Winter 3-9-2020

Plowing for Pennies, Protesting for Pride: An Examination of the United Farm Worker Union's Impact in Washington State, 1965-1972

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A Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

Undergraduate History Program of the University of Washington Tacoma

By

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March 2020

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Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my father Joel and mother Heleodora for their continuous financial and emotional support throughout my academic career. Their story of immigration to citizenship became the true inspiration for my project. I would also extend my thanks to my advisor Dr. Julie Nicoletta as well as previous history professors, such as Dr. Luther Adams, Dr. Michael Honey, and Dr. William Burghart, for providing the best feedback that improved the research and writing done for my senior paper.

Abstract

People of Hispanic descent have been central to the agricultural production of the United States since the eighteenth century. This paper highlights how the signing of the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement by the United States and Mexico in 1942 enabled the spread of Mexican labor workers to the agricultural fields and railroads of the US due to the labor shortage produced by World War II. This migration of labor delivered two decades of poor wages and atrocious working and living conditions for braceros by the hands of white farm growers. By the 1960s, the efforts of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) to organize labor workers transitioned the labor movement from California to the fields of the Pacific Northwest.

This paper consists of primary sources, such as newspapers and interviews, of former braceros that labored in agricultural fields throughout the Pacific Northwest from 1947-1952 and labor organizers that unionized minority workers from 1965-1972. Secondary sources, such as academic journals and scholarly books, examining the history of the Bracero Program provide context for the inhumane practices of farmers that continued well after the program's termination in 1964. Finally, this paper acknowledges the role of Chavez and the UFW during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s that enabled future generations of Latino Americans to organize labor workers in Washington State.

Introduction

Mexican Americans have been linked to the Southwest since the annexation of Mexican regions in the 1840s, however, the Pacific Northwest has sustained a pathway for Mexican migration since the 1900s. Although Mexicans maintained a minimal presence in the region, the recruitment of immigrants for agricultural production in the 1920s and development of dams and canals in the 1930s that increased agricultural production further resulted in the expansion of Mexican immigrants into states, such as Idaho, Washington, and Oregon.[1] By 1942, Mexico and the United States signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, an international treaty referred to as the Bracero Program, to ensure the legal protection of Mexican citizens before working in the United States.[2] While all states of Mexico participated, the majority of the braceros originated from the agricultural-rich states of Guanajuato, Michoacán, and Jalisco.[3] According to historian Dennis Valdes, the agreement granted the Mexican and US governments the oversights that ensured standards of recruitment, hiring, and transportation as well as quality working and living conditions of Mexican workers throughout the US.[4]

Contracted and supervised by local farms, braceros[5] signed contracts that guaranteed a thirty-cent hourly wage, a minimum amount of hours to work, and minimum working and living

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[1] Jerry Garcia, "Beyond the Spanish Movement: Mexicans in the Pacific Northwest," in *Memory, Community, and Activism: Mexican Migration and Labor in the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Jerry Garcia and Gilberto Garcia (East Lansing, MI: Julian Samora Research Institute, 2005), 2.

[2] Dennis N. Valdes, "Legal Status and the Struggles of Farmworkers in West Texas and New Mexico, 1942-1993," *Latin American Perspectives*, 22, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 118.

[3] Ronald L. Mize and Alicia C.S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (University of Toronto Press, 2011), 7.

[4] Valdes, "Legal Status and the Struggles of Farmworkers," 118.

[5] Derived from the Spanish word bracos meaning arms, bracero was the Spanish word that described Mexican labor workers from 1942-1964.

conditions throughout the duration of their contracts.[6] Additionally, the US government deposited ten percent of braceros' earnings into a Mexican savings account which they would receive when they returned home.

Originally, organizations, such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), favored the Bracero Program because of World War II's (WWII) demand for agricultural workers. The political weakness of farm labor unions, however, prevented farmers from enforcing clauses in the contracts that allowed workers to choose their representatives.[7] By the 1940s, farmers housed braceros in temporary labor camps located in the deserts near Twin Falls, Idaho, and Wenatchee, Washington. Labor camps, such as the Crewport Farm Labor Camp in Yakima, operated as migrant farm labor camps for families devastated by the droughts of the 1930s, yet Mexican immigrants obtained housing in them by 1944.[8] Unfortunately, the lack of material improvements by farmers led to the deterioration of cabins and ultimately the demise of campsites.

Foot and vehicle traffic at camps located in Eastern Washington's deserts created harmful dust problems for the men and damaged camp equipment.[9] When describing the government's poor preparation and development of campsites in the 1940s, historian Erasmo Gamboa explained how braceros regularly arrived in unfinished camps. In one particular instance, Gamboa stated that workers arrived at sites "as construction workers poured concrete bases for

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[6] Valdes, "Legal Status and the Struggles of Farmworkers," 119.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Mario Jimenez Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 157.

