

IMPERIAL DIVIDES: RACE, NATION, SECURITY AND THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER, 1940-1955

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DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

*Imperial Divides* explores the history of border policing between the United States and Mexico from the 1940s to the 1950s. I examine the links between international security and the early efforts to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border, focusing on the cultural production of a boundary cast in perpetual crisis. This project traces the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border as a global security threat and examines how it was enforced in both countries. It studies the relationship between warfare, migration, and boundary enforcement, arguing that the deep anxieties concerning the United States' inability to exercise complete control over its southern boundary during World War II and the Cold War were crucial in transforming the U.S.-Mexico border into a national security imperative. I contend that public spectacles of border enforcement were crafted in large part in response to global warfare, beginning with Axis nationals in the years leading up to World War II, and then shifting to Mexican nationals during the Cold War. Just as significantly, this dissertation draws attention to the opposition of the early efforts to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border. For radical artists, intellectuals, and activists, the joint policing of the border, and the Mexican state's close cooperation with the United States during the first decade of the Cold War signaled a troubling rightward shift in the nation. As the presidential administrations of Ávila Camacho (1940-46), Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-52), and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-58) sought greater political, economic, and security ties with the United States, a creative flurry of radical opposition emerged, insisting that the sovereignty of the Mexican nation was being undermined by its imperial neighbor.

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## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 ENTANGLING BOUNDARIES: HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE AND WARTIME BORDER SECURITY, 1940-1945.....	21
CHAPTER 2 COMBATTING A “WETBACK INVASION” ALONG A COLD WAR DIVIDE.....	63
CHAPTER 3 DRAWN INTO THE COLD WAR: ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND BORDER ANXIETIES IN MEXICO.....	105
CHAPTER 4 “NOSOTROS SEMOS EL PAIS”: RACE, NATION, AND THE ANTI- IMPERIAL IMAGINATION.....	153
EPILOGUE TOWARD A MILITARIZED BORDER.....	197
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	200

## Introduction

On September 20, 1955, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, met with members of President Dwight Eisenhower's cabinet to discuss the upcoming Geneva Summit, an important diplomatic initiative between the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. State Department officials were deeply skeptical about the prospects of forging meaningful agreements on the issues at the conference, which centered on nuclear disarmament, European security, and German unification.<sup>1</sup> In discussing a list of items that had the potential to provoke controversy, Dulles pondered the repercussions of the United States openly criticizing the Soviet Union's construction of watchtowers and deployment of guards along the border separating East and West Germany. Based on conversations with retired General Joseph Swing, acting director of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), Dulles suspected that the Soviets would respond by highlighting the recent militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. Dulles' main concern was that "the Communists" had created a film about the increased police presence along the U.S.-Mexico divide, documenting the Border Patrol's use of bloodhounds to track down Mexican migrants, the installation of sharp barbed wire fences to deter would-be crossers, and the increased presence of armed guards patrolling the international boundary. In all likelihood, Dulles conceded, the United States would have any criticisms it levied at the Soviet military presence along the East-German border "thrown back at us."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Both Dulles and Eisenhower doubted the wisdom of participating in the conference and would have avoided it altogether if not for pressure from Western European allies. Richard H. Immerman, "'Trust in the Lord but Keep your Powder Dry': American Policy Aims at Geneva," in Gunter Bischof, Saki Dockrill, eds., *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 35-54.

<sup>2</sup> "Memorandum of a Conversation, Washington, September 20, 1955," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, Volume XXIV, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Document 98.

Unfortunately, the memorandum of the conversation between Eisenhower’s cabinet only labels those responsible for the film as “the Communists,” making it difficult to pinpoint with certainty where the film was made. After all, communists and organizations with ties to the party from across the globe condemned the exploitative conditions Mexicans experienced in the United States. In 1953, Soviet officials met in Moscow to publicly denounce the systemic abuses of braceros—Mexican men contracted to work in the U.S.—in its effort to get the United States listed as a country that supported slavery by the United Nations Special Committee on Forced Labor.<sup>3</sup> In Mexico City, the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (Popular Graphic Art Workshop; hereafter TGP), a radical international print collective, created broadsides, lithographs, woodcuts, and linocuts denouncing the abusive system of low wages, backbreaking work, and draconian boundary enforcement practices that shaped the lives of Mexican migrants. In the United States, the *Asociación Nacional México-Americana* (ANMA), and other radical organizations with Mexican and Mexican American members, including the American Committee to Protect the Foreign Born (ACPFB), campaigned to bring international awareness to the heightened boundary enforcement and the racialized “police-state terror” directed against Mexicans. These organizations picketed immigration detention centers, raised money for immigrants fighting deportation orders, and wrote pamphlets condemning the warlike conditions created by the Border Patrol.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> After public debate, and a twenty month investigation, the USSR’s complaint that undocumented, easily deportable Mexican migrants were being used as modern day slave labor was ultimately rejected. Henry Cabot Lodge, Chief of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, hailed the finding, arguing that this was “a staggering revelation” that proved beyond any reasonable doubt that “the loud shouts of communism urging workers to arise and throw off their chains now stand revealed as a most brutal and ugly hypocrisy.” Kathleen Teltsch, “U.N. Finds Soviet Enslaving Labor,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1953, 1.

<sup>4</sup> These organizations were important pre-cursors to Mexican civil rights groups of the 1960s. ANMA represented workers from various unions, most prominently in U.S. cities in the western portion of the United States, including Phoenix, Denver, and Los Angeles. In 1951, the organization brought a complaint concerning the abuse of braceros to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. See, Zaragosa Vargas, “Challenges to Solidarity: The

As Dulles' concern about "the Communist" reaction to U.S. border policing suggests, the U.S.-Mexico border and the Mexican migrants who crossed it could not escape the international security politics of the Cold War. In fact, the State Department, Border Patrol, and INS justified the intensification of border policing in the post-war period in large part through the language of Cold War security. INS officials testified in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, closely documenting the activism of ANMA and the ACPFB.<sup>5</sup> Border Patrol officers testified in Congress arguing that communists had repeatedly crossed the U.S.-Mexico border without inspection. High profile arrests and extraditions of U.S. communists suspected of fleeing the United States by crossing into Mexico, including Gus Hall, National Chairman of the Communist Party U.S.A, were cited as proof that more resources were required for border enforcement.<sup>6</sup> In the summer of 1954, one of the immigration detention facilities used to detain Mexican migrants during "Operation Wetback"—the Border Patrol's policing campaign that resulted in the apprehension and deportations of more than one million Mexican migrants—had

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Mexican American Fight for Social and Economic Justice, 1946-1963," in Robbie Lieberman and Clarence Lang, eds., *Anticommunism and the African American Freedom Movement: "another side of the story"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 189-227; Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 276-77. In 1959, the ACPFB sought an international audience to hear its criticisms of Mexican labor exploitation, producing a document entitled, "Our Badge of Infamy: A Petition to the United Nations on the Treatment of Mexican Immigrants." See, "Badge of Infamy," ACPFB, Los Angeles, 1959 [reprinted in] Carlos E. Cortes, ed., *The Mexican American and the Law* (New York: Arno Press 1974), iii-50. See also, Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 146-47; Jeffrey M. Garcilazo, "McCarthyism, Mexican Americans, and the Los Angeles Committee for Protection of Foreign-Born, 1950-1954," *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2001): 273-95. The quote equating border policing to state terror is from a pamphlet created by the ACPFB. Patricia Morgan, *Shame of a Nation: A Documented Story of Police-State Terror Against Mexican-Americans in the U.S.A.* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Communist Political Subversion: Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities*, 84<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1957.

<sup>6</sup> The capture and extradition of Gus Hall in Mexico City was discussed across the United States. "Hall, Fugitive U.S. Red Aid, Reported Arrested in Mexico," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 10, 1951, 1; "Hall, Fugitive Red, Seized in Mexico, Deported to U.S.," *New York Times*, October 10, 1951, 1; "Fugitive Communist Bigwig Arrested in Texas by FBI," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 11, 1951, 10.

been funded two years earlier as a prison camp to hold Soviet subversives in case of war.<sup>7</sup> Trumpeting the success of its deportation regimes, the State Department even invited West German officers for a tour of Southern California a few months after “Operation Wetback,” insisting that the German visitors would benefit from learning how the United States protected its boundaries from the communist threat.<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-1950s, the U.S. federal government had transformed the border into a theater of enforcement, where actual and symbolic state violence against Mexicans and Mexican Americans was deployed in large part in response to the manufactured international security crises.<sup>9</sup> In the immediate post-war period, the U.S.-Mexico border created deep anxieties in the minds of security officials as a site rife with Soviet agents, plotting U.S. and Mexican communist party members, and even atomic bomb smugglers.<sup>10</sup> Within this backdrop, Mexicans crossing the border without legal sanction were not simply conceived of as individuals responding to the

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<sup>7</sup> “U.S. Prison Overflow Uses 2 ‘War’ Camps,” *The Washington Post*, July 4, 1954, pg. 2. Kelly Lytle Hernández contends that the number of deportations during “Operation Wetback” were intentionally inflated by the Border Patrol and General Swing, and that deportation levels were consistent with those of preceding years. However, the incredible effort to create such a spectacle of enforcement, I would argue, is evidence of the perceived need of U.S. officials to display control over its border during the Cold War. Kelly Lytle Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration: A Cross-Border Examination of Operation Wetback, 1943-1954,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (Winter 2006), 421-444.

<sup>8</sup> “Bonn Visitors Study Border Control Methods,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1955, A8.

<sup>9</sup> Renato Rosaldo coined the term “border theater” in reference to the border policing operations of the 1990s, writing that “The U.S.-Mexico border has become theater, and border theater has become social violence. Actual violence has become inseparable from the symbolic ritual on the border—crossings, invasions, lines of defense, high-tech surveillance and more.” Renato Rosaldo, “Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism,” in William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 33. On the performance and symbolic nature of the border, see also: Robert Alvarez, “The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* (1995): 447-70; Alejandro Lugo, “Theorizing Border Inspections,” *Cultural Dynamics* 12 (2000): 353-73.

<sup>10</sup> “Mexican Commie Leader Seized for Deportation,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 14, 1953; Willard Edwards, “200 Dangerous Aliens Operate Freely in U.S.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 23, 6; “Wetback Invaders Include Communists,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 21, 1951, 1; “Washington Alert for Smuggling of Red Bombers,” *The Hartford Courant*, June 27, 1954, 6.

logics of a capitalist system that demanded temporary, disposable, and deportable labor.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the very presence of undocumented workers in a time of war was constructed by government agencies, journalists, and within U.S. popular culture, as a national security crisis, as a terrifying “wetback invasion.” The rise in unsanctioned Mexican migration and the profound anxieties of an “open border” resulted in Mexican migrants being perceived as national security threats, their lives deeply entangled with the policing regimes of the U.S. Cold War. From 1944-1954, a period sometimes referred to as the “wetback decade,” the Border Patrol greatly expanded, doubling its number of agents while reconfiguring the scope of its operations, resulting in the unprecedented return of more than four million migrants to Mexico.<sup>12</sup> Such extraordinary displays of boundary enforcement by a variety of governmental agencies were imagined as legitimate and necessary responses to reassure an alarmed public that the United States could reestablish security over its southern border.

*Imperial Divides* explores the links between international security and the early efforts to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border by studying the cultural production of a boundary cast in perpetual crisis. Scholars of U.S. immigration, Cold War security, and the U.S.-Mexico border have not fully taken into account how international security concerns shaped the history of boundary enforcement in the 1940s and 1950s. Beginning with Axis nationals in the years

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<sup>11</sup> On immigration law, the construction of “migrant illegality” and expanding deportation regimes in the United States targeting Mexican migrants, See especially, Nicholas De Genova, *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and “Illegality” in Mexican Chicago* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 213-50; Nicholas De Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419-47; Nicholas De Genova, “The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant ‘Illegality,’” *Latino Studies* 2 (2004): 160-185; Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in American and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 110-34; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 127-66.

<sup>12</sup> This number was up from about 70,000 migrants returned to Mexico in the previous decade. These figures include both migrants who were deported and those who chose to “depart voluntarily.” See, Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 122.

leading up to World War II, and then shifting to Mexican nationals during the Cold War, the imagined security crisis and corresponding border enforcement spectacles were crafted in large part in response to global warfare. Just as significantly, this dissertation draws attention to the opposition of the post-war efforts to police the U.S.-Mexico border. For radical artists and intellectuals in Mexico, the policing of the shared boundary and the Mexican state's close cooperation with the United States during the first decade of the Cold War signaled a troubling rightward shift in the nation. As the presidential administrations of Ávila Camacho (1940-46), Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-52), and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-58) sought greater political, economic, and security ties with the United States, a creative flurry of radical opposition emerged, insisting that the sovereignty of the Mexican nation was being undermined by its imperial neighbor.

### **Migration, Militarization, and U.S. Empire**

Writing on the contemporary militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, Gilberto Rosas explains that warlike enforcement regimes have been crafted in response to the “nightmares or dense anxieties about porous boundaries and Other bodies” that seep across the international border and “speak to anxieties among race, nation and punitive governance, and to the fictions of state sovereignty in a zone of international flows and movements.”<sup>13</sup> Rosas maintains that efforts to exercise sovereignty on the border by both the United States and Mexico since the early 1990s has resulted in the creation of a “new frontier,” which has transformed border security into “a

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<sup>13</sup> Gilberto Rosas, *Barrio Libre: Criminalizing States and Delinquent Refusals of the New Frontier* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 29.

kind of warfare that collapses the distinctions between the police and military, between regulating life and killing it.”<sup>14</sup> Essential in this formulation is Timothy Dunn’s concept of the “low-intensity conflict doctrine,” a Reagan era counterinsurgency program deployed by the U.S. military and intelligence communities in Central America in the early 1980s and then repatriated back to the border region.<sup>15</sup> The state’s adoption of low intensity conflict operations along the border has resulted in a sophisticated collection of police and military activities directed at combatting the flow of illegal drugs and undocumented migrants. Thus, for both Rosas and Dunn, the development of warlike border enforcement regimes in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries must be understood in relation to the expansion of clandestine U.S. military operations.<sup>16</sup>

*Imperial Divides* studies the relationship between warfare, migration, and boundary enforcement in an earlier period, arguing that the deep anxieties concerning the United States’ inability to exercise complete control over its southern boundary during World War II and the Cold War were crucial in transforming the U.S.-Mexico border into a national security imperative.<sup>17</sup> As Kelly Lytle Hernández explains in her institutional history of the Border Patrol,

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Though much of Dunn’s analysis on the “low-intensity conflict doctrine” focuses on the 1980s and early 1990s, he maintains the techniques developed for the United States’ covert military operations have long been repatriated to the U.S.-Mexico border, dating back to the Kennedy administration, and perhaps even earlier. Timothy Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home* (Austin, Texas: CMAS Books, 1996), 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Historian Neil Foley suggests that the border enforcement campaigns of the 1950s were the direct antecedents to contemporary border enforcement operations of the 1990s, including Operation Gatekeeper (California, 1994), Operation Hold-the-Line (Texas, 1994) and Operation Safeguard (Arizona, 1999). Foley contends that “The fear of a wetback invasion in the 1950s echoed the fear in the 1940s that the Axis powers might invade the hemisphere through Mexico and prefigured the immigration backlash of the 1990s and border fence security measure after 9/11.” Neil Foley, *Mexicans and the Making of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2014), 123-124.

the scope and mission of the agency was fundamentally transformed in preparation for the Second World War. The agency underwent a dramatic transformation prior to and during the war, essentially turning the organization from one concerned almost exclusively with the local interests of growers and border residents to a national police force taking directives from Washington. In fact, the Border Patrol, which along with the INS was transferred from the Department of Labor to the Department of Justice in 1940, had its budget double from 1939-1941 and its responsibilities drastically expanded. The agency transported Japanese and Japanese-Americans to internment camps in California, guarded internees in Texas, interrogated German and Italian nationals in New York, and protected against Axis submarine warfare in the Gulf of Mexico. New technologies were adopted by the Border Patrol that strengthened coordination between officers and border stations through improved mobile communications in the form of car radios and air surveillance from military supplied Stinson L-5 airplanes.<sup>18</sup>

After the war, these new technologies were put into practice in unprecedented displays of border enforcement largely targeting Mexican migrants. U.S. immigration scholars have long pointed to the influences of nativism, racism, and labor control on behalf of agricultural interests in the design and implementation of policing campaigns directed at Mexican migrants during the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>19</sup> Over the past few years, a surge in scholarship on the Bracero Program has greatly enriched and deepened our understanding of a variety of aspects of this migration to the United States. Recent scholarship has documented the creation of transnational

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<sup>18</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!*, 103.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example: James Cockcroft, *Outlaws in the Promised Land: Mexican Immigrant Workers and America's Future* (New York: Grove Press, 1986); Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (San Jose, CA: The Rosicrucian Press, 1964); Juan Ramon Garcia, "*Operation Wetback*": *The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press: 1980).

families,<sup>20</sup> examined how gender and modernity shaped braceros' experiences in Durango and California,<sup>21</sup> complicated the regional depiction of the Bracero Program by studying migrants' labor in the U.S. South,<sup>22</sup> and sharpened our understanding of how race, gender, and indigeneity operated between migrants through oral histories.<sup>23</sup> However, many questions regarding the intensification of border policing in this period remain. While it is clear, for example, that the ability to secure cheap labor for large farming interests was one central component to U.S. immigration policy, this reason alone does not account for why the Truman and the Eisenhower administrations conceived of the unprecedented and extralegal deportation campaigns of the early 1950s as reasonable political responses to combat undocumented migrant crossings. Studying the "wetback invasion" as a reaction to a Cold War security crisis opens up a critical avenue for understanding how the state imposed the harsher border policing regimes of the period.<sup>24</sup> In short, this project helps to explain how the act of policing the U.S.-Mexico border became synonymous with protecting national security.

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<sup>20</sup> Ana Rosas, "Flexible Families: Bracero Families' Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964," (Ph.D. Diss, University of Southern California, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Julie Weise, "Dispatches from the 'Viejo' New South: Historicizing Recent Latino Migrations," *Latino Studies* 10:1-2, May 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Mireya Loza, "Braceros on the Boundaries: Activism, Race, Masculinity, and the Legacies of the Bracero Program," (Ph.D. Diss, Brown University, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Only scant attention has been drawn to the rhetoric of anti-communism and border security during the Cold War. Avi Astor, "Unauthorized immigration, securitization and the making of Operation Wetback," *Latino Studies*, (1): 5-29. Likewise, very little scholarship has been produced addressing Mexican and Mexican American activism during the Cold War. On interracial coalition building and Mexican and Mexican American membership in the Communist Party, See, Enrique R. Buelna, "The Mexican Americans in the Communist party, 1940-1957," Center for Research on Latinos in a Global Society, University of California, Irvine, 1999, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/crlgs/wp14>; Zaragosa Vargas, "Challenges to Solidarity: The Mexican American Fight for Social and Economic Justice, 1946-1963," in Robbie Lieberman and Clarence Lang, eds., *Anticommunism and the African American Freedom Movement: "another side of the story"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 189-227.

Moreover, *Imperial Divides* examines how representations of U.S. empire, security, emigration, and border enforcement were constructed within Mexico. Much to the concern of radical artists and activists, the Mexican state remained a staunch Cold War ally of the United States, despite the widespread critiques concerning U.S. imperialism and the deep resentment regarding the exploitation of its migrant citizenry.<sup>25</sup> As Eric Zolov explains, during the early 1950s when “the ‘third world’ was the disputed terrain of superpower rivalries, Mexico became a model nation in the U.S. imaginary and valued strategic ally.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the authoritarian nature of the Mexican state and its efforts to combat the strength of independent labor unions, radical student groups, and leftist political parties, was justified through its own language of anti-communism.<sup>27</sup> Thus, my work seeks to build on efforts to understand how the antidemocratic and repressive actions of the state were constructed within Mexican popular and political culture.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most persistent critiques of the Mexican state by radical artists and

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<sup>25</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez has been a leading voice in the efforts to incorporate the framework of U.S. empire in explaining the more than century long process of migration from Mexico to the United States. Gilbert G. González, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (New York: Paradigm, 2005); Gilbert G. González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004); Gilbert G. González and Raúl Fernández, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Eric Zolov, “Discovering a Land ‘Mysterious and Obvious’: The Renarrativizing of Postrevolutionary Mexico,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 248.

<sup>27</sup> The last decade has seen a proliferation of interest in U.S. Cold War relations with Latin America. And yet, Mexico remains deeply underrepresented in this scholarship. See for example: Hal Brands, *Latin America’s Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Fernando Herrera Calderon and Adela Cedillo, ed., *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982* (New York, Routledge, 2012); Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph, ed., *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America’s Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, ed., *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Daniela Spenser, ed., *Espejos de la guerra fría: México, America Central y el Caribe* (México, D.F. CIESAS/Porrúa, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> In part a desire to historicize the ongoing drug war and the use of military style tactics and weapons to manage civilian populations, scholars have begun to rethink the consolidation of the Mexican state, recentering attention to state violence and repression as constitutive practices in the making of modern Mexico. Wil Pansters notes in the introduction to his edited volume *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making in Twentieth Century Mexico*, that there has been a “remarkable lack of theoretical and empirical work that critically engages the issues of violence, coercion,

intellectuals during the first decade of the Cold War centered on the belief that Mexico's political, economic, and cultural affairs were being unduly shaped by the United States.<sup>29</sup>

### A note on sources

In addition to the government documents located in the *Archivo General de la Nación* and *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, I examine two key sources to better understand the divergent responses to the increased policing of Mexican migrants and the cultural representations of U.S.-Mexico relations in Mexico during the 1940s and 1950s. The first is artwork from the *Taller de Gráfica Popular*, an international radical art collective based out of Mexico City that provides an important thread connecting the critiques of U.S. empire throughout this project.<sup>30</sup> During World War II, the collective provided tactical support to the

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and insecurity in postrevolutionary state-making in Mexico." Pansters adds that there a multitude of ways that Mexico's "perfect dictatorship"—the roughly 70 years of rule by the PRI from 1929-2000—hinged on military and police actions "against rebellious strongmen in the 1920s and 1930s and against electoral opposition in the 1940s and military and secret police repression of labor movements during the 1940s and 1950s, students in the 1960s, and rural rebellions during the entire period." Wil Pansters, "Introduction," in Wil Pansters, ed., *Violence, Coercion and State-Making in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur* (Stanford, California: Stanford California Press, 2012), 7-8, 15. While this collection offers valuable insights into rethinking how the PRI was able to maintain authoritarian rule in Mexico, there is a conspicuous lack of attention to both migration and the transnational processes of state formation. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez notes the lack of attention to emigration in much of the scholarship on Mexican state formation in his excellent historiographical essay that traces the major trends and practices in twentieth century Mexican migration. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, "Histories and historiographies of Greater Mexico," xv-xlv, in Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, ed., *Beyond la Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xv.

<sup>29</sup> The vast majority of this Cold War scholarship in Mexico has focused on the years after the Cuban Revolution. Robert F. Alegre, *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico: Gender, Class and Memory* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Celeste González de Bustamante, "*Muy Buenas Noches*": *Mexico, Television, and the Cold War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Renata Keller, "A Foreign Policy for Domestic Consumption: Mexico's Lukewarm Defense of Castro, 1959-1969," *Latin American Research Review* 47, no.2 (2012): 100-119; Julia Sloan, "Carnivalizing the Cold War: Mexico, the Mexican Revolution, and the Events of 1968," *European Journal of American Studies* [Online], Vol 4, No 1, Online since 18 March 2009, connection on 28 July 2013.

<sup>30</sup> See, Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 181-194; The most complete work is Deborah Caplow's examination of Leopoldo Mendez, director of

United States' war against fascism and played an important role in forging the cultural diplomacy between the two countries through its promotion of Pan-Americanism.<sup>31</sup> However, in the immediate post-war period the TGP rejected the conservative and reactionary politics in Mexico and the U.S., transforming the collective into one of the most persistent and visible critics of the emerging Cold War in Mexico. Artists denounced the inability or the unwillingness on the part of the Mexican state to keep American capital, culture, and corruptive politics out of the country. Their efforts to critique U.S. empire found a sizeable and sympathetic audience not only in Mexico, but with audiences around the globe. By supporting leftist politicians and workers engulfed in labor disputes in Mexico and abroad, while opposing U.S. military and economic domination in Latin America and Asia, the collective created public art of global importance.<sup>32</sup> Large collections of the TGP's work were held in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Western Art in Moscow, and the National Museum in Mexico City.<sup>33</sup> In the immediate aftermath of World War II, TGP members travelled throughout the U.S., staging exhibitions in Chicago (1946), New York (1946), Boston (1947), San Francisco (1947) Los Angeles (1948), and Hollywood (1949).<sup>34</sup> Due to Cold War hysteria, TGP artists were prohibited from traveling to the United States under the Internal

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the TGP during the most productive years of the group. Deborah Caplow, *Leopoldo Mendez: Revolutionary Art and the Texas Press* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Diane Miliotes, *What May Come: The Taller de Gráfica Popular and the Mexican Political Print* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 10.

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Critical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 17-20.

<sup>33</sup> Miliotes, *What May Come*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> *El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra*, XXIII.

Security Act of 1950, and as a result, the collective expanded its reach by traveling widely throughout Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China.

The TGP was committed to an aesthetics of figurative realism over abstraction. As an organization committed to ushering in radical social change to the widest possible audience, much emphasis was placed on the accessibility of their artwork. The collective's work is a valuable counterpoint to more traditional foreign relations sources, including diplomatic cables, international security conferences, and political speeches, especially because these artists worked in an era when many Mexicans would not have purchased newspapers or magazines—both because cost made it prohibitively expensive, as well as because Mexico continued to suffer from a high level of illiteracy. My interpretations of the TGP's artwork are meant to examine the political messages of the art as it was intended to be read by the public, placing the works in the political and historical context in which they were created and presented to the world.

TGP artists offered radical analysis distinct from what was available from mainstream outlets, as the works of the collective concentrated on the connections between U.S. empire, racism, and poverty experienced across the globe. Among the collective's most effective means of reaching the public was through their popular and inexpensive *Calavera* circulars. For example, published in *A la caragada calaveras* in 1951, Angel Bracho's "Este es el circo del siglo yanqui" (This is the Circus of the Yankee Century) drew connections between the international violence of U.S. imperial policing regimes, economic exploitation of migrants, and white supremacy, revealing how each impacted African Americans, Mexicans, Egyptians, and Iranians [Figure 1]. Bracho, who was a member of the *Partido Comunista Mexicana* (PCM), depicts a large skeleton representing the United States, or perhaps more accurately, the American justice system, overseeing its morally bankrupt empire in the crumbling Roman Coliseum. The

skeleton holds under one arm a copy of the Smith Act, legislation originally passed in 1940, but revised in 1948, making conspiracy a criminal act and which was utilized to punish radical labor activists. While the Smith Act was the legal justification behind the imprisonment of suspected communist leaders in the United States, it also was cited in the extradition of Gus Hall from Mexico City. In addition, the Mexican government borrowed from repressive U.S. Cold War era legislation, perhaps most significantly the anti-labor policies of the Taft-Hartley Act in its largely successful efforts to weaken independent labor unions.<sup>35</sup> In its other hand, the skeleton holds a torch which has a flame that is ominously shaped in the form of a mushroom cloud from a nuclear explosion. All of the consumer goods advertised served as a warning of the encroaching cultural imperialism of the United States in Mexico: a bottle of Coca-Cola, Mickey Mouse, the Ford Motor Company, and *Selecciones Reader* (Reader's Digest) were all available for purchase in Mexico City in the early 1950s.<sup>36</sup> A final sign advertises *carne de perro para braceros* (dog meat for braceros), as a collapsed image of a migrant desperately crawls to reach it. The fleeting comfort of American consumer culture were meant only for some, and in this case, the cruelty and racism of the capitalist system lowered the Mexican migrant to struggling in the vain hopes of simply being able to consume dog meat. The inclusion of the British empire, represented as a wounded lion gnawing at the bones of Egypt and Iran, underscores a global reading of America imperialism that extends beyond U.S.-Mexico relations as the British and U.S. are literally

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Snodgrass, "The Gold Age of Charrismo: Workers, Braceros, and the Political Machinery of Postrevolutionary Mexico," in Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 181.

<sup>36</sup> The editors of *Hoy* occasionally expressed similar concerns about the growing number of U.S. magazines in Mexico. "Amenza una penetracion imperialista," *Hoy*, June 28, 1952, 14-15.

chained to one another. And thus, as was common for the TGP, the struggle against racism and colonialism is shown as a global one, rather than just a Mexican concern.

Bracho depicts a corrupt and violent police force as necessary to maintain the U.S. empire. On the left side of the print, a grotesque pig sits high atop a pedestal on a balcony overlooking the decaying empire. One hoof grasps at its protruding belly, cigar dangling from its mouth, while the other hoof holds a baton, making it the ringleader of this imperial circus. Along with a crown on its head that has the letters “FBI” printed on it, the pig wears a gun and holster, and adorns a black patch that reads “G-MEN”.<sup>37</sup> At the center of the print, a member of the Ku Klux Klan stands on another pedestal where three bodies hang from it. Wearing a gas mask to protect him from the atomic explosion, a police officer stands directly to the left of this horrific scene and does nothing to stop the lynching, but instead, raises a club to strike a peace protester. Both the FBI and U.S. justice system face the Klansmen, giving tactical approval to the system of violent white supremacy. Whereas Truman and others in the State Department claimed that racial violence in the United States was merely an antiquated and dying part of U.S. Southern culture, Bracho and the rest of the TGP insisted that the systemic deployment of racial violence was an essential component to post-war U.S. empire.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> On FBI surveillance of Mexican and Mexican Americans in the United States during this period, see, Jose Angel Gutierrez, “Chicanos under surveillance: 1940 to 1980,” *Renato Rosaldo Lecture Series Monograph*, vol 2, series 1984-85 (Spring 1986), 29-58; Jeffrey M. Garcilazo, “McCarthyism, Mexican Americans, and the Los Angeles Committee for Protection of Foreign-Born, 1950-1954,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2001): 273-95. On the FBI training the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad*, the Mexican secret police under the Aleman administration, See, Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La charola: una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (México, D.F.: Hoja Editorial, 2001), 66-67, 74, 102, 209; On the CIA in Mexico during this period, See, Jefferson Morely, *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 47-49.



Figure 1. Angel Bracho, “Este es el circo del siglo yanqui,” *A la caragada calaveras*, 1951, University of California, San Diego, Geisel Library, Special Collections Library.

This critique highlights the racial and economic violence underpinning the entirety of the U.S. Cold War system. It asks readers to make comparisons between the racial terror visible in the lynched bodies of African Americans in the United States, to a global system, one that subjects Mexican migrants to crawling for dog food, and leaves nothing behind but the bones of Egyptians and Iranians. Bracho reveals a dangerous and morally bankrupt empire, but also one that cannot last, as it is on the brink of its own destruction. All of this done, as another corrido published in the *Calaveras* collection reads, at the hands of “los gangsters bolillos/ que forman el FBI”.

The second central source for studying Mexican culture in this project is the magazine *Hoy*, described by visual cultural historian John Mraz as one of the most popular magazines in all of Latin America in the 1940s and 1950s. The magazine's publisher, Jose Llergo, created the publication in the style of *Life Magazine* for the Mexican middle class in 1937. Mexico's most influential journalists, policymakers, intellectuals, cartoonists, and politicians published in the magazine. Eric Zolov explains that Llergo closely followed "presidentialism"—meaning essentially that all aspects of Mexican political and popular culture were fair game to public scrutiny, aside from the president who was expected "unmitigated reverence... as the supreme arbiter of political disputes and the standard bearer of the Mexican body politic."<sup>39</sup> *Hoy*'s efforts to cast itself as the leading periodical for the worldly Mexican consumer can be seen below in an advertisement that contends the reader could find "El mundo en las paginas de Hoy" (The world in the pages of *Hoy*) [Figure 2]. In this advertisement a young, barefoot boy sells the magazine with an image of President Dwight Eisenhower on the cover, presumably in Mexico City. The international focus of *Hoy* by a diverse group of writers from across the political spectrum has provided an invaluable opportunity to study the competing ways that Mexican popular and political culture were crafted during two global wars. Indeed, *Hoy* has proven indispensable to understanding how the middle class were presented with information on Mexico's political, economic, and security relationship with the United States, the Bracero Program, and boundary enforcement.

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<sup>39</sup> John Mraz, *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 153-200. See also, Eric Zolov, "Jorge Carreno's Graphic Satire and the Politics of "Presidentialism" in Mexico during the 1960s," in *Estudios interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2006, 13-38. These restrictions were closely followed. In fact, in the spring of 1953, Llergo and a few editors were forced to resign from *Hoy* when the magazine printed an unflattering photograph of President Aleman's daughter and her husband at a burlesque house in France.



Figure 2. *Hoy*, May 23, 1953.

Chapter 1 examines the important role that border security played in repairing the shaky diplomatic relationship between the United States and Mexico in preparation for World War II. Both countries emphasized joint border policing and mutual security as necessary to combat the perceived threat posed by Axis spies and saboteurs crossing the poorly guarded border. In

Chapter 2, I trace the emergence of the U.S.-Mexico border as a Cold War security threat in the minds of U.S. policymakers, politicians, and national media outlets. I argue that these border crises were critical in framing Mexican migrants as a national security problem and are essential to understanding the development of the mass deportation campaigns of the era.

The final two chapters turn our attention back to Mexico. Chapter 3 examines popular depictions of U.S.-Mexico relations in the immediate post war period, exploring the widespread sentiment in Mexico that the nation was being irreparably harmed by American capital, culture, and Cold War politics. The authoritarian turn under Alemán, coupled with the close relationship with the United States, left many critics worried that Mexico's border was not strong enough to keep the United States outside of Mexican territory. In the final chapter, I interrogate how notions of racial and class difference in Mexico impacted mainstream and radical understandings of anti-imperialism. This chapter begins by asking why despite the strong rejection of U.S. Cold War politics and policies, there was not a more robust call to end the Bracero Program or to protest the initial efforts to build cooperative migrant policing regimes between the two countries. I argue that the construction of migrants as racially and culturally backwards in magazines like *Hoy* played an important role in understanding why migrants became perceived as deserving of greater state policing. Contrasting mainstream depictions of migrants to the radical anti-racist images created by the TGP, helps to unpack the deep prejudices informing mainstream Mexican culture.

Taken together, this dissertation broadens our historical understanding of the origins and responses to the efforts to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border. These chapters examine the development of the border as an imagined site in need of dramatic defense during two global wars, one hot and one ostensibly cold. As importantly, it uncovers a history of dissent,

documenting early resistance to the transnational efforts to create a territory under permanent warfare.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Entangling Boundaries: Hemispheric Defense and Wartime Border Security, 1940-1945**

On the evening of March 30, 1942, in the northern border city of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, about two dozen members of a Japanese social club met to celebrate a child's birthday party when it was unexpectedly interrupted by an international assortment of police, military, and state officials. Five U.S. soldiers, the U.S. vice-consul, Juárez brigadier General Jaime Quiñones, and a small collection of Mexican soldiers and police surrounded the home, expecting to uncover a Japanese spy ring operating along the U.S.-Mexico border. The primary person of interest was Dr. Tsunesaburo Hasegawa, a naturalized Mexican citizen, who had lived in Ciudad Juárez for nearly two decades. While searching the house, law enforcement officers found a device believed to be a transmitter used to share information with Japanese warships in the Pacific. Hasegawa was escorted out of the party and placed in detention at a nearby police station where he was bombarded with questions by this international coalition about his allegiances to Japan and any knowledge he had regarding espionage activities by Axis forces.

Hasegawa's Japanese ancestry and frequent trips into El Paso had sparked suspicion from the United States Naval Intelligence at Fort Bliss a few months earlier. Naval Intelligence passed his case to the Special Inspections Division of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) which reported that the physician was a community leader with a poor reputation, citing rumors in El Paso that Hasegawa was willing to perform abortions for women who travelled from the U.S. to Juárez. Members of the Medical Association of El Paso interviewed by Naval Intelligence questioned Hasegawa's morality with one doctor maintaining that he was "repugnant to society." A few months earlier on one of his trips into El Paso, Hasegawa was

detained and questioned by intelligence officers who determined “that this Jap is definitely a trouble maker and does try to stir up the Japs against the United States.”<sup>1</sup>

The questioning of Dr. Hasegawa led to his eventual arrest despite his insistence of innocence and the weak evidence presented against him. Upon learning of Hasegawa’s detainment, community members of Japanese descent in Ciudad Juárez protested and strenuously denied the governments’ claims that the fifty-seven year old doctor had been orchestrating espionage activities. In truth, these police actions reveal much more about the imaginations of law enforcement officials in their attempts to maintain international security than it does about the threats posed by border residents. The doctor was not a spy and the transmitting device that sparked his detention turned out to be nothing more than an ordinary radio.<sup>2</sup> Even when this information became clear to investigators, Hasegawa was forced to move from Juárez to Mexico City so that his activities could be more closely monitored by the *Departamento de Gobernación*.

Hasegawa’s fate was similar to that of many Japanese and Japanese Mexicans living near the U.S.-Mexico border. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Ávila Camacho declared war against the Axis powers and passed an executive order that restricted the rights of “Axis nationals” in Mexico.<sup>3</sup> Japanese immigrants and their children who had received Mexican citizenship in the previous two years had it revoked and perhaps most egregiously, the

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<sup>1</sup> “Memorándum,” AGN, Sala 2, Caja 361, Expediente 54.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Germans, Japanese, and Italians had their bank accounts frozen and some 250 businesses were confiscated and became run by the state under the *Ley relativa a propiedades y negocios del enemigo* (Decree relating to the Property and Business of the Enemy). Stephen R Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 117-18.

*Departamento de Gobernación* ordered all Axis nationals living within 150km (about 93 miles) from any of Mexico's borders or coasts to relocate to Mexico City. Officially covering all Axis nationals, including Germans and Italians, the president's directive was only vigorously enforced for Japanese and Japanese-Mexicans. Beginning in February 1942, an estimated 80 percent of the 5,100 Japanese and Japanese-Mexicans residing along the nation's northern border and coasts were forced to register with the government and move from their homes to the nation's capital.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 3. Various photographs documenting this particular policing campaign in Ciudad Juárez were taken by U.S. intelligence agencies and were stored in the National Archives in Washington. The caption of the photograph reads: “General Quiñones questions Dr. T. Hasegawa, apprehended Japanese agent, about radio equipment which was seized in Mexican Army raids. Note armed guard of Mexican Army. 1942.” NARA, 111-SC-Box58-136729.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel M Masterson, *The Japanese in Latin America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 126.

These acts of cooperative border policing were emblematic of a wider set of agreements that had been forged between the two governments in the run up to the World War II. Following the tumultuous relationship between the U.S. and Mexico during Lázaro Cárdenas' presidency (1934-1940), there was a dramatic turn toward greater political, economic, and security cooperation. This momentous shift was marked by a historic meeting between Presidents Ávila Camacho and Franklin D. Roosevelt in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey in April, 1943.<sup>5</sup> Thousands gathered to celebrate at the elaborate and well-choreographed events in the city's zócalo and later at a nearby military base, providing an unequivocal visual representation of the goodwill and international cooperation shared by the two nations.<sup>6</sup> The U.S. press praised Mexico's enthusiastic participation in the allied war effort—noting the considerable sacrifices it had made for hemispheric defense—supplying the United States with valuable raw materials, granting the use of its citizens as temporary farm laborers, and coordinating efforts to guard its borders and coasts from Axis spies and saboteurs.

