

**In the Shadow of Mexico: Mexican and Mexican American Conservatives
during the Eras of U.S. Conquest and the Mexican Revolution, 1848-1940**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History)
in The University of Michigan
2024

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my biggest supporter, Ofelia, who regularly reminds me to *ponle ganas* in whatever I do.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project and my graduate journey would not have been possible with an array of family, friends, peers, colleagues, and professional organizations. What follows is my effort to thank my wonderful community. You have all been part of my intellectual and professional journey at every step of the way. It is you who I have often thought about in moments of complacency, doubt, and triumph. This dissertation is just as mine yours as it is mine. Thank you.

I am thankful for the generous funding and support I have received that made this project possible from the start. The University of Michigan's Department of History and Rackham Graduate School provided invaluable support with the Rackham Merit Fellowship, teaching opportunities, and summer funding. This wonderful institution most certainly provided a sense of comfort through a challenging process. I am also thankful to the Western History Association's support with research and travel funds for my dissertation. The University of New Mexico's Latin American and Iberian Institute also provided a space to workshop my ideas. Lastly, many thanks to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the School for Advanced Research for providing an invaluable dissertation fellowship. This funding provided me with a peaceful space in which to think about and complete my work in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I often miss my adobe home and office space where I spent many fruitful hours working on my dissertation writing.

I am also grateful for the support and opportunities I received at Indiana University-Bloomington's Department of History and Latino Studies Program as a master's student. My doctoral work would not have been possible without teachers, mentors, and friends at IU. First, I

want to thank the institution for giving this first-generation a shot at graduate study with full funding. John Nieto-Phillips provided me with an entirely new world view through his invaluable mentorship. Many thanks to my community in the Latino Studies Program who provided a true home away from home. I wish to also thank Arlene Díaz, Peter Guardino, and Michael McGerr for challenging me to expand my intellectual questions and interests. Lastly, I made the most incredible friends in Bloomington. I cannot say enough thanks to the friendship and support of Maxwell Johnson, Gregory Zorko, Whitney Day, and others who made me feel welcome and valued.

I am incredibly fortunate to have had Anthony P. Mora as my advisor and mentor at Michigan. He made me feel like more than a graduate student through his feedback and care. He has provided an invaluable model as scholar, mentor, and teacher I am eternally grateful for. His support for me as a person and student helped make the PhD experience an accessible one. I also thank Howard Brick, Victoria Langland, Rita Chin, William A. Calvo-Quirós, Stephen Berrey, Phillip J. Deloria, LaKisha Michelle Simmons, Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, Susan Juster, Silvia Pedraza, and Sueann Caulfield. You have all played an instrumental part in my thinking, teaching, and research while at Michigan.

I wish to also thank a host of other scholars and colleagues who have aided in my journey. At Michigan, Kat Wiles and Sue Douglas ensured I received all relevant administrative information to stay on the right track. At Lakeside School, I thank Debbie Bensadon, Paloma Borreguero, Nancy Rawles, Jay Waltmunson, Ryan Boccuzzi and others who provided support as I balanced teaching with the completion of my dissertation. Moreover, a special thank you to all my wonderful students who provided levity through their curiosity and drive. Others provided seminal feedback and support at various stages of the PhD process. Thanks to Rachel St. John,

Omar Valerio-Jiménez, Geraldo Cadava, Alina R. Méndez, Michael F. Brown, Paul Ryer, Katherine Wolf, Dmitri Brown, M. Benjamin Junge, Adriana Linares-Palma, Chelsi West Ohueri, and Merry Ovnick.

Finally, I would like to give my entire family all my thanks and love. Chris, Linda, Janeli, and Rhyan have all been amazing siblings and supporters. A special thank you to my three perfect dogs, Montauk, Paris, and Stanley. You guys provided me with so much love and support that I could never imagine completing this without you. My life partner, Katharine, also deserves special recognition. She has always been with me in my highs, lows, and in-betweens providing uplift and encouragement. Finally, thank you to Ofelia and Catalina, my mother and grandmother who have sacrificed so much for their families as Mexican immigrants. They instilled in me the value of hard work and the power of education. Without them, none of this would have been possible. *Que Dios te bendiga.*

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ABSTRACT

“In the Shadow of Mexico: Mexican and Mexican American Conservatives during the Eras of U.S. Conquest and the Mexican Revolution, 1848-1940” examines different forms of Mexican and Mexican American conservatism in Los Angeles during U.S. conquest (1848-1880) and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1940). This project understands conservatism as an individual’s and/or groups’ efforts to retain traditional political, social, and cultural structures and the status quo by resisting radical change. During these periods, some Mexican and Mexican American conservatives painted their liberal and leftist opponents as agents of social disorder, insecurity, and instability. Conservatism, in contrast, provided stability, security, and continuity as Los Angeles and Mexico experienced vast change. “In the Shadow of Mexico” considers a few perspectives of conservative Mexicans and Mexican Americans who negotiated changing patterns of state-formation in Mexico and the United States by clinging to traditional structures of power through their resistance to social change in Los Angeles and in Mexico.

In the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, during the Spanish and Mexican national periods, a group of upper-class Mexicans adopted liberal ideas of republicanism and liberty to counter a centralized government in Mexico City. Part of this strategy involved leaders wanting to maintain power over lower-class Mexicans and Indigenous people. After the U.S.-Mexico War, some of these same leaders, now Mexican Americans, embraced conservative United States’ party politics to socially distance themselves from African Americans and Indigenous peoples. They worked to retain the traditional social and political structure during U.S. conquest that existed during Los Angeles’s earlier periods.

Conservatism remained in the early-twentieth century, albeit in different forms. Some Mexican exiles articulated wariness about the liberal Revolution unfolding in Mexico. While in Los Angeles, these exiles continued to embrace traditional social and political structures they believed that the Revolution undermined. Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors, this Revolutionary Generation articulated and grounded their conservative politics within Mexico rather than in the United States. In doing so, they engaged in transitional citizenship which hinged on their views of the nation and mexicanidad that revolved around ideas about race, religion, and citizenship. In their attempts to define and “recover” the nation, they also articulated their own ideas of what it meant to be Mexican during the early-twentieth century. By utilizing Spanish newspapers, personal and family correspondence, and government records, this dissertation tells a more complicated story about Mexican and Mexican American politics in the United States. It contributes to ongoing conversations about the conservative political orientations of contemporary Latinx politics by looking at earlier periods of identity formation.

INTRODUCTION

Mexican and Mexican Conservatism in the U.S. Southwest

“It ees [sic] harmless,” asserted Alfonso Regul, a representative of the Los Angeles Mexican consulate, regarding a local Revolutionary drama entitled *Across the Border* in 1911. As a front-row spectator, he saw a performance which depicted the Mexican Revolution only a year after the outbreak of the rebellion against Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz. According to the *Los Angeles Herald*, Ethel Dolson, the playwright and member of the Southern California Women’s Press Club, portrayed the “oppression of the peons” and the suppression of civil liberties by the Díaz regime. Favoring the Revolutionary cause with the hope of raising funds for its rebels, the *Herald* reported that one person protested during the performance despite the Mexican consulate’s objections to the play. Nonetheless, Regul lamented, “I am so sorree [sic], however, zat zee pepul [sic] here feel ze [sic] way zey [sic] do against my government.”¹

The play, though in the nascent stage of the Revolution, acknowledged Los Angeles as a borderland city with vigorous transnational connections to Mexico. Dolson’s dramatization of the Revolution and her philanthropic goals looked southward with a rosy celebration of democracy over tyranny. Likewise, the Mexican consulate’s presence at the play signaled the Mexican government’s goals to defend their government in Los Angeles and Southern

¹ “Censors of ‘Across the Border,’ Who Watched Play and Reported to Mexican Consul and District Attorney,” *Los Angeles Herald* (Los Angeles, CA), March 12, 1911; “Talented Young Writer Whose First Play Will Have Production Saturday,” *Los Angeles Herald*, March 5, 1911.

California. Indeed, the consulate stopped a different production in the same year which had promised a “debate of questions” about the Revolution to shroud the brewing instability in Mexico.²

The play shows how assumptions about the Revolution informed the United States’ view of Mexico’s civil war. Many Euro Americans in Southern California filtered their understanding about the conflict through their own ideas about race and nation. Though sympathetic, even Dolson presented Mexicans as simple peons exploited by a tyrannical regime. She ignored the complexities of the social revolution and Mexico’s diverse population across Mexico and the United States. As the Revolution unfolded, a new generation of Mexicans arrived in Los Angeles. Like some Euro Americans, many articulated their own ideas of the Revolution as they staked their place in their new spaces.

During the early-twentieth century, elite, middle-class, and working-class Mexicans poured into Los Angeles because of the Revolution. They brought with them their differing ideas about the meaning of Mexico’s social and political Revolution. They articulated multiple and competing meanings of *mexicanidad*, the qualities of being Mexican, outside of Mexico. Their mobility and displacement ultimately transformed the U.S.-Mexico border as the Revolutionary violence escalated and Mexicans entered the U.S. in even larger numbers. In this way, the Mexican Revolution also became a crucial watershed across the U.S. Southwest. Moreover, it raised political and social questions that engaged many Mexicans. Some Mexican conservatives had an outsized influence on these debates on the United States.

² “Mexican Revolutionary Drama to be Staged Here,” *Los Angeles Herald*, March 2, 1911.

As later chapters will show, Mexican and Mexican American conservative beliefs differed in time and place. Broadly, I understand conservatism as a resistance to change by clinging to society's existing social, political, and cultural order. In his history of conservatism, political journalist Edmund Fawcett notes that conservatism's founding can be traced back to the early-nineteenth century as a response to the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment.³ Fawcett notes that conservatives "promised certainty and security" through an embrace to a traditional social order.⁴ Like Fawcett, scholar Michael Freeden argues that conservatives seek to control and mitigate change. Moreover, Freeden adds that they emphasize a supposed "natural order" of society that is outside of the bounds of human control.⁵ One might think first of political activity when discussing and/or thinking of conservative values. Although this project engages with politics, it also understands conservatism as an ideology that informed some Mexicans' and Mexican Americans' social and cultural views of themselves and Mexico. For these individuals and groups, resistance to change expressed the broader stakes as they competed with varying articulations of mexicanidad. Between 1850 to 1940, Mexicans' conservative values transitioned from a grounding in U.S.-based politics in the mid-nineteenth century towards a connection to Mexico in the early-twentieth century. These changes unveil how some individuals used conservative politics to express their sense of belonging and identity in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and sought to control others.

Southern California already had a long history of political debates about its relationship to Mexico. In 1837, for example, californios in Los Angeles objected to the appointment of Juan

³ Edmund Fawcett, *Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 41-42.

⁴ Fawcett, *Conservatism*, 42, 48-49.

⁵ For a concise and accessible discussion of Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) see Edmund Neill, *Conservatism* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2021), 11-14.

Bautista Alvarado as governor in Monterrey. One year prior, Alvarado led the rebellion against Nicolás Gutiérrez, a constitutionalist governor appointed by the Mexican government. Antonio Coronel, a rising political figure in Los Angeles, recalled that the “ostensible cause of this was a disagreement between Gutiérrez and the deputation.”⁶ He continued by asserting that he “was accused of incompetence, misappropriation of public funds, vice, corruption, and setting a bad example.”⁷ The disagreement pitted residents in Alta California against the government in Mexico City which sought to strengthen its centralized authority. To do so, Gutiérrez invalidated the 1824 Mexican Constitution with a new one that curbed Alta California’s political agency and liberal aspirations.⁸ Alvarado’s rebellion succeeded, but not without objection from his some of his compatriots in the Southern California who worried about the centralization of power in Monterrey. Others continued to back the federal government and sought to install their own candidate for governor.⁹ These fears claimed different visions of Los Angeles’ relationship to Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century even before the U.S.-Mexico War. Their efforts to retain authority represented a liberal strand of Mexican politics in the early-nineteenth century. Land-owning Mexican men of mixed-race sought to promote autonomy in their communities as they vied for power in Mexico. After the U.S.-Mexico War, however, these same leaders adapted to conservative politics to negotiate conquest and citizenship.

This is a history that considers different forms of Mexican conservative politics in Los Angeles from 1850 to 1940. During this period, the city experienced vast political, social, and

⁶ Antonio Coronel, *Tales of Mexican California*, ed. Doyce B. Nunis, Jr., (Santa Barbara: Bellerophon Books, 1994), 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Carlos Manuel Solomon, *Pío Pico: The Last Governor of Mexican California* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*

cultural transformations because of U.S. conquest and Revolution across the border. In 1781, the Spanish settlers of Los Angeles were predominantly of mixed-race. As will be seen, many found that exploiting Indigenous people benefited their rise on New Spain's caste system. In 1825, José María de Echeandía was appointed territorial governor of California. In his tenure he championed the liberal ideas of Mexican independence which centered on equal citizenship, republicanism, and free markets. He mentored Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Juan Bautista Alvarado (the same who led the revolt against the government), and José Antonio Castro with ideas.¹⁰ The subsequent decade ushered a period of liberalism for Mexican politicians across Alta California. This project uses this context as a point of departure to examine some perspectives of conservatism during U.S. conquest and the Mexican Revolution. During this period, I argue, some Mexicans embraced and articulated conservative in two distinct ways. First, male Mexican leaders espoused conservative values to stake belonging in the United States. Second, some exiles of the Mexican Revolution articulated conservative ideas of Mexico and *mexicanidad* as liberal politics flowed in Mexico. This second strand, however, based these politics in relation to Mexico rather than in the United States. By juxtaposing these two periods, this project hopes to show the wider developments of how some Mexicans have embraced conservatism while residing in the United States.

By highlighting different expressions of Mexican and Mexican American conservatism in Los Angeles, this project contributes to the Mexican American historiography in two central ways. First, it aims to provide a better understanding of conservatism and Latinxs in recent decades by highlighting a longer historical trajectory. Historian Geraldo Cadava has traced the rise of the "Hispanic Republican" in the late-twentieth century to explain Latino support for the

¹⁰ John Mack Faragher, *California: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 92-96.

GOP.¹¹ The 2016 and 2020 elections, many note, showed an increase from 28 percent to 32 percent of the Latino vote for Donald Trump.¹² Cadava's work complicated assumptions that Latinxs and Hispanics only lean towards liberal politics. "Their politics," he observes, "are a product of history and human action, not nature."¹³ My own study contributes to Cadava's work by highlighting an earlier period in Mexican and Mexican American history.

Second, my project intervenes in a larger literature on identity choices by Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest.¹⁴ In his study of early-nineteenth century Texas and New Mexico, Andrés Reséndez argues that the Mexican state and U.S. market divergences "conditioned" the identity choices of frontier residents.¹⁵ Reséndez's study shows how a nascent Mexican state and economy crumbled under the pressure of an encroaching, and vital, U.S. economy in Texas. Rather than elucidating this process as an inevitable force of U.S. expansion, he highlights how frontier residents "participated actively and in deeply human ways that did not conform to implacable national or ethnic lines."¹⁶ Other historians such as Raúl A. Ramos, Anthony P. Mora, and Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez, build on Reséndez's findings in local studies.

¹¹ Geraldo Cadava, *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Political Identity, from Nixon to Trump* (New York: Ecco, 2020).

¹² Since 1972, the Republican Party has secured approximately a third of the Hispanic vote. Gerald Ford and Bob Dole have been the only two candidates who secured less in their campaigns. Statistics cited in Geraldo Cadava, *The Hispanic Republican*, x-xi, xiii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xix.

¹⁴ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Andres Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Anthony P. Mora, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848-1912* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier*, 3-5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Ramos' *Beyond the Alamo* traces the development of "tejano identity" as Texas encountered Euro-Americans in the mid-nineteenth century. Elsewhere in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, historian Anthony Mora unveils the complexities of racial and national identities vis-à-vis U.S. imperialism and state formation in a study of Las Cruces and Mesilla, New Mexico. Mora takes the U.S.-Mexico War and formation of the modern border as a point of departure to examine identity choices within these two communities. He concludes his study in 1912, when New Mexico gained statehood, to juxtapose his previous examination of racial and national identities with "twentieth-century understandings of 'being Mexican' in the United States."¹⁷ Finally, in the Texas's Río Grande Valley, Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez deploys a similar analytical lens of race and market over the course of three state formations. He fruitfully elucidates the "transformation of privileged Spanish subjects into neglected Mexican citizens" and then into marginalized American citizens.¹⁸ Despite Mexicans and Mexican Americans distance from the centralized government in Mexico City or Washington D.C., conservative Mexicans in Los Angeles still sought to negotiate their ties to those nations on their own terms. In other words, some negotiated state-formation in their local context with an embrace of conservatism.

This dissertation complicates George J. Sánchez's formative work in *Becoming Mexican American* as well as other works in Mexican American Los Angeles. Sánchez argues that a sense of "Mexican American" identity formed around the 1930s. "Ethnicity," he claims, "was not a fixed set of customs surviving from life in Mexico, but rather a collective identity that emerged from daily experience in the United States."¹⁹ Interactions between Mexican immigrants and

¹⁷ Mora, *Border Dilemmas*, 16.

¹⁸ Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 3-4.

¹⁹ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 11-12.

Mexican Americans within larger Los Angeles, he argues, constructed a sense of a shared ethnic identity unique to the U.S.²⁰ Elsewhere, historian Douglas Monroy posits that early-twentieth century Los Angeles experienced a “rebirth” of the Mexican community as they rebuilt the communities they left behind in Mexico.²¹ Historian Edward J. Escobar also argues that Mexican racialization by the Los Angeles Police Department cultivated a political identity situated within United States society.²² Sánchez, Monroy, and Escobar view the early-twentieth century as a critical juncture that changed identity and community formation. I aim to complicate the periodization of these studies by showing a different perspective of Mexican and Mexican American politics in Los Angeles. As I will show, some groups and individuals resisted the urge to acculturate as “Mexican Americans” by focusing on conservative ideas of “being Mexican.” While in the U.S., some continued to embrace their Mexican citizenship and their relationship to the Mexican nation. Their idea of Mexico largely only existed as an imagination about the past social order. There was not so much a “rebirth” of the Mexican community as a new strand of Mexican conservatism that differed from their nineteenth century predecessors.

My focus on perspectives of Mexican and Mexican American conservatism also yields contributions to other historiographical trends and debates in other fields. First, my work takes part in the growing literature on slavery and forms unfree labor in the U.S. Southwest in the nineteenth century.²³ These works collectively eschew a north-south dichotomy of slavery. They

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3.

²² Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

²³ Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

unveil how debates over chattel slavery unfolded in the U.S. Southwest as well as the East. Likewise, they point towards nuanced discussions of how local systems of unfree labor, such as debt peonage and Indian slavery, unfolded within these debates. Southern California, as historian Kevin Waite observes, “was slavery’s heartland in the Far West” due to the political culture created by Southern Democrats.²⁴ My research joins this scholarly debate by connecting the Spanish and Mexican periods with the advent of Democratic Party politics. Land-owning Mexicans, previously “considered liberals,” turned to U.S. conservative beliefs as Mexican Americans to retain their place in the social order. Likewise, they translated their marginalization of Indigenous people onto debates of Black slavery to inform their identities. Mexican elites articulated ideas of Indigenous people and African Americans in relation to broader debates of slavery in the “free state” of California.

By 1930, xenophobia towards Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. reached a zenith.²⁵ Some, like Congressman John C. Box, referred to them as an “inferior mixed-race people” who threatened the United States.²⁶ Roy Garis, an American economist, warned Congress of the “Mexicanization” of the U.S. Southwest. He imagined this threatened the “home for millions of the white race.”²⁷ Garis reacted to the rapid rise of the Mexican and Mexican American community at the turn-of-the-century. In 1910, the U.S foreign-born population

Press, 2015); Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (New York: Mariner Books, 2016); William S. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery: The Struggle over Captivity and Peonage in the American Southwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Kevin Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Jean Pfaelzer, *California: A Slave State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).

²⁴ Waite, *West of Slavery*, 102-106.

²⁵ Erika Lee, “Immigration,” in *Myth America: Historians Take on the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer (New York: Basic Books, 2022), 60-61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁷ Quoted Lee, “Immigration,” in *Myth America*, 61.

increased to 222,000. Within a decade, this number increased yet again to 486,000. By 1930, the same year as Garis' warning, between 640,000 to one million Mexican and Mexican Americans resided in the U.S.²⁸ Los Angeles had one of the most rapid expansions of this community during this period. In 1910, the community numbered approximately 5,000. Ten years later, it grew to thirty thousand. It then tripled to over 97,000 by 1930.²⁹ Box and Garis represented a growing xenophobic attitude that greatly shaped the Mexican and Mexican American experience in the U.S. We might ask, though, was the U.S., and Los Angeles specifically, "Mexicanized" as they feared? While the Mexican population greatly increased, this dissertation shows that Garis' "Mexicanization" message in U.S. the Southwest lacked historical memory. Since the nineteenth century, this region had *always* been a Mexican place. Euro Americans sought to limit or forget this longer history from the region after conquest. At some moments it appeared that this erasure would succeed. Garis and others hoped to paint the community as threatening newcomers. What he described, however, was an expanded, but not new, Mexican and Mexican American population. That population, though, became more politically diverse than their nineteenth century predecessors.

The Mexican Revolution stood at the center of this growth across the United States. In the last two decades, a range of scholars have shown the Revolution's immense contributions to the formation of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, its cities, and the racialization of Mexicans across the U.S. Southwest.³⁰ A 2010 symposium at the University of Houston's Center for U.S.-

²⁸ Alexandra Délano, *Mexico and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies of Emigration since 1848* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 66, 68.

²⁹ Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 50–51.

³⁰ See works by Gabriela Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Arnoldo De León, ed., *War along the Border*; Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (Princeton, NJ:

Mexican American Studies considered the relevance of the Revolution to the Mexican American experience and their communities. These scholars linked the Mexican Revolution and the tejano experience to map out the potential of an understudied topic.³¹ Their work resulted in *War Along the Border*, an edited volume which reframes our understanding of a watershed in Mexican history in a transnational framework. By rejecting a singular nation-state analysis, these scholars take on new historiographies and national histories to understand the Mexican and Mexican American experience in the United States. This approach, concludes historian Raúl A. Ramos, builds a “new appearance” of the Revolution, and unveils its extent beyond the border.³²

Indeed, scholars have shown this appearance in various ways. While many of these histories vary in scope, they all consider the Revolution a formative period for both nations. At a most basic level, of course, historians have discussed how the Revolution generated a massive wave of Mexican migration. Many also consider how this eventually formed a sense of a shared racial identity. For instance, in her history of Mexican Chicago, Gabriella Arredondo shows that economic and social upheaval forced many to leave Mexico. In early-twentieth century Chicago, she argues, Mexicans encountered a new ethnic schema and “became Mexican” in ways that they

Princeton University Press, 2005); Claudio Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (Princeton, NJ: Zone Books, 2014); Jason Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House: Travel to Porfirian Mexico and the Cultural Politics of Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Julia G. Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jessica Kim, *Imperial Metropolis: Los Angeles, Mexico, and the Borderlands of American Empire, 1865–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); John H. Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago: Immigration Politics from the Early Twentieth Century to the Cold War* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018); Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022); Christina Heatherton, *Arise! Global Radicalism in the Era of the Mexican Revolution* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

³¹ See Arnoldo De León, “Introduction,” in *War along the Border: The Mexican Revolution and Tejano Communities*, ed. Arnoldo De León (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2013), 1–7.

³² Raúl A. Ramos, “Understanding Greater Revolutionary Mexico: The Case for a Transnational Border History,” in *War along the Border*, 310–12.

had not considered themselves while in Mexico.³³ Likewise, Benjamin Johnson suggests that the Plan de San Diego, a revolutionary manifesto, and its backlash aided in constructing a “Mexican American” identity distinct from Mexican nationals.³⁴ The Plan’s call for an “army of races” to kill Euro American men increased racism and violence against tejanos. To escape the violence, many eschewed their connections to Mexico and the Revolution. They emphasized their U.S. citizenship and rights, most notably through organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).³⁵

Other historians have considered the Revolution’s impact on the making of the modern U.S.-Mexico border and border control.³⁶ In *Line in the Sand*, Rachel St. John explores the gradual formation of the western U.S.-Mexico border through a lens of capitalism. “In this new capitalist context,” she states, “the boundary line took on significance as a divide between legal regimes and a custom and immigration checkpoint.” The eruption of the Revolution and resulting mass migration prompted a more policed and regulated border.³⁷ In a complimentary history of the U.S. Border Patrol, historian Kelly Lytle Hernández likewise examines the Revolution as informing its creation under the U.S. Immigration Law of 1924. The rapid rise in Mexican migration during this period, Hernández argues, shifted Mexicans into the “regulatory gaze” of U.S. officials. Their transformation into the quintessential “illegal Mexican brown” forced the

³³ Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago*, 7, 15, 22.

³⁴ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 5.

³⁵ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 1, 79-82, and 180-185.

³⁶ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

³⁷ St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 3-5; For a detailed account on the Mexican Revolution’s impact on border formation and shifts in binational cooperation see Chapter Five, “Breaking Ties, Building Fences: Making War on the Border,” 119-147.

Mexican state to grapple with U.S. immigration policies amid questions of national reconstruction.³⁸ These works provide crucial context and important questions to consider during this era.

Most recently, historian John H. Flores' *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago* provides another critical model for my own study of Los Angeles. Flores argues that Mexicans in Chicago translated "their experiences and understandings" of the Mexican Revolution into their new city. Flores examines the politics and activism of the "revolutionary generation" of Mexicans consisting of competing liberal, conservative, and radical factions from the 1920s to the 1950s.³⁹ Flores counters Arredondo's claim that Mexicans "became Mexican" in the U.S. Rather, he argues, many remained immersed in their brand of politics and nationalism even thousands of miles from the Revolution and their homeland.⁴⁰ Liberals aligned with the Revolutionary government's secular, modernization mission. In contrast, "traditionalists" labeled the Mexican government as deeply anticlerical, secular, and radical.⁴¹ One side celebrated the Revolutionary legacy in Chicago while the other grew alarmed by its perceived reach. Flores notes that their Mexican political allegiances can be used as a predictor of who decided to naturalize as a U.S. citizen in Chicago. Traditionalists ultimately cultivated a sense of mexicanidad defined by Catholicism, not Mexican citizenship. Liberals, in contrast, emphasized the importance of

³⁸ Hernández, *Migra!*, 83-85, 89-91, and 93.

³⁹ This project borrows Flores' use of "Revolutionary Generation" to refer to Mexican exiles in Los Angeles during the early-twentieth century. Like Flores, I do not assume that this generation held universal beliefs. Rather, I find utility in the term to highlight how they found refuge in Los Angeles and continued to negotiate politics during and after the Mexican Revolution in Mexico. Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago*, 3-4 and 24-25.

⁴⁰ Here, Flores is grappling with Gabriela Arredondo's claim in *Mexican Chicago* that Mexicans "became Mexican" in Chicago in *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago*, 3-4 and 24-25.

⁴¹ Flores, *Mexican Revolution in Chicago*, 17 and 48.

Mexican citizenship and an ongoing relationship with the Mexican government.⁴² They actively discouraged their fellow Mexicans from making Chicago their permanent home. Traditionalists, rejecting a return to secular Mexico, accepted their future in Chicago through U.S. naturalization.

My own work joins this growing literature with a focus on Los Angeles. Flores raises plenty of fruitful insights into a wide range of political “consciousness” in Mexican Chicago. He even claims that Chicago “has been the political capital of Mexican immigrants since the 1920s.”⁴³ Flores’ conclusions hinge on his assertion that Chicago contrasted to Los Angeles and the U.S. Southwest where Mexicans “assimilated” and “naturalized” as Mexican Americans.⁴⁴ My work, though, suggests that many of the same processes occurred in Los Angeles and U.S. Southwest as in Chicago. In contrast to Flores, conservative Mexican and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles resisted the urge to adjust to life in the United States by embracing their idealized and traditional ideals of *mexicanidad*.

Finally, my work specifically engages with historian Jessica Kim’s *Imperial Metropolis*, a work that reveals the links between Mexico and the United States during the Revolution. Kim’s work contributes to notions of an “informal empire” in which Euro American boosters in Los Angeles exploited Mexico’s resources and labor.⁴⁵ Although Mexico plays a central role in her argument, she focuses mostly on Euro American’s ideas of the Revolution. This project therefore compliments her study by showing some perspectives of different Mexicans who shaped Los

⁴² Ibid., 58.

⁴³ Ibid., 165.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁵ Kim shows the relationships between Euro American boosters and leaders and political officials in Mexico. She argues that these connections contributed to the growth and infrastructure of Los Angeles. Moreover, this created a more refined social hierarchy as racial and labor divisions were drawn as a result. For more, see *Imperial Metropolis*, 8-9.

Angeles and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through their own ideas of the Revolution and Mexico.

The Revolution's legacy in the borderlands was continuously debated in Mexico and in the United States during and long after the conclusion of the revolution's most violent phase. As such, this project expands our analysis of a longer Revolution to include a postrevolutionary phase in which Mexicans continued to debate the meaning of the Revolution and its aftermath for themselves and each other.⁴⁶ By focusing on both the U.S-Mexico War and the Mexican Revolution as critical transition points, this project reveals legacies of conservative political perspectives in Los Angeles. Nonetheless, the U.S. government sometimes painted these groups and individuals as threatening to the status quo due to their racialization of Mexicans.

More broadly, this project contributes and intervenes within the periodization of Mexican and Mexican American history in the Los Angeles and the U.S. Southwest.⁴⁷ Scholars

⁴⁶ For instance, historian Rick A. López uses the term “postrevolutionary” in his examination of art and national identity in Mexico from 1920–1970. Rather than serving as an assessment of the conclusion of the Revolution, he asserts that the term provides “an analysis of how individuals and groups saw the revolution as a mandate” to articulate their own interpretation of national identity, in *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 6; Likewise, historians Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau contend that a plethora of individuals and groups “continued to claim and negotiate the meaning of Mexico’s social upheaval and its legacy” after the Revolution’s conclusion, in *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 2.

⁴⁷ Some examples include Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930*, reprint (Dallas: Southern Methodist Press, 2005); Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); William F. Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Edward J. Escobar, *Race Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Jessica Kim, *Imperial Metropolis: Los Angeles, Mexico, and the Borderlands of American Empire, 1865–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Stephanie Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective, 1890-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009); Molina, *Fit to be Citizens?*; Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Erika Pérez, *Colonial Intimacies: Interethnic Kinship,*

traditionally have fallen into two camps of periodization of Mexican American history. The first I refer to as the “early-twentieth century school” which uses 1900 as a major hinge point.⁴⁸ Many of these works focus on a burgeoning Mexican American community through racial and political formation. This is best exemplified by Sánchez’s formative *Becoming Mexican American* and other works previously discussed. The turn-of-the-century developments are often treated in isolation from the nineteenth century. In 1979, Chicano historian Albert Camarillo’s field-breaking *Chicanos in a Changing Society* examined the transition of Santa Barbara’s Chicano community from a Mexican pueblo in the mid-nineteenth century to an American barrio in the early-twentieth century.⁴⁹ Thereafter scholars shifted their analysis to the twentieth century while simultaneously dismissing the nineteenth century “as insignificant in the rise of the Chicano proletariat.”⁵⁰ In his history of nineteenth-century Los Angeles, historian David Samuel Torres-Rouff suggests that scholars often view the late-nineteenth century as a period wherein the city “springs forth fully formed from its pre-urban ether” into the twentieth century.⁵¹ As a result, he laments, we miss out on an entire century of “urban engagements” in Los Angeles’s rich

Sexuality, and Marriage in Southern California, 1769–1885 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018); Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Yvette J. Saavedra, *Pasadena Before the Roses: Race, Identity, and Land Use in Southern California, 1771–1890* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020); David Samuel Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781-1894* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ See Monroy, *Rebirth*, Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American* as traditional examples. A most recent example includes Aaron E. Sánchez, *Homeland: Ethnic Mexican Belonging Since 1900* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021).

⁴⁹ Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society*.

⁵⁰ John R. Chávez, foreword to *Chicanos in a Changing Society*, xiii.

⁵¹ Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 17.

history.⁵² Our understanding of the Mexican American experience in the U.S. Southwest remains split into two centuries that are mostly kept distinct and apart.

The second major periodization in Mexican American historiography therefore focuses on the nineteenth-century developments of the U.S. Southwest.⁵³ The U.S.-Mexico War stands front and center as a major watershed in these works and as a bridge between the two national periods. My analysis follows this same trajectory to set the foundations of Mexican Los Angeles. This project intends to flesh out some of the unique identity choices conservative Mexican and Mexican American leaders in Los Angeles made as Mexico emerged as an independent nation-state in nineteenth century. Before the U.S.-Mexico War, politics and culture remained tenuous in Mexico's far north through the development of regionally specific identities. This should not be understood, however, as a disconnect that made conquest of these territories inevitable. Mexicans in the region still took part in a process of claiming a role in the Mexican nation.

A rebinding of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, however, is needed to show the transition of Mexican Los Angeles. Like Torres-Rouff's formulation of Los Angeles historiography, I contend that the emphasis on early-twentieth century Mexican Los Angeles averts our gaze from Mexicans who made complicated choices in the nineteenth century. Though

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies, Second Edition: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Deena J. González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); William S. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery: The Struggle over Captivity and Peonage in the American Southwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Anthony P. Mora, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848-1912* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border: The State, Capitalism, and Society in Nuevo León, 1848-1910* (Austin: University of Texas, 2010); Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Andres Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2018); Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

these experiences were distinct, a side-by-side analysis of the transformations and debates this community undertook highlights how some utilized Los Angeles as a crucial borderland to articulate their notions of belonging through politics. For this project, we can see how conservatism differed in its articulation because of U.S. conquest and the Mexican Revolution.

Cultural Politics and Belonging in the Shadow of Mexico

The title of this work seeks to capture the distance of Mexican and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles from Mexico as a lived and imagined experience. “When Mexican revolutionaries went into exile,” claims scholar Claudio Lomintz, “they became shadows [...] on the U.S. side of the border.”⁵⁴ As I will show, Mexicans did become shadows in the United States as they made sense of the Revolution from afar. As early in the nineteenth century, Mexicans continuously sought to understand their relationship to Mexico and their sense of belonging. Los Angeles acted as a site of negotiation wherein Mexican and Mexican Americans engaged with their own local circumstances relatively removed from national struggles in Mexico. In this period of profound transformation, Mexicans witnessed state-formation, conquest, racialization, and Revolution. Conservatism filled the void for some individuals and groups who sought to stake their place in Los Angeles. As such, two ideas, cultural politics and belonging, sit at the backdrop of my analysis throughout this work.

I take up the process of negotiation with an understanding of cultural politics, the arena in which politics inform culture and vice versa. Historian Mary Kay Vaughn provides another useful definition of cultural politics as a “process whereby definitions of culture” ranging from

⁵⁴ Claudio Lomintz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, xxxviii.

national identity, citizenship, and other social categories are “articulated and disputed.”⁵⁵ Likewise, in his study of the Cultural Front in the 1930s, historian Michael Denning asserts that “the political stances artists and intellectuals take depend upon their understanding of the ground on which they work.”⁵⁶ Mexicans and Mexican Americans articulated and defined their relationship to Mexico in Los Angeles in varying ways. Conservatism informed some forms of cultural politics.

Relatedly, this project engages with how some Mexicans articulated their relationship to Mexico to explore their conceptions of their homeland and how it configures to notions of *mexicanidad*. I contend with historian Aaron E. Sánchez’s assertion that ideas of the homeland are highly “ideological and emotional.”⁵⁷ He adds that “a homeland” also configures one’s notion of “belonging” that is rooted in physical and imagined borderlands.⁵⁸ Conservatism, and politics more broadly, yields insights into an individual’s and groups’ senses of belonging in the United States or Mexico. No matter the case, Mexican and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles resided in the shadow of Mexico. On a broader scale, then, this project takes into consideration how conservatism played a role in what it meant to accept permanent residence in the United States.

Sources and Methods

The following work relies on a variety of primary sources which include newspapers, personal and family correspondence, and government records. When my research began initially,

⁵⁵ Mary Kay Vaughn, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 4.

⁵⁶ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso Books, 1998), xix.

⁵⁷ Sánchez, *Homeland*, 1-2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

I was interested in assessing the Mexican Revolution in Los Angeles. Two developments occurred as I dived deeper into my sources. First, I found that many of the perspectives, excluding the magonistas, were wary and/or critical of the Revolution. Many, for the most part, were not straightforward in their ideas of the Revolution, but pinpointed to social and cultural aspects they some felt were undermined in Mexico. A common thread throughout my initial research unveiled some skepticism of the political and social events unfolding in Mexico. I began to then broaden my question to ponder on how conservative Mexican exiles viewed their home country and the government that spawned from the Revolution. Another second major development occurred that I did not anticipate. I was drawn to similar questions about nineteenth century Los Angeles than I had planned. I became interested in the foundations of Mexican Los Angeles and how they viewed themselves in the city's transitionary period.

Many scholars have also considered these sources and periods in compelling sources. For instance, Francisco P. Ramírez and his contributions in *El Clamor Publico* have been explored in-depth elsewhere.⁵⁹ Likewise, the magonistas and other Mexican exiles of the early-twentieth have been increasingly centered in historical narratives in recent years. My own methodology and analysis, however, relies on a relational lens of race and ethnicity. Race, scholars Daniel Martinez HoSang and Natalia Molina surmise, “is a mutually constitutive process [...] that change across time and place.”⁶⁰ Race is never created in isolation, but relationally across individuals and groups. My interpretation of sources and events sought to unpack how some conservative Mexican and Mexican Americans, at any given period, understood themselves in

⁵⁹ See Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.* and Paul Bryan Gray, *A Clamor for Equality: Emergence and Exile of Californio Activist Francisco P. Ramírez* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 2012).

⁶⁰ Daniel Martinez HoSang and Natalia Molina, “Introduction: Toward a Relational Consciousness of Race,” in *Relational Forms of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice*, ed. by Natalia Molina, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and Ramón A. Gutiérrez (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 8.

relation to their ideas of others. A relational lens framework allows us to see how elite Mexicans used other groups, such as Indigenous people and African Americans, to form conservative politics in the nineteenth century. During the Revolution, it also yields insights into how individuals, groups, and families essentialized traditional ideas of being Mexican against the supposed threat of the Revolution that supposedly challenged Mexican identity.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is organized chronologically in its examination of Mexican and Mexican American cultural politics in Los Angeles roughly from the nineteenth century up to 1940. As such, it follows the city's transitions during its Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. periods to follow the trajectory of conservative politics in Mexican Los Angeles.

Chapter One situates the founding of Los Angeles as a Spanish pueblo, its brief Mexican national period, and residents' negotiation of U.S. conquest. After Mexican Independence, some of Los Angeles's leading Mexican leaders sensed great potential to mold the pueblo to their liking. They espoused liberal ideas to counter a centralized government in Mexico. By advocating for the secularization of the region's mission system, these leaders gained increased access to land, labor, and power. This newfound leverage sought to elevate Los Angeles as a central Mexican capital whose autonomy would be decided by these political leaders. Finally, the chapter considers the transition from liberalism to conservatism after U.S. conquest. It follows some debates that some Mexican leaders undertook in U.S. party politics. A few sought to elevate and retain their political power while others did so as a means of accommodation and survival. By examining these different perspectives in the nineteenth century, the chapter unveils how various Mexicans defined themselves and the vastly changing political landscape in Los Angeles.

The following chapter focuses on the turn-of-the-century up to 1926 during the Mexican Revolution. During this period, Euro American settlers mostly configured Mexicans as a relic of the past despite their obvious ongoing presence. Euro Americans often wanted to make Los Angeles a “white,” American place. The outbreak of the Revolution challenged this narrative as Mexicans poured into the city as part of the “Revolutionary Generation.” The magonistas were one of the first, formative groups to utilize Los Angeles as a site of mobilization. Their radical left, eventually anarchist, activity influenced racialization of Mexicans as “dangerous” during this period. Other exiles who arrived in the city were more conservative leaning. Figures like José María Maytorena viewed the Revolution with suspicion. Nonetheless, his correspondence and political activity was tracked by the U.S. government. Others, like Enrique Estrada, mobilized Mexican exiles to counter the Revolutionary government. Los Angeles continued to remain a Mexican place. Moreover, their conservative stances changed with an increased connection to Mexico. In other words, Los Angeles represented a temporary home where they imagined their conservative ideas could potentially influence Mexican politics.

The next two chapters consider the longer Revolutionary legacy in Los Angeles. Chapter Three examines the Cristero War and La Segunda, a transnational conflict between the secular Mexican government and devout Mexican Catholics. Like the previous decades, this church-state battle contributed to the growth of Mexican Los Angeles with the arrival of Cristero exiles. The chapter assesses two similar, yet divergent, conservative experiences within this community: the Venegas family and Pedro Villaseñor’s Comité Popular de la Defensa Mexicana (CPDM). Both found themselves in Los Angeles as Mexican exiles during the Cristero Revolt. While in exile, they looked towards an eventual return to Mexico and articulated their relationship to the homeland in this experience. These similarities aside, both elucidated varying experiences of

Cristeros in the city. As such, I utilize the Venegas family to show their sense of longing for Mexico while in exile. This longing, I suggest, expressed a sense of mourning of what they thought was lost because of the Cristero conflict. Pedro Villaseñor, on the other hand, shows how some Mexican exiles undertook radical right-wing activity in the city to counter the Mexican government. Hoping to salvage the church's influence in Mexico, he created the CPDM to mobilize Southern California's Mexican Catholics based on a fascist ideology.

The final chapter explores the founding of *La Opinión* in Los Angeles by Ignacio Lozano. Lozano, part of the Revolutionary Generation, first founded San Antonio's *La Prensa* in 1913. That success prompted him to establish a Spanish-daily in Los Angeles in 1926. By focusing on the paper's first decade, this chapter assesses how Lozano aimed to influence the political ideas of Mexican exiles through his conservative ideas of the Revolution. Like other conservative exiles, he warned of the supposed dangers of the Revolution and its legacy. As such, he used his papers to arouse alarm over Mexican politics. He emphasized that Mexicans in the United States should embrace their Mexican citizenship and participate in Mexico's politics from afar to order to retain or reassert the Porfirian social order.

Still, the legacies of Mexicans in the nineteenth century and the Revolutionary Diaspora of the early-twentieth century show aspects of the community's conservative bent. Los Angeles remained a borderlands space wherein Mexicans and Mexican Americans negotiated their sense-of-belonging and their relationship to Mexico from afar.

CHAPTER ONE

Forming Mexicanidad and Conservatism in El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles, 1848-1890

On July 29, 1893, less than fifty years after the U.S.-Mexico War, Los Angeles's *Dos Repúblicas* reprinted an inquiry regarding the history of California's Mexican population in the nineteenth century. The question, like the name of the paper (Two Republics), acknowledged the fluidity of living in the borderlands. According to the reader, a rumor loomed over the native californio community that the Mexican government had sold parts of its territory and its people to the United States for fifteen million pesos.¹ "Is it true," asked the reader, "that the Mexican government sold California and californios?"² The question likely reflected an ongoing uncertainty within Southern California's Mexican community. Many lamented the possibility that Mexico had betrayed californios by selling the land and surrendering its residents to the United States. Although succinct, the reader's question held many implications for Mexican politics in Los Angeles during this period. If Mexico had indeed betrayed them, what would this mean for their identity as californios subjugated under U.S. rule? The reader seemed bewildered as they asked, "What forced Mexico to make this sale?"³

¹ "Mexico no Vendio a los Californios," *Dos Repúblicas*, July 29, 1893.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The paper responded by brushing aside the notion that the Mexican government had betrayed its citizens with the sale of California and other territories in the U.S. Southwest. The loss of these spaces, the paper argued, resulted from “violent dispossession [...] committed by the United States” decades prior to the U.S-Mexican War (1846-1848).⁴ While Mexico succumbed to U.S. designs, they asserted, it did so at gunpoint. In other words, their home country was “forced to acquiesce in the loss” of California and other parts of Mexico and worse still, some of their citizens to the United States. The Mexican government and its former citizens had the choice to give up either their “sombbrero or life.”⁵ The paper thus gave a history lesson to its readers. It reminded them of the injustices suffered by Mexicans, especially those residing in the U.S. Southwest. “It was not a sale,” they wrote, “but a violent armed robbery committed by the United States.”⁶ In doing so, the response negated the idea that the Mexican government had “abandoned” californios. By painting Mexico as the victim, not the villain, the paper implicitly claimed californios’ experience as part of Mexico despite their presence in the U.S. The Mexican government had chosen “life” by surrendering the northern territories. Mexicans who remained in those lands had to make their own political and social choices about life in the U.S. context.

Mexicans in Los Angeles negotiated their political and social identities in tandem with the region’s economic development in the nineteenth-century. This chapter focuses on mid-to-late nineteenth-century Los Angeles and Mexicans and Mexican Americans’ politics in claims of belonging to the pueblo. After the conquest, most Mexicans in Southern California clung tightly

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

to a region that they called home. They used both the United States and Mexico as points of reference to understand themselves. This chapter shows that the Mexican community became immersed in U.S. partisan politics after the U.S.-Mexico War. By focusing on how some conservative individuals aligned themselves with U.S. political parties, I assess how they negotiated U.S. conquest while also understanding their own racial and political identities.

Founding of Spanish and Mexican Los Angeles

The formation of Mexican conservative politics in nineteenth-century Los Angeles cannot be disentangled from the earlier Spanish and Mexican national periods. Racial and social categories from the late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries continued to inform life in the region. In 1869, New Spain expanded to Alta California with missions and presidios that stretched from San Diego to Monterrey.⁷ By 1781, 44 individuals founded El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles by the nearby Mission San Gabriel. Unlike the religious and military sites, Los Angeles's settlement as a pueblo was a strategic effort for colonial stabilization after soldiers and neophytes began to intermarry.⁸ The pueblo's founding required the violent displacement of Kumivit (Tongva-Gabrielino), one of the area's indigenous groups. Spaniards were often impressed with the bountiful geography, but they saw indigenous people who had resided in the area for over 7,000 years as barriers to "progress".⁹ Long before the establishment of Los Angeles and the arrival of European settler-colonists, historian Kelly Lytle Hernández notes the

⁷ David Samuel Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A. Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781-1894* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 23-24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 17-19.

region was “ordered, dynamic, and generations deep.”¹⁰ Moreover, their knowledge of the landscape enriched it and provided vast networks across the region.¹¹

Ten years prior to the establishment of Los Angeles, the Franciscans, a Catholic order, founded the Mission San Gabriel Arcángel nearby.¹² It signaled an overt infringement on Indigenous life and autonomy. Those who were converted began to be referred to as “neophytes.”¹³ Spanish missionaries exploited their labor, introduced Spanish attire, and promoted gender segregation as part of their evangelizing. By and large, the mission “emerged as a fixed outpost for the Spanish Empire in the Tongva Basin.”¹⁴ Franciscans therefore relied on indigenous groups and individuals to gain access to and control of the land. These missionaries firmly believed that their work would transform neophytes into proper colonial subjects who would practice Catholicism and embrace Spanish values.¹⁵ This founding paternalistic attitude would continually resurface in subsequent decades as Los Angeles’s conservative social and political platforms developed. These foundations also helped set a larger pattern for how Spanish

¹⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 25.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 25-26.

¹⁵ Yvette J. Saavedra, *Before the Roses: Race, Identity, and Land Use in Southern California, 1771-1890* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 22-23.

citizens, and later Mexican citizens, utilized “Indians” as a category of difference and social distance.¹⁶

New Spain had an intricate taxonomic system that implied Indigenous people’s permanent status on the bottom of the social order. Missionaries, soldiers, and settlers marked most Indigenous groups as “indios bozales” (wild and ignorant Indians), “indios infieles/gentile” (heathen Indians), or “indios bárbaros” (savage Indians).¹⁷ These classifications limited the possibility of Indigenous persons elevating themselves on the racial caste system. They also illustrated the intricate social and cultural system New Spain brought and imposed on Alta California’s landscape. This racialization of the region’s Indigenous people largely informed Los Angeles’s racial and social landscape in subsequent decades as more Spanish settler-colonists settled in the area. These new settlers juxtaposed themselves to the region’s Indigenous people to meet their own ends through increased social status and land ownership in later decades.¹⁸

The pobladores (settlers) of the newly established pueblo negotiated a new social hierarchy in relation to the region’s Indigenous groups. Throughout Latin America, Spanish elites largely prescribed social status and legal rights under an intricate caste system defined by supposed respectable social and cultural attributes.¹⁹ The two broader labels, “gente de razón”

¹⁶ For a more in-depth analysis on the caste system in colonial Mexico see María Elena Martínez's *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Saavedra, *Before the Roses*, 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 31; Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 26-27.

(people with reason) and “gente sin razón” (people without reason), named a binary between those deemed “civilized” and “uncivilized.”²⁰ The former category distinguished those who displayed “Spanish” characteristics like the speaking of Spanish, Catholic baptism, and dress style.²¹ Gente sin razón, in contrast, referred to the unbaptized slaves or Indigenous people who refused to reconcile themselves to the Spanish empire.²² Many, if not most, of the families and individuals who colonized Los Angeles in the late-eighteenth century lay at the lower parts of the caste system. Only two men in the initial colonist group identified as españoles while roughly 95 percent of the group made some claim to African and/or Native ancestry as indias/os, mulatas/os, negros, and/or mestizos.²³ These diverse settlers hoped that they could begin anew by climbing the social and cultural ladder of the New Spanish colony in California.

Distance from the core of the Spanish empire provided options for those in the lower ranks of the caste system to rise in status. Borderlands historian Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez notes that “time and regional considerations” alongside demographics severely blurred the distinctions of the caste system in the northern part of the Spanish empire by the early-nineteenth century.²⁴ In Los Angeles, settlers strategically negotiated and transformed the caste system. Whereas birth and ancestry took prominence to define one’s social standing in most other parts of New Spain, self-designation and cultural markers carried much more weight for the pueblo settlers.²⁵ Indeed,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 27.

²³ Ibid.; Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 25.

²⁴ Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 31.

²⁵ Saavedra, *Before the Roses*, 37.

once in the pueblo, many pobladores began to redefine their identities vis-à-vis indigenous peoples who had been subjugated under the mission system. Alarmed by the close contact between Indians and settlers in 1787, Pedro Fages, Governor of Alta and Baja California, issued a proclamation to regulate social boundaries and behavior among the two groups.²⁶ The new law forbade Indians inside settlers' homes and required any work to be done in the public eye.²⁷ Fages feared intimate relations between the two groups and sought to prevent the blurring of social boundaries through illicit sex. In some cases, though, settlers obtained knowledge of Indian languages and intermarried with them. Likewise, Native's encounters with settlers further increased their exposure and adoption of Spanish culture.²⁸ Many mixed-race settlers also strategically juxtaposed themselves against indios and claimed to be españoles. They sought social mobility by elevating their racial category against a binary opposite. Nonetheless, one could not simply declare themselves an español so easily. Instead, Spanish colonists measured claims to one's social behavior and cultural practices that hinged on characteristics such as religion and class.

State Matters and Market Developments in Mexico's Far North

Los Angeles and Alta California broadly followed a similar trajectory as other sites in the far north of New Spain, albeit in a varying pace. In Texas and New Mexico, the Mexican state and U.S. markets collided, historian Andrés Reséndez argues, and conditioned the "identity

²⁶ Saavedra, *Before the Roses*, 33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

choices of early-nineteenth century frontier society.”²⁹ In New Mexico the opening of the Santa Fe Trail in 1821, after Mexico gained its independence, promoted economic trade with the United States and distributed land to Anglo settlers in New Mexico.³⁰ New Mexican officials hoped economic trade and colonization would bring development to their territory as a crucial link between Mexico’s far north and the United States.³¹ By 1833, the Catholic Church, led by Bishop José Antonio Laureano de Zubiría y Escalante, simultaneously sought to reassert its position in the territory. As part of this mission, Zubiría considered ways to incorporate foreign settlers in New Mexico through inter-marriage and land ownership.³² Like secular state officials, Zubiría hoped to build the territory as an intermediary space, a borderlands in which the Mexican state could flourish with access to U.S. mercantile goods.³³ Texas followed a similar, and more expansive, version of these developments due to their proximity to the United States and large numbers of Euro-American settlers. Land distribution changed Texas’s political and social contours in conjunction with political debates occurring in Mexico’s early-national period during the 1820s and 1830s.³⁴ Two political camps, understood as “conservatives” and “liberals”, divided the territory.³⁵ Conservatives, known as “centralists” for their preference for centralized

²⁹ Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

³⁰ Reséndez, 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 34 and Peter Guardino, *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican American War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 316-317.

³² Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier*, 74-81.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Andrew Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 76.

³⁵ Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 76.

power in Mexico City, feared that dispersed governance would hinder Mexico's consolidation as a nation.³⁶ Liberals, or Federalists, advocated for a more autonomous and localized government. Access and ownership of land became a central feature of federalist positions.³⁷ These factions thus represented a larger debate on national identity and the future of the nation that unfolded within Alta California as well.

