

We Grew The Food You Ate . . .  
And Our Work Made You Rich

by

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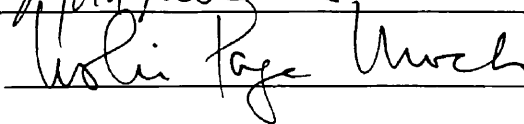
Presented to the American Culture Faculty  
at the University of Michigan-Flint  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Liberal Studies  
in  
American Culture

August 1, 1995

First Reader



Second Reader



## **We Grew The Food You Ate. . . And Our Work Made You Rich**

### Introduction

More than anything else, the history of Mexican immigration in the United States is a history of exploitation by corporations, agriculturists and the United States government of one group of people. Largely unskilled men, women and children created the cheap labor pool sought by U.S. growers to plant and harvest the various crops. Consideration will be given to the importing of Mexican nationals and Mexican-American citizens from the Southwest to work in the sugar beet fields of Michigan. The position occupied by these Mexican-American citizens and Mexican nationals in U.S. agriculture will also be discussed. Consider the 1974 definition of Mexican-American.

The term "Mexican American" refers to persons living in the United States who are themselves of Mexican origin or whose parents or more remote ancestors came to the United States from Mexico or whose antecedents resided in those parts of the Southwestern United States which were once part of the Mexican Nation. . . .--United States Commission on Civil Rights<sup>1</sup>

In 1848, after the Mexican-American war, the United States assumed possession of the present-day states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, Oregon, Washington, and Oklahoma. Within that territory, which came to be known as the Southwestern and Northwestern portions of the United States, Mexican nationals, with a stroke of a pen, became United States citizens. Their subsequent internal migration and U.S. policies specific to Mexican immigration to the United States contributed a significant, but unheralded, impact on U.S. agriculture and the economy.

Wilbur Zelinsky, a cultural geographer, posits that whenever an empty territory undergoes settlement, or an earlier population is dislodged by

invaders, the specific characteristics for the first group able to effect a viable, self-perpetuating society are of crucial significance for the later social and cultural geography of the area, no matter how tiny the initial band of settlers may have been.<sup>2</sup> Thus the contributions of the initial settlers (Spanish) in the development of the Southwest were to be disregarded by the westward advance of the Anglo-Americans. This is because the colonial record so ideally exemplifies the Doctrine of First Effective Settlement.<sup>3</sup>

Also to be discussed are factors which include the racial attitude of white Americans towards the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, occupational segregation in the growing fields, reasons for allowing or not allowing the immigration of Mexican nationals into the U.S., the conflict between the various immigrant groups created by U.S. growers and the reasons for exclusion of one group over the other. The discussion will also include, as alternatives to working in the fields, the role of the railroad and the auto industry in this internal and international migration as a way to "settle out," purchase a home and be considered American in 20th century United States society

The spatial relation of Mexico to the Southwest, the proximity of the border, the closeness of the parent group, are all important factors in the Mexican Problem. It should be noted that relations between Anglos and Hispanics have been constantly influenced by the state of relations between the United States and Mexico. A specific set of historical and geographical factors are also very much a part of the Mexican problem.<sup>4</sup> It should never be forgotten that, with the exception of the Indians, Mexicans are the only minority in the mainland United States who were annexed by conquest; the only minority, Indians again excepted, whose rights were specifically

safeguarded by treaty provision.<sup>5</sup> Rodolfo Acuña in his book, *Occupied America*; forwards the following conditions inherent to this conquest:

1. The land of one people is invaded by people from another country, who later use military force to gain and maintain control.
2. The original inhabitants become subjects of the conquerors involuntarily.
3. The conquered have an alien culture and government imposed upon them.
4. The conquered become the victims of racism and cultural genocide and are relegated to a submerged status.
5. The conquered are rendered politically and economically powerless.
6. The conquerors feel they have a mission in occupying the area in question and believe that they have undeniable privileges by virtue of their conquest.

These points apply to the relationship between Chicanos and Anglos in Mexico's former northwest territory.<sup>6</sup>

In the end it should be understood that it was the Anglo-Americans who initially came to the Hispanic world, not the Hispanic who came to the Anglo world. The Hispanics are 25 million strong, the vast majority of Mexican origin, but many from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central and South America. They are the fastest-growing minority in the U.S.A.<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire has written:

The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed [is]: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only the power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free you.<sup>8</sup>

Those who seek power are deprived of their humanity to the point that they themselves become the oppressors. Such is the case for the Anglo-Americans.

## From Sea to Shining Sea

Prior to any formal examination involving the contribution of Mexican American citizens and Mexican nationals to United States agriculture, an examination of contributing determinants which led to the prevailing Anglo attitude regarding Hispanics must be presented. The discussion will focus on the concept of Manifest Destiny and the conquest of the Mexican nationals in the Southwest.

Historians write that Manifest Destiny had its roots in Puritan ideas, which continue to influence Anglo-American thought to this day. The doctrine of Manifest Destiny was based in concept on that of predestination, which was part of the Calvinist doctrine: God destined you to go either to heaven or to hell. The Puritans believed they were the chosen people of the New World. This belief carried over to the Anglo-American conviction that God had made them custodians of democracy and that they had a mission to spread its principles. Many citizens believed that God had destined them to own and occupy all of the land from Atlantic to Pacific and from North pole to South pole. This mission was to spread the principles of democracy and Christianity to the unfortunates of the hemisphere.<sup>9</sup>

The physical conquest of Mexico's northwest territory began when Anglo-American settlers infiltrated Texas in the 1820s and then forcibly seized the area in 1836. Racism is at the heart of colonialism. It facilitated, as well as promoted, the social domination of the Mexican. The *gringos'* long-standing antipathy toward the Indian was transferred to the Mexican.<sup>10</sup> Even today relatively unbiased sources play down the expansionist, land-hungry characteristics of the Texas settlers and they write glowingly of the democratic civilization they represented:

The Americans who came into Texas . . . brought with them a deeply rooted democratic tradition. Herein lay the basis of another conflict, which was essentially cultural in its nature. The American colonist and the native Mexican soon discovered that the same words could have vastly different meanings, depending on the traditions and conditional attitudes of those who spoke them. Democracy, justice, and Christianity, thought at first to be ideals held in common, became rallying cries of a revolution because of the different interpretations put upon them by the American colonists and their Mexican rulers in Texas.<sup>11</sup>

Acuña, quoting Eugene C. Barker, a Texas historian, draws a parallel between the Texas revolt and the American Revolution, stating:

In each, the general cause of revolt was the same--a sudden effort to extend imperial authority at the expense of local privilege. At the close of the summer of 1835 the Texans saw themselves in danger of becoming the alien subjects of a people to whom they deliberately believed themselves morally, intellectually, and politically superior.<sup>12</sup>

In the progress of technology, the domination of civilization over nature, American expansion westward, and the destruction of Indians and Mexicans, the destiny of white America seemed manifest.<sup>13</sup>

The Texas War created a legacy of hate and determined the status of the Mexicans which remained in Texas, as that of a conquered people.<sup>14</sup> Generalizations and stereotypes about the Mexicans have been circulated in the United States for over 150 years. Adjectives such as treacherous, lazy, adulterous, and terms such as "meskin" or "greaser" have become synonymous with Mexican in the minds of many Anglo-Americans.<sup>15</sup>

On February 2, 1848, the Mexicans agreed to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as the Texas border and ceded the Southwest (which incorporates the present-day states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, and parts of Colorado) to the United States in return for \$15 million.<sup>16</sup> The provisions that specifically refer to the Mexicans and their rights are found in articles VIII and IX and article X, which

was omitted. Article IX guaranteed Mexicans the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the meantime shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction.<sup>17</sup> When Mexican officials protested the omission of article X, Anglo-American emissaries drafted a Statement of Protocol on May 26, 1848, which read:

The American government by suppressing the Xth article of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did not in any way intend to annul the grants of lands made by Mexico in the ceded territories. These grants . . . preserve the legal value which they may possess, and the grantees may cause their legitimate (titles) to be acknowledged before the American tribunals.

Conformable to the law of the United States, legitimate titles to every description of property, personal and real, existing in the ceded territories, are those which were legitimate titles under the Mexican law of California and New Mexico up to the 13th of May, 1846, and in Texas up to the 2nd of March, 1836.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that the children of these Mexican nationals born on American soil were automatically American citizens under the Fourteenth Amendment, which provides that "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."<sup>19</sup>

Ramón Eduardo Ruíz writing in *The Mexican War: Was It Manifest Destiny* says:

No war waged by the United States has won more striking victories than the Mexican War of 1846-1848. After an unbroken string of military triumphs from Buena Vista to Chapultepec and the occupation of their first foreign capital, Americans added the sprawling territories of New Mexico and California to their domain. The United States had also fulfilled its Manifest Destiny, that belief of American expansionist that Providence had willed them a moral mission to occupy all adjacent lands. No American can deny that war had proved profitable.<sup>20</sup>

Historian Félix D. Almarza, goes on to write: "All too often, Texan specialists have interpreted the war as the defeat of a culturally inferior people by a culturally superior class of Anglo frontiersmen. . . ."21

Perhaps having seen the future of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States, Mexican diplomat Manuel Cresenio Rejón, at the time the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed, commented,;

Our race, our unfortunate people will have to wander in search of hospitality in a strange land, only to be ejected later. Descendants of the Indians that we are, the North Americans hate us, their spokesmen depreciate us, even if they recognize the justice of our cause, and they consider us unworthy to form with them one nation and one society, they clearly manifest that their future expansion begins with the territory that they take from us and pushing [sic] aside our citizens who inhabit the land.<sup>22</sup>

Shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the editor of the Southern Quarterly Review discussed the significance of the Conquest of California reflecting the attitude of white Americans towards the new citizens:

The American Revolution had given this country a national existence. The War of 1812 had provided security. The Mexican-American War had clarified the national purpose. By their violence, United States troops had chastised arrogant and fraudulent Mexicans; they had punished the insolence of her sons in the sight of her daughters. They had demonstrated their superior courage. There are some nations that have a doom upon them. . . . The nation that make no onward progress . . . that wastes its treasure wantonly--that cherishes not its resources--such a nation will burn out . . . will become easy prey of the more adventurous enemy.<sup>23</sup>

The report of war atrocities have perpetuated the reality for Chicanos that they are a conquered people: the Mexicans and the Indians are the only people in the United States who were forced to become part of this country after the occupation of their lands by Anglo-American troops.<sup>24</sup>



*A Documentary History of the Mexican Americans*, published in 1971

states:

As the only minority, apart from the Indians, ever acquired by conquest, the Mexican Americans have been subjected to economic, social, and political discrimination, as well as a great deal of violence at the hands of their Anglo conquerors. During the period from 1865 to 1920, there were more lynching of Mexican Americans in the Southwest. But the worst violence has been the unrelenting discrimination against the cultural heritage--the language and customs--of the Mexican Americans, coupled with the economic exploitation of the entire group. Property rights were guaranteed, but not protected, by either the federal or state governments. Equal protection under law has consistently been a mockery in the Mexican-American communities.<sup>25</sup>

Encounters with Mexicans in the Texas revolution, the Mexican War, and the California Gold Rush, all violent incidents, had led Americans to view Mexicans as a savage and insensitive people, prone to cruelty against man and beast alike. Mexicans manifested the essence of their character, Americans thought, in the barbarous bullfight, the cowardly massacre of defenseless Texans at the Alamo and the bloodthirsty rampages of roaming outlaws.<sup>26</sup>

## Mexican Immigration to the United States

At the beginning of the twentieth century the United States government did not know the precise number of immigrant Mexicans in this country. Prior to 1908 it did not compile statistics concerning the number of Mexican immigrants. In 1900, 103,393 Mexican-born persons resided in the United States. By 1910 this number had climbed to 221,915. Ten years later the Census Bureau counted some 486,418 Mexican-born in this country.<sup>27</sup> Prior to 1910, Mexican immigration was uncounted. In the years before the adoption of the 1924 Quota Act the techniques of enumerating immigrants from Mexico left much to be desired.<sup>28</sup> The rapid increase of Mexican immigrants in the border states after 1900 can be seen in the following table:

Table I  
Mexican Immigration to the United States 1900 to 1930<sup>29</sup>

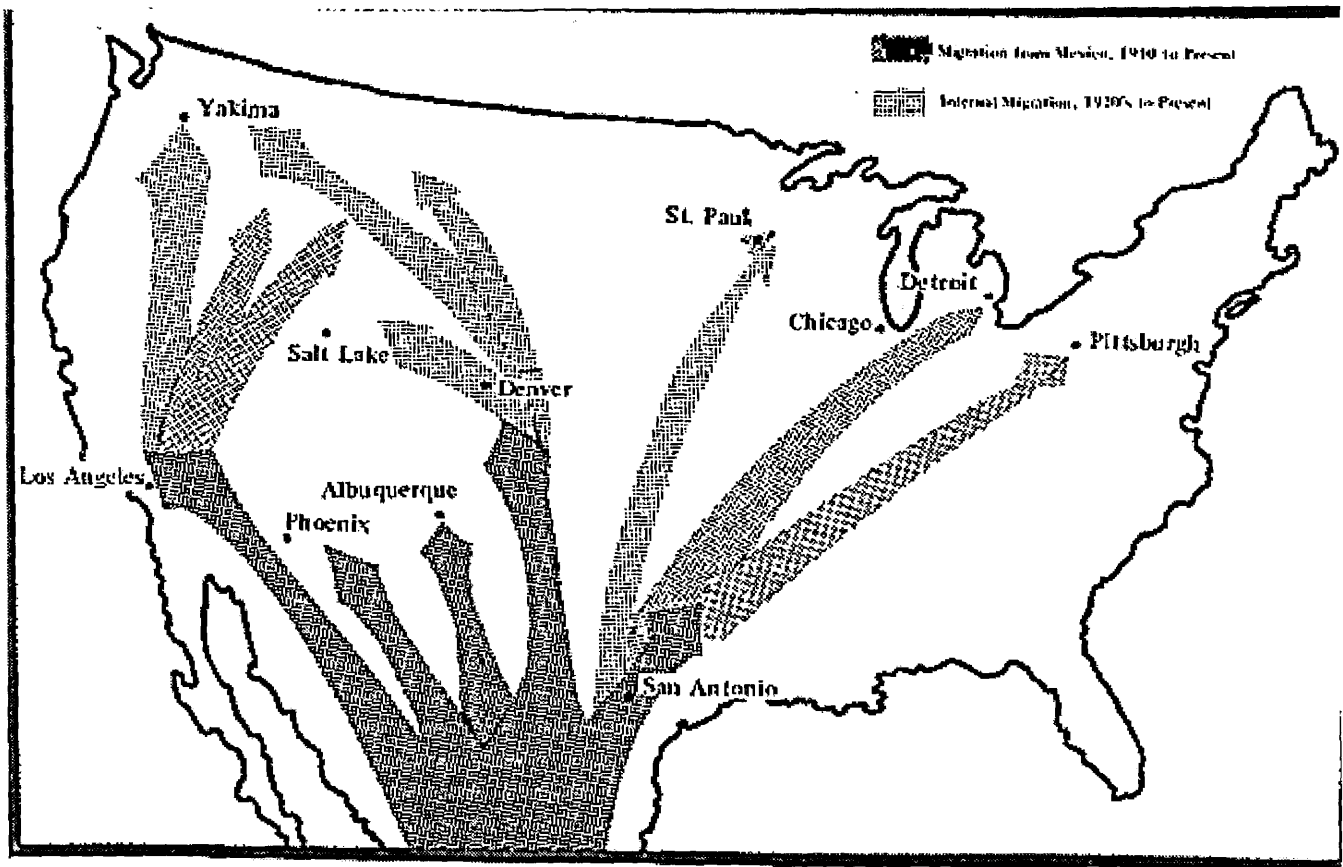
	1900	1910	1920	1930
Arizona	14,171	29,987	61,580	114,173
California	8,086	33,694	88,881	368,013
New Mexico	6,649	111,918	20,272	59,340
Texas	71,062	125,016	251,827	683,681

The bulk of Mexican emigration to the United States came from the central part of Mexico. Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Zacatecas were the states which furnished more than 50 percent of the legal entries into the United States.<sup>30</sup>

Three fundamental characteristics marked the migration into the U.S. Southwest. First, it was a migration of families. Thus the recruitment of families rather than single men became economically cheaper for the company and provided them with a more stable force. The company made its intentions clear to the grower when it pointed out that their workers were

only machines and that it was in the best interests of the growers to see that their machines ran well.<sup>31</sup>

Second, it was a labor recruited primarily by the monopoly corporations which since the 1880s had come to dominate the U.S. economy and state machinery at federal and local levels. This demand for labor quickly was filled by the flow of refugees from Mexico. Thus, push-and-pull factors in Mexico and the United States set in motion a massive twentieth-century movement of people.



Mexican Migration-1900 to 1930-Patterns of Disbursement  
[500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures, Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), p. 73]

The migration of these families involved a class and cultural transition, from the peasant class and strongly feudal patriarchal culture of Mexico to the working-class, agricultural, industrial, or urban and capitalist culture of the United States.<sup>32</sup> The Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1921

disrupted established living patterns and created a movement of people from the haciendas to the cities. This pattern of movement provided for the United States a ready pool of cheap labor to be imported.

This migration set into motion a secondary migratory wave. Moving north in a fanlike pattern, Mexican Americans inaugurated their own migration from south central Texas. By 1920, Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals made up three fourths of Western agricultural labor, nearly all of Western railroad-track labor, and the majority of Western mining labor.<sup>33</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, sugar-beet acreage in California and Colorado expanded rapidly as a result of protective sugar rates established by the Dingley Tariff in 1897.<sup>34</sup> The Dingley Tariff, designed to protect U.S. sugar from Caribbean competition, created a great demand for sugar beets and thus the demand for Mexican labor was increased. The growing of sugar beets is unique in that it represents a curious union of family farms and million dollar corporations. The principal growing areas were to be found in California, Michigan, and Colorado. The sugar-beet companies experimented with other types of labor: Japanese in Colorado; the so-called Volga-Germans in Nebraska and other areas; and Belgians and Poles in Michigan.<sup>35</sup> But the demand for migrants was particularly strong in the sugar-beet industry, and by the time the United States entered World War I, Colorado beet growers were already using large number of migrant workers, principally Mexican Americans from New Mexico and Texas.<sup>36</sup>

The first Mexican workers were imported to the South Platte Valley of Colorado in 1903; by 1909 there were more than 2,600 Mexican workers and constituted over 40 percent of the sugar beet work force.<sup>37</sup> Opportunities for crop picking also abounded in California's San Joaquin Valley, the Salt River

Valley of Arizona, the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, and in sugar beet fields which could be found in Michigan, Minnesota, and Colorado.<sup>38</sup>

The political and economic advantages of family labor emerge most clearly in the sugar beet fields of the South Platte Valley of Colorado dominated by the Great Western Sugar Company. Beet production in Colorado historically had relied heavily on family and child labor. When it became necessary to bring in outside labor, German-Russian families were brought in. When the German-Russian flow was stopped by World War I, Japanese and Mexican-American single men were brought in to increase the labor supply and to afford competition against the German-Russian in a certain district. By 1929, Mexicans dominated the beet labor group.<sup>39</sup>

In order to assure themselves of a regular and readily available labor supply, sugar-beet companies at this time began to develop local labor colonias (colonies), in which they encouraged migrants to settle rather than to return to New Mexico or Texas for the winter. Migratory workers, of their own volition, also began to winter in many of the larger cities within sugar-beet production areas, thus gradually eliminating the annual return southward.<sup>40</sup> From 1916 to 1948, between thirty thousand and sixty thousand Mexican workers were directly dependent upon sugar-beet employment with average annual earnings of from \$500 to \$600 per family.<sup>41</sup>

This migration led to a rising tide of anti-Mexican feelings by the end of World War I, as Mexicans became the largest, most recent flood of unskilled or low-skilled immigrant workers entering the United States. In Texas, for example, violence and discriminatory practices against Mexican Americans became so widespread that by the late 1920s, the Secretary of State warned the governor that action would have to be taken to protect Mexican Americans.<sup>42</sup>

The Mexicans are here--from California to Pennsylvania, from Texas to Minnesota. They have penetrated the heart of industrial America; in the steel region on the southern shore of Lake Michigan they are numbered in thousands; in Eastern industrial centers by hundreds. And they have made Los Angeles the second largest Mexican city in the world <sup>43</sup>

The Mexicans, because of their numbers and willingness to work for lower wages, had become the preferred employee of railroad companies, steel and heavy industry, and most of all, agriculture. Their increase, in terms of numbers, soared from around 100,000 to over half a million in twenty years.

