

Link Title: Learning from Documents Subject: U.S. History (Social Studies)

Learning from Documents

Summary

Students will examine two public laws and other primary resources related to the Bracero worker program and apply their knowledge to evaluate whether the program was carried out as intended.

Objectives:

Students will be better able to

- describe aspects of the *Bracero* labor program, which operated from 1942 to 1964.
- use documents as primary resources.

Grade levels: 6-8/9-12

National Center for History Standards¹:

U.S. History Standards

Standard 3C-The student understands the effects of World War II at home.

Standard 4A-The student understands the “Second Reconstruction” and its advancement of civil rights.

Historical Thinking Standards

Standard 2-Understands the historical perspective

Materials:

- Primary Resources:
 - Public Law 45 available at <http://www.ccrh.org/comm/moses/primary/bracero.html>
- Public Law 78 available at http://library.uwb.edu/guides/USimmigration/1951_public_law_78.html
- Documents, essays and photographs located at www.braceroarchive.org
- Computer with Internet access
- Printer
- Pen, pencils and paper

Activity:

1. Ask students to read the first two paragraphs *Public Law 45* and section 501 *Public Law 78* (Explain to students that they are reading primary documents; in this case, legislation which relates to the creation and implementation of the *Bracero* program in the United States.) Have them fill out the Document analysis Worksheet (attached).

¹ Standards available online: <http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/era9-5-12.html>

For extra challenge, consider asking students to describe how these laws fit into or contrasted against other programs put in place by the presidents involved (Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Lyndon B. Johnson).

For additional research into the presidents, consider visiting the online exhibition *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden* (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/home.html>), from the National Museum of American History.

2. Have students search the *Bracero* Archive (www.braceroarchive.org) to research the living and working conditions of *bracero* program's workers. Have students record the resources they examine and take notes of from each resource.
3. Using the evidence from their research, have students discuss this topic: Did farmers follow through with the laws and protections set forth by these laws? What evidence do you have to support your conclusion?

Assessment:

Category	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Use a variety of sources to locate relevant information	Uses a limited variety of sources to locate relevant information	Uses an adequate variety of sources to locate relevant information	Uses a good variety of sources to locate relevant information	Uses a wide variety of sources to locate relevant information
Describe the lifestyle of the <i>bracero</i> program's workers	Simply describes the lifestyle of the <i>bracero</i> program's workers	Adequately describes the lifestyle of the <i>bracero</i> program's workers	Competently describes the lifestyle of the <i>bracero</i> program's workers	Thoroughly describes the lifestyle of the <i>bracero</i> program's workers
Use primary resource evidence logically to support conclusions	Rarely uses evidence logically to support conclusions	Sometimes uses evidence logically to support conclusions	Usually uses evidence logically to support conclusions	Always or almost always uses evidence logically to support conclusions
Express ideas and opinions confidently, without domination	Rarely expresses ideas and opinions confidently, without domination	Sometimes expresses ideas and opinions confidently, without domination	Usually expresses ideas and opinions confidently, without domination	Always or almost always expresses ideas and opinions confidently, without domination

Document Analysis Worksheet

Present students with the following questions:

- On which dates were these laws signed?
- Which president signed *Public Law 45*?
- Which president signed *Public Law 78*?
- Who was president when the *bracero* program ended in 1964?
- After you have identified each of these presidents, name 2 or 3 other major events which took place during their respective presidencies.
- How much money was appropriated towards the *bracero* program, according to *Public Law 45*?
- For what purposes was this fund intended? Read carefully and list and/or describe how this money was to be spent, according to the laws.

Answer Key to Document Analysis Worksheet

Present to students the following questions (answers in **bold**/parentheses)

- On which dates were these laws signed? (**Public Law 45 signed April 29 1943; Public Law 78 signed July 12, 1951**)
- Which president signed *Public Law 45*? (**Franklin D. Roosevelt**)
- Which president signed *Public Law 78*? (**Harry S. Truman**)
- Who was president when the *bracero* program ended in 1964? (**Lyndon B. Johnson**)
- After you have identified each of these presidents, name 2 or 3 other major events which took place during their respective presidencies.

