

PROJECT JOBS: REAGAN, THE INS, AND UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS IN 1982

by

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ABSTRACT

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Using digitized archival material, newspaper articles, and court documents, this thesis examines a 1982 federal deportation campaign in the United States called “Project Jobs,” which resulted in the apprehension of an estimated 5,400 undocumented workers, and the ultimate deportation of 4,000 of them. The operation targeted nine major U.S. cities with the goal of freeing up jobs for unemployed U.S. citizens during a recession. While Operation Wetback targeted undocumented workers in the agricultural sector, Project Jobs targeted high-paying urban jobs that were intended to be desirable for U.S. citizens. Although the operation received substantial publicity at the time, it has since been forgotten, and is virtually absent from the current historiography. By linking the operation to the economic recession in 1981, the suffering reputation of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Reagan administration’s four-year struggle to get the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 passed through Congress, this thesis argues that Project Jobs was a significant event in U.S. history, with substantial consequences for undocumented workers in urban America.

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Introduction

“At the very bottom was the worker who had entered illegally. Living outside the law, he had no one to champion his cause. He had only those who sought to exploit him and those who sought to expel him.” – Juan Ramon García, *Operation Wetback* (1980)

On April 27, 1982, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) stormed Marilyn Belts and Bags Inc, a manufacturing company in Dallas, Texas, and arrested eighty-six undocumented workers. Reporters flocked to the scene as Mexican immigrants were handcuffed and loaded onto a bus, helpless, anxious, and frightened. The owner of the company watched in frustration as his employees were apprehended, and he told reporters he would have to shut down operations until further notice, meaning his documented workers were also out of a job. When asked why he could not simply replace the apprehended workers, he explained that American citizens were not willing to work for \$3.35 an hour. He told reporters that even if they were all deported, his employees would be back in a few weeks. Until then, his documented workers, mostly black and Hispanic citizens, would have to find another job.¹

This raid was part of a national INS operation in 1982 called “Project Jobs,” also known as “Operation Jobs,” which rounded up undocumented workers in nine major U.S. cities with the stated goal of creating vacancies for unemployed American citizens during a national recession. An estimated 5,400 undocumented workers were apprehended nationally between April 26 and 30 alone (most of them Mexican), and more than 4,000 of them were ultimately deported. While some called Project Jobs a success, others referred to it as a “reign of terror,” while still others

¹ “INS Raid,” KXAS-TV news clip, April 27, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1248046/m1/?q=INS>.

believed the operation did not go far enough.² Although at the time it was commonly compared to Operation Wetback, an INS initiative in 1954 that resulted in the deportation of over one million people back to Mexico, Project Jobs oversaw only a small fraction of the deportations carried out during Operation Wetback. Nevertheless, the raids in 1982 made national headlines and caught the attention of almost every major state.³

The raids invoked mixed reactions. Latino/a activists expressed outrage over a failed mission they considered to be merely a publicity stunt, one which threatened to increase anti-immigrant sentiment and racial profiling. Latino/a workers, regardless of citizenship, were subject to state-sanctioned abuse and harassment, and in some cases, wrongful arrest and deportation. Employers whose companies were targeted expressed frustration over disrupted business and an inability to fill the vacancies created by their deported workers. On the other side of the spectrum, white conservatives and some black activists criticized the federal government for not doing more to ensure the operation's long-term success, because within weeks, some companies reported that almost all their deported employees had returned to work, which was blamed on lax border security. INS commissioner Alan Nelson, however, remarked he was "very pleased" with the results of the operation, declaring it to be a successful experiment to demonstrate the expanding capabilities of the agency, with more to come.⁴

² Dan La Botz, "From the Archives: Immigration Raids Make Latino Workers the Enemy," *Labor Notes* (July 26, 2019), <https://labornotes.org/2019/07/archives-immigration-raids-make-latino-workers-enemy>.

³ Jeet Heer, "Operation Wetback Revisited: The Horrifying Story of the Program Donald Trump Wants to Emulate," *The New Republic* 247, no. 6 (2016), <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=1ad56a72-8408-4ee2-8484-7006ad238aa4%40redis>.

⁴ Caryle Murphy, "INS Chief 'Very Pleased,'" *The Washington Post*, May 7, 1982, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/05/07/ins-chief-very-pleased/d0ebdbe3-38aa-43f1-94c2-08548fef50e6/>.

When President Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the United States fell into a severe economic recession, and many Americans, especially in the South, were blaming high unemployment on job displacement by undocumented workers from Mexico. This was not new. Hostility by the American working class against immigrant labor has a long history in the United States, but the post-civil right era was unique in two important ways: First, Mexicans had become the face of “illegal” immigration. The white working class was no longer concerned with European immigrants, such as Italians, the Irish, and Jews. Mexicans were the leading enemy “other” because their growing population in the United States threatened white superiority, meaning Mexican immigrants posed a double threat as desired workers and as producers of future non-white voters. Second, in an era when it was becoming less socially acceptable to be publicly racist, the word “illegal” had replaced “wetback” in the U.S. media, making it much easier to disguise racist sentiment and policies with narratives of legality and citizenship. According to Ana Raquel Minian, in the “post-racist society” beginning in the seventies, “illegality...became a proxy for the racial hostility many Americans felt.”⁵ The growing use of the term “illegal” in reference to Latin American immigrants further degraded their inferior status in the United States by characterizing them as rightless, exploitable, and deportable – a status entirely upheld by the law.

The American people, especially those living in border states, were becoming increasingly hostile towards a growing Mexican population, and ever critical of the federal government’s futile attempts to secure the border. Under intense pressure to appease some state and local governments and to gain some support for his immigration reform plan (which was getting blasted in the media), the Reagan administration authorized increased funding for the

⁵ Ana Raquel Minian, *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 67.

INS, and in 1982, they launched a highly publicized deportation operation called “Project Jobs” the same year the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was being introduced for the first time. This thesis will argue that Project Jobs was a political stunt designed by the federal government to bolster support for the Immigration Reform and Control Act, to quell some of the criticism by state and local officials and the American public that the federal government was not doing enough to solve the perceived immigration crisis, to uplift the INS at a time when the agency was coming increasingly under attack by all sides of the political spectrum, and finally, to scapegoat Mexican immigrants for the recession. More broadly, Project Jobs was symptomatic of a dysfunctional political system that prioritizes elections over legislation and caters to an electorate that has never been truly representative of the people it serves. Rather than properly educating the public on the U.S. economy’s reliance on immigrant labor, the Reagan administration reinforced a dangerous narrative that Mexicans were an enemy other that should be kept out, and that they were to blame for high unemployment and inflation. Although they were living in the United States as productive members of society by working and paying taxes, undocumented workers were not allowed to vote, rendering them rightless and their lives virtually inconsequential in the eyes of the politicians who influenced their legal status and daily lives.

Examining local politics is crucial to analyzing federal immigration operations, because their success strongly depends on cooperation with local police departments, as police officers will often act as unofficial federal agents during roundups. Dallas and Los Angeles, for example, two cities notorious for police brutality against the Latino/a community at this time, were also highly cooperative with the INS during Project Jobs. Before the U.S. Border Patrol was founded

in 1924, the responsibility of policing the U.S.-Mexico border was largely left to state authorities. State Rangers formed between 1835 and 1901 in Texas, Arizona, and California, and they guarded their borders with little to no assistance from the federal government. In fact, in 1915, Texas governor James E. Ferguson sent a letter to President Woodrow Wilson requesting \$30,000 to hire additional Texas Rangers to guard against Mexican bandits. Ferguson's request was denied on the grounds that border policing was the responsibility of the state, a claim that has since been considerably challenged, and has yet to be fully resolved.⁶ For example, on November 16, 2022, Texas Governor Greg Abbott criticized the Biden administration's failure to enforce immigration laws or enhance border security, accusing Biden of placing the burden almost entirely on the state of Texas to secure its portion of the border, despite repeated requests for additional funding and increased personnel.⁷

As has been argued by Kelly Lytle Hernández and Monica Muñoz Martínez, local law enforcement has always and continues to play a crucial role in the policing of migrants. When the U.S. Border Patrol was founded in 1924, this federal agency was stepping into a role that had been molded by a tradition of "state racial terror and vigilantism." A "regime" of state Rangers, local law enforcement, U.S. soldiers, and armed southern farmers had reigned terror on Mexicans in the borderlands for close to a century, and their practices and collaboration shaped the policies of the U.S. Border Patrol.⁸ Not only were many Border Patrol officers recruited directly from the Rangers, but the Border Patrol continued to maintain a close relationship with

⁶ Jeff Guin, *War on the Border: Villa, Pershing, the Texas Rangers, and an American Invasion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021), 93.

⁷ "Governor Abbott to President Biden: Texas is Escalating Border Security Efforts," *Office of the Texas Governor*, November 16, 2022, <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-to-president-biden-texas-is-escalating-border-security-efforts>.

⁸ Ryan Keft, "The Legacy of the Texas Rangers: A Look at the Long History of Violence at the Border," *PBS*, October 10, 2019, <https://www.pbsocal.org/shows/voces/legacy-texas-rangers-look-long-history-violence-border>; Monica Muñoz Martínez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 7.

the group as well as with local police. According to Hernandez, the relationship between local, state, and federal law enforcement in the borderlands represented a “brotherhood,” who effectively communicated and protected each other from the legal consequences of their violent actions by concealing and burying evidence.⁹ Therefore, Mexicans in the borderlands were up against a multilateral law enforcement system, which according to Martinez, allowed officers to “[execute] subjects at will.”¹⁰

This collaboration between local law enforcement and federal immigration officials persisted throughout the twentieth century and extended to the cities. Max Felker-Kantor has examined the growth of municipal police power between 1960 and 1990 “around the aim of controlling the city’s black and brown populations.” Beginning in the 1970s, officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) began collaborating with the INS by arresting undocumented immigrants and transferring them to federal authorities as part of the war on crime. According to Felker-Kantor, “Flipping the standard narrative of federal enforcement of immigration law reveals how the LAPD expanded the police power into immigration enforcement during an era when the INS had limited resources and manpower.”¹¹ These partnerships occurred in various cities, and they played a crucial role in dictating which areas were targeted during Project Jobs.

In analyzing cooperation with local police forces, this thesis will also critique the INS’ role within the federal government. Although immigration officials are federal agents, it is important to note that the federal government is not a monolithic structure. Throughout its

⁹ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 64-5.

¹⁰ Martinez, 9.

¹¹ Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 2; 162-3.

existence from 1933 to 2003, the agency was forced to respond to a fundamental contradiction between its emblematic duty to protect the nation's sovereignty and its intrinsic yet more obscure role of sustaining capitalism. INS agents were pressured by some politicians and the nativist public to secure the border and ramp up deportations, while simultaneously compelled to secure a substantial undocumented labor force for politicians and employers who profited from immigrant labor. Therefore, although they were federal agents, INS officials were often at odds with Congress, as policymakers deliberately underfunded the agency to ensure its ineptitude yet publicly scapegoated the agency for the nation's perceived lack of control on immigration. That being said, the agency's cruel and abusive treatment of immigrants was also an internal dysfunction stemming from the inherent racism built into the fabric of the agency.

This thesis will also analyze the role of the media in contributing to the pattern of scapegoating that occurred over the course of the twentieth century, tracing how racism and xenophobia intersect to construct the Mexican "illegal alien." As Mae Ngai has observed in *Impossible Subjects*, "undocumented immigrants are at once welcome and unwelcome."¹² They are desired as a cheap and exploitable labor force, while simultaneously blamed for many of the nation's problems. Deportation campaigns tend to follow economic recessions, and the federal government has always sought press attention during them for the purpose of shifting blame and boosting support for themselves. For example, when 500,000 Mexicans were deported between 1929 and 1939 in large repatriation campaigns to relieve unemployment during the Great Depression, public officials intentionally generated considerable publicity.¹³ Later, in 1954, U.S.

¹² Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

¹³ Robert R. McKay, "Mexican Americans and Repatriation," *Texas State Historical Association*, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mexican-americans-and-repatriation>; "INS Records for

Attorney General Herbert Brownell implemented Operation Wetback in response to intense public pressure and rising xenophobia after an economic slump in 1953. It is estimated that one million Mexicans were deported during Operation Wetback, and according to García, the operation's "much-publicized 'success' lulled many...into believing that the influx of 'illegals' was under control," thereby relieving some of the pressure on the federal government.¹⁴ However, INS agents were accused of colluding with employers, strategically waiting to raid worksites "until after Harvest season was over," when workers were no longer needed, allowing employers to avoid paying them for their labor by having them arrested.¹⁵ Operation Wetback demonstrated that the INS was more useful for securing a cheap, exploitable labor force than they were for expelling one.

This thesis argues that deportation campaigns have historically been strategically designed to *control* the undocumented labor force – not to remove it. During the Great Depression repatriation drives, Operation Wetback, and Project Jobs, the media played a crucial role in the construction of deportation as a spectacle. Statistically, Project Jobs was underwhelming in comparison to Operation Wetback and the repatriation drives, and yet its media coverage was equally copious. This demonstrates how the media was used in part as a tool to fashion a narrative that served political interests by exaggerating the operation's significance, thereby striking fear into the immigrant community and sending a message to the American public that the federal government was actively responding to their concerns of an expanding immigrant population. However, this should not diminish the suffering experienced by the

1930s Mexican Repatriations," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/history-office-and-library/featured-stories-from-the-uscis-history-office-and-library/ins-records-for-1930s-mexican-repatriations>.

¹⁴ García, 167.

¹⁵ Ibid, 111.

victims of the workplace raids. Although the deportations from Project Jobs were less substantial than the operation's equally publicized predecessors, many referred to this period appropriately as a "reign of terror," and this thesis seeks to uncover how dramatically people's lives and businesses were disrupted as a result.

To date, the only academic essay that has been written on Project Jobs was published in 1993 by Donald L. Huddle, a former professor of economics at Rice University, who conducted a study in 1982 along with some of his graduate students to determine the impact of Project Jobs in Houston, Texas. In his essay "Dirty Work," Huddle argued that immigrant workers hurt the American working class by causing job displacement, depressing wages, and draining welfare, and that the "economic health of the underclass... would be markedly improved by a more effective, tightened immigration policy." Huddle declared Project Jobs to be a success because his field studies showed that the operation created more than 5,000 jobs for displaced U.S. citizens. He argued, however, that the federal government's failure to properly secure the U.S.-Mexico border caused the operation to ultimately fail in the long-run.¹⁶

Huddle's findings were full of errors, inconsistencies, and racist assumptions, yet his status as a credible and highly respected economist combined with his outspoken defense of Project Jobs made him one of the most influential figures on the topic. Huddle's name appeared repeatedly in the headlines and content of newspaper articles as right-wing journalists and politicians cited his work to boost support for the operation. Others, however, attacked his credibility, claiming his findings were racist, biased, and inaccurate. Nonetheless, in 1985 the INS invited him to speak at a conference to call on the federal government to increase funding

¹⁶ Donald L. Huddle, "Dirty Work: Are Immigrants Only Taking Jobs That the Native Underclass Does Not Want?" *Population and Environment* (July 1993), 535-6, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1307174001?parentSessionId=UGXgc5gcsFbCCKiV8sOmdX79J5D33LgR3pQkEONT5Bs%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=7117&imgSeq=1>.

and manpower for the agency as the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act were still being debated in Congress.¹⁷ Therefore, the history of Project Jobs cannot be properly understood without discussing Huddle, who played a crucial role in turning the operation into a national spectacle to increase its legitimacy and perpetuate nativism.

I relied heavily on primary sources because secondary sources on Project Jobs simply do not exist. I utilized digital history projects such as The Portal to Texas History from the University of North Texas Special Collections, archived newspapers from Ancestry.com, and the Department of Justice archival collection, as well as court documents. Based on my source material, this thesis is largely written from the perspective of the media, as I was unable to access the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and the INS has only digitized some of their records before 1955. Unfortunately, uncovering stories of the undocumented can be a difficult endeavor as well, given that those living in the U.S. “illegally” have and continue to choose to exist under the radar out of fear of being exposed and deported. Reporters who interviewed undocumented workers typically used pseudonyms or allowed subjects to remain completely anonymous to protect their identities and their families. When caught on camera, victims of the workplace raids usually hid their faces and refused to comment to reporters. Therefore, this paper is more of a political, legal, and labor history than a social one because it analyzes the idea and status of undocumented workers in the United States more so than their lived experiences.

Women are also virtually absent from this narrative, as the vast majority of those apprehended and deported during Project Jobs were men. Although female workplaces were

¹⁷ Jay Mathews, “Economist Says Illegal Aliens Cost the U.S. Jobs and Taxes,” *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1985, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/04/19/economist-says-illegal-aliens-cost-the-us-jobs-and-taxes/e9b94859-7272-4b5d-bba9-71c73dd37cad/>.

occasionally targeted, immigration officials were less concerned with Mexican women because they did less desirable domestic work.¹⁸ Additionally, the vast majority of the unemployed American labor force were men because the rising popularity of *laissez faire* economics during the Reagan era was encouraging companies to begin outsourcing jobs overseas, and these jobs largely existed in male-dominated industries, such as manufacturing, construction, and mining.¹⁹ Therefore, jobs were disappearing in the eighties not because immigrants were stealing them, but because American businessmen were seeking cheap exploitable labor overseas in a less regulated atmosphere. Although the raids mainly targeted men, however, women and children were victimized as well. Most of those apprehended were separated from their families by deportation and faced with the dangerous and expensive task of having to cross the border again to reunite with them, and many of the children who were left behind were placed into the care of extended relatives, or in some cases, the state.

This paper begins by examining the economic recession that occurred during the Reagan era, and the growing pressure placed on the federal government to control rising immigration caused in large part by deteriorating economic conditions in Mexico and political turmoil in Central America. As the economy suffered, Reagan's approval ratings were dangerously low, and the public's reaction toward his immigration reform plan was generally negative. At the same time the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was under intense stress, pressured

¹⁸ "Perspective #3," KXAS-TV news clip, September 13, 1978, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1135399/m1/?q=Mexicans%20welfare>.

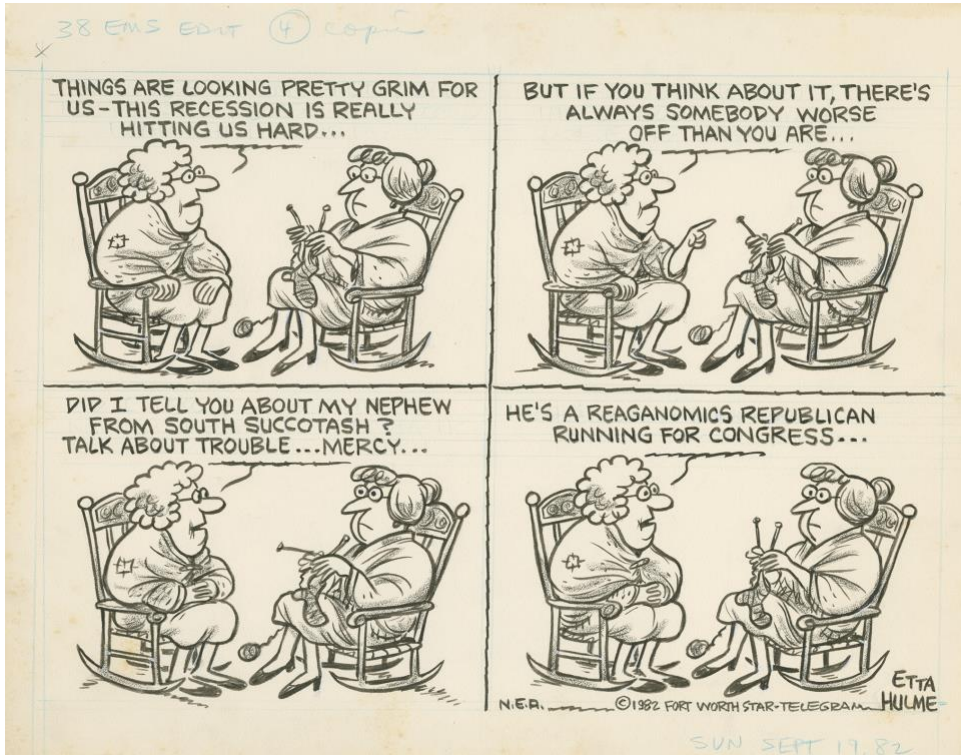
¹⁹ Larry DeBoer and Michael Seeborg, "The Female-Male Unemployment Differential: Effects of Changes in Industry Employment," *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (1984), 8, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1984/11/art2full.pdf>; Linette Lopez, "The White House is Only Telling Half of the Sad Story of What Happened to American Jobs," *Business Insider*, July 17, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-happened-to-american-jobs-in-the-80s-2017-7>.

by both the government and the American public to gain control over the borders and to reduce the undocumented population in the U.S. with limited funding and manpower. Meanwhile, undocumented workers were increasingly concentrating in the cities as they sought higher pay and better working conditions, but were being terrorized by white nativists, local law enforcement, and federal immigration officials. In 1982, under the direction of a new commissioner, the INS implemented a highly publicized national deportation campaign to create jobs for unemployed Americans, boost support for Reagan's immigration reform plan, and encourage increased funding for the INS. Although the operation was highly unpopular for various reasons, economist Donald Huddle became the operation's strongest defender, yet his public statements were rooted in racism and xenophobia and served to proliferate misinformation about immigration. This thesis ends with the passage and the aftermath of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which was introduced to Congress the same year as Project Jobs. There is an abundance of scholarship on IRCA, but to date, no account has ever included Project Jobs in its analysis. This thesis will draw a direct connection between IRCA and the INS deportation campaign of 1982 to argue that neither subject can be properly understood without analyzing that link.

In an age of reform, Project Jobs reaffirmed the boundaries of national belonging by deciding who was and who was not worth protecting. By guarding the social construct of citizenship, the United States government sent a strong message that undocumented workers were welcome until they were not. They were desired for their labor until their presence became a political inconvenience. They were needed to maintain the foundation of capitalism, as long as they remained silent and invisible, and stayed in their place at the bottom rung of the caste system. Project Jobs effectively illustrated the fixed oppressed status of undocumented workers

in 1982. Ultimately, they were not to blame for the nation's problems, but they were the nation's greatest scapegoat.

