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Constructing Citizenship: Americanization Efforts in the Southwest U.S. (1910-1931)

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CONSTRUCTING CITIZENSHIP: AMERICANIZATION
EFFORTS IN THE SOUTHWEST U.S.
(1910-1931)

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Master's Program in History

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Gerardo Torres

2018

Dedication

I want to thank my wife, Claudia, for her unconditional support and faith in me. Without her, I would not have gathered the inspiration nor the courage to become the scholar that I am today.

This is for you, thank you for being my best friend.

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IN THE SOUTHWEST U.S.

(1910-1931)

by

GERARDO TORRES

THESIS

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I began this study with a very different approach and direction in mind. It was supposed to be about the migration of political refugees fleeing from the oppression of the Mexican Revolution and the atrocities of Francisco Villa (Doroteo Arango). However, history took me on a different path and I am grateful for that. This shows that as scholars we serve history and not the other way around. Writing about the construction of citizenship and identity in the Southwest Border of the United States has been an ambitious task but it has also given me an enormous academic and personal gratification. After all, it is a way for me to reconcile with conflictive feelings of identity and mobility. I would like to thank my AP World History students for all the joy that they bring to my career. Lastly, I want to thank all my history professors because I am a fragmented version of each and every one of you, and that, is a true honor.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	1
U.S. Southwestern Border	2
Waves of Mexican Immigrants	4
Social Development and Ways of Governance	7
Chapter 1: Acculturation as Portrayed Through the Press and Social Sciences.....	10
Mexican Limitations and Criminality	11
Personal Hygiene	12
Mexican Cuisine	13
Childrearing Methods	15
Family Environment	16
IQ Test	18
Socio-Psychological Studies	19
Eugenics	23
Chapter 2: Americanization Through Education and Home Infiltration	27
Education	27
Segregation and Punishment	31
Home Infiltration	34
Americanization Programs	38
California Home Teacher Act	44
Americanization Advocates	46
Chapter 3: Government Involvement	49
Department of Public Health	49

Border Patrol	49
Immigration Acts.....	51
Repatriation Campaigns	55
The Aftermath of Americanization Process	58
Bibliography	61
Vita	67

Introduction

The dynamics of migration go beyond the simple relocation of people. In most cases, Mexican nationals migrate to the United States with the intention of fleeing political oppression, poverty, social disorder, and to join their relatives.¹ The Mexican exodus to the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California between 1913 and 1921 serves as an example. The start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, its violent development throughout the rest of the decade, and the disproportional poverty in Mexico made the American Southwest an alluring haven. In response to the large number of Mexican immigrants, the U.S. government attempted to Americanize Mexican immigrant communities through a combination of strategies, which included public education, home infiltration, and the construction of social norms.² Pre-conceived notions held by Americans in regards to the social, educational and genetic make-up of Mexicans drove the Americanization movement. This study argues that despite governmental efforts at constructing an American identity for Mexican immigrants, the views that Anglo Americans developed of them outweighed their initiatives at acculturation, eventually leading to the repatriation campaigns of the 1930s.

I begin this study in 1910. This year marks a decisive point in the Mexican exodus to the United States due to the initiation of the Mexican Revolution. I decided to end the study in 1931 because in this year the repatriation campaigns influenced the removal of thousands of Mexicans from the United States. The relocation of Mexicans out of the United States is vivid proof that

¹ Manuel Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant* (1931; rpt., New York: Dover, 1971), 87-91.