For many, the new strategic relationships marked an opportunity to move past the two nations' contentious histories. Only a few years earlier, it would have been unfathomable for a sitting U.S. president to visit a Mexican military base and discuss mutual security concerns with his Mexican counterpart. Such acts revealed to optimistic observers that the relationships between these countries could no longer be described as being one marked by U.S. economic or

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<sup>5</sup> "Monterrey Crowd Greet 2 Leaders," *The New York Times*, April 21, 1943, 11; Charels Leavelle, "Booming Guns Hail President in Monterrey," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1943, 1; "Nations' Heads pledge unity of 'neighbors,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1943, 1; Douglas Cornell, "Avila Camacho Repays visit by Roosevelt," *Washington Post*, 1; W.H. Lawrence, "U.S. and Mexican Presidents Visit an air station in Texas", *New York Times*, April 22, 1943, 1; Barnet Nover, "Good Neighbors," *The Washington Post*, April 22, 1943, 14; Bertram Hulén, "Mexico Meeting viewed as solidarity gesture," *New York Times*, April 25, 1943, E7.

<sup>6</sup> "La Vista de Roosevelt," *Hoy*, May 7, 1942, 7. 7-8.

political domination. Instead, they argued, that the much heralded Good Neighbor policy toward Latin America had helped usher in a new era of good will built on mutual respect and cooperation. The editorial page of the *New York Times* was one of the many U.S. publications that celebrated President Roosevelt's declaration that closer relations between the two countries proved that "the day of the exploitation of the resources of one country for the benefit of any group in another country is definitely over."<sup>7</sup> In just one meeting, the United States was able to claim that it had successfully shed its imperial past, forging a new future built on friendship, deep understanding, and mutual aid.

Roosevelt's desired clean break from the past was echoed by the binational Mexican-American Commission for Economic Cooperation. The commission, which sought to develop the Mexican national economy by more closely integrating it with the U.S. economy, proudly proclaimed that "the days of exploitation or economic imperialism, whether by nations or by powerful private groups, are past—no future Mexican or United States government will condone or permit their reappearance."<sup>8</sup> Such joint declarations hailing the end of U.S. imperial interests in its southern neighbor's territory were in large part an effort to convince the Mexican public that wartime sacrifices were in fact in Mexico's national interests. Mexican leaders claimed that collaboration with the United States and sacrifices made during the war would eventually help create a more modern, socially equitable, and just Mexican society. Indeed, the repeated rejection of U.S. imperial intentions by leaders from both countries was meant to assure a skeptical Mexican public that wartime policy decisions were not being imposed by the "Colossus of the North," but were in-fact being negotiated in good faith between trusting partners with

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<sup>7</sup> "Two Presidents at Monterrey," *The New York Times*, April 21, 1943, 24.

<sup>8</sup> "Good Neighbor," *The Washington Post*, July 23, 1943, 10.

shared long-term interests in developing Mexico's economy, and a short term imperative of keeping the Axis powers out the Americas, to ensure victory in the war.

Rather than exploring the entire array of diplomatic processes that helped forge closer military, economic, and political ties during the war, this chapter focuses on the role that Mexico's shared border played in shaping this new spirit of cooperation. It looks at how government and non-government actors perceived threats to national security by the Axis powers were mapped on to the borders of each nation. It traces how Mexico's coastal and border defense were entangled with United States' larger objective of hemispheric defense. This chapter examines how boundary threats were mobilized in the development of what historian John Mason Hart has described as a new era of United States imperial relations, built on cooperation and accommodation, rather than outright confrontation with Mexican political and economic elites.<sup>9</sup> This chapter lays the foundation for understanding how a Mexican public deeply skeptical of U.S. imperial aims were encouraged to embrace the emerging partnership. Border security and the threat of insecure boundaries were central to forging this wartime relationship between the United States and Mexico.

### **The politics of Good Neighbors and Hemispheric Defense, 1930s-1940s**

Franklin Roosevelt's presidency spurred major changes in diplomacy between the United States and Latin America under the "Good Neighbor Policy." These efforts to alter U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America had actually begun to change course under the previous presidency

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<sup>9</sup> John M. Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico Since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 401-31.

of Herbert Hoover (1929-1933). Hoover had initiated a different diplomatic approach for a variety of reasons, including limited access to federal funds during the Great Depression, public discontent over the large U.S. military operations in the region, and the belief by many policymakers that cooperation with local elites was ultimately more beneficial to U.S. interests than outright occupation of Latin American countries. Hoover's policy of rejecting direct unilateral military intervention in Latin America and the projection of greater respect for national self-determination was adopted by Roosevelt. Shortly after Roosevelt came to office in 1933, Secretary of State Cordell Hull publicly declared at the Seventh International Conference of American states in Montevideo, Uruguay, an end to direct U.S. military interventions in the Americas. Within months the United States had voluntarily ended formal military occupation of Nicaragua and began removing troops from Haiti the following year.

In the 1930s, as the United States was reconfiguring its policy objectives toward Latin America, Mexico was undergoing a rapid period of economic and political transition under the direction of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). According to historian Friedrich Schuler, the global economic crisis "provided the revolutionary state with a new mandate to act as economic financier, developer, and marketing agent."<sup>10</sup> During the early years of the Cárdenas' administration, there was a clear movement to the left in the nation's political governing philosophy, as the Mexican state adopted far greater direct involvement in economic modernization programs. Cárdenas' active state policies were much greater than any previous presidents and paved the way for open confrontation between the Mexican state and foreign

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<sup>10</sup> Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican foreign relations in the age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 12.

corporate interests that had long been running profitable enterprises, with minimal state intervention.

In 1935 and 1936 the revolutionary state began to expand its presence in the production, exploration, and processing of Mexico's oil and mining reserves. However, the Mexican government was still dependent on more capital rich nations to help extract, refine, and export natural resources. The poor economic climate during the worldwide depression encouraged Mexico to look to Europe and Asia in order to expand its potential trading partners. Therefore, in addition to seeking U.S. investments, the Mexican government sought German, French, Italian, Dutch, and Japanese expertise for the development of industries that would maximize revenue from Mexico's natural resources. The Cárdenas administration pit European, Asian, and U.S. interests against one another to create competition for access to Mexico's resources and markets. This strategy aided in the growth of revenues for the Mexican state in the mid-1930s and allowed it to pursue developmental policies despite the global depression. However, a convergence of factors in the summer of 1937, including widespread labor unrest, high inflation, and poor weather resulting in diminished crop yields, resulted in a sharp economic downturn that threw the viability of the Mexican state's economic development plans into jeopardy. Ultimately, the economic collapse and a strengthening political opposition in Mexico convinced President Cárdenas that his only option to maintain power and save the activist state was to seize all foreign oil holdings, which he did in March of 1938.<sup>11</sup>

The Mexican public, which had long experienced the presence of foreign companies extracting natural resources with little evidence of direct economic benefit, responded

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7-10.

overwhelmingly in favor to Cardenas' expropriation, viewing it as a bold and positive step toward real and lasting economic independence for the nation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, hostilities erupted almost immediately between the Mexican state and the oil corporations. U.S., Dutch, and British oil companies operating in Mexico rejected the maneuver, challenging the legality of expropriation and the decision by the Mexican government to defer compensation for up to ten years.<sup>12</sup> However, the political timing of the state expropriation was selected with great care, and the business community was ultimately left with few strong options to retain their oil claims.<sup>13</sup> U.S. foreign policy makers proved to be more concerned about Mexico's political stability, citing the burgeoning inter-American alliance, Good Neighbor policy, and most importantly, the fear that disrupting the Cárdenas regime could open the door to fascist or communist groups to seize power in the country, as reasons for not fighting harder for American oil interests. The United States did exert economic and diplomatic pressures to try and ensure "fair compensation" was paid to companies, but these measures, including the denial of accesses to silver and oil markets, in conjunction with restricting oil extracting equipment, did not prove burdensome enough to force Mexico to radically change course. In the end, for U.S. policymakers—with global war all but a certainty—national security concerns trumped the demands of dissatisfied individual businesses and corporations operating in Mexico.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Alan Knight, "The Politics of Expropriation," in Jonathan C. Brown and Alan Knight, *Mexican Petroleum Industry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 90-129; Lorenzo Meyer, *Mexico and the United States in the Oil Controversy, 1917-1942* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977) .

<sup>13</sup> Hart, *Empire and Revolution*, 398-399.

<sup>14</sup> Josefina Zoraida Vazquez and Lorenzo Meyer, *The United States and Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 126-152.

Mexican officials were well aware that that the impending international conflict limited how European powers and the United States could react to the domestic Mexican economic agenda. The United States had begun to articulate concerns regarding hemispheric defense and Mexican leaders came to see it as an opportunity to expand on its economic and military modernization plans. Minister of Hacienda Eduardo Suarez and Minister of Gobernación Garcia Tellez, two advisors close to Cárdenas, actively sought to take advantage of the war and saw it as a possible cure for Mexico's economic crises. They viewed wartime cooperation as inevitable, but believed that the situation could be manipulated to Mexico's benefit by promoting plans to build and modernize existing public infrastructure, especially railroads, telegraph systems, highways, and electricity plants.<sup>15</sup>

By the time of the 1940 presidential election, Cárdenas had begun to shift the country rightward as state support for workers' rights waned once the Mexican government became sole owner of commercial operations. Cárdenas' hand-selected choice was Ávila Camacho, Secretary of National Defense, who ran against northern general Juan Andreu Almazán. An independent candidate from the Revolutionary Party of National Unification (PRUN), Almazán claimed that Mexico was a nation in crisis. In campaign stops across the country he presented himself as the sole candidate who could direct Mexico out of the ongoing economic downturn, secure better relations with the United States, and prepare a strong domestic response to the war in Europe and Asia. Almazán warned citizens that Axis subversives were already operating in the country and as the former commander of the Northern military zone, such allegations came with an air of authority. Although he would lose what many considered to be a fraudulent election, his claims of Axis espionage did garner attention from U.S. officials. After losing the election, Almazán

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<sup>15</sup> Schuler, *Mexico Between Hitler and Roosevelt*, 29-30.

fled to the United States and was convinced that the U.S. would intervene militarily on his behalf. While a few supporters took up arms in Mexico to challenge the election results, Almazán realized such efforts were destined to fail once it became clear that the U.S. was not going to offer its support. U.S. military support was not forthcoming in part because newly elected President Camacho worked hard behind the scenes to convince U.S. officials that his intentions were to mend the relations that had soured under Cardenas' presidency. Camacho assured skeptics in the State Department that one of his first points of order would be to make sure that the two countries would work together on matters of international security.

In August of 1940, following Camacho's contested election, Under Secretary Sumner Welles and Mexican ambassador Francisco Castillo Nájera met to discuss a variety of issues, including trade agreements, a railroad dispute, and cooperation on matters pertaining to international defense.<sup>16</sup> For the U.S., these initial meetings were viewed as a successful starting point. Mexico promised to provide much needed raw materials for the war effort, while in exchange, Mexican officials' secured promises for technological and military aid from the United States. Henry Wallace, who became the first vice-president in U.S. history to travel to Mexico City to attend an inauguration of a Mexican President, remarked that for the first time since the Mexican revolution the United States had "a good opportunity to clean up sources of misunderstanding and irritation" that had plagued the relationship between both nations.<sup>17</sup>

As Axis victories mounted in Europe and Asia during the first few months of Camacho's presidency, suspicions grew in the United States about the possibility that Axis spies and

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<sup>16</sup> María Emilia Paz Salina, *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

saboteurs would target Mexico. In March of 1941, negotiations concerning Mexico's participation in hemispheric defense were made public in statements released by the State Department in Mexico City.<sup>18</sup> By April, details of the mutual agreements were being reported by the press in both nations. U.S. and Mexican army officials planned for worst case scenarios, including how to respond to an Axis invasion or devastating acts of sabotage. In preparation, Mexico more than doubled its army from 60,000 to 120,000 and received lend-lease aid from the U.S. to build highways, railroads, harbors, and airstrips.<sup>19</sup> In exchange, Mexico guaranteed to cooperate with hemispheric defense, allowing U.S. radars to be set up in Mexican territory. U.S. planes were also permitted to refuel at Mexican airports on their way to and from the Panama Canal, and U.S. military personnel and intelligence agents were granted access to Mexican territory. As F.S. Clark, head of the United States War Plans Division, remarked, this was the first time that military representatives from both nations were able to meet and make wartime preparations in "complete harmony" with one another.<sup>20</sup>

Mexico also agreed to temporarily loan thousands of agricultural workers to the U.S. during the war under the Bracero Program. Southwestern growers and their allies in Congress argued that labor shortages caused by the war would leave no one to harvest crops, unless Mexicans were permitted to fulfill the required labor. Both countries stood to benefit from the program, growers argued, as Mexican migrants would gain higher wages than were available in their hometowns and learn valuable modern farming techniques, while the U.S. war effort would be bolstered by ensuring agricultural crops were harvested. Like many issues dealing with the

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<sup>18</sup> "Defense Parleys on Hemisphere Aid Open with Mexico," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1941, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Virginia Prewett, "Jap Propaganda vs. U.S. Aid," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 1942, 1.

<sup>20</sup> "Memorandum de conversación," AGN, MAC, Sala 5, 550/390405, July 22, 1940, 2.

wartime cooperation, the emergency wartime program proved to have long lasting consequences, as the Bracero Program would persist into the 1960s under a series of negotiated labor contracts.

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the day following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Mexican government suspended official diplomatic relations with Japan and prepared for a possible Japanese attack in Baja California. President Camacho immediately responded by placing restrictive measures on Axis nationals. The attack on Pearl Harbor led to an intensification of the cooperative agreements, and in February 1942, Roosevelt signed into law U.S. Executive Order 9080, which created the Joint Mexican-United States Defense Commission. As stated in the executive order, the purpose of the commission was to study and come up with solutions to the “problems relating to the common defense of the United States and Mexico, to consider broad plans for the defense of Mexico and adjacent areas of the United States, and to propose to the respective governments the cooperative measures which, in its opinion should be adopted.”

### **Imagining a “fifth column”**

The Good Neighbor Policy proved useful in cultivating a security coalition in Latin America that would serve as a basis for keeping the Americas isolated from the growing conflicts brewing in Europe and Asia. Throughout the 1930s, rumors spread within the United States about the presence of foreign agents plotting to overthrow governments, blow up valuable oil fields, and disrupt the hemispheric stability that U.S. policymakers found so important to their own national security. In 1943, during a radio broadcast, President Roosevelt commented on these threats, reporting that German airfields had been uncovered in Colombia by U.S.

intelligence agencies, though he would later have to backtrack, following a diplomatic firestorm that ensued as a result of the unfounded allegations.<sup>21</sup> According to military experts, some of the greatest risks to hemispheric defense included Brazil, Colombia, and the Panama Canal.

However, while Latin America as a whole was seen by the military as susceptible to Axis attacks, no country received as much attention from U.S. officials as did their southern neighbor.

The U.S. mainstream press utilized the term “Fifth column” to discuss the potential for Axis sabotage throughout the Americas. It was reportedly first used in 1935 during the Spanish Civil War by General Emilio de Mola in Seville. De Mola boasted in a radio broadcast that General Franco had four columns of troops prepared to attack the Republican stronghold of Madrid, while a fifth column, consisting of Madrid residents and supporters of the fascist leader, would rise up and aid in defending the city. Ernest Hemingway helped popularize the term in his play “The Fifth Column,” which he wrote about his experiences reporting during the Spanish Civil War. In the United States, the term proved to be elastic. It would be used interchangeably in the late 1930s and early 1940s to refer to anyone or group of people suspected of treason, sabotage, or spying. The press reported that Italian fascists, Japanese imperialists, Soviet Bolsheviks, and German Nazis operated as fifth columnists.

Throughout the late 1930s, charges of fifth columnist activities were occasionally found in newspapers and in radio commentary highlighting Axis espionage in Europe. However, it was not until the German blitzkrieg in the spring of 1940 that resulted in the fall of Poland, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France in Europe that the fifth column fear really began to permeate U.S.

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<sup>21</sup> Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign Against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-2.

popular culture.<sup>22</sup> News agencies searching for a way to explain the rapid success of the Nazi blitzkrieg in Europe blamed fifth columnist saboteurs who had sold out their respective countries to aid the Nazi army.<sup>23</sup> The *New York Post*, for example, ran a story proclaiming that traitors within Norway were responsible for surrendering with the Nazis without resistance.<sup>24</sup> From this point onward fifth-columnists would be associated most closely to Axis nationals and anyone who aided them. Harold Lavine, writer for the New York City newspaper *PM* and later the editor of *Newsweek*, explained that prior to the fall of France the attitude from most newspaper editors was that the multitude of reports on the fifth column were largely written off as “crackpot stuff.” Such reports were crafted by a variety of sources with varying levels of credibility, including the Department of Justice and the Office of Naval Intelligence, as well as groups like the American Jewish Committee and the American Committee Against Nazi Propaganda, along with a variety of veterans’ groups. But after the spread of the Nazi army across Europe, much to the dismay of Lavine, newspapers in the United States reevaluated the stories they had once dismissed and “newspapermen, who once had derided [reports on an American Fifth Column], laughed no more, and stories which had gathered dust for years hurled into print.”<sup>25</sup> These “crackpot” stories, as Lavine called them, found a place in the mainstream media and helped promote the

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<sup>22</sup> Although there is some evidence that ethnic Germans in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland may have contributed to Nazi territorial gains, there is little reason to believe that such aid was determinative in the outcome. Overall, there is no doubt that the claims of espionage were wildly inflated in the press at the time. Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious foes: the Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4-6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Harold Lavine, *Fifth Column in America* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1940), 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

idea that there was an active and dangerous fifth column lurking in the United States that was a threat to U.S. national security.

Part of the power of the fifth column concept was that it conjured up images of a standing army that was waiting for the most opportune time to attack. News reports claimed that fifth columnists used every means at their disposal, including inciting rumors, publishing propaganda, and planning military attacks. One paper went so far as to claim that one million fifth columnists were known to be operating in the United States.<sup>26</sup> According to these papers, the large number of potential enemies and the wide diversity in their underhanded tricks required vigilance on the part of U.S. citizens. Readers were instructed to be aware of the actions of friends and neighbors who could have secretly been acting as spies and saboteurs. This vigilance took a number of different forms during the height of the fifth column hysteria. Harold Lavine paints a vivid picture of the impact that the growing attention and mounting anxiety had on the American public:

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses, an innocent group of religious fanatics who refuse to salute the Stars and Stripes because of their religion forbids the worship of symbols, were mobbed in the streets. A foundry worker in Sparta, Mich., killed his neighbor because 'he was in the Fifth Column.' In Sapulpa, Okla., it was decided that Technocrats were Fifth Columnists, and one was actually jailed. An Erase-the-Fifth-Column, Inc, was formed in Los Angeles. Jeff Davis, self-styled King of the Hoboes, appointed One-Eye Connolly, the hobo gate crasher, to watch the Fifth Column on freight trains riding the rods. Some fifty women, meeting in New York, started an organization pledged to shoot down German parachutists, with the acting regional director of the National Legion of Mothers as their head. The Erie County, New York, American Legion mobilized to keep Fifth Columnists from crossing the border at Niagara Falls.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 13-16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5.

Despite the lack of credible evidence, high-level public officials were insistent about the possibility of a fifth column attack in the United States. William J. Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services, laid out the problem succinctly for the American public, explaining that there were lessons to be learned from the quick German victories across Europe. Donovan pointed to fifth column propaganda campaigns as being particularly important as they lowered national morale, created divisions of national unity, and most importantly, created suspicion among the American public. In particular, Donovan was worried that fifth columnists were planning to “incite jealousy and antagonism between different classes of society as well as between various political, racial, and religious groups.”<sup>28</sup> Along with the possibility of being attacked from within, public officials circulated information that fifth columnists may be working just outside the reaches of U.S. law enforcement. Edward L. Bernays, who had worked for the Committee on Public Information, the propaganda commission charged by Woodrow Wilson to drum up support for United States participation in World War I, formed the Counsel on Public Relations, a pseudo-scientific group seeking to manufacture public opinion through the use of modern media systems during the Second World War.<sup>29</sup> Bernays’ speech entitled “Fighting the fifth column in the Americas” laid out a bleak picture of the outlook in Latin America. Bernays singled out Mexico as having a significant problem with German spies who posed as tourists, but who were actually engaged in espionage.<sup>30</sup> It was within this context that in

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<sup>28</sup> William J. Donovan, *Fifth Column Lessons for America* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Stuart Ewen, *PR!: A Social History of Spin* (Basic Books, 1998), 158-173.

<sup>30</sup> Edward L. Bernays, *Fighting the Fifth Column in the Americas: An Analysis and a Program* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1940).

1939 the INS commissioner reasoned that “The international situation which is developing in Europe furnishes strong reason for strengthening the Border Patrol without undue delay.”<sup>31</sup>

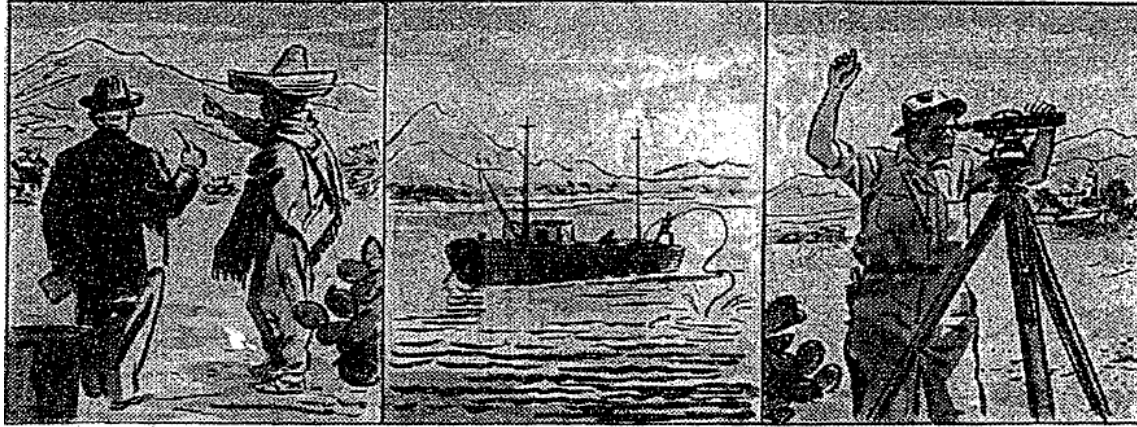
The U.S. press began to focus on Mexico as a place where fifth columnist activity was likely to be brewing. Reports cited Axis nationals, the Spanish Falange, and communist sympathizers as capable of sabotaging the U.S. war effort. The problem was not simply that such groups existed, but that Mexicans were possibly unwittingly aiding the enemy’s cause. For example, a drawing appearing alongside a *Washington Post* article entitled, “Germans Developing Fifth Column Which is Serious Threat to U.S. Security,” depicted German tourists, engineers, and Japanese fishing boats as a grave cause for concern. In one panel of the drawing an unsuspecting Mexican wearing a sombrero and poncho gives directions to a German. While the Mexican believes he is simply helping a tourist, he is actually unknowingly contributing to German espionage by directing the spy northward to the United States.<sup>32</sup> Such concerns were stated by INS officials, who advised Border Patrol agents that it was entirely possible that “Axis agents may endeavor to look the part of a local farmer or at night may even black their hands and faces, particularly in isolated areas, to look like negroes.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!*, 104.

<sup>32</sup> Russell B. Porter, “Germans Developing Fifth Column Which is Serious Threat to U.S. Security,” *The Washington Post*, September 1, 1940, B5.

<sup>33</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!*, 105.



A Nazi tourist . . . A Japanese fishing boat . . . A German engineer . . .  
potential "Fifth Column" menace in the Western Hemisphere.

Figure 4. Russell B. Porter, "Germans Developing Fifth Column Which is Serious Threat to U.S. Security," *The Washington Post*, September 1, 1940, B5. Caption: A Nazi tourist... A Japanese fishing boat... A German engineer... potential "Fifth Column" menace in the Western Hemisphere.

The quality of newspaper reports and the potential for Axis sabotage varied greatly. For its part, *The New York Times* documented the mobilization of the Mexican military on its western coast in preparations for a possible Axis invasion, while other dailies depended on headline grabbing sensationalist articles warning of an imminent attack on the United States.<sup>34</sup> In an article entitled "100,000 German Spies in the Americas!", for example, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that the United States was in grave danger due to the inability of Latin American governments to wage successful campaigns against German espionage. This full paged article, complete with photographs of fugitive Axis agents, documented the treacherous activities

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence E. Davies, "Enemy Aliens Baffle West Coast Authority: Restrictions Prove hard to Enforce and Problems are Many and Varied," *New York Times*, February 15, 1942, E5; "Axis Group Opposes Mexican Zone Order: Evacuation From Border and Coastal Area Not Enforced," *New York Times*, April 3, 1942, 6; "Mexico Seizes 10 Germans and Japs Near U.S. Border," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 4, 1942, 9; "Mexico Speeds Shift of Coastal Japanese: Plans Exodus by End of March—Silent on 5<sup>th</sup> Column Curbs," *New York Times*, March 17, 1942, 13.

of the thousands of spies plotting throughout the Americas.<sup>35</sup> These agents were mostly described as well-trained radio and submarine technicians, or as communications and propaganda specialists who had snuck into the hemisphere through illicit means, while posing as salesmen, trade promoters, and tourists.

The list of offenses supposedly carried out by Axis nationals in Mexico varied greatly. Some reports claimed that enemy sympathizers were attempting to manufacture an economic crisis by spreading unfounded rumors concerning likely food shortages.<sup>36</sup> Newspapers reported that Axis spies were travelling widely throughout Mexico with agents showing special interests in Mexico's ports and harbors, the Gulf of Mexico and Pacific coastline, and its valuable oil fields. Rumors circulated in the press suggesting that large swaths of land had already been purchased in Acapulco and along the west coast by Axis nationals, which ultimately would be used for an attack on harbors that were crucial to Mexico's strategic defense. The coast along Baja California was viewed as one of the more likely places for an invasion due its sparsely settled population, relatively large Japanese community, and its proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Journalist Betty Kirk, who worked as the foreign correspondent to Mexico for numerous British and U.S. newspapers including the *Christian Science Monitor*, commented extensively on the growing troubles along the U.S.-Mexico border and the Pacific coastline. Kirk's book, *Covering the Mexican Front: The Battle of Europe versus America* (1942) concluded with a

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<sup>35</sup> "100,000 German Spies in the Americas!," January 25, 1942, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, G9.

<sup>36</sup> Harold Callenders, "Mexicans are told U.S. 'Grabs' Food: Axis Agents Urge Hoarding to Meet Price Rises Laid to Our Heavy Demands," *New York Times*, December 26, 1941, 5.

chapter warning of the possibility of an imminent attack on United States soil. Kirk ominously informed readers that in Mexico:

Japan has a skeleton army in the direct command of Premier Hideki Tojo. This skeleton army...has two plans. One is to direct the invasion...of the United States through the Mexican states of Sonora and Sinaloa. The other is to promote in cooperation with the Spanish Falangista allies, the rebellion of Mexican Indians against the whites—in particular, against the ‘Yankees’. These race riots will be coordinated with the invasion attempts.<sup>37</sup>

Kirk’s work highlights the highly malleable nature of the threats looming along the U.S.-Mexico border. It also shows how hearsay, rumor, and innuendo were passed off as plausible war strategies to a veteran news correspondent. Importantly, Kirk affirmed that that the Japanese had a well-established wartime plan for invasion in Mexico, and that as it had in the case of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese army was simply biding its time to attack the United States when it least expected. Secondly, Kirk draws on various threats to the global order, including a possible Japanese alliance with Spanish fascists, who were also rumored to be active in Mexico. Finally, this passage reflects some of the concerns of William J. Donovan, who worried about racial tensions in the United States being used to incite discord and conflict amongst the American populace. Drawing on one of the key tropes of the fifth column threat, Kirk suggested that the Japanese would be able to take advantage of the racial discrimination experienced by indigenous people in Mexico to launch a race war that would ultimately cause disruptions or distractions allowing for the Japanese invasion to occur. Although it may not be surprising that a journalist

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<sup>37</sup> Betty Kirk, *Covering the Mexican Front: The Battle of Europe versus America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), 81.

would report on such rumors, it is noteworthy that Kirk's contemporaries looked upon her work favorably despite the fact that she supplied very little compelling evidence to support her claims. James Ferguson King, a Latin American historian at Northwestern University, went so far as to proclaim in a review of *Covering the Mexican Front* that Kirk's writing was not "just another superficial journalistic account," but was a "responsible, eye-witness report on recent history in Mexico by a specialist."<sup>38</sup>

While the most important result of the Axis fifth column threat was that it was used to justify the relocation orders of Japanese in both Mexico and the United States, it is worth noting that like most countries in the Americas, including the United States, there was Axis propaganda published in Mexico. Most of it was pro-Nazi materials spread by German migrants living in larger cities, including Monterrey, Guadalajara, and Mexico City.<sup>39</sup> Much to the dismay of the U.S. Consulate, some German migrants printed pro-Nazi pamphlets and handed them out directly to Mexican citizens. Local newspapers accepted money by these groups to print pro-German and pro-Axis stories. The propaganda sought to highlight the strength of the German army, to place the blame of poverty in Mexico on Jews working in the United States, and to stress that many of the economic hardships in Mexico were due to the nation's semi-colonial status with the United States. The noise made by these groups was far greater than any threat they actually could have carried out in Mexico or the United States. However, for a U.S. public

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<sup>38</sup> James Ferguson King, "Review: *Covering the Mexican Front*," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 30, No. 1 (Jun., 1943), 93-94.

<sup>39</sup> For greater detail into espionage plans in Latin America during World War II, See, Leslie B. Rout, Jr., and John F. Bratzel, *The Shadow War: German Espionage and United States Counterespionage in Latin America During World War II* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986); Stanley E Hilton, *Hitler's Secret War in South America, 1939-1945: German Military Espionage and Allied Counterespionage in Brazil* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); María Emilia Paz Salina, *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Thomas David Schoonover, *Hitler's Man in Havana: Heinz Lüning and Nazi Espionage in Latin America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

reeling from the bombing of Pearl Harbor and fearful of subsequent attacks, the ubiquitous reports on the operations of a fifth column operating in Mexico were viewed as a frightening possibility.

### **Cultivating a Culture of Cooperation**

The United States' imperial history in Mexico made a quick and seamless transition to closer military and economic relations between the two nations politically unfeasible. A systematic propaganda effort by the governments in Mexico City and Washington D.C. sought to obscure the imperial past and craft a public image of two nations working together on equal footing to defeat a common enemy. Essential to this process were the public campaigns arguing that the shared U.S.-Mexico border represented a legitimate threat to hemispheric security and that the Allied war effort was necessary to ensure peace and prosperity in Mexico. Images of Axis spies and saboteurs lurking throughout the hemisphere intensified in both countries following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Mexican government launched propaganda campaigns that equated public participation in the war effort as synonymous with good citizenship. It sold a closer relationship with the United States to a weary Mexican public as a means to ensure domestic security, while also being critical to jump starting economic development in a struggling economy, all of which would further the goals of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>40</sup> While the results of the propaganda campaigns in Mexico did not always lead to

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<sup>40</sup> Monica A. Rankin, *Mexico, La Patria!: Propaganda and Production During World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 1-12.

popular enthusiasm that officials intended, the relations between the two nations' governments continued to grow stronger through wartime preparation.

One of the major hurdles the Mexican government faced in convincing its citizens to get behind the war effort was in persuading them that that the war being waged in Europe and Asia represented a direct threat to the Mexican nation. This was accomplished in part by projecting the potentially catastrophic results of an Axis victory to Mexico's revolutionary ideals of democracy and racial equality. Similar to reports circulating in the United States, espionage and propaganda activities by Germans, Italians, and Japanese were printed in Mexican newspapers and government sponsored publicity campaigns. Reports surfaced claiming saboteurs were operating in various locations within the country, from the major cities of Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey, to more remote pueblos located along the coastlines and border areas in the north and the south.

From the beginning of Avila Camacho's presidency, the U.S. press wrote mostly favorable accounts of the Mexican federal government's commitment to the Allied cause.<sup>41</sup> There were, however, a few skeptics that were not convinced that Mexico would be a strong ally, questioning whether the Mexican people were capable of making real contributions to the war effort. An article in the *Washington Post* doubted whether Mexican society was developed culturally or economically enough to be an adequate partner. Numerous examples were cited that could hinder Mexican participation in the war, including the lack of training among military leadership, language barriers that military personnel faced in instructing its large indigenous

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<sup>41</sup> "Mexican President Reveals Move for Closer Ties with U.S.," *The Washington Post*, September 2, 1941, 15; Harold Callenders, "Mexican Explains avoidance of War," *New York Times*, December 28, 1941, 18.

population, and the limited financial resources at the government's disposal. The article was accompanied by a picture of a Mexican campesino sitting on a donkey with a caption reading: "This Mexican, living near Mexico City, typifies the problem his government has in selling the war to the population. Left alone, most of them would prefer not to worry about such a complicated venture."<sup>42</sup> The picture reinforced the notion that the valiant efforts on the part of the Mexican state were likely to be hindered by the large population of small-scale farmers who had difficulties grasping concepts outside of their direct lived experiences. Some Mexicans, the *Washington Post* argued, simply were unable to understand the impact of global affairs on their provincial lives. Indeed, it was difficult for the newspaper to fathom how the United States could possibly expect the Mexican military to successfully be able to prepare for the war.

Other national newspapers raised concerns regarding the Mexican military's professed desire to work with the United States on thwarting Axis advances. On a practical level some wondered whether the Mexican Navy was well-enough equipped to guard the thousands of miles of coastlines along two oceans. Others believed that the Mexican army had been irrevocably corrupted. Rumors surfaced claiming that Germans had made large inroads with the Mexican Army and that these foreigners had crafted a "strong impression on Mexican military men, many of whom have expressed strong pro-German sentiments."<sup>43</sup> Perhaps most concerning was that these Nazi sympathizers had reportedly maintained close personal relationships with former

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<sup>42</sup> Mary St. Albans, "Nation's Handicaps Heavy, But Effort in War is Unstinting," *Washington Post*, May 9, 1943, B3.

<sup>43</sup> Russell B. Porter, "Nazi Agents Found Busy in Mexico; Viewed as Threat to U.S. Defense," *New York Times*, August 28, 1940, 6.

President Cárdenas who had symbolically agreed to take charge as the Secretary of War stationed in Baja California.

By and large, however, national and local papers in the U.S. praised Camacho for his ability to stand up against the Axis powers at a time when few other Latin American nations had been willing to do so. The *Hynes-Clearwater Journal's* editorial page praised “our gallant Mexican allies” who were exhausting all efforts to take care of the espionage on the Pacific Coast. It praised the work of the Mexican government, but also the enthusiastic response by the Mexican people, concluding that it would be grateful if “Mexico would loan some of her enthusiasm in the war effort to a lot our indifferent American citizens.”<sup>44</sup> Likewise, the *St. Post-Louis Dispatch* hailed Mexico’s uncompromising stance against the Axis powers, publishing an editorial cartoon depicting the Mexican national symbol of an eagle strangling the Nazi swastika in its talons, suggesting the paper’s appreciation for its neighbor’s commitment to the war.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the glowing international reviews that Camacho received from the United States, the president remained worried about the potential domestic political fallout from forging closer ties with its northern neighbor. Many Mexicans questioned the economic development policies that included large amounts of wartime materials and foodstuffs being exported to the United States, even as food shortages were being experienced in Mexico. Camacho attempted to calm these concerns and cultivate support for the war by frequently broadcasting addresses on the radio directly to the Mexican public, by organizing a large civilian reserve army, and by holding

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<sup>44</sup> “Mexico’s War Spirit,” *The Hynes-Clearwater Journal*, September 14, 1942, AGN, MAC, 550/44-32.

<sup>45</sup> “New Version of Mexico’s Great Seal,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 27, 1942, AGN, MAC, 550/44-32.

numerous public events displaying Mexican military might. Local branches of the civilian army were established throughout the nation, ostensibly to train and prepare Mexican citizens for a possible attack on its soil, but which also functioned as a medium for the government to unify its citizenry behind its wartime policies. Indeed, according to *Hoy*, one of the unexpected benefits of wartime preparation was that it helped bridge social divisions in Mexico between young men from distinct racial and economic backgrounds. In a photo-essay titled “Ciudadanos de la república,” the magazine celebrated how it was now possible for a dark skinned young man from the countryside to forge a meaningful friendship with a light skinned recruit who was a “son of capitalists” [Figure 5]. In such accounts, obligatory military service was changing the national character, as young men from radically different racial and class backgrounds had the opportunity to interact with one another, and by doing so, to strengthen the nation. The caption of the image read:

Las diferencias de clases, de raza y de color no solamente desaparecen en el cuartel de conscriptos, sino que se establecen inquebrantables lazos de amistad entre los jóvenes de la ciudad y del campo, entre obreros, campesinos e hijos de capitalistas. Ahí todos son soldados con los mismos derechos y las mismas obligaciones.

(Differences in class, race and color, not only disappear in conscription rooms, but create an equality and friendship between the youths from the city and countryside, between workers, campesinos and sons of capitalists. In the conscription rooms everyone is a soldier with the same rights and same obligations.)

Thus, one of the benefits of the war, according to supporters of Mexico’s wartime preparedness campaigns, was that it gave an opportunity to forever alter the long-standing racial questions plaguing the Mexican nation. Working together, these men were capable of forging a stronger

and better Mexico—one in which histories of racial difference and class privilege were erased, and men from vastly different racial and socio-economic backgrounds took up arms to fight for *la patria*.



Figure 5. Ignacio León, “Ciudadanos de la república,” *Hoy*, January 1, 1944.

In addition to forever altering the domestic racial and class divisions between fellow countrymen, optimistic Mexican observers argued that the war would lead to breaking down the United States’ imperial relationships with Mexico. As evidence, magazines like *Hoy* pointed to scenes of defense and solidarity between the two nations that would have been unthinkable just a

few short years earlier. For example, *Hoy* congratulated the women of the American Colony Committee in Mexico City for their eager contributions to war effort. The article documented how these women were preparing for the war by learning to fix tractors and shoot pistols [Figure 6].<sup>46</sup> In addition, women in the group devised elaborate plans for how their organization would respond in the event that the Axis powers managed to invade Mexico City, explaining to the magazine that they planned to turn their recreation areas at their golf course into hospital rooms and to turn the golf course into a shooting range.



Figure 6. “Esfuerzo femenino para la guerra, desde México,” *Hoy*, January 30, 1943, 22.

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<sup>46</sup> “Esfuerzo femenino para la Guerra, desde México,” *Hoy*, January 30, 1943, 22-27.



Figure 7. “Esfuerzo femenino para la guerra, desde México,” *Hoy*, January 30, 1943, 25.

This article stressed that wartime preparation was being adopted by Mexican women as well. Mexican film star, Dolores del Río, appeared in *Hoy* handling a machine gun [Figure 7]. The accompanying article congratulated her efforts to support the American Colony Committee. Thus, wartime cooperation provided many new ways for the two nations to rethink their security relationship to one another. Even the idea of armed white American women in the capital was not out of the realm of possibility, should the borders of Mexico be comprised by the Axis powers.