I. The Recession and Reagan's Immigration Reform Plan



This political cartoon was featured in the Fort Worth Star Telegram on September 19, 1982. Photo Courtesy of the Etta Hulme Papers, 1980s, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

The year Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the country was plunged into the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. Unemployment reached 7.5 percent by the end of 1980 during Jimmy Carter's term, and then peaked at 11 percent by the end of 1982. This seemed ironic to the public given Reagan's campaign's focus on economics, but the recession had little to do with his administration – it was caused by the actions of economists and policymakers in the 1960s and 70s who were pushing the Phillips Curve, a “stop-go” monetary

policy which attempted to lower unemployment by raising interest rates to stimulate inflation. Unemployment had been steadily rising since the seventies due to government spending during the Vietnam War, the 1973 oil crisis, and the ending of the Bretton Woods agreement, but the American public were largely optimistic that once Reagan took office, he could quickly fix the economy.²⁰ A poll conducted in the spring of 1981, shortly before the onset of the recession, found that “nearly half of Americans said the Reagan administration would make their family’s financial situation much better.” However, according to the Pew Research Center, “by the summer of 1982, only 42 percent of Americans approved of the president,” and only 36 percent wanted him to run for reelection.²¹ During the midterms of 1982, unemployment was the leading issue for voters, especially in the southwest, where voters were increasingly blaming high unemployment on job displacement by undocumented workers.²²

The notion that Mexicans take American jobs has existed since the Great Depression and has escalated in waves during times of financial stress. According to Ana Raquel Minian, as the economy was booming in the sixties, “most white U.S. citizens,” although they still believed Mexicans to be racially inferior, “did not fear that Mexicans were taking their jobs and resources.” A 1965 Gallup poll revealed that only 33 percent of respondents believed that immigration needed to be decreased. Therefore “politicians made no serious efforts to restrict unauthorized border crossings.”²³ However, in 1976, at the end of a severe economic recession,

²⁰ Tim Sablik, “Recession of 1981-82,” *Federal Reserve History*, November 22, 2013, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/recession-of-1981-82>; Michael Corbett, “Oil Shock of 1973-74,” *Federal Reserve History*, November 22, 2013, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/oil-shock-of-1973-74>.

²¹ Richard C. Auxier, “Reagan’s Recession,” *Pew Research Center*, December 14, 2010, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2010/12/14/reagans-recession/>.

²² Mark Shield, “Burnt-Out Issues of Campaign ’82,” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 1982, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/09/17/burnt-out-issues-of-campaign-82/742367aa-a216-4295-b77e-e3884022b978/>.

²³ Minian, 52-53; Sarah R. Coleman, *The Walls Within: The Politics of Immigration in Modern America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 16.

congressional hearings for the Eilberg Bill (which, once passed, restricted immigration from Mexico and Latin America for the first time since the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965) “focused primarily on the idea that Latin American immigrants displaced citizens by availing themselves of scarce resources and jobs.” According to Minian, “From the 1970s onward, the belief that there were too many migrants in the country encouraged government officials to limit the number of Mexicans who could legally enter the United States, to fortify the border, and to conduct more raids in Latino/a communities. These measures did not reduce the number of undocumented individuals who resided in the United States, but they did reinforce the association between migrants and illegality.”²⁴

In the seventies, nativists were increasingly focusing on the issue of illegality to disguise the racism underlying anti-immigrant policies and press. According to Minian, “At a time when racial prejudice was being denounced and a multicultural and post-racist society celebrated, many citizens and state officials denounced migrants’ illegal status rather than focusing on their race and ethnicity.”²⁵ There were many similarities between the political climates preceding the repatriation drives of the Great Depression in 1929, Operation Wetback in 1954, and Project Jobs in 1982. In every case, local news stories in the southwest embellished stories of impoverished Mexicans flooding across the border to invade communities, displace American workers, and drain welfare. These stories also sparked public anxiety over a lack of border security by decrying insufficient border fencing as well as underfunding of the U.S. Border Patrol, alleging it required little effort for migrants to cross over illegally.²⁶ The greatest distinction, then, between

²⁴ Ibid, 48.

²⁵ Ibid, 67.

²⁶ Jack Anderson, “Human Assembly Line,” *Irving Daily News* 18, no. 272, January 5, 1978, 6, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/53243344/>.

the political climates of Project Jobs and its predecessors was the added effort to mask racism in the age of reform.

The seventies also saw the term “immigrant” used in an increasingly racialized and negative context in the media, associated specifically with Mexican Americans.²⁷ According to Hana E. Brown and Michelle S. Dromgold-Sermen, the U.S. media uses the terms “immigrant” and “refugee” to selectively make a distinction between those deserving sympathy and public support and those who pose a cultural, economic, or criminal threat, “regardless of the forces driving their migration.” In the seventies, it was becoming more common to see the words “immigrant” and “illegal” used to characterize Mexican immigrants as “disease-prone, dirty, and dangerous,” while immigrants labeled as “refugees” were portrayed as victims.²⁸ For example, in 1971, the *Grand Prairie Daily News* published an article stoking fears of an “illegal alien epidemic” in Dallas, accusing Mexican immigrants of taking American jobs and draining taxpayer money.²⁹ The following year they published an article titled “The Immigrant Problem,” which referred to Mexican migrants as wetbacks and accused them of scheming against American employees to steal jobs and then spend their money in Mexico, where the American dollar could be stretched further.³⁰ In 1975, the same newspaper published an article titled “Tho Makes a Go of It in America,” celebrating Vietnamese refugees who had escaped communism and come to the United States seeking political freedom and employment. The article stated that when Vietnamese refugee Huynh Van Tho arrived in Grand Prairie, he found “a general

²⁷ David Clark, “The Immigrant Problem,” *Grand Prairie Daily News* 64, no. 175, May 24, 1972, 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/15202890/?terms=immigrants&match=1>.

²⁸ Hana E. Brown and Michelle S. Dromgold-Sermen, “Border, Politics, and Bounded Sympathy: How U.S. Television News Constructs Refugees, 1980-2016,” *Social Problems* (2022), <https://academic.oup.com/socpro/advance-article/doi/10.1093/socpro/spac036/6617767?login=true>.

²⁹ “Dallas, Favorite of Illegal Aliens,” *Grand Prairie Daily News* 23, no. 117, May 17, 1971, 5, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/15188845/>.

³⁰ Clark.

outpouring of hospitality and warmth and a job.”³¹ The juxtaposition between these Dallas County news articles reveals how the media can “shape local residents’ racial ideologies and raise public anxieties about immigrants, affecting immigration politics and support for restrictive immigration policies.”³²

According to Jason Ariel Daza, by 1980, the public had grown “fed up” with the federal government’s perceived laissez-faire approach to immigration, and a 1980 Roper poll found that 91 percent of respondents agreed “an all out effort [should be made] to stop illegal entry.”³³ When Reagan took office in 1981, Texas politicians were particularly concerned about his lax immigration reform plan, which aimed to launch a new guest worker program and grant amnesty to hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers already living in the United States, without substantially increasing funding for the Immigration and Naturalization Service or the U.S. Border Patrol.³⁴ Texas Governor Bill Clements ardently opposed the planned program before meeting with the Reagan administration on September 21, 1981, when he suddenly announced that he had misunderstood the proposal. He then declared his newfound support for the plan, a switch some speculated was the result of a back door quid pro quo arrangement in which the Justice Department agreed to no longer interfere in lawsuits by Texas prisoners against the state corrections department.³⁵ Beginning in 1972, the Texas Department of Corrections was hit with a slew of lawsuits based on accusations of overcrowding, abuse, and health and safety violations,

³¹ Bob Bocell, “Tho Makes a Go of It in America,” *Grand Prairie Daily News* 67, no. 219, July 17, 1975, 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/26350339/?terms=refugee&match=1>.

³² Brown.

³³ Jason Ariel Daza, “Attitudes Toward Illegal Immigration: What the Public Believes, What the Government Can Learn,” MA thesis, (University of Texas at Arlington, 2007), 13.

³⁴ Gene Goldenberg, “Proposals Could Alienate Congress,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, July 22, 1981, 5, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/798688054/>.

³⁵ Mark Thompson, “Clements Ends Tour of Capital,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, September 22, 1981, 3, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/635406027/?terms=Reagan%20immigration&match=1>; Jim Davis, “Governors Agree to Disagree on Policy Statements,” *Del Rio News Herald* 53, no. 177, October 6, 1981, 6, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/13869201/?terms=Reagan%20immigration&match=1>.

and in 1980, U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice ordered sweeping and expensive changes to the Texas prison system.³⁶ Months before Clements met with Reagan, however, Clements declared Reagan's proposal was "doomed to failure" and suggested a proposal of his own which required all employers of undocumented workers to pay for the deportation of their own workers. Clements' concerns over Reagan's proposal were also reinforced by the governors of California, New Mexico, and Arizona, who collectively criticized the plan's neglect of border security and worried the guest worker and amnesty programs would exacerbate inflation and unemployment.³⁷

INS employees were also outraged over Reagan's immigration reform plan, and on August 21, 1981, they organized a nationwide protest on the grounds that the proposal would only "add to the INS workload without accomplishing anything." A key protest site took place outside the DFW airport, where frustrated INS employees called Reagan's immigration plan "a cruel hoax" and criticized his administration's reluctance to increase funding for the department, as employees were overwhelmed with work but often accused of incompetence. One man could be seen carrying a sign that accused illegal aliens of stealing six million American jobs, while another man carried a sign that read "Do you really want open borders?" INS employees accused the new president of intentionally neglecting border security to maintain a "large pool of cheap labor," careless of the consequences on unemployment in a time of recession.³⁸

³⁶ Ruiz v. Estelle, 503 F. Supp. 1265, U.S. Court for the Southern District of Texas, December 12, 1980, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/503/1265/1466998/>.

³⁷ Dan Balz, "Texas Governor Breaks Ranks on Reagan Immigration Policy," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 1981, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/08/30/texas-governor-breaks-ranks-on-reagan-immigration-policy/a36cd85e-96cd-48bd-b725-aa97ed39ed9d/>.

³⁸ Scott Merville, "INS Employees Plan Reagan Policy Protest," *The El Paso Times* 101, no. 218, August 6, 1981, 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/435958256/?terms=Reagan%20immigration&match=1>; "INS Pickets," KXAS-TV news clip, August 21, 1981, The Portal to Texas History, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1283880/m1/?q=INS>.

Whether or not Reagan was intentionally neglecting border security, Thomas R. Maddux has argued that immigration was never a top priority for the president. During his presidential campaign, he occasionally commented on the need to control illegal entries, but he consistently denounced proposals for more fencing and guards, and he refused to condemn undocumented people living in the United States. When Reagan served as governor of California from 1967-1975, he maintained that immigrant labor was necessary for the economy and remained skeptical of claims that there were too many immigrants or that they were displacing American workers. In 1977, Reagan critiqued the “illegal alien fuss” by blaming high unemployment on American citizens’ refusal to accept jobs that employers were then forced to give to undocumented workers.³⁹ However, as president, Reagan was faced with intense pressure to respond to the perceived immigration crisis. Amidst “a backdrop of economic recession” and a corresponding spike in public xenophobia, immigration *was* a chief concern for the American public, particularly for local communities with the highest Latino/a populations. Therefore, a combination of political pressure and resistance to his immigration reform proposal prompted the Reagan administration to establish a task force on immigration in 1981.⁴⁰

The Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (SCIRP) recommended expanding the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), beefing up border security, and enforcing sanctions against employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers.⁴¹ In 1952, the federal government struck down a proposal to impose criminal penalties for the employment

³⁹ Thomas R. Maddux, “Ronald Reagan and the Task Force on Immigration, 1981,” *Pacific Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (2005), 202-3. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/stable/pdf/10.1525/phr.2005.74.2.195.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A5c0edf1306e1759d9016ac69473a71ff&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1.

⁴⁰ Maddux, 198; Kristina Shull, “Reagan’s Cold War on Immigrants: Resistance and the Rise of a Detention Regime, 1981-1985,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 40, no. 2 (2021), 3, <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=txshracd2597&id=GALE|A656765766&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon>.

⁴¹ Maddux, 208.

of undocumented workers, and the issue had not been seriously raised again until 1981, when anti-immigrant sentiment during the recession prompted “a majority of Americans [to favor] the idea of employer sanctions to control immigration.”⁴² SCIRP put together a memorandum for the Reagan administration on March 4, 1981 which contained recommendations for how to approach the immigration issue and still garner public support. The memorandum stated, “Immigration policy embodies highly political issues. Attempts to render immigration law devoid of political significance are doomed to failure.” It is clear based on this report that politics was the top priority regarding immigration reform legislation, rather than the implications of the legislation itself.

The task force recommended Reagan attempt to dispel myths created by previous administrations that immigrants were to blame for U.S. economic problems and to hold true to his “political philosophy and values.”⁴³ Therefore, months later, on July 31, 1981, President Reagan delivered a carefully prepared statement which aimed to quell some of the swelling controversy over his immigration reform plan without aggravating anti-immigrant sentiment. He reminded the American public that the United States is a land of immigrants and declared undocumented workers to be “productive members of our society” and a pivotal part of the work force. However, he assured critics of his plan that he would “establish control over immigration”

⁴² David Bacon and Bill O. Hing, “The Rise and Fall of Employer Sanctions,” *Forham Urban Law Journal* 38, no. 1 (2010), 85. <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2615&context=ulj>; Benjamin Crouse, “Worksite Raids and Immigration Norms: A ‘Sticky’ Problem,” *Marquette Law Review* 92, no. 3 (2009), 593. <https://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1524&context=mulr>.

⁴³ Memo from Joe Ghougassian to Martin Anderson and Ed Gray, March 4, 1981, Immigration and Refugee Policy, President’s Task Force (1), box 19, Martin Anderson Files, Ronald Reagan Digital Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smaf/assistantpolicydevelopment/anderson/box-019/40-013-12009221-019-012-2018.pdf>.

by strengthening border security and penalizing employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers.⁴⁴ Reagan's revised immigration plan did little to calm emotions, however.

While the majority of Americans insisted Reagan was not doing enough to control immigration, the rest of the country believed his plan was repressive and an abuse of executive power. Mexican scholars and Mexican American activists attacked the plan for making immigrants scapegoats for unemployment and recession and for its potential to worsen the oppression of undocumented workers. Dr. Jorge Bustamante from El Colegio de Mexico in Mexico City and advisor to Mexico's president, José López Portillo y Pacheco, blasted Reagan's proposal, claiming it would force Mexicans in the United States "to exist as a 'sub-class' in a 'caste system.'" According to Bustamante, "Under the 'amnesty' proposal put forth by the administration, Mexicans would have to reside in the United States for ten years before attaining permanent resident status, and during that period they could not bring...their spouses and children under eighteen years old – restrictions far tougher than those applied to normal immigrants. And, they would have to pay various taxes while not being permitted to collect the benefits for which those taxes pay."⁴⁵ Mexican authorities also staunchly opposed federally enforced employer sanctions as this would result in a "massive return of poor people to Mexico."⁴⁶ In addition, Mexican American activists expressed concern that employer sanctions would prompt racial profiling and discriminatory hiring practices against Latinos/as who were U.S. citizens.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "Reagan's Statement on Immigration," *The New York Times*, July 31, 1981, 12, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/31/us/reagan-s-statement-on-immigration.html>.

⁴⁵ Mark Thompson, "Mexican Scholar Blasts Reagan Immigration Plan," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 4, 1981, 8, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/635333946/?terms=Reagan%20immigration&match=1>.

⁴⁶ Minian, 41.

⁴⁷ "Immigration," KXAS-TV news clip, April 29, 1984, The Portal to Texas History, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1176595/m1/?q=Reagan%20immigration>.

By 1982, the year Reagan would formally introduce his plans for the Immigration Reform and Control Act (which would also become known as the Simpson Mazzoli Act when it was finally passed in 1986), criticism on both sides of the political spectrum sent a strong message to the Reagan administration that attempting to walk the tightrope on immigration was not effective. If Reagan wanted to raise his approval ratings and gain support from his constituents for his immigration plan, he would need to take a stronger stance on immigration by increasing cooperation with state and local governments and expanding the authority of the INS. The greatest concern regarding his proposal was the underfunding of these two agencies as well as his reluctance to reduce the number of undocumented workers already in the United States. The conservative American public wanted to see substantial changes, i.e., stronger border enforcements and more deportations, and shortly into his presidency, Reagan was faced with the daunting task of having to appease a dissatisfied constituency that was severely disappointed with the person they recently elected and were soon to re-elect.

II. The INS and Rising Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

In 1981, the INS was coming under increasing attack for alleged inefficiency during a time of recession, but the agency urged the public to direct their frustrations to the federal government, warning that the Reagan administration's new immigration plan would only impede the agency further. In addition, the position of Commissioner of the INS had been vacant since 1979 when Leonel J. Castillo, the agency's first Latino commissioner, resigned to run for mayor of Houston, rendering the agency leaderless for two years before the onset of the recession.⁴⁸ However, in 1981, Reagan appointed his former colleague Alan Nelson as the new commissioner of the INS, and Nelson was determined to change the agency's crumbling reputation, as well as counter some of the attacks aimed at the Reagan administration.⁴⁹ Nelson would bolster the agency's image by using the media to demonstrate to the public that the INS was under new leadership and under control, and that the federal government was becoming more active in controlling immigration.

By the end of the 1970s and into the early 80s, media sensationalism was alerting the American public that not only was the border under attack, but the Mexican "menace" was no longer concentrated solely in the southwest. In 1979, the *El Paso Times* distinguished between the "Mexican urban illegal alien" and the "Mexican rural illegal alien," warning its readers that urban undocumented workers were more dangerous than rural ones because they were more skilled and educated. Unfortunately, according to the article, the INS and Border Patrol were

⁴⁸ "INS Chief Leonel Castillo to Run for Mayor of Houston," *El Paso Times* 99, no. 265, September 22, 1979, 15, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/436147314/?terms=leonel%20castillo%20mayor&match=1>.

⁴⁹ "New Man at INS Has a Major Job," *The Miami Herald*, November 27, 1981, 118, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/629604614/?terms=alan%20nelson%20INS&match=1>.

concentrating all their efforts in the border region and neglecting urban areas with growing immigrant populations.⁵⁰ Another article in *The Lewiston Daily Sun* warned its readers in 1976 that “urban dwellers” were “harder to find than rural workers of the past and therefore less fearful of deportation.”⁵¹ The INS frequently invoked this narrative to petition for more resources to hunt and expel this new urban “menace.”

However, the INS’ lack of success in the cities had nothing to do with what the agency and the nativist media characterized as a new breed of illegal alien that was more threatening and tougher to apprehend. Rather, the INS was more efficiently established in the southwest where they capitalized on a deep-rooted system of collusion between growers and Border Patrolmen. García pointed out that “apprehensions in Texas were the highest during the month of August, the month that marked the end of the seasonal need for stoop labor in the southern portions of that state.”⁵² According to Cristina Salinas, growers’ ability to maintain a steady and reliable undocumented labor force in the southwest relied on mutually beneficial arrangements with Border Patrol officers in which patrolmen agreed to wait until after Harvest season to raid plantations. Through these arrangements, Border patrolmen could count on a certain number of apprehensions to meet their quotas, while growers did not have to worry about business interruptions and could regularly evade paying their workers at the end of the season.⁵³ In the cities, however, colluding with employers was not as effective. While some employers did call the INS to raid their worksites to avoid paying their workers, it was not as common because

⁵⁰ Ed Foster, “Up Front,” *El Paso Times* 99, no. 352, December 18, 1979, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/435858777/?terms=Mexicans%20urban&match=1>.

⁵¹ Holger Jensen, “Invasion of Illegal Aliens Termed Out of Control,” *The Lewiston Daily Sun* 84, June 30, 1976, 23, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/830322355/?terms=illegal%20aliens&match=1>.

⁵² García, 110-112.

⁵³ Cristina Salinas, *Managed Migrations: Growers, Farmworkers, and Border Enforcement in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 61.

business in the cities was more constant than seasonal agricultural work. Most urban employers vehemently resented the INS. It was for this reason that success in the urban sector depended so heavily on a collaborative relationship with local law enforcement.

Unsolved hit-and-run accidents in urban areas were commonly blamed on Mexican immigrants even in cases where authorities did not have substantial proof. An article in *The Los Angeles Times* in 1978 accused Mexican immigrants of being irresponsible and reckless drivers who were determined to avoid authorities at all costs.⁵⁴ News stations in North Texas raised alarms that Mexican immigrants were a danger on the roads after a woman and her son were killed in a car accident in Fort Worth in March of 1981 involving an undocumented driver who fled the scene but was later caught by police. A Fort Worth police officer told NBC news he believed as much as 60 percent of hit and run accidents were caused by uninsured undocumented immigrants, while another officer claimed it was closer to 70 percent. Investigators explained that undocumented immigrants fled the scene after car accidents because they were uninsured, did not have licenses, and were afraid of being deported. In response to rising concerns over hit and run accidents, the head of the Immigration Service in Dallas-Fort Worth, Bill Chambers, blamed the presence of undocumented Mexicans in the community on local businesses for luring them to North Texas.⁵⁵

Mexican men were also habitually blamed for the presence of drugs in urban communities, accused of smuggling them across an unprotected border. An article in Waterloo,

⁵⁴ Mike Ward, "Alien Drivers Seen as Peril on Streets," *The Los Angeles Times* 97, July 9, 1978, 703, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/384391363/?terms=alien%20drivers&match=1>.

⁵⁵ "Accident," KXAS-TV news clip, March 18, 1981, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1177972/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>; "Alien Drivers," KXAS-TV news clip, June 1, 1981, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1176764/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>; "Alien Politics," KXAS-TV news clip, September 24, 1981, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1306820/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>.

