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COMMODITY MIGRANTS:  
A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MEXICAN IMMIGRATION  
TO THE UNITED STATES

Jorge A. Bustamante  
Centro de Estudios Sociológicos  
El Colegio de México

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## Introduction

This essay consists of four sections. The first deals with the conceptual frame of reference within which Mexican immigration to the United States will be analyzed. In this section, the concept of commodity-migration is introduced as an attempt to explain 1) the association between immigration and capital expansion in the historical context of the class structure of the United States border region and, 2) the process of formation of cultural meanings in the superstructural or ideological dimension of the social relations of capitalist production. In such a context, migration is understood as a social relationship that takes place in the area of relations of production in which migrant behavior consists basically of a self transportation of the migrant's labor power, conceived as a commodity, to where the capital investor requires it. The second section focuses on some aspects of the historical background of Mexican immigration to the United States. The historical approach of this section derives from the conceptualization of commodity-migration discussed in the previous section, in which it is contended that Mexican immigration to the United States has responded to an immigration policy aimed at the creation and maintenance of a "cheap labor pool" for the benefit of capital interests, particularly in agricultural

production. A distinction is made in this section between various types of Mexican immigration, namely undocumented or "ilegal" immigration, "braceros" and "commuters" or "tarjetas verdes". The third section deals with some macro-social aspects of immigration to the United States at large, which are discussed from the theoretical perspective of the concept commodity-migration outlined in the first section. Focus is placed in this section on the process of formation of cultural meanings in the superstructural context of capitalist relations of production. The fourth section focuses on the social relations of the undocumented immigrant in the context of the class structure of the border region. This context is illustrated by the use of social types or typical people who enter and/or affect the social relations of the undocumented immigrant from Mexico.

#### SECTION I THE CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS OF COMMODITY-MIGRATION

When immigration is focused as social behavior we could conceive it as an alternative to situational conditions. This alternative has a social character to the extent that is culturally given to the would be migrant in the context of a power structure corresponding to a certain class structure. Among the variety of factors that make migration factual, focus will be placed on what it is viewed as a sufficient although not

necessary condition for Mexican immigration to the United States namely a demand for cheap labor in the context of capitalist relations of production. Evidence from Hourwich <sup>1/</sup> and, Thomas <sup>2/</sup> support the validity of focusing on the factors of labor demand in the United States based on the assertion that on the whole "pull factors" have had more weight than "push factors" in determining the conditions for immigration to the United States. It is assumed in this paper that such a demand for cheap labor has to be known by the would-be immigrant in order to come to the United States as opposed to some other place of destiny. Our assumption implies that such a demand becomes part of the social relations of capitalism in which labor selling makes sense only because there are known labor buyers.

Using our interpretation of Weber's concepts of social action discussed elsewhere <sup>3/</sup> we could define the social nature of immigration as behavior made in reference to other people's behavior. In this context, the meaning of that "reference" is derived from the superstructure or "culture" corresponding to capitalist relations of production. The source

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<sup>1/</sup> Isaac Hourwich, Immigration and Labour, New York: E.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912

<sup>2/</sup> Brindley Thomas, Migration and Economic Growth, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954.

<sup>3/</sup> Jorge A. Bustamante, "The Parsonization of Weber in American Sociology" (paper presented in The American Sociological Association Annual Meetings in New Orleans in 1972)

from which the would be immigrant "knows" the meaning of selling his labor in exchange for money, is the superstructure or culture within which he has been socialized. It is from superstructural definitions that the worker has learned to accept as legitimate not to be paid in full for the value of his labor's input into the product's exchange value. In short terms, it is from the "culture" of capitalist relations of production that the immigrant has learned to behave as if he were a commodity for the labor force market.

The process of socialization in which the individual learns to conceive his living labor as a commodity is the same in which the worker learns to offer his objectified labor to the capital owner under the terms defined by the latter. Migration in this context is nothing else but the self-transportation of labor as a commodity to where the capital owner demands it. Social behavior corresponding to these conditions outlined above could be called commodity-migration. In terms of the definition of immigration as a social behavior used in this paper, commodity-migration could be defined as migration (behavior) that is referred to other people's behavior labor demands typified by the cultural definition of "el patron" --the employer), to which an expressed meaning culturally given (commodity exchange) is imputed (in the context of capitalist relations of production) and according to which both the migrant (commodity carrier) and the employer (commodity buyer)

will orient reciprocally the future course of their actions.

The conceptualization of a commodity-migration is by no means all inclusive of possible kinds of migration. There are other migrant-behaviors that would not correspond directly to a commodity relation of a capitalist system of production. Our purpose here is to conceptualize the kind of social relations that involve the behavior of the Mexican immigrant as well as the behavior of all those who make the behavior of that immigrant "make sense." Thus, commodity-migration as a concept can only be applied to capitalist relations of production characterized by an inherent contradiction between labor and capital. In this context commodity-migration is understood as involving the following aspects:

- (1) Commodity-migrants enter into the relations of production of a capitalist society occupying the lowest paid positions of the occupational structure of that society; therefore, becoming a source for capital expansion by providing additional sources of surplus-value to capital investors.
- (2) Commodity-migrants are socially defined as deviants and sanctioned through prejudice and discrimination; thus, the presence of commodity-migrants is used as a factor reinforcing dominant values in accordance with which discriminatory practices are justified and social privileges are maintained. This in turn reinforces the superstructure and legitimizes the prevailing relations of production.
- (3) Commodity-migrants are cast into conflict with the lowest paid native workers, with whom commodity-migrants compete for the lowest paid jobs; thus, commodity-migrants operate as a means for preventing solidarity among workers.

- (4) In times of crisis, the powerlessness of commodity-migrants (which makes possible the aspects outlined above) makes them a favorite target to be blamed for it. That is, commodity-migrants are found being used as scapegoats for social, economic or political problems; this displaces the responsibility of dominant groups in society. This rationalization is used to prevent structural changes from taking place.

## SECTION II MEXICAN IMMIGRATION AND CAPITAL EXPANSION

It did not take long for employers in the United States, with a concern for mining, agriculture, industry, railroads, or business and commercial enterprises, to see the advantages of "importing" labor force from Mexico.

Social scientists in charge of the assessing of conditions of immigration to the United States were suggesting as early as 1910 an immigration policy toward Mexico that would encourage the importation of labor power without the burden of increasing immigration. The following excerpts from the Dillingham Commission's report <sup>4/</sup> illustrate in what terms this contradiction might become possible.

The progress of the Mexican children in the Los Angeles schools is below the average and they leave school early. A large percentage of the native-born can not speak the English language. Because of their strong attachment to

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<sup>4/</sup> U.S. Senate, Immigration Commission (Dillingham Commission), Reports of the Immigration Commission, 43 volumes, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1911, Vol.1, pp.690-691

their native land, low intelligence, illiteracy, migratory life, and the possibility of their residence here being discontinued, few become citizens of the United States....

In so far as Mexican laborers come into contact with natives or with European immigrants they are looked upon as inferiors. Though Mexican teamsters frequently live and eat with white ranch hands, when Mexicans are employed in groups they eat by themselves or in some cases with the negroes. Marriages between Mexicans and Europeans or Americans are rare. Though it is apparent upon their return to Mexico that American ideas and institutions here left their imprint upon them, their progress toward assimilation has perhaps not been more rapid than that of the conservative Chinese....

Because of a lack of thrift and a tendency to regard public relief as a "pension", as indeed it is commonly known among Mexicans in Los Angeles, many of the Mexican families in times of industrial depression become public charges....

Thus it is evident that in the case of the Mexican he is less desirable as a citizen than as a laborer. The permanent additions to the population however, are much smaller than the number who immigrate for work....

The Mexican immigrants are providing a fairly acceptable supply of labor in a limited territory in which it is difficult to secure others, and their competitive ability is limited because of their more or less temporary residence and their personal qualities, so that their incoming does not involve the same detriment to labor conditions as is involved in the immigration of other races who also work at comparatively low wages. While the Mexicans are not easily assimilated, this is not of very great importance as long as most of them return to their native land after a short time. They give rise to little race friction, but do impose upon the community a large number of dependents, misdemeanants, and petty criminals where they settle in any considerable number....

The aforementioned remarks of a Congressional policy advising committee seem to fit propositions (1) and (2) of the conceptualization of commodity-migration outlined in the first section of this essay. Of a particular importance is to realize the precedence of this view in the



U.S. Senate over the beginning of a massive immigration from Mexico. In the period of 1900 there were 2,259 immigrants from Mexico. In the following period from 1905 to 1909 there were 21,732. From 1910 to 1914 the number immigrants from Mexico increased to 82,588 <sup>5/</sup> It is our contention that "push factors" like the Mexican Revolution have been over emphasized while, on the other hand, too little emphasis has been given to the effect of "pull factors" on Mexican immigration.

The Corpus Christi Herald for example in 1910 advertised and invited investment in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, offering as its principle attraction of the region "the cheapest Mexican labor that you can find". <sup>6/</sup> Parenthetically, we find the same type of propaganda being offered by the Chambers of Commerce of American border cities and their development commissions as late as 1973. This is the twin-city concept but it has the same meaning namely, cheap labor is available for American industry.

As a result of the efforts to obtain cheap labor early in the century, we find also a reaction of domestic laborers who feel affected by such a competition. This situation, accompanied by lower wages and high unemployment rates of domestic employees in the border area, has as a consequence the displacement of domestic employees, particularly workers of Mexican descent. Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of

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<sup>5/</sup> Leo Grebler et.al., The Mexican American People, New York: The Free Press. 1970, p. 64

<sup>6/</sup> Paul S. Taylor, An American-Mexican Frontier: Nueces Country Texas, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934, p. 105

labor, illustrates the problem in this way: "When confronted by demands of high wages, shorter hours and better conditions in New Mexico, the mine operators called across the border line and Mexican miners came to take the places of the Americans". <sup>7/</sup>

Since the owners of the mines of New Mexico and Colorado also owned the mines of Mexico, the experience and ability of Mexican miners was well-known in the United States.

