



“AMERICAN IN NAME, IN DEED, IN TRUTH, AND IN FACT”: THE MULTIPLE  
MEANINGS OF ETHNIC MEXICAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES FROM  
1910 TO 1930

by

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## **Introduction: Citizenship and Immigration**

Isobel Sandoval came into the United States as a young girl, having presumably entered the country through the busy Sonora – Arizona border crossing before settling in Tucson with her family of seven. She grew up in the U.S. and moved to San Francisco, spending time in the American public school system. Through two marriages and subsequent divorces, as well as the birth of two children, she seemingly became very culturally assimilated. She learned unaccented English, moved into an apartment, and stopped regularly going to church. Despite these indicators of Americanization, however, along with the fact that she fulfilled both the language and residency requirements for naturalization and was planning to remain in the U.S. to rear her children, Isobel never naturalized to become an American citizen.<sup>1</sup>

The case of Isobel is far from unique. For various reasons, Mexican immigrants throughout the early twentieth century refused to naturalize, keeping their Mexican citizenship instead of taking that final step in becoming an American.<sup>2</sup> Though more than nine in ten immigrants would refuse to naturalize, the years from 1910 to 1930 saw a near doubling of the rate of naturalization for Mexican immigrants. During the same period, Anglo Americans sought to define the role that ethnic Mexicans would play in American society, using the premise of citizenship as a framework for their arguments. Finally, the

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Gamio, “Isobel Sandoval,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant: Autobiographic Documents Collected by Manuel Gamio*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1971), 242-5.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the term “Mexican immigrant” or “Mexican” will refer to individuals born in Mexico, who have chosen to move to the United States. “Mexican American” will refer to American citizens of Mexican descent, either naturalized by their own will, involuntarily through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, or by being born in the United States. Finally, “ethnic Mexicans” will refer to the broader community of all individuals of Mexican descent living in the U.S., regardless of citizenship status. “Anglos” will refer to American citizens of European descent out of simplicity, as opposed to an accurate reflection of genealogical background.

nascent Mexican American community began to separate itself from Mexican immigrants, as its leaders pointed to American citizenship as the key to legal equality.

From 1910 through 1930, then, legal citizenship played a key role in the changing ethnic Mexican community as immigrants began to recognize the distinctions between American and Mexican citizenship and increasingly opt for American citizenship based on a growing set of benefits. Though accounts of cultural assimilation successfully demonstrate subtle changes within the immigrant community, the study of naturalization adds greatly to scholarly understanding of immigrants, Mexican Americans, and Anglo relationships with ethnic Mexicans.<sup>3</sup> By looking at the ethnic Mexican community within the U.S. through the lens of citizenship, this study will present a deeper, more thorough image of this formative period in Mexican American history, when Mexican American activist groups were able to bring about an increase in the rates of immigrant naturalization by making gains in the fight for full social equality.

Mexican immigrants in the early twentieth century faced many critical decisions. Coming to the United States, they had to determine where to settle, how to earn money, and how to fulfill their Mexican Dreams – that is, how to earn money working in America, return home, and buy a plot of land. Building off of those concerns was the question of citizenship. Although Mexican immigrants in the U.S. faced stiff societal discrimination, during the twentieth century, American laws never blocked them from applying for, and receiving citizenship. The decision to naturalize was always legally open, but immigrants' actions regarding citizenship depended on a host of factors, with a consideration of the long- and short-term benefits of naturalization based on what the individual immigrant's future goals

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<sup>3</sup> For examples of ethnic Mexican acculturation see: George Sánchez, "Workers and Consumers: A Community Emerges," in *Becoming Mexican American* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 188-206.

might be. Similarly, opinions about citizenship and naturalization among the Anglo and Mexican American populations also reflected their long-term hopes towards the future role of the ethnic Mexican population within the U.S. Anglos alternately encouraged or discouraged both ethnic Mexican naturalization and participation in U.S. society. Mexican Americans generally sought to establish a permanent ethnic Mexican presence in the U.S. and worked to better the future of that community through fighting for improvements in the education entitled to them and their children, by virtue of their status as American citizens. With Mexican immigration growing exponentially during the Mexican Revolution, and the founding of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1929, the years from 1910 through 1930 proved crucial in setting patterns for how Anglo Americans, Mexican Americans, and Mexican immigrants understood the role of ethnic Mexicans in the United States, and how they consequently utilized American citizenship to guide the ethnic Mexican population into the specific roles that they envisioned.

Statistically, ethnic Mexican naturalization occurred at a much lower rate than any other immigrant group from 1910 through 1930, excluding groups who could not legally become citizens, such as Chinese and Japanese immigrants. While it is true that Mexican Americans often excluded immigrants from their activist organizations in order to display loyalty to the U.S., immigrants themselves also frequently chose *not* to take advantage of opportunities to Americanize, both culturally and legally.

Despite relatively simple requirements for citizenship, many Mexican immigrants believed that even though they could become American citizens, racist Anglo society would never accept them regardless of their legal status. Additionally, as theorized by Mexican American activist Alonso Perales in a series of articles on Mexican Americans written for the



Spanish language newspaper *La Prensa*, and since noted by historians such as Abraham Hoffman, Zaragosa Vargas, and Mario T. García, immigrants' previous lives in Mexico had created deep-rooted sentiments of home, and it was easier for them to plan on returning home than to ignore their internal Mexicanness.<sup>4</sup> Further, as Gilberto Gonzalez, Emilio Zamora, and Francisco Balderrama have shown, the actions of Mexican consuls also kept Mexican immigrant naturalization low. While consuls could not completely prevent cultural assimilation of the Mexican immigrant population, their efforts to remind immigrants of the home they left and their offering of Mexican government services did serve to successfully limit immigrant naturalization.<sup>5</sup>

Ethnic Mexicans who were citizens of the U.S. – either through rare cases of naturalization or, more commonly, by their birth on American soil – used their legal rights in very specific ways to advance their social standing through political and judicial activism. In response to such efforts, Anglos attempted to hold ethnic Mexicans, citizen and immigrant alike, to the responsibilities of citizenship while withholding its privileges as best they could. An exploration of the issues surrounding the legal belonging of ethnic Mexicans shows a complex set of incentives and deterrents, with members of each community basing their actions off of various motivating factors. The relationship between citizenship and the inclusion of Mexican immigrants, still an important issue today, hinged on the changes

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<sup>4</sup> Alonso Perales, "The Unification of the Mexican American III," September 6, 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 19; Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 201; Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 106-9.

<sup>5</sup> Gilberto G. González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009); Francisco Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate, and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982).

taking place within the ethnic Mexican community from 1910 to 1930 – namely the efforts by Anglos and Mexican Americans to persuade or discourage naturalization and the reaction of Mexican immigrant community to those efforts. Meanwhile, shifting Anglo attitudes during this period set up a series of conflicts and compromises that shaped the future of interactions between the U.S. government and its resident ethnic Mexicans, both immigrant and Mexican American alike.

The ethnic Mexican presence in the U.S. grew dramatically from 1910 through 1930, creating a unique environment in which to examine the multiple meanings of their increased presence among several communities. This growing presence, within an America that had legally established a racial binary following Reconstruction, forced ethnic Mexicans and Anglos in the Southwest to consider what role the ethnic Mexican would play in America's future. Surrounding this search for collective identity was the recent development of the field of sociology. The use of data to analyze population groups helped enlighten the country, but it also created an opening for eugenicist research and a broad audience for nativist polemic.<sup>6</sup> Though many Anglos fought for the assimilation of immigrants during this period, nativists eventually convinced the Anglo public of the negative consequences of an ethnic Mexican presence in American society and brought about a series of deportations and expatriations during the Great Depression. Following this nativist victory, agribusiness took control of the future of the Mexican community during World War II, importing immigrants strictly as a temporary source of labor, and keeping them separate from Anglo society,

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<sup>6</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, 2nd ed. (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 149.

supported by the American government in the form of the Bracero Program.<sup>7</sup> As American business worked to isolate Mexican immigrants from the rest of Anglo and Mexican American society, Mexican American groups slowly earned victories in the fight for education that they had initiated in the 1920s, in order to improve the condition and reputation of their community. Within this chaotic environment, Anglos, Mexican immigrants, and Mexican Americans all articulated ideas of ethnic Mexican citizenship and naturalization according to their unique opinions about what shape the ethnic Mexican community should take in the long-term future.

Mexican immigrants generally saw themselves returning home and buying farmland for their family's future generations using hard-earned American dollars. With this goal in mind, naturalization in the U.S. seemed ludicrous. Though it might result in the short-term benefits of higher wages, increased economic support from the American government, and greater civil rights, naturalization would have forced them to discard their life goals. Strengthening this sentiment among the Mexican immigrant community was a deep sense of pride, and particularly an ideal of masculine sacrifice for future generations, as well as the uniquely heavy presence of Mexican consuls, which allowed Mexican foreign officials to reinforce postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism. Nonetheless, by 1930, the always-small rate of Mexican naturalization had nearly doubled. Consuls and cultural factors remained able to prevent many immigrants from becoming Americans, but the fight for equality by Mexican American activist groups did result in a slight incentivization of American citizenship, as seen by the growing number of naturalizations.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the Bracero Program, see: Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

Within the ethnic Mexican community, Mexican nationalism, sponsored by Mexico's foreign officials and domestic policies, strengthened connections between immigrants and their memories of Mexico and provided a strong, often-successful deterrent to naturalization. Though unsuccessful in maintaining a purely Mexican cultural presence in the U.S., Mexican consuls did manage to encourage immigrants to look towards Mexico for their long-term plans. Anglo inclusion of Mexican Americans as targets of anti-Mexican discrimination also discouraged naturalization, as it served to undermine the tangible benefits of citizenship. The proximity of Mexico played a factor in immigrants' decisions as well, as it made return visits easier and a permanent return home a distinct possibility. Finally, the revolutionary nature of the Mexican government bestowed ethnic Mexicans with a sense of investment in Mexico's future, reinforcing plans to return home and instilling an unparalleled amount of ethnic loyalty among early twentieth century American immigrant groups based on its nationalist rhetoric and promises of a better Mexico.

While Mexican immigrants looked back home, their Mexican American counterparts bought into the patriotic rhetoric of World War I and sought to carve a space for themselves within Anglo society. They served proudly during the war and formed activist organizations to advance their civil rights once they returned.<sup>8</sup> Pointing back to their military service and the rights granted them by the U.S. Constitution, their long-term goal was full, legal, equal inclusion. Working toward that end, their greatest tool, and the first step in their fight for rights, was to bring about satisfactory education for ethnic Mexican children. Mexican American middle-class community leaders knew where their own loyalty lay, but they faced the challenge of inculcating those values within the rest of the ethnic Mexican population.

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<sup>8</sup> José A. Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 19.

Perhaps more importantly, they used education as an attempt to disprove Anglo stereotypes by example, to show that they were worthy of full U.S. citizenship. Their aims for the Mexican immigrant population were similar to what they believed had occurred with other immigrant groups: Anglos would eventually come to accept all ethnic Mexicans, who would then be able to access Anglo society while still retaining their unique Mexicanness. The ethnic Mexican community as a whole would have to cut many of its ties to Mexico and adopt English as its official language, but these small sacrifices would be worth the gains from joining Anglo society and becoming American citizens. Both Mexican and Mexican American strategies took place within the backdrop of rampant Anglo discrimination. Anglos justified discrimination against all ethnic Mexicans due to their lack of hygiene, education, and inability to communicate in English.<sup>9</sup> Anglos with more extreme opinions saw ethnic Mexicans as a partially developed race, lacking the characteristics required for good citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

For its part, Anglo society split into three distinct opinions about the long-term future of the ethnic Mexican community. At times lacing their rhetoric with eugenicist thought, the myriad ways that different groups of Anglos saw ethnic Mexican citizenship and naturalization mirrored several distinct visions for how they hoped America's ethnic Mexican population would take shape. The first group, assimilationists, called for the integration of ethnic Mexicans into Anglo society. Unlike Mexican Americans, however, they sought the complete erasure of Mexican culture and tradition. Nativists comprised the second group, opposing the assimilationists by arguing for the total removal of ethnic

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<sup>9</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 53.

<sup>10</sup> Alonso Perales, "Testimony to the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization," 71<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 7, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

Mexicans from the U.S., couching their rhetoric in heavy eugenecism. They saw no benefit from any ethnic Mexican presence and perceived Mexican culture as a threat to Anglo-supremacy. The third group, countering both the nativists and the assimilationists, included American businesses. They saw Mexican immigrants as the ideal labor force: plentiful, malleable, and easily deportable. Business leaders, particularly in southwestern agriculture, fought efforts to restrict immigration but did not want their workforce to naturalize.<sup>11</sup> Their idea of a future ethnic Mexican community was a group of disposable foreign workers. While these three competing philosophies would wax and wane depending upon the broader political climate, business's vision of the Mexican immigrant worker would eventually prevail, with both the creation of the Bracero Program during World War II and its continuation following the war. However, from 1910 through 1930, the future of the growing ethnic Mexican population of the United States was far from determined, and Anglos of each group waged pitched battles to garner political support for their respective causes.

### **Fractures Within the Ethnic Mexican Community**

Among ethnic Mexicans, the creation of LULAC in 1929 led to the surfacing of long-simmering tensions. Beginning with their roles as labor-providing *contratistas*, arranging immigrant labor contracts for southwestern businesses, Mexican Americans had established a pattern of contention with Mexican immigrants crossing the border.<sup>12</sup> The creation of LULAC extended this gap. The exclusion of non-naturalized Mexicans from the group

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<sup>11</sup> One exception was heavy industry, which supported a fully naturalized workforce in order to encourage national loyalty and undermine radical activity, though historians have shown that this strategy failed, with the opposite in fact taking place. For more information see: Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*.

<sup>12</sup> Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2009), 130; Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41-6.

reflected the fact that legal citizenship had emerged as a key dividing point within the ethnic Mexican community between 1910 and 1930. Before this period, U.S. legal citizenship was a secondary concern, with other factors such as cultural assimilation, class status, and political orientation acting as the main divisions within the community. By 1930, however, middle class Mexican Americans had chosen to pursue a future within the United States. All ethnic Mexicans would benefit from their battles against segregation and stereotyping, but their actions reflected an interest in joining Anglo society, not returning to Mexico.

The Harlingen Convention of 1927, a meeting of Mexican American activist groups with the goal of forming a Texas-wide organization, signaled a key moment in which Mexican Americans formally embraced a policy that excluded noncitizens and firmly divided the ethnic Mexican community. LULAC scholars Edward D. Garza and Benjamin Márquez overlook the exclusion of noncitizens, with Garza focusing upon the merger of three separate organizations and Marquez more concerned with the incentives that LULAC provided to its early members.<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Orozco, on the other hand, places the controversy of citizens-only membership at the core of her narrative of the Harlingen Convention.<sup>14</sup> Immigrants were outraged at their exclusion, but Mexican American leaders believed they had made a pragmatic choice, seeing American civil rights as the key to ending discrimination. Though the decision was far from unanimous, Mexican Americans who supported the separation could point to the U.S. Constitution in ways that immigrants could not.<sup>15</sup> All ethnic Mexicans would benefit from the advances that LULAC would make against discrimination

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<sup>13</sup> Edward D. Garza, "LULAC: League of United Latin American Citizens" (master's thesis, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, 1951), 4-7; Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 36.

<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, Or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 125-36.

<sup>15</sup> Oliver Douglas Weeks, "Resumé of the Proceedings at San Diego, Texas," 16 February 1930, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

regardless of citizenship status, but the inclusion of those with no entitlement to constitutional rights was seen by Mexican Americans as simply too impractical.<sup>16</sup> Mexican American leaders thought that including immigrants would undermine group solidarity and make their claims for equality much more tenuous.<sup>17</sup>

### **Historiography**

Mexican immigration has fascinated scholars in various fields dating back to the early 1920s. The first key studies looking into the process of immigration and acculturation were the work of sociologists and anthropologists following the recently established Chicago school of social research. Developed from the University of Chicago's Sociology Department, formed by Dr. Albion Small in 1892, this style of investigation focused upon interaction between different cultural demographics, with a heavy emphasis upon fieldwork. It rose to prominence by examining the newer areas of social movements and the workplace within urban settings.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Emory Bogardus, who received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1911, was one of the key early researchers of the ethnic Mexican community.

Bogardus, who taught at the University of Southern California, published an account of the Mexican community in California, with the goal of informing the American public about the demographic tendencies of America's resident ethnic Mexican population. His objective, like other authors of his era, was to help the U.S. anticipate future waves of Mexican immigrants. Though Bogardus published during the Great Depression when immigration was at an all-time low, he warned that an improved economy would lead to more

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<sup>16</sup> "Una Iniciativa," *El Paladin*, 31 August 1928, Andrés de Luna Collection, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>17</sup> Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 88-97.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Michel Chapoulie, "Using the History of the Chicago Tradition of Sociology for Empirical Research," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 595 (Sept. 2004): 158.



Mexicans entering the U.S. He thought that politicians should make their decisions regarding future immigration before the economy improved in order to avoid bias, and sought to provide as much information as possible for their analysis.<sup>19</sup>

Scholar-activists composed the next group of authors engaging Mexican immigrants. From the first years after the Great Depression through the beginning of the Chicano movement, books about the Mexican community in the U.S. followed a pattern that would come to be known as the “Handlin school.” Though Oscar Handlin did not publish his famous account of immigrant life until 1952, members of this school were characterized by their viewpoint that upon arrival, immigrants began an inevitable process that would lead to their complete assimilation.<sup>20</sup> Handlin mainly wrote about Europeans, but Carey McWilliams, an Anglo social activist and muckraker, focused his writing upon the Mexican community. In his *North from Mexico*, McWilliams emphasized the racial conflict present in the American Southwest along with the struggles present in the everyday life of America’s Mexicans as they made a unique imprint upon Southwest culture.<sup>21</sup> A journalist by trade, he used his books as a platform to argue for racial equality. In addition to his writing, like other activists of his generation, McWilliams took action to promote equality. After the shaky conviction of twenty-two Los Angeles Mexicans for murder after police found a body in the aftermath of violence at the Sleepy Lagoon, McWilliams chaired the Sleepy Lagoon Defense

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<sup>19</sup> Emory Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1934), 7.

Other works of a similar type during this period include Berkeley economist Paul Taylor’s multiple-volume studies of Mexican labor across the U.S. (*Mexican Labor in the United States*) and Columbia-educated Mexican sociologist/anthropologist Manuel Gamio’s *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, commissioned by the U.S. Social Science Research Council in 1926 and accompanied by a volume of autobiographical documents entitled *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, which figures largely in Chapter 1.

<sup>20</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1973).

<sup>21</sup> Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, New ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

Committee and played a key role in overturning the verdict.<sup>22</sup> Ethnic Mexican activists during the Great Depression likewise fought for rights within the recently created LULAC and published accounts of Mexican American service during World War I to argue against the withholding of rights from ethnic Mexicans.<sup>23</sup>

The studies of ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. advanced in the 1960s and 70s as the fight for civil rights led to the creation of Chicano history. Early writers demonstrate the existence of ethnic Mexicans in the American Southwest pre-dating American annexation, showing the resiliency of Mexican culture and portraying Anglo migration into the area as an imperialist colonization. Rodolfo Acuña's first edition of *Occupied America* embodies this group of scholars. As he proposed the idea of internal colonization, Acuña emphasized the strength of the Mexican culture and its ability to survive the onslaught of Americanization campaigns. By focusing on barrios as sources of cultural strength and safety, other early Chicano histories emphasize the Mexicanness of America's ethnic Mexican population, breaking from the traditional narrative of inevitable assimilation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel Geary, "Carey McWilliams and Antifascism, 1934 – 1943," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (December 2003): 930.

For a more in-depth examination of the Sleepy Lagoon trial see: Eduardo Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> For examples of this, see: Alonso Perales, *En Defensa de mi Raza* (San Antonio: Artes Gráficas, 1936); José de la Luz Sáenz, *Los Mexico-Americanos en la Gran Guerra y su Contingente en Pró la Democracia, la Humanidad, y la Justicia* (San Antonio: Artes Gráficas, 1933).

<sup>24</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972).

Other Chicano histories include: Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930*, First ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Robert J. Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest: "The Sacred Right of Self-Preservation"* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Richard Griswold del Castillo, *La Familia: Chicano Families in the Urban Southwest, 1848 to the Present* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984).

For reappraisals of the internal colony model, also see: Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants*; John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); John R. Chávez, *Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North American World, 1400-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

The first Chicano wave gave way to a set of studies that also include the role of Mexican immigrants and portray a complex interaction between Anglos, immigrants, and ethnic Mexican residents of the Southwest. Mark Reisler's labor history, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, argues that Mexican immigrants in the United States from 1900 to 1940 did not advance from their state of isolation and poverty, and that American nativism extended beyond the 1924 National Origins Act.<sup>25</sup> Mario T. García's history of Mexican immigrants in El Paso, *Desert Immigrants*, shows how the economy of the Southwest developed, on the backs of immigrant laborers who came to America and found little prospect for advancement.<sup>26</sup> Sarah Deutsch and Vicki Ruiz added women, gender, and migration to the discussion. Deutsch's *No Separate Refuge* explores the role of ethnic Mexican women within the "regional community" of New Mexico and Colorado, as significant actors in the process of accommodation or resistance to Anglo culture.<sup>27</sup> In *From Out of the Shadows*, Vicki Ruiz examines efforts by ethnic Mexican women to claim personal and public space as they utilized unique strategies to interact within the multiple cultural terrains of the American Southwest.<sup>28</sup> These authors build on the efforts of Chicano historians to present a community reacting to its Anglo surroundings using survival strategies to adapt to life in the U.S.

Moving between poles of assimilation and traditional resilience, *Becoming Mexican American*, by George Sánchez, argues that America's ethnic Mexican community formed a

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States 1900-1940* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976) ix-xi.

<sup>26</sup> Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

unique hybrid culture instead of purely resisting or giving in to assimilation.<sup>29</sup> Sánchez argues that Mexican consuls failed in their attempts to maintain a purely Mexican culture among the ethnic Mexican communities of the United States. However, as this study will show, a closer look at the low rates and multiple meanings of naturalization for Mexican immigrants suggests that consuls and Mexican nationalism were largely successful in maintaining at least nominal legal ties between Mexico and her immigrants. Though the everyday life of Mexican immigrants may have changed – what they ate, who they interacted with, and how they behaved, immigrants still kept their deeper goals of returning to Mexico and buying property. This meant that until 1930, at least, though immigrants would find difficulties upon going back to Mexico, the country could still profit from their return.

More recent studies of Mexican immigration typically approach citizenship as a dividing factor within America's ethnic Mexican community. In *Walls and Mirrors*, David Gutiérrez examines the ethnic Mexican community based on the interaction between immigrants and Mexican Americans, showing a gap that grew between the two groups during the 1920s and 1930s along with disputes within the Mexican American community about whether to embrace or reject Mexican immigrants.<sup>30</sup> Neil Foley makes a similar argument, claiming that Mexican Americans betrayed immigrants and blacks to gain economic and political benefits by associating themselves with Anglos.<sup>31</sup> However, Gutiérrez and Foley examine each group in isolation from each other, and do not take into account efforts by Mexican American activist groups to convince immigrants of the benefits of naturalizing to

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<sup>29</sup> Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*.

<sup>30</sup> David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 208-11; Neil Foley, "Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and the Faustian Pact with Whiteness" in *Reflexiones 1997*, ed. Neil Foley (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 54.

gain American citizenship. Mexican Americans may have felt threatened by the huge waves of incoming immigrants, but they still sought to bring Mexican immigrants into the fold as American citizens, to help in their fight for equal rights. Chapter Two will examine these efforts in further detail.

Looking specifically at LULAC, Cynthia Orozco examines the contentious period of the group's formation and finds significant disagreement between Mexican immigrants and the first Mexican American generation. Orozco's book adds to the field by demonstrating the reasons why LULAC sought to separate itself from the broader ethnic Mexican community. Mexican Americans desired to include themselves with Anglo populations to avoid discrimination under the existing black-white dynamic, as well as to distance themselves from prejudice associated with newly arrived Mexicans. However, in separating from non-citizens, Orozco argues that LULAC also aimed to use the citizenship status of its members to change anti-Hispanic discrimination in the U.S. from within the system, using constitutional rhetoric of equality and freedom.<sup>32</sup> LULAC members popularized the term Spanish American or Latin American, which created a rift within the ethnic Mexican community, but in pressing for the realization of their freedom as American citizens, they also fought for rights that would benefit Mexican immigrants.<sup>33</sup> Though they did not include immigrants in their organizations, Mexican Americans had a clear goal of what form the ethnic Mexican community might take, and they organized to bring about an ethnic Mexican presence that retained much of its culture while participating in American democracy as a racial equal to Anglos.

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<sup>32</sup> Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 118.

The other major work is *LULAC*, by political scientist Benjamin Márquez, which attempts to use incentive theory to demonstrate how the organization has been able to maintain its strength over such a long period of time.

<sup>33</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 32.

While many historians investigate the shifting culture of ethnic Mexicans in the United States, few bring up the category of citizenship, defined here as legal inclusion within the American democracy, and all the privileges and responsibilities it brings. Martha Menchaca, in her recently published book entitled *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants*, provides a good introduction, but she focuses on a broad time period, skimming over the crucial years of change in the concepts of citizenship and naturalization for the ethnic Mexican community (most notably the years surrounding World War I). Additionally, Menchaca uses a largely top-down approach, presenting broad changes but missing subtler features of ethnic Mexican citizenship in the U.S. In her chapter on the key period from 1910 to 1930, when the ethnic Mexican community began to create its modern citizenship identity, Menchaca focuses on women and the way that women's suffrage made ethnic Mexican women important political actors.<sup>34</sup> While this is an important point, Menchaca misses the larger developments of that era. Instead of just women's suffrage, the late 1910s and 1920s saw ethnic Mexicans becoming aware of their citizenship status through the World War I draft, and beginning to form the activist groups that would fight for civil rights and incentivize immigrant naturalization.