[9] Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), 93.

tents."[10] According to former braceros, the majority of barracks held at least six braceros within a confined room, furnished with folding cots and one blanket per person.[11] Whereas high temperatures transformed these barracks into saunas in the summer, poor insulation and inadequate supplies, resulted in freezing temperatures for their inhabitants during the winter. Two decades after the end of WWII, Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 which increased the number of immigrants into the US and replaced braceros with undocumented workers. The act enabled employers to avoid granting workers with perks, such as adequate wages and quality working and housing conditions, the program provided. If they complained or expressed interest in unionizing, some employers would exploit the legal status of undocumented workers with intimidation tactics that often-included threats of deportation.[12]

As the mistreatment of farmworkers by their employers increased, Cesar Chavez emerged as an opposing force during the 1960s. As a member of the Community Service Organization (CSO) in 1952, Chavez organized Mexican communities in California but departed a decade later due to the union's lack of concern for agricultural workers and immigrants in rural communities.[13] After the merger of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the National Farm Workers Association in 1965, Chavez recruited Dolores Huerta, Gilbert Padilla, and others to establish the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).[14] By the 1970s, the UFWOC conducted marches, boycotts, and strikes in major cities throughout the

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 96.

[12] Valdes, "Legal Status and the Struggles," 119.

[13] Matt Garcia, "Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* 9, no. 1 (May 2016): 2, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.217.

[14] Ibid., 3.

United States, such as New York City, Pittsburgh, and Detroit, that brought the struggles of farmworkers to the public eye. Though the UFWOC would change its name to the United Farmers Workers Union in 1972, the organization maintained its goal of fighting for the injustice encountered by farmworkers and their families.

Labor unions and organizations had a major impact on Mexican immigrant workers in Washington State during the 1960s and 1970s. The emergence of Cesar Chavez and the UFW in California inspired students and volunteers in Washington State to organize farmworkers in Eastern Washington. More importantly, the work of Chavez and the UFW led to the emergence of leaders, such as Tomás Villanueva, Guadalupe Gamboa, and Roberto Trevino, who advanced the unionization of agricultural workers in the Pacific Northwest and encompassed the Chicano Movement. Villanueva, Gamboa, and other Latino activists influenced the Movement by producing important Hispanic organizations, such as the United Mexican American Students (UMAS), the Brown Berets, and el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (MEChA), that advocated for justice for Latinos in cities and schools within the state. The UFW's organizing of thousands of agricultural workers fueled the Chicano Movement during the 1960s and enabled it to become the driving force for social justice throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.[15] The contributions of Chavez and the UFW proved to be an important role during the Chicano Movement and enabled future generations of Latino Americans to organize for change in Washington State.

Methodology

In order to gain more knowledge about the Bracero Program and the organizations that advocated for the rights of farmworkers during the latter part of the twentieth century, various

[15] James Michael Slone, "The Struggle for Dignity: Mexican-Americans in the Pacific Northwest, 1900-2000," (master's thesis, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2006), 45.

sources had to be utilized. For the most part, secondary sources, such as books and scholarly articles, provided the analysis of primary sources that developed evidence for the paper's argument. Arguments from scholars and historians enable a clearer understanding of how the history of the Bracero Program's implementation of Mexican immigrants into the US continues to develop. The evaluation of data, such as the number of workers the US contracted from 1947-1964 and the procedures needed for braceros to return home after their contracts ended, offered the general overview of the program. Other sources include oral histories of former braceros that were crucial for understanding the first-hand experiences that illustrated daily life in labor camps. Documentary films provide in-home interviews with former braceros, their spouses, and/or family members for those who have passed away.

The University of Washington's Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project provided most of the primary sources used in the paper. The project's collections, pictures, and documents examine the history of civil rights movements and important figures that have impacted Washington State. These sources are readily accessible on the project's website.[16] The website's Photos and Document Gallery section contains collections, such as the Rosalinda Guillen Collection and the Chicano/a Movement in Washington State Collections, that document protests and rallies for farmworkers from the 1970s. Newspapers, such as the *University of Washington Daily*, *Tri-City Herald*, and the UFW's *El Macriedo*, provide articles of news covered during the time period, such as the nation-wide grape boycott conducted by the UFW in the 1960s and the union's involvement in the Yakima Valley hop strikes during the early 1970s.

Additionally, the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project includes interviews with former labor organizers, such as Pedro Acevez, former president of MEChA (Movimiento

[16] *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, University of Washington. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/index.htm.

Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan de UW), Tomás Villanueva and Guadalupe Gamboa, founders of the UFW of Washington State, Rosalinda Guillen, a former community organizer for the Rainbow Coalition, and Michael Fox, a UFW attorney from 1969-1988. In addition to expressing their separate experiences on the agricultural fields of the west coast, Villanueva and Gamboa explain how the UFW's organization in California inspired them to create the UFW Cooperative in Washington State after a meeting with Chavez in 1966. These interviews provide first-person accounts of protesting methods organizations used to unionize farmworkers and the obstacles they overcame in Washington State directly from the people who organized.

Literature Review

The Bracero Program remains a controversial topic of discussion by historians since the program's termination in 1964. Scholarship focuses on the mistreatment of braceros in the US, namely in the Pacific Northwest and Southwest, and expresses how the UFW, MEChA, and other organizations organized braceros to improve their housing, wage, and work conditions. Although the program did not extend past 1947 in the Pacific Northwest, historians contextualize how braceros survived labor camps in the region, such as Washington State's Crewport Yakima Labor Camp and Oregon's Pendleton Labor Camp. Documentaries about the Bracero Program allow former braceros to reveal their stories through intimate interviews. In addition to illustrative stories, braceros explain their non-existent social lives and constant degradation from their employers that produced a sense of hopelessness. As contracts expired, scholars note that former braceros either created permanent settlements in areas of the Pacific Northwest, such as Yakima, Washington and Corvallis, Oregon or returned to their homes in Mexico.