Iowa in 1977 warned its readers that Mexicans were “peddling dope” across the border and referred to them as “the very worst type of criminals.”⁵⁶ An article in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1978 reported on the growing concern of heroin addiction in Chicago among black and Latino/a communities, blaming the supply surge on Mexican drug traffickers. According to the article, Mexicans “hide their wealth and work hard at menial jobs as a cover for their drug activities.” The newspaper also generalized “Latino drug dealers” as people “who drive battered klunkers and hide like hermits in one-room apartments.”⁵⁷ When *NBC News* in Fort Worth reported on marijuana smuggling on the border in 1982, they alerted the public to the inability of immigration officials to control trafficking, exclaiming “the enemy is winning, not because of the attitude of the troops in the field, but because there aren’t enough of them.”⁵⁸ Although immigrants were frequently blamed for the presence of drug use and crime in cities, a range of studies have shown that “first-generation immigrants are predisposed to lower crime rates than native-born Americans” and second-generation immigrants. This is especially true of undocumented immigrants, who “have a stronger incentive...to stay out of legal trouble” to avoid deportation.⁵⁹

While Mexican men were portrayed as criminals, the threat of Mexican women was distinctly tied to their sexuality and fertility. Mexican women were frequently accused of prostitution both on the border and in urban areas. For example, in 1978, Tarrant County Judge

⁵⁶ Vinton Times, “Drug ‘Heros,’” *The Courier*, December 18, 1977, 5,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/357605030/?terms=Mexican%20criminals&match=1>.

⁵⁷ Ronald Koziol, “Diamonds, Gold, Silk – But ‘Unemployed,’” and John O’Brien and Ronald Koziol, “Heroin City, U.S.A. – Chicago’s New Title,” *Chicago Tribune* 131, no. 8, January 8, 1978, 1; 24,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/386452677/>.

⁵⁸ “Drug Smuggling,” KXAS-TV news clip, May 14, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, The University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections,

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1309757/m1/?q=drug%20smuggling>.

⁵⁹ Michelle Ye Hee Lee, “Donald Trump’s False Comments Connecting Mexican Immigrants and Crime,” *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/07/08/donald-trumps-false-comments-connecting-mexican-immigrants-and-crime/>.

Jesse Duvall criticized Mexican citizens for their alleged “openness to prostitution” as he was trying female prostitutes in court and declared prostitution to be a “public nuisance” in the community.⁶⁰ The most pressing issue regarding Mexican women in urban areas, however, was the belief that they had too many children. Carly Hayden Foster has examined “gendered racism” in the post-civil rights era, drawing parallels between rhetoric of African American women as *welfare queens* and Latina women as mothers of *anchor babies* in posing immigrant women and women of color as threats to the white majority.⁶¹ In the late seventies, Mexican women were increasingly being accused of purposely having children in the United States to take advantage of welfare for their American-born children and to hopefully gain citizenship for themselves. The U.S. media embellished stories of pregnant Mexican women crossing the Rio Grande to give birth on the U.S. side of the border, as well as stories of Mexican immigrant women having “too many children.”⁶² An NBC news clip in Fort Worth in 1980 reported that Tarrant County taxpayers were paying thousands of dollars in unpaid medical bills for undocumented Mexican women giving birth in a single local hospital.⁶³ The anchor-baby phenomenon became so pronounced that when ABC’s popular medical drama *Having Babies* aired on March 14, 1980, the season premiere featured a fictional story of a Mexican immigrant woman with malaria who gave birth in a U.S. hospital so her child would be born a citizen, and then immediately

⁶⁰ “Prostitution,” KXAS-TV news clip, January 12, 1978, The Portal to Texas History, The University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc939363/m1/?q=Mexican%20prostitution>.

⁶¹ Carly Hayden Foster, “Anchor Babies and Welfare Queens: An Essay on Political Rhetoric, Gendered Racism, and Marginalization,” *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 5, no. 1 (2017), 52. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/stable/10.5406/womgenfamcol.5.1.0050?pq-origsite=summon&seq=3#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁶² Minian, 66.

⁶³ “Illegal Babies,” KXAS-TV news clip, December 3, 1980, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1176193/m1/?q=illegal%20children>.

abandoned the child.⁶⁴ While Mexican men were blamed for crime and job displacement, Mexican women were blamed for draining welfare and increasing unwanted diversity.

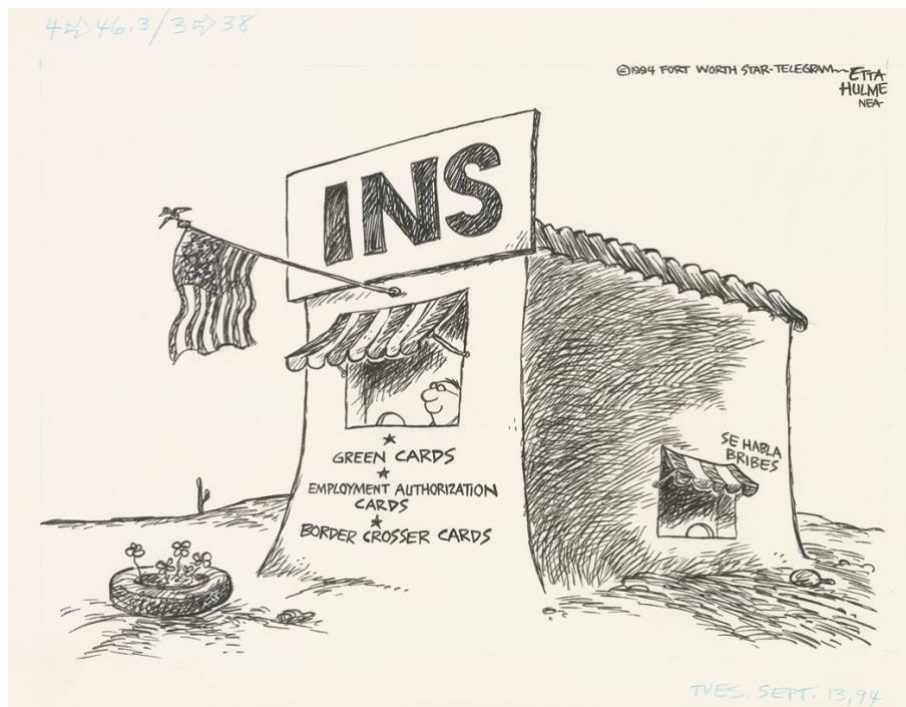
By the start of Reagan's presidency, the notion that the U.S.-Mexico border was a place of drugs and prostitution, and that this dangerous underworld was seeping into urban America was weaving its way into the American imagination. Furthermore, the belief that there were too many Mexicans in the United States was sparking severe public unrest and was reinforced by racialized and gendered rhetoric that focused on crime, job displacement, and welfare. When the recession began in 1981, these issues dominated popular discourse on immigration, mounting public pressure on the INS to take serious action. However, the reputation of the INS and Border Patrol had been souring, and morale within the agencies was plummeting as a result of public sentiment as well as the refusal of the federal government to increase funding and manpower. Immigration officials were not widely trusted or highly regarded, but the American public were still calling on them to do their jobs.

Incompetency and disorganization have long plagued the INS, and Lisa Magaña has credited these problems to popular and political sentiment, "dictated by racism, economic gains, competition for jobs, and even political opportunism." According to Magaña, Congress responded to changing public and political climates by hastily creating new and poorly formulated policies that were "guided more by public sentiment and less by reason," leaving the INS "uncertain as to their goals and mandates," making it "difficult to run the agency."⁶⁵ According to Dorris Meissner, former commissioner of the INS from 1993 to 2000, "Public attitudes demand that someone pay attention to immigration laws." However, Lisa Magaña has

⁶⁴ "'Perfect Gentleman' is a Witty, Stylish Story," *The Index Journal* 60, no. 32 (March 14, 1978), 8, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/71997371/?terms=illegal%20alien%20babies&match=1>.

⁶⁵ Lisa Magaña, *Straddling the Border: Immigration Policy and the INS* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 13; 22; 62.

discussed the willingness of politicians to use immigration issues to gain election, and then quickly abandoning their promises after the elections are over, causing “a general misunderstanding by the public regarding immigration issues.”⁶⁶ Further, Magaña has argued that the abusive behaviors of street-level INS officials were affected by immigration policies, as the agency was “faced with having to implement a service...that [was] limited by program budgets and the dramatic ebb and flow of public opinion.”⁶⁷ Although personal prejudice certainly affected the behavior of individual INS agents, the pressures of operating under difficult and chaotic circumstances while forced to answer to an angry public no doubt impacted much of the abuse and misconduct that occurred in 1982.



Political cartoon featured in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram on September 13, 1994. Photo Courtesy of the Etta Hulme Papers, 1990s, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 3-6; 22.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 65.

The political cartoon above appeared in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in 1994 and it effectively reflects the general public's attitude toward the Immigration and Naturalization Service at this time. The drawing features a small and disheveled shack in the middle of the desert with the letters "INS" written above it, its front side decorated by an old tire filled with some flowers, likely to resemble Mexican-style yard décor. "Green cards," "Employment Authorization Cards," and "Border Crosser Cards" are written on the front of the shack, and there is a small window on the side with the words "Se Habla Bribes," or "We Speak Bribes" written above it.⁶⁸ This cartoon suggests that not only was the agency inefficient and underfunded, but it was too friendly to Mexicans, and therefore counter-productive to federal immigration control.

According to Kitty Calavita, southwestern congressmen deliberately underfunded the Border Patrol and encouraged lax enforcement of the law to maintain a sufficient and steady farm labor supply to serve the economic interests of their states and of themselves.⁶⁹ As a result, they consistently encountered intense public pressure to manifest results while facing constant threats of budget cuts as well as attempts by some members of congress to shut the agency down altogether. García credited this "vicious circle" to an institutional conflict in which powerful private interest groups profiting from undocumented labor manipulated their control over local and national politics to pressure the Border Patrol to "go easy" during Harvest season. Throughout this period, legislators consistently denied requests by the INS and Border Patrol for increased funding and personnel and deliberately passed legislation to limit their effectiveness yet pointed to their ineffectiveness as the reason for congress' continued denial of increased

⁶⁸ Etta Hulme, "Se Habla Bribes," Etta Hulme Papers, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, Special Collections, <https://libraries.uta.edu/ettahulme/image/20108650>.

⁶⁹ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 38-39.

appropriations. “Immigration officials were told repeatedly” that appropriations must be earned by proving “they could do the job,” but “when the Border Patrol did undertake intensive measures to stop the influx, the same detractors accused it of being wasteful and inefficient.”⁷⁰

The American public, however, aggravated by the media, persistently blamed the “influx” of “wetback” labor on the inefficiency of the Border Patrol. García has discussed intense social pressure and harassment of Border Patrol officials and their families in the southwest in the 1950s, claiming they were sometimes “denied hotel accommodations, housing, and service in restaurants” and “their wives were socially ostracized, and their children harassed at school.”⁷¹ Border Patrol officials were asked to do an impossible job designed to fail by the very legislators who scapegoated them for the ineffectiveness of the nation’s immigration enforcement, and this pattern continued throughout the twentieth century.

News stories frequently complained of “unguarded borders” and the inability of immigration officials to handle their workload, but the inefficiency of the Border Patrol became even more apparent in the mid-1970s, when a surplus of labor in Mexico prompted Mexican authorities to discontinue their efforts to restrict undocumented migration, placing the burden almost entirely on the United States.⁷² *NBC News* in Fort Worth declared in 1981, “illegal aliens can cross to the United States at will” and “the Border Patrol is hard pressed to stop them.”⁷³ A 1980 article in the *Tallahassee Democrat* titled “America’s Borders Guarded by Problem-Plagued Agency” claimed, “In a typical year, the agency deals with more than a quarter of a billion people at America’s gateways,” but because of a staff shortage and an inadequate record-

⁷⁰ García, 110-117.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Minian, 41.

⁷³ “Brownsville Border,” KXAS-TV news clip, August 21, 1981, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1163385/m1/?q=border%20patrol>.

keeping system, the INS “doesn’t know whether there are two million aliens in the country illegally – or ten million.” The article went on further to say, “The agency needs a leader” addressing the recent resignation of Leonel J. Castillo.⁷⁴ In labeling the INS a “bureaucratic nightmare” unable to handle its “mountains of paperwork,” an article in the *Spokane Chronicle* claimed that some of the agency’s problems were “its own doing,” crediting “‘inbreeding’ – promoting its own employees instead of hiring outside talent.”⁷⁵ The INS was frequently characterized as problematic, mismanaged, and unreliable, and whether the public was placing blame on the federal government or the agency itself, the perception that immigration officials were incapable of performing their duties was a serious concern.

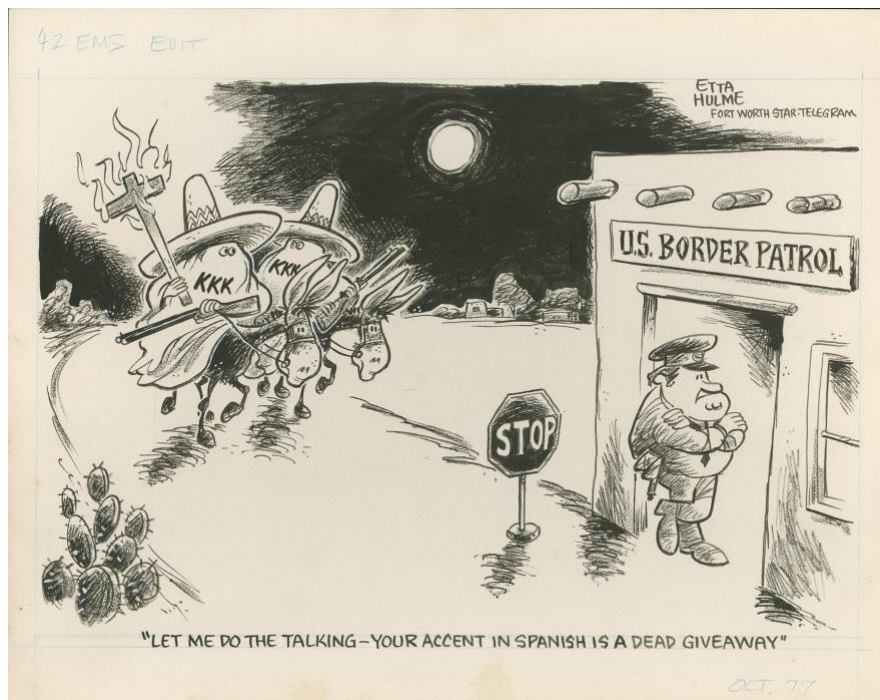


Photo Courtesy of the Etta Hulme’s Papers, 1970s, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

⁷⁴ Mike Feinsilber, “America’s Borders Guarded by Problem-Plagued Agency,” *Tallahassee Democrat* 57, no. 209, August 3, 1980, 11, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/246744085/>.

⁷⁵ Jack Anderson, “Merry Go Round,” *Spokane Chronicle* 95, no. 41, November 7, 1980, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/564963277/?terms=immigration%20and%20naturalization%20service&match=1>.

The political cartoon above was published in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in 1977 and it features two Mexicans dressed as Ku Klux Klan members attempting to trick the U.S. Border Patrol in order to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. This cartoon effectively captures public opinion of the agency leading up to Project Jobs. First, the Border Patrol officer is alone and facing the opposite way, relying on a small “Stop” sign to control the checkpoint, reflecting the belief that the agency lacked funding and manpower. Second, the attempt by two Mexicans to cross the checkpoint dressed in KKK robes and sombreros, while holding a burning cross and riding donkeys, suggests both racism and incompetency. Although the two Mexicans are portrayed as senseless by attempting to cross the border in poorly designed disguises, the indication that they will be successful is a greater insult to the officer who will let them in. The dialogue at the bottom of the cartoon, which suggests that these border crossers will communicate with the officer in Spanish, further indicates the cartoonists opinion that crossing the border is relatively easy. Finally, the immigrants’ attempt to manipulate the officer by posing as Klan members demonstrates the belief that Border Patrol officers were racist. While the cartoonist mocks both Mexican immigrants and the U.S. Border Patrol, the overarching theme of an unsecured border reflects the commonplace border anxiety that characterized this era.

In response to accusations of inefficiency, immigration officials consistently returned to the excuse that there were simply too many Mexicans crossing the border and not enough money or manpower to stop them. When questioned on a report in 1980 that there were an estimated 100,000 undocumented immigrants living in the Dallas Fort-Worth metropolplex, INS Director William Chambers in Dallas responded to reporters, “We have more aliens...than we can

handle.”⁷⁶ Employees in naturalization processing centers complained of “a lack of computerization,” making it virtually impossible to process the estimated ten million applications filed every year, and were wary that the Reagan administration would make the problem worse as millions of new immigrants filed for amnesty. One employee complained to a reporter, “We might as well just close the service right now.” In 1981, *Washington Post* reporter Charles R. Babcock referred to the INS as the “unwanted stepchild of the Justice Department.” According to Babcock, “The horror stories from customers are as endless as the lines at the district offices. Phones and letters go unanswered. Files are lost. Routine applications take months or even years to process.”⁷⁷

Criticism pointing to INS inefficiency became so widespread that in 1981 Southern Regional Commissioner of the INS Ed O’Connor wrote a letter to *The Los Angeles Times* challenging an editorial the newspaper published condemning the agency. O’Connor spelled out the agency’s accomplishments over the last year, disclosing exact figures, including that they had apprehended 517,384 undocumented people and deported 114,270 of them, as well as inspected more than 89 million people at the border, seized 1,969 vehicles, and “presented 3,372 smuggling cases for prosecution resulting in 2,870 convictions.” In response to an increasing workload, however, O’Connor blamed problematic immigration laws, as well as the federal government’s failure to make immigration a priority.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ “Alien Immigration and Naturalization Service,” KXAS-TV news clip, September 4, 1980, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1286358/m1/?q=Immigration%20and%20naturalization%20service>.

⁷⁷ Charles R. Babcock, “Overloaded Agency Wary of Changes,” *The Journal Herald* 174, no. 206, August 28, 1981, 11, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/391945088/?terms=immigration%20and%20naturalization%20service&match=1>.

⁷⁸ Ed O’Connor, “Accomplishments of Immigration Service,” *The Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1981, 51, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/389015422/?terms=immigration%20and%20naturalization%20service&match=1>.

Not all complaints directed at immigration officials pointed to inefficiency, however, as many were much more concerned with allegations of misconduct and abuse. In May of 1972 the Justice Department launched an investigation into the INS called Operation Clean Sweep in response to allegations of “sexual misconduct, physical abuse of immigrants, allowing entry of certain aliens for illegal purposes, bribery, smuggling of narcotics, and smuggling of aliens themselves.”⁷⁹ The American public had been alert to INS misconduct since Operation Wetback, when “wild charges” of brutality, abuse and “heartless treatment of Mexican families” achieved widespread publicity.⁸⁰ Operation Wetback shed an unflattering spotlight on the agency, prompting a surge of complaints in the coming decade, but the reputation of the government agency deteriorated even further when Operation Clean Sweep uncovered a prostitution ring run by immigration officials on the border. According to reports, border patrol agents were soliciting Mexican prostitutes and using them to compromise and bribe high profile government officials, including the House Judiciary Committee chairman, Peter Rodino.⁸¹ Those implicated in crimes connected to INS misconduct included “individual congressmen in both political parties, members of congressional staffs, a federal judge, and some officials of the executive branch.”⁸² In response to the widespread corruption unveiled during Operation Clean Sweep, INS officials

⁷⁹ “‘Operation Clean Sweep.’ Program Aimed at Ending Abuses of Immigrants About to Take Effect,” *Corsicana Daily Sun* 78, no. 23, September 27, 1973, 9,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/42627899/?terms=operation%20clean%20sweep&match=1>.

⁸⁰ Hoyt Hager, “Current Wetback Roundup Methods Arouse Antipathy,” *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 73, no. 156, July 20, 1954, 24,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/755864089/?terms=operation%20wetback%20abuse&match=1>.

⁸¹ “House Probes Alleged INS Corruption,” *The El Paso Times* 94, no. 226, August 14, 1974, 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/434465724/?terms=prostitute%20border&match=1>; “Implies Prostitutes Used in Border Ploy,” *The Kansas City Times* 106, no. 274, July 24, 1974, 11,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/676548833/?terms=prostitute%20border&match=1>.

⁸² Frank Del Olmo, “U.S. Border Corruption Tape Mentions Rodino,” *The Capital Times* 115, no. 34, July 23, 1974, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/520931987/?terms=operation%20clean%20sweep&match=1>.

insisted that the issues were not reflective of the agency, but were instead caused by “a few bad apples,” reflecting some inter-departmental tension.⁸³

Following Operation Clean Sweep, the reputation of the INS as a crooked government agency was made apparent in the 1982 film *The Border*, starring Jack Nicholson and directed by Tony Richardson. When the film’s main character Charlie Smith, played by Jack Nicholson, loses his job and moves to Texas to become a border patrolman, he is exposed to a world of violence, corruption, and incompetence on the U.S.-Mexico border. His first day on the job, Smith’s colleague, Hawker, played by Alan Fudge, refers to the border fence as a “tortilla curtain,” referencing the new controversial border fencing that was erected in 1978. According to Oscar J. Martinez, “Heated controversy broke out when the public learned of the design of the fences, which included barbed wire with sharp razors that would have the potential to maim climbers.”⁸⁴ The “tortilla curtain” was a play on the Cold War-era Iron Curtain, in reference to the political boundaries erected in Europe between the Soviet Union and non-communist countries. Hawker uses the term, however, to denigrate it as weak and ineffective, explaining that it is only three miles long, but most people cut holes in it to save time, validating common concerns that it did nothing to slow or discourage immigration.⁸⁵

Hawker later spots some migrants trying to sneak across the border by using a tunnel underneath the fence, and after he chases them back into the tunnel, he turns to Smith and says, “Day workers mostly. Come over in the mornin’, go back at night. No way to stop ‘em, no point in really botherin’. You ever throw dirt clods as a kid? Well, it’s the same damn game.”⁸⁶

⁸³ “‘Operation Clean Sweep.’ Program Aimed at Ending Abuses of Immigrants About to Take Effect.”

