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THE COLOR OF YOUTH:  
MEXICANS AND THE POWER OF SCHOOLING IN CHICAGO, 1917-1939

BY

MARIO RIOS PEREZ

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Yoon K. Pak, Chair  
Professor James D. Anderson  
Associate Professor Christopher M. Span  
Professor James R. Barrett  
Professor David R. Roediger

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the social and educational experience of the first mass wave of Mexicans who migrated to Chicago in the early twentieth-century. It recaptures how the racially, socially, and economically charged experiences of Mexicans reshaped their national and cultural identity in Chicago. This study explores how their ideals for a democratic, equitable, and self-governing society influenced how they viewed schools. It examines their migration to Chicago, their eventual settlement in various colonias, and examines how the national and cultural identity of their youth became critical in their understanding of social institutions.

*Para Martha, Sebastian, y Nico*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the political and social experiences of the first wave of Mexicans that settled in Chicago during the early twentieth century and examines how their migratory experiences were shaped by educational experiences of their children. This period was characterized by dramatic changes in federal immigration policies that restricted the entry of Southern and Eastern Europeans and Asians, while giving more relative leniencies to Mexicans.<sup>1</sup> As a result, companies actively contracted non-white groups that had historically been excluded from white-dominated occupational structures. Furthermore, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), the development of Mexico's national railway system, and the reign of Mexico's anti-clerical government provided additional impetus for Mexican emigration to the urban north. Scholars have calculated that approximately one-eighth to one-tenth of Mexico's population emigrated. This group was the first mass wave of Mexicans immigrants that settled in United States cities. As a whole, these phenomena shaped the Mexican settlement patterns and educational experiences for decades to come.

Although most Mexican immigrants initially settled in the Southwest, some began to move eastward and settle in places like Chicago. A Chicago health official, for example, noted in 1929 that city of officials ought not "close our eyes to the

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<sup>1</sup> See, Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005). Also, see Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

facts revealed by the figures of the southwest. What is the problem of Los Angeles and Orange County today will be the problem tomorrow of Chicago and Cook County.”<sup>1</sup> As the health official predicted, Chicago’s Near West Side, Back of the Yards, and South Chicago eventually became the three permanent sites of residency for Mexican migrants. And unlike the seasonal, migrant, and agricultural labor that prevailed in the Southwest, labor recruiters in Chicago targeted Mexicans as permanent industrial laborers, which accelerated their settlement. In 1900 only 102 foreign-born Mexicans resided in Chicago, but by 1930 the number surged to about 14,733. Families steadily became central to these new ethnic neighborhoods. Data shows that as early as 1920, approximately 85 percent of Mexican men in Chicago had families with them.<sup>2</sup>

This study begins by looking at how Mexicans migrated to Chicago, proceeds by looking at how they settled in the city during the interwar period, and ends with a discussion of a series of debates regarding the schooling of children in city schools. It attempts to bridge an oft neglected connection between the general field of history of youth with the more specialized and recent growth in the history of racialized children.<sup>3</sup> Historians and educators know little as to how Latino youth have negotiated within the economic, social, and political milieu. For this reason, this study looks at the educational experiences of Mexican youth well as how the political and economic ramifications that

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Goldberg, "Tuberculosis in Racial Types with Special Reference to Mexicans," *Bulletin of the City of Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium* 9, no. 3/4 (1929): 18.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriela F. Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity, 1916-39* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), Juan R. García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996). For more on Chicago during the early period see, Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, "The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Miroslava Chávez-García, "Youth, Evidence, and Agency: Mexican and Mexican American Youth at the Whittier State School, 1890-1920," *Aztlan* 31, no. 2 (2006), Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), and Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sizquoc, eds., *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

shaped Mexican migration affected how they lived their lives. This dissertation thus builds on areas of study that have given cursory attention to the history of Mexican American youth. Urban children learned and were socialized in public spaces during the early twentieth-century. This was, and remains, part of the complicated socialization process of immigrant youth. As child labor laws barred youth from industrial labor, schools and the city streets became the locus of children's social activity. Youth were closely monitored and scientifically categorized in schools. And at home and in churches they were bound by strict moral authority. Indeed, Chicago's streets provided Mexican immigrant children an extraordinary amount of autonomy that startled parents, school and city officials. Historians do not overstate childhood experiences when they assert that the streets were also the immigrant children's homes. These were the spaces where children and adolescents liberally moved, thought, and talked.<sup>4</sup> Chicago's industrial, educational, multiracial, and immigrant history provides an ideal site for this analysis.

Throughout this study I use two words that need further explication—schooling and education. Although they are interconnected, they often correspond to distinct institutions and social processes. In looking at schooling I use the definition provided by Steven E. Tozer, Paul C. Violas, and Guy Senese. “Schooling,” they explain, “simply refers to the totality of the experiences that occur within the institution called school, not all of which are educational.” Their definition, which is helpful to this study, encapsulates three major components of school activity—the formal curriculum, the hidden curriculum

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<sup>4</sup> David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). For other examples, see Howard P. Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "Street-Rats and Gutter-Snipes: Child Pickpockets and Street Culture in New York City, 1850-1900," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2004), and Suzanne Wasserman, "Cafes, Clubs, Corners and Candy Stores: Youth Leisure-Culture in New York City's Lower East Side During the 1930s," *Journal of American Culture* 14, no. 4 (1991).

(i.e., what is also learned through the process of going to school), and extracurricular activities. Additionally, the specificity of schoolings is helpful in that it reveals the relationship between the state, democracy, and individuals.<sup>5</sup> And although children are educated in schools, education is not confined to the schools. Education can be defined as a process where learning takes places. Defining it in this way is helpful since it expands how educative forces influencing children may be conceptualized. This approach acknowledges that schools are not the sole educators of children, but only one of the many institutions that teaches children.<sup>6</sup>

### **Historiography**

I draw from two fields of historical research. First, I build on the history of education, which has produced some of the most incisive studies on youth.<sup>7</sup> Historians of education have shown how Americanizing efforts, Progressive Era reformers, settlement house workers, and the urban development of schools affected immigrant communities.<sup>8</sup> Scholars in this area examine how schooling, or the lack thereof, has shaped Latino communities. Yet, this dissertation diverges and expands from this area of research in

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<sup>5</sup> The hidden curriculum, perhaps the most ambiguous, refers to the “unplanned learning” that is essential, but not officially recognized as part of the school curriculum. This includes organization, architecture, time management, teaching methods, and authority structure. See, Steven Tozer, Paul C. Violas, and Guy B. Senese, *School and Society: Educational Practice as Social Expression* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 3.

<sup>6</sup> This approach is best defined by Bernard Bailyn’s work on the colonial period. See, Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of the American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1960).

<sup>7</sup> N. Ray Hiner, “Children in American History,” in *Rethinking the History of American Education*, ed. William J. Reese and John L. Rury (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> For example, see Marvin Lazerson, “If All the World Were Chicago: American Education in the Twentieth Century,” *History of Education Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1984), Michael Olneck, “Americanization and the Education of Immigrants, 1900-1925: An Analysis of Symbolic Action,” *American Journal of Education* 97, no. 4 (1989), Judith Rosenberg Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools, 1885-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), Eileen Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity: The Nisei Generation in Hawaii* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), and Reed Ueda, *Avenues to Adulthood: The Origins of the High School and Social Mobility in an American Suburb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

that histories of Latinos and schooling are reticent to situate children and youth at the center of their analysis. Generally, these studies look at school curriculum, ideas, educational policies that addressed Latinos, and the economic implications of social inequity. In other words, they invoke a top down approach to schooling, which inevitably privileges adult centered and controlled activities. For example, although historians of education have researched bilingual education, the schooling of immigrants, and segregation, we know little as to how youth felt, what they did, and how they understood themselves in that context. As a result, the lived experiences of children are tangentially discussed or overlooked altogether.<sup>9</sup>

The second major area of research I draw from is the history of children and youth. Most historical research on Latino youth, and especially Mexican Americans, is guided by two general objectives. The first is led by a group of scholars who interrogate the assimilation and acculturation models by positioning the parents' home life as the proxy of cultural change. These "they are so different than us" studies posit child rearing practices, familial norms, and language against city life, popular culture, and school

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<sup>9</sup> For a good characterization of this approach, see Guadalupe San Miguel Jr. and Richard R. Valencia, "From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to Hopwood: The Educational Plight and Struggle of Mexican Americans in the Southwest," *Harvard Educational Review* 68, no. 3 (1998). Also, see Victoria-Maria MacDonald, "Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, or 'Other'?: Deconstructing the Relationship between Historians and Hispanic-American Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2001). The historiography of Chicago schools is extensive. See, Mary J. Herrick, *The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971), David John Hogan, *Class and Reform: School and Society in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), Michael W. Homel, *Down from Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920-41*, *Blacks in the New World*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), John F. Lyons, *Teachers and Reform: Chicago Public Education, 1929-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), Kathryn M. Neckerman, *Schools Betrayed: Roots of Failure in Inner-City Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), Kate Rousmaniere, *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), James W. Sanders, *The Education of an Urban Minority: Catholics in Chicago, 1833-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Dorothy Shipps, *School Reform, Corporate Style: Chicago, 1880-2000* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006), Laura M. Westhoff, *A Fatal Drifting Apart: Democratic Social Knowledge and Chicago Reform* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), Julia Wrigley, *Class Politics and Public Schools, Chicago 1900-1950* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982).

curriculum as central to the story of cultural change—each side resting on opposing poles in the cultural order. These conflicting forces are characterized as antagonizing a child's identity.<sup>10</sup> Whether Mexican adult immigrants are depicted as “uprooted” or “transplanted,” Latino youth are continually typified as occupying a temporary mental state of ethnic and racial disorientation.<sup>11</sup> However, recent research has challenged this approach. Historians have shown that immigrant youth consciously created their own restrictive ethnic neighborhoods—thus challenging the entry of newer immigrants into the social structure. These studies suggest that youth activities were more than child's play. They represented the “social divisions ingrained in American cities in concrete spatial form.”<sup>12</sup> And although there is a growing body of scholarship that attempts to understand the history of Latino youth, it is defined by scholars who examine students or youth following World War II.<sup>13</sup> An additional area of historical research I draw from is best defined by studies that question how Mexican children and adolescents evoked

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<sup>10</sup> For an example of this approach, see Erlinda Gonzalez-Berry, “Which Language Will Our Children Speak?: The Spanish Language and Public Education Policy in New Mexico, 1890-1930,” in *The Contested Homeland: A Chicano History of New Mexico*, ed. Erlinda Gonzalez-Berry and David R. Maciel (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), Douglas Monroy, “Our Children Get So Different Here: Film, Fashion, Popular Culture and the Process of Cultural Syncretization in Mexican Los Angeles, 1900-1935,” *Aztlan* 19, no. 1 (1990), and Vicki L. Ruiz, “The Flapper and the Chaperone: Cultural Constructions of Identity and Heterosexual Politics among Adolescent Mexican American Women, 1920-1950,” in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> For diverging views on immigration history, see the classic studies of John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), and Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1951). Also, see Rudolf J. Vecoli, “Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of the The Uprooted,” *Journal of American History* 51 (1964), and David G. Gutierrez, “Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the ‘Third Space’: the Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>12</sup> James R. Barrett and David R. Roediger, “The Irish and the ‘Americanization’ of the ‘New Immigrants’ in the Streets and the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 3 (2005): 7-8. Also, see Mark Wild, “‘So Many Children at Once and So Many Kinds’: Schools and Ethno-Racial Boundaries in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2002).

<sup>13</sup> For example, see Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), and Anthony F. Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

political resistance. In general, they show how young people overtly participated in political protests. Yet, these studies focus on the southwestern United States—with little or no analysis of Mexican youth in the Midwest.<sup>14</sup>

This dissertation is heavily based on two types of sources. First, and most essential to this study, are primary sources housed in archival repositories. The most indispensable sources I use are from special collections housed at the Chicago History Museum (formerly the Chicago Historical Society), the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Abraham Presidential Library and Museum, the University of California, Berkeley, and Tulane University. Although none of these institutions have a collection that specifically pertains to Mexicans in Chicago, they contain a wealth of unpublished sources are interspersed in various collections that yield a rich history, which come to life in this study. I also use, although to a lesser degree, papers that are part of the Research Group Collection 85 (RG85) from the National Archives and Records Administration. Collection RG85 contains hundreds of interviews with Mexican children as they attempted to cross the border and reveals the educational aspirations of Mexican youth during the period analyzed in this study. The second type of sources that I draw from is published and unpublished reports, newspapers, and dissertations that were published between 1915 and 1940. These sources are voluminous and have allowed me to gauge how Mexican youth were depicted and experienced life in Chicago. The most useful sources I found came from a slew of Spanish language newspapers that were published in Chicago during the interwar period. Many of these

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<sup>14</sup> For example, see Carlos Muñoz Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement (Revised and Expanded Edition)* (New York: Verso, 2007), and Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).



papers folded in the 1930s, but the stories they preserved in their brief existence tell of enlivening debates about ethnic resistance and cultural accommodation.

In invoking a historical approach, this dissertation is framed by studies that center on race. Specifically, I situate the study by utilizing studies that ground the social construction of race within the political economy. This body of work argues that the historical contingency of race has had lasting effects on federal policy.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, this dissertation situates childhood and youth as historically and socially constructed as well. The concept of childhood and adolescence, as historians have demonstrated, is a concept influenced by time and space. These approaches are integrated into this study.<sup>16</sup> Although this study centers on Mexican youth, it will approach the study of race using a multiracial framework that pays close attention to how communities developed in relation to their racialized neighbors. “Consciousness and choice,” historian Juan Gómez-Quíñones notes, “assume greater importance when there is more interaction across ethnic boundaries.”<sup>17</sup> While Mexicans are at the center of this analysis, they are examined in relationship with other racialized youth living in Chicago. As historians have shown,

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<sup>15</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), and David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, "Reflections on the History of Children and Childhood in the Postmodern Era," in *Major Problems in the History of American Families and Children*, ed. Anya Jabour (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), and Patrick J. Ryan, "How New Is The 'New' Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 4 (2008). Also, see Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?: Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), and Julia Grant, "A 'Real Boy' and Not a Sissy: Gender, Childhood, and Masculinity, 1890-1940," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Juan Gómez-Quíñones, *Roots of Chicano Politics, 1600-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), ix. Also, see Gary Ross Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), Rudolph J. Vecoli, "An Inter-Ethnic Perspective on American Immigration History," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 75, no. 2 (1993), and Luis Alvarez, "From Zoot Suits to Hip Hop: Towards a Relational Chicana/o Studies," *Latino Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007).

multiracial approaches have clarified some of our misconceptions regarding race relations and urban policy.<sup>18</sup>

### Significance

This dissertation makes a contribution to our understanding of the history of education, immigration history, urban youth, and the history of Mexican Americans by examining how immigrant children and parents have interpreted and experienced schooling, writ-large. Thus far, studies of Latino Chicagoans tend to focus on the postwar. The few studies that examine the first wave of Mexican immigrants to Chicago, do not examine education or children. In addition, the tendency found in histories of education on the Midwest is to focus on white ethnic groups, the Progressive Era, teachers, administrative practice, and the African American experience.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, Latinos have been ignored altogether.<sup>20</sup> Such depictions negate the Midwest's and,

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<sup>18</sup> See, Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Also see, James D. Anderson, "Race-Conscious Educational Policies Versus a 'Color-Blind Constitution': A Historical Perspective," *Educational Researcher* 36, no. 5 (2007).

<sup>19</sup> For a synthesis, see William J. Reese and John L. Rury, *Rethinking the History of American Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and John L. Rury, *Urban Education in the United States: A Historical Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Also, see Jim Carl, "'Good Politics Is Good Government': The Troubling History of Mayoral Control of the Public Schools in Twentieth-Century Chicago," *American Journal of Education* 115, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>20</sup> There has been a new group of young scholars who have produced important studies on the educational history of postwar Chicago. For example, see Jaime Alanis, "The Harrison High School Walkouts of 1968: Struggle for Equal Schools and Chicanismo in Chicago" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010), Rene Luis Alvarez, "Minority Education in the Urban Midwest: Culture, Identity, and Mexican Americans in Chicago, 1910-1977" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2008), René Antrop-González, *'This School Is My Sanctuary': The Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Alternative High School, Working Paper No. 57* (Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University, 2003), Gabriel A. Cortez, "Education, Politics, and a Hunger Strike: A Popular Movement's Struggle for Education in Chicago's Little Village Community" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008), Ana Maria Espinoza, "The Role of Communities in Bilingual Education: A Case Study of the German and Mexican-American Communities in the Pilsen Area of Chicago: 1865-1985" (Ed.D. Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1994), Rita Diane Hernandez, "The Silent Minority: Mexican Americans in the Chicago Public Schools, 1970-2001" (PhD Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 2002), Angelica Rivera, "Re-Inserting Mexican-American Women's Voices into 1950s Chicago Educational History" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008), Mirelsie Velazquez, "Brincamos El Charco Y Ahora Que: Historicizing Puerto Rican Education in Chicago, 1967-1977" (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010).

especially, Chicago's history of multiracial schooling. This deep cleft is even more piercing when searching for historical research on regions east of Texas and California.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, drawing attention to the educational experience of Latino youth is not new. Policy reports date back to the mid twentieth-century when educators and city leaders viewed Latino children as intellectually deficient and, consequently, as threats to American prosperity. In the 1970s these reports comprised a larger series of studies endorsed by the Commission on Civil Rights that addressed the wretched schooling condition of Latino students.<sup>22</sup> Recent reports also note the rising importance of considering the needs and experiences of Latino youth. Nevertheless, such studies forsake any attempt to understand how the historical development of schools, race, and children informs our contemporary social policy.<sup>23</sup> And by doing so, policymakers fail to take value in how the historical integration of immigrant youth elucidates modern debates. As such, old questions regarding the racial integration, the achievement gap, and educational success of Latino youth are thwarted as new. The paradox of historical research is that although youth comprise a major part of formal educational institutions and have been central to the discussions of racial demographic shifts across the nation, they are rarely placed at the center of research. This dissertation intends to do so by showing how the experiences of urban immigrant youth have been shaped by a multitude of educative forces.

## Chapter Outline

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<sup>21</sup> For exceptions, see Ruben Donato, *Mexicanos and Hispanos in Colorado Schools and Communities, 1920-1960* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), and Armando Solorzano, "Latinos' Education in Mormon Utah, 1910-1960," *Latino Studies* 4, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>22</sup> The Commission on Civil Rights printed six reports in the 1970s. For an example, consult United States Commission on Civil Rights. Mexican American Education Study, *Report 6: Toward Quality Education for Mexican Americans* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> For example, see Rosina M. Becerra, *California's Latino Children, Ages 0-5: A Focus on Fourteen Counties* (Los Angeles: Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2000).

This dissertation is organized in six chapters. The first chapter serves as the introduction to the dissertation and situates the study within the larger bodies of work in the field. The second chapter examines the migratory experience of Mexicans to Chicago and addresses how migratory networks developed in the Midwest. This chapter uses data collected in the 1920s and 1930s to discuss how women and children became important in the settlement process of Mexican communities. The third chapter specifically looks at the physical and social structures of Mexican neighborhoods. It describes the early formation of Mexican *colonias* and discusses how the living arrangements in the early communities were important to Mexican social organizations. In the 1920s there was a slow shift in the composition these neighborhoods. Within ten years the migration patterns slowly shifted to include more children and women. In a portion of this chapter I also describe the racialization of Mexicans in Chicago. I look at how city officials constructed a Mexican racial identity that vacillated between cultural, national, and linguistic descriptors. The fourth chapter turns to the cultural concessions made by Mexican parents and youth as they settled in Chicago. In this chapter, I discuss how children were agents of cultural change in their homes. Here, I discuss how parents attempted to drive away the forces Americanization that youth began to bring into their homes. In chapter five, I look at the multiple ways in which children became critical in the development and progress of Mexican communities. Spanish language newspapers and interviews of educators, parents, and children show how their differing educational philosophies resulted in racial animosity. Mexican parents promoted formal schooling, yet resisted the demexicanization of their youth. Parents wanted their children to preserve their Mexican identity as they became American. In the final chapter I discuss how

conceptions of culture and race became significant factors in the battles of over schooling. This chapter argues that an acute focus on the school can lead us to misplace the important role schools play in the economy, politics, and social development of the United States. Schools, as I argue in this study, are only one of the many social institutions that can help us better understand the past. If one desires to assess the lives of children and the political role of schools, we must look at the social and cultural context in which they operate, to understand their failures and successes.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This “latitudinal approach” has been critiqued by Lawrence Cremin and Margaret Connell Szasz. Szasz notes that this approach, mostly espoused by Bernard Bailyn, was too “broad” and “unwieldy.” The late 1980s saw a turn away from a broader definition of schooling to a “focus on formal schooling as a single, crucial dimension of the larger process of cultural interaction.” See, Margaret Connell Szasz, *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607-1783* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 3. However, in a recent study by Hilary Moss, she found that in cases when educational records were sparse, it was helpful when she was “peering beyond the schoolhouse” to “paint the fullest possible picture of education.” See, Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 8.

CHAPTER 2  
IMMIGRANTS IN THE MAKING:  
MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT AND LOCAL LIFE IN MEXICAN CHICAGO

Mexicans living in Chicago in the early twentieth century were immigrants in the making. They typically did not point to a particular state or city as their final destination. Influenced by the political climate, the economy, family aspirations, and brash judgment, Mexican families migrated and eventually settled in communities they thought presented the best economic and social conditions. Settlement was not a decision, but something that seemed to catch up to them as time went on.

Without having to stoke their memory, Mexicans in Chicago told an array of stories. They recounted how they were unfairly laid off in Iowa, the racial politics they experienced in Michigan's heavy industry, or their unforgettable ship ride they endured from Veracruz to New Orleans. They could vividly retell the beauty of the early morning sunlight they awoke to before laboring in the beet fields of Colorado or how the afternoon sun singed their skin as they labored in the Texas cotton fields. And, they would grin as they remembered a few faint childhood memories when they played in the streets of Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, Yucatan or California. They would show anguish too; especially when they recalled tragedies and memories of the loved ones they lost along the way.<sup>1</sup> Before Mexicans arrived to Chicago, they could rarely name more than one site

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<sup>1</sup> After assessing the cases of more than 1,300 Mexicans in Chicago, a worker from the Immigration Protective League found five major migratory routes taken by Mexicans before arriving to the city. See, Anita Edgar Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," *Social Science Review* 2 (1928): 584-85.

of employment, much less the city streets, regional landmarks, and schools their children would enter. All they knew and hoped for was the new community they were about to enter would yield a higher wage and better social prospects. As they migrated from one location to another, they gathered invaluable knowledge about how cities and industries best fit their needs. During their migratory journeys they learned first-hand the intricacies of managerial styles, the nuances of the natural landscape, the importance of city services, and the social problems afflicting many American cities.<sup>1</sup>

### **Mexican Population in the United States**

There were few cities across the United States left unseen by Mexicans at the wake of World War I. Mexicans slowly moved north. They dispersed away from the west and tacitly migrated east to live in places like Chicago. States like Massachusetts, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, New York, Alabama, Wisconsin, Alaska, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Kansas were among the places Mexicans could be found.<sup>2</sup> In 1926, Manuel Gamio, the renowned Mexican anthropologist, reported his preliminary findings on Mexican migration at a Social Science Research Council conference in Dartmouth College.<sup>3</sup> Gamio found that Mexicans resided in 1,511 cities across the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams : Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939, Class and Culture*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence A. Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), John Martinez, "Mexican Emigration to the U.S., 1910-1930" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> Manuel Gamio was the first Mexican in the U.S. to undertake monumental study and provide a critical analysis of Mexicans in the United States. Gamio was Franz Boas' doctoral student at Columbia University and, thereafter, became one of the prominent anthropologists in Latin America. In the 1920s, Gamio established a professional relationship with Robert Redfield from the University of Chicago who introduced him to his anthropological work on Mexicans in Chicago. Resulting from Gamio's reputation and professional ties, the SCRC's Committee on Scientific Aspects of Human Migration selected him to direct the research on Mexican migration. The SCRC had established six areas of inquiry, Mexico being two of them. Paul Taylor, from the University of California, Berkeley, was selected to look at the "economic aspects of human migration" while Gamio was to examine the "social studies." Gamio's

Only four states—Maine, Vermont, North and South Carolina—did not yield evidence of any Mexicans.<sup>4</sup> “There is hardly a state where they have not penetrated,” a 1929 national Catholic study reported of Mexicans.<sup>5</sup> Convinced by labor recruiters, enticed by educational missionaries, or induced by the multitude of opportunities that stood before them, Mexicans migrated and became one of many national groups that comprised America’s urban neighborhoods during the early twentieth century.

In the 1920s the Mexican population in the United States was growing exponentially. As a result of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), a large number of Mexicans emigrated to escape their country’s social, political, and economic instability.<sup>6</sup> In the United States, a lack of workers caused by WWI and a combination of restrictive

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recommended project was tentatively titled “Preliminary Survey of the Antecedents and Conditions of the Mexican Population in the United States and the Formation of a Program for a Definite an Scientific Study of the Problem” and was under the direction of Fay-Cooper Cole and Edith Abbot. Taylor’s study was published in 1932 by the University of California Press. See, Social Science Research Council. *Report of the Committee on Scientific Aspects of Human Migration, December 18, 1926*, Folder 13 Box 17, Immigration Protective League Papers, University of Illinois at Chicago. It remains unclear why Gamio, who specialized on Mexico, decided to temporarily focus on the demographic impact of Mexicans in the United States. Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso suggests Gamio’s interest was sparked by Redfield’s own anthropological work on Chicago. Casey Walsh argues that Gamio’s U.S. studies could have arisen from the simple financial need to survive. For a nuanced look at Gamio and his migration studies, see Quetzil E. Castañeda, “Stocking’s Historiography of Influence: The ‘Story of Boas’, Gamio and Redfield at the Cross-Road to Light”, *Critique of Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2003), Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, “Manuel Gamio: El Inicio De Las Investigaciones Sobre La Inmigración Mexicana a Estados Unidos,” *Historia Mexicana* 52, no. 4 (2003), Casey Walsh, “Eugenic Acculturation: Manuel Gamio, Migration Studies, and the Anthropology of Development in Mexico, 1910-1940.,” *Latin American Perspectives* 31, no. 5 (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Preliminary Report on Mexican Immigration in the United States* (Unpublished Report for the Social Science Research Council, 1926), 20. There are five known variants of this report. Though I use various drafts of this report in this dissertation, the copy I consulted for this particular citation is housed at El Colegio de México and does not include an appendix. An updated and unorganized copy is part of the *Manuel Gamio Papers* at the Bancroft Library, which does include an extensive appendix. There are earlier drafts housed at the *Archivo Particular de Plutarco Elías Calles* in Mexico City and the *Rockefeller Archives* in New York, which I have not examined. The final draft of Gamio’s study was formally published in 1930 as a book, but excludes the rich details that are part of earlier drafts. See the final book, Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930).

<sup>5</sup> Linna E. Bresette, *Mexicans in the United States: A Report of a Brief Survey* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1929), 7.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent take on how the Mexican revolution shaped Mexican American politics in Chicago during the early twentieth century, see John H. Flores, “On the Wings of the Revolution: Transnational Politics and the Making of Mexican American Identities” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois, Chicago, 2009).



immigration policies that curtailed the immigration from Europe and Asia caused labor recruiters to seek out Mexicans. An Illinois researcher noted that, “the only solution to this [labor] problem was that the demand for Laborers [sic] might be filled through the nearest open door--Mexico.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1900, for example, there were approximately 103,393 Mexicans in the United States. By 1910 they doubled to 221,915 and doubled again to 486, 418 in 1920. The data collected by the Commissioner General of Immigration showed that between 1901 and 1910, Mexicans comprised 0.6 percent of all immigrants entering the United States and 3.8 percent between 1911 and 1921. After 1921, the numbers became even larger. In 1922, the proportion of Mexicans admitted increased to 5.9 percent (18,246) and steadily grew each successive year. One year later, they jumped to 12 percent (62,709) and by 1927 Mexicans comprised 19.9 percent (66,766) of all the immigrants entering the United States. Scholars studying immigration argued that the data collected on Mexicans gave an inaccurate picture. Louis Bloch, a researcher from the California Department of Industrial Relations, argued that the data from the U.S. Census showed a major discrepancy between Mexicans who entered legally and those who did not. Since the data collected by the Commissioner General of Immigration was restricted to legal entrants at U.S.-Mexico border inspection sites, Mexicans who circumvented border policies were unaccounted for in final estimations. It was unfair, however, to expect the Commissioner General of Immigration to present an absolute figure since accounting for “illegal” entrants was beyond anyone’s realm. Manuel Gamio, for example, provided an alternative approach that would best estimate the Mexican population in the United States. He suggested U.S.

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<sup>7</sup> Elmer Cornelius Koch, "The Mexican Laborer in the Sugar Beet Fields of the United States" (MS Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana, 1928), 8. Also, see Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

national population figures could accurately measure the population of Mexicans only if the entry and departure of Mexicans was considered. Gamio argued that because most Mexicans were immigrants and followed the seasonal flow of labor, demographers needed to regard Mexicans as a non-sedentary population. Thus, he recommended to scholars studying Mexican immigration that they integrate the data collected by Mexico's Department of Migration to account for the back-and-forth movement of migrants between both countries. Regardless of the data source or reasons and desires for migration, data sets collected during this period depicted a Mexican population that increased dramatically across the country and targeted certain regions. Texas, Arizona, and California accounted for 90.3 percent of the total Mexican population in 1920. Most Mexicans resided in the Southwest because of the proximity to Mexico and their historical legacy in the region that reached back to Spanish colonization. Though their proportion decreased in these three states to 85 percent in 1910 and 82.7 in 1920, the bulk of Mexicans continued to concentrate in these three states. In 1900, only 0.1 percent of the total U.S. Mexican population lived in Illinois. Their number in Illinois did increase by over two-thousand percent in 1920, but proportionally Mexicans in Illinois comprised only 1.4 percent of their total U.S. population.<sup>8</sup>

### **Mexican Population in Midwest**

When Mexicans first arrived in Illinois, settlement house workers and urban reformers were well acquainted with the needs of newcomers. First it was the Western

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<sup>8</sup> Louis Bloch, "Facts About Mexican Immigration before and since the Quota Restriction Laws," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 24, no. 165 (1929): 51-56, Manuel Gamio, "Mexican Immigration into the United States: Explaining the Apparent Paradox That More Mexicans Have Re-Entered Mexico Than Have Emigrated," *Pacific Affairs* 8 (1929). For more regarding the difficulty in enumerating the Mexican population, consult the appendix of Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 265-67.

and Eastern European immigrants. Now it was blacks from the south and Mexicans from the west. The social workers and educators that Mexicans encountered had devised ways to address new arrivals. In the southwestern states, however, Mexicans had a historic presence—roots that remained absent in the American Midwest. In the Midwest, Mexicans were “merely another immigrant group,” asserted historian Carey McWilliams.<sup>9</sup> In 1884, for example, the bibliography in Hubert H. Bancroft’s book titled *History of California* included approximately one-thousand sources published by Spanish speakers in California.<sup>10</sup> This was a testament to the callous history of conquest and colonialism that formed much of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. Mexicans were known in the Southwest. They had a presence. There was a way people dealt with them and a way they resisted. And like an unsaid manual, people followed it.<sup>11</sup>

In the distant Midwest, however, Mexicans were considered green horns. They were not only newcomers to a far-off geographic space, but also to a social cauldron where race was being remade. In 1931 the progressive publication *The Survey* wrote, “Up the railways, the irrigation ditches, the dusty roads of cotton lands the Mexicans came.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, their migration *up* was more than a geographic one. The shift *up* to the urban north was also a climb *up* through racial hierarchies—a process that would redefine their racial and national identities. In 1930, Sydney Willett Spalding, a graduate student at the

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<sup>9</sup> Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1949), 222.

<sup>10</sup> Luis Leal, “Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective,” *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 1, no. 1 (1973).

<sup>11</sup> William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, “The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848-1928,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 2 (2003), Maria Raquel Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land: Spanish-Mexican Women and Interethnic Marriage in California, 1820-1880* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2007), Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), Deena J. González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> N.A., “The Gist of It,” *The Survey* 66, no. 3 (1931): 1.

University of Illinois suggested that an “intermediate group” had resulted from Spanish colonialism. “The Spaniards unlike the northern peoples, particularly those of English origin,” Spalding noted, “have been willing to depart from the European standard and affiliate with a lower race. Miscegenation produces modifications in the social life of the Americans, and gave rise to an intermediate group. The mongrel type is a hybrid both in physique and culture.” Midwesterners, like Spalding, who were unfamiliar with the “intermediate group,” would finally explore these theories firsthand when Mexicans migrated to the American Midwest.<sup>13</sup> One thing Spalding was certain about was that racial contact caused social conflict and political instability. Midwesterners still remembered the Civil War and the white and black tensions that followed in the North. Spalding explained that, “in every part of the world in which the white and colored races have come into intimate contact, race problems have presented the most intractable of all social problems.”<sup>14</sup>

Mexicans were the first Latin Americans that settled and developed communities in the Midwest.<sup>15</sup> As early as the nineteenth century, smatterings of Mexicans appear in Midwestern records. For example, in 1890 the *New York Times* reported that Juan C. Armijo, a twenty-six year old wealthy Mexican, had resided in St. Louis for four years where he was completing his post-secondary education. Armijo was from a wealthy

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<sup>13</sup> Sydney Willett Spalding, "A Comparative Study of Racial Adjustment" (MA Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana, 1930), 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Although Mexicans comprised the largest Spanish speaking group in Chicago, the *Sunday Times* reported that a Spanish community predated their arrival by 60 years. The article also reported small Puerto Rican, Panamanian, and Cuban communities that were “scattered throughout the city,” but mostly were found within the “Mexican colony.” See, Bruce Grant, “Little Mexico in Chicago!: Gayety, Color and Strumming Guitars,” *Sunday Times*, May 26, 1935. CFLPS Reel 2, Spanish/Mexican, III A, II B1a. In her groundbreaking study, Elena Padilla discusses how some Puerto Ricans who lived in Mexican communities became “Mexicanized.” See, Elena Padilla, "Puerto Rican Immigrants in New York and Chicago: A Study in Comparative Assimilation" (M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1947), 98.

family and had been sent “North” at age twelve to be educated. Before enrolling in St. Louis University and Washington University in St. Louis, he had already attended St. Mary’s College in Kansas and the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. Upon finishing his studies Armijo left St. Louis, but was sent back to the U.S. by his father because he was afraid Juan would fall into “bad habits of the wealthy young men of his class.” Upon his return to St. Louis, it was said that Armijo was “in very good terms” with Fannie Armstrong, the white daughter of his landlady and that there were “rumors hint[ing] at a marriage.”<sup>16</sup> Armijo’s case was representative of Mexican migration to the Midwest before the 1920s. It was not organized nor represented a unified social threat to local life. Mexicans were characterized as sojourners—ephemeral constituents of the city.

Mexicans who were part of the first mass wave to settle in the Midwest were overwhelmingly young and were often male bachelors who took part in a circuitous migratory system. And as they settled in the Midwest, they followed the rhythm and reason that best suited their needs. Some of the first migrants were characterized as “job-hoppers” who “skipped-out” on labor contracts if they were treated unfairly or had an attractive offer elsewhere. Most importantly, they were the information seekers—an informal reconnaissance unit that surveyed the area for their families and friends back home. A Mexican in Chicago’s Immigration Protective League office recounted he had heard that within six months after arriving in Chicago he would have enough money to purchase a car and “a piano for my little girl who likes music.”<sup>17</sup> The remittances and letters sent back were culprits in mocking up an opulent image of the American

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<sup>16</sup> N.A., “A Wealthy Young Mexican: Rumors That He Is to Marry a Young Lady of St. Louis,” *New York Times*, December 23 1890, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Paul S. Taylor, “Mexicans North of the Rio Grande,” *The Survey* 1931, 202.

Midwest.<sup>18</sup> One observer noted that the Mexican “whose life was almost on the same level as that of a slave...the North American States, heralded as the ‘Land of Opportunity’...was a great attraction, and was the incentive to the establishment of one of the most gay and colorful colonies in the city of Chicago.”<sup>19</sup>

However, there were migrants who recounted the wretched side of migrating north. A publication written to dissuade Mexican emigration contained a story about a Mexican cotton worker whose hair was long, yet shorn, and whose hands were rough, and looked in such a way it “would not be known whether they were knots of a tree or actual hands of a working man.”<sup>20</sup> The gripping stories, recounted by Alfonso Fabila, were published in Spanish and widely distributed in Mexico in an attempt to ebb the flow of U.S.-bound migrants. Fabila insinuated that Mexicans were deceived by illusory contracts and, once in the U.S., would experience an “unnamed torment” and accept “even a sponge soaked in wine that was mixed with bile.”<sup>21</sup> If they returned to Mexico, he explained, they would do so “crying with the dishonor of their daughter or wife, or the loss of their husband.”<sup>22</sup> These stories were printed throughout Mexican newspapers. An editorial printed in the Mexican newspaper *El Demócrata* stated: “Once our compatriot has crossed the border without knowing English and without further patrimony than his emaciated arm sustained by the doubtful nourishment of maize, he finds himself in a scene which often confuses and maddens him. The American system which defends his

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<sup>18</sup> Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940.*, 102. Reisler identifies three main methods Mexicans migrated to the Midwest. He argues that they were directly recruited to heavy industry, job-hopped north, or were seasonal migrants in the agricultural industries. I will explore these three themes in the latter chapters of this dissertation.

<sup>19</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago” Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Federal Writers Project Papers, Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>20</sup> Alfonso Fabila, *El Problema De La Emigración De Obreros Y Campesinos Mexicanos* (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1929), 15. Translation made by author.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

rights by means of law is a box of mysteries and surprises wherein the Mexican is the victim of this dreams of conquest.”<sup>23</sup> Mexico City’s major newspapers discussed the demographic and social impact emigration was having on their country and noted there should be “No more unheathful [sic] utopians, no more sterile phraseology, no more statistical data manufactured ‘ad hoc’ which deceive no one!”<sup>24</sup> In the winter of 1928 the Mexican Consul ran ads in Mexico’s major newspapers discouraging migration from Mexico because they would unlikely find work after settling in the U.S.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the U.S. Consul in Mexico reported that “while [these stories are] numerous and perhaps exaggerated [they] do not stop the influx of Mexican peons into the United States.”<sup>26</sup> The Mexican press avidly printed articles reporting the northern labor conditions. Calling Mexicans who headed north “our laborers,” Mexico City’s *El Universal* divulged the inhumane conditions *braceros* confronted. Despite the positive economic influence Mexican workers had on American industry, Mexico’s journalists were struck by the racial inequities their compatriots endured in the north.

In spite of the hard labor conditions and the glum weather reported back home, the formation of Mexican communities in the Midwest hardened by the early 1920s.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>“A Law Which is Becoming Necessary,” *El Democrata*, December 28, 1925, reel 204, frame 869, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910-1929, NARA.

<sup>24</sup> “Mexico is Being Depopulated” October 13, 1925. *El Universal*. Slide 913, reel 204, M274, # 812.5611/2, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter cited as RDS-IAM Papers). Article translated by the Embassy of the United States.

<sup>25</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 589.

<sup>26</sup> “Exodus of Mexican Laborers to the United States: September 17, 1925,” Slide 904, reel 204, # 812.5611/1, *RDS-IAM Papers*.

<sup>27</sup> For an in depth discussion of Mexican migration to the Midwestern, see chapter one of Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Also see, Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, “The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1976), James B. Lane and Edward J. Escobar, eds., *Forging a Community: The Latino Experience in Northwest Indiana, 1919-1975* (Chicago: Cattails Press, 1987), Michael M. Smith, “Mexicans in Kansas City: The First Generation, 1900-1920,” *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 2 (1989), Dionicio Nodín Valdés,

Even migrants who followed the stories that discouraged them from migrating could never have prepared for the biting winters or conceived of the arduous work that was ahead of them. In 1924, Silvestre Revueltas, an acclaimed Mexican musician who lived in Chicago, began a letter to a friend by saying that all he saw was, "White and gray, and more white and more gray."<sup>28</sup> But solitary male sojourners, like Revueltas, were not the norm. Historian Ramón Guitierrez argues that our misunderstanding of how gender has influenced the migratory process has shaped the conceptualization of the Mexican diaspora. Guitierrez asserts, "The stronghold of the Mexican immigrant in the United States has been a male heroic tale."<sup>29</sup> The prominence of a "male heroic tale" loses buoyancy when looking at the migratory and subsequent settlement of Mexicans in the Midwest. Rather than solitary sojourners, women and children steadily became central to the stream of Mexicans making their way to the American Midwest.<sup>30</sup> Mexicans were highly concentrated in particular Midwestern industries, schools, and neighborhoods. In 1915 there were enough Mexicans in Topeka, Kansas to garner the attention of urban reformers who helped support the construction of a park so that Mexican children could play and be Americanized.<sup>31</sup> In 1910, for example, Mexicans comprised fifty-five percent of track laborers in Kansas City and ninety-one percent in 1927.<sup>32</sup> The *Iowa Journal of*

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*Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in, Robert Parker, "Revueltas, the Chicago Years," *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 25, no. 2 (2004): 180.

<sup>29</sup> Ramón Gutiérrez, "Hispanic Diaspora and Chicano Identity in the United States of America," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 914, no. 1/2 (1999): 212.

<sup>30</sup> See, Gabriela F. Arredondo, "Lived Regionalities: Mujeridad in Chicago, 1920-1940," in *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and John R. Chávez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> "Play for the Mexican Population in Topeka, Kansas," *The Playground*, April 1916.

<sup>32</sup> Juan R. García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 6-7.