In his chapter in the edited volume of *Memory, Community, and Activism*, Mario Campean focuses on experiences braceros encountered while living in labor camps in the Pacific

Northwest and provides a different perspective on immigrant labor in Washington State from 1940-1970. According to Campean, Mexican American and immigrant farmworkers have been central to the agricultural economy of the Pacific Northwest, since the turn of the twentieth century.[17] He acknowledges the importance of community braceros acquired during their stay and provides personal accounts of families that lived in labor camps in the Pacific Northwest. In the book, the author suggests that farmers originally built labor camps, such as the Crewport Yakima Labor Camp, for temporary residency but bracero families permanently inhabited them by the 1950s.[18]

Other scholars examine the impact of the Bracero Program on migrant workers in the Pacific Northwest. Professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington and cousin of UFW in Washington State co-founder Guadalupe Gamboa, Erasmo Gamboa remains an important figure in the University of Washington's activist history due to his efforts in the establishment of the university's Chicano Studies program during 1970.[19] For three decades, works stemming from his dissertation at the University of Washington in 1985 to his latest publication of *Bracero Railroaders* in 2018 solidify Gamboa as one of the leading scholars in the field. Other works by Gamboa include his book *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon* which focuses on the Bracero Program's impact in Oregon and includes photographs of Mexican families, either of former braceros or their family members, during the 1940s and present day.

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[17] Mario Compean, "Mexican American and Dust Bowl Farmworkers in the Yakima Valley: A History of the Crewport Farm Labor, 1940-1970," in *Memory, Community, and Activism: Mexican Migration and Labor in the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Jerry Garcia and Gilberto Garcia (East Lansing, MI: Julian Samora Research Institute, 2005), 153.

[18] Ibid., 168.

[19] Erasmo Gamboa, interview by Angelita Chavez and Trevor Griffey, November 1, 2005. *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, University of Washington. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/Erasmo_Gamboa.htm.

In his book *Mexican Labor and World War II,* Gamboa notes how scholars have explored Mexican labor and the bracero program, however, they have disregarded the Pacific Northwest compared to other regions of the United States, such as the Southwest. He argues that braceros throughout the US shared common experiences, such as living conditions and racial discrimination, but cold temperatures and lack of Spanish-speaking communities set the Pacific Northwest apart from other regions.[20] Gamboa states that farmers around the country subjected braceros to the same dual wage system and racial oppression, however, Northwestern braceros stood up to their employers and the federal government through strikes, rallies, and other forms of protest.[21] Although the book primarily focuses on labor during WWII, it provides a brief history of Washington State's labor culture and Mexican migration prior to the 1940s.

Works that include Ronald L. Mize and Alicia C.S. Swords's *Consuming Mexican Labor*, Barbara A. Driscoll's *The Tracks North*, Mireya Loza's *Defiant Braceros*, and Mario Jimenez Sifuentez's *Of Forests and Fields* examine the unionization of Mexican immigrant workers from 1960-1980 and how agricultural workers resisted exploitation from their employers. As Mize and Swords explain how farmers and communities humiliated men which demonstrated braceros' marginalization in both Mexico and the US, Driscoll focuses on the suffering braceros endured while performing non-agricultural labor on the country's railroad tracks.[22] Although Mexican American and immigrant labor elevated the Pacific Northwest into one of the country's most productive agricultural regions after World War II, Sifuentez argues that unions, such as the UFW and Pineros y Campesinos Unidos Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farm Workers

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[20] Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II,* xiii.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ronald L. Mize and Alicia C.S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (University of Toronto Press, 2011), 5.

United), assisted men in becoming managers of their labor after years of exploitation by white farm employers.[23]

While some scholars detail Cesar Chavez's life in a positive light, author Miriam Pawel and historian Mario Garcia analyze his controversial leadership qualities which led to the dismantling of UFW membership in the 1980s. More specifically, they explain how the UFW, under Chavez's leadership, struggled to transition from a social movement in the 1960s to a union in the late 1970s.[24] In his article "Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Movement," Garcia suggests that most of the union's frustration came from the volunteers. Contrary to unions who paid organizers to recruit workers and negotiate contracts, Garcia states that "the UFW depended on a volunteer system and a compensation structure that only paid ten dollars per week."[25]

In her book *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* and article "A Self-Inflicted Wound: Cesar Chávez and the Paradox of the United Farm Workers," Pawel expresses Chavez as a flawed figure and questions how the UFW failed to achieve their goal of creating a sustainable labor union for farmworkers.[26] Although Chavez's leadership style and control issues became controversial in later years, Pawel maintains that they appeared early on during the fight for farmworkers' rights. During a meeting in 1969, Filipino leaders of the UFW complained about Chavez's dictator-like demeanor that neglected their decision making in the organization. After dismissing their complaints that expressed a one-man union, Chavez stated that "Yes, that's

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[23] Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest*, 4.

[24] Garcia, "Cesar Chavez," 10.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Miriam Pawel, "A Self-Inflicted Wound: Cesar Chávez and the Paradox of the United Farm Workers," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 83 (2013): 154.

true. If I leave, I bet you that most of the volunteers who work with me would leave. They're here mostly because of me."[27] In a series of taped conversations, Pawel notes how disrespectful Chavez was towards his colleagues through his arrogant attitude rather than the iconic figure history has pertained him to be.