## Office of Inter-American Affairs and Oficina Federal de Propaganda

The Mexican government regularly put its wartime preparation on display, revealing to the public the extent to which the nation had transformed in response to the war. The Mexican Army participated in public spectacles celebrating cooperation with the United States, such as parades on the international bridge in El Paso by U.S. and Mexican military personnel. These events made visible the shared wartime commitment, reinforcing the idea that the imperial relationship between these countries were as President Roosevelt and the Binational Mexican-American Commission for Economic Cooperation had stressed, something to be relegated to history books. Indeed, not unlike like the Mexican soldiers from distinct racial and class backgrounds who fundamentally altered their relationships to one another by forging a sense of national solidarity through wartime preparation, both the U.S. and Mexico were for the first time on an equal footing, made possible through the shared interests in defeating the Axis powers.<sup>47</sup>

According to the U.S. State Department, despite all the work being done by the Mexican government, a sympathetic press, and President Camacho, it appeared that the Mexican public often lacked interest and expressed apathy toward the war effort. These concerns about Mexican public opinion help explain the role the United States Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) assumed in Mexico. This agency, headed by Senator Nelson Rockefeller, was established in 1940 to bolster security efforts through hemispheric defense and advocated close and lasting commercial relations with Latin American nations. The OIAA adopted numerous responsibilities

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<sup>47</sup> “Notas Diversas,” *Hoy*, December 8, 1941, 63; “La Marina Mexicana,” *Hoy*, February 7, 1942, 36-43; “Preparativos Guerreros en Mexico,” *Hoy* February 21, 1942, 36-42; “La Cruzada Patriótica,” *Hoy*, July 25, 1942, 54-55; “Tropas Mexicanas en Maniobras,” *Hoy*, September 12, 1942, 20-21; “El Gran Desfile Militar 16,” *Hoy*, September 26, 1942, 20-30.

in Mexico. It published and distributed materials asserting the power of the United States army and its desire to work in harmony with all of Latin America. The agency paid for much of this pro-U.S. literature to appear in Mexican newspapers, magazines, and radio programs. It also supported modernizing Mexico's communication infrastructure and monitored companies and programs that were deemed to be pro-Nazi. According to historian Julio Moreno, the OIAA spread the idea that the U.S. and Mexico "had common goals: the pursuit of democracy, material prosperity, and upward mobility. It suggested that Mexicans could achieve these goals through mutual cooperation and friendship with the United States under the Good Neighbor Policy. It presented the United States as a partner instead of a threat to Mexican nationalism."<sup>48</sup> Responding to the success that the specter of the fifth column had on the U.S. public, the OIAA paid for hundreds of articles to be printed in Mexican newspapers warning of the encroaching *quinta columna*.

Even with the specter of the *quinta columna* operating in Mexico, crafting the image of an equal partnership was not easily accomplished. Shortly after President Ávila Camacho declared war on Axis powers following the sinking of two Mexican merchant ships in the Pacific in 1942, the *Oficina Federal de Propaganda* (OFP, Federal Propaganda Office) was established to get the Mexican public behind the war effort. The OFP frequently broadcast reports regarding Nazi atrocities on radio programs, created posters that were plastered on buildings throughout Mexico urging citizens' vigilance in a global war that was quickly encroaching onto Mexican soil. The propaganda efforts incorporated figures of Mexico's past including heroes from the war of independence and the 1910 Revolution, which sought to show that the Mexican nation had a

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<sup>48</sup> Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!*, 46.

tradition of fighting to protect its democratic principles.<sup>49</sup> Other campaigns launched by the OFP focused on the need to develop Mexico's industrial infrastructure and to modernize the army. This propaganda spread the message that Mexico's economic, political, and national security hinged on the willingness of the Mexican people to work together to ensure the safety of its nation against the Axis menace.

Various propaganda posters printed by the OFP agency and were distributed throughout Mexico. One example pictured two men working in an industrial worksite, pouring smelt, with a caption in bold lettering that read *Trabajo: Fortaleza de nuestras frontera* (Work: the strength of our borders). This poster, like much of the wartime propaganda, reinforced the proximity of the wars waging in Asia, Africa, and Europe to Mexico, and attempted to create a sense of sympathy and solidarity with the United States.<sup>50</sup> It highlighted the importance of a cooperative citizenry, a workforce that looked out for the interests of the nation by forging a strong industrial sector. Finally, it highlighted security concerns that were circulating about the border, informing a knowing public that the dangers along the border could only be alleviated through hard work and dedication by men looking out first and foremost for the best interests of the nation.

The message that Mexican national sovereignty and security were dependent on stronger relations with the United States was carefully crafted as the OFP worked with the OIAA.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Monica A. Rankin, *Mexico, La Patria!*, 104-158.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>51</sup> Cultural expressions of shared responsibility and sacrifice were put on display to a Mexican public that was not always aware of the extent of U.S. influence on the wartime propaganda they consumed. Seth Fein has argued that such wartime practices and the shift of the Mexican state rightward "did not represent international subversion of the regime's role in cultural production but rather the adoption of new discursive practices to maintain its nationalist ideological veneer in an era of transnationalization." Seth Fein, "Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema," in Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov, eds., *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 163.

Mexico's most famous cartoonist, Arias Bernal, who worked for *Hoy* amongst other publications, forged a partnership with the OIAA to create twelve war posters in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, which were distributed throughout Latin America. The artwork was based on two interrelated themes, "What we are fighting for" and the need to maintain inter-American solidarity. One representative poster, printed by the OIAA in 1941, depicts a soldier who has one foot firmly planted in North America and the other in South America. The soldier holds a rifle and stands guard against a possible Axis attack. In this image, Bernal implores each nation to work together "Como un solo hombre" [Figure 8] to ensure hemispheric security.

Both the U.S. press and the Mexican press were eager to show the scope and scale in which the Bernal's work impacted Latin America.<sup>52</sup> In addition to local newspapers, examples of his posters were printed in *LIFE* and *Collier's* during the war.<sup>53</sup> After interviewing Bernal, the *New York Herald* praised Bernal's work as being critical in hemispheric defense because they had a profound impact "on the minds of the people of Mexico, where a high degree of illiteracy exists among the Indians and peons." The *New York Times* would later comment that Bernal "was the most strident voice against dictators in Latin America during World War II. His bitter cartoons of black-booted Nazis and Fascists were published in papers from Mexico to the southern tip of the hemisphere."<sup>54</sup> It noted that hundreds of thousands of booklets of his cartoons

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<sup>52</sup> "Speaking of Pictures," *LIFE Magazine*, February 9, 1942, 7-9; "Arias Bernal," *Collier's Magazine*, February 6, 1943, cover image; Fernandez Aldana, "Arias Bernal en Nueva York," *Hoy*, November 28, 1942, 45.

<sup>53</sup> "Bernal, Cartoonist, Describes Role of War Posters in Mexico," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 2, 1942, 15; "Mexican Cheered by War Spirit Here," October 2, 1942, *New York Times*, 23; Edward Larocque Tinker, "New Editions, Fine and Otherwise," *New York Times*, August 1, 1943, BR23; "A Mexican Sees the Prowess of Our Navy," *New York Times*, December 4, 1942, 28.

<sup>54</sup> "Antonio Bernal, Cartoonist, Dies," *New York Times*, January 1, 1961, 49; Gustavo Vázquez Lozano, *El siglo XX en la mirada de Antonio Arias Bernal* (Aguascalientes, Ags: Instituto Cultural de Aguascalientes, 2007), 11.

were distributed by the OIAA and that his work was particularly well positioned to explain the importance of hemispheric defense and pan-Americanism.



Figure 8. Arias Bernal, “Como un solo hombre,” Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.]: El Coordinador de Asuntos Interamericanos, 1941.

Artists in the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (TGP) also lent their talents for wartime propaganda, publishing works with both the OFP and OIAA. Deeply concerned about the rise in fascism, the radical art collective turned out hundreds of illustrations for the anti-fascist press during the Spanish Civil War, created backdrops for political rallies, and a graphic exhibition titled “Against Nazi Terror.” The TGP published thousands of posters with the slogan “Mexico’s

first line of defense is on the Soviet front.” To defray costs, the organization sold a collection of their wartime drawings, etchings, and woodcuttings, titled the *Libro Negro del Terror Nazi* (The Black Book of Nazi Terror).<sup>55</sup> Co-founding TGP member, Pablo O’Higgins, made the following print, entitled “Buenos vecinos, buenos Amigos” or “Good Neighbors, Good Friends” for the OIAA. In it, we see Benito Juarez and Abraham Lincoln, suggesting a shared democratic revolutionary history between the two countries. In the image, a Mexican *campesino* and American extend their arms across the U.S.-Mexico border to shake hands with one another.



Figure 9. Pablo O’Higgins (Mexico City: Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1944). Princeton University, Digital Archives.

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<sup>55</sup> Hannes Meyer, *T.G.P. Mexico: El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva/ The Workshop for Popular Graphic Art: A record of Twelve Years of Colective Work* (Estampas de la Revolución: Mexico, 1947, XV).

In addition to printed artwork, the OIAA initiated a campaign to show the Mexican public U.S. propaganda and newsreels about the war. However, these film viewings did not always function to build the type of goodwill and solidarity hoped for by its U.S. promoters. The American Consulate in Monterrey, for example, expressed concern about one of the film screenings in particular, in which two men in charge were disrespectful to the audience. The consulate gave a long list of complaints about what transpired when the film operators, an off duty Texas Ranger and an official with the Highway Department, showed up to run the film. Working class audience members in Monterrey were disturbed that both men showed up with their badges and guns in full display. In addition, the films that were shown, “Bombing of Marshall and Gilbert Islands” and “Bombing of Pearl Harbor” were intended for U.S. audiences and the consulate argued that the films had no relevance to Civilian Defense in Mexico, particularly because the films did not show the U.S. military in a strong light. In addition, the films had not been dubbed in Spanish, did not have subtitles, and the two men acted abrasively, soliciting applause from the audience in the scenes in which U.S. troops appeared. The consulate worried that “these Gringos” were poorly received and were convinced that “one such incident create more ill feelings among the working class than can be regained in a considerable period of time.”<sup>56</sup> In addition, Mexican viewers were aware that what they were watching was intended to be propaganda. Consulates complained of the jeering and laughter that would accompany the screening of films whose overt purpose was meant to elicit sympathy from the audience.

One way to counteract concerns being expressed in Mexico about the growing presence of overt U.S. propaganda was by funneling money secretly to Mexican run propaganda agencies.

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<sup>56</sup> Henry S. Waterman, “American Consul, Visits of Civilian Defense Commissioners to Monterrey,” August, 6, 1942.

The OIAA helped fund and oversaw the creation of feature length films that were produced and shown in movie theaters in Mexico, including the wartime films *Espionaje en el Golfo* (1942) and *Soy Puro Mexicano* (1942).<sup>57</sup> In *Soy Puro Mexicano*, released on September 16, 1942, Mexican Independence Day, Guadalupe Padilla, played by Pedro Armendáriz, was a northern revolutionary leader that escaped from jail and stumbled upon a spy ring operating in Mexico.<sup>58</sup> The spy ring consisted of Japanese, German, and Italians that were distributing propaganda and sending military information by radio to submarines off Mexico's Pacific coast. Padilla is the quintessential revolutionary figure, a paunch and bearded northeño, wearing a large sombrero, complete with cartridge belts strapped across his chest. The film provides an excellent example of the central tensions involved in creating a sense of Mexican nationalism while simultaneously displaying the benefits of cooperation with the United States. The plot of the film served as a thinly veiled answer to the question of how someone that was unmistakably a "puro Mexicano" could support Mexico getting involved in a global conflict on the side of the United States.

At the start of the film Padilla hears on the radio an address that announces that Mexico was soon to partner on the side of the United States in a war in Europe. It is apparent that this highly masculinized revolutionary leader is unimpressed by the announcement, questioning what his country could possibly gain by joining a global conflict. He summarily dismisses the prospect that the United States and Mexico could ever work with one another as equal partners, doubting that the nations had any shared interests. The reasoning for Padilla's contempt is meant to be self-evident to viewers and goes unstated. His outright rejection of fighting alongside the United

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<sup>57</sup> Seth Fein, "Transnationalization and Cultural Collaboration: 'Mexican' Cinema and the Second World War," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 17 (1998): 105-28.

<sup>58</sup> José M Sánchez García, "Historia Gráfica del cine hablado en México," *Hoy* February 13, 1943.

States in a global conflict is not attributed to any particular U.S. military, economic, political policy or action. Choosing not to elaborate on Padilla's hesitancy to ally with the United States makes the inevitable collaboration between the two nations far less complicated. Eventually an alliance is forged between Padilla and a FBI agent, a self-identified "pocha" (a Mexican-American woman) from Texas, who was working to uncover the plans of a spy ring in the northern state of Chihuahua. Like many such films representing the collaboration of the two nations during World War II, the United States is signified through the character of a woman, thereby alleviating some of the threats associated with the U.S. foreign intelligence agencies operating in the country.<sup>59</sup> The fact that this woman was of Mexican descent posits that a strong bond existed between Mexico and the United States, and it suggests a long-standing, shared history between the two nations.

In addition to the inevitable plot line that results in the U.S. and Mexico fighting on the same side together, Padilla helps to define those who are incapable of making legitimate claims to the Mexican nation and national culture. When Padilla stumbles upon the group of Italian, German, and Japanese, they are clearly marked as "foreign" and out of place through dress, accents, and phenotype. Padilla demands to know the identity of this group of foreigners and what business they have in Mexico. When Padilla questions the real identities of these men, they each respond in a heavily accented Spanish, insisting that they are in fact Mexicans. Padilla indignantly replies "Amigo, a usted lo engaño su madre." (Friend, your mother must have fooled you). The spies were arrested through the planning between Mexican intelligence agents, Padilla, and the Mexican-American FBI agent. Through films like *Soy Puro Mexicano* a Mexican

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<sup>59</sup> Seth Fein, "Myths of Cultural Imperialism" in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, (2001).

audience could see positive examples of the U.S. and Mexico partnership, without the visible fingerprints of the United States' propaganda agencies being legible to the film-going public.

The Mexican state sought to get its public behind the wartime effort through various projects, including state propaganda, the civilian army, and the assistance of the OIAA. Such examples in popular culture were important as they created a possibility for the public to rethink Mexico's place in the world and its obligations to hemispheric security. These films and the other forms of government propaganda were not enough to erase the histories of U.S. empire or skepticism of U.S. wartime intentions, but there is evidence to suggest that wartime nationalism and fear of Axis attacks resonated with members of Mexican society. Thousands became involved in civilian defense measures, although the success of these programs, as reported by weary U.S. consulate officers, varied greatly throughout the nation. The propaganda campaigns and the ubiquitous stories of the *quinta columna* along Mexico's borders and coasts, along with the sinking of Mexican merchant ships, did seem to have some effect on the public and at least made palatable the idea of forging an alliance with the United States during the war.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusions

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<sup>60</sup> 'Editorial: México pelea por la libertad y defiende su honor y su vida,' *El Continental*, 9/20/42, AGN; *El Continental*, MAC, 550/44-32; "Elocuente mensaje de Ávila Camacho en la creación del Consejo Supremo anoche," *El Continental*, 9/25/42, 1., 53; AGN, MAC, 550/44-32 The secretary of foreign relations received numerous letters from the Mexican public describing the fears of an Axis invasion in the north. Reports on possible fifth column activities were also reported by Mexicans residing along the southern border with Guatemala. See, AGN, MAC, "Extranjeros Baja California—territorio norte Japoneses Permanencia," 550/9-1.

Despite a rocky start to the 1930s, the United States and Mexico underwent a profound shift in their bilateral relations due the impending global conflict, and the rightward turn in Mexico's domestic politics. The looming threat of an outside enemy operating throughout the hemisphere and along Mexico's coasts and borders, created the opportunity for a new culture of cooperation between the countries. The war helped usher in a new era of inter-American defense that actively sought the support and cooperation of the political elite in Latin America. In explaining the success of inter-American defense, Sumner Welles, Under-Secretary of State, reflected on the shared histories between the U.S. and Latin America, claiming that "for the first time in the history of our hemisphere joint actions of the highest political character has been taken by all of the American nations acting together without dissent and without reservation."<sup>61</sup>

Closer economic, political, and military ties forged in the 1940s would shape Latin America for decades. Nowhere, with the possible exception of Brazil, were its affects more strongly felt than in Mexico.<sup>62</sup> As the southern neighbor to the United States, Mexico and its 2,000 mile long shared border held a special place in the imaginations of U.S. military and policymakers preparing for war. The spirit of wartime cooperation marked an important shift in boundary management and enforcement as the Camacho administration made clear its intentions to work with the United States to ensure closer regulation of its shared national boundaries. The changes in border policy did not occur exclusively at the top secret meetings in governmental

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Francis O. Wilcox, "The Monroe Doctrine and World War II," *The American Political Science Review*, June, 1942, no. 3, 437.

<sup>62</sup> The fear of a military invasion of Northeastern Brazil via Africa by the Germans gave Brazil considerable leverage in economic and military negotiations. Brazil received three-quarters of all lend-lease aid to Latin America. The economic aide and the lack of European competition were vital to the emerging manufacturing industry. Joseph Smith, "Brazil: Benefits of Cooperation," in Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel, eds., *Latin America during World War II* (Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2007), 144-161.

offices in Washington D.C. and Mexico City. Nor did the closer relations only alter the day-to-day operations and security management in the region. Narratives of border security were carefully crafted within the larger wartime context and resulted in state-sponsored efforts to create public awareness of the looming Axis threat along the nations' coasts and borders, as well as the bilateral actions required to guard against them.

Thus, a border that had been forged through U.S. imperialism was reshaped into one that created a cooperative spirit between the two nations. Images of border threats were crafted in the popular press, as well as through government agencies actively seeking ways to demonstrate friendship, hemispheric solidarity, and political goodwill. Wartime cooperation would have consequences for long-term economic and military cooperation in the following decades as Mexican governmental officials tied themselves more closely to the United States. While suspicions and distrust did not altogether disappear between the nations' policing agencies, a fundamental shift occurred as border security was viewed as best addressed through bilateral cooperation. For border residents, migrants, and potential border crossers, joint border policing represented a new era of uncertainty amidst the promise of ever greater boundary enforcement.

## Chapter 2

### Combatting a “Wetback Invasion” along a Cold War Divide

In February of 1955, the United States hosted Kurt Lemke and Karl-Ulrich Hagelberg, two executive officers of the West German Federal Border Police for a tour of the U.S.-Mexico border. Their visit took place some six months after the completion of “Operation Wetback”—the Border Patrol’s highly publicized, quasi-military campaign, which had U.S. public officials proudly touting the deportations of more than one million undocumented Mexican migrants from across the country.<sup>1</sup> At the behest of the U.S. State Department, the two German officers and the United States Border Patrol spent one month exchanging border policing techniques and strategies with the expectation that the recently formed West German Federal Border Police would be able to apply what they learned in the U.S. Southwest to the increasingly volatile East-West German border. At the same time, the State Department believed that the Border Patrol would benefit from the insights offered by men working in the shadow of the “Iron Curtain.”

Despite the insistence by the Border Patrol that the U.S. southern border with Mexico represented a strategic site for potential communist sabotage, the *Los Angeles Times* did not report any run-ins with Soviet spies or saboteurs during Lemke and Hagelberg’s visit. Rather, the newspaper reported that the two guests witnessed the Border Patrol’s far more mundane efforts to capture, detain, and deport Mexican “wetbacks” who had surreptitiously crossed the United

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly Lytle- Hernández explains that deportations in the early 1950s rose dramatically and were not all attributed to “Operation Wetback.” In fact, despite the consistently high numbers attributed by U.S. government officials—Commissioner Joseph Swing, for example, placed the number as more than one million, Lytle-Hernández suggest that actual number of deported were closer to 30,000. Lytle-Hernandez, *Migra!*, 171-217. See also, Garcia, *Operation Wetback* (1980).

States' southern border.<sup>2</sup> At the risk of being viewed as ungracious guests, the German agents detailed the limitations of this collaborative border policing exchange. Judging by the answers they gave to reporters, Lemke and Hagelberg returned to Germany largely unimpressed with their visit. They doubted that there was much value in such collaborative exchanges, insisting that boundary policing within Europe was far more complex than the comparatively easy task assigned to U.S. immigration officers. As they had just witnessed firsthand—the Border Patrol primarily used race to distinguish U.S. citizens from Mexicans, but the two Germans argued such racial profiling methods would be useless in West Germany as “All Germans look alike.”<sup>3</sup> This made the West German job of preventing “the subversive [sic] dangerous elements among the people crossing from East Germany” more challenging than the comparatively simple task of keeping easily distinguishable Mexican migrants out of U.S. territory.<sup>4</sup>

It became clear pretty quickly that the two Germans thought their hosts' anxieties about communist sabotage in the U.S. Southwest were greatly exaggerated. In fact, Lemke and Hagelberg may have been wary of U.S. Cold War politics even prior to leaving for Los Angeles as they were from Bonn, Germany, a city that had experienced the anticommunist tactics of Joseph McCarthy first hand. About a year and a half earlier, two of McCarthy's aides had been widely ridiculed in the Bonn press for attempting to root out an imagined communist conspiracy in the United States Information Service overseas library program.<sup>5</sup> Whatever their reasoning,

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<sup>2</sup> “Bonn Visitors Study Border Control Methods,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1955, A8.

<sup>3</sup> It was precisely this racialized logic that resulted in numerous Mexican-Americans being unlawfully questioned, detained and occasionally deported.

<sup>4</sup> “Bonn Visitors Study Border Control Methods,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1955, A8.

<sup>5</sup> Joan L Clinefelter, "Overcoming the Führer by Confronting the Senator: McCarthyism and the German Past," Paper presented at the *European Studies Conference, October 6-8, 2011, University of Nebraska at Omaha*. [www.unomaha.edu/esc/2011Proceedings/ClinefelterPaper.pdf](http://www.unomaha.edu/esc/2011Proceedings/ClinefelterPaper.pdf)

the men downplayed suggestions that the United States' southern border with Mexico carried legitimate risks of communist infiltration, instead explaining that a communist invasion was far more likely along the West German border with the "Iron Curtain."

In discussing the differences between the two countries, the Germans pointed out the much greater investment their nation had made in boundary enforcement. The West German Federal Border Police consisted of more than 20,000 patrolmen, far surpassing the 1,200 men stationed along the much longer U.S.-Mexico divide. In addition, the West Germans worked within shouting distance of Soviet military personnel, while the United States shared borders with reliable Cold War allies in Canada and Mexico. Lemke and Hagelberg saw firsthand how closely Mexican officials worked with the INS in processing migrants contracted as braceros. They probably also witnessed the close collaboration between the two countries as immigration officials on both sides of the border detained and processed undocumented migrants.<sup>6</sup> By 1955, for the West Germans, such cross-border collaboration with East Germany would have been unimaginable.

What the Germans did not fully grasp, and what historians have since failed to adequately address, is that in the minds of U.S. officials, the U.S.-Mexico border and the hundreds of thousands of migrants who crossed it without state permission in the late 1940s and early 1950s, were Cold War threats. This chapter contends that the mass detentions and deportations of Mexicans in the U.S. were made possible through Cold War thinking. Susan Carruthers argues in *Cold War Captives* that the U.S. public States perceived the American capitalist system as promoting freedom and choice, while the Soviet system produced corporeal, mental, and

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<sup>6</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!*, 127-130.

spiritual enslavement wherever communism spread.<sup>7</sup> As I show in this chapter, the distinction between slavery and freedom was a central trope in the construction of undocumented Mexican migrants.

Mexican men laboring as farmworkers embodied a serious Cold War threat, not so much because they were thought to be communists or communist agents—though this was occasionally claimed—but because the mass movement of a population imagined as “modern slaves” and “peons” had no place in the U.S. society.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, “illegal” Mexican migrants garnered so much attention in large part because they had bypassed the rule of law, allowing themselves to surrender their free labor. U.S. politicians, policymakers, and the popular press made distinctions between legal bracero workers and “wetbacks.” Braceros were free—processed through international agreements and afforded labor contracts, guaranteeing fair wages, meals, and housing. In sharp contrast, “illegal” immigrants crossed the U.S.-Mexico border without inspection, and their labor was much more likely to be exploited by unscrupulous farmers. As highly racialized “wetbacks,” Mexicans were imagined as a horde of dark-skinned, humble, illiterate, and easily taken advantage of masses—an international disgrace, the antithesis of America’s Cold War self-projected image of a land of liberty, freedom, and progress. U.S. government officials found themselves in an awkward position, promoting the Bracero Program—the largest contract labor system in human history—while simultaneously

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<sup>7</sup> Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Gonzalez argues that the terminology of peonage was first crafted by U.S. capitalists and journalists in the late nineteenth century. This collection of U.S. government, business, and literary production, he argues, “orientalized” Mexican migrants into a homogenous group in desperate need of paternal care. It was this imperialist mindset that shaped public opinion and policy toward Mexican migrants. Gilbert Gonzalez, “Mexican Labor Migration, 1876-1924,” in *Beyond la Frontera*, 28-78.

condemning “illegal” Mexican workers, who were subjected to exploitation akin to slavery.<sup>9</sup> In addition, during the first years of the Cold War, Mexican migrants were harbingers of a tremendous amount of anxiety because their very presence in the United States evoked an image of an unguarded border that could easily be crossed by Soviet spies and saboteurs.

This chapter examines the efforts to construct the U.S.-Mexico border as a critical Cold War site. In the post-war period, Mexican migrants were not viewed as simply a large number of individuals following the dictates of the international marketplace, but rather, came to represent something far more sinister—a “wetback invasion.” Thus, the draconian and unprecedented border policing operations of the early 1950s were in large part a response by the Cold War security state’s efforts to ease the domestic alarm over a poorly protected border. Examining the “wetback invasion” through the context of the Cold War sheds much needed attention on how national security concerns helped shape the initial calls for mass deportation.

### **Cold War Politics and Border Policing**

In the 1950s, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), made explicit the connection between Mexican migration and communist subversion.<sup>10</sup> It entered into evidence dozens of examples of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) propaganda and efforts to organize

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<sup>9</sup> These facile constructions ignored the fact that these supposedly different groups of men often worked with one another in the same fields. It was complicated even further as braceros frequently would leave the farms where they were contracted in search of better working conditions. In breaking the terms of their contracts these men became part of the dreaded “wetback invasion.”

<sup>10</sup> “Atom Spies in U.S., Say Legion Chief: Red Ages Go unhindered, D.A.R. Told,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1947, 1.

around the mass detentions and deportations of Mexican migrants in the post-war period. The fact that the Soviet Union and radical organizations in the United States condemned the exploitation of the Bracero Program pushed Mexican migrants and the border they crossed into the forefront of Cold War discussions.<sup>11</sup>

INS officials added their voice to those who insisted that “illegal” Mexican migrants were international security threats, repeatedly informing the American public that the large presence of undocumented border crossers made the United States less safe from the global communist enemy. Ben Habberton, acting commissioner of the INS, declared in front of Congress in February 1954 that the agency had discovered at least 100 members of the Communist Party who had unlawfully entered the United States from Mexico.<sup>12</sup> This accusation was similar to ones made by INS officials a year earlier to the House Appropriations subcommittee. In their sworn testimonies, which were part of repeated requests for increased government funding, the agency stressed that the U.S.-Mexico border was out of control and the situation represented nothing less “than a threat to the security of the United States.” Estimates provided by the INS indicated that 1,500 members of the Mexican Communist Party resided directly across the border from El Paso, and that the CPUSA and the Mexican CP collaborated with one another. In fact, according the INS, the open border was “an easy avenue of entry...for almost any number of Communists or foreign agents from Mexico, Guatemala, from Dutch Guiana and, entry into Mexico being as easy as it is, from any country in the entire world.”<sup>13</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup> House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Communist Political Subversion: Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities*, 84<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1957.

<sup>12</sup> “Heavy Influx of Reds Into U.S. Reported,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1954, 23.

<sup>13</sup> “Reds Slip into U.S., Congress Warned,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1954, 23.

this way, the INS attempted to insert the agency into the Cold War, insisting that border policing was indispensable to the global battle against communism, and that the frontline of the global struggle against the Soviet Union was actually located along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The pervasive anticommunist sentiment in the United States helped the INS find powerful allies in the Senate in faithful Cold War warriors like Pat McCarran (D-Nevada), who lambasted President Eisenhower's refusal to increase allocations to the Border Patrol as tantamount to "trifling with the security of this country."<sup>14</sup> The vulnerabilities created by these unchecked border crossers were reinforced in a series of high profile deportations of U.S. communists from Mexico, as well as extraditions of suspected communist Mexican labor leaders from the United States to Mexico.<sup>15</sup> Immigrants who were deported were often apprehended deep in the interiors of both nations in major urban areas like Chicago and Mexico City.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the deportation procedures for labor leaders like Refugio Martinez, who had worked with the United Packinghouse Workers of America, his presence as a foreign born communist was constructed as an argument for bolstering border security, despite the fact that he had lived in Chicago for more than two decades.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Jenner Group Sees Red Peril in 'Wetbacks'?" *The Washington Post*, May 3, 1954, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1992); Rebecca Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Critical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 13-15.

<sup>16</sup> The capture of Gus Hall, the national secretary of the American Communist Party, in Mexico City as he prepared to travel to the Soviet Union was perhaps the most widely circulated example. "Hall, Fugitive U.S. Red Aid, Reported Arrested in Mexico," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 10, 1951, 1; "Hall, Fugitive Red, Seized in Mexico, Deported to U.S.," *New York Times*, October 10, 1951, 1; "Fugitive Communist Bigwig Arrested in Texas by FBI," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 11, 1951, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Rick Halpern, *Down on the killing floor Black and white workers in Chicago's packinghouses, 1904-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 186-188.

In the months preceding “Operation Wetback,” the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee explicitly linked the border to Cold War security concerns. Members of the committee announced that they would investigate the “subversive dangers inherent” in Mexican farm workers crossing into the United States without proper government inspection. The chairman, Senator William E. Jenner (R- Indiana) appointed Senators McCarran and Herman Welker (R- Idaho) to investigate. McCarran described the increasing numbers of Mexicans migrating into the United States as “a direct threat to the internal security of the Nation because it is an open door for Communist agents.”<sup>18</sup> In a prime example of the grossly exaggerated security threats, McCarran wrote an open letter to the subcommittee, part of which was reproduced in the *Washington Post*, claiming that “Red spies” were “crossing and “re-crossing” the border after successfully infiltrating the ranks of Mexican laborers.<sup>19</sup> Such claims about the insecure nature of the border were not limited to conservative members of Congress. Even in locales with few Mexican migrants, far from the United States’ southern boundary, the prospect of illicit border crossings were perceived as a grave security problem. The two liberal Senators from Minnesota, Herbert Henry Lehman and Hubert Humphrey, for example, highlighted the vulnerabilities of the southern border, warning that at a minimum one hundred, and “perhaps many hundreds” of communists crossed from Mexico into the United States daily.<sup>20</sup>

As described more fully in the Chapter 3, the Mexican press often ridiculed the over-the-top hyperbole of U.S. security culture of the late 1940s and early 1950s. While there were plenty

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<sup>18</sup> Senator Welker became so closely associated with the red scare and McCarthyism that he was known as “Little Joe from Idaho.” “Jenner Group Sees Red Peril In ‘Wetbacks’?” *The Washington Post*, May 3, 1954, 2.

<sup>19</sup> “Brownell Scouts Spy Ring Reports,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1954, 12.

<sup>20</sup> “Senate Passes Bill for Hiring of Mexicans,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 4, 1954, B9.

of concerns in Mexico about the large number of emigrants “abandoning” the nation, the mainstream press remained consistent in its dismissive attitude toward the idea that these men were likely to be sympathetic to communism. Instead, media outlets paid close attention to the hardships, harassment, and abuse that Mexican migrants faced at the border, detailing the inhumane inspections that Mexican nationals were forced to endure in the name of national security. In an article from *Hoy* in 1954, for example, an U.S. immigration official presses his thumb against the outreached hand of an *aspirante* hoping to gain admission to the United States. Complete physical inspections for braceros were part of the contracting procedure, and while thick callouses were evidence of intimate familiarity with agricultural work, it also was part of the security screening process. The caption explains that even after these humiliating inspections, migrants were accused of being “communist infiltrators” by Texans who sought to avoid paying migrants their rightfully earned wages. Mexican migrants were thus forced to submit to demeaning physical inspections of their bodies in the name of U.S. national security, only to then be accused of being Cold War threats by Texas growers so that they could maximize profits. Such arguments were mobilized in the *Hoy* to suggest that the politics of immigration and security were more about controlling migrants, rather than having anything to do with the safety of United States citizens.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “El peso de Mr. Suárez,” *Hoy*, February 27, 1954, 83.



Figure 10. *Hoy*, "El peso de Mr. Suárez," February 27, 1954, 83. Caption: Comprobación de que el bracero tiene encallecidas la manos. No obstante, después son acusados por los texanos de 'comunistas infiltrados'. (Caption: Checking the bracero's calloused hands. Nevertheless, they are later accused by Texans as being "communist infiltrators.")

### **Crafting a "wetback invasion": Slavery, Peonage, and an Open Border**

Beginning in the late 1940s, newspaper articles from all across the country began to directly link the failure to prevent undocumented migrants from crossing the United States' southern border to the growing fear of communist infiltration in the United States. The U.S.-

Mexico border became a blank canvas for sensationalist communist plots as major newspapers published articles with ominous sounding titles like “‘Wetback’ Invaders Include Communists,” and “200 Dangerous Aliens Operate Freely in U.S.”<sup>22</sup> Some articles even warned that atomic weapons could easily be smuggled across the border.<sup>23</sup> In a three part series entitled “Red Dagger at our Back,” Manuel Morris, journalist of the northeastern paper *The Hartford Courant*, cautioned readers to be vigilant of the growing threat of communism in Latin America, which was after all, “the back door to the United States.”<sup>24</sup>

What prompted the most persistent connection between the language of Cold War invasion and the U.S.-Mexico border, however, was not actual communist spies, but the heightened awareness and near hysterical resistance to the presence of undocumented Mexican migrants in the United States. In the ten years following World War II, the perceived international security threats along the U.S.-Mexico border underwent a remarkable transformation. U.S. efforts to protect its southern boundary from German and Japanese spies were firmly redirected toward the illicit border crossings of Mexican migrants. In the 1950s, Mexican laborers who had been largely celebrated during the war, were transformed nation-wide into “wetbacks,” as disruptive and undesirable elements in the national body. Within U.S. popular imaginaries, Mexicans were constructed as the prototypical “illegal” subjects. Their undesirability was nearly universally expressed by the two major political parties, the INS,

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<sup>22</sup> “Mexican Commie Leader Seized for Deportation,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 14, 1953; Williard Edwards, “200 Dangerous Aliens Operate Freely in U.S.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 23, 6; “Wetback Invaders Include Communists,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 21, 1951, 1.

<sup>23</sup> “Washington Alert for Smuggling of Red Bombers,” *The Hartford Courant*, June 27, 1954, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Manuel Morris, “Red Dagger At Our Back: Reds in Mexico Active but their Power Wanes,” *The Hartford Courant*, May 12, 1953, 10.

popular press, as well as many national labor unions. If Morris was concerned about an “open back door” allowing communist infiltration, then for many in the United States, the presence of undocumented migrants was a startling reminder that this door had been left ajar for hundreds of thousands—and perhaps even millions of Mexicans—who surreptitiously entered into the United States without state inspection.

While the dehumanizing term “wetback” was first conceived of in the 1920s, it was not until the end of the Second World War that it became widely used in U.S. popular culture. As “wetback” was not recognized nationally as a term defining the legal immigration status for Mexicans, it had to be perpetually defined for its audiences.<sup>25</sup> As a typical article in the *Washington Post* warned in 1953, “Last year more than three-quarters of a million immigrants of the unfortunate variety known as “wetbacks”—poverty-stricken Mexican agricultural workers who have slipped across the border illegally—were put out of the country.”<sup>26</sup> Such language functioned to strip migrants of their humanity, relegating their existence to a transgression of U.S. immigration law, transforming them into a single homogenous, highly racialized group, whose legal presence in the United States by definition always required greater scrutiny.<sup>27</sup>

Corresponding with the second red scare, the term “wetback” was ubiquitous throughout the United States and was utilized by politicians, academics, immigration officials, and the U.S. public at large. It became part of everyday discourse, appearing regularly in the nation’s most

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<sup>25</sup> The *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, informed its readers that “wetbacks are illegal entrants, so designated because in many cases they cross the Rio Grande and get wet in the process.” As this definition suggests the process of crossing the Rio Grande was not by itself a prerequisite for the use of the label of “wetback,” only that this was true in “many cases”. “Senate Passes Bill for hiring of Mexicans,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, 1954, B9.

<sup>26</sup> “Southern Border,” *The Washington Post*, 7/25/1953, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas De Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419-47.

respected newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post*. As a term first gaining traction in this period, it was further reinforced through its usage in a wide array of media, from radio dramas and comic strips, to the titles of major motion pictures, and was even the subject of an academy award winning short film produced by the Walt Disney Corporation titled *The Wetback Hound*.<sup>28</sup>

It was perhaps through popular fiction that the imagined peril along the border most dramatically reached the majority of Americans. The border became a favorite location for the dangerous tales of border patrol agents and cowboys, depicted as heroes, protecting the nation from a myriad of border problems that often merged together, from the large presence of undocumented Mexican migrants and thieves to drug smugglers and communist agents. Indeed, the imagined lawlessness of the border made it an ideal setting for comic books.<sup>29</sup> A story entitled “River of Blood,” for example, recounted the stories of two U.S. border smugglers who recruited undocumented Mexican migrants to help them harvest marijuana in Texas. In one dramatic scene, these men led a group of Mexican migrants across the Rio Grande even though they were fully aware of the possibility of a flash flood.<sup>30</sup> As the migrants get caught in quickly rising waters and drown, one of the smugglers, showing no emotion or remorse, exclaimed “What’s the difference as long as we made it! We can always get more wetbacks where they

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<sup>28</sup> See, “Wetbacks” MGM [1956]; “The Wetback Hound” told the story of Paco, a lost hunting dog that had become distracted and wandered away from its owner, and then proceeded to travel across the U.S. border. “The Wetback Hound” Disney [1957]; Children would have also had the opportunity to learn about the vulnerabilities of the U.S.-border from the Mexican cartoon mouse, Speedy Gonzales, who in a short released in 1955, aided a group of his friends by stealing cheese located across the Mexican border in United States territory. The border was only haphazardly guarded by Sylvester the cat, who acted as a U.S. border patrol agent. “Speedy Gonzales,” Warner Brothers, 1955.

<sup>29</sup> See also, “Men Without Fear,” *Danger* (New York: Allen Hardy Associates) 1:4, July, 1952; “Wise Guy of the Prairie,” *Roundup* (Rockefeller Plaza, New York: D.S. Publishing Company) 1:2, Sept-Oct, 1948.

<sup>30</sup> “River of Blood,” *Underworld Crime* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc), 1:5, March 1953.

came from!” Mexicans were presented as tragic figures who were subjected to violence and caught up in a dangerous business operation that they did not fully grasp until it was too late. Importantly, even the horrific violence of migrants drowning is not enough to convince the smugglers to rethink their business operations as there were plenty more migrants willing to come to the United States [Figure 11].



