

Displacement

We were treated like slaves. They saw us as beasts, nothing more.

—DON SANTOS

We're gonna let 'em in cause you need 'em.

—PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP

When Luna left her village of Santa María Natividad in the Mixteca Baja region of Oaxaca, she was determined to cross into the United States with her husband, Ricardo. The couple was recently married and trying to make up for the lack of support for agriculture and schools in their town. Luna felt confident leaving the village. They had paid a coyote US\$1,500 each to guide them safely across the border. That was the equivalent of about \$15,000 MXN and represented more than a month's earnings for the young couple. They borrowed the sum from a local moneylender, hoping they could quickly repay the loan with their earnings in the United States.

Ricardo had previously crossed by himself in 1990. At that time, he just “swam across the Río Bravo,” which stretches over 1,200 miles from Ciudad Juárez–El Paso to the Gulf of Mexico. Ricardo recalls that part of the journey being easy, saying, “No tuvo que cruzar la linea, me fui mojado” (I did not have to cross the border, I went “wet”).

By 2004, when Luna and Ricardo made their journey together, crossing the Mexico-U.S. border had become more dangerous, and a coyote was essential. Luna recalls being in Tijuana “looking at the other side.”

I felt my nerves in my stomach. We were crossing with ten other people from different pueblos. The first two times we tried to cross, immigration arrested a lot of people. We had to run many times. We were turned back three times and only made it across on the fourth. Only four of us made it across. And that time, we only made it because it rained and the officers could not see us.

When Luna got to the U.S. side of the border, she was finally able to stop running. Only then did she notice that her knees were bloody from scraping against

brush on the way. She described her journey: “We suffered a lot to cross that first time.” Once in the United States, the couple was able to find work easily picking fruits and flowers in Washington State. They were not asked for documentation stating that they were authorized to work in the United States. Moreover, in the four years that Luna and Ricardo worked in different industries in the Northwest, they never encountered immigration enforcement officials. Luna said, “We were always looking out for the *migra* [Immigration Customs and Enforcement, or ICE], but I never saw them.” The real problem, according to Luna, was the harsh working conditions and meager pay, which forced Luna and Ricardo to work several jobs at once and required them to leave certain positions to escape abusive treatment.

It was those conditions that finally convinced Luna to return to Mexico. She recalls living with a number of other people and having to take turns to cook and shower. Since returning to the Mixteca in 2008, Luna has thought about returning to the United States several times. However, she says, “I remember the journey, and I decide to stay here,” alluding to the high incidence of violence against migrants, particularly women. Ricardo returned home in 2012 and says that he no longer wishes to go back across the border. When we spoke in 2013, the couple had begun a small business selling ceremonial animals that was providing enough for a sustainable living. “We are fortunate that we do not have to return,” Luna said in one of our last conversations.

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AS A TOOL OF RACIAL CAPITALIST RELATIONS

Luna’s story takes place at a particular historical moment when both border and interior enforcement efforts were escalating. However, that escalation does not reflect a move toward stopping people like Luna and Ricardo. Rather, it reflects a new mechanism for wealth accumulation in the form of surveillance, tracking, and incarceration. By the time Luna made her journey, there were three modes of extraction from migrants who sought to enter the United States. The first, exemplified by Luna’s story, displaces labor into industries that have long demanded Mexican labor in particular. Policies facilitating this displacement are rooted in historical, overtly racist depictions of Mexicans as almost bestial and therefore particularly suited to agricultural and other grueling labor. A second, overlapping mode of extraction involves racialized depictions of Mexican migrants as bringing crime and stealing work,¹ which serves to fill public coffers and fuels private profit through various immigration enforcement policies and practices. These policies and practices include criminal penalties for unauthorized entry; enforcement infrastructures such as checkpoints, surveillance devices, air and land vehicles, physical barriers, and detention centers; and immigration enforcement personnel, who make up the largest federal law enforcement workforce in the country. For migrants racialized as both perfect workers and carceral subjects, a third

TABLE 3 Similarities in Displacement to Industry across Communities

	Tabasco	Oaxaca	Tlaxcala	Puebla
Migration rate* 1980–89	Very low	Medium	Very low	Low
Migration rate 1990–99	Very low	Medium	Medium	Medium
Migration rate 2000–2009	Very low	High	Medium	Medium
Displacement industry #1	Agriculture/ food processing (n = 15)	Agriculture/ food processing (n = 11)	Service (n = 9)	Service (n = 9)
Displacement industry #2	Service (n = 7)	Building (n = 4)	Agriculture (n = 8)	Factories (n = 1)

* “Migration rate” is a measurement derived from Mexico’s National Survey of Demographic Change (ENADID) in its quinquennial report, “Tendencias y características de la migración mexicana a los Estados Unidos.”

extractive mechanism requires them to pay coyotes to arrive at their destinations. Increasingly, this means that organized criminal enterprises have now joined the more formal U.S. private and public actors as sources of extraction.

This approach to analyzing immigration enforcement mechanisms integrates what other scholars have discussed as separate, historically idiosyncratic threads into one theory that encompasses the evolution of modes of extraction over time. For example, the Mexico-U.S. migration scholars Gilbert González and Timothy Dunn have demonstrated that immigration policies through the early to mid-twentieth century served the wealth accumulation goals of U.S.-based employers and other entities.² Moving forward in time, Tanya Golash-Boza, Harsha Walia, and Gargi Bhattacharyya have explained how twenty-first-century surges in immigration enforcement by the United States, Europe, and Australia are part of the racial capitalist relations between the state from which migrants originate and the state to which they tend to migrate.³ As the stories in this chapter reveal, the mechanisms used to import labor and deter migration are part of a singular migration-as-extraction cycle.

To fully explicate the displacement phase of migration as extraction, this chapter begins with an analysis of policies that first actively and then passively recruited Mexican labor to perform agricultural and food processing work the United States. Through historical records and migrant narratives, it shows that these early recruitment efforts had long-lasting impacts across demographically and geographically diverse regions (table 3). Whether a person was from a state like Tabasco with its very low migration rate or from a state like Oaxaca with a high migration rate as of 2000, the labor markets that migrants were pulled into were (in order of frequency of response): the agricultural and food processing industries; the service industry (including hospitality, home services, and janitorial services); and construction and factory work. Agriculture/food processing and the service industry were the most prevalent locations of migrant labor displacement, reflecting patterns of recruitment dating to the early twentieth century.

These historical and contemporary migration patterns are analyzed against immigration enforcement policies that allow unauthorized labor to both enter and persist while simultaneously demonizing this entry and presence. Three enforcement policies—enforcement of employer sanctions, border enforcement, and interior immigration enforcement—are examined through the experiences of migrants to illustrate the selective enforcement of these policies in order to continue the free flow of desired labor while simultaneously profiting from the “homeland security state.”

DISPLACEMENT OF MIGRANTS AS EASILY EXPLOITED LABOR

Scholars from various disciplines have examined U.S. immigration enforcement efforts, particularly those targeted at Mexican migrants, as designed to help displace or transfer Mexican labor into specific, segregated industries in the United States.⁴ Nowhere is this labor transfer more prevalent than in the agricultural and food processing industries. The stories of several migrants—including Don Pablo, who migrated as a *bracero* in the 1960s, Elfego, who migrated as an unauthorized agricultural worker in the 1980s, and Luna and Ricardo, who made the same journey as Elfego in the 2000s—illustrate the clear preference for these workers by U.S. and Mexican agribusinesses. Similarly, a large number of Mexicans, particularly Mexican women, have been recruited to work in food processing such as meat-packing and fish cleaning. The stories of women from Chiltepec and Soyataco, Tabasco, highlight one such migration pattern: from the Gulf coast of Mexico to the crab-cleaning plants of the Southeast. Whether authorized or not, these migrants discussed a litany of labor abuses and exploitative practices by employers: practices facilitated by the decided underenforcement of immigration laws prohibiting employers from hiring unauthorized workers while simultaneously targeting workers for immigration violations.