Many Spanish political leaders across the far north of North Spain supported Federalist ideals as liberals. Land seemed abundantly available and political power attainable for the former colonial subjects. Like New Mexico, local leaders sought to develop the Texas territory through land ownership and promotion of foreign settlement for development. Texas, however, experienced more contact with Euro-American settlers because of colonization projects.³⁸ Antonio Martínez, Texas's governor, for instance, surmised in 1822 that the population in Texas was "too small."³⁹ He found it "essential to settle Texas so the easiest and least costly way to accomplish this is by admitting and encouraging the settlement of Europeans settlers known as *extranjeros*."⁴⁰ By 1824, federalists succeeded in enacting a new federal plan of colonization. This colonization law gave territories in the far north the power to form their own "laws or

³⁶ Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 77; Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 73.

³⁸ See Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*; Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 76.

³⁹ *Jefe político* Antonio Martínez, "estado actual de la provincia de Texas," San Antonio, February 6, 1822 as quoted and translated by Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

regulations for the colonization of those lands which appertain to them.”⁴¹ In 1825, Coahuila and Texas responded by drawing out a colonization plan that they promised would bring prosperity and stability in the region through settlement. The plan envisioned an increase of Mexican settlers in Mexico’s northern states; however, it enabled foreigners the opportunity to have access to land if they converted to Catholicism and yielded authority to Mexican officials.⁴² Despite Centralist objections, the project proved successful as a burgeoning U.S. market increasingly infiltrated the Texas territory and other parts of Mexico’s far north with goods and Euro American settlers. “Tejanos continued to define their regional identity,” historian Raúl A. Ramos asserts, while growing the importance of being Mexican and of strengthening their identification with the new nation.”⁴³ The same can be said in Alta California where social and political identities were equally contingent on local contexts in relation to broader national debates.

Los Angeles took part in similar debates between Centralists and Federalists. By 1820, approximately sixty-one families resided in Los Angeles.⁴⁴ Alta California, more broadly, remained a frontier region within the nascent Mexican state. Mexico did not grant Alta California statehood due to its small settler population. It did allow, however, male citizens over eighteen to elect a national delegate, as well as seven representatives for a territorial legislature.⁴⁵

⁴¹ “Translation of the General Law of Colonization, No. 72,” August 18, 1824, as quoted in Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 77.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28-29, 64.

⁴³ Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 93.

⁴⁴ David Samuel Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 26-27.

⁴⁵ John Jack Faragher, *California: An American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 93.

Still, the central Mexican government appointed its own governor, José María de Echeandía, to oversee the territory and its inhabitants. While the Mexican government might have hoped Echeandía would solidify ties between Alta California and the central state, he did not.⁴⁶ Instead, Echeandía opposed a centralized government and encouraged Alta California's residents to advocate for the liberal cause defined by autonomy. Juan Bautista Alvarado, a rising and prominent politician during this period, recalled that Echeandía first introduced "the true principles of republicanism and liberty" in the region.⁴⁷ He argued that settlers, not the Catholic Church, should lead the politics of the community through access to mission and native lands.⁴⁸ Echeandía became instrumental in bringing Los Angeles into the nation's liberal and conservative debates of power, autonomy, religion, and secularism. Historian Carlos Manuel Salomon contends that under Echeandía, California experienced a "revolutionary shift in the political character of citizens" by mobilizing its settlers towards liberalism.⁴⁹ In the next section, I argue that this also brought a wider shift in Mexican politics in Los Angeles. Rather than simply debating the political factions of the nation, settlers' politics informed their relationship to the state as well as their notions of identity in their local context. Nonetheless, they formed their stance in relation to Central Mexico. In other words, while they considered themselves as part of a larger, nascent state, they also envisioned a rich opportunity to shape Los Angeles to their own designs in a quest for land and power.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 94-95.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Faragher, *California*, 94.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁹ Carlos Manuel Salomon, *Pío Pico: The Last Governor of Mexican California* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010)

Secularization and Land at the Eve of the U.S.-Mexico War.

Figures like Echeandía sought to take control of local lands and undermine the mission system in a process known as “secularization.”⁵⁰ This process reflected the larger Federalist and Centralist debate that divided Mexico during this period. Many Mexicans in Alta California deeply yearned for their political autonomy and elevated status through land. Some wanted to take land away from Native peoples rather than treat them as equals.⁵¹ Echeandia, however, offered a more practical means to achieve these goals through secularization. He wanted to limit the Church’s power in the region and broader nation by enabling converted Indians to gain ownership over mission lands. Once the region had been divided among them, he thought, other Mexicans could then obtain the remaining property.⁵² By 1830, he rushed for secularization, but conservatives had taken power in Mexico City that same year. One year later, the new government replaced Echeandia with Colonel Manuel Victoria, an avid supporter of the Church. He quickly halted Echeandia’s liberal policies and agenda.⁵³

Mexicans in Los Angeles, and elsewhere in Alta California, mobilized to challenge Victoria’s appointment. They believed he would undermine their pursuit of political autonomy and land. Pío Pico, a rising politician in Los Angeles who benefited from Echeandia’s term as governor, mobilized other compatriots in Southern California. He proclaimed that Victoria’s

⁵⁰ El Ciudadano Ignacio Martinez, General de brigada y Gobernador del Distrito federal (1833): Proclamation of the Secularization of the Missions in California, Early Mexican Imprint Collection (GC 1147), Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History (SCWHR); Faragher, *California*, 89-101; Saavedra, *Before the Roses*,

⁵¹ Faragher, *California*, 95.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

measures were “contrary to our federal system” enshrined in the 1824 Constitution.⁵⁴ In November 1831, Pico and others issued a declaration called the Plan de San Diego that formally announced a rebellion against Victoria.⁵⁵ The plan, however, did not simply condemn Victoria’s appointment, but the larger Centralist policies that threatened their political autonomy. They claimed that centralism produced “all-powerful” figures who abused their authority and the constitutional rights of Mexicans.⁵⁶ The rebellion eventually succeeded. Pico proclaimed himself the new governor, even though Victoria had surrendered his role to Echeandia. General José Figueroa eventually arrived in 1833 to assume the role of governor and asserted a tenuous stability to Alta California.⁵⁷ The rebellion illustrates both the larger political struggle at the national level and the complexities of local politics. Salomon argues that Pico and others succeeded in establishing “California as an independent force within” Mexico.⁵⁸ In other words, California remained a part of Mexico, but its local leaders claimed the right to determine its future. In Los Angeles, elite Mexican men clung tightly to this notion. Secularization became one of their urgent goals.

In 1833, the central Mexican government formally passed a secularization policy that disbanded the mission system across Alta California.⁵⁹ In fifteen points, the law outlined the transition of mission lands into parishes. The law stated parish priests could not receive any form

⁵⁴ Pío Pico, *Contestación*, October 15, 1831, quoted in Solomon, *Pío Pico*, 36.

⁵⁵ Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 38.

⁵⁶ Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 34-38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁹ Proclamation of the Secularization of the Missions, SCWHR.

of compensation for any religious services rendered.⁶⁰ Within these newly instated parishes, the law instructed the public to use vacant mission buildings and lands as town halls and schools. Parish priests could claim no more than two hundred square yards of land in addition to one of the mission buildings.⁶¹ In one swift stroke, the Mexican government limited the Church's power and influence in California, thereby opening a path for a more secular and liberal government.

In addition to curbing Church power, the secularization of the mission system redistributed land to the neophytes in Alta California. After Mexican independence, liberals sought to dismantle the caste system with the 1824 Constitution. Many envisioned secularization as a means for Indigenous people to become equal Mexican citizens by cultivating the land formerly owned by the Church. They reasoned that if race no longer had government legitimacy than Indigenous people should not have specific status in the mission system. Conservatives, however, feared that this vision would ultimately challenge and undermine the status of leading Mexican government officials in Alta California.⁶² Secularization emerged from larger tensions between Mexican officials and the mission system. The plan's paternalistic goals, however, would unfold in ways other than many of those in the Mexican government intended. To ensure that mission lands would go to neophytes, the Mexican government named them as the sole heirs of that property.⁶³ As "native of the lands," californios acknowledged and concurred with Indigenous rights to mission property. Californios, however, found ways to manipulate the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 36.

⁶³ Saavedra, *Pasadena Before the Roses*, 64-65.

language of the law to include themselves as rightful heirs to the land by identifying themselves as *nativos*.⁶⁴ Throughout Alta California, over 800 *californios* successfully claimed eight million acres of former mission land.⁶⁵ The unequal distribution of land reified Indigenous people as a “racial other” who provided much of the labor force for the area’s *ranchos* just as it had been under the dismantled mission system. In other words, the Mexican settlers transported old wine in new bottles by taking advantage of the abundance of land intended for Native peoples.

Access to land ushered in the *rancho* era where new social categories of difference developed between *californios* and other mixed-race people who did not own land.⁶⁶ During the Spanish period, when the mission system reigned, missionaries and other Spanish settlers distinguished its inhabitants through the dichotomy of *gente de razón* or *gente sin razón*. These juxtaposed Spanish *pobladores* with the area’s Indigenous people.⁶⁷ Historian David Torres-Rouff argues that *californios* “built on existing Indian racial formulations [...] between themselves and Indians” which reified understandings of difference.⁶⁸ The newly landed-elite fashioned ways to stratify their changing society when prior distinctions had become difficult to

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Historian John Mack Faragher asserts that the “mission era [...] was over” after secularization thereby starting the “*rancho* era” in *California*, 111. Yvette Saavedra likewise refers to this as the “*Rancho Period*” whereby prominent families made claims to millions of acres of land after secularization in *Pasadena Before the Roses*, 63-65.

⁶⁷ Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 33-34.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

discern. Like those categories in the mission era, Indians become ever central. Californios replaced the Franciscan missions in their exploitation of Indigenous labor.

Mexican Californians in the region shaped their politics through land ownership during this period. Around the late-1820s, Juan Bautista Alvarado, a californio politician deeply influenced by Echeandia, addressed a letter to Mexicans in Alta California. He recounted a quelled plot by Euro Americans who had sought to make claims to the land.⁶⁹ These “ungrateful settlers,” Alvarado asserted, attempted to take what was “the most precious treasure that is the homeland and life” in California.⁷⁰ In celebrating the Mexican victory, Alvarado juxtaposed these encroaching settlers with Mexican national identity. He encouraged Mexicans to be “generous and friendly” among each other and with other compatriots in the country. He further stated they needed to resist Euro Americans. Alvarado sought to mobilize under a Mexican national identity by painting Euro Americans as a threat to their political autonomy. Alvarado reminded Mexicans that the government would not “lose any means to ensure the integrity of this precious part of the nation” and counted on their collaboration and cooperation as Mexicans.⁷¹ It seemed that Alvarado interpreted this defeat of a foreign plot as a national victory to be celebrated by all Mexicans in California. While Alvarado sought to cultivate a sense of Mexican nationalism, which consolidated the region’s Mexican population, his celebration benefited only land-owning californios who would have lost land should the Euro Americans had been successful. Essentially, Alvarado, a prominent californio, sought to unify Mexicans of all

⁶⁹ Juan Bautista Alvarado, Document #2, Early Mexican Imprint Collection, SCWHR.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

classes under a national identity despite the fact that it was a call to defend a style of land ownership most did not enjoy. As owners of the “most precious treasure” of the land, californios utilized such rhetoric as a strategy to retain political power and consolidate Mexican Californians into part of an “imagined community” in Alta California.⁷² Alvarado’s assertion highlights the relationship between land and power for californios. It helped maintain their desired social order that fixed residents on class and culture in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles politicians also sought to make their city the political center of Alta California. They briefly achieved this in 1835 when Carlos Antonio Carillo, provincial deputy of California to Mexico City, issued a decree which elevated Los Angeles from a pueblo to a city.⁷³ More importantly, the decree proclaimed the newly minted city the capital of Alta California.⁷⁴ To “make it known,” the announcement ordered the news “to be posted in the usual places, and to be circulated to those who are responsible for its observance.”⁷⁵ The shift from pueblo to a capital city promised to bring greater prestige and power in Los Angeles. However, protests from the Monterey political elite made this change short lived.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, this achievement signified the goals of Los Angeles’s californios to consolidate power in Los Angeles as part of Mexico.⁷⁷ Though short-lived, Los Angeles’ designation as a city and temporary capital signaled

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Document #5 and #6, Early Mexican Imprint Collection, SCWHR

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Document #5, Early Mexican Imprint Collection, SCWHR.

⁷⁶ Michael J. González, *This Small City Will Be a Mexican Paradise: Exploring the Origins of Mexican Culture in Los Angeles, 1821-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 67-68.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

its arrival as an important site for Mexico in Alta California. These pivotal transitions in the region set the foundation for a later embrace of conservative values.

As late as February 1846, months before the U.S.-Mexico War, some leading Mexican officials in Los Angeles understood their political pursuits through ideas about race. Although the secularization process in the previous decade espoused an egalitarian uplift of California's Indigenous groups, some did not agree with this goal. Instead, they continued to juxtapose themselves with Indigenous people despite their own mixed-race backgrounds. A petition signed by thirty prominent californio men called for Pío Pico to address the "problem" of a Native settlement recently displaced outside of city.⁷⁸ The men noted that the "race" of Native people partook in celebrations which left them intoxicated. Fearing that such vice would spread disease in Los Angeles, the petition called for surveillance "of these Indians or that they be quarter[ed] at the employer's rancho" on which they work.⁷⁹ The petition denied Indigenous people physical and social inclusion within Los Angeles a racial "other." This exclusion showed how durable the older caste system was and how it drew the boundaries of respectful behavior according to those with high-ranking social and political status. As a region the city also rejected earlier calls, such as those of Alvarado, of supposed Mexican national identity and unity.⁸⁰ For some, this was only useful when countering Euro American settlement. While the mission system pursued a paternalistic undertaking to evangelize Indians through forced labor, californios elevated their status through access to land and continued racialization of Indigenous peoples. Society, asserts

⁷⁸ Translated and cited in González, *This Small City Will Be a Mexican Paradise*, 19.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Juan Bautista Alvarado, Document #2, Early Mexican Imprint Collection, SCWHR.

historian Albert Camarillo, “reflected the class divisions of the pueblo” in Southern California before the U.S.-Mexico War.⁸¹ Rancheros, who took advantage of the secularization laws, resided on top of this division. Mestizos, he notes, made up a small working class, but Indigenous people made up the largest of the workforce.⁸² Later, the arrival of United States conquest challenged land-owning californios to reformulate their politics and these racial projects as Euro American categories threatened what californios had worked to build.

Conquest and the U.S.-Mexico War in Los Angeles

On March 13, 1846, José Castro, Lieutenant Colonel of the Mexican Cavalry and Commandant General, warned compatriots in California about encroaching U.S forces.⁸³ The Captain of the U.S military, John C. Frémont, “with no respects to the laws,” he asserted, had disobeyed orders to vacate the Mexican territories.⁸⁴ Instead, Frémont informed Mexican authorities that he was ready to resist any forces in the Gabrielino Mountains in Central California.⁸⁵ Castro’s warnings called on Mexicans in Alta California to mobilize as a collective against U.S. forces:

Compatriots, in the action of the rising by the American Pavilion the insults and threats against the authorities of this country, they are worthy of the hate and loathing of the Mexican people. Let us prepare to defend our Independence, so that united we can repel with strong hands the audacity of ungrateful men. Who received all the testimony of a

⁸¹ Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (1979, reis., Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2005), 12.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ L.2100.13.68-713a: Citizen, Jose Castro, Lieutenant Colonel of the Mexican Cavalry and Commandant General of the Interior of the patrimony of California, March 13, 1846, Early Mexican Imprint Collection, SCWHR.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

real hospitality in our country, and respond with ingratitude to the rights that were afforded to them by our cordiality and benevolence.⁸⁶

The threat to the Mexican government and people, Castro surmised, created an opportunity to consolidate Mexicans into a political block. This call to arms, however, neglected to consider the complex social terrain in Alta California which still depended on divisions by race and class. Castro's call to arms also echoed earlier proclamations that painted Alta California's land as a "treasure" threatened by Euro American settlers.

After the war, Los Angeles, like other parts of Mexico's far north, joined the United States under the terms of the Treaty de Guadalupe Hidalgo after the war. In addition to ceding over one-third of Mexico's territory, the treaty also proffered "all the rights of citizens" to Mexicans when deemed the proper time.⁸⁷ As historian Rachel St. John notes, the treaty completely "remade the map of North America."⁸⁸ Yet, it would take decades to flesh out the "full aspirations" of the border that hinged on the new document.⁸⁹ Historian Juan Mora-Torres suggests that this difficult process granted Mexicans living in the borderlands some autonomy to shape the new border in the late-nineteenth century.⁹⁰ Building on Reséndez's work, other historians have undertaken local and regional analyses to show how some people on the border reconciled and negotiated U.S. conquest after the war.⁹¹ Most of these perspectives show the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 13-14.

⁸⁸ St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 21-23.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border: The State, Capitalism, and Society in Nuevo León, 1848-1910* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 11.

⁹¹ See Mora, *Border Dilemmas*; Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*; and Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*.

change of “neglected Mexican citizens [...] into unwanted American citizens.”⁹² This same change appeared in Los Angeles where many residents sought the most practical outcome that would benefit them.

Historian Peter Guardino recently examined the outcome of the U.S.-Mexico War. The most popular interpretation, he notes, juxtaposes the strength of U.S. nationalism with Mexico’s weaker status as a “divided” nation.⁹³ Mexico, the interpretation goes, lacked unity, while Americans “were united and more nationalistic.”⁹⁴ Guardino counters this argument by suggesting that nationalism did exist in Mexico, albeit in a variety of ways.⁹⁵ Economic disparity, geography, and different political trajectories between the two nations, he suggests, contributed to the United States’ victory in the war rather than a simple lack of nationalism.⁹⁶ For one, the United States prospered with access to more cultivable land and resources. The U.S also had the advantage of being a nation forty-years older than Mexico and longer periods of political stability. Mexico, only twenty-six years removed independence, remained politically divided over regional differences exacerbated by geography as well as the Centralist and Federalist split.⁹⁷ Guardino’s explanation accounts for the complexities of Mexican society through the motivations of Mexicans who resisted U.S. conquest through their varied politics. He argues that

⁹² Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 3.

⁹³ Peter Guardino, *The Dead March*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 8-13.

the impoverished state of Mexico and divisions in politics prevented the nation's success against the looming threat in the north. Leading up to the war, Los Angeles evidenced different political trajectories, but also showed different versions of nationalism. Local government officials attempted to proclaim a supposed national identity when convenient. This strategy would later change during and after U.S. conquest as they encountered Euro American understandings of race.

When the United States forces arrived in Alta California in July 1846, they encountered a small Mexican community spread out across Alta California that numbered around 7,300. There were also 150,000 more Indigenous people.⁹⁸ The small californio population along with the distance from the Mexican government weakened Mexico's strength against U.S. forces during the war. Far away from the capital's population and wealth, Mexico's Pacific coast remained separated by rough terrain which made the distribution of goods hard, if not impossible. California ports found a market in the United States' East Coast, where goods could be easily transported via sea.⁹⁹ Like Texas and New Mexico, Alta California had built economic connections with U.S. markets which played a part in eroding its relationship with Mexico City. By 1840, Euro Americans recognized California's immense value based on its access to Pacific and potential for agricultural development.¹⁰⁰ Some californios welcomed U.S. encroachment on the territory as an opportunity to elevate their status in Alta California. In San Diego, the wealthy landowner, Miguel de Pedrorena, thought that U.S. conquest would bring an improved

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 305-306.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 310-315.

government to the region, as well as better market development.¹⁰¹ Pedreña's assessment likely reflected two trends. First, he saw the political ties between Southern California and Mexico City as tenuous. Second, he viewed increased ties with the burgeoning U.S. market as more positive to the region's economic stability. Likewise, Pedro C. Carrillo envisioned it as an opportunity for Mexican Californians to gain even more political, social, and economic leverage.¹⁰² Such rich individuals thus viewed the invasion through the lens of political and economic opportunity. Others, perhaps sensing the dangers to their land claims, viewed U.S. conquest as a threat to their social status. Juanita de Dios Rendon, for instance, shared that the "the Americans" left her with the inability to "protect my property rights" after they raided her home.¹⁰³ By 1847, a number of residents submitted petitions to the municipality seeking new paper titles for their property in preparation for the new government.¹⁰⁴ Torres-Rouff argues that these petitions also reified earlier distinctions between land owning elites and landless cholos from the Mexican period.¹⁰⁵ By arming themselves with these petitions, landowning californios tried to protect their land and, by extension, their social and political status. They envisioned land ownership as safeguarding their power in the transitional period during conquest. If land defined the power dynamics of the region, they thought, then they could avoid marginalization within a burgeoning Euro American population. Nonetheless, these landed elites pursued strategies to retain or elevate their

¹⁰¹ Erika Pérez, *Colonial Intimacies Interethnic Kinship, Sexuality, and Marriage in Southern California, 1769–1885* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 156.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ LACA, October 29, 1847 untitled record series, vol. 4, folder 1, 228-229 quoted in Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 68.

¹⁰⁴ Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 67-68.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 68.

status by participating in U.S. partisan politics. Most, nonetheless, lost their land within one generation after the establishment of the California Land Act of 1851.¹⁰⁶

The same californio leaders continued to racialize Indigenous groups to claim higher status in Los Angeles's new emerging social and political landscape after the war. In addition to reported illicit activity among Native people, conflicts between vecinos and U.S. soldiers unfolded in Los Angeles. When rumors of supposed duels between the two sides emerged, the ayuntamiento forbid any congregation in the settlement on Saturdays.¹⁰⁷ Colonel Jonathan Stevenson, who was stationed in Los Angeles to oversee its transition during the war, rejected this solution. Instead, he threatened simply to destroy the settlement should such dueling and other illicit behavior continue. In response, the ayuntamiento took up Stevenson's solution by abolishing the settlement in Los Angeles. During this process, they mandated Natives to be boarded and supervised by their employers and banned any social gatherings.¹⁰⁸ These measures, if for a moment, continued to echo the social hierarchy of the Mexican period with Indigenous people at the bottom of the hierarchy, followed by vecinos.¹⁰⁹ These restrictions aligned with Stevenson's racialization of Indigenous groups. In doing so, the Mexican committee continued to juxtapose their status with them as a racial other. During the initial U.S. months of occupation,

¹⁰⁶ "1851, March 3 - 09 Stat. 631, Act to Settle Private Land Claims in California" (2016). US Government Legislation and Statutes. 7. https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/hornbeck_usa_2_d/7.

¹⁰⁷ Los Angeles City Archives, November 3, 1847, untitled records series, vol. 4, folder 2, 498, 499 cited in Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, Los Angeles City Archives, November 6, 1847, untitled records series, vol. 4, folder 2, 505-506, and Los Angeles City Archives November 6, 1847, Spanish originals, ayuntamiesto records, vol. 4., folder 2, 632 quoted and cited in Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.* 69-70.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 70.

this shifted to an even stricter form of control which signaled the californio desire to keep that racial hierarchy intact. They could appease Stevenson, while also continuing to subjugate local Indigenous populations with more harrowing oversight. More importantly, Stevenson acted as a proxy for the larger Euro American population who appeared to have initially accepted the local racialization of Native and Mexican people.

Californios pushed for their own understanding of the local population while failing to account for Euro American's ideas about race. They did not share californios' understanding based on the caste system from the Spanish and Mexican periods. In July 1847, for instance, the Mormon Battalion arrived at the pueblo. Its soldiers immediately commented on local life and its racial composition. In his journal, U.S. soldier, Henry Standage, described the pueblo using racist, reductionist language. After exploring the city, Standage asserted that its inhabitants were the "most degraded set of beings [...] who professed to be civilized and taught in the Roman Catholic Religion."¹¹⁰ The abundance of "grog shops" and "gambling houses," he noted, rivaled the number of private residences.¹¹¹ Further, he bemoaned the utter lack of storefronts in the city that, according to him, numbered at no more than six. Finally, the widespread architecture of unburnt brick and flat roofs left much to be desired.¹¹² Standage's assessment of Los Angeles and its people hinged on his understanding of "civilization" and religion. Painting Los Angeles as an undeveloped place, he justified taking it from the recently conquered foreign population.

¹¹⁰ Journal of Henry Standage, Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection; Newberry Library (Chicago), Ayer MS 825, 23.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

He grouped the city's residents under what he presumed to be a "backward" religion in a city full of vice to illustrate the superiority of the U.S.

While Standage considered the city's population as the most "degraded beings," it appeared that he also seemed to understand the region's racial and social schema that hinged on labor divisions. The Spanish, he observed, owned much land in the countryside where their abundance of livestock roamed. There, he wrote, "Indians do all the labor" while the Mexicans ride on horseback through the night. Standage revealed the three-tiered hierarchy that he observed: Spanish landowners (*californios*), Mexicans (*vecinos*), and Natives. The U.S. forces appeared to have acknowledged this as well. For example, on July 4, 1847, Standage and his comrades took part in a display of U.S. nationalism in Los Angeles. In the morning, the battalion paraded at Fort Moore to the tune of the Star-Spangled Banner while raising the United States flag to nine cheers and a federal salute of thirteen guns firing. By 11:00 am, in the presence of "Spaniards and Indians," they paraded in front of the fort yet again and witnessed a reading of the Declaration of Independence against the backdrop of United States patriotic tunes. The U.S. battalion, Standage claimed, offered the Spaniards to have the document "read in their language, if desired."¹¹³ These observers reportedly declined the patronizing offer, perhaps signaling an initial resistance to become Americans during occupation. The Fourth of July celebration marked a watershed in Los Angeles that signaled the advent of conquest that Mexicans would have to negotiate in subsequent decades. By reading the cherished U.S. document, the U.S. soldiers signaled their authority over the city's Mexican population. Despite observations of class

¹¹³ Journal of Henry Standage, Ayer Manuscript Collection, NL, 32.

distinctions, Standage conflated “Spaniards” and “Mexicans” as immoral drunkards whose only redeemable qualities were their horse-riding skills and quality of horses.¹¹⁴ No matter the case, he deemed the people inferior and ripe for conquest.¹¹⁵ In his eyes, class did not overcome the supposed backward markers of the pueblo and its people as not white. This racialization would continue in subsequent years which influenced the new political strategies of the city’s Mexican population.

In October 1849, issues of race came to the forefront during California’s Constitutional Convention. Euro Americans and land-owning Mexican representatives debated the meaning of whiteness and enfranchisement.¹¹⁶ The document’s final language stipulated that “every white male citizen of the United States [and] Mexico who have elected to become a citizen” would be entitled suffrage.¹¹⁷ Indians “or the descendants of Indians” would be granted suffrage “in such special cases that the legislative body may deem just and proper.”¹¹⁸ Although this was the final language in the state’s constitution, the meaning of the word “white” was intensely debated at the convention by Euro American and its Mexican delegates. Edward Gilbert, a Euro American delegate, first advocated to include “every male citizen of Mexico” drawing on the Treaty of

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 23-28.

¹¹⁵ Peter Guardino notes that three themes—gender, race, and religion—help us understand the motives and differences between Mexico and the United States during the war. They were “central to the ways in which both societies were organized and the ways in which people [...] thought about their lives.” In *The Dead March*, 22-29.

¹¹⁶ The opening proceedings list the following individuals with Spanish surnames as participants: Antonio M. Pico, Miguel de Pedrona, J.A. Carillo, M. Dominguez, P. La Guerra, M. Cabarruvias, and M.G. Vallejo in John Ross Browne, “Article II, Constitution of the State of California,” *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October 1849* (Miami: Hard Press Books, 2019). 7.

¹¹⁷ Browne, “Article II, Constitution of the State of California,” *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹¹⁹ In response, Charles T. Botts amended the suggestion by including “all white male citizens of Mexico.”¹²⁰ Gilbert rejected that proposal on the grounds that “white” was not fully understood by Mexican citizens since most of them were of mixed-race background.¹²¹ The meaning of “whiteness” proved to be a great concern for californios. It opened the possibility of marginalization based on phenotype, behavior, and national identity. Such was the case when Pablo de la Guerra, one of eight californio representatives, asked to clarify the meaning of whiteness in Gilbert’s proposal. “Many citizens of California have received from nature a very dark skin,” he asserted, and have “been allowed to vote, and not only that but to fill the highest public offices.”¹²² He argued that it would be “unjust” to strip suffrage rights from them “merely because nature had not made them white.”¹²³ De la Guerra lamented the potential dangers of disenfranchisement that he and his compatriots faced due to phenotype. When he pointed to dark-skinned Mexicans holding high positions, he did so with his own understanding of race that hinged not only on phenotype but culture and behavior that illustrated class status. Before their eyes, the eight californio delegates witnessed a threat to their social status where they would possibly be racialized as being the same as vecinos, cholos, and Indians if they did not simply “look white” enough.

¹¹⁹ Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California*, 62-63.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 63.

¹²³ Ibid.

Mexican delegates subsequently juxtaposed themselves against Indians and African Americans to salvage their political and social status. De la Guerra shifted towards supporting the word “white” if it “was intended to exclude the African race.”¹²⁴ Botts confirmed that he meant to exclude the “inferior races of mankind” which included “African and Indian races.”¹²⁵ The convention pondered the status of “Indians and negroes” under Mexican law. De la Guerra confirmed that both groups were not excluded from voting or citizenship and pointed to the mixed-race makeup of the first men of the republic.¹²⁶ Again, de la Guerra attempted to insert his own understanding of race from the Spanish and Mexican periods since many of the Mexican representatives themselves were of mixed-race. By pointing to the supposed egalitarianism of Mexican law, he hoped to prevent race from excluding full citizenship to Mexicans, namely those like him who were of higher-class status through landownership. He was willing to sacrifice African Americans and Indigenous peoples to do it. Stephen Clark Foster, a representative from Los Angeles, noted that while Indians were considered citizens during the Mexican period, not all were afforded suffrage rights due to “property qualification, or by occupation, or mode of livelihood.”¹²⁷ Foster described the intersections of race and class that structured society in Los Angeles and California. Using this foundation, the convention contrasted Indigenous people with “property qualifications” from “pure uncivilized Indians” who would not be allowed to vote.¹²⁸ The final language left open the possibility for them and their

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 64-65.

descendants to obtain suffrage through land ownership. The status of land-owning californios remained safe, if for a moment. This debate and its resolution would ultimately foreshadow the establishment of a new racial regime that altered Mexican politics and debates within the community.

***El Clamor Público* and Mexican Cultural Politics during Conquest**

After the U.S.-Mexico War and the passing of the California constitution, Euro Americans increasingly marginalized the state's Mexican people. Francisco P. Ramírez, a descendant of Southern California's original Spanish settlers from the late-eighteenth century, founded *El Clamor Público*, the region's first exclusively Spanish-language newspaper in 1855. His grandfather, Francisco Ramírez Sr., arrived in Alta California in 1794.¹²⁹ The elder Ramírez settled at the Mission Santa Barbara with his wife, Rosa Quijada, where they had their first son, Juan M. Ramírez.¹³⁰ They relocated to Los Angeles in 1828 after Ramírez failed to secure a land grant from the Mexican government. Juan cultivated new relationships to improve his social position through marriage and business affairs. Within two years he married Petra Ávila. The prominent Ávila family awarded him a small vineyard as a result. He also built a rapport with Jean Louis Vignes, a French winemaker who had naturalized as a Mexican citizen.¹³¹ While these networks improved the Ramírez family's status, they were neither *ranchero* elites nor

¹²⁹ Paul Bryan Gray, "Francisco Ramírez: A Short Biography," *California History* 84, no. 2 (December 2006), 20.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

working class. They stood in between these two poles within a small number of middle-class agriculturists, merchants, and entrepreneurs.”¹³²

Born in 1837, Francisco Ramírez sought to defend Mexicans of all classes and identity with his newspaper. While Francisco and his family held no political influence, they remained highly educated. By age 14, Francisco mastered three languages, Spanish, English, and French, which represented his family’s connections. A native Spanish speaker, Francisco learned English through interactions with Euro American settlers. He also familiarized himself with French through Vignes’s mentorship.¹³³ By 1851, Francisco’s skillset made him an ideal candidate to work for the *Los Angeles Star*, a bilingual newspaper. Francisco spearheaded the paper’s Spanish section, which appeared on the back page. He also gained crucial insights into the print world that made the founding of his own newspaper possible.¹³⁴ Moreover, as historian Paul Bryan Gray notes, the paper cultivated local and world consciousness within Francisco. Since the paper printed materials from a range of sources, “he had information about the world at large” that would later influence the content of his own newspaper.¹³⁵

In his famous work on nineteenth-century Mexican California, historian Leonard Pitt refers to *El Clamor Público* as a “frontier newspaper” with “journalism [that] left much to be desired.”¹³⁶ Pitt’s claim, in large part, relies on the paper’s tendency to blend news with

¹³² Ibid., 25.

¹³³ Ibid., 21-22.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁶ Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 183.

subjective editorials throughout its short life span. This, Pitt asserts, made it difficult to scarcely “distinguish fact from analysis.”¹³⁷ This distinction eschews our understanding of the young Mexican journalist and the intention of his newspaper. I argue that we shift from Pitt’s framing of the paper as a “frontier paper,” which printed subjective news, to understand it as a “borderlands paper.” It offered a forum to consider how Euro American occupation changed Mexicans lives.¹³⁸ This distinction provides a better understanding of Ramírez’s efforts to subvert marginalization through his attempts to politically mobilize the Mexican community into U.S. partisan politics. Francisco Ramírez assessed the threats to Mexicans in the mid-nineteenth century. By blending facts with analysis, he sought to mobilize Mexicans to fight for their place in the former Mexican city. *El Clamor Público* therefore offered insights into one of Los Angeles’s first Mexican American political activists in the city’s early decades of conquest. Moreover, the newspaper countered the conservative positions of the city’s Mexican and Mexican American elite who began to embrace U.S. politics that hindered the position of Mexicans. We can learn about the ongoing divide between conservatives and liberals that lingered in the Mexican community. Lastly, at times, Ramírez also expressed some conservative ideas which clung to relational notions of race.

¹³⁷ Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 183.

¹³⁸ Historians Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron define frontiers as “a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined.” Borderlands signify “contested boundaries between colonial domains.” in “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 104, No. 3 (Jun. 1999), 815-816. While these understandings might support Pitt’s claim as a “frontier newspaper” I argue that the “borderlands” distinction more fully captures the goals of Ramírez’s *El Clamor Público* which sought to “contest” Euro-American domination while seeking to politically mobilize Los Angeles’s Mexican community.

Ramírez's newspaper articulated liberal politics that hinged on ideals of liberty and political representation. One of the main tenets of the paper revolved around negotiating and defining the idea of liberty within the U.S. More specifically, the paper mused on a hemispheric idea of liberty as defined by democracies in North America. It referred to liberty as a "dream" that had been much spoken about across the continent. He reprinted a perspective from *La Cronica*, a San Francisco Spanish newspaper. The idea of liberty and freedom prevailed, they claimed, when men were free from acting as mere tributaries to the nation-state.¹³⁹ Moreover, these free populations in North America held the ability "to speak, write, work, have fun, and enjoy" their freedoms in their respective countries of residence.¹⁴⁰ In other words, the article implicitly critiqued European imperial powers in the Western hemisphere who impeded on the region's freedom. Ramírez referred to the region's democracies as "the first ones under the apparent shelter" of liberty, a "starry veil" that unfortunately applied to a select few.¹⁴¹ Although the article explicitly referred to liberty within North America, it also reflected a broader position which lauded the potential of solidarity across the Americas. On a wider scale, Latin American historian, James E. Sanders, traces the linkage between modernity, social, and economic rights in what he calls "American republic modernity."¹⁴² Sanders suggests that many Latin Americans viewed the Western Hemisphere as the future of modernity and civilization. This contrasted with

¹³⁹ "Libertad-Norte América," *El Clamor Público*, July 17, 1855.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 1-8.

Europe, which they believed continued to live in the past of monarchs and aristocrats.¹⁴³ As Francisco Bilbao, a Chilean intellectual and politician, put it, “Civilization is today America and the Republic.”¹⁴⁴ When *La Cronica* and Ramírez defined the “dreamed freedom” throughout North America, they imagined California as part of a larger political and social project unfolding in the Americas.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, Ramírez’s celebration of liberty sought to make claims to the promise of U.S. citizenship in the initial decade of conquest. He hoped that Mexicans would reap the benefits of liberty in their new nation.

Ramírez often wrote about the idea of liberty in the context of California and the United States. A week after the *Cronica* editorial, Ramírez wrote that ideas of liberty alone would not guard against the marginalization of Mexicans. “The idea of freedom in the United States,” he began, “is truly curious.”¹⁴⁶ He then referred to that idea as “imaginary” due to California’s so-called “Greaser Law.” He expressed dismay that this law specifically targeted Mexicans or “all persons known as ‘Greasers,’” for increased policing and incarceration in 1855.¹⁴⁷ This law, Ramírez asserted, “widens the barrier that has long existed between” Euro Americans and Mexicans.¹⁴⁸ In other words, the law contributed to increased inequity between the two groups. Ramírez’s criticism of Euro American legislators and newcomers was hardly coincidental. His

¹⁴³ Sanders, *Vanguard of the Atlantic World*, 1-8.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ “Libertad-Norte América,” *El Clamor Público*, July 15, 1855.

¹⁴⁶ *El Clamor Público*, July 24, 1855.

¹⁴⁷ *El Clamor Público*, July 24, 1855; John Mack Faragher, *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2016), 320.

¹⁴⁸ *El Clamor Público*, July 24, 1855.

paper often critiqued U.S. imperialism during this period and sought to map out how Mexicans could obtain the rights promised to them under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹⁴⁹

Ramírez’s definition of liberty required giving Mexican people in the region equal social and economic rights. He wrote of three “facets of liberty”: natural, civil, and political. He made claims of the “freedom of man, freedom of the citizen, and freedom of the nation.”¹⁵⁰ The first type defined liberty as a natural “right that by nature man enjoys to dispose of himself as he pleases.” Second, he explained civil liberty as the “right granted by society to every citizen.” Finally, political, or “national” liberty referred to the “right of every nation to act for itself without dependence on any other nation.”¹⁵¹ He argued that the U.S. failed to uphold these values during and after the U.S.-Mexico War. Appealing to Mexican readers, Ramírez sarcastically observed that these rights remained reserved for only those who steal and murder in the U.S. He referred to the U.S.-Mexico War of the previous decade and the violence against Mexicans after conquest to prove his point. Despite calling themselves a “model republic,” he wrote, “slavery is tolerated [and] the vile despotism reigns unchecked.”¹⁵² “How singular,” he continued, “are the institutions of a country that seems to absorb everything for the cause of ‘Manifest Destiny.’” Ramírez bluntly articulated how Mexicans faced racist exclusion from their rights.¹⁵³ Ramírez sought to politically rally Mexicans through their collective experience based

¹⁴⁹ See following issues of *El Clamor Público*: August 28, 1855; October 30, 1855; May 3, 1856; June 14, 1856; August 2, 1856; September 13, 1856; May 9, 1857; August 29, 1857; June 5, 1858; June 12, 1858.

¹⁵⁰ *El Clamor Público*, July 24, 1855.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

on race and marginalization. He utilized his observations of a widening barrier between Euro Americans and Mexicans with the aim to create a sense of urgency among his community. Yet, he stopped short of a call for revolution or a revolt to return California to Mexico. Instead, he sought the more moderate goal of civic inclusion in the United States.

That same month, Ramírez critiqued U.S. party politics to continue making his case. Ramírez warned that the “Know-Nothings” were the largest threat looming over the U.S. West.¹⁵⁴ That political movement developed in Massachusetts as a response to the increasing immigration of Irish people to the United States.¹⁵⁵ The party, made up of Protestant Americans, argued that Irish Catholics were unable to join American life and democracy due to their perceived devotion to the Church. They called for severe immigration restrictions as a result.¹⁵⁶ Ramírez warned readers of these “miserable and fanatic beings” who persecuted anyone who “has the misfortune to profess the Catholic religion.”¹⁵⁷ For Ramírez, this discourse obviously threatened the Mexican population who remained mostly Catholic. “If we can unite our votes” against this political threat, he encouraged, “there will be no danger because [of our] strength.”¹⁵⁸ He also warned that apathy in politics would ensure that they would “be governed by the Know-Nothings.”¹⁵⁹ Despite knowing that Mexicans increasingly faced racist discrimination, Ramírez

¹⁵⁴ August 21, 1855, *El Clamor Publico*.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Bryan Gray, *A Clamor for Equality: Emergence and Exile of Californio Activist Francisco P. Ramírez* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2012), 23

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Gray, *A Clamor for Equality*, 23.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Gray, *A Clamor for Equality*, 25.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

still had faith in the U.S. political system. He hoped that Mexicans could take advantage of their U.S. citizenship by voting in local, state, and federal elections which might improve their place in the region.

In 1856, Ramírez called on the United States again to honor its ideals of “liberty” and “freedom” that it promised with citizenship. “This nation,” he asserted, “was not planted with the objective to rob the rights of other nations.”¹⁶⁰ Instead, its mission, he asserted, was to maintain those rights as a model for the world of “civil and religious freedom.”¹⁶¹ Ramírez believed that the U.S. could live up to its own Constitution and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. He also strategically contrasted those documents with the reality of U.S. society, particularly in California. He pointed to the U.S. conquest over Mexico and Mexicans in the new U.S. Southwest. Ramírez, though, suggested it was just a few groups and individuals who hindered the full potential of the U.S. Constitution. “The unbridled ambition of [U.S.] rulers has upset the spirit of the Constitution,” he lamented, “and everywhere in this vast continent there is nothing but fratricidal strife.”¹⁶² He again referenced the “Know-Nothings” in more detail. Ever since their arrival on the political scene, he claimed, the population of immigrants had dropped significantly due to European observations of U.S. xenophobia.¹⁶³ In Europe, he noted, “They have a very bad idea of the country where they proclaim freedom while persecuting people who profess a religion different from theirs or a political party that does not conform to their

¹⁶⁰ *El Clamor Público*, August 2, 1856.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

interests.”¹⁶⁴ The juxtaposition between Europe and the United States was intentional. As noted earlier, Ramírez lauded the potential and promise in the American nations over their European counterparts. By using European critiques of the U.S, he claimed that it was just a few individuals who perpetuated discrimination and made liberty an exclusive right for Euro American Protestants.

Through his frequent calls for political mobilization, Ramírez sought to consolidate Mexican people under one racial identity to defend against their marginalization. He also began to juxtapose Mexicans to African Americans to obtain political rights. On October 30, 1855, *El Clamor Público* translated an article on the annexation of Mexico from the *Buffalo Patriot and Journal*, an English-language paper.¹⁶⁵ “What will be done with Mexico?,” the paper asked, “not only for the inhabitants of that unfortunate country,” but also the United States?¹⁶⁶ The article lambasted Mexico and Mexicans by referring to their failed nation and unstable government after “thirty years of experimentation” with democracy.¹⁶⁷ “Mexico,” the paper proclaimed, “has tried republicanism and failed.”¹⁶⁸ Though they, and other Latin American nations, had copied “institutions [...] from our own,” those countries “have shown that freedom is not something that can be imported from abroad, but must come from the center, from the character of the people who wish to enjoy it.” *The Buffalo Patriot* argued that Mexicans and other Latin Americans

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ “Mexico,” *El Clamor Público*, October 30, 1855.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

could not replicate the stability and success of the United States because Mexico consisted of indios and mestizos. “History,” the article argued, “shows that no civilized black race is capable of maintaining free institutions.” Ramírez reprinted the article to illustrate notions of white supremacy and the conflation of mixed-race people with black people. The reprinted article also suggested “that [the U.S.] neither weighed nor estimated the dangers of such an addition to our republic.” It warned that incorporating more of Mexico and its mixed-race population would threaten the United States.¹⁶⁹ Ramírez strategically used this article as an illustrative example of how many in the United States viewed Mexico and Mexicans. For *The Buffalo Patriot*, race overruled imperialism to retain ideals of an American nation where liberty was reserved for white Euro Americans.¹⁷⁰ Ramírez’s lack of commentary on the reprint signaled his fear that Mexicans were being conflated with blackness. Rather than advocating for other mixed-race people, Ramírez used the fear of racialization to show that Mexicans were being linked to other marginalized groups, which many of them had racist ideas about.

In a biography of Ramírez, historian Paul Bryan Gray argues that *El Clamor Publico* was doomed from inception.¹⁷¹ Ramírez, he suggests, remained “out of touch” with the city’s elite, conservative Mexican community.¹⁷² Instead, he embraced a brand of Mexican liberalism that emphasized racial equality, abolitionism, and equal rights for citizens reworked for a U.S.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ For a compelling discussion between race and empire in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century see Eric T. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹⁷¹ Gray, *A Clamor for Equality*, 17.

¹⁷² Ibid.

context. In contrast, the city's ranchero elite had largely embraced the platform of the Democratic Party. Wealthy Mexicans, after all, held Indigenous people as slaves.¹⁷³ They therefore initially aligned with white Southern slave holders. Their status afforded them access to political and social networks with prominent Euro Americans arriving in the region. Joseph Lancaster Brent of Maryland, for instance, learned Spanish to recruit this small group to the Democratic Party.¹⁷⁴ Although Ramírez might have considered the Mexican elite under his racial umbrella, he underestimated how his message would counter to their interests. He also neglected to consider how the elite's class status, who only made-up 3 percent of the population, enabled them to control working-class Mexican political activity through reciprocal social relationships. In addition, most of his intended audience remained illiterate.¹⁷⁵ Combined, this likely limited his outreach and goals for mass scale political mobilization.

Ramírez's initial discussion of U.S. politics acted as a form of cultural brokerage in the early years after conquest. Elsewhere, historian Raúl A. Ramos shows how Tejano elites functioned as cultural brokers between Euro American immigrants and Mexican government officials.¹⁷⁶ By acting as intermediaries between two clashing worlds, he argues, these elites "translated" local Mexican culture for Euro Americans while strategically building crucial social

¹⁷³ Ibid., 18; For an expanded exploration of Native slavery in the Americas see: William S. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery: The Struggle over Captivity and Peonage in the American Southwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002), and Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2017).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷⁵ Gray asserts that the working class made up a bulk of Mexicans in Los Angeles during the 1850s. By 1860, he estimates seventy-seven percent of "skilled and unskilled laborers" made up the Mexican population, *A Clamor for Equality*, 18-22.

¹⁷⁶ Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 81-83.

ties through intermarriage.¹⁷⁷ He suggests this “set in motion a variety of shifts in Tejano identity and social structures affecting Tejanos’ place in the world around them.”¹⁷⁸ While elite tejanos merged Euro American immigrants into Mexican society, the rising numbers of that population began to emphasize race over class as the dominant marker of difference. Ramírez acted as a cultural broker in Los Angeles in similar, but also different ways than those in Texas. More broadly, both Ramírez and some tejanos recognized the shifting social and political landscape. These transitions challenged Mexicans to negotiate their status within a changing landscape. Instead of merging Euro Americans into Los Angeles and Mexican culture, Ramírez aimed to do the opposite. He sought to incorporate the city’s Mexican population into the U.S. political system and body politic. He worked to interpret the U.S. political system for Mexican readers with the aim that they reap the supposed benefits of U.S. citizenship granted through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In doing so, he sought to counter the marginalization of his community unfolding before them by emphasizing their shared racial identity.

Ramírez also documented Euro American violence against Mexicans in Los Angeles and California.¹⁷⁹ On July 19, 1856, Constable William Jenkins shot Antonio Ruiz after an altercation involving Ruiz’s guitar. One witness, María Candelaria Polloreña, recalled her visit at Ruiz’s residence that day when Jenkins arrived. Jenkins initially sat down with the two, but then

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 81-83.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 81.

¹⁷⁹ *El Clamor Público*, July 26, 1856, June 5, 1858, September 3, September 1859; For more studies on violence against Mexican during this period see William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) and John Mack Faragher, *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2016).

abruptly made his way into an “inner room [...] without speaking.”¹⁸⁰ She sensed that Jenkins arrived with “bad intentions” as she followed him with Ruiz behind her.¹⁸¹ Jenkins exited the residence with Ruiz’s guitar and subsequently handed him a writ of an unpaid fine. Ruiz realized a letter belonging to Pollorena, written by her mother, remained hidden inside the confiscated instrument.¹⁸² After Ruiz attempted to obtain the letter on her behalf, Pollorena recollected, Jenkins drew his pistol and shot him.¹⁸³ The Mexican working-class community described him as a “quiet, inoffensive man” who was well-respected. Ruiz died the next day. Jenkins then surrendered himself to the authorities. The Los Angeles Sheriff did not find it “proper to place him in confinement” and released him on a \$3,000 bail.¹⁸⁴ Ramírez utilized this tragic event to call for Mexicans political mobilization by showing Mexicans marginalized position as a racial group.

The ensuing conflict revealed some of the political divide between the Mexican community that hinged on social status. After Ruiz’s funeral, the paper reported, the Mexican community and others gathered to discuss what was to be done about this injustice. Some, like Fernando Carriaga, a Frenchman, suggested attacking the jail that had confined Jenkins.¹⁸⁵ Others overruled this vigilante action. Instead, they appointed six individuals to see that due

¹⁸⁰ “Examination of Wm. Jenkins for the Killing of Antonio Ruis,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Faragher, *Eternity Street*, 322-323.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*; *El Clamor Público*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁸⁴ “A Man Killed,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁸⁵ Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 121; Faragher, *Eternity Street*, 324.

justice would be “impartially administered.”¹⁸⁶ The subsequent struggle signaled a larger divide between Euro Americans and Mexicans in the city. Tensions ran high and threatened to ignite a race war. “The lowest and the most abandoned Sonorians and Mexicans,” reported the *Los Angeles Star* hysterically, had mobilized to sack the city “with the fiercest maledictions against the Americans [...] to wipe them out.”¹⁸⁷ Even *El Clamor Público* warned that “the population has been divided into two different factions” drawn between “armed Mexicans” and “Americans.”¹⁸⁸ Both papers narrated a tumultuous week with similar narratives. In reality, though, the groups were not so neatly divided as it might have appeared. For instance, Don Andrés Pico, Pío Pico’s brother, led “a group of twenty Californians” to arrest Carriaga, the instigator of the mob.¹⁸⁹ Pico’s leadership of californios signaled their effort to keep the peace in Los Angeles. Counter to fears of a race war, the rumored mob was not led by a Mexican, but a Frenchman. In the graveyard, Carriaga proclaimed to the members of angered Mexican community that the law in the United States “is not administered equally to the poor and Mexicans.”¹⁹⁰ By pointing to class and race, Carriaga highlighted how such social categories functioned to marginalize particular people and groups. He acknowledged, “I am French, but at this moment I am Mexican like the others.”¹⁹¹ Despite being European, Carriaga imagined that his class status aligned him with the plight of lower-class Mexicans in Los Angeles. Moreover,

¹⁸⁶ “A Man Killed,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *El Clamor Público*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁸⁹ “A Man Killed,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in Faragher, *Eternity Street*, 326.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

he implicitly linked mexicanidad with lower class status and race. Carriaga supposedly used Ruiz's murder to mobilize working-class Mexicans into vigilante violence. In addition to a growing racial divide, which elite Mexicans might have feared, the murder exemplified the intersections of race and class to subvert the status quo.

The city's police force meanwhile worked to undermine the potential of mob violence. On July 22, 1856, Marshal William Getman, Deputy W. Peterson, and five to six other armed men approached the graveyard "for the purpose of ascertaining the position and the force of the mob."¹⁹² Upon their arrival they counted between 200 to 300 participants who began to make their way toward the town. Getman instructed his team to follow. Some "insurgents," the *Los Angeles Star* reported, caught glimpse of Getman and began to shoot at them. Getman received a non-fatal gunshot wound to the head from one of the fifteen shots fired in the altercation.¹⁹³ The shooting of the marshal reflected some Mexicans' willingness to the use of violence to fight against marginalization. They viewed Getman and other law officials as contrary to justice. Implicitly they rejected Ramírez's faith in U.S. institutions. Rather than taking legal recourse to effect change, they mobilized as a vigilante mob. The next day "a number of prisoners were arrested" by a party of Euro American U.S. citizens from nearby Monte who had arrived to assist Los Angeles authorities.¹⁹⁴

That same morning, Los Angeles Euro American authorities and Mexican political figures formed a committee to quell the violence and restore order. In the afternoon session, the

¹⁹² "A Man Killed," *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁹³ *El Clamor Público*, July 26, 1856; "A Man Killed," *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁹⁴ "A Man Killed," *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

committee collectively condemned the number of “thieves, robbers, and murderers, who have stolen our property, murdered our citizens, and from whom we are in hourly danger of our lives.”¹⁹⁵ The meeting did not discuss the murder of Ruiz. Instead, it focused on the mob violence which left Getman injured. As a result, the meeting agreed to six resolutions to prevent such activity from occurring again. First, it formed a “Committee of Twenty,” composed of elite Euro-American settlers and californios, who would review any complaints and accusations of suspicious or disorderly citizens. Second, they wished to avoid the “shedding of blood” and pledged that they would “not take away the life of any man unless he is found resisting” authorities. Third, they proclaimed that individuals found with arms “shall be arrested and disarmed.” Other resolutions named the committee members, while also stipulating their authority to deport persons from the country. It also formed a smaller committee known as the “Committee of Five” to enforce the resolutions.¹⁹⁶ Some Mexicans on the larger committee included Don Andrés Pico, Don Antonio F. Cornel, Don Augustín Olvera, Don Tomás Sánchez, and Don Louis Sansevaine. Moreover, Don Juan Padilla and Ignacio Coronel took part in the smaller committee.¹⁹⁷ Rather than advocating for Ruiz, these Mexican members saw themselves as aligned with the Euro American authorities. By Friday, Los Angeles returned to “its peaceful character” after days of patrolling by the U.S. military and rangers.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ *El Clamor Público*, July 26, 1856; “Proceedings of a Public Meeting,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁹⁶ “Proceedings of a Public Meeting,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁹⁷ “Proceedings of a Public Meeting,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁹⁸ “A Man Killed,” *Los Angeles Star*, July 26, 1856.

