

**Social Workers and the Bracero Program:
Working Within Migration Discourse and Conflicting Policy**

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ABSTRACT

Prior to the formal end of the Bracero Program in 1964, different factions sought to influence federal legislation according to their own interests. While many American newspapers represented the Program's closure as a peaceful shift from hiring Mexican to domestic workers, the dialogue between growers, workers, social advocates, and others reflected dissonance. Although growers could no longer contract braceros, they continued to hire many Mexican workers illegally, a continuation of employment patterns during the Program. I investigate the social healthcare and education programs promoted by social workers as they introduced reform to Mexican laborers through grassroots movements, especially as migrant labor conditions deteriorated in the 1950s and 1960s when Mexico's ability to protect its citizens declined. I reviewed newspapers, policy papers, Congressional debates, legislation, and the documents that social workers retained. The paper binds the discourses of social workers with the legislation that often ignored their interests. Despite their ineffectiveness in shaping policy, social workers interpreted legislation in ways designed to protect all workers, regardless of their legal status. This paper argues that social workers played on sympathies that the American public held for domestic workers and children to shape immigration and farm labor legislation in a way that would improve the workspace of all farm workers. By circumventing more controversial topics and focusing on the distresses of domestic migrant workers and youths without education and healthcare, social workers implemented public services attended by all agricultural workers, regardless of domestic or immigrant status. Their efforts helped lay the groundwork for community networks.

KEYWORDS

Social workers, healthcare, education, youth, Wyckoff collection

INTRODUCTION

The Mexican Farm Labor Program, more often referred to as the Bracero Program, mostly reflected the legislative interests of growers. From 1942 to 1964, Mexico and the United States issued temporary work permits to migrants recruited from Mexico, who became known as braceros. During this time, various amendments affected the rights and experiences of migrant workers. United States government policy and corporate interest in Mexico accelerated migration. Various literature points to the disconnection of larger political and economic factors that forced displacement of workers (Kunkel 1965, Taylor 1972, Karim 1986, Wright 2005). Public Law 78, an amendment to the Bracero Program agreements passed in 1951, changed recruiting from a bilateral responsibility to a unilateral one. The United States recruited from the Mexican-American border rather than setting up recruitment stations in the heartland of Mexico, which had been the previous policy of the Mexican government. This brought tens of thousands of agricultural workers into close proximity of the United States, which increased illegal crossings. Many of these workers had experienced drought and were unable to pay off loans borrowed at the beginning of the season (Kim 2004, Wright 2005). Braceros travelled to the United States to pay off debts in order to keep working on their own land (Wright 2005). With the flood of both illegal and legal workers entering into the United States, farmowners benefited from the huge pool of cheap laborers. Farmers overwhelmingly supported the Bracero Program and bitterly fought for unrestricted regulation of hiring practices and loose border patrol. However, other interest groups contested the dominance of farmers in policy formation.

Interest groups, including farmers, contractors, labor unions, government officials, social workers, border patrol, and migrant workers, among others, voiced very different opinions to Congress as they pushed legislation to serve their needs (Library of Congress, 1980). People who fought to maintain rights for agricultural workers represented labor unions, social workers, and migrant workers, but their objectives often tangled and contradicted one another. Agricultural workers themselves consisted of a diverse group of people, with different and even opposing interests within the group (Ngai 2005). Other Mexican-Americans resented braceros and illegal Mexican workers for lowering wages (Ngai 2005). Although many social workers intended to help domestic agricultural workers retain jobs in the United States, they also acknowledged that many Mexican nationals faced worse conditions than domestically hired hands, and they

sympathized with those in need regardless of their legal or illegal status (Tomasek 1961). This suggests the need to distinguish between the goals that social workers articulated and the steps they took to achieve their objectives.

