



Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando El Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-Mexico Border*, 2014.

Dr. Ana Rosas is a professor at the University of California, Irvine in the Departments of History and Chicano/Latino Studies. She is a specialist of twentieth century United States history, specifically on the Mexican immigrant family experience. Her first book, the award-winning *Abrazando El Espíritu*, studies how the demand for farm workers for American farms had key implications for immigrants and their loved ones across the border. The Bracero Program was more than just about workers in the United States; it transformed the lives of people in both nations.



In this passage from her book, Dr. Rosas speaks to this alienating separation of families.

Mexican women married or related to braceros did not abandon writing to their bracero relatives completely. Throughout their program participation, their emotional investment in their marriage or extended family moved them to write letters of love, or enlist others to help them write such letters, to their bracero husbands or other bracero relatives in which they expressed that they missed the braceros, prayed for their prompt return, valued them, and wished them well. Francisca Negrete Gonzalez was one of these women. Writing from Nuevo Leon, Guanajuato, in October 1943 to her husband, Juan Gonzalez Garcia, Francisca shared and requested information from him and reminded him that she was the “one who loves you truly, and wishes you the best, that you write me, your wife that loves you and never forgets you.” She began her letter by telling Juan to “receive greetings from my mama and my uncle and from me receive the finest memories.” She reminded him that regardless of how much money he was able to earn and save from his contract labor in Bakersfield, California, he would not be forgotten; he and their memories together were very much in the hearts and minds of their family. Like many other young women in long-distance romantic relationships with braceros, she also asked him to send her a photograph of himself. Explaining to Juan that “I wish to see you instead of writing you,” she urged him to “please have your picture taken if you have the way of doing so. I wish to see you again.”

Pages 105-106

On November 17, 1943, Teresa Garcia helped her ten-year-old daughter Rosa Lopez write to her bracero father, Jesus Lopez, from Distrito Federal [Mexico's capital]. Cautiously enclosing her daughter's letter in her own letter—perhaps to avoid attracting the unwanted attention of the US and Mexican governments—Teresa “shared with him that she had carried out his request to provide fifty pesos of their family savings to his mother. Reassuring him that their hard-earned savings had also made it possible to provide comfortably for their children—“wanting in school nothing and already I had bought shoes for both of them”—was Teresa's way of demonstrating to Jesus that out of her love for him and their family and marriage she had honored his wishes and acted as responsibly as possible.

Teresa concluded her letter of love by encouraging Jesus to “receive many kisses from all your children,” and “from me [to] receive the most sincere kisses, from your Teresa that loves you, and that prays to God that you will soon return.” Her emphasis on return was meant to dovetail nicely with Rosa writing her father, “I hope that you are well,” and asking him to “ask God that soon you will be with us to give you many little kisses and hugs as you give them when you are with us.” By stressing that she and “my brothers say that you must not forget them,” she tried to express the full extent of her affection for her father by echoing her mother's wish that he soon return to them. Writing to Jesus to make him feel their love, which was in no small part reciprocal for what he had done out of his love for them, was essential to Teresa and Rosa's pursuit of creating, providing, and sharing a moment of love with Jesus that did not discount the importance of their emotional needs.

Page 108

Questions for discussion

How do you see families staying in contact despite the far distance between them? What kinds of messages do loved ones behind in Mexico send to their bracero relatives in the United States?

Describe the range of emotions in these letters. How has this separation affected men, women and children?

Today you might not write a letter to an absent family member, go to a professional photographer to take your picture and develop it, or send money via a bank wire transfer. How has your modern-day approach to communication and sending changed? If you were the relative in Mexico wanting to contact your bracero father, husband, son or brother now, what would you say, what would you send, and how would you do these actions?