*History and Politics* reported in 1929 that the Mexican population in Mason City, Iowa had increased four times within eight years.<sup>33</sup> In Chicago, Mexicans made up 12.1 percent of the steelworkers in three Chicago steel mills by 1924 and 11.7 of area steelworkers in 1925.<sup>34</sup> In 1909 only one Mexican was recorded in Chicago's slaughterhouse and meatpacking industry. But by 1928 the number surged to 746 (13% of foreign born workers) when the proportion of most European foreign born populations shrunk, thus making Mexicans the third largest foreign-born group in those two industries.<sup>35</sup> This trend continued across the Midwest, and in 1927 German-Russian and Belgian sugar beet workers in the upper-Midwest were replaced by Mexicans. Mexicans mustered an unprecedented seventy to ninety percent of the sugar beet field workers in Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Minnesota and North Dakota. Mexicans did more than displace and compete with white workers. As Carey McWilliams noted, they were used to "dilute" and "thin-out" the African American labor force.<sup>36</sup>

Sugar beet labor contractors were part of the first wave of recruiters to entice entire Mexican families to migrate to the Midwest. Contracting agencies frequently

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<sup>33</sup> Chas. M. Meyer, "The Mexican Problem in Mason City," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 27, no. 2 (1929): 227.

<sup>34</sup> David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 266-67. Reisler argues that the influx of Mexicans to the steel industry was precipitated by the Steel Strike of 1919. In 1918 there were 90 Mexicans employed by Inland Steel and 94 in 1919. By 1926 there were over 6,000 Mexicans employed in the Chicago region steel industry and they comprised 35 percent (2,526) of Inland Steel's labor force. See, Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940.*, 103, F. Arturo Rosales and Daniel T. Simon, "Chicano Steel Workers and Unionism in the Midwest, 1919-1945," *Aztlán* 6, no. 2 (1975): 267-68. Also, see Paul S. Taylor, "Employment of Mexicans in Chicago and the Calumet Region," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 25, no. 170 (1930).

<sup>35</sup> The largest foreign born group was the Polish, whose number decreased between 1909 (4,293) and 1928 (1,570). The second largest foreign born group was the Lithuanian who stood at 1,860 in 1909 and decreased to 1,033 in 1928. The native born represented 7,500 (57%) of the workers in these two industries and the foreign born 5,694 (43%). The foreign born were grouped in 34 separate classifications and the native-born workers were classified in three distinct groups: white (2,931 in 1909 and 3,604 in 1928), colored (459 in 1909 and 3,894), and Indian (none recorded in 1909 and 2 in 1928). See, Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, vol. 7.2 (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Economics, 1932), 40.

<sup>36</sup> McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 222.

purchased advertising space in Chicago's Mexican newspapers. The S.W. & A. Contracting Employment Company located on West Madison Street ran articles in Chicago's *El Heraldo de Mexico* newspaper that read, "ATTENTION: 500 FAMILIES NEEDED."<sup>37</sup> West Madison Street, northeast of Hull House, was a hub for labor agencies and became a major industrial pen of labor recruitment. Aside from being called a "slave-market," because it was filled with employment agencies, it also was described as a "hobo-heaven" and being filled with "honky-tonks" (dives). Containing approximately ten Spanish-speaking agencies, this thoroughfare was an axis for recruiters who were seeking Mexican laborers. The street was lined with rooms and boarding houses catering to unemployed Mexicans.<sup>38</sup> An observer reported that Mexicans were "a constantly shifting group the size of which varies with the demand for laborers."<sup>39</sup> A Federal Writers' Project worker described this area being "thick" with Mexican workers during "prosperous times."<sup>40</sup> A *Chicago Daily Tribune* article noted that the increase of Mexican workers along West Madison caused "floaters" and hobos, who were caught between the "moon[shine] and the Mex" to favor federal immigration policies that restricted the flow of Mexican laborers.<sup>41</sup> Historian Mark Reisler found there were at least fourteen labor recruitment agencies in the Chicago area devoted to Mexican workers during this period.<sup>42</sup> Mexicans who roamed up and down the sidewalks of West Madison searching for work found more than employers who were interested in hiring them. Ramon Isidro

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<sup>37</sup> *El Heraldo de Mexico*, Abril 7, 1928: 4.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," 587. This street was also described as the hobo's "main stem." See, Paul G. Cressey, *The Taxi-Dance Hall: A Sociological Study in Commercialized Recreation and City Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), 211.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," 587.

<sup>40</sup> "Mexicans in Our Midst," page 18, Folder 5, Box 193, *Federal Writers Project Papers*, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur Evans, "Mexican Labor Is New Problem for Floaters," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 5 1925.

<sup>42</sup> See page 121, footnote 58 in Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940*.

recounted a story of a friend who was invited into an inconspicuous Christian church along West Madison as he looked for work. Isidro's friend entered "more out of curiosity than anything else." Once inside, Isidro retold, the proselytization began as a lady asked his friend "to pray in his own tongue."<sup>43</sup> Mexicans patronized West Madison and many other places where recruiters were willing to hire them. Labor agencies were ingenious at finding ways of appealing to Mexican immigrants. Aside from purchasing advertisement spaces that specifically targeted Spanish speakers, they would also take-up shop in Mexican neighborhoods and hope Mexicans would be allured by their labor contracts. An ad that appeared in Chicago's *La Verdad* Mexican newspaper in 1927 stated it was recruiting five hundred men and asked anyone interested go to the "Sociedad del Santo Nombre" (Holy Name Society) located at 1212 Newberry Avenue, which was in the heart of the Mexican neighborhood.<sup>44</sup> Paul Taylor, an economist who published a monumental study on Mexicans in Chicago in the 1930s, reported in the national magazine *The Survey* that he had seen offices along the Hull House neighborhood with "Spanish signs advertising track work" and that Mexicans were "conspicuous among those sauntering by, or loitering before offices." Mexicans were "fair game," he reported, "for the 'man-catchers.'"<sup>45</sup> If Mexicans wanted to be caught by the "man-catchers," as Taylor suggested, they certainly were better off taking their families with them. Mexicans who desired to labor in the beet fields needed to be "comparatively young, have no one in his family who is an invalid, and have a large enough family, if he is a married man, to work the acreage he desires to include in his contract."<sup>46</sup> Family units became indispensable in

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<sup>43</sup> "R.I., Ramon Isidro." Box 56, Folder Life Histories Part 1, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>44</sup> See ad in *La Verdad*, July 3, 1927 page 4.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, "Mexicans North of the Rio Grande," 140.

<sup>46</sup> Koch, "The Mexican Laborer in the Sugar Beet Fields of the United States", 27-28.

the Midwest. Even agencies appearing to be noncommittal in recruiting whole families made sure that single Mexican male laborers would “muster sufficient help.”<sup>47</sup>

The income women and younger children provided significantly increased their seasonal earnings. Up until 1927, for example, the largest deposit made by a Mexican at the Atlas State Bank in the Hull House neighborhood was by a family who had returned after the summer’s harvest in Michigan’s beet fields. The family, which consisted of a mother, father, and three children, deposited eight hundred dollars, thus pocketing about two hundred dollars more than the average deposit of its kind.<sup>48</sup> Some labor agencies devised mathematical computations estimating the profit individual family members could yield. Though children participated in the five basic steps used to harvest sugar beets, the youngest among them were preferred to work in the “pulling” and “thinning” stages.<sup>49</sup> An adult or “young person” between sixteen and seventeen years were estimated at potentially harvesting ten to twelve acres, while young children between eight and thirteen years were estimated at working half as much as a “grown person.”<sup>50</sup> Children who were too young to help were simply “left to amuse themselves in the fields or at the house.” Babies were often taken to the fields and placed under tents in baskets or on blankets between the beet rows while the mothers worked.<sup>51</sup> For older children, their work did not end in the fields. Many of them acquired medical conditions from the long hours of stooping, being exposed to dust and cold, or dampness of the ground. These children were rarely treated by physicians and always expected to contribute with

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<sup>47</sup> “Mexicans Replacing European Labor in Sugar Beet Fields of Northern States,” *The United States Daily*, July 23 1927, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 590.

<sup>49</sup> Koch, “The Mexican Laborer in the Sugar Beet Fields of the United States”, 14-17..

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 34’, 43’, and 70.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

household chores by carrying water, splitting wood, carrying in fuel, and washing the dishes. Regardless of age, whether through accommodation or physical labor, everyone contributed to the earning power of the family.<sup>52</sup>

### **It is Families They Wanted: The Paradox of a Reliable and Impermanent Migrant**

Though Mexican migrants had travelled to the Midwest prior to the 1920s, immigration policies that crimped the pipeline of European and Asian labor made Mexicans even more attractive to labor recruiters in the Midwest. Companies that had filled their shop floors, factories, and fields with labor from Asia and Europe confronted three restrictive immigration policies that hindered the operation of their companies.<sup>53</sup> Industries in the Midwest that had traditionally looked to the Eastern Hemisphere turned to Mexico for a reliable source of labor. Yet the dependence on a flow of work hands was shaped by a particular notion of reliability, nothing close to a writ-large welcome of all Mexicans. Single and young Mexican men were frequently characterized as immigrants in passing—essentially birds of passage. A Federal Writers' Project worker in Chicago described young Mexican men as "unmarried and often unreliable, working their way from place to place and job to job."<sup>54</sup> They were perceived as unpredictable workers—volatile commodities—that should be supplanted by trustable and dependable married men. Single men were described as the most transient sector of the Mexican immigrant

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 70-72. In chapter 5, "Women and Children in the Sugar Beet Fields," Koch provides a good overview of their activities. For more on Mexican beet workers, see Dennis Nodin Valdés, "Betabeleros: The Formation of an Agricultural Proletariat in the Midwest, 1897-1930," *Labor History* 30, no. 4 (1989).

<sup>53</sup> I refer to the Acts of 1917, 1921, and 1924. Rather than focus on the general details of these policies, I will only address how they affected immigrant youth and women. For more on these policies, see Mae M. Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (1999). And John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

<sup>54</sup> "Mexicans in Illinois" Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Federal Writers Project Papers, Box 193, Folder 5, pages 2-3.

community who, without any family ties in Chicago, could jeopardize the stability of a company by vanishing at any given moment. A resident engineer in El Paso noted, “the Mexican seems to have allied himself with the American ‘hobo’ and now wants to be on the move, especially the single ones.”<sup>55</sup>

The characterization of what qualified a reliable workforce was being shaped at the federal and state level as well. Debates regarding the criteria for admitting immigrants from Mexico were framed within a normative male figure. Agricultural growers across the country, like sugar beet companies had in the Midwest, who favored Mexican immigrants, argued before the Congress that immigration policies enforcing the head tax and literacy exam formalized by the Immigration Act of 1917 had an adverse affect on Mexican immigration.<sup>56</sup> A representative from the South Texas Cotton Growers’ Association, for instance, took a grievance to the Congress by posing a hypothetical situation. Literacy exams, he claimed, could nullify eighty to ninety percent of all of Mexican immigration because many Mexicans who took the exam migrated as family units. Thus, if one person who was part of a sixteen-member family did not pass the exam then, the representative proposed; all of the family would not make their trek north. The Texas representative asserted, “It means that the mother would go back, and if the mother does not come in the children will not come, and if the father comes he is very little help by himself.” After being pried about this issue by members of Congress and admitting

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<sup>55</sup> "Peculiarities of Mexican Labor," *Railway Age Gazette* 1912, 530.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the development of literacy exams, see Jeanne D. Petit, *The Men and Women We Want: Gender, Race, and the Progressive Era Literacy Test Debate* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

that men were of little help by themselves, the Texas grower replied, “We would practically get no labor. It is families we want.”<sup>57</sup>

The 1920s saw the rise of two Mexican immigrant figures. The first was that of a married committed worker, who was believed to obey the sexual colorline. The critical factors that made this figure most attractive were because married men were perceived as sedentary, complacent, and manageable. Midwestern labor recruiters who were abandoned by “job-hoppers” and contested by labor agitators believed there was an advantage to hiring married Mexican men. They could be expected to follow the rules. The married man signified Christian normativity and, most importantly, would increase the financial profits of a company by taking their family to work. The single male figure, however, was poised on the other end of economic and social acceptance. The instability of single men not only posed a threat to the labor industry, but so too did their sexual prowess. The unmarried man was characterized as a conniving figure that commanded little respect. Years earlier, William Z. Ripley, a leading eugenicist, had already claimed that “the presence of large numbers of adult unmarried men of lower class in any community inevitably leads to immorality.”<sup>58</sup> *Solos* (single Mexicans) were thought of creating an “unnatural situation” in Chicago, as one Mexican described, because they were “not subject to the controls which a family usually exerts.”<sup>59</sup> The adventurous man represented sexual avarice and was depicted as having little commitment to work and, most importantly, someone who found joy in breaching local customs. He rejoiced in vice and comingled with labor agitators. It was in this way that he provided the most

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<sup>57</sup> House of Representatives Sixty-Sixth Congress Second Session, “Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers: Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization,” (1920), 58.

<sup>58</sup> William Z. Ripley, “Race Progress and Immigration,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 34, no. 1 (1909): 131.

<sup>59</sup> “House of G’s.” Box 56, Folder Life Histories Part 1, *Survey Papers*.

threat to U.S. labor and to social norms. At the same time, women and children were not perceived as immediate threats. In fact, they were portrayed as squelching the unmarried male's desires to engage in racial and sexual escapades. In a letter to Secretary of Labor W.B. Wilson, Edward F. Parker, a vice president of a major cotton company, noted he believed Mexican laborers were,

The solution of our common labor problem in this country. Many of their people are here, this was once a part of their country and they can and they will do the work. Their condition is greatly benefited as compared to that which they have in Mexico, and I personally find them, especially those with families, to be appreciative of fair treatment and to be deserving of it. I do not think these people constitute any problem, such as the negro problem.<sup>60</sup>

Crafting an immigration policy and upholding an ideal that favored married over single men created an ideological paradox. Urban reformers and labor recruiters saw a benefit in handpicking family units. They would arrive together, work together, live together, and perhaps leave the country together. For example, a study on criminality in Illinois argued that the disproportionate amount of single Mexican men created a social problem. The report noted that "many of those [single Mexican men] wishing to marry must either seek their mate from another race or nationality, or remain single. There is the further social danger of loose sex life resulting."<sup>61</sup> Yet the contradiction of the family ideal was that as the family unit became less impermanent it did engage in city politics. Once the settlement process began, it would be difficult to rid an entire family from the multiple social spaces they occupied. Single men, who frequented pool halls and speakeasies, were generally restricted to racialized spaces. As historian Kevin Mumford has diligently

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<sup>60</sup> Southwest Cotton Company to Secretary of Labor Wilson, 28 May 1917. File# 54211/123, Reel 6, Frame 704. National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter cited as INS Records).

<sup>61</sup> Paul Livingstone Warnshuis, "Crime and Criminal Justice among the Mexicans of Illinois," in *Report on Crime and the Foreign Born*, ed. Edith Abbott (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1931), 278.



shown, Chicago's racial boundaries were most permeable in places of vice. These interzones, as Mumford calls them, were largely immune to the racial scripts afflicting public space.<sup>62</sup> The family unit, in contrast, was a usurper of racial complacency and challenged the interzones. Their identities and needs were malleable and transcended racial boundaries. They were more than laborers. They occupied hospitals, parks, and schools too and were critical in making "Mexican Chicago."<sup>63</sup>

The wives, sons, and daughters of Mexican men were granted extreme legislative leniencies by the immigration policies passed between 1917 and 1921.<sup>64</sup> In Chicago, these quotas were referred to as an "open field for the Mexican."<sup>65</sup> Implementing such quotas would not necessarily adversely affect the flow of Mexican immigrants to cities in the Midwest. An unpublished report noted that,

The movement of Mexicans to such cities [Chicago and Detroit] would seem to be, to a considerable extent, part of the general movement from the country to cities which is generally taking place in the United States. Unless the agricultural industries rise out of the present slump in which they find themselves, continued migration of Mexicans may be expected to the expanding industrial cities of the Middle West.<sup>66</sup>

An important trend that arose alongside the literacy exams and quota plans enforced by immigration policies was the way in which underage students were classified and dutifully admitted by the U.S. border inspectors and consular representatives. What

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<sup>62</sup> Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> I borrow the term "Mexican Chicago" from Nicholas De Genova, "Race, Space, and the Reinvention of Latin America in Mexican Chicago," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 5 (1998). The concept of "Mexican Chicago" has also been advanced by Gabriela Arredondo. See, Gabriela F. Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Usually, immigration policy included adult woman as "wives" and youth, regardless of gender, as "children." These policies based the admissibility of the family unity around the male figure.

<sup>65</sup> "Conditions Surrounding Resident Mexican Families: A Paper Read at the 1929 National Conference of Social Work" *National Conferences of Social Work Records*, 1929-1932. Box 1, Folder 3, University of Chicago, page 2.

<sup>66</sup> "Routes Taken by Mexican Reaching Chicago," Page 10 Box 60, Folder Misc Manuscripts, *Survey Papers*.

developed was a far cry from an impartial approach to the admissibility of all Mexicans. Underage youth were admissible to the U.S. if they could show they were going to be reunited with a parent or guardian, if they were not likely to become a public charge, and if they were going to attend school. A legal analyst who endorsed the entry of immigrant students noted that “[t]he student class is one of the most desirable for the United States to cultivate. No other single group can contribute so much to promoting friendly relations between this and other countries.”<sup>67</sup> The Women's Committee for the Council of National Defense, for example, praised immigrant children for their social, economic, and political potential. The Committee's chairperson believed immigrant children were “raw material to be sure, but with what splendid possibilities—to be developed into the best we desire to have.”<sup>68</sup> These debates and legal loopholes facilitated the entry of Mexican youth; especially those who pledged to stay in school and become good Americans.

The general understanding of how immigration policy was directed at youth during the early migration of Mexicans to the United States remains unclear, but the three immigration acts passed successively in 1917, 1921, and 1924 provide a glimpse as to how underage and unaccompanied youth were able to legally enter into the United States. Immigrant youth, especially those from Mexico, were classified under the non-quota section of the Immigration Act of 1924, which facilitated their entry. Individuals who qualified for non-quota admission were wives of U.S. citizens, religious or academic professions, residents of the Western Hemisphere, unmarried children under eighteen years of age of U.S. citizens, and “bona-fide students” under fifteen years of age.

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<sup>67</sup> Philip C. Jessup, "Some Phases of the Administrative and Judicial Interpretation of the Immigration Act of 1924," *The Yale Law Journal* 35, no. 6 (1926): 720.

<sup>68</sup> Sarka B. Hrbkova, *Bridging the Atlantic: A Discussion of the Problems and Methods of Americanization* (Los Angeles: Adolph Herman, 1919), 20.

Although Mexican adults and immigrants from Asia or Europe encountered a complex set of strict policies and numerical restrictions, it was Mexican children and youth whose entry was least policed. Although the 1924 Immigration Act made it explicit that “bona-fide students” would only be admitted, the admissibility of Mexican children was left to the discretion of individual border inspectors. What “bona-fide” and “student” really meant was undefined and, thus, became a fluid description of what youth needed to speak to during immigration hearings at the U.S.-Mexican border.<sup>69</sup> The case of the two teenage siblings demonstrates this. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, Manuel and Angela Carbajal who were on their way from Michoacán, Mexico to Chicago pleaded their case before a Border Patrol Inspector in El Paso, Texas. They were unaccompanied by their parents, had no money, and had never been in the U.S., yet were admitted on the basis that they were “expected” to go to public day school once they arrived to Chicago. Manuel and Angela, twelve and fourteen years of age respectively, were on their way to Chicago to meet their older unmarried brother named Eulutorio, but were met by Reverend S.D Athens who would chaperone them on their train ride to Chicago. There were no legal papers garnered or accommodations explained to the immigration officials to affirm that these children would enter public day school or not become a public charge. When Border Patrol officials asked the Reverend about his correspondence with Manuel and Angela’s older brother in Chicago, he replied: “he said that he wanted to educate them.”<sup>70</sup>

Explaining they would go to school was all the validation immigration officials needed

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<sup>69</sup> Students who worked to pay for their schooling were not considered “non-quota” immigrants because they were said to have relinquished their “student” status. Though these policies were said to have been relaxed by individual officers. See, Jessup, “Some Phases of the Administrative and Judicial Interpretation of the Immigration Act of 1924,” 720.

<sup>70</sup> In the Matter of Manuel and Angela Carbajal. BSI No. 7233, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, reel 11, frame 210. INS Records.

and the Carbajal children were legally admitted. Mexican immigrant children received legal privileges that many other immigrant children were deprived from. Like Angela and Manuel Carbajal, immigration records show that following the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917 thousands of unaccompanied Mexican children were admitted into the United States, so long they claimed they would attend day school.

In addition to immigration policy, the make-up of the population migrating north was also affected by what was happening in Mexico. During the Mexican Revolution, families that were displaced or children that were orphaned considered the United States as a political and social haven. One U.S. border inspector observed this demographic shift and stated:

Before the revolution began and for some time after, we had each day from two to four Pullmans, well filled; three to five first-class coaches, and two to four second-class coaches. First the Pullman class disappeared, then the first-class traveler, until now we have only the second-class arrival; and even this class has deteriorated. In normal times we had many of the laboring class who were in the prime of their life and fine specimens of physical manhood. This class has almost entirely disappeared, and only the ordinary laborer and a few women and children are now coming.<sup>71</sup>

These conditions gave the impression that Mexico's most vulnerable sector had displaced a more refined Mexican emigrant who could contribute to the well being of any community. One immigration official lamented over the demographic change by noting that "under the present conditions the quality of the average Mexican immigrant is far below the average of those who came to the United States under the normal conditions, the majority of recent arrivals being women and children and hardly self-supporting."<sup>72</sup>

What these immigrant officials disregarded was that labor recruiters and urban reformers,

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<sup>71</sup> James E. Trout to Office of Inspector, 23 March 1915. File# 962/1B, Reel 5, Frame 371. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service: Subject Correspondence Files, Part 2, Record Group 85, INS Records.

<sup>72</sup> Frank W. Heath to Office of Inspector, 22 March 1915. File# 233/5, reel 5, frame 376. INS Records.

most often, preferred the family unit to single males. The inclusion of women and children in Mexican communities appeared to sanitize the social risks attributed to the unmarried Mexican man.

### **General Population Trends in Chicago & Illinois**

Mexicans first made a national demographic presence in the U.S. during the 1920s. For the first time they were dispersed across the country in considerable numbers. They were a racial group that was not restricted to the southwest or relegated to one industry. As Manuel Gamio alluded in 1926, Mexicans were immigrants in the making and projected that the flow between both countries could not be stopped “unless a large army of Mexican and American police were to patrol the line.”<sup>73</sup> Gamio’s study affirmed their national presence and predicted a future that dismayed immigration restrictionist. An article in Washington D.C.’s *The United States Daily*, poignantly headlined “Mexicans Replacing European Labor,” echoed Gamio’s findings. The news story reported that Mexicans in the Midwest were contracted from Texas by labor agencies while others were simply “picked up” in Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and other cities.<sup>74</sup> A police officer in Chicago’s stockyards elaborated on this trend: “They are taking the place of these respectable, law-abiding, large familied [sic] Lithuanians and Poles.”<sup>75</sup> A journalist from Chicago’s *Herald Examiner* added that the arrival of Mexicans “might influence our organization in a way that would not agree with our

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<sup>73</sup> Gamio, *Preliminary Report on Mexican Immigration in the United States*, 12.

<sup>74</sup> “Mexicans Replacing European Labor in Sugar Beet Fields of Northern States.”

<sup>75</sup> Paul S. Taylor, “Crime and the Foreign Born: The Problem of the Mexican,” in *Report on Crime and the Foreign Born*, ed. Edith Abbott (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1931), 234.

attitude.”<sup>76</sup> Mexicans were everywhere. They heeded the call to fill the void of any industry and become part of an elaborate migratory circuit that required their brawn.

Chicago was an urban Mecca of the Midwest. Between 1890 and 1930, the city’s population increased exponentially. In 1850, for instance, Chicago was the twenty-fifth largest city in the country and by 1890 outpaced most urban areas making it the second most populous city behind New York City. It had risen from a swamp-town to a city of affluence, where neo-classical buildings began to occupy the city’s skyline. Chicago’s overall population stood at 1,099,850 in 1890 and increased to 3,375,329 in 1930—marking a 206 percent jump between those two decennials.<sup>77</sup> The dramatic population growth was mainly caused by the influx of white foreign-born groups. In 1860, the foreign-born were 54,624 of Chicago’s overall population and swelled to 783,428 in 1910. Between these years foreign-born whites caused approximately one-third of the growth, but this trend subsided when Mexicans began to arrive in the 1920s.<sup>78</sup> One historian characterized the population increase with ambivalence. “The giant city,” he noted “was renewing its blood-vessels with a tremendous and terrifying speed.”<sup>79</sup>

In 1860, for example, foreign-born whites were recorded at 35.5 percent of the regional population and fizzled to 28 percent by 1920. The proportion tilted in favor of the native-born as restrictive immigration policies prevented European immigrants from

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<sup>76</sup> “VI-29-26. Entrevista Dr. Dennison. Herald Examiner,” Box 3, Folder 11. *Gamio Papers*.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest Watson Burgess and Charles Shelton Newcomb, *Census Data of the City of Chicago, 1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 5-6. Also, see Helen Rankin Jeter, *Trends of Population in the Region of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), 22.

<sup>78</sup> Jeter, *Trends of Population in the Region of Chicago*, 24. In 1860, the foreign-born comprised 49.99 percent (54,624) of Chicago’s overall population. Though their numbers continued to increase, proportionally they dropped to 35.85 percent (783,428) in 1910. See, Lewis W. Hill, “The People of Chicago: Who Are We and Who Have We Been,” (Chicago: City of Chicago, Department of Development and Planning, 1976), 11-39.

<sup>79</sup> Lloyd Lewis and Henry Justin Smith, *Chicago: The History of Its Reputation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 286.

replenishing their migratory flow. In the late nineteenth century there were particular nationalities migrating to the Chicago area that had dwindled by the 1920s. Germans were indicative of this trend. In 1870, Germans comprised 38.5 percent of the foreign-born population, but by 1920 had dropped to 15.3 percent. In the same period, the percentage from Ireland fell from 23.8 to 6.1 percent. Other groups, however, did increase. Italians, Polish, and Russians were the three white foreign-born populations that experienced the most proportional growth. As a whole, these three nationalities were merely 6.9 percent in 1890 and by 1920 grew to 34.6 percent of the foreign-born population. By the end of WWI, Chicago had become the third most “foreign” city in the country, trailing only Boston and New York. Though Chicago continued to receive a multitude of European immigrants, the immigrant population would never achieve the proportion it had experienced in the nineteenth century. The total increase of non-white groups was slow-footed and first gained significant momentum during the 1920s. In 1850, for example, the “Negro” regional population stood at 641 and increased to 127,033 in 1920 out of which 109,458 were counted as living in the City of Chicago. Indeed, following the Civil War the increase of African Americans was massive, but even with this dramatic increase, they comprised about 0.03 percent of Chicago’s regional population in 1920. Those classified as white hailed on top with 96.6.<sup>80</sup> Chinese, Native

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<sup>80</sup> John M. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890-1936* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 20, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: State Compendium Illinois* (Government Printing Office, 1924), 68, Jeter, *Trends of Population in the Region of Chicago*, 33-35. Mexicans were classified as foreign-born white. Also see, Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), St Clair Drake and Horace Clayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, 1945), James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). For a concise, yet important, discussion on European migration, see Sucheng Chan, "European and Asian Immigration into the United States in Comparative Perspective, 1820s to 1920," in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Americans, and Japanese also began to migrate to the Midwest. The U.S. Census shows that in 1920, 94 “Indians” and 417 Japanese resided in Chicago. The Chinese represented the largest Asian group in Illinois and were mainly concentrated in Chicago. Of the 2,776 Chinese living in Illinois in 1920, 2,353 (84.76 percent) resided in Chicago. Nonetheless, as a whole, Asians comprised 0.1 percent of Chicago’s 1920 population. Even with these numbers, Chicago was largely a white city. For it was in the 1920s when Chicago became and thereafter remained a white city.<sup>81</sup>

### **Mexican Population in Chicago**

As the need for labor increased in the Midwest, so too did the migration of Mexicans. Records show that Mexicans first arrived in Chicago in large numbers as the Progressive Era faded away. For most of the early twentieth century they represented a minute percentage of Chicago’s racial make-up and would not comprise a significant percentage of the city’s total population until the 1960s. Beginning in 1860, the U.S. Census enumerated four foreign-born Mexicans in Chicago. Between 1860 and 1900 they increased to 102.<sup>82</sup> In 1931, University of Chicago sociologists Ernest Burgess and Charles Newcomb extracted data from U.S. Census tracts showing 252 Mexicans living in Chicago in 1910 and 1,310 in 1920.<sup>83</sup> The data reveal that Mexicans comprised an insignificant percentage of the immigrant populations that settled in Chicago. In 1910

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<sup>81</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: State Compendium Illinois*, 41. Also, see Jacalyn D. Harden, *Double Cross: Japanese Americans in Black and White Chicago* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), Barbara M. Posadas, "Crossed Boundaries in Interracial Chicago: Pilipino American Families since 1925," *Amerasia* 8, no. 2 (1981), Barbara M. Posadas and Roland L. Guyotte, "Unintentional Immigrants: Chicago's Filipino Foreign Students Become Settlers, 1900-1941," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 9, no. 2 (1990). Straus and Valentino argue that although Indians lived in Chicago since the 1800s, it was not until the 1920s when an “Indian community” developed. See, Anne Terry Straus and Debra Valentino, "Gender and Community Organization Leadership in the Chicago Indian Community," *American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 3/4 (2003).

<sup>82</sup> Hill, "The People of Chicago: Who Are We and Who Have We Been," 11-39. All of the population calculations made by researchers and government agencies do not always align. The contradictions become more apparent with the foreign-born populations.

<sup>83</sup> Burgess and Newcomb, *Census Data of the City of Chicago, 1920*, 19.



there were 188 foreign-born Mexicans in Chicago out of a 783,428 “foreign white stock” immigrants. They increased slightly in 1920, but only comprised 0.15 percent (1,224) of the total “foreign white stock” population in Chicago.<sup>84</sup> Out of the 28 foreign-born white nationalities recorded in Chicago, Mexicans numerically tied as the three smallest white groups with Armenians and Syrians.<sup>85</sup> Even with this lean percentage, between 1920 and 1926 Gamio recorded 2,923 remittances sent from Illinois to Mexico, 1,242 from Indiana, 3,318 from Texas, and 8,582 from California. This data showed that Illinois ranked third in terms of postal money orders mailed back to Mexico. Only California and Texas surpassed Illinois. These numbers were significant. They reveal the tendencies and high concentration of a Mexican population that maintained incomparable ties with their homeland.<sup>86</sup>

Yet, it is difficult to provide a figure that fairly estimates the population of racialized groups in Chicago. The U.S. Census Bureau typically looked at two major variables to estimate the quantity of non-white immigrants and racialized groups residing in Chicago. Census takers collected data on color, country of birth, and citizenship, which helped them distinguish between “Negro” groups, “White” groups, and foreign-born populations. Even so, it is difficult to come up with a definitive number for each population that also encompasses the native-born sector of each group. This problem is

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 21. Another source estimates there were 1,141 foreign born Mexicans in Chicago in 1920. See, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: State Compendium Illinois.*, page 41.

<sup>85</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: State Compendium Illinois.*, page 41. Paul S. Taylor found that “Texas-Mexicans” were tabulated as native born, thus resulting in an undercount of the overall Mexican population in Chicago. See table 17, Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, 124.

<sup>86</sup> Gamio, *Preliminary Report on Mexican Immigration in the United States*, 19. The 1930 U.S. Census revealed that Mexicans comprised approximately 85 percent of the “other races” classification in Illinois yet only about 0.004 percent of the overall population. African Americans made up a larger percentage of the overall population, but still represented a minute 0.04 percent, while Asian Americans represented 0.001, and Native Americans 0.0001. For a racial breakdown of the 1930 Census, see “3,873,457 Males and 37,757,197 Females Live in Illinois,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 6 1931.

even most poignant when analyzing the data collected on Asian Americans and U.S. born Mexicans. Unfortunately, U.S. born non-white groups remained undercounted. Their numbers remain ambiguous and can only be estimated. Mexicans, in particular, were classified as foreigners—not as natives. For instance, the *Instruction to Enumerators* distributed to U.S. Census takers in 1930 noted that “In order to obtain separate figures for this [Mexican] racial group, it has been decided that all persons born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, who are not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese, should be returned as Mexican.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, those who arrived in Chicago were not direct immigrants from Mexico, but also inter-state migrants that originated from Texas, Colorado, and California. Additionally, some were classified as “definitely white.”<sup>88</sup>

Even with this ambiguity, all data show clearly that Chicago was an overwhelmingly white immigrant city. It was made up of an eclectic mix of Eastern and Western European groups that came from a mix of political, social, and economic backgrounds.<sup>89</sup> Chicago was an immigrant conglomerate. African Americans lived there too. In fact, they preceded the arrival of many white-foreign born groups, yet held little political power. This was also the case for Asians and Latin Americans who first made noticeable inroads to Chicago’s racial make-up in the 1920s. Alan Spear’s study of Chicago’s African American community demonstrates that perhaps the most useful

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in, N.A., “Racial Classification in 1930 Census,” *Eugenical News* 16, no. 9 (1931): 150. The *Instructions for Enumerators* also stated: “Mexicans.—Practically all Mexican laborers are of a racial mixture difficult to classify, though usually well recognized in the localities where they are found.”

<sup>88</sup> Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

<sup>89</sup> James R. Barrett, “Unity and Fragmentation: Class, Race, and Ethnicity on Chicago’s South Side, 1900-1922,” *Journal of Social History* 17, no. 4 (1984), Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990), Hartmut Keil and John B. Jentz, *German Workers in Chicago: A Documentary History of Working-Class Culture from 1850 to World War I, The Working Class in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), Dominic A. Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the South Side, 1880-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Sanders, *The Education of an Urban Minority: Catholics in Chicago, 1833-1965*.

approach to understanding how race played-out in Chicago is to lend a keen eye and ear to the city's streets and neighborhoods.<sup>90</sup> A report on the religious and social conditions of Mexicans in Chicago appraised the racial complexity of the city in noting that "With our great blocks of foreign population we are not one city but many."<sup>91</sup> Like appendages to a larger whole, what took place in the streets and church pews was critical to how the whole body operated.

### **Chicago's Racial Density and Its Significance to Mexicans**

Chicago was, in fact, a multi-racial city. It was an aggregate of languages, religions, nationalities, and colors. A 1922 map produced by the United Charities of Chicago displays the location where Polish, German, Hungarians, Irish, Italians, and "Negroes" lived. It also displayed six "cosmopolitan" neighborhoods where no single racial group was said to predominate. Yet, the overall map revealed a case of severe racial segregation. Foreign-born whites were scattered throughout Chicago, but had claimed their respective spaces.<sup>92</sup> There were high concentrations of particular groups in neighborhoods where they occupied sizeable percentages of the local industries, schools, and churches. Race was critical for them and it would be even more when non-white groups attempted to make any inroads.

The concentration of racial groups in particular areas is evident in the data collected at the neighborhood level. Though the demographic weight of groups, like Mexicans, may appear to have no measurable influence in Chicago, they were critical

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<sup>90</sup> See, Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>91</sup> Robert C. Jones and Louis R. Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago* (Chicago: Committee Commission of the Chicago Church Federation, 1931), 29.

<sup>92</sup> United Charities of Chicago., *Sixty-Six Years of Service: An Account of the Activities of the United Charities of Chicago, Including Reports of Social Work Done and Financial Statement for the Period, October 1, 1919 to October 1, 1922* (Chicago: United Charities of Chicago, 1923), 89.

to the development of the city. This, however, requires a granular and intimate view of the urban space. According to demographic data analyzed in the mid 1920s by Helen R. Jeter, professor at the University of Chicago, Mexicans arrived to the Chicago's densest areas.<sup>93</sup> Rather, they were scattered throughout the city and never comprised the majority in any one neighborhood. There were small pockets where they created vibrant spaces. A University of Chicago student found that Mexicans who worked at Burlington Railroad Company were "scattered through one or two blocks" along 18<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson, for example.<sup>94</sup> As late as 1940, when the focus of this dissertation ends, the population data analyzed by Louis Wirth and Eleanor H. Bernert show that foreign-born Mexicans were a "leading nationality" in only six of seventy-five Chicago neighborhoods. Wirth and Bernert found that Mexicans comprised up to 11.6 percent of the foreign-born in particular neighborhoods. In the Riverdale neighborhood, southwest of Lake Calumet, Mexicans were recognized as one of the leading nationalities, but represented a measly 0.008 percent of the overall population. In the Near North West neighborhood that encircled Hull House, Mexicans comprised 9.5 percent of the foreign-born population in this area, yet only 0.02 percent of the total population.<sup>95</sup> At 11.6 percent of South Chicago's foreign-born, Mexicans did not reach one percent of its overall population. It is difficult to ascertain with certainty the population of Mexicans and the role that such figures presented on the practical affairs of the city.

Data indicate that Mexicans remained at the periphery in all quantitative measures. Their numerical presence was insignificant in comparison to African

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<sup>93</sup> Jeter, *Trends of Population in the Region of Chicago*, 26, 28.

<sup>94</sup> Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," 588.

<sup>95</sup> Louis Wirth and Eleanor H. Bernert, eds., *Local Community Fact Book of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949). The pages in this book are not numbered. Instead, each neighborhood is assigned a number.

Americans and foreign-born white populations. If city officials, labor contractors, educators, and settlement house workers in Chicago relied strictly on population data to address issues of the city, then Mexicans would have been easily ignored. But they were not. In a city like Chicago, shaped by Progressive Era politics and heavily influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology, hard data was not the sole variable used to understand the city. The people in Chicago knew that Mexicans, even at a fraction of Chicago's population, were significant to the Midwest's social milieu. Because Chicago was an immigrant city and its people understood the significance of race, Mexicans used these factors in their favor. Demographically, they remained elusive. They defied racial categorization. They were Mexican, colored, immigrant, or white—depending on the need.

CHAPTER 3  
MORE THAN LABORERS:  
MEXICANS AND THE IMMIGRANT WORLD IN CHICAGO

In the 1920s, the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio began charting the national dispersal of Mexicans across the United States. Gamio's collaboration with the Social Science Research Council revealed that Mexicans were slowly migrating to and settling in an array of regions across the country. A University of Chicago student pointed to the ubiquity of this migration. He noted, "Today from the switch yards of Newark to the stockyards of Chicago, from the beet fields of Colorado to the fisheries of Alaska, Juan, Pedro and Miguel are on our payrolls."<sup>1</sup> Mexicans fully entered Chicago's immigrant world in the 1920s. Affronted by the city's economic, racial, and political milieu, they could not stave off the misery of the migratory experience, the adversity of the city, or retreat from their tenuous immigrant identity. They appeared to be marching in goose step towards social disintegration. After settling and creating new communities, Mexicans found that Chicago belonged to them, as much as they belonged to the city. It was the place where they worked during the day, walked the streets in the afternoon, learned in the evenings, and danced during the dark hours of the night. It was, most importantly, the place that began to reshape them and also affect how they understood the world around them. This chapter looks at the formation of Chicago's first Mexican

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<sup>1</sup> "The Mexican in Chicago by Samuel Shepard" Page 8. Box 134, folder 4, *Ernest Burgess Papers*, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. Hereafter cited as the *Burgess Papers*.

*colonias* that developed in the early twentieth century. It also looks at the ways in which their racial identity was shaped by the migratory experience.

### **Reaching Chicago: Provenance and Regional Distribution**

A 1930 report written by Robert C. Jones and sponsored by the Chicago Theological Seminary revealed that sixty-one percent of the 1,300 Mexicans who registered with Chicago's Immigrant's Protective League (IPL) and the Mexican Consul were from Jalisco, Michoacan, and Guanajuato—Mexico's central plateau.<sup>2</sup> Anita Jones, an IPL worker, seemed to use the same data in her estimate, but included Zacatecas as a fourth sending state.<sup>3</sup> The trend in sending communities did not veer off too much from other U.S. states that were receiving Mexicans. In fact, cities in Texas and California revealed the same trend.<sup>4</sup> However, data collected in Chicago that considered the remaining thirty-nine percent not accounted for by Robert Jones or Anita Jones showed a more nuanced source of origin. In the fall of 1926 the Mexican Consul in Chicago reported that of the Mexicans who were from Mexico, forty percent were from Jalisco, thirty percent from Michoacán, twenty percent from Guanajuato, and ten percent from other states in the central plateau.<sup>5</sup> Unlike other regions, Chicago's Mexican population was also comprised of a group that had already resided in the United States prior to

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<sup>2</sup> "Hypothesis Relating To the Religious Life of the Mexican in Chicago by Robert C. Jones." *Survey and Research Papers*, Chicago Theological Seminary, Box 60, Folder 3, pg 1. Hereafter cited as the *Survey Papers*. 1,151 were registered with IPL and 168 with the Mexican Consul.

<sup>3</sup> Anita Edgar Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," *Social Science Review* 2 (1928): 581. Other than sharing the same last name, there was no relation between Robert and Anita. There is a Margaret Jones from Columbia University who also researched Mexicans in Chicago during this period and who also holds no relation with the aforementioned. See, Margaret Jones, "An Introduction to a Study of Culture Change in a Chicago Mexican Community" (MA Thesis, Columbia University, 1934).