The significance of bringing Mexican workers has had the stigma that this labor has been brought to the United States to act as strikebreakers, to hamper the union movement, and to lower the wages and the working conditions of the American Laborer. We quote Samuel Gompers again to illustrate this point:

Distance was no barrier to the coal and gold mine operators of Colorado who wished to use unsuspecting Mexican miners of Colorado... conditions had stultified Mexican laborers. They were not fully conscious of the wrongs done to themselves or the injury that they did to American workers by undermining existing standards and conditions. <sup>8/</sup>

The number of Mexican immigrants to the United States as of 1924 is estimated by Gamio at 890,746. <sup>9/</sup>

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<sup>7/</sup> Lamar B. Jones, "Mexican American Labor Problems in Texas, "Ph.D. Dissertation, microfilm. Austin: University of Texas, 1965, p. 15

<sup>8/</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>9/</sup> Manual Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States, New York: Dover Publications, 1971, p. 2.

Although Gamio himself questions the reliability of this figure referred to immigrants who were admitted legally. No one knows how many Mexican immigrants entered without visa into the United States at the beginning and during the massive population movement which took place between the first and second decade of this century. But we can estimate that the number without visa was greater than the lawful immigration if we take into account the following factors which favored immigration without visa. These factors were observed by Gamio in his investigations made in 1926.

1. The difficulties presented by the American immigration laws to illiterates who could not pass the literacy test.
2. The loss of time and money which was caused by waiting on the Mexican side while the legal requisites were taken care of before admission to the United States.
3. The amount of money paid to a smuggler or "pasador" in order to get in to the United States was generally less than the \$18 which the immigrant visa cost. <sup>10/</sup>

At the turn of the century the Mexican peasant was by definition illiterate. Not only was education beyond his reach, but education was often prohibited to him (see Chapter V). Thus his very ignorance kept him a peasant. Under these conditions his life was conditioned by the prevailing societal

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<sup>10/</sup> Ibid., p. 10

structure. This was a peasant who had no alternative but to follow the route north, a route which did not really take him away from the cultural influence that he had known. <sup>11/</sup> McWilliams says "Migration from Mexico is deeply rooted in the past. It follows trails which are among the most ancient of the North American continent. Psychologically and culturally, Mexicans have never immigrated to the Southwest: They have returned". <sup>12/</sup>

On the one had legal admission to the United States was terribly complicated and quite often beyond the reach of the peasant; on the other had with the exception of five or six points of entry, there was little vigilance on the border which is 1,870 miles long. Thus it seems logical that for the most part mexican immigration to the United States would be illegal.

The creation of the Border Patrol in 1924 made necessary a greater distinction between those who cross the border legally and those who violated the immigration laws. The mission of the Border Patrol was enforcement of these immigration laws which up to this date are not well understood or

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<sup>11/</sup> Arthur J. Rubel, Across the Tracks, Mexican Americans in a Texas City, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966, pp. 41-45

<sup>12/</sup> Carey McWilliams, North from Mexico, The Spanish Speaking People of the United States, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968, p. 58

either ignored by the immigrant who, in the absence of an official who might sanction him upon his illegal entry does not really identify himself as a lawbreaker. The Border Patrol became this official who served as a reference point to the illegal immigrant with regard to the legal consequences of the violation of the immigration laws. Before the Border Patrol, the illegal immigrant just had to stay out of trouble and not implicate himself with the police or the judicial authorities in order to consider himself completely safe in the streets and roads and fairly free to choose the most convenient work. <sup>13/</sup> Only the courts could decree his deportation. Generally speaking deportation came as a consequence not so much of having entered illegally but rather having become involved in some criminal offense.

The creation of the Border Patrol was accompanied by a new administrative procedure which accelerated the expulsion of the illegal immigrant, which before this time was made through deportation. This new administrative procedure is called "voluntary departure". An illegal immigrant who has been apprehended is required to demonstrate his legal status in the country. If he can not demonstrate this status he is subject to deportation. If the illegal immigrant, however, wishes to

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<sup>13/</sup> Jones, op. cit., p. 16

avoid being deported, he is invited to leave the country voluntarily. If he refuses this invitation, theoretically he should be taken before a judge in order to prove his legal entry. If he can not prove legal entry he is then subject to deportation.

Table I illustrates the effects on illegal immigration after the creation of the Border Patrol and the administrative procedure of voluntary departure.

The very apparent increase which appears in the decade 1921 to 1930, marks a very important change in the history of the Mexican illegal immigrant. From being one of many migratory workers and almost certain that his illegal entry would not bring any sanction, his status was changed, beginning in 1924, to that of the fugitive from the law who had to be constantly hiding in order to not be apprehended and expelled from the country. He became known as the "wetback".

The establishment of the Border Patrol was accompanied by an organized form of smuggler, "man-snatcher," "coyote," "enganchista," or "pasador," The "smuggler" has usually been a Mexican and he operates by keeping abreast of the demand for labor in the United States, particularly agricultural labor along the border, and many times he acts as an agent or labor contractor. If he acts as an agent or contractor he is paid so much a head for each worker. He crosses the border into Mexico, secures his workers and assures them that he knows the

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TABLE I

Mexican Immigrant Workers Without Visa

Year	Total	Year	Total	Year	Total
1924	4,614	1940	8,051	1957	44,451
1925	2,961	1941	6,082	1958	37,242
1926	4,047	1942	DNA	1959	30,196
1927	4,495	1943	8,189	1960	29,651
1928	5,529	1944	26,689	1961	29,817
1929	8,538	1945	63,602	1962	30,272
1930	18,319	1946	91,456	1963	39,124
1931	8,409	1947	182,986	1964	43,844
1932	7,116	1948	179,385	1965	55,349
1933	15,875	1949	278,538	1966	89,751
1934	8,910	1950	485,215	1967	108,327
1935	9,139	1951	500,000	1968	151,000
1936	9,534	1952	543,538	1969	201,636
1937	9,535	1953	865,318	1970	277,377
1938	8,684	1954	1,075,168	1971	348,178
1939	9,376	1955	242,608	1972	487,124
		1956	72,442	1973	577,000

Sources: From 1924 to 1941: Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor. From 1942 to 1960: Special compilation of the Immigration and Naturalization Service reported to us. From 1961 to 1972: Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Figures for 1973 are taken from Good Neighbor Commission of Texas, Texas Migrant Labor 1973 Annual Report.



best crossing sites. Sometimes this means that there will be less vigilance at the sites or sometimes it means that he has made an arrangement with the Border Patrol. None of these promises on the part of the smuggler need necessarily be true in order to get the necessary men to follow him. The price for his services are paid in advance. In 1926 it was less than \$18. <sup>14/</sup> Our own investigation in 1970 suggests that the price to the smuggler varies between \$200 and \$300. Some of the workers do in fact cross safely, that is, without being apprehended, and find work as promised by the smuggler. More often than not, however, the Mexican undocumented migrant is apprehended before he finds work.

There have been many tragedies with regard to the smugling of aliens, most of which are related to the methods of transportarion.

The establishment of the Border Patrol in 1924 modified not only the interaction between the illegal entrant and the employer. Before 1924 salaries and working conditions were established according to the supply and demand of the labor force. after the establishment of the Border Patrol a new factor came into being, namely the danger of being apprehended and thus returned to Mexico. Thus the threat of being turned in presented

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<sup>14/</sup> Gamio, op. cit., p. 10

a new dimension to the disadvantage of the illegal entrant. Since anyone can turn in an illegal, such a threat began to narrow the social contacts which the illegal might establish, with the exception that he must always have some relationship to the employer. In our estimation the implicit or explicit threat of being turned in, even by the employer a new element into the situation with regard to wages and working conditions. In a real sense the immigrant worker without visa is at the mercy of the employer, the alternatives of accepting or not accepting a job are not necessarily open to the worker, because an employer can in fact insist that the wages and working conditions be accepted by the worker without visa or face the possibility of being turned in to the Border Patrol. How common this is we do not really know but such instances have been reported by Saunders and Leonard,<sup>15/</sup> Hadley,<sup>16/</sup> and Jones.<sup>17/</sup> Seventeen out of 493 Mexican workers without visa interviewed by the author complained of the employer having turned them in to the Border Patrol without having paid their salaries. Fourteen were working in Texas, two in California and one in Arizona. The following illustrates a

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<sup>15/</sup> Lyle Saunders and Olen F. Leonard, The Wetback in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, Inter-American Education Occasional Papers, No. 7, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951.

<sup>16/</sup> Eleanor M. Hadley, "A Critical Analysis of the Wetback Problem," in Law and Contemporary Problems, Vol. 21, Spring, 1956, pp. 334-357.

<sup>17/</sup> Jones, op. cit.

situation with regard to the relationships between the Border Patrol, the interests of the employer in obtaining cheap labor and the exploitation of the immigrant worker.

