

Humphreys College

NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT

SPRING QUARTER

June 2007

THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BRACERO PROGRAM

By Amanda Lukasiewicz, Liberal Arts Student

In American history, there is a noticeable pattern of labor shortages that come along with War. World Wars I and II, and the Korean War, depleted the United States labor force. Mexican migrant workers were needed to fill jobs in the areas of farming and railroad construction. The governments of the United States and Mexico cooperated to form a contract that would allow Mexican laborers to be employed temporarily in the United States. The Bracero Treaty, also known as the Mexican Farm Labor Supply Program, The Bracero Program, and the Mexican Labor Agreement, was started in 1917, but not signed as a contract until August 4, 1942 by both participating governments. Immigrant worker migrations to the United States are historic events that shape the very texture of the cultural values embraced within the country. Four areas will be covered in this article: The first Bracero Program (1917-1921); in between the first and second Bracero Programs (1921-1942); the second Bracero Program (1942-1947); and the extension of the 1942 Program (1947-1964).

The First Bracero Program (1917-1921)

According to "Mexican Immigrant Labor History," the Revolution in 1910 left the Mexican government unable to improve the lives of its citizens. Mexican peasants looked to the United States, with its need for laborers, to employ them, and ensure their survival. Employment opportunities were abundant because much of the American labor force was overseas fighting the war. It seemed a perfect solution to meet the needs of both countries, so in 1917 agencies in Mexico recruited for the railway and agriculture industries in the United States.

In Between Bracero Programs: The Great Depression

Many events occurred between the first and second Bracero Programs. The Quota Act of 1921 restricted the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States during a single year. This law was created mainly to lessen immigration from eastern and southern Europe and Asia. Suddenly, Mexico and Puerto Rico became major labor sources. With the onset of the Depression, Mexican immigration to the United States virtually ceased and return migration increased sharply (Events in Hispanic American History). Daniels writes about the decrease of Mexican immigrants to the United States during the Depression. Elements contributing to this decrease were government actions, market forces, a mandatory literacy test, and American migrant competition for existing jobs.

According to the article "Depression and the Struggle for Survival," the Depression hit Mexican immigrants especially hard. They had to face the same job crisis and food shortages that United States workers did, but they had the added fear of deportation:

As unemployment swept the United States, hostility to immigrant workers grew, and the government began a program of repatriating immigrants to Mexico. Immigrants were offered free train rides to Mexico, and some went voluntarily, but many were either tricked or coerced into repatriation, and some United States citizens were deported simply on suspicion of being Mexican. All in all, hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants, especially farm workers, were sent out of the country during the 1930s—many of them the same workers who had been eagerly recruited a decade before.

The Second Bracero Program (1942-1964)

As previously stated, The Bracero Program was signed on August 4, 1942 by the governments of the United States and Mexico. The program was revised on April 26, 1943. "The Official Bracero Agreement" established that Mexicans entering the United States under this contract were not to be involved in the military service or suffer dis-

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

criminary acts of any kind. All transportation, living expenses and repatriation would be paid by employers. Workers were to receive full pay with no deductions to cover the expenses previously mentioned.

The End of the Bracero Program: A Common Misconception

The Bracero Program of 1942 was ended in 1947 because the Mexican government demanded a bond be paid for each employee hired and that employees receive higher pay; the farmers refused to meet the demands, so the Mexican government did not renew the contracts. The common misconception is that Mexico canceled Bracero contracts because the United States failed to pay some workers savings accounts upon returning to Mexico. However, certain articles written over the years reveal that these accusations are suspicious for different reasons.

The article "Mexico Cancels All Wetback Labor Contracts" (published in the *El Paso Herald Post* 60 years ago) states that the contracts were actually canceled because the Mexican government made new demands to be met in order for it to be willing to renew the soon expiring Bracero agreement. The United States declined these demands and chose instead to let the contract expire. It was the right of the Mexican government to ask for more money, but it was also the right of the American government to decline the request. The article states that the Mexican government demanded that each worker be contracted on an individual basis, a bond of \$30 for each worker must be posted in a Juarez bank, and cotton pickers are to be paid \$2 per hundred pound of cotton. American farmers did not want to pay this much, so the Mexican government did not renew the contracts.