Instead of rehashing issues brought about by labor unions, border patrol, contractors, and farmowners, this study investigates the common interests of migrant workers and social workers, in order to gauge the means by which social workers attempted to improve migrant experience (Kandel and Kao 2001, Tomasek 1961). Unlike labor unions that focused on improving the working conditions of migrant workers, social workers interacted with braceros on very personal matters such as health and family issues. They then presented their knowledge to the American public as well as Congress to sway legislation with moral guidelines (Valdés 2000). The dissolution of legal rights held by braceros during the tail-end of the Bracero Program rallied many social workers to advocate for civil rights for all United States residents, both legal and illegal. To evaluate social workers' effectiveness in protecting migrant interests, I analyzed Congressional debates, policy papers, and newspapers to trace social workers' actions during the end of the Bracero Program, when migrant workers faced even greater challenges to social and economic independence. Although social workers were not as directly successful in influencing legislative policy relative to many larger institutions such as labor unions, they helped mold American perceptions of migrant workers as subjects worthy of legislative protection.

METHODS

I examined primary sources and conducted research in three areas. I interpreted the American public's understanding of the Bracero Program, as represented in newspaper articles published during the 1960s and early 1970s. These newspapers include the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wallstreet Journal*, and *Washington Post*, acquired from the ProQuest's historical newspaper database. Second, I drew from LexisNexis Congressional to trace policy papers, policy debates, and legislation that changed the Bracero Program in the 1950s, during which legal and illegal immigration reached its height. This allowed me to construct a comprehensive narrative of the steps leading to the passage of specific pieces of legislation. The purpose was to give a clear sense of the issues social workers engaged in. I accessed policy papers to analyze the different factions represented in policy debates, and then compared those discourses that were represented and those that were not represented to actual legislation. I also

investigated the laws that dissolved the Program and how different factions dealt with the changes. Finally, I focused on the role of social workers in appealing to the American public and to policymakers to aid migrant workers.

I explored the voices of social workers in congressional hearings, legislative debate, policy journals, and newspaper articles. Since the closing chapters of the Bracero Program propagated enormous change for many agricultural workers, this study focuses on the activity of social workers recorded from 1950 to the late 1960s. Most of this portion of the research drew from archival sources found in Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, which houses a large collection of social workers' newsletters, pamphlets, personal correspondence, and news clippings. The Florence Wyckoff collection was my key source for the perspectives of social workers. Mrs. Wyckoff led many activist groups on the local, state, and national level to assist migrant workers. Most of her collection highlights the events prior to the end of the Bracero Program in 1964 and the immediate years after. Her collection contained committee agendas, notes and letters to legislators and other social workers, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, health studies, and other important pieces of literature worthwhile to academic research. The narratives from her collection provide concrete evidence of the discourses to which social workers subscribed. Public conception of migrant workers influenced policy. This meant that all of the additional concern for migrant workers translated into better legislative protection for them. Their successes as aides to migrant laborers relied on the level of public commitment to community programs. Therefore, supplemental material from newspapers and the policy aspects contextualized the contributions that social workers made in navigating within policy formation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The lack of concern for braceros and other migrant workers conveyed by the American public precluded policy makers from creating programs that targeted migrant workers. Selections from newspapers reinforced the perspectives that the American public held over braceros and other migrant workers. Americans viewed workers as an eclectic group of young and old, single and family men ("Smiling Braceros" 1951 Sep 22, Dredge 1954 Feb 7). Given the opportunity of work in the United States through the Program, many candidates travelled from all over Mexico to meet recruiters at the northern border (Kim 2004, Library of Congress 1980). Americans

assumed that braceros willingly travelled to the United States for better wages and ignored broader economic and political factors that forced displacement. (Wright 2005) Americans concluded that Mexican workers toiling in the lowest paying fields in America generated higher earnings than if they stayed in Mexico and therefore believed that all immigrant workers should minimize complaints about their working conditions (Dredge 1954 Feb 7, Wilhelm 1954 Feb 14). Working with these attitudes, social workers sought to serve the immediate needs of migrant workers by refocusing the perceptions Americans held over migrant workers.

Social workers focused most of their efforts on migrant health and education. With policy consistently favoring growers and leaving workers unprotected from declining wages and expensive yet unsanitary living conditions, social workers began campaigning to improve working conditions for workers. In the context of the American public's general indifference to migrant workers in the 1950s and legislative policy that blocked justice for migrant workers, social workers sought to involve the American public through family, health, and education issues. They backed their sympathies for migrant workers by citing crucial economic developments that would benefit a democratic society of both American citizens and Mexican workers.