### Transition from European to Mexican Workers

The most employed European immigrant workers in agriculture were Belgians, who in the later years of the first decade of the 1900s became the most important group of workers in the Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin sugar beet areas. They had acquired the trade in France where 50,000 Belgian agricultural workers specialized in sugar beets.<sup>44</sup> The second most numerous among the Europeans were Germans from Russia, who had lived for several generations in Russia, (in the Volga region), recruited largely from Nebraska and Kansas. Hungarians, Poles, Serbians, and other Slavic groups from several midwestern cities also worked in the fields.<sup>45</sup> In an effort to keep wages low, sugar-beet companies began to import Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals to compete with Japanese and German-Russian workers.<sup>46</sup> Outside the Southwest, Mexicans were widely used in the sugar-beet industry, which began to expand after 1897, when the Dingley Tariff Act was imposed on imported sugar.<sup>47</sup>

Polish immigrants continued to move to Michigan as many found jobs topping sugar beets, working in the coal mines, or performing labor parallel to construction in the foundry.<sup>48</sup> Companies encouraged many of these families to become growers by providing tools, advice, and low-interest loans. The range of paternalistic corporate inducements enabled many immigrant families from Europe to become farmers by first renting and later purchasing land they had previously worked under contract.<sup>49</sup>

The transition from industry to agriculture differed for the Mexicans. Early in the 1880s, Mexicans comprised up to seventy percent of the section crews and ninety per cent of the extra gangs on the principal western lines which regularly employed between 35,000 and 50,000 workmen in these categories. In 1908, some sixteen thousand Mexican were recruited in El Paso

for railroad employment.<sup>50</sup> From Texas, Mexicans were recruited in small numbers for employment on the plantations in the Mississippi Delta; thousands were recruited for employment in the Northern and Western sugar-beet fields; and an entire trainload was, at one time, shipped from Texas to Seattle for employment in the Alaska canneries.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to fulfilling the requirements of California agriculture, Mexicans became the mainstay of the labor force in the sugar beet fields of Colorado and the Midwest during the 1920s. Mexican beet workers, like their compatriots on West Coast farms, were unable to share in normal standards of life while providing the fundamental manual labor for America's sugar beet industry.<sup>52</sup> By 1909 employers had brought more than 1000 Mexicans to the California sugar beet fields to compete with Japanese workers.<sup>53</sup>

The Bethlehem Steel Company, in need of immediate labor in 1923, recruited approximately one thousand Mexican nationals from San Antonio, Texas, for its plant in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to act as strikebreakers.<sup>54</sup> In the same year, National Tube Company, an affiliate of United States Steel, recruited about 1,500 Texan Mexican Americans for its Lorain, Ohio plant.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the Germans and Scandinavians, who rapidly achieved farm ownership, and the Irish and eastern and southern Europeans, who generally became industrial workers, most Mexicans throughout the United States continued to be landless field workers.<sup>56</sup> However, as a result of World War I, coal mines, steel plants, packing houses, automobile plants, and other industries recruited Mexican Americans to work in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and Michigan.<sup>57</sup> By 1926, 12,000 Mexican beet workers had displaced Eastern Europeans in the Midwest as they had displaced European and Asian beet workers in other parts of the country. According to a 1927 survey, Mexicans formed an estimated seventy-five to



ninety percent of the total labor force in all of the beet-growing regions.<sup>58</sup> Some of the reasons included the fact that they worked for less wages, the whole family worked rather than just the head of household, the distance to Mexico was closer to import large number of workers thus guaranteeing ready hands for the anticipated turnover of workers and Mexicans were not subject to immigration laws such as those affecting European workers.

## Overview of Mexican Beet Workers

I came under contract  
from Morelia  
Earnings dollars was my dream  
I bought shoes and I bought a hat  
And even put on trousers.

And now I'm overwhelmed  
I a shoemaker by trade  
But here they say I'm a camel  
And only good for pick and shovel.<sup>59</sup>



Sugar Beet Worker Chopping with Short-Handled Hoe  
[500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures, SouthWest Organizing Project, (SWOP), p. 81]

The key element in unmechanized agricultural production was stoop labor brought about by the introduction of the short-handled hoe. Prior the 1920s, workers usually blocked with long-handled hoes. Agricultural researchers then declared that the short-handled hoe was more effective,

although it forced workers to walk stooped over on their knees. The simultaneous introduction of the short-handled hoe and Mexican workers linked the two in the popular and academic mind.<sup>60</sup>

Sugar beet cultivation was typical of this type of labor-intensive activity. Workers had to prepare the soil for planting. They then planted and covered seed in rows that stretched for mile after mile. When the new shoots were above the ground, they had to be thinned by workers on their hands and knees. As the summer season progressed the crop needed daily attention to weeding and irrigation. During harvest season the beets were pulled from the ground and their tops cut off. The work was fatiguing and paid poorly. Most United States citizens refused to engage in this type of work, therefore growers brought in thousand of Mexican migrant to work the beet fields.<sup>61</sup>

The world of the Mexican transient laborer was impermanent and disturbing. Most families enjoyed no opportunity to establish permanent roots in a particular locality.<sup>62</sup> In an effort to obtain as many workdays as possible, the Mexican farm worker unflaggingly followed the ripening crops. Groups of families would sometimes move together by automobile or truck, in a patriarchal system that included a father and his sons and their families.<sup>63</sup> Generally, they followed a migratory route along which they moved to harvest truck crops in the southwest in the late winter and early spring, to pick cotton in the south in the summer months, and then to harvest sugar beets and fruit in the great plains states and Midwest later in the season.<sup>64</sup>

If all members worked, the average Mexican family, before the deduction of expenditures, earned roughly \$600 per beet season during the late 1920s. They engaged in an occupation that a Farm Security Administration report described as follows:

Sugar beet hand work is considered one of the most arduous and disagreeable of all agricultural occupations. The monotony, difficulty, and drudgery of the work, frequently performed in inclement weather, combined with the long hours of work and low earnings, make sugar beet field work one which most laborers would avoid if they could find other means of employment.<sup>65</sup>

Families engaged in migrant agricultural labor also suffered harsh exploitation:

For some of these the living conditions are indescribable. Houses which have been abandoned as unfit for human habitation. . . . The congestion of living quarters reaches almost the saturation point. . . . On the Western Plains with the weather at freezing temperature, they live in tents, in smokehouses, and in cars. There is no evidence that these conditions are harder upon the women than upon the men, but the babies pay a heavy tribute to King Cotton.<sup>66</sup>



Housing for Carrot Workers, Imperial Valley, California  
[500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures, SouthWest Organizing Project, (SWOP), p. 89.]

Hundreds of shacks without electricity or running water had been hastily built by growers and farmers to accommodate the migrant workers. Forced to use community out-houses and to drink from central water supplies where mosquitoes bred, workers and their families were often treated little better than slaves.<sup>67</sup> A minister describing a camp inhabited by Mexicans in the Imperial Valley in 1926 stated in devastating detail:

Shelters were made of almost every conceivable thing--burlap, canvas, palm branches. Not a single wooden floor was observed in the camp.... Chicken yards were mixed in with human shelters, in a perfectly democratic way. There was a huge pile of manure close by the houses.... There were flies everywhere.... We found one woman carrying water in large milk pails from the irrigation ditch. The water was brown with mud, but we were assured that after it had been allowed to settle that it would be clear and pure.<sup>68</sup>

In the sugar beet fields of the Midwest and Colorado, the experience of growers with Mexican workers proved to be very profitable. In these areas, Mexican workers soon came to comprise the backbone of the labor supply. A close scrutiny in the sugar beet states provides a good indication of the conditions under which a majority of Mexican immigrants labored in the United States during the 1920s.<sup>69</sup> Despite the fact that Mexicans were invariably paid less than their American counterparts, by 1926, the average of all reported wages paid to Mexican laborers in the United States was \$3.38 per day, or almost \$105 per month--six times what the same worker could hope to earn in his homeland.<sup>70</sup> For those Mexicans who had made the border crossing, working in the United States paid more than working in Mexico and allowed the workers to send some money home to family still in Mexico. Other studies in the 1930s found that Mexican families laboring in the beet fields of Colorado and the Midwest averaged between \$340 and \$436 annually. Most midwestern beet workers wintered in Texas and were transported north each spring by truck for a fee of \$9.00 to \$15.00 per capita.<sup>71</sup> The universality

of employment patterns was established in a study made in California in 1930. A very large proportion of Mexican immigrants were imported, often under contract, by particular employers, for employment in particular industries at particular tasks. It was not the individual who has been employed but the group.<sup>72</sup>

