

Q: I had sort of three kinds of questions, types of question. We want to spend some time focusing on the object itself [00:00:24] and then spend some time thinking about what you do as a curator in the museum exhibiting the object, the kind of things you want to put with [00:00:32] it and then sort of thinking about it in larger terms, historical terms, thematic terms. So the first thing I'd like to do is ask you to tell us about [00:00:39] the object and what you think is interesting about it physically.

Response: Do I get [00:00:44] to look at the object or do you want me to sit still? This object is short-handled hoe and short-handled hoes are interesting. [00:00:13] We've actually got two short-handled hoes. Probably will [00:01:04] eventually acquire a few more in our collections, but this is a really special short-handled hoe because this hoe was actually owned by the [Cesar] Chavez's father [00:01:16] and used by many different members of the family as they worked as migrant agricultural workers. The short-handled hoe is in many respects a really sad chapter in American [00:01:33] history, a piece of kind of innocent technology that has a story about it and a much broader story about how people actually relate.

Q: Can you [00:01:47] tell us sort of the significance of the short handle [00:01:50] and how people would use the hoe? Who would use the hoe?

Response: Hoes, of course, are used for cultivation, [00:01:57] for getting rid of weeds, for thinning crops, working in the fields. The short-handled hoe is sort of an interesting story. Usually hoes have handles that [00:02:10] are about four or five feet long and you can stand up and use the hoe without bending over. The short-handled hoe has an 18-inch long handle and people theorized that [00:02:20] they started to arrive in the United States around 1880 or 1890. It's a little unclear but possibly coming into California with Chinese or Japanese [00:02:33] agricultural workers.

The short-handled hoe in terms of American history has its real importance as really a tool of oppression, that the owners of row crops, so things [00:02:53] like lettuce, sugar beets, celery would demand in California that their workers use a short-handled hoe. This meant that the [00:03:03] workers had to stoop over, bending their back working in the field. The one idea was that [00:03:13] by being closer to plants, they would be more accurate [00:03:14] in their cultivation. It pretty clearly was a means of exercising control, that by forcing them to stoop over, it showed who was really in [00:03:28] control. It also became a tradition and traditions are very difficult to break and it becomes a question of who has the power to break the tradition, but short-handled hoes [00:03:38] were not in use all across the country. You don't see them on the east coast. You don't see them throughout most of the south. You [00:03:46] don't see them in Michigan even for same crops like sugar [00:03:56] beets that are grown in Colorado, in Michigan and California. Only in California did you see people using the short-handled hoe.

Q: If you're to exhibit the hoe here in the museum what's sort of the thing that you want visitors to notice [00:04:10] about it?

Response: Well, you certainly want— You want people to see the hoe, understand how it's used, just like any piece of technology, that you can [00:04:21] use it for cultivation, but you really want to use it to connect to the story of people, that some objects are about function and some objects really [00:04:30] are more iconic and this short-handled hoe is all about being iconic, to connect to [00:04:38] that human story about what it means to be an [00:04:35] agricultural worker, what it means to be on the migrant trail and the hoe certainly is great. Any time you have one that's connect to specific [00:04:48] individuals so that you really know their stories, it becomes even more important. In Spanish, the short-handled hoe is referred to as el [cortito], which means [00:05:00] the short one or the little one and it was not a term of endearment, that it was people were really angry about the short-handled hoe and in the Latino community, [00:05:11] the short-handled hoe became the symbol around which the United Farm Workers did a lot of organization, that this was a real fight to gain power [00:05:23] in the fields, to control their own destiny, that people who worked an entire lifetime in the fields using hoes like this would often be debilitated [00:05:34] by age 50, that they could no longer bend over, that their spine had been ruined by the stooped labor.

Q: Can you tell us a little about the bracero project [00:05:48] or about the bracero movement? What is the appropriate term for it?