Displacement into Commercial Agriculture

Commercial agriculture, or agribusiness, in the United States has always relied on conscripted labor from other parts of the world. Modern commercial agriculture has its roots in the plantation system that relied on enslaved African labor to work lands expropriated from the Indigenous populations. Until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, the primary laborers in U.S. agribusiness were subject to chattel slavery. After the abolition of slavery, forced labor continued in sharecropping and other arrangements, but many descendants of enslaved Africans sought other work. Agribusiness had to seek out new types of laborers, leading to the importation of migrants from China, Japan, the Philippines, parts of Europe, and Mexico. By the late 1800s, however, racist ideologies in the United States led to

the exclusion of Asian and Eastern European immigrants, and by the 1910s, these exclusions began to result in labor shortages on expanding commercial farms. The same racist ideology cast Mexican workers as ideal for the backbreaking agricultural work while also depicting them as “docile” workers who would not rebel against the dreadful conditions.⁵

There is little documentation of migrants’ experiences in their own words from this era, but several songs included in Manuel Gamio’s 1930 volume, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* recounted the recruitment of migrants in the 1920s. One such song was called “Los Betalberos” (The Beet Field Workers).⁶

LOS BETABELEROS

Año de mil novecientos veinte y tres
en el actual
Fueron los betabeleros

A ese “michiga” a lorar.
Por que todos los señores
Empezaban a regañar

Y don Santiago les responde:
Yo me quiero regresar
Por que no nos han cumplido

Lo que fueron a contar.
Aquí vienen y les cuentan
Que se vayan para allí,
Porque allá les tiene todo
Que no van a batallar,

Pero son puras mentiras
Los que vienen y les dicen.

THE BEET FIELD WORKERS

In the year 1923
Of the present era
The beet field workers went

To that “Michigan,” to their grief,
Because all the bosses
Began to scold,

And Don Santiago says to them:
“I want to return
Because they haven’t done for us

What they said they would;
Here they come and they tell you
That you ought to go up there
Because there you will have everything
Without having to fight for it.

But these are nothing but lies,
And those who come and say those
things are liars.⁷

The lyrics specifically refer to the “bosses” in the United States and to efforts to recruit workers for U.S. agribusiness: “Here they come and tell you/ That you ought to go up there.” But the song also describes the terrible working conditions that these recruited workers found in the United States. This is emblematic of the sugar beet industry, which is among the most deeply involved in the importation and exploitation of Mexican labor.

Sugar beet growers and refiners fought successfully to officially import Mexican labor in 1917, when World War I caused a severe labor shortage. The growers' advocacy was aimed at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the agency charged with immigration management at the time. The agency responded to the growers' efforts by authorizing a waiver of the requisite head tax and other requirements to allow Mexican citizens to enter the United States to perform agricultural work. Thus began the first official collaboration between the U.S. government whose officials had to grant the entry waiver and U.S. agribusiness that sent labor recruiters to the border to fill their slots.⁸ "Los Betalberos" refers to this agricultural waiver era. The waivers remained in effect until 1921, when the demand for labor created by World War I decreased. But access to Mexican workers continued after 1921 as growers from California and Texas pushed to continue to exempt Mexico from the national origins quotas passed by Congress that year and renewed in 1924.⁹ Indeed, Mexican workers would not be subject to any numerical limitations on entry until many years later.

After this time, U.S. immigration policies continued to favor the entry of Mexican workers even as exclusionary measures against other ethnic groups were escalating. By the time Don Pablo, whose journey and work in the United States was highlighted in chapter 1, migrated as a *bracero*, the idea that Mexican labor was ideal for U.S. agriculture had become firmly entrenched.¹⁰ The Bracero Program, under which Don Pablo migrated, set up an even more formal set of procedures for the importation of Mexican labor. Rather than a discretionary waiver for anyone who made it to the U.S. border, the Bracero Accords were a series of formal agreements with the Mexican government that allowed U.S. companies to recruit inside Mexico.¹¹ The first agreement was signed on August 4, 1942, and was formally called "Agreement of August 4, 1942 for the Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers to the United States." Over the course of the next eight years, numerous other agreements were signed. In 1951, the contract labor system created by the Bracero Accords formally became part of U.S. law as Public Law 78 and remained in place until 1965. During those years, nearly five million Mexican men entered the United States to work as *braceros* in U.S. fields.¹²

In order to be eligible to enter the United States as a *bracero*, one had to be male and unmarried, have no children, and have agricultural work experience but own no land of one's own. In addition, applicants had to have a reference letter from their local authorities. This left out a good number of Mexican *campesinos* who needed work and excluded women completely. Moreover, not all U.S. states were able to participate in the program. Notably, Texas—where many agribusinesses were located and where Mexican labor had long been a feature of local agriculture—was barred from participating due to Mexico's concerns about that state's history of slavery and segregation. The combination of high dislocation rates in Mexico pushing migrants ineligible to enter as *braceros* and the demands of

Texan agribusinesses resulted in millions of unauthorized migrants entering the United States alongside legally authorized *braceros*.¹³

The U.S. government response to unauthorized migration at that time was to apprehend unauthorized migrants, “deport” them to Mexico, and immediately return them to the United States as regularized workers under the Bracero Accords.¹⁴ Thus, the pattern of public-private collaboration to provide a ready workforce to U.S. commercial farms continued. For the workers, the program provided much-needed income. However, this was more than offset by the hazardous working conditions. They were so toxic that they drew the attention of civil rights and workers’ rights movements.¹⁵ Even DOL officials were concerned. Lee G. Williams, the officer in charge of the program in the 1960s, referred to the program as a system of “legalized slavery.”¹⁶ Under pressure from social movements and inside the DOL, the program ended in 1965.¹⁷ Don Pablo does not remember the civil rights struggles, but he referred to the substandard conditions in his characteristic understated way. In explaining why he did not stay, despite his boss’s efforts to retain him, he said, “The only thing over there is work and nothing else. One does not feel like one is in one’s place.” Perhaps the greatest evidence that working conditions were too arduous was the fact that, despite continuing economic difficulty and despite his U.S. employer’s request that he return, Don Pablo did not return to the United States once the Bracero Program ended.

Perhaps Don Pablo was prescient as the end of the Bracero Program meant that most Mexican agricultural laborers in the United States became unauthorized. In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act was amended to place annual quotas on the number of people who could legally migrate from Mexico to the United States for the first time and partly as a result of fears of the population increase in Mexico.¹⁸ Those quotas were further reduced in 1976, resulting in only 20,000 Mexicans being able to migrate as permanent residents in a year. The quotas combined with the termination of the Bracero Program converted the previously authorized stream of Mexican migrants into an unauthorized stream. Though the law technically provided agricultural employers with an alternative authorized means of employing foreign workers through the H-2 visa program, employers did not like the program because of its bureaucratic hurdles and requirements to pay for travel and lodging of H-2 workers. Unauthorized entries from Mexico ballooned from an estimated 87,000 in 1965 to almost 1.5 million in 1978.¹⁹ This has led scholars to refer to the period between 1965 and 1985 as the “era of undocumented migration.”²⁰ This did not mean that Mexican workers were excluded, however. U.S. laws during this time had attributes of what Gerald López calls “prohibitions and permissions,”²¹ including laws that formally disallowed migration as well as laws that permitted unauthorized migrant life.

In 1986, U.S. law shifted to being both more formally permissive albeit time limited and formally prohibitive. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) included several provisions that gave unauthorized migrants a path

to legalizing their status.²² The first was not limited to farmworkers and allowed migrants who had resided continuously in the United States since 1981 to legalize their status. The other three provisions were specifically geared to agricultural workers. First, Congress enacted the Special Agricultural Workers program, which allowed those who had worked in agriculture for one year as of May 1986 to legalize their status to a permanent immigration status.²³ Second, Congress allowed for Replenishment Agricultural Workers to make up for any shortfalls in labor supply during the 1990s. And finally, IRCA split the H-2 visa into two categories: the H-2A for agricultural workers and the H-2B for all other temporary work.²⁴ The immediate legalization provisions (including both the general and farmworker provisions) were not limited to Mexican migrants, but the vast majority of people who benefited were of Mexican origin because the vast majority of people working in the United States without authorization at the time were from Mexico. Three million people applied for one of the many benefits, and 2.7 million were ultimately approved. Of those approved, 75 percent, or just over 2 million, were migrants from Mexico.²⁵ On the prohibitive side, Congress finally passed a law preventing the hiring of workers who lacked authorization. However, as detailed below, these prohibitions have rarely been enforced against employers in their nearly fifty-year history.

For those who did not benefit from the time-limited legalization program, the only option for lawful entry into the United States was an employer's willingness to sponsor them for an H-2A visa. The new H-2A visa had no cap on the number of temporary workers authorized to enter for work in agriculture.²⁶ Despite this unlimited pool of visas, fewer than ten thousand H-2A visas were issued each year before 1995,²⁷ and by 2015, they still accounted for only 5 percent of the agricultural workforce.²⁸ In contrast, over half of the U.S. agricultural labor force is undocumented, a majority from Mexico. Don Santos is one of many who migrated during this period. He was able to secure an H-2A visa for one year, in 1994, but explained, "I started going back without documents because the visa was expensive and the rent that the employer charged was very expensive. Also, we did not earn much." Don Santos also referred to the captured nature of H-2A visas. He had to work for the employer who sponsored him regardless of working conditions, whereas he was able to switch employers more easily when he was unauthorized. While Don Santos explains why a worker might decide it is better to work without authorization, it is also beneficial to employers to have a largely unauthorized workforce that can be disciplined more easily.²⁹ Moreover, having a visa did not protect workers like Don Santos from brutal working conditions. As he told me:

We were treated like slaves. We began working before the sun rose, and you could not take a break. They managed us hard. You had to be fast. I was fast, but even I needed a break! If we tried to take a moment to rest from the sun, the exhaustion, we were yelled at, even hit. They saw us as beasts, nothing more.

