229; Regarding 287(g), see “Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act,” U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, <http://www.ice.gov/factsheets/287g>.

⁴⁰¹ Morawetz, “Understanding the Impact of the 1996 Deportation Laws and the Limited Scope of Proposed Reforms,” 1936-1962.

increasingly fortified US-Mexico border made it more expensive and difficult for deported migrants to re-enter the United States. But also because IIRIRA changed the way the INS deported people. More money to detain and deport immigrants and less, if any, judicial oversight allowed the INS to ramp up formal deportations, or “removals,” to previously unknown levels. After 1996, migrants who would have once been deported via voluntary departure (“return”) found themselves subject to removal, bans on re-entry ranging from five years-to-life, and possible felony criminal charges for returning to the United States. The INS, for its part, adopted a “take-no-prisoners approach with regard to the deportation of criminal aliens”—with “criminal aliens” now encompassing a much broader group of people. In the six years after Congress enacted IIRIRA detention and deportation spending increased by more than 160 percent, reaching nearly \$1.28 billion in fiscal year 2002. As the Service’s stature within the federal government grew along with its budget, it paid more attention to removal statistics than the “human casualties” of deportation in the age of the criminalization of migration and militarization of the border.⁴⁰²

A new deportation regime emerged post-1996, but the consequences of being deported became even harsher after the events of September 11, 2001. In the wake of the attacks that brought down the World Trade Center towers in New York City and damaged the Pentagon, Congress hastily passed the Uniting and Strengthening America

⁴⁰² Morawetz, “Understanding the Impact of the 1996 Deportation Laws and the Limited Scope of Proposed Reforms,” 1943-1950; Hagan and Phillips, “Border Blunders,” 86-87; “Immigration Enforcement Spending Since IRCA,” Migration Policy Institute (November 2005): 7. Spending on border control and interior enforcement increased as well, but only by 94 percent and 51 percent, respectively. It should be noted, as well, that detention and removal spending increased more than 800 percent between fiscal years 1985 and 2002.

by Proving Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act. The USA PATRIOT Act, as it is known, broadened the definition of what constituted “terrorist activity,” limited the rights of non-citizens already in the country, and authorized officials to indefinitely detain non-citizens. As Nicholas De Genova has noted, in the aftermath of 9/11 “‘terrorism’ [came] to ubiquitously serve the same ideological role of pervasive and imminent external threat to the stability and security of the United States that ‘communism’ previously did during the Cold War.” Less than two years later, the INS was subsumed under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as part of “‘the most extensive reorganization of the federal government in the past fifty years.’”⁴⁰³

Immigration policies in the post-9/11 United States became more restrictive and prioritized security over human rights and civil liberties. (Even the rhetorical shift from “Immigration and Naturalization” to “Homeland Security” reflected the changing priorities of the US immigration bureaucracy.) In 2003, the DHS announced “Endgame,” a ten-year strategic enforcement plan whose goal was “the removal of all removable aliens.”⁴⁰⁴ These changes had a profound effect on border control and interior enforcement, which, as Amy Kaplan has argued, cannot be separated. “Although homeland security may strive to cordon off the nation as a domestic space from external

⁴⁰³ Eight years before the 9/11 attacks, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center heightened fears about the connection between immigration and terrorism. Nicholas De Genova, “The Production of Culprits: From Deportability to Detainability in the Aftermath of ‘Homeland Security,’” *Citizenship Studies* Vol. 11, No. 5 (2007): 421-448; Kevin R. Johnson, “September 11 and Mexican Immigrants: Collateral Damage Comes Home,” *DePaul Law Review* Vol. 52 (2003): 849-870. For more on state terror and the connections between the Cold War period and the current moment see Rachel Ida Buff, “The Deportation Terror,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 60, No. 3 (September 2008): 523-551. For more on social control and the punishment of immigrants in the post-9/11 US, see Charis E. Kubrin, Marjorie S. Zatz, and Ramiro Martínez, Jr., eds., *Punishing Immigrants: Policy, Politics, and Injustice* (New York: NYU Press: 2012).

⁴⁰⁴ “ENDGAME: Office of Detention and Removal Strategic Plan, 2003-2012” (August 2003).

foreign threats,” Kaplan writes, “it is actually about breaking down the boundaries between inside and outside, about seeing the homeland in a state of constant emergency from threats within and without.”⁴⁰⁵ This, in turn, has resulted in the racial profiling and persecution of Arabs, Muslims, and unauthorized immigrants. It has led to a resurgence of nativism, anti-immigration lobby groups, the formation of “Minutemen” militias that patrol the US-Mexico border, and draconian local and state laws meant to cause immigrants’ “self-deportation.” Moreover, lawmakers have relied on the conflation of undocumented migrants as potential terrorists (and as an existential threat to the country) to justify ever-increasing DHS, Border Patrol, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) budgets. Indeed, from 2000 to 2013 the INS/DHS budget spiked from around \$4.3 billion to \$20.6 billion; the Border Patrol budget rose from just over \$1 billion to some \$3.5 billion; and the number of Border Patrol agents more than doubled, from 9,200 to over 20,000 (ninety percent of whom patrol the southwestern border). And in the decade after the creation of ICE, its budget grew from \$3.3 billion to \$5.6 billion.⁴⁰⁶ (See Figures 5.1 and 5.2, above)

The INS/DHS funding boom after 9/11 was key to the deportation regime’s punitive turn. However, contrary to scholarly and popular belief, the number of

⁴⁰⁵ Amy Kaplan, “Homeland insecurities: reflections on language and space,” *Radical History Review* No. 85 (2003): 90. Also cited in De Genova, “The Production of Culprits,” 423.

