Chapter 7
MEXICAN AMERICAN MIGRANT WORKERS

We pick
the bittersweet grapes
at harvest
one
by
one
with leather worn hands
as they pick
at our dignity
and wipe our pride
away

We pick
with a desire
that only survival
inspires
While the end
of each day only brings
a tired night
that waits for the sun
and the land
that in turn waits
for us . . .

–Ana Castillo

Introduction

Research and publications concerning Mexican Americans in Idaho are nearly non-existent. The research amounts to an M.A. thesis (Reilly 1976) on Mexican American dropouts in one school in addition to a few state and federal reports on the housing conditions of Mexican American migrant workers. Historians, including Ourada (1979) and Gamboa (1990), have also examined the circumstances of Mexican American migrant workers in Idaho, but this was not the primary focus of their research.

The Idaho Ethnic Heritage Project (Mercier and Simon-Smolinski 1990) and the Idaho Human Rights Commission (Mabbutt 1990) produced reports on Mexican Americans in Idaho. The authors of these reports could find no major studies examining
the Mexican American population of Idaho. Most of the Heritage Project's data came from articles in Idaho newspapers, and the Human Rights Commission project concluded that the lack of research on Idaho's Mexican American population reflects the low status of the Mexican American community in Idaho.

The reports listed above agree that the primary reason that Mexican Americans came to Idaho was to fill the need of Idaho farmers for field workers. In the early 1900s Idaho sugar factories advertised in south Texas and in Mexico for farm workers. The Bracero program, an agreement between the American and Mexican governments, brought Mexican males to Idaho's fields to fill the labor shortage caused by World War II (Gamboa 1990). However, in 1960 only 3,300 Mexican Americans resided in Idaho on a year-round basis. The available literature reveals that Mexican American migrant workers have faced a consistent pattern of abuse. Historically they received low wages, lived in very poor housing, and faced intense discrimination. The Heritage Project (Mercier and Simon-Smolinski 1990) concludes that, "Idaho had the most notorious reputation for discrimination."

The Gamboa (1990) study reveals that several strikes were organized by the Mexican workers of the Bracero program during the early 1940s in southwestern Idaho to protest the poor housing, food, and working conditions. The Mexican Consulate in Portland barred Mexican workers from coming to Idaho for two years because of the intense bigotry.

The few documented studies available show that little has been done to change the circumstances of the Mexican American workers in Idaho. Almost all Mexican American migrant families in Idaho live in poverty. The average migrant family earns approximately half the poverty level income. Most live in substandard housing and have inadequate access to medical care. The summary that can be drawn from the existing data is that Mexican American migrant workers, both historically and currently, are exploited. Yet the work they do is essential for the agricultural industry of Idaho.

reports that an additional 4,500 Mexican American farm workers permanently reside in Farm County. López (1989) estimates that 10,000 undocumented Mexicans migrate yearly to Farm County. However, most governmental officials and Mexican American leaders think the number of undocumented workers is significantly lower than the 10,000 figure. Yet the Immigration and Naturalization Service arrested and charged a farmer from Farm County with twenty-two counts of knowingly creating and supplying false immigration documents for Mexican Americans working on his ranch. The Idaho Statesman, Boise’s daily newspaper, in its May 29, 1991, issue further reported that this same farmer employed 1,000 farm workers.

Because of the mobility of migrant workers, no one has been able to determine an accurate figure on the number of Mexican American farm workers in Farm County. The figures given above suggest that during the six-month farm season Farm County’s Mexican American population is perhaps double the official figures. This means that for half of the year 20 percent of the work force in Farm County is Mexican American—obviously a significant contribution to the Idaho economy.

**Radical Exploitive Model**

A strong case for the radical exploitive model comes from examining the social and economic position of Mexican American migrant and seasonal farm workers. As mentioned, Idaho’s Mexican American migrant workers earn, on the average, less than half the federal poverty standard. The wages of seasonal workers are only slightly better. Economic exploitation is possible because of the excessive number of workers who can only secure intermittent employment. Since they have traveled a great distance to seek work, migrants essentially become a captive labor force. The situation of Mexican American migrant workers in Farm County can be described as one of hard-core poverty. They survive on a limited diet that consists primarily of beans, potatoes, and tortillas. Migrant workers have few possessions, and most drive old cars that frequently break down. Their families generally do not have adequate access to health care. It is a
fact that only Mexican Americans primarily work as laborers in the fields, and it is common knowledge that nobody else looks to do this work. These Mexican American workers do among the hardest types of work for the lowest pay. The situation could be viewed as one of occupational apartheid.

A core element facilitating the exploitation is the ideological justification for the subordination of Mexican Americans. Middlewest and Farm County Anglos hold a set of beliefs that effectively serve to blame the victim. A key component is that poverty occurs because of individual deficiencies; therefore, migrant workers do not deserve assistance. The victimization of Mexican American migrant workers involves a standard rhetoric and a set of myths that includes the following: the migrant workers drive new cars; they cheat on welfare; they make good money; they prefer field work; they lack motivation; and they do not value education.

The capitalistic ideology contends that workers are free to select the type of work that they want, and that each person's attributes or "character" will determine his/her occupation, income, and social status. Such a belief system inhibits Anglos in recognizing flagrant inequality. Only a small percentage of Anglos viewed Mexican American poverty as a social problem.

As temporary residents, Mexican American migrant workers are not eligible to vote in Idaho. The result is that they have virtually no influence on government policies, whereas their employers, the Anglo farmers, have significant political influence at all political levels. One consequence of having no political voice is that governmental agencies that are supposed to provide services can bypass the Mexican American community. Parts of this chapter and the next will document the political oppression of Mexican American migrant workers. One result of political impotence is that the criminal justice system can easily abuse the civil rights of migrant Mexican Americans. The next chapter will examine the oppressive treatment of Mexican Americans within the judicial system.

Nothing could support more effectively the view that Mexican American farm workers face oppressive conditions in Idaho than the report on the migrant-seasonal worker farm survey
conducted by the Idaho Department of Employment (1991). It found that 30 percent of these workers were unemployed at the time of the survey. More than 30 percent of the workers were from Mexico and approximately 33 percent of those surveyed were unmarried. The average level of workers' schooling was the sixth grade, and most of their children will undoubtedly receive far less education than the national average. Eighty percent of those interviewed said that finding work and housing was a serious problem. The survey found an oversupply of farm workers. It also found that these workers often do not apply for government assistance programs; less than half even applied for food stamps. It is a sociological truism that the conditions listed above will result in a myriad of social problems.