⁸⁴ Oscar J. Martinez, “Border Conflict, Border Fences, and the ‘Tortilla Curtain’ Incident of 1978-1979,” *Journal of the Southwest* 50, no. 3 (2008), 263, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40170391?seq=1>.

⁸⁵ *The Border*, directed by Tony Richardson, screenplay by Deric Washburn, Walton Green, and David Freeman, featuring Jack Nicholson and Harvey Keitel (Universal Pictures, 1982), 0:18:24

⁸⁶ *The Border*, 0:19:00

Hawker's comments illustrate the agency's apparent helplessness in controlling border crossings, supporting public sentiment that border patrolmen were overwhelmed with work and intentionally neglected their duties. In the film, Smith's colleagues regularly acknowledge the seemingly pointless and endless cycle of their jobs in which they play pawns in a capitalist game. One patrolman says to Smith, "Seems kind of silly, don't it? We're bustin' our asses to send 'em back, and respectable businesspeople payin' to bring 'em in." Discouraged by inefficiency and financial hardships, Smith eventually chooses to work with the drug cartels and coyotes, accepting bribes to turn a blind eye to the smuggling of drugs and people across the border.⁸⁷ The film's portrayal of border patrolmen indicates that before the onset of Project Jobs, the American public had little faith in the federal government's ability to control immigration, and the INS' tainted image was increasing unrest and anxiety over border security.

When President Reagan appointed Alan Nelson as the new commissioner of the INS on September 23, 1981, Nelson was faced with the daunting task of finding a way to undo some of the irreparable damage that had been done to the agency's reputation following a two-year period when the position of commissioner of the INS had been vacant. An article in *The Miami Herald*, published on November 27, 1981, was largely optimistic that Nelson was just the man for the job, "capable of solving the problems of inefficiency and understaffing that have plagued the agency in recent years." Many were pleased by the fact that Nelson had a close working relationship with the new president, as they had worked well together when he was a member of Reagan's Administration in California.⁸⁸

Others were skeptical. Tony Bonilla, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) ardently opposed Nelson's nomination, accusing the Reagan administration

⁸⁷ *The Border*, 0:34:37

⁸⁸ "New Man at INS Has a Major Job."

of cronyism. Bonilla stated, “Reagan’s administration is top-heavy with cronies from the president’s staff or friends. This allows no independent thought – no opposition of any type. This was the same atmosphere that brought in Watergate... We are disappointed once again that the administration wouldn’t have appointed a Hispanic.”⁸⁹ While some wanted to see Nelson restructure the INS, others were concerned that his lack of expertise on the subject of immigration as well as his relationship with the president would result in more dysfunction.

Despite mixed feelings regarding his appointment, Nelson wasted little time in settling into his new position, quickly making national headlines for his crackdown on immigration. In addition to “Project Jobs,” Nelson was also credited with busting “the largest alien smuggling ring ever broken, by INS agents” at the time. In June of 1982, under Nelson’s direction, two undercover immigration agents penetrated an “alien smuggling ring” called the Villasana Organization, who were “believed to have smuggled into the United States about 2,000 aliens each month, grossing more than \$24 million a year.” Nelson claimed that these immigrants “came from Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Central American countries,” and that “the ring may have smuggled as many as 100,000 into the United States during its four-year operation.” Immigrants were squeezed into car trunks three to four at a time and driven to various locations, reaching as far as New York. Nelson was glorified for his role in the operation, which resulted in thirty-eight indictments.⁹⁰

Nelson also oversaw increasing numbers of workplace raids, but many were concerned and even outraged over some of the methods being used. For example, in March of 1982, Nelson was named as a key defendant in a lawsuit filed by four Latinos who alleged that during a sting

⁸⁹ Jo Ann Zuniga, “LULAC is Opposing Nominee for INS Post,” *Corpus Christi Times*, November 20, 1981, 3, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/760159639/?terms=alan%20nelson&match=1>.

⁹⁰ “38 Persons Indicted for Alien Smuggling,” *The Kilgore News Herald* 51, no. 148, June 24, 1982, 5, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/612289624/?terms=alan%20nelson&match=1>.

operation in El Paso, Border Patrol agents “violated the rights of Mexican Americans” by racially profiling Latino/a U.S. citizens, making illegal arrests, and questioning people “without warrants or probable cause.” One of the plaintiffs, Pascual Mendoza, claimed that he was drinking in a bar when officers “burst in and demanded proof of citizenship from all the Mexican Americans in the bar.” When Mendoza handed them his birth certificate, the officers accused him of stealing it because he did not speak English. They arrested him for “being drunk,” and after he was released, they refused to return his birth certificate to him.⁹¹ Latino/a U.S. citizens were frequently mistaken for undocumented workers and subjected to harassment and abuse, and oftentimes, wrongful arrest.

According to Minian, “as early as 1973, immigration agents decided to ‘step up’ their drives against migrants in response to the growing media attention on the issue.” And although these “efforts did not reduce the number of unauthorized workers in the United States, they did make a clear public statement that Mexicans were not wanted in the country.”⁹² When Alan Nelson assumed a leadership role within possibly the most highly strained and controversial government agency at a time when the president who appointed him was facing intense pressure to secure the border and reduced undocumented workers in the country amidst a national recession, he knew he needed to demonstrate control and efficiency, whether this reconstructed image of the INS was genuine or not. Doris Meissner, commissioner of the INS from 1993 to 2000, has claimed “citizens need to *believe* that the INS can control immigration.”⁹³ When Project Jobs was launched in April of 1982, the number of apprehensions were relatively modest,

⁹¹ “Suit Names Former Border Chief,” *Longview News-Journal* 111, no. 51, March 12, 1982, 6, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/191040847/?terms=alan%20nelson&match=1>.

⁹² Minian, 71.

⁹³ Magaña, 22.

but excessive media attention exaggerated the operation's success. Some believed that the new commissioner and the new president were collaborating to finally "do something" about immigration. However, as Meissner has pointed out, it was all a façade, a political stunt that did not substantially reduce the number of undocumented workers in the country but *did* fuel anti-immigrant sentiment and victimize thousands of innocent people and their families.

III. Undocumented Workers in Urban America

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the 1980s saw an aggressive increase in “immigration raids in Mexican and Central American communities in Los Angeles... They were so frequent that, for many immigrants in the country illegally, their children and other Latinos, it became a fact of life.” Richard “Cheech” Marin, writer, director, and lead actor in the 1987 film “Born in East LA,” commented on the roundups, stating, “I remember how normal it was. They were happening all around, and you were reading about it in the newspapers all the time.”⁹⁴ As Mexican immigration was rapidly increasing in the seventies because of a severe unemployment crisis in Mexico, urban workers and state officials became alarmed at the noticeable shift in the settling patterns of Mexican migrants. In contrast to the anti-immigrant sentiment prior to Operation Wetback, which focused its concerns on undocumented labor in the agricultural sector concentrated in the southwest, local news stories beginning in the seventies were becoming increasingly alert to an increase of immigrants to urban areas.

The termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 coupled with urbanization in the seventies prompted Mexican migrants to begin relocating to cities rather than settling in rural communities because the work in cities “tended to be less strenuous, was more stable, and paid higher wages.” As a result, immigrants were becoming “more visible on city streets,” sparking a new concern that migrants were coming after the jobs of white, blue-collar citizens.⁹⁵ An article in 1975 warned its readers that “illegal aliens no longer concentrate in the Southwest, working in

⁹⁴ Ruben Vives, “‘I Left My Tacos on the Table and Took Off Running.’ Immigrants Remember the Workplace Raids of the 1980s,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-immigration-trump-fears-20170109-story.html>.

⁹⁵ Minian, 56-57.

the asparagus, lettuce, and cotton fields. Now they head for the big cities and better paying jobs.”⁹⁶ Even more concerning, INS officials claimed undocumented workers were more difficult to apprehend in the cities, sparking public unrest, which allowed the INS to advocate for more federal and local support to police the “urban illegal alien.” The 1980s, therefore, marked a crucial milestone for the relationship between federal immigration officials and municipal police departments, delineating a key distinction between Project Jobs and INS operations before it.

While immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border had been rapidly increasing since the 1970s, two important developments caused it to explode after 1980.⁹⁷ The first was the 1980 Refugee Act, which caused a massive increase of Central American and Caribbean migrants fleeing political turmoil to cross the border seeking asylum. The 1980 Refugee Act changed the definition of “refugee” from a person fleeing a communist country to any person with a “well-founded fear of persecution.”⁹⁸ Beginning in the 1980s, the United States became involved in a series of counterinsurgency wars in Central America to suppress communist subversion following the Vietnam War. The U.S. contributed to the conflicts by supplying weapons to rightist authoritarian regimes in areas such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Cuba, which served to intensify political violence and genocide. As a result, a large number of asylum-seekers fleeing the violence came to the U.S.-Mexico border. It is estimated that between 1981

⁹⁶ “Washington Report from William H. Harsha,” *Washington C.H. Record-Herald* 117, no. 113, April 23, 1975, 9, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/87374624/?terms=Immigration%20and%20naturalization%20service&match=1>.

⁹⁷ “U.S. Immigrant Population and Share Over Time, 1850-Present,” Migration Policy Institute, Accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time>.

⁹⁸ *An Act to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to Revise the Procedures for the Admission of Refugees, to Amend the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 to Establish a More Uniform Basis for the Provision of Assistance to refugees, and for Other Purposes (Refugee Act of 1980)*, Public Law 96-212, S. 643, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., Introduced in House March 6, 1980, <https://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/refugee-act-1980/#:~:text=It%20raised%20the%20annual%20ceiling,between%20Congress%20and%20the%20President.>

and 1990, “one million refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala” entered the United States. However, despite the lure and promise of the 1980 Refugee Act, “the Reagan administration rejected almost all Central American applicants” for political asylum, so many refugees were forced to enter the country “illegally.” Various churches and religious groups created a version of the “underground railroad” which transported refugees across the border and moved them “into the safety of churches and people’s homes.”⁹⁹

The second major event was the devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1982. Against the backdrop of the world recession in 1980, Mexico’s oil exports dropped significantly as “international oil markets became oversupplied because of the drop in energy demand,” firing a substantial blow to the national economy. In an effort to stimulate the economy by encouraging exports and discouraging imports, the Mexican government devalued the peso in February of 1982 and again in August of the same year, when it lost half of its value. That year, inflation reached 100 percent in Mexico, and unemployment reached 40 percent, causing extreme impoverishment. Meanwhile, U.S. citizens eagerly ventured across the border to take advantage of the peso devaluation by “hoarding” cheap products, causing food and supply shortages on the Mexican side of border towns. After the August devaluation, each U.S. dollar was worth one hundred and thirty pesos in Mexico. This, in turn, meant Mexicans lost considerable buying power on the U.S. side of the border, which drastically damaged local transnational border economies, especially in “small towns where much of the employment [was] concentrated in retail trade.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, as Mexicans surged across the border to escape high unemployment

⁹⁹ Virginia S. Williams, Roger Peace, and Jeremy Kuzmarov, “Central America Wars, 1980s,” United States Foreign Policy History and Resource Guide Website, 2018, Accessed March 23, 2023, <http://peacehistory-usfp.org/central-america-wars/>.

¹⁰⁰ Jay Matthews, “Peso Devaluation Causes Turmoil,” *The Washington Post*, August 29, 1982, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/08/28/peso-devaluation-causes-turmoil/292443e2-7fae->

and a depressed economy, they arrived to find eerily similar conditions in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, encouraging many to venture north in search of jobs. News of Mexicans migrating northward to urban industrial towns created a xenophobic hysteria amongst blue-collar U.S. citizens that Mexicans were coming to steal their jobs.

As 1970s “invasion” rhetoric shifted from rural to urban concerns, cooperation between federal immigration officials and municipal police became a crucial element to immigration policing in the cities. According to Amada Armenta, the 1980’s experienced a rise in cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration officials as a “professional courtesy” – partnerships that became even stronger in the 1990’s and 2000’s.¹⁰¹ Before the Secure Communities program was piloted in 2008, however, which enabled local police to check the immigration status of every person arrested for a crime, it was often against local and federal policies to do so. For example, in 1978, the attorney general of the Department of Justice issued a press release declaring it was not the responsibility of local police forces to enforce immigration laws. In 1979, at the local level, “the Los Angeles Police Department issued a policy, Special Order 40, banning immigration investigations,” yet according to Armenta, “some officers did so anyway.” Other police departments “took a more permissive attitude toward immigration enforcement,” including Dallas and San Diego.¹⁰²

As pointed out by Laura E. Gómez, “It is no coincidence that some of the most draconian anti-immigrant state and local laws are coming out of the South...where local police are more likely to partner with ICE.”¹⁰³ Dallas, for example, one of the most successful sites in the 1982

[49dc-bdc5-8cd74fae14ad/](https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1985/10/art3full.pdf); Louis Harrell and Dale Fischer, “The 1982 Mexican Peso Devaluation and Border Area Employment,” *Monthly Labor Review* (October 1985), 25-30, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1985/10/art3full.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Amada Armenta, *Protect, Serve, and Deport: The Rise of Policing as Immigration Enforcement* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 2-4.

¹⁰² Armenta, 25-26.

¹⁰³ Laura E. Gómez, *Inventing Latinos: A New Story of American Racism* (United Kingdom: New Press, 2020), 10.

INS operation, was also highly cooperative with federal immigration officials and continues to be today. Marc J. Moore, the field officer director for enforcement and removal operations at ICE's Dallas office, said that 70 percent of their arrests occur after they are notified by local jails and state prisons, and that the Dallas area currently leads the nation in ICE arrests. Randy Capps, director of research for U.S. programs at the D.C.-based Migration Policy Institute, said in 2019, "North Texas law enforcement officials are simply more friendly toward federal immigration enforcement" than other states or even other parts of Texas. California, for example, has limited their cooperation with federal immigration officials, as well as Houston, whose mayor, Sylvester Turner, announced in 2017 that the Houston Police Department would continue to refuse to cooperate with ICE, despite Governor Greg Abbot's threats to "punish" Texas cities for acting as sanctuary cities. The same week as Turner's announcement, Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings announced on a Dallas radio station that despite public sentiment, Dallas was not a sanctuary city, and that the local police would continue to follow federal immigration laws and to cooperate with federal officials in reporting and detaining undocumented immigrants.¹⁰⁴

Caroline B. Brettel has argued that local politics have played a substantial role in a city's enforcement or lack thereof of immigration laws, because "particular individuals in positions of leadership can make a difference in setting an inclusionary or exclusionary course."¹⁰⁵ Dallas County's foreign-born population increased significantly between 1970 and 1980, and then doubled between 1980 and 1990, causing rising hysteria that Latinos/as would soon replace the

¹⁰⁴ Dianne Solis, "Where in the U.S. Are Immigrants Most Likely to be Caught by ICE?" *The Dallas Morning News*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/immigration/2019/10/09/us-immigrants-likely-caught-ice/>; Leif Reigstad, "More Than One Million Undocumented People Live in Houston and Dallas Combined," *Texas Monthly*, February 13, 2017, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-daily-post/one-million-undocumented-people-live-houston-dallas-combined/>.

¹⁰⁵ Audrey Singer, Susan Wiley, and Hardwick and Caroline Brettel, *Twenty-First-Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 78.

white majority in the county. In 1971, congressman Jim Collins warned his constituents that Dallas County was becoming a “favorite” destination for immigrants “because of its size, location and industry,” and that the problems resulting from immigration were “manifold” because they contributed to unemployment and drained welfare. Collins announced that Dallas was “rapidly approaching an illegal alien epidemic stage,” and that deportations were increasing in the area to combat the problem.¹⁰⁶ In discussing the escalating immigration to Dallas and other urban areas in 1974, Jeff Long of the *Grand Prairie Daily News* pointed out that the INS was underfunded and understaffed, which impeded their ability to control immigration. He explained that the Texas Department of Labor Standards, in charge of licensing labor recruiters, were “powerless to stop aliens” because they had “no police powers,” and therefore could not “carry firearms or make arrests.”¹⁰⁷ William Chambers, district director of the local office of the INS in Dallas commented that Dallas was “one of the first major stopping grounds for illegal aliens coming from Mexico,” but that the agency lacked the manpower to police them.¹⁰⁸ In examining concerns among local government officials that the INS was incapable of controlling immigration, it is not surprising that Dallas County would turn to local law enforcement for assistance.

When local police officers acted as immigration enforcement agents, however, it compounded issues of police brutality, which was rooted in the organizational culture of certain local police departments.¹⁰⁹ Dallas, for example, a city with a strong and highly influential Klan

¹⁰⁶ “Dallas, Favorite of Illegal Aliens,” *Grand Prairie Daily News* 23, no. 117, May 17, 1971, 5, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/15188845/>.

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Long, “Illegal Aliens Count Reaches 800,000,” *Grand Prairie Daily News* 67, no. 11, November 15, 1974, 6, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/15254775/?terms=illegal%20aliens&match=1>.

¹⁰⁸ Peggy Smith, “Carter Alien Plan Expected to Have Major Impact Here,” *Irving Daily News*, August 10, 1977, 10, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/58594741/?terms=illegal%20aliens%20&match=1>.

¹⁰⁹ Felker-Kantor, 2; David Brooke, “The Culture of Policing is Broken,” *The Atlantic*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/how-police-brutality-gets-made/613030/>.

presence, was declared “the number one city for police shootings in the nation in 1987.”¹¹⁰ Dallas police officers terrorized black and brown communities in the 1970s and 80s, and their actions regularly went unpunished. In 1970, Dallas police officer Darrell Cain shot and killed black eighteen-year-old Michael Morehead after he and his brother stole food from a local restaurant. Cain shot Morehead in the back as he was running away, then fired more shots into his body “as he lay wounded on the ground, pleading for his life.”¹¹¹ The Dallas County Grand Jury found Officer Cain innocent of any wrongdoing, ruling he had acted “in the line of duty.”¹¹² Three years later, the same officer was again implicated in allegations of misconduct when he shot and killed a twelve-year-old Mexican American boy named Santos Rodríguez while playing a game of Russian roulette as he was handcuffed in the back of Cain’s squad car. Furious black and brown protesters took to the streets of Dallas to demand justice for Rodríguez, and this time Cain was found guilty of murder but was only sentenced to five years in prison.¹¹³

The relationship between the Dallas Police Department and the Ku Klux Klan was made apparent on July 16, 1983, when five hundred and fifty Dallas police officers guarded sixty Klansmen as they marched through downtown during a white supremacist rally. According to NBC News, the Dallas police department had been planning the parade for months, costing Dallas taxpayers an estimate of \$8,000 in resources.¹¹⁴ Marches like this were held every few years, and the Dallas police department continued to maintain close involvement. Topics surrounding immigration were frequently addressed at these parades as Klansmen called for

¹¹⁰ Max Krochmal and J. Todd Moyer, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown: Histories of Struggle and Resistance in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 224.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 222.

¹¹² “Police Shooting Deemed Dutiful,” WBAP-TV news script, May 27, 1970, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1268317/citation/?q=michael%20morehead#cite>.

¹¹³ Krochmal, 222-224.

¹¹⁴ “Klan March,” KXAS-TV newsclip, July 16, 1983, The Portal to Texas History, The University of North Texas Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1282861/m1/?q=klan%20march>.

stricter immigration laws and protested future amnesty and guest worker programs. The photo below captures Grand Dragon Charles Lee as he shouted, “Close our borders” through a microphone across a sea of white supremacists.¹¹⁵



Dallas police officers protecting Klansmen from protestors at a KKK march in downtown Dallas, July 16, 1983. Photo courtesy of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram Collection, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

¹¹⁵ Joe Giron, “Dallas police officers at Ku Klux Klan march in downtown Dallas,” Fort Worth Star-Telegram Collection, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, 1983, <https://library.uta.edu/digitalgallery/img/10019727>.



This photo features a multi-racial group of protesters holding a banner that reads “Death to the Klan” at the Dallas KKK march in 1983, as they are contained behind a wooden fence and a wall of police to protect the safety of the Klansmen. The group holds members from the Coalition for Human Dignity, the Mexican American Brown Berets, the East Dallas Bois D’Arc Patriots, as well as feminist and LGBT activist groups. Photo Courtesy of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram Collection, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act permitted immigration officials to “interrogate any person believed to be unlawfully residing in the country,” essentially legalizing the practice of racial profiling for the purpose of policing immigration, and local police officers were amply useful for this task because they had more daily access to the general public than INS officials.¹¹⁶ Therefore, routine traffic stops, house calls, and patrol duties became grounds for interrogation, thereby considerably extending the INS’ reach in cities like Dallas. A special NBC news report in 1985 announced that “on average, thirty illegal immigrants are rounded up

¹¹⁶ Arnolando Toral, “*La Migra* in 1980s Los Angeles: Exploitation, Unemployment, and the Legality of the INS Raids,” MA Thesis (Northridge: California State University, 2021), 19, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59adf409cd39c3b55facd701/t/60ef2d898e78d3026206f4d3/1626287498040/C/SUN+2021+Arnolando+Toral+-+La+migra+in+1980s+Los+Angeles.pdf>.

every day in the Dallas Fort Worth area,” and local police officers were frequently involved in the raids.¹¹⁷ For example, on May 14, 1982, the road leading to a Dallas Spanish-speaking drive-in movie theater was blocked by local police officers as they checked each car one at a time, demanding citizenship papers from every driver in line. Those who could not produce documentation were promptly arrested and forced to leave their families behind. Many wives and children were left stranded on the side of the road because they were unable to drive. Upon interrogation, the police department argued that the roadblock was not a “roundup,” but simply a “routine check to enforce the laws of Texas,” a response designed to quell allegations that they were acting outside their jurisdiction by conducting themselves as immigration officials.¹¹⁸

Arresting undocumented immigrants served a double purpose for the city. Not only could they aid the federal government in controlling the immigrant population in their cities, but they also profited financially from arresting them. When an undocumented immigrant was arrested on criminal charges, their families often paid hefty bonds for their release while they awaited trial, at which point they could request for the bond money to be returned to them. However, most undocumented immigrants did not show up to trial, either intentionally to avoid deportation, or because they had already been deported by another city. Therefore, the cities usually kept the bond money, a crucial motivation factor for local police departments to target undocumented immigrants.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ “INS Raids,” NBC News clip, December 5, 1985, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1159975/m1/?q=INS>.