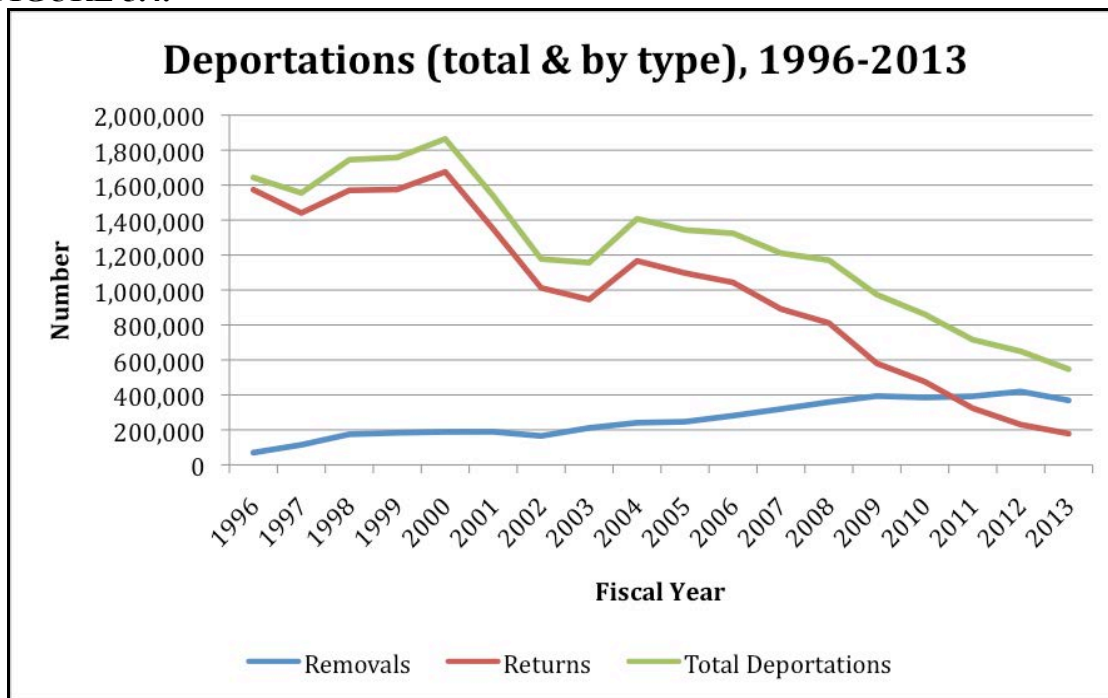
⁴⁰⁶ De Genova, “The Production of Culprits,” 421-448; Statistics from The Mexican Migration Project. For more on Minutemen, see Harel Shapira, *Waiting for José: The Minutemen’s Pursuit of America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013). For more on the INS/DHS’s growing enforcement budget see “Immigration Enforcement Spending Since IRCA,” Migration Policy Institute (November 2005): 1-12. For more on the “devastating” impact the federal government’s inability or refusal to pass immigration reform has had on undocumented migrants in recent years, see Alicia Schmidt Camacho, “Hailing the Twelve Million: U.S. Immigration Policy, Deportation, and the Imaginary of Lawful Violence,” *Social Text* 28, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 1-24.

deportations has actually *declined* over the last fifteen years, from an all-time high of 1.8 million-plus in 2000 to 547,000 in 2013.⁴⁰⁷ To understand the contemporary deportation regime we must examine how deportation has changed qualitatively in addition to quantitatively. The criminalization of migration and elevated fears about domestic terrorism produced (1) a pervasive sense of insecurity that justified expanding the DHS's influence and unchecked power, and (2) a "specter of guilt" around unauthorized migrants that legitimized the violation of their rights and liberties.⁴⁰⁸ Those two factors, combined with the immigration bureaucracy's unprecedented resources, enabled the INS/DHS to formally deport more people than ever before, just as the 1996 Immigration Act called for. Whereas the INS/DHS removed fewer than 70,000 people in fiscal year 1996, it removed more than 188,000 in 2000 and an average of 379,000 per year between 2009 and 2014, including over 419,000 in 2012. This change in DHS policy, along with a dip in unauthorized Mexican migration, caused voluntary departures to drop from around 1,675,000 in 2000 to some 580,000 in 2009, and fewer than 179,000 in 2013. In 2011 removals exceeded returns for the first time in seven decades, and now outnumber returns two-to-one.⁴⁰⁹ (See Figures 5.4 and 5.5)