² The term “Mexican immigrant communities” will be used in this study to refer to the communities of both Mexican Americans with legal status or that are second generation, but also to those communities that recently arrived as immigrants from Mexico and have no status at all.

the Americanization efforts and all other benevolent intentions were outweighed by racialized judgments towards the Mexican community.³

U.S. Southwestern Border

The U.S. Southwestern border is a distinctive space. Approximately 2,000-miles from end to end, it encompasses the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.⁴ One historian has described the Southwestern border as “a conquest of race, an establishment of a subordinate labor force, and an expansion of American capitalism.”⁵ Indeed, the U.S. Southwestern border represents a liminal space where cultural encounters, socio-political challenges, and assimilation consistently take place. The term “assimilation” has been defined in different ways and through a number of perspectives. According to sociologist Robert Courtney Smith, assimilation is a socio-cultural process in which the individual negates his or her ethnicity in order to blend into the new society that he or she is now a part of.⁶ Other scholars such as Rodolfo Acuña see assimilation as a process of interaction and renegotiation that changes from generation to generation.⁷ In this thesis, I maintain that assimilation is both the negation and the negotiation of identity from generation to generation and from place to place. For example, immigrants decide to adopt a new culture with the recurrent hope of fully blending into American society. Some of them abandon their culture in the process, while others insist on

³ Mark-Overmyer Velazquez, *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U. S Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55.

⁴ Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 37.

⁵ Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 52.

⁶ Robert Courtney Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational lives of New Immigrants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 220.

⁷ Rodolfo Acuña, *Anything but A Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles* (New York, 1996), 15.

holding on to theirs. The reality is that such an undertaking is expressed according to the “space” in which the assimilation is taking place. Space, particularly ethnic space such as “barrios,” defines the identity people adopt, and they determine the social expectations of the people that occupy them. In short, distinct ethnic spaces shaped and influenced the assimilation process for millions of Mexican immigrants throughout the Southwest.

It is also important to mention that a conversation about borderlands cannot be separated from a discussion of space because spaces are always crafted and delineated by the people who live in them. In addition, spaces can be natural or they can be socially constructed. Regardless, spaces, because of their distinctive ethnic configurations, help shape the social, political, economic, and ethnic statuses of migrants.⁸ It is also important to differentiate between a migrant and an immigrant. In this study, a migrant is referred to as an individual who has recently immigrated to the U.S., has constant mobility, and has no plan to remain on American soil. The immigrant on the other hand, refers to an individual who is looking to settle and start a new life in the United States without an intent to return to his home country. The identity that an individual might embrace in one ethnic space will be completely different in another. For example, in California, Mexican migrants who lived at the outskirts of Los Angeles, formed “barrios,” keeping their distance from Anglos who lived in suburban areas. Those Anglos who controlled suburban areas had a much more efficient infrastructure, better social services, and a lower crime rate. Therefore, cultural assimilations were shaped not only by the migration of people but also by the ethnic spaces where they were relocating. In general, the migrant experience was different according to the space that he or she decided to occupy.

⁸ Smith, *Mexican New York*, 47.

Waves of Mexican Immigrants

The first wave of Mexican immigration to the Southwestern border occurred in the early 1880's. During this time, border cities such as Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, Nogales, and El Paso Del Norte (now Ciudad Juárez), were part of a free zone of border trade and were the direct beneficiaries of the expanding railroad industry.⁹ As a result of intense economic activity in this region, many Mexicans began to migrate to the U.S in search of economic opportunities.

Another factor that attracted Mexican immigrants to the United States during this time was the agricultural expansion that occurred throughout the southwest. President Porfirio Díaz, who governed Mexico from 1876-1911, promoted the appropriation of land by the government in order to sell it to foreign investors (primarily Europeans). Because the Porfirian government had sold off their ancestral lands, many Mexican nationals began to look to the north (*pa'l norte*) in search of new opportunities.¹⁰ For Mexicans, migrating to Northern Mexico was a step closer to relocating to the U.S. It is important to distinguish northern Mexico from the Southwest U.S border. Although they are closely tied together by geography, they are worlds apart in terms of urbanization, economy, and overall quality of life. To many Mexicans, the northern states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Sonora, and Baja California Norte served as the link to a better life in the American nation. Because of the American need for agricultural labor, and because Mexicans desired opportunities for a better life, the Mexican population in the U.S. increased significantly and at a steady rate throughout the 1920's.