Bracero Program

In August of 1942, the federal governments of Mexico and the United States signed a wartime labor agreement which allowed Mexican men temporary employment within the US. Although the agreement was intended to serve as a wartime relief measure for temporary workers, the US Department of Agriculture suggests that arrangements continued until 1964 and contracted approximately 4.5 million workers.[28] The Bracero Program's implementation expanded workers into the agricultural fields and railroad tracks from the American Southwest to the Midwest. Within the first five years, the federal government recruited an estimated 51,000 braceros into the Pacific Northwest, with over 13,000 braceros inhabiting labor camps in Oregon and another 15,000 in Washington State.[29] According to the War Manpower Commission (WMC), the federal government guaranteed workers fair compensation for their labor which they defined as "the wage received by other workers performing the same work" and established that all farm growers must grant their workers with time and a half for work that exceeded eight hours in one day.[30] Unfortunately, the federal government recognized braceros as seasonal workers, therefore, this part of the clause did not apply to them.

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[27] Ibid., 157.

[28] Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor*, 3.

[29] Ibid., 5.

[30] Driscoll, *The Tracks North*, 104.

Mexico's economic disadvantages and high poverty resulted in Mexican men joining the Bracero Program in hopes of improving the financial situation for themselves and their families. As former braceros returned to their native country, they encouraged friends and family to acquire a contract since they had the opportunity to make more money working as a bracero in the US than a laborer in Mexico. In the documentary film *Bracero Stories,* former braceros Don Andrés de Guanajuato and Jorge Colima explained how they left Mexico for necessity rather than pleasure. Though Mexico had plenty of agricultural work during the 1940s, they stated that "money earned every day left no opportunity to save for comfort, strictly survival."[31] Before arriving in processing centers, men traveled from their homes to train stations in unfamiliar cities, such as Mexico City, Nogales, or Ciudad Juárez. In addition to relocating recruitment centers to different areas of Mexico, the Mexican government further inconvenienced migrants by charging processing and transportation fees which resulted in families selling furniture and livestock to afford costs.[32] Unfortunately, reaching processing stations did not always result in a contract for hopeful workers.

Upon their arrival, employees sprayed Mexicans and their belongings with dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), a liquid pesticide used for crops and bugs banned by the US in 1972, which killed potential diseases or viruses laborers could transfer across the border.[33] As days turned into weeks, braceros suffered financially and grew severely malnourished. In some cases, braceros ate banana and watermelon peels due to the lack of food recruitment

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[31] Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor*, 3.

[32] Ibid., 7.

[33] *Bracero Stories: A Video Documentary About the Experiences of Mexican Guest Workers in the United States*, directed by Patrick Mullins (Cherry Lane Productions, 2008), 00:13:34 to 00:13:51.

centers contained.[34] According to historian Barbara Driscoll, physicians from different organizations, such as the WMC and the Farm Security Administration (FSA), conducted physical exams at processing stations, while the US dispatched Public Health Service (PHS) personnel that supervised the official contracting of Mexican workers.[35] Along with receiving tests on their heart, lung, and other organs, braceros suffered from degrading examinations that included testicular, hernia, and prostate exams that required multiple braceros to stand nude inside a crowded room. As a determining factor for contract approval, physicians examined workers' hands for calluses since it ensured labor experience. After completing all exams, workers met with growers, Mexican government officials, and US Department of Labor representatives to sign their contract and be assigned an identification card which included the worker's name, date of birth, and the permit's expiration date.[36]

Once in labor camps, employers managed braceros' lives by subjecting them to intense surveillance. Among other things, the contracts entitled braceros a minimum wage, health care, adequate housing, and protection from social discrimination by employers. However, many employers illegally neglected these benefits by engaging braceros to twelve-hour workdays that consisted of manual agricultural work with unregulated hand tools that increased injuries. In addition, poor wages and living conditions led some braceros to an early contract withdrawal. When explaining the departure of braceros in 1945, the Chief of Operations at Portland stated that ten percent of all braceros contracted in the Pacific Northwest “were either missing or had

[34] *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*, directed by Gilbert Gonzalez, Vivian Price, and Adrian Salinas (Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2011), 00:12:25 to 00:13:20.

[35] Driscoll, *The Tracks North*, 55.

[36] Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor*, 11.

been granted early repatriation."[37] Farmers illegally substituted deductions, such as housing and non-occupational insurance, implemented in the contracts for higher deductions that included transportation and replenishment of farm tools supplies which limited braceros' weekly wages to as low as two dollars.[38] During an interview, former bracero Pedro Gamboa remembered receiving a paycheck of thirty dollars after working one hundred hours in a week on a fifty-cent hourly wage but also recalled that some workers would not receive a paycheck for weeks at a time.[39] Although Washington pea farmers boasted about their workers earning ninety dollars a week, they failed to explain that braceros had to work fifteen-hour workdays, seven days a week.[40]

For the most part, the Pacific Northwest consisted of converted Japanese internment camps, chicken coops, and gymnasiums in labor camps that housed up to thirty braceros per barrack.[41] Although military barracks and mess halls resembled the living conditions found in labor camps, braceros received minimal privacy and poor hygiene practices during their stay. In an interview, Tomas Villanueva recounted his time at the labor camps of Toppenish and Wapato, Washington in 1958. In addition to the one-room cabin that contained bunk beds and a wood stove, he stated that workers "had to retrieve water from a central water faucet and had only one outside shower for men and women."[42] Historian Erasmo Gamboa recounted his own experience

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[37] Gamboa, "The Bracero Program," 45.