The Bracero Program Extends to 1964

Although Mexican laborer contracts were not renewed in 1947, the Bracero Program lasted until 1964. Daniels writes that there was no Bracero Program in place between 1947 and 1951, when another was implemented to make up for labor shortages caused by the Korean War (310). Rosenberg states that "during 1956-1959, with use of the program at its peak, some 450,000 Braceros worked on nearly 50,000 farms in 38 states." He points out that there was public concern on how the Bracero Program would be run with such a lack of United States government involvement.

Congress enacted Public Law 78 on July 12, 1951; it gave new structure to the Bracero Program, addressing the pervious concerns. The new changes included: immigrant workers could only be hired after United States domestic workers were proven to be not sufficiently available; employment of Mexican workers would not adversely affect wages or work conditions of United States workers similarly employed; and that employers had made reasonable efforts to attract domestic workers first.

The major factor contributing to the end of the Bracero Program in 1964 was "the sense that it was preventing normal interplay of supply and demand, infringing on employment opportunities for United States resident workers, and dragging down their wage levels" (Rosenberg). In early 1962, wages for Braceros had to be increased to a level determined to protect wages of United States workers. When Public Law 78 came up for renewal in 1963, Congress decided to extend the Bracero Program only one year further. Representative Bernice F. Sisk of California, a long-time supporter of the program, observed that:

"...the time has come to serve notice on the American farmer that he and we combined must come up with an alternative program... This is the last time I shall enter the well to ask for an extension, we have come to the end of the line" (qtd. in Rosenberg).

In his statement upon the end of the Bracero Program on December 31, 1964, Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz presented three policies to guide the government's role in the farm labor market: (1) there will be no administrative extension of the situation existing under Public Law 78; (2) the responsibilities of the Secretary of Labor under the Immigration and Nationality Act will be strictly administered; and (3) an active domestic labor recruitment program has been instituted and must be continued.

In conclusion, I find that while the Bracero Program was a great attempt at supplying workers for unfilled American jobs and providing jobs for unemployed foreign workers, the impact the program had on the American labor force, economic flow, and society in general was not fully considered. The Bracero Program was masked as a genuine arrangement that would benefit both participating parties, the United States and Mexico. However, after

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

the research, the program seems more like a sugar-coated trade of coerced labor. Foreign workers were brought to the United States *only* when they were needed and were sent away after the benefit desired had been obtained. To me, the Bracero Program is another shameful act in our history that imbrues the concept of the American Dream, and leaves me worried over the possibility of history repeating itself.

Works Cited

Daniels, Roger. *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

“Depression and the Struggle for Survival.” *Library of Congress’ Learning Page, Immigration: Mexican*. 20 April 2005. 21 Dec 2006 <<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/mexican6.html>>.

“Events in Hispanic American History.” *Gale Free Resources: Hispanic Heritage Timeline*. 2006. 13 Dec 2006 <http://www.gale.com/free_resources/chh/timeline/1907.htm>.

“Mexican Immigrant Labor History.” *The Border*. 11 Nov 2006 <<http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/17.html>>.

“Mexico Cancels All Wetback Labor Contracts.” *El Paso Herald Post*, September 19, 1947. 10 Nov 2006 <<http://www.farmworkers.org/hp091947.html>>.

“Official Bracero Agreement, The.” *Farm workers Organization Online*. 03 October 2006 <<http://www.farmworkers.org/bpaccord.html>>.

Rosenberg, Howard R. “Snapshots in a Farm Labor Tradition.” *Labor Management Decisions*. (13)1. 1993. 21 Dec 2006 <http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/lmd/html/winterspring_93/snapshots.html>.