¹¹⁸ “Cockrell Roadblock,” KXAS-TV news clip, May 14, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1245518/m1/?q=Mexicans>.

¹¹⁹ Jolie McCullough, “Cash is Piling Up in Kinney County From Bonds Posted to Free Migrants Arrested Under Texas Border Crackdown,” *The Texas Tribune*, May 13, 2022, <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/05/13/texas-border-migrants-cash-bonds/>.

Those brave enough to challenge local law enforcement's legal jurisdiction to act as federal immigration officials rarely succeeded. For example, in 1982, Raul Gonzales, a Mexican citizen with lawful U.S. residency status sued the Peoria Police Department of Illinois for violating their jurisdiction by enforcing federal immigration law, and for making unlawful traffic stops and arrests without probable cause. On June 26, 1978, Raul Gonzales was in a car with three of his friends on their way home from the post office when Peoria police officer, William Cain, pulled them over for no reason other than he suspected they were undocumented. While Gonzales was a legal resident, two of his friends were undocumented, yet all four were arrested when they could not present valid documentation and were subsequently turned over to the U.S. Border Patrol for processing. After Gonzales was eventually released, his lawyers discovered a series of similar incidents between 1977 and 1981 and put together a case that exposed an intermingled and collaborative relationship between the Peoria Police Department and the INS. Ultimately, only two of the twelve plaintiffs showed up to testify, and the United States District Court of Arizona ruled that the Peoria Police Department had acted in accordance with the law.¹²⁰ The *Gonzales v. Peoria* trial took place the same week as the April roundups of Project Jobs, setting an important precedent that it was acceptable for local law enforcement to act as federal immigration officers, as well as to make traffic stops and arrests based on racial profiling. Ultimately, cooperation between federal immigration officials and local police departments intensified the power of law enforcement in enforcing immigration laws in the 1970s and 80s, causing Latino/a populations to become the most criminalized ethnic group in the country.

¹²⁰ Raul Gonzales v. The City of Peoria, 537 F. Supp. 793, United States District Court of Arizona, April 19, 1982, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/537/793/2348121/>.

In November of 1979, attorney general Benjamin Civiletti issued an order restricting INS raids to workplaces rather than private residences, further shining a spotlight on employers who hired undocumented workers.¹²¹ This order had a stronger impact in urban areas, where companies' "illegal" workforces were more visible to the public, but employers insisted it was impossible to know unequivocally if they were hiring citizens because undocumented workers produced fraudulent documents that appeared valid. In 1987, for example, INS officials busted a counterfeit document scheme that had made millions from selling fake "Social Security cards, driver's licenses, baptismal certificates, and rent receipts," as well as offering "expensive and often unnecessary advice" to desperate immigrants.¹²² However, Magaña has argued that employers often encourage the use of fraudulent documents to protect themselves against legal consequences when hiring undocumented workers, sometimes capitalizing on this legal loophole by calling the "INS to raid their own worksites, thereby avoiding the need to pay wages. Such actions are not penalized because the employer can claim that he or she examined the documentation."¹²³

Although Latino/a activists were wary that enacting penalties against employers would worsen racial profiling against American citizens with brown skin, many black activists and even some Mexican Americans were in favor of employer sanctions because of a popular narrative that migrant workers displaced poor black and Latino/a workers, incidentally the central thesis in Huddle's "Dirty Work." Dr. G.E.A. Toote, for example, who wrote a column titled "The Power and the Glory" for *The Louisiana Weekly*, an African American-run newspaper in New Orleans,

¹²¹ "Testimony of Ruben Bonilla Jr. and Ruben Sandoval," U.S. Department of Justice, Speeches of Attorney General Benjamin Richard Civiletti, December 17, 1979, 7, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2561042s/1.pdf>.

¹²² Stephanie Ward, "Counterfeiters Make Millions off Fake IDs," *Reno Gazette-Journal*, May 3, 1987, 42. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/148590692/?terms=fake%20social%20security%20immigrants&match=1>.

¹²³ Magaña, 48.

argued in 1977 that the failure of the federal government to control illegal immigration was impacting the problem of black unemployment.¹²⁴ In addition, INS agents often claimed that most of their tips came from U.S. citizens of Latin American descent who were supposedly being turned away from jobs occupied by undocumented workers.¹²⁵

Employers of undocumented workers argued their employees did not take American jobs because they did the jobs American citizens would not do – dirty, dangerous, and low-paying jobs, such as those in restaurants, factories, landscaping, and domestic work. In 1982, a manager of a poultry packing plant in San Francisco whose business had just been raided by the INS told reporters he would not be able to replace his workers with U.S. citizens, and then remarked, “You hang up chickens and cut their throats. They work in guts and blood and in a cold damp place all the time. I wouldn’t do that kind of work for anything.”¹²⁶ As was the case with Marilyn Belts and Bags Inc., companies that were raided by the INS were typically forced to shut down operations temporarily until their employees returned because they could not fill the vacancies with American citizens. When Braniff Airlines went bankrupt in May of 1982, Dallas Mayor Jack Evans started a Task Force in October to find work for the thousands of local employees who had been laid off, in an episode some described as the “biggest unemployment crisis in recent memory.” However, the task to find jobs for these unemployed Braniff employees during a national recession proved to be difficult, not because there were not enough jobs, but because the laid off Braniff employees were uninterested in the jobs available. According to *NBC News*,

¹²⁴ “It Won’t Go Away,” *Tri-City Herald*, August 2, 1984, 4.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/820979956/?terms=employer%20penalizations&match=1>; G.E.A. Toote, “The Power and the Glory,” *The Louisiana Weekly*, July 16, 1977, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/853967652/?terms=employer%20penalizations&match=1>.

¹²⁵ “INS Raid,” KXAS-TV news clip, August 9, 1984, The Portal to Texas History, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1155679/m1/?q=INS>.

¹²⁶ Michael Wright and Caroline Rand Herron, “The Nation in Summary; U.S. Job Squads Arrest Aliens by the Hundreds,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1982, 4, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/02/weekinreview/the-nation-in-summary-us-job-squads-arrest-aliens-by-the-hundreds.html>.

“there are plenty of jobs out there,” but “many Braniff workers do not want to work unless it’s another airline job,” and some were reportedly devastated by having to leave such “a glamorous industry.”¹²⁷ Following an INS raid in 1983, the foreman for Demko Manufacturing in West Dallas claimed his company had been raided four times in two years, and each time he could not fill the vacancies with American citizens even during times of high unemployment. He then promised the reporter interviewing him that eighty percent of the workers apprehended that day would be back by Monday.¹²⁸

Employers of undocumented workers were not the only ones who saw an opportunity to capitalize on the increase of immigrants to cities. Business owners increasingly began advertising to the growing Hispanic consumer base by placing signs on their stores that read “Se Habla Español” and running Spanish advertisements on the local radio and television.¹²⁹ In 1981, brothers Michael and John Gonzalez created a bilingual Yellow Pages book for Dallas, which contained a collection of advertisements from local companies all eager to cater to Spanish speakers. In discussing their business, the Gonzalez brothers commented, “when you take the U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent, along with the undocumented workers, there’s really no telling exactly how much money is out there.”¹³⁰

Undocumented workers were often victimized by those seeking to profit off them. Landlords, for example, charged immigrants high rent for homes that were small and

¹²⁷ “Unemployment,” KXAS-TV news clip, October 8, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1246575/m1/?q=unemployment>; “Layoffs,” KXAS-TV news clip, April 14, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1246799/m1/?q=braniff%20layoffs>;

¹²⁸ “Alien Raid,” KXAS-TV news clip, May 19, 1983, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1175834/m1/?q=illegal>.

¹²⁹ Jo Ann Zuniga, “Firms Target Hispanic Consumers Here,” *Corpus Christi Times* 74, no. 243, December 13, 1984, 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/759715479/?terms=advertising%20to%20hispanics&match=1>.

¹³⁰ “Yellow Pages,” KXAS-TV news clip, January 5, 1981, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1286312/m1/?q=Mexicans>.

uninhabitable, knowing undocumented tenants were unlikely to complain, especially if landlords threatened to report them to the INS. Undocumented immigrants also frequently fell victim to robberies because it was common knowledge that they did not put their money in banks. These robberies often proved fatal to the victims if they tried to fight back against their assailants. In 1980, Dallas police reported an alarming increase in homicides against undocumented immigrants, whose bodies were found discarded in fields and alleys with no identification and no evidence as to who had murdered them. In 1981, *NBC News* covered a story of an unnamed undocumented immigrant who had been robbed and stabbed to death in his home. The police reported they had no leads and that the “communication barrier” between them and the witnesses was impeding the investigation.¹³¹ After two undocumented workers were robbed and murdered in their home in Ellis County, Texas in 1985, a law enforcement officer on the scene neglected to indicate action was being taken to find the murderer, instead blaming the presence of “illegal” immigrants on employers who hired them.¹³² Crimes like this often went unsolved, receiving little to no media coverage. The victims’ names were rarely mentioned, and they were quickly forgotten. Contrary to the media’s common portrayal of immigrants as criminals, they were more often the victims of crimes.

The escalation of workplace raids in the 1970s and 80s affected the entire Latino/a community because all of its members were perceived as being undocumented by government officials and the American public, regardless of citizenship status. According to Magaña, a

¹³¹ “Murder Cases,” KXAS-TV news clip, September 19, 1980, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1285987/m1/?q=hate%20crimes;> “Illegals,” KXAS-TV news clip, January 10, 1981, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc503085/m1/?q=Mexicans>.

¹³² “Palmer Murders,” KXAS-TV news clip, May 29, 1985, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1154866/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>.

Gallup Poll conducted in 1993 showed that “Americans believe that most immigrants are undocumented,” and that most undocumented immigrants are Mexican.¹³³ Therefore, citizenship status was virtually irrelevant, as workers were universally subject to racial profiling. For example, in 1978, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) filed a class-action lawsuit against the INS for a series of raids that took place one year prior at some garment factories in Los Angeles. The suit claimed that “only employees of Latin appearance were questioned,” and that the employees were not informed of their rights. Although immigration officials presented warrants during the factory raids, the warrants did not “specify by name the individuals who [were] suspected of being undocumented workers,” meaning agents were permitted to question everyone with brown skin, violating their Fourth Amendment rights. According to attorneys of the ILGWU, immigration officials also violated Fifth Amendment rights by failing to inform arrested workers of their right to counsel and to remain silent.¹³⁴

The lawsuit was dismissed by the federal district court of Los Angeles, but the union appealed, and in 1982, against the highly publicized and controversial backdrop of Operation Jobs, the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned this decision by agreeing that workers’ Fourth Amendment rights were indeed violated during the garment factory raids.¹³⁵ The court ruled that workers must be questioned on a “case-by-case” basis because “the apparent Hispanic ancestry of one sought for questioning, while possibly relevant...is insufficient, even if noticed in conjunction with the knowledge of the presence of a person in an area known to contain a high

¹³³ Magaña, 2.

¹³⁴ Narda Zacchino, “Union Sues Over Garment Factory Raids,” *The Los Angeles Times* 97, August 23, 1978, 30, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/384586997/?terms=garment%20factory%20raids&match=1>.

¹³⁵ Tobias Higbie and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, “The Border at Work: Undocumented Workers, the ILGWU in Los Angeles, and the Limits of Labor Citizenship,” *Labor* 19, no. 4 (December 1, 2022), 31, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt14g5026b/qt14g5026b.pdf>.

concentration of illegal aliens.”¹³⁶ However, this decision was reversed again in 1984 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the factory raids did not violate the Fourth Amendment because immigration officials “had probable cause to believe” the questioned employees “were unlawfully present in the factory” in *INS v. Delgado*.¹³⁷ This court case set an important precedent for the future of workplace raids by sending the message that law enforcement did not need a valid warrant to search business grounds and arrest suspected undocumented workers.



This photo features an INS raid at a clothing manufacturing building in Los Angeles in 1977. Photo Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

In the 1970s and 80s, Latino/a activists became increasingly mobilized against workplace raids, organizing conferences, marches, and protests, and using the media to spread awareness, thereby making the issue increasingly more difficult to ignore. When Civiletti issued the

¹³⁶ *International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union v. Sureck*, 681 F.2d 624, U.S. Court of Appeals Ninth Circuit, July 15, 1982, <https://cite.case.law/f2d/681/624/>.

¹³⁷ *Immigration and Naturalization Service v. Delgado*, 466 U.S. 210, 1984, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/466/210/>.

workplace order in 1979 for the purpose of focusing the agency's "limited resources" on creating jobs for American citizens, Ruben Bonilla of LULAC and Herman Baca of the Committee on Chicano Rights collaborated to protest Civiletti and the INS.¹³⁸ On November 20, 1979, *Zepeda v. INS* ruled that INS agents must present a valid warrant before conducting searches and seizures of undocumented persons both in private residences and businesses, but according to Bonilla, the INS frequently ignored this provision, and continued to do so after Civiletti's order. Bonilla wrote to Civiletti explaining that the renewed emphasis on workplace raids was therefore a violation of the Fourth Amendment, and further explained that they were damaging the Latino/a community as a whole because "many Americans make no distinction between Mexican nationals and Hispanic-Americans." He also asked that the federal government pass regulations that would hold INS officials accountable for their actions, crediting their abuse and misconduct to something he called a "'wild-west' mentality."¹³⁹ Bonilla's requests were ignored, but his concerns reflected many other prominent Latino/a activists.

Catholic churches were some of the strongest sources of support for undocumented workers and their families in urban communities. They provided free legal advice and representation, financial aid, food and clothing banks, temporary shelter, job counseling, and medical help for all immigrants, regardless of citizenship status. The Catholic Charities of Dallas held day-long workshops to help educate Mexican and Central American migrants and refugees of their rights and to hold legal consultations with immigrants facing deportation or attempting to

¹³⁸ Robert Pear, "Focus of Search for Aliens Shifts From Home to Job," *The New York Times*, November 27, 1979, 18, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/11/27/archives/focus-of-search-for-aliens-shifts-from-home-to-job-criticism-in.html>; Letter from Ruben Bonilla to Herman Baca, U.S. Department of Justice, Speeches of Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, December 3, 1979, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2561042s/1.pdf>.

¹³⁹ Testimony by Ruben Bonilla before the Select Commission of Immigration and Refugee Policy, U.S. Department of Justice, Speeches of Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, December 17, 1979, 7-10, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb2561042s/1.pdf>.

become naturalized.¹⁴⁰ Catholic leaders also utilized their voice in the media to protest state-sanctioned abuse of migrants by demanding the federal government pay attention to the crisis and take action against it. For example, Bishop Francis Green of the Tucson Diocese and Archbishop Roberto Sanchez of Santa Fe attended a news conference in 1977 and issued a joint statement urging Congress to investigate growing violence on the border perpetrated by “hatred” and “race discrimination.”¹⁴¹ Not only did Catholic churches provide a safe and comfortable space for migrants and refugees to worship, connect with their communities, and converse in their native tongue, they were also a vital source of support. Many Catholic leaders exercised agency on behalf of the undocumented, using the press to vocalize their opposition to INS raids for violating the Fourth Amendment, and for bringing pain and suffering to families who they believed should be granted asylum, not expelled.¹⁴²

The global recession of 1980 occurred amidst a period of intense institutional, political, economic, and social dysfunction regarding the lives of undocumented workers in the United States. The need for cheap and exploitable labor contended with fierce anti-immigrant sentiment, creating confusing and highly oppressive conditions for the undocumented worker, who was forced to exist on the margins of society, secretly contributing to the economy but living an “illegal” existence. While the federal government was mindful of the undocumented worker’s value to the nation, the pressure to appeal to constituents forced leaders into a corner. Reagan’s

¹⁴⁰ Kathy DaGroomes, “Agency Reaches Out to Illegals,” *South Texas Catholic* 19, no. 9, August 26, 1983, 3, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph840606/m1/3/?q=illegal%20aliens>; Linda Rapattonl, “Catholics Reach Out to Hispanics in L.A.,” *The Daily Spectrum*, May 30, 1986, 22, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/285872922/?terms=illegal%20aliens%20catholic%20church&match=1>.

¹⁴¹ “Catholics Ask Probe of Violence,” *The Waxahachie Daily Light*, February 2, 1977, 16, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/89427940/?terms=border%20drug%20smuggling&match=1>.

¹⁴² “Sheltering Refugees is Pro-Life Effort,” *The Messenger* 78, no. 4, January 25, 1985, 2, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/750972411/?terms=illegal%20aliens%20catholic%20church&match=1>.

administration was losing favorability in the polls, his immigration reform plan was under attack, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) were struggling to bounce back from a debauched reputation that had been steadily declining since the time of its creation. Although Project Jobs did virtually nothing to slow immigration or reduce unemployment, spokespersons for the federal government created a spectacle around the operation, making it appear as though it had been much more extensive and effective than it was. This initially appeared to be highly beneficial for Reagan's approval ratings, and for immigration officials eager to prove their worth and increase their bargaining power for more funding. However, despite some positive feedback, the media's response toward Project Jobs was largely negative for various and conflicting reasons. Meanwhile, undocumented workers found themselves entering a new era of intensified police surveillance and state-sanctioned oppression.

IV. Project Jobs

In April of 1982, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) – under the new direction of Alan Nelson and Joseph Salgado, the associate commissioner – launched a one million deportation campaign called “Project Jobs,” also known as “Operation Jobs,” involving a series of workplace raids which targeted nine U.S. cities (Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, New York, Newark, and Denver) with the goal of freeing up jobs for unemployed U.S. citizens during a national recession. According to Caryle Murphy of *The Washington Post*, “Nelson called the operation a ‘test of new techniques’ in enforcement efforts to make them more effective.” The operation was geographically expansive, and unlike Operation Wetback which mainly targeted the agricultural sector concentrated predominantly in the southwest, Project Jobs went after “quality jobs” in big cities that INS spokespersons claimed were high paying and attractive. However, this was completely untrue, as urban factory jobs were just as dangerous, just as difficult, and just as underpaid as those in farming and livestock. In 1982, the federal minimum wage was \$3.35 an hour, but the INS generally targeted workplaces where the wages were at least \$4.80 an hour, which would be about \$10.39 an hour today. What the federal government discovered was that these wages were still considered too low for unemployed U.S. citizens even during an economic recession. Five hundred and sixty worksites were reportedly raided during the operation, resulting in the apprehension of close to six thousand workers, and the deportation of more than four thousand.

According to a report in the *De Rio News Herald*, 99.3 percent of the apprehensions were from Latin American and Caribbean countries, and 87 percent of those were Mexican.¹⁴³

It should be noted that the timeline of the operation is unclear, as some cities carried out the raids longer than others, so while some reports claimed it only lasted a week, other reports indicated it lasted two to three weeks. Although the bulk of media attention on the operation occurred the week of April 26-30 of 1982, also referred to as the “April roundups,” some reports indicate the operation lasted even through 1983. For example, a lawsuit filed against the INS referenced events of abuse that occurred in 1983 that allegedly transpired under the umbrella of Project Jobs. In addition, some incidents reportedly connected to Project Jobs did not occur within the nine cities the INS had targeted, as some agents had ventured outside of those locations. The issue with these various and conflicting timelines, as well as confusion over the exact locations of the raids is that it is unclear at times which raids were part of the operation, and which were not. However, as mentioned earlier, the 1980s saw a dramatic escalation in workplace raids in general, and Project Jobs was only a small part of this trend. Therefore, the timeline of the operation is not as important as the media coverage that surrounded it, and the position it held in the American imagination. Whether Project Jobs lasted a week or a year, the operation was representative of a changing economic and political climate in which immigrants were no longer seen as a threat that existed solely in the southern agricultural sector. Mexicans were moving north and taking city jobs, meaning a new demographic of the American population was waking up to the threat of job displacement and increasing pressure on the federal government to take action.

¹⁴³ Murphy; Ruben Treviso, “INS Netted 99.3 Percent Latinos,” *Del Rio News Herald* 54, no. 91, June 18, 1982, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/14425074/?terms=Operation%20jobs&match=1>.

While the number of deportations were a small fraction of the estimated one million Mexicans deported during Operation Wetback, Project Jobs received an alarming amount of media coverage, prompting many to call the operation a political and publicity stunt. According to *The Washington Post*, while workplace raids throughout the country were not uncommon at this time, “Project Jobs differed from normal operations in part because [the] INS referred job openings created by the raids to state employment commissions,” hoping to help fill the vacancies with U.S. citizens.¹⁴⁴ However, despite government efforts, U.S. citizens ultimately did not fill the vacancies, and within weeks, most of the deported workers had returned to their original jobs. Although Alan Nelson claimed to be pleased with the results of the operation, it ultimately failed in its mission, and in the process, thousands of families were torn apart, businesses were forced to shut down operations, and immigrants were further made into scapegoats for the federal government’s failure to respond to the national recession.

In the early weeks of May in 1982, under the operation Project Jobs, INS agents raided the Boulder Valley Poultry Farm a half an hour outside of Denver. After spotting federal immigration officials, undocumented worker Jose Armando Morales ran from the farm in a panic and into the main road where he was struck by a gravel truck and instantly killed. Stories like this prompted many to refer to this period as a “reign of terror” on urban Latino/a communities.¹⁴⁵ As the events of Operation Jobs made national headlines, widely circulated images of immigrants being handcuffed and loaded onto busses as their families watched helplessly fueled mass hysteria as well as outrage among Latino/a communities.