Figure 11. “River of Blood,” *Underworld Crime* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc), 1:5, March 1953.

In addition to comics, newspapers, and popular magazines, the depiction of the “wetback invasion” would have been brought into American homes by way of radio and television

programming. NBC's radio program "Tales of the Texas Rangers," reenacted the "real stories" of the Rangers, many focusing on the persistence of Mexican thieves and migrants. Jayce Pearson, a fearless Texas Ranger, kept the lone star state safe from rough and tumble cowboys, as well as drug smugglers and Mexican lawbreakers that snuck their illicit goods across the border. Stories entitled "Illegal Entry," "Cover Up," and "Paid in Full" told the pitiful and tragic tales of a Mexicans farmworkers along the border.<sup>31</sup> Through many different mediums the U.S. Mexico border was crafted as a site of illegal activities and as a looming threat national security. In suspenseful tales, government officials were charged with securing the safety that was disrupted by those failing to abide by the laws governing the nation. Death along the border, which was an increasingly common occurrence in the 1950s, was documented in these popular films and comics, as well as in newspaper articles discussing the border crossing deaths. The fault was placed on either unscrupulous coyotes—men who made a living by guiding migrants across the border without being detected—or as simply bad luck by migrants who chose to risk crossing the treacherous dessert terrain just so they could be treated as slave labor.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This program was later turned into a television series that continued to deal with contemporary issues as well as those from the "Old West." Tales of the Texas Rangers, "Illegal Entry," NBC Broadcast, June, 6, 1952; Tales of the Texas Rangers, "Cover Up," August 17, 1952; Tales of the Texas Rangers, "Paid in Full," May 13, 1951. Another television program "Border Patrol" ran for a few seasons on NBC in the late 1950s. Many of the same topics were addressed, including ones that addressed the prevention of Communist plots: See, Border Patrol, "The Party Line," NBC Broadcast, March 29, 1959.

<sup>32</sup> The U.S. Border Patrol was largely responsible for these deaths as its efforts to put greater emphasis at policing popular crossing points forced migrants into more difficult and dangerous treks across desolate desert areas. The documentation of migrants' deaths—a topic that also has not been fully accounted for historically—within the popular press failed to make the link between increased policing and death. For mention of migrant deaths along the border in the mainstream press in the early 1950s, See, "Mexican 'Wetbacks' Crossing Border Risk Death in Torturous Desert Trek," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1950, 3; "Four Men Found Dead in Gasoline Tank Car," *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1952, 1; "3 Pinned by Steel Pipe Miss Death by Inches," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1953, 1; "3 Found Dead in Tank Car," *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 1953, 12"; The dangers faced by border crossers were also picked up by nationally circulated magazines: See, "The Wetbacks" *Time*, April 9, 1951, 24; "Ants: Mexican Wetbacks" *Time*, April 27, 1953, 29; "Wetbacks Swarm In," *Life* May 21, 1954; "Bulge of Braceros at the Border." *Life*, February 15, 1954, 26-29; "New Wetback Answers?" *Newsweek*, August 21, 1953, 26; "War with the Wetbacks," *Newsweek*, June, 28, 1954.

Importantly, in the context of the Cold War, the “wetback” as seen through these popular media outlets represented a lamentable return to debt peonage, and unacceptable forms of mental, as well as physical slavery. The “wetbacks”’ inherent foreignness—as illiterate, meek, racially inferior, easily exploitable, and ultimately tragic figures—made them unassimilable into a modern and free American society. Journalists blamed farmers for placing profit over patriotism, by taking advantage of migrants’ backwards ways. In exchange for the farmers’ greed, U.S. citizens had to deal with narcotics, disease, and migrants’ immorality, all of which disrupted American ideals of freedom, equal economic opportunity, and democracy.

In the early 1950s, Gladwin Hill, special correspondent to the *New York Times*, relied heavily on the tropes of peonage and slavery in his Pulitzer Prize winning condemnations of the “wetback invasion.” Cold War anxieties were evident in the more than two dozen articles Hill wrote on the national emergency of the invasion. Undocumented border crossers were discussed in militarized language in Hill’s work, which included articles with titles such as: “‘Wetback’ Invasion is Broadening Despite All U.S. Counter-Moves,” “‘Wetback’ Influx Sets Record High; 175 an Hour Jump Border,” and a front page article “Tide of ‘Wetbacks’ Reaches Crest; 1,500,000 in Southwest in 1952.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1954, after a one year study of the Southwest in which Hill interviewed politicians, academics, and white residents of the region (but not migrants themselves)—he wrote that “a recent 5,000 mile tour of the border area, shows it to be a phenomenon whose real economic and social implications should shock the average American when fully known and comprehended.”

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<sup>33</sup> Gladwin Hill, “‘Wetback Invasion Is Broadening Despite All U.S. Counter-Moves,” *New York Times*, February 11, 1952, 12; Gladwin Hill, “‘Wetback’ Influx Sets Record High; 175 Mexicans an Hour Jump Border,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1953, 23; Gladwin Hill, “Tide of ‘Wetbacks’ Reaches Crest; 1,500,000 in Southwest in 1952,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1953, 1.

Occasionally, Hill made a direct link between an open border and communist threat, as when he wrote, “it has lately been realized that the ‘wetback’ traffic offers a wide-open avenue for Communist spies to enter the country...and that in cold fact Joseph Stalin might adopt a perfunctory disguise and walk into the country this way.”<sup>34</sup> What should shock the conscious of his readers, however, had little to do with communists, as Hill found it unfathomable that the U.S. could allow the large farming interests to return the country to an earlier era of debt peonage and a labor system “like the Southern slave owners of a century ago.”<sup>35</sup>

Hill certainly was not alone in comparing the exploitation of Mexican farmworker to an earlier era of slavery. A critical congressional investigation likened a cargo ship used to deport migrants from Port Isabel, Texas to Veracruz, Mexico to “an eighteenth century slave ship” and a “penal hell ship.”<sup>36</sup> Organized labor also voiced its opposition to the Bracero Program and the large number of undocumented laborers in the country, arguing that Mexican migrants lowered wages for all workers and that their treatment was akin to modern day slavery. In the following example, from a machinist trade magazine, Alfred Green informed readers about the growing number of millionaires among the factory farms in California. It was “starvation wages” offered at these industrial farms, Green contended, that forced Mexican migrants northward to the Midwestern factories. In the article, Green quoted the President of the American Federation of Labor National Farm Labor Union, H. L. Mitchell, who argued that the large scale farmers were “engaged in the most vicious practices of labor exploitation or slavery known in American history.” Drawings accompanying the article make clear the stakes of modern day slavery for

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<sup>34</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Southwest wink at ‘Wetback’ Jobs,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1951, 1, 34

<sup>35</sup> Gladwin Hill, “‘Wetback’ Drive Irks ‘The Valley’,” *New York Times*, August 2, 1954, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 156.

American industrial laborers and farmers. In the first image [Figure 12], the capitalist lashes the Mexican laborer who pulls the men in a cart. Dollar bills fall from the capitalist's hands as the poor campesino allows this humiliation—we learn from the article—in return for as little as 20 to 25 cents an hour. In the second drawing from the same article, we see how Mexican migrants displace the honest, hard-working white American worker, who would never permit himself to be exploited like the Mexican slave, the Mexican strikebreaker [Figure 13].<sup>37</sup> Historian Mae Ngai contends that “The use of slavery and concentration-camp metaphors emphasized the unfree nature of contract labor aimed to evoke sympathy for the victimized braceros,” but importantly, while doing so, this discourse had “the effect of constructing braceros as a foreign element entirely outside the American labor force and society, obscuring the many points of contract and integration that braceros had with other ethnic Mexicans in the United States and the transnational character of agricultural workforce.”<sup>38</sup> The language and imagery of slavery not only cast migrants as an unmistakably foreign element—but taking place during the red scare—it suggested that migrants were a danger to U.S. society precisely because they were willing to submit to being unfree laborers. In Edward Murrow's *Harvest of a Nation* (1960), which is often attributed for shocking the public conscious and for being partially responsible for the demise of the Bracero Program, the question of slavery is front and center. From the beginning, Murrow explains how close migrant farm work resembled peonage and slavery, which he insisted had no place in modern American society. In the first scene the camera opens to poor black migrant farmers, men, women and children, Murrow's distinct voice situates the viewer, explaining: “This is not taking place in the Congo. It has nothing to do with Johannesburg or Cape Town. It

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<sup>37</sup> Alfred Green, “Ripple of ‘Wetbacks’ Becomes a Tide,” *Machinist Monthly Journal*, December 1951, 364-365.

<sup>38</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 161.

is not Nyasaland or Nigeria. This is Florida. These are citizens of the United States—1960.”  
The language of slavery is present throughout, with a farmer being quoted saying “We use to own our slaves, now we rent them.”<sup>39</sup>



Figure 12 Alfred Green, “Ripple of ‘Wetbacks’ Becomes a Tide,” *Machinist Monthly Journal*, December 1951, 364-365.

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<sup>39</sup> *CBS Reports: Harvest of a Nation* (1960).

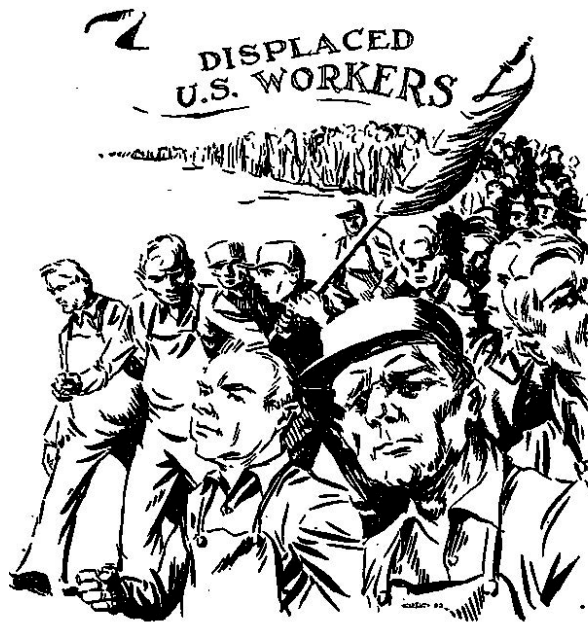


Figure 13. Alfred Green, “Ripple of ‘Wetbacks’ Becomes a Tide,” *Machinist Monthly Journal*, December 1951, 364-365.

It was, after all, the Mexican male “peasant” or “peon”—with their close proximity to indigeneity—that obsessively inhabited the imaginations of those writing and thinking about the U.S.-Mexico border during the Cold War.<sup>40</sup> While exploitation and peonage were troubling aspects that should be erased from American society, this was made profoundly more difficult because the migrant not only embodied exploitation, but also Cold War contagion—or, as

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<sup>40</sup> Historian Deborah Cohen vividly explains how a diverse group of migrants, from different social backgrounds, attempted to perform easily discernable characteristics of indigeneity that were expected by U.S. officials and growers. The migrant reception centers, Cohen argues, were in essence a “casting call” for indigeneity. Race and class expectations on the part of U.S. participants created “scenes in which men—bakers, mechanists, waiters, carpenters, construction workers, and agricultural wage laborers—were required to perform backwardness for U.S. officials and growers down to the last detail: no belt, cowboy hat, or shoes; only *huaraches* (sandals), the quintessential sign of indigeneity. No city slickers, with schooling beyond their life’s station, need apply. Men were reduced to their hands, calluses, and muscles. Those chosen performed this backwardness well, acting like the docile humble Indians that growers sought.”<sup>40</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens*, 100.

Gladwin Hill noted, the migrant “has baneful effects on the citizenry with which they mingle.”<sup>41</sup> The fusion of multiple border threats, including disease, communism, and the “wetback invasion” served to reinforce one another.<sup>42</sup> Thomas Sutherland—chief executive of the commission on Texas race relations in the 1950s—wrote in the *Saturday Evening Post* that he preferred to think of migrants as victims of modern culture which they were ill equipped to fully participate in. In contrast to the small group of educated middle-class Mexicans, most Mexicans in Texas tended to be “an earthy folk, rooted in an ancient culture more in harmony with the thirteenth century than with ours.” Where U.S. citizens would have seen “abject poverty,” the “patient and indestructible Indian” saw merely a “way of life.” Fortunately, Sutherland informed readers, the large scale raids and mass deportations were fixing the problem—soon the “dollar-a-day Mexican” and the “social evils of uncontrolled and immigration of cheap labor” were going to be a relic of the past, thanks largely to the diligent efforts of federal immigration officers.<sup>43</sup>

The stakes for allowing peonage within the borders were incredibly high. As Hill’s article entitled, “Peons in the West Lowering Culture,” explained in its byline, “Health, Education, Democracy—in Areas Where ‘Wetbacks’ Work Are Deplorable.”<sup>44</sup> Hill described

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<sup>41</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Southwest wink at ‘Wetback’ Jobs,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1951, 1, 34.

<sup>42</sup> As other scholars have noted, the press documented the imagined threat of a horde of disease ridden Mexicans sneaking into and infecting the nation with tuberculosis and other communicable diseases. “‘Wetback’ Control Sought to Curb Disease Spread,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1952, A20; Agnes E. Meyer, “Life on the Rio Grande 1946 Model,” *Washington Post*, April 22, 1946, 1; “Eisenhower Backs ‘Wetbacks’ Drive,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1953, 16; “Patrol Increased to Stop ‘Wetbacks,’” *New York Times*, September 5, 1953, 23. See, Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 21 and “Nationalism on the Line: Masculinity, Race, and the Creation of the U.S. Border Patrol, 1910-1940, in Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 299-324; Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 157-212.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Sutherland, “Texas Tackles Race Problem,” *Saturday Evening Post*, January 12, 1952.

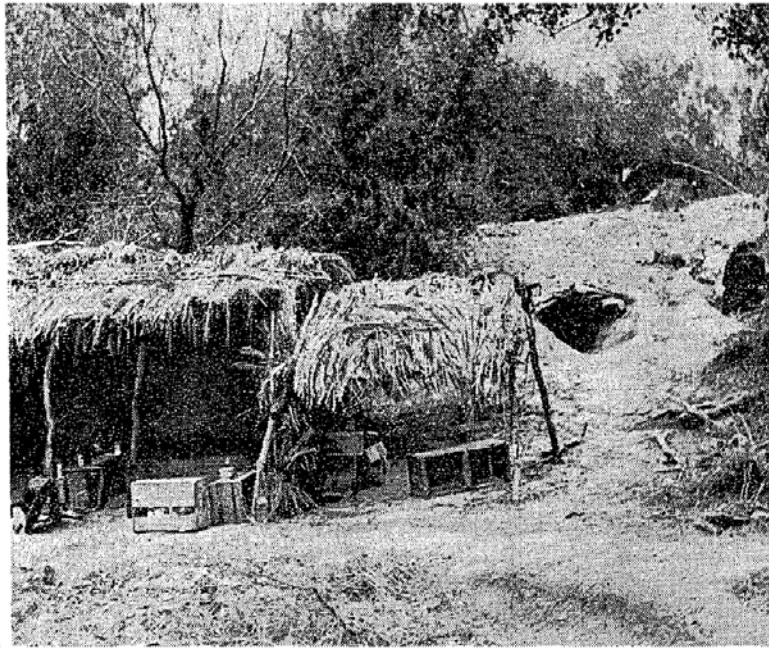
<sup>44</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Peons in the West Lowering Culture: Illegal Migrants from Mexico Form Vast Unassimilable Block of Population,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1951, 31.

the prototypical Mexican migrant as a “penniless fugitive,” whose “traditional housing is the crudest form of shack or hovel, where he can find it, or just the open air. His status denies him access to regular community legal and welfare agencies.” A photograph of the living conditions accompanied Hill’s account, again made the connection between peonage and indigeneity—referring to the “grass hut” that migrants lived in near McAllen, Texas [Figure 14]. Such images of migrant backwardness were incongruous with post-war life in the United States. Certainly the individuals residing in grass huts were incapable of adding to or benefitting from the modern systems of health, education, and democracy outlined in Hill’s work.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Writing in 1950, U.S. colonial and labor historian Richard B. Morris, cited Hill’s series on Mexican migration in an article exploring the legal origins of the term “peonage,” making clear the dire stakes of Hill’s reporting in Cold War America. For Morris, the question of slavery and peonage was one of grave importance—whether of black tenant farmers in the South or Mexican contract laborers. Allowing the persistence of these forms of labor put into jeopardy the very question of whether the U.S. was fit to maintain “leadership among the democracies.” Morris argued, “At no time in our history since the Civil War have the American people been as sensitive to the shadowland between freedom and slavery as they are at the present day. Recent prosecutions for violations of the Thirteenth Amendment, revelations of sporadic cases of peonage and foreign contract labor, and the exposés of the continued version of tenant farming into a form of debt bondage constitute, however minimal, that freedom demands unceasing vigilance. If by proper example we are to maintain our position of world leadership among the democracies and at the same time strive to contain successfully a competing ideology disseminated from an area supported forced labor must accept responsibility for preserving and enlarging the orbit of freedom at home. We ought to know how much freedom we have, how much freedom we want, and the processes, both legal and economic, by which freedom was achieved in this country.” Richard B. Morris, “The Course of Peonage in a Slave State,” *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 65, No. 2 (Jun., 1950), 238-263.

WHERE ILLEGAL MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS LIVED IN TEXAS



United States border patrol inspectors from McAllen found "wetbacks" living in this grass hut and caves in the bank of an irrigation canal.

Figure 14. "Peons Net Farmers a Fabulous Profit," *New York Times*, March 26, 1951, 25.  
Caption: "United States border patrol inspectors from McAllen found 'wetbacks' living in this grass hut and caves in the bank of an irrigation canal."

Taken together, Hill's rhetoric made clear that nothing less than the integrity and national security of the United States were at stake in the battle to gain control over the nation's southern border from the horde of modern day slave laborers. In August of 1953, Hill highlighted the high-volume and the overall ease in which Mexicans crossed the border. It was accompanied by a map titled "The 'Wetback' Invasion—As Administration Plans Action," which showed the growth of Mexican migration into the U.S. Southwest [Figure 15]. Arrows placed just across the U.S. side of the border pointed northwards, signifying where the border had been breached by an army of more than one million Mexican migrants. The map illustrated the migrant invasion in dramatic detail and would have resonated with readers who had seen many similar maps printed

during the Korean War. Indeed, the uncanny similarities between Hill’s illustration and those of the North Korean army’s invasion of South Korea two years earlier suggest how Cold War geographies were quite literally mapped onto the U.S.-Mexico border in response to a migrant “blitzkrieg” [Figure 16].<sup>46</sup>

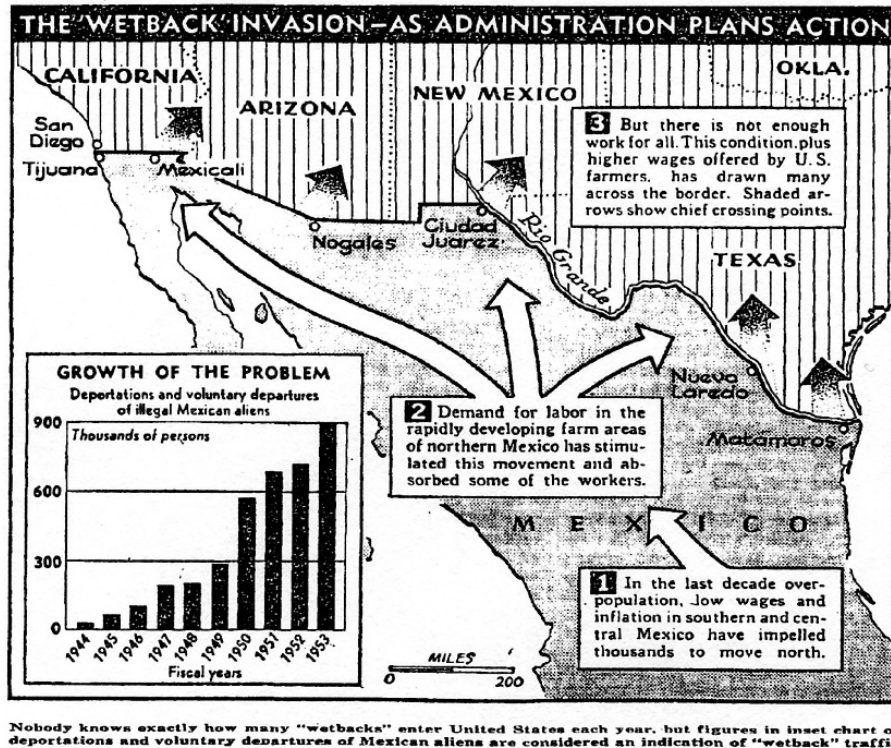


Figure 15. Gladwin Hill, “‘Wetback’ Problem is attacked Anew,” *The New York Times*, August 30, 1953, E7. Caption: Nobody knows exactly how many “wetbacks” enter United States each year, but figures in inset chart on deportations and voluntary departures of Mexican aliens are considered an indication of “wetback” traffic.

<sup>46</sup> Gladwin Hill, “‘Wetback’ Problem is attacked Anew,” *The New York Times*, August 30, 1953, E7; Hanson Baldwin, “Korea’s Battle Picture: Our Defense is Stiffer,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1950, E5.

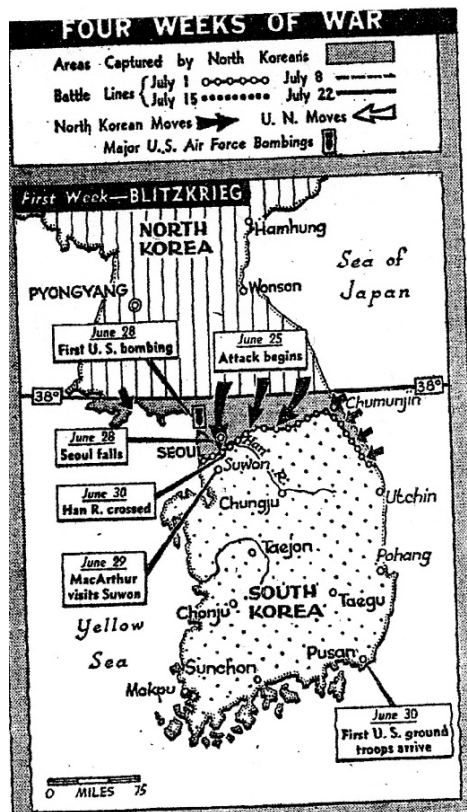


Figure 16. Hanson Baldwin, “Korea’s Battle Picture: Our Defense is Stiffer,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1950, E5.

### **The Border Patrol, National Security, and the “Wetback invasion”**

Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, the Research and Education Department of the INS was devoted to shaping the public image of the Border Patrol, highlighting the professionalism, dedication, and “all American” qualities of the force while shaping the debates about national security and border enforcement. The department provided photographs, case files, and other materials for stories appearing in national magazines, newspapers, documentaries, and films. *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Time Magazine*, and *Look Magazine* all published dramatic INS-approved photo essays highlighting the national security threat that illicit border crossings

represented. In return for this cooperation, however, the INS demanded the right to review materials prior to its publication and to have final say in what would be released.

The Research and Education Department played a critical role in producing the border as a Cold War threat. Readers from every corner of the U.S. learned that the immigration inspectors were modern-day cowboys, whose preparation demanded specialized skills, from the ability to track footprints to a rigorous physical fitness routine that many had mastered while serving in the United States Army.<sup>47</sup> Standing in sharp contrast to the foreign Mexican “peon,” was the tough and disciplined image of INS agents who fought to keep the nation secure from unwanted migrants and communist threats. Embracing the new security responsibilities of the late 1940s, Nick Collaer, Chief of the Border Patrol, explained in an interview published in *Mechanic Illustrated* the immediacy of the “unprecedented situation in American history that the INS had been entrusted with guarding.”<sup>48</sup> A black and white map of the continental United States with a bright red line around the nation’s border suggested that all borders and coasts were vulnerable to foreign infiltration [Figure 17]. Collaer cited the smuggling of “Mexicans...Chinese...Central Europeans and Hindus” as major problems facing the department. After citing “humorous” examples of migrants being caught attempting to illicitly cross into the United States, Collaer proclaimed that border security was no laughing matter, noting that “Aliens who try to crash our borders may be subversive, criminal or even diseased. But, in any event, all are breaking U. S. immigration laws and must be stopped.” Thus, Collaer rendered all border transgressions as

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<sup>47</sup> Historian Stanley Cork, for example, has argued that Westerns during the period were “offering narratives that resonate at some symbolic or allegorical level....At their best, they effectively conjoin history and myth to appeal powerfully to incipient nationalism in the U.S. audiences.” Stanley Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warrior: The Western and U.S. History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>48</sup> Nick Collaer, “10,000 Miles of Trouble,” *Mechanic Illustrated*, September, 1949.

potential matters of national security, concluding with personal assurances to the U.S. public that “your Border Patrol is meeting the challenge. Day and night you’ll find us keeping vigil over America’s 10,000 miles of trouble.”<sup>49</sup> Importantly, while Collaer described a variety of “illegal” immigrants the Border Patrol was charged with arresting, and he argued that the nation’s boundaries constituted “10,000 miles of trouble,” the numerous photographs accompanying the article only depicted groups of Mexican male laborers who were captured along the U.S.-Mexico border. Even when the agency sought to highlight the wide range of problems that the agency addressed, the U.S.-Mexico border took center stage as the place that represented the most pressing security concerns.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

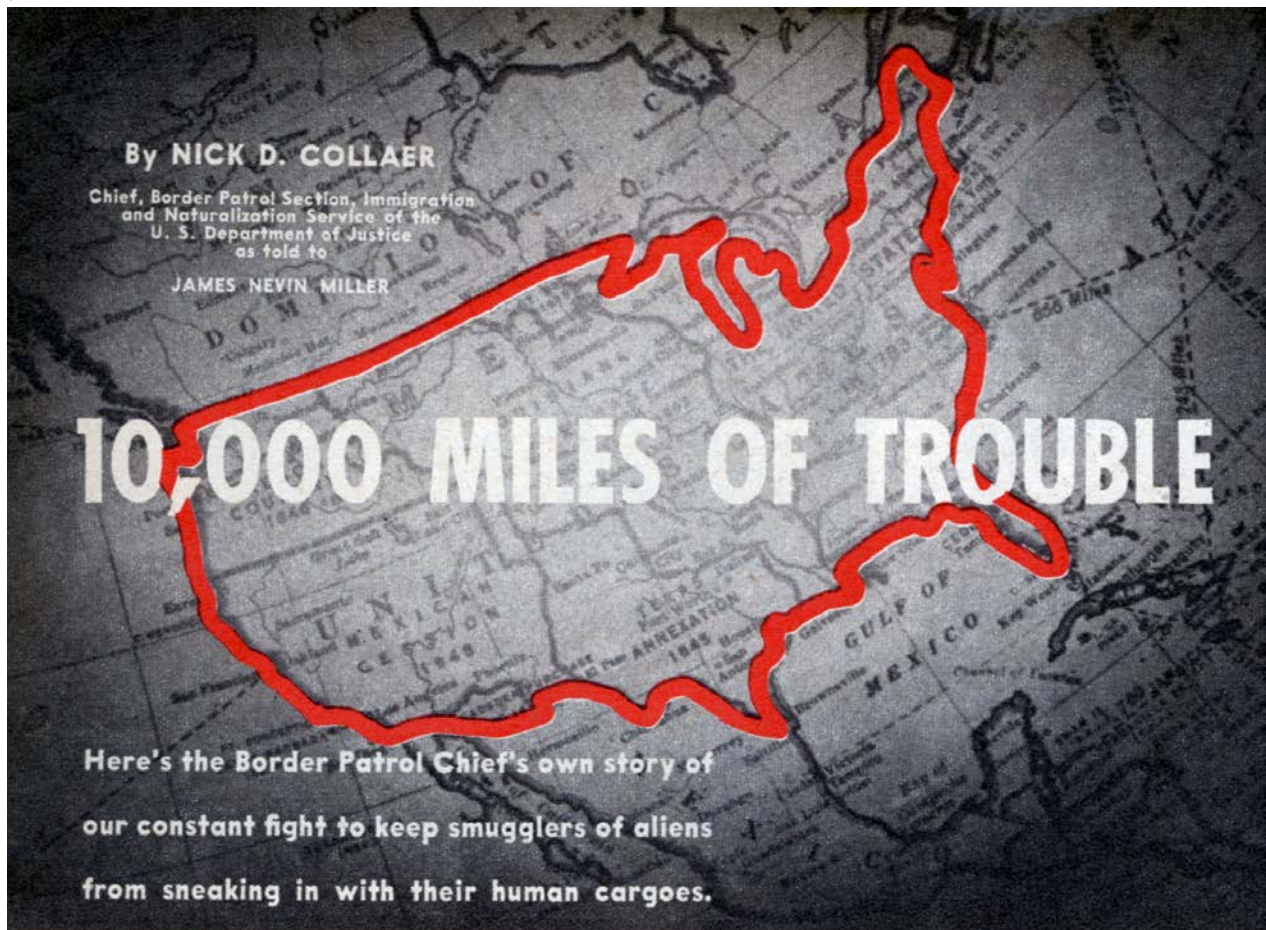


Figure 17. Nick Collaer, “10,000 Miles of Trouble,” *Mechanic Illustrated*, September, 1949.

The Research and Education Department honed its message on the heroic quality of the Border Patrol, tapping into long running narratives of frontier justice and the rough and tumble image of the Texas Rangers. This carefully crafted imagery proved to be enticing story material for Hollywood studios, which, with the aid of the INS, produced numerous films and television shows about the agency. One such collaboration between Hollywood and the INS resulted in the film *Illegal Entry* [1949]. Collaer was presented with an early draft of the film and he personally sent back script revisions, clearing up factual errors such as the names and locations of INS inspection stations to give viewers a more authentic experience. In these early drafts, Collaer was

particularly critical of representations of the agents. It was unacceptable, Collaer wrote, that agents be portrayed as either “cops or sloppy detectives.” Instead, they needed to be depicted as “the young, trim, educated young men that they are.”<sup>50</sup> Collaer insisted that the Border Patrol be presented as an unambiguously white, “all-American” police force that resembled a branch of the military. Scribbled in the margins of the script, Collaer noted his objections that the main inspectors’ name “sound[ed] foreign,” recommending that it be changed from “Buonomi” to the more “American sounding Westlake.” The revised character, he insisted, had to be a “more dignified, reserved, almost military person.”<sup>51</sup> In the early years of the Cold War, during an era of U.S. military engagement and preparedness throughout the globe, it is noteworthy that a leading officer of the domestic border security agency was compelled to make sure its members reminded viewers of military men. The Border Patrol did in fact view itself as a military-like agency, almost an extension of the army.<sup>52</sup>

In return for adhering to the script suggestions, the studio was permitted to use the official seal of the Department of Justice and allowed to market the films as real life docudramas based on previously secret INS case files.<sup>53</sup> Studios attempted to create buzz for the film by claiming the authenticity of stories and the close proximity in which filmmakers had worked with governmental agencies. The movie posters promoting *Illegal Entry* [1949] boasted that Attorney General Tom Clark made a personal appearance in the film. Additional INS officials

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<sup>50</sup> NARA 623927, “Man Hunt,” Box 114.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Former military men, like retired General Joseph Swing were put in charge of the INS in the 1950s, and former members of the armed forces were given first priority to become Border Patrol agents.

<sup>53</sup> Despite being from “secret files”, the story circulated in the press prior to its being the subject of the MGM film.

had small cameo roles in the film and attended the film's premier.<sup>54</sup> Similar publicity tactics were established in subsequent films produced with the aide of the INS, including the use of Border Patrol uniforms and weaponry for the opening of the MGM film *Border Incident* [1949]. Similar to *Illegal Entry*, the film praised the Bracero Program, claiming that it was fundamental to the U.S. agricultural economy and ensured public safety as it required inspections of all would-be Mexican laborers prior to their arrival to the United States. It was the unchecked, unknown subjects, who clandestinely snuck into the United States who posed immediate risks to the U.S. public. The film revolved around the exploitation and murders of undocumented agricultural laborers, who were susceptible to violence and exploitation due to their docile, pathetic, and dependent nature. A murderous transnational gang of Mexican and U.S. border thieves trafficked in the "illegal" Mexican migrant "slave markets."

The theatrical trailer marketed the film as a real life story of the dangers found along the U.S-Mexico border, claiming it to be "sensational," "amazing," and "unbelievable," but based completely on fact. Indeed, the viewer learns early on in the film that just like *Illegal Entry*, the plot of *Border Incident* was based on the "secret files of two governments," and as such, the film became more than just another fictional police drama—it was a contemporary informative piece of "a savage border in peril."<sup>55</sup>

The presence of Mexican migrants working in the agricultural fields is portrayed as being mutually beneficial for the workers and absolutely necessary to the U.S. economy. The opening scene of the film takes place in California's modern and efficient Imperial Valley as the

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<sup>54</sup> "Illegal Entry," *New York Times*, June 11, 1949; "Random notes on the Movie Scene," *New York Times*, June 12, 1949, X5.

<sup>55</sup> *Border Incident*, MGM Studios, 1949.

voiceover concisely explains to the audience that a contingent labor force is essential to agriculture industries, as each year “A vast army of farm workers...must be available when needed. And this army of workers comes from our neighbor to the south, from Mexico.” Most Mexicans, the audience is told, entered the United States legally, but there were some who chose not to follow the law. At this point, the opening scene abruptly changes from the daytime footage of the impressively modern looking and orderly Imperial Valley to a nightmarish desert landscape, consisting of a barbed wire fence in bleak desolate terrain. According to the script, three “obviously Mexican” men wearing “the big straw hats of field hands”—run towards the border fence, hoping to return safely back to Mexico. Moments after crossing into Mexican territory the migrants are brutally robbed and murdered by a small band of Mexican and American border thieves. The narrator explains that this is not an atypical occurrence. Undocumented migrants “are often victims of the robberies by bandits who infest both sides of the border.”<sup>56</sup>

The plot revolves around the collaborative efforts of the United States and Mexican police forces to regain control of the shared border from a transnational gang of modern day “border slave-traders.” The two main characters are Jack Bearnese of the United States’ INS and Pablo Rodriguez, investigator of the *Policia Judicial Federal* (described as the Mexican F.B.I.). These men go undercover to dismantle the transnational gang responsible for the exploitation and deaths of the migrant laborers. After infiltrating the organization, Bearnese was murdered, crushed by a large turbine driven by a gang member who discovers the agents’ true identity. Bearnese’ brutal death highlighted the risks police officials faced while attempting to protect the nation from such individuals law-breaking elements. Indeed, the film’s lobby card vividly

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

portrayed the grave danger and imminent violence faced by the Border Patrol [Figure 18]. Mexican men representing the illegal organization were highly racialized, grotesquely drawn thieves and thugs with sharp daggers and thick wooden clubs attacking white border patrol agents. A white woman grasping a revolver—who does not actually appear in the film—is displayed prominently in the upper left hand corner of the card showing that “The shame of two nations!” is powerfully corrupting the security, as well as the perceived morality of the United States.<sup>57</sup>



Figure 18. *Border Incident*, MGM Studios, 1949.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Importantly, the men commenting on the film from the Research and Education department were pleased that the entire Mexican nation was not portrayed as a problem, but only the more target figure of the Mexican “wetback.” After all, the United States and Mexico worked closely together on the transnational policing of Mexican migrants and despite occasional disagreements on the logistics of contracting bracero workers, the two countries were partners. The agency went to great lengths to ensure that the Mexican government was not too sharply disparaged for having so many of its citizens migrating into the United States. In his letter approving the final script, the Los Angeles District Director Carmichael commented that “‘Border Incident’ is an excellent story and if properly done should have a high entertainment value.” As important, “The script appropriately stresses cooperation between Mexican officials and the US INS.”<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps recognizing that the racialized image of Mexicans attacking the Border Patrol would not sit well with audiences outside of the United States, the lobby card was completely redesigned for its Latin American audiences [Figure 19]. While the card still depicts violence, gone were the racialized Mexican gang members beating down desperate Border Patrol agents. Additional changes included Mexican-born actor Ricardo Montalbán receiving top billing and the central scene displayed in the lobby card was an international meeting about border security between the U.S. immigration officers and the Mexican *Policia Judicial Federal*. The title of the film in Spanish, “Mercado humano” (Human Market) emphasized the illicit trafficking of migrants, evoking the image of a slave trade. The tagline on the lobby card reads “Una lucha desesperada y sin tregua en torno a la igominia del” (A desperate and relentless struggle over the

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<sup>58</sup> W.A. Carmichael, District Director, to Raymond Farrell, Acting Special Assistant to the Commissioner, n.d., NARA 623927, Box 109.

dishonor of the) “Mercado Humano” (Human Market). It was a savvy decision to market the film in Mexico in relationship to the question of modern day slavery, as it aligned with the language and descriptions adopted by the mainstream media in Mexico to describe its emigrant population. Indeed, as described more fully in Chapter 4, within Mexico there were repeated calls in the press to increase border policing in order to prevent the exploitation of the nation’s migrants.



Figure 19. *Mercado Humano* (Border Incident), MGM, 1949.

### Cold War Exceptionalism: The case of “Wetback Joe”

Occasionally, there were examples of migrants who did not fit into the dominant narrative that “illegal” Mexican migrants posed a threat to the national order. Such stories keyed in on particular qualities or circumstances of a migrant which made them different from the standard tropes of peonage and slavery, and thus put into question the state’s incarceration and deportation policies. Historian Gary Gerstle has written about the inherent tensions that exist between U.S. “civic tradition” and U.S. racial nationalism in the twentieth century. In the 1950s, the civic tradition, which was constructed in opposition to communism, placed great value on liberty, equality, and democracy, at the same time, it functioned in a political and cultural climate built on a nationalism informed by white supremacy that made people of color and even some European migrants’ second-class citizens.<sup>59</sup> The story of José Toscano, a sixteen year old boy who was arrested in Los Angeles in the early 1950s illuminates the tensions between American civic nationalism on the one hand and white racial supremacy on the other. Toscano’s story, as first presented in the *Los Angeles Times* and then broadcast to outlets across the country, illustrates the particular racialized logic of Cold War deportation regimes in which, as Kelly Lytle-Hernandez explains, the Border Patrol’s “narrow focus” was on “policing poor brown-skinned Mexicans.”<sup>60</sup> According to sympathetic portrayals in the *Los Angeles Times*, at the young age of thirteen, Toscano had determined to leave his small town in Mexico and travel to the United States by himself, following the death of his father. Through his ingenuity and

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<sup>59</sup> Citing the attention paid to Anglo-Americans, as opposed to the largely Jewish radicals of the 1920s, Gerstle argues that “from the first Red Scare through the late 1930s, the threat of communism had been conflated with the threat of unwanted immigrant or radical groups. This conflation began to break apart in the Cold War, and the ‘radical other’ began to lose the ethnic or racial connotations to which it had long been tied.” While Gerstle’s suggestion that Anglos were targeted is undoubtedly correct, he fails to address the massive increase in deportations for Mexicans in the 1950s, which I contend can only be understood when it is placed within the context of the second red scare. Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 245. See especially, Chapter 6, “The Cold War, Anticommunism, and a Nation in Flux,” 238-267.