The wetback who finds agricultural employment in the Valley frequently does not have an enviable lot, even in terms of local standards.<sup>18/</sup> His hours are long, his wages low....His work day may vary in a length from eight to twelve hours. His time is completely at the disposal of the employer. His productivity hour for hour is probably less than that for the citizen laborers, but he will work longer and more steadily than the citizens. He is usually afraid to protest against working conditions and will accept fairly low wages without comment. He seldom bargains for his services, but accepts the rates offered by the employer....It is a common belief among those familiar with working conditions in the Valley that it is the wetback's docility, even more than the low wages he works for, that makes him so attractive as a worker. At least it can be stated with assurance that the illegal status of the wetback in the U.S. provides a powerful club that can be brandished over his head at any time. And, it is not difficult for an employer to see that a recalcitrant wetback is rapidly deported to Mexico.<sup>19/</sup>

The depression of the 30's brought about a number of measures which affected immigration from Mexico . Perhaps the more serious of these was what has been called "operation deportation" realized in 1930. Although no statistics were kept for this operation <sup>20/</sup> the general procedure was to require all

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<sup>18/</sup> We must point out that the "local standards" with which Saunders and Leonard are comparing the "non-enviable lot" of the worker in that area, were found to be the lowest in the United States with the sole exception of the Indian Reservation's surrounding areas. (Select Commission on the Western Hemisphere, 1968, pp. 113-130)

<sup>19/</sup> Saunders and Leonard, op. cit., pp. 54-55

<sup>20/</sup> Jones, op. cit., p. 18

those suspected of being aliens to prove that they were born in the United States. The person who could not satisfy this requirement was expelled by the country under the administrative procedure of "voluntary departure." This was done in order to reduce the number of unemployed during the Depression as well as the large number of people who were on welfare. This procedure also proved to be a hardship for many Mexicans who had in fact left Mexico as many as twenty years before, as immigrants, and now they found themselves expelled from the country.

Many inhabitants of the urban areas along the border blamed the immigrant worker without visa for all their problems without giving much thought to the attitude of the growers which was summarized eloquently by Vice-President Garner, "In order to make profit out of this (agri-business) you have to have cheap labor". A similar attitude was expressed by Senator McCarran who pleaded that we look at the situation realistically in terms of the interests of the employer and his need for the worker without visa.

As the problem grew more serious it also began to get national attention. The New York Times said:

It is remarkable how some of the same Senators and Representatives who are all for enacting the most rigid barriers against immigration from Southern Europe suffer from a sudden blindness when it comes to protecting the Southern Border

of the U.S. This peculiar weakness is most noticeable among members from Texas and the Southwest, where the wetbacks happen to be principally employed. (New York Times, November 28, 1952). 21/

President Eisenhower asked Attorney General Brownell who had visited the region to propose a plan. The Plan turned out to be that General Joseph May Swing, 22/ was named Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Service, in charge of the "Operation Wetback".

In July of 1954 General Swing presented his plan to a group of employers in South Texas and said: "When President Eisenhower appointed me for this job his orders were to clean up the border. I intended to do just that." 23/

"Operation Wetback" was pursued with military efficiency and the result was that over a million Mexican workers without visa were expelled from the country in 1954.

At the end of 1956 some people considered that the problem of the Mexican worker without visa was an episode of history. But as we move through the years we find that while there was a great decrease in the number of Mexican workers without

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21/ Otey M. Scruggs, "Texas and the Bracero Program," Pacific Historical Review, August, 1963.

22/ General Swing's service record includes his participation in the "Pershing expedition" that invaded Mexico in 1916.

23/ John G. McBride, Vanishing Bracero, San Antonio: The Naylor, Co., 1963, p. 5.

visa from 1954 to 1959, we begin again to see an increase of Mexican immigrants up to the present time.

One might in fact suggest that if agricultural production was so dependent on Mexican workers then presumably "Operation Wetback" would have brought about an economic catastrophe to the border region. Other things happened and the economic catastrophe was not realized. The process of legalizing workers without visa and converting them into braceros (which we will discuss in the following section), was one thing. Many of the workers without visa who were expelled as "illegals" came back as braceros, legally. "Operation Wetback" may have dried out a pool of cheap labor within the United States but it certainly augmented the size of unemployment across the border in Mexico.

#### Law, Power and Discrimination

The decade between the 1930's and 1940's was a period in which it became obvious that the supply of labor, whether legal or illegal (for the Southwest), was obviously based in Mexico. It was during this period also that the prejudices and the discrimination towards this labor was in a sense institutionalized. This means that the attitudes, the values, and the norms of behavior related to this population were formalized and continue to the present time. A deputy sheriff

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appearing before the LaFollette Committee hearings, illustrates the point: "We protect our farmers here in Kern Country.... they are our best people....they keep the country going....but the Mexicans are trash. They have no standard for living. We herd them like pigs. 24/

In this eloquent declaration we find a statement of the factors which have been related to the interactive process between immigrant Mexicans as they relate to the social structure which needs his labor. Without elaboration these factors are: 1) The need to protect the interests of the growers. 2) The value judgments which justify the protection of these interests. 3) The power of the growers as they are "protected." 4) The justification to treat Mexicans in whatever manner is necessary. 5) The lack of power of the Mexican immigrant before the social structure. 6) The prejudicial attitudes and the discriminatory behavior directed toward the Mexicans.

Other writers quoted before (Saunders and Leonard, Hadley and Galarza) have noted the same prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavior which in short can be called the exploitation of cheap labor.

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24/ McWilliams, op.cit., p. 191



The point here is that this exploitation was institutionalized during this period although the historical basis preceded it. Note for example:

Mr. Chairman, here is the whole problem in the nutshell. Farming is not a profitable industry in this country, and, in order to make money out of this, you have to have cheap labor...in order to allow land owners now to make a profit on their farms, they want to get the cheapest labor they can find, and if they can get the Mexican labor it enables them to make a profit. That is the way it is along the border and I imagine that is the way it is anywhere else. 25/

The above quotation was taken from John Nance Garner, before he became Vice-President of the United States, during the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. This statement from such a high official in the U.S. Government suggests if not the power certainly the influence of the growers.

Senator McCarran, many years later declared:

....Senator (Elender), I think you will agree with me that on this side of the border there is a desire for these wetbacks...Last year when we had the Appropriations Bill up, the item that might have prevented them from coming over to some extent, was stricken from the bill...we might just as well face this thing realistically. The agricultural people, the farmer along the Mexican side of the border in California, in Arizona, in Texas...want this help. They want this farm labor. They just can not get along without it. 26/

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25/ U.S. Congress, Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, 1926, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1926, pp.20-24

26/ U.S. Senate, Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary S. 1917, Appropriation Hearings, 1953, p.123 (Senator McCarran).

This again illustrates the institutionalization of the exploitation of cheap labor with regard to Mexicans. There seems to be little regard in these statements as to the morality of the action and certainly not much regard as to the legality of the action. Thus illegal immigration and the hiring of Mexican workers without visa seems to be taken for granted, and it comes as a given in the economic situation along the border.

In the meantime the growers defined the situation of the Mexican immigrant as a question of a "natural" interplay of supply and demand. Expressed in these terms they presumably did not view the reduction of wages over time as anything bad. Gamio found that in 1926 <sup>27/</sup> the average wage for the Mexican immigrant was \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day (8 hours) in Texas. Saunders and Leonard found in 1950 that the average wage of the wetback in the lower Rio Grande Valley was \$2.50 for a twelve hour day. <sup>28/</sup> This then means that twenty-four years later the grower of south Texas had not increased wages, whereas the profits for agribusiness in the same region of the Lower Rio Grande Valley between 1920 and 1950 increased 1000%. <sup>29/</sup>

In view of this situation one can only wonder what are the ideological factors and how do the institutions of

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<sup>27/</sup> Gamio, op.cit., see Table XVI, figures for agriculture.

<sup>28/</sup> Saunders and Leonard, op.cit., pp. 16-17.

<sup>29/</sup> Ibidem.

socialization function in order to perpetuate those ideological factors that have made the worker blame the powerless newcomer for low wages and living conditions. At this point we could say that the failure of the worker to relate his working conditions to the power structure where the employer and the worker himself are located, represents a similar kind of alienation shown by the nativist worker of the "know nothing party" against Irish and German immigrants, or the unionized worker of the Exclusion League against Asian immigrants, or, the farm worker of the present time against Mexican immigrants. That alienation becomes a necessary element for commodity migrants to exist.

A fruit picker from Sonoma County, California, where work in the fall of the year can be found in apples, prunes, grapes and walnut picking, shows typical bitterness over immigrants' competition in a letter to government officials dated September 1953. He complained:

The Wetbacks are driving the American workers out of the fields, the American workers don't want to live on charity, they want to work under decent conditions...

We are American taxpayers, we have worked hard to pay for our small homes, we have also been paying income taxes for years when we had steady jobs, work has been falling off in Sonoma County of late...and us taxpayers need these fruit jobs badly, it is bad enough to compete with Mexican National labor (Contract Labor usually brought in) but we just cannot compete with Wetbacks.

We just cannot live under the same conditions these Wetbacks live under, and we just cannot work under these

conditions these ranchers expect American People to work under. The Chamber of Commerce advertises over the radio, also in the newspapers, how short the ranchers are on help to harvest their crops, there is no shortage of fruit help, the reason is, the ranchers want cheap labor, that will live and work under any conditions. 30/

This letter is illustrative of the syndrome of displacement of the employers' responsibility in shaping the conditions under which working conditions are established. Even though farm workers now speak frequently and bitterly about the low wages they are offered, they talk about the number of times they are refused work because they are citizens, the necessity to move northward during a part of the year because of their inability to obtain work in places where the immigrants have been hired at wages on which they can not live, and the educational handicaps placed on their children as a result of this migration; which, for many starts before school is out in the spring and ends long after it has started in the fall. 31 /

#### The Bracero Program

The Bracero Program was created by an agreement between the United States and Mexican governments in July 23, 1942.