Finally, Carlos Kevin Blanton, in his 2009 article "The Citizenship Sacrifice," uses citizenship as a tool for his analysis of the years following World War II. He examines the response of the Mexican American community to the Saunders-Leonard Report of 1951, and argues that early Mexican American activists made the conscious decision to exclude Mexican immigrants from their movement, making a sacrifice in order to gain civil and

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<sup>34</sup> Martha Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants: A Texas History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

economic rights for themselves.<sup>35</sup> However, in describing the overall ideology of citizenship within the ethnic Mexican community, Blanton does not cover the crucial formative years before World War II. These instances do not fall within the scope of his essay, but analyzing them is key in explaining why Mexican Americans took the actions that they did, against Mexican immigrants. While history has begun to focus upon naturalization as a useful category of analysis, the field has not yet utilized it to its full potential. An examination of citizenship's multiple meanings from 1910 through 1930 demonstrates trends that would continue through the twentieth century, which began during this formative period in the ethnic Mexican experience. The decisions of better-studied post-World War II activists had their origins decades earlier than commonly attributed.

The category of citizenship in immigration history is useful because, by seeking American citizenship, an immigrant demonstrates several key aspects of assimilation. First, the would-be citizen shows that he does not have any immediate plans to return to his country of origin. Applicants for citizenship also demonstrate their desire for legal belonging in an immigrant's new home society. Combining these sentiments, appeals for citizenship show that an immigrant sees a benefit from naturalization and that this benefit outweighs any connection to his or her homeland. Unlike other cultural factors, which allow for hybridity, citizenship is a black-and-white category. Mexico did not permit dual citizenship until a constitutional amendment in the 1990s, so naturalizing immigrants faced immediate loss of their legal rights as Mexicans.<sup>36</sup> Acquiring American citizenship forced immigrants to face

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<sup>35</sup> Carlos Kevin Blanton, "The Citizenship Sacrifice: Mexican Americans, the Saunders-Leonard Report, and the Politics of Immigration, 1951-1952," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 2009): 299.

<sup>36</sup> Robert C. Smith, "Migrant Membership as an Instituted Process: Transnationalization, the State and the Extra-Territorial Conduct of Mexican Politics," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 302.

the possibility of permanent residence in the U.S. and is thus a useful additional measure in analyzing immigrants' intentions of permanency.

In this thesis, "citizenship" follows the broad definition presented by T. H. Marshall, that of universal rights, based on inclusion into a state. Here, citizenship differs from social membership in that citizenship brings political rights, as well as mechanisms that can be used to influence the actions of the state. This ability, present in the voting process for democracies, separates citizenship from membership or even simply residency, in that non-citizens can become involved in public life, but do not have the ability to engage directly with the state.<sup>37</sup> This definition separates Mexican American citizens from non-citizen ethnic Mexican activists despite frequently overlapping goals within the broader Mexican-descent community. For an immigrant, becoming an American citizen requires the completion of a long bureaucratic process, at the end of which he must declare loyalty to the American government and reject any legal ties to his country of origin. While LULAC and Mexican consuls eventually came to promote rights for all ethnic Mexicans, immigrants considering naturalization had a distinct choice between two types of assistance, one stemming from Mexican citizenship, and the other emanating from the rights of an American.

The two decades after 1910 represent a crucial time in the history of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. The period opens with the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, which sent many immigrants north to the U.S. in the form of exiles and refugees, a flood compared to the trickle of economic immigrants leaving Mexico after Porfirio Díaz's privatization of *ejido* lands. This period includes World War I, when many Mexican Americans first encountered the draft, and forcibly learned their citizenship status, which they had either

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<sup>37</sup> T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 30.



ignored or assumed was based on race and not birthplace. American nativists were also extremely vocal during this period, giving an insight into the ideology of anti-immigrant Anglos as it relates to Mexican citizenship. By 1930, LULAC had set several of its key foundations in the battle to ensure equality through faithful citizenship. LULAC's strategy would be tested but remain unchanged despite Great Depression-era deportations and repatriations when Anglo nativists triumphed over assimilationists.

Though this thesis will not have an explicit geographic boundary, it is generally limited to areas with a large ethnic Mexican presence. Detroit and New York occasionally appear, but overall the focus will remain upon the American Southwest. Chapter One, an analysis of the Mexican immigrant population, occasionally extends into Mexico, with its descriptions of the Mexican consul system. Its engagement of LULAC and other early Mexican American activist organizations limit it to Texas for much of its content, particularly in Chapter Two. However, the discussions of nativism in Chapter Three envelop rhetoric from across the country. This study does not focus on one area so that it may present a broader image of the meaning of Mexican citizenship across the entire country over this period of time.

### **Legal Paths to Citizenship**

For Mexican immigrants, methods of obtaining American citizenship had existed since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In fact, concerns over Mexican permanency within the United States did not arise to provoke widespread opposition to Mexican citizenship until the 1920s. The low levels of naturalization, high return migration to Mexico, and relatively insular nature of the ethnic Mexican community meant that the U.S. government simply did

not notice any desire for citizenship among Mexican immigrants.<sup>38</sup> However, from 1910 through 1930, Mexican immigrants' ideas of American citizenship began a set of fundamental changes. The efforts of ethnic Mexican groups to limit discrimination, paired with their exclusion of non-U.S. citizens and a decrease in return migration back to Mexico incentivized American citizenship.<sup>39</sup> These benefits came to slightly outweigh both sentimental ties to Mexico and the possibilities of an eventual return home, especially as back-and-forth migration to Mexico decreased. In addition, Mexican immigrants began to view American citizenship in a much more pragmatic manner, abandoning their stoic loyalty to revolutionary Mexico in favor of increased legal opportunities in the United States.

While other immigrant groups naturalized at a rate of 47.8% in 1910 and 49.7% in 1930, Mexican naturalization crawled upward from the sluggish rate of 3.3% in 1910 to 5.5% in 1930.<sup>40</sup> However, even this slight increase of 2.2% represents a near doubling of the rate of naturalization. Mexican immigrants still remained largely reluctant to naturalize, but Mexican American activist groups had made significant inroads in incentivizing naturalization within the immigrant community.

The first wide-scale naturalization of Mexicans occurred in 1849, though in this instance the American government bestowed its citizenship upon a passive group of residents. Bringing an end to the War with Mexico in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo offered American citizenship to former Mexicans living in territories ceded to the United States, automatically granting citizenship to them if they did not explicitly choose to

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<sup>38</sup> Clare Sheridan, "Contested Citizenship: National Identity and the Mexican Immigration Debates of the 1920s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 4.

<sup>39</sup> A hardening of the border, brought on by increasing restrictions from the Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924, along with the creation of the United States Border Patrol, decreased circular migration dramatically. For more information on this, see: Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the United States Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 8.

retain their Mexican citizenship within a year.<sup>41</sup> This process would set a precedent for the rights of ethnic Mexicans to become citizens, in spite of America's Naturalization Act of 1870, which only granted citizenship to black and white residents.<sup>42</sup> However, many ethnic Mexicans were unaware that the Treaty had granted them American citizenship. These residents of the Southwest assumed that their status was determined by *jus sanguinis* citizenship, based upon their Mexican ethnicity, as opposed to the *jus solis* definition of citizenship, determined by one's birthplace. They spent generations living in the United States, either after the Treaty or having been born to early immigrants from Mexico. These ethnic Mexicans were generally unaware that they were American citizens, until the U.S. government called upon them in the draft for World War I. Despite the ignorance of ethnic Mexicans toward their citizenship status, nativists nonetheless did their best in the period after the Treaty's signing to undermine its authority and sought to take away the ability of ethnic Mexicans to naturalize.

The first major test of the Treaty's validity was the case of *In re Rodríguez*, tried from 1896 to 1897 in San Antonio's Federal District Court. In this case, local politicians interrupted the citizenship application of Ricardo Rodríguez before its approval in court. Arguing that Rodríguez possessed Indian heritage, which made him ineligible under the Naturalization Act of 1870, they hoped to set a precedent in blocking the political rights of ethnic Mexicans. The case failed, however, when Judge Thomas Maxey ruled that the contents of the Treaty allowed for Mexicans to obtain American citizenship regardless of

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<sup>41</sup> "Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Limits, and Settlement with the Republic of Mexico," February 2, 1848, *United States Statutes at Large* 9, 929-30.

<sup>42</sup> George P. Sanger ed. "An Act to Amend the Naturalization Laws..." *The Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America, from December 1869 to March 1871* 16, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1871), 254-7.

The *In re Rodríguez* ruling in 1897 found that even though the government at the time did not consider ethnic Mexicans white, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo exempted them from the restrictions of the Naturalization Act of 1870.

either Indian heritage, or the racial restrictions put in place by the Naturalization Act of 1870.<sup>43</sup> This finding proved difficult to overturn. Though nativists asked the Department of Labor to put forward a case to challenge *In re Rodríguez*, the Department refused, pointing to both the complexity that would be involved in categorizing Mexican immigrants according to the amount of Indian blood they had and the potential stress that an overturning of *In re Rodríguez* would put upon U.S. – Mexico international relations.<sup>44</sup>

Other court cases in the 1920s demonstrate the importance of whiteness, as Asian residents sought to redefine themselves as white; immigrants questioned American naturalization policy in the cases *United States v. Ozawa* (1922) and *United States v. Thind* (1923). For ethnic Mexicans, these cases served as an example of why they should fight to retain their citizenship rights, as Asian residents of the U.S. faced a steep uphill climb towards legal recognition. The first of these cases, *United States v. Ozawa*, was a challenge to the ethnic definition of whiteness in which Takao Ozawa, a native Japanese man living in Hawaii, sought American citizenship based on the color of his skin, as well as his cultural adoption of white characteristics. The Supreme Court, however, decided against him, citing his Mongolian, rather than Caucasian, heritage. Following up on this ruling, *United States v. Thind* continued the exclusion of races outside the white-black binary. In this case, Bhagat Singh Thind sought American citizenship, justified by his Indian heritage. Using anthropological definitions, immigrants from the Indian subcontinent were technically categorized as Caucasian, fulfilling the requirements for naturalization as defined by *U.S. v.*

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<sup>43</sup> Natalia Molina, “‘In A Race All Their Own’: The Quest to Make Mexicans Ineligible for U.S. Citizenship,” *Pacific Historical Review* 79, no.2 (May 2010): 168-70.

<sup>44</sup> Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 136.

*Ozawa*. However, the Supreme Court decided against Thind, citing popular definitions of Caucasian as the defining factor in eligibility for citizenship.<sup>45</sup>

With the legal path to ethnic Mexican citizenship open thanks to *In re Rodríguez* and its continued upholding, Mexican immigrants had the opportunity to seek naturalization. The process of becoming an American citizen was not particularly difficult during this period. Naturalization required the completion of two government forms, the Declaration of Intent to Naturalize and the Petition for Naturalization, along with the payment of accompanying fees and fulfillment of several waiting periods. In order to complete a Declaration of Intent, an immigrant simply needed to establish a residency, show up to either a naturalization court in their county of residence or a U.S. district court, complete a form that did not require any knowledge of English, and pay a one-dollar fee. The Petition for Naturalization was filed after the immigrant had waited at least two years but no more than seven following their Declaration of Intent. However, before becoming a citizen, an immigrant needed to reside in the U.S. for five years in total.<sup>46</sup> To complete his naturalization, the immigrant had to go to court with two American citizens to swear as witnesses that he had indeed fulfilled the five-year residency requirement, pay a four-dollar fee, and swear loyalty to the United States. If candidates for naturalization who had filled out their Declaration of Intent waited more than seven years to file a Petition for Naturalization, they had to re-file a Declaration of Intent and start the process over from there.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-8.

<sup>46</sup> To become a citizen, an immigrant needed to live in the U.S. for at least five years. However, during those five years (or more) an immigrant could space out naturalization paperwork as he saw fit. For example, an immigrant could immediately file a Declaration of Intent, but then he would have to wait at least five years to complete the process. An immigrant who had lived in the U.S. for three years or more before filing his Declaration of Intent could proceed through the naturalization process after waiting the minimum amount of two years between steps.

<sup>47</sup> “Cuestiones Relativas a Naturalización,” *El Cosmopolita*, July 24, 1915; “Naturalización,” *El Heraldo de Mexico* October 1, 1920; Dorothee Schneider, “Naturalization and United States Citizenship in Two Periods of

Historians have thoroughly examined the legal and political background to Mexican American citizenship, as well as ethnic Mexican attempts at cultural belonging in the United States. However, a social history of ethnic Mexican naturalization does not yet exist. Immigrants' ability to choose to begin the process or retain their rights as a Mexican citizen represents a distinct choice to embrace or reject a long-term future in the United States. This study argues that the way different groups within the U.S. acted in the short-term towards Mexican citizenship and naturalization reflected their long-term idea of what shape the ethnic Mexican community should take. For Mexican immigrants, the ideal result was a return back home, pockets filled with money from American wages and dreams of the easy land ownership promised by the Revolution. At the same time, Mexican Americans, whether born in the U.S. or naturalized, fought for their right to a better education in order to improve their lives and gain societal acceptance for future generations of Mexicans. Finally, the Anglo reaction to Mexican citizenship brought attempts to reinforce the temporary status of immigrants as well as calls for either the absorption or excision of America's resident Mexicans. Through analyzing these separate demographics, all with a distinct interest in Mexican acquirement and use of citizenship, this thesis will depict a complex political and social setting in which individuals and communities make decisions based on both cerebral and sentimental reasons, with the eventual prevailing of the pragmatism of both LULAC and American business interests.

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Mass Migration: 1894-1930, 1965-2000," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 58; "An Act to Establish a Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, and to Provide for a Uniform Rule for the Naturalization of Aliens Throughout the United States," *The American Journal of International Law* 1, no. 1 (January 1907): 32-5.

Martha Menchaca attempts to provide an explanation of the naturalization process under the Naturalization Act of 1906 on pages 210 through 214 of *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants* but seems to combine the first stage of naturalization, the Declaration of Intent to Naturalize, with one of the final steps, the Petition for Naturalization.

This thesis will divide the story of ethnic Mexican citizenship in the United States into three parts, by demographic group. Chapter One will examine Mexican immigrants, seeking to understand their reluctance to naturalize and analyzing their justifications for keeping Mexican citizenship. Chapter Two shifts focus, looking at Mexican Americans and naturalized immigrants and how they viewed American citizenship, in both its privileges and its responsibilities. The third chapter looks at Anglo responses to the ethnic Mexican community, examining the three different groups vying for political control to enact their vision of the future of America's ethnic Mexicans. Each of these demographics had different goals for the ethnic Mexican community, but all of their future plans revolved around the gaining or rejection of American citizenship. They all play a large part in telling the story of the changes in the ethnic Mexican community during these two key decades, and establish trends of thinking that stretch all the way into current political rhetoric about immigration. Naturalization, an oft-ignored category of analysis, presents an underutilized view inside the experience of America's ethnic Mexican population. Ethnic Mexican citizenship in the United States is a black-and-white categorization that upon further analysis reveals much information about long-term intentions. By showing whether immigrants embraced or rejected naturalization, how Mexican Americans viewed their citizenship, and the ways Anglo groups sought to extend or withhold citizenship, this thesis will demonstrate what each demographic's long-term vision for the ethnic Mexican community was, and how it sought to implement that vision. The way that each of these groups engaged the topic of ethnic Mexican citizenship shows how much it desired to include or exclude ethnic Mexicans in America's future. An analysis of these topics, therefore, adds more to the study of early twentieth century ethnic Mexican cultural adaptation by showing how and why each of these

groups sought to enact its version of the perfect ethnic Mexican presence in the United States.



## Chapter 1: Why Did Ethnic Mexicans Pass Up On Citizenship?

### Introduction

Juan Berzonzolo was a California resident who had lived in the U.S. for seventeen years. He had grown up a laborer in Mexico before crossing the border at El Paso in approximately 1900, to find work in the U.S. on the railroads. During his time in the U.S. Juan also worked as a farmer and as a laborer in a brick factory, but despite economic hardship, he managed to save enough money to buy property in Mexico. Juan sought to return to Mexico, taking advantage of the Mexican government's attempts to create internal colonies, specifically in San Cristobal. His children had already matured in the United States, but he planned on bringing his entire family back to Mexico in order to prevent his as-yet-unborn grandchildren from taking on American customs and becoming *pochos*.<sup>1</sup> He had convinced his brother to move back to Mexico as well. Berzonzolo's time in the U.S. had already exposed his children to American culture and customs, but their family was close enough to return to Mexico as a unit, reversing the generational trend of Americanization. By relocating the entire family Berzonzolo could ensure that his children grew up Mexican, instead of attempting to instill Mexican values amidst a backdrop of American culture.<sup>2</sup> Juan's story demonstrates the ideal future path of most Mexican immigrants. They entered the country, worked to save money, and hoped to return home and become landholders. This plan for the future kept them from naturalizing and caused them to prize their Mexican citizenship. However, immigrants justified their retention of Mexican citizenship in many

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<sup>1</sup> *Pocho* – A Mexican slur used by immigrants to detract from Americanized members of the ethnic Mexican community. Literally translated as “discolored.”

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Gamio, “Juan Berzonzolo,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant: Autobiographic Documents Collected by Manuel Gamio*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1971), 147.

different ways. This chapter will analyze those reasons, providing a look inside the world of the Mexican immigrant and his future plans.

While Mexicans were never denied the opportunity to become American citizens, the vast majority chose to retain their status as Mexicans. Torn between their heritage back home and the economic and political benefits of American citizenship, Mexicans from 1910 to 1930 generally refused to abandon their homeland. However, the 1917 and 1924 Immigration Acts and stricter enforcement of the border by the fledgling United States Border Patrol made entering the United States much more difficult.<sup>3</sup> Mexican immigrants, who had previously engaged in circular migration by coming to the U.S. to work and returning home seasonally, faced increasing challenges in crossing the border legally.<sup>4</sup> With each legal crossing requiring a fee of eight dollars under the 1917 Act, and with an additional ten dollar fee for a visa implemented under the 1924 Act, when returning to Mexico immigrants had to choose between giving up return visits to Mexico, paying more to re-enter the U.S., or entering the U.S. illegally.<sup>5</sup> Though these obstacles incentivized remaining in the United States for the long term, most Mexican immigrants could not overcome the cultural taboos of American citizenship and still refused to naturalize. A combination of Mexican nationalist pride and traditional sense of honor deterred Mexican immigrants from making the choice to go through the process of gaining American citizenship. Their aspiration was to return to Mexico with money to establish their families as landholders for future generations. Ben Garza, Mexican American activist and first president of LULAC, mentioned another

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<sup>3</sup> Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>4</sup> George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 49.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 24, 59.

justification for remaining Mexican in a testimony to Congress, claiming that immigrants thought that their Mexican citizenship would prove more beneficial since they could retain the protection of the Mexican consul system.<sup>6</sup> Even though they were physically located in the U.S. for years at a time, by refusing to naturalize, they could retain the protection of this system of representatives of the Mexican government, despite the fact that its aegis was repeatedly proven ineffective at best, as shown by the work of historians Cynthia Orozco, Emilio Zamora, and Gilberto González.<sup>7</sup>

During this period, the majority of Mexican citizens living in the U.S. were either economic immigrants or political refugees. While political refugees occasionally found white-collar positions, economic immigrants had to take whatever work they could find, usually in poor conditions, particularly in the field of agriculture.<sup>8</sup> The overall availability of jobs in the Southwest drew Mexicans across the border, but they did not plan to stay in the U.S. permanently. In a letter from Mexican American activist Clemente Idar to then-President of Mexico Alvaro Obregón, Idar assured the President that Mexican immigrants worked to earn money only so that they could either return to their original homes and buy land or invest in one of the Mexican government's internal colonization projects.<sup>9</sup> These colonization projects, government-sponsored efforts to populate once-desolate areas of Mexico, largely failed, but while they existed they provided a unique opportunity for

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<sup>6</sup> Ben Garza, "Testimony to the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization," 71<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 31 January 1930, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, Or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Gilberto G. González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009); Francisco Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate, and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 77.

<sup>9</sup> "Letter from Clemente Idar to Alvaro Obregón," 13 June 1921, Clemente Idar Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

immigrants to venture south after amassing savings from American wages in order to buy land at low prices. Immigrants' plans to return were tangible and concrete, and when reinforced by their strong attachment to Mexican culture and proximity to the border they precluded Mexican immigrants from naturalizing.

The future promises of revolutionary rhetoric and the temporary nature of economic immigration to the U.S. also incentivized Mexican citizenship for the perceived benefits from returning home with American money to a wealthier, politically stable Mexico. Even immigrants who did not support the current rulers of Mexico wished their country well and hoped for the occasion to return. The chaos of the Revolution served as motivation to leave Mexico temporarily, but the promise of a democratic, economically strong nation led Mexican migrants in the U.S. to retain their Mexican citizenship based on long-term hopes, instead of the short-term benefits naturalization would offer. Faced with discrimination and societal marginalization in the U.S., many of these immigrants had no desire to naturalize and settle permanently in a country hostile to them because of their ethnic background.

Mexican immigrants made the decision not to naturalize based on several key factors. These ranged from Mexican pride to concrete plans to return home, and when asked about their decision not to naturalize, immigrants were quick to justify their decision. Many of the sources for this chapter come from a published set of oral interviews compiled by Mexican researcher Manuel Gamio in a study commissioned by the United States Social Research Council. In these interviews, Gamio and his researchers asked dozens of immigrants about life in America, including questions about naturalization and assimilation.<sup>10</sup> Their responses

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<sup>10</sup> Gamio remains more well-known for his role in postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism, where his book, *Forjando Patria*, played a key role in the effort to create a hybrid national culture, known as *indigenismo*. The interviews that Gamio conducted among Mexican immigrants in the U.S. most frequently appear in academic

provide a unique look inside immigrants' justification of retaining their citizenship even with plans to remain in the U.S. for an extended period. Though the presence of the questioner or the status of Gamio as a Mexican working for the U.S. government could skew responses, the wide variation in immigrant demographic background and shocking consistency of responses make this source seem to be a trustworthy indicator of immigrant opinion. Though they may be imperfect, this preservation of these immigrant voices for over eighty years represents a unique view into immigrant perceptions of citizenship. Like all sources there are inherent biases, but it would be shortsighted to ignore their ability to shed light on historical knowledge of early twentieth century Mexican immigration. This chapter will utilize these interviews to discuss the reasons why Mexican immigrants justified keeping their Mexican citizenship, from simple nationalistic pride, to the continuing of family traditions, and even the ideas of gender inherent in male bragging of Mexican loyalty. Most common among the interviewees, however, was their sense of pride that emanated from being a Mexican, even as an economic or political refugee from the Mexican Revolution.

### **Nationalist Pride**

In personal interviews with sociologist Dr. Manuel Gamio and his research assistants, Mexican immigrants cited nationalist pride in their Mexican citizenship as the most common reason for rejecting naturalization. Plans for return migration played a heavy part in the

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writing as interesting anecdotes, as opposed to tools for determining the sentiments of immigrants. For more on Gamio and his political writings see: Manuel Gamio: *Forjando Patria: Pro Nacionalismo* First ed. (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1916); Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, "Las Ciencias Sociales en la Encrucijada del Poder: Manuel Gamio, 1920-1940," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 64, no. 3 (July – September 2002): 93-121; David A. Brading, "Manuel Gamio and Official Indigenismo in Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 17, no. 1 (1988): 75-89. For examples of Gamio's interviews as anecdotes in academic writing see: Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 108; Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 62; David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 204; Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 201-4; Richard A. García, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 54-5, 141.

decisions of these immigrants. While Mexican immigrants spent extended periods of time in the U.S. and developed a new, hybridized culture, one aspect of their lives that never disappeared was nationalist pride. Even exiles and other refugees of the Mexican Revolution expressed pride in their Mexicanness and saw their Mexican citizenship as a symbol of that pride.

Isidro Osorio, for example, had lived in the United States from 1921 until 1923, working on the railroad before returning home for three years to find only low-paying work. The Mexico he had left in 1921 was still sputtering through the last violent phases of the Revolution as Pancho Villa faded in influence and Venustiano Carranza lost his hold on the presidency to Alvaro Obregón. Osorio's two years in the U.S. likely earned him some spending money, so he returned to Mexico with his savings to try and find work.

Osorio went home to a more peaceful Mexico, but despite the greater political stability, he still could not find work. He had returned to Mexico in 1923, just as the final few moments of Revolutionary turmoil worked themselves out, with Plutarco Elías Calles institutionalizing the Revolution in the form of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario. However, order in Mexican politics did not create immediate improvements for the economy, and Osorio encountered few economic opportunities. Following his wallet, Osorio came back to the United States in 1926 and found work as a laborer. He saw the United States as a good place to live, and demonstrated his willingness to migrate seeking American labor on two separate occasions, but Mexico was still the greatest nation in the world to him. He had only returned to the United States out of necessity, in order to earn money to provide for his family. Osorio wanted nothing to do with either Anglos or naturalized Mexicans, whom he saw as traitors, and he would have remained in Mexico had he found profitable work.

Osorio, channeling the entire Mexican community, made his interviewer well aware of his opinions towards Anglos, asserting that he “[didn’t] care what they think of us for after all we don’t like them either.”<sup>11</sup> However, economic realities forced his relocation, and while he migrated north once again, he still felt loyal to Mexico and its government.

Gonzalo Plancarte, a Mexican farmer and onetime railroad worker, also felt a strong loyalty to Mexico. While his landlords and co-renters consistently pointed to the benefits of American citizenship through government protection and assistance, he had steadfastly refused. Even though “those who swear to the Flag [were] helped more than those who remained aliens,” his sense of connection to Mexico was too strong to naturalize for temporary benefits. For his long-term future, Gonzalo sought to return to Mexico with his children, to ensure that later generations of his family remained Mexican both legally and culturally.<sup>12</sup>

Many immigrants, especially in the Southwest, reflected on the area’s Mexican heritage using American imperialism to justify loyalties to Mexico. Angelino Batres, a shoemaker and resident of Tucson for nearly ten years, suggested that Mexico would eventually recover its lost territory. To him, ethnic Mexicans who did not espouse this view were traitors, especially if they had naturalized. He also took an extremely strong view towards the Mexican Revolution, supporting Pancho Villa as the only true revolutionary. Batres strictly opposed Alvaro Obregón, especially during the final stages of the conflict as Obregón consolidated power over Villa. To justify his reasoning, Batres asserted that Obregón would

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<sup>11</sup> Gamio, “Isidro Osorio,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 44-5.

