THE HEART OF AN INDUSTRY: 
THE ROLE OF THE BRACERO PROGRAM IN THE GROWTH OF VITICULTURE 
IN SONOMA AND NAPA COUNTIES

by

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A thesis submitted to
Sonoma State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in
History

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of the Bracero Program in the growth of Sonoma and Napa County viticulture in an attempt to understand how important bracero labor was to the industry. While most histories of the Bracero Program are nationwide or statewide in scope, this study explores the regional complexities of how and why the program was used in Sonoma and Napa Counties, how both the growers and laborers in the region felt about it, and how this was different from and similar to other regions.

Government documents provided the statistics necessary to determine the demographic changes in the region due to the Bracero Program. Important primary source material that provided the human side of the story includes a number of oral history interviews I conducted, the collection of Wine Industry Oral Histories, and various regional newspaper articles.

The Bracero Program played a major role in the rapid expansion of vineyard acreage in the late 1960s and in how Mexican and Mexican-Americans became the primary source of vineyard labor today. Even though those contracted under the Bracero Program were used in relatively small numbers in Sonoma and Napa, braceros were integral to the growth of the regional viticulture industry. By providing the labor when it was needed, gaining the expertise necessary to grow premium wine grapes, and in establishing productive relationships with growers in spite of marked cultural differences, the braceros, and the non-bracero Mexican laborers who followed, were an essential factor in this growth.

While the smaller landholdings in Sonoma and Napa Counties contributed to growers hiring fewer braceros as compared to other regions in California, it also encouraged more personal connections between growers and workers. While these connections and the relationships that developed did not mitigate all instances of racism and discrimination directed toward braceros, they improved the braceros’ daily life while in the U.S. and, in the eyes of the braceros, made Sonoma and Napa Counties highly desirable locations to work.
By the time that the Bracero Program was terminated, Mexican labor was well-established in the vineyards of Sonoma and Napa Counties. By greatly increasing the number of Mexican workers, including bracero and non-bracero labor, in the U.S., the Bracero Program created a pool of skilled Mexican laborers in the region that was crucial to the dramatic increase in vineyard acreage that occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s. The entire industry rests upon the Mexican worker today, and their influence is in large part a result of the Bracero Program.

Chair: ______________________
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It takes a village to write a thesis. While I alone have spent countless hours at the computer writing this thesis, I could not have completed the project without the assistance of a number of people. Professors Steve Estes and Clarice Stasz supported the project since its inception, encouraging me to develop further a topic that I conceived in a seminar paper. I later introduced the idea to Professors Kathleen Noonan and Maggie Miller, and they too were excited about the prospect of seeing this project to fruition. Professor Stasz has since made the transition to (partial) retirement and thus was not a member of my committee, but the others agreed to take on the arduous task of being a committee member. I want to thank Professor Estes for reading the numerous drafts, for his insightful criticism, and for always answering all of my questions. His guidance has greatly contributed to my success in this program. Professor Noonan and Professor Miller shall also be commended for their careful reading of a draft and for their suggestions on how to improve the work.

Coming to this project with a knowledge of the wine and grape industry that was limited to three years of helping my father-in-law and mother-in-law make wine at home, I am wholly indebted to those who have written about it before me. I did, however, attempt to move beyond research that has already been completed by others and therefore owe a great deal to those that were willing to take time out of their schedules and meet with me to conduct an interview. I developed a seemingly personal connection to the wine industry through the oral history interviews that I conducted. I personally thank Rafael Rodriguez, Richard Uribe, Elias Fernandez, Louis M. Foppiano, and an
“Anonymous Sonoma Valley grape grower” for sharing their memories and for their contributions to this story. In addition, I want to thank the Regional Oral History Office at U.C. Berkeley for providing access to the wealth of information contained in their Wine Industry Oral History series.

I want to thank my wife Amy for her patience, for her unflinching belief in me, and for always reminding me that family was and is more important than this project (while, at the same time, she encouraged me to finish it). This thesis is dedicated to my infant son Elijah, who was born as I began to write it, for showing me what I am capable of.

Sonoma, California
July 2005

Z.L.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Vineyard Labor Before the World War II</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Bracero Experience</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Bracero Experience in Sonoma and Napa Counties</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vineyard Labor After World War II</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Acres Planted to Grapes, by year and county (1919-1941)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Major Fruit Crop Production (in tons) in Napa County, 1923-1943</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Number of Mexican farm workers employed under the EFLSP, specified dates</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Minimum and Maximum employment of braceros in California, 1944-1950</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. California: Agricultural employment by type of worker, annual averages 1944-1960</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Agricultural Employment in California, Sonoma County, and Napa County, annual averages, 1950-1964</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Acres planted to Grapes, by Year and County (1942-1964)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Major Fruit Crop Production (in tons) in Napa County, 1943-1978</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Immigrants from Mexico to the United States, selected decades</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Acres Planted to Grapes, by Year and County (1965-2003)</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Producing quality wine grapes is a multi-year project. A newly planted vineyard will not produce grapes worthy of making wine for up to four or five years, and grape quality continues to improve for decades as the vines mature. In fact, some of the best wines are said to have come from vines planted nearly 100 years ago. Nevertheless, in order for vines to mature into quality producers, they must be carefully managed every year. An integral part of this management comes in the year-round vineyard labor that is necessary to produce premium grapes. Among other things, vines must be planted or pruned during the winter and protected from frost in the spring, the grapes must monitored and pruned for optimum sun exposure and growth through the spring and summer, and, of course, they must be harvested late in the summer or early fall. Pruning and harvesting both require that a large labor force be ready when and where it is needed, for if these practices are not done or completed at the right time, a grower can lose an entire crop. Thus, even if nothing else stayed constant, growers have always needed and utilized a large, seasonal, wage labor force.

During the period under discussion, however, one noticeable change did occur in the labor force. During Prohibition and shortly after repeal vineyard labor in Sonoma and Napa was primarily local and migrant white labor. By the 1960s, this group was primarily composed of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. A major reason for this shift was the influx of Mexican contract laborers brought into the U.S. through the guest worker program initiated after the United States’ entry into World War II commonly known as the Bracero Program. Between 1942 and 1964, formal agreements were in place between Mexico and the United States that brought Mexican nationals to the U.S.
to work as agricultural laborers. When these workers, known as braceros, came to Sonoma and Napa Counties as contracted laborers, they were put to work in all of the counties’ agricultural pursuits – i.e. prunes, walnuts, and olives. They were also, however, put to work in the vineyards and taught the art of viticulture. Grape growers were impressed with their skills and admired the work that they did. Interestingly, this was the first time that Mexican laborers were used in this region as well as in viticulture, and their prominence certainly did not end with the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964.

Perhaps the most important guest-worker program ever implemented in the United States, the Bracero Program greatly influenced the ways in which agriculture was practiced. Its main purpose was to provide the grower with a supply of labor whenever domestic labor was not available, and through this it had a major effect on the perpetuation and growth of agribusiness in the United States during and long after World War II. Under the auspices of this program more than 5,000,000 Mexican workers were brought to the United States as agricultural laborers in order to fill the seemingly unending demand of American growers between the years of 1942 and 1964.

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1 The definition of bracero is unclear in much of the literature. Its meaning is derived from the Spanish word brazo, which means arm, loosely indicating one who works with their arms. Many refer to braceros as only those who were contracted under the U.S.-Mexico agreements between 1942 and 1964, however, since Mexican Nationals have a long history of coming to the United States for work in agriculture, many are inclined to refer to those coming before and after the official dates of the “Bracero Program” as braceros. For the remainder of this study, to be clear, the term bracero will only be used when referring to those contracted under the Bracero Program. As will become obvious, this distinction is critical when examining Sonoma and Napa during the period under study. When referred to in the text, all necessary precaution will be used to be as clear as possible as to the status of braceros and other agricultural laborers from Mexico, documented or undocumented. Mexican or Mexican-American will be the terms used in reference to workers who were not braceros. The phrases “Sonoma and Napa” and “Sonoma and Napa County” are repeatedly used throughout this paper and refer to the counties of Sonoma and Napa, not the cities of Sonoma and Napa, unless otherwise noted in the text.

Braceros were brought to the United States under a number of bi-national agreements made between Mexico and the United States. Braceros were contracted for agricultural work in 27 states; however, most were contracted to growers in California and Texas. Forever changing the way in which growers viewed labor by providing them with a reliable source of cheap labor, the Bracero Program quickly became politically charged as it challenged the fundamental, perennial questions of agribusiness. Where will labor be found for harvest? How will wages be determined? Is it ethical to rely on a foreign labor source? With a tremendous amount at stake in terms of crop success and income, growers quickly learned to rely on this government sponsored labor system and expected it to continue forever. Initially set up to eliminate a declared wartime labor shortage, the program was extended through 1964 due to powerful pro-bracero lobbying.

Nationwide, opinion about this program varied greatly. Some felt that it worked well and should become a permanent solution to periodic labor shortages in American agriculture. Others were very unhappy about the program’s effect on American agriculture as it seemed to them to accelerate the growth of large farms and clearly benefit agribusiness. The Bracero Program was rife with contradiction, tension, and controversy. Its politics included complex alliances and struggles between international powers, industry leaders, small businesses, domestic laborers, braceros themselves, and various government agencies whose concerns intersected at a myriad of places. Growers presented the Bracero Program as a legitimate means of procuring labor, as it came to

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them as a great subsidy because they had access to a cheap labor supply, yet anti-bracero activist groups and domestic labor criticized the program as unfair because it was only utilized by some within the agricultural industry and full of too many abuses.

This grower versus activist focus is, however, rather limiting. By looking at the program on a regional level, it becomes clear that it functioned in different ways in different places and sections of the agricultural economy and that experiences of braceros varied greatly. What was understood to be normal in one place (i.e. California’s central valley) or one crop in which braceros were used (i.e. tomato harvesting) was entirely opposite in another location (i.e. Sonoma or Napa County) or crop (i.e. viticulture). How then are we to understand the program itself or the growth of Sonoma and Napa County viticulture without micro-studies completed on a regional level? Given the importance of the program, the paucity of scholarly research that has examined the Bracero Program in a specific region and/or crop is alarming. The emergence of Sonoma and Napa as the premiere wine growing regions of California necessitates a study of the use of the Bracero Program in Sonoma and Napa viticulture.

Examining the role of the Bracero Program in the growth of Sonoma and Napa County viticulture is necessary in order to realize how important bracero labor was and is to the wine industry. It ventures to add another dimension to the common understanding of the rapid expansion of vineyard acreage in the late 1960s and how Mexican and Mexican-Americans became the primary source of vineyard labor today. Even though those contracted under the Bracero Program were used in relatively small numbers in Sonoma and Napa Counties when compared to the large industrial farms of the central valley, the Bracero Program was a critical component of the growth of the regional
viticulture industry. By providing the labor when it was needed, gaining the expertise necessary to grow premium wine grapes, and in establishing productive relationships between growers and laborers in spite of marked cultural differences, the bracero, when used, was as essential to the industry as grapes are to wine. In essence, as the industry was reviving and expanding its relationship with the consumer, braceros helped to re-create Sonoma and Napa viticulture “by the sweat of their brow.”

Beyond that and perhaps more important, however, is the way in which the beginning of the Bracero Program commenced a new relationship between Mexico and Northern California. Even though Mexican labor has been prevalent on farms throughout the Southwest and especially in Southern and Central California throughout the 20th century, such was not the case in Sonoma and Napa Counties before World War II. As mentioned above, agricultural labor in Sonoma and Napa Counties was primarily local and migrant white labor. While this fact may not seem particularly illuminating, a careful analysis of the Bracero Program reveals the reason for the rapid shift in the demographics of the labor force in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Bracero Program allowed growers to contract labor from Mexico that was guaranteed and delivered to them with an agreed upon wage that was generally lower than the prevailing wage in the U.S. Not surprisingly, large growers contracted for huge numbers of braceros with little regard for the existing labor pool. Growers commonly underestimated the workers available in the domestic labor pool to justify their inclusion in the Bracero Program, and with the influx of bracero labor, available domestic labor was out of work. In the case of many Southern and Central California farms where

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bracero labor quickly became ubiquitous, the existing labor pool had primarily been comprised of Mexican workers who commonly split their time between Mexico and the U.S. When braceros were brought into these regions, many of these Mexicans were forced out due to the fact that there was little work to be found.\(^5\) What were these workers to do? Some, of course, moved back to Mexico and either found work there or came back to the U.S. as braceros. Others migrated north in search of work on farms in Northern California. After traveling hundreds of miles north into California, trips back to Mexico became increasingly difficult. The result was that what was once a migratory work force in Southern California before the Bracero Program became a permanent work force in places such as Sonoma and Napa Counties during and after the Bracero Program. Thus, the Bracero Program both initiated a dramatic restructuring of the agricultural labor force in Sonoma and Napa counties as growers in that region now had access to both bracero labor and a permanent pool of Mexican labor and also altered the patterns of Mexican migration into California.

Past research in this specific area is scarce. It is situated at the intersection of two existing bodies of literature: studies of Sonoma and Napa County viticulture and of the Bracero Program. Even though an integrated analysis of these two seemingly exclusive topics has been neglected, a regional yet comparative analysis illuminates not only the idiosyncrasies of the program in one region but also offers a more complex portrait of the program nationally; the periphery is as important as the center, namely the Central Valley.

\(^5\) Although a common practice, growers hiring braceros were not allowed to hire undocumented workers. Thus, regions in which braceros were used extensively as well as regions closer to the national border were more heavily regulated by immigration officials than regions using less bracero labor and farther from the border. This is not to say that there was not work to be found for Mexicans in Southern and Central California; as told by Keith Mets, the president of the Imperial Valley Farmers Association, in 1951 in reference to illegal aliens, “Every farmer from Brownsville to San Diego uses these people.” As quoted in Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story; an account of the managed migration of Mexican farm workers in California, 1942-1960* (Santa Barbara: McNally & Lofton, 1964), 60.
and Southern California, in defining the Bracero experience precisely because of the migratory nature of the workers.

If past research is any indicator of what is important to academics, vineyard labor in Sonoma and Napa appears to be of little interest altogether. The academic work on the wine region is extensive; however, even the recent scholarship ignores any extensive discussion of vineyard labor or braceros. There are, as well, a number of important studies of the Bracero Program; however, they are statewide or national in scope and fail to examine local dynamics.

Scholars of Sonoma and Napa Counties’ wine industry, it seems, are primarily local residents. Although their numbers are limited, they have produced a large body of literature examining the history of the region’s wine business. Within this literature, however, broad studies on topics such as wineries, winemakers, grape growers, vineyards, trade associations, and marketing techniques are the standard. If at all, vineyard labor is only given a passing reference in most studies of this nature. One comes away from them with historical and contemporary perspectives concerning how, why, where, and when many local wine entrepreneurs ran their businesses.

Based on local newspapers clippings, the industry publication Wines and Vines, and over 150 interviews that he conducted with various people throughout the valley, William Heintz’s California’s Napa Valley is an eclectic history of wine in Napa.6 At one point, Heintz examines the development of the Napa Valley experiment station after the generous gift from E. H. Churchill, “the cashier of the Goodman Bank in Napa,” in 1902 to the Department of Agriculture of twenty acres of land in Oakville. Churchill died just

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6 See William F. Heintz, California’s Napa Valley: One Hundred Sixty Years of Wine Making (San Francisco: Scotwall Associates, 1999).
months later; however, within ten years “over 12,000 tests had been conducted” at the new experiment station. The significance of this experiment station, Heintz notes, was that at this point “science had arrived in Napa Valley winemaking.”

Scientific research was later used extensively throughout viticulture, especially after World War II as the industry was rebuilding and promoting consumer interest in premium wines. However, an interesting paradox arose during this time in the wine industry. The national economy was growing faster than it ever had before yet the wine grape industry was prostrate. In fact, the total acreage planted in grapes in Napa had actually decreased during this period. Heintz explains, however, that despite what the nationwide industry indicators showed, “business was booming” in Napa. “Before the war,” Heintz wrote, “Napa’s forty-odd wineries had produced about four million gallons of wine a year. In May 1947, the Star reported that the figure had doubled, to 8,041,000 gallons.” The explanations for this phenomenon are unclear, but Heintz notes, reiterating a creed of Louis Martini, that even during a recession “there would never be a problem for fine wines” because “wealthy people would always afford the best.”

When setting out to write his regional history of the Napa wine industry that became *Bottled Poetry*, James Lapsley also felt that it was not necessary to examine labor or, for that matter, the grape growers. Napa’s “reputation would ultimately be based on the products of its wineries,” he wrote, with little regard to those in the fields with the grapes, “not those of its vineyards. Grapes are not bottled and aged, opened and savored, reviewed and remembered; wine is.” While this statement is “ultimately” true, many

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7 Ibid., 233.
8 Ibid., 303-304.
rightfully argue that good wine starts in the vineyards with good soil and climate as well as with a workforce that knows how to take care of the vines.

Nevertheless, Lapsley argues that a dramatic transformation took place in the fifty years following Prohibition in which the quality of Napa wines gradually increased. According to Lapsley, however, this is only half of the story. “Napa producers were leaders in defining wine quality,” he wrote, yet they were also leaders in “creating a market for such wine.” The market for premium wine was nearly nonexistent following repeal, so industry leaders at wineries such as Inglenook, Beringer, Beaulieu Vineyards, and Larkmead, whom receive the majority of the attention in this book, actively promoted and marketed Napa’s varietal wine as the premiere wine from the premiere wine region in the world, even though early on it was a lower grade, bulk style wine. Lapsley claims, however, that through the 1940s and 1950s “only a handful of Napa wineries showed any interest in attempting to make fine wines, and most of those owned their own vineyards.”

Aside from the continuous “heavy brand promotion of table wines by the large national and international corporations that entered the California wine industry during the boom,” Lapsley also argues that the wine boom of the late 1960s was the result of a profound cultural change in America. As baby-boomers grew into adulthood, he wrote, the rise in affluence helped wine find “a place on the table.” Also, by choosing wine over spirits, this new generation of wine connoisseurs was rejecting “the ‘gray flannel suit’ values of 1950s corporate America” with an “affirmation of individual experience and

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10 Ibid., 2.
11 Ibid., 51.
This cultural change dramatically increased consumer demand for wine, but if wine quality had not improved, consumers may not have selected California wine as the beverage of choice. Skilled labor was an big part of the equation necessary to produce quality wine, but Lapsley overlooks labor’s influence and repeats that the industry leaders’ promotional efforts made this shift possible.

One work that creatively examines agricultural labor in Sonoma County during World War II, titled “Migrant Farm Workers, Growers, and the Healdsburg Community, 1941-1945,” by Claire Rithner, looks at “the way in which growers moved to protect their access to low wage farm labor during this period of extreme labor shortages, and how a community economically dependent on agriculture worked to help further grower’s interests.” Rithner argues that by the end of the war, growers had become accustomed to new sources of labor brought in by the Bracero Program. “World War II represents a turning point in the way labor was procured,” Rithner wrote, and the primary change was that “after the war, growers turned less to their community for help harvesting the crops and became more and more dependent upon outside, government-supplied labor.” She clearly notes that the ethnicity of the labor force in Healdsburg had changed by the end of the war. Her attempts to interview braceros who had been in Healdsburg during the war, however, were unsuccessful, and she did not write about the experiences of braceros in Sonoma County. Important for its examination of the social impacts of World War II on the Healdsburg community and Sonoma County at large, this study nevertheless fails to

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12 Ibid., 197-199.
14 Ibid., 70.
evaluate the Bracero Program in its entirety, as the study was limited to examine the war years.

The Bracero Program ultimately changed the face of agriculture across the nation. Similar to other noteworthy multinational agreements, the Bracero Program has been examined at length by a number of scholars from a wide range of perspectives. Within the range of these studies, however, there are some common organizing principles. Organizing their studies from both contemporary and historical viewpoints, major issues in these works are geographic, political, racial, functional, and economic. Besides the aforementioned limitations of these studies in relation to Sonoma and Napa, a major inadequacy lies in the fact that most authors tend to view the program from the perspective of the United States at both interest group and state levels, neglecting the views and participation of Mexico and the braceros. Of the sources listed, only Henry Anderson, Ernesto Galarza, whose works we will turn to next, and Erasmo Gamboa made contact with braceros in attempt to understand the story from the bracero perspective. With the exception of Gamboa who acknowledges that braceros contracted to work in Washington demanded the guarantees of their contract, however, the tone of these

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studies, even filled with the voices of braceros, is one that views the braceros as passive victims under the hand of a multifaceted hierarchy of control.\textsuperscript{16}

A number of authors writing about the program document the shortcomings of the everyday functional regulations in place to protect braceros while in both Mexico and the U.S. Of those, authors Anderson and Galarza stand out as the most prolific and critical writers of the Bracero Program. Taken together, Anderson’s and Galarza’s work remains the most inherently anti-bracero invective based on significant field research. Neither of the two authors claims to have set out to write a stinging attack on the Bracero Program, however, they were simply reporting the facts from the data that they had collected.

Based on over 1150 interviews conducted with braceros in the mid 1950s, Anderson’s \textit{The Bracero Program in California} was originally intended to assess the “healthways of braceros before and after their contracts” and “ascertain how adequately the health needs of braceros were being met, by U.S. standards, during the time they were in this country.”\textsuperscript{17} Providing a very captivating study of the program, Anderson’s book shows how inherently corrupt it was in its day to day operations. Anderson grew increasingly contemptuous about it by 1976, writing in his introduction that “it had nothing legitimately to do with a ‘good neighbor policy’” or a “wartime labor shortage.” The bracero system, Anderson wrote:

was simply a device for American agribusiness to take selfish advantage of the poverty of Mexican peons (which comes from the same root as “pawns”), to the devastation of U.S. farm workers, Mexican-Americans whether farm workers or not, small farmers, family life in rural Mexico, and every reasonable standard of social decency and honor. In some ways, the exploitation was more heartless than chattel

\textsuperscript{16} A major point of Gamboa’s \textit{Mexican Labor and World War II} is that a number of inhospitable conditions in the Yakima region led to a relatively higher occurrence of worker resistance that included strikes and other work stoppages. However, he refers to them throughout the work as a group or individually as braceros, not acknowledging their individual identities.

\textsuperscript{17} Anderson, \textit{Bracero Program in California}, from introduction to 1976 edition, not paginated.
slavery. Slaves were often permitted families in the new land; braceros, never. Slaveholders bore some responsibility for their chattels in the off-season; bracero-users, never. When they no longer needed their “Nationals,” they deported them to the misery from which they came, out of sight, out of mind.18

Anderson truly believed that the Bracero Program was detrimental to all labor groups involved, domestic and foreign. In the widely available copy of The Bracero Program in California, Anderson exposed many of the problems that arose during the program, uncovered their causes, and recommended methods for improvement.19 He did not, however, believe that these problems could be fixed. “All the shortcomings in the bracero system – wages, housing, food, health services, or whatever– were traceable ultimately,” he wrote, “not to administrators, or regulations, or appropriations, but to the nature of the organism itself, and the nature of the soil in which it was planted.”20

Ernesto Galarza, a scholar, writer, and activist at heart, took a similar approach yet was not so explicit in his condemnation of the program. Galarza wrote extensively about Mexican-American labor and produced what is widely considered the seminal text about the Bracero Program in 1964, just one year prior to its termination.21 Working for both the National Farm Labor Union and the National Agricultural Workers Union in the 1940s and through the 1950s, however, Galarza was “convinced that Public Law 78 was the greatest hindrance to farm labor organizing and devoted his energies to fighting the

18 Ibid., intro, n.p.
19 Undertaking this project while he was a graduate student in the School of Public Health at U.C. Berkeley, however, Anderson’s academic freedom came under direct attack as he submitted an 800-page monograph to his faculty members and was asked that all copies be destroyed because of “what they considered [Anderson’s] over-emphasis on ‘politics’.” Given one more chance to rewrite the study, he later produced a much shorter document, avoiding “politics” and “limited to an audience of ‘responsible’ persons,” that became the book published by Arno Press in 1976. Nevertheless, 100 copies of the original study were later reproduced under a different title and given to select depository libraries. See Henry Anderson, A Harvest of Loneliness: An Inquiry Into a Social Problem (Berkeley: Citizens for Farm Labor, 1964).
20 Anderson, Bracero Program in California, intro, n.p.
21 Galarza’s works about the the Bracero Program and Mexican-American agricultural labor include the classic study Merchants of Labor, as well as Strangers in Our Fields; and Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970).
Mexican labor importation program, instead of formally organizing.”22 In order to have accurate information from which he based his claims, Galarza toured over 150 farm labor camps housing bracero workers and therein saw the terrible conditions they endured. Writing up his findings in *Strangers in Our Fields* in 1956, Galarza exposed the wretched conditions that caused pro-bracero agricultural groups to launch a fierce campaign to suppress the report. All attempts at suppression failed, and his report became widely circulated and received critical acclaim.23

As Galarza published *Merchants of Labor* in 1964, pro-bracero interest groups had, for the most part, lost the battle for continuation of Public Law 78. Thus, the persuasive evidence presented in *Merchants of Labor* was the final blow to an already dying system. This study of what Galarza calls “Mexico’s most valuable surplus – men,” is original in its breadth and its intentions yet it is important for its powerful historical, political, sociological, and economic treatment of the Bracero Program; *Merchants of Labor* remains the most thorough and objective study to date. Even the provocative title causes one to rethink the nature of agricultural labor. If you look at the resulting product of agricultural labor, the services they provide work to feed the entire country. Braceros were not simply selling their labor; they were selling growers another option that was often more reliable and cheaper than domestic labor. The fact that so many growers came to rely on them is another story, but these merchants, be they the braceros or the United States government, knew that their product was in high demand.

