“EVEN THE WOMEN ARE LEAVING,” GENDERED MIGRATIONS BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES: REVOLUTIONARY DIASPORAS, DEPRESSION-ERA DEPATRIATIONS, AND WARTIME BRACERO CONTROLS, 1900-1950

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By

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This dissertation examines how Mexican families experienced migration and binational living between 1900 and 1950. By examining families during this period, a crucial era for the development of family migration and familiarity with the cross-border journey, this study argues that migration revolved around binational family connections as well as the search for labor opportunities. This project highlights social networks of migration with particular focus on migrant-sending communities, and enhances an overall understanding of how migrants experienced cross-border journeys, and life in the U.S. and Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century. By 1920 there was already a diverse group of migrants living binational lives. The economic crisis of the 1930s led to the return and removal of many migrants from the United States. Migrants often embarked on multiple migrations through eras of prosperity, economic crisis, and war. Families left their communities, traversed national spaces, crossed an international border, and encountered new landscapes and languages—they lived at the intersection of local and global dynamics.

By focusing on family migration and especially on women, I not only trace the multiple border crossings of entire families throughout the first half of the twentieth century. This project also analyzes citizenship, exclusionary border policies, and the separations and reunifications of binational families. The findings draw upon sources from national archives of the United States
and Mexico, Jalisco state archives, and from the Mexican National Institute of Migration. Migrant correspondence sent to officials in both Mexico and the U.S. reveals what migrants came to expect from each government, what governments expected of migrants, and early efforts toward the regulation of an increasing and evolving human mobility. Sources including, letters written to presidents, passport applications, border crossing cards, census reports, newspapers and train manifests of migrants returning to Mexico, reveal how migrants organized their journeys, lived in two nations, and how their experiences changed over time. These sources reveal the importance of family migration in the early part of the twentieth century, and foregrounds a dynamic era of female and family migration before midcentury migration policies shifted the gendered dynamic and rhetoric of migration.
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INTRODUCTION

Micaela Carranza, Andrea Torres, Magdalena Ayala: these are women who left their home towns in Mexico, undertaking long and complicated northward journeys, crossing an international boundary, and becoming integral members of binational families and migrant communities on both sides of the border where they lived and worked during the first half of the twentieth century. These women sometimes migrated alone or with only their children, sometimes they went as part of large extended families, or sometimes they traveled with only a spouse or sibling. They experienced episodes of circular migration, sometimes forced by life’s circumstances, other times explicitly designed as part of strategies for personal and family livelihoods. These migrant women also wrote letters to local government officials, consuls, and Presidents on both sides of the border, telling their stories, asking for help and guidance for themselves and their family members.

Antonio Silva, Angel Flores, Joseph Columbus: these are men who left home towns in Mexico, undertook cross-border journeys similar to those of female migrants, except that men crossed the border more easily and found greater labor opportunities on arrival in the U.S. These men were also integral members of bi-national families and migrant communities on both sides of the border where they lived and worked in the twentieth century. The men, too, sometimes migrated alone or only with their children; some also traveled as part of large extended families or sometimes went only with their spouse or sibling. Like the women who migrated during this era, some men initiated their own journeys while others followed family members; many experienced episodes of circular migration, sometimes forced by life’s circumstances, other times explicitly designed as part of strategies for personal and family livelihoods. These men
also wrote letters to local government officials, consuls and Presidents, telling their stories, asking for help and guidance regarding their own migrations and the migrations of their family members. They did so with a stated and explicit responsibility as providers for their families.

Children like William Nuñez, widowed grandmothers like Angela Moreno, and diverse others all lived parts of their lives in both the U.S. and Mexico during some of the most dynamic and difficult periods of Mexican and U.S. history. Catalina Hidalgo suffered personal tragedy and fled Mexico during the Revolution. Francisco Pérez campaigned for President Ávila Camacho before he trekked north. Charles Hinojosa had worked for the WPA. Hundreds of thousands endured the social and economic dislocations of the Great Depression. The story of Mexican migration in the early twentieth century is one of diverse groups of migrants moving back and forth across the border for multiple reasons, living out their lives in two countries and establishing foundational networks and patterns of migration—before the more recognizable and massive emigration from Mexico in the late twentieth century.

The historiography of Mexican migration lacks in-depth understanding of the diversity within migration patterns during this foundational period. The participations and visions of women in the first generations of Mexican migrants to the United States are rarely analyzed or even acknowledged. Furthermore, while family migration is recognized during this early period, few studies investigate its roots in sending communities and receptions in host communities. This study seeks to rectify key lacunae in the history of early Mexican migration to the United States. By utilizing sources that provide first person migrant testimonies and new detail about movement back and forth, this study reveals important aspects of migrants’ lives. It shows that women as well as men migrated during the early twentieth century, and that family-centered
motivations were significant for men and women, as both joined the rising streams of migrants who came north before the Great Depression. Family issues remained central to those facing movements back and forth during that decade of challenge—and the war years that followed. Throughout, migration involved more than just labor and the concerns of men seeking work; border movements and transnational lives were as related to family and community networks as to labor markets and economic conditions. Migrants of both genders migrated to reunite with family members, just as migrants of both genders migrated in search of more economic stability. Family commitments and gender relations were intimately related to questions of economic opportunity and stability, and it was the combination of these factors that motivated migrants to continue difficult migrations despite the challenges that accompanied increasingly restrictive immigration legislation. Drawing new attention to the importance of family migration and the presence of women within early generations of migrants, this study offers new perspectives on Mexican migration within the context of Mexican history.

Many studies of Mexican-American communities in the United States and Mexican immigration to the United States have provided strong analyses of the settlement, adjustment, lives, and identities of Mexicans in the U.S.; yet we rarely see how two-way and serial migrations shaped Mexican lives. While most historical studies on pre-1950 immigration provide some historical background on conditions in Mexico, they emphasize how Mexican communities developed within the United States. However, many Mexicans went back and forth across the border during their lifetimes and their stories, and the histories of multiple Mexican migrations are important to the histories of both the United States and Mexico. Understanding the history of Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century is essential to understanding the history of
migrants. They were Mexican citizens who lived through the turbulence of revolution, post-revolutionary reforms, and a changing nation seeking new ways of development that provoked enduring conflicts; and they repeatedly dealt with the Mexican state. A portrayal of migrants and their sending communities illuminates the reasons people left and why some came back. It provides a more comprehensive picture of the migrations and social relationships that crossed and re-crossed the border to connect the two countries.

By providing a spotlight on the familial and social aspects of migration, taking into consideration how gender shaped migration patterns, and focusing on both sending and receiving communities, I argue that that family-centered motivations ranging from departures in search of income (that resulted in separation), to migrations in search of reunification (to better sustain the family), were essential aspects of the complex motivations that promoted sustained migration throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century. The turbulence of the 1930s and new migration order organized by the governments of Mexico and the United States in the 1940s would dramatically change migration patterns. Too often that new order shapes how scholars understand early migration history and imagine new beginnings to old concerns of binational mobility and divided families. What follows is a more comprehensive view of early migrations where we see families and social networks that crossed borders to shape two countries—yet remained marginal to the priorities of both states until the labor needs of World War II focused their attention.
Uncovering a forgotten history

Pioneering waves of migrants included migrants of various ages, family status, gender, and socioeconomic status. Yet the typical migrant of the period from 1890 and through the 1920s is imagined to be young, male, single, and from a rural community. These characteristics may define a majority of the migrants that went to the U.S. in the first decades of the twentieth century, but by overgeneralizing from this majority we neglect the broad diversity within migrant groups. Too often, the result is the exclusion of women in these histories. There are reasons for conceptualizing the prototypical migrant as male. Most early studies of migrants focused on individuals rather than families, and those individuals were “usually conceived of as males or genderless.”

Furthermore, within the historiography on Mexican migration, there has been an emphasis on labor, which has carried the assumption that labor migration meant only males.

Scholarly work focused on early twentieth century Mexican migration emphasizes labor in the United States. The key contemporary works of economist Paul Taylor and later analysis by historian Mark Reisler detail how Mexican workers were integrated into U.S. agriculture and industry. The contemporary Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio and U.S. historian Lawrence Cardoso share a similar emphasis on labor, but do highlight some of the challenges in Mexico that led to emigration. Families are mentioned throughout the work of all four authors; and some family experiences are revealed by Gamio and Taylor’s interviews with female migrants. Still, details within these early studies privilege the male laborer experience. Most

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works on early Mexican and Mexican-American communities also see migrant families, often providing strong analyses of family life in the U.S., but leaving Mexican history as background context—and rarely seeing Mexican communities and bi-national movements.²

The difficulty of finding sources helps account for the neglect of family and female migration experiences. With the exception of Paul Taylor and Mario Gamio’s contemporary fieldwork and interviews, migrant experiences as told by migrants themselves are hard to find. Moreover, detailed information about the exodus of emigrants for that period in Mexico is fragmented and dispersed. How, and when, did communities and authorities take notice and document emigration? Gamio’s and Taylor’s studies emerged in the 1920s, when Mexican immigration became observable and motivated by growing interest by the U.S. State in the “Mexican Problem.”

First-person testimonies by women and men describing family migration primarily examine the years after 1965, when family and female migration accelerated.³ The scholarship on post-1965 migration has contributed invaluable conceptual frameworks for the study of migration including: transnational families, intimate migration, and chain migration. I draw upon these themes to look at intimate and familial aspects of migration and social networks of


³ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo,Gendered Transitions. Massey et. al. Return to Aztlán, Segura, Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, Boem, Intimate Migrations
migration, with the understanding that the family and social networks more easily observed and more frequently analyzed in the latter half of the twentieth century were also essential to migration in the early twentieth century.

The emphasis on post-1965 migration has also led the historiography of Mexican migration to the United States to take the Bracero Era as the starting point for modern patterns of Mexican migration. It was during this era between 1942 and 1964 that migration from Mexico began to escalate; however using the Bracero program that focused on recruiting single men as a starting point to gain an understanding of migration patterns over the last sixty years obscures the rich pre-1940 history of family migration, the ways in which each State tried to manage that migration, and thus the diverse ways that human mobility across the Mexico-U.S. border shaped families and communities in both nations in the first half of the century. By seeing the first half century of migration as a mostly male labor history stripped of its social and family dimensions, we miss a critical history and rich stories that need to be told not only to give full voice to migrant experiences, but to also understand how to situate Mexican and Mexican-American migrants in the longer and long-integrated national and transnational histories of Mexico and the U.S.

*Social Factors of Migration*

In order to recover the forgotten history of early twentieth century family and female migration, this study takes as its premise that in addition to macro-structural factors having to do with economy and labor, very personal social relationships drive and sustain migration. In their work on migration to the U.S. from Western Mexico, Douglas Massey, Rafael Alarcón, Jorge
Durand and Humberto González suggest that while structural changes within sending and receiving countries might generate migration, “once begun, this migration eventually develops a social infrastructure that enables movement on a mass basis. Over time, the number of social ties between sending and receiving areas grows, creating a social network that progressively reduces the costs of international movement.” These scholars also recognize that life cycle changes shape family migration strategies, that networks of migration are sustained by return migration and by migrants who eventually settle more permanently in receiving communities, and that at individual and community levels, migration is likely to encourage repeated migrations. The following chapters demonstrate that social networks have been operating to sustain migration for well over a century. With this understanding, and while tracing the journeys, experiences and objectives of migrants in the early twentieth century it becomes clear that family networks lie at the heart of the broader social networks that have historically sustained Mexican Migration.

*Family*

By focusing on family and the voices and experiences of a variety of migrants, we will see women as less peripheral to early histories of migration. Mothers traveling with children figure more centrally, and we see that mothers have been a vital part of family migration for more than a century. Expanding the focus to incorporate family also uncovers the migrations of grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and daughters, and how their participations linked them to multiple

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4 Massey et al., *Return to Aztlan* 3-6
communities and diverse ways of migration. We also come to see the migration of men as equally linked to family connections and motivations.

Families had to contend with an evolving system of U.S. immigration legislation, and not all family members were subjected to the same kind of scrutiny or leniency at the border. Observing family migration during an era of evolving policy sheds light on the type of migrants Mexico preferred to send and the immigrants that the U.S. preferred as entrants, and how policy impacted families who, through their migrations constantly endured family separations and reunifications. Even when only one family member ventured north, familial duty, whether represented by a father going abroad to earn money to support his family in Mexico, or by a family member going to help a sick relative across the border, was a central motivation for migration.

Gender

Recognizing that social factors sustain migration and emphasizing how families experienced migration also informs our understanding of how gendered opportunities for labor conditioned gendered patterns of migration, how the concept of gender functioned at the border, and how gendered norms justified migrations differently for men and women. Patriarchal norms for family and community, centering on the expectation that men labor and provide, and women tend to the home and contribute to the family in their reproductive roles as mothers, influenced expectations about who should migrate. Patriarchal norms and work opportunities in the United States also favored the migration of Mexican males, drawing them to railroad and agricultural labor. However, by the 1920s, there was more space for family migration as growers of diverse
crops looked to families as preferred units of labor. While women sometimes migrated alone and sometimes followed a male family member who had gone before, more and more women joined family units in crossing the border. Policies at the border, however could not keep up with the evolving social and economic changes in Mexican migration patterns. Like female migrants from other countries, Mexican women faced gendered challenges when entering the U.S.  

Women had to navigate gendered policies that guided U.S. immigration officials at the border; agents scrutinized their appearance, questioned their ability to provide for themselves, or demanded proof that another family member could. They also judged whether they were entering for moral purposes. Men faced similar judgments, but the assumption that men could easily get work and would depend less on public charity, and that as men they would not likely engage in prostitution, protected them from the primary exclusionary measures applied to women. 
Patriarchy and gendered norms of sexuality operated at the border as well as in sending and receiving communities. 

Despite the progressive measures such as divorce introduced as a consequence of the Mexican Revolution, the 1928 Civil Code still assigned housework and household sustenance to wives. It also required wives to live where their husbands decided. A modernization of patriarchy in the 1930s “sought to remake the family—men, women, and children—in the interests of nation building and development. It rested upon a restructuring of male productive

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practices and sociability, a mobilization of children for patriotic development and the rationalization of domesticity.”⁷ While Mexico experienced a modernization of patriarchy as the state sought to govern domestic relations in service of a more modern nation, migrant women witnessed a modernization of patriarchy—with the patriarchal prerogatives of the male head of household still enforced, while the state tried to assert increasing authority in the private lives of citizens. In the 1940s the Mexican and U.S. governments negotiated a new labor system that attempted to send men to labor alone, away from their families.

_A view from the sending regions_

In addition to shedding light on the social processes of migration, including the role that family and gender played in early Mexican migration, this study contributes to the literature on Mexican migration and immigration to the United States by examining migration with an emphasis on the sending regions. My analysis combines a national and regional approach in order to detail some of the specifics of regional migration from western Mexico, while also being attentive to national trends and policies. A regional approach lends insight into the timing and process of migration, and provides a view into how sending communities in Mexico perceived and coped with the exodus of their residents—often dozens locally and many thousands across key regions. Jalisco, and especially the region of Los Altos, served as a key sending region from the late 1800s. Predating the Revolution and the Cristero wars, migration from Jalisco gained

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government attention and laments by local observers in the early 1920s. The State had witnessed a shift from internal migration to cross-border migration at the turn of the century, and as Chapter 1 demonstrates, passport requests filed by aspiring migrants in 1920, indicated that migrants had established homes in the United States as well as patterns of circular migration, and were already experiencing the challenges, triumphs and complications of family migration.

*Migrants and the state*

By focusing on the sending regions, this study also analyzes how migrants interacted with the Mexican State, what they came to expect of government officials even while engaged in cross-border migrations, and how they envisioned claims to citizenship despite mobile lives. Correspondence between migrants and diplomatic officials, migration officials, and leaders at local, state and national levels reveal that a significant number of migrants took their concerns and questions about migration and return migration to the State. A language of petition specific to aspiring migrants reveals how they highlighted their legitimacy as citizens, translated their hardships to people in power, requested services, money, and attention from the President and lesser state officials, and insisted that they were worthy of consideration and attention.

We will see how migrants made themselves a social category of their own, with needs that the State must attend to or to contend with. The government’s responsibility to respond to people who have left the nation’s boundaries—but not the nation—increased over time, especially during moments such as the repatriation campaigns of the 1930s when hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrants returned home, more or less willingly. Was the Mexican government responsible for providing security to migrants who had faced hardship and then
ostracism in another country? Migrants also negotiated their identities and rights in the United States, where it became clear during the Great Depression that there was a preference for laboring bodies over anything else, and only during flush times. While some Mexicans were able to incorporate themselves into U.S. American society, many migrants had to make their way in both countries with the understanding that they were disposable, and had to cope with the threats to their welfare and stability that accompanied that reality.

Mexican governments repeatedly had to strike a balance between recognizing the initiatives of migrants and their language of petition, enforcing the politics of borders and bounded citizenship, maintaining favorable relationships with the U.S., developing a strong Mexican national image on the world stage, and especially having to implement or, failing that to deftly distract from their own ambitious and progressive revolutionary and post-revolutionary promises.

*Bringing migrants in from the margins*

The following chapters bring to light forgotten histories of family and female migration, and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of who migrants were, why they migrated, and how family networks sustained bi-directional migrations. The larger goal of this project, however, is to not only uncover forgotten histories, forgotten voices and forgotten experiences of migration, but also to bring Mexican migrants and immigrants in from the margins of U.S. and Mexican national histories. Rather than viewing Mexican migrants as living their lives within liminal spaces in each country during the first half of the twentieth century, it is important to recognize that Mexican migrants and Mexican migration played integral roles in the
intersecting national formations of both countries. Migrants created social networks, bicultural livelihoods, and binational families that combined to integrate cross-border communities—while national leaders, especially in the U.S., increasingly aimed to separate, perhaps to segregate, neighboring nations and their often inseparable communities.

Chapter Outline

The following chapters explore the pioneering journeys in the early 1900s through the boom of Mexican migration in the 1920s, the traumatic repatriations of the 1930s and the reorganization of Mexican migrant patterns shaped by the binational labor agreements of the 1940s, known as the Bracero program. The first two chapters examine the conditions in Mexico and the United States that led to unprecedented levels of Mexican migration to the U.S., and explore how and why families used migration as a crucial economic survival strategy during trying times. The next two chapters illustrate how the worldwide depression uprooted and often split immigrant and migrant families, and how women, and mothers in particular, coped with family separation. The final two chapters show how bi-national labor agreements in the 1940s dramatically gendered migration patterns to facilitate the legal migration for Mexican men and empower them as household providers, while simultaneously denying women status as productive immigrant laborers.

Chapter one describes conditions in Mexico that led to the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans beginning with the construction of railroads connecting Mexico to the United States and a description of the violence that gripped the civil war during the Mexican Revolution. During this same period- shifting land tenure patterns and increasingly
commercialized agriculture led displaced workers to venture farther from home, first pulling together economic livelihoods through internal migration and then crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Revolution, the threat of violence and the disruption of family and community personal and economic security spurred even more migration resulting in hundreds of thousands of refugees streaming into border cities. Revolution paired with World War I and the U.S.’s need for agricultural laborers ushered in a new era of migration—one that was characterized by the exodus of entire and extended families.

To illustrate the presence, significance, and growth of family migration during this pioneering wave of Mexican migration to the United States, this first chapter analyzes passport applications filed by aspiring migrants from the state of Jalisco filed in 1920. They demonstrate the extent to which migrants were already going to join relatives in the United States. They also provide insight into the demographic and socio-economic background of migrants. Families composed of men and women, adults, children, and elderly adults migrated in the first two decades of the twentieth century and their compatriots had begun to take notice. Newspaper articles from, El Informador, a Guadalajara newspaper, are used to supplement passport requests, to demonstrate that the exodus of Mexican migrants was already observable by regional observers and the Mexican national government.

Thematically, Chapter 1 introduces and expands the concept of migration as a social process and family centered motivations for migrating. It suggests that migrants were relying on their family members across borders in their migrations, and shows how family migration during this period laid down the foundations for multigenerational journeys across the border. Not only were people of different generations migrating together during this period, but they were already
passing on migration experiences, know-how, employment connections, and resources to their relatives; thus creating 1) robust family networks and 2) family and community legacies of migration.

Chapter 2 examines 1920s as a booming decade of migration. New opportunities in the U.S. facilitated permanent immigration and seasonal migration to the U.S. Whereas chapter one asks readers to consider the importance of family centered migration, and the reunification of family members as a major motivation for migration to the United States, Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of the intersection of family and labor in Mexican migration. The 1920s were a booming decade not only due to a general growth in U.S. southwestern agriculture but also because families were a preferred source of labor for commercialized crops such as cotton and sugar beets. The 1920s also brought U.S. immigration legislation and restriction more forcefully to the border with Mexico. Migrants began to interact with the State in order to figure out how to best navigate their border crossings.

Following the establishment of foundational family networks, as described in chapter one, chapter two asserts that families gained experiences across borders and experienced life transnationally, demonstrating that continued family migration led to an increase of binational families, a term used to describe families that lived in both nations and families composed of both U.S. and Mexican citizens. The more that families that moved back and forth across the border, the increased likelihood that some, if not all children would be born in the U.S. Mixed status families had to negotiate border crossings differently. They would also have different experiences with settlement and return migration, and possible repatriation in the years ahead.
Members of the same family but with different citizenships would experience privileges, opportunities, and identities differently.

The decade of the 1920s was a dynamic decade for Mexican migration characterized by the building up of Mexican-American communities in the United States, a more regulated border and immigration system operating between the two countries, and the continued strength of family networks and circular migration as a family livelihood strategy. The worldwide economic crisis of the Great Depression had a profound impact on Mexican migrants, dramatically interrupting and changing migration patterns. Chapter 3 examines migration in the years leading up to the onset of the Great Depression including a portrayal of conditions in Mexico and the politics that began to play out with regard to migration. It also examines the dramatic impact that economic crisis in the United States had on Mexican migrants in the early 1930s and showcases the lives of migrants struggling to stay afloat in the United States and those hoping to return to Mexico. We see how migrant poverty led to family separation and abandonment, and how migrants interacted with welfare and other state officials during times of crisis. Steep unemployment in the United States and an environment of growing intolerance to foreigners led to an episode of the largest return migration that Mexico had ever witnessed. Some migrants were removed forcibly through coerced repatriation and deportation; others returned willingly, sometimes through subsidized travel provided by the Mexican and U.S. governments.

Train manifests containing an in-depth look at the biographical data on 577 migrants returning on repatriation trains through Laredo, Ciudad Juarez, and Nogales in 1931 reveal important details about the ages, gender breakdowns, family composition, labor status, and return destinations of migrants. Based on the ages and birthplaces of parents and children, a fascinating
geography of migration throughout the United States and between the United States and Mexico during the 1920s can be traced. The multiple paths and migrations of families reveals the breadth of mobility within the United States and confirms the presence of Mexican communities far beyond the border.

The dislocations of migrants and their families during the great depression resulted in particularly challenging separations. While family reunification had been a goal of aspiring migrants, as illustrated in Chapter 2, family separation and reunification took on different dimensions in the 1930s. Chapter 4 illustrates how the stifling poverty brought on by the economic crisis of the 1930s not only caused the separations of some family units; it also had a paralyzing effect on those migrants who found themselves stranded on one side of the border when they had intended to be on the other. Such family separations became entrenched by new inhibitions on migration. Furthermore, if Chapter 2 presented a seemingly harmonious case for family migration and networks, the experiences related in Chapter 4 show how economic crisis challenged patriarchy, and how the conflicts it created were negotiated across borders. The hardship of the period is revealed through fascinating letters from migrants to U.S. and Mexican Presidents. Additional letters, written to Consular officials and welfare officials, reveal intimate details about spousal and family discord that when juxtaposed against the ad hoc migration bureaucracy of States, shows their capacities and how unprepared they were to handle the human dimensions of migration.

At the onset of World War II, after a decade of pressing Mexican immigrants and many of their U.S. citizen children back to Mexico, the demands of wartime created labor needs that many who had experienced repatriation, or knew of its difficult dislocations, hesitated to return
to fulfill. So the U.S. and Mexican governments worked together to restructure Mexican migration patterns according to a compromised, but for the most part, coherent logic. The temporary guest worker program known as the Bracero Program sought to order a migration that for the several decades had evolved according to economic and life cycles beyond the control of either government. A rising grower demand for cheap labor veiled by the exigencies of war led to a program for the importation of Mexican men for labor in agriculture and railroad. The goal was a controlled exodus of male workers from Mexico. The control was only partially achieved. The Bracero Program had the effect of resetting migration patterns for a short period, but the foundational networks and factors fueling migration had been laid down for half a century. The State stepped into a role that had formerly been occupied by families who and had been integral arranging contracts, facilitating transportation, and providing financial support. For the sake of keeping migration temporary, both governments left families on the outside of this process. Chapter 5 presents letters from Bracero family members and shows how families interacted with the state in efforts to try to accompany their relatives, claim savings on behalf of their bracero family members and explain their circumstances to the State. As the Bracero program began to change and slowly dismantle, one legacy remained and that was that the dual state creation of an ideal migrant as male, able bodied, and most importantly temporary. Those falling outside of this category were subject had less claims to legality and thus one major consequence of the Bracero program was an increase in illegal, or undocumented, migration.

Nevertheless, after half a century of migration with the establishment of binational livelihoods, the crossing of a diverse group of migrants, and the proliferation family and social
networks, men, women, and children, continued to migrate. They came from new regions, went to new places, and took slightly different paths, but in general, they followed the footsteps of the millions who had gone and returned before them. This dissertation presents the stories and often unheard voices of the people who made those border journeys and who lived at the intersection of dynamic change in both countries. It highlights the migration experiences of women and illustrates the ways in which their cross-border journeys were different from the male immigrants and yet integral to family migration for generations. It also shows the bidirectional nature of migration and the livelihood strategies that were involved in living across borders. Lastly, it illuminates migrant lives and migrant pasts.
CHAPTER I
“And They Go Silently:” Family-Centered Migration During the First Wave

In 1920, Elena G. Viuda de Arroyo, a fifty-year-old housewife from Tamazula de Gordiano, Jalisco petitioned for a passport to join her children in San Antonio, Texas. When asked to state the objective of her journey she stated that her children had been residing in the United States for eight years and that her intention was to reunite with them. Elena’s children had gone to a burgeoning Mexican town north of the border only two years after the outbreak of the civil unrest and violence known as the Mexican Revolution, and she was now intent on joining them.⁸

Twenty year-old Rodolfo de Luna stated in his passport application in July of that same year that he also intended to go to San Antonio, Texas. His objective for going north was similar to Elena’s in that the rest of his family was now established in the United States. Rodolfo, a businessman, expressed that he hadn’t initially been able to travel with other members of his family when they first made their way to the United States because he had to stay behind to attend to some business matters but that he was now ready to reunite with his family stating, “I have found myself here completely alone, and as is only natural, I find myself needing my family to care for me and for me to help them as well.”⁹

Micaela Carranza planned to go to the small agricultural town of Exeter, California to work and submitted her application in June of 1920. She submitted a letter of support from the Compania Galletera Nacional attesting to her good character, as well as a letter from her mother

⁸ Passport Application for Elena G. Viuda de Arroyo, Archivo Historico de Jalisco G-8-1920, Box 54
⁹ Passport Application for Rodolfo de Luna, Archivo Historico de Jalisco G-8-1920, Box 53
giving her permission to leave. Although Micaela reported that she was over the age of twenty-one and therefore not a minor, she likely had her mother, Leocadia Ruiz, write a letter of consent to help convince officials that she, a single woman seeking work in the United States, was deserving of a passport and had community and family support to do so.  

For unknown reasons, passport pictures and supporting documents were given back to Micaela, the young single woman, and Rodolfo the businessman, indicating that their efforts in obtaining a passport had been unsuccessful. Elena Arroyo seemed to have better luck in securing a provisional passport to the United States, the first of many steps to crossing the border in the 1920s. The three portraits above provide insight into the types of situations and motivations that encouraged migrants to leave their Mexican homelands during what was a relatively early period of Mexican migration to the United States. Each story reflects aspects of early migration that challenge historic and current understandings and portrayals of Mexican migration and migrants—portrayals that suggest that family migrations for the purpose of reunification happened in the the fifties and sixties, that women did not migrate on their own until the eighties, that early male migrants only migrated in search of work, and that families weren’t likely to exist transnationally before the era of technology-induced globalization.

10 Passport Application for Leocadia Ruiz, Archivo Historico de Jalisco G-8- 1920, Box 53  
11 Most studies of transnational Mexican and U.S. American families begin with 1965 as a departure date for their analysis for various reasons. The 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration act, recognized for removing country quotas and facilitating family reunification through family member restriction exemptions. It coincided with the end of the Bracero Program, an increase in illegal immigration, and a notable increase in female migration from Mexico. These changes in migration patterns in addition to the increased attention given to Mexican American communities through the farm workers movement and Chicana/o scholarship led to a sociological focus on family. However, few studies extended an analysis of family migration and binational families prior to the Bracero contract era. Key studies documenting post 1965 family migration are Douglas Massey et. al. Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994); Denise A Segura and Patricia Zavella. Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico
This chapter examines early twentieth-century Mexican migration to the United States with particular emphasis on migrant families and family-motivated migrations. After briefly detailing the important features of migration during the Porfiriato and the revolutionary decade to follow, I will illustrate how conditions in Mexico and the United States produced the mass and sustained migration of both genders and all ages, and laid out the foundation for binational family networks and later twentieth-century migrations. The increased movement across the border in the 1920s became a cause of concern for both governments as well as local officials in sending and receiving regions. Local leaders were forced to piece together ad-hoc policies in order to prevent mass migration as well as develop ad-hoc solutions to deal with groups of migrants who had already committed to leaving their homes on a binational journey. Migrant experiences and testimonies featured in passport applications, intergovernmental documents, and ethnographic interviews conducted by early experts in the field provide a wide-ranging portrayal of migrant and immigrant life. Motivations were complicated, life-stories were not often similar, and migrant journeys were hardly predictable. The migration of thousands of Mexicans back and forth across a largely un-policed border created families of mixed citizenship statuses, and made for a jurisdictional mess. Migration officials and local observers were witnessing the beginning of a movement that would never be regulated and much less governable.

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The testimonies of Mexican migrants and aspiring migrants—told in their own words to a degree but almost always mediated through government paperwork, officials, or interviewers—reveal valuable insights into the process, the lived experience, and the obstacles and triumphs of migration. Migrant words also speak to the world around them, and not just about what they might have encountered along the way or once they got to their destination, but also about the world from which they came. In this chapter, migrant voices, along with newspapers and government documents will shed light on what Mexicans lived through as their country became increasingly gripped by war, and as they witnessed a number of significant cultural, political, and economic changes in the post-revolutionary era. The majority of Mexicans stayed put, many migrated to Mexican cities, and some like Elena, Rodolfo and Micaela found reasons to venture north.

Elena’s story reminds us to consider the migrations that happened prior to, and soon after, the shouts of revolution began to ignite Mexicans around the country to challenge local and regional power systems. Whether her sons had migrated for political, economic, or social reasons is unknown, but they had certainly migrated during uncertain times and had been part of the first wave of pioneering migrants from the central western region of Mexico. We are also encouraged to think about what a fifty-year old widow might have gone through in order to leave her home country, her friends and family, the safety of her hometown, and her language. Would her sons be there to pick her up at the border, or might one have visited home to accompany her on her trek? Would she face border officials alone, or maybe she had friends offering her pointers about the process? Her sons had been in San Antonio for eight years, perhaps that thought alone had comforted any unease she might have had about leaving Jalisco. Although she would be living in
a foreign land she would be reunited with her boys where they could all take care of each other and be a family once again.

Rodolfo de Luna’s stated objective is so compelling because he clearly indicates his need to be with his family. A young businessman with enough prospects to stay behind and attend to business while his family went ahead, he felt the need to qualify his request by pointing out the “natural” tendency for one to be close to family. Perhaps he saw a future of growing business once he crossed the border, but Rodolfo stood out from other applicants because for this twenty-year-old young man, life across the border meant first, and foremost, that he would be cared for. His story forces us to consider the complexity and the multiplicity of migrant motives.

Micaela’s story is different. While she might have had family or friends in Exeter, California, she made it clear that her intention was to work. That Micaela specifically identified the town of Exeter, a growing but none-the-less small farming community in Tulare county in the San Joaquin Valley, suggests she would have likely heard about job opportunities for single young women by word of mouth. Would her journey have looked different from Rodolfo’s due to her gender? What challenges she might have faced at the border or traveling either on ship up the coast, or overland across Texas to Arizona and then up to Exeter? The Governor’s office rejected her request, but a border crossing card for 1926 matching her name, age, and birth place suggests that she did cross eventually. She had paid for her own crossing, and demonstrated her ability to read and write. She had obtained a border crossing card for the first time, and she had last lived in Ciudad Juarez just prior to crossing into the United States. More notably, she was traveling alone. Did her ability to pay her own head tax, prove that she was economically stable and not likely to become a public charge—a common basis for the exclusion of women migrants
in the early 1920s? Or perhaps her letters of support attesting to her honorable character warded off suspicions of moral turpitude (i.e.: prostitution), the other common excuse for rejecting female migrants at the border during this era.\textsuperscript{12}

The three aspiring migrants mentioned here were just three out of three hundred Jaliscences who applied for a provisional passport to the United States in the year 1920. The three hundred can be considered only a small fraction of those who migrated or began the process of migration that year. Applying to the Governor’s office for a provisional passport was but one of many ways to legally or illegally initiate a north-ward journey. Others went to the American Consulate in Guadalajara to obtain a passport, or other consulates en-route north to the border. Still others ventured to the United States without a passport to try their luck at entering the through a legal port of entry or a un-policed point along the boundary. The border, after all, was largely unregulated at this point in time. The U.S. 1917 immigration law had only just established an eight dollar head tax for migrants crossing from the South through immigration inspection stations that only dotted border. The U.S. Border Patrol would not come into existence for another seven years. Laws finally being applied to the southern U.S. border would seem to indicate that Mexican migration was in its infancy in 1917, but Mexican migrants had been crossing back and forth across the border since for decades, and border legislation was already falling behind real migration trends. If we consider the number of passport applicants in 1920 that were hoping to reunite with family members already established in the U.S., it is clear that pioneering migrants arrived much earlier than the 1920s. By the time U.S. officials had

begun to take seriously the largely unregulated and high volume of migration coming in through the Mexican-U.S. border, the economic, social and logistical foundations for such migrations already existed.

_Pioneer Migrants_

The foundational networks of Mexican migration were established as the rails of the Santa Fe and South Pacific railroads in the U.S. Southwest, and the trunk lines of the Mexican Central, a Santa Fe subsidiary, from El Paso to Mexico City were laid.\(^{13}\) The railroads provided a means for exodus but also drew laborers northward with the promise of high wages. Migration to northern Mexico from the interior states was already underway by 1900 as jobs in mining and commercialized agriculture attracted many Mexicans to industrializing centers during the latter half of the nineteenth century. New economic opportunities and new means of transport initiated the first large movements of Mexican migrants and immigrants across the northern border but revolutionary violence from within and an international war would ensure a steady stream of Mexicans into Texas and California throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century.\(^{14}\)

The movement north began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to a combination of many external and internal conditions in Mexican communities and a demand for cheap labor in the United States. Railroads, in addition to integrating the U.S. southwest with


northern and central Mexico and thereby facilitating the exchange of goods, also connected labor to bourgeoning mining and ranching economies, and led to the growth of cities along the border. In some regions the railroad disrupted old trade networks, which led to the displacement of muleteers and cargo carriers in places like Michoacán. But mostly railroads stimulated job growth, not only because of the labor that construction and maintenance required but also because goods were able to reach more distant markets. Metals, such as copper, were more easily transported between mines and smelters. Especially after the U.S. ban on Chinese immigration in 1882, Mexican nationals began to take the place of Chinese laborers and by 1909 were responsible for most of the maintenance work on railroads in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada. High wages drew migrants to track sites as did company recruiters. Migrants could find work through employment agencies at the border or through recruiters traveling to the interior of Mexico with promises of high wages and free rail travel across the border to work sites.

The technological changes brought on by the advent of rail and industrializing economies in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands began the transformation of communities and patterns of temporary migration on both sides of the border. Mexican cities such as Ciudad Juarez, Nogales, and Mexicali developed alongside their twin cities on the U.S. side of the boundary line and networks of labor, goods, consumers and vice moved back and forth rather freely up until the

18 Ibid, 8-9.
second decade of the twentieth century. Mexicans and U.S. Americans of different socio-economic backgrounds flocked to cities on the border and other growing cities such as San Antonio and Tucson. The population in Tucson doubled between 1900 and 1920, and doubled in San Antonio between 1890 and 1910. San Antonio merchants advertised to middle class and elite Mexicans while labor contracting agencies attracted Mexican laborers, placing them in jobs throughout the Midwest.

A growing capitalist economy in the borderlands in conjunction with changes in the Mexican countryside during Pofirio Diaz’ rule sparked migration of landless peasants to other urban areas in Mexico, specifically to the north, and eventually to the United States. Large-scale cotton production also drew Mexicans north. Just as railroads, irrigation, and colonization led to large-scale cotton agriculture in southern Texas, La Laguna, Coahuila became the cotton center of Mexico and similarly required the importation of many seasonal workers, especially during the two-month harvest period. As scholar Casey Walsh points out, “by 1910 the Laguna had become just one stop on international labor circuits that included the cotton harvest of Texas and the harvest of California.” While some workers would have returned to their homes in the interior of Mexico, many would join groups of workers heading north for other seasonal opportunities. Migrants lacking opportunities in the central western states could rely on Mexican


21 Casey Walsh, Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border, (Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 32.
employers and even on the Mexican government to pay for their transportation to jobs in northern Mexico in hopes of parlaying a domestic labor contract into a contract that could earn them higher wages on the other side of the border.\textsuperscript{22}

This was the case, for example, in Jalisco and Michoacán where changing land tenure patterns and an orientation toward commercial agriculture turned seasonal migrations between harvests into longer migrations that took laborers farther away from their hometowns. In Jalisco, a switch in agricultural production to maguey and sugar (as opposed to basic food stuffs), alongside the increasing concentration of lands among fewer landholders, resulted in urbanization, starvation in the countryside, and “Bracerismo.” As early as 1899, community leaders in Lagos de Moreno in Los Altos de Jalisco petitioned the governor to create a law preventing labor recruiters from coming into their community. A comparison of census from 1900 to 1910 reveals a gender imbalance in Los Altos de Jalisco where women clearly outnumbered men suggesting that male laborer-led emigration had indeed already been under way.\textsuperscript{23} Whether to the North or to the United States, emigration became an established characteristic of Los Altos communities within the first decade of the twentieth century. Similar patterns of increasing landlessness existed in indigenous towns like Naranja, Michoacán where land privatization during the Porfiriato and ensuing ecological changes forced an increasing

\textsuperscript{22} In considering whether the Carrancista administration actively supported emigration as safety-valve for labor unrest, Enciso finds no concrete evidence that the executive government encouraged international immigration, but rather argues that government-funded mobilization of workers from the interior to better job markets in northern Mexico and along the border unintentionally contributed to the exodus of Mexican workers to the United States; See Fernando Saúl Alanis Enciso. \textit{El Primer Programa Bracero y El Gobierno De México, 1917-1918.} (San Luis Potosí: Colegio de San Luis, 1999), 85-89.

\textsuperscript{23} Mario Aldana Rendón, \textit{Del revismo al nuevo orden constitucional, 1910-1917,} (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1987)

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number of men, and sometimes their families, to migrate and sell their labor elsewhere, either in
a neighboring state or north of the border.24

It was the combination of demographic pressure, land tenure patterns, and the
intensification of commercial agriculture for export that made the central western area such a key
migrant sending region. However, it is important to emphasize that a shift from internal
migration—that is, migration to nearby cities or other regions in Mexico—to migration north of
the border had served as precursor to international migration in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries. For example, in Michoacán, peasants living in rural areas near Zamora and
Purépero migrated to those cities first, and when they could not be absorbed into an increasingly
industrial labor market they went further north.25 Michoacanos also traveled to Veracruz,
Campeche, and Chiapas as contract laborers. In some cases men were specifically required to
bring their families as a condition of their labor contracts—a requirement designed to keep
migrants from leaving their work easily or prematurely.26 Seasonal migrations within Mexico
transformed into more prolonged migrations that turned northward as railroads provided critical
means of transportations for the landless, unemployed and underemployed masses that faced
increasingly dire circumstances toward the end of the Porfiriato.27 Labor contractors, or
*enganchadores*, faced with the task of replacing Chinese and then Japanese labor in the U.S.,

25 Álvaro Ochoa S., “Arrieros, jornaleros, braceros y migrantes (1894-1934)”, in *Emigrantes del Occidente*,
(Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y los Artes, 1990), 24-26; and José Alfredo Uribe Salas, “Enganchados y
emigrantes en el occidente de Michoacán” in *Emigrantes del Occidente*, 43.
26 José Alfredo Uribe Salas, “Enganchados y Emigrantes,” 52.
27 A discussion of mobility and security referencing chapter 8 from *Insurrection*... to come soon here.
heralded the favorable conditions and wages in the U.S. and so people left their communities to travel farther distances.²⁸

Thus, community transformations occurred on both sides of the border and government officials began to take notice. As early as 1884, railroad work in the U.S. Southwest attracted enough Mexican labor to cause concern over its negative impacts on industry and the labor market in Mexico.²⁹ The Secretarias de Gobernación and Relaciones Exteriores began to send out circulars to state governors as early as 1904, bringing attention to abusive conditions for Mexican workers in the U.S. and asking government officials to encourage migrants to stay in the country rather than to go abroad for work. Even hacendados began to complain to government officials about the lack of laborers.³⁰ The labor exodus was concerning to Mexican political officials not only because they feared that labor was fleeing from the industrializing north but also that it was fleeing agricultural heartlands in the interior.

Still, little could be done by the federal government, let alone state governments, to combat the forces unleashed by unchecked land privatization, poor harvests, new technologies oriented toward capitalist production, and the foreign capital that laid the foundation for pioneering migrants. As much as railroads led to booming industrialization in the Southwest and

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²⁸ See Riesler, By the Sweat of their Brow, chapter 1 for a discussion on labor contractors, as noted above in the example of Michoacanos going to Southeast Mexico on labor contracts, the history of contract labor and specifically the labeling of contractors as enganchadores, (coming from the word enganche which means to hook) predates migration to the United States. Labor contractors would offer high wages and offer to pay transportation to and from worksites in order to entice laborers, but, more often then not, costs for transportation, food, and basic necessities would be taken from their wages thus creating indebtedness.


Northern Mexico—resulting in more developed and integrated mining, cotton, and ranching economies—foreign capital driving such development also tied Mexico’s economic fate more closely to that of the United States. Northern Mexican elites, members of the growing middle class, and migrants benefitted during boom times but also suffered greatly during periods of economic recession, like that which followed the economic panic of 1907. The years of 1905 through 1909 are illustrative of the type of situation that would confound governments and migrants alike for decades to come. Migrants fled to the U.S. in greater numbers after agricultural crises in Mexico occurred between 1905 and 1907 only to be forced to retreat back across the border after losing their jobs in mining and rail work.\textsuperscript{31} The repatriations and deportations of workers between 1907-1909 was significant enough to capture the attention of Porfirio Diaz. He alerted congress in 1907 to the hundreds of Mexican workers that had returned from the U.S.\textsuperscript{32} Could Diaz have foreseen that the return of hundreds or even thousands of Mexicans into the already economically fragile and politically volatile north would contribute to breakdown of his regime?\textsuperscript{33} By 1911 when the Mexican department of labor was created in order to attend to general labor issues and to specifically address concerns over the labor exodus

\textsuperscript{31} See Ochoa & Uribe, 43; and Victor Clark, “Mexican Labor in the United States” (from Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Labor Bulletin No. 78) Washington, D.C., 1908 in Mexican Labor to the United States, New York: Arno Press, 1974 for Increase in Migration and Friedrich Katz describes the challenges faced by Mexican semi-agricultural and industrial workers who were confronted by “constant insecurity” caused by cyclical fluctuations in his article, “Labor Conditions on Haciendas”, “Whenever a recession or crisis occurred separately, the agricultural workers could always resort to another occupation. If the harvest was bad they could go to the mines, if there was no work to be found in mining they could go to the United States, and if the Americans offered no work they could go to an hacienda and try sharecropping. But if all three employment opportunities were affected by the same crisis their situation became desperate. “Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirián Mexico: Some Trends and Tendencies, The Hispanic American Historical Review, 54(1), 1974. p. 35

\textsuperscript{32} González Navarro, “Los braceros en el Porfiriato, 11-12.

across the international border; it was too late.\textsuperscript{34} Porfirio Diaz was deposed, and revolution had begun.

\textit{Migration during the war years}

As a series of civil wars broke out around the country that left the old Porfirian guard scrambling to retain some measure of federal control, violence and disruption led to the mass internal migration throughout the country. As fighters for various factions moved throughout the countryside, families fled violence and banditry and often left rural areas for urban centers. While some migrants feared death as a result of the wanton violence, political refugees also fled to the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. Especially as the war drew on, Mexicans fled across the border as an alternative to being forceful conscripted.\textsuperscript{35} Refuge was sought across the border then not just for those steeply embroiled in revolutionary conflicts, but also by those wanting nothing to do with war. Groups of migrants with varying interests—whether pacifists or revolutionaries—joined the rail and agricultural braceros that had already been traveling migrant paths.