Response: Program. [00:05:57] The bracero workers are an interesting group of people. The bracero program was a short period of American history from 1942 to 1964 [00:06:12] under which Mexican nationals, Mexican citizens could come to work in the United States on short-term labor contracts. It was a guest worker program and it [00:06:24] was initiated during World War II as— There was a tremendous lack of workers and looking for people to help out while [00:06:34] soldiers were fighting in Europe and in Asia and the program continued on. It became very attractive to growers. It was very attractive to [00:06:51] people in Mexico. It was a bilateral agreement. It was actually a series of different agreements and over the lifetime of the bracero program, [00:07:01] the 22 years it was in operation, it's estimated 4.5 million contracts were let and while some people came on numerous, [00:07:08], it's in excess of two million [00:07:11] different people came to work in the U.S. as guest workers. Now, many of these workers eventually stayed. They learned— had connections, learned [00:07:26] the land, and decided to stay. Others went back, but it represents a very important chapter in American history.

The bracero program is one of those stories [00:07:39] that's bittersweet, that it created opportunity for impoverished people, that many Mexicans had no opportunity for cash work and by coming [el norte], coming [00:07:56] north to work in the U.S., they could make what was for them huge money and they could build houses, they could feed their family, they could [00:08:06] buy agricultural equipment, they could buy things like radios and things that we think of as everyday necessities, clothing, but they were also exploited, that [00:08:18] they were paid lousy wages by our standards. They were put

up in substandard housing. They were given poor food. They were segregated as separate [00:08:28] people and treated unfairly, so it is very difficult to understand. One has to look at the bracero program and see it as important but you [00:08:40] can't say that it was all bad nor was it all good. It was a complicated story and like all history, the more you look it, the more you unpack [00:08:46] it, the more troubling and confusing it becomes.

Q: And is the short-handled hoe the [00:08:53] primary implement amongst bracero workers or is it associated with other groups of laborers or is it sort of widespread across [00:08:59] California?

Response: The short-handled hoe is used primarily by people in California, a little bit in Arizona, not to any degree that I'm aware in Texas, and it would be used [00:09:16] for crops where you need to do cultivation, so sugar beets and row crops would be where you'd be doing it. Cotton needs to be cultivated, [00:09:27] but not to the same degree. Fruit, pruning of fruit trees, picking up citrus, and fruit, you, of course, wouldn't need a hoe, so there are [00:09:38] a variety of different tools for different areas. We have a little machete that was used to harvest broccoli. We have a short knife used by a bracero [00:09:49] that was for cutting grapes in the wine industry, but literally hundreds of thousands of braceros worked in the row crops, worked in Salinas, [00:10:01] worked in the San Joaquin Valley and row crops were tremendously important and as such, the short-handled hoe started to have this [00:10:14] iconic status that made it a symbol that really stands for their experience.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about how this particular hoe ended up in the collection [00:10:26]?

Response: The museum acquires artifacts in many different ways. Sometimes we go out and really seek things. Sometimes they're given to us anonymously and sometimes [00:10:42] we become an attractive target and it's one of the reasons that a museum needs to be public in order to let fortuitous occasions happen. The Smithsonian sponsored [00:10:54] a very large exhibition, a traveling exhibition celebrating our own history, our 150 years of existence and as the exhibition traveled the country, it traveled [00:11:10] to California and the Chavez family saw the exhibition and thought that it was important that this hoe, this family heirloom and this was something that was really priceless. [00:11:24] It was really well respected within the family, that it should be in the Smithsonian with these other treasures of American history, with Jefferson's desk, with the [00:11:36] Star Bangled Spanner, with those great things. It would be important to have the Chavez hoe and so while the Secretary of the Smithsonian was out in California, [00:11:48] they contacted us and made the presentation, so it was really— It was a wonderful thing. The collections became [00:11:53] stronger, they got the— Really the honor that they duly should receive and it was a great occasion.

Q: That's a wonderful story. I'm sort of [00:12:07] wondering if you feel like the short-handled hoe means different things to different people. If there're sort of multiple

meanings for the hoe and [00:12:19] multiple significances for it, if we could think about what those might be.

Response: The notion that artifacts mean— really are perceived of differently by different [00:12:34] folks is really a smart question and as an historian, that's constantly what we should be asking—how do different people think about this, that when we come up with [00:12:46] easy answers, when we know what the truth is, when we know what the answer is, we're almost always wrong, that history is all about context, about complexity [00:12:54] and understanding that the same thing is known to be true in different ways to different people at the same time. The short-handled hoe I think [00:13:10] is probably a good example of that, that within the Latino community it would be seen as a symbol of oppression.