Contrary to the Anglo stereotype, the survey found that Mexican American migrant workers would prefer to exit the migrant stream and have full-time work other than farm labor.

**Migrant Life**

Most Mexican American migrant workers come from Texas—from towns such as Eagle Pass, Pharr, and McAllen near the border. They migrate because they are unable to find work in their own area. Some of these workers travel a circuit through Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington. Most of them drive straight through from Texas to southwestern Idaho, arriving in May and leaving in October. They may stop for short breaks or to nap, but they do not stay in motels and they seldom eat in restaurants. Their worst fear is having car trouble.

I interviewed twenty-five Mexican American families who migrated to Farm County to do field work. My key-informant migrant family came to Idaho in a Ford van and a Mercury coupe. The previous fall, they had only traveled 100 miles when the transmission failed; it took several days to repair the car. The family had no choice but to sleep in the van. If auto repairs are too expensive, migrant workers sell their vehicles for junk.

Two of the most popular myths believed by Anglos are that migrant workers drive new cars and that they earn good wages. Generally, nothing could be further from the truth. A new car
is an exception, and, while migrant workers may sometimes receive decent paychecks for a period of time, they regularly live in poverty—not because they don’t know how to manage their money but, rather, because of their general economic circumstances.

A few young male Mexican Americans have older automobiles that they modify into “lowriders,” cars that they have adjusted to ride lower to the ground. The cars receive a coat of metallic paint and the owner removes much of the chrome. Mufflers are adjusted for a noisy rumble. Some owners reupholster and modify the interior of their cars. To a labor camp visitor, these cars can provide an intriguing introduction to a different culture.

The Sánchez family has been migrating for twenty-two years. They come to Idaho because they cannot find full-time employment in south Texas. The family includes seven children, whose ages range from two to nineteen years old, as well as the children’s grandmother. The group had a difficult winter because Elena Sánchez and two of the boys had worked for a fast-food restaurant that cheated them out of their pay. They arrived at the Middlewest Labor Camp broke. They sought the assistance of the Idaho Migrant Council, which has a federal grant to provide a small amount of assistance for migrant families for gas, rent, and food. The director of this program informed me that many migrant families arrive in Idaho with little or no money.

To understand better the migrant work system, one must start with the labor contractor or “crew boss.” The crew bosses work for the farmers and recruit the necessary labor to do the field work. A crew boss operates as a foreman who has the responsibility of supervising the field workers. A crew boss will generally have two or three crews working in the fields. Some bosses work exclusively for one large farm, and the crew bosses who manage the labor for big farms live year-round in Farm County. Other crew bosses for smaller farms are migrants.

Many migrants and seasonal workers claim that the crew bosses cheat them. They say that the farmer pays their money to the crew boss, who then takes some of their earnings. Also, farmers frequently award the crew bosses a bonus which they
do not share with the workers. The low pay workers receive, coupled with the privileged position of the crew boss they witness, often results in the laborers’ resentment toward these labor contractors.

The farmer bears the responsibility for the low pay of the Mexican American migrant worker, but the crew boss, usually another Mexican American, serves as a buffer between the owner and the worker. On the one hand, the crew boss represents a success story. A crew boss for a large farm can earn over $25,000 a year. This position offers an avenue out of poverty for the migrant worker. On the other hand, the crew boss sometimes acquires and displays the same negative attitudes as the farmer; and even if they do not take advantage of their fellow Mexican American workers, crew bosses generally will be resented and viewed as being disloyal to the Mexican American community.

Everado Villa is a labor contractor for one of the large farms in Farm County. His father was also a crew boss. He dislikes workers from Texas because they do not work hard enough; and he prefers workers straight from Mexico because “they work hard and keep their mouths shut.” He claimed that he has to keep his eyes on the Texas migrants to make sure they work and do not steal anything. He said that he absolutely hates the Legal Aid people because they take the farmers to court for no legitimate reason. Everado earns more than $30,000 a year and his family has experienced a high degree of assimilation. He was proud that he does not live like the other Mexicans. He and his wife plan to have just one child, so that they can afford to send her to college. Most of their friends are Anglo and their leisure time activities include boating and snow skiing.

Flora and Salvador Enríquez are also crew bosses, and they too arrived in Farm County via the migrant trail. They have become bicultural by developing friendships with both Anglos and Mexican Americans. Flora is on a bowling team in which the rest of the team is Anglo. Salvador has served on the board of directors of the IMC. Both of their children have college degrees, and they said that this is the land of opportunity. Yet they also believe that Mexican Americans receive “unfair” treatment
from Anglos. They believe the schools and the police “mistreat” Mexican American youth. Salvador believes that the farmers pay their workers as much as they can. Flora said “we [her family] want to keep our culture and get ahead.” She said that the couple supports the Mexican American community because “we know what it is like to be poor.”

The farmers in Farm County are dependent on migrant labor. Their labor needs include the following: weeding, thinning, and irrigating crops; picking fruit; detassling corn; harvesting; repairing machinery; applying fertilizers and pesticides—to name only some jobs. However, the farmer requires many workers only intermittently. Local farmers generally have one or two Mexican Americans who work for them most of the year; one of these might be the crew boss and the other a seasonal worker.

The migrant workers earn a minimum wage of $4.25 an hour, or sometimes less. Some jobs pay by piece work. In the fall of 1991, apple pickers in Farm County received 22 cents a bucket for picked apples. The fastest workers made up to sixty-six dollars a day. Only young males could earn this much, and they had to work at incredible speed. With a ladder and a bucket, these men worked without breaks in order to pick 300 buckets in a day.

In topping onions, the fastest workers could make $100 a day by working rapidly for long hours. The work quickly becomes backbreaking, since the worker must bend over all day pulling onions from the ground and cutting off the dried tops. The laborer must then stack the onions in rows for the harvester to convey them into trucks. Topping onions takes place in the early fall on hot, dry, and dusty days. Spending a day working in the onion fields would be a great experience for those who believe in the myth that Mexicans are lazy.

If the field workers only picked fruit and topped onions regularly they could make a decent living, but these jobs are only of brief duration. The typical migrant worker goes many days without work. Also, a person does not remain young and fit forever.

I spent two weeks with Elena and Gilbert Sánchez and their family to gain a better sense of the life of a migrant farm laborer
family. They informed me that their religion plays a significant role in their family life. They belong to the Mennonite Church and attend services three times a week; they joined this church because Gilbert needed help to overcome a drinking problem. Each morning at 6:00 A.M. as I joined the family in their van, they said a prayer before leaving for the day’s work.