Revolution and counter-revolution was often a family affair and women and children followed federal and revolutionary factions to keep families together, help with provisions and vital services, and simply to save themselves from a worse fate that could befall them if left


\textsuperscript{35} For examples of migrants leaving because of the violence of the Mexican Revolution and to avoid conscription see testimonies in Manuel Gamio, \textit{The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant: Autobiographic documents collected by Manuel Gamio}. New York: Dover Publications 1971. 4, 61, 96, 153, 195, 217.
behind. So when battles ensued near the U.S.-Mexico border and retreat took Mexicans into U.S. territory, and then to internment in military camps, women and children were prisoners of war alongside their male relatives and companions. One such instance occurred as a result of Pancho Villa’s assault on Ojinaga on January 10, 1914 when 5,019 Mexicans crossed the Rio Grande into Texas. Camp administrators were responsible for “provisioning and otherwise caring for this motley aggregation of some 5000 men, women, and children, wet, cold and half-starved, together with one thousand seven hundred and eighty odd animals on the verge of starvation.”

The group included 1,081 women and 533 children and would be transferred to Fort Bliss from Presidio, Texas just days later. They were followed by others claiming to be relatives of soldiers and seeking entrance into camp.

At a national level, U.S. observers were more concerned with the spreading of violence in the borderlands and with the safeguarding of U.S. interests and financial investments, but at a local level communities in the Southwest began to notice the impact of the war and the newcomers it brought into their ranks. In February 1915, the Los Angeles Times reported, “100 babies have been born at the Mexican refugee detention camp near Ft. Rosecrans since the refugees arrived a number of months ago. The military authorities are worried and so are the fathers and mothers. The babies are American born but the parents are prisoners of war and can’t return to Mexico, while the babies are free to do as American citizens and may return to Mexico or may give their allegiance to the American flag.”

As this article suggests, the influx of war

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36 “Internment of Mexican Troops”, *Infantry Journal Volume* 11 pg. 751-752
37 Ibid, 765.
refugees extended concern beyond the sheer logistical challenges of accommodating war refugees. The birth of children complicated the citizenship status and rights of Mexican families by yielding mixed-status families. The article explicitly alluded to the potential danger of families being separated along national lines but it also revealed implicit anxieties about the increased settlement of Mexicans in the U.S., and the growth of Mexican American communities. The legal complications posed and encountered by binational families, and anxieties over permanent settlement persisted through the century.

Whereas, the importation of temporary Mexican contract workers to help replace “less desirable” immigrant groups was seen as acceptable, or perhaps just not as widely noticed, the permanent settlement of entire Mexican families, many of them destitute from their journeys north provoked questions regarding assimilation and the ideal immigrant as a temporary one. Mexican migrants were perceived as a public health threat, as evidenced by a series of headlines in a 1916 Los Angeles Times article. An article in a section called, “Social Puzzle” read, “Refugee Horde Called Danger: Supervisors Discuss Steps to Expel Mexican Indigents. Thousands Considered Menace to Health and Morals. Inter-County Meeting to Grip Problem is Planned.” Concern over the number of newly arriving Mexicans extended beyond the confines of the refugee camps and into conversations about public resources and public safety. “The reason for the agitation against the immigrants is that a great number of them have become charity wards shortly since their arrival here. According to reports of the County Health Officer, at least half the arrivals are afflicted with disease, many with a loathsome and practically incurable malady. More than 25 percent of the patients at the County Hospital are recent
Mexican immigrants.”\textsuperscript{39} Rhetoric and fear coalesced around Mexican migrants and problematic citizenship, overuse of public resources, and worse still: the perceived invasion of a potentially diseased other.\textsuperscript{40}

Restored rail lines and a lessening of bloodshed in late 1915 led to expectations that refugees might return home. J. Blaine Gwin, the secretary of the Associated Charities in El Paso, Texas noted that, “a fairly steady stream” of Mexicans had returned to Mexico since 1915 in his article, “Immigration Along our Southwest Border.”\textsuperscript{41} While some migrants returned to their homelands, the consecutive years of economic and political instability in the first half of the decade continued to fuel migrations northward. For example, Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso points out that despite the improvement of working conditions in Matehuala, San Luis Potosí beginning in 1915 and 1916, laborers and middle-class Potosinos continued to migrate. The opening of Mexican factories that had been closed simply was not enough to solve problems of unemployment.\textsuperscript{42}

Sustained migration, from all sectors of Mexican society, including political refugees, small owners in the nascent middle class, skilled and unskilled laborers, indigenous and Mestizo, all migrated back and forth across the border between 1910 and 1920. Mexicans were no longer generally viewed as the migrant “peon” who returned back his village for the harvest or elite

\textsuperscript{41}J. Blaine Gwin the Secretary of Associated Charities in El Paso, Texas noted the trend of Mexicans returning after 1915 in his article “Immigration Along our Southwest Border,” \textit{Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science} 93, 1921. 126-130.
politician and businessman who partnered with American entrepreneurs and bought luxury goods in the borderlands. Migrant families and refugees who survived difficult circumstances but emerged from civil war conflicts poverty-stricken, in poor health and with few options for a peaceful return to their hometowns remained in the U.S. For refugees who chose to remain in the U.S. after revolutionary conflict subsided, perhaps to raise their children in the land of their birth, or for laborers who went on temporary sojourns prior to the outbreak of revolution and chose to stay in the U.S. rather than return to a war-torn Mexico, immigration of a permanent kind may have never been intended. But as the two countries became physically tied together through railroads both facing cyclical economic contractions and war, the number of border crossers, whether as political refugees, prisoner of wars, migrants and/or immigrants, increased.

Just as the revolutionary era fighting began to diminish in some regions of Mexico, American involvement in World War I led to another more intense and logistically muddled era of migration. Mark Reisler and Lawrence Cardoso detail the extent that growers in the Southwest pressured the U.S. government into exempting Mexican workers from provisions of the 1917 Immigration Act, namely those rules governing contract laborers such as literacy tests, and head taxes. Alanís Enciso describes how employers, consuls, and government officials nearly organized a temporary worker program. However, a bilateral agreement at the federal level was hardly possible considering that the Carrancista government was tasked with several other national priorities including the achievement of economic stability, political consolidation of the country, and limited social reform.43

43 Cardoso, Mexican Immigration; Riesler, By the Sweat of Their Brow; Fernando Saúl Alanís El Primer Programa Bracero y El Gobierno De México, 1917-1918. San Luis Potosí: Colegio de San Luis, 1999
Emigration, did however, garner enough attention to warrant a section of article 127 of the Mexican Constitution dedicated to protecting emigrant contract laborers. It specified that the municipal president of the sending town and a foreign consul were required to approve an emigrant labor contract and that the employer should provide enough money for the eventual repatriation of the employee.44 It said nothing of non-contract laborer emigrants or emigrant family members. The constitutional measure fell in line with the nationalist framework of the constitution and responded to the only set of problems that the federal government could actually mediate from a diplomatic standpoint—the abuse of laborers in the United States. The burden of preventing contract labor fell largely to local Mexican authorities, but hundreds of families had already been recruited to work in U.S. agriculture and were crossing the border without approved contracts.

The new revolutionary government was too weak and contested, misinformed, or uninterested to regulate the exodus. Individual employers, state officials and eventually federal officials in the U.S. negotiated with Mexican consuls, rather than the Mexican ministries of the Government and Labor. Mexican officials trying to prevent the exodus issued their directives to Mexican state governors and municipal presidents. Dialogue, ideas, and resolutions regarding emigration and immigration were disparate, scattered, and loosely connected at best. The different, and even competing, frames of reference and expectations held by government officials within and between both countries left migrants vulnerable to abuses and misinformed about the requirements and risks involved in taking jobs or joining family in the U.S.. Absent official

policy and within the context of increasing incentives for the use of Mexican labor in the U.S. war effort, Mexicans interested in going to the U.S. faced a barrage of mixed messages. Employer announcements in borderland newspapers advertised the need for Mexican workers and their families, while Mexican newspapers often highlighted worker abuses in an attempt to dissuade migrants from leaving. Aside from a small section in the constitution and newspaper propaganda, Mexican officials relied on little else to curtail, control or even accurately assess emigration and repatriation sparked by World War I U.S. labor demands.45

Wartime production in the U.S. and the expansion of sugar and cotton required cheap labor and both governments were forced to accept the eventual migration of Mexican workers and the challenges that accompanied such large scale migration and return migration. On June 30th, 1918, a letter written by the municipal president of Guadalajara, Jose Rivera Rosas, was published in El Informador. It was published repeatedly on July 2nd, 4th and 7th which indicates both the importance and necessary distribution as a public document. The municipal president included an excerpt of a letter from the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores to the state governors warning that they should do whatever possible to prevent the exit of laborers from their states since migrants were often being left stranded at the border for failing to have proper immigration documents. The reminder was sent out because the municipal presidents of Jalisco had been informed that, “With each passing day, our workers who are contracted to work in the United States increasingly suffer abuses.”46 The letter served as a simultaneous warning to would-be border crossers that they might be stranded at the border by broken promises made by

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45 Alanís Enciso, Fernando Saúl, El Primer Programa Bracero, 26-32.
46 El Informador, June 30, 1918.
enganchadores. The messages were sent out to the general public and labor contractors to prevent the northward exodus. The scenario was not so unlike the concern over labor exodus and the warning to workers issued in 1906 and 1907. The important difference was that within the context of the First World War a balance of national needs and diplomacy shaped approaches to migration. Mexico needed workers to rebuild the nation, at least according to rhetoric, and U.S. officials had to balance the policing of the nation’s borders to prevent the entry of unsuitable and dangerous immigrants while at the same time bending to the demands of a war-induced labor shortage.

On April 9, 1918, El Informador reprinted a notice from American consul John R. Silliman summarizing the key passport requirements according to the U.S. Immigration Act of November 1917. While the notice contained a fairly basic summary noting the requirement and procedure for obtaining a passport, most of the column space was dedicated to outlining the requirements for the entry of minors to the United States. Children under the age of 16 would be allowed into the country only “when immigration officials found that: 1) the child was healthy and strong, 2) that while the child was abroad they would not be subject to public charity, 3) that they were going to live or visit with close family members who were able to, and agreed to, support and provide appropriate care for them, 4) that it was the intention of those relatives to send the child to (day) school until he or she is 16 years of age, 5) that the child would not be made to engage in work inappropriate for their age.”47

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47 “Aviso,” El Informador. April 9, 1918. see original translation in appendix/translations
In comparison to the text of the actual Immigration Act of 1917, the focus on the legal requirements for children is disproportionate. While the subject of children takes up the bulk of attention reprinted in the Guadalajara newspaper, it takes little relative space in the actual text of the law where more attention is given to excludable categories, contract workers, the punishments for importation of illegal immigrants, and the ban on immigrants from the “asiatic barred zone.” The increased emphasis on the migration of minors is significant and revealing of the migration patterns that were beginning to emerge in the central western states. The conditions laid out in the announcement were meant to apply to those parties specifically traveling with children that were not their own but that perhaps belonged to a brother or sister or other close relative. Further instructions were given to those accompanying them reminding them to have a letter of consent signed by either the mother or father of the child. Family members were traveling together to cross the border but not always in nuclear family units, and both female and male children crossed regularly enough to warrant the added consideration of American immigration officials and added emphasis in the local paper. From a national and binational reading of the history of the period, we know that growers in the American Southwest demanded Mexican laborers and exemptions to immigration requirements after the armistice and up until 1920, and that President Carranza sanctioned the emigration of laborer. However, a perspective offered up by the regional newspaper suggests that migrations of those not usually imagined within the framework of laborer need to be accounted for such as those without formal
contracts, those of both genders, of varying ages, and varying abilities of whose migrations were facilitated by binational familial and social networks.\textsuperscript{48}

Government officials then, and historians now, attribute Mexican migration in the second decade of twentieth century to the Mexican Revolution and World War I—macro structural economic and political push and pull factors that provide a general perspective but fail to capture the social and familial linkages that fostered, encouraged, and sustained migration. By examining the issue from a regional perspective, and examining the messages that were being directed toward migrants in key sending areas we come to understand that minor children and family members were an important feature of migration trends during the war-time years. The public notice emphasis on minor children also reveals insights into how the process of migration was shaped by a person’s age and gender. Male adolescents, specifically those over the age of 16, were expected to file a separate passport for themselves and could not be included in one of their parents passport applications, whereas female children were included in their parents passports up until the age of twenty-one unless they were already married. Young women would be spared the cost for a separate passport application, but presumably those between the age of sixteen (the minimum age of entry) and twenty-one would be considered by migration officials as subject to their parent’s protection, wishes, and control. Patriarchy governed at the border as well and a young woman's ability to independently enter the United States was limited and made more difficult because she faced extra pressure to prove they, she, or a relative, would be able to

\textsuperscript{48} Reisler, \textit{By the Sweat of their Brow}, 29-36, 38
support her economically. Border officials knew that female migrants as opposed to young male migrants would have much less opportunity for remunerative employment in the United States.\textsuperscript{49}

A key pattern emerged during the decade of revolution and civil war: whereas male migrants stretched their sojourns northward in the face of economic insecurity during the waning years of the Porfiriato, economic insecurity paired with threats of violence sparked the migration of entire families. The building of railroads had facilitated the migrations of pioneering migrants in the first decade of the twentieth century, but the disruptions caused by revolution would have also prevented the arrival of much needed remittances to family members in Mexico. Mexican migration between 1900 and 1920 skyrocketed due to the interlocking of a number of phenomena and so too did family migration. Aside from the factors causing Mexicans to leave Mexico, families were able to work alongside each other in agriculture, and contracts, even if were they intended to attract male laborers for temporary work stints, incidentally drew women and children into the booming war and post-war economy in the United States. According to newspaper accounts, government reports and migrant testimonies of the period we know that families increasingly migrated during this period.

With the exception of Manuel Gamio’s interviews and other ethnographic field work by Paul Taylor, we are left to try to understand the migrant experience through government documents rather than through migrant perspectives, leaving us with the challenge of piecing together refracted realities and making assumptions about complex motivations. However, letters that were written by, or commissioned by, aspiring migrants as part of their passport

applications provide another source by which to gather information on motivations for migration in the early twentieth century. They also provide a more comprehensive view of the communities and family-networks surrounding migrants and their migrations.

Reasons for leaving

Provisional passport applications from 1920 reveal insight into the motives, processes and strategies undertaken by many Mexicans hoping to go to the United States. They represent but a fraction of those leaving the Jalisco, since many left without obtaining a passport, either hoping to get one along the way or get across the border without one. Passports were not simply needed as a component part of exiting the country but would also be needed to re-enter Mexico in the future. The reasons for leaving as listed on passports show a changing trend from one dominated by single male labor migrations spurred by incentives of higher wages and promises of labor contracts toward patterns of migration that were more inclusive of family migrations motivated by economic and social motivations for moving to the United States. The evolution was made possible precisely because Mexicans not only found sufficient opportunities to earn a living but also found enough security and guarantees to encourage them to invite family members and friends to join them in their new homes.

Aspiring migrants were leaving Mexico to bolster family income and support relatives back home but they were also joining migrants abroad. Family networks stretching from the historic sending states of Michoacán and Guanajuato and Jalisco were facilitating migration and facilitating further networks for binational families. The tumult caused by a decade of civil war certainly was a factor in emigration. Violence, the lack of work opportunities, disrupted land
tenure, and opportunistic bandits all threatened community stability. But rural migration was happening all around Mexico, populations redistributed according to the degree of industrial and agricultural disruption and revolutionary violence experienced, and not all of the routes headed north. Mexicans who did embark on northward routes were supported and motivated in their migrations to the United States from the central-west states of Mexico by family.

Passport applications surprisingly demonstrate that a majority of migrants seeking legal entry into the United States sought to reunite with family members as opposed to searching for work or adventure. Migrants indicating their intentions to reunite with family, visit family or “arreglar asuntos de familia” clearly outnumbered those who yearned to go north for business, work, or education opportunities. In order to preserve family reunification, a migrant might have been more likely to seek legal route for crossing so that they would not jeopardize future entry and re-entry. Passport applications also provide details into how families might have organized separate or joint migrations, making them an invaluable resource in puzzling together the trends for non-head of household migrants. Multiple dependents could be listed on a family passport depending on specific criteria—criteria that was defined by expectations of normative gender roles and based on models of nuclear family relations. Most importantly, passport application letters feature migrants stating their motivations for going to the U.S. in their own words. The letters also provide insight into the knowledge and assumptions that migrants held about crossing the border and the strategies they employed to realize successful attempts.

Before presenting an analysis of trends, it is important to sketch out the formal regulations for border crossings, and general knowledge about the northward journey and border crossings that might have circulated around aspiring migrants leaving Mexico during this time.
As referenced above, newspapers were used by employers to encourage interest in labor opportunities across the border and also by Mexican federal and local governments to discourage widespread emigration. Attributing too much influence to local print sources assumes a certain level of literacy within sending communities that is difficult to calculate, but evidence from letters written to Mexican presidents in the 1930s and 1940s suggest that migrants cited specific newspaper articles for their information regarding migration requirements.\textsuperscript{50} Just as newspapers had published announcements regarding passport requirements according to changes in U.S. immigration law, local government officials continued to place announcements reminding migrants of passport regulations and border conditions throughout the 1920s.\textsuperscript{51} 

*El Informador* relayed news and announcements from neighboring Michoacán and published a government announcement to the public and those interested in migrating to the United States in February of 1920. It was a reminder that valid passports required the approval of the state governor, municipal authority, and American consul, adding that anyone who could not read or write would be turned away at the border, and also warning of scam artists who were taking advantage of unsuspecting migrants by offering to arrange paperwork at exorbitant costs.

\textsuperscript{50} See Chapter 3, 4

\textsuperscript{51} Lawrence Cardoso suggests that the effort to dissuade Mexican migrants from going to the border by publicizing harsh conditions in the U.S. and the difficulties crossing the border was actually part of the Carranza administration’s policies toward regulating emigration during the period. He argues that this propaganda campaign (of course some of the abuses suffered and difficulties at the border were true) was part of a two step effort toward preventing and regulating emigration. The other part of the policy included promoted better protection of workers abroad through the work of consuls. This may be the period, as Cardoso suggests, that acted as the basis for future policy toward emigration. However, as a “policy”, it seems that the measures taken were not significantly different from previous efforts to stymie emigration, nor is there enough evidence to suggest that the measures taken were outlined, regulated, mandated, and funded by a centralized authority. “Labor Emigration to the Southwest, 1916-1920: Mexican Attitudes and Policy.” *Southwest Historical Quarterly* 79(4), (1976), 400-416.
when most paperwork could be filed free of charge.\textsuperscript{52} Later that year, the Jalisco state government also warned that numerous Jaliscences were stranded at the border after failing to have appropriate passports.\textsuperscript{53} After being issued a passport by the state governor or a provisional passport issued by a municipal president, it was necessary to have it endorsed by the American consul nearest to the sending region from which the migrant was leaving. The measure was in place to prevent migrants from overwhelming the American consulates that dotted the Mexican-American border, and to ensure that migrants had at least fulfilled the most basic and important requirement before journeying far from home. However, Mexican and American officials near the border were permitted to endorse documents for those migrants hailing from their jurisdictions. As was too often the case, migrants would trek to the border first and hope to fulfill legal requirements second, or to perhaps avoid legal steps all together. Either path could lead to hardship and costly expenses for the migrants, and overpopulated border communities.

The process proved cumbersome especially for rural migrants whose pre-migration preparation would require an extra journey–meaning added travel costs and extra time–to the state capital or another major city. For example, migrants in the northeastern part of Jalisco, generally known as Los Altos de Jalisco, would have to travel in the opposite direction to Guadalajara before doubling back to go northeast up toward Ciudad Juarez crossing the border into El Paso in order to follow the proper steps for legal documentation. The American consul at Ciudad Juarez wrote to the governor of Jalisco alerting him to the fact that many migrants from the town of San Juan de Los Lagos failed to get proper approval from the consulate in

\textsuperscript{52}El Informador, Feb 18, 1920
\textsuperscript{53}El Informador, October 16, 1920
Guadalajara and thus they were denied entry into the United States.\textsuperscript{54} Thus migrants often sought legal entrance but a combination of evolving bureaucratic and logistical circumstances were obstacles to entrance.

The Ciudad Juárez Chamber of Commerce wrote to the Governor of Michoacán to express concern about the number of Michoacanos who had been turned away from the border and had remained in the city, for what they feared was an indefinite period of time.\textsuperscript{55} The mapping of bureaucratic requirements onto a landscape of migrant mobility led to gaps in information about the scope and magnitude of emigration problems which then led to erratic and idiosyncratic approaches to a solution. Many migrants didn’t learn of proper procedures until it was too late; officials along the border witnessed the gravity and trends of regional migration before those in the sending regions did, and so local and state officials were left only with the hope that migrants would read the cautionary tales and heed newspaper warnings. Aside from real logistical issues that prevented efficient and standardized practices toward regulating emigration, which had more to do with distance and communication, Mexican officials in different parts of the country had varying incentives for preventing or allowing for emigration.

While some municipal presidents might have viewed emigration as a safety valve, others would see the departure of vital laborers as a threat to local economy.

What some aspiring migrants learned about the process of migration through newspaper announcements, others learned more intimately through personal connections. Many migrants heard about the opportunities and process of migration from a friend or family member, perhaps

\textsuperscript{54} Jalisco: Desde La Revolución, Tomo 1.
even making their first crossing alongside an experienced migrant. The strategy would have worked out well enough prior to 1920 when passport and border crossing requirements were more static and less strictly enforced, but even experienced migrants would encounter setbacks during the post-1920 era of restriction. Increasing pressures placed upon state governors and other government officials in the interior also meant that there were no guarantees that migrants would even make it past the increasingly bureaucratic first step in crossing the border: obtaining a passport.

On March 17, 1920, Cristino Zaldivar, wrote to the Governor of Jalisco, Don Luis Castellanos y Tapia to request a passport with the intention of going to Galveston, Texas where he would reunite with family members. Many letters written to the governor were formulaic, an indication that they used the services of a notary to have their letters written for them. Cristino wanted to do everything in his power to comply with regulations, “knowing that a passport is an indispensable requirement” and hoping that the governor would so order a passport for him so that he could make his trip, “without any difficulties whatsoever.” He submitted three letters of support, along with a copy of his birth certificate and three copies of a passport picture. A border crossing card for Cristino Zaldivar on the Twentieth of April shows that Cristino was successful in entering the United States. In his passport application he stated that he was going to the U.S.

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58 Box 53 AHJ, Gobernación, Sin Clasificar
to reunite with family members; at the border he told officials he was looking for work, like thousands of migrants who migrated in the 1920, he left his home town in Jalisco to do both.\(^{59}\)

Only a handful of the sampled three hundred passports have annotations indicating whether a passport was awarded. Letters of support, birth certificates, and photos were attached to some requests but not others, which likely tells us more about how the documents were filed and preserved rather than who submitted what. Within the letters themselves there are differences in tone and structure. Some specify their intended final destination down to the street and neighborhood, while others simply state the need to go to the U.S.\(^{60}\) All top five destination cities were either in California or Texas. Twenty percent of applicants (53) indicated Los Angeles—the most frequently cited city—as their city of destination. San Francisco (29) in California, and San Antonio (28), El Paso (17), and Laredo (14) in Texas round out the top five cities.\(^{61}\) The top destination cities were also some of the cities with the largest population percentages of Mexicans during this period. The fact that two of the top three cities are not considered points of entry is illustrative of the growing concentration of Mexicans in destinations away from the border. In 1920, Mexicans made up 68% of the population of San Antonio, and 54% of Los Angeles.\(^{62}\) Some applicants stated their occupation, their marital status, and their age, while others did not. The majority indicated their city of residence, many of them listing Guadalajara as their current residence. Other frequent responses were Ocotlán, La Barca, and

\(^{59}\)National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.; Record Group: 85, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service; Microfilm Roll: 69. Accessed through ancestry.com
\(^{60}\)Twenty-eight listed the U.S. without specifying their destination; Seven did not state destination.
\(^{61}\)The next five cities indicated were Chicago (9), Toledo, Ohio (7), Dallas, Texas (7), New York (7) and Pueblo, Colorado (5).
Arandas. Their ages varied with the youngest being four months and the eldest being sixty. And while three hundred passport requests were submitted, the requests were filed on behalf of more than 500 people. The letters, for the most part, are short and to the point but even some of the most brief notes reveal curious circumstances behind certain aspirations. All applicants, at the very least, stated their intentions for acquiring a passport and their motivations for entering the United States.

The motivations, as stated in applicant letters, are an invaluable and unique source to understand migrant desires at the time, or shortly prior, to their planned migration. Most historical understandings of such motivations rely on oral testimonies given after their arrival to the United States (sometimes recorded shortly after arrival, or many years later, as in the case with oral history). Passport applications provide an insight into an aspiring migrants plan at one of their initial points of contact with government officials, before the challenges of migration befall them or possibly prior to a smooth adjustment in the U.S., with of course a range of possible outcomes falling in between such extremes. They reveal as much, if not more about their assumptions about their migration as opposed to the reality of their journey. Zapopan native Antonio Silva, for example, requested a passport to go to Arizona to search for his family members whom had been ill the last time he had heard from them. The letter of support attached to his passport application was written on behalf of a mutualist group of restaurant workers and confirmed Antonio's anxiety about his loved ones, “he fears that they are sick, and without resources, and maybe even dead.”

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63 box 54 AHJ, Gobernación, Sin Clasificar
them, either by supporting them in the United States or bringing them back to Mexico, was to prove his case to the governor of Jalisco and demonstrate his character as an honorable citizen.

Antonio’s request, like so many others is notable because it was centered on family. Passport requests to the government, like testimonies to interviewers also need to be examined within the context of their audience and stated objectives must be considered for the truths they may hold but also for the strategy they exhibit. Was Antonio trying to find a sympathetic audience that would intercede favorably on his behalf? The veracity of his stated objectives would have been difficult to prove or contest by officials reviewing his application; nor could they spend time vetting applications that were piling high. He was not the only applicant who desired a passport for such reasons, but he was one of the few who so explicitly conveyed such a level of anxiety. The many who stated that they were going to the U.S. “to attend to family matters” might have faced a similar range of circumstances but kept a more neutral approach before government officials. Sixty-four percent of applicants listed family centered motives. In the era of the enganche and the period defined most as one of labor emigration, passport requests strikingly reveal the importance of family.64

The majority of those with family centered passport petitions stated specifically that they were going to “reunite” with family members living in the United States (40% of the total number of applicants). These were men and women of all ages, married, single or widowed. It is evident that brothers or sisters went in groups, sometimes taking nephews or nieces with them.

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64 Archivo Histórico de Jalisco G-8-1920 Boxes 53 & 54. 40% specifically requested passports for the purpose of reuniting with families. The 40% of requests that made no mention of family listed, commercial interests, work, study, and recreation as the main purpose for their journey.
Some indicated that they were going only for a temporary period—there were those migrants going for recreation or specifically to buy certain goods and tools—while others implied they were going to take up residence in the U.S. without indicating the duration. There were also cases where more than one motive was stated, this happened most commonly in cases where applicants desired to go to the United States to enroll themselves or their children in school, as was the case with Dámos Pérez. In this case, Dámos’ two older sons had gone abroad first and he wanted to reunite with them in San Antonio explaining, “so we can live together and so I can provide an education for my youngest son better than I would be able to here.” Despite his last statement, one that is slightly indicting of Jalisco’s post-revolutionary economy and Mexico’s education system more broadly, Dámos request for a passport for himself and his 13-year-old son, Roberto, was approved. The combination of Dámos’ humble and honest approach, his motive of providing a better education for his son, and the fact that he had two sons already working in the U.S. must have convinced officials that Dámos would not be turned away at the border, and most critically, that he had a support system in the United States.  

During this era approval was most likely based on completing requisites rather than based on stated motivations for travel. Migrants were required to provide a birth certificate from a state authority, which proved a challenge in of itself for those who had no secular proof of birth and relied on their baptismal records instead. Applicants also needed to provide three photos of a particular size and letters of recommendation confirming their stated objectives and attesting to the “honorable” character of the person in question. Letter of recommendation writers also felt

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65 Box 54 AHJ, Gobernación, Sin Clasificar
compelled to state clearly that the aspiring migrant had absolutely no involvement in political affairs— an indication of the still tenuous political atmosphere and a nascent revolutionary government. Given that migrants needed letters confirming their intentions and their status in the community, it is unlikely that applicants would falsely state their objectives for acquiring a passport, unless of course it was in the best interest for the letter writer and community that the migrant go north. It is equally important to consider those migrants who could not secure such letters, afford pictures, or find birth certificates. Honor, politics, money, or even the destruction of documents during the revolution were all components to the first legal hurdle that migrants either overcame, failed to clear, or just decided to circumvent all together.

The fact that sixty-four percent of applicants had family centered motivations is all the more surprising when considering that only ten percent of applicants explicitly stated that their intention was to work in the United States with another ten percent listing “commercial interests” as their main objective. Considering that male applicants did outnumber women applicants, the percentages are still more significant because it suggests that the primary motivation for male migrants traveling alone during this period was not strictly related to job opportunities and higher wages. 63% of men, requesting a passport on behalf of themselves only, specified that they were traveling for family related reasons, and 65% of those men, or 41% of total male applicants specifically stated that their objective was to live with family members in the United States.66 Additionally, 21% of total passport requests indicate that families, including spouses and

66 Other family-related reasons for travel by men were specified as “visiting or seeing family” which accounted for 6%(11 of 183 specified), and “making family arrangements”, which accounted 15% (27 of 183 specified). The language used in these cases conveys that trips were meant to be of a shorter duration and that temporary migration or permanent immigration was not the goal of such trips.
children, were also traveling together to reunite with family members on the other side of the border. Based on the evidence yielded by passports in Jalisco, it is very clear that the migration of women and men during this era was largely facilitated by familial and social networks, suggesting that family stage migration and family unit migration was already a feature of Mexican migration to the U.S. By 1920.67

Men, especially when traveling to the U.S. alone (despite their marital status) or without any apparent dependents, have been categorized as “independent migrants” whereas women have been most often considered “dependent” or “associational” migrants. Scholar Pierrette Hondagneu Sotelo suggests labeling those instances in which women and children also migrate, even if at a later date than their male family members, “family stage” migration. Her typology offers “family unit” migration as the best term to define instances in which family migrate together. Hondagneu Sotelo’s acknowledges that “independent” female migration exists during her period of focus, particularly in the Post-WWII era as does other work focusing on gendered patterns of migration.68 However, research on early twentieth century Mexican migrations typically overlooks “independent” female migration in the early twentieth century.

Even “family stage” migrations in which women had the charge of traveling with her children to join her husband or other family members is an understudied phenomenon of the period. Of the 16% of women who initiated their own passport requests, nearly half of them

intended to bring family (i.e., children, siblings, and cousins) along with them but notably more than half did not. These migrations have important implications for understanding the logistical challenges of migrating and how they changed over time, particularly with regard to different family members. Quirina Gómez, a thirty-eight-year-old housewife, applied for a passport to join her husband in Pueblo, Colorado in October of 1920. Her husband, J. Concepción Gómez, who had made two failed attempts at obtaining a passport for himself and his son earlier in the year, had most likely entered the U.S. illegally sometime after May. In October of that year Quirina succeeded in obtaining a passport for herself and five of her young children, while her eldest son, 18-year-old Jose, after previously being denied, was also successful in obtaining his passport. Whereas her husband and son had failed to obtain passports earlier in the year, Quirina even with five young children, was able to secure passports for herself and her family. In this instance, family migration, even as stage migration, where the male provider was not accompanying the family, was not only sanctioned but succeeded where independent male legal migration didn’t. Family migration was privileged, perhaps because it encouraged reunification, but the Gómez migration strategy also evolved over time. The first passport application in April by J. Gómez did not specify where in the United States he and his son intended to go, but only stated that their objective was to see family and bring back some merchandise. The second passport in May identified Pueblo, Colorado as the destination and the objective was slightly modified to indicate that they would be reuniting with family. This attempt less than a month later was also unsuccessful and led to another strategy. The head of the household would try his luck by himself; meanwhile, Quirina would hold down the home front on her own and then would
initiate her own passport request, this time in October, with a destination specified, and the her male partner established on the other side.\textsuperscript{69}

While Quirina’s decision to migrate was likely very much linked to her husband’s, Quirina clearly interacted with state officials and took on the challenges and negotiations of her own migration, and as indicated through passport requests for that year, so did forty-eight other women. The passport requests of women who went through the bureaucratic processes of migration during this early period along with requests of men who either traveled with family members, sought to reunite with relatives, and depended on other family members to successfully cross the border, challenge the gendered assumptions between “independent” and “dependent” migration. While many male migrants prior to 1920 certainly set out for the northern border as family pioneers and embarked on independent migration, many could also be considered as dependent migrants when following their brothers, fathers, or uncles, and (though not as common) their female family members in their migration journeys.

Within the context of these varied family centered motivations and processes of migration, Rodolfo de Luna, mentioned at the outset of the chapter, and his claim of needing the care of his family conveys a strong sense of dependence on family networks and family care within the processes of migration. Equally significant is the fact that some women like Micaela seem to have migrated entirely independently. Because she was subject to more discerning inspection at the border, and due to potential safety threats, her migration and the independent migrations of other women illustrate the strength and determination of those who choose to cross

\textsuperscript{69} Archivo Histórico de Jalisco G-8-1920 Box 55
by themselves. Thus, motivations revealed in passport applications helps to combat the gendered assumptions about men always being independent and women automatically being considered as dependent migrants.

Overall, we see that family-centered motivations need to be considered and recognized as constituent of pre-bracero era migration patterns. Furthermore, both Mexican official expectations for emigration and American official expectations for immigration might have shaped how migration patterns were perceived and categorized. Migrants didn’t hesitate to take a family centered approach to obtain a passport which indicates that family networks and contacts were common and expected by government officials in the facilitation of migration. After all, migrant families had been emigrating in increasing numbers since before the revolution. Local government officials knew this because they witnessed communities transform. They also knew that family and social networks, except during times of crisis, likely bolstered a migrant’s ability to withstand the challenges of binational migration.70

In fact, border crossing cards and manifests, as well as numerical tallies offered by border officials for the era, only indicate who succeeded in crossing the border, who might have paid their passage, where they were headed, and perhaps a note on physical features. They do not capture the broader contours of the families such as the aspirations of would-be migrants, details about the peon and the non-peon, those hoping to enroll in college or start their own business, or the lone widows leaving their homelands to be with their families in distant places. But letters

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70 A San Luis Potosí consul commented specifically that after a review of passport applicants in 1918, nearly all applicants had friends assuring them of “good treatment: in the United States. Consul Cornelius Ferris to Consul Lansing, March 11, 1920, File 811.504/203, RG 59, NARA, as found in Cardoso, Labor Emigration, 408.
written to secure passports illuminate not only motivations gleaned from stated objectives, but also reveal details about the logistical processes, financial concerns (for example the costs associated with getting photographs taken, obtaining an attorney or a notary, and getting documents to state officials), and the wider social networks behind migration in the early twentieth century. Passports also critically help disaggregate the mass of early Mexican migrants away from a homogenized image of the male Mexican migrant lured by either higher wages or an enterprising labor recruiter. Economic forces and the ever contracting and expanding labor markets of the early twentieth century should not be underestimated, but a new set of questions and answers need to be incorporated into explanations of early twentieth century migration including: Who went before these migrants? Who did they bring with them? And how did these connections evolve through the generations?

“Even the Women are leaving”: Reaction and Response

Much editorial ink was spilled pondering the causes and impacts of Mexican emigration in the Guadalajara’s newspaper, *El Informador*, in the year 1920. News from the municipality of Atotonilco El Alto characterized the number of migrants leaving to the United States as “truly shocking.”71 The departure of 84 migrants from the small town of San Diego de Alejandría during just one week in late February was highlighted as a sign that “the agriculture and industry of Jalisco was in grave danger of lacking sufficient braceros.”72 The worry conveyed in editorials, however, quickly turned into anger, confusion and politicization. Agrarianism, the failings of the revolution, and flawed legislation were all blamed for the labor exodus, and

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71 ibid, Sept, 20, 1920
72 ibid, Feb 29, 1920
indeed each of these factors contributed to continued economic insecurity in the region. But family and social networks also played an integral role in continued migration, providing a kind of social and emotional security when economic stability was hard to come by. Migration, often family centered, had become a viable option and an established pattern that would continue to impact sending regions and draw the attention of concerned citizens trying to understand, characterize, and sometimes critique those who left.

The author of an editorial in Guadalajara’s “El Informador” expressed his alarm about the increasing emigration from the state of Jalisco in an article titled “Pueblo Vacio” or empty town. He first lamented that “the strongest men who work the fields” were emigrating by the hundreds leaving emptied haciendas and ranches behind. But his most vociferous complaints were directed toward the markedly dire situation indicated by the fact that women were now leaving as well. He cited the example of female migrants emigrating from a small town in Los Altos de Jalisco and stated almost incredulously that, “even the women were leaving.” He followed this statement with an emphatic “Que se vayan!” effectively bidding the women migrants of Jalisco good riddance, showing that his concern had turned into disdain.73 That women were leaving was especially significant in a post-revolutionary context. The decade of turmoil caused by revolutionary uprisings not only caused labor shortages, it was failing Mexican women and the families of Jalisco.

During his presidential campaign in 1919, future president, Álvaro Obregón, acknowledged the increasing emigration and offered a general solution by emphasizing the need

for giving guarantees to capital or else capital would “remain inside the safe deposit box, or outside our borders, and then our workers will continue to have to leave the country, in hungry peregrinations, to look for bread in other countries where capital enjoys the sort of guarantees that it cannot find here.”74 The quote reflected the blend of nationalism and pragmatism that would come to define his administration as president. The presidential hopeful clearly connected the political need for stability, the protection of capital, and the emigration of workers together in a clear recognition of the worker and family exodus to the United States. If Obregón meant to steer a moderate course, especially away from the tense and controversial relationship with the United States in the beginning of his administration, by the third year of his rule he finally secured U.S. diplomatic recognition, and in the process, exempted foreign capital from the retroactive reach of Article 27 of the Mexican constitution bringing relief to foreign oil and mining interests.75 His policies at the outset of his administration, however, failed to keep capital or emigrants in the country; the economic crisis of 1921 and 1922 would have a much more profound impact on Mexican migrants in Mexico and in the United States than any government policy.

The economic recession throughout 1921 and 1922 brought hardship to thousands of Mexican workers in the United States and neither country or government had sufficient resources to attend to the concerning trend of destitution affecting Mexican families and the harsh, and even violent, treatment directed at migrant workers. During these years the need for, and use of,

74 As cited in Jurgen Buchenau, The Last Caudillo: Álvaro Obregón and the Mexican Revolution
Mexican migrant laborers in the Southwest U.S. was seriously questioned by labor unions.\textsuperscript{76} As illustrated above, Mexican migrants, either as workers or refugees, were always subject to targeted restriction into the United States, but the post-war economic crash in the United States heightened labor unrest in general, and drew attention, in particular, to the many Mexicans who, not so long before, had enjoyed exemptions from war-time immigration restrictions.

According to James L. Slayden, a former Texas congressman, “the Mexican immigrant…was not regarded as even a possible competitor for their [trade-unionists] jobs” because he had no mechanical training and because he would be expected to go into agricultural and domestic work. By the time of his writing in 1921, Slayden noted a change, “there begin to be signs that the unionists are changing their minds in that respect with the natural, resultant suspicion and antagonism.” The antagonism manifested itself in threats to Mexican families, pressure on Mexicans to either become citizens or repatriate, and in violence. Not only were Mexicans working in agriculture for low wages, but they had also been working in factories and were being used as strike breakers in places like Chicago. Nativist ire was directed at Mexican families across the southwest and labor unions began to call for deportation. With the plummeting prices of commercial agricultural products, especially cotton, wheat, and beat sugar, labor cutbacks meant that workers faced poverty in Arizona, went on poor relief in Los Angeles, and were stranded in destitution in Colorado.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{76} Reisler, \textit{By the Sweat of Their Brow}, 67-70
Throughout 1921 and 1922 Mexican newspapers reported on the dismal conditions affecting migrant workers and the steps taken by government officials to try and both prevent the exodus of more workers and help facilitate the repatriation of others. For example, in November of 1921, President Obregón bolstered contract labor laws by mandating that laborers and contractors deposit enough money to cover the full fare of a roundtrip ticket for each contract laborer. The measure was supposed to prevent the Mexican government from having to foot the bill for the expenses of repatriation. Nevertheless, by the end of 1922 the Obregón government had indeed facilitated the repatriation of thousands of destitute Mexicans. In fact, the government felt the need to warn migrants that should they cross again after being repatriated, their repatriation would not be provided for again. The warning indicated that migrants also began to see their returns to Mexico as temporary, and that perhaps repatriated migrants, were remaining close to the border rather than returning to the interior of Mexico.

Despite the reports of misery north of the border and the repeated warnings to aspiring Mexican migrants, migration had resumed by late 1922 and so had the editorials that lamented the exodus and increasingly blamed the federal government’s economic policies as the main contributing factor. In a section titled, “commentaries of the day” the author suggested that all of the efforts to contain emigration had been in vain and that the means by which “agraristas”

78 “Se Garantizaran Los Intereses de Los Mexicanos Que sean enganchados,” *El Informador,* Nov. 10 1921
80 *El Informador* March 12 1922; Newspaper reports from *El Informador* during this period do not note any regional and local impacts that return migration might have had in Jalisco.
81 The exodus, being noted again in newspaper reports-like that from San Martin de Hidalgo, Jalisco in February reporting that a large amount of braceros were looking for jobs in the North. *El Informador* February 26, 1923.
and “obreristas” were carrying out their goals were pushing workers out of the country. Post-revolutionary governments had to carefully balance their stance toward the protection of capital with the demands of Zapatistas in the South. For this commentator, the Obregón administration had gone too far in favoring the more radical revolutionary demands and he stated, “the war on capital was ruining all factories and businesses” and he concluded that the dispossession of hacendados had led to unemployment. The impact on emigration was clear: “In a country that is being ruined more every day, what can these people without work do? Steal or emigrate. Most aim to emigrate to the United States where they are lynched. They go because they cannot live in their country.”\(^{82}\)

Rhetoric coming out of Guadalajara about “bolshevik agrarianism” is reflective of the fact that throughout the region there was much less of a demand for land redistribution. Revolutionary land redistribution posed more of a threat than a promise.\(^{83}\) Jalisco did see a degree of early although limited land redistribution under Carrancista Govenor Diéquez’ administration up through 1919 and again under Governor Luis Castellanos y Tapia. Governor Zuno’s radical zeal for land redistribution beginning in 1923 would elicit even more opposition from conservative interests in the area.\(^{84}\) In reality, especially in places like the center-west

\(^{82}\) “Los Que Se Van,” *El Informador*, Dec. 10 1922.

\(^{83}\) The newspaper *El Informador*, although tending to lean conservative, actually was known for staying fairly objective in it’s reporting. Rather than extend critiques toward the government or church, it tended to focus more on global events, in large part, due its patronage and subscription by French and American colonies of Guadalajara in its inception. Ironically, despite the commentary from above which shows so much disdain for Obregón, the newspaper departed from it’s more neutral political stance during the era by promoting Luis Castellanos y Tapia for Governor and Obregón for president. Enrique E. Sánchez Ruíz, “Apuntes para Una Historia de la Prensa en Guadalajara,” en *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 4-5 Cuadernos del CEI Universidad de Guadalajara, 1989.

states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato, the parcelization of land through inheritance, the rise in landless and increasingly mobile workers, and the proliferation of familial and social networks facilitating migration had started the century before and continued due to the insecurity of economic contractions, violence, and protracted political instability of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Despite the Obregón administration’s effort at land redistribution and Obregón’s role as final arbiter in the restitution and awarding of land, migrants kept leaving.\(^85\) Despite the measurable gains in political and economic stability since the revolution, the protracted political violence and economic crisis would persist throughout the decade as the Cristero wars again gripped communities.

It’s impossible to say how many migrants were directly impacted by new policies and how many were simply following familiar paths north based on previous personal or family experience. Despite the public concern over emigration illustrated through newspaper reports, and the government’s interaction with migrants in its efforts to prevent them from leaving, we hear very little from migrants themselves. And while passport requests provide a window from which historians can look through to gleam motivations, sketch out family migration patterns, and find the voices of the many who left, the actual experiences of the many migrants eluded their contemporaries.

The chapter’s opening passage quoting an editorial written in July of 1920 is quite revealing of how Mexicans began to see their compatriots who went north, “se van mudos, con una maleta de trapos a la espalda y un morral con tortillas, sin decir lo que ven y lo que saben;

pero resueltos, con pasaporte o sin él, con enganchadores o por su cuenta; pero se van, se van...”86

Those going north were the silent poor who kept their head down but went forward determined to leave by any means necessary. The observation was right to a certain point, with two key exceptions. First, not only the poor or even the poorest left. Second, those leaving were not always silent. Their hopes and even their disappointments can be found in the plainly stated objectives contained in passport requests. And if the author of the editorial saw a silent mass of Mexicans turning their backs to their hometowns, the next decade would see them build vibrant transnational communities, crossing back and forth across the border up until the end of the decade when Mexican presidents and government officials alike would bear witness to the very vocal return of their compatriots. Many Mexican families would come to know two countries, and raise their families in each. They would tell their stories of what life was like on the other side, ask to co.

