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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**Rightful and Moral Work: Rethinking Free Labor and Sex Work at the California
Borderlands, 1877-1937**

A dissertation submitted in partial
satisfaction of the requirements for the
degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
HISTORY
with an emphasis in LATIN
AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDIES

by

Erik Bernardino

June 2021

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ABSTRACT

Rightful and Moral Work: Rethinking Free Labor and Sex Work at the California Borderlands, 1877-1937
Erik Bernardino

“Rightful and Moral Work: Rethinking Free Labor and Sex Work at the California-Baja California Borderlands, 1877-1937” explores Mexican working-class identities from a transnational perspective. I argue that Mexican workers, specifically agricultural workers and sex workers, leveraged their crossings between the United States and Mexico to assert rights favorable to themselves and their families. Migrants’ proximity to the US-Mexico border was a critical factor in defying the most exploitative elements of free and semi-free labor systems in which agricultural and sex workers toiled. At the California-Baja California borderlands, mobility disrupted some of the most visible forms of labor exploitation, including contract labor and poverty wages. Mobility also altered how growers and immigration officials understood laborers who struggled against state control of their movement and labor power. Three overarching questions underscore this study: 1) in post-1877 borderlands society, why did Mexican agricultural workers and sex workers resist constraints against their mobility by Mexican and American state-makers; 2) why did Mexican working people living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands contest state-based definitions of labor and morality by developing and asserting their own ideas about work and honor; and 3) given that scholars have understood the border as

fluid for Mexicans before 1917, what do these early border crossings tell us about the nascent regimes of federal immigration regulation at the Baja California-California borderlands? “Rightful and Moral Work” shifts our understanding of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through a focus on morality that considers freedom and unfreedom in everyday identity formation. In connecting morality to labor, this study redirects our attention to early policing mechanisms that created and favored certain laborers over others.

Chapter One engages key debates and questions in the historiography of labor, migration, and policing by scholars in Mexico and the United States. Besides identifying the historiographical commitments of the study, Chapter One explores why American society sought to criminalize certain workers, while in Mexico, the same laborers were free from such punishments. In the same vein, Mexican contract labor workers, when they crossed into the United States, entered as free laborers. The difference lay in what each nation considered rightful and moral labor to be. Chapter Two examines the colonization projects of the 1880s in northern Baja California. It lays out a new understanding of labor based on a blended system of both wage labor and debt peonage. Ultimately, Mexicans rejected this combined free labor system and developed strategies to retain political rights like migrating to other places in Mexico or crossing north into the United States. Chapter Three examines the early years of Mexicali’s prostitution industry and the construction of morality from two contested views of labor and morality: the commerce in sex as a threat to decency and an affront to respectability controllable through strong regulatory measures, and the commerce

in sex as a part of the local economy and as a temporary measure used by women to support their families. Chapter Four explores the 1926 Pass-book Plan in California's Imperial Valley, also known as the Gentlemen's Agreement. The Plan, developed by U.S. immigration inspectors, local entrepreneurs, the Calexico Chamber of Commerce, the American Consulate in Mexicali, and Mexican labor contractors, allowed 6500 Mexican men, women, and children to enter the U.S. The Pass-book Plan recognized these efforts and afforded pass-book Mexicans a pathway to American citizenship. Chapter Five examines the labor strikes of the 1920s and 1930s at the California-Baja California borderlands. Municipal police and federal immigration agents policed strike activity and impeded cross-border movement. The Chapter shows that agricultural and sexual commerce workers defined labor as based on one's ability to provide subsistence for family survival, not morality tied to middle-class religiosity or female chastity. The Epilogue discusses the 1990s and the growing militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border alongside the trope of immigrants as criminals and undeserving welfare users. "Rightful and Moral Work" recasts Mexicans as circulating in a complicated political and cultural landscape between freedom and unfreedom through which they strived toward a better life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the support of the faculty and staff of the History Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. This dissertation would not exist without the support of my incredible advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Grace Peña Delgado. I thank Dr. Delgado for being so patient, supportive, and encouraging through the entirety of my graduate career. I can never repay the tremendous debt I owe her for the career guidance and all the countless hours spent meeting with me to improve my arguments. Dr. Delgado was always ready and willing to provide feedback at every stage of the writing process. The day I met her was the day I hit the academic jackpot.

I am grateful for the time and assistance of the members of my committee. Dr. Matt O'Hara provided key insight that pushed me early on in the dissertation's writing. I also thank Dr. O'Hara for his support when my wife and I lost our twin daughters. I thank Dr. Gabriela Arredondo for her constant support and encouragement to engage with theory. Dr. Arredondo also taught me how to create community in graduate classrooms and the importance of carrying myself as someone who belonged in the academy. Dr. Verónica Terríquez has always been a supportive and enthusiastic mentor. I met Dr. Terríquez at a critical time when I was considering ending my graduate career, but her willingness to help me was a turning point. I

would also like to thank Aaron Aruck, Priscilla Martinez, Bristol Cave-La Coste and Carlos Cruz. Thank you for forcing me to step away from the dissertation to socialize.

I would not have completed the dissertation without the generous financial support that allowed me to conduct research. The UC Santa Cruz History Department funded research trips to Southern California, Baja California Sur, and Mexico City. The Lionel Cantu Memorial Award funded a most productive research trip to Mexicali, Baja California. The Research Center of the Americas' Writing Community Dissertation Award funded professional editing for Chapter Four. A yearlong position with the History and Civics Project at UC Santa Cruz provided me necessary time to write Chapters One and Two. The HCP at UC Santa Cruz also reminded me of the importance of Mexican American history, engaging with public audiences, and my passion for teaching history. Thank you to Dr. Daisy Martin, Emily Howe, and Dr. George Bunch for the wonderful opportunity.

I could not have completed this dissertation without the support of my family. To my mother, I would not be here without you. You are my inspiration. Above everyone else, you have never doubted me and or my ability to complete the dissertation. You can now brag you have a Doctor for a son. Tias Naty and María, *gracias por los chistes, pozoles, y atoles*. To my brothers, Aldo and Andy, thank you for driving to Santa Cruz and bringing me Tomy's and excusing my less than helpful demeanor at various stages of the writing process. My in-laws, Salim and Mina, thank you for driving to Santa Cruz to care for Javi when I needed help meeting deadlines.

My wife Saira, my first editor, soundboard, and unwavering supporter, I cannot thank you enough. We moved away from everything and everyone we knew, and at times I left you in solitude to write. But through it all, you worked hard to give me time to complete the dissertation. Lastly, to my children, Javier, Kira, Estrella, and Luna, *los quiero a todos*. Javier, your smile reminded me there were more important things in life than sentence structure. Kira, I only held you for a short time, but I will treasure it until the end of my days on this earth. Estrella and Luna, we never had the opportunity to meet, but I see both of you in my mind's eye when I look up to the night sky. To all three of my daughters, so long as your mom and I remember, you will never truly be gone. *Gracias*.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 1929, Miguel Armenta, a legal resident of Calexico, California, and a citizen of Mexico received a home visit from Zachary T. Forester, a U.S. immigration inspector. What prompted Forester's visit to the Armenta home was an anonymous letter alleging members of the Armenta extended family entered the United States without authorization.¹ The anonymous letter-writer characterized the Armenta family as "no good" and suggested that they posed a danger to society. Contents of the letter constructed a picture of the Armenta family as living in the United States without official authorization. While Forester formed a biased impression of the Armenta family from the anonymous letter, earlier but failed attempts to locate and deport members of the family most likely added to the immigration inspector's aggravation and suspicion of their illegality. After Forester's initial questioning failed

¹ I use the term "illegal" in select places throughout the dissertation to clarify the status of immigrants. I use "illegal" with much pause, preferring instead to use "unauthorized" or "undocumented" to describe the status of the migrants. At all times, this study endeavors to humanize immigrants even as the American and Mexican states label and treat them as less than full persons.

to determine the extended family's whereabouts, the immigration officer detained Armenta at a local immigration inspection station to pressure him into revealing the location of family members.²

But Armenta did not comply. Once at the immigration station, the Calexico resident grew increasingly concerned about Forester's intentions. Soon after, Armenta fled his detention for the nearby border town of Mexicali, Mexico, believing the immigration officer violated his rights. "I saw no legitimate reason," asserted Armenta, "to continue waiting nor for the restriction of my liberty... after all I had not committed a crime..."³ As a result, border patrol agents barred Armenta's return to the United States, forbidding the Calexico resident to re-enter until he cooperated with Forester's investigation. Armenta also rejected this decision and wrote to the Mexican Consulate in Calexico to demand reentry. As a Mexican citizen with legal standing in the United States, Armenta insisted that he had the right to live and work in Calexico, free from harassment. That Forester demanded information about his family's whereabouts was an act of malice. "[No] law existed in the civilized

² Miguel Armento a Cónsul de México en Calexico Enero 9 1929, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada: Acervo Histórico Diplomático, Mexico City (Hereafter SRE-GE-GE), 10-1-46(I), 53.

³ Miguel Armenta a Cónsul de Mexico en Calexico, SRE-GE-GE 10-1-46(I), 53; "...no vi motivo legítimo...que continuará esperando y coartada mi libertad...pues ningún delito o falta de policía había cometido, me pase para el lado mexicano." All Spanish translations by author.

nations,” asserted Armenta, “... that would force a citizen to deliver to the authorities a person... bound by family ties...”⁴ Armenta asked the Mexican consul, Edmundo L. Aragón, to intervene on his behalf and sought immediate relief from the unjust treatment by Forester. Armenta implored Aragón to ensure “the guarantees he was entitled to as a peaceful resident...[of Calexico]” and one with an unblemished record of behavior.⁵

Border residents like Armenta and his family depended on their ability to cross the U.S.-Mexico boundary freely, that is, without the threat of detention or deportation. Armenta traversed south to Mexico to assert his rights as a Mexican citizen to live in the United States free from the threat of detention and intimidation. Armenta’s letter to the American consulate was an example of how migrants claimed rights enshrined in the Mexican Constitution of 1857, and reified in the 1917 Constitution, to move freely within the nation and across its border with the United

⁴ Miguel Armenta a Cónsul de México en Calexico Enero 9 1929, SRE-GE 10-1-46(I), 53. “...lo estimo enteramente irregular, puesto que ninguna ley en los países cultos del mundo obliga a los ciudadanos a entregar a las autoridades a ninguna persona quien lo ligan vínculos de parentesco como en el presente caso...”

⁵ Miguel Armenta a Cónsul de México en Calexico Enero 9 1929, SRE-GE 10-1-46(I), 54. “...se me den las garantías a que soy acreedor, como vecino pacífico que he sido de la propia ciudad de Calexico, Calif. en donde he residido con mi familia desde hace varios años, observando siempre una intachable conducta...”

States.⁶ Armenta's actions for himself and his family were like many Mexican workers at the borderlands. Although most workers did not appeal directly to Mexican consular officials to advocate on their behalf, as did Armenta, many workers balanced their capacity to move across borders to militate against narrowing labor-market choices and the possible curtailment of their civil rights. Importantly, the Mexican working poor also used mobility, whether crossing the border northward or southward, to draw awareness to and reject characterizations as societal scourges.

This dissertation, "Rightful and Moral Work: Rethinking Free Labor and Sex Work at the California-Baja California Borderlands, 1877-1937," argues that Mexican workers, specifically agricultural workers and sex workers, leveraged their crossings between the United States and Mexico to assert rights favorable to themselves and their families. Migrants' proximity to the US-Mexico border was a critical factor in defying the most exploitative elements of free and semi-free labor systems in which agricultural and sex workers toiled. At the California-Baja California borderlands, mobility disrupted some of the most visible forms of labor exploitation, including contract labor and poverty wages. Mobility also altered how growers and immigration officials understood laborers who struggled against state control of their movement and labor power. Three overarching questions underscore this study: 1) in post-1877 borderlands society, why did Mexican agricultural

⁶ Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La Constitución de 1857 y sus críticos* (México: Editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica-Clío-El Colegio Nacional, 2007).

workers and sex workers resist constraints against their mobility by Mexican and American state-makers; 2) why did Mexican working people living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands contest state-based definitions of labor and morality by developing and asserting their own ideas about work and honor; and 3) given that scholars have understood the border as fluid for Mexicans before 1917, what do these early border crossings tell us about the nascent regimes of federal immigration regulation at the Baja California-California borderlands? “Rightful and Moral Work” shifts our understanding of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through a focus on morality and mobility that considers freedom and unfreedom in everyday identity formation. In connecting morality and mobility to labor, this study redirects our attention to early policing mechanisms that created and favored certain laborers over others.

To examine these questions, I use a borderlands framework to explain why migrants retreated from one nation-state to another and why their identities as free laborers depended on their ability to circumvent certain laws, harsh racialization, and middle-class notions of morality.⁷ As agricultural workers and sex workers crossed at

⁷ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation, States, and the People in Between in North American History” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 104, no. 3 (June 1999):814-841; Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett “On Borderlands,” *The Journal of American History* (September 2011): 338-361; Michel Baud and Willem Van Schendel “Towards a Comparative History of Borderlands” *Journal of World History* Vol. 8 No. 2 (Fall, 1997): 211-242; Ramon A. Gutiérrez and Elliot Young, “Transnationalizing the Borderlands History” *The Western Historical Quarterly* Vol. 41 No. 1 (Spring 2010):26-53; Kelly Lytle

the California-Baja California borderlands, the border itself transformed the meaning of free labor and morality. At its core, Mexican working-class people's morality stressed the survival of themselves and their families. Therefore, rightful conduct for agricultural workers and sex workers corresponded to their labor, that is, taking on the most laborious, punishing, and ignominious jobs. Mexicali agricultural contract laborers, for example, agreed to cross the border into the United States for higher wages knowing that they could be easily harassed, jailed, or deported for rejecting the terms of employment. Some, however, grew tired of working seasonally in Calexico, California, and joined labor unions in Mexicali, Baja California, to organize for land redistribution policies and against "days of total poverty."⁸

The border was equally decisive for sex workers. In Mexico, the system of regulated prostitution kept the commerce in sex a legal, although not ideal, form of labor. Sex as a commodity circulated in Mexican commerce, and sex workers asserted themselves as sanctioned workers who subjected their bodies to an invasive system of

Hernández, "Borderlands and the Future History of the American West" *Western Historical Quarterly* vol. 43 no. 3 (Autumn 2011): 25-30; Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, "Introduction: Gendered Borderlands" *Gender and Society* vol. 22 no. 5 (Autumn 2008): 537-544.

⁸ Macrina Lerma Álvarez, "Por el Esclavo y el Burgués, a Prison," in Everardo Garduño, *Voces y Ecos de un Desierto Fértil* (Mexicali, Baja California, MX: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 1991), 109-116.

regulated prostitution as a show of morality.⁹ Yet, after 1907, Mexican sex workers could not cross the border into the United States and work in prostitution. The 1907 Immigration Act barred known or suspected prostitutes from entering the United States and made the exchange of sex for money a deportable offense. In essence, after 1907, the border on the American side nullified sexual commerce for Mexican women as a legitimate form of work.

At the heart of the experiences of agricultural and sexual commerce workers were the meaning of labor and freedom. In the post-Reconstruction United States and post-Reforma Mexico, the importance and place of free labor consumed both nations. Beginning with the 1875 Page Act, the United States shifted its policy at the federal level toward “scientific” racism and anti-Chinese sentiment and linked ideas of free

⁹ Eric Michael Schantz, “All Night at the Owl: The Social and Political Relations of Mexicali’s Red-Light Districts, 1913-1925” *Journal of the Southwest* vol. 43. no. 4 (Winter 2001): 549-602; “From the *Mexicali Rose* to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2001); Vicente C. de Baca, “Moral Renovation of the California’s: Tijuana Political and Economic Role in American-Mexican Relations, 1920-1935,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, San Diego, 1991); Lawrence D. Taylor, “The Wild Frontier Moves South: US Entrepreneurs and the Growth of Tijuana’s Vice Industry, 1908-1935,” *Journal of San Diego History* 48 no. 3 (Summer 2003): 204-229; Paul J. Vanderwood, *Satan’s Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America’s Greatest Gaming Resort* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Catherine Christensen, “*Mujeres Públicas*: American Prostitutes in Baja California, 1910-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (May 2013): 215-247.

and unfree labor to immigration. The law intended to restrict working-class women's immigration from China. US immigration officials constructed suspected prostitutes as unfree female coolie labor and excluded them because they were imported under contract and did not arrive in the United States voluntarily.¹⁰ The shift in US policy continued into the twentieth century and grew to include Mexican families at the US-Mexico borderlands who tried crossing even as US immigration officials marked them as unfree contract laborers.

Similarly, in Mexico, questions about free, semi-unfree bonded labor circulated throughout society. The same year the United States passed the Page Act, 1875, the Mexican government authorized the *Ley General sobre Colonización* and moved the country away from individual landholders and toward corporate holdings and rejected Mexicans living abroad as a potential pool of labor and began to exercise a preference for foreigners. In 1877, Porfirio Díaz's rise to the Mexican presidency

¹⁰ Kerry Abrams, "Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law" *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (Apr. 2005):641-716. See also Lucie Cheng Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 5, No. 1 (1979): 3-29; George Pfeffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration before Exclusion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Ming M. Zhu, "The Page Act of 1875: In the Name of Morality," *Legal History Workshop* (March 2010): 1-38; Sucheng Chan, "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943" in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, ed. Sucheng Chan, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

placed foreigners above Mexicans throughout the country.¹¹ The Díaz regime's embrace of foreigners reached its height in 1886 when the Porfiriato sold eighteen million acres of Baja California land to the International Company of Mexico under the guise of supporting colonization and development projects in the region. But the colonization schemes of the 1880s and 1890s failed. In the economic vacuum, vice industries developed in border towns like Mexicali at the turn of the twentieth century. American and Mexican women worked in brothels and houses of assignation in Mexico, but US society cast them as immoral threats that needed to be removed from the interior of the US. In 1913, for example, the California legislature signed the Red-light Abatement Act and closed the red-light districts, further pushing sex workers across the border into Mexicali.

The explosion of the agricultural industry at the California-Baja California borderlands in the 1920s transformed the region once again into a large agricultural center that would thrive because of the existence of a contract labor system in Mexico that provided Mexican workers for growers in Calexico, California. In a 1928 strike, workers in the Imperial Valley rejected the contract labor system that exploited them

¹¹ Moises Navarro, *Extranjeros en México y Los Mexicanos en el Extranjero*, vol. 1-3 (México: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos), 1994; Erika Pani, *Para Pertenecer a La Gran Familia Mexicana: Procesos de Naturalización en el Siglo XIX* (Mexico City, México: El Colegio de México, 2015); Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

with a bonus wage system that tied them to employers and diminished the role laborers played in the region's development. Each of these laws and events highlighted employer and nation-states' attempts to control and exploit workers. The end of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) Second New Deal in 1937 continued the legal exploitation of agricultural workers through their exclusion from the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and the closing of the border to the cross-border movement for Mexicans.¹² In 1937 landless, poor Mexicans forced Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas to confiscate thousands of hectares of foreign-owned land and redistribute them as communal *ejidos*. The redistribution of land in Baja California, commonly referred to as The Land Assault (*El Asalto a las Tierras*), fulfilled Article 27 of the Mexican revolutionary constitution and the Revolution's promise for the people in the region.¹³

¹² Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat White Gold: California Farm Worker, Cotton and the New Deal* (University of California, 1994); Matt García, *A World of its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹³ Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); John Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute: The Expropriation of American-Owned Rural Land in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Everado Garduño,

La disputa por la tierra...la disputa por la voz: Historia oral del movimiento agrario en el valle de Mexicali (Mexicali, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2004). Mexican labor historians have focused on agricultural workers, but in the United States, labor historians have focused on industrial and agricultural labor, but they have not questioned the very categories of labor they use. Many American labor histories take labor and work as pre-determined categories. Cindy Hahamovitch and Rick Halpern pushed US labor historians to move beyond the industrial sectors and consider the rural agricultural sectors. See Cindy Hahamovitch and Rick Halpern, “Not a ‘Sack of Potatoes’: Why Labor Historians Need to take Agriculture Seriously,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 65 (Spring 2004): 3-10. See also Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997). However, Mexican labor historians have embraced a more holistic view of labor, particularly regarding women. See William E. French, *A Peaceful and Working People: Manners, Morals and Class Formation in Northern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourse and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Ann Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2009); Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Working Women, Entrepreneurs, and the Mexican Revolution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Heather Fowler-Salamini and Mary Kay Vaughan eds. *Women of the Mexican Countryside, 1850-1990: Creating Spaces, Shaping Transitions* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); Sonia Hernández, *Working Women into the Borderlands* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2014); Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey: Workers, Paternalism, and Revolution in Mexico, 1890-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Chapter One engages key debates and questions in the historiography of labor, migration, and policing by scholars in Mexico and the United States. Besides identifying the historiographical commitments of the study, Chapter One explores why American society sought to criminalize certain workers, while in Mexico, the same laborers were free from such punishments. In the same vein, Mexican contract labor workers, when they crossed into the United States, entered as free laborers. The difference lay in what each nation considered rightful and moral labor to be. Chapter Two examines the colonization projects of the 1880s in northern Baja California. It lays out a new understanding of labor based on a blended system of both wage labor and indebted labor. Ultimately, Mexicans rejected this combined free labor system and developed strategies to retain political rights like migrating to other places in Mexico or crossing north into the United States. Chapter Three examines the early years of Mexicali's prostitution industry and the construction of morality from two contested views of labor and morality: the commerce in sex as a threat to decency and an affront to respectability controllable through strong regulatory measures, and the commerce in sex as a part of the local economy and as a temporary measure used by women to support their families. Chapter Four explores the 1926 Pass-book Plan in California's Imperial Valley, also known as the Gentlemen's Agreement. The Plan, developed by U.S. immigration inspectors, local entrepreneurs, the Calexico Chamber of Commerce, the American Consulate in Mexicali, and Mexican labor contractors, allowed 6500 Mexican men, women, and children to enter the U.S. The Pass-book Plan recognized these efforts and afforded pass-book Mexicans a pathway to

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At the California-Baja California borderlands, employers, government officials, and local communities regulated local community membership to manage or control individual behaviors. In nineteenth-century Mexico, local municipalities policed idle and troublesome men who produced no wealth, did not support their families, and were considered social scourges. In Guanajuato, Mexico, for example, a military recruitment law passed in 1824 stressed four categories of men which towns could enlist soldiers from those who had no trade or profession; those who had a trade but did not practice it; those who did not maintain their families or lived apart from them, and those who were "habitually immoral." Guanajuato's military recruitment laws became how towns in Mexico controlled male community members and

expelled those who did not abide by the municipal norms of the family, productivity, and morality, all of which local municipalities used to police familial relationships and obligations.¹⁴

Likewise, in the United States, local communities throughout the nineteenth century grew increasingly concerned with vagrants, prostitutes, and those deemed social ills and a drain on society.¹⁵ Vagrant beggars faced the pressures of policing in the late nineteenth century, not because they were idle but because they failed to “take care of themselves” and had become burdens or dependents on public charity.¹⁶ In both cases, local communities reacted to the fear of dependency by removing real and perceived threats to the community through expulsion. One of the principal aspects of policing was the local government’s ability to react to fears and supposed threats. Local governance did not need to wait until the dangers of vagrancy and

¹⁴ Timo H. Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia: The Rise and Fall of Legal Rule in Post-Colonial Mexico, 1820-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 66. For a discussion of idleness, see Andrew Lyndon Knighton, *Idle Threats: Men and the Limits of Productivity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 115. See also Christopher G. Tiedeman, *A Treatise on State and Federal Control of Persons and Property in the United States* 2 vols., New York, 1975, 1: 149, 143-44.

dependency inflicted harm. Officials could prevent the danger from ever being produced.¹⁷ Those deemed social scourges, vagrants, or prostitutes did not have to violate any moral norms. The fact communities placed people into categories of dependency meant they could also take actions to remove them.

The meanings of freedom were at the heart of these projects and their reimagining. Both the American post-Civil War and Mexican post-*Reforma* governments had addressed questions of freedom and the role of governance in policing labor through their embrace of the so-called free labor contract, that is, the ability of citizens to enter agreements without fear of threat or coercion. Yet, within both societies, contradictions appeared. Societies policed and regulated sex work and agricultural work as unfree and coerced labor seemingly within the meaning of the free-labor contract. Sex and agricultural workers each seemed to fit within the freedom of contract's definition but would fall under the regulatory eye of local, regional, and national agencies that construed their labor as unfree. In terms of sex work, early twentieth-century, anti-white slavery crusaders believed that all forms of prostitution were acts of sexual slavery, and targeted prostitution for abolition.¹⁸ In

¹⁷ Markus D. Dubber, *The Police Power: Patriarchy and the Foundations of American Government* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 86-88.

¹⁸ Ann S. Blum, *Domestic Economies*; Christensen, "Mujeres Públicas;" James Alex Garza, *The Imagined Underworld: Sex, Crime, and Vice in Porfirian Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Katherine Bliss and William E French, eds. *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America since Independence*

the same vein, agricultural workers, while perhaps the fullest embodiment of the meaning of contract freedom after 1877, were often recruited to work for poverty wages, in a specified industry, for a particular amount of time, under coercion. At the California-Baja California borderlands, what marked one group of agricultural workers as free, marked another as unfree and dependent.¹⁹ By exploring people's

(Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Jocelyn, H. Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Susie Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*; Carmen Ramos Escandón, *Presencia y Transparencia: La Mujer en la Historia de México* 2nd ed. (México D.F: El Colegio de México, 2002); Fernanda Nuñez Becerra, *La Prostitución y su Represión en la Ciudad de México, Siglo XIX: Prácticas y Representaciones* (Barcelona: Gedisa Editorial, 2002); Katherine E Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001); Salvador Novo, *Las Locas, El Sexo, Los Burdeles* (Mexico City: Organización editorial Novaro, 1972). For a US discussion of anti-white-slavery and prostitution, see Jessica Pliley, *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the F.B.I.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in American, 1900-1918* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1982).

¹⁹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* Reprint Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working*

behaviors and how free or unfree categories influenced them, this study explores the boundaries of contract freedom, the meaning of labor, and how emerging modern liberal nation-states attempted to control agricultural laborers and sex workers by denying them certain civil rights and by restricting their movement across borders.

At the California-Baja California borderlands, policing labor and morality became avenues to expand federal power in the region. While Mexican and American state makers shared similar concerns about regulating labor and morality, important differences in governance existed in Baja California and California. Unlike California, which gained statehood in the United States in 1850, Baja California remained a Mexican territory until 1952. Statehood was a critical difference in the

Class (New York: Verso, 1991); Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Stacey Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Mark A. Lause, *Free Labor: The Civil War and the Making of an American Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Jung Moon-Ho, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

region as Baja California's territorial government was much more flexible in its enforcement of morality and understanding of free labor. Vice regulation became a tool to serve political and social interests in Baja California as the short-lived *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (PLM) government in 1911 and the authoritarian governorship of Esteban Cantú (1915-1920) depended on the revenue sources that vice industries generated to govern and maintain power. Various municipal governments focused on regulating, not ending, the "immoral" industries.²⁰ Baja California's regulation of vice was in stark contrast to the use of policing powers in California, which sought to end the regulated prostitution in 1913 when it passed the California Red Light Abatement Act. The Act led to the migration of sex workers into Mexican border towns like Mexicali and Tijuana.²¹

²⁰ James A. Sandos *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan de San Diego, 1904-1923* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1992); Lowell L. Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution: Baja California, 1911* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1962); José Alfredo Gómez Estrada, *Gobiernos y Casinos: El Origen de la Riqueza de Abelardo L. Félix* (Mexicali, Baja California: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Instituto de Investigaciones, 2002); Marco Antonio Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y Revolución: Los Acontecimientos de 1911 en Baja California* (Tijuana, México: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2008).

²¹ Christensen, "Mujeres Públicas," 220; See also Christensen "Mujeres Públicas: Euro-American Prostitutes and Reformers at the California-Mexico Border, 1900-1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Irvine, 2009). See also Mara Laura Keire, *For Business and Pleasure: Red-Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the*

An uneven process of national incorporation shaped the differing approaches and political and economic goals. While California's arable land and Pacific Ocean-facing harbors quickly made it the most economically significant state in the American West in the eyes of officials and politicians, in Baja California, regional caudillos, territorial governors, and federal officials pursued their own separate economic and political interests that were, at times, at odds with one another. As a result, a unified vision of governance and economic development in the region did not emerge until 1974, when Baja California Sur became Mexico's thirty-first state.²²

United States, 1890-1933 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Peter C. Hennigan, "Property War: Prostitution, Red-Light Districts and the Transformation of Public Nuisance Law in the Progressive Era" *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 16 no. 1 (Jan. 2004): 123-198.

²² For Baja California see Oscar Sánchez Ramírez, *Formación del Estado de Baja California* (Mexicali, BC: Aljibe Editorial, 2013); Miguel León Portilla and David Piñera Ramírez, *Historia Breve de Baja California* (México D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2010); Joseph Richard Wene, "Esteban Cantú y la Soberanía Mexicana en Baja California," *Historia Mexicana* 30 no.1 (Jul-Sep., 1980): 1-32; Pablo L Martínez, *Historia de Baja California* (Mexico City: Editorial Baja California, 1960). For a discussion of caudillismo in Mexico see John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Alejandro Quintana, *Maximino Avila Camacho and the One-Party State: The Taming of Caudillismo and Caciquismo in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

Until then, but especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, free labor and morality were locally defined, fluid social categories that could be shaped to accommodate the lives of working people in the Californias. As agricultural workers and sex workers crossed the boundary between Baja California and California, the complicated if bewildering task of identifying and policing against forms of unfree and immoral labor, eroded state power on both sides of the border.

The border crossing of agricultural workers and sex workers converged with questions over political membership in the United States and Mexico, respectively. As the United States and Mexico developed into modern liberal nation-states, they gradually refined the boundaries of national citizenship. The United States operated under the concept of birthright citizenship derived from the legal concept of *jus soli*, which meant that anyone born within the nation's physical jurisdiction was accorded full political membership.²³ However, the United States defined political citizenship

²³ Ayelet Shachar, *The Birthright Lottery Citizenship and Global Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 113-114. For a discussion of the challenges and debates of birthright citizenship, see D. Carolina Nuñez, "Beyond Blood and Borders: Finding Meaning in Birthright Citizenship," *Brooklyn Law Review* 78 no. 3 (2013): 835-881; Allen R. Kamp, "The Birthright Citizenship Controversy: A Study of Conservative Substance and Rhetoric," *Texas Hispanic Journal of Law and Policy* 18 no. 1(2012): 49-79; Matthew Ing, "Birthright Citizenship, Illegal Aliens and the Original Meaning of the Citizenship Clause," *Akron Law Review* 45, no. 3 (2012): 719-768; Nick Petree, "Born in the USA: An All-American View of Birthright Citizenship and International Human Rights,"

narrowly as a construct rooted in race, gender, and class exclusions and used each category to gauge “fitness” and allegiance to the US polity. US society imagined the recipients of birthright citizenship as propertied white males. Even when the United States expanded citizenship after the Civil War, Americans still excluded groups of people who did not fit within the idealized conceptions of national citizenship.²⁴

In Mexico, a more complex and uneven process of citizenship occurred. Under the Constitution of 1857, Mexico embraced *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), the legal principle that a child’s nationality is the same as one or both parents.²⁵ These rules, however, did not apply to Mexicans living in territories that became the American Southwest after 1848. To remain citizens of Mexico, Mexicans had to petition the government to retain political membership. Those who did not formally apply for Mexican citizenship became, by default, American citizens under the Treaty

Houston Journal of International Law 34, no. 1 (2011): 147-185; Bethany Berger, “Birthright Citizenship on Trial: Elk V. Wilkins and United States V. Wong Kim Ark,” *Cardozo Law Review* 37, (2016): 1185-1258; Katherine Culliton-González, “Born in the Americas: Birthright Citizenship and Human Rights,” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 25, (2011): 127-182; Jacqueline Bhabha, “The Birthright Citizenship Amendment: A Threat to Equality,” *Harvard Law Review* 107, no. 5 (1994): 1026-1043.

²⁴ Eddie L. Wong, *Racial Reconstruction: Black Inclusion, Chinese Exclusion, and the Fictions of Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

²⁵ This, in fact, stripped Mexican citizenship away from those who had been born in Mexico but whose parents were foreigners. See Erika Pani, *Para Pertenecer a La Gran Familia Mexicana*, 43.

of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Sixty years later, the Mexican Constitution of 1917 also addressed citizenship and naturalization in Mexico but from an entirely different impulse. Article thirty of the revolutionary constitution distinguished between Mexican nationals and Mexican citizens. Unlike in 1857, the rights and privileges of citizenship under the revolutionary constitution one did not extend to the other.²⁶ In other words, Mexican citizenship was conferred separately through *jus soli* or naturalization, a deliberate and formal acquisition of political membership. The split between the two types of citizenship was a response to the system of governance of the *Porfiriato* and the lack of rights Mexicans enjoyed under that regime. The Porfirian government denied Mexicans--both citizens and former citizens born in territories that became the American Southwest--priority in purchasing land. Díaz's positivist slogan of "order and progress" guided Mexico's national economic development project and helped to justify the diminution of land distribution by local, municipal authorities.²⁷ In effect, "order and progress" worked to deny most

²⁶ Julian Lim, *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migrations and the Law in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 163. See also Pani, *Para Pertenecer a la Gran Familia Mexicana*; Moisés González Navarro, *Los Extranjeros en México y los Mexicanos en el Extranjero, 1821-1970 vol 2*. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1994).

²⁷ For a discussion of the Porfiriato see Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol I, "Porfirians, Liberals, and Peasants," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Francois-Xavier Guerra, *Mexico: Del Antiguo Régimen a la Revolución 2 vol.*, trans Sergio Fernandez Bravo (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988);

Mexicans from participating in national economic and political life just as race, gender, economic exclusions had for many in the United States.

The mechanisms of border policing and the administration of political membership created markers of ideal Mexican and American citizens. When government officials on both sides of the border policed laborers they were managing citizenship through the language of work, productivity, and morality. Government officials in the United States, in particular, policed agricultural workers and sex commerce workers as racialized dependents and dangers to the public good even as these laborers attempted to cross the international boundary to ply their trades. When prevented from crossing the border, or when their capacity to remain in the United States without fear of detention or deportation was compromised, working-class

Friedrich Katz, "Mexico: Restored Republic and Porfiriato," in *Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 5 ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 3-78. For a discussion of Positivism in Mexico, see Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974); Natalia Priego, *Positivism, Science, and 'The Scientists' in Porfirian Mexico: A Reappraisal* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2016). For a discussion of the "nation of villages," see Michael T. Ducey, *A Nation of Villages: Riot and Rebellion in the Mexican Huasteca, 1750-1850* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant, and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Mexicans drew on their constitutional rights as members of the Mexican nation to ensure their right to move across borders be retained.

As Miguel Armenta's experience in 1929 showed, an anonymous letter that made a local concern about racialized danger and immigrant dependency led to federal level intervention by immigration inspector Forester. Even as policing for the public good occurred at the local level, the Mexican and American federal governments intervened when it came to Mexican immigrants.²⁸ The Mexican government asserted the constitutional rights of one of its citizens, Miguel Armenta, through Consul Edmundo Aragón. By placing Armenta's experience at the California-Baja California borderlands, we see that Mexican government officials strived to ensure—in the words of Charles Hale, “the liberties of the individual.” State-makers also balanced those ideals with what the positivist Mexican Justo Sierra

²⁸ Dubber, *The Police Power*, 82.; William Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 9. The interactions between Mexican and American policing of individuals grew out of the belief of patriarchal systems of policing where the father's ability to have unlimited discretion to discipline to maintain the household's welfare. Importantly, the anonymous letter and Forester defined public welfare as ensuring local community members could legally be in the United States and not dependents, not Armenta. It was in his best interest to re-enter the United States, but the public welfare concerns he and his family presented superseded Armenta's.

called “practical liberty,” acting for the greatest good for the greatest number.²⁹ The liberty of the individual and utilitarianism underscored Aragón’s actions on Armenta’s behalf. As Aragón worked to confirm Armenta’s right to freedom of movement, he also upheld that right for all Mexicans who complied with U.S. immigration regulations to cross north. When the immigration officer Zachary T. Forester questioned and tried to detain Armenta, he did so based on the assumption that Armenta posed a threat to the American body politic. Forester policed Armenta

²⁹ Charles A. Hale, “José María Luis Mora and the Structure of Mexican Liberalism” *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 45 no.2 (1965): 196-227; *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: 1989); *Mexican Liberalism in the Age of Mora, 1821-1853* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Alan Knight, “El Liberalismo Mexicano desde la Reforma hasta la Revolución (una interpretación)” *Historia Mexicana* vol. 35 no. 1 (Jul-Sep. 1985): 59-91; D.A. Brading, “Creole Nationalism and Mexican Liberalism” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* vol 15. No.2 (May 1973): 139-190; William Fowler & Humberto Morales Moreno coord., *El Conservadurismo mexicano en el siglo XIX* (Puebla, MX: Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, 1999); Timothy E. Anna, *Forging Mexico, 1821-1835* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Jaime E. Félix O., ed. *The Divine Charter: Constitutionalism and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2005); Christon L. Archer ed., *The Birth of Modern Mexico 1780-1824* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc. 2003); Antonio Annino, “Pueblos, liberalismo, y nación en México” in *Inventando la nación: Iberoamérica. Siglo XIX* eds. Antonio Annino and François-Xavier Guerra, (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003).

before any threat had emerged. It was enough that Forester *perceived* Armenta to be a threat to enact an arrest.³⁰ Maintaining the public interest and well-being through policing was most evident at the federal level in the United States and Mexico.

The end of the Mexican Revolution in 1917 saw a growing wave of nationalistic sentiment in the country that by the 1930s focused squarely on the so-called Chinese problem in Sonora, Sinaloa, and to a lesser extent Baja California, Mexico. Anti-Chinese campaigns worked in tandem to deny Chinese Mexicans citizenship rights under the Mexican constitution and to erase them from the Mexican imagination as national members.³¹ The United States similarly enacted restrictionist

³⁰ Dubber, *Police Powers*, 96. As the historian William Novak argues, the well-regulated government occurs through the enactments of laws founded on the principle of the welfare of the people is the supreme law (*salus populi suprema lex est*). Novak argued governance was predicated on the assumption that public interest superseded private interest and that regulation existed to protect and further the community's well-being, not to protect pre-existing private rights. Novak, *The People's Welfare*, 9.

³¹ Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); Fredy González, *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017); Delia Salazar Anaya ed., *Xenofobia y xenofilia en la historia de México siglos XIX y XX: Homenaje a Moisés González Navarro* (México, DF:SEGOB INM, 2006); Eduardo Auyón Gerardo, *El dragón en el desierto: Los pioneros chinos en Mexicali* (Mexicali, Baja California: Instituto de Cultura de Baja

policies. American immigration policy racialized Chinese migrants and denied them citizenship through naturalization beginning in 1898.³² But in places like the Arizona and California borderlands, Chinese Mexicans remained and created vibrant

California, 1991); Flora Botton Beja, “La persecución de los chinos en México” *Estudios de Asia y África* vol. 43 no. 2 (May-August 2008): 477-86; Rosario Cardiel Marín, “La migración china en el norte de Baja California, 1877-1949” in *Destino México: Un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas a México, siglos XIX y XX* eds. María Ota Mishima (México, DF: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios de Asia y África, 1997); Robert H. Duncan, “The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 74 no. 4 (Nov 1994): 615-647; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “The Chinese in Baja California Norte” in *Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Council on Latin America Studies* vol. 12 *Baja California and the North Mexican Frontier* (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press, 1986).

³² *United States vs. Wong Kim Ark* (1898). Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 10. See also Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Dan Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the US Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Kunal Parker, *Making Foreigners: Immigration and Citizenship Law in America, 1600-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); George Pfeffer, *If They Don’t Bring Their Women Here*; Lucy E. Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

communities, despite exclusionary laws and the lack of citizenship through naturalization. In Baja California, most famously in *La Chinesca* (Chinatown) in Mexicali, Chinese Mexicans engaged in transnational politics that made them visible and essential members of the social body. In much the same way Mexican sex workers and agricultural workers did, Chinese Mexicans negotiated between national racial projects at the California borderlands and asserted their political rights.

The presence of Chinese Mexicans at the borderlands highlighted an issue Mexico faced throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike the United States, Mexico had trouble attracting many immigrants well into the late nineteenth century, particularly to its peripheries, despite the federal government's various attempts to entice immigrants into those regions. Historians of Mexican immigration have marked distinct eras and differentiated between the nineteenth century and the policies of the *Porfiriato* aimed at colonization projects and twentieth-century immigration policies that the myth of *mestizaje* helped to formulate.³³ But important similarities existed between the two, particularly once we

³³ Jurgen Buchenau, "Small Numbers, Great Impacts: Mexico and Its Immigrants, 1821-1973," *Journal of American Ethnic History* vol. 20 no. 3 (Spring 2001): 23-49; Monica Palma Mora, "De la Simpatia a la Antipatia: La Actitud Oficial ante la Inmigración, 1908-1990," *Historias* 56 (Sept- Dec 2003): 63- 76. For a discussion of mestizaje and how it shaped twentieth century Mexican immigration laws see Pablo Yankelevich, "Mexico for the Mexicans: Immigration, National Sovereignty and the Promotion of Mestizaje," *The Americas* 68, no. 3 (January 2012): 405-436. For a discussion of the difference between colonization and immigration in Mexico see

consider the role of the central government. During the last decades of the *Porfiriato*, the drive “to govern is to populate” motivated Mexico City’s central government, much like other Latin American governments at the time and made famous by Juan Bautista Alberdi, to promote colonization and immigration in its northern territories. The goal of the Porfirian government was not simply to populate the peripheries of Mexico but to populate it with the “right” people. The Porfirian government became entranced with “whitening” Mexico and sought to encourage European migration to colonize northern Mexico. They intended regulations like the 1883 Colonization Law to make Mexico attractive to European migrants but failed to populate Mexico’s lands with immigrants. The Díaz administration then shifted and sought to attract private companies to develop the lands through colonization laws in 1893 and 1894 to assist land accumulation by doing away with cultivation requirements.³⁴ However, the

Marcela Martínez Félix, “El Proyecto Colonizador de México a finales del siglo XIX: Algunas Perspectivas comparativas en Latinoamérica,” *Secuencia* 76 (Enero-Abril 2010): 104-105.

³⁴ Martínez Félix, “El Proyecto Colonizador de México a finales del siglo XIX,” 109; Moisés Navarro, *Colonización en México*, 9. See also Dorothy Pierson Kerig, “Yankee Enclave: The Colorado River Land Company and Mexican Agrarian Reform in Baja California, 1902-1944,” (PhD diss University of California Irvine, 1988); William Orel Hendricks, “Guillermo Andrade and the Land Development on the Mexican Colorado River Delta,” (PhD diss, University of Southern California, 1967).

Porfiriato's shift led to the vast accumulation of Mexican lands by foreign interests and was one of the leading factors that led to the Mexican Revolution.³⁵

In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, the newly formed Mexican government and the 1917 constitution embraced "Mexico for the Mexicans" in rhetoric and policy. The constitution sought to end the control of Mexican lands, particularly in the north, by foreign interests.³⁶ *Mestizaje*, and its creation of a Mexican national character, became the driving force behind many of the government's policies in the 1920s and beyond. The nationalist rhetoric and policy action made its way into Mexico's immigration policies. But historians of Mexican immigration have largely ignored the years between 1908 that saw the passage of Mexico's first immigration law and the later 1920s because of the turmoil caused by

³⁵ Mexican historians have debated if it was an actual revolution or reform movement. Revisionists of the Mexican Revolution see it as a rupture point and refute the earlier arguments that the revolution was a continuation of the Porfiriato, and the gains were minimal. For a discussion of the revolution as a continuation, see John Womack, "The Mexican Economy During the Revolution, 1910-1920: Historiography and Analysis," *Marxist Perspectives* 4 (Winter, 1978): 80-123; for early revisions to this, see Alan Knight, "The Mexican Revolution: Bourgeois? Nationalist? Or Just a 'Great Rebellion?'" *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 4:2 (1985): 1-37; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*; Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*.