Gilbert shared with me his views on the difficulties of migrant life and of his inability to get ahead financially. In 1991 the yearly earnings of Gilbert, Elena, and their two older sons amounted to $12,000. They needed to make car payments and they also had expensive car repairs. They cannot afford to go to the low-income medical clinic when a family member becomes ill. Gilbert and Elena hope that their seven children will have a better life; they remain happy because of their faith in the Lord.

The following summer, I spent another week with the Sanchez family. Elena is a crew boss, and I wanted to observe her organizing and supervising her workers. Elena had two crews of twenty workers each in the fields. Most of the workers in one crew were relatives of Elena’s. Her family and Gilbert’s brother’s family work together in the fields. This extended family has a very congenial relationship with one another. When Elena checks on the other crew, Gilbert takes charge of the number one crew. Elena’s crews spent the week thinning crops, which does not require the speed of piece work; but the workers kept a steady pace. The crews work six days a week and take a fifteen-minute lunch break.

One of the reasons migrant families earn a low income is that there are many days when they do not have work. In the fall of 1990 the workers could not top onions for ten days because of hot weather and the danger of the high temperatures scalding the exposed onions. In the spring of 1991 the workers could not thin and weed crops for a week because of rain. Even without weather problems, migrant workers lose many days of work because farmers do not need them regularly.

Another type of migrant work involves working in the sheds, the places where fruit and vegetables are sorted and packed. I spent a week observing and interviewing people employed at an
onion shed and at an apple packing plant in Farm County. These facilities employ approximately forty workers. Farm produce can be stored there until it is delivered to food wholesalers. The supervisors and managers are Anglo and they generally hold negative opinions of their Mexican American workers, who include a mixture of migrant and seasonal workers. These people earn minimum wage or close to minimum wage, work irregular hours, and must be available for work at the time of day and for the number of hours specified by the manager. The number of hours worked ranged from zero to as much as twelve hours a day. The manager of the onion shed had an exceedingly high rate of firings, with well over 50 percent of his workers being fired in a season. The sheds and plants operate only four or five months out of the year, yet this work is held in higher esteem than is field work.

The Anglo foreman works year-round, receives benefits, and earns five times the amount paid to the Mexican American workers. The manager earns twenty times as much as the Mexican American workers. The three Anglo farmers who owned the shed declined to disclose to me their average annual profits from this business. The Mexican American migrant workers, earning low wages and with little control over their working hours and conditions, have few resources and few allies, which makes them easy targets for abuse.

The children of migrant laborers start to work in the fields when they reach the age of twelve to fourteen, depending on their strength and how much the family needs the additional income. The younger children generally attend migrant Head Start programs operated by the IMC. The children too old for the Head Start program stay in the local labor camp, where grandparents, an older child, or a neighbor look after them.

The migrant children I talked with do not attend school in Middlewest. The schools in Texas arrange for migrant youth to make up the days of school they miss because of migrating. These children miss a month of school in both the fall and spring, and I suspect that the quality of their education must be seriously diminished. Migrant parents usually value
education, but their way of life contributes to many of their children becoming school dropouts.

When the Sanchez's daughter Tina failed to pass the seventh grade, Elena and Gilbert had her working in the fields to teach her a lesson. They believe the hard work will convince her to study. However, when the children of migrant workers go to the fields, they join their family and friends who also are working there. The youths' most important role models often work in the fields, and adolescents generally want to achieve adulthood as soon as possible. Field work actually can be an attractive option to young people who are doing poorly in school and who never plan on being sick or getting old. Yet with the loss of these young minds and their creativity from the schools, the Mexican American community loses many potential teachers, social workers, and doctors.

Health Care Problems

Mexican American migrant workers frequently do not have health insurance or enough cash to pay for medical care. Several migrants said that they could not afford the low-income medical clinic. This situation forces many migrant families to forego needed medical care. Some migrants informed me that the Middlewest hospital has refused to provide services to them. Liz Jarvez, who lives in the Middlewest Labor Camp, said: “My neighbor Sherry, her daughter was playing—she turned a pot of boiling water on herself. Sherry took Maria to the emergency ward in Middlewest. I got there an hour later. Those people hadn't treated Maria. I was so mad I started yelling and screaming for someone to help this little girl. They finally treated her; but if I wouldn't of come, Sherry was ready to leave.”

One day I observed Elena Sánchez rubbing the sides of her face; I asked her what the problem was. She informed me that her teeth ached constantly. I asked if she had seen a dentist, and she replied that they were behind on the rent at the labor camp and could not afford any dental bills. I checked with various social service agencies, inquiring about low-income dental assistance in Middlewest. Each agency referred me to another
agency. The low-income medical clinic finally informed me that they have one dentist who works part-time for the clinic. I asked for an appointment for Elena; they said they would place her name on a waiting list. I declined to make the appointment for Elena when I learned that she would have to wait one year for it.

Carlos Cortez, a young adult migrant worker, shared the following experience. His father, Juan, had serious ulcer problems. Carlos had to take his father to the emergency ward at the Mid­dlewest hospital, which refused to treat him because he had no insurance or cash. Juan underwent surgery for a bleeding ulcer in a Texas hospital three weeks later.

Migrant Field Workers

Mexican American migrant workers have different attitudes and perceptions of migrant life, which can be depicted as an uneven continuum. On one end of the continuum are a few migrants such as eighteen-year-old Sid Guzmán. He represents the small number who enjoy working in the fields. He feels like an adult because he has a paycheck, a wife, a pickup, and a new baby. He likes making his own decisions, and he feels important because he has more money than the local residents when he spends the winter in Mexico.

At the other end of the migrant continuum are many more people, such as Benita Diaz. She hates all the traveling involved in the migrant way of life and recognizes its negative impact on her children’s education. She works in the bakery of a grocery store and also has a part-time job as a secretary at the labor camp. Benita has worked at the grocery store during several migrant seasons and has been offered the opportunity to work there permanently. She has asked her husband to let the family stay in Middlewest year-round because it would allow their children to do better in school. He would like to exit the migrant trail but he owns a house and has family in Texas; however, his main concern comes from his doubts about being able to find a permanent job.