<sup>12</sup> Gamio, “Gonzalo Plancarte,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 96.

be the most likely out of all the revolutionaries to naturalize if exiled to the US, an unforgivable trait even though it only occurred in Batres' theoretical scenario.<sup>13</sup>

Vicente Gaumer was another immigrant who expressed deep pride in his Mexican heritage. The son of a German father and Mexican mother, he suggested that his love of Mexico was stronger even than his love for his mother. He was imprisoned in Fort Bliss during World War I because of his German background, but did not harbor any resentment towards Anglos based on that experience. Instead, he grew tired of constant misidentification as an Anglo, even by other Mexicans. This reinforced his nationalist pride and made him cling to Mexico by fervently decrying American citizenship. While the statement quantifying his love for Mexico as greater than his love for his mother does seem melodramatic, his placement of the relationship in the context of his strong maternal bond reflects the depth and substance of his nationalism.<sup>14</sup>

Harsh views of Anglo-American citizens were common among Mexican immigrants, expressed through sharp criticism of Anglo morals and business practices. When asked about her husband, Concha Gutiérrez del Rio thought immediately of his relationship with their family's Anglo firewood supplier. When delivering firewood, the supplier would usually harass her husband about becoming a naturalized citizen. Her husband's replies were often harsh enough that she would become scared that he would insult the supplier and bring about serious consequences. Her husband, when questioned as to why he would buy firewood from an Anglo if he distrusted them so much, insisted that he only dealt with them out of necessity. Concha herself demonstrated a general distrust of naturalized Mexicans and

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<sup>13</sup> Gamio, "Angelino Batres," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 172-5.

<sup>14</sup> Gamio, "Vicente Gaumer," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 181-3.



Anglos through her suspicion of the leadership of La Cruz Azul.<sup>15</sup> This women's aid organization was formerly run by a Mexican American woman whose criticism of Mexican immigrants drove immigrants away. The new president was an Anglo, who pointed to her marriage to an ethnic Mexican man as a justification for why she cared about helping immigrants. However, this did not stop Concha from theorizing that the Anglo woman was spying on immigrants on behalf of the mining companies and should therefore not be trusted.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to Anglos, naturalized Mexicans became targets of suspicion among the immigrant community as well. In a biographical piece in *La Prensa*, Mexican actor Ramon Navarro felt it necessary to address rumors of his naturalization. The interview was Navarro's first opportunity to bring up his citizenship status since accusations that he had become an American citizen had surfaced six years earlier and he repeatedly emphasized his Mexican pride, which led to his retention of Mexican citizenship. In fact, despite the fact that Navarro did not bring up his citizenship until well into the interview, *La Prensa* thought that this portion of the article was interesting enough to its Spanish-speaking readers to merit mentioning in the headline. Though most of his fans assumed that he had naturalized, Navarro assured readers that becoming an American citizen would make him hate himself, and that he embraced his Mexicanness with all his soul.<sup>17</sup>

Pablo Puerto Orellano felt slightly more positive about American citizens, but still had a strong sense of Mexican pride despite his experiences during the Mexican Revolution. A former mayor of a town in Durango, he faced exile in the earliest stages of the revolution.

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<sup>15</sup> La Cruz Azul was Mexican women's aid group sponsored by local consuls. This organization will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

<sup>16</sup> Gamio, "Sra. Concha Gutiérrez del Río," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 167.

<sup>17</sup> "Ramon Navarro Niega Que Haya Adoptado la Ciudadania de los Estados Unidos," *La Prensa*, December 23, 1932.

Cast into the United States, he managed to find work in the publishing industry with two newspapers for the ethnic Mexican community in San Antonio. His eviction from Mexico did not result in harsh feelings, however. Orellano refused to change his citizenship, even though the poor conditions created by the revolution prevented his permanent return, because “it [was his] country and [he was] always thinking and hoping the best for it.” Orellano did feel comfortable enough to send his children south for short term visits, to give them a love for their heritage, but did not see the situation in Mexico as stable enough to return to live permanently in Durango.<sup>18</sup>

Even ethnic Mexicans born in the US felt connected to the Mexican government through their heritage. Elías Sepulveda was born and raised in Nogales, having only visited Mexico once in his life. Though he disliked that Mexico was not as modern as the US, he still felt loyal because of his heritage. He insisted that he did pay American taxes, but felt that his Mexican blood determined his citizenship status, more so than place of birth. To Sepulveda, all ethnic Mexicans, regardless of citizenship status, were connected through common mistreatment by Anglos. As was the case with many immigrants, Sepulveda, a Mexican American, also insisted that he would never fight for the U.S. should war ever erupt with Mexico.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gamio, “Pablo Puerto Orellano,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 217-8.

<sup>19</sup> Gamio, “Elías Sepulveda,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 267-8.

The idea of a theoretical war with Mexico was a common theme among immigrant interviews. Though there was little actual risk of this, border tensions throughout the 1910s, the previous example of the U.S.’s War with Mexico, and the conscription of ethnic Mexicans into the U.S. military during World War I made the possibility of having to fight against their home country a distinct fear in ethnic Mexican minds. For more on border tensions during the Mexican Revolution see: Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, *The Secret War in El Paso: Mexican Revolutionary Intrigue, 1906-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009); Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, *Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico, 1910-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); and James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan de San Diego, 1904-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

While immigrants would justify keeping their citizenship with other, more tangible reasons, for the people in these examples pride in Mexico proved to be a sufficient barrier to naturalization. Immigrants equated naturalization to betrayal, and their sense of honor did not allow them to accept American citizenship. As immigrants, they had spent extended periods in the U.S., and they would likely remain for years, but the potential of workplace benefits and access to American government support were not sufficient enough to derail their Mexican patriotism. Many other immigrants, however, expressed distinctly concrete ties to Mexico.

### **Family Connections to Mexico**

Nationalist immigrants regularly connected their family heritage to Mexican pride. Family rhetoric appears as immigrants looked to respect their parents, as well as their somewhat less tangible relationship with their Mexican ancestors. Much like the example of Gonzalo Plancarte above, immigrants wanted to preserve Mexicanness in future generations of their family. Mexican immigrants' strong family ties led to a fear of betraying their parents as well as an apprehension towards remaining in the United States for too long, in case their children developed the customs of the reviled *pochos*.

A perfect example of this is laborer Pedro Navas. An eight-year resident of the U.S., he had found success in being able to establish a home and host his recently arrived younger brother. Navas, who apparently had not experienced much anti-Hispanic discrimination, raved about American equality and contrasted it with Mexico's strict class system. However, he still equated Mexico with his mother, and refused to naturalize. For Navas, abandoning one's Mexican citizenship "would be to deny the mother who [had] brought one into the world." Despite his willingness to bring his brother to America and help him establish a life

in Los Angeles, his satisfaction with American societal freedom, his plans to remain in the United States for the rest of his life, and his marriage to a Mexican American woman, Navas never once entertained the idea of accepting American citizenship.<sup>20</sup>

Immigrants did their best to pass their family's authentic Mexican heritage to their children, taking action to prevent their children from becoming *pochos*. Jesús Mendizábal, a newspaper salesman and Phoenix resident of forty-eight years, did not feel strongly about Anglos or the United States government. His long duration in the U.S., and what he saw as the milder nature of racism in Arizona, likely acclimated him to Anglo discrimination, as he did not have any complaints against America in general. He also did not have any sympathy for other immigrants with complaints about life in America. To him, ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. were "treated according to the place which each one demands," blaming American mistreatment of Mexicans on his fellow immigrants. Despite his generally positive sentiments about life in the U.S., Mendizábal did not want his children raised as American citizens. He did not express much disappointment in their cultural Americanization through Phoenix public schooling, but he did hope for the chance to return to Mexico with them, so that they would learn both the Spanish language and the Mexican culture.<sup>21</sup>

Education was a consistent concern of ethnic Mexicans, among both those who declined citizenship and Mexican Americans. For persistent non-citizens, American schools were a threat to the continuation of their culture. While parents worried about their daughters' social lives, they also fretted over the lessons their children of both genders were learning in the classroom. Determined to control the actions of the young women of their

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<sup>20</sup> Gamio, "Pedro Nazas," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 47-9.

<sup>21</sup> Gamio, "Jesús Mendizábal," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 131-2.

household, fathers insisted providing a pro-Mexican education for their children.<sup>22</sup> Americanization threatened family patriarchy through a generational disconnect, and undermined a father's *machismo*. With curriculums devoted to fostering middle class, Anglo values that also guided ethnic Mexican students towards vocational education paths, the Mexican immigrant community vilified American public schooling.<sup>23</sup> Boarding schools, emphasis on Mexicanness at home, visits to Mexico, and household use of the Spanish language were all tactics that non-naturalizing immigrants used to shore up their family's cultural heritage. Ethnic Mexican children picked up on their parents' sentiments, reflecting their attitudes towards school and their classmates.

Children presented a unique opportunity for immigrants to select the citizenship of their offspring, and of future generations of their family. Mexican consuls extended Mexican citizenship to immigrant children born in the U.S., so in an interesting twist for immigrant families, parents could choose to change their own citizenship and naturalize as American citizens, or utilize Mexican foreign officials to change the citizenship of their American-born children, making them Mexican. While the first Mexican American generation was growing up, parents had the opportunity to decide whether their children retained the same legal rights that they had, or gained the protection of U.S. citizenship while losing their ability to return to Mexico as full citizens. As neither the U.S. nor Mexico recognized dual citizenship at this time, abandoning the American citizenship that all children born in the U.S. were entitled to in favor of the Mexican citizenship offered by consuls represented a definitive choice by ethnic Mexican parents. As seen in the following examples, parents often vehemently opposed the Americanization of their children, a view reflected by the children themselves,

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<sup>22</sup> Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> García, *Desert Immigrants*, 114-123.

and used the consular system to ensure the Mexican citizenship of future generations of their family.

Frank Menéndez, a bootlegger and ten-year resident of the U.S. who opposed naturalization, passed his sentiments on to his offspring. His ten-year-old son, who attended public school in Texas, felt strong ties to his Mexican heritage. He faced constant teasing from Anglo students because he was Mexican, but managed to fight back against the smaller children who called him “greaser.” As a result, he felt loyal to the Mexican flag, and insisted that he was Mexican-born despite his actual birthplace in Texas, arguing that his *jus sanguinis* Mexican citizenship, determined by his Mexican ethnicity, overrode his *jus soli* American citizenship, determined by his birthplace. A poor relationship with other children at school led to his declaration that he would return to Mexico if there were ever a war between Mexico and the U.S. While much of the Mexican American generation grew up looking to participate in American society and assert their rights, Frank Menéndez’s son grew up in isolation and felt no connection to his American citizenship.<sup>24</sup>

Other immigrants choosing to remain in the U.S. took concrete steps to ensure that their children would feel connected to Mexico. Despite the existence of foreign officials to link immigrants back to Mexico they often had harsh words for Mexican consuls. However, the ineffectiveness of many consuls, as representatives of the Mexican government and tangible benefits of Mexican citizenship, was not enough to disincentivize Mexican citizenship. Even increased consular activity in the World War II era did not provide much motivation for avoiding naturalization, as consuls worked with Mexican American organizations like LULAC to advance pan-Mexican interests, not just those of Mexican

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<sup>24</sup> Gamio, “Frank Menéndez,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 261-2.

citizens.<sup>25</sup> However, during the 1920s, the divisively bitter Mexican Revolution led many exiles to despise consuls as corrupt representatives of the ruling party. This sentiment did not stop exiles from wishing to eventually return to Mexico, as they directed their frustration and mistrust at the individual consuls as extensions of Revolution opponents, not at the broader nation of Mexico.

An example of this type of individual is Tomás Mares, who had fought in the Mexican Revolution under Francisco I. Madero and harbored an intense distrust of consuls. He had left Mexico for personal reasons during the Revolution, but once his local consul heard a rumor regarding his supposed backing of Adolfo de la Huerta's failed 1923 rebellion, Mares was blacklisted from returning to Mexico, regardless of the rumor's veracity. Mares' exile prevented him from sending his children to school in Mexico, but he was mostly frustrated that his children would not learn to love Mexico by growing up in the American public school system, as opposed to being concerned about the general quality of their education. His method to retain Mexicanness was to keep his own citizenship and then register his children at the consulate, to make sure they did not lose their rights as Mexicans. Despite his use of the consulate to ensure his family's legal Mexican status, Mares insisted that the consuls were tasked with espionage, and that they reported any potentially subversive activity back to Mexico City. In addition, he asserted that consuls often denied Mexican citizenship to eligible individuals simply out of laziness. While this view was not particularly common among immigrants, Mares was far from the only individual to express frustration at Mexican officials in the U.S.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Gamio, "Tomás Mares," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 137-9.

Gonzalo Clark ended up in a similar situation, but was much less antagonistic towards the consuls. The son of an English father and Mexican mother, he ran a printing press in his hometown of Guaymas, Sonora. Constantly in trouble for his criticism of the actions of Mexico's ruling party as well as the actions of other rebel groups throughout the Revolution, he was finally ejected from the country and settled in Tucson, establishing a successful newspaper enterprise there. He criticized Mexican consuls for their inaction, and accused them of taking on the position of consul solely for financial gain, as opposed to the altruistic motives they ought to have had. They quickly became a frequent target in his weekly newspaper. Personally, Clark would have liked to return to Mexico, but he preferred to wait for the Revolution to die down. He did, however, send his thirteen-year-old daughter to a boarding school in Sinaloa. While his other children had already matured, his daughter faced an American schooling system that enforced loyalty to the red, white, and blue, and, in Clark's opinion, relied upon superficial teaching methods. Clark may not have been willing to permanently return himself, but he sought to reinforce Mexican customs in his daughter through her education.<sup>27</sup>

Mexican immigrants, proud of their citizenship, ensured that future generations of their family would not fully become Americans. Immigrants played a direct role in forming the trajectory of America's ethnic Mexican population through their actions regarding the citizenship of their children. Their plans to return home with their family necessitated maintaining the Mexicanness of their children, and they worked hard to avoid drastic generational assimilation, trying to prevent their children from becoming too American both socially and legally. Though immigrants adopted some Anglo cultural practices, they remained distinctly Mexican, as the aforementioned examples demonstrate.

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<sup>27</sup> Gamio, "Gonzalo Clark," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 213-6.



## **Immigrant Gender and Citizenship**

*Machismo* was a prevalent element of Mexican culture that appeared frequently in immigrants' opinions of naturalization.<sup>28</sup> To demonstrate their masculine loyalty to Mexico, immigrant men often elaborated what they would do before naturalizing as an American citizen. These proposed alternatives were always unpleasant, and usually involved some sort of physical pain, putting their value of Mexican citizenship into vivid perspective. However, these nationalist examples of "would you rather" also demonstrate a sensitivity to the benefits of American citizenship, as immigrants tacitly acknowledged that they would advance further by belonging to American legal society and still chose not to do so. While some of these statements embrace dark humor and melodrama, the individuals making these assertions were indeed placing the value of their Mexican citizenship on a spectrum of perceived physical pain and hardship, as indefinite and abstract as that spectrum may be. Loyalty was important to these immigrants, and though their responses are blustery and overtly masculine, their insistence on remaining Mexican citizens reveals much about their opinions on naturalization.

Carlos Ibañez used physical pain to describe his preference for Mexican citizenship. In one of the more commonly cited interviews of Manuel Gamio's book, he insisted that he "would rather cut [his] throat before changing [his] Mexican identity." Despite the dramatic statement, however, Ibañez had lived in the U.S. for over twenty-five years, and admitted that his life as an immigrant was better than it would have been if he had stayed in Mexico. His ultimate goal was to return home and spend the rest of his life there; he was only biding

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<sup>28</sup> Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Overcoming Patriarchal Constraints: The Reconstruction of Gender Relations among Mexican Immigrant Women and Men," *Gender and Society* 6, no. 3 (September 1992): 397.

his time in the U.S. until peace and stability spread throughout Mexico.<sup>29</sup> In his opinion, though, he would rather have died than abandoned his dreams of going back to Mexico. America may have been a long-term place to stay, but it was far from his permanent home.

Elías Gonzáles brought up a similar sentiment. He had come to the U.S. with his parents at the age of twelve and despite his education in American public schools and having lived in America for all of his adult life, he still insisted that he “would rather die before changing [his] citizenship. [He] was born a Mexican and [his] parents told [him] never to change from being a Mexican citizen because one never ought to deny one’s country or one’s blood.” Much like Ibañez, though, he recognized the benefits of naturalization, especially tangible in his case due to a series of job rejections owing to his non-citizen status. In an attempt to ameliorate this, Gonzáles sought a letter of recommendation from his local consul, so that he could find work and earn money for his family. However, this experience left him feeling bitter, as the consul declined his request. To him, this action demonstrated the uselessness of the consul, and provided no incentive to remain a Mexican citizen. His loyalty to his parents’ request and to his national heritage were his only barriers to naturalization, and despite concrete incidents that demonstrated the value of American citizenship, in seeking employment and in being refused a letter from the consulate, Gonzáles stubbornly retained his legal status as a Mexican.<sup>30</sup>

Wenceslao Orozco, a carpenter from Durango, also expressed his desire to maintain Mexican citizenship using metaphors of pain, even after he ran into similar economic barriers based on his citizenship. While he did find work in the U.S., he would have had much more opportunities had he applied for naturalization, as it would have permitted him to join a

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<sup>29</sup> Gamio, “Carlos Ibañez,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 46-7.

<sup>30</sup> Gamio, “Elías Gonzáles,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 123-6.

carpenter's union. However, he asserted that he would rather lose both of his eyes than abandon his Mexican citizenship. Demonstrating his *machismo* embrace of his family's Mexicanness, he also became upset when he learned that his children were legally categorized as American citizens, since they were born in the U.S. Upon learning of this, he immediately took his children to the consulate, in order to maintain the Mexican legal status of his entire family.<sup>31</sup>

Another immigrant, Anastacio Cortés, framed his preference for Mexican citizenship within the context of economic loss. He was a mule driver who came over to the U.S. and failed to find work until a preacher inspired him to put more effort into becoming successful so that he could bring his family to the U.S. as well. As a successful cooper, undertaker, and construction worker, he was able to reunite his family in Los Angeles. Despite finding success in America, however, Anastacio still felt a deep, fiercely prideful connection to his Mexican heritage. He would get emotional whenever Mexico came up in a conversation and grew angry with his sons for speaking English within the home. His wife mirrored this sentiment, and their children developed strong Mexican pride, getting into fights with the Anglos and *pochos* who insulted them at school. When it came to American citizenship, Anastacio's wife asserted that she would rather give up everything else in her life, including her religion, before naturalizing. Anastacio was much more explicit. If forced to naturalize, he was certain that he would abandon all his possessions, take whatever small valuables he had, along with his family, and go so far as to walk back to Mexico if he could find no other source of transportation. This devotion to Mexico manifested itself in Anastacio's efforts to promote Mexican pride among his community. After finding economic success, Anastacio donated both money and time to the construction of a school to promote the Mexicanization

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<sup>31</sup> Gamio, "Wenceslao Orozco," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 53.

of immigrant children. Much like other immigrants, he was reluctant to return home given the current state of chaos in Mexico. However, his firm sentimental ties and the promise of an improved future Mexico kept him from naturalizing, despite his long-term stay in the U.S. and the potential economic and legal benefits he could gain from it.<sup>32</sup>

Mexican immigrant men showed their masculinity by asserting that their love of Mexico was stronger than that of others. Placing their patriotism on a scale of physical hardship, immigrants could prove their dedication to Mexico and assert their plans to return home. By placing such an importance upon their country, it is likely that they reinforced their ideals for future landholding in Mexico and made their trip back to Mexico seem more realistic, since Mexico was their first priority, more important than even life itself. However, other immigrants relied upon concrete connections to Mexico, in the form of the consular system, to keep Mexico in their minds during ritual celebrations and provide their U.S.-born children with Mexican identities and citizenship.

### **The Consular System, Mexican Government, and American Citizenship**

The Mexican consular system provided both a network to incentivize Mexican citizenship for immigrants and a method of preserving it even among children born in America. The few immigrants that did choose to naturalize lost the legal protection of the consulate. Though consuls were particularly ineffective in guarding the rights of immigrants, the meager protection that they provided was better than nothing. Additionally, consuls, with the encouragement of the Mexican government, sponsored cultural festivals to keep memories of Mexico alive within the minds of immigrants, ensuring that they kept up their plans to return home even though they did not provide an impermeable barrier to immigrant

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<sup>32</sup> Gamio, "Anastacio Cortés," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 205-9.

cultural assimilation. Finally, the consuls themselves were a group of immigrants that, despite their small numbers, had a distinct financial interest in remaining Mexican citizens.<sup>33</sup>

Consular officials, either nominated from among the existing immigrant population or sent to the U.S. from Mexico, received a salary from the Mexican government in order to act as its representative within areas of the U.S. with a large Mexican population. They worked to smooth out problems for other immigrants and ensure that they received fair treatment from Anglos and American government officials. Though many immigrants reviled their presence, they provided incentives to retain Mexican citizenship in the form of a tangible extension of the government, and their legal representation was a benefit that would disappear with naturalization. Consuls also put forth widespread efforts to recreate Mexican nationalist culture within the U.S. In addition to reinforcing Mexican citizenship, consuls themselves were Mexican citizens, with stronger ties to Mexico than typical immigrants because of their government connections. For them, that direct connection to the Mexican government put enough investment in the future of Mexico to override any potential benefits of naturalization.

Pascual Tejeda, for example, was a career diplomat, having attended college in the U.S. and served as the Mexican consul in several places across the U.S. and in various other countries. With his firm connections to the Mexican government, he had no desire to attain U.S. citizenship, though he did settle down in Los Angeles. In addition to his role as consul, Tejeda took on work editing a newspaper and translating movies. He admitted the benefits of living in the U.S. given Mexico's domestic problems but did not look down upon other Mexican immigrants like a naturalized Mexican would. Instead, he saw the system of

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<sup>33</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*; Emilio Zamora. *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas*; Francisco Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*.

Mexican immigration into the U.S. as unfairly one-sided, and did his best to support other immigrants through his role as consul. For example, at a Chamber of Commerce meeting in a small California town, he stood up for the reputation of ethnic Mexicans against an Anglo accusing them of racial inferiority. Tejeda was so passionate and persuasive in his rhetoric, with a counterargument pointing to the American government's classification of Mexicans as Caucasian, that he earned an apology from the Anglo speaker.<sup>34</sup>

Juan Casanova was also involved in the Mexican consular system. Though he only reached the position of vice consul, he too served the community of Mexican immigrants. However, he did not enjoy the work, and eventually relocated from Nogales to New York City, in order to pursue photography. His relative apathy stands out from other foreign officials, as he chose to leave the consular service. In addition, he did not feel the same discrimination as other consuls, likely from his posting in Arizona, as opposed to other locations with stronger reputations for anti-Mexican discrimination, such as California and Texas.<sup>35</sup> Casanova did retain his citizenship, but he did not have a deep passion for his Mexicanness. Ideally, he saw himself returning home and opening a small business, but he, like other immigrants, was waiting for the chaos following the Mexican Revolution to subside. He thought that "if things don't go back to a state of peace and normalcy in Mexico that he [would] perhaps have to stay here always and ... become an American citizen."<sup>36</sup> Casanova is unique in his willingness to abandon his Mexican citizenship, but his economic situation did not mandate an involuntary move to the U.S. for work or for safety, like other immigrants. While economic immigrants and political refugees had to remain in the U.S.,

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<sup>34</sup> Gamio, "Pascual Tejeda," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 183-6.

<sup>35</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 166-8.

<sup>36</sup> Gamio, "Juan Casanova," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 58-61.

Casanova chose to, as he had the financial ability to return to Mexico whenever he felt necessary.

Consular officials posted throughout the U.S. supplemented existing immigrant ties to Mexico with their efforts to unite *Mexico de afuera*, the Mexican government's nationalistic term for ethnic Mexicans living abroad, by doing their best to prevent any erosion of immigrants' Mexican pride. While many other immigrant groups experienced similar levels of cohesion and consecutive waves to refresh ethnic culture, the Mexican community in the U.S. stands alone with its presence of active consular officials having a broad cultural presence within the community.<sup>37</sup> Consuls incentivized Mexican citizenship through their attempted legal defense of Mexican citizens and served as a direct connection between Mexico City and many immigrant communities in the U.S. However, most important in blocking naturalization, consuls formed immigrant community groups and orchestrated nationalist celebrations of Mexican holidays, preventing a wholesale depletion of culture and reinforcing immigrant Mexicanness on an annual basis. Their ability to intervene on behalf of immigrants was severely limited, but the role of the consul in promoting return migration is widely visible; one of the first actions taken by President Venustiano Carranza in his policy towards immigration was to strengthen the consuls, particularly their ability to reinforce Mexican nationalism among *Mexico de afuera*.<sup>38</sup>

The main duty of the consuls was the defense of Mexican citizens living in the U.S. through legal action, along with the protection of Mexico's reputation abroad.<sup>39</sup> History's view on the success of these foreign officials is mixed. Francisco Balderrama, whose 1982

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<sup>37</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Gustavo Cano and Alexandro Delano, "Working Paper 148: The Mexican Government and Organized Mexican Immigrants in the United States: A Historical Analysis of Political Transnationalism, 1848-2005," for *The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies*, University of California – San Diego (June 2007): 11.