[38] Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor*, 11.

[39] *Bracero Stories*, 00:45:15 to 00:45:59.

[40] Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor*, 12.

[41] Ibid., 18.

[42] Tomas Villanueva, Interviewed by Anne O'Neill and Sharon Walker, Toppenish, Washington, June 7, 2004. *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, University of Washington. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/villanueva.htm.

in the book *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon*. While living in the Golden Gate hop ranch in Independent, Oregon, Gamboa stated that the camp consisted of "long-wood buildings divided into separate cabins by unfinished lumber" that contained "a table with wooden benches, two bunks or metal folding cots with straw mattresses," and housed an estimated 1,500 adults.[43] Other farmers throughout the Pacific Northwest housed braceros in mobile tent camps or in permanent farm labor camps with aluminum-built barracks whose minimal ventilation caused poor air conditioning.[44] Although stores and community centers presented a recreational appearance, Gamboa stated that poor financial management led to sanitation setups near outhouses and garbage cans while other camps forced braceros to bathe by wells located near dirty ditches.[45] After witnessing the camps first-hand, a private citizen complained to Secretary of State Cordell Hull about the bracero living conditions in 1954. In a letter, the citizen stated that braceros "live in tents, full of holes, have only very small tin stoves for heating purposes and have no bathrooms."[46] While unclear if Hull responded, the letter expressed concerns for the livelihood of braceros neglected by their employers.

Irregular visits from Mexican and US officials allowed white farmers to continue their mistreatment towards braceros. In California's Imperial Valley labor camp, farmers provided one bucket of water at each end of the field but forbade braceros from drinking until they completed the day's work.[47] Lack of refrigerators within the barracks often resulted in food spoiling and

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[43] Erasmo Gamboa, "A Personal Search for Oregon's Hispanic History," in *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon (Essays and Recollections)* edited by Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn Buan (Portland, OR: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 14.

[44] *Harvest of Loneliness*, 00:28:15 to 00:28:51.

[45] Gamboa, "A Personal Search,"14.

[46] Driscoll, *The Tracks North*, 113.

[47] *Harvest of Loneliness*, 00:23:25 to 00:24:07.

illness. The most serious outbreak of food poisoning required the hospitalization of 300 men on a hop ranch near Grants Pass, Oregon in 1943.[48] The unfamiliarity braceros had with machinery and disregard of farmers for safety resulted in accidents that ranged from work activities to car accidents that occurred frequently within labor camps.[49] In some cases, transportation to and from work sites resulted in accidents and safety violations, since overworked or unqualified drivers appointed by farmers neglected mandatory stops to limit expenses. In one particular instance in 1963, an accident left 31 braceros dead after a bus collided with a moving train in Chualar, California.[50] In another instance, a driver who logged approximately 800 miles in twenty-four hours resulted in his falling asleep at the wheel and killing two people.[51] Although the US returned deceased bodies to Mexico for proper burial, costs became too expensive which left the federal government to bury braceros in the US.

As they endured a terrible quality of life and unfortunate accidents persisted within labor camps, braceros also encountered racial discrimination from their employers and local white communities. Similar to African Americans, owners of public venues, such as movie theaters, stores, and restaurants, placed signs that stated "no Mexicans or dogs allowed" that further proved the hatred enforced against the attendance of braceros.[52] During their time in the US, Mexican officials expected braceros to "be an example of honesty, refuse to spend money and

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[48] Gamboa, "The Bracero Program," 43.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor*, 15.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Daniel DeSiga, interview by Michael D. Aguirre, Seattle, WA, July 30-August 7, 2011. *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, University of Washington. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/DeSiga_interview.htm.

send it home, and refuse to cause trouble or strikes" which led to minimal resistance.[53] In the book *Tracks North,* Driscoll explained how a worker assigned to work in New Mexico obtained permission to visit Mexico, but when he returned "he found his belongings removed from his sleeping quarters and his contract terminated."[54] In addition to being fired, the bracero had to pay for his transportation back to Mexico.[55]

After long workdays, braceros returned to their barracks where they sang and laughed to pass the time and forget their sorrows. When contracts ended and braceros returned home, many reported discrimination, substandard conditions, and inadequate housing during their stay. Unfortunately, the Mexican government did not notify or report this to the US government. Rather, the Mexican government further stiffed returning braceros with additional costs by sending them back to areas where they signed their contract, such as Mexico City, instead of their agreed-upon home of origin.[56]

The United Farm Workers Union and Cesar Chavez

From 1947-1964, braceros endured unjust treatment from their employers. While some never returned after their first contract, the economic disadvantages braceros, such as Roberto Rosales, Pedro Llemada, and Pedro Gamboa, faced back home in Mexico resulted in their constant return to the US. Unions and strikes led by Hispanic activists, such as Ernesto Galarza, had occurred during the 1940s and 1950s, yet they remained ineffective until the emergence of Cesar Chavez in California during the 1960s. As a member of the Community Service

[53] Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor,* 16.