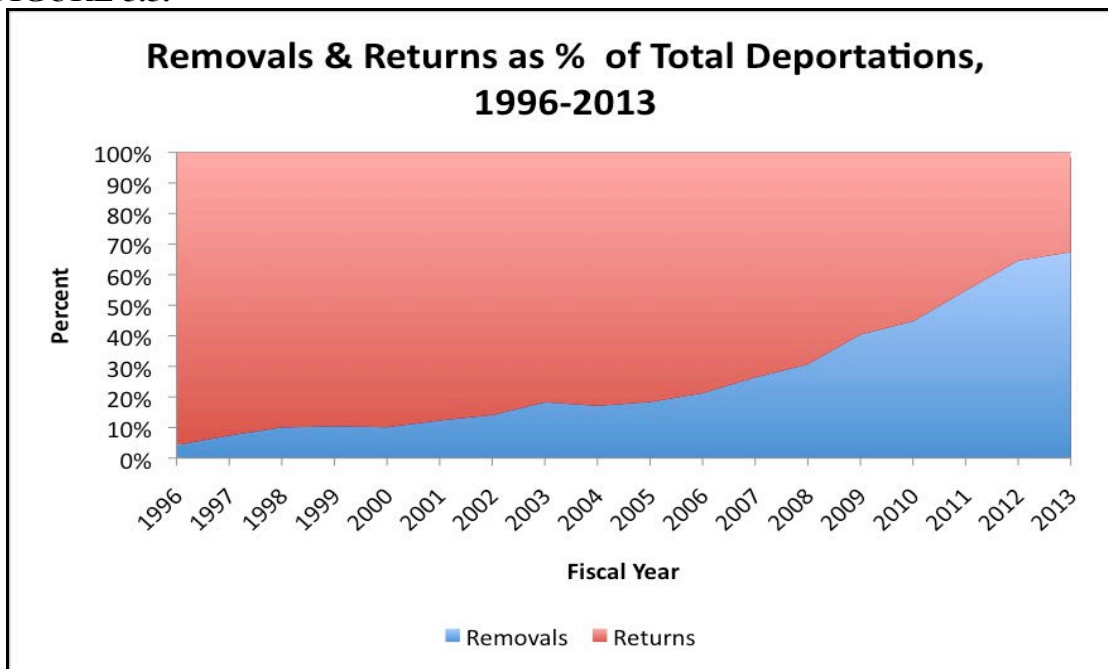
⁴⁰⁷ As discussed at length in previous chapters, total deportations equal the sum of removals and returns. INS/DHS Annual Reports and Office of Immigration Statistical Yearbooks, 1942-2014.

⁴⁰⁸ De Genova, "The Production of Culprits," 435-436.

⁴⁰⁹ DHS OIS Statistical Yearbook, 2012-2014.

FIGURE 5.4.

Source: DHS OIS Statistical Yearbook, 2012 & 2013. (Calculations and graph by AG)

FIGURE 5.5.

Source: DHS OIS Statistical Yearbook, 2012 & 2013. (Calculations and graph by AG)

Another key component of the deportation's regime punitive turn was the concurrent rise of immigration detention, which Nicholas Genova has referred to as the "real goal" of the Homeland Security State.⁴¹⁰ The boom in immigration imprisonment has occurred within the broader growth of the carceral state in the late twentieth century. The United States has imprisoned more people since 1970 than any other country in the world.⁴¹¹ Between 1972 and 1997 the country's general incarceration rate increased by a factor of five.⁴¹² According to legal scholar Jonathan Simon, "more than three percent of the resident adult population of the United States were under some form of correctional custody" in 1996. "No other society in history ha[d] ever tried to govern such a large proportion of its population through prisons or their specter."⁴¹³ Immigration detention had been relatively small by comparison. In 1991 the INS's detention capacity was around 6,000, while the US general prison population hovered around one million people-per-day. But the INS/DHS's immigration detention capacity has grown

⁴¹⁰ De Genova, "The Production of Culpits," 433.

⁴¹¹ Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *Journal of American History* Vol. 97, No. 3 (December 2010): 703.

⁴¹² Morawetz, "Understanding the Impact of the 1996 Deportation Laws and the Limited Scope of Proposed Reforms," 1944.

⁴¹³ Jonathan Simon, "Refugees in a Carceral Age: The Rebirth of Immigration Prisons in the United States," *Public Culture* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1998): 577. For more on the growth of the carceral state see David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Bruce Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America* (New York: Russell Sage, 2006); Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006); Ruth Gilmore Wilson, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2007); Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2008); Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010); William J. Stuntz, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2011); Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics* (Princeton: PUP, 2014); Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014); Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2014).

significantly during the last two decades. Whereas the Service's detained an average of just under 6,800 people each day in 1994, that number had grown to more than 34,000 by 2012. Today the United States detains some 400,000 immigrants each year, some sixty percent of them in the 130 private prison facilities across the country, which have a total capacity of 157,000 beds.⁴¹⁴

The federal government's lack of detention has long forced it to rely on third-party, for-profit companies to imprison immigrants.⁴¹⁵ However, in recent years, these companies have also actively sought out government contracts and spent tens of millions of dollars on political lobbying to influence DHS policy and state-level immigration laws in places like Arizona.⁴¹⁶ Companies such as the Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group (and their shareholders) have financially benefitted from detaining more migrants for longer periods of time. In fiscal year 2012 they reported annual revenues of

⁴¹⁴ Simon, "Refugees in a Carceral Age," 580; Alina Das, "Immigration Detention: Information Gaps and Institutional Barriers to Reform," *The University of Chicago Law Review* Vol. 80, No. 1 (Winter 2013): 137-138; David Manuel Hernández, "Pursuant to Deportation: Latinos and Immigrant Detention," *Latino Studies* Vol. 6 (2008): 43; Michael Cohen, "How for-profit prisons have become the biggest lobby no one is talking about," *The Washington Post* (PostEverything), 28 April 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/04/28/how-for-profit-prisons-have-become-the-biggest-lobby-no-one-is-talking-about/>.