A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

By Howard Lachtman

“What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

That famous line—from the made-in-Stockton movie “Cool Hand Luke”—sums up what students in my English 101 class have been learning by analyzing news articles and reports that contain just such failures.

First-person journalism offers us intriguing examples of how even professional writers can fall short and fail to communicate. It’s a

learning approach that’s fun for my students because it makes use of offbeat and colorful stories beyond our “correct” text and shows how writers fall into the trap of promising more than they deliver. Students are encouraged to recognize the problem and avoid similar errors in their own writing.

A notable example was the first-person account of a *Los Angeles Times* reporter who journeyed to Pamplona for the festival of San Fermín. Although he had not originally

intended to run with the bulls—an ancient tradition made famous by a young American visitor named Ernest Hemingway—, he decided (for no discernible reason) to join the throng of runners whom the bulls chase, bump, bruise and sometimes batter along the narrow streets of the town.

His subsequent report was as brisk and headlong as the run, but was it insightful? The flow of events ended with his falling and narrowly missing disaster. Thirty seconds of fear and then and it was over. End of story? Not quite. My

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

students learned, in the immortal words of Yankee catcher Yogi Berra, "It ain't over until it's over." The writer gave us action without introspection or evaluation. Result: failure to communicate.

Or take the sea cliff diver who described climbing 40 to 50 feet up rocky ledges from which there was no retreat in order to take his chances on an ocean plunge. No serene swimming pool for this thrill-seeker. But why was he drawn to this dangerous sport? Challenge? Escape? Bragging rights? Who knows? The writer didn't tell.

Again, we found an otherwise absorbing account marred by a writer unable or unwilling to find the core of his adventure—the self-awareness necessary to turn description into discovery and experience into education.

Recently, we read a travel report about several men from Los Angeles with more money than time to pursue their love of travel. The men chose worldwide destinations—some as remote as Machu Picchu, that mysterious mountain citadel of the ancient Inca world. Quick flights and quicker trips were their style of these hasty travelers. They had always dreamed of seeing the Taj Mahal, so off they went to India by the fastest route, racing to Agra. Their large color photo of the Taj, taken from across the Yamuna River, was prominent at the top of the page, but nothing in the story indicated that they got any closer than a river view. There was no

account of standing on the actual ground and absorbing the spirit of the place—something readers who have never been to India might wish to know. We got the impression of merry rovers who waved to the Taj as they waved at the rest of the world and fell far short on communicating a sense of discovery.

"Maybe it was meant to be a comedy about travelers in such a hurry they can never relate to any place they visit," one student suggested about these superficial sightseers.

Closer to home, Stockton's efforts to establish itself as a "destination city" offered us another means for evaluating a gap between intention and communication. This time, our focus was on the city's avoidance of its own rich history as a card in the tourist game.

Although Stockton served as the main terminus of travel and supply for Gold Rush miners, 49er history plays no current role in the city's marketing and promotion plans. Surveys show that northern California visitors rate Gold Rush lore and legends high among their travel interests—something on which Mother Lode towns wisely capitalize.

City founder Captain Charles Weber, we found, could provide an ideal link between Stockton's origins and 21st-century developments. Weber was an immigrant, an optimist, and a pioneering opportunist. He planted a two-story "mansion" and extensive gardens on the point of a watery wilderness, hoping a port would take shape around it and a city around the

port. A year later, the discovery of gold made him look like a prophet.

Could a Captain Weber/Gold Rush museum or theme park capture the California dream and communicate our special history? Students decided such a facility could indeed lure "the folks off I-5" with displays, interactive activities, and a Captain Weber impersonator, scanning the channel with his telescope (as Weber often did) in search of a sail. It could even replicate the loud cannon the captain was in the habit of firing to welcome arrivals and signal the town.

The ship the captain longed to see was that of Commodore Robert Stockton. History tells us that Weber hoped the commodore might send a Navy vessel his way, helping to establish the reputation of his infant settlement, open trade and lend credence to the idea of a port city. That's why he named it Stockton instead of Webersburg or Webersville.