<sup>60</sup> Kelly Lytle-Hernandez, *Migra!*, 201.

determination, Toscano found a job washing dishes at a local restaurant, began to learn English, and excelled at a local Catholic middle school. However, only one month prior to his eighth grade graduation someone anonymously reported him to the INS for working unlawfully in the United States. While just one example of the thousands of monthly planned deportations taking place at the time in the Los Angeles area, Toscano's misfortune quickly was transformed into a compelling human interest story. Toscano first came to the public's attention when a picture of him receiving his middle-school diploma from two nuns while awaiting deportation orders in a juvenile detention center was printed in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>61</sup>

The press was incredulous. José Toscano, who was quickly dubbed “Little Joe” or “Wetback Joe,” was an acceptable “foreigner” and he embodied none of the traits of Mexican “wetback” who represented national security threats. The decision to deport Toscano was challenged by the *Los Angeles Times*' editorial page, which evoked the founding fathers in their strong support of “Wetback Joe.” Editorials insisted that if he were alive, Benjamin Franklin would have fought to support the right to keep Toscano in the country. While they understood that Toscano had technically broken the letter of the law, his case was fundamentally different from the vast majority of Mexican migrants residing without permission in California. Toscano did not belong in the category of most undocumented workers, who were characterized in the press almost exclusively as darker skinned, middle-aged male migrants, with little or no formal education—whose only productivity in the U.S. was limited to stoop labor in the agricultural fields. Unlike these men, Toscano was not a slave-like “peon,” he had never been “a burden on

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<sup>61</sup> “Wetback, 16, Gets School Diploma in Jail,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1953, A3; “Deported Mexican Boy Back as Legal Resident,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1953, A20; “Wetback Joe Says Thanks to All Who Helped Him Return to U.S.A.,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1953, 5.

the taxpayers,” and as the young man informed reporters, he had always had a higher calling or higher purpose. Revealing a deep understanding of the Mexican “peon” trope, Toscano explained that “I had this dream to come to the United States for education. Not for the dollars, not to work in the camps for 65 cents an hour—but to study, to learn.”<sup>62</sup>

Certainly this was not the typical story of undocumented migration appearing in the *Los Angeles Times* in the early 1950s. The paper had focused its attention to documenting the rapid growth of “illegal” migrants, and the inability of the Border Patrol to successfully prevent these crossings. Approval of the INS’ raids and large scale deportations were tempered in the paper by the sense that the underlying threat of Mexican migrants was never completely removed.<sup>63</sup> Many articles explicitly noted the difficult, if not impossible task that the border patrol agents were assigned. Even after undocumented migrants were captured and deported, it was reported that nothing prevented them from easily crossing once again.<sup>64</sup> In fact, some claimed that migrants were able to make it across the border more quickly than the planes that deported them.<sup>65</sup> In sharp contrast, the paper lamented the difficulties Toscano would have in returning from Mexico,

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<sup>62</sup> “Wetback, 16, Gets School Diploma in Jail,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1953, A3; “Ben Franklin Would Have Backed Him,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1953, B4.

<sup>63</sup> “Raid Bring Arrests of 400 Aliens,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1949, 11; “Wetbacks’ Rounded up,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1951, A6; “Air Flight of Workers Continues: Additional 180 Men Taken Into Mexico from Imperial Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1951, B7; “120 Wetbacks Nabbed,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1951, 2; “Airlift Hurries Wetbacks Deep into Mexico,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1952, 10; “Wetback Rounded Up,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1952, 14; “97 Wetbacks Put on Bus for Mexico,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1952, 28; “‘Wetback’ Raid at Oxnard Nets 51 Nationals,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1953, A6; “Porterville Raids Net 100 Wetbacks,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1953, 11

<sup>64</sup> “Wetbacks Seized for Third Time,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1953, 6

<sup>65</sup> “Wetbacks Get Back Faster Than Plane Hauls Them Off,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1951, 9.

arguing that his case must be “tempered by higher considerations” than immigration law.<sup>66</sup> Toscano was “a Mexican boy of intelligence and promise,” and astonishingly, the U.S-Mexico border that he crossed was described as nothing more than “an arbitrary geographical line.”<sup>67</sup> In comparison to the unassimilable “wetbacks”—the dark-skinned peons and slaves who had no place in modern America—these articles focused on how well Toscano had found a place in U.S. culture, noting how he had won the admiration of immigration officers through his poise and good demeanor. Officers had even reportedly offered him legal advice, telling the newspaper they “made no secret that they were on Joe’s team.”<sup>68</sup> Toscano’s story resonated strongly with some Los Angeles residents. Marnie Norlan, a widow who had learned of Toscano’s impending deportation through the stories in the newspapers eventually was successful in securing the necessary paperwork to allow him to return to the United States. Los Angeles’ adopted son would occasionally reappear in newspapers even years later, with stories published when he earned his high school diploma, when he married, and six years after his story first appeared, when he finally received U.S. citizenship.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Toscano was not the lone case of Mexican Cold War exceptionalism. Additional stories focused on characteristics that made these migrants unique from the typical Mexican “peon”, and thus perhaps worthy of consideration for U.S. citizenship, or at a minimum, would render their deportation questionable. The age of migrants was one of most persistent characteristics that were exploited by newspaper reports. One such case was that of the twelve year old Felix Chavez, celebrated in the *Los Angeles Times* as “world’s youngest wetback”. See, “Mexican Boy’s Long Trek to L.A. in Vain,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1951, 5; “Juvenile Wetbacks Seized by Detectives,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1953, A; “Seized Child Wetback Pleads to Keep His Dog,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1953, 21.

<sup>67</sup> “Wetback Student May Return to U.S. Legally,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2,, 1953, A1.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “Elopement of Former Boy Wetback Hinted,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1954 29; “Happy Climax to Story: Wetback Who Made Good Takes a Bride,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1954, 4; “Youth, Former Wetback, Keeps Promise to remain Out of Jail,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1956, A1; “Dancer, Once Victim of Nazis, Becomes Citizen: Mexican Wetback Who Dreamed of Being American Also Among Class of 169,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1959, B1.

The press attention given to Toscano's story helps clarify the underlying logic behind what precisely constituted the "wetback invasion." The overriding belief was that middle-aged men comprised nearly all of the undocumented Mexican migrants in the United States. However, immigration law pushed women, children, and families to cross the border without permission as the Bracero Program only provided the legal possibility for some men to migrate legally.<sup>70</sup> Despite the fact that women and children composed of large numbers of those captured by the Border Patrol, they were not often mentioned by the press. It was only within this context that Toscano's capture could be considered an anomaly.

Central to the articles praising Toscano were how quickly he learned to speak English, adopted American dress, and grasped a thorough understanding of the civic ideals of the United States. The various photographs that appeared of Toscano presented him in a manner that was quite different from other migrant workers who had been detained by INS officials. Rather than appearing in photos after crossing desolate areas, or surrounded by border patrol agents, Toscano was well prepared for photographs, wearing either a suit or his work uniform.<sup>71</sup> The first article written about him was accompanied by a picture of Toscano in juvenile detention with Sister Agnes and Sister Therese [Figure 20]. Rather than constituting a figure capable of violating the law, Toscano was an anomaly, a victim of an unjust circumstance. He represented the model migrant, someone for whom the nation could be proud, not simply another field hand that had no

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<sup>70</sup> Deborah Cohen, "Caught in the middle: The Mexican State's Relationship with U.S. and its own Citizen-workers, 1942-1958," *International Labor and Working Class History* 69 (March 2006), 81-103; Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!*, 130-137; Ana Elizabeth Rosas, "Women and the Bracero Program," Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia and Sanchez-Korrol, eds., *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, (Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>71</sup>"Deported Mexican Boy Back as Legal Resident," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1953, A20.

legitimate claims or real understandings about U.S. ideals of democracy, independence, and equality that made-up these Cold War national narratives.



**GRADUATION IN JAIL**—Joe Toscano, 16, center, in Georgia Street Juvenile Jail for illegal entry to United States, receives diploma from St. Turibius School, presented by Sister Therese, left, and Sister Agnes. He faces deportation.

*Times Photo*

Figure 20. “Wetback, 16, Gets School diploma in Jail,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1953, A3. Caption: Graduation in Jail—Joe Toscano 16, center, in Georgia Street Juvenile Jail for illegal entry to United States receives diplomas from St. Turibius School, presented by Sister Therese, left, and Sister Agnes. He faces deportation.

A large part of Toscano’s charm was in how he spoke of the United States as a land of opportunity, despite being placed in a juvenile detention center for being in the country without permission. In a thank you letter that he sent to the *Los Angeles Times*, and which was later printed in the paper, Toscano spoke glowingly of the newspaper and the United States. He wondered:

How such a great and powerful newspaper selected the case of a poor wetback to publish a story about in its important Sunday editorial page is beyond my understanding, except that only in America could such a thing happen to one like me. I do understand and know that the fact that you did carried much weight with my own government in permitting me to leave the country and come to America, and did much to get my passport through quickly so that I would not miss school in September.<sup>72</sup>

Toscano's narrative spoke to those qualities that his readers most admired about their own nation. The ability to change his immigration status with the help of the *Los Angeles Times* spoke not to the harsh and unforgiving immigration system in which hundreds of thousands of Mexicans were interrogated and deported every year, but on the contrary, Toscano's story revealed even in the midst of a "wetback invasion," at its core, the United States was still a proud nation of immigrants.

## **Conclusions**

When Kurt Lemke and Karl Ulrich travelled from Germany to the U.S. Southwest, they did not fully understand how completely most Mexican migrants were cast as Cold War subjects, whose status as "illegal" workers were crafted within the heightened security panic set off by the second red scare. From the Pulitzer Prize winning articles about a "wetback invasion" to Disney films, and Border Patrol approved scripts for "B" films, the U.S. public learned about the myriad of dangers presented by the Mexican "wetback." Mexican agricultural laborers were produced as undesirable foreigners whose decision to cross the U.S.-Mexico border without authorization

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<sup>72</sup> "Wetback Joe Says Thanks to All Who Helped Him Return to U.S.A.," *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1953, 5.

was responsible for bringing slavery and peonage back to the United States in period which these not only contradicted long standing American ideals, but made the sharp distinctions between the U.S. and Soviet Union more difficult. With sharper attention given to the Cold War, the politics behind “Operation Wetback” and the mass deportation campaigns of the 1950s becomes more understandable. Efforts to rid the nation of Mexican migrants corresponded within a decade’s long backdrop of a “wetback invasion” that both showed the vulnerability of the U.S. border to spies and saboteurs and the return to slavery and peonage, labor practices that were unacceptable in Cold War America.

## Chapter 3

### Drawn into the Cold War: Anti-imperialism and Border Anxieties in Mexico

**U.S. Border Agent:** [In heavily accented Spanish] ¿Tiene usted intenciones de derrocar al gobierno de los Estados Unidos?

[Do you intend to overthrow the United States government?]

**Cantinflas:** Hay, mire. ¡Hay no sea payaso hombre! ¡Pues solamente que yo tuviera armas, y esas las acaparan ustedes!

[Oh, come on. Don't be a fool! It's not like I own any weapons. The United States hoards them all!]

**U.S. Border Agent:** No me refiere a los medios, sino a las intenciones.

[I am not referring to whether or not you have the means (to overthrow the government), but whether you intend to do so.]

**Cantinflas:** Pues ¿qué de plano me ve usted muy mal intencionado ¿o qué?

[Well, do I look like I have bad intentions?]

**U.S. Border Agent:** Nunca sabe uno. Además, éste es el cuestionario de rutina.

[One never knows. Plus, this is the routine questionnaire.]

**Cantinflas:** Bueno pues ahí apúntenle que pueden dormir tranquilos en Washington. Por el momento no tengo así, pensado derrocarlos. Eh. Que no me hagan enojar, ¡eso sí! Porque un día amanece el capitolio de Washington tapizado de zarapes de Saltillo. ¡Hmm! ¡Derrocar al gobierno! Lo derroco y, ¿luego quién nos presta la lana?

[Well, you can write and tell them they can rest easy in Washington. At the moment, I have no plans to overthrow the United States. But tell them not to annoy me. Yes, tell them that! Because if they do, then Washington will wake up with a serape from Saltillo hanging in the city. Hmm! Overthrow the government? Why, then who would lend us money?]

In the above scene from the film *Por mis pistolas* (1968), Mexico's most famous comedian, Mario Moreno—better known as Cantinflas—confronts in his typical roundabout fashion anxieties in Mexico over U.S. border enforcement, economic power, and military influence. As Moreno attempts to cross the border to collect an inheritance from a deceased relative in Tucson, he encounters a buffoonish American border agent, who is no match for Moreno's double-entendres, word play, and apparent nonsense and non sequiturs. While answering the barrage of questions from the official, the shabbily dressed star asks whether the guard thinks every Mexican is a bracero and jokes about being a first class tourist as he struggles to keep his donkey from wandering onto U.S. territory. The absurdity of the scene reaches its apex when the officer demands to know whether or not the comedian intends to overthrow the U.S. government. Pausing briefly, gazing incredulously at the agent, Cantinflas dismissively responds: "Oh, come on. Don't be a fool! It's not like I own any weapons. The United States hoards them all!" The bemused border agent, limited by language, imagination, and bureaucratic directives from Washington D.C. is incapable of seeing what Moreno does—the absurdity of the logic that turned the comedian—and in fact all Mexicans crossing the border—into a Cold War national security threat. Cantinflas relishes in shining light on the illogical nature of this exchange, permitting the audience to take pleasure in the fact that the border guards of the most powerful nation on earth feared him.

This border crossing encounter was meant to satirize Mexico's asymmetrical relationship with the United States. In doing so, Cantinflas was adding his voice to political sentiment that was shared by many in the country who had for the previous two decades warned that Mexico was being irreparably harmed by the expansion of U.S. power during the Cold War. For these critics, the U.S.-Mexico border was a rhetorical and symbolic point of emphasis, deployed to

show a nation under attack from a diverse collection of U.S. political, cultural, and economic forces. While the strengthening relationship between the U.S. and Mexico in the 1950s helped usher in an era of unprecedented economic growth for some in the country, it occurred at a great cost. The Mexican state sought to limit dissent, breaking independent labor unions, detaining radical activists, and adopting anticommunist politics meant to ensure foreign companies that the nation was a safe place to invest.<sup>73</sup> Aided by the U.S. Embassy and FBI, the newly formed *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS) kept close watch over labor organizers suspected of being communists.<sup>74</sup> DFS agents were initially trained by the FBI and eventually adopted many of the same techniques as U.S. intelligence agencies, including wiretapping and relying heavily on input from paid informants.<sup>75</sup>

This chapter examines popular perceptions of the imperial relationship between the U.S. and Mexico during the first years of the Cold War as Alemán's administration sought to create a closer ties to the United States and construct a more welcoming economic climate for American capital. By highlighting the dissent emerging from Mexican artists, journalist, and intellectuals, this chapter explores a diverse group of individuals who viewed Mexican sovereignty as one of the first victims to the United States' expanding Cold War. This chapter examines a series of

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<sup>73</sup> Historian Kevin Middlebrook has argued that anticommunism in Mexico provided President Alemán the ideological justification necessary to carry out the assault on the independent trade union movement in Mexico. Kevin Middlebrook, *The Paradox of a Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 140. Recent scholarship has uncovered that the red-baiting policies detrimental to miners, railroad workers, and petroleum unions, were also mobilized to break the incipient efforts to create a transnational bracero union. Mireya Loza, "Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de Mexico en Los Estados Unidos, 1943-1964," in Paul Lopez, ed., *Que Fronteras?: Mexican Braceros and a Re-examination of the Legacy of Migration* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishers, 2010), 215-236.

<sup>74</sup> Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 198-200.

<sup>75</sup> Patrick Iber, "Managing Mexico's Cold War: Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the Uses of Political Intelligence" *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* Vol. 19, No. 1, (2013), 11-19.

events that provoked the strongest condemnation of U.S.-Mexico relations during Alemán's *sexenio*, including: President Truman's goodwill tour of Mexico City, the Mexican state's use of anticommunism to protect American mining interests in northern Mexico, rumors about the forced participation of Mexican migrants in the Korean War, and the spread of the Red Scare into Mexico City. By focusing on critics of the U.S. Cold War, I show a broad and highly visible critique centering on the popular perception in Mexico that the nation had lost control of its ability to keep the United States outside of its political borders.

### **Truman and the Legacies of Conquest**

In March, 1947, President Harry Truman visited Mexico City as part of a good will tour marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States' occupation of the capital during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). During this memorable meeting, Truman assured President Alemán that the United States remained committed to the Act of Chapultepec, a *resolution approved by the Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace* at the conclusion of World War II. The treaty stressed mutual assistance and hemispheric defense as cornerstones to U.S.-Latin American relations, promoting cooperation rather than unilateral military actions. Even still, non-intervention was not inviolable, Truman lectured during a banquet held in his honor, explaining that "Non-intervention does not and cannot mean indifference to what goes on beyond our borders." Because the post-war world was intricately connected, Truman explained that each nation in the hemisphere had a stake in ensuring that the rule of law was applied throughout all of Latin America. No nation could be allowed to put hemispheric security in jeopardy by permitting communism to flourish within its borders, lest

“the lawlessness of one nation... threaten the very existence of the law upon which all nations depend.”<sup>76</sup> On the final day of his visit, Truman stopped at the Chapultepec Castle where a few months earlier, representatives from Latin America had agreed to the treaty bearing its name. Rather than expand on his earlier remarks on the limits to the non-intervention treaty, Truman spoke to the bright future of U.S.-Mexico relations. At the end of his remarks Truman laid a wreath at the tomb of *Los Niños Héroes*—a monument commemorating the six cadets mythologized in Mexican history for wrapping themselves in the Mexican flag prior to killing themselves, rather than accept surrender to the U.S. occupying troops during the Mexican-American War.

While U.S. newspapers praised Truman’s gesture as symbolizing a new era of cooperation in Latin America, the Mexican press was far less charitable.<sup>77</sup> To many Mexican critics, Truman’s non-intervention message rang hollow as the president’s emphasis on non-intervention in Latin America—except to prevent the spread of communism—sounded like a thinly veiled threat, a signal to Latin American governments to engage in post-war politics that could not be mistaken as remotely communistic.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, it was widely known in Mexico

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<sup>76</sup> “Nonintervention,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1947, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Reciprocating this gesture, President Alemán laid a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier during his visit to Washington D.C. a few months later. The wreath laying was even the subject of a comic book “Mexico’s Man of Action,” *True Comics*, (December 1947). A few years later the two nations exchanged flags that had been captured during the war in elaborate ceremonies depicted in *Hoy*: “Banderas,” *Hoy* September 23, 1950, 9, 14.

<sup>78</sup> At the time, many in the United States viewed this as a grand symbol that signaled a lasting change in the relationship. The *Washington Post*’s editorial page noted that “Truman’s informal gesture did more to cement genuine understanding with Mexico than a thousand cold orations on the good neighbor policy.” “Truman’s Gesture,” *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1947. While the *New York Times* reported on its front page that “People shouted [Truman’s] name, with the inevitable “viva,” wherever United States citizens appeared on the streets or in cafes.” Felix Belair, “Mexico is Touched as Truman Honors Her Heroes of 1847,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1947, pg. 1. Since that time, some have presented the wreath laying ceremony as an important example of goodwill and trust shared by the U.S. government and Mexican public. David McCullough writes “with one simple, unheralded gesture, [Truman] did more to improve Mexican-American relations than had any President in century. Within hours, as the word spread, he had become a hero.” David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 542. Truman’s presidential goodwill gesture elicited numerous literary responses in the United States and

that the U.S. Embassy referred to nearly all critiques of the United States as dangerous examples of “Yankeephobia” and clear evidence of the firm grasp that communism held in parts of the country. Although the Mexican Communist Party was numerically small, Embassy officials chose to see communism as a looming international security threat.<sup>79</sup> “The traditional background of anti-Americanism in Mexico,” Embassy officials argued, made the “task of Communists relatively easy and far more effective than their numbers would indicate to be possible.”<sup>80</sup> While Mexican critics cited the history of American imperialism in the country as a legitimate reason for being skeptical of the expanding U.S. Cold War, American officials viewed the long history of opposition to U.S. imperialism as evidence that communists would take advantage of a culture of “Anti-Americanism” permeating throughout the nation. One writer who captured the U.S. Embassy’s attention was the young Mexican intellectual José Iturriaga, whose “satirical and clever” work was deemed a dangerous example of the sentiment in leftist newspapers, pamphlets, and organizational meetings. An article Iturriaga published in May of 1951 in *El Popular* levied a series of complaints directed at the United States by humorously masking them as criticisms of the Soviet Union. This piece cited a long history of imperialism in Mexico by the Soviets as reason why it was impossible for a “Mexican patriot” to support the

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Mexico—both celebratory and critical. See, Belinda Linn Rincón, “Heroic Boys and Good Neighbors: Cold War Discourse and the Symbolism of Chapultepec in María Cristina Mena’s *Boy Heroes of Chapultepec* (1953)” in Clara Lomas and Gabriela Baeza Ventura, eds., *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2011), 17-36.

<sup>79</sup> Seth Fein’s work has revealed how important the image of the United States in Mexico was to U.S. governmental agencies during the Cold War. His work documents the limited success of the USIA’s Project Pedro, a front corporation designed with the objective of securing favorable news coverage in films and newsreels for Mexican public consumption. Seth Fein, “From Collaboration to Containment: Hollywood and the International Political Economy of Mexican Cinema after the Second World War,” in *Mexico’s Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*, ed. Joanne Hersfield and David Maciel (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Seth Fein, “New Empire into Old: Making Mexican Newsreels the Cold War Way,” *Diplomatic History* 28:5 (November 2004): 203-48.

<sup>80</sup> Philip Raine, Cultural Attache, Mexico Embassy to State Department, May 4, 1951, File 611,12/5-451.

Soviet war in Korea, urging its readers to recall that it was after all “Esteban Austinev,” “Samuel Houstonoff” and the Russian Czar “James Polkove” who were responsible for the military conquest of Texas.

Like much of the criticism leveled against the U.S., Iturriaga viewed U.S. economic, military, and cultural imperialism as a direct threat to Mexican sovereignty. Highlighting the belief that U.S. imperial actions were causing harm in Mexico, Iturriaga argued that the U.S. displays of power in the post-war period were eerily reminiscent to an earlier period of U.S. domination. Further, he claimed that American capital—or what he shrewdly referred to as “ruble imperialism”—was responsible for ruling over Mexico, especially in the northern part of the country near the U.S.-Mexico border where American corporations held Mexican mineral deposits. These companies, notably the “Russian Smelting Company”—a reference to the American Smelting and Refining Company (ARASCO)—“shorten the miners’ lives through hunger salaries.” A long series of complaints followed that noted the impact of “Soviet” imperialism in his country:

Soviet Russia, possessed of a laughable stupidity, wants us Mexicans to forget the disputes and offenses of more than a century just because in January, 1957 [1947] Stalin [sic], the ineffable Stalin, came to Chapultepec Park and theatrically placed a wreath on the monument to the young Chapultepec Heroes. In exchange for this Stalin wants us Mexicans to go and fight a war which is obviously not ours, and wants us to die defending a culture which sprang from I know not what cardinal point of the planet.

And, even if we were too forgetful and were sufficiently “Coca Cola-ized”—pardon, “vodka-ized”—we could not ignore the daily information that reaches us from the Moscow Tass agency – the biggest news monopoly in the world which indicates to the average man of every country the manner in which he must think every day regarding the humiliations suffered by our wandering farmers, who, because they want to earn a few rubles on the other side of the Volga, are discriminated against and ill-treated because they are guilty of not being Slavs.

Finally, in order for me to become russofile [sic] it would be necessary that the economic imperialism, exercised by the Soviets over our country, disappear, in order that Mexico may attain its most authentic economic and political sovereignty.<sup>81</sup>

In this passage, Iturriaga captured the dilemma of Mexico's geographic proximity to the world's leading superpower during the initial tumultuous years of the Cold War. On the one hand, Mexico was unable to prevent economic integration efforts, as U.S. businesses crossed Mexico's northern border with few restrictions placed on them by the Mexican state. American cultural imperialism prevailed as the country became "Coca-Cola-Ized" and the United Press inundated Mexico with U.S. propaganda that informed the "average man of every country" what to think. On the other hand, Mexican farmers who migrated in response to the economic crises created by the United States, faced racial discrimination and violence if they crossed the Volga—the Rio Grande in search of work. Within this backdrop, it was with "laughable stupidity" that the United States sought Mexican support to engage in a Cold War battle over Korea's borders.<sup>82</sup>

As a result of Iturriaga's criticisms, the U.S. Embassy subjected him to greater surveillance. It did not matter to U.S. officials that many Mexican intellectuals in contact with the Embassy insisted that Iturriaga was not a communist. By travelling to Havana to attend the Inter-American Conference for Democracy and Freedom, a leftist gathering, and then publishing harsh criticisms of the United States, the Embassy reasoned that "if [Iturriaga] is not actually a

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Jose Iturriaga went on to have a long political career, including a stint as the Mexican Ambassador to the Soviet Union. He also served as a key advisor to presidents Adolfo López Mateos y Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

member of the Communist party” he might as well have been one as “all his work and thoughts support the Communist position.”<sup>83</sup>

Much to the concern of the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. State Department, Iturriaga’s sentiments were hardly a lone voice in Mexican political circles, as broad support of the United States during World War II turned to heated condemnation of America’s global Cold War. Like Truman, the Mexican-left also commemorated the 100 year anniversary of the U.S. occupation of Mexico City, though predictably, they did not share the American president’s belief that the centennial should be used to symbolize goodwill and friendship between the two nations. Instead, they used the anniversary to link the ongoing inequality and disparities of wealth in Mexico to histories of U.S. military incursions onto Mexican territory. In 1947, Arturo Garcia Bustos, a young member of the TGP, was recognized for his painting condemning U.S. empire at an art exhibition held by the *Universidad Nacional de México*. Artwork supportive of U.S. policies, such as Pablo O’Higgins’ World War II era painting “Buenos vecinos” [Figure 9], no longer matched the political objectives of the art collective. Bustos’ painting depicted the United States’ invasion of Mexican territory through outstretched arms reaching across Mexico’s northern border. Illustrating resistance to the attack, a Mexican peasant uses a machete to cut off

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<sup>83</sup> The State Department’s contempt for the series of international peace conferences was matched by the House Un-American Activities Committee. In April, 1951, it issued its “Report on the Communist ‘Peace Offensive’: A Campaign to Disarm and Defeat the United States.” Though Iturriaga was not named in the report, the American Continental Congress for Peace, held in Mexico City in 1949, was described in detail. HUAC condemned it as a group of Anti-American forces in the Western Hemisphere “staged right on our own doorstep as a direct challenge to the United States.” Attendees to the Mexico City conference included TGP members Leopoldo Mendez and Pablo O’Higgins. Other supporters of the conference as indicated by the report included W.E.B. Dubois and Paul Robeson. See, *Report on the Communist ‘Peace’ Offensive - A Campaign to Disarm and Defeat the United States*, Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, House report No. 378, April 1, 1951.

the hands labeled “imperialismo” before they are able to grasp the entirety of the Mexican nation. The penalty for this outright theft is as swift as it is righteous [Figure 21].



Figure 21. Arturo García Bustos, “Cartel contra el Imperialismo,” *El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva*, 87.

Much of the power of this image is in how Bustos successfully blurs the line between an imperial past and present. Resistance to U.S. imperialism is portrayed through the machete of a campesino, an image meant to evoke the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century struggle against the U.S. invasion. Standing in front of the campesino are men dressed as modern factory workers—expected to take the mantle of the vanguard—they are dressed in overalls and caps, and carry banners in support of the effort to cut off the hands of the American empire. The overlapping of past and present is

a call for preparedness, as the Mexican people may be required to cut off America' imperial reach once again.

### **Nueva Rosita and the “Caravan of Hunger”**

Anticommunism was an important tool in the political and economic development strategies of the Mexican state in the 1950s. Seeking a better investment climate for foreign companies, President Alemán pushed through a series of tax concessions, removed protective tariffs, and replaced suspected communist labor leaders from national unions with men who were sympathetic to the industrial development agenda. Perhaps the most dramatic fight over the conservative shift in the political and economic climate in Mexico was waged in the mining towns of the northern border states of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon. In 1950, head of the Mine and Metallurgical Workers Union local 14 union, Antonio Garcia Moreno, was fraudulently removed from his seat, prompting five thousand miners to declare a strike against the American Smelting and Refining Company (ARASCO), a U.S. owned company that accounted for nearly 65 percent of all mining operations in Mexico.<sup>84</sup> After a series of setbacks for the independent union, including a federal ruling declaring the strike illegal, Alemán sent in national troops to restore order in the company towns of Nueva Rosita, Cloete, and Palau. The anti-democratic legacy of the Alemán government was secured as it imposed martial law and waged its own anticommunist battle against Mexican miners. As historian Michael Snodgrass describes, “Soldiers blockaded highways, expelled journalists, and patrolled city streets to enforce a prohibition against the right

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<sup>84</sup> Norman Caulfield, *Mexican Workers and the State* (Fort Worth: Texas University Press, 1998), 78.

to assemble.”<sup>85</sup> The miners and their families found themselves increasingly isolated and with few options for winning the concessions they sought. In hopes of gaining an audience with the president, many of the towns’ residents began an eight-hundred mile march to Mexico City. Dubbed the “Caravan of Hunger,” the failed effort represented in the words of Ian Roxborough, “the last gasp of militant unionism of the 1940s.”<sup>86</sup>

The Mexican left rallied against ARASCO, arguing that its close relationship with Alemán revealed the president’s dangerous strategy for modernizing the country by giving into the demands of U.S. corporations. Throughout the duration of the strike, ARASCO’s efforts to break the work stoppage hardly made the company appear sympathetic to the public, as management decided to cut electricity and water to the miners’ homes, and even shut down the only health clinic in the town, resulting in the deaths of several children.<sup>87</sup> The men, women, and children who joined the trek to Mexico City received mixed responses from the press. Some outlets chastened the miners and the families as little more than pawns of communist organizers who enjoyed watching the strike from the comforts of their luxury hotels.<sup>88</sup> More sympathetic accounts included a short series in *Hoy*, which published a stunning set of photographs documenting the group’s harrowing march to the capital. Miners and their families were presented in these photographs carrying various banners made by the TGP. Protestors carried posters depicting a mother and child who died as a result of the company’s efforts to break the

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Snodgrass, “The Golden Age of Charrismo: Workers, Braceros, and the Political Machinery of Postrevolutionary Mexico,” in eds., Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, *Dictablanda*, 175-83.

<sup>86</sup> Ian Roxborough, “Mexico,” in *Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, 190-216 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 213.

<sup>87</sup> Caulfield, *Mexican Workers and the State*, 75-78.

<sup>88</sup> Snodgrass, “The Golden Age of Charrismo,” 177.

strike, as well as images of the Mexican police with rifles and bayonets that included the words “stop the war on the working class!” Others held handmade signs that read simply “No soy comunista.”<sup>89</sup>

For the TGP, the impunity in which ARASCO acted was understood as directly related to the close ties that had been forged between President Alemán and Truman.<sup>90</sup> In the print below, for example, Angel Bracho depicts the “Sometimiento de los sindicatos” (Subjugation of the unions). Bracho illustrates the rapid deterioration of workers’ rights under Alemán’s conservative administration and places the blame on Mexico’s close partnership with the United States [Figure 22]. The choice of the chess board most likely were taken from comments made by Truman during his visit to Mexico City in 1947, when the American president touted his administration’s collaboration with Alemán, boasting of the shared commitment to progress through economic, cultural, and military cooperation. In public remarks to the Mexican president, Truman stated:

International relations have traditionally been compared to a chess game in which each nation tries to outwit and checkmate the other. I cannot accept that comparison with respect to the relations between your country and mine, Mr. President. The United States and Mexico are working together for the mutual benefit of their peoples and the peace of the world.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ismael Cassola, et al., *La caravana del hambre* (Universidad Autónoma de Puebla: Fototecad del INAH), 43.

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of Alemán’s “tactic support of violence to divide the labor movement,” See, Stephen Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 198.

<sup>91</sup> Harry S. Truman: "Address in Mexico City," March 3, 1947. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12841>. Last accessed July 24, 2013.

In the linocut, Bracho reveals the sordid result of both governments working together on the same side of the chess board. Alemán sits at a large table in complete control of Mexico. Each piece represents a different social group within Mexican society. Alemán's pieces include two rooks, representing the wealthy elite, the military police in the figure of a knight, and the *charro*—or corrupt government-appointed union leader—as the pawn held in the president's hand. The Mexican popular classes are Alemán's opponents, as represented by the striking railroad workers, *campesinos*, and a woman who closely resembles the Virgin of Guadalupe. These figures were under direct assault on the chess board, but also above it where miners from the ARASCO Corporation are shown locked out of the company town, and to the right of the board, where workers are hit with the butts of police rifles and the fumes from a smoke bomb.



Figure 22. Ángel Bracho, “Sometimiento de los sindicatos,” in *450 años de lucha: homenaje al pueblo mexicano*, (Ciudad de México: Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1960).

As a description of the print in *450 años de lucha* explained:

También distinguió el Gobierno de Miguel Alemán por su ataque a los derechos de la clase obrera. Los principales sindicatos fueron asaltados (ferrocarrileros, petroleros, mineros, etc.) y se instauró el nefasto “charrísimo”, o sea la casta de los líderes obreros corrompidos, traidores a su clase.

The government of Miguel Alemán distinguished itself by attacking the rights of the working class. The principal unions were assaulted (railroad, oil, mining, etc..) and nefarious "charrísimo" was implemented, that is the caste of corrupt labor leaders, traitors to their class.

Bracho depicts the Mexican military as little more than strikebreakers, protecting the interests of U.S. capital. In the top left hand corner of the drawing, President Truman and Alemán conspire on how to break the democratic union. Thus, for Bracho, the United States was a destructive force in large part responsible for the plight of the miners and the state violence they experienced. For organizers of the strike, the presence of the United States was perhaps even more insidious, as they claimed the FBI was watching and reporting on their actions.<sup>92</sup> The anticommunist backlash resulted in striking workers being placed on blacklists, unable to work in any of the northern mines or to earn contracts as braceros.<sup>93</sup>

### **Rallying Opposition to the Korean War**

During the Korean War, the United States looked toward Mexico for material goods, sought Mexican soldiers to join the conflict, and continued to insist braceros were a critical wartime necessity.<sup>94</sup> However, a robust opposition to U.S. involvement in the Korean War developed within Mexico, and an even larger majority were against Mexico supporting the conflict by sending its own troops to the front lines.<sup>95</sup> Across the Mexican-left but also within

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<sup>92</sup> Mario Gil, *La huelga de Nueva Rosita* (México: Impreso México, 1959), 54.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>94</sup> In fact, U.S. containment efforts in Asia found little support throughout Latin America. William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 292-293.

<sup>95</sup> In the United States, Mexican opposition to the war was blamed on communist influence. The *New York Times* argued that communists were responsible for Mexico's refusal to sign on to the Mutual Security Act, an agreement

mainstream publications, there was a belief that as the U.S. flexed its postwar power across the globe, it became more likely the reverberations of the actions would be felt in neighboring Mexico.

Opposition to the Korean conflict in Mexico was brought to the public's attention from the center and the left. Moderate observers condemned both the Soviet Union and the United States' proxy wars, fearing that Mexico would be irrevocably harmed if global warfare broke out. Communists and the Mexican-left often focused on the profiteering of U.S. warfare and the neocolonial relationship of the United States with Latin America, in which American capital extracted material resources necessary for the wars being waged around the globe, while the vast majority of Latin Americans remained impoverished. For its part, the TGP relentlessly attacked the Korean War as being counter to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. In "Sociedad Alemán," Angel Bracho shows the corruption of Alemán and the deleterious impact that the United States' escalating Cold War had on Mexico [Figure 23]. In the collection's introduction, Bracho's print is described as making visible the consequences of U.S.-Mexico foreign relations during the Cold War:

El Gobierno del Presidente Alemán se distinguió entre otras cosas, por su inclinación a la alianza con el Gobierno de los Estados Unidos de América. En realidad se constituyó una sociedad entre Truman y Alemán... Se aplicó la política llamada de "puertas abiertas a las inversiones extranjeras" y la política de Guerra fría de los norteamericanos fue secundada por régimen de Alemán.<sup>96</sup>

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for economic and military aid in exchange for a shared responsibility of defense. Sydeny Gruson, "U.S.-Mexican Arms Parleys Collapse After Red Pressure," *New York Times*, February 22, 1952, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Ángel Bracho, "La sociedad Alemán -Truman," 1949, in *450 años de lucha: homenaje al pueblo mexicano*, (México: Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1960).

President Alemán's government distinguished itself, amongst other things, for its eagerness to ally itself with the United States Government. The alliance constituted a partnership between Truman and Alemán... They initiated a policy known as the "open door policy for foreign investments" and the Cold War policies of the North Americans were supported by the Alemán regime.



Figure 23. Ángel Bracho, "La sociedad Alemán -Truman," 1949, in *450 años de lucha: homenaje al pueblo mexicano*, (México: Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1960).

Echoing many of the concerns in Iturriaga's article that were flagged by the U.S. Embassy, Bracho's print vividly condemns the open trade between the two countries. It shows U.S. businesses flooding consumer goods onto the Mexican market, while uranium used to

manufacture atomic weapons, perhaps to be used in the Korean conflict, are sent back across a non-existent border between the two countries. Mexican national sovereignty has been given away as the nation's culture is corrupted and wealth is pillaged by Alemán's underhanded, pro-business administration. By undermining the trust of Mexico's people, President Alemán stands to personally profit by selling out the nation. Indeed, there can be no mistaking this point as Bracho depicts Alemán quite literally handing over the nation to President Truman and U.S. business interests.<sup>97</sup> Behind Truman a grotesque rat wears a suit and top hat as it stands on the pillared steps of the Capitol Building next to an engraving in marble that reads "Wall Street." In other versions of this print Bracho switches the face of a rat for that of John Foster Dulles. The lack of any meaningful border separating the two nations allows the rat to simply dump harmful U.S. material goods, including whisky, Coca-Cola, cigarettes, and *Life Magazine*, into Mexico. The large pipeline being stuffed with U.S. consumer goods represents the major changes allowing for outside capital investments in PEMEX, the state-run oil company.<sup>98</sup> On the opposite end of the pipeline, the United States extracts Mexico's mineral wealth. Robbing Mexico of national resources, the United States had the audacity to sell back worthless consumer goods to the Mexican people. Even worse, the national resources being plundered, like uranium, were

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<sup>97</sup> Historian Stephen Niblo confirms the rampant corruption under the Alemán regime, which included the pilfering of millions of dollars worth of government loans for private businesses, political rewards for major corporate executives, and the use of violence and intimidation to break independent labor unions. According to Supreme Court Justice Luis Corona, the Alemán administration was a "moral cesspool." These actions no doubt contributed to Alemán being named by *Fortune Magazine* as one of the world's wealthiest men a few years after leaving office. See, Stephen Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 207-16, 253-303.

