

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE PORTRAYAL OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS IN OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND ITS
INFLUENCE ON STATE AND FEDERAL IMMIGRATION REFORM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACILITY
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION

By
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Norman, Oklahoma
2021

**THE PORTRAYAL OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS IN OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND
ITS INFLUENCE ON STATE AND FEDERAL IMMIGRATION REFORM**

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Dedicated to the Mexican immigrant community in Oklahoma who have contributed immensely to the prosperity of this country and state without proper recognition.

“Y aunque le duela a muchos, somos mayoría” - Calibre 50¹

¹ Calibre 50, El Inmigrante, Corridos de Alto Calibre, Disa/UMLE, 2013.

Acknowledgements

This thesis and my journey in higher education would not be possible without the community of people who lead me here. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of them.

I wish to thank, first, and foremost my committee chair, professor, and advisor Dr. Mirelsie Velazquez. Your guidance and mentorship changed my life in and outside the classroom. Without your impact as an educator, I would not have been able to make it to the finish line. It is because of educators like you that students like me can fulfill their potential. Thank you for sharing your knowledge, wisdom, and support.

I want to express my gratitude and thanks to my committee members Dr. Kirsten Edwards and Dr. Kari Chew, for their support and resources as committee members and professors. Being able to learn from you both transformed my journey as a graduate student. Thank you for being two of the most influential professors of my graduate career.

My thanks and appreciation to my mentor Dr. Sara Mata, you have believed in me from the start even when I did not. Without your support, I would have never pursued a graduate degree. Your mentorship changes lives, and I am proof of that. I wish to carry the impact you do in your students' lives. Thank you for never giving up on me.

I am indebted to all of the people who believed in me, supported, and vouched for me. I want to express my immense gratitude to the community that made this journey possible. I want to thank Scott Cady, Brenda Palomino Grant, Tracey Morales, Akash Patel, Paola Lopez Fincannon, Matt Cancio, Dr. Mackey, and many others who mentored me along the way.

This thesis and all of my accomplishments are dedicated to my parents. Quiero darle las gracias a mis padres. Les debo todo mis logros. Sin ustedes y todos sus sacrificios y amor incondicional esto nunca hubiera sido posible. Este logro no solo es mío si no de nosotros. Gracias por enseñarme a luchar por mis sueños a pesar de los obstáculos. Ustedes son la razón porque nunca me di por vencida y sigo luchando.

Thank you to my sisters Paulina and Keiry; you both are my motivation and support system. Thank you for believing in me and loving me extra on the hard days.

I am immensely grateful to my best friends Paola, Catalina, and Carlos. Thank you for supporting me, motivating me, and believing in me. Thank you for the countless words of encouragement you provided throughout this journey, thank you for sharing my stress, thank you for sticking with me. Words cannot express how much your friendship means to me.

I would also like to thank my roommate, classmate, and friend Vanessa. We began this journey together, and it is a privilege to finish it together. Thank you for lifting me up on the hard days and being there through it all.

Lastly, I would like to thank the community of first-generation students, undocumented students, and Latinx students who came before me. Your contributions matter, and without them, I would not be here.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
ABSTRACT	VII
INTRODUCTION	1
FROM NARRATIVES TO ACTIONS	12
RESEARCH METHOD AND SOURCES	13
THESIS OUTLINE	18
CHAPTER 1: NEWSPAPERS: TOOLS OF THE OPPRESSOR	20
CHAPTER 2: WORDS OR WEAPONS	26
THE BRACERO PROGRAM	30
OPERATION W*TBACK	37
BORDER PATROL	41
INVADERS	47
CRIMINALS	49
LOCO WEED	50
MEXICAN MARIJUANA	52
LANGUAGE	57
CHAPTER 3: ENACTING VIOLENCE OR ENACTING CHANGE.....	61
EDUCATION WITHIN IMMIGRATION POLICY	66
CONCLUSION	69
BIBLIOGRAPHY	71

Abstract

The portrayal of Mexican immigrants in Oklahoma history is damaging to the growth and prosperity of the Mexican immigrant community because it enforces the stigma and negative stereotypes this community continues to battle today. This directly affects our current era because the consistent themes that immigrants are portrayed in ignite anti-immigrant rhetoric in society and policy work. Access to citizenship is one way that these narratives affect the population, as it continues to limit their access to resources, and at times portraying them as not deserving of citizenship and the legal rights, and protections citizenship would extend to the population. Such actions are enforced by the fear of allowing this community to become a part of this country because of the stereotypes created about them. Immigration policy cannot improve and serve all populations equally if the dominant narrative of Mexican immigrants is not dismantled, challenged, and analyzed. The perceptions of immigrants have been created and enforced throughout history, carried over time, and are still present in the media today. One such example is the 2016 election, and the propaganda used to gain public support by Donald Trump, who ran on the claim that "Mexico sent its "worst elements," including rapists, drug-runners, and criminals to the U.S., that "tremendous infectious disease" poured across the U.S.-Mexico border, and that a "beautiful" wall built between Mexico and the U.S. (and paid for by Mexico) was a necessary solution to the "problem" of immigration."² It is vital to recognize how history continues to affect the future of marginalized communities. This research will aim to make that connection by exploring how negative perceptions of Mexican immigrants are directly connected

² Winders, Jamie. 2016. "Immigration and the 2016 Election." *The University of North Carolina Press* (University of North Carolina Press) 56 (3): 291-296.

to immigration reform in Oklahoma. Oklahoma is left out of the conversation on Latina/o/x history, and I argue it is a much-needed space to interrogate to speak to how populations have been negatively impacted by master narratives that framed them as outsiders.

Key Words: Immigration Policy, Dominant Narrative, Mexican Immigrants, Oklahoma History

Introduction

The U.S. has a long-standing history with immigration, even being referred to as the land of immigrants. This reference of the U.S. as a “land of immigrants” ignores the history of settler colonialism and enslavement which continues to harm communities of color. In the 20th and 21st centuries, conversations on immigration have influenced presidential and state elections and continue to be a major influence in the social, political, and economic development of communities. This thesis aims to research the portrayal of Mexican immigrants in Oklahoma history and expose the influence it has on immigration reform. Thus, it is necessary to look at the history of the United States and immigration.

The United States’ relationship with immigration is unique, being a country whose interventions in other countries’ turmoil often contribute to destabilizing countries’ economies and leading to poverty and war, leaving them worse off than when they began. Latin American countries know this experience far too well. Puerto Rico is a prime example of U.S. intervention leading to turmoil. Gonzalez explains in *Harvest of Empire*, a book dedicated to navigating the United States’ role in destabilizing Latin American Countries. As Gonzalez contends, “Nowhere did the new U.S. policy leave such a profound legacy as in Puerto Rico. When General Nelson Miles Landed in the town of Guanica on July 25, 1898, in the midst of the Spanish-American War, most Puerto Ricans greeted his arrival and rejoiced at his promise to end Spanish Colonialism.”³ The United States arrived in Puerto Rico with the false intentions of freeing them from Spanish Colonialism, and General Nelson Miles claimed false promises stating, “Our

³ Gonzalez, Juan. 2011. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America Revised Edition*. Penguin Group.

purpose is not to interfere with the existing laws and customs which are beneficial for your people.”⁴ Actions from the United States did not align with this proclamation. The Foraker Act is an example of the United States’ ability to hold power over other countries and their disregard for the people who inhabit these places. The act:

declared the island a U.S. territory and authorized the president to appoint its civilian governor and top administrators. The new law permitted islanders their own House of Delegates, but it reserved for Congress the right to annul any laws those delegates passed. It assigned trade, treaty, postal, sanitary, and military powers to the federal government and it gave the island only one nonvoting delegate in Congress. In many ways, the Foraker Act gave Puerto Ricans less self-government than they had enjoyed under Spain.⁵

United States officials arrived in Puerto Rico under false pretenses of assisting the people towards their freedom from Spain only to take their independence from them. The Foraker act is one example of the harm caused by the United States towards Puerto Ricans. U.S. intervention did not begin and end with Puerto Rico. It continued in various Latin American countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Panama, Colombia, and other Central American countries. Intervention changed along with administrations; under the Franklin D. Roosevelt presidency intervention tactics shifted, “overt bullying from Washington and military occupations largely ended, Instead, American diplomats in the region sought to control events through pliant pro-U.S. dictators who were expected to maintain order.”⁶ U.S. officials intervened in Latin American presidential elections favoring candidates that prioritized their interests and left the needs of the communities behind.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, pg. 69.

Latin American populations migrate to seek stability no longer available in their home country caused at the hands of U.S. intervention. As Stuart Hall mentions, “There are more people on the move across the globe than at any time in modern history-- whether driven by persistent poverty, underdevelopment, hunger, and unemployment, by the modern pandemics of disease and ill-health, ecological devastation, and environmental disaster or by the civil war, ethnic cleansing, religious or tribal conflict.”⁷ Due to the state of other countries, migration is inevitable. Immigration is a topic that has no expiration date, especially when individuals aim to find any opportunity at survival or when countries are constantly in flux. The United States has tried to sustain the image of the country of opportunity, built up by the concept of the “American Dream.” A concept suggesting hard work will result in obtaining freedom, success, and financial stability. This illusion attracts the flow of immigration, but who has access to the American Dream needs to be debated, as opportunities are framed around the racial, gender, and class politics of the era.

The American Dream is a concept created and enforced by the dominant narrative. It is an ideal ingrained in Americanism and the foundation of the nation, where “[b]uilding upon the foundational ideals of the Declaration of Independence, James Truslow Adams (1931) formally introduced and defined the concept of “The American Dream” as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.”⁸ This dream evolved into the identity of the United States, giving American citizens a goal to strive for. Due to the illusion of this dream, the United States was

⁷ Hall, Stuart. 2003. "Cosmopolitan Promises, Multicultural Realities." *Divided Cities the Oxford Amnesty Lectures 2003* 20-51.

⁸ Chang, Aurora, Mark Anthony Torrez, Kelly N. Ferguson, and Anita Sagar. 2017. "Figured Worlds and American Dreams: An explanation of Agency and Identity Among Latinx Undocumented Students." *Urban Rev* 189-216.

assumed to be a place of opportunity, attracting a flow of immigrants in the past and present. A chance at a better life influenced the migration of individuals from other countries, “this dream—of life in the free and prosperous ‘America’—has historically influenced immigration trends, luring millions of people in search of a better life to travel to the US, both legally and illegally.”⁹ The American Dream is an illusion created by the dominant narrative to upkeep the idea that the United States is a country of equal opportunity, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. These imaginings give the perception of inclusion, of the possibility of achieving the ‘American Dream’, of feeling like any American. Reality shows a different story.”¹⁰ An illusion that motivates populations yet is not equally accessible continues to thrive due to the dominant narrative. The dominant narrative has made the American Dream the staple it is in American society and history.

To understand the power products of the dominant narrative holds, such as that of the American Dream, it is necessary to understand what this narrative entails. History in the United States includes many different versions; the version that remains consistent and celebrated is the version told through the voice of conquerors, the oppressors. This voice holds power therefore; it reigns over the marginalized version of history. As Linda T. Smith states in the book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, which explores the harm western research causes communities of color such as indigenous people:

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Rodriguez, Gabriel. 2017. "El Hogar Es Donde Esta el Corazon: Making Meaning through Oral History Interviews with Family." In *Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People Oral Histories of (Mis) Educational Opportunities in Challenging Notions of Achievement*, edited by Yoon K Pak, LaTasha Louise Nesbitt and Suzanne M Reily. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks.

[w]e believe that history is also about justice, that understanding history will enlighten our decisions about the future. Wrong. History is also about power. In fact, history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that “we have been excluded, marginalized and ‘Othered.’”¹¹

The dominant narrative is the voice of the powerful in American society; it has created and upheld institutions and systems of oppression through its framing of certain groups in history. The narratives of the marginalized are silenced and erased from history due to their lack of power, and therefore the dominant narrative becomes the main narrative. Ideals and attitudes about marginalized groups have been influenced by the writings in historical texts. History is deemed as factual information rather than stories created and enforced by the dominant narrative. Marginalized communities’ versions of history are discredited because they contradict the version of the dominant narrative. The dominant narrative restricts the marginalized ability to exist in history, “[f]or communities of color, our histories are often relegated to the margins, or existing within other community’s memories, virtually forced to exist as footnotes in the writing of those histories.”¹² The dominant narrative is powerful due to its ability to modify history accordingly, and marginalized communities are harmed along the way. Immigrant communities continue to experience this due to the dominant narratives’ portrayal of them in history.

Attitudes towards immigrants in the United States have been shaped by how they are portrayed in history by the dominant narrative. Not to say that anti-immigrant rhetoric does not

¹¹Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books London and New York.