Newspapers: A Public Perspective of the Political Arena

Articles published in the 1950s emphasized the diversity of braceros, and newspapers pointed to individual interests as a dividing factor within the group. The successes or catastrophes of their experience depended upon the actions of each person. It was expected that the braceros were happy and willing to set foot in the country. As the *Los Angeles Times* noted in September of 1951, braceros disembarked the train with smiles on their faces. If they felt sick or missed home, they could obtain a 45 day leave of absence and return home to plant corn in their fields in Mexico ("Smiling Braceros" 1951 Sep 22). Contempt gained greater momentum among Mexican workers, domestic workers and American citizens in the 1950s. The *Los Angeles Times* again defended the piety of some braceros as family men devoted to sending remittances to their wives and children but also illustrated the young and the unmarried as reckless individuals dedicated to decadent spending on clothes and drink (Dredge 1954 Feb 7). Other newspapers echoed similar issues, oftentimes focusing on the positive attitudes of braceros, but also highlighting the rise in crime that these foreigners brought into agricultural society. The

Washington Post reported similar incidences of success through self reliance. The *Post* drew upon imagery of dirtied homesick faces, driven to the United States due to high unemployment rates in their hometowns (Wilhelm 1953 Feb 14). Honest braceros looked towards America as a momentary buffer against poverty, soon to be rewarded with economic gains when they returned home. Irresponsible braceros turned to America as an adventure. According to the newspapers, few braceros formed long term labor goals or relations to each other due to their temporary stay in the United States, and instead braceros turned to self control to overcome tribulations. Growers received similar treatment, in that newspapers also analyzed their activities through narrow case by case reports.

Newspapers defended growers against the increasing accusations that they preferred Mexican workers over others by pointing to the sparse evidence of grower exploitation. The *Los Angeles Times* confirmed in 1954 that farmers sometimes hired illegal immigrants knowingly and that farmers should receive harsher punishment for their actions. Criticizing the abuses of growers, the *Los Angeles Times* pointed to a case in Los Angeles County where the Sugden couple “shielded and concealed wetbacks” and paid their workers a third of the going wage in Yuma Valley under constant threat of reporting them to the immigration law offices (“Wetback Case” 1954 Feb 13). At the same time, the *Los Angeles Times* continued to emphasize the rarity of such cases, pointing out that exploitation of illegal workers stemmed from dishonest members of society. The *Washington Post* denied the assertion by the Mexican government that American farmowners widely abused Mexican workers. They fired back that cases of “economic or social discrimination against braceros in the American Southwest” were merely “untypical” of employer behavior (Wilhelm 1954 Feb 14). Newspapers, however, failed to focus on the illegal immigrants in the fields.

Instead of narrating the problem of exploited workers within the context of political sanction for farmowners, newspapers avoided criticizing farmowners by placing direct blame on the Mexican government. In 1953, the United States began recruiting from the American side of the border against Mexico’s wishes. Newspapers blamed the spike in illegal immigration rates on the Mexican government’s refusal to continue authorizing the recruitment of legal braceros from their nation. The Mexican government overstepped their authority in the United States and refused work with the United States unless given full veto power over the terms of braceros working in the United States (Gruson 1952 Aug 13, Gruson 1952 Dec 25). Newspapers failed to

mention United States policy that during the 1940s, border patrol apprehended and carted migrants to the border, legalized their stay in the United States, and then returned them to the farms (Martin 2003). In 1951, President Truman, pressured by the Mexican government and domestic labor unions, urged Congress to control illegal immigration into the United States. Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1952 which imposed fines on employers who knowingly hired illegal workers, but it also included a proviso which dismissed hiring illegal laborers as equivalent to harboring illegal aliens. The miniscule penalties held against farmowners for hiring unauthorized Mexican workers meant they continued to hire illegal workers with impunity (Martin 2003). The continual flow of illegal immigrants embarrassed the Mexican government, and the Mexican government pressured the United States government to curb illegal immigration by delaying the renewal of a new labor contract agreement in 1953 and banned Mexican immigrants from certain counties notorious for abusing workers (Calavita 1992, Snodgrass 2010). Newspapers, instead, represented the decision to hire unauthorized workers as a personal and independent choice, rather than pointing to the powerful lobbying power of farmowners in Congress and the subsequent legislation that enabled their choice to hire illegal immigrants.