³⁶See John J. Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute*.

the Revolution.³⁷ However, as the historian Erika Pani argues, there are ways in which historians of Mexico can approach these years and seek to understand Mexico's policies of naturalization, and by extension, its policies of colonization and immigration.³⁸ Baja California during the Revolution provided an opportunity to understand Mexican immigration during these years. The region enjoyed relative stability after the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and Ricardo Flores Magón's short-lived uprising in 1911, as Esteban Cantú's governorship remained on the periphery of the revolution.³⁹ Thus, Baja California during these years provided

³⁷ Tomas Pérez Vejo, "La Extranjería en la Construcción Nacional Mexicana," *Nación y Extranjería: La Exclusión Racial en las Políticas Migratorias de Argentina, Brasil, Cuba Y México* ed. Pablo Yankelevich (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009). See also Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far From Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Jerry García, *Looking Like the Enemy: Japanese Mexicans, the Mexican State and US Hegemony, 1875-1945* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); Analisa Taylor, *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination: Thresholds of Belonging* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

³⁸ Pani, *Para Pertenecer a la Gran Familia Mexicana*, 164-165.

³⁹ For a discussion of the IWW and the PLM see Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*; Claudio Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (New York: Zone Books, 2014); Samaniego López, "El Poblado Fronterizo de Tijuana. Emiliano Zapata y la Revolución de Toluca," *Historia Mexicana* vol. 66 no. 3 (2017)1123-1175. For a discussion of Cantú see César Alexis Marcial Campos, *Un Territorio en Disputa: El Distrito Norte de la Baja California durante el gobierno de Esteban Cantú, 1915-1920* (La Paz, México: Consejo Nacional Para las Artes, 2016); Max Calvillo

fertile ground to understand how regional levels of government dealt with an influx of both national and foreign migrants into the region.

At the national level, immigration rhetoric in both the United States and Mexico centered on idealized imaginings of who Americans and Mexicans were and what the government could do to help create and propagate that representation. But state-level policies also worked to create similar images of Americans and Mexicans. Hidetaka Hirodata's work has shown that the origins of US immigration policies began at the state level and concerns over paupers and people with mental defects, two categories that seemed to violate the public welfare of the states and were drains on society shaped them.⁴⁰ Historians such as Mae Ngai have argued that immigration policies provide a lens for studying how a nation sees itself and its relationship to the rest of the world.⁴¹ But works such as Ngai's over-focus on the federal levels of governance while the United States' territoriality confined Hirodata's work. However, Hirodata's work shows there needs to be a closer examination of individual regional and state-level government bureaucrats and how they also influenced

Velasco, "Indicios para descifrar la trayectoria de Esteban Cantú," *Historias Mexicana* vol. 59, no. 3 (Jan-Mar 2010), 981-1040; Jerne, "Esteban Cantú y la soberanía mexicana en Baja California."

⁴⁰ Hidetaka Hirota, *Expelling the Poor: Atlantic Seaboard States & the 19th Century Origins of American Immigration Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5. See also Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 98-137.

⁴¹ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9.

immigration historians. Taking into consideration local governing structures can help deepen our understanding of people's movement across international lines.⁴² Mexico, for example, centered its concerns on people's morality and worker availability, yet historians have not addressed the local and regional governance reactions.

“Rightful and Moral Work” connects local-level immigration enforcement to labor policing. As Robert Steinfeld argued, historians should abandon artificial divides between free and unfree labor forms and instead investigate them as one unit of analysis. Steinfeld called on historians to move beyond the coercive pressure wages could exert and also consider non-pecuniary pressures.⁴³ For example, both the

⁴² Pani, *Para Pertenecer a la Gran Familia Mexicana*, 106-107; Lytle Hernández , *Migra! 5*; Hirota, *Expelling the Poor*, 4-5. See also Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem: The Dillingham Commission and its Legacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); S. Deborah Kang, *The I.N.S. on the Line: Making Immigration Law on the US-Mexico Border, 1917-1954* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁴³ Robert J. Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9-16. Steinfeld defined these coercive pressures as a regime that employed non-pecuniary pressures to extract labor from workers. He further argued the line that separated free from coerced labor relations hinged on what coercive pressures were brought to bear on these that determined if they were legitimate or illegitimate. I add to this by incorporating the state but also do not exclude the financial pressures as people's livelihood often dictated what work they would or would not undertake, but it was the class and moral distinctions that shaped the legitimacy of it for others. For a discussion of the role of the state and laws in creating the category of “free labor,” and the creation of a

1908 Mexican immigration law and the various US immigration laws of the early twentieth century sought to restrict certain categories of people deemed public charges or without the means to provide for themselves and their families. These immigration laws then become a way to “see” policing in action and understand the coercive forces that the state could marshal against workers through laws. Mexico and the United States both restricted immigration based on monetary concerns, whether individual immigrants had the financial resources to support themselves. The “Likely to Become a Public Charge” (LPC) category in US immigration policy had monetary implications, and under Mexican immigration laws, immigrants needed to have money to support themselves for an amount of time.⁴⁴ In both the United

capitalist labor market that explained and legitimized the actions of the state, see the work of James D. Schmidt, *Free to Work: Labor Law, Emancipation, and Reconstruction, 1815-1880* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). For a discussion of morality and labor, see French, *A Peaceful and Working-Class People*.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of how likely to become a public charge was disproportionately applied to women, see Deirdre M. Moloney, *National Insecurities: Immigrants and US Deportation Policy since 1882* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Anna R. Igra, *Wives Without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, and Welfare in New York, 1900-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Martha Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women Immigration and Citizenship, 1870-1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Candice Lewis Bredbenner, *A Nationality of Her Own: Women, Marriage, and the Law of Citizenship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 175-177; Donna R. Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigration Life in the US*,

States and Mexico, there was concern over people's labor and how they supported themselves and their families to avoid being dependent on public charity. The concern expressed itself through laws meant to regulate the free labor market and labor relations. Thus, national and local-level laws and their enforcement delimited free and unfree labor relations and marked what was legally work and not work and its consequences.

Key to understanding the role of labor in state actions and policies was the ideology shaping work. Historians of both nations have discussed how the government and society sought to maintain a regular and predictable supply of workers in a region while also holding fast to the other's understanding of freedom and unfreedom in liberal republican nations.⁴⁵ In the United States, free labor

1820-1990 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). For Mexican policies see Pani, *Para Pertencer a la Gran Familia Mexicana*. See also *Colonization and Naturalization Laws of the Republic of Mexico with Amendments* (Mexico: American Book and Printing Co., 1906).

⁴⁵ Many historians of US immigration have focused on the laboring lives of immigrant groups. See John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); James Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the*

ideology emerged as a critique to chattel slavery in the mid-nineteenth century. A critical aspect of the ideology was worker and employer consent to enter labor contracts, which defined the work, the wages, and the responsibilities of laborers and employers. In other words, workers and employers agreed to a set of rules that governed their labor relations and wages willingly.⁴⁶ In post-Civil War America, contract relations between workers and employers became the ultimate marker of freedom. As the historian Amy Dru Stanley argued in *From Bondage to Contract*, the contract became a worldview that idealized the ownership of oneself and valorized the voluntary exchange between individuals who were, at least in theory, if not practice, equal and free.⁴⁷ As contract relations became the ultimate marker of freedom, they also became a way to understand and advocate for legal and political

US-Mexico Border (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Madeline Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How The Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ Aziz Z. Huq, “Peonage and Contractual Liberty” *Columbia Law Review* vol. 101 no. 2 (March 2001): 351-391; James Gray Pope, “Contract, Race, and Freedom of Labor in the Constitutional Law of “Involuntary Servitude” *The Yale Law Journal* vol. 119 no. 7 (May 2010):1474-1567; Aviam Soifer, “Federal Protection, Paternalism, and the Virtually Forgotten Prohibition of Voluntary Peonage” *Columbia Law Review* vol. 112 no. 7 (November 2012): 1607-1639; Michael F. Magliari, “Free State Slavery: Bound Indian Labor and Slave Trafficking in California’s Sacramento Valley, 1850-1864” *Pacific Historical Review* vol. 81 no. 2 (May 2012): 155-192.

⁴⁷ Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, x.

rights. Entering contract relations without coercion did not mean those relations were absent of domination, subjection, or exploitation.⁴⁸

In Mexico, the contract labor system developed in similar ways to the American free labor ideology and questions about labor coercion and consent. In the early decades of modern, liberal Mexico, the Porfirian government drew on the tenets of liberalism—open markets, contracts, and individual choice—to distinguish between free labor and its opposite, servitude in Mexico. Working with government officials, landholders used people’s indebtedness to tie workers to specific landholdings across Mexico. But workers often agreed to enter debt, and employers did not expect to be repaid and encouraged worker indebtedness. Debt served cultural functions linked to the system of paternalism.⁴⁹ The striking similarities between

⁴⁸ Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 83.

⁴⁹ Lee Alston Shannan Mattiace, and Tomas Nonnenmacher, “Coercion, Culture, and Contracts: Labor and Debt on Henequen Haciendas in Yucatán, Mexico, 1870-1915,” *The Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 1 (2009):105-106; Harry Cross, “Debt Peonage Reconsidered: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Zacatecas, Mexico” *Business History Review* vol. 53 no. 4 (1979): 473-495; Eric Van Young, “Beyond the Hacienda: Agrarian Relations and Socioeconomic Change of Rural Mesoamerica” *Ethnohistory* vol. 50 no. 1(2003): 231-245; Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Silvia Marina Arrom, *Containing the Poor: The Mexico City Poor House, 1774-1871* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Gabriela Solís Robleda, *Bajo el signo de la compulsión: El trabajo forzoso indígena en el sistema colonial yucateco, 1540–1730*

Mexico's contract and peonage systems revealed that Mexican workers, even exploited ones, often decided their work.

But important gendered differences existed between Mexican and American labor systems at the borderlands as the work of Sonia Hernández showed. Hernández argued people the peonage system had openings where people used it for their agency, for women, sexual violence, and its threat diminished many of the negotiating spaces that existed for men.⁵⁰ Mexican historians have shown that the peonage system varied throughout Mexico and have uncovered important differences between northern and southern Mexico and how, in the Mexican North, workers used the proximity of the border and created spaces for themselves and also used the peonage and contract labor systems to their advantage in limited ways.⁵¹ Land loss

(México: CIESAS: ICY, Instituto de Cultura de Yucatán: M.A. Porrúa Grupo Editorial: Conaculta, INAH, 2003).

⁵⁰ Hernández, *Working Women into the Borderlands*, 42-43.

⁵¹ Friedrich Katz, "Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirian Mexico: Some Trends and Tendencies," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 1 (February, 1974): 1-47; Arnold J. Bauer, "Rural Workers in Spanish America: Problems of Peonage and Oppression" *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 59 no. 1 (1979): 34-63; Alan Knight, "Mexican Peonage: What Was it and Why Was it?," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 18, no. 1 (1986): 41-74; Barry Carr, "Las peculiaridades del norte mexicano, 1880-197: ensayo de interpretación" *Historia Mexicana* vol. 22 no. 3 (Jan-Mar 1973): 320-346; Herbert Nickel, *El Peonaje en las Haciendas Mexicanas: Interpretaciones, Fuentes, Hallazgos* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1997).

and devastated infrastructure in the first decades of the twentieth century minimized labor opportunities for Mexicans. As a strategy of survival, many of Mexican migrated to the United States. Mexicans used mobility consistent with labor formations that activated survival strategies within larger oppressive labor systems.⁵²

To fully understand the meaning of labor for the Mexican working-class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians must bridge these disparate historiographies. Freedom and unfreedom shaped both immigration policies and enforcement and notions of labor morality. In the United States, free labor was free white labor. Racialized groups like the Chinese, bondspersons, and Mexicans were constructed as unfree workers in the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction.⁵³ Their wages and poor working conditions were signposts that their labor was “slave labor” and that they were not, in fact, workers but something closer to slaves.⁵⁴ In

⁵² This notion of family survival was also put forth by Adam Smith when he defined wages in terms of family survival, or the amount necessary to continue the race of journeymen and servants. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry in the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York, 193; orig. 1776), 80. Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 144.

⁵³ Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*. See also Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge Press, 2014).

⁵⁴ Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*; Foner, *Free Labor, Free Men*.

places like California, racialized labor relations recast workers as either “peon” or “coolie” labor, and white free laborers constructed them as not only unfree and akin to slave labor, but they also used them as a vehicle to explore their anxieties over the developing capitalist system and their relationship to wage labor.⁵⁵

Local and state levels of governance expressed these anxieties, but they were also visible in immigration policy at the federal level. When US immigration inspectors enforced the 1885 Alien Contract Labor Law, also known as the Foran Act, they drew on idealized notions of workers and working conditions informed by concepts of free and unfree labor that narrowed the understanding of a worker and labor. Immigration inspectors who enforced the Foran Act created a template for a future immigration policy that constructed Mexicans crossing the border as unfree and unproductive migrants.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 81. See also Michael F. Magliari, “Free Soil, Unfree Labor: Cave Johnson Courts and the Binding of Indian Workers in California, 1850-1867” *Pacific Historical Review* vol 73 no. 3 (August 2004): 349-390; “Free State Slavery: Bound Indian Labor and Slave Trafficking in California’s Sacramento Valley, 1850-1864” *Pacific Historical Review* vol. 81 no.2 (May 2012): 155-192.

⁵⁶ Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 84-93. See also Kitty Calavita, *US Immigration Law and the Control of Labor, 1820-1924* (London: Academic Press Inc, 1984), 51-59; Andrew Urban, *Brokering Servitude: Migration and the Politics of Domestic Labor during the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 171-174. Calvitta argued the act was largely a symbolic action meant to appease the concerns of US labor unions and their concerns over competition from European immigration. However, both Urban and Peck highlighted critical exemptions to this

In historiographical terms, a critical difference between US and Mexican labor historians has been the differing approaches to integrating gendered labor differences. Mexican labor historians have examined the moral factors that shaped women's laboring lives. Morality served as a tool to make class distinctions, on which it based identities of labor in Mexico. Historian Mark Overmyer-Velázquez argued notions of honor were useful for understanding the social construction of class identities. Honor and morality revealed more about middle-class and elite Mexicans who embraced them than it did about the working-class people who they affected and who reacted against them.⁵⁷ But it was women who used the rhetoric of morality away from notions of female chastity and middle-class respectability to chart out social spaces for themselves in their laboring lives.⁵⁸ But unlike in Mexico where sex work was a

symbolic act. Urban discussed the domestic servant exception and the racial and gendered dimensions of dependency and placed them in contrast to the imagined free white male workers. Peck focused on the role of the padrone and how it allowed the contractions of the Foran Act to exist alongside free labor ideology to bridge the contradiction between the two.

⁵⁷ Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City*, 126. See also French, *A Peaceful and Working-Class People*.

⁵⁸ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*; Ann Blum, *Domestic Economies*; Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Working Women, Entrepreneurs, and the Mexican Revolution*; Heather Fowler-Salamini and Mary Kay Vaughan eds. *Women of the Mexican Countryside*. For a discussion of gendered spaces, see Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, *Gender, and the Negotiation of Daily Life in Mexico, 1750-1856* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Katherine E Bliss and Ann S. Blum, "Dangerous Driving:

legal and regulated form of commerce, in the United States Beginning in 1907, sex workers were barred from entering the country and in 1910 were further criminalized and could not cross interstate lines.⁵⁹ In 1924, the gradual restrictionism of the border, first experienced by sexual workers, intensified for all Mexicans who tried crossing from Mexico into the United States.

Miguel Armenta's decision to cross into Mexico from the United States laid bare a clear understanding of the importance of the national border. Armenta's actions also revealed that the border was more than an artificial divide that separated two nation-states.⁶⁰ For working-class people such as Armenta, and sexual commerce

Adolescence, Sex and the Gendered Experience of Public Space in Early-Twentieth-Century Mexico City" in *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Latin America since Independence* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

⁵⁹ Pliley, *Policing Sexuality*; Grace Peña Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution Along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 2012): 157-178.

⁶⁰ Truett and Young, "Making Transnational History," 2. See also, Elliot Young, *Catarino Garza's Revolution on the Texas-Mexico Border* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Elliot, Truett, and other borderlands historians were responding to Adelman and Aron's call to shift from borderlands to bordered lands. See Jeremy Adelman and Steven Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nations-States and the Peoples in between in North American History," *The American Historical Review* 104 no. 2 (Jun 1999): 814-841.

Mexican workers, the border was a tool they used to assert themselves as transnational workers who at times claimed rights against the interest of the state. Their actions, and those of immigration inspectors and employers, represented the tensions over policing and growing liberal states in Mexico and the United States and how they became more complicated in the US-Mexico borderlands. Each nation exerted its respective power to police and merged local concerns over border crossing with federal immigration policy. In this process, the power to police laborers affirmed each nation's sovereignty.⁶¹

The power to police and regulate was perhaps most visible in California's Imperial Valley during the 1920s when employers began a scheme, known as the

⁶¹ However, as each attempted to define workers and labor from their perspectives, they drew on the patriarchal concept of household kings. Each believed they acted within their rights as "kings," or patriarchs, in controlling workers in their "households" by corrective actions of police powers. Patriarchy, where men were the rulers of their homes and had omnipotent control over the families, pervaded both Mexican and US societies, particularly at the household level. Both expected heads of households to correct family members who were disobedient or violated household rules. Importantly, they controlled the labor of their families the way a monarch controlled their subjects' labor. Dubber, *The Police Power*; Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia*, 58. For a discussion of family control, see also Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 87; William E. French, *The Heart in the Glass Jar: Love Letters, Bodies, and the Law in Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2015), 30-32.

Pass-book Plan, which placed Mexican workers on a legal path to regularize their American immigration status even as it tied them coercively to their assigned labor task. Local police would arrest and detain workers who refused to participate and use the threat of deportation to control their labor. But police tactics had a much longer history rooted in local forms of seeing labor linked to immigration control. Local officials used labor as a category to create the illegal and immoral worker in immigration discourse and rhetoric. Mexican workers who rejected the policing mechanisms of control responded in 1928 and 1935 with a series of strikes targeting the transnational contract labor system at the California-Baja California borderlands.

Bringing together municipal- and federal-level attempts to police morality shows that immigrants themselves helped to shape federal immigration and local-level laws regulating cross-border movement. Local-level immigration agents created new categories of work while laborers complicated these classifications because of their commitments to various ideas about mobility, gendered labor, and morality. Localized policies were also critical in understanding why Miguel Armenta might have believed Inspector Forester's threats of detention and exclusion. While Forester denied having ever done so, local sheriff's deputies in Brawley, California, apprehended, detained, and deported labor agitators in the surrounding area. It was not inconceivable then that Armenta feared the same thing might happen to him. To fully understand Miguel Armenta's trials, it is necessary to examine cross-border labor in terms of local and federal-level policing mechanisms.

In the main, “Rightful and Moral Work” redirects our attention to the importance of interrogating early policing mechanisms at the local level and federal level. Labor, therefore, is read as a historically legible, cross-border category of early immigration and social control that can tell us much about the differing labor statuses among Mexican workers—unfree, semi-free, wage labor, and temporary free labor—at a time when the category of the “illegal” Mexican migrant was in its incipience. Such an approach, I argue, is tied to the gendering and moralization of the Mexican working class, a process that was shaped by workers themselves, state-makers, immigration officials, and growers. Workers actively created and negotiated this complicated political landscape between freedom and unfreedom to carve out a better life for themselves and their families. While scholars’ understanding of the California-Baja California borderlands often elides the forces in Mexico shaping immigrants’ choices and identities as they cross north and return, an analysis of labor, morality, and mobility expands our understanding of how migrants challenged and defied local policing strategies and the regime of immigration restrictionism at America’s southern border with Mexico. In the early years of the presidency of Porfirio Díaz, mobility proved vital to workers as they navigated and resisted a blended labor system imposed in Baja California.

CHAPTER TWO

Mexico's Blended Labor System at the California-Baja California Borderlands

In 1887, the Mexican federal government sold eighteen million acres of the Baja California peninsula to the International Company of Mexico, a colonization and land development business venture incorporated in Mexico by U.S. business interests. The same year the International—a shorthand of the American corporation's official name—published an informational booklet titled "Description of Lands in Lower California," for potential future settlers. The booklet described the land in idyllic terms emphasizing the fertility, adaptability, climate, and scenery of northern Baja California, and its superiority to the state of California. The International acknowledged the lack of significant population and infrastructure, but it cast these as minor obstacles to overcome. The International argued that a new railroad system and steamship lines, along with ports of entry, could render the region's isolation a thing of the past.⁶² Northern Baja California's lack of population, the International

⁶² Dorothy Kerig argued nothing ever came of infrastructure projects meant to connect the Pacific coast with the Gulf of Mexico like railroad concessions, and nothing ever came of the nine contracts for rail lines to serve the Baja California region. See Kerig, "Yankee Enclave," 41.

contended, would benefit the region. Settlers and squatters, unlike in California, had not overtaken northern Baja California.⁶³ The brochure highlighted the role the Mexican government played in its economic project, first by passing the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos* (Law of Vacant Lands) that invited “citizens of other nations to share in the advantages of the new country,” and then by promising to build needed infrastructure.⁶⁴

La Ley de terrenos baldíos was an active and critical policy the Mexican government promulgated to develop the region and implement laws to benefit foreign companies. The *Ley de terrenos baldíos* expanded the law that governed vacant

⁶³ In 1888, Porfirio Díaz, President of Mexico, formally divided Baja California in two military territories, El Distrito del Sur de la Baja California, and El Distrito Norte de la Baja California. See Pablo L. Martinez, *La Historia de la Baja California*, 465-466.

⁶⁴ *Description of Lands in Lower California, for Sale by the International Company of Mexico, Absolute Patent Title from the Federal Government of Mexico* (San Diego, CA: Ferguson, Bumgardner & Co., July 1887), 3-6. A 1863 law defined terrenos baldíos as: “todos los terrenos de la república que no hubieran sido destinados a un uso público, ni cedidos por la autoridad a ningún individuo o corporación.” “Ley de 20 de Julio de 1863 Sobre Ocupación y Enajenación de Terrenos Baldíos” in *Legislación de Terrenos Baldíos, o Sea Completa Colección de Leyes, Decretos, Órdenes, Circulares, Reglamentos, Contratos y Demás Disposiciones Supremas, Relativas a Terrenos Baldíos de La República, Publicadas Hasta El Mes de Setiembre de 1885*. (Chihuahua: Impr. y librería de D. Miramontes, 1885), Accessed on HathiTrust.

public lands and increased subsidies for foreign investors.⁶⁵ The Mexican government did more than invite foreigners into the region or make promises to build railroads. Importantly, the government passed a series of land reform and immigration and colonization laws to attract foreign migrants, Mexican nationals, and corporations to the region. Laws such as the *Ley de terrenos baldíos* created ideal spaces for corporations, like the International, to thrive, often to the detriment of the few people who lived in the northern portion of Baja California. The law signaled a shift by the Mexican government away from its reliance on individual settlers, domestic and foreign, to encourage internationally-owned corporate development.

In 1886, to further support these goals, the Mexican government signed into law the *Ley de extranjería y naturalización* (Immigration and Naturalization Law) and gave foreigners civil and economic rights of citizenship equal to that of Mexican nationals. After the *Ley de extranjería*, foreign businessmen, like those working for the International, could naturalize and own land within 20 leagues (60 miles) of the Mexican border, a right once reserved for Mexican citizens or those who were the

⁶⁵ Much has been written about the agrarian issue and colonization schemes of the nineteenth century. Friedrich Katz identified the works of Andrés Molina Enríquez and Wistano Luis Orozco as shaping in some way the historians who address these issues. Mexican historians like Marco Antonio Samaniego, among others, have continued to address the issue of colonization in Baja California. See Katz “Mexico: Restored Republic and Porfiriato, 1867-1910,” 831-835.

children of Mexico-born parents.⁶⁶ Land at the U.S.-Mexico border gave foreign capitalists easy access to American markets and railroad lines, preconditions to any successful business endeavor in Mexico. Together, the Naturalization Law of 1886 and the 1883 Vacant Lands law highlighted early attempts by the Mexican government to address the lack of industrial development in Baja California by opening up the possibility for land ownership and citizenship through naturalization for foreign companies and individuals. But these shifts were not the only ones at play.

The colonization projects of the second half of the nineteenth century, long associated with Porfirio Díaz and his presidency, had roots in the Benito Juárez presidency (1858-1872). There was a gradual shift over time away from Mexican nationals, former Mexicans, and even individual foreigners toward colonization and development companies to purchase and cultivate large tracts of unused public land. Similarly, the mechanisms of control the Díaz regime used to achieve its vision of development in Baja California also had their origins in the first decades following Mexico's independence from Spain. The Mexican government was long concerned with its northern region and its inability to control people's movement. In the years preceding the U.S.-Mexico War, for example, mobile indigenous groups and their

⁶⁶ Ricardo Rodríguez, *Código de Extranjería Contiene La Historia Legislativa de México sobre la condición jurídica de los extranjeros. Preceptos Constitucionales. Ley actual de Extranjería de 28 de Mayo de 1886. Su comentario en presencia de las legislaciones extranjeras de la época presente* (México: Herrero Hermanos, Editores, 1903), 247.

ability to move and raid across the land weakened the regions of Northern Mexico.⁶⁷ Baja California in the second half of the nineteenth century shared many similarities with the more populated northern regions of Mexico. The Cocopah were one of the larger indigenous groups of the region and lived a semi-nomadic life. As the federal government began its development project in the region, it needed a legal way to criminalize mobility. But again, much as it had with colonization, the Porfirian government needed to build on Mexico's existing legal framework.⁶⁸

The Mexican government undertook various laws and actions to attract foreign corporations and individuals and drew on the language of liberalism and the freedom of the contract. This same approach to attract capital also worked to establish a coercive regulatory system of labor. Porfirio Díaz's rule of Mexico (1877-1911) was the catalyst for the Mexican government's vision of organizing labor for foreign corporate interests beyond what the liberal Constitution of 1857 had intended.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁷ Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). DeLay placed indigenous Mexican groups at the center of the U.S-Mexico war. For a discussion of Indigenous mobility in the Mexican borderlands, see Cynthia Radding Murrieta, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); James David Nichols, *The Limits of Liberty: Mobility and the Making of the Eastern U.S.-Mexico Border* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).

⁶⁸ Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia*, 212-213.

⁶⁹ Cosío Villegas, *La Constitución de 1857 y sus críticos*.

administration's positivist logic of order and progress" represented the transformation of Mexican liberal ideology. Its slogan equated the political stability of the Porfirian dictatorship with economic and social progress. Díaz's government favored economic development at the cost of a more democratic society.⁷⁰ While the Porfirian government still espoused the *Reforma*-era language of liberalism, it had rejected most of its principles in practice.⁷¹

To achieve "order," Díaz placed personal and political allies in positions of power and gave Mexicans who challenged his regime a choice: *pan o palo*. Either they complied with Díaz and enjoyed the benefits of his rule—*el pan* (bread or benefitting from payments of the authoritarian presidency), or they challenged him and risked the loss of land, political office, *el palo* (the cudgel). The Porfirian order created a patronage system with the dictator and his inner circle at the center of the arrangement. The patronage system meant that foreign companies could overcome

⁷⁰ Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City*, 19. See also Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, v. 1. Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1990); Enrique Krauze and Fauston Zerón-Medina, *Porfirio* (Mexico City: Clio, 1993); Richard Weiner, "Battle for Survival: Porfirian Views of the International Marketplace" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32 (October 2000): 645-670.

⁷¹ For a discussion of *La Reforma* see François-Xavier Guerra, *México: Del Antiguo Régimen a la Revolución, I* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 2003); Richard N. Sinkin, *The Mexican Reform, 1855-1876: A Study in Liberal Nation-Building* (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas Press, 1979).

any obstacle if they supported Díaz's patronage with financial incentives. And many corporations did just that. For everyday people, however, currying favor through patronage was not a readily accessible option. Instead, they faced the Porfirian government's goal of economic development, pressured by the metaphorical *palo*, which ensured a tractable labor force for foreign-owned corporations through state-sanctioned coercion. Workers tried to adjust and conform to the Porfirian order while maintaining their ability to move between jobs in the face of possible coercion.⁷²

Workers in Baja California resisted and adjusted to the Porfirian government's political agenda and fended off a coercive labor system by using their mobility as a strategy of resistance. While the legal and economic mechanisms to constrain workers were firmly in place, it was not a system that people readily accepted. Residents of the region, some who held land or labored for subsistence, and semi-nomadic indigenous peoples, resisted the economic and governmental attempts to create these ideal spaces for foreign-owned corporations.⁷³ They claimed rights under the liberal-

⁷² For a discussion of labor and state-sanctioned coercion, see Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1992); Leticia Reina, *Las rebeliones campesinas en México, 1819–1906* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1998); Paul Hart, *Bitter Harvest: The Social Transformation of Morelos, Mexico, and the Origins of the Zapatista Revolution, 1840–1910* (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 2006).

⁷³ For a discussion of indigenous groups and their relationship with Colonization companies see José Alfredo Gómez Estrada, *La Gente del Delta del Río Colorado:*

inspired Constitution of 1857—the rights of the individual, and rejection of corporatist landholding, and used their mobility to enter, or not, the labor market when they found conditions favorable. Laborers strived to maintain employment options by moving away from less favorable ones even as the Porfirian regime sought to restrain mobility and worker choice as strategies for its economic development schemes.

The government's reaction to people's mobility was to create a labor system couched in the language of freedom of contract, but was actually coercive. It tried to control Mexican nationals' ability to move to better jobs and working conditions by preventing their physical movement by political means. The government also deployed strategies of land dispossession to develop Baja California for foreign-owned corporations like the International.⁷⁴ The Díaz administration used the language of liberalism—open markets, worker-employer contracts, and individual

Indígenas, Colonizadores y Ejidatarios (Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2000).

⁷⁴ Dispossession occurred at two avenues, land and water access. For indigenous groups like the Cocopah, loss of water access was more detrimental to them than the loss of land. Gómez Estrada, *La Gente del Delta del Río Colorado*, 11. However, land dispossession was not as widely practiced as once thought; Marco Antonio Samaniego Lopez argued this view of land loss was a product of historiographic construction that attempted to explain a post-Revolutionary moment and show Cardenismo as the triumph of the revolution. See Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y Revolución*, 50-54.

choice—to distinguish between free labor and coercive labor. This distinction would be key in Baja California.⁷⁵

To achieve its economic vision, the Porfirian government built on earlier liberal Mexican policies, taken under different circumstances, and tried to seek Mexico's development through foreign investment.⁷⁶ In 1863, twenty years before the Porfirian government enacted the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*, amid the French invasion and occupation of Mexico, Benito Juárez, then president of Mexico, signed into law the *Ley sobre ocupación y enajenación de terrenos baldíos* (Law on

⁷⁵ Historians of Baja California have maintained that peonage never existed in the region, no large haciendas were ever created. Angela Moyano Pahissa argued that the colonization schemes were not actually exploitative. She argued the stipulations in the contract ensured no foreign corporation violated the contract, and by extension, Mexican people. See Angela Moyano Pahissa, *California y Sus Relaciones Con Baja California: Síntesis Del Desarrollo Histórico De California y Sus Repercusiones Sobre Baja California* 1 ed. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica; CONAFE, 1983), 70-75.

⁷⁶ John Coatsworth argued that the Díaz administration revived and expanded actions the Juárez administration of the mid-nineteenth century had taken in the middle of the French invasion of Mexico to encourage the concentration of landed wealth. See John Coatsworth, *Growth Against Development: The Economic Impact of Railroads in Porfirian Mexico* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), 151. See also Charles Hale *The Transformation of Liberalism* and his discussion of the “unifying liberal myth.”

Occupation and Alienation of Vacant Lands).⁷⁷ The 1863 law would be the first attempt by the Mexican government to pass an effective land colonization law.⁷⁸ The 1863 *Ley* allowed Mexican nationals and former Mexican citizens in the United States who returned to claim up to 2500 hectares of land of vacant, unused land.⁷⁹ To receive the land, Mexican nationals and those repatriated from the U.S. Southwest to Mexico needed to comply with certain stipulations. Once an individual or family received two hundred hectares, it was expected that they reside on the land full-time. For every additional two hundred hectares of land requested, claimants needed to add one additional member to the family unit. If settlers did not maintain this ratio, they risked losing the land and their investments in it. People who claimed land would also be responsible for all costs associated with surveying the land, deeding the title, and

⁷⁷ For a discussion of Benito Juárez, see Brian R. Hamnett, *Juárez, Profiles in Power* (London: Longman, 1994).

⁷⁸ The Mexican government had tried to address land colonization in 1824, 1830 and 1848. But due to political turmoil these acts never had the intended effect. See Francisco F. de la Maza, *Código de Colonización y Terrenos Baldíos de La República Mexicana* (México: Oficina tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1893). For an overview of land colonization laws see Jan de Vos, “Una Legislación de Graves Consecuencias: El Acaparamiento de Tierras Baldías En México, Con El Pretexto de Colonización, 1821-1910,” *Historia Mexicana* 34, no. 1 (1984): 76–113.

⁷⁹ It followed an 1861 proclamation that targeted former Mexican nationals living in the areas Mexico had seceded to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. For a discussion of former Mexicans living in the United States see Navarro, *Extranjeros en México y Los Mexicanos en el Extranjero*.

other fees for the land they claimed. This last stipulation ended any attempts at colonization since most people did not have the capital or resources to undertake such an expense, and it excluded foreigners.⁸⁰ The act also emphasized Juárez's vision, and by extension that of Liberal Mexicans, stressing the development of Mexico and its peripheries lay with its people—Mexican nationals and former citizens—and not foreigners or their corporations.⁸¹ Mexicans living in territories Mexico ceded to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 were important stakeholders in fulfilling Juárez's vision of colonization and development.

⁸⁰ México, *Legislación de Terrenos Baldíos, o Sea Completa Colección de Leyes, Decretos, Órdenes, Circulares, Reglamentos, Contratos y Demás Disposiciones Supremas, Relativas a Terrenos Baldíos de La República, Publicadas Hasta El Mes de Setiembre de 1885*. (Chihuahua: Impr. y Librería de D. Miramontes, 1885), 3-9; de Vos, "Una Legislación de Graves Consecuencias," 78.

⁸¹ The Juárez administration also addressed the issue of vagrancy and land. In 1867, Manuel Clemente Rojo, *juez de primera instancia*, discussed a key feature of vagrancy law as having, or not having, some form of work that a person could use to support themselves. He discussed what government officials of the Northern District of Baja California should do with vagrants. Since 1867, the district did not have a local jail, and many of the legal options under Mexican law did not apply to Baja California since its conditions were markedly different. Clemente Rojo cited the conditions and offered some alternative solutions that were suggestive of a coercive labor system. Manuel Clemente Rojo, "Circular del Juzgado de 1er Instancia del Partido Norte" Nov. 7, 1867, MSS 778 Box 2 Folder 7, Documents of the Baja California Government, UCSD.

Raymundo Yorba was one such former Mexican. He was born in Alta California, Mexico, but lost his Mexican citizenship under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo because he was unaware that the Mexican and American agreement required him to declare his intention to remain a citizen of Mexico. In a letter he wrote to the *Sub-Jefe Político del Partido Norte de la Baja California* (sub-district political boss), Yorba stated it had always been his intention to have a home in Mexico with his family.⁸² In the 1860s, he purchased a ranch and land from Agustín Mancilla, a landowner in the San Rafael Valley of Baja California, and began sending his personal goods to the property. By 1870, while Yorba had not yet permanently moved to Baja California, he had registered as a resident with the local *Registro Civil* (Civil Registry). Local authorities led Yorba to believe that to enjoy all the rights and privileges of Mexicans citizenship, he needed to officially register with the Civil Registry. In 1874, Yorba was still waiting for his citizenship but had received a certificate of acknowledgment that proved he had applied, and with this, Yorba

⁸² A jefe político exercised legislative, judicial, and administrative responsibilities at the local level. Romana Falcon argued that during the *Porfiriato* these *jefes politicos* became the tools of the central government and would be appointed by governors, or Díaz himself. See Romana Falcon, *El Jefe Político: Un Dominio Negociado en el Mundo Rural del Estado de México, 1856-1911* (Mexico City, Centro de Estudios Históricos: CIESAS), 2015.

considered himself and expected to be respected as a Mexican citizen.⁸³ Yorba's actions in the 1860s and 1870 seemed to fall within Juárez's vision for Mexico's peripheral regions. After Juárez's death in 1872, however, Mexico moved from former Mexican citizens to develop and populate Baja California to a strategy that emphasized foreign individuals and corporations.

Under the presidency of Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada in 1874, colonization officials began recruiting foreigners and used local municipal authorities to displace landowners like Raymundo Yorba. This practice transpired because of the failure of the 1863 law to make significant inroads in the development of the region by drawing on Mexican nationals and citizens. In 1871, the Juárez administration rescinded the contract because this approach failed to attract colonists.⁸⁴ Lerdo de Tejada's rejection

⁸³ Raymundo Yorba a el Sub-Jefe Político del Partido Norte de la Baja California, Oct. 26, 1874, MSS 778 Box 1 Folder 39, Baja California Government Documents Collection, University of San Diego (UCSD) Special Collections.

⁸⁴ Known as the Leese Concession, the Juárez Government sold two-thirds of Baja California to a colonization company because of dire financial strains brought on by the French occupation. In 1871, because of a failure to meet the contract stipulations, the Mexican government rescinded the contract. See Moisés González Navarro, *Los Extranjeros en México y los Mexicanos en el Extranjero, 1821-1970*, vol. 2, 17-18; Antonio Padilla Corona, "Leyes y Concesiones de Terrenos Baldíos," Catalina Velázquez Morales, ed., *Baja California: Un Presente Con Historia* (Mexicali, México: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2002); Fernando Iglesias Caldero, "La Concesión Leese: Recopilación de Documentos Oficiales Seguida de

of the 1863 law also highlighted a tension that had always been present in the Liberal Party—centralization versus local autonomy. Liberals’ rejection of corporatist landholding had also disposed of collective landholdings of pueblos, meaning their policies often hurt the very people they intended to help—and one the Porfirian government would take to new heights. This new view of development proved costly for Yorba. He was a Mexican by birth but Tejada’s rejection of the 1863 law meant he was treated as a foreigner. By 1874, the Minister of Development (*Ministro de Fomento*) notified Yorba that he needed to remove all his belongings and vacate the land he had purchased under the Juárez agreement. In essence, the Mexican government shifted the law under Yorba’s feet with Lerdo de Tejada’s rejection of the 1863 law and its aim of drawing on repatriated Mexicans. As now a foreigner who did not live in Mexico, the Mexican government charged that legally Yorba could not own land within 20 leagues of the Mexican border. The minister argued that the original owner who sold the land to Yorba, Agustín Mancilla, had failed to meet the requirements to own the land and had no right to occupy it, much less sell it.⁸⁵ It

Un Estudio Crítico-Histórico,” *Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano* 12 (1924): 1-193.

⁸⁵ Ministro de Fomento, February 26, 1874, Baja California Government Documents, UCSD MSS 778 Box 1 Folder 39. El Ministro cited the March 1842 and February 1856 Mexican laws that banned foreigners from owning land within 20 leagues (Approximately 60 miles) of the Mexican frontier. For both the 1842 and 1856 laws see de la Maza, *Código de Colonización y Terrenos Baldíos de la República*.

charged that Yorba's ownership of the land prevented Mexican nationals' ability to claim the land. As a result, the ministry ordered Yorba to vacate the lands, but he failed to do so. Juan Meléndez, the person Yorba had left to oversee his belongings, stated he had not seen nor heard from Yorba since October 1874 and that while he, Meléndez, was a law-abiding citizen who would comply with the law, he did not have the resources to do so in this case.⁸⁶

Ultimately, Yorba returned and tried to challenge the eviction. In his defense, he stated that if the minister forced him to vacate the lands, he would lose all of his investment. Yorba defended himself against the minister's accusation of absenteeism. Yorba claimed he had not permanently settled in Baja California because he had to care for his younger siblings and attend to his family's interests in California, since his father's death. He regularly crossed back and forth between California and Baja California because of his family responsibilities. Yorba also restated his right to own the property, having purchased it legally from Mancilla. He reaffirmed Mexican national membership even though he had lost his citizenship in 1848. Yorba had tried to regain his Mexican citizenship after he was old enough to do so, pointing out that

⁸⁶ Statement of Juan Meléndez, MSS 778 Box 1, Folder 39, Baja California Government Documents, UCSD Special Collections. "Yo, señor, obedezco las órdenes, pero no tengo los medios de cumplirla... yo no tengo dinero del Señor Yorba para buscar y pagar vaqueros..." ("I, sir, obey orders, but I don't have the means to carry it out... I don't have money from Mr. Yorba to look for and pay wranglers...") Author translation.

goods he previously sent to the ranch proved his intention to live in Mexico. Yorba repeatedly cited his unsuccessful attempts to regain Mexican citizenship and that he conformed to local laws as he understood them.⁸⁷

Yorba's experiences in the 1870s highlight the shifting dynamics of Mexican citizenship and property ownership. First, Yorba's actions pointed to the importance of Mexican citizenship in making claims to own land near the border with the United States. When Yorba lost his Mexican citizenship, the Mexican state, in effect, treated him as a foreigner. Officials at the *Ministro de Fomento* (the Department of Development) seemed to take advantage of Yorba's lack of knowledge. In 1874, officials tried to force Yorba off his lands.⁸⁸ Officials cited both an 1842 and 1856 law that prohibited foreigners from owning land at the border but omitted the 1863 *Ley sobre ocupación y enajenación* (the Occupancy and Disposal Act) and Juárez's targeting of former Mexican nationals who lived in the United States to populate and develop Baja California. Government officials ignored all of Yorba's attempts to

⁸⁷ Raymundo Yorba al Sub Jefe Político del Distrito Norte, April 1875, MSS 778, Box 1, Folder 39. Documents of the Baja California Government, UCSD Special Collections.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the Secretaria de Fomento see María Cecilia Zuleta, "La Secretaría de Fomento y el fomento agrícola en México, 1876-1910: la invención de una agricultura próspera que no fue," *Mundo Agrario* vol. 1, no. 1 (2000). Zuleta focused on agriculture but also discussed the organizational structure of the Secretaria.

comply with the citizenship clause of the law, his registration with the local Civil Registry, and his pending citizenship application.

Officials' decision regarding Yorba reflected Lerdo de Tejada's shift away from Benito Juárez's vision of repatriated Mexicans toward embracing foreigners as the drivers of development in the region and Mexico's other peripheries. Lerdo de Tejada solidified his policy shift with the passage of the 1875 *Ley general sobre colonización* (General Law of Colonization) that replaced Juárez's 1863 law. Under Lerdo de Tejada's 1875 law, Mexico moved away from individual landholders and embraced corporate investment to plan economic development. The new policy underscored Lerdo de Tejada's rejection of Mexicans living abroad as a potential pool of labor and demonstrated a preference for foreigners. Lerdo de Tejada's policy also limited the choices of Mexicans abroad (*afuera*) who wanted to regain their Mexican citizenship upon returning from the United States. In 1876, Porfirio Díaz rebelled against Lerdo de Tejada and became president of Mexico the following year and all but abandoned colonization projects.⁸⁹ The federal government would not address colonization again until the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*.

⁸⁹Lerdo de Lerdo de Tejada announced he would seek reelection in 1876 and Díaz responded with the *Plan de Tuxtepec* and claimed Lerdo had violated the no-re-election principles of the 1857 Constitution. See Jan de Vos, "Una Legislación de Graves Consecuencias," 79-80. De Vos notes the first colonization contract signed under the law dealt with Baja California and the *Compañía Mexicana Agrícola*

Both the 1875 and 1883 colonization laws favored corporations and foreign colonists and used financial incentives to attract them. The 1875 *Ley general sobre colonización* offered to pay colonists' expenses for their voyage and cost of living for the first year while the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos* exempted settlers who established homes from all forms of taxes for ten years, except for municipal taxes, and from fees related to the importing of goods on tools, machines, or construction materials. In terms of political rights, the *Ley general sobre colonización* granted foreigners Mexican citizenship through naturalization, while the *Ley de terrenos baldíos* automatically extended to all colonists the rights and privileges of political membership.⁹⁰ Both offered companies similar financial incentives. The Mexican government repaid companies' land surveying expenses in the form of land. It would give companies one-third of all lands it granted as reimbursement, and the companies could buy the other two-thirds at reduced costs. Under the 1875 law, the Mexican government granted land to any family connected with foreign companies. Both laws sought large corporate landholdings and not individual settlers like Yorba.