¹² Velázquez M. (2019) Lessons from the Past: Listening to Our Stories, Reading Our Lives: The Place of Oral Histories in Our Lives. In: Fitzgerald T. (eds) *Handbook of Historical Studies in Education*. Springer International Handbooks of Education. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0942-6_51-1

exist in every immigrant experience because “[t]he U.S. has a rich tradition of immigration; but alongside this richness lies an undebated record of xenophobia aimed at immigrant populations. The diminishing or the ‘othering’ of immigrant populations has always existed; it is a mistake to assume it is no longer relevant.”¹³ Immigrant populations continue to face hardships in the United States due to anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobic attitudes. Though, it is important to recognize that immigrant experiences are not monolithic. They can differ on the basis of nationality, skin color, etc., and this can be demonstrated by looking at the experiences of immigrants of color versus European immigrants. Whiteness allows immigrants access and the ability to integrate into the American culture without being racialized. An example of this is the history of Irish immigrants in the United States, “the Irish were often deemed white enough to be included in white societies and were keen on aligning themselves with the white majorities in America. This whitening of the Irish also extended to the Irish immigrants' sense of self, their religious and class affiliations, and their aspired social and economic success.”¹⁴ Whiteness plays a role in the assimilation of Irish immigrants in the United States and their ability to discard their own traditions and adapt. Being white-passing allowed Irish immigrants a route towards economic success, “[m]uch in the sense of passing as a form of upward mobility, Irish Catholics in particular attempted to get rid of their status as a race.”¹⁵ Discarding their race allowed the Irish to integrate into American society without being othered due to their race or skin color.

¹³ Rodriguez, Gabriel. 2017. "El Hogar Es Donde Esta el Corazon: Making Meaning through Oral History Interviews with Family." In *Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People Oral Histories of (Mis) Educational Opportunities in Challenging Notions of Achievement*, edited by Yoon K Pak, LaTasha Louise Nesbitt and Suzanne M Reily. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks.

¹⁴ Heinz, Sarah. "'Not White, Not Quite': Irish American Identities in the U.S. Census and in Ann Patchett's Novel 'Run'." *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 58, no. 1 (2013): 79-100. Accessed April 15, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43485860>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Immigrants of color are not granted that access and are often racialized with the stereotypes that follow.

There are ways in which the immigration system has racialized particular bodies. For example, the early 20th century found Asian immigrants, and by extension Asian-Americans, the target of policies targeting not just their movement to the U.S. but also within the U.S. As was the case for Japanese Americans via Executive Order 9066, War-time politics targeted the population, “In February 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which delegated to military commanders the power to relocate persons of Japanese ancestry living in the United States.”¹⁶ Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants were deemed as a danger to the nation and relocated to internment camps. This executive order labeled them outsiders regardless of citizenship or legal status. President Roosevelt viewed their race as a danger to Americans due to the country’s conflict with Japan. Nationality and race can determine the portrayals and attitudes towards immigrant communities. Negative public opinion about immigrants can be influenced by this racialized view of immigration. Immigrants migrate from all over, but European immigrants can create less anxiety for Americans due to their whiteness.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric can be heightened when society views immigration as solely made up of immigrants of color. The public is likely to assume that immigration is a danger to the country because “Anti-immigration rhetoric also often has group over- tones and, explicitly or implicitly, distinction between stigmatized ethnic or racial groups, such as Hispanics, and

¹⁶ Aitken, Robert, and Marilyn Aitken. "Japanese American Internment." *Litigation* 37, no. 2 (2011): 59-70. Accessed April 15, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23075502>.

“good” immigrants, such as those from Canada, Ireland, or Poland.”¹⁷ The good and bad dichotomy is harmful because it increases negative public opinion about immigrants of color.

Fear can lead to stereotypical views of these communities but:

[n]egative stereotypes about Latinos in particular might boost concerns about cultural assimilation, consumption of scarce public resources, crime, and so on. Thus when the news media highlight Latinos in discussions about immigration, white citizens may come to believe that immigrants pose an even greater problem than if white Europeans were featured.¹⁸

As populations begin to feel fear or threatened, it might influence action. Anti-immigrant rhetoric and negative public opinion about immigrants of color can influence the modification of immigration reform. An example of this is Donald Trump’s initiative to strengthen regulations around the public charge rule for immigrants. The public charge rule existed prior to Donald Trump’s modification, and it served to determine if immigrants applying for legal status had the potential to become a public charge. Particularities of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 set forth the ways in which “citizenship” can be withheld to individuals, and at times used to target groups of people:

Under; section 212(a)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), 8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(4), an alien seeking admission to the United States or seeking to adjust status to that of a lawful permanent resident (obtaining a Green Card) is inadmissible if; the alien, "at the time of application for admission or adjustment of status, is likely at any time to become a public charge." If an alien is inadmissible, we will not grant admission to the United States or adjustment of status.¹⁹

¹⁷ Brader, Ted, Nicholas A. Valentino, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2008. "What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 959-78.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. 2021. *Public Charge Fact Sheet*. March 10. Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://www.uscis.gov/archive/public-charge-fact-sheet>.

A community that was targeted through the public charge rule was Mexican women, “conversely, immigration inspectors routinely stopped those considered ‘likely to become a public charge’ in other words solas (women crossing the border alone) and single mothers. Agents scrutinized passport applications and conducted special hearings to determine women’s eligibility for entrance into the United States.”²⁰ Mexican women were determined unworthy of being admitted into the United States because they held the potential to become a public charge due to their marital status. Another example of discrimination towards immigrants of color is the treatment Mexican immigrants endured in their arrival to the United States after the passing of the Immigration Act of 1917, on top of the hardships of this act, such as literacy tests and a head tax.²¹ Once immigrants arrived in El Paso, Texas, they experienced dehumanizing treatment and conditions such as being herded in examination pens, detained without access to food, water, or bathrooms, undressed and disinfected, public examinations, and public baths.²² The public charge rule, the literacy tests, head tax, and/or the inhumane treatment offered are just products of the immigration system of the United States and its portrayal of immigrants of color. The barriers immigrants face to access entry to the country leads them to emigrate without legal documentation.

Negative attitudes and anti-immigrant rhetoric are the key tools to maintain a divide in immigration politics. Racism and xenophobia are active agents in the immigration system, and that becomes apparent when the issue of immigration is brought up in political settings.

American values are ingrained in politics, and politicians use that to their advantage by using

²⁰ Ruiz, Vicki L. 2008. *From Out of the Shadows Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

²¹ Ibid, pg. 13.

²² Ibid, pg. 13.

common negative stereotypes about immigrants to increase or keep negative attitudes towards this community. For example, [p]ublic debates about immigration, like those in other domains, often suggest the interests, values, or lifestyles of citizens are in harm's way. Elite discourse tends to emphasize adverse consequences for jobs, taxes, crime, schools, cultural norms, or social harmony.²³ The idea that immigrants are a threat to the country was created by the dominant narrative in history. A driving force in distributing negative stereotypes of immigrants and false narratives has been the mass media. The negative attitudes towards immigrants can originate from a place of fear which is typically enforced by the media and the information they distribute. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has been a consistent theme in the United States history, and the media has been a tool that has been utilized to remain consistent in this act.

A community that has been a victim of being portrayed negatively would be Mexican immigrants. The negative portrayal of Mexican immigrants in the United States has been influenced and enforced by history. American history is made up of narratives that hold more power than credibility, and that power can be a danger to communities of color who have no power or voice. A narrative can be used to silence and erase groups of people from the major narrative. In the case of the United States, the dominant narrative holds power to create narratives on non-white communities. They are excluded from history and painted a certain way that contributes to the dominant narrative; this contribution is done at their expense. Mexican immigrants have been victims of the dominant narrative historically by being painted as the enemy and a threat to the U.S. economy and safety. Their power to combat this has been taken

²³ Brader, Ted, Nicholas A. Valentino, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2008. "What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 959-78.

from them by consistent erasure and silencing. History has molded Mexican immigrants to fit into a specific label, a label that carries trauma and violence.

History creates the foundation for the future, and it holds power to undermine the histories of marginalized communities as well as their present and future livelihoods. Stories hold power, and they can become weapons against communities. History in the United States has been told in a manner that portrays the dominant narrative as the victors and saviors. Non-white bodies have been used as tools to enforce this image. This has been done by leaving out parts of history or erasing a whole group of people from it. The narratives discussed in the history books used to teach new generations do not include the real histories of marginalized groups. Mexican immigrants play a key role in United States history, but that was erased because it contradicts the idea of a white America.

As Gonzalez states in the book *The Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, “Anglo America continues to deny how much the social, cultural, political, and economic reality of the west and southwest has been shaped by Mexicans. They have been part of its creation and they will form an even bigger part of its future.”²⁴ History from the dominant narrative cannot include major contributions from non-white bodies because it can undermine the foundation of white supremacy this country has existed on since its inception. Admitting that non-white bodies such as Mexican immigrants are an essential part of this country’s foundation will disrupt the dominant narrative’s version of history, where they have portrayed Mexican immigrants as invaders. The dominant narrative has used its power and influence to write history from one

²⁴ Gonzalez, Juan. 2011. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America Revised Edition*. Penguin Group.

point of view that endangers marginalized communities. The portrayal of non-white communities in history, whether it be in the country overall or by the individual state, can be detrimental. Mexican immigrants have faced scrutiny nationwide due to the false portrayal of their community and the state of Oklahoma shares in that history.

The portrayal of Mexican immigrants in Oklahoma history is damaging to present and future Mexican immigrant communities because it created and enforced the stigma and negative stereotypes that this community continues to battle today. The major narrative written in history about Mexican immigrants has created anti-immigrant rhetoric, which affects the growth and prosperity of these communities. They continue to be targeted with labels and stereotypes such as criminals and drug traffickers; these negative stereotypes bury the contributions that Mexican immigrants bring to the country and the state of Oklahoma. History influences the values and opinions communities form therefore; it is difficult for the residents of this state to believe a different narrative than the one they have grown up seeing enforced. Immigration reform statewide cannot improve if people are not educated on the truth of these communities and how false narratives have allowed this country to stray away from progressive immigration reform. To strive towards a solution, the danger of the dominant narrative must be exposed.

From Narratives to Actions

While narratives are damaging by creating obstacles for Mexican immigrants to thrive in Oklahoma, there are other ways that it can affect them besides socially. The narratives that people grow up learning through the media can become difficult to unlearn and can be carried into their everyday values. This can be detrimental when these values bleed into someone's occupation. An example of this would be policymakers, and how they can carry bias from learning negative stereotypes about Mexican immigrants, which can lead them to be biased in

policymaking. The language that is used in policy is very similar to the language used in newspapers from Oklahoma history that portrayed immigrants in a bad light. This language is outdated and damaging to these communities and contributes to their dehumanization. The need to disrupt these narratives is apparent more than ever. If we want to work towards an effective immigration system that does not exploit immigrants of color, we must start locally. That means working to disrupt narratives that create bias in the policy that is passed.

The goal of this research project is to expose damaging narratives to the Mexican immigrant community in Oklahoma historical texts such as newspapers. The act of exposing traditional ways of documenting history and shining a light on the problematic nature of historical texts such as the archives is part of this project. Combating erasure and silencing of communities can be done by exposing patterns that history has influenced and enforced, such as deeming alternative ways of documenting history as non-credible. These alternative ways of history are the only accessible narratives people of color have. The goal is that the major findings will support this and exposed how harmful the negative portrayal of Mexican immigrants in Oklahoma history is and continues to affect their lived experiences.

Research Method and Sources

Mexican immigrants have experienced first-hand being silenced and spoken for as well as labeled by stereotypes that go on to define them. United States history has been led by the dominant narrative as well as Oklahoma history. The lack of Mexican immigrant's voices was not anticipated before this research began; it became apparent that there is an immense need for archival research due to the violence enacted on marginalized communities in historical texts. The purpose of this thesis is to research the portrayal of Mexican immigrants in Oklahoma history and expose the influence it has on immigration reform. Therefore, the methodology that

this research project employed was a qualitative method, and it included archival research. This study will examine Oklahoma Newspapers from the time frame of the 1900s-1990s and the reporting on Mexican immigrants; as well as policy from past and present that is connected to immigration. Newspapers that were used in this study were narrowed down by how frequently they reported on Mexican immigrants in regards to the drug trade, border patrol, treatment of immigrant workers, cheap bodies of labor, language, criminalization, and inferiority. The newspapers that were consistent in these themes were used to determine if there was a relationship between the common themes included in the writings and the policy written around that time frame. Newspapers were used as the main research method to develop a consistent idea of how immigrants were portrayed in Oklahoma through this time frame because they were the main source of news for Oklahomans. Any policy that is connected to issues of immigration in Oklahoma will be considered for this thesis research.

The Oklahoma newspapers that were used were narrowed down by using keywords that were commonly used in the time periods chosen for the research. Each time frame required different code words because of the slang and derogatory terms that were used in that era of reporting. In order to find information, it was necessary to search racial slurs used for immigrants in those time periods. Valuable information for this research was not found through code words such as immigration, Mexicans, or Mexican immigrants because the dominant narrative used different variations of labels and names for this community. This was one of the limitations that impacted this research because in order to find information, it meant searching multiple newspapers to find one story and use that information and keywords to try to gather more newspapers. Different time frames used different racial slurs, and those were noted in order to adjust research tools accordingly, and soon more information emerged specifically in older

newspapers. A limitation of archival research on marginalized groups is that the dominant narrative will always make documents not meant for these groups inaccessible. Therefore, it is difficult to access legitimate accounts from people of color. Instead, pieces of them are embedded through the dominant narratives.

Another limitation faced in this research was accessibility. I had to resort to archival research online due to the global pandemic. One of the tactics I expected prior to beginning my research was that the archives would be inaccessible due to the set hours they have. These hours are typically not accessible for working-class communities, which is a community to which I belong. Due to the current global pandemic, those hours are even more restrictive due to the necessary precautions that are being taken. Digital archives are only accessible if people have access to technology, and once they access it, they must know how to navigate the archives. Thankfully I have access to technology and could do my research through the online archives but was not able to have an extensive look at materials that are not digitized.