The first mass arrival of Mexicans to the Southwestern border during the twentieth century occurred during the decade of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). As Mexicans

⁹ Oscar Martinez, *Ciudad Juárez: Saga of A Legendary Border City* (The University of Arizona Press, 2018), 25.

¹⁰ Martinez, *Ciudad Juárez*, 42.

arrived, they sought to establish social relationships with Anglo-Americans, but they soon found those connections difficult to attain because they were treated as an inferior population.¹¹ For decades after their arrival, the only unifying force between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans were labor relations. From the outset, Mexicans were expected to return to their nation after the Mexican Revolution had ceased. Instead, Mexican communities started to form around Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, and they began to construct leadership structures of their own.¹² As Mexican immigrants encountered a lack of recognition, representation, and legitimacy from American society, they sought acknowledgement through the formation of groups such as neighborhood associations and oftentimes through street gangs (*pandillas*). By 1930, the number of Mexicans living in Southwestern states of the U.S. had increased significantly. According to the U.S. census of 1930, 683,681 Mexicans lived in Texas, 368,013 in California, 114,173 in Arizona, 59,340 in New Mexico, and 57,676 in Colorado.¹³ Although the census had no precise numerical data on Mexican populations prior to 1930, it stated that according to previous calculations and conclusions, this was an ascending immigrant minority.

The expansion of the Mexican population in the U.S. did not improve the way in which Mexican immigrants were treated or perceived in American territory.¹⁴ Most Mexicans and soon to be Mexican Americans (Second generation of Mexicans in the U.S) continued to be treated with prejudice due to their customs and their language. However, just as there were many

¹¹ Anthony Mora, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848-1912* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 18.

¹² Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 98.

¹³ Guide to Records of Immigration Census (Part 2) *Mexican Immigration 1906-1930*. Reel 3-5 (0617), (0690), (0779), (0884), (0974).

¹⁴ Mario Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexican of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 30.

peasants and economically disadvantaged people arriving to the United States, there were also elite government officials and business owners that arrived alongside them. Unfortunately, it was difficult to maintain the high status that they had back in Mexico since they were “different.”¹⁵ In the United States, wealth or financial stability were often overshadowed by racial codifications. Once the Mexican migrant had crossed over into the United States, it did not matter if he or she was of high status or financially privileged because they looked, acted, dressed, and spoke differently. Being different meant having cultural and social discrepancies that were not congruent with the American way of life. According to Jerry Gonzalez’s study on suburbanization in the Los Angeles region, contemporaries of the time believed that being an American implied cleanliness (personal hygiene), a properly balanced diet, a certain wardrobe, and the ability to attain the American Dream, which prioritized home ownership in a suburban area.¹⁶

The idea of being an American was more than the mere acquisition of material items, it was also a way to define an identity. To be an American meant to be civilized, well oriented, and of proper moral character.¹⁷ This identity and the construction of citizenship led to the differentiation between the Mexican and the American border. One side of the border was home to the leaders of capitalism and modernization, the other was the land of a mixed race that had social, intellectual, and physical limitations. The clear distinctions between the people who inhabited the frontiers would be the basis for institutionalized prejudice, persecution, and the

¹⁵ The term “Different” will be used in this study to describe a person of dark skin, short height, and with a Mexican complexity or with Mexican physiological features.

¹⁶ Jerry Gonzalez, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 54.