Industrial y Colonizadora de los Terrenos de Colorado which was supposed to establish two hundred families in Baja.

⁹⁰ de la Maza, *Código de Colonización y Terrenos Baldíos*, Article 1 sección III, 827. "otorgar a los colonos: la naturalización Mexicana y la ciudadanía en su caso a los naturalizados." ("to grant to the settlers: Mexican naturalization and citizenship, and where appropriate, to the naturalized.") Author translation.

The 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos* was more specific in terms of laying out financial incentives. For example, the law exempted companies from a host of taxes and fees for twenty years. The incentives in the 1875 and 1883 laws stood in stark contrast to Raymundo Yorba's experience in 1874 when he still had not received his Mexican citizenship after years of waiting and faced the very real possibility of losing his entire investment in Baja California because the government was forcing him to vacate the lands. The shift toward foreign corporations had begun before the 1875 *Ley general*, and the law's passage solidified the beginnings of a system meant to benefit companies and not individuals like Yorba. For him, government intervention meant a loss of access, rights, and investment. While the 1883 law addressed repatriated Mexicans, it favored foreign immigration and investment, much like the 1875 law.

The question became if the *Ley general* and the *Ley de terrenos baldíos* were similar in the benefits they offered, why not enforce the 1875 law? A partial answer lay in the differences between the two acts, which had lasting consequences. Under the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*, the president had the authority to allow companies to survey uninhabited lands, a change from the 1875 law that had only vaguely referred to the executive's role. The Díaz administration, at the time headed by Manuel González, had, in 1883, the political authority under the law to agree to companies surveying unused federal lands.⁹¹ Under the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*,

⁹¹ Porfirio Díaz stepped down as Mexico's president from 1880 to 1884, and Manuel Gonzales, a trusted political ally of Díaz, was elected president. Díaz eventually

González—but more likely Porfirio Díaz—had the final say in all land colonization schemes. Historian Jan de Vos argued that this was significant, given the Porfirian government’s interpretation of the law.⁹² The Díaz administration hoped the law, as passed, would populate, develop, and survey unused government lands but did not require settlers. The 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos* had grave consequences for Baja California. By 1887, the year the International Company of Mexico bought land, the federal government had granted sixty percent of all of Baja California through colonization concessions.⁹³ As the historian Pablo Herrera Carrillo saw it, the International Company land concession was much more complete in Baja California than in Mexican Texas before the secessionist war in 1836.⁹⁴

The Porfirian vision of development dominated the legal and social world of Baja California in the years up to and before the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*. It was

returned to the presidency in 1884 and remained Mexico’s president until 1911, when he resigned during the beginning stages of the Mexican Revolution. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez argued that during his tenure as governor of his home state of Oaxaca from 1881 to 1883, Díaz was consulted on matters of national importance like obtaining financing from the United States for the Mexican Southern Railway. See Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City*, 20-21.

⁹² de Vos, “Una Legislación de Graves Consecuencias,” 81.

⁹³ Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border, America in the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 80. St John notes that some historians have placed this number even higher.

⁹⁴ Pablo Herrera Carrillo, *Reconquista y Colonización del Valle de Mexicali y otros escritos* (Mexicali, Mx: UABC, Instituto de Cultura de Baja California), 57.

one where the legal landscape was changing, and distinct groups used that to promote their specific interests. Mexico was also shifting away from an individual level of recruitment with nationalistic impulses to a system that sought large-scale, international, corporate development and investment. Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada's presidency granted, under the 1875 *Ley general sobre colonización*, subsidies and concessions to foreign and domestic investors, hoping to attract them. This approach to development continued and focused on foreigners under Porfirio Díaz and the allowances in 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*.

The Porfirian government's actions in northern Baja California in 1887 varied but signaled underlying tensions within greater Mexico. Once Mexican newspaper editors learned of the sale of eighteen million acres of Baja California land to the International, the reaction was diverse and sharp: there were those who favored the sale and those who adamantly opposed it because of fears of American annexation, as had happened with Texas in 1836. Many of the latter opinion began a vehement campaign of opposition.⁹⁵ Editors of *El Tiempo*, a newspaper published from Mexico City, stated "it is not the agreement itself that we have issues with, rather, it is what is

⁹⁵ Newspapers in Mexico voiced opposition mainly because they worried the land concessions would lead to the annexation of Baja California by the United States. See González Navarro, *Los Extranjeros en México y los Mexicanos en el Extranjero, 1821-1970*. vol. 2, 227-232.

being done now that rightly alarms us.”⁹⁶ The newspaper editors worried that the actions of the government and the International were, in effect, opening the northern border to unfettered American interests, one where capital crossed international boundaries unconstrained.⁹⁷ *El Tiempo*, and other newspaper editors, seemed to recognize Díaz’s blatant disregard for the rule of law, even if they only hinted at it as they criticized the land sale. Likewise, editors from the Sinaloa-based *El Corriente del Occidente*, stated that the smallest discrepancy in land titles would lead to dispossession for Mexican nationals, hinting at the Díaz administration’s flagrant violation of laws. *El Corriente* editors also believed that while “the whole world” would benefit from the International’s development project, the scheme would come at the cost of those landless and poor Mexicans who opposed the company’s interests. *El Corriente*’s editors wondered what the point of Baja California’s development was if “the foreigner dominates and the Mexican is inferior.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “El Asunto de la Baja California,” *El Tiempo* Noviembre 29, 1887. *El Nacional* expressed similar sentiments in its article “Cuestión de la Baja California,” Noviembre 21, 1887.

⁹⁷ “Otra Vez El Asunto de la Baja California,” *El Tiempo* Diciembre 01, 1887. *El Tiempo* editors expressed concern about the International ignoring the requirement that all colonists had to be approved by the Mexican government. The newspaper charged that the contract had allowed for a group of German colonists in Baja, but instead of this, the International was selling the allocated land to American colonists.

⁹⁸ “La Colonia de la Ensenada,” *El Corriente del Occidente* noviembre 3, 1887. “...de que sirve a México que aquella porción del territorio mexicano progrese si ha de ser

While some newspaper editors, like those of *El Corriente*, understood the exploitative nature of the government and the International's arrangement with Porfirian officials, many also were preoccupied with the threat of American annexation. But by focusing on annexation, newspaper editors minimized the ways the Díaz administration used patronage to further presidential-level nepotism under the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*. The system of patronage centered on Díaz and his allies and their intervention. For example, in decrying the sale to the International in 1887, newspaper editors characterized Luis Huller, the principal owner of the International, as a friend of Díaz as they criticized the company's acquisition of 18 million acres of land.⁹⁹ *El Nacional* editors hinted that Huller and the International had circumvented Mexican law by appealing to Díaz's patronage. In favoring foreigners over nationals, a process that began under Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada's presidency, the Mexican federal government signed various laws to attract foreigners to Mexico that included land incentives, duty-free imports, and gave them all the

para que el extranjero domine y el mexicano se vea postergado, y para que se nos arrebatase en últimas cuentas una porción más del territorio nacional? (“...of what use is it to Mexico that that portion of Mexican territory progresses if the foreigner dominates and the Mexican is left behind, and so that in the end one more portion of the national territory is taken away from us?”) Author translation.

⁹⁹ “Cuestión de la Baja California” *El Nacional* 22 noviembre, 1887. *El Nacional* reprinted stories from *El Partido Liberal* and the San Diego Sun newspapers, who were the ones who described Huller as a personal friend to Díaz. *El Nacional* heavily criticized both newspapers' coverage and was critical of the sale.

rights and privileges afforded to Mexican citizens, as most notably stated in the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos*. Both aspects of the relationship between the Mexican government and foreign companies were precursors for controlling labor in the region. Together, Porfirian officials and international corporations created an economic and political structure to modernize Mexico and from which a progenitor of Mexico's blended system of labor would descend.



1 Carlos Pacheco c. 1870. Courtesy of DR Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, Mexico.

Carlos Pacheco, the Mexican Secretary of Development (*Secretario del Ministro de Fomento*) who oversaw land and economic development, published an exposition in 1887 on colonization in Baja California that made clear the relationship between government, business interests, and the organization of labor.¹⁰⁰ In his writings on land use in Porfirian development projects, *Exposición que hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California* (A Presentation by the Secretary of Development on the Colonization of Baja California), Pacheco defended the government's decision to sell the land to the International. The Secretary of Development also allayed fears that the land acquisition was not akin to American annexation of northern Baja California. He promoted Baja California's progress through investment. Pacheco defended the need of foreign capital and migration and the local and federal government roles' in passing and enforcing laws to develop and populate the region. The Secretary argued there were two distinct avenues to achieve Baja California's development and grow its population: through national avenues, meaning to marshal resources of Mexico and its people, or through international channels, which translated to attracting and depending on foreign capital

¹⁰⁰ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California* (Mexico City: Oficina Tip. De la Secretaría de Fomento, 1887).

and investors.¹⁰¹ Pacheco believed Mexico lacked the population necessary to achieve development on its own, which would lead to the ruin of Baja California thus ensuring the “the [entire] depopulation of the territory.”¹⁰² Given the high costs associated with surveying lands, parceling, plotting, measuring, and creating land deeds, the vast majority of Mexican peoples did not have the financial capacity to

¹⁰¹ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 38. Accessed on HathiTrust Database.

“...debemos a todo costa procurar el... acrecentamiento de esta, hasta que guarde con la extensión y riqueza del territorio la debida proporción. Teóricamente hay dos medios para lograrlo. Consistiría el primero, en atenerse exclusivamente a los elementos nacionales disponibles... consiste el segundo, en procurarse el concurso del elemento extranjero.” (“...we must at all costs strive for the... increase of this, until it reaches the proper proportion in size and wealth of the territory. Theoretically there are two means to achieve this. The first would consist of sticking exclusively to the available national elements... the second consists of procuring the assistance of the foreign element”). Author translation.

¹⁰² Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 40. Accessed on HathiTrust Database.

“El primero no solo no conducirá al resultado, sino que por el contrario sería la ruina del país. Nuestra población indígena decrece de una manera rapidísima....Nuestra población mestiza...no basta su crecimiento...Si cerramos nuestros puertos y nuestra fronteras...la despoblación del territorio sería tan rápida como segura.” (The first will not only not lead to the result, but on the contrary it would be the ruin of the country. Our indigenous population is decreasing very rapidly Our mestizo population ... its growth is not enough ... If we closed our ports and our borders ... the depopulation of the territory would be as fast as it is safe.”) Author translation.

participate in land development projects.¹⁰³ In effect, the only real avenue to economic development in the view of Pacheco and the Porfirian government was through international channels, that is, by meeting the demands of foreign-owned companies like the International who coveted large swaths of land for development and colonization schemes.

The Secretary of Development defended the land consolidation of eighteen million hectares into the hands of the International's few corporate stockholders by advancing an argument in favor of large landholdings to foreign corporations over distributing land to local farmers in smaller plots. Pacheco and the Porfirian government believed it was indisputable that Mexico needed to "join forces with foreign capital" because "everyday foreign capital and labor produced increases in public wealth."¹⁰⁴ The Secretary of Development saw the land consolidation into the hands of a foreign, capitalist class as the best course for development in Baja California. He argued that corporate farming produced inexpensive, staple foods through cattle ranching and large-scale cultivation of grains. Pacheco asserted,

¹⁰³ de Vos, "Una Legislación de Graves Consecuencias," 78.

¹⁰⁴ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 40. "El concurso del capital y del trabajo extranjero, produce cada día aumento en la riqueza pública...En principio pues es inconcusa la necesidad para el país de allegarse el concurso del brazo y del capital extranjero." ("The participation of capital and foreign labor produces an increase in public wealth every day ... In principle, the need for the country to join forces with foreign capital and arm is incontrovertible.") Author translation.

cheaply produced goods would lead to “workers’ emancipation and improve their living conditions.”¹⁰⁵ He further defended corporate agriculture by recognizing that foreign capital could marshal and sustain an export economy of scale in Baja California that the Mexican government or subsistence farming could not. Pacheco called for a limited government role—a hallmark of Mexican liberalism. The government, affirmed Pacheco, should only identify lands for companies leaving the surveying, deeding, measuring, plotting, and settling to investors.

An interesting consequence of Pacheco’s approach transpired as he argued for a minimal role of government in economic development. The Secretary of Development inadvertently identified another potential problem: the International’s vision to develop Baja California by selling small landholdings to Anglo American colonists. Pacheco criticized small landholdings for settlers as a misguided course of action for Mexican development and rejected the notion that small landholdings

¹⁰⁵ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 46-48. “Para los productos baratos de fácil cultura y de gran consumo, como los cereales y el ganado por ejemplo, las ventajas de la gran propiedad son incontestables. Solo con ella se pueden producir a bajo precio los artículos de primera necesidad y contribuir así a la emancipación del jornalero, mejorando sus condiciones de existencia.” (“For cheap products that are easy to grow and are widely consumed, such as cereals and livestock for example, the advantages of large property are undeniable. Only with it can basic necessities be produced at a low price and thus contribute to the emancipation of the day laborer, improving their living conditions.”) Author translation.

believed it was the path to greater independence and emancipation from servitude.¹⁰⁶ “While [the sale of small landholding] was worthy of consideration,” reflected Pacheco, “it was a moral, not an economic, consideration.” He shifted the discussion toward economics by implying supporters of small-scale agriculture let emotion drive them, not the reasoned logic of *Porfirian* positivism.¹⁰⁷ Pacheco thought the mistake the supporters of small-scale farming in Mexico made was that they saw it as the only path to achieve people’s economic well-being. He pointed out a problem with the small farming model thinking: small landholdings for subsistence farming was not the

¹⁰⁶ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 46. “Los partidarios de la pequeña propiedad se preocupan de convertir al jornalero en propietario, y por ese camino, de darle la independencia y una dignidad mayores, y de emanciparlo de la servidumbre a que lo condena la sujeción obligado a un amo.” (“The supporters of the small property are concerned with converting the laborer into an owner, and in that way, giving him greater independence and dignity, and emancipating him from the servitude to which he is condemned by forced subjection to a master.”) Author translation.

¹⁰⁷ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 45-46. “Esta solución, por el hecho de procurar ennoblecer al hombre, es digna de toda consideración; pero más que de carácter económico es de carácter moral. Además entraña una confusión y conduce a un error.” (“This solution, by trying to ennoble man, is worthy of all consideration; but more than of an economic nature, it is of a moral character. Furthermore, it entails confusion and leads to error.”) Author translation.

proper model for a more populated region, which was the goal of the colonization scheme.

Pacheco's view of corporate farming influenced his understanding of free labor. His notion of free labor—workers' ability to choose their work on their terms—was complicated and contradictory. His tenets of labor fused ideas of free labor with a robust additive of what is traditionally understood as coercive labor systems, like servitude. In Pacheco's view, servitude (*servidumbre*) stood with free labor on equal terms, and both defined worker choice in Baja California's development. The Secretary of Development developed three tenets of his moral system of labor philosophy. The first tenet was that workers' be given the ability to subsist for themselves. For Pacheco, unfree or coercive labor was not defined by a master-servant relationship. Instead, he thought a free worker was someone able to survive without depending on others for daily subsistence. He also believed it was the workers' predicament to meet daily subsistence needs that sometimes compelled them into accepting conditions of servitude. Pacheco further clarified what he meant by servitude existing in the absence of a master: "servitude does not stem solely from having a master, nor does it really cease when you have no one to obey."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 46. "La servidumbre no dimana únicamente del hecho de tener un amo, ni cesa realmente cuando no se tiene a quien obedecer."

Pacheco expanded on the idea of subsistence in his second tenet. Worker choice was the central tenet of his moral labor philosophy. The Secretary of Development thought the way to avoid subsistence-based coercion was workers needed to have work options between masters, or employers, to prevent exploitation and servile status. He stated, “servitude only exists when there is a lack of demand for work and necessity leads to serving a master unconditionally without being able to change to a better one.”¹⁰⁹ His third tenet placed ultimate responsibility on workers, assuming workers could move freely within the labor market from job to job. Wages and working conditions improved when workers withheld their labor or used their mobility to escape coercive labor arrangements. Free workers enjoyed “advantageous conditions and no one could consider it.... servitude.”¹¹⁰ Pacheco argued that it was possible for workers “to be of service without being a servant.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 46. “La servidumbre sólo existe cuando faltando la demanda de trabajo, la necesidad obliga a servir incondicionalmente a un amo que no se puede cambiar por otro mejor.” (“Servitude only exists when, lacking the demand for work, necessity forces one to unconditionally serve a master who cannot be exchanged for a better one.”) Author translation.

¹¹⁰ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 46. “Además, entraña una confusión y conduce a un error. La servidumbre no dimana únicamente del hecho de tener un amo, ni cesa realmente cuando no se tiene a quien obedecer. La servidumbre sólo existe cuando faltando la demanda de trabajo, la necesidad obliga a servir incondicionalmente a un amo que no se puede cambiar por otro mejor. En caso contrario el servicio se presta

The Secretary of Development's tenets assumed a static and relatively optimistic view of the Baja California labor market. In actuality, working conditions were subject to change and these changes did not benefit workers. First, when he argued servitude stemmed from a need to subsist, he overlooked that wages, in any form, were often just enough to ensure workers' subsistence but also high enough to ensure a continual labor force. He further undercut worker agency when he identified three key elements to create wealth: capital, land, and labor. He believed that separately land, capital, and labor were "sterile," but coming together, they generated wealth. Wages equated to subsistence, yet capitalists, Pacheco asserted, could pay

siempre bajo condiciones ventajosas, y nadie lo considera, ni debe considerarlo coma una servidumbre: se puede, pues ser servidor sin ser siervo, con tal que haya demanda activa de trabajo." ("Furthermore, it is confusing and misleading. Servitude does not arise solely from having a master, nor does it really cease when there is no one to obey. Servitude only exists when, lacking the demand for work, necessity forces one to unconditionally serve a master who cannot be exchanged for a better one. On the contrary, work is always provided under advantageous conditions, and nobody considers it, nor should it consider it as a servitude: it is possible, then, to be a servant without being a servant, provided there is an active demand for work.") Author translation.

¹¹¹ Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 46. "se puede, pues, ser servidor sin ser siervo..." ("Thus, one can be of service, but not a servant.") Author translation.

workers in “some other form” of wages, including crops and livestock.¹¹² A traditional hallmark of free labor was wage labor, yet under Pacheco’s tenets, foreign capitalists could develop some other forms of payment besides cash.

Second, Pacheco’s tenets assumed work options meant laborers had a variety of market opportunities for employment. Pacheco, however, ignored the most critical dimension of workers’ employment opportunities: that jobs depended on the owners of the means of production, the foreign capitalists. They could hire and fire workers and decide which crops were most profitable to produce. Corporations also determined workers’ wages, working conditions, living costs, and market prices for daily goods. While Pacheco thought options for workers could prevent them from falling into servitude, he failed to see that a larger labor pool for employers and capitalists could reduce wages because of the availability of labor. Even when workers moved from employer to employer, their working conditions remained dismally the same. In the 1880s, Pacheco’s tenets corresponded with servitude in Baja California masked as free labor. Servitude meant, for the Secretary of Development,

¹¹² Secretaria de Fomento, *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, 46. Pacheco hinted at what some other form of capital might be when he discussed capitalist landholdings could produce cheap goods like grain and livestock. “Los productos baratos.... como los cereales y el ganado... las ventajas de la gran propiedad...” (“Cheap products.... like grains and cattle ... the advantages of large property.”) Author translation.

an explicit and understood system of exploitation where workers did not have choice between employers and were tied to their laboring conditions. But his tenets made clear so long as workers *appeared* to have a choice it was not a coercive labor system.

Pacheco's labor tenets established the defining characteristic of servitude and free labor during the *Porfiriato*. For Pacheco and supporters of Díaz, there was no contradiction in having a system of coerced labor, like servitude, coexist alongside a free labor system. Pacheco's insistence on worker options as a marker of free labor created the space for servitude to coexist alongside a free labor system. Blended labor systems, that is the co-existence of coercive and free labor systems, was not unique to Mexico. American society allowed for the existence of a blended system of labor, which afforded American corporations like the International the ability to comprehend and navigate Mexico's similar system. While corporations understood that labor contracts in postbellum America were symbols of freedom and consent, they were also familiar with what Pacheco meant by "other forms" of wages, given that American industrialists all but ignored an American law that banned debt peonage in the United States.¹¹³

Just nine years after the U.S. annexation of what became known as the American Southwest, the Territorial Supreme Court of New Mexico decided *Maríana Jaremillo v. José de la Cruz Romero* (1857). In 1849, José de la Cruz Romero sued

¹¹³ Amy Dru Stanley argued contracts were a worldview in *From Bondage to Contract*, x.

María Jarenillo for failure to service a debt she promised to repay in labor. The court case eventually reached the New Mexico Territorial Supreme Court in 1857 and was the first judicial interpretation of the meaning of debt peonage.¹¹⁴ The territorial court opinion, written by Chief Justice Kirby Benedict, determined that Jarenillo had not voluntarily entered into a servant relationship with José de la Cruz Romero and that she “was not a party to the transaction [resulting in her debt-peonage] and had no opportunity to defend against the [the indebtedness].” In deciding in favor of Jarenillo, Benedict recognized the difficulty of defining peonage in a newly-incorporated American territory that had been part of Mexican nation nine years prior, and before that a colony of Spain for three centuries. Benedict distilled the long, legal genealogy of peonage across Spanish, Mexican, and US legal systems and found that the term “peon” was equivalent to “servant.” Wrote Benedict, “In all instances where we might expect to find [the term peon in the legislature] ... we invariably find [the term] servant [instead] of the term peon...peon is now used in this country [the United States] as synonymous with servant.”¹¹⁵ Benedict explained the association between peonage and slavery and concluded that state legislatures preferred to use the euphemistic word “servant” to describe the masters and peon

¹¹⁴ William S. Kiser, “ ‘A Charming Name for a Species of Slavery’: Political Debate on Debt Peonage in the Southwest, 1840s-1860s” *Western Historical Quarterly* vol. 45 (Summer 2014):169-189.

¹¹⁵ *María Jarenillo v. José de la Cruz Romero* 1 N.M 190 (1857). Thomas Reuters Westlaw Database accessed July 24, 2020.

relation “as are found to be established between the master and his slave in different states of the union.”¹¹⁶ Thirty years later in 1887, Carlos Pacheco also avoided using the term peon and instead used servant. The International’s executives knew master and servant was another way of saying master and slave.

The implications of Benedict’s decision on debt peonage did not go unnoticed. In 1859, the New Mexico legislature reissued a law declaring all black slaves the legal property of their masters.¹¹⁷ Despite Judge Benedict’s *Jarenillo* decision in 1857 against peonage, the coercive system continued in the United States until 1911.¹¹⁸ The Thirteenth Amendment, passed in 1865, formally established “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime... shall exist within the United States,” but it did not directly address peonage.¹¹⁹ In the American

¹¹⁶ The *Jarenillo* decision was the same year as the *Dred Scott* Decision. William Kiser argued Benedict mirrored Chief Justice Taney’s decision in *Dred Scott* antithetically. While Taney sided with proslavery interest on slavery and the meaning of citizenship, Benedict established the New Mexico court as the face of antislavery judicial activism. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*, 107-108.

¹¹⁷ Andres Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 298-99.

¹¹⁸ In *Bailey v Alabama*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Alabama’s peonage laws and ruled the punishment for nonpayment was a prison, and states could not also force people into involuntary servitude. See Peter Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

¹¹⁹ U.S Const. Amend. XIII, §1. Accessed July 25, 2020.

<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/amendments-11-27>. For a discussion of the

West, specifically in territories like New Mexico, the Thirteenth Amendment's use of "involuntary servitude" allowed unfree labor systems to continue despite the *Jarenillo* decision. In essence, employers interpreted the phrase "involuntary servitude" to mean that voluntary servitude, where both the employer and employee agreed to enter a master-servant relationship, an arrangement that did not violate Thirteenth Amendment. The relationship between masters and servants hinged on their interpretation of free labor ideals, that is, two consenting parties agreeing to enter into a labor contract. Radical Republicans worried the legal distinction between voluntary and involuntary would allow systems that were akin to slavery to continue to exist despite the Thirteenth Amendment. Congress passed the 1867 Peonage Act, known as the Anti-Peonage Act, which stated, "the holding of any person to service or labor under the system known as peonage is hereby...unlawful."¹²⁰ Radical

thirteenth amendment, see Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); for a discussion of the thirteenth amendment and labor rights, see James Gray Pope, "Contract, Race, and Freedom of Labor in the Constitutional Law of 'Involuntary Servitude'," *The Yale Law Journal* vol. 119 no. 7 (May 2010), 1474-1567. For an overview of historical works on the 13th amendment, see Alexander Tsesis, ed., *The Promises of Liberty: The History and Contemporary Relevance of the Thirteenth Amendment* (New York, United States: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹²⁰ "An Act to Abolish and Forever Prohibit the System of Peonage in the Territory of New Mexico and other Parts of the United States" 14 Stat. 546 39 Cong. Ch. 187 (1867). Accessed on Nexis Uni Database July 29, 2020.

Republicans clarified that they wanted all forms of coerced labor systems in the United States to end. They did not exempt consensual verbal or written contracts from this stipulation. Ultimately, however, the Anti-Peonage Act did little to end coerced labor in the U.S. And laws and court decisions were little more than symbolic measures.¹²¹

The US judicial system oversaw Radical Reconstruction's undoing and the Thirteenth Amendment's narrowing with decisions like the *Slaughter-House Case* (1873). The majority decision in the *Slaughter-House Cases* reduced the civil rights of citizens by distinguishing between federal and state-level rights, but the decision also discussed coercive labor systems like Mexican peonage and Chinese coolieism. Justice Samuel F. Miller, who delivered the majority decision, argued that "if Mexican peonage or Chinese coolie labor system shall develop slavery of the Mexican or Chinese race... [the Thirteenth] Amendment may be safely trusted to make it void."¹²² Miller argued that the intent of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments addressed African slavery. While the amendments could apply to other groups in the future, Miller argued they did not at the time of the court's

¹²¹ *Maríana Jarenillo v. José de la Cruz Romero* N.M. 190, 1 Gild 190, (1857) Accessed Thomson Reuters Westlaw, March 15, 2020. For a discussion of servitude and its relationship to peonage, see William Kaiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*, 165; Anthony Reséndez, *The Other Slavery*.

¹²² *Slaughter-House Cases* 83 U.S 36 Supreme Court of the United States (1872). Thomas Reuters Westlaw Database accessed July 25, 2020.

decision. “If Mexican peonage or the Chinese coolie labor system shall develop slavery of the Mexican or Chinese...within our territory, this amendment may... make it void.”¹²³ Miller did not believe Mexican peonage or Chinese coolieism was slavery as they existed at the time. But his decision ignored the discussions about and intent of New Mexico’s peonage system in 1867 and the Anti-Peonage Law of the same year that had understood there was little difference between slavery and peonage.

Stephen J. Field’s dissenting opinion in the *Slaughter-House Cases* linked the Thirteenth Amendment, slavery, and coerced labor systems. The amendment “was intended to make everyone born in this country a freeman... [and] to give to him the right to pursue the ordinary avocations of life without other restraint...” Field argued any prohibition that prevented workers from enjoying the “fruits of their labor” would place the laborer in a condition of servitude. Field’s discussion of compulsion was the most striking. “The compulsion... would force him to labor... in one direction... would be almost as oppressive and... an invasion of his liberty as the compulsion which would force him to labor for the benefit or pleasure of another and would equally constitute an element of servitude.”¹²⁴ Field understood that compulsion was more than just being forced to work for a specific master. He recognized that

¹²³ *Slaughter-House Cases* 83 U.S 36 Supreme Court of the United States (1872). Thomas Reuters Westlaw Database accessed July 25, 2020.

¹²⁴ *Slaughter-House Cases* 83 U.S 36. (1872).

compulsion could take multiple forms, like controlling access to land, food, water, and wages, to reach the same result of workers having no choice in who they worked for or their working conditions.

Field's dissenting opinion was eerily similar to Carlos Pacheco, as he tried to attract companies like the International to Mexico in 1887. Both men were on opposing sides of the issue of compulsion. While the Secretary of Development tried to obfuscate a coercive labor system and mix it with aspects of free labor, Fields explicitly stated that compulsion took multiple forms and was not only about exercising free choice. Pacheco argued that what compelled workers into a servile condition was the lack of work options, not changing one master for another. Fields, unlike Pacheco, recognized employers created compulsion. It was not mere happenstance. Fields understood the distinctions between coercive systems like peonage and slavery were in name only. The only significant difference was the term servitude instead of peonage, whereas laws had used the term slavery. This small legal distinction influenced labor systems in both countries.

State-makers like Pacheco and capitalists, like the International owners, applied their legal understandings from Mexico and the United States labor systems to develop Baja California. They created a transnational labor system in the California-Baja California, based on legal distinctions between coercion and free labor. The discussions of forced labor systems like servitude in the United States, from the *Jaremillo* to the *Slaughter-House* cases and beyond, were strikingly similar to Pacheco's discussion of servitude in 1887. The legal arguments presented in

Jaremillo depended on the voluntary nature of work. Employers and servants had both willingly and freely entered the arrangement. Justice Miller's rejection of Mexican peonage as slavery reified this. Likewise, Pacheco argued against servitude by hinging his argument on workers' option for jobs to choose their employer, their voluntary consent, even though he never discussed what those options were.

The similarities between the United States and Mexico remained between the *Slaughter-House* cases in 1873 and Pacheco's exposition in 1887. Both Mexico and the United States created and maintained a transnational labor system that masked coercive labor practices as free labor. Such a system relied on state-level laws to ensure a consistent labor supply. Several individual American states, for example, used vagrancy laws and court fines to create convict labor pools.¹²⁵ Ultimately,

¹²⁵ Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*, 175. Kiser argued in the U.S. South, debt peonage and convict labor became virtually synonymous within a penal system that perpetuated a quasi neoslavery into the twentieth century. For a discussion of the U.S. South and peonage see Peter Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*; Daniel A Novak, *The Wheel of Servitude: Black Forced Labor After Slavery* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1978); Leon F Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996); Douglas A Blackmon *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008);

Pacheco's use of the word "servant" instead of peon or slave was not happenstance. He adeptly used it to make clear just how similar the two nations' systems were.¹²⁶

Pacheco avoided stating what was clear even to US diplomats stationed in Baja California. In 1885, James Viosca, the US consul for La Paz, Baja California, discussed what Pacheco avoided two years later in his labor exposition. Viosca stated employers paid laborers fifteen dollars a month, but not in cash. Instead, they paid laborers in goods and provisions sold at exorbitant prices.¹²⁷ Viosca's description was similar to other U.S. Consuls' descriptions of the plight of Mexico's agricultural workers throughout the nation. Consul Campbell of Monterrey stated that while Mexico ended its peonage system in the mid-nineteenth century, its worse features remained and made the practice of hiring labor unpleasant and complicated.¹²⁸ Warner P. Sutton, the US Consular-General, went even further than Campbell. He pointed out that the peonage system still existed in many places throughout Mexico and that its

¹²⁶ Samaniego argued Pacheco translated and published his exposition in the United States to protect the *Porfiriato*'s image in the U.S. Marco Antonio Lopez Samaniego, coord. *Breve Historia de Baja California* (Mexicali, Mexico: Editorial UABC, 2014), 234-235. Apple Books.

¹²⁷ James Viosca, "Agriculture, Mining and Industries of La Paz: Report of Consul Viosca," December 12, 1885, in United States Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, vol. 63-68 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 501.

¹²⁸ Robert C. Campbell, "Mexico: Agriculture, Mines and Factories" October 21, 1885. *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, 486.

existence directly contravened the Mexican constitution, a document he described as “one of the most liberal and well-considered documents ever written.” Sutton lamented that peonage interfered with hiring wage laborers, like sharecropping had in the American South.¹²⁹ “The problem of getting the lower classes to work is as difficult here [in Mexico] as in Louisiana...[In Mexico], state makers made the debtor workman a slave to the glebe.”¹³⁰ In effect, the assertions of Viosca, Campbell, and Sutton made clear what Pacheco would not two years later: capitalists and developers looking to expand from the United States into Mexico could expect the same labor system they were accustomed to in the United States. They could ignore Mexico’s constitution in much the same way they ignored the *Jaremillo* decision. In 1887, what Pacheco’s exposition ultimately described and defended was a U.S.-Mexico transnational labor system.

The Porfirian government and the foreign companies in Baja California created the transnational labor system by manipulating Mexico’s legal system and cooperation to their benefit. Baja California had vast amounts of land. After the

¹²⁹ Warner P. Sutton, “The State of Agricultural Labor in Mexico” March 4, 1886 *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, 530. For a discussion of Warner P. Sutton, see David M. Pletcher, “Consul Warner P. Sutton and American-Mexican Border Trade during the Early Díaz Period,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (1976): 373–99.

¹³⁰ Warner P. Sutton, “The State of Agricultural Labor in Mexico” March 4, 1886 *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, 530.

passage of the 1883 *Ley de terrenos Baldíos* and the 1886 *Ley de extranjería*, the Mexican government had motivated foreign capitalists with tax exemptions and loosening the naturalization process that would allow foreigners to own land on the Mexican border. But the government, and the foreign capitalists, could not attract Mexican or foreign labor. Demographically, Baja California had fewer people, and an oppressive labor system establishment would work against its capacity to develop industrially. In 1895 the Northern District of Baja California had a population of 7,268, while the entire peninsula's total population was 41,838. In comparison, Sonora, the closest neighboring state to the east, had 189,158; Guanajuato, a state in central Mexico, had 1,047,817; Yucatan, 297,088.¹³¹ Demographically, Baja California had fewer people, and an oppressive labor system establishment would work against its capacity to develop industrially. As a result, the Porfiriato used the challenging demographic conditions to populate Baja California and other Mexican peripheral states with foreigners and capitalists. Legally, the Porfirian government established safeguards to prevent the loss of land through foreign annexation, just as Mexican officials had for the Coahuila-Tejas province in the 1820s and 1830s. The relatively small number of people who lived in the Baja California region proved difficult. The International eventually sold its possessions in the region to another

¹³¹ Dirección General de Estadísticas, *Censo General de la República Mexicana Verificado el 20 de Octubre de 1895* (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1899). See Appendix One, 259.

company, the British-owned Mexican Land and Colonization Company, because it developed no meaningful land or investments as anticipated. By 1890, Buchanan Scott, the manager of the British Company as it was locally known, recognized what the International had not. Without workers, foreign corporations were better off considering all the land they had purchased, lost to them. The intractability of Mexican workers ultimately led to the International's failure to develop Baja California as Porfirian state-makers had hoped.¹³²

Indigenous groups in the California-Baja California border region, for example, challenged their removal from ancestral lands. Many refused to leave land companies like the International claimed to own. The historian Verónica Castillo-Muñoz has argued that what led to their evictions was Native people's refusal to work for the new landowners. The Indigenous groups of Baja California were not a pliable workforce, so they had to be removed. Landowners appealed to the Mexican government using fears of rebels mounting on the border, "...the settlements of these groups...could be harmful. They could rebel against our government like the Indians in Sonora..."¹³³ But Native Peoples also used the Mexican legal system to challenge their evictions. In December 1896, Diegueño and Yuma families argued they had been born in Baja California, and their families had lived in the region for generations. Indigenous Peoples used their permanence to challenge forced mobility

¹³² Sarmaniego López, *Nacionalismo y Revolución*, 50-51.

¹³³ Castillo Muñoz, *The Other California*, 19.

and dispossession, and they were successful. The court ordered only two men deported in 1896 from the group of Diegueño and Yuma families.¹³⁴

Mexican landowners, like Indigenous groups, challenged the government's monopoly on land. In 1904, Romualdo Ochoa, whose lands were within those claimed by the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC), alerted the consular official of Calexico that the company was trying to evict him. He rejected the company's claim to his lands. Ochoa had refused to sign a declaration, under force by land speculators, that would invalidate his legal title. Ochoa had developed the land for years by himself, with little to no help from the Mexican government.¹³⁵ He suggested that the government helped foreign companies with tax exemptions, generous land prices and expedited the naturalization process.¹³⁶ Ochoa's appeal to the local consular, and not the federal government, suggested the federal government favored foreign companies. Likewise, local officials resisted the federal government's support of foreign interests over individual Mexican citizens. In 1888, Luis Emeterio Torres, *jefe politico* (political boss) in Baja California, pointed out that Mexican

¹³⁴ Castillo Muñoz argued this was an example of indigenous resistance and demonstrated how they were caught between the U.S. and Mexican governments and investors. Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 18-20.

¹³⁵ Romualdo Ochoa a Daniel E Montes, 26 septiembre de 1904. Archivo de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (ASRE) Fondo CILA exp. X-106-5. Cited in Samaniego Lopez, *Nacionalismo y Revolución*, 104.

¹³⁶ Samaniego Lopez, *Nacionalismo y Revolución*, 103-104.

residents owned their lands outright through legitimate inheritance laws. Despite the lack of government help, they made the lands arable and productive. The Baja California politician also observed that the Mexican government, not individual landowners, failed to protect Mexico's interests. Torres stated the residents of Baja California were the only representatives of the Mexican state in the region, and if they misunderstood the property laws of Mexico, it was the government's fault, not theirs.¹³⁷ Torres was not the only local official to side with the residents. Agustín Sanginés, *jefe político* from 1894 to 1902, went a step further than Torres. Sanginés created and signed land titles for Mexican landowners and indigenous groups to give them the legal right to their lands. Ultimately, both Torres and Sanginés recognized the Mexican government had a responsibility to its citizens, one that it had abandoned in the interests of foreign capitalist development.¹³⁸

Local officials like Torres and Sanginés challenged the power of foreign corporations while the Mexican newspaper editors for *El Tiempo* and *El Nacional* alerted the Mexican public to the International's dangerous—and illegal—actions in 1887. Newspaper editorials created such uproar they forced Carlos Pacheco to defend the sale of land to the International, even though his explanation did not appease the public. To further satisfy the Mexican people, the government-appointed Manuel

¹³⁷ Carta de Luis Emeterio Torres, Jefe Político y militar del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, a Porfirio Díaz, 1 abril de 1888. Cited in Samaniego Lopez, *Nacionalismo y Revolución*, 51.

¹³⁸ Samaniego López, *Nacionalismo y Revolución*, 51-52.

Sánchez Facio as Special Investigator and sent him to Baja California to inspect land sale to the International. The government got more than it bargained for in Sánchez Facio. The Special Investigator concluded that the actions of both the International and the Mexican government were tantamount to fraud and a violation of the use of land as outlined in the Mexican constitution of 1857. Sánchez Facio wrote one of the strongest rebukes of the activities of Porfirian state-makers and the International stake-holders in his 1889 report.

Sánchez Facio showed that the International, along with the Mexican government, used the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos* to defraud Mexicans of their lands. Sánchez Facio reminded government officials that the primary aim of the 1883 *Ley de terrenos baldíos* was to attract people into the region with the promise of land ownership. Instead, affirmed Sánchez Facio, the government secured 18 million hectares of Baja California land for the International.¹³⁹ In effect, Sánchez Facio's report showed that the Mexican government used the *Ley de terrenos baldíos* to benefit the International and not the Mexican people. Sánchez Facio's example of

¹³⁹ Manuel Sánchez Facio, *The Truth about Lower California: Forfeiture of the Contract made by and between the Mexican Government and the "Mexican International Company of Colonization" Demonstrated by the Official Report of M. Sánchez Facio, C.E., Special Inspector for Lower California, Appointed by the Mexican Government: Frauds Committed by the "Mexican International Company," Under the Protection and Sanction of the Present Administration of Mexico: Illustrated with Two Complete Map* (San Francisco, CA, 1889),18-19. Accessed on HathiTrust Digital Library.

Victoriano Warner and his seven brothers stood as a generalized experience faced by most Mexican landowners in Baja California. To dispossess the Warner family, the Mexican government forced them to “re-validate” their legal right to land. If the Warner family could not prove legal title, the government would seize the land for the International. Fortunately, the local court determined that the Warner family owned their land rightfully and legally.¹⁴⁰

Once the Mexican government realized Sánchez Facio acted against its interests, they attempted to end his investigation. The government denied Sánchez Facio’s financial support to continue his investigation while the International blocked his access to pertinent information. Both tried to discredit him. In the government’s estimation, Sánchez Facio went beyond the original directive of investigating the International’s land contract and removed Sánchez Facio’s Special Investigator title. To further delegitimize Sánchez Facio, the International accused him of accepting bribes while the other government action against him forced the Special Investigator to flee to the United States.

Once safely in California, Sánchez Facio published his report in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and sent it to Mexican newspaper editors. In the opening section

¹⁴⁰ Sánchez Facio, *The Truth about Lower California*, 31-32. Marco Antonio Samaniego has identified *el Archivo del Juzgado de Primera Instancia Civil de Ensenada* as a possible archive that contains more examples of people using the legal system to contest dispossession by foreign companies. See Samaniego, *Breve Historia*, 243.

of his report, the Special Investigator underscored why *jefes politicos* such as Luis Emeterio Torres and Agustín Sanginés sided against the International. The company held local officials in contempt as they did with Sánchez Facio. He described the company's treatment of him as "...an impertinent attitude of protection, tutelage, and threat, which is the same conduct it observes and has observed toward the employees of the government of Mexico...."¹⁴¹ International executives seemed to think Sánchez Facio's very presence challenged their authority. In the International's view, Sánchez Facio was a nuisance to be vanquished in the same way the American agricultural corporation sought to purge Mexicans from their land.

Ultimately, no amount of government protection or help would save the International and its development project from public criticism or Sánchez Facio's disclosures. The company and the government could not attract either Mexican or foreign migration into the region, and their colonization schemes failed. The fatal flaw that the International and the Mexican federal government did not fully comprehend in 1887 was their inability to control people's movement in and out of the region. People in the region used their mobility and relied on the same tool the Porfirian officials used, the Mexican legal system. While the Porfirian government used the language of liberalism, it did not believe in the tenets of liberalism or the principle of equality under the law. People refused to move or be moved when they thought conditions were favorable for them. Laborers also refused to work for the

¹⁴¹ Manuel Sánchez Facio, *The Truth about Lower California*, iii.

benefit of foreign capital and used strategies of resistance to choose to work, or not, freely. With labor in short supply in Baja California, the International could not withstand the late-1880s recession in the United States, and was forced to sell its holdings in Baja California to the British-owned Mexican Land & Colonization Company. The British Company—as it was commonly called in Mexico—however, differed in its approach to development. Instead, the British Company preferred a slower-paced, systematic approach of exploiting Baja’s resources for themselves.¹⁴² By 1893, the remaining Porfirian development colonization schemes also failed.¹⁴³

What did persist from the Porfirian-International project was Carlos Pacheco’s rhetoric of a blended labor system, premised on controlling worker movements. Pacheco’s three labor tenets in 1887 provided the language of a mixed labor system based on servitude and free labor in Mexico and the United States. Even as the

¹⁴² *Breve Historia de Baja California*, 256-257. The British Company, however, did take a more aggressive stance. In 1890 it became embroiled in accusations of having financed an attempted forced annexation of Baja California. The company believed its landholdings would be more valuable if it were part of the United States. The *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Diego Union* newspapers uncovered the plot and the British Company’s role in it.

¹⁴³ Of the one hundred fifty-six colonization contracts signed, the Mexican government established only sixty colonies. But the Mexican government continued signing contracts with development companies until 1908. See María Cecilia Zuleta, “La Secretaría de Fomento y el fomento agrícola en México, 1876-1910: la invención de una agricultura próspera que no fue,” *Mundo Agrario* vol 1, no. 1 (2000), 17.

colonization schemes failed, Pacheco's tenets influenced how laborers viewed themselves in relation to the labor market and how they understood and exercised workplace rights. Pacheco was correct about workers' desire to labor and subsist, but the *Secretario de Fomento* had been wrong in assessing that foreign capital would lead to workers' emancipation. In the end, it was the Mexican people like Raymundo Yorba, the Warner family, and Romualdo Ochoa who, by asserting their land rights, defined what it meant "to be of service without being a servant." Over the next two decades, to work for wages competed with other forms of labor that redefined morality, honor, and work for agricultural workers and sex workers despite the hardship of their labor.