While Jenkins and Carriaga both awaited trial, *El Clamor Público* painted Ruiz as a martyr for the Mexican community. Ramírez, however, did not endorse or celebrate the mob violence. Instead, he used the conflict to show how Mexicans were treated as second-class citizens by Euro Americans. Despite being unarmed, the article asserted Ruiz was a “victim of the bloodthirsty ferocity of a public employee.”¹⁹⁹ Moreover, the paper noted that the response fell into two camps: the “Spanish side,” who mobilized in calls for justice; and the authorities of “law and order” who protected Jenkins. The paper’s illustration of these neatly defined oppositions functioned to critique the U.S. justice system. The article subverted the intentions of the mob by strategically, and sarcastically, calling into question the United States’ proclivity to lynch people of color. The Americans, the paper quipped, responded to the mob when “they believed that an attempt was being made to summarily execute the prisoner in the manner they are accustomed to under the famous ‘Lynch law’”²⁰⁰ In doing so, the paper implicitly highlighted the ways in which the balance of power favored violence against a group of people over another. The Committee of Twenty, the paper claimed, “convened and resolutions were adopted with the intention of hypocritically harming the Spanish population.”²⁰¹ The newly formed Committee meant to subdue the mob violence, rather than bring justice to the murder of Ruiz. The article further called attention to how the committee silenced and criminalized the mob. The committee’s resolutions served to “banish the unhappy lot who had committed the crime of

¹⁹⁹ *El Clamor Público*, August 16, 1856.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

asking for justice.”²⁰² Ramírez also expressed disappointment with some members of the Mexican community who voted in favor of the committee. He noted that these “Californios and Mexicans” would have better served their community by staying quiet rather than voting in favor of the group. Ramírez then shifted his tone about the committee. “Fortunately,” he asserted, some appointments “fell on our best citizens and we were saved from a ruin and humiliation unparalleled in any savage or civilized town.”²⁰³ In spite of his earlier critiques, he viewed the inclusion of more prominent Mexicans as a sign of representation in the city’s politics as well as continued hope for the political system.

Ramírez questioned the strategy of the working-class Mexican community who pursued vigilante violence. The paper asserted that the community had gained nothing through this approach and hoped that this would be the last time arms would be taken against the authorities. Nonetheless, their status had “remained the same as it had before.”²⁰⁴ Ramírez utilized the shortcoming of the mob to highlight a more pragmatic, if not idealistic position for the city to undertake. While *El Clamor Público* referred to vigilante violence as a miscalculation, it also acknowledged the difficult situation the city’s Spanish-speaking people faced. The article concluded by calling for the union of the city’s Euro American and Mexican population in the pursuit of law and justice. This “union,” Ramírez suggested, would only be possible if hate between the races did not exist.²⁰⁵ Race, in addition to class, remained a crucial marker that

²⁰² Ibid

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

further drew the boundaries between Mexicans and Euro-Americans in Los Angeles. The use of violence made Mexicans' position more precarious. Ramírez remained committed to more conservative strategies to reclaim their belonging in Los Angeles and within the United States.

Around the same time, the *Los Angeles Star*, an English language paper, ran a series of articles on racism against Mexicans. At first, the paper seriously considered the possibility of biased law enforcement in Los Angeles. If true, they wrote, “a remedy may be applied, and no criminal permitted to escape unwhipt [sic] of justice.”²⁰⁶ The *Star* reviewed the city's prior six-month arrest record of 110 individuals. Of those arrests, 57 Mexicans, eleven californios, and 33 Indians made up the bulk of arrests. In comparison, only seven Euro Americans faced arrest. These numbers, historian Torres-Rouff argues, confirmed Mexicans' complaints that they suffered injustice in Los Angeles.²⁰⁷ The paper, though, downplayed these statistics by pointing to a lack of convictions among these individuals.²⁰⁸ The *Star's* assessment confirmed the same racial regime in Los Angeles that *El Clamor Público* highlighted in its pages. It showed the disproportionate arrest of Los Angeles' Mexican population. Contrary to the paper's claim, Mexicans were the quintessential targets of policing and incarceration.

Five months after the Ruiz incident, the *Star* targeted *El Clamor Público* as contributing to divisions within the Los Angeles community. After the presidential election in 1856, the *Los Angeles Star* published an attack on their Spanish speaking peer, Ramírez, in Spanish. The *Star* accused Ramírez's paper of instigating partisan conflict between Mexicans and “our American

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 122.

²⁰⁷ Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 122-123.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Democratic brothers.”²⁰⁹ It brushed away Ramírez’s efforts and role as the editor of *El Clamor Público* by referring to him as “only a boy.” The *Star* likened the paper’s content to some “evil genius” hidden by a curtain with “diabolic writing.”²¹⁰ This response worked simultaneously to undermine Ramírez’s experience as an editor and questioned his manliness. Historian Gail Bederman argues that white Americans associated manhood and racial dominance in a discourse that conflated whiteness and manliness at the turn-of-the-century.²¹¹ By referring to Ramírez as “only a boy,” the *Star* exposed how the city’s Democratic Party backers often saw most Mexican men as child-like and unable to formulate their own political sensibilities. In this instance, Euro Americans drew on linked ideas about gender and race to undermine Ramírez’s political arguments and mobilization. Ramírez countered their accusations with sarcasm. “We wonder,” he wrote, “how long our brothers will continue to call us ‘greasers,’ a name Democrats have always used for us.”²¹² Ramírez also scoffed at Euro Americans strategic use of Mexican voters when convenient for them. He remarked that Mexicans “serve[ed] as instruments in their own ruin” by supporting the Democratic Party.²¹³ Once their victory was achieved, he concluded, “the brotherhood is over.”²¹⁴ Afterward, he pointed out, Mexicans were left with the “epithet of ‘negros,’ mestizos’” and other racist terms.²¹⁵ Ramírez thus pointed out how Euro Americans

²⁰⁹ *Los Angeles Star*, November 15, 1856; Gray, *A Clamor for Equality*, 43.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4-5

²¹² *Los Angeles Star*, November 15, 1856; Gray, *A Clamor for Equality*, 44.

²¹³ *Los Angeles Star*, November 15, 1856.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

took advantage of Americans for their own political ends. Afterwards, Euro Americans treated them as second-class citizens due to their race.

El Clamor Público advocated for Mexicans to back the Republican Party in the 1856 election as a means of incorporating themselves into the body politic of the United States. This political backing unveils the temporary void in which Mexicans, such as Ramírez, weighed their sense of national belonging. Los Angeles, not Mexico, in Ramírez's eyes became the primary site where Mexicans sought to stake their place. Ramírez's coverage operated within two interrelated nodes. First, he fought for the rights of U.S. citizenship to be afforded to Mexicans of all classes. Second, he countered the racism that Mexicans experienced in Los Angeles after conquest. At times, though, they also took a hemispheric view. In its critique of the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, James Buchanan, the paper focused on his imperial agenda. Buchanan, they asserted, envisioned annexing Cuba from Spain.²¹⁶ If Spain did not surrender the territory, the paper reported that Buchanan proclaimed that "then according to all human or divine law we will be justified in uprooting it from Spain if we have the strength to do so."²¹⁷ Through this example, the article worked to draw parallels between the United States' conquest of California and other Mexican territories with other imperial efforts in Latin America. That, he suggested, confirmed Euro Americans' assumption of superiority over all Latin American people. "Californios," he began, "remember that Democratic newspapers announce[d] to the world that your families are the vilest in the world [...] that would make the devil himself blush

²¹⁶ *El Clamor Público*, October 18, 1856.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

with shame.”²¹⁸ The article also noted Buchanan’s fear that slaves escaped to Mexico, where they supposedly found an equal society. Buchanan, the paper reported, referred to Mexicans disparagingly as a mixed-race nation made up of “Spanish, Indian, and Black” peoples.²¹⁹ By using these examples, Ramírez sought to stir up a response from Mexicans by likening them to other racialized individuals in Los Angeles and across the U.S. Southwest. In this instance, Ramírez’s polemic articulated relational racial scripts which linked the experiences and racialization of the region’s racial groups.²²⁰ Historian Natalia Molina suggests that the racialization of groups is often connected. “Once attitudes, practices, customs, policies and laws are directed at one group,” she argues, “they are more readily available and hence easily applied to other groups.”²²¹ Ramírez revealed this process through his focus on “Greaser laws” that racialized Mexicans. He emphasized that “Greasers” were conflated with a “negro” category.²²² Ramírez also feared how Mexicans had been conflated with Africans and African Americans. Ramírez’s strategy illustrated another avenue of political mobilization that hinged on the rising understanding of race in the United States. In other words, if Mexicans had been racialized akin to “negros” then their future would not be better than the United States’ African slave

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 6-7.

²²² *El Clamor Público*, October 18, 1856.

population. Ultimately, Ramírez sought to arouse fear of their potential racialization as black and aimed to distance Mexicans from Africans and African Americans.²²³

Ramírez took a more urgent tone between 1857 and 1859 after Buchanan won the presidency. An 1857 article entitled “Americanos, Californios!” called attention to the divide between Euro Americans and Mexicans. He noted that these two groups resided within the same republic with guarantees to the “same rights and protection under the law.”²²⁴ He implored some prominent Mexican families and “all former citizens of California” to work towards “uniting the two or more races which form the body of our population.”²²⁵ Ramírez’s request recognized the potential that prominent californios had in advocating for Mexicans of lower class and other races. Likewise, “former citizens” of California likely referred to Euro American settlers who had resided in California during the Mexican period. By calling on their aid, Ramírez hoped to bridge the disconnect between the Mexican masses and the promises of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In her study of language politics in the U.S. Southwest, historian Rosina Lozano deploys the term “treaty citizens” to refer to “former Mexican nationals annexed with California and New Mexico.”²²⁶ In these spaces, she argues, Mexicans repeatedly referred to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as a “sort of amulet” to make claims of citizenship and belonging in their

²²³ For more on Francisco Ramirez’s polarizing discussion of race see José Luis Benavides, “El Clamor Público’s Contradictory Role in the Racial Formation Process in Early California,” *California History* 84, no. 2 (December 2006): 54-66.

²²⁴ *El Clamor Público*, January 31 and February 21, 1857; Saavedra, *Pasadena Before the Roses*, 142.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Rosina Lozano, *An American Language: The History of Spanish in the United States* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2018), 5.

conquered territories.²²⁷ These conquered people, she notes, were central to the erection and stabilization of United States' political institutions. For instance, in California, prominent "treaty citizens" acted as mediators for U.S. officials and the Mexican population. In turn, these figures gained access to politics at the state and local levels that helped retain their status.²²⁸ When Ramírez wrote of the "same rights and protection under the law" for Mexicans he similarly invoked the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.²²⁹ Yet treaty citizens' ability to do so was contingent on notions of class. That is, lower class Mexicans were citizens who could claim the stipulations of the treaty but were unable to enjoy its full potential.

Ramírez and other Mexicans subsequently entertained the idea of escaping the broken promises of life in Los Angeles by creating a new colony across the border in Sonora, Mexico.²³⁰ By looking to Mexico as a potential site of refuge, these colonization plans saw life in the United States filled with violence and subjugation. Jesús Isla and Andrés Pico created repatriation societies in 1855 and 1858, respectively, in response to their marginalization, violence, and land displacement.²³¹ Isla, whom Ramírez called a "native Mexican," formed La Junta para Promover la Emigración de Todos los Hispanos-Americanos Residentes.²³² Its goal, he shared, "was to

²²⁷ Lozano, *An American Language*, 5.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-52

²²⁹ *El Clamor Público*, January 31 and February 21, 1857; Saavedra, *Pasadena Before the Roses*, 142.

²³⁰ *El Clamor Público*, February 16, 1856; May 10, 1856; May 17, 1856; October 28, 1858; and November 13, 1858.

²³¹ José Angel Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century: A History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 150-151.

²³² *El Clamor Público*, May 10, 1865; Quoted in Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century*, 151.

escape the inhospitable social and economic climate of Anglo-American dominated California.”²³³ When Ramírez referred to Islas as a “Native Mexican” he likely did so as a reference to his family’s roots in the Spanish and Mexican periods. Islas relied on Spanish newspapers in California, such as *El Clamor Público*, to recruit Mexicans and other Spanish-speaking peoples, such as Chilenos and Peruanos. In these efforts, Islas referred to notions of class by promoting increased economic opportunities in Sonora beyond agricultural work. In addition, Islas juxtaposed the “barbarous Apache” of the frontier with potential repatriates “trained by contact with the Saxon race” who could control them.²³⁴ While the repatriation projects were seen by organizers as uplift for Mexicans, they also brought the racist understandings with them exacerbated after U.S. conquest. If Mexicans served as the racial “other” in Los Angeles, Indians, symbolized similar in Sonora. Moreover, although Mexicans were subjugated by Euro Americans in the United States, they could bring that political system to Mexico and elevate themselves to an elite status. Isla’s contrasted life in the United States with Mexico by suggesting that Mexican repatriates could make themselves the dominant power in Sonora. By 1865, Islas succeeded in recruiting over 300 individuals to Saric, Sonora. Others waited in Los Angeles to gather enough funds to make the trek to the colony.²³⁵ The initial founding of the colony was reportedly a success, but later ran into trouble with the central Mexican government.²³⁶

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization*, 152-154.

²³⁵ Ibid., 155.

²³⁶ Ibid.

Mexican critics of repatriation projects and other colonization plans pointed to the Mexican government's failure to protect them from U.S. conquest and the continued threat of "barbarous Indians."²³⁷ Moreover, they also emphasized the puzzling possibility of returning to a country that had abandoned them after the U.S-Mexico War. Distrust of Mexico's central government prevented some potential repatriates from even entertaining the idea of a Sonoran colony. In May 1856, one critic wrote *El Clamor Público* a letter about the colonization plans.²³⁸ The author wished "them safe passage and [hoped] that Mexico will help them in a satisfactory manner" despite the Mexican government's unruliness. The critic shifted their critique to staking Mexicans' place of belonging in Los Angeles:

The only advantage that these settlers have is that they go to their land and if they see that they are not fulfilled they will remain among their families, or they will go as soldiers to join one of the many chiefs that at every moment are pronounced; But keep in mind that the lion is not as fierce as it is painted; California and mainly the district of Los Angeles has been the asylum [asilo] of the inhabitants of Sonora and has been the place where they have found good salaries, hospitality and positive enjoyment, which should not be forgotten."²³⁹

The critic highlighted the opposite of the colonization projects and asserted that Los Angeles remained a refuge for Mexicans. Moreover, it harkened back to when Sonorans migrated to Los Angeles in the late-eighteenth century. Despite U.S. conquest, the author said, Los Angeles remained the rightful home for its Mexican population where they had a history and enjoyed

²³⁷ Sonora," *El Clamor Público*, December 13, 1856, quoted and cited in Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization*, 155.

²³⁸ "Mas Sobre la Emigración a Sonora," *El Clamor Público*, May 17, 1856, quoted and cited in Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization*, 156.

²³⁹ Ibid.

privileges since its founding. Returning to Sonora, they implied, would only bring despair.

Ramírez countered that Los Angeles was no longer a Mexican place. “It is true that the Mexican government,” he acknowledged, “was not perfectly consolidated.”²⁴⁰ Nonetheless, he argued that Mexico remained an additional outlet for the city’s Mexican population:

Men who leave a foreign country, where they are badly seen and worse treated, to go to their native land where their wives, daughters, and sisters live; where the houses in which they were born exist; where their language, their customs, their hopes, their wishful thinking are; where, in short, they will enjoy the rights of a free citizen.²⁴¹

Sonora, he concluded, seemed to provide more advantages than residing in Los Angeles.

Ramírez painted Mexico as a nation where Mexicans were treated as full citizens. He also asserted that claiming California as an asylum was “not worth answering because facts speak louder than words.”²⁴² He pointed to “native californios” who betrayed their Mexican brothers and worsened their conditions.²⁴³ Ramírez concluded the article by posing a rhetorical question to the critic, “Are the californios as happy now as they were when they belonged to the Mexican Republic, despite all their revolutions and changes of government?”²⁴⁴

Historian José Angel Hernández suggests that reparation projects “were a direct response to government inaction” on both sides of the border. They became a “proverbial ‘third way’ out

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

of this particular condition in postwar California.”²⁴⁵ Islas’s society represented an escape with a possibility of an improved future. For instance, after the demise of *El Clamor Público* in 1859, Ramírez visited Sonora’s many Mexican colonies over a period of two years. He continued to follow politics in Los Angeles as editor of *La Estrella de Occidente*. In 1861, he returned to Los Angeles when the Republican Party appeared to have gained some momentum which he thought could bring improved status for Mexicans.²⁴⁶ Like colonization projects, Ramírez’s *El Clamor Público* represented an additional strategy with different goals for Mexicans to stake their place in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through an emphasis on United States politics and enfranchisement. While Ramírez promoted colonization plans, he also suggested other strategies to aid Mexicans in Los Angeles in the late-1850s, like voting Republican. As Los Angeles’s first Spanish newspaper, *El Clamor Público* represented and articulated one active political voice for Mexican in the early years after U.S. conquest. Moreover, the paper warned about imminent dangers that Mexicans faced under the United States. It also tended to endorse a fairly conservative strategy of fighting those dangers.

Negotiating Cultural Politics through U.S. Party Politics

In 1860, Enrique Avila, a member of the prominent Avila family in Los Angeles, wrote a letter to Antonio María Pico, a California politician in San Jose. Avila, a self-proclaimed “native of Los Angeles,” declared to have shared “the same interests that my fellow countrymen

²⁴⁵ Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization*, 156; For another discussion on colonization plans see Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios*, 210-213.

²⁴⁶ Gray, *A Clamor for Equality*, 69-82.

possess.”²⁴⁷ Avila wrote Pico as a representative of Los Angeles’s Mexican community in the debate between the Democratic and Republican Parties. Avila acknowledged Pico’s claim that “native Californians” had suffered greatly after the U.S.-Mexico War. “But justice obliges me to say,” he wrote, “that this must be attributed more to the effect of the tumultuous and disorderly classes of population which the great abundance of gold attracted here, than to the laws and desires of the American Government.”²⁴⁸ The introduction of new populations, not the U.S. government, Avila argued, negatively affected the Mexican community more than institutional racism. As such, Avila wrote that he would not support Pico and his backing of the Republican Party. He also sought to salvage the promises of U.S. citizenship by scapegoating working-class migrants rather than the U.S. government. Despite being outnumbered by Euro Americans in Los Angeles, Avila claimed that both they and Mexicans lived “together peacefully” and in “good relations.” He believed that this unity and cooperation would “mutually overcome our worries.”²⁴⁹ This would not have been possible, he asserted, “without the aid of our fellow Americans” in the Democratic Party. Moreover, he reminded Pico that Los Angeles remained “highly Democratic; and we Californians here have almost invariably sustained that ballot.”²⁵⁰ Avila ultimately painted his elite compatriots and himself as an example that other Mexicans could emulate through the support of the Democratic Party.

²⁴⁷ Letter from Enrique Abila to Antonio María Pico (#66), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

In later parts of the letter, Avila shifted his critique to issues of land and race. He countered Pico's assertion that the Democrats were responsible for the displacement of Mexicans from their land. After U.S. conquest, Mexicans had to prove their land claims to the U.S. government. In 1851, the California Land Grant Act stipulated that Mexicans could retain their land by applying for a land title and supplying proof of their claims.²⁵¹ Mexicans and Euro Americans filed eight hundred claims in response. Although three-quarters successfully obtained land titles, the court process often left Mexicans, including elite californios, bankrupt.²⁵² Avila made two claims. First, he acknowledged the hardships that some had suffered from the land act. He reminded Pico, though, that the "law that formed the Land Commission was signed by Millard Fillmore, who was a Whig and Know-Nothing and not a Democrat."²⁵³ Second, Avila claimed that the law meant to differentiate between "legitimate" and "false" land claims. He wrote to Pico that Manuel Requena, Alejandro Bell, and Abel Stearns, prominent Republicans, spread rumors of false land titles in Los Angeles. "My countrymen," he proclaimed, "should keep that in mind, and hold accountable the real people and parties."²⁵⁴ Like Ramírez's backing of the Republicans, Avila firmly believed that the Democrats presented the best option for Mexicans. It was true, he acknowledged, that Mexicans were losing their land. He, though, felt blame should be placed elsewhere and taken into consideration when supporting a political party in the U.S.

²⁵¹ Faragher, *California*, 192-193.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Letter from Enrique Abila to Antonio María Pico, SCWHR.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

The letter concluded with a discussion of race in Los Angeles. Avila wondered about the Republican Party's preoccupation with slavery. He attempted to paint the discussion of African Americans as irrelevant to California. Yet, his own comparison of them to Indians belied such a claim. Avila reflected on the region's mission period where Indians were supposedly "contented and happy, sober and industrious" and "instructed in religion, and taught virtue and work" by their "venerable fathers."²⁵⁵ He critiqued abolitionists by claiming that they sought to do for Africans what the Mexican government had done through the secularization of the mission system. Avila viewed the liberation of African Americans as dangerous to U.S. society. Secularization, he argued, did not liberate Indians as the law intended. Rather, he claimed that they reverted to "vice," and they did not contribute to society. Avila contended that "a party was raised [...] talking about humanity and how bad it was to keep the Indians in bondage." He asked, "and what was the result?" Avila viciously claimed that:

The Indian became a drunken animal working, just to get enough liquor, to get drunk; the Indians became prostituted women--the bane of the society. And this is what you wish to do with the blacks, to take them away from the state in which they are, happy and useful to man, and degrade them like the Indians of California!"²⁵⁶

Avila strengthened his case for Mexican support of the Democratic Party by juxtaposing Mexican identity with Indigenous groups. Other prominent californios endorsed the letter including Cristobal Aguilar, Vincente Lugo, Julian Chaves, Ignacio del Valle, Antonio F.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

Coronel, and Diego Sepulveda in 1860. It was reprinted for the public on October 18 of the same year with the “hope that its contents will be adopted by all of California.”²⁵⁷

Avila’s letter exposed a fear that political and social structures relied on a claim that unfree labor would be undermined in Los Angeles. Support for the Democratic Party’s slave platform suggested a way to keep open the option of slavery in Los Angeles. In his critical study of whiteness, historian David Roediger asserts that “chattel slavery provided white workers with a touchstone against which to weigh their fears and a yardstick to measure their reassurance.”²⁵⁸ Indeed, these individuals were not working-class, but their strategy looked the same. Although California was admitted as a free-state and banned African slavery, its constitution left other forms of unfree labor, such as peonage, intact. Like other parts of the Southwest, California transitioned Indian slavery into debt peonage by the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵⁹ This transition, historian William S. Kiser argues, “provided the perfect complement to the preexisting regime of Indian slavery, and it bolstered the labor force in a province experiencing gradual economic and demographic expansion.”²⁶⁰ By the early 1860s, the time of the letter’s publication, lawmakers moved to disrupt the peonage system and succeeded in 1863.²⁶¹ By reprinting the letter for the public in 1860, however, these Mexican political figures sought to dissuade the Mexican

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 3rd ed. (New York: Verso Books, 2007), 66.

²⁵⁹ William S. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery: The Struggle over Captivity and Peonage in the American Southwest* (Philadelphia: University of Penn Press, 2017), 120.

²⁶⁰ Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*, 11-14.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 141, 151.

community from supporting abolition. The letter's content and debate thus represented one of two paths that Mexicans could choose to undertake. They could support the Republican Party and risk another supposed negative outcome or support the Democrats to sustain the racial status quo which they believed benefited Mexicans.

Leaders of the Democratic Party also responded to Antonio María Pico. In a proclamation addressed to "los hijos del pais," the party focused on land ownership and race relations in the northern and southern parts of the United States. Their statement warned that the Republican Party's anti-slavery position would contribute to further turmoil in the United States. They painted the Republican's platform as lying to the public. "The facts also prove," they claimed, "that in the North these philanthropic ideas are nothing more than a hypocritical veil to deceive the world." They accused the Republicans, despite their support for abolition, of continuing to import slaves from Africa.²⁶² The Democrats, the proclamation claimed, had a "squadron on the coast of Africa to prevent this odious traffic."²⁶³ The political document warped the U.S. national discussion over slavery for California Mexicans. By arguing that the North subjugated Africans, it tried to veil the violent realities of slavery in the South. "The history of the republics," they claimed, "teaches us the horrors committed in the name of liberty." Earlier in the document they claimed that "free blacks" were worse for society than the "moral and superior" blacks of the South. In doing so, they pointed to Haiti and Jamaica as dangerous examples of black liberation.²⁶⁴ In short, it sought to convince readers of the benefits of the plantation system. To

²⁶² "A Los Hijos del País" (#67), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

support this point, it claimed that rancharo society in California mimicked the plantation system in form and function:

In the south the planters occupy a position very similar to that of the ranchers of California; they have land in large divisions in which the father of the family as head has everything in his name; and the possession of such land is employed in the North to excite the hatred of the landless against those of the south, as here in California the same landless observe the same conduct as the ranchers.²⁶⁵

Their argument rested on the supposed relation between the two regions. It encouraged Mexicans to ignore the rhetoric of the Republican Party to retain the status quo. In doing so, it would avoid California becoming “a desert next to a garden” like the emancipated black republic of Haiti.²⁶⁶

The proclamation argued that the states of the South, like California, “have been formed from territories that formerly belonged to the Spaniards.”²⁶⁷ This comparison, however, was merely meant to support the similarities between the rancharo and plantation system. Moreover, it utilized these comparisons to laud the notion of “popular sovereignty” and protection of private property.²⁶⁸ Finally, the proclamation attempted to influence Mexican voters by claiming that they would benefit from a linked railroad system to the south. “If the Republicans come to power,” it warned, “the iron road will be built to the north to benefit the interests of these states, supporters of Lincoln.”²⁶⁹ The political proclamation attempted to link the South and California

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

metaphorically and spatially. By linking the supposed shared relations between the two regions, they implied that Republicans would threaten the foundations of California society. Supporting the Democrats, in contrast, would ultimately bring progress through railroads and the continuation of a society founded in the Spanish period.

Such political propaganda was common in Los Angeles during the early 1860s. Democrats attempted to recruit Mexicans through proclamations printed in Spanish. On another occasion, “a citizen” called on californios to “read and reflect” on the dangers of the Republicans after the 1860 election.²⁷⁰ In what would become a routine strategy, such statements claimed that their adversaries would wage war in the United States and raise taxes. To arouse even more hysteria, they claimed that an appraiser appointed by Abraham Lincoln would invade their homes. After likening Lincoln to a power-hungry dictator, this statement included Mexicans as part of the nation’s body politic. They implored them to choose a side between “good” and “evil” defined by the Republicans and Democrats, respectively.²⁷¹ While such reductionist claims within partisan politics should not be surprising, it is quite telling how they recruited landowning Mexicans. Moreover, the statement also neglected to include any discussion about slavery. Instead, it merely implored for the “restoration of peace” and resistance against “these ruinous taxes.”²⁷² As potential Democratic allies, these Mexicans supposedly had an opportunity to either retain or elevate their social status in exchange for their votes.

²⁷⁰ “Californios, Leed, Leed, y Reflecionad!” (#287) Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

This political campaigning signaled Southerners' visions of California as a battleground over slavery and political power. In the previous decade, proslavery Southerners often tried to infiltrate Mexican territory through filibustering schemes.²⁷³ George Fitzhugh, a proslavery intellectual, justified these schemes as a sort of moral imperialism.²⁷⁴ The schemes, historian William S. Kiser notes, sought to counter abolitionists "by imposing a Southern empire of slavery in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and beyond."²⁷⁵ Moreover, the broader region acted as a prime opportunity to incorporate parts of Mexico into a potential slave empire. For instance, Dan Showalter, a California legislator, sought to extend the hegemony of the South in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands by supporting the Confederate's success and pro-slavery agenda.²⁷⁶ Led by white Southerners, the Democrats sought to use Mexicans for their purposes.

Even as late as 1880, Democrats continued to warn about corruption and oppression by the Republicans. They blamed the party for the "deplorable" Civil War. In contrast, the Democrats referred to themselves as the "people's party" who advocated for the working class, as well as their beliefs, customs, and traditions.²⁷⁷ As evidence of this supposed egalitarianism, the proclamation cited the U.S-Mexico War as a sign of solidarity with Mexicans. "Let us examine the first Americans who invaded the Mexican republic," they wrote, "and we shall see"

²⁷³ William S. Kiser, *Illusions of Empire: The Civil War and Reconstruction in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Philadelphia: University of Penn Press, 2022), 25-27.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Kiser, *Illusions of Empire*, 25.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 37, 100-103.

²⁷⁷ "A Los Hispano-Americanos: Residentes en el Estado de California" (#196), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

they were Republican. They pointed to invasions in California in previous decades by Thomas ap Catesby Jones and John C. Frémont under the “piratical bear flag” as key examples of Republican threats.²⁷⁸

Likewise, despite earlier claims as the “people’s party,” they also perpetuated xenophobic rhetoric against California’s Chinese immigrants by eschewing their immigration to the state. By pointing to the Chinese “problem,” people who “absorb work and render useless the occupation of our industrious people,” the party utilized racism and labor as a point of recruitment for Mexican voters.²⁷⁹ “This social moth,” they continued, “this dismal swarm to the well-being and occupation of our people was invited by” the Republican Party “to invade our soil.”²⁸⁰ By racializing Chinese laborers as a threat to the social and political structure of California, the statement sought to arouse hysteria among Mexicans. The supposed invasion of the Chinese on “our soil,” the statement argued, threatened the freedom of California and its citizens. They concluded that the Democrats would “stop the Chinese invasion” while also offering “freedom, and the independence of suffrage, the basis of freedom of the people.”²⁸¹

By including Mexicans as victims of this supposed Chinese menace, the Democrats strategically positioned them as beneficiaries of their exclusionary policies. After the Civil War, both Democratic and Republican leaders worked persistently to restrict Chinese immigration and labor in the United States. During this process, however, Democrats used racial and gender

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

categories to argue for the supposed impossibility of assimilation of Chinese laborers. They claimed that “coolie slaves” inherently lacked the qualities of a republican citizen due to their unmanliness.²⁸² To enfranchise them, they asserted, would thus supplant gender and racial roles in the U.S.²⁸³ First taking credit for leading the charge in Chinese exclusion, the proclamation concluded that they would fulfill promises of “individual freedom and independence of suffrage” should Mexicans vote in favor the for the Democratic Party.²⁸⁴ Likewise, Democrats centered these discussions as a threat to whiteness in California, a social category that Mexicans had mixed access to. In 1862, they proposed and passed the Act to Protect Free White Labor against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor, and to Discourage the Immigration of Chinese into the State of California. The act essentially placed a monthly tax on Chinese laborers and placed that burden on the employers who hired them.²⁸⁵ Historian Stacey Smith argues that the act pitted white labor and Chinese labor in direct competition with each other and that the former needed protection.²⁸⁶

Such racial rhetoric appeared to have played a large role in Antonio F. Coronel’s political inclinations. As a teen, Coronel arrived with his family in California as part of the Híjar-Padrés Colony in 1834. Led by José Maria Híjar, a civil leader, and José María Padrés, a military

²⁸² Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 207-217.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ “A Los Hispano-Americanos: Residentes en el Estado de California” (#196), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

²⁸⁵ Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 195-196.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

commander, the colony aimed to strengthen Alta California's ties to Mexico with colonization during secularization.²⁸⁷ After the failure of the colony, as well as conflict between Monterrey and Southern California, the Coronels settled in Los Angeles by 1838.²⁸⁸ In subsequent decades, Coronel served in various political positions during both the Mexican and U.S. periods. Through the 1850s, Coronel regularly served on Los Angeles's Common Council and was listed as an electoral representative for Democrat John C. Breckenridge.²⁸⁹ In 1867, Coronel endorsed Henry Huntley Haight for governor of California. Haight, the Democratic nominee, used an anti-Chinese platform to critique the Union and Republican Party. He argued that toleration of Chinese immigration and servitude would lead to a new electoral base. Even worse, it would lead to the enslavement of white men. By curtailing Chinese immigration and labor, he reasoned, then white slavery could be evaded and their exclusive rights to citizenship protected.²⁹⁰ Coronel emphasized the "Chinese problem" to his Spanish-speaking audience. Coronel sought to raise fears by referring to Republicans as "radicals" who had perpetuated "dictators" and "traitors" in California and the United States. "The radicals," claimed Coronel, "have made a reciprocal treaty with the Celestial Empire" that gave Chinese immigrants "the right to come to this country and get all the benefits" of citizenship.²⁹¹ Moreover, he continued, they would continue to endorse

²⁸⁷ Antonio F. Coronel, *Tales of California* (Bellerophen Books: Santa Barbara, CA 1994), 12-13.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

²⁸⁹ Notification of Election (#35A-C) and "A Los Hijos de Pais" (#67), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

²⁹⁰ Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 210.

²⁹¹ Antonio F. Coronel Speech (#247), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

citizenship for individuals of any nationality, race, or color.²⁹² By pointing to the supposed onslaught of naturalization by Chinese immigrants, Coronel utilized terms of inclusion and exclusion for Mexicans that hinged on access to U.S. citizenship and xenophobia.

These Democratic proclamations also diverged from a larger pattern during this period which sought to diminish the use of Spanish in the U.S. Southwest. At the 1849 state constitutional convention, Pablo Noriega de la Guerra, a californio politician, advocated for governance under two languages.²⁹³ This position did not signal his political inclinations, but instead reflected the need for Mexicans to understand their new government at the state and local level. De la Guerra succeeded in ensuring Spanish translations of the law within the California constitution.²⁹⁴ Thirty years later, however, California's Second Constitutional Convention convened without any californio or Spanish-speaking representatives.²⁹⁵ In their absence, the guarantees of Spanish translations were dismantled by nativists who had sought to make English the sole language of the state.²⁹⁶ The absence of Mexicans at the convention also provided cause for alarm for their deteriorating social standing. Coronel called the elimination of Spanish translations an injustice. He emphasized its importance to the state's market and social relations.²⁹⁷ In other words, he suggested that the erasure of Spanish would disrupt the social structure Mexicans had become accustomed to in the nineteenth century. The timing of the

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Lozano, *An American Language*, 42-46

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 40-46.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 62-64.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 62-64.

²⁹⁷ Antonio F. Coronel letter (#238), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

Democratic Party's Spanish proclamations in the 1860s reveals the extent to which they understood the importance of language in recruiting Mexicans and other Spanish-speakers. The Democrat's xenophobic rhetoric and Republican scapegoating likely appeared as an attractive and pragmatic opportunity in a changing society for some Mexicans.

If racism and xenophobia enabled elite conservative individuals such as Sepúlveda, Coronel, and other prominent Mexicans to define themselves in relation to race and class, then their insertion into Democratic politics also unveils other notions of power they pursued. A speech by Coronel around 1869 demonstrates the ways in which he linked local and national politics. Coronel again emphasized the supposedly enormous threat of Chinese immigration against U.S. citizens.²⁹⁸ In other parts of the speech, however, Coronel traced how the national divide, as defined by party politics, threatened Los Angeles. "Everyone knows," he asserted, that the Civil War occurred because "the radicals wanted to give liberation to the blacks." Coronel went even further to suggest that Republican radicals had sought to destroy the Southern states' power by targeting "its great elements and wealth."²⁹⁹ Coronel did not envision the Civil War as a battle of liberation. Instead, it was one that targeted the elite class in the South to curb their power. Indeed, after the South had been left in "total ruin," he continued, "the radicals have not wanted to admit them another time to the Union" as a form of punishment.³⁰⁰ Coronel's speech did not focus on Los Angeles, but on larger national debates in the United States. This focus put these debates front and center for the city's Spanish-speaking people to show how Los Angeles

²⁹⁸ Antonio F. Coronel Speech (#251), Antonio F. Coronel (1817-1894) Papers, SCWHR.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

might be affected. In other words, he utilized the threats of the “radical” Republican party to show how elements and wealth of California’s elites were threatened and would be undermined like white southerners. Coronel’s fear thus sought to align Los Angeles’s politics within the regional landscape of the nation between North and South.

Conclusion

On November 18, 1887, Dr. J.P McFarland, a former Democratic representative in Los Angeles, reflected on the city’s history from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. McFarland resided in Los Angeles from 1850 to 1861 as a representative of multiple Southern California counties.

This is my first visit here since 1861, and though I had heard how marvelously Los Angeles had grown,” he stated, “I must confess that I was astonished on my arrival the other day. When I left here it was a regular adobe town, and now there are business blocks and residences that would do credit to any city in the United States.³⁰¹

In his reflection, he continued by describing mid-nineteenth century Los Angeles as a “frontier town” populated with Mexicans in which “turbulence and lawlessness ran riot.” In 1887, McFarland noted that many prominent “old time” residents remained in Los Angeles, like the Pico, Del Valle, and Sepúlveda families.³⁰² In his eyes, Los Angeles had achieved progress as an American city through its spatial and social makeup. Like other Euro-Americans, he equated adobe structures with a distant, Mexican past. Adobe, as historian William Deverell succinctly

³⁰¹ “Dr. McFarland Talks of Thirty Years Ago,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 18, 1887.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

states, “stood for the past, a dark-skinned past at that, even a different epoch.”³⁰³ Despite its utility, the material’s racialization harkened back to a time in which Los Angeles remained inhabited by Mexican people. Brick, in contrast, symbolized progress and the erasure of the Mexican past through an Anglo future.³⁰⁴

Mexicans during the mid-to-late nineteenth century undertook identity choices to make sense of the Los Angeles’s transition. Conservative Mexicans interpreted this transition through a negotiation and articulation of politics that they believed best suited them after conquest. Their choices invoked their U.S. citizenship to counter and evade their marginalization while also seeking to keep their power. In other words, they made attempts to eschew a status as the “prohibited and forbidden” as Los Angeles continued to grow with the influx of Euro Americans. Los Angeles and Mexicans were undoubtedly in transition during the nineteenth-century. Some Mexicans envisioned political participation as either Republican or Democratic as a means of negotiation and survival in a city that they called home during the nineteenth century. Likewise, their identity and political choices during the U.S. period also articulated their understandings of empire, race, and class which were grounded from the city’s Mexican period. Los Angeles remained a Mexican place, though they adapted to their changing place in the city. The Mexican reader’s question about conquest in the opening of this chapter signaled an effort to understand the immense social and political change in the nineteenth century.³⁰⁵ Their inquiry, however,

³⁰³ William Deverell, *White-Washed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 133.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁰⁵ “Mexico no Vendio a los Californios,” *Dos Repúblicas*, July 29, 1893.

focused on the role the central government in Mexico had in Los Angeles's conquest. It did not consider the role that leading figures had in the period after conquest. The political activities, such as those of Francisco P. Ramírez, Antonio F. Coronel and others, sought to pursue personal ambition by promoting their own political agendas. Yet the increasing racialization of Mexicans undermined many of their political positions by century's end. As McFarland observed, the city had completely transformed. This change, though, would be disrupted by the arrival of the Revolutionary Generation in the early-twentieth century. Mexican Los Angeles grew as a new generation of Mexican migrants and exiles arrived with a new range of political ambitions rooted in Mexico.

CHAPTER TWO

The Mobilization of the Revolutionary Generation in Los Angeles during the Mexican Revolution

In May 1893, Ygnacio Francisco de la Cruz García, a resident of Sonoratown, claimed to be 112 years old. He offered the *Los Angeles Herald* proof with his baptismal certificate dated May 4, 1781. According to the document, de la Cruz García was anointed by Fray José Pico at the San José de Gracia Catholic Church. The legitimate son of José García and Mariana González, who were described as “Spanish people,” the newspaper authenticated the certificate as accurate.¹ Although de la Cruz García’s memory waned, he described his journey to Los Angeles to the *Herald*. Born in Hermosillo, Sonora, he first worked on his father’s farm. He later served as a cavalryman against Apaches and Yaquis in the borderlands. After learning many trades, de la Cruz García ventured to Los Angeles where he married three times and claimed four “legitimate” children and possibly nineteen “contrabands.”² Undoubtedly the *Los Angeles Herald* exoticized the supposed 112-year-old through his miraculous age and life. More significantly, it utilized his story as a romantic relic of a supposedly distant Spanish and Mexican past. Though de la Cruz García claimed to have been of “Castilian” descent, the paper surmised that he “was evidently a mestizo” with hair “snowy white, eyes deep blue, and complexion

¹ “One Hundred and Twelve,” *Los Angeles Herald*, May 9, 1893.

² Ibid.

swarthy.”³ He credited the “medicine of the women,” an undisclosed remedy, for reaching his age. The *Herald* also noted that he did not consume alcohol or nicotine, “what is singular for a Mexican.”⁴ The paper’s coverage of de la Cruz García’s “long career” worked to provide a form of spectacle about the city’s supposedly fading Spanish and Mexican past.

Around the same time, in the 1890s, Euro Americans began to organize a festival to celebrate and promote the city’s growth in the late-nineteenth century. On February 18, 1894, the *Los Angeles Herald* announced La Fiesta de Los Angeles. This “splendid carnival,” the organizers promised, would reflect the spirit that had made the city the “second commercial metropolis of the Pacific coast.”⁵ Indeed, as more details of the spectacle came to fruition, organizers continued to make Los Angeles a tourist destination with a world-renowned celebration.⁶ Yet, they did not envision promoting the city in isolation. The paper reminded readers that the festival would celebrate both Los Angeles and Southern California as a whole.⁷ On one hand, this served to encourage the cooperation of cities, such as San Diego and Santa Barbara, to fund the grand festival. On another, it revealed the implicit process of positioning Los Angeles as the central urban site that connected Southern California’s other towns and cities.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “La Fiesta de Los Angeles, The Merchant’s Association’s Projected Carnival,” *Los Angeles Herald*, February 18, 1894. (California Newspaper Database)

⁶ “La Fiesta de Los Angeles, Latest Arrangements for the Great Festival,” *Los Angeles Herald*, March 18, 1894. (California Newspaper Database)

⁷ Ibid.

Los Angeles, boosters hoped, would become the social, economic, and political center of the region.

Both moments highlighted the process by which Euro Americans simultaneously erased and romanticized the Spanish and Mexican past of Los Angeles. The celebration made de la Cruz García literally the last remnant of “old” Los Angeles through his miraculous age. As a 112-year-old, his inevitable death implicitly marked the end of that era. “On almost any warm, sunny day,” the *Herald* reported, de la Cruz García’s “bent form can be seen [...] as he takes his constitutional walk with a feeble gate.”⁸ La Fiesta would package the region’s Spanish and Mexican history into a curated celebration of Los Angeles’s past which emphasized its modernization during the United States’ conquest and settler colonialism. The complex developments of Los Angeles, and the efforts of some Mexicans to claim their place within the pueblo had discursively been displaced onto an alleged by-gone era by Euro-Americans. While Euro-Americans worked to build Los Angeles to their designs, however, the city also experienced an influx of Mexicans at the turn of the century due to the Mexican Revolution.

This chapter focuses on the arrival of the Revolutionary diaspora which strengthened political, cultural, and social links between Los Angeles and Mexico. This diaspora brought with them their own set of ideas and politics about the Revolution which they debated and articulated in Los Angeles. In his study of Mexican Los Angeles in this period, historian Douglas Monroy highlights how Mexicans created a “México de Afuera.”⁹ He claims that Mexican migrants

⁸ “One Hundred and Twelve,” *Los Angeles Herald*, May 9, 1893.

⁹ Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 4.

“understood themselves to be reestablishing Mexican communities in the new land.”¹⁰ In other words, they sought to recreate their lives in Mexico in the United States. While I agree with Monroy’s contention, I also suggest these communities contributed to an even stronger relationship between Los Angeles and Mexico than previously existed. Mexicans in the nineteenth century crafted their politics with an understanding of Los Angeles as their home. The Revolutionary Generation, in contrast, relied more on the developments in Mexico to articulate their politics while in Los Angeles. Mexico, not the United States, continued to be their homeland in most of their minds.

As this chapter will explore, Euro-Americans attempted to celebrate the city’s whiteness by relegating the bygone era of the Mexican past. The influx of the Revolutionary Generation challenged that belief. They introduced a new set of ideas and debates to Mexican Los Angeles that differed from the previous period. This chapter focuses on the establishment of La Fiesta de Los Angeles to show the existing social, racial, and political categories Mexicans encountered at the turn of the century. Thereafter, I shift my focus to the relationship between Los Angeles and Mexico in the imagination of Mexican exiles. Both became inextricably linked thereby keeping Los Angeles a Mexican place.¹¹ After setting this context, the chapter highlights some perspectives from mostly conservative Mexicans who utilized Los Angeles as a site of refuge for their politics and their ideas of Mexico. The chapter focuses on three case studies: the

¹⁰ Monroy, *Rebirth*, 38.

¹¹ Historian Jessica Kim argues that Mexican resources helped urbanize Los Angeles from a small town. In that process she designates Los Angeles as a “borderlands city” that acts as a “portal to the growth of American capitalism and empire building south of the border.” In *Imperial Metropolis: Los Angeles, Mexico, and the Borderlands of American Empire, 1865-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 6-7.

mobilization of the magónistas, an anarchist group led by Enrique Flores Magón and Ricardo Flores Magón, in Los Angeles; José Maria Maytorena, the former governor of Sonora who resided in Los Angeles during his exile; and the Estrada Rebellion, the mobilization of a small-Mexican “army” which sought to invade Baja California from Los Angeles. Many Mexican Americans in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century looked for ways to utilize the promises of United States citizenship through party politics. Some in the Revolutionary diaspora, however, grounded their politics within Mexico during the Revolution. These case studies, of course, do not represent all the Revolutionary diaspora. They do, however, show that ideas about being Mexican varied based on one’s political view of the Mexican Revolution.

Romanticizing the Mexican Past

La Fiesta de Los Angeles was rooted in the city’s social and economic history in the nineteenth century. In the 1880s, the city experienced a great boom with the arrival of the railroad and an expanded economic market.¹² Those same developments, however, extended across the American West. It created immense competition among regional markets. The next decade represented an important juncture in Los Angeles’s history with equal potential and danger to the city’s future.¹³ To address the depression in 1893, local merchants, boosters, and Chamber of Commerce members collectively strategized to promote Los Angeles. During that year they formed the Merchants Association, later renamed to the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, “to devise ways and means for alleviating the economic ills of the city.”¹⁴ Taking

¹² Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 53.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Quoted in Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 261; Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 52-53.

inspiration from local and national pageants, such as the World's Fair or San Francisco's Mid-Winter Fair, the organization created La Fiesta as a local history shown through spectacle.¹⁵ They hoped it would promote the economic development of Los Angeles through tourism.¹⁶

The first La Fiesta took place in April 1894 and eventually became a larger spectacle in subsequent years. It contained two contradictory strands of how Euro Americans racialized Mexican Americans. They celebrated some features of the Mexican past to illustrate Euro American control and conquest in the region. By fusing boosterism with history, though, leaders of the festival also sought to paint Los Angeles and Southern California, more broadly, as "an American place." In its inaugural year, organizers hoped that the event would become one of the most recognized annual parades in the world.¹⁷ They also sought to center Los Angeles as the major urban site of Southern California, though they acknowledged Santa Barbara and San Diego as well. They called for their support and participation to collectively contribute to the promotion of Southern California.¹⁸

White boosters planned many themed events over the festival's week. A historical day, focused on floats for each epoch of Los Angeles's history dating back to the Spanish conquest. This neatly curated teleological narrative ended with U.S. conquest. Organizers encouraged participation by Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Chinese Americans to provide

¹⁵ Torres-Rouff asserts that La Fiesta's organizers were deeply influenced by the successes of World's Exposition in Chicago and San Francisco's Midwinter Fair in *Before L.A.*, 261-262; *Los Angeles Herald*, April 17, 1895.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ "La Fiesta de Los Angeles: Latest Arrangements for the Great Festival," *Los Angeles Herald*, March 18, 1894

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

white onlookers a “chance to comingle with and study multitudes of their fellow creatures.”¹⁹ This inclusion functioned to provide an exotic element to Los Angeles contained by the city’s conquest by Euro Americans. A year later, the *Los Angeles Herald* described the “elaborate parade” through progress which showed “the change of flags.”²⁰ The presence of “foreign societies” reified the status of white participants and observers to show “the boom and the boomers, the solid prosperity, and finally the various business houses of the city.”²¹

Mexicans remained central to La Fiesta’s historical performance and narrative. Rather than being depicted as a prominent group in modern Los Angeles, though, they represented an idealized remnant of a past. Like the *Herald*, organizers deployed Ygnacio Francisco de la Cruz García, now supposedly 115 years old, as a prop for festivalgoers to observe in 1896.²² Such use of Mexican figures reflected a larger pattern of what historian Jay Cook calls “artful deception” in the rise of nineteenth-century U.S. popular culture.²³ This process involved a “calculated intermixing of the genuine and the fake” to provide a moment of disbelief through a narrative. This potential illusion challenged audiences in a self-reflective exercise on whether what they were seeing was true. Cook suggests that the mode of “illusion” was also fused with a “second distinctive aesthetic mode” known as realism that offered a “transparent window onto reality.”²⁴

¹⁹ Quoted in Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 56-66.

²⁰ *Los Angeles Herald*, March 18, 1894

²¹ Ibid.

²² Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 75.

²³ Jay Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Edge of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1-19.

²⁴ Cook, *Arts of Deception*, 17-19.

Through both modes, audience members participated in the rise of spectacle as a form of mass culture. De la Cruz García's participation might have required a suspension of disbelief through illusion, but festival organizers strategically offered him as a form of realism to suggest that Mexican Americans were the city's past. The festival chose such an aged person to represent a fading romantic people while ignoring the prominent Mexican population that existed.²⁵

In other parts of the festival, boosters utilized time and memory to signify the alleged distance between a "modern" Euro American Los Angeles and Mexican Los Angeles. In the 1897 "parade of nations," Mexicans, mostly played by Euro Americans, dressed as caballeros adorned in colorful garb and masterful horseback riding. One Dixie Thompson of Santa Barbara took part in this performance leading a supposedly one-hundred-year-old Mexican wagon by horse.²⁶ By highlighting the more appealing features of Mexican culture, the festival selectively curated the city's Mexican past. For instance, the paper reported that Theresa Sepúlveda "wore the old-time costume of a Spanish granddame, a black lace mantilla over her head" as she rode the wagon. They also described it as the "most unique and historically interesting vehicle" through its craftsmanship and decoration.²⁷ By combining a figure of a prominent Mexican family with the authenticity of the wagon, the paper's coverage continued to highlight one perspective of the Mexican past that hinged on an elite class. La Fiesta's highlights of upper-class Mexican symbols also signaled a wider pattern of place-making in the U.S. West. Historian Phoebe Kropp shows that Euro Americans in Southern California fully embraced the Spanish era "to regain a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Espectaculo Publico de las Naciones," *Los Angeles Herald*, April 25, 1897.

²⁷ Ibid.

sense of control over their cultural environment.”²⁸ At the center of this process, she argues, were racial discourses that enabled Euro Americans to define themselves and local identity.²⁹ The *Herald* concluded with a four-page recap of “Twenty-Give Years of Progress in Southern California” dating back to 1870.³⁰ Los Angeles and Southern California, the paper wrote, “have all been built up since that date and today they furnish happy homes for thousands of people.”³¹ When they referred to these people, the paper implicitly linked infrastructure with the arrival of more Euro Americans in the city. This racial project worked in tandem to remake place while also failing to reconcile the growing importance of Mexicans in Los Angeles.

Around the same time as La Fiesta’s launch, the *Los Angeles Herald* ran an article which marginalized the city’s contemporary Mexican community. Unlike La Fiesta, this strand of racialization highlighted supposedly undesirable features of that community as threats to Los Angeles. If Mexican representation in the parade signaled a nostalgic past, then the continued presence of Mexicans reminded Euro Americans of their claims to whiteness. In a series of articles entitled “The Steamy Side of Los Angeles,” the newspaper embarked on explorations of “old and historical part[s] of the city [...] passed through by many but known by few.”³² The *Herald* first explored Sonoratown, a site where a majority of Los Angeles’s Mexican community resided. Located north of the city’s plaza, this area received its name after an influx of Mexicans

²⁸ Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

²⁹ Kropp, *California Vieja*, 6-8.