Immigration is a popular topic in the research field, and there has been a vast amount of influence and information provided by researchers who take part in this work. For this research, there needed to be a specific focus on Mexican immigrants, not just immigration. As well as the erasure and silencing of non-white groups by erasing them from history and the act of using stories as weapons. Each literature serves various purposes, but all align with the goal of this research project. First, the work of William Perez in *We Are Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* explains the common negative public opinions of immigrants and combats these views with actual testimonies from undocumented students striving towards accomplishing the American Dream. This book demonstrates how negative stigmas have blinded the public from the truth about immigrant communities and their contributions to the nation.

Secondly, the work of Juan Gonzalez' *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* provided me with the background knowledge on the history of Latin America and the United States. Gonzalez offers a history of Latinos in America that has not been provided previously. Non-white bodies are left out of history books and have to consume their history through the white lens; this is something I experienced while going through the archives and trying to find information on Mexican immigrants but soon realized there were no authentic narratives found, just those of white Americans. Gonzalez combats the white historical narrative and includes Latinos in the United States history, giving them a voice. He also discusses Mexican immigrants and their long-standing history with the United States. He states, the "most troubling are the descendants of the Mexican pioneers, for once you admit Mexicans long history on U.S. soil, you must necessarily accept the Hispanic culture and the Spanish language as integral components of our own national saga."²⁵ This allows me to provide information that combats the idea that Mexican immigrants are outsiders and how they have been targeted as threats in history. Gonzalez recognizes the connection between erasing Mexican immigrants from the United States history because once it is recognized, it challenges the idea of a white America. This influences how non-white bodies are portrayed in history to prevent them from dismantling the foundation white narratives have built.

Garcia's book *Strategies of Segregation Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality* discusses a newspaper in Oxnard, California, that caters to the major narrative that is trying to keep Mexican residents at a disadvantage. Garcia states that "The Oxnard Daily Courier later called The Press-Courier, rarely reported on the Mexican community,

²⁵ Gonzalez, Juan. 2011. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America Revised Edition*. Penguin Group.

though the criminal actions of Mexican men often made headlines.”²⁶ In this research project, newspapers are the center for the main findings because of how much influence they can have on creating an image of a community. As mentioned in Garcia’s work, newspapers often use their power to cater to the white narrative omitting details from reporting’s and only publishing work that depicts marginalized groups as the white narrative demands. Words are damaging to non-white communities’ images and portrayals because they do not hold power to fight back against these accusations. For the purpose of this research the context that Mexican immigrants are written about matters, especially because the words used in headlines and stories can expose a lot about the portrayal of Mexican immigrants in the past. Garcia wrote, “When news stories did refer to Mexican residents they did so with the consistent racial identifier (e.g., “Oxnard Mexican Murders Girl,” “Mexican Stabbed in Alley Brawl,” “Mexican girl Injured in Traffic Jam at Fire”) and regularly misspelled their names within the story.”²⁷ Connecting similar patterns to newspapers during archival research can result in finding a pattern in portrayals of immigrants, as well as connecting it to present newspaper companies.

King’s book *The Truth About Stories* introduces storytelling and how stories can carry power and impact depending on who tells them. In this research, newspapers hold power to create an image for Mexican immigrants and influence the ideologies of Oklahomans who consume this content. In his book, King states, “so am I such an ass to disregard this good advice and suggest that the stories contained within the matrix of Christianity and the complex of nationalism are responsible for the social, political, and economic problems we face?”²⁸ If

²⁶ Garcia, David G. 2018. *Strategies of Segregation Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ King, Thomas. 2005. *The Truth About Stories a Native Narrative*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Christianity and the portrayal of immigrants were switched, it would allow people to consider how much that has influenced their decisions in how they view immigrants, treat them, and the way they vote on immigration policy. King asks, “yet how can something that has never existed – the Indian—have form and power while something that is alive and kicking—Indians—are invisible?”²⁹ This contributes to this research because it puts into perspective how the portrayal of Mexican immigrants created by a white narrative has had more impact than their actual identities in Oklahoma history.

Lastly, the work of Ana Elizabeth Rosas in *Abrazando El Espiritu Bracero Families Confront the US-Mexico Border*, where the background of the Bracero program and testimonies from individuals who lived as braceros is necessary to understand how exploitation goes above legality. Mexican immigrants have suffered from horrid treatment due to being seen as cheap bodies of labor, yet Braceros who had legal contracts to work in the United States were discriminated against despite laws present to protect them. Labor and exploitation is an important area to explore when analyzing the portrayal of Mexican immigrants in history, and the Bracero Program is a vital event in this matter. Ronald Mize’s textbook “The U.S. – Mexico Bracero Program” contributed to the knowledge of the program as well as an original testimony from a former Bracero.

Thesis outline

This thesis will consist of three chapters. Chapter 1 will focus on the perceptions of Mexican immigrants in Oklahoma history. In addition, this chapter will examine common stereotypes and labels describing Mexican immigrants and how they were written about in

²⁹ Ibid, 53.

Oklahoma newspapers. This chapter will also dive into an analysis of how language played a role in the negative portrayal of the Mexican immigrant community in Oklahoma. Chapter 2 will focus on the importance of newspapers and the power they hold to create and sustain the dominant narrative. It will discuss how newspapers carry impact due to the populations' dependence on them as the main source of news; as well as being the main source of information on Mexican immigrants. This chapter will expose how newspapers reinforced hatred towards the community. Lastly, the negative perceptions created by these narratives will be compared to the info in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 will focus on the policy aspect of this research, specifically immigration policy in Oklahoma. Policy related to immigrant rights and immigration overall. This final chapter is vital to this thesis because it connects history to the present by allowing us to see how newspapers in Oklahoma history have directly influenced policy, whether it be in wording or the common perceptions of immigrants in immigration policy.

Chapter 1: Newspapers: Tools of the Oppressor

The dominant narrative remains powerful due to the tools that continue to distribute and enforce it. Different tools serve different eras. In the present day, people rely heavily on social media outlets to receive their information. Though technology exists now, it is not much different in its delivery as it was in the past. Before television and social media, newspapers were a prevalent source of news; therefore, the narratives that newspapers distributed were impactful to the population due to their dependence on their information. When considering how marginalized communities have been harmed by newspapers and their influential dominant narrative, it is necessary to consider how they were a tool of the oppressor. Stories without power are bound to be erased or silenced, while stories that are told through a population with power have a long-standing effect and are difficult to dismantle. Whiteness prevails in newspapers as the voices of white Americans are amplified, and those of people of color are hidden or silenced. The accessible amount of newspapers for people of color versus the amount available to white Americans in the 1900's-1990's is unequal, proven by archival research. In the time frame researched, there were mostly American newspapers that reported on people of color, not for them. They were talked about, but their voices were never a part of the conversation.

Living in an era where an individual's identity is created for them can create a separation from who they truly are and what they are seen as to the general public through mass media. Newspapers became a medium to support dominant narratives harmful to marginalized communities through their publishing's or lack thereof. The role of newspapers as a source of news in American society has been underestimated. The Pew Research Center reports that "Among all adults, newspapers were cited as the most relied-upon source or tied for most relied

upon for crime, taxes, local government activities, schools, local politics, local jobs, community/neighborhood events, arts events, zoning information, local social services, and real estate/housing.”³⁰ This allows newspapers to hold power and influence over populations due to their reliance on their coverage. It also leaves little room for fact-checking or credibility when they have gained influence over their respective population. Newspapers can be used as weapons by inciting violence on a group of people. An example of this is demonstrated by the Tulsa Race Massacre and the role of a newspaper in inciting it. *The Tulsa Tribune* played a major role in inciting this massacre because of its influence on the community, as the article states:

On May 31, a newspaper edition of Tulsa Tribune was distributed, including a report of an alleged assault by Rowland against a White female, Sara Page. Press coverage of the alleged offense was enough to evoke curiosity in some and disgust in others. Shortly after its circulation, white citizens throughout the city began assembling at the local courthouse where Rowland was being held on charges. Rumors and threats of an imminent lynching permeated the city.³¹

Looking at this piece, it is evident that the newspaper is the center of this event, and it was the catalyst for the violence that occurred after. This is made possible due to the influence the newspaper has on its community, and the trust people have that their information is credible. Dominant narratives carry enough power to be considered credible without factual proof due to the way newspapers frame their stories. Framing is vital to understanding the power newspapers have to incite actions; the Messer and Bell article states, “Diagnostic framing involves the establishment of blame or causality.”³² This type of framing is used to place blame on marginalized communities as well as responsibility for certain problems the country faces. The

³⁰ 2011. *Pew Research Center Internet and Technology*. September 26. Accessed March 11, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2011/09/26/part-3-the-role-of-newspapers/>.

³¹ Messer, Chris M, and Patricia A. Bell. 2010. "Mass Media and Governmental Framing of Riots: The Case of Tulsa, 1921." *Journal of Black Studies* 851-870.

³² Ibid.

second type of framing is called prognostic framing, which “refers to the identification of remedial strategies and tactics, or the solution to overcome the problem.”³³ This is demonstrated in various ways in newspapers; for example with the Tulsa Race Massacre the solution was seen as the attack on the Black community of Greenwood. In other case, it means staging organizations of power as the solution to a problem such as border patrol which has been glorified as a means to end the immigration problem in the United States.

Framing is achieved through word choice and the tainting of a group’s reputation. As Benford and Snow discuss in their article, “collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization.”³⁴ In the case of newspapers and frames, newspapers use this as a tool to influence collective action or the formation of collective ideals. It becomes dangerous when newspapers use these frames to shape the way a population views a community. Mexican immigrants have been a community that faces constant scrutiny under the public eye due to the portrayals created by the media. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has been publicized through newspapers leading to a collective view of immigrants as unwanted. The harm behind collective ideologies is that they can lead to collective action; Benford and Snow explain “Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action. Collective action frames also perform this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the “world out there.”³⁵ Collective action has flexible definitions, but one possible action in regards to the immigrant community would be policy. Influencing the way a

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review Sociology* 611-39.

³⁵ Ibid.

population views a community can lead them to vote against a policy that would improve their wellbeing or allow them a life in the United States.

All of this information is presented to further prove that newspapers can have an impact on the wellbeing and future of a community. This is true for the Mexican immigrant community who were a victim of being framed negatively by newspapers leading to anti-immigrant views by the Oklahoma community. Garcia demonstrates a perfect example of newspapers and their harm towards the Mexican community. He states that “The Oxnard Daily Courier, later called The Press –Courier, rarely reported on the Mexican community, though the criminal actions of Mexican men often made the headlines.”³⁶ Oklahoman newspapers had little to no positive coverage on the Mexican immigrant community. They led newspaper headlines with derogatory terms or accusations about the community. Garcia’s work predicted the archival findings of this research when he stated, “When news stories did refer to Mexican residents, they did so with the consistent racial identifier (e.g., “Oxnard Mexican Murders Girl,” ”Mexican Stabbed in Alley Brawl,” ”Mexican Girl Injured in Traffic Jam at Fire”) and regularly misspelled their names within the story.”³⁷ Adding derogatory terms or racial identifiers was an indication that the center of the story was their nationality and the connotations that carried. Later on in this paper, this will become relevant, especially with newspaper publishing’s titled with ‘Mexican’ followed by a negative stereotype of the community. This is a form of dehumanization to further excuse their treatment of Mexican immigrants.

Newspapers have the power to discredit the work of communities of color, not only by making them inferior but by invalidating their experiences. Thomas King,, in his book *Truth*

³⁶ Garcia, David G. 2018. *Strategies of Segregation Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

³⁷ Ibid.

about Stories, further explains how powerful stories are. Newspapers to the average eye are not viewed as weapons, but they can be when they use their power to create stories about communities that will be carried through time. King states, “I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live. Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous.”³⁸ The stories that have been told about the Mexican immigrant community have survived and thrived, destroying the ability of Mexican immigrants to escape their consequences. Individuals today cannot escape the trauma caused by the stories written about their parents, grandparents, loved ones. Children cannot escape the history books that teach them their community is the villain in the story of the U.S. Stories have consequences, and the Mexican immigrant community continues to endure them. The stories told about this community have created their paths by denying them an escape. The dominant narrative remains consistent, which is demonstrated by the repetitive news coverage on this community throughout time.

Immigration reform will not lead to a progressive change until history and its harm on the Mexican immigrant community are exposed and acknowledged. King asks a relevant question to this research, “so am I such an ass as to disregard this good advice and suggest that the stories contained within the matrix of Christianity and the complex of nationalism are responsible for the social, political, and economic problems we face?”³⁹ This question exposes how these institutions of power have been influenced and carry a foundation of stories. Whiteness bleeds into the dominant narrative, and the stories that it carries hold responsibility for the issues

³⁸ King, Thomas. 2005. *The Truth About Stories A Native Narrative*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

³⁹ Ibid. 26.

communities of colors specifically Mexican immigrants face. In order to make the connection and expose prevalent patterns, it is necessary to explore the responsibility of newspapers and their negative portrayals shown in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Words or Weapons

A consistent portrayal of Mexican immigrants in mass media has been related to the economic prosperity of the United States and their role in destabilizing the economy. Assumptions about Mexican immigrants range from being a population that takes away resources from American citizens such as jobs, social services, medical services, etc. As well as not contributing to tax revenue. There is a negative public opinion of immigrants because they are seen as invaders and othered. William Perez explains in his book, “A perception that drives hostile public opinion about undocumented immigrants is that they are exploiting the U.S. economy. The widespread belief is that the undocumented cost more in government services than they contribute to the economy.”⁴⁰ Immigrants have been portrayed as exploiters of the U.S. economy due to their hold on jobs in the agriculture industry, but this is a misinterpretation created by a biased history. Newspapers upheld this misinterpretation through their publishing’s.