CHAPTER THREE

Obreras Clandestinas: Sex Work as Rightful and Legitimate Labor at the Baja California Borderlands

“... In a short time ... the town of Mexicali ... has become a dreadful center of vice and depravity”

In their 1909 petition to Mexican president Porfirio Díaz, Rodolfo Gallego and twenty-eight other heads of households characterized Mexicali, Mexico as a “dreadful center of vice and depravity.”¹⁴⁴ By 1902, the border town emerged as a new international gateway linking its American sister city, Calexico, to Mexico and the United States at the California-Baja California borderlands. After Baja California experienced the failure of American colonization and immigration projects in the 1880s and 1890s, it remained unclear what type of commercial industries would take hold and foster economic development in northern Baja California and its newest border town, Mexicali. For the time being, American corporate projects in need of enormous capital investment, such as the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC), gave way to a different economic development project in Baja California that endured

¹⁴⁴ Petición de Varios Residentes de Mexicali al Presidente Porfirio Díaz, Agosto 30, 1909. Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas (Here after: UABC IHH), Ramo Gobernación. Folder 40.41.

well into the twentieth century: the vice industry. According to Gallego, twenty-eight other male signatories, and Enrique de la Sierra, the Mexican Consul in Calexico, seventy-five percent of all Mexicali buildings comprised bars, prostitution houses, and gambling dens.¹⁴⁵ Despite the ostensible diverse market in vice commerce, the “disgusting practice of prostitution” drew the strongest ire from Gallego, his fellow petitioners, and de la Sierra.

In Gallego’s petition, the group implored President Díaz to address the burgeoning vice industry in Mexicali, especially prostitution. The group resented the proliferation of brothels in Mexicali. It decried that houses of ill-repute prevented local families from crossing the border because they neighbored the American gateway in the north-central part of town. The unacceptable location of brothels, the Gallego group contended, restricted respectable families’ movements by forcing them to avoid the major section of town out of fear that wives might be mistaken for prostitutes or that children might encounter one. The Gallego group placed in stark relief the unfettered movement of prostitutes and procurers against women and children, which the unfortunate location of the brothels hampered. “[T]he immoral’ enjoyed free movement in town and across borders,” the group decried, “while the [brothels] prevented women and children from crossing” into the United States.

¹⁴⁵ Enrique de la Sierra al Señor Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, August 31, 1909. Archivo Histórico Genero Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (Hereafter SRE-GRE Archive) Folder 15-23-76.

“Move the houses of prostitution,” the Gallego petitioners demanded, “so that our children know nothing of their existence.”¹⁴⁶

Even as the Gallego petitioners decried prostitution’s stain on the new border town and its threat to respectable families, their terms for redress were flexible if not transactional. Their petition requested Díaz reopen Mexicali’s only public school, closed since the Colorado River had flooded the town in 1907, with the tax revenue from commercial vice, including prostitution.¹⁴⁷ The group believed “if the vices mentioned before were tolerated to acquire funds for the construction of a... school...[the vice commerce] would be excusable.”¹⁴⁸ Even as the Gallego group decried sex work as a scourge on society, they envisioned scenarios where prostitution could benefit the public by generating revenue. The Gallego group argued

¹⁴⁶ Petición de Varios Residentes de Mexicali al Presidente Porfirio Díaz, UABC IIIH Folder 40.41. The quote in Spanish is, “...no sería cuerdo que se le designará un lugar aparte y lejos, para que nuestros hijos no se dieran cuenta de su existencia...” (“It would reasonable for it to be designated a place apart and far away, so that our children would not be aware of its existence.”) Author translation.

¹⁴⁷ Schantz, “All Night at the Owl,” 555.

¹⁴⁸ Petición de Varios Residentes de Mexicali al Presidente Porfirio Díaz, UABC IIIH Folder 40.41. “Por lo menos, si los vicios que mencionamos antes, fueran tolerados con el propósito de adquirir fondos para el fomento de la instrucción y la construcción de una escuela decente, sería un tanto disculpable...” (“At the very least, if the vices we mentioned earlier were tolerated for the purpose of acquiring funds for the promotion of instruction and the construction of a decent school, it would be somewhat excusable ...”) Author translation.

that if the government allowed liquor and prostitution—meaning regulated, licensed, and taxed—and provided funds for a school, that would make vice more acceptable to them. As the group asked Díaz to move the houses of prostitution, they remarked “that such people were necessary for protecting society...” regarding prostitutes, procurers, and other vice providers. What prostitutes and other vice workers provided in terms of social protection was not explicitly identified by the petitioners. However, historians have pointed out that the commerce in sex was a necessary social evil because prostitution seemed to stabilize households and promoted heterosexual relations among single men. Many contended that men, without the availability of prostitution, could slip into homosexuality or begin heterosexual liaisons that could threaten their marital vows.¹⁴⁹ Gallego and his petitioners abhorred prostitution and vice but did not wish to see it disappear entirely. Instead, the heads of families wanted to regulate prostitution and confine it to a specific section of town in a way that benefited Mexicali.

The Gallego petition, however, would not go without challenge. Boldly, a set of Mexicali merchants and residents responded to the Gallego petition and accused the group of misrepresenting who they were and their real interests. Over sixty signatories from heads of households with both Spanish and English surnames

¹⁴⁹ Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 29. While not clear from the record, historians like Katherine Bliss have argued that Mexico’s prostitution regulation regime was based on Catholic notions of morality and that prostitution was a necessary evil that prevented men from creating more significant societal threats such as rape.

accused the Gallego's petitioners of caring "little or not at all about the local interests..." as they were not actual residents of Mexicali, but Calexico. Charges of inauthenticity by the *mexicalienses* (residents of Mexicali) may have discredited the Gallego petition altogether if not for their shared view that vice dollars could help grow the local economy and give families a way to earn livelihoods, especially after previous colonization and immigration efforts failed to do so. "In our small town of Mexicali," contended the merchants and residents, "we do not have other means of livelihood that other sources of commerce would provide."¹⁵⁰ The merchants and residents of Mexicali blamed a handful of American land colonization companies for Mexicali's underdevelopment, and thus its dependence on a vice economy.¹⁵¹ Vice industries and dollars, contended the merchants, were necessary because American companies "failed in their stated mission" and created the conditions for the

¹⁵⁰ Al Secretario de Gobernación, UABC IIIH, Ramo Gobernación. Folder 40.41. "[E]n esta localidad se suscritos de vida con que contamos para sostener a nuestras respectivas familias, son los que nos suministran los establecimientos comerciales de la localidad." ("[I]n this locality, the subsistence subsidies we have to support our respective families are those supplied to us by the local commercial establishments. ") Author translation.

¹⁵¹ Al Secretario de Gobernación, September 21, 1909. UABC IIIH, Ramo Gobernación. Folder 40.41. "El que por dicho sea de paso no cuenta con más elementos de vida, que los que le suministran los elementos comerciales que existen."

outmigration of several of Mexicali's "native sons."¹⁵² Unlike vice industries, the *mexicalienses* pointed out, American corporations generated no local revenue in municipal taxes and duties. Capital accumulation was exported, and few dollars remained for local development.

This chapter examines the early years of Mexicali's vice district and the construction of morality from these two contested views of labor and morality. On the one hand, the Gallego group viewed the commerce in sex as a threat to morality and an affront to respectability that was controllable through strong regulatory measures. On the other side, the Mexicali merchants and residents held a much more nuanced view of prostitution than Gallego's group. If the commerce in sex was part of Mexicali's economy, then it should be considered a temporary measure to help the poor feed their families.¹⁵³ In both group's estimation, regulating prostitution was necessary. However, the two groups differed widely in their moral judgments and the valuation of sex workers' labor. The perspective that commerce in sex was a rightful

¹⁵² Al Secretario de Gobernación, UABC IIIH, Ramo Gobernación. Folder 40.41. En vez de cumplir con la misión que se han impuesto, parece que tratan de exterminar de estos lugares a los pocos hijos del país que en él vivimos, en lugar de fomentar el desarrollo y engrandecimiento de estas regiones..." ("Instead of fulfilling the mission they have imposed on us, it seems they are trying to exterminate from the country the few children that live in these places, instead of promoting the development and expansion of these regions ...") Author translation.

¹⁵³ Al Secretario de Gobernación, UABC IIIH, Ramo Gobernación. Folder 40.41.

and legitimate form of labor prevailed in practice and law. At the same time, revenue from prostitution emerged as a legitimate and lucrative source of local revenue.

In the view of Celso Vega, *Jefe Político del Distrito Norte de la Baja California* (Political Boss of the Northern District of Baja California), prostitution was a socially useful practice and one that was not morally repugnant. In a letter to the *Secretaría de Gobernación* (Secretary of Interior), Vega responded to the Gallego petition and rejected the group's claims that Mexicali was a place of depravity.¹⁵⁴ While Vega acknowledged that prostitution existed in Mexicali, he contended there was only one house of prostitution in the new border town, which was well-operated and maintained. The house of prostitution he argued in "no way affected public morals nor good customs."¹⁵⁵ The *Jefe Político* also noted that Mexican agents could not distinguish between women and men of ill-repute from the people the Gallego

¹⁵⁴ Kerig, "Yankee Enclave, 119-121. Kerig dismissed Celso Vega's letter as little more than a corrupt *Jefe Político*, who held an economic stake in vice industries protecting his self-interest. In 1911 David Zarate Zazueta, Juan B. Uribe, accused Vega of profiting from vice licensing. See Catalina Velázquez Morales, Coord. *Baja California: Un Presente Con Historia, Tomo I*, 318.

¹⁵⁵ Celso Vega al Secretario de Gobernación, Octubre 1, 1909. UABC IHH, Gobernación, Folder 40.41. "Las referidas pupilas, permanecen siempre dentro del local y no salen a la calle a provocar a los hombres ni a dar espectáculos de inmoralidad..." ("The aforementioned pupils always remain inside the premises and do not go out into the street to provoke men or engage in spectacles of immorality ...") Author translation.

claimed were “models in their public morality” who crossed daily into Mexicali. He asserted that it would be difficult for Mexican immigration officials to distinguish between immoral and moral persons crossing the international boundary. In his rebuttal of the Gallego group, Vega articulated the boundaries that separated the immoral practice of sex for money from a rightful form of labor. His discussion of prostitutes’ proper behavior—that they not display overtly scandalous or flagrant behavior marking them as sex workers—promoted acceptance of prostitution in Mexicali society before official government regulation in 1912.

Vega’s view of prostitution and the proper comportment of prostitutes corresponded with the prevailing view of prostitution in Mexican society. In 1888 Francisco Guemes, a medical student in Mexico City and a member of the *Porfirian* middle-class, recognized prostitution as legitimate and transitory labor. Guemes argued that women who practiced prostitution could end their status as sex workers by removing themselves from local registry rolls. “[I]t would be an injustice and immoral,” Guemes contended, “to keep a woman as a registered prostitute when she wanted to leave the practice.” In times of uncertainty, women entered prostitution to ease short- and long-term episodes of unemployment.¹⁵⁶ Guemes recognized women

¹⁵⁶ Francisco Guemes, *Algunas Consideraciones sobre La Prostitución Pública en México*, Disertación Inaugural: Oficina de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1888, 107. In 1908 Luis Lara y Pardo wrote the more well-known *Prostitucion en Mexico* where he argued prostitutes were the symbol of working-class degeneracy and a threat to moral decency. However, Lara y Pardo held all workers in contempt and as the lowest

could, and often did, use prostitution “to earn a living and obtain financial resources.” The medical student placed sexual commerce on the same footing as industry and commerce as a legitimate form of labor and noted that prostitution could be an avenue for state-building through much-needed revenue. He believed sexual commerce should be subject to the same penalties as “merchants and industrialists” for violating regulations and face fines or other penalties.¹⁵⁷ Guemes argued regulation was the way to “diminish the disorder prostitution brought with it.”¹⁵⁸ He stressed the importance of hygienic regulation more than anything else. Although Guemes recognized that while society should respect a woman’s liberties, public hygiene—understood as the social body being free from venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea—overrode any other concerns.¹⁵⁹ While inconvenient, inspections were an effective way to accomplish public safety and protect the general welfare. Guemes discussed the proper comportment of prostitutes in Mexico. Regulations stressed that

members of the Mexican social body. He often referred to many working women as a group, like artists, comerciantes, empleadas, and operarias, as “vagas.” See Luis Lara y Pardo, *Prostitución en México* (Mexico City: Librería de la Vda. De Ch. Bouret, 1908), Chapter 3. See also William French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work and the Family in Porfirian Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 72 no. 4 (Nov. 1992), 537-538.

¹⁵⁷ Guemes, 107.

¹⁵⁸ Guemes, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Guemes, 95.

so long as a woman who practiced prostitution was not “scandalous and constantly public, society and law would protect them.”¹⁶⁰

Guemes’ recognition of prostitution’s legitimacy as rightful work, its transitory nature, and the importance of regulation as a marker that distinguished between a moral and immoral practitioner highlighted the differences in state control over female sexuality in Mexico and the United States. While countries engaged in anti-vice crusades at the turn of the twentieth century, there were similarities between the United States and Mexico’s legal actions against prostitutes, the reality of the implementation was vastly different. The Gallego’s petitioners, for example, praised US regulation in Calexico, California, as a model of respectability and morals policing. The group placed in sharp relief the rampant vice conditions in Mexicali against its prohibition in Calexico. “[T]he sale of liquor,” the petitioners touted, “was persecuted and drunkards who crossed the international line were arrested and fined.”¹⁶¹ Similarly, the Mexican Consul in Calexico, de la Sierra, praised American

¹⁶⁰ Guemes, 21.

¹⁶¹ Petición de Varios Residentes de Mexicali, Agosto 30, 1909. UABC IIH Folder 40.41 “Estamos frente por frente de una población americana que es un modelo, por lo que respecta a la conducta pública de sus moradores, y en la cual, no solo se persigue la venta de licores, sino aprisionan a los que en estado de embriaguez cruzan la línea, imponiendoles fuertes multas.” (“We are face to face with an American population that is a model, with regard to the public behavior of its inhabitants, and in which, not only is the sale of liquor punished, but those who in a state of intoxication

towns across the international line in the Imperial Valley for having “focused on eliminating every morbid element of immorality, vice, and disorder” and developing infrastructure and businesses in ways that had not occurred across the border in Mexicali.¹⁶² The United States, and California in particular, was becoming a prohibitionist society that culminated in 1919 with the Eighteenth Amendment to the American Constitution outlawing the sale, production, transport, and sale of intoxicating liquors illegal. The Eighteenth Amendment did not outlaw the actual consumption of alcohol. Shortly after the US Congress ratified the Amendment, they also passed the Volstead Act to provide for the federal enforcement of alcohol Prohibition.

As an adjunct to the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act, states began to pass their state-level restrictions on vice. California led the charge with a

and cross the street are imprisoned and heavy fines are imposed on them”) Author translation.

¹⁶² Enrique de la Sierra al Señor Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, August 31, 1909. SRE-GRE Archive, Folder 15-23-76. “Los vecinos de las pocas poblaciones americanas que se han ido estableciendo en este Valle o condado de Imperial, se han preocupado por eliminar desde sus principios todo elemento morboso de inmoralidad, de vicio, o desorden...dotándolas en cambio de servicios municipales bastante adelantados...” (“The residents of the few American populations that have been established in this Valley or county of Imperial, have been concerned with eliminating from the beginning any morbid element of immorality, vice, or disorder ... providing them instead with fairly advanced municipal services ...”) Author translation.

series of anti-vice legislation, including restrictions against prostitution. In 1913 the state passed the Red-Light Abatement Act, a law.¹⁶³ The statute was an anti-prostitution measure that targeted the owners of brothels by making them liable to punishment. But because of the Red-Light Abatement Act, prostitutes in the United States faced a choice, either leave sexual commerce and find other employment, continue but face state reprisals, or, if possible, cross into Mexico where they could practice their sexual labor without criminal punishment. Many women entered Mexico and continued laboring as prostitutes. Legislation like the Abatement Act placed the American government in the role of protector against degenerate and immoral behavior, and in the words of one US congressperson, “[it] gave the people pure morals.”¹⁶⁴

Morality, however, was not so clear cut against the backdrop of diminished economic opportunity, local labor markets, and people’s need to subsist. The disparity was especially stark for Mexican women in rural developing spaces like Mexicali. By the turn of the twentieth century, the region’s agricultural industry was in its incipient state. Its industrial economy was decades from developing, and cross-border movement to meet domestic labor demand in California border towns had not yet begun as it had in other northern areas. To define what was and was not rightful labor,

¹⁶³ Catherine Christensen, “*Mujeres Públicas: Euro-American Prostitutes and Reformers at the California-Mexico Border, 1900-1929*,” 2.

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Congress, House, “White Slave Law,” *Appendix to the Congressional Record* January 11, 1910.

historians must account for the contingencies of respectable forms of labor in temporary work like prostitution. Historians have focused on American women in the region who freely crossed back and forth, practiced prostitution as they liked in Mexico, and asserted their agency.¹⁶⁵ But a focus on American women prostitutes reveals American notions of morality and labor, not Mexican views. According to Verónica-Castillo-Muñoz, historians have overemphasized Mexicali's vice conditions and those in greater Baja California.¹⁶⁶

Being a rightful and free laborer in Mexico meant a person worked to feed themselves and their families, not only that they abided by middle-class constructions of morality. Carlos Pacheco, *Secretario de Gobernación*, had articulated that view in his 1887 defense of foreign colonization in the region when he reflected on the difference between servitude and free labor.¹⁶⁷ Pacheco understood the need to subsist as a primary motive that drove workers to engage in various labor forms, and worker choice was the ultimate marker of a free and rightful worker. Pacheco's view, his tenets of the moral system of labor, continued to resonate into the twentieth century

¹⁶⁵ Christensen, "*Mujeres Públicas*," 246.

¹⁶⁶ "Beyond Redlight Districts: Regional and Transnational Migrations in the Mexican-U.S. Borderlands, 1870-1912," in *Globalizing Borderlands Studies in Europe and North America* eds. John W.I. Lee and Michael North (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 193-212.

¹⁶⁷ *Exposición que Hace el Secretario de Fomento sobre la Colonización de la Baja California*, (Mexico City: Oficina Tip. De la Secretaría de Fomento, 1887).

and expanded to include industries he had never considered. By the turn of the twentieth century, vice had become a significant economic avenue for the region. Mexican women workers had a choice: enter a labor market where sex was a commodity, or like many other workers in the region, relocate elsewhere. However, because of the increasingly substantial number of American women crossing into the Baja California region to work as prostitutes, Mexican officials addressed vice conditions. By doing so, Mexicali officials created protections under the law for women who practiced prostitution to enjoy the protection of laws and society that Guemes had first called for in the 1880s.

Mexicali's first regulation of sexual commerce came in 1912. Manuel Gordillo Escudero, *Jefe Político del Distrito Norte*, adopted Mexico City's regulations for the district. The *reglamento* (prostitution regulation) established monthly dues for brothels and the cost for registered prostitutes. The 1912 regulations also made it the responsibility of local government to designate the spaces where prostitution could exist, an issue that the 1909 Gallego group had discussed. The *reglamento* established the importance of public hygiene and made madams, brothels, and individual prostitutes responsible for complying with the weekly inspections. By 1915, the government of Esteban Cantú, a Mexican military officer who arrived in Baja California in 1911 and rose to be the *Jefe Político* within four years, revised the 1912 *reglamento*. Under Cantú, Mexicali's *Reglamento Para las Casas de Tolerancia* (Regulations for the Houses of Prostitution, 1915) stipulated the local government license women who practiced prostitution. Local governments also bore the

responsibility of collecting all the prostitute licensing fees. Registered prostitutes had to submit to weekly medical exams every Friday and agreed to medical treatment if they had venereal diseases.¹⁶⁸ Compliance with the regulations in Mexicali became tied to the definition of rightful work. Women engaged in sexual commerce were moral because they safeguarded public hygiene. On the other hand, clandestine prostitutes, women not on the local prostitution registries and, therefore, operating in an unofficial capacity without the weekly medical examinations, were considered immoral and dangerous to society because they did not comply and risked public health and morals.

Celso Vega's discussion of the proper comportment of prostitutes in 1909, however, predated the 1912 and 1915 regulations. *Reglamentos*, especially the 1915 law, reflected locally defined notions of the proper comportment of women. The regulations legally sanctioned prostitution as permissible work. Prostitutes complied with the regulations and weekly examinations and continued to view their labor as honorable as a factory or domestic worker. Historians of gender and sexuality in Mexico have argued that women who practiced prostitution often found themselves in the liminal spaces between social deviance and decency that the ruling classes

¹⁶⁸ Reglamento Para las Casas de Tolerancia de la Ciudad de Mexicali Baja California. Decretado por el H Ayuntamiento de dicha Municipalidad y aprobado por la Jefatura Política del Distrito por oficio de 13 de septiembre de 1915, 4-6. Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Mexicali.

designated.¹⁶⁹ Mexican sex workers complied with prostitution regulations as an act of morality and as a way to maintain social order. Like Celso Vega's discussion in 1909 about the proper comportment of prostitutes, Mexicali society was concerned with the behavior of prostitutes and their proper place in town.

Matías Contreras, a resident of Mexicali since 1905, emphasized the distinction between immoral and overtly public displays of sexual commerce, and the notion of prostitution as rightful labor so long as prostitutes did not violate middle-class sensibilities about proper comportment. Contreras arrived in Mexicali via train from San Diego as a child in 1905. In his later life, he reflected on his memories of the town and described it as "a pretty place back then" and "moral." He observed that *Sub-Prefecto* Terrazas, who served as a local government official from 1898 to 1911, was strict and did not allow public displays of vice. It was, though, Contreras's memories of prostitution in town that were the most striking. At first, Contreras contended Mexicali did not tolerate prostitutes in town but then remarked, "when they were allowed to practice their trade, they were in a building entirely apart from town behind a high fence."¹⁷⁰ Contreras's memories yet again suggested that not only

¹⁶⁹ Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City*, 127.

¹⁷⁰ Edgar Gómez Castellanos and Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, *Mexicali: Escenarios y Personajes* (Mexicali, Mexico: UABC, 1987) 47-48. Schantz discussed Contreras's oral history and argued it was evidence of Mexicali's divide between its golden age and subsequent fall from grace. He also argued Celso Vega was the catalyst that precipitated the fall. See Schantz, "From Mexicali Rose to Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours

was Mexicali a respectable place, even as the town sometimes banned prostitution, but residents also made spaces for the practice to continue within certain limits. Mexicali's 1912 and, more directly, the 1915 regulations reflected the localized notion of proper behavior, labor exchange, and prostitution. The local government did not end the practice. Instead, it tried to set rules for it to establish the town's morality, and by extension, the women practitioners.

When Mexicali *Jefe Político* Manuel Gordillo Escudero imported Mexico City's regulations into the new border town in 1912, he hoped the town would start on a path towards morality and respectability. In his discussion of the regulations, Escudero revealed the same concerns about the public nature of scandalous prostitutes that both Contreras and Celso Vega had expressed years earlier. Gordillo was frustrated with the violations of Mexican immigration laws by vice industries.¹⁷¹

of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965," (Ph.D. diss, University of California Los Angeles, 2001), 106-107. However, I differ from Schantz's interpretation in that even as Contreras might have thought prostitution immoral, again, it existed within specific locally defined parameters.

¹⁷¹ However, even as he expressed his frustration, he took a curious action. Gordillo instituted the requirement that bars hire one Spanish speaker and that all Casino signage include Spanish translations. He also, convolutedly tried to differentiate Mexicans who participated in vice as US-born Mexicans but acknowledged their nationality could not be verified and was "dubious." Article V of Jefatura Política del Distrito Norte, Baja California, Sección Primera Circular, Feb. 15, 1912. For Gordillo's views on his requirement see Al Secretario de Gobernación, March 7, 1912. Baja California Government Documents, UCSD MSS 778 Box 8, Folder 23.

However, regarding prostitutes, he stated not only were women practicing prostitution clandestinely, what was worse, “they stand in the front of bars as if they were the owners” and were most daringly “without fear practicing their degrading occupation, as if laughing at the regulations.”¹⁷² Even as Gordillo condemned the notoriety of prostitutes and their overt public practice that violated public morality, he still discussed local officials’ reallocation of taxes and fees from prostitutes for public services like police. Gordillo castigated Rodolfo Gallego, a member of the 1909 Gallego group who became *Subprefecto político* in 1912, for allowing prostitution to thrive to acquire taxes for the local police and other public services. Furthermore, Gordillo chastised Gallego’s approach because it had no legal basis in Mexicali law. Gordillo believed Gallego’s approach “failed to fix the problem [of public displays of prostitution] and instead made Mexicali a hub of prostitution.”¹⁷³ Gordillo’s solution

¹⁷² Manuel Gordillo Escudero al Secretario de Gobernación, July 1st, 1912. UABC IIH Periodo Revolucionario, Folder 1.35 “...el ejército de la prostitución, esta última continuaba ejerciéndose clandestinamente, valiéndose las prostitutas del ardid de ponerse a la frente de cantinas como propietarias de ellas, en donde sin temor ni dificultad alguna se entregaban al ejercicio de esa manera...” (“... the army of prostitution, the latter which continue to be practiced clandestinely, the prostitutes making use of the ruse of putting themselves in charge of canteens as their owners, where without fear or difficulty, they gave themselves up to the practice in that way ...”) Author translation.

¹⁷³ Manuel Gordillo Escudero al Secretario de Gobernación, July 1st, 1912. UABC IIH Periodo Revolucionario, Folder 1.35. “Desde el momento en que su recaudación no tenia origen en ninguna disposición legal, cuya falta influyo poderosamente para

was to regulate prostitution. He believed it was impossible to end the practice, and that “the only way to moralize the town were through regulations.” Gordillo thought regulations were the key and would make it more difficult for prostitution to continue to grow in Mexicali, but he made clear what he wanted. The *Jefe Político* reflected that he hoped the new regulations would “severely punish clandestine prostitutes,” those who did not register their status with the city.¹⁷⁴

Gordillo’s idea that regulations would lead to a more respectable Mexicali—and curtail immoral and clandestine prostitution—was enshrined into the later local changes. Later local governments based their revisions to the *reglamento* around Gordillo’s goals. Article Three and Four of the 1915 regulations addressed when women had to register as public women. A woman could voluntarily register, or local authorities could force them to register if officials knew the woman was practicing prostitution clandestinely. Article Four of the regulations expanded and clarified what local government considered markers of prostitution. If a woman lived in or frequently visited a *bordello*, local officials would assume that woman was a

que lejos de remediarse el mal fuera tomando día con día mayor incremento al grado de ser Mexicali un verdadero foco de prostitución.” (“Since the collection of revenue was not based in any legal provision, the lack of which had a powerful influence so that, far from remedying the evil, it indicated that with each passing day, Mexicali was becoming a true hub of prostitution.”) Author translation.

¹⁷⁴ Manuel Gordillo Escudero al Secretario de Gobernación, July 1st, 1912. UABC IIH Periodo Revolucionario, Folder 1.35.

prostitute and register her. However, section two of the article reflected the proper behavior of women: local officials would register women as prostitutes if a woman committed licentious acts in public that violated local morals.¹⁷⁵ Article Ten of the *reglamento* enshrined in law that prostitution in Mexicali could be a temporary measure. The local government would remove a woman from the registry rolls if she could “prove” she had returned to a life of good customs or found an alternative way to “provide the necessities of life.”¹⁷⁶

Residents like Contreras and local officials like Gordillo and Gallego all viewed prostitution as immoral, but they also recognized that it had a place in Mexicali. Residents framed the legitimacy of the practice as labor within the parameters they thought led to better controlling prostitution. The *reglamento*, in some ways, provided a blueprint for women prostitutes to understand their labor as rightful and moral even within an immoral act. Women could leave prostitution; it was not necessarily a permanent identity. What often drove women to the practice was the need to feed themselves and their families, and until this goal was satisfied, they could exercise the option to register as a prostitute. Once women financially

¹⁷⁵ Reglamento para las Casas de Tolerancia de la Ciudad de Mexicali, Baja Cfa. Decretado por el H. Ayuntamiento de dicha Municipalidad y aprobado por la Jefatura Política del Distrito por oficio de 13 de Septiembre de 1915, Art. 4 Sec. II. Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Mexicali.

¹⁷⁶ Reglamento para las Casas de Tolerancia de la Ciudad de Mexicali, Art. 10. Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Mexicali.

stabilized their families through the earnings of prostitution, they had the option to leave the practice by petition. For example, in the 1915 *reglamento*, women who wanted local officials to remove them from the registry needed to state their cases to Mexicali's municipal officials directly. Local town council presidents decided to remove women from the registry rolls.

Government officials across Mexico were often the ones who removed women from the prostitution rolls. Officials would determine whether a woman or her spouse had enough resources to support an "honest life." Reyes Saisa, a registered prostitute in La Paz, Baja California Sur in 1893, for example, wrote to the *jefe político* asking him to remove her from the prostitution registry rolls. In her letter, Saisa addressed the reason she no longer needed to work as a prostitute. Saisa had begun a relationship with one Francisco Tapia, who "would see to her well-being." Saisa stated that Tapia was "providing her with the resources to live an honorable life." Tapia himself attested to the fact that he was providing for Saisa.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, in 1901 Susano Leon deposited fifty pesos on behalf of Florinda Morales, a registered prostitute who Leon had recently hired as a cook. Morales, registered since 1894, asked the *jefe político* to remove her from the registry rolls since she had found work with Leon and had given testimony and a witness that she wanted to do so and had

¹⁷⁷ Al Jefe Político, Septiembre 22, 1893, Archivo Histórico de Baja California Sur Pablo L. Martínez, Ramo Porfiriato, Sección Gobernación, Año 1893, Exp. 11.

the means to support herself.¹⁷⁸ While Saisa's and Morales highlighted the role that regulations played in the transitory nature of prostitution work, they both cited the *reglamento*'s article that set out the rules for removal; their petitions also showed their understandings of their needs to subsist and provide for themselves. Dolores Molina's experiences in 1901 showed what often drove women into sexual commerce was an economic need. Molina had been a registered prostitute in the 1890s but had met and lived with a man, and together they had "led an honorable life." After a few years, they separated, and Molina returned to prostitution and registered in 1900. The following year she once again petitioned government officials to remove her from the rolls because she was "under the protection" of Armando Ortega and would once again live an honest life.¹⁷⁹ The experiences of Saisa, Morales, and Molina, although in a different region with a higher population than northern Baja California and a long history of prostitution regulation, can help historians understand the lives of women prostitutes in places like Mexicali. Baja California Sur was also a remote region of Mexico far removed from the center of power in Mexico City. As the Northern

¹⁷⁸ Al Señor Hon. Coronel Jefe Político y de las Armas, Abril 19, 1901, Archivo Histórico de Baja California Sur Pablo L. Martínez, Ramo Porfiriato, Año 1900, Sección Gobernación, Exp. 173.

¹⁷⁹ Dolores Molina al Jefe Político de Baja California Sur, Mayo 7, 1901. Archivo Histórico de Baja California Sur Pablo L. Martínez, Ramo Porfiriato, Año 1901, Sección Gobernación, Exp.143.

District, Baja California Sur was far behind other regions of Mexico in terms of industrial and commercial industries.

Mexicali's working-class had limited work options because of the lack of developed industries and labor markets. American domination of the few existing industries exacerbated the lack of work options. Foreigners controlled the few non-vice industries in the Northern District of Baja California, which angered Mexicans living in the region. In January 1905, the construction firm Shattuck & Desmond built railroad lines for the Southern Pacific Railroad Company between Yuma, Arizona, and Calexico, California. However, part of the company's lines were located in Mexicali, and materials and equipment had already crossed into town. The Vice-Consul of Calexico, Daniel E. Montes, reported that many of Mexicali's workers objected to the fact Shattuck & Desmond was only hiring American workers. When Mexicans had tried to ask for work, the company rejected them. Montes had learned that Mexicali's workers were planning to form a commission to demand work that they badly needed. If American workers' preference continued, Mexicali workers would try to prevent the construction from taking place.¹⁸⁰ Historians of Mexico have argued the discrimination Mexican railroad workers faced was prevalent in other

¹⁸⁰ Vicecónsul Daniel E. Montes al Señor Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, January 16, 1905. SRE-GRE Archive, Folder 15-15-1. See also Marco Antonio Samaniego López, "Formación y consolidación de las organizaciones obreras en Baja California, 1920-1930," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* vol. 14 no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 329-362.

sectors of Mexicali's economy.¹⁸¹ American companies controlled the labor market in Baja, but they also tried to control workers' social worlds.

American corporations had tried to control Mexicali since the town's inception. In December 1902, Hiram W. Blaisdell wrote to the *Jefe Político*, Abraham Arróniz.¹⁸² Blaisdell headed the *Sociedad de Irrigación y Terrenos de la Baja California* (Land and Irrigation Society of Baja California), a subsidiary of the California Development Company, who tried to operate an irrigation system in Mexico for the benefit of Calexico.¹⁸³ The sale of liquor in the region concerned Blaisdell. He believed it was a threat to the town's peaceful residents, but he was more worried about the company's canal workers. He asked Arróniz to close all the bars because local authorities could not patrol them. Guillermo Andrade, one stockholder of the *Sociedad de Irrigación y Terrenos*, made clear the company's interest in the matter. Andrade wrote Arróniz and argued the sale of liquor would "cause the ruin of our interests" because only "bandits" would want to settle in a place where their families were in constant danger.¹⁸⁴ As vice industries grew more

¹⁸¹ Andrea Spears Kirland, Hilarie J. Heath Constable, and Patricia Aceves Calderón, "Mexicanos calificados y deseosos de trabajar: políticas de empleo y agrupaciones sindicales en la industria ferroviario-bajacaliforniana (1902-1955)," *Región y Sociedad* vol. 27, no. 63 (Ma./Ago. 2015), 218.

¹⁸² Kerig, "Yankee Enclave," 46.

¹⁸³ Kerig, "Yankee Enclave," 46.

¹⁸⁴ Guillermo Andrade a Abraham Arróniz, Jefe Político y Militar del Distrito Norte. March 6, 1903. UABC IHH, Ramo Adalberto Walther Meade, Folder 2.14. "...no

profitable in later years, American companies became active consumers of vice, most famously in Tijuana and Mexicali.¹⁸⁵

Andrade, Blaisdell, and the *Sociedad de Irrigación y Terrenos*, an American-owned company based in Mexico, circumvented laws that restricted foreign businesses at the Mexico border instead of vice industries in 1902. As the years passed, American corporations and individuals profited from the industry. The 1909 Gallego petition to President Díaz, supported by the Mexican Consul Enrique de la Sierra, and the Calexico Chamber of Commerce, all addressed Americans' prominent role, as both clients and providers, in Mexicali's vice industries. In a letter written to President Díaz, the Calexico Chamber of Commerce called American vice customers "dissolute and disreputable characters consisting almost wholly of society's offscourings...." The Chamber blamed the "disreputable characters" for Mexicali's

puede acarrear más que desórdenes y desgracias que causan la ruina de nuestros intereses, pues ninguna persona sino es un bandido, irá a hacerse colono en un lugar en donde su familia esté en continuo riesgo de ser atropellado..." ("it cannot bring anything but chaos and misfortune which will ruin our interests, for no one but a rogue will become a settler in a place where his family is in continual danger of being overwhelmed...") Author translation. For a discussion of Guillermo Andrade see William O. Hendrick, "Guillermo Andrade and the Mexican Colorado River Delta, 1874-1905," (Ph.D. diss university of Southern California, 1967).

¹⁸⁵. Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground*.

vice conditions while absolving the moral and law-abiding Mexican citizens.¹⁸⁶ Consul de la Sierra agreed with the Chamber of Commerce and observed that most owners and clients of Mexicali's vice industries were Americans.¹⁸⁷ He believed Americans moved to Mexicali to "circumvent the laws that prohibit gambling, prostitution, and the sale of liquor in [California]..."¹⁸⁸ American views of Mexicali's vice conditions, and the causes, were contradictory and helped mask an economy and cross-border movement dependent on the industry. The contradictory views also revealed the lack of work for Mexican people in the region, particularly women.

Moral understandings of women's work encompassed many laboring lives, not just those of women in sex commerce. Similarly, women often drew their morality from their ability to feed themselves and their families, not from their ability

¹⁸⁶ To His Excellency General Porfirio Díaz from the Calexico Chamber of Commerce, Sept. 16, 1909. UABC IIIH Ramo Gobernación, Folder 40.41. The letter was also printed in the September 30 issue of the *Calexico Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* discussed the issues the letter would raise throughout the month.

¹⁸⁷ The framing of Americans as the cause of Mexicali's vice conditions, in part, can be attributed to the sentiment of not wanting to offend Mexico. Newspapers like the *Imperial Valley Press* suggested the letter should be carefully worded to give Mexico no offense and set forth clearly that the town was a refuge for criminals from the U.S. side of the border. See, *The Imperial Valley Press*, "Nuisance at Mexicali," September 18, 1909.

¹⁸⁸ Enrique de la Sierra al Señor Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, August 31, 1909. SRE-GRE Archive, Folder 15-23-76.

to be the moral centers of the household and raise moral, upstanding citizens. Unlike in the United States, Mexican women did not ascribe to what the historian Linda Kerber calls “republican motherhood.”¹⁸⁹ Evocative of the understanding of women as moral was an Ensenada newspaper, *El Progresista*. The newspaper regularly published articles discussing women’s role in the household, women’s education, romantic poems, and articles like one that discussed how a laugh revealed a woman’s character. An article titled “El Trabajo y la Mujer,” Manuel Mateos, *Secretario de la Jefatura Política y Militar*, discussed women as workers. After extolling how much he loved his mother and wife, Mateos stated that the woman he loved most of all was the working woman. Mateos opined it was women who worked “to have bread in their mouths...gave themselves to tasks, sometimes pleasant sometimes laborious and difficult...” that were examples to men with dubious notions of honor.¹⁹⁰ Mateos,

¹⁸⁹ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 15-17; Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 44-63.

¹⁹⁰ “El Trabajo y la Mujer,” *El Progresista* June 12, 1904. “...pero adoro a la mujer: mujer era mi madre, mujer es mi esposa y las ‘más mujeres’ para mí son las que, por amor al trabajo, por diversión, o por llevar un pan a su boca y a muchas bocas las más veces se entregan a faenas, ora agradables, ora laboriosas y pesadas, poniendo el ejemplo a muchos seres que se dicen hombres a los que hay que creer solamente bajo la ‘flexible’ palabra de su dudoso honor.” (“but I adore women: a woman was my mother, a woman is my wife, and ‘most women’ for me are those who, for love of work, for fun, or for putting bread in their mouths and in many persons’ mouths, give

however, did not stop there. He questioned why society regulated women to the status of men's dependents. Mateos thought dependency was only used to avoid using the term slavery, which he believed was women's actual status.¹⁹¹ His admission to women's status as akin to slavery was striking. However, it fits within a worldview developed in Mexico and the United States, around the question of dependency labor like peonage.¹⁹² The *Secretario* returned to the question of subsistence, and women as providers, not only for themselves but for their families. He called the women "heroes" because they "worked for food, and many times, placed it in the mouths of an aging parent, a younger sibling, or an invalid husband."¹⁹³ Mateos ended by

themselves over to laboring tasks that are sometimes laborious and difficult, whereby setting an example to those who call themselves men at least among those who believe in the 'flexible' meaning of the word of their dubious honor.") Author translation.

¹⁹¹ "El Trabajo y la Mujer" *El Progresista* June 12, 1904. "...toda obra de los hombres se consigna que la mujer es una 'dependencia' nuestra, por no decir una esclava..."

¹⁹² Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*; Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*; Resendez, *The Other Slavery*. For peonage in Mexico see Moisés González Navarro, "El Trabajo Forzoso en México: 1821-1917," *Historia Mexicana* 27, no. 4 (1978):588-615; Friedrich Katz, "Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirian Mexico;" Knight, "Mexican Peonage;" Herbert Nickel, *El Peonaje en las Haciendas Mexicanas*.

¹⁹³ "El Trabajo y la Mujer" *El Progresista* June 12, 1904. "que dire cuando se busca un pan y muchas veces lo allea a la boca del padre envejecido, del hermano pequeño, del esposo invalido y eso bajo el concepto de que he vista a muchas hembras

praising working women, stating “she who is a woman is a worker, and it is very difficult for her not to be honored.”¹⁹⁴

Mexican society, however, did not praise working women living at the borderlands, as Mateos thought. Mexican society and the government often used women’s economic precariousness against them, a fact underscored by Mateos’ recognition of the links between women’s dependency on men’s wages and slavery. The experiences of Leonor Vizcarra, Rosa Palacio, and Guadalupe Pueyes, three teaching assistants in Tijuana, Baja California reflected women’s working situation, families’ dependence on women’s wages, and the delegitimization by government officials of women as workers. In 1913, after passing their teaching exams, Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes worked as teaching assistants in Tijuana. However, the *Secretaría de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes* (The Secretary of Education and Fine Arts) notified the three that it reduced their salaries and reassigned the women to

heroes...” (“what is there to say when [women] worked for food and many times placed it in the mouths of an aging parent, a younger sibling, or an invalid husband.”)

¹⁹⁴ “El Trabajo y la Mujer” *El Progresista* June, 12, 1904. “Por eso alabo a la honrada mujer trabajadora; por eso y porque quien es Mujer es trabajadora es muy difícil que deje de ser honrada.” (“That is why I praise the honest working woman; for that reason and because who is a woman is a worker, it is very difficult for them to stop being honored...”) Author translation.

towns far from Tijuana.¹⁹⁵ Making matters worse, the Mexican government did not build a road from Tijuana to Ensenada, the half-way point to the relocation towns, until 1923. Without a road on which to travel to their reassigned jobs, the three women were effectively prevented from work. In a letter to the local *ayuntamiento* (town council), Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes asked the local council to rescind their reassignments. The three stated they could not afford the cost of relocation and were forced to resign. Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes pleaded not only for themselves but also for their families. The teaching assistants stated they used their small salaries to support their families who could not move even if they could raise funds to move. Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes made clear what their resignations would mean for their families. The women blamed the Inspector General of Education for their sudden reassignment and charged him with “intend[ing] to take away... the bread that we bring to our homes....” Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes linked their labor and their ability to provide for their families with societal notions of morality. The three teaching assistants charged “... instead of a helping hand so that society continues to receive us in its bosom, [their reassignment] is intended to place us on the path of suffering and punishment because we need to work to have bread to take home.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ The three were reassigned to El Rosario, San Telmo, and Rancho de Santo Domingo in the Sierra de San Pedro Martir. All three locations are located in central Baja California.

¹⁹⁶ Leonor Vizcarra, Rosa Palacio Y Guadalupe Pueyes piden ayuda a no ser cambiadas de lugar, 28, Junio, 1913. Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California,

Both Mateos' opinion article in *El Progresista* and the letter from Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes underscores the rhetoric and reality of Mexican working women's lives in northern Baja California. While Mateos opined Mexican society should exalt working women as heroes, providers, and productive members who would put food in the mouths of family members, the *Secretario* also understood his ideas did not reflect the reality for women workers. In Mexico, many women lived non-autonomous statuses; Mateos believed it was slavery. Vizcarra, Pueyes, and Palacio knowingly played on the sentiment that Mateos voiced, and one reflected in Baja's society when they stated that their jobs as teaching assistants had "opened up a respectable position in society, which always knows how to appreciate the work of women."¹⁹⁷

Caja 7B Exp. 55. "...se nos pretende quitar con el empleo que desempeñamos, el pan que llevamos a nuestros hogares, y, en vez de darnos la mano para que la sociedad continúe recibiéndonos en su seno, se pretende con tan indigno medio, lanzarnos al camino del sufrimiento y de las penalidades porque necesitamos trabajar para llevar el pan a nuestros hogares." ("the aim is to take away from us, with the work we do, the bread we bring to our homes, and, instead of giving us a hand so that society may continue to receive us in its bosom, the aim is to use such unworthy means to throw us onto the path of suffering and hardship because we need to work to bring bread to our homes.") Author translation.