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23 Biographical information in the preceding paragraph can be found in “Ernesto Galarza”, *Contemporary Authors Online*, The Gale Group, 2000.
The Bracero Program was developed to address growers’ needs for cheap labor, but it resulted in a new agricultural labor market throughout the Southwest. The arguments supporting and condemning it are clear, yet the facts show that California agriculture grew a great deal during the time the program was administered. Braceros could be found working throughout the state, even within the relatively small populations of farming towns in the Bay Area. Braceros dominated the labor force on many San Joaquin and Imperial Valley industrial-sized farms, but were, nevertheless, also used on the small vineyards of Sonoma and Napa Counties.

The research concerning the history of the wine country is carefully researched and written while the work about the bracero program is magnificently investigative and revealing. Taken together, these works provide an exceptionally clear and thoughtful analysis of both Sonoma and Napa County viticulture and the use and abuse of Mexican contract labor. Still, research is needed to bring the two separate bodies of scholarship together and return Braceros to the storied rise of viticulture in the wine country.

The perspectives above make it possible to move well beyond the common analysis that is national or statewide in scope or that looks at one critical aspect (health issues, migration, politics) of the program in great detail. While these are reasonable starting points, it should be clear that the scope of the program was so wide that its use and implementation throughout the regions where braceros were used were not homogeneous. This study therefore moves beyond the simplified national and statewide generalizations to explore the regional complexities of how and why the program was utilized in the wine country, how both the growers and laborers in the region felt about it, and whether this
was different from other regions; it contributes to current work on the significance of both the program and regional vineyard labor.

The primary source of information included in this study is from a number of oral history interviews that I conducted as well as from the series of wine industry oral histories conducted by the Regional Oral History Office at University of California Berkeley. Considering that research in this area has heretofore been neglected, a good way to gain real knowledge in this field was to speak with former braceros and Sonoma and Napa residents that were involved with the program or in viticulture during the period under study.

In order to understand where the Sonoma and Napa wine industry stood at the onset of World War II, the first chapter provides a brief overview of the development of the wine industry in Northern California and of the sources of labor commonly used in the vineyards through the Prohibition years. Chapter two is a thorough historiography and analysis of the Bracero Program. In addition, as it is relevant to the study, it provides the history of Mexican labor in the United States and California, and how it has differed in Sonoma and Napa Counties. My intent in this section is to give readers a sense of the implications of the Bracero Program and how that forever changed viticulture in Sonoma and Napa. The first two chapters in this study provide the critical background information needed in order to analyze the impact of the Bracero Program.

Chapter three is an examination of the use of bracero labor in Sonoma and Napa Counties throughout the tenure of the program. This chapter also includes a discussion of the experiences of braceros that came to the region and worked in viticulture, and compares those experiences to that of braceros that worked in other regions and crops.
The final chapter looks at how Mexican labor became the primary source of labor in the region’s vineyards as Mexican-Americans moved permanently into the region. It further discusses how many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have moved up the ranks in the industry into positions of increasing responsibility in the years after the Bracero Program ended.
Sonoma and Napa Counties have established strong reputations for making fine wine. Many believe that the distinction of these two counties belongs to a unique blend of natural topography and innovative winemaking that has combined to create, in short time, a wine region whose product competes regularly for top spot in global markets. There are only a few comparable areas throughout the world, including the venerable wine regions of Europe, that naturally possess the right geographic features and climate, such as those found in Sonoma and Napa, capable of producing grapes that can be made into great wine. With the exception of rare years containing particularly harsh weather in which the grapes are unable to reach their full potential both on the vine and off, premium wine is produced year after year. Sonoma and Napa stood as the major testing grounds for the development of scientific winemaking through the early and mid-20th century. Environmental and scientific factors aside, however, winemaking is a delicate process encompassing many other elements that must function together.

Sonoma and Napa residents have been growing grapes and making wine for over 150 years, and these years of experience have allowed the laborers, growers, and winemakers the opportunity to recognize their interconnectedness. Beautiful grapes are grown and

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1 When discussing the entire wine region that is the United States, Maynard A. Amerine noted that “The Napa Valley, Sonoma County, and other cooler areas of the north coast region produce the best wines” while neglecting mention of other place names. Robert L. Sisson, who was the Sonoma County Director and Viticulture Farm Advisor from 1950 to 1985, said that “the wine grape industries, . . ., are here because of a unique climate overlay that permits the production of world class wine grape varieties and world class premium wines.” Sisson also noted that there are only a few locations worldwide similar to this region. He continued: “The premium varieties we grow here can not be grown successfully just anywhere. . . This was not the case with the apples, pears, prunes, hops or any other similar crop. These were no unique growing conditions here for them, it was simply a nice place to grow them. They are also grown quite nicely all over the planet. There is no where else to go and be able to match our unique microclimates for premium wine grapes.” See Robert L. Sisson, “County Director and Viticulture Farm Advisor Emeritus, 1950-1985,” interview by Joyce Griffin, 28 September, 1999, Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County oral history series (Healdsburg, Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County, 2003), 118.
harvested under the attention of growers, vineyard managers, and a large, hardworking, labor force. After harvest, the grapes are quickly trucked away from the vineyards to be crushed, fermented, pressed, aged, and bottled at one of the region’s hundreds of wineries. At that time, they pass into the care of an entirely new workforce of laborers and winemakers. This workforce, both in the fields and in the processing plants, consists primarily of Mexican and Mexican-American fieldworkers or day laborers. Many of these workers now live permanently in this region. In a typical year during a period such as harvest, however, thousands of workers from Mexico as well as other agricultural regions of California flow into Sonoma and Napa and find work through family connections or through work arrangements from previous years. They stay until they can no longer find work, usually a few months, and return to Mexico or migrate to where work can be found.

Members of the surrounding communities have become familiar with this influx of workers and understand it as a necessary component of growing a labor intensive crop such as wine grapes. As a consequence of this process, local economies have developed an intimate relationship with the surrounding vineyards and wineries. Wine grapes are now the major agricultural product produced in both counties while the wineries have become the destination of countless tourists.

For those engaged in commercial viticulture in Northern California during its developing years, things were not always so agreeable. An examination of the development of the wine industry in Sonoma and Napa Counties reveals that premium wine has not always been produced; for years, the vintages were labeled drinkable at best. In addition, the California wine industry at large, including that in Sonoma and Napa, has
faced a number of lengthy setbacks that have nearly devastated the dream of producing wine in the state. A detailed analysis of vineyard labor in Sonoma and Napa shows that while at times trends have followed those of the state, sources of labor have varied and have developed locally, for the most part, to fit the demand when it was needed. Interestingly, however, because of the distance from the border and the relatively small number of Hispanic residents in the region, at no time prior to World War II was Mexican labor used extensively in the vineyards of Sonoma and Napa Counties.

Wine production in Sonoma and Napa is not a recent phenomenon. It began long before the wine boom of the 1960s. Wine grapes were first brought to California late in the eighteenth century as missionaries moved into Spanish California. Although it is commonly written that wine production in California began at Mission San Diego de Alcala, in present day San Diego, soon after 1769, “the most likely date for California’s first vintage is 1782 from plantings made at Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1779.”

The Spanish planted vines throughout the state at each of their missions. Interestingly, however, Bo Simons wrote that “Sonoma stands as the one county in California where the Spanish were not the first to plant the vine and make wine.” It has been noted that the Russians began planting grapes at Fort Ross in 1812 “to supply food for their fur trading operations in Alaska.”

Throughout the North Bay counties, however, vineyards were planted by Spanish missionaries, Mexicans, and white settlers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Within a year of establishing Mission San Francisco de Solano de Sonoma in 1823, Father Altimira had planted over three thousand grapevines to be used

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for making wine in Sonoma Valley. Records of grape growing in Napa Valley date back to 1838 when George Yount, a white settler from Missouri, planted a small vineyard on his land. As American settlers inundated Northern California after U.S. acquisition of the territory in 1848, vineyard acreage continued to grow throughout the counties as populations grew and settled agriculture developed.

Wine grapes, however, did not constitute the primary agricultural pursuit in Sonoma and Napa in the mid to late nineteenth century. As with much of California, vast tracts of land in Sonoma and Napa were put to use growing cereal crops such as wheat or the land was fenced and parcelled to create pastures for cattle, dairy, and poultry operations. For some years, wheat, hops, and pasture land dominated the landscape of Sonoma and Napa. In fact, Sonoma and Napa Counties were not the center of the wine industry in California. In 1856, of 2,265 acres planted to grapes in California, the Sonoma Viticultural District held only 93 acres in grapes while the Napa Viticultural District had only 225 acres. By the 1880s and 1890s, much of the land previously planted to cereal crops had been converted to fruit crops, and consequently, viticulture had gained importance in these counties. In 1858, Sonoma and Napa had increased their vineyard acreage to 287 and 263, respectively. Just ten years later in 1868, Sonoma had jumped to 6,185 acres and Napa totaled 3,740 acres planted to grape vines. During the two following decades,
however, a shocking increase in vineyard acreage occurred that was comparable to the “boom” in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1876, Sonoma County held 6,500 acres in grapes. This number increased to 7,060 acres the following year. By 1890, however, Sonoma County wine grape growers had 22,351 acres under cultivation.\(^7\) Napa County viticulturists had 11,285 acres in vines by 1891.\(^8\) Many vineyards had been planted, wine was being produced, and commercial wineries were in operation. California’s first winery was opened by Agoston Harasthy in Sonoma in 1857 and named after his eastside ranch, Buena Vista. In 1860, thirty-two wineries were in operation in California.\(^9\) A number of Napa vintners opened their own cellars as well; among the earliest were Charles Krug winery, established in 1861, and Schramsberg winery, founded in 1865. The number of wineries in Sonoma County increased very rapidly; by 1880, there were 37 wineries in Sonoma Valley alone.\(^10\)

The wine produced at these wineries, however, remained a low quality, bulk wine throughout the nineteenth century.\(^11\) It is clear that growers remained focused on quantity over quality as winemaking techniques remained rudimentary and many growers neglected the concept that using superior grape varietals would produce better wine. Haraszthy had returned from a trip to Europe in 1861 with thousands of cuttings and rooted vines to promote varietal grafting, but for many years growers continued cultivation of the inferior Mission grape.

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\(^7\) Ibid., 257-259.
\(^10\) *Sonoma Index-Tribune* (Sonoma), April 24, 1880, p. 8.
\(^11\) Bulk wine is wine that would have been shipped to market by railcar in barrels. Retailers would then sell the wine at a set price per gallon. Consumers would either bring their own jugs or purchase jugs from the retailer to fill with wine.
Vineyards planted with Mission grapes were extremely vulnerable to the serious outbreak of phylloxera that destroyed vines worldwide in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{12} As the phylloxera hit France’s wine industry first in the 1870s, Peninou wrote that “in California the scourge was in two ways a blessing in disguise.”\textsuperscript{13} At first, French vineyards suffered huge losses from phylloxera, resulting in a greater demand for California wines. Consequently, the California wine industry witnessed unparalleled prosperity in the early 1880s. Nevertheless, a serious depression hit the wine industry as phylloxera hit northern California vineyards in the mid-1880s. It was soon realized that phylloxera could only be overcome by replanting vineyards with specific vines resistant to the pest. Devoted to winemaking, industry leaders quickly brought disease resistant vines from around the world to the North Bay. Thus, those growers who chose to uproot old vineyards planted in strains such as the Mission grape and replant with resistant vines were now able to grow grapes that could theoretically make a higher quality wine. If phylloxera had not forced growers to replant old vineyards, Sonoma and Napa wine quality may have remained rather poor for decades to come. By 1900, the California wine industry had recovered from its first major setback and had become a major force in the worldwide market.\textsuperscript{14}

Vineyard acreage totals seem to confirm these records. As Napa County had 11,285 acres in vines in 1891, total acreage had dropped to 5,465 by 1895 and 2,000 in 1900. In 1900, however, Napa had 2,738 acres in non-bearing vines; vineyards had been cleared of infested vines and replanted by 1900, accounting for the large number of non-bearing

\textsuperscript{12} Phylloxera is a louse-like insect native to the east coast that attaches itself to the roots of the vine and essentially destroys it.
\textsuperscript{13} Peninou, \textit{History of the Sonoma Viticultural District}, 21.
\textsuperscript{14} Vincent Carosso, \textit{The California Wine industry, 1830-1895: A Study of the Formative Years} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 143-144.
vines at that time. In 1905, bearing vines in Napa covered 6,500 acres while 2,400 acres were planted yet non-bearing. By 1910, Napa County had a total of 11,270 acres in bearing vines and 4,840 acres in non-bearing vines. By 1919, however, total acreage planted to grapes in Napa County had dropped to 9,320. Sonoma County acreage totals fluctuated with nearly the same fluidity as did Napa’s in this period. In 1893, grape acreage in Sonoma was 23,291; there was a slight increase to 26,343 by 1904. By 1910, however, Sonoma County had only 17,401 acres in vines. In 1914, that total had risen up to 19,408 acres but had surprisingly dropped again by 1919 to 17,080 acres in grapes.

There were a number of reasons for the boom or bust cycle of the California wine industry in the early 20th century. Nationwide recessions hurt grape growers, while occasional shortcomings in European wine production boosted the industry out of slumps. By 1919, years of war and early efforts by prohibitionists had taken a toll on some California growers’ ability to be competitive and they had replaced vineyards with other crops. In Northern California, however, very few growers took to uprooting vineyards in anticipation of prohibition. “In Napa and Sonoma Counties in particular,” wrote John Meers, “the growers felt that there was little else they could grow on their land. Furthermore, the growers had an attitude of wait and see.” Wait and see they did; what they found was that demand for grapes increased nearly every year through Prohibition.

Prohibition led to industry consolidation, but even though the number of operating wineries was greatly decreased due to Prohibition, growth in vineyard acreage continued

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15 Robinson, Landscape Regions of Napa Valley, 72.
16 Peninou, History of the Sonoma Viticultural District, 260-264.
17 Heintz, California’s Napa Valley, 217-218.
through the mid 1920s as demand for grapes used in home winemaking boomed across the nation. As is shown in Table 1, vineyard acreage during Prohibition, which one thinks would have dropped rapidly with so many wineries closing their doors, actually increased over 4,000 acres in Sonoma County and nearly 2,000 acres in Napa County.\textsuperscript{19} Many growers that continued to grow grapes added to their vineyards with acres of vines of hearty varieties that could withstand being shipped to the east coast where demand was greatest. The grape varieties planted in the 1920s had “a high sugar content, heavy color and thick skins” and were far inferior to those in existing vineyards. Even though these grape varieties allowed for many viticulturists to survive during the years of Prohibition, they “would have a lasting, damaging effect on California wine long after Repeal” because of their poor ability to make good wine.\textsuperscript{20}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>17,080</td>
<td>9,320</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>21,100</td>
<td>11,340</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>21,111</td>
<td>11,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>17,230</td>
<td>9,420</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>21,326</td>
<td>11,350</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>20,982</td>
<td>11,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>17,340</td>
<td>9,520</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>21,510</td>
<td>11,070</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>21,175</td>
<td>12,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>18,040</td>
<td>10,220</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>21,710</td>
<td>10,950</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>21,784</td>
<td>12,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>18,740</td>
<td>10,680</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>21,043</td>
<td>10,955</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>21,925</td>
<td>12,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>19,695</td>
<td>10,880</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>21,502</td>
<td>11,090</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>22,235</td>
<td>12,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>20,545</td>
<td>11,180</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>21,496</td>
<td>11,175</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>23,391</td>
<td>12,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>20,605</td>
<td>11,280</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>21,356</td>
<td>11,225</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The increase in acreage planted to grapes at first meant higher profits for Sonoma and Napa growers, but it had its disadvantages as well. The wine industry had fought

\textsuperscript{19} Tabulated from Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Department of Agriculture, State of California, \textit{Acreage Estimates: California Fruit and Nut Crops, 1919-1953 – By Counties}, Special Publication 257 (Sacramento, Ca: 1956), 98-99;

\textsuperscript{20} Peninou, \textit{History of the Sonoma Viticultural District}, 33.
tremendously hard against Prohibition; once it arrived, the growers prospered because they were allowed to ship their grapes by railcar to markets in the east. By 1927, however, prices of grapes had fallen extremely low due to overproduction and the consequential flooding of the eastern markets with too many grapes. At this point, growers turned in favor of Repeal as that “would assure the grape industry a more orderly market for its grapes, for wineries could crush the surplus.” Even though grape growers for a time seemed immune to the agricultural depression of the 20s and Prohibition, when the Great Depression hit at the end of the 20s, growers were hit hard; some were forced to tear out their vineyards and plant fruit crops such as prunes or apples. Vineyard acreage totals dropped slightly early in the Depression, but in 1933 Sonoma growers still had 21,496 acres in grapes while Napa growers had 11,175 acres. Interestingly, however, grapes were not the only crop produced in Napa County whose total output was reduced due to Depression era developments. As is shown in Table 2, out of the growers producing the five top fruit crops in the county between 1928 and 1933, only cherry growers were able to increase production as all others faced significant reductions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1938</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>1,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherries</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>25,250</td>
<td>25,860</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>38,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pears</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>2,899</td>
<td>1,640</td>
<td>1,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunes</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>12,100</td>
<td>16,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Nearly all the wineries had disappeared, but by the time Repeal came in 1933, the growers had survived the second major setback to the wine industry. Grape production slowed down through the Depression, but growers rebounded quickly by producing 250 percent more in 1938 than they had five years earlier. Many eager new winemakers and viticulturists moved into the industry in the 30s, however, both counties witnessed little growth in vineyard acreage in the ten years following repeal; the industry was busy rebuilding itself. Fortunately, there were some courageous growers that counted on the wine grape industry to rebound well. William McCutchan’s grandfather planted vineyards in 1932 on land that had for years been planted in hay. “Things were pretty rough there in the ‘30s,” McCutchan noted, “. . . but there wasn’t any money in hay, and I gather he thought it would be better in grapes.”

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, even though vineyard acreage in Napa County only increased by slightly less than 1,000 acres between 1933 and 1938, grape output had dramatically increased; grape tonnage had more than doubled in five years. This increase can most likely be attributed to the growing demand for grapes from wineries after Repeal that subsequently initiated full production efforts on vineyards that had for years been left behind. The number of small, family wineries slowly began to increase following Repeal, but in the 1930s, profits shifted to large scale commercial vintners and wineries that had the capital necessary to essentially restart the damaged wine industry.

By 1933, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated as President, agriculture was the most seriously depressed sector of the American economy. Farmers across the nation were puzzled at the fact that as they became more efficient and continued to produce

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more, they were suffering from shrinking incomes. The early form of agribusiness
exemplified in California, however, was not immune to either the agricultural depression
of the 1920s or the perils of the Great Depression when the prices received for
agricultural production and farmer income fell to the lowest point since the late 19th
century.\footnote{R. Douglas Hurt, Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 66.} By the 1930s, however, California possessed the most industrialized,
intensive, specialized, and yet regionally diversified agricultural industries of all the
states in the nation.\footnote{Paul Taylor and Tom Vasey, “Contemporary Background of California Farm Labor,” Rural Sociology 1:3 (Dec. 1936), 401-403. Lawrence J. Jelinek, Harvest Empire: A History of California Agriculture (San Francisco: Boyd & Fraser, 1979), 61-77. Carey McWilliams, Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1939), 5. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as referred to by Taylor, an industrialized, large-scale farm is any farm whose annual product was valued at $30,000 or more in 1929. Intensive farming refers to growing crops that demand a large number of farm laborers for picking during a limited harvest period, i.e. grapes. By 1929, intensive crops represented nearly 80% of the value of agricultural production in California. Specialization on the farm refers to a farm that focuses on one or maybe two products, like many fruit and vegetable farms. The regional diversity of California can be understood through California farmers producing over 180 specialty crops.} Of the 30,437,995 acres in farms in California in 1935, 18,957,126 acres were located in farms of 1,000 acres or more. Of that number, 6,963,174 acres
were in farms of 10,000 acres or more. In that same year, statistics show that 3.5 percent
of the farms in California held 62.3 percent of all the land in farms. A few other states
held similar distributions of land in farms, but by 1929, California possessed 2892 of the
7875 large-scale farms in the United States.\footnote{In Texas, the state with the next highest number behind California, there were only 731 large-scale farms. All of the statistics in this paragraph can be found in U.S. Department of Commerce. United States Census of Agriculture: 1935. General Report: Statistics by Subjects, Volume III (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), 90, 91; and Taylor and Vasey, “California Farm Labor,” 402, 403.}

Interestingly, California growers also managed over 60 percent of the large scale fruit
farms in the U.S. with 1,157 of a nationwide total of 1,924 farms.\footnote{Taylor and Vasey, “California Farm Labor,” 403.} Large-scale fruit
farms were not, however, as common in Sonoma and Napa Counties as in other
California counties. Although the average size of all farms in Sonoma and Napa Counties in 1935 was 109 and 204 acres, respectively, the average size of farms from which crops were harvested that year was 24 acres in Sonoma and 39 in Napa. Compared to counties such as Imperial and Yolo where the average size of farms on which crops were harvested were, respectively, 103 and 141 acres each, Sonoma and Napa growers clearly worked much smaller plots. In comparison to farms in other major grape producing counties in California, Sonoma and Napa farms were still, on average, considerably smaller. The average size of farms in the seven counties composing the San Joaquin Viticultural District, which in 1935 had a combined total of 382,086 acres planted to grapes, was nearly 58 acres while Sonoma and Napa Counties’ farms combined for an average 27 acres.27

Growers on small farms such as those found in Sonoma and Napa Counties faced similar difficulties as large growers when it came to economic recessions and the Depression. However, Sonoma and Napa Counties’ smaller farms and vineyards, coupled with a unique geographical position close to an international port, meant that at certain times different sources of labor would be used as compared to large Southern California farms close to the border with Mexico. In the late 19th and early 20th century, in fact, vineyard labor in Sonoma and Napa Counties has shifted through various ethnic groups following statewide developments.

27 Figures tabulated from data given in *U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1935*, 938-943. It is misleading to report averages size of farms for all land in farms because of the variants in pastureland usage throughout the state. Thus, for a more accurate picture of the average size of farms relevant to this study, it is more accurate to look separately at the average size of farms in which crops were harvested. The San Joaquin Viticultural District is composed of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Kern Counties. In 1935, these counties had 36,542 farms reporting a total of 2,110,765 acres of crop land harvested. Sonoma and Napa Counties had 7,422 farms reporting a total of 199,138 acres of crop land harvested. Grape acreage for San Joaquin Viticultural District given in Peninou, *History of the Sonoma Viticultural District*, 269.
By the beginning of the commercial wine industry in California in the late 1850s, uses and sources of labor varied. If a grower’s vineyards were small enough for the family to control, no year round outside help was hired; workers were only hired during harvest. However, this was not common. More frequently, it seems, a grower would hire a number of workers to work year round and also hire a large number of workers during the intensive harvest period. Interestingly, this is very similar to common procedures used today. There are, however, some striking differences.

California’s agricultural labor force, including Sonoma and Napa Counties’, has, historically, largely been comprised of various minority groups and newly immigrated foreigners such as the Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Mexicans. These farm workers were, as Cletus Daniel noted, “beyond any question, among the most disadvantaged workers in the United States.”

The relatively low prevailing wages for agricultural laborers caused many to spend their lives in poverty. In terms of how labor contractors have shifted from using one group to another, Carey McWilliams wrote that “the established pattern has been somewhat as follows: to bring successive minority groups; to exploit them until the advantages of exploitation have been exhausted; and then to expel them in favor of more readily exploitable material.”

The agricultural laborer in California has filled a unique position in the work force; the structure of agribusiness in California in the early twentieth century caused growers to view the laborer simultaneously as a necessity and also as refuse. “They were the essential reason for the

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29 McWilliams, *Factories In the Field*, 305.
prosperity of California’s industrialized agriculture,” notes Daniel, “but were the state’s least prosperous workers.”

Finding the large numbers of seasonal laborers needed in specialty crop agriculture has puzzled farmers since growers began growing these crops commercially. In Sonoma and Napa, however, growers had little difficulty finding workers during intensive periods. Initially, the Chinese formed the primary source of labor in the region’s vineyards and wineries. Between the years 1858 and 1900, Chinese were employed extensively throughout the region in nearly all tasks relating to viticulture and winemaking short of winemaking itself. In fact, the Chinese were responsible for completing tasks such as clearing land, planting vines, digging wine cellars (caves), crushing grapes, and constructing wineries. Albert Brounstein, wine grower and owner of Diamond Creek Vineyards, noted that “the Chinese were very influential in the development of the wine business, because they would accept low wages, . . ., but they were very ingenious and very qualified laborers.”

Widespread hiring of Chinese was commonplace at this time as Caucasian workers did not want to do that type of work; many Caucasians only turned to agricultural labor during times when it was financially necessary as they “otherwise nursed the day-dream of striking it rich at gold or silver or some land-selling scheme.”

In fact, some growers could not even find Caucasian workers to hire if they had wanted to hire them. When asked by a U.S. Senator in 1877 “if he could get ‘white labor’ for his

32 See William F. Heintz, “The Role of Chinese Labor in Viticulture and Wine Making in Nineteenth Century California.” (M.A. Thesis, Sonoma State University, 1977), 40. Heintz has now completed over 100 histories of wineries and vineyards in Sonoma and Napa. Interestingly, his Master’s thesis is a history of Chinese labor in the California wine industry, including vineyard labor, yet his work following that project primarily focuses on wineries and their owners. Only rarely do any of his book length works study vineyard labor in any detail.
vineyard work,” John Hill of Glen Ellen remarked “I do not think we could. I think it
[viticulture] is one of the industrial resources of the country that would have to be
abandoned if it depended on white labor.”33

Among other reasons, however, anti-Chinese agitation, the Chinese Exclusion Act of
1882, and “the arrival of thousands of Italian laborers with a special expertise and love of
the grape and wine” pushed most of the Chinese out of the region and thus out of
viticulture by the turn of the century.34 Nevertheless, the Chinese had quite an impact on
the local culture; they were especially noted for their traditional funeral ceremonies.
Through the late 19th century, many were employed in Napa both as laborers and used as
domestic help to aid raising children. Interestingly, after writing that “Napa Valley
residents did not really object to differences in skin color or religion,” William Heintz
deftly noted that “they didn’t like the fact that so many ‘foreigners’ [i.e. Chinese] were
coming into the county.”35 Before the Chinese minority had a chance to move up in the
wine business into positions of winemaker or ownership, however, political pressures led
to their departure from the industry and they were replaced by Italian laborers.