One Oklahoma based newspaper, *The Sapulpa Daily Herald*, published a piece titled ‘*Illegal Alien Cost Said High*’ where they state “it’s costing the American taxpayer a total including welfare benefits to the aliens as well as citizens who are unemployed because of illegal aliens taking their jobs probably upwards of \$18 billion annually.”⁴¹ Throughout time a common narrative for immigrants was their contribution to the percent of unemployed Americans as well as their disturbance to the welfare system and the use of tax payer money. Perez explains that immigrants do not exploit the economy; they do the opposite in fact. He states, “the

⁴⁰ Perez, William. 2009. *We Are Americans Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream*. 1st edition. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

⁴¹ Livermore, Edward K. 1972. "Illegal Alien Cost High." *Sapulpa Daily Herald*, March 6, 1 ed.: 2.

undocumented actually contribute more to public coffers in taxes than they cost in social services. Their labor brings down the costs of goods and services for all and makes firms and sometimes entire industries more competitive.”⁴² The claim made by Perez can be proven by the research collected in this research project. Newspapers in Oklahoma consistently reported on Mexican immigrants and their labor, placing blame on them for jobs being unavailable for Americans; as well as being portrayed as bodies of cheap labor and painted as disposable. The responsibility was rarely placed on Americans who hired undocumented workers. Rarely did they report that farmers actively recruited Mexican laborers to work for them regardless of their legal status. Some employers even disliked Mexican immigrants but still hired them. *The Sunday Oklahoman* published a piece titled ‘Oklahoma ‘Land of Promise’ to Mexicans Seeking Work’ where an American, states “I don’t like Mexicans” he said. He explains he has hired up to 15 illegal aliens during past cotton seasons only because he couldn’t find other laborers. While saying the aliens are darn good workers.”⁴³ Undocumented immigrants had a positive effect on the agricultural industry, and it was shown by the demand for their labor. Employers were aware that they were undocumented but still hired them. In the previous piece mentioned from *The Sunday Oklahoman* they discuss how an employment manager was involved with undocumented workers that would seek work with fake identification or social security documents. He stated, “I’m sure we’ve put some illegal aliens on the job.” Beltr*n said. All we want is a number. I don’t care if they make it up out of the clear blue sky. We’re not investigators.”⁴⁴ The demand for work and the number of employers willing to hire continued the cycle of migration to the

⁴² Perez, William. 2009. *We Are Americans Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream*. 1st edition. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

⁴³ Eiter, Jim, and Denise Melinsky. 1982. "Oklahoma 'Land of Promise' to Mexicans Seeking Work." *The Sunday Oklahoman*, November 7: 79.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

states. Legality was not an issue for employers due to the need for undocumented immigrant labor.

The archives consisted of various categories of damaging narratives about undocumented Mexican immigrants. Throughout these narratives, there were common themes that worked to destruct the image of these communities by influencing the viewpoints of Oklahoman's. This was achieved through the main source of media in these time frames: newspapers. The archives had a wide collection of Oklahoma newspapers that followed these themes that worked together to dehumanize Mexican immigrants. The first common theme exposed was the exploitation of Mexican immigrants and their treatment in the labor industry. A consistent stereotype in these newspapers was that Mexican immigrants only served the purpose of being used for cheap labor, specifically in the agriculture industry. Due to their status, employers faced no limitations on the treatment of these individuals, and they could be put in inhumane conditions and treated as inferior without punishment. *The Sapulpa Daily Herald* included a story titled "5 Million Slave Laborers in the U.S., American Claims" which included an interview with a former spy who witnessed various communities, including Mexican immigrants being 'held to involuntary servitude.'⁴⁵ The newspaper writes that the individual claims "the system is the same as the slave system used in pre-civil war days" meaning that the overseer has a hold over these individuals by keeping them owing a debt. ⁴⁶ Due to their legal status, Mexican immigrants had no protections in place to prevent their exploitation in situations as mentioned by the newspaper.

The demand for work from American employers called for Mexican immigrants to seek labor in the country. The responsibility was placed on Mexican immigrants and their 'criminal

⁴⁵ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1952. "5 Million Slave Laborers in the U.S. American Claims." November 7, 1 ed.: 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

action' of working illegally in the United States. The dominant narrative worked in favor of employers in the United States by placing blame on the undocumented Mexican laborers for taking jobs instead of holding employers responsible for this surge in Mexican immigrant laborers because of their recruitment. Mexican immigrants crossed the border to look for employment because they were encouraged by property owners that they would be hired. Proof of this is in newspapers that state how property owners seek out Mexican immigrants to employ them regardless of legality. *The Sapulpa Daily Herald* reports that "New York representative states many Texas property owners making use of w*tbacks he said some encourage the aliens to come to the United States so they could employ them illegally."⁴⁷ Property owners sought cheap labor despite the law because it served their own interests. It was not about the lack of employees available to fulfill the demand for work. Braceros were available to be employed, and they held legal documentation but that did not suffice for some employers. They did not favor the bracero program that was implemented by the United States and Mexican government due to its restrictions.

⁴⁷ *Sapulpa Daily Herald* . 1952. "Rivers Says N.Y. Accusations Part of Smear Plot ." June 6: 3.

The Bracero Program
"De paisano a paisano
Antes de seguir cantando yo le pregunto al patrón
¿Quién recoge la cosecha? ¿Quién trabaja en la limpieza?
Hoteles y restaurantes
¿Y quién se mata trabajando en construcción?
Mientras el patrón regaña tejiendo la telaraña en su lujosa mansión
Muchas veces ni nos pagan" - De Paisano a Paisano Los Tigres del Norte⁴⁸

The Bracero Program was a turning point for the U.S. and Mexico in regard to labor relations. It was presented as an opportunity for Mexican workers to gain financial stability as well as skills that would allow them to contribute to their country's labor industry. The success of this program was advertised by both Mexican and American officials. Mexico hoped that the employment of rural Mexican men would bring improvement and innovation to the country enough to affect generations.⁴⁹ The program was officially established August 4th, 1942 and was terminated December 31st, 1964.⁵⁰ To understand the Bracero program overall the general provisions have to be listed. The general provisions are what follows:

- 1) It is understood that Mexicans contracting to work in the United States shall not be engaged in any military service.
- 2) Mexicans entering the United States as result of this understanding shall not suffer discriminatory acts of any kind in accordance with the Executive Order No. 8802 issued at the White House June 25, 1941.
- 3) Mexicans entering the United States under this understanding shall enjoy the guarantees of transportation, living expenses and repatriation established in Article 29 of the Mexican Federal Labor Law as follows . . .
- 4) Mexicans entering the United States under this understanding shall not be employed to displace other workers, or for the purpose of reducing rates of pay previously established . . .
 1. a) Contracts will be made between the employer and the worker under the supervision of the Mexican Government. (Contracts must be written in Spanish.)

⁴⁸ Los Tigres del Norte, De Paisano a Paisano, Track 1 on De Paisano a Paisano, Fonovisa Records, 2000.

⁴⁹ Rosas, Ana Elizabeth. 2014. *Abrazando El Espiritu Bracero Families Confront the U.S. Mexico Border*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

1. b) The employer shall enter into a contract with the sub- employer, with a view to proper observance of the principles embodied in this understanding.⁵¹

The provision that stands out most for this research specifically is provision number two, stating that there was an executive order that applied to Mexican laborers, and they were not to be discriminated against. Due to its legality, this program was expected to protect the rights of the Braceros as well as their well-being, though that did not occur because “discrimination continued and Braceros experienced sub charges for room and board, deducted pay, and exposure to deadly chemicals.”⁵² The treatment Braceros endured went against the guidelines the government set for the program. Braceros were charged sub charges for room and board even though general provision number three stated that they would be guaranteed living expenses under the Mexican Federal Labor Law. Legality is emphasized throughout the existence of this program but it did not apply to the rights of Mexican laborers. The exploitation of Mexican immigrants is difficult to captivate through the lens of the dominant narrative when labor programs such as the Bracero Program are documented in history inaccurately. The bracero program offered a legal pathway for both employers and the economy’s needs to be met, but that did not halt undocumented immigrants from being recruited.

Legality appeared to be the main issue Americans had with Mexican immigrants, as shown by how they were portrayed consistently in mass media. The Bracero Program was advertised to Mexican laborers as a contract that would protect the rights of workers as well as

⁵¹ 2019. *Immigration History*. Accessed March 18, 2021. <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/bracero-agreement/>.

⁵² Library of Congress. n.d. *A Latinx Resource Guide Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States*. Accessed March 20, 2021. <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/bracero-program#:~:text=An%20executive%20order%20called%20the,on%20short%2Dterm%20labor%20contracts.>

offer ideal working conditions and pay, and the plus was that it was all legal. Braceros were talked about in newspapers as acceptable because they were granted legal entry to the country as workers. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* published a story titled ‘Farmers Complain Over Border Patrol Drive on w*tbacks’ where they report ‘Braceros Carry Papers’ “Braceros carry papers to legally show they are in the country legally and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent usually have either birth certificates or naturalization papers to prove their status.”⁵³ The center of this excerpt of the newspaper is the concept of legality and how Braceros and Mexican citizens differ from undocumented Mexican immigrants because they have legal documentation. For Mexican laborers to be granted legal documentation to become a part of the program, they had to be able to purchase it, and many did not have the means making it inaccessible. The newspaper further reports on the statement from a landowner and employer that said, “Mexican workers on her farm had told her they sometimes had to pay \$10 to \$75 bribes to Mexican officials in order to be certified as braceros. They said farmhands had no choice but to become w*tbacks. If they couldn’t afford the bribes, Miss Marrs said.”⁵⁴ The Bracero program’s inaccessibility left eligible workers behind, and they had to resort to seeking work as undocumented immigrants. Officials claimed undocumented Mexican immigrants were not needed because Braceros were available to fill in the spots at farms, but farmers stated otherwise. The newspaper continues their interview, stating, “Miss G.L. Marrs who runs a citrus nursery and also grows cotton, pointed out that a gin near her place was ‘busy 24 hours a day’ until the drive started. But not it has idle a lot of the time. This has almost brought this area to a halt.”⁵⁵ The drive she mentions refers to the time of the

⁵³ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1954. "Farmers Complain Over Border Patrol Drive on w*tbacks." July 16: 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

newspaper that border patrol led on undocumented immigrants, leaving them without workers even though the Bracero program is in full effect during this time frame in 1954. In the newspaper article, they further report the resentment of farmers by a statement from one them claiming, “The Bracero program is inadequate and worthless,” said Ray. “I think an awful lot of farmers who have signed the contract will be sick of it before it’s over.”⁵⁶ Farmers were unhappy with the program and the hunt on undocumented immigrants led by border patrol because they were left without laborers. Overall the program was unsuccessful in the eyes of farmers and in the experiences of Braceros who faced exploitation and mistreatment.

The dominant narrative painted the program as a good deed of the United States, but that was to prevent tainting their reputation. Testimonies from Braceros about their lived experiences during the program dismantled the picture-perfect image it left in the history books, as “A testimonio ‘places the most neglected voices at the center of storytelling ... as a form of resistance.’”⁵⁷ A testimonio from a former bracero named Don Julio revealed the horrid experiences endured for little to no pay. Don Julio explains, “We got up at five and we made our lunch and we went to work. There it was by weight for what you made or what you got.”⁵⁸ He goes on to explain that the pay was not minimum wage or by the hour instead, it was by how much cotton they picked all day. When the interviewer asked if they got paid by the hour he responded, “No, well, sometimes ... it took us ... what can I say? If we hurried all day in those times we’d earn three pesos (dollars).”⁵⁹ Braceros endured traumatic experiences that they would carry for life, and they were separated from their families to send money back for them all with a

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Mize, Ronald. 2021. *The U.S.-Mexico Bracero Program, 1942-1964*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

legal permit to work. A contract they signed to be paid less than minimum wage for Americans for a day's worth of work. Don Antonio further explains that they were paid by the weight of the cotton they picked or contract they were assigned; he states, "By contract or what it weighed. But I don't know how much it was per pound. I mean I don't know how much we got per pound.... And then they put us in really bad parts sometimes. Parts where it [the cotton] was really small. And those that were from here they were put where it was better."⁶⁰ U.S. Citizens received better pay and better job locations, according to his testimony. The discrimination Braceros faced was not prevented by the executive order they were promised to be protected by. This is only one out of many testimonies that exist out there, but one story can expose the discrimination they had to endure as laborers for the U.S. regardless of legal documents and laws. If this was a legal program and workers still underwent horrid treatment, contracting Mexican immigrants without the proper documentation could allow further exploitation of undocumented Mexican laborers. The Bracero Program would go on to affect many relations, especially those of undocumented Mexican immigrants and the United States government. As Rosas mentions:

The Bracero Program and restrictive immigration policies targeting ethnic Mexicans—like the Internal Security Act, the Walter-McCarran Act, and Operation W*tbck—escalated class, ethnic, and racial tensions among and between braceros, undocumented Mexican immigrants, longtime Mexican immigrants of varying legal statuses, and Mexican Americans, all of whom competed for employment in the US agricultural industry.⁶¹

The hunt for undocumented Mexican immigrants has always been present in the history of the United States, but Operation w*tbck is one of the most discriminatory acts this community has

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Rosas, Ana Elizabeth. 2014. *Abrazando El Espiritu Bracero Families Confront the U.S. Mexico Border*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

faced. The Bracero Program was a tool used by the dominant narrative to sustain the image of the United States as the land of opportunity. Braceros true experiences were withheld while the oppressor's point of view remained. The purpose of mentioning it in this research is to captivate how the dehumanization of Mexican laborers goes above legality. All of the Mexican laborers who participated in this program had to carry the burden of their voices being silenced and U.S history speaking for them. It is important to amplify their voices and humanize them.