⁴¹⁵ Scholars like Jonathan Simon and Stephanie Silverman have noted important historical precedents, such as Japanese internment during World War II. But they generally trace the rise of contemporary detention to the Cuban and Haitian refugee crisis in the early 1980s. However, this ignores the deportation regimes disproportionate targeting of Mexicans throughout the twentieth century and the large-scale detention of Mexican migrants in the Southwest. As the number of apprehended Mexicans grew, the INS started relying on third-party facilities. I have found information about the use of local jails and private prisons in the mid-to-late twentieth century. See Simon, "Refugees in a Carceral Age," 577-607; Stephanie J. Silverman, "Immigration Detention in America: A History of its Expansion and a Study of its Significance," Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Working Paper No. 80 (2010): 1-31.

⁴¹⁶ See, for example, Meredith Kolodner, "Immigration Enforcement Benefits Prison Firms," *New York Times*, 19 July 2006; Laura Sullivan, "Prison Economics Help Drive Ariz. Immigration Law," *NPR*, 28 October 2010, <http://www.npr.org/2010/10/28/130833741/prison-economics-help-drive-ariz-immigration-law>; Cohen, "How for-profit prisons have become the biggest lobby no one is talking about," 28 April 2015; Bethany Carson and Eleana Diaz, "Payoff: How Congress Ensures Private Prison Profit with an Immigrant Detention Quota," *Grassroots Leadership* (April 2015): 1-27.

\$1.76 billion and \$1.48 billion, respectively, and taxpayers footed a \$1.9 billion (more than \$5 million per day) bill for DHS's custody operations.⁴¹⁷ Communities in which these immigration prisons are located have come to depend on them—and the continued detention of non-citizens—for jobs. Ultimately, the privatization and expansion of immigration detention has had devastating consequences for non-citizens, who have limited rights and little means of recourse, are less likely to have legal representation, and are at risk of being transferred to detention centers thousands of miles away from their families.⁴¹⁸

Recent legislative proposals and new DHS policies have also contributed to the criminalization of migrants and burgeoning detention populations. In 2005 the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (HR 4437), known as the “Sensenbrenner Bill,” sought to make being in the United States without authorization a felony offense instead of a civil violation. But immigrants and activists protested the

⁴¹⁷ Corrections Corporation of America 2012 Annual Report, p. 49, http://thomson.mobular.net/thomson/7/3368/4799/document_1/CCA_2012_AR_10k_-_final-V2.pdf; The Geo Group, Inc. 2012 Annual Report, p. 1, https://materials.proxyvote.com/Approved/36159R/20130314/AR_159415/document.pdf; “The Math of Immigration Detention,” *National Immigration Forum*, August 2013, <http://www.immigrationforum.org/images/uploads/mathofimmigrationdetention.pdf>; Das, “Immigration Detention,” 143-145.

⁴¹⁸ Scholars and journalists have documented this at length. See, for example, Mark Dow, *American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2004); Daniel Wishner, *Immigration Detention: Law, History, Politics* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012); Morawetz, “Understanding the Impact of the 1996 Deportation Laws and the Limited Scope of Proposed Reforms,” 1943-1950; and Nina Bernstein’s important articles on detention in the *New York Times* from 2006-2009. Deepa Fernandes and Tanya Golash-Boza have argued that the growing profitability of immigration enforcement has created an “immigration industrial complex,” while others have referred to it as part of a “migration industry.” See Deepa Fernandes, *Targeted: Homeland Security and the Business of Immigration* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007); Tanya Golash-Boza, *Immigration Nation: Raids, Detentions, and Deportations in Post-9/11 America* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012); Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4th ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2009); Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, eds. *Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Ruben Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2014).