“When I arrived in 1902,” remarked Charles Forni, an Italian immigrant who moved
to St. Helena, “the Italians adapted to the vineyard work and we, they beat the Chinamen
out. In two years, we cleaned them all out.”36 It is unclear where the Chinese went, but
by looking at the numbers of these groups in the area, it is easy to see how this
transformation took place so rapidly. In 1890, there was about the same number of both

33 United States Senate, Report of the Joint Special Committee, 1877, 796. As quoted in Heintz, “Chinese
Labor,” 41.
35 Heintz, California’s Napa Valley, 130, 175.
53.
Chinese and Italian born immigrants in Sonoma County. By 1900, even though the number of Italians had only increased slightly, the number of Chinese in Sonoma County had dropped by half. Ten years later, there were four times the number of Italians as in 1900, yet there were seven times the number of Italians than there were Chinese.\textsuperscript{37}

Writing in 1903 for the \textit{Pacific Wine and Spirit Review}, Leonard Coates wrote that “in the bay counties . . . there are some Indians [Native Americans] and Chinese among the grape gatherers, but the majority of the laborers are white.”\textsuperscript{38} An investigation of farm labor on 117 farms in Napa and Sonoma Valleys completed in 1908 shows that while temporary “oriental” labor was still prominent, they had nearly disappeared from permanent employment on valley farms. Of 2,393 temporary workers, 1,211 were “white” and 1,182 were “oriental.” However, of 642 permanent workers, there were 641 “white” and only 1 “oriental.”\textsuperscript{39} Italian laborers supplied the bulk of the hand labor through the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and the Italian influence in the Sonoma and Napa wine industry continued to grow as many purchased vineyards and opened wineries. Many of these are still in operation today; Sonoma County’s Foppiano Vineyards and Sebastiani Winery were founded by Italian immigrants Giovanni Foppiano and Samuele Sebastiani as they both planted vineyards and opened wineries in 1896 and 1904, respectively.\textsuperscript{40}

Louis J. Foppiano, Giovanni’s grandson who later took over the winery and vineyards, remembered furnishing his Italian laborers with wine in the fields. “We did give the


\textsuperscript{39} Bureau of Labor Statistics, \textit{Thirteenth Biennial Report} (California, 1907-08), 119, as cited in Table 6 of Speth, 53. It is not indicated which racial or ethnic groups are included in these figures. It is likely that “oriental” includes Chinese and Japanese.

\textsuperscript{40} For a extended discussion of the Italian American influence in the wine industry see Dick Rosano, \textit{Wine Heritage: The Story of Italian American Vintners}, with a forward by Robert Mondavi (San Francisco: The Wine Appreciation Guild Ltd., 2000).
Italians a gallon of half wine, half water, with a sack around it. You’d wet the sack, and that would keep the wine cool. They’d stick it behind a vine or under a tree, and it would stay cool. They’d go up and make a furrow or two, and then they’d take a drink of wine. It was hot, you know.”

Italian laborers apparently had a connection to the vineyards that previous labor sources did not. Italian vineyard workers, many of whom were raised growing grapes or at least in families that drank wine, were simply doing what they had learned in Italy. Perhaps this contributed to the ease in which Italian workers so easily displaced Chinese workers and moved up into the ranks of growers and winemakers.

Many of the Chinese working in the vineyards were long-time agriculturalists, but they were not vineyardists or vintners by nature. It is only natural that any labor group aspires to rise to the top of their industry; the Chinese may have had the same desire as the Italians, but there were too many factors including simple racism working against them.

Even though labor shortages were reported in Sonoma County during World War I, most reported crop losses were due to harsh weather rather than a lack of labor. When labor shortages did occur, the result was not as severe as other locations in the state as the local communities worked together to get through the time of crisis. “Women, children, and older workers,” wrote Frank Speth, “were used to take the place of the younger men.”

Considering that the large demand for workers comes during intensive periods such as harvest, the work that these workers were doing was simple hand labor that does not require a skilled workforce; the women, children, and older workers were thus capable substitutes.

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At this time, resident workers made up the bulk of the labor force. However, as production rapidly increased on Sonoma and Napa County farms in the early twentieth century, so did the proportion of nonresident, migrant workers on those farms. Many of the Chinese vineyard workers were migratory workers, so local communities had seen this process develop through the years. Nevertheless, as has been noted, there were “certain significant changes in the character of the supply” by the 1930s. Following the Depression, the labor supply in the region was “practically all white, with the exception of a few Filipinos who work the seed crops.” Remembering the early days on his ranch and vineyard land, Louis J. Foppiano said that “in the late teens and twenties. . . up until the Depression we had Italian workers, and then the Oklahomans came in. . . The pickers were Oklahomans then. They did a lot of work. . . They were good workers, good farmers.”

Speth noted that many of these workers were “‘professionals,’ having followed the seasonal crops for many years.”

Differing in ethnicity yet comparable to seasonal agricultural workers in Sonoma and Napa at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Speth wrote that “these [white] workers are the most efficient and are generally sure of securing work if they stay with the same employers every season.”

It is common for vineyard workers in Sonoma and Napa today to live in the area only temporarily each year. During their stay, they are continually facing challenges with how to ascertain decent and affordable housing for themselves and their families. Like many

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43 Louis J. Foppiano interview, 40.
44 The “professional” white migratory workers of the 1930s may have had the knowledge and ability to facilitate the growth of Sonoma and Napa viticulture had they been the primary labor force during the time of growth within the industry. However, many of these workers were either drafted into the armed forces during World War II or moved into manufacturing jobs in the 1940s. In short, they moved away from agricultural work never to return again. Following this, it was necessary to locate and train another group of “professional” workers. Just as well, this is not to say that there were not any Mexican workers being used on the farms and ranches of Sonoma and Napa County. It is likely that there were some Mexican workers employed extensively on the regions farms, however, their numbers must have been small.
ranchers, the Bussman family provided a camp for their workers during the hop harvest. During the Depression, the Bussmans attracted workers to their ranch by distributing handbills promising “free rent and food, hot and cold water, lights and so forth” and by housing the workers in various sized canvas tents. They gathered a large and diverse group of pickers, but these incentives caused many workers to come back yearly. “We used to have between 350 and 500 people on the ranch during the hop harvest,” remembered Robert Bussman, “They came from all over the state – Pomo Indians from the mountains, ‘Okies’ and ‘Arkies,’ gypsies, longshoreman from the docks of San Francisco.”46 However, as early as 1938, it was suggested that in order for these migratory workers “to maintain higher standards of living” and “supplement their income,” since most relied on seasonal work as their only source of income, “remedial measures of a local character” must be implemented “in the form of public services for the migratory workers such as medical aid, schools, health and sanitary facilities in camps, and where private camps are maintained, the provision of the best possible facilities for sanitation and comfort.”47 Some improvements were made by the start of World War II, however, these same recommendations were said to be requirements for those growers hiring bracero labor during and after the war.

In addition, Speth wrote that in order to reduce the problems that had developed with the influx of white migratory workers, growers were faced with the long-time objective and responsibility of “extending the season of employment as much as possible.” This, of course, could not be done as growers continued the trend of specialization on their farms. Sonoma and Napa County agriculture was still relatively diverse at the

46 Robert Bussman, as quoted in Gaye LeBaron, *Santa Rosa: A Twentieth Century Town* (Santa Rosa, Ca: Historia, Ltd., 1993), 74.
beginning of the 1940s, as grapes were still only a small part of total production; however, the diversity of crops was seen under an umbrella group of fruit crops that all came to maturity during the same season. Thus, the diversity of the particular crops grown in Sonoma and Napa was relatively inconsequential as much of the labor needed throughout both counties was concentrated into a period of a few months. “By diversity of specialized individual farms on which peak seasons come at different times,” Speth wrote, “it is possible to utilize labor for longer periods of time with less migration.”\footnote{Ibid., 105.} As we know now, however, following World War II, Sonoma and Napa County agriculture has become less diverse and increasingly specialized in one crop. Recent regional developments have created specialized individual farms, many focused on grapes.

Nevertheless, critical of how the growers followed the “policies of the past” in the 1930s and continued to alter “the labor supply to meet the needs of a changing demand,” Speth declared that “some attention must be focused on adjusting the demand or labor market to more efficiently absorb the supply.”\footnote{Ibid., 106.} A noble theory indeed, however, it seems that nobody paid attention to his proposal. The policies of the past became the policies of the future as Sonoma and Napa growers lived with existing labor problems and eventually looked to Mexico to change the nature of the supply, just as many Southern California growers had for years. Speth did not know that World War II would arrive and pull many able-bodied men into the armed forces, leaving agriculture and industry with a deficient labor pool. Although defense industries found a previously untapped source of labor, i.e., an ambitious group of women entering the workforce, employers in the agricultural industry immediately began to question where they would
find the large number of reliable workers required during harvest. By the end of 1942, the Bracero Program had begun and the character of the labor supply had been altered yet again.
“In ’45, what we did,” recalled Sonoma County grower Mike Teldeschi, “we hired almost anybody we could get at the time. For the pruning and everything.” Working tirelessly so as not to lose his crop in those years, Teldeschi remembered having trouble finding labor for his vineyard. In his recollection, the Mexicans did not begin to arrive until the late 1940s. Teldeschi continued:

My brother and I did a lot of pruning ourselves, and then we hired local people at the time. There wasn’t the influx of Mexicans like there is today. After World War II, they began to come in. They called it the Bracero Program or whatever. They began to import them, and then they stayed here over the grape and prune season and went back. Then pretty soon a lot of them began to come in and stay. And then we had a lot of illegal aliens that used to come in there, but it didn’t matter who they were, as long as they worked, you know, and we don’t really care.¹

Teldeschi’s statement evidences the fact that very few Mexican migrant workers were available for vineyard work prior to World War II. In short time, however, Teldeschi’s labor shortage problems had been remedied as Mexican labor became prevalent in the area. The agricultural labor force in Sonoma and Napa Counties changed drastically during and after World War II, but it did not change overnight. The transformation from a primarily white agricultural labor force to a primarily Mexican and Mexican-American labor force was slow; its origins date back to the early 20th century and its eventual outcome was not reached until the 1960s. Throughout this period there were years in which little visible developments took place in the region as changes that would later affect Sonoma and Napa were developing elsewhere in California, and there were times in which a drastic restructuring of the region’s labor force took place in the course of a

¹ Mike Teldeschi, “Vineyardist of Dry Creek Valley,” interview by Carole Hicke, 1995 (Healdsburg, Ca.: Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley, 1995).
single year. Nevertheless, the nexus of the visible transformation of Sonoma and Napa Counties’ labor force came with the start of World War II and the beginning of the Bracero Program.

An analysis of the use of Mexican labor in the United States, California, and Sonoma and Napa Counties prior to World War II reveals that Mexican labor was utilized both intensively and extensively in some regions but was nearly nonexistent in others. By the time the Bracero Program was started it seems that U.S. growers who had not previously used Mexican labor were willing and excited about the prospect of employing Mexican labor on their farms. Ignorant of the similar program implemented during World War I, many growers thought that this was the first time that such a program had been used. Due to the massive response from growers supporting the program and using bracero labor, the program was extended time and time again through 1964.

Between the years 1942 and 1964, bracero labor unquestionably aided the growth of American agriculture. Overall, over 5,000,000 Mexican workers were brought into the United States as agricultural workers under the Bracero Program.² Braceros were utilized in the fields of over 30 states throughout the country, but throughout the entire program California farmers contracted the largest numbers of braceros. Bracero labor was a key component of the growth of California agriculture around the middle of the twentieth century. The influence of the Bracero Program on California agriculture and on the demographic makeup of California is undeniable. Overall, this program greatly benefited the agricultural industry. The experiences of braceros, however, were not

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² Tabulated from figures given in Ernesto Galarza, Merchants of Labor, 53, 79; and Stephen H. Sosnick, Hired Hands: Seasonal Farm Workers in the United States (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1978), 388. The total number of Mexican workers, including resident Mexican-Americans and undocumented workers, entering the U.S. and employed on U.S. farms, however, was considerably larger.
always favorable. Many of these workers who were driven out of Mexico by political and economic hardships faced something north of the border that was at times nearly as bad as the hacienda system they were trying to escape.

Farm labor importation into California dates back to the late eighteenth century when Indian field hands were brought to Alta California “under an elaborate program to plug a labor shortage” as what one scholar calls “California’s first braceros.”3 As a settled agricultural industry blossomed in California after the gold rush, however, only a small number of Mexicans came to the state for work in the late nineteenth century. The burgeoning industrial farms of the late nineteenth century that were transformed by developments in irrigation and mechanization were surely in need of a large labor force, but they “were heavily dependent upon ample supplies of European and Asian workers, and Mexican workers were simply not needed in large numbers.”4 The remarkable expansion of agricultural production in the Southwest at the turn of the century witnessed the development of exceptionally large farms, and with the decline in Asian labor, this growth created a need for Mexican migrant workers. With improvements in transportation, it became common for Southwestern farmers to recruit workers “directly in Mexico.” Many of the over 60,000 Mexican workers that immigrated to the United States each year between 1900 and 1910 stayed close to the border and came only temporarily, returning to Mexico when they could not find work. Others made the U.S.

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their permanent home and brought their families with them. Over 49,000 Mexicans were legally admitted to the U.S. in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁵

Although some of these men had never worked in agriculture before being hired in the U.S., many were farmers in their home states in Mexico. Unable to profit enough through their agricultural pursuits at home, however, they were forced to abandon their fields for those in a foreign land. What California had to offer these immigrants was seasonal employment and a way of living ultimately determined by their employer. A disheartening fate indeed, but it reveals a fundamental socio-economic problem within Mexico that remained through the Depression and into the years of the Bracero Program.

Throughout Mexico in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, land ownership was concentrated in the hands of an elite few who consequently controlled a majority of the cultivated land in the nation. As was the case in many Latin American countries, Mexico’s agricultural industry, in large part, was under the control of the hacienda system. In the hacienda system, landless tenant farmers labor primarily for the profit of a wealthy landowning grower. *Hacendados*, or hacienda owners, were reluctant to invest money to improve production techniques on their farms because they were accustomed to a surplus of labor and land, so they continued to use and promote labor intensive farming methods well into the twentieth century. To the detriment of traditional societies that had an economic and cultural connection to crops such as corn, *hacendados* readily “increased acreage in crops” such as sugar, coffee, and cotton “that promised the highest return on their investment.” This commercialization of agriculture “widened the

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⁵ Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 13. According to U.S. Census reports, in 1900 there were 103,393 “Mexican-born persons” in the U.S. This number had increased to 221,915 by 1910 and 486,418 by 1920.
economic gap between rich and poor in rural Mexico” as *hacendados* and other wealthy businessmen profited from higher commodity prices and as the peasants and tenant farmers wages “stagnated or fell.”

For over twenty-six years prior to the Mexican Revolution in 1910, Mexico had been under the authoritarian government of José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz whose regime, fittingly, consistently stressed the importance of modernization through industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and mining. The Mexican revolution of 1910 and the resulting semi-democratic constitution of 1917, however, spawned reforms that changed the entire structure of the Mexican government as well as Mexico’s agricultural industry. By 1920, the opportunistically responsive government began to focus its attention on, among other things, implementing a comprehensive program of agrarian land reform. Mexico’s land reform plan involved the transfer of land from generally wealthy landowners to landless Mexican peasants. Initially, land distribution commenced at a slow but steady pace. Wary of U.S. intervention, Mexican leaders focused on other issues because of the association of land distribution and communistic tendencies. It was not until president Lázaro Cárdenas took power in 1934, when a favorable geopolitical climate was in place, that land reform became a priority. Even then, however, Mexico’s

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9 The literature on the Cárdenas presidency is extensive. Some very useful studies providing an overview and some analysis of his programs include Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Enrique C. Ochoa, *Feeding...
problems persisted. Peasants were given land, but they did not have the capital necessary to become successful farmers and the land they received was ill-suited for growing crops.

Despite the Revolution and promises that they would be given land, the number of Mexicans immigrating to the United States increased steadily through the early twentieth century. Between 1911 and 1921, over 250,000 Mexicans arrived in the U.S. During the next ten years the total reached 459,287.\textsuperscript{10} Mexican labor quickly became so important to agriculture that when labor shortages arose during World War I, farmers looked to the government to ease immigration policies in order to secure labor directly from Mexico. Prior to 1917, restrictions on immigration from Mexico were very relaxed; however, the immigration act of 1917 was at that time “the most restrictive in American history” and excluded many aliens from entering the U.S. on the basis of their personal qualifications. Interestingly, almost immediately after the act was passed, restrictions such as the eight dollar head tax were waived due to labor demands in agriculture, railroads, and mining. Between 1917 and 1921, U.S. employers imported nearly 73,000 Mexicans for temporary employment, many for work in California.\textsuperscript{11}

There are many important parallels that can be drawn between this early labor importation program and the Bracero Program. During World War I, the government assumed no responsibility for the recruitment of labor, employers were “required to sign an agreement with United States government specifying conditions under which the [Mexican laborers] could enter for employment” and were “responsible for feeding, transporting, and housing the Mexicans, although these costs could be deducted from the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Galarza, \textit{Merchants of Labor}, 28.
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migrants’ wages.” Employers of braceros were also required to sign a contract, screen the incoming laborers, and provide the same for their workers. During World War I, interest groups arose and an alliance between the railroads, coal mines, sugar-beet growers, and cotton and fruit farmers was well represented and supported by high ranking government officials. Opposition groups in Mexico and the U.S. complained of the mistreatment of these Mexican workers and spoke out about American employers that “took advantage of the helpless foreign labor.” Interest group politics also had a significant influence on the implementation and continuation of the Bracero Program twenty years later. As for the “helpless foreign labor” brought in between 1917 and 1921, it seems that many were more content in the U.S. than they were in Mexico; over half of the laborers temporarily admitted to fill the wartime labor shortage never returned to Mexico, ignoring the fact that a percentage of their wages earned in the U.S. was tied up in a postal savings account. Not surprisingly, comparable problems permeated the World War II Bracero Program in spite of similar incentives for braceros to comply with the stipulations of their contract.12 In addition, the Southwest was inundated with a steady flow of illegal immigrants from Mexico during World War I. Even though 72,862 workers were legally admitted, Kiser found that “the overwhelming majority of Mexican immigrants entered illegally” during the war years.13

Not all of these immigrants went into the agricultural labor pool, but they slipped into California at a rather opportune time. A decade later during the Depression years, thousands of Mexicans were repatriated after being charged with taking jobs from white domestic labor, but those Mexicans arriving in the 1920s were welcomed by many in

12 The incentives in place to return to Mexico were based on the assumption that the only reason for coming to the U.S. was economic.
California. Throughout the decade, Mexican labor became increasingly important to California agriculture. Whereas Mexican workers comprised only 7 percent of all workers in migratory labor camps in 1915, by 1929 they comprised over 31 percent of the group. Interestingly, just twenty years after the Immigration Commission reported that Japanese workers dominated the vineyards of California, the California Department of Industrial Relations noted that in 1928 over half of the non-white laborers hired in the production of grapes and deciduous fruit were Mexican.\footnote{U.S. Congress, Senate, \textit{Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor}. Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, 76\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940), LIV, 19842-75, as cited in Harry Schwartz, \textit{Seasonal Farm Labor in the United States, with special reference to hired workers in fruit and vegetable and sugar-beet production} (New York, Columbia University Press, 1945), 51.} Some argue that the large influx of Mexican labor into California undermined domestic labor. Growers, however, defended Mexican laborers at the same time that they described the workers with contradictory stereotypes. They spoke about Mexican labor with an appreciative disregard, commenting on them with remarks such as “Mexicans are very satisfactory. . . but require constant supervision and driving” or “they do with grace what we tell them to do, and we don’t have to be too particular about the way we tell them.”\footnote{Paul S. Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor in the United States: Imperial Valley, Vol. 1} (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1930), 31.}

Despite the increase in their numbers in agricultural production, immigration from Mexico began to slow by the end of the 1920s due to the economic crisis of the Great Depression. As the number of available jobs quickly disappeared, problems of and associated with illegal immigration also diminished. Many Mexicans residing in the U.S. actually returned to Mexico at this time; in fact, over 100,000 left the U.S. in the 1930s.\footnote{About 67,000 Mexicans entered legally in 1927. By 1930 that number had dropped to 11,915. Kiser, “Mexican American Labor,” 134.}
It is clear that Mexico’s fundamental problems had not been eradicated in the 20 years following the Revolution. In addition to the thousands of workers wishing to become a bracero, countless numbers of illegal immigrants again traveled to the farms of California during the 1940s and 1950s, claiming that they were making more money in a few months in California than they could all year in Mexico. Those desiring a contract to enter as a bracero, it seems, were willing to tolerate nearly anything to escape Mexico. The pre-contract experience and medical screening procedures that potential braceros endured both in Mexico and the United States were not only confusing but at times rather humiliating. Still, not knowing what the future held for them, the braceros endured these hardships to escape the starvation and lack of financial opportunity in Mexico.

Expressing his lack of understanding about the process, Rafael Rodriguez, who first came to the U.S. as a bracero in 1943, noted that as he was waiting to be selected at El Estadio Nacional in Mexico City, he “didn’t know if they were looking for agricultural workers or if they were looking for industrial workers,” but he did know that “they were looking for bodies.”

Sometimes waiting for days in long lines, aspiring braceros commonly paid a mordida, an unauthorized fee given to contracting officials, in order to guarantee a chance at being contracted. Nevertheless, being selected did not guarantee employment; nearly three percent of those transferred to U.S. reception centers were rejected after being examined for diseases such as tuberculosis, syphilis, and venereal disease and dumped on the Mexican side of the border, usually hundreds of miles from

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17 Rafael Rodriguez, interview by author, 16 April 2004, Rutherford, Ca.
18 Anderson, Bracero Program in California, 6. Anderson notes that the term mordida is “essentially untranslatable.” However, it is the Spanish word for “a bite.” “It is a form of payment which lies, in the eye of the beholder,” he wrote, “somewhere between a bribe and gratuity for services rendered.”
their homes. This screening process was misunderstood by Mexicans who saw it as mysterious, and many complained of having their blood taken. Interestingly, many braceros believed that the reasons for it were for their own good and not to protect the Americans from infectious diseases as it was designed.\textsuperscript{19} Although they were given a rough guide explaining the basics of their contracts, i.e. wages, employment guarantees, housing, meals, their future return to Mexico, etc., many of these men had little idea of what to expect, including their destination, in the United States.\textsuperscript{20}

During the years of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program (EFLSP), which ran between 1943 and 1947, U.S. growers contracted with the government to bring 219,500 Mexicans to the U.S. to work as agricultural laborers. Not surprisingly, growers in California immediately became the largest employers of bracero labor. In 1945, the year in which the most braceros were hired under the EFLSP, growers in California employed 63 percent of the braceros in the U.S. for the year. During a few months of that year, California growers employed up to 90 percent of the Mexican contract workers in the U.S.\textsuperscript{21} As shown in Table 3, the four states that contracted the largest numbers of braceros under the EFLSP were California, Montana, Oregon, and Washinton. Clearly, for the dates specified, California growers utilized this program more expansively than did growers in other states. Between 1943 and 1947 California farmers employed over 55 percent of the contracted Mexican Nationals admitted to the United States. California growers had, as is seen in 1945 when the disparity was smallest, over five times the

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., chapters 2 and 3 passim.
\textsuperscript{20} Translated to English from “\textit{Guí para los Trabajadores Agrícolas Mexicanos en los Estados Unidos de Norte América}” and published by the Labor Department’s Bureau of Employment Security, this guide informed the braceros about their work, what was expected of them, and what was required from their employers. For the complete text see “Appendix F: Mexican Worker Guide” in U.S. Department of Labor, \textit{Farm Labor Fact Book} (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959; reprint, New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 227.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Migratory Labor}, 38, 39.
number of braceros in their fields than growers in any other state. In addition, it is noteworthy that the number of braceros employed in the United States had been in decline since 1944.

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<td>1,158</td>
<td>1,625</td>
<td>2,788</td>
<td>41,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 3, 1947</td>
<td>14,088</td>
<td>3,209</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>31,331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It appears that growers in California initially utilized the program as it was intended: as a means of procuring harvest labor during the war years. After the war ended, California and U.S. growers contracted fewer braceros than they had during the war. Growers were unsure about how to “reap fully the advantages” of using braceros, and thus were cautious in contracting them. Over time, the U.S. government no longer paid for the transportation of braceros to and from the U.S, so employers felt that they were getting less. The Mexican government also began to show that they would not accept poor treatment of their nationals, and some growers were blacklisted for violating standards. The discrimination of braceros while they were in the U.S. became “the cause of continuing differences between the two governments,” and the increasing tension contributed to growers contracting fewer braceros each year.22

These reasons, however, are not the primary forces that caused a decline in usage. As bracero usage dropped off heavily after World War II and the output on California farms

still increased, it is obvious that many growers found other sources of harvest labor. Even though growers had the option of contracting braceros from Mexico as America entered World War II, many growers continued using non-bracero Mexican and Mexican-American labor, many of whom were likely undocumented, to fill their labor demand. These growers were troubled by having to lay off braceros when domestic work became available and in paying the fifteen dollar contracting fee per bracero. In addition, “holdbacks” from the bracero’s paychecks were not “sufficiently high to discourage the bracero from ‘skipping.’” Bracero contracts also had a minimum term of four months, a period considered impractical to growers that needed a labor force only for a short time during harvest. In this way, the Bracero Program greatly increased the number of undocumented workers coming into California by pushing growers to use illegal immigrants and making “channels” for the migration stream. Mexican labor had been used on California farms long before the labor shortage during World War II, however, it rapidly became more prevalent. For growers in locations in which the use of undocumented workers was widespread, the Bracero Program only opened up an additional labor pool. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, all growers were encouraged to “dry out” any undocumented workers they used by taking them to the border, documenting them, and contracting them as braceros. Nevertheless, many growers operated illegally by employing both braceros and “wetbacks” – a derogatory term that referred to Mexicans who entered the United States through border rivers such as the Rio Grande – at the same time.  