In terms of the growers' community and growers [00:13:25] are important people, I think that the reaction would be a lot different. I think the growers would see— Their perception would be that they're just [00:13:35] trying to do a great job, that their understanding of how to grow lettuce properly required this careful kind of cultivation, that they're really [00:13:45] not trying to enslave a group of people and they're misunderstood and that to them this become a red flag of perhaps unfair attack on them. It [00:13:56] would be interesting. I haven't talked to any growers specifically about this, but it would be an interesting point.

In terms of political [00:14:05] history, the hoe should actually have some significance. It became the part of an important legal case, the— [_____] Jeran] of the California Rural Legal [00:14:20] Assistance Group is the person who led the attack to have the hoe taken out of the arsenal of tools to be used and they had to [00:14:31] use a very narrow interpretation of the law, that it was an unsafe tool and they had to prove that this was an unsafe tool. Now, you can't really [00:14:42] imagine this hoe being very unsafe. Even at 60 miles an hour, it's not going to fall apart. You're not going to stand on the hoe like this [00:14:49] and the only way that you could say it's unsafe is that by using it requires you to bend over and it ultimately breaks your back and, of course, that [00:14:59] was what won, but it required a pretty sophisticated campaign. A group of poor people lawyers that didn't have a lot of funding going up against corporations [00:15:14] that had lots of funding with really affluent lawyers and compiling statistics, creating this case that eventually led to a suit.

The California Industrial [00:15:32] Safety Board initially heard the testimony and turned it down because it was an industrial health issue and so it was [00:15:43] tried in that court. It was appealed to the California State Supreme Court and that's where on appeal it was ruled to be unsafe [00:15:53] and eventually forbidden from use, so from an industrial history perspective it would represent a totally different kind of story that would be sort of interesting [00:16:05] for a small group of people.

Q: So as a curator, how did you become interested in collecting and working with these types of materials?

Response: For me [00:16:21] as a historian of technology, I'm interested in how the stuff of history interacts with the people of history, that history is this really rich [00:16:33] occasion and while I admit that I'm a little bit of a square and kind of a wonkish person that likes to understand how these machines [00:16:42] work, how does a cotton picker really work, how do the different processes really work, I recognize that you've got to understand the people that use them and what [00:16:52] it means to those people and so we've made a real conscious attempt to start collecting artifacts, to look for objects, look for things [00:17:01] like this simple— simple machines like a hoe or complex machines that still have a context of use where we can understand the [00:17:11] folks that used them. We can hear about their lives. We can hear about their relationship to their families, about a much bigger picture of history and for [00:17:23] me, it's a much more exciting kind of interpretation.

Q: So if you were to put the hoe at the center of an exhibition, what sorts of things would you [00:17:31] put with it?

Response: You could put this hoe in many different exhibitions. And that's actually always a fun game to play is given three extraneous pieces, what exhibition [00:17:48] could you create out of this and it's a good exercise. Everybody should try it because there're many different answers. One could do clearly a biography [00:17:59] of Cesar Chavez, a really interesting and very dimensional personality. One could obviously do something on agricultural traditions. One could do a story. [00:18:12] This could be a big chapter and a story on immigration and migration. One could look at Latinos in the United States. I think the list of [00:18:26] possible exhibitions and stories of which this sort of innocent little hoe could be a major player really are great. There're lots of different things and [00:18:40] that's what you want to do as a curator is collect those objects that are not single purpose, that can be used in many [00:18:49] different ways.

Q: So this is the Chavez hoe. I know you have another hoe. Have they been on exhibition in the museum?

Response: The Chavez [00:18:58] hoe has been on exhibition. At least once before we had a small case on Cesar Chavez and the Chavez jacket [00:19:11] was in that exhibition as was the hoe. Our second hoe has not been on exhibition and it's certainly something that we look forward to sharing. Everybody, any curator [00:19:25] that has a good object in that collection sort of really seeks to get— to find an occasion to put it on an exhibition. It's like having a dollar in your pocket and [00:19:36] being in a candy store, that you want to use it.

Q: The next question I wanted to ask you about sort of as a curator, what sorts of— as you collected this, [00:19:51] sort of what your research process looks like. What's kinds of work you do to sort of build a context around an object?

