

Mireya Loza. *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Pp. 234. Paper. \$27.49.

Mireya Loza, Assistant Professor of Food Studies at New York University, focuses on the complex realities of participants in the Bracero program in her book *Defiant Braceros*. The Bracero Program was initiated on August 4, 1942 when the United States signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement with Mexico. Bracero is a Spanish term meaning “manual laborer” and the program was a series of laws and diplomatic agreements. Loza interprets the complexity of the Braceros’ lives through their defiance to political, sexual, and racial norms.

Defiant Braceros uncovers the oppression these individuals faced from both the American and Mexican governments. Loza uses a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches to illustrate their defiance. The goal of her book is to bring truth and importance to these individuals by exploring the diverse experiences of the Braceros themselves, which contradicts the romanticized image associated with the family-oriented Mexican fathers. Braceros emerge as more than the simple family men whose lives consisted of only work. Braceros embraced nonconformist identities as they intentionally defied state laws while they demanded fair and just treatment from both governments.

Each chapter explores the ways in which Braceros demonstrated their defiance. Loza initially focuses on the experiences of indigenous workers and their crucial role in shaping narratives of Mexican modernization through the Bracero program. She explains the ways in which the Mexican government constructed the indigenous as socially and racially deviant. Loza continues to explain how many Braceros developed new sexual and social relationships which transformed ideas about gender, family, and masculinity for both men and women. The absence of braceros at home also rearranged the family unit, creating a more significant role for women. Alianza, an organization founded by Braceros along with Ernesto Galarza was an effort to create a transnational union for Braceros. The final quarter of the book focuses on the creation of BJM, the Bracero Justice Movement,

and their fight against the repressive actions of the Mexican government to reclaim the overdue back wages of Braceros along with their identity. Finally, Loza explains some of the differences that emerged among migrant citizens and undocumented workers.

Defiant Braceros is based on oral histories collected through interviews of former Braceros as well as political leaders, archival documents, and scholarly work. This also includes hundreds of digitized documents, as well as dozens of artifacts for the National Museum of American History in both the United States and Mexico. The bottom-up approach of oral histories from ex-braceros and family members allows readers to picture the struggles all participants faced during the era. Loza's top-down approach is evident with oral histories of political leaders and leaders of Alianza. A social and cultural approach is utilized when explaining the experiences of women sex workers who were present throughout the Braceros' journey. Many women are portrayed by Americans with an emphasized racial concept of idealized Mexican beauty in which indigenous women are unattractive. Loza includes crucial information about the Bracero program and how the American government oppressed these workers. However, she does not offer suggestions about how to solve issues pertaining to their back wages and whether they were compensated in any way for such injustices. This is an excellent book that successfully explains the racial tension and oppression within Mexican communities themselves. Understanding the history of the Bracero program helps inform our current debates and decisions about immigration reform, labor, and the real people affected by these policies. This book calls attention to government exploitation of the mestizo and indigenous population, while also showing the failure of integrating the rural poor into the national economy.

Dulce Rico