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30/ As quoted by Hadley, op. cit., p. 345

31/ Willian E. Scholes, "The Migrant Worker," in Julian Samora (ed.), La Raza: Forgotten Americans, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966.

The rationale for the program was to overcome manpower shortages originated by the involvement of the United States in the World War II. Agricultural production was viewed as vital to winning the war. Thus, the lack of agricultural labor was considered a concern of the War Food Administration. This agency, in cooperation with the Department of Labor and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, established a labor recruitment program as an emergency war measure <sup>32/</sup> based upon the U.S.-Mexico agreement.

The main provisions of the U.S.-Mexico agreement for the Bracero Program were:

Mexican workers were not to be used to displace domestic workers but only fill proved shortages. Recruits were to be exempted from military service, and discrimination against them was not to be permitted. The round trip transportation expenses of the worker were guaranteed, as well as living expenses en route. Hiring was to be done on the basis of a written contract between the worker and his employer and the work was to be exclusively in agriculture. Brace-ros were to be free to buy merchandise in places of their own choice. Housing and sanitary conditions were to be adequate. Deductions amounting to 10% of their earnings were authorized for deposit in a savings fund payable to the worker on his return to Mexico. Work was guaranteed for three-quarters of the duration of the contract. Wages were to be equal to those prevailing in the area of employment, but in any case not less than 30 cents per hour. <sup>33/</sup>

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<sup>32/</sup> Report of the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, p. 92

<sup>33/</sup> Ernesto Galarza, Merchants of Labor, The Mexican Bracero History, Santa Barbara, California: McNally and Loftin, 1964, pp.47-48

These provisions as they related to adequate transportation, housing, wages, food, medical care, and guaranteed length of work, were seldom provided and more often than not, the agreements were violated by the U.S. subscribers. <sup>34/</sup>

Several factors intervened in the constant violation of the provisions of the agreement by the farmers: 1) They were able to hire Mexican workers as braceros, by-passing the centers for recruitment run by the Mexican government, regardless of the provisions of the agreement; this made it impossible for the Mexican Government to control the guarantees established in protection of the bracero; <sup>35/</sup> 2) The overt cooperation of the Border Patrol to admit workers as braceros regardless of Mexican government consent; <sup>36/</sup> 3) The practice of the "drying out" of wetbacks by the Border Patrol which consisted in taking large groups of "wetbacks" to the border, after their apprehension for their illegal entrance, making them place a tip of the toe on the Mexican side in order to make lawful their admittance as braceros; <sup>37/</sup> 4) The powerlessness of the Mexican government to enforce the provisions of the agreements over the American farmers and the indifference of the U.S. Government about its violations.

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<sup>34/</sup> Ibid., pp. 251-254

<sup>35/</sup> Ibid., p. 2

<sup>36/</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>37/</sup> Ibid., p. 4

World War II ended but not the emergency war-time measure called the Bracero Program. By several extensions the war measure lasted 22 years ending on December 31st of 1964. Table 2 shows the magnitude of the Bracero movement which totaled 4,646,199.

The Bracero history did not accomplish one of the goals as conceived by the Mexican government, namely eliminating discrimination and exploitation of the Mexican worker.

#### The Commuter

It is necessary to distinguish between the official definition of commuter and the commuter phenomena. The former has been expressed in the following terms: "The aliens referred to as "commuters" are those aliens who have been lawfully accorded the privilege of residing permanently in the United States but who choose to reside in foreign contiguous territory and commute to their place of employment in the United States. <sup>38/</sup> In the legal sense, commuter is the one who bears a form I-151 known as "green card," issued to a person upon the rationale of the official definition.

The commuter history (related to Mexicans) might be traced back to the second decade of the century, when the 1921, 1924

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<sup>38/</sup> Report of the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, p. 101

TABLE 2

BRACEROS ADMITED AND UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS FROM MEXICO  
EXPELLED FROM THE UNITED STATES  
1942-1973

Year	braceros	Mexican undocumented immigrants returned to Mexico
1942	4,203	10,603
1943	52,098	16,154
1944	62,170	39,449
1945	120,000	80,760
1946	82,000	116,320
1947	55,000	214,543
1948	35,345	193,852
1949	107,000	289,400
1950	67,500	469,581
1951	192,000	510,355
1952	197,100	531,719
1953	201,380	839,149
1954	309,033	1,035,282
1955	398,650	165,186
1956	445,197	58,792
1957	436,049	45,640
1958	432,857	45,164
1959	437,643	42,732
1960	315,846	39,750
1961	291,420	39,860
1962	194,978	41,200
1963	186,865	51,230
1964	177,736	41,589
1965	20,286	48,948
1966	8,647	89,683
1967	7,703	107,695
1968	0	142,520
1969	0	189,572
1970	0	265,539
1971	0	348,178
1972	0	430,213
1973	0	609,673

*It made it  
more difficult  
define + plus  
cancel the illegals*

Source: Vernon Briggs, "The Mexico-United States Border: Public Policy and Chicano Economic Welfare" "Studies in Human Resource Development, paper No. 2, Center for the Study of Human Resources, University of Texas at Austin, Texas: 1974: p. 9



and 1927 Immigration Acts made reference to this category. But it was not until the Registration Act of 1940 that the category of commuter was sanctioned by the Congress in its actual form.

The commuter phenomenon acquired numerical importance since 1954, the year of the Operation Wetback. <sup>39/</sup> We must point out that the figures available for the development of this topic do not indicate its actual history, as we learn from the Report of the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration that says to this respect:

Many thousands of Mexican citizens are permitted to enter this country for business of pleasure with entry documents that do not permit them to work. Undoubtedly some of these visitors do work, despite the best efforts of U.S. authorities. Such illegal, wetback, workers would be regarded in the popular mind as commuters but would not appear in any official or <sup>40/</sup> semi-official estimate of the volume of alien commuters.

With reference to those who enter the U.S. but who are not permitted to work, the U.S. Consul General at Tijuana, Mexico stated, "Considerable in excess of 150,000 are estimated to be holding border crossing cards issued by I.N.S. at San Ysidro. <sup>41/</sup>

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<sup>39/</sup> Julian Samora, Los Mojados, The Wetback Story, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971, p. 51-55

<sup>40/</sup> Report of the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, p. 114.

<sup>41/</sup> Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, Hearings, Part I, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, p. 16

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<sup>40/</sup> Report of the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, p. 114.

<sup>41/</sup> Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, Hearings, Part I, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, p. 16

That is to say, the volume of the commuter phenomena comprises 1) The "green card" (Form I-151) holder, 2) The crossing card (Form I-186) holder who crosses legally but may work illegally in the U.S. and 3) The Mexican worker without visa who lives on the border side of Mexico and crosses back and forth illegally.

We shall attempt to draw a picture of the commuter phenomena by inferring from scattered information about some aspects of each category.

The first dimension is shown in Table 3 although we must point out that the figures for 1967 at least, appear to be incoungruent with a statement made by George K. Rosenberg, Los Angeles District Director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service who said:

From time to time a sample count is taken and the last such sampling was taken between November 1, 1967 and December 31, 1967, the total number of commuters crossing the border between Mexico and California during this period was 15,284. 42/

These figures, however, and those in Table 3, are generally considered conservative, because regular statistics are not kept and other than "green carders" commute.

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42/ Ibid., p. 6.

TABLE 3

Mexican Immigrants Admitted As Commuters to the U.S.

Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number
1952	9,079	1958	26,791	1964	34,448
1953	17,183	1959	22,909	1965	40,686
1954	30,645	1960	32,708	1966	47,217
1955	43,702	1961	41,476	1967	43,034
1956	61,320	1962	55,805	1968	44,000
1957	49,321	1963	55,986		

Source: Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, pp. 40-56.

In reference to category (2) we shall take into account part of the testimony of Mr. Rosenberg at the same hearings:

Mr. Scammon: What about the 72-hour cardholders, do you have any estimate as to how many there are in the area?

Mr. Rosenberg: No, Sir, I don't have any estimate because we keep no statistics.

Mr. Scammon: Would there be several hundred thousand?

Mr. Rosenberg: Yes, I would say that for the reason that we inspect monthly at San Isidro, approximately two million people a month. Now, that is counting the same body each time they cross. And the bulk of these people would be 72-hour cardholders.

Mr. Scammon: Rather than commuters?

Mr. Rosenberg: Yes, we feel that there are about 15,000 commuters crossing from Mexico into California. 43/

The form I-186 (crossing card or shopping card or 72-hour card) is valid for 4 years. 44/ Most of the aliens working illegally in the border area have entered legally by using the crossing card. 45/

No one knows how many persons cross legally using the crossing and shopping card and work illegally in the U.S.