These conditions were widespread enough that they led African American Representative Charles Rangel to comment in 2013 that the H-2A program was “the closest [thing] I’ve ever seen to slavery.”³⁰

Don Santos’s and his neighbors’ displacement into U.S. agriculture indicates the continuing reliance on racialized patterns of exploitation in place since the 1910 waiver programs. Three of every four agricultural workers in the United States are from Mexico, and the majority of those identify as Indigenous, showing a continued pattern of displacing Indigenous peasant farmers into U.S. agribusiness.³¹ In the twenty-first century, public officials no longer have to explicitly racialize workers as “docile” or “bestial” to call for their entry for exploitation. As President Trump told a group of supporters in 2018, “For the farmers . . . it’s going to get good. . . . We’re going to have strong borders, but we have to have your workers come in. . . . We’re going to let them in ‘cause you need them. . . . We have to have them.”³²

“We’re going to let them in ‘cause you need them,” echoes the policies since the early 1900s that bend immigration laws to the needs of large agricultural employers. Moreover, Trump’s reference to having “strong borders” while simultaneously allowing “your workers [to] come in” hearkens back to depictions of Mexican workers as both a threat and a necessity in the 1920s and points to the continued use of immigration laws to control rather than prevent entry. Indeed, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) declared that H-2A workers were essential and would therefore be exempt from the otherwise blanket rule barring temporary migration.³³ This “waiver” for agricultural work is starkly similar to the waiver programs over one hundred years earlier. Unlike the 1920s, the Mexico-U.S. border is now fortified, and Trump administration directives were to criminally prosecute 100 percent of those who sought to enter without inspection. This did interrupt the flow of undocumented workers, forcing employers to utilize the H-2A process. At the same time, DHS issued a rule change that effectively reduced the wages of these H-2A workers, already among the lowest paid in the United States.³⁴ The wage reductions for authorized workers brought their wages closer to those of unauthorized workers, essentially assimilating these two labor pools. And the pandemic choked off other labor markets, leaving workers with little choice but to toil under even harsher conditions. Thus, even as the border became less permeable for most migrants, the Trump administration ensured both the entry of necessary workers and an even more hospitable environment for exploitation in the agricultural industry, extending the century-long policy of importing colonized labor.

Displacement into Food Processing

Food processing is another industry dominated by foreign workers. One example is the crab-cleaning plants along the North Carolina and Virginia coasts. Initially concentrated in the Chesapeake Bay, blue crab farming and cleaning moved south

to the North Carolina coast as waters became polluted and industrialization and gentrification pushed crab farms out of Maryland.³⁵ The work in these plants involves taking freshly caught and cooked blue crabs and painstakingly separating the meat from the shell. Pickers take up one after another crab and work a knife under and then around the rim of each carapace, lifting off the top and separating viscera and fat from meat with deft swipes of the knife. A number of women from Chiltepec and Soyataco, Tabasco, have been working in these crab-cleaning plants since 1989, when U.S.-based labor recruiters first began training and hiring Mexican women.

The first people recruited to work in these plants in the early twentieth century were African American women.³⁶ Recruitment was through an informal labor network and benefited from the proximity of the plants to coastal African American neighborhoods.³⁷ Payment was by the piece, necessitating speed to make a decent wage for a day's work. But speed led to injuries from the knives used to cut the flesh from bone. By the 1980s, the low pay and propensity for injury in these plants led many African American women to find other sources of income. The outflow of workers did not lead to improvements in labor conditions. Rather, much like their agricultural colleagues, the processing industry employers began to seek labor from outside the United States. Beginning in 1988, these plants began to formally recruit women from Mexico under the H-2B visa program.³⁸

One of the earliest recruitment firms was Mariscos Bocas, an American firm that contracted with the crab-cleaning companies to find Mexican workers. Mariscos Bocas, known as "Bocas" in Mexico, recruited women primarily from Chiltepec beginning in 1989.³⁹ The company had a relationship with Chiltepec because one of its agents, known only as "Bobby," was married to a local woman. That first year, about twenty-five women migrated from Chiltepec to Elizabeth City, North Carolina.⁴⁰ This number increased each year. One of the women recruited and trained was Serena, a housewife and mother of three who was looking for ways to help pay for her children's education. She made her first trip on an H-2B visa in 1997, by which time there were nearly four hundred women moving from Chiltepec to Elizabeth City for the crab-cleaning season.⁴¹

The H-2B visa that facilitated the movement of Serena and other workers was split from the original H-2 visa that covered all so-called low wage work. The split occurred in 1986 as part of the Immigration Reform and Control Act. The H-2B's creation coincided with the period during which crab-cleaning and other food service industries were experiencing a loss of domestic workers. Unlike the H-2A, which concentrates on the recruitment of foreign agricultural workers, the H-2B allows employers to recruit workers in a broad range of nonagricultural settings. Also, in contrast to the H-2A, the H-2B has a cap of 66,000 visas per year.⁴² Ironically, the total number of people entering on H-2Bs has actually exceeded the total number of H-2A entrants each year, despite the former being capped. Since 1993, the number of H-2Bs issued has risen annually from 9,691 to a peak of 129,000 in

2007.⁴³ The latter number reflects the George W. Bush administration's efforts to meet American business demand for H-2B workers by exempting returning workers from the 66,000 cap. Thus, since 2003, returning workers like Serena have been sought after as they do not count toward the total number of foreign workers that a company can hire. More recently, the Biden administration has increased the cap to almost double its statutory size, releasing an additional 64,716 H-2B visas for U.S. employers.⁴⁴ Thus, the U.S. government has continued to facilitate the transfer of workers into the U.S. economy through formal channels.

Migrating with authorization does not necessarily protect Mexican workers from abusive working conditions. They are systematically underpaid, work in dangerous conditions, and are subjected to sexual and racial harassment. So dismal are the wages and working conditions of H-2B workers that several studies have described the work as "the new American slavery," similar to descriptions of H-2A workers' conditions.⁴⁵ This gross underpayment ostensibly should be prohibited by the legal rules surrounding the visa application process. U.S. employers seeking to hire H-2B workers must first obtain a certificate from the DOL indicating that they have attempted to recruit persons already in the United States for the position and that they are offering to pay foreign-born workers wages that will not adversely affect the rate of pay for the position.⁴⁶ However, research has shown that the DOL regularly certifies employers at wage rates far lower than the average pay for the position and region.⁴⁷ And U.S. employers have continuously lobbied to allow these violations to continue unabated.⁴⁸ Between 2004 and 2014, wages in the crab and other fishing industries declined. Adding to the particular issues faced by jaiberas like Serena, the three states that use the largest number of H-2B workers in the crab industry—North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland—also have among the lowest average wages in the country.⁴⁹

Serena reported making up to \$100 a day on a piece rate system that has existed since the early twentieth century. Thus, her average hourly earnings were dependent on her speed and accuracy in cutting the crab flesh from its shell. For Serena, the money was sufficient help support her children to complete their education. However, for many others, the wages are much more severely suppressed.⁵⁰ Serena's relative satisfaction with her wages did not extend to the working conditions at the plant in Elizabeth City, which she described as onerous: "We worked from four in the morning to four or five at night all the time we were depulping the crabs. It hurts your hands. The manager treated us very badly. He would insult us a lot. He used racism."

Though Serena did not want to expand on what she meant by "he used racism," she later recounted that the manager would use foul language in reference to Mexicans and women. Such abuses have been widely documented by transnational advocacy groups.⁵¹ In addition to racist comments, women have reported widespread sexual harassment and abuse, as in many other industries.⁵² These reported

cases of abuse are likely wildly undercounted because women are afraid to speak out for fear of being blacklisted and therefore unable to return for work the following year. Serena did not report the abuses she experienced and witnessed, but others have been blacklisted after complaining about harassment or even violence.⁵³ Moreover, under the terms of her visa, Serena could not leave her employer in Elizabeth City. She was stuck working long hours and suffering racial and sexual harassment. Thus, the legal rules facilitate maximal extractive opportunities for employers of workers like Serena.