23 Ibid., 56, 57.
24 Understanding the derogatory nature of the term, “wetback” has only been utilized to show how it has been used in the cited sources. Growers hiring braceros were not legally allowed to hire illegal aliens, however, “wetbacks” were used extensively across California as agricultural labor, illegally, in the same
There was a steady decline of bracero usage on California farms in the middle to late 1940s, and interestingly, the number of braceros contracted per year in the United States continued to decline until 1951 when agricultural labor shortages arose due to the Korean War. The passage of Public Law 78 in 1951 and the accompanying Migrant Labor Agreement, however, signified a shift in the Bracero Program and “gave a permanence to earlier executive agreements for alien contract labor.” As PL 78 took effect, another era of bracero contracts immediately began in California and across the nation. The total number of braceros contracted to come to the United States during the later years ranged from 190,745 in 1951, up to 450,422 in 1957, and back down to 195,450 in 1963. During these years, the bulk of the contracted workers were sent to Texas, California, and Arkansas.

Nevertheless, California farmers utilized the program extensively through the 1950s. As exhibited in Table 4, which shows the minimum and maximum number of braceros working during one week in California by year, growers had an increasing need for braceros through most of the 1950s. The fluctuation in total numbers of braceros at work on California farms throughout the year was large, but the trends show that growers hired the most braceros during the late summer and early fall when many of California’s crops needed to be harvested.

Mexicans who were contracted to California entered a state in which many growers’ lack of attention and care, along with extreme regulatory oversights, contributed to living fields with braceros through the extent of the program. “Dehydration” efforts were somewhat successful, however, many “wetbacks” were simply sent back to Mexico. “Wetback” apprehensions and deportations grew through the late 1940s and early 1950s. As the federal government implemented “Operation Wetback” in 1954, officials deported 1,108,900 “wetbacks” in that year alone. See Ibid., 59. For an extended discussion of the “wetback” problem see Copp, *Wetbacks and Braceros*, 34-52, and Juan Ramon Garcia, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980).


conditions far below those they endured in Mexico.\textsuperscript{27} There were problems associated with housing, food, transportation, and wages. As most braceros were housed in one of thousands of labor camps across California, it was difficult for a small inspection staff with limited qualifications to ensure that standards were met. Some growers were less than responsible in matters such as housing. In fact, one employer stated that “[braceros] like to live like animals.”\textsuperscript{28}

Table 4. Minimum and Maximum employment of braceros in California, 1944-1950.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minimum Working</th>
<th>Maximum Working</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>12,000 (January 15)</td>
<td>36,600 (August 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>18,900 (February 17)</td>
<td>32,400 (August 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>13,800 (December 14)</td>
<td>20,700 (August 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>12,800 (April 19)</td>
<td>18,100 (November 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>6,300 (May 15)</td>
<td>10,300 (October 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>3,100 (September 15)</td>
<td>7,500 (December 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>5,700 (June 17)</td>
<td>10,100 (December 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>10,800 (January 13)</td>
<td>36,200 (October 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>12,400 (March 15)</td>
<td>39,500 (October 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>17,300 (January 17)</td>
<td>40,000 (October 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>13,500 (January 23)</td>
<td>51,200 (October 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>20,600 (January 22)</td>
<td>77,200 (October 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>26,600 (January 14)</td>
<td>100,800 (September 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>26,200 (February 2)</td>
<td>93,100 (October 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>25,800 (February 15)</td>
<td>92,400 (September 27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>27,400 (January 3)</td>
<td>83,000 (September 19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Employment, State of California. \textit{Mexican Nationals in California Agriculture, 1942-1959} (Sacramento, Ca: 1959), Table 1, not paginated.

Equally deplorable were some of the restaurant facilities that growers set up to feed braceros. Food poisoning and intoxication was rampant. Even when the food was not rotting, braceros were served primarily American style foods with little variety on the menu. Braceros were also commonly charged too much for food. Under contract, food

\textsuperscript{27} For the complete text of the Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951 that details what was required of employers see Senate, State of California, \textit{Report of the Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, California’s Farm Labor Problems}, Part 1 (Sacramento: 1961), 271-292.

\textsuperscript{28} Between 1950 and 1960 there were between 4,150 and 6,450 labor camps in operation in California. \textit{Anderson, The Bracero Program in California}, 59, 74.
was to be provided to braceros for a fee of no more than $1.75 per day. During his analysis, Anderson found it unlikely that any grower was spending more than one dollar per man each day for food. Nevertheless, most growers charged the maximum $1.75 per day regardless of their cost.  

A number of violations occurred when transferring braceros to and from the fields. State law later became more restrictive after a number of domestic farm worker deaths, but a number of braceros were killed as they were thrown from flat bed trucks or involved in car accidents. “The danger of transportation accidents kept many braceros uneasy,” wrote Galarza, “and was the subject of frequent complaints.” It seems that most braceros, however, were willing to travel under any circumstances in order to work.  

There were reports of dishonest growers not paying the braceros for work done, but most grievances arose as braceros were not allowed by their employers to work as much as they wanted or were contracted to work. Contracts were signed for periods between four weeks and six months, however, there were many days in which braceros were asked to work only a few hours. In addition to this, there were huge disparities in the hourly wages of braceros as well as in their total earnings after all deductions had been made. Some were illegally charged for tools, but even legitimate deductions for room, board and health insurance certainly cut into total earnings, especially when total hours were low.  

Health insurance was required from growers as part of the braceros’ contract and was deducted from workers’ earnings at a charge between three and seven dollars per month.  

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29 Meals were supposed to be furnished at cost. Charges for room and board, however, simply appeared as one large deduction on the braceros’ paychecks. Ibid., 84.  
30 Galarza, Merchants of Labor, 195.  
31 Anderson, Bracero Program in California, 148, 149.
Without full explanations of their deductions, many braceros did not know what services were guaranteed them. Thus, most braceros did not use the health services that they paid for. In fact, most had not even visited a doctor in Mexico. Braceros that did seek out medical attention complained that they did not trust the camp doctors. Not surprisingly, many of the doctors covered under their health plans did not speak Spanish. \(^{32}\)

Another major problem that arose was domination by bracero labor of a single crop or region. There were instances in which braceros represented over 97 percent of the labor force in a region. Growers and government officials always referred to braceros as supplementary workers, however, it is clear that domestic labor at times became the supplementary workers. Ernesto Galarza noted that the “official definition” of bracero domination was fluid; he wrote that “in 1956 domination was said to occur when braceros composed 75 percent of the labor force if there were 800 or fewer workers in the activity. By 1960 it meant, officially, that there were fewer than 200 domestics in a wage finding class and that they represented less than 25 percent of the total employed.” \(^{33}\) Thus, adapting to the rate at which domestic labor was being overtaken by braceros, officials succeeding in finding a way around admitting to the plight of domestic labor by denying that domination took place. Ironically, Galarza noted that there was a saying among domestic laborers “that the way to get a contract and hold a job in agriculture was to go to Mexico and come back as a bracero.” \(^{34}\)

Interestingly, those in the Council of California Growers (CCG) argued in 1959 that there was “not a great request for braceros.” If there was not a “great request” for

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 246.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 156. If, for example, in 1960 there were 250 domestics hired in a crop activity, it would not be said that domination was occurring even if there were over 5000 braceros working alongside them.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 257.
braceros as claimed, however, it would seem that the numbers of braceros contracted would not have been so large. At the peak of the harvest season in October 1957, there were over 100,000 braceros employed in California fields. Throughout the entire year in 1957, California farmers contracted over 192,438 braceros. The CCG also claimed that without braceros, many of the stoop labor crops in the state would be forced out as there would be nobody to harvest them. Not supplying braceros to California farmers, they claimed, would then result in jobs lost in other segments of the economy when factories and transportation companies would be forced to shut down. Thus, the CCG attempted to influence the entire agricultural industry, as well as the general public, that their crops relied on the use of bracero labor.

The Bracero Program was a necessity for many growers in California and many relied on it as their primary source of labor. Richard Uribe, who knows the influence of bracero labor on the industry through his years of helping vineyard laborers at Vineyard Workers Services in Sonoma, noted that without the braceros in California, “the agricultural industry would have just gone completely bananas, it would have been dead.” The number of workers contracted from Mexico is remarkable; without that labor, many crops may have been lost. Nevertheless, as is shown in Table 5 below, most of California’s agricultural labor force was either domestic workers or undocumented Mexican workers.

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35 Jelinek, *Harvest Empire*, 83. Due to the large-scale, intensive, industrialized nature of California agriculture beginning in the late nineteenth century, the state has always been dependent on a large, seasonal, migratory, wage labor force. However, by the 1950s, over 65 percent of agricultural labor in California was comprised of hired labor; twice that of the nation as a whole. See *California’s Farm Labor Problems, Part I*, Figure 37, p. 50.


37 For a list of other pro-bracero lobby groups, most of which represented the “forces of agribusiness,” that influenced legislation, see Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 24, 139-142. For a list of the “opponents of imported Mexican farm labor,” which was a much more diversified group in comparison to the “disproportionately agriculturally based” pro-bracero groups, see Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 28, 142-143.

38 Richard Uribe, interview by author, Sonoma, Ca, digital audio recording, 15 April, 2005.
Even though bracero domination was reported in some regions through the 1950s, the number of Mexican nationals legally contracted, on average, was considerably small when compared to the total number of agricultural workers used on California farms. California growers became increasingly reliant on the bracero program until 1956 when Mexican Nationals represented 27 percent of all seasonal workers in agriculture.

### Table 5. California: Agricultural employment by type of worker, annual averages 1944-1960.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Workers</th>
<th>Hired Domestic Workers (Seasonal)</th>
<th>Mexican Nationals</th>
<th>% of Total Workers that are Mexican Nationals</th>
<th>% of Seasonal Workers that are Mexican Nationals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>332,500</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>26,600</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>368,571</td>
<td>151,765</td>
<td>25,800</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>354,000</td>
<td>147,500</td>
<td>17,700</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>367,500</td>
<td>163,333</td>
<td>14,700</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>390,000</td>
<td>156,000</td>
<td>7,800</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>411,207</td>
<td>153,683</td>
<td>4,900</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>403,883</td>
<td>132,016</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>416,916</td>
<td>131,608</td>
<td>18,600</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>428,016</td>
<td>133,542</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>444,958</td>
<td>139,350</td>
<td>25,500</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>459,625</td>
<td>142,192</td>
<td>28,400</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>473,541</td>
<td>142,425</td>
<td>39,900</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>467,375</td>
<td>134,842</td>
<td>50,300</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>464,250</td>
<td>132,900</td>
<td>51,300</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>456,800</td>
<td>132,900</td>
<td>46,600</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>453,700</td>
<td>132,200</td>
<td>47,600</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mexican Nationals in California Agriculture, Table 1., not paginated, and California’s Farm Labor Problems: Part 1, Figure 45, 74. Note: The numbers in each column are estimates that represent full weeks of work (manweeks) and are not a count of individuals. Also, the figures for 1944-1948 for Total Workers and Hired Domestic Workers are the author’s estimates based on percentages given.

As was exhibited earlier in Table 4, however, at certain times during the year the number of braceros employed increased greatly. For example, in 1949, the year in which the fewest braceros were contracted in California, over the period of one week in September there was a minimum of 3,100 braceros employed, whereas in 1956, the year in which the weekly average was at its peak, there were over 100,000 braceros employed.

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39 Table 4 can be found on page 52.
on California farms in the first week of October. It was during periods such as this that braceros dominated the labor force in some regions. As is revealed in Table 5, however, domination was not a statewide problem; it was a regional problem primarily found in the Imperial Valley and other agricultural regions of Southern California. There are no reports of braceros dominating the labor force in Sonoma and Napa County, as was the case for most of California.

In spite of the oversights in the everyday operations of the Bracero Program, growers managed to receive Mexican labor year after year. Growers, as a group, were the Americans who benefited the most from this government sponsored labor importation program. Authors N. Ray and Gladys Gilmore believed that growers had the advantage in securing braceros because of inadequately staffed state and federal offices in charge of regulating conditions. Growers could claim, with little proof, that without braceros their crops would perish. All growers, of course, wanted both a reliable labor pool and low operating costs. The presence of undocumented workers increased the labor pool and lowered the prevailing wage, but there was some inherent risk in using this group as they could be deported at any time. The Bracero Program assured growers that both of these objectives would be obtained. By setting the prevailing wages at rates that caused domestic workers to leave areas, growers were allowed to contract braceros, a relatively reliable labor force, at rates below what it would cost them to hire domestic labor.

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40 Mexican Nationals in California Agriculture, n.p
41 N. Ray Gilmore and Gladys W. Gilmore, “The Bracero in California,” Pacific Historical Review 32:3 (1963), 273. Gilmore and Gilmore identified “four particularly troublesome areas in the operation of the program” that are as follows – “enforcing compliance with the numerous regulations, estimating labor needs, estimating the prevailing wage, and the domination of a geographical area or a particular crop or activity by braceros.”
42 For a discussion of the theory of the prevailing wage see Samuel Liss, “The Concept and Determination of Prevailing Wages in Agriculture during World War II,” Agricultural History 24 (January 1950): 4-18. As to the corruption apparent in determination of the prevailing wage, Galarza refers to it as the “prevailing
Growers, who were exempt from paying the state unemployment insurance tax because they employed agricultural labor, were also, in effect, “subsidized by those who do pay unemployment taxes” because major funding of the program was paid for through this tax pool. For over two decades growers had the power to secure these advantages through interest group lobbying.\textsuperscript{43} Between 1942 and 1951, government interference was held to a minimum as contracting braceros “was the responsibility of United States employers and their representatives.”\textsuperscript{44} However unpopular this early arrangement was from the perspective of opposing interest groups and both nations’ state departments, farmers were content with their level of control.\textsuperscript{45}

The pattern of control was certainly not homogenous across the nation, but it is clear that many growers who used bracero labor organized themselves into labor associations. These large conglomerates of growers became powerful lobbyists with capabilities to

\textsuperscript{43} Gilmore and Gilmore, “The Bracero in California,” 265.

\textsuperscript{44} Craig, The Bracero Program, 35, 63. There were a number of international agreements made prior to 1951: the first in 1942, again in 1943, and another in 1944 that was in effect until the end of 1947. Each agreement was under the control of a different state department or administration yet they are all referred to under the title Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program (EFLSP). See Gilmore and Gilmore, “The Bracero in California,” 269-270. For an extended review of the initial years see Wayne D. Rasmussen, A History of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program, 1943-1947, Agricultural Monograph, no. 13, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951). Other agreements made include those made in 1948, in which it was decided that “contracts would be made directly between the employer and the worker” (thus, the government was no longer responsible for contracts) and 1949, in which “preference was given to legalization of “wetbacks” already in the United States” (making illegal workers legal by registering them as braceros). Each of these agreements admitted braceros under the Immigration Act of 1917. In 1951 Public Law 78, which was an amendment to the Agricultural Act of 1949 and had no inherent labor legislation, was passed, admitted braceros on its own right, and remained in effect until December 31, 1963. For an analysis of these agreements and their amendments see Copp, Wetbacks and Braceros.

\textsuperscript{45} In reference to the desires of growers as the first Mexican labor agreement was being developed, Gamboa wrote that “northwestern growers, like their counterparts in other parts of the country [including California], wanted the federal government to help them secure workers as long as it did not impose conditions of employment” and that “farmers wanted the federal government to provide Mexican nationals in order to provide relief from the labor crisis, but they wanted it on their own terms.” In the midst of a severe labor shortage this was a “peculiar position to take,” but since the final decisions provided them with a secure labor force, growers were happy to concede certain stipulations contained within the work contract. Gamboa, Mexican Labor and World War II, 37, 43.
influence farm policy. By “maintaining that a genuine labor shortage did exist,” these
groups were essential in securing the extensions required to perpetuate the program
through the 1950s.46 These groups faced only minimal resistance and their success
during this period “reflected the political power and access of pro-bracero farm interests.”
In fact, between 1952 and 1959, “there was no all-out, coordinated effort among anti-
bracero elements aimed at terminating or substantially altering the program.”47 Growers
certainly had a vested interest in securing labor from Mexico, and the combination and
manipulation of international and domestic circumstances worked to preserve the
operation of the program through 1964.

Farm groups were also aided by a “favorable set of public attitudes and symbols” as it
was still believed that agriculture “was the nation’s basic industry” and “farmers were the
nation’s chosen people.” Laborers, on the other hand, received no special privileges
based on an elevated status. At this time, of course, both foreign and domestic laborers
were “almost completely unorganized.”48

Nevertheless, by the end of the 1950s and into the early 1960s, growers began to lose
some of their bargaining power. Divisions within the farm group arose due to regional
differences and between commodity groups. Grower influence also began to divide
among the class lines of the farmers. “Farm opinion came mostly from the representatives
of upper-income farmers,” so smaller growers who did not hire any outside labor became
ardent critics of the program as well. Growers across the nation that did not use braceros

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47 Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 147, 148.
48 Hawley, “Politics,” 165, 166.
therefore did not feel the need to “pay taxes to subsidize the farmers of the Southwest.”

Critics also made major gains in the early 1960s by appealing to “social justice” as they exposed the (im)morality and (un)ethical aspects of the program. Each year that a congressional debate concerning an extension of Public Law 78 came up after 1959, an increasing number of interest groups, senators, and representatives joined the fight against continuing the importation of Mexican laborers. As the public image of those farmers wanting to use braceros soured, so did their ability to influence public policy. “With all the economic and moral ills it was said to engender,” Craig wrote, “[the bracero program] appeared increasingly out of place. . .” By 1964, growers had lost their ability to lobby for a continuation, and the Bracero Program was terminated.

By the time the Bracero Program was terminated, the wine industry’s forty year long stagnancy was nearly over. Looking back, it is easy to see that the years of the Bracero Program were decisive years for the unstable industry. Wine grape growing in this region could have easily been eliminated. However, the outcome was not so unfavorable. Having implemented new scientific grape growing techniques while effectively utilizing what was quickly becoming a professionally trained labor force by 1964, Sonoma and Napa County viticulturists had customized their growing styles and were well prepared for the growth that would follow. Before moving forward with an analysis of the boom in the industry, however, it is necessary to look back at the uses of Mexican labor in Sonoma and Napa and the maturity of the industry during these years. Bracero labor was not utilized in a similar numbers in Sonoma and Napa as it was in other regions in

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49 Ibid., 166.
50 For lists of those who joined the ranks against extending P.L. 78 in 1960, 1961, and 1963 see Craig, The Bracero Program, 161-162, 175-176, and 197, respectively.
51 Craig, The Bracero Program, 197.
California, but the introduction of Mexican labor on Sonoma and Napa farms initiated a crucial shift that allowed the future growth to occur.
Chapter 3

The boom and bust cycle occurring throughout the wine grape industry created significant hardships for the small producers and growers. By the early 1940s, the industry had recovered from Prohibition, but growers were still wary of planting new acreage because of the lack of an increasing demand from wineries. The government requisition of the entire raisin crop along with price controls on wine during the war, however, increased the demand for grapes and significantly changed the ways that wineries conducted business during and after World War II.\(^1\) In a serious shift from past practices, many wineries began bottling wine for the first time. The demand for wine and the price of grapes decreased again after the war, and as price controls were lifted, vintners once again found themselves operating in a relatively unrestricted environment.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Before the war, growers throughout the state that were unable to sell all of their raisin or table grape crop would commonly use these grapes to make wine, resulting in an oversupply of cheap, poor quality wine on the market. As the government took over the entire raisin crop for use in K rations during the war, the reduction in grapes crushed for winemaking meant that the supply of wine “moved abruptly from a state of surplus to one of scarcity in less than a year.” Considering that whiskey production had stopped by October 1942 and beer was “trade-rationed,” wine was the only alcohol freely available to the consumer. A simple rule of economics tells us that in a free market the price increases when the demand is greater than the supply. Logically, it seems that wineries would have raised the price of wine, but such was not possible; government price controls on wine prevented that. On the other hand, the price of wine grapes, a raw agricultural product not subject to price controls, dramatically increased. Growers enjoyed the rise in prices they received for their grapes, but both growers and the general public had difficulty purchasing the alcohol they desired. What this meant was that at a time when demand for wine suddenly expanded due to its availability, winery profits initially suffered due to a double burden; a limited supply and government sanctioned price controls. See Lapsley, *Bottled Poetry*, 100-101; and Louis Gomberg, “Analytical Perspectives on the California Wine Industry, 1935-1990,” an oral history conducted in 1990 by Ruth Teiser, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 14-15.

\(^2\) Noted wine industry analyst Louis Gomberg recalled that prior to the war, “bulk wine represented approximately 80 percent of all the California wine shipped to market.” Even though the Office of Price Administration “put ceilings on both bulk wine and bottled wine,” those in the industry saw that the restrictions varied. The price controls set for bulk wine “could hardly be tolerated,” but “bottled wine ceilings, . . .,” noted Gomberg, “reflected prices and returned to wineries anywhere from two to five times as much as had they sold the same wine in bulk.” The result of price controls, then, was that “the bulk wine market for all practical purposes disappeared. . . Since the war, and up to the present, bulk wine shipments, . . .” Gomberg recalled, “dwindled to . . . less than five percent” of all wine shipped to market. Louis Gomberg interview, 14, 15.
Wartime developments also forced growers to modify their mode of operation. Wineries responded by changing the ways in which their product was shipped to market, growers, on the other hand, had to alter the ways in which their product was managed. The wartime demand for troops pulled much of the growers’ available labor source into the services, so growers inevitably responded by utilizing new sources of labor. Wartime labor shortages quickly created a demand for bracero labor in Sonoma and Napa. Early in the 1940s, growers were forced to make a dramatic change in labor procurement. Even through the 1950s, however, as the acreage devoted to grapes continued to decrease, growers made very little change in the nature of production. The affluence of the 1950s did not trickle down to most wine grape growers, in fact, some moved into other occupations altogether. Nevertheless, grape quality continued to improve in the twenty years after the war as growers replaced many old vineyards with young rootstock and grafted them with high quality varietals. Bracero labor was critical in transforming the region’s vineyards during those years. Braceros were used primarily during harvest, but they were also employed extensively and trained for year-round cultivation of grapes.

A detailed examination of the utilization of the Bracero Program in Sonoma and Napa Counties reveals that bracero labor aided the region’s growers through tough times. Sonoma and Napa growers contracted for a small share of braceros throughout the tenure of the program, but they were pleased with the work done by the braceros. Racism directed towards braceros was present in the region, but both local growers and the braceros they hired have reported that race relations were different in Sonoma and Napa than they were in other places in California. Within the wine and agricultural industry at large, laborers were always expected to stay within the hierarchical structure that placed
them below both the processors and the growers, but the distance from the border, which initially meant that there were fewer undocumented workers in the area, and the relatively small Mexican population in the area had the effect of easing tension on all sides. While the experiences of braceros that came to Sonoma and Napa County were similar to the experiences of many braceros in California, from the viewpoint of the bracero Sonoma and Napa were highly desirable locations to work. Braceros that were taught the art and science of viticulture took with them a skill that could be put to use later in life.

Even though their numbers were small when compared to other regions in California, braceros were used during harvest and at other times of the year on Sonoma and Napa County farms in the 1940s. Growers in both counties were in need of harvest labor during the war years and consequentially, growers in both counties opted to employ bracero labor as early as 1943. In fact, Sonoma County was the first county in the North Bay region in which growers availed themselves of bracero program.³ By early June of 1943, over 100 braceros were working on Sonoma County farms. Growers utilizing the braceros noted that they were particularly good for “routine work” and that several hundred more were expected shortly.⁴ As expected, the Healdsburg Farm Labor Association received 693 braceros late in June of 1943 and approximately 814 the following year.⁵ Talmage “Babe” Wood was one of the growers that contracted a large percentage of these workers. “In 1942, the first harvest after the war began,” recalled Wood, “labor was really short.” That year Wood found Italian women from the Fulton

³ J. Clarence Felciano to Gaye LeBaron, 29 June 1987, letter, Gaye LeBaron Collection, Box # boy-can, File – braceros, University Library, Sonoma State University. In Sonoma County, farm labor associations were set up in Sonoma and Healdsburg.
⁴ The Press Democrat, 6 June 1943, 5.
⁵ Healdsburg Tribune, 25 June 1943, 1, as cited in Rithner, 39.
area to work for him, but in search of labor again in 1943, he decided to hire braceros. “And then we heard about Mexican Nationals becoming available,” he continued, “The federal government opened an office on the fifth floor of the Rosenberg Building [in Santa Rosa]. I contracted for 125 workers for the harvest of ’43.”6 He was content with the work performed by these individuals, and apparently, so were other growers around the region. Under the headline “Mexican Farm Workers Giving Satisfaction,” the Sonoma Index-Tribune staff wrote that the regional director of the Bracero Program stated that employer-worker relations were excellent and that “their work has been outstanding.”7

It was estimated that in September, 1944, there were 44,000 farm labor jobs in Sonoma County and, reportedly, that farm labor shortages had intensified from the previous year.8 It is clear that braceros numbering less than 2,000 were not the primary source of seasonal labor for Sonoma County farmers. Braceros thus represented a much smaller percentage of the seasonal labor force in Sonoma County than they did throughout California, as is seen in Table 5 (chapter 2), at 19 percent in 1944. Nevertheless, as the harvest time is not the same for all crops, braceros commonly worked in more than one crop through the duration of their contract, and thus played a more important role in the county than their numbers suggest. Of those crops in which

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6 Talmage Wood, as quoted in Gaye LeBaron’s Notebook, “From the Crisis of the ‘40s Came our Fiestas y Futbol,” The Press Democrat, 21 June 1987. Gaye LeBaron wrote a series of articles about braceros in Sonoma County that appeared in The Press Democrat on the 14th, 21st, and 28th of June, 1987. The articles can also be found along with various notes at Gaye LeBaron Collection, Box # boy-can, File- braceros, University Library, Sonoma State University.