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43/ Ibid., p. 9

44/ Ibid., p. 9

45/ Ibid., p. 13

The number, however, must be in the thousands. In Tijuana it is estimated that 150,000 persons have such cards and 75,000 in Juarez. El Paso issues between 2,500 and 3,000 of these cards monthly. Brownsville issues 1,500 to 2,000 monthly. Also hundreds of these cards are revoked monthly along all check points, because the violators have been caught working.<sup>46/</sup>

SECTION III  
THE IDEOLOGY OF IMMIGRATION OR THE SUPERSTRUCTURE OF CAPITALIST  
RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

New inventions and scientific discoveries for the late 18th century onwards brought about, for the first time in the United States, the possibilities of mass production. But this required the availability of workers in sufficiently large numbers. New technology plus the great demand for human resources altered the set of roles that immigrants could play on their entry into the United States. The third decade of the 19th century was no longer a time when the new immigrant could easily become a colonizer and owner of land. The role of entrepreneur began to demand more resources than those generally brought by the new immigrant and thus an increasingly wide gap developed between the economic resources of the "native " and those of the newcomer. Consequently, the new immigrant's chance of becoming an entrepreneur decreased as the role of an employee

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<sup>46/</sup> Ibid., p. 12

became increasingly available because of mass production. Empirical evidence has been presented by the economist Brindley Thomas of an association between the rapid increase of immigration and the economic growth of the United States as measured by increases in the production of bituminous coal and in mileage of railroad-tracks added,<sup>47/</sup> The process of economic expansion became both a cause and effect of the rapid increase in availability of cheap labor through immigration. The greater the immigration (cheap labor) the greater the possibilities for economic expansion, which in turn increased the demand for more cheap labor. The U.S. Industrial Commission of 1901 was well aware of that relationship as illustrated by its conclusions of a study of the effect of immigration upon business:

Immigration follows business conditions in obedience to the opportunities for employment. In times of business expansion, when capital is seeking investments and the resources of the country are being eagerly developed.... immigrants enter in increasing numbers to take a share of the increasing wages and employment, but in times of business depression their numbers decline. <sup>48/</sup>

In this period which begins in the third decade of the 19th century, there occurs a massive immigration of Irish.

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<sup>47/</sup> Thomas, opus cit. pp. 26-34

<sup>48/</sup> As quoted by Hourwich, opus cit., p. 86

Irish immigration marks the beginning of a paradox never to be absent in the forecoming history of mass immigration to the United States: on the one hand, the immigrant was welcomed as a worker, and, on the other, he was socially defined as a deviant and was assigned an inferior status in the social structure. <sup>49/</sup>

Mass immigration after 1830 preceded an increase in industrial expansion which in turn ran parallel to an increase in the size of industrial working class <sup>50/</sup>. The interest in maintaining undisturbed a system of production that was increasingly prosperous led to a search for ways and means of controlling the mass of the workers. An ideology or a rationale to justify the poor working conditions of industrial workers was provided by intellectuals from the dominant groups in society. The notion of impersonal "natural laws" of supply and demand came to provide the basis for a social definition of the conditions for the relations of production. The worker was then taught to believe in the existence of those "natural laws" as regulating wages and working conditions in response to the supply and the demand of labor.

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<sup>49/</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865: a Study of Acculturation*, New Haven: Harvard University Press. 1941, p. 186

<sup>50/</sup> Thomas, opus cit., pp. 159-160



Most important was the corresponding belief that a "natural" interplay of supply and demand of labor worked independently from the employers' will, and outside of their personal relationships with the workers. The belief in the externality and autonomy of "nature" as determining the living conditions of workers and employers led to the absolution of the employers' direct responsibility for the low standards of living of the workers. Responsibility for low wages and poor working conditions was placed beyond the existing relations between employers and employees, thus, increasing the possibilities for maintaining the prevailing system of production.

It is not by chance that the general attitude of the native worker toward the new immigrant began to change almost simultaneously with the onset of mass production and mass immigration in the 1830's. Those were the years that marked the origin of "nativist" movements in the United States. <sup>51/</sup> In accordance with the belief in the natural laws of supply and demand, the immigrant was seen as increasing the supply of labor force and, therefore, as intensifying the competition for jobs which were seen as a commodity. The powerlessness of the new immigrants vis-a-vis the older immigrants or "native"

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<sup>51/</sup> John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 1965.

workers, made it easier to displace responsibility for poor working conditions away from the employers and upon the less powerful social group namely, the immigrants. <sup>52/</sup> From then on a man made structural condition such as wages became socially defined as the result of impersonal laws of supply and demand in which context, jobs were believed to be a scarce commodity for which workers have to compete amongst themselves.

In the case of immigration to the United States, competition for jobs became a divisive factor that pitted worker against worker, thus preventing the alliance and solidarity of those with the same role in the relations of production. Such a competition prevented the workers from realizing that they had interests in common, i.e., to improve working conditions and thus oppose the employers' interests of minimizing the cost of labor and maximizing profits.

A competition for jobs based on an ideology derived from capitalist interests led to a conflict among workers themselves which was the more intense where the greater the imbalance of power. That was the case of the conflict between native workers and immigrants in which failure to conform to the values of the dominant groups of the host society, from the part to the

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<sup>52/</sup> Roger Daniels and Harry L. Kitano, American Racism, Exploration on the Nature of Prejudice, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1970. pp. 40-46

immigrants was sufficient condition to be labeled as deviant by the "natives".

Among other factors, the powerlessness of the immigrant was associated with a differential ability to take advantage of the protective mechanisms that the social system provides for those who conform to its dominant values, i.e., superiority based on skin color and/or ethnic origin, ability to speak English, the knowledge of how to manipulate rights and privileges, etc. Thus, immigrants who failed to conform to the dominant values of the dominant White-Anglosaxon-Protestant classes, were vulnerable to any conflict with other already structurally assimilated groups.

Capital owners in the United States soon became aware of the association between immigration and capital expansion. William H. Holister from California, one of the most powerful owners of the State in the 19th century, stated before a congressional committee, "I think that the future wealth of this country will be due to the advent of cheap labor. <sup>53/</sup> However, in order to win the necessary agreement from workers to remain "cheap" and from the larger society to justify it, the construction of what Duster calls "new morality" <sup>54/</sup> was required.

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<sup>53/</sup> As quoted by Daniels and Kitano, opus cit., p. 44

<sup>54/</sup> Troy Duster, The Legislation of Morality, New York: The Free Press. 1970.

A new morality had to justify and/or rationalize the conditions of exploitation of immigrants and, also, the demand for them. Part of the new morality or ideology that justified the demand for immigrant's cheap labor was manifested in Emma Lazarus' words engraved in the Statue of Liberty, "...Give me your tired, your poor your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" These words were in ironic contrast with the prevailing view among native workers at the beginning of the century illustrated by what could be called a classification of deviant labels given by a steel worker:

By the Eastern European immigration the labor force has been cleft horizontally into two great divisions, the upper stratum includes what is known in vogue parlance as the "English speaking men;" the lower contains the "hunkies" or "ginies". Or if you prefer, the former are the "white men", the latter the "foreigners". An "English speaking man" may be neither native American, nor English, nor Irish. He may be one of these, or he may be German, Scandinavian or Dutch. It is sufficient if the land of his birth be somewhere west of the Russian Empire or north of Austria-Hungary. A "hunkie" is not necessarily a Hungarian. He may belong to any of the slavic races, "Ginny" seems to include all the "hunkies" with the Italians thrown in. 55/

A similar derogatory classification is present in the Report of the Dillingham Commission (1911), in reference to the so called "new" immigration. A prevailing view among The -

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55/ As quoted by Hourwich. opus cit., p. 164

Commissioners is illustrated by one of the social scientist member of the panel of that Commission:

It is undoubtedly true that the availability of the large supply of recent immigrant labor prevented the increase in wages which otherwise would have resulted during recent years from the increased demand for labor. The low standards of the Southern and Eastern European, his ready acceptance of a low wage and existing working conditions, his lack of permanent interest in the occupation and community in which he has been employed, his attitude toward labor organizations, his slow progress toward assimilation, and his willingness seemingly to accept indefinitely without protest certain wages and conditions of employment, have rendered it extremely difficult for the older classes of employees to secure improvements in conditions or advancement in wages since the arrival in considerable numbers of Southern and Eastern European wage earners. 56/

Consistent with the pattern which seems to have started with the Irish immigration and repeated with the German, the so called "new" immigrant from Eastern and Southern European countries was the target of prejudice and discrimination at the same time that he was welcomed as cheap labor. A political issue emerged out of the increasing immigration from these countries. At the same time a derogatory comparison between the "old" and the "new" immigration started at all levels of public opinion. Alleged qualities of the "old" immigration were opposed to the racial characteristics of the "new" immigrant who was deemed inferior. The main argument was that whereas the "old" immigration (from Northern European countries) represented the

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56/ Jeremiah W. Jenks and W. Jett Lauck, The Immigration Problem, New York: Funk and Wagnalls. 1912. pp. 195-196

best qualities of American society the "new" immigration was threatening United States society by lowering moral standards and displacing native workers from jobs <sup>57/</sup>

Research on organized labor shows that trade unions in the United States gained legitimacy almost simultaneously to the beginning of the Southern and Eastern European immigration. It is noteworthy to see the shift of views on organized labor before and after the decade of 1870 to 1880. Before 1870, nativist movements labelled immigrants as deviants for their attempts to organize in unions. This was considered "unAmerican". At the turn of the century immigrants were labelled deviants for precisely the opposite reason namely, their reluctance to enter unions. <sup>58/</sup> The increase in the number of strikes as a consequence of labor organizations, overcoming worker's previous misconceptions about unions, seen alongside the inflow of "new" immigrants, make plausible the hypothesis that industrial employers had to look for new sources of cheap labor force available started to organize and demand better wages and working conditions. Once a new source of cheap labor was secured it became important to reinforce the belief that the "new" immigrant worker was an enemy of the "old" immigrant worker by blaming the former for low standards of living

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<sup>57/</sup> Hourwich, opus cit., pp. 18-19

<sup>58/</sup> Jenks and Lauck, opus cit., p. 192

of the latter, that is, pitting "old" immigrant workers against "new" immigrants and thus preventing their mutual solidarity. At the same time this acted to legitimize a social definition of deviance manifest in the negative stereotypes of the new immigrants supported by an ideology based on the racial superiority of "nordics" over the races from the rest of the world. In support of this hypothesis there is evidence that unions became an instrument for monopolizing jobs on behalf of certain groups of workers, and thus creating divisions within the working class rather than consciousness and solidarity. <sup>59/</sup> A good illustration of the legitimization of racial differences and the "new morality" distinguishing "old" from "new" immigration is the voluminous report of the Dillingham Commission, which, in the name of science, supported arguments that deemed the "new" immigrant inferior. <sup>60/</sup>

The negative orientations of native workers toward immigrants were transformed into labor demands at the same level than better wages and working conditions. Native workers on the west coast demanded, as a group, the removal of the Chinese from the country. <sup>61/</sup> Such labor demands as an eight-hour working day and better wages, made in 1879 by the Workingsmen's Party in

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<sup>59/</sup> Hourwich, opus cit., pp. 346-347

<sup>60/</sup> William Peterson, "The 'Scientific' Basis of our Immigration Policy" in, The Politics of Population, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964, pp. 195-215.