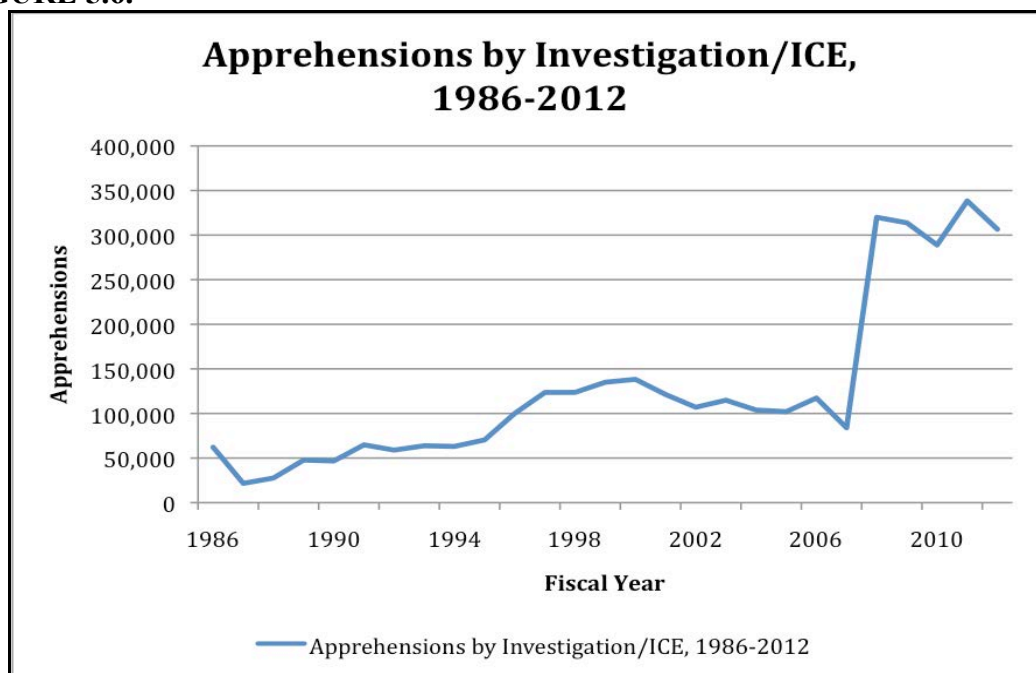
proposed law en masse. After the bill, which also sought to ramp up border and interior enforcement and punish people who aided unauthorized migrants, passed the House, up to five million people—including hundreds of thousands during single marches—took to the streets of more than 160 cities across the country in the spring of 2006. These mass marches demanded justice and equal rights migrants and proved key to preventing the Senate from passing the draconian measure.⁴¹⁹

However, two years later ICE launched the Secure Communities program under then President George W. Bush. Similar to 287(g), Secure Communities called for the cooperation of law enforcement officials at every level to carry out immigration enforcement. It integrated local, state, and federal law enforcement databases, which meant that any interaction an undocumented migrant had with a law enforcement official could result in that person's deportation. Whereas the Obama administration at first offered localities the option of participating in Secure Communities, it later announced that the program would extend nationwide by 2013, with no choice of opting out. Some mayors and cities protested, citing the detrimental effects the program had on police-community relations and the likelihood that undocumented people would report domestic violence and other crimes. The Obama administration justified the program by claiming that it targeted hard criminals. But that was little more than empty rhetoric: During the

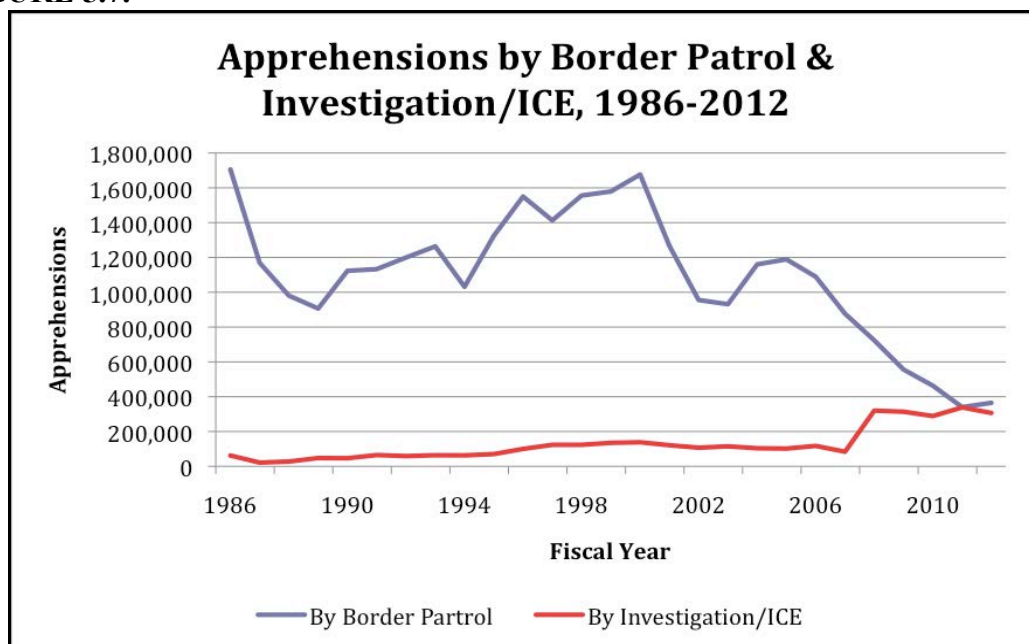
⁴¹⁹ Alfonso González argues that the 2006 marches built on the activism of previous generations of Chicana/o and Central American activists. See Alfonso González, *Reform Without Justice: Latino Migrant Politics and the Homeland Security State* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014), 3 and 21-74; Chris Zepeda-Millán, "Weapons of the (Not So) Weak: Immigrant Mass Mobilization in the US South," *Critical Sociology* (May 2014): 1-2. On the tension between the simultaneous criminalization of migration and the expansion of migrants' rights, see Patrisia Macías, "Policing Citizenship: Regulating Immigrants through Rights and Crime at the U.S.-Mexico Border" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2006).