Newspapers correctly assessed the depression in wages, but misjudged the extent of the diminishing quality of life for all workers. Wages fell, especially for domestic workers whose contracts often did not require food, transportation, shelter, or minimal healthcare as the Bracero Program outlined. Newspapers placed the blame on individual farmers who chose to exploit workers as the pitfall of the Bracero Program, rather than the institutionalization of bringing in temporary labor as the cause for greater poverty. As contemporary studies assessed, the Bracero Program gave clearance for farmers to hire illegal immigrants, and Congress deliberately crafted the legislation to minimize penalty against farmowners who hired illegal immigrants (Kim 2004, Grove 1996, Snodgrass 2010).

Newspapers tended to address the Bracero Program in binary terms consisting of only braceros and farmowners. Articles cultivated stories of diverse braceros and portrayed them as individuals making impressive monetary gains and others as irresponsible spenders enjoying their higher wages. Editorials described bracero dress, food, mess halls, and other daily happenings. They evaluated the quality of the bracero experience as based strongly on personal initiative and choice. Newspapers failed to construct the political backdrop that many braceros

concerned themselves with. Although some braceros contently settled on their wages and carried out their contracts dutifully, many others realized that many farmowners consistently deprived them of basic rights. Common violations of contracts included inadequate amounts of food, rotting food, insufficient healthcare, and poor hygienic conditions such as the lack of bathrooms and sinks (House of Representatives 1951). Even Congress recognized these violations, and congressional debates reflected the discontent of many agricultural workers while farmowners vied for loose regulation over agricultural practices.

Efforts to amend the Mexican Farm Labor Program instigated debate over whose interests Congress should honor. In the months following the passage of P.L. 78 on July 12, 1951, Congress invited various factions to express concerns and grievances experienced by migrant workers and farmers. Over multiple hearings during the winter of 1950, farmers, members of the state department, immigration services, representatives from the department of agriculture, and other representatives of various commissions stated their opinions and gave recommendations to the House and Senate. The majority of testimonies centered on the need to accommodate for farmers hiring braceros, who claimed that American agriculture would come to a standstill from the shortage of domestic laborers. In a statement by a farm manager in Louisiana, George B. Franklin complained that bureaucratic paperwork confused farmowners, and therefore sometimes led to the employment of undocumented workers (House of Representatives 1951). Farmers also disparaged over stringent contract obligations, such as the responsibility of providing transportation, healthcare, and housing for braceros when many domestic workers did not receive these benefits (House of Representatives 1951). Although grower perspective dominated the discussion, small farmowners and people concerned with the condition of migrant workers interjected with accounts of labor exploitation sanctioned by government regulation. A small farmowner testified that the Bracero Program largely benefited corporate farmowners who held strong ties with contractors and left small farmers competing for few available workers (House of Representatives 1951). The Subcommittee on Migratory Labor stressed the need for adequate wages and reasonable housing for all workers (House of Representatives 1951). Union leader Ernesto Galarza condemned the exploitation of Mexican workers and addressed farmowners' flagrant attempts to hire illegal immigrants over braceros and domestic workers (Senate 1952). Despite Congress' acknowledgement of their concerns, the final legislation exhibited loopholes in employment regulation.

Congress responded to American concerns of the shortage of workers by sanctioning de facto illegal immigration. As reflected in newspapers, Americans who believed that there was a shortage of domestic workers tolerated braceros. Some Americans who sympathized with the migrant workers even accepted illegal workers if the higher American wages were absolutely necessary to save themselves from abject poverty in their hometowns. In 1953, the *Washington Post* described the chaos at the recruiting stations at the border after months of drought in Mexico. “Thousands of immigrants from southern Mexico wait to be recruited. When rejected, they swim across... Hunger and employment drive them to cross” (Wilhelm 1953 June 7). The *New York Times* shared similar views, and in January 1954, the newspaper stated that the farmers relied on “impoverished migrant farm workers” who shared no protection from the federal government, earned the lowest wages, and faced deportation even before collecting any wages (Hill 1954 Jan 31). These sympathies for the condition of Mexican workers translated to the perpetual lenience towards farmowners. Growers expressed their fears of unpicked harvests laying to waste and the surge in food prices the growing population would have to face (House of Representatives 1951). Yet the final verdict of the law punished the immigrants for crossing the border instead of penalizing the employers of the illegal immigrants.