7 Sonoma Index-Tribune, 2 July 1943, 6.

8 Sonoma Index-Tribune, 13 Oct 1944, 6.
there was the heaviest demand for labor in Sonoma and Napa Counties, wine grapes were in the top seven.  

Mexican laborers were brought to Sonoma County to aid in the harvest of hops, grapes, prunes, and apples. Wood had hired 125 braceros in 1943 to help with the harvest of these and other crops on his father’s ranch. Even though all of them wanted to stay after the harvest was over, Wood chose 15 of those men to stay year round and help, among other things, with the vineyard. “I taught them pruning,” Wood remembered, “we had a vineyard and 40 or 50 acres of apples. They worked out just fine.”  

Presumably, the vineyard in which these braceros worked was small compared to the acreage of other crops on his ranch; otherwise he may have needed more than 15 for the grape harvest later in the year. Nevertheless, it was at this point that these workers were introduced to viticulture.

Wood was not the only Sonoma County grower to make use of bracero labor in the “off-season.” Over 135 braceros were working on Healdsburg area ranches in March of 1945, and another 165 were expected to arrive shortly. It is safe to assume that more braceros would have been contracted later in the year, but these were to be the last arrivals of braceros “to the Healdsburg region that year, as all available trains normally used to bring them North were diverted for military use.”  

By August of that year, Sonoma Valley growers, also unable to secure additional braceros, used German prisoners of war to harvest the prune crop. Still in need of workers in the middle of  

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9 Ibid.  
11 Rithner, 42. See *Healdsburg Tribune*, 23 March 1945, 1.
September, the Sonoma Seasonal Farm Labor Office continued to recruit labor for help with the grape harvest.12

Louis J. Foppiano used German and Italian prisoners of war during the war, but as they were taken away when the war was over, he contracted for braceros.13 “We were still short of help,” he recalled, “so then we got the Mexicans.” Explaining how he got them and how he employed them, he said:

We formed a group and decided how many we wanted for picking or pruning. We had to house the Mexicans. They’d come up on a bus, and you’d go in and pick which ones you thought were good. . . For this district in the county, we’d bring in about 240 for the crop or the pruning. We’d try to teach them pruning. We had to have camps for them ourselves.14

Louis M. Foppiano, Louis J. Foppiano’s son, clarified that the braceros that were hired for work on their ranch were employed for general ranch work. “We didn’t bring them in just for picking,” he noted, “We brought them in for all year round, or for how long their contract was.” The Foppianos hired up to 15 or 20 braceros for the harvest, and since the Foppianos grew more crops than just grapes at that time, the braceros “picked all crops.” The Foppianos also used Mexican migrant labor for the harvest, but “the migrant families were only for harvesting,” recalled Louis M., “they weren’t here the rest of the year, that’s where the braceros came in.” The number of braceros they employed year-round

12 Sonoma Index-Tribune, 24 August 1945, 1; 14 September, 1945, 1. There was a government run POW camp in Sonoma County outside of the town of Windsor. The camp was originally “built for migrant workers by the Farm Security Administration in 1937” and housed 1,500 prisoners during the summer of 1944. Growers only had to request workers one day in advance and pay them the prevailing wage. German POW labor was used quite extensively in Sonoma County. See LeBaron, Santa Rosa, 305-306. For an extended analysis of the use of German POWs in the Healdsburg community during the war see Rithner.

13 The Foppianos said that the German P.O.W.s were German submariners, and that “they did not want to do agricultural work, they were the elite of the German military.” As for the Italians they used, Louis M. Foppiano remarked that “90 percent of the ranches were owned by Italians, so they could all speak the language, they were mostly all peasants so they were just as happy working on the ranch. It was the same kind of work they were doing at home.” Louis M. Foppiano, interview by author, Healdsburg, Ca, digital audio recording, 7 June 2005.

14 Louis J. Foppiano interview, 35-36.
was far less than the number they needed during the harvest season. On average, they employed about four or five throughout the year. As required under contract, they provided housing for these workers on site.  

The first bracero that the Foppianos received, a man named Juan, ended up working for them for thirty years. For a time, Juan would go back and forth from Mexico to the Foppiano’s vineyards, but eventually he received legal U.S. residency, lived with the Foppianos full time, and married. Similar to Juan, Daniel Novella, a man from Mexico City who first “came to Sonoma County as a contract laborer” in 1943, was allowed to stay in the U.S. with a “green card” and found work making champagne at the Italian Swiss Colony in Asti, Sonoma County. He later received full citizenship and worked for the ISC for nearly forty years. While working at ISC, Daniel met and later married his wife Eva, a former migrant laborer who came to Sonoma “from Tucson with her family to pick prunes.”

During the years of the EFLSP, braceros were brought in almost exclusively for harvest of the grape crop in Napa County. At Napa County’s Inglenook Vineyard, which at the time employed a particularly diverse group of about 12 Portuguese, 5 to 10 Italians, 2 Germans, 2 African-Americans, and at least one bracero fulltime, about 20 to 25 braceros were hired during harvest to help bring in the crop. It is likely that during the harvest there would have been domestic laborers in the fields with the braceros, but as Rafael Rodriguez noted, there was really not enough domestic labor around for harvest. With some exceptions braceros were responsible for harvesting only and were not trained

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15 Louis M. Foppiano interview.
16 Louis J. Foppiano interview, 36. In my interview with Louis M. it was revealed that Juan had a wife and family in Mexico that he continued to support but rarely visited and also had a wife in Healdsburg. Louis M. Foppiano interview.
to perform all of the tasks that would need to be known if they were involved in viticulture throughout the year. Inglenook was one of only a few companies in Napa at the time that both grew grapes and made wine and because of this two or three braceros would, on occasion, be trained to work in the labeling department or with the fermentation tanks punching the caps. Knowing that they would be losing most of the braceros after their six month contract expired, however, vintners were hesitant to devote to much time training braceros in winery operations and simply trained them in vineyard operations.18

If they were not harvesting grapes, the braceros were given the toughest manual labor jobs, the “worst jobs.” The “bracero was used as hand labor, with the responsibility of working as many hours as was needed,” Rodriguez explained, “seven days if necessary. All the grower had to comply with was to pay the bracero sixty-five cents per hour.” There were of course more things required of growers hiring braceros such as housing, meals, health care, and transportation, but Rodriguez’s statements show how labor was viewed simply as a factor of production in which a grower would attempt to maximize value and efficiency. Braceros given the “worst jobs” in the vineyards were nevertheless acquiring expertise of viticultural techniques. At Inglenook braceros were used only through the war years. After that point, other sources of Mexican harvest labor were found. Even though the trend in California shows that braceros were used even more in the 1950s than in the 1940s, Rodriguez claims that Inglenook never again, after 1948, hired braceros for harvesting the grape crop.19

18 Rafael Rodriguez interview.
19 Ibid. Rodriguez’s contract was renewed a number of times. He worked for Inglenook Vineyard year-round while a bracero.
After the war through 1950, farmers in both Sonoma and Napa Counties were not using much, if any, bracero labor on their farms. Labor shortages were minimal and migrant labor proved to fill the demand through the harvest season. In fact, growers had little trouble finding workers. The extension service realized that labor was prevalent and after nearly five years in operation and the placement of 49,431 workers on Sonoma County farms, the Farm Labor Offices in Sonoma County were ordered to close. As the need for its services had dwindled, the Sonoma Farm Labor Office closed in September 1947 and Farm Labor Offices in both Petaluma and Santa Rosa shut down operations in November of that year. The farm labor associations operating in Healdsburg and Sonoma that were the major channels through which braceros would arrive in the region, however, remained open as bracero contracting was only a small part of their functions.

Though migrant labor was available to growers, through most of the 1950s growers in Sonoma and Napa counties did hire braceros, but again, as was the pattern during the EFLSP, usage was relatively small. As is shown in Table 6, after the passage of Public Law 78 in 1951, bracero contracts were made in Sonoma and Napa Counties, but of all agricultural workers in these counties, they never averaged more than six percent of the workforce. In 1951, braceros represented only 1.8 percent of the agricultural workforce in Sonoma County. According to published accounts of labor shortages in that year, labor was scarce throughout the entire harvest season; there was “a dire need for prune pickers” at the end of August and grape pickers were “still badly needed” late in

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20 There was not a single notice in the Sonoma Index-Tribune in 1948 declaring a shortage of labor for the harvest of any crops. In fact, one article specifically noted that “there is no shortage of apple pickers here.” See Sonoma Index-Tribune, 6 August 1948.

21 Sonoma Index-Tribune, 5 September 1947. The Farm Labor Offices were “operated by the Extension Service of the University of California under the ‘Emergency Farm Labor Project’ as a war time project.”
October.\textsuperscript{22} It is unknown why Sonoma grape growers did not contract more braceros that year, but the labor shortage did not cause a significant amount of crops to perish before being harvested.

The need for and use of bracero labor in these counties increased through the second half of the decade and then steadily dropped to zero by 1961. During the peak of the grape harvest in 1958, Sonoma growers employed 255 braceros picking wine grapes. At the same time, there were 405 braceros working in wine grapes in Napa County.\textsuperscript{23} In 1959, up to 857 braceros were employed one week picking wine grapes in the North Coast region. A year later, North Coast grape growers contracted significantly less bracero labor, employing no more than 360 braceros during one week.\textsuperscript{24} There were more braceros working in Sonoma County that year, they just were not working in wine grapes. Don Mills, the manager of the Sonoma County Farm Labor Association, had provided Sonoma County farmers with 1,080 braceros during the week of August 23, 1960.\textsuperscript{25} From 1961 through 1964 growers in both Sonoma and Napa Counties completely stopped hiring braceros.\textsuperscript{26} Even though the need for additional agricultural workers increased in the state in the early 1950s as a result of the Korean War and only

\textsuperscript{22} *Sonoma Index-Tribune*, 24 August 1951; 31 August 1951; 19 October 1951. Growers were in such need of labor in 1951 that the Farm Labor Office explicitly noted that “family groups” were welcome to apply for work.

\textsuperscript{23} *Mexican Nationals in California Agriculture*, Table II. The maximum number of braceros contracted for work in wine grapes in Sonoma and Napa County was during the week of October 4. In Napa, wine grape growers utilized bracero labor more than growers of any other crop. In Sonoma, however, both apple and prune growers used more braceros during the week of maximum usage in those particular crops. On August 9, 1958, there were 675 braceros working in apples and on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of August there were 310 braceros working in prunes in Sonoma County. *California’s Farm Labor Problems*, 111.

\textsuperscript{24} *California’s Farm Labor Problems*, figure 68, 107. The “North Coast” region includes Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, and Lake Counties.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 283.

\textsuperscript{26} There were over 50 employers and associations employing bracero labor in California in 1964, none of which were in Sonoma or Napa County. See *List of Employers of Mexican National Agricultural Workers*, Bureau of Employment Security, Region X (San Francisco), 02/12/1964, available online at http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/arc_home.jsp. (accessed 15 February, 2005).
later began to decrease, as was shown in Table 5 (chapter 2), Table 6 illuminates the fact that total agricultural employment in both Sonoma and Napa Counties declined throughout this period. Some of the reduction in labor needs can be attributed to the mechanization of labor that was utilized on a decreasing number of ever larger farms. Some growers simply stopped producing labor intensive and less profitable crops, such as prunes, during the years of the Bracero Program, which contributed to the reduction in agricultural employment.

### Table 6. Agricultural Employment in California, Sonoma County, and Napa County, annual averages, 1950-1964

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Sonoma Co.</th>
<th>Napa Co.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contract Foreign</td>
<td>All Workers</td>
<td>Contract Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>7,400</td>
<td>10,030</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18,600</td>
<td>9,810</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>22,900</td>
<td>9,730</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>25,300</td>
<td>9,640</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>28,300</td>
<td>9,540</td>
<td>210</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>40,200</td>
<td>9,420</td>
<td>340</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>50,900</td>
<td>9,100</td>
<td>460</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>52,900</td>
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<td>47,100</td>
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<td>1959</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>28,000</td>
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</table>

**Source:** Employment Development Department, State of California, Report 881-X, Agricultural Employment Estimates, Annual Averages 1950-1982 (Sacramento, Ca, 1983), n.p. **Note:** Estimates represent full weeks of work (man weeks) and are not a count of individuals.

The need for and use of bracero labor within Sonoma and Napa Counties follows a similar pattern as that of the entire state. The annual averages for full weeks of work for contract foreign labor shown in Table 6 illustrates that an increasing number of braceros were required through 1957. In fact, all of the agricultural counties in California used
braceros in a manner that follows this pattern. Some counties such as Imperial and San Joaquin counties, however, continually contracted braceros at rates that dwarf the numbers used on North Coast farms. For example, bracero employment in Imperial and San Joaquin Counties at the middle of the month of September, 1958 was at 8,400 and 14,410, respectively. At that same time in Sonoma and Napa Counties, employment was at 760 in Sonoma and 190 in Napa. Imperial and San Joaquin Counties are large agricultural counties, but the number of braceros contracted, at times, represented well over half of the agricultural work force in these counties. Examining bracero contracts in Sonoma and Napa Counties shows that braceros never did represent as large a percentage of all agricultural workers, or even of seasonal agricultural workers, as they did in many of the southern and central valley agricultural counties where large industrialized farms were the norm. The limited use of braceros in all crops within Sonoma and Napa Counties, and especially in viticulture, illustrates how the structure of agriculture in these counties was inherently different from the structure of agriculture throughout California’s central valley.

Though it was not an explicit objective, grape growers in Sonoma and Napa Counties have long been different from those elsewhere in California. In relation to all farms across the state of California, Sonoma and Napa Counties grape growers held, on average, significantly smaller farms. The mean size of farms in California in 1954 was over 300 acres whereas in Sonoma, the mean acreage per farm was 130 acres. In Napa,

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27 Department of Employment, State of California, Report 881M #6, Agricultural Employment by Type of Worker, Mid-Month Estimates, 1958-1967 (Sacramento, Ca: Farm Labor Service, 1968), n.p. Interestingly, even though the figure given for Imperial County is relatively large, harvest in that area is in January and not September. Thus, the figure for Imperial County, if adjusted for harvest time as are the other three counties used in the comparison, should be 13,360. Also, for an overall comparison within California, the bracero employment in September 1958 was 89,600. Note: The numbers given represent full weeks of work and are not a count of individuals.
the mean acreage per farm was under 200. This alone may not seem particularly significant; however, the average size of the vineyards was considerably smaller than these numbers. While wine grape vineyards in some counties across the state averaged over 85 acres each, Sonoma vineyards averaged only about 17 acres each and Napa vineyards averaged 25 acres in 1954.28 Alexander Valley grape grower William McCutchan is a clear example of a large Sonoma grape grower. He had most of his land in prunes in the 1950s, but he also cultivated 27 acres of grapes. Most Sonoma County vineyard holdings were much smaller than McCutchan’s. “Our 27 acres of grapes was one of the bigger acreages of grapes at that time,” noted McCutchan, “we were one of the bigger grapegrowers.”29 Smaller vineyards required smaller numbers of workers throughout the year as well as during harvest, so most growers never had the need for a huge group of braceros.

Wine grapes are one of the few crops in which the specific location of the planting is critical. Thus, the size of the vineyard has a significant impact on the final product. Quality wine grapes are in large part a result of the grower’s acknowledgement and implementation of the “inexorable viticulture fact” that smaller vineyard units recognizing the principles of microclimates will produce better grapes. It is simply impossible to take advantage of microclimates in a large sprawling vineyard. One major reason that Sonoma and Napa wines have received such acclaim is because for over fifty years growers in Sonoma and Napa have conducted pedological and climatic surveys prior to planting in order to match their “one particular tiny patch of earth” to the

29 William McCutchan interview, 50.
vareitats they plant. Many Southern and Central California vineyards were poorly planned for wine grape production and were commonly much larger. Thus, during the middle of the twentieth century production of premium wine grapes was concentrated in the counties of the North Coast, primarily in Sonoma and Napa Counties.\textsuperscript{30} Nevertheless, production of premium wine grapes was not widespread during these years. Even though a large percentage of the production of premium wine grapes took place in the North Coast counties, wine grape production in Sonoma and Napa remained, through the 23 years of the Bracero Program, only a small portion of the total production of all wine grapes in California. A look at wine grape production in Sonoma and Napa Counties reveals as well that wine grapes were only a small portion of the agricultural output in each county.

Between the repeal of prohibition in 1933 and the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, the total number of farms as well as total acreage devoted to producing wine grapes in the state had significantly decreased.\textsuperscript{31} The same had happened in Sonoma and Napa County. As is shown in Table 7, vineyard acreage in Sonoma had decreased by nearly half during that time, while Napa’s vineyard acreage was reduced by about 15 percent. Between 1950 and 1954 alone, the number of farms growing grapes in Sonoma County

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\textsuperscript{31} The reduction in total acres in wine grapes and in the number of farms growing wine grapes between 1930 and 1960 reveals that growers were removing old vineyards and/or moving out of the business of growing wine grapes. In 1930 there were 13,997 farms producing wine grapes with a total area encompassing 198,937 acres. By 1940 the number of farms had dropped to 8,997 and the acreage had fallen to 186,631. Acreage of wine grapes had increased by 1945; the total area was up to 193,937 acres. By 1950 the number of farms had slightly fallen to 8,891 and acreage had decreased to 172,706. The change in total acreage between the years 1950 and 1960 reveals a major reduction in production of wine grapes in California. By 1954, wine grapes still encompassed 139,129 acres in 6,310 farms, yet in 1960, farmers only had 126,501 acres planted to wine grapes. See California Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, \textit{Acreage Estimates: California Fruit and Nut Crops, 1919-1953 – By Counties}, Special Publication 257 (Sacramento, Ca: 1956), 98,99; and \textit{Census of Agriculture, 1954, 1:33} , 36, 43.
dropped from 982 to 695 and from 459 to 437 in Napa. Total acreage of Sonoma County wine grapes by 1960 was at 11,033 acres, the lowest it had been since 1877. The total area of Napa County wine grapes was 9,623 acres, reflecting a return to the total acreage of 1921. These were slimming years for California’s wine grape growers. Fewer acres in vineyards in Sonoma and Napa each year also meant that fewer laborers were required. Even though fewer laborers were required in the county, as was seen in Table 6, growers continued to hire braceros for vineyard work through most of the 1950s.

The late 1950s, however, proved to be a major turning point for the wine grape industry as the continuing decline in grape acreage in both counties turned around. In fact, statistics show that 1960 was the year in which wine grape acreage in California decreased to the lowest point it would drop. Since 1960, total acreage has increased every year. Wine grapes represented only 27 percent of all grape production in California that year, but even at the low acreage mark of 1960, California ranked number one in the country for production of grapes, growing 91 percent of all America’s grapes, with a total 461,890 acres planted and production valued at $173,555,000. As seen in Table 7, in 1960 there was a combined total of 20,656 acres planted to wine grapes in Sonoma and Napa County.

The acreage devoted to wine grapes compared to the acreage of all other crops within Sonoma and Napa counties shows that viticulture was still a relatively small portion of both counties agricultural pursuits. Since the middle to late 19th century, both counties have been dominated by agriculture, but wine grapes have not always been the primary

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33 Department of Agriculture, Napa County, Agricultural Crop Report (Napa County, various years); Peninou, History of the Sonoma Viticultural District, 48, 270-275; State of California, Report and Recommendations of the Agricultural Labor Commission (Sacramento, California: 1963), 435.
Table 7. Acres planted to Grapes, by Year and County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
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Agricultural commodity produced in these counties as is now the case. In past years farmers in both of these counties grew a number of field crops, raised livestock, maintained dairy farms, and engaged in the production of various fruit and nut crops other than wine grapes. In 1950, Sonoma farmers had 774,125 acres cultivated in 1950 while Napa farmers had 349,886 acres in farms the same year. As is clearly seen in the total acreage planted to grapes through the fifties, the production of wine grapes was not an exclusive agricultural practice in these areas.

It has been shown that braceros were hired in grape production in Napa in the 1950s. Of all crops produced in Napa at this time, however, it is also most logical that they would have been employed in the production of grapes. As is shown in Table 8, in terms of total production of fruit crops in Napa County, grapes far surpassed apples, pears, and prunes combined. In terms of acreage devoted to a particular crop, Napa growers had more acreage in wine grapes than they did in any crop other than hay, but hay production

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35 Cherry production in Napa County had ended by 1943 and therefore are not included in this table.
required only a small harvest labor force as much of it was mechanically harvested.\textsuperscript{36}

Although the total acreage in grapes was decreasing between 1943 and 1960, it is clear that grape growers were increasing the yield per acre as the amount of grapes produced, at minimum, remained around 30,000 tons. Each of the other major fruit crops in Napa suffered significant declines in production and acreage during this time, so growers of those crops required a progressively smaller labor force each year.

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Even though grape production was relatively steady during these years, the prices that growers received for their grapes were continually fluctuating. Between the repeal of Prohibition and the end of the Bracero Program, Sonoma County growers received average prices ranging from $10.43 per ton in 1935 to $136.67 per ton in 1964. Just prior to the U.S. entry into World War II, growers were getting around $25 per ton. As the wartime raisin requisition was in effect, however, wine grape growers received an average of $125 per ton for their product in 1944. Prices were up until 1946, when they received $124 per ton, but as the wartime advantages subsided, prices quickly dropped.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} California’s Farm Labor Problems, 242. There were 15,000 acres devoted to hay production in Napa County in 1958.

Growers had grown accustomed to high prices, however, and they were especially troubled when prices plummeted. In September 1947, 150 grape growers met in Healdsburg and decided that they would demand $80 per ton for their grapes. Before the meeting, some growers had received up to $65 per ton, but wineries were offering only $45. The growers put on record an ultimatum of “$80 per ton or else let ‘em hang on the vines,” but what they ultimately received was far less. It is unclear how many growers left their crop to rot on the vines, but the average price received came to $35 per ton, nearly 25 percent of what they had received the previous year.38

Between 1950 and 1959, Sonoma growers received an average of $55 per ton for their grapes.39 Farmers growing varietal grapes as opposed to common red or white grapes, however, were paid much higher for their product. In 1951, Buena Vista Vineyards (a renovated and reopened winery modified from the original founded by Agoston Harashy in 1857) paid $120 per ton for Johannisberger Riesling and $100 per ton for cabernet, Riesling, and Traminer varietals when the average per ton price for common varieties in Sonoma County was $55. Buena Vista Vineyards had a relatively small operation at this time, but unable “to grow more than 50 percent of its requirements” on estate vineyards, they purchased grapes from small growers in Sonoma and Napa Counties. “What we are interested in is small lots of fine grapes from the small growers,” noted Frank Bartholomew, the owner of Buena Vista, “and we have always paid a substantial bonus for them, and so have the other premium wineries in Sonoma and Napa Counties.” Bartholomew also said that Buena Vista could “never get enough varietal grapes,” which

38 Sonoma Index-Tribune, 12 September 1947; 15 October 1948.
39 Edmond A. Rossi interview, 168.
indicated that there was “a sound market here for the small vineyardist – the man with anywhere from a fraction of an acre to two or three acres to spare.”

In 1948, varietal grapes comprised a mere 57 percent of the total acreage in Sonoma vineyards, but while there was a persistent demand from wineries for more varietals, growers made little change during the 1950s. In fact, in the 1950s many farmers in Sonoma County continued growing prunes and not grapes, much less varietal grapes. As the market for dry table wines increased rapidly in the early 1960s, an increasing number of wineries demanded ever more varietal grapes. By this time, growers were prepared to change. The prices received for prunes were continually decreasing and the prices of varietal grapes were rapidly increasing. Financially, vineyards began to look much more attractive than orchards. As a result of the demand for more grapes, acres devoted to apples, pears, and prunes were replaced with vineyards. Yet there was another factor in addition to market forces that encouraged growers to switch to varietal grape production. Growers had access to a trained supply of Mexican and Mexican-American labor in the region. Without the threat of labor shortages, there was less anxiety involved with planting such a labor intensive crop. If a skilled vineyard labor force was not available, growers would have faced much difficulty in their attempts to produce quality grapes. As a result of the increase in vineyard acreage, Mexican laborers with experience in viticulture were assured a steady load of work.

Much of the preceding discussion has been set up to highlight the distinct components of the grape industry and utilization of the Bracero Program that set Sonoma and Napa

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40 Frank Bartholomew, as quoted in *Sonoma Index-Tribune*, 2 November 1951.
Counties apart from the rest of California. Overall, the evidence that has been used to prove these differences was not selected only because it stresses the exclusive character of Sonoma and Napa as a grape growing region; it was selected because it greatly contributes to the significance of the story. A close examination of the use of the bracero in Sonoma and Napa viticulture therefore reveals that this was small group of workers that ultimately had a big impact on the development of a unique industry. In relation to the experiences of braceros in Sonoma and Napa viticulture, however, it is not fair to emphasize minor differences in their experiences in this region when their experiences were generally similar to other braceros that did not enter Sonoma or Napa.

