

Watsonville Immigrant Farm
Workers: A Look at the Cultural
Factors that Influence
Immigration Into Watsonville

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Organization of the Presentation

- Objective
- Research Questions
- History of Mexicans in the U.S.
- History of Mexican Farm Workers in Watsonville
- Participants
- Instruments
- Important Themes
- Conclusion

Objective of the Project

- The main objective of this project is to investigate the cultural reasons that influence the migration of Mexicans to the United States and, more specifically, to Watsonville, CA. By “cultural reasons” I mean reasons apart from one’s desire to earn more money.

Research Questions

- What are the reasons, apart from economic necessity, that influence the immigration of Mexican farm workers to Watsonville?
- Why did they come to Watsonville?
- Why did they decide to stay in Watsonville?

History of Mexicans in the U.S.

- Begins with the ending of the Mexican-American War in 1848.
- 1848- Approximately 100,000 Mexicans in U.S. territory (Oboler, 341). Majority migrated back to Mexico (Steinhauer, Loc.gov).
- 1880's- First period of Mexican migration to the U.S., construction of the railroad system (Oboler, 341).
- 1910-1920- First major migration of Mexicans to the U.S. due to the Mexican Revolution (Steinhauer, Loc.gov). Close to 1 million immigrated in those years (Rose, 15minutehistory.org).

Cont'd

- 1926-1929- Years of Mexican “Cristero Wars.” Induced migration to U.S (Steinhauer, Loc.gov).
- 1929-1939- Great Depression begins and about 1 million Mexicans are deported due to the fact that they compete for precious jobs with Americans. “Repatriation” (America’s, npr.org).
- 1942-1964- “Bracero Program.” 4.6 million Mexicans admitted to the U.S. to work in agricultural fields (Braceros, ucdavis.edu).
- 1954- “Operation Wetback.” 1.3 million Mexicans forcefully removed & sent back to Mexico (Dwight, ontheissues.org).

The History of Agricultural Workers in Watsonville

- 1769- Spaniards started the mission system in California (California, califa.org).
- Indigenous people were used as laborers to tend the animals and crops (Dunn, 35).
- 1834- Missions were secularized (Mexican, csun.edu).
- Many of the Indians moved to the “ranchos” to work as “vaqueros” (cowboys) and to tend the crops (Dunn, 35).
- 1848- Gold is discovered in California and the Mexican-American War comes to an end (Dunn, 36).

Cont'd

- Many foreigners arrive in Pajaro Valley and planted crops. Indigenous people hired to harvest crops (Dunn, 36).
- The first Mexicans begin to come to the Valley. They work mainly as “vaqueros” (cowboys) (Dunn, 36).
- 1942- start of “Bracero Program” (Dunn, 51).
- Most braceros in Watsonville came from Michoacán. The next largest groups came from Jalisco & Sonora.
- The braceros lived in one of the four different labor camps in Watsonville.
- All braceros returned to Mexico at the end of 1964.

Cont'd

- In the years following the “Bracero Program,” Mexicans began to return to Watsonville to work in the fields & began to settle there.
- 2010- Population in Watsonville is 51,199 (U.S. Census, 2010).
- 81.4% Latino/Hispanic (about 42,00). (U.S. Census, 2010).

Participants

- 20 total- 18 men, 2 women.
- Youngest-19, oldest-57.
- Median age- 35.85
- All work in the raspberry, blueberry, or strawberry industries in Watsonville.
- 10 pickers, 8 hourly workers (ranch maintenance, tractor driving, etc.), 3 crew bosses.
- Mexican states of origin- 8 Michoacán, 3 Jalisco, 2 Hidalgo, 2 Oaxaca, 2 Guerrero, 1 Veracruz, 1 Zacatecas, 1 Guanajuato

Instruments

- Semi-structured, one on one interviews
- 27 questions
- Topics
 - Place of origin
 - Influencing factors for coming to U.S.
 - Reasons for moving to Watsonville
 - Differences in lifestyle between Mexico and U.S.
 - Reasons for staying in Watsonville
 - Satisfaction with working/living conditions in Watsonville

Important Themes

- Everyone is from a subsistence farming community. Little economic opportunity. U.S. is seen as the land of opportunity. Children are heavily influenced by TV programs about the U.S. and by older people returning with cars & other new things. They start thinking about going to the U.S. at a young age. It is their choice, there is zero parental influence.

Important Themes

- Almost everyone ended up in Watsonville due to family invitation.
- Only two people planned on moving here permanently. The other 18 initially planned on returning to Mexico after a short period of time, but ended up resettling here (border danger also a factor).

Important Themes

- The participants like their work. More \$ in the field than in stores/restaurants, seasonal or year-round work, no discrimination.
- 2 of the 20 would like to go back to Mexico. The other 18 do not want to leave Watsonville. 100% of the people said that, overall, they like living in Watsonville.

Conclusion

- This group of people left home for the U.S. out of curiosity (and to make \$). They came to Watsonville because they had family here and heard there was plenty of work. They originally planned on returning to Mexico, but for a variety of cultural and other reasons (children's future, community acceptance, family ties, great weather) force them to stay. Watsonville has what they need, and they are happy to live there.

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