¹⁴⁴ Dan Balz, “Many Texas Employers Raided by INS Report U.S. Workers Are Hard to Find,” *The Washington Post*, July 18, 1982, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/07/18/many-texas-employers-raided-by-ins-report-us-workers-are-hard-to-find/713ee310-4f6d-40b6-bb1c-d1c4c6902bb3/>.

¹⁴⁵ Botz.

Spanish-language radio stations and newspapers had learned of the plans for the operation a week before it was carried out due to an alleged “news leak from a disgruntled INS agent,” allowing them to warn the Latino/a community in advance. As a result, immigrants were so afraid of being apprehended during and after the weeks of Project Jobs that many chose to stay home, refusing to go to work, church, or even shops. Merchants in a Latino/a shopping district in downtown Los Angeles complained about a devastating loss of sales as a result of the crackdown. John Silva, owner of Silva’s Meats, claimed business was down fifty percent, forcing him to throw out more than 300 pounds of meat and to lay off one of his employees. Reverend Luis Olivares of Our Lady Queen of Angels, a Roman Catholic church in LA heavily visited by Latinos/as, reported that attendance at Sunday Mass was down fifty percent as well. Catholic bishops in Dallas reported that their attendance was also down because of false rumors circulating that immigration officers were waiting outside the churches. Bruce Corwin, the owner of thirty-seven Spanish-language theaters, reported that his box office sales were down 70 percent. According to Corwin, “You couldn’t read a newspaper or turn on a radio or television without hearing how many people were picked up today and seeing people in handcuffs.”¹⁴⁶

INS agents were accused of exhibiting “Gestapo-like conduct” and using “unconstitutional methods” to make apprehensions during Project Jobs, prompting a slew of lawsuits against the agency following the operation. Attorneys for the plaintiffs claimed that immigration officials had violated the Fourth Amendment by conducting unreasonable searches and seizures without warrants, had forced undocumented workers to sign away their rights, and

¹⁴⁶ Larry Stammer, “Heat of ‘La Migra,’ Chills Business in Latino District,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1982, 1-3, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/388339650/>; “Raids ‘Like the Alamo’ Net Illegal Aliens,” *United Press International*, April 28, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/04/28/Raids-like-the-Alamo-net-illegal-aliens/6806388814400/>; “Bishops Oppose Round-up of Aliens,” *South Texas Catholic*, May 11, 1982, 2, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph840721/m1/2/?q=INS%20raids>.

arrested many U.S. citizens simply for having brown skin.¹⁴⁷ In 1986, the International Molders' and Allied Workers' Local Union, represented by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), sued Alan Nelson for the INS' violation of Latino/a citizens' constitutional rights while raiding fifty workplaces in San Francisco during Project Jobs. According to the plaintiffs, out of the fifty raids conducted in San Francisco, only eight warrants were presented. Additionally, INS and Border Patrol agents reportedly illegally entered workplaces or positioned themselves at the exits and preceded to only target and question workers of "Hispanic appearance," promptly arresting those who could not immediately prove their citizenship. Some of the arrested employees had proof of citizenship at home but did not have those documents with them at the time of the raid. The plaintiffs contended that they were "unlawfully detained, interrogated, harassed, and assaulted solely because of their appearance or language."¹⁴⁸

After their arrest, many were denied access to lawyers or their families, were not allowed to collect their final paychecks, and were intimidated, threatened, and forced to sign away their rights. Ray Romero, an attorney with MALDEF, remarked, "They're putting people on planes and forcing them to sign waivers...giving up the right to remain silent, to speak to a lawyer, the right to post bond pending a deportation hearing, and that's just the beginning."¹⁴⁹ As a result of

¹⁴⁷ James A Finefrock, "Raided Businesses Say INS Aim Was to Punish," *The San Francisco Examiner* 118, no. 59, August 19, 1982, 26, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/460827721/?terms=unconstitutional&match=1>.

¹⁴⁸ International Molders' and Allied Workers v. Nelson, 643 F. Supp. 884 (N.D. Cal. 1986), <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/643/884/1908872/>.

¹⁴⁹ "Raids 'Like the Alamo' Net Illegal Aliens.," Lynn Hughes, "Immigration Picks Up 73 Illegal Aliens Here," *The Baytown Sun* 60, no. 156, April 30, 1982, 1, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapath1063472/m1/1/?q=INS%20raids>; Frank del Olmo, "'Operation Jobs,' Proves that INS Should be Abolished," *Oakland Tribune*, May 12, 1982, 9, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/736623487/?terms=Operation%20jobs&match=1>.

pending lawsuits nation-wide, immigration officials were instructed not to discuss the details of the operation with anyone, especially reporters.¹⁵⁰

Mexican American organizations such as MALDEF pointed to the obvious racism underlying the INS operation in that the only workplaces raided were those with high percentages of Latino workers. It was for this reason that so many Latino U.S. citizens were wrongfully arrested. This regular occurrence is depicted in the film “Born in East LA,” when Rudy Robles, a Mexican American U.S. citizen, is arrested during a factory raid in LA and deported because he spoke little English and did not have identification on him at the time of the raid.¹⁵¹ Robert Flores, an immigration attorney in Los Angeles, claimed “it was selective enforcement...I’ve known undocumented people from Europe and Sweden and they never had any problems. They walk freely because their skin is white.”¹⁵²

In 1989 the *Los Angeles Times* reported another pending lawsuit involving Project Jobs, and disclosed some disturbing stories of INS abuse in northern California. Marcos Gutierrez, one of the plaintiffs in the case, was working at a furniture factory in San Jose when his workplace was raided by the INS. He testified that he was handcuffed to two of his co-workers, pushed to the ground, and called a “wetback.” Another plaintiff, Ramon Estrada, was fifty-seven when he and seventy others were arrested at a mushroom farm near Half Moon Bay. According to the article, “when he refused to answer questions,” instead requesting to speak to his lawyer, “agents became so abusive that they pushed his head toward dog excrement.” Jose Mendes, a legal U.S. citizen and superintendent at Modern Mode Inc., a furniture factory in the Alameda County city

¹⁵⁰ “Many Illegals Back to on Job After Federal Crackdown,” *The Daily Sentinel*, October 24, 1982, 3, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/537634833/?terms=Operation%20jobs%20Reagan&match=1>.

¹⁵¹ *Born in East L.A.*, directed by Cheech Marin, screenplay by Cheech Marin, featuring Cheech Marin, Paul Rodriguez, and Daniel Stern (Universal Pictures, 1987), 85 minutes.

¹⁵² “Latinos: Coalition Formed to Condemn INS Raids, Handling of Arrested Workers,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1982, 35, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/389039873/>.

of San Leandro, reportedly demanded a warrant from INS agents when they swarmed his factory the morning of July 20, 1983, and began handcuffing his workers. After cursing at the agents, they chased him down, “grabbed him around the neck, forced him to the ground, and then threw him from a loading dock to the ground, about three feet below.” Afterwards, the owner of the company, Anthony Ratto, wrote a letter to President Reagan detailing the incident. In it, he described himself as a “loyal Republican,” and wrote: “Mr. President, something wrong occurred at my plant on July 20, and I believe the facts should be brought to light.” The *Los Angeles Times* article also claims that the INS investigated the incident, but concluded in September of 1984 that there was “no evidence of wrongdoing.” Alan Nelson commented “that the charge was ‘unsubstantiated,’ and he ‘sincerely regretted any hardship or inconvenience [Estrada] may have experienced.’”¹⁵³

Leaders of the Latino/a community were particularly concerned and disturbed by the way these raids affected the children of undocumented workers. During the operation, teachers at bilingual schools, such as Daza Elementary School in Fort Worth, lodged formal complaints that immigration officials were approaching children on school grounds to question them about their parents’ citizenship status, harassing and frightening them. Officials also requested some teachers in Texas to “identify the children” of undocumented workers. As a result, immigrant parents were keeping their children home from school during the raids out of fear of being deported. More concerning, however, was the number of children left behind when their parents were deported, some even being placed in state care.¹⁵⁴ When Elena Rodriguez was deported on

¹⁵³ Dan Morain, “Trial Targets INS Raids of Workplaces for Illegal Aliens,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 1989, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-01-23-mn-677-story.html>.

¹⁵⁴ “Cinco De Mayo,” KXAS-TV news clip, May 5, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1247824/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>; Minian, 73; “Illegal Kids,” KXAS-TV news clip, April 29, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1305034/m1/?q=deportations>.

April 27, 1982 while working at Melody Homes Manufacturing Co. in Fort Worth, her husband, Jorge, immediately traveled across the border to find his wife and bring her home, leaving their four children in the care of his sister. After being gone for a week, their nine-year old daughter, Maria, told reporter Robert Seltzer, “I have faith...I know my parents will come back. When I found out they were not here anymore, I wanted to cry, but I believe they will return.” Seltzer disclosed that these were not the family’s real names, as was a common practice for reporters covering the victims of Project Jobs, who insisted that newspapers not disclose their identities.¹⁵⁵

Dallas lawyer Adelfa B. Callejo filed a \$5 million class action lawsuit against the INS for deporting parents of U.S.-born children and splitting up families in the process. The suit was based on an accusation of age discrimination, claiming that “U.S.-born citizens 21 or older are permitted to have their immigrant parents live in the United States as ‘immediate relatives,’” whereas “citizens under 21 do not have that right.” In response to the backlash of splitting up families, INS district director in Dallas, William Chambers, responded, “If the families are split up, it’s by their own choice. They are asked if they have relatives here, and many, many times they say, ‘No, we don’t have any family members here,’ in order to protect them. If they tell us they do have relatives here, we will send them back to Mexico together.” However, Callejo contended that U.S.-born children were “as American as apple pie and hamburgers,” and sending them to Mexico to be with their parents would be difficult and traumatic, nor did their parents want them sent to Mexico.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Robert Seltzer, “Mother Was Deported,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, May 12, 1982, 29, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/635415198/?terms=Operation%20jobs&match=1>.

¹⁵⁶ Seltzer; “INS Sued Over Round-Ups,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 7, 1982, 24. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/635406192/?terms=Operation%20jobs&match=1>.

After the mass raids of Project Jobs, one of the greatest concerns for employers became filling the vacancies created by the deported workers. INS spokesman Verne Jarvis said that Operation Jobs had resulted in long lines of people interested in the jobs left behind,” but statements by employers completely contradicted this assessment.¹⁵⁷ Trinity Valley Iron and Steel Company in Fort Worth was left with fifty vacancies after Project Jobs, severely impairing productivity at a company that was already short-staffed. Employers at the company claimed they needed to fill one hundred and twenty jobs, but they had only managed to hire six new workers a week after they were raided. The company claimed the pay was “well above the minimum wage,” but that the work was heavy and undesirable.¹⁵⁸

Employees at the Texas Employment Commission claimed that following the raids, their offices were “crowded with people looking for work,” and yet unemployed citizens were uninterested in the jobs left vacant by deported immigrant workers.¹⁵⁹ TEC officials reported that by May 7, 1982, Project Jobs had created over a thousand vacancies in Houston, but the agency only managed to make forty-two job referrals. Employers in Houston claimed that the “widespread publicity” of Project jobs brought dozens of workers to their doors, but “many left when they learned of the low wages and difficult work.” Rudy Reyes, vice president of a tree trimming company in Houston complained that the unemployed U.S. citizens referred to him by the TEC following Project Jobs were obstinately opposed to the dangerous working conditions required “to climb trees with ropes and then cut branches near telephone lines and high-voltage power lines.” Reyes told reporters that the unemployed referrals told him and his staff “to go to

¹⁵⁷ United Press International, “Job Raids a Success, INS Says,” *The Berkshire Eagle*, May 5, 1982, 27, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/532903173/?terms=Operation%20Jobs%20success&match=1>.

¹⁵⁸ “INS Jobs,” KXAS-TV news clip, April 27, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1235075/m1/?q=INS>.

¹⁵⁹ “TEC,” KXAS-TV news clip, May 3, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1247409/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>.

hell.”¹⁶⁰ Arnold Mandel, owner of Marilyn Belt & Bags Inc. said Project Jobs created eighty-six vacancies at his company that he did not expect to be filled by U.S. citizens. Mandel complained that he could never find enough people to work. “We’ll gladly employ all the legals we can get, if they’re willing to get off welfare,” he told reporters. “We’ll hire anybody that will walk through the door with a Social Security card.”¹⁶¹ Following the raids, local newspapers and news stations consistently reported on a worker shortage crisis caused by the inability of companies to fill the vacancies created by Project Jobs.

Companies that did manage to hire U.S. citizens had mixed reports on the success of their new hires. By and large, however, most companies complained that the employees referred to them by the TEC did not last. Paul Boyd, president of East-West Pipe Co. in Houston claimed that he hired eleven U.S. citizens to replace some of the vacancies created by Project Jobs, but his new crew only lasted one day before quitting. Robin Denke at Trinity Steel in Fort Worth hired sixty U.S. citizens after the raids, but by July, only fifteen to twenty remained. According to Denke, “We’ve tried to find people, but when we check refernces, they’ve got poor attendance records or bad attitudes.” Reyes from Trees Inc. told reporters he hired two hundred people after the raids, but only “seven stayed on the job.” Christian Goddard, employer of a window-assembly company in Houston, hired ninety-two people following the raids, but when the INS conducted a follow survey in May to evaluate the success of the operation, sixty-eight of his new hires had quit the company.¹⁶² By May, some companies reported to the INS that they had successfully filled all of their vacancies with U.S. citizens. However, these accounts are not

¹⁶⁰ Rone Tempest, “Americans Balk at Jobs Left After Illegal-Alien Sweeps,” *The Honolulu Advisor*, May 2, 1982, 34,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/262628755/?terms=children%20immigration%20and%20naturalization%20service%20raids&match=1>.

¹⁶¹ “Raids Nab 140 Alien Workers,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 29, 1982, 30,

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/637878787/?terms=Operation%20jobs&match=1>.

¹⁶² Balz, “Many Texas Employers Raided by INS Report U.S. Workers Are Hard to Find.”

entirely credible. For one, companies were likely lying or exaggerating in an effort to escape the government's attention. Second, employers frequently insisted they could not tell a U.S. citizen from an undocumented worker. According to Gordon Trantham, general manager of Melody Homes in Fort Worth, "I don't know a legal alien from an illegal alien... We require a Social Security card, and they have to state their citizenship on our application. But other than that, I have no way of knowing where they're from. I couldn't tell you if we've hired any illegal aliens since the raid."¹⁶³

It is no surprise then, that only two weeks after the April roundups, news stories reported that most of the deported workers were back at work. Economist Donald Huddle found that after two weeks, half of the deported workers had returned to their jobs in Houston, as well as 25 percent in Los Angeles and Dallas.¹⁶⁴ After six weeks, he estimated that nationally, those figures reached 40 percent.¹⁶⁵ However, given that most undocumented workers managed to stay under the radar, these figures were likely much higher. By August, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that 80 percent of those apprehended during the April roundups had returned to work in Los Angeles.¹⁶⁶ Vice President of Plated Plastic Industries in New York City, Nick Anis, claimed that 70 percent of the undocumented workers arrested during the raids returned to work the next day, and Price Pfister Brass Manufacturing Company in California claimed fifty of their eighty arrested employees returned to work shortly as well. In many of these cases, the employees were able to return so quickly because they were U.S. citizens but had not been able to produce their

¹⁶³ Seltzer.

¹⁶⁴ "Aliens Deported in Sweep Quickly Back at Work," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1982, 19, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/389148158/?terms=Donald%20Huddle&match=1>.

¹⁶⁵ "Economist Says Many Aliens Back in US After Deportation," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 10, 1982, 23, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/635481724/?terms=Donald%20Huddle&match=1>.

¹⁶⁶ "Ousted Aliens Back at Work," *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 2, 1982, 46, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/451659498/?terms=Operation%20Jobs%20back%20at%20work&match=1>.

citizenship documents at the time of arrest. The ultimate result was that the raided companies lost business, and the arrested employees lost paychecks.¹⁶⁷

Although Alan Nelson and the INS fervently maintained the operation had been a success, the highly publicized limitations and failures of Project Jobs had mixed reactions from the American public. Latino/a leaders were outraged by the state-sanctioned racism, abuse, and misconduct exhibited during the raids, and they quickly set out to file lawsuits, organize marches, and bring their complaints to the media. Arnaldo Torres, a spokesman for LULAC, denounced the operation as a “‘political hype,’ that had ‘created more problems and was doing no good for the purpose for which it was originated.’”¹⁶⁸ On May 8, LULAC and the American GI Forum took to the streets of downtown Dallas to protest the “discriminatory treatment” of Latinos/as by law enforcement during the April raids. They argued that children were the most traumatized from being separated from their parents, their educations disrupted, and their lives uprooted.¹⁶⁹ This is important because it marks a crucial contrast in the attitudes of naturalized Latino/as during Operation Wetback and Operation Jobs.

In the 1950s, the Mexican American civil rights organizations were exceedingly vocal in their opposition to undocumented migrants, whom they believed thwarted assimilation efforts by the larger Latino/a community in the United States. Middle-class Mexican Americans were a “dependable source of support” for Border Patrol officers, frequently addressing their mutual interests and defending the agency as “misunderstood” and “underappreciated.” In fact, according to Hernández, the American G.I. Forum was “one of the Border Patrol’s most vocal

¹⁶⁷ “Alien Sweep No Complete Success,” *The Town Talk* 100, no. 50, May 5, 1982, 42, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/216060696/?terms=Operation%20Jobs%20success&match=1>.

¹⁶⁸ Murphy.

¹⁶⁹ “Mexican March,” KXAS-TV news clip, May 8, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1245198/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>.

partners” in the 1950s yet became one of their most vocal critics in the 1980s.¹⁷⁰ Murata Katsuyuki has credited this to a radical shift in Latino/Chicano politics that began in the mid-1970s as organizations confronted their middle-class leadership against the backdrop of the national immigration reform debate, a growing population of undocumented immigrants that were becoming more difficult to exclude from their memberships, and resistance to employer sanctions which threatened to harm the entire Latino/a community. As a result, throughout the 1970s, these organizations abandoned traditional assimilationist efforts that sought to achieve “whiteness,” in favor of “antirestrictionist stands” that eventually included undocumented immigrants on their platforms for social justice.¹⁷¹ Therefore, resistance in the aftermath of Project Jobs was unique because Latino/a civil rights organizations were far more unified with their undocumented community members than they had been during Operation Wetback.

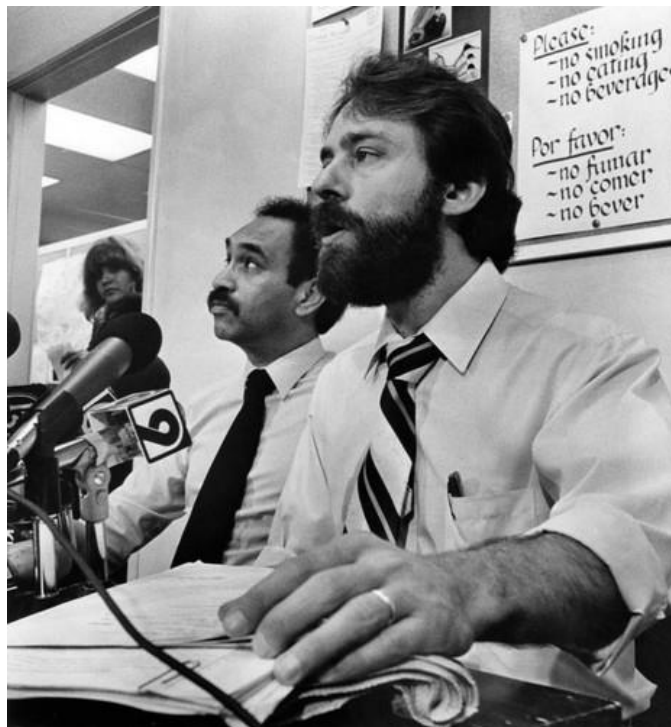
On June 13, Hector Marroquin of the Socialist Workers Party, who was handed a federal deportation order in March, held a rally in Dallas in which he claimed, “Operation Jobs was a Reagan administration attempt to shift the blame for a depressed economy.” He went on further to argue that Operation Jobs “was aimed at keeping political activists like himself from spreading what he call[ed] the truth about American involvement in Central America.”¹⁷² Tony Bonilla, the executive director of the LULAC Dallas branch, said “The whole matter is nothing more than a grandstand play by the INS to cover up deficiencies of their own department and to cover up the

¹⁷⁰ Hernández, 173-176.

¹⁷¹ Murata Katsuyuki, “The (Re)Shaping of Latino/Chicano Ethnicity Through the Inclusion/Exclusion of Undocumented Immigrants: The Case of LULAC’s Ethno-Politics,” *American Studies International* 39, no. 2 (June 2001), <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=txshracd2597&id=GALE%7CA76488157&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon>.

¹⁷² “Deportation Rally,” KXAS-TV news clip, June 13, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1308870/m1/?q=deportations>.

inadequacies of the Reagan economic policies.”¹⁷³ In May, a coalition composed of representatives of the GI Forum, Hispanics for Political Progress, the Mexican American Bar Association, and the Mexican American Political Association was formed in response to the operation, and they wrote a letter to President Reagan that stated, “Your policy of reinstating immigration raids upon workplaces of Mexican/Latino citizens without documents is not only inhumane and ill-conceived, but it also has the effect of scapegoating our community for the nation’s economic problems that this Administration has created or is unable to resolve and cannot rationally explain without endangering its popularity in the upcoming elections.”¹⁷⁴



This photo features a press conference by Latino/a leaders protesting the recent immigration raids in Los Angeles in 1982. Photo Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

¹⁷³ Elaine S. Povich, “Government Efforts to Round Up Illegal Aliens at Work,” *United Press International*, April 27, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/04/27/Government-efforts-to-round-up-illegal-aliens-at-work/2899388728000/>.