CHAPTER II
From Revolution to Exodus: Family Migration and Revolutionary Families

También los otros muchachos
que bien atras piscando
vienen muy apuraditos
ya nos vienen alcanzando

Y mi tía Josefita
que viene también piscando
ya toditos la largaron
también agarró su paso.

También mi Tío Juanito
y que es muy buen piscador
los muchachas lo largaron
con cien libras de algodón.

En las piscas de algodón
nadie lo puede negar
que toditos a lo menos quiere
sus 100 libras piscar.

Corrido de Robestown by Eusebio González87

After the economic recession of 1920-1921, a boom in Southwestern U.S. agriculture, the legal restriction of European immigrants to the U.S., and continued insecurity and violence in Mexico led hundreds of thousands of Mexicans to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in search of opportunity, family, and stability. Emigration out of Mexico soared to new heights despite the relative decrease in violence that accompanied the centralizing governments of Obregón and Calles. Emigration continued apace from pre-revolutionary sending areas and became a new and

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enduring feature for other communities. Setting out for jobs in the North became an increasingly viable option in those regions where the revolution caused disruptions and rebuilding was slow and limited. The 1920s waves of migration marked a new pattern of emigration even before a new round of civil war rocked the emigration heartland of Guanajuato, Michoacán, Jalisco and Zacatecas beginning in 1926 resulting in yet another wave of migrants. Some were journeying north for the first time while others were going to reunite with family in a land of growing opportunity and bourgeoning, yet already bustling, Mexican communities.

Cities grew replete with Mexican colonias with pool halls, Mexican markets, and mutual assistance societies. Schools and churches would sweep in toward the end of the decade along with the missionary zeal of Americanization campaigns. Groups of Mexican migrants and immigrants were also appearing more frequently throughout the U.S. countryside where they would follow harvests and work in family units. The excerpt of the corrido above describing cotton work in Texas captures how the labor landscape was changing in the U.S. It not only reflects the role that migrants would play in that labor system, but also shows how Mexican family labor became central to commercial agriculture during the 1920s. The corrido provides a picture of Mexican men and women in agriculture and extended families working alongside each other. It exalts quick working family members, and beckons those nearby to work faster. It is decidedly upbeat for a song about picking cotton, a rally cry more than a lament. It reminds subtly that piecework equals profit when you work fast enough, and it rhymes to a catchy tune, a tune that migrants could carry with them across harvests and across borders.

This chapter will examine the 1920s as a booming decade of migration. In the first section I will describe how new opportunities and labor diversification in the United States
attracted permanent Mexican immigration and seasonal migration to the United States and expanded the demand for laborers to include families including women and children to unprecedented levels. The second section will explore how U.S. immigration legislation and evolving practices on behalf of the Mexican government transformed the border and the nature of border crossing. In the third section I will illustrate how Mexicans responded to the exodus northward and what the continuous migration reveals about the nature of state formation in post-revolutionary Mexico. Understanding how Mexican migration functioned in the 1920s is critical to understanding future migration patterns, the development of social and familial networks for migration, the intersection between labor and family as motivating factors for migration, how the categorizations of “legal and illegal” emerged to define Mexican migrants, and why migration from this point on would be intimately connected to community transformations and revolutionary policies on the Mexican side of the border. During the 1920s Mexican migration became more visible, debated, and derided in Mexico, and migrants leaving embattled communities as unhappy citizens were symbolic of a contested revolution, a breakdown of national borders, and an opportunity for unrestrained human mobility.

*Growth of Mexican Colonias and the Southwest Agriculture Boom*

The influx of Mexicans into the United States after the recession of 1921 and 1922 signaled a growing and sustained phenomenon of migration that could no longer primarily be attributed to the dislocations of civil war and the labor demands initiated by World War I. According to most estimates, more than double the number of Mexican immigrants arrived
between 1920 and 1930 than did between 1910 and 1920.\textsuperscript{88} And while the conditions wrought by a decade of civil war continued to play a role in migrations to the north, for some like Juana Martinez, recently divorced and having just lost her father, migrating from Mazatlan to Los Angeles in 1924 along with her mother and two sisters provided better protection against devastating poverty in Mexico.\textsuperscript{89} The lure of higher wages persisted, after all in 1923 a laborer would earn 40 cents a day in Mexico compared to the 25 cents per hour that U.S. railroads paid.\textsuperscript{90} Similarly, Isabel Gonzalez went north after trying, unsuccessfully, to keep his late parents' cattle ranching business profitable in Jalisco. After making some money as a railroad track worker in California, he sent for his two siblings.\textsuperscript{91} In the 1920s, Mexican migration to the United States, especially in the center-west of Mexico had not only become a viable option when faced with economic and social insecurity, it had become a way of life.

The 1920s marked a new era of migration as migrants were encouraged to migrate by family members and social networks sufficiently developed to make the crossing of friends and family members easier and more regular. Family-centered migrations happened alongside, and in combination, with those facilitated by enganche, the active recruitment by labor contractors that

\textsuperscript{88} From 219,004 to 459,28. Statistic from INEGI, 1985: 125 found in, Luis Miguel Rionda Ramírez Y jalaron pa’l norte.. Migración, agrarismo y agricultura en un pueblo michoacano: Copándaro de Jiménez, (Mexico: D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1992). U.S. and Mexican government statistics used by Paul Taylor reveal a similar trend despite the noticeably (and chronically) differences between numbers gathered on each side. For the period of 1920-1928 U.S. statistics measured 579,031 arrivals (from 247,846 in between 1910-1920) and Mexican statistics counted 446,392 (from 298,266 between 1910-1920) \textit{Mexican Labor in the United States, Vol. 1}, 241. The half a million migrants (give or take) entering the US from Mexico during the decade only reflects those whom entered legally. Lawrence Cardoso suggests that 100,000 illegal Mexican immigrants entered yearly during the 1920s, Cardoso, \textit{Mexican Emigration}, 94. Mae Ngai, also found that 100,000 undocumented suspected to come in, but found that an average of 62,000 came in legally per year, Mae Ngai, \textit{Impossible Subjects}, 131.

\textsuperscript{89} Gamio, Juana Martínez, 277-288.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Return to Aztlán}, 46-47

\textsuperscript{91} Gamio, Isabel González, 255
characterized many of the migrations occurring prior to the Mexican Revolution. Contracting for railroad and mining interests continued but diverse labor opportunities and social networks provided new avenues and demand for migration. Mexican men, women, and children labored for growing U.S. agribusiness, while increased labor opportunities in cities encouraged permanency, especially as children born to Mexican parents began to attend U.S. schools.

The Mexican population in well-established receiving cities such as San Antonio and Los Angeles skyrocketed, while cities in the Midwest also witnessed growing Mexican populations. Cities far from the U.S-Mexican border like Chicago witnessed Mexicans settling into rail camps and also into the industrialized labor environments of meat packing plants and steel factories. Some migrants could find work in cities in the off-season, and in some regions of the United States, like Los Angeles, where the expanding city was surrounded by irrigated farm land, migrants and migrant families could both follow the seasonal crops and work in clerical, construction, and service jobs within the city.

The development of colonias and the opening of service jobs was critical to the development of semi-permanent and permanent Mexican communities since it meant that families weren’t automatically subjected to seasonal incomes, non-permanent housing, interrupted education, and unstable work environments. Businesses catering to Spanish speakers provided security to Mexican migrants in times of need, while commercial businesses led to

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much needed capital for some migrants and led to a bourgeoning Mexican consumer class. The developments made for a more hospitable environment to mitigate some of the challenges of racism and segregation, which while facilitating a community for permanent settlers, also encouraged the continued seasonal migrations of families for experienced migrants and first-time migrants alike.

Permanent or semi-permanent settlement in growing cities also meant that gender and age did not predetermine migration to the same degree that it had before. Opportunities beyond brutal manual labor provided spaces for women, children and elderly to build their lives. Mexican children and adolescents attended schools and worked, and Mexican women also found employment opportunities beyond domestic service or as laundresses. In fact, Mexican women outnumbered Mexican men in the cities of San Antonio and El Paso. George Sanchez describes these cities as clearinghouse cities in which male laborers would find, and be contracted for, work elsewhere, while their families remained in cities.

The trend by which primarily Mexican male laborers still labored in the outlying areas or took short trips away from their families in the U.S. signaled families’ willingness to locate more permanently on the U.S. side of the border for what was likely a variety of reasons. The trend also indicates that either men were able to gain wages that were sufficient enough to support family members, or that family members were able to also contribute to the household wage.

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94 ibid, 188-206.
96 Sanchez, Becoming Mexican American, 66.
Nowhere was this most evident than in U.S. agriculture, where, the southwest and Midwest experienced a boom in commercialized agriculture.

When interviewed by Manuel Gamio’s team of interviewers, Señora Cruz Loera de Torres, who lived in San Antonio for at least a decade had explained that everyone in her family, including her 10-year-old granddaughter would pick during cotton season. The family, however, did not solely rely on the cotton harvest for wages. In fact, if not for her husband, who had signed their family up for the cotton harvest the previous season, they were going to skip working the cotton season all together. Unfortunately, the family’s luck ran out when they arrived to a fallow cotton field and were deceived into buying food on impossible credit. The family recovered well enough as the señora’s two daughters, ages 19 and 16, managed to get jobs in a pecan shelling factory. In addition to working, her daughters also attended classes provided by the Cruz Azul, a local mutual aid society. The Torres family thus participated in agricultural harvests, agriculture-related factory work, and attended reading classes in the city, taking advantage of the rural and semi-urban opportunities afforded to them while living in San Antonio. When Señora Torres’ husband died a couple of years later the Torres daughters were able to maintain their family’s residence in San Antonio through their work at the pecan factory.

The opportunity for mixed work, agricultural and urban, skilled and unskilled, expanded greatly during the 1920s as a result of a boom in Southwestern agriculture, federal immigration legislation in 1921 and 1924 restricting the entry of European immigrants, and the consequent migration of African Americans to northern industrial jobs as part of the Great Migration. Just

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97 Gamio, Señora Cruz Loera de Torres, 230-232. US 1930 Census
as Mexican labor had begun to replace Chinese labor on the railroads and other ethnic immigrant labor in truck crops earlier in the first decades of the twentieth century, Mexican migrants also became tenant farmers and share croppers of crops like cotton and sugar beets.98 After the importation of Mexican contract laborers during World War I had successfully secured profits for U.S. agribusiness and because of developments throughout the 1920s, Mexican labor, composed of both single laborers and migrant families, became the dominant labor force for many agricultural harvests.

In addition to the building up of Mexican communities in urban regions of Texas, California and near Chicago, the expansion of large-scale agriculture was very significant in facilitating family migration. While familial and social networks would have encouraged family members to migrate, giving migrants either the peace of mind that they could find community on the other side of the border, or by seeing hard evidence through letters and remittances sent to home in good times, the welcoming, and even the preference for Mexican families by agricultural employers in the U.S. made it possible for migrant family groups to stay together. In contrast to circumstances in which families were stretched across distance and the border, the potential for family members to work and live as a unit would have been an appealing option. Whether because of the decade of violence that ripped some men and women away from their homes and families, or the decades of land tenure transformation that ripped families away from their land, U.S. southwestern agricultural expansion provided an avenue for families to work

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land together once again. And if the land was not theirs, the wages were, and wages multiplied when migrant groups and families worked together.

Understanding labor needs and conditions of U.S. farming and agro industrial business in the 1920s is imperative to explaining the increase in Mexican and Mexican-American communities on the U.S. side of the border and the beginnings of a system of labor that would go on to perpetuate migrant family crossings for the rest of the twentieth century. The most notable developments related to agriculture and the use of Mexican labor occurred in California, but a significant increase in sugar beet production in Midwestern states and Colorado, along with the continued use of Mexican labor in Texas also promoted sustained employment of Mexicans in agriculture. In the 1920s California truck crops increased by 50%, fruits and nuts by 30%, and cotton by 400%.99 Intensified irrigation, a pattern of continued large landholding extending from the era of large Mexican land grants, and a ban on Japanese landholding led to this surge of production in California.100 The resulting pattern of production required intensive manual labor in a much more demanding manner than before and relied on an abundance of unskilled labor at peak harvest times. The scale, but also the types of crops required more labor, with, for example a crop like lettuce needing ten times the hours of labor per acre than wheat.101

99 Reisler, 78.
100 Reisler, 78, Weber, 23. According to Taylor the California alien land law of 1920 and then a federal alien land law of 1923 accounted for the decline in land ownership and perhaps more significantly the overall amount of Japanese laborers in California agriculture, and the number of Japanese who had previously leased land for truck crops such as melon and lettuce. When Japanese lesers were forced out merchant companies would sublease small parcels of land from growers to produce a system that Taylor describes as, “in effect, large scale agriculture upon a leasing rather than an ownership basis,” 4-6,32.
101 Reisler, 78.
The Imperial Valley followed by the San Joaquin Valley in California also witnessed the expansion of cotton production in the 1920s. In 1920 cotton acreage in California increased from 61,217 acres to 126,081 acres. In 1924, due in part to the creation of a new superior strain of cotton (with increased market value), and to the strong encouragement by business and government leaders, large landholders and small land holders alike began to specialize in cotton, leading to a cotton boom. Specializing to a time sensitive-harvest crop with three pickings over a six-month period also required huge inputs of temporary labor. Whereas cotton had ranked eleventh in importance in 1924, by 1929 it was “the fourth most valuable crop in the state, accounting for an annual return of $24 million.” Just as Mexicans had been, and remained, a crucial source of labor for cotton growers in Texas, migrants became a significant labor pool in California cotton as well.

Post-World War I acreage in sugar beet cultivation also increased greatly in places like Colorado and the Red River Valley in North Dakota and Minnesota. In Northeastern Colorado, in particular, sugar beet acreage more than doubled between 1909 and 1927, and accounted for 85% of sugar production in the state. Mexican laborers increased from 9.4% to 59% of the labor pool during the same period reaching 14,313 in 1927 from 1,002 in 1909. The increase acreage accounted for the population increase, as did the decline of Japanese and

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103 Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal*. (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1996), 20-35. Despite the difficulty that small landowners might have had in acquiring enough capital to maintain cotton farming and invest in technological equipment, Weber suggests that government interest came from the increase in profits to the public utility sector that would come from increased reliance on irrigation needed for cotton.
German-Russian laborers working in sugar beets. A ban on Japanese Immigration in 1907 and restrictions to European immigration in 1921 and 1924 created spaces for Mexican laborers who were both recruited from Mexico and contracted from Texas to fill labor needs.\textsuperscript{106} Immigration legislation restricting European immigration led to an increased reliance on Mexican labor for crops such as sugar beets in Colorado, and other agricultural products, including cotton, crop vegetables, and citrus. As illustrated in chapter one employers had already begun to prefer Mexican workers even before changes in immigration legislation binational family and labor networks had already been operating for the previous two decades.\textsuperscript{107} After demographic labor shifts spurred by World War I including: American men (ethnic white men) going off to fight, African Americans migrating to industrial jobs, Asian migrants being banned and forbidden from owning and leasing land, and migrants from any part of the Eastern hemisphere were being restricted by numeric quotas, the largest ethnic minority group of ethnic minorities to occupy positions in unskilled poorly paid agricultural work were Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

Employer preferences with regard to Mexicans can be most easily gleaned in examples of preference for Mexican \textit{family} labor for some of the largest and most labor demanding crops of the agricultural boom of the 1920s. Employers preferred family units in cotton, sugar beet, and some fruit and vegetable production (i.e.,: onions in Texas, citrus in southern California).\textsuperscript{108} The

\textsuperscript{106} Taylor, 108-109.
\textsuperscript{107} There is evidence that even before the restriction to European immigration, employers began to prefer Mexican workers for their perceived docility and reluctance to participate in strikes. Any perceived docility, was likely do the deportable status of those many who had previously arrived undetected and undocumented and who were less likely to strike especially after deportation became a more important feature of U.S. immigration policy after 1924. Examples of Employer comments and preference can be found in both volumes of Paul Taylor’s \textit{Mexican Labor} and also in Weber’s \textit{Dark Sweat, White Gold}, Reisler’s \textit{By the Sweat of Their Brow}.
\textsuperscript{108} Taylor, vol 1, 323
increased preference of family labor units over *solos* was a stark contrast to earlier decades of migration patterns which had reflected labor preferences for single men. The boom in agriculture thus induced and paralleled the boom and pre-World War II peak of Mexican family migration.

The type of agriculture and the specific farm labor needs in the 1920s required families who labored together as a unit and married men who could be accompanied by their families. The distinction between the explicit preference for family labor and a preference for male laborers who were married is an important one as it reveals the multiple paths for Mexican migrant family incorporation into U.S. labor systems and society. In northeastern Colorado sugar beet farming Mexican families became the preferred source of labor starting in 1920. “Shipments” of families came from Mexico initially but throughout the decade more and more came from the reserve pool of laborers on the U.S. side of the border in San Antonio and El Paso.109 The labor commissioner for the Great Western Sugar Company revealed that 90 percent of migrants in “each shipment” should be composed of family labor.110 Even though transportation cost more per family and families did not necessarily ensure more efficient labor, labor bureaus switched to family labor for many reasons. Paul Taylor explains quite simply that the policy changed because, “The families are more stable.” Single laborers were thought to be more lawless and ‘apt to be more shifting in residence.’111 Rather than gang labor, each family became its own contractor as a result of family model preference. Sugar beet companies also

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109 Taylor, Vol 1. 132
110 ibid, 131
111 Taylor, 134
preferred resident labor so as to limit recruitment and transportation costs and in fact invested in permanent housing which led to an increase in resident family labor. Taylor found that, “in six years the number of families has increased an average of 258 families per year, or 288 per cent greater than the number resident in 1921.” Additionally, the presence of families could potentially defray the costs of prepared food for migrants and shift the burden of raising and preparing of food and the cost of housing upkeep to families rather than employers. For example a bilingual worker's manual published by the American Beet Sugar Company encouraged women and children to contribute to the preparation of food provisions to sustain families toward winter months saying “The wife who learns how to preserve fruits and vegetables will confer great benefits on her family” and published the names of women who had canned the most fruits and vegetables the previous winter.113

Family labor also became a mainstay for cotton farming. As the corrido at the opening of the chapter describes, cotton picking was largely a family affair. As difficult as the backbreaking labor involved in sugar beets and cotton was, there were some advantages. Long seasons in cotton and sugar beets allowed for a semi-permanent labor and living situation, and prevented migrants from having to follow shorter harvest seasons for other crops. Women and children could also contribute to the wages and the family could be concentrated in one area working together, stabilizing migration patterns and reducing labor uncertainty.114

112 Taylor, 139
113 American Beet Sugar Company, Carton 10, Folder 38, Paul Schuster Taylor papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
114 Weber, 64.
Although a preference for family labor expanded opportunities for families to stay together and could lead to greater economic gains with total labor, entire families would also be subject to exploitative working conditions. Some employers might have certainly believed that family labor could domesticate male laborers, but it is likely that employers such as cotton growers in Texas favored families because children could pick cotton right alongside their parents and perhaps pick just as much. Employers benefitted from patriarchal family structures where fathers acted as the foreman for the family.

The Arizona Cotton Growers Association recruited, transported and provided overall organization for the importation of Mexican laborers from Mexico to Arizona and California and even sponsored the border crossing of a few women in addition to the many male laborers. An ‘Alien Laborer’s Identification Card’ for Dolores Torres, age 38, showed that she entered the U.S. through Nogales accompanied by her husband and fifteen-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son in 1919. Her destination was Tempe Arizona and her card was stamped with Arizona Cotton Growers Association. Dolores’ card did not include a return date, but cards for two other women indicated that the women returned to Mexico six months after their arrival. The identification cards speak to the fact that entire families were sponsored by labor bureaus and grower associations. A different variant of family labor can be found in the citrus workers in southern California described by Matt Garcia. Employers preferred married men as opposed to solos or single men, as laborers. The logic for this preference was similar to that governing sugar beet

117 Solos were single men that were not considered attached to family groups, Taylor, 139.
labor: marriage and children were seen as domesticating forces that inculcated more worker discipline over all. Married men were considered to travel less, be more mature, more thrifty with their earnings and less likely to risk their jobs and family livelihoods by engaging in worker strikes.118

As mentioned, the incentives that drew migrant families to work in agriculture together equally benefited employers. Whether to furnish a more domesticated labor force, establish semi-permanent or resident labor colonies, cut down on recruitment and transportation costs, or generate overall labor stability with hopes of increasing production, employers in U.S. agriculture welcomed family labor. This led the way to the opening of critical spaces for women and children not just to work or support a head of household but also in very practical terms of family housing, family transportation costs across the border or within the U.S. Family migration proved to be very beneficial to employers.

Beyond facilitating migrant family labor, the employment of Mexicans in agriculture changed the landscape of Mexican communities in the U.S. and migrant mobility. Mexican and Mexican-Americans were still most concentrated in the U.S. borderlands but resident communities began to dot the states in the northern U.S. beyond the industrial communities in Chicago. More migrants, whether newly arrived, or already having worked along the border in South Texas and Southern California, migrated specifically to agriculture intensive regions and states, which took them across various states and into the interior of the U.S. In California, this led to increased internal migration throughout the central valleys, such as to the San Joaquin

118 Matt Garcia, *A World of Their Own*, 42.
Valley for cotton work. Mexican migrants also participated in Midwest agriculture, specifically sugar beets. Mexican workers made up 75%-90% of sugar beet workers in areas such as Michigan, Ohio and Minnesota.119 In a study published in 1932 on Arandas, a municipality in Los Altos de Jalisco, Paul Taylor found that emigrants had gone and worked in as many as 24 different states from that town alone. 120

The need for Mexican labor in agriculture also led to the constant over-recruitment of Mexican migrants and their families to provide sufficient low-wage labor during harvest periods. Recruitment functioned to keep a sufficient number of workers for the peak harvest periods, but over-recruitment became a critical feature of the agricultural labor system in order to keep the cost of labor and minimum wage levels low.121 While the over-recruitment certainly worked to growers advantages (large growers, not small), it would contribute to a massive social problem toward the end of the decade. The Great Depression also impacted cities and thus revealed that in times of crisis urban and rural areas simply could not absorb underemployed and unemployed Mexican laborers, especially when they could not afford to pay the transportation costs of seasonal intrastate and binational migration.

While agricultural needs were immensely critical in sparking mass family migration and thus perpetuating permanent and semi-permanent settlement, it is crucial to point out that not all

119 Reisler, 88.
121 Labor shortage versus labor over-supply. Riesler points out that the definitions for labor shortage were inconsistent, suggesting that growers consistently complained about labor shortages when they felt like harvesting crops in the quickest, most profitable manner was inconsistent, whereas other perspectives such as that from the Department of Agriculture judged that there was a chronic oversupply of labor during the 1920s, 82. Weber also points this out.
Mexican migrants were agricultural laborers that worked in family units. Women worked in canneries and packing houses as well, but this auxiliary agricultural work was not contracted on the basis of family labor. Men and women also worked in manufacturing and other industries and many women also worked in domestic service.\textsuperscript{122} The lure of higher wages persisted, after all in 1923 a laborer would earn 40 cents a day in Mexico compared to the 25 cents per hour that U.S. railroads paid.\textsuperscript{123} In addition to agricultural opportunities Mexicans also found work in industrial and construction work. They made up 16.4\% of pick and shovel construction workers in California in 1928, and an estimated 75\% of unskilled construction labor in Texas. As many as 28,000 Mexicans worked in California industries in the same year.\textsuperscript{124} There were also small numbers of migrants who would come not as part of the laboring class but as middle class and upper class professionals. The overall increase in agricultural labor during the decade, and the willingness of major employers to open spaces to family labor contributed to the overall impression that there were jobs to be had and provided hope for the stream of migrants that were headed either directly to the border or their nearest consulate.

Twenty-four-year-old Macaria Avalos had been in Ciudad Juarez with her husband and her one-and-a-half-year old child for six months with the goal of crossing over to El Paso. It took them four months to walk north from Torreon where they had been working on a ranch and had heard that there was work and money ‘in abundance’ in El Paso. Since they didn’t have

\textsuperscript{122} One study in the 1930 actually suggested that 40\% of Mexican women worked in domestic service where only 21.2\% worked in agriculture. However, the numbers are not disaggregated into categories of Mexican born and U.S. born mexicans. Data from Lori Hembold, “The Work of Chicanas in The United States: Wage Labor and Work in the Home, 1930 to present.” as found in Gonzalez, “Chicanas and Mexican Immigrant Families 1920-1940.”

\textsuperscript{123} Massey et. al. \textit{Return to Atzlan}, 46-47

\textsuperscript{124} Riesler, 97
sufficient money to either enter the U.S. legally or as ‘contraband’ they stayed in Ciudad Juarez where Macaria and her husband could save enough to make the crossing. At the time of her interview with one of Manuel Gamio’s research assistants, she was begging on the street to contribute to the family savings.\textsuperscript{125} Macaria’s testimony speaks to the allure of U.S. employment, an allure so strong as to induce a family to take their chances on a trek up north despite it leaving them penniless in the process. It also speaks to the struggles encountered during the northward journey— the physical and the financial cost of moving.

\textit{The Border Rises}

Though agriculture boomed and communities began to flourish on the U.S. side of the border migration did not ensure unmitigated good and guaranteed wealth. The difficult journey and border crossing was made more difficult by the 1921 and 1924 legislation that had spurred on the demand for Mexican labor in the first place. Debates leading up to the establishment and enforcement of the law reveal that Mexicans and Mexican families were not automatically welcomed with open arms. Hostility aired in these debates reflected and reproduced racist and intolerant attitudes toward Mexican families and even when Mexicans were exempted from quota restrictions by the law, new financial requirements had real life consequences for aspiring migrants. Furthermore, the law refined the criteria that would describe and essentially come to define any person who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border as either legal or illegal. This law

\textsuperscript{125} Gamio, Interview by Luis Felipe Recinos, Ciudad Juarez, March 1927.
codified a more selective system of admission and saddled migrants with labels-turned legal identities, which had stigmatizing and divisive impacts on communities and families.

Overall, immigration legislation in 1921 and 1924 contributed to the increase of Mexican migration to the United States. Laws that set quota limits on the number of people entering from the eastern hemisphere transformed the immigrant labor system that had operated for a century whereby migrants from countries such as Ireland, Germany, and Italy had been arriving to the eastern seacoast occupying jobs there, as well as filling the swelling ranks of laborers setting out to the west. As scholars point out, immigration legislation was not meant to apply to the Western hemisphere, nor to contain Mexican migrants, much less to interfere with a southwestern labor system that was dependent on an inflow and outflow of Mexican labor. Yet emerging debates that revolved around exclusion, inclusion, and the regulation of Mexican migrant laborers reveal that the proposed federal legislation forced employers and state leaders to confront the perceived benefits and threats of Mexican migration and to define the functions of a flexible or closed border like they never had before. In contrast to the previous decade when there was more perceptible violence, the migrants were not received or categorized as refugees.

Thus, it could be said that 1920s legislation was most important as a symbolic starting point for debates about Mexican migration that have continued to this day. It should also be noted for being an extremely significant, but by no means the only factor that contributed to an increase of Mexican migration in the 1920s. From the perspectives of U.S. employers and some migrants, 1924 legislation, or rather the exclusion of Mexicans from the quota restrictions, might have seemed like a welcome call for Mexican labor and increased opportunities, but the overall
fortification of the border, changed the nature of border crossing and impacted migrants in significant ways.

The law restricted immigration to 155,000 a year overall and issued national quotas so that any one nation’s immigrants could total only two percent of that country’s population in 1890.126 Again, this limit did not apply to the Western Hemisphere and was primarily used to limit southern and eastern Europeans. Still the law kept the sometimes prohibitive fees that were introduced in 1917 ($10 head tax, and $8 visa), established a border patrol and made it so that anyone who had entered without documentation prior to July 1, 1924, could be deported without consideration of the conditions and the date of their entry. In other words, all migrants who had entered prior to 1924 without documentation—which included those who crossed where there were literally no gates of entry—could be subject to deportation. This not only criminalized many immigrants and migrants, it did so retroactively. The burden fell not on the state to protect and inspect the border, but rather onto the migrant to have had entered at a legal point of entry, when an inspector was on duty, to have had kept a record of their own entry or ensured that immigration officials had kept a record, even as methods of recording were constantly changing. It mattered little whether a migrant might have crossed with the absolutely clear intention of breaking the laws of another country by entering illegally, or that they crossed with the hopes of regularizing their status once they arrive, deportation would affect them in the same way.127

It is important to point out that even prior to the 1924 law, and since the 1917 law, the process of entering the United States became more bureaucratically complicated for those hoping

126 Mae Ngai, Impossible Subjects, 23.
127 Ibid, 64-74
to cross the border and reside there legally. As illustrated by the passport applications in chapter one, despite a porous border and flexible immigration inspection needed by southwest growers to fill labor needs, hundreds, if not thousands, of aspiring migrants, especially those from the interior of Mexico, made every attempt to fulfill legal requirements so as to not encounter difficulty at the border, or waste resources and time on a failed crossing. Throughout the 1920s migrants from Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima and Nayarit submitted visa applications and directed their questions to the U.S. Consulate at Guadalajara. Consuls fielded a range of questions about border crossings, visas, head taxes and other fees associated with migrating. Consuls received letters of recommendation for migrants such as those to attest for the honorable and non-political character of Mrs. Angela Zorrilla de la Torre, Ms. Enriqueta Aranda, Mrs. Guadalupe Garcia, and Mrs. Carmen Paez de Gutierrez, all of whom were going to visit or live with relatives. Letters like that for Mrs. Rosa Mendoza implied a knowledge of border conditions and gave clues to the range of means that migrants had for making the trip. After all, Mrs. Mendoza, as pointed out by the president of a local real estate company, had, “ample means for taking this trip and returning home.”

Crossing the border, was in effect, easy if you were able to read and write, were in good health, and had the money to pay your own head tax. At least, that is what Fernando Manzano Ybarra was told in a letter from consul McConnico in April 1924. Ybarra, writing from Tenamaxtlan, Jalisco in what could be characterized as a barely literate letter (himself apologizing for addressing the consul with no knowledge of orthography), expressed that he and

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128 NARA, RG 84 Consular posts Guadalajara Mexico, Volume 74, file no. 811.11
129 NARA, RG 84 Consular posts Guadalajara Mexico, Volume 74, file no. 811.11
various other men from his town wanted to go to the United States to “lend their services wherever needed.” He inquired about requirements to cross the border ‘without any disturbance,’ since he had heard about the “many difficulties” associated with going to the United States. A month after receiving information from the consul, Ybarra wrote again conveying that while he didn't think he would have a problem with requirements, he had been made aware by letters recently sent home that there was now a shortage of work opportunities. He desired a letter of recommendation from the consul so that even if this were true, he could cross without difficulty. The consul reassured him that he should be fine as long as he could fulfill requirements, he added that he should have proof of $50 savings that would support him in the U.S. while he looked for work. He also confirmed that the only shortages he had knowledge of were in Southern California, and that he should avoid going there. The proof of savings was viewed as a guarantee about Ybarra’s future economic standing and in order to prevent him from becoming a public charge.

With the rise of family migration, a wide variety of migrants, and dives motivations for crossing the border, consuls were inundated with questions which were not always easy to answer. The consul’s letter to Ybarra showed that the consul, knew of, and extended tacit support to, Ybarra’s goal of going to the United States in search of work. Never mind that Ybarra could not read or write well, that he was likely of the lower classes, and almost definitely unemployed or underemployed in his own country. In the 1920s, especially before the 1924 law, there was no concerted effort to prevent this kind of migration especially for single men. While family labor was required by some major agricultural sectors, from the perspective of the border and immigration agents, families faced a heavier burden of proof of acceptability, because they might
have included potentially non-laboring family members. They also faced the assumption that they could not support themselves while able-bodied men faced the assumption that they should always be able to support themselves.

The 1924 law shifted more duties to the consuls by having them predetermine migrant acceptability, which at times required extra diligence in understanding families and interacting with various family members. A circular outlining consular duties acknowledged the change stating, “From a study of its provisions it will be seen at once that the duties, authority and responsibilities of consular officers in connection with the execution of the restrictive immigration policy of the United States are greatly increased by this act.”¹³⁰ The circular then goes on to outline the changes that would specifically impact consular officials with at least two being of extreme importance in the case of Mexican immigrants. Consular officials in Mexico and at the border would need to help ensure that, “A clear distinction between the classes of travelers to the United States to whom passport visas are granted and those who desire to emigrate to the United States to reside permanently and who must obtain consular immigration visas.” This meant that consular officials in Guadalajara were tasked with making a clear distinction between those migrants seeking to go with the clear intention of only a temporary visit—no more than 6 months, and those who might end up staying for a longer period of time. The regularization of visas and quantitative determinations for length of stay required by bureaucratic procedures clashed with the unpredictable trajectories of migrants.

¹³⁰ Department of State- “Admissions of Aliens into the United States,” General INS. Consular No. 926- Diplomatic Serial No. 273, June 13, 1924. Received by American Consulate in Guadalajara, Mexico June 25th 1924 to the Diplomatic Officers of the United States. NARA
While, “the burden of proof of admissibility to the United States is placed upon the alien seeking admission,” the consular official was very much responsible for carefully determining whether the potential migrant or immigrant could be denied entry based on a number of exclusionary categories. The added burden to the migrant, and in some ways added burden to the consular official was that even if the (im)migrant was given a visa-they could still be denied entry upon arrival to the United States, which meant that in some cases migrants had to prove their case for admissibility twice. Administratively, it meant that consular officials had not the last say but perhaps only the first say in a migrant’s potential admissibility, and it created room for confusion among both migrants and government officials. The consular department acknowledged that officials would at times be placed in difficult positions and that, “apparent hardships may result to families or groups of aliens.” Consular officials would write constant petitions and appeals to clarify cases and they, in turn, had to field a host of petitions and appeals from aspiring migrants and migrant family members. The state department and consular service could perhaps not have fully anticipated the impact that new legislation, more rigorous criteria, and added administrative hoops would have on both consular officials and migrants, nor that it would create a unique emotional and social space where representatives of the state and migrant family members would meet to navigate the processes of binational living and migration together.

The law changed the nature of passports and visas in critical ways as well. The provisional passport solicited from a state governor was no longer required. The proof of admissibility was no longer a responsibility of Mexican officials. In-effect, migrants no longer needed a Mexican passport to enter the United States. The balance of State-migrant interaction
shifted to U.S. officials over Mexican officials except in very specific cases as will be explored later in the chapter. A Mexican passport no longer did anything to confirm or assure that the migrant would be accepted into the United States upon arrival. For, while letters of recommendation might attest to a migrant’s reputable character or perhaps demonstrate that the migrant would indeed return to Mexico and not stay on as an immigrant, approval or recommendation from the Mexican government alone was not enough to counter perceived reasons for exclusion, especially for those deemed likely to become a public charge.

The public charge exclusion was the most important exclusion that governed the border and the possibility that a Mexican migrant had of entering the country legally. This stemmed from the cyclical incidences of group repatriation and economic crisis that had already, albeit to a limited scale, impacted Mexicans in the U.S., their families in Mexico, and U.S.-Mexico border communities. The Public Charge exclusion of course applied to immigrants from all countries, and was a very clear indication that the U.S. government only wanted immigrants and even temporary visitors within the nations boundaries if they brought capital or labor. Its application to Mexico, however, carried with it more exceptions, especially to facilitate the flow of temporary labor and the exceptions led to a more subjective application of the law. The subjective nature of application meant that different immigration officials prior to 1924 and different consular officials after 1924, could make widely different judgements about the

131 The excludable categories of political affiliation were very critical during the armed phase of the revolution as was the contract labor exclusion at various points during the first two decades of the twentieth century, but during the 1920s, especially as Mexican labor restrictionists lost their battle to incorporate Mexican immigrants into the quota system—the strict application of the “likely to become a public charge” exclusion was encouraged so that those entering the United States as laborers could at the very minimum pay for the return back to their countries in the event of a shortage of labor opportunities. It is clear that various employers in the U.S. were able to have influence via the application of the Public Charge exclusion law.
potential earning capacity of a migrant and thus their approved entry into the United States. It also meant that officials could be influenced by unequal pressures in making their determinations.

The pressure brought on by a U.S. employer lobbying for the entry of necessary labor was, for example, very different from that of a family member assuring that the migrant in question would be a guaranteed wage earner or that they had family members that would provide completely for their livelihood. It is worth noting that family members at times vouched as employers of their migrant family members. Subjective application of the law, meant that people of influence such as diplomats, or business partners could influence, and possibly bribe officials, to overlook proof that might otherwise exclude migrants.132

Variations in the application of the law were also based on gendered understandings of wage-earning, appropriate head of households, and expectations of family providers. An added provision came into the 1924 law that made subjective determinations more objective—but the law still carried an added burden of proof for migrant families and women. According to the provision, an immigrant that was otherwise admissible could be admitted by the Secretary of Labor “upon giving a bond or putting up a cash deposit, under terms laid down by the Secretary, holding the United States harmless against such alien becoming a public charge.” The rule most likely was used to placate U.S. employers who could use the opportunity to sponsor cheap labor

132 Although I have yet to find a case where a person of influence pushes their weight to try and prevent a person’s migration, the possibility exists that the subjective nature of the law could allow for that as well. While, the concept of political patronage and favorable labor contracts and migration status does not present itself clearly until the Bracero contract era, it is worth considering, especially during the Obregón and Calles period, as patronage politics was forging a number of political alliances, that Mexican politicians could influence Mexican and U.S. immigration officials.
but families could also take advantage of the rule to aid those who were suspected or thought to have,

insufficient funds to afford support until arrival at final destination or until employment could be secured; advanced age and no responsible friends or relatives; crippled condition; limited earning power and numerous dependents; a plain intention not to work but to depend on wits and chance for a living; addiction to drink or gambling—these and similar conditions brought out in the course of examination of an applicant would justify refusal of an immigration visa on the grounds that he was likely to become a public charge.133

In August of 1924 the consul at Nogales, Arizona relayed to the consul at Guadalajara that the brothers of 20 year-old Andrea Torres signed an affidavit stating that Andrea was not likely to become a public charge. Given a recommendation from the Consul of Guadalajara after collecting information on Andrea Torres from the municipal president of the Mexican town in which she had resided, the affidavit from her brothers who worked in Ray, Arizona was enough to sanction her migration. Andrea’s manifest recorded on October 24, 1924, (at least three months after arriving to the border) indicates that she was traveling alone, the occupation listed for her was “domestic,” and that her brother paid for passage. In the box indicating “time expected in the U.S.,” she had stated that she intended to reside in the U.S. Andrea had the money to pay the head tax could read and write, and technically had a job as a domestic (as opposed to “none”) and even indicated that she had $120 in savings, and yet she was still held up at the border and further action involving, two consuls, the municipal president of Ameca, and her brothers’ affidavit in order to prove that she was unlikely to become a public charge. Being a

133 “Admission of Aliens into the United States” General Ins. Consular No. 926 Diplomatic Serial No. 273 June 13 1924. Issued by the Department of state & received by the American Consulate in Guadalajara, Mexico June 25th 1924. NARA RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts; Consular Posts, Guadalajara Mexico Volume 92.
single woman, traveling alone, and perhaps looking of a certain class made Andrea subject to more scrutiny. The fact that an affidavit from her male brothers—with no assurance to their likelihood of becoming public charges—is another example of the patriarchy inherent in border policy. It is worth considering whether an affidavit from a female family member would have carried the same weight.

Especially the condition outlined by the phrase “limited earning power and numerous dependents” could be very easily understood as gendered and pertaining mostly to women. But even a cash deposit, bond, or affidavit would not be sufficient to counter suspicions of someone whose visual appearance suggested destitution. If a migrant was suspected of not having enough money to arrive to their final destination, the “responsible” nature of a relative or friend of an elderly person could be called into question. Furthermore, “limited earning power” lacked clear explanation, and quite ironically considering the boot-straps version of the American dream, wits and chance alone were not enough to counter any perceptions that one was likely to become a financial burden on the community or state that they were destined for. The danger to this course of determination was that racial perceptions and stereotypes equating Mexicans to poverty, which had increasingly spread in the U.S., and made the challenges to entry more formidable than ever before. To ensure against the challenges and potential rejection and consequent personal crises at the border, much in the same way that aspiring migrants did with their passport applications in the 1920s, migrants and their family members (desiring legal admittance) wrote

134 NARA RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts; Consular Posts, Guadalajara Mexico Volume 90.
to state officials, put their best foot forward, and hoped that they would eventually reach their destinations.

Evidence of family migration can be found in consular papers of the U.S. consulate at Guadalajara. Just as passports from the early 1920s revealed, Mexicans undertook migration journeys across the border together as family units but also as part of chain migration, a phenomenon which consists of a few relatives migrating first with the intention of playing a role in the subsequent migrations of family members. In November of 1924, Angel Flores, temporarily stopping over in Nogales, Sonora wrote to his consular district officer in Guadalajara to advise him that he intended to go to Santa Paula, California accompanied by his brother and wife, asking for “permission necessary at this border in order to proceed.”

Flores had already worked in the United States for a year before returning attempting to return to the states with his relatives. The fact that Angel Flores had to write to the consul implied that he had encountered trouble at the border and was told that he needed permission from his consular district. Consul Dwyre replied to Angel that he must present his case to the consul at Nogales since it was impossible for him to get immigration visas without applying in person for entry. Either as a result of the change in law since the last time he had crossed, or perhaps because he was accompanied by his brother and wife who had not previously entered the United States, Angel had to initiate a new bureaucratic process with the State. Stricter enforcement of the law meant that Angel’s time as a resident in the U.S. did not exempt him from regularizing his status;

135 NARA RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts; Consular Posts, Guadalajara Mexico Volume 90.
strengthened deportation laws required him to do so in an era of increasingly formalized migration.

Angel’s case as well as other cases of family migration also show how family unit and chain migration could bring migrants into contact with the state more than lone migrations. Adolfo García Gómez’ letter, written in October of 1924 from San Luis Obispo, California states “Having decided to marry here, and finding that my future wife is there [Guadalajara] I ask that you inform me of the requisites that she needs to start the journey to this country without setback.” In this case the consul replied to Adolfo suggesting that his fiancé “call at this consulate, and she will be given all the information necessary.” Letters such as Adolfo’s were purely informational and characterize much of the correspondence throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Even such simple requests illustrate instances of family migration, and provide insights into migrant questions that were generated during an era of evolving border and immigration legislation. Such letters also illustrate the extent to which U.S. consuls served as vital allies to migrants as they navigated their binational livelihoods and journeys. The 1920s marked only the beginning of this peculiar relationship between migrant families and consuls abroad, and the limits of diplomatic officials would be tested during the economic crisis of the 1930s.

Consular correspondence during the 1920s illustrates how in the middle of the busiest decade ever for Mexican migration, U.S. immigration legislation led to new debates, a policed border, new migration strategies and an overall increased selectivity. Labor and perceived transience was preferred at the border. Money to cross, health of body and mind, and overall

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136 NARA RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts; Consular Posts, Guadalajara Mexico Volume 90.
perceived usefulness to the country defined the admissible and thus the legal migrant. The burden of legal requirements increased, as did illegal immigration—not only represented by an increase of illicit crossings but also by growing culture of extralegal forgeries, bribes, and corruption. A treasury official near the Mexican border claimed that 75% of inhabitants in Ciudad Juarez were somehow involved in the business of contraband, “Los contrabandos de hombres son enormes. En las plazas públicas y en todos los centros andan los conrabandistas o coyotes recogiendo gente para pasarla ilegalmente al lado americano. Casi siempre cobran de los cinco dólares por persona para introducirlas. Infinidad de Mexicanos pasan en forma ilegal al lado Americano porque se ven la imposibilidad de pagar 18 dolares que les cobran por la visa del pasaporte y por el head tax.” The consul pointed out that most smugglers were native to the region and thus knew the landscape and how to smuggle men, women, and merchandise. Migrants that had once entered illegally like Gregoria Ayala later felt the pressure to pay the 18 dollars when re-entering the United States so that she could reenter legally. Although she eventually regularized her status upon a subsequent entry, her first entry was facilitated by a coyote who charged her only 10 dollars to cross the river as opposed to the $18. Gregoria, like many other migrants entered legally and illegally at various times throughout their life. Even those who had lived in the U.S. for years only to return to Mexico for temporary visits sometimes were harangued to pay their fees again.

Despite new obstacles for experienced and new border-crossers, migrants continued to leave Mexican communities fueling growing cross-border movement. Observers on the Mexican

137 Gamio, 236
138 See Gamio interview with Señor Sandoval, 160-161 and interview with Gregoria Ayala, 184-186.
side of the border also began to direct their attention to the impact that emigration was having on Mexico. Consuls did not comment extensively on the impact that migration was having on local communities which begs questions about either the visibility of such migrations, or the scale of knowledge that consuls had about local communities, but community impact beyond the impact on state resources of migration office can be found in Mexican newspaper reports and editorials lamenting the exodus. In editorials throughout the 1920s, emigration was related to the foremost problems thought to be plaguing the nation including policies regarding labor (article 123), education, and land redistribution.