¹⁹⁷ Leonor Vizcarra, Rosa Palacio Y Guadalupe Pueyes piden ayuda a no ser cambiadas de lugar, 28, Junio, 1913. Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California, Caja 7B Exp. 55. "significa para nosotras, huérfanas, un halagüeño porvenir puesto que nos proporcionaba no solo el sustento nuestro, sino también el de nuestras

The experiences of Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes, while disconnected from the worlds of vice and prostitution, provide an insight into the challenges faced by working Mexican women at the borderlands. The three assistants recognized how important a woman's moral standing in Mexican society was. The three women drew their own morality from their abilities to feed their families. The three tried to persuade the *ayuntamiento*, highlighting their age and the fact that the relocation towns would be far from the "vigilance of authorities." Their use of the phrase path of "suffering and punishment" was also opportune. While the three in no way discussed prostitution or vice, their mention of being far from the surveillance of authorities, their age, and a path of suffering and punishment could suggest a moralized view of working women's position in Baja. It might also suggest that the three women understood that there was a preoccupation with middle-class Mexicans with prostitution and vice in border towns. They might have cleverly phrased their words to suggest that their reassignments might force them to turn to prostitution if they did not have another way to feed their families. As the historian Sonia Hernández argued, the crucial role Mexican working women played in the economic development of the

familias abriéndonos además un puesto respetable en la sociedad, que siempre sabe apreciar el trabajo de la mujer..." ("for us, orphans, it meant a promising future, since it provided us not only with our own livelihood but also that of our families, opening up a respectable position in society, which always appreciates the work of women.")
Author translation.

borderlands has gone mostly unrecognized.¹⁹⁸ While Hernández deftly showed that working women at the Texas-Mexico borderlands labored in that region's developing industrial occupations, such industries were not yet established at the California borderlands. However, vice industries such as bars, cabarets, and brothel prostitution were primary employment sources for women in the absence of industrial work. Employment in vice did not dishonor women in the way it had for women in other parts of Mexico. The California-Baja California borderlands, and Mexicali in particular, thrived economically because of its vice economy.

The diminishing of women's work, as providers within family units, discussed by Mateos and experienced by Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes, happened to women across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and prostitution was often a factor. U.S. immigration officials, in March 1919, detained Apolinar Valadez, who had previously crossed unfettered from Mexico to the United States. Accompanying him were his wife, Guadalupe, their six children, and members of his extended family. American officials detained the group over concerns of violations to the ban on contract laborers. However, immigration inspectors viewed Guadalupe, the wife of Apolinar, and Prisciliana, his daughter, as either potentially immoral prostitutes or as non-laborers. The view directly opposed the way the Valadez family—and women like Vizcarra, Palacio, and Pueyes—understood their migration and forms of organizing labor. While the family unit was the initial marker of unfree labor, each individual

¹⁹⁸ Hernández, *Working Women into the Borderlands*, 23.

family member's interrogation highlighted both the gendered and competing narratives of labor present at the time in the U.S-Mexico borderlands. U.S. Inspectors interrogation of Guadalupe, Apolinar's wife, revealed the morals policing women experienced at the border.¹⁹⁹ Immigration inspectors questioned Guadalupe about her marriage and stressed the details to "discover" that Guadalupe was an immoral woman and a prostitute. Inspectors also interrogated Prisciliana, Apolinar's oldest daughter, but when the question of arranged labor arose, immigration inspectors did not pursue a further inquiry. Instead, the board dismissed Prisciliana outright even after she admitted she would perform work in whatever her father had arranged for her, a clear violation of the contract labor ban. The Valadez family's experiences at the U.S-Mexico border revealed the different understandings of labor as an organizing concept for Mexican families and the gendered differences between the concept of labor held for women and men. It also highlighted the erasure of working women at the borderlands. U.S. immigration inspectors dismissed Prisciliana, but if she was a male migrant, officials would have barred her entry as a contract laborer. U.S. immigration officials could not fathom a migrant woman as anything more than

¹⁹⁹ Grace Peña Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution Along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 2012): 157-178.

a dependent member of a family unit. Their idea was in clear opposition to Prisciliana's, and other working women, understanding of themselves as workers.²⁰⁰

To understand why immigration inspectors should not have seen Guadalupe and Prisciliana's actions and those of their family members as unfree labor, a more comprehensive view of power relations in the U.S-Mexico borderlands is necessary. The United States burgeoning immigration regime had not yet cemented its power to control the movement of people across the border. By 1919 Venustiano Carranza's Constitutionalist faction had emerged victorious in the Mexican Revolution and controlled Mexico City but did not have as firm a grip on the rest of the nation. These national forms of power contended with local centers of power. Guadalupe, Prisciliana, and their family used borderlands spaces to challenge the meaning of labor in the United States and Mexico. Operating within a family unit of labor, Prisciliana, for example, viewed what she did as labor as helping her family survive. Priscilliana's view was consistent with labor formations in Mexico that stressed survival strategies within larger oppressive labor systems that *Secretario* Mateos, Leonor Vizcarra, Rosa Palacio, and Guadalupe Pueyes had articulated. Women like Prisciliana did not have the luxury of distinguishing between what they did, their work, and who they were as mothers, daughters, sisters, brothers, sons, and fathers

²⁰⁰ Record Group 85, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, El Paso District Investigative Files Box 10 folder 5020/210, National Archives and Records Administration, Fort Worth Texas.

within societies that stressed divisions between the domestic and public spheres. Migrant women in search of work refashioned the concept of morality to their familial unit's survival. Prostitutes, in borderlands spaces like Mexicali, likewise tied their labor identities that fell outside of the nation-state and middle-class constructions of morality, to familial survival. The Mexican Revolution, the American morals campaign and the rise of local political figures like Esteban Cantú all worked together to erase Mexican working women, including prostitutes, as legitimate laborers.

Esteban Cantú arrived in Mexicali in 1911 as a major in charge of the local military garrison. By 1914 Cantú, ever the savvy politician, had risen to the level of colonel and the Northern District's *jefe político*. Amid the Mexican Revolution, the colonel quickly recognized the benefit of supporting whatever political faction benefited him. Cantú deftly used the revolution's social and political turmoil and Baja California's geographic distance to assert his autonomy. The colonel often ignored directives from the capital. Cantú built and funded his "kingdom" through bribery, taxes on industries, and close relationships with American businesspeople who paid handsomely for exclusivity rights. While Cantú had initially criticized other local officials for accepting bribes, he quickly recognized the personal economic benefit. By 1916 Cantú became heavily involved in businesses ranging from agricultural

interests to processing plants.²⁰¹ Cantú devoted much of the money collected through taxes and fees to developing Baja California's infrastructure, investing in public improvement projects like building roads and schools. While some funds for public works projects came from more readily visible sources: taxes on cotton and other agricultural products or customs fees levied on Chinese immigrants in the region, Cantú also funded projects with the revenue generated by vice industries, notably the racetrack in Tijuana, gambling concessions, and licensing fees from industries like prostitution.²⁰² Concessions for casinos and other vice industries often went to the highest bidders. Carl Withington, owner of The Owl in Mexicali, a famous gambling casino, paid Cantú eight thousand dollars per month for the exclusive rights to gambling and prostitution.²⁰³ The influx of American dollars into local municipality treasuries and Cantú's own hands meant that at times the colonel governed with U.S. interests in mind.

²⁰¹ José Alfredo Gómez Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos: El Origen de la Riqueza de Abelardo L. Rodríguez* (Mexicali, MX: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California: Instituto de Investigaciones, 2002), 42-62. See also Joseph Richard Werner, *Esteban Cantú and the Mexican Revolution in Baja California* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 2020); Max Calvillo Velasco, "Indicios para descifrar la trayectoria política de Esteban Cantú," *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 59 no. 2 (Jan-Mar 2010), 981-1040.

²⁰² Calvillo Velasco "Indicio para descifrar la trayectoria política de Esteban Cantú," 998; Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground*, 78-79.

²⁰³ Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground*, 83.

In February 1915, Cantú began an effort to “clean-up” Mexicali and rid the town of all the “undesirable” people who were living there. His proclamation threatened police would arrest and jail any person who did not leave promptly. Individuals who did leave Mexicali and crossed into the United States, the Calexico police arrested almost immediately. Cantú’s desire to clean-up Mexicali appeared to be another example of government officials waxing and wavering over the town’s proliferation of vice industries. However, the *Calexico Chronicle*, a local U.S. newspaper, seemed to understand Cantú’s real motivations. The newspaper pointed out Cantú’s proclamation had been at an opportune moment for Calexico as “the round-up occurred at a time when free labor was in great demand by the Calexico authorities...” The *Calexico Chronicle* cast the fortuitous arrests as an opportunity for individuals to “reflect on past opportunities” and prepare for future contingencies.”²⁰⁴ The 1915 incident highlighted Cantú’s more than a willingness to use Mexicali’s vice conditions to benefit American businesses even across the international border.

Even as Cantú favored American interests, and his own finances, over Mexicali, the town residents still saw the economic benefit of vice industries. In 1920 The Owl Casino, owned by Carl Withington and others, burned down. Residents implored Cantú to “consider the prosperity of the town” and do everything in his

²⁰⁴ *Calexico Chronicle*, “Mexicali Scum Dumped onto Calexico” February 16, 1915.

power to see the casino rebuilt.²⁰⁵ Mexicali's residents made familiar arguments about the Owl which had gambling and prostitution: the need to control and regulate the industries. "Customers look for vice where they can find it, what is needed is vigilance... in this way we will obtain the rapid development...the humble residents of this town need."²⁰⁶ While Withington and his partners rebuilt The Owl, many women who had worked in the casino crossed into Calexico. However, in September

²⁰⁵ Al Señor Gobernador Coronel D. Esteban Cantú 11 Febrero 1920. UABC IIIH Fondo Adalberto Walther Meade, Folder 14.19 "hemos creído prudente dirigimos a usted para suplicarle atendiendo a su afán por la prosperidad de este lugar al que en caso de que los concesionarios de dichas casas de juego, piensen reedificar de nuevo suplicamos a usted si a bien tiene que sea un 'pueblo nuevo' el cual daría más impulso a la prosperidad de esta lugar."("we have thought it prudent to address you, to beseech you, in view of your eagerness for the prosperity of this place which, in case the concessionaires of the said gambling houses are considering rebuilding again, we ask that you make it a 'new town' that would give more support to the prosperity of this place.") Author translation.

²⁰⁶ Al Señor Gobernador Coronel D. Esteban Cantú 11 Febrero 1920. UABC IIIH Fondo Adalberto Walther Meade, Folder 14.19. "Como otra parte la gente afecta al juego lo busca donde quiera que este se encuentre, bastaría una vigilancia ordenada y en regular servicio de policía, para sostener el orden y de esta manera se obtendría el desarrollo más rápido y efectivo que bien lo necesitamos los humildes vecinos de este lugar..." ("On the other hand, the people affected by the situation are looking for any place where it is found, it only requires orderly vigilance and regular police to maintain order, and in this way we would obtain a faster and more effective environment, which we, the humble neighbors of this place, need...") Author translation.

1920, the Calexico City Marshal E.S. Boucher ordered all the women to leave town. The women could return to Mexicali or go somewhere else, but Boucher set a deadline for the women to leave, or police would arrest them. While Calexico's local government had a strict abolitionist view of prostitution, Mexicali's residents understood the role of vice industries like prostitution in the local economy. Rather than try to end it, residents found it more beneficial to try and regulate industries. By controlling the vice industries, residents reified the idea of prostitution as a rightful form of labor.

The end of the Mexican Revolution in 1917 also signaled the end of Cantú's kingdom and the more localized understanding of prostitution and other vice industries. Álvaro Obregón and his military faction had emerged victorious and now controlled Mexico. Known as the Sonora Dynasty, Obregón and his successor, Plutarco Elias Calles, began a moralizing campaign across Mexico that lasted for over ten years. In the summer of 1920, Obregón forced Cantú to leave the Northern District and established a series of civilian governments.²⁰⁷ During this period, Baja California's civilian governments tried to rid places like Mexicali and Tijuana of all the different forms of vice that existed and, in that way, return the towns to a moral

²⁰⁷ Marco Antonio Samaniego López, *Los Gobiernos Civiles en Baja California, 1920-1923: Un estudio sobre la relación entre los poderes local y federales* (Mexicali, MX: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California: Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, 1998).

way of life.²⁰⁸ When the Owl burned yet again in 1922, Obregón and the Baja California's civilian government refused to rebuild the casino. The government indicated it had no intention of rebuilding, nor had it authorized any such efforts. Instead, the government would "continue the moralizing campaign with all rigor."²⁰⁹ The end of vice industries meant the loss of significant revenue for local governments. In February 1922 expenditures for northern Baja California had reached 1,500,000 pesos but the local government only had 82,000 pesos on hand to cover accounts.²¹⁰

The Sonora Dynasty's efforts to end vice in places like Mexicali were never complete. The rebuilt Owl Casino assumed a different name, and prostitution continued taking place in it.²¹¹ Even as the government in 1922 claimed to recover revenues without allowing gambling, it noted a surplus was available at the end of the racing season in Tijuana.²¹² Throughout the 1920s, discussions of vice and prostitution in Mexicali society and Northern Baja California became more entangled

²⁰⁸ Gómez Estrada, *Gobiernos y Casinos*, 60.

²⁰⁹ El Gobernador José Inocente Lugo al Secretario de Gobernación, May 14, 1923. UABC IHH, Fondo Dirección General de Gobierno, Folder 6.21

²¹⁰ U.S Department of Commerce Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Mexican West Coast and Lower California: A Commercial and Industrial Survey* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 297.

²¹¹ Schantz, "All Night at the Owl," 582.

²¹² U.S Department of Commerce Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Mexican West Coast and Lower California*, 297.

with political corruption and postrevolutionary nationalism. What had begun in 1909 as a debate between Rodolfo Gallego's group and the Mexicali merchants and residents over contested views of morality and labor evolved into broader questions about regulation and women's labor, especially the commerce in sex. Mexicali's 1912 prostitution regulations, and the 1915 revisions, addressed to some extent Gallego's initial concerns about scandalous or flagrant behavior of sex workers. However, the laws also created spaces for sex workers to continue to earn their livelihood so long as they complied with local regulatory measures. The local laws also supported the view held by most working people about sex work. The law recognized that if prostitution was part of Mexicali's economy, it should be considered a temporary measure to help feed poor families. Ultimately, the perspective that sexual commerce was a rightful and legitimate form of labor prevailed in practice and law. Simultaneously, the revenue from prostitution emerged as a legitimate and valuable source of local revenue.

Reading labor as a historically legible, cross-border category of social control, historians can better understand why Mexican prostitutes and other temporary, semi-unfree workers rejected the characterizations as racial and moral scourges. Sex workers claimed rights based on their identities as rightful and legitimate laborers. The early years of Mexicali's vice district and the construction of morality through the Gallego group and the Mexicali merchants and residents reveal that morality was much more complicated than prohibition, abolitionism, or regulation. Everyday working *mexicalienses* believed that rightful and legitimate work was not altogether a

question of conservative morality that assigned honor to women based on their sexual purity. Such a view may have been held in other Mexican borderlands and Guadalajara and Mexico City, where industrial, agricultural, or domestic work was readily available to women. However, in Baja California, failed economic development plans left few alternatives for women to work and support their families. In Mexicali, the *reglamento* accommodated women to feed their families, which defined them as decent and honorable working women.

CHAPTER FOUR

The 1926 Gentlemen's Agreement, Contract Labor, and the Creation of the Criminal Mexican Laborer

“How singular it seems that the people of Calexico should so strongly champion the cause of an alien people for whom they have no personal love”.²¹³

Irving F. Wixon

Immigration Chief Inspector of the U.S. Department of Labor, Irving F. Wixon, arrived in Calexico, California, in January 1926 and quickly formed an outsider's opinion of the Imperial Valley. Wixon thought local commercial stakeholders wanted the two border towns of Calexico and Mexicali “be made one big community,” even in the face of a burgeoning vice district south of the borderline.²¹⁴ Wixon upheld this view. The Chief Inspector believed the commercial

²¹³ I. F Wixon to the Harry Hull Commissioner General of Immigration, January 26, 1926. National Archives Records Administration (NARA) Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

²¹⁴ I.F. Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration January 18, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

stakeholders of Calexico thought the job of U.S. immigration officials was to promote cross-border trade and “act as guides to the most approved mercantile establishments.”²¹⁵ Within weeks of his arrival, Wixon recognized what had developed in the region; the border did not exist in the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys, as it did in other places. The Chief Inspector believed residents “had lost sight entirely of the existence of an international boundary between Calexico and Mexicali.”²¹⁶

There was, however, another vision of the border. Calexico immigration officials, led by Inspector-in-Charge Fred D. Jack, recently started enforcing immigration laws that the newly created Border Patrol Agency (1924) seemed to empower. Jack conducted deportation raids at nearby ranches, deported Mexican laborers who had illegally entered the United States, and questioned people as they crossed from Mexico into the United States. Inspector Jack’s actions angered local business owners, who started a campaign to remove Jack from his post. The attacks against Inspector Jack pushed Commissioner General of Immigration Harry Hull to send Chief Inspector Wixon to the region to investigate. Local Imperial Valley

²¹⁵ I.F. Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration January 18, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through History Vault Database.

²¹⁶ I.F. Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration, February 4, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through History Vault Database.

business owners accused Inspector-in-Charge Jack of acting as a “border czar,” handing down harsh edicts that violated local norms of border enforcement.²¹⁷ Commercial stakeholders accused Inspector-in-Charge Jack, who, according to Wixon, had no prior experience in immigration enforcement techniques, of “antagonizing the residents of Mexicali so much that good relations socially and commercially cannot be restored” and wanted him removed.²¹⁸ But what angered Calexico business owners more than anything were Inspector Jack’s deportation raids at local agricultural ranches. The raids deprived the agricultural industry of the much-

²¹⁷ The Calexico Chronicle labeled Inspector Jack a “czar” and reported he insulted and harassed Mexican merchants and officials. The newspaper cited Jack’s “edict” that no Mexican could enter Calexico without first securing a border permit. No one, even government officials like Abelardo Rodriguez, was exempt. “Inspector Jack to be Removed,” *Calexico Chronicle* December 9, 1925. *The Mercury* referred to Jack as “worthy help-meet... petty, officiousness, who... wants to show his authority.” The newspaper also indicted Director Walter Carr, head of the 31st district of US Immigration Services. “U.S. Immigration Heads are Raising Cain,” *The Mercury: Intercommunity American Section of Mercurio* September 5, 1925. September 4, 1925, Calexico Chronicle suggested Carr and Jack had some “diabolical scheme” in mind with their rigid enforcement, and their officers seemed to take a “particular delight” in humiliating high ranking Mexican officials like P. Nunez, Inspector in Charge of the Mexican Immigration department. “Our Town,” *Calexico Chronicle* September 4, 1925.

²¹⁸ I.F. Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration January 19, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

needed Mexican labor force by removing Mexican workers already in the Imperial Valley. The deportation campaigns also kept other migrant Mexican laborers from coming to the Imperial Valley because they feared immigration officials would apprehend and remove them. Jack's raids, deportations of Mexican laborers, and his stringent regulations materially affected businesses. Local entrepreneurs wanted Jack removed, claiming that Jack's actions depleted the only source of labor in the region.²¹⁹ Wixon believed Inspector Jack's restriction of laborers and border enforcement was the real problem, and there needed to be some "happy solution" for all the involved parties.²²⁰

Wixon, as an outsider, was not privy to all the different aspects of the region's migrant stream. After a month in the Valley observing and trying to understand its complexities, Wixon devised a plan, although he built his solution to the worker problem on several critical assumptions about the border and labor migration. Wixon criticized local business owners' attempts to control immigration agents and create a fluid border for commercial purposes. The chief inspector assumed, rightly, that local business interests superseded federal border enforcement policy to restrict entries and

²¹⁹ I.F. Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration January 19, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

²²⁰ I.F. Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration, January 19, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

close the border.²²¹ Although Wixon recognized the need for Mexican agricultural workers in the Imperial Valley, he underappreciated Mexicali's local government's role in supplying Calexico with Mexican workers. In 1919, Mexicali's *Camara de Comercio* (Chamber of Commerce), for example, began a project of contract labor importation that fed the needs of American agricultural employers, not Mexicali's, Baja California's, or Mexico's. *La Camara* brought in workers under contract from places like Baja California Sur, legal action under Mexican law, but illegal under American law, which banned the recruitment and importation of labor into the United States.²²² Wixon's third assumption was that the border was open to cross-national

²²¹ Deborah Kang argued in her work that INS was not only a law enforcing body of the federal government but that it also served as a lawmaking body and that often local INS officials modified and interpreted policy in response to local needs. Deborah Kang, *The INS on the Line: Making Immigration Law on the US-Mexico Border, 1917-1954* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 169. See also Hirota, *Expelling the Poor*; Lytle Hernández *Migra!*.

²²² The 1885 Alien Contract Labor Law and the 1917 Immigration Act prohibited the importation of immigrant workers under contract. See Alien Contract Labor Law of 1885 H.R. 2550, 48th Congress, 2nd Session; Camille Guerin González discussed Mexican restrictions on labor recruiting, but these were often at a municipal or state level. See Guerin González, *Mexican Workers, and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 33-36. Mexicans were exempt from the ban on contract labor because of WWI from 1917 to 1921.

movement and commerce. The Chief Inspector's final assumption was correct but commercial interests and other local needs affected cross-border movement.

Wixon recognized the interdependence of the border, but he did not realize the international line was never unfettered toward Mexican laborers. Border enforcement, like the actions taken by Inspector Jack, were mechanisms of mobility control by Imperial Valley growers and business owners to keep labor tractable. Wixon's assumptions about the border, Mexican labor, and local control of border enforcement coalesced throughout the 1920s in Calexico and the Imperial Valley. By 1926, as Wixon stated, Calexico residents "championed" the cause of "alien" Mexican immigrants, but it was qualified advocacy.²²³ Calexico residents showed no love to Mexican workers. If they attempted to seek better working conditions outside of the region or made rights claims based on their movement, entrepreneurs and growers criminalized them as vagrants and deportable subjects. Throughout the Imperial Valley, the business interests of agriculture held sway over ostensibly "free" Mexican workers through a system of restrictive labor, immigration, and criminal controls.

When Calexico residents advocated for unfettered migration of Mexican workers in 1926, they did so at a time most historians recognize as when the United

²²³ I. F Wixon to the Harry Hull Commissioner General of Immigration, January 26, 1926. National Archives Records Administration (NARA) Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762.

States tightened restrictions at the US-Mexico boundary.²²⁴ However, some historians have challenged the assertion that the 1924 National Origins Act signaled a more restrictive border enforcement period that lasted until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.²²⁵ Patrick Ettinger, for example, demonstrated the interdependence on Mexican laborers before 1917, although the Immigration Act of that year started to erode workers' cross-border movements.²²⁶ Mexicans, exempt from numerical quotas of the 1924 National Origins Act and a temporary exemption from literacy tests and contract labor ban from 1917 to 1921, faced other obstacles to entering the United States as free migrants. As Mae Ngai argued, the National Origins Act marked a new approach in U.S. immigration enforcement. The act eliminated the statute of

²²⁴ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 131. See also Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates*; Aristide R Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control* (Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 50-62; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

²²⁵ Maddalena Marinari, Madeline Y Hsu and María Cristina García eds., *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered: U.S. Society in an Age of Restriction, 1924-1965* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2019); Kang, *The INS on the Line*.

²²⁶ Patrick Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration, 1882-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 124.

limitations for deportations and established that immigration officials could deport a person who entered the United States without a valid visa or inspection.²²⁷ U.S. immigration officials subjected Mexicans to many of the same regulations that barred the infirm, contract laborers, prostitutes, and those likely to become public charges.²²⁸ The National Origins Act, Ngai argued, created Mexicans as “the iconic illegal alien.” Yet, as Ettinger pointed out, local interests often interacted with national immigration policies to determine cross-border movements of labor migrants that mitigated against illegal alienage.²²⁹ Collaboration between international, national, and local-level stakeholders continued after 1924 in the Imperial Valley, and interdependent cross-national movement superseded most border controls. In the Imperial Valley, labor

²²⁷ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 60.

²²⁸ Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines*, 127. Ettinger argued that for contract laborers, the border began to harden in 1909 as U.S. border agents began to screen migrants according to the law. However, he argued Mexicans were largely unaffected as labor recruitment from Mexico was waning, and circular migration had already “seeded” in the Mexican interior and created circular migration. Ettinger, 134.

²²⁹ Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines*, 143. Deborah Kang argued that border officials employed administrative discretion in enforcing the 1917 Immigration Act to address local demands but closed the border to subversives and unwanted immigrants. Kang, *The INS on the Line*, 20.

needs and worker supply were the engines of immigration policy—not national sovereignty and state territoriality.²³⁰

One such approach, the Pass-Book Plan of 1926, can be better framed as a localized, legal, year-long experiment that came out of contingent border enforcement practices. Also known as the Gentleman’s Agreement, the Plan placed Mexican men, women, and children who worked in the ranches and fields of Brawley, Calexico, and El Centro on a path to legalizing their status and exempted them from deportations.²³¹

²³⁰ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 62. Ngai argued the undocumented immigration denoted a new imagining of the nation and placed national sovereignty and state territoriality in the foreground and the engine of immigration policy.

²³¹ Mark Reisler’s work on Mexican immigrant labor remains the most extensive discussion of the Pass-book Plan. Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976), 60-66. Both Patrick Ettinger and Benny Andres followed Reisler’s model and discussed the Pass-book Plan in similar terms. In her study on the changing nature of the border, Rachel St. John differed slightly by integrating local views of the border but never referred to the Plan specifically by its name. Deborah Kang argued the Plan as a legal innovation I.F. Wixon devised because the Border Patrol could not enforce the law on its own and needed the cooperation of businessmen and workers. See Patrick Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines*, 163; Benny Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2015) ,110-111; St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 186-187; Kang, *The INS on the Line*, 56. However, I differ in my approach by placing the Plan within a larger history of the Baja California-California borderlands. I contend Wixon built his legal innovation on a pre-existing contract labor system in

As a “happy solution” to increasingly restrictionist immigration laws and the local need for migratory labor, Chief Inspector Wixon, Imperial Valley businesses, and the local immigration officials charted the Pass-Book Plan. To accommodate the scheme, growers in the Imperial Valley formed the Associated Labor Bureau under C. B. Moore’s direction. Under the Pass-Book Plan, laborers, including men, women, and children over the age of 16, provided proof of literacy and Mexican birthplace and supplied six photographs to the American consulate. Once laborers met the preliminary registration steps, they were required to make an initial monetary deposit toward their Pass-Book fees, which covered a ten-dollar cost for an American visa and an eight-dollar charge for the immigration head tax fee.²³² For these efforts, the Associated Labor Bureau issued Mexicans a Pass-Book marking their participation in

the Valley. It was not a legal innovation but a continuation of an existing labor system.

²³² Wixon reported to newspaper agencies migrants would pay the fees through wage deductions. However, he “endeavored to exercise the greatest care” in his dealings with newspapers because of the concern that the Plan might be seen as “doing violence to the spirit or the letter of the law.” For newspaper reporting of the wage deductions, see *Los Angeles Times* February 3, 1926. Spanish-language newspapers like *La Prensa* and *El Heraldo de Mexico* discussed the wage deductions in much of their coverage about the Plan. For Wixon’s discussion of violence to the law, see I.F. Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration February 8, 1926, NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through History Vault Database.

the Plan.²³³ To remain current in the program, Pass-Book laborers made regular installments toward the head tax fees. Once workers satisfied all head tax payments, the American consulate at Mexicali, Frank Bohr, verified the completed payments and issued visas legalizing participants' immigration and labor status in the United States.²³⁴

The holder of this book has deposited with _____
_____ the amounts set forth there-
in, to enable him (her) to meet the requirements of the immigra-
tion laws, and hereby agrees that upon the amount of \$18.00,
(eighteen dollars) accruing to his credit, that he will apply
in person to an American Consular officer for an immigration
visa, presenting this book, properly indorsed to show deposits,
at the time of making such application, and upon securing an
immigration visa that he will make application at an United
States Immigration Office for admission to the United States.

Before applying for an immigration visa the holder
should obtain a birth certificate or other evidence of nativity
of the country in which born.

THIS BOOK DOES NOT ENTITLE THE HOLDER
TO REMAIN IN THE UNITED STATES, and IS ISSUED
ONLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENABLING THE PERSON
TO WHOM ISSUED TO MEET THE FISCAL REQUIREMENTS
OF THE IMMIGRATION LAWS.

2. 1926 Pass-Book, NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762.

²³³ "To The Mexican Laborer" NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through History Vault Database.

²³⁴ Kathryn Cramp, Louise P. Shields, Charles A Thompson, "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley," March 31-April 9, 1926.

The Pass-Book Plan was a critical innovation in the system of transnational labor migration. Although cross-border labor migration was not a recent phenomenon to the California borderlands, the Plan bore the imprint of a scheme that accommodated free, unfree, or semi-free labor statuses. Paul S. Taylor, an economist who extensively researched migrant farmworkers and conducted one of the earliest studies of Mexicans in the Imperial Valley, argued Valley growers experimented with different strategies to address their labor needs. Taylor found 1917 marked the shift to a more serious attempt to import Mexican labor by recruiting workers from the interior of California and the “continued drift across Baja California.”²³⁵ By 1926, when the Associated Labor Bureau endeavored a steady labor supply for Imperial Valley growers, they built on past examples of organizing labor and looked to Mexican officials and entrepreneurs for help. A principal example was Mexicali’s town council, which established a contract labor importation system in 1920 that provided border town growers with a steady stream of workers. Headed by Arnulfo Liera, a local proprietor, the system identified, organized, and transported laborers from the southern region of Baja California to work in the fields of the northern part of Baja California.²³⁶

²³⁵ Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928) 17-18.

²³⁶ “Problema sobre la traída de jornaleros,” *Revista Agrícola: Órgano Oficial de la Dirección de Agricultura* Tomo V no. 1 September 1919, 391- 394. In 1917, Liera

In reality, most Mexicali laborers abandoned their contracts and crossed into the United States to work in the Imperial Valley. In 1927, for example, one Mexican labor contracting company imported thirteen thousand Mexicans into Baja California, but two-thirds of workers “drifted across the line into the United States.”²³⁷ As early as 1920, the Mexicali Chamber of Commerce realized workers’ intentions and instituted worker movement and choice into organizing a transnational labor system the Calexico growers welcomed. Workers did not casually or by mere happenstance cross into the United States. Instead, Mexicali’s contract labor system was a systematic approach to funnel workers to Valley growers instead of workers dispersing across California. Once Anrulfo Liera transported laborers into northern Baja California, American labor contract recruiters worked dual roles as both labor recruiters and contractors (*enganchadores*, literally “hookers”) met the workers in Mexicali and enticed them to cross the border to work in the Imperial Valley. Recruiters discussed wages, length of the contract, and other working conditions to lure workers north.²³⁸ Such activities violated the 1917 Immigration Act and the

formed *Compañía de Navegación del Golfo* and began transporting workers and manufacturing goods into Mexicali via boats. See José Alfredo Gómez Estrada, *La Gente del Río Colorado, Indígenas, Colonizadores y Ejidatarios* (Mexicali, México: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2000), 100.

²³⁷ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 18.

²³⁸ “300 Familias del Distrito Sur de la Baja California Vienen a E.U,” *Heraldo de México*, September 30, 1920; “Se Despuebla el Distrito Sur de la B. California,” *La Prensa* October 8, 1920.

Foran Act, an 1885 labor law prohibiting individuals and companies from encouraging or assisting immigrants.²³⁹ U.S. immigration officials expedited migrants as free workers instead of banning them as contract labor. Once inspectors legally admitted migrants, recruiters transported workers to fields throughout the Imperial Valley.²⁴⁰ Mexican officials did not object to the migrants crossing the border, even though workers were supposed to stay in Baja California. Instead, Mexican officials asked recruiters to provide workers transportation back to Mexico once they completed their labor contracts.

Mexican officials in Baja California and Imperial Valley growers built the transnational labor system based on a free labor understanding that also allowed them to constrained laborers' working options. The system continued the blended labor system that Carlos Pacheco had defined as far back as 1887 in his defense of the colonization projects the Porfirian government attempted in the region. By the 1920s,

²³⁹ Act of Feb. 26, 1885, 23 Stat. 332 (1885); Act of Feb. 5, 1917, § 3, 39 Stat. 874, (1917). Gunther Peck argued while the Foran Act declared all importations of immigrants under contracts illegal, but that federal judges tried to reconcile the act's anti-contract aspects with the doctrine of liberty of contract. Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 85. For a discussion of the Foran Act, see Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 84-88; Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines*, 30-34. Kitty Calvitta argued the Foran act was a symbolic law, Calvitta, *US Immigration Law*, 43-66. For a discussion of the 1917 Act, see Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines*, 142-143; Kang, *The INS on the Line*, 20-21.

²⁴⁰ "Mexican Laborers Arrive from Far Below Boundary," *Calexico Chronicle*, September 27, 1920.

Mexicali's government and the Imperial Valley growers achieved Pacheco's vision of a blended system. Wages were a critical aspect of the mixed labor system. On workers' arrival into the northern region, American recruiters would entice laborers to cross into the United States with promises of higher wages. But as Pacheco argued in 1887, wages could be more than monetary. They could force workers to remain, growers could withhold laborers' wages until Mexicans completed the contract, or wages could take multiple forms that placed growers in paternalistic positions relative to their workers. Valley growers proclaimed Mexicans "appreciated... a small gift."²⁴¹ Other growers believed Mexicans would remain loyal if growers maintained a paternalistic relationship with them. One grower remarked they had given their workers cigars, toys, and dolls as recognition for their labor.²⁴² But the intention behind the gifts was clear. Growers wanted docile, free Mexican workers who did not question their working conditions.

A critical aspect of the transnational labor system were men like Arnulfo Liera and the labor recruiters. These men, particularly in Liera's case, were state-sanctioned *padrones*. Liera's authority derived from Mexicali's local government, which approved and supported his actions and role in the state-sanctioned transnational labor system. He served as the official spokesperson for Mexico as a member of the *Camara Agricola* and testified before the California Department of Agriculture. Liera

²⁴¹ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 40.

²⁴² Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 41.

represented the *padrone*'s evolution beyond a mediator between Mexican immigrants, employers, and U.S. immigration officials that developed at the Texas borderlands region.²⁴³ Liera was a key cog in the Baja California-California transnational labor system in the 1920s. His ascent as a state-sanctioned Mexican *padrone* differed from the experiences of labor contractors in Texas. As Gunther Peck has argued, places like El Paso, Texas, U.S. immigration officials in 1910 excluded Mexican labor contractors from government attempts to formalize the *padrone* system.²⁴⁴ One reason for the difference between Liera and Texas-based Mexican *padrones* was the labor system developed in Baja California. Since the 1880s, northern Baja California society has blended free, semi-free, and coerced labor forms. In other northern regions of Mexico, free labor systems developed where employers and landowners

²⁴³ Gunther Peck defined the *padrone* as “professional middlemen” who created international labor markets and served as mediators of immigrant and native-born cultural hierarchies. Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 2.

²⁴⁴ For example, Roman González, a Mexican *padrone* active in El Paso, Texas, was excluded from Frank Berkshire’s 1910 “Mexican Agreement” that allowed Mexican contract laborers to come into the United States but at the expense of limiting González’s role, see Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 99-106. Peck further argued that by the 1920s, the power of the Mexican labor agents waxed and waned throughout the 1920s. Peck noted the differences between Texas and California, where a labor contract system extended into the 1930s because “employers nurtured the labor contract system in agricultural sectors that had remained impervious to labor-saving techniques.” Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 230-231.

accepted that to keep workers, higher wages had to be paid.²⁴⁵ But since the 1880s, northern Baja California's regional government worked hand-in-hand with foreigners to control worker movements, and rather than pay workers more, businesses in the region tried to control them. Mexicali's contract labor system in the 1920s was the fulfillment of a blended labor vision that combined free, semi-free and coercive labor relations. Workers who signed work contracts that defined the length, place, and type of labor did so freely and without coercion.

But the transnational aspects of the labor system marked an added layer of coercion. Once in the United States, Mexican families were subject to U.S. labor regulations. If Mexican men, women, and children violated U.S. norms or transgressed local customs or expected behaviors, U.S. immigration authorities could deport workers back to Mexico. Liera and the men in charge of the transnational labor system offered what Simon J. Lubin, California Commissioner of Immigration, described in 1914: "a way by which an ignorant immigrant is taken care of by men of his own race versed in the ways of the country."²⁴⁶ *Padrones* like Liera, along with

²⁴⁵ Katz, "Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirian Mexico: Some Trends and Tendencies;" Knight, "Mexican Peonage: What Was it and Why Was it?;" González Navarro, "El Trabajo Forzoso en México: 1821-1917."

²⁴⁶ Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Report on Unemployment to his Excellency Governor Hiram W. Johnson in First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Immigration and Housing of California*, January 2, 1915 (San Francisco: State Printing Office 1915), 37. Accessed through HathiTrust Database.

local business owners and stakeholders, worked to recast the borderlands region as one of openness and movement, but one they controlled.

The Mexican contract labor system was a part of a larger system of human movement, one that predated 1926 and emerged in the 1910s with the cross-border movement of sex workers. Agricultural workers were not the first laborers in the region who U.S. and Mexican stakeholders targeted and tried to control their mobility. Sex workers in the region faced similar obstacles to practicing their trades. Both agricultural and sex workers' bodies were commodities in the borderlands, and residents believed they could buy and exploit them. Business owners and local government officials tried to deny both agricultural and sex workers the ability to move freely and engage in circular migration that benefited laborer's needs and not employers. Both agricultural and sex workers were laborers in a transnational system of mixed labor, both free and unfree, where worker options and employers' attempts to constrain them co-existed. Ultimately, it was sex workers in the region who business owners first tried to constrain their ability to work as they chose. Stakeholders in agribusiness similarly regulated agricultural workers in the same way they had sex workers, that is, to constrain their cross-border movements to exercise labor market choices. This effort was in vain. After the 1920s, Mexicans crossed the border and worked freely as agricultural workers, just like sex workers had in the 1910s. In both instances, Mexican men and women were free laborers; they entered labor contracts and employment freely and worked within acceptable working conditions.

The realities of contract labor, however, revealed the mixed system. Investigations of the 1926 Pass-Book Plan, for example, uncovered the contract labor system and its general conditions. The investigators found some contractors and sub-bosses would disappear with the worker's wages. Paul Taylor found instances where contractors did not pay or withheld wages and bonuses and suggested the growers used the bonuses to reward workers who remained for the duration of their contracts. By paying workers bonuses, contractors and growers also avoided violating California labor laws of withholding pay. Contractors would also spend the money employers paid them and have nothing left for the workers, or if a crop failed, many would have no financial resources to pay since some contractors were also leasers of land, growers, and employers.²⁴⁷ Since 1919, the Imperial Valley agricultural industry developed and based its workforce around third-party contractors and sub-bosses, not the growers, who hired Mexican workers. A Brawley Chamber of Commerce member believed the contractors and sub-bosses were the real problems, and a centralized system like a state employment agency, or even perhaps a system like the Pass-Book Plan, would prevent further exploitation.²⁴⁸ By 1926, a centralized labor agency already existed and funneled Mexican workers to the Imperial Valley for six years.

²⁴⁷ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 44.

²⁴⁸ Cramp et al. "Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley," March 31-April 9, 1926.

In July 1918, the local Mexicali town council formed a *Camara Comercial*. The purpose of the Chamber of Commerce was to study Mexicali's economic state and develop plans to help ease the town's lack of industries—a problem since the town's inception and one that entrepreneurs tried to solve by promoting vice in the 1910s.²⁴⁹ Members of the Chamber identified the lack of agricultural workers in the region as one of the most pressing and difficult problems they needed to address. One solution was to write to the Mexican Consuls of Nogales, Tucson, and Phoenix, Arizona, to send information about the laborers in their regions and how feasible it would be to send workers to Mexicali. Fernando Villaseñor presented another solution. He proposed renting a boat and bringing in workers from the Southern District of Baja California, where the Chamber knew workers were unemployed. The Chamber built on Villaseñor's Plan and placed Arnulfo Liera, a local Mexicali entrepreneur who was also a member of the Chamber, in charge of importing upwards of two thousand workers. Liera charged a transportation fee of twenty-five dollars per worker over the age of fifteen, but the *Camara* would initially cover the cost. The *Camara* planned to recoup its costs by levying an export tax on local agriculturalists, but in the interim, the banks of Calexico helped finance the project. By December 1919, Liera had imported 2,879 men, women, and children. The *Camara* distributed

²⁴⁹ *Periódico Oficial: Órgano del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California* no. 33, Julio 5 1919.

workers to the agricultural fields that needed them.²⁵⁰ The project's goal was to solve Mexicali's labor shortage, and the Chamber claimed it had succeeded.

Transportation costs and the financing undertaken to pay for the 2,879 workers revealed the project was not a complete success. The Chamber's Plan called for collecting \$10.50 for each person over the age of fifteen and \$5 for each child between twelve and fifteen years old from the imported laborers. But collecting worker's contributions proved difficult. Many workers left to work on the railroad or "other points of their choosing."²⁵¹ In all, the *Camara* collected less than half of the expected worker reimbursements. Even as the Chamber claimed many workers remained in the Mexicali region, the failed collection of their transportation costs suggested many workers did not stay.

By September 1920, as Liera continued to import workers from across the Southern District of Baja California, many families crossed into the United States. Imported workers might have recognized the benefits of working in the railroad industry or crossing into the United States where they could earn higher wages. One caravan of one hundred fifty families entered the United States before Mexican

²⁵⁰ The total of 2,879 workers comprised the following: 1,099 men over the age of 15, 849 women over the age of 15, 110 boys between the ages of 12-15, 117 girls boys between the ages of 12-15, and 704 children under the age of 12. "Problema sobre la traída de jornaleros," 393.

²⁵¹ "Problema sobre la traída de jornaleros," 393. La *Camara* also had trouble collecting the export tax from growers who tried to avoid paying the fees.

authorities could arrange proper transportation. Another group of seventy families would have entered in the same manner if not for the interventions of Manuel Cubillas, Immigration Agent in Mexicali, and Rafael C. Silver, Inspector General of the District Police, who both demanded compliance with Mexican laws. But neither Silver nor Cubillas opposed the families entering the United States. Instead, both men objected to the behavior of American contract labor recruiters. Silver and Cubillas insisted recruiters needed contracts stipulating the type of work done, a minimum salary of \$4 per day, length of the contract, and a promise of returning the workers to Mexicali before they would allow workers to leave.²⁵² Interestingly, in 1920, Mexican immigration officials like Cubillas opposed border crossing for the same reasons American inspectors seemed to in 1926: workers had not paid the \$3 tax for contracts.²⁵³ For both American and Mexican officials, it seemed a work contract formalizing employer and employee labor relations was the ultimate marker of a free worker, and paying the immigration tax was all that separated allowed cross-border migration from unallowed.

Arnulfo Liera, the organizer and head of Mexicali's contract labor system, articulated his view of Mexican's role in the transnational labor system. Liera,

²⁵² "300 Familias del Distrito Sur de la Baja California Vienen a E.U.," *Heraldo de México*, September 30, 1920; "Se Despuebla el Distrito Sur de la B. California," *La Prensa* October 8, 1920.

²⁵³ "Mexican Laborers Arrive from Far Below Line," *Calexico Chronicle*, September 27, 1920.

testifying before the California Department of Agriculture in 1920 in a meeting meant to discuss a cotton quarantine, described the relationship between Mexicali and Calexico as one of commerce moving freely across borders.²⁵⁴ Mexicali agriculturalists exported cotton into the United States, and manufacturing goods from the Valley often found their way into Baja California. But Liera made a most curious remark when he described the interdependence of the border region. He described Mexicali as the “ranch headquarters for Imperial Valley.” Liera believed Mexicali existed to supply the ranch companies.²⁵⁵ While Liera never directly discussed laborers in his testimony in May 1920, his company boats had already transported 2,879 workers from the southern region of Baja California into the Northern District, many of whom crossed into the United States. When Liera discussed Mexicali as a supply store for the Imperial Valley, he knew workers were a part of the supply chain.

By 1924, Mexicali would further formalize and strengthen the contract labor system, and also, in 1924, Mexicali opened a temporary employment bureau. The

²⁵⁴ Cindy Hahamovitch argued that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was a mouthpiece of the country’s reactionary interests and its role in local labor markets set a moral tone. USDA, controlled by southern farm interests, trained others around the country to combat the boll weevil. The quarantine California was meeting to discuss was due to boll weevil. Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of their Labor*, 80-81. See also Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 11.