The commodore didn't send a ship or pay a courtesy visit to his namesake, but Weber's optimism didn't slacken. Perhaps he felt he owed the commodore a debt for saving his life during the Mexican-American War. Perhaps he thought the commodore might someday become Secretary of the Navy—or even president—and look west to the flourishing port city of Stockton as a prospective capital of California.

The name stuck. Stockton is still waiting for its commodore

Failure to communicate? Perhaps. But one that's a golden part of our history.

HAWAIIAN CRUISE

By Bruce Bodine

During two weeks in April, my wife Toni and I took a cruise for which we had waited over ten months to take: a two-week cruise to Hawaii, roundtrip out of San Diego. We had previously been on a number of cruises but never one of two weeks' duration. Oh, my goodness: the food, the activities, the food, the sleep, the food, the balcony. Did I mention the food? It is very possible to eat all day long and all night long, if you want to punish yourself.

In the course of our travel to Hilo, Hawaii, we had one day of 18-foot swells and 40 mile per hour winds. However, on a ship that was 965 feet long and weighed in at about 92,000 tons, the ride was quite smooth. The gentle motion of the ship just helped rock me to sleep. I did see a few passengers now and

then wearing the patch, which I understand, but I am glad that I do not suffer from motion sickness.

After four and a half days at sea, we spotted land - what a relief! By that time, I was beginning to wonder if

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

we were going the right direction. Luckily, the trip director and staff worked very hard to make the cruise fun and to keep everyone busy. There were so many activities from which to choose: educational, scientific, literary, sporting, gambling (very tight!); contests of all kinds, computer classes - just almost anything to make the cruise interesting and fun! Still, I was glad to reach land, and I was very excited to visit Hawaii again.

The last time my wife and I were in Hawaii was in 1979, after our first visit in 1977. We reached it by airplane (a 747, not a single-engine biplane) and visited only Honolulu. Obviously, we were excited to see other islands. This time, our first port was Hilo on the Big Island. We visited several tourist areas around Hilo. The location I truly liked was Akaka Falls, a most beautiful location to see a waterfall of 420 feet. We hiked through very dense forest to reach the small canyon where the falls were located. This hike proved to be a small test for both of us for what was to come several days later in Honolulu.



After leaving Hilo, we endured a nighttime experience that I am glad we did not miss. The ship sailed around the southern end of the Big Island very slowly, providing the opportunity to see lava plunging into the ocean from the Kilauea volcano that has been active since 1983, making it the most active volcano in the world. This happened at about 10:30 p.m., so all we were able to see was the red glow of the lava and lots of steam - very exciting and fascinating.

Our next port was the town of Kona, also on the Big Island. It is considered the tourist area of the island. We were told that the real estate on this side of the island is at least twice as expensive as the Hilo side of the island. It is also the dry side. Hilo apparently receives about 200 inches of rain annually, and Kona gets only a small percentage of that amount. The temperature that day in Kona was different than Hilo - much warmer and very humid.

The third port was the town of Lahaina on the island of Maui. What a beautiful town and area! We left the ship at 7:00 a.m. and went to the Pioneer Inn, right next to the pier area. This was the first time of the cruise that we had a full meal off the ship. How does macadamia nut pancakes with coconut syrup sound? (I am sure it was diet food!) Those pancakes and Maui island coffee - I could have stayed there a lot longer... We rented a car and traveled across the island to Kahului and then on to the town of Hana and Hana Bay. When we left Kahului, it rained for about the first 30 miles, maybe more. We drove on a road that I hope I never see again: the Hana Highway. It took us well

over two hours to travel about 50 miles. The views were fantastic, but the driving certainly was not easy. When we reached Hana Bay, we found out that we had to go back the same way because of the roadway ahead. It was a very rough dirt road, and our rental car contract would have been voided if we traveled over it. So back we went. Luckily, we made it back in time to the ship.