<sup>4</sup> See Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> "Informe Sobre los Ciudadanos Mexicanos Residentes en La Jurisdiccion del Consulado de Mexico en Chicago, IL" *Manuel Gamio Papers*, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley Box 3, Folder 14. Hereafter cited as the *Gamio Papers*.

settling in Chicago. Ruth Camblon, Assistant Superintendent for United Charities of Chicago, found data that supported the indirect nature of Mexican settlement in Chicago. Using data she had collected on Mexicans that she serviced near Hull House, she determined that Mexicans were migrating to Chicago from places within the United States. Her data found that Mexicans originated from twenty different states in the United States and nineteen states in Mexico prior to settling in Chicago.<sup>6</sup> Supporting this find, historian Louise Año Kerr showed in her dissertation that only fifteen percent of the Mexicans arriving in Chicago came directly from Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

A distinguishing trait of Mexican Midwestern migrants was the roundabout migratory pattern etched in their experiences as they reached Chicago. Illustrative of this pattern is the migratory experience of “D.G.,” a Mexican born in Tequila, Jalisco who arrived in Chicago in 1917. His excursion to Chicago began in 1913 when he migrated to his neighboring state of Guanajuato to work, then to Mexico City and finally to Tamaulipas before returning to his home state of Jalisco. Years later, after exhausting his employment options in Mexico, he made his first trip to the United States. Although a contract laborer promised that California would be his final destination, he ended up working near the San Carlos Indian Reservation in Arizona. He eventually migrated to the Midwest where he worked in the railroad yards of Kansas City and then worked at the Dodge Brothers Factory in Detroit. He also worked in Pittsburgh, Akron, Cleveland, and “other places.” In 1917, four years after he had first left his birthplace and after migrating to at least eight different cities, he ultimately settled in Chicago.<sup>8</sup> The case of an unnamed

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<sup>6</sup> Ruth S. Camblon, “Mexicans in Chicago,” *The Family* 7, no. 7 (1926): 208.

<sup>7</sup> Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, “The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1976), 21.

<sup>8</sup> “D.G.” Box 56, Folder Life Histories Part 1, *Survey Papers*.



male and female couple recorded by one of Detroit's social agencies reveals the way Chicago, unlike the case of D.G., was used as a migratory cooling point where Mexicans could temporarily settle before packing their belongings and moving elsewhere. Detroit's social agency stated that the Mexican couple had entered the U.S. via Jacksonville, Texas in 1917 and stayed there for ten months working on the railroad. While in Texas, the couple worked in various railroad companies located in cities like Hawkins, Ross, and Dallas prior to relocating to Chicago in 1920, where they remained for about one more year. The scanty records of this couple show they moved to Detroit where they lived until 1928 when "he" was laid off from the city's gas company and subsequently applied for relief.<sup>9</sup> This indirect journey, whether from Mexico, the United States, or both, defined much of the migratory experience that was shaping Mexican Chicago.

The data collected by the Mexican Consul, the IPL, and the United Charities was left for open interpretation. Though surveys revealed the provenance of Mexicans, it was subjected to urban reformers, city officials, social scientists, and policy-makers who were interested in making sense of Mexican migrants' racial background. To understand Mexicans, Chicagoans looked towards the American Southwest, to Mexico, and at other racialized groups to gauge the racial make-up of these new immigrants. They examined research on Mexico and, most often, came up with a contradictory and conflicting depiction of a typical Mexican. Anita Jones, for example, described women from the state of Jalisco as "especially beautiful, largely on account of fair skin and well developed physique."<sup>10</sup> Matthew Concha, for example, who was one of the few Mexicans who had become a U.S. citizen, was described as having a "keen and analytical mind." Concha's

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<sup>9</sup> "Routes Taken By Mexicans in Reaching Chicago." Page 3. Box 60, Folder Misc Manuscripts, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," 583.

“pure white ancestry” had, an observer concluded, “opened ways into American life which are closed to most of his countrymen.”<sup>11</sup>

Central Mexico, which includes the states of Guanajuato, Michoacan, and Jalisco, was a region described historically as *mestizo*—a mixed-race people of indigenous and Spanish ancestry. Although Mexicans who arrived in Chicago largely originated from the central plateau, the range in color and racial identity was wide. Most observers in Chicago used descriptors typically ascribed to U.S. Native Americans to racialize Mexicans. Chicagoans addressed Mexicans as immigrant competitors, unfit immigrants, law-abiding immigrants, and even their best immigrants. Generally they were described as “the most recent addition to the city’s foreign population.”<sup>12</sup> These discontinuous perceptions played well for their racial positioning. Mexicans in Chicago were learning the racial politics of the city and were slowly accepting the fact that, regardless of their small proportion to other groups, they were no longer interim inhabitants who could lay no claim to the city.

The most descriptive insight regarding the racialization of Mexicans was collected by workers from the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) that had been hired during the New Deal to walk the city streets and write about the daily lives of the people they encountered.<sup>13</sup> In Chicago, a cadre of writers specifically looked at immigrant groups—one being the Mexican population. An FWP worker noted,

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<sup>11</sup> Robert C. Jones and Louis R. Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago* (Chicago: Committee Commission of the Chicago Church Federation, 1931), 23.

<sup>12</sup> “Point of interest not on Tours”, *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. FWP workers described them as their most recent additions and immigrants. Also, see “The Mexicans in Chicago #3” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 1.

<sup>13</sup> As Shaw did in her study of former slaves, I too read against the grain and am cognizant that these sources limit our understanding of the interviewees’ perspectives. These recorded accounts must be re-evaluated and juxtaposed with other documents to provide a more nuanced and latitudinal view. For more

The Mexican immigrant is almost entirely from the lower and most ignorant classes of people; but while their ignorance and low standards of living make them a serious element to cope with to the social worker they nevertheless rank high in social behavior, with an exceptionally low rate of delinquents. They are law abiding, said to be because they have an innate fear of the law.<sup>14</sup>

As FWP workers mapped Chicago, they found that Mexicans did not fit within their traditional racial ideal. Rather, Mexicans could be white, black, Asian, Indian, or racially mixed. What FWP workers found and wrote seems contradictory at best, yet reveals a rich story of the array of racial identities Mexican immigrants seemed to fit. A particular FWP worker noted that the Mexicans he encountered were “predominantly Indian in origin.”<sup>15</sup> This observer was obsessed with the racial make-up and approximated that about five percent of the Mexicans in Chicago were from the *criollo* group (Spaniards naturalized as Mexican), which was, he concluded, much less than in San Antonio, Houston, or Los Angeles. The FWP worker did not explain how he came to this conclusion, but it is clear that he used color a variable in his analysis. Whether Mexicans appeared darker or whiter was, perhaps, the best variable FWP workers could use to make a racial approximation. This FWP writer compared Mexicans in Chicago to those from the “Middle West” and the east and began to regionalize the Mexican experience. “As in Chicago,” the FWP writer noted, “the Mexicans of Pittsburgh, Detroit, Buffalo, and New York live next to the railroads, in the core of the slums and are part of that army which does the work that other immigrants and of course native Americans disdain.”<sup>16</sup> At

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on the use of similar documents, see Stephanie J. Shaw, “Using the Wpa Ex-Slave Narratives to Study the Impact of the Great Depression,” *Journal of Southern History* 69, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>14</sup> “The Mexicans in Illinois,” *Federal Writers Project Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 4, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. Hereafter cited to as the *FWP Papers*.

<sup>15</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 20-21.

<sup>16</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 20-21. Manuel Bueno describes as having interviewed a Mexican “creole.” See “The Mexican in Chicago by Manuel Bueno,” Box 188, folder 4, pg 7, *Burgess Papers*.

least spatially, Mexicans in Chicago were different from those in the West. Though many originated from Texas and California, they appeared to undergo an additional process of urbanization and racialization that subjected them to Chicago's social practices.

Nationally, characterizing Mexicans as Indians meant they were situated as a social threat that could not be assimilated. It was always better to welcome the lighter Mexicans who had undergone a process of racial *meztlizaje*, than any native Mexican Indian who was believed to be intellectually backward. An article in the *World's Work* described Mexican Yaqui and Maya Indians as "less unassimilable [sic] than Japanese and Chinese" because they "demonstrated little capacity for citizenship in their own country" and would "show even less in this."<sup>17</sup> This fear was real, and the way Mexicans were understood was continually shaped in relation to other racialized groups in the United States.<sup>18</sup> City leaders in Chicago did not have any control as to which Mexican racial type they would receive and, thus, these conceptions were crucial as to what social programs they would put in place. The Mexican Indian appeared to be cutoff from modernity, while the Mexican mestizo and "white" Mexican was modern or on its way there. But, the characterizations of the Mexican Indian were not solely collected through the observation of social scientists or FWP workers. In some rare cases, Mexicans self-reported themselves as Indian. In her 1926 study of Chicago, Ruth Camblon interviewed a man from Guadalajara, Jalisco who asserted he was from "pure Aztec lineage." In a separate case, Camblon described a man from Michoacan who had "oriental physical characteristics," which Camblon attributed to being Indian. He and his family had "low

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<sup>17</sup> "'Little Mexico' in Northern Cities," *The World's Work*, September 1924, 466.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on how racial ideologies are developed and then applied to a variety of racialized groups, see Natalia Molina, "The Power of Racial Scripts: What the History of Mexican Immigration to the United States Teaches Us About Relational Notions of Race," *Latino Studies* 8, no. 2 (2010).

stature, round flat heads, almond-shaped, glistening brown eyes, and a dark olive complexion,” yet he spoke and read Spanish, to Camblon’s surprise, “intelligibly.”<sup>19</sup> Camblon also described one woman as a “typical” Mexican Indian because her hair was “parted in the middle and hanging in two braids.”<sup>20</sup> In a separate case, Pedro Martinez was simply described as “strongly Indian.”<sup>21</sup> The racial make-up of Mexicans who arrived in Chicago during the first mass migration puzzled outsiders. In a run-in with an eighteen-year-old Mexican male, University of Chicago anthropology student Robert Redfield described him as “being good looking, intelligent” and with “little or no Indian blood.”<sup>22</sup>

Arbitrary categorizations were privy to the social conceptions of other racialized groups in Chicago. Questions regarding how they fit the black, Asian, Native American, or European immigrant model were constant for Chicagoans who interacted with new arrivals. A booklet titled “Mexico” that was distributed by Chicago’s Methodist Episcopal Church was an “up-to-date” summary on “interesting information on the country.” Aside from recounting the Methodist missionary activities in Mexico, it described Mexico’s racial make-up. It noted that in Mexico, thirty-eight percent of its people were “descendants of the Aztecs and other Indian tribes,” forty-three percent were of “mixed blood” (mostly Indian and Spanish), and that the remaining nineteen percent

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<sup>19</sup> Camblon, “Mexicans in Chicago,” 208.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: 209.

<sup>21</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> “The Mexicans in Chicago, Journal,” *Robert Redfield Papers*, 1917-1958, Box 57, Folder 20, Pg 21. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. Hereafter cited as *Redfield Papers*. For more on the importance of Robert Redfield study of Mexicans in Chicago, see Patricia Arias and Jorge Durand, *Mexicanos En Chicago: Diario De Campo De Robert Redfield, 1924-1925* (Guadalajara, Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2008).

were white.<sup>23</sup> Even if described a God's children, Mexicans could not escape racial classification.

Though there was uncertainty as to the distinctive nature of Mexicans who migrated to Chicago, there were some points made about their unifying characteristics. In Chicago police records, for example, they were classed with "All Others" while the Department of Public Welfare referred to them as the "Mexican race."<sup>24</sup> Yet, some Germans who worked alongside Mexicans referred to them as "niggers."<sup>25</sup> A University of Chicago graduate student noted that, for example, "the majority of Mexicans have one unifying mark, their dark complexion, which they cannot remove. And this fact has important consequences in their relations with the larger community."<sup>26</sup>

The classification system imposed on Mexicans by Robert Redfield, an anthropology student at the University of Chicago, ranged from "Indian type," "superior Mexicans," "mostly white," to "white Mexican."<sup>27</sup> Some Mexicans were cast as a mild hybrid of Spanish and Indian—a group that had overcome generations of oppression. They were neither white nor brown. Even if Mexicans were subjugated by the white racial category, as described by Redfield, the clench of nationality situated them as white "Mexicans." They could not yet fully acquire the badge of simply being called "white." A

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<sup>23</sup> "Mexico: Paragraph Pictures," *Survey Papers*, Box 58, Folder Misc Info: Mexico" CTS.

<sup>24</sup> For Department of Public Welfare, see footnote 1 on page 5 of Elizabeth A. Hughes, *Living Conditions for Small-Wage Earners in Chicago* (Chicago: Department of Public Welfare, 1925), 5. For information on the police, see "Mexicans in the Great Lakes Region" *Samuel Kincheloe Papers*, Box 52 Folder 3, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. Hereafter cited as the *Kincheloe Papers*.

<sup>25</sup> Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, vol. 7.2 (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Economics, 1932), 116.

<sup>26</sup> "Juvenile Delinquency in Ethnic Colonies" *E. Jackson Baur Papers*, Box 2, Folder "Burgess 1934-1939," University of Chicago, page 9. Hereafter cited as the *Baur Papers*.

<sup>27</sup> "The Mexicans in Chicago: Journal, 1924-1925," *Redfield Papers*, page 41, 95, 100, and 103. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. University of Chicago. Hereafter cited as Redfield Papers.

Board of National Missions pamphlet published in the 1920s titled, *Enter the Mexican* detailed this complexity.

The American census with its smooth classification puts down the Mexican immigrant as “white.” Yet as we look over a crowd of Mexicans and note the range from the fair skin of the Spanish type, through all gradations, to the bronze hue of the Indian, we wonder where he really belongs. He is a walking experiment in the fusion of races.<sup>28</sup>

In one case a Mexican was described as “basically Indian, with only an overcoating [sic] of Spanish speech and customs, he represents an indigenous civilization, in many respects superior to the European system which conquered it.”<sup>29</sup> Their *indianess* did more than distinguish them from Mexico’s embattled past that many Americans understood. It helped situate them in a racialized system that they would soon inhabit. As the Board of National Missions pamphlet noted: although “the racial differences are of decreasing significance in the thinking of modern scholars. To the man in the street, however, a difference in facial color still means distrust and prejudice and sometimes fear.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Little Old Mexico: Colonias, Neighborhoods, and Mexican Spaces**

Chicagoans had many names for Mexican spaces. FWP workers described them as “Tamaletown,” “Old Mexico” or “Little Old Mexico.” The picturesque nature of these Mexican districts fascinated observers who described them as “one of the most gay and colorful colonies in the city of Chicago.”<sup>31</sup> But these “gay” and “colorful” descriptions did not concur with the actual physical spaces Mexicans inhabited. Mexicans generally

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<sup>28</sup> Charles A. Thompson, “Enter the Mexican.” Page 1, Circa 1930. Box 60, Folder Misc Info: Mexico, *Survey Papers*, CTS. Thompson mentions that “The Spaniard” who was a “well-mixed product from Iberian, Celt, Goth, and Moor” did not hesitate to “mingle his blood with the various Indian tribes” in Mexico. He also noted that “small increments” of “Negro and Oriental blood” had been added.

<sup>29</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, “Enter the Mexican,” page 4.

<sup>31</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. Also see, “The Spanish and Mexican Dance in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 1. Also, see “Mexicans to Stage Own Opera,” *Chicago Daily News*, March 7 1930.

resided in overcrowded tenement quarters, multi-family dwellings, wet basements, poorly ventilated flats, abandoned railway box cars, faulty wooden shanties, dingy back rooms, converted carriage cars, or in dilapidated apartments with yard-toilets that were more of a health hazard than a modern amenity (see images 1-6).

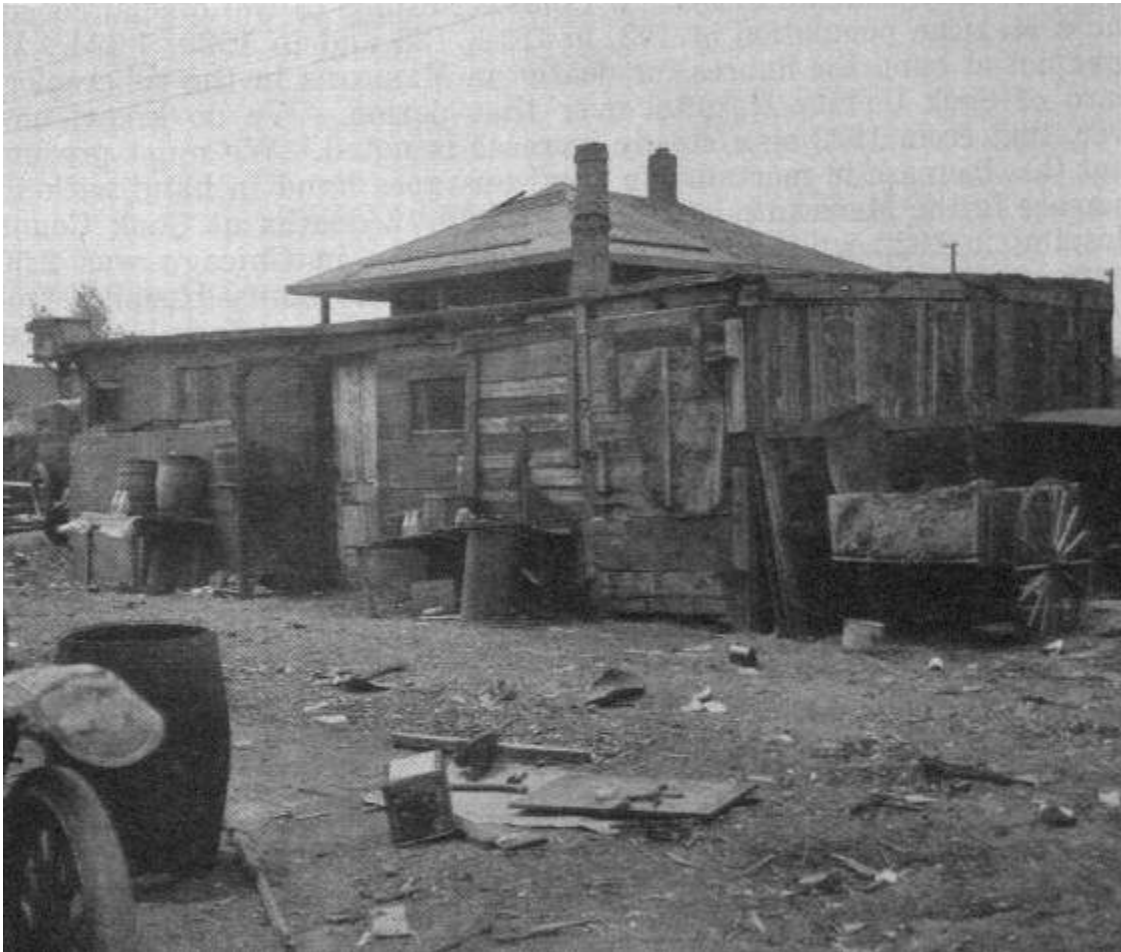
**IMAGE 1:** Photo of a “remodeled” box car in a typical Mexican railroad camp in Chicago.



Source: Benjamin Goldberg (1929), “Tuberculosis in Racial Types with Special Reference to Mexicans.” *Bulletin of the City of Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium* 9, no. 3/4: 9.

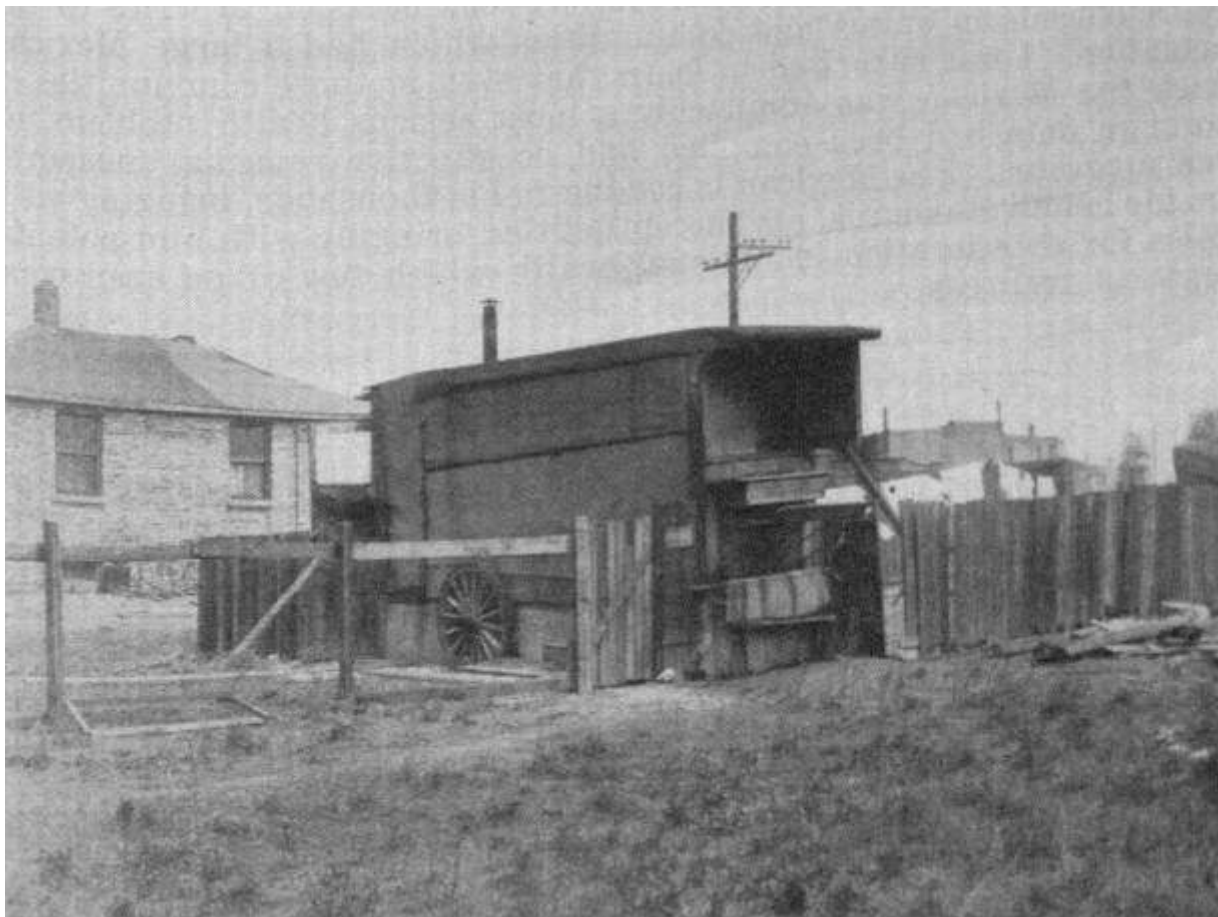


**IMAGE 2:** Photo of a Mexican house in a Chicago alley.



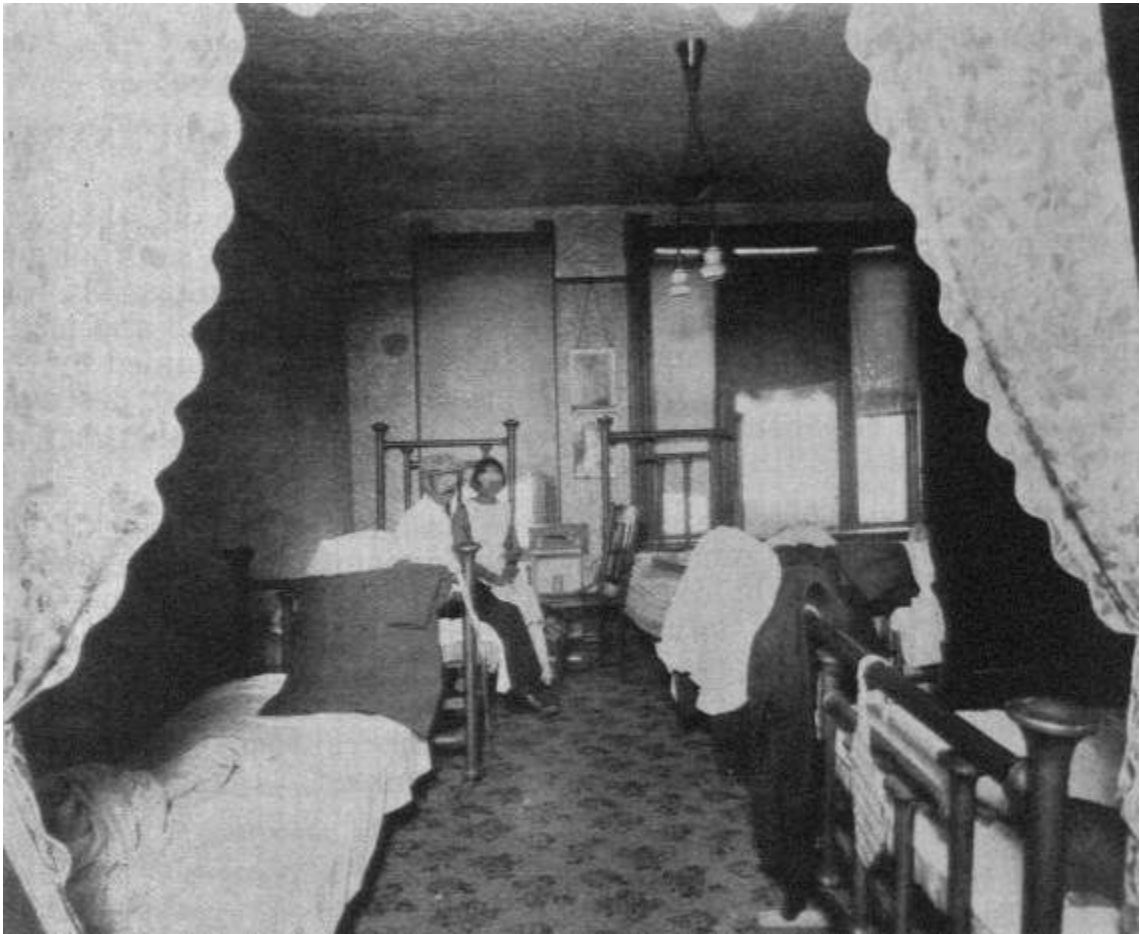
Source: Goldberg, "Tuberculosis in Racial Types with Special Reference to Mexicans," page 33.

**IMAGE 3:** Photo of a discarded “van” used as a Mexican home.



Source: Goldberg, page 5.

**IMAGE 4:** Photo of the interior of a boarding house operated by Mexicans. About five men occupied this room. The woman in this photo was reported as having tuberculosis, living with her “own family of three” in this building, and as being the in-house cook for ten men. The eyes of the woman and man were blanked out in the original photo to maintain their anonymity.



Source: Goldberg, page 23.

**IMAGE 5:** Photo of the interior of a converted box car in an unnamed Mexican railroad camp.



Source: Goldberg, page 19.

**IMAGE 6:** This is a photo of the interior of a Mexican home in Chicago.



Source: Goldberg, page 12.

In a speech delivered in Chicago during the 1928 annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, a leading economist from the University of Texas argued that Mexicans were reinvigorating the undesirable conditions of the slums. He noted:

We are having "Mexican districts," and the ancient "battle with the slum" will have to be fought all over again, perhaps on a more dismal and distracting scale. The corral, the jacal, the airless, lightless room, which no one would use, is making its reappearance on the stage for numberless Mexican family tragedies. Helpless and speechless, because the Mexican learns English with difficulty and often not at all, he is exposed to all the ravages of callous landlordism, often by members of his own race, and to a shameless padrone system, invariably by members of his own race. Even the Negro has managed to climb higher in the general raising of the average standard of living. The Mexican now forms, and for a long time will continue to form, the residual group, and in the near future will have to struggle desperately against the threatening ravages of destitution, and a lurid yellow press will regale us again with the sentimental titbits [sic] of how "the other half lives."<sup>1</sup>

The living conditions Mexicans were subjected to, it was reported, "Would many times be productive of crime."<sup>2</sup> In an earlier report printed by Chicago's Department of Public Welfare, it described Mexicans, along with African Americans, to be the "latest heirs to the city's worst housing" and to be living in the "most used, most outworn and derelict housing which the city keeps."<sup>3</sup> One FWP worker described Mexicans homes as having been "discarded by other immigrant groups."<sup>4</sup> The fact that Mexicans inhabited discarded living spaces was a subtle implication that a process of ethnic and racial succession was taking place. The Department of Public Welfare report echoed the FWP observation by noting that the living spaces once occupied by "early immigrants" were acquired by

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<sup>1</sup> Max Sylvius Handman, "Economic Reasons for the Coming of the Mexican Immigrant," *American Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 4 (1930): 611. Handman's argument is that Mexicans are repeating the process described by Jacob Riis. See, Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Livingstone Warnshuis, "Crime and Criminal Justice among the Mexicans of Illinois," in *Report on Crime and the Foreign Born*, ed. Edith Abbott (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1931), 278.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, *Living Conditions for Small-Wage Earners in Chicago*, 9 and 61.

<sup>4</sup> "Mexicans in Our Midst," *FWP Papers*, 193, Folder 5, pg 18.

“Slavs, Lithuanians and Italians.” However, these groups were now “giving way,” the report found, to the newest arrivals from the “South and Mexico.”<sup>5</sup> A young Mexican man living with a Jew “who didn’t speak English very well” noted that he wanted to find a room with an “American family” so that he could learn English and “see something of American life.”<sup>6</sup> A national report published by the Federal Emergency Administration Public Works one decade later continued to observe the trend of ethnic succession that persisted in areas with dilapidated housing. The report noted that,

It was predominantly [sic] Irish and German in the earlier years; then Scandinavian and Slavic, then Italian, Negro and Mexican. The latest comers always seem to crowd into the worst housing and to have the highest delinquency rates. Their predecessor move into better neighborhoods and adapt themselves gradually to the higher standards of behavior they find in vogue their.<sup>7</sup>

Improving the dwellings of all citizens went hand-in-hand with the belief that it would improve the quality of citizens. The report further claimed that, “If a farmer wants good livestock, he knows that he must give them good housing—dry, clean, spacious, sunny, and airy. It should be equally obvious that if a nation wants good citizens, it must see that they have good housing.”<sup>8</sup> These observations were critical in promoting comprehensive housing policies and local zoning ordinances that sought to improve living conditions in cities. It was recognized that a good quality living space was not simply for the betterment of the nation, but also for a harmonious social environment. The 1935 federal report went so far as to assert that the “natural” result of poor living conditions was “class hatred, social unrest, and revolutionary propaganda.” The report further affirmed that the

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes, *Living Conditions for Small-Wage Earners in Chicago*, 9. This was one of the rare reports that specifically compared African Americans and Mexicans in Chicago.

<sup>6</sup> “A.G.” Box 56, Folder titled “Life Histories (Chicago/Detroit), part 1.” Survey Papers, CTS.

<sup>7</sup> Edith Elmer Wood, “Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States,” (Washington, D.C.: Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, 1935), 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

individuals most threatened were the children and youth because they were “putty-like” and “moldable.”<sup>9</sup> Even after noting the probability of delinquency and the blighted living conditions, observers believed there was a slight chance that Mexicans, especially the younger ones, could be next in line to join in on the assimilation process. Yet, the implication of this framework relied on quantitative growth for qualitative improvement. Most directly, better housing conditions were based on idea that immigrants from previous waves would be “pushed out” of the slums. In order for Mexicans and their youth to move up the racial hierarchy, Chicago’s racial and immigrant make-up could not remain static—newcomers needed to arrive and the reinvention of race needed to occur for children to climb up the racial ladder.<sup>10</sup>

### **Mexicans in their Homes and the Organization of Space**

A visit to an unnamed Mexican home in Chicago revealed that Mexicans had a strategy to survive in the winter months when work was scarce and the discomfort was so high that Mexicans were continually on the hunt looking for better places to live.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Redfield reported that Mexicans,

[P]ile up progressively larger and larger numbers during December, January, Fenruary [sic], March,--as the small accumulated surplus is exhausted. Unlike all other national groups, the Mexicans come here with no personal property, no household gods [sic], no furniture, no clothing often but what they have on.<sup>12</sup>

An observer who entered a Mexican home reported seeing children “under foot and over head.” Babies were “swinging in hammocks over the beds” and there was “scarcely room

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>10</sup> Wood discussed the danger of relying on a *laissez-faire* approach to improving housing conditions since population growth among many U.S. cities were coming to a halt. She advocate for a more hands on approach that challenged the unregulated approaches to ethnic succession. See, Ibid., 19.

<sup>11</sup> “The Mexican in Chicago by Manuel Bueno,” *Burgess Papers*, Box 188, folder 4, pg 30. A portion of the archival collections containing material at the University of Chicago underwent a numbering process. As a result, some of the boxes and folders numbers I cite may very well not correspond with studies conducted prior to my research.

<sup>12</sup> “The Mexicans in Chicago: Journal, 1924-1925,” *Redfield Papers*, page 25.



to pass between trunks and beds.”<sup>13</sup> Robert Redfield noted that Mexicans lived in boarding houses and crowded spaces as a way to make the high cost of rent bearable for families. They live “so thick, though” Redfield noted, “it’s cheap for them at that.”<sup>14</sup> A University of Chicago student who was conducting a study on Mexicans described his sojourn into one of the Mexican neighborhoods as having to sustain “offensive odor” from “refuse” as he worked his way through an alley that was “very muddy.”<sup>15</sup> After Manuel Gamio interviewed Josefina Martinez and her family, he noted that they lived in a house with five small rooms and an outhouse that was in “fatal conditions.” The pipes in the Martinez home were wet and the basement was full of water and debris. Though the house had electrical wiring, an electric grill, a gas stove, the appliances were not installed and, as a result, the Martinez family had reverted to using coal. The house, nevertheless, appeared to be tidy. It contained “American furniture,” a brass bed, leather chairs, carpets, and “a bit of Mexican influence in the furniture.” The entire house was clean, Gamio observed, except for the kitchen which was dirty and covered with flies.<sup>16</sup> In El Paso, a rail way engineer claimed that Mexicans accepted abject poverty as long as they remained Mexican. “We quarter them in bunk houses constructed of old ties and occasionally of brick, stone or adobe;” the engineer noted, “all of which are provided with doors, windows and chimneys or fireplaces with chimneys. This is usually satisfactory till he becomes Americanized, at which time, if a married man, he provides himself with stove, bedstead and camp cooking utensils.”<sup>17</sup> Few landlords attempted to

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<sup>13</sup> Camblon, “Mexicans in Chicago,” 210.

<sup>14</sup> “The Mexicans in Chicago: Journal, 1924-1925,” *Redfield Papers*, page 50.

<sup>15</sup> “The Mexican in Chicago by Manuel Bueno,” *Burgess Papers*, Box 188, folder 4, pg 7.

<sup>16</sup> “VIII-6-26—Casa de Josefina Martinez-4548 Justine Street” *Gamio Papers*, Box 3, Folder 11. The original source is in Spanish.

<sup>17</sup> “Peculiarities of Mexican Labor,” *Railway Age Gazette* 1912, 529.

improve these conditions. If there was a choice as to who occupied their rental property, Mexicans were preferred over African American tenants because Mexicans lived in larger groups and could, consequently, pay more for the same living space. Landlords found tactics to increase the profitability of housing Mexicans by increasing their rent. An interview with a “white Mexican” revealed he could garner a lower rent only if he was successful in passing as an American. In the interview he noted:

This apartment that we are living in is not very satisfactory. It is too low and damp although it is not in the basement. I have been looking around some for a better place. The other day I found a nice place which the landlady said rented for twenty-five dollars a mont [sic] unfurnished. “que bueno” I said to my boy who was with me. The lady then at once asked me whether we were Mexicans. We told her that we were. She then said that she had made a mistake that the rent was forty dollars and not twenty-five.<sup>18</sup>

Another Mexican noted that the landlords who kept boarders were “often heartless” because they bled the boarders for all they could.<sup>19</sup> As it was reported by one observer, “Very few Mexican families are ever evicted for non-payment of rent. On this score they are the antithesis of the negroes, who are the poorest payers in the world.”<sup>20</sup> In one particular case Camblon entered the home of a Mexican family who migrated from Houston and resided in the rear of a two-story frame house located near railroad tracks that had three small rooms. The building, Camblon observed, had been abandoned by all of the races except by the “colored” tenants. The house had a table made of boxes, a makeshift bed made of bedsprings and boxes, and a small stove. These homes were poorly ventilated and crowded, which health officials correlated to their poor health. This house was so badly insulated and the family had such few clothes that when the winter

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<sup>18</sup> “The Mexicans both in Chicago and in Detroit...”, page 6. Box 60, Folder Misc Manuscripts, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>19</sup> “House of G’s” Box 56, Folder Family Histories Part 1, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>20</sup> George T. Edson (1927), “Mexicans in our Northcentral States,” page 35, Box 13, Folder 38, *Paul Taylor Papers*.

months hit one child died of pneumonia.<sup>21</sup> But the fact that these buildings had been abandoned by everyone, except by the “colored” tenants showed the social position Mexicans occupied. Although they were thought of as the “antithesis of the negroes,” as a whole, they lived among them and remained tied to the strict racial system practiced in Chicago.

The historical evidence that has been preserved provides insight into the living arrangements of Mexicans; however, it is largely from point of view of social workers, sociologist, and urban reformers who surveyed their homes. In rare instances we have records from the point of view of Mexicans who described their own homes. For example, a Mexican recorded as “D.G.” recounted how a pastor had written negative articles for a local newspaper regarding their living conditions, which “a good many [Mexicans] criticized the article.” Although the actual public exchange might not have been preserved, it is clear that Mexicans viewed their own homes with greater admiration. This is not to say they accepted the subpar living conditions, but that they recognized the work it took them to build their household—even if it was not the most ideal. As D.G. further noted, “What he [the priest] said was largely true but it wasn’t very complimentary to the colony...[h]is descriptions of the conditions under which we live was considered to be a blow at the prestige of the Mexican immigrants. In that regard I am reminded of the proberb [sic]: El que dice la verdad no peca, sino incomoda. (He who tells the truth does not sin but irritates.).”<sup>22</sup>

Despite the despicable living conditions, there were some social agencies that felt compelled to report on their positive attributes. A health report by the Chicago Central

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<sup>21</sup> Camblon, “Mexicans in Chicago,” 208-09. Also, see “*Conferencia Dr. Mexueiro---Julio 21 de 1926*” pg 25, *Gamio Papers*, Box 3, Folder 11.

<sup>22</sup> “D.G.” Box 56, Folder 1, Survey Papers, CTS.

Free Dispensary noted that Mexicans “were quite above the average for cleanliness.”<sup>23</sup> In general, Mexicans left a positive impression on workers from the Central Free

Dispensary organization who noted they were,

impressed upon us the fact that the average Mexican has unusual native intelligence, a very pleasing courtesy and a marked ability to get along happily in very poor surroundings and with few or no possessions. These native instincts make them, in our opinion, a very desirable addition to our American mixture.<sup>24</sup>

Yet officials were careful to project how Mexicans would fair in the migratory process.

They admired their potentials, but measured their adaptability based on their “admixture.”

Soon enough, Mexicans became subjects of the Chicago School of Sociology who sought to scientifically understand the multiple aspects of the urban social environment.<sup>25</sup>

In 1930 Robert C. Jones, a student at the Chicago Theological Seminary, conducted a preliminary study on Mexican communities across Chicago and shared his findings with the Chicago Church Federation. His tentative results suggested that Mexicans could not survive in Chicago because it was “so strange” and “often antagonistic.” Jones’ Chicago Theological Seminary study on religious adaptation was led by Professor Samuel Kincheloe, who was a recent graduate of the University of Chicago. Kincheloe, along with Jones, was interested in finding how religious affiliation affected the social adaptation of Mexicans in Chicago. This period of “racial dislocation” was critical, Jones

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<sup>23</sup> “Our Mexican Patients at the Central Free Dispensary,” pg 5, *Rush Medical Center Archives*, Central Free Dispensary Records, Box 4.

<sup>24</sup> “Our Mexican Patients at the Central Free Dispensary,” pg 7, *Rush Medical Center Archives*, Central Free Dispensary Records, Box 4.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the Chicago School of Sociology, see Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Though many of the primary sources I use for this study are from prominent members of the Chicago School of Sociology, I do not intend to replicate the analysis provided by Yu. However, it is critical to note that many of the social scientists in California and Texas who wrote on Mexicans were heavily influenced by the social scientific work produced in Chicago. For an important critique of the Chicago School of Sociology consult chapter two of Yu’s book.

claimed, especially for Mexicans who settled in South Chicago's industrial environment. Jones hypothesized that Mexicans were searching for "some group" with whom they could build a relationship. Mexicans, as Jones opined, were "seeking to discover and learn the etiquette of a new society" so that they would feel "conformity" with the group they came in contact with. Jones' thesis was premised on the idea that the migratory and resettlement process broke down the religious organization of Mexicans. His thesis of religious loss supposed that Mexicans had a weak self-identity and, consequently, should be recruited by the mostly white Protestant churches located in South Chicago. As he noted, Mexicans were "not sure about many things." Yet, they did not fully relinquish their identity, Jones asserted; instead it was slowly being washed away by the abrasive migratory process.<sup>26</sup>

Robert Jones' hypothesis was echoed in a more formal report he co-authored with Louis Wilson a year later for the Chicago Church Federation where they affirmed that upon migration "practically all of the Mexican's old associations are broken and unless he is already more or less accustomed to the atomized life of the city he feels lost and bewildered."<sup>27</sup> The recommendations proposed by Jones and Wilson were to call upon Protestant congregations and other social organizations to stabilize these affects. Manuel Zuniga, a young Mexican church worker, said that "What these superstitious and liciencious [sic] Mexicans of South Chicago need is our prayers and our faith."<sup>28</sup> Jones' report however, noted that,

The Mexican has been made exceedingly sensitive by his immigration experiences. His feelings are easily hurt. Moreover, he is position as a newcomer,

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<sup>26</sup> "Hypothesis Relating To the Religious Life of the Mexican in Chicago by Robert C. Jones." *Survey Papers*, Box 60, Folder 3.