Figure 1: Don Maximo Marquez Rivera

My grandfather was a part of the Bracero program in the 1940's, his memory lives on through the stories of my mother. I am honored to mention him due to his contribution to the United States as a Mexican laborer in Wyoming. His recognition among every Bracero who took part in this program matters.

Operation w*tback

“You won’t have your name when you ride the big airplane all they will call you will be deportee” – Woody Guthrie⁶²

The United States government aimed to prevent undocumented Mexican immigrants from obtaining employment through various avenues. One of the ways they aimed to end ‘illegal immigration’ was through operation w*tback. Newspapers published stories including titles that brought attention to the operation and persuaded Oklahoman’s to offer support. The delivery of these newspapers to create portrayals of the Mexican immigrant community was possibly influenced by the portrayal of Mexican immigrants in the United States, specifically in policy. A prominent bill that was directly related to dehumanizing Mexican immigrant laborers was titled “Operation W*tback” who’s sole mission was to detain Mexican immigrant laborers and put them in detention centers, and then send them back to Mexico. Before diving into the specifics of this policy, it’s important to think about how easily derogatory terms were publicized. Words that carry traumatic memories for the Mexican immigrant community made their way to United States legislation. Not only making it part of Oklahoma history but the country as a whole.

This operation was advertised as a means to secure borders and a step towards progressive immigration policy, but truly, it was created to target Mexicans specifically. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* published a piece titled ‘Law signed to Curb w*tbacks’ where they report “President Truman signed into law Thursday night a bill designed to curb the illegal flow of Mexican ‘w*tback’ laborers into the United States.”⁶³ A president has influence over the

⁶² Woody Guthrie, *Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)*, 1948.

⁶³ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1952. "Law Signed to Curb w*tbacks." March 21: 2.

American population, and their actions carry an impact. President Truman's initiative ignited discriminatory acts towards the Mexican immigrant community and excused these actions under the law. This bill was not targeted towards all immigrants; it was specified it was only towards Mexican laborers. The *Weleetka American* reports that "detentions for 1955 totaled 140-553, including 125, 606 Mexicans. In 1954, detentions totaled 386,710 and of that number, 349,730 were Mexican Nationals showing effectiveness of Operation Wetback in reducing the necessary number of detentions in the southwest border."⁶⁴ For this operation to be considered effective Mexican immigrants must have been detained and deported, newspapers continued to report on this, such as the *Sapulpa Daily Herald* that reported a story titled 'Operation w*tback Sends Aliens Back into Native Mexico' where they explain how "the government launched Operation w*tback Thursday in an effort to round up illegal Mexican aliens in every section of northern California."⁶⁵ This operation disrupted the lives of many Mexican immigrants because it led to their detainment and deportation and the elimination of their only source of income. Though, when these newspapers reported on this event in history, it was always through the dominant narrative, such as the efforts of the government to protect the country or the conflict it brought Americans and employment.

Newspapers aided in the dehumanization of Mexican immigrants by making them a side character in Americans' lives and stories. Mexican immigrants were valued for their cheap labor and were only advocated for if it served the interests of other parties. For example, farmers refused to accept the passing of President Truman's w*tback bill. *El Reno Daily Tribune* reports

⁶⁴ *Weleetka American*. 1956. "Scanning the News Operation w*tbacks." March 1: 5.

⁶⁵ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1954. "Operation w*tback Sends Aliens Back into Native Mexico'." June 18: 4.

on their story titled *'Texans fight w*tback bill'*, and the newspaper explains how this bill would allow immigration services to search private properties without warrants, specifically farms, to arrest illegal immigrants and deport them back to Mexico.⁶⁶ This is an issue for property owners because it could mean legal trouble for them due to the new law stating those who "recruits, transports, "conceals or harbors" an illegal alien" would face jail time of up to five years or fines of up to \$2,000.⁶⁷ Often times when they reported on this population, they objectified them. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* titled a story *'Farmers Complain Over Border Patrol Drive on w*tbacks'* by analyzing the title, it is evident that the main character of this story and who is portrayed to be affected most are the farmers. In the newspaper article, the reporter continues to explain how this is a nuisance to the farmers and their profit, stating that "some lower Rio Grande Valley farmers charged Friday they were being 'driven to the poorhouse' by U.S. Border Patrol's Operation w*tback."⁶⁸ There is an increase of concern for the farmers and their income so much so that it is reported on a newspaper article, as well as titling the next portion 'Farmers very resentful' where they state that "they have their w*tbacks and they don't like to have their farms disrupted."⁶⁹ Looking at that sentence and identifying keywords is important to determine how they viewed Mexican immigrants, the word 'their' is used to talk about their farms which is their property. This word is used as well by stating that 'they have their w*tbacks' representing property to the farmers, and it is 'property' that is being taken from them by border patrol and the U.S. government.

⁶⁶ Dyer, Ray J. 1952. "Texans Fight w*tback Bill." *El Reno Daily Tribune*, February 25: 1.

⁶⁷ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1952. "Law Signed to Curb w*tbacks." March 21: 2.

⁶⁸ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1954. "Farmers Complain Over Border Patrol Drive on w*tbacks." July 16: 6.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

Mexican immigrants are treated and viewed as property and inferior to a citizen, and that is demonstrated by how they are talked in the newspapers mentioned; they are seen as cheap bodies of labor that are disposable and replaceable. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* published a story titled 'Border Patrol Delays w*tbback Round up 'till Friday' where they report "Border patrol has decided to postpone the Lower Rio Grande Valley w*tbback roundup until Friday to 'play fair with Valley farmers.'"⁷⁰ They further explain that they did not want to be a threat to farmers and allow them time to find other legal laborers.⁷¹ Farmers and profit are prioritized meanwhile, Mexican immigrants are forgotten. The roundups were only postponed to not upset the labor industry. The problem farmers had with operation w*tbback was not about the horrid treatment, detainment, and deportation of Mexican immigrants instead, it was about how it was disrupting the lives of farmers by halting their income. It was merely a disturbance and inconvenience. Yet it was never reported how the livelihood of Mexican immigrants was affected. Their point of view was never mentioned because they were not viewed as equals.

⁷⁰ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1954. "Border Patrol Delays w*tbback round up till Friday." July 12: 6.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

Border Patrol

“El mojado, el indocumentado

carga el bulto que el legal no cargaria ni obligado

El suplicio de un papel lo ha convertido en fugitivo” – Mojado Ricardo Arjona⁷²

The intention behind this bill through President Truman’s words was ‘necessary’ “to eliminate the exploitation of hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants.”⁷³ Nevertheless, this bill only transferred the power of exploitation from property owners to border patrol agents who would detain and deport immigrants with inhumane means. This bill was current news in the year 1952, but in 1953, the *Sapulpa Sunday Herald* published a story titled *Death March Reported Forced on w*tbacks*, the newspaper reports on how border patrol agents detained Mexican immigrants and abandoned them on a trail back to Mexico after taking all of their money which they would have used to purchase a ride back home.⁷⁴ The newspaper titled this a ‘death march’ because of the 100 plus degree weather they would have to endure on their way back with no food, water, or shelter. The newspaper further stated that border patrol agents told Mexican immigrants, “they had to take off their shoes even to see if they had hidden a few nickels in them. Their hatbands, pants cuff, belts, pockets, were searched.”⁷⁵ That proves the agents did not want them to have any chance at purchasing a bus ticket home instead, they faced no other choice but to walk. There is a discrepancy in intentions when a government claims to be looking out for the safety of the Mexican immigrant community by trying to stop their exploitation, but a government agency such as immigration services and border patrol was

⁷² Ricardo Arjona, Mojado, Track 7 on Adentro, Metamorfosis Enterprise Limited, 2005.

⁷³ Dyer, Ray J. . 1952. "Texans Fight w*tback Bill." *El Reno Daily Tribune*, February 25: 1.

⁷⁴ *Sapulpa Sunday Herald*. 1953. "Death March Reported Forced on w*tbacks." June 7: 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

responsible for putting their lives in danger purposely. Border patrol agents took their only source of income that would pay for their transportation and led them to their possible death.

Mexican immigrants have been dehumanized consistently in the media that newspapers became desensitized to the suffering of this community. Their traumatic experiences became just another headline. Another instance of violence by border patrol was reported on the *Sapulpa Daily Herald* titled 'U.S. Citizens tell how the border patrol moved his family' in this story a man explains how the border patrol "took his Mexican wife and their four children 120 miles to another border city before deporting them, although his wife suffered repeated attacks of appendicitis."⁷⁶ The well-being and safety of the Mexican immigrant community were not prioritized, as demonstrated by border patrol continuing to deport a woman suffering a medical emergency. Newspapers and border patrol seemed to work hand in hand in Oklahoma history by excusing each other's actions.

Newspapers painted border patrol as the good guys and the saviors and Mexican immigrants as the bad guys. This allowed border patrol agents to gain support from the country due to the anti-immigrant rhetoric that surrounded most of the mass media, especially newspapers. Newspapers in Oklahoma reported stories including border patrol as the main characters and Mexican immigrants as the side characters in their story. They were the group responsible for taking care of the Mexican immigrant problem, and they received much praise and attention in the newspapers. Most of the newspaper's headers centered on border patrol and informed the public on how they lacked funds to continue doing the necessary work, such as maintaining the safety of the country's border. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* reported that

⁷⁶ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1953. "U.S. Citizen Tells How Border Patrol Moved His Family." June 10: 4.

“immigration agents said they need the additional money to meet problems caused by w*tbacks.”⁷⁷ Earlier in this paper, prognostic framing was mentioned, which refers to, “ the identification of remedial strategies and tactics, or the solution to overcome the problem.”⁷⁸ In this case, Mexican immigrants are the problem, and border patrol is the solution, and in order to continue being the solution, they need more funding which comes from more support from the government and the public. This is demonstrated by the number of newspapers that centered on border patrol and their actions towards Mexican immigrants. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* published a story titled ‘Patrol Rounds up w*tbacks for deportation’ where they report “The Border Patrol is taking ‘fare’ from 11,000 w*tbacks it has rounded up in the lower Rio Grande Valley to take them to El Paso- 600 miles away- for deportation.”⁷⁹ Earlier in this chapter, the ‘Death March’ was mentioned where border patrol took Mexican immigrants bus trip fare and left them to fend for themselves on their way back to their home country. This newspaper shares the same sentiment where border patrol agents withhold fare from immigrants they are deporting. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* published another story titled ‘Border Patrol to Step Up Campaign Against w*tbacks’ where they state, “Border Patrol officials briefed their reinforced ranks Friday as a prelude to launching the government’s biggest offensive in history against illegal Mexican laborers.”⁸⁰ They further state, “The impending drive, ordered by U.S. Attorney General Herbert

⁷⁷ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1952. "Rivers Says N.Y. Accusations Part of Smear Plot." June 6: 3.

⁷⁸ Messer, Chris M, and Patricia A Bell. 2010. "Mass Media and Governmental Framing of Riots: The Case of Tulsa, 1921." *Journal of Black Studies* 851-870.

⁷⁹ *Sapulpa Daily Herald* (Sapulpa, Okla.), Vol. 39, No. 270, Ed. 1 Monday, July 19, 1954, newspaper, July 19, 1954; Sapulpa, Oklahoma. Page 1-2 cited

⁸⁰ *Sapulpa Daily Herald* (Sapulpa, Okla.), Vol. 39, No. 239, Ed. 1 Friday, June 11, 1954, newspaper, June 11, 1954; Sapulpa, Oklahoma.

Brownell, will center along the Mexican Border in Southern California and Arizona, the focal point of the 'w*tback' invasion."⁸¹ The word invasion carries power because it portrays Mexican immigrants as the enemy that is invading the country. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* published a story titled "*Designed to send Mexicans Home Border Patrol Poised Today for Second 'W*tback Round Up*" and in this story they stated "This isn't going to be a hit-or-miss, one-shot affair," Carter told the United Press. "We'll bring in as many men as are needed to do the job, and it will continue permanently, or until every deportable alien is deported."⁸² Border Patrol took pride in targeting Mexican immigrants as well as instilling fear in the community no matter how much effort is required to do so.

Border Patrol gains the power to carry their operations and discrimination of Mexican immigrants through this. The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* published a piece titled 'California Profits From Crackdown on Mexican W*tbacks' in this article they state, "The Border Patrol's recent crackdown on Mexican w*tbacks in California has been worth about \$325,000 a week to that state's employers and taxpayers, according to a telegram received by the immigration and naturalization service."⁸³ This statement pins the responsibility on Mexican immigrants as the consumers of the country's resources. In that same piece, they state, "We attribute the additional 10 percent drop to the fact our unemployed American citizens who were drawing benefits were referred back to suitable jobs vacated by w*tbacks."⁸⁴ Border Patrol is made responsible for taking Mexican immigrants out of California and handing resources and jobs back to Americans.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1954. "Designed to Send Mexicans Home Border Patrol Poised Today for Second w*tback Round up." July 9: 1.