The View from West Central Mexico

Migration in the second half of the decade turned into an uncontrollable force that observers, Mexican officials, and communities alike were forced to reckon with. In May of 1924 in the ‘commentaries of the day’ section of El Informador an entry simply titled "Emigration" read, "the emigration of Mexican peons who go to the United States is contained by no one. It's a curious phenomenon. At issue is a contagious suggestion that because of being well paid and happy in some businesses, the recruiter arrives or the letter of some friend who is getting paid a lot of money in Chicago and they leave without listening to reason."139 The author went on to state that if immigrants had been reasonable they would have realized that there were still jobs left in Mexico and they would not be foolish enough to just leave their homes on blind faith or lofty promises. After all, there were job opportunities in places like La Laguna where one could

139 El Informador, May 13, 1924
earn, "3 pesos daily." The commentary elucidates some of the major themes characterizing the phenomenon of migration, 1) that it was an uncontained phenomenon, 2) that the knowledge or rumor of good wages was widespread, and 3) letters and reports from friends served as a type of informal recruitment that was already operating independently or in concert with more traditional forms of recruitment.

Although Mexico began to see the first signs of real economic growth and hopes of political stability by the mid-1920s, emigration to the United States had become a more permanent feature in some communities than ever before. Just as increased labor opportunities and the proliferation of family networks and affective ties between migrants across the border contributed to an upturn in migration in 1927, conditions in Mexico also contributed to the outflow. Immigration entries as recorded by the U.S. government show that Mexican immigration in the fiscal years of 1926 and 1927, and 1927 and 1928, surpassed immigration during the earlier part of the decade. In years immediately preceding the onset of the Great Depression, conditions in both countries were such that migration continued apace. Despite an effort toward delivering on the constitution, a peaceful transition of power between President Obregón and President Calles, upturn in economy within the first two years of Calle’s presidency (1924 to 1926), and a soft de-escalation of violence by way of appeasing revolutionary generals with political spoils, many regions in Mexico were still marked with economic and political instability.

140 1926-1927 66,766 equalling 19.9% of total admitted, 1927-1928 57,765 equalling 18.8% of total admitted. In actual numbers these years were similar to 1923 and 1924 but made up less of total immigrants into the United States. “Mexicans in California Report of Governor C.C. Young’s Mexican Fact-Finding Committee,” 1930, pg. 20.
The West Central region of Mexico witnessed continued conflagrations throughout the 1920s and the state of Jalisco, in particular experienced deep political tensions as evidenced by it having 12 governors in 10 years, being one of the most significant stages for the 1924 De La Huertista rebellion, and it being a hotbed of the Cristero War revealing the strong anti-regime sentiments. Despite, or perhaps because, of having a radical revolutionary and loyal Obregonista governor, between 1923 and 1926, many Jaliscenses were caught up in the violence exchanged by radicalism and fanaticism of pro-government partisans one side and pro-Catholic church interests on the other. As in other parts of central western Mexico such as Michoacán the violence that that emerged as a result of the Cristero War was as much about the defense of a regional power structure from the over reach of a centralizing state as it was about the defense of Catholicism. And with the state of Jalisco having a particular and historical regionally independent-streak, the 1920s proved to be a dynamic era ripe with anti-government grievances, increased industrialism and rural to urban migration, and contentious agrarianism; all of which provided the backdrop for the largest emigrant exodus seen yet.141

While there were jobs in some places like La Laguna, where the cotton industry was growing, other regions were suffering from a severe shortage of labor opportunities. For some Mexicans, revolutionary promises had been delivered in the form of ejidos and the potential for land reform, but for others, reform policies signaled the demise of local autonomy and the downturn of economic production. Violence was sporadic and spread out but emblematic of the

continued struggle for power by regional challengers. Discontent was most obviously manifest in the few attempted coups and the bloody Cristero wars in the central western states that would take hold of the migrant sending heartland in 1927. Even before the Cristero wars rocked Jalisco, the exodus was directly connected to high levels of underemployment thought to be a result of national policies of agrarian reform.

Actual land redistributed in Jalisco through policies of agrarian reform were not nearly as substantial as in other areas of Mexico such a Morelos but some land was redistributed as early as 1915 as a way of ending conflicts between indigenous communities and nearby haciendas, but mostly as a way for Carranza to shore up support and cut into Villa and Zapata’s base. These early instances of land redistribution that continued through 1920 and redistribution under Governor Zuno’s (1923-1926) gave momentum to groups of agraristas, causing concern to large landholders, ranchers, and small landholders alike. Early conflicts between agraristas and landholders led to violence in places like Ocotlán, Jalisco during the first half of the 1920s. The violence and tension that impacted Jalisco strengthened emigration trends that were already in place.

Arandas, which already had sent migrants—usually the sons of businessmen, tailors and small land holders—in the first two decades of the twentieth century, saw widespread emigration when the Cristero War broke out. Sharecroppers, and ranch laborers rebelled against the central government in defense of the Catholic Church, culture, and traditional hierarchies of power.

142 Tamayo, Los movimientos sociales, 1917-1929,162. More research is needed to bare out a direct connection between pre-cristero violence and emigration in the region, but it is worth noting that Ocotlán was one of the most notable emigrant sending regions in 1920 revealed through passport applications, see Chapter 1.
Agraristas did not gain much traction in towns like Arandas, like San Jose de Gracia in Michoacán that had already experienced the breakup of large land into smaller units of production through inheritance. When the tension between agraristas and the defenders of land, tradition, and church spilled over to engulf the Center west in the Cristero wars, Arandanses either left or fought to defend traditional forms of landholding and power. Nevertheless, the war would have a devastating effect in the region.

Paul Taylor documented that some 1200 Arandenses emigrated to the United States in the years between 1926 and 1929. The Cristero war hit the region particularly hard. Those Cristeros actively defending the Catholic Church and the local structure of power against the federal troops and agraristas took control of Arandas in 1927. Guerrilla war and an onslaught of federal power and draconian measures to root out Cristero rebels led to destructive violence and terror for the community’s inhabitants. Throughout Los Altos de Jalisco in general, the federal government congregated the region’s populations into towns as a strategy to more effectively fight against the Cristeros, but also kept Alteños from working haciendas, thus creating dire circumstances, and forcing many to move to other parts of Mexico and especially to the United States.

Taylor’s assertion, “Thus, a religious motive became an important incentive to emigration from Arandas” is certainly true, and religious exiles certainly migrated to the United States, but in general, it was the economic and social dislocations caused by violence and a

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143 Although there are similarities between San Jose de Gracia and Arandas with regard to land tenure patterns, ranching, and roles in the Cristero wars, a key difference is that Arandas had been sending emigrants to the United States for decades, whereas San Jose de Gracia did not experience emigration until after the Cristero wars.

144 *Arandas*, Paul Taylor 37-40

disruption to the production of goods that led to emigration. In short, the Cristero wars accelerated emigration in places where it had already existed. Emigration to the United States had become an increasingly viable option for Mexicans throughout the Center west. Whether due to wages, family connections, or simply because there was more security for labor and life than in surrounding regions, Mexicans in the center west continued to migrate north. For example, a Sugar hacienda in Nogueras, Colima reportedly suffered a shortage of workers because their workers had been emigrating to the United States. Rather than look for jobs in surrounding areas during the offseason, workers began to go to the United States. Due to a scarcity of workers, the hacienda was forced to operate at reduced capacity. Emigrants began bypassing nearby cities and looked directly to the U.S.

Other factors that coincided with the Cristero War and that were as specific and acute as draught, flood and crop blight continued to provoke the migration of campesinos. On June 6, 1927, an article from a leading Guadalajara newspaper titled “Many Mexicans suffer misery in the U.S,” reported on what was by now a familiar theme, too many Mexican workers, “braceros Mexicanos”, were going to border cities only to be stranded for lack of proper documents and resources. While the theme was familiar and had at various times over the past decade prompted officials to try and stem the tide of workers by using newspaper propaganda, the immediacy and seriousness of the problem was conveyed by the fact that the Chamber of Commerce in Nogales, Arizona had written to the Department of Commerce, Industry, and mining of Guadalajara, Jalisco to specifically communicate their concerns about the hundreds of workers who had

146 “Se anuncia la inauguracion del Ferrocarril sud-pacifico para el domingo 17 de los corrientes.” April 9, 1927 El Informador. “Corespondencia de Arrandas: 30% de las cosechas se perdió” Jan 6, 1926
streamed into Nogales, many of them without legal documents. The letter that was published in the newspaper so that its warning and suggestions could reach aspiring migrants in Guadalajara. It opened, “With the opening of the new rail connection in Guadalajara, the traffic of passengers toward this port has resulted in many people coming from Jalisco to the United States by rail through Nogales. An abnormal number of individuals are now coming from the state of Jalisco to look for work.” The main recommendation issued by the Nogales Department of Commerce was for migrants to go to the U.S. consulate before leaving Guadalajara so they would not be stranded at border once being refused entry into the U.S. Not only was it significant that the numbers of migrants were increasing, but that those without proper documents were increasing as well. It is also significant that local department of commerce wrote to one in Mexico, suggesting that regional authorities were much quicker to seek solutions to the mass influx of migration, and any problems that might have ensued.

*Taking Notice: Connecting Emigration to the failings of the State*

The material threats of violence and substandard means of living certainly played a role in migration, but observers and editorialists were much quicker to blame the increased emigration on post-revolution reform and politics surrounding land redistribution as opposed to enganchadores and deceptive labor recruiters from the North. It’s difficult to pinpoint the degree to which migrants attributed to their own exits to the changing political and economic landscape

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147 “Muchos Mexicanos sufren Miseria en EE.UU,” *El Informador*, Guadalajara, Jalisco, June 6th 1927, pages 1 & 5. Trains connecting Guadalajara directly to Nogales began running April 17th, 1927 less than two months before the noticeable increase in migrants as indicated by Nogales department of Commerce.
but editorials of the era suggest that observers certainly began to connect the emigration of hundreds of thousands of productive workers to failings of the State. At the very least, laments over emigration became a tool by which to lodge grievances against the government during President Calles’ term and subsequent Maximato.

Guadalajara editorials mentioned in chapter one confirm that observers blamed agrarianism. Other editorials from the latter part of the 1920s suggest that observers from the sending state also blamed national and local governments and reform politics for the emigration of their countrymen and women. The tones taken in the editorials reflect a general dissatisfaction with government, and conforms to a general resistance to federal authority prevalent in Jalisco. The authors of the articles certainly seem to capitalize on the problem of emigration in order to throw blame at the central government, but their arguments provide insight into the broader social changes, the politics of the time, and a shifting economy that might have led some Mexicans to pioneer north or join family members abroad.

One editorial pointed out that despite the concessions given to workers as outlined by the progressive article 123 of the Mexican constitution, workers continued to leave.\textsuperscript{148} While the Calles government did make a commitment to increase wages and allow for strikes, several independent labor unions were bribed and coerced into joining the federally affiliated CROM. In fact, while workers might have been supported in some sectors, such as cotton, in others, workers faced repression and layoffs. Workers affiliated with the Confederación de Sociedades Ferrocaríleros (Confederation of Railroad Societies) suffered a reduction of wages by 25% and

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{El Informador}, March 17, 1925
four thousand workers were fired. So while, some concessions were given to laborers, those concessions did not prevent massive unemployment, and in some cases even fueled it.

Another hallmark reform of the Calles administration was critiqued and correlated to the emigration of Mexicans: Education. An editorial on September 24, 1926 in the Guadalajara newspaper, *El Informador* brought attention to the fact that an increased number of Mexican students were being enrolled in schools across the Rio Bravo in Texas. The rumor that 10 million Mexican students (however exaggerated the claim was) were attending school in El Paso alone prompted the author to point out that the education of future Mexicans abroad posed a potential threat to Mexican nationalism. Emigration was thus contemplated as a threat to Mexico’s future as well as Mexico’s present. The reform government’s proposals for education became emblematic of a post-revolutionary people’s struggle for personal and community autonomy. Education, a most important and noble political priority, and a critically effective tool of propaganda, became a new battle ground for the ideologues, a stage for the impending religious conflict, and as noted by the author of the editorial, an important measure of freedom that could also impact one’s desire to participate or abscond from the national project, “What is to be done about the emigration of students and workers that causes us such harm? In the first place, to grant true educational freedom so that parents might elect the school that is most appropriate for their children following their convictions and beliefs which are completely within their right to express. In the second place, the adults should make life inside the home pleasant.”

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150 *El Informador*, September 24, 1926.
The call for educational freedom was representative of a reaction toward the federal government’s effort to extend more and more power from the center. Along with reforms in education, labor, the redistribution of land, the Calles administration also created a National Bank, and nationalized railroads. The federal government’s emphasis on building up infrastructure through road building was part of a larger effort to stimulate industrialization and exports. Mid-decade the country witnessed a growing economy but by 1926 a slow economic decline paired with an increasingly intrusive state brought on critiques toward the government. In the same article that lamented increased numbers of Mexicans receiving education in the United States, the author pointed out the weakness of an increasingly centralized government, and its failures to contain emigration.

“That all of us Mexicans live happily in our land, so that there is prosperity and work for all, it’s necessary for our governments to carefully study the idiosyncrasy of the people and their needs. And once they’ve done so, so as to not contradict the will of the people and to provide necessities as much as possible. If despite that emigration continues, then the Government wouldn’t be at all responsible, well they would have done everything they should have.”

As articulated by the author of the editorial, emigration did not simply signal a failure of government, rather it marked the incongruence between state led reform and the will of the people. The spaces created by the disjuncture between the state and the people, perpetuated by idiosyncratic pueblos, and brought into stunning relief by the blunt overreach of the state, resulted in the growth of corporative groups loosely or tightly affiliated with government and

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151 See Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Schools and Peasants in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987) for a description of the contested educational programs of the Cardenista period and the ways in which communities used state rhetoric to advocate for local demands related to education.

152 *El Informador*, September 24, 1926.
momentous demand for more reform. That disjuncture shaped the negotiations of those who stayed, but critically also influenced the lives and the trajectories of those who left. The government was not only expected to appropriately study and know its regions and population, but also to serve its needs in a way fitting of its newly reasserted democratic ideals. That is, not to force the will of a tyrant, oligarchies, or regional strongmen, but to absorb and respect a wide-ranging will of its people. The government arguably came to know and provide concessions some regions over others, and the editorial author from Guadalajara, saw Jalisciences as being left out.

Another observer from Guadalajara did not see the situation changing, and a peaceful transition of power began to represent simply a continuation of the status quo or apathy toward a range of issues that were not being addressed including emigration. During the 1927 Presidential campaign an editorialist suggested that the three candidates differed little in their solutions for critical issues such as emigration, stating that they “pass over like hot embers the huge problem that needs to be resolved so that our country does not continue to bleed; so that our wealth does not continue to emigrate, so that the exodus of workers and capitalists is contained.”

Emigration increasingly became the subject of Mexican editorials and even student debate. There was for example, a national student debate contest in July of 1928 that was dedicated to the topic of Mexican Emigration to the United States. And yet even as the topic of emigration began to capture more public attention, it lacked an easy solution, and a clear policy from the Mexican government.

153 El Informador, July 11, 1927
154 El Informador, July 5, 1928 “la gente culta y conocedora del ambiente laborista en los Estados Unidos”
Preventing the Exodus

The Mexican Office of Migration only slowly began to involve itself actively in the regulation of migrant exodus toward the late 1920s and even then was primarily involved with regulating immigration into Mexico, policing for undesirables much in the same way that the U.S. government did, and dealing with the smuggling of unwanted people and untaxed or illegal products into national territory.\(^\text{155}\) By March of 1925 the Secretary of the Interior had established two new offices of migration in Torreón and Saltillo, both in the state of Coahuila. The creation of these offices revealed the government’s tolerance and acceptance of emigration and it sought to ensure that emigrants complied with the laws of both the U.S. and Mexican governments. But these offices were also specifically created to better the distribution of migrants in the U.S. so that critical masses would not overwhelm certain destination cities subsequently leaving the unemployed vulnerable to repatriation.\(^\text{156}\) The two offices of migration would work closely with the Ferrocarriles Nacionales to carry out a policy that had been recommended in 1923 by Secretary of Gobernacion Calles, whereby the sale of second class train tickets would be regulated so that train tickets might be sold only to those who had already fulfilled U.S. immigration requirements.\(^\text{157}\) As the case of Ana María Hernandez de Cantu demonstrates these tactics simply did not work.

\(^{155}\) *El Informador*, Nov 3 1925
\(^{156}\) *El Informador*, March 3, 1925 "Serán creadas dos nuevas agencias de migración"

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Ana Maria Hernandez de Cantu along with her two young children journeyed north and presented herself before Mexican migration agents in Saltillo, Coahuila to arrange the proper documentation and obtain a pass (alternatively referred to as a ticket or identification card) to cross the border. She was planning on returning to the United States where her husband lived. She had come to Mexico two months prior, probably to pick up her daughter (or perhaps give birth to her) and take her back with her to Austin, Texas. She ran into difficulties when the migration officer told her that she wouldn’t have sufficient money to cross especially with the added cost of a $10 visa for her daughter. He didn’t authorize her documents. She ran into further trouble when she couldn’t provide the U.S. consul with a birth certificate for her daughter, thus failing to get her a passport.

Against the migration agent’s suggestion of getting in contact with her husband to have him send her more money, Ana Maria instead went back the next day to the migration office without her daughter, explaining that her daughter would no longer be making the trip. With this lie she succeeded in getting a pass for herself and her son and hopped onto a Pullman car heading north. Ana Maria never sent her daughter away and when migrant agent Gustavo Aguila saw her with both children on board the train and realized that he had been “deceived,” he forcibly removed the family from the train. Despite Aguila’s objections the train conductor, after successful convincing by Ana Maria, refunded her tickets in full. The incident actually led to a fall out between the migration agent and rail employees, which perhaps benefitted Ana Maria in
the end. Within two months, she had made it to Austin, Texas where she actually lodged a formal complaint against the migration agent for poor conduct.\footnote{INAMI 4-353-2-1925-5A}

The Mexican government had no real mechanism for preventing emigration, but it also might not have sought to turn off the escape valve that saved it from intervening in even more local land and labor conflicts. The community president of Etúcuaro in Michoacán wrote a letter to his state agriculture committee (which was passed on to the Office of Migration) complaining about the exodus of workers in his community. He specifically demanded that a neighboring municipality stop giving his community members provisional passes to migrate, and suggested that migration agents 875 kilometers away in the state of Nuevo Leon prevent the crossing of his community members into the United States. He was willing to send a list of names to facilitate the blocking of this exodus. The matter was redirected toward the state governor instead; migrant officials had plenty of work ahead of them by trying to monitor the stream of migrants at various points on their northward journey. Government officials at various levels passed on the responsibility preventing the northward exodus to other officials. During the 1920s, U.S. employers and contractors with more capital and transportation infrastructure were winning in the contest for Mexican laborers, and the Mexican government was not able to do much to ameliorate the situation for the Mexican labor contractors and employers who were losing out.

Mexican communities were losing out as well. The commentary section of El Informador supplied a witty, if not disparaging remark on what the "feminine exodus" or "éxodo mujeril" meant to communities. "Un periódico da la noticia un tanto cuanto alarmante de que..."
solamente por Ciudad Juárez, están saliendo mil mujeres diariamente con destino a Los Estados Unidos. Pues señor nos estás sin faldas; y eso que ya ella se habían quedado antes por efecto de la moda actual, que ha reducido tal incremento a sus mínimas proporciones. Hay que poner remedio al éxodo de mujeres; por que un pueblo de puros hombres sería un puchero sin sal. Mal con ellas, peor sin ellas.\textsuperscript{159}

That 1000 women would be leaving daily through Ciudad Juárez, although likely exaggerated is still striking. The exodus of women was clearly alarming and inappropriate for gendered expectations of migration. The author calls for a remedy to the exodus of women from Jalisco communities stating, “a town with only men would be like a stew with no salt: bad with women but worse without them. The emigration from Arandas noticeably became more of a family affair, "all the cars and buses going to San Francisco Rincón, Guanajuato are going with passengers solely for the purpose of going (to the United States), some with families,” began to provide detail to the seemingly voiceless and faceless emigrants of the previous decade.\textsuperscript{160}

While U.S. employers were starting to welcome laborer wives that accompanied laborer husbands, the family and female exodus was drawing concern and shock in sending communities. The full extent and ramification of the migrant exodus, families would not be felt until the Great Depression sent most of them back.

Conclusion

Mexican immigrants and migrants coming to the United States in the 1920s witnessed the expansion of work opportunities, increased border regulation, and the proliferation of social

\textsuperscript{159} El Informador, February 1927
\textsuperscript{160} El Informador April 4, 1927.
networks. Despite new restrictions at the border and more exclusive U.S. immigration policy, Mexican legal migration in the 1920s was more than double that of the previous decade. Work opportunities and wages still remained higher in the U.S. and Mexico, and consular correspondence and migrant testimonies reveal that family networks continued to encourage and facilitate migration. The use of Mexican labor and specifically Mexican family labor in agriculture made space for the waves of new migrants, and inspired still more to come. Thus the growth of Mexican communities and social networks in combination with the need for family labor truly defined the decade of the 1920s as a decade when a range of migrants with varying social statuses, ages, gender, origins and destinations made their way across an ever-changing border.

The volume of emigrants paired with the new U.S. legislation governing migration and Mexican efforts to prevent border cities from being overwhelmed by migrant traffic made it exceedingly clear to Mexican officials that Mexican migrations tested intergovernmental, interregional, and binational cooperation. Mexicans who left were not simply immigrants going abroad to try to live or to labor elsewhere. They were leaving in family units or on their own; sometimes they would return back to their places of origin, or sometimes their journeys would take a multitude of directions and stops. The movement of people out of their communities and into others challenged traditional boundaries and notions of community resources and labor distribution, especially if the presence or absence of migrants was great enough to impact the labor market. But with growing unemployment, threats to community stability by both radical agraristas and fanatical cristeros, a slow economic decline beginning in 1926, the extending powers of the federal government, and narrow-sighted reforms the exodus could not be stopped.
The 1920s, a decade described with terms like ‘roaring’, ‘boom’ and ‘abundance,’ proved to either set Mexican migrants on a course of stability and permanence on the one hand or a course for deportation and disaster and the other. Neither migrants, their family members, nor either government could have imagined the paralyzing effect that the Great Depression would have on Mexican migration to the U.S.
CHAPTER III
The Great Depression and The Great Return

In 1931, during the height of the Great Depression, thousands of Mexican families boarded trains in the United States and headed to their former home towns in Mexico. The stifling economic crisis compelled thousands of migrants to journey back south across the border where they sought reprieve from the insecurity and massive unemployment that struck ferociously at the land of plenty. The reputed abundance found in the City of Angels (and its unincorporated areas) was on the wane. William Nuñez, a U.S. citizen, born in El Paso, Texas to Mexican parents, was only eleven when he had to leave his hometown of Belvedere, California. He was one of thousands of children that were swept up in return migration. William's stay in Mexico would be temporary. By 1940 he had made his way back to the country of his birth, where at the age of twenty, he worked as a 'vegetable man' in a hotel kitchen. His sister worked for a luggage company and together they supported their elderly parents and the family household that they had been compelled to leave nearly a decade earlier in Belvedere, California.\(^{161}\)

We can't be certain of what the train ride from Los Angeles to the Mexican border town of Ciudad Juárez would have been like for 11 year-old William Nuñez, what he was leaving behind, and what he knew, if anything, about the Mexico he would make his new home. Like the one-hundred and fifty other passengers riding the train through Ciudad Juárez on the twenty-

second day of October 1931, he would be leaving one home to find another, and learning what it was like to live on both sides of the border. William's return was one of the many journeys during an era of economic turmoil and restrictive national borders. Despite the challenges of border crossing during the depths of the Great Depression there existed a lush landscape of migrant mobility. Eleven-year old William Nuñez, who had left his country of origin and childhood home in 1931 only to return again as a young man, lived that reality.

For William, the journey back to Mexico was not simply a “repatriation.” The term is used to describe the voluntary or involuntary return of the many Mexican citizens to their home country. The era of Mexican migration between 1930 and 1933 is best known as the era of repatriation, as there were, of course many Mexican citizens that returned to Mexico for a variety of reasons. There were also many deportations, which in addition to splitting up families had the devastating effect of preventing the legal reentry to the United States of those who were deported. There were traumatic returns, and family separations, and the removal of some immigrants was conducted illegally and in the margins of law where migrants found themselves vulnerable to the shifting attitudes of their host nation. William’s status as a United States citizen allows us to see his journey as just one of many possible cross-border migrations. To

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capture the many different circumstances and migrations, it is best to characterize this era as one of return.

An examination of the era of return migration reveals to us how heightened nativism during the United States’ economic crisis and evolving border legislation responding to foreign elements led to the exclusion and physical return and removal of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans from the U.S. World War I, the uncertainty that came with it, and the demographic transformations across the world and within countries were memories from the not so distant past. Human dislocations were not new or even greater than before, but on the U.S.-Mexico border the movement of people was being subject to more regulation that was experimental in practice and short-sighted in concept. The life cycles of migrants and their families shaped migrations alongside labor shifts and the search for a living wage. All the while domestic bureaucracies were dealing with national issues, and diplomatic agents were tasked with political and economic duties that did not always take into consideration the actual people who were streaming across borders and creating their own adaptations in a changing world.

Through studying this era of such great mobility, the multiple paths and lived experiences of migrant families are revealed. The details garnered from the lives of those who boarded trains back to Mexico reveal life histories otherwise seldom told. On the one hand, we find a number of migrants that by all accounts might have made one or two migrations in their lifetimes, on the other hand we find evidence of migrants and families that embarked on international and internal migrations to such a high degree that we begin to understand cross-border movement as part of a broader and planned out strategy for economic and social livelihood—one defined and determined by migrants themselves, and not always just the historical events that we are conditioned to
believing shape human action. The migration journeys in and of themselves, as revealed through return train manifests and migrant correspondence, illustrate the broad geographic scope of Mexican migration during the 1920s and 30s and encourages us to see the binational and borderland landscapes.

William Nuñez reminds us of the many children who were either born to Mexican migrant parents while in the United States, or who made the journey with their parents during the boom decade of Mexican family migration. Growing opportunities for Mexican migrant families, burgeoning Mexican-American communities, and increased integration into the economic and social fabric of the United States in the 1920s resulted in a large group of United States residents facing devastating economic conditions and family separations in the 1930s. While we are able to speculate about the migration journey(s) William’s family undertook we are left with other questions. Were he and his parents forced to go to Mexico or did they choose to take advantage of a subsidized trip back across the border? Possibly. However, several of his family members remained in the United States. The train manifest that records their departure lists William, his sister, and his mother and father as returning to Mexico. However, he had seven other siblings that lived with him and his parents in his 1930 Belvedere house, and it is important to note that the family owned rather than rented their house. His father was unemployed from his job in construction but William’s siblings worked in a macaroni factory, a trunk factory, a paper factory and one was a cabinet maker in a furniture factory. The fact that, despite the economic hardship that plagued so many Americans, William returned to his family home in 1940 shows that his family was able to maintain home ownership. Was the return to Mexico a choice of elderly parents who saw a better future for their two youngest children—still
of school age-in Mexico, or was it meant to be a temporary move to ride out the economic crisis? If the Mexican Revolution had failed families in the 1910s and 1920s, were uprooted Mexican families now suffering from a failing economic system in the United States?

William’s story forces us to ask more questions about why people moved across borders and illustrates the diversity in motive and life circumstance. It also reminds us of the diversity of experiences within migrant families. In William’s family he was the only sibling born in the United States. In contrast to his eight siblings who were born in the Mexican state of Durango where his parents were also born, William was born in El Paso, Texas. Birthplaces of the children document the migrations of the family. In this case it appears the family seemed to make a fairly straightforward migration to Texas in 1916 where William was born and one more migration to Belvedere, California by 1930. For other migrants and families, the migrations were many and when seen together weave a vibrant tapestry of human movement, survival, and adaptation.

The era of return thus illustrates much more than a conflicted era of U.S. border and immigration policy, strained diplomacy, and the potential heartache of uprooting one’s life out of desperation, or by force. Some return migrations were likely exceptional, but others also fit within a context of established migrant strategies and should be normalized so as to give more understanding to the complexities of Mexican migration-the bidirectional and multidirectional, the planned, the ad hoc, those governed by social relationships, those governed by labor, those shaped by hospitable environments, or those by changing societal landscapes. What follows is a brief description of Mexican migrant lives during the Great Depression and an attempt to recognize return migrations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to Mexico during the peak
year of 1931 as part of both an exceptional moment for some and just one chapter in the established binational livelihoods of others. Letters from aspiring migrants to consuls and presidents, correspondence between welfare officials in the U.S. and diplomatic agents abroad, and lastly the records of 577 repatriates collected from train manifests, broaden our understanding of the bidirectional, multigenerational, and diverse nature of migration and repatriation. The Great Depression thus did not merely result in disruption of Mexican lives in the U.S. but also a disruption and destruction in some cases of well entrenched patterns of family migration and binational living.

The Great Crisis: Mexicans in the Great Depression

The Great Depression that gripped the United States beginning in 1929 initiated a process in which migrants were systematically shut out of the country. They were induced to board trains back to their homelands, and subject to intense deportation efforts—all of which would not only have devastating impacts on family life and social networks, but would also critically shape future migration patterns. In a drastic turn of events that must have seemed particularly jarring to the many Mexicans finding opportunity and community during a period of economic boom, the 1930s led to the displacement, relocation, and hardship for millions of Mexican migrant families in the U.S, and their relatives in Mexico. Economic crisis had initiated what some authors have called “a decade of betrayal,” for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States.163 Families who had begun to establish their lives in the U.S. and for whom U.S. agriculture,

163 Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, Decade of Betrayal. Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: New Mexico University Press, 2006)
mining, and railroad employers depended on were now being pressured to leave. Local government officials, immigration restrictionists and social workers demonized Mexicans for overextending state-resources.\textsuperscript{164} Economic crisis unleashed discriminatory practices toward foreigners in an environment of heightened nativism. This nativism was not so different from the nativism in the late eighteenth century that accused German and Irish immigrants of taking American jobs, and led to a ban on Chinese laborer immigration. Whereas economic and social dislocation across the U.S.-Mexico border had occurred cyclically for decades, the influx of migrants during the 1920s prompted a particularly intense period of immigrant removal efforts during the early years of the Great Depression. More employers were hiring only U.S. citizens, and groups of Mexicans were threatened by deportation raids that swept through communities.\textsuperscript{165} Some even faced mobs of disgruntled workers who clamored for their return to Mexico.\textsuperscript{166}

Even before the stock market crashed in the United States, Mexicans experienced difficult living conditions that led to voluntary return migrations. Levels of unemployment paired with a concerted effort toward restriction during 1928 and 1929 did not approach those of the peak period between 1931-1933, but 1928 was a crucial year for the fate of Mexican migrants in the United States. Mexican and U.S. government officials perceiving the worsening conditions and anticipating further decline in Mexican living standards began to crack down on surreptitious

\textsuperscript{164} See Natalia Molina for a details on immigration restrictionists and their concern regarding the fecundity of Mexican women and the fear that they relied disproportionately on welfare. Molina, \textit{Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939}, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 141-150. Balderrama and Ramirez in \textit{Decade of Betrayal} describe how certain community organizations like the National Club of America for Americans Inc. tracked the cost of welfare spending on “aliens” and pressured county officials in Los Angeles to prohibit relief spending on Mexicans, pg. 94-99.

\textsuperscript{165} Balderrama and Rodriguez, \textit{Decade of Betrayal}, 90, 120-121.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 73-78
migration. Debates between representatives of the U.S. government and agricultural interests over immigration restriction had begun to emerge in the middle of the decade. Restrictions to Mexican immigration had been staved off for most of the decade until the Great Depression. Prior to the economic crisis, the need for Mexican migrants had superseded nativist designs toward restriction. However, the successive developments of a congressional hearing in 1928 on a proposed quota to limit immigration, and an immigration bill in 1929 making illegal entry a criminal offense finally had the overall impact of decreasing immigration, increasing return migration, and challenging employers and their use of undocumented and even documented Mexican laborers.\(^{167}\)

Meanwhile, Mexican migrants began to face the challenge of unemployment as early as 1928. In May, “grave circumstances” for Mexican workers in the United States were reported and, repatriation efforts by the Mexican government were being considered. Rumors that troops would be deployed to prevent illegal entry of Mexican workers began to circulate. Additionally, “a multitude of Mexicans in border communities” were in “terrible conditions due to the absolute lack of work and the many humiliations suffered at the hands of American authorities.”\(^{168}\)

Unemployment would go on to grip the entire nation, but economic crisis impacted agricultural areas early and hard. For example, in 1929 growers in California had failed to pay

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\(^{168}\) *El Informador*, May 19, 1928.
10,000 dollars in wages to their workers due to the depression.\textsuperscript{169} Agricultural wages in the California fell from 35 cents to 14 cents between 1929 and 1933.\textsuperscript{170} Those who had skilled jobs moved into agriculture and children dropped out of school to labor with their families. Unemployment in cities and displaced workers to agricultural areas compounded rural job shortages. Those who dared to stay rather than leave had to resort to hunting and eating off the land like those migrants living in the Imperial and San Joaquin Valleys who could not afford to buy food.\textsuperscript{171} Even within agriculture sharecroppers, who might have brought in steadier incomes and maintained greater autonomy, were forced to become field laborers in order to survive the Great Depression. All the while, wages and the number of available jobs were declining precipitously.\textsuperscript{172} Things would get worse for Mexican sharecroppers in Texas: In 1933, the New Deal’s Agricultural Adjustment Act called for the reduction of the cotton crop by 10 million acres (one-fourth of the crop) and led landlords to evict tenants and withhold government checks that were supposed to be distributed to their sharecroppers.\textsuperscript{173}

City residents, of course suffered unemployment as well. Los Angeles suffered an unemployment rate of nearly 10\% in 1930.\textsuperscript{174} Mexicans in cities experienced unemployment even more severely. Even in cities like Houston, Texas, which had better survived the years of economic crisis, Mexican dockworkers, plumbers and electricians found less work as businesses

\textsuperscript{170} George Sanchez, \textit{Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945}. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 210-211
\textsuperscript{171} Weber, \textit{Dark Sweat, White Gold}, 77
\textsuperscript{172} Weber, \textit{Dark Sweat, White Gold}, 76-77.
\textsuperscript{173} Neil Foley, \textit{The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 166.
\textsuperscript{174} Sanchez, \textit{Becoming Mexican American}, 210-211
and labor unions preferred and protected their white counterparts. Mexicans in places like South Chicago and Detroit also suffered unemployment, causing them to migrate to other parts of the U.S. or back to Mexico. In Michigan, for example, Mexicans working in sugar beets were displaced to cities only to be displaced again from jobs in automobile factories. In November of 1932 alone, 5000 families and single men were deported.

Mexican immigrants dealt with the hardships brought on by the Great Depression in a variety of ways. While some migrants were fortunate enough to determine their own path through the Great Depression by willingly returning to Mexico, waiting out the depression where they were at if they maintained employment, or asking for charitable aid, many others were forcibly removed, coerced to return to Mexico, and legally deported. Restricted access to jobs threatened family livelihoods and in some cases migrants reached out to representatives of both governments to try and weather the devastation of unemployment and family separation and to navigate exit and return. The stories that follow illustrate the range of migrant fates and strategies during the era of crisis. Correspondence between migrants and government officials illustrate the stifling poverty, the challenges that migrant families faced, and an end to the mobility that so many migrants relied on to build and maintain their cross-border livelihoods.

175 Arnoldo de León, Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: A History of Mexican Americans in Houston, (Houston: University of Houston, 1989), 47.
The Tale of Jose Ochoa Cobarrubias/ Joseph Columbus

In January of 1930, Florence Nesbitt, a social worker from the United Charities of Chicago, wrote to U.S. ambassador of Mexico Dwight J. Morrow in what would be the first letter of an exchange that would soon involve the U.S. consul at Guadalajara, the municipal president of Ciudad Guzman, and the adoptive mother of Jose Ochoa Cobarrubias living in Sayula, Jalisco. Jose Ochoa Cobarrubias arrived to the United States in 1926, thereafter going by the name Joseph Columbus. Hard times fell on Columbus in 1930 when he became ill and unable to support his wife and three young children (Doris, 4; Emma 2; and Joseph Jr, 10 mos.) After a period of “irregular” work as a tailor and as a result of his sickness, Nesbitt reported, “The family is in very poor circumstances and have scarcely enough to meet their living expenses. Mr. Columbus is very anxious to secure any money that he is entitled to.” In a move that would become very characteristic of county aid and private charity associations, Nesbitt was reaching out through diplomatic channels to try and learn more about a potential inheritance due to Columbus that could then prevent his family from an increased reliance on United Charities. The combination of insecure work, even as a skilled tailor in an urban setting, and Columbus’ illness created just the type of circumstances that in the midst of an economic depression paralyzed many Mexican families. Columbus’ particular case was made all the more interesting because of the many different people that became involved in correspondence, including his adoptive mother Virginia Cobarrubias who gave a dramatic account of his life story, and who professed her inability to help her adopted son in his dire circumstances abroad. Virginia received the boy when he was a couple of days old along with 50 dollars from a woman who had become pregnant through an adulterous relationship. Despite the woman’s promise to continue to
contribute financially to the raising of the boy, Virginia raised him without seeing any more money from his biological mother. Jose migrated to the United States at a young age and would go on to send money to support his adoptive parents in Mexico. He returned home to Mexico just once and sought out his biological mother to ask for money to help him return to the United States. According to Virginia, Jose’s birth mother actually gave him money, an act that perhaps gave Jose and Ms. Nesbit some hope that the birth mother might now help him obtain the alleged inheritance that was owed to him. Even though Virginia stated, “there is little hope that he may be helped by someone, because as I have mentioned, I am old, and very poor, and his legitimate mother, I assure you, goes so far as to deny that he is her son,” both Nesbitt and the U.S. consul at Guadalajara wrote to Jose’s birth mother to ask for help in the matter and received no answer. In the end it seemed that the best course to obtain the alleged inheritance would be to find a lawyer in Mexico, and as for the impoverishment that faced Jose and his family, the last recourse would be to obtain aid from the Mexican consul in Chicago.178

“We feel that the boys are trying very hard to find employment.”

The hardship brought on by economic crisis was especially acute for those families that were without a working male head of household. In November of 1930 a social worker from the

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178 file number 310, Columbus/Cobarrubias. 1930. General Correspondence, Guadalajara Consulate. NARA. As part of their consular duties, Mexican consuls had been involved in aiding the repatriation of Mexicans, as well connecting Mexican migrants abroad with local resources. One of their primary functions was to protect Mexicans abroad, and during the Great Depression this meant that many were involved with the repatriation processes, and when they did not see local remedies to difficult economic circumstances, consuls actively tried to invite and facilitate transportation of Mexicans back to their Mexican hometowns, see Mercedes Carreras de Velasco, Los Mexicanos Que Devolvio La Crisis 1929-1932, (Tlazolco, Mexico: Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1974), 73-80 and Jaime R. Aguilaa, “Mexican/U.S. Immigration Policy prior to the Great Depression,” Diplomatic History 31, no. 2 (2007): 207-225.
Associated Charities of Oakland, California wrote to the U.S. Consul at Guadalajara about the Bernal family who was struggling to make ends meet. Salvador Bernal had reportedly deserted his family on April 19, 1930, leaving his wife, three sons, and two daughters in desperate circumstances. Despite the fact that four out of the five children were above the age of 18 only one could secure after school employment as a janitor at the high school he attended. The two other sons were suffering from poor health, one having recently lost sight in an eye. The social worker explained that, “because of language difficulty it is impossible for Mrs. Bernal to secure work here.” She went on to say, “It does seem that even without the assistance of Mrs. Salvador Bernal, the three boys over sixteen years of age should be able to care for their mother and little sister, but they are not able to. We feel that the boys are trying very hard to find employment.”

At the outset of economic crisis, the Bernal family felt the pressures brought on by unemployment, illness, and desertion. Virginia Bernal, the matriarch of the family was able to apply for charity as a mother of a minor, but social worker Harriet Allen was interested in connecting the Bernal family with their family in Jalisco to see if the whole family might be supported, if her sons could be employed by their shop-owning uncles, and if the head of household would “assume his responsibility in caring for his wife and minor child,” Whether the effort on behalf of Oakland Associated Charities was in accordance with increased pressure by immigration and county officials to remove Mexicans from relief rolls, or whether it was merely the next best policy sought out by welfare officials to ease some of the burdens of economic crisis is difficult to glean. The ten questions Mrs. Allen encouraged the American consul at Guadalajara to ask Bernal’s relatives in Mexico suggests an interest beyond simple removal.

Aside from providing a striking example of the ways in which families stretched across borders
were expected to participate with the care and support of migrants in a complicated web of interfamilial and binational formal relationships, the hardships facing the Bernal family show how multiple hardships became cumulative and put Mexican migrants in a precarious position during the Great Depression.179

“Aunque no tengo necesidad de que se me recuerde de los deberes”

The turmoil that befell women and children abandoned by a male provider during the economic crisis—one in which women were nearly always characterized as victims and men were blamed for shirking their responsibilities as husbands and fathers—extended across borders to such a significant extent that consular officials and welfare workers routinely became actors in the conflict resolution of intimate familial relationships. The social worker writing on behalf of Mrs. Brust from the Associated Charities of San Francisco lauded her in her attempts to stay afloat during economic hardship stating, “Mrs. Brust has been making a brave attempt to help herself by doing dressmaking. She has found it impossible, however, to earn enough to support herself and her four children.” The family had been provided with “full food relief” for three months and Manuel Brust, the absent father and husband was seen as the solution to the problem. The social workers asked the American consul to track down Manuel Brust in the state of Colima and to, “find out just what his plans are in regard to his family and why he is making no effort to fulfill his responsibility as a father?” Consul Raleigh Gibson wrote to Brust telling him, “it’s urgent that you take some measure to help your family, and to take on the necessary obligations

179 File number 310, Letter to Mr. R Gibson, American Consul at Guadalajara, Jalisco Mexico from Mrs. Harriet Allen, Associated Charities of Oakland, California. 1930. General Correspondence, Guadalajara Consulate. NARA 129
that are yours as a father and husband.” What exactly were Manuel Brust’s necessary obligations as a husband? Was it that he should move his family back to Mexico, or perhaps move back to the United States to support his family and rescue them from relying on food relief? Brust not only understood his duties but took umbrage at the implication that he did not, writing “Although I have no necessity for you to remind me of the duties I have, given that I know them, I want you to know that I wrote to the Associated Charities of San Francisco, California about how I think to best resolve these difficulties.” Several exchanges ensued between the social worker, the consul, and Brust and it became evident that despite Mr. Brust’s attempts at sending money to his family, Mrs. Brust was still having to do her best to keep her family afloat. The social worker stated, “The woman’s willingness to cooperate is signified by the fact that last week she went into a home where there were five small children and did all the washing, ironing and cooking and cared for a sick mother and the little ones, in order to make a few cents to help herself out.” At the end of the exchange it appeared that Mr. Brust would not be able to satisfy his duties as a husband after as he wrote to the consul explaining that he was unable to send money due to an illness that prevented him from working. He even accompanied his explanatory letter to the American consul with a note from his doctor as a way of lending proof to his statement.

Several important themes emerge from the Brusts’ binational experience of economic crisis with the social worker and consul’s indictment of Mr. Brust and Mr. Brust’s defense perhaps the most compelling. We also see that migrants like Mrs. Brust made repeated attempts to make ends meet and that she had difficulty doing so as a woman engaged in poorly remunerated work. Repatriation, a reality faced by so many migrants during the era of the Great
Depression, was not seen as the ultimate answer to the resolution of a migrant family's difficulties. The family would remain split across borders in an interesting geographic reversal where the male provider attempted to send money and provide for his family in the United States while staying in Mexico. The duty of the husband was no to be by the side of his wife, but to support her economically, a requirement that was difficult to fulfill during the Great Depression. During the 1930s migrant families had to navigate not only the politics of migration at the border but also be able to communicate effectively with representatives of two governments. During economic crisis many migrants struggled with intimate politics of family separation and reunification.

*Enslaved in the land of dollars*

Some migrants were more than willing to return to Mexico and less interested in waiting out the difficult living standards in the United States. By 1930 requests for assistance began streaming into the Palacio Nacional, where Presidents Ortiz Rubio, Abelardo Rodríguez, and eventually President Cárdenas had to contend with the many Mexicans left stranded during the 1930s in impoverished conditions. Luis Narvaez, a road gang laborer for the Southern Pacific, along with Alberto Macías and Carlos Jiménez wrote a second letter to President Ortiz Rubio when they were denied rail passes back to Mexico that they had previously asked for.**180** Their second petition was laden with patriotism and explanations as to the reasons they were asking

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**180** Transcribed letter in letter to Sec. de Agricultura and Sec. de Industria Comercio y Trabajo from the Office of Migration, July 17, 1930, 3-356-1930-94, -INAMI. Census data on Luis Narvaez stated that he had arrived in 1923, and that in April of 1930, only 2 months prior to his letter to the President, he had been living in a rail car along with other Mexican laborers. 1923 was likely his first entrance into the U.S. after which subsequent migrations were made.
and deserving of some aid in their return migrations. Putting their best foot forward, they stated, "With heart and hand we assure you that we are proud to say that not a single Mexican in the United States of America does not wish the aggrandizement of our country, and are willing to sacrifice ourselves so that in short time our Mexico can occupy first place among the civilized nations." After also assuring that they were not involved in politics and that they worked in low-skilled jobs, they stated that they have done nothing but "stayed true to the sustenance of their homes," and that due to their low wages, have found it impossible to pay for their return trips. In fact, as opposed to those migrants and families who might have found themselves residing more permanently in the United States either by design or by circumstance, these laborers asserted that their continued stay in the U.S. was actually against their own will. Their intention had been to stay temporarily, but as a result of poor pay and subsequent debt, they found themselves stranded in place, lacking the mobility to migrate according to their initial strategy. Even worse, these men were stranded away from their families whom remained in Mexico. Their abilities to provide were compromised and the distance between them and their families was not easily traversed. They hoped to find a sympathetic audience in the president noting the "kindness" that the President had made clear through his propaganda in the press.¹⁸¹ "Anxious" for a solution, the three men looked forward to the day when they would "be free from the enslavement of the land of the dollar." After all, working in the U.S. towards the sustenance of their families was quickly disappearing as viable option.