Miguel and Beatrice Flores both grew up in migrant families
and have become migrant workers themselves. They live in the Middlewest Labor Camp with their daughter. The parents of the couple also live in the camp. Beatrice’s family has lived in the camp for several years. Beatrice spent some time attending the high school in Middlewest but she dropped out in the tenth grade because she hated school and the teachers. Miguel’s family has migrated from southern California for the past fifteen years.

Miguel and Beatrice together earned $8,000 in 1991; they also receive rental assistance and food stamps. They spend most of their leisure time in the labor camp, where they like living because they have family and friends there. Miguel enjoys sports and drinks an occasional beer with the other men in the camp. The Flores do not have much contact with Anglos, but they dislike how Anglos treat them in Middlewest. The local police have arrested Miguel several times for driving violations, including not having a driver’s license, not having insurance, and driving under the influence of alcohol. Miguel thinks that the police only arrest the Mexicans. The couple claim that Anglos stare at them and look down on them when they go to the local stores; they say some Anglos call them “wetbacks.”

The Flores do not feel optimistic about their future. They want their children to speak Spanish and to be proud of being Mexican, but they hope that the children will not have to do farm work. The couple have more hostility about their inability to escape field work than do some of the older Mexican American migrant workers. They told me: “The field work is in the hot sun and it’s dirty work. They pay you less money. The Anglos have everything, air conditioning. No Anglos work in the fields. This is not a way to live; we can’t pay our bills. . . . We would like to work in the nice office, same rights, be able to get loans, and be treated more the same as the Anglos.”

Romero and Eva Vásquez also live in the Middlewest Labor Camp with their daughter. They both grew up in migrant families and they met in the fields. Both dropped out of school because they could not keep up with the non-migrant youths. They earned $7,000 working in the fields during the summer of 1990. Romero said that he could not find enough work
because of the high number of migrants seeking work. The Vasquezes experienced financial problems when they bought a car. Romero paid $1,300 cash for a 1979 Ford and then he and a friend had to rebuild the engine. Romero reported that he only had a part-time construction job during the winter in Texas and Eva could not find work. They borrowed money from a relative to finance the 1990 trip to Farm County. They arrived in Middlewest broke, but they received some emergency assistance from the IMC. They do not like the Middlewest Labor Camp because the single men there drink and fight; it bothers Eva that nobody controls their behavior.

The Vásquez family received food stamps but still were not able to save much money for the winter. They barely have enough money to return to Texas. They think that the labor camp manager is unfair because he will not return their rental deposit of fifty dollars because of some problems with the apartment. They claim that the apartment had the problems when they moved in, and the deposit certainly represents a large amount of money to them. Romero said the following about race relations: "We hardly ever go out to dinner. When we go back to Texas we drive straight through. We only stop to nap and to buy groceries. We decided to go out to dinner. Everyone in the restaurant was looking at us. We felt so uncomfortable we left."

Romero holds a confusing set of beliefs about his circumstances. He wants to attend vocational school to become a mechanic, but he does not have any money to finance his education. He doubts if he can gain acceptance because he does not have a high school diploma and he has to work to support his family. Yet he has not given up on the American dream: that you can get ahead in America if you try hard enough. Romero vacillates between his pessimism and the hope that someday his family will prosper.

Carlos Cortez lives with his parents in the Hop Town Labor Camp. He has migrated from Texas with his parents for as far back as he can remember. He speaks fluent English; his parents understand English but lack the confidence to speak it. Carlos serves as interpreter when his parents need to talk to Anglos.
His parents grew up in Mexico, and Carlos said that they prefer to live like traditional Mexicans. They generally remain in the camp to avoid interacting with Anglos; they listen to the Spanish radio station and attend Spanish mass. They always eat Mexican food, mostly beans and tortillas, because they only earn $7,000 a summer. The family only leaves the camp on Sundays to attend church, purchase food, get gas for the car, and wash their clothes at the laundromat. When the family members are not working, they rest. They live a spartan life: their apartment furniture consisted of a kitchen table and chairs, an ancient television sitting on an empty crate in the living room, and their beds. These items constituted the entire furnishings of their apartment when I met them.

Carlos said that he worries about the lack of work and the low wages; he does not think that the family has saved enough money to get through the winter. He told me that he did not intend to marry, because he could not raise a family on his wages. The family refuses to apply for food stamps although they meet the eligibility requirements. Carlos concluded by claiming that the family can survive because they know how to get by with little money.

Juan Zapata, a twenty-four-year-old Mexican American, lives at the Hop Town Labor Camp. He grew up in Mexico. The INS deported his family several times before they received legal papers. Juan only attended school for three months before beginning life in the fields. He has traveled all over the United States as a migrant worker. He has relatives in Middlewest but he has only migrated to Idaho for the past two years.

Juan shared with me much of his knowledge about “getting to know the ropes” upon arriving in a new area. He had no money when he arrived at Middlewest. He stayed with relatives until he could rent his own apartment, and his relatives told him where he could receive emergency assistance. His next problem was gaining information about how to contact the crew bosses. From talking with other workers, he learned about the best jobs that are available to migrant workers. Fighting fires for the Bureau of Land Management pays the highest wages, and the BLM frequently hires large crews during the fire season.
Juan considered himself lucky to obtain the second best work, a job at the sugar factory, because they needed extra workers on the day he applied. Juan then spent the late fall and early winter working the four-month campaign at the sugar factory. During 1991 Juan had five different jobs.

In the winter, however, Juan could not find work. He met the eligibility requirements for food stamps and unemployment insurance. The insurance can be manipulated to a slight extent, since the recipient can choose when to have the payments begin, allowing the worker to receive the highest benefits. Juan listens to the Spanish-language radio station because he likes the music and also because he obtains information pertinent to Mexican Americans, such as information about work availability and the schedules of performances of the good Mexican bands.

Juan said that when migrants have car trouble it helps to know the local Mexican American mechanics, who generally live in the camps, because they're the only ones migrants can afford. He told me that he generally buys cars from private parties; most migrant workers do not trust used-car salesmen. Juan learned that license plates cost significantly less in Idaho than they do in Texas. He said that few migrant workers have checking accounts but they do have savings accounts. He also inquires about the location of the best low-income medical clinic. I asked Juan if racism is a problem for Mexican American migrant workers. He replied: "Most migrant workers do not have much interaction with Anglos. When we go to the stores and businesses, some Anglos will look at you. By the way they look, you can tell that they don't think you belong here. Just by how they look they tell you your presence is offensive. I have had to face this all my life, so it is not that much of a problem because I expect it."