<sup>98</sup> Within days of coming into office Alemán ordered the military to break a work stoppage and left-leaning labor leaders in the petroleum workers' union were eventually expelled in response to the government crackdown. "Inversion, No Invasion," *Hoy*, March 12, 1949, 9.

meant to be used in an escalating Cold War in which Mexico had very little voice, but could potentially forever feel the reverberations of nuclear warfare.<sup>99</sup>

Importantly, the burdens of all these transactions are most acutely felt by the Mexican family—as a man, woman, and child maintain the structural integrity of the pipeline over their backs. This entire transaction was made possible by Alemán who oversaw an era in which Mexico’s national borders were rendered meaningless due to the free reign of the U.S. government and business interests.<sup>100</sup> While the United States imagined a group of committed communists fomenting international conspiracies by illicitly crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, the Mexican left was far more worried about the deleterious impact of Yankee capital, culture, and war within Latin America. Printed at a time of growing suspicion that the United States was to blame for a series of problems in post-war Mexico, including high inflation, the decline in the value of the peso, and debilitating food shortages, Bracho’s artwork informed viewers that the hunger and anguish felt by Mexican citizens was directly tied to U.S. political and economic policies.

The U.S. State Department kept close watch on the types of criticism offered by Bracho. In a letter addressed to President Eisenhower, U.S. Ambassador Henry White explained that the Mexican left had often focused its attention on issues that had widespread support amongst the Mexican public, especially the prevailing feeling that Mexico’s national sovereignty was under attack by the United States. Leftist organizations like the TGP, White wrote, sought to widen their political base by adopting “causes which find a responsive chord among many Mexicans

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<sup>99</sup> “Hay uranio en México para producir la bomba atómica,” *Hoy*, April 9, 1949.

<sup>100</sup> See, Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don’t Go Home* (2003).

irrespective of political outlook.” These criticisms were numerous but often centered on “the possibility of the betrayal of the national patrimony.” The litany of concerns by ordinary Mexicans cited by the ambassador included:

[the loss of] petroleum and, more recently, supposed uranium deposits—to foreign interests; the invasion of Mexican markets by United States firms, especially chain stores; the bracero question; the electric power question; land reform and the division of the remaining large tracts, some of which are owned by United States interests; the foreign mining companies; military cooperation for continental defense; and the general question of the economic “invasion” of Mexico.<sup>101</sup>

The language of invasion was worrisome to the Embassy because of the imperial reputation—from the American president on down—that U.S. officials were hoping to escape. In an era of expanding U.S. military presence in the world, the ability to keep the U.S. out of Mexico’s political, economic and cultural activities was proving nearly impossible.

Journalists in *Hoy* were also critical of the Korean conflict. When a syndicated American newspaper columnist cited U.S. military history with Mexico to frame the possible outcomes of military engagements in Korea, Mexican journalists were indignant that the violent histories of American imperialism would be rehashed to justify war in Southeast Asia. In 1950, as the United States debated whether to cross the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel into North Korea, David Lawrence wrote in his column, “Today in Washington,” that the history of U.S. military intervention in Mexico provided compelling evidence in favor of invading North Korea. Lawrence likened North

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<sup>101</sup> Letter From the Ambassador in Mexico (White) to the President, Mexico City, August 29, 1955, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Volume VI, American Republics: Multilateral; Mexico; Caribbean, Document 213.*

Korea's invasion of South Korea to the raids of Columbus, New Mexico, by Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution. Just as President Woodrow Wilson had not hesitated or sought international permission to send forces across the international boundary into Mexico to capture Villa, neither could President Truman wait for international approval to send U.S. troops across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. In Lawrence's view, U.S. military action during the Mexican Revolution had set the precedent for the United States to cross into North Korea, and like the 1916 Pershing expedition, the U.S. Army would simply "withdraw after the United States felt that adequate reprisal had been achieved."<sup>102</sup>

Not surprisingly, the comparisons made by Lawrence were not well received in Mexico. Writing from Mexico City, journalist José Rubén Romero, lambasted Lawrence for his "Yankee arrogance" and "ignorant" belief that U.S. imperial histories in Mexico offered a blueprint for U.S. military actions along Korea's 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Romero argued that such arrogance typified U.S.-Mexico relations and that it shed light on the policy decisions being made in Washington. The only way Lawrence could have displayed greater arrogance, Romero reasoned, would have been if prior to printing the article, he traveled to Veracruz and placed a wreath on a monument commemorating the lives of Mexicans lost in the U.S. occupation of the port city during the Mexican revolution.<sup>103</sup> According to Romero, Mexico had no business in this war and U.S.

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<sup>102</sup> David Lawrence, "Today in Washington: No Reason to Halt at the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel," *Lewiston Daily Sun*, September 30, 1950, pg. 4.

<sup>103</sup> This was a not too subtle shot at President Truman's goodwill trip to Mexico City, which occurred a few years earlier, but had left a lasting imprint in how Mexicans viewed America's Cold War military expansion. José Rubén Romero, "Se levanto el Telón y Comenzó el Drama," *Hoy*, July 8, 1950, 16-17.

efforts to forge strong relations with Mexico were jeopardized when prominent American voices cited the history of U.S. conquest in Mexico to justify the use of military force in Korea.<sup>104</sup>

The TGP also rigorously protested military action in Korea and the United States' efforts to secure Mexicans to fight in the war were ridiculed mercilessly by the art collective. In a drawing printed in *Calaveras aftosas* (1947), a publication released to commemorate the Day of the Dead, the monument to the *Niños Héroes at the Chapultepec Castle is shown* with Truman's wreath of flowers encircling the tomb. Skeletons, representing the cadets, are crushed by the weight of the American flag located at the bottom of the image.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> José Rubén Romero, "La Guerra No es Negocio de México!," *Hoy*, July 29, 1950, 16-18.

<sup>105</sup> This was printed as part of the *Taller's* popular *calaveras* series—pamphlets produced for the *día de los muertos* celebrations. Members of the Taller saw these as amongst their most influential pieces due to the low cost of the printing and its wide circulation.



Figure 24. Jesus Escobedo, *Calaveras Aftosas*, 1947, University of California, San Diego, Geisel Library, Special Collections Library.

To the left, American canons are pointed directly at the monument, suggesting the implicit threat of warfare that accompanied Truman's visit. The *corrido* printed alongside the drawing asks why U.S. politicians had suddenly reversed course, now appearing remorseful for its military incursion onto Mexican soil. It contends that Truman's goodwill tour was all about the United States' need for troops in the event that a full scale war broke out in Korea. The *corrido* reads, in part:

Scott vino hace cien años  
 En actitud altanera,

Y asesinó a nuestros héroes  
Después de una guerra artera

Truman llegó hace muy poco  
Y ‘pa borrar los rencores”  
Colocó en Chapultepec  
Una corona de flores

¿Por qué este cambio tan raro,  
---me preguntará Encarnación?  
“Es porque urge a los gringos  
Tener carne de cañón”

Pues Truman y sus agentes  
Con mucha zalamería  
Quieren llevarnos muy pronto  
A nueva carnicería<sup>106</sup>

[In a haughty attitude,  
Scott came a hundred years ago  
And killed our heroes  
After a deceitful war

Truman came very recently  
And to “erase the bitterness”  
Placed in Chapultepec  
A wreath of flowers

I ask Encarnación—  
Why such a strange change?  
“Because the gringo needs  
To have cannon fodder”

With much flattery  
Truman and his agents  
Want to take us very soon  
To a new butcher]

Mexican readers were reminded that General Winfield Scott, who served as military governor of Mexico City from 1847-1848, arrived in Mexico a hundred years earlier to “kill our

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<sup>106</sup> *Calaveras Aftosas*, 1947,

heroes.” In the very next stanza, there is a seamless transition into Truman’s visit to Mexico City. Even though the Cold War had created strange occurrences, foremost among them, Truman’s goodwill tour, the corrido pleaded with readers not to be fooled by empty symbolic gestures. Truman’s visit had nothing to do with honoring the young boys who died in the unjust American imperial venture, but instead, reflected the United States’ need for Mexican soldiers as cannon fodder in Korea.

In addition to the *calavera* prints critical of the war efforts, the TGP produced a filmstrip in 1949, *¿Quienes quieren la guerra—quienes quieren la paz?* (Who Wants War, Who Wants Peace?), that highlighted the precariousness of Mexican sovereignty should the United States begin a war in South East Asia. The film graphically explained what might happen in the event that an American war with North Korea turned into a global conflict:

A third world war would destroy democracy and our constitution. The imperialists would control the unions, democratic political parties, work contracts, and the prices of basic necessities...Our factories, field and our homes would be invaded and occupied by armed forces of the United States...Our youth, brothers, and children be enlisted as cannon fodder to fight under the orders of the Yankee helmets...Our Mexican earth would be totally occupied by the army of the United States...Our raw materials and our natural resources would be expropriated to be converted into products of war by the United States.<sup>107</sup>

U.S. military action in Korea meant a complete erasure of the border between the United States and Mexico, as a likely third world war would cause irreversible losses to Mexican democracy. Mexican “youth, brothers, and children” would be sent to die on the front lines and a ruthless occupying U.S. army would transform Mexico into nothing more than a colonial outpost.

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<sup>107</sup> As quoted in Caplow, *Leopoldo Méndez*, 218-219.

Building on these anti-war sentiments, Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros dramatically brought the issue of Mexicans being used for the Korean War to the Mexican public. His painting, “The Good Neighbor, Or How Truman Helps the Mexican People,” depicts the campesino as the victim of the United States. Siqueiros, a lifelong member of the *Partido Comunista Mexicana*, depicts the Mexican campesino becoming cannon fodder for American imperialism. A rifle is slung across the shoulder of a grim looking man, his hands are bound by chains, as he kneels completely nude in front of the American president [Figure 25].<sup>108</sup> In stark contrast to the soldier, Truman is dressed in a hazardous waste suit, protecting himself from possible nuclear fallout, while holding a small wad of cash in his hands. The bounded hands suggest that the Mexican is not a paid mercenary, but rather, that Truman’s money is more likely reserved for the unscrupulous Mexican politicians willing to sacrifice their citizens for personal profit.

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<sup>108</sup> Although Siqueiros produced prints for the TGP, lasting tensions between Siqueiros and the organization were created when Siqueiros and a group of miners used the TGP’s workshop without permission to change into paramilitary disguises prior to their assassination attempt of Leon Trotsky. TGP members were questioned by the police and some briefly detained in connection to the crime. Caplow, *Leopoldo Méndez*, 154-158.



Figure 25. “The Good Neighbor, Or How Truman Helps the Mexican People,” 1951.

Philip Stein, an American artist and associate of Siqueiros, living in exile in Mexico, estimated that some 30,000 people, mostly from working class backgrounds, visited the gallery where the painting was on display. It was also reproduced on the front page of the newspaper *El Popular*. In addition to the painting, Stein explained how Siquieros was able to take action against the war while he completed “The Good Neighbor” painting:

Siqueiros had adopted a method printing and distributing his own handbills and leaflets whenever he deemed events serious enough to call for such action. With the Korean War raging, he and his leaflets printed in a small neighborhood printing shop. Then, late at night, when work on the mural had finished, Siqueiros and a couple of artists piled into the Plymouth with a bucket of paste and the leaflets. [Siquiero's wife] Angelica drove through the darkened city streets, making hasty stops while the leaflets protesting the Korean War were pasted on the poles and buildings.

Like much of the work from the Mexican left, these leaflets looked to the United States' imperial past to better understand the war in Korea.

In the handbills, Siqueiros argued against Mexican support for the Korean War by asking the public to consider the high stakes of Mexican aid to the United States. These handbills were pasted around Mexico City by Siqueiros and others in the Mexican Communist Party members:

### **Betrayal by Mexico**

And a Criminal Offense to the People

What would you think of the position of a small country that would have sent foodstuffs to the French forces that invaded Mexico in 1863, or to the Yankee troops that invaded the territory of the Nation on any of three occasions?

Judge for yourself, today, June 1951, the position of the Government of Mexico in sending rice, sugar, etc. (articles of prime necessity for our people who are dying of hunger), to the troops invading Korea.

Speak out, write, telegraph or collectively demonstrate your energetic protest!<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Philip Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works* (New York: International Publishers Co., 1994), 180-195.

Siquerios asked the Mexican public to consider the United States' actions against Mexicans a century earlier while they contemplated how history would judge those who supported imperial warfare. In addition, in a country struggling to feed all of its citizens, how was it possible that staple goods were sold to a foreign imperialist army?

### **Mexican Migrants at War**

Siquerios' artwork must have seemed prophetic as mainstream newspapers began to erroneously report that thousands of Mexican migrants in the U.S. had been abducted by the U.S. military to serve on the frontlines of the Korean conflict. Alfonso Guerra, Assistant Secretary of Foreign Affairs in Mexico, was forced to hold a late night press conference denouncing the unsubstantiated claims.<sup>110</sup> This was not the first time that allegations had been made that Mexicans were being used to fight in Korea. More than a year earlier the *Los Angeles Times* lamented the persistent rumors regarding migrants being captured at the border to fight in the Korean War, noting that such rumors sounded eerily similar to Soviet propaganda that appeared in the *New Times* of Moscow at the start of the conflict.<sup>111</sup>

At its core, the persistence of rumors about Mexicans' forcible participation in the Korean conflict spoke to the unbalanced power between the U.S. and Mexico, as well as the long standing mistrust of the U.S. military among a broad spectrum of Mexican society. Rumors of Mexican migrants being kidnapped were occurring at a time when U.S. government officials

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<sup>110</sup> "'Kidnap' Report is Denied," *New York Times*, December 28, 1952, pg.7.

<sup>111</sup> "What Next?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1951.

spoke openly about the possibility of combatting the “wetback invasion” by calling in the U.S. Army to the U.S.-Mexico border. Such talk caused an outpouring of resentment in Mexico, and was brought to a fevered pitch in response to a speech given by U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell in August of 1953. During a tour of Southern California to address the increase in unsanctioned Mexican migration, Brownell announced to reporters that the Eisenhower Administration was seriously considering stationing army reserves popular points along the border where migrants crossed into the state. Francis White, Ambassador to Mexico, vehemently disagreed, understanding better than most in the Eisenhower administration the outrage and ill will that this course of action was likely to cause among the Mexican public. White wrote to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles asking the administration reconsider its plans, comparing the potential damage to the U.S. gunboat diplomacy of the first part of the twentieth century. White explained that it would take only one “trigger-happy” soldier to undermine the clear distinctions he had made to Mexican bankers in Mexico City between “The Iron Curtain frontier” and the friendly relations shared along the U.S.-Mexico border. Simply put, he worried that placing the U.S. Army along the border would not allow the United States to “make capital” out of the differences between the Soviet and U.S. policy. White wrote that “if we have bayonets and muskets on our frontier... This situation will be exploited throughout Latin America. It will be seized by Communists for anti-American propaganda here, in Latin American and in the rest of the world.”<sup>112</sup>

White’s fears were well founded. Throughout the 1950s, the Mexican left, as well as the mainstream Mexican press printed stories about the hardships faced by braceros, the

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<sup>112</sup> “The Ambassador in Mexico (White) to the Secretary of State,” Mexico City, August 14, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Volume IV, The American Republics, Document 582.

discrimination they experienced in the United States, and the difficulties migrants experienced with crossing the increasingly militarized U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>113</sup> It is likely that the direct cause for Ambassador White's concern on this occasion was a particularly damning editorial cartoon drawn by Arias Bernal, published in *Excelsior* days before White wrote to the Secretary of State [Figure 26].<sup>114</sup> The cartoon highlighted the anger and resentment to Brownell's suggestion of using the U.S. Army for policing migrants along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. It shows a frightened bracero, drawn with distinct characteristics meant to denote indigeneity, including a partial mustache, bare feet, ragged clothing, and sharply drawn facial features. Sweat drips off the migrant's face as he stares upwards at an U.S. Army issued rifle and bayonet pointed at his left hand, which he has raised, signaling his unconditional surrender. The enormous size of the bayonet in comparison to the migrant symbolizes the tremendous military might of the United States, as well as the lack of discretion in which the U.S. military was being mobilized. The caption reads "Entre la espada y la pared" (Between a rock and hard place), suggesting the paternalistic empathy Bernal felt for the migrant, whose dangerous journey to the United States was now threatened by the entirely unjustifiable presence of U.S. soldiers at the border. Discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, Bernal repeatedly drew exaggerated indigenous features for his migrant subjects. In this context, the indigenous portrayal is meant to amplify the injustices perpetrated against the nation, as their poverty and ignorance made them subjects of pity, making the United States' actions even more reprehensible.

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<sup>113</sup> This is discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>114</sup> Another article commenting on the possible deployment of the U.S. Army on the border, likened the conditions of migration to warfare. The article in *Excelsior* went on to compare the capture of migrants by the Army and their placement in immigration detentions centers in McAllen, Texas, as being reminiscent of concentration camps in World War II. "Nuestros braceros," *Excelsior de Jueves*, August 27, 1953, 13.



Figure 26. “Entre la espada y la pared,” *Excelsior*, 8/22/1953, 7b.

The editorial cartoon powerfully demonstrates the wide disparity of power between the two nations. Impoverished Mexican citizens met first-hand the power of the United States’ military when crossing the border. This image shows that American military might was as powerful as it was overbearing.<sup>115</sup> And as Ambassador White wisely acknowledged, the inevitable, indiscriminate force utilized against Mexicans along California’s southern border by

<sup>115</sup> “Nuestro braceros,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, August 27, 1953, 13.

U.S. Army personnel, would not bode well for garnering Mexican support for further American Cold War policies. Ultimately, President Eisenhower denied requests by the U.S. Border Patrol to launch “Operation Cloudburst,” which would have used the U.S. military and National Guard to rid the nation of Mexican migrants. Army General Joseph Swing expressed great excitement over the idea, suggesting that the training opportunities in rounding up and deporting Mexican migrants in the desert terrain would yield tremendous training benefits for soldiers preparing for the Korean War. While Eisenhower ultimately denied the request, when Swing retired, he was appointed commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.<sup>116</sup>

### **The fallout of Atomic Warfare**

U.S. military engagement in Asia combined with its destructive red scare politics served to heighten the belief in Mexico that the world was on the brink of total, perhaps nuclear, warfare. Within Mexico’s mainstream press, the nation’s inability to meaningfully impact the growing conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States was a great concern. In a world where nuclear warfare was seen as a distinct—if not, likely possibility, Mexican observers witnessed the increasingly belligerent brinkmanship between the two worlds’ superpowers and realized that their country had little practical ability to prevent wider warfare.

In the early 1950s, *Hoy* closely documented the advances in nuclear technologies, while at the same time, lamenting that such developments could cause massive destruction in Mexico. In articles with titles declaring “El mundo esclavo del atomo” (The world slave to the atom) and

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<sup>116</sup> Lytle-Hernandez, *Migra!*, 182-184.

“1 hora de terror” (1 hour of terror)—about nuclear bomb testing in Nevada—Mexican journalists presented their nation as being held hostage, stuck between the world’s two superpowers.<sup>117</sup> A sense of powerlessness pervaded parts of Mexican popular culture in the face of unspeakable destructive force that an atomic bomb could cause. In the event of nuclear warfare, national borders would not protect the country from the foreign policies of the United States or the Soviet Union. An article concerning the new technologies of the hydrogen bomb entitled “Asi se hace la paz” (This is how they make peace) forcefully makes this point by demonstrating the destruction this bomb would make in Mexico City. In an aerial photo, a dark line was drawn around the periphery of the city, noting the projected radius the destruction a hydrogen bomb attack would cause on the metropolis.<sup>118</sup> Such a horrific scene was likely, the article explained, should diplomatic relations completely break down between the Soviet Union and the United States. For these mainstream outlets, it was precisely Mexico’s lack of power on the world stage that gave journalists the most cause for concern. Whereas, for the Mexican left, potential nuclear warfare was the result of the Mexican state too adhering to U.S. wartime requests, such as providing supplies for the Korean War and raw materials for atomic weapons.

Both the Mexican left and the mainstream media paid close attention to nuclear developments. In one of many editorial cartoons critical of the growing possibility of expanded warfare, Arias Bernal depicted how Mexico had been taken hostage by the threat of nuclear war. In April of 1953, Bernal drew a cartoon for the cover of *Hoy* that showed the globe praying for

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<sup>117</sup> “Otra vez la atómica,” *Hoy*, March 28, 1953, 54-55; “La atómica en Nevada,” *Hoy*, April 26, 1952, 38-39; “La atómica, arma del pasado,” *Hoy*, July 2, 1949, 19; “En el mundo caen 2 bombas,” October 8, 1949, 36-37, 82; “1 hora de terror!” October 10, 1953, 22; “Cancilleres del fracaso,” *Hoy*, March 6, 1954, 50-51; “La bomba ‘H’ principio de fin del mundo,” *Hoy*, April 10, 1954, 76-77.

<sup>118</sup> “Asi se hace el paz,” *Hoy*, July 12, 1952, 33.

peace, while a plume of grey smoke covers the title of the magazine.<sup>119</sup> Bandages on the side of the globe show the harm that atomic weapons have already caused to the earth. In the previous chapter we saw how U.S. journalists and politicians fretted over the idea that the U.S.-Mexico border could be subverted to smuggle atomic bombs across it, but within Mexico, middle class outlets expressed deep anxiety that the national boundaries between the two nations would provide very little security from the devastating impacts of a global war. When Mexico's Secretary of Defense announced that Mexico City would implement emergency planning in the event of a nuclear attack, he was criticized in *Hoy* for falling for a U.S. ploy to bring Mexico more closely to its neighbor's Cold War policies.<sup>120</sup>

Echoing such concerns, Cecilia Calderón, a member of the TGP, suggested that the dangers of the nuclear threat in Mexico increased as the nation's leaders cooperated with the United States. In "La nación no acepta bases extranjeras" (The nation does not accept foreign military bases), Calderón reaffirmed the wisdom of President Camacho's decision to refuse the United States territory for military bases on Mexican soil during World War II. In the linocut, a woman with indigenous features places her hands along the U.S.-Mexico border, blocking Uncle Sam and his tanks, warplanes, and nuclear weapons from crossing into Mexican territory. While the image commemorates a refusal of President Camacho, it also provides Cold War commentary, as Uncle Sam's arms are loaded with both atomic and hydrogen bombs.

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<sup>119</sup> Despite being wary of the growing showdown between the United States and the Soviet Union, and especially the possibility of nuclear warfare, Arias Bernal remained largely uncritical of the United States democratic presidents. For example, Bernal sent a letter to President Truman with one his caricatures, showing the president in a boxing ring against the Republican challengers, assuring Truman that Mexico was behind him in his reelection campaign. "Cartas a los editores," *Hoy*, August 6, 1949, 4.

<sup>120</sup> In addition, the magazine doubted much could be gained by copying the United States' nuclear preparedness plans, which would have been ineffective in the event of a real attack "Suicidios atómicos: dictado por la defensa," *Hoy*, October 30, 1954, 47-49; "Disparo el general," *Hoy*, February 2, 1954, 21-23.



Figure 27. Celia Calderón, “*La nación no acepta bases extranjeras,*” *450 años de lucha: homenaje al pueblo mexicano*, (México: Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1960).

In March, 1954, Mexican diplomats surprised many in the country by refusing an important security request by the United States. The diplomats refused to sign the United States’ sponsored resolution against the spread of communism in the Americas, put forth at the Tenth Inter-American Conference, held at Caracas, Venezuela. John Foster Dulles wanted to secure a binding agreement for military cooperation in the event that any nation came under communist domination. After two weeks, Dulles was only able to secure a water-downed version of the agreement, which called for “consultation and collective action” in the event of communist

infiltration in any country in the hemisphere. The final version, as accepted by the conference read, in part:

That the domination or control of the political institutions of any American state by the international Communist movement, extending to this hemisphere a political system of an extra-continental power, would constitute a threat to the sovereignty and political independence of the American states, endangering the peace of America, and would call for the consultation and appropriate action in accordance with existing treaties.<sup>121</sup>

Frederic Ganzert, writing for *World Affairs*, explained that the American Secretary of State “displayed acumen and persistence” in getting most Latin American nations to sign on to a “resolution against Soviet infiltration that showed that Pan-Americanism and the Monroe Doctrine were vital forces against communist domination.” Mexico and Guatemala attempted to make collective action against a Latin American country only possible in the event of an actual invasion by a country outside of the hemisphere. Mexico, Guatemala, and Argentina were the only nations that refused to sign the pact. Mexican diplomat Roberto Cordova explained in his dissent that his country did not support international communism, but that Mexico believed in the democratic right for countries to choose their political institutions. Though the Mexican-left would have certainly questioned Cordova’s insistence on Mexico’s steadfast belief in democracy, they were supportive of the decision to not sign on to the resolution. Cordova politely only alluded to the history of U.S. empire in explaining why Mexico would abstain from the agreement, noting that as country that had experienced intervention not only by European

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<sup>121</sup> Frederick Ganzert, “The Caracas Conference,” *World Affairs*, Vol. 117, No. 2 (Summer, 1954), 44-46.

powers, but also from “countries on our own continent,” and thus, Mexico could not in good conscience support an agreement that made foreign intervention in Latin America more likely.<sup>122</sup>

Mexico’s refusal to sign on to the agreement at the Tenth Inter-American Conference was heralded as an act of bravery by the press. An editorial titled “La unidad continental no significa colonialaje” (Continental unity does not signify colonialism) argued that signing the agreement would have been tantamount to ceding Mexico’s sovereignty to the United States.<sup>123</sup> The American Secretary of State’s negotiating strategy was humorously depicted in a cartoon by Rafael Freyre, in which Dulles displayed his understanding of “pan-americano”—this is a play on words—as “pan” also means bread—which Dulles’ toaster had turned into a nuclear explosion, while a concerned woman representing Latin American is startled by the exhibition [Figure 28].

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> “Digamos en Caracas la verdad de América,” *Hoy*, February 27, 1954, 4-5; Isaac Abeytua, “El Vaor del débil: conferencia interamericana en Venezuela,” *Hoy*, March 13, 1954, 27-29; “La dignidad de nuestra postura internacional,” *Hoy*, March 13, 1954, 27-29; “Sucedió en la semana,” *Hoy*, March 20, 1954, 12-13; “Mexico dijo en Caracas la auténtica verdad de América,” *Hoy*, March 20, 1954; “Jornadas nacionales: Mr. Dulles integro en caracas,” *Hoy*, March 27, 1954, 52-53.



Figure 28. Rafael Freyre, *Hoy*, March 20, 1954, 7.

This cartoon was not only about the difficulties of the weak negotiating positions of Latin American in relation to the United States, but also spoke to greater concerns about the United States using the specter of communism invasions and potential nuclear war to bargain in bad faith with Latin America.

### **Mexico's Red Scare and the Guatemala Coup**

Anxieties of nuclear warfare in Mexico increased as the politics of the red scare unfolded in the United States in the early 1950s. Mexican journalists saw the destruction caused by Joseph

McCarthy's brand of anti-Communism as particularly detrimental to the security of Mexico. A number of articles, including one penned by Carlos Fuentes, compared McCarthy's tactics to those utilized by Hitler and Mussolin. All three men, Fuentes wrote, thrived during a period that had greatly shaped modern Mexico. In September of 1953, *Hoy* published a drawing of McCarthy on its cover in the image of a scarecrow. In the background a tornado ripped through the earth as McCarthy looked undeterred by the havoc that he had left behind him.<sup>124</sup> Others compared McCarthy's tactics to the Spanish Inquisition.<sup>125</sup> Concerns in Mexico went far beyond mere lamentations about the state of U.S. democratic political culture, as the deterioration of American politics at the hands of McCarthy and his supporters had serious consequences in Mexico.<sup>126</sup> Most alarming was that McCarthy's anti-communist theatrics were being adopted by aspiring politicians in Mexico—most notably, by a Mexico City politician and fervent anticommunist, Jorge Prieto-Laurens. In June 1954, the following image was printed in *Hoy* that linked McCarthy's anti-communist agenda to the work Prieto-Laurens [Figure 29]. The caption reads "La voz de su amo" (The voice of his master). According to Freyre's image, Mexico's politicians were little more than puppets of America's most conservative and dangerous politician. Even the conservative press in Mexico worried about the United States' "attempt to export McCarthyism."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Isaac Abeytua, "Cesar de cartón: McCarthy esgrime el anticomunismo," *Hoy*, March 20, 1954, 51-53; Ernesto Salinas, "Los resortes que mueven al dictador," *Hoy*, March 20, 1954, 66-67; Carlos Fuentes, "McCarthy, el enemigo," *Hoy*, April, 18, 1953, 17; Isaac Abeytua, "Genio encadenado: por las intrigas de Mac Carthy," *Hoy*, May 1, 1954, 26-29; "La suprema orden de Lenin para McCarthy," *Hoy*, May 1, 1954, 44-45.

<sup>125</sup> "Ellos y ellas", *Hoy*, May 22, 1954, 52-53.

<sup>126</sup> José R. Colín, "El Vecino se mete en nuestra casa: Los Estados Unido agitan la acusación de comunistas contra todos que le disgustan," *Hoy*, January 30, 1954, 12-15; Ernesto Salinas, "Que Viene el Lobo...Y es comunista! Diplomáticos americanos y los corderos de Wall Street," *Hoy*, February 13, 1954, 24-27.

<sup>127</sup> "Red Influx Puts Mexico on Guard," *New York Times*, March 8, 1954, 2.



Figure 29. “Carton de Hoy,” *Hoy*, June 12, 1954, pg 8.

Unbeknownst to Mexican journalists writing in 1954, Prieto-Laurens had been working with CIA operatives in Mexico City for nearly five years as he sought to present himself as one of the premier anti-communist leaders in Latin America. In fact, Prieto-Laurens played a little known role in the history of Operation PBSUCCESS—the CIA’s coordinated overthrow of democratically elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz.<sup>128</sup> Based on scattered evidence from the CIA, it appears that Prieto-Laurens contacted the intelligence agency in hopes of holding a hemispheric meeting for anti-communists in Mexico City. Prieto-Laurens assured the agency that he would personally make sure that Joseph McCarthy and fellow Wisconsin Senator

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<sup>128</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, N.J., University of Princeton Press, 1992); Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2nd Edition, 2006.)

Alexander Wiley would attend the event. After meeting with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in April, 1953, Prieto-Laurens' organization, *Frente Popular Anti-Comunista de Mexico* (Popular Anti-Communist Front of Mexico) received U.S. financial and logistical support to move forward with its plans.<sup>129</sup>

Despite some reservations by the intelligence community, the CIA decided to support Prieto-Lauren's efforts. Dating back to 1949, the *Frente Popular Anti-Comunista* had been working with the CIA and the U.S. Embassy, passing out unattributed anti-communist literature in Mexico City that had been prepared by U.S. intelligence agencies.<sup>130</sup> During this time, agents found Prieto-Laurens to inflate his sense of importance to the anti-communist project in Latin America, and while the agency did not doubt his convictions, CIA operatives were concerned that he was making "selfish" political calculations along the way. An agreement eventually was struck between Prieto-Laurens and the CIA in which the *Frente Popular Anti-Comunista* would be given about ten thousand dollars to arrange the hemispheric anticommunist congress in Mexico City. Prieto-Laurens' organization was charged with inviting hundreds of individuals from across Latin America to the conference, as well as to work with Guatemalan exiles to push a vote on a resolution declaring that "Soviet Imperialism has established a beachhead in Guatemala and is rapidly consolidating its position to make Guatemala a Satellite." Additional objectives were included in a letter addressed to the Chief of the CIA in the Western Hemisphere, and included:

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<sup>129</sup> Chief WH to Chief of Station, Lincoln, "Anti-Communism in Mexico: Frente Popular Anti-Comunista de Mexico," PBSUCCESS May 17, 1954, HUL-W-370.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

- A. To induce a hemisphere resolution against Soviet intervention in Guatemala
- B. To build a hemisphere mechanism for combatting Soviet influence in Guatemala;
- C. To unify the several anti-Arbenz groups in exile;
- D. To smokescreen U.S. activities in PBSUCCESS;
- E. To create maximum psychological impact on the target audience<sup>131</sup>

Every step of the way Prieto-Laurens failed to satisfy the CIA. In one memo CIA officers wrote that Prieto-Laurens' leadership was "highly unreliable and unpredictable," and as the conference grew near, it was becoming increasingly clear that there was a good chance that the conference would be an utter disaster. Prieto-Laurens proved incapable of following through on essential tasks put forth by the CIA, failing to secure top-level participants or even finding an adequate location in Mexico City to host the event. Perhaps this explains why intelligence officers changed his top secret pseudonym from "RNSHIELD" to "PEON" as the conference drew closer.<sup>132</sup>

The scant amount of press coverage that the conference received in the United States was not flattering. After informing readers that the anti-communist gathering was held at the Cervantes Theatre—a well-known burlesque house—the *New York Times* explained that "no delegates of international prominence were present."<sup>133</sup> This was hardly the kind of publicity that

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<sup>131</sup> Lincoln to Chief, Western Hemisphere, "Hemisphere Conference in Mexico, April, 1954," PBSUCCESS, February 22, 1954, HUL-A-76.

<sup>132</sup> Memorandum, "Results of [ ] Trip to Mexico," PBSUCCESS, February 12, 1954, 4-5A-26.

<sup>133</sup> "Anti-Red Group Meets in Mexico," *New York Times*, May 28, 1954, pg 5.

the CIA had envisioned, but it was far better than the story appearing in the same paper a few days later, entitled “Anti-Red Congress in Mexico a Failure.” The conference had gone so poorly that delegates from Costa Rica and Ecuador walked out in protest, claiming the meeting had devolved into a shouting match of angry charges “against the Government of Mexico, against the United States and against practically everything.”<sup>134</sup>

For those who remained at the conference past the first day saw conditions break down even further. The presence of Russian, Polish, and Czech ambassadors in the Western Hemisphere was condemned by Prieto-Laurens.<sup>135</sup> The Mexican delegation presented a list of Mexican intellectuals and artists they accused of being Soviet spies—including artists Diego Rivera and Alfaro Siquieros, as well as popular actresses Maria Asunsolo and Dolores del Rio, in addition to well-regarded scholars, Eulalia Guzman and Maria Teresa Puentes.<sup>136</sup> After two days, conference attendees established eight principal agreements for the organization, most of which dealt with the need for greater anticommunism in Mexico. The principles included: to help sustain the Mexican regime; to condemn the theories of communism; to prosecute Mexican communist traitors and foreigners who would meddle in Mexican internal affairs; to close the *Universidad Obrera* in Mexico City; to deport “communist cells” operating in Mexico; and finally, to officially form the *Consejo Nacional Anticomunista*.<sup>137</sup> One of the few lasting results of the conference was the printing of a book, *El libro negro del comunismo en Guatemala*

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<sup>134</sup> “Anti-Red Congress in Mexico a failure,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1954, 5.

<sup>135</sup> Raúl Trejo Delarbe, “The Mexican Labor Movement: 1917-1975,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 1976), 133-153.

<sup>136</sup> “Mister Jorge, Mister Prieto,” *Hoy*, June 12, 1954, 2; Cesar Martino, “Comunismo! Se ha dado a la palabra,” *Hoy*, June 12, 1954, 16-17.

<sup>137</sup> “Comunistas” *Hoy*, June 12, 1954, 16-17.

(1954), which focused on the work completed at the conference and the continued threat of Guatemala to the rest of Latin America.<sup>138</sup>

Just a few months after the conference, the CIA began its operations to overthrow the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. Activists and journalists in Mexico were quick to condemn both the staging of the anticommunist congress in Mexico City as well as U.S. belligerence in Central America. The Spanish exile, Isaac Abeytua, wrote a series of scathing rebukes of U.S. actions as other journalists in *Hoy* blamed American economic hegemony and support for the United Fruit Company for the war.<sup>139</sup> Four members of the TGP, Angel Bracho, Alberto Beltran, Leopoldo Méndez, and Fanny Rabel, were among those named by the CIA as members of the *Sociedad de Amigos de Guatemala*, an organization created in December 1953 to help defend the democratic and progressive policies of the Guatemalan government under Arbenz.<sup>140</sup> Members of the organization came from mostly leftist organizations, including from the *Partido Popular*, *Partido Comunista Mexicano*, *Federación de Partidos del Pueblo Mexicano*, and the *Consejo Nacional de Partidarios de la Paz*.<sup>141</sup> The CIA reported that the Guatemalan Embassy was providing these organizations with the funds needed

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<sup>138</sup> It is likely that intelligence agencies covertly wrote and paid for the printing of this book, which focused on the alleged atrocities committed by Arbenz's regime. Lincoln to Chief, Western Hemisphere, "Hemisphere Conference in Mexico, April, 1954," PBSUCCESS, February 22, 1954, HUL-A-76. See also, *Manolo Vela Castañeda*, "Guatemala, 1954: las ideas de la contrarrevolución," *Foro Internacional*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 2005), 89-114.

<sup>139</sup> Isaac Abeytua commented extensively on the situation in Guatemala: "Chamusco Yanki: Guatemala el pulpo del 'trust'," *Hoy*, February 20, 1954, 27-29; "El Quetzal Herido," *Hoy*, July 3, 1954, 27-29; "Victory, Victory! Guatemala está bajo poderoso triunvirato" *Hoy*, July 10, 1954, 29-31; "Consummatum Est!..Y Triunfo el ejército libertario," *Hoy*, July 17, 1954, 24-27. "United Fruit Army: La Estela Trágica de Braden," *Hoy*, June 6, 1954,

<sup>140</sup> "Formation of the Sociedad de Amigos de Guatemala," PBSUCCESS October 29, 153 Report No CS-26596.

<sup>141</sup> "Sociedad de Amigos de Guatemala," PBSUCCESS January 6, 1954, RYBAT #27; "Sociedad de Amigos de Guatemala," PBSUCCESS February 11, 1954, CS-30357.

to drum up opposition to a possible American led invasion and claimed that tens of thousands of leaflets were passed out in Mexico City condemning U.S. intervention in Guatemala.<sup>142</sup>

Throughout this period, U.S. intelligence agencies kept close records of the anti-American sentiment in Mexico and attempted to bolster anticommunism in the country. The U.S. Embassy and the CIA kept surveillance on members of the TGP, especially as the organization tried to prevent the overthrow of President Arbenz. CIA agents proved no better at selecting political operatives in Mexico as they were in hand picking dictators, as the stumbling character of Prieto-Laurens proved to be an unmitigated disaster for the agency in its efforts to organize a continental wide anticommunist effort.

## **Conclusions**

U.S. histories of imperialism in Mexico informed a variety of critiques from radicals as well as moderates as the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American occupation of Mexico City approached in 1947. The Mexican-left highlighted the similarities between pre-revolutionary era of imperialism in the country, in which a corrupt Mexican state allowed its northern neighbor to ransack Mexico's wealth—and the open trade, anticommunist sentiments of the Alemán administration. American officials hoped that the post-war period would usher in a new era of cooperation between the two countries and that Truman's visit in particular would mark a

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<sup>142</sup> Perhaps the best known artworks that stood in opposition to the United States' intervention in the Guatemala comes from Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. His mural, "Glorious Victory," completed in 1955 after the coup, depicted John Foster and Allen Dulles conspiring to overthrow the Arbenz regime, speaking with Castillo Armas and Colonel Elfego Monzón, while Indigenous men load bananas onto a United Fruit ship. Memorably, President Eisenhower's face is drawn on an atomic bomb in the center of the image.

renewed commitment to economic and security cooperation. While the U.S. could largely count on the support from Mexico's increasingly authoritarian government throughout the early years of the Cold War, Mexican artists, intellectuals, and journalists proved to be skeptical observers of the United States effort to combat communism across the globe. The free flow of capital and close political relationships between the two countries informed a wide range of criticisms—from Mexico being “Coca-Cola-ized” to fears Mexican migrants were to being kidnapped to fight in Korea, to concerns that the U.S. red scare was being exported to Mexico City. Each of these worries reflected a wider concern that Mexico was losing its political, economic, and cultural autonomy in a period of expansive U.S. power.