first two years of Secure Communities more than three-quarters of all people identified by the program had no record at all or a traffic violation or some other minor offense. The outsourcing of immigration enforcement to local law enforcement officials—including the infamous Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Maricopa County, Arizona—made it nearly impossible to implement a uniform, top-down policy. Moreover, it led to racial profiling, the criminalization of migrants and Latinos regardless of legal status, and, ultimately, an increase in interior apprehensions (both in real numbers and relative to border apprehensions) in established communities.⁴²⁰ (See Figures 5.6 and 5.7)

⁴²⁰ Hiroshi Motomura, *Immigration Outside the Law* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014); Adam Goodman, “A Nation of (Deported) Immigrants,” *Dissent* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 2011): 64-68. For more on who is removed and the question of discretion, see Marc R. Rosenblum and Kristen McCabe, “Deportation and Discretion: Reviewing the Record and Options for Change,” Migration Policy Institute (October 2014): 1-51. For more on the gap between legislation and implementation see Ellermann, *States Against Migrants* (2009). Daniel Kanstroom argues that programs like Secure Communities and the rise in apprehensions by ICE can be attributed to a shift toward “post-entry social control.” See Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation* (2007) and Daniel Kanstroom, *Aftermath: Deportation Law and the New American Diaspora* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012). Even though the Obama administration announced in late 2014 that Secure Communities “as we know it” would be coming to an end, it noted that immigration officials would still collaborate with local and state law enforcement authorities in many instances. See Jeh Charles Johnson, Secretary, DHS, to Thomas S. Winkowski, Acting Director, ICE; Megan Mack, Officer, Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties; and Philip A. McNamara, Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Affairs, 20 November 2014, http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/14_1120_memo_secure_communities.pdf.

FIGURE 5.6.

Source: DHS OIS Statistical Yearbooks, 1986-2013. (Graph and calculations by AG)

FIGURE 5.7.

Source: DHS OIS Statistical Yearbooks, 1986-2013. (Graph and calculations by AG)

Over the course of the last decade immigrants and allies have protested against 287(g), Secure Communities, immigration enforcement policies that create fear in communities, and the separation of families as a result of deportation. Youth immigrant activists have been at the forefront of this movement. After Congress failed to pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act (first introduced in 2001), which would have granted legal status and the possibility of citizenship to some young people, undocumented teenagers and twenty-somethings organized. This diverse group of activists, some of whom referred to themselves as DREAMers, formed organizations like DreamActivist, United We Dream, the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, and the Immigrant Youth Justice League, and engaged in increasingly sophisticated political activism over time. They staged sit-ins in Senators' offices, orchestrated marches and bus trips across the country, and held "coming out" events in which they publicly identified as undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic. Many of the groups used social media as a mobilizing tool to gain support for their cause and, in some cases, stop the deportation of their friends and family members. Most recently, undocumented activists in the US have formed transnational bonds with some of the 500,000 young people who have returned to Mexico—on their own volition or via deportation—since 2005. Although youth immigrant activists did not succeed in pushing Congress to enact the DREAM Act or comprehensive immigration reform, they forced the Obama administration to declare executive actions like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in June 2012 and Deferred Action for Parents of US Citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) in November 2014. Almost 750,000

people have applied for DACA, some eighty-eight percent of whom have been granted the opportunity to work and remain in the United States without the threat of deportation, even if temporarily. (The implementation of DAPA is currently on hold because more than twenty-five states filed a lawsuit against it.) Rifts between some organizations may exist when it comes to where to focus the attention or how to most effectively push for change, but as a whole the movement has won impressive victories that have expanded the rights and improved the lives of undocumented people, their families, and their communities.⁴²¹

And yet, deportation remains harsher than ever. The fortification of the border has, ironically, meant that more migrants have stayed in the United States than did during earlier periods of “circular migration.” Over the last twenty years it has also become more expensive and dangerous to re-enter the US after being deported. The result has been more permanent family separation and a growing deportee population living in dire conditions along the Mexican side of the border. Children bear a considerable burden

⁴²¹ For more on undocumented youth activists see Eileen Truax, *Dreamers: la lucha de una generación por su sueño americano* (México, D.F.: Océano, 2013); Walter Nicholls, *The Dreamers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2013). For more on the evolution of youth immigrant activism and the politics of the family see Amalia Pallares, *Family Activism: Immigrant Struggles and the Politics of Non-Citizenship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2015); Tania A. Unzueta Carrasco and Hinda Seif, “Disrupting the dream: Undocumented youth reframe citizenship and deportability through anti-deportation activism,” *Latino Studies* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2014): 279-299. For more on the diversity within the movement and queer migration politics see Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalition Possibilities* (Champaign: U of Illinois Press, 2013); Cristina Beltrán, “‘No Papers, No Fear’: DREAM Activism, New Social Media, and the Queering of Immigrant Rights,” in Arlene Dávila and Yeidy M. Rivero, eds., *Contemporary Latina/o Media: Production, Circulation, Politics* (New York: NYU Press, 2014): 245-266. For more on returned and deported youth in Mexico, including groups like Los Otros Dreamers and Dream in Mexico, see Jill Anderson and Nin Solís, *Los Otros Dreamers* (México, D.F., 2014); For the latest on DACA and DAPA see Audrey Singer, “What’s Next for Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States?,” *World on the Move* (Newsletter of the American Sociological Association’s Section on International Migration) Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring 2015): 7-8.