Amelia Morales is a grandmother. I arrived at her apartment in the Middlewest Labor Camp just as she returned from the fields where she had been topping onions. As I explained my research project, she kept rubbing an arthritic knee and moaning because of her aching back. Her three grandchildren sat quietly watching cartoons on a snowy television screen. She has custody of the
children because their mother has a drinking problem and is unable to provide care for them.

Amelia’s husband of thirty-seven years left her because, as he said, “We raised our kids and we’re not raising any more.” She told her husband she didn’t have a choice. She receives assistance, but the money doesn’t go far enough; therefore, this sixty-year-old grandmother has to top onions, which is the most physically demanding field work. An unrelated middle-aged Mexican American woman was also living in the apartment. I learned that Mrs. Morales had taken her in because she had no money and her boyfriend had left her stranded at the labor camp.

I interviewed two Mexican American migrant women whose responses to my interview were incoherent. They seemed very confused and I could not make sense of many of their responses. They could not clearly present to me an account of their recent experiences. However, I was able to obtain some information from these interviews by listening to the tapes several times. Their confused mental state is quite possibly the product of their chaotic lives. Their lives had lacked any permanence for several years and the extreme instability had left them exhausted. They moved often; they had lived with two or three different men; they drank excessively; and they had held many jobs, but only for short periods of time. Seeing the fear and pain exhibited in the appearance and the demeanor of these women, who were living on the edge, just barely hanging on to a human life, was a sobering experience for me.

When I interviewed Deli Gonzáles, she had just moved into the Budget Motel. She had money for one week of rent because of the rental assistance she received from the IMC. Tony, a man with whom she has lived for three years, had not been able to find work. They had started back to the state of Washington when their car broke down. With only enough money for food, they had to live in the car for a week.

Deli had a crying baby on the bed beside her. Flies in the room took turns investigating the baby and the spoiled, half-eaten cans of food left on the table. There was no refrigerator, so it was necessary for them to buy their groceries daily.

Deli said that her husband, from whom she has not obtained
a divorce, has her three other children. The courts awarded custody of them to her husband because she had left the children with their grandparents. She wants her children back, but she acknowledged that the courts will not assist her because she and Tony drink excessively. Deli fears that Tony is going to leave her, because he threatens to do so when he drinks. With her shabby clothes, tangled hair, and desperate eyes, Deli appeared wilted, as though she had just finished running a marathon. Her soft, defeated voice echoed her state of depression. I could not help but feel that she was losing her race for survival.

The leisure time of many Mexican American migrant workers is used to go into town for gas, shopping, and to use the laundromats. They also go to church and watch television. Migrant families do not have the financial resources to participate in the consumer-oriented lifestyle of the Anglo middle class. They live separate lives from the Anglos. Their dream is for their children to become educated and better able to participate in elements of the life that is denied them.

Many Mexican American migrants resemble the Sanchez family. They work hard, go to church, love their children, and never cause any trouble. They live lives preoccupied with day-to-day survival. Unfortunately, the Anglos of Middlewest and Farm County often do not see the quiet dignity of these Mexican American migrant families.

**Housing**

Much of the housing for Mexican American migrant workers was initially provided by the farmers. Older Mexican Americans in Farm County described as primitive the housing provided by the farm associations. The units consisted of one small room with a wood stove and no insulation. Sanitary conditions were substandard because of the lack of running water in the units and the communal toilets and showers. Most of the units did not have window or door screens.

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights stated that nine farm labor housing entities served migrant workers in southwestern Idaho. It also reported that much of the housing available to migrant workers was deplorable. Today, only three farm housing operations remain in Farm County. Farm County farmers said they closed down the units they operated because of "unnecessary government regulations." The condition of farm housing today varies widely.

In 1991 the State Economic Opportunity Office (SEOO) evaluated the housing units at the Middlewest Labor Camp. Its report states that a serious housing problem exists because of the lack of affordable housing for migrant laborers. The report also states that overcrowding exists in the available housing units and that local communities appear reluctant to rent to migrant workers. The SEOO report records the fact that the 112 apartments at the Middlewest Labor Camp have a 60 percent occupation rate year around. Since they do not have sufficient insulation or adequate heating units, these units do not meet the year-round requirements for housing.

In a 1991 letter to SEOO, the director of the Western Idaho Community Action Program reported that in serving large numbers of low-income Mexican Americans they found inadequate housing to be their most serious problem. The program claims to have assisted forty Mexican American families in one week at the Middlewest Labor Camp. These Mexican Americans had no choice but to sleep outdoors or in their vehicles.

The situation for migrant, H2A worker, and undocumented Mexican American worker housing has to be horrendous for Farm County. The local television station in 1991 carried a story reporting that single males from Mexico were sleeping in abandoned buildings and garages.

The housing expert for the Idaho Migrant Council shared his frustration over the housing problems facing migrant workers. The IMC field administrators find many labor housing operations to be grossly inadequate, but the IMC is reluctant to lodge complaints with government agencies because the farmers' associations have said they then will simply tear down the facilities.
If the frugal farmers were willing to tear down these housing units, it does not take much imagination to appreciate what their quality is.

From my observations in interviewing Mexican American migrant workers in their apartments, trailers, and labor camps I found the majority, but not all, of the migrant housing to be substandard. The Hop Town Labor Camp has decent housing for Mexican American migrant workers but this camp is the exception. The majority of Mexican American migrant families live in apartments that are overcrowded and inadequately maintained. Few of the housing units have washers and dryers; the kitchen appliances and heating units are antiquated. Most housing units for migrants are not properly maintained, which means that most are in need of extensive repairs.

**Middlewest Labor Camp**

The Middlewest Labor Camp is technically part of the town of Middlewest but there is a two-mile gap between the labor camp and the town. The Middlewest Labor Camp is a rural ghetto. The housing could only be described as wretched. If the camp existed in town and had greater visibility, there would most likely be an outcry to either eliminate or improve this housing. My Mexican American informants assured me that many such labor camps exist across southern Idaho. The Middlewest Labor Camp has a housing capacity of 900, but a member of the Middlewest Housing Authority said that he believes the camp has approximately 1,400 residents. Many Mexican American families residing in the camp exceed the prescribed limit of five persons per apartment. One migrant family I interviewed consisted of ten family members living in an apartment.