²⁵⁵ Testimony of Arnulfo Liera, May 12, 1920, *Monthly Bulletin of the Department of Agriculture State of California* IX no.7 (July 1920), 251. Accessed through HathiTrust Database.

experiment was such a success that two months later, in August, the Bureau became permanent. The Mexicali Employment Bureau required employers to pay a nominal fee for using its services to hire workers for the fields. Much like Liera's worker importation plan, the purpose of the labor agency was to solve Mexicali's lack of workers. But the Bureau planned to provide laborers to the Imperial Valley during the lettuce and cantaloupe harvests. However, by 1924, the contract labor exemption the U.S. Congress had granted to Mexicans to solve World War I concerns about labor shortages ended. The agency's Plan to supply the Imperial Valley with workers was an obvious violation of U.S. law. Even as it violated U.S. immigration law, the employment agency noted it would also require the worker's head tax and transportation expenses.²⁵⁶ In a similar situation to the 1926 Pass-Book Plan, the employment agency plan recognized paying the head tax fees for workers was paramount.

By October 1924, Walter E. Carr, District Director of Immigration stationed in Los Angeles, California, defended the Mexicali Labor Bureau's existence. Carr argued Mexicali's town council established the labor agency for "the express purpose of providing employment and encouraging labor to remain" in Baja California.²⁵⁷ The

²⁵⁶ "Mexicans Open Labor Bureau," *San Diego Union* August 8, 1924.

²⁵⁷ Walter E. Carr to Commissioner General of Immigration October 6, 1924, NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 Case File 55224/358B Folder 001733-015-0001. Accessed through History Vault Database.

agency's goal was to recruit workers from the interior of Mexico. Mexicali's growers would fund those efforts, much like Liera's 1920 contract labor system. Carr recognized that Mexican workers crossed into the United States, but he noted he had recently sent an additional force of Border Patrol Inspectors to the Imperial Valley region. The District Director believed the increased patrols discouraged unauthorized entries by making them more hazardous. Carr pointed to the larger collection of head tax fees as evidence of the Border Patrol's success and that the Mexicali Labor Bureau was not sending workers into the United States. However, the employment agency planned to pay the worker's head tax fees from its collected employer fees. The increase in head tax fees was not evidence of the success of increased patrols. Instead, it suggested the Mexicali Labor Bureau, with the financial support of Imperial Valley growers, successfully circumvented U.S. immigration and labor laws that banned contract labor importations.

The formalized 1920 contract labor importation and 1924 employment bureau were not the only mechanisms to bring Mexicans from Baja California into the United States for work. Informal streams of labor migration also existed. In 1923, for example, a group of twenty-eight Mexican soldiers deserted and crossed into the Imperial Valley to find work in the cantaloupe fields for higher wages than they earned in Mexicali. The twenty-eight deserters surreptitiously crossed and avoided U.S. immigration inspectors by hiding in empty refrigerator cars while a train waited

to enter the United States in Mexicali. Colonel Robinson, the commanding officer of the Mexican military, at once reported the desertions and tried to determine where the men had fled. Colonel Robinson learned Mexican women appeared to have assisted the men by giving them clothes and transportation to different areas where labor contractors had arranged work for the soldiers. Labor contractors, acting as recruiters, paid the women to spread tales of high wages, freedom, and the comforts of employment on the U.S. side of the international boundary.²⁵⁸ The role of Mexican women yet again highlighted women's key roles in the transnational labor system. Not only were women key workers in the Baja California-California borderlands, but they were also recruiters. Ultimately, U.S. immigration officials apprehended the deserting soldiers and deported them to Mexicali.

But in a sign of things to come, the twenty-eight men were not destined for the agricultural fields of the Imperial Valley. Instead, the men traveled to the apricot and fruit picking industries of Ontario, California.²⁵⁹ In April 1924, fifty Mexican workers entered Calexico destined for the interior United States. The Alaska Packing House Association made regular trips to Calexico and Mexicali to entice Mexican workers to cross under the promise of higher wages, free transportation, and steady work. Both Calexico and Mexicali government officials opposed the recruiting because the

²⁵⁸ "Mexican Soldiers Lured to Valley Become Deserters," *Calexico Chronicle*, June 15, 1923.

²⁵⁹ "Deserters Taken in Custody for Mexicali Officers," *Calexico Chronicle*, June 18, 1923.

Packing House Association induced Mexican workers outside of the regular formalities. The Alaskan Association lured Mexicans to enter without the proper authorization to hold Mexicans “in a sort of bondage” because workers would not dare “make complaints because of their illegal entry.”²⁶⁰ Both the 1923 and 1924 incidents involved importing Mexican workers into the United States, but importantly, to places beyond the immediate vicinity of the Imperial Valley.

By 1924, the Imperial Valley enjoyed a Mexican migrant stream built on contract labor importation and violations of U.S. laws. But just as northern Baja California had trouble keeping workers for its labor pool, Valley growers would increasingly face the same problem. By the fall of 1925, Imperial Valley farmers declared they faced an acute labor crisis and partially blamed U.S. immigration inspectors for the lack of workers. Employers could not find workers, even at higher wages. Growers needed four thousand laborers at once or faced the prospect of losing thousands of dollars in lost crops.²⁶¹ But they decried the exorbitant high wages they were offering. Employers offered to pay \$4 to \$4.50 per day to Mexican workers, where they had paid \$3. Lettuce growers who needed laborers to thin lettuce paid \$9 per acre, compared to \$6 in the past. Cotton farmers were paying \$1.25 to \$1.75 a hundred pounds to pickers.²⁶² One contractor hired eighteen men to work for him, but

²⁶⁰ “Hombres Maybe Returned by Officials,” *Calexico Chronicle*, April 19, 1924.

²⁶¹ “Imperial Valley Farmers Need Laborers” *Calexico Chronicle*, November 2, 1925.

²⁶² Louis Bloch, Report on the Mexican Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley, April 2, 1926. *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State*

all the workers failed to show up on the day of work because they had found work for higher wages elsewhere.²⁶³ But the crisis of workers in the fall of 1925 did not lead to a loss of revenue or crops in lettuce. An investigation into the Mexican conditions in the Imperial Valley reported that in 1925 workers picked all the crops in time as farmers paid higher wages.²⁶⁴

Throughout the 1920s, California farmers claimed to need Mexican workers. They had lobbied Congress in the past because of concerns of labor shortages. Growers had won an exemption for Mexicans to the 1917 Immigration Act's head tax fee by arguing a lack of workers threatened the U.S. war effort.²⁶⁵ When the war exemptions ended in 1921, agricultural stakeholders wanted the large labor pools that depressed wages to continue. But large numbers of Mexican workers were only desirable at certain times of the year. Investigations into the Imperial Valley described a circular migration pattern for Mexican families that mirrored other parts of the state. Between July and September in 1921, there was little work in the Valley, and many families left in search of wages elsewhere. Throughout California, growers described Mexicans as either "birds of passage" or "homing pigeons" who returned to

of California, (Sacramento, California State Printing Office, 1926), 115; "Imperial Valley Farmers Need Laborers" *Calexico Chronicle*, November 2, 1925. See also Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 37-38.

²⁶³ "Imperial Valley Farmers Need Laborers" *Calexico Chronicle*, November 2, 1925.

²⁶⁴ Bloch, Report on the Mexica Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley, 114-115.

²⁶⁵ Guerin González, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams*, 44.

Mexico during the slack seasons, and they did not burden local communities by relying on charity.²⁶⁶ But because places like Calexico and Mexicali were so interdependent, instead of returning to Mexico, many Mexicans moved into the interior of California.

Paul Taylor found only in August did growers in the Valley not have any form of work Mexicans did not dominate. The other eleven months of the year, Valley growers had at least one sector dominated by Mexicans actively working.²⁶⁷ State investigators discovered many Mexicans rarely returned to Calexico or the Valley because they found higher wages and better living and working conditions in cities like Los Angeles and California's inland counties. Agricultural stakeholders in the Valley needed a solution to keep workers in Calexico and the surrounding region when they needed them, not when they did not. To solve the "labor crisis" in 1925, farmers created an immigration enforcement crisis. Growers blamed U.S. immigration authorities who were deporting Mexicans and conducting raids for their inability to find workers.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Guerin González, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams*, 45-46. For a discussion of seasonal migration in the United States, see Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1800-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2003); Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of their Labor*.

²⁶⁷ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 34-35.

²⁶⁸ Bloch, "Report on the Mexican Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley," 115.

Mexicans were avoiding the Imperial Valley out of fear of arrest and deportation. U.S. immigration officials, beginning in the fall of 1925, began enforcing immigration laws more aggressively. The raids and deportations, argued growers, broke Mexican families' cycle of seasonal migration.²⁶⁹ Growers pointed to the lack of workers across the region as evidence of the cost of the deportation raids. C. B. Moore, eventual manager of the Associated Labor Bureau, claimed in October, November, and December 1925, growers did not harvest eighty percent of the Valley's cotton when they should have because there were not enough workers.²⁷⁰ Imperial Valley agricultural business owners claimed to lose millions of dollars because of the deportations.²⁷¹

Growers contested the deportation raids because of financial self-interest, but some also believed they were "taking care" of Mexican workers. Agricultural stakeholders held a paternalistic view of their relationships with the laborers. Many ranchers believed Mexicans were ignorant of U.S. laws and would be destitute

²⁶⁹ Bloch, "Report on the Mexica Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley," 115; "Imperial Valley Farmers Need Laborers," *Calexico Chronicle*, November 2, 1925.

²⁷⁰ Cramp et al., "Study of the Mexican Population in the Imperial Valley," 4.

²⁷¹ "Defiende a los Trabajadores Mexicanos la Cámara de Comercio de Calexico," *La Prensa* April 13, 1926. Conversely, once the plan had been approved, thirty-three thousand acres of cantaloupe were harvested worth an estimated \$20,000 at the time. See "Todos los Braceros del Valle Imperial Tendrán Trabajo," *La Prensa* April 30, 1926.

because of deportations.²⁷² Agricultural stakeholders, however, were not self-reflective. For one, the notion of Mexicans as ignorant of the law seemed to fall apart because growers had feared wage complaints to the California Labor Commission. Mexican laborers knew enough of U.S. laws to advocate for their wages.²⁷³ Similarly, while growers tried to present themselves as the caretakers of Mexican workers, they also opposed higher wages and tried to bring them down in 1925 and 1926 by having larger worker pools. If Mexicans earned more money working, they could live above subsistence, yet agricultural interests actively tried to keep them low by fabricating a labor crisis. For example, the agricultural interests of the San Joaquin Valley and even the larger growers of Calexico and the surrounding regions reported no labor shortage and argued it was because they paid higher wages than others.²⁷⁴

At the end of 1925, agricultural interests manufactured conditions to their benefits and set the stage for the 1926 Pass-Book Plan. Harry Hull, General Commissioner of Immigration, sent Chief Inspector Wixon to the region to investigate because of pressure from men like Harry Chandler, the *Los Angeles Times* publisher and a large landowner in the region.²⁷⁵ By February 1926, Wixon

²⁷² “Imperial Valley Farmers Need Laborers” *Calexico Chronicle* November 2, 1925.

²⁷³ See Appendix Two, 260.

²⁷⁴ Bloch, “Report on the Mexican Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley,” 123.

²⁷⁵ I.F Wixon to Harry Hall, January 22, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database. See also Harry Chandler to Hon. John W Davis, Secretary of Labor; Robe Carl White to

announced a solution that counteracted Inspector Jack's months-long raids and tried to assuage workers' fears. Chief Inspector Wixon proclaimed an end to deportations. After two months in the Imperial Valley, Wixon disclosed he had never wanted deportations to continue. He had been working toward the exact opposite goal and had finally succeeded. He announced his Pass-Book Plan that would permit all Mexican laborers in the Valley to remain. In his announcement, Wixon also warned Calexico growers. If they did not live up to all aspects of the agreement, deportations would resume.²⁷⁶ The Association also agreed to report any Mexican unwilling to register to immigration officers in Calexico.²⁷⁷ In the interim, U.S. immigration agents would only deport Mexicans who did not have the Pass-Book, had not registered with the Associated Labor Bureau, and had not made an initial payment toward the head tax fees. Wixon, with his Plan, solved the "labor crisis" and appeased local agricultural interests.

However, not everyone celebrated Wixon's announcement. Carlos Ariza, Mexican Consul in Calexico, expressed his opposition to the Pass-Book Plan; in doing so, he articulated exactly how the Plan sought to control the Mexican worker,

Harry Chandler May 6, 1926; D.L Ault to Harry Chandler, April 13, 1926, NARA Washington DC Case File 55301/217A Folder 001733-016-0001 Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

²⁷⁶ "Entry Plan Offered to Curb Abuse," *Los Angeles Times* February 12, 1926.

²⁷⁷ "Relief in Labor Shortage: Gentlemen's Agreement Offered Ranchers by Federal Agents for Retention of Mexican Help" *Los Angeles Times* February 3, 1926.

their mobility, and ultimately exploit them. Ariza feared the migratory patterns of Mexican families would mean they would move out of the country, forget their payments, and lose any money they had paid into the program.²⁷⁸ If the laborer left the region, they might lose their deposits since the Plan only applied to the Imperial Valley and did not extend into the interior of California. The Plan's payment system tied the Mexican laborer to the region. Immigration officials like Wixon wanted to stop Mexican workers from moving into the interior of California. Calexico officials' focus on stopping Mexican movement into the interior was in line with the larger mission of the Border Patrol. In 1930, Commissioner General of Immigration Harry Hull described the Border Patrol as a "scouting organization" that operated not only "on the line" but one hundred miles "back of the line."²⁷⁹

Consul Ariza realized the Pass-Book Plan restricted Mexican laborers' ability to move and choose their labor freely. The Associated Labor Bureau warned growers who did not want to participate in the Plan that immigration agents would conduct raids on their ranches.²⁸⁰ By doing so, the Associated Labor Bureau created a blacklist of places where Mexicans should not work. Mexican Consul Ariza believed the Bureau also coerced Mexicans to register with it and forced some U.S. citizens

²⁷⁸ Cramp et al. "Study of the Mexican Population in the Imperial Valley."

²⁷⁹ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 56.

²⁸⁰ To the Employers of Mexican Labor in the Imperial Valley. NARA Washington D.C. Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

who were not subject to deportation to pay the fees. Ariza pressed the Associated Labor Bureau about who exactly its representatives were registering and what steps they were taking to ensure they were not enrolling Mexicans who were citizens of the United States. Associated Labor Bureau employees like Genaro Gonzáles claimed the only thing that mattered was taking down names, handing out Pass-Books, taking deposits, or arranging payment at banks. They did not care if Mexicans had legally entered the United States, already paid the immigration head tax fees, or were citizens or residents. Consul Ariza believed the Bureau's actions violated U.S. law since many Mexicans were legally in the United States and not subject to deportation.²⁸¹

Gonzales' admission that fees and registering Mexicans was all that mattered to the Bureau was in line with regional practices. Throughout the 1920s, immigration officials and business owners' primary concern was collecting immigration fees in California and Baja California. In 1920, Baja California Sur's local government protested the contract labor importation project because contractors did not pay local fees; the Mexicali border agents likewise protested workers crossing into the United States on grounds they had not paid the Mexican immigration fees. The Associated Labor Bureau continued the practice of collecting fees as paramount. Like Nicholas Meza, Paulino Carpio, and Doroteo Ramírez, several Mexicans legally in the US

²⁸¹ Consul Carlos V. Ariza to C.B Moore March 20, 1926, in *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1925-1926* (California State Printing Office, Sacramento, 1926), 119.

claimed the Bureau registered and took their initial deposit toward the head tax fees, even though they were not subject to deportations. They appealed to Consul Ariza and successfully recouped their initial deposits.²⁸² Even when workers did not register, employers violated the law, paid their fees for them, and then withheld their wages. The Associated Bureau, for example, registered Ponciano Barrera and his wife Victoria de Barrera, and their Pass-Book showed both had paid the \$18 head tax and consular fees. But in reality, the Bureau had paid the fees in advance, and then growers deducted the fees from the couple's wages.²⁸³ The Barrera's were not an isolated incident. Growers had, in February 1926, when Wixon announced his Plan, agreed to pay the immigration fees of their "Mexican peons" so they would not "move away and [could] continue in their labor."²⁸⁴ In all, growers paid the head tax fees of approximately five thousand Mexicans.²⁸⁵

Mexicans' "voluntary" participation in the Pass-Book Plan was compulsory and meant to control their movement and working options. Consul Ariza understood the Plan's monetary aspects forced Mexicans to remain in the Valley or lose their

²⁸² Consul Carlos V. Ariza to C.B Moore March 20, 1926, in *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1925-1926*, 119.

²⁸³ Consul Carlos V. Ariza to C.B Moore March 20, 1926, in *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1925-1926*, 119.

²⁸⁴ "Evitose la Expulsión de Miles de Mexicanos en California," *La Prensa* February 24, 1926.

²⁸⁵ "Se Amenaza con Expulsar a Cerca de Ocho Mil Braceros Mexicanos que Están en California," *La Prensa*, Sept. 7, 1926.

deposits. Even when Mexicans did not agree to register with the Associated Labor Bureau, the organization registered them anyway and withheld their wages, or growers reported them to U.S. immigration officials for deportation. If Mexican men, women, and children worked for growers who were not participating in the Plan, they risked immigration raids. Paradoxically, the strategy and rhetoric Wixon used to urge the Plan's acceptance also re-inscribed unregistered Mexicans as criminals. Consul Ariza accused the Bureau office in Brawley of "making a spectacle" of Mexicans and lining workers up in the street like criminals while registering them.²⁸⁶ Mexican workers complained Brawley police officers, sheriffs, and employers threatened them with jail, firings, and deportations if they did not comply with the Bureau's Plan.²⁸⁷ The Plan lent itself to mark Mexicans who violated local customs and norms. It created a "delicate situation" where immigration officials and local police received anonymous tips about Mexican men, women, and children who did not have a Pass-Book. Local officials would immediately arrest the accused individual, then jail and deport them.²⁸⁸ Both immigration agents and Imperial Valley agricultural stakeholders used the threats of mobility and vagrancy to their advantage. They

²⁸⁶ Cramp et al., "Study of the Mexican Population in the Imperial Valley," 5.

²⁸⁷ Consul Ariza to CB Moore, March 20, 1926, in *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1925-1926*, 119.

²⁸⁸ "Hay que Cumplir con la Ley de Migración," *El Herald de México* Aug. 24, 1926.

described a roaming mass of destitute Mexican workers who would eventually “become inmates of our charitable and penal institutions” to their advantage.²⁸⁹

Chief Inspector Wixon explained Mexicans took advantage of the charitable goodwill of the people of California. He rejected the idea that Mexicans worked in the United States for a time and returned to Mexico when they had no work. Instead, Wixon thought Mexicans roamed from one ranch to another looking for work, eventually ending up in prison or charity wards. Wixon believed that Mexicans were a burden, and it was the duty of immigration officials to remove them.²⁹⁰ Robe Carl White, Assistant Secretary of Labor, echoed Wixon’s views of Mexican families. White reiterated the general opinion that Mexicans were crowding state prisons and filling up charity rolls across the United States. However, White was more forceful in his discussion of the role of immigration officials. He stated immigration agents could not leave the gates at the Calexico border “left wide open... merely because of local

²⁸⁹ I.F Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration, January 19, 1926. NARA Washington Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

²⁹⁰ Chief Inspector IF Wixon to Commissioner General of Immigration, January 19, 1926. NARA Washington DC Case File 55301/217A Folder 001733-016-0001 Accessed through HistoryVault Database. See also *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 6, 5883 for a discussion of Mexican and charities in California.

interests when infinitely larger interests are adversely affected.”²⁹¹ In Robe’s estimation, Mexican families threatened not only the well-being of Calexico but the entire state of California and the nation. When the Assistant Secretary of Labor defended the Pass-Book Plan to Congress in 1926, he argued immigration officials focused on deporting undesirable aliens “particularly criminals, public charges...”²⁹² By explaining the purpose of the Border Patrol, and its goal of deporting undesirables, White established the Plan and created the idea that Mexicans who registered through the Plan were “self-supporting, and law-abiding” migrants.²⁹³

Even state investigators like Louis Bloch, who argued Imperial Valley growers manufactured a labor shortage from 1925 to 1926, thought of Mexicans similar to Wixon and White. Bloch thought many Valley growers did not expect all Mexican families to stay in the region and work. Instead, Bloch believed what agricultural interests wanted was a plentiful supply at reasonable wages. But, if growers could keep all the Mexican workers in the region, they would create the problem of the dependent Mexican, who they would need to deport. Bloch argued problems of “dependency, disease, and crime... would be augmented to cause serious

²⁹¹ Robe Carl White to Harry Chandler May 6, 1926, NARA Washington DC Case File 55301/217A Folder 001733-016-0001 Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

²⁹² Carl Robe White to Congressman Cyrenus Cole, July 1, 1926, in *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 11, 12562.

²⁹³ Carl Robe White to Congressman Cyrenus Cole, July 1, 1926, in *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 11, 12562.

concern.”²⁹⁴ Agricultural stakeholders created a Mexican who either complied with their plans or were criminal threats that immigration officials needed to remove. Bloch echoed that sentiment. He stated Imperial Valley growers who favored the Pass-Book Plan and unrestricted immigration did not consider the consequences of large numbers of Mexican men, women, and children in the region. Bloch believed Mexican families were already a burden on the local charities who cared for them, and Mexican laborers filled many of the region’s jails.²⁹⁵

Grower machinations created a dependent Mexican who was a burden or a criminal. As early as 1923, the California Commission of Immigration and Housing discussed the Imperial Valley, the Mexican workers, and their living conditions. The Commission lamented the vicious practice of tenant farming and found many of the growers, who were often contractors and recruiters who hired Mexicans and enticed them to enter the United States, leased a ranch for one or two years and had little desire to spend money on worker housing accommodations. Alongside the absentee landowners like Harry Chandler, tenant farmers felt no responsibility for the abject

²⁹⁴ Louis Bloch, “Report on the Mexican Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley,” 123. See also “Medio Millón de Mexicanos Cruzaron la Frontera,” *La Prensa* April 2, 1926, for a Spanish-language newspaper discussion of his investigation and efforts to refute some of his claims.

²⁹⁵ Louis Bloch, “Report on the Mexican Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley,” April 2, 1926, *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California, 1925-1926*, 126.

living conditions of Mexican families.²⁹⁶ In December 1925, Sheriff Charles Gillett stated that twenty-five of the forty-seven Mexicans in jail were “floaters” who had been in the Imperial Valley less than six months. But Gillett believed the remaining twenty-two Mexicans had only claimed to be county residents to gain favor with judges.²⁹⁷ Even when Mexicans lived in the county, local officials like Gillett still thought of them as vagrants. By the fall of 1925, farmers, growers, and local authorities used the housing conditions of Mexicans, their general poverty, and dependency on work to cast them as burdens and roaming criminal masses who threatened the safety of decent, charitable people.

Proponents and opponents of the Pass-Book Plan used the language of criminality, dependency, and degeneracy of Mexican families to reach their respective goals. U.S. Congressman John C. Box was the loudest critic of the Plan and assailed it on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. Box argued Wixon’s Plan violated U.S. law, and neither Wixon, Commissioner General Hull, nor Secretary of Labor Davis could unilaterally change U.S. immigration law. Box thought the Plan was not a gentleman’s agreement but an “outlaw’s agreement.” While Box objected to Wixon’s Plan as a violation of U.S. law, he was an ardent opponent of Mexican immigration and believed Mexicans would always remain

²⁹⁶ *Ninth Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1923), 38-39.

²⁹⁷ Cramp et al, “Study of the Mexican Population in the Imperial Valley,” 12.

foreigners. He referred to Mexican workers as “pauper peons” and differentiated them from “respectable Mexicans.”²⁹⁸ Congressman Box described Mexican peons as “usually illiterate, and often criminal and diseased.”²⁹⁹ He also continued the trope of Mexicans as drains on U.S. society and charities. Box believed Mexicans and their children became much of the inmate population and negatively affected local communities’ health and created labor problems.³⁰⁰

Regional views of Mexicans extended into Mexico, where foreign-owned businesses used the narrative of Mexicans as criminal vagrants to achieve different goals. Corporations like the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC), one of the largest landholders in Baja California, bemoaned Mexican laws that required either Mexicans or Mexican companies to hold all land titles, forcing the company to create a shell corporation on the Mexican side of the boundary, a practice established in the 1880s. Much of the land companies like the CRLC owned had been Mexican or native people’s land. Since the 1880s, both groups had resisted attempts to displace them, and many held on to their legal land titles. By the 1920s, the CRLC described both groups as “squatters” who infringed on some of the best lands in the valley. The

²⁹⁸ *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 6, 5883.

²⁹⁹ *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 10, 10866.

³⁰⁰ *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 6, 5883. Newspaper articles from *Calexico Chronicle* and *La Prensa* usually discussed labor issues and the number of children, and their impact on regional schools. See *La Prensa* April 24, 1926.

company lamented the post-revolutionary spirit of the Mexican government that did not take steps to eject the Mexican and indigenous groups from the lands.³⁰¹ Not only were Mexicans criminal squatters, but they also were a squatter army who denied Americans the ability to exploit lands. During crop harvesting times when employers needed large numbers of Mexican workers, Mexicali became “the center... for a large floating population...”³⁰² American commercial stakeholders wanted to control Mexican families’ movement on both sides of the international line. When business owners could not control the mobility of families, on either side, stakeholders resorted to casting Mexican men, women, and children as squatters, social burdens, and criminals the Mexican and American governments had to remove. With the CLRC, Mexicans were amassing on the U.S. border. If local government officials, Mexican or American, did not properly police them, the company hinted they would soon invade the United States.

By 1926, Imperial Valley residents tied criminality to Mexican workers and called for immigration officials to safeguard the Imperial Valley. During his investigation, Wixon found eight of the ten workers unlawfully residing and working in the United States. But even for the two individuals who immigration agents had

³⁰¹ U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Mexican West Coast and Lower California: A Commercial and Industrial Survey* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 306-307.

³⁰² U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Mexican West Coast and Lower California*, 293.

legally admitted into the United States, Wixon believed they were immoral and criminal threats. The two men were living out of wedlock with women, one of whom had an illegitimate child. Wixon contrasted Mexicans' immorality and criminality with the Japanese who "have some respect for our law."³⁰³ The criminal Mexican burdened the charities of the Imperial Valley and required a heavier police presence, something Wixon, the growers, and landowners upheld as they argued in favor of the Pass-Book Plan. Mexicali, the CRLC believed, was the center of a floating army of Mexican workers "who held residents who lived at the edges of places like Brawley in terror."³⁰⁴ The Pass-Book Plan, Wixon and others argued, would protect residents, but in the meantime, they needed a larger police force to control the criminal Mexican.

The Pass-Book Plan provided a way for immigration officials to regulate Mexicans in the region through the Associated Labor Bureau. By July 1926, Wixon's Pass-Book Plan registered 6,500 Mexican men, women, and children and ensured the Imperial Valley's crop harvesting.³⁰⁵ Chief Inspector Wixon and the growers considered the Plan a resounding success. Wixon believed the Plan was a blueprint to

³⁰³ I.F. Wixon to Harry E Hull, January 13, 1926. NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762. Accessed through HistoryVault Database.

³⁰⁴ "El Problema de Migración Crea Serios Conflictos en California," *La Prensa* March 21, 1926.

³⁰⁵ Bloch, "Report on the Mexican Labor Situation in the Imperial Valley," 118.

solving “serious labor shortages... from San Joaquin Valley and other parts of the Southwest.”³⁰⁶ Once interested parties in the Imperial Valley showed the Pass-Book Plan worked, Wixon expected U.S. immigration officials and business interests would put the Plan in place throughout California.³⁰⁷ Agricultural interests like the San Joaquin Valley Growers Bureau, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and the Farm Bureau Federation of California all asked about the Plan. Throughout 1926, they argued in favor of it. Texas agricultural interests closely followed Wixon’s actions and the Pass-Book Plan in Calexico, hoping to replicate the state’s system.³⁰⁸ In California and Texas, interested parties used the same arguments Imperial Valley growers had. There was an acute labor shortage, and farmers desperately needed workers. Mexican families, agricultural stakeholders argued, were the best suited for the labor; they had the experience and the resilience to complete the work. Chambers of Commerce and growers in both Texas and California argued for the free movement of Mexicans across the US-Mexico border.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ “Relief in Labor Shortage,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1926

³⁰⁷ “Enter Protests in Move to Save Labor Troubles,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1926.

³⁰⁸ “Hay que Cumplir con la Ley de Migración,” *El Heraldo de México* August 32, 1926. Spanish-language newspapers covered the Pass-book Plan and comings and goings of Wixon in the Imperial Valley and when he visited other border towns with large agricultural workers. See *La Prensa* and *La Cronica del Valley*.

³⁰⁹ “Hay que Cumplir con la Ley de Migración,” *El Heraldo de México* August 32, 1926.

However, while some were in favor of the Plan and thought it provided a blueprint to create labor relations across the United States, others found it a threat. In March 1926, upon learning of the Plan, Box attacked it and described it as “doing violence to the laws” on the floor of the House.³¹⁰ By July 1926, Box again tried to end the program. Box believed if Congress allowed the Plan to continue, and immigration officials considered it a blueprint for the rest of the United States, it would undermine Congress’s ability to pass immigration laws since immigration officials could make side agreements. U.S. Congressman Cyrenus Cole of Iowa joined with Box and continued attacking the Plan and questioning its legality in July 1926. Cole wrote to Assistant Secretary White and demanded an explanation of the program. White’s response only fueled Box’s ire. Box attacked White as purposely misleading and noted how White had conveniently worded his response. Box ultimately exposed Chief Inspector Wixon, with the approval of Commissioner-General Harry Hull, as the chief architect of the Pass-Book Plan with whom the Imperial Valley growers were so pleased.

In August 1926, Secretary of Labor James J. Davis abruptly ended the Imperial Valley Pass-Book Plan. Davis ordered the District Director in Los Angeles, Walter E. Carr, to stop issuing new Pass-Books and confiscate all those officials had

³¹⁰ *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 6, 5878-5885. See also *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 10, 10865-10867; *Congressional Record* 69th Cong., 1st Session 1926, v. 67 pt. 11, 12812-12814.

already issued.³¹¹ Davis's decision threatened eight thousand Mexican men, women, and children with deportation. Imperial Valley business owners launched a campaign to convince Davis to change his mind. But August J. Mercier, President of the Brawley Chamber of Commerce, noted it would be very difficult for the Chamber, or anyone else, to do anything to make Davis and the Department of Labor reconsider.³¹² However, it seemed there was no concern that eight thousand Mexican men, women, and children had either voluntarily or involuntarily registered with the Plan and paid an initial deposit toward their head tax and consular fees. Consul Ariza's initial concern that families would lose their money and that the Plan's legality was questionable and could change proved prophetic. In effect, the Pass-Book Plan created a list of deportable subjects. When immigration officials asked Mexicans to present their Pass-Book and they did not have one, officials could deport laborers because they had not legally entered the United States. If they turned over their Pass-Books, workers would admit they were not in the United States legally, and U.S. immigration officials could deport them.

When Chief Inspector Wixon arrived in the Imperial Valley in January 1926, he was perplexed by what he saw as a contradiction. He wondered why "the people of Calexico should so strongly champion the cause" of Mexican people while also

³¹¹ "Take Troubles to Davis," *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1926.

³¹² "Se Amenaza con Expulsar a Cerca de Ocho Mil Braceros Mexicanos que Están en California," *La Prensa*, Sept. 7, 1926.

holding feelings “toward Mexicans as a whole [as] more or less hostile.”³¹³ But the Chief Inspector soon understood how the Imperial Valley residents held such competing feelings. On the one hand, residents might love Mexican workers, but maybe they also had qualified advocacy for other reasons.³¹⁴ The California Commission on Immigration and Housing suggested what one other reason might be. In 1927, the Commission noted crop acreage across California, but especially in the southern part of the state, had increased, and so had “the constant parade of Mexicans.”³¹⁵ California’s agricultural industry would always require Mexican workers. But because of their transitory nature, Mexicans would always require a watchful eye. The Commission argued Mexicans were used to a low standard of living and poverty. Mexicans’ poverty made them more susceptible to other evils. As criminal threats but indispensable workers, the Imperial Valley residents’ contradictory views of Mexicans solved itself. Mexicans were workers, so long as

³¹³ I.F. Wixon to Harry Hull, January 26, 1926, NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762.

³¹⁴ I.F. Wixon to Harry Hull, January 14, 1926, NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762.

³¹⁵ I.F. Wixon to Harry Hull, January 14, 1926, NARA Washington D.C. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Case File 55301/81 Folder 001733-015-0762.

growers and business owners needed them. Once employers no longer needed workers, Mexican workers became dependent, immoral criminal vagrants.

The transnational labor systems seemingly ended in 1928 with a series of labor strikes. But the system did not disappear entirely. An informal system continued and even expanded beyond agricultural workers. But it also continued the practice of criminalizing Mexicans who crossed into the United States, even when U.S. residents enticed them. For example, U.S. immigration officials arrested Carmen Reynaud for entering the United States without proper inspection. Reynaud worked as a cook in a Mexicali restaurant. Ramona Johnson, a resident of Wilmington, California, approached Reynaud about working for her as a servant in her home. When officials arrested Reynaud, she argued Johnson deceived her and made her abandon her work and cross into the United States to work as her servant. Johnson convinced Reynaud that reporting to the immigration station for inspection was unnecessary. Instead, as a citizen of the United States, Reynaud would take care of all the arrangements and ensure immigration officials legally admitted Reynaud into the country.³¹⁶ Johnson's actions were not an aberration or a coincidence. Throughout the 1920s, California residents, particularly in the Imperial Valley, considered Mexicans a pliable and easily accessible labor pool. Johnson hired Reynaud to work as a servant and perhaps thought she could ensure Reynaud's legal entry. But Johnson premised her labor arrangement on Reynaud working *for* her. Reynaud's labor, just like agricultural

³¹⁶ Consul Edmundo Aragón to Franklin Davis, SRE-GE 10-1-46.

workers, was tied to a specific individual. Reynaud was not free to choose her labor once in the United States.

Imperial Valley residents' discussion of Mexicans, the border, and their attempts to create "one big community" between Calexico and Mexicali hid the very manufactured conditions that led to Mexicans crossing the border. It was not mere happenstance. Throughout the 1920s, as the agricultural industries the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys flourished, employers grew dependent on Mexican agricultural workers. A cross-border labor coordination project between American and Mexican interests in the region began. Government and local business interests began a concerted effort to import large numbers of Mexican families into the region from places like Baja California Sur and the interior of Mexico to satisfy the region's desire for large tractable labor pools. The characteristics of transnational labor organizing systems were based on organizing and constraining labor for the benefit of commercial interests and denying workers of economic claims and mobility rights—which were also techniques of control and border enforcement. When Mexican laborers transgressed these techniques of control by attempting to seek better working conditions outside of the region or making rights claims based on their free labor, they became deportable illegal aliens or were cast as vagrant threats. But Mexican workers did not meekly accept their conditions. They forced the end of a contract labor system in 1928, and while the Great Depression and subsequent deportation drives of the 1930s further threatened Mexicans with expulsion, workers did not

readily accommodate nativists' demands. Rather, they continued to assert a labor identity premised on their free movement.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Death and Rebirth of Free Labor, 1928-1937

“Do you want to end the abuses committed...without scruples and ensure your work is better rewarded?”
-J.M. Garza

Macrina Lerma Álvarez arrived in the Mexicali Valley as a five-year-old in 1915. Her family, originally from Santa Rosalia, Baja California Sur, came to the Northern District to work as contract laborers in the Mexicali cotton fields. Like many contract laborers at that time, the Álvarez family crossed seasonally into the United States for higher paid work seasonally and returned to work in Mexicali's local agriculture. Over the next decade, the family continued this pattern of labor at the California-Baja California borderlands. By the 1920s, though, Macrina Álvarez grew tired of working seasonally and longed to toil her own land.³¹⁷ She settled in northern Baja California, in 1929 with great expectations. Now married and pregnant, Álvarez pressed her husband to buy land from another migrant farmworker in the Mexicali Valley in exchange for the family car. But even after achieving her dream of owning land, Álvarez and her family did not prosper. They could not grow any crops

³¹⁷ Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, 65.

or even raise chickens. Álvarez described it “as days of total poverty” where “so much hunger forced us to organize.” She and her husband joined a local union, *Rojo y Negro* (Red and Black), and met in secret to discuss local worker and land issues. In one such meeting, Álvarez reflected, “how is it possible that we as Mexicans do not have the right to a piece of land, that is unjust.” Union members recognized that even families like the Álvarez, who did own land, faced obstacles from foreign-owned companies like the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC), who denied small-landowners access to water and resources. With the support of local government officials like Governor José María Tapia, the Company tried to force families to work on its land, either as farm workers or through land leases.³¹⁸

The Álvarez family’s experiences were like that of many cross-border migrant workers at the California-Baja California borderlands. On both sides of the border, workers negotiated their mobility and decisions of where to work based on wages, favorable work conditions, and the ability to support their families. Workers based their negotiations on their ideals of what work was, what was acceptable, and what was moral. The actions of companies like the CRLC, supported by local government officials, revealed the employer mechanisms of labor discipline meant to ensure a labor supply and thwart any attempt by Mexican landowning workers to make their lands productively. Companies tried to ensure a pliable workforce by pressuring

³¹⁸ Macrina Lerma Álvarez, “Por el Esclavo y el Burgués, a Prison,” in Garduño, *Voces y Ecos de un Desierto Fértil*, 109-116.

laborers off their land and into the labor market. They refused small landholders access to water and restricted access to land and other resources to force families like the Álvarez's into working for them. Similarly, on the US side of borderlands, employers used charges of vagrancy, and other laws that criminalized behavior, to threaten workers with deportation and ensure their obedience. US and Mexican employers did not allow mobile workers to engage in free labor, to move and work where they choose for wages they deemed acceptable. Instead, growers marked migrant workers as vagrants and immoral.

At the heart of interactions between migrant laborers like Macrina Álvarez and employers was the meaning of work. From the vantage of laborers such as Álvarez, the meaning of work hinged on moral understandings of the market economy, which was robust enough to support a worker's family and recognized laborers' contributions as important in building local society state-making as more than the commodities workers' labor produced. The meaning of labor at the California-Baja California borderlands obscured the differences between all forms of labor, including agricultural and sex work. Rather than guided by morality tied to middle-class religiosity and chastity, workers defined labor as rightful and moral on the foundation of providing subsistence for family survival. For workers such as Álvarez, the

meaning of labor minimized morality and immorality relative to the need to meet the needs of everyday subsistence.³¹⁹

Workers asserted labor, rightful, legitimate work, was a moral livelihood. They chose to assert rights-based claims to live dignified lives and tied to familial survival and became how they defined honor and morality. Since the nineteenth-century Mexican society had constructed a worker, often a male laborer, as someone who provided for their family and marked those who did not as immoral.³²⁰ In northern Baja California, workers' ability to feed their families hinged on their mobility and ability to cross borders. Agricultural and sexual workers in northern Baja California also consistently made claims on the Mexican state to demand redress even when they were in the United States. To be a moral worker in northern Baja

³¹⁹ Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Working Women, Entrepreneurs, and the Mexican Revolution*. Fowler-Salamini, argued factory work in Veracruz, became synonymous with prostitution and that economic necessity forced women out of the home and lived on the fringes of society where they slipped in and out of casual prostitution as a survival strategy. See also French, *A Peaceful and Working People*; Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*; Blum, *Domestic Economies*, Bliss, *Compromised Positions*. For a discussion of women's place in Mexican political discourse, see Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Katherine E. Bliss and Ann S Blum, "Dangerous Driving: Adolescence, Sex, and the Gendered Experience of Public Space in Early- Twentieth-Century Mexico City" in *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Latin America since Independence* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

³²⁰ Timo Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia*.

California, meant providing for a family, free to move across borders, and claim rights. When agricultural and sex workers appealed to the government and society, they gave birth to a worker-based conception of labor on moral grounds of livelihood and freedom. Workers knew employers and government officials often exploited them for their labor, but the Mexican working-class did not mark laborers as immoral dependents as in the United States.³²¹ Instead, Mexican working-class society tied worker morality to a relationship with the state, like taxes, regulation, or rights. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, laborers rejected the discourse of labor that had dominated the California- Baja California borderlands for decades, one that favored employers and cast them as pioneers conquering an inhospitable environment and erased the critical role workers had played in the region's development.³²²

³²¹ In antebellum America, society was concerned with slavery and described wage labor as slave labor. Interestingly, Gunther Peck has argued white slavery shifted away from labor to sexual commerce. See Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*; David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Gunther Peck, "Feminizing White Slavery in the United States: Marcus Braun and the Transnational Traffic in White Bodies, 1890-1910," in *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* ed. Leon Fink (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³²² Andres, *Power, and Control in the Imperial Valley*, Chapter One; see Charles Robinson Rockwood, *Born of the Desert* (Calexico, CA: Calexico Chronicle, 1930); Address of Hon. A.H. Herbert, President of the California Development Company, to the Settlers of Imperial Valley in support of the water and Property Rights Owned by the Company on the Colorado River, Imperial, California, July 25, 1904. (Los Angeles: Southern California Printing Co.)

Workers were fundamental to the economic development of the borderlands. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, laborers increasingly understood how to achieve their moral livelihood and subsistence goals. Workers at the borderlands who crossed between the United States and Mexico to find a moral livelihood increasingly turned to the contract to claim rights and livelihood when employers denied their moral livelihood in both nations. As workers crossed from Mexico into the United States, they carried their understanding of labor with them.³²³ Mexican laborers encountered an American conception of free labor, which gave priority to the contract and wages. Migrant Mexican agricultural workers in the United States—it excluded sex workers from any claims to rights—used the language of wages and contracts to claim moral livelihood. Workers expressed morality differently depending on what side of the international boundary they were on. The contract became a way to understand both American and Mexican issues. Mexicans living in Mexico like Macrina Álvarez often voiced their demands for land using the postrevolutionary nationalist language and decried the prevalence of foreign-owned companies that dominated so much of northern Baja California. But on the American side of the borderlands, worker morality hinged on wages and contracts. While the primary issues might differ, in

³²³ Eileen Boris and Noah Zatz have argued that laborers are constructed categories incorporating a series of cultural and historically specific assumptions in the United States work and laborers. In the United States, a worker meant to belong and become entitled to social citizenship. See Noah D. Zatz and Eileen Boris, “Seeing Work, Envisioning Citizenship,” *UCLA: Institute for Research on Labor and Employment*.

both Mexico and the United States, workers often worked as organized units across borders and pressed their sense of worker morality by insisting on contracts. But the underlying issues for workers in both Mexico and the United States were similar. Laborers advocated for moral livelihood, supporting their families, moving freely across national borders, and engaging in labor free of coercion and demand rights.

Workers' discourses of labor and morality worked alongside business interests and local laws and regulations in Mexico and the United States that were rigid and based in arbitrary binaries that attacked workers as immoral dangers that were threats to local communities. As William French argued, middle-class societies in northern Mexican regions like Chihuahua saw a new dangerous class composed of beggars, drifters, and workers marked by their idleness and rejection of traditional authority emerge. Middle-class *chihuahuenses* drew boundaries of respectability to differentiate between themselves and the emerging floating population.³²⁴ For Middle-class women in Mexico, the prostitute was the symbolic representation of the links between morality, work, and the discourse of women's place within the home.³²⁵

³²⁴ French, *A Peaceful and Working People*, 65-66.

³²⁵ French, *A Peaceful and Working People*, 87-107; for a discussion of women's roles in shaping Mexican middle-class identity, see Susie Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker: Middle-Class Identity and Female Consciousness in Mexico, 1890-1950* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); for a discussion of women workers in Mexico see also Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*.

Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, workers in the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys fought for the right to work and live honorably as they chose, and not as employers and government officials believed they should. In places like Chihuahua, Mexico, elites and the northern middle-class have used morality to discipline workers since the *Porfiriato*. The coming of the railroad in Chihuahua mirrored some of the same consequences that economic and agricultural developments in northern Baja California faced decades later. In both cases, subsistence, the need to earn a livelihood, was central in worker decisions about morality.³²⁶ This chapter builds on the historiography of work and morality to argue that workers made claims based on the need to feed their families, the right to dignity and respect while employers and local government officials rejected their demands and tried to cast laborers as immoral threats, provides a bridge to understand both agricultural and sexual commerce workers as a more holistic category of “worker” in the region. Morality was a key component of the assumptions about work at the California- Baja California borderlands.³²⁷ Employers and government officials weaponized morality to delegitimize workers and their claims, while workers made their claims to

³²⁶ French, *A Peaceful and Working People*, 67; Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker*, 189-190; Fowler-Salamini, *Working Women, Entrepreneurs, and the Mexican Revolution*, 207; Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, 175.