⁸³ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1954. "California Profits from Crackdown on Mexican w*tbacks." July 29: 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

A heroic act built up by newspapers by using interests of the country such as economic and financial stability to sell an organization that preys on marginalized communities.

Border Patrol was a tool used by the government and newspapers to enforce the negative public opinion towards Mexican immigrants. The distrust towards this organization comes from years of violence and discrimination. This agency has sustained anti-immigrant sentiments through its work in history and the present. It was necessary to include them in this research to demonstrate the binary of good and bad in which the border patrol serves as the protector and Mexican immigrants as the invader.

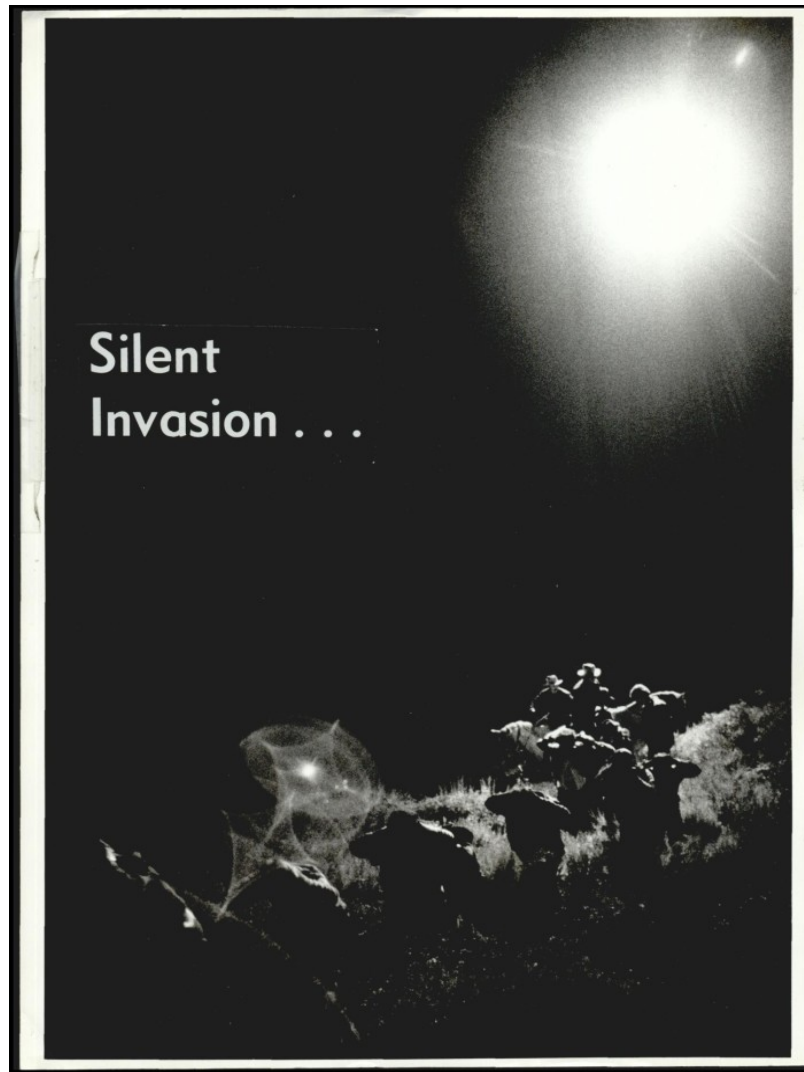


Figure 2: A picture shown below is published by the Daily Oklahoman with the caption "A group of Border Patrol agents riding on horseback leads a cluster of apprehended aliens out of Moody's Canyon, with cover and lighting supplied by Border Patrol Helicopters close at hand."⁸⁵The photograph demonstrates how the border patrol is seen by Americans, they are the center of attention in the picture and the caption.

⁸⁵ [Photograph 2012.201.B1284.0037], photograph, August 12, 1980; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc745516/>). The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Invaders

“America nacio libre, el hombre la dividio. Ellos pintaron la raya, para que yo la brincara y me llaman
imbasor” – Tigres del Norte ⁸⁶

History from the dominant narrative can determine whose story is told and affirmed. Mexican immigrants have a long-standing history in the United States that has been silenced and erased. Mexicans have roots in the U.S. that have been left out of historical texts because this could disrupt the idea that they are outsiders. American culture has enforced assimilation, “for many Americans, it is the responsibility of immigrants to adapt to U.S. society as unobtrusively as possible, without imposing costs of inconveniences on natives and without changing American life as it existed before their arrival.”⁸⁷ Due to this, Mexican immigrants have become a threat to Americanism because they cling to their culture, traditions, language, etc. Immigrants from other countries, especially European countries, do not face this negative portrayal because they are likely to assimilate to American culture without conflict.⁸⁸ As the United States has left the contributions of Mexicans out of their history, states like Oklahoma follow. As Michael M. Smith states:

Between 1900 and the beginning of World War II Mexican immigrants played an important, yet largely ignored, role in Oklahoma’s economic development. They probably constituted a majority on the railroad maintenance crews, formed a significant segment of the labor force in the coal mines, participated annually in the cotton harvests, and filled numerous unskilled positions in meat packing

⁸⁶ Los Tigres del Norte, *Somos Mas Americanos*, Track 7 on *Uniendo Fronteras*, Fonovisa Records, 2001.

⁸⁷ Rodriguez, Gabriel. 2017. "El Hogar Es Donde Esta el Corazon: Making Meaning through Oral History Interviews with Family." In *Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People Oral Histories of (Mis) Educational Opportunities in Challenging Notions of Achievement*, edited by Yoon K Pak, LaTasha Louise Nesbitt and Suzanne M Reily. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks.

⁸⁸ Brader, Ted, Nicholas A. Valentino, and Elizabeth Suhay. 2008. "What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 959-78.

houses, oil fields, quarries, various industries, and municipal services throughout the state.⁸⁹

Mexican immigrants have over a hundred years of contributions to the state of Oklahoma that have been hidden behind negative stereotypes. They have contributed to the development of this state and the U.S. As Juan Gonzalez reminds us, “No Hispanic group has contributed more to the nation’s prosperity than Mexicans, yet none makes white America more uneasy about the future.”⁹⁰ The fear comes from recognizing Mexicans as part of the United States and it’s future because that gives them a place in the history of the nation. Mexican immigrants also face the stereotype of being newcomers and having no roots in this country, yet Gonzalez explains, “The Mexican diaspora is at the core of our country’s Latino heritage. Not only are two of every three Latinos in the United States of Mexican Origin, but only Mexicans can claim to be both early settlers on U.S. soil and the largest group of new arrivals.”⁹¹ The criminalization of the Mexican immigrant community has become a tactic of newspapers. Newspapers have racialized and criminalized Mexican immigrants to contribute to the portrayal they have created that they are outsiders to deny Mexican immigrants a place in the United States history.

⁸⁹ Smith, Michael M. 2009. "Latinos in Oklahoma: A History of Four and a Half Centuries." *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 87: 186-223.

⁹⁰ Gonzalez, Juan. 2011. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America Revised Edition*. Penguin Group.

⁹¹ *ibid*

Criminals

*“Some of us are illegal and some are not wanted our work contracts out and we have to move on, six hundred miles to the Mexican border they chase us like outlaws, like rustlers, like thieves” – Woody Guthrie (Deportee)*⁹²

Another common stereotype about Mexican immigrants is that they are crossing the border and engaging in criminal behavior once they reside in U.S. communities. Newspapers enforced the idea that Mexican immigrants were attempting to invade the United States, and they were a threat to the safety of the country. Perez argues against this claim by stating, “According to a 2008 report from the conservative Americas Majority Foundation, crime rates are *lowest* in states with the *highest* immigration growth rates.”⁹³ Statistics argue against this claim, but yet it is still a consistent portrayal of the community. The criminalization of Mexican immigrants served a purpose for different parties; for the U.S. government it allowed them to continue passing legislation that targeted this population. Rosas explains, “The Mexican and US governments’ commitment to controlling Mexican immigrant labor and settlement escalated over the years, resulting in widely publicized border enforcement campaigns, Operation Wetback, the Internal Security Act, and the Walter-McCarran Act.”⁹⁴ Mexican immigrants gained negative public opinion through these campaigns and further glorified border patrol and deportation. Yet Perez mentions, “Whereas some have noted the number of undocumented immigrants in federal detention centers, reporting of these figures often fails to mention that violations of U.S. immigration law are civil infractions, not criminal acts, and most violators are guilty only of

⁹² Woody Guthrie, *Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)*, 1948.

⁹³ Perez, William. 2009. *We Are Americans Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream*. 1st edition. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

⁹⁴ Rosas, Ana Elizabeth. 2014. *Abrazando El Espiritu Bracero Families Confront the U.S. Mexico Border*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

seeking to improve their welfare, and that of their families, by taking jobs that few Americans want.”⁹⁵ Newspapers demonstrated their support towards border patrol and deportation by claiming that the Mexican immigrants brought crime and were connected to drug trade. Instead, they were often deported for minor violations and border patrol mass operations. The connection made by newspapers of Mexican immigrants and the drug trade has a long-standing effect on how they are viewed and treated by law enforcement in the past and present.

Loco Weed

Mexican immigrants, among various stereotypes, have always been connected to crime, and more specifically, the drug trade. This portrayal continues to be perpetuated to this day. The connection between Mexican immigrants and the illegal drug trade has been present since before the 1900s. Drugs carried various names through time frames beginning with the nickname of ‘Loco Weed.’ *The Duncan Banner* published a piece on Saturday, December 22nd, 1894 titled ‘General News in Brief’ where they report current events of the week, one of the events reported on was “George H. Lewis of Kansas City, Mo, became violently insane from drinking tea made of loco weed on a sugar plantation near Linderas, Mex. On Tuesday; jumped into the Rio Tigre river and drowned.”⁹⁶ The drug already had a negative connotation due to its connection to the death of an individual close to the river near Mexico. Due to the time frame of the research presented for this paper, there is more of a focus on the time frame of the 1900’s-1990’s. In the 1900s the weed was seen as a poison; *The Magnum Sun-Monitor* posted a piece on Thursday, July 4th, 1901 stating, “Dr. Salmon, an expert of the Department of Agriculture at Washington,

⁹⁵ Perez, William. 2009. *We Are Americans Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream*. 1st edition. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

⁹⁶ *The Duncan Banner*. 1894. "General News in Brief." December 22: 2.

has been instructed to take up the subject of the “loco” plant and try to find an antidote for the poison.”⁹⁷ Comparing the weed to poison increased the perceived threat of it.

The *Sapulpa Herald* Published a piece in 1928 titled ‘Mexican Held; Had Loco Weed’, where they state, “Mexican from Tulsa is being held in the city jail on investigation. Pet*s when arrested had his possession several tobacco cans filled with loco weed, a poisonous weed which is smoked by the Mexicans and results in Making them insane for the time being.”⁹⁸ It is apparent by the context of the newspaper reporters were not informed on Marijuana enough at the time. The drug was not named ‘Mexican Marijuana’ yet, but it was still connected to Mexicans due to the word ‘loco’ in Spanish and the title including ‘Mexican’ in bold capital letters; the drug continued to carry a negative connotation because of its connection to poison and insanity. The *Sapulpa Herald* reported this story on Monday, October 15, 1928, and they released another piece on Tuesday, October 16th, 1928, titled ‘*Mexican Is Held for Trial Here*’ in the piece they state, “Alb*no Per*s, Mexican, who was arrested Sunday by Officer Fred Archer will be tried in the county court for having possession of loco weed. A poisonous weed which is smoked by the Mexicans.”⁹⁹ Including the ethnicity of individuals who were in possession of this drug was only consistent with Mexicans; as shown from other newspapers mentioned, as well as the two above, the responsibility for a drug problem in Oklahoma was shifted solely to Mexicans. They became the scapegoat for the issues of Marijuana Oklahomans presented with. The *Sapulpa Herald* was one of the newspapers that were consistent in their attack on Mexican immigrants; it had become apparent in all areas of this research, and drugs was a theme that did

⁹⁷ *Magnum Sun Monitor*. 1901. July 4: 4.

⁹⁸ *Sapulpa Herald*. 1928. "Mexican Held Had Loco Weed." October 15: 4.

⁹⁹ *Sapulpa Herald*. 1928. "Mexican is Held for Trial Here." October 16: 8.

not fall behind. Another piece was reported by the *Sapulpa Herald* on Tuesday, November 6th, 1928, not a month after the last piece reported on Mexicans and loco weed. It was titled ‘The Drug Weed Hidden In Yard Mexican Failed To Conceal Quantity of Loco Weed From Discovery’ and they state, “Mexican failed last night to conceal a 10 gallon can of Mexican loco weed.”¹⁰⁰ Similar to ‘Mexican Marijuana’, the drug was previously nicknamed ‘Mexican Loco Weed’ which did not allow for any separation of the community and the drug. Immediately if there was a Mexican individual reported on, they were connected to the drug and vice versa.

Mexican Marijuana

Newspapers took part in enforcing this portrayal by making a direct connection to drugs by naming Marijuana Mexican Marijuana. Newspapers ran with this drug title and used it to bring attention to Mexican immigrants as possible drug smugglers, only further strengthening the need for secure borders. *El Reno Daily Tribune* published a story titled ‘Mexican Marijuana Easy to Buy Easy to Smuggle into the U.S.’ where they report, “The w*tbacks Mexican job hunters illegally sneaking across the U.S. border seem to finance their trips in the states by taking along a pound or two of marijuana or loco weed as they call it.”¹⁰¹ Mexican immigrants who sought labor opportunities in the United States were connected to drugs through this reporting--clumping all Mexican immigrants together with the label of drug traffickers. The dominant narrative tarnished the reputation of the Mexican immigrant community and their opportunity to thrive in this country by criminalizing their existence.