Congress did little to obstruct the hiring of illegal immigrants by farmowners. The American public opposed the hiring of illegal immigrants since they robbed domestic workers of opportunities and lowered the going wages, and Congress crafted legislation to scorn growers for hiring illegal immigrants but failed to incorporate stern enough penalties to discourage growers from unlawful conduct. In section 503 of P.L. 78, the law vaguely references that employers must make “reasonable efforts... to attract domestic workers” before hiring foreign workers (Public Law 78 1951). Growers interpreted the “reasonable effort” in subjective terms and loosely followed the guidelines (García 1980). To further protect the interest of growers, Congress approved the Immigration and Nationality Act, better known as the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952. In an amendment of the act known as the Texas Proviso, the act declared “harboring or concealing” an illegal immigrant a felony, but hiring them did not constitute as such (Immigration and Nationality Act 1952). Growers possessed a stronghold over policy formation, but social workers attempted to restructure public opinion of migrant workers to invoke citizen response.

In the 1950s, the American public did not view the growth of labor movements as a major force for change. (Tomasek 1961, Gilmore and Gilmore 1963, Kim 2004). The public's interest barely peaked when the agreement terminated. As the *Wall Street Journal* observed, the debates preceding the end smoothed after the official end. Domestic workers welcomed the end of imported labor while growers predicted that new workers would drag out the harvest season due to their inefficiencies. Despite optimism by domestic workers and pessimistic outlooks by farmowners, the promise of technology on farms meant fewer hired hands needed on the farm but at high productivity rates to prevent food prices from soaring (Lawson 1967, Bylin 1967). This satisfied the average consumer whose memories of the food shortages and outrageous inflation during the Great Depression played vividly in their minds. Nevertheless, the number of illegal immigrants continued to steadily increase while the number of deportations remained consistently low (U.S. Department of Justice 1979). Nevertheless, Americans viewed migrants as beneficiaries in the United States since they could earn higher wages in the United States than Mexico, and therefore made little effort to rally Congress in order to provide benefits for migrant workers (Picket 1964). Without the aid of the American public, the social workers' influence over policy formation remained weak throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. To compensate for their weak impact in Congress, social workers provided relief to migrant workers without the help of the federal government and called upon the American public to assist in these programs. Although interest remained low throughout the 1950s, social workers provided the groundwork for networking and planning within the migrant community.

Social Workers Mitigate Change

Rather than simply advocating for amendments to legislation, social workers initiated change by working within the framework of policy and by raising their own funds to help migrant workers. They framed legislation intended for specific groups of people to benefit all workers, domestic and foreign, legally or illegally contracted. However, they still needed the cooperation of public and private donors and volunteers, so social workers sought to change the attitudes of the American public. Instead of focusing on the migrant experience as isolated incidences of self control, as some newspapers illustrated, social workers sought to implicate migrant workers into the lives of the American public. Workers handled food, and the poor living and hygienic conditions that migrant workers suffered from could lead to public health

hazards (Fuller 1959, Greenfield undated, Harper 1969, California Department of Public Health 1963, McAllister 1953). Uneducated workers and neglected children of migrant workers led to higher rates in crime. The absence of education and health programs became a disadvantage to the community. By citing legislation that set standards for education and public health, social workers succeeded in garnering attention for the need to meet the standards outlined by regulations. They depended heavily on volunteer groups to catalyze education programs for migrant workers such as church leaders, the Parent-Teacher Association, nurses and clinicians, non-government organizations, and other volunteer societies and individuals.