<sup>39</sup> Francisco Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 6.

book *In Defense of La Raza* focuses on the Los Angeles consulate, suggests that consuls provided vital legal shielding to the entire ethnic Mexican community.<sup>40</sup> In her definitive history of LULAC, Cynthia Orozco disagrees, suggesting that the broad consular network was accessible, but generally useless to Mexican citizens.<sup>41</sup> Gilbert G. González, like Balderrama, also analyzed the consuls for the entirety of his book, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*. However, his conclusions suggest that consuls strayed from simply enforcing legal protection of Mexicans abroad, as he argues that they were truly only effective at preventing early Mexican labor organizations from radicalization.<sup>42</sup>

Despite their varying approaches, these different perspectives all agree that consuls had little true power in improving the lives of Mexicans in the U.S. and that they had little direct persuasive power to encourage the retention of citizenship. Political factionalism in Mexico brought criticism of consuls appointed by controversial administrations.<sup>43</sup> Mexican immigrant support for opposition parties, particularly during the failed 1929 campaign of José Vasconcelos, eroded the popularity of the Mexican government, and by extension, its representatives in the U.S.<sup>44</sup> Even further, clashes of personality and the bias of individual consuls could limit the amount of aid available to immigrants.<sup>45</sup> For example, Anastacio Torres, a Mexican immigrant and resident of Kansas City, specifically avoided his consul, due to the consul's widespread reputation for inaction.<sup>46</sup> However, the role of the consular system in opposing naturalization did not rely on approval from the immigrant community. Instead, efforts by the consul to extend Mexican culture and reinforce customs through

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>41</sup> Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 128.

<sup>42</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 86.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>44</sup> Cano and Delano, "The Mexican Government and Organized Mexican Immigrants in the United States," 13.

<sup>45</sup> Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Roots of Chicano Politics, 1600-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 379-380.

<sup>46</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 3.



sponsored festivals and parades served as a powerful, more passive method of solidifying *Mexico de afuera* against assimilation and naturalization.

Consuls used their locations in the U.S. and their connections to postrevolutionary nationalist Mexican governments to promote Mexicanness among the immigrant community through community organizations and sponsored celebrations. The presence of these officials across the U.S. gave ruling Mexican administrations a broad footprint, and their ability to maintain a visible presence served as a frequent reminder of immigrants' roots and made the cultural benefits of return migration a more tangible reality. The Mexican government's presence also grew alongside the spread of Mexican immigrants, with over fifty consulates established by 1930, placed strategically in areas with high concentrations of immigrants.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to these official consuls, the Mexican government established a series of *comisiones honoríficas mexicanas* to serve smaller immigrant communities.<sup>48</sup> Rómulo Munguía, of San Antonio, was one of these honorary consuls. A former exile who had run newspapers on both sides of the Rio Grande, Munguía was very active in the ethnic Mexican community, eventually establishing strong ties to the Avila Camacho administration in the 1940s. Munguía's efforts to extend Mexico into the U.S. led to the creation of the *Agrupación del Ciudadanos Mexicanos en el Extranjero* (ACME), a group that sought to foster Mexican literacy, establish the rights and obligations of Mexican citizens abroad, solidify connections between Mexicans and their consuls, and support repatriation efforts.<sup>49</sup> Munguía's efforts overshadowed many official consuls, as even beyond the founding of

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<sup>47</sup> Cano and Delano, "The Mexican Government and Organized Mexican Immigrants in the United States," 14.

<sup>48</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Rómulo Munguía, *Unfinished Autobiography*, Rómulo Munguía Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

ACME, he also worked to establish transnational versions of Mexican institutions, from the Chamber of Commerce, to Mexican banks, and even Mexican libraries and universities.<sup>50</sup>

Women were also involved in consular aid, with the creation of *brigadas de la cruz azules*. These female-only groups provided food, shelter, clothing, and occasional medical aid to their surrounding communities.<sup>51</sup> However, their all-female membership and the lack of authority granted to them from the ethnic Mexican community limited their effectiveness mainly to the support of other, male organizations. Even independent *mutualistas*, immigrant-formed mutual aid societies, linked up with consuls, frequently placing them in honorary positions of power.<sup>52</sup>

Consular officials were tasked with the protection of Mexican citizens but were severely limited by both their instructions not to intervene in U.S. politics or internal affairs (made official by government regulations in 1923 and 1924) and their hierarchical structure, which required the forwarding of complaints to the Mexican Ambassador or to the Secretary of Foreign Relations in Mexico City.<sup>53</sup> Hamstrung by these restrictions on direct intervention, the success of consuls depended heavily upon both their personal effort and the amount of funding that they received.<sup>54</sup> The San Diego consulate did manage to overturn school segregation in the Lemon Grove School District in a 1931 suit, but apart from that, consuls had little success in American courts.<sup>55</sup> However, they did perform exceptionally well in their secondary roles. Acting as Mexican government officials, consuls offered *jus*

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<sup>50</sup> "Letter," July 10, 1948, Rómulo Munguía Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>51</sup> Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 63.

<sup>53</sup> Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Cano and Delano. "The Mexican Government and Organized Mexican Immigrants in the United States," 8; González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Robert R. Alvarez Jr. "The Lemon Grove Incident," *The Journal of San Diego History* 32, no. 2 (Spring 1986).

*sanguinis* Mexican citizenship to ethnic Mexicans born in the U.S., an action made official by the 1934 Mexico Nationality and Naturalization Act.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond these legal ties to Mexico, consuls brought Mexican culture to the U.S. One of the most basic ways consuls went about this was the creation of Mexican schools for immigrant children. In 1920, the Los Angeles consul began efforts to establish one such school. The progress dragged on for several years, but in 1926, it finally opened, its main goal being to provide a Mexican nationalist education while reinforcing Mexican cultural values.<sup>57</sup> Rómulo Munguía, honorary consul in San Antonio and founder of ACME, mirrored this effort in the early 1940s. His proposal for the extension of a branch of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico* into San Antonio finally succeeded in 1944. The presence of the *Universidad* spread a sense of Mexican governmental strength across Texas by offering Mexican university courses to the immigrant community.<sup>58</sup> However, offering education to immigrants and their children was only one small part of consular involvement in spreading Mexican culture.

More significantly, by creating community groups and sponsoring Mexican celebrations, consuls were able to extend Mexican culture to a wide audience of ethnic Mexicans, using immigrant participation in festivals as a regular, tangible reminder of the country they had left behind. The Mexican government placed its consuls in charge of planning Mexican holidays, ordering them to provide the ethnic Mexican community with refreshments and entertainment and schedule a series of speakers to explain important events

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<sup>56</sup> Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 8.

<sup>57</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 53.

<sup>58</sup> "Letter," July 10, 1948, Rómulo Munguía Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; Filiberto Rodrigues, "Letter from Filiberto Rodrigues to the Secretary of Public Education in Mexico," Rómulo Munguía Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

in Mexican history and instill nationalist values within a crowd of listeners.<sup>59</sup> Rómulo Munguía also acted in this capacity as honorary consul. His organization of the celebrations of Mexican independence included history lessons, music, group dances, and the singing of both the American and Mexican national anthems.<sup>60</sup>

These expressions of cultural unity and national pride brought Mexico into the U.S. and prevented immigrants from forgetting about Mexican customs and traditions. The frequent rituals and customs exercised in these celebrations forced them to recall positive memories from the homes they left behind, and made a return visit more realistic, and much more attractive. They may not have succeeded in keeping Mexican immigrant culture completely pure, but by adding to the desirability of coming back to Mexico through widespread celebration of Mexican culture, the Mexican government was able to limit the naturalization of Mexican immigrants.<sup>61</sup> This ensured that much of the money earned by temporary migrants would return to the Mexican economy, in the form of either remittances or as immigrant savings when they finally returned. Immigrant naturalizations increased over this period, but even in 1930, more than ninety percent of immigrants kept their citizenship, ensuring that Mexico could continue to profit from its immigrant presence in the U.S.

The Mexican government also employed other means to retain its citizens. Through immigrant-friendly laws, Mexico ensured that property-owning Mexicans were able to continue owning land in Mexico even if they naturalized as Americans.<sup>62</sup> Though the majority of emigration from Mexico was due to economic reasons, and immigrants largely

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<sup>59</sup> González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 56.

<sup>60</sup> Nicolas Vázquez, "Letter from Nicolas Vazquez to Rómulo Munguía," Rómulo Munguía Papers, Box 5, Folder 3, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>61</sup> Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 124.

<sup>62</sup> "Sección de Consultas," *La Prensa*, October 10, 1919.

retained their connections back home, the Mexican government saw a need to reinforce ties to its wealthier immigrants, in this instance most likely middle- and upper-class refugees from the Mexican Revolution. Even José Vasconcelos, the former Mexican Secretary of Education, estranged from the Mexican government at the time, encouraged immigrants to return to Mexico during a speaking tour of Corpus Christi. Interestingly, Ben Garza, on the eve of forming the pro-naturalization organization LULAC, played host to Vasconcelos. At a banquet hosted by the Corpus Christi chapter of the Order Sons of America, Vasconcelos addressed his audience, insisting that Mexico had changed and would welcome back its immigrants. He expressed pride at the accomplishments of ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. and encouraged them to return home, hoping that “they [would] some time see fit to return to Mexico and help in the big problems [they had] down there.”<sup>63</sup> Though Mexico could do little to dissuade its citizens from emigrating, its representatives did their best to keep the image of home alive in the minds of immigrants and persuade them to either return or maintain family connections that would keep remittances flowing back to Mexico.

Mexican immigrants almost always declined naturalization as a viable option. Pride in their home country kept plans for return alive within their minds, which prioritized the long-term benefits of Mexican citizenship over the short-term gains of becoming an American. Through education and the use of the consulate they were able to keep the Mexican culture alive within their children, so that their family was able to plan on going back together. Immigrant men used their masculine definitions of loyalty to insist that they loved Mexico above all else, and in doing so, reassured themselves that they were doing all they could to return. Finally, the consuls themselves, immigrants with financial incentives to

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<sup>63</sup> “Vasconcelos Honor Guest at Banquet Here,” Ben Garza Collection, Album 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

remain Mexican, held festivals and extended Mexican bureaucracy into the U.S. Their efforts to preserve the Mexican heritage of the immigrant community were not fully successful, as America's ethnic Mexicans developed a unique culture, but they did manage to shore up the citizenship of Mexicans living in the U.S. They continued this success up through the Great Depression, though Mexican American activist groups managed to make inroads in convincing immigrants to naturalize. With their own perception of what it meant to be an ethnic Mexican in the United States and how one should engage American citizenship, LULAC and other such organizations played another key role in the formation of America's ethnic Mexican community.

## Chapter 2: How Did Ethnic Mexicans Utilize Citizenship?

### Introduction

Manuel C. “M. C.” Gonzales was a Mexican American activist who was born in 1900 as the grandson of Mexican General José Carbajal. Despite this prestigious family background, M. C. lived in poverty as a young child and had to fend for himself.<sup>1</sup> Working for the Western Union, and eventually becoming a delivery boy for a local grocer at the age of thirteen, Gonzales slowly advanced into a legal career, becoming a lawyer and government bureaucrat after serving during World War I.<sup>2</sup> The Spanish language press frequently featured him in biographical articles, and the ethnic Mexican community followed him throughout his career. Bookish, intelligent, and energetic, he had also acted as an interpreter for the attaché to the U.S. ambassador in Madrid in 1919 before returning to Texas to fight for the advancement of ethnic Mexicans.<sup>3</sup>

One of Gonzales’s first actions as a public figure in the ethnic Mexican community was to urge ethnic Mexican voters to abandon the political machines that they had traditionally supported and cast their ballot for a series of “better government” candidates in

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<sup>1</sup> “Sociales y Personales – Defunción,” 18 January 1929, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; “M. C. Gonzales Has Memory Full of Strange Anecdotes,” 1964, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

For more on M. C. Gonzales see: José A. Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 120-6; Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 27, 31, 36, 40-1; Zaragoza Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203, 264, 288-90; Thomas H. Kreneck, *Mexican American Odyssey: Felix Tijerina, Entrepreneur and Civic Leader, 1905-1965* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 206; Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 193; Richard A. García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 290-9; Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 104-7, 125-30, 160-5.

<sup>2</sup> “M. C. Gonzales Has Memory Full of Strange Anecdotes.”

<sup>3</sup> “Un Joven Mexico Tejano Que Ha Sabido Triunfar Honrando a su Estado Natal,” *El Imparcial de Texas*, 7 August 1919, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

San Antonio during the 1924 election.<sup>4</sup> This attempt to get ethnic Mexicans to support candidates who would align more directly with their interests and limit accusations of the corruptibility of ethnic Mexican voters largely failed. However, Gonzales continued his community involvement, practicing law and becoming directly involved in politics himself. By 1930, he and other activists had formed several advocacy groups for the ethnic Mexican community, amassed broad memberships, and merged the groups to form LULAC. With a high profile among both Anglos and ethnic Mexicans, Gonzales ran for the state legislature in the 1930 election, though he suffered defeat at the ballot box. In the process, however, he gained endorsements from across the political community and used his campaign as a platform to speak for ethnic Mexican equality. In order to avoid alienating Anglo voters, Gonzales focused his campaign message on the fact that he was both proud of his Mexican descent and had demonstrated pride and loyalty to his family's new country through service.<sup>5</sup> Though Gonzales would lose this race, he would continue his work with LULAC as the organization pointed to the proud patriotic tradition of military service of Mexican Americans when fighting for the desegregation of schools. Gonzales also spoke out on more specific issues of Mexican equality. In the early 1930s, he voiced his support for the mandatory public education of Mexican children as young as five.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Gonzales

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<sup>4</sup> "Mexican Voters Stirred to Support 'Better Governmenters' by Former Interpreter at Embassy," 18 July 1924, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>5</sup> "M. C. Gonzales Endorsed for State Office," *The Bexar Facts*, 6 June 1930, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>6</sup> "Se Empondrera una Campa#na Educativa," 1931, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.



played a key role in desegregating theaters in New Braunfels, Texas.<sup>7</sup> After his election to head LULAC in 1931, he vowed to continue fighting for integrated schools.<sup>8</sup>

The career of M. C. Gonzales demonstrates Mexican American opinions of the ideal role of ethnic Mexicans in the United States, along with the tactics that ethnic Mexicans should use to bring about that ideal. Pragmatic in his approach, M. C. looked for small gains, hoping to eventually earn complete equality for ethnic Mexicans. He engaged several different areas in fighting for rights, but focused mostly upon improving ethnic Mexican education. Finally, he pointed to his service to his country as a source of pride and justification for why he and others like him deserved full constitutional rights. To Gonzales, American citizenship was the future of the entire ethnic Mexican community, as a legally assimilated but culturally independent segment of the American population. He sought to contribute to the United States and prove himself a worthy American, earning equal rights by embodying the ideal citizen. Though Gonzales was born in the U.S., his actions highlight a key meaning of ethnic Mexican citizenship in America, namely what Mexican Americans thought they should do as citizens, and which rights that they felt entitled to because of their citizenship. Unlike immigrants, Mexican Americans were born with American citizenship. However, their role in the history of immigrant citizenship and naturalization is still important. The actions of Mexican Americans, even when excluding immigrants from groups like LULAC, served to incentivize naturalization by limiting Anglo discrimination and adding to the benefits of American citizenship. This chapter will first examine ethnic Mexicans born in the United States as important actors in determining immigrant

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<sup>7</sup> “La Segregación de los Mexicanos,” 25 June 1935, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>8</sup> “El Lic. Manuel C. Gonzales Tuvo un Merecido Triunfo,” M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

naturalization before shifting to explore the motives of a few naturalizing immigrants at its close.

For immigrants who chose to naturalize, American citizenship was a pragmatic choice that allowed them increased economic opportunity through favorable hiring and the extension of government aid. These newly minted Americans demonstrated what American citizenship meant to them through written records as well as through their attempts to gain equality through litigation in U.S. courts. Organizations like LULAC served to incentivize citizenship through their exclusive membership requirements. The involvement of Mexican consuls before the 1930s may have served to limit Mexican naturalization as U.S. citizens, but their decreasing presence left immigrants in a unique situation. The potential of recognized rights in the U.S., and lack of tangible short-term consequences for abandoning Mexican citizenship led immigrants to see the value of naturalization in slightly increasing numbers as conversion to American citizenship slowly grew. There were still many holdouts, immigrants who clung desperately to their legal connections to Mexico and saw naturalization as treason, but more and more immigrants saw American citizenship as a good thing. Economic opportunity, extended American legal rights, and educational opportunities were all justifications used by Mexican immigrants who sought American citizenship, outweighing sentimental ties, Anglo prejudice, and protection from Mexican consuls. This chapter will examine what that citizenship meant to Mexican Americans by examining the early organizational goals of LULAC and that organization's tactics in achieving them.<sup>9</sup> It will also present the reasons why the few naturalized immigrants from among the Gamio

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<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of primary sources on LULAC for this chapter are from the 1930s, outside of the defined period of 1910 to 1930. However, as examples of early efforts by LULAC, these sources reflect the guiding principles of both the group's founding as well as the objectives and sentiments of its predecessors, which merged in 1929. Although these sources are from after 1930, they also show the prevailing attitudes of the Mexican American community from 1910 to 1930, which eventually became the membership of LULAC.

interviews chose to abandon their Mexican citizenship. Although naturalized immigrants and American-born ethnic Mexicans had different ideas of what American citizenship meant, both perspectives fill out the picture of immigrant naturalization and ethnic Mexican citizenship in the United States.

### **LULAC and American Citizenship**

Those ethnic Mexicans who already possessed American citizenship used their constitutional rights to advance their cause in a few key areas. The creation of LULAC in 1929, despite its insistence that members would not form a voting bloc, brought a concerted effort at unified support of pro-Hispanic candidates in local and national elections. LULAC and other activist groups such as the Order Sons of America (OSA) and the Order Knights of America took up the role of *mutualistas* in providing legal defense for members of the Mexican American community, through the creation of group funds.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, Mexican Americans continued the efforts of Mexican consuls in fighting for the desegregation of schools and attempting to bring higher quality education to their children.

Mexican Americans, whether they became citizens through naturalization, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, or *jus solis* citizenship (through birth on American soil), showed an advanced awareness of the privileges that American legal belonging granted to them. Looking at Mexican American opinions of what American citizenship meant helps explain their separation from Mexican immigrants, a break that set precedents for activism that continued prominently within the Mexican American community through the Chicano generation. Though LULAC's work continued for decades, its early years built a foundation upon the fight for a quality education for ethnic Mexican children, as both a right they

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<sup>10</sup> Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86-9.

deserved due to their American citizenship and a tactic for the advancement of the ethnic Mexican community. Though LULAC's first judicial win in the fight to desegregate Texas schools would not come until *Delgado v. Bastrop ISD* in 1948, during the organization's early years it fought for equal education and did its best to ensure that ethnic Mexican students had the best education possible, despite low state funding and poor facilities.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars such as Cynthia Orozco, Benjamin Márquez, and Edward D. Garza have all written accounts of the formation of LULAC mentioning the group's efforts to improve education to its early years.<sup>12</sup> Although they see education as a way for LULAC to improve the future of the ethnic Mexican community, these authors fail to stress the connection that LULAC made between citizenship and education. While Márquez places education as part of LULAC's efforts to bring about assimilation and create a meritocracy to increase opportunities for ethnic Mexicans, he fails to portray it as central to LULAC's struggle.<sup>13</sup> Orozco only mentions education as part of the LULAC constitution, preferring to focus on the group's origins and its gendered hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> Garza comes closest to representing education's dual meaning to LULAC, but only focuses on education as a way to improve the condition of ethnic Mexicans, not a key right that Mexican Americans deserved.<sup>15</sup>

Yet to LULAC, American citizenship entitled ethnic Mexican children to a sound education. Improving the education of ethnic Mexicans was a key way of asserting members' citizenship, both for their own sake, and as a way to show Anglos that they were

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<sup>11</sup> *Civil Action #388*, George I. Sanchez Papers, Box 79, Folder 4, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; García, *Mexican Americans*, 57-8.

<sup>12</sup> Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 166-8; Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 28; Edward D. Garza, "LULAC: League of United Latin American Citizens" (master's thesis, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, 1951), 26-34.

<sup>13</sup> Márquez, *LULAC*, 23-31.

<sup>14</sup> Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 116-8.

<sup>15</sup> Garza, *LULAC*, 26-34.

serious about fighting for their rights. Additionally, though LULAC excluded non-citizens from membership, improved education was a collective benefit for the entire ethnic Mexican community. By demonstrating the potential gains from American citizenship, LULAC contributed to the near doubling of naturalization rates for immigrants, a 2.2% increase from the miniscule rate of 3.3% in 1910 to the slightly improved rate of 5.5% in 1930.<sup>16</sup>

LULAC's long-term goal was assimilation into American legal society, and the best way to proceed towards that objective was to produce a generation of intelligent, loyal ethnic Mexicans in order to disprove the stereotypes used to justify discrimination. Cultural assimilation was not a major goal. LULAC leaders did not seek to Americanize Mexicans and did not even hope to convince them to drop the Spanish language. They *did* encourage the learning of English, however, so as to better communicate with other Americans.

The main purpose of LULAC, then, was to help Mexican Americans learn to comply with citizenship obligations and exercise citizenship rights through economic and intellectual improvements. LULAC members saw the benefits of American citizenship and though the Mexican government offered Mexican citizenship through its consular system, LULAC thought it was a mistake for American-born Mexicans to give up their American rights.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, despite attempting to maintain its distinctly Mexican culture, the organization did encourage the adoption of American holidays and the abandonment of Mexican ones, following the examples set by earlier immigrant groups from Europe. In a 1932 issue of *LULAC News*, the group justified their goals of gaining recognition in the U.S. due to the feeling that Mexican Americans had been completely “disowned in Mexico,” which was a

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<sup>16</sup> Francisco Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cástulo Gutiérrez, “Para los que no Conocen Nuestra Institución,” Ben Garza Collection, Album 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

more difficult problem to overturn than the issue of Anglo discrimination. Forcing their way into Anglo society was both easier and more rewarding due to the long-term economic and political benefits that stemmed from American citizenship.<sup>18</sup> As a way of achieving this, LULAC and its predecessor, the OSA, excluded non-citizens from its membership.<sup>19</sup> Though neither group would explicitly mention this restriction in their constitution, the benefits of a membership composed completely of American citizens outweighed the inclusion of a broader demographic. The OSA justified this by suggesting that they were “a national organization . . . whereby all organized citizens of the United States of Mexican or Spanish extraction may be represented, and matters pertaining to their condition be discussed and improved.”<sup>20</sup> LULAC was slightly more subtle, mentioning that their goal was “[t]o define with absolute and unmistakable clearness our unquestionable loyalty to the ideals, principles and citizenship of the United States of America.”<sup>21</sup>

Both groups saw citizenship rights as crucial to their fight for equality and so excluded non-citizens, to ensure that they had a membership that was universally American. LULAC’s victories would improve the conditions of Mexican immigrants, as all ethnic Mexicans faced Anglo discrimination, but LULAC founders pragmatically left out immigrants, who did not have the same constitutional claims to civil rights and would undermine their claims for the full rights of Americans. Mexican Americans first fought to improve their status utilizing many of the same tools as immigrants, participating in *mutualistas* and defense societies prior to the First World War. However, efforts at creating

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<sup>18</sup> *LULAC News* 2, no. 4 (December 1932): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Márquez, *LULAC*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> “Order Sons of America Declaration of Principles, 1922,” in Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 231.

<sup>21</sup> “Constitution, League of United Latin American Citizens, 1929,” in Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 237.

large-scale Mexican American organizations largely failed before the war, due to both the limited infrastructure in Texas and a lack of enthusiasm.<sup>22</sup>

The war served several purposes in promoting Mexican American activism. Many Mexican Americans joined the U.S. military, through the draft or by volunteering, and fought bravely alongside Anglo soldiers. In addition, those who remained on the home front helped direct activities to support the war. Though individuals like Rómulo Munguía and William Flores would have more notable participation in World War II (a better-known period of ethnic Mexican patriotism), Mexican American community leaders would do their best to rally their neighbors during World War I as well, as shown by historian José A. Ramírez.<sup>23</sup> Several leaders offered to form their own Mexican American divisions, but the main form of support within the ethnic Mexican community was through patriotic events, to motivate young men to volunteer and gain the support of the rest of the community.<sup>24</sup>

When the American government announced its plans to institute the draft, in the Selective Service Act of 1917, panic spread through the broader ethnic Mexican community.<sup>25</sup> In an attempt to pacify the community and prevent the “exodus” of ethnic Mexicans fleeing to Mexico, Mexican American newspaper editors and community leaders did their best to step in, making draft requirements known to the public and answering

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<sup>22</sup>Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 67-72.

<sup>23</sup>“Letter from the Lone Star Brewing Company to Rómulo Munguía,” 14 July 1944, Rómulo Munguía Papers, Box 5, Folder 4, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; Rollo Smith, “Letter from Rollo Smith to A. Alvarez,” 21 September 1942, William Flores Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

Munguía would get deeply involved with campaigns to secure war loans from the ethnic Mexican community while Flores would work with government organizations in an attempt to secure Spanish-language brochures for air raid preparedness and other homefront defense topics.

<sup>24</sup>Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*.

<sup>25</sup>Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 150; Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 105; Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 38.

immigrant questions about the potential of being drafted.<sup>26</sup> Labor organizer Clemente Idar, a member of the influential Idar publishing family in Laredo and one of the key figures in the early Mexican American civil rights movement, personally wrote to Governor James Ferguson and his wife Miriam with several ideas to calm Texas' ethnic Mexican populace.<sup>27</sup> First, he suggested that the state should create a unit of Texas Rangers composed entirely of recruits of Mexican descent, which he would help form, in order to help improve the reputation of the Rangers. He also volunteered to lead a series of meetings to explain the functioning of the draft to laborers.<sup>28</sup> With widespread illiteracy among the ethnic Mexican working class, the ideas in his newspaper could reach a larger segment of the ethnic Mexican community via word of mouth, making speaking engagements all the more important. Idar attributed the laborers' paranoia regarding forced service to misinformation and rumors, and, along with other community leaders, did his best to placate his neighbors.

Once enlisted in the military, by choice or conscription, Mexican Americans both native-born and naturalized served proudly. They saw the war as an opportunity to prove their patriotism and loyalty and hopefully reap the benefits of their sacrifice later, through greater cultural acceptance. Soldiers from areas with a high concentration of ethnic Mexicans also experienced greater acculturation in serving with Anglos.<sup>29</sup> The Mexican American community back home followed their soldiers abroad in local Spanish-language

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<sup>26</sup> Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 101-3.

<sup>27</sup> Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 176; Clemente N. Idar, "Letter from Clemente Idar to James and Miriam Ferguson," 3 June 1917, Clemente N. Idar Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>28</sup> Clemente N. Idar, "Letter from Clemente Idar to James and Miriam Ferguson," 3 June 1917, Clemente N. Idar Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>29</sup> Carole E. Christian. "Texas's Mexican Americans during World War I," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (April 1989): 587.