³⁰ “Twenty-Five Years of Progress in Southern California,” *Los Angeles Herald*, April 25, 1897.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² “The Steamy Side of Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 25, 1895.

from Sonora settled in the mid-nineteenth century.³³ After a time, both immigrants and vecinos built the community into a crucial social, cultural, and economic space for the city's Spanish speakers. By 1900, around 3,000 to 5,000 Mexicans lived in Sonoratown.³⁴ It became a site of racialization and marginalization as the Euro-American population grew in number. In this way, Sonoratown illustrated a process historian Alberto Camarillo calls "barrioization of the Mexican population" where they formed "residentially and socially segregated" enclaves.³⁵ Ultimately, Sonoratown became a segregated working-class Mexican community. By 1895, the *Herald* participated in racializing this community in full force. Adobe buildings, it claimed, had shown the "bygone days" of Los Angeles which they referred to as the "unmistakable signs of decay and desolation."³⁶ Like other parts of California and the U.S. Southwest, the paper used architecture as a point of juxtaposition between "old Mexico" and "the modern United States."³⁷ The paper also pathologized Sonoratown as unsanitary and immoral as evidenced by the close quarters of its residents.³⁸ It concluded by describing the area as full of "wickedness and sin" where youth could not escape the "horrors that blight their lives."³⁹ According to the *Herald*, Sonoratown had most of Los Angeles's Mexican residents and other threatening racialized people. In addition to "Spanish," "Spanish Mexican," and "Mexican" people, it noted that Italian,

³³ Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*, 139-141; Monroy, *Rebirth*, 15-18.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society*, 53.

³⁶ "The Steamy Side of Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 25, 1895.

³⁷ See Kropp, *California Vieja* and Chris Wilson, *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

³⁸ "The Steam Side of Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 26, 1895.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Arabian, and other “colored families” resided in the “squalor.”⁴⁰ Sonoratown’s racialized residents, the paper claimed, should be kept a distance from the city’s white population.

This focus exemplified a wider trend of public health used by officials to racialize Mexican Americans and Asian Americans from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries. In his study of San Francisco’s Chinatown, historian Nayan Shah argues that “‘health’ and ‘cleanliness’ were embraced as integral aspects of American identity; and those who were perceived to be ‘unhealthy’ were considered dangerous and inadmissible to the American nation.”⁴¹ Likewise, historian Natalia Molina adds that public health officials created discourses of health issues to highlight marginalized groups’ “purported deficiencies in [...] biological capacities and cultural practices.”⁴² The *Herald* racialized Sonoratown’s residents as non-white and threatening to Euro American residents of Los Angeles. By pathologizing and emphasizing residents’ supposed immoral character, the paper illustrated the parameters of whiteness through the intersections of race and class. The paper juxtaposed Sonoratown with the rest of Los Angeles as a cautionary tale. As they wrote, “Comparisons are said to be odious, but they often times help to point to a moral, and not infrequently serve in adorning a tale.”⁴³

The *Herald* continued to combine pathologization and racialization of Mexicans with narratives of Los Angeles’s alleged progress. In November 1895, the paper explored the city’s

⁴⁰ “The Steamy Side of Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 25 and 26, 1895.

⁴¹ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 12.

⁴² Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 1-5.

⁴³ “The Steam Side of Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 26, 1895.

history as a “pueblo” through its transformation into a “modern metropolis.”⁴⁴ This tale of progress sought to raise the prestige of Los Angeles as an important site of the U.S. West. It asked when “Los Angeles [would] take first place among the cities of the Pacific coast” against the likes of San Francisco.⁴⁵ It concluded that the city was quickly nearing that status. To prove the city’s modernity, the paper juxtaposed Los Angeles’s Spanish and Mexican past to U.S. conquest as evidence of how far the pueblo had come under U.S rule. The paper asserted that the “scum of Mexico,” uneducated and poor, had established themselves in the pueblo by 1790 after being founded first by Spanish priests. The arrival of Euro-American settlers, however, assured the city’s gradual growth in the nineteenth century. By 1895, this narrative of progress, the paper claimed, was evident through every “modern convenience and improvement” seen throughout Los Angeles.⁴⁶ Taken together with the supposed backwardness of Sonoratown, the *Herald’s* history made Mexican people remnants of the city’s backward past and a threat to an improved Euro American present and future.

Similar racial projects and regional memory became commonplace across Los Angeles’s Euro American population. On March 3, 1909, H.C. Dillon gave a speech entitled “Mexican Rule in California, 1824-48” to the Badger Club of Los Angeles, a local booster organization club.⁴⁷ Dillon’s history largely perpetuated the idea that the Mexican government failed to control Alta California. In doing so, he painted this period in Los Angeles as a “frontier” that

⁴⁴ “Old and New Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 11, 1895.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ “Mexican rule in California 1824-1848,” Ayer MS 240, Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library (NL), Chicago, IL.

needed to be tamed. “California had governors galore during the period of Mexican rule,” he told the audience, “but what was there to govern?”⁴⁸ To elucidate this supposed emptiness, Dillon romantically narrated the California mission system during the Spanish period as “heroic and self-sacrificing” institutions that strove to bring the region’s indigenous populations into civilization.⁴⁹ Spanish priests, he and other boosters reasoned were the first conquerors of California who Euro Americans succeeded.⁵⁰ Secularization under Mexican leaders, he lamented, introduced Indians to ideas of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” that reverted them, and Los Angeles, back to “into barbarism.”⁵¹ Dillon’s narrative suggested that Euro Americans’ arrival acted as some sort of divine intervention by God. “[Mexican] booty,” he concluded, “had been taken from them by Almighty God and given to the Americans.”⁵² He reminded audience members that after U.S. conquest, Los Angeles witnessed “war between whites and Indians [...] until the latter were practically wiped off of the Earth.”⁵³ The paper juxtaposed the Mexican government’s liberation of Indians with the violence of Euro American settler colonialism. The success of the latter, the speech appeared to have implied, had made Los Angeles a safe white place over an egalitarian mixed-race town. This history claimed that Mexicans had their chance to rule Los Angeles, and California more broadly, but they had failed miserably. White Euro

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ During this period, Euro-Americans saw the economic potential of California’s mission system as a tourist attraction. They succeeded in linking the missions through the construction of El Camino Real. During this process they also reconciled the meaning of the Spanish past by reifying American conquest and progress in the U.S. West. See Kropp, *California Vieja*, 47-102.

⁵¹ “Mexican rule in California 1824-1848,” Ayer MS 240, Edward E. Ayer Collection, NL.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

Americans successfully rebuilt and tamed the city through the conquest of Mexicans and genocide against Indigenous people. As such, they painted themselves as destined to reap the rewards of their bounty. Despite the discourse presented in *La Fiesta* and other Euro American mediums, Mexicans continued to arrive in increasing numbers at the turn of the century with the Revolutionary diaspora.

The Mexican Revolution and Los Angeles

“Order and Progress” were the key ideals that Porfirio Díaz pursued in his thirty-five-year rule as president of Mexico, a period known as the Porfiriato. Díaz largely succeeded in molding Mexico to his vision through his dictatorship. He restored “order” by centralizing power, quelling dissent, and ensuring his rule would continue through rigged elections.

“Progress” was achieved through the “modernization” of Mexico’s transformed economy and by creating new rail lines to the United States. In doing so, however, he catered to foreign investors who began to own the bulk of Mexico’s land and resources.⁵⁴ While American and British governments and newspapers hailed Díaz’s rule, his plan came at the expense of the Mexican masses who had hardly reaped the benefits of its developments. In 1908, James Creelman, an American journalist, published a hagiographic piece entitled “President Díaz, Hero of the Americas.” He quoted Díaz’s assertion that the Mexican people were “ready” for democracy and announced his term would end in 1910.⁵⁵ Although Díaz refused to step down that year, he

⁵⁴ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 96.

⁵⁵ Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 31-32.

inadvertently opened a political Pandora's box in Mexico which erupted into revolution across the nation.

As violence from the Revolution increased, many Mexicans moved across the border seeking refuge. Since the nineteenth century, Mexicans and other racial groups utilized the U.S.-Mexico border to “resist national control and subvert local authorities.”⁵⁶ The Porfiriato's modernization efforts marginalized poor Mexicans in Mexico. Many ventured to U.S. cities in search of work for an increased quality of life. Over 1.5 million Mexicans crossed the border into the U.S. between 1900 and 1930.⁵⁷ Approximately 367,510 Mexicans were living in the United States at the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. This population increased to around 1,422,533 by 1930.⁵⁸ During this period, foreign-born Mexicans began to outnumber U.S.-born Mexicans by a wide margin. Los Angeles experienced this expansive growth at the turn of the century.⁵⁹ In 1910, Los Angeles's Mexican population stood at five thousand. Ten years later, it grew to thirty thousand. It tripled to over ninety-seven thousand by 1930.⁶⁰

This growth completely remade Mexican Los Angeles. Historian George J. Sánchez notes that during this period foreign-born Mexicans began to exponentially outnumber

⁵⁶ Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 279; In her study of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, historian Julian Lim adds that “variously racialized and subordinated people converged” at the borderlands “to pursue economic, political, and social opportunities that were denied them elsewhere on the basis of their race and class.” In *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migration and the Law in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 3.

⁵⁷ Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago*, 23.

⁵⁸ Sánchez, *Homeland*, 17.

⁵⁹ For more expansive discussion between Los Angeles and Mexico during this period see Jessica Kim's *Imperial Metropolis: Los Angeles, Mexico, and the Borderlands of American Empire, 1865–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁶⁰ Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens?*, 50-51; Kim, *Imperial Metropolis*, 28-29.

American-born Mexicans.⁶¹ This reached its peak around 1920 when foreign-born Mexicans accounted for 75 percent of the Mexican population in the U.S.⁶² A city survey conducted by the Interchurch World Movement of North America referred to the city as the “The American-Capital of Mexico” in 1920.⁶³ The organization claimed this growth connected Los Angeles and Mexico in a dangerous way. “Los Angeles,” it asserted, “is a strategic center, and its influence for good or ill will be felt throughout the length and breadth of Mexico.”⁶⁴ In particular, the report differentiated between “Old” and “New” Mexico in building Los Angeles’s Mexican communities. The original settlers of California, known as “Californians” or “Spanish,” the report asserted, “have found their place in the social life and are educated, loyal American citizens.”⁶⁵ This suggested that this group of Mexicans had assimilated into U.S. society through their behavior and education. Likewise, referring to them as “Spanish” implied a closer link to whiteness. The report then expressed fear about the supposedly different type of Mexican who arrived in Los Angeles. By and large, the report painted recent Mexican immigrants as Catholic menaces who needed to be uplifted through white Protestantism. Only then would they “become

⁶¹ In 1920, foreign-born Mexicans outnumbered U.S.-born Mexicans two-to-one. By 1930, the heads of Mexican families were led by foreign-born immigrants at five times the number of those born in the U.S. See Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 70, 90. Other parts of the U.S. experienced similar growth in their Mexican communities and its linkages with Mexico. For instance, Chicago, like Los Angeles and other parts of the U.S. Southwest, also experienced tremendous growth in their Mexican community. In 1920 over 1,000 Mexicans resided in Chicago. Within ten years this number grew to approximately twenty-one thousand. See Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago* and Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago*.

⁶² Sánchez, *Homeland*, 17.

⁶³ “The Mexican in Los Angeles: Los Angeles City Survey,” *Interchurch World Movement of North America. Survey Department-Home Missions Division* (1920), Electronic reproduction, New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2015. NNC.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

a force in the interest of righteousness both in the United States and Mexico.”⁶⁶ The report further symbolized the changes that had occurred in the city at the turn of the century to 1920. The Mexican community had indeed increased immensely. These exiles were not the same as Californians of centuries past. “The Mexican situation in the city of Los Angeles,” the organization wrote, “calls upon the organized forces of Christianity to build up a work of such a nature that the community life will be Christianized, the individual Mexican brought in touch with the ideals of America and Christianity.”⁶⁷

As the Revolution spilled across the border, U.S. border officials increasingly policed the U.S.-Mexico border with great concern. In 1914, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Immigration Service hired Walter A. Weymouth and R.D. Evans to police the Tijuana border in response to an influx of “alien refugees” and “disturbances in Mexico.”⁶⁸ Border officials were vague as to the duration of their deployment but claimed it would last a short period.⁶⁹ By 1918, the U.S. government, under the newly passed Passport Control Act, required a visa for those entering the United States. The establishment of a nascent Border Patrol, in 1924, in combination with visa programs and fence-building reified the U.S.-Mexican border. The U.S, though, still favored the entry of Mexican laborers, it just made entry into the U.S more difficult.⁷⁰ It also sought to police

⁶⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Letter from Acting Supervising Inspector to Commissioner General of Immigration, May 1, 1914, “Mexican Border Situation, Border Officers' Reports on the Mexican Civil War, Its Influences on Immigration, and the Refugee Problem, 1910–17,” Casefile 53108/71K (February-May 1914), *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)*, Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906–1930.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 138–47.

the activity of revolutionary Mexicans in Los Angeles. The U.S. government followed rumored revolutionary activity at the international border and cities. Although Los Angeles remained peaceful in April 1914, the INS confirmed that two factions existed in the city: the Constitutionals and the supporters of President Victoriano Huerta, who had led the coup against Francisco I. Madero in 1913. Other rumors abounded that “Mexicans of anarchistic tendencies” would embark on violent activity, necessitating “extra diligence” by law enforcement in the city.⁷¹

The growth of the Mexican community included a new generation of Mexicans who brought their differing ideas about the Mexican Revolution and Mexico. They encountered the existing Mexican community which had developed in the nineteenth century. The newly arrived Mexicans contributed to Euro Americans’ racialization of Mexicans no matter their class standing. Like their nineteenth-century counterparts, however, their politics were diverse. While Euro-Americans made great efforts to eschew the Mexican past by marginalizing them within the depths of history, the arrival of a Revolutionary Diaspora marked a new epoch for the borderlands city and its Mexican community.

The Magónistas, the Partido Liberal Mexicano, and Leftist Cultural Politics

Ricardo Flores Magón and Enrique Flores Magón were among the most prominent of the exiles to settle in early-twentieth-century Los Angeles. The city, however, was not their first stopping point in the United States. Between 1905 and 1907, the group ventured across many

⁷¹ Inspector in Charge to Supervising Inspector, April 27, 1914, Mexican Border Situation, Casefile 53108/71K, (February-May 1914), INS.

urban cities as they evaded arrest by United States federal officers for violating neutrality laws.⁷² The Magón brothers and their allies first settled in San Antonio in 1904. There they published three issues of *Regeneración* in the United States, a radical newspaper founded four years earlier in Mexico. It called for the restoration of the Constitution of 1857 by calling for an anticlerical government, free press, and limited foreign investment in Mexico.⁷³ Anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz notes two trends in the early years of *Regeneración* in his study of the magónistas. In its first five months, the paper avoided direct critiques of Díaz in favor of broader calls for justice. After 1900, the paper openly critiqued Díaz and his supporters while also building a political movement against him.⁷⁴ This shift came after Díaz obtained his sixth consecutive term as president of Mexico. As Lomintz asserts, the journal became more “militantly committed to political change.”⁷⁵ The move to San Antonio brought their cause north of the border.⁷⁶ After an assassination attempt on Ricardo Flores, the brothers relocated to St. Louis in 1905. This relocation, according to Kelly Lytle Hernández, gave the brothers a “gateway to the U.S. West and a railroad hub with lines crossing” North America. She adds that it brought labor radicalism alongside a burgeoning Mexican community which made the relocation sensible.⁷⁷

⁷² Justin Akers Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio: Magonistas, Socialists, Wobblies, and Communists in the Mexican American Working Class* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 129.

⁷³ Gabriela González, *Redeeming La Raza: Transborder Modernity, Race, Respectability, and Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 58; Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands* (New York: W.W. & Norton, 2022), 55-56.

⁷⁴ Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, 83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 85-87.

⁷⁶ Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*, 103-105.

⁷⁷ Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 101 and *Bad Mexicans*, 105.

That same year, they formed the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) with the objective of restoring democracy in Mexico by overthrowing Díaz “by any means necessary.”⁷⁸ Within a year they formed and distributed the Plan of the Mexican Liberal Party in Mexico and the United States. In addition to rebelling against the Díaz regime, the plan advocated for workers’ rights, land reform, and the creation of a new bank for small-scale farmers.⁷⁹ Lastly, it called for the restoration of ancestral ejidos to Mexico’s indigenous groups by expropriating land from foreign investors and other elites.⁸⁰ This plan has been hailed by historian Justin Akers Chacón as the “foundation of the social Revolution in Mexico” and credited as setting the foundations of the Constitution of 1917.⁸¹ By July 1906, Díaz obtained a copy of the plan. He subsequently forwarded it to the U.S. government hoping that they would quash the Magón brothers and the PLM.⁸² Both governments joined forces and continued policing and pursuing the group in subsequent years. The brothers relocated to Los Angeles in 1907 and fashioned links with some of the city’s anarchists and socialists. After their arrest and subsequent release, they established the city as their home base with a goal of sparking a revolution in Mexico and the borderlands.⁸³

Their relocation to Los Angeles signaled the wider network of Mexican immigrants during the Porfiriato that predated the arrival of the magónistas. The presence of other Mexican

⁷⁸ Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*, 113.

⁷⁹ Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio*, 135.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Quoted in Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio*, 135.

⁸² Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*, 144-145.

⁸³ Kim, *Imperial Metropolis*, 83-84.

immigrants in Los Angeles made their arrival possible and seamless.⁸⁴ María Brousse de Talavera and Lucía Talavera-Norman, for instance, were instrumental in Ricardo's resettlement. The Talaveras family arrived in Los Angeles in the 1890s from Zacatecas, Mexico. By 1905, they joined the Socialist Party and were subsequently introduced to the PLM's ideology. María recruited the PLM to Los Angeles and even housed Ricardo for a time upon his arrival. She and Lucía would serve as pivotal organizers and mediators for the PLM in Los Angeles.⁸⁵ Such individuals represented far-left sects of Mexican immigrants during the Porfiriato who resided across the U.S. Southwest before the Revolution. Like the PLM, small numbers of Mexicans who were actively socialist formed their politics in relation to Mexican society and politics during the Porfiriato. These factors represented a sort of ideology in which individuals, such as María, and groups like the magónistas, negotiated the two experiences of exploitation in Mexico and racism in the United States. As historian Justin Akers Chacón asserts:

Crossing the border changed the equation. No longer was the struggle a Mexican one. Poverty, land dispossession, and exploitation, and the other forms of capitalist oppression so loathed [...] had followed the Mexican experience into the U.S.⁸⁶

Mexican immigrants and exiles fled Mexico's exploitative regime and produced a vision of the nation from afar at the turn of the century. The magónistas acted as a pivotal contrast to conservative predecessors and contemporaries in Los Angeles. They, though, contributed to the larger racialization of Mexicans in the United States because of their anarchist politics. As a

⁸⁴ See Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*, 229-240.

⁸⁵ Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio*, 188-189; Ricardo and María Brousse also appeared to have developed a romantic relationship during this initial period. See Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*, 210-211.

⁸⁶ Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio*, 153.

result, other conservative and moderate Mexicans of the Revolutionary Generation were still seen as suspect. For Euro Americans, it did not matter that Mexicans' ideas of the Revolution varied.

The magónistas framed their understanding of Mexico's burgeoning conflict with a class lens. They named the fight between the "working-class" and "privileged class" in *Regeneración*. Porfirio Díaz acted as an example to expound upon these class distinctions and conflict. For example, in September 1910, an article written by Lázaro Gutiérrez de Lara contrasted Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's "Grito de Dolores" in 1810 with Díaz. He referred to Hidalgo as the "leader of the popular revolution" and Díaz as a "bastard abortion of a leprous and pestilent patriotism."⁸⁷ By calling Díaz a disease, the author argued that the president had betrayed its people under the guise of patriotism. "The people," he continued, "have suffered for long years under the despotism of the Beast."⁸⁸ This critique countered some U.S. groups and individuals who lauded Díaz as a hero and modernizer of Mexico during his reign.⁸⁹ For instance, Marie Robinson Wright, an American travel writer, published an idealized narrative of Mexico called *Picturesque Mexico* in 1897. She dedicated that book to Díaz by calling him "the pride and glory of his country" through his "interpreted moral character, distinguished statesmanship, and devoted patriotism."⁹⁰ Mexico's modernization, she continued, "is due to the patriot whose administration Mexico now flourishes and holds its proud position among the republics of the

⁸⁷ "1810-1910," *Regeneración*, September 10, 1910.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Jason Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House: Travel to Porfirian Mexico and the Cultural Politics of Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 66-69.

⁹⁰ Quoted Jason Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House*, 66-69.

world.” Others, such as the editors at the *Los Angeles Times*, printed similar narratives about Díaz and Mexico.⁹¹ By referring to Díaz as a “bastard abortion,” *Regeneración* critiqued this version of Mexican politics enabled and celebrated by U.S. elites. While such harsh descriptions are not surprising, this attack reveals the *magónistas*’ critique of Mexican society and politics. According to this viewpoint, Díaz acted as a sickly “beast” of Mexico who spread disease through despotism. As a “murderer of your race,” Gutiérrez de Lara concluded, “you are almost drowning in the blood and tears of your victims.”⁹² He implored Díaz to “live a little longer” so that he might “suffer” and that the “people may punish you in life.”⁹³

The *magónistas* initially underscored Mexico’s struggles through their Marxist perspectives while also trying to define the meaning of the nation for Mexicans. This article invoked Mexican history to explain the formation of class distinctions. As Gutiérrez de Lara explained, “There is no more conscious struggle and no more well-defined aspiration in our history than the popular struggle and aspiration of 1810.”⁹⁴ In this way, the newsletter combined class rhetoric with a populist understanding of national formation to mobilize working-class Mexicans on both sides of the border. According to the party, the foundations of Mexico’s classes formed in 1810. They claimed that throughout Mexico, the privileged classes exploited land and laborers. Gutiérrez de Lara argued that Miguel Hidalgo successfully challenged this

⁹¹ Ruiz, *Americans in the Treasure House*, 68-79.

⁹² “1810-1910,” *Regeneración*, September 10, 1910.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

oppressive system which he called for independence. He painted this movement as a continuation of class struggle.⁹⁵

This class understanding of the nation remained linked to racial formation. Elsewhere, the group claimed that Díaz and others in power loathed the Mexican people. The article referred to “Mexicans” as mixed-race people to exclude figures such as Díaz, whom they imagined descended from elite Europeans. “The Mexicans of the European race are of the upper classes,” they wrote, “the descendants of the Spanish conquistadors; they are the ones who form the mass of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie that holds the land and the capital.”⁹⁶ For figures like Díaz, the article asserted, “there [was] no race lower, more stupid, more lazy, more perverse, more vicious, more immoral, more stubborn to civilization than the Mexican race.”⁹⁷ As such, Mexico’s elite marginalized the working-class through class and racialization and represented a threat to mexicanidad. Díaz, according to the author, betrayed the nation and the people to serve European American interests. In doing so, they defined this as distinctly working-class and mixed-race people who were oppressed by Mexico’s privileged European class. Moreover, they differentiated between these two groups through the lens of conquest and mestizaje. This bourgeoisie, they argued, hated “the Mexican race proper, the Indian and the mestizo, to which the immense majority of Mexicans belong, [which] greatly [harmed] each and every individual of Mexican nationality.”⁹⁸ It’s worth observing that this passage left out blackness within a

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “El Odio de la Raza,” *Regeneración*, November 12, 1910.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Mexican identity. The article sought to mobilize Mexicans under a collective identity that merged mestizaje and with economic class. The article warned in its conclusion that Díaz envisioned Europeans and other white North Americans cultivating and inhabiting “the lands of Mexico [...] because the Mexican population is incapable of forming the greatness of the nation.”⁹⁹ The nation would be taken away from Mexicans in favor of Europeans and Euro-Americans.

If class and race were the nation’s central struggles, then who did “Mexico” as an idea and nation-state serve? The magónistas began to believe that nation was shaped by and served only elites. The party, though, initially asserted that working-class Mexicans could claim the nation as their own once the Revolution began. For instance, on January 11, 1911, Ricardo Flores Magón on the significance of their nation’s civil war to the world. First, however, he affirmed that the Revolution and the Partido Liberal represented the interests of the “Mexican race.” He proudly wrote that the “effective conquests” by Mexicans would “provide an example for the timid all over the world who dream of overthrowing capital by means of the electoral ballot.”¹⁰⁰ Ricardo thus placed the notion of race as an equally significant category alongside class. Ricardo, though, eventually changed from wanting an original nation-based revolution to a worldwide one. In this case, he placed emphasis on a revolution by Mexicans for Mexicans to reclaim the nation. By doing so they could serve as a sort of inspiration for other working-class groups in other nations.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ “La Revolución Mexicana,” *Regeneración*, January 14, 1911.

This emphasis on race and class also influenced the Plan de San Diego, a radical document that called for revolution on the Texas borderlands in 1915.¹⁰¹ By then over half of *Regeneración's* copies were distributed by party members in Texas where Mexicans increasingly mobilized across the state to fight their discrimination and violence. Aniceto Pizaña, a rancher from Brownsville, ardently supported the Magón brothers and the PLM. He helped form a group called “Perpetual Solidarity” where he read the paper to members and led revolutionary activity.¹⁰² Pizaña serves as one example of the PLM’s influence beyond Los Angeles. Indeed, their platform, particularly its early emphases on the intersections of race and class, aided in creating the Plan de San Diego. The manifesto called for a rebellion against the U.S. to liberate Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Asians to regain the lost territories in the U.S.-Mexico War and to murder any white men over the age of 16.¹⁰³ These declarations aroused fears of a race war in Texas, which sparked great discontent among white Euro Americans in the U.S. Southwest.¹⁰⁴ The Magón brothers did not take credit for inspiring the manifesto. They looked on with approval, however, by labeling it as a “movement of legitimate defense by the oppressed against the oppressor.”¹⁰⁵ Though the Plan de San Diego did not come to fruition, the threat of multiracial mobilization on the borderlands sparked immense fear for Euro Americans.

¹⁰¹ See Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turn Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans*, 298-302; Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio*, 216-224.

¹⁰² Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 61-63.

¹⁰³ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 72, 79-82

¹⁰⁵ *Regeneración*, October 9, 1915 quoted and cited in Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 132.

It also unveiled how the PLM had widened their scope on both sides of the border to include other marginalized racial groups to expand revolution across the borderlands.

Although the PLM denied being involved in the plan, it represented how their ideas had influenced anarchistic ideologies on the borderlands to address racial injustice. Unlike earlier proclamations, *Regeneración* frequently claimed that the Mexican working-class had no “patria” because that notion was constructed by elites. Consequently, the idea of the nation was only meant to serve their interests and retain their status. In November 1911, for instance, the paper informed their “disinherited brothers and sisters” on their discovery of the meaning of “patria,” whom the “elites” had reportedly called to be defended. The article scoffed at this call to arms as an attempt to protect their “private property” in haciendas, factories, mines, and forests. “The poor,” they lamented, “have no homeland.”¹⁰⁶ The PLM slowly embraced anarchy, and they encouraged Mexico’s working-class to mobilize against the bourgeoisie and nationalism. “We have awakened,” they wrote, “and are determined to fight until victory or death for the redemption of our class [...] who produce everything and lack everything.”¹⁰⁷ By seizing the means of production, they argued, they could challenge the bourgeoisie idea of the nation. Indeed, this notion remained impossible if Mexico’s elite remained in power. As such, the magónistas eschewed prior notions of nationalism in favor of class and anarchism.

This shift towards class consciousness referred to the Mexican elite as well as foreigners as heavily invested in Mexico’s resources and dominated its politics. This was especially true in

¹⁰⁶ “Manifestó: Al pobre que sufre,” *Regeneración*, November 25, 1911.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Baja California, a Mexican state *Regeneración* utilized as a prime example of imperialism.

Ricardo Flores Magón lambasted the United States, as well as British and French capitalists who exploited Mexicans along Mexico's West Coast.¹⁰⁸ "Baja California," he wrote, "does not belong to Mexico, but to the United States, England and France."¹⁰⁹ While such laments served to underscore the PLM's political agenda, it also served other purposes. Ricardo Magón called on "patriotas" to respond to foreign capitalists on behalf of "the patria."¹¹⁰ To be sure, he utilized the notion of a patriot in two distinct ways defined by class. Indeed, Ricardo wrote this in a sarcastic tone which targeted elite "patriots." Likewise, in his critique of this group, he implicitly outlined a contrasting "true Mexican patriot." Echoing earlier critiques of elite Mexican nationalism, Magón reminded "patriots" that "you have no homeland, simply because you have nothing to die for" since foreigners exploited and owned Mexico.¹¹¹ Was the homeland worth fighting for? In Magón's eyes, it could be if the nation's resources were seized, and its elites killed. Indeed, he assured readers that the PLM aimed to fight for a "true homeland" free of "tyrants and exploiters."¹¹² To close the article, Magón further emphasized that Mexicans needed to reclaim their nation from foreigners. He used Francisco León de la Barra, the interim President of Mexico in 1911, as an example. De la Barra bridged the Díaz and Madero administrations at the start of the Revolution. Magón's critiqued his administration to push for Mexico to be for native-born working-class Mexicans. De la Barra, Magón noted, was a child of

¹⁰⁸ "A los patriotas," *Regeneración*, June 17, 1911.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Chilean parents. A foreigner, he observed, had elevated himself to the highest position in Mexican politics. He challenged elite Mexicans on how they favored foreigners and businessmen within their nation. Only by breaking this pattern, he reasoned, could Mexicans “have a homeland.”¹¹³

As the Revolution grew in intensity, the magónistas’ push away from nationalism was further solidified. Although the group made attempts to reclaim the patria for the Mexican working-class, they became further disillusioned with nationalist stances. By 1912, the paper shifted from nationalist rhetoric towards anarchist rhetoric. Rather than celebrating the nation-state, the paper claimed land, the “patria grande,” as the true homeland of all mankind. It asserted that “of the earth we men all live, not of the one nation to which we belong.”¹¹⁴ The land, the paper claimed, had become a major point of divergence in human history as both the source of violence and a unifier of people. It posited the idea of a “patria parcial” which referred “only to the land, not to the inhabitants.” As a result, nations had participated in wars over property while completely ignoring the plight of their citizens.¹¹⁵ The idea of a partial homeland signaled a shift from claiming the nation to disavowing nationalism entirely. It reiterated the longer theme of elite nationalism that marginalized most citizens. Now, though, it compared this idea to an “altar on which most victims are immolated.”¹¹⁶ This altar, the “patria grande,” could be claimed. While this rhetoric echoed earlier ideas in the paper, it eschewed any mention of race or

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ “La Patria,” *Regeneración*, January 27, 1912.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

ethnicity. While earlier calls of mobilization combined race and class categories, the PLM favored the former over the latter for a more inclusive version of class solidarity in a revolution through the reclaiming of land. Only when the land was won by all, they wrote, “will the altar of that modern Moloch stop spraying blood and men will recognize that they are all members of one family.”¹¹⁷ They hoped that Mexicans would expropriate land from Mexican and Euro American elites. Likewise, it simultaneously applied their ideas in Mexico and the United States. “Flores Magón and his followers,” notes historian Gabriela González, “came to believe that only by completely remaking society could workers have a chance at true emancipation” by toppling an “abusive capitalist system.”¹¹⁸ They emphasized that the “patria parcial” had to be reclaimed, in order for the Mexican working-class on both sides of the border to make claims to the “patria grande.”

By 1916, the PLM faced increased legal and financial struggles. This made the printing of *Regeneración* more difficult. The Magón brothers and PLM members became the center of a “Brown Scare” in the U.S. Southwest in which authorities targeted Mexicans as sources of radical activity.¹¹⁹ As mentioned, the outbreak of the Revolution threatened the interests of many American elites in Los Angeles. Likewise, many white residents grew ever more cautious of the Mexican community due to the revolutionary violence on the borderlands. Historian Edward J. Escobar identifies three crucial moments that contributed to the suspicion of Mexican loyalty:

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ González, *Redeeming la Raza*, 72.

¹¹⁹ Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 69-75.

President Woodrow Wilson's occupation of Veracruz in 1914; Pancho Villa's violent raid in Columbus, New Mexico in 1916; and, finally, the news that Germany had sought an alliance with Mexico should they enter the Great War.¹²⁰ In addition to World War I, anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz adds that the continued complexities of the Mexican Revolution and conflicts in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands made *Regeneración's* survival questionable.¹²¹ These developments cultivated fears that Mexicans in the U.S. Southwest would mobilize against the United States. It marked them not only as a suspicious racial group but also a political one whose allegiances were entirely questionable.

Rumors of radical revolutionary activity in Los Angeles abounded. In 1914, a federal immigration inspector observed the Mexican community in Southern California with great suspicion. Although the city had appeared peaceful, he noted that "certain classes of the Mexican element are proved to be sympathetic with the affairs of their own government, and incidentally express themselves as unfavorable to the attitude of the United States."¹²² Although he explicitly identified two factions in Los Angeles, the Constitutionalists and Huertistas, the inspector also gestured toward the presence of magónistas. He described them as "Mexicans of anarchistic tendencies" who had supposedly "contemplated blowing up" buildings.¹²³ Nonetheless, his report named all revolutionary activity as threatening. Looking on perceived relationships with Mexico with suspicion, it presumed Mexican and Mexican Americans as potentially un-

¹²⁰ Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 69-75.

¹²¹ Lomintz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, 454.

¹²² Letter from Inspector in Charge to Supervising Inspector of Immigration, April 27, 1914, Mexican Border Situation, Casefile 53108/71K (February-May 1914), INS.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

American and a threat to the U.S. status quo. While the inspector noted different factions with various political orientations, he referenced them collectively as “Mexican activity” which needed to be tracked locally and federally. Indeed, in 1916, another federal officer asserted that “Mexicans of this city [were] ripe for an upheaval and will cause all manner of trouble” and “immediately throw themselves with Mexico in case of war with the United States.”¹²⁴ The Magón brothers and PLM, in particular, remained ever present in the gaze of the Los Angeles Police Department and federal law enforcement due to their anarchist ideology that called for violence on the borderlands.

As their influence and activity dwindled, the magónistas continued to champion class solidarity while eschewing racial and national categories, a shift from their earlier views. In 1916, Enrique urged readers to avoid calling for the death of Anglo-Americans.¹²⁵ Such framing, he asserted, wrongfully homogenized Americans as the enemy. A majority, he claimed, acted as brothers in solidarity.¹²⁶ This position became the magónistas’ final formulation of class solidarity. At the Revolution’s inception, the group emphasized class alongside Mexican nationalism to mobilize Mexican workers. They simultaneously advocated for transnational support by working-class individuals to support radical Mexican revolutionaries. Their position changed by the middle of the decade. Rather than seeing it as a struggle only in Mexico, they imagined it as global. As such, Enrique explicitly countered national and racial categories to espouse a transnational class solidarity:

¹²⁴ Quoted in Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 73.

¹²⁵ “Todos los Pobres somos Hermanos,” *Regeneración*, August 12, 1916.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

It does not matter what color our skin and hair and eyes are; it does not matter what language we speak and what the customs and habits of the region where we were born are; nor does it matter what race we belong to; we are all poor and, therefore, we are brothers, and as brothers we should see each other; as brothers we should love each other; as brothers we should treat each other.¹²⁷

Although Enrique's formulation clearly meant to inspire an egalitarian class solidarity, he also espoused a sort of color-blind outlook. In other words, he forgot his previous understanding of the racial realities of working-class Mexicans on both sides of the border in favor of international solidarity. What initially began as an expression of *mexicanidad* transformed into an anarchist dream which sought to revolutionize the world. Like these individuals and groups, much more conservative individuals utilized Los Angeles and the U.S. Southwest to make sense of the Revolution and mobilize from afar.

The Exile of José María Maytorena in Los Angeles

On the evening of February 26, 1913, José María Maytorena, the governor of Sonora, began a trek from Hermosillo, Sonora to Tucson, Arizona. Other Mexican politicians and revolutionaries accompanied him. Among them was Francisco R. Serrano, a general with Álvaro Obregón, then a military leader in the North.¹²⁸ The journey northward to the United States appeared necessary given the Revolution's many twists and turns. Weeks earlier on February 18, Victoriano Huerta, a former Porfirian military leader, orchestrated a coup against Francisco Madero with the help of U.S. government agents.¹²⁹ Within three days of the coup, Huerta's

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ "Mi Gobierno en Sonora," 33, Box 7, Folder 17, José María Maytorena papers (JMM). Special Collections, Honnold/Mudd Library, Claremont University Consortium.

¹²⁹ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution*, 52-53.

faction assassinated Madero and his vice president, José María Pino Suárez, at point-blank range.¹³⁰ Huerta subsequently moved to consolidate his power. He threatened to confiscate dissenters' property and even arrest and execute them if they did not acknowledge his rule. The arrest of Abraham González, the governor of Chihuahua, showed that Huerta lived up to his word. He executed González on March 7, 1913.¹³¹ An ardent supporter of Madero and an ally of González, Maytorena and his compatriots crossed the border to escape such political persecution. As Maytorena asserted, they "had solemnly agreed with me to disown the Huerta government."¹³² Eventually, Maytorena settled in Los Angeles where he continued to monitor Mexican politics and correspond with other Mexican revolutionaries as part of the Revolutionary diaspora.

Before arriving in Los Angeles, Maytorena traversed U.S. Southwest border towns where large numbers of Mexicans resided. In Nogales, Tucson, and El Paso, he became more firmly entrenched in transnational and exile politics with other former leaders of the Revolution. At each stop he articulated the same goal of "fostering the revolution" with his compatriots.¹³³ Maytorena articulated his ideas of the Mexican Revolution and sought to shape it from the United States despite his exile. Maytorena, however, did not espouse anarchistic ideas like magónistas and instead viewed the revolution as "destabilizing" Mexican society. As such, he saw events occurring in Mexico with extreme worry and fear, especially after Huerta's

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Sharon Egger Heston, *Felipe Ángeles and the Mexican Revolution* (Shelbyville, KY: Wasteland Press, 2021), 80-81.

¹³² Chronology: 1909-1915, Box 7, Folder 1, JMM.

¹³³ "Dates para la biografía del Sr. José M. Maytorena," Box 7, JMM.

successful coup. Maytorena envisioned Los Angeles as a temporary stopping point. There he would plan for his homeland, its people, and their future. Unlike those leftist radicals who participated in Marxist ideology, Maytorena aligned with the Conventionist sect of the Revolution by 1915.¹³⁴ This faction emphasized agrarian reform in Mexico. Best represented by Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, historians Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau note that they pursued the ideals of the “common men in their ranks” while also abhorring “official procedure and politicians.”¹³⁵ This, though, did not mean that Maytorena aligned wholeheartedly with Villa or Zapata. Above all, he wished for stability in Mexico so that he may resume his post as governor of Sonora. The Constitutionalists, on the other hand, represented the liberal ideologies of Mexico’s elite who had merely wished to reform the Porfirian model by consolidating Mexico’s diverse people and classes.¹³⁶ In other words, they sought to pour old wine into new barrels with the hope of instilling modest social change.

By 1916, three years after his exile in the United States, Maytorena felt stability and safety in Los Angeles. That January, he wrote to Felipe Ángeles, another Mexican exile who had served in Pancho Villa’s army, regarding his time in the city. He informed Ángeles that he remained unsure whether he would depart the city for two reasons: the continued persecution of Venustiano Carranza’s enemies; and the increase of Mexicans arriving from Sonora, many of whom had served Maytorena during his tenure as governor.¹³⁷ The first point expressed

¹³⁴ Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 70.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 70.

¹³⁶ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 69-71.

¹³⁷ Letter from José Maytorena to Felipe Ángeles, January 17, 1916, Box 6, Folder 1, JMM.

Maytorena's fear of returning to Mexico to engage in armed revolutionary activity that would likely result in his death. In October 1914, delegates from revolutionary factions met in Aguascalientes in hope of achieving unification and consensus about Mexico's future. Not surprisingly, the convention failed to do so. Instead, it exacerbated tensions in Mexico between the Carranza and Villa camps. The former refused to concede to Villa and Zapata's agrarian reforms, which they interpreted as "anarchism."¹³⁸ Maytorena felt content to assess the Revolution from afar in Los Angeles. He also saw potential in the city to restore some order in Mexico. While other Mexicans already resided in the city, he embraced compatriots from his home state of Sonora who had supported his government. Maytorena also felt an immense obligation to financially aid his supporters in Los Angeles.

Day-by-day my expenses increase because although I take care of myself it is hard for me not to help so many poor people who have the imperious need to live in a foreign country, where it is difficult for them to find work that produces them even the indispensable to subsist.¹³⁹

As a former governor of Sonora, he imagined he could reassume his leadership to help this community adjust to life in Los Angeles. He, though, seemingly neglected to notice the challenges that Mexicans from other regions faced or ones that they faced collectively due to their racialization.

Maytorena and Felipe Ángeles began to see their stay in the United States as potentially long-term. While they engaged in transnational politics through a continued correspondence of

¹³⁸ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution*, 63-64.

¹³⁹ Letter from José Maytorena to Felipe Ángeles, January 17, 1916, Box 6, Folder 1, JMM.

ideas, they also valued the possibilities of a peaceful life away from political persecution. Mexican exiles such as they negotiated life away from Mexico even as they lived with the fear that their vision for the Revolution would not come to fruition. They routinely discussed Ángeles's ranch in Texas. On one occasion Maytorena inquired about the status of that property and gauged its benefits. "You understand perfectly well," he asserted "since you, like me, have the firm intention of living as quietly as possible, away from all politics."¹⁴⁰ The "ranchito," as Maytorena referred to it, represented refuge on the borderlands. Likewise, it symbolized a potential future away from Mexico. They did not always want to mold Mexico's politics and society with the aim to return one day. In this way, Maytorena's politics negotiated much more than the Revolution in Mexico. They began to consider what living in the United States permanently might mean depending on the direction the Revolution took. For the two, Los Angeles and El Paso thereby acted as strategic sites to weigh a return to Mexico or "peace" in the United States. They chose both. As will be seen, both figures continued to participate in Mexico's politics from afar. In this way, they followed the trajectory of other Mexican revolutionary exiles such as Francisco Madero, who utilized the border and the United States to weigh the Revolution's trajectory and outcome.

As a former governor of Sonora, U.S. border officials in Southern California and Arizona closely monitored Maytorena. In March 1916, Pancho Villa stormed Columbus, New Mexico by attacking U.S. military camps, banks and stores, and civilians. One observer recalled that the "town was a holocaust" which signaled the immense violence of the Mexican Revolution for

¹⁴⁰ José Maytorena to Felipe Ángeles [typed letter signed], February 4, 1916, Box 6, Folder 1, JMM.

Euro Americans.¹⁴¹ While General John Pershing pursued Villa across the border in response, the U.S. government tracked other Mexican exiles in the U.S., such as Maytorena, of inciting revolutionary activity by the U.S. government.¹⁴² The following day after the raid, for example, the U.S. government received information from Luis Hermosillo, a former general under Villa, regarding plots in the U.S.¹⁴³ He claimed that Mexican revolutionaries sought to create a conflict between the U.S. and Mexico to destabilize Carranza and the Constitutionalist faction. To do this, they would invade and pillage border towns with funds furnished by the German government. The hope was to “compromise the United States and Mexico in a war” to deter them from entering the war in Europe.¹⁴⁴ The report concluded with a list of supposed revolutionaries who resided throughout Arizona. These Sonoran exiles were suspected by the U.S. government to have received direct orders from Maytorena in Los Angeles.¹⁴⁵ While Maytorena did keep in contact with exiles in the U.S. Southwest, the U.S. government actually gave him too much credit. Maytorena suspected that the U.S. government believed “that we are seeking to foster a movement” while in exile.¹⁴⁶ He blamed these rumors on Ángeles’s political enemies who “constantly [spread] the news that you sent secret agents to Sonora to advise the Yaquis of the Sierra.” He pointed to these rumors as “big lies” spread as part of the “biggest

¹⁴¹ Mary Means Scott, Written memoir; *Password* 20, no. 4 (1975): 163-167, quoted and cited in St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 134.

¹⁴² “Alleged plans of Mexican party under leadership of Felix Diaz,” March 10, 1916, Surveillance of “Villa Junta,” Alien Agitators, Casefile 54152/79, (March-June 1916), *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (INS), Series A: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ José Maytorena to Felipe Ángeles [typed letter unsigned], February 18, 1916, Box 6, Folder 1, JMM.

slanders of the Carrancistas.”¹⁴⁷ No matter the case, these rumors appeared to have placed Maytorena under surveillance by U.S. border officials. Maytorena and his allies, though, were more selective in the type of activity that they would take. They did not seek to mobilize militarily. Instead, they sought to reinsert themselves into Mexican politics when it was safe to do so.

While the U.S. government tracked revolutionary activity to deport Mexicans, they had to do so pragmatically. Such was the case on March 21, 1916, when the U.S. government recommended Ramón Zavala, a “dangerous agitator,” for deportation. Weeks after the Columbus Raid, Sage received information from Villa’s political opponents about members of Villa’s camp. The Inspector of Charge of the Immigration Service, however, took a nuanced assessment of Zavala. He countered that recommendation within the categories of politics and respectability based on class status. The Inspector argued that Zavala, like other refugees from Sonora, was not so much pro-Villa as they were “contra-Carranza.” “They are, as a matter of fact,” the report asserted, “followers of Maytorena [...] who threw in with Villa on account of his opposition to Carranza.”¹⁴⁸ Zavala and his compatriots from Sonora, the Inspector continued, “would not support Villa at the present time any more than any of the Mexican people will support any leader until that leader has been forced upon them by some other power.”¹⁴⁹ In this case, Zavala’s loyalties were formulated through his relationship to José Maria Maytorena. While U.S.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Inspector in Charge to Supervising Inspector, March 21, 1916, Surveillance of "Villa Junta," Alien Agitators, Casefile 54152/79 (March-June 1916), INS.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

border officials policed Maytorena's supposed political leadership officials, in their eyes he certainly was no Pancho Villa. In addition, Zavala's class status was measured in his defense. Frederick Simpich of the United States consul called him "one of the 'old school' of Mexicans, exceedingly polite and courteous, well dressed, and considerate in every way of the American Consular Office."¹⁵⁰ Simpich expanded on this in a statement at the American Consulate in Nogales. He highlighted Zavala's educational background and moral character. More importantly, the U.S. government asked Simpich if he considered "Zavala a hater of the Americans and the American government." They clarified by asking, "Did you consider him anti-American as are a number of other Mexicans?" Simpich simply replied, "I can't say that I did."¹⁵¹ The INS was more concerned with whether Zavala had anti-American stances than his allegiances within the Mexican Revolution. Elsewhere, the report more broadly claimed that Sonoran refugees were not of the "bandit, cut-throat, murderous element in any way."¹⁵² Such assessments, however, did not necessarily entail that the U.S. government lauded "respectable" Mexicans in the U.S. Instead, it reflected the U.S. government's efforts to monitor Mexicans entering the U.S. if it affected it. Should they deport Zavala, the report asserted, then they "would simply be playing into the hands of the Carranza element which desires to see him punished because of personal and political reasons."¹⁵³ In other words, it might be seen as their endorsement of the Carranza faction. Nonetheless, this report suggests that the U.S. government

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

viewed Maytorena and his ardent supporters as less than a threat to it than major figures such as Villa, Zapata, and Carranza.

Despite not being a major player, however, Maytorena and his followers remained as persons of interest to U.S. border officials. One month later, in April 1916, the U.S. Department of Labor Immigration Service continued to monitor revolutionary activity in the U.S. Southwest. They obtained help from Luis Hermosillo, an “ex-Villista general” deported to Mexico from Nogales. Hermosillo informed U.S. officials that “various factions opposed to the present de-facto government were planning to make common cause against the Carranza government.”¹⁵⁴ The report included Maytorena as a leader of one of these factions in addition to seven individuals who were supposedly mobilizing in Arizona under his direction. Agustin Acuña, for instance, furnished “arms and ammunition to various factions in Sonora” and had been “suspected of being engaged in recruiting for the Maytorena forces.”¹⁵⁵ The report, however, suggested that such activity was no cause for alarm. “It is not thought that violence on American soil is expected from these refugees,” the report asserted, “but concerted action on their part against Mexico with the United States territory as a base” might be expected.¹⁵⁶ In other words, the U.S. government deemed revolutionary activity from Mexican exiles as threatening if it challenged the U.S. status quo or took place on U.S. territory. Maytorena’s supposed army and

¹⁵⁴ Inspector in Charge to Supervising Inspector, April 1, 1916, Surveillance of "Villa Junta," Alien Agitators, Casefile 54152/79 (March-June 1916), INS.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

politics posed no immediate threat to the U.S. The U.S. government, however, continued to monitor Maytorena and his networks in the U.S. Southwest to ensure this remained true.¹⁵⁷

In the months after the Columbus Raid, Maytorena received an invitation from many Mexican exiles to participate in the creation of the Liga Nacionalista Mexicana. On June 24, 1916, Manuel Calero, a Mexican lawyer, and politician in exile in New York City, personally invited Maytorena to the group's "informal" meeting.¹⁵⁸ In addition, Calero invited approximately ten other Mexican exiles to the meeting including Ernesto Madero, a relative of Francisco Madero and Jesús Flores Magón. The purpose of this meeting, according to Calero, was "to exchange views on the serious situation our country is going through and to resolve, if possible, some combined action within a patriotic criterion."¹⁵⁹ Calero's invitation unveils interesting insights into some exiles' views of Mexico and the Mexican Revolution. Those invited hardly shared the same visions for the future of the nation. The only common factor that united them was their status as exiles in the U.S. Calero utilized this common element to recruit an array of Mexican political viewpoints with the hope of setting some sort of shared foundation to restore unity to the nation. In other words, he hoped that invitees would collectively eschew their hard-nosed positions for the sake of salvaging their homeland from the Carranza regime. The idea of the nation came first. Factional politics, by contrast, should only be secondary. As

¹⁵⁷ A report on April 19, 1916, for instance, continued to identify members of the Maytorena faction who regularly corresponded with him through letters and travel to Los Angeles. Alfred E. Burnett to Supervising Inspector, April 19, 1916, Surveillance of "Villa Junta," Alien Agitators, Casefile 54152/79 (March-June 1916), INS.

¹⁵⁸ Manuel Calero to José Maytorena [typed letter signed] June 24, 1916, Box 6, Folder 1, JMM.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

political exiles, Calero reasoned, they could remedy the political situation within Mexico from without.

In a letter to Manuel Bonilla, Calero asserted that he found it ridiculous that no unified platform against Carranza had been established among the many exiles. As such, he “continued to hammer and hammer [...] to achieve the formation of a union that can and should be heard in this country that has been arbitrated by unworthy Mexicans.”¹⁶⁰ While Calero lamented the lack of representation in Mexican politics and unity for Mexicans in the U.S., he also underscored their potential as a political force that could subvert Carranza and steer the future of Mexico. Calero hoped that the Liga Nacionalista Mexicana would fill a void and function as a site of mobilization against Carranza.

On July 29, 1916, the representatives in New York City officially established the *Liga*. Its founding pamphlet emphasized an anti-Carranza stance and the disorder within Mexican politics. It referred to Carranza as a “revolutionary caudillo of the same type that the turbulent history” of Latin America had produced.¹⁶¹ Carranza, they argued, was an opportunist who had taken advantage of the Revolution for his own ends. His regime, the pamphlet further suggested, would be no different than the Porfiriato. The organization also pointed to Carranza’s rise to power as “arbitrary and anarchic,” and did not reflect the will of the masses.¹⁶² Yet, the Liga Nacionalista Mexicana did not explicitly outline a detailed political platform beyond criticizing Carranza. It instead emphasized a broad desire to restore the Constitution of 1857 in Mexico. By

¹⁶⁰ Manuel Calero to Manuel Bonilla [typed letter signed] July 8, 1916, Box 6, Folder 1, JMM.

¹⁶¹ Liga Nacional Mexicana [pamphlet] July 29, 1916, Box 7, Folder 16, JMM.

¹⁶² Ibid.

acknowledging the will of the masses and preventing foreign intervention, the organization hoped the nation could achieve “organic peace and democratic freedom.”¹⁶³ Leaders chose not to outline a clear agenda for a significant reason. Their labor, they claimed, was not “partisan, but of national character.”¹⁶⁴ Unification acted as the group’s core idea and platform. Instead, the organization broadly attempted to create a political space for Mexicans to articulate their varied views to mold the nation from afar. It emphasized collaboration and dialogue to prevent the rise of figures such as Carranza and Porfirio Díaz. “Our association will be open,” the organization’s pamphlet concluded, “to all Mexican citizens who believe that it is imperative [...] to return to constitutional order, and that is an unavoidable duty to defend it against the interventionist action of foreign countries in domestic political matters.”¹⁶⁵ They took the most conservative set of goals to appeal to the largest number of exiles.

Despite the organization’s inclusive rhetoric, not everyone appeared to have agreed. Out of the twelve invited participants, only four figures signed the pamphlet: Ricardo Molina, Manuel Calero, E. Maqueo Castellanos, and J. Flores Magón. Maytorena, for example, did not sign. He attended the initial meetings that summer but departed New York City because his daughter became sick in August. Instead, he asked Felipe Ángeles to represent him and notify him of subsequent developments in his absence.¹⁶⁶ In early September, Maytorena thanked Calero for forwarding him the organization’s pamphlet. He also agreed with the general premise

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ José Maytorena to Felipe Ángeles [typed letter unsigned] August 14, 1916 and José Maytorena to Manuel Calero [typed letter unsigned] August 14, 1916, Box 6, Folder 2, JMM.

that “to save our country from the crisis it is going through, it is necessary to restore order and the constitutional regime.”¹⁶⁷ Despite this, Maytorena declined to join the organization. He remained firm in his belief “that we should not be active as long as U.S. troops remain in Mexican territory” and until “two conditions” mentioned are met.¹⁶⁸ It is likely that Maytorena referred to the restoration of order and the Constitution of 1857 in Mexico as these conditions. Nonetheless, his reasons for declining to join the organization raise some interesting questions. At first glance, it appears that Maytorena chose to take a pragmatic route by waiting to see how events unfolded in Mexico after foreign intervention ceased. In his mind, it might have been difficult to arrange a political program with the U.S. occupying parts of Mexico. Other evidence, however, points to his fear of being tracked by U.S. government agents which might have resulted in his deportation. On September 15, he notified Ángeles that the U.S. government monitored his and other Liga members’ activity. “It is good for you to be aware of this,” Maytorena advised, “for your own defense or to come clean on charges that are probably unjust.”¹⁶⁹ While Maytorena might have liked to fully participate in the organization, he recognized the implications of doing so while in the United States. Rather than joining, he instead quietly sat in the shadows.