¹⁷ Gonzalez, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills*, 57.

relocation of Mexican residents and immigrants along the Southwest border. It is important to understand that during this time, being an American carried political, social, cultural, and ethnographical connotations. American citizenship was complex, it took time to attain, and it had to be constructed through a series of habits, behaviors, and cognitive processes. Americanization not only had to be taught, but it also had to be experienced on a daily basis. The problem with this philosophy, however, is that everyone lived it in a different manner, and while some assimilated, others did not. Although the U.S. government took initiatives to construct an American citizenship for Mexican immigrants through modernization, education, and acculturation, the racialized judgment and estimation behind those initiatives ended up outweighing those efforts. Racialized ideas of Mexicans became a crucial pretext to label and classify Mexican immigrants who arrived in the Southwestern border in the following two decades. In addition, it would culminate with the Repatriation Campaigns of the early 1930's.

Social Development and Governance

Social development and governance were categories that differentiated Mexicans from Anglos. An example of this differentiation was New Mexico's numerous attempts to attain statehood. Their lack of success in attaining admittance into the American union portrayed the lack of trust U.S. officials had in its heavy Mexican population. Since the colonial period, New Mexicans had identified themselves as Spanish or of Spaniard descent. Many of them refused to be called Mexicans even though they had become part of the Mexican Empire in 1821. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, ceding New Mexico to the United States, New Mexico had to reconsider the meaning of its racial and national identity because its geographic

position had once again shifted to another country.¹⁸ Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, New Mexico repeatedly applied for statehood. Its appeals to the U.S. Congress in 1850, 1865, 1871, 1875, 1881, 1889, 1892, 1893, 1902, and 1908 were rejected on the basis that the state had a “mixed, incomplete race” that was far from having European roots, spoke Spanish, had the customs of bandits, and was unable to self-govern successfully.¹⁹ In 1912, New Mexico finally ceased to be a territory, obtaining statehood and becoming the U.S.’s forty-seventh state. After defeating the firm opposition of the U.S. Congress, New Mexico managed to prove itself as a worthy state by inventing a “pure” Spanish identity that made them white or of European descent. The last thing they wanted was to be considered Mexican.

The case of New Mexico highlights the notion of constructing identity and the nature of being worthy and unworthy of statehood. In order to deserve the right to American statehood, the local population had to prove to congress that they were not of Mexican decent. Having a dominant Mexican population jeopardized this opportunity. It also reinforced the idea that the construction of identity was a difficult process. However, many people, institutions, and states were willing to fulfill its requirements in order to attain a dignified status. New Mexico’s fight for statehood also serves as an example of the political impediments that Mexicans in the U.S. Southwestern border were subject to because of racialized classifications. The U.S. federal government was convinced that since New Mexico had a predominantly Mexican population, they did not have the capacity to govern themselves or to promote social order. The abundance of Mexicans in the state represented a socio-political handicap, a collective mistrust, and a concern for social structure.

¹⁸ Mora, *Border Dilemmas*, 22.

¹⁹ Mora, *Border Dilemmas*, 23.

The state of California faced a similar dilemma, but to a lesser degree, because they were not trying to obtain statehood. The California Senate elections of 1900 were a unique and peculiar situation during the time. For instance, California Senator Dan Burns wanted to give a more prominent political voice to Mexicans in California. But other leading Republicans throughout the state opposed and publicly discredited Burns. The elite members of the state declared Mexicans to be “unfit” to represent or govern. They published pamphlets and periodical columns in which they argued that the election of a Mexican Californian for the senate would be a disgrace to the state and the nation. Lastly, they reminded citizens about the recurrent concern and the negative connotations with which the U.S. Federal Government would perceive California if a Mexican were to be elected.²⁰ Once again, racial profiling was a sufficient and relevant enough asset to discredit the Mexican’s ability to establish social order. In his book *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy*, Miguel Levario argues that during the first three decades of the 1900’s Mexicans were labeled as criminals, unwanted citizens, and an unchanging threat to the United States.²¹ It may be that the concept of a “racialized profile” was non-existent yet, but there were preconceived notions behind the Mexican migration to the Southwest border of the U.S during the early twentieth century.

²⁰ “Leading Republicans Throughout the State Declare the Mexican Unfit to Represent This Empire in the Senate of the United States,” *The San Francisco Call*, January 27, 1900, 1.