A useful way of judging the nature of the bracero experience in Sonoma and Napa is, of course, to compare that with the stories of other braceros. In her book *The Bracero Experience*, Maria Herrera-Sobek wrote a chapter titled “An Oral History Interview with a Composite Bracero” that was based on 16 oral history interviews she conducted with former braceros from the state of Michoacán in Mexico. In order to put the “interview” together, she “selected a range of common experiences” that were told in the interviews “to form a composite bracero view.” She included both “happy, fruitful experiences as well as empty, sad ones,” and her goal was “to present as wide a spectrum of bracero experiences as possible.” Of particular interest to this study, she also made an effort “to probe for overtones of racial or cultural animus.” Herrera-Sobek’s composite biography is a fascinating literary device, but since the sentences actually spoken in the oral histories were published verbatim and only reorganized to become “Pedro’s story,” the biography can be read as a primary source.

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43 Ibid., 41.
Herrera-Sobek concluded from “Pedro’s story” that none of the many different representations of the bracero experience in fiction had accurately depicted how the bracero saw himself. “The bracero,” she wrote, “saw himself as a man conscious of what he was doing, aware of the dangers and sufferings that awaited him, but imbued with ambition nevertheless, going about life with an adventurous, inquisitive, conquering spirit.” Summarizing the experiences of such a diverse group of men is difficult, but the generalizations she made were clearly evident in the story. All of the braceros she spoke to went to the U.S. as a means to escape their environment in Mexico. “No matter what lay ahead of him in this strange, alien country known as the United States of America,” commented Herrera-Sobek, “he knew he could survive with less exploitation than in Mexico.” By evaluating the bracero experience that comes out of “Pedro’s story” in conjunction with the experience of braceros that came to Northern California, it becomes clear that while they preferred for various reasons to work in Northern California, they faced similar challenges across the United States.

Prior to Rafael Rodriguez coming to the U.S. for the first time in 1943, his father told him to “always be honest with the gringo, and he will take care of you.” Rodriguez tried to believe what his father had told him, and while he was honest with Americans, he very quickly realized that he would have to take care of himself. “I began to see,” noted Rodriguez, “that the gringo was not what I had been told” and he realized that “segregation was strong.” He first worked picking lettuce in Salinas. While in Salinas, Rodriguez worked for a number of growers that he said were “mean” and that provided

44 Ibid., 74.
him with “horrible” housing and poor treatment. Although the work, lodging, and food were disagreeable, he was more than happy to earn 65 cents per hour.\textsuperscript{45}

After a short time, however, he had the opportunity to go “up north” and he was transferred to work for a prune grower named Charlie Wagner in Napa.\textsuperscript{46} According to Rodriguez, Wagner was “one of the meanest growers,” and the work was very hard and physical. As opposed to the previous grower he had worked for in Salinas, Wagner did provide him with comfortable housing and good food. In a drastic change from his arrangements in Salinas, Rodriguez lived in a “nice and clean” shack and was even given a mattress on which to sleep. He was working with twelve others on Wagner’s farm, but because he was the only bracero, he alone was provided with housing. Nevertheless, Rodriguez was fired from Wagner’s farm after a short time because he “couldn’t keep up with the migrant families” he was working with.

He was not sent home but transferred to work at the Salvatori Emilo Nursery. There he began working with grape rootstocks and cuttings, preparing him for vineyard work he would later do under the guidance of Joe Souza at Inglenook Vineyards. While at these jobs, his perception of Americans and Napa changed. Rodriguez was not being cheated out of money or work and he was fed well, paid well, and lived well. In fact, “most braceros interviewed seem to think that Americans were fair and honest.” “The bracero,” wrote Herrera-Sobek, “was more aware, and possibly more hurt, by the treatment given to him by his own people.”\textsuperscript{47} At Inglenook, Rodriguez lived in on-site housing in which

\textsuperscript{45} Rafael Rodriguez interview.
\textsuperscript{46} In the 1940s, Wagner was growing prunes. He later planted grapes and opened Caymus Winery in 1972. Interestingly, Wagner named his winery after the name given to the Mexican land grant known as Rancho Caymus that encompasses what is now the town of Rutherford in Napa. Rancho Caymus was granted to George Yount, the man who is credited with planting the first vineyard in Napa in 1836.
\textsuperscript{47} Herrera-Sobek, \textit{The Bracero Experience}, 127.
had a house by the river all to himself. His contract was renewed every six months so he was not required to go back to Mexico; with little desire to return to the “starvation” he left in Mexico, he stayed in Napa.48

Despite having been distantly removed from his family and friends, Rodriguez managed to enjoy his life and the work he was doing in the vineyards. “It was field work,” he noted, “just manual labor.” Initially, he worked in tasks such as planting, pruning, weeding, burning brush, and harvesting. Absorbing all that he could about grape growing, however, he came to know more than nearly anyone about the intricacies of the vineyards at Inglenook. Due to Rodriguez’s knowledge and experience with viticulture, after a few years of work as a bracero, the owner of Inglenook, John Daniels, recommended to government officials that he be allowed to stay in the U.S. indefinitely. Rodriguez was subsequently granted citizenship, moved permanently to Napa, and he married. He continued working for Inglenook for a total 23 years and became vineyard manager of over 100 acres.49 Rodriguez’s upward mobility was certainly not typical of braceros. Most braceros were not asked to stay in the U.S. after their contract expired, most did not get full U.S. citizenship, most did not move up in the ranks of the agricultural industry, and most did not master the English language. It is difficult to assess typicality when examining bracero experiences, but upward mobility was not common.

Rodriguez liked living in Napa when he was a bracero. Even though he had completed two years of college in Mexico to go into the textile industry, he was getting paid much more in Napa than he could have there; by the end of the war he was receiving

48 Rafael Rodriguez interview.
49 Ibid.
85 cents per hour. In striking contrast, “Pedro” reported receiving wages as low as 35 cents per hour while working in Montana in 1947.\textsuperscript{50} Obviously, wages varied greatly from one region or time to another. One bracero that worked in Santa Rosa for 45 days in 1959 returned to Mexico having made hardly enough to pay back his 1200 peso \textit{mordida}.\textsuperscript{51} On the other end of the spectrum, Pedro made 18 to 20 dollars per day picking cotton in Texas in the mid 1950s.\textsuperscript{52} Despite widespread complaints of not working enough while in the United States, most braceros claimed that they could not have earned the same in Mexico.

It may be that the particular employers that Rodriguez worked for in Napa just happened to be better people than others he came across elsewhere in California, but he found that he could trust his employers and the community he lived in to provide him with a comfortable life. “When I came to the Napa Valley it took me about a year to figure out that this was heaven. Prejudice was less noticeable than in other places. In this valley,” Rodriguez noted, “you found 80 percent friendship, 20 percent segregation.”\textsuperscript{53} Race relations were not perfect anywhere in California at the time, but Rodriguez saw a clearly delineated regional trend. Pedro reported that of all the states in which he labored he “liked California the best because we can earn more money and there is more work but the treatment, the way the patrones treated you, was best in Montana and Arkansas.” While Pedro may not have had equally agreeable experiences in California as Rodriguez, Pedro developed good relations with most of his employers.

\textsuperscript{50} Herrera-Sobek, \textit{The Bracero Experience}, 45.
\textsuperscript{52} Herrera-Sobek, \textit{The Bracero Experience}, 56.
and claimed that “the Americanos treat us very well.”  In fact, corroborated by both Rodriguez and Pedro, it was not usually the “Americanos” that treated them poorly; it was the Mexican-Americans. There were not as many Mexican managers in Sonoma or Napa as there were in other parts of California at that time, but there are some today. Some vineyard laborers continue to face poorer treatment or work environments from their Mexican bosses as compared to others. Employers are now required to provide bathroom facilities, water, breaks, and lunch periods to their workers, but not all comply with the law. Richard Uribe noted that “the ranchers and the wineries who do it all [hire their own labor] independent are pretty good” at meeting the requirements of the labor laws mandated by the State of California. “The ones who sometimes are pretty bad are the management companies,” he said, “and the ones that are the worst are the Mexican management companies, the ones owned by Mexican people. Those are the ones that are the toughest and really fudge on the rules.”

Even though Pedro reported that the treatment of braceros was best in Montana and Arkansas, of the braceros that were contracted to work in California, many preferred and demanded to come to Northern California. Due to the prevalence of racial, cultural, and economic discrimination that braceros faced in places such as Southern California, some, exercising their guaranteed “freedom of choice” of employment, refused to work in that

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55 Not all Mexican-Americans treated braceros poorly. However, Pedro said that Mexican-Americans “felt resentment against us” and that “they feel uncomfortable with us” which causes them “to take advantage of us. We tell them something and they pretend they did not hear us. They laugh instead at us.” Rodriguez’s experience with Mexican capitans, or foreman, “projected what the Spaniard was to the Mexican – mean.” Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 65; Rafael Rodriguez interview. “The friction between braceros and Mexican-Americans stemmed partly from the fact that Mexican-Americans were put in supervisory positions and were thus in charge of disciplining the braceros. Also contributing to this friction,” wrote Herrera-Sobek, “was the fact that Mexican-Americans saw their jobs threatened by the influx of cheap labor.” Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 127.
56 Richard Uribe interview.
Two braceros awaiting work in Empalme, a reception center in Southern California, refused a number of contracts to work in the Imperial Valley. One explained that he was “still hoping to go up north” and the other noted that he was told that he “would be able to choose an employer from Northern California.” The first man claimed that he would not accept a contract in Imperial Valley because the pay was too low, but it seems there may have been other reasons for their defiance. “I have never worked in either of those places [Imperial Valley or Yuma],” he noted, “and I don’t want to, from what I hear.”

Unfortunately for these men, when employers came to select braceros for work in Northern California, they were not chosen because their passports had been marked with an “R,” indicating that they had refused work in the Imperial Valley.

As mentioned above, Rodriguez did not have a preference of where to go upon his first entry into the U.S., but he quickly formed an opinion about the nature of employers based on where he worked. “It’s day and night the way the farmworker, the bracero, the illegal, and the wetback were treated. In the south one way- In the north, a different way – much better in the North,” Rodriguez recalled, “Sonoma, they are good. . . Napa is good. . . Right here the farm worker is treated in the family atmosphere.” Not only is there evidence that paternalistic relationships between growers and laborers were inherent throughout the industry, but it seems possible that growers and the local population were less discriminatory to Mexican labor than their counterparts in the sprawling vineyards of Central and Southern California. Since the vineyards in Sonoma and Napa are

57 Anderson, *Fields of Bondage,* 28. The guarantee of the “freedom of choice” turned out to be “inoperative,” however, as a provision in the International Agreement stipulated that “a Mexican worker shall not remain at a reception center more than five consecutive days after his arrival from Mexico.” A bracero thus had only five days to “choose” where he was to work. After five days at a reception center, braceros were returned to Mexico.
59 Rafael Rodriguez interview.
considerably smaller and therefore require fewer laborers in the vineyards at harvest, a
different understanding arose between the growers and laborers. “Most of the ranches up
here are not very big. It is only now that you have Kendall-Jackson and Gallo with 3,000
acres, and some others with a thousand acres,” stated Louis M. Foppiano, “This ranch
with 140 acres under cultivation was one of the larger ranches in the whole area,
including Napa. Nobody had big groups [of braceros], when you don’t have 40 guys out
there, you tend to have a better rapport with your workers.”60 The braceros interviewed
by Herrera-Sobek all noticed a difference in their employers based on the size of the
operation in which they worked. She wrote that “the braceros interviewed preferred the
one-to-one personal relationship with an employer,” such as a bracero contracted in
Sonoma or Napa may have had, “to the impersonal relationship with huge efficient
contracting companies” commonly found near the border in Southern California.61 It is
much more difficult for a grower to treat his labor force inhumanely when he lives and
works alongside them, as was commonly the case in Sonoma and Napa.

If there was a difference with race relations between braceros and their employers in
Sonoma and Napa as compared with the rest of California, it can be attributed to a
number of possible explanations. First, employers in Sonoma and Napa that had had
relatively little experience with Mexican labor may have seen no reason to treat Mexicans
any different than they had white domestic labor. They were simply utilizing a different
and new labor source. Secondly, the few braceros who were hired in Sonoma and Napa
were placed on farms in which they were only a supplemental part of the labor force. In
other locations in California, braceros dominated the labor force. Therefore, because

60 Louis M. Foppiano interview.
61 Herrera-Sobek, The Bracero Experience, 41.
braceros worked alongside small groups of white domestic labor and Mexican labor on Sonoma and Napa County’s small farms, employers were perhaps able to develop closer relations and then could not consciously treat them differently than others. Thirdly, employers may have had a strong perception of their secure position in the hierarchical structure inherent in agriculture that places them as first or second class citizens and labor as third class citizens. With little threat of upward mobility or organizing from braceros because those laborers so segmented, employers relaxed any racial animosity they may or may not have had and treated the Mexicans as they would any laborer. Though Rodriguez is himself an example of upward mobility, he is an exception, not the rule.

It may have also been that the braceros did not perceive racial discrimination as it was; Herrera-Sobek remarked that the braceros that she interviewed “either were oblivious to prejudice that the Anglo-Saxon segment of the U.S. population might have directed at them or unconsciously repressed the idea altogether.”62 Braceros were secluded on farms for much of the time they spent in the U.S., and most were certainly not able to understand, as most could not read English, any negative publicity that appeared in local newspapers concerning their presence in the area. While articles demeaning bracero labor were not widespread across Sonoma and Napa County, the Healdsburg Tribune did its best to stigmatize bracero labor by writing about them most often “after a bar fight or other violent episode.”63

The expressed opinion of fewer racial problems and prejudice in the region seems to be a major reason why braceros preferred Northern California and it sets the region apart from others. In terms of the treatment of braceros in issues such as housing,

62 Herrera-Sobek, The Bracero Experience, 127.
63 Rithner, 49, 50. See Healdsburg Tribune, 24 September 1943, 1; 15 October 1942, 1; 25 August 1944, 1; 12 October 1945, 1; 10 August 1945, 1.
transportation, and meals, however, there is little that sets the region apart. Benny Carranza came to Sonoma County as a bracero in 1943. Since he happened to be bilingual, he was given the opportunity to assist Don Mills with the contracting of other braceros. Carranza became “el patron,” the man who both workers and employers would come to in case of any problems, so he heard and saw a lot that made him feel that braceros had “suffered” in Sonoma. “You’d be surprised how growers would treat the men,” Carranza said, “They even opened their mouths and looked at their teeth – like a horse. We felt degraded.” Practices such as this may not have been necessary, but all braceros were given health inspections that many thought were inappropriate. Pedro recalled a story about a man that was rejected at a reception center because he coughed without covering his mouth while being inspected. He was not sick, but the American Inspector refused to accept him simply because he exhibited poor manners.

Braceros who passed the health inspection and were contracted to Sonoma or Napa County faced the risk of being seriously injured on the route to and from the fields. Sonoma County grower Talmage “Babe” Wood allowed one of the braceros he hired to haul the others around on a flatbed truck. At first, he was worried about them, but after they assured him “we will not fall off,” his fears subsided. “You couldn’t shake them off that truck.” Luckily, none of the men Wood hired were ever injured in accidents, but it was clearly unlawful to require braceros to risk their lives just to get to work. While this

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64 Benny Carranza, as quoted in “Farm Labor has History of Broken Rules,” The Press Democrat, 28 June 1987.
65 Herrera-Sobek, The Bracero Experience, 43.
may sound like a bad joke, it is a telling anecdote that shows how any grower was willing to cut corners and operate outside of the contract in order to save a few dollars.67

In reference to the housing provided to braceros and Mexican migrant workers, Rafael Morales, a contract laborer that came to Sonoma County in the 1950s, said that “in those days it was better than it is now. The ranchers supplied water, blankets, dishes, medical care. . .” Many employers do not provide housing for their workers these days, but employers of braceros were required to meet certain standards in the housing they provided. Carranza remembered that the labor camps were inspected to ensure that all of the growers’ requirements were filled. Among other things he recalled that the “tents had to have platforms off the ground” and that “there had to be so many showers for so many people.”68 Assuring that Sonoma County growers fulfilled the minimum requirements, Carranza’s remarks cause one to wonder if anything above the minimum requirements was ever provided to braceros in Sonoma County. The Foppianos are confident that the housing they provided braceros was above standards; if for no other reason, they did not want to lose their braceros because of a failure to comply with the contract. “We used them through the ‘50s,” Louis M. Foppiano remembered, “You had to provide housing and they [government officials] inspected the housing. It was under contract, there were certain obligations you had to meet.”69

In other cases across the state and especially in the later years of the program, braceros were housed in superior camps. After hundreds of labor camps across California in the 1940s and early 1950s were reported being “beyond salvaging” and “not fit for people to

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67 Article 7 of the Standard Work Contract, as amended in 1951, stated that vehicles used to transport braceros “shall have sufficient and adequate fixed seats for the transportation of passengers and adequate protection against inclement weather.” See California’s Farm Labor Problems, 289.
68 Rafael Morales and Benny Carranza, as quoted in The Press Democrat, 28 June 1987.
69 Louis M. Foppiano interview.
live in,” some growers’ associations consolidated their camps into central facilities that were “modernly equipped and even comfortably appointed.” The larger camps “became models of farm labor housing, showpieces of compliance and performance above and beyond the call of decency.” With the number of braceros hired in Sonoma and Napa so small, a large consolidated camp was never created in the region and the quality of the housing in which braceros were placed varied greatly from one ranch to the next.

Those who objected to the ethics of the bracero program have long argued that braceros took work away from the domestic laborer. Legally, however, braceros were only to be hired when domestic labor could not be found. With the percentage of domestic labor actually used on Sonoma and Napa County farms so much higher than bracero labor, as explained earlier, this argument loses its credibility when examined regionally. There were, of course, times when sufficient domestic labor could not be found to fulfill labor demands. Don Mills, remained bitter about the United States’ decision to terminate the bracero program. He believed that the bracero program, as it was used in Sonoma County, was a justifiable labor program. “They said we were displacing our own workers,” he told a local journalist, “but Americans didn’t want to do farm work.” Mills tried very hard to employ domestic labor, but those he found were incompetent. For example, on one occasion Mills remembers interviewing nearly 500 men for farm jobs in Sonoma County. “I would hear that there were 500 men who wanted work and I’d go down and interview them. The interviews were very strict. I’d

70 Galarza, Merchants of Labor, 194, 195.
71 Article 9 of the Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951 stated that the Secretary of Labor had the authority to rule on the availability of domestic laborers. If domestic labor was found to be available, authorization for employment of braceros was to be immediately withdrawn. See California’s Farm Labor Problems, 274.
72 Considering the demographics of the labor force in the 1950s, bracero laborers were, if this argument is true, actually taking jobs away from Mexican labor and the domestic Mexican-American laborer. This reflects the opinion expressed in Gonzales, Mexican and Mexican American Farm Workers, 16-18.
make sure they were warm [comfortable] and ask them if they’d like to work on a ranch.”
Out of the 500 interviews, he noted, only about 35 would agreed to do farm work. Out of those, he remembered, “two would say they’d go and one of the two would show up. And he’d work half a day.”

Growers across the nation in the 1940s and 1950s frequently had difficulty procuring labor. Access to bracero labor, however, facilitated the ever increasing output on American farms as it lessened growers’ fears concerning their ability to produce various crops and consequently provided the manpower needed to harvest them. Regional differences in crops and total production affected not only growers’ needs for bracero labor but also the ways in which growers themselves and laborers perceived particular regions. Smaller vineyards in Sonoma and Napa Counties meant smaller crews working the vineyards; less anonymity for the laborer perhaps caused an inclination to work hard to create wonderful grapes. As with many braceros who came to the U.S., those that came to the region had a positive experience that afforded them at least some economic gain, allowed them to experience new cultures within Mexico and the U.S., gave them a “forward thinking” outlook, and ultimately improved their standards of living. Unlike many braceros, however, those that were trained in grape growing acquired an expertise that demanded to be utilized. Along with a group of hard working Mexican migrant laborers, many former braceros returned to Sonoma and Napa in later years to put their skill and knowledge to work as the industry exploded.

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74 Herrera-Sobek wrote that “the most important single thing acquired” by braceros while traveling and coming in touch with a new culture “was not of a material nature but of an educational one and that is a willingness, a new disposition to accept change and to adopt new modes of life.” For evidence of how former braceros changed their communities “that seemed destined to be changeless” after they returned, see Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 124-128.
In the past 60 years, no other migration stream has had a bigger impact in California than that from Mexico. Mexican migration has forever changed the societies of both the U.S. and Mexico. International migration has long been studied by historians and sociologists. Sociologist Douglas Massey wrote about a discernable pattern that has developed in Mexican migration to the United States, and this pattern holds up on a number of scales. The pattern of Mexican migration to the U.S. is similar in many ways to the pattern of Mexican migration to Sonoma and Napa Counties. Massey has identified six components that are common to international migration:

That migration originates in the socioeconomic structure of sending and receiving societies; that, once begun, migrant networks form to support migration on a mass basis; that, as international migration becomes widely accessible, families make it part of their survival strategies and use it during stages of the life cycle when dependency is greatest; that individual motivations, household strategies, and community structures are altered by migration in ways that make further migration more likely; that, even among temporary migrants, there is an inevitable process of settlement abroad; and that, among settlers, there is a process of return migration.1

Massey developed this analytical structure through years of studying Mexican migration patterns. The actions of many of the Mexicans that migrated to Sonoma and Napa Counties match this pattern. The first two propositions have been discussed at length throughout this paper: economic problems in Mexico and labor needs in the U.S. worked to support the bi-national Bracero Program that initiated a period of mass migration. Mexicans who have moved to Sonoma and Napa, including former braceros, have used migration as a way to escape financial difficulties in Mexico, have been successful after arrival (which entices other family groups to follow), and have become productive

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citizens in the communities to which they moved. The implications of using bracero labor in the U.S. are many, and those implications significantly changed the character of Sonoma and Napa Counties.

A distinct agricultural landscape of smaller farms in Sonoma and Napa Counties during the Bracero Program ultimately resulted in growers hiring fewer bracero laborers than growers in other counties. Nevertheless, growers in Sonoma and Napa Counties always needed large numbers of laborers to harvest their crops, so aside from braceros, they hired any available seasonal migrant labor. By the end of the war, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans comprised the majority of the migratory labor force. Legal immigrant and undocumented laborers of Mexican descent changed the ethnicity of California’s migrant labor pool during and after the war when they filled the void left as white laborers entered the service and as their numbers in California increased because of the Bracero Program. The increase in Mexicans in the migrant labor pool in the 1940s not only increased the number of Mexicans working in Sonoma and Napa vineyards but also started the demographic shift that increased the number of Mexicans that lived permanently in the region.

Aside from the braceros who were brought in to the region, the Mexican laborers who arrived in Sonoma and Napa Counties after the war were migrants; they arrived during harvest and moved on to another locale as work slowed down. By the late 1950s, however, just as Sonoma and Napa growers stopped using bracero labor, a growing number of Mexican migrant laborers and families began to settle in the region. As a result, this new group of resident Hispanics, many of whom had previously come to the region as braceros, became the permanent vineyard laborers in the region. Some of the
migrant workers who settled in the region found year-round work in the vineyards they had previously labored in as migrants. Even for those who did not become full-time workers, the choice to establish a home in one place permanently changed the ways they thought about themselves. No longer migrant laborers working in a number of crops and locations throughout the year, these workers made the transition into the role of year-round vineyardists as the acres devoted to wine grapes exploded across the region. It took years for them to recognize how essential they were as a group to the industry, but in the meantime, they were treated fairly by growers.

Even though there were and are a large number of undocumented Mexican farm workers in Sonoma and Napa Counties, the percentage of Mexicans in the vineyards as well as the number of resident Hispanics in the region has grown continuously since World War II. Many Mexican-Americans that have come to the region as agricultural laborers have moved into other occupations; many others have remained agriculturalists. Nevertheless, the continuous influx of new immigrants replenishes the labor force and has perpetuated the Mexican influence in Sonoma and Napa viticulture. In the past 30 years, some of these men and women have moved up from laborers in the grape growing and wine industry into more prominent positions. Today you can find the Mexican influence throughout the industry, from the laborers to winery owners.

It has been shown that prior to World War II, Mexicans did not make up a large part of the agricultural labor force in Sonoma and Napa Counties. There were some Mexicans in the migrant labor pool at the time, but of the reported 368,013 Mexicans in California in 1930, relatively few made their home in either Sonoma or Napa County. Less than
100 Mexicans lived in Napa County and there was “at least one rural agglomeration” of over 194 Mexicans in Sonoma County.² In fact, after conducting an historical analysis of the Hispanic community in Napa, Rene Austin, the former Education Coordinator for the Napa Valley Museum, concluded that there were only three Mexican families living in Napa in 1925.³ These Mexicans, presumably, did work in agriculture, but their numbers were so small that they comprised an insignificant percentage of the labor force. In comparison to regions such as the Imperial Valley or Los Angeles County where it was estimated that 28,000 and 96,000 foreign-born Mexicans lived in 1930, it seems that Sonoma and Napa County were not popular destinations for these immigrants. By 1940 there were over 200 colonias, a small enclave of Mexicans, in California in which thousands of locales, “the stable portion of the Mexican population,” lived, but there is no evidence of the existence of a colonia in Sonoma or Napa County.⁴ The number of Mexicans living in the area did not immediately increase at the beginning of the war, but the Bracero Program and the increased percentage of Mexicans in the migrant labor pool brought more Mexican laborers to the region than any time in the past.

For many years after the war, most of the Mexicans in these counties were either braceros or migrant laborers; not people who could be considered full-time residents. Nevertheless, even though growers were still for a time able to find domestic labor locally, through utilizing braceros and migrant laborers, they were becoming accustomed to utilizing Mexican labor during harvest. “When we got involved in 1946 over here,”

³ Bedolla, “Hispanic Roots.”
⁴ Galarza, Merchants of Labor, 32. Galarza noted that locales were “resident farm laborers who became less desirable as they grew in understanding of the ways of an aggressive and powerful industry.” For a brief history of the colonia see Carey McWilliams, North From Mexico: The Spanish Speaking Population of the United States (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1948), 215-223.
noted Teldeschi, “there were mostly local people, and if they weren’t local, they were Mexican that came in at the time of the crop here.” 5 The Foppianos remember that a lot of white high school age kids would come to the ranch looking for summer work at that time, and they were commonly employed to help with harvesting. The Foppianos used Italian laborers on their ranch through the 1930s, but according to Louis M., Italians “were not doing stoop labor” in Sonoma County during the war, and in that era “they were actually buying their own land and moving up.” After the war, he remembered, “You had to go somewhere else for field labor.” 6 As expected, since Mexicans were the group that was available they turned to Mexican labor for help.