Response: There's a lot of different [00:19:59] research that one does around any object and clearly there're a couple of different fundamental questions that you have to ask. One is how does it work and with a hoe, [00:20:13] it's pretty straightforward. You use it

to hoe items and so the specific use of it in this case is fairly easy, but with some [00:20:23] other objects, it's a little bit more complicated. You can often ask how it was developed, how it fits into a chronology of technological change. [00:20:34] Another general classification of questions is around provenance, that provenance, where it actually came from it really important and while donors [00:20:44] are very well intentioned, they're not necessarily always correct and so it's really important to listen to donors, to respect donors and equally important is you've [00:20:55] got to double check the stories because the best apocryphal stories, those wonderful stories that you hear about often come from the donors, from [00:21:06] the family members, and it's incumbent upon the curator to chase them down and see if they really are accurate or not and it often requires very [00:21:17] serious kinds of research, going back into city directories, going back and talking to other folks, seeing whether this person could've been at this place [00:21:24] in time and so there're many different kinds of things that you have to do.

Q: I wonder if you had a group of teenagers here at the museum and they had seen [00:21:43] an exhibit with the hoe, sort of what would be the, in your feeling, the most important thing you'd want them to take away about it?

Response: For teens, there [00:21:55] are a lot of different reactions that one could have towards this hoe and I would suspect and I could be wrong, but I would suspect [00:22:06] that there are two different areas that would be important. One would be Chicano history or Latino history, that this hoe really is a great symbol [00:22:20] of Latino history in the United States and there's this great opportunity to think about a huge number of Americans and what this means in terms of identity and roots. [00:22:35] Beyond that, I think that another important story and for teens is that of fairness.

We did an exhibition several years ago on sweat shops and I frankly [00:22:48] was amazed. I expected this show to be of interest to a fairly small group of really well educated adults and I was wrong, that as I read through [00:22:59] the comment books where people sat down and wrote comments, some of the most perceptive, some of the most interesting comments were written by middle [00:23:09] schoolers and one of the reasons as I looked at those comments, I started to understand was that that is a time in life when one is dealing [00:23:19] with peers, one is dealing with pressures of an outside world when [there're] a lot of challenges, when the world looks pretty darn unfair, and teens are very understanding [00:23:32] of injustice and can identify with injustice and the short-handled hoe is a symbol of injustice and I think that adults sometimes [00:23:48] start to see this kind of injustice in more abstract terms and teens, it's more personal. It's about what happens to them every day, what's [00:23:59] really fair, how people treat them.

Q: I'm sort of wondering if you can tell us maybe a little bit more about the campaign itself, about organizing [00:24:14] around the hoe, how that happened and who the major players in that were and sort of how that's important to the history, understanding the history of agricultural [00:24:24] labor but also of California and of these people.

Response: The hoe is unquestionably to a huge number of agricultural workers was just a [00:24:36] horrible thing. It physically tore their bodies apart and it was this nasty symbol, but it was not people that were likely to make a change themselves [00:24:45] personally. Many of them didn't have the right to vote; not being citizens they certainly were not incredibly powerful group of people in a [00:24:57] political sense. They didn't have a lot of money so they couldn't influence people that way, so the fight to terminate the use of the hoe is [00:25:09] all about finding people to fight the cause for you and this is— As we look at history, this is often the case, that there's no end of [00:25:22] problems and issues that need to be solved and it's often finding the people and convincing those people that can solve them to work on it for you. [00:25:34]

In this particular case of the hoe, there were many groups that were interested in ending the use of the hoe and there frankly were groups that were interested [00:25:42] in preserving the use of the hoe. In terms of those that wanted to end the use of the hoe, Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers were certainly [00:25:53] a very strong group, that Chavez was very strong about raising the physical conditions for agricultural workers. Some of the [00:26:02] most downtrodden workers in the nation are agricultural workers and trying to free them from pesticides were one of his big causes and trying to [00:26:15] make sure they got fair wages and trying to make sure that they physically were not being abused and the hoe was part of this. The hoe became part [00:26:19] of this physical abuse, so as the farm worker union became stronger, the pressure to not use the hoe became stronger.

