

THE BRACERO LEGACY ON MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL LABOR

Yael Sanchez, History, UIC

BRACERO PROGRAM BACKGROUND

- The Bracero Program was a set of labor agreements that allowed Mexican laborers to work in the U.S. under temporary contracts.
- The program began in August 4, 1942 in response to labor shortages stemming from World War II drafts (10m men drafted).
- Braceros worked throughout the country especially western agricultural states like California, Texas, & Arizona.



RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The goal of this study is to underscore how the **Bracero Program** not only fueled the political engagement & mobilization of migrant workers in the US, but how it also institutionalized the importance of **civic & political engagement** to foster ongoing change through the creation of the UFW.



METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Study

- Documentaries
- Interviews & Transcripts
- Newspapers
- Academic Texts
- Journal Articles

BRACERO MOBILIZATION AFTER WWII

Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1946-48: National Farm Labor Union President Harry L. Mitchell recognized the importance of Braceros.• 1952: Fred Ross recruited Cesar Chavez to the Community Service Organization (CSO).• 1956: Dolores Huerta recruited into the CSO.• 1962: Chavez would leave the CSO after 10 years in order to create a new union dedicated to helping farmworkers.	
Org Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NFLU: Language barriers, a lack of translators, & deportation threats resulted in few Mexican farmworkers joining; 2000 members, mainly Anglos.• CSO: Mexican-American civil rights group founded in 1947 by Fred Ross, Antonio Rios, & Edward Roybal in the Boyle Heights neighborhood (Los Angeles, California) to provide legal & naturalization services to undocumented immigrants; launched careers of Cesar Chavez & Dolores Huerta.• UFW: Founded in 1962 by Chavez (who would serve as president until his death in 1993), Huerta, & Philip de la Cruz in Delano, California; UFW would be a labor union mainly affiliated with the AFL-CIO.• Founded in response to the failure of the Bracero Program.• Temporarily merged with Agricultural Workers Organization Committee to form UFWOC in August 1966.	
Political Agendas (UFW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program failed in protecting rights of Braceros with many being physically, mentally, & financially exploited.• Joined forces with Larry Itliong's Agricultural Workers Organization Committee in the Delano Grape Strike on September 8, 1965—La Huelga.• 100s of Mexican-American/Filipino farmworkers took part in the Delano to Sacramento March (280 miles—March 17- April 10, 1966) which resulted in union victories (rest periods, hand-washing facilities, protective clothing).• During the strike, the UFW sought to network with other groups to gain greater political support—Martin Luther King Jr (Civil Rights Movement) & 1968 Democratic candidate Robert Kennedy (a staunch supporter of both the union & the Delano Grape Strike.)• Results: First union contracts signed by the grape growers of Delano; wage increase of \$1.80 an hour plus 20 cents per grape box picked; health care plan with growers putting 10 cents an hour towards the aid.	

UFW CASES

2001 Taco Bell Boycott

2022 Ostrom Mushroom

Call to Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Coalition of Immokalee & UFW came together to end the “sweatshops in the fields” in Immokalee, Florida.• A cry for boycott was made against Taco Bell due to tomato pickers (whether migrant or not) being underpaid, as well as not being given health insurance & holiday/sick days.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 140 U.S.-based Ostrom Farm workers were fired without notice & replaced with a foreign workforce brought to the US under H2A visas.• When this was made public, UFW quickly mobilized & under their signature motto “Si Se Puede” the union sprung into action both physically & digitally.
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The CIW & UFW allied with university students in order to “Stop the Bell”.• The Student/Farmworker Alliance included students from Notre Dame, UCLA, & the University of Chicago.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The UFW aimed to ally themselves with Ostrom Farm workers, but they especially hoped to gain support of the female workers of Ostrom—whether employed or terminated.• H2A workers were also recruited during mobilization efforts as Ostrom Farm was discovered to have neglected H2A guidelines through unfair firings.
Methods of Resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the alliance’s <i>Campaign for Fair Food</i>, a four-year boycott ensued.• El Acuerdo: Set of agreements signed by Taco Bell.• Agreement included better wages for the Immokalee tomato growers & a strengthening of the Supplier’s Code of Conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just like the Chavez-era, the UFW’s peaceful demonstrations of Ostrom Farm resulted in an immediate response.• Fliers (<i>#StandWithOstromWorkers</i>) have been disturbed throughout Sunnyside, Washington.• Digital copies can be found online with QR codes that lead to a support declaration form.• The boycott of Ostrom produced mushrooms is still ongoing.



CONCLUSION

- The Braceros ultimately failed to improve the program as it was terminated on December 31, 1964.
- Many migrant farmworkers turned to the H2A program for legal temporary work status.
- The H2A program was similar to the Bracero Program as it allowed foreigners to work in the US under temporary time limits.
- The UFW continues the legacy of Cesar Chavez & the Braceros by fighting for the rights of migrant workers in this nation.