Maytorena’s warning also suggests another reason why he might have declined to join the new organization. Elsewhere he confirmed that he did not wish to join if the United States occupied Mexico. He added, however, “that once that inconvenience” disappears so would the

¹⁶⁷ José Maytorena to Manuel Calero [typed letter unsigned] September 5, 1916, Box 6, Folder 2, JMM.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ José Maytorena to Felipe Ángeles [typed letter unsigned] September 14, 1916, Box 6, Folder 2, JMM.

U.S. backing of Carranza. Only then would the “necessary elements for the organization and promotion of the revolution [...] be available.”¹⁷⁰ While he might have feared mobilization while in exile in the United States, Maytorena also recognized the impact that the United States government had on Mexico. He alluded to the impossibility of successful revolutionary mobilization if the U.S. intervened in Mexico’s affairs. Their backing of the Carranza administration ensured that any other challenging factions would be quelled.

The Liga Nacionalista Mexicana was not the only organization Maytorena declined to join during this period. In the same year, he also declined invitations from the Partido Legalista Mexicano based in El Paso on similar grounds as the Liga.¹⁷¹ Two years later, he also declined to join the Alianza Liberal Mexicana because he did not agree with their platform despite the involvement of his good friend Felipe Ángeles. Maytorena appeared to have felt strongly about who was a Revolutionary or not in the Alianza:

I did not want to take any part in those works, because among the organizers and main members, there were individuals of political creed diametrically opposed to mine, they were not revolutionaries, and although they seemed to accept the doctrines of the movement initiated in 1910, it was only for the convenience of the moment.¹⁷²

Based on some of the members’ politics, it is likely that Maytorena scolded the politics of individuals in the Alianza. In addition to Ángeles, whose participation Maytorena called “unfortunate,” other members included Antonio Villareal (Bolsheviki), Enrique Llorente (Villista), Federica G. Garza (Maderista), Enrique Santibañez (Carbajalista), Ignacio Peláez

¹⁷⁰ “Algunos hechos importantes de mi actuación como Mexicano y como revolucionario durante mi permanencia en el extranjero en calidad de exiliado,” Undated, Box 7, Folder 31, JMM.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

(Pelaísta), Joaquín Valle (Zapatista).¹⁷³ Like the other organizations, this group sought to unite different factions under one collective banner of unity and patriotism. Indeed, Ángeles informed Maytorena that the group was influenced by the recommendation of a delegate of the American Federation of Labor. He advised them “that all Mexicans should unite without party distinction if we wanted to avoid an intervention.”¹⁷⁴ Like the Liga, the Alianza tried to eschew factional distinctions to mobilize Mexicans against U.S. intervention. In a last-ditch effort to recruit Maytorena, Ángeles wrote that “this association will do patriotic work and that it will save Mexico from intervention.”¹⁷⁵

Maytorena might have had a personal or political disagreement with one of the leaders, but a closer look at the context of the organization’s founding provides more clarity. For instance, why was the AFL advising on the political mobilization of Mexican exiles? And why did they listen? On October 23, 1918, Ángeles informed Maytorena of the AFL’s visit to Mexico to assess the conditions of its workers. After meeting with a Mexican commission, AFL representatives found that Mexicans’ anger over U.S. intervention made concern for workers’ rights absent. The commission made four points to the AFL: 1) they referred to the Carranza administration as a “disruption [...] on the road to ruin;” 2) they went even further by referring to all revolutionaries as a “calamity” who merely contributed to Mexico’s current situation; 3) “that everyone in Mexico is disillusioned” with the political situation and see intervention as inevitable; 4) and, finally, it was the commission’s opinion that peace could be achieved by

¹⁷³ Felipe Ángeles to José Maytorena [typed letter signed] November 9, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, JMM.

¹⁷⁴ Espinosa to José Maytorena [typed letter signed] December 24, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, JMM.

¹⁷⁵ Felipe Ángeles to José Maytorena [typed letter signed] December 11, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, JMM.

uniting all the political factions to avoid foreign intervention.¹⁷⁶ The AFL met with Ángeles and others to inform them of their findings. He stated that the “majority decided that if we united with the reactionaries, we would discredit ourselves in the eyes of the revolutionaries who are in arms in Mexico and that it would be more effective to form” the Alianza Liberal Mexicana. The group, he continued, would provide a space for discussion of differing opinions to “make a common effort, with the sole object of bringing about the pacification of the country.”¹⁷⁷

Personal disagreements aside, it might also be possible that Maytorena scoffed at the AFL’s involvement in Mexican affairs. Indeed, Ángeles admitted (and found it “indisputable”) that “the truth is that Mr. Iglesias came to us speaking on behalf of the American Federation of Labor and urged us to unite as Mexicans to prevent the intervention.”¹⁷⁸ Maytorena’s cordial response on December 8, 1918, does not provide any clarity on why he declined to join the group. Instead, he cryptically cites the “special situation” he finds himself in.¹⁷⁹ While he claimed to have disagreed with the Alianza Liberal Mexicana’s agenda, he also did not buy into its supposed patriotic zeal. Whatever the case, Maytorena remained steadfast in his refusal to participate in such organizations so long as the U.S. meddled in Mexican affairs. His “special situation,” I suggest, was perhaps his status as a conservative exile stuck in the shadow of Mexico. He appeared to have recognized the impossibility of his situation in molding the Mexican nation due to a variety of factors. Nonetheless, Maytorena’s discussion with these

¹⁷⁶ Felipe Ángeles to José Maytorena [typed letter signed] October 23, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, JMM.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Felipe Ángeles to José Maytorena [typed letter signed] November 9, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, JMM.

¹⁷⁹ José Maytorena to Felipe Angeles [typed letter unsigned] December 6, 1918, Box 6, Folder 4, JMM.

organizations' leaders illustrates the wide spread of the Revolutionary diaspora's networks across the United States. From the U.S. Southwest to New York City, these exiles sought to intervene in their nation. From afar, Maytorena represented a part of this network with his home base in Los Angeles. From there he imagined a life back in his home country, but only once peace was achieved. He, though, also wanted peace only on his terms. Perhaps Maytorena desired to resume his post as a governor of his home state. Although other exiles and leaders attempted to recruit Maytorena, he continually refused as they did not align with his broader vision for a return to a more conservative Mexico before the Revolution. At the least, Maytorena remained unwilling to intervene directly in Mexican affairs with the looming threat of U.S. imperialism. Other Mexican exiles, however, were willing to take that risk no matter the cause. One such example mobilized as a small-Mexican army in Los Angeles with the intent to invade Baja California to incite a Revolution.

The Estrada Rebellion and Mexican Exile Mobilization in Southern California

In the summer of 1926, a Baja California state representative awarded 30 individuals in Southern California a gold watch. He engraved each watch with the following message: "August 15, 1926—Governor A.L. Rodriguez".¹⁸⁰ This date marked the mass arrest of a would-be Mexican army, led by General Enrique Estrada, with the aim to invade Baja California. The recipients of the gold watches ranged from sheriff forces of San Diego County, members of the Los Angeles Police Department, and agents of the United States Immigration and Department of Justice. The presentation of the gold watches, however, presented a conflict of interest to the

¹⁸⁰ Letter to the Attorney General, January 13, 1927, United States Department of Justice (DOJ), RG 60, Entry A1 COR 71, Box 1, 71-1-3.

United States Department of Justice. According to a clause in the constitution, individuals could not accept “any present [...] of any kind” from a foreign state without the authorization of Congress.¹⁸¹ The U.S. Department of Justice continued to deliberate on the situation over the course of the year in 1927. The watches, however, stood as an unlikely symbol of the uneven relationship between the U.S. and Mexican governments, border formation, and México de Afuera. In this instance, officials from both sides of the border worked together to quell a mercenary army established in Los Angeles and Southern California. Mexican state forces relied on U.S. government agents to supplant this supposed threat by utilizing the border as a safeguard. Likewise, the Estrada Army also utilized the border as a strategy to safely mobilize against the Mexican government and overthrow the Álvaro Obregón regime.

Estrada sought allies across the U.S. Southwest as he used Los Angeles as a home base. Unlike Maytorena and Felipe Ángeles, Estrada cultivated a plan to invade Mexico with an army made up of Mexican exiles in Southern California. A backer of the failed Adolfo de la Huerta coup in 1923, Estrada had a contentious history that led him to exile in Southern California. De la Huerta served under President Álvaro Obregón as Secretary of the Treasury. In that role, he held responsibility for resolving Mexico’s foreign debt, a key to gaining U.S. diplomatic recognition.¹⁸² De la Huerta grew unsettled once Obregón undermined the implementation of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution to gain favor with the U.S.¹⁸³ Likewise, Obregón

¹⁸¹ Memorandum to Assistant Attorney General Marshal, January 17, 1927, DOJ 71-1-3.

¹⁸² Julian F. Dodson, *Fanáticos, Exiles, and Spies: Revolutionary Failures on the US-Mexico Border, 1923–1930* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2019), 60-61.

¹⁸³ Dodson, *Fanáticos, Exiles, and Spies*, 61-62.

intervened in the local affairs of San Luis Potosí, an act de la Huerta interpreted as an abuse of federal power.¹⁸⁴ Thereafter, de la Huerta accepted the Partido Nacional Corportisa's scheme to obtain the Mexican presidency. Select military leaders saw him as a key figure against Obregón and his successor, Plutarco Calles. Such support, however, was not enough. The rebellion was defeated in under a year due to de la Huerta's weakened military position against government forces.¹⁸⁵

After their failed rebellion in 1924, the delahuertistas went into exile in the United States. They scattered throughout the cities of Los Angeles, El Paso, and San Antonio. Their political activity pursued in Mexico remained resolute despite their financial constraints. The coalition sought and found support from wealthy individuals, banks, and corporations to stage a rebellion against Obregón.¹⁸⁶ During their exile, the delahuertistas also found an ally through Mexican Catholic exile networks. That is not to say that they neatly aligned with Cristero politics. Rather they balked at the infringement on private property within the Mexican Constitution of 1917. For Catholics, the anticlerical consensus challenged their politics and beliefs. For these exiled military leaders, it signaled a threat to Mexico's economic and political foundations.¹⁸⁷ The two sides found agreement based on individual rights in which to build a dialogue of cooperation.

After the failure of the de la Huerta coup, Estrada sought refuge in Southern California between Los Angeles and San Diego. Like de la Huerta, Estrada had a desultory military and

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Dodson, *Fanáticos, Exiles, and Spies*, 66.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

political career. By 1920, he served as the Military Commander of Veracruz under the presidency of Venustiano Carranza.¹⁸⁸ His loyalty, like the armed period of the Mexican Revolution, proved tumultuous. When Álvaro Obregón drove out carrancistas that same year, Estrada chose to revolt against the deposed president who sought a peaceful escape through Veracruz. After assuming the presidency, Obregón rewarded Estrada's backing by naming him Secretary of War. The post was short-lived as Estrada rebelled against Obregón alongside de la Huerta.¹⁸⁹ To be sure, Estrada always planned a return to his homeland. Like other military and political exiles, he crossed the border for his own safety. He, though, continued his political and revolutionary activity to change Mexico from the outside with a more hardened approach. To build an army, he built an ideological front among revolutionary exiles within and across the borderlands by promoting ideas that eschewed the liberal Revolutionary government. They traversed the border promoting their politics and bid their time in cities such as Los Angeles. Estrada and over one hundred other Mexicans formed an "army" with the goal to shape Mexico and its Revolution.

In July 1925, Estrada met Earl C. Parker, the president of the Parker Hardware Company in San Diego. With the help of Benjamin Ruque, a Mexican citizen residing in San Diego, Estrada and Parker engaged in negotiations over the course of the year for the purchase of arms and ammunition. Though it is unclear why Parker joined, it is possible that he simply relished the opportunity to fulfill a large order of armed goods. While Estrada grasped the opportunity, his plans were temporarily put to a halt due to a lack of finances. Still, by June of the following year

¹⁸⁸ Report by Agent Hopkins, October 15, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Estrada had mysteriously gathered \$40,000 from an unknown source to fulfill his vision. Taking the funds, Parker put in an order for 400 Springfield rifles, 150,000 rounds of ammo, other assault weapons, armored vehicles, and gear.¹⁹⁰ By August 4, the shipment of the arms arrived in Los Angeles from New York City. The plan stipulated that these goods would be transported to San Diego to be closer to the U.S.-Mexico border.¹⁹¹ Two weeks later, Estrada directed Parker and Ruque that the time was right. Little did they know, however, that the FBI had already been tracking the shipment's delivery and storage in Los Angeles. Two caravans of agents thus headed towards the border to seize the arms in La Mesa, California.¹⁹²

The Mexican government attempted to influence the prosecution of the case before and after the plot was undermined. Two days before the arrests, Mexico's embassy received news of a "shipment of arms [...] intended for some point on the frontier by a group of men" plotting against the Mexican government.¹⁹³ They forwarded this threat to the United States Department of State with the hopes of stopping the would-be rebels. They also recognized the line at the U.S.-Mexico border by acknowledging their inability to intervene across it. The Mexican government relied on the United States border officials to stop and arrest the army. On the surface, it appeared that the two worked in cooperation to quell the Estrada plot. Mexican representatives implicitly endorsed the rising U.S. immigration regime by soliciting the help of the U.S. Border Patrol to their own ends. The Mexican government also made attempts to

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Letter to the Attorney General, August 16, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3; Embassy of Mexico Memorandum, August 16, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

influence the prosecution and trial. A week after the arrests, the Los Angeles Consul of Mexico representative, F. Alfonso Pesquiera, wrote Gunther R. Lessing authorizing him to write to Samuel W. McNabb, the U.S. District attorney.¹⁹⁴ Lessing quickly followed Pesquiera's instructions and "offered" his services to McNabb. He was quick to note that he did not seek to "appear in any sense in the prosecution as a prosecutor." Instead, he sought to be of assistance citing his familiarity with the "Mexican situation and the personnel of the conspiracy awaiting examining trial," as well as previous experience as a representative of the Mexican government.¹⁹⁵ Pesquiera wrote McNabb giving his full confidence and assurance of providing aid deemed necessary.¹⁹⁶

A perplexed McNabb forwarded the request to Attorney General John Marshall. McNabb remained sure that there was no need for additional counsel. Still, he did not wish to offend the request of the Mexican Consul and risk straining what he considered at the time a "friendly character."¹⁹⁷ Yet, it seems that he was deeply unsettled by Lessing's request to sit in on the proceedings and have full knowledge of the evidence and prosecution since the case had been within U.S. borders.¹⁹⁸ By offering Lessing's services, it seemed that the Mexican government sought a proxy who would relay information to them, and ideally, influence the case. John Marshal also dismissed this notion as a conflict of interest that would lead to "complications and

¹⁹⁴ Letter from F. Alfonso Pesqueira to Gunther R. Lessing, August 23, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

¹⁹⁵ Letter from Gunther R. Lessing to Samuel W. McNabb, August 23, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from F. Alfonso Pesqueira to Samuel W. McNabb, August 27, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

¹⁹⁷ Letter from Samuel W. McNabb to the Attorney General, August 28, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

embarrassments.”¹⁹⁹ From the onset, the Estrada army arrests highlighted two issues: the violation of Neutrality Laws and the desire of the Mexican government to grapple with and police the makings of a México de Afuera who mobilized militantly. Mexican exiles used the safety of the international border to mobilize against the Mexican government, but in the process found that they would be violating neutrality laws of the United States. While the Mexican government respected the border and U.S. sovereignty, some Mexican exiles in Los Angeles utilized it to plan an insurrection against Mexico’s government. A few Mexican exiles saw potential in the increasingly reified border, which they could use to their advantage to mobilize.

The ensuing investigation and trial in the United States differentiated between military leaders and rank-and-file recruits. In the initial trial brief, Hopkins identified seventeen individuals as “leaders and principals.” Of this group, ten were former generals and low-ranking members of Mexico’s army.²⁰⁰ By the trial’s end, the U.S. government convicted thirteen of these individuals of violating neutrality laws. Of the rank-and-file, 68 pleaded guilty before the trial began. They found the other remaining soldiers not guilty. According to McNabb, the jury felt that their “connection with the Revolution was held passive” and that their time served before the trial had sufficed as punishment.²⁰¹ In short, the jury viewed these participant’s motivation as minimal in its revolutionary scope. In contrast, he asserted that the convicted

¹⁹⁹ Letter from John Marshall to Samuel W. McNabb, September 3, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

²⁰⁰ Memorandum for Assistant Attorney General Letts, November 5, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3; Report by Agent Hopkins, October 15, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

²⁰¹ Letter from Samuel W. McNabb to the Attorney General, May 5, 1927, DOJ 71-1-3.

“embraced all of the principals involved in this revolutionary movement.”²⁰² As such, Estrada received the harshest penalty with a sentence of 21 months and a \$10,000 fine.²⁰³

In his analysis of the revolt, historian Julian Dodson argues that the arrests of conspirators and the army “proved that the border needed to be secure.”²⁰⁴ The motivations of participants were difficult to assess in U.S. Department of Justice records. Nonetheless, Estrada recruited a majority of them from Los Angeles barrios. Most were devout Catholics with an awareness of the political situation in their homeland in which the government challenged the Catholic Church.²⁰⁵ At the same time of the Estrada army’s arrest, another plot to overthrow the Mexican government was quelled in Mexico City. This failed rebellion, according to Dodson, was associated with the Catholic lay association known as the Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa (LNDLR). Mexican officials determined that both plots were linked with each other.²⁰⁶ It is difficult, though, to claim that the Estrada rebels organized on behalf of the Catholic Church. This correlation, however, unveils how the two varying causes were lumped together because they shared a broader goal to overthrow Calles.

Despite the jury’s general impression of the majority of the participants’ passiveness, their participation cannot be understood as simply blind followers of an attempted military expedition. Like the leaders in the Revolution, the participants held their own motivations.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Letter from Samuel W. McNabb to the Attorney General, March 1, 1927, DOJ 71-1-3.

²⁰⁴ Dodson, *Fanáticos, Exiles, and Spies*, 97.

²⁰⁵ Dodson, *Fanáticos, Exiles, and Spies*, 99.

²⁰⁶ Dodson, *Fanáticos, Exiles, and Spies*, 102-105

Though limited, many of the statements provided by defendants noted descriptions of the coup's activity and their motivations for participating in the Estrada Army. A majority claimed to have been promised a small pay for their acceptance into the army and an additional sum once the Baja invasion succeeded. Some individuals, such as Taribio Carrasco, were promised a "good position" in the rebellion's aftermath.²⁰⁷ Few individuals made attempts to separate themselves from the group as mercenaries. Only Manuel Soto, who stated "to have been drunk" when following his father-in-law onto the armored caravan, claimed that he lacked any knowledge of the army's goals.²⁰⁸ This may suggest that many participants were knowledgeable agents of their activity and goals. They were willing to participate in an armed rebellion for their benefit whether through financial or political gains. Virtually all appeared to have been assured that they would remain undisturbed by American officials once the expedition began their trek to and across the Tijuana border. Such assurances might have been made to convince them of the safety of their journey and the viability of the army's goals.²⁰⁹ Considering these motivations in the immediate struggle also helps in understanding how these individuals, whether influenced by a political Catholicism or secular critique of the Mexican government, continued to grapple with the Revolution from afar while in the United States.

Nonetheless, the variety of statements highlights the agency and informed decisions of the Estrada Army. The recruits reportedly used a variety of terms to refer to their coalition in its

²⁰⁷ Memorandum to Assistant Attorney General Letts, December 23, 1926; Report by Agent Hopkins, December 1, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

²⁰⁸ Report by Agent Hopkins, December 1, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

²⁰⁹ Report by Agent Hopkins, December 1, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

recruitment process and its consolidation that ranged from a “revolution,” “revolutionary movement,” and “revolutionary expedition.”²¹⁰ Such terms worked to articulate their understanding and significance of their activity. Likewise, they were well informed of Estrada’s and other military leaders’ roles and reputations. During his recruitment in late July 1926, Pedro Audelo attended “many meetings of revolutionists” in which recruiters informed the details of the coups’ broader goals. In this manner, those willing to join the army knew the broader meaning of the army in the context of Revolutionary Mexico. Likewise, the army was well informed of the leaders’ reputations and involvement in Mexican politics. Some like Daniel Márquez, who was recruited by Cisto Ramírez, a former revolutionary chief in Zacatecas, met with leaders to make his decision to join. After his recruitment, he became acquainted with Rodríguez and Rigoberto Bannelos, who informed him in more detail of their strategy and goals.²¹¹ Men like Audelo and Márquez did not blindly join the Estrada Army. They carefully assessed the situation, its makeup, and its potential to inform their decision to join.

Ramón Mojica and Angel Novar provided the most in-depth statements of the defendants that illustrated self-interest as a primary motivation. Promised a high-ranking “civil appointment” in Baja California, Mojica claimed that “they were going to fight the Calles government and start a revolution.”²¹² Whether or not Mojica aligned with the leadership’s mission, he envisioned this as an opportunity to elevate himself to a new political position. At the least, Mojica shared the leadership’s desire to combat what he saw as a threatening government

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

for personal means. Angel Novar, moreover, asserted that leaders aimed to combat Calles “because it was not a liberal government.”²¹³ Novar did not expand on this, but at this point, Calles had instituted some liberal reforms under his administration. He had passed the Petroleum Law which began to apply Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Foreign investors who held oil property in Mexico had to apply for concessions if they wished to retain those estates. Likewise, Calles limited the increase of foreign land ownership under the Alien Land Law. Most famously the Calles Law limited the political and social influence of the Catholic Church in Mexico.²¹⁴ Estrada and its leaders identified themselves as the true liberals of the revolution. Though they did not count themselves as defenders of the Church, they found Calles’ undermining of church practices an affront to the liberal doctrine of individual rights.²¹⁵ Though details are murky, and motivations surely varied, most of the recruits’ seemingly involvement agreed with the effort to combat the Calles regime.

American officials rightfully suspected that the rebellion had much to do with the ensuing conflict in Mexico. Just days after the initial arrests, the Department of State received a pledge form based out of Louisville, Kentucky condemning the conflict in Mexico and seeking United States intervention or severing of diplomatic relations. The pledge called for American citizens to:

join and become part of an expedition of the said Legion of Freedom into Mexico or elsewhere [...] should it become necessary for Catholics and others living Mexico to

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 98.

²¹⁵ Dodson, *Fanáticos, Exiles, and Spies*, 101-102.

resort to use of force to protect their sacred right of religious freedom and to preserve that same fundamental principle common to all freemen of every country and clime.²¹⁶

The pledge echoed a similar strategy used by the Estrada Army by calling for the organization of individuals for armed action across the border. In this case, however, white Euro Americans saw the Mexican government's challenge to religious freedom as an attack on their own values.

Utilizing the language of individual rights and liberties, the pledge from white Americans provides another example of how Mexico's post-revolutionary conflicts, whether through the Cristero War or the organization of contrary politics, had spilled across borders. The Estrada Army, though a failure, ultimately marked a potential point of rupture that could have directly influenced Mexican politics. Just as significantly, it utilized Los Angeles as a site of refuge whereby Mexican exiles and migrants could organize to violently change their homeland.

The case concluded with the trial and the offer of gold watches. By March 1927, American officials finally determined that such activity violated Clause 8 of the Constitution and Section 3 of the Act of January 31, 1881.²¹⁷ They concluded that they were not gifts from the state of Baja California nor Calles and confirmed that Rodríguez entrusted Frank Lamadrid to distribute them across the border.²¹⁸ Who Lamadrid was remains unclear in the case records. Sources suggest, however, that he may have been the culprit who undermined the rebellion by acting as an informant for the Mexican state. The Mexican government appointed Lamadrid, in addition to a representative of the Automobile Club of Southern California and a San Diego

²¹⁶ Letter to the Attorney General, March 18, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

²¹⁷ Letter to the Attorney General, March 8, 1927, DOJ 71-1-3.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

deputy sheriff, as special investigators.²¹⁹ Records show that Lamadrid escorted a U.S. agent to meet with the Antonio Martínez, the acting governor of Baja California, who briefed the agent on the information that they had collected on Estrada. Up until the date of arrests, Lamadrid played the role of middleman in confirming the rumors of an organizing army.²²⁰ Mexican officials continued to deploy him as a mediator when they used him to distribute the gold watches to American officials. Lamadrid claimed that the “watches were given by the Governor himself not as an official recognition of the Mexican Government but only as a remembrance from the Governor himself.”²²¹ He concluded that he acted merely as a friend of the governor.²²² It was clear, however, that the Baja governor had used Lamarid to send the gifts to American officials and agents. The U.S. State Department required the return of the watches to Frank Lamadrid “with thanks.”²²³ As Lamadrid’s involvement and the gold watches suggested, the Mexican government would reward those across the border who served their interests against those who sought to undermine their Revolutionary government. While the Estrada Army could safely mobilize in Southern California, they still faced the challenge of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border to play out their designs in Mexico. In other words, the Mexican government also used the reified border, like Mexican exiles, to their advantage. They monitored Revolutionary activity in the U.S. and used the border as a buffer from these groups and individuals.

²¹⁹ Report by Agent Edwin N. Atherton, September 18, 1926, DOJ 71-1-3.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Letter to the Attorney General, February 4, 1927, DOJ 71-1-3.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Letter to the Attorney General, March 25, 1927, DOJ 71-1-3.

In January 1925, Maytorena departed with his son and his secretary, Roberto Almada, from Los Angeles to Mexico City. It remained unclear if the government invited him or if Maytorena merely wanted to visit the country after the end of the Revolution. Nonetheless, he sensed that he might have difficulty crossing the border at El Paso. He instructed his son and Almada to wait at the border until he crossed. Within days, however, Maytorena received word that Calles “was very upset” about his return and ordered his subsequent return on the next train.²²⁴ Maytorena defended himself by asserting that he had “the right to return to my country as many times as I wish.”²²⁵ If the government wished for his exit, he continued, they would have to do so by force.²²⁶ Maytorena did not receive the warm homecoming that he might have liked. He remained marked by the Mexican government as a dangerous Mexican exile who might challenge the Mexican government. His difficulties did not end after this initial encounter. In subsequent weeks, Calles continued to press for Maytorena to go back to the United States. On January 25, he received another threat from Calles which demanded that Maytorena leave Mexico within 72 hours. “I will not leave,” he responded.²²⁷ Evidently, Calles viewed his return as “a problem for the government.” Calles revoked the order but still sought to boot Maytorena out to ensure any political activity could be prevented.²²⁸ He never wavered until October 3, nine months after his arrival. It is likely that he finally succumbed to the government’s pressure as he

²²⁴ José Maytorena, *Mi Viajo en México* [typescript] 1925, Box 7, Folder 23, JMM.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

was escorted by two police officers to the border. “Please note that I am expelled,” he lamented in his journal, “not by my will.”²²⁹

Maytorena’s statement to Mexican officials reflects the larger underpinnings of the Revolutionary Generation. While not all were able to leave Mexico during this period, many prominent figures such as the magónistas, Maytorena, and Estrada utilized the border as a site of refuge and mobilization. Others, however, who flocked to the border during this period fled their home country to stabilize their lives. In this sense, they were expelled and not by will.

Individuals like Maytorena blamed the Mexican government for their exile. This is not to suggest that they did not hold some agency because they certainly did. Although they traversed the borderlands and the United States, Los Angeles became a strategic site for some Mexican exiles. In doing so, they took part in bringing new conservative politics and ideas of the Revolution in the city rooted in Mexico. They indirectly countered Euro-Americans’ attempts to distance Mexicans as a remnant of the region’s history in the early twentieth century. The city’s white population might have hoped their narratives of the Mexican past were true. The arrival of this new generation of Mexicans ensured that Mexicans remained a critical part of Los Angeles’s past, as well as its present and future. This, though, would be the last vestiges of the Revolutionary Generation as the community underwent new cultural developments in Los Angeles. Still, they would counter these instances by retaining and promoting their ties to Mexico as the Revolution’s impact grew.

²²⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

Negotiating Race and Nation at the “Gates” of Mexico during the Cristero War and La Segunda, 1926-1936

On April 29, 1928, Miguel Venegas, a Cristero exile, and his two oldest children attended the celebratory opening of Los Angeles’ City Hall building. Spanning over three days, the festival’s agenda consisted of a mass spectacle that tracked Los Angeles’s growth as a modern metropolis through its history. First, the nine-million-dollar building was greeted with a dedication parade of over thirty-four bands and ethnic-inspired floats, and the arrival of United States military units. By night’s end, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, the building’s Lindbergh Beacon would be lit via “direct wire from Washington” by President Calvin Coolidge.¹ The finale of the ceremony depicted a historical pageant operated by the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, which largely worked to illustrate the city’s progress through a narrative of United States conquest.²

The City Hall’s grand opening celebrations claimed to start a new epoch of Los Angeles history as a modern urban site of the American West. They also sought to claim domination over

¹ “City Hall Fete to April 26,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1928, accessed February 2, 2020, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* and “Los Angeles Dedicates Imposing New City Hall,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1928, accessed February 2, 2020, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

² “City Hall Three-Day Program of Dedication Ceremonies,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1928, accessed February 2, 2020, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* and “Pageant Revives Old West,” April 29, 1928, accessed February 2, 2020, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

previous national periods through their subjective use of history within the festivities and City Hall architecture. “Whereas 147 years ago,” proclaimed the *LA Times*, “padres and the booted dons trod deserted plains, yesterday a city of upward of 1,500,000 people gathered” to dedicate “a sheer tower of white symbolizing a new era of accomplishment and progress for the Pacific Southwest.”³ Various doors of the building illustrated key dates in the city’s history including its founding under the Spanish, the building of the aqueduct in 1913, and U.S. conquest that brought “progress” to the area.⁴ The pageant sought to depict a more “colorful” version of Los Angeles in four eras. These included pre-conquest, the founding of the missions under Junípero Serra, the Spanish period, and the “coming of the United States soldiers.”⁵ In one broad stroke, the building narrated Los Angeles’s eclectic ethnic history to portray the advent of American progress over their Spanish predecessors. At the same time, the pageant romanticized “California’s famous missions” and the Spanish’s arrival as the “first white men” who “invaded the West” to further solidify their vision of the region defined by whiteness and progress.⁶ As a spectator, Miguel Venegas thus consumed a curated narrative of Los Angeles’s history through progress. Just like decades prior, the City Hall envisioned Los Angeles as a white place.

On another level, Venegas’ perspective represented the strengthened connections between Los Angeles and Mexico as the city grew and the Revolutionary legacy continued. Writing to his brother in Mexico, Venegas described the view of the vast city from City Hall’s

³ “Los Angeles Dedicates Imposing New City Hall,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1928

⁴ “City Hall Door Tells Story,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1929, accessed February 2, 2020, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁵ “Pageant Revives Old West,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1929.

⁶ *Ibid.*

twenty-seventh floor.⁷ Arriving just two years prior to the City Hall's completion, Venegas took part in the growth of Los Angeles.⁸ Venegas and his two sons represented the continued growth of Los Angeles' Mexican community. Unlike prominent political exiles in the previous two decades, Venegas represented a different type of Mexican exile as a labor migrant seeking better opportunities in the United States. He was a Catholic Mexican exile from the state of Jalisco during from the Cristero War of 1926. With the Venegas family and other similar Mexican migrants during this period, we can see how Mexicans and Mexican Americans continued to debate their place within the metropolis in the American West. Far away from his homeland, Venegas witnessed firsthand the growth of Los Angeles, and potentially, his future in it from the twenty-seventh floor. For some, Los Angeles represented an urban site of progress, for Venegas and others, however, it acted as a site of refuge from the Mexican government who targeted their notion of mexicanidad defined by religious identity.

This chapter considers radical Mexican political actors in Los Angeles who utilized the city for their own strategic aims from 1926 to 1936. In doing so, they helped contribute to its growth and that of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I also show that Los Angeles continued to act as a temporary refuge away from the liberal reforms and attacks of the revolutionary regime in Mexico. Part of this experience collided with the outbreak of the Cristero War in 1926, a regional civil war between the Mexican government and devout Mexican Catholics.⁹ The city thus

⁷ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, April 29, 1928, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 2, Venegas Family Papers (VFP), 099, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University (LMU).

⁸ Ibid; "Los Angeles City Hall," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1929, accessed February 2, 2020, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁹ Julia G. Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26-30.

became a strategic meeting place in which these Mexicans sought to understand, shape, and negotiate that same regime. As a transnational event, the Cristero War shaped the experiences and political, social, and cultural identities of devout Mexican Catholics in Los Angeles.¹⁰ As such, the Cristero diaspora's experience in Los Angeles yields some insights into how they articulated conservative ideas about Mexico and mexicanidad in conjunction with the church-state conflict occurring in Mexico. While the Mexican government embarked on an era of reconstruction, Los Angeles's Cristero diaspora sought to understand these developments. They produced new strategies to combat Mexico's secular government from afar and in safety from persecution. Studying this portion of Mexican Los Angeles ultimately sheds light on a wider range of Mexican experiences during this period. Never far from Mexico, Cristeros brought religious politics to Los Angeles while also resisting the urge to "become Mexican American."

This chapter follows two perspectives of conservative politics with different sets of archival evidence. First, I examine the firsthand experience of the Venegas family, an exiled Cristero family who found safety and residency in Los Angeles, through their personal letters. In contrast, to the political activity of the previous chapter, this family yields insights into the everyday experiences and coping strategies of the Venegas family. They dealt with uncertain futures in both Mexico and the United States. Second, the chapter examines the formation of the Comité Popular de Defensa Mexicana (CPDM) in Los Angeles during the mid-1930s. The organization also emerged from the Cristero diaspora in Los Angeles as part of the Cristero War and during *La Segunda* (1930–1938), the second part of the Cristero conflict. Rather than looking towards a future in the United States, this organization sought to arouse opposition to the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

Mexican government among Mexicans living in Los Angeles. This organization articulated a right-wing ideology based on their ideas of race, gender, and nation. Some of Los Angeles's Cristeros conflated their political activity with "virtue" and nationalism. Thus, when they spoke of defending their religion and homeland, they did so as interrelated and inseparable causes. By utilizing *Pro-Patria*, the movement's flagship journal, I assess fascist articulations of Mexican nationalism that emerged in the city.

These different sources unveil some of the nuances of Mexican and Mexican political actors to complicate our understanding of Mexican Los Angeles in the early-twentieth century. I argue that the reconstruction phase of the Mexican Revolution should be considered instrumental in shaping Mexican Los Angeles and borderlands. Mexican migration and the transnational exchange of ideas challenged Mexicans to debate on the meaning of "Mexico" as a political and social construct. Their expressions of nationalism, broadly defined by their ideas of political and religious liberty, unfolded in Los Angeles and informed their activity there. Their political mobilization and longing to shape their homeland defined their ideas of a Mexican nation and people in specific ways. Taken together, they illustrate how Los Angeles hosted conservative groups of Mexican exiles which sought to counter the Revolutionary regime in Mexico.

¡Viva Cristo Rey! The Cristero Rebellion and Mexico

The Cristero struggle came out of the longer tenuous relationship between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church. In the mid-nineteenth century, Mexican liberals and conservatives debated the Church's influence on the young Mexican nation. For instance, Benito Juárez, a liberal Mexican President, enacted a series of anticlerical measures within the Constitution of 1857 that ultimately sought to diminish the Church's political power and property holdings. Known as La Reforma (1854–1876), this debate set off a series of violent

conflicts centered on the question of Church and state.¹¹ When the dictator Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) took over as President, he understood that the conflict had to be resolved, or at the very least, softened to achieve political stability in the country. He resolved tensions by easing the enforcement of, but not revoking, the anticlerical measures found in the 1857 Constitution.¹² Rebellion against the dictator resulted in the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), though not for religious reasons. The Church-state question resurfaced again through anticlerical policies in the 1917 Constitution. In 1926, President Plutarco Elías Calles finally enforced those policies. Some devout Mexican Catholics rebelled against the measures and sought to salvage the Church’s influence in what became the Cristiada (Cristero War).¹³ As it unfolded on both sides of the border, the conflict ultimately signaled the larger conservative and liberal divide in Mexico’s history which often centered on the Church’s place in Mexican society and politics.¹⁴

The Constitution of 1917 diminished the political power of the Church. The most extreme measure, Article 130, gave the government the right to intervene in Church affairs. Moreover, it limited the number of priests per state, while entirely banning foreign clergy within Mexico. Most significantly, it forbade clergy members from engaging in politics. Relatedly, Article 5 banned any religious orders. Church property, under Article 27, would also be nationalized. While these impacted the Church’s power and structure in Mexico, other measures altered the

¹¹ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 20–22; Robert Weis, *For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 9–11.

¹² Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 22; David Espinosa, *Jesuit Student Groups, the Universidad Iberoamericana, and Political Resistance in Mexico, 1913–1979* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 17–18.

¹³ Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 28–29.

¹⁴ Historian Ben Fallaw refers to the “place of the Church in a Catholic country” debate as Mexico’s “religious question.” Although he utilizes this framework to examine postrevolutionary state formation, his definition of the religious question fits into the longer trajectory of the Church’s place in Mexican politics and society from the nation’s inception in the nineteenth century. See *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

religious practices of Mexican Catholics. Those measures, Articles 3 and 24, prohibited religious education and religious practice in public, respectively.¹⁵ Though not immediately enforced, the expansion of these measures worked to increase Church-state tensions in Mexico that had existed since the mid-nineteenth century.

In January 1926, Archbishop and Primate José Mora y del Río, speaking on behalf of Mexican Catholics, refused to recognize these restrictive measures if implemented. He declared that the Church would be prepared to fight them.¹⁶ In response, President Plutarco Calles began to ban foreign clergy members and closed Catholic schools. Soon afterward, the first violent episode of the Cristero struggle commenced after two Mexican Catholic protestors were killed in a skirmish in Mexico City.¹⁷ That summer, Calles announced penal reforms, known as the Calles Law, to enforce the measures by directing police to inspect, search, and arrest any violators. While Mexican Catholics were first angered by the infringement on their religious practices, they also recognized how their religion became conflated with crime. In other words, they had to choose between the word of law or their religion.¹⁸ In response, the Catholic hierarchy suspended all religious activities across Mexico on July 31, 1926. Popular protest, as a result, turned to armed conflict, known as the Cristero War, across Mexico's west-central states.¹⁹

Lasting over three years, the conflict, like the Mexican Revolution of the previous decade, proved quite complex. Initially, the rebellion lacked any clear leadership. Sporadic

¹⁵ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 23–24.

¹⁶ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 25–26; Jean A. Myer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People between Church and State 1926–1929*, trans. Richard Southern (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 42–44.

¹⁷ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 25.

¹⁸ Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 28–29.

¹⁹ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 26–27

waves of rebellion and violence erupted within various regional communities. These outbursts eventually coalesced into coordinated large-scale assaults.²⁰ Historian Jean Meyer notes that the self-proclaimed Army of National Liberation was a “reflection of the peasantry from which it was recruited [;] the army was a federation of republics and communities and arms.”²¹ While participants rallied under the same banner, they brought with them their religiosity that stemmed from their local contexts. Nonetheless, their ideas about the role of the state in local and, often, rural affairs largely remained the common factor that mobilized the rebels. Eventually, some Cristeros formed a War Committee to pursue more tactical and coordinated militarized activity against government forces. Between 1927 and 1928, the struggle escalated into violent battles, resulting in casualties on both sides of the conflict. The rebellion reached a stalemate when it became clear that the rebels could not entirely defeat trained government forces. Likewise, as the rebellion continued to grow it became increasingly difficult for federal troops to crush these rebels.²²

During the summer of 1929, the Mexican government, the Mexican Catholic hierarchy, Vatican representatives, and U.S. diplomats organized a peaceful resolution known as the Arreglos (Agreements). The Mexican government promised to cease persecution of the Catholic Church and allow religious services to resume. These negotiations, however, excluded many rank-and-file Cristeros, who interpreted the resolution with skepticism and as a betrayal.²³ The

²⁰ Myer, *The Cristero Rebellion*, 114.

²¹ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 27–29.

²² *Ibid.*, 125–26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 33, 54–59

resolution also stipulated that Mexico would be recognized as a secular state and cease to infringe on the internal affairs of the Church. In exchange, the Church leaders would suppress the rebels and promote support for the Mexican state.²⁴ On one level, many Mexican Catholics remained unconvinced that the state would cease its anticlerical policies. Relatedly, they felt betrayed by elite Catholic officials for making what they viewed as a deceptive deal with secular elites.²⁵ As historian Ben Fallow states, the “meaning of the place of the Church in a Catholic country after an anticlerical revolution” remained to be settled.²⁶ While Church-state relations long reflected that struggle, the late 1920s forced Mexicans to come to terms with those relationships by reconciling their political, social, and cultural identities. Across the border, the struggle unraveled in unique ways from communities in Mexico. Some Cristero exiles tried to reconcile the difficulties of their exiled status, while others took part in the creation of radical conservative groups during La Segunda. Either way, some of these experiences articulated conservative ideas about Mexico and being Mexican.

Exile, Migration, and Longing in a Cristero Family

The political conflicts unfolding in Mexico during the Cristero conflict showed the Revolution’s longer transnational trajectory. This instability also converged with the rise of Mexican migration, United States immigration policy, and the growth of Los Angeles. Two years prior to the struggle, the United States pursued a more stringent immigration policy by passing the National Origins Act.²⁷ The new policy placed national quotas that limited immigrants from

²⁴ Fallow, *Religion and State Formation*, 15.

²⁵ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 127.

²⁶ Fallow, *Religion and State Formation*, 2.

²⁷ Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 28.

Europe while entirely excluding those from Asia. At the same time, however, agribusinessmen managed to curtail such quotas and exclusions in the Western Hemisphere to continue recruiting Mexican labor.²⁸ The act created the Border Patrol as a new state-regulated force to police the border and curb Mexican migration.²⁹ Still, Los Angeles' Mexican population continued to grow exponentially. At the beginning of the decade, the city's Mexican population numbered approximately 30,000. By 1930, it had grown to over 90,000.³⁰

Included within this growing population were Cristero exiles and refugees who sought to escape the religious conflict and persecution in Mexico. Some claimed that their departure from Mexico was forced or out of necessity. Others were largely displaced from their communities because of the ensuing violence.³¹ Miguel Venegas, who sought refuge in Los Angeles in 1927, fell into both categories. Born on September 29, 1897, Venegas married Dolores Dávalos Morales of Zapotlanejo, Jalisco in 1919. Over the next eight years the two would have four boys and opened a general store in Los Angeles. Dolores' grandfather's estate of five haciendas gave the Venegas family financial comfort.³² Venegas joined a non-violent political party called the Union Popular. This group opposed the revolutionary regime's affront to Church practice and affairs. Venegas attended regular meetings and distributed the party's weekly flyer. This caught the eye of Don Rosario Orozco, the local political boss, who viewed Venegas as a threat.³³ The

²⁸ Ibid., 29.

²⁹ Ibid., 32-57.

³⁰ Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, 78-79.

³¹ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 33, 54-59

³² Maria Teresa Venegas, *Letters Home: Mexican Exile Correspondence from Los Angeles, 1927-1932*, 102-103, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

³³ *Letters Home*, 103, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

outbreak of the war transitioned Venegas's membership in the group to an increased participation in the armed part of the conflict. Miguel Gómez Loza, one of the party's leaders, recruited Venegas to guide the rebels with his knowledge of the local highland terrain near Zapotlanejo. Venegas obliged and served Loza as a guide and contributed his literacy and writing skills for the cause. His participation, however, came at the cost of his store and his properties. Realizing he could not return home or to safety, Venegas decided to venture to the United States for refuge.³⁴

Venegas's self-imposed exile separated him from his homeland and his family who stayed behind in Mexico. His experience, and his family members who later joined him, ultimately yields insight into the ways in which the Cristero diaspora coped with displacement and with the immigrant experience. More significantly, it yields insights into the conservative values of the family who regularly wrote of traditional values they lost as a result of the Cristero War. For the family, letter writing acted as a strategic tool of communication and as a continued link to their home community. Letters maintain personal relations. Historian Romeo Guzmán has shown that the Venegas family followed similar patterns of letter writing as European migrants.³⁵ He argues that their letters informed their transnational lives while also articulating "migrant-defined ideas of belonging and rights that transcended the formal boundaries" of the U.S. and Mexico.³⁶ Venegas's family's letters, and others, also served to reconcile their uncertain and difficult experiences between two spaces. Letter writing described the transnational

³⁴ *Letters Home*, 105 and 109, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

³⁵ Romeo Guzmán, "The Transnational Life and Letters of the Venegas Family, 1920s to 1950s," *The History of the Family* 21, no. 3 (June 2016), 458-482.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 459.

repercussions of the Cristero War. Similarly, historian Clay Stalls has explored how the Venegas family overcame the difficulties of exile to thrive in Los Angeles.³⁷ My exploration builds on these findings to consider the everyday experiences of the Venegas family while they articulated notions of longing and conservative ideas about Mexico and being Mexican. As part of the Cristero and Revolutionary diaspora, the family took part in a different strand of Mexican Los Angeles by resisting the process of becoming Mexican American. A large part of their letters, as shown by Guzmán and Stalls, detail their experiences as exiles, but I also show that they held implicit ideas of mexicanidad and Mexico defined by those experiences and their Catholic identity. Their letters fulfill the three “categories of negotiations” of purposeful writing identified by historian David A. Gerber. First, regulative writing which aims to continue contact with distant ones to organize and maintain those relationships. Second, they were expressive writing that recounts the lived experience and emotions. Finally, their letters acted as descriptive writing of daily life and situation.³⁸ Taken together, this archive helps us understand the experience of some Crister exiles during this turbulent period and their views of the Mexican government from afar.

The decision to migrate to the U.S. and navigate the process provided great uncertainty for Venegas and the family left behind. Though Venegas did not leave personal evidence detailing his hasty exile to Los Angeles, other Mexicans in the same year detailed the strenuous process in their letters back home and to Southern California. Writing to his brother in Los Angeles, Ysidro Alvarado shared rumors of the increased difficulty of crossing the Laredo and

³⁷ Clay Stalls, ““El Único Problema Aquí”: A Cristero Family and Workin Los Angeles, 1927–1932,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 51, no 2 (Summer 2020), 161–188.

³⁸ David A. Geber, *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 101, 102-105, 116-125, and 129-139.

Juárez points of a passage where the border patrol had increased and turned away those seeking to cross.³⁹ Despite these difficulties, Venegas crossed the Juárez border on May 17, 1927. He then took a train from El Paso to Los Angeles.⁴⁰ His decision to relocate to Los Angeles illustrates the broader links the Mexican migrant population held with friends and family in Mexico in their recruitment to the city. In August 1926, Valentín Vela, for instance, helped his brother, Margarito, cross the border. He gave him \$100 for the immigration fees and recommended that he obtain a passport for work. He also advised his brother to avoid the Laredo border crossing and, instead, go through El Paso. He also warned of smugglers due to its difficulty and danger with increased immigration forces.⁴¹ Mexican migrants often acted as facilitators who explained the migrant journey to friends and family pondering passage to the U.S. Though it is unclear if Venegas received such help, he did choose Los Angeles as a site of refuge knowing that friends from home had resided there.⁴² Like many before him, Miguel later moved Dolores and his two sons to the city.

Venegas's initial months in Los Angeles proved difficult in adjusting to his new life and the confusing status surrounding his exile. First working as a dishwasher in Los Angeles, Miguel lauded the pay in comparison to what he could have made in Mexico. "Even more could be earned" in the fields, he wrote, but he "would not last long" in such hard work.⁴³ Separated from

³⁹ Letter from Ysidro Alvarado to Antonio Alvarado, March 6, 1926, Box 1, Folder 1, Alvarado family letters (AFL), The Huntington Library (HL), San Marino, California.

⁴⁰ Miguel Venegas Border Crossing Card, Box 1, Folder 15, Venegas Family Papers Addendum (VFPA), MS 128, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University (LMU); *Letters Home*, 115-116, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

⁴¹ Letters from Valentín Vela to Margarito Vela, Box 1, Folders 1-3, Vela Family letters (VFL), MS125, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University (LMU).

⁴² *Letters Home*, 115-116, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

⁴³ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, July 12, 1927. Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 1, VFP, LMU.

his family, Venegas also lamented the impact his exile, if long-term, would have on Dolores and his family in Mexico. In doing so, he weighed the scenarios that would best benefit his family should they remain in Zapotlanejo or join him in Los Angeles.⁴⁴ Miguel referred to his exile and displacement, as well as those surrounding him, as suffering and sacrificing. Yet, he made sure to alleviate their concerns by comparing his hardships to those “more unfortunate [...] without money, without work, and in a strange land far from their people” as a result of the war.⁴⁵ In other instances, he continued to reconcile his nostalgia for Mexico by weighing the benefits of living in Los Angeles.⁴⁶ Venegas thus made the best of an uncertain situation for his sake, and for those he had abruptly left. In doing so, he kept open the possibility and hope of returning to Mexico, while also realizing that Los Angeles might become a permanent home.

Venegas’s sister, Soledad Venegas echoed the same sentiments of sacrifice and suffering. Unlike her brother, however, she came to the U.S. exclusively for religious pursuits. In 1926, Soledad arrived in San Diego with the aim of joining a convent, a prospect that proved difficult in Mexico due to the limits on religious orders. Throughout her correspondence, she expressed themes of suffering, persecution, and pain from being separated from her family in Mexico. In addition to religious persecution, migration provided another layer of difficulty. For Soledad, the hardships of separation signaled their devotion to the glory of God and the religion she so cherished. In her first year in the United States, she assured her father that they would be

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Letter from Miguel Venegas to María del Rosario Venegas, July 23, 1927, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder ,1 VFP, LMU; Letter from Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, January 4, 1928, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 2, VFP, LMU.

⁴⁶ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, June 12, 1928, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 2, VFP, LMU.

rewarded by God for their sacrifice that separated the Venegas family across North America.⁴⁷ After taking her religious vows two years later in a San Francisco convent and adopting the name Sor Gabriela de la Inmaculada Concepcion, she emphasized the meaning of her great sacrifice again for her family.⁴⁸ The family expressed their resentment of this separation and Rosario's, Soledad's, and Miguel's youngest sister, departure to the convent. Soledad continued to utilize religious sentiments as reconciliation. Rather than dwell on the separation, she encouraged her father to recognize the essential work that they were doing on behalf of their religion.⁴⁹ Around April 1931, their father wrote to Soledad expressing hopelessness that Miguel would be able to return to Mexico. Rather than comforting her father, she affirmed that she also had "no hope" of returning. She, however, pointed to her enjoyment of the pleasure of practicing her faith with freedom.⁵⁰ It is evident that Soledad relished her faith, however, her emphasis on this point added another dimension. By 1931, five years after the Cristero War, Soledad had assessed that her life was better in the United States. She implicitly emphasized a positive potential for life outside of Mexico. Though Miguel and Soledad's trajectory differed, their sentiments of suffering and sacrifice sought to place meaning to their situation. While the two did so in their own ways, this strategy exhibited coping mechanisms to understand their displacement and exile. These strategies, as a result, negotiated the meaning of their religion within their identity together

⁴⁷ Letter from Soledad Venegas to Juan and Julia Venegas, March 3, 1927, Subseries C, Box 4, Folder 5, VFP, LMU.

⁴⁸ Letter to Soledad Venegas to Juan Venegas, Subseries C, August 14, 1929, Subseries C, Box 4, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

⁴⁹ Letter from Soledad Venegas to Juan Venegas, November 22, 1931, Box 1, Folder 11, VFPA, MS 128, LMU.

⁵⁰ Letter to Soledad Venegas to Juan Venegas, Subseries C, April 5, 1931, Subseries C, Box 4, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

while in the U.S. For Soledad, it appeared that she had ceased to think of herself as part of Mexico.

Meanwhile, Venegas continued to juggle life in Los Angeles with his old one in Mexico during the Cristero War. He wrote often to his brother, Francisco, to settle his struggling storefront in Mexico. After his abrupt departure, Venegas was left in debt to various creditors after the business's seizure by the local government.⁵¹ Rather than leaving this debt unresolved, Venegas sought to settle it in case he might return to Mexico one day. Balancing the operation of his newly opened grocery store in Los Angeles with the debt greatly frustrated Miguel. The long workdays left him tired and unable to fully assess his business matters in Mexico, which prolonged its settlement.⁵² As a result, he often weighed the possibility of cleaning slate and distancing himself from the situation completely by leaving his debt unresolved. He pointed to his family in Mexico and his love for his homeland as the main factors in preventing the liquidation of the business.⁵³ This balancing act and negotiation show some dimensions of the Cristero diaspora's experience. First, it showed that for many life left behind in Mexico could not be ignored due to the sudden decision to seek refuge in the United States. In the case of Miguel, he likely felt a sense of responsibility to resolve his debt to protect the livelihood of the family members. Second, it also projected the ways in which he clung to his life and memory in Mexico. By noting the love for his family and nation, Miguel remained hopeful that he would return one day. The situation provided even more uncertainty for the Venegas family by keeping

⁵¹ *Letters Home*, 119-20 and 123., Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

⁵² Letter from Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, March 19, 1928, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 2, VFP, LMU.