Exploitation Facilitated by Immigration Laws

U.S. immigration law ostensibly prohibits employers from hiring those who are not authorized by the U.S. government.⁵⁴ There is no concomitant prohibition against employees working without permission, though a person could become ineligible for certain immigration benefits if they work without authorization. The history of the employer sanction law, along with its current implementation, demonstrates that it is designed as “image craft,”⁵⁵ giving the appearance of deterring migration while actually seeking to control migrants and facilitate exploitation.

The U.S. Congress first considered a bill sanctioning employers who hired unauthorized workers in the 1950s. The bill was introduced in response to pressure from the Mexican government rather than any domestic efforts in the United States and was actively opposed by legislators in Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana.⁵⁶ At that time, the United States and Mexico were renegotiating the Bracero Accords. The Mexican government was concerned that unauthorized migration out of Mexico was causing labor shortages for Mexican agribusiness. In order to try and continue the Bracero program, U.S. legislators agreed to try and help Mexican efforts to stem unauthorized migration. Lawmakers from Texas were the most vocal and effective opponents of the bill, understanding that it would have an outsized impact on agribusinesses in that state which were excluded from the Bracero Program and therefore employing tens of thousands of unauthorized Mexican workers.⁵⁷ Congressmen from Texas introduced an amendment to the Mexican government’s supported bill called the “Texas Proviso.” The Texas Proviso turned a law focused on employers into one focused on “harboring” and explicitly exempted employers from its reach. The amendment passed the Senate and the House and was signed into law in March 1952.⁵⁸ By taking employment out of the statute’s reach, the new law served as *carte blanche* to employers seeking to hire unauthorized workers and “could not have been better suited to growers’ needs.”⁵⁹

Lawmakers from large agribusiness states continued to successfully facilitate employer access to unauthorized workers over the next thirty years. In the 1960s and 1970s, these efforts were led by Senator James Eastland of Mississippi. A former cotton grower with strong segregationist roots and ties to agribusiness interests, Eastland chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee and its Subcommittee on

Immigration and Naturalization from 1965 to 1975. During that decade-long tenure, Eastland held exactly zero hearings of the immigration subcommittee, effectively blocking a vote on any sanctions bills in the Senate.⁶⁰ Eastland's departure from the Senate gave space for congressional hearings on the issue, but opposition to sanctioning employers continued to be strong.⁶¹ Organizations representing agribusiness like the Farm Labor Alliance (FLA) formed specifically to oppose employer sanctions.⁶² FLA members like Matthew Durando of California testified that employer sanctions would be harmful to their bottom lines as "probably in excess of 50 percent of [our] labor currently are illegal aliens."⁶³

Eventually, employer sanctions did become part of the IRCA. However, over the course of the negotiations on the law, the FLA and its allies in Congress managed to water down employer sanctions and create a supplementary worker program to facilitate labor for southwestern growers. Criminal penalties were stripped from the sanctions structure, and employers were only required to voluntarily verify their employees' eligibility to work. In addition, a special guest worker program introduced by FLA allies Representatives Leon Panetta (D-CA) and Sid Morrison (D-WA) was passed giving the growers' lobby almost all of what it asked for.⁶⁴

Given the ambivalence in Congress over employer sanctions, it is no surprise that there has been very little in the way of enforcement of these penalties in the years since its passage. Only one of the more than forty migrants interviewed reported having an employer ask for the required paperwork when they arrived to the jobsites, and none were required to leave due to lack of paperwork.⁶⁵ Instead, most migrants were hired easily. For example, Luna found work quickly after her harrowing journey in 2004. "We knew where to go even before we left the pueblo," Luna reported, referring to the migrant networks that stretched from the Mixteca through Sinaloa in northern Mexico and north along the Pacific coast to the Canadian border. "We used to work picking strawberries, cucumber, blueberries. This was in Seattle, Washington. Then we picked tulips for two to three hours a day to make some extra money." When asked about any encounters with immigration enforcement agents, Luna explained that they were a shadow rather than actual presence, "We were always looking out for the *migra*, but I never saw them."

The specter of immigration enforcement agents contributed to the harsh working conditions and low pay in the United States. "Life is very difficult there," Luna said. "We lived in a room with fifteen other people. It was so crowded. We had to stand in line to cook." Even when she found other work, she continued to encounter issues:

I found work in a nursery that paid better. At first the boss was nice, but then we got another boss who was just looking for reasons to fire people. After I got fired from that job, I got another one, this time packing potatoes. But the supervisor, she would be looking closely to see if we even faltered a little.

Luna said that Ricardo and she withstood the uncertainty and low wages for six years, first to pay off their debt and then to save a little to start their own business. "Once we had enough to build the house and buy some goats, we came back."

Luna and Ricardo knew from the stories of other people who had successfully migrated to the United States from their region that they would find work. One of these people was Elfego, who had first migrated in 1985 and had spent the next thirty years moving back and forth from his home in San Martín Duraznos, Oaxaca, to various places along the west coast of the United States. Elfego's first trip took him to a ranch in Oceanside, California, where he picked tomatoes and strawberries, two crops most commonly worked by Mexican migrants. The work was "very tiring and badly paid," according to Elfego. But as this was his first trip to offset the lack of work in his home community, Elfego stayed on the ranch for three years. In subsequent trips, he was able to find work as a gardener, which he found "less backbreaking, but still not as well paid as I'd hoped." He asked this employer to sponsor him for a work visa, but the employer refused. Nonetheless, Elfego returned to this employer twice more, rationalizing that it was better than picking fruit in California. But then, in the early 2000s, Elfego learned of work in Washington State in carpentry. The hours and working conditions seemed better than the gardening job. Elfego made the longer journey to the Northwest and easily found work to sustain him and his family for the next several years. Throughout this time working in three different states and three different industries, Elfego never encountered interior immigration officials, but their presence weighed on him, as it did Luna. "One is always thinking that the *migra* can catch you," he explained. "But I had to keep going, to just keep working and counting the days before I could go home."

Even those who did not have extensive networks already in the United States were able to find work by journeying to locations where they knew others from their home villages had landed. Elias left his home in Soyataco, Tabasco, in 1999 without knowing anyone who was working in the United States. However, he knew that women from Soyataco and Chiltepec were being recruited to work in coastal towns in North Carolina and figured that he would find others from Tabasco in that area. His first journey brought him to Morehead City, about 150 miles south of where Serena and her coworkers were cleaning crabs. He was referred to work in a factory farm his first week in the small town. After working there for about three years, he moved on to cut lumber and then worked in a family-owned store. Elias recounted that he was "treated well" by the store owner, his last employer in the United States. This was in contrast to working on the farm and cutting lumber, which Elias described as "work meant for animals." He reported being able to move to a different employer easily. "I was never asked for papers," he said. Like Elfego and the other migrants interviewed, Elias was never approached by immigration officials during his nearly ten years in North Carolina.

The combined experiences of workers like Luna, Elias, and Elfego are reflected in the low number of employers facing sanctions. By 1990, only 8 percent of INS's enforcement efforts were dedicated to workplace raids.⁶⁶ Moreover, the number of fines issued against employers who hired unauthorized workers actually declined between 1991 to 2001, from a peak of a thousand employers fined in 1991 to a low of zero employers penalized in 2001.⁶⁷ This is the same period that saw a huge increase in unauthorized migration from Mexico, including first trips for many migrants like Elias.⁶⁸ And the share of unauthorized workers in agriculture exploded during this period, rising from 14 percent in 1989–91 to 55 percent in 1999–2001.⁶⁹ Thus, by the time migrants like Elias and Luna came to work in U.S. fields, almost all of their coworkers were unauthorized. The declining enforcement against employers at precisely the time when unauthorized migration was increasing demonstrates the law's continued facilitation of labor displacement despite its stated goal to the contrary. As one INS official said in 1999, "We don't want to have a negative impact on the production capabilities of these companies."⁷⁰

In a sense, the migrants profiled in this book were lucky to never experience deportation as more than a shadow threat, operating as a backdrop to their working lives. For thousands of other migrant workers, deportation was a more material reality. From 2006 to 2008, the Bush administration carried out massive raids targeting migrant workers for deportation and criminal prosecution.⁷¹ As a result, thousands were deported and hundreds were subject to criminal penalties for identity theft and other offenses. But employers continued to escape sanctions for employing these workers.⁷² The administration of Barack Obama signaled a potential shift in policy in April 2009, instructing ICE agents to "prioritize the prosecution of the actual employers who knowingly hire unauthorized workers because such employers are not sufficiently punished or deterred by the arrest of their illegal workforce."⁷³ However, as in past eras, the practice was the opposite of prosecuting actual employers. Only a few hundred employers were fined through 2014, representing only 0.2 percent of employers nationwide.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the Obama administration engaged in massive deportation of workers and other immigrants.

