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The Bracero Program

What is the Braceros' program and who benefited from it?

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Braceros' Stories. Dr. Patrick Mullins. YouTube. 13 Sep 2009. Web. 3 Mayo 2010.

This video was not a scholar publication; however, this information seemed to be reliable and similar to the information of other reliable sources. In the video the author presented pictures where I appreciated the peccary conditions that the braceros¹ lived. Also, the video explored the braceros experiences while working in the United States. The video stated that approximately 4.4 million contracts were signed between braceros and the United States government by 1944. These contracts stated that the braceros were guaranteed housing and a minimum wage. Also braceros were entitled to free rides from their homes to work. Moreover, the video explained how stories of braceros were similar because most of them were going through the related living conditions. In this video, braceros were characterized by being young isolated bachelors. The braceros were depicted as hard-workers with no distractions beyond their work. They were behind the prosperity of California's agriculture growth because they worked long hours in the fields receiving a miserable wage.

Driscoll, Barbara A. *Google Books*. Web. 2 May 2010. <<http://ghttp://books.google.com/books>>.

With the signing of the new Braceros program, the United States of America was obligated to provide the following guest-workers: the trip to the United State, a formal contract between the company and the worker, transportation form the house to work place, and minimal housing and sanitation. The agreement also stipulated that ten percent of their wages would be deducted from their paychecks and to be saved for the braceros to return to Mexico. This money was going to be saved into a special account. The book The Tracks North: the Railroad Bracero Program of

¹ A Mexican laborer admitted legally to work in the U.S. for a short period, during 1940's. This worker usually performed agricultural labor. The name comes from the Spanish word Brazo or arm.

World War II by Barbara A. Driscoll contains a report by Mauricio Gamboa who stated that the farmers in northwestern part of the United States sought extra agricultural workers through the bracero program to meet the work demands. With high demand for braceros, the Department of Agriculture implemented interstate farm worker transportation so that braceros had transportation for work. This new implementation failed in 1943 when the agriculture farm owners reported that they were still short on workers. United States was ahead in agricultural production; therefore, it became one of strongest exporters of vegetables and fruits.

Farm Worker Justice. http://www.fwjjustice.org/Immigration_Labor/braceros.htm <05/05/2010

The controversy about social impact of the bracero program was shared among the Mexicans and Americans alike. Mexicans had left their families and suffered humiliations just because they wanted a better opportunity to work and earn money for their families. During the Second World War millions of workers from the poorest areas of Mexico worked legally under protection of the bracero program. Unfortunately, they were promised things that were never received or hardly ever in most cases. Among the promises they were to receive was fair treatment, housing, and minimum wage. One of the more attractive promises was to deduct ten percent of their wages to be saved for their return to Mexico. However, the majority of these braceros did not receive any money when they returned to Mexico. Therefore, a Federal District Court in San Francisco awarded some of these laborers (those who worked from 1942-1946) a reimbursement of about \$38,000 pesos. The presence of braceros made the American community uncomfortable because they were afraid of losing jobs. However, braceros were exploited and were treated with poor job and living conditions. Abuse and exploitation were the main difficulties the braceros went through; even when they made such a great contribution to the United States' economy.

Gonzales, Manuel G. *Mexicanos: a History of Mexicans in the United States*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999. Print.

After World War II, some Mexicans were recruited from Mexico to work in the United States of America, specifically in the agriculture sector on a temporary basis. With WW II and the shortage of men in the Southern Western of the United States caused a negative impact in agriculture production. There were not enough workers in this area to work the fields and harvest the crops. As a result, Mexicans were brought in by the United States' government to work the fields as braceros to solve the shortage of field workers. During the 1940's, California led the agricultural production nationally and more labor workers were needed. Therefore, Mexican braceros were brought to work in the United States' fields. The braceros contributed to the expansion of agriculture which increased the economy approximately 70 % of the national production of vegetables and fruits in the United States.

Latin Americans in Texas, by Pauline R. Kibbe. The University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1948.

In July 1942, the Bracero Program was established by executive order which was enacted into Public Law in 1951. The agreement was expected to last for two years. This program allowed braceros to work on farms contributing to the United States' economy. This article stated that the majority of the braceros were experienced farm laborers who were affected by the Mexican bad economy during the 1940's. These braceros stopped their production in Mexico and traveled to United States hoping to make a vast amount of money and come back to harvest their land in Mexico. The Bracero Program became the largest and most significant U.S. labor guest worker program of the 20th century. Although, the contracts were well-intentioned, the program still had controversy. The braceros complained that employers were abusing and

violating their legal and civil liberties. This program seemed domed as opportunities for some Mexican to make a decent living; however, their conditions in the United States were humane questionable. Even though, the braceros harvested hundreds of millions of pounds of vegetables and other fresh products, they were still mistreated. With the hard work of the Mexican braceros the agriculture sector grew about 80%.

Meyer, Michael C., and William L. Sherman. *The Course of Mexican History*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.

Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho and United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to allow braceros to work only in agriculture sectors in certain states of the South West. This agreement was made possible because of Mexico's support of the war. Therefore, the two governments decided that a job opportunity for Mexicans was a form to pay back Mexico's support of the war. After the bracero program was enacted about 300,000 braceros were brought into US by 1943. The terms of the agreement were carefully spelled out: workers were offered free rides from house to work; they were not to displace any American workers, and earn a minimum wage of \$0.57 hourly, and not to ask for a wage increase. The bracero program contributed to the United States' economy because this was a source of cheap labor and a high quality of production. The braceros helped to maintain low wages and increase the productions of vegetable, fruits, and grains.

The Journal Editorial PSB. www.pbs.org <May 2, 2010>

This is non-scholarly information website, but the information about the bracero program was reliable and coincided with other reliable sources that in July 23 1942, Mexico and U.S. governments signed the Bracero Program. This agreement stated that Mexicans were explicit

guest-workers who were allowed to work only in the U.S. agriculture sectors. Between 1943 and 1964, about four million Mexicans were allowed into the United States in order to offset labor shortages following World War II. The Mexican work force was critical in developing the economy and prosperity of the United States. The Mexican workers were willing to work for low wages, in questionable working conditions.

United States Department of Agriculture. USDA <http://naldr.nal.usda.gov> <05/08/2010>

After the WWII, United States government needed cheap labor to reenergize the economy and increase from production. On the other hand, the Mexican government saw the bracero program as an opportunity for millions of Mexicans to find jobs. The Mexican government wanted fair contracts to ensure the workers' rights. The bracero program was arranged to only last for two years. Public Law 78, subsequent was extended because of the positive impact the braceros had done in the Agricultural market. Through the war years, but mainly after the war, braceros made more than 10% of the labor force in some states. During the years of 1942 to 1959 about 70,000 braceros work in the country boosting the Agriculture sector with about \$120 to 500 billion dollars. By 1963, the braceros were about 81% of foreign labor workers used in the states of California, Texas, New Mexico, Michigan, Florida, Arkansas, Colorado, and other states. In these states, but especially in California braceros produced over half of the United States tomatoes and other vegetables.

One of the most positively impacted agricultural sectors by the braceros program was the production of lettuce. California and Arizona were the top lettuce-producers. For instance, in the counties of Monterey, Ventura, and Stanislaus, just to mention a few, there were about

11,000 braceros harvesting the lettuce production which was almost half of the national production in 1962. As for as Arizona the largest lettuce production counties were Maricopa and Yuma.