To keep Mexicans earmarked for exclusive employment in a few low-paying, industries, their employers set them apart from other employees in separate camps, in company towns, and in segregated colonias.<sup>73</sup> "Plainly, writes Fred W. Ross, "it was never intended that the colonias were to be a part of the wider community; rather, it was meant that they were to be apart from it in every way; colonia residents were to live apart, work apart, play apart, worship apart, and unfortunately trade, in some cases, apart." Living in ramshackle homes, in cluttered, run-down shacktowns, set apart from their neighbors, denied even the minimum civic services, the residents of the colonia came to resent the fenced-in character of their existence.<sup>74</sup>

Along the major rail lines of the Southwest, Mexican settlement sprang up, usually in the form of boxcar housing, or later, rows of company housing.<sup>75</sup> In addition to settling in mostly mixed ethnic working class neighborhoods in industrial zones, many Mexicans settled in railroad colonies.<sup>76</sup> It is very likely that Mexican railroad workers worked their way to Detroit and used the Mexican boxcar communities established along the rail lines as channels into Detroit's area industries.<sup>77</sup>

St. Paul, Minnesota offers a microscopic view of how Mexican beet workers established a colonia. Nineteen twenty-nine is generally regarded as an important year in the formation of the Mexican colonia in St. Paul. The workers had no work in the beet fields between August 15 and September 25. Some women from the beet fields were able to find employment in the

canning factory in Le Sueur, Minnesota. They were apparently unemployable as domestics because of prejudice and their unfamiliarity with the demands of the Anglo-American household.

In 1931, the American Sugar Beet Company abandoned many of its welfare practices provided during seasonal unemployment, thus increasing the influx of Mexicans to the urban areas where they eventually became known to practically all of the social agencies.<sup>78</sup> Prior to 1931 during times of seasonal unemployment, the company had provided relief efforts for the Mexican workers to keep them tied to the sugar-beet area. By 1936, there were 3,123 Mexican beet workers who made Minnesota their home. The beet workers constituted 96 percent of the Mexican population of Minnesota. In 1936, 1,791 beet workers resided in Ramsey County, and 1,761 of these were on relief. In 1938, about 3,637 Mexicans were in the state, 3,123 of whom were beet workers. This situation was essentially identical to that of 1936. About 2,782 of the beet workers were on relief.<sup>79</sup>

The conquest of Mexico by Spain destroyed Indian religions and imposed Catholicism in its place. Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals might have expected the Church to be a refuge in the United States but this was not to be the case. From 1848 to 1930, anti-Catholicism was vehement in the Southwest where the population was overwhelmingly Protestant. The reasonable person would have expected the church in the Southwest to welcome their fellow Catholics; however, the Catholic Church refused to promote social action and limited itself to meeting the minimal spiritual needs of the people. The church in the United States was greatly influenced by an oligarchy of wealthy laymen. In many places, special masses were set aside for the Mexicans and they were excluded from the church's social functions. The abandonment of the church was especially noticeable in rural

areas where the rich parishioners employed Mexicans.<sup>80</sup> In Detroit, the Catholic Church joined the Americanization Committee and the city's largest employers--like Ford Motor Company--at the forefront of the city's Americanization drive, in promoting the principles of American government and citizenship among both native and foreign-born residents. Besides investigating the family conditions of recently arrived Mexicans, the church, in cooperation with several laymen's organizations, formed Americanization classes for adult Mexicans.<sup>81</sup> In the end, the Mexicans were forsaken by the Catholic Church, which sided with the Anglo-Americans to avoid persecution.

To be a Mexican worker in the United States meant to live in a state of poverty and insecurity. Doing the most arduous of unskilled labor, they were the marginal workers in the fields, on the railroads, in the steel mills, in the packing houses. Their wages were barely at the subsistence level.<sup>82</sup>



## The Role of Female Mexican Immigrant Workers

The formation of gender identity for Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American women and men evolves from the interaction of race, class, and gender--as it does for white women and men, although in different ways. In Chicano communities women's roles are adaptations to the conditions of exclusion, marginality, and hostility that have characterized the relations of Chicanas to American society.<sup>83</sup> The early history of Chicana labor was affected by a family-based economy. A strong gender division of labor was maintained, with women's work located primarily in the home but contributing directly to the family-based production. Women dominated the garden work and the canning, forms of household economy labor that contributed an important portion of family subsistence. Some families canned hundreds of quarts of tomatoes, hot peppers, squash, and other vegetables that filled their plates during the year.<sup>84</sup> The transition to a wage-based economy upset existing patterns of Chicana labor and family life.<sup>85</sup>

Perhaps the unique characteristic of the Chicana is in the nature of her triple oppression. Chicanas are part of an economically and politically exploited colony. They are victims of attempted cultural genocide as the dominant group has sought insidiously to destroy Chicano culture and render its institutions subordinate and dependent.<sup>86</sup> Dominant group stereotypes of Latino women define them as virgins or whores, a dichotomy that restricts their sexual identity and expression. These stereotypes of Latino women are accentuated by the significance given to virginity within Latino communities.<sup>87</sup>

The acculturation and assertion of independence by Mexican women on entering the work force in the 1920s did not dissolve traditional Mexican patriarchal authority. Rather, the interface of traditional cultural patterns

with employment patterns of Mexican women produced new relationships between Mexican males and females. The authority males enjoyed remained reasonably intact--although women were given more economic responsibility and the concomitant independence that accompanied it.<sup>88</sup> In 1926, the Detroit News reported that casas de asistencia (boarding houses) in the city were small eating establishments located in or near large Mexican settlements operated by what it patronizingly describes as enterprising Americanized proprietors ... most of whom were young men, ambitious to build up a good business on the right basis. Mexican women, both single and married, also operated casas de asistencia in Detroit.<sup>89</sup>

Traditionally, Mexican women had not engaged in wage labor outside the home because of the duties to reproduce and maintain the family unit. If a Mexican immigrant woman worked it was usually before marriage in her late-adolescent or early-adult years.<sup>90</sup> The patriarchal family relations were very strong, to the extent that women hired out as laborers to pick cotton were never paid their own wages. This payment of women's wages to the family men served to benefit the employers:

Even when the woman becomes a hired laborer, she has no individual economic existence. Her husband, father, or brother handles the financial affairs. She does not collect her own money; she does not know how much is paid for her services; she seldom knows how much cotton she picks a day or how many acres she chops. The wage paid is a family wage, and the family is distinctly patriarchal in its organization. When the family groups of from ten to twenty members may be secured to pick cotton, and the women keep house in the open air or in disreputable shacks, there is all of the advantage of group living and the employer profits therefrom. What effect would be had upon the cost of production of cotton if the price of picking were set by the individual laborer rather than for the group? How long could the group system continue if the Mexican women refused to practice their sphere under existing conditions.<sup>91</sup>



Mother and Child Picking Carrots, Edinburgh, Texas  
[500 years of Chicano History in Pictures, SouthWest Organizing Project, (SWOP), p. 83]

Some landowners preferred Mexicans to white tenants because the wives and children of Mexican tenants worked in the fields, while white tenant families (for example, Germans), did not.<sup>92</sup>

Ruth Allen, an economist, after carrying out a study in 1920 of farm women observed that: "In a large part of the agricultural economy of the South the importance of children as a force of workers, while making a woman an indispensable adjunct to a farm, tends also to place her in a subordinate position as a means to an end and, in the case of many farmers, degrades the mother to the position of a breeder of a labor supply."<sup>93</sup>

Rather, the patriarchal bondage of women was perpetuated by such mechanisms as the family labor contract, the family wage paid to the male head of the family for the agricultural labor of women, and the isolation of

Mexican peon families in labor camps. Likewise in manufacturing and urban employment, women found themselves segregated in certain industries and at low occupational levels, and often paid by piecework wages.<sup>94</sup>

Allen's study found that although women as a rule worked in the fields, they did not obtain economic independence. Further, she was appalled by the apparent subservience of Mexican women:

If the migration of a people is to be effective, it must be a migration of families. Because it is such a movement of families, the penetration of Texas by the Mexican peon is effective and, shall we say, fear inspiring. The Mexican woman has been taught as her guide to conduct the vow of the Moabitess, *Where thou goest, I will go*. Up and down the road she follows the men of her family. . . . She brings with her across the Rio Grande traditions of feminine subservience which seem strange in twentieth century America. And here, these habits are probably strengthened . . . for she has fewer contacts with the new civilization . . . and her ignorance of the English language is greater.<sup>95</sup>

It is also a fact that in many Chicano families, the woman makes many of the important decisions--not just consumer decisions--though the importance of her role will be recognized only privately. This may seem hypocritical or like a double-standard, but the knowledge of having real influence affects how the Chicana feels.<sup>96</sup>

Migrant workers, most of whom are Chicano women and men, are at the very bottom of the occupational ladder, where they face physically demanding jobs, poor working conditions, and extremely low wages. Migrant women, like other women workers, also work a double--first in farm fields and then in their own families.<sup>97</sup> Large agricultural interests (beet, cotton, melon, grape, and lettuce) were the principal recruiters of women's labor, while the manufacturing industries were the secondary recruiters.<sup>98</sup>

In the Southwest, Chicanas were employed in the expanding agricultural market, which often forced whole families to migrate to find seasonal labor. The newly industrializing agricultural economy placed men

in mining, railroad work, and agricultural field work as pickers; women were employed in canning and packing houses, and in the textile industry; and Chicanas continued to work as domestics--mainly as servants, laundresses, cooks, and dishwashers.<sup>99</sup> The employment of women in industry was characterized by the payment of piecework--a favorite method of employers for extracting the greatest amount of labor at the lowest wages, using the greatest exploitation to produce the greatest profits.<sup>100</sup>