³²⁷ However, recent studies of the region have described the region as either a racialized hierarchy or a multicultural society. See Benny Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 8; Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, 3.

livelihood by appealing to a greater sense of morality both in the United States and Mexico.

A key strategy for workers to make their claims to livelihood was their mobility. Worker cross-border movement was a key aspect of the borderlands culture of work and one of the major challenges to employer systems of labor exploitation who moralized movement as dangerous. Laborers used mobility strategically to negotiate their moral livelihood. A 1922 transnational strike in the region would be one of the first examples of the clash between workers, organizing across borders, and employers who suppressed labor actions through criminalized morality.³²⁸ In May 1922, J.M. Garza, Joe Molino, and others organized a transnational labor union in the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys to mount a binational strike against cotton and melon growers. They demanded higher wages for workers and recognition for their contributions in helping to develop the Imperial Valley. *La Unión Mexicana de Trabajadores del Valle Imperial* (The Mexican Union of Imperial Valley Workers) members first struck in the cotton fields of Mexicali, Baja California, and in a tactical decision meant to pressure the region's growers, in the melon fields of El Centro and Brawley, California. In an open letter to workers, Garza argued Mexican workers

³²⁸ Benny Andres discussed the strike and described it as a model for future labor suppression tactics, while Paul Taylor described it as “a small union...formed in Brawley during the cantaloupe season. It was temporary and did not survive the season.” Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*; Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 53.

were the ones who most contributed to the agricultural development in the region, yet “they had always been given wages that did not repay them for their efforts.” He advised all those who might consider coming to the Imperial Valley not to let labor recruiters seduce them with promises. Garza believed labor contractors had tricked many workers into “enthusiastically abandoning” their work, homes, and families to labor in the cantaloupe fields of the Imperial Valley.³²⁹ But instead of earning high wages that would benefit their families, workers realized all too late that the cantaloupe fields were only beneficial to the growers. Garza and Molino’s efforts to address labor inequalities quickly resonated with workers. Within two weeks of its formation, *La Unión Mexicana de Trabajadores del Valle Imperial* claimed almost two thousand members across the California-Baja California borderlands.³³⁰

³²⁹ An example of the recruiter promises can be seen in the May 26, 1922 issue of *El Heraldo de Mexico* ad titled “El Mejor Tiempo Para Hacer Dinero” placed by the Industrial Association of Imperial Valley asking for over 2,000 men because there were “currently few workers.” See figure three, 201.

³³⁰ “1978 Trabajadores Mexicanos se Unen en el Valle Imperial, Para Defenderse,” *El Heraldo de México*, May 27, 1922. In the Imperial Valley, workers struck against the melon growers who were primarily Japanese. Historian Benny Andres argued this was a tactical decision based on US racial hierarchies and worker calculations that US society might not react to the strike as forcefully. Interestingly, in Mexicali, in the months before the strike Japanese, and Chinese, Companies had recently acquired large amounts of land to develop. See “Chinese and Japanese to Develop a New Acreage on Mexicali’s Outskirts,” *Calxico Chronicle*, January 28, 1922; Genaro Castro a Señor Gral. Alvaro Obregon, April 23, 1922. Archivo General de la Nación

**EL MEJOR TIEMPO
PARA HACER DINERO**

La temporada para la
PIZCA DE MELONES
comienza ahora

Venga a BRAWLEY. Valle Imperial

3,000 acres de melones se echarán
a perder a menos que consigamos
= 2,000 HOMBRES MAS =

ACTUALMENTE
HAY MUY POCOS TRABAJADORES

VENGA A GANAR DINERO
La mejor cosecha en muchos años

INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION,
SOCIEDAD MUTUALISTA
(Miembros Mercantiles)
DE
IMPERIAL VALLEY, CAL.

3 Contract Laborer Recruitment Advertisement, *El Herald de Mexico* May 26, 1922.

As a sign of things to come, growers and local government officials across California and Baja California moved quickly to suppress the emerging union activity through morality and their perceptions of work culture. They discredited the organizing efforts by accusing the strikers of holding communist sympathies and threatening to arrest the unionists for morality crimes. Growers accused the Mexican

(AGN), Administración Pública, Fondo Departamento de Trabajo, Caja 456, Exp. 11; Andres, *Power, and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 131-133.

strikers of threatening American workers with violence to demand higher wages.³³¹ The Chief of Police of Calexico, T.J. Worthington, and El Centro's Chief of Police, Dave Matlock, worked together to stamp out the radicals by embracing an attitude of "Work or Jug." Worthington and Matlock gave workers a choice, either work or go to jail. They targeted "loafers, vags, and all classes of undesirables in both cities."³³² After police arrested the "undesirables," workers faced a justice system skewed against them. Local court Judge Markey told one striking worker arrested for public intoxication that officials would use any excuse they could find to arrest, jail, and sentence labor agitators.³³³ Employer and police action like those of Chiefs Worthington and Matlock that targeted immoral behavior provided a model for future labor suppression tactics that portrayed any worker who challenged grower authorities as dangerous, immoral threats and worked in tandem with northern Baja California's policing tactics across the international boundary.

Few government officials in Mexicali or northern Baja California acknowledged conditions for laborers in Mexico were just as bad as they were in California. In January 1922, residents of northern Baja California expressed concern with the labor conditions, while local government officials presented a difficult but improving situation. By March, the Mexican consul in Calexico described the

³³¹ "Gun Play Used to Intimidate in Cant Field," *Calexico Chronicle* June 7, 1922

³³² "Work or Jug," *Calexico Chronicle* June 24, 1922.

³³³ "I.W.W. Keep Out Sign Put up in Chain Gang Term," *Calexico Chronicle*, December 1, 1922.

improvements workers were enjoying.³³⁴ Because local officials had for months described an improving situation, their reactions to a strike were hardly surprising. In May, Mexicali growers and government officials went to great lengths to quell the unrest and cooperated with US officials to suppress the strike. While California officials arrested agitators, Mexicali's growers had soldiers guarding the incoming laborers they recruited into the region to keep union members away from potentially gaining more support. Officials in Mexicali also enforced martial law, and when workers crossed into the US to escape, local police promptly arrested them.³³⁵ The two-pronged attacks on the union succeeded. In Mexicali, after a month of picketing, soldiers effectively ended the strike.³³⁶ Owners had refused to increase wages and successfully defeated *La Union Mexicana* on both sides of the international boundary. The region would not have another strike for six years.

³³⁴ Genaro Castro al Señor Gral. Alvaro Obrego, April 23, 1922; A los Señores Genaro Castro y L. González, AGN, Fondo Departamento de Trabajo, Caja 456, Exp. 11; J. Poulat al C. Jefe del Departamento de Trabajo, March 25 1922, AGN, Fondo Departamento de Trabajo, Caja 496, Exp. 12. In January 1922, the Mexican consul in Calexico had discussed the difficulties in the region and many of the conditions he described were similar to the union complaints. See Al Jefe del Dept. de Trabajo, Jan. 20, 1922, AGN, Fondo Dept. de Trabajo, Caja 496, Exp. 12.

³³⁵ "Thousands of Laborers Strike Below Line,: 'Red' Plot Alleged for Valley," *Calexico Chronicle*, May 25, 1922.

³³⁶ Andres, *Power, and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 132.

But the 1922 strike established the battlegrounds for later labor actions in the region. Workers like Garza and Molino challenged a labor system that exploited laborers and did not pay them enough to support themselves or their families. They decried the familial abandonment and the diminishment of Mexican contributions to the region's economic development. Garza and Molino appealed to workers and made their demands to employers in moral terms. Growers and government officials, similarly, attacked workers on moral grounds. Chiefs Worthington and Matlock's officers arrested loafers, vagrants, and undesirables, but the Chiefs' proclamation of "work or jail" made clear any person who did not work, under conditions set by growers, was an undesirable loafer and vagrant.

Interestingly, in the two years before the transnational strike, Mexican President Obregon's moralizing campaign had closed all the casinos and vice industries in the region. By February 1922, the local government only allowed two casinos in the region to operate: an American-owned casino in Tijuana and a Chinese-owned casino in Mexicali. Governor Epigmenio Ibarra Jr. allowed the Monte Carlo casino in Tijuana because it was the town's main economic engine. Ibarra also allowed the Chinese casino, known as the "Little Owl," to open after the owners had agreed to pay ten thousand pesos in monthly taxes to the federal government. But the closing of vice industries decimated local municipal revenues that depended on the

taxes.³³⁷ During the first half of 1922, the federal government continued to deny all requests to allow vice. Casinos in Mexicali would not open until June 1922, after the transnational strike had begun. Unfortunately for vice workers, in June, the Owl Casino in Mexicali burned down in a suspicious fire and left upwards of sixty women homeless.³³⁸ By then, Mexico's federal and local governments slowly allowed more casinos to reopen, and their posture towards vice shifted to one of ambiguity for the rest of the decade.³³⁹

Historians have argued the Mexican federal government had realized the error in closing the vice industries and allowed the local governor to decide what to open due to "pragmatic reasons."³⁴⁰ However, Governor José Inocente Lugo—Ibarra had returned to Mexico City in January 1922—was a key player who suppressed the 1922 strike. He realized one way to appease workers was to reopen the vice industries and provide laborers one avenue to earn their livelihood while denying another.

The pattern of labor strikes coinciding with the closing of vice industries in the region would continue throughout the decade and into the 1930s and proved particularly significant for female sexual commerce workers. Unlike their male counterparts, who found some success striking in Mexico, the Mexican government

³³⁷ Gómez Estrada, *Gobiernos y Casinos*, 70-80. See also "Little Owl Refuses Make Tax Payment," *Calexico Chronicle*, January 14, 1922.

³³⁸ "Owl Resort Burns; Loss \$250,000," *Calexico Chronicle* June 28, 1922.

³³⁹ Gómez Estrada, *Gobiernos y Casinos*, 77.

³⁴⁰ Gómez Estrada, *Gobiernos y Casinos*, 78.

excluded women from land redistribution programs and denied single migrant women access to resources and subsidies.³⁴¹ While the Mexican government endeavored to help male citizens earn a subsistence-level living, it abandoned Mexican women and left them susceptible to poverty. Unable to earn a living, some women fell into temporary prostitution. Throughout Mexico, poor and working-class women developed economic strategies that ensured their individual and family survival. When labor was in short supply, like it often was in northern Baja California, women turned to other options, among them prostitution and other vice-related industries. Since Mexicali's founding in the early twentieth century, prostitution, and other vice industries, were a large part of the local economy. Yet, Mexican and American societies and governments excluded women who engaged in sexual commerce as workers because of their "immoral," and criminal work. Mexican women workers experienced the dual impacts of being the invisible agricultural worker and the immoral sexual laborer while struggling to feed their families.

As women workers struggled to earn their family subsistence, the borderlands enjoyed relative stability following the transnational strike in 1922. Imperial Valley growers in the subsequent years would more forcefully and successfully establish the trope of the dangerous Mexican "vagrant" who roamed from town to town exploiting the goodwill of charitable organizations or filling jails cells. Between 1924 and 1927, Mexican workers organized and advocated for fair labor conditions and wages in

³⁴¹ Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, 64.

northern Baja California, but employers in the Imperial Valley successfully cast migrant workers as vagrants. Employer efforts culminated in the 1926 Pass-Book Plan, a system that made the Imperial Valley growers de facto US immigration agents in charge of legalizing unauthorized workers in the region through a payment system or face deportation and was the crowning victory of a transnational labor system that exploited, control, and managed migrant mobilities in the region. In Mexicali, workers continued to demand land. One labor organizer, Filiberto Crespo, stated Mexicans were tired of feeling like foreigners in their lands. By 1927, the local Mexicali government identified eleven unions in the region that regularly met on Sundays to discuss working conditions, higher wages, and housing. The local unions played an important role in the negotiation between workers and employers. They also petitioned the Mexican government for the rights to communal farmlands.³⁴²

The region's relative peace ended in 1928. Borderlands workers agitated again to address their exploitation and demanded their rights under the law. In January 1928, registered sex workers in Mexicali complained about the municipal government's decision to charge them a weekly medical inspection fee of \$9.10 (pesos). They believed the fee to be "arbitrary and onerous" and argued Mexican law was on their side. The workers wrote to the federal public health official and argued the local *Reglamento para la ejerció de la prostitución* (Regulations for Prostitution)

³⁴² Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, 64.

established sex work was to be exempt from fees.³⁴³ Workers “respectfully protested” to the public health officials, “energetically against the threatening action, in no way can our wages allow us to support.”³⁴⁴ Many of the sex workers who opposed the new fees had recently arrived in Mexicali from Mexico City and other regions of Mexico and used their knowledge of Mexican laws to their advantage. The laborers declared no other municipal authorities charged sex workers with a medical registration like Mexicali’s town council was trying to do. Even other towns in northern Baja California like Ensenada and Tijuana did not charge sex workers any fees and the Mexicali sex workers believed an “individual payment... was unjustified.” They

³⁴³ Article 152 del Código Sanitario stated “Queda prohibido el imponer o cobrar impuesto o contribución algunos de carácter personal, a las mujeres que hagan del comercio sexual una profesión o medio de vida dentro de las prescripciones del reglamento...” (“It is prohibited to impose or collect taxes or contributions of a personal nature, to women who make the sex trade a profession or way of life within the prescriptions of the regulation ...”) Author translation. Cited in Al C Secretario de Gobernación February 18, 1928 Archivo IIH, Dirección General del Gobierno, 11.53.

³⁴⁴ “Recurrimos a usted protestanto respetuosa pero enérgicamente contra medida tan atentatoria que de ninguna manera nuestros ingresos nos permitirán soportar.” (“We appeal to you to protest respectfully but energetically against a measure so threatening that in no way our income will allow us to bear.”) Author translation. IIH, Dirección General del Gobierno, 11.53. January 6, 1928.

pleaded with the public health authorities to “protect and help us against” the town council.³⁴⁵

Since 1909, Mexicali’s society had debated the role of sex workers and vice in the region. Men like Rodolfo Gallego and his supporters wrote to then-President Porfirio Díaz decrying Mexicali’s depravity, while groups of merchants and residents argued Mexicali’s limited economic opportunities left people with little option but to rely on vice for their livelihoods. Throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s, prostitution in Mexicali existed both as an immoral act but a rightful form of labor, so long as prostitutes registered with the local municipal government, that also contributed to the local economy as tax revenues. In 1928, when registered sex workers felt the town council and brothel-owners were exploiting them, they were within their rights to demand redress under Mexican law. They knew that by registering and complying with the law, they had rights. Sex workers understood it was the federal government’s responsibility to protect them from exploitation. If public health officials did not end the new fees, they would further reduce workers’ meager wages.

Mexicali’s local municipal council defended its decision to charge the fees. In response to Enrique Osorio, a Public Health official in Mexico City, the town council

³⁴⁵ Al C. Delegado Sanitario, Mexicali Baja California, January 6, 1928. IIH Fondo Dirección General de Gobierno, 11.53. See also Arturo Fierros Hernández, *Historia de la Salud Pública en el Distrito Norte de la Baja California 1888-1923* (Tijuana, Mx: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 2014).

claimed, “no fees are being made or will be made to the women,” instead it cleverly distinguished that it was charging brothel owners the fees which were allowed under Mexican law and the regulations that governed sex work. The council further argued that it was unjust that the local treasury funded the hospital where daily there were eight to ten women who were “cared for and fed during their illness.”³⁴⁶ The local council continued. If Mexico City’s public health officials—who the municipality noted did not help fund the hospital and only dictated terms that hurt the hospital’s ability to operate—did not allow them to collect the fees, the council would find other ways to secure funds. The local hospital would demand a five-pesos “guarantee” per day from sex workers who received medical attention. If sex workers did not guarantee the amount, the hospital would turn them away. The hospital was a public charity, funded by the local treasury funds, and it was “unjust and logical to indemnify it against the costs of those who receive treatment, as it happens with prisoners...”³⁴⁷ The town council equated legal sex workers to criminals, a

³⁴⁶ Al Secretario de Gobernación del Secretario Dral. De Gobierno E. Del D. January 20, 1928, IIH Fondo Dirección General de Gobierno, Folder 11.53

³⁴⁷ Al C Jefe del Departamento de Salubridad Publica del Delegado Sanitario, 20 January, 1928. Mediante una garantía que asegure el pago de la hospitalidad y atenciones médicas que reciben en el citado Hospital, a razón de cinco pesos diarios cada una- Se ha tomado esta determinación en virtud de que siendo el Hospital Municipal una institución de beneficencia pública, sostenida por el Municipio...es lógico y justo que le indemnice en los gastos que se hagan por cuenta ajena, como sucede con la manutención de presos que no están a disposición de esta Presidencia y

longstanding practice in the region. The council delegitimized workers' claims, but it also tried to portray laborers as drains on society that threatened the public good.

In response, public health officials stated that while the local municipal council was following the letter of the law and had the receipts showing brothel owners paid the fees, it was not following the spirit of the regulations. Federal officials believed that while owners might be the ones to pay the government fees, they charged sex workers for them. Workers understood that brothel owners charge them for the new fees, so they wrote to federal officials. Workers objected to brothel owners and the town council system of fees that reduced their wages. It might be true that sex workers needed regular treatment at the local hospital, but Mexican law required brothel owners, their employers, to pay the medical registration fees, not them.

Brothel owners' exploitation of sex workers was not unlike the tactics agricultural growers and supporters of the region's contract labor system used.

son reducidos a la Cárcel Municipal.” (“By means of a guarantee ensuring the payment of hospitality and medical attention they receive at the aforementioned Hospital, at a rate of five pesos a day each - This determination has been made by virtue of the fact that the Municipal Hospital being a public charity institution, supported by the Municipality ... it is logical and fair to compensate you for expenses incurred by someone else, as happens with the maintenance of prisoners who are not at the disposal of this Presidency and are reduced to the Municipal Jail.”)

Throughout the 1920s, Mexican and American interests had developed a transnational labor system that imported Mexicans into the region for work. Employers used labor contractors to hire and pay workers, but often the contractor did not pay laborers or withheld their wages until the end of the picking season to ensure laborers did not leave to work elsewhere, effectively reducing worker wages. When workers tried to seek redress, growers denied any responsibility since they had not hired the workers. Instead, they hired contractors who found and paid workers directly. Agricultural workers, just like sex workers, attacked the system of exploitation while legal abused them. In 1928, agricultural workers launched another strike in the Imperial Valley that eventually targeted the region's transnational contract labor system.

In April 1928, upwards of three thousand workers refused to sign a new labor contract with employers.³⁴⁸ Workers formed a new union, The Union of United Workers of the Imperial Valley, and approached the Chamber of Commerce to ask for a raise in the cantaloupe fields, ice for their drinking water, and free picking sacks. The Chamber refused the union, who then tried to appeal directly to Valley growers.³⁴⁹ Workers did not make demands of growers. Instead, they tried to appeal

³⁴⁸ "Los Mexicanos del Valle Imperial van a Huelga," *El Heraldo de Mexico* May 8, 1928. Charles Wollenberg placed union membership by the time of the strike at 2,754. Charles Wollenberg, "Huelga, 1928 Style: The Imperial Valley Cantaloupe Workers' Strike," *Pacific Historical Review* vol. 38, no. 1 (Feb 1969), 49.

³⁴⁹ Gilbert González, *Mexican Consul and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 167.

to employers' senses of morality and paternalism. Laborers asked employers for their "valuable help" in reaching a new labor agreement and discussed the "bad occasions" they lived through in the past. Workers also wanted to dissuade growers' concerns of communism and radicalism by assuring them laborers wanted to "keep on cooperating with our hand of labor." Workers only wanted "more liberal wages, enough to cover our...necessities." The union described the current pay rates as not enough "to meet our expenses of alimentation, clothing, house rent...and other small exigents." Union members linked their deplorable wages to their living conditions and sense of morality. They described their current situation as a "most unhonorable and miserable" way of living. Union members appealed to employers' morality, respectfully stating their demands were "reasonable according to the justice of the companies...and we ask of your valuable moral and material influence..."³⁵⁰

However, workers' appeals to employers' sense of morality fell on deaf ears. Some growers acknowledged the need for higher wages but had already signed labor agreements and insisted workers honor them. When cantaloupe workers refused to work under existing labor conditions, threatening the ripening crops, employers turned to local police to force laborers into the fields. The Imperial County Board of Supervisors ordered Sheriff Charles Gillett to have officers present at all worker meetings and arrest any agitators. Gillett quickly complied. By May 10, his officers

³⁵⁰ *Mexicans in California Report of Governor CC Young's Fact-Finding Committee* (San Francisco, CA: State Printing Office, 1930), 138.

had arrested forty-eight Mexican workers, thirty-seven of them on charges of vagrancy and disturbing the peace.³⁵¹ Gillett also issued a familiar threat of deportation. He declared anyone agitating or unsatisfied “with the conditions... might better return to Mexico.” He further warned that if Mexicans continued to cause trouble, “a general deportation movement of all Mexican laborers in the Imperial Valley would begin.”³⁵²

Most egregious was Gillett’s treatment of Francisca Rodriguez, owner of the Martinez Pool Hall in Westmoreland, California, where Mexican workers congregated. The sheriff targeted pool halls because he believed during labor unrest, workers would use them as meeting halls where “fiery and gesticulating orators might agitate.”³⁵³ He also forbade picketing, speeches, or circulating union literature and declared it unlawful for “foreigners” to gather on the street or public spaces.³⁵⁴ On May 10 Gillett visited the Martinez Pool Hall. The sheriff claimed he found over a thousand Mexicans congregating in the hall. Gillett stated that he tried to disperse the crowd and announced that officials would not permit a mass meeting of Mexican in the Imperial Valley and ordered the group to work. After workers refused and “forced

³⁵¹ “Melon Pickers Launch Strike,” *Los Angeles Times* May 9, 1928; “48 Workers Are Held in Jail,” *Calexico Chronicle*, May 10, 1928.

³⁵² *Imperial Valley Press*, May 9, 1928. Quoted in *Mexicans in California Report*, 143.

³⁵³ *Mexicans in California Report*, 143.

³⁵⁴ Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 136.

him out,” he returned with a squadron of deputies and arrested five individuals on charges of resisting an officer and disturbing the peace.³⁵⁵

Francisca challenged Gillett’s version of events. She contested his number of one thousand workers and instead argued it had only been six workers. Francisca stated Gillett, who initially did not identify himself as the sheriff, did not order the workers to disperse. Instead, he told her husband Félix to tell the laborers to go to work, but her husband refused. Gillett then announced himself as the sheriff and ordered Félix to disperse his customers out of the pool hall. Francisca claimed Félix once again refused, and Gillett drew his pistol, but she grabbed the sheriff’s hand to stop him from shooting her husband.³⁵⁶ Spanish-language newspapers at the time reported that police officers beat both Francisca and another woman, Beatriz Cota, after arresting Félix and four others.³⁵⁷ The following day, May 11, Félix and the three others who Gillett arrested, posted bond, and paid two hundred fifty dollars each.³⁵⁸ Francisca’s experiences in 1928 highlighted the challenges for all Mexican workers in the region. Gillett’s actions underscored no Mexican was safe, even in

³⁵⁵ “Mexican Agitators Arrested,” *Los Angeles Times* May 11, 1928.

³⁵⁶ *Mexicans in California*, 142.

³⁵⁷ “Siguen Las Persecuciones de Mexicanos en el V. Imperial,” *Heraldo de México* May 13, 1928.

³⁵⁸ *Mexicans in California Report*, 144-145.

their own businesses, and he and his deputies would create sensationalized stories of dangerous Mexicans to justify their actions.³⁵⁹

On top of Gillett and his officers' pressure on Mexican workers, growers also attacked the laborers as ungrateful and circulated unsigned pamphlets meant to break morale. They warned workers to "look out" because federal officers were "watching the conditions." Employers subtly reminded Mexican workers of the 1926 Pass-book Plan and warned laborers that many of them would have returned to Mexico with "little chance of coming back" if it had not been for the growers and shippers who "spent time and money on your behalf." Growers claimed to have protected workers in the past, but employers would use their "funds and influence" to deport them permanently if workers failed to cooperate.³⁶⁰ Growers and Gillett compared Mexican workers to children, stating they were excitable and would work toward their detriment if left to their own devices.³⁶¹ But employers also used the language of livelihood to further their interests. In an unsigned circular, growers warned workers the union would deceive them and had no interest in their wellbeing. They stated, "many of you have... families... and homes in the Imperial Valley," which the

³⁵⁹ Gillett would continue harassing Mexican workers. In 1930 A.S Mejia, president of the Asociacion Mutua del Valle Imperial, wrote to Mexican consul Edmundo Aragón describing a series of abuses by Gillett in the wake of a Mexican strike. See Asociacion Mutua del Valle Imperial, January 16, 1930, SRE-GE Folder 10-1-46(1).

³⁶⁰ *Mexicans in California Report*, 144-145.

³⁶¹ Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 136.

union's actions were threatening. But it was the employers who threatened workers' livelihood by recruiting laborers from other regions to break the strike. "If they introduce outside workers... you and your families will have to suffer...the laborer from outside will... seize your work, and you will then be in need."³⁶²

Police violence and grower response led to a change in tactics by workers. The union moved away from the polite requests for higher wages and embraced a more direct discussion of the real problem: the contract labor system. Workers targeted the contract labor system because labor contractors and growers had used it throughout the 1920s to exploit laborers and avoid any repercussions from California state labor boards for violating labor laws. Contractors often absconded with worker's wages, and growers denied any responsibility arguing they had hired and paid contractors with no mention of many of the growers' and labor contractors' dual identities. In the early months of the strike, when the Mexican Mutual Aid Societies were the main organizing forces behind the new union, Carlos Ariza, the Mexican consul in Calexico, who opposed the 1926 Pass-book Plan, was a key actor, while his replacement Hermolao Torres was not supportive.³⁶³ Historian Gilbert González

³⁶² Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 49.

³⁶³ Ariza, however, was forced to resign early on after being accused of extorting a widow for \$500. As a private citizen, he filed papers of incorporation for the union in April 1928. Gonzales, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 166; Wollenberg, "Huelga, 1928 Style," 49. For a discussion of Torres, see Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 134-135.

argued the Mexican consulates controlled Mexican labor unions in the United States to create a *Mexico de afuera* that reflected the Mexican federal government's interests both domestically and internationally.³⁶⁴ But when the workers began discussing going on strike and making larger demands about the contract labor system, Ariza and Torres denounced them as radicals. Like many Mexicali government officials, both were wary of any worker associations with radicalism, bolshevism, or communism and quickly differentiated between radicals and "the better class of Mexicans."

Despite the actions of the Mexican consuls, workers persisted. Filemón González, the union president and one of the key organizers, declared that as Mexican citizens, workers had "certain rights to claim and demand them." González appealed to the Mexican government through the press, hoping to win its support for the union. He complained to the Mexican government that those American growers denied workers "every right due to us, crushing and insulting the laborer" and tried to provoke workers into taking violent actions to give men like Gillett the excuses they needed to justify the arrests he and his officers were already making. The Mexican government, however, did not respond to González and the union appeals.³⁶⁵

González's decision to appeal to the Mexican government and claim rights as a

³⁶⁴ González, *Mexican Consul and Labor Organizing*, Chapter 2. See also Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, Chapter 5; John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

³⁶⁵ Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 135-136.

Mexican citizen in the United States was striking. His actions underscored the interconnected nature of the California-Baja California borderlands and the fact that for the workers, the international boundary was not a barrier to claiming rights. The Mexican government's inaction was hardly surprising. Local and federal government levels had been complicit in creating a transnational contract labor system in the 1910s that exploited Mexican migrant workers.

The first half of 1928 saw sex workers and agricultural workers attack, in different ways, systems of exploitation tied to their wages. Both appealed to the Mexican government and asserted workers' rights, and demanded redress, and both achieved some successes. Sex workers successfully repealed the medical fees by relying on Mexican laws. Agricultural workers' success was less immediately tangible, but would have a far more lasting impact on the region's laborers. In December 1928, the Grower's Committee for the Revision of the Picking Agreement, composed of five elected growers representing the region, worked with the California Department of Industrial Relations and announced an end to the contract labor system. Employers agreed to end the practice of withholding workers' wages and established that "growers, not the contractors, will pay to the laborer all wages earned..."³⁶⁶ Much like sex workers in 1928, agricultural workers ended a practice that exploited them. Both groups of workers' actions, appealing to government

³⁶⁶ *Mexicans in California Report*, 150.

officials and labor agitations, highlighted the paths to workers' success moving forward: contract relations' importance enshrined and enforced in law.

However, the more conservative Mexicans employed a third strategy, repatriation, but their actions would underscore the importance of land for all workers in Mexico in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. By January 1929, members of the Brawley, California, Mutual Aid Association wrote to northern Baja California Governor José Tapia. Workers referred to the strikes of 1928 but noted that Mexicans “did not enjoy the guaranteed rights under the laws of the United States,” and the “inferior authorities” abused their power. Upwards of two hundred eighty families asked Tapia for help to repatriate and wanted him to assist them with acquiring a plot of land in Mexico. However, Tapia refused. The governor argued that giving repatriated Mexicans lands would only exacerbate the current crisis. Instead of land, he suggested workers should return to work in the Imperial Valley fields, even when they had not “obtained favorable resolutions after striking.”³⁶⁷ While the Mutual Aid organizations in the Imperial Valley had consistently taken a more conservative approach to labor agitations, breaking with the Union of United Workers of the Imperial Valley after unionized workers called for a strike in 1928, mutualistas continued the practice of crossing borders to seek their livelihood.³⁶⁸ Their decision,

³⁶⁷ Al Ciudadano Consul General de Gov. Tapia, January 18, 1929, SRE-GE Folder 10-1-46(I).

³⁶⁸ Often, the association announced it was not supporting workers because of concerns over communism or radicalism, as it did in 1928 and again in 1930. See

in 1929, to return to Mexico and secure land highlighted the importance of land, not wages, in Mexicali.³⁶⁹ Mutualistas would not be the only group of workers asking for land or government intervention to help them earn their livelihood.

Unlike the Imperial Valley mutual aid societies, workers living in Mexicali in 1930 wanted to assert the contract's importance in regulating labor relations, union agreements, and the Mexican government's role in the region. But their actions made clear the differences in Mexican and American discourses of labor to demand their rights using the language of contracts. In Mexicali, workers embraced the postrevolutionary nationalism of Mexico and demanded access to land, but failing that, they demanded the government support their claims to work. Workers did not use the language of wages like in the Imperial Valley. Instead, they insisted that Mexicans in Mexico had a right to land and work in their country. The difference was revealing. Workers understood Americans tied their conceptions of work, and laborers, to wages. But Mexican laborers tied access to land to their notions of workers and labor.

In June 1930, Daniel Ruiz, a member of *El Sindicato de Proletarios de Paredones* (The Union of Proletarians of Paredones), summarized the issues workers in the region faced in a meeting between Mexicali's agricultural labor unions and

Asociacion Mutua Mexicana del Valle Imperial, January 16, 1930, SRE-GE, Folder 10-1-46(1); Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley; Mexicans in California Report*.

³⁶⁹ Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 59-65.

business owners, and local government officials. The purpose of the meeting was to address the region's "impending" labor crisis. Ruiz argued that while the various owners of companies like the Colorado River Land Company—the largest landholding company in the region—and the *Compañía Industrial Jabonera del Pacífico*, pledged to honor a recently signed labor contract between unions and businesses; the contract was meaningless if the *mayordomos* (supervisors), the people who hired workers, were against the contract stipulations and did not honor the agreement. Ruiz stated, "today they honor the contracts and tomorrow they cast them aside."³⁷⁰ He asked the heads of companies to "send energetic orders to their underlings and demand that they comply with the contracts to avoid conflicts" with workers.

Ruiz, hedging against the inevitable employer calls for cooperation and sacrifice during a crisis, reiterated that workers already had agreed to concessions in the past to help ease the lack of work. Workers were trying to find solutions to the labor crisis that might hurt them individually but were better for local communities. Laborers had suggested work rotations, workers working some days but not others, and giving preferences to those with families. But Ruiz made clear who should decide the rotations: workers. "The authorities should not decide turns and even less by the

³⁷⁰ For a discussion of *La Compañía Industrial Jabonera del Pacífico* see Aidé Grijalva, "Agroindustria y algodón en el valle de Mexicali. La Compañía Industrial Jabonera del Pacífico," *Estudios Fronterizos* vol. 15, no. 30 (2014), 11-42.

bosses.... They [government officials and bosses] will leave organized workers without work and use free workers.” Even as organized workers made concessions and tried to ensure families could feed themselves, employers exploited the concessions for their benefits.³⁷¹

Employers did not agree with Ruiz and their rebuttals hinged on the difference between the newly signed union contracts and Mexican law. The workers’ union contracts required employers to hire eighty percent of their workforce from organized laborers, while Mexican law only required fifty percent of the employer’s workforce to be Mexicans, and it did not distinguish between organized and unorganized workers. Manuel Rivas, a small-landholder, went further and argued he never asked workers if they were unionized or free laborers. Instead, Rivas claimed that what

³⁷¹ “Versión Taquigráfica de la Junta Celebrada entre campesinos y hombres de negocios en el Salón de Recepciones del Palacio de Gobierno de Mexicali el día 28 de Junio de 1930,” Archivo UABC, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Fondo Adalberto Walther Meade, Folder 10.34.

“En realidad todos los representantes de las Compañías han estado en muy buena disposición de cumplir con el contrato, pero resulta que los mayordomos de los campos, casi en la generalidad no están dispuestos a ello. Se cumple hoy y mañana se deja de cumplir.” (“In reality, all the representatives of the Companies have been in a very good disposition to fulfill the contract, but it turns out that the stewards of the fields, almost in general, are not willing to do so. It is fulfilled today and tomorrow it will cease to be fulfilled.”) Author translation.

determined who he hired was the worker's morality. He believed an employer could determine "when someone was a good worker and when they were vice-ridden" (*vicioso*). Once Rivas decided a person was a potential good worker, he would immediately "invite them into his home." If there was no work for the laborer, Rivas explained, he would provide them a house on his ranch where they could live. Once there was an opening, he would offer them the work ahead of others. Rivas begged the workers present not to press the contract for stipulation enforcement. He argued all of them were looking to lessen the suffering and minimize the number of people in need. Rivas asked workers to "consider the present situation's circumstances." He believed instead that workers should "cooperate with the employers."

Together the two would find the solution and keep in mind "the interests of the communities."³⁷² However, Rivas's discussion of how he picked workers was the most concise explanation of the stakes for all involved parties. He relied on his impression of the workers' morality and workers' willingness to live on his lands, waiting for work in deciding who to hire. His definition suggested that whoever could define morality would control workers and labor relations in the region. Rivas' explanation also highlighted that if laborers wanted to find work, they needed to conform to employer expectations of who *deserved* to work. Since government

³⁷² Junta Celebrada entre campesinos y hombres de negocios. UABC IHH, Fondo Adalberto Walther Meade, Folder 10.34.

officials like Governor Tapia seemed to side with employers, the workers' only option was to contest employer-defined morality parameters.

Rivas's discussion of worker morality, not whether they were union or free workers, was striking. But it was General José María Tapia, northern Baja California's governor in 1930, who made clear why Rivas's distinction was important to the Mexican government. Tapia tried to balance workers and employers while positioning the government as a mediator in his opening remarks to the assembled group. The governor believed the government was "morally obligated, in all cases, to side with the workers." However, he argued that his government would not side with workers "simply because they come to us asking for the food they need to live." Tapia made clear the limits of governmental support. His administration would not tolerate, under any circumstances, "red or bolshevism elements." Tapia acknowledged the class struggle and worker's fight against it, but he believed radicalism would only "make more difficult the present conditions in Baja California, which has distinct problems from the rest of Mexico." Although Tapia had expressed support for workers in his opening remarks and limits, he dismissed worker complaints regarding the contract. Workers, like Francisco Félix, throughout the meeting had tried unsuccessfully to impress upon Governor Tapia that while they had agreed to work rotations, it was not a blanket agreement. Employers had instituted rotations in places where workers had not agreed to them and mostly made organized workers rotate, but not others. When workers complained about Manuel Rivas, Tapia rose to his defense. He believed it was unreasonable to "demand Rivas employ eighty

percent of organized workers because he has helped solve the Chinese problem...”
Tapia’s remarks, and his strong defense of Rivas revealed that the government believed there were other pressing issues, the Chinese question being one, and ensuring the continued economic development of the region. Rivas elevated the discussion of work to a moral level, and Tapia quickly joined him and clarified that workers’ contracts did not matter nearly as much as the government’s actual concerns.³⁷³

Whereas workers wanted to assert organized labor and the contract’s importance, government officials and employers undercut them by using the language of morality, advocating for the “greater” social good, and asked workers to make concessions that helped further the goals of officials and employers. Tapia, and men like Rivas, pointed to the “distinct conditions of Baja California” in making their arguments. Whereas in the past, many workers in the region crossed into the United States and helped relieve the regional lack of developed industries, with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the United States was enforcing US immigration laws and deporting laborers in larger numbers than before. Making matters worse, a growing number of Mexican migrants, from places like Sinaloa and Sonora, were coming to Baja California, adding to the unemployment and exacerbating the labor crisis. Francisco Javier Gaxiola, *Secretario General de Gobierno* (Secretary General

³⁷³ Junta Celebrada entre campesinos y hombres de negocios. UABC IIH, Fondo Adalberto Walther Meade, Folder 10.34.

of Government), believed many migrants came with “fantasy illusions of the favorable economic conditions” in Baja California. But instead of a fantasy land of plentiful work, arriving migrants quickly met the harsh reality that Baja California had large numbers of unemployed workers competing for scarce job opportunities.³⁷⁴

Felipa Arrellano, a widow with three children from Sinaloa, Mexico, was one such migrant who arrived in Mexicali in 1930. Arrellano quickly became a leading voice of the Mexicali branch of the Mexican Socialist Party. Arrellano told local party

³⁷⁴ Junta Celebrada entre campesinos y hombres de negocios. UABC IIIH, Fondo Adalberto Walther Meade, Folder 10.34. La primera es la crisis que se ha presentado en la región de los Estados del Noreste del país, principalmente en Sonora y Sinaloa, y muchas gentes, ilusionadas por ciertas fantasías que existe respecto a las favorables condiciones económicas de la Baja California, han venido a procurar aquí trabajo que no han encontrado... Este es uno de los principales factores, pues ha venido a agravar la competencia entre los mismos trabajadores carentes de ocupación. Por otra parte, las disposiciones vigentes en los Estados Unidos respecto a migración han colocado a muchos compatriotas nuestros en condiciones de no poder permanecer en territorio americano debido a la falta de documentación en regla...” (“The first is the crisis that has occurred in the region of the Northeast States of the country, mainly in Sonora and Sinaloa, is that many people, excited by certain prospects that exist regarding the favorable economic conditions of Baja California, have come here looking for work that they have not found ... This is one of the main factors, as it has aggravated competition among the unemployed workers themselves. On the other hand, the provisions in force in the United States regarding migration have placed many of our compatriots in conditions of not being able to remain in American territory due to the lack of proper documentation...”) Author translation.

members she was ready to fight, come what may. She spearheaded efforts to put on a play originally written by Ricardo Flores Magón by May 1, International Workers' Day, and after two weeks of rehearsals, Arrellano warned the group that local officials might arrest or even kill them in response to their participation. *El Esclavo y el Burgués* (The Slave and the Bourgeois) portrayed Arrellano as a landowning woman with a large estate, who had servants, and whose sons impregnated and mocked the town's women with impunity. In the play, when workers demanded her sons take responsibility for the pregnant women, Arrellano's character denied all responsibility to the women or their children. When her sons beat workers, she defended their actions and blamed workers for being lazy. The day after the play, May 2, 1930, Mexican soldiers arrested Arrellano, her three children, and other prominent leaders of the play and various labor actions meant to protest the lack of land available to workers. Within a week, the local government had sentenced the group to five months of hard labor and sent them all to María Island, a maximum-security prison off the coast of Nayarit, Mexico.³⁷⁵

Arrellano's play was a direct critique of the local government's acquiescence with foreign companies as they pleased Mexican workers and land. In the January 1930 meeting with workers, Governor Tapia stated he and his government wanted to help workers find solutions to the region's labor situation. But his government's

³⁷⁵ Álvarez, "Por el Esclavo y el Burgués, a Prison," *Voces y Ecos de un Desierto*, 109-116; see also Castillo-Múñoz, 52-53.

arrest and imprisonment of Arrellano and the other leaders in May shattered any illusions of cooperation. His actions crystalized the government's intention to control worker actions and aggressively suppress any type of dissent. In *El Esclavo y el Burgués*, Arrellano's characters asked the landowner to take responsibility for her sons' actions, much like workers had asked Governor Tapia to take responsibility for their inability to work as more than subjugated workers. But, just as Arrellano's character denied any responsibility, Mexicali's local government negated its role in enforcing union contracts meant to protect workers. Instead, it sided with employers like Rivas who supported the anti-Chinese campaigns and the economic development of the region at workers' expense.³⁷⁶ The play exposed the displeasure Mexican residents felt at the lack of land. Arrellano's landowning character, the sons' sexual exploitation of local Mexican women, and the beatings of workers who they deemed lazy, spoke to the resentment of residents against men like Rivas who decided workers' morality based on their assessment. An immoral or vice-ridden worker could expect the employers and the government to jail them.

³⁷⁶ For a discussion of Chinese in northern Baja California see, Fredy González, *Paisanos Chinos*, 54-59; Catalina Velázquez Morales, *Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California, 1920-1937* (Mexicali, Mx: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2001); Robert H Duncan, "The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 74, no. 4 (Nov. 1994), 615-647; Hu-Dehart, "The Chinese of Baja California Norte." See also Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*; Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico*.

Between 1930 and 1934, Mexican workers in the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys continued to organize, often working with other ethnic groups like Filipino and white American farmworkers. In the Imperial Valley, schisms existed between different factions of the Mexican working-class groups. Some advocated for higher wages, and others, like the more conservative mutual aid societies, asked for help to repatriate back to Mexico and ask the Mexican government for land.³⁷⁷ By October 1933, migrant workers formed *La Unión de Trabajadores del Valle Imperial* (Union of Imperial Valley Workers) and demanded a two-dollar-a-day wage. But the cycle of grower refusal and Mexican government officials attempting to control the union continued, and workers soon launched a one-day strike. Mexican Consul Joaquín Terrazas tried to form his government-sanctioned union, one that expelled the more radical element of workers, but Mexicans refused to join because former labor contractors and farm supervisors led it. At the heart of the conflict was the workers' insistence on the contracts which growers would not uphold.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Asociacion Mutua del Valle Imperial, January 16, 1930.; Edmundo Aragón to Antonio S Mejia, January 20, 1930, SRE-GE Folder 10-1-46(I). See also Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 139-142 for a discussion of the 1930 strike and the tensions between the various groups. For a discussion of the repatriated Mexicans in northern Baja California, see Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California*, 63-64.

³⁷⁸ Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 143-153; González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 168-173.

Campbell MacCollough, secretary of the Regional Labor Board, arrived in the Valley to investigate. He soon discovered the same thing previous investigators like Louis Bloch had. Local police officials charged with arresting labor organizers were also landowners with a vested interest in stopping unionization. He observed that the local police had arrested seventy-five people and considered them labor agitators. But local officials lacked any credibility. Captain Frank Oswald, who was in charge of a contingent of state highway police, Sterling Oswald, Chief of Police Lon Cromer, and Sheriff George Campbell, owned acres of land in the Imperial Valley. MacCollough argued that fact warped “the unbiased judgement of those in control of the situation,” and their actions as police would at least “operate against impartial treatment of the workers.” Justice of the Peace H.B. Griffin declared, “\$1 a day is enough for the Mexican field worker.” Given grower sentiments, MacCollough believed “no worker can hope to get justice” in the courts.³⁷⁹

Mexican workers could choose between accepting the employers’ terms of labor, or they could leave the Imperial Valley and return to Mexicali. County Commissioner of Agriculture B.A. Harrigan encouraged the return strategy. He opined that “a little starving would be good for” migrants and it was not the growers’

³⁷⁹ Charles MacCollough, Labor Conditions in Imperial Valley Report, 4-7. National Archives and Records Administration, Riverside (Hereafter NARA Riverside), CA Record Group 25, Records of the National Labor Relations Board, Records Relating to the California State Recovery Board, 1933-1935, Box 2, Folder Imperial Valley Agreement.

responsibility to feed them nor the residents. Workers would not become public charges. Harrigan believed laborers had two choices: voluntarily leave or local officials would force them out. It made no difference to Harrigan and growers like him that many of the “penniless workers” were women and children.³⁸⁰ Mexican Consul Joaquín Terrazas also encouraged workers to return to Mexico. Regarding three thousand surplus workers and their families in the Imperial Valley, who Terrazas described as impoverished, he suggested that the Mexican government would welcome laborers if growers or the US government-financed their return. Harrigan and Terrazas’s descriptions of workers hinged on their apparent immorality. Both described the three thousand workers as impoverished and a menacing threat, and a serious problem for the region.