The Foppianos utilized Mexican migrant labor along with the bracero labor every year after the war until the late 1950s. They routinely hired the same Mexican families each year. These families would spend the winter months in Southern California or another of the Southwestern states. Late in spring, Foppiano would receive a letter from them asking if their services were needed for the coming harvest season. Upon Foppiano’s approval, the families would arrive in time for the prune harvest, usually in August, and live in the housing he provided them. Apparently, the kids were not only welcome, but very important for harvesting prunes. Prunes are shaken off the tree and picked up off the ground, so the more kids a family had the more prunes they could pick, which meant more income. 7 The families that had children usually left the area before the grape harvest began because the children were required to go to school, but others remained in

5 Mike Teldeschi interview.
6 Louis M. Foppiano interview.
7 Child labor restrictions are more relaxed in agriculture than other industries where the minimum age requirement is 14, but even in agriculture, it is unlawful to hire children under the age of 10. In the 1940s and 1950s, it seems that these restrictions were either overlooked or working children were not reported to the government as the patriarch of the family would be paid the family’s wages in one sum.
the region through October to see the grape harvest to completion. “Families that didn’t have children,” Louis M. recalled, “were the ones who stayed and picked grapes.”

Migrant labor was so important to local growers that even during World War II, some growers preferred to utilize any available migrant labor rather than contract braceros. In other words, there were growers in Sonoma County that did not hire local workers but hired Mexican workers who were not braceros. Robert Jones was accustomed to hiring white migrants to fill most of the seasonal labor demand on his Dry Creek Valley ranch, but beginning during the war years, “Jones hired Mexican families from Southern California.” One particular family he hired, headed by Henry Ortega, returned each year during harvest for nine consecutive years. Jones’ labor demand was minimal, but at his request, the Ortegas would “usually bring another Mexican family or two with them” to fulfill his requirements. The Ballard family also used Mexican families in addition to government supplied workers such as P.O.W.s on their Healdsburg ranch during the war. Each member of these families who was physically able to work was put to work. Being too young to work legally, “the children of these families,” wrote Rithner, “all worked under their father’s name so that at the end of the season the father was paid for the work of his entire family.”

Alexander Valley growers also had difficulty finding labor during the war. Eugene Cuneo and Eugene Saini hired braceros to help with their grape crop “because everybody was in the service.” They did, however, prefer to use “the migrants that came up every year” because they “had some pretty good families that came up.” They housed both the braceros and the migrants on their ranch. They did not use braceros after the war because

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8 Ibid.
9 Rithner, “Migrant Farm Workers,” 44, 45.
they had migrant labor available. After a few years in which the same families came during harvest, “one of the families never went back” and lived for a while on the ranch.\textsuperscript{10} It is unclear what the living conditions were like on Cuneo’s ranch, but these workers started as migrants and eventually stayed permanently, so the conditions were presumably tolerable at minimum. This period therefore marks the development of the informal networks that brought an ever increasing number of migrants to the region.

One Sonoma Valley grape grower said that even through the early 1950s most of the year-round workers on his family’s ranch were Italians, and that his parents employed Mexicans only during harvest. In his recollection, the Mexicans became more prominent as year-round labor in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Having grown up in Sonoma Valley in the 1950s, that grape grower recalled memories from his youth of school openings postponed so that children could assist with the prune harvest. The grape harvest usually lasts well into September and October, so he also remembered kids 5 or 6 years old coming “to school with their fingers black from walnuts or purple from grapes” because they had followed their “poor” families into the fields “on the weekend or after school.” During times of extreme labor shortages, growers may have appreciated the community assuring a successful harvest by postponing school opening, but they were hesitant to rely on these “poor” white families to harvest grapes. Year after year, growers depended on the greater skilled labor they received from braceros and seasonal migrant labor. That same grower also remembers that a large number of Mexican migrant workers arrived every year in the valley during harvest. “When harvest came, there they were,” he recalled, “walking up the sides of the road, ten of them in the back of a pickup

or whatever.” He noted that the number of migrants coming into the valley “might have even been more so than now, but probably about the same” in relation to the land in farms. The actual numbers of migrants that arrived in Sonoma and Napa Counties are significant because of the percentage of all farm workers that they represented. In 1957, it was estimated that there were between 3,000 and 10,000 domestic agricultural migrants in Sonoma County at the peak of the crop season and between 500 and 3,000 in Napa County. In August and September of 1960, reports totaled 4,450 migrants in Sonoma County and 1,450 in Napa County. There were more migrant workers in the region than there were braceros, but both groups were important.

Clearly, it quickly became very common for Sonoma and Napa County grape growers to hire workers of Mexican origin. The migrant workers were a reliable source of labor for harvest. As the immigrants were primarily from the agricultural Mexican states of Juanajuato, Jalisco, Guerrero, and Michoacan, many of them were agricultural people before they arrived in the U.S. Most of the Mexican families who migrated to Sonoma and Napa during the war years, however, had been migrant laborers in California for some years. There were not a great number of families that migrated across the border during the 1940s; usually the men came alone, either illegally or as a bracero. In the eyes of Sonoma and Napa growers, most of the families that immigrated to the U.S. in the 1950s became migrant workers. Up to that time, these families had not begun moving

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12 California’s Farm Labor Problems, 270. The 4,450 migrants in Sonoma and 1,450 in Napa include what was recorded as “both workers and nonworking dependents.” Within the migratory agricultural worker population, however, many dependents, though reported as nonworking, were working with their families in the fields. The number of “workers” in these counties was 2,900 and 950, respectively.
13 Richard Uribe interview.
into the region in any significant numbers, so growers had no reason to think they would ultimately settle down. Beginning at some point in the 1950s, however, the resident Mexican population rapidly increased in Sonoma and Napa Counties. Growers did not at first complain; they were the accepting recipients of a permanent Mexican labor force. When these migrants first arrived in Sonoma and Napa, they did not only work to bring in the grapes. Grape acreage had not yet increased at the expense of other crops, so Mexican migrants came to assist with the harvest of all of the crops grown in these counties.

It is important to remember that many migrant workers employed across the state in the late 1940s and 1950s were former braceros or other recent arrivals to California since the start of World War II. Even as early as the late 1940s, some of these men had received temporary or permanent citizenship or were undocumented altogether, but most had not yet brought their families to the United States. The relative ease with which these men could go back and forth from Mexico to California, albeit illegally for non-braceros, during the years of the Bracero Program made moving the entire family across the border unnecessary. It wasn’t until the cost of crossing the border illegally became more difficult and prohibitively expensive, as it did after the Bracero Program ended, that it became necessary for migrant workers to move their families to the U.S. Without easy access back and forth across the border that guaranteed that the men would return after a period of time, it was essential to make a new home north of the border.

Countless numbers of immigrants came illegally into the United States, but by looking at the ever increasing number of legal immigrants to the United States from Mexico after 1950, it is easier to understand why the Mexican population in Sonoma and Napa
increased so rapidly after that time. Many new arrivals stayed in Southern California, but for reasons such as an availability of jobs, family connections, or simply to escape immigration officials, many others moved north to places such as Sonoma and Napa. In addition to the thousands of braceros and illegal immigrants in the U.S., as is shown in Table 9, roughly 300,000 Mexicans immigrated to the U.S. between 1951 and 1960. The number of immigrants from Mexico has increased dramatically each decade since the 1940s; more than seven times the number of immigrants came to the U.S. from Mexico in the 1960s than in the 1940s. California absorbed more of these immigrants than any other state in the U.S. In fact, between 1940 and 1990, in terms of receiving the most immigrants from Mexico, California “dominate[d] all other destinations” in the U.S.\textsuperscript{14}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941-1950</td>
<td>61,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>454,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1980</td>
<td>640,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1990</td>
<td>1,656,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For example, Elias Fernandez Sr. first came to the U.S. as a bracero and was contracted for work in California. In the early 1950s, Elias Sr. moved permanently to California and became a migrant farmworker, traveling across the state throughout the year. He continued migrating to the San Jaoquin Valley to pick tomatoes, but in 1961, Elias Sr. moved his family to the Napa Valley because he found year-round work in the prune and walnut industries. The management company for which he worked for over 30 years.

years made the transition from prunes and walnuts to grapes as the valley’s agricultural industry switched from a diverse group to a strictly wine grape monoculture, and Elias Sr. was content to work in any crop as long as he had work year-round. There was not a large Mexican population in Napa at the time, but Elias Fernandez Jr. remembers a significant influx of Mexican migrant labor each year. “I lived on a ranch and there was a labor camp next door,” he recalled, “In the wintertime it would be dead cause they would all be in Mexico, that was around December. Then around January 15 they would all come back for pruning. It has been going on forever.” Fernandez went to school in Calistoga, and at the same school that is “51 percent Hispanic” today, was “probably about five percent” Hispanic when he attended. While this may make it seem as if there were relatively few Hispanics in the area, Fernandez remembered that “there were a lot more Hispanics in the [Napa] valley, but their kids weren’t here.” In his recollection, only the men came to Napa for work, and since they did not intend to live there more than six months of the year, they did not bring their families with them.\textsuperscript{15}

Family groups began to move to the region in larger numbers after the Bracero Program ended, which happened to be around the same time that the acreage planted to grapes began to increase. As was shown in Table 7 (chapter 3), the acreage planted to grapes decreased in both Sonoma and Napa Counties in the 1940s and 1950s, but this was quick to change. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as can be seen in Table 10 below, the bearing acreage of grapes in both Sonoma and Napa rapidly expanded, and this growth has yet to wane.

\textsuperscript{15} Elias Fernandez, interview by author, Napa, Ca, digital audio recording, 27 April 2005.
Table 10. Acres Planted to Grapes, by Year and County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>13,940</td>
<td>12,151</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>24,724</td>
<td>24,168</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>33,189</td>
<td>31,514</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>15,510</td>
<td>12,339</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>26,193</td>
<td>24,831</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>34,122</td>
<td>31,184</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>24,385</td>
<td>17,584</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>28,046</td>
<td>27,858</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>46,587</td>
<td>37,072</td>
<td></td>
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</table>


In the late 1960s, the consumer demand for wine and the price received for grapes increased so rapidly that the value of land on which vineyards were or could be planted skyrocketed. Between the early 1900s and the 1970s, the aforementioned grape grower’s 200 acre Sonoma Valley ranch was primarily planted in row crops with sufficient pasture land to sustain the family’s cattle and dairy operation. Attempting to move out of the business of farming as he came of age, this grower started a construction business, so for many years, he had no interest in planting grapes on his property. “We hung out for a long time and didn’t want to [plant grapes],” he said, “We have always had cows, the dairy, and the construction - that’s what we did.” After the boom, however, he felt forced to switch to grapes. “What were we going to do,” he noted, “you can’t afford not to plant, so we planted grapes.” In the early 1970s, Sonoma County growers received over $500 per ton for grapes, over five times the amount received just ten years prior. This rancher planted his first vineyard in the early 1970s, and as prices for grapes have continued to rise even as the total acreage in grapes continues to increase, he has planted...
more vineyards through years, bringing his total acreage in vineyards to over 125.\textsuperscript{16} Following market forces, growers of many other crops have gradually switched to grapes as well.

Labor, of course, was a critical component in the region wide expansion of wine grape acreage. Without cheap labor, it would have been unfeasible to plant, grow, or harvest all the new vineyards. The bracero program laid the foundation of skilled, cheap labor that allowed the wine boom to happen. Before the bracero program ended, however, the supply of skilled Mexican labor in the region grew to a point that braceros were not needed. “In the early days that I can remember,” Elias Fernandez noted, “that was in the late ‘60s, there was a lot of workers from Mexico, a lot of them were not legal.”\textsuperscript{17} Seeing the transformation of the region’s vineyards as he moved to Napa in the early 1940s, Rodriguez observed the changes in the labor supply from the bracero and ex-bracero perspective. “Within the wine industry,” Rodriguez recalled, “the bracero was being eliminated little by little by the influx of the Mexican family.”\textsuperscript{18} Louis M. Foppiano attributes the increase in family groups moving to the region after the Bracero Program to the fact that “up until then it was still fairly easy to go back and forth across the border.”\textsuperscript{19} With each passing year, crossing the border, both legally and illegally, became increasingly difficult.

It is unclear where growers would have looked for labor if Mexicans were not there to fill the demand. Without access to a cheap labor pool, growers across the nation may have struggled while they figured out what possibilities were available, but they never

\textsuperscript{16} Anonymous Sonoma Valley Grape Grower interview. Prices received for grapes can be found in Edmund A. Rossi interview, 1990, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{17} Elias Fernandez interview.
\textsuperscript{18} Rafael Rodriguez interview.
\textsuperscript{19} Louis M. Foppiano interview.
faced this challenge. Braceros were paid the prevailing wage set by the growers, and because there was scarcely a shortage of migrant labor available, growers had the upper hand over their wages. Even though many of the braceros and migrant workers became skilled vineyard workers, they nevertheless had little bargaining power. It is commonly known that these people sought after work, and many were willing to work for almost any wage. In fact, migrant workers in this region commonly worked ten hours days six days a week. The wine industry would not be what it is today without these workers. “There was work to be done and these people would do it for very little,” noted Elias Fernandez, “When an industry is starting there is not a lot of money out there so you have to have cheap labor in order to get something going, and I think they [Mexicans] were crucial in the beginning.”

Louis M. Foppiano clearly remembers the economic motivations of the braceros and migrants he had employed on his family’s ranch. He said “I don’t think they were overly pushed. It was a different time. They wanted to make money.” All workers of course want to make money, but these workers had a drive that he did not see in others. “If they lived in Mexico and worked up here,” he noted, “their money was going back to Mexico and they knew they had a certain amount of time to make a lot of money. So they were not interested in how little hours they worked each week; it was how much can I work each week and how much can I make. They wanted to work.”

This ambition did not change as the workers changed. Mexicans who moved into the region are still known for the hard work they contribute to the vineyards just as much as braceros were known for their hard work. This is not to suggest that they were directly

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20 Elias Fernandez interview.
21 Louis M. Foppiano interview.
rewarded for their work. Growers needed labor and this group filled the demand.

Mexicans across California faced difficulties in seizing the opportunities for upward mobility; many farm workers remained farm workers their entire lives.

In both 1960 and 1970 the Fair Employment Practice Commission concluded that Mexican-Americans “living in California lag seriously behind the general white population in schooling, jobs, and income.” These findings have not changed in the last 35 years, especially when looking at Mexican-American farm workers. In 1997, 78 percent of California farm workers were Latinos, and it is commonly known that farm workers will work for wages far below what persons of similar skill levels are paid in other occupations. Many farm workers receive minimum wage. The California Development Department’s 1996 annual agricultural survey reported that farm workers in the North Coast region received the highest annual average hourly and weekly earnings of farm workers anywhere in the state. That year, laborers in the North Coast region were paid at least ten percent more than the state average. Nevertheless, the average $7.55 hourly rate and average $312.57 weekly earnings for farm workers in Sonoma and Napa Counties was barely above the minimum wage, and many of these workers do not work full-time. Rick Theis, the former Executive Director of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association, noted that seasonal workers in Sonoma and Napa earned between $10 and $25 per hour picking grapes in 1996 and that laborers doing the same

work in the Central Valley earned about $4.25 per hour. The numbers given do seem to conflict, but even though it is in the interest of the SCGGA to overestimate the hourly wage, both Richard Uribe and the anonymous Sonoma Valley grape grower I spoke with corroborated the high hourly wage for harvest workers. Uribe noted that it is very rare for harvest workers to be paid an hourly wage. When they do get paid by the hour, he noted, “they are usually making about $7.50 an hour,” which after taxes comes to a little over $6 per hour, so they do not like to be paid hourly wages. He said that harvest workers prefer to work “in what is called a quadrilla, or a squad.” One quadrilla consists of about eight workers that are all paid together based on the number of tons of grapes they pick in a day. One quadrilla can pick up to eight tons of grapes in a day, so considering that they are paid “something like $200 for each ton of grapes,” these workers can earn up to $200 in a single day. The Sonoma Valley grape grower said that some harvest workers hold jobs in other industries but “they’ll come just for the harvest to pick grapes because they can make major dough.” He says that at times these workers earn over $30 per hour. They are being paid by the ton or by the piece, and he noted that “they work hard; they earn it, every penny. There is no way that I could pick grapes as fast as they can. It’s like it is raining grapes, and they never stop, they run all day long.” When being paid by the ton or by the piece, it is certainly in the workers interest to pick as much as possible. In this case, both parties are content with the results. The growers are happy to see their vineyards picked at the precise time that the grapes have the correct sugar content and the laborers are happy to be earning higher wages.

24 Rick Theis, Sonoma County Viticulture: a history of quality and diversity (Santa Rosa, Ca: Sonoma County Grape Growers Association, 1996), 21.  
25 Richard Uribe interview.  
26 Anonymous Sonoma Valley Grape Grower interview.
Even with the higher wages in Sonoma and Napa, however, wages for vineyard laborers in Sonoma and Napa have not kept up with the ever increasing cost of living. Miguel Gonzalez, a former Sonoma County farm worker, noted that while “farm workers are the backbone of the Sonoma County wine industry, they are way underpaid for what they do.” Working now assisting farmworkers through non-profit programs, he resents the fact that farm workers are “underpaid and then looked down upon as criminals or aliens in communities where they want to live and raise their families” because he believes that they are an integral part of those communities.27

California farm workers, most of whom are Mexican, are among the least paid as well as the least educated of any laborers in California. Nearly 70 percent of farm workers had “less than a high school education” in 1997.28 Many Mexican-Americans that have been in California for a number of years have reached a level of parity with the general white population, but it is very difficult for the Mexican-American community as a whole to make gains in schooling, jobs, and income when so many desperately poor immigrants continue to arrive in California.

Hispanic children that grew up in Sonoma or Napa in the 1960s and 1970s graduated from high school and some went to college, but these were not the farm workers themselves; these were their children. Even so, prejudice in the schools contributed to the educational lag of Mexican-Americans in California. Candido Morales went to school in Napa County and remembers that “in school there was not overt discrimination, but there were some attitudes and practices that were not to the benefit of minorities.” He had dreams of going to college and faced resistance as “school counselors would not

28 Lopez, Farmworkers in California, 11, 61.
schedule Mexican and Mexican-American students for college prep courses back in the ‘50s and ‘60s.” 29 Mexican and Mexican-American students composed a very small percentage of the student population in this region; the abovementioned grape grower said that he remembers that there were only four Mexicans in his entire grade school of over 300 students. 30 With the increasing numbers of Mexicans in the region’s schools in later years, however, these practices diminished. Elias Fernandez, who graduated from St. Helena High School in the 1970s, said that there was very little racism or discrimination towards Mexicans in school or in the community. 31 Members of the surrounding communities realized the importance of this immigrant group towards the success of local economies and have therefore accepted them into the region, but that does not mean that they have welcomed them with open arms.

The Mexican-American population of Sonoma and Napa Counties has increased over the years at a similar rate as the total population of these counties. As seen in Table 11, total population figures in Sonoma and Napa more than doubled between 1940 and 1960 and have continued to increase greatly each following decade. In 1970, of the 204,885 persons in Sonoma County, there were 8,207 persons with Spanish surnames of which roughly 6,330 were from Mexico; of a total 79,140 persons in Napa County, there were 4,037 persons with Spanish surnames of which 1,082 were from Mexico. 32 By 1980, 20,850 of the total population of Sonoma County were persons with Spanish surnames,

30 Anonymous Sonoma Valley Grape Grower interview.
31 Elias Fernandez interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sonoma</th>
<th>Napa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>38,480</td>
<td>16,451</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>147,375</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>48,394</td>
<td>19,800</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>204,885</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>52,090</td>
<td>20,678</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>299,681</td>
<td>99,149</td>
</tr>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>62,222</td>
<td>22,897</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>388,222</td>
<td>110,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>69,052</td>
<td>28,503</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>458,614</td>
<td>124,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>103,405</td>
<td>46,603</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>466,725</td>
<td>131,607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2000, there were 79,511 Latinos in Sonoma County and 29,416 Latinos in Napa County. The growth in the resident population of Latinos in the region shows that many Mexicans moved into the region, but the numbers given are presumably a significant percent lower than the actual number of Mexicans in the region at any given time. Not included in the figures are the migrant farm workers that continue to come to Sonoma and Napa Counties each year as well all of the undocumented or illegal immigrants living in the region. Undocumented Mexican immigrants do their best to stay “under the radar” and are therefore overlooked in census records. In 1987, a local writer estimated that of the 30,000 hispanics in Sonoma County, about 5,000 had originally come to the U.S. with the bracero program. This number may be slightly inflated, but it shows that instead of going back to Mexico after the Bracero Program ended, many workers decided to make their lives in the region and

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bring their families with them.\textsuperscript{35} Many of the men that chose that path still work in the vineyards. “These are permanent people now,” Richard Uribe stated, “some have been with these wineries for 25 or 30 years. . . A lot of their kids are now taking over.”\textsuperscript{36} These men work in the fields year-round and are responsible for tasks that harvest labor is not around for such as pruning, gleaning, and deweeding.

Among those who came as braceros and others who worked in the vineyards as laborers, a number have risen to the top ranks of the wine industry. By the middle of 2004, there were over 12 Mexican-American families making and selling wine from estate vineyards in wineries they had established themselves. This number has grown quickly; there were not any wineries owned by Mexican-Americans in Northern California in 1990.\textsuperscript{37} Pablo Ceja, whose family now owns Ceja Vineyards of Napa County, worked for years as a bracero in St. Helena. He moved his entire family to St. Helena in Napa County in 1967 and found work in the vineyards and wineries of the region. The Ceja family now owns over 110 acres of vineyards and makes premium Carneros wines. Reynaldo Robledo came to Sonoma County over 35 years ago and although he came from an agricultural region of Mexico, he learned all that he knows about viticulture through his years of experience in Sonoma County. He and his family now own both Robledo Vineyard Management Company and the Robledo Family Winery, which produces wine from grapes grown on estate vineyards. Robledo Vineyard Management is now one of the largest management companies in the region; they take

\textsuperscript{35} Gaye LeBaron, “From the Crisis of the 40s came our \textit{Fiestas y Futbol},” Gaye LeBaron’s Notebook, \textit{The Press Democrat}, 21 June 1987.
\textsuperscript{36} Richard Uribe interview.
care of ranches in Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino Counties. Elias Fernandez received
a degree in fermentation science from UC Davis and is now the winemaker at Shafer
Vineyards in Napa County. Fernandez notes that all of the vineyard workers at Shafer
are Hispanic and that he respects them for what they do as much as they respect him.
“One of the advantages I think I have is that I know the vineyard. . . And the people that
work there are all Hispanic,” Fernandez explains, as he grew up in St. Helena and spent
time with his father in the vineyards, “I know the culture. I know them. They respect me
because of where I have come from and they do things how I think they should be done
to make great wine. It starts in the vineyards.”

The skill of these workers comes in large part from their initiative, but they are trained
according to the requirements of the grower for whom they labor. “Our vineyard
managers out there re trained by me,” noted Fernandez, “and they train the other guys
appropriately, they know what we need to do. It is skilled, it is not easy work, you need
to know what you are doing, especially during pruning and stuff like that.” Fernandez
said that it is hard to train workers how to pick grapes - it is best to learn from experience
- but that they do train their workers in all other tasks. The anonymous Sonoma Valley
grape grower noted that while the vineyard workers that he has employed for nearly 20
years “are not well educated [formally],” they are educated in the art of vineyard
management and are incredibly “crafty.” He continued by noting that “they are capable
of doing more than you think they can do when you give them the slack to let them do it.”

38 For information about the Ceja family and Ceja Vineyards, see http://www.cejavineyards.com. [Accessed
May 2005]. For information concerning Reynaldo Robledo and the Robledo Family Winery on the
interview.
40 Elias Fernandez interview.
Even though he provides them with the necessary tools, he remarked that “they’re pretty ingenious in the things that they come up with and they way they do things. They’ll make things work with a piece of rope and a stick where I’ll use some fancy tool and they’ll get the same effect.”

As a means of continuing the vocational education of the skilled labor force that Sonoma and Napa growers utilize, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) of Sonoma County organized workshops in 2001 for vineyard workers and managers that covered topics such as the “overall growth cycle of the grapevine, what steps should be taken throughout the year from dormancy through harvest, including canopy management,” and “about identifying and managing pests and diseases in the vineyard.” By elevating the workers’ skills and introducing them to the evolving practices of sustainable vineyard management, workshop organizers hoped that workers can become “field scouts” for the managers and growers so that “they can spot trouble before it spreads – saving time, money, and resources.” Since vineyard workers often “have more opportunities to move out of agricultural work than they have to learn and earn more in the vineyards,” wrote Linda Peterson, workshops such as these that aim to craft a stable and educated labor force to assure the long-term viability of the wine industry.

Sonoma and Napa Counties have become known for the respect that their growers have for vineyard labor. The treatment of and services available to vineyard laborers have changed through the years, but a common understanding between growers and laborers has remained constant.

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41 Anonymous Sonoma Valley Grape Grower interview.
It is no surprise that Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers made extraordinary gains just a year after the Bracero Program officially ended; when growers no longer had access to a foreign labor supply, Chavez saw an opportunity to unionize farm workers that was not previously there. A common lack of respect and understanding between growers and laborers contributed to the need for unionization on Central Valley farms, but unions have had little success with grape growers and vineyard laborers in Sonoma and Napa. “There are some unions but they don’t do very well,” noted Fernandez, “Winemaking and grape growing unions don’t do well [in Napa] because it is an agricultural product that quality, especially in the Napa Valley, has such importance. Sometimes the unions get in the way of quality.”