[54] Driscoll, *The Tracks North*, 116.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

Organization (CSO), a grassroots group founded by labor organizer Fred Ross, Chavez educated undocumented immigrants with legal and citizenship lessons and successfully organized poor Mexican Americans throughout California from 1952-1962.[57] Despite his work and strong leadership capabilities, Chavez departed from the organization on April 12, 1962 due to its inability to unionize agricultural workers in rural communities.[58]

Shortly after his departure, Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in 1962. After appointing himself as president of the NFWA, Chavez recruited members and appointed five vice presidents that included Gilbert Padilla and Dolores Huerta.[59] Shortly after the establishment of the organization, Chavez gained the trust of farmworkers by teaching California's controversial agricultural and farmworker history, specifically from the negligence of farmers towards braceros. Raised by Mexican sharecroppers himself, Chavez understood the difficulties farming produced. By explaining the state's past failures, he expected that workers would understand how unionization would improve their work conditions and quality of life.[60] From approaching workers as they walked away from the fields to passing out questionnaires that allowed them to understand worker needs, leaders of the NFWA used simple approaches that convinced Mexican workers to create a large and sustainable union.[61] By September 30, 1962, over 200 NFWA members had their first convention in an abandoned movie theater in Fresno, California. The union unveiled their symbolic flag, a black eagle

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[57] Pawel, "A Self-Inflicted Wound," 155.

[58] Garcia, "Cesar Chavez," 2.

[59] Ibid., 3.

[60] Bill Harris, "Chicano Has Become a Word to Describe a Movement," *Tri-City Herald*, April 1, 1971. http://depts.washington.edu/ufw/images/1971/4.1.71%20TCH%20p16%20all.jpg.

[61] Garcia, "Cesar Chavez," 2.

(signified pride and dignity) on a white circle (signified hope) in a red field (signified hard-work and sacrifice) and adopted their union slogan "viva la causa" or "long live the cause."[62]

On September 8, 1965, the NFWA accompanied the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), a union consisting of primarily Filipino American members, in forming a boycott against Delano grape growers due to their poor treatment of workers and inadequate wages.[63] According to historians Richard Jensen and John Hammerback, Chavez agreed since he believed "relatives in the area could provide necessary support and the number of workers that lived in that region" could strengthen the union.[64] After joining the strike on September 16, Chavez and NFWA gained support from churches, student volunteers and civil rights activists, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In fact, the African American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that fought against racial and ethnic prejudice to improve the lives of African Americans in the South provided an activist model that consisted of boycotts and strikes for Chavez and the UFW.[65]

The NFWA and AWOC drew national attention for farmworkers when they embarked upon a 340-mile pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento that symbolized the long historical road farmworkers have traveled alone.[66] During the strike, the two organizations merged and formed

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[62] "UFW Chronology," United Farm Workers, accessed January 29, 2020, https://ufw.org/research/history/ufw-chronology/

[63] "UFW Chronology."

[64] Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, eds., *The Words of Cesar Chavez*, 1st ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 3.

[65] Roger Bruns, *Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers*, Landmarks of the American Mosaic (Santa Barbra, CA: Greenwood, 2011), 42.

[66] "UFW Chronology."

the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), renamed the United Farm Workers of America in 1972, on August 22, 1966. [67] By organizing a national grape boycott, Chavez, grape strikers, and union volunteers extended the fight for farmworkers' rights from the field to the US consumers. The highly effective boycott that began in Delano, California spread to the east coast into states such as New York, Massachusetts, and Michigan. After losing millions of dollars over the span of five years, grape growers admitted defeat and the UFWOC officially ended the Delano grape strike in July of 1970. As result, over twenty-five growers signed contracts that provided over 70,000 farm workers with legal protection, strict pesticide safety requirements, fair wages and benefits that included a dollar wage increase.[68]

The UFW in Washington State

The progressive political mobilization of the 1960s and 1970s swept the United States with an optimistic future due to the emphasis placed on the human rights of minorities. The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, sex, and religion in the workplace as well as public facilities, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which discouraged racial discrimination in voting, marked the 1960s as a decade consisting of victories for minorities. Although overshadowed by these events, the passing of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 increased immigrant entry into the US and immediately readmitted former braceros back into agricultural labor. This act enabled the same exploitative white farmer behavior performed during the Bracero Program for over almost two decades to be reinstated into public law.

[67] Garcia, "Cesar Chavez," 1.

[68] Bruns, *Cesar Chavez*, 72.

As Cesar Chavez and the UFW contributed to the Chicano movement, popularly recognized as El Movimiento by Hispanic historians, by fighting for the civil rights of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in California, they simultaneously had a similar focus in Washington State. According to historians Daniel Estrada and Richard Santillan, the Chicano Movement emerged in both the Midwest and Pacific Northwest during the late 1960s and offered "Chicanos new political opportunities, challenges, and a cultural ideology." [69] The UFW's aggressive strikes and boycotts in California protested the low wages and maltreatment of farmers towards farmworkers which inspired Chicano activists in Washington State to protest.

From 1965-1970, Cesar Chavez frequently visited the Pacific Northwest, specifically in areas of Eastern Washington and Northern Oregon. During visits, Estrada and Santillan suggested that Chavez promoted "farmworker unionization and increased awareness of the inhumane working conditions on farms within the region."[70] Additionally, the union offered workshops at Washington State University that informed students about the UFW grape boycott, promoted anti-racist ideology which often featured César Chávez and classes that taught farmers "how to get along with their workers."[71] According to historian Oscar Rosales Castaneda, the UFW dominated activist strategies in Eastern Washington during the 1960s and helped the formation of other Latino activist and student organizations, such as MEChA, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), and the Mexican American Federation (MAF)[72] These

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[69] Daniel Estrada and Richard Santillan, "Chicanos in the Northwest and the Midwest United States: A History of Cultural and Political Commonality," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 6 (1997): 199.