<sup>27</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> "The Mexicans in South Chicago," *Taylor Papers*. Box 11, Folder 59, Page 1.

divorced from his old ways and thoughts and as yet but imperfectly wedded to the new, results in a highly unstable personality pattern. He is apt to be caught up in one enthusiasm today only to have tomorrow bring a compelling new idea with a new loyalty. This is but the inevitable result of the cultural shock to which he is being subjected.<sup>29</sup>

Mexicans, as Jones assumed, did not divorce themselves from their past affiliations. Paul L. Warnshuis, for example, asserted that the migratory process impelled Mexicans to break laws because they entered “a community life whose standards differ in several respects from those to which he is accustomed” and found “the odds against him in spite of his earnest desire to keep out of the hands of the law.”<sup>30</sup> Though they might have experienced migratory “shock,” they replicated many of their social institutions in the spaces they settled in Chicago. George L. Paz, an FWP worker, counted twenty-three social organizations of “Mexican and Spanish peoples” in the Chicago and, though some were small in size, Paz reported that they “all serve[d] the intellectual and social needs of the colony.”<sup>31</sup> The mid-1920s experienced the growth of three major Mexican districts, each with its own labor force and political interests [see images 7-8].<sup>32</sup> In addition to the three major districts, Anita Jones found Mexicans “scattered in small settlements near the important ones” and identified thirteen smaller Mexican districts that she could not identify by name.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, a report printed in 1925 by the Chicago Central Free Dispensary identified eleven different Mexican neighborhoods and at least three railroad

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<sup>29</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 25-26.

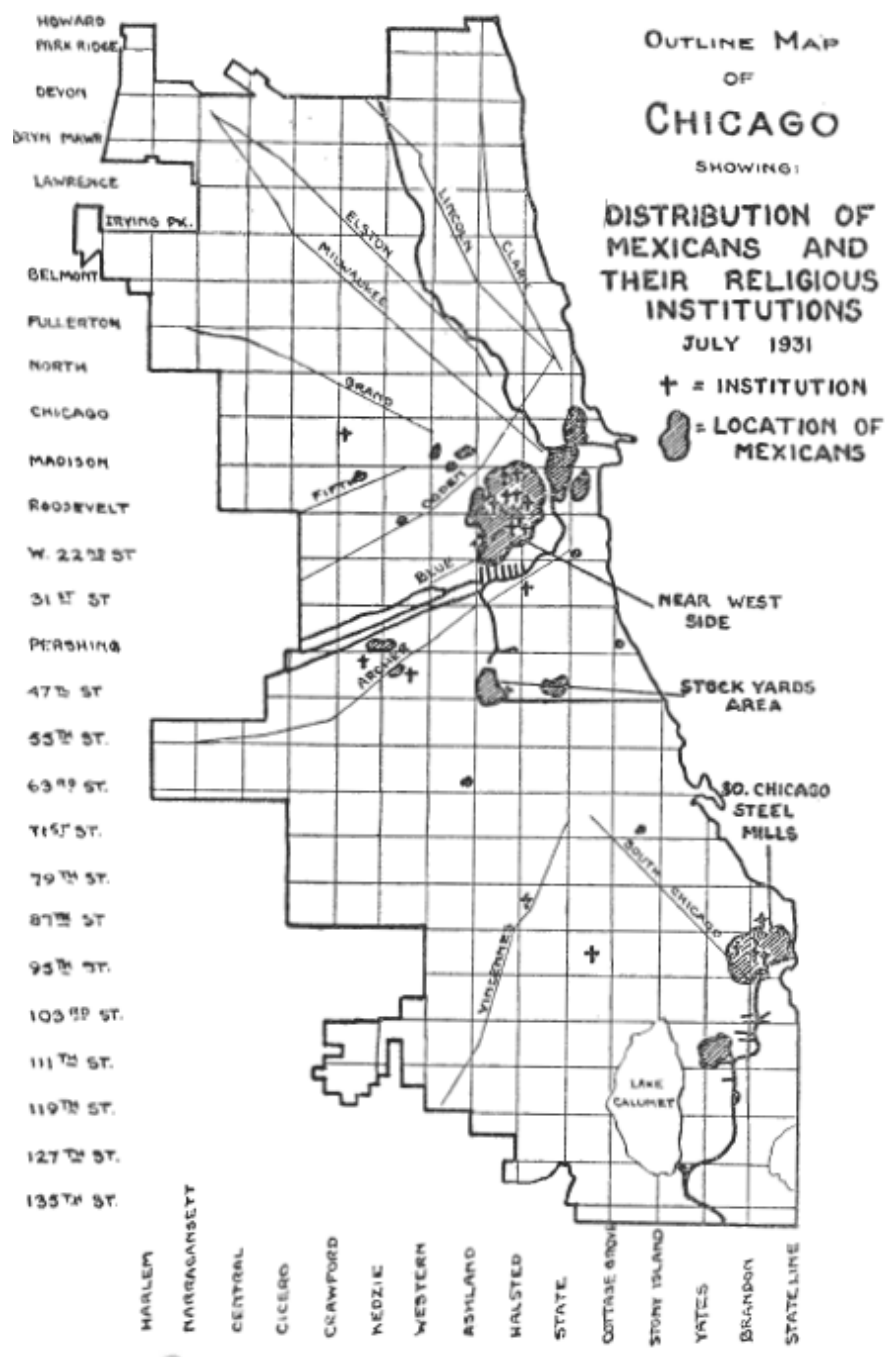
<sup>30</sup> Paul Livingstone Warnshuis, “Crime and Criminal Justice among the Mexicans in Illinois” (MA Thesis, University of Chicago, 1930), 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> “The Spanish and Mexican Clubs in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Page 1, Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>32</sup> Laurencio Sanguino and Mauricio Tenorio, “Orígenes De Una Ciudad Mexicana: Chicago Y La Ciencia Del Mexican Problem ,1900-1930,” (México, D.F.: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, A.C., 2007).

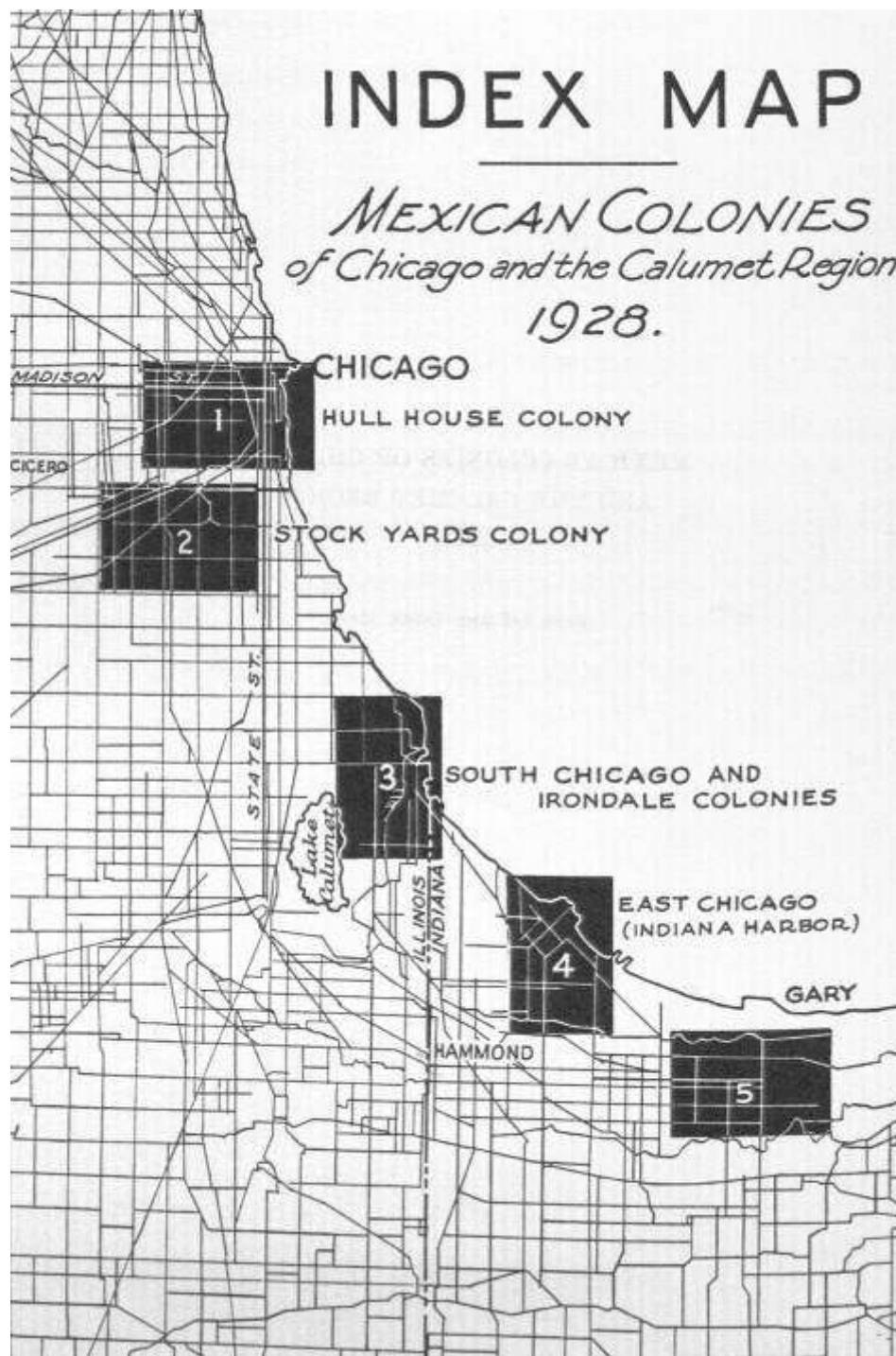
<sup>33</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 585.

**IMAGE 7:** Distribution of Mexicans in Chicago and their Religious institutions, 1931.



Source: Jones and Wilson, *Mexicans in Chicago*, page 25-26

**IMAGE 8:** Map of Major Mexican Communities in the Chicago area, 1928.



Source: Paul Taylor, *Calumet and Chicago*, page 57.



camps.<sup>34</sup> A University of Chicago study estimated there were approximately one thousand Mexicans still living in railroad camps by 1927.<sup>35</sup> Though Mexicans were dispersed throughout the city, it is difficult to know to what extent Mexicans self-identified their ethnic neighborhoods as *colonias*. There were many areas, as social workers and students found, where only a few Mexicans lived. Jones' estimation of three neighborhoods is the most precise, however, and the most widely accepted interpretation. The first Mexican colony was around the Near West Side near Hull House and Halsted Avenue. The second *colonia* was located in South Chicago and the third was in the Back of the Yards section.

### **The International Highway: The Near West Side and *La Colonia Hull House***

Of the three major Mexican districts where Mexican settled, *la colonia de hull house* was the largest. As early as 1904, Mexican children had registered in Hull House. However, it was not until the mid 1920s when a sizeable amount began to immigrate that an inkling of a distinctive Mexican *colonia* began to develop.<sup>36</sup> Located near the heart of Chicago's vibrant downtown, this was the busiest of all the Mexican barrios. It was surrounded by busy streets, newly constructed parks, improvised marketplaces, and eclectic shops. It was "hemmed" by so many "national communities" that it was coined the "international highway."<sup>37</sup> FWP workers who walked through the streets of this

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<sup>34</sup> "Our Mexican Patients at the Central Free Dispensary," *Central Free Dispensary Records*, Box 4, pg 1, Rush Medical Center Archives, Chicago, IL.

<sup>35</sup> "The Mexican in Chicago by Samuel Shepard," pages 23-25. Box 134, folder 4, *Burgess Papers*. In 1928, Anita Jones found twenty-two active railroad camps that were either in or near Chicago. See, Anita Edgar Jones, "Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago" (M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1928), 87.

<sup>36</sup> Frank X. Paz, *Mexican-Americans in Chicago: A General Survey* (Chicago: Council of Social Agencies of Chicago, 1948), 2. Paz notes that Mexicans were initially recruited by labor agencies along Canal Street. Thereafter, the first Mexican settlements began appearing along this street. However, few records of this nascent neighborhood exist. See page 4.

<sup>37</sup> "Mexicans in Our Midst," Page 18, FWP Papers, Box 19, Folder 5.

neighborhood chronicled seeing “throngs” of Mexican children going to school and hearing the “clanging noises of street cars, the buzzing horns of automobiles and the rush of laborers and business people.”<sup>38</sup> This space was imbued with Jane Addams’ long legacy of immigrant work and, thus, it was no surprise that it was also known as the “melting pot of many nations.” Halsted Street, which cut through the center of this Mexican *colonia*, jostled with traffic that bumped and clanged as curbside vendors screamed out prices to attract buyers to their “strangely assorted wares.” Someone described it as being the “natural place for the immigrant to begin his life in Chicago.”<sup>39</sup>

This international highway was a multi-racial district and contained approximately one-fourth of Chicago’s Mexican population.<sup>40</sup> It was nestled with Greeks on Blue Island Avenue, Italians on Taylor Street, Italians and Polish on the east and west sides of Halsted, and with Jews, African Americans, and Russians along Roosevelt Road. One observer reported that this was a “gay and romantic colony” and when she walked through it felt the “gayety and spirit of these people who have entrenched themselves and their culture into the gray sordid atmosphere of an industrial city.” “The children,” the observer continued, would “romp through the streets calling ‘*venga amigo*’ – ‘*Mama, dame un centavo para dulce*’, [‘come friend’—‘Mama, give me a penny for candy’] in this most beautiful and musical tongue.”<sup>41</sup> The bliss like depictions chronicled by FWP workers seemed envious. Mexicans were admired for their obedience, docility, and their sense of respect for authority. Mexican children, thus, were seen as potentially obeying, preserving, and replicating Chicago’s social order. Despite the idyllic characterization of

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<sup>38</sup> “Mexican District,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>39</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 586.

<sup>41</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. For a brief racial description of this area also, see Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 9-10. Translation made by author.

the relationship between youth and their parents, Mexicans in this neighborhood did not escape the destitute conditions affecting non-white immigrants. Anita Jones reported that Mexicans were “nearly always to be found in the rear houses, in the basement, or the most undesirable part of the buildings.” They live in “dilapidated houses” and “dreary homes,” she continued, “some have been known to sleep with guns under the bed to shoot rats in the night.”<sup>42</sup> In his walk through this *colonia*, Paul Taylor described seeing “rows of frame houses whose roofs cut across the vision like saw-teeth.”<sup>43</sup>

This was, indeed, the largest, most “typical,” and described as the “most socially” organized of the three major *colonias*.<sup>44</sup> It was dotted with an array of pool rooms, restaurants, food shops, bookstores, and music stores, which made it an educational, political and recreational hub. One observer noted that all of the stores were only a “stone’s throw” from Hull House.<sup>45</sup> It contained the *Mundial Music Store*, on 907 S. Halsted, which sold sheet music, magazines, newspapers, and books in Spanish.<sup>46</sup> In these stores you could find, as one observer described, “shawls from Spain, sandals from Mexico and Mayan and Aztec pottery.”<sup>47</sup> Less than ten years after they arrived to Chicago, Mexicans had established a string of businesses that reflected their needs and racial identities. They were neither Spanish, nor Indian, but both. Stores that dotted the streets would “tempt you,” an FWP reported, “to buy and taste of [sic] the foods of this

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<sup>42</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 596. The existence of rats were reported as being prevalent in the “Mexican quarters” of Los Angeles by the *Chicago Tribune*. It is unclear if these reports were part of the national trend depicting Mexicans as a public health threat. See, “Test Chicago Rats for Pneumonic Plague Signs,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 11 1924. For a larger discussion, see Natalia Molina, “Medicalizing the Mexican: Immigration, Race, and Disability in the Early-Twentieth-Century United States,” *Radical History Review* 94, no. Winter (2006).

<sup>43</sup> Paul S. Taylor, “Mexicans North of the Rio Grande,” *The Survey* 1931, 197.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 106.

<sup>45</sup> “Point of interest not on Tours,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>46</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 4.

<sup>47</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 4.

exotic people”<sup>48</sup> Still in their nascent phase of immigration, Mexicans continued to arrive in large numbers. Their numbers continued to blossom and the new social spaces they inhabited burgeoned with life.

It was becoming the heyday for Mexican entrepreneurship, civic organizations, and social jubilee. And though Hull House was a multiracial neighborhood, Mexican businesses almost exclusively catered to Mexican residents.<sup>49</sup> At *El Chin-Chun-Chan* meat-market, located in 641 S. Morgan Street, Mexicans could purchase *carnitas* (braised pork) and *chicarrones* (pork rinds) before walking a few blocks west to *La Esperanza Panaderia y Reposteria* (The Bakery and Confectionary of Hope) to buy some freshly baked Mexican sweet bread.<sup>50</sup> *El Puerto de Veracruz* (The Vera Cruz Port) restaurant, also located near Hull House, was one of the oldest Mexican restaurants in Chicago. The cuisine included *tortillas*, beans, *nopalitos* (cactus leaves), “real” Mexican cheese, rice of “Spanish origin,” and other food of “Indian origin.”<sup>51</sup> Though restaurants like these could “temp you” to eat their delicacies, these spaces did more than ease the Mexican immigrant’s culinary desires. They employed Mexicans and, most importantly, served as a space where young people could rendezvous and where artists and intellectuals could meet.<sup>52</sup> The intellectuals and artists who met at the *Puerto Veracruz*, it was reported,

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<sup>48</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>49</sup> “Mexican Settlement,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. Also see, “The Mexicans in Chicago #3,” pg 1 *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>50</sup> See respective ads in *La Raza*, pg 6 April 28, 1928. Chin-Chun-Chan reflects the phonetic spelling of Tzintzuntzan, Michoacan. Translations made by author.

<sup>51</sup> “Mexican Restaurant” *FWP*, box 193, folder 5. The address provided by FWP workers was located at 813 S. Halsted, though an ad shows it as 1121 Newberry Avenue. See, ad in *La Noticia Mundial*, September 25, 1927, pg 2.

<sup>52</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago” *FWP*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 6, and “Point of interest not on Tours,” *FWP*, Box 193, Folder 5. For more on how these spaces have been critical in the development of immigrant and racialized communities, see José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonades out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

would gather to “discuss the latest trends in arts and literature”—it was a gathering place for a “young artistic group of Mexicans.”<sup>53</sup>

This *colonia* had the most and widest array of Mexican organizations, unlike the rest of Chicago. It was home to labor, social, and mutual aid organizations that sought multiple ways to shape how Mexicans would acclimate in their new social spaces. *La Liga Obrera*, or Workers League, was headquartered only a short distance south of *El Puerto Veracruz* restaurant, at 841 S. Halsted.<sup>54</sup> *La Liga Obrera* was established in 1932 and was regarded as the “most outstanding” economic organization. It had open forum meetings every Sunday at 2:00pm to discuss current events. Roman Martinez, the main organizer, explained that the *La Liga*’s purpose was to “gain greater amounts of relief for the unemployed Mexican worker.” *La Liga*, like *El Puerto Veracruz*, was multi-faceted. It was founded with the clear intention of serving as a workers’ organization, but ultimately was affected by the immediate needs of its community. Martinez was also interested in “developing a greater culture among the Mexcians [sic] and toward this end ha[d] invited Mexican leaders in Art, Writing and Politics, to lecture to the people in Chicago.” He claimed they had a small membership base, but that they had “hundreds sympathetic with its aims.” They held dances where people not only attended to “dance

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<sup>53</sup> “Point of interest not on Tours,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. In 1935 journalist Bruce Grant described this restaurant and noted that it was owned by a “Spanish born” named Antonio J. Ladra, known as “Tony,” who previously attended from Indiana University. Grant made reference to youth gathering in this restaurant. See, Bruce Grant, “Little Mexico in Chicago!: Gayety, Color and Strumming Guitars,” *Sunday Times*, May 26, 1935. CFLPS Reel 2, Spanish/Mexican, III A, II B1a. Also, see “El Progreso Del Comercio Mexicano De Chicago,” *La Noticial Mundial*, September 16 1927.

<sup>54</sup> “Point of interest not on Tours,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. For a brief, albeit important, discussion of *La Liga*’s national significance see, Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 156.

and laugh,” but also to “hear the reports” on the “progress of unifying the Mexican Colony.”<sup>55</sup>

*La colonia hull house* was home to a wide mix of organizations that were founded by Mexicans or by other groups that catered to them. Groups like *M. Hidalgo y Costilla* met at 701 West 14<sup>th</sup> Place.<sup>56</sup> The Infant Welfare Society, housed at Hull House, was attended by Mexican mothers who got first aid and infant care instruction.<sup>57</sup> *El Club Azteca*, a woman’s organization, and the *Club Deportivo Cuahutémoc*, an athletic club, were both housed at Hull House.<sup>58</sup> The Hull House *colonia* was also home to the Firman House on Gilpin Street, which was a “popular center” for Mexican women and girls.<sup>59</sup> There was also *Club Recreativo* (Recreation Club), which took the lead in organizing most of the social events and presumed gender equality by sharing organizing responsibilities. Men and women organized the fiestas in intervals—in an attempt to halt the affects of gender inequality.<sup>60</sup>

As a whole, there were at least thirty-five fraternal clubs recorded in the Hull House area in the 1930s. *Club Anahuac*, located at 850 Lake Shore Drive, was comprised of “professional men” and as part of its membership boasted “prominent and influential Mexicans in the city.” *El Club Anahuac* was created to “foster better and friendlier relations between Mexican and American peoples” and Engenio Pesqueira, its president, was the Mexican General Consul. The *Alianza Fraternal Mexicana*, 1552 West

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<sup>55</sup> “The Spanish and Mexican Dance in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, Pg 7-8.

<sup>56</sup> “The Spanish and Mexican Dance in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, Pg 6.

<sup>57</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst”, *FWP Box 193, Folder 5*, pg 19. Anita Jones noted that the Infant Welfare Society treated Mexican children with UV rays. See, Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 596.

<sup>58</sup> “Las Organizaciones Mexicanas,” *Correo Mundial*, September 6 1926.

<sup>59</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst.” *FWP Box 193, Folder 5*, pg 19. The Firman House relocated on various occasions, once due to a fire. For more on the Firman house, see chapter 5 of this study.

<sup>60</sup> “The Spanish and Mexican Dance in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, Pg 4.

Roosevelt Road, was the largest Mexican fraternal organization in Chicago.<sup>61</sup> A settlement house worker in South Chicago called it the best organized Mexican society in all of Chicago, because most Mexican organizations were ephemeral and did not have a “spirit of unification.”<sup>62</sup> *La Alianza* had about two-hundred members, a women’s group, and organized a free educational class for children that met on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7:00pm to 9:00pm. They taught children Spanish, geography, and history of Mexico and by 1936 began publishing a small monthly news-sheet.<sup>63</sup>

Organizations like *La Alianza*, *Club Anahuac* were not located at the heart of the Hull House *colonia*. These were organizations were located blocks away from Hull House. *La Sociedad Mutuo Recreación Mexicano Benito Juarez*, founded in 1917 and located at 20 E. Jackson Boulevard, was also situated on the periphery of Hull House, but was one of Chicago’s most influential groups whose geographic distance to Hull House was minimal compared to its social and political clout. For members of the *colonia* Hull House wanting to visit the Benito Juarez club would need to walk only a few blocks east across the Chicago River. Some of the most prominent members of the Mexican community visited this location. *El Correo Mexicano*, one of Chicago’s Mexican newspapers, described it as being comprised of Mexican activists and enthusiasts, which included workers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, business men, writers, and artists.<sup>64</sup> Presidents of mutual aid societies, doctors, politicians, and journalist would wrangle over the social and political needs of their respective *colonias*. This club boasted being

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<sup>61</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 4. Also, see “The Mexicans in Chicago #3,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 3.

<sup>62</sup> “Associations of the South Chicago Mexican Colony,” *Baur Papers*, Box 2, Folder “Hughes 1936-1952,” page 20.

<sup>63</sup> “The Mexicans in Chicago #3,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 3.

<sup>64</sup> “Las Organizaciones Mexicanas.” This organization was commonly referred to as the Benito Juarez Club. Using the data collected by Paul Taylor, Kerr found that this organization was established in 1918. See, Kerr, “The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970”, 47.

“indispensable in its advice and moral help in the struggle of daily life.” The office space contained a library with books of “all classes.” The Benito Juarez club was primarily comprised of Mexican medical doctors, which unlike other organizations did “good work” for the sick. They served as informal liaisons between Chicago’s hospitals and Mexicans to ensure that beds would be reserved for Mexicans when they fell ill.<sup>65</sup> A key component of the organization was that it offered a life insurance policy intended to cover widowed Mexican women and orphans. Like *El Puerto Veracruz* restaurant, the office space of *El Benito* served multiple purposes. In a visit to this space, Robert Redfield described it as being filled with “great stir and activity” as members discussed the development and founding of *México*, Chicago’s most prominent Mexican newspaper in the 1930s.<sup>66</sup> In a handbill announcing the founding of this important newspaper, the editors noted:

Its columns remain at the disposition of the RACE, in order to scourge, WITHOUT PREJUDICE, WITHOUT RANCOR, AND WITHOUT FEAR all of those ‘countrymen’ and ‘patriots’—individuals without any scruple—who have found a ‘modus vivendi’ in the Mexican colony.<sup>67</sup>

But organizations like *México* that were determined to defend their *patria* exhibited a fragmented allegiance. Although settlement house workers and the bulk of social scientific research indicated that Mexicans in Chicago were not becoming citizens, those managing *México* contradicted the formality of becoming a citizen. On June 29, 1927, *México* newspaper ran a quarter-page ad inviting its readership to a free-of-charge “4 de Julio” (Fourth of July) celebration they organized [see image nine].<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “The Mexican in Chicago by Manuel Bueno,” *Burgess Papers*, Box 188, folder 4, pg 28 and 38.

<sup>66</sup> “The Mexicans in Chicago: Journal, 1924-1925,” *Redfield Papers*, page 73.

<sup>67</sup> “Mexico,” *Redfield Papers*, Box 57, Folder 20.

<sup>68</sup> “Alegre Dia De Campo,” *Mexico*, June 29 1927.



IMAGE 9: Fourth of July ad in *México*

**ALEGRE DIA DE CAMPO**  
 PARA EL  
**4 DE JULIO**  
 EN EL  
**COLUMBIA PARK**  
 Willow Springs,  
 ORGANIZADO POR EL PERIODICO BISEMANARIO  
**"MEXICO"**  
 Las Sociedades y el Comercio de Chicago  
 Concursos de Baile, Juegos Deportivos, Carreras a pié etc., gran  
 des Premios a los vencedores.

**Direcciones para llegar al Parque:**  
 Tómese cualquier tranvía que cruce con el de la calle Archer,  
 marcado "Archer-Cicero". Trasborde hacia el Oeste y vaya  
 hasta el final de la línea, en donde tomará uno de los tran-  
 vias de Joliet, hasta Willow Springs. En Willow Springs habrá  
 varios autos que lo conducirán hasta el Parque Columbia. La  
 distancia que hay de la estación de Willow Springs al parque,  
 es corta y se puede hacer a pié en 10 minutos.

Para ir en automóvil, tómese Ogden Ave., o Archer Ave.  
 hasta llegar al Columbia Park, lugar de la fiesta, situado a mi-  
 lla y media al oeste de Willow Springs.

**Entrada Gratis**  
 LA COMISION.

**NO FALTE USTED A ESTE GRANDIOSO FESTIVAL**

Source: *México*, June 29, 1927, page 5.

For them citizenship was a legal process—one that was imbued with political bureaucracy. Even, the most prominent and patriotic organizations like *México* revealed a tendency to practice U.S. customs.<sup>69</sup> Housed in the outskirts of Hull House, the offices of *Mexico* and *La Sociedad Mutuo Recreacion Mexicano Benito Juarez* aspired to maintain political and social independence. The pages of *Mexico* showed instances where national allegiance paraded to a different beat.

Maintaining complete autonomy was an ideal few organizations could claim. Social, political, and economic organizations developed during this period entered a social contract that obliged them to meet the vying needs of the Mexican community. Mexican men, women, and children had multiple interests that could not be filled by one institution. The development of the Hull House neighborhood, like all other Mexican neighborhoods, was most successful when various organizations collaborated. It was for this reason that the development of religious institutions was critical to the development of any *colonia*.<sup>70</sup>

Hull House was home to Saint Francis de Assisi Church, the ninth oldest church in Chicago first established by Germans, which contained large stained windows brought from Munich, Germany. The church remained German until the mid-1920s when its parishioners were made up of “few” Germans and Italians, but mostly Mexicans. In 1926,

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<sup>69</sup> This relates to the idea of cultural citizenship. See, William Vincent Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds., *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

<sup>70</sup> “The Church of Saint Francis of Assisi by George L. Paz,” *FWP Papers*, Box 181, Folder: Churches-Near West Side, page 7. The folders in this box are titled rather than numbered. Although Catholicism was the leading religious order for Mexicans in Chicago, other religious organizations also developed in Chicago. For example, Espinoza discusses the significance of national healing campaigns that also toured through Chicago during the 1920s. See, Gastón Espinosa, “Brown Moses: Francisco Olazábal and Mexican American Pentecostal Healing in the Borderlands,” in *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*, ed. Gastón Espinosa and Mario T. Garcia (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 275, Malachy Richard McCarthy, “Which Christ Came to Chicago: Catholic and Protestant Programs to Evangelize, Socialize and Americanize the Mexican Immigrant, 1900-1940” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 2002), 118.

Cardinal Mundelein gave the church to the Claretian Fathers and to the Mexicans who modified the altar by adding a shrine to the Virgen de Guadalupe. The church was “staunch in character,” “Gothic in appearance,” attracted the “old, stopped, bewrinkled men and women of the Mexican race.”<sup>71</sup>

The Hull House colonia was described as the “main cultural life” of Mexicans in Chicago.<sup>72</sup> The Enciso family, for example, who had migrated there from Los Angeles, was a family of dancers who were known to participate in holiday celebrations. During the annual *Cinco de Mayo* fiesta the youngest of the Enciso children would dance in the center of a stage as the rest of the family, dressed in “gay and colorful costumes,” surrounded him. The Enciso father, was a tailor by trade, but organized his five children as a dancing troupe who would make costumes for “the very low price of eight dollars”<sup>73</sup> The celebrations and holidays ranged from political meetings, Mexican national holidays, and religious festivities. The *noche buena* (Christmas Eve) celebrations began two weeks prior to Christmas and were described as the “most interesting of the religious holidays.”<sup>74</sup> Yet, the biggest celebration took place on September 16 on Mexico’s Independence Day at the Ashland Boulevard Auditorium, 824 S. Ashland, which would be celebrated “anxiously, reverently, and patriotically,” and with “all their heart.” [see image ten] An editorial in *El Correo Mexicano* reported: “It does not matter the place or time where these celebrations take place: it is about honoring the motherland and that

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<sup>71</sup> “St. Francis of Assisi Church by Lillian Gregory,” *FWP Papers*, Box 181, Folder Churches-Near West Side.” Also see, “St. Francis of Assisi by Wayne Fuller,” *FWP Papers* Box 181, Folder Churches-Near West Side. For a larger discussion regarding the role of religion, see David A. Badillo, “Incorporating Reform and Religion: Mexican Immigrants, Hull-House, and the Church,” in *Pots of Promise: Mexicans and Pottery at Hull-House, 1920-40*, ed. Cheryl R. Ganz and Margaret Strobel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), McCarthy, “Which Christ Came to Chicago: Catholic and Protestant Programs to Evangelize, Socialize and Americanize the Mexican Immigrant, 1900-1940”.

<sup>72</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5

<sup>73</sup> “The Spanish and Mexican Dance in Chicago,” Pg 5-6, *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>74</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 5

encourages and makes us happy, because we see that Mexicans, the farther we are from our land, the more Mexican feel.”<sup>75</sup> The day’s festivity was filled with “national folk songs” as people broke out in “informal dance” and addresses were delivered by prominent members of the colony.<sup>76</sup> An FWP observer noted that Mexicans celebrated the independence holiday “just as their great-grand parents did 150 years ago.” On this day a queen was elected “who reigns over all the festivals during the year.”<sup>77</sup>

### **Back of the Yards District: Box Car Communities and Religious Diversity**

The Back of the Yards neighborhood contained the second oldest Mexican *colonia*. Located southwest of Hull House in the stockyards area, it centered around 46<sup>th</sup> and Ashland, and it too was referred to as “little Mexico.” Though Hull House was the most socially and politically organized *colonia*, Back of the Yards contained its share of important cultural centers. In a study of this neighborhood, Anita Jones estimated that one-eighth of all of Mexicans in Chicago lived there and, based on an adult-child ratio, concluded that it was the youngest of all Mexican communities.<sup>78</sup>

Mexicans who lived in neighborhood worked in the packing houses and stockyards that surrounded this *colonia*.<sup>79</sup> Here, they lived in apartments, more “airy” living spaces. Anita Jones described this *colonia* as the most comfortable, relatively speaking, since most Mexicans in the Hull House district were living in basements or in the rear of buildings.<sup>80</sup> In the Back of the Yards they lived in one to three frame cottages

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<sup>75</sup> "Las Organizaciones Mexicanas." Original in Spanish. Translation made by author.

<sup>76</sup> "Point of interest not on Tours", *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> "Little Old Mexico in Chicago" *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 5.

<sup>78</sup> Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," 586. and "Mexicans in Our Midst," *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 19.

<sup>79</sup> "Little Old Mexico in Chicago," *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5. Also, see Gabriela F. Arredondo, "Navigating Ethno-Racial Currents: Mexicans in Chicago, 1919-1939," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>80</sup> Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," 596.

IMAGE 10: Mexican Independence celebration ad.

1810 LA FIESTA DE LA PATRIA 1926

# ¡MEXICANOS!

PARA LA NOCHE DEL 15 DE SEPTIEMBRE  
A LAS 7.30 P. M.  
CONMEMORACION OFICIAL  
— DE LA —  
**INDEPENDENCIA DE MEXICO**  
EN EL  
**ASHLAND AUDITORIUM**  
ESQUINA DE ASHLAND BOULEVARD Y CALLE VAN EUSEN

PRESIDIDA POR EL HONORABLE CONSUL DE MEXICO EN CHICAGO, QUIEN  
VITOREARA A LOS HEROES DE LA PATRIA.

**4000 ASIENTOS.** **DOS MAGNIFICAS ORQUESTAS**

DESPUES DE LA CEREMONIA OFICIAL CONTINUARA UN  
**ANIMADO BAILE**  
QUE TERMINARA A LAS TRES DE LA MAÑANA

**Coros Nacionales Mexicanos y el Himno Nacional cantado  
por toda la Concurrencia, a las 11 de la noche.**

Invitados de Honor: el Honorable William E. DEVER, Mayor de la Ciudad; Mr. Morgan  
A. COLLINS, Jefe de la Policía y los Honorables Cónsules Hispano-Americanos.

La Entrada Sera Absolutamente Gratis

Espléndido Servicio de Restaurant — Platos Eminentemente Nacionales.

Source: *Correo Mexicano*, September 4, 1926, page 3.

or brick structures, which in some cases did not have bathes. A Davis Square Park director estimated that there was about one bath per every three blocks.<sup>81</sup> The racial tensions experienced in this neighborhood were primarily with the Polish communities who had settled there decades prior to World War I. One FWP worker noted that the Polish had been “influential in preventing” the settlement of Mexicans in this area and forced Mexicans to form a gang that protected against Polish attacks when they went to bathe at the local park. Mexicans used the showers in the park Monday through Fridays, while the Polish claimed Saturday.<sup>82</sup> These social arrangements made it possible for them to live next to each other. Another FWP worker reported that, “races of other nationalities inhabit this district also, the Colored race being in the minority.”<sup>83</sup>

This *colonia* was dotted with pool halls, restaurants and was “plentiful” with “other favorite Mexican rendezvous.”<sup>84</sup> Around 46<sup>th</sup> and Ashland there were beauty shops, “eat shops” and small stores that catered to Mexicans. These “cherished” stores had fruits and vegetables in “abundance.” In a tour of this neighborhood, an FWP worker wrote that at meal times these places were well attended by “these straight-hair and red-skin people who fondly chatter in Spanish conversation.”<sup>85</sup> A block south on Ashland to 47<sup>th</sup> was the nexus of the Loop, or center, of this Mexican district. It had “large” credit houses, hardware stores, department stores and “almost every large type of business house, with gorgeous show-window display as you would find in the Chicago Loop, with multitude of shoppers going in and out all of the business hours of the day.”<sup>86</sup> Blocks

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<sup>81</sup> “Davis Square” FWP Box 193, Folder 5, and “Mexican District” FWP, box 193, folder 5

<sup>82</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 594.

<sup>83</sup> “Mexican District,” *FWP Papers*, box 193, folder 5.

<sup>84</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst,” *FWP Papers* Box 193, Folder 5, pg 19.

<sup>85</sup> “Mexican District”, page 2-3, *FWP Papers*, box 193, folder 5.

<sup>86</sup> “Mexican District”, page 2, *FWP Papers*, box 193, folder 5.

away there were impromptu shops. One shop was marked with a crayon sign on a car that stated, “We sell Mexican sausage,” “Stop here for better food, coffee, and drinks,” and “Order your groceries here and we will deliver to your address.”<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the Mexican district in Hull House and South Chicago, this *colonia* did not have one religious institution that most Mexicans patronized. Instead, there were three small churches that were entirely comprised by Mexicans.<sup>88</sup> This *colonia* also had one of the major Mexican newspapers, *La Defensa*, 4531 S. Ashland, published by Jose de la Mora.<sup>89</sup> This neighborhood was home to the influential University of Chicago Settlement House run by Mary McDowell, which housed the *Club Union de Madres Mexicanas* (Mexican Mother's Club), an adolescent athletic club, the Sunday Male and Female Adult Club, known as the "Grays," and a Tuesday evening Spanish Mexican Culture Club, which was taught by Mr. Jose Alcazar. The Settlement House also operated a relief and placement agency, which serviced more than Mexican 65 families.<sup>90</sup> The University of Chicago Settlement House was active in working with immigrants and one Spanish-speaking worker specifically assisted “new arrivals” with their “most pressing problems.”<sup>91</sup> A University of Chicago Settlement House annual report noted that Mexicans,

had proven an interesting factor in our neighborhood; pathetic in their inability to cope with the doubling and tripling of rent rates when trying to rent a house for themselves; interesting in the reaction of their Polish neighbors to them; and

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<sup>87</sup> “The Mexicans in Chicago, Journal,” *Robert Redfield Papers*, 1917-1958, Box 57, Folder 20, pages 54-55. Original in Spanish, translated by author.

<sup>88</sup> “Mexican District” FWP, box 193, folder 5

<sup>89</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, pg 7.

<sup>90</sup> “Mexican District”, page 2, *FWP Papers*, box 193, folder 5. Also, see “Club Union de Madres Mexicanas” *Mary McDowell Settlement Records, 1894-1970*. Box 25, Folder titled, “Mexican Mother’s Club,” Chicago Historical Society.

<sup>91</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst”, *FWP Papers* Box 193, Folder 5, pg 19.

delightful in both their courtesy and abandon [sic] when frolicking at one of their fiestas<sup>92</sup>

During the Mexican Independence on September 16<sup>th</sup> a large celebration was organized at its athletic field on the corner of 46<sup>th</sup> and Gross Avenue.<sup>93</sup> The *Club Deportivo Moctezuma*, which was an all girls club with ages between fifteen and twenty-five, used its facilities to meet. First organized in 1934, it had about twenty members and organized two large fiestas every year.<sup>94</sup> The organization of these spaces varied and they were not nicely constricted by geographic boundaries. Mexicans also lived in the outskirts of *colonias*, which were nestled next to various ethnic and racial groups, and moved about the city as long as their Mexicaness did not prevent it. Mexicans who resided in the Back of the Yards lived around Ashland and 46<sup>th</sup> and also in the western section that was spliced by rail road lines. There, Mexicans established box car settlements described as a “small colony.” This particular small colony was around the Crane Company Plant and the Santa Fe Railroad, which in many cases had no permanent address.<sup>95</sup>

### **The South Chicago District:**

The newest of the three largest neighborhoods was located in the South Side.<sup>96</sup> Considered the second largest district with over 5,000 Mexicans it had a Catholic church, the First Mexican Baptist Church of South Chicago, and the United Mexican Evangelical Church.<sup>97</sup> An informal census conducted by the South Chicago Community Center found that Mexicans were one of thirty nationalities said to take part in all settlement activities

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<sup>92</sup> “Annual Report of Work Done at University of Chicago Settlement, 1923-24” Box 19, Folder titled “Annual Reports, 1918-1930,” *Mary McDowell Settlement Records, 1894-1970*. Chicago Historical Society, Page 3.

<sup>93</sup> “Mexican Independence Day & Davis Square” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 3, pg 1.

<sup>94</sup> “The Spanish and Mexican Clubs in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, box 193, folder 5, pg 5.

<sup>95</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst,” *FWP Papers* Box 193, Folder 5, pg 20. Anita Jones SSR 590. Also, see “Teach Americanism in Box Car School,” *The Chicago Daily News*, December 6 1918.

<sup>96</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 587.