Youth education

Many social workers portrayed migrant children as the victims of displacement and poor education. When migrants moved to follow the crops, they withdrew their children from school to travel with them (McAllister 1953). This served as the hook to involve the community in building better schools for otherwise neglected children, and they articulated the need for community participation. In numerous meeting agendas, the speakers addressed the need to systematically include the local community and build public concern (California Youth Authority 1958, Committee on Families 1959). The Federal Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth (FICCY) sought to interest local participation by publishing poignant stories of the tribulations of migrant youth. Their pamphlets included tales of poor migrant children torn from elementary and middle school friends before the beginning of summer, then rejoining their classmates in late fall, weeks behind on school work. Instead of enjoying summer vacation or a full school year, they labored in the fields alongside their parents (FICCY 1955).

Social workers cited substandard educational conditions to justify programs committed to social change. They named the Fair Labor Standards Act as the standard for education unmet by public schools in high migrant population areas. Amended in 1949, federal law prohibited the employment of children during school hours (Fair Labor Standards 1949). By referring to this piece of legislation, social workers legitimized their cause by targeting migrant *families*, not braceros who were mostly men travelling without children (Calavita 1992). This evaded the issue of educating illegal immigrants with public funds, yet when they implemented afterschool tutoring programs, they often served to educate migrant adults as well. To attract project funding for education, social workers named various benefits that schools would bring to non-migrant

members of the community. Not only would they foster learning and creativity, they would form an integrated society which would promote public safety and American commerce. Many studies concluded that lack of instruction led to juvenile delinquency, and schools would prevent children from crime that might harm the non-migrant community (California Youth Authority 1958). Other claims provided more positive incentive for community cooperation. According to the Council of Church Women which worked closely with migrants in Hoopeston, Illinois, non-migrants who learned to speak just one hundred words of Spanish could cater to migrants and therefore expand their own business (FICCY 1955). Thus, their efforts targeted migrant children, but it alluded to the interaction between migrants and non-migrants. Educating children became a platform for the introduction of even greater social problems.

Healthcare for migrant families and individuals

Just as social workers advocated a need for better education among the children of migrant workers, they also portrayed children as victims of poor healthcare. Many migrants could not afford health services. Nor did they have the time or means to visit hospitals, which seldom were located in rural regions (Harper 1969). Additionally, migrant families often crossed state borders, so migrants could not establish permanent residency. Nearly all county hospitals turned away migrants who did not live in the state, let alone another country (Greenfield undated, Harper 1969). Social workers pointed to the travesty of the situation for children, who did not choose to be sons or daughters of migrant workers but experienced exclusion from healthcare because their parents migrated seasonally (O'Rourke undated, Harper 1969). With the back-breaking work extracted from migrant laborers and the low pay offered to them, social workers argued that communities owed migrant laborers some social services. Thus, the implementation of health and childcare facilities in Fresno, California under the Rural Health and Education Committees was just one example of communities' responsibility to assist migrant workers (FICCY 1955). Clinics originally dedicated to serving children ended up providing healthcare for adults as well, since many nurses and volunteers found themselves unable to turn patients away (Greenfield undated).

Although pamphlets distributed to the public tended to celebrate the accomplishments achieved in developing education and health care facilities for migrant families, FICCY committee reports tended to reflect a bleaker reality. In a note addressing a future meeting with

Governor Earl Warren of California, Wyckoff disclosed her intentions to wholeheartedly support the Governor's plan for education. However, she remained skeptical that the boost in education would translate to better opportunities for many rural migrants, since too many regions lacked proper funding (Wyckoff undated). Although community aid for migrants targeted families, social workers also acknowledged the problems that braceros and illegal migrant workers faced. However, the law lacked enforcement provisions, allowing contractors to continually place braceros in dilapidated shacks often without toilets or sanitary facilities for washing hands (McAllister 1953). In a report filed by Bard McAllister of the chairman of the Subcommittee on the Migrant Child for the Governor's Advisory Committee, it stated that adequate housing, medicine, and education needs "should be met when they arise, without regard to the residence status of the migrant." Although this could refer to domestic laborers who traveled between states and could not establish legal residency, it could also refer to the illegal aliens who were not covered by Public Law 78 and could not ever qualify for residency. Despite this ambiguity, evidence suggests that social workers included the welfare of braceros and illegal migrants on their agenda. Social workers provided health care services to all migrant workers since all legally hired workers were entitled to these services. Since farmers claimed they hired legal workers, then all their Mexican workers qualified for health care under the Bracero Program. In section 501 of Public Law 78, the United States guaranteed contracted braceros adequate housing and emergency medical care (Public Law 78 1951).