For an example of this occurring during World War II see: Emilio Zamora, "Mexican Nationals in the U.S. Military: Diplomacy and Battlefield Sacrifice," in *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of a Generation*, ed. Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and Emilio Zamora (Austin: University of Texas, 2009), 109.



papers. Even a naturalized immigrant like Francisco Rodriyuez received mention in the San Antonio paper *El Imparcial de Texas*, after earning a citation for valor while serving in France, protecting the mule train he was assigned to under General Pershing as enemy fire killed the majority of his comrades.<sup>30</sup> José de la Luz Sáenz, a future leader of LULAC, also volunteered to serve. He chronicled his experiences in a diary that he eventually published, letting the world know about the brave deeds of his comrades in fighting for their country.<sup>31</sup> Alonso Perales, another important figure in the creation of LULAC, published his wartime experiences as well, in a two-volume set.<sup>32</sup> Belying the image of the cowardly Mexican that Anglo nativists would attempt to spread, Mexican Americans served with honor during the war, and would point to that experience when making claims for equality in postwar activist groups.

Mexican American patriotism during World War I loomed large in the rhetoric of LULAC members and other activists who demanded constitutional rights. Ethnic Mexican veterans put their wartime deeds at the center of their arguments and used the military's recognition of ethnic Mexican soldiers to undermine criticisms of their loyalty.<sup>33</sup> During his 1930 campaign for political office, M.C. Gonzales looked back to World War I, insisting that "[he] served his country during the war. [He was] an American and proud of it. [He was] proud that [he had] always served [his] country like any other American."<sup>34</sup> Mexican Americans wrote fervent defenses of their patriotism during the war whenever Anglos attacked them, an instance which occurred a year after Gonzales' speech, during one of

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<sup>30</sup> "Un Mexicano con el General Pershing," *El Imparcial de Texas*, July 18, 1918.

<sup>31</sup> José de la Luz Sáenz, *Los Mexico-Americanos en la Gran Guerra* (Artes Gráficas: San Antonio, 1933).

<sup>32</sup> Alonso Perales, *En Defensa de mi Raza* (Artes Gráficas: San Antonio, 1937).

<sup>33</sup> Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*, 125-7; "Una Vigorosa Defensa de los Mexicanos," January 27, 1930, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Box 1, Folder 22, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>34</sup> "M. C. Gonzales Endorsed for State Office," *The Bexar Facts*, June 6, 1930, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

LULAC's attempts at desegregating San Antonio schools (in this example during the fall of 1931). Writing to "The Open Forum" of the *San Antonio Light*, Mexican Americans had to justify their service, as in the example of John Gonzalez's letter of October 1, which asserted that "we pay our taxes and go to war to fight for you all, and we leave our wives and children behind. Aren't our children entitled to your privileges?"<sup>35</sup> Some Anglos even recognized ethnic Mexican military accomplishments, like Colonel Sam A. Robertson, who wrote an article for the *LULAC News* enumerating several instances of ethnic Mexican heroism, paying particular notice to the case of Little Jean Salazar, who had earned the French *Medal Militaire* for his bravery under fire.<sup>36</sup>

According to the historian Cynthia Orozco, in the years following World War I, the ethnic Mexican community began to create the foundations for LULAC in the establishment of the OSA, in San Antonio in 1920. The large following that this group would gather and its embrace of American patriotism made this group unlike other *mutualistas* or local protection leagues, and the OSA's emphasis on loyalty to America and embrace of education would set precedents for LULAC to build on after 1929.<sup>37</sup> In fact, in the OSA Declaration of Principles, composed in 1922, the organization mentioned education directly, with desegregated schools as one of the rights that members' children deserved.<sup>38</sup> Though the OSA would also focus on other issues, LULAC would continue its tactic of providing incentives for success in education achieved by ethnic Mexican students.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Juan Gonzales, "Letter to The Open Forum," *San Antonio Light*, October 1, 1931, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>36</sup> Colonel Sam A. Robertson, "By Their Deeds Ye Shall Judge Them," *LULAC News* 2, no. 7 (March 1933): 12.

<sup>37</sup> Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 73-4.

<sup>38</sup> "Order Sons of America Declaration of Principles, 1922," in Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 231-3.

<sup>39</sup> "Order Sons of America Minutes," May 16, 1928, Andrés de Luna Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

This best-known ethnic Mexican activist group of the era came together nearly a decade after the OSA, uniting a number of similar groups into an organization across Texas that would soon spread nationwide. Based upon the ideals brought forth in a 1927 conference in Harlingen, Texas, LULAC would combine Mexican American groups across the state, and present a unified voice on behalf of Mexican Americans as the U.S. entered the Great Depression. Though LULAC would fight for many kinds of equality, its early efforts to improve schools matched with the rhetoric of its leaders, who asserted that Mexicans would only find acceptance in the U.S. by giving their children the necessary schooling to hold skilled jobs, countering Anglo stereotypes and accumulating economic and political power.

### **LULAC and Education**

Historians agree that better education for Mexicans formed a key part of LULAC's early struggles on behalf of the Mexican community.<sup>40</sup> As both a right of citizens and a route to equality, education for Mexican children was a key point in the initial platforms of LULAC. In looking to improve schooling for ethnic Mexican children, LULAC took a two-pronged approach. First, it fought to integrate schooling and provide ethnic Mexican students with the same learning conditions as Anglos. Second, it worked to convince the ethnic Mexican community to prioritize learning, and provided incentives for scholastic achievement.

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As seen by LULAC's use of writing prizes and scholarship later in the chapter. The OSA, on the other hand, distributed gold watches as a reward for ethnic Mexican high school graduates.

<sup>40</sup> Jesse Luna, "League of United Latin American Citizens," 1979, M. C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; Orozco, *No Mexican Women, Children, or Dogs Allowed*; Kreneck, *Mexican American Odyssey*, 66; Craig A. Kaplowitz, *LULAC, Mexican Americans, and National Policy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

The effort to improve schools made up one of M. C. Gonzales' twenty-five aims for the organization, and Mexican activists perceived the lack of education within the Mexican community as one of its greatest barriers to equality.<sup>41</sup> In fact, LULAC organizers read a letter from University of Texas Professor Carlos E. Castañeda asserting their right to an education during the very first session of business at the convention to found LULAC in Corpus Christi, in May of 1929.<sup>42</sup> Uneducated children grew into uneducated adults, and LULAC saw that the poor education of Mexicans had created a leadership void within the ethnic community that only improved schooling could address. In an address to LULAC in 1931, Dr. Herschel T. Manuel addressed the organization with his analysis of the failings of education for ethnic Mexicans and proposed some solutions. He pointed out that the lack of education damaged the reputation of ethnic Mexicans, as it resulted in increased reliance on welfare, which only provided more fuel to nativist arguments of Mexican inadequacy.<sup>43</sup> Jesse Luna, in an unpublished article from 1979 on the history of LULAC, suggested that the lack of education within the Mexican community presented a key barrier to the early days of the organization, as it kept good jobs out of the reach of community members and limited the ability of ethnic Mexicans to access the training necessary for those jobs.<sup>44</sup> Andrés de Luna held this sentiment as well. When he addressed the Monday Club in an undated speech, he claimed that any hope for improvement of the condition of Mexicans in the U.S. had to come from the ascension of Mexicans into more professional positions of employment, which

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<sup>41</sup> M. C. Gonzales, "Draft of Questionnaire Response," M.C. Gonzales Collection, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>42</sup> Oliver Douglas Weeks, "Notes from LULAC Convention at Corpus Christi," May 18, 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; Oliver Douglas Weeks, "The League of United Latin American Citizens: A Texas-Mexican Civic Organization," *Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly* 10 (December 1928): 257-78.

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Herschel T. Manuel, "The Latin American Child in the Public Schools," Address to LULAC, 1931, 3, 8, Andrés de Luna Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>44</sup> Luna, "League of United Latin American Citizens."

could only occur through effective schooling.<sup>45</sup> To Manuel, without an education, ethnic Mexican children were little more than “stunted human lives” who could eke out a living but would face extreme difficulty in advancing both themselves and the reputation of the Mexican community.<sup>46</sup> However, activists also pointed out that educating Mexicans would benefit the state of Texas and the U.S. as a whole, by improving the citizenship of the entire ethnic Mexican community.

Following the nationalistic idea that the state’s role in education was to ensure that its residents became loyal, Mexican American community leaders pointed to the positive consequences of improving schooling for their children. To the south, Mexico was doing its best to follow this vision, incorporating education into its post-revolutionary state-building via Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos’ *indigenismo* program, an attempt to create a singular Mexican culture.<sup>47</sup> LULAC advanced a similar idea in its calls for Mexican education made to the Anglo community, suggesting that educated Mexicans would benefit Anglo society.<sup>48</sup> The organization argued that the role of the public school was to create useful citizens, which was where schools with ethnic Mexican students failed.<sup>49</sup> If a democratic nation truly benefitted from an intelligent, loyal populace, then the lack of effort to teach citizenship to Mexican Americans damaged the country as a whole, according to a

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<sup>45</sup> Andrés de Luna, “Address to the Daughters of the American Revolution,” Andrés de Luna Collection, Folder 9, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>46</sup> Manuel, “The Latin American Child in the Public Schools,” 3.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen E. Lewis, “Education and the ‘Indian Problem’” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: National and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, ed. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 180; Deborah Cohn, “The Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950-1968: Cosmopolitanism, National Identity, and the State,” *Mexican Studies* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 141-82.

<sup>48</sup> This ideology would eventually be embraced in the theoretical writing of political scientist Ernst Geller

<sup>49</sup> Andrés de Luna, “Address to the Monday Club,” Andrés de Luna Collection, Folder 9, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

survey filled out by LULAC's Encino council.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, segregated public schooling worked against what should be the state's primary goal, to use education to create cooperative citizens and promote its own well-being.<sup>51</sup> LULAC's Ruben Lozano also addressed nativist accusations that a large Mexican population undermined national security and presented a large internal concern for Anglos, arguing that "[t]he rise and fall of a nation is through its citizenry, and history has clearly shown that internal evils, regardless of nature or size, may be cured by education."<sup>52</sup> However, LULAC was pragmatic in its pursuit of education. The group sought to bring about broad changes through a series of small variations in schooling, in order to bring quality education to Mexican children and advance the Mexican community within the United States.<sup>53</sup>

The segregation of ethnic Mexican students was a common practice in Texas during the early twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Whenever activists managed to challenge the entrenched system, Anglos were able to successfully defend it in court, pointing to the language barrier presented by Mexican students, many of whom entered the school system coming from a Spanish-speaking household with little to no English skills. With separate facilities, Mexican students faced a similar situation to black students across the South. Overcrowded schools, poor learning conditions, and underpaid teachers limited the educational potential of Mexican students.<sup>55</sup> In Eagle Pass, Texas, the Mexican school was so overcrowded that classes

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<sup>50</sup> "Survey – LULAC Council of Encino," Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>51</sup> Manuel, "The Latin American Child in the Public Schools," 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ruben R. Lozano, "An Appeal," *LULAC News* 2, no. 3 (November 1932).

<sup>53</sup> Manuel, "The Latin American Child in the Public Schools," 8.

<sup>54</sup> David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 168-9.

<sup>55</sup> De Luna, "Address to the Monday Club."

rotated and students only received a half day of schooling.<sup>56</sup> Manuel's study, presented to LULAC in 1931, also found that a full eighth of all school-age children in Texas came from Spanish-speaking homes, and of that number, only half actually attended school. Even worse, those students who did attend schools were clustered in the lower grades; few ethnic Mexicans advanced to high school, let alone earned a degree.<sup>57</sup> Rodolfo de la Garza, a prominent LULAC member, put the number of unschooled Mexicans even higher, at 100,000 out of 187,000.<sup>58</sup> Even in unsegregated schools, like the El Paso district in which William Flores (a leading LULAC figure who would eventually become the group's fourteenth president) grew up, Mexican students faced hostile learning environments. Though younger Mexican students displayed strong ethnic solidarity by sticking together in classes and in creating social circles, by the time Flores' class got to high school, all but two had dropped out.<sup>59</sup> Mexican education in Texas was clearly insufficient, and Mexican American activists turned to several theories to explain why.

LULAC was certain that an education was the right of every child in America, but members disagreed on the causes of inadequate schooling of ethnic Mexican children, blaming it on a host of issues.<sup>60</sup> In a survey sent out by LULAC to local affiliates, the Encino, Texas council claimed that so-called Mexican schools had worse conditions than Anglo schools, with lower budgets and underpaid teachers. Anglos came under fire for their

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<sup>56</sup> "Letter from LULAC – Eagle Pass Council 19 to Andrés de Luna," Andrés de Luna Collection, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>57</sup> Manuel, "The Latin American Child in the Public Schools," 3.

<sup>58</sup> Rodolfo de la Garza, "Our School Children," *LULAC News* 2, no. 3 (November 1932): 9.

<sup>59</sup> William Flores, "Oral interview with Oscar J. Martinez," conducted November 26, December 4, 1975. William Flores Collection, Box 4, Folder 8, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>60</sup> "Letter to the Public Forum," *Chronicle*, Andrés de Luna Collection, Folder 8, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

apathy in providing adequate facilities to Mexican students.<sup>61</sup> When Anglo officials cut funding, it forced personnel in Mexican schools to cope with what little budgets they had, with poor results for students. Greater cooperation between Mexicans and Anglos would lead directly to improved schools and better educations.<sup>62</sup> However, other members of LULAC, like Andrés de Luna and Rodolfo de la Garza, also pointed to the ethnic Mexican community, suggesting that schools would be much improved if students got more support from their family at home. Andrés de Luna, again in his speech to the Monday Club, brought up the eugenicist image of the stereotypical ethnic Mexican in an attempt to gain sympathy, suggesting that a general meekness of character in the ethnic Mexican community prevented them from assertively claiming the right to a solid education for their children.<sup>63</sup> This unfortunately also meant that the children of the community, and the community itself, lost out on the benefits that would come with education. Other opinions put an even greater blame upon the ethnic Mexican community. Rodolfo de la Garza argued that an indifference toward education among ethnic Mexicans had permitted the entrenchment of segregation, a system the community now had to band together and fight in order to improve their future.<sup>64</sup> Manuel agreed about the effect of community indifference, but also added poverty and a general undervaluing of education by ethnic Mexican parents to the equation, creating a situation where many parents actively prevented their children from going to school.<sup>65</sup> If students failed to show up for lessons, even schools in the best condition could not spread education across the community. Knowing that they had to both improve both their schools

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<sup>61</sup> "Survey – LULAC – Encino Council," Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>62</sup> "Survey – LULAC – Falfurrias Council," Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 1, Folder 8, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>63</sup> De Luna, "Address to The Monday Club."

<sup>64</sup> De la Garza, "Our School Children," 9.

<sup>65</sup> Manuel, "The Latin American Child in the Public Schools," 8.



and convince the ethnic Mexican community to prioritize education, LULAC members pursued a complex approach in raising the quality and quantity of educated ethnic Mexicans.

LULAC's obsession with education for Mexican children would manifest itself in several different forms – eliminating segregation, improving resources, and working around language barriers. Much like the OSA Declaration of Principles, LULAC's Constitution contained demands for the elimination of segregated schools as one of the organization's key tenets.<sup>66</sup> In the fifth issue of the *LULAC News*, an official publication of the organization that was started in 1931, an article entitled “Are You a LULACKER or Slaker [sic]” pushed the idea that education would be the best way to make future generations of children into good citizens.<sup>67</sup> Since LULAC saw good citizenship as the key to ending discrimination, its members fought for integrated schools, or at least better conditions in Mexican schools. Through lawsuits aimed at Anglo school board officials, LULAC accused them of segregating Mexican students for no practical reason, and for providing Mexican students with inferior conditions.<sup>68</sup> These efforts did not have a widespread impact until after World War II, but William Flores, decades after the fact, still remembered that the struggle for improved education was the turning point in the condition of ethnic Mexicans in El Paso.<sup>69</sup>

One of the impediments to courtroom success was the language barrier that many students faced upon entering school. Acknowledging this, LULAC reduced its request,

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<sup>66</sup> “Constitution, League of United Latin American Citizens, 1929,” in Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 237-9.

<sup>67</sup> “Are You a LULACKER or Slaker,” *LULAC News* 1, no. 5 (December 1931).

The term “slacker” refers to a slur that had developed during World War I referring to individuals avoiding military service. Here, LULAC clearly tries to classify themselves as patriotic Americans, as opposed to the nameless stereotype of the Mexican draft dodger propagated by Anglo nativists.

<sup>68</sup> Gonzales, “Draft of Questionnaire Response.”

<sup>69</sup> Flores, “Oral interview with Oscar J. Martinez.”

For more on the fight for better education see: Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., “*Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Ignacio García, *White but Not Equal: Mexican Americans, Jury Discrimination, and the Supreme Court* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

allowing that separate schooling through the first grade was acceptable while demanding that Anglos recognize that after that age, Mexican students would have enough English language skills to participate in an integrated classroom.<sup>70</sup> School officials in areas with a large ethnic Mexican population also suggested that parents encourage their children to speak English at home and re-prioritize education over work, leaving their children in class for the entire school year instead of taking them out a month early for summer vacation and sending them back a month late.<sup>71</sup> Eventually, to aid students in learning English, LULAC started “The Little School of the Four Hundred” in the mid 1950s, which provided incoming first grade students with a four hundred word English vocabulary during the summer before they entered school.<sup>72</sup> This attempt was mainly in order to improve the grades of ethnic Mexican students, as opposed to an effort to integrate schools. However, in the 1930s and 40s, LULAC’s main concern remained the fight to overturn wholesale segregation.

LULAC also engaged Mexican students directly. The “Education” section that appeared occasionally in the *LULAC News* provided advice to Mexican students on continuing their studies and offered monetary prizes for high school essay writing, even during the darkest days of the Great Depression.<sup>73</sup> The journal would publish these student essays whenever possible, as in the example of graduating high school senior J.A. Hernández’s essay, “A Nation’s Real Wealth,” which elaborated on the benefits that enlightened citizens provided for their governments. Hernández argued that more advanced citizens have a higher capability for participation in government, and that American citizens needed to prove themselves worthy through self-reliance and social cooperation, paralleling

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<sup>70</sup> De la Garza, “Our School Children,” 9.

<sup>71</sup> José de la Lus Saéñz, “Nuestra Niñez, Su Educación,” Ben Garza Collection, Album 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>72</sup> Kreneck, *Mexican American Odyssey*, 218-32; Luna, “League of United Latin American Citizens.”

<sup>73</sup> “Education,” *LULAC News* 2, no. 4 (December 1932): 8.

the goals of LULAC.<sup>74</sup> LULAC's efforts to convince students of the importance of education had visible success, at least at the highest levels of education. Though Texas did not legally force its public schools to integrate until 1948, an article by Professor Castañeda noted increasing numbers of ethnic Mexican students pursuing law degrees as early as 1933, a trend that boded well for the future of the Mexican American community.<sup>75</sup>

Aside from court battles to forcibly end desegregation and attempts to change the priorities of the ethnic Mexican community, one of LULAC's other early campaigns to improve education was an effort to revamp the teaching of Texas history. LULAC thought that the message behind Texas history led to prejudice against ethnic Mexican children, and reinforced goals of mediocrity among ethnic Mexican youth. LULAC leaders pointed to the achievements of ethnic Mexican figures in early Texas, as well as their own loyalty, as lessons that ethnic Mexican children should learn in order to study Mexicans in history beyond the villainous images of Santa Anna and Pancho Villa.<sup>76</sup> To supplement the Texas history taught in the classroom, LULAC provided its own version, in the April 1932 issue of *LULAC News*, pointing to Mexican colonization of Texas and the American citizenship stemming from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, granting them rights that were confirmed by the principles of the Constitution. The same article mentioned contemporary conditions, noting that 400,000 Mexicans in Texas faced denial of suffrage and were refused seats on juries, government jobs, and proper education. To close, the article mentioned the role of

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<sup>74</sup> J. A. Hernández, "A Nation's Real Wealth," *LULAC News* 2, no. 3 (November 1932): 6.

<sup>75</sup> Dr. Carlos E. Castañeda, "More Latin-American Students Enter Texas University," *LULAC News* 2, no. 7 (March 1933): 6.

<sup>76</sup> *LULAC News* 2, no. 4 (December 1932): 4.

Mexican Americans in World War I, “who had crossed the Atlantic in great numbers and whose graves in Flanders show their loyalty to the flag.”<sup>77</sup>

LULAC made other pragmatic efforts to improve education as well. In 1932 it sent one of its “Flying Squadrons,” a delegation composed of members who would visit towns to meet with local officials and drum up support for the establishment of new councils, to Dilley, Texas.<sup>78</sup> During its visit, the squadron visited the School for Mexican Children where members of the squadron poked fun at Texas’ segregated education, suggesting that the school should be recategorized; it was not a Mexican school, since all of the students learned in English. In addition to this more lighthearted point, the squadron recognized the efforts of students there for their efforts in learning to make themselves into better citizens.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to preparing future generations of children to grow into loyal Americans, the group also did its best to use education to transform ethnic Mexican adults. Through citizenship education on the rights of Americans as well as American history, LULAC hoped to create ideal ethnic Mexican citizens who would gain acceptance in Anglo society. The group’s end goal was “intelligent citizenship, through the education and membership in community organizations.”<sup>80</sup> In addition, the group wanted to educate Anglos on differences within the ethnic Mexican community, as defined by citizenship. LULAC believed that Anglo confusion between ethnic Mexican citizens of the United States and ethnic Mexican citizens of Mexico was one of the major factors leading to discrimination.<sup>81</sup> Anglo officials treated all ethnic Mexicans alike, and one of the ways LULAC sought to assert its members’

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<sup>77</sup> “Are Texas-Mexicans ‘Americans?’” *LULAC News* 1, no. 9 (30 April 1932): 7.

<sup>78</sup> Márquez, *LULAC*, 27.

<sup>79</sup> Paul C. Jones, *LULAC News* 1, no. 7 (February 1932): 6.

<sup>80</sup> M. C. Gonzales, *LULAC News* 1, no. 8 (March 1932): 1.

<sup>81</sup> M. C. Gonzales, “Draft of Questionnaire Response.”

rights as citizens was to educate the Anglos on the diversity within the ethnic Mexican community.<sup>82</sup>

LULAC's campaign to improve education would take years to come to fruition. Though the group worked to motivate ethnic Mexican students, activists did not achieve legal victory in desegregating schools until after World War II.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, LULAC's role in promoting education exposed children of immigrants to the rights and obligations of American citizenship. By inserting itself into education, LULAC was able to improve the long-term prospects of ethnic Mexicans and begin to bring about its vision of an ethnic Mexican population that existed permanently in the U.S. and enjoyed the full rights of citizens. LULAC's fight for equal rights incentivized American citizenship beginning in the late 1920s and extending into the 1930s and beyond. However, even before LULAC, Mexican immigrants did naturalize, albeit in smaller numbers. LULAC's ability to add to pre-existing motivations helped increase the rate of naturalization, but in Manuel Gamio's 1927 study, the few immigrants who did naturalize explained their own actions. A complete description of the changing history of Mexican naturalization includes both LULAC's actions as accelerants to the rate of naturalization along with other motives that stretched back before LULAC, explaining why the 3.3% of Mexican immigrants naturalizing in 1910 chose to do so and demonstrating the foundation of legal assimilation that LULAC sought to build upon.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> "Letter from LULAC – Eagle Pass Council 19."

<sup>83</sup> Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., "The Struggle against Separate and Unequal Schools: Middle Class Mexican Americans and the Desegregation Campaign in Texas, 1929-1957," *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 350.

<sup>84</sup> Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 8.

## **Naturalization**

For Mexican immigrants, the main reason for naturalizing was the economic benefit of American citizenship. Better job opportunities and entrance into Anglo labor unions provided tangible benefits from legal Americanization. Mexican immigrants who had weaker sentimental ties back home chose to go through the process of filling out paperwork through the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and looked forward to both the immediate and long-term benefits of becoming an American.

Doña Clarita, an older woman who had lived in the U.S. for the majority of her life, was married to a man who chose American citizenship. His story demonstrates the distinct economic benefits of becoming an American citizen. Her husband, Felipe Galván, initially encountered the concept of American citizenship when local Anglos attempted to use him as a tool for voter fraud. However, Galván eventually did apply for and receive citizenship when it became economically necessary for him to do so. The owner of a mine, Galván had to naturalize to accommodate American restrictions upon immigrants holding property. During the Mexican Revolution, a group of recruiters approached him, requesting that he return with them to Mexico. Galván declined, explaining that he had become an American citizen. He justified his naturalization because of the economic convenience that it gave him, which outweighed the legal and social benefits of remaining a Mexican citizen. Though he would not return to Mexico with the recruiters, Galván assured them that he would return home should the U.S. ever threaten Mexico. While he saw workplace benefits from naturalizing and felt that those outweighed any concrete disincentives for naturalization, Galván retained his sentimental connection to Mexico. Significantly, even though this event had occurred years before, in the 1910s, his wife remembered exact details for her interview

for Gamio's study in 1927. Her husband had legally abandoned his heritage, but she knew where his true loyalties were, and could recall his response to the revolutionary recruiters in great detail, suggesting the statement's ongoing importance to her.<sup>85</sup> While her husband chose American citizenship because of its distinct economic benefits, his heart was still with Mexico. This sense of pragmatism, knowing that he would likely remain in the U.S. and that he needed American citizenship to continue his work in the mining industry, was rare among immigrants, but it did occur in other cases, becoming increasingly common over time.

José Robles, an immigrant who had lived in both Dallas and Detroit, had also chosen American citizenship to improve his economic situation. Upon arrival in the U.S., he immediately moved to assimilate culturally by learning English and adopting American customs. After earning money working as a translator in Dallas, he followed thousands of other immigrants who moved north to Detroit attempting to secure factory work in the burgeoning American automotive industry, entering the city with the first wave of large-scale Mexican migration.<sup>86</sup> Upon moving to Detroit, he began work at a Studebaker assembly plant. Pressured by his coworkers, he naturalized in 1919. After working in the factory, he transferred to a higher-paying job with Ford, married a woman of German descent, and completely abandoned his Mexican traditions. He joined the Masons, followed American sports, and even lost his taste for Mexican food.<sup>87</sup>

Robles' marriage demonstrated his complete abandonment of his Mexican heritage, as he consciously eliminated his connection to Mexico. When he married his wife, he did so without bothering to notify the Mexican consul. In contrast, most immigrants would have

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<sup>85</sup> Manuel Gamio, "Doña Clarita," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant: Autobiographic Documents Collected by Manuel Gamio*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 81-3.