The Middlewest Labor Camp has two sections. One section has forty-six wood houses built during World War II. These houses look to be in an advanced state of dilapidation. The exterior wood cries out for a coat of paint; the yards have more weeds than grass. The walls of some buildings are covered with graffiti. Empty bottles, cans, and other litter cause the camp to resemble a trash dump. The interiors of the homes
and apartments match the abysmal appearance of the exteriors. Most units need numerous repairs to appliances and bathroom fixtures. The interior walls have holes and need paint; the floors do not have protective coverings of any kind.

The summer daytime temperature in Farm County can remain in the nineties for six to eight weeks. After a day of hard labor in the hot fields, the farm worker must return home to a small apartment that can feel like an oven. Some Mexican Americans live in the uninsulated apartments in the winter. Frost collects on the interior walls and the residents may turn on all the gas burners on the kitchen stove in an attempt to stave off the cold. Even then, they must wear winter coats or other extra clothing in order to stay warm. Many Mexican American subjects reported that their children frequently have colds or pneumonia.

A typical apartment at the Middlewest Labor Camp is sparsely furnished with items that have little or no monetary value. The units consist of four rooms, including two small bedrooms. The kitchen floor space measures approximately eight by ten feet. The table and chairs could hardly be given away. Most families have to eat in shifts because of the small size of the room and its table. The bathrooms commonly feature leaky faucets and noisy toilets needing repairs. Water problems have ruined the floors of many apartments. The apartments look, feel, and smell uninhabitable due to an accumulation of dirt, stains, and crumbling cinder blocks. The inmates at the Idaho State Penitentiary have better housing. What happens to the psyche of those living in poverty conditions, when they know that a sentence to the state prison would improve their housing, food, and medical care?

Cars, pickups, and vans are an integral part of the labor camp scene. Occasionally, one sees a recent model car or truck but, for the most part, the typical Mexican American migrant worker (no Anglos lived in the camp during the research period) drives an older model car that has seen better days. Mexican Americans appear to like big American cars, but part of their popularity lies in the affordability of these cars. Many of the vehicles have mechanical problems, and with many of these cars in various states of repair, the camp can bear a striking resemblance to an auto-wrecking yard.
One can frequently observe Mexican American men working on the cars. Migrants do their own auto repairs because they cannot afford commercial garages. If the mechanical problem exceeds the men’s technical knowledge, they then use the informal network of both migrant and permanent resident Mexican Americans who have training in auto mechanics and will repair the migrants’ cars at an affordable price. This sharing of expertise exemplifies the sharing nature of Mexican American culture and its solidarity, although some sociological writers see this cooperation mainly as a response to poverty conditions (Connor 1985).

Some labor camp residents complain about the noise, drinking, and car traffic at night. They maintain that the family people do not cause any trouble—it’s mostly the single, young males who drink and fight. Liz Jarvez, a camp resident, said, “When it comes right down to it, all the problems in the labor camp come down to one thing: alcohol; it causes all the problems.”

Because of the devastating poverty in their own country (Davis 1990), Mexican nationals—mostly young, single males—migrate from Mexico for the summer farm season. Typically, they attempt to save half their earnings to take back to Mexico. Some of these men live in large groups, in housing that at best would be called shacks; some Mexican nationals also live in the Middlewest Labor Camp.

During the period of my field research, some crimes (mostly misdemeanors) occurred in the labor camps, and one murder did occur at the Middlewest Labor Camp. Newspaper accounts of the crime and interviews with camp residents indicate that the murder resulted from a fight between two young men over a woman. A young observer of the fight was accidentally shot and killed.

If it were society’s intent to create criminals, the living conditions of the typical farm worker would be a perfect spawning ground. Most Mexican nationals and some migrants are young males with a limited education and frequent periods of unemployment. Add to this the fact that most Anglos hold racist views toward Mexican American migrants and avoid contact with them. Stir into this mix a group of single men who remain
on the fringes of the local Mexican American community. Conflicts inevitably arise, and these conflicts often are aggravated by the police, who are anxious to separate out the "unfit."

Virtually every aspect of the Middlewest Labor Camp provides evidence to support the radical exploitive sociological model. A colonial arrangement develops because the elected government officials create and maintain the labor camps. Politically, the labor camp is part of Middlewest; the city government has authority for the camp, but the camp does not receive city services such as street and park maintenance. No one on the city council campaigned at the labor camp for election. The county does not provide regular police service to the camp. The state of Idaho, manifests good intentions by assisting in writing grants for new housing, but this will simply extend the life of this ghetto. The camp is unofficially but effectively considered to be "out there" somewhere and that allows all levels of government to shirk responsibility for the housing conditions.

The Farmers Home Administration (FHA), a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides the capital necessary to build migrant farm housing. The arrangement is ironic because few yell louder about government taxation and welfare than farmers, and yet these same farmers have their workers' housing costs assumed by the government. Furthermore, almost all migrant workers meet the eligibility requirements for food stamps, a program of the Department of Agriculture, and one which would not be so greatly used if migrant workers could earn better wages. Yet in both cases Anglos interpret governmental assistance programs as evidence of the inferior status of Mexican American migrant workers. The situation could be termed a Catch-22, because migrant workers are oppressed and yet are blamed for the results of such oppression.

**Housing Authorities**

The Farmers Home Administration has the ultimate authority regarding the farm labor camps, and it establishes the rules and regulations for these facilities. The FHA requires that each camp be governed by a housing authority. The mayor of the
town in which the labor camp is located appoints a governing board. The boards in Farm County are primarily made up of local farmers, which leads to some interesting analyses concerning their governance. It is almost like the old company towns where the company governs the town and not only controls people’s work but also their houses. One wonders why farmers are considered the best governors of these camps and why the tenants have no representation on the boards.

I interviewed five housing authority board members in Farm County. These people did not perceive any problems with the governance or the maintenance of the labor camps. The ideas that the labor camps might be governed non-democratically or that the managers might abuse their authority were ones they had not seriously addressed. The board members believe that the labor camps are run fairly and that the migrant workers should be thankful such inexpensive housing is available.

The living conditions at the Middlewest Labor Camp have many similarities to urban barrios, yet the board members do not perceive such an arrangement as a problem. The board generally ignores or is indifferent to the complaints of the tenants. The oppressive conditions are exacerbated by having Anglo managers who do not speak Spanish in charge of camps where all of the tenants are Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans.