The last port was Honolulu. The first impression of the city was how much it had changed in 28 years. We were very surprised to see that so many tall buildings had sprung up since we were last there. The area of Waikiki has had many large hotels for many years, but the downtown area has really exploded with growth - condos and businesses.

Now, for a description of a fun activity in Honolulu: climbing Diamond Head. We did not even know this was possible until several months before we left on the cruise. So, on Monday morning, we hailed a taxi and went to Diamond Head State Monument. The taxi took us through a long tunnel into the crater and parking area. From

then on, we walked. The crater covers 350 acres, but the public is allowed only in certain areas. We were amazed at the popularity of this hike. We arrived at about 10:00 a.m., and there were already a lot of hikers coming down from the crater's rim.

I do not know who constructed this trail, but they were quite sneaky. It begins with just a gentle increase in elevation on a very nice cement walkway. Then it turns nasty: it climbs rather steeply and turns into a dirt path. That is still the easy part. A little higher up, the path turns to rough stone steps - a lot of them - with numerous switchbacks. That is still not the worst part! After resting at a concrete landing/lookout, we began a climb up 74 concrete steps that led to a 225-foot narrow tunnel. We had just enough space in the tunnel to pass other hikers going the opposite direction. After the tunnel, there were another 99 steps at a very steep angle.

Not over, yet. These steps led us into two sets of spiral staircases, again very narrow, which made it very difficult to pass other people. These staircases led us into the top floor of what was once called the Fire Control Station (4th floor), surrounded by concrete. There were narrow slits all around the concrete bunker that looked out at part of the island and ocean. To get out of this area, it was necessary to climb up a three-step steel ladder that was attached to the concrete. This was not easy since there was a concrete ceiling only about 3-1/2 feet above the steps.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

I finally exited by getting on my knees after climbing the steps. And guess what? There were still more paths to follow and steps to climb to finally get to the top.

Once we arrived on top, it was crowded. The fenced-in area is rather small, but everyone eventually maneuvers around to see from all sides. There is a separate platform at the very top that is even more difficult to reach because there is a small steel ladder that only one person can use at a time. But it was worth it. The view from the top of Diamond Head is spectacular. Apparently, it is always windy, so there are warnings posted to hold on to hats or any loose clothing. It was really, really windy up there, but totally worth it. Using my camera to take video, all I got on sound was wind noise.

Would I do it again? You bet. But I don't know if I can survive another hike like that because of having to drag my wife all the way up. That was really punishing at my age. After 35 years of marriage, I should have learned by now that just because the hike was her idea does not mean that I had to rush her. But I will admit that going down was actually fun. She was happy as a clam and numerous times gave advice to hikers on their way up.

One last thought: The cruise was absolutely wonderful. However, if I wanted to go to the islands again, I would not do it by taking a cruise. There just is not enough time to spend on the islands since it takes so long to get there and get back to California.

Now one last decision that I have to make: Do I show this trip summary to my wife or not? I do want to make it to 36 years and longer. I guess that I will not suggest that we climb to the top of Half Dome in Yosemite as I did when I was eighteen. Come to think of it, she would enjoy it if we landed on top by helicopter, except she is not crazy about flying, which is exactly why we decided to take the cruise in the first place. Oh, well. I guess no more hiking.



Main Campus

6650 Inglewood Avenue

Stockton, CA 95207

209.478.0800

Fax 209.478.8721

Branch Campus

3600 Sisk Road, Suite 3-A

Modesto, CA 95356

209.543.9411

Fax 209.543.9413

www.humphreys.edu

Humphreys College Newsletter *Supplement*, June 2007

Stanislav Perkner, Editor, sperkner@humphreys.edu

Cynthia Becerra, Co-Editor, cbecerra@humphreys.edu

Leslie Walton, Executive Editor, lwalton@humphreys.edu

Student Contributor: Amanda Lukasiewicz