<sup>86</sup> Zaragosa Vargas, "Life and Community in the 'Wonderful City of the Magic Motor': Mexican Immigrants in 1920s Detroit," *Michigan Historical Review* 15, no. 9 (Spring 1989): 48.

<sup>87</sup> Gamio, "José Robles," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 226-9.

alerted the consul, since Mexico automatically recognized marriages that occurred in foreign countries. With no need to inform foreign officials and little connection to the broader immigrant community, Robles did not feel that it was necessary to report his new union. His loose sentimental ties to Mexico also allowed him to surrender his citizenship without much guilt. Any difficulty in renouncing his loyalty to the Mexican government was offset by the economic benefits of his high-paying factory job.<sup>88</sup> Robles faced several disincentives to naturalization, namely the large ethnic Mexican community surrounding the automotive factories in Detroit, which grew from 3,000 individuals in 1920 to 15,000 by the end of the decade, and the efforts by the consul and various community groups that sponsored holiday gatherings and other activities in order to celebrate their Mexicanness. Robles naturalized, however, persuaded by a larger paycheck, along with Americanization campaigns in Detroit spearheaded by the automotive industry and the Catholic Church.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, Elías Sepulveda, an Arizonan baker, was born in the U.S., but could have chosen to adopt Mexican citizenship through the consul, much like the example of Francisco Gómez in Chapter One. Instead, he retained American citizenship out of preference. When he returned to Mexico for a visit, Sepulveda grew disillusioned by the overall poverty and lack of modernity across the Mexican countryside. His education, birthplace, and upbringing aligned him culturally with Anglo-Americans, and he pragmatically realized that he would never permanently return to Mexico, so de-naturalizing would be little more than a symbolic gesture. Sepulveda did recognize his Mexican heritage, however, and saw a unity among the ethnic Mexican population brought about by general mistreatment from Anglos.

Contradictorily, Sepulveda supported a limitation on future immigration from Mexico,

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<sup>88</sup> Robles earned fifty-five cents an hour at the Studebaker factory, getting a raise to eighty-eight cents working for Ford.

<sup>89</sup> Vargas, "Life and Community in the 'Wonderful City of the Magic Motor,'" 46, 58-9, 61-3.



believing that the practice had few benefits for the immigrants themselves. Sepulveda also brought up the oft-mentioned theoretical war between the U.S. and Mexico, affirming that he would stay out of any such conflict while suggesting that other ethnic Mexicans might not feel as loyal towards their heritage, and would take up arms against Mexico much like ethnic German soldiers who joined the American armed forces during World War I.<sup>90</sup>

Like Sepulveda, Juan Salorio, an El Paso native, was born in the United States like Sepulveda. He too could have chosen to recategorize himself as a Mexican citizen, but remained legally American. Like most other immigrants, he felt connected to the broader Mexican ethnic community and considered himself “Mexican.” Unlike other immigrants, though, Salorio served in the U.S. military during World War I, touring Europe after the war’s conclusion. Wartime duty was an adventure to Salorio as opposed to simply a patriotic duty. Though he put his life on the line for the U.S., he still did not feel a connection to Anglo citizens. Salorio maintained his American citizenship because, in his opinion, loyalty to one’s home country was important.<sup>91</sup>

Ethnic Mexicans who were American citizens thus interpreted their citizenship in several different ways. Before LULAC, American citizenship was a way to make economic gains, a route taken by only the most pragmatic of immigrants. With the creation of LULAC, citizenship came to mean proud service to one’s country, and the right to an education for one’s children. By advancing their claim to equal rights based on constitutional entitlement and the examples of prior service, activists re-framed American citizenship in positive terms and were able to slightly incentivize it within the Mexican immigrant community. While immigrants still did not naturalize in large numbers, rates nearly doubled, from 3.3% in 1910

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<sup>90</sup> Gamio, “Elías Sepulveda,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 267-71.

<sup>91</sup> Gamio, “Juan Salorio,” in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 278-81.

to 5.5% in 1930.<sup>92</sup> LULAC had made progress toward bringing about its vision of the future of the ethnic Mexican population and sowed the seeds for long-term changes through education and the battle for equal rights.

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<sup>92</sup> Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 8.

### Chapter 3: How Did Anglos View Mexican Citizenship?

#### Introduction

While Mexican immigrants slowly but surely turned towards naturalization, for Anglo-Americans and the Anglo-controlled government, ethnic Mexican citizenship became an intensely controversial topic. From 1910 through 1930, three competing philosophies toward immigrant naturalization competed for prominence. Assimilationists saw danger in a large, culturally independent population of ethnic Mexicans and reacted by urging the adoption of American customs and ways. Embedded in this campaign was an attempt to naturalize immigrants and gain their loyalty. Southwestern agribusiness took a different approach. Working against Mexican permanency, it sought to encourage seasonal, bird-of-passage immigration, in which workers would return to Mexico regularly, whenever their labor was no longer needed. This type of migration would allow agribusiness to retain a pliable, easily deportable workforce. Nativists composed the third group, advocating the elimination of the Mexican presence entirely, utilizing eugenic arguments and concerns of Mexican disloyalty to instill a general disregard for the ethnic Mexican population and undermine the argument for Mexican naturalization.

The American government shifted between these policies. Additionally, as the scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn has shown, though ethnic Mexicans were legally entitled to American citizenship and its benefits, local, state, and national governments at this time show distinct patterns of the denial of citizenship rights for ethnic Mexicans, as both immigrants and Mexican Americans faced discrimination in jury selection, segregated schools for their children, and restrictions on voting.<sup>1</sup> Through its actions during the First World War and in

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 163.

response to Mexican voting, the American government at every level did its best to hold American citizens of Mexican descent to all of the responsibilities of American citizenship while restricting as many of citizenship's privileges as possible. This chapter will examine assimilationists, nativists, and business interests in succession, looking at the way each of these key groups envisioned the future of ethnic Mexicans along with the tactics they used to bring about that ideal. Not all Anglos agreed on what to do with America's resident ethnic Mexican population, and yet the debate between factions set the tone for ethnic Mexicans' decisions about migration and naturalization. One cannot understand the latter without also examining the rhetoric and actions of Anglos in response to America's ethnic Mexican presence.

Though none of the three Anglo groups achieved true dominance over the others, each experienced definitive periods of strength. Before World War I, the ethnic Mexican presence did not draw much attention from Anglos, but when the U.S. began contemplating entrance into the war, mobilizing the large ethnic Mexican population of the Southwest became a key to wartime success. In this environment, assimilationists dominated, aided by the patriotic, pro-American sentiment of the time, along with the fact that business was still able to benefit from cheap labor, and that nativists were distracted, focusing on European and Asian immigrants instead. After the war, nativists earned key victories against European and Asian immigration and shifted their gaze to the Southwest. Though agribusiness was able to delay nativists from restricting Mexican immigration until the 1930s, assimilationists all but disappeared, with only LULAC carrying on the tradition of pro-naturalization rhetoric. Nativists sought to undermine business's reliance upon ethnic Mexican labor throughout the 1920s with arguments against allowing a large ethnic Mexican presence in the U.S. After

legislative defeats in which anti-Mexican nativists were unable to include Mexican immigrants in the National Origins Act or pass the Box Bill to add Mexico to the quota system, nativists finally were able to use economic arguments against Mexican immigration to bring about deportation and repatriation in the 1930s. However, in the long term, agribusiness managed to re-establish large-scale temporary Mexican immigration with the Bracero Program in 1942, implementing a government initiative to utilize the labor of Mexican immigrants while limiting their access to American society as much as possible.

Following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States legalized ethnic Mexican citizenship, but the ethnic Mexican community did not become aware of the concept of *jus solis* citizenship, granted to them based on their location, as opposed to their ethnic background, until World War I. Though Mexican in-migration grew throughout the early 1910s, the blending of working-class ethnic Mexicans, regardless of birthplace, muddled distinctions between Mexican and American citizens. As the decade passed, many ethnic Mexicans who had been born in the U.S. were unaware of their citizenship status, and embraced their *jus sanguinis* Mexicanness. They thought that their background as ethnic Mexicans entitled them to Mexican citizenship despite the fact that according to both American and Mexican laws, their birthplace and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo made them citizens of the United States.<sup>2</sup> This confusion had few consequences for ethnic Mexicans for much of the 1910s, as they often declined to vote and remained generally unmolested by the government. However, U.S. recruiting efforts for World War I led to a

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Garza, "Testimony to the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization," 71<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, January 31, 1930, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

forced recognition of the obligations of citizenship by members of the ethnic Mexican community.<sup>3</sup>

### **The American Government's Call to Service**

The United States, previously willing to leave ethnic Mexicans generally unaware of both the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship, called its citizens to action on May 18, 1917, when President Wilson first implemented the draft for World War I, requiring the registration of all residents by June 5.<sup>4</sup> Though the draft required the registration of all residents of the U.S., residents who could prove foreign citizenship were exempted. However, the responsibility to prove non-citizen status lay with individuals. Mexicans who had been born in the U.S. but who assumed that they were Mexican citizens faced punishment for avoiding the draft, and Mexican immigrants who could not prove that they were ineligible as non-citizens found themselves entered into the draft pool against their will. Many ethnic Mexicans who had been born in the U.S. were unaware of their American citizenship and its obligations, assuming that they were legally Mexicans. According to LULAC's J. T. Canales, at the time of its signing, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was not made public, and until the draft, the U.S. government saw little need to alert its resident Mexicans of their citizenship status.<sup>5</sup> Historians Carole E. Christian and Cynthia Orozco

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<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 50.

<sup>4</sup> R. R. Domínguez, "Importante Declaracion del Consul Mexicano," *El Tucsonense*, June 2, 1917; José A. Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 22.

Though all citizens had to file paperwork, the government only drafted citizens and permanent residents who could not prove foreign citizenship.

<sup>5</sup> J. T. Canales, "Testimony to the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization," 71<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, January 29, 1930, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

likewise see the draft as a turning point in ethnic Mexican awareness of citizenship status.<sup>6</sup> These American citizens had been unaware of their status for generations, with little reason to question their assumption of Mexican citizenship.

The ensuing confusion over the draft among the ethnic Mexican community, particularly given the strict consequences for draft dodgers, led to an exodus south.<sup>7</sup> Frequent explanations of how the draft worked appeared in Spanish-language newspapers across the American Southwest in an attempt to halt the massive amounts of ethnic Mexicans fleeing for the border.<sup>8</sup> Draft officials also posted information regarding the obligations of ethnic Mexican citizens throughout public areas, intending to inform them of mandatory actions in response to the draft.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. government was happy to point out the responsibilities of citizenship when it needed ethnic Mexican recruits. Though ethnic Mexicans would later return from wartime service and face heavy discrimination, according to historian Benjamin H. Johnson, in the Army they joined integrated units and served alongside Anglo soldiers.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. needed as many men as it could find, and the need for recruits ultimately overruled nativist fears of ethnic Mexican disloyalty and racist exclusion of ethnic Mexicans from Anglo society.

In order to help the draft go as smoothly as possible, local government officials used the Spanish language press to spread information among America's ethnic Mexican

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<sup>6</sup> Carole E. Christian, "Joining the American Mainstream: Texas' Mexican Americans during World War I," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (April 1989): 562; Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 50-1.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 150.

<sup>8</sup> José A. Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2009), 62.

<sup>9</sup> Antonio Salinas, "El Servicio Militar Obligatorio Selectivo," *Evolución*, May 8, 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 161.

population.<sup>11</sup> In Laredo, the Sheriff of Webb County, Antonio Salinas, took it upon himself to contact the local paper, *Evolución*, to explain to readers what the Anglo government's draft requirements were, who exactly was eligible, how they should register, and why the draft was important. He also sought to quell the rampant rumors about the draft's targeting of Mexican citizens. Although the military would accept foreign soldiers, Salinas sought to clarify that foreign residents of the U.S. were exempt from the draft even though they were required to fill out paperwork.<sup>12</sup> While the draft did require all residents of the U.S. to register, the forms provided distinguished between immigrants in various states of naturalization. However, continuing confusion among the ethnic Mexican community led editors in cities with a high ethnic Mexican presence to attempt to provide more clarity to their readers.

The bi-weekly Spanish-language paper *El Tucsonense* of Arizona took this extra step. The front page of its June 2, 1917, edition contained several articles and opinion pieces, as well as a letter from Consul R. R. Domínguez of Tucson, asserting that Mexican citizens were not obligated to serve. Domínguez advised readers to comply with draft registration requirements, but assured them that they could gain their exemption from the draft by coming to his office to acquire evidence of their Mexican citizenship, providing an additional, temporary benefit of Mexican citizenship.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the paper warned young men about the consequences of fleeing the draft, as most Mexican draft dodgers headed into Sonora, a dangerous province only made more so by the ongoing Mexican Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*, 24; Christian, "Joining the American Mainstream," 567.

<sup>12</sup> Salinas, "El Servicio Militar Obligatorio Selectivo," 4.

<sup>13</sup> R. R. Domínguez, "Importante Declaracion del Consul Mexicano," 1.

<sup>14</sup> "Salen de Guatemala para Entrar a...," *El Tucsonense*, June 2, 1917.



*El Tucsonense* also published on its front page an exact copy of the card that draft registrants were required to fill out. On this form, the government asked for citizenship status (native-born, naturalized, naturalizing, or foreign), along with the current progress of a naturalizing immigrant. In addition, the definition of and penalties for draft evasion were spelled out in a paragraph on the lower half of the card. For any eligible individual caught fleeing the draft by leaving the country, the government would assess a penalty of no less than one year of jail time, as well as forcible registration with the expectation that the individual would report to basic training should he be called up.<sup>15</sup>

*Evolución*, a Laredo paper, followed with a similar piece the day after. This article, on the second page, and written in paragraph form, went through the contents of the form for readers question-by-question, preparing them for the process of draft registration. The paper also explained the purpose of the questionnaire, described the ways in which the secretary of war would use the information, and urged readers to take care in filling out the form. It also contained a long description of what legally made one a citizen, either birth in the U.S. or the filing of one's final naturalization papers. Those who had only completed the first set of papers, the Declaration of Intent to Naturalize, were still legally foreigners.<sup>16</sup>

*La Prensa*, a conservative San Antonio newspaper circulating among exiles from the Mexican Revolution who were living in South Texas, also saw the need to explain why the U.S. government was holding its citizens to their responsibilities of service, through an article written by the Anglo official in charge of running the draft. In his explanation, posted in several public places as well, he went through each question individually, listing it and then providing a short explanation to the Spanish-language readership. In the explanations,

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<sup>15</sup> "Tarjeta de Registración," *El Tucsonense*, June 2, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> "Forma en que se Hará el Registro de los Habitantes Mayores de Edad, el Dia 5 del Actual," *Evolución*, June 3, 1917.

the article defines legal citizenship several times, to clarify to readers how to answer those questions.<sup>17</sup> The paper also sought to quell rumors more directly, addressing a story that it attributed to German agents, claiming that the U.S. government was planning to draft ethnic Mexican women to go to France and Belgium and serve as laundresses.<sup>18</sup> This fear might seem farfetched, but newspapers had to counter the deep paranoia that spread among the ethnic Mexican community in order to maintain cooperation with the draft and other wartime efforts.

Spanish language newspapers during World War I saw ethnic Mexican citizenship in much the same way that LULAC would after the war. They cooperated with the government to prove their loyalty and hoped that by answering the call to service, ethnic Mexicans could make gains towards equality. Some editors of Spanish language papers still did their best to advocate for their readership, urging consuls to process applications for Mexican citizenship quickly and without charging fees. Despite the efforts of individual consuls to protect as many ethnic Mexicans as possible from the draft, historian Carole Christian suggests that the Mexican government's desire to maintain close diplomatic ties to the U.S. resulted in limited government support for these consuls' actions.<sup>19</sup> The most common action taken by ethnic Mexicans was thus panicked flight, relocating back to Mexico, which was then in the final years of its revolution, or moving about within the United States, hoping to avoid detection. During the war, however, Spanish-language newspapers put forth a significant effort to inform their readerships of the intricacies of the draft, seeking to encourage ethnic Mexican loyalty and calm the fears that sent many ethnic Mexicans south to cross the border.

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<sup>17</sup> "Las Instrucciones Para el Registro," *La Prensa*, September 4, 1918.

<sup>18</sup> "Es Propalado Un Absurdo Rumor," *La Prensa*, September 4, 1918.

<sup>19</sup> Christian, "Joining the American Mainstream," 574.

The actions of the Anglo government also demonstrate much about its view of ethnic Mexican citizens. The government expected Mexican Americans to learn about the privileges of citizenship on their own, with no effort to enlighten them of its benefits, as seen by its willingness to leave many Mexican Americans unaware that they were citizens until the draft. However, when it needed manpower to fight in the war, the government held ethnic Mexicans to their citizenship responsibilities and forced immigrants to prove their exemption. Until this point, many ethnic Mexicans were unaware of their citizenship, and though the draft forced many of them into service – citizen and immigrant alike – it also spread an awareness of the rights and obligations of legal belonging of which they were previously unaware. With more ethnic Mexicans cognizant of their citizenship status and the rights it entailed, postwar groups like the OSA and LULAC had a larger pool of potential recruits to draw from and a stronger sense of what equal American citizenship meant.<sup>20</sup>

When ethnic Mexicans failed to show when drafted, or if they misled the draft board, the American judicial system took action, prosecuting them for their violations. Common tactics to avoid the draft, for those who remained in the U.S. after the initial hysteria, included either the tried-and-true Anglo approach of medical exemptions, or the fraudulent claiming of Mexican citizenship. Others grudgingly joined the army and did their best to earn a rapid discharge, often conspiring with one or two fellow ethnic Mexicans. These bluffs and tricks did not always work, however, and draft dodgers frequently faced punishments varying from one day in prison up to several months.<sup>21</sup> Even those unaware of

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<sup>20</sup> Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., “The Struggle against Separate and Unequal Schools: Middle Class Mexican Americans and the Desegregation Campaign in Texas, 1850-1940,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 347; Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> “Records of the U.S. District Courts for the Western District of Texas, San Antonio Division, 1918,” Record Group 21, National Archives and Records Association, Southwest Branch, Fort Worth; Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 30-8.

their citizenship status endured summons to court, with the draft board forcing an awareness of their legal obligations as American citizens.

As an example, Francisco Gómez was an American citizen, who was born in San Antonio, but had gained Mexican citizenship. As a young child, his parents returned to Chihuahua for his baptism. When he grew older, he legally became a Mexican citizen, through paperwork filed at the consulate. This acquisition of Mexican citizenship, however, provided more than just sentimental benefits for Gómez. During World War I, he was able to avoid the U.S. draft by presenting paperwork from his baptism and from the consulate. Local draft officials were aware of his San Antonio birth, but Mexican citizenship and de-naturalization kept Gómez from enlistment and service in combat for a country towards which he felt no loyalty.<sup>22</sup>

The federal court system in the American Southwest was filled with trials of ethnic Mexicans; whether aware of their responsibilities or not, they faced prosecution for violations of the Selective Service Act. Within one week in May of 1918, the Federal District Court for the Western District of Texas, San Antonio Division tried three separate men in two trials after they attempted to avoid military service. In what must have been an interesting trial, the court indicted two men, José M. Dominguéz and Antonio Flores, for shirking their duties. Though court records do not provide specific details, these two men had signed up for the draft and reported for duty, but during basic training apparently decided the Army was not for them, and so jointly conspired to earn discharges to return home.<sup>23</sup> In

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For further details of ethnic Mexican draft evasion, see the examples of José M. Dominguéz, Antonio Flores, Francisco Arguero, and Isidro Hernández below.

<sup>22</sup> Manuel Gamio, "Francisco Gómez," in *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant: Autobiographic Documents Collected by Manuel Gamio*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 71-6.

<sup>23</sup> "May 23, 1918 – Case Number 2674," *Records of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas – San Antonio Division*, National Archives and Records Administration, Southwest Branch, Record Group 21.

another trial, Francisco Arguero faced accusations of false testimony before the Draft Exemption Board, in an attempt to excuse himself from the draft. Once convicted, he faced a sentence of forty days in prison, his perjury bringing a more serious sentence than the one day punishment handed down to Isidro Hernández, another ethnic Mexican born in the United States who simply ignored his draft notice and faced trial several months later in September.<sup>24</sup>

While the U.S. government did its best to hold its resident ethnic Mexicans to the responsibilities of citizenship, three main groups of Anglo civilians attempted to assert control over how the government would react to ethnic Mexican citizenship. Assimilationists were strongest during the war, when they took advantage of patriotic rhetoric to suggest that all Mexican immigrants naturalize, and that all ethnic Mexicans adopt Anglo culture. Nativists were the second group, opposing any ethnic Mexican presence and fighting to end Mexican immigration. Though the anti-immigrant movement pre-dated World War I, anti-Mexican nativists did not develop a strong following until the 1920s.<sup>25</sup> Once the Great Depression began, nativists were able to bring about widespread deportations and repatriations of both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, leading to the return of approximately half a million ethnic Mexicans, both immigrant and Mexican American, from 1929 to 1935.<sup>26</sup> The final group, American business interests, was itself internally conflicted. Industry sought a loyal workforce to avoid radicalism, so it sponsored naturalization efforts, particularly after World War I during the first Red Scare.

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<sup>24</sup> “May 21, 1918 – Case Number 2663,” *Records of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas – San Antonio Division*, National Archives and Records Administration, Southwest Branch, Record Group 21.

<sup>25</sup> Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 186.

For more information on nativism see the discussion beginning on page 101.

<sup>26</sup> Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 126; George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 210-25.

Agribusiness, on the other hand, wanted a malleable workforce. It looked to continue massive Mexican immigration while preventing naturalization, so that workers would remain vulnerable to deportation. This sub-group had political power throughout the early twentieth century but did not bring about a dramatic change in immigration policy until World War II, when it was able to implement the Bracero Program to import temporary labor without allowing immigrants access to American society. These three groups combine to demonstrate how Anglos thought of ethnic Mexican citizenship in the United States, and the actions that they took to either embrace or discourage it.

### **Anglo Assimilationism**

Anglo assimilationists became most prominent during World War I, where patriotic rhetoric and demands for loyalty allowed them to insist that the absorption of America's ethnic Mexican population would be better than its removal.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately for ethnic Mexicans, assimilationists also demanded the abandonment of Mexican customs, citizenship, and any plans to return home, and required absolute patriotism and loyalty to the U.S. For most immigrants, this price was far too steep. However, Mexican immigrants' reluctance to naturalize did not stop assimilationists from extolling the virtues of Americanness and the benefits of American citizenship.

Anglos had incorporated ethnic Mexicans into their society in many ways prior to the war, but most citizenship rights came only with naturalization. However, the state of Texas,

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<sup>27</sup> For information on the Americanization movement see: Richard A. García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 128-9, 196-8; Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 212-20; Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*, 86-9; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 231-2; Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33-4; Zaragoza Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from the Colonial Times to the Present Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 200-1; Cynthia Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 48-50.

usually notoriously unfriendly to non-Anglos, permitted immigrant political participation dating back into the nineteenth century. While accounts from 1910 through 1930 are rife with Anglo claims of voting fraud through the corruptibility or ineducation of ethnic Mexicans, Texas still allowed noncitizen residents to vote, choosing instead to exclude voters based on class, via a poll tax.<sup>28</sup> White primaries kept nonwhites from influencing who would become the Democratic candidate, but the state did allow noncitizens who had paid a poll tax to vote in general elections.<sup>29</sup> Until 1921, Texas law granted suffrage to foreigners who had fulfilled the following requirements: lived in the U.S. for a full year, remained within the county where they would vote for six months, and filed their Declaration of Intent to Naturalize.<sup>30</sup> This meant that immigrants only had to file a simple piece of paper, without the ability to write or speak English, to gain access to the ballot. As an additional check against black, ethnic Mexican, and poor white political power, a poll tax remained in place, but wealthy political candidates or their allies at times covered that expense, a corruption of the democratic process that nonetheless resulted in noncitizen voting.<sup>31</sup>

Nativists had scored a victory against noncitizen voting on June 6, 1906, when Congress passed an updated Naturalization Act, which required a working knowledge of English for citizenship and, more importantly for Texas' noncitizen voters, set a time limit

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<sup>28</sup> Evan Anders, "Boss Rule and Constitutional Interests: South Texas Politics during the Progressive Era," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (January 1981): 269; S. W. Bass, "Government 86, Webb County," *Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers*, Box 1, Folder 22, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>29</sup> Jamin B. Raskin, "Legal Aliens, Local Citizens: The Historical, Constitutional, and Theoretical Meanings of Alien Suffrage," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 141, no. 4 (April 1993): 1416; Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 161.

<sup>30</sup> The Declaration of Intent to Naturalize was a simple step in the process of naturalizing that involved the filling out of one form and payment of a small fee, without any language requirement. Often, immigrants would fill out this form and halt their naturalization process there, without fully completing a Petition for Naturalization. The commonality of this practice led the federal government to put a limit on the length of time that a Declaration was valid for in 1906.