¹⁰⁰ *Sapulpa Herald*. 1928. "Had Drug Weed Hidden in Yard Mexican Failed to Conceal Quantity of Loco Weed from Discovery." November 6: 6.

¹⁰¹ *El Reno Daily Tribune*. 1951. "Mexican Marijuana Easy to Buy Easy to Smuggle into the U.S." September 4: 6.

The *Sapulpa Daily Herald* reported on a story titled ‘Marijuana Attack Two-Pronged’ in this excerpt, they discuss how “The U.S. government is using two potent weapons- education and economics- to discourage young people from smoking marijuana.”¹⁰² The educational component uses the resources of the National Institute of Mental Health to distribute the dangers of the drug and the criminal charges behind the possession and use of it. They use mass media such as newspapers to distribute this message. The economic component puts a direct focus on the Mexican border and increased patrolling. The claim made here is that drugs are coming from Mexico, placing responsibility on the people and country for creating the drug problem in the United States. This harmful connection leads them to label the drug Mexican marijuana in the article. The magnitude of this is demonstrated by who created the program, which is the United States government. The government distributed this message to its people that drugs are a danger to the youth, and this danger is being brought here from Mexico. Mexican immigrants have to deal with the consequences of being criminalized with no credible proof, just the claim from the dominant narrative. The *El Reno Daily Democrat* titled a piece ‘Drug Addict Admits Crime’, a story that discusses a crime committed by an American who attempts to negate responsibility for the crime by claiming he was under the influence of marijuana. In the excerpt, they state, “Coffey admitted that the crimes were committed while he was under the influence of a Mexican drug similar to Indian hemp.”¹⁰³ The responsibility is shifted not only to a drug but to a ‘Mexican’ drug. Placing the blame and responsibility partly on Mexicans. This story is also reported on the *Sapulpa Daily Herald* titled ‘Coney Coffey Admits Part in Many Robberies and

¹⁰² *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1969. "Marijuana Attack Two Pronged." September 28: 5.

¹⁰³ *El Reno Daily Democrat*. 1924. "Drug Addict Admits Crime." December 5: 1.

Killings’, and in bold capital letters the title includes “Says Drug Led Him to Crimes.”¹⁰⁴

Another piece reported by The *Sapulpa Herald* includes a mug shot of a man with a description that states, “Victor Licata, 21-year-old drug addict of Tampa, FL, who is being held by police of that city charged with the ax slaying of his mother, father, sister, and two brothers. He is a user of Marijuana, a Mexican weed that is said to cause insanity.”¹⁰⁵ The dominant narrative holds so much power that it can directly state that a white American man murdered someone and still shift part of the blame to the Mexican community. It is a perfect example of how a narrative can be extremely harmful and determine the treatment of Mexican immigrants. The word Mexican is tied to drugs that, without proof, simple statements can tarnish the reputation of a population. They are made powerless because their voices are silenced while the dominant narrative is amplified.

The criminalization of Mexican’s and Mexican immigrants has been enforced by the dominant narrative with the tools of mass media, and it can be argued by looking at how they write about Mexicans and Marijuana versus drugs and Americans. The *El Reno Daily Tribune* published a piece titled ‘State Revokes Permit to Produce Marijuana’, in the piece, they state, “The permit had been issued by the state board of health to J.E. Batchelor, who wanted to raise the marijuana weed to produce canary seed. Marijuana seed frequently is found in bird food. It is said to make canaries sing oftener, louder and more spiritedly.”¹⁰⁶ When there is a positive connotation to the drug, it is connected to an American individual, especially because in the

¹⁰⁴ *Sapulpa Herald*. 1924. "Coney Coffey Admits Part in Many Robberies and Killings' Says Drug Led Him to Crimes." December 5: 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Sapulpa Herald*. 1933. "Slayer of Five?" October 30: 6.

¹⁰⁶ *El Reno Daily Tribune*. 1938. "State Revokes Permit to Produce Marijuana." April 25: 3.

article, their race or ethnicity was not included or connected to the drug. When an article mentioned a crime being committed, such as murder, it was immediately connected to ‘Mexican marijuana’. This is an example of how the dominant narrative hold power to create labels and stereotypes for one group while excusing another. Groups with power are given the luxury of having a voice to deny accusations, *The Sapulpa Daily Herald* published a piece titled ‘Guard Commander Doubts Report’ where they state, “The head of the Oklahoma National Guard says he does not believe a newspaper report that members of the Oklahoma Air National Guard were involved in smuggling marijuana from Mexico.”¹⁰⁷ Further down in the article, the Major claims that there has been a mistake made in this accusation, and there is not enough information to prove this claim besides the newspaper article. When Mexicans are accused of being in possession of drugs, the proof available is a newspaper article, and that solely makes them guilty of the crime. Power determines who is guilty due to the way they are portrayed in society and their status. This piece differs from a piece about Mexicans being blamed for marijuana possession by calling it an allegation instead of being about an actual arrest. They state in the article “The Oklahoma National Guard has been taken by surprise by the allegations about Oklahoma Air National Guardsmen being involved in smuggling marijuana in military aircraft,” Coffey said. We find it hard to believe that this unit or any personnel from Oklahoma could be involved.”¹⁰⁸ Various articles uncovered in the archives discussed Marijuana had negative connotations, as well as discussed its danger to the countries youth. Mexican immigrants are persecuted without the ability to defend themselves over a connection to drugs, a narrative

¹⁰⁷ *Sapulpa Daily Herald*. 1978. "Guard Commander Doubts Report." 10 March: 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

created and enforced by the dominant culture. Narratives are detrimental to marginalized groups because their identities are tied to labels and negative stigmas that carry over to the future.

There are various articles that continue to tie Marijuana and Mexicans together from 1920-1980. In a piece reported by the *Payne County News* newspaper, "Officers Seize Dangerous Drug in Crushing Raid, Three Negroes Held," the newspaper used another title for a portion of the article. "Mexicans Use it," the article states, "Marijuana is a Mexican name given the drug. It is formed from the names Mary and Jane. This name is best known in this section of the country because Mexican laborers introduced it into the United States. They grew small patches in their backyards for their own use. Later they sold it and it became a public menace."¹⁰⁹ All responsibility for the distribution and existence of the drug is given to Mexicans, specifically Mexican laborers. This generalization implies that all Mexican laborers are responsible for bringing a drug to the country leads to their criminalization. Once again, comparing this article to the previous one in the *El Reno Daily Tribune*, an American man grew his own Marijuana, and his word of growing it for canary seed was accepted without question. Mexicans are not allowed that opportunity because they have been stamped with the label of drug traffickers regardless if they are guilty or not. The dominant narrative does not write history for marginalized groups; it writes history about them. They become side characters in the dominant story, and they are given roles they have no control over. There is a pattern of blame in these newspaper articles where Mexican immigrants carry the role of responsibility in crimes committed by Americans, as well as the responsibility for endangering American youth due to Marijuana.

¹⁰⁹ *Payne County News*. 1938. "Officers Seize Dangerous Drug in Crushing Raid, Three Negroes Held." November 4: 1.

Language

“Yo soy la sangre del indio Soy latino soy mestizo
Somos de todos colores Y de todos los oficios Y si contamos los siglos
Aunque le duela al vecino Somos mas americanos Que toditos los
Gringos” - Somos mas Americanos – Somos Mas Americanos Los Tigres Del Norte¹¹⁰

Language is central to communities, especially in their survival and development. Mexican immigrants have a stronghold on their culture and language. Spanish-speaking immigrants are often seen as a threat to the nation due to their commitment to keeping their language and not assimilating to the dominant culture. Migrating to the United States is filled with expectations in order to be considered welcome and worthy of citizenship. Emma Perez explains, “Immigrants are expected to become part of the dominant culture; they are urged to adopt its habits and forget their own—to erase.”¹¹¹ Erasure is not an option for Mexican immigrants the way they navigate power is by keeping a part of their identity tied to their home country by keeping their culture alive.

There is a dominant culture, and within that culture, English is the language necessary to belong. *The Sapulpa Daily Herald* included a piece titled ‘Illegal Alien Problem’ where an individual interviewed states, “your immigration problem is completely out of control illegal Spanish-speaking immigrants are flooding into your country. If you don’t act promptly you are going to have a huge new population that has never heard of Thomas Jefferson or the Bill of Rights.”¹¹² There are many assimilation attempts included in this piece simply by looking at how language is the central issue mentioned. The individual mentions Spanish-speaking immigrants,

¹¹⁰ Los Tigres del Norte, *Somos Mas Americanos*, Track 7 on *Uniendo Fronteras*, Fonovisa Records, 2001.

¹¹¹ Perez, Emma. 1999. *The Decolonial Imaginary Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press Bloomington & Indianapolis.

¹¹² Rusher, William. 1984. "Illegal Alien Problem." *Sapulpa Daily Herald*, January 31: 4.

not immigrants in general, making language and nationality the conflict. In order to be considered worthy of citizenship, they must conform to the norms and values of the United States. Therefore, if they do not leave behind their culture and language, they are a threat to the country. Another part of the excerpt states, “these new residents must learn to speak English if they don’t, they will inevitably become second class citizens, with all the dangers that implies.”¹¹³ A key statement would be ‘the dangers that implies’ in-regards to refusing to assimilate and leave their language behind; if Spanish-speaking immigrants do not integrate themselves into the dominant culture by learning and speaking the dominant language, they will face repercussions. This is not an isolated event, *The Daily Oklahoman* published a response from an Oklahoma resident to a piece they published about Rosa King, the then director of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural center. This piece is just an informative article about the center and her work as a director. The individual who responded was critical of Rosa King’s work because “her work should be directed toward their comforts but should also be directed toward teaching them the English language, customs, etc.”¹¹⁴ English is central to being considered a full member of society in the United States, and as shown by the remarks of this individual having a space where Latinos are embraced for their culture and lifestyle is an attack on the dominant culture. A place where assimilation was not the goal instead, it was preservation. American ideals do not welcome steering from the dominant culture, and this was what the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center appeared to do in this individual’s opinion. One person does not speak for everyone, but it is apparent that Mexican immigrants fail to gain positive public opinion because they will not let go of their identity and assimilate. As Gonzalez explains, “Most troubling of the descendants of

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ J. Shroyer, Durant. 1988. "Encourage Bonding." *The Sunday Oklahoman*, August 7: 12.

the Mexican pioneers, for once you admit Mexicans' long history on the U.S. soil, you must necessarily accept Hispanic culture and the Spanish language as integral components of our own national saga."¹¹⁵ Accepting Spanish-speaking immigrants and not forcing assimilation upon them would mean that Americans accept Spanish as a part of their culture and history; an action that would affect racial superiority.

In David Garcia's book *Strategies of Segregation Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality*, he navigates Oxnard, California, and the community tactics to segregate education for Mexican children as well as the discrimination of the Mexican community. He discusses the idea of white architects and how they are responsible for creating institutions that create segregation intentionally. As Garcia argues, they needed the Mexican community but only for their labor, and they were not willing to integrate them or accept them as their own. This resonates with this research because throughout all of the common stereotypes Mexican immigrants faced, they were still sought for their labor. They were never accepted as members of society because that came at a cost. Accepting them would mean accepting their language, and that would risk the comfort of Americans. Using language for an angle of racial superiority was not only a tool of newspapers but a tool of a society that values assimilation. In the book, they state that they "characterized Spanish-speaking as a disadvantage and generalized that "the average Mexican child" took two years to complete one grade, which "drags down the average for the "American child."¹¹⁶ The center of this statement shows that Spanish is an inconvenience for Americans because it can lead to their failure. The fear of it coming between their success is

¹¹⁵ Gonzalez, Juan. 2011. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America Revised Edition*. Penguin Group.

¹¹⁶ Garcia, David G. 2018. *Strategies of Segregation Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

what makes language a barrier in the United States. Spanish-speaking immigrants pose a threat to Americans because it means they have to accommodate to another language and fear it becoming the language majority in the United States. Any characteristic that comes in-between Americanism is seen as a threat, and Mexican immigrant's stronghold of their culture makes them targets.

This chapter demonstrated how newspapers published a variety of stereotypes over time that contributed to the negative portrayal of Mexican immigrants. Damage can be done through words due to its effect on the viewpoints of the public. It can also affect how Mexican immigrants view themselves in a society that believes them to represent all these narratives. What can pose extreme damage to a community is how these narratives can influence policy which only furthers the damage on marginalized communities. Mexican immigrants had to face the consequences of the dominant narrative through immigration policy.