Camp managers have far more power than do the managers of most rental complexes, because there is practically no other low-income housing that will be rented to Mexican American migrants. Having a captive set of tenants creates a situation where camp managers have less accountability and a wide latitude in their management of the camps; they know that most complaints will not be considered legitimate. The tenants also know that the housing board will not often respond to their complaints, even when they have sought out the support of the Idaho Migrant Council or the Idaho Legal Aid office. The managers are basically unchallenged when they retain the deposits of tenants, regulate visitor privileges, evict tenants, and rent to whom they choose.

Camp managers have numerous complaints about the tenants. They claim that the tenants do not properly maintain their
housing units, and they feel that the Mexican American migrants do not share the values of cleanliness or the need to care for property. Each manager I interviewed listed a series of complaints: the need to constantly repair appliances and paint the facilities; the children destroying the playground equipment; parents allowing their children to destroy mattresses; and the accumulation of junk and clutter in the yards, which makes the whole place an eye-sore. The conclusion is that Mexican American migrant families are considered incapable of living as “normal human beings.” The Middlewest Labor Camp manager summed up the sentiment: “Look, they [Mexican American tenants] do not follow the rules and they tear things up. They can’t get housing in Middlewest because of their poor reputation. They deserve discrimination. Their culture is mostly bad. They have a tendency to fight, they only live day to day, and they have no initiative.”

The managers justify their control of the labor camps because of the character of Mexican American migrants. The managers and the board believe that migrants regularly get into trouble and are involved in “all kinds of shenanigans.” Migrants are seen as being abnormally involved in criminal behavior, especially that which involves violence and drugs. A number of migrant tenants told me that the Hop Town Labor Camp “is run like a prison.” A key informant who attended a board meeting of the Middlewest Housing Authority said that a board member, who had previously been the manager at the camp for twenty-two years, opposed placing washers and dryers in the new housing units because the tenants lack the ability to operate such equipment. One labor camp has required that tenants surrender their driver’s licenses as security when they cannot afford the rental deposit.

**Hop Town Labor Camp Dispute**

The most compelling experience of my field research involved observing a series of meetings which addressed issues regarding the labor camp at Hop Town. The situation at this labor camp provides a clear example of the treatment of Mexican
American migrant workers. An informant suggested that I might be interested in attending a meeting of tenants of the Hop Town Labor Camp (HTLC). Seven Mexican American tenants had gathered for an evening meeting with the Idaho Migrant Council’s field manager and a Legal Aid lawyer.

The tenants had several grievances, including unfair resident evictions, unfair court action against residents, evictions of tenants because of the manager’s decision that they did not earn their income from farm work, harassment of tenants, and firing of people for speaking Spanish. The manager was portrayed as having no respect for the tenants, who he demeaned with his abrasive manner and rhetoric.

The most serious complaint related to a Farmers Home Administration policy that allows forty-five units to receive a rental subsidy. The other two labor camps use all of their rental subsidies, but at the Hop Town Labor Camp, thirty-three subsidies remain unused. The tenants accused the manager of intentionally neglecting to inform them of the availability of assistance and of incorrectly disqualifying them for the rental assistance.

The IMC representative confirmed that the camp manager had a history of mistreating the tenants. Tenants complained of inadequate communications with the manager because he does not speak or understand Spanish. The manager does have a Mexican American office worker who can translate for him, so the housing authority believes this situation does not create a serious problem. The manager has been accused of spying on the residents. Some tenants believe that he does not respect their privacy, and they say he has entered their apartments when they are not at home.

Another complaint involved the guest policy. The housing authority has concerns about overcrowding and has set limits on how long guests can stay. The tenants must notify the office when they have guests. Some tenants believe that the manager unnecessarily harasses them when they have guests. They also believe that he does not follow housing authority rules in renting to people, claiming that he acts capriciously when deciding who meets the eligibility requirements for residency. The group accused the manager of telling people that there are no vacancies when, in fact, vacancies do exist.
Another complaint involved the rule of no pets being allowed to the tenants in the labor camp, while the manager regularly brings his dog to the office. One tenant reported that the manager threatened to evict him because his spouse was absent. To prevent their eviction, the tenant had to have his wife call the manager from Texas to inform him that she would be back by the end of the week.

Alfredo Ramirez was the principal leader of the tenant group at the Hop Town Labor Camp. He said that his family had been migrating illegally to California for several years. Alfredo finally received a green card (legal status) to work in the United States. He told me, “I love Mexico but the economy is so bad I cannot make a living.” I asked why he was organizing the tenants. He replied: “No one I talk to likes this manager; he mistreats everybody. He is just a bad guy. He kicked my son and his family out of the camp. It was unfair. Somebody had to do something; we are people too.”

I interviewed two of the farmers on the board of the Hop Town Housing Authority. The members of the housing authority believed that the manager does a good job. They acknowledged that he was not good with people but said that he “keeps good records and financial reports.” The farmers also said that renters always complain about managers—it goes with the job.

I had the opportunity to observe one meeting of the Hop Town Housing Authority at noon in the Hop Town Cafe, at which they were to discuss tenants’ complaints. The housing authority members kept the tenant committee and the Legal Aid lawyer waiting one hour after the scheduled meeting time. The Mexican American farm workers became nervous and finally returned to work in the fields. They worked for the son of the chair of the housing authority. The Legal Aid lawyer, by himself, presented the grievances of the tenants. The lawyer only presented four problems; he thought this was the best strategy because too many complaints might overwhelm the board:

(1) The tenants wanted to establish a grievance committee that complies with the policy of the Farmers Home Administration.
(2) The court illegally evicted one Mexican American woman and ordered her to sell her car to pay the back rent.

(3) The tenants desired to apply for the rent subsidy provided by the Farmers Home Administration.

(4) Tenants needed to know how much of their income has to be earned from farm work to be eligible to reside in the HTLC.

The board's non-verbal and verbal responses sent a clear message that they did not consider the complaints to be legitimate grievances. The board chair and the manager dominated the discussion. They did not believe it necessary to establish a grievance committee, and they felt that the tenants should come to the board if they have any problems. The Legal Aid lawyer finally convinced the board that the tenants have the right under the policy of the Farmers Home Administration to establish a grievance committee consisting of two tenants and two members of the housing authority.

The manager, who functions as an ex-officio member of the housing authority, informed the lawyer that the tenants must be elected to serve on the committee. This was an interesting requirement since neither he or the board members face elections. The chairman of the board then appointed the manager to the grievance committee, although most of the grievances concern his own behavior.