¹⁸¹ Mexicans, had, in fact, been invited to return to their homelands and encouraged to do so by consuls abroad. Records do not indicate whether these three men actually returned to Mexico like they had originally hoped to.
My daughters who cry at my absence

Family was at the heart of the matter for many migrants desiring aid from the Mexican government and more specifically from the Mexican President. Jose G. Perez, wrote from an address listed as 306 Tent Alley in Sacramento, California in 1932 asking President Abelardo Rodríguez for help getting back to Aguascalientes where his 87-year-old father, wife and three young daughters had been living for three years while he worked in the United States. Perez explained that because of the “strong crisis” he was unable to send any money to his family. He had been unable to secure even the work that would allow him to save for his return to Mexico and to join his family, whom he stated “cry at my absence and lack my work and sustenance.” He had already asked the consul at San Francisco for help and was told that he would need to at least be able to pay the $11.50 train ticket to get him from his current location to the border. The office of Migration eventually agreed that if Jose could prove his indigence, his Mexican nationality, and could get to the border either by his own account or with the help of a mutual aid society that the Mexican government would then foot the bill for his train ride from the border to his family in Aguascalientes. We can’t know what kind of work he was trying to get while in the U.S., but his address is indicative of the shanty towns that cropped up during the Great Depression, which means that if he had any work at all, whether it was steady or not, it was likely poorly paid. His appeal to the President is striking because his approach is filled with sentimentality but also demonstrative of his diligence in trying to secure a job, a return passage, and a livelihood as a provider.

182 Letter to the President October 31, 1932, 4/356/1173, INAMI; 244.1/3 Ramo Presidentes Abelardo Rodriguez, AGN
“Ya sabia un dia u otro se me exigiría mi naturalización”

As the Depression wore on even those having resided in the country for years holding skilled jobs were not exempted from feeling the pressure to return to Mexico. Ricardo Frías Beltrán wrote a letter to President Rodríguez acknowledging that during the most recent months of economic crisis (in 1933), “it had been nearly impossible to find work for non-citizens.” He realized that he was lucky to have had a job in insurance despite it being a poorly paid position. Frias Beltran did not lose his job like so many Mexicans at the time, instead he actually chose to quit his job, but for very important reasons. In his telegram to the President in March of 1933 he stated, “[my] bosses urge me to preemptively renounce my [Mexican] nationality or lose my job.” He initially only asked for any kind of help or guidance from the President, but wrote a follow up later explaining his situation further, explaining that he knew that, “one of these days he was going to ask me to nationalize.” After working so long in the United States, Frías Beltrán admitted to making “a grave error” in letting his children become educated in the U.S. “without knowing their patria.” He saw himself as being forced to resign his job during the throes of the Depression. He not only asked for financial assistance in repatriating, he also asked the President for a guarantee of employment stating that it would, “help provide me with means to return and support my family in Mexico.”183

For some of the cases above like Frías Beltrán’s, repatriation was the only reasonable option left to him. His struggles during the Great Depression were not only economic but

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183 Letter to President Abelardo Rodríguez from Beltran Frias 1933, 241/4 Ramo Presidentes, AGN, Mexico City.
demanded him to make challenging decisions about his citizenship and identity. His case shows how the economic crisis forced the decision between having an American job and a Mexican identity. He had actually experienced what others feared might happen to them—that migrants would have to choose to stay in their adopted country or return home but could essentially no longer live in between both. Aside from the material consequences of economic crisis and psychological fears about job loss, an additional hardship was that of feeling forced to choose one nation over the other. \footnote{For discussions on repatriation, americanization and identity See, Gabriela Arredondo, \textit{Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity and Nation, 1916-39}, (University of Illinois Press, 2008); Monica Perales, \textit{Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community}. (Durham:University of North Carolina Press, 2010)} For those migrants like Mrs. Brust, Mrs. Bernal, and Mr. Cobarubbias/Columbus leaving the U.S. was not the first and only option. A range of misfortunes befell them including illness, desertion, and language difficulties which, when combined with economic crisis meant that they embarked on creative adaptations to support their families and engaged in cross-border strategies to bolster binational support.

It is necessary to point out the role of welfare officials in several of the examples above. Relief agencies played a large role in facilitating binational family support networks and attempting to connect migrants in the U.S. with their families in Mexico. Relief agencies also provided financial assistance to Mexicans so they might stay in the United States, but they also were critical in promoting the repatriation of Mexicans to free up relief rolls for U.S. American citizens. Whether acting benevolently or in service of a more nativist agenda, relief agencies perpetuated what might be seen as the most targeted act of migrant removal in U.S. history. \footnote{Sanchez actually suggests that a decline in percentage of relief cases from 21% in 1929 to 16% in 1930 occurred rather than an increase dependence on aid, 107.}
Removal and Return

The stories above illustrate the precariousness of migrant livelihoods in the wake of the migrant boom and the shadow of the economic bust. The first three stories reflect how poverty impacted Mexican families during the Great Depression and how their cases came to the attention of welfare workers in the United States attempting to either find them support in Mexico or pave the way for their voluntary repatriation. The second set of stories reflect how Mexican migrants reached out to state officials to ameliorate their circumstances by providing aid in their return-migration. The stories provide more insight and background into the period known most for the dramatic repatriation and deportation of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans.

Many migrants, along with their U.S. born children were rounded up in deportation raids, encouraged to repatriate to Mexico by state and county officials, and sometimes misled, bullied or forced into involuntary repatriation. All were at greater risk for deportation which was the most effective federal strategy to help relief agencies and migrants who felt slashes in agricultural production particularly acutely. Trains full of families left from Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco and many cities in Texas back toward the interior of Mexico. Statistics kept on the exodus of Mexicans during the Great Depression are conflicting and are ‘estimates’ at best, but scholars Balderrama and Rodríguez offer a guess of 1 million.186

The struggles of Mexican immigrants and migrants during the Great Depression are often inextricably connected to the dramatic efforts carried out by U.S. federal, and local governments to deport and repatriate Mexican migrants back to their homelands. The deportations and

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repatriations by far stand out as the most striking feature of this era of Mexican migration and with excellent works by Abraham Hoffman and George Sanchez we learn about the ways in which some Los Angeles city officials and residents responded and reacted to the pressures of the Great Depression, the nativism that inspired drastic propaganda campaigns, and real efforts to uproot Mexican migrants from their homes in Southern California. Repatriation and deportation was not, however, the most salient and felt hardship for all Mexican migrants, especially in those areas that did not witness concerted efforts at removal. Moreover, where repatriation and deportation did happen it was not always an instantaneous event, but rather a process that took time and involved multiple officials in a multi-step coordination of events. In a few cases, deportation and repatriation consisted of swift action targeting unprepared migrants, but in many other circumstances migrants advocated their own solutions to the gripping poverty and stifling unemployment that clamped down so intensely on migrant mobility. The repatriation and deportation of individuals might best be seen as culminating, or turning points in a migrant’s experience with binational migration. Focusing narrowly on the discrete instance of forced removal and return overlooks longer personal histories as migrants, strategies for living during economic crisis, and the uncertainty and range of hardship that migrants endured in the first months and years of the Great Depression.

The repatriation of Mexicans, whether voluntary or coerced, tell us a great deal about return migrations but also shed light on the precarious living of Mexican migrants despite the proliferating social networks and increased economic opportunities achieved during the 1920s. Deportation efforts on behalf of local and federal officials in the U.S. during the Great Depression should be seen as part of greater history of immigrant removal. Lastly, migrant
experiences during this era are only part of greater migrant life histories and experiences living in two countries. Migrant returns in the 1930s, or removals—in the case of coerced repatriation and deportation, tie together U.S. and Mexican migrant landscapes that are critical to examine in order to understand bidirectional migration.

The peak era of repatriation and deportation in the early 1930s would go on to impact subsequent waves of entry and return. The heavy logistical burden and cost to both countries for the massive repatriation and the deportation on one hand, and the separations of families on the other, forced a reconsideration of the role of the State in actively regulating binational labor and migration. While the decade of the 1930s taught the two governments lessons on the bureaucracy of binational migration management, families who lived at the intersection of two countries and two crises—those who had to endure a return or removal as a unified family, who had been forcibly split apart, or who were abandoned by loved ones—had to learn how to negotiate the politics and processes of unexpected exits and returns.

By placing families at the center of analysis for the era of crisis, we learn about the intricacies of return migration and the challenges that faced families with varying immigration and citizenship status. Families had become increasingly binational during the 1920s, and not just because they acquired life experiences in two countries but also in terms of citizenship: children were born to Mexican parents living in the U.S. and their presence challenged strict definitions of ‘immigrant,’ ‘migrant,’ citizen, and non-citizen and general notions of belonging to one nation or the other. Family life cycles and mobility defied increasingly rigid national boundaries. Through the 1920s and subsequent years of economic crisis in the 1930s Mexican migrants in the United States acquired experiential knowledge of the United States, embarked on
binational and intrastate migration, and became all too familiar with their sometimes precarious position as temporary residents. Deportation and repatriation was not the reality for all migrants and immigrants at the time, but the threat of removal became a very real threat, and the lack of security inspired the kind of fear that drove thousands of migrants back to their homelands.

The return of the prodigal sons and daughters to Mexico—to the nation, to their communities, and to their families was often fraught with its own challenges. Despite any slow gains that Mexican families and communities might have made since the more tumultuous decades of insurrection and civil war, the influx of so many repatriates presented the Mexican State and Mexican families with more mouths to feed. A closer examination of the migrants and families that returned, reveal not only the diversity and geographic scope of migrations that they had undertaken in the 1920s, but illustrate that by the mid-1930s migrant families, in fact were in many ways, very much Mexican and American.

*The Trains*

While some migrants had been removed by legal deportation efforts carried out by the United States government, Mexicans also embarked on the journey back home through their own means and with the help of the Mexican government. By late 1930 and early 1931 Mexican consuls had begun to arrange for discounted rail passes from U.S. cities to the border. Early Mexican efforts to help facilitate the repatriation of Mexicans, whether through reduced customs fees or additional assistance provided by Mexican consuls, transitioned into more concrete

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actions that aimed to control and provide for the transportation of repatriates from the border to cities in the interior. With so many migrants congregating in border cities, and with the beginning of county-sponsored trains from Los Angeles, the Mexican government worked with the Mexican National Railways to get free passes and reduced fares to carry migrants the rest of the way home.\textsuperscript{188} Depending on whether migrants were receiving aid from welfare agencies, being deported, or perhaps paid their own way on the trains, Mexican officials had specific requirements for migrants hoping to get free or reduced passes from the government.

Mexican consuls would undertake the task of selecting which migrants were eligible for government assistance. They were to conduct “a study of their circumstances, from a legal perspective, to see whether they faced deportation, or from an economic perspective to see if the economic crisis or the lack of personal abilities that forced them to leave.” After this initial selection was completed a second phase of selection would categorize repatriates based on their labor skills to see whether they could work in agriculture, industry, or business upon their return to Mexico.\textsuperscript{189}

When the president of the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana, in San Angelo, Texas wrote to President Rubio Ortiz on behalf of a group of twenty families in dire need of aid and transportation, the Office of Migration took over correspondence and stated that the families would be able to get rail fare from the border to their towns of origin provided that there was

\textsuperscript{188} Carreras, 90, Hoffman, \textit{Unwanted Mexican Americans}, 87. County-sponsored trains began leaving Los Angeles in March, 1931.

\textsuperscript{189} INAMI 4-356-1931-338 "Plan para la repatriación de connacionales"
proof of indigence by the Office of Migration in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. It is unclear how consuls in the U.S. would determine which aspiring repatriates qualified as indigent, but at the very least those migrants who were in such dire circumstances that they could not pay for their return trips home were likely considered as candidates for government-paid train fare. In order to be considered for subsidized travel fare migrants were to have lived abroad for two years. As will be shown later, at least a handful of migrants had crossed into the U.S. only shortly prior to their repatriation, suggesting that the requirement of living abroad for two years was not always enforced.

The trains were just one component of efforts in both countries to transport migrants from the United States to Mexico. The journey from the border to the interior of Mexico was the first step in what the Mexican government intended to be a comprehensive plan for the repatriation of their co-nationals. As early as June 1931 a detailed plan by the chief of the Department of Migration Andrés Landa y Piña outlined how Mexican migrants would be selected to receive aid and be transported by the Mexican government, and how domestic labor conditions could be improved to absorb the entry of repatriates into the work force. A heavy emphasis was placed on making sure that repatriates, and the skills they might have obtained in the United States could be utilized in Mexico. Repatriates were valued for their experience in agriculture, which is why agricultural colonies became such a central focus of repatriation campaigns within

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190 INAMI 4-356-1931-603, letter from President of Comisión Honorífica Mexicana en San Angelo Texas December 1931.
191 INAMI 4-356-1931-63 Letter to Department of Migration from Manuel Mascarenas Jr., Delegado de Migración, Nogales, Sonora, Dic. 31 1932
192 INAMI 4-356-1931-338 "Plan para la repatriación de connacionales"
Mexico. The Mexican government would receive their Mexican repatriates and even aid them in their arrival but also had designs to redistribute according to worker shortages in the country. In short, the Mexican government, much like the American government, envisioned very specific conditions under which repatriates would be sponsored and let back in. Mexico, after all, was dealing with its own labor challenges where the threat of worker unrest was constantly shaping political alignments and the stability of post-revolutionary administrations. In this setting, Mexican repatriates, those who were truly destitute and without other means, were particularly beholden to whomever paid for their transport and were subject to migratory paths that were predetermined and regulated for them as opposed to of their own choosing— at least in theory.

The plan established for the transportation and settlement of repatriates also proposed that efforts should be made within the country to accommodate the influx of new labor. The “Ley de Trabajo,” a law emerging out of the economic crisis, had called for the protection of Mexican workers by regulating the presence of foreign laborers. Specifically, it called for a reinforcement of Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution, which mandated that the percentage of domestic workers in factories would outnumber the percentage of foreign workers by three times. During the economic crisis efforts were even made to deport foreign workers—a move that opened up spaces for Mexican repatriates. The Office of Migration worked directly with state governors, asking them for help in finding lands for repatriates, and contributing to transportation funds. The Office of Migration efforts were also bolstered by Presidential decrees that increased

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immigrant entry fees and provided a source of revenue with which to help cover the cost of repatriation. The repatriation of Mexicans was to be an undertaking shared amongst the states and the federal government, especially as migrants moved into the interior.

In order to control the flow of repatriates, the Mexican government specified three ports of entry through which trains bringing migrants could enter: Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juárez, and Nogales. These border cities were where the majority of Mexicans had first crossed into the United States. In January of 1931, a Los Angeles Times article reported that according to Mexican statistics more people had returned to Mexico through Nuevo Laredo in two weeks than had entered the U.S. for the previous 5 months combined.\(^\text{194}\) Those streaming though Nuevo Laredo had come from Illinois, Texas, and Colorado and were going primarily to Jalisco and Michoacán. The flow and accumulation of migrants at the border city was reported as “abnormally heavy,” and in fact many borderland cities were being transformed during this period. Migrants would find themselves stranded on the U.S. side of the border where they would “call on the government for aid in rehabilitating themselves in Mexico.”\(^\text{195}\) The return exodus of migrants who had settled in the Midwest was striking, and in September of 1930 preparations in Nuevo Laredo were made for as many as 4000 Mexicans, including 800 families, coming mostly from Karnes, Texas and nearby counties to return to Mexico.\(^\text{196}\)

\(^{194}\) 1635 between December 16th and December 30th
\(^{195}\) Los Angeles Times, “Exodus of Mexicans Runs High: Nuevo Laredo Returns in Brief Period Pass entry totals for five months.”
\(^{196}\) Los Angeles Times, “Thousands of Mexicans will Go Back home”, Sept. 30
Throughout March of 1931 trains from Nuevo Laredo to central Mexico transported two hundred and fifteen repatriates who “voluntarily” left the United States.\textsuperscript{197} When boarding the trains that would take them to their homes in the interior of Mexico, returning migrants were asked to give their names and ages along with what kind of employment they held in the United States and where they had lived. Those who had documented their original exit from Mexico were also asked about the port they left through and the date of their original crossing. Aside from the detailed biographical data that also included the destinations in Mexico to which they were returning to, train manifests reveal certain migration patterns and shed light on the multiple paths and migrations that Mexicans, and often times their Mexican-American children, embarked on during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Perhaps one of the more notable characteristics of the repatriates who left through Nuevo Laredo was not only the fact that many had resided in the Midwest but that so many had lived in cities and towns in northern states and many hundreds of miles from the U.S.-Mexico Border. 40.1% of adults leaving through Laredo had previously resided in Texas, but only one-third of them lived, on or near, the border. 24.5% of repatriates were leaving the state of Illinois, and perhaps more significantly, all of them (39) had previously lived in Chicago. Michigan was the third greatest sending state with 11.3% of migrants having previously resided mostly in Detroit. A few east coast states were represented such as New York and Massachusetts with most east

\footnote{\textsuperscript{197}“Repatriados que voluntariamente regresar al pais” Laredo a Mexico, March 1931, INAMI 1-161-1931-189}
coast migrants having lived in Pennsylvania. A handful of migrants were making their return trips after living in Missouri and Indiana.\footnote{There were 159 adults for which the previous location of residence was indicated. Top return-migrant sending states included: Texas-65, Illinois-39, Michigan 18, Missouri-11, Pennsylvania-10, Indiana, 7.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous state of Residence for Those Returning Through Nuevo Laredo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus migrants returning though Laredo had already traveled great distances before embarking on the next phase of their migration and in some cases they traveled just as far to get to their hometowns in Mexico. The majority of migrants reported that they were returning to the central west states of Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato with 43.5\% of migrants returning to
Guanajuato specifically. Mexican migrants passing through Laredo were in fact returning to the three most significant Mexican sending states of the 1920s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States of Return for those returning through Nuevo Laredo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michoacán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalisco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% of migrants who had resided in northern U.S. cities like Chicago and Detroit and states like Indiana and Pennsylvania were returning to Jalisco, Michoacán, or Guanajuato. Based on this sample we see a pattern of migration stretching specifically between the central western Mexican states and northern U.S. states. Not only does this pattern convey the great distance by which migrants traveled, but also suggests that traditional sending communities in Mexico were likely the first communities to see their compatriots press farther and farther north of the U.S.-Mexico border. While labor opportunities in northern industries could have certainly beckoned migrants to bypass labor opportunities along the border in the Southwest and Texas, the existence of such strong and exclusive migration patterns between the Mexican center-west and northern U.S. cities suggests that social networks and established and extended family migrations contributed greatly to such trends. Despite heavy return repatriation during the 1930s, the foundations for

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199 Out of the 74 migrants returning from Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Indiana, 4 returned to Mexico City, 3 of whom resided in Philadelphia.

146
binational communities, with family members living across borders had been firmly established and the Mexican migrant diaspora existed beyond the traditional geographic definition of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Region of Return for those returning through Nuevo Laredo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central West</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such long distance travel was undertaken not only by single and unattached males, although men clearly outnumbered women in return migration through Laredo. Women made up 24% of total returning adult migrants, while children of both genders traveling with family members made up another 27%. Families with three or more children traveled across long distances from cities such as, Indiana Harbor, Kansas City, and Chicago. Antonia Caldera Zavala, for example, was returning to Puruándiro, Michoacán from Chicago, Illinois with her husband and her six young children. Antonia had last entered the United States with her husband and four of her children in September of 1927; her two youngest children, Felipe and Jose, would eventually be born in the United States. She had previously lived in Kansas City from 1916 through 1920, returned to Mexico at some point and in 1927 was headed toward San Antonio on a visitor’s visa indicating that she would stay in the United States for 90 days. Four years later she found herself in Chicago, Illinois during the depths of the Great Depression. From there she
would make her journey back to Puruándiro, Michoacán where her mother lived. Although the birth places for her four eldest children are unknown, her two youngest boys were U.S. citizens and likely journeying to Mexico for the first time, when they boarded the repatriate train.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The group returning through Laredo during March of 1931 was a young group, 98% of total repatriates were under the age of forty, and 64% and were under the age of thirty. Twenty families with children were repatriating together and fifty-three of the two hundred and fifteen repatriates were minor children. Some families were large while some consisted of couples traveling with only one child. Focusing on family units reveals a wide age distribution among repatriates, with the eldest repatriate being seventy-years old and the youngest being only seventeen days.

Romualda Guerrero de Hernandez was the young mother carrying the youngest passenger on the Laredo train and her story serves as an example of return family migration. She and her husband Anástacio Hernandez had been living in San Antonio, Texas during the Great Depression. Both originally from Cerrito, San Luis Potosí, they lived in a rented house along
with their three children, one of Anastacio’s children from a previous marriage, as well as
Anastacio’s brother and nephew. Mrs. Romualda Guerrero de Hernandez, 27 years younger
than her husband, was a young mother who gave birth to her daughter Margarita little more than
2 weeks before packing up her family and traveling to Mexico. General farm work had been
listed for the men in the household of working age. Romualda’s occupation was listed first as
“housewife” but later scribbled over and replaced with the word “none” in the 1930 U.S.
census. All of her children, including her stepson had been born in Texas. Her brother-in-law
Marcos and his son Angel did not appear to accompany them on the return trip to Mexico.

The Dávalos Rodríguez family reveals yet another picture of family mobility and shows
the multigenerational nature of migration. Maria Martínez Vda de Dávalos was 60 years old
when she returned to Mexico from Philadelphia. Her daughter and her four young
grandchildren, ages 7, 6, 4, and 3 accompanied her. Her daughter was recently widowed and had
been working as a domestic servant in Philadelphia, and Maria’s own occupation was listed as
“housewife,” on the return train manifest. On the return trip a relative of her daughter’s
deceased husband accompanied them. Together they made the trip back to Jalisco. The Dávalos
Rodríguez and the Hernandez families were similar to many other migrant families that lived or
made cross-border journeys with members of their extended families. The Betancourt family
was another extended family that made the return trip together from Eagle Pass, Texas. The
family was composed of four adult sisters ages 49, 39, 26 and 23 along with one of the sister’s

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201 Repatriados que voluntariamente regresar al país” Laredo a Mexico, March 1931, INAMI 1-161-1931-189
husbands and four young daughters. In total, nine family members made the trip from Eagle Pass, Texas to Monte de San Nicholas, Guanajuato. Forty-nine-year-old Jesús Gonzalez was the only male in the group. While some migrant families migrated as a nuclear unit including a mother, father, and children, large extended families were common as were relatives traveling in pairs. Pairs of relatives were mostly male, while large extended families, like the Betancourt family often included many women.\textsuperscript{202}

Florentino and Ignacio Capilla, were brothers who had worked in the steel industries of Pennsylvania before returning to Tingüíndín Michoacán. Florentino had arrived to the United States and entered legally at Nuevo Laredo on June 25th, 1928 establishing himself in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. His brother would join him in 1929 taking up residence in the same house on Merchant Street and also working in the steel industry. They lived alongside other steel workers who mostly were Mexican with the exception of some Czechs. While Florentino was recorded as having entered legally, his brother Ignacio was not. Florentino would have most likely gone first to establish residence and get a job after which his brother soon followed.

In addition to family migration, other forms of social migration occurred in which sets of friends without any apparent kinship traveled to Mexico and often returned together. Victoriano Valtierra and Melquiades López both originally from Guanajuato, Guanajuato worked first in Saginaw and then in Detroit before returning back to Mexico. They had first migrated to the United States each at the age of twenty and lived just a couple of houses down from each other as lodgers on N. Washington Avenue in Saginaw, Michigan. In 1930 both were employed by an

\textsuperscript{202} Repatriados que voluntariamente regresar al país” Laredo a Mexico, March 1931, INAMI 1-161-1931-189
auto foundry, and though they were each listed as lodgers living without relatives in the United States, both were listed in the census as married, likely meaning that their wives had remained in Mexico.

The majority of migrants traveling to and from the United States were males, but evidence from the Laredo train manifest suggest that many extended families, groups of women, and sibling also returned together. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that young men who migrated alone were unattached. Even if not married, and many were, migrant males were part of extended family networks that they supported and that supported them either from within Mexico or north of the border. Women traveled alone as well, but not nearly as often as men. Only four women returned to Mexico completely on their own without any relatives or children. Four other women traveled as single mothers with one child each. All other women traveled with their partners, children, or extended family networks.

The train manifest from Laredo also contains details about the type of labor each returning migrant had performed while in the United States. 75% of males were listed as being “jornaleros de campo” or field workers, even in places where they were likely engaged in some industrial labor. Only seven women were listed with professions other than “su hogar,” or “her home.” The seven women who were not listed as housewives included a seamstress, cook, laundress, chambermaid, servant, general employee and businesswoman. Rail and factory labor were other common occupations for men, and there were also some migrants with more explicitly skilled occupations such as mechanics and carpenters. Jobs other than field worker were most commonly listed for those in cities like Detroit and Chicago.
In sum, most migrants returning to Mexico through Laredo were male and agricultural workers, but women and children made up half of those returning, and migrants had held jobs outside of agriculture as well. Labor status was likely self-reported and might not have captured the full range of professions and the complexity of migrant livelihoods and labor strategies. Many migrants working in agriculture throughout the Midwest and beyond engaged in seasonal agriculture and would supplement this labor with work in other industries. Informal labor might also not be fully captured from the train manifests. Women’s informal labor such as cooking, childcare, laundry, and vending on small and informal scales would be subsumed under the category of housewife.\textsuperscript{203} The inclusion of labor status on the train manifest gives us a sense of what type of work migrants engaged in and would have been recorded for the purpose of providing that kind of information to Mexican government officials. Especially as repatriation continued, government officials made attempts to evenly distribute laborers back into the country and assist migrants with job placement.

In addition to the gender, age, employment and family status, we also know the dates of arrival to the United States for a subset of Laredo migrants. The overwhelming majority of migrants returning through Laredo for whom we know arrival dates to the United States, arrived between 1927 and 1929 with 38% of them arriving in 1928. Evidence from border crossing records for some of these same migrants, however, reveal that they might have repeatedly

entered the United States starting as early as 1909. Arrival dates, thus speak more to the most recent arrival date, suggesting that many migrants had lived their most recent stay in the United States for only a couple of years before having to return to Mexico. The frequency of arrivals between 1927 and 1929 coincides with the last big wave of migration before the onset of the Great Depression. Train manifests from Juárez and Nogales, however, point to another wave in 1923 and 1924. Migrants hailing from the U.S. West and Southwest had generally been established in Mexican U.S. cities like Los Angeles and San Antonio for longer periods of time than those in the Midwest, and like their compatriots returning through Laredo, many of them traveled between the United States and Mexico within family units and social networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF ARRIVAL to the US FOR THREE SUBSETS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laredo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
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<tr>
<td>DATE OF ARRIVAL to the US FOR THREE SUBSETS</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laredo</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
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<td>1919</td>
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<td>1920</td>
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<td>1930</td>
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<td>1931</td>
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</tbody>
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Tables compiled by author, “Repatriados que voluntariamente regresar al país,” INAMI 1-161-1931-189
There are some general similarities between the groups of migrants traveling through Laredo, Nogales, and Ciudad Juárez but there are also notable differences and distinct regional trends. In general, migrants returning through Nogales and Ciudad Juárez were mostly young adults, except there was a slightly greater percentage of adults above the age of 40 than in Laredo. A greater percentage of women returned through Nogales and Ciudad Juárez as well. Women made up 35% of Nogales migrants and 36.4% of Juárez migrants (as compared to 24% of those returning through Laredo). Notably, more women over the age of 40 also returned through Nogales and Juárez. There were also greater percentages of children traveling in the Juárez and Nogales groups as compared to the Laredo group. Children accounted for 33.3% of total returning migrants through Nogales and 43% of those returning through Juárez. Train lists of repatriates from Los Angeles on trains to the interior of Mexico via Nogales and Ciudad Juárez also reveal a strong pattern of return family migration. Of the 120 repatriates leaving through Nogales in October of 1931, thirty repatriates traveled alone while twenty-six family units traveled together, including 18 families with minors. Of the 242 repatriates leaving through Ciudad Juárez, 45 repatriates traveled alone while 53 groups of families repatriated together, including 39 families with minors.

Migrants returning though Nogales and Juárez were older, included more women and children, and traveled more in family units than their Laredo counterparts. These patterns confirm the presence of more established patterns of migration to the Southwest. Migrants coming back through Laredo from the Midwest and Eastern United States were likely to have more instances of pioneering migrations of individuals rather than families. Bourgeoning
Mexican-American communities created an environment of support networks for migrant families, and the range of occupational work available for both genders as well as the existence of Mexican schools and other community organizations was much more prevalent in the Southwest United States in comparison to the smaller Mexican colonies in the Midwest and Northern cities. There were also some distinct regional patterns for those returning through the three different ports of entry and exit that reveal the most common geographic paths of migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Laredo</th>
<th>Nogales</th>
<th>Juárez</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gender</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas migrants returning through Laredo had come from a broad swath of land between the Midwest and eastern United States, migrants traveling through Juárez and Nogales hailed mostly from the region around Los Angeles. While the majority of migrants appeared to have lived near Los Angeles before their departure, migrants catching the train there had lived throughout California and the West before returning to Mexico during the era of repatriation. A higher concentration of migrants, in addition to the fact that Los Angeles County had the most active repatriation campaigns, accounts for such a focused sample. However, like those traveling
through Laredo, their journeys from communities across the border and within the United States and then back and forth to Mexico spanned many miles.

As can be seen from the tables above illustrating the different states of birth for adult migrants, Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato emerge once again as important sending and receiving states for Mexican migrants throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The key difference is that migrants from central and northern Mexican states were more likely to travel through Juárez, while Mexicans from the western states used the Nogales port of entry for exit and return. Those traveling through Juárez were overwhelmingly from the states of Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, and Durango. Migrants from the more central northern states might have taken advantage of government subsidized rail fare more than those living closer to the border since they could more easily travel by foot or car back to their hometowns. In either case we get another portrait of long migration journeys stretching from northern central Mexico all the way to the West coast of California. The distances traveled by migrants were no easy undertaking. Travel necessitated considerable planning and demonstrates not only the lengths to which migrant families went to build their cross-border and regional livelihoods, but also suggests that economic crisis could have devastating impacts on migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State of Birth for those traveling through Juárez</th>
<th>Jalisco</th>
<th>24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Central States</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michoacán</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinaloa</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While we do not have the occupational listings for the Juárez and Nogales groups, census and border records provide a snapshot of some migrant occupations. Many migrants were listed as general laborers but some specifics indicate that migrants were working on railroads, ranches and farms, in cement mills and in general construction. Jobs for women were harder to uncover for this sample, many again being listed as housewife, as if not having work, but as mentioned in chapter two, we know that fruit picking, cannery work and work as domestic servants would have been common occupations for migrant women living in Southern California. One woman, Celia de Ortega, who had migrated to the United States in 1913 and lived in New Mexico, then Texas, and then Compton, California was listed as a soft-drink seller in the 1927 Compton City
One of her eldest daughters had also been employed in a fish cannery. Only Celia and her youngest son returned to Mexico on a train from Juárez in 1931, potentially being separated from her husband and five older children who appear to have remained in the United States.

While the train manifests for Nogales and Juárez do not list information such as labor status, they do serve as an invaluable source of information for the birthplaces of migrants and their children. Together with details about age, these birthplaces tell us a great deal not only about family composition and structure, but also about the actual geography of Mexican migrations. As can be seen below, tracing the birthplaces of children born to Mexicans in Mexico and the U.S. sketches out cross country and binational migrations when migrant voices are otherwise unavailable. Additionally, the birthplaces specifically of children returning to Mexico during October of 1931 actually show what scholars of repatriation have previously argued: that the great repatriations of the 1930s did not simply consist of sending Mexican migrants home to Mexico, but actually resulted in a generation of Mexican-American children—U.S. citizens by legal definition, leaving their birth nation. Lastly, by examining the birthplaces of migrant children, it also becomes clear that Mexican migration was creating binational families with differentiated legal status among family members—a phenomenon that would impact and shape Mexican migrations in the future.

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205 See Hoffman for discuss of U.S. born children who were sent back, Unwanted Mexican Americans In The Great Depression, 94-96. In Decade of Betrayal Balderrama and Rodríguez, suggest that up to 60% of total Mexican repatriates were American born, 330.
Most children who were born to Mexican parents while in the United States were born in California, but the states of Texas, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, and Idaho were also all represented as birthplaces. Sixty-five percent of total children on the Juárez train were born in the U.S. while 62.5% of children on the Nogales train were American born. While some, like William Nuñez mentioned at the outset of the chapter would eventually return to the United States, it is difficult to know how others returned to their birth country.

The birthplaces listed above for children born to Mexican parents provide a snapshot of where families were settling down either permanently or perhaps for an agricultural season. Birthplaces concentrate in Southern California. When examined at a family level, we also see that every family with a child born in the U.S. would from that point on have to negotiate future border crossings as a binational family with mixed citizenship status. This meant that the burden of documentation, proof of citizenship, whether Mexican or American, was now more complicated. As will be seen in the following chapter, binational families, especially undergoing strained marital relationships, faced a host of problems when crossing the border, with relation to child custody, and even in the instances where proof of marriage or marriage dissolution was critical to migrant lives and livelihoods across borders.

It was not only that parents and children in migrant families were likely to have different citizenship status, but citizenship status was often different among siblings. In fact, families where children were born in different countries and different states provide the most striking evidence for the diverse geographical journeys of migrants throughout the 1920s and the implications for family return migration, separation, and reunification in the 1930s. The
journeys also demonstrate how the cycles of life–birth, death, and overall changes in family composition–continued throughout migrations and across borders.

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<th>US Born Children returning through Juárez</th>
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For example, the birth places and ages of the Baltazar family returning on a train to Mexico from Los Angeles via Nogales provides a possible sketch of the family’s migration and also illustrates the mixed citizenship status that often made migrations and return migrations challenging to negotiate. The father was born in Pénjamo, Guanajuato, in 1898 while the mother was born in Leon, Guanajuato, in 1902. It appears that at some point both parents migrated to Denver, Colorado, perhaps separately or together where they had their first child in 1919. This family would already be negotiating with the mixed citizenship status of their family after their first child. It appears, however, that the Baltazars did not simply migrate to Denver and stay there, for at some point at least the mother traveled back to Pénjamo, Guanajuato and had her second child there in 1924. The family moved back to the United States where in 1927 they had their third child and second daughter in Santa Rita, New Mexico. They migrated once more to Simons, California, a company town and the site of a brickyard that housed a large Mexican community, where sometime between 1927 and 1929 they had their youngest daughter. The train lists do not reveal details about the Baltazar family beyond birth places and ages, but what we can see is that this migrant family was composed of both Mexican and U.S. citizens, with children born in three different U.S. cities and one in Mexico, and embarked on a return migration that was just one part of their larger family history of migration.

Train lists reveal various details about repatriates moving back to Mexico during the height of the Great Depression.206 The type of details included in such lists depended largely on where trains were coming from in the United States and where they were going to in Mexico. As

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can be seen, train lists from Laredo include the occupation of repatriates and where they had been living in the United States, where as some train lists from Nogales and Ciudad Juárez do not reveal such details, but do reveal the birthplace of every repatriate boarding the train. The 577 repatriates culled from three train lists each representing the number of repatriates on trains for one month in 1931 is a telling sample of the many who returned, and reveal certain patterns showing the bidirectional, multigenerational and diverse nature of migration and repatriation during the Great Depression.

**Family and Women**

Given the lack of records, estimates of repatriated families are next to impossible to gather, but the slightest bit of context may be gleaned from the statistic that 40,687 children under the age of fourteen left the United States during the year 1931. That’s 8,715 going to Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato. The 40,687 is likely an underestimate but even then, it lends insight into the number of families that came back during just one year of repatriations. That many of them were likely U.S. citizens raises important questions about how Mexican migrants were expected to be temporary, and the degree to which mass repatriation fueled by the uncertainties of economic crisis, propaganda campaigns, and increasing nativism in parts of the United States perpetuated (sometimes by force) the notion that Mexican migrants were unusually and naturally mobile and were highly expendable. This notion seemed to give both Mexican

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207 “Repatriados registrados en el país durante el año de 1931, con expresión de las Entidades Federativas donde fueron a radicarse y grupos de edad hasta 14 años,” June 25th, 1932. Departamento de la Estadística Nacional. File number 4-350-1930-448, Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración (INAMI).

208 As Katherine Benton-Cohen shows, the Dillingham Commission, the U.S. commission tasked with studying immigration from 1907-1910, had not viewed Mexicans as a threat to American labor because they were expected to
and U.S. American societies excuses to justify the mass removal and recruitment of Mexicans and their families without regard to the finer details of what that relocation required, the material and psychological impact that it could have, not to mention the reality of the legal complexities that such families posed to rigid frameworks of nationality and citizenship.

Similar to the stories documenting the various forms of migrant hardships, stories revealed by letters to Mexican Presidents reveal creative approaches to resolving issues and surviving the economic crisis. Letters to the Presidents suggest that migrant language was a language of petition but also a language of demand and expectation. Migrants communicated their expectations of the Mexican government despite their liminal state across borders. Migrants would go on to articulate their expectations even more powerfully by migrants in the latter 1930s and 1940s.

In 1930 Micaela Amador wrote to the Secretary of Government Portes Gil from Las Vegas, Nevada, in the throes of economic difficulty having recently lost her husband and finding that a brother in the United States could not support her and two children. She was left “without a home, and without money to support her family.” Micaela had read in a newspaper that a new school for those who had little money was opening up in Mexico City. In an expression of patriotic lobbying she explained that she didn’t want her children to grow up in the United States but rather in Mexico so that her children would “love their flag and serve their country.” She didn’t just want to repatriate, she had a plan, and addressed the former president with patriotism and persuasion to help her put her plan into action. Like so many others who wrote to consuls

and presidents during that period, she was told to look for financial aid from charitable organizations in the U.S. to help her get to the border where the Mexican consular service could then cover her travel expenses into Mexico.209

Micaela, a recent widow with a young family and no means of support was similar to others writing to government officials between 1930 and 1934. Five themes pertaining to family emerge in the letters written during the worst part of the Great Depression. 1) Large family size; 2) spousal abandonment; 3) illness; 4) death of a family member 5) or being stranded in between their point of departure in the U.S. and their final destination. All migrants specifically asked for money or ‘passes’ to cross the border, (passes usually implied a combination of financial aid and an expediting of legal documents).

At least sixty letters requesting help to return to Mexico were written to President Abelardo Rodríguez between 1932 and 1934 with many more were written to President Lazaro Cárdenas throughout the 1930s. The letters appealed to the patriotism and greatness of their president, explained their reasons for leaving Mexico in the first place, and then explained what circumstances led them to the point of writing their letter. Fernando Ascencio’s letter explains some of the trouble that binational and migrant families faced with repatriation. In 1934, Ascencio, a native from León, Guanajuato, wrote from Los Angeles, California where he lived with his children. Since arriving to Los Angeles in 1926 with the goal of putting his children through school, he had lived through a series of “unforeseen accidents” including the death of a son, and more recently the death of his wife. These deaths and material concerns had kept him in

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209 Letter to Emilio Portes Gil from Micaela B de Amador, February 27, 1930. File number 4-356-1930-89 INAMI. 167
the U.S. when all along he had planned on returning to Mexico. Ascencio reached out to the President knowing well that the County of Los Angeles could help him in his repatriation, however, he was convinced that were there strings attached to the offer and he feared of never being able to return to United States. He could not bear to leave as an official repatriado for fear that he would not be able to return to the three children that he was leaving to finish their education in the U.S. and his “wife and one son in a cemetery.”

His hesitation in accepting welfare relief at the cost of never returning to the U.S. was shared by other migrants who believed that American immigration officials were forcing Mexicans to sign false testimonies allowing agents to deport them.

The combined factors of confusing local, state and federal policies and the drying up of funds in the U.S. and Mexico for assisted repatriation, forced families to migrate separately, at times leaving a family member stranded on either side of the border. In February of 1933 a letter on behalf of three men in Chicago described their “unbearable crisis due to the crisis in the U.S.,” and their urgent necessity to return to Mexico. They had sent their wives and sons back to Mexico City eight months earlier but had since then been unable to make enough money to sustain their households. The chief of the consular department in Mexico City was forwarded the letter and encouraged the Mexican consul in Chicago to do everything in his power to help the men reunite with their families in Mexico. In a reversal of chain migration that might have first brought men to the United States with their families following, men were now sending their

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210 Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Abelardo Rodríguez (AGN-RP-ALR) Box 24 244.1/41-1.

211 Letter to President from Juan Diego Valdez AGN-RP-ALR Box 24 244.1/52.
family members back to Mexico and trying to adapt their family economic migration to new economic realities. Here, the families of the men might have benefitted from government assisted transportation but in trying to wait out the crisis the men instead found themselves in even more precarious circumstances.

The plight of single women is revealed in letters to the President as well. Emilia Siller Falcon wrote the President petitioning him for help for her sister who had been abandoned in Chicago.  

Without any family in the United States, lone women faced challenging circumstances during economic crises, suffering from decreased work opportunities and reduced access to welfare relief. Tepoxina Pintada Vda. de Ferrer, from San Antonio, showed appreciation for the U.S. ‘government aid’ that she had received over the past year due to her spinal arthritis, and said she “understood why she shouldn’t be supported indefinitely.” She counted on the president to help her obtain rail tickets to Chiapas where summer weather might ease her physical pain. While many women left Mexico in the 1920s to reunite with their husbands, two women writing to President Rodriguez in 1934 now hoped to leave the U.S. to get away from their husbands; one from a husband who spent all his money on his “vices”, and another from the fallout of a fight with her mother-in-law in which she lost her washing machine and thus her sole method of supporting herself. Both women, struggling to provide for themselves and whose lives were exacerbated by the hardship of the economic crisis, preferred to return to Mexico.  

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212 AGN-RP-ALR, Box 25 244.1/66.  
213 AGN-RP-ALR, Box 25, 244.1/89.  
214 AGN-RP-ALR, Box 25, 244.1/75, 244.1/89.
The cases above demonstrate the impacts of economic crisis, repatriation and deportation, and the complicated border crossing requirements on Mexicans families who faced challenging separations and reunifications. Many migrants whether single or with family members, migrated to the United States and back to Mexico without government assistance or approval–in fact many migrated beyond the purview of one or both governments all together. Still, together the stories suggest that family migrations–requiring planning, legal documents and financial resources, were an important feature of Mexican migration in the 1920 and the 1930s. The petitions to the Mexican presidents also remind us that the repatriation was not a process that began and stopped on the northern side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Mexican officials had to reckon with the sheer mass of repatriates that were streaming into the country, and the Mexican public had to contend with these returned migrants as well.

Mexican border states especially felt the impact of the return exodus of Mexicans, but so did the center-western states. In June of 1931, the Student Federation of Jalisco wrote to President Ortiz Rubio requesting support in transporting ‘repatriados’ out of the capital of Guadalajara, saying that “daily, repatriates from different points in the United States are arriving to this capital in very bad conditions and with their families.” 215 The group had been working to help provide recently arrived migrants with help and jobs but could not keep up with the influx of people. Those coming back were not all healthy experienced, easily moveable, workers. There were, as mentioned, children and families, and elderly sick and poor. While some migrants took advantage of free train tickets to Mexico- a big incentive offered by state and

215 Letter to Mexican President Ortiz Rubio from Student Federation of Jalisco, June 26, 1931. File number 4-356-1931-332, INAMI.
county welfare offices between 1929 and 1931, others found that they had missed their opportunity for assisted repatriation or had simply decided to try and weather the initial crisis. For a variety of other reasons, and perhaps due to the logistical challenges of repatriates desiring to repatriate their entire families, migrants placed their hopes in top government officials, writing impassioned letters to plead their case for assistance.

The response to the repatriates in Mexico consisted of private charitable organizations, individuals, and the Mexican government (largely through their aid in the U.S. by Mexican consuls) contributing to the transportation of repatriates from the border to the interior of Mexico. Aid societies in Mexico and the Mexican government had often helped repatriated Mexicans in the past albeit on a smaller scale than in the 1930s. In May of 1929, even prior to the economic crash, the Mexican Cruz Azul aided those returning to Mexico and the Secretary of Gobernación following Presidential arrangements committed to helping Mexicans in the U.S. who needed assistance “due to the hostilities carried out against them by immigration authorities.”