²¹ Miguel Levario, *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 10.

Chapter 1: Acculturation as Portrayed Through the Press and Social Sciences

In the case of the Mexican community, adaptation to American culture was not a simple process because it contained within it predetermined notions of their own inferiority. This concept of Mexican inferiority remained prevalent throughout the following two decades and did not change even as acculturation took place. In a way, one can say that this was expected because racialized ideals had been around since the early 1900's. An example of this kind of rhetoric was evident in a speech U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt gave in 1907 in which he stated that "the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else . . . We have room for but one flag, the American flag . . . We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language . . . and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people."²² Therefore, the problematic situation could only be diminished if Mexicans fulfilled the requirements of being a citizen of good moral character and a useful asset to the community. Along with the idea of the inferiority of un-accultured Mexicans, propaganda became even stronger in favor of "Americanizing" Mexicans. Newspapers from California such as *The Llano Colonist*, shed light on the importance of teaching English to immigrants in order to turn them into full-fledged Americans.²³

One of the most important aspects to understand when analyzing the hardships of Mexican communities in their adaptation to American society is that they were not considered by most Anglos to have the capability to assimilate. The ideas of differentiation that Anglo Americans had about Mexican immigrants prevailed throughout the rest of the decade (1910-

²² Theodore Roosevelt "Ideas on Immigration and Being an American," 1907.

²³ "Mexican Education through English," *The Llano Colonist*, August 26, 1922, 2.

1921). The perspectives expanded beyond the physiological distinction, emphasizing that Mexicans had different attitudes and ways of living and thinking. From as early as 1880, with the initial migration of Mexicans to the Southwestern border, the United States developed pre-conceived notions of Mexicans and questioned their methods of behavior in different areas of their lives. Anglos scrutinized Mexican's eating habits (dietary habits and table manners), their precarious cleanliness, and their lack of motivation to further educate themselves in both formal and informal education.²⁴

Mexican Limitations and Criminality

Newspapers, journals, periodicals, ads, and pamphlets exposed the potential disadvantages that the incoming immigrants could bring. Local newspapers from across the Southwest and in areas as influential as Washington D.C. became common sources for scrutinizing Mexican customs. For example, in 1910 the *El Paso Herald* published an article in which it described the lack of motivation that predominated the Mexican personality. Amongst its declarations, an article written by Robert H. Murray, explained that "The Mexican citizen was not devoted (by devoted, it meant dedicated, committed, and consistent) regardless of his quick and solid talents."²⁵ This statement demonstrated the belief that even though Anglo Americans recognized the abilities of Mexicans, their skills were not sufficient for Mexicans to reach their full potential. This rhetoric would continue throughout the next two decades as school

²⁴ In this case study, the term "Formal Education" will refer to schooling and University training. On the other hand, the concept of "Informal Education" will refer to the way of speaking/interacting with people, basic hygiene skills, and even the process of deciding where to live and in what conditions.

²⁵ "Lack of Education of the Masses, Drawbacks in Development," *El Paso Herald*, February 26, 1910, 22.

segregation took place and as education became fragmented. During this period the gap between Mexicans and Anglo-Americans widened.

Another concern that seemed to predominate in regards to Mexicans populating the border was the idea of criminality. The *El Paso Daily Herald* published an article on November 2, 1900 which stated that the borderland between the U.S. and Mexico was a land where no one was safe, where there were herds of half-bred Indians and Mexican desperadoes, that unrestrained outlawry was common, and that raids of outlaws and bandits were a priority for the governor of Arizona, New Mexico, and even the state of Sonora in Mexico.²⁶ This concept of criminalizing a particular group of people resurfaced in the mid 1920's with the creation and the rhetoric behind the border patrol. As this study will delineate, the Border Patrol was created for the purpose of prosecuting alcohol smugglers from Mexico, but as time went on, it shifted into the idea of "criminalizing and labeling" who is legal and illegal. At times, the conditions on which Mexicans entered the U.S. served as the grounds to define their moral character.²⁷