One reaction to Mexican immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century was the establishment of programs aimed at Mexican women explicitly for the purpose of changing their cultural values. Older Mexican women were seen as primary targets because of their important role in homemaking and child rearing, but when they proved difficult to Americanize these programs refocused their efforts upon the adolescent American-born Chicana.<sup>101</sup> English instruction was intended to provide the immigrant with much more than facility with the common language of the United States; it also sought to imbue the foreigner with the values of American society. Throughout U.S. major cities home teachers were instructed to teach the following song to immigrant women (to the tune, Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching). The song was intended to instruct them about women's work while they learned twenty-seven new English words.:

We are working every day,  
 So our boys and girls can play.  
     We are working for our homes and country, too;  
 We like to wash , to sew, to cook,  
 We like to write, or read a book,  
     We are working, working, working every day.  
 Work, work, work  
 We're always working,  
     Working for our boys and girls,  
 Working for our boys and girls,

For our homes and country, too--  
We are working, working, working every day.<sup>102</sup>

The conscious strategy of these reformers was to use the Mexican woman as a conduit for creating a home environment well suited to the demands of an industrial economy. In the ditty *The Day's Work*, home teachers utilized the following sequence of English phrases to emphasize a woman's contribution to this new order:

In the morning the women get breakfast.  
Their husbands go to work.  
Their children go to school.  
Then the women get their houses in good order.  
They give the baby its bath.  
They wash, or iron, or cook.  
They get the dinner.  
After dinner they wash the dishes.  
Then they sew, or rest, or visit their friends, or go to school.  
The children must help to cook the supper and wash the dishes.<sup>103</sup>

By and large, however, Americanization programs failed to change the fundamental cultural practices of Mexican immigrant families for two principal reasons: 1) Mexican immigrants in the 1920s never fully committed themselves to integration into American life; and 2) the various forces behind Americanization programs never assembled an optimistic ideological approach that might have attracted Mexican immigrant women. Instead, they presented a limited, inconsistent scheme which could not handle the demographic realities of the Mexican immigrant community.<sup>104</sup>

Mexican women could not hope to develop allegiances to the United States when the economic condition of their families forced them to migrate consistently in search of an economic livelihood.<sup>105</sup> What was achieved turned out to be little more than second-class citizenship. The most progressive assumptions behind Americanization programs were never fully shared by the government or business interests involved, and thus they could

never be fully implemented.<sup>106</sup> Quoting Maria Varela, who works in the Chicano movement of the Southwest:

When your race is fighting for survival--to eat, to be clothed, to be housed, to be left in peace--as a woman, you know who you are. You are the principle of life, of survival and endurance. No matter how your husband is--strong but needing you to keep on, or weak and needing you for strength, or brutal and using you to keep his manhood intact--no matter what *he* is, your children survive and survive only through your will, your day-to-day battle against inimical forces. You know who your are. This is even more true when, as a woman, you are involved in battling the forces of oppression against your race. For the Chicano woman battling for her people, the family--the big family--is a fortress against the genocidal forces in the outside world. It is the source of strength for a people whose identity is constantly being whittled away. The mother is the center of the fortress.<sup>107</sup>

The following bilingual poem is a grown man's memory of his mother in a migrant camp as she began the daily ritual of lighting the fire, rolling out tortillas and starting breakfast in the darkness while her family slept.

When I remember the campos  
 Y las noches and the sounds  
 of those nights en carpas o  
 Bagones I remember my jefita's  
 Palote  
 Clik-clok; clik-clak-clok  
 Y su tocesita.

(I swear, she never slept!)

Reluctant awakening a la media  
 Noche y la luz prendida,  
 PRRRRRRINNNNGGGGGGG!

A noisy chorro missing the  
 Basin.

Que horas son, ama?  
 Es tarde mi hijito. Cover up  
 Your little brothers.  
 Y yo con pena but too sleepy,

Go to bed little mother!

A maternal reply mingled with

The hissing of the hot planchas  
Y los frijoles de la hoyo  
Boiling musically dando segunda  
A los ruidos nocturnos and  
The snore of the old man

Lulling sounds y los perros  
Ladrando-- the familia  
Hallucinations just before sleep.

And my jefita was no more.

But by then it was time to get up!

My old man had a chiflidito  
That irritated the world to  
Wakefulness.

Wheeeeeeeeeet! Wheeeeeeeeeet!

Arriba, cabrones chavalos,  
Huevones!

Y todavia la pinche  
Noche oscura

Y la jefita slapping tortillas.

Prieta! help with the lonches!  
Calientale agua a tu 'apa!

(Me la rayo ese! My jefita never slept!)  
Y en el fil, pulling her cien  
Libras de algoda se conreis  
Mi jefita y decia,  
That woman--she only complains  
in her sleep.

The tone of the poem captures the awe with which the young boy marvels at his mother's stamina. She not only maintains a household but pulls her hundred pounds of cotton alongside her husband. The height of the boy's wonder at his *jefita* comes when he remarks that she is uncomplaining: she only complains/in her sleep.<sup>108</sup>



## Overview of Sugar Production

From 1880 until the onset of World War I--the period when sugar production was technically modernized--the production of centrifugal (modern) sugar rose to more than sixteen million tons.<sup>109</sup> In a letter to William R. Merriam, Director of Census, 12th Census, Census of Manufactures, #59, dated March 7, 1901, S.H.D. Horth, Chief Statistician for Manufactures wrote, The decade ending with the 12th Census covers the period of greatest activity in this industry, and may almost be said to have witnessed its birth as a successful manufacturing enterprise. The 12th Census, Census of Population, had found that of the 16 new factories, 15 of which were operated for the first time in 1899, several were not completed when the harvest was ready, and in some instances there were serious losses from deterioration of the beets.<sup>110</sup> The 13th Census of Manufactures found that all sugar beet factories were owned by corporations, except one.<sup>111</sup> Thus, the midwestern sugar beet industry owned the factories but had to contend with two groups of humans actors to ensure production in the fields: farmers and workers.<sup>112</sup>

Conditions were to change considerably by the 14th Census. The 14th Census found that the acreage of sugar beets harvested in the United States in 1919 was 636,434 acres and the production was 5,993,409 tons, as compared with 360,433 acres, producing 3,902,071 tons, in 1909. The value of the sugar beet production in 1919 was \$66,051,989, as compared to \$19,695,384 in 1909.<sup>113</sup>

The success of the sugar beet industry in the Midwest hinged on a combination of circumstances: an expanding market, a publicly financed research network, available investors, and cheap land. Five distinct areas of sugar beet production appeared in the Upper Midwest during the early

twentieth century. The most important were in Michigan, referred to by Mexicano workers as Michoacán del Norte, (Michoacán of the North) <sup>114</sup>



Farmer Atop Sugar Beet Harvest

[500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures, Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), p. 81]

In the early days of the sugar beet industry, Michigan's crops had been planted, cultivated, and harvested by Polish, Belgian, Hungarian, Russian, and German immigrants who had settled on small farms near the state's major sugar beet districts around Adrian in the southeast and Mt Pleasant, Saginaw, Bay City, Flint, and Port Huron in central and thumb area.<sup>115</sup>

Growing and processing sugar beets in the Saginaw Valley was a venture enthusiastically received by many lumber men and farmers. In 1897, the state legislature, under pressure from lumber men, offered a bounty of

one cent per pound for all sugar made in Michigan. The values of sugar beets as a cash crop was promoted by Joseph Seemann of Seemann's & Peters Printing and Robert C. , a chemistry professor at Michigan State University. But the sugar trust in the East were able to manipulate a lower tariff and force out competition. By 1904, small competitors merged into the Michigan Sugar Company and the Monitor Sugar Company and sugar-beet manufacturing returned a profit.<sup>116</sup>

In 1915, the Great Western Sugar Beet Company, Colorado's leading sugar beet processor, began its drive to attract labor. Five years later, this one company spent \$360,000 to recruit, feed, and transport from Texas and Mexico a record number of 13,000 Mexicans. A 1927 Bureau of Labor Statistics study estimated that Mexicans comprised from 75 percent to 90 percent of the beet workers in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas. Approximately 15,000 Mexicans were employed in the beet fields of these states.<sup>117</sup> The growers of the Great Western Sugar Company alone employed about two thousand Mexicans to grow 293,000 acres of beets. The Columbia Sugar Company of Michigan employed four hundred Mexican families.<sup>118</sup>

The timely recruitment of Mexican workers became an essential component of the success for the sugar beet industry in the midwestern and western sections of the United States. Refinery personnel, through labor agents located in border cities, brought to the local area the necessary number of Mexican workers. The continuing importation of large numbers of workers thus became part and parcel of sugar beet farming and refining throughout the United States. The sugar beet industry almost overnight became the exclusive domain of Mexicans after the laws of 1921 and 1924 all but ended the immigration Slavic workers.<sup>119</sup>

The sugar beet companies' experience with Mexicanos in the 1918-1921 period convinced them that they had found the best group of workers. They were abundant, did not have an established presence or political voice in the region, and could easily be removed with the assistance of the government when not needed.<sup>120</sup> By 1927 it was estimated that, of 58,000 sugar-beet worker, 30,000 were Mexicans. In states such as Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and North Dakota, Mexicans constituted from seventy-five to ninety percent of the labor supply. San Antonio was the principal place of recruitment for Mexicans in the Middle Western areas.<sup>121</sup>

Three major factors played important roles in decisions to come to Michigan: 1) railroads began to transfer Mexicans as far north as Detroit; 2) the announcement of the \$5.00 work day by the Ford Motor Company; and 3) the sugar beet industry began to import Mexicans to the Midwest. This latter factor was by far the most significant in terms of numbers of Mexican migrants coming to Michigan.<sup>122</sup> The first trainload of Mexican farm laborers rolled into the state of Michigan in the spring of 1915.<sup>123</sup>