<sup>97</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 11.



in that area.<sup>98</sup> This Mexican colony was encircled by the Illinois Steel Company Mills on the east, Commercial Avenue on the west, the railway tracks to the north and south.<sup>99</sup> The South Side neighborhood was generally considered the “least livable” of all industrial districts and Mexicans were at the “center of the colony.”<sup>100</sup>

South Chicago was described as one of “Chicago’s poorest industrial districts, whose sordid tenements and old frame dwellings are occupied by Mexican-Americans, workers in steel mills and on railroads and unemployed.”<sup>101</sup> One observer noted that three to four Mexicans lived “like cattle” in one flat where only one “American family” would ordinarily live.<sup>102</sup> The United Charities of South Chicago reported that they lived in “exceedingly poor quarters” and that in the winter their living condition was “distressing.”<sup>103</sup> Although, there were some Mexicans who lived in “poor homes,” Anita Jones noted that the majority lived in quite “comfortable quarters.”<sup>104</sup>

Prior to the mid 1920s few Mexican organizations had been formalized in this district. Social and political groups in this area were usually “spontaneous” and “informal.” Bird Memorial, the most prominent settlement house in the area, specifically catered to youth by developing boy’s clubs, and encouraged youth to participate in organized activities planned in the gymnasium during the winter months. A survey of four youth clubs that were affiliated with the Common Ground Settlement House, located on 91<sup>st</sup> and Houston, found that Mexican youth were members in all of them. In the *Atlas* club, for example, Mexican youth comprised all of its eight members. Unlike the *colonias*

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<sup>98</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 595.

<sup>99</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 11.

<sup>100</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst,” *FWP Papers* Box 193, Folder 5, pg 20.

<sup>101</sup> “Far South End of Chicago: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church,” *FWP Papers*, box 181, Folder Churches-South Chicago, pg 1.

<sup>102</sup> “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” *Taylor Papers*. Box 11, Folder 59, Page 14.

<sup>103</sup> “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” *Taylor Papers*. Box 11, Folder 59, Page 29.

<sup>104</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 596.

in the Back of the Yards and Hull House neighborhoods, the South Side contained the most Mexican athletic youth clubs.<sup>105</sup> Between 1928 and 1938 athletic clubs sprang up in the South Side with names like the *Aztecas*, *Mexicanos*, *Los Reyes*, *Yaquis*, *Mayas*, *Excelsiors*, *Pirates*, and *Western Arrows*. Taking claim of local gymnasiums, parks, sand lots, and streets these youth clubs were primarily comprised of young boys. Yet, groups like the *Amapolas* were one of the few all girls' Mexican clubs that existed across the city. A student at the University of Chicago noted that the clubs with younger children tended to be "mixed nationally," because, as he noted, they became more "conscious of nationality" and "color differences" as they grew older. Woman usually took part in the *Sacred Heart of Mary* group, which was affiliated with *Our Lady of Guadalupe* church or the Mexican Mother's Club. Men participated in the *Comite Pro-México* club, which countered the criticisms made by Chicago's Catholic priests who supported U.S. intervention in Mexico to quell the anti-clerical movement. Resulting from political and social disagreement, members of the *Comite Pro-México* splintered off to create the *Liceo*, or Lyceum in English, to discuss literature and politics. Communists groups like the *Liga Intervencionista* and the Big Five Youth Club also attracted a Mexican following. The *Santa Cruz* club was formed by men who worked in the same department at the Wisconsin Steel Industry and the *Esfuerzo Unido* was a social club that hired orchestras to play at the "lavish" dances they organized.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> See, Michael D. Innis-Jiménez, "Beyond the Baseball Diamond and Basketball Court: Organized Leisure in Inter-War Mexican South Chicago," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 7 (2009).

<sup>106</sup> "Associations of the South Chicago Mexican Colony," *Baur Papers*, Box 2, Folder "Hughes 1936-1952." South Chicago also was home to the Mexican "Band of South Chicago," which was in all *colonias*. For more on clubs, see Kerr, "The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970", 49-50', 93-94, "Music Aids Young Mexicans in Chicago with Family Ties," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 22 1932. Also, see Michael D. Innis-Jiménez, "Organizing for Fun: Recreation and Community Formation in the Mexican

Other similar organizations like *El Frente Popular*, organized in 1935, were founded through the aid of the Hull House colonia's *Liga Obrera*. One of the leaders was Enrique Rosas, who noted that before *El Frente Popular* and *La Liga* were established, there were numerous clubs organizing fiestas. *El Frente* was established after a group of Mexicans attended a League Against War and Fascism meeting held in Cleveland. Although the Founders League Against War and Fascism was a communist organization, the Mexicans in Chicago ended organizing along racial lines. Upon their return from Cleveland, a debate ensued regarding the pliability of developing a Mexican communist organization in Chicago. Don Rafael Pérez, one of the leading communist organizers of *El Frente*, stated that "The solution is in organizing, and the Frente Popular Mexicano has done this." But dissenters believed that organizing along racial lines was most relevant to Mexicans in Chicago. One dissenter stated: "What did we in Chicago care [about capitalism], What does the Steel Mill [sic] worker in South Chicago working before his ovens care about Mussolini or Fascism?" Eventually, *El Frente* ceased to organize along class lines and the objective became, "uniting all the Mexicans in Chicago." *El Frente* was divided into four regional sections and met in different Mexican neighborhoods in Chicago. "Section Four" met in Packingtown, "Section Three" in South Chicago, and all four sections met jointly once a month at Hull House. The Hull House *colonia* served as the hub of Mexican politics and social life in Chicago. Being the oldest Mexican neighborhood, it also had the most diverse set of Mexicans who had developed a conglomerate of organizations. The leader of *El Frente* was Leon Lira, who did not disassociate himself with the politics in Mexico. He was interested in the uplift of

Mexicans in Chicago and his larger philosophical goal, as he noted, was for “the desires and determination of the Mexican people for a free and sovereign Mexico.”<sup>107</sup>

The Mexican *colonia* in the South Side established the first Catholic Church that specifically catered to Mexicans.<sup>108</sup> Though Mexicans had gathered informally and attended all-white Catholic churches or Protestant congregations prior to its founding, it was not until the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church was built in 1928 that Mexicans could formally call Chicago their religious home.<sup>109</sup> It was designed in Spanish mission style, but smaller in comparison to other Catholic churches in the city and was described as “a house of worship for the poorer class of Mexican-American steel mill and railroad laborers.”<sup>110</sup> The church, one observer vividly detailed, stood “out like a beacon of light among the smoke stack of the Steel Mills.”<sup>111</sup> Another FWP observer noted that it was is “a church with a shrine of national reputation.”<sup>112</sup> It contained an auditorium with the

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<sup>107</sup> “The Spanish and Mexican Dance in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, Pg 8-9. On the communist nature of the organization, see, “Frente Popular Mejicano,” *Adena Miller Rich Papers*, Box 1, Folder 11, Special Collections and University Archives Department, University of Illinois at Chicago. Hereafter cited as the *Rich Papers*. For more on labor organizing in Chicago, see Gerardo Necochea Gracia, “Customs and Resistance: Mexican Immigrants in Chicago, 1910-1930,” in *Border Crossings: Mexican and Mexican-American Workers*, ed. John Mason Hart (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1998). It is clear that there were numerous attempts by communists groups to organize Mexicans in Chicago. A twenty-three year old Mexican reported that he did not want to get “mixed up with them” because he would lose his job if people found out he was a communist. On one occasion when he was recruited by communists, he concluded that they did not know “communism” because after asking them about “Marxian theory” he found they “hadn’t even heard of it.” See, I.G., Box 56, Folder Family Histories Part 2, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>108</sup> The groundbreaking was on October 19, 1923. See, McCarthy, “Which Christ Came to Chicago: Catholic and Protestant Programs to Evangelize, Socialize and Americanize the Mexican Immigrant, 1900-1940”, 142.

<sup>109</sup> The development of religious institutions were critical to the early social and political development of these communities. Churches, like the ones in Chicago, sprang up across the Midwest. For more, see David A. Badillo, “Catolicismo Mexicano Y La Transnacionalización En Chicago Antes De 1940: Institución Y Proceso,” *Relaciones: estudios de historia y sociedad* 17 (1996), Sister Mary Helen Rogers, “The Role of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in the Adjustment of the Mexican Community to Live in the Indiana Harbor” (Master of Social Work Thesis, Loyola University Chicago, 1952).

<sup>110</sup> “So. Chicago: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church,” *FWP Papers*, box 181, Folder Churches-South Chicago.

<sup>111</sup> “Little Old Mexico in Chicago,” *FWP Papers*, Box 193, Folder 5, page 7.

<sup>112</sup> “Far South End of Chicago: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church,” *FWP Papers*, box 181, Folder Churches-South Chicago, pg 1.

seating capacity of 700. One observer noted that the interior of the church was, colorful and impressive with a blue painted ceiling, traversed [sic] by delicate bands of varied color, and to the walls harmonizingly [sic] blended with border trims of delicate design and intricate scroll work, considerable of the painting of the interior of the church is the accomplishment of the Mexican members of the parish.<sup>113</sup> Along with the large auditorium, it contained a basement that had a kitchen, a space where “moving pictures” could be viewed, and a small print shop where they could print English and Spanish material.<sup>114</sup> Yet Mexicans in the South Side had multiple religious affiliations. Though Our Lady of Guadalupe served as a central building that Mexicans, regardless of their religious affiliation, could claim as their own, they also patronized Pentecostal missions, and Methodist and Baptists churches. Mexicans were reported as participating in a makeshift Protestant congregation that met at Bird Memorial and were also spotted at the South Chicago Neighborhood House where the First Baptist Church held their meetings. These religious centers were spiritual centers as much as they were social sanctuaries that provided Mexicans coal, food, housing and a space to meet and exchange information critical to their survival in the city. A former Catholic man who began frequenting a Protestant church noted that he had “not only learned and grown spiritually” but also had been helped with his “problems.” He further asserted that “after God it has been the [Protestant] pastor, who has helped me the most. I have absolute confidence in him.” Even with this level of fidelity and admiration this parishioner left the Protestant Church, which he had originally left over the Catholic Church, for a Pentecostal church because it

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<sup>113</sup> “So. Chicago: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church,” *FWP Papers*, box 181, Folder Churches-South Chicago.

<sup>114</sup> “So. Chicago: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church,” *FWP Papers*, box 181, Folder Churches-South Chicago, pg 5

had more “enthusiasm,” “deepness of spirit,” and its leaders “really feel their religion.” This individual also became dissatisfied with the Pentecostal church because it gave “too much attention to monetary matters.” As he noted, “I can’t believe that it is the right to give what one’s family absolutely needs.”<sup>115</sup> Mexicans’ religious loyalty was difficult to discern, which caused consternation among religious leaders. Another Mexican was adamant about his Christian obligation, which was not to a particular Christian branch. “Denominations won’t save us, nor the baptisms nor does keeping the Sabbath or Sunday saves us. What saves us,” he clarified, “is our acts. Jesus didn’t teach us denominationalism.”<sup>116</sup> Some Mexicans, however, were ambivalent about becoming ardent religious followers. They legitimized their decision not to follow particular congregations because they felt restrained by religious authorities who imposed ideas that were disconnected from the immigrant needs. A Mexican, recorded as “M,” proclaimed that he did not “know anything much” but that he did “know some things” that the “*Biblicos*” did not because of their fanaticism. “They think that every word in it [Bible] is true. That isn’t reasonable. Like that story about Jonah and the whale. That is nothing but mythology.” Religious ideas espoused by influential leaders were challenged by orthodox Christians who were devoted to their particular religious branches. “M” was a relentless critic of formal religion and provided free healing sessions to Mexicans of all faiths. He claimed that he had once healed a Mexican woman who could not be cured by county or Presbyterian hospitals. In separate case, “M” claimed that he cured a Catholic couple, whose feet and face were swollen, “by means of magnetic passes.” “M” questioned the role of Christian churches in the Chicago and their ardent faith in the Bible. “M” stated:

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<sup>115</sup> “I.B.,” Box 56, Folder Life Histories, Part 1, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>116</sup> “Worker,” Box 56, Folder Life Histories Part 1, *Survey Papers*.

The Bible is just full of such stories and although it is a great book and contains great truths those who think that it is all true are foolish and besides they are egotistical. Take the fables of heaven and hell and all those things like the devil for example. Those are beliefs that belong back in the stone age [sic]. Rational men can't believe such things. Neither God nor nature work that way. To me it is not only foolish but egotistical for a man to believe that he is saved while those who don't think as he does are lost.<sup>117</sup>

Another Mexican who had previously lived in the Texas believed that Mexicans in the Southwest were more religious because of their lack of economic opportunities. In Chicago "where the wages are good and most people are able to satisfy a great many of their needs they tend to become self-satisfied," he explained, "and to feel that they do not need God."<sup>118</sup> A twenty-three year old Mexican reported that he and one of his friends had purposely agitated a local reverend with the many questions they asked. "We say a lot of things that we really don't believe," he said, "in order to shock him."<sup>119</sup> These dissensions and religious transgressions disturbed Christian leaders who worked with Mexican communities. Mexicans, though religious, were not loyal to any one church in Chicago. One protestant minister, for example, reported he was well aware that all of his members were Catholics "at heart" and that they would call upon him during sickness and death only after having been tended to by a Catholic priest. Another minister suspected that Mexicans simply attended his congregation because they had a "sense of obligation."<sup>120</sup> Priests, ministers, reverends, and pastors in South Chicago were mindful that the Mexican's relative newness to the city put religious institutions at the disposition of their interests. They could either acquiesce, or lose potential members.

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<sup>117</sup> "M.," Box 56, Folder Life Histories Part 2, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>118</sup> "J.M.," Box 56, Folder Life Histories Part 2, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>119</sup> "I.G.," Box 56, Folder Life Histories Part 2, *Survey Papers*.

<sup>120</sup> "Associations of the South Chicago Mexican Colony," *Baur Papers*, Box 2, Folder "Hughes 1936-1952," pg 17-19.

South Chicago was a vibrant Mexican community with many Mexican owned shops and business that “carried on a thriving trade.”<sup>121</sup> Similar to the Back of the Yards and Hull House *colonias*, this South Side district had its share of shops. *La Gloria Tavern*, 81<sup>st</sup> and Mackinaw Avenue, offered Spanish and Mexican entertainment on Tuesday and Sunday nights.<sup>122</sup> Yet, to some, there were not enough shops and pool halls in this area to “form an ‘exclusive’ [Mexican] neighborhood.”<sup>123</sup> One of the busiest streets was 90<sup>th</sup>, between Brandon and Burley. This street was filled with shops that sold most of the Mexican newspapers in the area. Though Mexicans in the South Side were described as not reading high brow literature, 90<sup>th</sup> street was the hub where residents could acquire literature that addressed the social and political needs of the Mexican community. In a 1928 study by Raymond E. Nelson, conducted for the Chicago Congregational Missionary Extension, he found a rich stock of Spanish and English language newspapers and magazines that were sold along the streets. After having walked through the South Side, Nelson found a medley of titles from Mexico City, Illinois, Texas, and California.<sup>124</sup>

Curiously enough, even with this high level of organization, Mexican neighborhoods were critiqued for the lack of social coherence and mental backwardness.

Father Tort, of the Mexican Catholic Church, said that Mexicans in South Chicago were

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<sup>121</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst,” *FWP Papers* Box 193, Folder 5, pg 20. Also, see Neil Betten and Raymond A. Mohl, “From Discrimination to Repatriation---Mexican Life in Gary, Indiana During the Great Depression,” *Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (1973), Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, “Chicanas in the Great Depression,” in *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History*, ed. Adelaida R. Del Castillo, *La Mujer Latina Series* (Encino, CA: Floricanto Press, 1990).

<sup>122</sup> “The Mexicans in Chicago #3,” *FWP Papers* Box 193, Folder 5 pg 3.

<sup>123</sup> “Final Examinations, 1936: Questions on Social Institutions,” *Baur Papers*, Box 2, Folder “Burgess 1934-1939,” page 2.

<sup>124</sup> Raymond E. Nelson (1928), “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” pages 29-30, Box 11, Folder 59, *Taylor Papers*. Some of the titles he listed were *El Informador*, *El Democrata*, *La Prensa*, *El Roto Grabado*, *Cinelandia*, *Ovaciones*, *Mexico*, and *El Heraldo Juvenil*. Newspapers from Mexico were also found in Hull House. The socialist Mexican newspaper *Izquierdas* was reported as being sold at a Hull House meeting. See “Frente Popular Mejicano,” *Rich Papers*, Box 1, Folder 11, page 3.



“made up of the lowest and most ignorant Indian stock” and that they were “comparatively inferior” from those who lived in the downtown area. Manuel Zuniga, a young church worker, added by saying, “You ought to come down town to see the folks there [in downtown]. The people out here [in South Chicago] do not know anything.” Dr. Ablaza, a Filipino medical doctor who treated Mexicans noted that Mexicans living in South Chicago were “ignorant, superstitious, disillusioned, wily and licentious [sic].” Some of Dr. Ablaza’s major complaints were the “sordid” relationships that took place between Mexican men and “Negro” women. A worker at the Union State Bank simply referred to Mexicans as being “seclusive, timid, and clannish.”<sup>125</sup> Those who interacted with Mexicans were left in awe by a behavior they considered vile and confusing. Mingling with African American women bewildered people like Dr. Ablaza who were surprised that Mexicans would want foster any relations with “Negroes.” Their odd social behavior perplexed urban reformers. This was most pronounced in the way that Mexicans practiced Catholicism. Father Tort, a Spaniard and Assistant Priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, was befuddled by their unorthodox Catholic gestures. Mexican Catholicism in Chicago strayed away from the norm. It was superstitious, dubious, and did not fit with Father Tort’s Catholic ideal. In an interview, Father Tort stated:

When the Mexican enters the church, instead of just dipping his hand into the Holy Water and crossing himself once, he will cross himself probably half a dozen times. They are superlatively Catholic, and expect from every little ceremonial set miraculous results. They sometimes “play” with the Holy Water, touch their temple, their heart or even the backs of their heads, expecting from this extra devotion and faithfulness that they will receive additional consideration from God.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” *Taylor Papers*, Box 11, Folder 59, pages 11-13.

<sup>126</sup> “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” *Taylor Papers*. Box 11, Folder 59, Page 20.

Tort explained that some of these mannerisms were unnecessary. After Father Tort explained to his Mexican parishioners that many of their actions were merely symbolic and unnecessary, he ceded to their resistance. “They seldom, heed our advice,” Tort noted.<sup>127</sup> But these assumptions, perhaps best pointed to the heterogeneous nature of Mexican Catholicism, which Mexican migrants attempted to replicate in Chicago. One Mexican reported that Catholic Mass in Chicago was quite different than the religious ceremonies he partook in Mexico. He observed that in Chicago parishioners knelt and stood at the same time. In his hometown he recounted that he could stand or sit as he liked throughout the service. “Here if one doesn’t do as the rest do,” he told, “the usher is likely to come and ask one to do the same that the others are.”<sup>128</sup>

### **Conclusion: Las Colonias Mexicanas en Chicago**

By the mid 1930s, three Mexican neighborhoods developed in Chicago; each had its own political identity, could lay claim to its own geographic space, and had a unique local experience. Collectively, however, Mexicans in Chicago had a similar story that connected them to the city and to Mexico. Upon their arrival, the struggles they endured to make the best out of poor social conditions they experienced unified them as a larger Mexican community in Chicago. By 1930 “any one who has frequented Halsted Street between 14<sup>th</sup> and Harrison of recent years cannot fail to note the increased amount of Spanish to be heard with each month that passes,” a University of Chicago student observed, “It is no longer rare to see places of business bearing Spanish names.”<sup>129</sup> What seemed to be a sudden surge of Mexicans in Chicago, had slowly taken place over twenty years. Initially recruited by labor contractors and then attracted by the northern industrial

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<sup>127</sup> “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” *Taylor Papers*. Box 11, Folder 59, Page 20.

<sup>128</sup> “J.H.,” *Survey Papers*, Box 56, Folder Family Histories Part 2.

<sup>129</sup> Warnshuis, “Crime and Criminal Justice among the Mexicans in Illinois”, 12.

opportunities, Mexicans settled and developed an intricate migratory circuit that helped develop Mexican Chicago. “So gradual has been the penetration of this new racial or national element into the composition of our polyglot population, and so scattered its distribution in different and separated sections of the city,” one of Ernest Burgess’ graduate students described, “that few residents of Chicago are familiar with their presence in our midst.”<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, they never represented a majority even where they concentrated. Historian Louise Año Nuevo Kerr defined Mexicans as living within a “plurality.” In the Hull House colonia they lived alongside Italians, Russians, Greeks and Poles; in the South Side with Poles, Slovaks, and Germans; and in the Back of the Yards with Poles, Irish, and African Americans.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, the discreet nature of Mexicans in Chicago did not diminish or stymie their significance in the racial imagination of the city. Mexicans, as unnoticeable as they were to some urban reformers, organized influential patriotic organizations, observed religious holidays, and provided the best they could for their youth. As one observer noted, these Mexicans were attuned to Mexican politics and literature in Spanish, and the national colors they preserved helped “revive patriotic feelings for the homeland.”<sup>132</sup> Adult Mexicans were creating Mexican communities that they aspired their children would soon occupy. According to Louise A. Kerr, their goal to create Mexican spaces for their youth would soon be challenged. Children and especially popular culture would threaten these aspirations. These were the “paradoxical strains of Mexican patriotism and Americanization,” Kerr noted.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> “The Mexican in Chicago by Manuel Bueno,” *Burgess Papers*, Box 188, folder 4, pg 1.

<sup>131</sup> Kerr, “The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970”, 28.

<sup>132</sup> “Associations of the South Chicago Mexican Colony” *Baur Papers*, Box 2, Folder “Hughes 1936-1952,” pg 24-25.

<sup>133</sup> Kerr, “The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970”, 43.

## CHAPTER 4

## CARRYING THE DUST OF THE LAND:

## MEXICAN YOUTH AND AMERICAN LIFE IN CHICAGO

White public indignation piqued during a mid-afternoon Fourth of July celebration in 1931 when a stray watermelon rind thrown by a Mexican teenager hit a Polish youth. Mexican youth breached an indiscreet racial barrier that would ordinarily draw little public attention. The racial boundaries etched in Chicago's social practice had for some time permitted Mexicans to sustain an *uneasy truce* with their Polish and Italian neighbors. Yet, on that day, the uneasy truce was too weak to curb racial violence. The spatial encroachment imparted by Mexican youth on that South Side beach escalated into a fury of rock throwing and caused "*both sides*" to draw knives. When Mexicans were finally ousted from the park by the *other side*—Poles and Italians—the racial incident left two Mexican girls seriously injured and a throng of beachgoers physically hurt. Whether this was a light shrug against the North's strict racial colorline or a blatant act of racial rebellion initiated by Mexicans is up for interpretation. Yet, what is unquestionable are the racial practices that were inscribed in the social environment shaping northern towns and cities. Although Mexican youth did occasionally mingle with Poles and Italians under an unstable racial compact, Mexican youth stood on the *other side* of the colorline. Mexicans were negotiating the fastidious racial expectations of the North that ethnic immigrants and African Americans were still trying to figure out for themselves. The fact that Mexicans were not black and, at times, accepted as white, did not absolve them from

the threat of racial antagonism. In fact, the arrival of Mexicans tested and agitated Chicago's racial system that soon experience much reconfiguring and adjusting over the years.<sup>1</sup>

The "minor" race riot in 1931 attracted the attention of the Mexican Consul in Chicago because the Polish and Italian youth who severely injured the two Mexican girls were not charged. Yet, the scope and significance of the attacks is not solely found in the eruption of violence that occurred on Chicago's sandy beaches that day, but also on what befell Mexican youth in Chicago as they resided on the *other side* of the racial colorline. Such incidents, it is important to note, did not occur on a large scale.<sup>2</sup> The Chicago Race Riot of 1919, for example, occurred under similar circumstances, incited citywide violence, and drew national media attention.<sup>3</sup> Instead, for Mexican youth, an event of this magnitude would not be felt until the summer of 1943 when large-scale race riots erupted against zoot suiters in Michigan, Texas, and California.<sup>4</sup> Before then, Mexican youth—

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<sup>1</sup> F. Arturo Rosales provides an excellent discussion regarding the creation of an "uneasy truce" that commonly ended in racial violence. He details the events that occurred at Calumet Beach on the Fourth of July, which he calls a "minor riot." See, F. Arturo Rosales, "Mexicans, Interethnic Violence, and Crime in the Chicago Area During the 1920s and 1930s: The Struggle to Achieve Ethnic Consciousness," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 2 (1989): 83, F. Arturo Rosales, *¡Pobre Raza!: Violence, Justice, and Mobilization among México Lindo Immigrants, 1900-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 116, 28, and 210. For a very brief account of the incident also see, "Chicago Judge Stirs Nations," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8 1931, "Sentenciado a Seis Meses De Prision Por Defender a Sus Connacionales," *El Nacional*, July 31 1931.

<sup>2</sup> Paul S. Taylor, recorded "small riots" in 1922 when "Mexicans used to stop polish girls." See, "George Glossa; Employment Department, Armour & Company, March 1929," Box 10, Folder 5, Paul Taylor Papers. Also see, "Quell Riot as Woman Slays Former Deputy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 26 1927.

<sup>3</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Colin Fisher, "African Americans, Outdoor Recreation, and the 1919 Chicago Race Riot," in *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History*, ed. Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> See, Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), Edward J. Escobar, "Zoot Suiters and Cops: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department During World War II," in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* ed. Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot*

like the minor Fourth of July race riot—were often met with a lighter resistance, in the streets and at home, that was not as clearly defined and understood by all Chicagoans.<sup>5</sup> The social restrictions Mexican youth encountered were inconsistent, impractical, and contradictory. Mexican youth were able to transcend more easily through most racial barriers unlike their adult counterparts, as long as they conformed to the power dynamics set forth by whites. Mexicans children and youth occupied and redefined public spaces reserved for whites and interacted with ethnic immigrants, yet still were considered to be on the *other side*. Being young seemed to circumvent the racial thinking endorsed by white racial supremacists, and required permutations in order to suppress Mexican public encroachment. If Mexicans were young enough, or not yet old enough to have a lasting imprint of Mexican ideas, then perhaps they could be molded by an Americanization process engulfing social agencies across American cities. Considering these circumstances, this chapter looks at how Mexican youth experienced life in their homes and how their parents renegotiated their own national identity based on their children's experiences.

Unlike Mexican immigrant adults who were described as creating a Mexican problem because they did not naturalize at the same rate as ethnic whites and were accused of clinging to a Mexican identity, children and youth in Chicago were American by birth. Nonetheless, they revealed a national identity that was neither Mexican nor

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*Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Catherine Sue Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> In fact, Mexicans did experience widespread opposition, but it was not on the same scale imposed on blacks. However, some studies have shown that there were specific instances when Mexicans were the preferred victims of choice. For example, see Carrigan and Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848-1928." For a nuanced look at how regional location shaped the Mexican experience, see Julie M. Weise, "Mexican Nationalisms, Southern Racisms: Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. South, 1908-1939," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008).

American. Mexicans migrants who arrived in Chicago in the early twentieth century, as some historians have noted, reclaimed their Mexican identity by the 1940s.<sup>6</sup> This trajectory was shaped by Chicago's racial restrictions that impeded full entry into mainstream social spheres and by the heightened nationalistic fervor on the eve of the Mexican Revolution. This process has been also characterized as "cultural and generational fissures" that occurred in the second generation to the detriment of parent and child relations.<sup>7</sup> Yet, Mexican youth confronted a transnational quandary that went beyond having to wrestle with two opposing cultures. For the young generation who did not have to naturalize or seek out Americanization, they became part of a transnational generation that reconciled cultural and racial expectations transcending national boundaries. Indeed, these cultural and racial expectations extended across the U.S.-Mexican border for all migrants, but it was the children and youth who had to deal with it firsthand.<sup>8</sup>

"El Enganchado" (the hooked one), was a popular Mexican *corrido* (ballad) that told the story of Mexican father who had been recruited to work in the United States. Printed in Chicago's *Mexico* newspaper, it disclosed the racial, generational, and gender

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<sup>6</sup> This particular claim has been made by Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39*, Kerr, "The Chicano Experience in Chicago: 1920-1970", Rosales, *¡Pobre Raza!: Violence, Justice, and Mobilization among México Lindo Immigrants, 1900-1936*.

<sup>7</sup> Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 119. Also, see Douglas Monroy, "'Our Children Get So Different Here': Film, Fashion, Popular Culture and the Process of Cultural Syncretization in Mexican Los Angeles, 1900-1935," *Aztlan* 19, no. 1 (1990).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the "Mexican problem" and the argument that Mexican immigrants in Chicago became Mexican rather than American, see Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39*, Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, "Mexican Chicago: Chicano Assimilation Aborted, 1939-1954," in *The Ethnic Frontier*, ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977). For a recent discussion on transnationalism, see Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way, "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008), Flores, "On the Wings of the Revolution: Transnational Politics and the Making of Mexican American Identities", Roger Waldinger, "Rethinking Transnationalism," *Empiria: Revista de Metodología en Ciencias Sociales*, no. 19 (2010).

discords that Mexicans experiences when they arrived in Chicago. A portion of the corrido stated:

Many Mexicans don't care to speak  
the language their mother taught them.  
They go about saying they are Spanish  
and denying their homeland.

Some are darker than tar  
but they pretend to be Saxon.  
They go about powdered up to their neck  
and use skirts instead of pants.

The girls go about almost naked  
and call *la tienda* the "estor."  
They go around with their legs very dirty  
but with stockings of chiffon.

They have even changed my old lady  
who now dresses with short silk clothes.  
She goes around painted like a piñata  
and in the night goes to the "dancing jol."

My kids only speak "inglís"  
and they now don't like our Spanish.  
They call me "fader" and don't work  
and they are very good at the Charleston.

I am tired of this foolishness  
and I will return to Michoacán.  
As a memory I will leave the old lady behind  
to see if someone wants to take her on.<sup>9</sup>

The cultural, gender and generational fissures affecting Mexicans in Chicago were not restricted to the United States or Mexico. It was akin to a romantic saga between two contiguous countries. As described in the corrido *El Enganchado*, Mexicans were

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<sup>9</sup> For the Spanish transcription of the corrido, see "El Enganchado," *Mexico*, August 8 1928. Paul Taylor published this corrido four years after it was originally published in the Chicago newspaper *Mexico*, but Taylor does not note where or when he first came across the ballad. See, Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, viii. For a general discussion on the significance of corridos, see Guillermo E. Hernández, "What Is a Corrido?: Thematic Representation and Narrative Discourse," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 18 (1999).



undergoing a radical cultural shift that some men lamented. Manuel Gamio chronicled these social transitions when he researched the migration of Mexicans to Chicago. Through his local contacts and many interviews, he found a linguistic phenomenon in the urban north that was characterized as corrupting their native tongue. He recorded Mexicans using *Anglismos* (Anglicism) on a daily basis, which he found were not solely being used by youth. Gamio found a hybrid, or a phonetic adaptation, of particular English words frequently used. “What’s a matter” became *guasumara* and “stock yards” became *estoque yardas*. Other words like *daime* (dime), *traque* (track), *yarda* (yard), *guachando* (watching), *puchar* (push), *lonchar* (to lunch), *bonche* (bunch), and *chante* (shanty) were additional words that caught Gamio’s attention.<sup>10</sup> This slow cultural and national transition threatened the formation of what was believed to be authentic Mexican communities.

Manuel Gamio reported in preliminary study on migration that “The result of English words in his speech, after the immigrant of Mexican-American border fashion, is a barbarous patois, impossible grammatically.”<sup>11</sup> In the American Southwest, for example, debates about language abilities became everyday discussions for Mexican parents.<sup>12</sup> However, in Chicago, the propensity to use Anglicisms transcended generations, as Gamio noted. In an article printed Chicago’s prominent Spanish language newspaper *México*, an author was upset at the extent to which *anglicismos* had spread in Chicago’s communities. The author noted, “It is somewhat ridiculous, and even

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<sup>10</sup> “Fenómenos de Lingüística,” Box 3, Folder 11, Gamio Papers, UC Berkeley. Translation made by author.

<sup>11</sup> Gamio, *Preliminary Report on Mexican Immigration in the United States*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Monroy, “Our Children Get So Different Here”: Film, Fashion, Popular Culture and the Process of Cultural Syncretization in Mexican Los Angeles, 1900-1935,” Vicki L. Ruiz, “Star Struck”: Acculturation, Adolescence, and the Mexican American Woman, 1920-1950,” in *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*, ed. Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

annoying, when hearing through the lips of our countless co-citizens mispronounced *anglismos*, even though most of them know English, it is a most reprehensible act, even so.” The author recounted of a dinner between José Manuel Puig Casauranc, Mexico's secretary of education, and Mexican civic leaders from Chicago when a Mexican from Chicago blurted, “You have ‘*espoliado*’ (spoiled) my dinner,” to which Dr. Puig replied, “Have you not stopped Americanizing yourselves, my friends?” The author noted that Mexicans in Chicago ought to “demonstrate to our brothers in Mexico that we have not been completely demexicanized.” He was asking adults to not succumb to the forces that were eroding their national identity. For youth, however, the expectations coming from staunch nationalists like this author were distinct and not as rigid. The author concluded, “This may well be forgiven among children born here, but never among the ‘big boys,’ whose sacrosanct motto is to love, preserve our language, our nation and our great love for the blessed land that saw us be born, Mexico!”<sup>13</sup>

Mexicans in Chicago did not resist learning English, in fact, they promoted it. Instead, they were afraid of losing their own language at the price of learning English. They were adamant about embracing their new environment, learning, and perhaps taking up new cultural expressions they encountered in Chicago, but not at the cost of forsaking their own. In a discussion regarding the observance of the Fourth of July, Mexicans did not resist partaking in these “American” celebrations. In fact, they promoted respecting and celebrating national holidays, albeit once all the racism against them stopped. An article in *México* was diplomatic in its intonations. It noted, “Naturally it would be correct, since it would be a demonstration of culture and friendship to unite with the sons of this country to celebrate their greatest celebration, but this, as I said before, provided

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<sup>13</sup> “Desamericanicemonos Señores!,” *México*, July 7 1928. Translation made by author.

there wasn't this tremendous abyss of hate that separates us from this town; an abyss that he made with his conduct toward our suffering race, it has been responsible for deepening it more and more."<sup>14</sup> In a short, yet poignant article, Jose Vasconcelos wrote an article in *México* that he specifically directed to *los jovenes* (the youth). Vasconcelos noted, "Today we need a [new] generation. Let them not take us as models; let them forge their own lives, inspired by what has been the great humility of all epochs."<sup>15</sup> According to Vasconcelos, as it was for many nationalist, adherence to Mexican culture was mostly reserved for the "big boys."

The greatest trial Mexican men endured, like the protagonist of *El Engachado* proclaimed, was the negotiation of race and ethnicity. Young Mexican boys were expected to meet the demands of manliness, or at least prepare for it. A father noted that boys in Mexico "are not like the boys here [in Chicago], that just like to be out in the street, laughing and talking with the girls and playing ball. They can't get any place doing that. In Mexico, boys from eight to ten start learning something."<sup>16</sup> It was not the use of "inglés" words, as described in *El Engachado*, or the assimilation of Anglo customs that put pressure on generational fissures. Rather, these debates had already begun in Mexico, prior to Mexican emigration. *Americanism* was not relegated to the United States. In fact, it had already perforated Mexican borders. Minor indications of any cultural infringement were evident in the practices being promoted in Mexico. A 1926 ad printed in the *Durango Rotario* stated it had a full assortment of caskets upholstered in "American

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<sup>14</sup> "Los Mexicanos Y El Cuatro De Julio," *México*, June 30 1928. Translation made by author.

<sup>15</sup> José Vasconcelos, "A Los Jovenes," *México*, June 18 1927. Translation made by author.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Jackson Baur, "Delinquency among Mexican Boys in South Chicago" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1938), 143.

style.”<sup>17</sup> Americanization was a transborder affair and it became a heated issue when talkies from the United States made their debut in Mexican cinemas. An article printed in Mexico City’s *El Universal* newspaper titled “The Motion Picture and The Peaceful Invasion” publically castigated the United States for what it was doing to Mexican culture. The editorial accused the United States’ film industry for its imperialistic posture that was expanding U.S. Empire across Latin America. The issue, as it was in Chicago, was the fear of losing their identity over an Anglicized culture. The article in *El Universal* noted, “The fantastic wealth and power of the United States overflows its bounds and floods all continents, imposing American standards, taste, and manners by all multiple expansion---motion picture, linguistic, musical, etc.---which is always easy and effective, impelled as it is to by a cunning hand weighed down with dollars.” *El Universal* noted that halting the southward flow of U.S. dominance was an urgent matter most notably because of the influence it had on children who were “delivered up defenceless [sic] to all the poisons of the [U.S.] films, and whom it would be well to rescue under the slogan ‘Protect Childhood’...”<sup>18</sup> Carleton Beals, a U.S. journalist who frequented Mexico, predicted a track that U.S. popular culture would have on Mexico. Beals noted, “As the day advances, jazz pushed the *zandunga* aside. The [Mexican] young folk will one-step and fox trot and waltz. After their own fashion, for all of these

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<sup>17</sup> “Durango Rotario, 1926.” Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910-1929. NARA, frame 930, reel 151.

<sup>18</sup> “Stokeley W. Morgan to U.S. Secretary of State, June 11, 1929.” *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910-1929*, NARA, reel 148, slide 906- 910. Film historian Carlos Mora notes that U.S. silent films, like *Adventures of Pearl White*, had already showcased in Mexico and were usually translated into foreign languages, but the American motion picture producers saw no need to do so for films that had sound because they saw their largest market in the U.S. See, Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896-1980*, Rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 19. Also, see Joanne Herschfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

dances will not be exactly as we know them. It is difficult to glide on dirt floors with bare feet; the one step is a hopping whirls—rapid, exhilarating, energetic, sensuous.”<sup>19</sup>

The debates concerning the threat of Americanization was an issue that highly affected Mexicans in Chicago, as well as those who had not yet migrated to the United States. Observers in Chicago noted that Mexicans “are often brought in contact with a great variety of new ideas through the movies, newspapers and radio which it is impossible for the church as a whole to assimilate at once.”<sup>20</sup> The educational theorist John Dewey, for example, believed that the Americanization of Mexicans could do some good, except for the recoil effect it had on American schools. “In some sense,” Dewey noted,

[T]he ‘Americanization’ of the country [Mexico] appears to be an inevitable process, both for good and for evil. The Ford car and the movie are already working a revolution. English is practically the only foreign language taught in the schools, including even the national military school. The large emigration from Mexico into the United States is having a reflex effect. Increasing numbers of Mexican youth are sent to the United States for their schooling.<sup>21</sup>

These debates about Americanization took place in various mediums. Mexicans who began to publish their own newspapers in the United States printed rejoinders. In an article that appeared in *México* an author noted that he had come across a child who he knew was Mexican based on his “ethnic characteristics” and had asked the young boy if he was Mexican. The child told him that he was not, but that his father was. The author of the article used this run-in with this child as proof that Mexican youth in Chicago were

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<sup>19</sup> Carleton Beals, “The Mexican Maze: Snatches of Life in Aztec Lands,” *The North American Review* 230, no. 4 (1930): 458.

<sup>20</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> John Dewey, “From a Mexican Notebook.” *The New Republic*. October 20, 1926, 239-241. Clipping in Robert Redfield Papers, University of Chicago-Special Collections Research Center, Box 56, Folder 23.

being “completely Americanized.” They use “‘daddy’; ‘block’,” the author added, “but don’t know what ‘bravo’ means.”<sup>22</sup>

Historian Vicki Ruiz notes that, “Americanization seemed to seep into the barrios from all directions—from schools, factories, and even their ethnic press.”<sup>23</sup> However, Americanization was not always a unilateral process or the prime force that altered Mexican identities. A look at how gender roles were affected shows how Mexican communities in Chicago generated their own formal and informal spaces where women challenged hetero-normative expectations. Labor and the new market economy they entered in Chicago enabled women to engage in and create social spaces that challenged gender relations at work and at home. For example, a women’s society named the *Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez* was organized to visit the sick in local hospitals. The main duty was to take flowers, food and newspapers to Mexican patients.<sup>24</sup> As the work of sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo indicates, migration and immigration of Mexican families into new economies reshaped the role of women and young girls. The division of household labor, decision-making power in marital relationships and their spatial mobility was altered.<sup>25</sup> As Americanization “seeped” into Mexican neighborhoods, women took part in a wider assortment of social roles. This not only affected the male-female relations, but also changed the familial power relations. Moving into these

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, 273. Taylor cites an article published on April 11, 1925.

<sup>23</sup> See Ruiz, “‘Star Struck’: Acculturation, Adolescence, and the Mexican American Woman, 1920-1950,” 113.

<sup>24</sup> “Visit to the Sick,” *La Defensa*, October 17 1936, (CFPLS), Reel 63.

<sup>25</sup> Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). For a historical perspective on these relations, see Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

unregulated spaces displaced their traditional gendered role. Roles ascribed to young girls and boys were altered by the new economic and social freedoms. A Mexican mother noted that girls were losing their integrity as women “because they run around so much and are so free, that our Mexican girls do not know how to act... This terrible freedom in this United States. The Mexican girls seeing American girls with freedom, they want it too, so they do what they like.”<sup>26</sup> Aspirations of freedom were not seen in the traditional sense of liberty and autonomy or as a threat to a sheltered life. Instead, the tenets of freedom were perceived as motivating activities that would de-Mexicanize the youth.

Being out late at night or “hanging with the boys” was only part of the cultural threat that was continually prohibited by parents—most importantly, it was the social process that went into acquiring these freedoms which seemed most dangerous. Mexican parents juxtaposed the traits attained in this process with those of a “good” Mexican child. Entering the realms of Chicago’s freedom not only meant being more like an American, but also less Mexican. A 1931 study of Chicago noted that Mexican girls modified their dress to acquire jobs and alter sexual relations. “The Mexican girl finds an entirely different standard of women’s dress prevailing in this country,” the study noted, “often enough economic necessity itself demands of the girl that she dress in modern fashion if she would win a job. Once persuaded she is apt to go to the extremes in her modernity. The men do not understand.”<sup>27</sup> It was not only the men who did not understand the extremes of modernity, older women were also reported as showing distaste towards the new fashion that attracted these transnational girls. “The older woman gazes after them [Mexican girls] in stern disapproval,” a 1931 report noted,

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<sup>26</sup> Emory S. Bogardus, “Attitudes and the Mexican Immigrant,” in *Social Attitudes*, ed. Kimball Young (New York: Henry Holt, 1931), 310.