Foppiano said that the failure of the unions in Sonoma can be attributed to the fact that “there was nothing for them up here” because “there weren’t a lot of workers. What are they going to do come here and do five, and go over there and do four. They still have never done well up here. We always paid more up here.” As mentioned earlier, laborers do receive better wages in Sonoma and Napa, and this is in part because of union pressure. “In order to keep them out,” Fernandez remarked, growers have resisted. In terms of “better pay and better benefits” for the workers, union pressure “itself has improved the quality of the life of these vineyard workers.” The unions have gotten in at times, but the laborers and growers found ways to get out of the contracts because “they felt that they were losing more than they were gaining out of that.”

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43 Elias Fernandez interview.
44 Louis M. Foppiano interview.
45 Richard Uribe interview.
both Sonoma and Napa, but as Richard Uribe noted, they have faced difficulties because “most of the people that live here and work here are very loyal, the owners to the people, and the people to the owners. There are people who do bad to each other, but very little.”\textsuperscript{47} There is, of course, a small minority of growers “who are not operating in the best way and paying wages demanded by the times,” said Pete Opatz, a vineyard manager in Sonoma County, but “80 to 90 percent of the more than 1,000 vineyard owners in Sonoma County are paying fair wages to farmworkers” because “competition for skilled workers is driving up wages and benefits.”\textsuperscript{48} Wages and benefits, however, are not the only measure of the treatment of farm workers.

Some of the detrimental effects of herbicides and insecticides on the human body were unknown in earlier years, and because of this, farm workers were regularly exposed to dangerous amounts of toxins. “As far as the stuff they were spraying in the vineyards which was bad for their health,” noted Fernandez, “they weren’t protected.” Laws have gotten increasingly strict, however, and these practices have changed. “Today, when you see people working the vineyards they have all kinds of stuff on, depending on what they are using,” he continued, “some of the chemicals they were using back then are illegal now. They were using them without any gloves or anything like that. But today they are much more protected than they were back then. I think everyone is more involved in that.”\textsuperscript{49}

Low-cost health clinics are available for farm workers in Sonoma and Napa Counties, and one group has started a project that aims to assimilate the workers’ medical records into an electronic format that is accessible on the internet. As part of a grant from the

\textsuperscript{47} Richard Uribe interview.  
\textsuperscript{48} Pete Opatz, as quoted Tesconi, \textit{The Press Democrat}, 1 November 1999.  
\textsuperscript{49} Elias Fernandez interview.
California Endowment and the Rural Community Assistance Project, Vineyard Workers’ Services (VWS) in Sonoma Valley has implemented a test program for migrant farm workers called Visitor’s Information Access (VIA) in which each person has an individual account that catalogs information about things such as medical conditions, chronic ailments, dental records, health care providers, and current prescriptions.\textsuperscript{50}

Equally important, the records document the real name, address, and date of birth. Due to the language barrier that many vineyard workers have with the health care community, each participant has an identification card that can be given to doctors or the like so that any health care provider can access the subject’s records wherever he may be working. This program also provides the participant with an email account. As of April 2005, the information of 2,000 farm workers had been uploaded into user accounts. VIA was first implemented in Sonoma Valley, but ultimately the goal is to encompass all of Sonoma County, as well as all agricultural workers and Mexicans in other occupations.\textsuperscript{51}

Farm worker housing, especially during harvest, is another delicate issue in local communities. Despite efforts made by local businesses and organizations to provide housing for migrant workers, there are commonly occasions in which these people live in substandard conditions. “Most of the people that come here during the harvest season stay with people or relatives that they have here,” said Richard Uribe, but many others “sleep in cars, in garages, in sheds.” These workers come to save money, so if they do rent an apartment, rent is split between as many men as possible, “up to six or eight in a

\textsuperscript{50} VIA can be accessed online at http://www.vwsvia.org/. To see which records can be stored for participants, click member log-in and enter Juan as the username and February as the password to view records of a “sample” participant.

\textsuperscript{51} Richard Uribe interview.
one bedroom apartment.” In Napa it is common for migrant workers to camp out on the banks of the Napa River. Attempts to provide housing for migrant workers has proceeded slowly. “There was a boom in farmworker housing during the first part of the decade [1990s],” wrote Tim Tesconi, “after news reports of workers living under bridges and in cars during the harvest.” In the ten years following those reports, 19 units that “provide living accommodations for 500 seasonal and permanent vineyard workers” were “built by growers and vintners throughout Sonoma County.” Since that period, however, no new facilities have been built to house farm workers in Sonoma County.

In fact, it is commonly known that there was more farm worker housing available in the 1970s and 1980s than there was through the 1990s and today. “Through the '80s, there were accommodations for about 400 workers in the [Napa] valley,” wrote Glen Martin, “enough to house about one-fifth of the labor force during the crush, and perhaps half of the workers during the remainder of the year.” Through the 1990s, there were accommodations throughout the valley to provide housing for only 250 workers. The Napa Valley Housing Authority has made major gains in providing shelter for migrant farm workers in recent years. They have purchased and renovated old labor camps from various wineries throughout the valley and now operate five camps with total accommodations for over 230 workers. At a cost of ten dollars per day, workers typically share a room with another individual, and they are provided with two hot meals and a sack lunch.

52 Ibid.
In addition, a tax on vineyard land in Napa has funded a facility that houses up to sixty workers, and workers are allowed to stay for up to nine months each year. VWS sets up temporary camps each year in Sonoma that together houses sixty people, but many workers still have nowhere to go. VWS charges residents ten dollars per day for services including two meals at the dining hall, bathroom facilities, clothes washing facilities, and a bed.\textsuperscript{55} Migrant farm workers enjoy these facilities, but since they only house sixty workers, only a small percentage of them are able to stay there. The southern part of Sonoma Valley alone receives an influx of about 5,000 workers each year during harvest.

Some growers provide housing for all of the migrant workers they hire as well as the workers they use full-time. “We have very good relations with our help,” recalled Henry Dick, “Most of our help has been with us for years. We have good housing for them.” Dick uses Mexican labor year-round, and when harvest arrives he hires additional Mexican labor. “They let the families know in Mexico,” he continued, “their family, and nearly all their family will come and pick our grapes. Once in a while we hire outside, but most of the time it’s just the families, big [extended] families, that come, and then they harvest the grapes, and then they go back home.” The Mexicans that Dick hires are part of only three families, and after utilizing their labor for years, he claims that he has no problem with labor.\textsuperscript{56} Eugene Cuneo housed 15 full-time employees on his ranch and “the extra help that they need when they harvest, it’s all pretty much friends or relations.” “You have to hire these extra fifteen or eighteen, twenty people from some other place.”

\textsuperscript{55} Richard Uribe interview.
\textsuperscript{56} Henry Dick, \textit{A Lifetime of Agriculture, an oral history}, interviewed by Carole Hicke (Healdsburg, Ca: Alexander Valley Winegrowers, 1997), 71.
he noted, “but they’ve always done pretty well.”\textsuperscript{57} Migrant networks are apparently alive and well within some farm worker families in Sonoma County.

The aforementioned Sonoma Valley grape grower does not know where the harvest workers he hires stay, but since he thinks “it is the grower’s responsibility to provide housing,” he has housing for all of his full-time employees. The full-time workers he uses have been working for him for “15, 18, almost 20 years some of them.” He knows that “they are all related” and that “they come from the same area” of Mexico. This particular grower also uses some of the same workers at harvest each year, but of the others he is forced to hire, he remarked, “probably half of those guys are not legal.”\textsuperscript{58}

There are a lot of undocumented workers everywhere in California, and while their numbers seem to have decreased in recent years due to a number of amnesty programs, they are still present.\textsuperscript{59} For years during and after the Bracero Program there were “a lot of illegal aliens that used to come in there,” noted Teldeschi, referring to Sonoma County, “but it didn’t matter who they were, as long as they worked, you know, and we don’t really care” because “there was no restriction.” Most growers did not worry about hiring undocumented workers because they didn’t perceive anything to be wrong with it. In fact, in earlier years, the terms illegal or undocumented were not used; if somebody was willing to work, they were hired without any questions asked. In the past fifteen years, however, legal requirements have changed. “Finally, I think about three or four years ago,” remembered Teldeschi in 1995, “it came down that they had to be legal

\textsuperscript{57} Eugene Cuneo interview.
\textsuperscript{58} Anonymous Sonoma Valley Grape Grower interview.
\textsuperscript{59} Starting in 1986 with the Immigration and Reform Control Act that provided “a blanket amnesty to some 2.7 million illegal aliens,” the U.S. Congress has passed seven amnesties to illegal aliens. Following IRCA in 1986, amnesties have been passed in 1994, two in 1997, 1998, and two in 2000. Overall, amnesty has been provided to over five million illegal aliens. See “U.S. amnesties for illegal aliens,” available online at http://www.numbersusa.com/interests/amnesty_print.html [accessed 7 June 2005].
before we could hire them. So some that we had working for us for a long time, we were able to make out papers with the federal government and legalize them.” Teldeschi now hires at least ten migrant laborers that come in and out of the U.S. legally each year.

“They go home after the crop, after the grape season is over,” he continued, “and they’ll come back and prune and do whatever work and then go back. They’ve got legal papers. They just go back home and come back.”

The anonymous grape grower noted that he has particular requirements that must be cleared before he can hire any vineyard workers on his Sonoma Valley ranch. “They got to come in and show me their social security card, they have to fill out a 99 form, and they have to give me proof of identification and a driver’s license,” he said, “and they all got it.” Many undocumented workers arrive in Sonoma or Napa with fraudulent papers that declare a name and social security number, and growers then have to decipher from these who can legitimately be employed and who can not. “I can’t tell one that’s legal and one that’s not.” he continued, “It’s not fair for the government to try to force me to do that.”

Growers will continue to use Mexican labor in their vineyards at least until all illegal immigration is stopped, because only then will growers discover if they can manage without a source of cheap labor. No other labor source is available at the wages currently offered, so growers think that they have no other choice. “Americans won’t do the work. You need the Mexicans to do the work,” stated a Sonoma Valley grape grower, “who else is going to do the work?” This and most other grape growers in Sonoma and Napa

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60 Mike Teldeschi interview.
61 Anonymous Sonoma Valley Grape Grower interview.
Counties are so reliant on Mexican labor these days that can’t foresee where they would find a labor force if Mexicans were to disappear. “You couldn’t pay these guys [white, domestic labor] enough money to do this work,” he continued, “It’s somewhat boring, it’s tedious.” If Mexicans were not available, he said, “it would completely shut the industry down overnight. Without these guys I don’t see how we could do it, I mean it would be impossible without them.”62 Indicative of his company’s reliance on Mexican labor, Louis M. Foppiano said that he has not “seen a white person come look for field work in 30 years.”63 His father, Louis J. Foppiano, noted much the same:

If we didn’t have the Mexicans now, we couldn’t get a white man out here. I’ve got forty pickers out there, and if you can find a white man amongst them, you’re doing better than I can. People say there are too many Mexicans, but if we didn’t have them, I don’t know how we would pick these crops today or do things. We just couldn’t do it all ourselves.64

Latinos make up by far the largest percentage of any minority group in Sonoma and Napa County, and many within that group are willing to do farm labor. As the industry expanded with Mexican laborers in the vineyards, a lot of work became available in the wineries and a lot of “white” laborers went there for work. More recently, however, Mexicans have pushed white labor of the wineries as well. They have taken over as the primary labor force within the wineries, operating and managing crushing, bottling, and racking departments.

The willingness of the Mexican laborer, including the bracero, to work for low wages and perform hard work on the land is perhaps the biggest contribution of this long running labor source to the region’s viticultural industry. In terms of what they endure and where this group fits into the industry, Elias Fernandez stated that:

62 Ibid.
63 Louis M. Foppiano interview.
64 Louis J. Foppiano interview, 36.
In the wintertime, they have to be out there at 30 degrees Fahrenheit - it’s cold - I have done it ever since I was a kid. In the summertime, it’s 100 degrees and they are out there doing the meticulous work that needs to be done in order to improve the quality of grapes and improve the wine quality. So basically, they are an important part of the winemaking team, that’s where it all starts. Going back to the early days, having those types of people was very important to the growth of the wine industry.65

The wine industry is one of if not the biggest industry in Sonoma and Napa Counties today. Without the Bracero Program, Sonoma and Napa Counties would not look like they do today; the thousands of acres grapes might still be planted in other crops and the labor force might still be composed of white domestic labor. Both of these major changes likely would have occurred at some point even if the Bracero Program had not been realized, but the influence of this program certainly aided and abetted the transformation of the Sonoma and Napa wine industry from mere nationwide acclaim to one of global authority.

As for Massey’s final proposition that “among settlers, there is a process of return migration,” it is safe to say that most Mexicans that come to Sonoma and Napa have no desire to live in Mexico once again. They have left Mexico with intentions of making a new life in California, and do not foresee returning. Intellectually, however, it seems as if there may be a process of return migration taking place. It is possible that grape growing techniques that were perfected in concert with Mexican labor in Sonoma and Napa have filtered into the vineyards of Mexico. Although wine has been produced in Mexico since the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, the Mexican wine industry has rapidly expanded and has begun, since the early 1990s, producing premium wines.66 Not

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65 Elias Fernandez interview.
66 For a discussion of the growth of Mexico’s wine industry in the global market see Global Agriculture Information Network Report MX3327, Mexico Wine Annual 2003 (United States Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service, 2003).
surprisingly, the heart of the Mexican wine industry, just as in California, rests in the hands of the Mexican laborer.
Epilogue

The wine industry in Sonoma and Napa County has benefited both directly and indirectly from the Bracero Program. Sonoma and Napa County grape growers not only used bracero labor, but as a result of the influx of Mexican labor into the United States, they also received a significantly larger influx of Mexican migrant labor and residents that were willing to work in the fields. The impact of Mexican and Mexican-American workers in this specialized industry can not be overstated.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated how the Bracero Program initiated the shift that placed Mexican-American and Mexican workers in a central role in the wine grape industry and how viticulture has become a dominant force in California agriculture. The Bracero Program brought Mexicans into California’s agricultural labor force in exceedingly large numbers; braceros who entered Sonoma and Napa Counties worked in viticulture for the first time. Although the numbers of braceros used in Sonoma and Napa County viticulture were relatively small when compared to the numbers used on larger corporate farms elsewhere in California, the Bracero Program represents the entry point of the Mexican farm worker into this unique sector of California agriculture. Braceros who were contracted to Sonoma and Napa County grape growers were working in an industry composed of smaller landholdings that encouraged more personal connections between growers and workers. While these connections and the relationships that developed did not mitigate all instances of racism and discrimination directed toward braceros, they improved the braceros’ daily life while in the U.S., which, in the eyes of the braceros, made Sonoma and Napa Counties highly desirable locations to work.
The bracero proved to Sonoma and Napa County growers that they were there to work, and they set the precedent for generations of future Mexican farm workers. As the regional wine grape industry underwent extreme expansion in later years, it was, and still is, the Mexican laborer who possessed the keen knowledge of viticulture that was required to produce the high quality grapes that have become synonymous with the region. Mexicans who moved into the region as farm workers have become well established in the fields of Sonoma and Napa Counties. In fact, Mexicans are ubiquitous in the vineyards; scarcely any vineyard workers are not Mexican these days.

A lot of skilled labor was required to create Sonoma and Napa as the premiere wine region in the U.S. If the braceros that were brought into the region were not properly trained in the ever evolving art and science of viticulture, the prestige of this regional industry may never have been generated. In a short time the braceros, as well as the Mexican and Mexican-American laborers who followed, were skilled grape growers who had a big part in building up the industry. Mexican vineyard workers are the lifeblood of the industry, and since they were so critical in its development over the last 60 years, telling the history of this regional industry requires that their story be emphasized. While the subtleties of wine made from Sonoma or Napa grapes may only be noticeable to an esoteric group of enophiles, anyone can see that the reputation of the grapes produced there, and the workers who produce them, remains inviolate. Nobody in the industry could ask for better grapes, and they certainly could not ask for a more skilled, hard-working labor force.

While this labor force may seem stable and permanent, it may not always be as such. As many Mexican immigrants move out of farm work after they become established in
the areas that they live, the farm labor force is continually replenished by the flow of legal and illegal immigration into California. By 2003, there were 10.3 million illegal immigrants in the U.S., and 2.4 million of those were living in California.¹ Those of that group that do farm work keep California agriculture alive. In the climate of post 9-11 politics, however, migration and undocumented workers are being viewed more and more as a security threat. The continued infiltration of migrants that are potential terrorists has thus caused President Bush to tighten up the border by increasing the numbers of border patrol officers and the budget needed to support the program. Nevertheless, he sees the labor needs in agriculture and other industry and has proposed to Congress the expansion of a guest-worker program for Mexican laborers.²

While employers of agricultural labor have a “temporary worker” program in effect as legislation now stands, it is not extensively utilized due to the availability of Mexican agricultural labor already in the U.S. as well as the restrictive stipulations required of growers.³ President Bush would like to expand this program to other industries, but instead of recruiting new workers from Mexico, his plan intends to utilize undocumented workers already in the U.S. Since 2001, President Bush has attempted to persuade

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² To see what other policy makers and interest groups have in mind for a guest-worker program see Temporary Guest Worker Proposals in the Agriculture Sector, Hearings before the Committee on Agriculture, House of Representatives, One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session, 28 January 2004, Serial Number 108-23 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004).
³ Growers can request workers from Mexico to be admitted under an H-2A visa that allows the agricultural worker temporary admittance into the U.S. while under contract with a specified grower. Growers utilizing workers on H-2A visas are required to provide housing and subsistence, are required to pay the prevailing wage, and must show proof that there was a concerted effort to attract domestic labor. As it stands, there is no provision for workers to become legalized citizens while in the U.S.; it is strictly a temporary program. It is similar to the Bracero Program in many ways, but the H-2A visa program is not widely utilized. In 2002, there were a total of 66,379 H2 visas issued in the U.S., of which only 24,946 were H2A visas for agricultural workers. See Congressional Research Service Memorandum, 3 February 2004, available online at http://www.farmworkerlaw.org; and “U.S. ‘guest-worker’ visa a pitted road not taken,” Palm Beach Post (Florida), 9 December 2003, available online at http://www.palmbeachpost.com.
“Congress to grant temporary worker status to many of the millions of foreigners living in the United States without government permission.” This proposal has met harsh opposition from Republicans and Democrats alike; some Republicans “regard his plan as amnesty to lawbreakers and a threat to national security” while some Democrats “detect a backdoor attack on labor unions and wage scales.” If this proposal is implemented as planned, these “temporary workers” would be allowed to “stay in the United States for renewable three-year increments before eventually returning to their home countries” and “travel legally from the United States to their home countries and back to jobs in the United States during their legal status as temporary workers.” Just as during the Bracero Program, Bush’s proposal aims to “match willing foreign workers with willing U.S. employers” when domestic labor is not available and it provides incentives, including pension credits and savings accounts, that can only be collected by the temporary workers in their native country, to return home after working in the U.S. These workers would receive legal status while working in the U.S., but there is no provision for “temporary workers” to obtain U.S. citizenship.

For the most part, California growers are in favor of this plan. Although it may increase the number of undocumented workers coming to the U.S. hoping to receive legal

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5 Both of the growers I interviewed suggested that they would like to see a “Bracero Program” implemented again. Louis M. Foppiano said that he is “very much in favor of the Bracero Program” because Mexicans will come into the U.S. to fill the labor demand with or without a formalized guest worker program. Creating an analogy between the labor demand and drugs, he continued: “The whole thing is, create a need, it will be filled, just like drugs. This government could spend $100 billion trying to stop drugs at the border. But if you have people that want to buy drugs inside, the drugs will get here.” The aforementioned anonymous Sonoma Valley grape grower has his own plan of how to run a guest worker program. It is not perfect, but his procedure is simple. He said that “the way to solve this deal is to let them come across the border. You give them a credit card with their picture and give them a number. They come to work for me, I swipe the card through a machine, we tax them, we pay them, we let them go back home, they give the card back.” Because of the difficulties he has with the government while hiring Mexican labor right now, he believes that something needs to be done to change the status quo. He
status, legalizing all undocumented Mexicans for work would ease growers’ troubles. As it stands now, growers are the party responsible for determining who is and who is not allowed to work based on their citizenship status. President Bush’s plan would transfer that responsibility to the government and theoretically clear any immigrant for work. Counting on the moral consciousness of American employers, President Bush has argued that “this program will be more humane to workers” than illegal immigration “and will live up to the highest ideals of our nations.”

The influence and impact of the Bracero Program did not end with its termination at the end of 1964. Improving the lives of many Mexican families, thousands of former braceros have moved with their families to the U.S. since that time as part of one of the world’s largest migration movements of the twentieth century. Similarly, the injustices dealt many braceros have also lingered. In fact, at the end of April 2005 the Mexican Senate finally approved a $27 million fund to repay former braceros the portion of their wages that was withheld and placed in savings and pension funds in Mexico that they never received. It should be clear by now that the “temporary worker” program for

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continued by saying that “they [Mexicans] are going to come in anyway, they are going to pay 1,500 to 2,000 bucks to a coyote to take them across, and that money is going to no good whatsoever. Just charge them, tax them heavily - 50 percent on the dollar and they will still come and work. It would be a cleaner deal. Americans won’t do the work. You need the Mexicans to do the work.” Louis M. Foppiano interview and Anonymous Sonoma Valley Grape Grower interview.


7 The lawsuit, which held the names of more than 400,000 former guest-workers, was originally filed against the U.S. and Mexican governments and various banks in 2001. See Jennifer M. Fitzenberger, “They were Braceros, Now they are plaintiffs seeking their lost wages,” The Fresno Bee, 11 March 2001. For information regarding the decision, see Vanessa Colos, “Ex-braceros want their money,” The Modesto Bee, 2 May 2005. The withholdings were originally deposited in the Mexican government bank, but they were lost as the bank “had a poor record-keeping system and went through multiple mergers before it was closed.” The $27 million is not “meant to repay dollar-for-dollar what was withheld, but rather will serve as a social welfare program.” Colos noted that the Mexican government would need to approve a fund of $500 million to $1 billion if the money was to be “repaid in today’s dollars.”
American agriculture known as the Bracero Program created workers that were anything but temporary. While Mexican and Mexican-American labor is already so entrenched in California agriculture, it will be difficult for a program that follows the plan President Bush is pushing to impact the agricultural industry in a similar fashion as the World War II era Bracero Program. It is likely, however, that any changes to the current guest worker program will have significant consequences for the agricultural industry and Mexican immigration for years to come.

Sonoma and Napa County grape growers are forced to speculate each year that their vines will produce high quality grapes, so like all growers across the U.S., they are inherently optimistic of the expected results. Policy makers, I suggest, are similar to growers in that they too are optimistic and are forced to speculate that their plans will live up to all that they have dreamed. Just as a grower will not reap the potential benefits of planting a new vineyard for a number of years, those with the power to enact legislation that will alter the path of the nation’s immigration policies will not realize the benefits or downsfalls of their proposals for many years. The nationwide discussion concerning race, nationality, citizenship, and industry is still clearly prevalent today, and one must remember that the Bracero Program was the result of a similar debate in American society. The legacy of the Bracero Program has had a remarkable impact on the U.S. Fortunately, as policy makers outline a new path for America’s guest worker and immigration policies, they can learn from the successes, failures, and abuses of this process by examining the impact that the Bracero Program had on regional industries such as Sonoma and Napa County viticulture.
# APPENDIX

## Protocol Summary Sheet

**Last Name:** LAWRENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requesting Exemption or Expedited Review, specify category (see Appendix B):</th>
<th>Title of Project: <strong>THE ROLE OF THE BEACEDO IN THE GROWTH OF SONOMA &amp; NAPA COUNTY VITICULTURE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brief description of purpose of project:</strong> TO DETAIL THE USE OF AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF BEACEDO FARM LABORERS TOWARDS THE GROWTH OF VITICULTURE IN SONOMA AND NAPA COUNTIES.</td>
<td><strong>New project</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subjects</strong></td>
<td><strong>Number:</strong> 10-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source/How contacted:</strong> WORD OF MOUTH, ONLINE, JOURNAL ARTICLES; LOCAL MEXICAN/MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Instruments** | **Check all that apply:** ☐ Tests ☐ Questionnaires ☑ Interview guides ☐ Other; Attach one copy of each instrument used. If not yet developed, provide drafts, samples, and/or outlines.

*How administered:*
- ☐ Telephone
- ☐ Mail or email
- ☑ In person

*Length and frequency of procedure:* 1-2 HOURS / 1 MEETING

*Setting:* IN HOME, WORKPLACE, NEUTRAL SETTING

**Data**

*Check all that apply:* Data will be recorded by:
- ☑ written notes
- ☐ audio tape
- ☐ video tape
- ☑ photography
- ☐ film
- ☐ other

*Information which can identify the subject (e.g., name, social security number, other unique identifier) specify:
- ☑ names
- ☐ codes linked to subjects name by separate code key
- ☐ codes not linked to subjects names

*Data will include:* For items checked above, circle box of those related to data that will be reported

*Data will be used for:*
- ☐ publication
- ☐ evaluation
- ☐ needs assessment
- ☑ thesis
- ☐ other

**Informed Consent**

☑ written (attach copy of consent form; see attached sample and checklist)

☐ oral (attach text of statement and request for waiver of written informed consent; see Appendix A)

**THIS SPACE FOR IRB USE ONLY**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>This project: ☐ is exempt under category A; ☐ is eligible for expedited review under category B; ☐ requires CRIS review</th>
<th>Human Subjects Administrator</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Chair, IRB</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Comments:**
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