Each year between April and June 1, thousands of illegally transported Mexicans would arrive in Michigan to spend about 30 days cleaning up dirt clods and weeds, thinning out sugar beet plants and hoeing the rows of sugar beets. With harvest occurring between October 15 and December 1, most workers realized only about 75 days of actual paid work during the average seven to eight month period for which they had been hired.<sup>124</sup>

Noting that more and more Mexican labor tended to stay over in the sugar-beet areas, cotton growers in Texas secured the passage of the Texas Emigrant Agent Law of 1929. The result of this law was to make out-of-state employment a kind of illegal conspiracy handled by Mexican truckers and contractors. Open stake trucks were loaded with fifty or sixty passengers and

equipment. The passengers were then covered with a tarpaulin which was fastened around the edges. Before leaving the drivers tossed a couple of coffee cans into the back to be used as urinals during the journey north. Stopping only for gas and oil, driving night and day, the drivers could make the trip in forty-five to fifty hours. Paid \$10 a head to deliver Mexicans in Michigan, the average trucker could make about \$3,000 a season. The sugar-beet company then charged the ten dollars against the workers summer earnings.<sup>125</sup>

An excerpt from the translation of a Mexican folk song of that period gives insight into the thoughts of the workers:

THE BEETFIELD WORKERS (LOS BETABELEROS)

In the year 1923  
 Of the present era  
 The beet field workers went  
 To that Michigan, to their grief  
 Because all the bosses  
 Began to scold  
 And Don Santiago says to them:  
 I want to return  
 Because they haven't done for us  
 What they said they would.  
 Here they come and they tell you  
 That you ought to go up there  
 Because there you will have everything  
 Without having to fight for it.  
 But these are nothing but lies,  
 And those who come and say those things are liars.<sup>126</sup>

Mexicans came to Detroit through the process of chain migration. Chain migration consisted of a first wave of single males or heads of household followed by the delayed migration of families to the receiving country.<sup>127</sup> The Mexican community that eventually evolved in Detroit was comprised of single male and married workers and their families. Some left Mexico because of the social and economic upheaval, while others bypassed

agricultural work and left sugar beet work in Michigan. Some Mexicans entered Detroit's labor market after being recruited in Laredo and San Antonio, Texas by Michigan sugar beet companies, railroads, and auto companies.<sup>128</sup> Former sugar beet workers and their families left a type of labor which was seasonal, paid low wages, and accompanying lifestyle which entailed living in social isolation on rural farm labor camps.<sup>129</sup>

In the Middle Western industrial centers, Mexicans were brought into much sharper and fuller contact with Anglo-American culture. Mexicans in Chicago and Detroit worked with members of other nationality groups in highly mechanized industries. In Chicago and Detroit, Mexicans were merely another immigrant group; in the Southwest they are an indigenous people.<sup>130</sup> The Mexicans who began arriving in Detroit in 1918 to work in the auto industry encountered a highly industrialized city with a large population of ethnic and black workers. Their status as working class immigrants would supersede their racial and ethnic status and would determine their everyday experiences in Detroit.<sup>131</sup>

The emergence of a national labor market consisting of highly mobile, unskilled urban American and immigrant workers (including Mexicans who sought jobs on their own or were recruited by labor agents), performed the degrading jobs in the auto industry previously held by skilled workers.<sup>132</sup> Workers which included Mexicans, supplied the new immigration, making Detroit one of the most important melting pots in the nation.<sup>133</sup>

The fact that Mexicans eventually hired at Ford had worked in southeastern Michigan foundries indicates that there may have been considerable intra-city migration between Saginaw, Port Huron, Flint, Pontiac, and Detroit. The fact that these foundries were located in Michigan's sugar beet belt strongly suggests that they were used by Mexican sugar beet

workers as transitional employment sites during their job hopping until they found employment in the auto industry.<sup>134</sup> Contrary to the stereotyped image of Mexicans as illiterate peasants, these Ford workers understood that a command of the English language was an important asset for job mobility.<sup>135</sup>

Auto workers working in auto plants and foundries in Saginaw, Flint, and Pontiac lived close enough to their families to visit them frequently until they arranged for them to move to Detroit. Likewise, former sugar beet workers arranged for their families living in rural farm camps to move to Detroit.<sup>136</sup> For Mexican Ford auto workers, their brief participation in Detroit's post-war economic prosperity was quickly brought to an end by the 1920-1921 Depression. However, as the auto industry recovered, production increased and auto companies once again began hiring workers, Mexicans slowly returned to Detroit.<sup>137</sup>

The colony in Detroit fluctuated in size due to the work offered in the sugar beet fields and the changes in employment needs of the companies.<sup>138</sup> In 1926, the Detroit News reported that casas de asistencia (boarding houses) in the city were small eating establishments located in or near large Mexican settlements operated by what it patronizingly describes as enterprising Americanized proprietors ... most of whom were young men, ambitious to build up a good business on the right basis. Mexican women, both single and married, also operated casas de asistencia in Detroit.<sup>139</sup>

The constant departure of immigrant workers and the high level of transience, cause by the annual and seasonal cycle of industrial employment, produced a high level of fluctuation in the population of immigrant communities. Edson, in his book, Mexicans in Our North Central States, observed that the Mexican population was:

. . .constantly changing and shifting as trains carrying Mexicans arrived to and departed from Detroit. In addition, sugar beet and railroad workers who came to Detroit to find work in the fall also tended to inflate and deflate the population of Mexicans in Detroit.<sup>140</sup>

It was in 1929 that the sugar beet industry of Michigan imported its final trainload of Mexican workers, consisting of 635 full fares and 74 half fares.<sup>141</sup> A 1935 study of child labor in the beet fields of the Midwest examined the living and working conditions in the sugar beet fields of Michigan, Minnesota, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. In the areas studied, sixty-five percent of the families of beet workers were Mexican or Mexican-American.<sup>142</sup> The track sugar has left in modern history is one involving masses of people and resources, thrown into productive combination by social, economic, and political forces that were actively remaking the entire world.<sup>143</sup>



## Company Reflections

Mexican Ford auto workers were not newly arrived immigrant peasants but came from all social and economic backgrounds and had worked in a wide range of occupations. They had already been exposed to industrial employment in the Midwest, had made the adjustment to the demands of this work, and shared particular attitudes toward work and working conditions in the Ford plants.<sup>144</sup> Perhaps the most favorable report on the Mexicans' work occurred in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, when Dr. [Paul S.] Taylor interviewed a number of executives, one of whom stated that he:

rated the Mexicans as equals or possibly the superior of the two important groups of Europeans available for the same work: The Mexicans are a good class of men as a whole; the majority are good steady workers. As a class their intelligence is above the Slavish [Slovaks] and Wendish. They are a bright, keen race, and good workers.<sup>145</sup>

Thus Mexicans were highly rated when compared to people not considered to be part of the northern and western European colonists. The executive considered the Slovaks and Wendish to be unskilled and not very intelligent.

While life in America's teeming cities did differ from that in migrant farm labor camps, the Mexican industrial worker, like his brethren in the fields, endured considerable economic insecurity and cultural anxiety in the United States.<sup>146</sup> In fact, as the Mexican barrios grew extensively during the 1920s, the need lessened for Mexicans to interact with Anglos. Mexicans were more likely than ever to retain their own cultural values because they experienced minimal contact with Anglo institutions.<sup>147</sup> By 1930, one of every two Mexicans in the United States lived in an urban setting. But, the greater the distance from the Mexican border and the more rural the community, the lesser the presence of Chicanas and the fewer the number of Chicano families.<sup>148</sup>

The attitude of the business community was best expressed in an intensive nationwide survey carried out by the United States Chamber of Commerce in 1929. It showed that without Mexican labor the continued economic development of the Southwest, large parts of the West, and sections of the Midwest would be severely impeded or suddenly halted.<sup>149</sup> American sugar beet interests had reacted with anger to the conclusion of the temporary admissions program issued by the Labor Department at the beginning of World War I. The beet companies argued that they had extensively increased sugar beet acreage at the urgent request of the Food Administration. Senators and congressmen from several western states quickly came to the aid of their beet-growing constituents, strongly urging the Secretary of Labor to modify his termination order. On January 2, 1919, Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson issued an order sanctioning the admission of Mexicans destined for the beet fields until June 30, 1919.<sup>150</sup>

Agriculture would be most efficient, said employers, if whites served as farm managers and Mexicans as manual laborers. Declared Fred Cummings, a corporate farmer from Fort Collins, Colorado, representing 3000 beet growers affiliated with Colorado's Great Western Sugar Company:

I do not want to see the condition arise again when white men who are reared and educated in our schools have got to bend their backs and skin their fingers to pull those little beets....You can let us have the only class of labor that will do the work, or close the beet factories, because our people will not do it, and I will say frankly I do not want them to do it...

If you are going to make the young men of America do this back-breaking work, shoveling manure to fertilize the ground, and shoveling beets, you are going to drive them away from agriculture....You have got to give us a class of labor that will do this back-breaking work, and we have the brains and ability to supervise and handle the business part of it. There is no danger of that class of labor taking over the supervising work.....<sup>151</sup>

A Texas grower expressed this widely held opinion:

Good white laborers save up their money and go into farming for themselves and don't labor any more for others. The Mexicans will spend what they make; they will spend \$1 a yard for silk for and dress, and sleep on a dirt floor.... What's the use of trying to help them save money? They won't do it anyway. They're laboring people. You know what the Bible says about the hewers of wood and drawers of water; the poor we always have with us; they're not progressive.<sup>152</sup>

I want to say to you, continued Cummings, that there is not a white man of any intelligence in our country that will work an acre of beets.<sup>153</sup>

The testimony of Representative Addison T. Smith of Idaho, questioned by Adolph J. Sabath of Illinois of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, advances the above argument:

Mr. Sabath: Mr. Smith, if the sugar-beet growers should increase the wages of the laboring men who are employed in that work, could you not secure all the white men for this work that you need?

