

Mexican Voices of World War II

Temporary workers from Mexico, or *braceros*, were recruited during the 1940s to help with wartime labor shortages. Approximately 1,000 *braceros* came to Philadelphia during this time, most to work on the Pennsylvania Railroad. These writings by *braceros* were originally printed in the newsletter, *El Bracero Mexicano*, published in 1945. The newsletter featured articles, essays, and poetry written by Mexican workers.



Braceros writing letters home, from the Philadelphia Record, 1944.

My Impressions, by Enrique Parra Ramírez (Camp # 464 – Philadelphia)

I feel so very happy to have come here to work on the railway lines of North America. I am happy not only because I have come to know this Great Land of Marvels but also because I have come to meet my obligations as a good Mexican citizen and to collaborate and help attain a victory for peace. I do this not as a soldier on the battlefields but rather as a worker on the work fields. While my countrymen fought on the frontlines, my fellow workers and I cooperate by working the railroads and others work in agriculture as well in order to assist this benevolent country the United States. We fulfill our commitment with our dear homeland showing in this fashion affection and friendship as good allies. We show that we know how to reciprocate the friendship that all of the United Nations has shown us.

Illusion, by H. Uribe González (Norristown Camp)

What is it that you seek, poor pilgrim
That you leave your home and homeland with pressured steps
Walking without direction or judgment
In light and shadows and on thorny paths?

I dream of relieving my outcast condition
Strengthen my spirit and soul
Not be burgess or proletariat class
Work hard with determination and rest in calm.

I seek the light that will brighten my thoughts
I seek a love that will enliven my soul
I am confident that I will find all of these things
Asking Him to help and guide me.

Why do you insist on useless wandering?
Longing to find all of this in foreign lands?
Return to your homeland, oh poor pilgrim
Be happy in your home, do not dream of quarrels.

Translation by Catalina Rios.

Source: El Bracero Mexicano, Nationalities Services Center collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

Reading Questions:

Who is the author?

Who is the intended audience?

What is the purpose of this writing?

What kind of writing is it? (i.e. news report, story, poem, advertisement)

Why do you think each author wrote about this topic?

Where is the setting for this writing?

When was it written?

How does it relate to the historical period?

What questions do you have about these pieces?

What experiences have you had that relate to what you read?