<sup>27</sup> Jones and Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago*, 19.

“Then she shakes her head. Such an immodest dress for a girl to wear in public! And to think of any young girl being out on the streets alone with her lover! Such things are never done in Mexico!”<sup>28</sup>

Popular culture and the complexities of gender influenced the Americanization of Mexican youth. Young girls’ and boys’ desirability to speak English and practice American norms created tensions at home. Nonetheless, the ability to speak two languages gave Mexican youth an edge over their parents. Most of the Mexican male migrants solely spoke Spanish and the little English they did handle was only enough to get them by. Consequently, Mexican children who spoke English learned to negotiate two worlds and exert power within their homes. The adults’ limited English proficiency enabled youth to invoke linguistic power in familial and Spanish speaking circles. “The children play a very different role from that which they did in Mexico,” a study on religious life reported, “The parents are often dependent on them as interpreters and they find it difficult to follow the child outside of the home. Cultural differences tend to separate parent and child. The child itself is liable to have problems which neither its parents nor its school teachers understand.”<sup>29</sup>

A University of Chicago college student found that Mexican adults were “largely dependent on the interpreters brought by the Mexicans themselves, who in many instances are only children without adequate English or Spanish vocabulary to explain the doctor’s orders.”<sup>30</sup> The ability to juggle the English language, even if it was poorly done, was highly valued. It gave Mexicans, and especially children, the opportunity to bridge a gap with their surrounding immigrant community. In a visit to the home of the Quintero

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>29</sup> “Untitled Document” Box 56, folder 6 “Religious Life of the Mexican in Chicago part 2,” Survey Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, “Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago”, 150-51.



family that had eleven children, a University of Chicago student asked a twelve year-old boy a question in English, but the Mexican boy only responded by nodding his head. When his mother noticed that he was not verbalizing his response, she told him in Spanish, "You have to practice your English, for they can tell you the meaning of things. Don't be timid." To this, the university student wrote in his journal, "His parents showed a great desire that their children learn English."<sup>31</sup> In a separate case, the ability of a child's English language skills enabled urban reformers to enter Mexican homes. When Robert Redfield visited a box car neighborhood "where no one was about," Redfield came across a little boy who was breaking up some coal. Redfield "made him the opening, soon engaging his mother and father in conversation."<sup>32</sup> In these communities, children were seen and heard. As historian Sucheng Chan argues, the second generation served as an "entering wedge" to a city's social structure.<sup>33</sup>

In these familial power relations, parents and children negotiated how they redefined culture at home. Delfino Gaytan, was a thirty-five year old man living in Chicago who had taken in his nineteen year old nephew as his own son. Gaytan and his nephew lived in an apartment that had a living room, two bedrooms, a toilet, and a kitchen that "looked quite American." And although Gaytan and his nephew lived in the same apartment, there were "certain infrequent and rather random references" in their conversation, an observer noted, suggesting they lived "in two fairly distinct worlds." Delfino noted that his nephew was "a good boy, as young fellows go now; he has his own

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<sup>31</sup> "The Mexican in Chicago by Manuel Bueno" page 16

<sup>32</sup> "C&W.I. Box Car Colony", Redifled Diary Pg. 68-69

<sup>33</sup> See Chan, "European and Asian Immigration into the United States in Comparative Perspective, 1820s to 1920," 66.

friends.”<sup>34</sup> The composition and the generational contact the Gaytan household provided influenced how children understood the world around them.

A study of Mexicans in South Chicago suggested there were four major categories of Mexican households. The first was a “boarding house family” where a number of single adults lived with a family. The second was a “bachelor-household,” which was where a group of same-sex adults lived together and shared housekeeping responsibilities. The third were households where families had many children who were born “at frequent intervals.” The fourth, and last category, was comprised of intergenerational families where two to three generations lived together.<sup>35</sup> In one multi-family home, for example, there were two Mexican families. Six children lived in the attic along with their parents and on the first floor a couple, one child, and additional boarders occupied the space.<sup>36</sup> A University of Chicago student interviewed a family living in two-bedrooms where five men, five women, and six children lived.<sup>37</sup> In assessing the composition of these homes, Robert Redfield, noted that “nearly every family has a boarder.” In another Mexican home Redfield found a wife, a husband, their two children, the wife’s mother, the husband’s mother, and a boarder. The Mexican family served as a central locus for boarders and influenced the cultural interaction children had in their homes. Children and youth were always in close contact with older adults, who in many cases were strangers to the family. When Redfield asked a local

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<sup>34</sup> “Delfino Gaytan,” Box 57, Folder 1, Survey Papers.

<sup>35</sup> “Family Organization and Sex Attitudes”: Box 56, folder 6 “Religious Life of the Mexican in Chicago part 2,” *Survey Papers*.

<sup>36</sup> “Redfield Diary” Redfield Papers, page 48.

<sup>37</sup> “Mexicans in Chicago by Manuel Bueno,” University of Chicago page 14.

post-master about the living arrangements of Mexicans, the postmaster noted that, “they gather around the married couple.”<sup>38</sup>

The most significant finding of the report that categorized Mexican households in Chicago was that in all of the categories there were “differences in the degree of Americanization” and that if a mother was present she usually was “overburdened with the care of the children.” For boys as young as twelve, the report also described, “it was not considered right” that they should assist in household chores because it was a “girl’s job.”<sup>39</sup> When Manuel Bueno, a Spanish student from the University of Chicago, visited the Quintero family he observed the oldest daughter, who was poorly dressed, washing the dishes. Further investigation by Bueno revealed that young girls were held to different standards. An acquaintance of the Quintero family told Bueno that the eighteen-year old girl had not left the two-bedroom home since arriving in Chicago. She “worked all the time,” the acquaintance told, “cooking, house-cleaning, and helping her mother about everything generally.”<sup>40</sup> It is not clear to what extent young girls were sequestered in homes or kept away from the streets, but these cases indicate a jarring reality influencing young Mexican girls.

On July 4, 1924 a brief cover-page article in *México* told the story of ten-year-old Santa López who died when she tried to climb out of her third story Chicago home after her parents left to work and locked her in a bedroom. It was reported that Santa attempted to climb out of a window when she noticed children playing out in the street. As she tried to climb out to join the kids below, a flowerpot she was holding onto lost its footing,

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<sup>38</sup> Redfield Diary, page 75-76, 84.

<sup>39</sup> “The Mexican Family in Chicago by Manuel Bueno” Pages 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> “The Mexican Family in Chicago by Manuel Bueno” Pages 17-18.

causing Santa to fall three stories to her death.<sup>41</sup> Santa's death did not attract additional commentary in the press. In fact, this was the only reference made about Santa.

Nonetheless, her tragic story is a powerful reminder of what was happening to Mexican families when they settled in the urban north. Mexicans, whether through symbolism or tragedy, were slowly losing their daughters to the city.

Young women in Chicago faced tighter restrictions than those applied to male youth. One sixteen year old Mexican girl adamantly proclaimed that American girls in Chicago had more "rights" than she did. If Mexican girls did not obey their parents, the girl noted, they could get "*unos buenos palos*" (a good clubbing). Girls, who were obedient and listened to their elders, did not have to worry so much. A mother, who had recently lost one daughter in a fire, was optimistic about the outlook of her surviving girl. "I have the best daughter that ever a mother had. She will not do a thing without first consulting me." The mother beamed because she encouraged her daughter, who worked in a factory, to buy her own clothes. Yet, the girl's co-workers critiqued her because they felt it was silly that she had to give up her check to her mother. The mother, seemingly oblivious to the social pressures that her daughter encountered at work, noted that she did not "get enough recreation." "I bought that phonograph for her," the mom noted, "now she enjoys music in the evening; you have no idea how that music in the evening helps her [because of her sisters death]." The cultural and social expectations that Mexican adults took with them to Chicago were not easily loosened, but were challenged nonetheless. A young Mexican male noted, "I don't care if the girl I marry bobs her hair

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<sup>41</sup> "Una Niña Mexicana Sufrió El Mortal Accidente En La Calle 14," *Mexico*, July 4 1929.

and wears a bathing suit, but she can't do it until after my mother's death because she wouldn't like it."<sup>42</sup>

Mexican youth appeased their parents at home and the expectations of the streets. Children of immigrants negotiated the fine line drawn by their parents and maneuvered their way around cultural and gender norms. A Mexican boy interviewed by Robert Redfield explained that although his father had resided in the United States for sixteen years he remained very strict and wanted to raise them in Mexico so that they would grow up with Mexicans. The youngster noted that roles in Mexico were very traditional, but that his cousin in Mexico had been mailing him Mexican newspapers that discussed how women were gaining more institutional and social power. To show evidence of his father's traditional propensity, he told Redfield that his father had him excused from gymnasium class because he thought it was immoral. The boy further stated that he and his father only attended the movie theaters about three times a year and that there was only one girl who came over his house. The boy stated that the only reason his father allowed the thirteen-year old girl to go visit him was because "she is in the same condition as me." Yet, the boy clarified, the girl went to the movies more often than he did and was "quite bold." Even so, the girl shocked the boy when she told him that despite having more liberties, she would "break away" when she turned eighteen. The boy reflected on his father's imposition and stated that "even American teachers tell me I shouldn't stay with my father, but I don't think it is good to break away from your family." The girls' condition was interpreted differently by a social worker who said that the girl was "so restricted" by her father that she would raise the height of her dresses hem when she went to school, and lower it upon returning home. The dress, the social

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<sup>42</sup> Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, 201.

worker noted, “was not too far out of style at school and yet [would] satisfy the demands of her father at home.” These, tactics were also practiced by a set of Mexican girls who had migrated from Texas. They were not allowed to mingle on the streets and could not remain too long after school because it would draw suspicion from their parents. Their mother would only allow them to go out with boys if they were chaperoned. These pretensions, however, were enforced by their parents because they were worried about what neighbors and friends “would say.”<sup>43</sup> Mexican parents could not have been more proud when their efforts to keep their kids off the streets was recognized by a local newspaper. In the summer of 1928, *The Calumet News*, a newspaper from East Chicago, printed an article titled, “We Take Our Hats Off to These Boys,” that praised the efforts of Mexican parents who were providing “healthful social activities that would divert” their children from pool halls and the “worse places.”<sup>44</sup>

Members of the Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) who were interested in providing moral and religious guidance set out to investigate Mexicans throughout Chicago.<sup>45</sup> In a series of interviews and field studies they found that Mexican children and youth would generally “cling very closely to their parents.” “The father,” a set of transcribed field notes explain, “is often a true counselor and protector for them and he in turn often depends upon them to take care of him in his old age.” Mexicans, it was noted, were “often sensitive to the fact that this relationship often does not exist [sic] in American homes.” CTS researchers walked through railroad camps, streets, social

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 201-02.

<sup>44</sup> “We Take Our Hats Off to These Boys,” *The Calumet News*, July 8, 1927. As cited in Rogers, “The Role of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in the Adjustment of the Mexican Community to Live in the Indiana Harbor”, page 24-25.

<sup>45</sup> Rev. John Evans, “Federation Makes Religious Survey of Chicago Churches,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 17 1929.

agencies, and schools excavating as much they could to understand Mexicans. Interview notes compiled in 1928 by CTS researchers affirmed the patriarchal structure of Mexican families. An unnamed Mexican man stated, “even when grown we go to our father for advice and he always gives us the best of his counsel. I have tried to teach my children that they should come to me when they are in trouble or have some problem. I think a father should help his children and protect them. I have noticed that in the United States children do not seem to respect their parents very much.”<sup>46</sup> Social workers and the researchers primarily honed in on issues of conflict. Their understanding of immigrants was premised on the idea that they would undergo and overcome a set of familial problems prior to fully accommodating to their new environment. When these researchers entered the home, they typically blamed the family structure for causing the social problems they were confronting in the city. A set of field notes collected by Eunice Felter, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, pointed to the internal turmoil of the families that was the blame for agitating the assimilation process. Felter noted,

Conflict is beginning to arise between generations as the young people become part of the larger community. This is particularly seen in the efforts of fathers to control the conduct of their daughters by the old Mexican standards. Churches which side with the older people tend to lose young people, but there is some question as to how the churches can help the young people to build up new standards of conduct to replace those which they are leaving.<sup>47</sup>

The Protestant churches, particularly those in the South Side of Chicago, proposed that they could best help the Mexican youth to “build up new standards.” Helping the youth, however, was not a simple task that involved a keen understanding of parental relations. Protestant churches felt that Catholicism did not provide the individual liberties that

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<sup>46</sup> “Due to the fact...” Survey Papers, Box 56, Folder 6.

<sup>47</sup> “Summary of Significant facts on the Religious Life of the Mexican in Chicago” Box 58, folder 2 “Original Manuscripts.

would enable them to become well-adjusted youth. Most importantly, religious leaders knew that if they wanted to work with children and youth, they needed to carefully toe the line drawn by parents. Church leaders felt that youth were outgrowing their traditional Mexican racial, national, and religious identities and saw this as an opportunity where they could do some good. The difficulty was that many of these organizations could not avoid becoming snared in the familial tensions that were shaping the first wave of immigrant families. The Protestant sentiment, Felter surmised, was that “in the next few years the young people will increasingly grow away from their families into the wider community. If the church opposes this it will lose the young people. If it second [sic] it, it may lose the parents and possibly the young people may be forbidden to attend.”<sup>48</sup> Settlement house workers, urban reformers, educators, and civic and religious leaders confronted this dilemma.

A female social worker, for example, who had worked with Mexicans, was quoted by Paul Taylor as saying, “Children want more freedom like the Americans. They want the money they earn, to dress better, and to go out without chaperons. The parents see that it is the custom here.” Taylor, who in the late 1920s had walked the streets of Chicago in an effort to understand Mexican migration, defined this as an “extreme conflict between parents and children over the adoption of American customs.” Taylor, unlike other individuals who worked with Mexican youth, understood the social and racial accommodation that was taking place in Chicago’s Mexican communities. As he noted, there was some “relaxation of Mexican customs.” He found that there were parents who were “quick to adjust themselves to their children” and who were “lenient” and

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<sup>48</sup> “Summary of Significant facts on the Religious Life of the Mexican in Chicago” Box 58, folder 2 “Original Manuscripts.



would “give in.” Other parents were, “gentle” and had “good control” of their offspring, Taylor reported.<sup>49</sup> For Manuel Gamio, the social problems Mexican youth in Chicago confronted were attributed to their cultural malnourishment. Perhaps, if Mexican parents could take their children to Mexico, at least temporarily, Gamio claimed, they could subdue the forces that heightened the Americanizing process in Chicago. Gamio noted, “It is the indefinite residence in the United States of the Mexican immigrant that produces these inevitable racial shocks, social discriminations, and cultural antagonisms.”<sup>50</sup> Scholars like Taylor and Gamio had differing ideas, yet both understood that it was time that influenced the changing nature of culture.

A master’s thesis completed by Paul L. Warnshuis in 1930 at the University of Chicago confirmed Gamio’s statement. Although Warnshuis’ study primarily focused on the delinquency and criminal activities experienced by Mexicans in Illinois, the surveys he conducted throughout the state showed that the ability to speak English progressively increased with time. After interviewing ninety-eight Mexicans who were incarcerated in jails throughout the state, Warnshuis pointed to how “few” Mexicans spoke English even after they had lived in the U.S. for more than ten years. He concluded that only twenty-six percent of all the Mexican-born prisoners who were in the U.S. less than five years spoke some English. For Warnshuis, analyzing the rate at which Mexicans acquired English, within a five-year time frame after they settled in the U.S., was enough to prove that they were not assimilating. However, a closer examination of his data does not corroborate his conclusion. In fact, the majority of Mexican-born prisoners (fifty-one percent)—regardless of the amount of time they had resided in the United States—spoke

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<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, 203.

<sup>50</sup> Manuel Gamio, “Migration and Planning,” *The Survey*, May 1 1931, 174.

some English. Since Warnshuis only discussed the first five years of residency in the U.S., it led his audience to believe that the grand majority of Mexicans could not juggle the English language. The raw data he included in his thesis, but failed to analyze in his narrative, clearly showed that the likelihood of Mexican nationals knowing “some English” surged as the amount of time they resided in the U.S. increased. Most poignantly, Warnshuis’ data revealed that fifty-nine percent of Mexican born prisoners who had resided in the U.S. for more than five years did speak some English. Additional data showed that sixty-seven percent of Mexicans who had resided in the U.S. for more than ten years spoke some English; for those who had lived in the U.S. more than twenty years, the percentage rose to eighty-two percent. Although it is unclear how Warnshuis evaluated the language skills of this group, the data he collected, albeit ignored by him, showed that the longer Mexicans resided in the U.S., the more likely they were to pick up some English skills. Most notably, what his data ultimately revealed was that the ability to know “some English,” for Mexicans who resided in the U.S. more than twenty years, was almost equal to the rate of Mexicans who were born in the U.S.<sup>51</sup> Even if Warnshuis did not focus on children and youth, his data, with all of its limitations, does reveal that there was a linguistic shift that was occurring as early as the 1930s—within all age groups. This first wave of Mexican adults who lived in Illinois was learning English. But the ability to learn English, as explained earlier, presented a threat to Mexican nationals who expected the next generation to maintain the culture and national identity.

In 1929, Anita E. Jones, director of the United States Children’s Bureau, delivered a paper titled “Conditions Surrounding Resident Mexican Families” at the National

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<sup>51</sup> Warnshuis, “Crime and Criminal Justice among the Mexicans in Illinois”, 22-23. Warnshuis found that eighty two percent of the U.S.-born Mexicans he interviewed spoke some English.

Conference of Social Work in San Francisco where she explained the social condition of Mexicans in Chicago. Jones noted that Mexicans in Chicago had followed a different ethnic trajectory than their counterparts in Texas or other white immigrants in Chicago. She found that Mexicans in Chicago were slow to change their diet, but generally altered their living conditions to fit the Northern way of life. She reported that Mexicans slightly modified their diet by making wheat flour tortillas, rather than eating the much more traditional tortillas made of corn admixture. Jones attributed this dietary adaptation to the dearth of facilities that sold ground corn, the hardness of the Illinois corn, but mostly because it was too expensive to produce corn tortillas. Honing in on style of dress, Jones found that Mexican women were less likely than “other foreign women” to wear a shawl. Mexican women, instead, could be seen wearing “boudoir hats” while Mexican men wore straw shade hats, caps, or “American style hats” rather than the typical sombrero. These “breaks in customs,” as Jones referred to them, were even more pronounced in the younger generations. What surprised Jones was that younger women and children rarely wore black attire, as it was commonly practiced in Mexico, to mourn their dead. These lapses in cultural practices were evident in children and young girls who “almost universally” had bobbed hair. A Mexican father in Chicago was quoted by Jones:

We had to change or lose our girls. The girls have to work and they have to go on the streets unattended. If we do not let the young men come into the home they will see them on street corners and in back alleys. My girls bought the parlor furniture and are paying for the piano so I let the boys come here and they all enjoy them together. Some of my neighbors think that I am terrible and my mother-in-law says that no good will come of it, but I notice that our house always has young people in it and there are no secret messages or unaccounted delays between work and home. My oldest girls married a good man. I hope the

others will do as well.<sup>52</sup>

Parents who vacillated between remaining Mexican and maintaining closer ties with their children chose to loosen their grip of authority over their children. Some parents felt that if they appeased the norms of the urban environment, they would facilitate the encroachment of American culture in their home. Nonetheless, they preferred some of the perversions, as they described, yielded to their native tongue and dress, rather than permit their children to partake in an unguided journey into Americanization. As one father had noted, it was better to change than to lose their children. Going back to live in Mexico could have been intolerable for some Mexican youth who saw themselves as native Chicagoans. All they knew was Chicago. But even the vast geographic distance did not quell how nationally and culturally entwined they remained with their southern ancestral land.

Mexican youth in Chicago, were still connected to Mexico. Even if they were born in the U.S., the shadow of Mexican nationalism and the social resistance they confronted outside of the home provided them with a sliver of curiosity to understand their parents' homeland. Jones found that, "The [Mexican] children all express the desire to go to Mexico so that they may know the land of their father and their relatives there, but they object strenuously to going back to Mexico to live permanently." The children and youth of Mexican nationals saw Chicago as their home and the place where they would set anchor. "While they wear the red, white, and green on the sixteenth of September and can sing and make speeches about the glories of the Mexican patria,"

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<sup>52</sup> "Conditions Surrounding Resident Mexican Families: A paper read at the 1929 National Conference of Social Work," National Conferences of Social Work Records, 1929-1932. Box 1, Folder 3, University of Chicago.

Jones further noted, “they object to going back to live.”<sup>53</sup> Children were bound by Mexican culture and the heightened sense of nationalism that pervaded Mexican communities in Chicago. When it came to instilling traditional cultural practices on her children, thirty-eight year old Abundia Lozano—mother of nine children, native of Guadalajara, and of the “Indian race”—did not fully accommodate to American standards. When Lozano’s children suffered from “evil eye” she adhered to traditional practices she had learned in Mexico. Lozano, as reported by Jones, cured her children by passing a raw egg over her child’s navel and the egg was “not emptied but it is burst by the heat of the sick little body.”<sup>54</sup>

An all-out desertion of Mexican cultural norms did not happen. Parents and children were selective, partial, and cautious in picking up new habits. As described by educational historian David Tyack, perhaps this was the process of “outward assimilation” in which immigrant families acclimated at vying gradations.<sup>55</sup> Although Mexican families were expressing generational dissidence, they both knew that they were negotiating the best way to go about making their lives within the social context that was shaping their future. An editorial titled “Carrying the Dust of the Land” that was printed in *México* spoke of the youth’s plasticity. It reaffirmed national identity and set an alarm of fear, but no caveat. It noted,

There is no danger of the [cultural] desertion of those who come with the ripeness of years. But those who come here as children or are born her are influenced by education, habits, simultaneous acquisition of Spanish and English, often preferably English, combined with a systematic official and private comparing of

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<sup>53</sup> “Conditions Surrounding Resident Mexican Families: A paper read at the 1929 National Conference of Social Work” *National Conferences of Social Work Records*, 1929-1932. Box 1, Folder 3, University of Chicago. For an in depth discussion on gender and migration, see Arredondo, “Lived Regionalities: Mujeridad in Chicago, 1920-1940.”

<sup>54</sup> Abundia Lozano, box 57, folder 3, Survey Papers.

<sup>55</sup> David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 236.

Americanization. This naturally tends to make them far away in spirit as they are in body from the land of their origin. At the end of two generations, when the parents who still carried the dust of their native land have died, when there are no causes for remembrance and no pretext for love, the idea of Mexico will be so flimsy and distorted that all those children who should be ours will belong to a country which offers them nominal rights of equality, but always with the reservations of a putative father, and, no one can deny it with a very profound and sincere conviction of absolute superiority, so that those who seek its support are always regarded with disfavor and some scorn.<sup>56</sup>

The danger, as it was discussed in this editorial, was not in the loss of their children, but in the social world they were on the brink of joining. The true fear was that their children were about to enter a world that would not grant them “rights of equality.” The debates about losing their children mostly vacillated around questions about cultural desertion and to a lesser degree about social acceptance. The preservation of their culture was debated in the homes, the newspapers, bars, and churches. Yet Mexicans understood the nuances of acceptance. Even if their children grew up with no “remembrance and no pretext for love” of Mexico, they knew that they would still encounter a world that barred them from political arenas—such as the minor race riot that broke out between Mexicans, Italians, and Polish youth. From the outset, Mexican youth lived in transnational communities and learned how to toe the mark.

When Manuel Gamio entered the home of Santiago Rivera, for example, Gamio recorded having observed the furniture as being “comfortable American style, velvet of the latest style” even though Rivera was adamant about retaining his Mexicaness. Mr. Rivera, a Mexican by birth, was a “mestizo markedly [of] Indian type” and his wife, who was born in Chihuahua, was described as being “white.” The Rivera children, of whom there were five and were also described as being white, exhibited cultural tendencies that

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Taylor cites the December 8, 1926 issue of *Mexico*. See, Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, 216.

disturbed their father. Gamio reported that Mr. Rivera continued to be “very much a Mexican as much in spirit as in customs. His meals are genuinely Mexican and he gets angry when his children...speak English in his home because they have been born here.” Rivera was the quintessential Mexican. He preserved his Mexican diet, avoided American theaters and restaurants, and showed signs of not knowing anything about boxing or baseball. Instead, he continued to celebrate the Mexican independence, was active in all other Mexican national holidays, and attended “all kinds of Mexican lectures.” Mr. Rivera resisted the intrusion of U.S. culture, but could not postpone the Americanization process, especially since he had children at home. Staunch proponents of Mexican culture, like Rivera, fell to the power of their own children. Rivera noted that when his sixteen-year old daughter “picks out the music pieces for the phonograph and for the *Pianola* [self playing piano], American jazz music is all that is to be heard in this house.” Santiago, Gamio reported, did not like when she played her music and was “always promising to get Mexican pieces.”<sup>57</sup> Parents like Santiago, reminded their children of Mexico’s cultural beauties and instilled a respect for their ancestry. The aroma of Mexican food and sonic waves of Mexican ballads filling their homes in Chicago were ambushed when children occupied those spaces. The harsh reality was that the Mexican home in Chicago was never a citadel that fully, and purposely, protected Mexican culture. The home was dynamic. Fathers and mothers were forgiving. And the youth who carried the “dust of their native land” knew that the dust they carried would be easily blown away.

The influence that youth had on families reshaped the trajectory of Mexican communities in Chicago. The power that parents exercised over their children was not

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<sup>57</sup> “Santiago Rivera,” Box 57, Folder 3, Survey Papers.

eroding, but being redefined. For example, in 1935 at a celebration that marked the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mexico's independence, five-thousand Mexicans gathered at the Ashland Boulevard Auditorium where entertainment, "colorful dances," and civic leaders addressed the Mexican community. A speech presented which exhibited the changing nature of the Mexican community titled, "Better Understanding Between American Heroes and Mexican Heroes," was delivered.<sup>58</sup> Parents learned about the city through the experiences that children shared with them and by the changes they saw their children undergoing. Perhaps it was their style of dress, the music they listened to, or the people they befriended that triggered adult Mexicans to conceptualize a new vision of the city. A father, whose wife and younger children remained in Mexico, straddled the U.S.-Mexican border as he managed to keep his older children, who were with him in Chicago, from acquiring bad habits. The father noted,

These sons here [in Chicago] will soon be wanting to marry, and sometimes I think that we made a mistake in ever leaving our '*tierra*' [land]. Evenings I spend teaching the sons here to play the violin and guitar which we brought with us from Mexico. The violin belonged to my grandfather, and the music of it makes me homesick. But when the boys try to pick out some of your jazz music, it makes me very angry inside. I do not think that the violin should be used to play such music. The boys say we can never sell our services for dances if we do not learn the up-to-date music. Do all Americans think jazz music beautiful?<sup>59</sup>

The "up-to-date music" that young children recommended was an intrusion on the homes. For some parents, the war that the urban environment was waging in their homes aroused intense suspicions about their choice to settle in the urban north. Since adults were transplanting their ideas to the north, they were anticipating that the ideas would be nourished by their children. For working adults who remained culturally isolated in their

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<sup>58</sup> "Mexican Pastor Addresses Large Patriotic Meeting in Adventures in Religion," Samuel Clarence Kincheloe Papers, Box 25, Folder 13, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, "Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago", 120.



neighborhoods, job sites, or home, the younger generation became the way some adults learned about American popular culture.

These emotions of uncertainty were triggered by the belief that Mexican youth were becoming too Americanized and perhaps losing their cultural roots, which were believed to sustain a cohesive community. Chicago's churches, aside from serving as a relief system when Mexicans were undergoing economic hardships, served as social spaces where newly arrived immigrants created social and political networks that empowered their communities. The entry into churches, nevertheless, was entangled with racialized conceptions of new immigrants. Although Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants had established Catholic churches, Mexicans could not cross the racial line infused in these religious institutions. A French minister who had done missionary work in Latin American noted the de-Mexicanization of the youth. Minister A.B. Apra noted,

The young people aren't really Mexican, yet they can't come in contact with the best in American life. They are just nothing. The children of mixed marriages between Mexican and Poles are especially bad off. Many of these young can't speak Spanish. They are ashamed of being Mexican.<sup>60</sup>

As children crept into the urban world, they served as the cultural scouts for Mexican families. When they returned home from the city they showcased new social practices that stimulated the curiosity of their parents. As the Mexican father noted earlier, "Do all Americans think jazz music beautiful?" Partly a question drawn from curiosity, the father was seeking affirmation that jazz music was, indeed, acceptable. The experience of this particular father was widespread. Parents resisted some cultural norms, but realized that they could not extinguish all forms of Americanisms and *Anglicismos* from entering their

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<sup>60</sup> Eunice Felter, "The Social Adaptations of the Mexican Churches in the Chicago Area" (MA Thesis, University of Chicago, 1941), 85.

homes. When Ruth Camblon examined Mexican homes, she found different gradations of Americanization and Mexicanization. Collectively, Camblon felt that these homes were not piously Mexican. Dances held in Chicago's first Mexican church, Our Lady of Guadalupe, were frequently avoided by younger boys. Manuel, a young boy, noted he avoided dances at the Our Lady of Guadalupe church because "that's for older people, and those foreigners like old country music. Of course they were raised different and like different stuff."<sup>61</sup> In fact, American popular culture thrived in their homes. Although it aggravated parents, they conceded to the sonic waves of American music. "But Mexican homes in Chicago do not seem to encourage this talent," Camblon wrote, "for the Victrola, with popular American jazz music, is common."<sup>62</sup> Efforts to replicate a vibrant Mexican culture in Chicago homes did not become a botched dream. Mexican communities were nowhere near becoming cultural ghost towns. Depicting families in this way would be divesting them from the dynamism they exhibited as they made their lives in Chicago.

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<sup>61</sup> Baur, "Delinquency among Mexican Boys in South Chicago", 187.

<sup>62</sup> Camblon, "Mexicans in Chicago," 210.

CHAPTER 5  
GUARDIANS OF THE REPUBLIC:  
THE EDUCATION OF MEXICANS IN CHICAGO

On April 29, 1919, Beatrix Avila and Luna Longinos were pulled for an immigration hearing in Laredo, Texas as they crossed the U.S.-Mexico border. The interrogation of Beatrix, a seven year-old girl, and Luna, a thirty-nine year old mechanic, was recorded in a U.S. Board of Special Inquiry hearing as they migrated to Chicago. Both Longinos and Avila were residents of Mexico City, but Luna had previously lived in Los Angeles in 1904 and was hoping to reenter the United States for a two-year stint because there was “a lack of work” back home. The seven year-old Luna, being chaperoned by Longinos, was hoping to permanently settle in Chicago where she was to reside with her father Jose Avila. The immigration officials were curious as to why a seven year-old girl would migrate alone with an older man who was no more than her “friend.” When officials asked Longinos about the young Beatrix, he answered:

The father of this child, who lives in Chicago, Ill, wants the child to come and live with him, *so she can be educated*; therefore he sent word by a friend of his and asked if I could be so kind as to bring this child and turn her over to him, as her mother is dead.<sup>1</sup>

Further inquiry revealed that Beatrix’s father had resided in the United States for two years and was a practicing mechanic in Chicago. Beatrix, whose mother had recently

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<sup>1</sup> “In the Matter of Longinos Luna and Beatrix Avila, April 19, 1919: BSI 6240,” Reel 11, frames 101-103. Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Part 2, Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration. Emphasis mine.

passed away in Mexico, had been living with her aunt and attending a “Mexican school” for the past two months. When immigration officials interviewed Beatrix, they could not acquire much additional information other than deduce she was “middle Mexican class, fairly well dressed, appears strong and healthy and of average intelligence.” Shortly thereafter, and without much more questioning, the Board of Inquiry unanimously decided to admit Luna and Avila into the United States.<sup>2</sup>

There are no additional records indicating if Beatrix ever attended school, met her father, or if she ever made it to Chicago. Her future can be left up to conjecture. What is striking from this Beatrix’ record, and numerous stories like hers, is that education had become an acceptable reason for immigration officials who allowed underage youth to legally migrate into the United States. Be it Pilot, Wyoming or Endicott, New York, children heading to towns and cities across the United States were permanently admitted on the basis that they would receive a free, public education.<sup>3</sup> Border officials and policy makers who were shaping federal immigration laws and facilitating the entry of Mexican youth hoped immigrant children would be molded into good Americans. Immigration interviews of children who migrated into the United States, like Beatrix’ journey to a school in Chicago, overwhelmingly indicate that education was the primary reason given to immigration officials after underage youth were asked why they were seeking admission into the United States. Whether children were coached by adults to provide education as

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<sup>2</sup> “In the Matter of Longinos Luna and Beatrix Avila, April 19, 1919: BSI 6240,” Reel 11, frames 101-103, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Part 2, Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>3</sup> See the numerous interviews of unaccompanied youth found in the Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Series A: Subject Correspondence Part 2, Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration. Also, see Yolanda Chávez Leyva, “Cruzando La Linea: Engendering the History of Border Mexican Children During the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and John R. Chávez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 90.

an answer during the interrogation, or if it indeed was a true aspiration is unknown.

Education, nonetheless, was consecrated as the justifying reason for admitting immigrant children into the United States.

In similar fashion, the aspiration of Mexican parents already in the United States was to educate their children in American schools. Mexican parents in Chicago valued education and wanted their children to enter schools in record numbers. These trends were evident in the southwest, and did not differ too much in Chicago.<sup>4</sup> From the outset, however, Mexican parents in Chicago attempted to subdue the unwelcome cultural influences of schools. Mexican communities printed their own newspapers to chronicle their stories and opened Mexican shops to affirm their culture.<sup>5</sup> They forged social and political organizations to fend-off the repressive nature of Chicago's racial state. It was no surprise then that the first mass wave of adult Mexicans who migrated to the urban north was bewildered when their children failed to adhere to their cultural mores. As discussed in chapter three, the agency that children exhibited in their homes changed the cultural trajectory of Mexican communities. The encroachment of U.S. culture was faced with hostility. Yet as Mexican children brought threads of the American way of life into the intimacy of their homes, parents made a cultural compromise. And although parents accommodated, they did what they could to stall the unrelenting force of Americanization

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<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Olneck, "What Have Immigrants Wanted from American Schools? What Do They Want Now? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigrants, Language, and American Schooling," *American Journal of Education* 115, no. 3 (2009), Guadalupe San Miguel Jr. and Richard R. Valencia, "From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to Hopwood: The Educational Plight and Struggle of Mexican Americans in the Southwest," *Harvard Educational Review* 68, no. 3 (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991).

driven by the American school.<sup>6</sup> The pressure that social institutions brandished on Mexican children was interpreted as originating from the educational system. It was in this period and context that Mexicans developed a tenuous relationship with public schools. But the question was never if their children should be educated, rather how and where they would be schooled. This chapter, therefore, looks at how newspapers, community leaders, parents, and children interpreted the political purposes of schooling in Chicago. It describes the institutions they attended and makes mention of their social experience in schools. Additionally, this chapter looks at schooling from the Mexican point of view and strives to tell the story of how each group had a stake in the educational process of youth. It is important to note, however, that this chapter and dissertation is not about one particular school or institutions. I agree with educational historian David Tyack who in 1974 wrote that schools, as institutions, can provide a useful “standing point” where historians gaze outward and into society.<sup>7</sup> However, such perspectives can silence, and in some cases ignore, the very voices of the people who worked and learned within those institutions. For this reason, this chapter gazes at schools from the outside and explores what the larger discussions about schools tell us about the cultural transformation of immigrant communities.

### **“The place they are born is a mere accident”: The Mexican Image in Chicago**

The world that Mexicans entered in the industrial north was far different than the one Mexicans were experiencing in the southwest. Chicago was a city of immigrants. It

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<sup>6</sup> Mario T. Garcia, "Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant, 1880-1930," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1978), Gilbert G. Gonzalez, "The Americanization of Mexican Women and Their Families During the Era of De Jure School Segregation, 1900-1950," in *Social and Gender Boundaries in the United States*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 9.

was a city where race relations were being reorganization. It was a place where African Americans, white ethnic immigrants and the white ruling elite vied for power.<sup>8</sup> The local Ku Klux Klan, also present in Chicago and boasting the largest membership in the United States, represented one of the most radical white supremacist organizations in Chicago that strived to create a nation that was “one hundred percent American.”<sup>9</sup> Even so, *Dawn*, Chicago’s official KKK newspaper, never mentioned Mexicans as a threat to the city. Instead, Mexicans were described as foreigners who lived in the Southwest or in Mexico—not Chicago. The KKK’s publishing arm, *Dawn*, was brimmed with Americanization rhetoric and the potential socializing power of city schools. An article appearing in *Dawn* in 1924 noted,

We have repeatedly admitted that all human beings are equal. The place they are born is a mere accident. What makes them better or worse is their mental equipment. And mental equipment cannot be obtained by any other means but education. The surviving races of the future shall not be those that live of a glorious past, but those that build, on the ruin of the past, a most magnificent future.<sup>10</sup>

The *Dawn* article continued,

The place of birth is an accident. A person may be born in one place as well as in another. It is a matter beyond his control. If the place of birth is the controlling element, then there are millions of children of foreign born citizens who should consider this country, and not other, their own. Likewise, those who secure naturalization papers should consider this country their own. The moment they display foreign emblems and show an attachment to the nation they quit greater

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<sup>8</sup> See, James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (1992), James R. Barrett and David R. Roediger, "The Irish and the 'Americanization' of the 'New Immigrants' in the Streets and the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 4 (2005), Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990), Jeffrey Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> For a brief, yet important, discussion of the KKK in Chicago, see chapter eight of Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Cairolì Gigliotti, "Where Should the Immigrant Place His Loyalty?," *Dawn*, February 9, 1924, page 13. Emphasis made by author.

than the one they display toward this country, show themselves to be disloyal and unworthy citizens, in spite of their affirmation or claim to the contrary.<sup>11</sup>

Although *Dawn* and the KKK leadership may have seemed to show some leniency towards immigrants, they were clear as to who could be admitted into Chicago's white social structure. *Dawn* published articles on the racial threat of African Americans, Jews, and especially Catholics. A political cartoon published by *Dawn* in 1923, for example, depicted Southern Europeans as the most inassimilable immigrant group in Chicago [see image eleven].<sup>12</sup> The cartoon included Italian, Greek, Serb, Sicilian, and Turk immigrants sliding down a chute and into a melting pot where Uncle Sam was readily stirring them in a boiling cauldron. As the cartoon depicted, white ethnic immigrants resisted the melting power evoked by Uncle Sam. Even with Uncle Sam's fierceness and unrestrained power to mix the pot, white immigrants still were able to jump out of one end of the cauldron as Southern Europeans, not American. The *Dawn*, like most Chicagoans, did not see Mexicans as an immediate racial threat.<sup>13</sup> In Chicago, it was not Mexicans who were changing the face of the city. Mexicans, in the mind of Chicagoans, were sojourners. The majority of articles that discussed Mexicans in mainstream newspapers were about Mexico and not about Mexicans residing in Chicago neighborhoods. In 1914, for example, *The Chicago Tribune* printed a political cartoon titled "Civilization Follows the American Flag" that ran on the front page (see image twelve). In it, there were two opposing drawings that depicted what happened to Mexicans who came under U.S. political rule. The top image included eight listless Mexican men who were dressed in

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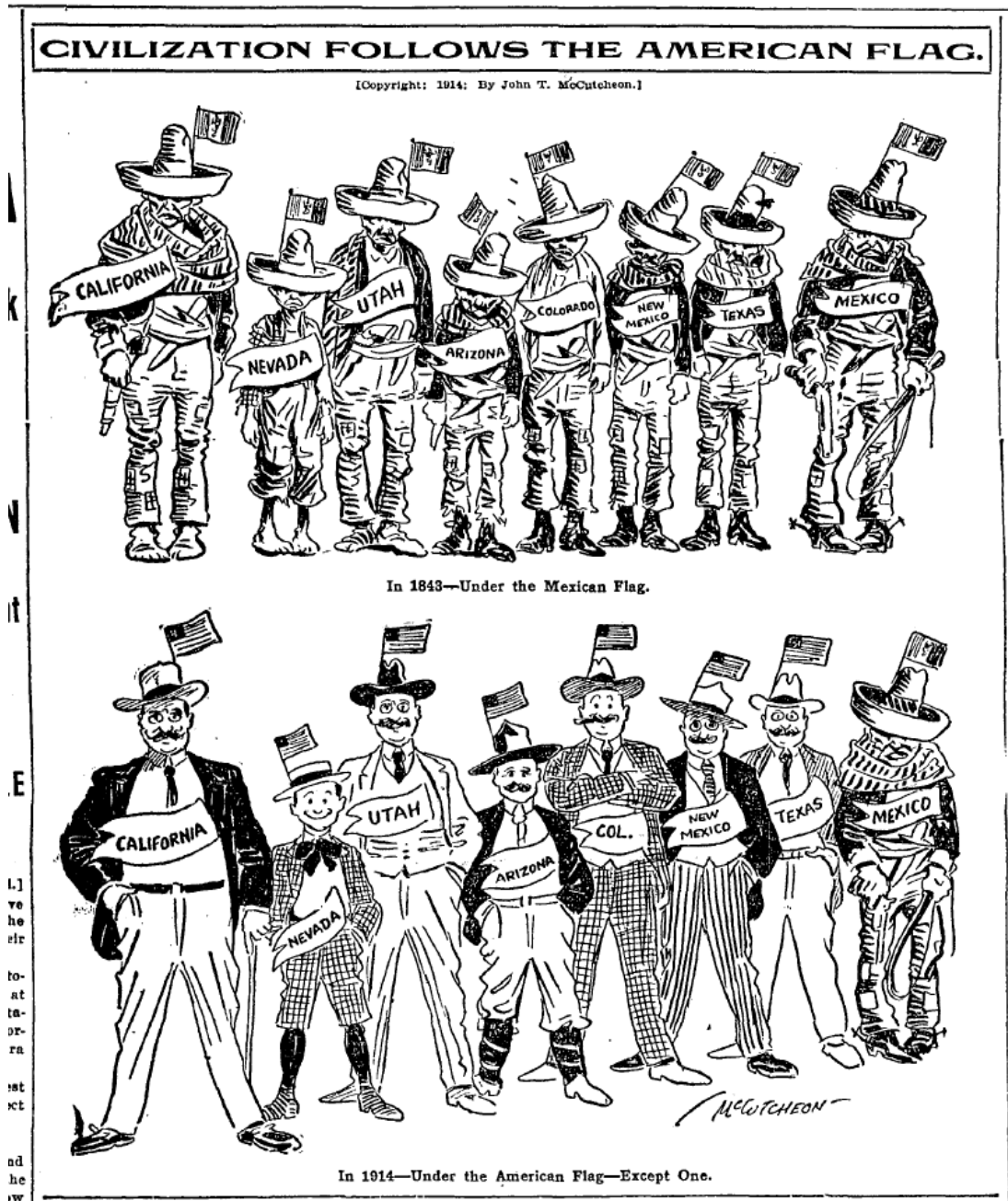
<sup>11</sup> Gigliotti, "Where Should the Immigrant Place His Loyalty?," page 20.