"Admonicion a los Mexicanos," *La Prensa*, July 22, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> Anders, "Boss Rule and Constitutional Interests," 269

for the naturalization process. Immigrants filing their Declarations of Intent after 1906 had seven years to gain their citizenship. If they failed to do so, they would have to re-file their Declaration, pay their fees once again, and spend at least another two years waiting to file their Petition for Naturalization.<sup>32</sup> Because of the seven-year time limit, this law first became relevant in 1913, but for the next presidential election in 1916, *La Prensa* of San Antonio published warnings to its readers. Any noncitizen whose paperwork had expired would face perjury charges upon paying a fraudulent poll tax, and felony charges for following through with a vote in the election. The Bexar County Election Commission estimated that at least a quarter of those receiving poll tax paperwork were ineligible for the election.<sup>33</sup> Texas nativists took steps to eliminate immigrant voting in 1915 with a failed attempt at constitutional reform, but the practice would continue until 1921.<sup>34</sup>

Though assimilationism was at its strongest in the years immediately following World War I, efforts to convince immigrants to naturalize preceded the war as well. In an address to the Wilson Normal School on July 13, 1916, reprinted in *LULAC News* seventeen years later, President Woodrow Wilson put forward an agenda through which American-born citizens could help encourage immigrant naturalization.<sup>35</sup> He urged his listeners to embody the ideals of the Constitution, leading immigrants to loyalty by example. He explained to his listeners that the difference between American citizenship and any other foreign citizenship is that Americans are loyal to principles laid out by the Constitution, not loyal to an

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<sup>32</sup> “Cuestiones Relativas a Naturalizacion,” *El Cosmopolita*, June 24, 1915.

<sup>33</sup> “Admonicion a los Mexicanos,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> “Reformas de la Constitución Política del Estado de Texas,” *La Prensa* June 16, 1915; Leon E. Aylsworth, “The Passing of Alien Suffrage,” *American Political Science Review* 25 (February 1931): 115.

<sup>35</sup> A university formerly known as the Washington Normal School, currently known as the University of the District of Columbia.



individual king or other ruler.<sup>36</sup> With Anglos leading model lives, citizenship would seem more lucrative to immigrants, encouraging naturalization, and creating a stronger America.

During the early stages of American involvement in the World War I, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce also argued for its members to adopt assimilationist practices. It adopted a resolution in 1917 requesting its affiliates do their best to convince aliens to naturalize in order to gain immigrants' assistance in defending American interests.<sup>37</sup> Immigrants did not have the same loyalties to America, and business interests outside of agriculture generally preferred a working class with an unquestioning faith in the government, as will be seen in postwar assimilation efforts led by superpatriotic groups with the backing of American industrialists. Agribusiness may have preferred the docility of a non-naturalized workforce, but industry sought to ensure as loyal a workforce as possible.

After the war, as the draft wound down, assimilationists continued to promote their viewpoint, using rhetoric developing out of superpatriotic organizations that had spawned to support the war effort. Concerned that a large, unintegrated population of foreign citizens would undermine national unity, they sought to promote the adoption of American culture, along with the naturalization of foreign citizens, in order to ensure immigrant loyalty to the flag. The most direct example of this effort to bring about legal assimilation was in the military's system of facilitated naturalization for noncitizen veterans, implemented following World War I.

Aside from the use of the draft, U.S. military recruiting for the war targeted foreign residents as potential volunteers. Within the rhetoric of this effort came promises of citizenship, and descriptions of its benefits. In order to accommodate foreign volunteers and

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<sup>36</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "The School of Citizenship," *LULAC News* 2, no. 7 (March 1933): 4.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "Resolution," 1917, 71<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 458. Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

make good upon its promises of citizenship, the U.S. government expedited the naturalization process for active duty soldiers in May of 1918.<sup>38</sup> Instead of filing a Declaration of Intent to Naturalize and enduring the mandatory waiting period to file their Petition for Naturalization, soldiers could report to a nearby district courthouse, bringing evidence of their active duty and two superior officers as witnesses, and file their Petition, which a judge would then immediately approve.<sup>39</sup>

For their part, however, Mexican immigrants typically sought to avoid military service.<sup>40</sup> Most ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. military at this time, therefore, were Mexican Americans; they were the individuals who had been born and educated in the U.S. and would return home to form LULAC, OSA, and other groups to fight for their rights. As such, nearly all of the postwar petitions filed by servicemen, even in the widely Hispanic district of San Antonio, were filed by European immigrants (this ratio shifts dramatically following World War II, but until then, Mexican immigrants simply avoided joining the military).<sup>41</sup> Despite Mexican American enthusiasm at the opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism and frustration at draft dodging by other ethnic Mexicans, along with the incentive of accelerated naturalization, immigrant residents did not relish the opportunity to serve.<sup>42</sup> A comparison of return migration to Mexico shows that the number of ethnic Mexicans headed south quintupled from 1917 to 1918, with nearly 100,000 more emigrants than usual.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lucy E. Salyer, "Baptism by Fire: Race, Military Service, and U.S. Citizenship Policy 1918-1935," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (December 2004): 851-2.

<sup>39</sup> "Petitions by Military Servicemen," National Archives and Records Administration, Southwest, Record Group 21, Fort Worth.

<sup>40</sup> As seen in the widespread paranoia about the draft, which Anglo and Mexican citizens attempted to quell with explanations, along with the individual case of Francisco Gómez from Manuel Gamio's interviews, and the four would-be draft dodgers (though there are hundreds of other examples) in San Antonio's court records.

<sup>41</sup> "Petitions by Military Servicemen."

<sup>42</sup> Christian, "Joining the American Mainstream," 576.

<sup>43</sup> Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*, 32.

Reluctant ethnic Mexicans may have fallen victim to the draft, particularly if they could not prove their Mexican citizenship, but the opportunity to join in military service did little to alter their long-term plans, which at this point did not include becoming Americans. The U.S. government believed that its efforts to encourage naturalization would lead to cultural assimilation even if it took several generations. However, the citizenship that the government offered to its Mexican noncitizen soldiers was still limited. Widespread local discrimination across the Southwest meant that Mexicans had fulfilled their responsibilities as citizens and residents, but did not return to see the same privileges as naturalizing servicemen of European descent. Poll taxes, exclusion from juries, and poor education for their children made Mexican citizenship less beneficial and mitigated against Mexican immigrants from seeking legal status as Americans.<sup>44</sup>

### **Anglo Nativism**

Rising alongside assimilationism during the war and continuing for a long period afterwards was a widespread nativist sentiment that ran through Anglo society.<sup>45</sup> Anglo-Americans nativists were vocal about their mistrust of all ethnic Mexicans regardless of citizenship status, and were adamant about the downfall of the entire country should this population continue to grow unchecked. While the movement pre-dated World War I, the wartime years provided an opportunity for the aggressive questioning of ethnic Mexicans' loyalty, even among Mexican Americans. The *Plan de San Diego* and the Zimmerman Telegram provided nativists with specific grounds for questioning ethnic Mexican patriotism.

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<sup>44</sup> Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 161, Clare Sheridan "Another White Race: Mexican Americans and the Paradox of Whiteness in Jury Selection," *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 112.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on nativism, see: John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns in American Nativism, 1860-1925*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Dale T. Knobel, *America for the Americans: The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996); Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; Gregory Rodriguez, *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America* (New York: Pantheon, 2007).

However, anti-Mexican nativists would not make many political gains during the war, as the war effort required both ethnic Mexican labor and a sense of patriotic unity.<sup>46</sup> A decade later, during the Great Depression, they were able to point to ethnic Mexicans as an economic problem and bring about large-scale expatriation and deportation campaigns across the country.<sup>47</sup> Though business interests would eventually win out with the creation of the Bracero Program in 1942, nativists were able to implement policies during the 1920s that drastically altered the makeup of the ethnic Mexican community.

Nativists saw ethnic Mexican citizenship in the United States as unacceptable. With eugenicist arguments and selective use of statistics, they sought to portray ethnic Mexicans as menaces to America – an immigrant group whose permanent residence would dilute the Anglo gene pool and doom the United States.<sup>48</sup> They too relied upon patriotic rhetoric, though theirs was a viciously exclusionary patriotism, with no room for nonwhites and no benefits from their presence. They wanted to put a halt to incoming immigration, relocate current residents, and give the jobs currently filled by ethnic Mexican workers to “hard-working” young men of Anglo descent.

The traditional targets of nativists were immigrants from Europe or Asia. In fact, John Higham’s seminal work, *Strangers in the Land*, does not deal with anti-Mexican nativism at all. However, the more recent scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn notes that with European and Asian immigration decreasing after the 1924 National Origins Act, nativists

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<sup>46</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1972), 128.

<sup>47</sup> Abraham Hoffman, “Stimulus to Repatriation,” *Pacific Historical Review* 42, no.2 (May 1973): 206; Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*; George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>48</sup> While many eugenicists argued these points in various fashions, the correspondence between C.M. Goethe and Congressman John C. Box, discussed later in this chapter, provides a perfect embodiment of the typical eugenicist stance.

moved their focus to the American Southwest.<sup>49</sup> Though their rhetoric regarding the threat of immigrant connection to a foreign influence was nearly identical when attacking European, Asian, or Mexican immigrants, anti-Mexican nativists also brought up the specific concern of what they perceived to be a general failure to learn English and assimilate among the ethnic Mexican community.<sup>50</sup> Though farmers and other employers of Mexican immigrants were able to hold off anti-Mexican nativist campaigns for much of the period from 1910 to 1930, during economic troubles in the early 1920s and again in the Great Depression, nativists successfully brought about Mexican repatriation campaigns affecting hundreds of thousands of ethnic Mexicans, both immigrants and American citizens.<sup>51</sup>

Border tensions surrounding the Mexican Revolution provided pre-war anti-Mexican nativists with plenty of examples of disloyalty to which they could point.<sup>52</sup> From its beginnings in 1910, the Revolution featured several instances of leaders dodging across the border, garnering support among the ethnic Mexican community in the U.S. and then returning south to continue their campaigns.<sup>53</sup> The Revolution also created tension at the highest levels of Anglo government, with President Wilson's refusal to recognize new Mexican president Venustiano Carranza becoming a key point of strife in 1915.<sup>54</sup> The eruption of Mexican "bandit raids" across South Texas that same year, in what came to be

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<sup>49</sup> Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 186.

<sup>50</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 4; Desmond King, *Making Americans*, 234.

<sup>51</sup> King, *Making Americans*, 235; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 72-5.

While the 1924 National Origins Act was a victory for nativism overall, with the establishment of strict immigration quotas, anti-Mexican nativists could not place a quota upon Mexican immigration.

<sup>52</sup> For examples of border tensions during the Mexican Revolution see: Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*; Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, *The Secret War in El Paso: Mexican Revolutionary Intrigue, 1906-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009); Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, *Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico, 1910-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); and James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan de San Diego, 1904-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> Susan M. Deeds, "Jose Maria Maytorena and the Mexican Revolution in Sonora (Part I)," *Arizona and the West* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 26; W. Dirk Raat, *Revoltosos: Mexico's Rebels in the United States, 1903-1923* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 137.

known as the *Plan de San Diego*, fuelled tensions even further. Loosely based upon an irredentist document supporting the reclaiming of much of the American Southwest through armed insurrection, the *Plan* shattered the already tense relationship between incoming Anglo agriculturalists and resident ethnic Mexicans in South Texas, both elite and working-class. Raids on Anglo civilians and widespread retribution against ethnic Mexicans created mutual distrust across the Rio Grande Valley.<sup>55</sup>

The *Plan*'s widespread support among ethnic Mexicans in the Rio Grande Valley seared images of the treasonous Mexican into southwestern minds, which became fodder for postwar nativist campaigns. Though the majority of Mexicans killed during *Plan* violence were victims of Texas Ranger retributions, the *Plan* drew many of its recruits from South Texas' ethnic Mexican agricultural workers. Its founders hoped that ethnic Mexican support would drive Anglos out of the Southwest and the fact that their success was minimal at best did not take away from the fact that ethnic Mexicans who had worked and lived with Anglos in South Texas had left their homes and workplaces to attack Anglo civilian targets.<sup>56</sup> While the *Plan* remained largely a regional issue and Anglo casualties from raids were far fewer than those killed in reprisals, news of the Mexican rebellion reached as far as the *New York Times*, just weeks after raids began.<sup>57</sup> The image of the treasonous Mexican spread across the country throughout the fall of 1915, allowing nativist arguments of Mexican disloyalty to resonate with an American audience.

As the U.S. pondered entry into the First World War, another cross-border incident inflamed relations and led to Anglo questioning of the patriotism of Mexican residents. When the British released the contents of the Zimmermann Telegram, in which Germany

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 93.

<sup>57</sup> "Send Families from Texas Border," *New York Times*, August 24, 1915.

proposed that Germany and Mexico make war and peace together and informed Mexico that Germany would provide Mexico financial backing and consent to Mexico's retaking of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, Americans linked ethnic Mexican residents to their fears of Mexican invasion.<sup>58</sup> In the minds of paranoid nativists, the large Mexican population living within America's borders could easily undermine national defense and aid a Mexican army in re-taking the land annexed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>59</sup> Fortunately for Mexicans living in the U.S., though the Zimmerman Telegram played a role in drawing American forces into the war in Europe, Mexico did not accept the offer, maintaining peaceful ties with the U.S. in the last few years of the decade. Even in South Texas, Anglos came to associate the Zimmermann Telegram mainly with German aggression, not Mexican opportunism. However, in its initial stages, it reminded them of the Plan de San Diego and kept memories of Mexican treason alive.<sup>60</sup> In addition to these events, the wartime actions of many Mexicans, in fleeing the draft and failing to register, report, or serve, added fuel to the nativist case for their removal. Wartime demands for labor and recruits mandated the temporary inclusion of ethnic Mexicans in war industries and the draft, but after the war, nativists pointed to immigrant draft dodging as proof of ethnic Mexican disloyalty.

Assimilationists may have had their heyday during World War I in determining policies towards America's ethnic Mexicans, but nativists also took advantage of patriotic rhetoric to play off of Anglo concerns about Mexican loyalty. Events occurring along the border served to advance this argument during the 1910s, but despite tensions between

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Boghardt, "Working Paper No. 6-04: The Zimmermann Telegram: Diplomacy, Intelligence and the American Entry into World War I," for *The Working Paper Series*, Georgetown University (November 2003): 9.

<sup>59</sup> Dennis J. O'Brien, "Petróleo e Intervención," *Historia Mexicana* 27, no. 1 (July-September 1977): 115.

<sup>60</sup> Evan Anders, *Boss Rule in South Texas: The Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 234-5.

American and Mexican governments, the need for labor and recruits prevailed, and the U.S. did not immediately take drastic steps to restrict ethnic Mexicans. Still, nativists pointed to the questionability of immigrant loyalty during the war, and again during the 1920s, as they proudly mentioned Anglo contributions to the war effort while denigrating the involvement of the Mexican community.

During the war, the government drafted Mexicans and allowed them to work in many war industries, but the most vulnerable positions in terms of national security were off limits.<sup>61</sup> Ethnic Mexicans found themselves restricted during wartime preparation when, in May of 1916, Secretary of War Newton P. Baker ordered the removal of all non-citizens *and* all naturalized citizens from positions related to the placing of undersea mines in American harbors. This policy came into effect immediately, and brought about the firing of five naturalized Mexicans who had previously held government positions at a military facility in Ringold. They protested, to no avail. The government did not allow them to return to work, and even restricted them from viewing the written text of the order.<sup>62</sup> These fears of the potential damage from Mexican disloyalty continued after the war, with the voice of nativism growing louder within the American public sphere.

With the Immigration Act of 1917 American nativists won a major victory, adding significantly to the requirements for entering the U.S. and disallowing immigration from nearly all of Asia. Four years later, the government's Emergency Quota Act set the now-infamous quota system in place, though it was only temporary. Additionally, this quota system did not place overly burdensome limitations on immigrants. However, in 1924, the Reed-Johnson Immigration Act gave the system teeth, with a clamping down on the raw

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<sup>61</sup> Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*, 39.

<sup>62</sup> "Solo los americanos de nacimiento serán empleados en colocar minas," *La Prensa*, May 18, 1916.



numbers of incoming Southern and Eastern Europeans. Fortunately for southwestern agribusiness and prospective Mexican immigrants, the quota system did not encompass countries in the Western Hemisphere. However, efforts to place Mexican immigration under the yoke of the quota would bring Mexican immigration and naturalization to the forefront of political debate in the second half of the 1920s.<sup>63</sup>

Anti-Mexican nativist arguments for the restriction of incoming workers finally took on a tangible shape in the form of the Box Immigration Bill. Put forward by Congressman John C. Box, representing Texas' second district and a member of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization Claims, it proposed extending the quota system to countries within the Western Hemisphere and appeared several times from 1924 through 1930.<sup>64</sup> Unlike other quotas, which relied on the number of existing immigrants to determine an acceptable number of incoming immigrants, quotas under the Box Bill would be set at four times the number of Americans emigrating to each country in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>65</sup> The bill created an uproar, as agricultural interests fought against racist private citizens to ensure their consistent streams of labor coming from Mexico. Box sided with the nativists. He sought to protect American workers by limiting labor competition and argued that immigrants were not entitled to enter the U.S. His justification for excluding Mexicans was based on his opinion that "aliens expecting to come to America have no vested rights to come

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<sup>63</sup> Ian F. Haney-López, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 38; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*, 137-8; Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*, 127; Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 22-3; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 52, 74; García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 114-5; Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 64-7, 199-208; "Summary of Box Amendment Bill," Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>65</sup> "Report to Accompany H.R. 10343," *Report #898: Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 17, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

here.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the U.S. government was fully within its rights to place a quota system upon immigrants from countries in the Western Hemisphere. The future leaders of LULAC involved themselves in the debate over the Box Bill as well, traveling to Washington to testify on behalf of the character and efficiency of the Mexican worker in opposition to nativists.<sup>67</sup> Correspondence to Congressman Box reveals much about the eugenicist, anti-Mexican sentiment common among everyday Americans, with their fears and concerns of Mexican residency and citizenship and its perceived effect on current society and the long-term prospects of the American nation.<sup>68</sup>

Nativists used the Box Bill to continue their tirades against Mexicans using similar arguments of disloyalty as those they had implemented during the war. With wartime unity having disappeared, the congressional debate over a quota system for Mexican immigrants provided the perfect forum for nativist rhetoric. Americans from across the country wrote in to Congressman Box with their opinions and experiences with Mexican immigrants and immigration. They also published articles in their local newspapers, and sent those clippings in to Box’s office.

Nativists framed their argument in several different ways. By bringing up the inability of many ethnic Mexicans to speak English and spreading fears of disloyalty, nativists hoped to convince Congress that ethnic Mexican residents threatened America’s future, and that the first step in keeping America safe was to halt Mexican immigration.

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<sup>66</sup> John C. Box, “Appendix No. 73.14,” *1927 Congressional Record*, 5965, John C. Box Vertical File, The Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>67</sup> *Report #898: Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 386-97, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 7, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin,

<sup>68</sup> Though letters sent in to Congressman Box represent the sentiments of the most opinionated Americans, as opposed to the average citizen, their content provides valuable insight into the perspective of American nativists and the arguments that they used to advance their position. Their use here should not be mistaken as representative of the opinion of most Americans, but rather the opinion of the most rabid anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican individuals.

Arguments for deportation based on the perceived effect Mexican immigrants had on the job market would come later, during the Great Depression. In the years following World War I, however, nativists were more concerned in showing how the ethnic Mexican failed to contribute to Anglo society.

Anti-Mexican writers frequently mentioned the lack of English skills among immigrants as a key reason for their exclusion from American legal society. These proponents for stricter requirements for naturalization looked to create significant obstacles to would-be citizens, in order to force them to prove their devotion and loyalty to the U.S. Rear Admiral Caspar F. Goodrich (Retired) of Michigan expressed his concern and raised several suggestions in an article that he wrote for the *Dearborn Independent*. Within his article, Goodrich equated the large immigrant presence in the U.S. to a modern-day Tower of Babel, following a trend of alarmist nativist writers in relating the immigrant threat to Biblical tales of warning. Goodrich proposed stricter language requirements, specifically forcing immigrants to learn English prior to filing their Declaration of Intent to Naturalize. To him, the current system, allowing an immigrant to file the initial paperwork signed with an “X” and learn English during the two year waiting period, was unacceptable. Goodrich brought up concerns about the integrity of ethnic Mexican voting as well, suggesting that allowing non-English speakers to vote was just as harmful as allowing immigrants to complete their initial naturalization paperwork regardless of English ability.<sup>69</sup> Anglos generally perceived ethnic Mexicans as both unable to speak English and unwilling to learn, frequently pointing to this shortcoming in arguments against Mexican citizenship.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “The Tower of Babel – A modern instance,” Rear Admiral Caspar F. Goodrich (Retired), *Dearborn Independent*, December 20, 1924.

<sup>70</sup> Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 201.

Goodrich and other nativists also sought a stricter naturalization process after the initial filing of papers. To him, lax naturalization requirements led to the acceptance of undesirable individuals as legal members of American society. He argued for the government's monitoring of the actions of naturalizing citizens, with the results of a successful Petition for Naturalization dependent upon good behavior.<sup>71</sup> This sentiment was mimicked in the *Fort Dodge Messenger*, where an unnamed author proposed that even fully naturalized citizens should lose their citizenship upon being found guilty of a crime. In this case, the paper argued that immigrants who came to the U.S. seeking its economic and political benefits should be grateful for their opportunities, and take it upon themselves to develop "a scrupulous respect for the laws."<sup>72</sup> Fears of Mexican-driven crime waves pervaded nativist writing. Anti-Mexican propagandists played up the dangers that Mexican criminals presented for Anglo women in order to provoke a response from their male audience, utilizing Anglo gendered ideals to gain support for their cause.

Rear Admiral Goodrich expanded on his proposal, as he saw a need to allow the government to deport noncitizens regardless of their length of residency.<sup>73</sup> Legislation at the time did not permit the government to expatriate residents of over five years, a restriction that many nativists found frustrating. With frequent claims of immoral and illegal behavior by ethnic Mexicans within the U.S. suffering only the lightest punishment, nativists predicted the downfall of American civilization, in part through repeat criminals taking advantage of morally sound native citizens along with the slow moral decay attributed to the eugenicist image of the lazy Mexican.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> "Alien Lawbreakers," *Fort Dodge Messenger*, n.d.

<sup>73</sup> Goodrich, "The Tower of Babel."

Morrison I. Swift, a prolific nativist journalist from New England, was another writer who weighed in on the American immigration laws that he perceived as weak. Swift presented a series of individual improvements that he thought would make America a much stronger nation. Key among these points were the registration of all immigrants and a requirement that they report their situation to the government annually. Swift also wanted a longer probationary period before immigrants were able to file their Petition for Naturalization, extended from two years to twenty. He thought that “herding aliens into citizenship [was] a blunder,” and felt that the U.S. should take more aggressive action in keeping the ballot from resident aliens.<sup>74</sup> Throughout his career, Swift wrote articles opposing all nationalities of immigrant, but this particular article focused on Mexicans and the Box Bill. Even though Mexicans still naturalized at a much lower rate than other immigrant groups eligible for citizenship, Swift still felt paranoid of Mexicans overwhelming American democracy. To him and other nativists, “citizenship [was] a rich boon which should be earned by a clear proof of fitness after a long test,” and though Swift never argued that Mexicans should be completely excluded from citizenship, his proposed changes, extending the residency required for naturalization to twenty years, for example, demonstrate a clear suspicion of the character and intentions of Mexican immigrants.<sup>75</sup>

Other nativists blamed negative Mexican characteristics upon the racial makeup of Mexico. The California Joint Immigration Committee of San Francisco voiced their concerns to Congressman Box, pointing out that the large unassimilated Indian population present in Mexico was ineligible for naturalization under existing citizenship laws dating to

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<sup>74</sup> Morrison I. Swift, “Strengthen the Immigration Law and Improve the American Race,” March 1926, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Box 2, Folder 3, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

1870 that prevented nonwhite, nonblack residents from gaining the full privileges of legal belonging. Though the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and subsequent *In re Rodríguez* decision permitted the citizenship of mestizo Mexicans, it did nothing for Indian tribes living in annexed territory. Therefore, with this policy extended to potential immigrants, any Mexicans with pure Indian blood could not become a citizen. The purpose of the Committee's correspondence with Congressman Box was its fear that the Box Bill would permit Indian citizenship by recognizing them as incoming immigrants, flooding the Southwest with "unassimilable and very undesirable Indian peons."<sup>76</sup> Their solution, to keep the American citizenry pure, was to distinguish between mestizo and Indians attempting to enter from Mexico, apparently accepting the partially Indian mestizos as long as they entered under the quota system.<sup>77</sup>

The threat of Mexican citizenship to American democracy arose in several other letters to Box, through a decline in the quality of American citizens brought about by an ethnic Mexican presence. C. C. Combs of Laredo wrote to Box with his concerns on the subject. Immigrants might have improved the U.S. by providing their labor, but he preferred the nation seek improvement by promoting a so-called better citizenry using eugenics. A

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<sup>76</sup> V.S. McClatchey, "Letter from V. S. McClatchey to Congressman John C. Box," July 11, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 6, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>77</sup> V. S. McClatchey, "Letter from V. S. McClatchey to Congressman John C. Box," August 11, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 6, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

Congressman Box did his best to clarify the laws for them, explaining that immigration laws prevented the entry of any individuals who would be ineligible for citizenship. However, the Committee did not recognize the difference. The U.S. government allowed any incoming immigrant to naturalize because it restricted nonblack, nonwhite immigration. Even if the government decided to allow Mexicans with pure Indian blood to enter the U.S., under the Naturalization Act of 1870, they still would have been ineligible for citizenship. Though Box promised the Committee that he would include an amendment to his bill that would restrict the entry of Mexicans of pure Indian ancestry, he eventually forwarded the question to the California attorney general, to explain the intricacies of immigration law and put the Committee's collective minds at ease.

permanent ethnic Mexican presence would present severe obstacles to democracy by “lowering the citizenship thru [sic] fusion with lower nationalities.”<sup>78</sup>

This concern became more tangible with the correspondence of Dr. T. J. Williams, who claimed to have witnessed voting practices in Corpus Christi. According to Williams, Mexicans, including native citizens, naturalized citizens, and complete noncitizens, voted in all elections. Local politicians did their best to manipulate ethnic Mexican voters.<sup>79</sup> These actions were the manifestation of Rear Admiral Goodrich’s fears of the manipulability of non-English speaking voters, paired with the corruption present in South Texas politics, where political bosses regularly utilized Mexican votes in maintaining their stranglehold on local government.<sup>80</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, one of the very first publicly political actions of M. C. Gonzales, career diplomat and eventual founding father of LULAC, was a call to Mexican voters to abandon political bosses in favor of “better government” candidates in the local elections of 1924. Nativists did not see a positive side to Mexican voting. Ethnic Mexican voters were malleable at best, but their corruptibility was a potential threat to the integrity of American democracy.