Terrazas and men like Harrigan worked toward the same goal: a pacified Mexican laboring pool under their control. Terrazas’s government union split Mexican laborers and led to infighting among both organizations while the Imperial Valley growers attacked striking laborers with charges of being communists and un-American.³⁸¹ In the end, their dual attacks succeeded, and they broke the union in 1934. Terrazas tried to appease Mexican workers by negotiating a thirty-cent wage increase and established wages for future cantaloupe harvests. However, after

³⁸⁰ MacCollough, *Labor Conditions in Imperial Valley Report*, 6. NARA Riverside RG 25, Box 2, Folder Imperial Valley Agreement.

³⁸¹ See “A los Trabajadores Mexicanos: Compañeros,” *Comité de Huelga de la Liga Industrial Agrícola Obrera*, SRE-GE 10-1-46 (I).

negotiating his wage increases, Terrazas transferred out of the Valley, and his government union collapsed as well.³⁸²

By July 1936, workers attacked the undermining actions of government officials like Consul Terrazas and the governors of northern Baja California like José Tapia, who had pledged to support workers but consistently undercut laborers' attempts to earn their livelihood both domestically and abroad. A group composed of the members of Tijuana's *Cámara Local del Trabajo*, *Comite Municipal del PNR*, *Comite Territorial del PNR*, and the *Federación de Sindicatos y Uniones Obreras* accused previous Mexican administrations of bribing workers with land distributions and laws that were little more than "ornate fixtures" while systematically and deliberately denying Mexicans their freedoms. The group attacked politicians and Mexico's government. Group members rejected Mexico's supposed status as a modern liberal nation-state and strongly criticized its ruling political class. The group pointed out no political institution or individual had ever concerned themselves "with organizing work for the public's good or benefit," much less to fund social needs. Instead, politicians had only focused on their benefits and the "debasement of the public spirit."³⁸³

³⁸² Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 155-156.

³⁸³ Se Pide la Democracia del Sindicalismo, al Presidente de la Republica, Tijuana B.C. July 31, 1936. UABC IHH, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas, Folder 6.26.

Instead of local officials, workers across northern Baja California turned to Lázaro Cárdenas, newly elected President of Mexico.³⁸⁴ In their open letter to Cárdenas, the northern Baja California group proclaimed the meaning of the Mexican Revolution as “the finality of supreme liberty of working people to establish the conditions of their lives, according to their interests and sentiments.”³⁸⁵ The group asked Cárdenas to “radically change their abject situation.” They pushed Cárdenas to embrace worker-backed policies in Baja California and have faith in unions that represented all the “spiritual and material activities of the Mexican people.” They believed workers’ lives were the lowest, the most inert, the most subjugated, and the group begged Cárdenas to help liberate them. The Tijuana group believed the fate of work and laborers in Mexico was the fate of the nation.

³⁸⁴ For a discussion of Lázaro Cárdenas, see Ben Fallaw, *Cardenas Compromised, The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Adrian A. Bantjes, *As if Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1998); Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Alan Knight, “Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Feb. 1994), 73-107.

³⁸⁵ Se Pide la Democracia del Sindicalismo, al Presidente de la República, UABC IIH, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas, Folder 6.26.

Carlos Lerdo de Tejada, former governor of Baja California, in October 1936, concurred with the Tijuana group and issued a call to arms to all Mexicans to support Cárdenas. He hailed Cárdenas as a transformative figure who would incorporate the territory within “the spirit, life and destiny of greater Mexico.” As a former governor, he believed he understood the region’s problems better than most and quickly identified the pressing issues Cárdenas needed to address. First, Lerdo de Tejada indicted previous federal government officials who, instead of serving Baja California, had frequently harmed it and were only interested in furthering “personal ambition... and amassing fortunes... instead of serving the public good.” With no real restrictions or sense of decorum, vice industries had grown exponentially, lamented Lerdo de Tejada. He believed vice did not leave a positive mark in the region, nor had it brought “any works for the material, social, economic benefit to the lives in Baja California.” The former governor tied the political corruption to the proliferation of vice industries in Baja California. Second, the former governor turned to the problem that had vexed the region since the *Porfiriato*: foreigners controlled and dominated all the lands and turned Baja California “into a factory and center of gambling, drinking, pleasures.” Lerdo de Tejada believed if Mexicans supported Cárdenas, their future would be “a new life washed of stains of their shameful past and they could create a new moral country.”³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ Carlos Lerdo de Tejada, Mexico October 19, 1936. UABC IIH Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas, Folder, 6.22.

The harsh critiques of past Mexican politicians by the Tijuana group and Carlos Lerdo de Tejada were direct indictments of Plutarco Elias Calles. Known as *el jefe maximo*, Calles had dominated the Mexican presidency throughout the 1920s through puppet administrations until Cárdenas' election in 1934. Cárdenas, as president, worked to undo Calles' political machine, launched a moralizing campaign, and closed down casinos in northern Baja California to undermine Calles' financial and political power. The Tijuana group, and Lerdo Tejada's more direct advocacy on Cárdenas' behalf, supported the president's efforts.

However, while Cárdenas meant to challenge Calles' power, his actions affected the vice workers of Baja California. In 1935, the Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos (CROM) in Tijuana protested the closure of the Agua Caliente Casino, one of the principal employers in town. The casino was owned by US business interests known as the border barons—Wit Bowman, James Crofton, and Baron Long. Mexicali had its border barons, known as the ABW Syndicate, who owned the Owl Casino. By July 1936, a group of twenty Mexican women appealed directly to Cárdenas. The women's group was "moved by necessity... to ask for justice for ourselves and our children." The group argued the closing of the Agua Caliente Casino had left their families without food, and their children "were dying of hunger...and if they survive, they will surely develop tuberculosis because of the lack of food." While the government had offered them and their families help, it required them to "abandon their homes and lose all of their sacrifices and savings."

According to the group, the Agua Caliente Casino employed over six hundred

employees and provided the families a school for their children and was the only one in northern Baja California that provided its students with supplies.³⁸⁷ The group of twenty women also positioned themselves on equal footing as their husbands who worked in the casinos; together they had “built our homes.” The group’s arguments about the benefits of vice industry, what it contributed to the local community, and that working in vice would not be so necessary if the region had other options for work were familiar arguments that vice workers had been making since 1909 when Mexicali’s merchants and residents and the Rodolfo Gallego group held conflicting views on vice, namely sex work, in the region.³⁸⁸

Unfortunately for the region’s vice workers, Carlos Lerdo de Tejada had correctly identified foreign-owned land as the most pressing issue Cárdenas needed to address to integrate Baja California into the rest of Mexico. Calls for land reform and critiques of foreign companies’ ownership of land continued to grow in 1936. Workers’ resentment against companies like the CRLC came to bear in the agrarian movement known as the *Asalto de las tierras* (assault of the lands) in January 1937. A group of landless Mexicans led by Jesus Cibrián Zamudio, president of the Union of Peasant Day Laborers, demanded northern Baja California’s governor, Rafael

³⁸⁷ Conjunto de Madres al Señor Presidente de la República, Lázaro Cárdenas, July 30, 1936. UABC IHH Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas, Folder 6.26.

³⁸⁸ Petición de Varios Residentes de Mexicali al Presidente Porfirio Díaz , Agosto 30, 1909; Petición de Varios Residentes de Mexicali al Presidente Porfirio Díaz, UABC IHH, Ramo Gobernación, Folder 40.41

Navarro Cortina, enforce article twenty-seven of the Mexican constitution, which states all land and water within Mexico were owned by the nation. If Navarro did not take action, Zamudio warned, “we will use force to take the lands, and if you do not give us water, we will break the floodgates.” By the next morning, Mexican peasants followed through on Zamudio’s threat and arrived “armed with axes...machetes and...the spirit of battle.” Within two months of the initial invasion, Mexican peasants had seized two hundred thousand acres of CRLC land and forced Cárdenas to uphold article twenty-seven of the Mexican constitution and redistribute the land into ejidos. Pedro Pérez, who took part in the *asalto*, explained the significance of the invasions “we workers finally got what we deserve, some land and water. Now we could have more things and live better.”³⁸⁹

The *asalto de las tierras* signaled the promises of the Mexican Revolution in Baja California. However, it also signaled a change in status for Mexican working women. In May 1938, Isaac De Soto, María del Carmen Flores, and Catalina Viuda de Arenas, members of the *Sindicato Femenil Leona Vicario* (Women’s League, Leona Vicario) wrote to Cárdenas and implored him to visit Baja California. The local women’s league wanted Cárdenas to visit the region to understand the hard times they were facing. Soto, María del Carmen, and Catalina explained to Cárdenas

³⁸⁹ John J. Dwyer, *The Agrarian Dispute*, 45. See also Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, Chapter 4; Everardo Guarduño, *La Disputa por la tierra...La disputa por la Voz: Historia oral del Movimiento agrario en el Valle de Mexicali*; Andres, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley*, 153-155.

that laborers could not find work and that Baja California still lacked, even in 1938, a fully developed industrial sector, and many were having a troublesome time being able to support themselves and their families. However, the *Sindicato Femenil Leona Vicario* members faced an even more difficult situation than others because they were women. Soto, Flores, and Catalina Viuda de Arenas argued many women wanted to work and earn their livelihood “with dignity, they wanted to live from the products of their labor” but could not do so. The group believed if Cárdenas visited the region, he would remedy the critical situation of women workers.³⁹⁰

The rise of women’s leagues like Leona Vicario coincided with Cárdenas’ plans for the region’s workers and attempts to undermine Calles’ power. Vice threatened Cárdenas’s crusade to transform the Mexican agricultural workers into modern Mexican citizens. Organizations like Leona Vicario positioned women as guardians of the household and ejido communities.³⁹¹ While still appealing for moral livelihood, Leona Vicario’s members no longer appealed for vice industries as an avenue to achieve it. Instead, women’s leagues like Leona Vicario turned to industrial and agricultural work as the way to achieve a moral livelihood. The league omitted sex laborers as moral workers.

³⁹⁰ Sindicato Femenil “Leona Vicario” al Presidente de la República Lázaro Cárdenas, May 11, 1938. UABC IAH Folder Lázaro Cárdenas Folder 1.36.

³⁹¹ Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, 86.

The league's silence on prostitution was not surprising. After the *asalto* in 1937, the Mexican government organized women's leagues in Baja California. However, many of Mexicali's women's agrarian leagues held strict anti-vice views.³⁹² Petra Pérez, secretary of the agrarian league on the Ejido Michoacán de Ocampo, described the anti-vice activities of the league as its "mission of protecting the ejido community." Pérez and the women of the agrarian league policed their communities with the aim of ensuring men did not spend "their two pesos earned..." on vice while at home, their families "lacked beans to eat." However, Pérez league went beyond policing of vice and accepting it within certain parameters as had been the custom in previous decades in Mexicali. Instead, some members of the women's league aggressively attacked vice industries. Pérez recounted one member went so far as going beyond the boundaries of the local community and when they found men playing cards, they "broke their liquor bottles."³⁹³

Mexicali's women's league activities coincided with a growing abolitionist push against vice and prostitution across Mexico. In Mexico City, opponents attacked sexual commerce by arguing ending the practice would fulfill the promise of the revolution and secure the future of the national community at large.³⁹⁴ Opponents of intimate labor succeeded where all others had failed. By the late 1930s Cárdenas's

³⁹² Castillo-Múñoz, *The Other California*, 87.

³⁹³ Petra Pérez, "Y en la profundidad, ¿quién lo va a escuchar a uno?," in Garduño, *Voces y Ecos de un Desierto Fértil*, 155-165.

³⁹⁴ Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 195.

administration ended the 1926 *reglamento para la ejercion de la prostitución* (Regulations for practicing prostitution) and deregulated the zones of tolerance, expelling hundreds of sexual commerce workers from their communities and their homes. Ending the regulations meant that workers no longer enjoyed the protections of civil law as registered sexual workers. By 1939, Cárdenas's proposed replacement, the *delito de contagion* (crime of contagion) was approved and reformed Mexico's penal code. The crime of contagion law placed Mexico on a similar path as the United States, sexual commerce was a threat to the nation and practitioners were criminals who belonged in prison. The following year in Mexico women who practiced sexual commerce could face up to six years in prison and a 10,000 peso fine. Mexico's government officially ended its tolerance of intimate labor as a legitimate, and rightful, form of labor. While sexual commerce continued to exist, Mexico's government no longer considered it a form of work. While Cárdenas had not played a direct hand in ending the practice, his administration's attempts to fulfil the promise of the Mexican revolution played a significant role.

Women's groups like the *sindicato femenil* had pushed Cárdenas and his administration, perhaps unknowingly, to elevate agricultural labor at the cost of delegitimizing sex work. But they were not the only ones. Local unions across Baja California representing barbers, cinematographers, musicians, and electricians all wrote to Cárdenas. The various unions' actions fit within northern Baja California's established practices. Workers had regularly written to the federal government demanding redress of grievances or claiming rights. What had changed was the role

of working women in the region, namely sex workers. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, laborers of sexual commerce had experienced many of the same issues and challenges as other Mexican workers in the region, like agricultural workers. But where agricultural workers in both the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys used the language of morality and livelihood to claim rights and found limited but gradual success, sex workers found continual denial. Agricultural workers in the 1937 *asalto de las tierras* forced Cárdenas to embrace the postrevolutionary nationalist rhetoric of Mexico and finally achieved the land appropriation laborers had been clamoring for decades. Sexual commerce workers instead found a more heavily restricted labor market. The status of sexual commerce, always tenuous, became worse. Cárdenas' integration of Baja California and his elevation of agricultural workers erased sex workers' critical role in the region's development. While agricultural workers continued to cross between Mexico and the United States, the Mexican government restricted the ability of sex workers to do the same, circulate their labor in search of the best working conditions for themselves, assert themselves as rightful and moral laborers. Cárdenas solidified that to be a free and moral worker in Mexico meant one was a male citizen who worked in the agricultural or industrial sectors of the nation.

EPILOGUE

“Rightful and Moral Work” has focused on the role of morality in the discourse of labor among Mexicans living at the California-Mexico borderlands in the first half of the twentieth century. It is a story of the Mexican working class and why nation-state narratives of labor have historically obfuscated worker identities as rightful and moral laborers. This dissertation shows that imposing national boundaries at the California-Baja California borderlands was not an even process. At key moments in the first decades of the twentieth century, workers, through their continual back-and-forth movements and local government officials, by their willingness or unwillingness to accommodate labor demand, blurred the distinction between Mexico and the United States. “Rightful and Moral Work” has focused on agricultural and sexual workers and the ways they negotiated between exploitation and consent and gave shape to a worker-defined morality founded on the survival of their families. Workers expressed their sense of morality through their mobility, used the border for their benefit, and demanded the United States and Mexico recognize their right to live and work where they chose. In response, employers and government officials tried first to control, and then gradually shifted to criminalizing, laborers’ movement. Employers’ machinations led to the moralization of sexual commerce

laborers as non-laboring individuals. Rather than understand prostitutes as legal workers, American employers and state officials discussed them as threats to the social body and middle-class morality. American society's discourse of immorality mapped itself onto other laboring groups, and it premised the rhetoric on certain important elements. An illegitimate worker, in employer terms, was a dependent, immoral, and criminal individual who police and immigration officials needed to detain and deport. The criminal discourse of labor would wax, wane, and strengthen throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

At the California borderlands, the battle between workers and employers over legitimate and moral labor's meaning affected all interactions between migrant Mexicans and state-makers. Miguel Armenta's interactions with U.S. immigration agent Zachary T. Forester in 1929, for example, were not about a labor agitation or Armenta's employment. But the discourse at the California borderlands affected how both Armenta and Forester acted. Armenta crossed from Calexico, California, into Mexicali, Baja California, to escape what he believed to be an unjust persecution by Forester. Armenta acted as many borderlands workers did in the early decades of the twentieth century. He used his mobility to cross the international border to demand his rights as a free and moral citizen of Mexico to live in the United States. The movements and actions of Armenta would become increasingly circumscribed in the second half of the twentieth century.

A little over ten years later, actions like those taken by Forester, where he policed, monitored, and eventually criminalized Armenta, would replace worker

morality and choice. The shift away from Armenta's strategy and toward Forester's surveillance was partly because of decisions of the Mexican government. The economic development that had so consumed Mexico's decisions about Baja California would finally appear in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1940s, Mexico slowly rejected the language of worker morality and choice that laborers at the California-Baja California borderlands had successfully used in the preceding decades. Instead of worker morality, criminality and danger came to matter more.

The United States also played a role in the shift. Forester's initial interaction with Armenta had been because an anonymous letter had denounced the family as potential threats, unauthorized border crossers, and public charges. Forester himself criminalized Armenta and his family because they avoided him, and he had failed to locate them for questioning. American Border Patrol agents also told Armenta's family they would not allow him to return unless he cooperated with their investigation. Agents effectively barred Armenta from reuniting with his family, and if he did, they would likely try to apprehend them as Forester had initially tried to do. In none of their interactions did either Armenta or Forester directly discuss his labor. Yet, the policing workers experienced, I have argued on moral grounds, was present in Forester's surveillance of Armenta and his family. By the second half of the twentieth century, the mechanisms of control Forester used, and countless other immigration officials did as well, would become the norm as the United States increasingly tried to restrict unauthorized migration across its borders.

The shift away from worker choice, mobility, and moral livelihood would occur slowly. It would culminate in the 1990s with the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and the criminalization of border crossers. Experiences like those of Armenta when he crossed back and forth from Mexico to the United States, a regular practice in 1929, were inconceivable by the 1990s. Mexico's rejection of the language of morality tied to worker mobility reached its zenith sixty years later in 1994 with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Goods and products would continue to move freely across borders, but individuals like Armenta would need to take more dangerous routes to enter the United States from Mexico.

NAFTA ushered in an era of capital investment expansion that led to an uneven process of development between Mexico and the United States. American investment moved freely across the US-Mexico border but increasingly restricted Mexican movement. NAFTA's neoliberal policies and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's ending of article twenty-seven of the Mexican Constitution led to the privatization of the communal *ejidos* and increased the number of Mexicans crossing into the United States. The reforms of the *ejido* system in Mexico, coupled with the increased policing of the international boundary, signaled the end of the cyclical migration pattern that Mexicans had engaged in since the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁹⁵ In Mexico, the indigenous communities of Chiapas rejected the

³⁹⁵ Patricia Fernandez-Kelly and Douglas S. Massey, "Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-US Migration," *The Annals of the American Academy of*

country's move toward neoliberalism and privatization. In January 1994, a guerilla force composed largely of poor indigenous peasants demanded social and economic justice.³⁹⁶ The Mexican government responded with military attacks and vilified the Zapatista leaders.

Rather than see the schism between Armenta's experiences in 1929, the militarized border in the 1990s, and the signing of NAFTA as two opposing ends of the spectrum, Forester's attempted apprehension planted the seeds that would slowly sprout throughout years and bloom in the mid-1990s. In 1994, the same year NAFTA went into effect, California set in motion an anti-immigrant campaign, with the infamous Proposition 187, that discriminated against undocumented people by denying them access to many state resources like health care and public schools, eventually spread across the United States and has yet to end. In 1995, President Bill

Political and Social Science vol. 610 (March 2007): 98-118. See also David Bacon, *The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the US/Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

³⁹⁶ Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, a Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas* rev. ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); George Collier, *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* 3rd ed. (Oakland: Food First Books, 2005); Antonio García de Leon, *Fronteras interiores: Chiapas, una modernidad particular* (Mexico: Oceano, 2002); Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Juan R. Ramírez Paredes, *Nunca más sin rostros: Evolución histórica del Proyecto del EZLN* (México: Eon, 2002).

Clinton, in his State of the Union address, declared the United States had to stop the abuse of U.S. immigration laws.³⁹⁷ Congress would respond with two laws, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The IIRIRA enacted some of the harshest measures against illegal immigration and continued the increasing militarization of the US-Mexico border that began with Operation Gatekeeper in 1994. Enacted in October 1994, Operation Gatekeeper built on a Texas-based response, known as Operation Hold the Line, to stop the flow of undocumented people across the U.S.-Mexico border. The Clinton administration launched Operation Gatekeeper under political pressure and partly because of the Texas approach of increased militarization. The sociologist Joseph Nevins has argued Operation Gatekeeper marked a shift in public perception of the boundary between Mexico and the United States. Rather than a border, or a zone of transition and commonality, the boundary line shifted to a divide between “us and them.”³⁹⁸ Finally, PRWORA, known as the Welfare Reform Act, severely restricted both legal and undocumented immigrants from receiving welfare benefits. Both laws reinforced the

³⁹⁷ William J. Clinton, State of the Union Address, January 24, 1995. C-SPAN <https://www.c-span.org/video/?62882-1/president-bill-clintons-1995-state-union-address>.

³⁹⁸ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on “Illegals” and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Rutledge, 2010), 114.

idea that immigrants, both undocumented and legal, were a drain on U.S. society that needed to be stopped.

IIRIRA shifted away from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) signed under President Ronald Reagan that for the first time recognized the role that employers and businesses played in attracting migrants into the United States and instituted an employer verification system. The act also offered undocumented migrants in the United States an opportunity to regularize their immigration status. Under the act, upwards of 3 million unauthorized migrants living in the United States legalized their status. However, IRCA failed to stop the flow of migrants. By the 1990s, the United States, and especially California, viewed immigrants, particularly Mexicans, as criminals who did not contribute to society and instead exploited the goodwill of US citizens who dutifully paid taxes. Many resorted to describing the border in almost militaristic terms. Gustavo “Gus” de la Viña, Chief Patrol Agent and later Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Western Regional Director, once described the California borderlands as being “completely overrun...there was no delineation of the border... people were all over the place.”³⁹⁹ The border region in the mid-1990s existed in the US imaginary as a lawless space and the perfect breeding ground for smugglers, drugs, and violence. In response, IIRIRA increased border policing. Under the act, the government would hire one thousand full-time

³⁹⁹ Lina Newton, *Illegal, Alien, or Immigrant: The Politics of Immigration Reform* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 119.

active-duty border patrol agents and 300 support personnel each year. Within five years, the law required that border patrol agents increase to 10,000 and a fourteen-mile-long fence be constructed along the border.⁴⁰⁰ The law increased criminal penalties for smugglers and document falsification and increased the legal reasons for deportations and exclusions.

IIRIRA also shifted away from IRCA employer-based regulations. The law lowered employer compliance that the IRCA act promulgated and made businesses at least partially responsible for hiring undocumented workers. Instead, under IIRIRA, employers had to make a “good faith” effort to comply with employment verification requirements when hiring new workers. Once the law was in effect, immigrants’ claim of employer discrimination, requesting more documents for employment verification or not honoring those submitted, needed to show an “intent” to discriminate.⁴⁰¹ Immigration officers, under IIRIRA, also had the power to order immigrant removal, providing no further review of the decision if the individual had entered the United States with falsified documents or no documents at all.⁴⁰² The shift

⁴⁰⁰ Austin T. Fragomen Jr., “The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996: An Overview,” *The International Migration Review* vol. 31 no. 2 (Summer 1997): 438-460.

⁴⁰¹ Fragomen Jr., “The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996,” 442.

⁴⁰² Fragomen Jr., “The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996,” 445.

away from employer-based regulations ignored the fact that employers often tried to hire undocumented workers because they could exploit and threaten them. IIRIRA made immigrants responsible for their exploitation and the discrimination they encountered. The law gave employers legal protection and erased the role they played in attracting migrants.

Both the claims of immigration discrimination and the almost unilateral power of immigration inspectors held under IIRIRA harkened back to the 1926 Pass-book Plan. Mexican Consul Carlos Ariza had worried about the discriminatory practices of the plan, how it did not differentiate between legal U.S. citizens and unauthorized Mexican immigrants in the country. However, Ariza had also worried that immigration inspectors, local police, and the Associated Labor Bureau held too much power and essentially decided what Mexican workers to deport and who to enroll in their Pass-book system. In 1934, local landowners who were the Imperial Valley Chiefs of Police, Sheriff, and local judges decided to deport. Almost sixty years later, business interests would still hold power to deport under IIRIRA.

The language politicians and others in the mid-1990s used to divide American citizens from undocumented immigrants was one of poverty, dependency, and illegality. Zachary T. Forester and the anonymous letter writer who reported on the Armenta family in 1929 would recognize much of the rhetoric and portrayal of Mexicans as a threat to local communities. During the congressional debates that eventually resulted in IIRIRA, for example, congressional representatives like California's Duke Cunningham gave shape to the trope of the criminal immigrant.

Cunningham described going on police ride-alongs in San Diego, California, and going to a crime-heavy area. He and the officers approached an apartment building where Cunningham claimed ninety percent of apartment building residents were unauthorized immigrants.⁴⁰³ But just as Armenta did in 1929, when immigration inspectors tried to arrest or question immigrants, many of them left and made it difficult for officers to question and detain them. For Cunningham, like Forester in 1929, that fact alone was proof of undocumented people's guilt and criminality. But Cunningham also used undocumented people's poverty against them as proof of their criminality. He opined, "I mean the filth, the debris, and I could see needles...we would see a mattress where prostitutes were using it..."⁴⁰⁴ For Cunningham, undocumented immigrants were all drug mules, addicts, and prostitutes who lived in squalor. Cunningham's descriptions of unauthorized migrants in San Diego would continue to hold sway in California and increasingly across the United States.

Having established the militarization of the border to keep unauthorized immigrants out, the United States Congress turned to expel them from the country's interior. Proponents of harsher immigrant policies seized on migrant poverty to differentiate them from the hard-working American citizens who regularly paid their

⁴⁰³ *Immigration in the National Interest Act of 1995*, HR 2202, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 142 (March 20, 1996): H2479.

⁴⁰⁴ *Immigration in the National Interest Act of 1995* HR 2202, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 142 (March 20, 1996): H2480.

taxes. Under IIRIRA, for example, a family-sponsored immigrant was inadmissible as a public charge unless their sponsor signed a legally binding affidavit of support. Along with IIRIRA, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) worked, as President Bill Clinton claimed, to end the welfare system as it existed for sixty years. The debates around the Welfare Reform act revolved around who was ultimately responsible for individuals' poverty. Was it the federal and state governments or poor people themselves? Since the 1930s, the U.S. federal government, through its Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program (AFDC), has played a role in assisting low-income families. Yet by the 1990s, federal assistance became tied with the idea of responsibility, finding work, and getting off welfare as soon as possible. Poor people had an obligation to society to find work and be self-sufficient. The idea behind the reforms was to "cure dependency" by limiting help and fostering self-sufficiency.⁴⁰⁵ PRWORA reversed decades of federal policy and ended cash assistance to the poor, reduced federal spending for the poor, and required states to play a larger role in assisting poor people through employment.

In California, this meant the anti-immigrant wave now had an avenue to punish immigrants further. Before PRWORA, states could not restrict access to

⁴⁰⁵ Mary Ellen Hombs, *Welfare Reform: A Reference Handbook*, 13; Brendon O'Connor, "The Protagonists and Ideas Behind the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996: The Enactment of a Conservative Welfare System," *Social Justice* vol. 28 no. 4 (Winter 2001): 5.

federal programs based on citizenship status. After Clinton signed PRWORA into law, not only were states able to bar access to federal assistance based on national membership, the act required them to do so.⁴⁰⁶ However, scholars have argued PRWORA also served as a covert means of immigration reform.⁴⁰⁷ The law banned noncitizens from receiving food stamp benefits and old-age assistance. Over one million legal immigrants became ineligible for food stamp benefits, while half a million were ineligible for old-age assistance the day President Clinton signed PRWORA into law. Demonstrative of the shift in who ultimately was responsible for poor people, the law made immigrant sponsors legally responsible for their charges for five years. After waiting a required five years, their sponsor's income and resources also determine eligibility when an immigrant applies for welfare. This stipulation created a two-tier system for welfare between American citizens and legal immigrants who would need to show a higher need to receive benefits.⁴⁰⁸

But the Welfare Act did more than differentiate between citizens and noncitizens. It sought to punish undocumented immigrants through their children and policed migrant homes. The law barred "unqualified" aliens, meaning unauthorized

⁴⁰⁶ Aubrey Singer, "Welfare Reform and Immigrants: A Policy Review" in *Immigrants, Welfare Reform and the Poverty of Policy* eds. Philip Kretsedemas and Ana Aparicio (Westport Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 21-34.

⁴⁰⁷ Alejandra Marchevsky, *Not Working: Latina Immigrants, Low-Wage Jobs, and the Failure of Welfare Reform* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 60.

⁴⁰⁸ Singer, "Welfare Reform and Immigrants," 27.

immigrants, from receiving public health benefits. But the children of undocumented immigrants could still receive benefits. To further punish undocumented immigrants who had US-born children, the law made social workers de facto immigration agents. The law required all state agencies who received federal funding to provide the INS, upon request, with the names, addresses, and any identifying information of any individuals who the agency knew were unlawfully in the U.S. The Welfare Reform act also required social service agencies in California to report undocumented people who needed assistance.⁴⁰⁹ If undocumented immigrants who had children eligible to receive benefits applied, they risked being reported to INS.

Duke Cunningham's comments in 1996, or the rhetoric of PRWORA, linking immigrants with vice and criminality would have fit with Rodolfo Gallego and Calexico heads of households in 1909 who decried Mexicali as a center of vice and depravity. Both Gallego and Cunningham abhorred prostitution and linked the practice to immorality and dangers to local communities. In their petitions to Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, the Gallego group decried the growing presence of prostitution in the center of Mexicali, Mexico. While the Gallego group loathed the existence of prostitution, it welcomed the revenues from the commerce in sex and the indirect business generated for the local Mexicali economy. The 1909 incident represented the constant shift in Mexico between calls for sexual commerce's

⁴⁰⁹ Lynn H. Fujiwara, "The Impact of Welfare Reform on Asian Immigrant Communities," *Social Justice* vol. 25 no. 1 (Spring 1998): 97-98.

abolition and its legal existence and regulation.⁴¹⁰ In their petition, the Gallego group relied on the danger prostitutes presented to Mexicali and the local community to argue for stronger regulations that would move brothels away from the center of town.

By the 1990s, little had changed. Sex workers in the United States continued to be criminalized. The regulation of sex workers represented a growing sexual panic, the policing of sexuality and home environments. Migrants, to people like Cunningham, were dangerous criminals who needed to be removed. Cunningham would agree with Gallego's concern in 1909 that the presence of sex workers was a danger to families. Children might come across a prostitute, or a potential client might confuse wives and mothers for one. Benjamin Shepard has argued sex, along with violence and drugs, are key themes behind the panic of public welfare and often emerge to justify policies that aim to control outsider groups.⁴¹¹ The objectives of

⁴¹⁰ By the 1950s, for example, Mexico City laws targeted madams and other individuals who benefited economically from sexual commerce, but the law did not criminalize sex workers. But this led to the increasing power of pimps who did not register with local authorities. Pamela J. Fuentes, "Burdeles, prostitucion, y género a través de los procesos por lenocinio. Ciudad de México, década de 1940," *Vicio, prostitucion, y delito Mujeres transgresoras de los siglos XIX y XX*. Elisa Speckman Guerra y Fabiola Bailón Vásques (Mexico City: UNAM Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2016), 227-254.

⁴¹¹ Benjamin Shepard, "Sex Panic and the Welfare State" *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* vol 34 no. 1 (March 2007): 155-172.

PRWORA supporters, in part, were the control and regulation of female sexuality. The law tied financial aid to women's age, marital status, the number of children they had on public welfare and encouraged two-parent households.⁴¹² While Cunningham and Gallego might disagree about sexual commerce's place in society, they would agree it represented a threat to local families and needed to be controlled by officials in some manner; for Cunningham, it was through deportation, and for Gallego, it was regulations.

On top of criminalizing undocumented people, part of dividing and differentiating them from proper American citizens was establishing them as "takers." Chief Inspector I.F. Wixon in 1926 had described Mexican migrants in similar terms. He and the 1926 Pass-Book Plan proponents described migrant agricultural workers as a roaming mass of vagrants going from town to town, filling the jail cells, and exploiting the charitable rolls. Wixon believed part of his job was to relieve local communities of the burden of the migrant worker through deportation. He likely reasoned fewer migrants on relief rolls meant more resources for Americans. Sixty years later, Tillie Kidd Fowler, a member of the Republican party from Jacksonville, Florida, would make similar arguments. Fowler argued the United States could not "be both the land of opportunity and the land of welfare dependency." Fowler believed that the U.S. immigration system "should reward those who bring skills and initiative" into the United States, but it was wrong to force U.S. citizens to "pay

⁴¹² Shepard, "Sex Panic and the Welfare State," 166.

benefits to people who never contributed to the system.” Unsaid, but directly implied in Rep. Fowler’s statement, she believed that certain immigrants were unskilled and unproductive individuals. However, just like Wixon, Fowler believed the laws before IIRIRA “encourage... immigrants to participate in welfare programs directly or to bring elderly family members to... retire at the taxpayer’s expense.”⁴¹³ Fowler articulated the link between the illegitimate worker—for her, it hinged on “productivity”—and dependency that the 1996 act meant to end.

Increasingly throughout the twentieth century, deportation and forcible removal became the cudgel to punish undocumented immigrants and remove them from the welfare rolls. In 1996, the US Congress would remove immigrants indirectly by denying them access to public assistance programs. For example, PRWORA, known as the Welfare Reform Act, limited the number of years families could receive public relief and incentivized people to work. The act also shifted responsibility away from the federal government and onto sponsoring family members to provide and ensure immigrants’ social and economic well-being. PRWORA differentiated between “qualified” and “unqualified” immigrant populations that hinged on the individual’s legal standing. The law barred undocumented immigrants from receiving public assistance, except for a relatively few like immunization and the free and

⁴¹³ *Providing for Consideration of H.R. 2022 Immigration in the National Interest Act of 1995*, H.R. 2022 104th Cong., 2nd Sess., *Congressional Record* 142 (March 19, 1996): H2368-H2369.

reduced lunch programs. PRWORA elevated citizenship status as a marker for who did and who did not deserve public assistance. Miguel Armenta and his family members would likely recognize PRWORA, their anonymous letter's evolution that warned of unauthorized border crossers taking advantage of the local Calexico community.

How the United States, by 1996, came to construct immigrants, both legal and unauthorized, as criminal dependents, did not transpire at the onset of a greater number of incoming migrants. Instead, U.S. society created the criminal-dependent migrant gradually across the twentieth century. This dissertation has shown a critical step in the process was the moralization of workers, who chose their labor based on their moral understandings, as dangerous threats to the social body. In the second half of the twentieth century, Mexican migrants would continue to move across borders and choose their labor. Whether they were braceros in the 1950s, agricultural workers in the 1970s, or factory sewists, laborers would often know they were being exploited but were willing to accept it because of the greater importance of feeding their families. Miguel Armenta's experience in 1929 signaled how a discourse developed around morality and workers affected all migrants at the California borderlands into the 1930s. If migrants violated local norms of acceptability, as the anonymous letter accused the Armenta family of through accusations of illegality and a drain on local resources, US immigration agents would police and deport them. Discussion of workers, morality, and criminality would crystalize and affect all Mexican immigrants by 1996.

My family history follows the trajectory of Mexican workers who rejected characterizations of themselves as exploited, criminal, or immoral individuals. Instead, throughout the twentieth century, members of my family chose to accept exploitation, low wages, or unrecognized workers if it meant they could feed their families. Like many Mexican families' stories of migration, my own begins in 1952 when my grandfather, Eleuterio, came to California from Oaxaca, Mexico, to work in the agricultural fields as a *bracero*. He would cross back and forth for the next twenty years, sometimes as a *bracero* and others as an undocumented worker. Decades later, he shared with me he rarely made enough money to send to his starving children in Oaxaca. My grandfather knew there was a greater likelihood of success for him and his children in the United States, and for twenty years, he accepted being exploited. My grandmother, Guadalupe, remained in Oaxaca throughout the years, raising my mother and her siblings, just as many Mexican women did. She worked in the fields, washed clothes, and sold tortillas to feed her children. My grandmother, not my grandfather, would eventually push, arrange, and help most of my uncles and aunts to leave Oaxaca and come to the United States. My grandmother, Lupe, was not atypical but did as so many mothers have done for decades. She ensured her children's survival, even if at great personal cost. She would not see some of her children in the flesh ever again. My mother left Oaxaca as an eighteen-year-old after working since she was nine years old as a domestic servant. She has continued to work her entire life in the service industry. She has often remarked that she did not dare take any chance to improve her working conditions, like joining a union, for example, out of

fear her children would go without food. Instead, she accepted she was underpaid and overworked. But for my mother, the greater calculation was her children and our survival.

How can historians make sense of calculations individuals like my grandparents and mother made? “Rightful and Moral Work” has argued one way is to understand workers’ choices. Rather than focus on worker exploitation or rejection, this dissertation has shown how laborers often existed in the liminal spaces between exploitation and consent. This study has shown that by focusing on what people did, and continue to do, to earn their livelihood and feed their families, we can better understand who workers were—and always have been. Mexican laborers earned the self-respect to work and live as they chose, with dignity and as moral persons.

APPENDIX ONE

		Poblacion por sexos.		De 0 a 1 año.		Poblacion por edades.						
						De 2 años.		De 3 años.		De 4 años.		
ESTADOS.	NÚMERO DE HABITANTES		Total.	H.	M.	Total.	H.	M.	Total.	H.	M.	Total.
	Hombres.	Mujeres.										
PRESENTE.												
POBLACION POR EDADES.												
ESTADOS.												
Del Centro.												
Distrito Federal.....	921,824	247,481	468,705	10,404	10,216	20,620	5,793	5,874	11,667	5,864	5,910	11,804
Aguascalientes.....	50,914	31,884	102,378	2,204	2,188	4,432	1,342	1,170	2,421	1,163	1,195	2,358
San Luis Potosí.....	274,672	251,323	502,195	13,660	13,169	26,719	7,989	7,733	15,712	8,199	8,076	16,275
Guerrero.....	529,381	518,436	1,047,817	26,344	25,276	51,620	13,808	13,400	27,208	13,330	13,009	26,339
Queretaro.....	112,489	112,359	224,848	6,072	5,570	11,642	3,035	2,891	5,926	3,198	3,308	6,506
Hidalgo.....	268,710	283,107	551,817	16,343	16,479	32,822	9,603	9,056	18,659	9,617	9,114	18,731
México.....	415,028	422,958	837,986	22,416	21,293	43,709	13,597	13,104	26,701	13,343	13,469	26,812
Morales.....	77,638	79,148	156,786	4,085	4,080	8,165	2,106	2,183	4,279	2,303	2,100	4,403
Morelos.....	78,745	84,489	163,244	3,408	3,306	6,714	2,867	2,682	5,529	2,601	2,675	5,276
Tlaxcala.....	471,803	502,573	974,376	29,299	29,535	57,834	16,363	15,171	30,524	15,288	14,984	30,270
Puebla.....	147,325	145,224	292,549	6,825	6,585	13,410	4,000	3,713	7,713	3,969	3,793	7,762
Durango.....	222,744	224,521	447,265	10,502	9,582	20,084	5,572	5,549	11,121	5,789	5,396	11,176
Zacatecas.....	95,602	92,556	188,158	4,387	3,936	8,323	2,078	2,588	5,266	2,712	2,586	5,298
Sonora.....	131,413	125,315	256,008	6,220	5,704	11,924	4,062	3,793	7,845	4,143	3,974	8,117
Chihuahua.....	123,189	114,616	237,810	4,867	4,494	9,351	3,517	3,282	6,799	3,641	3,372	7,013
Coahuila.....	156,058	151,838	307,896	7,588	7,365	15,353	4,881	4,550	9,431	4,801	4,605	9,406
Del Norte.												
Sonora.....	95,602	92,556	188,158	4,387	3,936	8,323	2,078	2,588	5,266	2,712	2,586	5,298
Chihuahua.....	131,413	125,315	256,008	6,220	5,704	11,924	4,062	3,793	7,845	4,143	3,974	8,117
Coahuila.....	123,189	114,616	237,810	4,867	4,494	9,351	3,517	3,282	6,799	3,641	3,372	7,013
Nuevo Leon.....	156,058	151,838	307,896	7,588	7,365	15,353	4,881	4,550	9,431	4,801	4,605	9,406
Del Golfo.												
Tamaulipas.....	103,217	100,028	203,245	4,480	4,291	8,771	3,174	2,989	6,163	3,322	3,081	6,373
Veracruz.....	428,389	425,503	853,892	25,716	24,254	49,970	13,315	13,398	26,713	13,148	14,607	27,755
Tlaxasco.....	66,451	67,475	133,926	4,131	3,993	8,124	2,468	2,366	4,844	2,469	2,321	4,790
Campoche.....	41,371	48,893	87,264	2,034	2,288	4,322	1,271	1,600	2,871	1,275	1,589	2,855
Yucatan.....	145,276	151,812	297,088	8,023	7,877	15,900	5,241	5,118	10,359	4,882	4,681	9,533
Del Pacifico.												
Michoacan.....	413,218	443,090	857,008	21,958	21,203	43,161	13,613	13,584	27,197	13,293	13,020	26,313
Colima.....	97,065	98,199	195,264	1,207	1,103	2,310	662	592	1,254	724	734	1,458
Guerrero.....	205,958	211,928	417,886	11,063	10,673	21,725	6,915	6,908	13,823	6,925	6,787	13,712
Jalisco.....	546,600	547,960	1,094,560	25,187	23,271	48,458	14,664	13,986	28,650	13,649	15,024	30,127
Sinaloa.....	126,929	125,929	252,858	7,441	7,162	14,603	4,393	4,981	9,374	3,649	4,805	8,454
Chihuahua.....	163,408	165,322	328,730	3,293	3,180	6,473	5,911	5,990	11,910	5,493	5,490	10,987
Oaxaca.....	429,813	443,089	872,902	23,906	22,799	46,696	13,887	13,651	27,538	14,308	14,139	28,447
Tepec.....	74,829	72,276	147,105	3,463	3,035	6,498	1,881	1,863	3,681	2,047	2,064	4,111
Baja California.....	21,828	19,910	41,838	937	889	1,826	606	565	1,151	659	667	1,316
SUMAS.....	6,190,211	6,301,262	12,491,473	324,202	308,727	632,929	180,934	185,418	375,362	389,977	387,240	772,217
							191,481	190,397	381,878			

Signe en las páginas 130 y 131.

Source: Dirección General de Estadísticas, *Censo General de la República Mexicana Verificado el 20 de Octubre de 1895* (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1899), 6.

APPENDIX TWO

TABLE 13
COMPLAINTS FILED BY MEXICAN LABORERS WITH THE STATE LABOR COMMISSIONER
IN THE SAN DIEGO-IMPERIAL DISTRICT, 1926*

	Number of cases	Amount
Refusal to pay wages.....	383	\$16,456.88
Pending (at close of year).....	150	8,219.45
Collected (at close of year).....	211	7,180.38
Dismissed.....	22	859.14
All other complaints.....	16
Total complaints.....	399	16,456.88

* Approximately eighty per cent of the Mexican complaints filed in this district came from Imperial County.

TABLE 14
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF MEXICAN COMPLAINTS TO THE STATE LABOR
COMMISSIONER, EL CENTRO, FROM AUGUST, 1926, TO JULY, 1927

Month	Mexican complainants	All complainants	Percentage of Mexican complainants
August (1926).....	37	123	30.1
September.....	73	205	35.6
October.....	12	66	18.1
November.....	34	81	42.0
December.....	72	125	57.6
January (1927).....	21	83	25.3
February.....	10	71	14.1
March.....	13	80	16.3
April.....	44	90	48.9
May.....	7	37	18.9
June.....	69	123	56.1
July.....	71	166	42.8
Total.....	463	1,250	37.0

Source: Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928), 43.

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