when they or one of their family members are removed or face the prospect of being removed.⁴²²

In recent years some migrant activists and advocates have taken to calling President Barack Obama the “Deporter-in-Chief.” They might have a point, but not based on the misconception that expulsions are at an all-time high. They are not. Formal deportations are, however, and the post-1996 changes to the deportation regime—from the increased reliance on removals and the unprecedented militarization of the border, to the criminalization of migration and expansion of immigration detention into a multi-billion-dollar industry—mark a punitive turn that persists to this day, with no sign of letting up.

⁴²² Laura Woldenberg and Bernardo Loyola, “Deportee Purgatory,” *VICE* (2013), <http://www.vice.com/video/deportee-purgatory-video>; Randal C. Archibold, “As Mexican Border Town Tries to Move On, Some Are Stuck in Limbo,” *NYT*, 28 November 2014; Other deportees return to their hometowns or create new lives for themselves in Mexico. See, for example, Christine Wheatley, “Push Back: U.S. Deportation Policy and the Reincorporation of Involuntary Return Migrants in Mexico,” *The Latin Americanist* (December 2011): 35-60; Anderson and Solís, *Los Otros Dreamers* (2014). On the uncertainty and unpredictability of whether deportees will return to the US or stay in Mexico, see Deborah A. Boehm, “¿Quien Sabe?: Deportation and Temporality Among Transnational Mexicans,” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* Vol. 38, No. 2/3/4 (Summer, Fall, Winter 2009): 345-374. On family separation and the burden deportation places on children, see Joanna Dreby, “The Burden of Deportation on Children in Mexican Immigrant Families,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74 (August 2012): 829-845; Pallares, *Family Activism* (2015); Jeremy Slack, Daniel E. Martínez, Scott Whiteford, and Emily Peiffer, “In the Shadow of the Wall: Family Separation, Immigration Enforcement and Security,” *The Center for Latin American Studies, University of Arizona* (March 2013): 1-39; Luis H. Zayas, *Forgotten Citizens: Deportation, Children, and the Making of American Exiles and Orphans* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015). For a general discussion of people’s post-deportation experiences, see Kanstroom, *Aftermath* (2012); David Brotherton and Luis Barrios, *Banished to the Homeland: Dominican Deportees and Their Stories of Exile* (New York: Columbia UP, 2011).

EPILOGUE

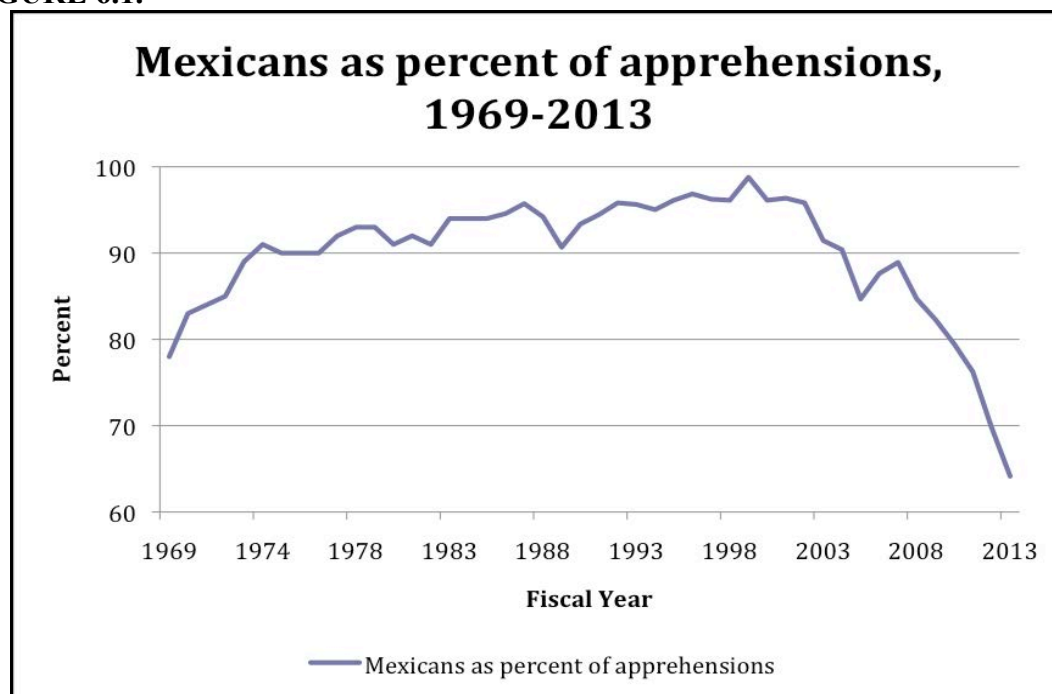
Today, current immigration policies and the general political climate make it difficult to imagine a less punitive and more humane deportation regime. The symbolic politics and moneyed interests that drive border enforcement are stronger than ever, and since 9/11 and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) preventing terrorism has come before all else. Both Democrats and Republicans agree on this and continuously stress the need to “secure” the nation’s borders. While saying anything to the contrary would amount to political suicide, one is left to wonder: Until what point?