Mr. Smith: I do not think so, Judge Sabath, for the reason that it is very tiresome work for anyone except persons who are small in stature, because they have to get down on their knees a great deal of the time and crawl along the rows and weed out the extra plants, and a large man such as you or myself, figuratively speaking, would have a good deal of difficulty in engaging in that sort of work with any degree of comfort for probably more hours per day. We might stand it two hours. . . .<sup>154</sup>

Said C. V. Maddux, Labor Commissioner of the Great Western Sugar Company of Denver, Colorado:

It is a mental and it is a physical suitability. A man who is high-strung could never work beets, because there are five miles of row to every acre, and if a high-strung man would look down those rows and figure there are five miles to every acre he would be distraught. He could not see the end. It takes a certain mental attitude, or whatever you call it, line of thinking and physical equipment to do this work.<sup>155</sup>

Anglo capitalists offered a philosophy to explain the structure of social relations in the mining industry. One mine owner, Sylvester Mowry, spelled out the advantages of cheap Mexican labor:

The question of labor is one which commends itself to the attention of the capitalist: cheap, and under proper management, efficient and

permanent. My own experience has taught me that the lower class of Mexicans, with the Opata and Yaqui Indians, are docile, faithful, good servants, capable of strong attachments when firmly and kindly treated. They have been peons [servants] for generations. They will always remain so, as it is their natural condition.<sup>156</sup>

As *Through the Leaves*, a publication of the Great Western Sugar Company, stated in 1927:

Necessity rather than preference forced beet farmers to accept the workers of Mexican derivation. Today we are more accustomed to the Spanish-speaking race. Problems arising from their presence in our midst do not appear to be so difficult as a few years ago. Acceptance of the Mexican is founded on the general satisfaction with his labor. He is doing good work, better on the whole than his predecessors<sup>157</sup>

The process reinforced Anglo class control and Mexican caste subordination as the values of progress and images of Mexican inferiority were dynamically counterpointed in the development of industrial capitalism.<sup>158</sup>

## Restrictionism versus Unrestricted Immigration

Prior to 1910, American agriculture had accepted Japanese, Filipino, Negro, and Hindu workers, as well as Mexicans. The American's image of the Mexican Revolution is that of the unshaven bandido wearing crossed bandoliers, brandishing an old rifle, and carelessly providing himself as an easy target for those very enemies he has sworn to avenge. From this view the Anglo American inevitably concludes that a people unable to govern themselves must be innately inferior.<sup>159</sup> Indians were a conquered race despised by Anglo-Americans. Mexicans are related to Indians by race and culture with the Indian part of their cultural and racial inheritance being more important than the Spanish. Mexicans were consistently equated with Indians by the race-conscious Anglo-Americans.<sup>160</sup>

These brown-skinned Mexicans became a disenfranchised, disadvantaged minority group whose ranks would be swelled by other forcefully incorporated, dark-skinned Spanish speakers on American soil, collectively known at times by the government-imposed term Hispanic. Their distant connection with Catholic Spain and more recent connection with chaotic, Spanish-speaking Latin America render them problematic for purposes of racial classification. Are Hispanics white and European, or are most of them different' by virtue of their religion, their language, and their intermarriage with Indians and blacks?<sup>161</sup>

The chief stereotype remains the Mexican as an agricultural laborer. A second stereotype centered around the reputed docility of the Mexican as a worker who worked hard for long hours at low wages without complaint.<sup>162</sup> In a statement on agricultural labor in California to William Butterworth, president of U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Arthur G. Arnoll, general manager of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, frankly claims: "The American

white is not physically capable to undertake many tasks in either the fruit or truck crop industry as well as cotton-picking.”<sup>163</sup>

The Immigration Act of 1917 imposed an eight-dollar head tax and, for the first time in the history of the United States, a literacy test which excluded many unskilled workers. Sugar beet growers and refiners in Colorado, for example, were no longer able to hire German and Russian workers.<sup>164</sup>

Conceding that Mexicans have proved to be efficient laborers and . . . have afforded a cheap and elastic labor supply for the southwestern United States, Samuel Bryan, writing in the 7 September 1912 issue of Survey, condemned their arrival because the evils to the community at large which their presence in large numbers almost invariably brings may more than over-balance their desirable qualities.<sup>165</sup> Thus Bryan echoed the racist, superior attitude of many Anglo-Americans at the time. Those who favored restriction of Mexican immigration included small farmers, progressives, labor unions, eugenicists, and racists, while large-scale growers of sugar beets, cotton, and vegetables, allied with railroads, chambers of commerce, and business associations generally favored unrestricted immigration.<sup>166</sup>

The Immigration Act of 1917 also established a literacy test and head tax, but these theoretical restrictions on entry did not apply to Mexican immigration.<sup>167</sup> Southwestern employers pressured Congress to make an exception for aliens entering this country for temporary employment. The concession they won was inserted as the Ninth Proviso to Section Three of the Immigration Act of 1917. It read: “That the Commissioner General of Immigration with the approval of the Secretary of Labor shall issue rules and prescribe conditions . . . to control and regulate the admission and return of otherwise inadmissible aliens applying for temporary admission.” On May 23, 1917, the Secretary of Labor issued an order exempting Mexican entering

for temporary farm work from the head tax, labor designated by specific contract, and literacy clauses of the immigration act.<sup>168</sup> From 1917 through 1920, the Department of Labor granted exemptions from these regulations to recruits for the beet fields, railroad gangs, and other contracted labor.<sup>169</sup>

The Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 were of primary importance during the decade. The first was a temporary, emergency measure to ensure that millions of Europeans who suffered the effects of World War I would not flood into the United States. The law of 1924 ended the immigration of large numbers of cheap, unskilled workers from European countries such as Italy, Poland, Greece and Romania thus opening the borders for the large migration of Mexican workers to fill the void.<sup>170</sup>

The Immigration Act of 1924 reflected the high tide of the belief that racial homogeneity was necessary to ensure the continuing progress of the United States. The Mexican, largely uneducated, of Indian background, and fleeing from a turbulent political scene at home, was claimed to be inferior to Southern and eastern Europeans and earlier Asians excluded in 1924.<sup>171</sup> The reaction of the Anglo-American was, in short, "Greaser go home!"<sup>172</sup> Many Anglo-Americans felt threatened since, like the Eastern and Southern Europeans, the Mexican did not fit the Anglo-Saxon image of a good Anglo-American citizen. But this did not lead to exclusion of the Mexican.

An increase in the volume of emigration from Mexico in the mid-twenties led to a corresponding rise in nativism. An attempt to include Mexico in the quota system took place in 1925, when William Harris and John Box introduced bills into Congress to restrict Mexican migration. During the hearings, testimony by representatives of the railroads, western farmers, sugar manufacturers, and cattlemen testified to their great need for Mexican labor.<sup>173</sup> Both nativists and Americanists shared a common

concern: the nativist wanted to control Mexican population growth for fear of a greaser invasion, while Americanists viewed unrestricted population growth as a vestige of Old World ways that would have to be abandoned in a modern industrial world.<sup>174</sup>

In 1927, thirty-four prominent academicians concerned with preserving the nation's genetic purity signed a memorial addressed to the president and Congress making a demand that the quota be extended. The signatories of this statement included A. Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard University, C. C. Little, president of the University of Michigan, as well as Professors William Star Meyers, Edwin S. Corwin, Edward A. Ross, John R. Commons, Franklin H. Giddings, Irving Fisher, and Henry P. Fairchild. These distinguished and learned Americans appealed for the restriction of nonwhite immigration from below the border, believing that without a reasonable degree of homogeneity...no civilization can have its best development<sup>175</sup> In 1928, Senator James E. Watson of Indiana introduced a bill, later defeated, which would have allocated to each Western Hemisphere nation a ten percent quota, and would give the Secretary of Labor the discretionary power to admit temporally 10,000 Mexican and 10,000 Canadians from 1928 to 1930 to perform seasonal labor.<sup>176</sup>

Mexicans had lost out in the struggle for co-existence and lacked not only the desire for personal gain, but, more importantly, the potential for civilization. The best people for the United States came from certain areas of northern and western Europe. They were:

the English, Dutch, Swedes, Germans, and ever the Scotch-Irish, who constituted practically the entire immigration prior to 1890. [All these groups] were less than two thousand years ago one Germanic race in the forests surrounding the North Sea. Thus, being similar in blood and political ideals, social training and economic background, this



old immigration has merged with the native stock fairly easily and rapidly.<sup>177</sup>

This virulent racism was dramatically expressed in by Dr. Roy Garis, a self-proclaimed expert in eugenics and professor of economics at Vanderbilt University, who wrote:

Their minds run to nothing higher than animal functions--eat, sleep, and sexual debauchery. In every huddle of Mexican shacks one meets the same idleness, hordes of hungry dogs, and filthy children with faces plastered with flies, disease, human filth, stench, promiscuous fornication, bastardy . . . . These people sleep by day and prowl by night like coyotes, stealing anything they can get their hands on, no matter how useless it may be . . . . Yet there are Americans clamoring for more of this human swine to be brought over from Mexico.<sup>178</sup>

The poverty and backwardness of the people were consistently stressed without any accompanying explanation of the factors--notably the isolation--which had produced such a "degraded" population. The conservative nature of many of the Anglo-American observers was shocked by the "half-naked children" and the "immodesty" of the native women who dressed without benefit of underwear, petticoats, bustles, bodices, or long sleeves. In these early impressions, one can find the outline of the present-day stereotype of the Mexicans. McWilliams quotes Marmaduke who said, "The greater part of them, are the most miserable, wretched poor creatures that I have ever seen, poor, petty, thieving, gambling, bull-baiting. . . ." <sup>179</sup> Kenneth L. Roberts, writing in The Saturday Evening Post, clearly expressed the nativist sentiments when he stated that in Los Angeles, one can:

. . . see the endless streets crowded with the shacks of illiterate, diseased, pauperized Mexicans, taking no interest whatever in the community, living constantly on the ragged edge of starvation, bringing countless number of American citizens into the world with the reckless prodigality of rabbits . . .<sup>180</sup>

Charles C. Teague, president of the California Fruit Growers' Exchange, presented an argument heard before in American history:

Mexican casual labor fills the requirement of the California farm as no other labor has done in the past. The Mexican withstands the high temperatures of the Imperial and San Joaquin valley. He is adapted to field conditions. . . . He does heavy field work--particularly in the so-called stoop crops and knee crops of vegetable and cantaloupe production--which white labor refused to do and is constitutionally unsuited to perform.<sup>181</sup>

S. Parker Frissell, representing the California Federated Farm Bureau, and the California Development Association, at a hearing before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1926, stated the problem:

We, gentleman, are just as anxious as you are not to build the civilization of California or any other western district upon a Mexican foundation. We take him because there is nothing else available to us. . . .