<sup>12</sup> "Close the Chute, It's Running Over," *Dawn*, December 22, 1923, page 11.

<sup>13</sup> Mexicans were, indeed, visible and were discussed by urban reformers. My sources attest to their visibility. However, what I am arguing is that they were not perceived as a threat to the entire city. The Mexican threat was understood as more localized and was discussed as being more manageable.







**IMAGE 12:** U.S. political influence was depicted as modernizing the Southwest.

Source: "Civilization Follows the American Flag," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 23, 1914, page 1.

the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The caption under it read “In 1842—Under the Mexican Flag.” In contrast to the limp spirit of these Mexicans, these men were redrawn and showed a strong confidence, eyes gleaming directly out of the page, and were wearing modern suits and hats. In this image, however, the quote read “In 1914—Under the American Flag—Except One.”<sup>14</sup> These two contrasting images represented the possibility of what could happen to Mexicans if they assimilated or came under U.S. rule. On one end, *Dawn* ignored Mexicans altogether, but proposed that “mental equipment” could be acquired through education. On the other, *The Chicago Tribune* insinuated that Mexicans could become modern Americans. This was the context that Mexicans entered Chicago. The possibility of them being garnered political power, presumably, was based on them going to school, shedding their national identity, and adhering to U.S. political rule.

The perspectives presented by Spanish language newspapers, local settlement house newsletters, or regional religious institutions diverged from the articles printed in publications like *Dawn* or *The Chicago Tribune*. They were more attuned to the migratory experience of Mexicans who were settling in cities across the country. They understood that Mexicans were migrating to cities across the country and published authors who shared their stories. Alberto Rembao, a Mexican theologian who was described as an “authority” on Mexican migration published an article in *Missions*, which claimed that the “roots that fix the Mexican to California or Illinois are undoubtedly stronger than the pulls that would detach him and send him back to the land of his

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<sup>14</sup> John T. McCutcheon, “Civilization Follows the American Flag,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 23 1914, 1. The Tribune frequently printed cartoons by McCutcheon. For a brief analysis of this cartoon, see Ana M. Alonso, “Borders, Sovereignty, and Racialization,” in *A Companion to Latin American Anthropology*, ed. Deborah Poole (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 233-34.

birth.”<sup>15</sup> Mexicans intellectuals, like Rembao, were interested in understanding the migratory flows of Mexican men. Rembao found that the economic and cultural forces in the United States affecting the migratory flow were stronger than any enticement in Mexico that hoped to attract them back to their homeland. “Every moment that passes,” Rembao noted, “strengthens the roots, creating new ones; every day that goes by diminishes the power of the ‘pull.’” Rembao outlined three reasons shaping the “power of the pull” that decreased the amount of Mexicans who would willingly return to Mexico. The first factor was the economy. Jobs, as explained by Rembao, were the primary reason why Mexicans moved north. Despite the poor and unfair conditions they endured in industrial centers, it was, Rembao explained, “better, perhaps, than anything he could get across the border now.” The second factor was the family. “Mexican children claim to belong here,” Rembao explained. As Rembao suggested, it was not only that children were born in the United States which kept Mexicans from returning to their *patria*, but it was also their sense of belonging that anchored families in Chicago. But Rembao also attributed the settlement process to the changing nature of the Mexican family as a whole. Initially, it could have been a job, or the children, but eventually the migratory experience, in and of itself, also altered the how the family operated in society. Described as the “third agency” by Rembao, he pointed to the “time element” as factor that sealed any probability of them returning home. Rembao stated:

Twenty, ten, even five years of sojourn in “*Yanquilandia*” have changed to some extent the Mexican immigrant’s wants and wishes, plans and purposes. No matter what the strength of the factors that work for the preservation of the Mexican

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<sup>15</sup> Coe Hayne, “Mexicans in the Great Lakes Regions” *Missions*, June 1930,” Box 52, Folder 3, Kincheloe Papers.

“islands”—and they are powerful—the Mexican is subject to the continuous and persistent impact of a culture that is not his own.<sup>16</sup>

The persistent impact of culture was an insistent threat that would play out in the schooling of Mexican children. As Rembao and the authors of the *Dawn* and *Tribune* newspapers suggested, schools could exert great power over children—they could shape the cultural trajectory of the nation.

### **“Our Own America”: Mexican Children in Schools**

By far, as discussed in chapter one and two, Chicago’s first Mexican communities were largely comprised of adult males. As male workers gained an economic foothold in the city, the population of women and children surged. The story of the *solo* (lone migrant) and *aventurero* (adventurer), nonetheless, makes up the grand narrative of Chicago’s Mexican community.<sup>17</sup> In a survey of twenty-two railroad camps in Chicago conducted between fall 1927 and winter 1928, Anita Jones found that, as a whole, adults outnumbered children. Her data showed that adults comprised sixty-three percent of camp inhabitants, while children represented thirty-seven percent. Yet, a closer look shows that there was an imbalance between age groups. Although men were the overwhelming majority—at forty-seven percent—of all inhabitants, women ranked third with only seventeen percent of the population in railway camps. Jones’ data reveals that there were camps that primarily housed men, while others had a mixture of ages and family compositions. Of all the camps Jones visited, there were only seven where no

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<sup>16</sup> Coe Hayne, “Mexicans in the Great Lakes Regions.” Also, see Alberto Rembao, “Are the Mexicans Here to Stay?,” *Interpreter*, January 1930, Alberto Rembao, “Las Golondrinas De Becquer,” *México*, May 20 1930. Referring to a poem written by Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Rembao suggested that Mexicans were like the dark swallows that would never return home.

<sup>17</sup> Research on Mexican women has recently been explored, which has revealed how women were critical to the early development of communities. See, Gabriela F. Arredondo, “Lived Regionalities: Mujeridad in Chicago, 1920-1940,” in *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and John R. Chávez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

children lived. In these all-adult camps, adult males made a hefty ninety-nine percent, leaving woman at one percent of the overall population. Yet, in the remaining fifteen camps where at least one child resided, the data reveals a stark difference. In these “family camps,” forty-seven percent of the inhabitants were children, thirty-four were adult males, and nineteen were adult women. As an aggregate, the adult population in the “family camps” only outnumbered children by six percent.<sup>18</sup> “There are no two camps alike in housing or in population. Some are entirely family groups,” Jones surmised, “some are all single men, some are all Mexicans, some are Greek, Italian or Irish. In some the sanitation is good, and in others far from satisfactory.”<sup>19</sup> Although it was difficult to discern any significant trends from Jones’ data, her surveys show that children exhibited numerical power in particular pockets.

In a walk through the Burr Oak railroad yards of South Chicago a journalist spotted a “funny looking box car” with “improvised windows and steps leading to the door.” Intrigued by what he saw, the journalist overheard what resembled a “shrill sound of children’s voices singing.” Upon more care, the journalist made out the song:

My country, ‘tis of thee.  
Sweet land of liberty.  
Of thee I sing.

The journalist stopped and with more attentiveness heard a “Spanish” teacher say, “Now, Alvarez. You must learn all of the words. All the rest know it. This is our country, you know, our own America, and we love it more than any other country on earth. Will you learn it now? Try it again.” Alvarez then replied, “Yes, ma’am, senorita.”<sup>20</sup> What the

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<sup>18</sup> Anita Edgar Jones, “Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago” (M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1928), 89.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>20</sup> “Teach Americanism in Box Car School,” *The Chicago Daily News*, December 6 1918, 20.

journalist came across that day in a Mexican rail road camps was demonstrative of the educational experience of Mexican children in Chicago. They were educated in the schools, in the boxcars, and in the streets. What they were taught was, nonetheless, a politically driven curriculum that sought to Americanize them.

It is unclear as to what degree Mexican children attended schools. An article noted, "Schools, churches and settlement houses report a larger turnover of Mexican children in the classes and clubs."<sup>21</sup> For example, Paul Taylor interviewed a teacher who noted, "In the railroad camps the [Mexican] children don't go to school regularly. Truant officers say there are so many of them they can't enforce the law. The cars may move on at 10 in the morning, and the parents don't want to leave the children in school."<sup>22</sup> The prevailing view of Mexicans was that they did not send their children to school. In large part, they were described as "seclusive [sic], timid and clannish."<sup>23</sup> A Federal Writers' Project worker noted that truancy was a major problem afflicting Mexican communities and that they preferred to send their kids to work over school. "They are spenders rather than savers and fail to recognize the importance of education," an FWP worker noted, "Truancy of the children is quite a problem. They believe in putting the boys to work at an early age to help support the family. They are a prolific race and the families are large."<sup>24</sup> Paul Taylor further explained, "Very many of them attend irregularly, very little, or even never, and thus are but slightly exposed to the influences of the American educational system."<sup>25</sup> The belief that they were "slightly exposed" to American

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<sup>21</sup> "Mexicans in the Great Lakes Regions by Coe Hayne in Missions: June 1930," Box 52, Folder 3, Kincheloe Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, vol. 7.2 (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Economics, 1932), 172.

<sup>23</sup> Raymond Nelson, "The Mexicans in South Chicago," page 13, Paul Taylor Papers.

<sup>24</sup> "The Mexicans in Illinois," FWP Papers, box 193, folder 5.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, 172.

influences worried some social reformers. Perhaps being slightly exposed to American influences could have been the case in 1896 and 1898, when 82 and 152 Mexicans students, respectively, were tallied in the Chicago Public Schools.<sup>26</sup> But by the 1920s, Mexican children were attending schools in record numbers. Using data collected by Anita Jones and additional attendance records provided by school administrators, Paul Taylor found that Mexicans attended schools throughout Chicago (see table one and images 13-15). In the spring of 1928, he recorded 1,740 Mexican children attending elementary schools. In schools surrounding Hull House, about 713 children attended schools like Dante, St. Francis Parochial School, Foster, and Goodrich. In the South Side, Taylor counted 450 children in schools like Thorpe, Sullivan, and Marsh.<sup>27</sup>

Anita Jones, who visited schools across Chicago, conducted an important survey of Mexican school children. In the University of Chicago Settlement area (Back of the Yards/Stock Yards), Jones counted 224 Mexican children enrolled in school. Some of the schools included Hamline, Seward, Graham, and the Hendricks.<sup>28</sup> In this district the public schools reported that there were “frequent fights” between polish and Mexican children, but that “it was not serious and was perhaps only the ordinary reaction against newcomers.”<sup>29</sup> Some educators brushed-off the racial tension between Mexicans and other white children as something customary that occurred with new immigrants. The Mexican children in the Stockyards, as it was reported by educators, displayed a unique friendship with other children. Jones recorded a principal stating, “Mexicans were well

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<sup>26</sup> Malachy Richard McCarthy, "Which Christ Came to Chicago: Catholic and Protestant Programs to Evangelize, Socialize and Americanize the Mexican Immigrant, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 2002), 97.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region.*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Anita Edgar Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," *Social Science Review* 2 (1928): 586.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 594-95.



able to keep up with the Slavs in their school work. Conflict between the Mexicans and Poles in the use of the Settlement gymnasium were reported; and chiefly because of this conflict the young Mexican men were said to have almost ceased coming to the

**TABLE 1** Number of Mexican Children in Elementary Schools of Chicago and the Calumet Region During the Spring Semester, 1928; Schools Grouped According to Location\*

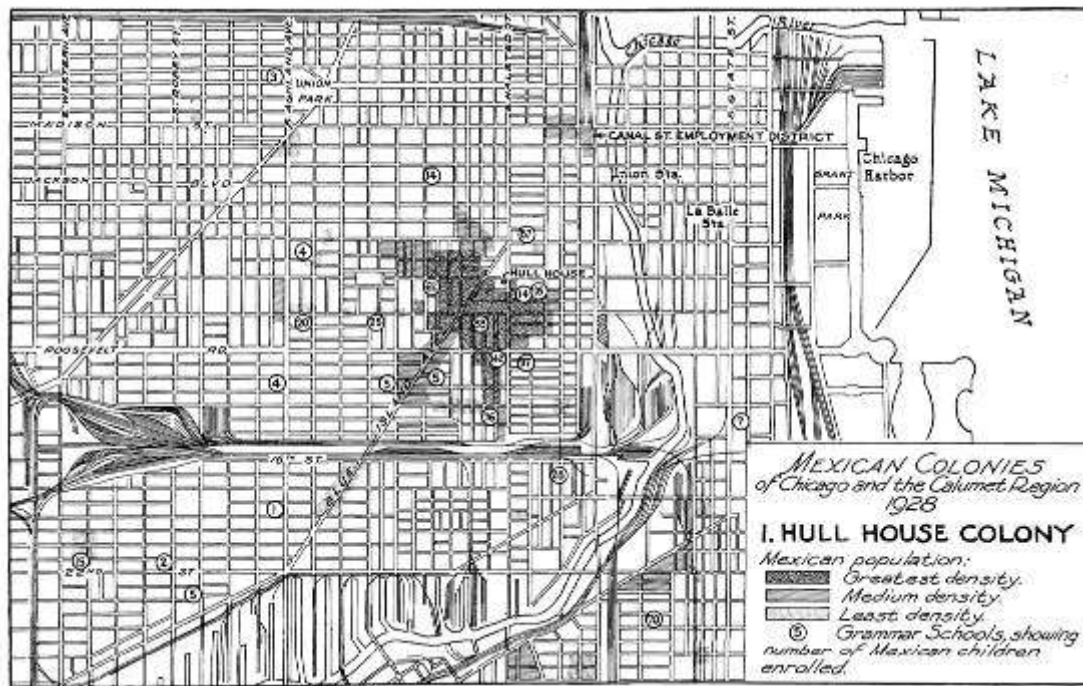
<b>Hull House Colony: Map 1</b>		
	<b>Address</b>	<b>Mexican Students</b>
St. Francis	12th and Newberry Sts.	142
Dante	840 S. Desplaines St.	105
Foster	720 O'Brien St.	97
Goodrich	915 W. Taylor St.	88
Dore	758 W. Harrison St.	87
Garfield	1426 Newberry St.	76
Jackson	820 S. Sholto St.	62
Swing	1701 String Ave.	28
Guardian Angel	Forquer and Desplaines St.	14
Skinner	1070 W. Jackson Blvd.	14
	Total Mexican	713
	Total Enrollment	2583
	Mexican Percentage	27.6
<b>Scattering West of Hull House Colony: Map 1</b>		
	<b>Address</b>	<b>Mexican Students</b>
Riis	1111 S. Throop St.	25
Jefferson	1522 Elburn Ave.	20
Pickard	2301 W. 21st Place	15
Rogers	1247 W. 13th St.	5
Smyth	1059 W. 13th St.	5
Whillier	1900 W. 23d St.	5
Clarke	1310 S. Ashland Ave.	4
McLaren	1500 Flournoy St.	4
Froebel	2021 W. 21st St.	2
Cooper	1624 W. 19th St.	1
Lawson (not on map)	1256 S. Homan Ave.	1
	Total Mexican	87
	Total Enrollment	2558
	Mexican Percentage	3.4
<b>Archer Avenue Stockyards Colony, East: Map 1</b>		
	<b>Address</b>	<b>Mexican Students</b>
Haines	231 W. 23d Place	70
Mark Sheridan (S. of map)	533 W. 27th St.	41
Drake (S. of map)	2641 Calumet Ave.	7
Ward (S. of map)	2701 S. Shields St.	7
	Total Mexican	125
	Total Enrollment	2604
	Mexican Percentage	4.8
<b>Forty-Third Street Stockyards, East: Map 2</b>		
	<b>Address</b>	<b>Mexican Students</b>
Hendricks	313 W. 43d St.	47
Graham	4426 Union Ave.	10
	Total Mexican	57
	Total Enrollment	2590
	Mexican Percentage	2.2

TABLE 1 (continued)

Stockyards Colony, West: Map 2		Mexican Students
Seward	4600 S. Hermitage St.	124
Hamline	4747 Bishop St.	43
	Total Mexican	167
	Total Enrollment	2569
	Mexican Percentage	6.5
Brighton Park Colony, Kedzie and Pershing Road: Map 2		Mexican Students
Davis	3014 W. 39th Place	86
	Total Mexican	86
	Total Enrollment	2606
	Mexican Percentage	3.3
South Chicago Colony: Map 2		Mexican Students
Thorpe	8914 Buffalo Ave.	298
Sullivan	83d St. and Coles Ave.	56
Marsh	9810 S. Exchange St.	35
Phil Sheridan	9035 Escanaba Ave.	19
Phil Sheridan, Branch	9356 Houston St.	24
Taylor	9912 Avenue "H"	4
Warren	9210 Chapped Ave.	6
St. Kevin's	105th St. and Torrence Ave.	6
	Total Mexican	450
	Total Enrollment	2586
	Mexican Percentage	17.4
Irondale Colony, South Chicago: Map 3		Mexican Students
Bright	10740 S. Calhoun Ave.	74
	Total Mexican	74
	Total Enrollment	2551
	Mexican Percentage	2.9
Scattering (mostly unmapped)		Mexican Students
Mitchell (unmapped)	2233 W. Ohio St.	9
Ogden (unmapped)	9 W. Chestnut St.	8
Luther Haven (map 1)	1472 Wabash Ave.	7
Agassiz (unmapped)	2851 N. Seminary Ave.	6
Knickerbocker (unmapped)	2301 N. Clifton Ave.	5
Arnold (unmapped)	718 Center St.	3
Spalding (map 1)	1628 Maypole Ave.	3
	Total Mexican	41
	Total Enrollment	2562
	Mexican Percentage	1.6
TOTAL MEXICAN STUDENT ENROLLMENT		1800
TOTAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT		23209
PERCENTAGE OF MEXICANS IN ALL SCHOOLS		7.8%

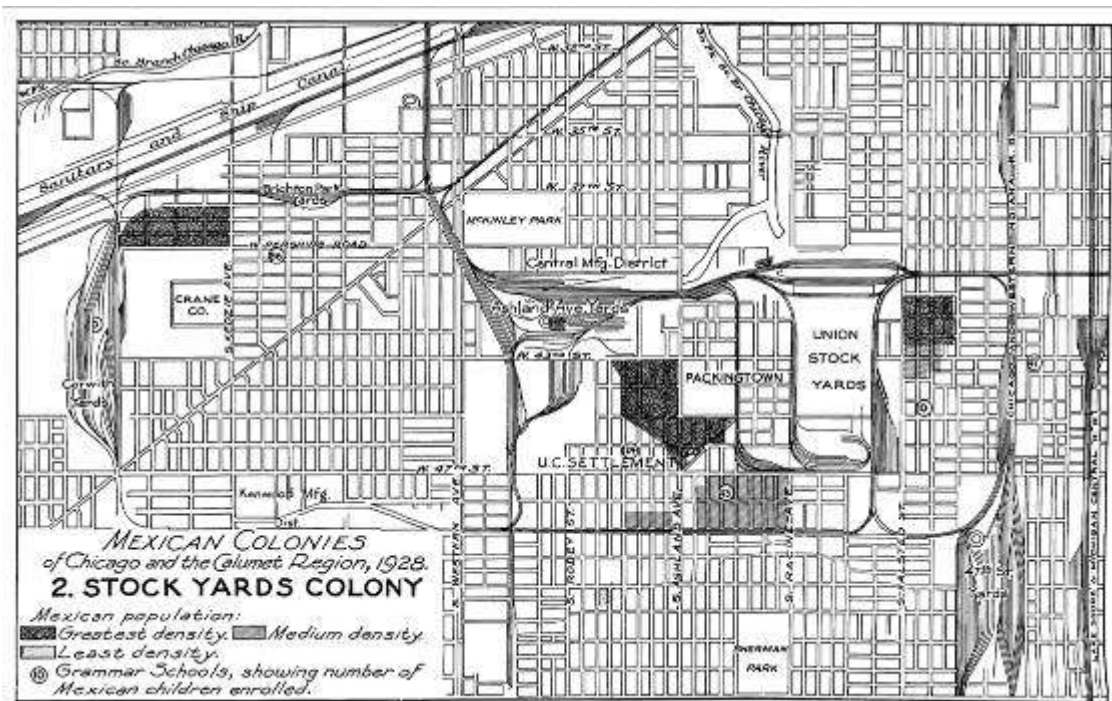
\*This data was compiled by Paul S. Taylor. See, Taylor, *Chicago and Calumet Study*, 54-55.

**IMAGE 13:** Hull House Colony

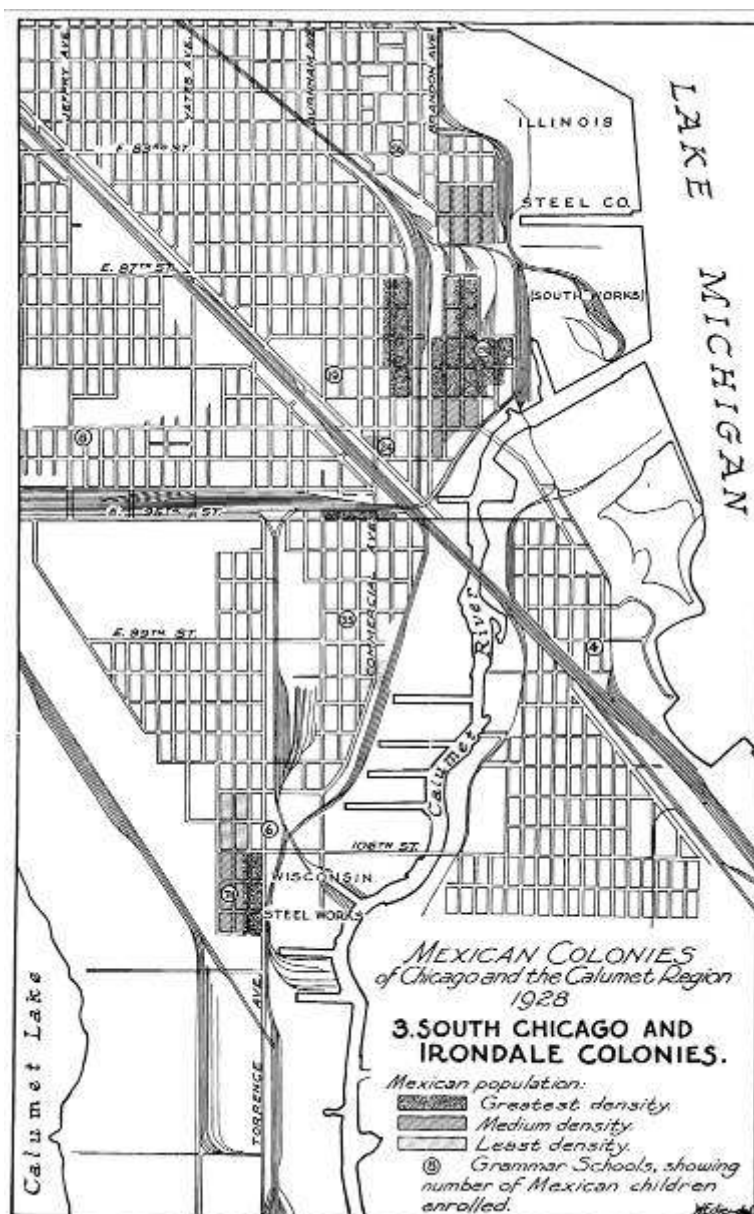


Source: Maps 11-33 appear in Paul S. Taylor, *Chicago and Calumet Region*, 56-57.

**IMAGE 14: Stock Yards Colony (Back of the Yards)**



**IMAGE 15:** South Chicago and Irondale



[University of Chicago] Settlement.”<sup>30</sup> These racial comparisons were constant as educators tried to figure out where to situate Mexican students in Chicago’s racial system. One educator was recorded as saying, “They [Mexican students] are regarded on an equal with our white pupils in this school and above the Negro. I sometimes separate the Negro children from the Mexican and whites in the gym classes for none of them like to play with the colored.”<sup>31</sup> In most cases, Mexicans fell in a liminal space. They were not accepted as whites, but were considered better than African Americans. In a sweeping study of Northern cities, George T. Edson concluded that “in comparison with the negroes the opinion was unanimous” that the Mexican students “had them cheated seven ways from Sunday.”<sup>32</sup>

In South Chicago Anita Jones recorded 414 Mexican children—229 in J.N. Thorpe School, seventy-four in Bright, forty-six in Sullivan, thirty-five in Marsh, and smaller numbers at Phil Sheridan, Taylor, Warren, and St. Kevin’s.<sup>33</sup> But even though Mexican children did attend schools, they remained elusive to some school administrators. In 1928, the school principal at Bright Elementary told Raymond Nelson that he did not “know anything about them” nor how many were enrolled in his school. Nelson pried the principal a bit further, which generated enough curiosity, that the principal “became enough interested” to show Nelson around the school to look for Mexicans in the classrooms. They found that about eleven percent (67) of Bright’s

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond E. Nelson (1928), “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” page 17, Box 11, Folder 59, *Taylor Papers*.

<sup>32</sup> George T. Edson (1927), “Mexicans in our Northcentral States,” pages 62-63, Box 13, Folder 38, *Paul Taylor Papers*.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 587.

student population was Mexican.<sup>34</sup> After the tour the principal stated, “I didn’t know anything about them before.”<sup>35</sup> The numbers collected by researchers reveal that Mexicans, albeit phantoms to some educators, were sprinkled throughout neighborhood schools (see maps 11-13). West of Ashland Boulevard, Mexican students attended Smyth, Riis, Rogers, Jefferson, McLaren, Clarke, Cooper, Whittier, Froebel, Pickard, and Lawson.<sup>36</sup> Around Chicago Ave and Clark Street, near Illinois and Wells, Anita Jones only counted eight Mexican students at Ogden School.<sup>37</sup> Around the Brighton Park area, there were eighty-six Mexican children at the Davis School.<sup>38</sup> At Pickard, Froebel, Whittier, and Mitchell schools Jones only reported nine Mexican children. At Haines, Ward, Drake, Mark Sheridan, Graham, Hendricks, Swing School, Arnold, Knickerbocker, Agassiz there were also negligible numbers.<sup>39</sup> Farther north, in the Hull House area, Jones counted 143 Mexican students in St. Francis School, 105 in the Dante School, 97 in Foster, 88 in Goodrich, 87 in Dore, 76 in Garfield, 62 in Jackson, and 14 in Guardian Angels—or a total of 672 Mexican children attending school (see table 1).<sup>40</sup>

Robert Redfield also recorded the location where Mexican students attended. At Mark Sheridan School, the principal told Redfield that in 1924 it had ten to fifteen Mexican students enrolled, but that by 1932 they had increased to forty-one. Mr Wilson, the principal at Mark Sheridan, told Taylor that Mexican students, regardless of their age,

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<sup>34</sup> Raymond E. Nelson (1928), “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” page 16, Box 11, Folder 59, *Taylor Papers*.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, “Mexicans in South Chicago.”: 17-18. Taylor Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Jones, “Mexican Colonies in Chicago,” 587.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*: 588.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 586.

were put in the first grade classroom until they could read English.<sup>41</sup> Raymond Nelson found that Mexican children remained in the first grade until they “could learn the rudiments of the English language.”<sup>42</sup> At the Haines Practice School, Redfield interviewed the assistant principal and recorded that it had “mostly Italians, but quite a number of Chinese, being on the border of Chinatown,” but that they had “more Mexicans than before.” Although Haines School had “more Mexicans than before” (70 in 1932), they still represented a numerical minority.<sup>43</sup> At Dore Elementary School, the enrollment figures showed that twenty-nine students “entered,” nineteen were still “attending,” and nine had “moved.” Nonetheless, there were more Mexicans than the previous year.<sup>44</sup> The social arrangement in these schools also kept Mexicans outside of the normal classrooms. At Dore, Mexicans were put in “special” rooms “for backward and defective children.”<sup>45</sup> In 1923, Redfield recorded sixty-three Mexican children in Davis Elementary School located in the stockyards district and fifty-seven in 1924.<sup>46</sup> Five years later, the enrollment figure slight increased to eighty-six students.<sup>47</sup> The notes collected by Paul Taylor, Raymond Nelson, and Robert Redfield describe the patterns of

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Redfield Diary, pages 16, 30, 34, Redfield Papers, University of Chicago. For the 1932 numbers, see Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region*, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Raymond E. Nelson (1928), “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” page 17, Box 11, Folder 59, *Taylor Papers*. Mexican communities in Chicago did not create their own schools, or were put in “Mexican” schools, as was common practice throughout the Southwest. The Chicago experience in is only comparable when educators gauged intelligence through the ability to speak English language as a way to segregate Mexican children within school sites. See, Carlos Kevin Blanton, “From Intellectual Deficiency to Cultural Deficiency: Mexican Americans, Testing, and School Policy in the American Southwest, 1920-1940,” *Pacific Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (2003), Ruben Donato, *Mexicanos and Hispanos in Colorado Schools and Communities, 1920-1960* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), Gilbert G. González, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1990). For a general assessment of the Southwest, see San Miguel Jr. and Valencia, “From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to Hopwood: The Educational Plight and Struggle of Mexican Americans in the Southwest.”, Richard R. Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Educational Equality*, *Critical America* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Redfield Diary, page 16, 31, and 34. For 1932 data, see Taylor, page 54.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Redfield Journal, page 58.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Redfield Journal, page 53.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Redfield Journal, page 57.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Redfield Journal, page 55.



Mexican student attendance in Chicago. In 1925, Raymond Nelson found that that 11.2 percent (124 students) of the student population at J.N. Thorpe School in South Chicago were Mexican and by 1928 the figure increased to 26.7 percent (298 students). The 1928 records showed that 56 percent of the Mexican students were born in Mexico, 22 percent in Texas, and the remaining 22 percent were born in “scattered states.”<sup>48</sup> An interview with George C. Phipps, principal at J.N. Thorpe School in, revealed that 450 Mexican children who were between five and sixteen years of age were attending that school. Phipps noted that the “language background handicaps these [Mexican] children a lot but in the average they are alert, artistic, and musically inclined.” Principal Phipps further explained that “compared with other national groups as the Polish, they [Mexicans] are not below them in their I.Q.”<sup>49</sup> Interviews with Mexican students showed that administrators and teachers believed that Mexicans were a social problem. Irene Shea, a Spanish teacher at Bowen High School, reported that the fifty “Spanish speaking” students at Bowen were a “little troublesome” and were sent to the office for “different offenses.” Shea noted that, “compared with the other students they lack ambition and are not perseverant in their tasks. This school has three classes in Spanish language and a literary Club that meets every Friday.”<sup>50</sup> The data collected by Jones, Nelson, Redfield, and Taylor show that Mexicans, unlike black children, were integrated in racially mixed schools.<sup>51</sup> A demographic profile provided by Paul Taylor in 1928 shows that about 7.8 percent (1,800) of the student population was Mexican.

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<sup>48</sup> Raymond E. Nelson (1928), “The Mexicans in South Chicago,” page 16, Box 11, Folder 59, *Taylor Papers*.

<sup>49</sup> “Interview: Mr. George C. Phipps, Principal, J.N. Thorpe School,” CFLPS, Reel 1A, Spanish/Mexican, IA1a.

<sup>50</sup> “Interview: Miss Irene Shea-Spanish Teacher, Bowen H.S.,” CFLPS, Reel 1A, Spanish/Mexican, IA1a.

<sup>51</sup> For an important discussion on African American in Chicago schools, see Dionne Danns, “Thriving in the Midst of Adversity: Educator Maudelle Brown Bousfields Struggles in Chicago, 1920-1950,” *Journal*

Settlement house workers promoted formal education too. In one particular case the newsletter *St. Mark's Messenger* reported on the case of Candido Marquez, who had been supplementing his father's income and forced to drop-out of Tilden High School. Candido was in his "third year" in high school and had been working at the Hull House's cafeteria, but had been let go. His father had asked Candido to leave school at the end of his third year to get a full-time job so that he could financially help his father, mother, and seven siblings. All the family needed, the newsletter reported, was an additional five-dollars per week. Pleading its readership for donations so that Candido could remain in school, *St. Mark's Messenger* noted, "Shall he quit school? I believe he is worth another year—and still there is a possibility of him finding work after school and on Saturdays....If you vote with a small check, cast it in favor of a boy's finishing high school. Candido attends church and Sunday School regularly—a worthy lad."<sup>52</sup>

Mexicans did not comprise a racial majority in most schools. One South Chicago Vacation School, organized by the Congregational Churches Union to keep kids off the "city streets and alleys during the summer days," contained so many different immigrant groups that it was easy to understand the "methods of dress of various countries and the imports of the United States to these countries" (see images 16-17). The vacation school was composed of "Negroes, Mexicans, Poles, Italians, Greeks, Bohemians, Russians, Bulgarians, and scores of others from the complex population."<sup>53</sup> Bird Memorial had

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of *Negro Education* 78, no. 1 (2009), Davison M. Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Michael W. Homel, *Down from Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920-41, Blacks in the New World*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

<sup>52</sup> "St. Mark's Messenger: Feb 1930," Box 42, Folder 2, Kinchloe Papers.

<sup>53</sup> "It Is Easy to Learn While Playing in Adventures in Religion, October 1935." Samuel Clarence Kinchloe Papers, Box 25, Folder, Box 13, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. For more on Vacation Schools, see Gertrude Blackwelder, "Chicago Vacation Schools," *The Elementary School Teacher*

“one of the finest examples of interracial intermingling that I know anywhere,” the Associate Director of the Chicago Congregation Union recounted, “Negro and Mexican and twenty-five other nationalities mingled together in fellowship. There seemed to be no sense of strain. They sang and then played and then danced, and their faces shone with happiness.”<sup>54</sup>

Some of the schools that experienced a consistent enrollment of Mexican students were religious schools. The St. Francis School in the Hull House *colonia* ran a school for students between the first and eighth grades. They taught drawing, painting and catechism.<sup>55</sup> The school had children of “both sexes” and was located on one of the oldest buildings.<sup>56</sup> An FWP worker reported that classes at St. Francis School were taught by Mexican sisters, had about 400 students, but at one time reported to having 2,000 boys alone.<sup>57</sup> In the South Chicago Neighborhood House at 84th and Mackinaw, Robert C. Jones recorded Mexicans attending Sunday school at a “Baptist institution.”<sup>58</sup> An article printed in Chicago’s Spanish newspaper, *El Ideal Mexicano*, noted that the Cordi-Marian Sisters taught Mexicans at 1000 S. May Street near the Hull House colonia. The article noted, “The parents who may wish a real education for their children, and the

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6, no. 4 (1905), Elizabeth Bright McKinney, "A Study of Nineteen Vacation Church Schools in Chicago" (M.A. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1934).

<sup>54</sup> “Report of the Associate Director To the Board of Directors: May 26, 1936” Box 26, Folder 3, Kincheloe Papers.

<sup>55</sup> “Church and School of St. Francis of Assisi by Hildergarde Fornof,” Box 181, Folder Churches-Near West Side,” FWP Papers.

<sup>56</sup> “St. Francis of Assisi Parish by David Black,” Box 181, Folder Churches-Near West Side,” FWP Papers.

<sup>57</sup> “St. Francis of Assisi by Wayne Fuller,” Box 181, Folder Churches-Near West Side,” FWP Papers.

<sup>58</sup> Jones & Wilson, *Mexicans in Chicago*, page 26.

**IMAGE 16:** A multiracial group of students at the Bird Memorial Vacation School.



Source: "Adventures in Religion," Box 25, Folder 13, Samuel Clarence Kincheloe Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

**IMAGE 17:** A group of Mexican children studying at the Vacation School.



Source: "Adventures in Religion," Box 25, Folder 13, Samuel Clarence Kincheloe Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

preservation of the faith in their little hearts, must send them to a wholly Catholic school, and no other.”<sup>59</sup> Another article printed in *El Ideal Mexicano* noted,

Every Catholic child to a Catholic school. The true ideal education is the Catholic. It means the complete formation of character for men and women whose lives can be dominated through good principles. This type of education can be secured for boys and girls in parochial schools, Catholic colleges and universities. This is the reason why the Church orders the parents to send their children to Catholic schools.<sup>60</sup>

The Church of St. Francis had “thousands of worshippers” and houses a parochial school that was taught by “American sisters” although some instruction in Spanish was provided by a “nearby group of Mexican nuns.”<sup>61</sup>

### **“School and More School”: Sending the Kids to School in the City**

Mexican parents who settled in Chicago were not resistant to enrolling their children in schools. The concept of sending youth to schools had already become customary in Mexico and in the southwest. Parents expected that their children would receive formal education in Chicago, even if it were fraught with political and social intonations of Americanization.<sup>62</sup> In 1936, for example, an editorial in Chicago’s *La Defensa* newspaper reified the social purposes of schooling Mexican children. “Here [in Chicago] is the advancement and culture for the youth. It is very near the school year, and possibly we may see how small is the number of graduates in the colony. We must not observe this with indifference, but stimulate the youth,” the newspaper noted. “The obligation is that of the parents, to procure by all possible means the progress of their children,” it further stated, “school and more school if they desire the happiness of their

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<sup>59</sup> “Schedule of Classes,” *El Ideal Mexicano*: Oct 4 1936, Reel 1A, Spanish/Mexican, IA2a, CFPLS.

<sup>60</sup> “Parents,” *El Ideal Mexicano*: Sept 6, 1936, Reel 1A, Spanish/Mexican, IA2a, CFPLS.

<sup>61</sup> “Mexicans in Our Midst,” FWP Box 193, Folder 5.

<sup>62</sup> Wendy Waters, “Revolutionizing Childhood: Schools, Roads, and the Revolutionary Generation Gap in Tepoztlán, Mexico, 1928 to 1944,” *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 3 (1998).

children and the aggrandizement of the country.”<sup>63</sup> Mexican immigrants saw their children as future beneficiaries of their “country” and rarely, if ever, broke the state compulsory laws.<sup>64</sup> They enrolled children in schools through their own volition, not because law school compulsory laws mandated it. They wanted their youth to play a central role in the future of their communities and saw school as the place where they could learn English, leadership skills, and important civic lessons. Anita Jones observed an educational impulse in Mexican communities and determined that their educational aspirations were not much different from other immigrant groups. Jones noted, “On the whole, the Mexicans have been much like other immigrant groups in many respects, living under hard conditions when necessary and gradually finding their condition improving with their period of American life. They participate in recreational activities and interests, and their children do well at school. The picture may fairly be called an encouraging one.”<sup>65</sup> What was encouraging for observers like Jones was that Mexicans appeared to be acquiescing to Chicago’s social norms. Social reformers viewed schools as the primary Americanizer of immigrants. Whether it was citizenship schools, evening adult schools, or day schools for children, progressive leaders expected all newcomers to receive some type of education and targeted groups who resisted.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "Let Us Prepare Ourselves," *La Defensa*, June 6 1936, 56. Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey (henceforth cited as CFLPS), Chicago Public Library Omnibus Project, WPA Chicago: Illinois, 1942, Reel 62, 1A1a.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Livingstone Warnshuis, "Crime and Criminal Justice among the Mexicans in Illinois" (MA Thesis, University of Chicago, 1930), 75-76, 138, and 41. Although the perception was that Mexicans were truants, Warnshuis' data suggests that legal force was rarely needed to encourage Mexicans to attend schools.

<sup>65</sup> Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," 597.

<sup>66</sup> Ronald D. Cohen, *Children of the Mill: Schooling and Society in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*, Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

The interviews conducted by members of the Chicago School of Sociology allayed the anxieties of urban reformers who worried over the educational aspiration of Mexicans. A Mexican father, for example, was recorded as showing great pride in the education that his six children were receiving in Chicago city schools. One of his children, he noted, drew excellent pictures of Santa Claus. Of his oldest son, who was attending Jefferson High School, the father said, "He likes to study. I am anxious to know what he would like to take up for his life work. I am going to let him choose for himself though for if a father imposes his will and makes a boy undertake something in which he is not interested he will be a failure." The father was hopeful that schools would give his children the opportunity they needed to find work.<sup>67</sup> In a visit to the home of confectioners, Anita Jones recorded, "Josephine [the mother] continues to make candy while the baby takes his nap or plays about on the floor. The other children are very much absorbed in their American school and rush home eagerly every afternoon to show and explain to their parents the things which they have found most interesting in school that day."<sup>68</sup> These sighting of Mexicans who succumbed to their new social environment were critical to creating a new image. The fact that Mexicans were removed from their country, and were experiencing a state of disorientation (as discussed in the earlier chapters), meant that schools could fill a void in the lives of children. Mexican newspapers in Chicago recorded the milestones made by their newly educated youth. An article printed in Chicago's *La Defensa* (The Defender) noted:

It is a great pleasure to inform you of the sons and daughters, of the Spanish speaking parents who have received high school diplomas this year. Thirty-one names have been received, of which fourteen of them are boys and seventeen are girls. It is difficult to know how many of them finished a four year term, and how

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<sup>67</sup> "F.A." Box 56, Folder Family Histories Part 3, Survey Papers.