J. C. Brodie, of Superior, Arizona, thought that immigrants demonstrated contempt by *not* voting. He tabulated immigrant political participation in Pinal County and found that only six percent of the overall Mexican population in the Miami voting precinct cast a ballot. Brodie was disgusted by the fact that there were only four Petitions for Naturalization pending in the Pinal Superior Court, out of an overall population of 3,500. He took

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<sup>78</sup> C. C. Combs, “Letter from C. C. Combs to Congressman John C. Box,” March 9, 1928, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 5, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>79</sup> T. J. Williams, “Letter from Dr. T. J. Williams to Congressman John C. Box,” June 7, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 36; Anders, *Boss Rule in South Texas*, viii, 13.

Mexicans' failure to naturalize personally, and since residents of up to twenty years often failed to naturalize, he thought that they should not be allowed to.<sup>81</sup> Immigrants were unwilling to become citizens, which spoke to their character. By allowing Mexicans into the country, he argued, the U.S. risked a slow degradation of the quality of its residents, which would have severe long-term consequences.

Other nativists mirrored this sentiment, attributing the quality of American citizenship as the true value of the country, much like Mexican Americans who fought for better education. Sara C. Wilbur, of Jessup, Iowa, inundated Congressman Box's office with anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and anti-drinking correspondence related to her Protestant, prohibitionist values and targeting Mexican immigrants throughout the debate over the Box Bill. Immigrant crime caused her to see a decrease in America's value as a nation, especially if the violators claimed American citizenship. While she blamed immigrant criminals for destroying America's integrity, it was law-abiding citizens that suffered, as their efforts to contribute to America were undermined by immigrant criminal activity.<sup>82</sup>

Nativists also specifically pointed to Mexican disloyalty using World War I as a concrete, recent example of the Anglo serving courageously contrasted with the Mexican shirking his duty. Dr. W. M. Branch of El Paso brought these fears up in a series of letters to Congressman Box, relating his worries into support for the bill. In his first letter, Branch related a powerfully nativist scene in which he delivered the child of a local Mexican woman:

I have a woman in bed now with a new baby, she was bred, born, and raised here, she cannot speak one word of English, there are thousands of just such, all over this

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<sup>81</sup> J. C. Brodie, "Letter from J.C. Brodie to Congressman John C. Box," Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 5, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>82</sup> Sarah C. Wilbur, "Letter from Sarah C. Wilbur to John C. Box," Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.



western country. Your boy and mine will gladly represent the Flag in No-Man's Land, twenty years from to-day, what please tell me what can this woman's child do? He will be excused by the Draft Board or possibly be required to bring wood and water twenty miles behind the lines. Is that a square deal, for Uncle Sam? For our Flag, for your boy and mine?<sup>83</sup>

Branch described nativist fears that generations of Mexicans would not assimilate and would prove both unwilling and unable to contribute to America in her times of need. He ignored the presence of Mexican Americans in the American Expeditionary Force in favor of his paranoid vision of an America who could not count upon the service of even her native-born citizens. Branch assumed that ethnic Mexicans would never assimilate, which therefore made the continuation of unabated Mexican entry into the U.S. a mounting problem across the southwest.

Another El Paso resident, John M. Lennon, wrote to warn Congressman Box and the Committee of the dangers of letting Mexicans into the U.S. He used the economic nature of Mexican immigration to show that immigrants refused to naturalize out of a deep-seated desire to take advantage of the American economy and then return home. Even worse, the next generation, born in the U.S. and endowed with American citizenship, would never admit that they were citizens and if forced, would claim that the only thing they cared about in the U.S. was earning money. To hyper-patriotic nativists insistent on loyalty to America above all else, hearing this from a native citizen was appalling. "It [was] enough to make an American who cares anything for his Country to feel like beating H--- out of any one of this

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<sup>83</sup> W. M. Branch, "Letter from W. M. Branch M.D. to Congressman John C. Box," April 6, 1924, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

breed.”<sup>84</sup> Hypocritically, Lennon went on to accuse older Mexicans of naturalizing in large numbers, in order to abuse the ballot and gloat about it to Anglos. Even the children of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, ineligible for citizenship, were preferable to Mexicans, who had an open path to naturalize and gained citizenship as future generations were born in the U.S. Lennon closed by mentioning that he hoped to “have been of at least a wee bit of service in helping to make this country a Country of Americans and not merely a place to make a living or for Aliens to suck the Blood out of with no real regard for the Country.”<sup>85</sup>

The *Fellowship Forum*, a magazine published by the Ku Klux Klan, offered its own take on Mexican immigration in an article sent to Congressman Box.<sup>86</sup> It argued that maintaining a quality American citizenship required constant vigilance from native-born Americans. Citizens must be loyal to the U.S. above everything else. Based on that criterion, America had no room for immigrants that were unwilling or unable to become citizens. The *Forum*'s article also included a quote from Theodore Roosevelt, asserting that the immigrant “must be an American in name, in deed, in truth, and in fact, from the time he lands on American shores until he is laid away in an American grave.”<sup>87</sup> This article addressed overall immigration, and certainly the quote addresses immigration from Europe more directly, but its points are also relevant for ethnic Mexicans. Nativists feared absorbing

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<sup>84</sup> John M. Lennon, “Letter from John M. Lennon to Congressman John C. Box,” January 14, 1926, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Christine K. Erickson, “Kluxer Blues,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 52.

<sup>87</sup> “Dangers of Immigration,” *The Fellowship Forum*, April 12, 1924, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin. For more information on Theodore Roosevelt’s conflicting views of the advantages of hybridity and racism as applied to immigration, see: Gary Gerstle, “Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1280-1307.

a large group of individuals who might not feel the same undying loyalty to the U.S., which in their minds would compromise national security.

The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization provided the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization with a report to accompany debate on the Box Bill, but even it managed to taint its information with nativism. The Bureau suggested that the high birth rate among Mexicans and a perceived lack of assimilation would create a “hyphenized, politically unstabilized, Latinized majority throughout the southwest.”<sup>88</sup> Percival J. Cooney, another government bureaucrat, wrote of the problems present in Mexican naturalization. From his position as Director of Americanization at the El Monte Union High School District in California, he had noted that not a single ethnic Mexican had taken out citizenship papers, among a population of over three thousand immigrants. Though the majority of ethnic Mexicans in El Monte were migrant workers whose frequent relocation rendered them ineligible for naturalization, Cooney saw it as a lack of political instinct among ethnic Mexicans.<sup>89</sup> Nativists perceived a separatist notion within the ethnic Mexican community, a problem that they proposed solving by removing ethnic Mexicans completely. The Box Bill was a way to begin that process, by stanching the flow of Mexican immigrants across the border.

When the Box Bill reached the floor of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, a heated debate broke out. C. M. Goethe, a Californian and president of the Immigration Study Commission, a private nativist lobbying group, submitted a lengthy diatribe to the Committee, railing against the dangers of allowing ethnic Mexicans into

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<sup>88</sup> “Report to Accompany H.R. 10343,” *Report #898: Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 4, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>89</sup> Percival J. Cooney, “Letter from Percival J. Cooney to Congressman John C. Box,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 3, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

American society. He predicted the downfall of American society in a letter to Congressman Box, which became entered into the official Congressional Record. In addition to his letter, he included two photos of interracial couples, with white brides marrying Korean and black grooms. This “hybridization of citizenry” smacked of the demise of Rome and Athens, and he desperately warned the Committee of the consequences of Mexican immigration. Asians were already excluded from entry, and black citizens were kept out of Anglo society, but Goethe warned of the consequences of allowing ethnic Mexicans into American society. Immigrant adults might not assimilate too much themselves, but they lusted after “the precious genes of Nordics for their children.”<sup>90</sup> Fortunately for the Committee, someone was checking up on Goethe, offering information regarding the veracity of his claims.<sup>91</sup>

Immediately following Goethe’s letter in the Congressional Record is an entry from R. H. Taylor, also of California. Taylor had taken it upon himself to fact-check the claims of Goethe and presented his findings to the Committee, immediately discrediting Goethe and his entire Commission. He had found that Goethe was the only member of the Immigration Study Commission, and that Goethe was a fervent nativist who staffed and funded the Commission out of his own pocket. Additionally, Goethe had no professional experience dealing with immigrants, as he was a real estate operator, wealthy enough to pay for influence but with minimal expertise on the subject. Taylor also accused Goethe of attempting to mislead the public to forward his own racist agenda.<sup>92</sup> Taylor’s attempts apparently succeeded, as Goethe disappeared from the Congressional Record after that.

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<sup>90</sup> “Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere,” Louis Wilmot Papers, Folder 7, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>91</sup> R. H. Taylor, “Letter from R. H. Taylor to the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization,” Louis Wilmot Papers, Folder 7, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Though Goethe lost his influence following that revelation, his opinion, and the façade that he put up in order to advance his agenda, provide a look inside the fatalistic alarmism that pervaded nativist thought and action surrounding Mexican immigration and inclusion within American society.<sup>93</sup>

Though the Box Bill suffered defeat in Congress, it was a concrete effort by anti-Mexican nativists to bring about their vision of the ideal ethnic Mexican population in the United States. By implementing a quota system, they sought to cut off immigration from Mexico, as a starting point in the effort to remove America's ethnic Mexican presence.<sup>94</sup> The failure of the Bill and the inability of anti-Mexican nativists to include Mexico in the 1924 National Origins Act demonstrate that though they were growing in strength, nativists still could not implement their vision. It was not until they could utilize fears of economic damage from ethnic Mexicans during the Great Depression that nativists were able to bring about the large-scale deportations and repatriations that they had been fighting for.

Nativists used several tactics to attack the Mexican community within the United States. By playing off of Anglo fears of Mexican crime, nativists justified cracking down on immigration with arguments of public safety. They also used fear of a divided population undermining national security to demonstrate that they had the country's best interest at heart. By utilizing the image of the treasonous Mexican they hoped to show that ethnic Mexicans did not belong in the U.S., but it was not until the Great Depression that their

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<sup>93</sup> Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 4.

<sup>94</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America*, 137-8; Ramírez, *To the Line of Fire*, 127; Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 22-3; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 52, 74; García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 114-5; Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 64-7, 199-208; "Summary of Box Amendment Bill," Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

arguments pointing to the economic consequences of an ethnic Mexican workforce resulted in government-backed deportation and repatriation.

### **American Business and Mexican Citizenship**

Efforts at encouraging immigration following the war also included business interests, but agriculture and industry were at odds over whether to naturalize immigrants or not. Organized campaigns by superpatriotic groups funded by industry formed as a response to the Red Scare, as an attempt to continue wartime rhetoric of loyalty and service to one's country.<sup>95</sup> With the recent examples of the Russian and Mexican Revolutions, as well as the large strike at the Phelps Dodge copper mine in Bisbee, Arizona, factory owners feared the consequences of a large, alienated working class.<sup>96</sup> Americans felt particularly vulnerable to a proletariat-led uprising given the country's large proportion of non-naturalized residents. This group, lacking loyalty to its adopted country or, in the case of first-generation Americans, to their citizenship-by-birthright, made up a large enough percentage of the population to worry U.S. officials and business interests at the highest level. Industrial supporters of naturalization would seek to fulfill their goals through citizenship education, the key to Americanization, and in this case a tool for Anglos to indoctrinate residents and citizens of questionable loyalty. To achieve this, American industrialists supported independent groups offering naturalization and language classes, with curricula aimed at assimilating immigrants both legally and culturally.<sup>97</sup>

One of these groups, the Better America Federation of California, took it upon itself to call upon Mexican immigrants to naturalize. Its full-page ads appeared nationwide in

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<sup>95</sup> Edwin Layton, "The Better America Federation: A Case Study of Superpatriotism," *Pacific Historical Review* 30, no. 2 (May 1961): 137.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S. – Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 174.

<sup>97</sup> Layton, "The Better America Federation," 138.

October of 1920, urging Mexican immigrants to take the steps necessary to become full citizens. The advertisements began by pointing out the would-be political power of nonvoters, residents of voting age who had not naturalized through a lack of awareness about the process, or who still harbored negative opinions towards becoming citizens (people who they claimed would see the benefits of naturalization if only they familiarized themselves with American society and government). If this group of potential citizens mobilized their political power, the Federation suggested that they could accomplish much greater goals than simply by acting as strikers and revolutionaries. The Federation calculated a nonvoting population of fourteen million, and insisted that it was there to help reform immigrants into loyal, voting citizens.<sup>98</sup>

The Federation informed immigrants of classes it sponsored, to inform potential citizens of the requirements for naturalization. These classes were organized according to nation of origin, led by a naturalized teacher who had emigrated from that same country. To the Federation, this link between teacher and student, as well as the teacher's instructions on going through the naturalization process, would be sufficient in convincing any reluctant immigrants to join American legal society.<sup>99</sup> Much like Wilson's lecture about leading by example, the Federation hoped that providing a role model with the same country of origin would make its classes less threatening and thus demonstrate the benefits of citizenship.

If immigrants remained unwilling to come to special classes held for them, however, the Federation's ad also provided extremely detailed instructions on naturalization. These steps targeted reluctant immigrants as well, focusing on the simplicity of initiating the process of naturalization and assuring readers that beginning the process with a Declaration

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<sup>98</sup> "Naturalizacion," *El Heraldo de Mexico*, October 1, 1920.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

of Intent required neither the presence of witnesses nor the knowledge of English. The ad also described the tasks that a naturalizing immigrant had to perform in order to have a successful Petition to Naturalize and the timing of each step. It warned immigrants that allowing that time frame to lapse would require the re-filing of paperwork and the re-payment of fees, and that the overall five year residency for a Petition must be fulfilled in one continuous location. Finally, the Federation offered its assistance in filling out those forms, and announced that copies of both forms were available at its office in Los Angeles. While this and other efforts at naturalization were largely failures, the fact that the Federation and groups like it did extend offers of assistance into the Mexican community demonstrates the efforts of industry to fund attempts to increase the rate of naturalization. Industry failed where LULAC succeeded, however, as LULAC made efforts to create new incentives for naturalizing, instead of pointing out existing benefits of American citizenship.

Agribusiness did not feel the same way. As Camille Guerin-Gonzales has shown, though their reliance upon a large, poorly paid, migratory work force, led farm owners to favor consistent Mexican immigration, they did not speak out in favor of Mexican citizenship or naturalization.<sup>100</sup> High immigration kept wages in the Southwest low and allowed commercial farmers to earn larger profits.<sup>101</sup> Congressman John Nance Garner, serving South Texas in the House, represented agricultural interests when he stepped up to argue against the passage of the Box Bill. Fighting for his Anglo constituents, Garner pointed to the specific needs of cotton farmers, who relied upon cheap Mexican labor to earn a profit

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<sup>100</sup> Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>101</sup> Charles Wollenberg, "Race and Class in Rural California: The El Monte Berry Strike of 1933," *California Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 155-6.



upon harvesting their crops.<sup>102</sup> California agriculture also opposed the Box Bill, as evidenced by the fact that two dozen California businesses composed a letter to the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in opposition of the bill.<sup>103</sup> California farmer Fred J. Hart chimed in with his opposition to the bill as well, stating his contentment with the status quo in both the labor market and agriculture industry during his testimony in front of the Committee.<sup>104</sup> While other Anglo groups were all-or-nothing in their opinions about whether to permit ethnic Mexicans to reside in the U.S. as well as permit their naturalization, agriculture's unique position led farmers to oppose limiting immigration but remain inactive on the issue of citizenship.

Anglo-Americans were divided into three large groups when confronted with the subject of America's ethnic Mexican population. Each group had an ideal vision of what form that population would take, and each tried to implement that ideal. Despite their different goals, each of these groups had one common dream – an America in which the ethnic Mexican population was either invisible or nonexistent. Though assimilationists wanted to include ethnic Mexicans into American politics, they also sought to erase their ethnic identity through cultural assimilation. Much like business's voiceless worker and the nativist's deported immigrant, visible ethnic Mexican populations were incompatible with assimilationists' ideal future of America. Additionally, the Anglo government during this

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<sup>102</sup> K. C. Barkley, "Letter from K. C. Barkley to Congressman John N. Garner," March 14, 1928, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 5, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; W. S. Gordon, "Letter from W. S. Gordon to Congressman Box," January 30, 1926, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 5, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin; David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 183-5.

<sup>103</sup> "Letter to the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization," 71<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 375, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>104</sup> "Testimony of Fred J. Hart to the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization," 71<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 403, Louis Wilmot Collection, Folder 1, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

period held ethnic Mexicans to the responsibilities of citizenship even as they were denied its privileges, by strictly enforcing the draft during World War I. Assimilationists, who held the most power during World War I and the years immediately surrounding it, put forward rhetoric encouraging the naturalization of Mexican immigrants. Though they had few long-term successes, they were able to create a facilitated naturalization process for non-citizen veterans. They lost power to the nativists in the years after the war. While nativists sought to force ethnic Mexicans out of the U.S. entirely, agribusiness was able to hold them off, gaining an exception for Mexican immigrants in the 1924 National Origins Act and then defeating the Box Bill in 1926 and 1930. However, during the Great Depression, nativists utilized economic arguments that resounded with the Anglo public and brought about widespread deportations and repatriations. It was not until 1942 when agribusiness definitively won control, instituting the Bracero Program in order to utilize Mexican immigrant labor without incorporating ethnic Mexicans into the U.S.

## Conclusion

By 1930, Mexican immigrants naturalized at a pace nearly twice as high as in 1910.<sup>1</sup> Though the rate was still well below one in ten, the two decades following 1910 clearly represented a formative period in the Mexican immigrant experience. Immigrants still generally clung to their Mexican citizenship and future plans for returning south, but Mexican Americans and Anglo assimilationists had made significant inroads in encouraging naturalization. Most historians point to the era after World War II as a turning point in the ethnic Mexican community, but the increasing trend of naturalization continues further back, all the way to the First World War.<sup>2</sup>

Mexican immigrants settled in the United States to work. They looked to earn money to send back home as remittances or to save enough of their wages to return to Mexico, buy land, and provide for future generations of their family. They did not seek long-term residence in the U.S., and even though they often spent an extended period of time there, they always kept their end goal in mind. For immigrants that brought families with them, whose economic situation required them to remain in the U.S., retaining Mexican citizenship for themselves and their children was crucial to their hopes for the future. Though Anglo culture may have made inroads, for most immigrants the incentives for naturalization were too few.

The Mexican government also played a significant role in keeping naturalization low. Through organized festivals and ritual reminders of home, immigrants could not escape their future plans to return to Mexico. Additionally, even though their successes were few and far between, prior to the formation of Mexican American activist groups, consuls provided the

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<sup>1</sup> Francisco Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 15-8; Richard A. García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

strongest legal protection for immigrants – an incentive they would lose if they chose to become American citizens. Finally, the Mexican government used its consuls to provide a transnational extension of their bureaucracy, offering Mexican citizenship to the children of immigrants so that immigrants could ensure that their descendants remained Mexican both by blood and by legal definition.

The foundation of Mexican American activist groups after World War I played a large part in defining what being an American meant to the ethnic Mexican community. Though community leaders would not join together to form LULAC until 1929, the group's early years set a foundation for the future battle for better education. LULAC connected education directly to citizenship in its fight for equality, as it was both a right of ethnic Mexican children to receive a quality education and the means through which they would create responsible, productive Mexican Americans who could exemplify American citizenship. This tactic, along with the frequent mentioning of ethnic Mexican service during World War I, shows that LULAC engaged ethnic Mexican citizenship as an ideal, as an attempt to form the rest of the ethnic Mexican community in the United States in its own middle-class image. Unlike Mexican immigrants, LULAC saw a permanent ethnic Mexican presence in the U.S., settled alongside Anglos and enjoying the same rights while fully participating in American democracy.

As LULAC made gains for ethnic Mexican civil rights, the group sought, with only limited success, to incentivize American citizenship. By making American citizenship a qualifying factor for membership, LULAC gave Mexican immigrants another reason to naturalize. Spreading rhetoric about the benefits of constitutional rights and providing a way to fight for those rights, the years after LULAC saw a slight rise in naturalization. However,

the Great Depression, with its deportations and repatriations, interrupted this trend for immigrants. LULAC continued fighting for the rights of ethnic Mexicans for decades, and though their impact on the pre-World War II immigrant community is less noticeable than postwar achievements, this period set key patterns of how Mexican Americans would go about gaining equality and implementing their vision of the future of the ethnic Mexican community in the U.S.

The Anglo-American community had three different visions of the ideal role of the ethnic Mexican community in the United States. Assimilationists sought to encourage naturalization and the adoption of Anglo cultural norms. Business interests wanted Mexican immigration to continue, but they did not want Mexican immigrant workers to naturalize and gain rights with which they could fight for higher wages and better conditions. Nativists thought that ethnic Mexicans had no place at all in the United States and did their best to stop Mexican immigration and remove the existing ethnic Mexican population. Through the early 1920s, assimilationists held the upper hand, riding the wave of patriotism from wartime rhetoric and propaganda. Nativism took hold during the Great Depression to bring about deportation and repatriation campaigns across the country. It was not until the 1940s when business interests would take control of Mexican immigration policy, instituting the Bracero Program.

American entrance into World War I forced the country to rely upon its resident ethnic Mexicans for both labor and military service. With the need for loyalty and nationalist theory taking hold in the U.S., Anglo assimilationists spread rhetoric encouraging America's ethnic Mexicans to become citizens in order to receive the civil rights of an American. By facilitating the naturalization process for foreign veterans and with campaigns spreading

information about the benefits of citizenship, assimilationists hoped that immigrants would permanently remain in the U.S. However, they also wanted those immigrants to lose their Mexicanness, seeing naturalization as a key inroad to begin the process of getting ethnic Mexicans to absorb Anglo culture.

Nativists were the precise opposite of assimilationists. They thought America was perfect as an Anglo country and saw Mexican immigrants detracting from the nation's strength. They existed throughout the early twentieth century, but did not truly engage Mexican immigrants until after 1924, when they supported the proposed Box Bill, which would have created a quota for Mexican immigration. With the bill as a rallying point, nativists put forth the image of the lazy Mexican in correspondence to Congress and in opinion pieces in their local newspapers. Though their arguments for removal based strictly on eugenics failed to take hold, their claims of the economic damage done by ethnic Mexicans became more relevant with the onset of the Great Depression. With Americans in need of jobs, local, state, and national governments acted to rid the country of its ethnic Mexican presence, with deportations and incentivized repatriations.

Nativists suggested that giving citizenship to ethnic Mexicans was harmful to America. They feared that ethnic Mexican citizens would undermine American politics through uneducated, corruptible voting practices and that the growth of America's ethnic Mexican population would leave American democracy vulnerable to takeover. By pointing to the slow cultural assimilation of ethnic Mexicans using the rhetoric of nationalism, nativists did their best to show how the Mexican presence was dangerous to American national security.

American business wanted to keep its immigrant labor force, but did not want its workforce to gain the rights of citizenship. By looking to continue the virtually unrestricted immigration from Mexico, business owners could keep labor costs low and undermine the ability of workers to negotiate higher wages and better working conditions, unless they felt threatened by workplace radicalism, in which case they adopted a welfare capitalist approach that included paternalist Americanization efforts. During the Great Depression, agribusiness replaced its Mexican workforce with unemployed Anglos, but as the economy improved and the country entered World War II, they were able to secure the passage of the Bracero Program, to restart heavy Mexican immigration with the explicit goal of gaining temporary immigrant labor before returning workers to Mexico when they were no longer needed.

From 1910 through 1930, ethnic Mexican citizenship underwent several significant changes as Mexican immigrants, Mexican Americans, and Anglo-Americans sought to re-define the future of America's ethnic Mexican population, working to bring about either a total relocation to Mexico or varying levels of membership in Anglo society. Though many historians ignore Mexican immigrant naturalization, it is a useful lens for examining this key period in the formation of America's resident Mexicans. Although a hybrid culture developed, the years from 1910 to 1930 were a key period during which the incentives for American citizenship came to outweigh both the benefits of Mexican citizenship and immigrant loyalty, with more immigrants choosing to naturalize even amidst growing efforts by Anglos to return them to Mexico. As these groups battled to implement their vision, they revealed much about the Mexican immigrant population and about themselves. The tale of the ethnic Mexican in this era does not end happily ever after, but despite setbacks during the Great Depression, World War II provided another opportunity for ethnic Mexicans to prove

themselves. Much like World War I, veterans returned to fight for their rights, through membership in LULAC and other growing activist organizations, and were able to make significant gains in seeking equality for ethnic Mexicans.



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## **Vita**

Zachary Adams was born in New London, Connecticut on September 9, 1986, the son of Chris and Sharon Adams. He grew up in Ledyard, Connecticut, attending Ledyard High School and graduating in 2004. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in history and a minor in political science in 2008, from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania after spending nine months abroad in Bologna, Italy.

After graduating, he moved to Washington, D.C. and worked at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center for two years, moving to Fort Worth in 2010 to enroll as a graduate student at Texas Christian University. While a student at TCU, he worked as a graduate assistant to Dr. Juan Carlos Sola-Corbacho and Dr. Benjamin Tillman, and completed his thesis in April of 2012.

He is currently engaged to Samantha Benich of Phoenix, Arizona. They live in Euless, Texas with their two rambunctious cats, Elliot and Dexter.

## **Abstract**

# “AMERICAN IN NAME, IN DEED, IN TRUTH, AND IN FACT”: THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF ETHNIC MEXICAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES FROM 1910 TO 1930

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This thesis examines the naturalization of Mexican immigrants from 1910 through 1930 using immigrant opinions of American citizenship and the broad presence of Mexican consuls in the United States to explain why many immigrants were reluctant to naturalize. Additionally, it explains the reasons for the near-doubling of naturalization rates during this period, as Mexican American activist groups such as the Order Sons of America and the League of Latin American Citizens managed to increase the benefits of American citizenship for ethnic Mexicans despite increasing anti-Mexican nativism across the United States. It argues that the years from 1910 through 1930 proved crucial in setting patterns for how Anglo Americans, Mexican Americans, and Mexican immigrants understood the role of ethnic Mexicans in the United States, and how they consequently utilized American citizenship to guide the ethnic Mexican population into the specific roles that they envisioned.