## Chapter 4

### “Nosotros semos el pais”: Race, Nation, and the Anti-Imperial Imagination

On August 3, 1955, India’s Ambassador to Mexico and the United States, Gaganvihari Lallubhai Mehta and his assistant B.A. Rajagopalan, unexpectedly found themselves drawn into an international debate concerning Jim Crow in the U.S. South. While waiting for their flight at the Houston International airport, they stopped at the Horizon House restaurant for a meal when the manager, Mary Allen, mistook them for “negroes.” Allen was overhead repeating to the two men “law’s the law,” before she escorted them to the restaurant’s segregated dining area.<sup>143</sup> This likely would have gone unnoticed if not for Frank Gibler, a former managing editor of *The Houston Chronicle*, who happen to witness the scene. Gibler explained that he thought it was “incongruous” that as Houston celebrated its fortieth anniversary as a “world port city,” that there were individuals like Allen who could make the metropolis seem like nothing more than “a provincial Southern City.”<sup>144</sup> When news of this incident spread, Secretary of State John Dulles sent a telegraph apologizing to Ambassador Mehta, as well as a letter of regret to the Indian Government in New Dehli. Houston Mayor, Roy Hofheinz, also extended an apology “on behalf of every citizen of Houston,” assuring Mehta that despite what he encountered, “We are proud that Houstonians do not discriminate against anyone of any race.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> “Houston’s Mayor Now Denies Snub,” *The Sun*, August 25, 1955, 1. Hofheinz’s executive assistant, John F. Stephens, noted that this was at least the third such incident of racial segregation occurring at the Houston airport, which had only opened a few months earlier. Stephens informed the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that the most recent case had involved Cubans, and he promised to look into this further as Houston’s airport held federal contracts, which banned segregation. “Envoy Honored Till Texas and U.S. Apologize,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 24, 1955, A2.

<sup>144</sup> “Bar Indian Envoy from Dining Room,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 23, 1955, 12.

<sup>145</sup> “Incident was Observed,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1955, 4; “U.S., Houston Mayor Apologize to India for Race Incident,” *Daily Boston Globe*, August 24, 1955, pg. 6.

Mehta's treatment prompted extensive commentary on the color line in America in India's press, African American newspapers, and the mainstream press in the United States.<sup>146</sup> A number of African American newspapers reacted to Mehta's experience with a mixture of hope that such occurrences would help gain attention to the inhumanity of Jim Crow, as well as resentment that it took an international incident involving a foreign diplomat to motivate some to reflect on the state of racial inequality in the nation.<sup>147</sup> Writing about the widespread attention Mehta's story was receiving abroad, a clearly frustrated *Chicago Daily Tribune* editorial asked its readers: "Are we alone in our impatience over having everything that happens in the United States evaluated on the basis of how it might be interpreted in Europe and Asia?"<sup>148</sup> It may have tested these editors' patience even further to learn that this example of Jim Crow America was not just fodder for European and Asian observers to criticize U.S. race relations.<sup>149</sup> In Mexico, Alberto Beltrán, a member of the TGP, reflected on Mehta's experiences with Jim Crow some

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<sup>146</sup> According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, most New Delhi papers recorded the incident on the inside pages of its paper. *The Hindustan Standard*, however, ran a front page headline reading, "United States Government apologizes to Indian Ambassador—Mehta victim of color bar." "India Describes Rebuff to Mehta as Closed Matter," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 1955, 10; "Mehta Unperturbed" *Christian Science Monitor*, August 26, 1955, 10; "Envoy is Victim of Segregation: India Receives U.S. Apology," *New York Times*, August 24, 1955, 4; See also, Aparnu Basu, *G.L. Mehta: A Many Splendoured Man* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2001), 161-162.

<sup>147</sup> "Diplomat Victim of Texas Bias," *The Chicago Defender*, September 1955, 1; "Surprised India Envoy Gets Apologies for 'Segregation'," *The Sun*, August 24, 1955, 1; "Texas Bias Backfires—so Brass Squirms," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 25, 1955, A1; "Southern Hospitality A La Negro Not Good for Indian Ambassador Mehta," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 27, 1955, 1.

<sup>148</sup> As quoted in, "What Other Newspapers Are Saying," *Chicago Defender*, September 10, 1955, 9.

<sup>149</sup> On the international struggle of African American racial equality, See, Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle For Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*; James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935–1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Francis Njubi Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions: African Americans Against Apartheid, 1946–1994* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

three months after the incident occurred. In a political cartoon titled “Cuando a Texas te vayas mi cuate” (When you go to Texas my friend), appearing in the radical Mexico City newspaper *Ahí va el golpe*, a skeleton is depicted advising his friend about what to expect when he entered *gringolandia* as a bracero [Figure 30]. Just moments before the would-be migrant steps foot into the Rio Bravo, his friend points to the examples of racism he is likely to encounter on his journey. Ambassador Mehta, represented here wearing a turban, has his chair pulled out from underneath him by a waitress as he attempts to sit down at a restaurant. Closer to the river, we see a man being chased down on the U.S. side of the Rio Bravo by a Texan wielding a gun. The skeletons, symbols widely deployed in Mexican popular culture, were often adopted by members of the TGP to ridicule politicians or mock explosive political situations—portraying the living in skeleton form was a neutralizing force that put all actors on the same level.



Figure 30. “Cuando a Texas te vayas mi cuate,” *Ahí va el Golpe*, November 1, 1955.

A corrido positioned at the bottom left hand corner of the drawing reinforced the international concerns of the radical art collective and provided a chilling image of white supremacy in the United States:

Quando a gringolandia vayas,  
A fregarte de bracero  
Cuídate mucho mi cuate  
De echar chiflidos a un cuero

Pues los discriminadores,  
Al mexicano y al negro  
Y hasta algún príncipe hindú

Convierten en esqueleto

(When you go to gringolandia  
To try your luck as a bracero  
Be very careful my friend  
If you whistle at a woman

Because those who discriminate  
Against the Mexicans and blacks  
And even an Indian prince  
Will turn you into a skeleton)

We learn from the corrido that the would-be migrant plans to find work as a bracero in the United States, but as he is about to enter the waters of the Rio Bravo, his friend intercedes with some potentially lifesaving advice. In the first stanza, the line “Cuídate mucho mi cuate/De echar chiflidos a un cuero” (Be very careful my friend/If you whistle at a woman) is a direct reference to another incident making international news in the summer of 1955, the gruesome murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old boy who had been tortured and then shot in Mississippi after reportedly whistling at a white woman. The bracero is warned that Mexicans and black Americans, and even Indian princes are subjected to racial violence in Jim Crow America—or *gringolandia*. For the Mexican left, to speak out against *Yanquis* or *gringos* in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was to conjure images of a lengthy history of U.S. imperialism built on racial apartheid and economic exploitation. The gringo in this image is a Texas law enforcement agent, perhaps a Texas Ranger, wielding a pistol in his hand, as he chases down a fleeing skeleton.<sup>150</sup> Following the advice from his *cuate* could very likely be a matter of life and death for the bracero.

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<sup>150</sup> The classic study on Texas border *corridos* is Américo Paredes’ *With His Pistol in His Hand*, which documents the corrido of Gregorio Cortez—an agricultural laborer of Mexican descent, who seeks revenge for the murder of his wife and brother by a Texas sheriff. Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand* (Austin: University of Texas

An important facet of this drawing and the corresponding corrido is that it suggests how Mexican radicals, like Beltrán, explained U.S. white supremacy to his working class audience. Rather than concentrating exclusively on a singular story of misfortune experienced by a Mexican migrant trying to earn a living in the United States, Beltrán depicts a wider system of state sanctioned white racial terror in America, in which Mexicans encounter discrimination, economic exploitation, and perhaps even death, alongside other non-white people. In fact, we are not entirely sure whether the man being chased down by the Texan is an African American or Mexican. It is just as likely that the figure is Emmett Till as it is a compatriot of the Mexican migrant. Beltrán's drawing depicts the ease in which state violence is directed against people of color, suggesting to the reader that to truly understand the racial oppression faced by Mexican migrants, it was necessary to look at how the United States dealt with other non-white populations. Importantly, though the discrimination of the "Indian prince" occurred at the Houston international airport, and the murder of Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi—the U.S.-Mexico border serves as the symbolic site for understanding American imperial relations and white racial violence.

And yet, Beltrán's artwork connecting Mexican migration and violence at the border to a much wider system of white supremacy in the United States remained very much outside the mainstream. Indeed, despite the widespread condemnation of the treatment of braceros in the United States within Mexican media, radical internationalist critiques like Beltrán's, linking the struggle of Mexicans to other non-white racial groups were exceedingly rare. This chapter

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Press, 1958). On corridos and border culture, see, José E Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989); Jose David Saldivar, *Border Matters: Remapping Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

compares the criticisms of the Bracero Program in Mexico by exploring the vast differences between representations of migrants created by the mainstream press and those forged by the TGP. Mainstream outlets like *Hoy* expressed profound anger at the violence Mexicans encountered in the United States, railing against the litany of abuses committed at the hands of Americans, but at the same time, this outrage was tempered by their own anxieties about the supposed cultural deficiencies of its emigrant population.<sup>151</sup> Migrants were targeted by the press for their provincial cultures and proximity to indigeneity, marked as less deserving citizens due to their language, clothing, *huaraches*, skin color, and indigenous features.<sup>152</sup>

The second portion of this chapter shows the profoundly different ways that the Bracero Program was portrayed by the TGP, centering on how the critiques of the art collective emphasized an international understanding of U.S. imperialism and white supremacy, built in part through the organization's long term commitment to working with black artists. The TGP's

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<sup>151</sup> The multiracial and multiethnic identities of Mexican migrants has perhaps best been taken into account by authors working on contemporary Mexican migration. See, Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Laura Velasco, *Mixtec Transnational Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005); Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivers, ed., *Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States* (La Jolla: Center for U.S. Mexican Studies and the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2004); Johnathon Fox, "Indigenous Mexican Migration," in *Beyond la Frontera*; Gilberto Rosas, *Barrio Libre*, 83-88.

<sup>152</sup> Scholarship on Mexican citizenship during the postrevolutionary period have focused attention to the modernizing attempts by state agencies to assimilate "backwards" indigenous subjects into the national fabric through discourses of mestizaje, concentrating on the first two decades following the Mexican Revolution. See, Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cardenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1995); Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico 1910-1940," in Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America* (Austin: UT Press, 1990), 71-114.; Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen E. Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). Deborah Cohen contends that the Bracero Program was an extension of these earlier modernization programs. Anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who advised negotiations and helped shape the program while working in the *Instituto Indigenista Interamericano*, argued that migrants learned more efficient work habits, gained modern skills, and improved themselves culturally by laboring in the United States. Cohen, *Braceros*, 35-37.

work on Mexican emigration focused not on the nationalistic rhetoric of abandonment, nor did it rely on the racist indigenous tropes that pervaded mainstream discourse, but instead sought to uncover the transnational crisis of emigration, which had its roots firmly planted with the corrupt and ineffective Mexican government's relationship with the United States. By comparing the differences in representations of Mexican, this chapter adds to the growing literature that emphasizes how perceptions of racial and class difference within Mexico impacted the migration experiences of braceros before, during, and after travelling to the United States.<sup>153</sup>

### **Migrants in caricature**

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the mainstream Mexican press printed hundreds of stories about the Bracero Program, detailing examples of racial discrimination men experienced in the United States, difficulties migrants encountered finding decent paying jobs, and the increase in the numbers of apprehensions, deportations, and deaths of undocumented immigrants. In a nation that had paid such close attention to its emigrant population and that harbored such deep resentment toward U.S. power for so long, why would these mass deportations fail to inspire people to mobilize in the streets to demand the end of the Bracero Program?<sup>154</sup> In Mexico's popular press, how was it possible that the draconian efforts to police

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<sup>153</sup> Ana Rosas, "Flexible Families: Bracero Families' Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964," (Ph.D. Diss, University of Southern California, 2006); Mireya Loza, "Braceros on the Boundaries: Activism, Race, Masculinity, and the Legacies of the Bracero Program," (Ph.D. Diss, Brown University, 2011), 23-103.

<sup>154</sup> A similar question was posed by Jorge Bustamante who argues that Mexico's elite have until recently viewed Mexican migrants as "pochos," as second class citizens. Jorge Bustamante, *Migración internacional y derechos humanos* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002); See also, Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, "Histories and Historiographies of Greater Mexico," in Overmyer-Velázquez, ed., *Beyond la Frontera* (2008);

the U.S.-Mexico border were met not with journalists' calls for mass protest, but rather, for increased numbers of officers to police the Mexican side of the border?<sup>155</sup>

To answer these questions it is instructive to recall that the architects of the Bracero Program in Mexico promised that it would aid in the modernization of the country. According to government officials, migrants would labor on the most technologically advanced industrial farms in the world and once they returned from the United States, they would be able to put those skills to work in the Mexican countryside where farmers were struggling to produce enough to keep up with the demands created by the rapidly expanding population. Historian Ana Rosas explains that the government's idea of modernizing the labor force through migration was deeply tied to notions of racial uplift. Rosas argues that "Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho proposed rehabilitating allegedly racially inferior rural Mexican men into modern citizens by exposing them to U.S. customs, skills, and work habits that they did not know through temporary contract labor in the United States."<sup>156</sup> While architects of the program argued that Mexican men from rural areas would be able to better themselves through the closely managed operations of the Bracero Program, they were far less optimistic that this applied to the migrants who traveled to the United States without state sanction. It was these migrants that the Mexican press relentlessly lambasted—the poor, uneducated, and racially suspect—who required greater state policing to prevent them from being exploited in the United States. For the Mexican

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Jorge Durand, "From Traitors to Heroes: 100 Years of Mexican Migration Policies," *Migration Information Source*, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=203> (accessed September 13, 2013).

<sup>155</sup> Protests that did occur often were staged by *aspirantes* who wished to migrate to the United States and wanted to change Mexican policies making it easier to leave Mexico. "Braceros desfilando," *Jueves de Excelsior*, May 27, 1948, 4.

<sup>156</sup> Ana Rosas, "Flexible Families," 1.

elite and emerging middle classes, the campesinos—often derogatively referred to as “peones” and even occasionally “inditos”—fleeing the countryside were a national disgrace, a poor representation of the emerging modern Mexico.<sup>157</sup> As the treatment of Mexicans in the United States worsened, as seen in the rapid rise of detentions and deportations of migrants in the border region—from about 90,000 in 1946 to more than one million in 1954, the Mexican mainstream press took increasingly harsh views of its migrant citizenry.<sup>158</sup> These observers determined that the only explanation for why migrants would leave Mexico—where they were likely to encounter discrimination and exploitation—was due to problems with braceros themselves, charging that these men lacked education, patriotism, and a proper sense of familial duty.

Arias Bernal, perhaps the best known cartoonist in Mexico, fit securely into the category of a member of the mainstream press who condemned U.S. border enforcement regimes while simultaneously blaming migrants for the violence they experienced. After World War II, Bernal’s previous emphasis of pan-Americanism [Figure 9] turned to a far more critical approach, with special attention given to how Mexicans fared in the United States [Figure 27]. In the cartoon below from April 29, 1950, Bernal captures the mundane, everyday violence experienced by Mexicans at the hands of Texas cowboys [Figure 31].<sup>159</sup> The two men are

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<sup>157</sup> In the early 1950s, many pages of *Hoy* were dedicated to describing indigenous people and cultures of Mexico, often leading to discussions about the challenges of incorporating them into the modern Mexican state. See, for example: “Perfora la Sierra del Nayar y rompe así el misterio de 2 siglos que envolvió a la raza Cora,” *Hoy*, January 7, 1950, 25-35; “Dioses rivales en la Sierra Nayarita!,” *Hoy*, January 14, 1950, 28-32; “En la cueva sagrada de los Coras descubre los restos del último rey Nayarit,” *Hoy*, January 21, 1950, 30-24; María elena de Pallares, “La Idolatria tras la cruz,” February 27, 1954, 127-128; “Vendedores de Historia,” August 21, 1954, 30-34.

<sup>158</sup> While the great majority of the Mexican migrants deported were residing in Texas and California, these policies were national in scope, with thousands of Mexican men, women, and children being deported from Chicago, Milwaukee, and Detroit. Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 50-56.

<sup>159</sup> Rafael Freyre, another one of Mexico’s leading cartoonists, published a number of comics that depicted the hardships migrants experienced at the hands of Texans. Rafael Freyre, “El Retorno,” August 14, 1954, pg. 6; Rafael

presented as possibly, but not necessarily law enforcement officials, who casually discuss the murder of Mexican men in the United States. The Texan on the left asks his friend about the significance of the decorative symbols on his shirt, to which the other man replies with a grin that the six symbols represented the number of braceros he had murdered.

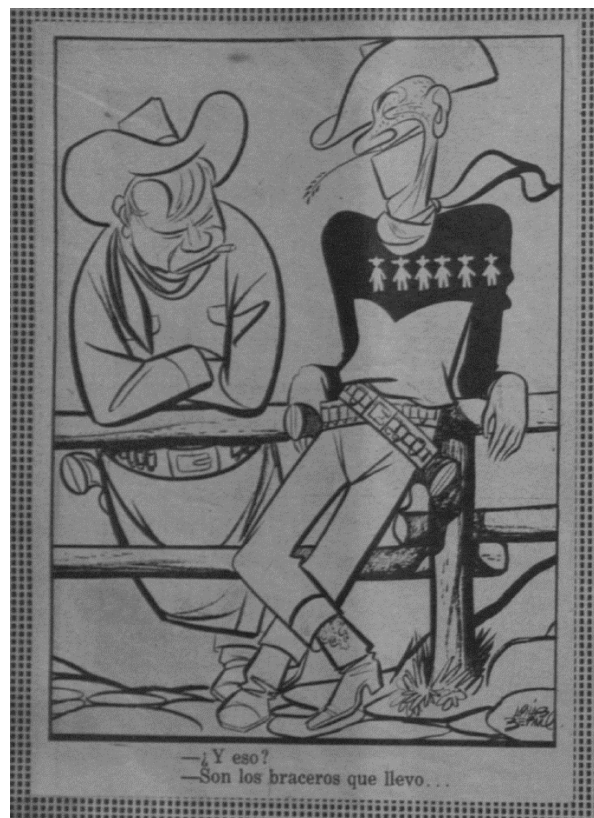


Figure 31. *Hoy*, April 29, 1950. Caption: “—Y eso?—Son los braceros que llevo...”

While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Bernal’s critiques of the racism and the concerns about the potential violence migrants experienced in the U.S., when we examine his full catalog of work it is clear that his cartoons cannot be read as exclusively empathetic to

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Freyre, “Vengan, que quiero platicar...,” *Hoy*, January 30, 1954, pg. 5; Rafael Freyre, “¡Bienvenida!...al ‘bracero’,” *Hoy*, January 1, 1955, pg. 6.

migrants' struggle. Bernal consistently emphasized the racial and class difference of migrants, producing numerous images of *aspirantes* that raised doubts about their capacity to comprehend the challenges they were likely to experience in the United States.<sup>160</sup> The editors of *Hoy* must have thought Bernal's observations of the Bracero Program were revelatory because in the span of just three years, four of Bernal's migrant caricatures were printed on the magazine's cover. According to Eric Zolov, front cover illustrations of Mexican magazines—known as *carátulas*—were highly desirable for artists in that they afforded them an opportunity to provide greater detail in color wash and were thought of more highly than *monitos*—the single frame pen and ink caricatures typical of newspapers and magazines of the period. In assessing the importance of the *carátulas* in the 1940s and 1950s, Zolov suggests that there existed meaningful similarities between magazine cover art and Mexico's mural movement "in that both used symbolic visual language to reach a broad, often semi-literature population. One did not need to purchase the magazine to 'read' the editorial content expressed by the cover, since magazines were sold from street-corner kiosks and could be browsed by ever passerby."<sup>161</sup> Indeed, as Mexico's leading caricaturist writing for the nation's most popular magazine, Bernal's magazine covers were prominently displayed in corner kiosks throughout the country.

In his *carátulas*, Bernal relied on markers of indigeneity to explain why migrants risked the humiliation of apprehension, deportation, and labor exploitation in the United States. For example, as Mexico negotiated with the United States on the updated terms of the Bracero Program in March, 1948, Bernal represented the humiliating experiences of indigenous migrants

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<sup>160</sup> Mexican artists and intellectuals both celebrated indigenous histories, while questioning the ability for indigenous peoples to successfully incorporate into the Mexican nation. Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, *Historias Secretas Del Racismo en México, 1920-1950* (Mexico City: Tusquets Editores, 2007).

<sup>161</sup> Eric Zolov, "Jorge Carreno's Graphic Satire and the Politics of "Presidentialism" in Mexico during the 1960s," 20.

who is ridden like a mule by a Texan to the United States [Figure 32]. Bernal identifies the migrant as indigenous through his poor clothing, linen pants, partial mustache, and cloth belt. The Texan dangles a large carrot reading “nuevos contratos” (new contracts), “mayores salarios” (better salaries) and “no mas discriminacion” (no more discrimination) in front of the Mexican’s face. The wide eyed, gullible migrant does not grasp the emptiness of the Texan’s promises, despite the fact that the cowboy is riding him like a beast of burden. The *aspirante* fails to see the other obvious warning signs—the Texan’s Pinocchio-styled nose and his sharp spurs, ensuring that despite the promises, new rounds of contract talks would not lead to improved treatment for the bracero.



Figure 32. *Hoy*, March 13, 1948.

Bernal's caricatures highlighted the vast class, racial, and ethnic differences between the middle class consumers of *Hoy* and the imagined gullible Mexican campesino who sought his fortune in the United States. In a cover appearing in May of 1949 [Figure 33], Bernal depicts a likely migrant, wearing linen pants, a shirt with patches, and no shoes—listening to “el canto de la sirena” (the siren’s song). Uncle Sam seduces the man, whose wide eyes and hand placement on his chin suggests his profound sense of confusion. While the *aspirante* struggles to comprehend what is happening in his world, the large dollar sign in the form of a rock implores that he heed the siren’s call. Such depictions were typical of *Hoy*. An article from May, 1951, for example, echoed Bernal’s concerns, lamenting the persistent “illegal” immigration and the tens of thousands of deportations, explaining that these were a result of “the ignorance, the dazzle [of the dollar] and an absence of *mexicanidad*” that had “prompted the laborers to abandon Mexico.” Making the situation even more tragic, the author noted that better work opportunities were beginning to become available in Mexico’s agricultural sector every day—yet emigrants were simply choosing to ignore the chance to better themselves and their country in the futile pursuit of the American dollar.<sup>162</sup> It was absence of proper patriotism and misplaced moral values, the author contended, rather than material necessity that resulted in men “abandoning” their country in such large numbers.

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<sup>162</sup> “Ve, oye, dice,” *Hoy*, May 15, 1951, 10.



Figure 33. *Hoy*, May 28, 1949.

These cartoons were far from harmless caricatures of migrants as they served to reinforce the idea that Mexico was a nation burdened by race and the primitiveness of its migrant citizenry. Importantly, such drawings helped create a visual rendering of subjects whose actions required greater attention by the Mexican state. Left to their own accord, migrants would be duped by the promises of better treatment, too impressionable to ignore the siren's call, too ignorant to understand that the American dollars he dreamed about were never meant for him. It was within this context that Mexican journalists began insisting that the humiliating experiences of migrants necessitated state intervention. Writing for *Hoy* in 1949, for example, José Rubén Romero questioned:

“¡Como un país que presume tanto de ir a la cabeza de la civilización puede aplicar tratos tan inhumanos! ¡Como en donde funcionan sociedades protectoras de animales, los hombres de nuestra raza no llegan a la categoría de perros! Y así pretenden que el mundo les tenga simpatía y los declare abanderados de la libertad.

Nuestro gobierno no puede ejercer ninguna protección absoluta para nuestros braceros. No contamos con tropas suficientes para establecer un cordón de vigilancia en la frontera, y evitar el paso de nuestros llamados braceros, esclavos en la antigüedad, galeotes en la Edad Media.”<sup>163</sup>

[How is it that in a country that claims to be the head of civilization they can treat you so inhumanely? How is it that in a society that protects its animals, that men of our race don't reach the category of dogs!

Our government cannot exercise any protection for our braceros. We do not have enough troops to establish a line of surveillance at the border and prevent the passage of our so-called braceros, slaves of antiquity, galley slaves from the middle ages.]

While Bernal and Romero were able to capture the various machinations of border violence in the U.S., their work chided the Mexican government for not acting more forcefully to prevent the movement of Mexicans across its northern border.

By the time that Bernal and Romero's accounts were published in the late 1940s and early 1950s, *Hoy* had established the central tropes of the Mexican migrant for the magazine's readers. However, when the magazine first reported on the Bracero Program, its investigative reporters scrambled to understand which Mexicans were leaving the country. In March of 1944, as tens of thousands of migrants gathered at the National Stadium in Mexico City, *Hoy* asked: “Y... quiénes son los braceros?” (“And...who are the braceros?”).<sup>164</sup> Journalist Horacio

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<sup>163</sup> José Rubén Romero, “Los braceros, como símbolos de México!” *Hoy*, January 15, 1949, 12-13.

<sup>164</sup> Horacio Quiñones, “Y... quiénes son los braceros?,” March 24, 1944, 33-34. *Hoy* reported on rumors over the previous few months that migrants caught in the United States without authorization faced corporeal punishment for breaking the law. “Los braceros engañados: centenares de trabajadores que dejaron sus pueblos, deambulan por Nuevo Laredo, en la miseria,” *Hoy*, July 25, 1942, 10-11; Horacio Quiñones, “La Aportación de Nuestros Braceros,” *Hoy*, December 12, 1943, 28-29; “Braceros,” February 6, 1943, 3-4.

Quiñones interviewed *aspirantes* who joked about the poor quality of the Mexican government and dismissed the popular opinion that they should somehow be blamed for “abandoning” the country. Instead, they argued that the nation had abandoned them as the government refused to redistribute land or ensure well-paying jobs. Each of the men was presented in individual portraits and though Quiñones did not identify migrants by name, the article did afford each the opportunity to explain why leaving Mexico was a rational decision that they had carefully weighed. As one man explained, he wanted to travel to the United States because he had no family and few job opportunities. Perhaps responding to the reporter’s question about lacking patriotism, the *aspirante* declared, “I wasn’t working, and even still, because I leave you say I’m ruining the country.” The article was unique in that the journalist conducted interviews and published the thoughts of men wishing to leave the country.<sup>165</sup> Over the course of the decade interviews with migrants and *aspirantes* were almost never included in stories about the Bracero Program printed in *Hoy*.

Nevertheless, the article managed to reinforce the racial and class difference of its migrant subjects. Like Bernal’s *carátulas*, the writer portrays *aspirantes* as provincial and lacking the ability to make rational decisions. While explaining his reasons for seeking work as a bracero, an unnamed migrant informed the reporter that when his mother died, he decided to travel to the U.S. because he was all by himself. Rather than writing his words as “murió dejándome así no más” (she died leaving me just like this)—the migrant’s remarks are written phonetically as “murio dej’andome ansina,” which was meant to demonstrate the migrant’s use

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<sup>165</sup> Such direct interviews with migrants in the early 1950s were rare. In fact it seems about as likely to encounter articles of Mexican reporters dressing up as braceros to get gritty investigative stories, as it is to find simple interviews of *aspirantes*. Jaime Sánchez Ramírez, “Yo sufrí el drama de los braceros,” *Jueves de Excélsior*, February 2, 1954, 27; Jaime Sánchez Ramírez, “Yo viví el drama de los braceros,” *Jueves de Excélsior*, March 11, 1954, 21; ““Metó a la muerte sobre el río bravo!” *Hoy*, March 3, 1951.

of improper Spanish. These ideas were reinforced by the author, who insisted that most of the migrants were illiterate with only a few of the men possessing basic knowledge of the alphabet. Importantly, when a group of men being interviewed explained that their experiences were representative of the majority of the country, declaring to the reporter “nosotros somos el país” (we are the country)—the words are written as “nostotros semos el país,” a clear sign that the writer doubted the migrants’ claims.<sup>166</sup>

*Hoy* published dozens of pictures of emigrants in the first decade of the Bracero Program that largely reinforced the difference between readers of the magazine and emigrants. In *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the Mexico–U.S. Borderlands*, Alicia Schmidt Camacho examines the photographs of migrants taken during this period by the Hermanos Mayo, Spanish exiles who fled the civil war and relocated to Mexico. Camacho notes that “the plurality of the images is astonishing when measured against Mexico’s prevailing discourse, which viewed the bracero as a single, simplistic figure. Instead, these men are beautifully complex—young and old, campesinos and urbanites, hopeful and resigned, both interacting with one another and contemplating their individual futures.”<sup>167</sup> Even in articles in which the Hermanos Mayo’s images were reproduced, Camacho explains, the accompanying text did not correspond with the class solidarity that the brothers tried to evoke with their photography.<sup>168</sup> In *Hoy*, while some

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<sup>166</sup>The conclusions about who were the migrants had become so ingrained in the Mexican population imagination that the very few articles questioning common wisdom had explanatory titles like: “¿Antipatriotas? ¡No, hambrientos!” (Unpatriotic? No, Hungry!). As evidence that migrants were in fact patriotic, the journalist printed a corrido allegedly sung by braceros, praising President Alemán as the rightful protector of the nation. In explaining the dire economic straits the men found themselves, two lines of the song explain: “Que si vamos a morir/mejor que sea trabajando” (If we are going die/better that we be working). Enrique Isla Cáceres, “¿Antipatriotas? ¡No, hambrientos!” *Hoy*, April 10, 1948, 54-55.

<sup>167</sup> Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), 77.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

photographs provided the sorts of complexity discussed by Camacho, more often the images were like the ones below [Figure 34, Figure 35], in which photographs capturing migrants' huaraches and dirty feet were paired with ones showing the large number of *aspirantes* in Mexico City, sleeping outdoors in public streets, park benches, and on sidewalks, all of which reinforced the vast cultural gulf between middle class readers and the rural migrants who fled Mexico.<sup>169</sup> Most often photographs captured anonymous large groups of men from a far distance, showing them waiting in long lines at migrant processing stations, sitting aimlessly in prisons in Mexicali and Los Angeles, and wading nearly nude into the Rio Grande.<sup>170</sup> While it is plausible that such images would have shocked Mexican readers into feeling empathy for the plight of migrant workers, the text almost uniformly found migrants responsible for their mistreatment, noting that despite having just experienced being apprehended or deported by the U.S. Border Patrol officials, most men would try their luck once again crossing the Rio Bravo. Indeed, images appearing in *Hoy* emphasized the mass "humiliation" of the campesino experience and the shame that such individuals brought to the nation. Importantly, anxieties about migration manifested in both the transnational movement of Mexicans to the United States, but also the internal migration of individuals from rural areas to the rapidly expanding Mexico City.<sup>171</sup> While some migrants would eventually travel to the United States, many more would

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<sup>169</sup> "Anualmente 350,000 mexicanos entraran ilegalmente a los EE. UU.," Feb, 21, 1952, *Jueves de Excelsior*, 26-27; El Personal del Ferrocarril trata en forma inhumana a los braceros, *El Porvenir*, August 11, 1952, 25; Frontera abierta," *Hoy*, June 20, 1953, 7; "Acción pública contra los asesinos del pueblo," *Hoy*, November 27, 1943, 29-31.

<sup>170</sup> "Ellos ven así a los braceros," *Hoy*, March 10, 1951, 24-25; "Meto a la muerte sobre el rio bravo!," *Hoy*, March 3, 1951, 84-89; "Frontera abierta," *Hoy*, June 20, 1953, 7-11; "Braceros al mismo precio," April 11, 1953, 8-9; Braceros a chorro y aviones con chorros de buena voluntad," *Hoy*, January 30, 1954, 53; "Los arboles ocultaron los bosques: La reforma agraria necesita nuevos planes," February 20, 1954, 11-13; "Venta de Esclavos en la bolas de los mercados diplomáticos," *Hoy*, March 27, 1954, 32.

<sup>171</sup> Articles in *Hoy* documented squatter camps and the social problems that coincided with the growth of migrant populations into Mexico City. Fernan Clavijero, "Palacios de la miseria en la Ciudad de México," *Hoy*, October 30, 1950, 34-37.

remain in the nation's capital. Thus, migration, as these images suggest created a host of potential social problems that would impact the daily lives of *Hoy's* cosmopolitan readers. Indeed, part of the appeal of politicians like the Ernesto Uruchurtu, regent of Mexico City from 1952-1964, was his reputation for making the nation's capital inhospitable to rural migrants. Uruchutu's commitment to urban renewal and beautification of the city led to clashes between police and the migrants milling about in public spaces, as well as years of largely favorable press in *Hoy*.<sup>172</sup>



Figure 34. *Hoy*, “Profesionales de la humillación, August 1, 1953, 9. Caption: ¿Para esto fueron a Estados Unidos? Ilegales, humillados, pies de la miseria. (This is why they went to the United States? Illegal, humiliated, feet of misery.)

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<sup>172</sup> Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 138-39. See also, Robert M. Jordan, “Flowers and Iron Fists: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu and the Modernization of Mexico City, 1952-1966,” (Ph.D. Diss, University of Nebraska, 2013).



Figure 35. *Hoy*, “Frontera abierta,” *Hoy*, June 20, 1953, 7. Caption: Están esperando. Los braceros, tendidos en las calles, duermen y quizás sueñen con el paraíso de los hombres dorados. La realidad les golpeará en el rostro. (They are waiting. Lying in the streets, braceros sleep and perhaps dream of paradise inhabited by wealthy men. Reality will hit them in the face.)

### **Abandonment and the Return**

*Hoy* writers clung to long standing anti-Indian sentiments in Mexico to explain and reinforce differences between men who travelled to work in U.S. fields and Mexican men who remained with their families, working hard to build the post-revolutionary nation. The act of abandonment was one of the most puzzling aspects of migration for middle class writers, who questioned what kind of men would leave their families only to encounter racism, labor exploitation, and possibly even death in the United States. In these accounts, the steep decline in the value of the peso, food shortages, and lack of land that prompted migration were replaced

with simple “truisms” about the inherent nature of the migrant as ignorant, unpatriotic, and susceptible to abandoning the nation and family on a whim.

Arias Bernal identified sexual pleasure and adventure as a central reason some Mexican men were willing to leave their nation and families. In the following example from April of 1950, the migrant wears huaraches, frayed overalls, and a straw sombrero. He grasps his suitcase as he dreams of the riches and sexual possibilities that await him in the United States [Figure 36].<sup>173</sup> In the migrant’s mirage, a blonde woman wears revealing clothing and holds a bottle of champagne. She is surrounded by signs posted in the clouds reading “buen trato” (good treatment) “muchos dolares” (lots of dollars), and “Ham and Eggs, Fried Chicken and Hot Cakes.”<sup>174</sup> The *aspirante* allows his tools, a pitchfork and hoe, to sit unused, gathering cobwebs, preferring to spend his time daydreaming of sexually promiscuous blonde women and hot cakes, rather than cultivate his land. According to Bernal, migrants were not only travelling to the

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<sup>173</sup> Bernal printed another *carátula* similar to this one. In the cover, a migrant takes a brief break from his work, resting on his shovel only to see a highly sexualized blonde woman wearing heavy makeup, lipstick, dressed in shorts and a form fitting shirt. She presents herself as being open to the migrant’s advances. The overly excited man struggles to maintain his composure, wiping sweat off his brow with a handkerchief while his sombrero flies off his head as he looks longingly at the woman who has “dolares” printed on her shorts. *Hoy*, February 17, 1951.

<sup>174</sup> These concerns about migrants changing diet can be traced back to the 1920s. For example, in Daniel Venegas’ *Las aventuras de don Chipote, o, cuando los pericos mamen* (1928), the main character, don Chipote, leaves Mexico in search of work in the United States when he encounters Mexicans in Texas who have been thoroughly “gringoized.” The Americanized men make fun of don Chipote’s Spanish and “deny their country for no other reason than for having tasted ham and eggs.” Richard Griswold del Castillo, “Mexican Intellectuals’ Perceptions of Mexican Americans and Chicanos, 1920-Present,” *Aztlán* 27, no.2 (2002): (37) 33-74. In his memoir, *Aventuras de un bracero* (1949), Jesús Topete also recounted how central food was to migration. As a writer from Mexico City, Topete goes to great lengths to distinguish himself from the average bracero and in one memorable scene, Topete writes about the deep shame he experienced while watching his countrymen attempt to eat pork with silverware, noting that “Muchos no sabían manejar los cubiertos, y de vez en cuando los huesos les saltaban del plato y se iban a estrellar en la cara de sus vecinos, lo que deba motive para que los gringos que estaban allí se rieran ruidosamente...” (Many did not know how to handle silverware, occasionally the bones jumped off the plate, hitting their neighbors in the face, which made the gringos laugh loudly...) In recounting this experience, Topete explains the almost unbearable shame of seeing his countrymen being laughed at. Arias Bernal was commissioned to draw the cover for Topete’s memoir in which the more cosmopolitan migrant does not resemble any of the *Hoy* covers. Instead, Topete is clean shaven and wears work shoes, socks, and jeans. Jesús Amaya Topete, *Aventura de un bracero: relatos de seis meses en Estados Unidos* (México, DF: Editorial AmeXica, 1949), 19.

United States under false pretenses, but by refusing to work on their fertile land in Mexico, they failed to contribute to the building of the Mexican nation.<sup>175</sup>



Figure 36. *Hoy*, April 29, 1950

The notion that men were leaving the country for sexual adventure was advanced in a number of articles in *Hoy*. The photograph below [figure 37], for example, appeared alongside an article chastising migrants' lack of patriotism and fidelity to the nation. It captures a small

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<sup>175</sup> The question of the degradation of the Mexican character through his lust after white women in the U.S. was a recurring trope in films on the Bracero Program. In *Espaldas mojadas* (1954), a critical film about migration of Mexicans includes a scene of Mexican migrants paying for sex with white women. Interestingly, the State Department prevented the film from being released for two years, and attempted to suppress the film from being shown in Latin America. In the film *Bracero del año* (1964), starring comedian Eulalio "El Piporro" Gonzalez, one of the key plot points is whether the main character will decide to stay with a wealthy American blonde woman or return to the impoverished woman he left behind in Mexico. On *Espaldas mojadas*, See, Seth Fein, "Transcultured Anticommunism."

group of men sitting outdoors on their journey to the United States. The camera lens focuses on a man who sits on a rock, passing the time by looking at the photos—not reading—“Burlesk” magazine. This distinction between “looking” and “reading” is important, as these emigrants were envisioned almost always a mass of illiterate men. Another bracero sits near the man examining “Burlesk”—the most distinguishable characteristic is his wedding ring. Thus, the lack of patriotism these migrants demonstrate was made even more tragic because men were abandoning their families as well. What would happen to the Mexican nation if hundreds of thousands of men each year were to stop fulfilling their obligations to the nation and family?