In Gómez Palacio, Durango, Charitable Ladies association’s provided aid to people returning to their hometowns in very poor conditions in what was described as, “the interminable caravan of repatriates that continues to pass through this city” composed of “families returning from the U.S. return in cars, very many of which no longer have tires, and in terrible conditions.”

Hundreds of families arrived on trains to Ciudad Juárez where some were given bread and even money. While other repatriates stranded in Monterrey, not having quite

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216 El Informador, Dec, May 24, 1929, “Se Modifica La Ley Box en E.U. en favor de Los Mexicanos”
217 El Informador, Dec. 19 1930, “Por Gomez Palacios Siguen Pasando Numerosas Repatriados”
218 El Informador, Enero 12, 1931, “Dio principio repatriación de Mexicanos.”
enough resources to get to their hometowns, set up “traveling bazars” where they would sell anything they could to make money they so desperately needed after arriving to the city impoverished.219

The response was both positive and negative, for where repatriates inundated some cities and stretched resources, other regions welcomed the influx of what was perceived to be a group of repatriates with “modern machines and experience acquired during the time that they worked in the United States.”220 Repatriates could also be seen as a threat to Mexican labor stability, and agents from the Mexican Office of Migration voiced their concern about the concentration of so many unemployed Mexicans living in misery and subject to influence of communist influence. Suspicions were raised that repatriates were potential agitators themselves and that together with discontent rail workers were like an “accumulation of gun powder near the tracks, that if not taken serious, any spark could be dangerous.”221 In the U.S., suspicions about Mexican migrants and repatriates being potential communists fueled the continued nativist demands for their deportation as the Great Depression wore on. With the range of characterizations given to migrants by observers on both sides of the border, it became increasingly evident that especially during the anxious period of economic crisis, repatriates were a wildcard, an unknown, even despite overconfident testaments to their character, “The emigrant of our country doesn’t have the capacity nor the character, nor the conviction to convert himself into a missionary for

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219 El Informador, Nov. 12, 1931, “Todo lo que traen consigo los repatriados lo están malbaratando.”
221 April 22 1931, Nogales, “Informe de la Visita practicada a a la Delegación del Servicio de Emigración Inspector Ramon Tirado,” INAMI 4 161-1931-173
communism.” In both countries, characterizations of Mexican migrants shifted to fit the purpose of either countries use and tolerance for them. Migrants were often seen as outsiders, with their citizenship and belonging questioned in both countries, leaving them vulnerable to being seen as disposable or second-class citizens. In the words of another editorialist wondering how the saga of Mexican migration and economic crisis would end and what the State’s real use for the returned migrant would be, “Do they call on them to rejoin part of the Mexican family, or to leave their money in the cash registers of the office of migration?”

Despite the Mexican government paying sixty percent of train tickets for repatriates, enticing them with colonization schemes in lowly populated agricultural areas in need of development, and the Presidential propaganda that welcomed Mexico’s prodigal sons and daughters, it remained to be seen whether Mexican migrants would have a place in the nation, or at the very least, whether Mexico would indeed offer them a better life. It remained to be seen whether FDR’s New Deal or Lazaro Cárdenas’ Mexico would provide enough to keep Mexican migrants satisfied or confined to either side of the border.

Conclusion

Migration during the era of the Great Depression between 1929 and 1934 was marked by deep instability. Central to the history of this troubled and even contentious period of migration are the stories about family. Whereas the movement of families predating the Great Depression remains hidden from the records to a large extent, the removal and return of migrant families during the Great Depression has always been central to the telling of hardship during the era.

222 “El Fantasma Migratorio” editorial, June 6, 1933, pag. 3, El Informador
223 El Informador, Feb 24, 1930 “Una remora para la repatriación”
Details about how families actually suffered through the economic crisis and how repatriation was actually carried out emerge from letters written by migrants, train lists of repatriates, and newspaper reports and give us more of an understanding to how migrants experienced the period. While excellent studies have provided details on how government officials on each side of the border acted on behalf of migrants during the crisis, a deeper look into migrant lives reveals that repatriation and deportation, return and removal, are only part of broader migration histories. Details about birthplaces of U.S.-born Children and Mexican parents reveal the scope and complexity of migration.

Repatriation had occurred prior to the Great Depression, but the scale of return and hardship had been unmatched in previous decades. The boom period of migration in the 1920s produced a huge population that faced enormous challenges as a result of the tightening Mexican-U.S. border, concerted local efforts toward immigrant removal, and broad propaganda campaigns encouraging Mexican migrants to leave and convincing them that they would be better off in their birth country. Mexican sending communities also felt the impact of the Great Depression as the economic crisis led directly to both the disintegration and reintegration of families. The impact of such dislocations was not simply material for both the migrants and the governments involved, but likely also had a critical psychological impact on migrants and prompted a serious consideration about the place of migrants in the national projects and development of both countries.

After all, this is not just the story about expendable and flexible migrants in a self-regulating binational labor market, but rather a story about binational families with binational livelihoods at stake. When repatriates boarded trains, or tried to wait out the crisis, sometimes
abandoned by their loved ones, entire families and community on both sides of the border were affected. Families composed of both men and women, and bicultural if not binational children, were split apart or learned how to navigate evolving bureaucracies in order to keep their families together. We see the many children born in the U.S. only to return to a land they might have not known very well, if at all. Like William Nuñez, some would then return after many years to take residence in their native countries. Children like William would grow up to be the Mexican/Mexican-American adults whose lives were shaped by two nations, the first 11 years in the United States, the next 9 years in Mexico and then back to the U.S. Their experiences could nominally be characterized as repatriation and deportation to match the experiences of their parents, but a potentially more insidious process that could be called depatriation occurred throughout the decade of the 1930s. Despite the years spent, and the work given in the U.S., and despite even having a U.S. birth certificate to justify the inclusion of Mexican migrants into the nation (U.S.), efforts toward repatriation and deportation suggested that inclusion was highly conditional…and yet highly flexible. Federico Camarillo and his wife Cristina Espinosa entered the United States in 1947 with their two American born daughters (18 and 14 years old). Their purpose of entering the United States: “to reside”. They would join Federico’s mother. Listed under “Ever in the U.S.” was the following “Yes, 1918 until 10/23/31.” The binational Camarillos were returning to the U.S. sixteen years after their repatriation to Mexico.

The era was not only characterized by removal but also by return. Although the return was fraught with challenges, the return also signaled a welcome by a nation that was perhaps more ready to receive them and make room for them than had been able to do before. The inclusion of Mexicans into the Mexican national project, though, was also conditional. Mexicans
could not be expelled from their own country, but local observers and government officials questioned the character of such migrants and expected them to contribute to the agricultural development of the country. While some of the Mexican migrant petitioners made more forceful demands in their interactions with the State during the early years of the crisis, economic devastation and desperate situations yielded beseeching letters. In coming years migrants would take in, and take advantage of, the rhetoric accompanying the New Deal and Revolutionary promises made to them as (conditional) members of two nations.
CHAPTER IV
Good Presidents, Bad Husbands, and Dead Fathers: Gendered Responses to the Limits of Binational Living

Dear Uncle Sam or President,

Hello? I am writing you this letter, asking my country for help to go back. Because we are suffering of hunger. There’s eight children, seven born in the state of Iowa. My father, mother and the small baby are of Mexico. When we came the American Consel was suppose[d] to hel[p] us the rest of the road in Mexico. The Mexican Consel didn’t help my father the rest of the road. Because we had a car. Then my father had to sell the [car] in which had travel all of the road from Iowa to El Paso, to travel by train to Nochistlan, Zac. Where we are yet suffering of hunger and education. Write me the answer to this address, Nochistlan, Zac.

Yours truly, friend, Nicha Rodriguez

Dear President,

I am writing this letter asking you a great favor which I will tell you in the following. My two sisters and I were born in Mexico (all the family was) us we look back to our childhood days the more it make me to ask you and my sisters beg me to write to you, Mr. President. I think you are wondering what my favor is, well is very simple, My President, that we haven’t enough money to go to visit our country for a few months. We come out of school in June and go back September, so My president, can you help us with the train fare please! (My sister is thirteen and the other one sixteen and I am fifteen).

My Dear father is dead and if you only knew what you would do, three girls who wan[t] to see their country very, very much and visit their relatives. My Dear President, please don’t disappoint us. We will be waiting for your answer.

My President, I know you can help us you are the Father of Our country and that is why I ask you.
I will close my letter dreaming of your answer.
Sincerely your[s],
Nahum Cervantes.

224 Unless otherwise indicated, correspondence is quoted exactly as written and grammatical mistakes are uncorrected. Nicha Rodriguez, 1936 Box 3, file no. 310; Consul of Guadalajara, U.S. Department of State. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788- ca. 1991. General Records, compiled 1936-1949 Record Group 84; National Archives at College Park, MD.
PS. Maybe I am asking too much but I wish I could see you in person and your dear wife.225

In 1936, Iowa-born Nicha Rodriguez, wrote to President Roosevelt, detailing the events of her family’s harrowing repatriation back to Mexico. Having traveled the long road from Iowa to El Paso and then to Nochistlan, Zacatecas, Nicha was “suffering of hunger and education” and was appealing to her president for some help to go back home. Across the border and writing to Mexican President Lazaro Cardenas in 1939, Nahum Cervantes, also appealed to her President for help in returning to her country. Nicha and Nahum, two young girls suffering from poverty in a foreign land and with no money to return home, appealed to the highest authorities of their respective nations to help them in their migrations.

Each letter reveals fascinating details about the binational lives that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans lived; the ways in which poverty, citizenship, and gender intersected and made for challenging migrations; and the appeals that migrants made to government officials. From Nicha’s letter we gain additional insight into the return migrations detailed in chapter four.

Her family almost had sufficient means to carry out their own repatriation, and thus did not get a subsidized train ride. After all, they had a car but needed to sell it in order to make it to their final destination of Nochistlan Zacatecas. The letter also reveals that Nicha was part of a binational family, and while her parents and youngest brother were born in Mexico, herself and six other siblings were born in Iowa, the U.S. was there home and FDR was their president. She was just one of hundreds of thousands of U.S. American citizens writing to the beloved New Deal

president. That she was living in a foreign country perhaps compelled her even more to write directly to the President. Whether it was the cult of personality that FDR inspired, or perhaps because no other obvious government official might help with such a plight, Nicha, along with many other Mexican and Mexican-American migrants wrote to their Presidents in troubling times.

Nahum Cervantes was also writing to her nation’s top leader. Lazaro Cardenas, another man of the people, who was to lead Mexico out of an era of crisis, into reform and to finally deliver on the promises of the revolution. Writing from San Jose California, Nahum appealed to the “father” of her birth country after her own father died and her family found themselves too poor to continue their cross-border migrations. She expressed nostalgia for her home country, but also indicated that she along with her sisters hoped to visit Mexico only for the summer months. Nahum’s letter reveals the difficulty of continued migrations in the face of poverty. In her case, poverty might have been the result of low wages and standards of living for Mexicans in the U.S. that had persisted since the Great Depression, or might have been more directly related to the passing of her father. With the absence of a male breadwinner at home, the regular visits that the Cervantes girls had come to rely on were now dependent on whether a benevolent President would pay their train fare.

Nicha and Nahum were part of a larger group of women, men, and children in transnational migrant families who found themselves in dire straits during the 1930s. Poor economic conditions in the United States and Mexico resulted in frustrated migration attempts of those trying to survive in both countries. The repatriation and deportation of thousands of
Mexicans to Mexico, the increased vigilance and restriction of migration along the US-Mexico border, and the financial cost of travel were all key factors in prohibiting the circular migration and immigration of U.S. and Mexican citizens across the international border. Women, already faced great obstacles in entering the U.S. legally, since many were suspected likely to become a public charge, found that their ability to use migration as an adaptive strategy was undercut even further during periods of economic distress. Women experienced the separation of their families, faced the loss of a male family member, were sometimes abused or in dire circumstances migrants reached out to the state for help, to Presidents and consuls.

This chapter first examines migration and migrant lives in the latter half of the 1930s in Roosevelt’s U.S. and Cardenas’ Mexico. Through letters to the President we gain an understanding not only of what the lives were like for migrants who were trying to cross the border during a time of heightened poverty and restriction, but also how migrants reached out to the State in order to plead their case. The chapter then describes how the intersection of citizenship, poverty and gender led to bureaucratic complications for migrants and the state, and also reveals the emotionally difficult situations for migrants who were stranded on either side of the border. We then see how binational families, having increased as a result from the surge in family migration during the 1920s and the surge in return migration in the early 1930s, faced

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226 Circular migration and immigration are not terms that are mutually exclusive but for the rest of this essay I will use the term “circular migration” to describe instances in which people migrate between the United States and Mexico repeatedly. I will use the term “immigration” when describing the process by which people seek to live in the United States permanently. I describe people as immigrants only when the evidence clearly suggests that they wanted to establish permanent residence in the United States, for all others, and the majority of these cases, I use the term, “migrant”.

additional challenges as border and immigration legislation became more strictly enforced. Specific attention is given to the plight of women with a unique window into how intimate family matters were often brought into diplomatic spaces. Lastly, this chapter suggests that especially in the face of bad or absent fathers and husbands’ women reached out to Presidents and Consuls in a particularly gendered way.

Migration in the post-depression years

Migration to the U.S. from Mexico between 1935 and 1940 drastically declined from the heavy migration of the 1920s. With decreasing job opportunities, a heavy wave of repatriates returning to Mexico and the increased efforts toward restriction along the border, Mexicans were not as likely to risk the journey. With the onset of the Great Depression in the United States, border agents were encouraged by the U.S. government to be particularly vigilant towards any “undesirables” trying to enter the country, decreasing the number of aliens that entered the country between 1930 and 1937 by as many as 1,000,000. Scholars, in fact, often refer to the Great Depression years and the decade of the thirties in general as a period where Mexican migration to the United States equaled to net zero. However, a reduced number of visas were still given to given to migrants, and as can be seen through letters to the consul and President,

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228 66,526 immigration and non-immigration visas were issued to persons born in Mexico for the years 1926-1927, after which the issuance of immigration visas dropped precipitously. Ten years later, for the years 1935 and 1936 only 1,427 visas were given. Statistical Report of Immigration and non-immigration Visas for year July 1, 1935 to June 30, 1936. Box 6, file no. 811.11

229 Immigration and Visa Discussions at the Consular Conference, Mexico City, October 9-15, 1937. Box 9, file no. 811.11.
Mexicans and especially Mexican-Americans who had previously been repatriated or who had family members in the United States still aspired to migrate in order to reunite with relatives and with hopes of ameliorating their impoverished situations.

Although recovery started earlier in Mexico than in the United States, Mexico was once again plunged into recession in 1937. With little money to invest in technological improvements, new landholding peasants were at the mercy of irregular rainy seasons, and could not rely on their corn crops for sustenance with any certainty. State workers, such as telegraph and postal employees, went through month-long periods without pay, and domestic servants joined with syndicates to negotiate for higher wages. Potential U.S. investors and merchants were, in almost all cases, regardless of their particular product, discouraged from bringing their money and business to Jalisco by US consular officials.

The purchasing power of Jaliscienses was devastated by low wages and steep prices on imports. Imported dried goods were prohibitively expensive. The U.S, consul at Guadalajara reported that, “Staple foods such as beans, rice, coffee and garbanzos, used by the natives have increased considerably, although not in the same proportion.” He went on to point out, “a

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230 Mexico’s industrial sector actually grew significantly from 1926 to 1940, but it doesn’t appear to have brought significant benefits majority of the Mexican population. Enrique Cárdenas. *La Industrialización Mexicana Durante La Gran Depresión*. El Colegio De Mexico: Mexico D.F., 1987. 32-55
231 Political and Economic reports July 1939-December 1939, Box 25 file no. 800, See section titled Agrarian in reports for July 1, 1939-December 1, 1939.
232 Ibid, Domestic Servants, see July 1, 1939 Report. Postal and telegraph workers, see August 1, 1939.
233 A number of US companies wrote to the consul seeking information on the market conditions for such products including jewelry, tobacco, cotton clothing, gas stoves, radios, cars See 1936 Box 7 file no. 867 ; 1937 Box 13 File no. 866.12
housekeeper with 200 pesos per month now finds that she can buy less than she formerly could with only 140 pesos per month.”

In 1936, the consul estimated that 85% of the consular district’s population was of the “laboring classes, of whose average wage is not more than 50 cents per day in terms of American currency.” In 1936 it cost about 25 dollars for a rail ticket from Guadalajara to Nogales, Mexico, where migrants would cross over to Nogales Arizona then travel by bus to points in the western United States. The trip north (and return trips south) required considerable saving and planning.

Conditions in the United States

Repatriations and deportations in the early 1930s certainly took a toll on many communities and dramatically reduced the number of Mexican residents in the U.S., but many other Mexican migrants were able to continue their lives in the U.S., albeit often in impoverished circumstances. Mexican migrants were hit particularly hard since it was more difficult for them to obtain various forms of welfare relief such as access to WPA employment. Mexicans in agriculture had to endure even more challenges when they found themselves without enough resources to follow the harvests of crops and cobble together seasons of work. Families waiting

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234 Political and Economic reports July 1939-December 1939, Box 25 file no. 800. October 2, 1939, Cost of Living
235 Letter from US Vice Consul, Norris S. Haselton to The Drell Manufacturing Novelty Company, July 14, 1936. Box 7, 867.4
236 Correspondence between US consul and Frank Valadez, 1936. Box 3, file no. 310

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on harvests, means to travel, or other employment could be found living in squalid conditions in Hoovervilles, or shack towns, across California.\textsuperscript{237}

Mexican families and living conditions came increasingly into view as government officials began to take stock of the housing problems caused by a dramatic increase in “migratory workers." The focus was not, however, particularly on Mexican and Mexican-American families as much as it was on number of destitute families streaming in from the Midwest into California. Dust Bowl migrants had begun to replace the Mexicans who had left and dramatically transformed the composition of agricultural labor in California.\textsuperscript{238} White migrant families came to occupy the attention of social reformers, economists and sociologists especially because of the terrible state they were in. For example, a principal of a migratory school in the San Joaquin Valley reported that Mexican children as opposed to “new white children” coming in recently from Texas and Oklahoma at least had shoes, underwear and coats.\textsuperscript{239}

In a 1939 report on Housing Conditions among migratory workers for the Division of Immigration and Housing in the state of California, Cary McWilliams reported that Mexicans

\textsuperscript{237} “Memorandum on Housing Conditions among migratory workers in California.” UC Berkeley Bancroft Library Manuscripts Collection. BANC MSS 84/38c, Taylor, Paul Schuster Papers, 1895-1984
\textsuperscript{238} In reality these migrants from Oklahoma, Texas, and much of the midwestern plains came in droves to California not only because of the extreme drought that contributed to the Dust Bowl. The Great Depression, with its decreasing crop prices, and subsidized programs that actually encouraged farmers to take their lands out of cultivation, hit the rural southwest particularly hard. The movement west by these white migrants (including white collar, blue collar and farmers) had it’s origins prior to the 1930s and was largely facilitated by family connections, however, the particular migrants that settled in the central valleys of California were a particularly destitute group hoping to take advantages of higher wages, year round farming, and California social relief. See. James Gregory, \textit{American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California.} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.)
made up 75% of sugar beet workers and 40% of those working in peaches and hops. While families were the primary working unit in both peaches and hops, mostly single men worked in sugar beets, perhaps indicating a slight shift away from the family labor in beets that had predominated in the 1920s. Another demographic shift, is revealed by the fact that despite the high proportion of Mexicans working and residing in Mexican “Jimtowns” in San Bernardino, Ventura, San Diego and Santa Barbara counties, white migrant families easily outnumbered Mexican families in the Imperial Valley by 1935.240

The Mexican families that remained in agriculture were primarily those families where heads of household (mostly men) and their spouses were born in Mexico and had come to California in the in the early 1920s or even before. In a Survey of California Workers, Paul S. Taylor and his research team found that, “only 17 families out of the total 122 did not come either directly or indirectly from Mexico.” Though the emphasis was placed on the birth place for heads of households, it was reported that “most of the women were born in Mexico, too.” 105 of the 110 families first entry into the United States was before 1930, suggesting families who had been in the United States longer were the ones likely to try to weather the Great Depression, even under difficult circumstances.241

For some families, seasonal migration following the harvests could sustain them year around, whereas others would have to temporarily endure stints of relief. A survey of families in

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cotton camps in 1937, reported that out of 150 families only 15 had gone on welfare relief. One of the families that was interviewed had come to California in 1923. Between 1934 and 1933 they would work in cotton for 5-6 months migrating to Tracy to work peas for three months, then to Clarksburg for two months in beets, and finally to San Leandro for work in Apricots. The father, mother, maternal grandmother and oldest son were born in Mexico, with a six-year-old son and a seventeen-day old daughter born in the United States. The family was reported to have lived in “exceptional” “standards of comfort and cleanliness.”

In contrast to the family described above, another family reportedly had lived in a filthy cabin that had been provided rent-free by the grower. The family of eight suffered health problems and one child in particular suffered from a spinal defect, while all were suspected of having tuberculosis. The father worked in cotton in Madera, California as well as peas and berries on the coast. The mother and some of the older children also worked from time to time. The family had first arrived in 1921 and returned to Mexico for 1926 for two years. They returned in 1929 and had been in the U.S. ever since. At one point they were able to keep three years of continuous residence in Madera County but were splitting time between the coast and the valley during the three years prior to the survey. The family had come to the attention of researchers because of one of their young boys who had spinal problems that required surgery in Fresno, California in 1927 and in Guadalajara in 1928. The family had been on relief when the
father lost his job, but only for 6 weeks, which considering the size of the family, low cumulative wages and health problems was fairly remarkable.242

Some Mexicans and Mexican-American families such as the one described above, received relief aid as a result of a slate of programs ushered in as part of the New Deal. The Federal Emergency Relief administration, the Works Progress Administration, and in California, the State Relief Administration technically did not bar non-citizens from access to New Deal relief programs, however, when possible, efforts were made to push Mexicans off relief rolls. This was partially accomplished by giving Mexican families less of an allotment of aid than non-Mexican families.243 Mexicans might also work on WPA projects, unless they were found to be illegal immigrants who were barred in 1936. By 1939 non-citizens were fully banned from work on WPA projects.244

As will be discussed later in the chapter, families were particularly at risk when a male head of household had died or abandoned their families. The chances of getting aid or welfare relief of some kind was, however greatly enhanced if families had U.S.-born children. Mothers with dependent children had been able to secure various forms of welfare relief throughout the 1930s and letters from relief agencies such as the Los Angeles County Department of Charities to the Mexican consul at Guadalajara suggest that many receiving some type of public assistance were mothers and children who found themselves in dire straits either as the result of the

243 Stephanie Lewthwaite, Race, Place and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective (University of Arizona Press, 2009), 162-163.
desertion or death of the father. However, men occasionally were represented in these letters but only after unemployment after some kind of injury or illness.

*Presidents*

Despite the increasing nativism that threatened to ban immigrants from relief, the growth in social welfare programs during the New Deal provided hope for millions of immigrants and Americans alike; so too did the charismatic President of the People Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was the combination of Roosevelt’s personal appeal and New Deal programs that led the public to write three times the amount of letters than any previous administration.245 Like Nicha Rodriguez’s letter at the open of the chapter, Rosie Garcia also reached out to the President from Mexico hoping that he could help facilitate her return migration to the United States:

“April 20, 1939. Dear President of the USA. I am a girl that pass all my childhood there in California. I came to America when I was only three year(s) old. And we when(t) to Mexico when I was 14-year-old. And as soon as we got in Mexico my father died. And we are having a very hard time to get along. We have no work to do. But if there was work we don’t like to live in Mexico, 4 of my sister are born in California and they are always sick because in Mexico the time is different for them. I am married, But I married a very poor men and like we live in a very little Ranch there is now work to do. And he says he loves to come to America. All day long I

am talking to my husband about my dear California. And he says that if you help us to come over there that he will work the very best he can.”

Twenty-one-year-old Rosie Garcia wrote this letter to President Roosevelt from the Mexican state of Jalisco. Rosie was a Mexican citizen who arrived to the U.S. in 1921 but had returned to Mexico in 1932. She was now writing to the president asking for a passport to her “dear California.” In the closing statements of her letter she wrote, “Do your very best to send for us. Answer my letter as soon as you can... I know you can do what we want.” \(^{246}\)

The fact that a young Mexican woman, wrote to President Roosevelt asking for him to “send for her” seems incredible, colorful, unlikely, maybe far-fetched, and unique. However, the story she conveys—one of family dislocation, economic hardship, heartache, binational living & divided patriotism— is emblematic of experiences that many Mexican families faced during the 1920s and 30s. In fact, Rosie Garcia was one of many migrants who petitioned top government officials in both the U.S. and Mexico for help to relocate family or reunite with family on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Nicha Rodriguez, along with Rosie Garcia, Antonia Vazquez, and Mary Torres, all wrote to President Roosevelt between 1935 and 1940 asking him if he could aid in their migration to the United States. \(^{247}\)

\(^{246}\) Letter from Rosie Garcia to President Roosevelt, April 29, 1939 Box 22, file no. 310 U.S. Department of State. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788- ca. 1991. General Records, compiled 1936-1949 Record Group 84; National Archives at College Park, MD.

\(^{247}\) Nicha Rodriguez, 1936 Box 3, file no. 310; Rosie Garcia, 1939 Box 22, file no. 310; Antonia Vasquez, 1939 Box 22, file no. 310; Mary Torres, 1936 file no. 811.11. These letters were written to the White House and then forwarded to the US consular office at Guadalajara. US consuls were responsible for writing responses to inform letter-writers that there were no funds to pay for the migration of US or Mexicans to the US. One other letter to the president surfaced in these files and was written by David Fernandez who wrote to the president asking for help in re-entering the country after he had been deported, and had since been turned away at the border. David Fernandez, 1937 Box 12, file no. 811.11. These files along with most others cited in this paper can be found in the National Archives at College Park, See, U.S. Department of State. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1788- ca. 1991. General Records, compiled 1936-1949 Record Group 84; National Archives at College Park,
Mary C. Enriquez wrote her letter to U.S. Vice President Henry Wallace in December of 1941. Having been encouraged by the Vice President’s recent visit to Guadalajara and inspired by her faith, Mary described the circumstances that had left her, an American-born woman, stranded in the Mexico.

“Your Honor, I know you possess a kind heart and I am quite sure that you are a member of the Episcopal Church, so under the Great Power of Our Mighty Lord, in this city there lives a poor American family who begs a hand from you. I am an American, a Public School Teacher graduate from New York. I married a Mexican in that city in 1924, and we have five American children all born there. During the terrible crisis of 1931, my husband who had been living in NY for a period of twelve years, lost his job, and the Public Welfare of New York sent us here, place of birth of my husband. Since that time, we overcome all kind of endurances and bitterness. My husband does not work, for there is no work at all, and my poor children are in the most deplorable situation.”

She went on to state, “I want to be repatriated back to New York” stating that she could work as a school teacher if she were to return home. In addition to stating her case, and demonstrating that she could contribute to society upon her return if given the chance she stressed not only her poverty but the responsibility of her home country in assisting her, “I am an American and I know that my country wouldn’t leave us disappear amidst the shadow of hunger and starvation.” In an approach that viewed state assistance as an obligation but also welcomed it as a gift, Mary closed her letter with the following: “May be your decision will be my best

MD. All consular records cited in this paper are from this record group and will be cited according to their file numbers and box numbers throughout the rest of the paper.
Christmas Present, for I am sure I shall have none.” Closing with an endearing, if not tragic statement, Mary tried to appeal to humanity, the faith, and generosity of Vice President Wallace.

Letters to Mexican President Lazaro Cardenas

Six years earlier, Magdalena E. Ayala sent a similar request to the Mexican President from her home in Alamo, Colorado. Writing to the recently elected, and increasingly popular, President Lazaro Cardenas on Christmas Day of 1934, Magdalena asked him for help in repatriating herself, her husband, and four children. Magdalena had also been a public school teacher before migrating to her adopted country, and opened her letter by explaining that she had served the Mexican government “in the year 1920, having in my charge girls school in Coeneo, Michoacán.” Her husband had been out of work for a year and they lacked resources to make the trip back. After all, they did have a car that was in need of either repairs or gas, in addition to any other help the President might offer in getting them back to Mexico. After living in Colorado for nine years and giving birth to three of her four children (in the coal mining regions of Del Carbon, Walsenburg, and Rocky Mountain), desperate economic conditions led Magdalena to put faith in the Mexican president. It is unclear if she ever received a response; many letter writers in similar circumstances often did not receive responses. Their letters would be recorded by the President’s secretary, sent in an abstract form to the President and then either forwarded on to another department for consideration or kept by the office of the President. Letter writers would either be informed that their correspondence was being forwarded to another department,

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248 Letter to President Lazaro Cardenas from Magdalena E. Ayala AGN-RP-LCR 549.5/22

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that they should direct their requests to the nearest Mexican Consul in the United States, or told simply that there were no funds for such repatriation efforts.\textsuperscript{249} In very rare cases, letter writers were asked for more details in order to facilitate the distribution of rail passes, or given additional aid.\textsuperscript{250}

Letters streamed into the Palacio Nacional during Lazaro Cardenas’ administration. Cardenas like no other Mexican president before him, or perhaps after him, cultivated a personalist presidency that attracted an almost celebrity like following. Mexicans around the country sent droves of letters to Cardenas, wishing him well, asking for small gifts, and most importantly using the framework of revolutionary reform to deploy their own demands of the government. He held an appeal similar to that of his counterpart in the U.S., but it was the combination of Cardenas’ populism and charismatic rhetorical return to the ideals of the Revolution rather than the introduction of any formal social welfare programs as with Roosevelt and the New Deal, that really brought on an avalanche of correspondence.\textsuperscript{251}

\textsuperscript{249} For an example of letter directing migrant to consul see Letter to Jesus Suárez from Manuel Gamio 549.69; Señora J. Márquez de Edwards Vda de Alonso writing from Seelay, California in 1938 was told that due to the budgetary constraints she would not receive aid for her repatriation but that perhaps aid could be granted the following year, 549.5/133.

\textsuperscript{250} Such was the case for Victor Sandoval who wrote from Nogales, Sonora in 1939 to ask the president for rail passes for his sister and her children from San Pedro, California to Aguascalientes. Sandoval had actually previously secured rail passes for himself and eight other family members from Chula Vista to the Mexico in 1935. 549.5/43

\textsuperscript{251} Federal programs directed specifically towards mothers and children emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, and the Secretaria de Asistencia Publica was created in 1937 just a few years after the New Deal programs in the United States. See Nichole Sanders, \textit{Gender and Welfare in Mexico: The Consolidation of a Post-Revolutionary State} (Penn State University Press, 2012). The 1917 Mexican constitution did include elements of social welfare, however including articles which gave the state control over benevolent organization and established a public health authority, see Sanders, p. 10. In one sense this can be interpreted as a fairly progressive move, but given the increased authority conferred to the state, this was more likely a direct attack on social welfare offered by religious institutions.
Cardenas was seen as a man of the people, and the public perceived a kindness in him and a particular generosity directed toward the poor. Sixty-five-year-old Refugio Espinosa from Laredo, Texas, wrote to the President after breaking her leg, finding herself without money for food, being denied by a relief agency and being neglected by the Mexican Consul. She wrote to Cardenas telling him that she had heard that he was a “very charitable person who hurts for the poor.” Other letter writers, such as Agustin Valle, expressed an excitement was generated around his administration’s capacity for reform telling the president that he desired to “return to my country, to be part of the history of Mexico in its time of reconstruction and sovereignty.” Migrants, likely employing a combination of genuine support and patriotic strategy, and hoping to return to Mexico heralded Cardenas’ accomplishments in general. Ricardo Renteria for example expressed faith in his government, “in your good person and patrimony, which he had demonstrated toward all of the Republic.” Filomena Reyes, originally from Chapala, Jalisco wrote to the President on behalf of her husband and her children, telling him that he was the only person that could help that and god would repay him for his help. She and her family wanted to return to Mexico from San Bernardino, California but didn't have the means to do so. Manuel Salinas wrote from Pueblo, Colorado not only asking President Cardenas to be repatriated but also asked for scholarships for his children.

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252 Letter to Lazaro Cardenas from Refugio Espinoza, April 14, 1938 AGN-RP-LCR 549.5/69..
253 Letter to Lazaro Cardenas from Agustin Valle, July 7, 1939 AGN-RP-LCR 549.5/170. Valle, was no doubt referring to Cardenas’ nationalization of oil.
254 Letter to President Cardenas from Ricardo Renteria, March 18, 1938. AGN-RP-LCR 549.5/74
255 Letter to President Cardenas, from Filomena Reyes, LRC 549.9/134
256 Letter to Lazaro Cardenas from Manuel Salinas, LRC 549.5/33
The approaches and themes of the letters for repatriation were varied. While some professed abject poverty, many suggested the ways in which they could be useful to the state or even ways in which they could contribute or offset the cost of their repatriation for the state. Flora Guajardo, writing from Corcoran, California and using as her address “East Side Cash Store Box 536” wrote to President Cardenas but assured him that she did not want her repatriation to cost the state, “Seeing as how I find myself very poor and accompanied by all of my family, and I don’t want to be a cost to the nation at all, since I can’t help, I want to sell the history of my life, if you allow it. Her life story featured the “sacred date of the centenary of independence” and the November 20th call to revolution. It was a story about a “bad father” and she, as the innocent daughter would sell the story of her life in exchange for some help from the President. Flora appealed to the president, asking for his forgiveness for her boldness and counting on his generosity that she “discovered every chance she got to open the newspaper.”

Migrants and aspiring repatriates also appealed to Cardenas not only for helping returning (the financial cost and legal arrangements were less of concern) but specifically for lands to establish agricultural colonies. One of the hallmarks of Cardenas’ administration was that he redistributed and gave our more land than any of his predecessors. Cardenas’ ambitious agrarian reform efforts, especially his commitment to redistributing land to ejidatarios in the first years of his administration, elicited letters from Mexicans around the country who were waiting for

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257 Letter to Lazaro Cardenas from Flora N. Guajardo, April 14, 1938 LCR 549.5/74. Flora wrote specifically that she learned of President Cardenas’ generosity through reading the “periodicos Lozano,” Periodicos Lozano, in likelihood refers to the spanish language newspapers started by Ignacio Lozano, a Mexican who fled to Texas during the Mexican Revolution and who started “La Prensa” in San Antonio and “La Opinion” in Los Angeles. These were the most widely read Mexican newspapers in circulation during the time. 91-94 Mario T. Garcia, “La Frontera: The Border as Symbol and Reality in Mexican-American Thought” Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos, 1, (2), 1985, 197-199.
access to parcels of land. An ejido committee in Oaxaca addressed Cardenas as follows, “We thus wait for you, fellow citizen President of the Republic, begging once more that they pay attention to just petitions [for land] of the disinherited and needy who struggle to survive at great cost.” Emigrant citizens north of the border also made pleas for land, connecting their absence and return to the possibility of becoming landholders.

Appeals to Migrants and the potential for land

Lazaro Cardenas had made appeals to repatriates in 1937, specifically to the emigrant agriculturalists and for the political agenda of agrarianism and again in 1938. Since the turn of the century, Mexican Presidents acted with patriotic duty to try and bring migrants and repatriates back into the fold of the nation, but President Cardenas’ plan for repatriation went beyond the traditional relationship between migrants and the Mexican State. According to varying Mexican press reports, the Cardenas government was not only willing to provide free transportation, reduce customs fees, and provide work opportunities for repatriates, but he would also offer land for those who fulfilled certain requirements. Far from being a welcome return to just anyone who found themselves in dire circumstances in the United States, under the guidance of Manuel Gamio, the program would privilege the repatriation of those with expertise in agriculture so that they could contribute to Cardenas’ nationalist project. Cardenas' plans for settling repatriates into agricultural colonies were not merely rhetorical, and groups of repatriates

260 Ibid., 151-155.
from California and Texas were actually resettled in Chihuahua and Baja California, where repatriated families were actually given land.\textsuperscript{261}

Hilario Gonzalez wrote to the president in 1938 from Swink, Colorado explaining that he and many of his compatriots in the United States wished to repatriate and wanted to know if the president was offering lands for repatriates as stated in the press.\textsuperscript{262} Writing from cities in Texas, California, Indiana, and Iowa, Ambrosio Gonzalez, Sabino Alzaga, Luis Navarro, Eugenio Ibarra and Victoria Valdes were just some of the Mexican migrants in the United States who wrote to President Cardenas and asked him for repatriation and land.\textsuperscript{263} It is unknown whether these migrants were resettled into agricultural colonies in Mexico, but in 1939 thousands of repatriated families moved to the agricultural colony, named after the infamous date of Cardenas’ oil nationalization, 18 de Marzo. The colony in Tamaulipas would ultimately collapse due to a lack of resources and infrastructure and a year of terrible floods.\textsuperscript{264}

The act was welcoming toward repatriates but also practical and even shrewdly political. Cardenas very well could have been pushed to act quickly on the invitation made to repatriates in order to counter criticism regarding his policy toward Spanish refugees.\textsuperscript{265} But even the possibility that the invitation to repatriates and actual attempt at settling them in colonies was

\begin{enumerate}
\item[261] Ibid., 161-163. In November of 1938 Cardenas’ plan for repatriation was formalized and government resources were used to provide for the repatriation and colonization of hundreds of Mexican families,
\item[262] Letter to President Lazaro Cardenas from Hilario González, Feb 22, 1938 LRC 549.5/88
\item[263] LRC 549.5/108 Fernando Gonzalez, LRC 549.5/113 Victoria Valdes; Eugenio Ibarra LRC 549.5/146; Luis Navarro 549.5/160; Ambrosio Gonzalez LRC 549.5/169; Sabino Alzaga 549.5/168
\item[264] See, \textit{Que se quedan allá} by Alanís Enciso for more on the repatriates and Colonization, including the establishment and collapse of the agricultural colony, “18 de Marzo” in Tamaulipas.
\end{enumerate}
meant as a more political than benevolent act signals a major moment in the history of Mexican migration, in which migrants were recognized as a social group that could be brought in and included into the nation, albeit with a specific purpose of currying political favor. Migrants who had written to the President used the language of patriotism, rights, and revolutionary promise to become as a form of and means to becoming part of the nation state. But for others, especially children and young adults, people in desperate need no politics were played out and presidents (or their secretaries) and consuls read about the sheer brutal truth of frustrated relocations and lives straddled across borders.266

*Binational Families reach out to the Consuls*

Binational families had increased in number over the 1920s and faced particular challenges in the era of Great Depression. Their circumstances regarding citizenship and economic circumstances were complex and they anticipated encountering obstacles at the border as they moved from one country to another. Consular officials became the recipients of many letters from female migrants trying to navigate their family migrations. As earlier indicated women faced more scrutiny at the border especially if unaccompanied by a male companion; because of these complications, letters asking the consul for help in migrating were disproportionately written by women.267 For Maria Refugio Cervantes and others, the migration

266 Four out of five letter-writers writing to the Consul at Guadalajara between 1936 and 1940 were women.
and reunion of their binational families required guidance from the U.S. consul and a deeper knowledge of immigration and naturalization policies.\textsuperscript{268}

Petitions to welfare officials, consuls, and presidents continued throughout the decade. A slew of letters was written to officials of both nations asking for economic aid and money for repatriation costs. (Between 1936 and 1940, 175 letters were written to US consular office at Guadalajara alone from welfare and relief agencies in the United States.)\textsuperscript{269} Letters exchanged usually resulted in the consul contacting family members in Mexico who might be able to support their families in the US. All but a few of the letters were on behalf of women and their children, and most of these Mexican and Mexican-American women were single mothers, widowed or abandoned by their husbands. US-born women made an appearance in these letters as well. In one case, a relief official wrote to a consul in Mexico to ask if the American wife and child of a Mexican man now living there were “returnable”.

Maria was concerned about the “difficulties” she and her binational family might encounter at the border. In 1936 Maria was planning on re-migrating to the United States from Mexico as she had been doing over the past several years. She had entered the United States at least twice before, crossing once at the age of twenty with her young daughter. She crossed to accompany her husband who labored in the agriculture fields along the central coast of California. She would give birth to her second child in Santa Barbara County before returning back to Mexico. Four years later she returned yet again to the United States this time with two

\textsuperscript{268} Box 2 no Maria del Refugio Gracian de Cervantes 130; Otilia R. Haro 130.7 H; Angela Cervantes 130.7 C; Vicente Carrillo, 130, letter from Irma Wagner 1938, Box 15, file no. 130.

\textsuperscript{269} 28 welfare case in 1936; 47 welfare cases in 1937; 29 welfare cases in 1938 ;27 welfare cases in 1939; 44 welfare cases in 1940.
small children and accompanied by her brother. She gave birth to three more daughters in the United States. The family settled in Santa Maria, California, at the time of the 1930 census, when her eldest daughter Isabelle was enrolled in school. In 1936 Maria was back in Mexico and now a widow with five daughters to care for. In her past two trips to the United States she had gone to the border to cross with a male family member and with enough money to pay the head tax. Now, as a single mother of five children, she asked the consul for any information that might be useful for the successful border crossing of her family. 270

The consul responded to Maria and attached an informational sheet with visa requirements for her and her Mexican-born daughter. In addition to paying the appropriate fees, Maria would have to prove that she was capable of supporting herself and her five children as a widow. Without this assurance, she would surely have been refused a visa on account of being likely to become a public charge. 271 Because she had entered the United States before with no listed occupation, chances of entering again were slim. However, if she could prove that other family members might be able to support her and her five children she might have entered successfully. The U.S. consul at Guadalajara would have to approve or deny her application before she attempted to go, so at least Maria would not have to make the trip to the border with

270 Correspondence between Maria del Refugio Gracian de Cervantes and the US consul, Box 2, no. 130. 1930 US Census, Border Crossing Manifest 1920, Border Crossing Manifest 1924, General Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85; National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. [Accessed through Ancestry.com]; Consuls left no indication or specific criteria for explaining the refusal of visas for particular cases. It can be assumed that during this period the majority of refusals were based on the likely to become a public charge ground for exclusion.

271 According to discussions held at the Consular conference on immigration in Mexico City, the public charge clause was responsible for 95% of visa refusals. Immigration and Visa Discussions at the Consular Conference, Mexico City, October 9-15, 1937. Box 9, file. no. 811.11. p. 8
her five daughters just to be turned away. It is unknown whether she was one of 21 people to have received a visa that year or, if, instead, she was one of the 181 people that were denied.  

Maria’s migration experience demonstrates how citizenship was intertwined with migration and how binational families faced added difficulties in crossing the border. Her four daughters born in the U.S. enjoyed citizenship rights and, therefore, the right to cross while Maria and her eldest daughter did not. Her experience also demonstrates that women’s circular migration could be jeopardized quite suddenly if they could no longer rely on the support of a male family member. Her correspondence with the consul indicates that it was likely that she had all of her daughters with her in Mexico. The same could not be said for many Mexican parents living in the U.S. Vicente Carrillo and Agustina Martinez de García each wrote to the consul in 1936 to ask the consul for advice on bringing their children across the border. Like Maria Refugio, their children were born in the United States but their citizenship needed to be established beyond a doubt, and that was not always easy.

Vicente Carrillo was among those migrants who wanted to make sure that they had done everything necessary to ensure that their children could join them in the United States. In a letter written to the consul in 1936, Vicente Carrillo wanted to know what he should do to successfully bring his U.S.-born son across the border to San Francisco, “without having any difficulties with the offices of emigration.” He went on to explain, “the boy was born in this country [the United States] and that’s why I want to bring him, because I want him to be educated here in the English

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272 Summary of Business for the Consular Branch of the American Foreign Service at Guadalajara. Quarterly Reports for 1936. 1936 File number 130, Box 2
language.” Vicente’s son had been living with his own parents in Guadalajara for the past eight years, but Vicente decided it was time for his son to come back. Agustina Martinez de García also wrote to the consul to have her daughter, whom she had not seen in 11 years, move back to the United States to live with her in Indiana Harbor, Indiana. Her daughter, Angela Cervantes, had been living with a couple who according to Agustina was “very willing that I have my daughter with me because they are old and cannot assure my daughter anything for the future.” Like Vicente Carrillo’s son, Angela was born in the United States. The consul informed both Vicente and Agustina that they would need to send money for travel and be able to establish their children’s American citizenship for the successful migrations of their family members.

Agustina sent Angela’s proper birth certificate but Vicente Carrillo only had his son’s baptismal certificate. With a civil birth certificate, Angela was able to establish her U.S. citizenship with the Department of State and register as a U.S. citizen with the consul’s office. The consul anticipated that she would have no problem crossing the border. Mother and daughter would be reunited after all. Vicente had reason to be concerned about the difficulties his son might encounter at the border. Although it was up to the discretion of the immigration officer who reviewed the paperwork, baptismal certificates were usually not sufficient proof of citizenship. The Mexican father in the U.S. and the American-born son in Mexico would remain separated, unless Vicente’s son chanced a trip north without the guarantee of entry that his U.S. citizenship should have afforded him. This was a common migrant family

273 See the following cases for examples of citizenship denied on presenting baptismal certificates alone, Correspondence between Louise S. Lopez and the consul Box 15 file no. 130, 1938; and Correspondence between Jose Cervantes and the consul, Box 15, file no. 130, 1938.
circumstance: the nature of circular migration and seasonal labor made it so that binational families were often separated by distance and national borders.  