From a historical perspective, the nation’s borders have never been so secure. Starting around 2008 a recession in the United States, combined with lower birth rates in Mexico and the elevated costs and heightened risks of unauthorized migration resulted in a significant drop in Mexican migration. “The largest wave of immigration in history from a single country to the United States has come to a standstill,” a leading research center reported.⁴²³ Mexicans as a percent of overall apprehensions declined considerably: Whereas Mexicans represented ninety percent or more of all apprehensions from the mid 1970s to the mid 2000s, they made up fewer than two out of every three apprehensions

⁴²³ Jeffrey Passel, D’Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Hispanic Center, 2012). In 2013 more authorized migrants came to the United States from China and India than from Mexico. This marked the first time in decades that Mexico was not the top country of origin of recent immigrants to the US. Muzaffar Chishti and Faye Hipsman, “In Historic Shift, New Migration Flows from Mexico Fall Below Those from China and India,” Migration Policy Institute, 21 May 2015, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/historic-shift-new-migration-flows-mexico-fall-below-those-china-and-india>.

by fiscal year 2013. (See Figure 6.1) Total apprehensions and deportations also dropped—by thirty-seven and fifty-three percent, respectively—from 2008 to 2013.⁴²⁴

FIGURE 6.1.



INS/DHS OIS Statistical Yearbooks, 1986-2013. (Graph and calculations by AG)

Yet, it seems as if the deportation regime will only grow in the coming years.

President Obama's funding proposal to Congress for fiscal year 2016 sought to increase

⁴²⁴ During this period enforcement efforts have increasingly focused on Central American migrants. From fiscal year 2013 to 2014 the Mexicans removed dropped by nearly twenty-seven percent, but the number of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans removed increased by twenty-six, fourteen, and ten percent, respectively. In 2014, Mexico (fifty-six percent), Guatemala (seventeen percent), Honduras (thirteen percent), and El Salvador (nine percent) comprised ninety-five percent of all removals. The remaining five percent were mostly to other parts of the Americas and Caribbean, with all other countries making up less than one percent of total removals. INS/DHS OIS Statistical Yearbooks, 1986-2013; DHS, "ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report," Fiscal Year 2014. For more on the history of Central American migration to North America, see María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, The United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2006). On immigration enforcement targeting Latino men in recent years, see Tanya Golash-Boza and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Latino immigrant men and the deportation crisis: A gendered racial removal program," *Latino Studies* Vol. 11, No. 3 (2013): 271-292.

the budgets of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) by more than seventeen percent (to \$6.3 billion) and Customs and Border Patrol's by over six percent (to \$13.6 billion). And DHS's 2014-2018 strategic plan's mission to "Prevent Terrorism and Enhance Security," "Secure and Manage our Borders," and "Enforce and Administer Our Immigration Laws" makes clear that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future.⁴²⁵

However, the deportation regime is not—nor has it been—static. It has undergone significant qualitative and quantitative transformations over the last seven-plus decades, and it can change again. The current expulsion system, as Daniel Kanstroom notes, needs to be questioned because of "its size, its ferocity, its disproportionality, its disregard for basic rights, and its substantial negative effects."⁴²⁶ The best chance to end the punitive phase of recent decades is to enact comprehensive immigration reform that grants undocumented migrants legal status and a pathway to citizenship, and includes provisions to regularize the status of future undocumented migrants. This would starve the deportation regime by reducing the number of deportable migrants on which it feeds.

An expansive policy overhaul will only happen if citizen and non-citizen activists apply sufficient pressure to convince the President and enough Senators and Congressional Representatives that it is in their best interest to enact bold new laws. The fact that so many Republican House districts are homogenous and pro-restrictionist (as a

⁴²⁵ The President's total budget request for DHS came to more than \$41 billion, an eight percent increase over the previous year. See Department of Homeland Security, "Budget-in-Brief, Fiscal Year 2016," 1-6; Department of Homeland Security, "Fiscal Years 2014-2018 Strategic Plan," 6.

⁴²⁶ Kanstroom, *Aftermath*, 5.

result of gerrymandering) does not provide migrants and their allies with much hope. But it is possible that new patterns of immigrant settlement and the Party's presidential aspirations could lead to top-down pressure and eventual change.

More than anything, politicians on both sides of the aisle must leave behind the symbolic politics of border enforcement and its deleterious effects on individuals, families, communities, and the country. Instead of embracing the politically efficacious fiction that it is possible to exert complete control over the nation's borders, lawmakers should revamp the United States's outdated quota system and create more authorized channels for immigration. For as long as nation-states's borders have existed, people have crossed them—with or without authorization. They will continue to do so in the future. The only questions are how, and at what cost to migrants and taxpayers.

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