¹⁷⁴ “Latinos: Coalition Formed to Condemn INS Raids, Handling of Arrested Workers.”

Several Catholic church leaders also denounced the raids through the media, such as by publishing articles in the *South Texas Catholic*, as well as supporting the victims through their charities. Some Catholic charities, although limited financially, helped to provide food, clothing, and supplies for families affected by the job raids. Counselor Raymond Rodriguez from Fort Worth told reporters that “illegals tend to help each other when they can,” but unfortunately, the operation had placed a great burden on catholic charities because so many undocumented male breadwinners had either been deported or were afraid to go out and find work.¹⁷⁵ Church leaders in Denver released a collaborative statement with one hundred signatures that accused the INS of abuse and of creating “immense suffering” as well as mass hysteria in Hispanic neighborhoods. Church leaders also voiced concerns that publicity of the roundups would fuel racism against the Latino/a community. Father Fred Martinez of St. James Parish in Dallas said that “the singling out of the Mexican in the round-up could give people the wrong impression about the Mexicans and Mexican Americans.”¹⁷⁶

Mexicans were sensitive to the plight of the undocumented in the U.S., so the widespread publicity of the injustices committed during Project Jobs outraged Mexican citizens and leaders, who publicly denounced the operation. The foreign ministry in Mexico City issued a statement through the Mexican government newspaper, *El Nacional*, claiming that “U.S. immigration authorities had violated diplomatic procedure by denying Mexican consular officials the right to interview Mexicans arrested during Operation Jobs.” It went on further to say that “those detained have been intimidated, pressured into voluntarily accepting their precipitated exit from

¹⁷⁵ “Illegal Rights,” KXAS-TV news clip, June 15, 1982, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1180198/m1/?q=illegal%20aliens>.

¹⁷⁶ “Bishops Oppose Round-up of Aliens.”

the country and thus denied the opportunity to receive salaries owed them and other severance benefits.”¹⁷⁷ President Jose Lopez Portillo criticized the federal government’s scapegoating of Mexican immigrants for the recession, noting that Mexico’s strategy to combat unemployment was to try to create more jobs, “rather than depressing the economy and throwing out workers.” Fidel Velasquez, leader of the Mexican Workers Conference, worried that the recent raids would serve to exacerbate the problem of unemployment in Mexico, while also accusing the United States of violating human rights.¹⁷⁸

According to the *United Press International*, “Mexico City daily newspapers were filled with reports and editorial cartoons” throughout the week of the April roundups that accused the Reagan administration of racism and abuse. These newspapers interviewed deported Mexicans and featured “horror stories” of mistreatment by U.S. authorities. The leftist newspaper *Ovaciones* featured a front-page story titled “Hitlerian Actions,” in which it compared the roundups to the actions of Nazi Germany. Everardo Leyva told *Excelsior*, “The agents detained us and piled us into camps in heaps. Then they gave us what was almost garbage to eat and there was nothing else to do but return home.” The Mexican government as well as Mexican business leaders issued statements that the United States’ actions threatened to affect diplomatic and commercial relations between the two nations, and “the Mexican Senate issued a petition calling on the United States to respect the human rights of the undocumented.”¹⁷⁹

Many denounced Operation Jobs as a political stunt designed by the Reagan administration to respond to public pressure. Martin Brown of the *Pacific News Service* argued that the INS operation was not intended to rid the nation of undocumented workers, but to

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Frederick Kiel, “Mexicans Outraged Over ‘Operation Jobs,’” *United Press International*, May 2, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/05/02/Mexicans-outraged-over-Operation-Jobs/1700389160000/>.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid; “Raids Nab 140 Alien Workers.”

convince the American public that the federal government was actively attempting to, while scapegoating Mexican immigrants for the depressed economy. According to Brown, “the public relations impact on Operation Jobs [was] clearly designed to blunt the demand for more drastic programs, such as employer sanctions or border enforcements which might substantially reduce the long-term flow of illegal immigrant workers.” Brown also argued that “Operation Jobs serv[ed] the purpose of the Reagan administration policy far better” than Operation Wetback because it “cater[ed] to those who would blame unemployment on illegal immigrant workers, without seriously threatening the actual flow of immigrant workers.” Finally, Brown declared, “The real message of Operation Jobs is that the U.S. economy can no longer generate enough decent jobs to allow for the historical and traditional upward mobility of new immigrant workers. And yet it is generating so many jobs that are dirty, unsafe, and inefficient that the United States economy must increasingly depend on the maintenance of a permanent underclass of second-class workers without legal or economic rights. This is a message which neither American nor Mexican workers should accept.”¹⁸⁰ Brown’s comprehensive analysis effectively scrutinized federal motives behind Project Jobs, characterizing the operation as a short-term solution for easing public hysteria without the long-term consequences of losing a valuable labor force.

While Mexican and Mexican American leaders decried the operation for going too far in its cruel treatment of undocumented workers, others expressed concerns that the government had not gone far enough in its mission to expel undocumented workers, and its failures were the fault of the federal government’s lax stance on immigration. Jack and Fred Paxton and Don Pepper wrote an editorial for *The Paducah Sun* defending the intentions behind Project Jobs but criticizing the federal government for not ensuring its long-term success by implementing a plan

¹⁸⁰ Martin Brown, “U.S. Doesn’t Tell Illegal to Leave, ‘Just Disappear,’” *The Tennessean* 77, no. 40, May 16, 1982, 22; 25, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/111941928/>.

that was “too limited.” The writers deemed the criticism by Latino/a leaders “nonsense,” arguing that the United States has “by far the most generous” immigration policy “in the world,” and contended that criticism by employers was rooted simply in greed. The problem, they argued, was “so vast” that Operation Jobs was “like fighting a flood by scooping up a teaspoon of water.” The editorial ended by presenting an argument in favor of a law that would make it illegal to hire undocumented workers, reasoning employers should have been arrested during the raids as well. “The United States has no need to apologize for its immigration policy,” they declared, but “‘Operation Jobs’ is not enough.”¹⁸¹

Donald Huddle was also exceedingly vocal in his criticism of the federal government’s failure to ensure the long-term success of Operation Jobs. Huddle estimated that anywhere from 20 to 40 percent of the arrested workers had returned to work within six weeks of the April roundups. According to Huddle, “You can take an alien to the border, but you can’t usually prevent him from returning and getting his old job back.” For Huddle, the only way to ensure the long-term success of future INS operations was to “seal the Mexican border with U.S. troops.”¹⁸² Huddle, an economics professor at Rice University in Houston, conducted a study on job displacement and the impact of Project Jobs as part of a state-wide task force to lower unemployment. His findings were shared nationwide as he mounted pressure on Congress to pass a bill “that would permit the immigration service to assess fines against and even jail the employers of illegal aliens.” Huddle considered “illegal aliens” to be the “no. 1 national problem” because they displaced poor whites and poor blacks in the labor force, drove down wages, and depleted welfare. For Huddle, it was undeniable that immigrants were the cause of

¹⁸¹ Jack and Fred Paxton, and Don Pepper, “‘Operation Jobs’ is Not Enough,” *The Paducah Sun*, May 4, 1982, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/426523954/?terms=Operation%20jobs&match=1>.

¹⁸² “Economist Says Many Aliens Back in US After Deportation,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 10, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/635481724/?terms=Donald%20Huddle&match=1>.

high unemployment, and it was the federal government's responsibility to fix the problem by securing the border and increasing workplace raids and deportations.¹⁸³

Huddle's findings appeared in news stories nationwide, and his study was referenced by journalists and fellow economists to defend the intentions and results of the operation. Later, in 1993, he wrote *Dirty Work: Are Immigrants Only Taking Jobs That the Native Underclass Does Not Want?* - the only academic essay to date that has thoroughly analyzed the impact of Project Jobs. In it, he detailed his findings, outlining the operation's successes and failures, and presented an argument in favor of more effective immigration policies. However, Huddle's study proved inconsistent, contradictory, and problematic, so the next section of this paper will analyze "Dirty Work," and in doing so will refute many of Huddle's claims to argue that immigrants do not directly cause job displacement, and that the failures of Project Jobs lay not in the federal government's failure to secure the border, but rather its failure to increase immigrants' rights.

¹⁸³ Tempest.

V. Dr. Donald Huddle's Role in Bolstering Support for Project Jobs

Donald Huddle spent a great portion of his career as an economics professor spreading fear of immigration with highly biased scholarship that argued immigrants caused job displacement, drained welfare, and drove down wages for American citizens. A key factor that made his studies so influential was that he was not only cited by white conservatives, but poor whites and citizens of color as well because he argued that those were the workers immigrants displaced. Huddle was so prominent in the eighties and nineties that Texas Attorney General Mark White placed him on a task force in 1982 to study the effects of increasing immigration in the state, and in 1985 he was asked to speak at an INS conference in San Diego, at which he urged a renewed emphasis on workplace raids and immigration-related traffic stops to more effectively police the new urban migrant.¹⁸⁴ In 1993, he published his findings on three field studies he conducted in 1982, 1985, and 1990 to evaluate job displacement in Houston. Although not everyone agreed with his findings, Dr. Huddle was a highly regarded economist, allowing proponents of the INS and workplace raids to draw on his scholarship to support the argument that Project Jobs and others like it were successful government operations that should be continued in the future.

Huddle's "Dirty Work" was written in response to an article of the same name written by Merle Linda Wolin of the *Wall Street Journal* which "called Project Jobs a failure."¹⁸⁵ After interviewing some of the employees who had taken the positions vacated by Project Jobs only to

¹⁸⁴ Matthews.

¹⁸⁵ Huddle, 517.

quit quickly after, Wolin concluded that U.S. citizens were not willing to do “dirty work” for low pay, and argued that this meant that the proposed Simpson-Mazzoli bill, which was supposed to create more than one million new jobs for unemployed Americans by granting citizenship to undocumented workers who entered the country prior to 1982, would not succeed because Americans were too prideful to work jobs held by immigrants. Timothy E. Cochran, for example, took a vacated position at Trees Inc. in Houston but quit after two weeks because the work was too hard and dangerous and because he didn’t like working with Mexicans. He was offended when they spoke Spanish, and he remarked that the reason they were unafraid of climbing trees was because they were “too stupid.” He also told Wolin that the wages were “woman’s pay.” Another example in the article is Jerry Goodman, who quit a vacated job as a shipping clerk in Chicago when he was asked to sweep the parking lot. Goodman explained it “belittled” his pride and that he “considered it slave labor.”¹⁸⁶ Huddle took particular issue with the *Wall Street Journal* article, calling it “highly biased,” claiming that the article’s sampling had been selectively chosen to support the “newspaper’s editorial prejudices favoring open borders.”¹⁸⁷ Huddle argued that the article’s assessment that Americans were not willing to do “dirty work” was incorrect, and that the issue was job displacement by immigrants, not entitlement by American workers.

Huddle recognized that many undocumented workers returned to their original jobs following the raids, but he argued that the operation’s real success was not necessarily “making room for a few thousand American workers,” but in acting as a “social experiment” to help the nation understand job displacement. A study he conducted between 1980 and 1981 concluded

¹⁸⁶ Merle Linda Wolin, “‘Dirty Work’: Disdainful of Meager Pay, Low Status, Americans Turn Down Jobs Once Held by Foreigners,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 1982, 1; 16, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpwallstreetjournal/docview/134692278/6F3415D7B7A34679PQ/1?accountid=7117>.

¹⁸⁷ Huddle, 520.

that one million U.S. workers had been displaced by undocumented construction workers in Houston, and that “a national payroll of more than \$7 billion a year goes to illegal aliens.”¹⁸⁸ In a study in 1985, Huddle found that for every hundred employed “illegals,” sixty-six U.S. citizens were “denied jobs.”¹⁸⁹ However, Leo Chavez, “research associate at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California at San Diego,” said that Huddle’s report did not support this claim. Chavez also took issue with Huddle’s claim that immigrants used more money in services than they paid back in taxes. According to Chavez, Huddle did not include “unmarried immigrants who demand little from the government,” nor did he include federal taxes paid by immigrants.¹⁹⁰

Further, Aviva Chomsky has argued that jobs were disappearing during the Reagan era not because of immigration, but because more companies were outsourcing labor to places like Puerto Rico, Mexico, and the Caribbean, meaning unemployment was caused by the global market, not local ones. Therefore, undocumented workers were not causing unemployment by taking urban jobs because those jobs had always been intended for cheap, exploitable labor. Second, contrary to the impression given by Huddle’s findings, “the number of jobs is not finite, it is elastic,” and “population growth creates jobs because people consume as well as produce.”¹⁹¹ Increasing immigration to urban areas in the eighties was stimulating the economy, which is evident by the number of local merchants who began advertising to a growing Hispanic

¹⁸⁸ “Houston Study: 3rd of Hardhats Illegal,” *El Paso Times* 102, no. 22, January 22, 1982, 14, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/436201423/?terms=Donald%20Huddle&match=1>.

¹⁸⁹ “Illegal Immigration is Bad for America,” *News-Pilot* no. 201, October 28, 1985, 4, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/606986810/?terms=Donald%20Huddle&match=1>.

¹⁹⁰ Matthews.

¹⁹¹ Aviva Chomsky, *“They Take Our Jobs!” And 20 Other Myths About Immigration* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2007), 4-9.

consumer base, and the fact that so many businesses suffered when immigrants were afraid to leave their homes during Project Jobs.

A significant finding in Huddle's study was that 60 percent of the vacated jobs from the operation were allegedly filled by U.S. citizens. He claimed that unemployed Americans "responded strongly to the new job openings," ultimately filling "the majority, though not all, of the vacated jobs." His task force helped to fill the vacated jobs in Houston with unemployed Americans listed with the Texas Employment Commission, and according to him, all seventeen of the raided Houston businesses had filled their vacancies within a week. His finding that 60 percent of the vacancies were filled with U.S. citizens was determined by "workplace observation and employer interviews," although he did not go into the details of his methodology. Additionally, there were discrepancies in his findings. First, many of the raided companies refused to disclose any information about their new hires or their wage rates, and none of the companies could prove that their new hires were "legal," despite Huddle's confident assumptions. For example, for one of the raided companies listed in Huddle's study, he wrote that "all of the new employees were believed to be legal." However, employers commonly complained that they could not determine conclusively if an applicant was a citizen or not, because most undocumented workers used fake social security cards to obtain employment. Furthermore, follow-up reports indicate that most of the U.S. citizens who did fill the vacated jobs left them within weeks and even days. Huddle countered this by claiming that 37 percent of the unemployed Americans his task force helped to obtain employment found work successfully, and that those workers were still at the same jobs several months later. However, Huddle did not specify if these jobs were the same jobs left vacant by the INS operation, saying instead that the

jobs “were like those held by illegal aliens.”¹⁹² Furthermore, according to journalist Rone Tempest, Huddle’s own research team “were unable to find most of the unemployed workers for follow-up interviews” after the task force found them employment.¹⁹³ Therefore, Huddle’s assertion that Project Jobs successfully resulted in unemployed Americans obtaining work was unconvincing and lacked conclusive evidence.

Huddle argued that U.S. citizens were willing and eager to work jobs normally held by immigrants, but that the reason unemployment was high was because employers preferred to hire undocumented workers. The first reason for this was that according to Huddle, “illegal aliens will often work harder under more difficult and unsafe conditions than will U.S. workers.” Second, Huddle claimed that undocumented workers were cheaper to hire because they accepted low wages and because employers did not have to pay taxes on their wages if they paid them under the table. The workers, in turn, did not pay taxes on their income, but their tax-free wages were “roughly equal to the net after-tax wage” U.S. workers made for the same job. Huddle argued that employers and undocumented workers were therefore “in collusion with one another” at the expense of the American taxpayer.¹⁹⁴ According to Chomsky, while it is true that some undocumented workers are paid under the table, so are many U.S. citizens who work in the informal economy performing independent contract work, domestic work, and gigs. However, many undocumented workers also work in the formal economy using false social security numbers. By doing so, they pay income taxes but do not have “access to the benefits they are paying for, like social security or unemployment benefits.” It is for this reason that immigrant workers provide the United States “with a subsidy of as much as \$7 billion a year.” Finally,

¹⁹² Huddle, 521-526.

¹⁹³ Tempest.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 532.

Huddle did not include in his study the amount of money undocumented workers contribute to the economy in sales taxes, real estate taxes, and gasoline taxes.¹⁹⁵

Despite copious evidence that suggested otherwise, Huddle fervently maintained that Project Jobs was a successful operation, but only in the short run, because the federal government failed to ensure its long-term success.¹⁹⁶ Huddle cited the nation's "crippled" border security as the main source of the nation's economic dysfunction, and he criticized both the Reagan and Bush administrations for failing to resolve this central issue.¹⁹⁷ For Huddle, the ultimate solution to the uplift the nation's underclass was to implement a tightened, more effective immigration policy, because if employers were faced with a labor shortage, they would be forced to compete with other employers, which would naturally improve wages and working conditions for the lower class.¹⁹⁸ His theory, however, completely disregarded the immigrant population as part of that underclass, dehumanizing them based on their citizenship status. Furthermore, businesses capitalize on immigrants' lack of rights, so "increasing repression and criminalization of immigrants actually creates greater demand for immigrant workers."¹⁹⁹ According to Chomsky, "Exclusionary citizenship has allowed the United States to maintain a fiction of equal rights while also making sure that employers have access to workers without rights... When one group of workers has gained rights, historically, businesses – with government help – have simply looked elsewhere to define or create a new group of rightless workers."²⁰⁰ The solution, then, is not to further criminalize immigrants, but rather to expand

¹⁹⁵ Chomsky, 36-38.

¹⁹⁶ Huddle, 522.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 535-536; Tempest.

¹⁹⁸ Huddle, 531, 535.

¹⁹⁹ Chomsky, 14.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 26.

their rights as workers and to pass legislation that protects all workers from exploitation based on race, gender, *and* citizenship status.

Huddle was also ardently opposed to Reagan's amnesty bill, despite the fact that Project Jobs was intended to promote it. He argued that granting amnesty to millions of undocumented immigrants would cost the taxpayer \$25 billion a year in unemployment insurance for displaced American workers, social services to unemployed Americans, and a "loss of tax revenue due to underpayment of taxes by illegal aliens." Senator Alan Simpson, one of the sponsors of the bill, called Huddle's findings "absurd" and a "gross distortion," alleging his "results were based on figures even experts cannot agree on."²⁰¹ Regardless, Huddle's prominence and career made him a highly respected intellectual, and his alarming figures made national headlines, creating negative publicity for Reagan's immigration reform plan, while simultaneously contributing to anti-immigrant media sensationalism.

Ultimately, neither the *Wall Street Journal* nor Huddle offered substantiated assessments of the operation. The *Wall Street Journal* incorrectly portrayed the American working class as lazy and entitled, while Huddle's assessment was racist, inconsistent, and inconclusive, and his findings did not offer an effective solution to the unemployment crisis or the economic recession. Instead, his study legitimized INS abuse and misconduct, increased anti-immigrant sentiment, and added to the public's animosity and distrust of the federal government. The fact that Huddle referred to Project Jobs as an "experiment" is indicative of his indifferent attitude toward the undocumented lives affected by the operation, as he completely disregarded their experiences. Huddle failed to acknowledge how Project Jobs victimized immigrants and their families and

²⁰¹ "Economist: Amnesty Bill Would Cost \$25 Billion," *El Paso Herald-Post*, December 16, 1983, 12, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/798985297/?terms=Donald%20Huddle&match=1>.

caused widespread hysteria and suffering. He often dehumanized immigrants in his reports, portraying them as villains and parasites on the nation's well-being, rather than victims of the same capitalist economy that suppressed the American working class he supported. For example, in 1985, he declared Los Angeles to be a "third world city," and warned El Paso that they would soon become one as well if they did not do more to stop immigration.²⁰² Like many Americans in the early eighties, Huddle was disguising his racial hostility with rhetoric of "illegality," maintaining the perception that Latino/a immigrants were rightless people who did not belong in the United States and should not be protected in the workplace. Ironically, it was this shared sentiment that allowed businesses to continue to recruit and exploit undocumented workers.

²⁰² Bill Thompson, "Twin Plants' Lure Brings More Aliens," *El Paso Herald-Post* 105, no. 105, April 15, 1985, 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/798858208/?terms=Donald%20Huddle&match=1>.

VI. The Immigration Reform and Control Act

This thesis has argued that Project Jobs was intended to promote the Immigration Reform and Control Act, also known as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act, which was introduced to Congress the same year, but not officially signed into law by President Reagan until 1986. This act benefitted both the federal government and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) by bolstering the Reagan administration's image and by increasing the funding and power of the INS. It also benefitted some immigrants by granting amnesty to three million people, who could now compete fairly in the U.S. job market and were protected from deportation. However, critics of IRCA have argued that it did not reduce the undocumented population in the U.S. or improve the lives of immigrants. Instead, it increased the demand for more undocumented labor, increased discrimination in the workplace, depressed wages for immigrants, and increased anti-immigrant sentiment. Essentially, the problems highlighted by Project Jobs were only made worse by the legislation designed to fix them, the same legislation Project Jobs was designed to promote.

By 1986, the U.S. economy was steadily improving. Inflation was the lowest it had been in twenty years, and national unemployment had fallen to 6.8 percent.²⁰³ On the other side of the border, the peso continued to devalue after 1982 and by 1986, Mexico's economy was in critical condition, suffering from "a huge foreign debt, triple digit inflation and...a 13.5 percent decrease

²⁰³ J.A. Cacy, Glen H. Miller, Jr., and Dan H. Hoxworth, "The U.S. Economy in 1985 and 1986," *Economic Review* (December 1985), 3, <https://www.kansascityfed.org/documents/860/1985-The%20U.S.%20Economy%20in%201985%20and%201986.pdf>; William Roberds and Richard M. Todd, "Forecasting and Modeling the U.S. Economy in 1986-88," Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, *Quarterly Review* 11 (1987), 1; 9, https://econpapers.repec.org/article/fipfedmqr/y_3a1987_3ai_3awin_3ap_3a7-20_3an_3av.11no.1.htm.

in real per capital income in the preceding five years.”²⁰⁴ Therefore, immigration from Mexico to the United States continued to surge, and by 1986, “angry voters...wanted something done about it.”²⁰⁵ IRCA offered a solution to the problem, but that solution was not well received. The reform was formally introduced in 1982, but news of the new administration’s plans had been circulating since Reagan assumed office in 1980, and the media had deeply scrutinized the reform’s provisions as either too lenient, too harsh, or impractical. For most of Reagan’s white conservative supporters, the amnesty proposal was the most nerve-racking part of the reform plan, because it threatened to exacerbate and reward unwanted diversification.