Even the Trump administration continued to facilitate the presence of desired migrant workers while ramping up raids and deportations. On the one hand, the Trump administration greatly expanded the scope of interior enforcement, making all unauthorized immigrants living in the United States priorities for removal.⁷⁵ Trump's director of ICE, Thomas Homan, stated in 2018 that his agency would quintuple workplace enforcement actions, but this time the U.S. government was more explicit that it would be targeting workers and not their employers.⁷⁶ Moreover, Trump publicly reassured employers that they would continue to have access to migrant labor and continued his predecessors' pattern of largely ignoring widespread employer violations of the law. As the narratives in this chapter

demonstrate, the lack of enforcement of this set of laws helped facilitate the displacement of unauthorized workers like Luna, Elias, and Elfego into industries where their vulnerable status was preferred for the ease with which these workers could be exploited. Combined with long-standing policies displacing Mexican migrants into particular kinds of work, the underenforcement of workplace sanctions facilitates extraction of migrants as labor.

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AS EXTRACTION: FROM EXPLICIT TO IMPLICIT PERMISSIVENESS

Extracting wealth from migrants extends beyond employers who extract from labor to public agencies and private companies who accumulate wealth from various forms of official immigration enforcement practices and extralegal endeavors that seek to profit from manufactured illegality. The remainder of this chapter focuses on extraction from Mexican migrants through three policies and practices: border enforcement, including the criminalization of unlawful entry; the resulting boom in coyotaje; and interior enforcement, including detention and deportation. Parallel to racialized efforts to facilitate the entry and ongoing presence of Mexican labor were efforts that raced Mexican (and other) migrants as threats to U.S. economic, personal, and national security to justify building massive public budgets and private contracts that accumulate wealth for public and private actors. This section traces the development of the latter form of racial capitalist accumulation and the resultant rise in the coyotaje industry.

Extraction Embedded in Border Control Policies and Criminalization of Unlawful Entry

In 1909, almost a century before Luna's journey across the Californias, there was no Border Patrol and no Department of Homeland Security. At this time, managing entry into the United States was explicitly tied to the demand for exploitable labor. As summarized by Frank Berkshire, a supervising inspector with the then Bureau of Immigration (BOI) under the DOL:

We can exclude practically all of the Mexican aliens of the laboring class who apply for admission at this port as persons likely to become a public charge, for the reason that they are without funds, relatives or friends in the United States, and have no fixed destination; at the same time, we know that any able-bodied man who may be admitted can immediately secure transportation to a point where employment will be furnished him.⁷⁷

Berkshire's sentiments were reflected in border control policies for nearly eighty years. The creation of the Border Patrol in 1924 provides one illuminating example. Separate from the BOI, which oversaw the lawful entry of foreign nationals at

ports of entry, the Border Patrol was charged with apprehending those seeking to circumvent U.S. immigration laws by entering between ports of entry. According to government sources, the Border Patrol was created “to control illegal entry *from Mexico*.”⁷⁸ The language here is important as it indicates the intent to target not Mexican migrants but Asian and European migrants who were taking advantage of the porous Mexico-U.S. border to circumvent U.S. immigration restrictions.⁷⁹ The new Border Patrol grew extremely slowly in its first decade. By 1925, the agency had hired 472 agents and two years later, 781.⁸⁰ These efforts did little to change the patterns of “border permeability” for Mexican migrants. As the historian Kelly Lytle Hernández documents, inspectors at the Mexico-U.S. border saw their role much like Inspector Berkshire did two decades before: not to “molest” Mexican migrants “except in the most extreme cases” because the laws “apply [chiefly] to European aliens.”⁸¹ Thus, the function of the Border Patrol was to manage entry into the United States, which largely meant facilitating the transfer of Mexican workers into industries that preferred their labor.

Parallel to the development and implementation of permissive border enforcement designed to extract from migrants as labor was the development of a carceral regime that extracted from migrants as arrestees and detainees. One of the key modes of carceral-based extraction was the criminalization of entry into the United States without authorization. The addition of these criminal penalties, beginning in 1929, was specifically designed to cast Mexican migrants as “illegal,” despite their recruitment to the United States in the period immediately before the law’s passage. Proposed by South Carolina’s avowed segregationist senator, Coleman Livingston Blease, the law made surreptitious entry a federal misdemeanor and surreptitious reentry after a previous deportation a federal felony. Enforcement of the new crimes was directed specifically at Mexicans, and in the ensuing ten years, as many as 99 percent of those charged and convicted were Mexican migrants.⁸² As Hernández has argued, this shift “had a massive social impact, rescripting the story of race in American by binding *Mexicanos* to the caste of illegals.”⁸³ Equating Mexican migrants with a “caste of illegals” at the same time that they were cast as perfect workers served to both furnish employers with their desired labor and provide a mechanism for controlling that workforce.

The border’s dual role as a door through which to usher in migrant workers and a site of criminal punishment has continued both rhetorically and materially to the present day. As narratives from migrants who entered without authorization demonstrate, border agents continue to facilitate the entry of a subset of Mexican migrants in the same way that Berkshire and his colleagues did in the 1910s. None of the migrants interviewed faced criminal penalties for entering without authorization. However, other sources have documented the continued targeting of Mexican migrants for criminal prosecution.⁸⁴

For migrants like Elfego, the threat of border apprehension barely registered in the mid-1980s. As Elfego explained:

Back then, it was easier. I did not have any money so I just crossed on my own. I left from Tijuana and started walking north. I was arrested once by immigration and returned, but I remembered the way and the second time I was able to make it across in about five or six days.

Elfego got information on how to “walk north” from cousins in Tijuana who had made the trip in prior years. Like Elfego, Don Manto also left the Mixteca Baja for work in the United States in 1985. “It only took an hour to cross the border,” he said. In 1986, he moved his journey to the San Ysidro area of Baja California and California, slightly east of his first crossing. “It was easy,” he said of the San Ysidro crossing, which he made to avoid a new U.S. Border Patrol check-point erected exactly where he had made his first journey.⁸⁵

Some migrants were able to continue using the route directly from the city of Tijuana on the Mexican side to San Diego on the U.S. side. For example, Don Santos described his first migrant trip in 1987: “A friend of mine invited me, and I crossed the border with him. We did not use a coyote. My friend knew the way. We arrived in Tijuana. From there it took us a few hours to walk. We were both there for six months.” Like Elfego and Don Manto, Don Santos migrated back and forth across the Mexico-U.S. border. His second journey was in 1988. “The second time,” he said, “I crossed alone. I learned the route, and it took me one day walking, nothing more.”

These first journeys of Elfego, Don Manto, and Don Santos occurred in the years following the first ever quotas on Mexican immigrants and a resulting surge in unauthorized entries. In 1965, the year the quotas were first enacted, experts estimate that about 87,000 entries from Mexico were unauthorized.⁸⁶ After quotas for lawful migration were reduced to only 20,000 per year, these same experts calculated that over one million Mexican migrants entered without authorization.⁸⁷ This surge continued after the neoliberal economic changes gutted the Mexican economy in the early 1980s. Elfego, Don Manto, and Don Santos were among the nearly three million Mexican migrants entering the United States without authorization each year from 1985 to 1989.⁸⁸ Like all three migrants from the Mixteca, about 86 percent of these millions of unauthorized migrants returned to their home communities within a year of arrival in the United States.⁸⁹ This circular pattern of migration was largely facilitated by a continued lack of any real border enforcement.

The porous border was about to become a more hardened line largely through the recasting of Mexican migrants as invaders who were causing unemployment. The language of “crisis” used by high-level immigration officials and President Gerald Ford worked to open up a new avenue of capital accumulation through border

enforcement spending.⁹⁰ The rhetorical claim that unauthorized workers were responsible for unemployment was the rationale for the increases in Border Patrol funding provided by IRCA in 1986. Subsequent to IRCA's passage, depictions of Mexican migrants evolved again to associate them with drug trafficking, opening even more avenues for enforcement industry profit. This resulted in Operations Hold the Line, Gatekeeper, and Safeguard in the early 1990s and the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996, which targeted so-called criminal aliens. Migrants were again recast as national security threats after the September 11, 2001, attacks, resulting in even more resources and a reorganization of the agencies charged with immigration enforcement. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) within the Department of Justice became the new Department of Homeland Security, which absorbed much of the former INS's role and split that agency's enforcement functions into two agencies: Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE).

The evolution of migrant racialization resulted in an escalation of both public border enforcement expenditures and private profits from the industries of migration control. Public budgets for border enforcement ballooned from \$665 million in 1986 to \$17.7 billion in 2021.⁹¹ Those budget increases include contracts with private companies like Boeing, Elbit, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon, which totaled more than \$3 billion by 2018.⁹² These same companies help fund U.S. congressional campaigns for both parties.⁹³ As figures 9 and 10 illustrate, the resulting cycle has facilitated massive capital accumulation by both public and private actors undergirded by racialized depictions of migrants as a threat of one kind or another.