<sup>61/</sup> Daniels and Kitano, opus cit., p. 38

California, did not succeed. Nevertheless, the Chinese Exclusion Act enacted in 1882, barring all immigration from China, was celebrated as a triumph of the native workers. For the first time a workers' organization of "native" Americans had the illusion of political power by obtaining federal legislation that was believed to protect the workers' interests.

Japanese immigrants became the labor substitutes for the Chinese that were required by the economic expansion of the west coast. The same paradoxical pattern initiated at the time of the "industrial revolution" with the Irish immigration was present yet. The Japanese were called "corrupted", "malicious", "clannish", "dangerous", etc. But these labels were used only after they had been welcomed as a new source of cheap labor. Similar to the Irish, Germans and Chinese, the Japanese immigrant was exploited and assigned the lowest position in the social stratification system. <sup>62/</sup>

The Asiatic Exclusion League of North America was reported to have 110,000 registered members in California alone. The League was composed of a number of affiliated bodies, most of them being labor organizations. <sup>63/</sup>

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<sup>62/</sup> Roger Daniels, The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion, Berkeley: University of California Press. 1962.

<sup>63/</sup> U.S. Senate Immigration Commission 1911, opus cit., V. 23, pp. 169-170.



The Exclusion League was clearly an illustration of a social reaction by organized labor primarily directed against Japanese immigration and, by extension, all Asiatic immigration. In 1905 the principles of the Constitution of the Exclusion League were formulated in the following terms:

The Caucasian and Asiatic races are unassimilable. Contact between these races must result, under the conditions of industrial life obtaining in North America, in injury to the former, proportioned to the extent that such contact prevails. The preservation of the Caucasian race upon American soil, and particularly upon the west shore thereof, necessitates the adoption of all possible measures to prevent or minimize the Immigration of Asiatics to America. With these principles and purposes in view we have formed the Asiatic Exclusion League of North America, to the end that the soil of North America be preserved to the American people of the present and all future generations, that they may attain the highest possible moral and national standards, and that they may maintain a society in keeping with the highest ideals of freedom and self-government. 64/

Social reactions against immigrants such as Chinese and Japanese allow us to trace the social process of "labelling" to its structural origins. In this social process there are at least two components. One, material in nature and, the other, ideological or superstructural. The material one refers to the structural conditions of domination-subordination of capitalist relations of production in which social positions derive from the ownership and/or control of the means of production. In this

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64/ Ibidem

context the abstractions or meanings imputed to actions, situations or behavior, are more likely to become socially predominant when they respond to the interests of capital owners. Social definitions of superiority-inferiority are applied to ex post facto situations of acts of domination over certain people. Both in the case of the immigrants, as the case of Blacks, there was first an act of power that rendered them subordinates and then, an imputation of inferiority to ideologically chosen physical or ethnical features based on which their "deviance" was socially recognizable.

At some point in the history of relations of production based on the private appropriation of the means of production racial and ethnic differences became a criterion for the division of labor, in addition to, and derived from, private property. At some point in the historical process of production, certain physical and/or ethnical characteristics shared by a group rendered subordinated (by the power that supports the social definitions of ownership over the means of production), are picked up by those in the position of domination as an ex post facto indicator of the inferiority status already imposed on the subordinates.

To illustrate the dialectics of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure discussed above we shall go back to the immigrants' case to show how the superstructure's

autonomy is only relative and how it is associated to the rela  
tions of production.

Workers' organizations that had demanded better wages and working conditions prior to the formation of the Workingmen's Party in California, had been consistently unsuccessful in their labor demands, as these were not supported by the val  
ues of the dominant groups. <sup>65/</sup> On the contrary, the workers' efforts to improve their living conditions through labor organizations were made appear as illegitimate. Past efforts of organization were labelled the work of "outside agitators", and demands for bettering working conditions were associated with socialistic ideas which, according to the powerful Know Nothing Party, were aimed at destroying the best qualities that distinguished "American" society. <sup>66/</sup> Therefore, labor organi  
zations were consistently suppressed. Suddenly, native workers in the state of California found themselves demanding the exclu  
sion of the Chinese based on an ideology of racial superiority deemed legitimate by the dominant groups of society. This orien  
tation made the city of San Francisco the most unionized region of the United States at the time of the Chinese exclusion  
campaign. <sup>67/</sup>

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<sup>65/</sup> Elmer Sanmayer, The Anti-Chinese Movement in California, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press. 1939. pp.46-48

<sup>66/</sup> Higham, opus cit.

<sup>67/</sup> Daniels and Kitano, opus cit., p. 38

Social values of superiority which had been functional for employers' interests, suddenly became a source of solidarity among "native" workers. <sup>68/</sup> This allowed workers to organize a political party, the "Workingmen's Party", through which, for the first time in the history of labor relations in the United States, workers gained enough political strenght to participate in a Constitutional Convention (1879).

The roots of United States' unionism were thus established and the old labelling of immigrants as deviants; that is, as the enemies of native workers' interests, became a permanent practice in trade-union policies. <sup>69/</sup> Inasmuch as trade-unions' demands for restrictions on immigration derived from an ideology which viewed the immigrant worker as the enemy of the "native", trade-unionism became instrumental in preventing the growth of workers' class consciousness across trades and modes of production. By internalizing the beliefs of racial superiority originated in the class' interests of capital owners, trade-unions became instrumental in the perpetuation of a system which exploited the immigrant, and which justified this by stamping him with a label of inferiority.

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<sup>68/</sup> Sanmayer, opus cit., p. 47.

<sup>69/</sup> Mary Ritter Beard, The American Labor Movement, New York: McMillan. 1937. pp. 57-58

Under conditions of alienation ("menschliches Dasein"; c.f. Meszaros) <sup>70/</sup> even oppression might become conceptualized within the cognitive models that respond to the dominant social class' interests. An illustration of this point, extensively elaborated by Paulo Freyre. <sup>71/</sup> would be the case of the workers who, in struggling for their social class' interests, are found in overt conflict against other workers. Such was the case of most working class organizations in California in 1910, which were using definitions also used by the dominant class to exploit workers. The Asiatic Exclusion League's platform contained the following statements with regard to immigrants labor:

Two or more unassimilable races cannot exist peaceably in the same territory. This action between such races results in the extermination of that one which, by reasons of its characteristics, physical and mental, is least adapted to the conditions of life originating in the given territory.

The conditions of life are, in the last analysis, determined by the conditions of labor; consequently the question of adaptability as between two unassimilable races must be resolved in favor of that race the characteristics of which most nearly conform to the conditions of labor. The labor of today in North America is a machine, as distinguished from a menial process. That race, therefore, which by its nature is best suited to complement the machine as the essential factor of production is in that respect the superior race, and therefore best adapted to the conditions of American industrial life. <sup>72/</sup>

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<sup>70/</sup> Istvan Meszaros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, New York: Harper and Row. 1970.

<sup>71/</sup> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, New York: The Seabury Press. 1970.

<sup>72/</sup> U.S. Senate Commission 1911. opus cit., V. 23, p. 169.

Given a lack of awareness of the social process through which the private mode of appropriation has become the source of capital and power, the worker is found defining an artificial enemy with his actual enemy's definitions; thus preventing a change that would threaten dominant class' position in the prevailing relations of production.

Criteria based on racial differences became a dominant feature of American culture through the privileged access of the dominant class to mass media and educational institutions. Once at the superstructural level, racial differences (as criteria for social treatment) acquire a certain degree of autonomy as a cultural element cutting across social classes. Differential treatment based upon such a cultural definition is what we understand by racism. As the interests of the dominant class are served by racism, the cultural diffusion of racism becomes a function of their power. As racism pervades as a cultural element, social relations, particularly ethnic relations, are conducted on the basis of dominant meanings culturally given, which correspond to the ideology that serves dominant class' interests; yet, that set of inter relationships is obscured by the relative autonomy of man-made cultural forces from its man-made economic origin. In the case of the immigrants' labor relations we can see that a dominant ideology that imputes the shape of economic conditions to impersonal laws of supply and demand, consistently displaces the dominant social class' -

responsability for existing working conditions. At the same time, the most powerless element of society, i.e., the poor immigrant, is blamed for social problems.

SECTION IV  
THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSION OF THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT'S SOCIAL  
CONTEXT

My personal experience as a Mexican worker without visa reported elsewhere <sup>73/</sup> was more a further step in a continuous endeavor of Verstehen than a search for causes. In this context my participant observation became an avenue to the net of social relationships in which the undocumented immigrated immigrant is involved. The "label" of criminal afixed on him makes his social interaction limited. This in turn makes easier to detect typical social relations and typical actors with whom the undocumented immigrant from Mexico interacts socially.