After the Legal Aid lawyer departed, the housing authority continued its meeting. The members proceeded to discuss their options and how to respond to the grievances. Some of the discussion was obviously for my benefit. The manager said, "These tenants are just a few malcontents who don't represent anybody. Boy, this lawyer is a pain in the ass; he doesn't work, he only feeds at the public trough."

A Mexican American utility man for the labor camp also spoke for my benefit. In his monologue, he attacked the general credibility of the tenants and mentioned several instances of damage to mattresses and appliances. He also talked about the criminal, drinking, and drug problems of the tenants. All these negative
comments occasioned a great many non-verbal expressions of consternation by the board. The message from the board, manager, and utility man was that the tenants were incapable of caring for the facilities. The board views migrant tenants as generally lacking the ability to live decently.

The attitudes of the housing authority members and the manager emerge from how they responded to the accusation that they had taken a Mexican American female tenant to court for not paying rent that she in fact had paid. Her Legal Aid lawyer had documents verifying that the woman had paid her rent. However, she failed to appear in court, and in such a situation the judge must find in favor of the plaintiff. The woman had to sell her car to pay the court fine.

The manager still insisted that this woman be kept from returning to her apartment because she had criminal relatives who visited her there. The manager also accused her of operating a business from her apartment, which is against the rules. She sold Tupperware to the other women in the camp. The housing authority recognized they would have to allow her to return but decided to threaten her with another eviction.

The housing authority has been known to bully and threaten with eviction certain tenants who share their housing with relatives or otherwise break the housing rules. To the housing authority, this behavior provides proof of the cheating character of Mexican American migrant workers. The rules of the Farmers Home Administration forbid more than one family living in a unit. Although there are good safety and health reasons behind this rule, the housing authority does not seem sensitive to the fact that relatives share housing because they have no money and no other place to live.

The most frightening aspect of this meeting was my knowledge that the housing authority knew I came to the meeting with the Legal Aid lawyer and the migrant tenants. One would assume that, at least for my benefit, the board and manager would attempt to present themselves as fair and reasonable men, and I have no doubt that several comments were made for my benefit. The housing authority members and the manager did not say Mexican American migrant workers are inferior to Anglos nor
were any racial epithets heard; but that seemed to be the best they could do. I can only wonder how these people regularly act since they lack any accountability.

A year later, Mike Jones, the same Legal Aid lawyer, requested that I attend an evening meeting at the Hop Town elementary school. A new tenant group had called this meeting in an attempt to organize the camp because of the continued abusive behavior of the camp manager. Fourteen tenants, representing seven families, spent the evening attempting to develop a strategy to remove the manager. This current HTLC tenant group had related complaints to those expressed the previous year.

A week later, this group of tenants met with the director of the IMC. They met in the city park on a cold and windy day, for fear that a manager’s spy might see them if they met in the labor camp. The committee told the director of their difficulties organizing tenants because the manager had intimidated them. They feared losing both their housing and their jobs. The director told the tenants that he would arrange a meeting with the state director of the Farmers Home Administration.

According to the director of the IMC, the meeting with the director of Idaho’s Farmers Home Administration accomplished little; the committee received a full measure of standard bureaucratic procedural discourse, which essentially resulted in no action, because the tenants did not follow the prescribed grievance policy.

Conclusions

This chapter attempts to build a strong empirical case for the radical exploitive sociological model as best explaining the circumstances of Mexican American migrant workers. Ideology can lead to indifference and a denial of any race problems. The Anglo farmers did not perceive their actions as the exploitation of migrant workers. A common response was, “Nobody is forcing them to work here.” If a society does not perceive a problem or ignores it, then it follows that such a society will be unable to solve that problem.
Another feature of the exploitive model is the perceived significance of race. America is a country of immigrants. The Mexican American migrant represents one chapter in that history. These people left their homes to escape poverty, and came to America with the hope that their children could live the American dream. Many migrants are not American citizens, though they have green cards that allow them to work in the U.S.; and this too is a common thread in America's immigrant history and social fabric.

The inability of the Anglo community of Middlewest and the Anglo farmers of the county to respond sympathetically to the poverty of Mexican American migrant workers appears to relate to their perception of Mexican Americans as being a separate race. One minister commented on his congregation's sponsorship of Russian refugees in Middlewest: Anglos offered their homes, cars, and assistance in finding an apartment, buying groceries, and obtaining services from government agencies. The minister reported that many Romanians also had come to Middlewest and received far greater assistance than have Mexican Americans. He said that the Anglos of Middlewest would never provide these services to the Mexican Americans.

The European refugees and immigrants to Farm County have church sponsors; they have ready access to resources and programs; Middlewest civic organizations raise funds to help provide them with the opportunity to take advantage of educational and training programs; and the community finds adequate housing for them. European immigrants are not found working in fields surrounding Middlewest. Though many of them, like the Mexican Americans, do not speak English and have a limited education, they are not stigmatized by the Anglos in the way that Mexican Americans are.

The oppression of Mexican American migrant workers is most disturbing when it results in the failure to provide a decent opportunity for migrant youth to be educated. Traveling with their parents, they miss a significant amount of school. Many must work in the fields to help support their families. Even though a low-income health clinic exists in Farm County, many migrants cannot regularly afford its services. The housing conditions of
most migrant workers is further evidence of their living under oppressive conditions. The social problems arising from conditions of poverty coupled with the large number of single males living away from their homes and families exacerbates their common plight.

Observations in this chapter support one of the most important factors in the radical exploitive model, the economic exploitation of migrants, who work in a secondary job market that generally pays only the minimum wage and involves many periods of unemployment. Their family wages generally remain far below the poverty level.

The most important aspect of the exploitive model is its ideological factor. Most Anglos are unable to see or recognize the oppressive poverty and abuse of Mexican American migrant workers because they hold a belief that poverty is the consequence of one's individual failure. Most Anglos ignore or are indifferent to Mexican American poverty because their lives focus on their own self-interest. Some Anglos in Farm County enclose themselves in an Anglo world—they have no interaction with nor any observations of Mexican American migrant workers. Their consequent lack of attention unintentionally enables a colonialism to go unchecked.

The final feature of oppression portrayed in this chapter is the lack of a political voice for Mexican American migrant workers. They are not eligible to vote. The resident Mexican Americans, the Idaho Migrant Council, and Mexican American leaders have had little success in addressing the many needs of migrant workers. The operation of the farm labor camps serve to maintain undemocratic and oppressive conditions for Mexican American migrant workers who live there. The situation of many Mexican American migrant workers in Idaho can be seen to violate both our democratic and religious principles.