The journeys of a number of migrants demonstrate that despite the ever-increasing resources poured into the border enforcement measures, including criminal prosecution, many people continue to successfully enter without authorization. For example, Elias' trip in 1999 involved getting to a point in the southern Sonoran Desert by vehicle and walking across to Arizona. By this time, Operation Safeguard had expanded to all of Arizona, with Border Patrol agents stationed at regular intervals along the section of the border that Elias crossed.⁹⁴ However, Elias described the walk as "easy." He indicated that his group "made it across on the first try" without encountering any agents. Also, in 1999, Rodolfo made his first trip to the United States from Tetlanohcan, Tlaxcala, crossing from Tijuana by foot. In describing the journey, Rodolfo said, "It was extremely difficult. It took us twenty days to a month to cross." But even Rodolfo's group did not come across border agents, despite the beginnings of a border wall in Tijuana or the fortified presence of border agents under Operation Gatekeeper.

In addition to migrants who made their first trips, migrants like Elfego and Don Santos continued to make virtually "unmolested" subsequent trips to the

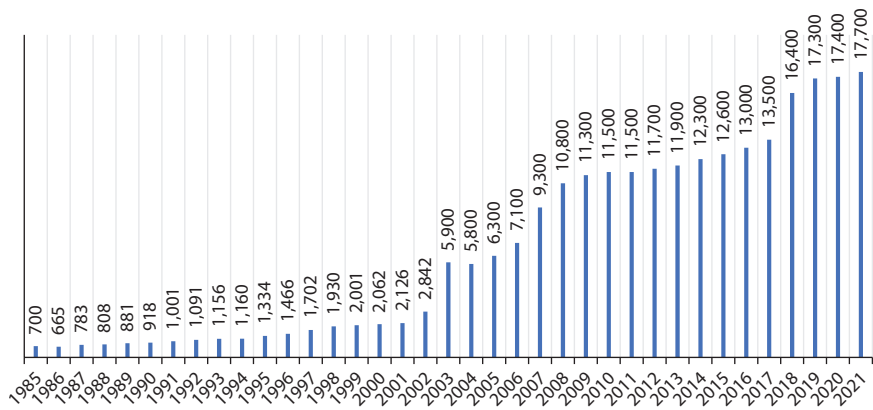


FIGURE 9. U.S. Border Enforcement Public Spending, 1985–2021.

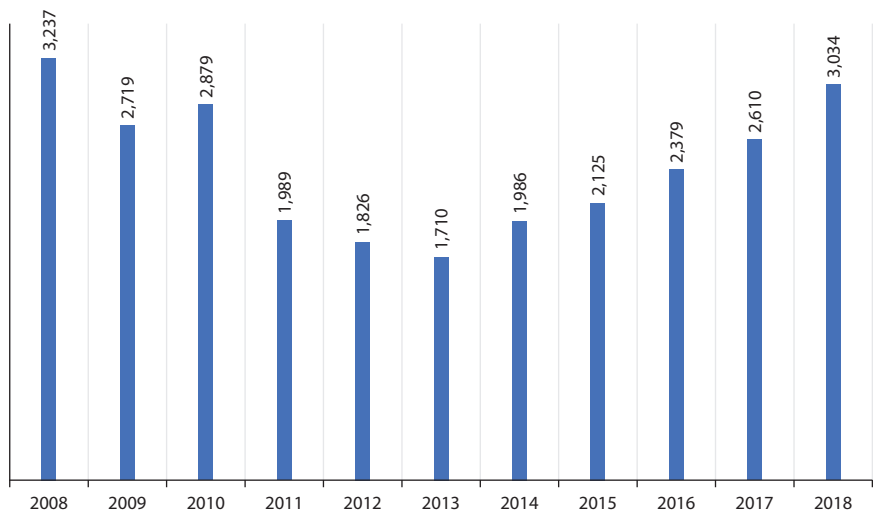


FIGURE 10. U.S. Border Enforcement Private Contracts, 2008–2018.

United States via Tijuana during the 1990s and 2000s. Don Santos did feel the policy shifts that brought about Operation Gatekeeper. “It was in 1994 when it started to get more difficult,” he explained. That year, Don Santos convinced his employer to sponsor him for an H-2A visa. However, in 1995, Don Santos returned to the United States without authorization, this time paying coyotes to help him navigate the new border enforcement measures. His journey in 1995 was more difficult than his trips in the 1980s. He was arrested once and sent back across the border but was able to successfully enter the United States on his second try. Similarly, Elfego was arrested several times in his subsequent journeys to the United States. While

he could not remember the exact years, Elfego made three trips to the United States between 1995 and 2009 and was able to successfully enter each time.

Elfego's experience reflects the continued permeability of the border even in the post-9/11 era. As Luna described, she and her husband, Ricardo, were able to eventually enter the United States in 2004 despite being arrested three times. As Luna explained, "The first two times we tried to cross, immigration arrested a lot of people. We had to run many times. We were turned back three times and only made it across on the fourth." A similar pattern emerged in Francisco Javier's retelling of his journey from San Pedro Cholula, Puebla, to Philadelphia in 2001. "We were arrested four to five times," Francisco Javier recalled. "And each time, we were returned immediately to the other side of the border. We finally crossed the fifth or sixth time."

Things had changed somewhat by November 2006, when Francisco Javier made his second journey. This time, according to Francisco Javier, "the *migra* took our fingerprints and told us that we would be punished if we tried again." The "punishment" in this case would be criminal prosecution for unlawful entry. In 2005, one year before Francisco Javier crossed, the U.S. government had launched Operation Streamline, requiring officials to prosecute 100 percent of people seeking to enter the United States for the crime of unlawful entry or reentry. The directive was limited to sectors in Texas, and Francisco Javier had crossed in Arizona. However, Operation Streamline was expanded to include Arizona and New Mexico by 2008. Thus, when Francisco Javier crossed via Arizona for a third time, in 2009, his prior arrest should have subjected him to prosecution for unlawful reentry. However, according to Francisco Javier, "I had the same experience as before. We were arrested, immigration took photos and took our fingerprints. I already had a record from when I tried to enter before, but they did not punish me." The Border Patrol officers who arrested Francisco Javier, much like their forebears in the early to mid-1900s, chose to allow Francisco Javier to try migrating again. And, like so many of his compatriots, he succeeded.

Despite evading incarceration himself, Francisco Javier's experiences at the southern border took place during a time of exponential growth in both the rhetorical criminalization of migrants and the actual imposition of criminal penalties. As a result of Operation Streamline, total convictions for unlawful entry across those sectors of the border went from 15,000 in 2004 to over 50,000 in 2008.⁹⁵ Prosecutions for unlawful entry continued to grow under the Obama administration, reaching a pre-Trump administration peak of over 65,000 in 2013.⁹⁶ Under President Trump, Operation Streamline was expanded to 100 percent of border sectors by April 2018.⁹⁷ As a result, prosecutions for unlawful entry and reentry would reach their modern zenith, with over 106,000 people prosecuted in 2019.⁹⁸ And despite the fact that unauthorized migration from Mexico was declining during this period, about 55 percent of prosecutions for unlawful entry and 75 percent of prosecutions for unlawful reentry were of Mexican nationals.⁹⁹ The cost of these new incarcerations generated nearly \$1 billion in additional funding for U.S. prisons, including private

prisons contracting with the U.S. government.¹⁰⁰ Thus, even as the United States continued to facilitate the entry of some Mexican migrants, it added a new source of capitalist accumulation through the expansion of the prison and related industries.¹⁰¹

Extraction through Coyotaje

The various permutations of extraction at the border resulted in a parallel development of extraction from migrants in the form of fees paid to coyotes to help circumvent ever evolving border enforcement mechanisms. The 1990s saw the U.S. government using new strategies that involved a much higher number of Border Patrol agents standing at short distances along common crossings like El Paso, Texas. These innovations had military-style names like Operation Hold the Line and Operation Gatekeeper. Studies on the effects of these operations showed that while the new lines of agents forced migrants to change their strategies for entering the United States, they did not deter most of them from making the journey.¹⁰² This was certainly true for Elfego and Don Santos, both of whom had migrated several times before the Clinton-era operations and continued to migrate to the United States without authorization until the 2000s. It was also true for Elias, Rodolfo, Efraím, and Luna, all of whom made their first journeys in the years after Operation Hold the Line and Operation Gatekeeper. Although these migrants were not deterred, they had to make two key adjustments to avoid apprehension. First, they began to take more dangerous routes through remote and hostile terrain. Second, the dangers of the more hostile territory and the risk of getting lost led these migrants to pay coyotes to help them navigate these new routes.