Some possible answers, but many other answers could be correct.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

- Great Depression
- The New Deal
- World War II: Pearl Harbor

Harry S. Truman

- World War II: Atomic Bombs in Japan
- GI Bill
- Marshall Plan

Lyndon B. Johnson

- War on Poverty
- Communist aggression in Vietnam
- Civil Rights Act of 1964

- How much money was appropriated towards the *bracero* program, according to *Public Law 45*? (**\$26.1 million**)
- For what purposes was this fund intended? Read carefully and list and/or describe how this money was to be spent, according to the laws. (**Purposes of the fund included “... the recruiting, placement and training of...workers; (2) transportation, supervision, subsistence, protection, health and medical and burial services, and shelter for such workers and their families and...personal property; (3) lease, repair, alteration, and operation of labor supply centers and other necessary facilities and services... (4) advancing to workers of sums due from employers within the United States...under contractual obligation... (5) employment of personnel and other administrative expenses; and (6) payment to or reimbursement of other**

public or private agencies or individuals for furnishing services or facilities for such purposes”)

Background Information

The economic and social upheaval stemming from both the Great Depression and World War II forced the United States to seek out a source of inexpensive labor to meet its manpower needs in both agriculture and railway maintenance.

Due to this need, a treaty was signed in 1942 between the United States and Mexico to alleviate the shortage of labor. With many American men sent off to fight in Europe and elsewhere, the recruitment and processing of an available pool of laborers from Mexico created what is called the *bracero* program. *Bracero* is a Spanish term which can be defined loosely as “one who works with his arms”, or as a close equivalent, as a field hand.

Under this program, Mexican workers, many of whom were rural peasants, were allowed to enter the United States on a temporary basis. Between 1942 and 1964, the year the program ended, it was estimated that approximately 4.6 million Mexican nationals came to work in the U.S. as *braceros*.²

Many laborers faced an array of injustices and abuses, including substandard housing, discrimination, and unfulfilled contracts or being cheated out of wages. Nevertheless, the impact of the *bracero* program on the history and patterns of migration and settlement in the United States remains an important area to explore and assess, particularly in the contexts of civil rights, social justice, and Latino history in the United States.

Key facts and moments in *bracero* history include:

- August 4, 1942 – the Mexican Farm Labor Program Agreement is signed by the governments of Mexico and the United States, the first establishing the legalization and control of Mexican migrant workers along America’s southern border area
- April 29, 1943 – the Mexican Labor Agreement is sanctioned by Congress through *Public Law 45*
- The agreement guaranteed a minimum wage of 30 cents per hour and “humane treatment” for workers
- With many *braceros* remaining in the United States after their contracts ended, the Immigration and Naturalization Service began Operation Wetback in 1954. Many US-born children of Mexican *braceros* were wrongly repatriated, along with their parents.

² Pastor, M. and Alva, S. (2004) “Guest workers and the new transnationalism: Possibilities in an age of repression.” *Social Justice* 31, 1-2. 95. See also: Martin, P. (2000). “Guest worker programs for the 21st century”. Washington, DC: Center for Immigration Studies. Available online at <http://www.cis.org/articles/2000/back400.html>.

- The *Bracero* program ended in 1964

Several short-term labor agreements existed until 1951, when Public Law 45 passed and was reluctantly signed by President Harry S. Truman.³ Many labor groups viewed the program as a temporary fix to the labor shortages during WWII. After the war, when the soldiers returned, the labor groups then considered the presence of Mexican workers as a detriment to employing American laborers. Despite labor opposition, many large farm owners were still able to lobby Congress to change the agreement between Mexico and the United States and create *Public Law 78*. This law had to be renewed by vote on a biannual basis, until the program ended in 1964.

³ According to an essay from *Rural Migration News*, available online, http://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=10_0_4_0