⁵³ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, September 11, 1930, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 4, VFP, LMU.

their sense of belonging connected to Mexico thereby claiming Los Angeles as a temporary fortress of refuge. Soledad had moved on from coupling her identity as part of Mexico. Miguel, in contrast, continued to cling to that part of his life. No matter the case, each used the Cristero struggle as a point of reference to define themselves and their future.

Dolores Venegas, Miguel's wife, expressed her own difficulties in adjusting to life in Los Angeles. Though only a few letters remain from Dolores, they reveal a more familial and urgent tone compared to those of Miguel. The gendered dynamics of labor, it appeared, kept Dolores busy and unable to communicate as regularly as she wished. Apologizing to her mother-in-law for the lack of contact, she blamed work at their family grocery store and the home for leaving little energy or desire to write for two hours.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Dolores frequently shared her and their children's immense desire to return to Mexico. For instance, in 1932 she wrote, "We are always with the desire of returning and we see that the day never comes, God knows how long we will remain here." She continued by assuring her father-in-law that the boys had hardly forgotten anything about their homeland and family.⁵⁵ This practice functioned to remind family members in Mexico remained in their minds and that a return was possible. In doing so, they refreshed their familial bonds, while also revealing that their time in Los Angeles was assumed to be temporary.

Such declarations of longing and returning home were not merely statements to maintain familial bonds. Rather, they held out hope of their eventual return to Mexico and spoke much of it. Young José Miguel, the oldest of the Venegas children, however, observed that "we just seem

⁵⁴ Letter from Dolores Venegas to Julia Cárdenas de Venegas, June 25, 1928, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 2, VFP, LMU.

⁵⁵ Letter from Dolores Venegas to Juan Venegas, February 11, 1932, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

to say” we will return.⁵⁶ He clearly doubted that plan would come to fruition. Nonetheless, he also imagined life in Mexico and yearned for a return. Using a youthful imagination, he wrote to his uncle Francisco that he and his brother were saving money to purchase a car or train tickets to return the family to Mexico. “Which way do you think we will end up going back?” queried José Miguel.⁵⁷ From the Venegas parents to the children, the family placed much emphasis on the significance of residing in Mexico in their first few years in Los Angeles. Still, Miguel and Dolores took the necessary steps to adjust to life in Los Angeles in case their time there would be long. In addition to the opening of his grocery store, the Venegas family enrolled José Miguel and Ricardo, their two oldest boys, in a local Catholic school. They began to learn English there and received a parochial education. The ability to pursue religious instruction provided Miguel and Dolores freedom of choice.⁵⁸ The boys’ enrollment in a Catholic school held much significance for the Venegas family in molding their children to Catholic culture and values.⁵⁹ As part of the Cristero diaspora, being able to choose between a religious or secular education was not merely understood in the language of “liberty.” Instead, it represented their Catholic identity which they saw as threatened in Mexico. In enrolling the children at a Catholic school, they thus remapped their vision of a Mexican life to an unfamiliar landscape.

The purchase of a used Ford car also provided levity for the Venegas family for trips throughout Los Angeles and in helping with the grocery store. As Miguel articulated, “the

⁵⁶ Letter from José Miguel Venegas to Aunt Lupita, August 1, 1931, Subseries E, Box 1, Folder 24, VFP, LMU.

⁵⁷ Letter from José Miguel to Francisco Venegas, March 23, 1931, Subseries E, Box 1, Folder 24, VFP, LMU.

⁵⁸ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas November 25, 1927, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 1 and letter from Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, June 12, 1928, Box 1, Folder 2, VFP, LMU.

⁵⁹ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, November 20, 1929, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 3, VFP, LMU.

automobile is as indispensable as a horse is to a rancher.”⁶⁰ Mimicking earlier strategies that worked to assuage family distance, these adjustments to life in Los Angeles largely reflected a process in which the Venegas contrasted life in Mexico to that in the United States. By doing so, it aided in reconciling life in an unfamiliar place should their exile remain longer than anticipated, or permanent. Indeed, after three years in Los Angeles, Venegas frankly identified liberty, namely that of freedom of religion, as an evident feature of American life. “One thing is evident here,” he wrote, “liberty.” He concluded that “here everyone is equal before the law.”⁶¹ An assertion rooted in his Cristero experience, the freedom of religious practice made Los Angeles, despite its difficulties and separation from family, a pivotal site of sanctuary.

In 1929, after the Cristero War’s conclusion, the Venegas family remained skeptical of the Mexican government. Venegas expressed major misgivings about Mexican state officials and the Mexican revolutionary legacy. Rather than situating the arrangement as a mere struggle defending Church affairs and practice, Venegas referred to the corruption in Mexican politics that included the “Supreme Government” placing their preferred candidate as the Mexican president. “That and the dirty work,” he continued, “by the caciquitos [...] contribute to making our country a place where liberty is found in the countryside and only as long as the wild beast and his cubs are not disturbed.”⁶² This skepticism reflected Venegas’s stance that viewed the terms of political representation at the state and local level, and his ideas of “liberty” as key factors. In reality, however, Venegas based these ideas through the secular government’s

⁶⁰ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, September 7, 1928, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 1, VFP, LMU.

⁶¹ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, March 6, 1930, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 4, VFP, LMU.

⁶² Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, September 20, 1929, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 3, VFP, LMU.

challenge to the Catholic church. The general distrust reveals the revolutionary legacy's effect on Mexican affairs. The Venegas family grappled with fallout from the Cristero War. Their distrust made the possibility of repatriation for the Venegas family a difficult and unlikely prospect in the initial years in Los Angeles. On the third anniversary of Venegas's departure, he bemoaned the lack of change in affairs that prompted his and many others' departure.⁶³ Rather than looking backward towards his residence in Mexico, he remarked, "one has to look ahead so as not to be left behind." Such an outlook began to let the notion of permanent residency in the U.S. sink in further.⁶⁴

The critique and distrust of the Mexican government also reflected challenges to their notions of race and nation. As seen, Venegas held immense skepticism of the Mexican government, yet it remained important to reside in the nation itself. The experience of exile and migration created uncertainty for Venegas. These experiences, in addition, forced him and Dolores to assess their relationship to Mexico, whether residing there or in the United States. Though the Venegas family expressed much longing and hope for their eventual return, they would not do so if they believed persecution and corruption reigned. Patriotism, Miguel felt, meant nothing if the government treated its citizens like "slaves." The only other option was to find refuge in a place where "tranquility of spirit and a tranquil conscience" was within reach.⁶⁵ Here, Venegas emphasized the contrasts between political oppression in Mexico to that of supposed political freedom in the U.S. He ignored the reality that many people in the U.S. did

⁶³ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, January 1, 1930, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder, 4, VFP, LMU.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, March 6, 1930, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 4, VFP, LMU.

not have equal rights. If the letters represented and expressed coping strategies of migration and exile, then residing in Los Angeles allowed for political freedom and served as a canvas on which to build a México de Afuera. Living outside of Mexico did not necessarily tarnish the bonds of Mexican identity, but instead served as a place in which to practice one's ideals which were threatened by the Mexican government. This suggestion puts the negotiative strategies of longing in prior letters in better perspective. In other words, coming to terms with living permanently in Los Angeles in positive language required imagining rights denied back in Mexico. It is also likely, however, that Venegas aimed to placate his family in Mexico by romanticizing his experience in the U.S. This perhaps worked to mitigate the separation they lamented throughout their writing.

Indeed, it is hard to accept Venegas' celebration of liberty in the U.S. Elsewhere, he wrote of crucial aspects of identity that were lost on his children compared to if they resided within Mexico. For instance, the possibility of a Catholic education in Los Angeles remained one of the most appealing factors for the Venegas family. Still, this education in the United States could not simulate the same experience the children would have received in Mexico. Though he listed it as one of the positives of their exile, Venegas regretted that the children would not be able to receive a Mexican education which would instill in them "Mexican ways."⁶⁶ Though Venegas does not expand on the meaning of this, he perhaps lamented to loss of instruction on Mexican history and culture. Whatever the case, he reasoned, they would not be able to appreciate their country nor love it.⁶⁷ Living outside of Mexico did not destroy Miguel's or Dolores' sense of Mexican identity or patriotism. The same, however, could not be said for their

⁶⁶ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, June 21, 1930, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 4, VFP, LMU.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

children whom they feared were losing much living outside of Mexico. In a few instances, the family began to refer to the Venegas children as “Chicanos.” Perhaps this marked their distance and lack of upbringing in Mexico. Dolores first used the term in 1930 to refer to her children in a letter to their grandmother. The term seemed to have caught on in Mexico as a letter from their Mercedes Gutiérrez de Dávalos referred to the Venegas children as “Chicanos” and “Americanos” whom she yearned to meet.⁶⁸ Referring to their children and nephews in these terms suggests a different national identity family members began to place on Mexican children raised in the U.S. The distance from Mexico and the imagined loss of love for it, therefore, would cultivate a new national identity the Venegas family recognized in their new context.

The Venegas’ contact with other Mexican people in Los Angeles also helped in their self-identity defined by their Cristero experience. The city, in other words, brought them into contact with other compatriots they might not have otherwise encountered in their home community in Mexico. As a result, these encounters largely illustrated a traditional and exclusive version of mexicanidad, one constructed from the daily experience in Los Angeles and in relation to Mexican politics. Upon moving to the city, Venegas identified Belvedere as a worthy site for relocation based on information about the Mexican community residing there.⁶⁹ Still, Venegas did not romanticize the compatriots he encountered. When rumors of increased immigration enforcement surfaced in 1929, Venegas described the bad treatment that Mexicans received from U.S. government officials. However, he blamed the plight of Mexicans for their alleged ignorance and behavior in which many “think they are in Mexico.” Venegas found another way

⁶⁸ Letter from Dolores Venegas to Julia Cárdenas, circa 1930, Box 1, Folder 14, VFPA, LMU and letter from Mercedes Gutierrez de Dávalos to Dolores Venegas, April 28, 1935, Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 2, VFP, LMU.

⁶⁹ *Letters Home*, 115-117, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 7, VFP, LMU.

to lambast the Mexican government while also critiquing compatriots in Los Angeles. He shifted the blame in the same letter from the Mexican community to the “Revolutions of nineteen years [...] because they have presented a very sad spectacle to our country” which was also responsible for the displacement of Mexicans.⁷⁰ If earlier critiques of the Revolution and its aftermath, as expressed by Venegas, cultivated an era of lawlessness and repression, then it served to produce Mexican citizens in that same vein. Likewise, as a Cristero, Venegas seemed to make contrasts between devout Mexican Catholics such as himself, and other Mexicans in Los Angeles. In doing so, he inadvertently defined mexicanidad as inherently Catholic in nature, and politically anti-revolutionary. He thereby excluded others who did not meet his own criteria.

By 1930, three years after the Venegas family arrived in Los Angeles, Venegas expressed immense fear and grief that those in Mexico had forgotten about them. In a concise letter, he angrily asserted, “Being that there are five of you who write a few lines it surprises me that so much time has gone by without remembering the absent ones and it appears to me that little by little you are forgetting about us.”⁷¹ In a similar vein, Dolores wrote home that “it has been a long time” since they received letters and expressed her worry for the family.⁷² Such declarations unveil the significance of letter writing as a strategic tool for coping with migration and separation. Acting as a form of regulative writing, the letters served the purpose of maintaining familial relationships in reciprocal contact. As David Gerber notes, this process measures “respect and affection for the other.”⁷³ Miguel’s tone and apparent fear in the above letter unveils

⁷⁰ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Francisco Venegas, July 23, 1929, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 2, VFP, LMU.

⁷¹ Letter from Miguel Venegas to Juan Venegas, November 18, 1930, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 4, VFP, LMU.

⁷² Letter from Dolores Venegas to Juan Venegas, July 27, 1931, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 5, VFP, LMU.

⁷³ Gerber, *Authors of their Lives*, 102.

the immense anxiety of being forgotten by his loved ones. He did not want to lose the ties to a community he hoped to rejoin one day. While most of his correspondence engaged in updates and in resolving his business affairs, Miguel regularly included a few lines to refresh kin bonds. As such, the expressed fear acted as a moment of rupture and vulnerability for Miguel that showed the importance his family and homeland held in his mind. Likewise, Dolores' worry resulted not only in the well-being of her family but also in the potentially deteriorating correspondence she so cherished that defined her identity.

La Segunda Activism and Fascist Ideology in Los Angeles

As Cristero exiles like Miguel Venegas crossed the border, they also created new transnational networks by establishing chapters of organizations founded in Mexico. One such organization was the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana (Catholic Association of Mexican Youth) (ACJM), established in Guadalajara by Bernardo Bergöend, a French Jesuit priest, at the peak of the Mexican Revolution.⁷⁴ Bergöend's background was one of activism. After serving as a priest in Spain, he transferred to Mexico during the Porfiriato in the early 1900s. During this period, some Mexican Catholics sought to address Mexico's social issues, which included alcoholism and social conditions of the Indigenous populations. Bergöend strategized ways to take advantage of the increasing political voice of Mexican Catholics obtained under the Porfiriato. In addition to instructing labor leaders in Guadalajara, Bergöend formulated ideas for a "Political Social Union of Mexican Catholics." After the fall of Díaz in

⁷⁴ David Espinosa, "'Restoring Christian Social Order': The Mexican Catholic Youth Association (1913–1932)." *The Americas* 59, no. 4 (2003), 453–54.

1911, the Catholic Church, supposedly inspired by Bergöend's ideas, formed the National Catholic Party to mobilize Catholics to intervene in Mexican politics and society.

In 1914, Bergöend sensed a supposed void in “apostolic zeal” among Mexican Catholics that might undermine the Church's influence amidst the immense anticlericalism during the Revolution.⁷⁵ He sensed a void in leadership and mobilization that would greatly hinder the Church's position. To combat this, Bergöend envisioned establishing a new organization targeting the training of Mexico's Catholic youth. He confided to a good friend that “in Mexico, as everywhere else, one needs well-molded men, and as you well know, only the young can be molded.”⁷⁶ Taking inspiration from the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Français [sic: Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française] (Catholic Association of the French Youth) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Bergöend sought to shape the social through his version of religious instruction, athleticism, and camaraderie with the formation of the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana (ACJM) in 1912.⁷⁷ With the Constitution of 1917's anticlerical policies, the ACJM's mission appeared urgent to some. Indeed, the organization greatly expanded between 1917 and 1924 from only eight groups in 1913 to over 192 in 1924 with 4,000 members.⁷⁸ Recruitment efforts focused predominantly on boys and young men in urban centers who had already been receiving a Catholic education. As members of the ACJM, leaders of its chapters continued to build on these foundations. In addition to Catholic philosophy and literature, the ACJM curriculum taught Mexican history with a specific

⁷⁵ Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 22.

⁷⁶ Espinosa, “Restoring Christian Social Order,” 454.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; Weis, 22.

⁷⁸ Espinosa, “Restoring Christian Social Order,” 455–56.

Catholic twist that sought to mobilize them as “action leaders.”⁷⁹ On February 26, 1926, months before the Cristero War, the organization issued a proclamation directly from Mexico City in defense of the Church with three points: the attack on “liberties of conscience;” the injustice of growing antireligious sentiment and laws; and finally, the natural law of “Christ’s rights.” They proudly proclaimed that “whether his enemies like it or not, he is by right king of the world, a title he holds by his divine nature, by the merits of his life, by the will of the civilized people.”⁸⁰ Taken together, these points illustrate that religion remained central to the ideological makeup of the ACJM that made the Church an institution worthy of defense for a small group of Mexican Catholics. In 1928, José de León Toral, a devout Mexican Catholic and ACJM member, assassinated president-elect Álvaro Obregón.⁸¹ Driven by faith and politics, León Toral took his role as an “action leader” to an extreme through his drastic decision.

In Los Angeles, Pedro Villaseñor led the local branch of the ACJM with vigor and alarm during the Cristero War. Border crossing records indicate that Villaseñor traversed the border often in the early twentieth century as part of the revolutionary diaspora. In 1912, as a young child, he moved with his mother to Imperial, California, from Morelia, Michoacán, a west-central state in Mexico.⁸² Though it is unclear how long he and his parents resided in Southern California during this time, records show that he ventured back to Mexico at some point. In 1940

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 456–59.

⁸⁰ “La Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana á la Nación,” Box 3, Folder 2, Pedro Villaseñor political papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

⁸¹ For a compelling description and analysis of León Toral and other militant Catholic youth, see Weis, *For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*.

⁸² *The National Archives and Records Administration* (NARA); Washington D.C., Manifests of Statistical and Some Nonstatistical Alien Arrivals at Laredo, Texas, May 1903–April 1955, NARA microfilm publication A3437, NAI: 3887283, Microfilm Roll Number: 029.

and 1943, Villaseñor, now an adult, reentered the United States at Laredo and Nogales, respectively. In both entry records, he estimated that he had resided in East Los Angeles from approximately September to December 1925, one year before the Cristero War.⁸³ Thus, it is likely that he spent his youth in Mexico, then moved to Los Angeles during his teen years as Church-state tensions expanded. While in Los Angeles, he met his wife, Celedonia Meza, who had migrated permanently to the city in late August of 1923 from Ciudad Juárez. Accompanied by her mother, the two ventured to the U.S. to meet a relative already residing there.⁸⁴ Pedro, Celedonia, and her mother thus represented a part of the Revolutionary Generation which continued to contribute to the growth of Los Angeles's Mexican community in the post-revolutionary period.

Though it is difficult to decipher entirely Villaseñor's background, the region of Mexico from which he migrated provides some insights. In her analysis of post-revolutionary Michoacán, historian Jennie Purnell shows how political identities, agraristas and cristeros, were fashioned in relation to notions of land and citizenship dating back to the nineteenth century. Rural communities that lost their political autonomy and land were more inclined to support the government's agrarian reform in the 1920s. Those who retained political autonomy threw their support behind the Cristero cause against the revolutionary state.⁸⁵ The formation of political identities in Michoacán was therefore contingent on local politics and individuals' understanding

⁸³ NARA, Manifests of Statistical and Some Nonstatistical Alien Arrivals at Laredo, Texas, May 1903–April 1955, NARA microfilm publication A3437, NAI: 3887283, Microfilm Roll Number: 111 and Index and Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Nogales, Arizona, July 5, 1905–1952, NARA microfilm publication M1769, NAI: 4486390, Microfilm Roll Number: 54.

⁸⁴ NARA, Nonstatistical Manifests and Statistical Index Cards of Aliens Arriving at El Paso, Texas, 1905–1927, NARA microfilm publication A3406, NAI: 4492771, Microfilm Roll Number: 078.

⁸⁵ Jennie Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 4–18.

of the state's authority. Villaseñor, born in the north-central village of Coeneo, likely came from a prominent family that retained land and political clout in their local village. His extreme allegiance to the Church therefore would make sense. Historian Matthew Butler adds that "if we cannot enter the spiritual mindset of every rebel, we can draw reasonable inferences" from their source communities as "rebels seem fairly representative of them."⁸⁶ If so, then Villaseñor's political activity in Los Angeles can be understood as an extended representation of north-central Michoacán Cristero politics. While we gain insights into his worldview from his activities, they also provide an entryway to understanding the link between his communities in Mexico and Los Angeles.

By 1931, in his mid-twenties, Villaseñor led recruitment efforts of the ACJM in Los Angeles. In doing so, he also represented the transnational connections between the Mexico-based organization and Los Angeles. He warned parents of contemporary society's "dangers" in an apocalyptic tone through a reprinted ACJM letter entitled "La ACJM y los Padres de Familia" (The ACJM and the Parents of Families). In the preface, he first linked the work of the ACJM with the memory of a "distant homeland" by reminding his readers of the "pains and wounds" not yet healed.⁸⁷ Likely referring to the Cristero War, Villaseñor rekindled the bonds of the nation by emphasizing that the Cristero struggle remained active and worthy of continued attention even from afar in Los Angeles. The letter also likened contemporary society to a disease on its way to a "fatal end" like biblical Sodom and Gomorrah. Disorder and anarchy, the

⁸⁶ Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion: Michoacán, 1927–29* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 215.

⁸⁷ "La ACJM y los Padres de Familia," April 5, 1931, Box 1, Folder 14, PVPP.

letter argued, led some away from God and made the rise of tyrants possible.⁸⁸ By linking politics with the disconnect from the divine, the recruitment letter thus conflated both categories into one in an expression of morality and politics. To distance oneself from God was conflated with the rise of leftist tyrannical governments. By contrast, preserving one's connection to the divine would lead to law and order and supposedly a legitimate government.

After critiquing contemporary society in the U.S. and Mexico, the letter then moved towards a critique on the home and family structure deeply affected by a supposed disorder. Referring to Mexican children both in Los Angeles and in Mexico, the author claimed, "Our youth has not had an integrated, fruitful, and healthy education" that first begins with the parents. Mothers and fathers, as the primary instructors, had failed to educate their children in moral and religious instruction essential to "society and the homeland." The youth, the author claimed, had become "amorphous, vicious, useless, and cowardly."⁸⁹ While this critique highlighted the shortcomings of parents, it also worked to raise fears about an immoral and disorderly society. Corrupt politics in combination with the lack of a moral education had contributed to the absence of God in society. Rather than receiving essential moral instruction at home, children received a dangerous secular curriculum at schools. Even more alarming, they were exposed to an "absurd" education via the cinema that further poisoned their "souls and consciousness."⁹⁰ The letter imagined a threat to the future of the Mexican nation that only could be countered by a conservative upbringing of Mexican children.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ This effort describes a politics of childhood, which Historian Anita Casavantes Bradford defines as "the strategic deployment of morally and emotionally resonant representations of childhood in the pursuit of power or resources,

It is likely that the letter, as an ACJM document, referred exclusively to threats within the Mexican nation in Mexico; however, Villaseñor's distribution of it in Los Angeles extended these fears to his local community. The letter hysterically raised the stakes by challenging parents to battle the ills of their society that desperately needed a cure: "Do you want to save your children? Do you want to make them useful to society and the homeland? Do you want to honor your name, your religion and your homeland?"⁹² The lack of moral education, he claimed, not only threatened the traditional family structure but also the very notion of civilization. Educating the youth in religious instruction would "cement the building of the future society" in civilized "virtue and holiness."⁹³ To fill this void, the letter concluded, the ACJM offered a means to cultivate "proper" Mexican citizens on both sides of the border defined by their Catholic faith.

Villaseñor's warnings reflected the ACJM's transnational activity against U.S. influences. As historian Robert Weis notes, the conclusion of the Mexican Revolution's armed phase coincided with the rise of Hollywood and mass culture. Catholic activists feared that this challenged the integrity of Mexico and its youth by turning them into "católicos de azúcar" (sugar Catholics).⁹⁴ Intertwined within this anxiety were the interrelated dangers to traditional gender roles and mexicanidad. The ACJM condemned dances, such as the Shimmy, and cinema

accompanied by efforts to press the bodies and minds of flesh-and-blood children into the service of broader political, social, and cultural objectives" in *The Revolution Is for the Children: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959–1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

⁹² "La ACJM y los Padres de Familia," PVPP.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 55–56.

for making young men and women immoral through promiscuity.⁹⁵ If Mexico's next generation strayed from the path, Catholic activists reasoned, then the future of Mexico, one that depended on a Catholic family structure, would lead to impending doom.⁹⁶ If mass culture represented the means of corrupting the youth, then Protestantism was the result. The Vatican helped drive such thinking by claiming that Protestants had utilized mass culture "to attract people of vacillating faith."⁹⁷ Catholic activists thus linked U.S. media and Protestantism under a collective umbrella, a notion that had found its roots in the Revolution. Many in the ACJM surmised that many revolutionaries were anticlerical. Relatedly, they sensed that American Protestants had taken advantage of Mexico's political instability to increase their missionary presence there. Through politics and culture, they argued that U.S. protestants sought to increase their hegemony in Mexico.⁹⁸

Villaseñor's firsthand experience in Los Angeles allowed him to apply these same fears in his local community. While Mexican youth regularly attended the cinema. By the late-1920s around 90 percent of families in Los Angeles, Mexican and Euro American alike, partook in cinema culture.⁹⁹ Moreover, in the early 1930s, second-generation Mexican youth increasingly participated in Los Angeles's booming "dance craze," much to the chagrin of their immigrant parents. One nineteen-year-old claimed to have attended five dances weekly. He commented that

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 55–61.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 61–67.

⁹⁹ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 173–74.

dance “is in my system” and “blood.”¹⁰⁰ One mother lamented her daughter’s desire to dance, while also highlighting the supposed immorality exhibited by Los Angeles’s Mexican youth dancers.¹⁰¹ By drawing out the parameters of morality, the mother mapped out a changing social landscape for the Mexican community of which she was a part.

Daily life in Los Angeles, argues George J. Sánchez, provided a new ground for the building of a Mexican ethnic identity. Through cultural contact and social interactions, Mexicans “became Mexican Americans.”¹⁰² Taken within this context, Villaseñor’s letter shows the ACJM’s efforts to alter that process. If the ACJM considered the United States as a threat to mexicanidad, which they defined as synonymous with Catholicism, then Villaseñor’s presence in that territory enabled him to observe firsthand the alleged dangers his community faced. In other words, the “becoming” process of second-generation Mexicans provided evidence to some that the U.S. transformed Mexicans into immoral individuals disconnected from their Catholic roots. Villaseñor sought to prevent Mexican youths from abandoning those roots by castigating their participation in U.S. youth culture.

By the mid-1930s, the Mexican government continued implementing its anti-clerical policies in its pursuit of a secular state. After Ortíz Rubio’s exit, Rodríguez proved his hardened stance against the Church by supporting anticlerical education and exiling Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flóres. As a result, some local and state governments pursued their own anticlerical

¹⁰⁰ Mary Lanigan, “Second Generation Mexicans in Belvedere” (master’s thesis, University of California, 1932, 58 cited in Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 185–86

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 11–12.

fervor.¹⁰³ In 1934, President Lázaro Cárdenas pursued a socialist education program that emphasized the government's brand of secular Mexican nationalism that many Catholics found threatening. Cristeros reacted against these anticlerical programs in a new series of uprisings known as La Segunda (1930–1938). Unlike the initial Cristero Rebellion, this activity did not have the explicit support of the Catholic Church. This made it more sporadic and specific to local contexts. Armed uprisings occurred but at a much smaller scale. Education arose as a prime issue in Mexico alongside the Church-state conflict. Cárdenas' program promoted Mexican revolutionary nationalism, anticlericalism, and sexual education, aspects that some Catholics scoffed at.¹⁰⁴ Historian Ben Fallaw notes that it is not clear when La Segunda began or concluded. We only know that it coincided with the rise of socialist education and continued anticlerical pursuits. Peaking in 1935, the new struggle remained disorganized and even more varied by local contexts as compared to the initial struggle of the Cristero War.¹⁰⁵

As a transnational organization, the ACJM appeared to have lost some of its appeal in the United States by the mid-1930s. Villaseñor would try new strategies of mobilization. In response to the new outbreak in Mexico, Villaseñor and others announced the formation of the Comité Popular de Defensa Mexicana (CPDM) in Los Angeles on January 6, 1935. Villaseñor, now president of the new organization, lauded the work that the ACJM had done in the “trenches” of Mexico but concluded that their reach was not significant enough to mobilize the Mexican communities across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands without the support of the Church.¹⁰⁶ He

¹⁰³ Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 18-19; Young, *Mexican Exodus*, 127.

¹⁰⁶ Letter to Sr. Director de la ‘Revista Católica,’ February 14, 1935, Box 1, Folder 14. PVPP.

envisioned that his new organization would lead the charge in mobilizing Los Angeles's Mexican Catholics in the continued struggle. In addition to continuing the trend of transnational politics for the Revolutionary Diaspora, the CPDM also articulated their version of a transnational Mexican identity.

The CPDM represented a larger network of new Cristero activism that unfolded across the U.S. to address local communities' exile. While it responded to La Segunda developments, it also signaled the local strategy to mobilize without the oversight of the Church. Mexican Catholic exiles had begun to cultivate their own strategies to counter the Mexican government from afar based on their specific ideas about being Mexican. The initiatives of other like-minded groups in the city named after Mexican heroes and martyrs, such as Agustín de Iturbide and Anacleto González, provided models for the CPDM to build on. Though not much is known about these groups, their names provide clear clues to their Cristero tendencies. Cristeros marked September 26, 1821, as the true date of Mexican Independence rather than the more popular date of Miguel Hidalgo's "Grito de Dolores" on September 16, 1810. After defeating the Spanish on September 26, 1821, they claimed, Iturbide added a white stripe to Mexico's flag as a tribute to the country's Catholic character.¹⁰⁷ The Iturbide group, an off-branch of the local ACJM chapter, organized Independence Day celebrations in honor of their namesake in Los Angeles.¹⁰⁸ The second local organization took its name from a martyr of the Cristero War. A lawyer and member of the ACJM, González Flores, had been brutally tortured and executed by the Mexican

¹⁰⁷ Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 77.

¹⁰⁸ *Pro-Patria*, September 27, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

army on April 1, 1927.¹⁰⁹ These organizations signaled the wide-ranging activism some Cristeros undertook in Los Angeles as extensions of the ACJM, as well as their emphasis on nationalist symbols rooted in Catholicism.

The CPDM took inspiration from the activism of Cristeros in Chicago during this period. In the organization's initial announcement, Villaseñor noted two goals in defense of U.S. Mexicans' religion and homeland. To highlight the "actual situation" in Mexico, it would organize a series of conferences for the area's Mexican Catholic community. This work, he asserted, would complement the work of their compatriots in Chicago, who had succeeded immensely in their activism.¹¹⁰ Propaganda and distribution of a newsletter appeared to have been what made Chicago's Cristero community a source of great admiration and success. A month after the formation of the CPDM, Villaseñor lauded the leadership of Francisco Martínez, the director of *El Ideal Mejicano* in Chicago. That periodical, he claimed, showed the great lengths that the community pursued for "truth and justice," which Villaseñor described as "brave and sympathetic."¹¹¹ He continued to express his admiration for Martínez's leadership, which Villaseñor likened to an apostle who devoted great energy and money to the Cristero cause.¹¹² By elevating Martínez to a holy status, Villaseñor articulated how some Cristeros conflated their political activity with "virtue and nationalism." Thus, when they spoke of defending their religion and homeland, they did so as interrelated and inseparable categories.

¹⁰⁹ Marisol López Menéndez, *Miguel Pro: Martyrdom, Politics, and Society in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Lexington Books, 2016), 157–59.

¹¹⁰ Letter D.E. Sánchez Cova, January 6, 1935, Box 1, Folder 14, PVPP.

¹¹¹ Letter to Francisco Martínez, February 10, 1935, Box 1, Folder 14, PVPP.

¹¹² Ibid.

With his Chicago compatriots in mind, he sought to mimic and complement their holy work by distributing the CPDM newsletter, originally titled *Comité Popular de Defensa Mexicana*, in Los Angeles. From February 1, 1935, to February 24, 1936, the CPDM published fifty-two weekly issues of their newsletter, never longer than two pages, in Spanish. Villaseñor worked tirelessly to gain subscribers locally and across the U.S. Correspondence shows that he gifted some issues. In turn, his recipients would sometimes enclose funds for subsequent issues and/or support. For instance, a St. Joseph's Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, enclosed \$5 to receive twenty-five issues each week in late December to help in "their little noble battle for God and Country."¹¹³ Other times, he reached out to exiled compatriots and allies in Latin America to help advertise the newsletter.¹¹⁴ Villaseñor's out-reach appeared to have succeeded, albeit momentarily. The June 20 edition proudly shared that they had subscribers in New York and the U.S. Midwest, as well as in South America and Cuba.¹¹⁵ It is unclear exactly why the newsletter dwindled after one year, but one letter provides some clues. On June 19, 1936, months after the last archived newsletter, a subscriber from Colton, California, apologized to Villaseñor because his group had "not sent a single cent" for their subscription to Pro-Patria, the new title assigned after its fifteenth issue. The subscriber thus inquired about their balance owed to settle.¹¹⁶ If this was a larger pattern with his subscribers, then it is likely that Villaseñor did not receive adequate

¹¹³ Letter to Pedro Villaseñor, December 24, 1935, Box 1, Folder 7. PVPP.

¹¹⁴ Villaseñor corresponded regularly with José Villa Barro and Robert Lamadrid in Cuba, and René G. Infante in Peru who helped promote the newsletter's distribution and contents. For examples see letters in Box 1, Folder 7, PVPP.

¹¹⁵ "Donde se Distribuye 'Pro-Patria,'" *Pro-Patria*, June 20, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹¹⁶ Letter to Pedro Villaseñor, June 19, 1936, Box 1, Folder 2, PVPP.

funds to sustain the publication for a long period of time. Moreover, it shows the limits of the small Cristero community in Southern California.

The CPDM organization's presence in Los Angeles also reveals how the group utilized the border strategically as a site of contestation against the Mexican government. Villaseñor charged that Mexican consuls and/or communist groups disparaged the Catholic Church via flyers and word of mouth within the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.¹¹⁷ For him and other organizers of the CPDM, Southern California and the broader U.S.-Mexico borderlands had essentially become a new battleground in the Cristero struggle between Church and state. This, though, took more of an ideological form than one fought with arms. In a letter to an ACJM leader, he emphasized the perceived imperative for collective action to defend from afar the interests of the Catholic Church within the Mexican nation.¹¹⁸ Later, Villaseñor wrote a more personal letter about the organization to Juan V. Navar, a compatriot in San Fernando, California. The group, Villaseñor shared, would pursue "social propaganda" through a newsletter to be distributed to Mexican colonies and pueblos throughout California.¹¹⁹ This activity thus made Southern California a new front for La Segunda in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where exiles such as Villaseñor took part. Neither he nor other leaders left California to fight in the struggle in Mexico. Instead, they enjoyed the relative safety of Los Angeles, thanks to a heavily militarized border, to fight an armchair war of propaganda. In other words, the organizers promoted devotion to the Mexican Catholics' fight in Mexico only from a safe distance. They might have

¹¹⁷ Letter to Juan V. Navar, February 6, 1935, Box 1, Folder 14. PVPP.

¹¹⁸ "Se Comunica Formación de un Comité Popular de Defensa Mejicana," January 6, 1935, Box 1, Folder 14. PVPP.

¹¹⁹ Letter to Juan V. Navar, February 6, 1935.

hoped to convince others to pick up arms and cross the border, but they would remain in the U.S while contributing to the powder keg. The CPDM thus supplanted the ACJM as the foremost lay-Catholic organization for Mexicans in Los Angeles. Building on its predecessor, it intended to mold the region's Mexican Catholics into devout Catholic nationalists. More significantly, it aimed to mobilize the community through a radical conservative version of Mexican nationalism which placed the Catholic Church at the center.

For the organization to be successful, Villaseñor claimed, it required the full cooperation of Mexicans and other Catholics in the region. To this end, he encouraged Navar to participate in the "activism" for the organization's success in California.¹²⁰ Villaseñor's constant emphasis on "collective action" reflected both the perceived shortcomings of the ACJM and the need to mobilize the local Mexican community for "action," broadly defined, against the Mexican government. Herein lies some insights into the CPDM's similarities and divergences from the ACJM. Like the Mexico-based ACJM, the CPDM fell under the category of what the Catholic Church called "Catholic Action." This term described a range of activism lay members pursued.¹²¹ In 1929, the *Acción Católica Mexicana* (ACM), a Mexican national branch led by the Vatican's international Catholic Action group, incorporated the ACJM into its fold. It pacified the militant organization and muddled the organization within the bureaucracy of the international Church.¹²² The Vatican regulated the ACM and the activity of its umbrella organizations to quell any violent activity during and after the Cristero struggle. The CPDM in

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Stephen J.C. Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2–3.

¹²² Ibid., 153.

Los Angeles, in contrast, sought to side-step this oversight by remaining an independent lay organization that pursued a counter-activism known as “civic action.” Authority, notes historian Stephen Andes, differentiated the ACM and civic action. “ACM represented a hierarchically-led Catholic lay movement,” he observes, “while civic action was engineered by many ex-Cristero militants, who desired to direct lay defense strategies.”¹²³ By operating as a “public opinion lobby,” the Los Angeles-based group sought to build a unified front against the Mexican government through propaganda, and if necessary, armed resistance.¹²⁴ The CPDM ultimately represented a local manifestation of civic action in Los Angeles in what had continued to unfold as a transitional conflict in the mid-1930s.

The CPDM’s newsletter, initially titled *Comité Popular de Defensa Mexicana*, later known as *Pro-Patria*, covered a range of issues and narrative styles in its pursuit of their mission. Above all, the organization utilized this as an outlet to articulate their strand of transnational Mexican identity. In the first issue, dated February 1, 1935, the newsletter reminded readers of the “cruel and horrible persecution in Mexico,” specifically citing the “brutality, lies, and defamation: of the Revolutionary Mexican government in society and politics. It asked for “sincerity and truth” from the revolutionary government in a sarcastic tone and called for it to admit to its persecution of Mexican Catholics and the Church, which the

¹²³ Ibid., 165.

¹²⁴ Stephen Andes notes that “civic action” largely countered Vatican policy wherein activists proposed “armed resistance when all other legal means failed.” Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism*, 148. I would clarify that the Vatican did not support violence. Thus, lay organizations formed with the intent to mobilize on their own. The CPDM, in some ways, contradicts itself. While they might have hoped that others would pursue armed resistance, they did not present this idea directly. In short, they utilized propaganda as an “in absentia” form of resistance. However, I still consider their activity as “civic activism”: Villaseñor, in essence, hoped his ideas would influence others to fight.

CPDM considered the moral fabric of the nation.¹²⁵ The newsletter often deployed letters and speeches directly related to their cause. Such was the case when it published a speech by exiled Bishop José de Jesús. He criticized the “socialist” Mexican government and its “anti-religious and anti-social legislation.”¹²⁶ The CPDM newsletter also published letters of U.S figures such as radio demagogue Father Charles Coughlin, who commented on Cristero struggle.¹²⁷ Other times, as will be seen, it aimed to highlight the Catholic Church’s historic influence in shaping Mexico and its people. By May 1935, the newsletter solicited readers to suggest a new name for the weekly newsletter. An unnamed reader from Flint, Michigan, suggested “Pro-Patria,” “for one’s country” in Latin, as the new title. Leaders claimed to have adopted this name as it neatly summarized their work as the popular voice of Mexicans defending humanity, freedom, and religion in Mexico.¹²⁸ Whether through the dissemination of recent news from Mexico or reflections on Mexican history, the newsletter combated the Mexican government from Los Angeles through fascist ideas.

By and large, the newsletter was dedicated to enforcing the bonds between Church and state through fascism. On two occasions, the newsletter cited the ideas of Benito Mussolini, the fascist Italian dictator. In a reprinted and translated piece entitled “La Iglesia y el Estado” (the Church and the State), Mussolini reflected on the long *durée* of Church and state conflict in which the latter was always defeated. Waging war against religion meant attacking the spirit,

¹²⁵ “Sinceridad y Verdad: ¿Hay o No Hay Persecución Religiosa en Mexico?” *CPDM*, February 1, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹²⁶ “Orientaciones sobre los Últimos Acontecimientos: Habla el Viril Obispo de Huejutla,” *Pro-Patria*, July 26, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹²⁷ “Habla el Rev. Carlos E. Coughlin sobre La Situación en Mexico,” *Pro-Patria*, June 7, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹²⁸ “Viento en Popa,” *Pro-Patria*, May 10, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

“the deepest and most intimate” element of an individual, he claimed. The fascist state, he continued, should not concern itself with religious matters that directly contribute to the morality and political order of the nation. Finally, he concluded that “anyone who disturbs or breaks the religious union of a country commits a crime against the nation.”¹²⁹ *Pro-Patria* highlighted this fascist vision as the path that the Mexican government should follow. Indeed, in the following issue, in another reprint of Mussolini’s ideas, it lauded Italy as the “champion of Catholicism.”¹³⁰ If the previous article worked to show the dangers between separating Church and state, this additional article celebrated nations and their leaders that were supposedly connected to Christ. Mussolini praised the Catholic Church for giving Italy its “spirit” and its citizens their “character.”¹³¹ He promised a respectful, cooperative relationship with the Church in Italy to maintain this vitality. To complement these efforts, he reassured his nation that he would devote equal energy towards Italian citizens who confided in him.¹³² Mussolini’s emphasis on the bonds between Church and state thus provided an extreme model for *Pro-Patria*’s readers. It warned that the secular government would be defeated. It offered a fascist alternative which would deliver a pro-Church government.

The newsletter endorsed a trend of global fascism that existed during this period. As will be seen, its writers articulated their version of Mexico’s “mythic past” through propaganda efforts to retain the Church’s influence on Mexican politics and society. Philosopher Jason Stanley asserts that the use of a mythologized past functions to “harness the emotion of nostalgia

¹²⁹ “La Iglesia y El Estado,” *Pro-Patria*, April 5, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹³⁰ “Italia Campeón del Catolicismo,” *CPDM*, April 12, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

to the central tenants of fascist ideology,” which includes authoritarianism, hierarchy, purity, and struggle.¹³³ In addition to Villaseñor’s leadership and recruitment efforts, he cultivated a sense of fear that stipulated a fight between “good and evil,” or “eagles and beetles” within the government and family structure. In this sense, and within *Pro-Patria*’s content, the CPDM organization resorted to many mechanisms of fascism that Stanley identifies in addition to mythmaking and propaganda. The CPDM embraced anti-intellectualism, unreality, hierarchy, victimhood, law and order, and sexual anxiety, among others.¹³⁴ The organization’s political leanings also aligned with other fascist sympathizers in the Americas. For instance, in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, some groups and individuals saw fascism as a means of coping with modernity while evoking “traditional values.”¹³⁵ Villaseñor aligned with this trajectory and molded the CPDM accordingly. Their conflation of religion and nationalism led them to embrace fascism to counter a secular government.

One might brush *Pro-Patria* aside as a form of propaganda that simply reacted to the Revolutionary regime as fanatical defenders of the Catholic Church. To do so, however, is to dismiss their activity as a form of political Catholicism and activism. As historian Robert Curley suggests in his study of Catholics in Jalisco, participants should not be seen merely as the agents of Catholic officials, but rather situated as lay Catholics who pursued their own political activity.

¹³³ Stanley quotes Mussolini’s ideas of the mythic past that likely influenced the organization’s thinking: “We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, a passion. It is not necessary for it to be a reality... Our myth is the nation, our myth is the greatness of the nation! And to this myth, this greatness, which we want to translate into a total reality, we subordinate everything.” In *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House Trade, 2020), 5.

¹³⁴ Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, xxx–xxxii.

¹³⁵ In her study of American fascist sympathizers, historian Katy Hull asserts, “They used fascism’s apparent successes to highlight what was wrong in the United States, to offer examples for what Americans could do, and to provide their countrymen with something that filled a lacuna in their own lives.” In *The Machine Has a Soul: American Sympathy with Italian Fascism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 18–19.

He posits the term “political Catholicism” to shift our understanding of Mexican Catholics’ activity as “political action [...] Catholic in inspiration, rather than a simple recognition of Catholics involved in politics.”¹³⁶ As such, framing the CPDM and *Pro-Patria* as a form of political Catholicism, albeit fascist, helps show the extreme extent that such groups undertake to elevate religion as a central part of their identity. *Pro-Patria* thus should be understood as a specific window into Segunda politics and ideology in Los Angeles. One that yields insight into their radical versions of race, nationalism, and patriotism amidst their critique of the Mexican government. The CPDM’s version of Mexico’s history helps illustrate this point.

Pro-Patria’s history of Mexico commenced with commentary on the biblical Book of Genesis, which linked the creation of Mexico. The author began describing God’s awesome power in creating the world, and more importantly, molding its people: “The Lord God formed man from the mud of the earth, and inspired the face of the spirit of life and became the living man with a rational soul.”¹³⁷ The author claimed Americas were “hidden for so many years from civilized and Christian nations” until God eventually exercised his “infinite power” by incorporating Mexico as part of New Spain.¹³⁸ This teleological point aids in explaining how Christianity, while absent from the Americas initially, did not entirely denote the absence of a Christian God. Rather, it situated the arrival of the Spanish Empire as God’s doing and as the harbinger of Mexican nation-making. This initial absence of Christianity ultimately forced *Pro-Patria* to reconcile Mexico’s Indigenous past and their place in Mexico’s evangelization.

¹³⁶ Robert Curley, *Citizens and Believers: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Jalisco, 1900-1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018), 4.

¹³⁷ *CPDM*, February 15, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Reframing the Bible's creation story fit with the *Pro-Patria* agenda, which they claimed, "explaining many points about the tribes that populated the territory of our beloved homeland." Marking the start of the Mexican state with Genesis held two interrelated strategies. First, it allowed the authors to claim God as the authority in the creation of the earth and over its inhabitants. By focusing and paying homage to this initial creation story, God remained ever present in the background of what later became the creation of the Mexican nation-state and people. Second, it linked the creation story to that of Mexico to argue that the two cannot, and should not, be separated from national memory. This ahistorical account also avoided engaging with the rise of the nineteenth-century liberal state.

Despite calling humanity "branches of the same trunk," *Pro-Patria*'s narrative painted Mexico's Indigenous peoples in an extremely negative light. They noted that Mexico's Indigenous nations, which numbered over 184, were diverse in dialect, customs, and organization. Still, the authors neglected to pursue the differences among the vast groups in favor of homogenizing all of them as nomadic and violent people. By minimizing the variation among these groups, their narrative reduced the Indigenous experience into one collective experience which they saw as "backwardness." Even though they acknowledged the vast number of Indigenous nations, the reductionist claim of Indigenous peoples as rudimentary individuals implied their status as "Indians" as living relics of an "uncivilized" past.¹³⁹

After retelling their own version of creation, the narrative shifted its focus to undermining the historical role of Indigenous people through a racist critique of their customs and behavior. "What was the civilization of the tribes that populated Mexico? What was his degradation and

¹³⁹ Ibid.

his brutal and fierce savagery?” *Pro-Patria* depicted the Aztec empire as both a despotic monarchy and the most advanced of Indigenous civilizations to answer these questions. By utilizing Mexico’s foremost Indigenous empire, *Pro-Patria*’s narrative strategically depicted the Aztecs as representative of all Indigenous peoples. It also paved the way to completely demean all the noted Indigenous nations. For instance, the authors acknowledged the Aztecs as among the “most brilliant” in pre-conquest Mexico. They painted the Aztecs as a violent and oppressive empire throughout Mexico. Moreover, it portrayed Aztec leaders as selfish, immoral, and decadent cannibals who held no concern or interest of their subjects.¹⁴⁰ The unidentified CPDM author admitted that the Aztec empire had achieved some successes in politics and culture, but warned that one should not mistake this success as promoting “patriotic love” or autonomy to the empire’s subjects.¹⁴¹

Pro-Patria countered the valorization of the Aztec empire by Mexico’s secular government. By the end of the nineteenth century, many Mexican elites praised the Aztecs and other preconquest peoples as important foundations of Mexican civilization.¹⁴² Entering the twentieth century, some Latin American elites sought to raise a “sympathetic awareness of the Indian” through a rhetoric of indigenismo. In Mexico, this ideology reached its zenith under President Lázaro Cárdenas, who aimed to finally incorporate the nation’s Indians into Mexico’s body politic through education and citizenship.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ CPDM, February 22, 1935 and March 15, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁴¹ CPDM, March 8, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁴² Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 107–09, 121–31.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 185–90.

In a similar vein, other elites throughout Latin American attempted to reconcile Indian subject and pre-Columbian past with the pursuit of nationalist visions in the nineteenth century. These topics were popular among criollos in Mexico and in Spanish America who sought to build a foundation in the pursuit of independence.¹⁴⁴ By utilizing the markers, figures, and history of the Aztec empire, some intellectuals and elites discounted Spanish rule by arguing that Mexican history predated the conquest.¹⁴⁵ *Pro-Patria* rejected that ideological project with its own history that minimized Indians from the nation's history and identity. While one could see the archaeological remnants of this empire, the organization's history suggested that there was little to celebrate or talk about before the Spanish conquest.¹⁴⁶ Such an argument also dismissed the existence of the Indigenous present during 1930s Mexico. If the Aztec empire offered any contributions, they claimed, it was their illustration of the dangers of a world without a Christian God. *Pro-Patria* implicitly stated Mexico would return to those barbarous times if a positive narrative of pre-conquest in Mexico be accepted. The authors thus warned of the resemblance of the oppressive Aztec empire to Mexico's revolutionary regime.¹⁴⁷

By negating the pre-conquest past and Indigenous peoples, *Pro-Patria* valorized the Spanish conquest as the quintessential marker of the modern nation. This does not mean, however, that to be Mexican was to be Spanish. Rather, they argued that the Spanish conquest contributed to evangelization of the Indigenous peoples that ultimately "created the Mexican nation." With one quick stroke, the authors lauded the Spanish empire for uniting the many

¹⁴⁴ The term "Creole" in this context refers to "individuals of European heritage born in the Americas." See Earle, *Return of the Native*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22–23, 29.

¹⁴⁶ *CPDM*, March 8, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁴⁷ *CPDM*, March 15, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

hundreds of aforementioned “races and tribes” under a unified religion.¹⁴⁸ One might think that the narrative would devote considerable attention to the history of the Spanish conquest to fully unpack these assertions. Surprisingly, however, *Pro-Patria*’s narrative did not. The Spanish, according to the CPDM, brought the pillars of “civilization” which transformed Indigenous people into worthy Mexicans. That foundation, Catholicism, thus formed the cultural bond of Mexican national identity for the CPDM. If challenged, the organization suggested, mexicanidad would be tarnished. *Pro-Patria* clearly undertook an anti-Indigenous and racist stance to express their strand of an extreme nationalism with a far-right Catholic bent. Their problematic use of indigenous people sought to elevate their “higher” identity as Mexican Catholics.

Pro-Patria’s history is not an entirely unique phenomenon. Indigenous people have been marginalized within historical texts for centuries in similar, problematic ways. Similar perspectives and the erasure of Indigenous pasts occurred often throughout the Americas in the nineteenth century. Historian Jean O’Brian asserts settlers in the colonial United States made bold claims that asserted “non-Indians were the first people to erect proper institutions of a social order worthy of notice.”¹⁴⁹ In a process she calls “firsting,” European Americans delegitimized the Indian past by arguing that Europeans brought civilization with them, and by extension, made claims to their lands. By doing so, they perpetuated their supremacy over Indian groups while also deeming them incompatible with modernity.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, *Pro-Patria*’s narrative juxtaposed Indigenous cultures with the Spanish conquest. They celebrated Christian European Americans,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxi–xxiii.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 1–53.

as the first to erect the pillars of supposed civilization and the history of their localities. Indigenous people, meanwhile, they argued, existed as a remnant of a distant, uncivilized past.

While earlier claims disparaged Indigenous people, the newsletter's tone shifted by crediting the Catholic Church with having "civilized" Indigenous people through conversion. Mexico's Native groups still existed throughout the nation because Catholicism did not destroy them. According to *Pro-Patria*, it made them harbingers of a nation of Mexicans.¹⁵¹ The possible contradictions in this thinking might initially make readers think that pre-conquest society and culture could not be incorporated within a Mexican nation. The authors, though, included the past within Mexico's history to highlight the Catholic Church's evangelization of Mexico's Indigenous nations. This made the pre-conquest into a murky precursor to the moment when Catholicism supposedly consolidated Mexico's diverse races.

Elsewhere the newsletter celebrated Mexico's lush landscape as national symbols. The sweetest attractions," they wrote, "the delicious charms of a virgin, feral and prodigious nature are found in the [. . .] panoramas of our beloved Mexico."¹⁵² In the section on Genesis, *Pro-Patria* highlighted Mexico's geographical features such as volcanoes and lakes as national symbols, attributing these landmarks to their Christian God. Although some Indigenous groups also accorded these resources supernatural meanings during the pre-conquest period, *Pro-Patria*'s celebration of Mexico's geography illustrated a teleological trajectory that presumed Spanish conquest and evangelization as possible. It indirectly justified colonialism and genocide

¹⁵¹ *CPDM*, March 15, 1935, Box 2, PVP

¹⁵² *CPDM*, February 15, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

in the creation of Mexico by making Catholics the rightful heirs to the nation's geography and resources.