The social setting where people are involved in the relations of undocumented immigration's interaction is characterized by a basic contradiction between labor and capital. This is in reality a dialectical relation between two parties that have opposite interests. The capital owner being interested in the maximization of profits and the worker being opposed to the

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<sup>73/</sup> Jorge A. Bustamante, "Espaldas Mojadas; Informe de un Observador Participante", Revista de la Universidad de México, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Marzo, 1973)

conditions in which the maximization of profits is accomplished. These conditions being that which allows the creation of surplus value at the expense of the worker's productivity and at the expense of the share of the product which corresponds to the worker, proportionally to the value of the work invested in the creation of the product. In other terms, that opposition of inte-  
rest is based on the contradiction implicit in the confrontation of the worker against the product of his own labor as something alien to him. This is not to say that the conflict of interest has to be conscious or recognized by the parties. Any survey properly conducted could result in the production of "empirical evidence" that the majority of workers in the United States might not find their interest opposed to the employers' interest. This would prove that workers in the United States have been so-  
cialized in terms of the values corresponding to the interest of the dominant groups of society. These are the values that ori-  
ginate and are diffused, maintained and transferred through institutional agencies of socialization. These are the values that have roots in the power structure derived from the position people have in the relation of production and that have acquired  
a relative autonomy as a superstructure of society. Social relations of immigration respond to the complexity of that dia-  
lectical relation between the relations of production and the superstructure. In that context certain people come in contact typically with the Mexican undocumented immigrant. For the



purposes of our discussion these people will be identified as social types. Without implying that these social types are the only ones that interact with the Mexican immigrant we will review -- (1) the law maker (2) the law enforcer and (3) the American worker of Mexican descent or the Chicago worker.

(1) According to superstructural values the law maker should be the one that represents the interest of the people working in a mechanism of checks and balance of power. Nevertheless the most general pattern followed by the law maker in regard to the immigration of Mexican workers without visa is to consider the working situation on the border area as something unavoidable or expected, more or less independent of the employer's will. The attitude of the law maker in this area seems to be either that it is convenient to conform or worthless to struggle against the situation.

Protection of the interest of undocumented immigrants' employers is best illustrated by a law (U.S. Congress, 8 U.S.C., section 1324, 1952) which makes it a felony to be an "illegal alien" but not to hire one. That law provides that "any person who willfully or knowingly conceals, harbors or shields from detection, in any place including any building or by any means or transportation, or who encouraged or induces, or attempts to encourage or induce, either directly, the entry into the

United States of any alien shall be guilty of a felony. Upon conviction he shall be punished by a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or by imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, or both, for each alien in respect to whom the violation occurs. Provided, however, that for the purposes of this section, employment, including the usual and normal practices incident to employment, shall not be deemed to constitute harboring." <sup>74/</sup>

This law illustrates some of the contradictions involved in the relations of the Mexican undocumented immigrant. On the one hand the law legitimizes the hiring of Mexican undocumented workers, in spite of the general recognition that is the possibility of being hired that attracts the Mexican worker to cross without visa. On the other hand, the very same law makes the same behavior a felony for all non-employers. It could not be more clear that what made a difference for the makers of this law was the interest employers have in keeping a source of cheap labor. That is, what made the difference in the production of that law was the differential position of employers and workers in the power structure derived from the relations of production.

The Chicano worker in another "social type" that enters into the social relations of the undocumented Mexican immigrant. Here we have the repetition of an old pattern of the immigration

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<sup>74/</sup> As quoted by Samora in Los Mojados, The Wetback Story, p. 139

to the United States. The old-versus-the-new-immigrant syndrome. The position that Chicano workers have in the relations of production and consequently, their position in the power structure of the United States, put them in competition against Mexican immigrants for the lowest paid occupations in the country. Unable to realize the connection between the presence of Mexican workers in the United States and the interests of capital owners in expanding their capital, many Chicano workers blame the Mexican immigrants for their low wages and working conditions. Obeying the same factors, we have again the same results. Some native workers are more exploited than others, therefore, the more exploited are more likely to respond negatively to the maintenance of the situation. Those interested in maintaining it look for ideas that can substantiate reality. For this purpose they count on their privileged access to the agencies of socialization, i.e., mass media. Ideas produced by those interested in maintaining the existing conditions, are imputed as being independent from the interest of dominant groups in maintaining and/or expanding the prevalent power structure. Thus, in the name of a source imputed to be independent from economic interest (i.e., God, morals or science), the agencies of socialization of legitimate values (i.e., the church, the school, etc.), provide and diffuse the basis of legitimization of ideas that justify conditions of exploitation. Then, the privileged access to mass media of those profiting from maintaining low

working conditions produces the differential "distribution" of mental production resulting in a biased process of socialization. Ideas that substitute reality benefiting dominant groups are learned by those lacking the analytical tools to understand the relation between the factors that shape their own situation. As a result of this process of socialization, workers fail to recognize the association between their living conditions and the privileged access that employers have to resources of power.

Throughout the southwest many Chicano workers have fallen into the trap of defining reality with the ideas supported by the employers. Paulo Freyre would describe the Chicano worker blaming Mexican workers for their living conditions as an example of defining oppression with the models of the oppressor. The result of this old syndrome of capitalist relations is the developing of ideas that start acquiring autonomy on their own by becoming myths or mores or social norms or even legal codes, pitting workers against workers, thus preventing working class solidarity.

Signs indicating the degree of pervasiveness of that old-versus-new-immigrant syndrome appear all over the southwest. Ranging from barrio feuds in East Los Angeles involving gangs clearly defined across national origins (i.e., Mexicans from Mexico sections versus Chicano sections of East Los Angeles)

to the beginning of a folklore-like image of a Mexican immigrant with a meaning of a hated symbol of a strike breaker. Other signs of that syndrome are spelled out by campaigns against Mexican immigration, like in the old days of "nativists" in the 19th century, organized precisely by the descendents of previous immigrants, in this case, from Mexico.

That of course represents one side of the picture which portrays signs of excess of new versions of an old idea, namely that of the "old versus the new immigrant" competition based on ideas of impersonal laws of supply and demand applied to a "free market" of labor force.

There is another side of the picture which portrays signs of failure of old ideas for substituting reality. That other side is in the process of becoming defined along working classes' interpretations as illustrated by the programs sponsored by organizations such as CASA in Los Angeles.

There is still one "social type" that should be taken into consideration in the understanding of the dialectics of Mexican undocumented immigration. That social type is the Immigration officer more commonly known as the border patrol (part of the Immigration and Naturalization Service), or as "la migra" or as "los chotas" or as "la jura" or "los rinches" particularly in Texas).

The Immigration officer is directly responsible for the prevention of undocumented immigrants' crossing the U.S. border and for the apprehension of undocumented immigrants already in the United States. According to a super-structural assumption such a role would place the Immigration officer in direct confrontation with the agricultural entrepreneur that is using Mexican undocumented immigrants. Inasmuch as the Immigration officer is supposed to enforce laws made in the interest of the people, the activities of the Immigration officer would in part supposedly be protecting the interests of the native worker from the competition of foreigners (therefore reinforcing the old versus new immigrant syndrome).

Evidence suggests that such an idea which links the Immigration officer to interests contrary to those of the agricultural entrepreneur does not correspond to reality. <sup>75/</sup> Instead, the conflict between the border patrol and the agricultural employers is somehow transformed into a covert cooperation through what Williams called "patterns-of evasion of the law."<sup>76/</sup> This transformation has involved the following: First, the agricultural employer offers little resistance to the apprehension

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<sup>75/</sup> See Lyle Saunders and Olen F. Leonard, "The Wetback in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas," Inter-American Educational Occasional Papers No.7, Austin: University of Texas, 1951, p. 68

<sup>76/</sup> Robin Williams, American Society; A Sociological Interpretation, New York: Knopf, 1951.

of undocumented immigrants, in exchange for the patrol's overlooking the undocumented immigrants when work needs to be done. Second, undocumented immigrants openly at work may informally legitimize their status as workers and then remain unharrassed. Third, the role of the law enforcer may be used by the employer as an additional mechanism to maximize surplus value by turning in the undocumented immigrant to the border patrol instead of paying wages due for several days of work. As an illustration of this possibility reference will be made to an instance that I witnessed at the office of the Director of one of the three Detention Centers, while I was conducting the interviews for the U.S. -Mexico Border Studies Project.

I was interviewing the Director of one of the US Immigration facilities when he received a phone call from a farmer who wanted to complain about what he termed, an "unfair competition" by his neighbor. He complained that his neighbor had been hiring undocumented immigrants for the whole season and after 10 or 15 days of having them work for him he just called the border patrol in to pick them up without having paid their wages. The complaining farmer proceeded saying that after his neighbor had disposed of a group of undocumented immigrants he just waited until the next Monday, hired another group of undocumented immigrants and repeated the same practice of turning them in to the border patrol without covering the wages already

due. The farmer argued that due to this practice his neighbor was selling at lower prices and was ruining his business. The Director of the detention center said that he was going to or der an investigation on the case. When I asked him if that kind of complaint was common he said that the problem was not the frequency of complaints but the limitations he had in stopping that practice since the hiring of undocumented immigrants was not illegal. The Immigration officer explained to me that in those cases what was illegal was the farmer's failure to pay the wages due, which was a violation of a State Law which was handled by the State Office of Labor and Statis tics.

I went to interview the officers in charge of enforcing that law against the employer who had failed to pay wages and I found that there was one single officer, close to retirement, with great difficulties to walk by his own assessment, with no knowledge of Spanish, in charge of the complaints for six border counties in the state. He in turn was complaining of being overloaded with work and of lack of cooperation by the Mexican Consuls who he said did not follow up the cases when the plain tiff had been deported. He showed me the forms to be filled out by the worker who had to write a statement (it could be in Spanish but with a corresponding translation into English) on the circumstances in which his employer failed to pay his wages According to Texas laws relating to labor (Art. 5157, R.C.S.