Cautiously distributed healthcare

The role that Mexican nationals played in fueling depressed wages and job insecurity forced social workers to advocate for improved living conditions with restraint and subtlety. By focusing on public health hazards for the entire community, social workers gained greater acceptance towards improving the living conditions of migrant workers (California Department of Health 1963, Greenfield undated, O'Rourke undated). In a state conference held by the California Association for Health and Welfare, the subcommittee on migrant workers criticized the lack of enforcement for sanitary measures out in the field. The mechanization of farms and the availability of cheap farmhands brought about by the Bracero Program allowed farmowners to utilize their extra workers to pack and ship produce on site, rather than handing over the task to another business (American Federation of Labor 1959). To generate concern for migrant

health, social workers pointed to the dangers of a packing operation near the fields. They argued that the lack of washrooms and plumbing forced workers to relieve themselves on the fields, contaminating the crops which were no longer “washed, trimmed, and packed” at a proper facility off site. Farmers subsequently sent tainted food products directly to the consumer. Social workers manipulated consumers to concern themselves over migrant health. Drawing upon bigoted language that might hearten American nativists, social workers represented Mexican nationals as too ignorant to fully understand the decrepit nature of the sanitary conditions they experienced.

Mexican Nationals are drawn from the most disease-ridden regions of a disease-ridden country. Enteric disorders... are endemic throughout rural Mexico... They receive a crude screening for venereal disease and tuberculosis, but not even the apologists for the program claim that all the men infected with these conditions are detected. Many, of course, become infected after they enter the United States, but there is nothing whatever in the way of periodic health examinations to check these reservoirs of infection. Mexican Nationals have only the vaguest notions about the transmission of disease, and quite different standards of personal hygiene from those of most Americans (American Federation of Labor 1959).

Thus, social workers lobbied for better sanitation for Mexican nationals by claiming that the diseases carried over from Mexico then spread among braceros. These diseases were further intensified by Mexicans’ unclean contact with one another (American Federation of Labor 1959). Social workers used racist perspectives to augment their discussion, but most likely did not wholeheartedly subscribe to this point of view because they identified farmowners as those responsible for the condition.

In meeting memos and reports at state and local levels, non-government organizations and government bodies emphasized the unsanitary practices perpetuated by farmowners that exacerbated health conditions. Public Law 78 required farmowners to provide workers with food, housing, and some medical care for braceros, but lax enforcement of agreements meant farmers faced few penalties for violating contracts (Ngai 2005). To lower costs, farmowners widely abused their workers. A bracero worker in San Joaquin County described a typical meal in his camp which housed 300 other braceros. “At breakfast this morning, all we got [were] some beans that had become sour. If we do not eat the food, we get weak. But if we eat the food, we get diarrhea. Just today, I had to go in the field for my ‘necessities.’ They do not give us any medicine for our condition” (American Federation of Labor 1959). Although this was a clear

violation of Public Law 78, social workers also pointed out that these conditions should not exist for anybody, regardless of the worker qualifying for benefits under Public Law 78. According to section 28287 of the Health Safety Codes of California, all buildings used for “production, preparation, manufacture, packing, canning, sale, or distribution of food” must include “convenient toilet or toilet-room” detached from places of food processing. The code also required these bathrooms be “maintained in a clean and sanitary condition” (American Federation of Labor 1959). Knowing the legal framework allowed social workers to gain legitimacy to protest against all workers’ dismal conditions. This implies that not only did social workers object to the poor health conditions that braceros faced, but they also indirectly challenged the indigent conditions that illegal migrants encountered.