For women, the new journeys came with a grave additional risk—that of sexual violence.¹⁰³ Researchers have calculated that up to 90 percent of women crossing the Mexico-U.S. border in the mid-2000s experienced some form of sexual assault.¹⁰⁴ Only one of the women interviewed spoke explicitly of witnessing gendered violence on her journey. The remainder of the women interviewed did not refer to sexual violence explicitly, but it was clearly in the background of a number of women's decisions on whether to make an unauthorized journey. Luna's first trip across the border included the harrowing chase that she described in 2004. She was clear that she went with other people "to feel protected." When we spoke in 2013, Luna had been back in Santa María Natividad for five years and was almost ten years removed from her arduous journey north. When asked if she would consider returning, she said that she did think about it, "but then, I remember the journey." "Remembering the journey" was as close as Luna came to recounting her possible experience of or witness to sexual violence. Others expressed fear at making even one journey. Efraím's wife, Irena, said, "Migration is not for women. Some do it, but, no, it's too dangerous." The fact that some women were deterred by the dangers of the new, longer journeys north demonstrates that the new border enforcement innovations "play[ed] out in gendered actions and interactions,"¹⁰⁵ increasing the risk of violence on journeys north.

Moreover, these innovations and the resultant risks deterred women who were perhaps among those less desirable as workers while continuing to facilitate the entry of needed labor.

For both men and women who did make the trip, coyotes were essential. Coyotes operate in a complex “bastard industry” of clandestine operations at the border.¹⁰⁶ Some coyotes are connected to criminal organizations like drug cartels or *bajadores* (thieves or bandits who rob migrants in the Sonoran Desert region).¹⁰⁷ Others are connected to their home communities or employers in the United States.¹⁰⁸ A few actually work alongside CBP agents, who are paid to allow migrants to pass through CBP checkpoints or walk unbothered through the remote areas between checkpoint stations.¹⁰⁹ But, whatever the mechanism by which coyotes operate, they wrest enormous amounts of money from migrants and their families.

The price that migrants paid for an unauthorized journey varied depending on what kind of coyote they hired and the methods the coyote used (figure 11). For example, Elias paid US\$1,800 in 1999 to travel from Soyataco, Tabasco, to a point in the southern Sonoran Desert by vehicle and then walk through the desert to cross. He described the journey nonchalantly. “Although we had to walk a lot,” Elias said, “it was easy. We made it across on the first try.” Just a few months before, Don Rodolfo made his first trip to the United States from Tetlanohcan, Tlaxcala, with “friends” who were going. In sharp contrast to Elias, Don Rodolfo paid only US\$300 to travel from Tetlanohcan to Tijuana by vehicle and cross into the United States on foot. The journeys that Don Rodolfo and Elias made within Mexico were roughly similar. Tetlanohcan is a little less than 1,800 miles from Tijuana, and Soyataco is a little more than 1,800 miles from the Sonora Desert. It is likely that the reason Don Rodolfo paid so little was that he was paying a more informal coyote who only worked with migrants he knew. Don Rodolfo and his friends quickly saw the drawback of using someone who did not have a vast network of connections. In describing the journey, Don Rodolfo said, “It was extremely difficult. It took us twenty days to a month to cross. We did not have any idea where we were going, but we ended up walking to Phoenix.” People who wanted to find ways to avoid the desert and surreptitiously cross at checkpoints paid the highest fees. Among those surveyed, the highest amount paid was US\$3,500 to hide in a car traveling through an official checkpoint.¹¹⁰

The amounts that migrants paid coyotes to try to ensure safe passage were exorbitant given that many of them earned less than US\$400 per month. In order to pay these fees, migrants relied on loans from family members already in the United States, family members in Mexico, or informal moneylenders who sometimes charged double digit interest. At times, the cost of the journey was more than the price of the economic gap the migrant was seeking to fill. For example, Elias took out loans from a local *prestamista* (loan shark) totaling US\$6,800 for his

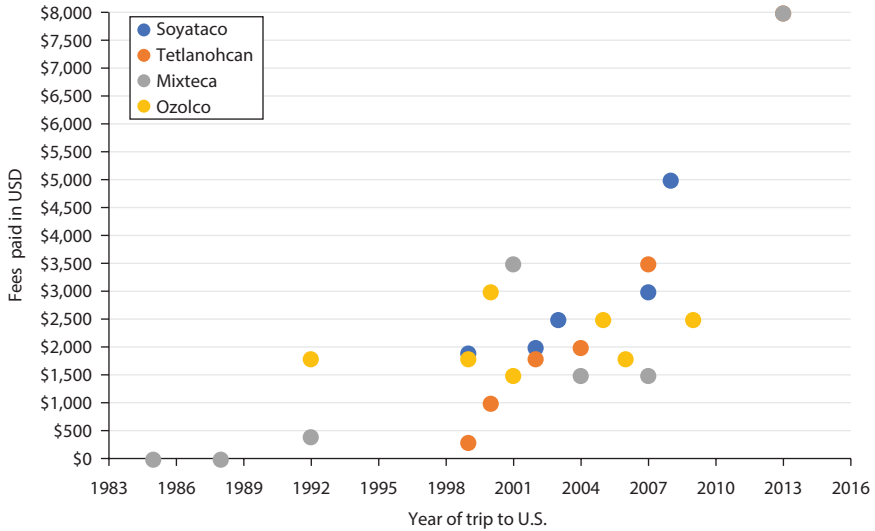


FIGURE 11. Fees Paid to Coyotes.

three trips to the United States. He made these trips primarily to pay school fees and the cost of transporting his children to school, items that would have cost him about US\$4,200 over the course of his children's educational careers. However, the only other method for paying school fees was to seek a loan for that expense directly. Personal loans are not available in Mexico, so Elias would have had to borrow money from the same prestamista he used to pay for his trips to the United States. Interest rates on these loans are high, 20 percent in some cases. Thus, one needs almost twice the original loan amount to repay the lender. In the absence of sufficient earning potential in Mexico, Elias had no way to pay the \$4,200 he needed for his children's education. The only way to make the finances work was to earn in U.S. dollars.

As expenditures on border enforcement strategies rose in the 2000s, so too did the cost to migrants of their journeys north. For example, Elias paid US\$2,500 for his second trip in 2003, an almost 50 percent increase over what he paid in 1999. As in his previous journey, Elias managed to cross the border without being detected by U.S. border agents. In contrast, Luna and Ricardo paid significantly less in the same period. Their journey cost them US\$1,500 each. However, their journey was also marked by more interaction with U.S. authorities. Eventually, the couple was able to cross but not with the same ease that Elias crossed with his more expensive guide.

Still others remained in the United States for longer periods to pay off their debts to the coyotes and to avoid having to pay a second time. Indeed, in Tetlanohcan, all but one migrant interviewed were still in the United States, sometimes

several decades after leaving. For example, Efraím made his most recent trip to the United States in 2007 and has remained there since. Efraím had paid US\$3,500 in 2007 to cross, and it took him three years to pay off the debt. Similarly, on his last trip in 2009, Francisco Javier paid US\$2,500. This was a 28 percent increase from the price he paid to cross the border just three years earlier. And prices rose rapidly after Francisco Javier returned.

By 2013, fees had risen so high as to create a barrier to crossing into the United States. That year, Efraím said that the main reason he could not return to Tetlanohcan to visit his family was “the cost, the expense. It is like \$80,000 [MXN] (the equivalent of US\$8,000) to cross now. I don’t have that, and I cannot ask for that much.” Luna and Ricardo quoted the same sum if they were to try to get to the United States in 2013. “The line is very difficult now,” Ricardo explained. Though he himself was not interested in crossing again regardless of the cost, Ricardo thought that many of his neighbors in the Mixteca would have trouble repaying the loans they would need to take out to pay the high fees. Figure 11 shows how these costs changed over time based on community of origin.

The amounts that migrants paid rose at the same time that U.S. enforcement methods picked up. However, they also reflect the changing nature of coyotaje. In some parts of the border region, coyotes became increasingly involved with international criminal organizations that dealt not only in the smuggling of people, but also drugs (to the United States) and weapons (into Mexico).¹¹¹ These efforts raised the cost of unauthorized migration exponentially.¹¹² Thus, extraction from migration benefited organized crime as much as it did U.S. employers and U.S. business and government interests involved in border enforcement.