Some of that pressure [00:26:37] was pushed onto the legal system, onto the pro bono kind of legal system. In this case, the lead was taken [00:26:47] by the California Rural Legal Assistance group and they had to use a very wide group of folks to help them. They had to take testimony [00:27:00] from thousands of workers. They had to find doctors who would testify that in fact stooping over for eight hours a [00:27:08] day [for] years of time was causing back injury. They had to show that statistically in reports that could [00:27:19] stand up in court, that statistically, workers who use the short-handled hoe were much more prone to back problems than workers not using the hoes and while [00:27:30] they did some of these kinds of surveys on an ad hoc basis and were convinced that they were right, eventually there was a university professor who got a [00:27:44] bunch of students together and they did a real survey that would have cost tens of thousands dollars to do except it was all done on a volunteer basis [00:27:52] and that became one more piece in their arsenal to beat it, so it was a very widespread movement to end the use of the hoe.

Q: Other [00:28:09] things that we haven't covered that you think are important?

Response: We could talk more about the bracero [00:28:15] program if you wanted to do that, but— How much do you want to go into contemporary issues?

Q: We're going to do that, too. I was sort of— [00:28:28] Roy asked this really interesting question the other day when we were talking about what questions to ask and

that was if there are no quotas for Mexicans to immigrate [00:28:40] to the United States, what's the attraction of the bracero project? Is it the guarantee of the contract?

Response: As historians— Good historians [00:28:58] really should not be contemporary political activists, but that doesn't mean that their information shouldn't inform contemporary political questions, so [00:29:11] while a Smithsonian employee can't talk about what might be going on in present-day choices, we're really good at looking at the past and seeing if [00:29:23] any experiences from the past might inform the public about the future and in that respect, there is no better example than the bracero program. [00:29:38]

A look at the bracero program to inform our question about immigration, about border politics, that the bracero program involved a huge [00:29:51] number of people, that there was great concern in the very late '40s and early '50s about illegal immigration and that at one point the choice [00:30:05] was made by the U.S. government to increase the number of apprehensions by the INS, try to stiffen up the border and at the same time, make the path for [00:30:21] legal contractual work in the U.S. much easier, so they had what was called Operation Wetback which at the time was the system to keep people from [00:30:30] illegally entering into the U.S. and the number of deportations and interdictions was quite high. They made it extraordinarily [00:30:42] easy to become a bracero, to be in a regularized program to the point of it being almost absurd. They would drive people to the border. They [00:30:51] would step— They would put one foot into Mexico and then come back and then they would be an official bracero, but what it did do was [00:30:57] regularize the program and people would be in the system and there was a degree of control.

It certainly seems attractive and seems good, but eventually [00:31:16] the bracero program was terminated, was eliminated and the reason was that while it was doing a good job of providing opportunity for Mexicans, it [00:31:26] was providing low cost labor for growers, there was [00:31:39] a very high degree of exploitation, that some individuals were not willing to just go with the low wages they were paying but wanted to make them even lower yet and to cheat on the housing offered, to cheat [00:31:50] on the pay and the enforcement of those that were running the farms and paying the workers was not great enough and it became a highly exploitive [00:32:05] system.

It was also complicated by the notion of what this huge number of workers coming into the U.S. was doing to native workers, that if you have [00:32:18] a lot of Mexicans coming north to work in the fields, is that depressing wages and it clearly was depressing wages and thus adversely affecting [00:32:32] American workers and as such, the American labor movement has usually been opposed to guest worker programs because it opens up the borders and gives them less [00:32:47] of a marketing position, so it is a complicated situation but I think it's one that we would all benefit by worrying about today by looking at yesterday.

Q: So [00:32:59] the bracero program ends in '64. Is this directly related to the 1965 immigration legislation or is that just sort of convenient?

Response: That's a [00:33:16] fascinating question. I don't— I'm unaware of a connection between the '65 immigration reform and the end of the bracero program, but it would [00:33:25] be actually an interesting concept to explore. Somebody should look at that a lot more. There are other factors that it's more closely connected to. [00:33:40] There're a couple of big factors. There's a lead up to the termination of the program. It's coming as the civil rights desires in the [00:33:54] U.S. increase. The pressures to determinate the bracero program increase as part of that because there's a lot of— There is no question that the [00:34:05] rights of Mexicans are really being pushed and taken advantage of, so the civil rights campaigns that we think of most often as affecting African [00:34:17] Americans in the American south are being extended to thinking about braceros in the west.