[70] Ibid., 200.

[71] Bill Harris, "Farm-Worker Cooperation to be Taught," *Tri-City Herald,* December 2, 1971. http://depts.washington.edu/ufw/images/1971/12.2.71%20TCH%20p5.jpg

[72] Oscar Rosales Castañeda, "The Fusion of El Movimiento and Farm Worker Organizing in the 1960s," in Farm Workers in Washington State, *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project* (University of Washington: 2009).

student organizations based out of the University of Washington protested against the university for the introduction of Mexican-American studies and advocated for the development and political empowerment of communities in the Yakima Valley.[73]

While visiting a UFW meeting in California in 1966, union organizers recruited University of Washington students Guadalupe Gamboa and Tomas Villanueva to form a union for farmworkers in Washington State. According to Gamboa, the federal government intended to aid families in Washington's Yakima Valley with programs, such as the War on Poverty, that aimed to decrease the national poverty rate; however, leaders neglected worker organization and the formation of unions.[74] Driven by their personal experiences of mistreatment by white farmers, Gamboa and Villanueva became interested in helping families and farmworkers. As a former agricultural worker himself, Villanueva devoted his life to organizing farmworkers throughout the Yakima Valley and contributing to the Chicano movement. After various efforts to create a union in Washington frustrated the Latino activists, Villanueva and Gamboa established the United Farm Workers Cooperative (UFWC) in 1967 in Toppenish, Washington.

The UFWC originally served as a farmer's cooperative that defended agricultural workers when farmers neglected to pay adequate wages and provide worker's compensation but transitioned into a community that facilitated Chicano student enrollment at the University of Washington.[75] Since the UFWC received no governmental assistance, Villanueva charged members a small fee that paid for their share into the union which helped build a store whose proceeds funded many protests. By 1968, the UFWC received legal representation when attorney

[73] Slone, “The Struggle for Dignity,” 39.

[74] Gamboa, interview.

[75] Castañeda, “The Fusion of El Movimiento.”

Michael Fox, most notably recognized for his efforts in *Garza v. Patnode* (1971) in which he successfully argued that farmworkers had the right to organize, connected with Villanueva and Gamboa.[76] With the help of Fox, the UFWC advocated for the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1968 which provided legal counsel to Latinos families and farmworkers in Yakima.[77]

Yakima Strikes

The activist and educational efforts made by the UFW provided Chicanos in Washington State with skills that organized farmworkers and opposed farmer exploitation during the Yakima Valley hop strikes of 1971. Similar to the Delano grape boycotts that originated six years prior, the Yakima Valley hop strikes erupted when farmers neglected the improvement of working conditions and enforced seven-day workweeks without overtime pay.[78] With an approximate "30,000 Chicanos permanently resided in the area and 40,000 during the harvesting season due to workers migrating from southern regions, such as California and Texas," the Yakima Valley consisted of the largest population of Chicano residents in the state.[79] When labor organizers Robert Trevino and Guadalupe Gamboa arrived in the Yakima Valley, farmworkers lacked job security and negotiation privileges that fought for better wages, insurance for hospitalization, and hourly schedules. In 1970, Washington State laws did not require farmers to know the legal status of their workers nor required them to report if an illegal immigrant worked on their ranch.

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[76] Michael J. Fox, interview by Josue Q. Estrada, Seattle, WA, July 17, 2014. *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, University of Washington. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/fox.htm

[77] Slone, "The Struggle for Dignity," 52.

[78] Oscar Rosales Castañeda, "UFWOC Yakima Valley Hop Strikes," in Farm Workers in Washington State. *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, University of Washington.

[79] "UFWOC in the Yakima Valley," *UW Daily*, May 12, 1972. https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/images/mecha/news/1972/9-May-72%20Daily%2014%20crop.jpg.

To make matters worse, court orders prevented labor organizers from arriving on labor camps to inform workers about unions.[80] Therefore, Trevino and Gamboa persevered and unionized workers which allowed them to reap the benefits a union provided and regain their dignity.

Although the strike originated in Granger, Washington, news spread into ranches in cities throughout the valley, such as Sunnyside, Toppenish, and Mabton. Labor organizer Roberto Trevino gained support by encouraging everyday civilians to visit the hop ranches on the weekend to "see how people really have to live."[81] Contrary to the Delano grape strike, it did not take five years for farmers to comply with worker demands. According to a reporter from the *Tri-City Herald*, hop strikes on the Alexander ranch "ended with an agreement to negotiate a contract for their 200 workers after a short three-day strike by the UFWOC" in September 1970.[82] Although some growers refused to hire those who engaged in union activity, the UFWC organizers successfully negotiated perks that included the rehiring of strikers, a two-dollar wage increase and two fifteen-minute breaks.[83]

Activism at UW

From 1965-1970, college students from the University of Washington supported the UFW grape boycott. Their efforts forced the university to ban grape sales on campus and extended the boycott to grocery stores within the community by 1968.[84] In an article in the *UW Daily* in 1969, journalist Cathleen Curtis explained the importance of condemning grape sales for

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[80] Ibid.