The authors also celebrated national figures and monuments in other parts of the newsletter to support their Catholic-centered narrative. *Pro-Patria* lauded Father Miguel Hidalgo and Agustín de Iturbide as the “initiator” and “perpetuator,” respectively, in Mexico's state-formation.¹⁵³ The newsletter emphasized Hidalgo as a devout Catholic who loved his faith and utilized it to secure Mexico's independence.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, they proposed that Iturbide united his faith with his military prowess and the people's adoration to successfully overthrow a monarchical government.¹⁵⁵ If Hidalgo acted as the spark, Iturbide represented the powder-keg. By emphasizing the Catholic foundations of the nation through these figures, the newsletter likened Cristeros as the successors of Mexican patriots. Lastly, by linking Catholicism with national heroes, the newsletter argued that the revolutionary government challenged the foundations of the nation. While these figures remained seminal in a retelling of Mexico's history, their emphasis on these Catholic figures reified the Church's influence. *Pro-Patria's* narrative ultimately placed Catholicism at the center of Mexico's founding, though often in historically dubious ways. The government's secularism and pre-conquest counter-identity, *Pro-Patria* suggested, would undermine the core foundation of mexicanidad.

The patriarchal family structure also became a topic of discussion in *Pro-Patria's* issues. Again, its writers juxtaposed an idealized Catholic past with Mexico's Indigenous past to support their point. One article asserted that the best way to measure the “dignity and civilization” of a

¹⁵³ *Pro-Patria*, September 13, 1935 and September 27, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁵⁴ *Pro-Patria*, September 13, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁵⁵ *Pro-Patria*, September 27, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

society was through the family. Again, the CPDM drew on the creation story in Genesis wherein God provided man with “help and companionship” in the form of a woman.¹⁵⁶ In doing so, the author(s) made two points. First, they positioned men as the patriarchal authority within a moral family structure. Women played the role as subservient wives and mothers. Second, they made the astounding assertion that Indigenous peoples had no family. Thus, they claimed, “it is not surprising that [their] degradation was so indecent and disgusting.”¹⁵⁷ *Pro-Patria* continued their racist vision of Native people through some idealized mythic past. They lauded the Catholic Church’s contributions to forming the patriarchal family structure of Mexico.¹⁵⁸

In other editions, *Pro-Patria* defined Cristeros as “modern martyrs.” It offered the historical parable of the Jewish people from biblical times as a “homogenous nation” wrongfully displaced from their homeland in Palestine by the Roman Empire.¹⁵⁹ As generations passed, the authors noted, the Jewish population continued to scatter across the world, always “foreigners” but identifying as Jews.¹⁶⁰ The article described their displacement from their homeland in Palestine by the Roman Empire, who had subjugated them as colonial subjects. As generations passed, the authors argued, the Jewish population continued to scatter across the world always a “foreigner living outside Palestine.” Nonetheless, they suggested, “the Jew is always Jewish [...] even long after Jerusalem has been destroyed, the temple scattered throughout the world, the

¹⁵⁶ “La Familia Indígena y la Familia Cristiana,” *CPDM*, March 22, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ “El Patriotismo en El Pueblo Judío,” *CPDM*, April 19, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* In another similar article, the patriotism of the Gauls is explored in relation to the Roman empire and their religious practices. This example is used to solidify arguments on how religion is among one of the most definitive factors in uniting society and culture and in building patriotism, in “El Patriotismo de los Antiguos Galos,” *Pro-Patria*, June 14, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

Israelite always feels Israelite.”¹⁶¹ The authors seemingly intended their Mexican readers in the U.S. to continue to see themselves as Mexican patriots displaced and persecuted by a secular government. *Pro-Patria* asserted that its readers, despite living outside of Mexico, continued an ongoing connection to Mexico and identity as Mexicans through a supposedly timeless patriotic love and duty to the homeland. For readers, this exploration was surely meant as a symbol of hope and mobilization. It also made an additional connection to the Jewish diaspora’s status as an exiled and persecuted community by emphasizing the religious characteristics of that patriotism. *Pro-Patria* wrote that:

The Jews are expelled from Palestine, scattered throughout the world but they always retain their indomitable fierceness, their hope is always alive, and even though Jerusalem is first converted into a pagan city and then in a Christian city but their memory is always living in the heart of the Jews, it is the lost homeland, not forever, perhaps someday the children of Israel will return there to rebuild for the fourth time that temple, center and life of the Jewish homeland. So, a religious motivation is the reason for being of Jewish patriotism.¹⁶²

This characterization worked to further emphasize their similarities to that ancient experience. Moreover, by articulating the holy character of Jerusalem as a temple, readers might have also thought of Catholicism as an inherent feature of the Mexican nation. Ultimately, the newsletter reminded readers to remain resolute in their identity. Unlike their Cristero counterparts in Chicago who, by promoting United States’ naturalization, decoupled Mexican identity from Mexican citizenship, the CPDM looked to Mexico and made Catholicism a defining marker of

¹⁶¹ El Patriotismo en El Pueblo Judío,” *CPDM*, April 19, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁶² *Comité Popular de Defensa Mexicana*, No. 12; In another similar article, the patriotism of the Gauls in relation to the Roman Empire and their religious practices is explored. This example is used to solidify arguments on how religion is among one of the most definitive factors in uniting society and culture in building patriotism, in *Pro-Patria*, “El Patriotismo de los Antiguos Galos”, No. 20, Box 2, PVPP HL.

mexicanidad.¹⁶³ Likewise, by considering their experience as being martyrs, the authors hailed their readers as performing a holy sacrifice in the name of God. Making Mexico a religious homeland, the authors argued that a conservative nation-state was something worth fighting for. Its territory, its history, its figures, and its religion, as defined by *Pro-Patria*, thus articulated this version of “Mexico” as the “nature and reason for patriotism.”¹⁶⁴

As the organization dwindled by decade’s end, Villaseñor found a new place by joining the newly formed Unión Nacional Sinarquista (National Synarchist Union). Founded in León, Guanajuato, in May 1937, the UNS became Mexico’s new far-right organization. Like the Los Angeles–based organization, the group served as a political and social outlet that defended the Catholic Church’s authoritative role in Mexican society and politics. The group went even further than the CPDM by creating its own organization symbols such as a flag and uniform. By the 1940s, observers viewed the organization as deeply influenced by a fascist ideology, a claim that was not unfounded.¹⁶⁵ Historian Julia G. Young ponders on whether they were “Nazis, fascist[s], or something else,” but also asserts that this question distracts from an interrogation of the UNS’s links to Mexican Catholic history “and its possible connections to other contemporaneous global Catholic movements.”¹⁶⁶ The CPDM and its newsletter acted as a point of departure for figures such as Villaseñor to articulate arch-conservative ideas that were later embraced by other organizations such as the UNS.

¹⁶³ Flores, *The Mexican Revolution in Chicago*, 78–80.

¹⁶⁴ “El Patriotismo en El Pueblo Judío,” *CPDM*, Box 2, PVPP.

¹⁶⁵ Julia G. Young, “Fascists, Nazis, or Something Else?” Mexico’s Unión Nacional Sinarquista in the US Media, 1937–1945,” *The Americas* 79, no. 2 (April 2022): 232–38.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

In October 1935, Leopoldo Ruiz y Flóres, the Archbishop of Morelia, wrote Villaseñor from his exile in San Antonio, Texas, thanking him for copies of *Pro-Patria*. Ruiz y Flóres congratulated Villaseñor and other members of the group for their cooperative work on behalf of the Mexican faithful, who he said had suffered immense hardships.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, he lauded the work they contributed to “knowledge of the truth” occurring in Mexico by shaping opinion against the atheist campaign.¹⁶⁸ Still, Villaseñor expressed some frustration and tiredness on January 2, 1936. Dissatisfied with what he saw as a lack of improvement in Mexico, he “resigned [himself] to [living] at the gates of my homeland, watching with astonishment and indignation, as in a movie . . . the appalling situation of my own people.”¹⁶⁹ One month later, on February 24, the CPDM published its last edition of *Pro-Patria*, only one year after the inception of the organization.

Although short-lived, the CPDM and its newsletter were likely not seen as a failure by its members. Ruiz y Flóres’s letter celebrated the collective action Villaseñor emphasized at the organization’s inception. Likewise, Villaseñor and CPDM members likely would have seen themselves soaring like “eagles” in their fight for a fascist version of mexicanidad defined by Catholicism. Although this vision did not come to the forefront in Mexican society, they believed themselves to have been fighting for their version of Mexican identity against the “beetles” of society. Adversity and failure, asserts historian Robert Weis, infused meaning into Cristero activism by marking it as “signs of religious renewal.”¹⁷⁰ As supposed “eagles,” they instructed

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Leopoldo Ruiz y Flóres to Pedro Villaseñor, October 2, 1935, Box 1, Folder 7, PVPP.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Letter to José Villa Barro, January 2, 1936, Box 1, Folder 7, PVPP.

¹⁷⁰ Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 58.

compatriots to “disregard those who crawl like beetles, those who see nothing but mud and slime even in the most beautiful things: let us despise them.”¹⁷¹

Ultimately, infringement on religious practice mattered to many Mexican Catholics in Mexico and Los Angeles. The Venegas family, as one example, showed how one group dealt with their displacement. This movement contributed to great uncertainty for such peoples in their journeys of refuge to the United States. Once there, they made attempts to make the best of a difficult situation. They initially imagined their residence as merely temporary and expressed a constant longing and memory of their homeland.

By the mid-1930s, *La Segunda* also unraveled in Los Angeles. The CPDM represented an extreme and reactionary response. Taken together, these instances show the vital role war played in many people’s lives. Moreover, it also remaps our understanding of the Mexican experience in Los Angeles which looked towards Mexico in some conservative form. For some, such as the Venegas family and Villaseñor, their way of life and identities were undermined and challenged. In Los Angeles, they made sense of the Cristero War by reconciling these experiences into different expressions of a Mexican nation. Venegas represented moderate conservatism, while Villaseñor was extreme. This is not to suggest that Cristero sympathizers in Los Angeles should be neatly defined. Rather, the struggle transcended the center-west states of Mexico across the U.S.-Mexico border. These cases do reveal that political, social, and cultural ties to Mexico remained intact. For many, those were defined by Catholicism. Writing to her father-in-law in Mexico, Dolores Venegas shared, “Last night I dreamt that I went over there and that I brought

¹⁷¹ CPDM, February 8, 1935, Box 2, PVPP.

back my compadre with me. What do you think, will this dream come true?"¹⁷² In many ways, these experiences followed Dolores' brief description of her dream that went to and from Mexico. Dolores eventually returned to Mexico two decades after her arrival in Los Angeles. But by 1931, this dream seemed likely to come to fruition due to the Church-state struggle.

¹⁷² Letter from Dolores Venegas to Juan Venegas, December 22, 1931, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 5, VFP.

CHAPTER FOUR

Forming *La Opinión* and Diasporic Enfranchisement in Los Angeles, 1926-1940

On October 23, 1934, Ignacio Lozano Sr., a newspaper mogul who published Los Angeles's *La Opinión* and San Antonio's *La Prensa*, received an urgent telegram. "Rivals [and] other agents," it stated, "confirm mail embargo."¹ That same day, Lozano received another telegram from José C. Valdés, his trusted correspondent in Mexico City. Valdés quoted *El Nacional*'s explanation that the government embargoed *La Opinión* as "seditious propaganda."² Lozano immediately appealed to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, the president of Mexico, in a telegram. He denied papers were seditious and reminded Rodríguez of Mexico's guarantee of a free press.³ This conflict, one intertwined with issues of a free press, border policing, and nationalism, represented just one instance when Lozano's papers received a distribution ban in Mexico. In contrast to the northward movement of Mexican peoples, resources, and ideas, the prohibition of Lozano newspapers represented a unique case of U.S.-Mexico borderlands conflict moving southward towards Mexico. As Mexicans became increasingly policed in the United States, conservative Mexican exiles like Lozano and his correspondents were monitored by the Mexican government. Moreover, Lozano represented a conservative instrumentation of Mexican politics

¹ LOP 260, Box 4, Lozano family/*La Opinión* collection (LLOC), The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

² LOP 1145, Box 19, LLOC

³ LOP 739, Box 12, LLOC.

and society for its readers. *La Opinión* and *La Prensa* functioned as borderlands newspapers which criticized leftist politics in Mexico from afar in the U.S. Southwest.

This chapter focuses on the establishment of *La Prensa* in 1913 and *La Opinión* in Los Angeles in 1926 by Lozano. The establishment of both papers served his political goals to counter the Mexican government that emerged from the Mexican Revolution. From *La Prensa*'s inception, Lozano's papers took sides in the Revolution's debates about what Mexico should be politically and socially. Lozano held great fear about the rise of leftist politics in Mexico. In 1929, the formation of the National Revolutionary Party brought uncertainty for Lozano. I trace moments in *La Opinión*'s first decade where the paper grappled with the Revolutionary government as it sought to share the political views of Mexican people on both sides of the border. These engagements often utilized democratic rhetoric that emphasized the importance of a free press and electoral representation for Mexicans on both sides of the border. The long Mexican Revolution played an instrumental role in establishing these two seminal Mexican borderlands newspapers as a counter to the Mexican government and Revolutionary legacy.

As transnational newspapers, I argue that the *La Prensa* and *La Opinión* sought to connect conservative expatriates in the U.S. Southwest with political conservatives in Mexico. In his examination of the Mexican press in mid-twentieth century Mexico, historian Benjamin T. Smith asserts that newspapers operated as a "key mediator" between citizens and the state. They transformed the "practice of everyday politics" through an increased readership. The rise of a Mexican news reading public prompted the Mexican government at the state and local level to

regulate what news and information was disseminated.⁴ Smith's argument, however, focuses on the period from 1940 to 1970. While I borrow from his findings, I also suggest that the development of a small Mexican news reading public occurred a bit earlier with Lozano's newspapers in the U.S. Southwest. The newspapers' distance from the Mexican government's regulation power made this possible. Hence, frequent embargo orders became a tool to censor Lozano by prohibiting Mexican readers in Mexico from reading his papers. Still, Lozano's newspapers built a Mexican readership in the U.S. and Mexico that connected them both to Mexican politics and society. *La Opinión* and *La Prensa* acted as a key mediator between conservative Mexican expatriates and the Mexican government. By extension, their contributors acted as cultural brokers, or intermediaries, between the Mexican government and Mexican expatriates in the United States.⁵ Surely many individuals and families sustained their own personal beliefs about the nation they left behind. Readers might have or might not have agreed with *La Opinión*'s conservative coverage or Lozano's interpretation of Mexican politics. Nonetheless, they became some of the most important Spanish newspapers in the United States.

In her content analysis of *La Opinión*'s first three years, Francine Medeiros found that over 70 percent of articles dealt with issues in Mexico. Lozano assumed seemingly most of his readers would return. This, she argues, made it an "exile newspaper."⁶ Others, however, have

⁴ Benjamin T. Smith, *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940–1976: Stories from the Newsroom, Stories From the Street* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 1-2.

⁵ Raúl A. Ramos defines "cultural brokerage" as the strategies and process in which individuals use to mediate between two or more parties. In his case, he argues how Tejano elites acted as cultural brokers between the Mexican state and Anglo-American immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century in *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁶ Francine Medeiros, "La Opinión, a Mexican Exile Newspaper: A Content Analysis of its First Years, 1926–1929." *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 11, no. 1 (1980): 65-87. Referenced in Raul D. Tovares, "La Opinión

pushed back on this label by suggesting that the paper and its leadership did not practice “exile politics” through their lack of support for one party or candidate in Mexico.⁷ Though I agree that the paper devoted itself to issues of exiles, I stray away from labeling Lozano’s papers as such. Instead, I show that they sought to represent a conservative exile community who resided in the United States. It promoted a transnational Mexican identity so that he could counter political elements in Mexico. Likewise, I also reset the argument that Lozano and his papers did not participate in partisan politics. He clearly aligned with anti-reelection efforts in Mexican politics from 1926-1940, an important moment in Mexican Reconstruction. Residing in the borderlands, Lozano used his newspapers for political and economic gains on both sides of the border.

Ignacio E. Lozano, *La Prensa* (San Antonio), and *La Opinión* (Los Angeles)

Ignacio E. Lozano, born in Nuevo León in 1886, arrived in San Antonio in 1909 with his parents and five siblings, at the age of twenty-two. The Lozano family found refuge in a city with a vast Mexican population as the Mexican Revolution gradually unfolded during the last years of the Porfiriato. The Lozano family took a keen interest in the power of print. They opened a bookstore right next door to a newspaper office run by Lozano’s sisters. Upon his arrival, Lozano found employment with local Spanish papers alongside selling newspapers and books. By 1913, the young Lozano founded the weekly *La Prensa* with a mere \$1,200 in

and its Contribution to the Mexican Community's Adaptation to Life in the US." *Latino Studies* 7, no. 4 (Winter, 2009), 484.

⁷ Nicolás Kanellos and Helvetia Martell, *Hispanic Periodicals in the United States, Origins to 1960: A Brief History and Comprehensive Bibliography* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000). Referenced in Raul D. Tovares, "La Opinión and its Contribution to the Mexican Community's Adaptation to Life in the US." *Latino Studies* 7, no. 4 (Winter, 2009), 484-485.

savings.⁸ “We’ve come to fight,” its first issue proudly proclaimed, “with absolute liberty and honesty” on behalf of Mexico.⁹ In its promise to readers as a “sincere friend,” it immediately claimed to be an outlet wanting news from Mexico.¹⁰ Lozano thereby tapped into the ever-growing Mexican community in San Antonio. In 1900, Mexicans composed 26 percent of the city’s population, which increased to 37 percent by 1920.¹¹ Lozano also set his sights on reaching other Mexican communities outside of San Antonio where no Spanish newspapers were readily available. For instance, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, a Mexican resident in South Texas recounted how he met the local train to pick up copies of *La Prensa* to distribute to his local town in 1930.¹² Within a year, the paper’s popularity enabled Lozano to purchase a larger printing press to transform the weekly into a daily newspaper. From its start, *La Prensa* included the perspectives from José Vasconcelos, while also reprinting the works of other Mexican writers and politicians such as Querido Moheno, Nemesio Garcia Naranjo, René Capistrán Garza, Aureliano Urrutia, and José María Lozano.¹³

These individuals made the paper a prominent forum for Mexican conservatives on both sides of the border. Scholars have observed that they largely served the interests of upper-class

⁸ Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez, “Ignacio E. Lozano: The Mexican Exile Publisher Who Conquered San Antonio and Los Angeles,” *American Journalism* 21:1 (2004), 78.

⁹ “A la Prensa, a nuestros amigos y a la publico,” *La Prensa*, February 13, 1913.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Rivas-Rodríguez, 81.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

Mexicans while eschewing the working-class.¹⁴ Historian Daniel Morales, for instance, notes it represented “the voice of the exiled elite [who] longed for pre-revolutionary traditional society.”¹⁵ This makes some sense given that Mexican migration during the early-twentieth century consisted first of elites who escaped the Diaz dictatorship and populist rhetoric of the Mexican Revolution.¹⁶ Subsequent waves of migration included laborers, many of whom also escaped the violence and aftermath of the social revolution, who sought an increased quality of life or opportunity in the United States.¹⁷ Historian Richard A. García, though, suggests that *La Prensa*’s writers remained largely critical of these lower-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans. They also worried that they would shed their Mexican identity in favor of Americanization.¹⁸ As a result, *La Prensa*’s writers and intellectuals often promoted an eventual return to Mexico in the hope of building a nation based on what they imagined as high culture in Mexican society.¹⁹ Groups like the League of United Latin American Citizens, García notes, promoted participation in U.S. society to improve their political and social status. Lozano and his writers instead countered with conservative cultural and social qualities that they believed would benefit Mexico upon their return.²⁰

¹⁴ Daniel Morales, “Tejas, Afuera de México: Newspapers, the Mexican Government, Mutualistas, and Migrants in San Antonio 1910–1940,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 40:2 (Winter 2021), 63-64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶ Rivas-Rodríguez, 81-82.

¹⁷ Rivas-Rodríguez, 82.

¹⁸ Richard A. García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2000), 243, 245. Cited in Rivas-Rodríguez, 82.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The paper nonetheless contributed to the experience of liberal working-class Mexicans in the United States. Rubén Munguía, a Mexican printer in Texas, credited *La Prensa*'s accessibility with giving working-class Mexicans a sense that "they could live better. They could send their children to school. They could indulge in the luxury of buying *La Prensa*, and in slowly picking out the forbidden letters, educate themselves."²¹ While Lozano and his contributors sought to "educate" México de Afuera on their specific vision of *mexicanidad*, many used *La Prensa* to find their own sense of belonging away from Mexico. Access to periodicals such as *La Prensa*, Munguía continues, offered "new opportunities [...] to choose their destiny and, despite the biased editorializing and reporting to which they were exposed, they were able to compare the idealized good old days 'that some wanted' with the realities of the life they had left behind."²² He concludes that as "a conservative paper, [it] can well lay claim to having awakened, even if this was not its goal, the liberal thinking of [...] men [...] who no longer sought to return to the old country. They finally realized that they belonged" in the United States.²³

Lozano and *La Prensa* looked to Mexican society and politics with an assumption that their reader's stay in the U.S. was temporary. As scholar Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez articulates, Lozano "believed his role, as an opinion leader of the exiled Mexican community, was to 'elevate' his countryman so that when political stability was established in Mexico, the masses of

²¹ Quoted in Rivas-Rodríguez, 82-83.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Mexican immigrants could return.”²⁴ Crucial to that vision was the retainment of a conservative version of Mexican identity and citizenship. Lozano resisted acculturation to the U.S. in favor of Mexican culture as an essentialized Mexican identity that, as I will show, revolved around political enfranchisement and engagement with Mexico’s politics.²⁵

On September 16, 1926 (Mexican Independence Day), Lozano followed *La Prensa*’s success by founding *La Opinión*, a Los Angeles based newspaper.²⁶ Always a pragmatist, Lozano cut shipping costs by forming a newspaper in the Pacific Coast city. Los Angeles became a point of distribution to other cities and towns throughout California.²⁷ While *La Opinión* mimicked its San Antonio predecessor, it should not be understood merely as an extension of it. In its first issue, the paper appealed to readers in California by claiming to serve the unique interests of Los Angeles and the broader region.²⁸ The paper acknowledged that they might appear as strangers from San Antonio, but he reassured them that they shared struggles as Mexicans.²⁹ By doing so, the paper claimed a union among readers of *La Opinión* in Los Angeles and of *La Prensa* in San Antonio. *La Opinión*’s introduction promised a “serious and useful” perspective for Los Angeles’s Mexican community. It utilized *La Prensa*’s pedigree to support its own conclusion that *La Opinión* would do the “honest and healthy work” to gain the

²⁴ Rivas-Rodríguez, 85-86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*,

²⁶ Every year *La Opinión* celebrated their anniversary in tandem with Mexican Independence.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁸ “Dos Palabras,” *La Opinión*, September 16, 1926.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

trust of its public.³⁰ At *La Opinión*'s founding, twelve other Spanish newspapers were published in Los Angeles.³¹ By 1926, however, only four of those remained in circulation. *El Heraldo de Mexico*, for instance, circulated 5,000 papers daily and distributed 6,000 on Sundays.³² As a successful newspaper mogul in San Antonio, Lozano recognized the immense potential of the ever-growing Mexican population in Los Angeles and California.

Days after *La Opinión*'s first publication, Victoriano Salado Álvarez, a prominent Mexican writer, lauded the formation of the Lozano daily in Los Angeles. He claimed that it would sustain and promote a sense of Mexican patriotism. Echoing the first issue's introduction, Álvarez painted *La Prensa* as a blueprint for the new Los Angeles paper. He pointed to *La Prensa*'s authority and success in appealing to Los Angeles readers. He argued Lozano and *La Prensa* made the life of Mexicans less difficult and more humane in the United States. In doing so, he suggested, it helped guide the opinion of its expatriates. Its absence would have left a great void of "pitiful falls and terrible disenchantment."³³ Two to three million Mexicans in the United States, he wrote, looked at the paper as a "friend" and "leader" that helped shape their opinions. More importantly, however, Álvarez noted the important role that the periodical played in combating Americanization efforts through the coverage of Mexican politics and society. Álvarez pointed out that the Mexican population in Los Angeles remained bigger than in Puebla and Guadalajara. As such, he implied that it was only logical that a leading Mexican newspaper

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Rivas-Rodríguez, 83-84.

³² Ibid.

³³ "La Edición de los Periódicos de Lozano en Los Angeles," *La Opinión*, September 18, 1926.

be established there for the community. *La Opinión* thus acted as a timely tool that he hoped would homogenize a growing Mexican public in Los Angeles and Southern California.³⁴

Mexican politics and society would act as the link. Lozano and his contributors would help steer that link in an effort to drive Mexican exiles toward their conservative agenda.

Forming *La Opinión* in Los Angeles with Empire

Not all news, though, focused exclusively on Mexico. The establishment of *La Opinión* coincided with the brewing conflict between the United States and Nicaragua during the Nicaraguan Civil War. This issue dominated much of the periodical's front-page news during its first year along with other news on Mexican society and politics.³⁵ Although not directly focusing on Mexican issues, the paper's coverage of Nicaragua tracked the struggle closely as an issue its readers should care deeply about. If the paper's larger goal sought to rekindle the bonds between Mexican exiles and Mexico, then the coverage of Nicaragua unveiled broader connections to *latinidad vis-à-vis* U.S. empire and Latin America.

Since 1912, the United States pursued an imperial tactic known as "Dollar Diplomacy" in Nicaragua instead of deploying military might.³⁶ This "Dollar Diplomacy" model would eventually steer U.S. foreign policy more broadly in Latin America. In Nicaragua, however, this form of imperialism worked purposefully to prevent other nation-states from taking advantage of

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ As noted, scholar Francine Medeiros found that seventy-three percent of editorials focused on news from Mexico during this period. Quoted in Rivas-Rodríguez, 84; Tovares, *La Opinión and its Contributions*, 486-488.

³⁶ Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 125.

the country's economic instability to build a new canal to rival the Panama Canal.³⁷ Nicaraguan nationalists viewed this economic imperialism as an affront to their nation's progress. Economic autonomy thus became a counter against U.S. imperialism.³⁸ After a decade of unrest in the 1920s, Calvin Coolidge finally ordered a full-scale military invasion of Nicaragua to quell the rebels.³⁹

La Opinión linked U.S. intervention in the Nicaraguan Civil War with Mexican autonomy in North America. Moreover, the critique on U.S. empire worked to implicitly highlight Mexicans' sense of belonging in Latin America. It specifically focused on expropriation in Mexico. On November 21, 1926, it was reported that U.S.-Mexico relations were quickly deteriorating due to the threat of expropriation of Mexico-based properties owned by U.S. businessmen. That same coverage connected relationships with the U.S. plans for a rumored protectorate in Nicaragua. The article reported it was a step "taken to prevent further spreading of 'Mexican radicalism' in Central America."⁴⁰ Furthermore, it argued that U.S. imperialism had major implications for Mexico which would undermine them. It claimed that the rumored protectorate intended to build a canal through Nicaragua to maintain supremacy between Mexico and the Panama Canal. Framing Nicaragua and Central America, writ large, as an important battleground in the Americas, the coverage rooted the struggle as a critique of U.S. empire in Latin America. It claimed that Mexicans in Los Angeles saw the tension between the

³⁷ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 125.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁰ "Se Teme Que Sea Llamado Sheffield A Washington," *La Opinión*, November 21, 1926.

two sides as one which pitted the two nations over who controlled the “hegemony of the small Central American countries.”⁴¹ The paper suggested that the United States’ imperial pursuits undermined Nicaragua’s and Mexico’s autonomy.

By January 1927, the United States undermined the Juan Bautista Sacassa led coup by backing the Adolfo Díaz regime. U.S. forces, the paper reported, arrived with fifteen warships, 215 officials, and over 4,500 marines and army personnel.⁴² This show of force, the paper reported, meant to intimidate Mexico. By occupying Nicaragua with the military, the United States aimed to reiterate its power in Central America and Latin America. Relatedly, diplomats reported that the U.S. had purposefully sought to establish a home base in the “Costa Oriental” in case Mexico expropriated petroleum properties and investments that would oust U.S. businessmen.⁴³ Later calling Mexico the match, and the United States the spark, Nicaragua continued to be carefully tracked as a potential powder keg for another world war. *La Opinión* began to articulate the conflict as one with deep implications for Latin America and Mexico by expressing a latinidad solidarity. Not only critiquing the United States empire, but the paper also continued to lambast other colonial countries such as France, Spain, and Russia as supplanting their might over weaker countries.⁴⁴ These nations, they continued, claimed supreme knowledge of “culture” and “civilization.” Their efforts to bring their colonial projects to other nations

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “51 Barcos de Guerra con 5,000 Soldados de EE. UU Apoyaran a Adolfo Díaz,” *La Opinión*, January 7, 1927

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Ese País Centroamericano Se Ha Convertido En Un Barril De Pólvora, Capaz de Incendiar Al Mundo,” *La Opinión*, January 10, 1927.

ultimately brought more violence “than barbarism itself.”⁴⁵ Standing in solidarity with Nicaragua, Lozano’s paper thus critiqued the United States’ intervention and backed the nation’s sovereignty. Subsequently, it promoted the Comité Hispana Americana’s call for a boycott of U.S. goods in Mexico City and throughout Latin America.⁴⁶ While it is unclear how successful or far-ranging the boycott was, it illustrated a larger notion of *latinidad* that sought to bond Latin Americans under a single cause against the U.S. intervention.

As the conflict developed in subsequent months, *La Opinión* began to publish extensive essays by Guillermo Prieto-Yeme, a Mexican journalist and Catholic exile, entitled “Intervención y Patriotismo.”⁴⁷ During the Cristero War, Prieto-Yeme sought to mobilize Mexicans in the United States “in defense of their brothers” in Mexico.⁴⁸ His discussion of U.S. empire similarly worked to convince readers of the dangers posed to Mexico and Latin America. Prieto-Yeme’s critique of U.S. imperialism highlighted the paper’s perspective of *latinidad* and *mexicanidad* for readers. According to Prieto Yeme, the phrase “American intervention” was a ubiquitous one that instilled hatred, fear, resentment, and pain throughout Mexico.⁴⁹ He claimed that the U.S.-Mexico War reminded Mexicans “of a brutal conquest with mutilation” which undermined national sovereignty.⁵⁰ Despite this shared perception, he argued, the idea of a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “Un Boycott Contra E.U.,” *La Opinión*, January 13, 1927.

⁴⁷ “Intervención y Patriotismo,” *La Opinión*, February 22, 1927

⁴⁸ Julia G. Young, “The Calles Government and Catholic Dissidents: Mexico’s Transnational Projects of Repression, 1926-1929,” *The Americas* 70, no. 1 (2013): 81.

⁴⁹ “Intervención y Patriotismo,” *La Opinión*, February 22, 1927.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Mexican nation remained imperfect among Mexicans. More significantly, Prieto-Yeme coupled his critique of U.S. imperialism with the Calles regime. He noted that groups of leading figures, such as Calles and Obregon, relied “heavily on foreign assistance.”⁵¹ In contrast, their opponents preserved a “classical patriotism” as they eschewed outside influences.⁵² He suggested that U.S. imperialism infiltrated the Mexican government and challenged the nation’s identity. Prieto-Yeme utilized Mexican exiles under the umbrella of this supposed classical patriotism. “Among Mexican expatriates,” he claimed, “the nuances of patriotism can be analyzed more distinctly.”⁵³ He implied that those living outside of Mexico could discern the differences between the leaders. Their distance from Mexico made them more aware of Mexico’s reliance on the U.S. government. Prieto-Yeme began to articulate patriotism in relation to various attitudes of compatriots in the “face of international problems” and American intervention.⁵⁴ He linked the leftist Mexican government with a fear of U.S. imperialism. This worked in tandem to critique both fronts for Mexicans residing in the U.S.

Prieto-Yeme quickly noted that U.S. intervention was not so much a looming threat than one enabled by Mexican politicians. According to him, there existed two irreconcilable entities in Mexico: the Mexican people and the government.⁵⁵ While Prieto-Yeme initially critiqued United States imperialism, he also linked that with a failing Mexican political system that he

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Intervención y Patriotismo,” *La Opinión*, February 28, 1927.

claimed had not represented the populace since achieving independence in the early-nineteenth century. In other words, to him, what banded most of the Mexican populace was a keen desire to participate and guide the nation rather than rely on individuals who allowed foreign intervention to blossom. Prieto-Yeme's idea of the nation signified a deep connection to the continued political participation of Mexican exiles in the construction of the Mexican nation. Through his critiques, he shared his vision of Mexican society and politics to push his agenda.

Prieto-Yeme reflected on the Porfiriato as a painful and sad epoch of the nation's history that highlighted the failure of Mexico's political system. During that era, he argued, Porfirio Díaz catered to Mexico's powerful neighbor which subjected the Mexicans to the "disappointment of their absolute independence."⁵⁶ Moreover, U.S. interventions in that era were hidden by the Mexican government from the Mexican populace or distracted through stories of heroes who defended the nation. Mexicans, as a result, were fed a myth from Mexican leaders. Prieto-Yeme painted the freedom of Mexicans within its borders as an illusion that hindered their awareness of interdependence of nations. The Mexican Revolution, he asserted, had the potential to destroy the shadow created by the Porfiriato, but ultimately repeated that same pattern of political corruption.⁵⁷

A day after Prieto-Yeme's third polemic, the United States reportedly critiqued the Mexican government. In an "energetic protest," the U.S. government took note of the Mexican government's criticism of U.S. political intervention in Nicaragua and Mexico. Furthermore,

⁵⁶ "Intervención y Patriotismo," *La Opinión*, March 1, 1927.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

they criticized Mexico's support of Sacassa and the revolutionaries after the U.S. had formally recognized the Adolfo Díaz regime. U.S. officials saw an infringement on their own sovereignty by noting that Mexico had made attempts to steer public opinion within the United States.⁵⁸ Both the Mexican government and *La Opinión* seemingly critiqued the U.S. Yet, the latter position worked to scapegoat the Mexican government within their criticism. Prieto-Yeme's series of articles worked to carefully critique the Mexican government as well as U.S. imperial designs. In the fifth article on the subject, he moved to differentiate between "egotistic" and "altruistic" intervention. The former defined an urge to gain territory while the latter a need to intervene on criminal activity.⁵⁹ Prieto-Yeme's two definitions worked to critique the U.S. "egotistic" ends while also showing the potential that Mexico had to defend their Latin American neighbors.

"Through the propaganda of Mexican politicians the influence of the United States in Mexico is given the character of a peaceful, selfish intervention [...] tending to divide the public men of Mexico and preserve the country in anarchy in order to make its development impossible, weaken the race, create a chronic state of unrest that would have as a sure end the annexation of our country to the United States."⁶⁰

Prieto-Yeme argued that the Mexican government had cloaked U.S. intervention as altruistic to hide its egotistic ends. Altruistic intervention, whether peaceful or armed, could have a positive effect only if sought to benefit the nation's masses not only select politicians. In

⁵⁸ "Kellog Guarda Secreto Sobre El Documento," *La Opinión*, March 2, 1927.

⁵⁹ "Intervención y Patriotismo," *La Opinión*, March 8, 1927.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Mexico, however, ruling parties had welcomed foreign intervention, even cloaking it as patriotism, to their benefit at the expense of the nation.⁶¹

Prieto-Yeme used the recent Mexican Revolution as another example of foreign intervention in Mexican affairs. Beginning with the Francisco Madero regime in 1911 and up to the contemporary presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles had the United States infringed on Mexican politics.⁶² Prieto-Yeme situated the Mexican Revolution as an era of corruption deeply influenced by the U.S. “The agents of the Constitutionalist Revolution,” he wrote, “knew how to present their case in Washington.”⁶³ Despite claiming to represent Mexicans, he continued, the Mexican government did not have the “slightest idea what the problems of Mexico were.”⁶⁴ The United States government, he claimed, had come to the full realization that “the stability of Hispanic American governments needed to be ensured through international sanctions.”⁶⁵ He implied that the Revolution worsened conditions in Mexico by appealing to U.S. interests. On March 13, one day after Prieto-Yeme’s article, *La Opinión* reported that Calles responded to accusations of Mexican propaganda regarding Nicaragua. He, alongside the former Mexican President Álvaro Obregón, assured the U.S. that the anti-American propaganda would end. More

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Intervención y Patriotismo,” *La Opinión*, March 12, 1927.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

importantly, he stated, that no obstruction of their policy in Nicaragua “will happen again in the future.”⁶⁶

Prieto-Yeme concluded his series by reminding readers about the need for accountability by Mexican politicians. He went as far as to say that they had been more treacherous and misleading towards the United States as a means to state that they were not merely puppets of an imperial power.⁶⁷ While this sudden shift in tone might seem surprising, it largely illustrates the type of nationalism that Prieto-Yeme and *La Opinión* sought to promote which hinged on a critique of the liberal Mexican government. This shift reminded readers of their political and national duties situated within the confines of Mexico, not the United States. In other words, the true enemy resided at home and must be addressed for the sake of liberation.⁶⁸ Indeed, the very stability of the nation depended on the status of their relationship with their neighbor, he implored. “Since such influence is inescapable,” he concluded, “let us take advantage of it in the future in the vein of disowning it or seeking to circumvent it.”⁶⁹ Collectively, the long series essentially called for a reorganization of the status quo in Mexico by electing new politicians. His insights incorrectly assumed that a change of regime would give way to a new nation independent of foreign intervention and in solidarity with other Latin American countries. Prieto-Yeme offered a vision with no concrete agenda other than a call for a regime change. He blamed them for enabling U.S. to undermine their autonomy and government.

⁶⁶ “Calles Accedio Ayer A Las Demandas de EE. UU,” *La Opinión*, March 13, 1927.

⁶⁷ “Intervención y Patriotismo,” *La Opinión*, March 15, 1927.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “Intervención y Patriotismo,” *La Opinión*, March 19, 1927.

***La Opinión* Politics during the Rise of the National Revolutionary Party**

On September 16, 1927, *La Opinión* celebrated their one-year anniversary and Mexican independence simultaneously. The paper would often compact the two in subsequent years. Nemésio García Naranjo, a prominent Mexican intellectual and politician, lauded the paper's successful first year.⁷⁰ Born in Lampazos, Nuevo León, Mexico, on March 8, 1883, Naranjo crossed the U.S.-Mexico border while attending elementary school in Texas. He made his return to Mexico enrolling at the Colegio Civil of Monterrey in 1897 followed by his study of law in Mexico City. After serving in the Francisco Madero and Victoriana Huerta administrations. García Naranjo fled to exile in San Antonio after the fall of the latter's regime in 1914. While there García Naranjo worked to organize the exile community against Venustiano Carranza all the while claiming, "strong nationalistic views toward Mexico."⁷¹ Like Lozano, García Naranjo envisioned the return of Mexican exiles to Mexico. As such, he sought to promote their continued ties to Mexican politics and culture with the aim of influencing Mexican politics.

García Naranjo praised Lozano, whom he claimed equipped Los Angeles with a successful "Mexican newspaper."⁷² In particular, he noted the exclusive collaborations with various Mexican writers and thinkers as well as the paper's professional presentation. García Naranjo thus painted *La Opinión* as a modern, first-rate institution of journalism for California's Mexican community. Its successful first year, he stated, acted as a "triumph" in the

⁷⁰ "El 1er Aniversario de 'La Opinión,'" *La Opinión*, September 16, 1927

⁷¹ Nora E. Ríos McMillan, "García Naranjo, Nemesio," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed August 31, 2020, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/garcia-naranjo-nemesio>. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

⁷² "El 1er Aniversario de 'La Opinión,'" *La Opinión*, September 16, 1927.

manner of “jubilee for the entire Mexican colony.”⁷³ García Naranjo, however, did not lionize Lozano as the sole or main contributor to *La Opinión* in Los Angeles. He acknowledged the journalists and other contributors for their original, compelling content that filled the daily. Still, he greatly emphasized Lozano’s role in paving the way for a paper dedicated to the pursuit of “truth” and “noble cultivation of authentic” mexicanidad which fought for Mexico while addressing the corrosion within it.⁷⁴ Finally, García Naranjo concluded his celebratory letter by refuting critics who claimed Lozano’s daily in Los Angeles and *La Prensa* in San Antonio were identical. Though they shared the same contributors, telegraphic services, and patriotic orientation, he differentiated the two by painting the two as relatives. Just as a “daughter resembles a mother” *La Opinión* also “differs from her.” *La Prensa* took a more “serene” character, while Los Angeles’s daily a more “vehement” one in a dynamism of renewal.⁷⁵ Naranjo’s descriptive imagery therefore treated *La Prensa* as formative print for San Antonio’s Mexican community. At the same time, he alluded to the immense potential of *La Opinión* in Los Angeles, a city where the Mexican population continued to boom. In other words, he gave the two newspapers its own credit. One had already shown success, while the other was yet to reach its full potential.

Around the same time, a new Mexican political juggernaut led by President Plutarco Elías Calles and his predecessor, Álvaro Obregón gained traction. According to historians Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, the two Sonoran leaders defined the 1920s as an era of

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

reform and repression through their emphasis on individualism and a secular society.⁷⁶ They refer to Obregón as a “caudillo” whose military prowess guided his leadership style. Calles, in contrast, took a more administrative and pragmatic approach by drawing on the urban middle class to retain hold of power and the status quo. Both, however, relied on violence to meet their objectives or fend off any threats.⁷⁷ According to historians Joseph and Buchenau, Obregón was said to have allowed the assassination of Pancho Villa after the famed revolutionary’s alliance with Adolfo de la Huerta proved threatening to the Obregón/Calles regime.⁷⁸ By October 1927, Obregón announced his candidacy for the upcoming election despite the constitution’s assurances that individuals could only serve one term. This, in combination with Calles’ reforms and repression against the Catholic Church, showed just how powerful the two had become in Mexican politics.

Aiming to disrupt the balance of power, Generals Arnulfo R. Gómez and Francisco R. Serrano, two antireeleccionistas, announced their candidacy for the 1928 election in the summer of 1927. In October 1927, however, news emerged about Serrano’s assassination and the rumored disappearance of Gómez.⁷⁹ *La Opinión* closely followed these developments in full detail to highlight the violence and instability in Mexican politics. In addition to outlining the assassination of Serrano and his thirteen allies, the paper shared Calles’ response to the Mexican

⁷⁶ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 89.

⁷⁷ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 89-90.

⁷⁸ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico’s Once and Future Revolution*, 95.

⁷⁹ *La Opinión*, October 5, 1927 and October 6, 1927.

consulate in New York regarding the Serrano and Gómez “rebellions.”⁸⁰ He assured these coalitions would surely be quelled with ease as the Mexican government had the means to do so. The report concluded with a somber tone which called these violent developments as an inevitable consequence of the political battle between Obregón and his political opponents in Gómez and Serrano.⁸¹

The paper investigated the rumored disappearance of Gómez by interviewing Encarnación Gómez, his wife, who resided in Los Angeles. Gómez quickly rejected the notion that her husband had fallen to the same fate as Serrano. First, she exclaimed, her husband had not been captured like Serrano and placed in jail. Instead, she claimed that he roamed free with an army who admired him in a land that he knew “inch by inch.”⁸² Despite her lack of inside knowledge of Gómez’s agenda, which he neglected to share with her in letters, the interview cultivated an image of Gómez as a hero on the run from the persecution of Calles. Likewise, *La Opinión* highlighted Gómez as a worthy figure who had the Mexican people in mind. According to a contact from Gómez’s party, the paper reported, he represented the “national cause and not just a military uprising as the government has tried to make you believe.”⁸³ To that end, the contact implied that Gómez aimed to combat a repressive regime through an oppositional party

⁸⁰ “El Trafico a Veracruz se ha Paralizado,” *La Opinión*, October 5, 1927.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “Pueden Estar Seguros de que Mi Esposo Esta Vivo,” *La Opinión*, October 6, 1927.

⁸³ “El Jefe Revolucionario habla de Sus Proyectos Para el Caso de que la Actual Rebelión Triunfe,” *La Opinión*, October 29, 1927.

with the national interests in mind. He envisioned nationalizing the nation's petroleum as well as mitigating the animosity between workers and capitalists.⁸⁴

By juxtaposing the Calles and Obregón political machine with opponents who sought to challenge them, the paper placed readers within the two sides in Mexico. For their part, *La Opinión* emphasized Serrano's assassination and the pursuit of Gómez as a dire warning to the exile community who opposed the Calles presidency. As a result, it painted the tragic story of Serrano as a martyr betrayed by both Calles and Obregón for his contrasting views and opinions. Describing Serrano as a sincere man, one generous to his friends and forgiving of his enemies, with moderate political leanings, the article ultimately presented a political figure who many in the exile community might have resonated with.⁸⁵ Though only revolutionaries on paper, the article claimed that the "refugees continue to wait [...] for the day when their dreams are made, when the battles that are painted in their fertile imagination become realities."⁸⁶ Despite Serrano's assassination and Gómez's hiding, these figures represented the potentials and the dangers of rebellion against the liberal Mexican government.

Still, Gómez fell victim to the same fate just one month after the murder of Serrano and his counterparts in November 1927. After a bloody battle in the state of Veracruz, the Mexican government captured and executed Gómez by firing squad. His body was subsequently transported to Mexico City. Encarnación Gómez, who previously dispelled word of his death,

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "Serrano Fue Traicionado Por Calles y Por Obregón," *La Opinión*, October 25, 1927.

⁸⁶ "La Fecunda Imaginación de los Revolucionarios Refugiados En E. Unidos," *La Opinión*, October 31, 1927.

somberly stated “it’s impossible.”⁸⁷ Building a narrative of tragedy and danger, *La Opinión* focused on the details of Gómez’s fall for readers. First, it painted Gómez as a martyr. Upon his capture, reports claimed that he stated, “Dead or alive, take me to Mexico [City].”⁸⁸ Gómez’s request symbolized a rebel committed to his cause, but also one with a love for his country even in defeat. The story might have served to resonate with Mexican refugees and exiles residing in Los Angeles and across the U.S. Southwest, many of whom envisioned an eventual return to their homeland. Second, the paper further humanized Gómez through a collection of four letters he requested to be distributed after his capture. Two cards asked his wife in Los Angeles to take care of their two sons, while another put his surrender in writing to the Mexican government.⁸⁹ For Lozano, Gómez symbolized a spark of hope for change against the Mexican government. In addition, it showed the potential fate political opponents could suffer.

La Opinión reflected on the meaning and implications of Gómez and Serrano’s assassinations. Both figures ran an antireelectionist campaign against the political machine of Calles and Obregón. Gómez, the second to be assassinated, was especially significant since he represented the last opponent to their regime. As such, the paper asserted that he deserved praise and mourning by many Mexicans.⁹⁰ The editorial not only lamented the loss of this potential hope, but also the misery and mistrust that seemed inevitable in the battle between revolutionary factions. They argued that violence would continue to reign supreme in Mexican politics and

⁸⁷ “El General Gómez Fue Fusilado,” *La Opinión*, November 6, 1927.

⁸⁸ “‘Muerto o Vivo, Llévame a Mexico’—Pidió A Escobar Después de la Captura,” *La Opinión*, November 7, 1927.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ “El Fusilamiento de Arnulfo Gómez,” *La Opinión*, November 7, 1927.

society. Moreover, there existed a more “transcendental” discontent “of the people, which saw its causes routinely quelled by the government.”⁹¹ The masses, the paper claimed, also articulated their discontent against the Calles and Obregón machine. The editorial predicted, however, that the people who were inflicted with hunger and oppression would not be contained by either the army or the current regime. This prediction surely served as a warning to Calles as the author called for him to mitigate the situation and admit his wrongdoings.⁹² By utilizing Gómez as a martyr of the antireelectionist platform, the paper continued its efforts to shape the national orientation of its readers in Los Angeles and the U.S. Southwest. Despite their distance from their homeland, they too were also included in the masses that Lozano believed needed to overthrow a supposedly tyrannical government in Mexico.

La Opinión and Lozano’s politics in the late 1920s revolved around an antireelectionist platform. This made the assassinations of Serrano and Gómez useful stories to emphasize for their readers. More particularly, it aimed to emphasize the continued connection to Mexican electoral politics from afar to shape Mexico’s future away from the Revolution’s legacy. According to the paper’s various articles, such as those by Prieto-Yeme and the Gómez/Serrano assassinations, there existed a real threat in Mexico. This danger still applied to those who found refuge across the U.S. Southwest despite their distance from the nation. Lozano and his papers therefore emphasized the violence and unrest to promote the idea that Mexico needed aid from its displaced citizens. By delineating a line between the supposed tyranny of Calles and Obregón and their opponents, it called for readers to place themselves on one side. The paper hoped to

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

promote the political participation of Mexican exiles in what they envisioned as a political battle in Mexico.

García Naranjo visited Los Angeles in November 1927 to give a series of speeches on the political situation in Mexico. According to *La Opinión*, his lectures focused on the dangers of the Calles presidency, which the paper reported, were well received by the Mexican crowd.⁹³ It also reprinted his speech for readers who did not get a chance to attend Naranjo's lecture. Using the context of the Cristero War, Naranjo critiqued Calles' invention in the country's "religious problem." Moreover, he also observed that in the United States Mexicans could freely practice their Catholicism. Still, he did not romanticize the U.S. as a place of total "liberty," but instead called it one of "tolerance," a distinction that sought to highlight the coexistence of various political and religious stances. He lauded the diverse set of ideas in U.S. society as opposed to the singular political party in Mexico. He praised the U.S. electoral process which honored the will of the people as represented by their vote. Calles, in contrast, did not represent the masses. His ascent to power came not by the vote, but by the will of his predecessor, Obregón. Naranjo's speeches were reportedly interrupted with frequent applause throughout the night.⁹⁴ The second night expanded his critique beyond the Calles presidency to one that highlighted a larger pattern in the history of Mexico. Dating back to the rise of the Porfiriato, the nation had long been "linked to individuals," he told the audience, "and not to the laws."⁹⁵ Naranjo also made a point

⁹³ "García Naranjo Llego hoy a Los Angeles y Hoy Dara Su Primera Conferencia," *La Opinión*, November 20, 1927.

⁹⁴ "Calles Fue Elevado al Solio por los Cañones de Ocotlán, Dijo Anoche García Naranjo," *La Opinión*, November 20, 1927.

⁹⁵ "La Segunda Conferencia de García Naranjo," *La Opinión*, November 22, 1927.

regarding the reelections and antirelectionist platforms. For him, reelections were neither good nor bad. Rather, it depended on context and the individual seeking reelection.⁹⁶ The reelection of an individual depended on their use of power and how they pursued their second term. His examples, however, still implied that the situation occurring in Mexico had leaned towards one of dictatorship and political machines.

After the assassination of Gómez and Serrano, Obregón was reelected as the president of Mexico in July 1928. *La Opinión's* extensive coverage of his campaign and the violence surrounding justified their emphasis for conservative Mexicans on the perceived threat brewing in Mexico. An even greater point, however, was further expounded by the paper two weeks after the president-elect's successful reelection. In Mexico City, José de León Toral assassinated Obregón. In his confession, León Toral identified as a follower of the Cristeros and as a devout Catholic. He justified his crime out of religious passion.⁹⁷ Despite opposing Obregón's reelection in his papers and personally, Ignacio Lozano Sr. quickly condemned the crime as senseless violence and proof of the instability in Mexico in a letter to his readers, he wrote:

General Obregón's murder is undoubtedly the most embarrassing political event recorded in Mexico in recent years. For many people this crime is but a logical consequence of General Obregón's activities, in connection with the deep division created in Mexico by the revolutionary party[...] I believe that, unfortunately, this murder would mark the beginning of an era of revenge and new crimes of the same nature. As a Mexican, I condemn [his] murder [...] as I condemn crime in all its aspects, for it has been my most vivid desire to see my country on better paths and ruled by honest men who adjust their procedures to the imperatives of civilization.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Joseph and Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution*, 104.

⁹⁸ "El Asesinato Político Mas Bochornoso," *La Opinión*, July 18, 1928.

While Lozano condemned the assassination, he also used it to his advantage in a roundabout fashion. His emphasis on “civilization” signaled how he wished for the political instability and violence to end in Mexico. In this case, another political assassination, this time a president-elect, referenced the ongoing political and social instability defined by extreme violence between rivals in Mexico. The assassination, not León Toral was condemned. His response also hinted that Obregón’s anticlerical position contributed to his death. As the paper aimed to illustrate in the previous year, only a political process guided by informed voters could serve to stabilize the Mexican nation. Obregón’s assassination not only deterred this mission but marked a point of rupture that might make Lozano’s vision impossible. *La Opinión* lamented and condemned the assassination but also used it to their advantage. It acknowledged their harsh critique of Obregón in the past years, but Lozano refused to outright approve his murder. To do so, he observed, would be this injustice would have been an affront to political change and civilization in favor of crime and violence.⁹⁹ Unlike the prior year’s assassinations, the coverage framed this event largely as a national tragedy, one that needed to be addressed collectively. Whereas Gómez and Serrano represented an opposing faction, the point remained that Obregón represented the highest position in Mexican politics.