It also is tied up in Cold War ideology that the [00:34:34] bracero program lasts for many years to an extent because of Cold War concerns that— of control of work force, of the dangers of communism, [00:34:53] the role of government, and by the mid '60s, that Cold War power has really started to ebb and so some of those things that was keeping the [00:35:07] bracero program in place start to weaken. The last along those regards is actually automation, that growers start to see the handwriting on the [00:35:17] wall and in many cases are looking towards machines to do the process that were once done by hand and there's an increasing degree of automation that [00:35:28] makes it possible to not need as many workers, so less lobbying going on to keep the bracero program alive.

Q: Have [00:35:45] I missed things?

Q: Was it easier to enter the U.S. as a bracero or— Like if you were a Mexican national and you decided not [00:36:02] to _____ bracero program and you still _____ the United States _____

Response: It's always been pretty easy to enter the United States to work, but certainly [00:36:21] in 1920 it was very easy. You just came across the border. There was a choice to be a bracero or to [00:36:30] just—

Q: Could we just take that from the top?

Response: To come to the United States as a bracero worker or to come to the United States on your own, the notion of [00:36:43] which is easier to do is an interesting question. I would say that both involve certain hardships and sacrifices and neither was particularly difficult, [00:37:00] that to be bracero, to qualify for the program, there were certain things that you had to do, that it was restricted to people from rural areas [00:37:11] of Mexico, that it was not open to Mexican nationals living in urban areas, so you had to prove that you were a rural worker. When you went to one of [00:37:25] the processing centers, typically the braceros would show their hands and they were supposed to be callused and if they weren't callused, then [00:37:30] they were probably clerks from a city and they might be tossed out.

You also had to come with recommendations from your police chief. I think it was [00:37:47] the mayor of the village and the priest. I think there were three of them [00:37:51] and this would put you into the program. You would then go— sign up to be able to be a bracero and taken to a major [00:38:01] screening center. All of these things could be accomplished, but quite often, almost always they were accomplished with bribes, that people were [00:38:16] paying small bribes in order to be braceros and so it required coming up with money. Often people had to borrow money in order to qualify for [00:38:25] the program and to pay these. They had to travel long distances, often by foot. Sit for weeks at a time waiting for them to come up, so [00:38:33] it was quite an ordeal.

Of course, on the other hand, to come to the United States just as an illegal immigrant would be difficult, too. You would still have [00:38:43] to travel a long distance. Early on, the crossing was relatively easy because the border was pretty soft. As time went by, the border [00:38:53] became tougher and tougher. The important part was as a bracero, you were guaranteed certain rights. You were guaranteed a specific [00:39:06] wage, certain number of hours for the contract that you would work, certain kind of living conditions. If you did have issues, the Mexican Consul [00:39:17] would support you and so there were tradeoffs in terms of being legal or undocumented. Many legal braceros eventually chose to become [00:39:29] undocumented because they had more flexibility but there were virtues and detriments to either way.

Q: Anyone else?

Q: Did the growers provide the hoe or did the farm workers themselves _____?

Response: I actually don't really know [00:39:56] whether— what tools were being provided and what tools are not. In the anecdotal literature, as the fight to the end the hoe is coming close [00:40:11] to the end, the growers are struggling for really last reasons and at one point, they say there aren't enough long hoes available in their area and [00:40:21] they say that they can't provide these. In other areas, we know that migrant workers are not always in the same crop, so if you're working [00:40:38] in lettuce and then you go to grapes, you need a different tool. As you look at these photographs of migrant workers, they're traveling pretty light [00:40:44] so it's clear that they're not carrying all the potential tools they have, yet a hoe like this indicates that individuals had their own—did have [00:40:54] their own tools, that this is the Chavez hoe. Supposedly it was purchased in 1939 and used by the family for many years afterwards, [00:41:08] so I suspect that in some cases, workers provided their own tools, but in the majority of cases, the grower or the employer would provide the tools [00:41:22] necessary.

Q: Where were they made?

Response: I have no idea.

Q: Were they sawed off?