We would prefer white agricultural labor and we recognize the social problem incident to the importation of Mexicans. We are loath to burden our State with this type of immigrant, but . . . it seems that we have no choice in the matter. The Mexican seems to be our only available supply.<sup>182</sup>

The Depression cut deeply into whatever economic and social gains Mexican Americans had been able to achieve since 1900. Anti-Mexican feeling was widespread in the Southwest, and job competition from Oklahoma and Arkansas dust-bowl refugees became intense in the early 1930s.<sup>183</sup> Because the Southwest lagged behind the rest of the nation in industrialization, local reformers were anxious to introduce Mexican women and men as rapidly as possible into a growing industrial society and inculcate Mexican families with a Protestant work ethic.<sup>184</sup>

The noted historian Alexander Saxton, expressed it succinctly in his book *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*:

America's supposed openness to newcomers throughout most of its history has been racially selective. By the time of Jefferson and Jackson the nation had already assumed the form of a racially exclusive democracy--democratic in the sense that it sought to provide equal opportunities for the pursuit of happiness by its white citizens through the enslavement of African Americans, extermination of Indians, and

territorial expansion at the expense of Indians and Mexicans. If there was an American orientation to newcomers, it was not toward giving equal opportunity to all but toward inviting entry by white Europeans and excluding others. It is true that the United States absorbed a variety of cultural patterns among European immigrants at the same time that it was erecting a white supremacist social structure. Moderately tolerant of European ethnic diversity, the nation remained adamantly intolerant of racial diversity. It is this crucial difference that has been permitted to drop from sight.<sup>185</sup>

### Labor Dissent in the Fields

In 1903, a strike of sugar-beet workers near Ventura, California, took more than a thousand Mexican and Japanese workers out of the fields. After two months of strife and some violence on both sides, workers won the right to negotiate directly with the grower. This strike gave rebuttal to the idea that Mexicans were completely docile workers.<sup>186</sup>

Under the policy of promoting the rights of Mexican labor in the United States, aggressive consuls soon became deeply involved in employer-labor disputes. Illustrative of this type of intervention was action by Consul General Teódulo Beltrán in May, 1918, to protect braceros employed by the Spreckles Sugar Company in California sugar beet fields. He found conditions of near slavery, with open-ended hours, irregular pay, poor food, unfit housing, and armed men in the work camps to ensure submission.<sup>187</sup>

The following is a translated copy of Dispatch N. 1152 from E. Garza Pérez, subsecretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Mexico to U.S. Ambassador Fletcher, dated June 17, 1918. It reads:

. . . I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that the Department of Gobernación has stated to me that, according to reports which it has received from various sources, Mexican laborers receive very bad treatment from their employers and that frequently the contracts made with them, principally with respect to payment, are not fulfilled; that the regulation of the Commissioner General of Immigration of the United States of America do not offer any guarantee against these evils or against the lack of fulfillment of the respective contracts: that if the government of the United States should be disposed to cooperate with ours to the end of doing away with these difficulties and annoyance to Mexican laborers, we would be glad to provide facilities for the emigration referred to. . . .<sup>188</sup>

A decline in agricultural prices and wages during the 1920s caused considerable dissatisfaction and unrest among Colorado beet workers, and some unions began to organize under the leadership of the IWW and AFL.

In 1928, C. N. Idar of the American Federation of Labor directed the organization of Mexican Americans in Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska, and was successful in forming a Beet Workers Association of about 10,000 members. However, the depression at the end of the decade and competition with non-union dust-bowl migrants brought about its decline.<sup>189</sup> A wave of strikes by migrant workers and families arose after the Depression began in 1929. They were met with bloody repression and harsh measures.<sup>190</sup>

The most effective agricultural labor unions during 1935 and 1936, writes Dr. Stuart Jamieson, were those organized among Mexicans. The strikes in California in the nineteen thirties, were duplicated wherever Mexican were employed in agriculture. Mexican field-workers struck in Arizona; in Idaho and Washington; in Colorado; in Blissfield, Michigan in 1935 and 1938 <sup>191</sup>; and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas.<sup>192</sup> With scarcely an exception, every strike in which Mexicans participated in the borderlands in the nineteen thirties was broken by the use of violence and was followed by deportations. In analyzing these strikes, Dr. Stuart Jamieson points out that Mexicans had become dissatisfied with their distinct status as a lower cast, which they held because of their poverty, color, and cultural attributes. Their position . . . in many ways came to parallel that of Negroes in the Southern States.<sup>193</sup>

As in agriculture, Mexican workers in urban industry responded militantly to their exploitation by organizing.<sup>194</sup> Chicanas who worked in textile and light manufacturing industries were frequently subjected to violence as they joined the struggle to organize workers.<sup>195</sup> Foremost amongst Chicanas who attempted to organize unions and the workers was Luisa Moreno, international vice-president of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). Her

most important accomplishments were the organizing of cotton workers in South Texas, pecan shellers in San Antonio, beet workers in Colorado and Michigan, and over 60,000 cannery workers in California.<sup>196</sup> In 1938 Moreno, played a key role in the organization of the National Congress of the Spanish Speaking People held in Los Angeles in defiance of the intense red-baiting and persecution in the country. The congress was explicitly political, involving Latinos from all over the United States: farm workers, steel workers, miners, educators, students, and professionals. It defended democratic political liberties, immigrants' rights, and the right of workers to organize. It further affirmed its commitment [to] the economic and social and cultural betterment of the Mexican people, to have an understanding between the Anglo-Americans and the Mexicans, to promote organizations of working people by aiding trade unions, and to fight discrimination actively.<sup>197</sup>

## Conclusion

Transformed from an agricultural-commercial economy to a complex industrialized economy, this country became the most highly developed technological society in the world. It served as metaphor and materialist basis for the domination of mind over body, capital over labor, and whites over Indians, blacks, Mexicans, and Asians.<sup>198</sup> The Hispanic Southwest continues as a battleground of cultures, the major example of cultural pluralism in the United States, and in some respects, a continuing political (and ecological?) protrusion of the Anglo-American realm beyond its logical limits into the periphery of Latin America.<sup>199</sup>

As a result of the depression, by early 1930, a change had begun to take place in the Anglo-American stereotype of Mexicans. Predominantly, because of the depression, the Mexican Americans' progress toward a greater share in the American dream was slowed down and even reversed.<sup>200</sup> Added to the earlier picture of the docile agricultural worker was the widespread Anglo belief now that the majority of Mexicans had become public charges on the American taxpayer. In the midst of the depression, because of chronic underemployment and low wages, Mexicans (together with many other poor) had become dependent on local and state relief.<sup>201</sup>

It is interesting to note that one-half of the Mexican-descent population of Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan were repatriated during the 1930s. Another injustice of the repatriation was that it included many United States-born children, whose civil rights were clearly violated. Most responsible for these injustices was the failure on the part of government officials to inform these American citizens of their rights.<sup>202</sup> More is involved, in situations of this kind, than the defeat of individual ambitions, for the victims also suffer from the defeat of their culture and of the society of which they are a part.<sup>203</sup>

America was born Protestant and bred Puritan, and the notion of community we share is derived from a seventeenth-century faith. Our society is as paradoxical as a Puritan congregation: We stand together, alone.<sup>204</sup>

Fleeing a country wracked by eleven years of civil war, millions of Mexicans joined Mexican-Americans seeking a better life in the United States. Relegated to agricultural fields from Michigan to California, they truly grew the food which supported the population of the United States. Some people did grow rich, the agricultural research institutions, the agricultural corporations, and even some farmers, but for the most part, the land was cleaned, weeded and hoed by men, women and children who lived a life of bare subsistence. Constantly on the move, it was because of being ostracized that they were able to survive. Relying on family and close knit working groups, these Mexican families, survived and eventually some were able to settle in industrialized cities and begin small colonias. But then as today, there is always the feeling that one does not belong, but rather is just renting space.

I wanted to know why are there Mexicans in the Mid-West, specifically Michigan. My mother, a former migrant worker, cried when, in 1974, I told her I was moving to Michigan. Now I know why. To find out that all we were was cheap labor imported to fill the role of strikebreaker or expendable field hands fulfills the personal belief that America was born and bred Puritan and that we, Mexicans, Chicanos, Latinos, do not share in the dream. Sometimes its better not to ask question, you may not value the answer.

In closing, consider the prophetic lament of a former Mexican president, who said:

Poor Mexico--  
so far from God--and  
so close to the United States.<sup>205</sup>



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