Whether parents like Maria were trying to migrate from Mexico with their binational families or whether they were already in the U.S. and trying to bring their children across the border, like Vicente and Agustina, they realized the necessity of making the appropriate arrangements for the passage of their family members. With so many visas being refused, establishing citizenship was the only guarantee for migration and reunification for these transnational families whose separation was becoming more permanent with the increasing strength of restrictive immigration legislation.

_Citizenship, poverty and gender_

On March 8, 1938, Ethel Hinojosa wrote a letter to the consul stating:

I am writing these few lines to ask you if you could do us a favor. My husband and I, also our little girls come here to Mexico on the 27th day of January. We thought we could get along better here, but since we came, we have all been sick and find conditions much worse than in the United States.  

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275 The lack of correct paperwork could be prohibitive in establishing citizenship but even with the right paperwork citizenship was unstable, and the potential for migration back and forth across the US-Mexico border reduced. Guillermo Warden hoped to establish his citizenship through his American father, but because he had been born out of wedlock, the consul reported back to him that it was doubtful that he would ever be able to gain US citizenship through his father. Correspondence between William Warden and US consul George H Winters. Box 2, file no. 130.

276 Letter from Ethel Hinojosa to the US consul at Guadalajara, March 9, 1938. Box 16, file no. 310.
Ethel assured the consul that they could get work on a farm upon their return to the States, if only the consul could provide them with some money for the migration trip. Ethel and her two daughters were born in the United States. Her husband, Charles Hinojosa, was born in Mexico, but had been living in the U.S. since he was two months old. The Hinojosa family was persistent and Charles wrote to the consul asking for help two months later.\textsuperscript{277} In a return letter, the consul suggested that they “endeavor to secure the necessary funds from relatives or friends.”\textsuperscript{278} They must have had little success. Ethel wrote again in June of 1939 reporting, “In the time we have been here we have gone hungry and my little girls are now barefooted.”\textsuperscript{279}

The Hinojosa letters suggest that during times of economic turmoil, when Mexicans faced low employment in the United States, some families returned to see if they could find better opportunities in Mexico. Charles had worked for the WPA (Work Project Administration) in the United States but decided that he might receive higher wages in Mexico, and believed that he had some property in Mexico.\textsuperscript{280} When he returned to Mexico he found that he “had nothing of value, only papers to an old house that has not been used since the Revolution and has not had any taxes paid on it.” The Hinojosas found no support from the U.S. consulate office as there were no funds for repatriation of any kind. The Hinojosas still thought it worth a try, however, since their trip to Mexico was “aided by the government.” It is unclear whether being “aided”

\textsuperscript{277} Letter to the consul from Charles Hinojosa, April 28, 1938. Box 16, file no. 130
\textsuperscript{278} Letter to Ethel Hinojosa from consul Geonare H Winters, March 11, 1938. Box 16, file no. 130
\textsuperscript{279} Letter to consul from Ethel Hinojosa, June 8, 1939. Box 22, file no. 310.
\textsuperscript{280} It is quite possible that Charles had lost his job provided by the New Deal’s WPA, since by 1937 the WPA had started to reduce WPA relief projects in places such as California’s San Joaquin Valley. See, Devra Weber, \textit{Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton and the New Deal}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 167-171.
meant that they were in fact repatriated by the U.S. government or whether they were deported, but in any case, the U.S. government was in no position to ameliorate the impoverishment that prevented them from going back.

The majority of correspondence at Guadalajara regarding migration between 1935 and 1940 consisted of these pleas for financial assistance. Barbara Cadena, another U.S.-born woman married to a Mexican man, appealed to the consul wanting help in moving her family to the U.S. because her children, like Ethel Hinojosa’s children, were sick.281 Mabelle Jaregui, also married to a Mexican man, wrote to the consul in 1939 asking for help to move back to the United States stating, “I have sold everything that [is worth] any money to buy food with, and my husband has no chance of getting work.” She emphasized that if they could just get back to Jerome, Arizona they could both easily find work. The consul regretted to inform her “that the government provides no funds for the relief of American citizens residing abroad.” To this Mabelle wrote back clarifying that she did not want “relief” abroad, but that she merely wanted assistance to return to her home country. Mabelle did not consider financial assistance from the U.S. government to migrate as charity; she expected it as a service.282

Barbara, Ethel, and Mabelle wrote in hopes of getting the passage paid for their entire families, including their Mexican and U.S.-born children and Mexican husbands. While Ethel could have potentially crossed by herself, she and her husband hoped to take the journey together. Barbara also wanted her husband to come along, emphasizing that he was the one that

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281 Letter from Barbara Cadena to the consul, March 27, 1940. Box 28, file no. 130
282 Correspondence between US consul and Mabelle Jauregui, 1940, Box, 28, file no. 130.
would make a living for their family. Mabelle asserted that her husband could not “find enough work to make a home” for them. These wives expected their husbands to provide for them and in the transnational circumstances described above women hoped to facilitate the migration that would enable their husbands to do so. In the cases above, men and women shared responsibility in the survival strategies of family migration, although clearly the patriarchal order in which the husband was the main provider was to be maintained whenever possible. The binational aspects of the relationship and migration draw attention to the fact that U.S.-Mexico border-crossing experiences were not easily categorized as homogenous scenarios where Mexican men initiate migration for their Mexican wives and Mexican children. Family composition was much more complex; citizenship was intricately tied to migration; citizenship and migration shaped migrant gender roles; and wives also played an important role in shaping migration strategies. The three women above were perhaps exceptional, but not because they were U.S.-born women who married Mexicans and chose to move to Mexico; rather they are exceptional because out of all the women letter writers they were the only women whose families remained intact.

Separation

The pressures of economic uncertainty and the complexities of transnational travel in a post-depression era, combined with domestic turmoil, broke many migrant families and furthered disputes between transnational families. Lovenia Chastain de Navarrette and her husband, “talked things over” and decided to go their separate ways under the economic stress. Having been married to her husband for eight years and moving with him to Mexico for the purpose of
visiting her sister-in-law, Lovenia wrote to the consul, “he wishes to stay with his folks, and since he cannot afford to support me alone, I have decided to go back to my father.”283 Lovenia had been told (by an unnamed source) “that the American Consulate is to help the Americans stranded in this country.” She would have been disappointed by the consul’s reply: to seek appropriate funds from her relatives. Her father did not have the resources to pay for her passage either, leaving Lovenia stranded in Mexico.284

Women in Crisis- Desertion

Some couples sought their solutions separately and like Lovenia some women chose to go it alone or maybe just not with their husbands-but many migrants, mostly women faced abandonment by their partners. Consular memos inquiring about whereabouts often listed inquiries by women seeking information on their estranged husbands. Like the Brust family and the Bernal family who, when abandoned by the head of household had to rely on charity, other migrant women and children also had to do the same.

283 Lovenia opened her letter to the consul, “I am an American girl, born January 22, 1913 in Emma, Illinois.” At the time of writing she was twenty-five years old, it appeared that she did not have any kids of her own. Her appeal to the consul is particularly interesting because she identifies herself as a girl, not a woman, and clearly suggests that she desires to go back to her father. This could of course be because she truly did see herself as young girl and defined herself still in relation to her father, not yet giving birth to her own children, but her use of such language could also be suggestive of her making an appeal to the consul on the basis of her youth, perhaps trying to elicit more sympathy. In any case, her letter is striking because Lovenia’s wellbeing is grounded in a patriarchal paternalism that orders women to be in the care of their husbands or of fathers. More research for this particular case is needed (there are only two letters exchanged), to speculate about how Lovenia might have viewed the consul in light of this system of protective patriarchy. In general, it seems that women might have purposely constructed appeals around this notion of protective patriarchy in order to make a better case to the consul, and attributing personal responsibility to consuls as substitute patriarchs.

284 Letter from Consul to Lovenia Chastain de Navarrete, August 8 1938, Box 16 file no. 310.
Other women found themselves economically and physically stranded because their husbands had abandoned them. These women were trapped in a foreign country and separated from family members who lived on the other side of the border. Women abandoned by their husbands had even less of a chance to fund migration to their home countries. Mexican and US-American women in both countries wrote directly to the consul to inquire about their deserter husbands, and were clearly seeking to track them down for economic support. Letters from welfare agencies in the United States reveal the impoverished conditions that Mexican women faced after their husbands abandoned them or died. Social workers asked consular officials at Guadalajara to locate and contact deserted husband or other family members that might be able to provide a home for their destitute relatives in the United States, and thereby lessening the cost of public relief.

*Abuse and Marital Discord*

For other women the decision, and need, to migrate back to the United States was not a shared decision between husband and wife, and was anything but civil. Theresa Romero wrote to the consul in hopes of escaping her abusive husband and destitute life in Mexico. Theresa was married in 1925 to Efren Romero in Illinois. In 1930 the couple migrated with their two young boys to Jalisco. After seven years in Mexico, Theresa was, in her words, “through putting up with this burden.” She was depressed and weak, suffering from emotional and physical abuse from her husband, and missed her life in the states—she missed white bread, butter, and frankfurters; and she missed her family. She had written to her father telling him that she would go insane if she stayed much longer in Mexico, and she begged him to send her money to pay for
her train and bus fare. She even willing to leave her children behind in Mexico. She wrote to her father, “My heart just breaks when I think of the dirty deal this ungrateful wife-beater has given me.”

Theresa’s journey would entail extra-careful planning, for she was not simply trying to migrate, she was trying to escape.

Theresa’s father wrote to the consul, passing on the letters from Theresa. Eventually Theresa herself wrote to the consul asking for help, until her husband began to intercept her letters. Despite facing death threats and having to leave all but her youngest child behind, Theresa managed to leave her husband after her father had put together sufficient enough funds to pay for her passage. For women like Theresa their U.S. citizenship was not enough to require extraordinary services from the US consul; the poverty of their relatives in times of economic crisis, and their own gendered subordinate positions in their households prevented their migration back to the United States.

In another long exchange of correspondence, Mabel Marquez (not to be confused with Mabelle Jaregui above), and her relatives in Stillman Valley, Illinois, asked the consul to provide funds for Mabel and her son Melvin to return to the United States. Like Theresa, Mabel’s living situation and marital relationship was precarious. Mabel complained that her husband treated her cruelly, threatened to shoot her, lay drunk day after day, and had two other women on the side. She described her situation to her uncle, saying, “We are here in a forest, nothing but trees, no cars, no trains, no shows, nothing here, nothing but murder and drunkards here, shooting at

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285 Letter from Theresa Romero to her father, May 16, 1937, Box 9, file no. 310.
night.”⁸⁶ In a letter she advised her mother to tell the consul that whoever came to help her should bring two soldiers so that her husband could not hurt her in her escape.⁸⁷

After initially trying to pass the case off to the consul at San Luis Potosi over a jurisdictional mix-up, the consuls at Guadalajara replied to various letters from Mabel and her relatives, advising them that they would need to provide money for transportation themselves and that because Mabel’s home was so far from the city of Guadalajara (three days by horseback), direct communication would “not be practicable for personal issues.” The consuls further advised that her family members send any money directly to Mabel once they raised enough. The consuls, either because of the burdensome distance or because of the hassle that such a complicated domestic dispute created, did not offer to facilitate wire transfers, payments to rail companies or anything of that nature. Mabel did finally leave her husband and fled to a house of a friend, once there she wrote once more asking the consul for shelter in Guadalajara as she was determined to get to that city to then return to Illinois. Predictably, the consul once again stressed the lack of appropriated funds for Americans in need of relief; he advised her not to come to Guadalajara. At this point the letters stopped; it is unknown whether Mabel and her son Melvin ever made it back to the United States.

These women had little to no recourse for their domestic turmoil. This vulnerability was in part due to patriarchal tolerance of spousal abuse (emotional and physical), and in part due to their complex binational relationships and transnational status. Who, for example, could do

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⁸⁶ Letter from Mabel to her uncle, April 22, 1936. Box 3, file no. 310.
⁸⁷ Mabel also had to communicate with the consul and her family by using the address of a friend in town once her husband became suspicious of her writing letters to the American consul.
anything about Carmen Kramer de Cavillo’s case, in which the money her mother sent her for help in traveling back to the United States was “appropriated by her husband.” There was quite simply no protocol for such cases. The consul’s reply in Carmen’s case captures this problem: “Whether the husband would permit her to leave without his consent, or permit her to remove the children from this country, of course this office cannot say; nor can it undertake to accept any responsibility in connection with the removal of the wife or children from Mexico.”

Women in general and in binational families specifically, were in a nebulous transnational space where the convergence of citizenship, poverty, and gender turned the migration process and survival strategies into personal and jurisdictional quagmires. The cases above provide snapshots into intimate relationships not easily governable by the laws of one nation, let alone two nations, and across borders. We also gain a glimpse into the gendered responses to transnational poverty and migration during the 1930s. Women’s mobility, in fact was more likely to be legally (subject to harsher immigration restrictions), economically (more difficulty in finding wage labor) and physically (as a result of abuse and assault) limited. It is worth asserting that the stories that emerge from the era reveal more discord than harmonious relationships, and difficulties endured by both men and women. It is undeniable that abandonment and desertion were common features of the era, and that more women than men

289 Letter from Consul M.L. Stafford to Predicanda Kremer Feb 7, 1939. Box 16, file no. 310. More research is needed to determine how Mexico and the United States’ independent legal systems would handle such issues of domestic abuse during the period and whether there was a subset of clauses outlining laws for resident aliens and legal or illegal immigrants. I suspect that neither country had enforceable legislation that would punish what we would not consider domestic abuse.
appear in the records— to have been trapped in a foreign country and separated from family members who lived on the other side of the border.

As revealed by the correspondence above Consuls came to play a key role as service coordinator, confidant, and counselor for migrant families in an era when no infrastructure, either diplomatic, national or binational could attend to the specific issues of binational families and migrant families. Due to the fact that Guadalajara was the commercial center of western Mexico, consuls primarily dedicated their time towards US state and citizen commercial interests such as U.S. investment and trade but in the era of depression, divided families, and due to the absence of a more appropriate official, Consuls fielded deeply personal petitions from many migrant women. In a meeting for consular officials held in Mexico City in 1928, Visa division chief Simmons cautioned that visa cases should be examined, “objectively, fairly, and reasonably, and if necessary exhaustively,” and reminded consuls that “Every immigration visa application represents a human problem and may in some cases have aspects of tragedy.”

While the consulate did prioritize issues of trade, business, and the protection of U.S. state interests abroad, the consular office also served as a critical hub of transnational migration, a thoroughfare for family communication; perhaps even a place for family conflict mediation. For some migrants like Frank Valadez, who was already in the United States, the US consul acted as a services coordinator by helping to arrange travel accommodations and forward money to relatives living in Mexico. Frank sent money to the consul at Guadalajara and asked him to

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290 Ibid, 3.
facilitate the cross-border transportation for Mrs. Juana R Franco and her daughter Rose Marie to the United States. The consul obliged, and in one of the more clear cut cases, mother and young daughter made the journey north quite smoothly.291

The decade of the 1930s was a dynamic era in both the United States and Mexico. Each state was transformed significantly as governments grew larger and faced rising expectations that they would provide for their people during times of uncertainty. Mexican migrants abroad and U.S. migrants in Mexico fell somewhere in between the extending embrace of the new welfare states. Yet while stability was created within national units, the border came down on transnational livelihoods with paralyzing force. Some migrants surely managed such difficulties with the help of family networks that stretched across national and transnational spaces. Some of these extended networks could surely mobilize economic resources, produce correct legal paperwork, or send family representatives to extricate their family members from delicate situations. Still, the stories represented above suggest that in the absence of resources for migration, and recourse to transnational forms of justice (for none existed for such intimate domestic disputes), many migrants, especially women, were forced to bear their burdens in an isolated fashion. U.S. consuls, relief agency officials, municipal presidents, and even Presidents were asked to be arbiters in transnational migration and family life and in fact at times provided an informal kind of bureaucracy. With little juridical power, no force of arms, and limited funds consuls were brought into the spaces of migrant lives that were simultaneously intimate and transnational.

291 Correspondence between U.S. consul and Frank Valadez, 1936. Box 3, file no. 310
Such migrant stories demand a reconsideration of migrant paths and experiences. These migrant paths were not simply shaped by formal labor and economic motivations, with males at the center and women and children on the periphery. Women, in fact emerge at the center, but so to do questions about the duties and responsibilities of migrant husbands and wives, the challenges facing migrant children in multiple status families, and the ways that tightening borders and increased poverty shaped migrant livelihoods. Questions about the responsibility of governments to their emigrant citizens also emerge and prompt a question as to whether governments responded to migrant families differently as compared with single migrants, or responded to men differently than women, laborer emigrants versus non-laborer emigrants or temporary versus more permanent migrants.

Migration to the U.S. during the latter half of the 1930s might aptly be characterized as a slow trickle, but return migration was much greater and though overall migration was less in volume during this era, it was still incredibly significant. The complex family migration patterns, and the tensions that were created by the inability of government officials to regulate life cycles, intimate family spaces, and human movement in the first three decades of the twentieth century have been obscured by the more visible and formal experience and histories of the Bracero era of the 1940s. The period of crisis, return, rigidly enforced borders, binational families enduring family separation and fighting for family reunification decisively shaped government designs for a more controlled regime of migration. The complexities produced by gender, poverty, and binational lives and families plus the onset of global war gave government officials the opportunity to finally attempt the regulation of migrant mobility that had escaped them for
decades. In the 1940s, a new migration order would be carved out and a new ideal migrant would emerge.
CHAPTER V
Braceros, Women, and Gender in the New Migration Order

Margarita Ramirez de Alvarado, married, Mexican, thirty years old, with the address Calle de Casas Coloradas # 19, Zacatecas, Zac, I state the following: That my husband Mr. Agustin R. Alvarado is in Fresno California contracted under the number 9-6376 for six months, since May 8 of the present year.

I desire that your office give me a pass to be by the side of my husband for the time left for him to complete his contract.

I should clarify that first I directed myself to the Consul of the United States in San Luis Potosí, and he answered by telling me to go to the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, to which I went. That Secretaría in a reply numbered 6-4267 on the twentieth of this month, directed me to this office, the Secretaría de Gobernación for the pass. Anticipating that you grant me this request, yours,

Margarita Ramirez de Alvarado

On August 7, 1944, the general director of the Office of Population of the Secretaría de Gobernación wrote back to Margarita explaining that he could not grant her the immigration visa she desired, stating, “this Secretary can only authorize the exit of national workers to the United States of America corresponding to the agreement between our country and that nation.”

Two years earlier the Mexican Farm Labor Program, a program later referred to as the Bracero Program, one agreed to by the United States and Mexican federal governments, transformed the nature of Mexican migration. After a turbulent decade of migration in the 1930s, the binational labor arrangement, lasting from 1942 to 1964, provided aspiring migrants with renewed hope. Despite the development of a restrictive U.S. border policy, a new legal channel for cross-border migration would open up to Mexicans on a scale like never before. However, in a dramatic reversal of family migration trends that were established in the 1920s, the 1940s

292 Letter to the Secretaría de Gobernación from Margarita Ramirez de Alvarado, AHINM 4-357-0-1944-6241 215
would usher in an era of new privilege for male migrants and increased limitations on family migration. At first glance, the mostly male migration during the Bracero era harkens back to the pioneering waves of migration at the turn of the century: the seasonal and temporary migration of mostly men recruited by U.S. employers to work primarily in rail and agriculture. However, after decades of social and family migration, the proliferation of binational families, the economic and social integration of women and children into Mexican-American life, and repeated and multi-generational border crossings, the attempts to reorder migration to be only male and only temporary were fraught and under constant renegotiation. Margarita Ramirez de Alvarado was one of the women who found herself caught outside of this new order of sanctioned migration. Emigrants were still welcomed to attempt a legal entry after having the proper documents, but even so, the preferences for the ideal migrant had been clearly set. Women, often wives and mothers, found themselves excluded from the new order, and men who did not fit the ideal prototype of a migrant and who failed to meet binational requirements fell outside the system as well.

Yet, while the governments of each country tried to determine a new set of regulations for human movement, human movement prevailed. This chapter will examine how Mexican migration proceeded throughout the 1940s. Braceros, aspiring braceros, and their family members wrote thousands of letters to Mexican Presidents, governors, and other officials. Through their voices we gain an understanding of the conditions propelling migrants to go north in the 1940s and the ways in which migrants framed their own pleas for bracero contracts within
the new context of World War II. We also come to understand how the exclusions of the program led to gendered patterns of migration and generated a surge in undocumented migration; consequences that would shape migration patterns for the rest of the century. Lastly, we see how women responded to the program and how families were impacted by the new logic of migration. The Bracero program strengthened patriarchy by preserving the privilege of household earning for males but also weakened patriarchy by requiring men to be away from their families.

Mexico in the 1940s

Mexicans living in the 1940s had just lived through the era of Cardenas and the Revolutionary Family, and were now headed toward Manuel Ávila Camacho’s vision of

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293 Scholarly works have offered different assessments of the Bracero program in search of answering some of these questions about its benefits and negative consequences at the individual, family, and State level and also whether it stands as a viable model for temporary labor programs. Most recently, the scholarship has centered on Bracero testimonies to find out whether the Bracero program was good or bad for braceros. It was both. And the experiences are not only wide-ranging but are also often based on memories of long ago. Indeed there is no homogenous bracero past. The program and the lived experiences of braceros were dictated by regional politics, social standing, labor status, position in the family, and responsibilities to community. Works by Deborah Cohen, Ana Elizabeth Rosas, and Michael Snodgrass inform my analysis of the bracero period and I join them in examining the bracero era in this chapter by examining bracero voices. Their examinations of the period provide needed analyses based on rich oral histories reflecting on the period, whereas, mine focuses on letters written during the short period of 1942-1945. By integrating the Bracero program into my analysis of family migration and how it changed over time, I focus on the changes brought by the Bracero program to previous migration patterns, (perhaps not to the extent that Cohen sees it as a shift having to do with modernity), and also on the continuities of binational relationships and family as a central theme that extends from the 1920s. Works based on oral testimonies complicate arguments that characterize the binational program primarily as exploitative and ascribe the braceros as victims. See works by Gilbert Gonzalez and Ernesto Galarza, Deborah Cohen, Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico. The University of California Press 2011. Michael Snodgrass, “The Bracero Program, 1942-1964,” in Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration. Ana Elizabeth Rosas “Flexible Families: Bracero Families’ Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964.” Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2006.
National Unity. The rhetorical shift resulted in real political and economic consequences, and a shift toward political conservatism and acted as a counterbalance to the radicalism of expropriation, land redistribution, and the syndicalism of Cardenismo. The shift was a reaction to both internal divisions and external challenges. The country, still reeling from the diplomatic consequences of expropriating and nationalizing oil, went from experiencing deep tension with their northern neighbor, to ambiguous neutrality in the lead up to world war. The onset of World War led to reconciliation, alliance, and mutual support between Mexico and the United States.

A growth in population sparked intense urbanization and fueled state initiatives toward rapid production in agriculture and the industrialization and modernization of technology. Ávila Camacho’s administration, while seeming to stay in line with Cardenas’ agrarian policies in rhetoric, favored private property over ejidos as the basis for Mexico’s agricultural production. A slow neglect of the ejido by government programs and a decrease in agricultural credit and technological support lent to ejidatarios posed challenging obstacles to Mexican farmers.

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294 The concept of the Revolutionary Family carried multiple meanings. In a political sense, the Revolutionary Family was a concept that sought to present a united front of power at the center— as a way of distancing post-revolutionary power holders from the factional infighting that took place during the 1920s, and as a concept that would legitimize the PNR through the 1930s. Scholars who incorporate gender into their historical analysis of the period see the Revolutionary Family more literally and following Mary Kay Vaughan’s concept of modernizing patriarchy suggest that the roles of the Revolutionary Family and revolutionary family members was defined by the state and prescribed gendered forms of contributing to the nation. It incorporate it here to reinforce the shift away from using the rhetoric of revolution to the rhetoric of unity—a rhetorical shift from left to moderate but also one from national to international. For Revolutionary Family as political, see Thomas Benjamin, “Rebuilding the Nation,” in p.467; Benjamin, La Revolución, p.68. also newspaper editorials in El Informador, Guadalajara, March 1929. For Revolutionary Family as prescriptive family norms see chapters such as Ann S. Blum, “Breaking and Making Families: Adoption and Public Welfare, Mexico City, 1938-1942” in Jocelyn Olcott, Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico, Durham : Duke University Press, 2006. See also, Mary Kay Vaughan, “Modernizing Patriarchy: State Policies, Rural Households, and Women in Mexico, 1930-1940,” in Dore, Elizabeth. Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2000; and Cohen, Braceros, 33.

295 Blanca Torres Ramirez, Mexico en La Segunda Guerra Mundial, (Mexico: El Colegio De Mexico), 1979.
President Alemán would move even further from the ejido system by reforming laws that amplified small plots and created larger land holdings. Small and medium sized property owners were privileged over individual farmers and resources and investments were directed toward export crops. Industrialization was encouraged and ejidos were expected to be productive units that would contribute goods to regional and national markets, rather than utilized as a collective good for community subsistence.\textsuperscript{296} The overall Mexican population grew from 23.4 million in 1946 to 27.8 million in 1952, while migration to cities led to a growth in urban population from 21.9\% in 1940 to 31\% in 1952.\textsuperscript{297} In Mexico City urban factory jobs could not keep up with the population which ballooned from 1,757,530 in 1940 to 3,050,442 in 1950.\textsuperscript{298}

It was within this rapidly changing, urbanizing, and modernizing context that the Bracero Program promised to deliver much needed wages and capital to Mexican men and their families through a new system of migration. With the onset of World War II and the persistently increasing demand of southwestern U.S. growers for imported labor, U.S. and Mexican governments began to discuss the possibility of a temporary labor program. The wartime context proved to be politically advantageous to the Mexican government who justified the bracero contracts as a means for Mexico to contribute to the overall war effort. By supplying manpower for production, Mexico would be lending critical support to the Allied forces. A mutually beneficial labor program also fell within the framework of Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor policy.

\textsuperscript{297} Blanca Torres, \textit{Hacia la utopía industrial}, El Colegio De Mexico, Mexico 1979, 52.
first articulated in 1933, but tenuously followed during tense diplomatic relations during the Cardenas Era.

Even before the U.S. declared war against the Axis powers, rumors began circulating about the U.S. need for Mexican workers to fill labor shortages. By the end of 1941 growers in Texas, Arizona, and California had already begun petitioning for the legalized importation of Mexican workers by the end of 1941. They specifically asked for exemptions from immigration laws that barred contract labor. By March, aspiring migrants were writing to the Office of Migration to inquire about rumored agreements between U.S. employers and the Mexican government to bring workers to the United States. Manuel Yanez, Aurelio Aguirre, and Fidel Carbajal wrote a letter to the Office of Migration on behalf of themselves and ten families, all of whom lacked work and were interested in migrating to the United States. According to the U.S. Consul at Guadalajara, “when the first inklings of a possible let down in barriers to workers was mentioned,” a constant stream of people came to the consulate. Mexicans were responding to articles like the one published in a Guadalajara newspaper that read, “100,000 Mexicans needed to work in the United States.” The article described one California senator’s plea for 100,000 Mexican immigrant workers to fill in for recently displaced Japanese agricultural workers.

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300 "Braceros Mexicanos“ letters to the Department of Migration from Manuel Yanez March 4, 1942. Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración, Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico, 4-357-1-1936–81 hereafter cited as AHINM

301 "Piden Cien Mil Mexicanos Para Que Trabajan en E.U." El Informador, April 13, 1942
While some aspiring migrants wrote to government officials, other Mexican families inspired by rumors of worker shortages trekked north before any formal agreements were announced. Premature migrations swelled populations in cities near the border. After they failed to cross the border, a group of 45 men wrote to President Ávila Camacho to ask him to intervene on their behalf after having encountered difficulties with Mexican migration agents. Like so many aspiring migrants before, they turned their pleas directly to the President in hopes for a favorable response. They likely never received a response from the President for their original letter was passed on to the Governor of Tamaulipas by the Secretaría de Gobernación urging him to dissuade workers from going to the U.S.

Organizations along Mexico’s border especially cautioned against arrangements for a guest labor program. In a letter written by the National Chamber of Commerce, representatives from Ciudad Juárez described the destitution of failed migrants at the border, stating that even those who do go, “hopeful for the fools gold that they are offered, but who are then exploited to the point that they are converted into human waste: they are thrown out without even one morsel of bread in their mouths, with their sick children and their starving women, and at this border have had to find themselves obligated to steal and commit crimes in order to subsist.” The dramatically stated case was meant to persuade the Mexican national government to take all necessary steps to ensure that Mexico didn't experience a shortage of workers and that after

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302 "No los dejarán ir a los E.U.” El Informador, April 23, 1942.
303 AHINM 4-357-1-1936-81 Braceros Mexicanos, Letter to Miguel Aleman, Secretaria de Gobernación from Confederaciones Camaras Nacionales de Comercio e Industria. June 1942.
having returned from completing their contracts, braceros would have sufficient resources to make it the rest of the way home.

Various organizations and government agencies weighed in on the matter and in April, three months before diplomatic agreements were solidified, Mexico’s largest union, the CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos) countered rumors regarding their support of laborers migrating to the U.S., stating to the press that they would not permit workers to leave the country during a time of national emergency.\(^{304}\) They insisted that all Mexicans were needed in the fields and workshops “to intensify national production.”

Government officials were tasked with preventing mass exodus toward the border before the finer details of the agreement were nailed down. Utilizing a strategy that was used over the past several decades, Mexican government officials tried to thwart a surge of migrants attempting to enter the United States by issuing warnings in the press, asserting that there was no demand for laborers. Prior to August harvests in California, officials would urge Mexicans to “pay no attention to invitations made to workers causing them to leave their country, since the best opportunity to ensure their livelihood is in Mexico if they dedicate themselves to the intensification of production.”\(^{305}\) In a reply to aspiring migrants, Carlos A. Gómez, sub-director of the Office of Migration, thwarted any premature acknowledgment of such an agreement. First, he plainly dismissed that such a program existed, thus making it impossible for him to provide help in the matter. He added that, “reports from the Ministry of Foreign Relations have suggested

\(^{304}\) “Que no Vayan a los EE. UU.” *El Informador*, April 17, 1942.

\(^{305}\) “No hay demanda de Mexicanos en los EE.UU,” *El Informador*, July 14, 1942.
that the presence of new immigrants in the United States would harm the interests of our co-
nationals that are currently residing in the country.”

In a warning similar to that made by the Ciudad Juárez Chamber of Commerce, Gómez reminded the letter writers of the hardships that had befallen many of their compatriots in the past. The difficult repatriations and the racism that marked the era of the Great Depression and much of the 1930s sparked hesitancy amongst residents along the border and Mexican officials alike.

Thus critics of the program argued against the program for fear of a shortage of workers, out of concern over how Mexicans might be treated after witnessing the racism and poor treatment of Mexicans during the Great Depression, and in order to prevent the congregation of hundreds and thousands of aspiring migrants in border towns. Yet, while the program had its critics, aspiring braceros likely saw the program as insurance against poor treatment in the U.S, as a way of avoiding getting stuck at the border, and as a way of bringing honor and wages to their country rather than contributing to a supposed shortage of workers. Despite propaganda and responses from the government encouraging them against migrating, Mexicans placed hope in the promises of a new and sanctioned era of migration to the North. The power of the American dream, the potential of successful migrations and binational living strategies—as confirmed by remittances and hopeful tales from friends and family abroad—and the new spaces created by a potential binational labor agreement were too powerful to resist.

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306 “Braceros Mexicanos” letters to the department of migration from Manuel Yanez March 4, 1942. Letter to Manuel from associate director Carlos A. Gomez March 10, 1942, Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración, Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico, 4-357-1-1936–81 hereafter cited as AHINM.
Correspondence between various government officials in the days just prior to the agreement revealed only signs of escalating interest in the program. Aside from the heightened war-time rhetoric, and a new sanctioned path of migration, completing a stint. Despite the more of work in the United States grew to be an entrenched pattern of livelihood for many Mexicans and had appealed to unemployed and underemployed Mexicans for decades. Prior experience in the U.S. was a major factor in fueling repeated migrations. Mexicans having already lived and worked north of the border were also making inquiries to government officials about the program. But even when encouraged to delay their migrations, experienced migrants and new migrants alike made their way to the border without formalized contracts in hand with the assumption that someone needed their services.

Government efforts and newspaper propaganda failed to stymie the stream of migrants that the consul at Nogales, Sonora confirmed to the consul at Guadalajara and described as a serious problem. The consul blamed newspapers circulated in those areas and speculated that they must have been giving “grossly misleading” information, stating that, “none of the applicants appear to have the slightest idea that the project is government controlled and that they should consult the federal or state authorities for information in this respect.” This, in fact, was a very different paradigm of migration for those experienced migrants who had previously gone to the United States for work under much more informal circumstances. Whereas in the past, migrants might have encountered a few government officials throughout

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307 AHINM 4-357-1936-81 Letter to Office of Migration from Jose de Jesus Cervantes. No date.
308 Letter to consul John James Neily from consul L.S. Armstrong, August 26, 1942. RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts, The Department of State, Mexico, Guadalajara Consulate General records 1936-1949; National Archives at College Park, MD; 701-811.11, box 41.

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their journey, likely connecting far more frequently with foremen and recruiters for labor migration, they had never witnessed government-controlled labor migration to this degree. With its inauguration in August of 1942, the new contract labor program would create formalized criteria for aspiring migrants, attempt to enforce organized selection of workers, and try to mandate a gendered, temporary, legal and ordered process of human migration. Many obtained the coveted contracts but countless Mexicans did not.

*The Program*

The program was finally inaugurated when Mexican braceros were admitted into the United States on September 29th, 1942 when 1,500 men were sent to farms in five locations of California to work in the production of sugar beets. Initial contracts were to last six months and could be renewed if agreed to by the laborer and the Mexican government. Pay equal to that which domestic workers received for each region was to be guaranteed, with a minimum of $ .30 per hour, as was the promise that workers would be able to work for at least 75% of the days in their contract. A stipulation mandated that 10% percent of the earnings of each worker would be sent back to Mexico and held for the worker by the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, to insure that workers and their families would be able to rely on some savings upon their return. Transportation across the border and to work sites would be covered by the employer and a basic minimum standard of housing and services would be provided to the braceros.

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309 Los Angeles Times Sept. 23 1942; Robert C. Jones "Los Braceros Mexicanos en Estados Unidos" in *Braceros* ed. Jorge Durand
The agreement would undergo revisions that would spell out more strict guaranteed standards of treatment for braceros, raise the minimum wage to reflect increased cost of living, and ensure that if problems occurred between employer and employee, Mexican guest workers would be able to make a case for mediation before being relocated to another work site or sent back to Mexico.\textsuperscript{311} Those stipulations worked well for each government at the outset of the labor agreement, but the program would undergo a series of negotiations in order for each government to be fully satisfied with the requirements and concessions.\textsuperscript{312} For example, a similar but separate agreement that governed the use of Mexican laborers for railroad work in the United States was terminated in 1946 due to pressure from unions in the U.S.\textsuperscript{313} Renegotiations for the agricultural labor program would occur frequently with the most significant set starting in 1947 when the U.S. government no longer agreed to guarantee contracts. It would no longer be responsible for enforcing contracts, which from then on were to be arranged directly between U.S. employers and the Mexican government. Renegotiations in 1948, years beyond the conclusion of the war, would usher in a new era of the Bracero program. In the 1948 iteration of the program Mexico was in a disadvantaged position and was no longer able to assure braceros a guaranteed minimum salary per hour or the guarantee of 75\% days employed for its workers. The most significant characteristic of the new negotiations however, was the commitment to a more concerted effort toward restricting undocumented immigration. As part of a crackdown on undocumented immigration employers who had hired undocumented workers in the past would

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{311} ibid, 167-168.
\item \textsuperscript{312} Jorge Durand. \textit{Braceros: Las Miradas Mexicana y Estadounidense: Antología (1945-1964)}, (México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2007).
\item \textsuperscript{313} Blanca Torres. \textit{Hacia la Utopía Industrial}, (Mexico: El Colegio De Mexico, 1979), 237.
\end{itemize}
be banned from participating in the program. During the early years of the program the consequent movement of undocumented workers was less visible and less concerning to both governments especially as World War on European and Pacific fronts loomed as a top priority. However, as the war concluded, huge waves of undocumented workers were hired by complicit employers, and greater numbers of overall migrants crossed the international border. Just as legal migration skyrocketed again with the initiation the bracero program, undocumented migration skyrocketed as well, leading to a host of problems for the Mexican government and Mexican workers alike. The creation of a legal group of migrants also led to a creation of an illegal group of migrants, just as had occurred in the past with cumulative immigration requirements introduced by new immigration laws.

Selection and the creation of the ideal migrant

The selection process for bracero contracts reveals the desired characteristics of the ideal Mexican migrant. Aspiring migrants needed to interact with a host of government representatives including those from the U.S. Consulate, the Mexican Ministries of Labor, Foreign Relations, and the Office of Migration, and could face rejection and dismissal at any step. In a response to brothers from Zacatecas who were interested in becoming braceros, a government official outlined the requisites:

Each interested applicant should obtain a visa from the North American [U.S.] consulate and should obtain a labor contract authorized by the Ministry of Labor. The Ministry of Foreign Relations also extends a passport which is required for immigration.

\footnote{ibid, 239-242}
Furthermore, one would need to complete the legal requirements and follow guidelines of the Office of Migration which requires that all emigrants 15 years and older obtain a form five card, which costs 5 dollars, and can be obtained either at this office, or an Office of Population at the port of exit.\textsuperscript{315}

Contract centers were first established in Mexico City and eventually were set up in different parts throughout the country in order to facilitate the process for braceros and employers alike. Contract centers were held in stadiums, office buildings, and town squares throughout the country and drew so many aspiring braceros that surrounding areas turned into makeshift camps for those hoping to be contracted and sent to the U.S. right away. Representatives of both governments would be at contract centers to ensure that men fulfilled crucial requirements, and doctors were on hand to provide health screenings and ensure a clean bill of health. Both governments would send representatives to ensure that men fulfilled crucial requirements.\textsuperscript{316} The U.S. government wanted proof that the workers had experience in manual labor and were free from diseases. While the Mexican government wanted to make sure that men had completed their military service obligation, were not currently employed in other work, and had not been recipients of ejidos.\textsuperscript{317} With each government looking for specific characteristics,

\textsuperscript{315} “Braceros Mexicanos,” Letter from Alfonso Garcia to Ochoa brothers, August 18, 1942, AHINM 4-357-1-1936-81.
\textsuperscript{316} Snodgrass, 90. For a description of the selection process see, Cohen, \textit{Braceros}, 91-93.
\textsuperscript{317} As discussed in previous chapters, land reform and the distribution of ejidos had been cited by contemporaries as a force that drove migrants out in the 1920s and enticed migrants back to Mexico in the 1930s. The exclusion of ejidatarios from Bracero contracts, reflects the broader and more pronounced government expectations that those who had received ejidos in the Cardenas period, were dutifully bound to work their ejidos to the exclusion of taking on other forms of wage-labor.
many Mexicans would be excluded from the program including artisans, some men who already had experience living and working in the United States.

In response to a complaint filed against Bracero contracts in Ameca, Jalisco, the municipal president of the town assured the general secretary of the state that enrollees into the bracero program did not own land and were not needed for agriculture. Instead they were described as, “the sons of barbers and potters who don't have established businesses, tailors who have no machine with which to sew, many of them recently married, with skill sets such as shoemaking but not recognized as official shoemakers, or skill sets for other jobs.” The municipal president saw no problem in them leaving as braceros, but it was doubtful that representatives of either government would accept them. The government was specifically looking for men experienced in agriculture, the men from Ameca although not employed, were at disadvantage because they were tradesmen.

Men who had previous experience working in the United States or who had even lived most of their lives in the United States could not readily obtain contracts. Catarino Escobar Cardona, a Mexican born man having lived the majority of his life in the United States since the age of four years old, had unfortunately forgotten his legal documents to re-enter the United States after a visit to Mexico. After a three-year process of trying to prove his legal residency in the United States, U.S. immigration agents were finally satisfied of his legal reentry. However,

318 Archivo Historico de Jalisco, 240/6 2088
due to the onset of the Bracero Program, it was Mexican migration officials that now prevented him from leaving the country as a bracero for failing to satisfy the requirements.319

A group of 50 men born in the United States to Mexican parents but living in Mexico tried to cross the border at Piedras Negras in September of 1942 but were prevented from doing so. Despite being born in the U.S., authorities prevented them from going to the United States to work for an employer who had personally contacted them. U.S. authorities prevented them from entering likely due to insufficient proof of their birth, while Mexican authorities prevented them because their employment did not fall within the rubric of the Bracero Program.320 Forty-five men from Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, that were Mexican by birth wrote to President Ávila Camacho stating that at various times they had lived in the United States but were hoping to return to the United States, since "in our beloved Mexico there is a scarcity of jobs or rather there are no jobs." Having the experience of previously working in the United States provided no guarantee that aspiring migrants would be accepted into the program.321 In short, previous binational work and living experience did not necessarily further the chances of aspiring braceros to be selected for legal contracts, and in fact, in certain cases served as more of an obstacle.

The new ideal migrant had to have experience working in agriculture, prove to be hardworking, be unemployed, not be an ejidatario, be able-bodied, preferably be single, over the age of twenty-one, and would have to return after their contract was over. While some of those

320 AHINM 4-357-1-1932-28 Telegram to the Secretaria de Gobernación from Benito Garza Villareal, Director general of Population at Piedras Negras, Coahuila. September 19, 1942.
321 “Braceros Mexicanos” AHINM 4-357-1-1936-81.
requirements were flexible, especially as the Bracero Program went on, one requirement was not negotiable and that was the requirement that Braceros be males.  

Aspiring female migrants in the Bracero Era

The glaring omission of women in these contracts further confirms the notion that an ideal temporary migrant worker would be considered male. Although women in the U.S. were increasingly entering the labor market to help fill the demand created by the war effort, Mexican women were still expected to serve their country in a domestic capacity. Those women who were forced to work outside the home were still expected to take jobs appropriate for their gender. A group of women did write to President Ávila Camacho on May 12, 1945 to offer their services as nurses in the United States. Their application was forwarded to the Ministry of Government and not to the Ministry of labor, an indication that they were not considered for labor contracts abroad even when appealing, in a specifically gendered way, to the need for wartime personnel.

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322 Although it is quite possible that women might have tried to pass for men to get Bracero contracts, I have found no evidence that this happened. Other requirements for Braceros might be circumvented by potentially using false documents to lie about age or occupation, and it’s very likely that officials might have looked in the other direction all together with regards to some of the requirements. However, the medical inspection, which often required aspiring Braceros to strip would have likely prevented any women who might have attempted to go through.

323 At a certain point in negotiations leading up to the final and formalized agreement, the inclusion of women and children must have been debated as illustrated by a study carried out by the Ministry of Labor in 1946 titled Los Braceros in Durand, Braceros, 162. Moisés González Navarro, Los Extranjeros en México y Los Mexicanos en El Extranjero, 1921-1970, volumen 3. El Colegio de México,1994. Cohen suggests that women and children were not included in contracts because their inclusion was feared to lead to the permanent settlement of braceros, Braceros, 22.

324 For various discussions on the tension between women’s proper role in labor see Jocelyn Oclott, Mary Kay Vaughan, Gabriela Cano eds. Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico. Duke University Press, 2007

325 Letter to the President from Carmen G de Terches, M. Rodriguez Neri and others AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-1, box 793.
When Elvira Moreno, writing to the president on February 29, 1944, offered to lend her services to the United States and specified that she wanted a contract to work in the fruit packing industries of California, the director of a government employment agency informed her that her request could not be granted. He further explained that this was because "no agreement relative to the contract labor of women existed between the two governments." Despite the growth of fruit packing industries, especially in California, the high proportion of Mexican women workers employed in this work, and the increased government contracts given to canneries and packing houses during World War II, the bracero agreements did not take into consideration the need for women migrant laborers. Elvira Moreno was likely just one of many women who knew about the canning opportunities and looked to the bracero program as a way of gaining access to employment. Moreno also might have had first-hand experience working in California in the past, and could have been looking to return seeing this opportunity as a way of extending or regularizing her status. Like other aspiring braceros she was likely in contact with friends and family abroad who would share news of important job openings. The difference between the early 1940s and the previous decades in which friends and family would share news of jobs and help facilitate their migration was that the new set of rules would structure a new legal and temporary order of migration. In short, government influence weighed more than social and family connections.

326 AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-1 box 793
328 Maria Heriberta Torres wrote to President Aleman, after the war ended in 1948 and asked for authorization to offer her services as a fruit packer. AGN-RP-MAV 546.6/1-8 box 0593.
Other women, like Margarita Ramirez de Alvarado mentioned at the outset of this chapter, asked government officials for assistance in joining their husbands, while others wrote hoping they could also get contracts and go along with their husbands or extended families. Maria de la Paz Angel wrote to President Avila Camacho from Guadalajara in 1945 to ask for passports for herself and her husband to go to the United States as braceros. Due to poor economic conditions, the couple did not have the money to pay for the cost of travel. Maria de la Paz had previously written to the first lady without any reply and was thus appealing to the president. This time her petition would be forwarded on to migration officials rather than to officials at the Department of Labor suggesting that she and her husband would have to attempt to enter the United States as migrants rather than sanctioned braceros. Juana Flores de Chavoya, also from Jalisco wrote to ask the President if her whole family, or at the very least, if her husband could go to the U.S. for six months as braceros.