[Penalty for Failure to Pay ] ) in case of being found guilty the employer had to pay a fine of \$50 regardless of the amount of wages due. In case the worker wants his wages paid he always has the civil courts to sue the employer. But that is another procedure.

Behind the role of the law enforcer there is an organizational superstructure that defines good and evil for society. In the case of laws related to "illegal aliens" there is an explicit purpose of carrying out the moral imperative of protecting the national labor from the competition of foreign labor, therefore, taking for granted a direct relationship between the entrance of foreign labor and a harm to the national labor which makes protection necessary.

After the creation of the Border Patrol the organizational superstructure, whose purpose was to carry out moral imperatives, resulted in a radical transformation of the previous interactions of Mexican immigrants. Of immediate concern was the reinforcement of the illegal status of immigrant workers under the label of "wetback". Nevertheless, moral imperatives, even those incorporated legally and implemented by specialized personnel, are not the only reflection of interest and rationalization of actions. Others, especially political and economic interest, can be at variance with these new moral imperatives and influence behavior. Where we examine such

conflicting interest we see that they may be selectively used, depending on the context of the action and the position the actor holds in the relations of production--in particular his power. Thus the agricultural employer in certain situations (i.e., harvest time) expresses his economic interest to hire undocumented immigrants with contracts calling for long hours of work and the lowest possible pay. In other situations (say, when he has unwanted workers or wants to maximize profits by turning in undocumented workers to the Border Patrol without having paid due wages) he uses the moral imperatives implicit in the law to denounce undocumented immigrants to the Border Patrol. A similar differential use of "expressed meaning" occurs with other groups. It is necessary to specify the nature of these expressed meanings at play in the social relations of the undocumented Mexican immigrant.

Looking at interests as a source of expressed meanings of social actions, we could focus them at the juncture where they shape behavior. That is, at the point of interaction between the undocumented Mexican immigrant and the social types discussed in this section. A distinction will be made between group interest related to the presence of the undocumented Mexican immigrant and group interests related to each social type's role independent of the presence of the undocumented Mexican immigrant. The latter would be those interests pertaining to the position each social type holds in the relations of

production and/or in the power structure derived from it; that is, (1) the Chicano worker's interest would be in this case to resist against the imposition of surplus labor, (2) the agricultural employer's interests would be to maximize the appropriation of surplus value; (3) the law maker's interest would be to respond to the interest that could affect his position in the legislation; (4) the law enforcer's (Immigration officer, Border Patrol) interest would be to justify the maintenance of the agency by enforcing the law. On the other hand, social type's interest related to the presence of the undocumented Mexican immigrant seems to indicate a different dimension of each social type's interest, as respectively it would be for (1) to stop the influx of Mexican immigrants in order to avoid their competition for jobs and to increase bargaining power vis a vis the agricultural employer. For (2) it would be to maximize the appropriation of surplus value by the use of the Mexican immigrant labor. For (3) it would be to gain political support from the agricultural employers by protecting their interest. For (4) it would be to enforce immigration laws selectively.

This distinction of interest seems to promote understanding of some contradictions in the social relations of the undocumented Mexican immigrant, such as (1) condemning the immigrant by labeling him as criminal, and at the same time, maintaining a demand for his labor force which is reflected in a

steadily increasing influx of Mexican undocumented immigrants (see Table 2); (2) penalizing a person for being an "illegal alien" but not an employer for hiring one (U.S. Congress, 8 U.S.C., section 1324, 1952); (3) maintaining an agency for the enforcement of immigration laws and at the same time exerting budget limitations and/or political pressures to prevent successful enforcement of the law. <sup>77/</sup>

These are some of the contradictions that become apparent by a dialectical analysis of the social relations of the Mexican undocumented immigrant, but they are nothing less than reflections of contradictions in the American society at large. This is particularly obvious to us when we see the conflict of interest between the employer and the Chicano worker (each trying to maximize his share of labor production) and when we see the presence of the undocumented immigrant kept undercover as a veil hiding deeper conflict. Indeed, when the undocumented immigrant from Mexico is introduced in the relations of production we see a different conflict of interest taking place--namely, that between the Chicano worker and the Mexican immigrant. The former blaming the latter for lowering working conditions and standards of living.

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<sup>77/</sup> Eleanor Hadley, "A Critical Analysis of the Wetback Problem," Law and Contemporary Problems, Vol. 21 (Spring 1956), p. 348

The nature of the two conflicts should be differentiated. Whereas the conflict of interest between the Chicano worker and the employer is determined by the position each one plays in the relations of production. The conflict between the Chicano worker and the Mexican immigrant is determined primarily by a set of beliefs that are not grounded in reality. Namely, that working conditions are determined by impersonal laws of supply and demand independent of the employers; that the Mexican immigrant causes low wages and low standards of living for the farm worker. It is important to note here that the conflict "created" by the Mexican immigrant would disappear if the Chicano worker had the bargaining position to negotiate the price of his labor. This way wages would be determined by negotiation and could be applicable to all trades. If agricultural wages could be established by a negotiation valid for each crop for all farm workers, the conflict between Chicano workers and Mexican immigrants would disappear.

Another aspect of our discussion of social type's interest is the power that support each specified interest and respective action. Since the group themselves reflect status differentials, it is the difference in power (and possible collisions of power) that give form to the interaction. Furthermore, the power legitimization of these actions sustain the existing form against any possible transformation.

Power differences among the various social types result from their ability to manipulate or influence interaction in the direction of their interest. In the present interpretation the employer is clearly the most powerful category, since he is able to influence all other social types in the social relations of the undocumented immigrant. On the other extreme is the Mexican undocumented immigrant. He clearly appears at a disadvantage. As an outsider he has no legitimacy. He is not eligible for public assistance since he is not permitted to stay in the country unless he is in jail. He is also not eligible for other benefits because of the stigma of having once broken the immigration laws. This might, technically, prevent him from acquiring a legal residence or citizenship in the United States. The Mexican worker without visa only has the original motivation which made him cross the border, survival, and a new one resulting from being labeled a criminal, which becomes another element of pure survival, not being caught. As an outsider with such elemental interest he dares not complain for fear of being apprehended. The only possible protest comes when his survival is in jeopardy in which case the consequence might be his deportation. The label of criminal becomes a central element of exploitation. The Mexican worker without visa is attractive to the employer because he can maximize profits by hiring an illegal immigrant at very low wages. The employer is able to minimize wages because the powerlessness of the Mexican

worker is directly associated to his migratory status. Thus, there is a paradoxical relation between being labeled a criminal and to be attractive to employers (as opposed to native workers). In this context it seems as if the Mexican worker would be in fact exchanging an especially attractive "product", his labor as a criminal, for an unstable taste of survival due to the character of criminality ascribed to him.

### Conclusions

There are three common believes associated to the question of Mexican immigration. One is, that further increase of restrictions to immigration will alleviate current conditions of unemployment in the United States. Other is, that Mexican immigrants depress wages. A third one is, that a new "bracero program" would prevent the number of illegal immigrants from either growing or taking place. The content of this essay could be summarized in reference to these common believes by the following points.

- I. Immigration from Mexico is for the most part, a matter of structural relations between labor and capital. These structural relations have manifested themselves historically as a difference of power. Powerlessness of the immigrant has been the factor that have made him "cheap labor" thus, attractive for the capital investor. Power differentials between immigrant labor and "native" capital are at the roots of the association between immigration and capital expansion. At the same time, the same power differentials make possible to blame the immigrant for unemployment, recession or depressions

without having to implement structural changes.

No differently than previous periods of sharp increase or unemployment there is a current campaign of fear against the immigrants associated to the myth that relates causally immigration to unemployment. Mass media speaks about current immigration as a "silent invasion" (The New York Times, December 29, 1974) and high officials of the federal government speak of a "national crisis" due to the number of undocumented immigrants coming to the United States (Leonard F. Chapman Jr. Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Service, as quoted by The New York Times, December 29, 1974).

II. Wages are directly related to the bargaining power of the worker and inversely related to his lack of organization and acces to the institutionalized resources of power.

Within the context of this asertion we could say that if wages were not susceptible of being lowered below certain amount that guaranteed the satisfaction of basic necessities and an equal acces to public resources, in theory, immigration would not affect wages. If there were a mechanism of control of excess profits and prices in which the organazed consumer would have an input, in theory , wage increses would not necesarely result in higher prices. Furthermore, if workers' organizations from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border would have an acces to jobs' allocations and wages' determination, in theory, workers



themselves could exert control and plan ahead on the availability of labor force. We could go on and on listing alternatives, only to realize that no working conditions could be changed for the benefit of workers without a direct representation in the political decision making process, at both sides of the border.

III. A new "bracero program" under the present power structure would result in a rise of expectations amongst the unemployed in Mexico in regard to the myth of abundance in the United States. This in turn will result in an increase of actual immigration, legal and illegal, thus, in an oversupply of labor, thus, in the perpetuation of the conditions of exploitation of the Mexican worker in the United States.

The myth of abundance that attracts Mexican immigrants to the United States seems to be inversely correlated by scarcity at home. Regardless of the number of "commodity-migrants" included in a new bracero program, history would repeat itself. Those who were not hired as bona fide braceros would probably enter to the United States any way as "mojados". The figures of table 2 suggest that the number of braceros has been directly related to the number of undocumented immigrants (with the exception of periods of massive deportations i.e., 'operation wetback'). The effects of this situation in ceteris paribus conditions would be an overflow of workers competing for a scare number of jobs which pits workers against workers, rendering them unorganized and more powerless. On the other hand, in Mexico, workers respond to a reinforcement of the myth of abundance that would