Sociologist Susan González Baker has argued that amnesty programs are risky for the governments all over the world because they are unpopular in the eyes of the general public, and because they construct an image of vulnerability as they expose institutional flaws. Essentially, amnesty serves as a cost-effective and expedient solution for the nation’s failure to control its borders or to find and prosecute all lawbreakers within its perimeters. Therefore, when policymakers are forced to reluctantly introduce an amnesty program, they do so “only on the heels of renewed efforts to limit...immigration” with “new enforcement threats” such as “wholesale efforts at deportation.” According to Baker, when the INS began publishing “estimates of the illegal immigrant population” in the mid-1970s, “the social construction of a nation losing control of its borders was well entrenched in public sentiment, making border control a popular policy theme and amnesty a very hard political sell.”²⁰⁶ Therefore, Operation Jobs served to bolster support for IRCA by demonstrating the federal government’s ability to

²⁰⁴ Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Developing Country Debt and the World Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 141.

²⁰⁵ Phillips, 233.

²⁰⁶ Susan González Baker, “The ‘Amnesty’ Aftermath: Current Policy Issues Stemming from the Legalization Programs of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act,” *International Migration Review* 31, no. 1 (1997), 7-8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2547255>.

enforce existing immigration laws, thereby sending the message that amnesty would not result in a laissez-faire approach to law-breaking via undocumented migration. Many opponents of IRCA decried the bill as being “pushed through Congress on the coattails of Operation Jobs.”²⁰⁷ It became apparent that policymakers were using its widespread publicity to communicate the idea that the nation had a pressing immigrant problem that could be remedied with new legislation.

The first significant outcome of IRCA was the enactment and enforcement of employer sanctions against those who hired undocumented workers. IRCA repealed the Texas Proviso, which had previously protected employers who hired undocumented workers from criminal prosecution. After IRCA, penalties for employers who failed to verify appropriate documentation from workers included fines up to \$10,000, as well as possible jailtime. While employer sanctions were celebrated by those who assumed it would discourage employers from hiring undocumented workers, others, including leaders of Latino/a communities, observed an increase in racial discrimination as a direct cause of the sanctions. Several studies conducted between 1986 and 1995 revealed that the fear of legal consequences for hiring undocumented workers had caused an increase in employer discrimination against “foreign-looking individuals,” regardless of citizenship status. However, studies also revealed that despite employers’ attempts to comply with IRCA, unauthorized hires continued because of the “widespread availability and use of fraudulent documents,” severely limiting IRCA’s effectiveness. One study conducted in 1994 found that nearly “half of the unauthorized hires since 1986 have been made by employers who complied with IRCA.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Jenny Deam, “Governor’s Hispanic Council Criticizes New Immigration Bill,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 9, 1982, 115, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/678777644/?terms=Operation%20jobs%20Reagan&match=1>.

²⁰⁸ Phillips, 233-234.

Employer sanctions also resulted in depressed wages for undocumented workers, which Phillips and Massey argued was credited in part to employers turning to subcontracting to avoid liability for hiring undocumented workers. Employers hired a subcontractor to provide a certain number of temporary workers for a specific task or job, and since “neither the subcontractor nor the workers [were] technically employees of the firm,” employers were able to avoid paperwork requirements and thus were not legally liable if the employees were undocumented. However, the subcontractor retained a portion of the worker’s pay, so while the employer eluded expensive fines for hiring undocumented workers, the workers themselves lost money. Meanwhile, employers who continued to hire undocumented workers through traditional hiring practices accounted for the risk by directly lowering workers’ wages, thereby transferring the costs and risks associated with hiring undocumented workers to the workers themselves.²⁰⁹ According to Peter Brownell, by 1990, employer sanctions were no longer being strictly enforced, but subcontracting continued to flourish as an effective alternative to the financial and criminal risks associated with hiring undocumented workers.²¹⁰ Therefore, studies indicate that employer sanctions did little to reduce the number of undocumented workers in the workforce, but it did increase discriminatory hiring practices and depress wages, as well as further criminalize the workers themselves. According to Phillips and Massey, “it is clear that undocumented Mexican migrants entered a new and more hostile labor market in the years after IRCA.”²¹¹

The second outcome was the expansion and strengthening of the INS to deter further illegal immigration, as well as to enforce the employer sanctions. The American public had long

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 234.

²¹⁰ Peter Brownell, “The Declining Enforcement of Employer Sanctions,” *The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute*, September 1, 2005, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/declining-enforcement-employer-sanctions>.

²¹¹ Phillips, 244.

been calling for more federal support for immigration officials, and the publicity from Operation Jobs demonstrated the agency's need for more manpower and resources. IRCA increased Border Patrol personnel by 50 percent and increased the agency's funding by 75 percent.²¹² According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "the INS workforce, which numbered approximately 8,000 from World War II through the late 1970s, increased to more than 30,000 employees in thirty-six INS districts at home and abroad by the turn of the 21st century" as a direct result of IRCA.²¹³ According to Baker, policymakers hoped "that ineligibles would find the new immigration law enforcement climate so inhospitable they would leave."²¹⁴ IRCA also gave "local police more authority to arrest and detain immigrants" by increasing the authority to search and seize based on "reasonable suspicion," meaning law enforcement could invoke ambiguous excuses that were difficult to dispute in court.²¹⁵ After Operation Jobs and the outcome of *INS v. Delgado* set the precedent that law enforcement did not need a valid warrant to interrogate, make arrests, or conduct workplace raids, IRCA further constrained undocumented workers' rights in the eyes of the law.

The third outcome of IRCA was to grant amnesty to two groups of undocumented immigrants who met a strict set of criteria. The first eligible group were admitted under the Legally Authorized Workers (LAW) program, which accepted applications between May 5, 1987, and May 4, 1988. Under LAW, applicants could apply for temporary residency status if

²¹² Pia M. Orrenius and Madeline Zavodny, "Do Amnesty Programs Reduce Undocumented Immigration? Evidence from IRCA," *Demography* 40, no. 3 (August 2003): 439, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1515154>.

²¹³ "Overview of INS History," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, History Office and Library, 10, <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/fact-sheets/INSHistory.pdf>.

²¹⁴ Baker, 8.

²¹⁵ "Making a Good Job Better," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1982, 32, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/390775622/?terms=local%20police&match=1>; Barbara A. Susman, "The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 ("IRCA"): Impact Upon Employer/Employee Fourth Amendment Protections Against Unreasonable Search and Seizure," *Hofstra Labor and Employment Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (1987), 3; 14; 16, <https://scholarlycommons.law.hofstra.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1087&context=hlelj>.

they could prove with documentation they had lived in the United States since January 1, 1982. If approved, eighteen months later, applicants could apply for permanent residency by meeting several other criteria, including “demonstrating basic knowledge of the English language and American civics.”²¹⁶ Under IRCA, newly legalized immigrants were also banned from accessing social services for the first five years of their legal residency.²¹⁷

The Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) program was open to applicants six months longer than LAW, from May 5, 1987, until November 30, 1988, and required applicants “to have worked in U.S. agriculture for at least 90 days during each of the previous three years or for at least 90 days during the past year” to receive temporary resident status. SAW applicants were not required to show proof of residency, unlike LAW applicants, but applications were only open to agricultural workers, meaning workers in the urban sector were ineligible. The inclusion of the SAW legalization program was a compromise by the Reagan administration in response to some of the controversy surrounding the amnesty proposals. According to Craig A. Kopolowitz, when Reagan finally signed IRCA in 1986 after a four-year long journey through Congress, “he called it ‘the product of one of the longest and most difficult legislative undertakings in the last three Congresses.’”²¹⁸ California growers, a group with powerful political influence, refused to support the bill without a guestworker program to protect their seasonal labor supply, while immigration advocates wanted “generous amnesty” in exchange for their support of employer sanctions which they strongly opposed.²¹⁹ The policymakers pushing IRCA were thus forced to debate, compromise, and revise the bill for four years before it finally passed, with much reluctance from

²¹⁶ Orrenius, 439.

²¹⁷ Baker, 9.

²¹⁸ Craig A. Kopolowitz, “The Great Repudiator and Immigration Reform: Ronald Reagan and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986,” *The Journal of Political History* 30, no. 4 (2018), 635, <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.uta.edu/article/703057>.

²¹⁹ Baker, 9.

almost everyone who signed it, making it one of the most controversial pieces of legislation in history.

There were advantages and disadvantages to legalization under IRCA. Legalization opened new doors and opportunities for immigrants who were no longer forced to work in an underground economy. They could petition for higher pay and better working conditions because their employers could no longer threaten to call the INS if they complained or rallied their coworkers. Legalized immigrants could also travel internationally, meaning they could cross the border legally to visit their families and deliver repatriations more securely in person, without having to risk becoming apprehended by the Border Patrol each time they crossed. They could also petition for their relatives to become legalized and join them in the U.S., which was a significant advantage because the journey across the U.S.-Mexico border was dangerous and the assistance of coyotes was expensive, not to mention precarious. Not only were coyotes often unsuccessful and quick to abandon migrants to the Border Patrol once they were compromised, but some also preyed on migrants by robbing them, raping the women, trafficking the children and teenagers, and subjecting migrants to hazardous and life-threatening conditions. The ability to bring their families to the U.S. safely and legally was a substantial motivation factor for undocumented immigrants seeking legalization.²²⁰

Despite expanding immigrants' freedom from a legal perspective, legalization under IRCA offered "little economic mobility." Becoming legalized put immigrant workers in direct competition with U.S. citizens for jobs because employers who relied on undocumented labor continued to find it even after their employees became legalized. For most immigrants legalized under IRCA, they could either continue to work under the same conditions for the same pay or

²²⁰ Baker, 18.

look for work elsewhere. As a result, an immigrant advocate in Los Angeles noted that IRCA had caused “the highest levels of unemployment among its immigrant constituency in recent memory.”²²¹ Therefore, amnesty did not substantially improve the status of immigrants in the workplace. Rather, it created a stronger demand for more exploitable labor, which is made evident by the surge of border crossings following the passage of IRCA. Legislators promised that IRCA would reduce the undocumented population in the United States through amnesty, as well as discourage further border crossings through intensified border security. However, according to Minian, “in the two decades following its passage, the number of unauthorized migrants grew faster than ever,” increasing from 3.2 million in 1986 to 5 million in 1996, and later 11 million in 2006. Therefore, Minian contests that enhanced border security did not reduce border crossings, but it did multiply “the number of deaths and injuries” of migrants who sought new, creative, and more dangerous means of crossing the border illegally, or were subjected to violence by Border Patrol agents.²²²

There were also several factors that deterred immigrants from applying for amnesty. For one, undocumented immigrants feared that by petitioning for their own legalization, they were risking outing themselves to the INS if their applications were denied, or risking calling attention to their ineligible family members. Surveys conducted in California also found that 83.3 percent of applicants were male because women had much greater difficulty achieving legalization.²²³ According to Baker, this is because under LAW, “legalization required a paper trail demonstrating U.S. residence since 1982,” and “women were less likely to have such evidence,

²²¹ Ibid, 21.

²²² Minian, 183-184.

²²³ Elizabeth U. Cascio and Ethan G. Lewis, “Distributing the Green (Cards): Permanent Residency and Personal Income Taxes After the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986,” *Journal of Public Economics* 172 (April 2019), 137, <https://www-sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/science/article/pii/S0047272718302160?via%3Dihub>.

particularly when (1) they were partnered with men whose names appeared alone on leases, bank accounts, etc. and (2) when they were employed in the underground economy of domestic service.” Finally, “the INS battled in the courts to exclude applicants,” meaning the path to legalization was often too difficult and too expensive for many migrants who also risked deportation if they lost their case.²²⁴

Finally, Baker argued that IRCA directly contributed to an “anti-immigration backlash,” caused by the legislation’s failure to reduce the immigrant population in the U.S. Not only were crossings continuing at the same rate, but one of the benefits of IRCA was that newly legalized immigrants could bring their family members across the border to join them in the U.S. The growing presence of immigrants was “commanding” media attention and producing a renewed hysteria in both rural and urban communities. IRCA’s legacy, Baker claimed, “is a new battlefield, pitting immigrants against natives once again.”²²⁵ For example, in 1996, Glenn Spencer of the anti-immigrant organization Voices of Citizens Together, called IRCA a “terrible mistake:”

I think...(IRCA) was probably the worst piece of legislation ever passed by the United States of America. And in years to come, people will look back and say that’s what ended the country; that’s what ended the U.S. as a cohesive political unit...It increased fraud. It increased chain migrant immigration, and essentially...turned the American Southwest into a Mexican suburb, at least Los Angeles.²²⁶

Anti-immigrant advocates pointed to the “lax” enforcement of employer sanctions as the chief reason why it failed, as well as the amnesty program for encouraging additional migration.

²²⁴ Baker, 12-17.

²²⁵ Ibid, 22-24.

²²⁶ Frank Trejo and David LaGessee, “Legal Immigrants Leery of Legal, Political Backlash,” *The News Tribune*, November 17, 1996, 60, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/739825999/?terms=IRCA%20&match=1>.

On the other hand, the Latino/a community argued that its failure lay instead in its fueling of discrimination against Latino/a workers and the depression of wages. Phillips has claimed that IRCA created a “sizeable gap in wages between documented and undocumented migrants, one that did not exist before 1987.”²²⁷ Employers continued to seek exploitable labor, and IRCA’s provisions only lowered the status of undocumented workers who were more criminalized than ever before. Muzaffar Chisti of the Ladies’ Garment Workers Union (LGWU) argued in 1992 that IRCA had caused an increase in underground sweatshops in urban areas that successfully evaded the INS’ radar, where workers were subjected to the most hazardous working conditions because the companies were completely unregulated.²²⁸ Ultimately, IRCA did not secure the border, reduce the undocumented population, or improve working conditions, making it one of the most contested and controversial pieces of legislation ever passed.

²²⁷ Phillips, 243.

²²⁸ Rodman D. Griffin, “Tougher Immigration Law Poses No Barrier to Thousands,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, May 13, 1992, 10, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/273127062/?terms=IRCA%20failures&match=1>.

Conclusion

According to Calavita, following Operation Wetback, the INS resorted to “periodic ‘Show-Of-Force’ operations” beginning in the 1960s that were designed to intimidate prospective employers of undocumented workers by capitalizing on media sensationalism.²²⁹ Although Project Jobs certainly fits this definition of a show-of-force operation, this thesis has illustrated that the political motivations behind operations like Project Jobs were multifaceted, and far more complex than Calavita suggested. The reputation and sustenance of the INS, public and congressional support for Reagan’s immigration reform plan, and national anti-immigrant sentiment were all implicated by the successes and failures of Project Jobs. Furthermore, countless lives were impacted by this institutional and social “experiment,” as it was callously referred to by Alan Nelson and Donald Huddle. Most importantly, the operation demonstrated the lengths the government will go to maintain an illusion of control over immigration, so as immigration continues to surge, the continuation of show-of-force operations today suggests a frightening prospect for the future of the nation’s undocumented population.

Spokespersons for the INS claimed Project Jobs only lasted a week, but there were many incidents in 1982 that were associated with the operation that occurred after the last week of April, also known as the “April roundups.” Regardless of which incidents were classified under the title of the operation, however, all were part of a larger pattern of urban workplace raids that were becoming more frequent in the 1980s, and ultimately, the scope and the importance of Project Jobs expands beyond a single week. The operation highlighted the status of

²²⁹ Calavita, 162.

undocumented workers in urban America as expendable, exploitable, and unwanted, and the publicity surrounding it represented how prominent immigration politics were at the time and continue to be today. Finally, the operation is evidence of the disappointing lack of progress in the lives of the undocumented over time. In analyzing the “precarious condition” of the undocumented migrant, Ayten Gündogdu has said, “Precisely when one appears as nothing but human, stripped of all social and political attributes, it proves very difficult to claim and exercise the rights that one is entitled to by virtue of being human.”²³⁰ By denying the undocumented the same rights as citizens, society has justified dehumanizing a considerable and valuable population of human beings, and as a result, history continues to repeat itself.

In discussing the dilemma of social progress as historically a “move toward ‘sameness,’” Emma Perez asks in *The Decolonial Imaginary*,

Can we salvage history from sameness, from an assimilationist course, when the argument for the other as the same is what allows for necessary social reforms?...It is almost as if we are doomed to repeat the past, to move, not ahead, and certainly not dialectically, but in circles, over and over, as our communities “become” another kind of colonized/colonizer with the colonial imaginary overshadowing movements.

In the quest for social justice, the undocumented have historically been excluded from the conversation of rights, because their status as non-citizens has rendered them inherently rightless in the eyes of the law. Therefore, federal immigration stunts like Project Jobs continue to occur and to be justified for the purpose of protecting “citizens” from a foreign menace. In 2019, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested nearly 300 people at an electronic

²³⁰ Ayten Gündogdu, *Rightlessness in an Age of Rights: Hannah Arendt and the Contemporary Struggles of Migrants* (Oxford: Oxford University of Press, 2015), 2-3.

refurbishing company in Allen, Texas, in what federal authorities called the largest workplace raid since 2008, when 398 people were arrested at an Iowa slaughterhouse. Dallas immigration attorney Eric Puente said raids were becoming “more common during Donald Trump’s presidency after falling out of use during the Bush and Obama administrations.”²³¹

However, according to Jim Freeman, since the beginning of George W. Bush’s presidency, the nation has “been deporting between 165,000 and 435,000 people per year,” meaning apprehensions never slowed down, but the nature of them has changed.²³² This is because the strengthening of cooperation between local and federal law enforcement over time has provided federal immigration authorities access to the undocumented through the criminal justice system, a more convenient alternative to the implementation of workplace raids, which so often places immigration officials in legal skirmishes over warrant violations. According to Freeman, “the criminal justice system and the immigration system have become so thoroughly intertwined that it is often impossible to say where one ends and the other begins.”²³³

This strengthening and expansion of federal immigration authority as a result of their relationship with local law enforcement over the past few decades has caused immigrants to become more criminalized than ever before. For example, against the backdrop of a renewed anti-immigrant backlash in the mid 2000s, state lawmakers introduced thousands of immigration-related bills to counter the federal government’s perceived inability to enforce immigration laws. In 2008, the Secure Communities program began a data-sharing system between federal, state, and local authorities for the purpose of easing the process of identifying and detaining

²³¹ Charles Scudder, “About 280 Workers Arrested in ICE Raid at Allen Technology Business,” *The Dallas Morning News*, April 3, 2019, 2-3, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/immigration/2019/04/03/about-280-workers-arrested-in-ice-raid-at-allen-technology-business/>.

²³² Jim Freeman, *Rich Thanks to Racism: How the Ultra-Wealthy Profit from Racial Injustice* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2021), 198.

²³³ Freeman, 199.

undocumented migrants. Initially, local officials were not legally required to participate, but “after several jurisdictions” opted out of the program, ICE made participation mandatory. After ICE was hit with a slew of lawsuits, the Secure Communities Program was replaced with the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), which limited federal authorities’ jurisdiction by only allowing them to pursue certain noncitizens who were considered “enforcement priorities,” based on the nature and number of their offenses. Although it phased out in 2014, Donald Trump reinstated it in 2017 through an executive order, eliminating its “enforcement priorities,” once again expanding the pool of immigrants federal authorities had access to.²³⁴

In 2010, Arizona’s passed its SB 1070 law, also known as the “Show Me Your Papers” law, which required local law enforcement to verify the immigration status of any person believed to be undocumented during routine traffic stops, detentions, and arrests. SB 1070 inspired “two dozen copycat bills” across the country, although only five of them passed. However, “a total of 164 anti-immigrant laws were passed by state legislatures in just 2010 and 2011,” and “the election of President Trump in 2016 spurred yet another wave of state immigration laws.” In 2017, “ICE expanded its target areas to include schools, hospitals, churches, and courthouses,” demonstrating that immigration raids were no longer limited to worksites. By 2021, ICE was partnered with “133 law enforcement agencies across twenty-four states,” and federal, state, and local government policymakers have played a fundamental role in establishing and maintaining these relationships, sometimes through direct threats, as has been the case with Governor Abbot.²³⁵

In *Deconstructing the Nation*, Maxim Silverman writes, “The ‘post-colonial’ era is not a clean break with the colonial past; it is thoroughly determined by it,” illustrating the trap of

²³⁴ Amada, 32-33.

²³⁵ Freeman, 190; 198.

history's inevitable continuity.²³⁶ He also writes that "citizenship is a plastic term," that has been racialized and "systematically institutionalized in the formation of the nation-state."²³⁷ Press coverage of Project Jobs largely fell into two main camps of opinion: (1) The operation was necessary because immigrants displaced American workers, or (2) The operation was unwarranted because immigrants did the jobs American citizens did not want. Both narratives were restricted by the social construct of citizenship, which ignores the plight of the undocumented because their status as non-citizens excludes them from national belonging. As rightless beings, they are only considered in relation to their service to the nation's citizenry. The United States has always relied on a cheap and exploitable labor force, and the ability to produce and maintain it is contingent on the policing of citizenship. Therefore, based on Perez' argument that true social progress depends on our ability to analyze history within the decolonial imaginary, the lives of the undocumented cannot be improved until society begins to deconstruct the meaning of citizenship, which has policed the boundaries of the nation-state far more effectively than any fence erected on the U.S.-Mexico border.

²³⁶ Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1992), 110.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, 126-127.

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