Extraction Embedded in Interior Enforcement

Once in the United States, Mexican migrants found they were haunted by the specter of detention and deportation. These interior enforcement mechanisms, like border enforcement, were designed to facilitate access to and control migrant workers. Just as the dual system of permitting entry while simultaneously criminalizing it developed at the border, massive raids in the 1930s saw the repatriation of 500,000 Mexican workers who had entered to work on farms, to build railroads and to mine copper.¹¹³ The repatriation efforts were couched as necessary to expel “illegal invaders.”¹¹⁴ These “invaders were described as having “nothing higher than animal function” and acting, ironically, “to the ultimate ruin of American agriculture . . . and to the detriment of . . . political and racial characteristics of the native American people of these regions.”¹¹⁵ In the 1950s, former army commander turned INS commissioner, Joseph Swing, repeated the “invasion” metaphor to justify a multiyear, derisively named Operation Wetback that would expel six million Mexican migrants.¹¹⁶

These operations correlated with economic downturns in the United States, including the Great Depression of the 1930s and recessions of the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹⁷ Like the justifications for border protection, they characterized Mexican

migrants as stealing work. However, the stated justifications masked justifications to hold on to the Mexican workforce, particularly in agriculture. Even as Commissioner Swing was carrying out the largest mass raid in history, he was guaranteeing employers that he would find replacements of any unauthorized workers who were removed with authorized ones.¹¹⁸ These guarantees were acted on, as most of the six million migrants expelled from the interior were “dried out” at the border and returned as *braceros*.¹¹⁹ Thus the massive raids, justified through racialized characterizations of Mexican workers as stealing jobs, operated less to expel Mexican migrants than to exert dominance over this workforce, particularly during times of economic downturns.

Both the racialization of Mexican migrants and the mechanisms of interior enforcement evolved over the next decades but continued to garner more resources for immigration control. In the 1980s, associations of Mexican and other migrants with crime brought new interior enforcement resources to the public and private sectors, matching similar spending increases and its justifications at the border. Interior enforcement began to include detention, a tactic that mirrored the rise of mass incarceration in the criminal legal system a decade earlier.¹²⁰ In the post-9/11 era, migrants became associated with threats to national security, and interior enforcement was expanded through the reorganization of the former INS into the Department of Homeland Security and the creation of ICE as an agency solely dedicated to interior immigration enforcement. These evolving associations of Mexican and other migrants with crime and national security concerns alongside ongoing association with the loss of U.S. jobs have coincided with massive increases in resources for interior enforcement. As shown in figure 12, successive legislation from 1985 to 2021 has increased interior enforcement spending on arrest, detention, and deportation by 2,700 percent, from \$300 million to \$8.3 billion. The largest single-year increases came in 1997, 2003, 2009, and 2018. As was the case with the large-scale removal operations in the 1930s and 1950s, these larger jumps in funding coincide with economic recessions in the United States, evincing the need to manage the supply of workers and to maintain their subordination. Like border enforcement measures, interior immigration enforcement does not just fatten public coffers. It also funnels funds to private contractors, like CoreCIVIC, Inc., and GEO Group, Inc., that garner over \$1 billion in profits from operating private immigration prisons (figure 13).¹²¹

Luna and other migrants profiled here escaped direct experience with interior enforcement, but the specter of detention or deportation loomed large in their consciousness. As Luna indicated, “We were always looking out for the *migra*.” This “looking out” prevented Luna and many others from complaining about substandard working conditions, low pay, and even employers’ abuse. One of those other migrants was Elfego, who labored in strenuous and exhausting conditions without complaint because, he said, “one is always thinking that the *migra* can catch you.” Even those who migrated with authorization felt the weight of possible deportation. Serena, who migrated with a visa, did not report the racist insults and

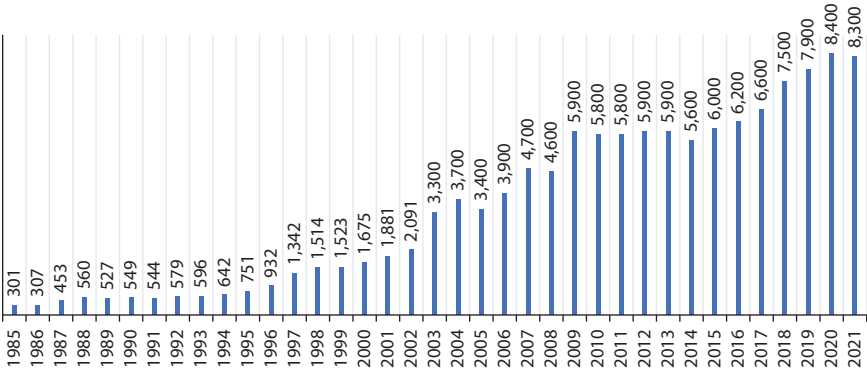


FIGURE 12. U.S. Interior Enforcement Spending, 1985–2021.

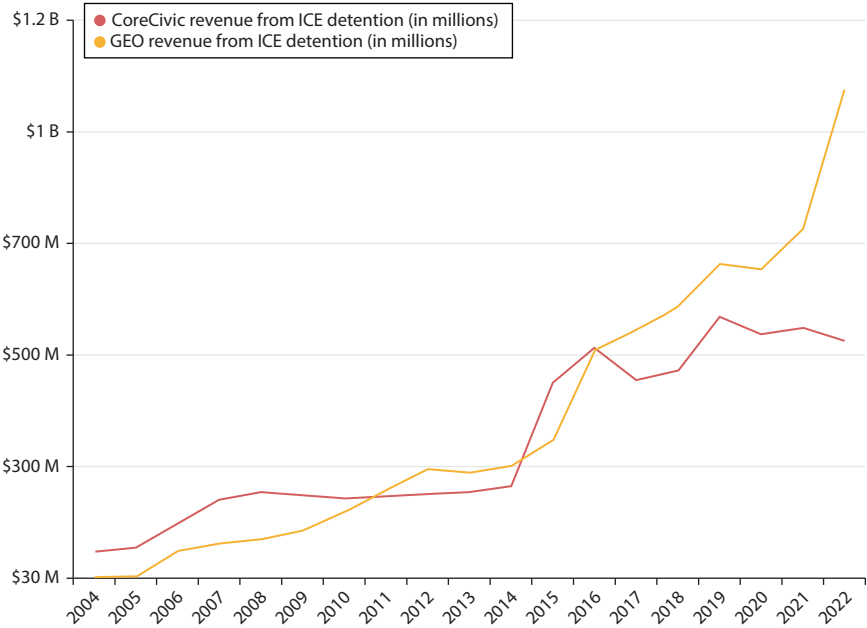


FIGURE 13. U.S. Interior Enforcement Private Contracts. Credit: ACLU. Reprinted with permission from American Civil Liberties Union.

grueling working conditions she experienced in part to avoid being blacklisted but also to avoid being fired and therefore subject to deportation. Thus, the massive spending and profits from interior detention and deportation operated to maintain the segregation of migrant workers in industries that preferred their labor—unauthorized or not—and exacerbate the harsh conditions migrants worked in while in the United States.

JOURNEY HOME

The other side of migrants' journeys to the United States were their journeys home. The vast majority of migrants interviewed had either already returned to Mexico or were contemplating return. Unlike many of their compatriots, the southward journeys of these migrants were voluntary, reflecting a broader pattern of largely voluntary return migration to Mexico in the late 2000s. Migrants regularly reported "voluntarily returning" to Mexico because their ability to perform the work available to them was exhausted. Elfego, for example, though he was only forty, said, "I returned because of my age and the work there [in the United States] was too difficult." Still other migrants returned because they became ill or injured at work and could not obtain health care. Don Santos returned for good in 2008 because he broke his back laying electrical wire in Tennessee and could not obtain necessary treatment there. Doña Mathilde, one of Elfego's and Don Santos's neighbors, had to return after only one year in the United States because she learned she had a heart condition.

Returned migrants were then confronted by the limits their contributions could make to the overall economic health of their home communities. Elfego had to return to preserve his physical health despite not being able to complete payments for his son's high school degree. This led his son to migrate. Don Santos noted the irony of being injured laying electric lines in the United States when his own pueblo lacked electricity and a proper school building as late as 2013. Even those who returned after completing their goals for their families saw the limits of their contributions. Elias returned after completing the payment of his children's school fees in 2008. "I always knew I would come back, and when the time came, I did," he declared. But many others from his town continued to migrate to pay those same school fees. Luna and Ricardo also returned to Mexico in 2008 after saving enough to start their own business. But their business could not lift up their entire community. These migrants' journeys north had enriched U.S. employers, government contractors, and coyotes much more than they enriched their home communities. This was not for lack of trying on the part of migrants. But the systems that migrants were operating in sought to entrench the gaps left by neoliberal disinvestment and the subsequent need for successive groups of people to move—the next phase of migration as extraction.