[81] "United Farm Workers in the Yakima Valley," *UW Daily*, May 11, 1971. https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/images/mecha/news/1971/11-May-71%20Daily%204%20crop.jpg

[82] "Chavez Halts Talks, Hop Strikes Expected," *Tri-City Herald*, June 27, 1971. http://depts.washington.edu/ufw/images/1971/6.27.71%20TCH%20p1.jpg

[83] Rosales Castañeda, "UFWOC Yakima Valley Hop Strikes."

[84] Slone, "The Struggle for Dignity," 67.

the Latino student community when she stated that the "Mexican Americans, being largely of farmworker families, identify completely with the strikers and thus we are the real issue at stake. Not grapes."[85] Due to the three meals farmworkers received a day, a journalist from the *UW Daily* published an article that embraced students to pass up a minimum of three meals on the following day, rather than donating food money to the UFW.[86] By selling grapes on campus, the student's believed they disregarded the experiences of farmworkers, thus further supporting the behavior of farmers.

As some students continued the pursuit of stopping grape sales, other student activists, such as Erasmo Gamboa, Robert Trevino, and Antonia Salazar, fought for the integration of ethnic studies into UW's courses. Like the activist approaches of African Americans that inspired the UFW grape boycotts in the 1960s, Gamboa, Trevino, and Salazar organized the almost non-existent Hispanic student population at the University of Washington and proposed a nonviolent approach to enforce their message. Students conducted walkouts by walking through hallways and creating noise that disrupted classrooms which resulted in the involvement of the school's administration. According to the *UW Daily*, one disruption resulted in a violent arrest when a Security Division officer threw a demonstrator against a door after "thirteen students forced themselves intentionally and violently into the classroom."[87] Their actions resulted in the university taking disciplinary actions and expelling Erasmo Gamboa, Carl Cunningham, Jim Emerson, and other participants; however, all were reinstated after student complaints. Students

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[85] Cathleen Curtis, "Mexican-Americans Tell Opposition to Grapes," *UW Daily*, January 22, 1969. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/images/mecha/news/1969/Crop%20Daily%20Jan_22_1969%20p%201.jpg

[86] "Grape Boycotters Want You to Fast," *UW Daily*, May 28, 1970. https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/images/mecha/news/1970/28-May-70%20Daily%2016%20crop.jpg

[87] Bruce Olsen, "Hearing Resumes Today; Defense Case Continues," *UW Daily*, April 8, 1969. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/images/mecha/news/1969/Crop%20Daily%20Apr_8_1969%20p%201.jpg

risked being jailed, losing their college enrollment, and damaging future careers in order to enforce their need for more ethnic courses and students on UW's campus.

Conclusion

The contributions of Cesar Chavez and the UFW in the 1960s allowed the Chicano Movement to become a political movement for Mexican Americans in the Pacific Northwest. In the following years, their efforts to unionize farmworkers in Washington State inspired a new generation of Mexican American activists and created a path for the development of future Latino social organizations and labor movements. Through strikes, boycotts, and other forms of protest, the UFW brought the predicament of farmworkers out of the fields and into the consciousness of everyday citizens. Chavez's goal of organizing farmworkers created a domino effect of Latino activism with the development of the UFW Cooperative in Washington State in 1966, the Yakima hop strikes in 1971, and student activism in the University of Washington in the 1970s.

By re-examining the Bracero Program, one can truly understand the importance that the UFW meant for the Hispanic population on a local and national level. From 1947-1964, the Bracero Program employed a flood of Mexican migrant workers into different regions of the US that alleviated WWII's depletion of agricultural workers. The program's implementation, however, provided farmers with an exploitable workforce that ignored worker rights. The distinctive relationship between employer and employee posed devastating issues, such as poor wages and sub-standard working and housing conditions, for bracero workers in the agricultural fields of the United States and continued for undocumented Mexican workers after the termination of the program. Since its termination, the Bracero Program has remained a controversial topic of discussion by historians. However, much of the scholarship requires

further attention. For instance, the presence of women has been extensively neglected from this history. Although the role of women, specifically Dolores Huerta, during the Chicano Movement has been heavily researched by scholars, the role of women both in the United States and Mexico during the duration of the Bracero Program suggests otherwise.

Although UFW membership has declined since the 1970s due to the migration of members to other unions, the accomplishments made by the organization can be felt to this day. Without the acknowledgment of the union's pursuit for proper farmworker organizing, the history of Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers in the United States would remain unwritten. Since the 1970s, numerous organizations within Washington State, such as the National Farm Worker Ministry and Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, continue the efforts made by the UFW three decades ago. Currently, the United States has two guest worker programs that enable temporary work for immigrants up to a year. Whereas the H-2A program refers to agricultural work, the H-2B program pertains to nonagricultural work.[88] According to Farmworker Justice, a nonprofit organization that works with farmworkers and organizations, these programs allow employers to "obtain permission to hire foreign workers on temporary visas and 'promise' to meet requirements regarding recruitment, wages and/or working conditions."[89] The names of guestworker programs have changed overtime; however, their similarities to the Bracero Program create a fearful future for immigrant labor in the United States. As long as the US continues to implement worker programs that exploit the rights of laborers to fulfill the country's labor demands, it is safe to say that there will always be an organization fighting for the rights of the worker.

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[88] "Guestworker Programs," Farmworker Justice, Accessed March 2, 2020. https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/advocacy-and-programs/guestworker-programs.

[89] "Guestworker Programs."

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