Migrants, though not always specifying the need to be part of the Bracero program continued to aspire to go to the United States and wrote for information and benevolent intercessions on their behalf just as they had decades before. The era of contract labor, however, influenced the migration process for all migrants and conditioned the responses of government officials in ways they had not before. A group of women wrote to President Aleman asking for intervention on their behalf before the Office of Migration in Chihuahua. They dared to go to the United States to work. Contrary to expectations, the group of women made no mention of family as a motive, and instead sought labor contracts. The President’s secretary passed the letter on to

329 Maria de la Paz Angel AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-8 box 793
330 AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-3 box 793
the Secretaría de Gobernación who passed it on to the Office of Migration. The Office of Migration advised the women not to attempt to cross the border until they had all of their paperwork in order and outlined the requirements for crossing with a valid labor contract “with someone in the United States whom desires to use your services.” The contract needed to be approved by the Mexican consul of the district to which the women were going to and to have a signature of approval from the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores. The employer who was contracting the migrants would also have to pay 500 pesos with which to guarantee the cost of repatriation to the worker should they need it. Contractual agreements, in general, were encouraged, as was a strict adherence to the policy of securing money for a migrant’s eventual repatriation. The Bracero program and emphasis on contractual labor with an expectation of employer responsibility was also a response to the crisis of repatriation and associated costs to the State (both the Mexican and U.S. governments) in the 1930s.

Both governments agreed to a temporary labor program based on their expectations of ideal migrants and migrations. These expectations were that the migrants would be men, that they would have experience with agriculture or rail work, that they would be hard-working, and that they would return home after their contracts had ended. Yet, each government was also attempting to graft bureaucratic requirements and ideal specifications for braceros onto a framework of migration that already included migrants from different sectors of society, of both genders, of a variety of ages, and a wide range of skills and interests. Moreover, migrants who had previously worked in the U.S. but encountered new requirements for their migrations would

331 Letter to President Manuel Aleman Valdez from Arcadio Ojeda Garcia, Chief of the Department of Migration. MAV box 594 546.6/1-7

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grow increasingly frustrated. Whether they were migrants who had successfully crossed the border in the past, those who felt they might not pass mandatory medical exams, those unsure of measuring up to other government expectations, or those who relied on meeting a family member near the border to help them get to the other side, many braceros simply attempted to cross the border outside the purview of the program. In fact, even if many qualified for the program, there was simply too high of a demand in comparison to available bracero contracts from the outset. Thousands of aspiring braceros wrote to Mexican presidents to see if they might be one of the chosen few for the new program.

Aspiring Braceros and their letters to the President

In March of 1943, a group of fifty-three men from Jaripo, Michoacán sent a telegram to the President of Mexico, asking him for a second time if he could help them get to the United States so that they could look for work. The group of fifty-three men were among thousands looking to obtain coveted Bracero contracts. They explained their reasons stating,

Well all of us lack our own lands to work, we only work them when those others who do have land are willing to formally contract us. We implore that you order the Ministry of Labor to acknowledge our impoverishment, and hope that the fact that we are unable to come to the capital does not cause difficulty. We know that this is not the time to leave our country but we will return as soon as you order us to, so as to complete our duty as good Mexicans.\(^\text{332}\)

\(^{332}\) Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Manuel Ávila Camacho (hereafter AGN-RP-MAC) Box 793, 546.6/120, telegram to the President from J. Jesus Guerrero etc., Zapata, Michoacán, March, 30 1943.
The letter captures several themes that can be found in other letters of aspiring braceros. These themes include: the lack of lands, general impoverishment, the difficulty of transportation, and an acknowledgement of duty and patriotism. What exactly was the duty of a “good Mexican” during World War II era Mexico? Bracero contracts ironically encouraged the action of emigration—the leaving of one’s country as opposed to staying—as a patriotic duty. Migrants, some who had been trekking back and forth across the border for years, witnessed a changing paradigm for their migrations as World War II sparked a dialogue about binational cooperation and introduced new restrictions and new hope for an era of sanctioned migration. Their letters reflect a host of conditions fueling migration in post-revolutionary Mexico and reveal how the desire to provide for family remained a motivating factor for migration and petition in the 1940s.

Aspiring migrants reached out to the President for intervention on their behalf and went to great lengths to justify their deservingness of the opportunity to serve their country abroad as providers and soldiers in production. Some went so far as to assert that a bracero contract was owed to them for their prior services as armed revolutionaries and for their sacrifices for the glory of Mexico. Letter writers incorporated the right to provide, even if they had to emigrate to do so, into a broader concept of citizenship. Their duties as heads of household and good family patriarchs bound them to implicit contracts with their family to provide sustenance, while international labor agreements bound them to contracts with the U.S. to provide labor and support for the international cause of democracy. Aspiring migrants had to cleverly justify the necessity to leave their patria, while balancing critiques against the current state of affairs in Mexico. Their pleas represented the limits of the national economy while their professions
expressed loyalty and commitment to elevating the value and honor of their homeland. They had something to offer as provider-citizen-soldiers but the state also owed them the opportunity to serve.333

Letters came in from nearly every state in the republic, letter writers were from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and family members including women, also wrote on behalf of aspiring braceros. Not everyone would have thought to write to the highest official in the land for such favors, but many did take their issues directly to the State. Mexico was a state in a transition, with a centralized government that simultaneously defined itself by, and distanced itself from, the era of revolution with each passing administration. Still, the power and cult of personality of the President that Cardenas had elevated during the previous administration held through the Ávila Camacho period, and migrants still viewed the President as the final arbiter, intercessor and benefactor in their quest for bracero contracts.

When the program was finally made official on August 4th an avalanche of would-be migrants descended upon border cities and the first letters of aspiring braceros began arriving at the Palacio Nacional. Mariano Gonzalez, was one such aspiring bracero who wrote to President Ávila Camacho on behalf of himself and fifty other campesinos from Jalisco less than two months after the Bracero program officially began. They made the trip north to Tijuana “based on the news from the capital reported in the newspapers assuring that there is a need for workers

333 As will be demonstrated later in the chapter aspiring braceros were versed in the war rhetoric of the times and relied on their previous military and militia experience during to conjure up the image of the soldier continuing his duty for his country. Based on oral history interviews, historian Michael Snodgrass also finds that veteran braceros continued to see themselves as ‘soldiers of peace.’ The Bracero Program, 79.
in the United States.” They described themselves as free workers—or those not belonging to a union—who were simply “looking for the bread of our subsistence.” They were now stuck at the border with no contracts or resources, and they were forced to sleep on the streets of Tijuana. Letters and telegrams came to the President from other border cities detailing similar circumstances: 400 men in Mexicali were stranded at the border and asked the President for help returning to their homes; 900 migrants, aspiring braceros and their families, who had traveled from the interior of Mexico to Ciudad Juárez still held out hope that the President could authorize their crossing into the United States.

There are several striking themes that emerge from the first letters and telegrams to the President. First, aspiring migrants, with the resources to do so, went directly to the border upon news of bracero contracts being given out, signaling both the expectation of a fairly straight forward crossing, and the intense appeal of a jobs program. Second, as a result of incomplete information and a lack of program infrastructure to handle the influx of migrants at the border, many were facing dire circumstances, with the cost of their trips and extended stays at the border having depleted the little resources that they had. The Bracero agreement was connected to the president; the ability to cross the border was tied to the President’s power and benevolence—making him the ultimate patriarch. The letters also suggest that the bracero program acted as a set of accords that provided a new framework of logic for migration to the U.S. Migrations were now set within a diplomatic context, and that context was nested in an understanding of global

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334 Correograma from Mariano Gonzalez to President, September 23, 1942. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-1 box 793.
335 Telegram from Alfredo Rodriguez Romo to President, August 22, 1942; Telegram from Luis Mendoza to President, August 24, 1942. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-1 box 793
politics. The aspiring braceros stranded in Mexicali wrote that, “we came to the border with the exclusive purpose of entering the United States to lend our services according to your agreement with the North American Embassy.”

Mariano Gonzalez, the man representing the fifty campesinos from Jalisco suggested that their fate could be sealed with the sign of the president’s pen. Surely if the President made a request to the American authorities, then the group would be let into the country, especially “considering the circumstances of cooperation and the good will that exists because of the Good Neighbor policy.” He closed the letter with this statement, “We profess our loyalty and are obligated to your government to give our immediate cooperation in accordance with the circumstances that command it, for we are in a state of war and the country must reclaim its sons.”

The powerful statement conveys compelling war-time rhetoric as well as the astute insight of aspiring migrants to incorporate it into their pleas. They conveyed their understanding of the government’s renewed insistence on hemispheric cooperation. Aspiring braceros couched their letters to the president in the same language that was being used to attract the support of Mexicans to the allied cause and to the elevation of Mexican honor on a global stage. To profess loyalty in the context of war, cooperation in the context of diplomacy, and to simultaneously articulate a sense of poverty in the context of Mexico’s post-revolutionary failings, resulted in a unique combination of sentiments that were meant to be expressed directly to the President of Mexico. At the same time, the letters conveyed the immense poverty caused by frustrated exit plans and also the dire conditions that caused migrants to leave in the first place.
Making ends meet in 1940s Mexico

It was generally a matter of impoverished economic circumstances—a lack of work, lack of land, and poor salaries—that drove braceros to the North, to Mexico City, and to other big cities in anticipation of obtaining the coveted bracero contract. Aurelio Hernández from Villa Acuña, Coahuila near the U.S.-Mexico border wrote twice to the President citing poor economic circumstances made worse by the fact that goods were being charged for in dollars. He stated, “with each moment it becomes worse and harder for me to support myself and my family.”336 A 1942 survey given to five-hundred aspiring braceros by the Ministry of Labor in Mexico City, reported that 71.8% of them wanted to work in the United States to earn more money, while 14.2% wanted to go for “emotional reasons” and 12.4% wanted to go in search of adventure.337 Letters written to the President partially confirm this trend in that the majority of letters, closer to 90%, cited the need for higher wages. Only a handful of the five hundred sampled letters for the years 1942 through 1945 mentioned anything such as adventure or education as a motivation. Qualitative insights revealed through letters also importantly suggest that, “emotional or affective reasons” should not be separated from the need to earn more money, in fact, the most oft-cited reason that braceros mentioned for wanting to leave Mexico for the U.S. was their

1.60 % wanted to go under the category “educarse” but the study authors suggest that those offering this as a motivation were exceptional cases in which they had actually mentioned one of the other three motivations as well.
inability to sustain their families on their current salaries or as the result of lacking permanent employment.

Women’s letters to the President asking for bracero contracts for their male family members also illustrated the connection between family life and the economic opportunities afforded to braceros. On January 6, 1944, Castula Guerrero wrote to President Ávila Camacho to ask him for two things. After wishing the President a happy new year, she first asked him if he could give gifts to her young children in honor of it being Three Kings Day. She then asked the President to help facilitate a bracero contract for her husband. Angela Velarde de Madrigal wrote to the President from Mexicali to ask for bracero contracts for herself and for her husband. She cited her husband’s low salary and their inability to sustain their four children as a reason for seeking employment opportunities in the U.S. Angela Velarde de Madrigal and Castula Guerrero both saw the bracero program as means for supporting their families.

A claim for rights

As the war rhetoric quieted down and aspiring braceros began to encounter more and more obstacles in getting bracero contracts (due to an insufficient supply and over demand of contracts, some were sold and resold in corruptive schemes, some states were blocked entirely by quotas), letters highlighted reasons for leaving their patria and took on a different tone. Whereas, initially braceros expressed their loyalty to the President as demonstrated by their willingness to support the country, the government and the war-effort, aspiring braceros began to

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338 Abstract of Letter from Castula Guerrero to President Ávila Camacho, AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-1 box 0793 241
characterize the bracero contract less as an opportunity and more as a fundamental right. They were asking the President to let them go because he owed them, not because they owed him.

Aside from asking for favorable intervention in the matter of acquiring a contract, letter writers included their justifications for why they should be given a chance to work legally in the North. Over the next few years the pleas became more explicit and the strategies for obtaining a favorable response more varied and extreme. Another element of war-time rhetoric emerged in the letters: Democracy and the rights of citizenship. Democracy and the rhetoric of rights were not new in any way within the context of petitions to the state. The articulation of civil and human rights remerged as a legacy of the Mexican Revolution. However, it was a new theme found in letters of aspiring migrants to the United States. Mexicans had long been exercising their constitutional right to leave the country— but aspiring braceros were now claiming the right to leave, the right to a bracero contract, as a political right in some cases, and a moral or human right in other cases.

Letter writers claimed the right to a bracero contract in a variety of ways. For some it was a right that was earned because of previous service to the country whether in the form of political campaigning or military service. Many letter writers mentioned that they supported President Ávila Camacho in his run for the presidency and either implicitly or very explicitly explained that they deserved a bracero contract because they provided political support.339 A group of braceros from Puebla wrote to the President in March of 1944 asking to be sent to the U.S. as braceros. They explained their deservedness by stating, “Well as you might be able to

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339 Letter Jose Santana S., May 13, 1943, Mexicali B.C. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120
understand, we lack everything needed to sustain our families. Our families who pray that you intervene favorably to our petition—a legal and just petition—considering that we risked our lives in the past presidential campaign in which our current President was elected.”

How they risked their lives for the presidential campaign was unclear, and was more likely strategically phrased to convey the drama of sacrifice. Still, others similarly requested the favor of a bracero contract making it clear that they campaigned for Ávila Camacho or even simply that they voted for him. Patronage politics certainly played a role in the Bracero Program.

Service was also defined by prior military service during the Revolution and the Cristero wars. A group of revolutionary veterans from Coahuila asked the President if he could facilitate bracero contracts for forty families due to the lack of work in the area. Aurelio Segura, the son of a military captain who fought in the Cristero wars also asked for a bracero contract on behalf of himself and his three brothers. He explained that his mother had never been able to obtain the pension after the death of her husband since she lived too far away from the capital. Aurelio implored the President to give him and his family bracero cards, due to the difficult economic situation of the entire family, and in consideration of the services offered and by the life by his now deceased father.

340 Letter to President from Francisco Pérez etc. March 14, 1944, Moyotzingo, Puebla. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120 box 793.
341 Jose Santana S. and others, Mexicali 5/13/43; Luis Sanchez, Ciudad Juarez, July 23, 1943. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120 box 793.
342 See Snodgrass for a discussion on the relationship between patronage politics and bracero contracts, 94-95.
343 Letter to the President from Sabino Pantoja, Nueva Rosita, Coahuila, August 7, 1943. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120 box 793.
344 Letter to President Ávila-Camacho from Aurelio Ureña Segura, January 2, 1945. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-5.
For others, the right to a bracero contract was envisioned more as a natural right—tied directly to the right to work and to provide for their family members. In its most extreme and yet simple elaboration, the right to a bracero contract was connected to the right to be free from hunger—the right not to starve. In post-revolutionary Mexico this right was compromised by politics, the environment, and ironically by the failings of land reform that had promised to even out the rights of campesinos. Drought, plague, and volcanic ash threatened harvests across Mexico during this period and according to aspiring migrants—who wanted to go north just to survive until the next harvest, the land was “dead” and “infertile.”\textsuperscript{345} Antonia Mora Miraflores wrote to the President complaining that the Banco Ejidal stopped extending credit, that the governor of Jalisco had done nothing to help workers with dead fields, and asked the President to let laborers of the region go to the United States as braceros.\textsuperscript{346} Agricultural unemployment and underemployment due to poor harvests or environmental disasters had led migrants to go north to other harvests for decades, but after the redistribution of lands under President Cardenas, the problems in the campo took an added political dimension. The land that had been given was not giving back, and aspiring braceros in the 1940s were essentially telling the new President that the revolution was not delivering. \textsuperscript{347}

A letter to the state governor of Jalisco with more than 70 signatories, all from an ejido in Santa Rosalia, Jalisco, expressed a similar sentiment that after finally getting necessary land by

\textsuperscript{345} Telegram from Salvador Tiscareño to President March 22, 1945. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-5.
\textsuperscript{346} Abstract of letter to the President from Antonia Mora Miraflores, March 13, 1945. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-5.
\textsuperscript{347} Letter writers from Guanajuato emphasized ruinous plant diseases and drought, those from Michoacán emphasized volcanic ash, those from Querétaro, Jalisco and Zacatecas also mentioned drought as the reason for poor harvests, AGN-RP-MAC 120.
Presidential resolution, “they gave us lands that were not cultivatable lands, which has led to a failure for our community.” They looked to the governor stating, “we ask of you to provide us with a pass to the United States of North America as braceros to remedy our needs and the needs of our families, since we find ourselves without land to work, and without work of any kind.”

Another letter written by Ismael Torres, President of an ejido in La Cienega, Jalisco, commented on the connection between land and emigration, “As you perfectly know our ejido in these moments finds itself in very poor circumstances in the form of harvestable lands; a great number of ejidatarios for whom the land does not favor want to go to the United States as braceros.”

Numerous requests for bracero contracts came from those who had received lands but had few resources to make the land productive. Land alone was not enough to sustain Mexican families, as it required capital in terms of financial investment and technology. Even still, some lands were far too small to adequately support larger families. An Ejido Commission from Rancho Nuevo de La Cruz, Guanajuato asked the President for ten bracero contracts for people “who couldn’t cultivate their parcels and lacked the resources to sustain their families.” Members of the Ejido commission assured the President that those with contracts would only temporarily leave their ejidos. In some cases, aspiring braceros had family members that could stay behind to work the parcels, and thus family represented a motivating factor for migration, a justification for deservedness of contracts, and an assurance that the migrant through the

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348 Archivo Historico de Jalisco, 240/6
349 Archivo Historico de Jalisco, 240/6
351 Abstract of letter from Jesus Cervantes to President. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-10.
extension of his family members would continue to contribute to the nation within and outside
the boundaries of Mexico.\textsuperscript{352}

Ejidatarios in Central Western Mexico and Jalisco lacking sufficient land resources were
not the only ones desiring to go north. Farmers of small and medium landholdings were also
looking for capital to be able to keep their goods in a market that was dominated by
commercialized and “modernized” agriculture. New seed hybrids, fertilizers and pesticides
introduced by the Green Revolution demanded more capital. Modernized tools, tractors,
machines and parts (many made in the United States) required costly investments.\textsuperscript{353} Displaced
factory workers also saw the Bracero Program as a means to facilitate their migrations north. In
Santiago, Jalisco the modernization of textile factories led to the unemployment of many of its
residents and men began leaving as braceros, accompanied by some women as well.\textsuperscript{354}

Men thus asked the government to reward them for being good patriarchs--for engaging
in military and political service, and challenging the government to protect and bolster their
patriarchy--to give them the opportunity to provide, especially when their bases for providing
(land for campesinos and job security for obreros) were declining. Women also wrote to the
President and other government officials to request contracts for their husbands or other male
family members. Maria Concepción Armenta de Aguilera from the Valle de Santiago stressed
her poor financial condition and asked the President for his help in sending her husband Julian to
the U.S. as a bracero.\textsuperscript{355} Maria de Jesus Vda. de la Cruz from Tenamaxtlan, Jalisco inquired

\textsuperscript{352} Letter from Natividad Amaro to President Dec. 6 1944, AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-10.
\textsuperscript{353} Angus Wright, \textit{The Death of Ramón González}, 171-188.
\textsuperscript{354} Massey et al. \textit{Return to Aztlan}, 89-91.
\textsuperscript{355} AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-8 box 793
about a bracero contract for her brother, another widow, Maria Anguiano Vda. de Hernández from La Barca, Jalisco needed help getting her son work as a Bracero.356 Aurelia Martinez, Concepcion Garcia and Maria Morales also from the Valle de Santiago, Guanajuato wrote together to the President requesting bracero contracts for their cousins.357

The bracero contracts did help some to preserve their roles as family patriarchs by facilitating short-term economic opportunities and the ability for some families to gain capital and credit for small business and agricultural tools and technology, and even greater status in their Mexican communities.358 However, the overall program was fraught with issues that resulted in further complications for those that did finally succeed in getting bracero contracts and for the families that had to endure separations and other hardships.

*Having already served*

By the end of Manuel Ávila Camacho’s administration, letters from those who *already* served time as braceros were arriving to the Palacio Nacional. Some wanted help getting their 10% savings, while others having finished their contracts saw the President as an intercessor in the process of obtaining jobs in their home states. The National Alliance of Braceros, representing men who had already served bracero contracts petitioned the President for still more

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356 Letter to President Ávila-Camacho from Maria de de Jesus Vda. de la Cruz; AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-5 box 793
357 AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-5 box 793
358 For example Massey et al. found that the Bracero program especially gave ejidatarios a source of investment capital and independence from moneylenders that had come to dominate economic life in Chamitlán, Michoacán after 1930s agrarian reform. A similar scenario occurred in Altamira, Jalisco where earnings from the Bracero Program facilitated farming that ejidatarios had been too poor to initiate prior to the program, *Return to Aztlan*, 55, 72-76.
contracts. They wanted to return north, since upon their return to Mexico they saw little promise for continued employment.

That braceros created such organizations not only speaks to the ongoing corporatist nature of politics in Mexico, but also to the longevity of the Bracero program and sustained interest. Their argument, like the language of service for the Patria, whether as revolutionaries, party affiliates, defenders of democracy, or soldiers in war production, cycled back to feed a new logic—the next phase of defining citizenship and rights. For their service in another country, for crossing of an international border, and for traveling far from their homelands and leaving their families in the name of Mexico—they deserved more. They deserved lands or at the very least the ability to make a living. To address the counterargument that there were jobs to be had in Mexico, they supplied a litany of abuses that employers and industrialists subjected non-salaried workers to in Mexico City. They were campesinos with skills that were increasingly incompatible within an urban labor market. And in a strikingly straightforward and intriguing articulation on the subject of rights, these former, and still aspiring, braceros partially attributed their desperate situation to the fact that they “didn’t have enough money to buy their rights”. They would need to go north again, for their options were limited in Mexico. They should be able to go north because they had already served their country as braceros. They rested their hopes on going to the United States to work legally and provide. They demanded the right to provide even if they had to repeatedly leave their country to do so.

Similar to men returning from World War II to the United States who were emboldened by their fight for democracy overseas, Mexican braceros at home and abroad pressed for more rights and asserted their ideal vision for Mexico's future. Mexicans in the U.S., with a new
perspective and perhaps at a safer distance to wage their critiques also expressed their concerns about Mexico's future and commented on how the role of migration could negatively affect Mexico's progress. Alfonso Velasquez wrote to President Manuel Ávila Camacho on October 29, 1945 from a railroad camp in Ashtabula, Ohio. He expressed to the President that he had received letters from Mexicans in Mexico stating, "They want to return to the United States and say that life in Mexico is so bad because salaries are so low, and food and clothes are so expensive. Furthermore, they state that there are no jobs and these endless letters reveal the horror of the situation.” He went on to state that many Mexicans wanted to become U.S. citizens because they believed that, "Mexico doesn't know how to treat their sons.” In line with the language of the times, Velazquez wondered if these Mexicans might be considered enemies of the Mexico, distancing himself by those critics by saying, "since I am in love with our beloved country, it gives me great sadness what they say about it.” The letter served as a cautionary tale to the President, and Velazquez, as a binational migrant, made himself a representative for former braceros now in Mexico, fellow braceros in his railroad camp, and himself. After stating, "I fear that Mexico is suffering heavy losses through the loss of men. I also fear that Mexico's sovereignty will be threatened,” he suggested that more attention be given to industry and agriculture.  

The Bracero Program, designed to supplement the U.S. labor force during war, and to give Mexican men needed jobs and experience with which they could utilize upon returning to their country, became a program that unemployed and underemployed Mexican families came to

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359 Letter to President Ávila Camacho from Alfonso Velazquez, October 29, 1945, AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-1.
place their hopes in for the next twenty years. Letters to the presidents increasingly revealed popular discontent and highlighted the failings of the State. Some of the most popular institutions and symbols of delivered revolutionary promises not only drew criticism but could not buffer against the strong desire to go north. A group of workers from Mexico City wrote to President Alemán to ask for bracero contracts for 500 workers who were unemployed after work had been completed on the Atzcapotzalco oil refinery. Even those working for PEMEX, a symbol of national sovereignty, sought contracts to work in the United States.\textsuperscript{360} Aside from vociferously criticizing the corruption of some officials in the handling of bracero contracts and a direct critique of the Banco Crédito Ejidal, a letter from Juan Rico Avalos to the Governor of Jalisco stated, “Mexico has men for work; the only thing it is missing is help from the government to give the incentive necessary to work with faith and valor.” The letter went on to state,

We want only work so that we can sustain our children so they can better serve the country. Our voice has been week, inaudible, and our complaints have been neglected on various occasions when we’ve asked to emigrate as braceros. Are we not so Mexican like our compatriots from other states who have been given the opportunity to emigrate in search for better possibilities in life?\textsuperscript{361}

Again, in this letter we see how the logic ushered in by the Bracero era connected the opportunity to emigrate as a fundamental right of being Mexican, a logic that had not been

\textsuperscript{360}Letter to President Aleman from Francisco Estudillo, AGN-RP-MAV 546.6/1-8
\textsuperscript{361}Letter to Governor Marcelino Garcia Barragan from Juan Rico Avalos, AHJ 240/6 849
articulated up until the contract labor program and one that transformed how emigration was viewed. Emigration was also justified as integral to a better future for Mexico, “We want a Mexico that is better so that in the near future our children may live happy.” But how did the Bracero program impact families who were left in Mexico?

*Impacting family and family migration*

While there is some evidence that women and children accompanied some braceros during their contracts in the United States, the majority of families affected by the bracero program remained in Mexico while their bracero family members were in the United States. Scholar Ana Elizabeth Rosas demonstrates that as a result of the psychological and economic impacts of separation, wives and children relied on each other when the State took little notice of the families left behind. When mothers and children had to labor in order to make up for the loss of the head of household’s wage, and when children had to cope with separation from either one or both parents, teachers in San Martin de Hidalgo, Jalisco stepped in to try and mediate the hardships experienced in communities affected by the bracero exodus.\(^{362}\) Some mothers were much less fortunate, and without community support, were forced to leave their children in orphanages when their husbands left to the United States. After not hearing from her husband

\(^{362}\) Ana Elizabeth Rosas "Breaking the Silence: Mexican Children and Women’s Confrontation of Bracero Family Separation, 1942-64" *Gender & History* 22 (2), 2011.
throughout the year that he had been in the United States, Maria Marrón was forced to leave her two girls at a Guadalajara orphanage in 1946.\footnote{Letter to State Government from Lucia Navarro de Perez, Hospicio Cabañas August 14, 1946 Re: Maria Marrón, AHJ Gobernación, 205 (28)/10; Letter to State Government from Lucia Navarro de Perez, Hospicio Cabañas, October 1, 1946 Re: Mercedes Alvarez, 205 (16)}

As the Bracero Program continued, presidents continued to receive letters from women desperately inquiring about the whereabouts of their bracero relatives. Others inquired about the savings supposedly available to families in Mexico and in the most tragic of cases, widows whose husbands had died while serving their contracts sought assistance to support their families through owed wages and indemnification. Trinidad Rojas Andrade wrote to the President in October 1943 after not hearing from her son who left as a bracero in January of that same year. She had already been in contact with a contracting office that told her that he disappeared from his job in August, after which she went to the President with her plea, “Sir, my son is young, and I find myself desperate, I have written to the Mexican consul but he has not answered me, I want to know about my son, well, for me he is everything, and that is why I write to you, for him, with the hope that my son will be returned to me or that I may learn what became of him.”\footnote{Letter to Consul general of Mexico, Los Angeles, Cal. from Secretary of Protection, Mistry of Foreign Relations AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-3.} She was not the only mother looking for her son, María Refugio Guzmán de Sandoval asked President Aleman for help in finding her son Rámon, who had been contracted as a bracero the previous year but never reached his destination.\footnote{Letter to President Manuel Alemán Valdez from María Refugio Guzmán de Sandoval, July, 29, 1947. AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/1-31 box 593} Family members of braceros from Tamaulipas wrote
to the President after hearing that braceros had been wounded after being shot somewhere near Cedar Creek Nebraska.\footnote{Letter to President Ávila Camacho from Ramona Avalos, Bertha Marquez and others, AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-8}

Enriqueta Sánchez de Cuevas’ husband died in Loray, Nevada while working for Southern Pacific Railroads and she wrote to President Ávila Camacho seeking savings that was owed to him. The husbands of Maria Carmen de Garcia also from Zacatecas, Juana Navarrete de Negrete from Pénjamo, Guanajuato and Maria de Jesus Ruiz de Sandoval from Yahualica, Jalisco all died while on bracero contracts in the United States, and each wrote to the President after attempting to petition another government agency for means of support in the wake of their husbands’ deaths.\footnote{AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120-8} A telegram sent by Angela Hernandez de Gonzalez to the President captures the widows desperation upon the death of her husband.

I, widow of bracero Margarito Gonzalez Azua, have official copy number 702 consul general Chicago, February 6 sending the Secretaría Relaciones checks for me 107827 and 109593 as social insurance and compensation death of my husband. After reiterating my circumstances before Secretaria Relaciones, they do not send me and finding myself in complete indigence, eight children to whom I give bread, I ask that you attentively order the sending of my checks to the end of aiding me in my desperate situation. Attentively Angela Hernandez Vda. de Gonzalez.
Women dealing with the death of their bracero husbands had to navigate through multiple government agencies on both sides of the border, face life without the anticipated crucial income that bracero work would bring, bear witness to their children losing their father, and deal with the loss of their partner in life.

Conclusion

The above letters add to the history of the program in two important ways. They reveal the strategy and the language which aspiring migrants used with the executive of the State at the moment of wanting to leave and they shed light on the Mexico that the braceros wanted to leave and the Mexico that most, if they had secured contracts, would end up coming back to. By using a rhetoric of democracy and rights that had begun during the Mexican Revolution and was reinvigorated by the democratic principles espoused during World War II, migrants placed their own desires to leave the patria in a broader global context while simultaneously commenting on their local realities.

Their local realities, in fact, were intimately connected with their articulation of rights and their desires to go abroad. They incorporated global language of democracy, sovereignty, and citizenship into visions of a future where they would be able to provide for their families. The opportunity, along with the vision, reinforced as it was by the federal governments of each country, were now reserved for men. Women were left behind in that sense. However, some women chose to stay behind, while some tried to also venture north, and many were still involved in supporting the migrations of their male family members.
The bracero program allowed Mexican migrants to reframe their motivations and actions as a way of lending their services to the United States and to Mexico. Rather than being seen as a selfish act of individualism, Mexican migration could now be perceived as service to both countries—a fact that obviously employers and migrants had understood for decades—but one that was curbed by American nativism and Mexican nationalism during the 1930s. The Bracero Program acted as a system for the legal sanctioning of temporary binational migratory labor. The program was conditional and selective and introduced a new expectation of the Mexican migrant—decidedly male and decidedly temporary—and was set within the context of World War II—in an environment rich with the rhetoric of service, rights, and democracy. The program also conditioned the expectations that aspiring migrants, as post-revolutionary Mexicans, had of their Patria and their Presidente.

Aside from the formalizing a new migrant ideal and trying to institute a new paradigm of migration regulation, and in addition to personal impacts caused by the Bracero Program (ranging from positive to devastatingly catastrophic), the Bracero Program had another profound impact on migration patterns: a surge in illegal immigration. 4.6 million Mexicans would benefit from legal contracts over the course of the program’s 22-year period. The families of millions of men would endure family separations either resulting in further opportunities or untold costs. In the next half decade some fortunate families, especially if they had relatives in the U.S., would bear witness to, and participate, in straightforward and orderly migrations into the United States.

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368 Letter to the President from Abel Martínez Luba, Acámbaro Guanajuato, May 5 1943, AGN-RP-MAC 546.6/120
369 A temporary labor program had operated during World War I, but was regional in scope and not sanctioned by either federal government.
Many more migrant families, however, would bear witness to, and embark on risky migrations over an increasingly militarized and violent border. Gone was the informal border of the 1910s, and the boom era of family migration of the 1920s (even the restrictive border and economic hardship of the 1930s allowed for more family migration). The Bracero Program, the great hope for binational cooperation and bilateral regulation, certainly brought on a new era of sanctioned migration, but it also brought a new era of vigilance. Many Mexicans lived their first migration experiences through the Bracero Program, but Mexican migration to the U.S. had already had a fifty-year legacy within some communities and families. Families would continue to migrate and those migrations would continue to be shaped by economic cycles, new border legislation, and life events. Who would go and how they would do it would just depend on the new attempted innovations made by each state. Binational families would continue to live across borders despite any attempts to reorder migration to be mostly male and temporary. After all migration was no longer an option for only a few, after the 1940s Mexican migration to the United States was firmly entrenched in the heart of Mexican communities and critical to the economic livelihood of two nations.
EPILOGUE
Fit to Be Migrants

In late spring of 1953, a reporter from the Laredo Times followed the deportation journey of 200 braceros from McAllen to Zapata, Texas where they were to return to Mexico across the international bridge. He reported the harrowing tale of 36 men who were unable to pay for their own transportation after being deported for working illegally in the United States as “wetbacks.” They were to make the return journey by foot through the hot desert without food or water. Deporting Mexicans by bussing them to point along the border from which they would have to walk miles before reaching the nearest town, was reportedly a punishment suggested by a U.S. government official as a way of discouraging them from ever returning.

The report included a profile of a man from Michoacán who had come to the United States with his wife. He told the reporter, “We could make very little from the crops from our little farm. Often the children were hungry.” So they left their children with his parents and crossed the river explaining that, “officials of both countries” made it difficult for them to enter. He knew what they did was illegal, stating, “but we knew, too, that your farmers needed our help. And we had heard how your great chiefs in Washington had what they called the ‘Good Neighbor Policy,’ and that they called Mexicans their friends and that your country was land of opportunity which welcomed all good people who wanted to work.” They were able to work only a couple of harvests before they were caught without papers and subsequently taken to a deportation camp. Officials would take his wife to Laredo and deport her there, while he would be made to suffer the trek into the desert as a lesson. “So I gave my wife the little money we had saved. She is somewhere now; maybe on the road between your Laredo and Monterrey. I told her
that, God willing. I would meet her there and we would return to our little farm together.” The reporter admitted his shock at the “senseless, brutal separation of a man and his wife.”

The reporter referred to the practice of requiring deportees to walk long stretches of dessert back to Mexico as the “hot-foot lift.” Compared to the bus lifts, train lifts and airlifts that were used in the deportation of undocumented migrants, the reporter found the hot-foot lift particularly pernicious. Dropping migrants off at the border near where they originally entered or in populated areas resulted in many of them returning to the U.S. not long after they had been deported. U.S. border patrol would drop deportees off in locations far from where they had entered or been apprehended so as to disrupt the social networks that could facilitate their return crossing.

The reporter’s story was particularly effective in demonstrating the crueler aspects of deportation by focusing on the separation of the couple from Michoacán. The poor farmer’s quote about the welcoming of Mexicans and mention of the Good Neighbor Policy rings with an unintended tone of irony. What began as a binational program and symbolic of diplomatic cooperation in the face of war unfolded into a period of disagreement over the Bracero program at the federal level and eventually to mass deportation. The Bracero Program, which was heralded for its commitment to hemispheric solidarity also brought with it a forceful crack down on undocumented migrations. A parallel trend of illegal immigration had occurred since the inception of the program but enforcement took on new dimensions in the 1950s. Another trend was starting to become more visible as well, and that was the increase in undocumented

370 Newspaper Clipping from the Laredo Times, June 5, 1953 found in #1554-3, Archivo Historico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.
migrations by women. In 1953 at El Paso, 60% of border patrol apprehensions were of women and children.\footnote{Lytle Hernández, \textit{Migra!}, 135}

While some women traveled alongside, or to join their husbands, more women also began migrating by themselves. An informal ‘bracera’ movement began as the demand for Mexican domestic servants increased in border cities, especially in Texas.\footnote{Gardner, \textit{Qualities of a Citizen}, 210-211} Communities in Central West Mexico that had not yet witnessed the “feminine exodus,” which had affected some areas of Jalisco in the 1920s, would see women migrating north for the first time during the latter years of the Bracero period.\footnote{Massey et al., \textit{Return to Aztlan}} Migration in the 1950s and beyond, however, would look very different than it did in the first half of the century.

For a brief period, the Bracero Program was able to enforce the new migrant ideal and a new migration order–one where male, able bodied, agriculturally skilled, workers would work temporarily, earn savings that would compel them to return home with sub subsidized travel to do so. Learning lessons from the era of economic crisis and repatriation in the 1930s, the Bracero Program made Mexican migration the opposite of what it had been in the 1920s–widely diverse, familial and sustained by social networks.

The program had a lasting impact on the way that families migrated as well. Men would migrate on their own in the absence of their families. The Bracero Program segregated men and women in their migrations (and in their deportations), and also in any work that they were to do in the United States. Mexican and Mexican-American families who had weathered the 1930s

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\item \footnotemark[372] Lytle Hernández, \textit{Migra!}, 135
\item \footnotemark[373] Gardner, \textit{Qualities of a Citizen}, 210-211
\item \footnotemark[374] Massey et al., \textit{Return to Aztlan}
\end{itemize}
together continued to travel from harvest to harvest, but Mexican families would not be arriving to work alongside each other as they had done in the 1920s and as depicted by the corrido that opened chapter 2. While binational family support was still important for the migrants who did go to the United States during the 1940s, binational family networks played a more limited role in facilitating the migration of braceros. Having family on the other side of the border did nothing to further selection into the program. Much of the cost of migration was transferred to the state but so was the control over migrant bodies. Migration went from a family affair to a state affair with the Mexican government, U.S. employers, and the U.S. government all struggling over who would become the ultimate patriarch. Increased violence came with increased State intervention.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the border was transformed like never before and Mexican migrants were increasingly criminalized. Operation Cloudburst (1953) and Operation Wetback (1954) counted on U.S. military support to prevent further illegal immigration and to wage the biggest deportation raids to date. New patrol tactics would channel aspiring border crossers to more treacherous routes causing more injury and deaths to migrants attempting to enter the U.S.\textsuperscript{375} Meanwhile, the Bracero Program continued sanctioning only specific migrations, families continued to find reasons to leave Mexico.

Problems in the Mexican countryside continued to worsen for those with inadequate resources to farm their land and urbanization overwhelmed cities with workers. The modernization and commercialization of agriculture that had its beginnings in the 1940s and with

\textsuperscript{375} Lyttle-Hernadez, \textit{ Migra!}
help from the Rockefeller foundation driven Green Revolution led to the increased reliance of farmers on fertilizers pesticides and hybrid seed technologies. The new high-yielding and expensive chemical farming not only challenged farmers using traditional farming techniques and their ability to keep goods in the market, it also led to increased reliance on debt, the need for more capital and migration to the U.S.  

Industrialization in the cities and especially near the border had a growing impact on migration as the Border Industrialization Program brought maquiladoras and female workers to the border. The internal migration of single women to urban areas was a centuries old legacy, but single women and mothers alike were now migrating to cities along the border to assemble mostly electronics to export to the United States. Like male workers going to northern regions of Mexico for mining and cotton and then pushing on further to the U.S. in the 1910s, women seeking higher wages or a more flexible working environment were just miles away from opportunities across the border. Commuter migrants also became a significant part of the migration stream, and took advantage of a new legal category which allowed for them to cross daily to work in the United States, but still reside in Mexico. While maintained united households, women’s necessity for higher wages pulled them away from their families, stretching binational families further and further apart.

During the height of the civil rights movement, new immigration legislation in the U.S. revised the decades old national quota system and was designed to show preference for family

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unification as well as for immigrants engaged in certain employment. The Hart-Celler act however also placed quotas on immigration from the western hemisphere. As with most subsequent immigration reforms, it brought promise for some migrants and peril to others. Those still able to take advantage of legislation by which migrants could rely on family members in the United States to sponsor their own immigration and legal residency were few in comparison to the many Mexicans that would seek refuge from the crushing economic crisis, subsequent austerity measures, and the neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s and ‘90s. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, was the last major reform that gave amnesty to many but encouraged militarization of the border—higher fences shored by more patrols with more weapons. Indigenous migrants and female migrants came to dominate the new migrations, and contemporary observers began to focus on issues such as transnational mothers, spousal abandonment, domestic violence, poverty, migrant health, and transformed gender relations within migrant and immigrant households. The scale of female and family migration was unprecedented but as the stories of women leaving and making their lives in two countries through the early decades of the twentieth century show: family migration was nothing new.

The developments surrounding Mexican migration over the last half-century take up a considerable amount of scholarly attention for good reason. Migration, after all is consistently contemporary— an ongoing phenomenon that every four to six years now takes center stage in many political debates. Social workers, teachers, and health care workers spend considerable effort trying to understand migrant needs. Politicians build platforms on their plans for amnesty, restriction, drivers licenses, and walls. Some employers lobby congress for special worker visas, some see no need, some are apathetic. Scholars debate migrant assimilation, Americanization,
cultural pluralism, and cultural relativism. Family members invite other relatives to join them or find themselves contemplating a return to their homelands. And migrants and immigrants keep coming to the U.S. from all world regions and for a variety of reasons. While the scale of these global migrations might be vastly different from the scale of migration in the early 1900s many core issues remain.

The stories of migrants from the early part of the century tell us the story of the ways in which Mexican migration has evolved over time in relation to: border policies, economic expansion and contraction, social pressures, and a range of State interventions, non-interventions and apathy. The Mexican migrants of the early 1900s traced their multiple journeys during a period when nations were defining nationhood, as well as across borders that became more physical and less conceptual over time. In the United States, the degree to which Mexican migrants or their U.S. born Mexican children would ever be fully accepted as citizens with equal rights was still to be determined. In Mexico, citizenship was being redefined in the throes and aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and the Cristero Wars. In places like Jalisco and the center west, Mexicans faced competing visions of nationalism and were skeptical of political power that emerged from Mexico City. Many of their routes after all led north and it is worth asking whether, or at which point, Mexican communities had more economic, social and cultural ties to the north rather than to the capital.

While mostly men traveled as pioneer migrants during the first decades of the northerly cross-border migration, relatives also began to migrate, and local observers and migration officials began to recognize that even the women were leaving. The early twentieth century was not only a period of dramatic transformation for each nation but it was also a period of
transformation within the family and of gender roles. First, migration was not only relegated to Mexican males and second, wage or formal labor was no longer relegated to only male migrants. Women were immigrating to be with their families but also to provide for themselves and their families as women in general in both the U.S. and Mexico were increasingly entering the workplace. It is difficult to know how gender dynamics changed within families and specifically how patriarchy changed, but the fact that women were also leaving their communities-- and not just to the nearest city but across an international border—indicated shifts in society that would increasingly challenge the traditional hierarchies within families and communities. That, is of course, if men could not reconstruct their version of patriarchy in quite the same way a world away from home. The 1930s, and the turmoil and separations that came from economic crisis, was one such era in which the hope for a more traditionally defined version of family and more unified vision of family migration was challenged. Paralyzing economic conditions stranded families across borders and began to regularize the experiences and expectations of migrant families having to live apart--and not just in ways that cut through families where the male breadwinner stayed on one side of the border while the others remained at home. Evidence from the latter half of the 1930s demonstrates the multiple obstacles for women who encountered separation from their male partners for one reason or another. The fact that consular officials and even presidents were called on to resolve financial and familial problems speaks to both the expected paternalism (and expected benevolence) of the State, and to the fact that family migration and reunification was a goal mostly realized in times of economic prosperity. Migration and repatriation during the Great Depression reveal the fragility of family unit and reunifying migrations. From this point on, while certainly some families with enough means
were able to migrate together or migrate easily to reunite with their loved ones, many families would need to make difficult decisions regarding who would go and who would stay, knowing full well if that if times were hard, relatives might not be able to return for a very long time. If the Bracero program tried to regularize migration, make it more temporary and more male, it succeeded but only for a brief time. Indeed, the fact that more than 4 million men participated in the program does represent a significant social reengineering of human migration, temporary as it might have been. Family migration would again prevail as women and children, brothers and sisters kept migrating albeit in a more restrictive environment. Letters from female bracero family members reveal many problems with the program, including the problem of being left behind, but as with other letters written to government officials, the letters most importantly reveal a language of petition and a bold assertion that migrant families and families of migrants deserved the attention, respect, and rights of any ordinary citizen in Mexico. Migrant letters joined the chorus of other letters streaming into the Palacio Nacional. Migrants and their families pleaded their case for assistance, for savings due, for the opportunity to provide for their families, and for the right to be heard just as other groups made their claims in post-revolutionary Mexico.

When examining Mexican migration and migration experiences through the words of those who migrated we see a much more detailed picture of temporary, bidirectional, and repeated migration, binational living, and cross-border experiences. We see migrants as part of families and communities, with evolving life plans, strategies, and dreams, rather than just a nameless mass of people who exist between two nations. Migrants made their lives in two nations. Migrants interacted with the State—two States—in fact, early in the twentieth century and
negotiated and navigated their cross-border livelihoods through a range of societal transformations. The wide variety of family and personal circumstances, the importance of life cycles, and the rich family histories of cross-border living, produced an enduring legacy of migration that could not simply be contained, regulated, reordered, or fit into a logic of labor and commodities. Migration was, and always will be, unpredictably human.
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**Abbreviations**

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