Chapter 3: Enacting Violence or Enacting Change

“Hay que arrancar el problema de raíz Y cambiar el gobierno de nuestro paiz.”-

Gimme the Power Molotov¹¹⁷

A policy can make or break a community. In order to work towards progress in the United States, ensuring the immigration system serves all communities equally and protects them, we must work to expose patterns that have created the system we know today. State policy is the focus of the chapter, and the most prevalent would be the passing of HB 1804 the Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act of 2007. A dominant narrative amplified throughout this research was that Mexican immigrants were a threat to the nation. This act proves that narratives matter in influencing policy. By analyzing the title of the act it demonstrates that the purpose is to protect the Oklahoma citizens from immigrants, enforcing the narrative that the immigrant community poses a danger to Oklahomans. The threat is originating from fear of their resources and taxpayer money being allocated to non-citizens. The Ok Policy institute explained this act stating, “Officially designated the Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Act – enacted a series of restrictions intended to limit access to jobs and public services for undocumented immigrants and to expand the powers of state and local law enforcement to verify the legal status of those they encounter.”¹¹⁸ The danger of this act is that it states the expansion of powers to law enforcement to verify legal status, and this can affect communities in various ways. Due to stereotypes influenced by history, law enforcement may believe undocumented

¹¹⁷ Molotov, Gimme the Power, Track 5 on Donde Jugaran Las Ninas? (10th anniversary edition), Universal Music Latino, 1997.

¹¹⁸ Blatt, David. 2010. *New Report Looks at Impact of Oklahoma's Immigration Reform Bill HB 1804*. January 22. Accessed March 20, 2021. <https://okpolicy.org/new-report-looks-at-impact-of-oklahomas-immigration-bill-hb-1804/>.

immigrants are condensed to a certain nationality, ethnicity, culture, etc. Communities of color, especially the Latino population, would have to deal with the consequences of being questioned about their citizenship or legal status. The Urban institute performed a study on this act due to its immense anti-immigrant rhetoric. It was titled ‘Untangling the Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Act: Consequences for children and families’. In this act they list all of the general provisions of the act as follows:

- Makes it a state (in addition to federal) crime to knowingly “transport, harbor, or shelter” unauthorized immigrants
- Prohibits issuance and use of driver’s licenses and other forms of identification (including birth certificates) for and by unauthorized immigrants
- Requires jails to verify the legal status of persons detained on felony and DUI charges
- Requires public employers and state and local government contractors to use the Department of Homeland Security’s electronic verification database (E-Verify) to confirm the work authorization of all employees
- Requires that all applicants for state and local public services and benefits over the age of 14 have their immigration status verified through the federal government’s Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements
- Encourages state and local law enforcement agencies to enter into cooperation agreements with the Department of Homeland Security to enforce immigration laws
- Prevents unauthorized immigrant students from receiving scholarships and financial assistance and allows the State Regents for Higher Education to preserve the policy giving unauthorized immigrant students access to in-state tuition as long as they can prove that they intend to adjust their legal status.¹¹⁹

This policy is an act of violence towards the immigrant community because it’s creation was to instill fear. First, local and state law enforcement working alongside DHS is dangerous as it has been demonstrated that border patrol, an immigration agency, has enacted violence and

¹¹⁹ Koralek, Robin, and Juan the Urban Institute, Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population, and Randy Capps Migration Policy Institute Pedroza. 2009. *Untangling The Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act: Consequences on Children and Families*. The National Council of La Raza.

tormented the immigrant community throughout history. Requiring employees to use E-verify only furthers the exploitation of immigrants by allowing employers who hire under the table to have leverage over them. The intent of E-verify is to create more job opportunities for Oklahoma Citizens and drive out immigrants by leaving them with fewer employment options. Requiring jails to verify legal status allows jails and DHS to work hand in hand. As well as making it a state/federal crime to transport, harbor or shelter immigrants puts the lives of family members of immigrants who have citizenship at risk for protecting their undocumented family.

This policy includes all of the common themes mentioned in chapter 2. They are treating the immigrant community as criminals, invaders, inferior, and use government agencies with power such as DHS to distribute and enforce these claims. Newspapers continue to be a medium to enforce negative portrayals; *The Lexington Observer* published a piece titled ‘Senate Committee Approves Illegal Immigration Bill’ where they report, “The Senate Judiciary Committee voted on Tuesday in favor of legislation aimed at protecting the jobs of U.S. Citizens. The measure also contains provisions to ensure taxpayer supported benefits are made available to American citizens and legal immigrants only.”¹²⁰ They further mention Senator James A. Williamson whom is the senate author of the house bill 1804 argues, “two issues bring illegal immigrants to Oklahoma – public benefits and employment.”¹²¹ The center of this bill is legality and how that determines how deserving an individual is of basic resources. As mentioned before in chapter 2, Braceros held a temporary legal status and were not awarded the same treatment that American citizens enjoyed. Legality does not determine the equal treatment of a community,

¹²⁰ *Lexington Observer*. 2007. "Senate Committee Approves Illegal Immigration Bill." April 5: 1.

¹²¹ *ibid*.

nor does it illegality equal a perceived threat. The dominant narrative continues to prevail through policy because patterns of harm have never been exposed or acknowledged.

The House bill 1804 directly states,

The State of Oklahoma finds that illegal immigration is causing **economic hardship** and **lawlessness** in this state and that illegal immigration is encouraged when public agencies within this state provide public benefits without verifying immigration status. The State of Oklahoma further finds that when illegal immigrants have been harbored and sheltered in this state and encouraged to reside in this state through the issuance of identification cards that are issued without verifying immigration status, these practices impede and obstruct the enforcement of federal immigration law, **undermine the security of our borders, and impermissibly restrict the privileges and immunities of the citizens of Oklahoma.** Therefore, the people of the State of Oklahoma declare that it is a compelling public interest of this state to discourage illegal immigration by requiring all agencies within this state to fully cooperate with federal immigration authorities in the enforcement of federal immigration laws. The State of Oklahoma also finds that other measures are necessary to ensure the integrity of various governmental programs and services.¹²²

Newspapers demonstrated how impactful framing and wording are in constructing the image of a community. This is reflected in government policy when phrases like “economic hardship and lawlessness” are used. Economic hardship stems from the idea that immigrants strain our economy and take resources from Americans. This notion was argued by Perez’s work and was discussed as a tactic to gain negative public opinion. Lawlessness contributes to the criminalization of the immigrant community, influencing distrust and anti-immigrant rhetoric. As it was done with Operation w*tback, and connecting immigrants to drug trade with wording like ‘loco weed’ and ‘Mexican Marijuana.’ Another phrase that resembles the dominant narrative is “undermine the

¹²² *Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act of 2007.*

security of our borders, and impermissibly restrict the privileges and immunities of the citizens of Oklahoma.”¹²³ Border patrol enforced the claim that Mexican immigrants were endangering the country’s borders and invading the country. Undermining the security of the country’s borders is an ideal passed from over 100 years of viewing immigrants as invaders and criminals.

Another policy that is relevant to this research is the Oklahoma Statutes title 57. Titled Prisons and Reformatories. The provisions of this statute are what follows:

It is the intent of the Legislature that the Department of Corrections vigorously provides assistance to the United States Department of Justice:

1. For the identification of foreign-born nationals who are in the custody of the Department of Corrections;
2. In conducting interviews of and processing foreign-born nationals or suspected foreign-born nationals who are in the custody of the Department of Corrections
3. In conducting and completing the deportation process of inmates whom the United States Department of Justice determines to be aliens deportable from the United States. The Department of Corrections shall assist the Immigration and Naturalization Service in obtaining court certified copies of any records requested for use in official criminal or administrative proceedings.¹²⁴

The immigrant community has a troubled relationship with law enforcement because of the narratives law enforcement is taught about them. Continuing this narrative that immigrant communities are criminals and are to be treated as invaders affects the way policy demands this community to be dealt with. This statute demands the creation of a pipeline from prison to deportation. Immigrant communities continue to be criminalized and live in fear due to policies like these. In order to move towards more effective

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Justia US Law. 2019. *2019 Oklahoma Statutes Title 57. Prisons and Reformatories 57-530.3 Aliens in Custody of Department of Corrections-Identification-Assistance to the United States Department of Justice*. <https://law.justia.com/codes/oklahoma/2019/title-57/section-57-530-3/>.

immigration reform, state and federal, it is necessary to mend the relationships between institutions of power and immigrant communities. This can only be done by exposing how the negative portrayal of immigrants in Oklahoma history has contributed to how law enforcement and immigrant services pursue this population.

Education within Immigration Policy

House Bill 1804 includes a portion about in-state tuition stating the bill “Prevents unauthorized immigrant students from receiving scholarships and financial assistance and allows the State Regents for Higher Education to preserve the policy giving unauthorized immigrant students access to in-state tuition as long as they can prove that they intend to adjust their legal status”.¹²⁵ The specifics on ‘adjusting legal status’ is mentioned in the bill by stating the student must “file an affidavit with the institution stating that the student will file an application to legalize his or her immigration status at the earliest opportunity the student is eligible to do so.”¹²⁶

Receiving in-state tuition is a step towards progress for the immigrant community, specifically undocumented students. The bill’s wording demonstrates the lack of knowledge in the pathway to citizenship. Attaining a legal status is not a simple action as mentioned in the bill; immigration reform will not progress unless the public and officials become aware of how difficult it is to attain residency or citizenship.

House bill 1804 was an example of how Oklahoma’s history with immigration has not progressed. The dominant narrative has influenced Oklahoman’s to hold negative sentiments

¹²⁵ Koralek, Robin, and Juan the Urban Institute, Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population, and Randy Capps Migration Policy Institute Pedroza. 2009. *Untangling The Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act: Consequences on Children and Families*. The National Council of La Raza.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

towards this community leading to the passing of this bill. A bill that originated from the state level speaks volumes to the intent behind it. Federal law regarding immigration was not strict enough for Oklahoma's standards that they took matters into their own hands with HB 1804. In 2003 a bill was passed to ensure undocumented students were eligible for financial aid "Oklahoma Senate Bill (S.B.) 596, signed into law on May 12, 2003, provides the state's undocumented students, including DACA recipients, with access to state financial aid. The bill states that students will not be disqualified on the basis of the student's immigration status from any scholarships or financial aid provided by the state of Oklahoma."¹²⁷ This is four years prior to HB 1804 it brings concern to think about what changed in the four years since S.B 596 was passed. In HB 1804 it states one of its purposes is to "Prevents unauthorized immigrant students from receiving scholarships and financial assistance and allows the State Regents for Higher Education to preserve the policy giving unauthorized immigrant students access to in-state tuition as long as they can prove that they intend to adjust their legal status."¹²⁸ This new act provides limitations and hands the power back to the institution.

States such as Oklahoma have a responsibility to acknowledge how they are complicit in how immigrant populations, such as Mexicans and Mexican Americans, are affected by immigration policies and lack of reform. Oklahoma newspapers carry much of that power in shaping the future of Mexican immigrant's communities. To strive towards progress, the first step is exposing harmful narratives and view the newspapers for what they are—tools of the

¹²⁷ Presidents' Alliance. 2021. *Oklahoma | Data on Immigrant Students | Higher Ed Immigration Portal*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/state/oklahoma/>>

¹²⁸ Koralek, Robin, and Juan the Urban Institute, Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population, and Randy Capps Migration Policy Institute Pedroza. 2009. *Untangling The Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act: Consequences on Children and Families*. The National Council of La Raza.

oppressor. Once harmful patterns in history are exposed, it is possible to work towards dismantling these negative portrayals to create a better future for the Mexican immigrant community in Oklahoma.

Conclusion

*“Soy uno de tantos Mexicanos
que trabajan dia con dia
para darle future a mis hijos y ayudar a mi familia
como extrano mi rancho querido
mis amigos que no los olvido
y a mis viejos que hace varios años
que no los he visto
piensan que porque brinque la linea
soy un narcotraficante
ya basta de mil humillaciones
no mas por ser inmigrante” – Calibre 50 El inmigrante¹²⁹*

It was fitting to begin my conclusion by including the lyrics to a song that reflects the experiences of many, especially my family’s experiences. Before I began this research, I told myself that it was a necessary project to expose the patterns that have affected the Mexican immigrant community for over a hundred years. The truth is that I wanted to find reasoning for myself to understand the actions of this state and this country. History is not given the credit that it deserves for creating our present. Mexican immigrant communities continue to suffer the consequences of the dominant narrative continuing to hold power and impact. To strive for a better future that includes progressive immigration reform and the humanization of this community, we must understand where these anti-immigrant views originate from.

I am an undocumented first-generation Latina, and within those labels, there is a lot of resistance and pain in institutions of power. I did not anticipate how much of this would resonate

¹²⁹Calibre 50, El Inmigrante, Corridos de Alto Calibre, Disa/UMLE, 2013.

with the way I view myself as an immigrant in the United States. History was not an interest of mine growing up because I never identified with the way they portrayed my community. I distanced myself from it because I began to internalize the stereotypes they placed on me. Doing archival research takes perseverance, patience, and dedication towards your community. By going through the archives and discovering the many negative narratives placed on my community, I found myself reliving instances where I believed these portrayals about myself. Words carry weight when they are spoken from the mouths of those who hold the most power. Marginalized communities often feel helpless in reality and in history. I wanted to do this work not only to expose the harmful patterns of the archives and mass media such as newspapers but to prove to myself that I am more than what has been portrayed about me. My family is more. My community is more.

As Paulo Freire says, “Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.”¹³⁰ Our stories matter; telling them is a form of resistance. We have been conditioned to stay silent and compliant. To not question. To simply survive. After all of the narratives about my community that I witnessed, it’s impossible to believe that history has included every narrative equally. Marginalized communities are rewritten as tools of the dominant narrative. While destroying their identities and the way they feel belonging in a country that has caused much harm. This research carried trauma by reliving and restating harmful narratives, but it also allowed me to dispute them with scholarly work from Latinos themselves. I take pride in this work and hope that the exposure of the dominant narrative continues and that my community gains their voices back.

¹³⁰ Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

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