Farmowners and Social Workers Appease the Public

Farmowners continually denied that they employed illegal labor, which allowed social workers to negotiate the rights for all migrant laborers. If not a single hired hand on the farm was illegal, then by default, every migrant laborer held rights for decent living standards. The House of Representatives investigated the impact of braceros on the domestic labor market, and in the hearings, Louis J. Ivey avoided all questionings of hiring illegal workers all together. Mr. Ivey, a farmowner and representative of the El Paso Valley Cotton Association Incorporated answered simply to the Committee on Agriculture that illegal immigrants did not belong in the United States, but would not associate himself with hiring one. (House of Representatives Committee 1951). Ironically, his take on illegal immigration does not differ so far from that of social workers, who too did not acknowledge the prevalence of illegal immigration.

In order to help illegal immigrants without infuriating the American public, social workers avoided categorizing agricultural workers into particular groups. Since the American public supported domestic workers, social workers fronted that issue through education and healthcare programs that would benefit migrant families, not braceros or illegal immigrants (McAllister 1953, California Youth Authority 1958, FICCY 1955). Along the way, they lumped illegal immigrants with other migrants so that both legal and illegal migrants could be treated the same (American Federation of Labor 1959). This reflected the need for social workers to pacify the local communities whose dedication and funding targeted family, youth, and domestic migrants, but social workers often utilized those contributions to those most marginalized of

legal rights. Programs intended to lift the standards of American education provided opportunities for teachers to interact with the parents or friends of migrant children (FICCY 1955). Legislation intended to outline the basic necessities of braceros such as washroom facilities or sanitary workspaces benefited illegal and domestic workers who worked alongside them (American Federation of Labor 1959). Blanket legislation allowed flexibility for social workers to implement their own objectives of providing healthcare and education for all migrant workers.

The End of the Bracero Program and the Beginning of the Civil Rights Movement

In 1964, the end of the Bracero Program marked significant attitude changes by many social workers. The supportive tone for migrant workers and illegal immigrants in the 1950s faced considerable setbacks, as many social workers assumed that the flow of Mexican laborers would end following the conclusion of the Bracero Program. Priorities shifted to accommodate for domestic workers rather than illegal immigrants (Sabrina Kurtz and Samper 1993, Curran 2002), yet the United States did not come close to ending Mexican migration (García 1980, Calavita 1992). Although social workers addressed the immediate needs of migrant workers, they did not change the fundamental causes of migration. They did, however, lay the foundation for community interest and involvement in migrant lives.

My investigation of the Bracero Program illuminated the steps social workers took to improve working conditions for migrant laborers, but it also narrowed the perspective of immigration policy. I only looked at select sections of the Wyckoff collection, and Florence Wyckoff elected to include information and exclude others when she donated her collection to the Bancroft Library. I have taken on her perspective and ignored the perspectives of many other social workers. Additionally, her active years in the 1950s and early 1960s coincided with two major events: the ratification of Public Law 78 and active deportation of illegal immigrants by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. These years might have reflected the alarm that Wyckoff felt which prompted her to participate in committees that advocated progressive education and healthcare benefits for migrant communities. Interaction between social workers and migrant workers during the earlier decades of the Bracero Program might have revealed different dynamics between social workers and migrant laborers. Still, progressive movements for workers' rights persisted into the 1960s.

Subsequent movements recognized the shortfalls of loosely addressing illegal immigrants within publically acceptable means. With the rise of union movements and the Civil Rights movement, an increasing number of domestic workers teamed with Mexican laborers to protest the exploitation of farm laborers (Brown 1972, Jenkins 1985). They outwardly expressed their dissatisfaction of labor conditions and identified the distresses of legal and illegal workers as of the same essence (Brown 1972, Jenkins 1985). Through publically displayed protest and strikes, migrant workers attempted to engage the public's awareness and morality, much like attempts to gain community involvement in migrant issues a decade earlier. Only with the 1960s, these appeals for rights consisted of larger and more cohesive movements (Brown 1972, Jenkins 1985). Nevertheless, social workers facilitated the discussion between the public and migrant workers, in order to convey the injustices that migrant workers suffered from. In this sense, social workers played an integral role in initiating dialogue that eventually culminated into the Civil Rights Movement.

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