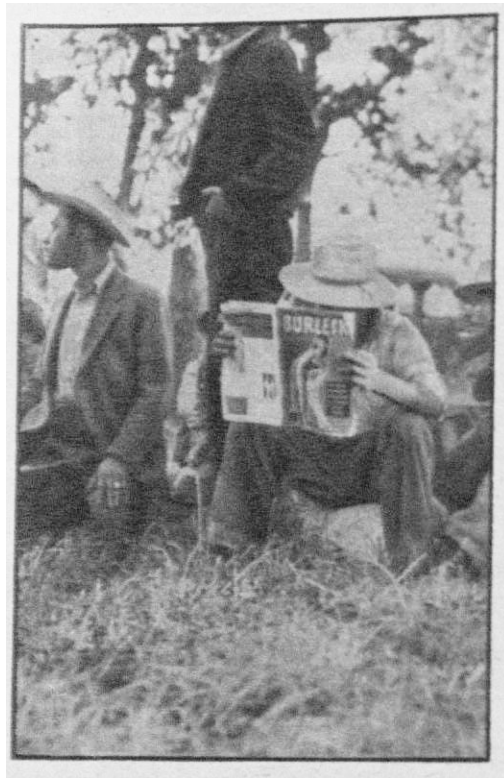


Figure 37. “Ve, oye, dice,” *Hoy*, May 15, 1951, 10. Caption: En un mes, 21,000 braceros deslumbrados por el dólar, cruzaron ilegalmente la frontera en Sonora y Baja California. Las autoridades norteamericanas los deportaron nuevamente a México. (In one month, 21,000 braceros dazzled by the dollar, illegally crossed the border in Sonora and Baja California. U.S. authorities deported them back to Mexico.)

Part of the concern over the number of migrants departing the country was based on the fear that they might never return. A caricature by artist Rafael Freyre, for example, appearing in *Jueves de Excelsior* showed a lonely young woman in her small village—identified as a campesina by her bare feet and braids—she stands with a worried expression on her face, as she watches her husband walk away in the distance. The caption reads: “The dark swallows return to your balcony to nest, but the man who left as a bracero...will not return!”<sup>176</sup> While migratory birds could be expected back annually, the same was not true for Mexican men who left the country. The moment of departure was given a special place in the cultural production of migration and was presented in photographs, such as the one below, in which an unnamed family is shown in the moments prior to when the bracero “leaves behind his self-respect and freedom” to risk his life with a *patero*—human smuggler—to get him safely across the border [Figure 38]. The young woman, identified as the migrant’s wife, holds on to her child and turns away from the man who will soon abandon her. The young woman is identified as an adolescent, whose difficult life is about to get considerably harder with her husband attempting to find work in the United States. Multiple tragedies unfold in this image. The first, which has been explored in a variety of images in this chapter, was the simple fact that the campesino must leave the country to make a living. The second, reinforced the social problem in rural areas of the nation, where such sexual impropriety of a grown man perpetrated against his adolescent wife went unchecked. The looming question which remained unanswered was whether the migrant would ever return to his wife and family, or whether he would simply stay in the United States. Of course, such decisions were not entirely up to the migrant, as the article informed the reader that the *pateros* were responsible for many deaths of the nation’s emigrants.

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<sup>176</sup> *Jueves de Excelsior*, “Carton,” June 12, 1947, 25.

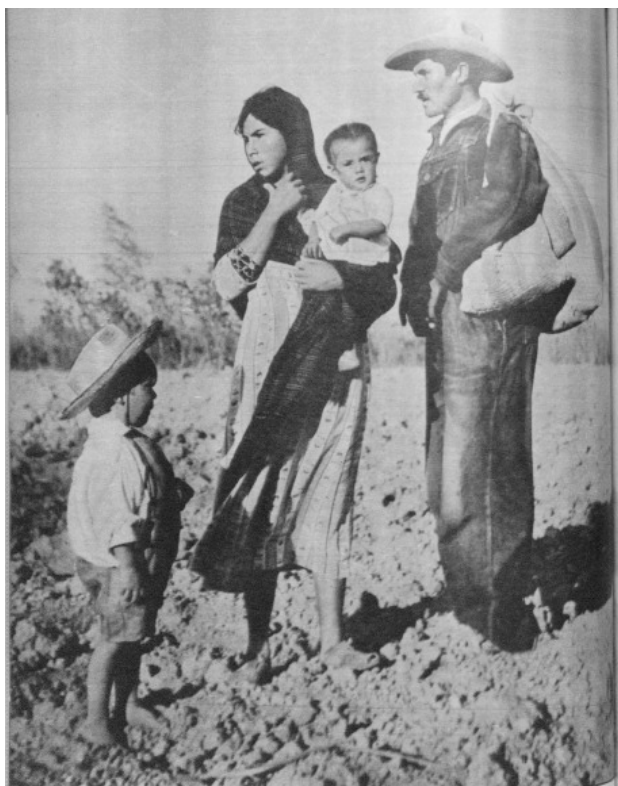


Figure 38. ““Metó a la muerte sobre el río bravo!” *Hoy*, March 3, 1951. Caption: Con la Patria, que está a punto de abandonar, el bracero deja el respeto a su persona y la libertad y se arriesga a perder la vida a manos del “patero”—el contrabandista de la carne humana que negocia con sus dolores pero la esposa, aun adolescente y los niños le piden el pan que su propia tierra les niega. Y por el pan de ellos, el protagonista de una de las mayores tragedias de nuestros días, se arriesga a toda. (About to abandon the homeland, the bracero leaves behind his self-respect and freedom, risking his life at the hands of the “patero”— the smuggler of human flesh that negotiates with pain. But the wife, still an adolescent herself and the children ask for the bread that their own land denied. And for their daily bread, the protagonist of one of the greatest tragedies of our days, risks everything.)

When braceros did return, they encountered unexpected problems resulting from their absence. Indeed, observers were equally concerned about what would happen to the family life of migrants when they returned from travelling to the United States. In July, 1953, Luis González Guzmán, who described himself as Mexico’s Norman Rockwell, depicted in a *carátula* a bracero returning to his rural mountain village after working as an agricultural laborer in Texas. The

magazine explains to readers that Guzmán intended to provide the magazine's reader with authentic and "relatively frequent scenes in *el campo*." After working in the United States for an extended period, the bracero—who is referred to as an "indito" (little Indian) returns home to his village, standing awkwardly in his new boots, jeans, cowboy hat, and western style shirt typical of Texas. In one hand, he carries a bulging suitcase—to his right rests a duffle bag, perhaps filled with goods purchased in the United States.

The inside cover reveals that the time in the United States has transformed the man, or as the magazine described it, "el ambiente yanqui conquisto al indito" (the Yankee environment conquered the little Indian). This buffoonish looking returning migrant has been conquered once again, and this transformation has been so complete that "su indita" (his little Indian woman) and child struggle to recognize this stranger who smiles and waves at them. An overarching theme is that migration is causing deep confusion in Mexico, as the indigenous woman, drawn with clearly racialized characteristics—an ape like face and large feet and hands—is confronted with a dilemma that she cannot solve. Similar to Bernal's comics with the male migrants showing confusion in preparing for migration, his wife struggles to understand the transformation that he had undergone. Even if his transformation into an authentic Texan was not convincing, migrants who stayed in the United States for extended periods signaled deep and lasting changes in their villages and within their families.



Figure 39. *Hoy*, July 11, 1953.

### **White supremacy and radical dissent in Mexico**

Prior to examining how the TGP's work challenged the dehumanizing portrayals of braceros in the mainstream press, it is important to more fully understand the expansive and inclusive vision of race and nation held by the international members of the art collective.

Unique for the period, TGP artists Celia Calderón, Leopoldo Mendez, Alberto Beltran, Francisco Mora, Elizabeth Catlett, and Mariana Yampolsky, all documented and celebrated the persistence of distinct indigenous and Afro-Mexican cultures within Mexico. Cesáreo Moreno explains that the Mexican political and popular culture “promulgat[ed] a homogenous definition of

*Mexicanidad* that was exclusively linked with ancient indigenous civilizations and Spain, the actual diversity present throughout post-Revolution Mexico was not only publicly denied but also officially eradicated.”<sup>177</sup> Black artists who worked in a variety of capacities with the TGP during the 1940s and 1950s were key forces behind both the attention the collective paid to both black history and culture in Mexico, as well as the racial violence of the Jim Crow system in the United States.<sup>178</sup> Some African American guest artists, such as John Wilson, participated briefly with the TGP, while Elizabeth Catlett became a permanent member, who along with her husband Francisco Mora, worked with the collective for more than twenty years.<sup>179</sup> Many of these artists had initially been drawn to the social realism of the muralist movement in Mexico and later joined the TGP where their works covered a variety of themes documenting poverty, racism, and discrimination in both countries.<sup>180</sup> Throughout the 1950s, TGP members created a number of

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<sup>177</sup> Sagrario Cruz-Carretero and Cesáreo Moreno, *The African Presence in México: From Yanga to the Present African Presence in Mexico* (Chicago: The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum), 82.

<sup>178</sup> In the post-war period a number of African American artists and intellectuals lived in exile in Mexico City in order to escape McCarthyism. Rebecca Schreiber prefers the terminology of exile to describe individuals who were coerced into leaving the U.S. during the Cold War. Schreiber argues, “exile is significant to the particular historical moment examined here because U.S. national belonging during the early Cold War era was vigorously policed in both the symbolic and administrative terms that essentially abrogated the citizenship rights of specified individuals...In the case of those who fled the United States to avoid government harassment or arrest during the early Cold War period, their relocation to Mexico was a response to the accelerated intolerance mandated by the U.S. state, which excluded those who did not meet the politically normative terms that policymakers established for national belonging.” Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles*, xv.

<sup>179</sup> Melanie Anne Herzog, *Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005). Aguirre’s woodcuts of Morelos were reprinted in José López Bermúdez, *Canto a Morelos* (Mexico: Morales Hermanos Impresores, 1965).

<sup>180</sup> Charles Alston, John Biggers, Elizabeth Catlett, Sargent Claude Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, Charles White, John Wilson, and Hale Woodrom were drawn to Mexico City to work with the “big three” Mexican artists, Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Orozco’s, *Negros Colgados* (1933-34), was drawn at the request of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) anti-lynching campaigns. Alma Reed, *Orozco*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 275-276. In 1933, NAACP president Walter White, tried but failed, to get Rivera to participate in the organization’s anti-lynching exhibit. While Rivera did not provide work for this exhibit, other work including Rivera’s *Reconstruction* (1933) did directly address the subject of lynching and the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in U.S. Society. Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 157-159. Acts of white violence are also present in Siqueiros’ *Cain in the United States* (1947), Stein, *Siqueiros*, 186-187.

pieces dealing with African heritage and history in Mexico, including works that celebrated slave revolts in Mexico, emphasized the Afro-Mexican heritage of sugar cane workers in Veracruz, and commemorated the leadership of Afro-Mexican revolutionary leaders.<sup>181</sup> Other members of the collective drew illustrations for books dealing with the question of white supremacy and the continued discrimination of African Americans in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>182</sup>

African American artists working with the TGP created socially conscious artwork that often depicted racial violence in the United States. For example, in 1952, while taking a class with TGP member Ignacio Aguirre on fresco paintings in Mexico City, John Wilson drew a mural entitled, "The Incident," depicting a lynching in the U.S. South at the hands of the Klan.<sup>183</sup> In a series of lithographs completed by Elizabeth Catlett titled "Against Discrimination in the United States" (1953-1954), the Washington, D.C. native documented the long struggle against anti-black violence in the United States.<sup>184</sup> In the linocut below from the series, Catlett shows the influences of the TGP on her artwork, in a piece that commemorates the life of William Patterson, an organizer for the Communist Party and leader of the Civil Rights Congress.<sup>185</sup> Patterson twists back the arm of a Klan member to keep him from hurting a black child. The use

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<sup>181</sup> Sagrario Cruz-Carretero and Cesáreo Moreno, *The African Presence in México: From Yanga to the Present African Presence in Mexico* (Chicago: The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum), 18-22.

<sup>182</sup> Aguilar de la Torre, *Dolor Por La Muerte De Un Negro* (México, D.F.: Fuego Nuevo, 1968); Gabriel Fernandez Ledesma, *Negro Sam del Tio Sam* (México, D.F.: Editorial Surco, 1957).

<sup>183</sup> While living in Mexico City, Wilson also worked with the TGP, creating "The Trial" in 1951, in which a young black child was drawn appearing in court in front of three white judges. Schreiber, 46-47; Lizzeta LeFalle-Collins, *In the spirit of resistance: African-American modernists and the Mexican muralist school* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1996), 19-26.

<sup>184</sup> Alison Cameron, "Buenos Amigos: African-American Printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular," *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 1999), 252-367.

<sup>185</sup> Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: an American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press: 2000), 100.

of the skeleton to depict the Klan member was reminiscent of many of the projects completed by the TGP in the period. Other pieces from the “Against discrimination” series included linocuts of Harriet Tubman, black women sitting in the “colored section” of buses, black sharecroppers, as well as portraits of W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson, both of whom were involved in the American Continental Congress for Peace, held in Mexico City in 1949.<sup>186</sup>



Figure 40. Elizabeth Catlett, “Civil Rights Congress,” 1949.

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<sup>186</sup> *Report on the Communist 'Peace' Offensive - A Campaign to Disarm and Defeat the United States*, Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, House report No. 378, April 1, 1951.

Importantly, for the TGP, white supremacy did not only impact those living in the United States, but threatened people from around the globe. Artwork from Erasto Cortés and Francisco Mora, published in *Calaveras aftosas* (1947), emphasized the global reach of white supremacy.

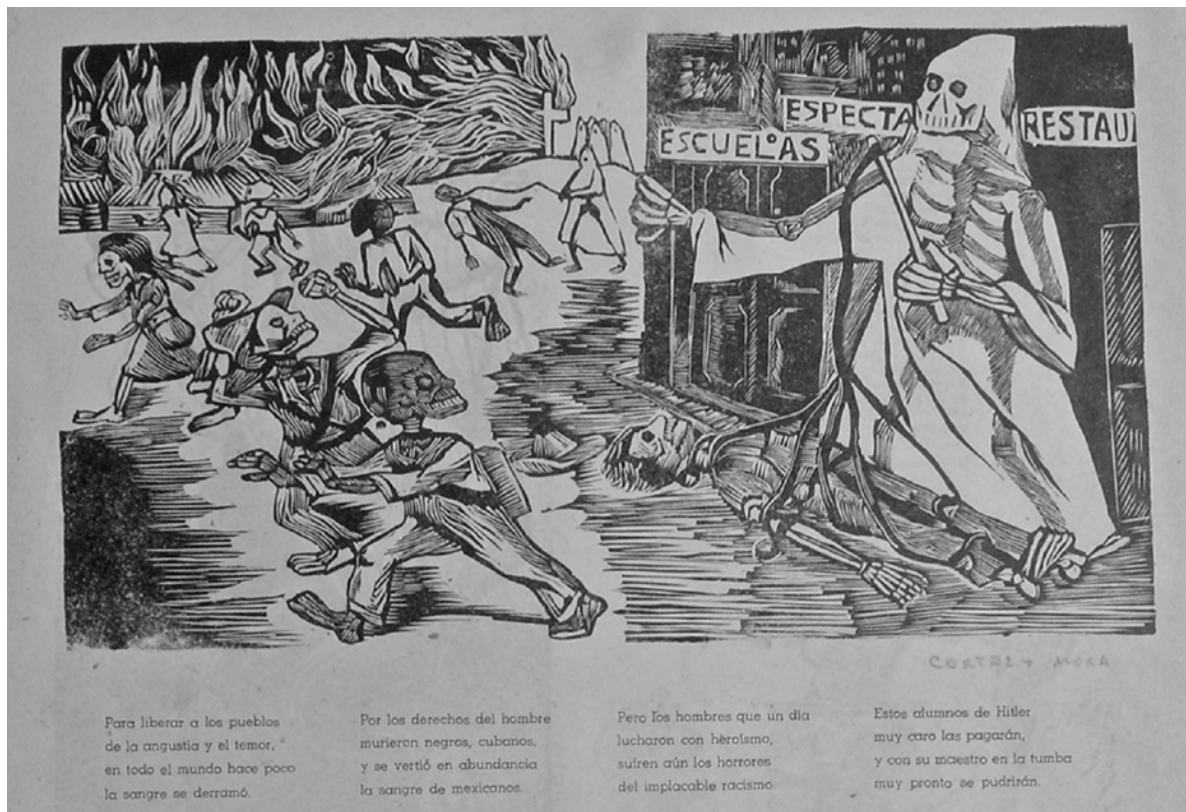


Figure 41. Erasto Cortés and Francisco Mora, “Calaveras aftosas,” 1947, University of California, San Diego, Geisel Library, Special Collections Library.

In condemning the actions of the Klan, Cortés and Mora tapped into a longer tradition of criticism against white supremacist organizations by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.<sup>187</sup> With

<sup>187</sup> José Guadalupe Posada, for example, created “Calaveras de los Bravos Ku Klux Klanes” (c. 1913), a broadside depicting the racial violence experienced by Mexicans near the U.S.-Mexico border at the hands of the white supremacist vigilante group. Dawn Ades and Alison McClean, *Revolution on Paper: Mexican Prints 1910-1960* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 11.

whips in hand, the Klansmen terrorize African Americans and Mexicans who are forced to flee from the imposing figures. Behind the Klansmen are public buildings labeled “escuelas,” “espectaculares,” and “restaurantes,” all which were subjected to Jim Crow policies that made them inaccessible to people of color.<sup>188</sup> The symbol of a burning cross with flames shooting outward sent a powerful message reminding Mexicans that the anti-Catholic beliefs of the Klan put their lives in jeporady.<sup>189</sup> The corrido speaks to the political uncertainty in the immediate post-war period, noting the profound sacrifices made by African Americans, Cubans, and Mexicans during World War II. Despite fighting against Hitler and his doctrine of racial supremacy, men returning from war were now forced to do battle with the Klan. The corrido reads:

Para liberar a los pueblos  
de la angustia y el temor  
en todo el mundo hace poco  
la sangre derramó

Por los derechos del hombre  
Murieron negros, cubanos,  
Y se vertió en abundancia  
La sangre de mexicanos

Pero los hombres que un día  
lucharon con heroísmo

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<sup>188</sup> Mexican labor organizer and radical activist Emma Tenayuca recalled hearing stories from her grandfather about the terror of the Klan in Texas in the early twentieth century. Zaragoza Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 124-125.

<sup>189</sup> On the Ku Klux Klan and Mexican-Americans, see, Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 99, 233, 248; Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1997), 200; Carlos M. Larralde and Richard Griswold del Castillo, "San Diego's Ku Klux Klan, 1920-1980" *Journal of San Diego History* Spring/Summer 2000, Volume 46, Numbers 2&3. George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 59.

sufren aún los horrores  
del implacable racismo

Estos alumnos de Hitler  
Muy caro las pagarán  
Y con su maestro en la tumba  
Muy pronto se pudrirán<sup>190</sup>

[To free people  
of anxiety and fear  
blood was shed  
recently around the world

For human rights  
Blacks and Cubans died  
the blood of Mexicans  
poured in abundance

But the men who on one day  
fought heroically  
still suffer the horrors  
of relentless racism

These students of Hitler  
Will pay an expensive price  
And with their teacher in the grave  
They too will soon be left rotting

The corrido documents the shared history of struggle against the crimes of the Third Reich during World War II, making the reemergence of white supremacist organizations even more tragic. Cuba's inclusion in the corrido most likely refers to the TGP's anti-fascist campaigns and support for a leftist international labor union run by Lombardo Toledano, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina* (CTAL). As Historian Barry Carr explains, beginning during the war and extending to 1948, "the CTAL, under Lombardo's energetic

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<sup>190</sup> Erasto Cortés and Francisco Mora, "Calaveras aftosas," 1947, University of California, San Diego, Geisel Library, Special Collections Library.

direction, extended the Cardenista project of revolutionary nationalism through the Caribbean and Central and South America. The promotion of antifascist national fronts in Latin America during the war years closely followed the strategy of the ailing Comintern and the Soviet Union and succeeded in building an extensive network of progressive labor movements throughout Latin America on the basis of the Popular Front's principles. While Lombardo was increasingly marginalized with the CTM, the dean of Mexican Marxism became the most successful hemispheric figure in the Americas." The image is referencing the widespread belief among the Mexican left that Spanish dictator Francisco Franco's international Falangist group had taken root in Cuba and was working to dismantle the gains that CTAL had achieved on the island. The anti-imperialist American writer Harold Preece, who wrote for a variety of publications including *The Crisis* and *The Nation*, referred to the Spanish Falange in 1946 as the "international ku klux klan" and noted that in the immediate aftermath of the war the organization was "carrying on to turn Cuba into a second Mississippi with a white-skinned 'aristocracy' doing all the bossing and Negro and poor white Cubans doing all the sweating."<sup>191</sup>

A central purpose of these images was to disrupt the notion that white supremacy only functioned within the United States, suggesting instead that U.S. imperialism brought with it deleterious economic and cultural institutions throughout Latin America.<sup>192</sup> The drawing depicts

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<sup>191</sup> Harold Preece, "The Negro in Latin-America: Cuba Heads Towards Race Riots," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 7, 1946, 4.

<sup>192</sup> The TGP frequently noted how anticommunism and racial oppression went hand-in-hand throughout the Americas. In the 1949 anti-war film produced about the Korean Conflict, *¿Quienes quieren la guerra—quienes quieren la paz?* a caption read "Local tyrants, serving imperialism persecute such men as [Luís Carlos] Prestes and [Pablo] Neruda. And in the United States itself, if a single one of the thirteen million negroes in the south tries to struggle against the system of economic peonage, he may lose his life..." The film was accomplishing two goals here. First, it showed the deleterious impact of U.S.-style anti-communism in Latin America, pointing to the well-known hardships faced by Brazilian labor leader, Luis Carlos Prestes, and the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. Secondly, it linked the irrational use of force to the treatment of African Americans in the U.S. South, noting that to struggle against the racist capitalist system, was likely a death sentence for black people with the courage to fight back. Later in the film, these points were reinforced by a mention of the Ku Klux Klan serving imperialism, accompanied by

both repression and resistance to the Klan—one man lays dead while another in the background is being choked by a whip, as black, Mexican, and Cuban skeletons attempt to escape the violence together. In the foreground, a skeleton wearing a sombrero and either Afro-Cuban, Afro-Mexico or African American—the skull has been shaded to denote the race of the skeleton—are among those attempting to escape the destruction. One skeleton raises his arms in the air, symbolizing that this terror will not passively be accepted.<sup>193</sup> White supremacy—whether in Cuba, Mexico, or the United States—was best fought, according to the radical internationalist vision of the members of the TGP, collectively between groups experiencing racial discrimination and violence.

A lithograph by TGP member, Jesus Escobedo, challenged the assumed reach of the Klan to the U.S. south. Titled “Discriminación”, Escobedo’s work connects the white supremacist organization’s activities to Cuba and the U.S.-Mexico border. Having spent years in New York City on a Guggenheim fellowship, Escobedo had witnessed U.S. racial discrimination first-hand. In this drawing three men are tied together on a stake, about to be burned alive by Klansmen. In the foreground, we see that there is no distinction between the police violence, the Klansmen, and the Texan.

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artwork by Guillermo Monroy. See, Helga Prignitz, *TGP Ein Grafiker-Kollektiv in Mexico von 1937-1977* (Berlin: Verlag Ricard Seitz & Co., 1981), 397-400.

<sup>193</sup> The National Federation of Cuban Negro Organizations also protested the murder of African-Americans in the U.S. South. Writing about the lynching of four African Americans in Georgia, for example, the group wrote a statement “even now in the southern part of the United States there exists...the same social evils and injustices for the disappearance of which we have fought.” “Protests on Lynching World Wide in Scope,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 10, 1946, 1.



Figure 42. Jesus Escobedo, “Discriminación,” *El Taller de Gráfica Popular: Doce años de obra artística colectiva* (Estampas de la Revolución: Mexico, 1947), 77.

As the police officer forcefully attacks an African-American man with a club, we do not see the tepid complicity of the state in the murder of its citizens, but its active engagement in it. A ghoulish looking Klansmen places his hand on the officer’s shoulder, directing his actions. In the center of the image is a man dressed as a Texas law enforcement agent, throwing his victim toward the fire. On the left side of the image, a man shoots flame out of a cannon that has swastika engraved in the metal—an obvious point of comparison that Escobedo wants his audience to make between the Ku Klux Klan and the fascist movements defeated in World War II. The proximity of Mexico to this violence is important and seen through the inclusion of a Texan—such symbols were a reminder of the proximity of the border violence.

## U.S. Empire and the Bracero Program

The TGP's international fight against white supremacy is critical to understanding the collective's artwork on the Bracero Program. In contrast to the disparaging images of migrants and the communities they came from found in the mainstream press, the TGP focused its attentions on the structures underpinning the injustices of migration. A characteristic image was, "México en la guerra: Los braceros se van a Estados Unidos," (Mexico in the war: The braceros go to the United States), created as cooperative piece. In this image, artists Leopoldo Mendez and Alfredo Zalce depict a diverse, multiethnic and multiracial group of Mexican migrants travelling to the United States. Men from different racial and class backgrounds—including phenotypically lighter skinned migrants as well as Afro-Mexicans—link arms with one another from the urban industrial workers wearing modern caps and coats to the central figure of the campesino wearing a serape and huarches. The distinct racial and class backgrounds of the migrants speaks to the vast difference in approaches to representing braceros between the mainstream press and the TGP. In addition, the inclusion of the Mexican police officer offers another important difference in how the radical artists differed from the work provided by mainstream journalists. The officer is an ominous figure, overseeing the movement of the men, while brandishing a club should anyone get out line. Whereas writers in outlets like *Hoy* insisted that the Mexican state protect its migrant citizenry by adding police to the northern border to prevent migration, Mendez and Zalce suggest the potential violence that the police threaten to keep workers in line.

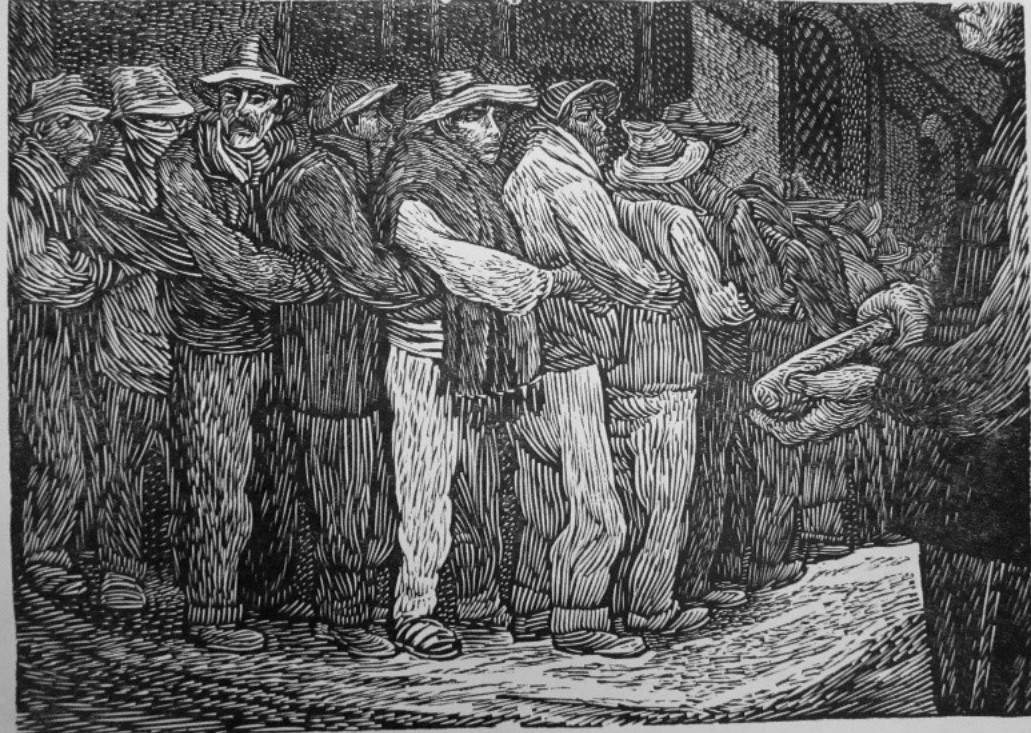


Figure 43. Leopoldo Mendez y Alfredo Zalce, “México en la guerra: los braceros se van a Estados Unidos,” 1947, in *450 años de lucha: homenaje al pueblo mexicano*, (México: Taller de Gráfica Popular).

An additional distinction between the mainstream press and the TGP was that the members of the art collective actively defined the Mexican state’s corruption as a central factor prompting emigration. Rather than a series of poor individual decisions by campesinos, as depicted in the mainstream press, braceros were responding to an exploitative global economic system in which the elite in the U.S. and Mexico benefitted. Pablo O’Higgins, an American artist living in exile in Mexico, made that clear in a drawing published in *Calavera a la cargada*, in which braceros were depicted as skeletons escaping Mexico only to find that they are being served “dog soup” produced by the Swift Company. Importantly, the title reads, “Without bread, land, or money, the bracero flees the country.” The symbolism of thousands of braceros lined up to be served dog meat, after just crossing the Rio Bravo, underscores the racism and exploitation

that Mexican migrants could expect in the United States, but as critically, the title and the corresponding corrido explain that these are decisions made by migrants who are not “abandoning the nation,” but rather, who have been forced to “flee.”

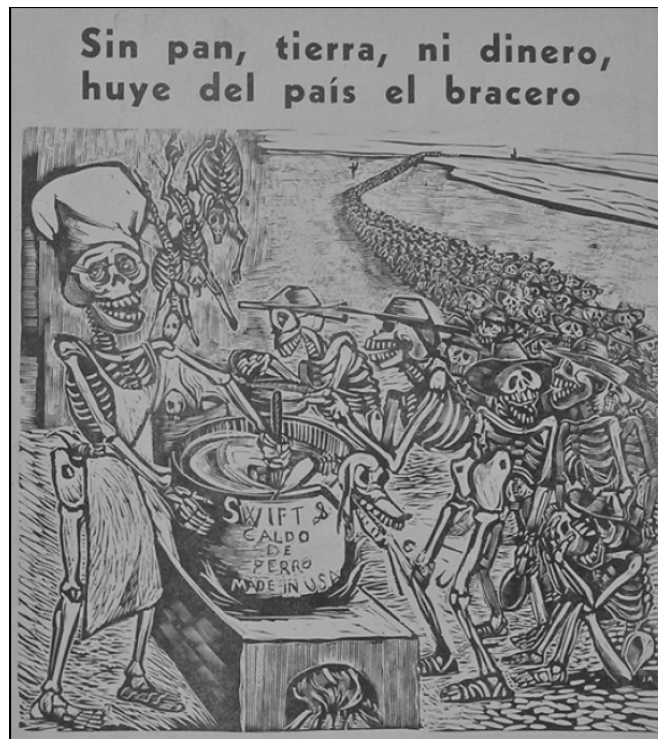


Figure 44. Pablo O'Higgins, “Swift & Co. caldo de perro,” *A la caragada calaveras*, 1951.

This distinction between “abandoning” and “fleeing” is key because it suggests very different causes prompting the mass migration of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Indeed, for the TGP, it was the Mexican state and its close collaboration with the United States that needed to be held responsible for the exodus of Mexicans from the country. It was, after all, the Mexican state that had created the social conditions that made it necessary for the Mexicans to leave in the first place. The accompanying corrido depicts braceros as heroic figures, as pilgrims in search of a

true homeland. In contrast, politicians are demonized for their corruption, for creating the conditions whereby migrants found themselves with few options, but to cross the border. The corrido explains that this forced migration had a long history in which the migrants were pushed off their land by Mexican leaders, half of that land had been taken by the United States in war under the ineffective leadership of Antonio-Lopez [de Santa Anna], and the other half sold off by current Mexican President Alemán.<sup>194</sup>

Piensa también, peregrino,  
Al recorrer estas tierras  
Perdidas en vanas guerras  
Y que hoy son del ‘buen vecino’  
En que es nuestro oscuro sino  
Ver a la Patria entregada:  
La mitad, satanizada  
Antonio-López vendida  
Y la otra mitad, sin vida  
Miguel-alemán-comprada

Think again, pilgrim,  
When you explore these lands  
Lost in futile wars  
That today belong to the ‘good neighbor’  
That is our dark fate  
To see the Homeland turned in  
Half of the land demonized  
Antonio-Lopez sold it  
And the other half, lifeless  
Miguel-Alemán let it be purchased

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<sup>194</sup> In a print by Ignacio Aguirre, the artist mocks the corrupt leadership of Santa Ana, showing the general hoarding U.S. dollars and liquor. Santa Ana was not only an ineffectual leader against the military invasion of the United States, but worse still, he was willing to sell Mexico for his own personal gain. Ignacio Aguirre, “La Mesilla” *450 años de lucha: homenaje al pueblo mexicano*, (México: Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1960).

This depiction of migrants as “pilgrims” is beautifully reinforced in Ignacio Augurre’s “Retorno del bracero” (1947). In the linocut, a Christ-like migrant returns to his humble family after laboring in the United States. Unlike the cartoons and the photographs in *Hoy*, the migrant makes a seamless transition back to his home. In fact, he is welcomed with open arms by a woman who is likely his mother. Such images evoked the iconic representation of Juan Diego’s encounter of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a symbol of motherhood and a formative image of the Mexican nation. Images of the barefoot woman and the huarches used by the returning migrant are not used to mock the migrant, the family’s poverty, or their cultural backwardness, but instead, articulate the centrality of the campesino to the Mexican nation. Rather than an object of ridicule or a subject in demand of racial rehabilitation, the return of the bracero to his homeland is cause for a somber celebration.



Figure 45. Ignacio Aguirre, “Retorno del bracero,” 1947.

## Conclusions

This chapter has examined some of the diverse responses to emigration and U.S. imperialism in Mexico. The mainstream press depicted Mexican migrants as simplistic figures, nothing more than destitute peons, whose personal shortcomings helped explain the mass migration from the countryside in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While many of these writers were quick to condemn the apprehensions and deportation practices of migrants by the United States, these same critics found fault among migrants for the state violence they experienced. Importantly, the only solution to the emigration problem for most writers in *Hoy* was increased

border policing in Mexico to prevent the humiliations experienced by its migrant citizenry. Standing in sharp contrast, the TGP created complex renderings of the nation's emigrant population, giving its audiences an opportunity to reflect critically not only on the violence of white supremacy in the United States, as well as in Cuba, but also, on the racial and ethnic diversity that existed within Mexico. In addition, the collective sought to make clear the role of the Mexican state in producing migrants through its corrupt imperial relationship with the United States.

## **Epilogue**

### **Toward a Militarized Border**

Kurt Lemke and Karl-Ulrich Hagelberg ultimately left the United States disappointed with their tour of the U.S.-Mexico border. Arriving in the winter of 1955 at the invitation of the State Department, the two executive officers of the West German Federal Border Police found little evidence to support their hosts' claims that the U.S.-Mexico border represented a grave national security threat. Occurring just months after the completion of "Operation Wetback," the Border Patrol's largest deportation campaign to date, the two men expected to encounter a far more militarized border. Rather than learning about elaborate preparations to prevent a Soviet military invasion, the Germans spent most of their trip watching immigration officials inspect Mexican laborers as they entered California. While the State Department may have viewed all unsanctioned movement across the U.S.-Mexico border as a Cold War security concern, the German visitors insisted that the vulnerability of the border appeared to be more rhetoric than reality.

If Lemke and Hagelberg had the ability to tour the U.S.-Mexico border a half century later they would have been more likely to believe that the United States government considered border security to be an essential component of national security. Beginning under President Bill Clinton in the early 1990s, and accelerating under George W. Bush, the U.S.-Mexico border underwent a profound transformation as portions of it have begun to resemble militarized zones. Fueled in part by politicians in the early 1990s, the Border Patrol responded to the xenophobic fear of undocumented Mexican migration by enacting dramatic spectacles of border enforcement. The agency sought to deter migration by policing urban areas at popular border

crossing sites, forcing migrants into isolated deserts. The names assigned to these operations by the Border Patrol reflected the growing militarization of the force: Operation Hold the Line in El Paso (1993), Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego (1994), Operation Safeguard in Tucson (1994), and Operation Rio Grande in Texas (1997). Such hardline tactics were redoubled following the attacks of September 11, 2001, as politicians and policymakers argued that border enforcement was essential to keeping the United States safe from terrorist threats. The size of the Border Patrol force stationed along the U.S. Southwest increased dramatically, from 3,555 in 1993 to more than 18,000 in 2014.<sup>1</sup> In the last decade alone, there has been a nearly tenfold increase in the annual budget of the Border Patrol from 363 million to 3.4 billion—money that has been invested in more guards, immigrant detention centers, and new technologies of war and surveillance.<sup>2</sup>

The human costs to border militarization have been tremendous in both the United States and Mexico. In response to the Border Patrol's heightened policing in urban areas in the 1990s, migrants were forced into the most dangerous and isolated desert crossing points, resulting in the deaths of at least 6,000 people since 1999.<sup>3</sup> Border residents, emigrants, and Central American migrants in Mexico have paid a terrible price as the Mexican government has strengthened economic, political, and security ties with the United States. After coming into office in a disputed election in 2006, President Felipe Calderón announced that his administration would offer tough and decisive action against drug cartels operating in the country. In an effort to

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Border Patrol, "United States Border Patrol: Border Patrol Agent Staffing by Fiscal Year," [http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Staffing%20FY1992-FY2014\\_0.pdf](http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/BP%20Staffing%20FY1992-FY2014_0.pdf), (October 10, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Border Patrol, "U.S. Border Patrol Fiscal Year Budget Statistics," <http://www.cbp.gov/document/stats/us-border-patrol-fiscal-year-budget-statistics-fy-1990-fy-2014>, (January 27, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Maria Jimenez, "Humanitarian Crisis: Migrant Deaths at the U.S.-Mexico Border," ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties and Mexico's National Commission of Human Rights, October 2009.

bolster Calderón's drug war, the United States Congress provided 1.4 billion dollars in military aid, as well as technical support from the Drug Enforcement Agency and U.S. Army to combat drug trafficking operations. As a result of this war, at least 70,000 people have died with human rights' organizations condemning widespread abuses of the Mexican military against the public.<sup>4</sup> Many of the victims of the drug war have been migrants caught in the middle of cartels' territorial struggles and corrupt government agencies charged with dismantling them.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most visible markers of the failed economic policies and drug wars have been the mass grave sites filled with the remains of Mexican and Central American migrants, a haunting reminder of an earlier era of the "dirty wars" in Latin America.

But if the failed legacies of joint border policing seem familiar, so too does the resistance to these practices. In the past year, immigration activists have fought for asylum rights of Central American children in Texas detention centers, live tweeted actions to prevent deportations in Chicago, and arranged transnational caravans protesting the Mexican state's role in the murder of 43 students in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. Artists have installed portraits, crosses, and makeshift caskets along the U.S.-Mexico border wall, marking the lives of those who have died in an ill-conceived war waged against drugs and migrants. Like the radical work of the Taller de Gráfica Popular fifty years earlier, these artists and activists not only condemn the most outrageous forms of state violence and government corruption, but insist upon the dignity and humanity of migrants forced to cross a dangerous border.

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<sup>4</sup> Carmen Boullosa and Mike Wallace, *A Narco History: How the United States and Mexico Jointly Created the "Mexican Drug War"* (New York and London: OR Books, 2015), 97.

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011).

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