

Link Title: Tracing the Route of a *Bracero*
Subject: U.S. History, Geography and Economics (Social Studies)

Tracing the Route of *Bracero*

Summary

Students will examine an oral history related to the *Bracero* worker program and present their research on a map.

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.
- appropriately select and use a map of the United States.

Grade levels: 6-8

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 1. Chronological thinking

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

Standard 3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Materials:

- Computer with Internet access
- Printer with paper
- Colored pencil or highlighter
- Pen or pencil
- Primary resource:
 - Interview with Juan Loza (<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/175>)

Activity:

1. Have students access the oral history of Juan Loza online at <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/175> (Spanish speakers can listen to the oral history in Spanish. Students who are not fluent in Spanish can read the English transcription.)
2. Have students print out the English transcript and read it. Ask students to highlight all sections related to Mr. Loza’s contracting work, identifying:
 - every state and town where he worked

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

- the crops he harvested
 - the dates he was in that location
3. Have students visit National Geographic's Xpedition Atlas (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/>) to select a map on which to plot their research.
For a greater technical challenge, consider having students use customizable maps on GoogleMaps (<http://maps.google.com/>) to electronically plot their research.
 4. Have students plot the locations where Mr. Loza worked. For each location, also note the crops he harvested in that location and the dates he mentions in connection with that location.
 5. Have students connect the locations on their map, indicating the direction of travel with arrows.
 6. Engage students in a discussion:
 - For how long was Juan Loza a *bracero* worker? What was the longest time he spent in one location?
 - What types of crops did he work on?
 - How many different work locations did he work? How do you think the travel between multiple work locations impacted his social or family life?
 - Why didn't he pick one location and stay there?
 - Articulate some of the thoughts he might have had about the locations where he worked. How might he have compared different locations? How might he have responded emotionally to the migratory nature of his work?
 - **For students with background knowledge on the *bracero* program,** Judge whether Juan was better off working as a *bracero* in America or staying in his homeland.

Assessment

Category	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Identify required information within primary resource	Identifies required information within primary resource with limited success	Identifies required information within primary resource with some success	Identifies required information within primary resource with considerable success	Identifies required information within primary resource with excellent success
Map locations of Juan Loza's work	Maps locations of Juan Loza's work with limited success	Maps locations of Juan Loza's work with some success	Maps locations of Juan Loza's work with good success	Maps locations of Juan Loza's work with excellent success
Analyze given scenario	Analysis of given scenario provides limited insight	Analysis of given scenario provides some insight	Analysis of given scenario provides considerable insight	Analysis of given scenario provides thorough insight

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.

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>.

Many US-born children of Mexican *braceros* were wrongly repatriated, along with their parents.

- 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