Response: One sort of interesting— I could've brought [00:41:37] down another tool. We collected other agricultural products that were harvested by migrant workers. It included things like asparagus and asparagus [00:41:54] knives are sort of a handle with a long metal piece and you slide it and it cuts the asparagus under ground and you pull the asparagus out. [00:42:03] Asparagus were harvested extensively by Filipinos and there is an asparagus knife that is Filipino, favored by Filipinos and it looks [00:42:16] a little bit different than other asparagus knives and we have one of those in our collections.

When it comes to— Not agriculture work, but when it comes to [00:42:24] garment work, Asian workers at sewing machines used shears that look absolutely different than the shears used by western workers. The Asian ones [00:42:41] are sort of bow-shaped and held in the palm and worked and the ones used by western workers are the kind that we're more used to with the [00:42:50] little loops that you put your fingers into, and so who actually does make the tools does sometimes have a bearing as different groups favored [00:42:58] different kinds of tools. I would say that in this case it's a pretty innocuous hoe.

Q: Are the handles sawed off or are they produced [00:43:09] like that?

Response: I'm pretty sure they produced to be— They're meant to be short, that they don't actually— They don't hack them off. I can't [00:43:20] say for sure, but—

Q: Somebody yesterday, one of your colleagues was talking about seeing through the object to the life behind it. If you had [00:43:34] to suppose what was it like to be in the field, what was it like to hold it, to where it might _____ [00:43:40] in your hand, people who are around you, the work scene. Can you describe some of those things if you had to conjure up an image?

Response: I think it's [00:43:48] really important as an historian to humanize an artifact, to really to not think about it as something that is in a Plexiglas case on [00:44:03] exhibit on in a storage cabinet, but it something that's really owned by a real person and used by a person and what that might mean and certainly [00:44:13] the hoe is a good example of that. It would be sweaty. You can imagine that the handle would be sweat-stained, that there would be dirt on [00:44:25] it. Typically people would put their hoes in their belt loops and carry them around sort of as a way that people often carried their hoes. One of the [00:44:34] interesting parts of hoes is hoes actually need to be sharp and if you look closely at this one, you can see it's been sharpened.

I was once out watching [00:44:47] workers in the field and they were actually harvesting asparagus and they were working down a long row. In California, these [00:44:53] farms go on for miles and they came to a road, a little asphalt road where they stopped and all the workers took their asparagus knife and just [00:45:05] rubbed them against the asphalt to put a little bit more of an edge on the piece and you can imagine doing that here, that you would occasionally take [00:45:15] your hoe to some concrete or to some asphalt and just sharpen up that edge to keep it sharp so that it would be effective as a tool. [00:45:26]

Q: That's an excellent answer because you can see the shine, the sharpened edge on it.

Response: I kind of suspect the family may have sharpened it just before [00:45:34] they donated it because it would be a dishonor to have a dull hoe.

Q: Anyone else?

Q: Have you used it in the field?

Response: I've [00:45:56] actually never used a short-handled hoe and I've really actually tried to use a long-handled hoe and I can't figure out how to do it effectively. People [00:46:10] talk about skilled work and unskilled work and this kind of work always falls into the unskilled end of things, but even unskilled work requires [00:46:21] a tremendous amount of skill and when you watch people using a hoe that actually do it professionally, they're really good at it and they can take their hoe [00:46:31] and sort of— It looks like with relatively little effort, be very effective at chopping the weeds and cultivating. I've taken my garden [end of recording, audio #1]

[audio #2]

[00:03:38] and gone out and tried to do it and I end up messing up the plants that it's close to. I end up killing [00:03:49] my back even standing up with a long hoe because it's really a lot of work and I don't do a very good job with the weeds, so it clearly is something [00:03:58] that requires a lot of experience and a lot of skill and I'm afraid that it's probably a skill that I will never really have.

Q: How young were they when [00:04:12] they started using that hoe?

Response: The bracero program was only open to— It was only open to men. It was only open to adults. There [00:04:27] could be no child labor. Agricultural work in general is one of the areas where child labor has always been and continues to be a real issue, that [00:04:37] you can go into the fields in many places in the United States today and find kids picking tomatoes or picking cucumbers right next to adults. It's distinctly [00:04:53] possible that hoes like this would be used by very young children.

Q: I think we might be done.

Response: All right. [end of recording, audio #2]