With the president-elect out of the political landscape, Calles took advantage of the tragedy. In a speech to the nation in September 1928, Calles called Obregón’s death a benefit of the nation as it signaled the rise of a “civilized nation” with the disappearance of the last

⁹⁹ “Obregón Asesinado,” *La Opinión*, July 18, 1928.

caudillo.¹⁰⁰ Thereafter he promised the nation that he would not serve as the provisional president, nor pursue the post in the subsequent elections.¹⁰¹ Instead, Calles envisioned something greater in scope and longevity. After announcing the pursuit of a “nation of institutions and laws,” he united all the revolutionaries by creating the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). Naming himself the leader, he subsequently handed the presidency to Emilio Portes Gil.¹⁰² Only Calles, noted party officials, held the training to lead this new group through his awareness of the problems and difficulties it will encounter.¹⁰³

La Opinión condemned the establishment of the new Revolutionary Party and Calles’ leadership as confirmation of their worst fears. The editorial questioned Calles’ invitation to the Mexican masses to mobilize under the Revolutionary banner. Do the dead, they pondered, and those executed say nothing about the problems of Mexican politics? Furthermore, it provoked the Mexican people to consider the last eighteen years of the Revolution and the conflict between its leaders and conservative opponents that had become even more violent. The editorial further raised the stakes between two political poles and a brewing battle with the formation of a new Revolutionary Party.¹⁰⁴

An editorial by Juan Sánchez Azcona, a Mexican journalist residing in Cuba, called for the political participation of Mexican exiles. He reminded Mexican readers that expatriation, no

¹⁰⁰ “El Jefe Del Ejecutivo Dio Su Palabra De Honor No Pretender Ya El Poder,” *La Opinión*, September 2, 1928.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Thomas Benjamin, “Rebuilding the Nation,” in *The History of Mexico*, ed. William H Beezley and Michael C. Meyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 447.

¹⁰³ “Forman un Partido o Desaparecen,” *La Opinión*, September 25, 1928.

¹⁰⁴ “Forman un Partido o Desaparecen,” *La Opinión*, September 26, 1928.

matter the cause and circumstances, “could never mean a disengagement from the homeland.”¹⁰⁵ Azcona argued that being far from the homeland harnessed a greater love for it than residing within it. Still, the expatriate, he warned, may only recall their affection for it rather than the unrest.¹⁰⁶ To further draw out this point, Azcona wrote about how expatriates from Spain, Italy, and Cuba continued their relationship to their homelands through political participation. He suggested that the same should be true for Mexicans throughout the United States. Azcona thus aimed to tap into the Mexican diaspora’s intervention in Mexican politics. This countered the claim that leaders in Mexico made that “political rights must only be exercised in the homeland.”¹⁰⁷ Azcona instructed readers to reject the Mexican government’s views of the diaspora as pariahs of the homeland by recognizing their crucial status as Mexican political subjects. Moreover, he treated their experiences in the United States, namely their exposure to the democratic process, as a positive factor in this status. By learning the meaning of citizenship in the U.S., he figured, they could bring these values to Mexico from afar.¹⁰⁸ Brushing aside experiences of xenophobia and racism, Azcona romanticized the Mexican experience on the borderlands in favor of their status as critical political citizens of Mexico in the United States. Azcona concluded that politics was the most effective way to ignite patriotism.¹⁰⁹ With the rise

¹⁰⁵ “La Participación de los Expatriados en la Política de su Patria,” *La Opinión*, November 18, 1928.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

of the Revolutionary Party, Azcona appealed appeal hoped a political bloc of exiles might play a role in undermining it.

Around the same time, *La Opinión* grappled with their distribution across the U.S.-Mexico border. In January 1929, President Portes Gil issued orders that the Lozano daily be allowed to flow freely across the border.¹¹⁰ Although both the Los Angeles and San Antonio dailies had circulated in some border towns, Portes Gil's orders were well received by Lozano as a sign of respect for Mexican law and freedom of press.¹¹¹ The initial prohibition of the newspapers during this period, however, presents interesting questions on the paper's significance. While critiquing the Revolutionary government in Mexico, the paper remained committed to promoting the civic engagement of Mexican exiles in the U.S. The periodicals also functioned as a sort of Mexican transnational national organization that promoted conservative ideas both in the U.S. and Mexico. Although published in and distributed across the U.S. Southwest, the periodicals should not merely be framed as a Mexican American newspaper. Instead, I suggest that they should be considered a transitional newspaper, a distinction that highlights its connections between the U.S. and Mexico. To be sure, the periodicals covered events on both sides of the border. The paper's prohibition in Mexico, however, positioned them as something unique. Lozano's print resided in the physical and abstract place of the borderlands. Their critical coverage of Mexican politics, the point of contention between them and the Mexican government, also allowed for an alternative Mexico to exist and flourish outside of it.

¹¹⁰ "La Opinión Tiene Ya Libre Paso a Mexico," *La Opinión*, January 9, 1929.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

In the summer of 1929, Azcona lauded the efforts of *La Opinión* in a celebratory editorial entitled “the transcendental importance of Lozano newspapers.” “Mexican and patriotic,” he wrote, Lozano “is a hero of the race because he watches over” Mexicans in the United States where they were “exposed to being injured and abused.”¹¹² Moreover, he referred to Lozano’s newspapers as “true Mexican publications” despite being published in a foreign land. Azcona went as far to call them “more genuinely Mexican” than periodicals published in Mexico. Many of those, he claimed, had forgotten the national interests which he described as “colorless themes.”¹¹³ In this case, Azcona appealed to *La Opinión*’s efforts to combat the Mexican government through news. Like the Lozano periodicals, he claimed, the vast expatriate population remained independent in thought. The two worked in tandem as guardians to create a free-thinking community away from the persecution of their home government. Azcona’s most important point, however, claimed that Lozano’s newspapers acted as a bridge for Mexican exiles. Lozano’s newspapers, he suggested, showed Mexico the intensity of Mexicans in the U.S. where they continued articulating their spirit and moral bonds to Mexico. Likewise, Mexicans were presented with the instability inside Mexico.¹¹⁴ By bridging the divide between these two Mexico’s, Azcona called again for Mexican exiles to use their Mexican citizenship in the U.S. Lozano’s efforts sought to mobilize and represent Mexican exiles from within the U.S.

The initial distribution conflict in early 1929 highlighted how Lozano utilized ideas of free press as a form of activism in shaping the Mexican nation and the exiled community.

¹¹² “La Transcendental Importancia de los Periódicos Lozano,” *La Opinión*, June 27, 1929.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Despite directions to be allowed in Mexico in 1929, the paper lambasted the idea of a free press as a myth in Mexico.¹¹⁵ The paper traced the country's persecution of his newspaper to the experience of Mexican exiles and the country's general instability. The "freedom of the press," an editorial read, "the true freedom of the press whose easiest and best vehicle is the newspaper does not exist in Mexico."¹¹⁶ This critique served a dual purpose for Lozano's newspapers. First, it presented another point of critique on the Revolutionary government which censured the Mexican press on both sides of the border. This negated contrary political expressions in Mexico, which many Mexican exiles espoused in the United States, according to *La Opinión*. Second, it emphasized the important work Lozano's newspapers did for the exile community. Not only did it sympathize with their status, but it kept their link to the homeland alive and well. If his readers could not reside in Mexico, they could at least keep up to date with its events through a trusted source like *La Opinión* to form their political opinions.

Later that year, *La Opinión* reprinted antireelection candidate José Vasconcelos' appeal to Mexican expatriates for the upcoming Mexican election.¹¹⁷ Vasconcelos emphasized the political instability and oppression occurring in the homeland.¹¹⁸ Through his dire request for the Mexican foreign press to support him, Vasconcelos sought to gain the backing of the vast Mexican expatriate community against the supposedly tyrannical revolutionary party. His emotional outreach aligned with *La Opinión*'s efforts to maintain the political participation of

¹¹⁵ "El Mito de la Libertad de Prensa," *La Opinión*, April 25, 1929.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ "Mensaje de Vasconcelos a La Opinión," September 19, 1929.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Mexicans in the United States while supporting a candidate to oppose the Revolutionary government. More significantly, however, it continued to illustrate the important role Mexicans in Los Angeles and the Southwest served in the Mexican national imagination for some Mexican politicians and intellectuals such as Vasconcelos. Like Lozano and other contributors, Vasconcelos did not deem their residence outside of Mexico as a negative. Instead, it illustrated the existence and potential of a diaspora that could influence the inner developments unfolding in Mexico and the upcoming election. After PNR nominee Pascual Ortiz Rubio gained over 90 percent of the vote in November, an uproar of corruption in the electoral process flooded the pages of *La Opinión* which further escalated their political leanings in subsequent years.¹¹⁹

In February 1930, Lozano and his papers backed Vasconcelos' candidacy yet contradictorily claimed that they remained politically independent. After months of discontent from the previous election, it clarified that their position was to "serve" the expatriates in maintaining a Mexican spirit, though, driven by politics. Despite the mass content on Mexican politics since the paper's inception, Lozano claimed that *La Opinión* was neither a partisan nor a political paper. Instead, when the paper wrote about politics, it did so from the stance of Mexicans who served their nation.¹²⁰ This paradoxical claim cloaked their political goals under some broad sense of national duty. Lozano responded to critiques of their treatment of Calles and support for Vasconcelos in the 1929 election. First, he assured readers that they did not consider themselves enemies of Calles and that their attacks on him were not systematic.¹²¹ Second, it

¹¹⁹ *La Opinión*, November 18 and 29, 1929.

¹²⁰ "Frente Al Nuevo Régimen," *La Opinión*, February 5, 1930.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

acknowledged their support and friendship with Vasconcelos. Yet, it reiterated their stance as independent of party lines.¹²² The letter, perhaps, was largely meant to deal with the distribution issues that would begin to plague the periodicals in subsequent years. By claiming to be independent, it therefore suggested that their embargo had been wrongly enacted. The new presidency of Pascual Ortiz Rubio, the paper hoped, represented a new era that would allow their distribution in Mexico.¹²³ Lozano's claims were hard to believe, but they represented his efforts to blunt his political goals by painting his newspapers as independent.

***La Opinión*, Belonging, and Repatriation during the Great Depression**

On January 10, 1931, *La Opinión* reported the repatriation of 800 Mexicans in a single day. In over 200 of their own automobiles, the paper reported, Mexican families crossed the border at Nuevo Laredo and Nogales “to settle in different parts of the Republic of Mexico.”¹²⁴ The next day the paper reflected on those who repatriated in an editorial. Instead of condemning the mass departure, it offered a more optimistic tone. It asserted the repatriated would bring their “hard experiences” to Mexico wherein they would contribute to its improvement with new “energy” and “practice of new methods in various fields of human activity.”¹²⁵ In this way, the paper reported Lozano's emphasis that Mexicans should return to and belonged in Mexico. On the other hand, it echoed notions posited by esteemed Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio during this period. Mexican officials viewed emigration as a crucial node of Mexico's

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “Cruzaron la Frontera en 200 Autos,” *La Opinión*, January 10, 1931.

¹²⁵ “Los 800 Repatriados,” *La Opinión*, January 12, 1931.

modernization.¹²⁶ Gamio noted three benefits of outward migration. First, he believed it allowed working-class families to find work in the U.S. to provide economic relief. Second, he saw this economic benefit to the nation's political stability. The diaspora contributed to Mexico's economy through remittances. When returning to Mexico, Gamio thought, they brought back knowledge and skills that would contribute to Mexico's reconstruction. Gamio supported Mexican emigration to the U.S. so long as many returned to Mexico. He believed that their experience in El Norte would instill them "modern culture." As modern political subjects, he reasoned, they would also make Mexico a modern nation.¹²⁷

By supporting the voluntary repatriation of the 800 Mexicans, *La Opinión* envisioned an opportunity for Mexicans to return and contribute to their homeland. Like Gamio, the editorial emphasized that this group would contribute to Mexican society. It naively assured readers that they would easily resume their lives in Mexico as "evidenced by the simple fact that they travel in their own cars."¹²⁸ While automobile ownership worked to highlight Mexicans' elevated class status, it also implied their choice to repatriate on their own terms. As both historians, Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez note, Mexicans often voluntarily left the U.S. to avoid humiliation. "They elected to face deprivation in their homeland," they write, "rather than endure the disparagement heaped upon them in El Norte. In Mexico, they might suffer hunger pains, but at least they would be treated like human beings."¹²⁹ Lozano's editorial looked at voluntary

¹²⁶ Hernández, *Migra!*, 85-88.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ "Los 800 Repatriados," *La Opinión*, January 12, 1931.

¹²⁹ Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 99.

repatriation in hopeful terms for Mexico and repatriated Mexicans. He also addressed the repatriation of Mexicans born in the United States and immersed in American customs. It was up to the parents, the editorial warned, to teach them about Mexico and Mexican ways if they were to flourish in Mexico.¹³⁰ Lozano and his papers advocated for the return of the Mexicans to Mexico, though on their own terms. The deportation and forced repatriation of Mexicans in the early 1930s ultimately presented a challenge in which they had to reconcile their positions. Voluntarily repatriation could be celebrated, but what about forced removal?

Between 1930 to 1939, Mexicans accounted for 46 percent of those deported despite only accounting for 1 percent of the U.S. population.¹³¹ As a leader of the Mexican exile and immigrant community, Lozano's papers worked to defend them. Before the mass deportations in 1931, the U.S. proposed to limit Mexican migration to the U.S. in 1930. *La Opinión* denounced this effort as lacking any "justice."¹³² Later, the paper called on the Mexican government to aid repatriated Mexicans.¹³³ As a Mexican exile, Lozano recognized the circumstances in which Mexicans ventured to the U.S. The instability of the Mexican Revolution and the more recent Cristero War made Mexico unsafe for many. As historian Nancy Aguirre suggests, they "were experiencing bilateral deterritorialization, being pushed and pulled across a political and cultural border into spaces where they were unable to fully belong."¹³⁴

¹³⁰ "Los 800 Repatriados," *La Opinión*, January 12, 1931.

¹³¹ Balderrama and Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 53.

¹³² Nancy Aguirre, "Exile and Repatriation in the Barrios: The Great Depression in *La Prensa* and *La Opinión*, 1930-1932," *Camino Real*, 7:10, Alcalá de Henares: Instituto Franklin – UAH, 2015, 100.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Aguirre, "Exile and Repatriation in the Barrios," 101.

In early-February 1931, just one month after the voluntarily repatriation of the 800, *La Opinión* addressed “the problems of the repatriated.”¹³⁵ The editorial reminded its readers that they want “nothing better than the return of all Mexicans to their homeland.” Mexicans were “only waiting for peace, security and freedom of conscience to come back to Mexico.” As such, the paper continued to advocate for that ideal.¹³⁶ Repatriation efforts and deportation, which the editorial considered the same, presented a roadblock to this vision. Like previous discussions, the paper lauded the skills and notions of modernity that they imagined Mexicans had gained while in the U.S. This argument also emphasized that “top quality” Mexicans had already voluntarily repatriated during President Pascual Ortiz Rubio’s inauguration. On the other hand, however, Lozano acknowledged how some Mexicans remained poor in the U.S. and likely faced deportation. While some skilled laborers would thrive in Mexico, the paper worried about others who would struggle in Mexico due to unemployment. Even though the paper referred to repatriation and deportation as the same, it unveiled how notions of class differentiated the experience for Mexicans and Lozano’s own conservative classism. “Every Mexican that steps again in our land will be a useful element,” the paper assured, “but for now it is a serious problem that the government should study carefully so as not to increase the number of unemployed.”¹³⁷

The paper subsequently pondered the status of Mexican laborers in a struggling Mexican economy and called on the Mexican government to aid them. While a return home could be

¹³⁵ “El Problema de Los Repatriados,” *La Opinión*, February 4, 1931.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

celebrated, their well-being remained up for debate if they could not utilize their skills through labor. As such, it suggested the “formation of agricultural colonies where to take advantage of the experiences that most of the repatriates acquired in exile in field work.”¹³⁸ This solution relied on the goodwill of the Mexican government to transition its citizens in a period of hardships. At the same time, however, it took this opportunity to unite Los Angeles’s Mexicans because of the rise of deportations in Los Angeles. Between February and March 1931 news of deportations blared on the headlines of *La Opinión*. U.S. officials reportedly detained and questioned an estimated three to four thousand Mexicans during this period. Official records show that over 13,000 returned to Mexico between March 1931 and April 1934. Historian Douglas Monroy, however, suggests that when voluntary repatriates are included, the number grows to 35,000, which accounted for one-third of Mexican Los Angeles.¹³⁹ Lozano used *La Opinión* to defend the Mexican community through this collective experience.¹⁴⁰ Unlike San Antonio and El Paso, it suggested, Los Angeles Mexicans remained disjointed and unorganized. On April 9, it announced the construction of “La Casa del Mexicano,” spearheaded by the local Mexican Consulate, that would serve the interests of Mexicans in Los Angeles.¹⁴¹ *La Opinión* asserted that the building would provide “moral order” in a time of instability as well as access to “representation of your government.”¹⁴² In essence, the paper’s celebration of the building’s opening unveiled its vision on how the Mexican government should serve Mexicans abroad.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Monroy, *Rebirth*, 149-150.

¹⁴⁰ “La Casa Del Mexico,” *La Opinión*, April 9, 1931.

¹⁴¹ Aguirre, “Exile and Repatriation in the Barrios,” 102.

¹⁴² “La Casa Del Mexico,” *La Opinión*, April 9, 1931.

When the editorial asserted their “encouragement for such a useful project” it more broadly referred to their idea of a strengthened bond between the Mexican government and exiles. While the stay was only envisioned as temporary, such sites would help stabilize México de Afuera during a turbulent period.

While they lauded the consulate’s efforts to aid Mexicans in Los Angeles, it also critiqued the limits of the Mexican government to transition those repatriated or deported. On April 9, the paper reported on the exploitation of repatriates in Mexico when crossing the border. One passenger, they claimed, had been charged by the Consulate of Mexico for transportation and his luggage. Even worse, the Ferrocarriles Nacionales “demanded tickets for the little ones” despite assurances that travel to the homeland would be free.¹⁴³ Although Mexican officials claimed that Mexicans could travel and bring their belongings without paying duties, the paper asserted that this “turned out to be a dead letter in the eyes of the customs authorities.”¹⁴⁴ Like earlier critiques of the Mexican government, this incident further unveiled how the paper tried to hold the Mexican government accountable for its citizens abroad. In another instance, the paper reported on a group of repatriates who arrived in Sonora “in distress,” famished and unemployed. Instead of transitioning these people, the governor, Francisco Elías sought to halt the influx of repatriated Mexicans into the state by issuing an order to stop the “invasion.”¹⁴⁵ This discussion confirmed earlier fears of the problems the repatriated would face in Mexico. While this report did not posit any suggestions, it functioned to remind readers on the difficulties of Mexicans.

¹⁴³ “Exploitan en Mexico a Los Repatriados,” *La Opinión*, April 8, 1931.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ “Es difícil la situación en Nogales,” *La Opinión*, March 18, 1931.

Moreover, it pointed to the failure of Mexican officials to aid them while ignoring the role of the U.S. in forcing them to return.

Repatriation and deportation illustrated the larger patterns of the Lozano newspapers which sought to represent and advocate for Mexicans outside of Mexico by critiquing the Mexican government. Likewise, it also alluded to the perplexing problem of belonging in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Although Lozano envisioned Mexicans returning to Mexico, it was clear that the Mexican government remained ill-equipped to welcome them back. At the same time, the U.S., which had acted as a supposed safe haven during the early-twentieth century, eroded with the increased racism towards Mexicans. This experience also began to change the meaning of *México de Afuera* as some Mexicans countered deportation and refused repatriation. Historian George J. Sánchez notes that the loss of one-third of the Mexican community greatly altered Mexican Los Angeles “toward second-generation dominance.”¹⁴⁶ What was once a predominantly immigrant community had transitioned into a city “dominated by the children of immigrants.”¹⁴⁷ The “decade of betrayal” challenged Lozano’s vision for Mexicans of all generations to retain their identity and return to a peaceful Mexico. While he might have hoped for this new generation to return to Mexico, many envisioned their life and sense of belonging in the United States. His intended audience, the immigrant base, had diminished in Los Angeles.

Banned in Mexico and at the Border: 1930s Embargo of Lozano Papers

¹⁴⁶ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 224-225.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

By the mid-1930s, *La Opinión* faced multiple embargos at the U.S.-Mexico border. As such, the decade used these scenarios as a measure of free press, or lack thereof, in Mexico. For instance, after being banned for distribution in Mexico in May 1930, Lozano directly appealed to President Ortiz Rubio to restore “freedom of thought via free press.”¹⁴⁸ The pithy letter avoided any formalities or niceties and frankly challenged the Mexican president to act on the matter. Moreover, by also sharing the letter on the front pages, Lozano included his reading public within the transnational conflict. Ortiz Rubio swiftly responded two weeks later on May 21, 1930, by giving Lozano’s periodicals and all others free entry into Mexico. In a short response to Lozano, Ortiz Rubio also assured him that he fell into the camp of free thought.¹⁴⁹ This turned out to be one of at least seven times that Lozano’s papers were banned from distribution across the border. These incidents, and their discussions, are best understood within the papers’ prohibition in October of 1934.

The last week of October 1934 turned out to be an incredibly busy week for Ignacio Lozano. During this period, he was flooded with telegrams that his papers were refused entry into Mexico. Lozano contacted President Rodriguez immediately after being informed of the manner. “It is notoriously unfair,” he asserted, “because these newspapers are not seditious, nor can they be accused of violating constitutional bases that guarantee freedom of the press nor do they deserve in any way to be attributed responsibility” for unrest in Mexico.¹⁵⁰ He concluded by asking the ban to be revoked by “those agencies of your government against free circulation of

¹⁴⁸ “Mensaje de Lozano, al Presidente,” *La Opinión*, May 10, 1930.

¹⁴⁹ “Los Diarios Lozano Obtienen Libre Circulación en Mexico,” *La Opinión*, May 21, 1930.

¹⁵⁰ LOP 739, LLOC.

press and opinion in national territory.”¹⁵¹ Lozano’s appeal clung tightly to the notion that they were not subversive. At the same time, however, his response implied that even if they were the papers were nonetheless protected by Article Six of the Mexican constitution which guaranteed the exchange of free ideas.¹⁵² It is also notable that Lozano felt violated by the Mexican government’s orders from afar in the United States. Now a resident for approximately twenty years, his offense reiterated his ongoing embrace of Mexican citizenship. By banning his papers for distribution, he believed that his rights were infringed upon which signaled a threat for all Mexicans on both sides of the border.

Lozano and his allies therefore moved with urgency to resolve the situation. His staff obtained a list of “which publications may not circulate in the country” but found that Lozano’s prints were not included.¹⁵³ Still, Lozano remained puzzled about why his newspapers were prohibited from crossing the border. José G. González, a correspondent for *La Prensa*, ventured from San Antonio to the Nuevo Laredo-Laredo border to investigate. He met with multiple Mexican officials to allow the Lozano prints to cross the border. One administrator, the postmaster of Nuevo Laredo, José V. Torres, all but confirmed the paper’s prohibition.¹⁵⁴ He asserted that he must first receive orders from the Postmaster General of Mexico, Arturo Elias, to allow the periodicals in the Mexican republic. González also informed Lozano that Torres had

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² “Mexico’s Constitution of 1917 with Amendments Through 1915,” *Constitute Project*, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mexico_2015.pdf?lang=en.

¹⁵³ LOP 1146, Box 19, LLOC.

¹⁵⁴ LOP 151, Box 3, LLOC.

been forwarding copies of *La Prensa* to Elias.¹⁵⁵ Although he failed on overturning the prohibitive order, González succeeded in confirming who had made the order. His travel to the border also signaled the status of the prints as borderlands newspapers. While they could focus on Mexican issues freely in the U.S., it participated in a larger struggle on how such news could be decimated across the borderlands. The border meant the paper could be regulated and prohibited from distribution by the Mexican government. The next day, on October 27, 1934, José C. Valadés notified Lozano that President Rodríguez “ordered the resumption of postal transit for our two newspapers” to be confirmed the following Monday.¹⁵⁶ Lozano subsequently prepped to distribute his papers across the border yet again. He wrote to Leandro Flores, Juan Gloria, Francisco Martínez Lozano, and Juan Martínez, residents of each of the Mexican states on the U.S-Texas borderlands, the same telegram; “Sunday newspaper goes by express delivery to border, please pick it up.”¹⁵⁷

The conflict, however, continued well into early-December as the scope of the conflict was unveiled. Ireneo Michel wrote to Lozano and Leonides Gonzalez that the post office administration in Hermosillo, Sonora was informed that “the embargo of all Lozano newspapers in the Republic” was ordered on the morning of October 20. Like José G. González, he confirmed that the postmaster general orchestrated the order.¹⁵⁸ Michel, however, also expressed fear that the postmaster was also tracking and holding the post of Lozano’s correspondents in

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ LOP 763, Box 12, LLOC.

¹⁵⁷ LOP 468, 477, 496, Box 8 and LOP 712, Box 12, LLOC.

¹⁵⁸ LOP 998, Box 17, LLOC.

Mexico. Michel asserted that he would cease correspondence until the situation was resolved. “You must understand,” he lamented, “that even the correspondents have suffered the damage of the cancellation of the postal service.”¹⁵⁹ Lozano responded to Michel weeks later on November 7. He hoped that Michel would resume his services once the situation was resolved. He reiterated that “this prohibitive measure has not failed to cause me surprise, since our newspapers cannot be accused of having been doing seditious work in anyway.” In this instance, he did not seem to find it urgent to resolve the issue. He claimed that some in Mexico City worked to rescind the order, but Lozano “told them not to continue to take any further steps in that direction.”

It is unclear why Lozano did not move toward rescinding the order. Lozano might have relished at the opportunity to embarrass the Mexican government by highlighting the embargo in his newspapers until the order’s conclusion. On November 8, he received confirmation directly from Postmaster General Elias that he had been banned “for publishing libelous articles against the government.”¹⁶⁰ Although this confirmed his correspondents’ investigations, he also had insightful information regarding the order. Santiago Treviño, a correspondent from Coahuila, claimed that he had received evidence that Elías Calles, the brother of Plutarco Elías Calles, signed off on the order on October 20. Lozano’s response echoed earlier sentiments in which he preferred “to wait until the situation became clearer.”¹⁶¹ Lozano used this particular instance to build on notions of free press and liberty for his readers. In other words, he elevated himself and his newspapers as some kind of beacon for democracy and free political thinking. The Mexican

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ LOP 105, Box 2, LLOC.

¹⁶¹ LOP 1122, Box 18, LLOC.

government, in contrast, threatened these principles. “There is a freedom that is basic. Without it, the others do not exist” read the November 15 edition of *La Opinión*. The author, Carlos Pereyra, claimed that liberty in a country is best measured by “the degree of the strength” of free press. Pereyra thus worked to awaken readers to the relationship between free press and “sacred rights.” If free press, and the opinions it articulated, were suppressed, he reasoned, then other avenues of “free opinion” in public life, such as education, would follow suit.¹⁶² By using their prohibition as an example, the paper guised itself as martyrs who unveiled the dangers of the Mexican government during the Maximato (1928-1934).

Building on this scenario, Lozano used the incident to emphasize the importance of his newspapers in the United States and its contributions to Mexico. By early-December, Lázaro Cárdenas became president of Mexico, perhaps another reason why Lozano had postponed the conflict’s resolution. “It is a constant fact,” the article reminded readers, “that the last Mexican administrations have been far from being directed by the apparent head of the government, being rather managed from behind the scenes by” Calles, the Jefe Máximo.¹⁶³ He appeared to have placed some cautious optimism for the new regime as detailed by a front-page letter of sorts. Rather than lambasting Cárdenas, this piece expressed hope and challenged the new Mexican president with instructions on his new role. It reminded him that he would be watched keenly by Mexicans for his “honesty, firmness of character, wisdom, spirit, fairness and broad knowledge of the needs of his people.”¹⁶⁴ The article hoped that Cárdenas might bring a new era of Mexican

¹⁶² “Afirmación,” *La Opinión*, November 15, 1934.

¹⁶³ “Sea Ud. El Presidente, Señor Gral Cárdenas,” *La Opinión*, December 2, 1934.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

politics that would pave the way for liberty among Mexicans and be more accommodating to Lozano. Among these themes, the paper emphasized Cárdenas as the potential “champion of freedom of thought and writing.” It finally concluded that the fate of Mexico lay in his hands.¹⁶⁵ During this time, Lozano’s papers remained prohibited in Mexico due to their “alarmist” nature and claims of unrest in Mexico that did not exist.¹⁶⁶ By gesturing towards the suppression of a free press, as evidenced through their prohibition in Mexico, the article urged the president-elect to take a divergent path from previous administrations. In essence, Lozano immediately put Cárdenas to the test to gauge whether he would be a respectable and honest president of Mexico.

The emphasis on free press would not suffice. Weeks later Lozano gestured towards the voices of México de Afuera to highlight the cultural contributions of his newspapers. During this discussion, the article differentiated between periodicals within and outside Mexico to point out crucial differences. They did not claim to be more intelligent or free compared to those prints. Rather, they argued that their distance from the nation afforded them the ability “to embrace wider horizons than they can perceive.”¹⁶⁷ Despite claiming an equal ground to their counterparts in Mexico, *La Opinión* asserted that they could report in more unbiased ways due to their distance. As they put it, “the distance puts us in the right perspective to appreciate the panorama of the whole Republic.”¹⁶⁸ If they were subservient or alarmist, as the Mexican government had claimed, then this activity highlighted their differences from Mexico-based newspapers. Lozano

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ LOP 1186, Box 19, LLOC.

¹⁶⁷ “Frente al Nuevo Gobierno,” *La Opinión*, December 16, 1934.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

thus conflated those accusations with his paper's supposedly honest work. By closing the Mexican border to his periodicals, he asserted, they "depriv[ed] the government of a source of honest information and, therefore, a basis for determining guidelines."¹⁶⁹ The article challenged and hope that the new president-elect would honor justice in his administration. But even if he did not, the paper reassured readers, "we will stick to our program and our flag."¹⁷⁰

El Gran Concurso Cívico Presidencial de los Periódicos Lozano

By and large *La Opinión* continued to encourage Mexicans in the United States to influence the Mexican presidential elections through democratic participation. On April 11, 1937, for instance, the paper held a contest, the Gran Concurso Cívico Presidencial de los Periódicos Lozano, which called on readers from Canada to Yucatan to submit 36 presidential candidates for Mexico. The contest instructed subscribers of "all Mexicans of nationality or blood" to completely fill out a form with their desired candidates. Participants were invited to join the contest with the hope of winning cash prizes ranging from \$100-\$250. One could win one of these prizes by correctly aligning with the popular vote outcome, as well as the paper's own proposed candidates.¹⁷¹

Although the contest surely meant to increase the paper's sales, it also represented a civic practice that the paper routinely promoted since its inception. Indeed, a few days after the initial announcement, the paper reminded readers of the contest's purpose in three points. First, they

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ "Todos los Lectores de estos Periódicos Pueden Tomar Parte," *La Opinión*, April 11, 1937.

claimed to revive the civic spirit of the patria and Mexicans on both sides of the border to think about the nation's future and who should lead it. Second, it acknowledged the different opinions of *La Opinión*'s reading base. Last, the contest claimed the integrity of the imagined election through a notary who would confirm the legitimate results. Likewise, they instructed participants not to treat the contest as a "riddle" or "game of chance" to be solved for the prize. Instead, the contest represented a platform in which to think critically about candidates.¹⁷² In essence, *La Opinión* embarked on a sort of mock election that would show, they claimed, the opinions of the Mexican public. Within a week of the contest's announcement, the paper hyped the contest. It reported that politicians in Mexico were supposedly "anxious" to see if they would be included in the contest's results.¹⁷³ In subsequent weeks, the paper constantly promoted the contest as an "obligation throughout Mexico" as a "reflection of the breadth" of Mexicans' voices.¹⁷⁴

Although that breadth surely kept Mexicans in Mexico in mind, it predominantly referred to those in México de Afuera. *La Opinión* thus used the political contest to draw two points for their readers in the United States. First, and in tune with their larger interventions, it sought to shape Mexican politics in Mexico. It claimed that "it is time for Mexicans, both by origin and by blood, to draw back the veil that covers" the political men who lead their country.¹⁷⁵ While this proclamation echoed Lozano's larger goals for their readership to counter the Mexican government, it also implied their responsibility to challenge their home country's leaders who,

¹⁷² "Piense en el Futuro de México," *La Opinión*, April 13, 1937

¹⁷³ "Los Políticos Mexicanos se Interesan Hondamente en el Concurso de 'La Opinión,'" *La Opinión*, April 17, 1937.

¹⁷⁴ "Obligación de todo Mexicano," *La Opinión*, May 4, 1937.

¹⁷⁵ "Nada Puede Perde el Lector," *La Opinión*, May 15, 1937.

according to Lozano, made the country unstable. By drawing back the curtain, he perhaps hoped that Mexicans would shape Mexico to meet his ends. Here, however, the distinction between Mexicans of “origin” and “blood” became ever so central. The paper built on the second point to further elevate the political power of Mexicans in the United States. “Why,” the paper asked rhetorically, “do the laws of Mexico” consider those born in its territory, as well as those outside of it, as equally of Mexican descent? It reminded readers that “it doesn't matter that you were born outside of Mexico if your ancestors were Mexican.”¹⁷⁶ While birth within Mexico served as an exceptional barometer of mexicanidad, the category of ancestry, or blood, became the foundations of that identity. The paper suggested that the diaspora had an equal responsibility as Mexicans residing in Mexico to vote in its elections. In other words, they were not any more or less Mexican, and this should not deter them from participating in their home country’s affairs.

At the same time, the paper took the opportunity to educate its readers on who was eligible for the presidency as stipulated by the Constitution of 1917. One had to be Mexican by birth and at least 35 years of age, a Mexican citizen, reside in Mexico at least one year before the election, and not be a priest or minister of any religion, and not have served a prior term as president.¹⁷⁷ Subsequently, the article listed individuals, former presidents, and military leaders, who were ineligible for the upcoming election. While it is unclear if readers really inquired on this matter, the article nonetheless served two important functions: In alignment with the contest, it mainly sought to prepare its readers for the upcoming election by educating them on the Constitution of 1917. Moreover, it also implied Lozano’s support of the 1917 Constitution and

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ “Quienes no pueden ser presidentes,” *La Opinión*, May 19, 1937.

hope that the Mexican government would follow it. Lozano, as a part of México de Afuera, thus utilized his papers as a form of mobilization and preparation for the diaspora. This signaled how he viewed himself as a leader of the Mexican diaspora in the United States as well as how he aimed to rekindle the affinity of Mexico in the 1930s for his readership.

Three months later in mid-June, the paper announced its winners and began to publish biographies of the candidates of the contest for subscribers.¹⁷⁸ In the announcement, the paper expressed great satisfaction in assessing the public opinion through the mock election. Moreover, it was pleased to prove “once again that among Mexicans of nationality and blood, there is a great interest in everything related to the origin of the homeland.”¹⁷⁹ There were 118 winners among the 1,030 contestants. Sixty-three were subscribers of *La Prensa* and fifty-five of *La Opinión*.¹⁸⁰ The locations of these contestants were largely spread across the U.S. Southwest, mostly from various parts of California and Texas, though there were a few readers from the mid-west. In addition, there were approximately 30 winners from Mexico, which revealed the scope of Lozano’s readership and participation in the gran concurso. The contest also appeared to have been predominantly made up of male participants. Only fourteen of the winners were women. Although this number is lopsided, their participation is of interest since women did not achieve suffrage in Mexico until 1953.¹⁸¹ Although Lozano encouraged political participation

¹⁷⁸ “El Primer Premio, Para Dos Lectores de ‘La Opinión’ y Uno de La Prensa,” *La Opinión*, June 20, 1937.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

from his male counterparts, the evidence of women's participation in the contest afforded that same activity to mexicanas on both sides of the border.

Initially, the paper posted thirty-six candidates submitted by participants. A month later, however, the paper also included an additional fourteen candidates suggested by Lozano's journalists.¹⁸² This perhaps illustrates the contest's greater goals in addition to self-promotion. They found ways to fit in their own preferred candidates in this supposedly democratic mock election. The paper rhetorically asked if readers were supposed to discuss all fifty of these candidates for president. It quickly responded "no." Instead, it urged them to learn about the candidates' personal and political backgrounds along with each of their individual "merits and demerits." It would later devote space in a special issue to explore each of the fifty candidates "with complete freedom, [and] absolute independence."¹⁸³ The paper tried to eschew endorsement of any single candidate to signal their supposedly impartial stance in partisan politics. Instead, it sought to advocate for an "open democratic process," one that still remained led by Lozano. The contest ultimately linked the freedom of press to the democratic process in Mexico. The paper expressed hope that the "Mexican political observers" had paved a way for a "singular interest" in the upcoming 1940 elections through an open dialogue of candidates. Ever since 1911, the paper claimed, Mexicans were denied the opportunity to discuss politics freely and without persecution. It thus called on independent papers to utilize their pages as intellectual sites to discuss the coming elections as a means to promote free-thinking of the populace, just as the

¹⁸² "Galería Política Mexicana," *La Opinión*, July 3, 1937.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

contest had successfully achieved. Mexicans, the paper hoped, “may glimpse a future of democracy” in Mexico.¹⁸⁴

In January 1938, General Eduardo Hay, the Mexican Minister for Foreign Affairs, accused Lozano of “the most unfair charge that can be conceived and that no one could possibly sustain.”¹⁸⁵ Hay claimed that Lozano had worked to break the “spiritual unity” of the Mexican nation by attempting to create a national hymn for México de Afuera.¹⁸⁶ The paper did not refute Lozano’s activity. It claimed that Lozano sought to unify his compatriots in the U.S. with Mexican patriotism by cultivating a hymn. He countered critics by referencing the national hymns that existed in the United States in addition to the Star-Spangled Banner. Hay, “like every politician of the extreme left” the paper quipped, took exception to this as a challenge to Mexican national identity. He feared that Mexican expatriates “allow[ed]himself to suppose that behind our purpose of giving the expatriates a new link that binds them to Mexico, there is the desire to detach them from the National Anthem.”¹⁸⁷ In other words, Lozano and General Hay both battled over the meaning of México de Afuera and the ways in which they expressed their bonds to the Mexican nation. For the last decades, Lozano viewed himself as a leader of that community and attempted to use his influence to promote his conservative agenda. Figures such as Hay perhaps sensed this threatening influence and strove to instill the Mexican government’s hegemony upon Mexican expatriates.

¹⁸⁴ “Libertad de Prensa,” *La Opinión*, July 1, 1937.

¹⁸⁵ “El Himno Nacional No Tiene ni Puede Tener Rivaless,” *La Opinión*, January 30, 1938.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The meaning of México de Afuera stood front and center of this debate. The government implicitly named Lozano's newspapers as misguided sources for Mexican expatriates in the United States. *El Mundo*, a Mexican newspaper from Tampico, explored the situation and the politics within México de Afuera, which *La Opinión* reprinted on February 1, 1938. It assured its Mexico-based readers that Lozano did not invent this community. Rather it was an invention by Mexican politician and intellectual José Vasconcelos who called on "México de Afuera to join the homeland and overthrow the Calles tyranny" in the previous decade.¹⁸⁸ Using these criteria, the paper negated the perceived threat of Lozano as a threat to the spiritual unity of Mexico. Falling in line with Vasconcelos's thinking, Lozano's purpose, it claimed, served "to give Mexicans absent from their homeland a hymn that expresses their feelings and their nostalgia for the distance from their beloved land." Moreover, it recognized that he achieved much of this work through his newspapers.¹⁸⁹ One should not interpret this editorial as a celebration of Lozano. Instead, it served as an example of how Lozano cloaked his conservative agenda within some egalitarian love of Mexico. It pointed to recent prohibitions of nationalism in various Mexican states. For instance, authorities prohibited a local celebration of Día de la Bandera in Tampico, while in Querétaro some were even arrested for distributing patriotic flags which read "¡Viva México!"¹⁹⁰

Hay was not alone in his critique of Lozano within Mexico. Around the same time, Lozano received an excerpt from *Futuro*, a newspaper published in Mexico City, which had

¹⁸⁸ "Destemplado del Abrupto de la Secretaria de Relaciones," *La Opinión*, July 30, 1938.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

published a sarcastic piece on Lozano's influence in the United States.¹⁹¹ The article first lauded Lozano's pragmatism by creating two Spanish dailies for the growing Mexican colonies in the United States. Both *La Prensa* and *La Opinión*, the piece noted, "became important newspapers with wide circulation not only in the U.S. but also in the Mexican border region itself."¹⁹² It subsequently traced the political roots of the dailies by emphasizing their attacks on the Mexican Revolution's legacy and their right-winged ideology which defended the "order" enforced by the Porfiriato, a regime which Lozano claimed deserved much respect. In short, Lozano was painted as a figure who yearned for a dictatorship in the past where only middle-and-upper-class Mexicans such as himself thrived. The needs of Mexican workers and farmers were hardly of his concern.¹⁹³ This portrait likely reflected his competition with newspapers based in Mexico, but it also unveiled how some Mexican press viewed his leadership in the United States with skepticism.

Lozano himself celebrated his contributions to México de Afuera. On the 25th anniversary of *La Prensa* in 1938, Adolphe de Castro of Los Angeles, a self-proclaimed "lover of Mexico" dedicated a sonnet to Lozano and the journalists of his dailies:

I If news a noble cause shall serve, then he
G Gird loins to do the task who'd this achieve,
N Nor count the toll, but in himself believe
A And in his aim; see things are to be.
C Creative grace possess and readily
I Ignite the flame to purge of ills the land
O Or lead the lowly with a gentle hand,
E Enlarge their lives with true humanity.

¹⁹¹ LOP 264, Box 4, LLOC.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

L Led by an inner light, you saw the shoals
O On which some Mexicans were cast, their fears,
Z Zymotic, then you stilled; inspired their souls
A And pleased all for five and twenty years:
N No patriot his flag need higher hold,
O Or couch in better phrase his thought of gold.¹⁹⁴

Hailing Lozano as a patriot, this author named him a crucial leader of Mexicans in a strange land through his papers. The hagiographic tone of the sonnet also suggests Lozano's lack of modesty and humility. He spent much time critiquing Mexican political leaders through his newspapers. At the same time, he elevated himself as some sort of hero of the Mexican diaspora. Although Lozano received polarizing depictions from Mexicans with differing political stances, it is evident that he had largely succeeded in becoming a major influence on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. By seeking to build and retain a bridge to Mexican politics, Lozano continued to promote his strand of *mexicanidad* from afar through conservative politics in the early-twentieth century. While some Mexicans sought to improve their lives by invoking their US citizenship in the 1930s, others like Lozano resisted this urge by embracing their Mexican citizenship. By using *La Prensa* and *La Opinión* to promote that impulse, the borderlands papers thus represented an alternative future for Mexicans residing in the U.S. that continued to look towards Mexico.

¹⁹⁴ LOP 192, Box 1, LLOC.

EPILOGUE

Reconsidering the “Rise” of Conservative Latinxs and Hispanics

In 1885, María Ruiz de Burton published *The Squatter and the Don* under the pseudonym C. Loyal, a quotidian title which stood for “Loyal Citizen” in nineteenth-century Mexico.¹ Ruiz de Burton saw firsthand the continued marginalization of Mexicans during the United States period just as Francisco P. Ramírez, Enrique Avila, and Antonio F. Coronel observed. Her signature and the novel symbolized californios’ assessments of U.S. conquest. *The Squatter and the Don* reflected on the promise and the failures of citizenship under the Treaty of Guadalupe de Hidalgo. Early in the novel, Don Mariano Alamar, the patriarch of the fiction’s dispossessed californio family, reflected on his initial “bitter resentment against [his] people” and “the mother country” after reading the document.² Don Mariano shifts his disappointment to the failures of the U.S. system which had “pledged its honor to respect our land titles.”³ The novel aligned with the looming threat of U.S. imperialism that Francisco P. Ramirez warned about decades earlier in *El Clamor Público*.⁴ Likewise, it also aligned with the efforts of prominent land-owing Mexicans who clung to land as a defining marker of power and relations. Mexicans such as Ruiz de

¹ Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, “Introduction to *The Squatter and the Don*,” in *The Squatter in the Don*, ed. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997), 13.

² María Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, ed. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997), 65.

³ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁴ *El Clamor Público*, October 18, 1856.

Burton, Ramirez and others witnessed a vastly changing landscape for Mexicans. Their conservative solutions attempted to salvage their status in Southern California. Ultimately, the novel describes the marginalization of Mexicans in California and their dispossession of their land.

Although a work of fiction, the novel symbolized some of Ruiz de Burton's own experiences during and after U.S. conquest. She was born in 1831 as María Amparo Maytorena in Baja California. Seeking "prestige and influence" she chose to carry her maternal last name over the paternal one for her grandfather's role as an attendant and ranch owner in Northern Baja.⁵ This strategy began to show the larger patterns some Mexicans undertook in the early Mexican period in the borderlands to elevate their status. Relatedly, María married Henry S. Burton, a captain of the U.S. army, just three years after the U.S.-Mexico War. Burton took María and another four hundred "friendly" Mexicans to Monterey, then the capital of Alta California. The group were afforded citizenship stipulated under the Treaty de Guadalupe Hidalgo.⁶ As an upper-class Mexican American, Ruiz de Burton experienced marginalization through the loss of land. As Chicana/o studies scholar Bernadine Hernández has recently written, María "was a Mexicana [...] negotiating and mediating her position within the geohistorical and geopolitical space of the Americas." Her work and life, she continues, "can be better understood as part of a broader hemispheric discourse" which emphasized a "racial hierarchy" by attempting

⁵ Bernadine Maria Hernández, *Border Bodies: Racialized Sexuality, Sexual Capital, and Violence in the Nineteenth-Century Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

to elevate mexicanidad along an understanding of whiteness.⁷ Ruiz de Burton serves as another example of Mexican Americans who articulated conservative politics in a vastly changing landscape for California and the borderlands. She combined her perceived notions of citizenship, behavior, race, class, and belonging to stake her place in the United States after conquest.

Like Ruiz de Burton, this project has shown that some Mexican and Mexican Americans articulated conservative stances in Los Angeles after U.S. conquest. From the pueblo's founding in the late-eighteenth century up to the mid-twentieth century, land-owning Mexicans envisioned Los Angeles to their own designs by emphasizing social distance from lower classes and Indigenous people. During the Mexican period, a few californios sought to elevate themselves to an elite status by asserting social hierarchies. Their efforts for autonomy from a centralized government in Mexico City expressed a broader strand of liberalism in Latin America. After the U.S.-Mexico War, however, many of these same californios attempted to retain this system through a new allegiance to the U.S. Democratic Party. As I have suggested, they continued to espouse conservatism during conquest in the U.S. context. Some like Francisco P. Ramírez warned of the increasing marginalization of Mexicans, regardless of class, in the new national period of Los Angeles. Even his work, however, articulated some conservative strategies that warned of Mexican and Mexican Americans being likened to African Americans. Moreover, he condemned vigilante activity when the community mobilized to counter racism and violence. Change, for him, could be achieved through an embrace of U.S. citizenship and electoral politics.

⁷ Ibid., 56-59.

By century's end, Anglo settlers outnumbered Mexican and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. As such, they worked to slowly erode the memory and presence of that community as a bygone era. The turn-of-the-century, however, witnessed the rise of the Revolutionary Generation in Los Angeles due to the Mexican Revolution. Like their predecessors, they continued to form their politics in relation to events in Mexico. The Revolutionary Generation did not form their stances, or sense of belonging, only in a Los Angeles context. Instead, they continued to express their connections to Mexico through their ideas of what it meant to be Mexican. Los Angeles nonetheless eventually became a permanent home for many during this period. Their politics varied, but those explored here share a common thread. They all imagined a leftist government had eroded the nation and identity for Mexicans. The U.S. became a haven for them to critique this government and express their own ideas of being Mexican from afar.

More broadly, this project seeks to contribute to discussions of contemporary conservative Mexican Americans and Latinxs in the United States. In recent years, the topic of conservative and Republican-aligned Latinxs has been front and center in mainstream U.S. politics.⁸ In the Fall 2022 mid-term elections, Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, a Chancellor for the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, claimed that the rise of the Latinx conservative bloc does not mean that they are becoming Republican. "It will mean," he asserts, "that we are becoming

⁸ A quick reference to mainstream U.S. media outlets will yield many discussions on the topics. For some examples see: Geraldo Cadava, "The Deep Origins of Latino Support for Trump," *The New Yorker*, December 29, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-political-scene/the-deep-origins-of-latino-support-for-trump>; Justin Gest, "Why Latinos are turning to the Republican Party," *CNN*, February 14, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/14/opinions/republican-latino-voters-gest/index.html>; Ruy Teixeira, "The evidence mounts: Hispanic voters are drifting toward the GOP," *The Washington Post*, July 5, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/07/05/hispanic-voters-gop-biden/>.

more American.”⁹ Suárez-Orozco’s argument hinges on the notion that Latinxs are assimilating into American society as “Americans,” which he defines as strong in familial relations and religious practices. Moreover, they are strong proponents of “strong government support, entrepreneurship and capitalism.”¹⁰ A quick search will yield a plethora of discussions of Latinx Republicans and conservative voters due in large part to Trump’s 2016 election. Latinxs, though, are not suddenly become conservative or assimilating as Americans in the last decade. As this project has shown, Mexican and Mexican Americans have always been diverse in political thought and action since the nineteenth century. I have argued that some embraced conservatism in the time after conquest and continued to express conservative stances in the early-twentieth century. Today, some still cling to conservative politics that they think align with their cultural values and ideas of identity even if it might seem paradoxical to observers. If we are to understand the diversity of the Latinx population, we need to move on beyond the reductionist “Democratic or Republican” debate.

Other forms of conservative thought continue to surface in the mainstream that show the intersections of Latinx politics and identity choices. Take, for example, a recent racism scandal in Los Angeles’s City Council. In October 2022, a leaked recording was released in which Latino council members Nury Martínez, Gil Cedillo and Kevin de León engaged in a racist conversation with Ron Herrera, the President of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. Anti-black bias figured prominently in their discussion of redistricting political boundaries in the

⁹ Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, “Are Latinos becoming more Republican? Or just more American?” *The Hill*, November 1, 2022, <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/3715068-are-latinos-becoming-more-republican-or-just-more-american/>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

city.¹¹ Martínez also critiqued immigrants from Oaxaca, a Mexican state with a prominent indigenous community and history. She combined her anti-Indigenous views with anti-Blackness by calling this immigrant community in Los Angeles “little short dark people.”¹² “I don’t know where these people are from,” Martínez continued, “I don’t know what village they came out of.”¹³ The scandal reveals how a form of racial conservatism continues to be a way some Latinxs assess a variety of social and cultural categories to pursue and/or retain political power. In this case, the council members echoed nineteenth-century Mexican leaders who marked Indigenous people, African Americans, and working-class Mexicans as “racial others” in their pursuit of power. The modern council members made claims to whiteness by socially distancing themselves from other racial groups and even among themselves.

More broadly, conservative politics has also become a prominent theme in debating the term “Latinx.” Such is the case in Connecticut where Democratic Latinos have worked to ban the use of the term from governmental documents. A similar law has recently been passed in Arkansas by Republican Sarah Huckabee Sanders, albeit for different reasons. Sanders views the term as a symbol of “woke” culture in U.S. society. Moreover, she asserted it is “ethnically

¹¹ “Racist remarks in leaked audio of L.A. council members spark outrage, disgust,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-10-09/city-council-leaked-audio-nury-martinez-kevin-de-leon-gil-cedillo>.

For an engaging study on Anti-Black bias within Latino communities see Tanya Katerí Hernández, *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2022).

¹² Christian Paz, “The Los Angeles City Council’s racist recording scandal, explained,” *Vox*, October 19, 2022, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/23404926/los-angeles-city-council-racist-recording-scandal-explained>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

insensitive and pejorative language.”¹⁴ Latino Democrats in Connecticut, on the other hand, view the term as an attack on the Spanish language and as a form of cultural appropriation.¹⁵ Representative Geraldo Reyes cited the term’s lack of use in Latin America as the reasoning behind their goals.¹⁶ Latinx is “offensive and unnecessary” he asserted in a statement. “The Spanish language has been around for 1,500 years, and it identifies male, female and neutral gender.”¹⁷ Moreover, the term is seen by such Latino Democrats as an infringement on their identity and history. Likewise, Ruben Gallego of Arizona views the term as an onslaught from outsiders of the Latino community.¹⁸ Although Huckabee and these Latinx politicians sit at different sides of the political spectrum, the views from both parties’ critiques align more than it appears. Both Sanders and Reyes Jr., for instance, emphasized the importance of gender in the Spanish language. It also highlights the larger pattern of what is perceived as an unlikely convergence between Latinxs and conservative thinking in U.S. history.

This project has shown conservative ideas within part of the Mexican and Mexican American community in Los Angeles during U.S. conquest and the Mexican Revolution. Much has been said about Mexican and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and the U.S. Southwest by historians. Nonetheless, we can obtain a new lens by considering how some reconfigured their political stances in relation to the development of Mexico and the borderlands. In doing so, we

¹⁴ Sara Maslin Nir, “Some Republicans Want to Ban ‘Latinx.’ These Latino Democrats Agree,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/01/nyregion/latinx-connecticut-arkansas.html>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

can gain a better understanding of the strategies that some undertook for political ends and how this shaped their identities. Likewise, this lens need not end merely with the Mexican and Mexican American experience in the United States. There is much to be said about the wider Latinx experience as it relates to their relationship to their home countries. In doing so we can better understand the diversity that defines this pan ethnic group throughout time and space.

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