<sup>68</sup> Jones, "Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago", 119. Emphasis made by author.



many just a two year term. Graduates! The world is here, the opportunities have not diminished, follow them with all the energy within their soul.<sup>69</sup>

The goal of these new arrivals was that wherever they were being educated would result in positive outcomes. They sent their children to schools with the anticipation that what they learned had some practicality in the world they were about to enter. At the same time, they treated schools with deference because they admired the general aim of educating the youth. A Mexican recorded as “D.G.,” for example, noted that, “in a city like Chicago there are many opportunities to study.” D.G. told his interviewer that Mexicans borrowed books from the Firman Settlement House and the public library were they had “a good number of books in Spanish.”<sup>70</sup> Local settlement houses, like Firman, were alternative places that provided Mexicans the opportunity to educate their youth. Some settlement houses organized after school activities, athletic tournaments, or weekend Sunday schools.<sup>71</sup> The Firman House, located less than a mile west of Hull House, was active in developing programs for Mexican youth. In 1931, Robert C. Jones and Louis Wilson recorded its staff as having one full-time Spanish-speaking “American” pastor, a Cuban ministerial student helper, a full-time children’s worker, a home visitor, and a part-time medical worker.<sup>72</sup> In a pamphlet printed by the Chicago Congregational Union titled, “Some Glimpses into the Lives of Boys influenced by Firman House,” it noted the “triumphs” it had over youth. Ramon Cabrera, the reverend at the Firman

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<sup>69</sup> “Latin Youth Graduated from High School,” *La Defensa*, July 17, 1936. CFLP, Reel 1A: Spanish/Mexican, IAIa.

<sup>70</sup> “D.G.” Box 56, Folder 1, Survey Papers.

<sup>71</sup> See, Michael D. Innis-Jiménez, “Beyond the Baseball Diamond and Basketball Court: Organized Leisure in Inter-War Mexican South Chicago,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 7 (2009), Michael D. Innis-Jiménez, “Organizing for Fun: Recreation and Community Formation in the Mexican Community of South Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 98, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>72</sup> Robert C. Jones and Louis R. Wilson, *The Mexican in Chicago* (Chicago: Committee Commission of the Chicago Church Federation, 1931), 26.

House, reiterated the successes it had on Mexican youth. The pamphlet told the story of one Mexican boy who had gone on to do missionary work in Costa Rica and another who had earned a scholarship to attend a music school. Yet there were some Mexican youth, who remained unaffected by the Firman House staff, and which the pamphlet reported who were not as fortunate as those who participated in the House's activities. The article reported, "many counterparts of these Mexican lads are roaming about the Spanish-speaking districts of the west side, purposeless, without supervision or understanding friends, for there are many needy lives which Firman House cannot contact without more volunteer service and increased interest and support for its work."<sup>73</sup> Settlement house workers actively sought the participation of Mexican youth and served as another force that was educating them in the American way. One of the directors described Mexicans as having the "temperament of the Spanish and the solidity of their Aztec ancestors," and hoped to give them advice on "American living standards."<sup>74</sup> In 1931, the Firman House and St. Mark's Church held an open house to recruit Mexicans. The program included musical performances, remarks by church leaders, and a "bilingual song" performed by Mexican children.<sup>75</sup> During the 1935 Christmas season, for example, a visitor to the Firman House chronicled how Mexican children flourished in their new environment (see image 18). The visitor reported:

"Peace on Earth," read the panel stretching the stage. Upon the platform dozens of Mexican children—black haired, sharp black-eyed "niños" [children]—demonstrated they could sing Christmas carols in the English language of their Chicago school rooms and in the Spanish tongue of their parents. More, they

<sup>73</sup> "Some Glimpses into the Lives of Boys Influenced by Firman House," *Adventures in Religion*, November 1935, Box 25, folder 13, Kincheloe Papers. From the records, it is difficult to tell if Cabrera is the "American" pastor that Jones was referring to in 1931.

<sup>74</sup> Mildred Wilds, "Bit of Mexico Looms Larger on West Side," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 24 1937.

<sup>75</sup> "Scrapbook of Robert C. Jones: Fireman House at New Location," CFLPS, Reel 1A: Spanish/Mexican, II D I. Firman was incorrectly spelled as "Fireman" by the CFLPS. St. Mark's was called "Evangelica San Marcos" by the Mexican press. See, "Aviso," *El Nacional*, December 12, 1931, page 4.

could present a Christmas play in English, and yet another, in Spanish, “El Mensaje de la Estrella,” [The Message of the Star] which told again the story of the Star.<sup>76</sup>

**IMAGE 18:** A group of Mexican youth “robed in colorful costumes” at Firman House presented “The Message of the Star” in Spanish.



Source: “Christmas Story in Spanish,” *Adventures in Religion*, January 1935, Box 25, folder 13, Kincheloe Papers.

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<sup>76</sup> “Christmas Kaleidoscope” *Adventures in Religion*, January 1935, Box 25, folder 13, Kincheloe Papers.

Although the education that Mexican children received was religious, Firman allowed some cultural flexibility that public day schools resisted. Public cultural celebrations provided the space where children could display their skills in “language of their Chicago school rooms,” while simultaneously exhibiting their cultural versatility in Spanish. Social spaces, like the one provided at the Firman House, enabled Mexican youth to perform their transnationality without social and parental repercussions.

The problem that arose from the education children received in public day schools, which I discuss in the next section of this chapter, was not that children were being taught U.S. history or the English language, but the way in which the American schools appeared to suppress their transnationality. Mexican parents and civic leaders wanted their youth to immerse themselves in American schools, yet maintain their Mexican identity. One of Ernest Burgess’ students compared Mexicans in Chicago with Molokans (Russian immigrants) in Los Angeles and found a contrasting picture. Edward Baur, Burgess’ student, concluded that Mexicans promoted education and were assimilating at a higher rate than their white ethnic counterparts in Los Angeles. Baur concluded:

Mexican parents [in Chicago] themselves are not averse to adopting American customs. They encourage their children to acquire as much education as possible. Many of the Mexican adults have taken courses in the trade schools. They pride in the facility with which their children use English and attempt to increase their own knowledge of the language. Both parents and children dress according to prevalent American fashion. On the other hand, the Molokan parents avoid using English, they oppose adoption of American dress, especially by girls, and they encourage their sons to go to work rather than to continue their education.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “Juvenile Delinquency in Ethnic Colonies: A Comparative Study of the Mexicans in South Chicago and the Molokans of Los Angeles,” Box 2, Folder “Burgess 1934-1939,” *E. Jackson Baur Papers*, University of Chicago. Also see, Pauline Young, “The Russian Molokan Community in Los Angeles,” *American Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 3 (1929).

Although Mexicans aspired to send their children to school in the city and were willing to make some cultural concessions at home, their genuine longing for a transnational identity resulted in some aggravation. In Mexico, the purpose of schooling was entangled in questions of nationhood and race.<sup>78</sup> The first mass-wave of Mexican migrants, whether from Mexico or the Southwest, sought to pass-on their social and political identities to their children. Thus, when the schools' authoritative curriculum attempted to breakdown their children's Mexican national identity, Mexican immigrants and Spanish language newspapers reinterpreted the role of American education.

The least vocal Spanish language newspaper that discussed education was *Solidaridad*. Published in Chicago by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), *Solidaridad* was first printed in Chicago in 1918 before relocating to New York City in 1926. Although its motto was "Educación, Organización, Emancipación," most of the articles primarily focused on labor issues, and those that concerned education solely focused on adults [see images 19-20]. For one writer in *Solidaridad*, however, the education of youth was also critical to the liberation of workers. In an opinion piece printed in 1926, Claudio Rivera asked workers to resist the temptations brought forth during times of leisure. "If in the hours of rest, conquered by force of bloody sacrifices, were used to educate children and to study the social problems and most unjust exploitation which we are subjected to," Rivera told, "the time would come to launch the glorious cry of human liberation." Rivera's call for liberation was far from a decree, but it pointed to the ways in which Spanish-speaking Chicagoans interpreted education.

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<sup>78</sup> Mary K. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), Mary K. Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928, The Origins of Modern Mexico* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982).

**IMAGE 19:** The caption reads: “Many unions of the A.F. of L deny the entry of colored workers.”



Source: “Exclusivismo Racista,” *Solidaridad* (Chicago), August 25, 1923, page 1.

**IMAGE 20:** Note the motto, “Educación, Organización, Emancipación.” Some issues of *Solidaridad* included this phrase in their masthead.



Source: *Solidaridad* (Chicago), February 7, 1925, page 4

Education could serve multiple purposes. For Rivera, the education that youth ought to receive went beyond the basic curriculum or concerns regarding earning the highest marks. Education could have a liberating power, as Rivera suggested, and was interconnected with the social and political world affecting workers. In closing his article, Rivera urged his readership to find a renewed interest in education. “It is therefore up to parents and to all of us who have embraced the ideal of human liberation,” Rivera urged, “to educate our youth free of prejudices, directing them towards new horizons where you could begin to see a society where all free men of the world are routed; the workers’ society emancipated.”<sup>79</sup> The opinion written by Rivera was indirectly debated. Weeks earlier, *México* printed an editorial that also raised the question of educating Mexican workers in Chicago. However, *México* saw the role of education as a mode for social mobility and nation building, rather than for liberating the working class. The editorial in *México* proposed that Mexican adult workers ought to receive an education. It noted, “The education of the worker is not only important but, in our idea, indispensable to the progress of the nations.” It remained unclear which “nations” it was referring to, but it was clear that *México* was pro-Mexican and promoted Mexican nationalism within the United States. Much of these articles that promoted education, projected a Mexican identity that was to remain impervious to the social forces evident in Chicago. Be it popular culture, or Americanization courses, Mexicans were to remain Mexican. The article in *México* further elaborated its educational stance by suggesting that nationhood, as well as economic interests, should drive Mexicans to receive an education. The editorial stated:

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<sup>79</sup> Claudio Rivera, "Eduquemos a La Juventud," *Solidaridad: El Periódico del los Trabajadores*, June 26 1926, 2. Translation made by author. This newspaper was originally titled *La Nueva Solidaridad* when it was founded in 1918 and then changed its name to *Solidaridad* in December of 1920.



A well-educated worker, a conscious worker, who has cultivated his intelligence, who has gone to school, who has studied and learned many new and useful things, is bound to climb up not only intellectually but economically. It is to say, that an educated worker will be in a position to perform better jobs, will be able to do more scientific and complicated jobs than those done by an illiterate and, therefore, will receive a better salary.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps oblivious to the racial restrictions practiced in Chicago, the editorial anticipated that education was a way members of Chicago's Mexican community could improve their social and economic condition. Education, they hoped, would also facilitate the creation of a Mexican nation in Chicago. "Through education," the editorial proclaimed, "the Mexican worker can become great, and will become not only the pride of his family and home, but of his beloved country, Mexico."<sup>81</sup> Mexican Chicagoans who promoted formal education held on to the deep conviction that education would provide an endless stream of economic, political, and social opportunities. Writers in *México* and *Solidaridad* ignored the deep and troublesome contradiction of Chicago schools. Mexicans aspired for their workers and children to remain Mexican, while receiving an education that strived to deny them both.<sup>82</sup> Although authors like Rivera and Mexican parents across Chicago diverged in the social role schools should play, they all agreed that children should enroll in city schools.

In 1929, an editorial printed in Chicago's *Correo Mexicano* newspaper expanded the discussion initiated in *México* and *Solidaridad* three years earlier. Newspapers had already transcended political boundaries by describing the transnational issues shaping Mexican communities, but *Correo Mexicano* began to situate the fate of children in the larger discussions involving Mexico and the United States. The author of the editorial

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<sup>80</sup> "Educacion: Dedicado a Los Obreros Mexicanos," *México*, June 5 1926, 3. Translation made by author.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

printed in *Correo Mexicano* focused on how the education, which he described as the “small things,” was of greatest significance.

The greatness of the people is neither more nor less than in the small things; the small things are what rulers, statesmen, scientists, and university professors pay most attention to. The small things are what give the most headaches to the people who manage public affairs, which is why governments of all civilized societies always worry about the child’s education, physical welfare, as well as moral and intellectual.<sup>83</sup>

The author compared Mexico’s educational state with the United States and noted it was disappointing that not all children in Mexico were educated. Since the author was concerned about becoming a civilized society, he felt that a country could not become modern without having a concern for its children’s education. Reverberating the sentiments put forth in *Solidaridad* and *México*, this editorial also saw education as having the potential of improving the social conditions of Mexican communities. It stated:

When a man is educated, he does not allow you to exploit his estate or pay him disgraceful wages; when man is educated and aware of their duties, he does not accept being be treated as a human beast, because he knows how to claim his rights; when man is man through and through, he does not let dictators, whether Diaz or others, to trade with him in such a demeaning fashion, as it happened in that time.<sup>84</sup>

It was for this reason that the first wave of Mexicans strongly supported education for political reasons. They felt that education was essential for a democratic, equitable, and self-governing society. “Educating our children, caring for and monitoring their development,” the editorial concluded, “our country, will in around fifty years from now have evolved greatly, ethnically, intellectually and economically.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> "Nota Editorial: El Futuro De Mexico Esta En Los Niños," *Correo Mexicano*, September 6 1926.

Translation made by author.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2. Translation made by author.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Translation made by author.

### **Mexican Children and American Schools**

There were few Mexican Chicagoans who disapproved of sending their children to city schools. They supported the general purpose of educating their youth. Eventually, however, as the Americanizing goals of city schools became clear and their cultural aspirations of molding Mexicans out of their children was weakened by what was taught in schools, Mexican parents showed great displeasure at the institutional direction of public day schools. Parents felt this way because they perceived schools as forcefully injecting white American values in their youth, which consequently threatened the development of a Mexican nation.

These sentiments were exacerbated in 1930 when *México* reported that geography and history schoolbooks adopted at a "Yankee school" in Mexico City had been confiscated by local Mexican officials because they openly insulted the Mexican revolution and past political leaders. The article reported, "The passages of those books that have provoked the indignation of all the people [in Mexico] are not only false but mal intended, ultimately it is a shameful and depraved attitude of these Yankee school officials who have no qualms in slandering the children of a country that provides hospitality."<sup>86</sup> Even in the interior of Mexico, the Chicago-based newspaper argued, Americans openly insulted Mexicans and disregarded their culture. If there was anything Mexicans in Chicago could do from afar to combat these antagonistic acts, it was to preserve their own strain of patriotism and nationalism, and create new guardians of their republic.

The educational ideal Mexicans maintained was that the education provided by schools in the city was inadequately equipping their children to be guardians of their

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<sup>86</sup> "Depravada Actitud De Una Escuela," *Mexico*, May 31 1930, 1. Translation made by author.

republic. Although Mexican parents had already made concession with their children when strains of American culture crept into their homes, parents resisted the attempts of schools to fully demexicanize—not Americanize—their youth. Different strategies were developed to assuage the process. The *Correo Mexicano* newspaper, for example, announced that it would play an educational role in the lives Mexicans in Chicago by instilling the idea of “collective improvement.” In so doing, it asked its readership to “take advantage of the education offered in this country” and reminded Mexicans of the significance it was to educate their children, because “sooner or later” they would return to their “maternal sun to lend assistance in the aggrandizement of the Country.” The fact that Mexicans promoted education, yet at the same time renounced efforts to strip them from their national identity was something that urban reformers did not understand. Mexicans, as much as they saw themselves becoming a permanent class in Chicago, still hoped to return to Mexico and, consequently, prepared their children for the exodus that never came. “In a word,” the *Correo Mexicano* article concluded, “it is about educating the Mexican in a rational ‘Mexicanism,’ without unfounded hatred, without rancid prejudices, without provincial ties, and without subversive ideas.”<sup>87</sup> The “rational” Mexican envisioned by the *Correo Mexicano* was someone who would question the curriculum taught in Chicago city schools, and would not have regional ties with Chicago, but with Mexico. A rational Mexican abandoned subversive ideas that threatened the well-being of Mexico—they aimlessly loved their homeland.

Mexicans in Chicago were anticipating that their children would become guardians of their republic. Through their publications, in their homes, and through their

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<sup>87</sup> Armando C. Amador, “La Educacion a Traves De La Prensa,” *Correo Mexicano*, September 30 1926, 2. Translation made by author.

church activities, Mexicans resisted negative portrayals of their country. They were clear about what their children were to know. In an article titled “It Is Necessary to Create an Educational Center that Teaches in our Language,” the *Correo Mexicano* urged Mexicans to preserve their national identity. “It causes real pain,” the article stated, “to see how the children of Mexicans living in these parts of the country, cannot read in our beautiful language, not knowing at all who were Hidalgo, Juarez, Madero and other major Mexican patricians.”<sup>88</sup> Knowing something about Mexico went beyond the acquisition of facts and dates. To know about Mexico signaled to adults that children were still holding on to Mexico. Parents’, however, did not want their children to become monolingual Mexicans who only knew about Mexican culture. Although parents were strong advocates for Spanish instruction and expected the youth to have a high respect for their Mexican country, they expected their children to saddle the national identities in being melded in both countries. Mostly, however, they pushed for Mexicanization, because they felt schools’ primary objective was to strip them of everything that was Mexican. A Mexican father recorded as “F.O.” by a student from the Chicago Theological Seminary revealed the uncertainty he had about teaching his children only English. F.O. told the interviewer, “It is a shame that Mexican children should forget their Native tongue. In school it is a fine thing that they can learn English but in the home and in the church they should speak their own language. When the children grow up they can choose whether they wish to become American citizens or not but they should not be forcibly Americanized.”<sup>89</sup> This father expected that his children should have a choice, and not be swept into a national identity based on what they solely taught in schools. For these parents saw their

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<sup>88</sup> “Se Hace Necesario Un Centro Donde Se Imparta Educacion En Nuestro Idioma,” *Correo Mexicano*, October 29 1926, 1. Translation made by author.

<sup>89</sup> “F.O.” Box 56, Folder Family Histories Part 1, Survey Papers.

children's national identity as a process and as something that ought to be free from political influences.

One of the most extended discussions regarding demexicanization was written by Julian Xavier Mondragon who was the editor of *México*. Titled, "Our Cultural Institutions," Mondragon detailed the difficulties of driving back social intrusions in Mexican homes. This was especially true, Mondragon explained, because children attended schools where they were being taught how to be Americans. "It cannot be denied that," Mondragon wrote, "as we are in a foreign country, our children attend public or private schools where they learn many things, especially the history and civics of this country. This runs the danger of what the newspapers of our country call 'DEMEXICANIZACION.'"<sup>90</sup> Mondragon wanted Mexicans in Chicago to be accountable to the critiques waged in *their* country. He worried about the creation of a new generation of Mexicans that had a minimal understanding of *their* Mexican history, geography, and culture. Mondragon championed Mexican education in Chicago, one that challenged an inevitable trajectory towards Americanism. Mondragon claimed that it was "highly embarrassing and even criminal," for their children to become American. He urged Mexican parents to teach children Spanish "with the objective that these children not ignore their racial, ethnic, and cultural origin, if you will."<sup>91</sup> His fear was that most of the children who migrated to Chicago at a young age or those that were born in the U.S. were becoming too Americanized. He stated:

They are Americanized in every way, and oftentimes, not only in the language, but even in the bad habits that abound in these parts, especially in the city of Chicago, where young people are very perverted. They talk the same, what

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<sup>90</sup> J. Xavier Mondragon, "Nuestras Instituciones Culturales," *México*, April 20 1929, 3-4. Translation made by author.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

beautiful things they have learned here, and almost hate Mexico, due to the poorly written American books they have read, where almost always Mexico is denigrated and set in the ground, calling it a country populated by savages.<sup>92</sup>

Mondragon had read over a high school textbook used in Chicago schools that had been authored by Columbia University professors and found it contained nothing but “barbarisms” about Mexico. The book he analyzed stated that Mexico had thirteen million inhabitants “when the entire world knows, and especially those who have reason,” Mondragon proudly clarified, “that it has fifteen.” He decried information that distorted Mexico as a backward country and explained that Mexico was, in fact, a modern urban nation, not the savage country depicted by Columbia University professors.<sup>93</sup> There is no indication that the first wave of Mexicans who settled in Chicago attempted to change what was taught in city schools. City-wide school publications did not record any attempts made by Mexicans to incorporate culturally relevant courses.<sup>94</sup> The records produced by Mexicans do show, however, how they resented city schools and how they began to develop spaces where they educated their own children outside of the authority of school officials. In this way, Mondragon’s article is reflective of the educational philosophy Mexican formulated across Chicago *colonias*. The way they contested the cultural assault on their children was to create their own institutions. Mondragon stated,

We can combat all of this as long as we organize educational institutions in Chicago that are purely Mexican where our children (and even many “big kids”), with the consent of their parents, can learn to read and write our beautiful and romantic language, our national history, our rich natural resources, and our glorious traditions.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> The Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, proceedings from the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, and various Chicago Board of Education publications between 1920 and 1940 did not record any discussion regarding Mexican school children. This is not to say that these publications accurately reflected the racial debates occurring in school sites, but I can not make any claim without evidentiary support.

<sup>95</sup> Mondragon, “Nuestras Instituciones Culturales.” Translation made by author.

It is unclear as to how many of these alternative schools were created. Proponents, nonetheless, did not ask city schools to change the curriculum. Even when it was clear that books used in Chicago schools defaced Mexican history, Mexican intellectuals and city leaders did not find it necessary to ask school officials to alter their curriculum. Instead, their solution was to form independent schools that would adhere to their own cultural expectations. Mondragon asked for schools that were exclusively Mexican, where as he explained, children would learn to “read and write our language, learn to love Mexico” and where they would “know our history and the biography and facts of our patricians.” He wanted to pass-on Mexican values and create a generation that would continue to “love and know our flag, which many of them completely fail to recognize.”<sup>96</sup> Considering that Mexicans were attending city schools, these alternative spaces became even more important. Mexicans promoted school attendance, but with a caveat. They had brought with them nationalistic ideas bred in the revolutionary movement that was sweeping Mexico and forging a new national identity. Intellectuals, labor organizers, and educational leaders in Mexico were asking that educational institutions complement Mexico’s political, economic, and cultural goals.<sup>97</sup> As Mondragon explained, education would “be the only way to create a homeland [in Chicago]. This would be the only way to say that we do something for our people, for the advancement and culture of our children and grown men, who greatly need it.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Translation made by author.

<sup>97</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria (Pro Nacionalismo)* (México: Librería de Porrúa Hermanos, 1916), 285.

<sup>98</sup> Mondragon, “Nuestras Instituciones Culturales,” 3-4. Translation made by author. For more on Mondragon and on the work of Mexican liberals who migrated to Chicago during the Mexican Revolution, see John H. Flores, “A Migrating Revolution: Mexican Political Organizers and Their Rejection of American Assimilation, 1920-1940,” in *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History*, ed. Leon Fink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).



### Mexican Schools for a Mexican Nation

*La Alianza* (The Alliance), one of Chicago's Spanish-language newspapers, established its own alternative school that supplemented the regular school curriculum for both boys and girls. The classes were primarily taught by its editor, Xavier Mondragon, who was also member of the fraternal society Alianza Fraternal Mexicana and years earlier, in the newspaper *México*, had proposed the idea of creating a Mexican school. Central to the curriculum was the geography and history of Mexico, and Spanish because, as the newspaper explained, it "would be useless to teach the little ones anything else since they are also attending Public and Parochial Schools." "Under no circumstances shall we permit our children to forget our language," *La Alianza* proclaimed, "through this work we can say, we are constructing a country." The books, which were primarily used by youth, could also be borrowed by community members or be bought for twenty-five cents.<sup>99</sup>

In 1926, *El Correo Mexicano* had already attempted to do the same. They attempted to create a night school for children and "workers" where "the most indispensable knowledge is imparted in educational material and patriotism." The editor of the newspaper, once again being Xavier Mondragon, had committed himself to teach one course that met three times per week.<sup>100</sup> A month later the newspaper ran a follow-up article noting that there had been great interest in establishing the alternative Mexican school. As a result, they printed a flyer that asked Mexican business owners and parents

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<sup>99</sup> "Our Educational Work," *La Alianza*, April 1936, CFLPS, Reel 1A: Spanish/Mexican, IAlb II B 2 f. The publication date of this article was not recorded in CFLPS records.

<sup>100</sup> "Una Escuela Nocturna Para Niños y Obreros," *Correo Mexicano*, October 29, 1926, page 1. Translation made by author. Xavier Mondragon was considered one of the Mexican leaders in Chicago who, as you can tell, served on various editorial boards. See, Flores, "A Migrating Revolution: Mexican Political Organizers and Their Rejection of American Assimilation, 1920-1940."

to come together at a meeting to discuss the plan and arrange the school's schedule. It noted, "It is assured that all parents will attend the meeting, the patriotism and love that Mexican parents feel for our beloved Mexico is evident, whom we owe to return, educating our children, the work and suffering that the country has suffered for giving us a nationality and name."<sup>101</sup> These schools were not formulated to replace what public day schools were already doing. Instead, organizers hoped to work around the public school's schedule and serve as a space where, through their children, would fend off American nationalism.

On occasion, Mexican schools were organized in basements of vacant stores where religious icons were integrated into the curriculum. This was done to avoid any administrative reprisals caused by integrating Catholicism into the curriculum.<sup>102</sup> Robert Redfield found that the Rodriguez family, who lived in a two-story frame house in South Side, maintained a school in the basement. Redfield noted, "This is a plain room with a dirty glass front. It is now furnished with a camp chairs and a blackboard. Evry [sic] evening Rodriguez has a school there. About 6 adults and 8 children come. They are all taught in one class at a time."<sup>103</sup> Another makeshift school was created in the Hull House *colonia* specifically for boys who were under eighteen years of age. At this school they were taught woodworking, painting, Mexican geography and history.<sup>104</sup> An additional effort made by Mexicans was to create resource centers, like libraries, where Mexicans could stage educational events and teach their youth about Mexico. On November 14,

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<sup>101</sup> "Quedara Instalado en Lugar Apropiado, Siempre Que Se Cuento Con La Ayuda de Los Comerciantes Mexicanos," *Correo Mexicano*, November 24, 1926, page 1.

<sup>102</sup> See Gabriela F. Arredondo, "'What! The Mexicans, Americans?': Race and Ethnicity, Mexicans in Chicago, 1916-1939" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999), 221.

<sup>103</sup> RR Journal, page 46-47. Redfield Papers, Box 57, Folder 3

<sup>104</sup> "New Classes offered to the Mexican Youth," *La Defensa*, August 29, 1936. CFLPS, Reel 1A: Spanish/Mexican: II B 2 f.

1927, the *Sociedad Femenil Mexicana* (Mexican Women's Society) inaugurated a library that was open every Monday and Wednesday between 5:00pm and 10:00pm. On Mondays, between eight and ten in the evening, they offered free painting classes and other "required" subjects. The library was for "ladies, and girls, and boys under 14 years." On the second and fourth Friday of each month they would offer English, grammar in Spanish, Mexican history that were taught by "competent teachers."<sup>105</sup>

### **Conclusion: American Schools, Mexican Dreams**

By the beginning of the twentieth-century, schools had become part of a larger consortium of social institutions that oversaw the creation of a new civic and democratic society. Their distinguishing factor, however, as Michael Katz has argued, was that a crucial aspect of public schools was to "mediate the contradictions between democratic ideals and the continuance of class and inequality." Schools served as "agents of cultural standardization" for immigrants, as much as they did for Mexicans in Chicago.<sup>106</sup> A book, published in an Americanization Studies series sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, claimed that schools were perceived as the main institution that Americanized immigrants. Written by John Daniels in 1920, the book noted:

If you ask ten immigrants who have been in America long enough to rear families what American institution is most effective in making the immigrant part and parcel of American life, nine will reply "the public school." The reply is significant in two respects. It means, first, that the immigrant is thinking not of himself, but of his children. He sees them go into the kindergarten as little Poles or Italians or Finns, babbling in the tongues of their parents, and at the end of half a dozen years or more he sees them emerge, looking, talking, thinking, and behaving generally like full-fledged "Americans."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> "Los Niños Mexicanos y la S.F.M.," *La Noticial Mundial*, December 4, 1927, page 1 & 4. Translation made by author.

<sup>106</sup> Michael B Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 16. For a similar discussion see, Michael B Katz, *Improving Poor People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Paul C. Violas, *The Training of the Urban Working Class* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Pub. Co., 1978).

<sup>107</sup> John Daniels "American Via the Neighborhood" (1920). Harper & Brothers Publishers, NY, pg 249.

The experience of Mexican in Chicago, however, was unlike the expectations discussed by Daniels. In Chicago, Mexicans subdued the Americanization movement by developing their own alternative educational spaces. They appreciated the efforts imparted by schools because they educated their children, but despised their efforts when they sought to Americanize their children. This quandary left many educators confused as to why Mexicans would not support their efforts. Mexicans, if threatened with Americanization, would cease to attend schools. In one reported case, where Mexicans travelled long distances to a school to learn English, they quit school without advising their teachers.

George T. Edson reported,

For some inexplicable reason the Mexicans quit coming. Some teachers never knew the reason, and when they questioned their former pupils they got evasive answers. The reason is that the teacher, or some enthusiastic “hundred percenter” who dropped in to make a speech, made a remark that soon the Mexicans would be ready to become full fledged American citizens. He might as well have mentioned that they would be ready to be shot on the Fourth of July, for the effect was to ruin the attendance.<sup>108</sup>

Edson further explained that in Northern cities Mexican parents did not like it when schools tried to “wean” their children “away from their racial traditions” and make them “love America and its ways.”<sup>109</sup> In the North, the arrival of Mexican children was too recent to draw a conclusion. “It is still problematical whether or not these bright eyed, vivacious and polite children can make the grade of intellectual progress side by side with the children of other races.”<sup>110</sup> To “ruin the attendance” was not caused because they were teaching Mexicans how to read and write English, but because educators were endorsing that they become less Mexican.

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<sup>108</sup> George T. Edson (1927), “Mexicans in our Northcentral States,” page 65, Box 13, Folder 38, *Paul Taylor Papers*.

<sup>109</sup> Edson, “Mexicans in our Northcentral States,” page 66.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*, page 67.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION: DEFYING THE FORCES OF AMERICANIZATION

In 1929 Benjamin Goldberg, a health reformer and practicing medical doctor in Chicago, tried to describe the racial, cultural, and national make up of Mexicans in his city. With a lack of precision, Goldberg could not affix an identity that would fully capture the social and historical formation of Mexicans in Chicago. Goldberg explained, “The Mexican is not a Mexican. The term Mexican has no significance.”<sup>1</sup> Concluding that the term “Mexican” had no significance was not a major miscalculation. Mexicans arrived in Chicago with a clear understanding of who they were ethnically, and how they envisioned their national identity, but it changed as they settled and formed communities. Initially, to be Mexican meant that they complied with specific political and cultural norms. They emigrated from Mexico and left the Southwest at time when Mexico was expanding its educational system and forging a new national Mexican identity.<sup>2</sup> Mexicans

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<sup>1</sup> Goldberg, "Tuberculosis in Racial Types with Special Reference to Mexicans," 14. This article explained how Mexicans were a health threat to Chicago. For more on this topic, see Benjamin Goldberg, "Tuberculosis in Racial Types with Special Reference to Mexicans " *American Journal of Public Health* 19, no. 3 (1929), J. J. Mendelsohn, "Tuberculosis among Mexicans in Chicago," *Bulletin of the City of Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium* 7, no. 5 (1927), Jacob J. Mendelsohn, "Tuberculosis in Mexicans," *Illinois Medical Journal* 53, no. 1 (1928).

<sup>2</sup> There have been a series of dissertations that have discussed the relationship between Mexico's project to create a national identity and the formation of a Mexican identity in Chicago. See, Flores, "On the Wings of the Revolution: Transnational Politics and the Making of Mexican American Identities", Michael D. Innis-Jiménez, "Persisting in the Shadow of Steel: Community Formation and Survival in Mexican South Chicago, 1919-1939" (PhD Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2006), Michael McCoyer, "Darkness of a Different Color: Mexicans and Racial Formation in Greater Chicago, 1916-1960" (PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2007), David Stafford Weber, "Anglo Views of Mexican Immigrants: Popular Perceptions and Neighborhood Realities in Chicago, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1982).

who migrated to Chicago were mired in this political movement, but their experience was affected by a political and national ideology in Chicago that shaped a different trajectory.

When Mexicans settled in Chicago they did not fit into the typical classifications understood by most social reformers—they could be too Indian to some, white or too African to others. The *Eugenical News*, for example, explained that Mexicans carried a “predominant amount of American Indian blood” and, as a result, were “neither Caucasian nor of African descent.”<sup>3</sup> Urban reformers in the Midwest who were sorting racial classifications were perplexed by their racial background, especially reformers like Goldberg who had a narrow understanding of how color and blood operated in the Mexican context.<sup>4</sup> In Chicago, this racial quandary worked in Mexicans’ favor. Their racial ambiguity allowed them to be classified in an array of ways and gain social privileges solely preserved for white ethnics. Some Mexicans, for example, were able to live and work alongside white immigrants groups, practice their religious beliefs in white churches, and enroll in all white schools. As described in this study, members of the Chicago school of sociology used a verity of descriptors to classify Mexicans. Urban reformers did not agree on one term. They could be described as *mestizo*, Spanish, or Mexican, while people like Manuel Gamio and Robert Redfield defined them as white and Indian. This gave Mexicans the opportunity to racially re-invent themselves at a time when Chicago’s racial arrangement was undergoing a major transformation.<sup>5</sup> However, what mattered most to the first mass wave of Mexicans who migrated to Chicago in the

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<sup>3</sup> “Mexican Immigration,” *Eugenical News* 15, no. 9 (1930): 132.

<sup>4</sup> For a important discussion as to how Mexicans understood race and color, see Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University, 2007), John M. Nieto-Phillips, *The Language of Blood: The Making of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico, 1880s-1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39*, Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*, Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

1920s was the preservation of their national identity—not their color, class, or regional ties. They wanted to cultivate a Mexican nation in Chicago. Indeed, color, class, and regional ties did matter. As they arrived in Chicago, they learned the politics of color and how class impacted everyday life. However, national identity, or Mexican nationalism, was the overarching force that shaped the first wave of Mexican immigrants. In looking at the experience of youth, it is difficult to argue that Mexicans in Chicago remained Mexican, as some historians have noted. Children embraced their transnational ties, but headed in a different trajectory than the one envisioned by Mexican parents, nationalists, journalists, or intellectuals. Instead, the debate about what it meant to be “Mexican” and the subsequent struggle to fend off demexicanization was fought over which direction the first generation of Mexicans in the urban Midwest would take. As a result, the schooling of children became a significant factor in this national and immigrant story. What Mexican meant and how it would be practiced relied heavily on the fate of children.<sup>6</sup>

As Mexicans migrated, settled, developed Mexican *colonias*, and had children, their elusive desire to remain purely Mexican became nothing more than a phantom dream. As described in chapter four and five, Mexicans supported the schooling of children. Interviews conducted at the border, like those of Beartix Longinos and the Carbajal sibling, which are discussed in earlier chapters, reveal that children aspired to enter city schools at the outset of their migratory journey to Chicago. Parents throughout the city were proud to announce the names of their graduates in local Spanish publications—they wanted more and more schooling. Radical newspapers like *Solidaridad*, nationalist publications like *México* proposed that all Mexicans needed more

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of how Mexican became Mexican in Chicago, see Kerr, “Mexican Chicago: Chicano Assimilation Aborted, 1939-1954.” Also, see Arredondo, “Lived Regionalities: Mujeridad in Chicago, 1920-1940.”

education. For adults this meant that they would enroll in night schools to learn English, and for children that they would enroll in day schools. However, what children learned in schools was more than what parents anticipated. To remain Mexican, that is, to safeguard their children's allegiance to the *patria*, was a task too grand to fulfill. Parents saw schools as one of the primary institutions that launched a cultural assault too powerful to escape and subdue. What children learned in the schools and in the streets threatened what Mexican parents wanted to cultivate in their children. In a two-part editorial written in *México*, Alberto Rembao described his dissension and sense of powerlessness.

Rembao explained, "The American public school bombards us at night through the conduct of our own children who preach to us the doctrines which they are inculcated in by day."<sup>7</sup> The longing of a Mexican national identity was troubled by the power of schools. What children were taught in schools became an internal and intractable threat to Mexican nationalism, which heightened the anxiety of Mexican parents. The home, as parents soon found out, was not a sanctuary where external societal forces could be ignored. As a result, this unnerved parents who wanted to create a Mexican Chicago. These forces were all embarking, and were not solely directed by educational institutions. Schools, along with a band of other factors contributed to the formation of an identity that was not purely Mexican. Rembao's explained,

And by day, we are subjected to the barrage of things that are North American--- machines, pie a la mode, gas stoves, electric lights, mechanized carriages, movies and "Lucky Strike" cigarettes. Before long, the Mexican is somewhat different from the person who crossed the border.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rembao, "Las Golondrinas De Becquer," 4.

<sup>8</sup> Alberto Rembao, "Las Golondrinas De Becquer, Continuación," *México*, May 22 1930, 3. Translation made by author.



Mexicans migrated to Chicago because of its economic allure, but their dreams to maintain a Mexican national identity were derailed soon after they became more than laborers. Rembao was indicative of this experience. Perhaps relinquishing to a phantom dream, Rembao noted,

On reflection, we can but only realize that we are builders here, we build a civilization that is not ours, which is not of our parents. And we forge a motherland that is neither ours, but through international rights and by citizenship; it is the homeland of our children. And we do not return.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Chicago was the homeland of their children, and Mexicans did not return to Mexico willingly. Mexicans had carried the dust of their land to Chicago, but soon after their arrival it was being forcibly swept away. A Mexican girl named Maria Lopez described her fear of going back to Mexico. In a letter to Rembao, she asked: "What shall we do in this case [of living in Mexico]? We are not from over there, but from here. Think of what would happen if we were sent to Mexico."<sup>10</sup>

Ernesto Galarza, a leading Mexican American labor organizer, called the ideological transition of youth as the "cooling of the loyalty." Galarza feared the "denationalization" of youth, but described it as an inevitable process that all second generation immigrants passed through. Even though parent dissented it, he noted, that there was a strong support for the schooling of their youth. "Incidentally," Galarza explained, "I wish to state that as far as my own experience extends, the Mexican parent is uniformly grateful for the educational opportunities offered to his children in this country."<sup>11</sup> Mexican parents supported the schooling of youth, but nodded with fervor of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>10</sup> Rembao, "Las Golondrinas De Becquer," 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ernesto Galarza, "Life in the United States for Mexican People: Out of the Experience of a Mexican," in *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work: Sixth Annual Session Held in San Francisco, California, June 26-July 3, 1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 402.

disagreement when educators meddled in the formation of their national identity. One Mexican father in Chicago shunned the Americanization process that had a tendency of fostering unwanted characteristics in youth. The Mexican father noted, “I think that the schools do about as much Americanization as anyone but I don’t think that they do very good work in that regard. The Mexican who is Americanized has a tendency to become rough, boistrous [sic] and disrespectful.”<sup>12</sup> These circumstances, however, did not break the will of Mexicans who created alternative spaces to cultivate their archetypical Mexican. Attempts by schools to demexicanize youth were followed by the development of countervailing institutions. As discussed in chapter five, Mexicans created schools that supplemented what children learned in public day schools. Fraternal organizations, newspaper editors, religious organizations, and parents schooled their children in Mexican history, the geography of Latin American, and the Spanish language to foster Mexican nationalism. Parents, community leaders, and churches agreed that Mexican children could be guardians of their republic in Chicago and came together to defy the forces of Americanization. Schools became one of the primary sites that Mexicans questioned and distrusted. The dissidence was regarding who had the right to define the national identity of youth. For example, one Mexican father questioned the ends of education. He noted, “Is it not preferable to have illiterate honest workers, rather than to have a phalanx of ‘cultured’ people who worry the authorities and are a bane to society?”<sup>13</sup>

The first mass wave of immigrants in Chicago soon realized that schools taught more than simple math and reading. Mexicans, as parents hoped, ought to remain

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<sup>12</sup> “E.L.” Box 56, Family Histories Part 1, Survey Papers.

<sup>13</sup> “A Nation of Hypocrites,” *Mexico*, November 10, 1928, IC IAIa, CFLPS, Reel 1A: Spanish/Mexican.

Mexican even it meant they would challenge what was being taught in schools. In the end, Mexicans felt a strong uncertainty about educating their youth in schools because they infringed on their ability to create Mexicans. The power of schools seemed all too encompassing. To become American, or not Mexican, meant that parents who had arrived in Chicago had to negotiate the social currents seeping into their homes. A young boy named Manuel noted that he avoided dances at Our Lady of Guadalupe because “that’s for older people, and those foreigners like old country music. Of course they were raised different and like different stuff.”<sup>14</sup> Children and youth exhibited their own agency from within the intimacy of their own homes and transformed their family’s cultural expectations. Children and youth listened to jazz music, picked-up on the latest fashions, and learned to speak English. What children learned and the new cultural identity they exhibited was too powerful for parents to regulate. By the 1930s, their cultural loyalty was Mexican, but an identity that is more closely defined by transnationalism.

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Jackson Baur, "Delinquency among Mexican Boys in South Chicago" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1938), 187.

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