Personal Hygiene

Other areas that were targeted in determining difference were the approaches with which Mexicans assessed health problems. Mexicans, Anglo Americans argued, were not advocates of cleanliness and hygiene; it was not in their cultural make up. Newspapers and weekly journals like the *Mason County Journal* periodically published short stories in which Mexicans were portrayed as "dirty," "drunken" and as individuals who sat in "dirty tables" and slept on "the

²⁶ "In The Borderland," *El Paso Daily Herald*, November 2, 1900, 3.

²⁷ Hernandez, *Migra!*, 123.

cold floor.”²⁸ Almost a decade later, the *Essex County Herald* published a letter/anecdote from an Anglo American to his bishop in which he described his trip from St. Louis, Missouri (his hometown) to Mexico City via railroad. In the vivid description, the narrator stressed the precarious conditions in which he traveled along Mexicans who were dirty and who carried several animals on them. He mentioned how he had to sleep with babies on the floor, how dirty ragged children asked him for cents and how once he arrived at the Mexican capital, the hotels were not properly attended and the food was distasteful, being nothing compared to what “us the Americans relish.”²⁹

The Santa Fe New Mexican prepared and published a special report on how to prevent Typhus. In this article, the virus was said to originate in Mexico because of its tropical climate, which tended to be ideal for the development of bacteria and abundant germs. In addition, the column went on to talk about how Mexican hygiene was at least half a century behind the United States, but that this was expected coming from a predominantly indigenous and half bred population of peons with a low standard of living.³⁰ The journalist then outlined a list of recommendations for keeping the virus out of the United States along with Mexican immigrants.

The message had been strategically diffused, the cultural and racial association had been made: Mexicans were dirty and were recipients and transporters of disease. The media (in this case the newspapers, journals, and pamphlets) were efficiently constructing a rhetoric that connected hygiene with race. This rhetoric of unsanitary Mexicans remained vivid throughout the upcoming years. In fact, at the end of the decade, special bath stations were established along the border between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. Unfortunately, their methods represented a

²⁸ The Mason County Journal, January 20, 1899, Image 4.

²⁹ “St. Louis to Mexico,” *Essex County Herald*, November 6, 1908.

³⁰ “Fight Devilish Typhus,” *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, December 1, 1913, 3.

hazard to human dignity and integrity. The justification of such intervention was based on the premise that the American people needed to be protected from disease and epidemics brought over the border by Mexican immigrants. This study will revisit this situation as the U.S. Government took in regards to Mexican immigration.

Mexican Cuisine

The dilemma of food was also controversial and significant to the Anglo-American population. Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson has argued that cultural customs were fundamental to the American process of determining which groups were permitted entry, who deserved full citizenship, and what immigrants accessed the benefits of whiteness.³¹ In fact, many Americans used food in the Southwest as the main constructor of racial differentiation and political inequality.³² For example, The *San Francisco Call* published an article claiming that “the Mexicans have very different ways of doing things, much more different than us, they eat different, they wet their hands to make pancakes, they do not eat bread, and instead they eat a rolled corn called tortilla.”³³ Mexican cuisine is a concept that became an area of fascination for some people who collected Mexican and New Mexican cookbooks to analyze cultural and social paradigms.

³¹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of A Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 88.

³² Katherine Massoth, *Mexican Cookery That Belongs to The United States: Evolving Boundaries of Whiteness in New Mexican Kitchens*(Rutgers University Press, 2017), 30.

³³ “A Little Girl’s Trip from Mexico,” *The San Francisco Call*, October 26, 1912, 2.

In addition, some Anglo American women wrote “Mexican cookbooks” through the compilation of recipes from “*Señoras Mexicanas*.”³⁴ One of these women was the writer, historian and storyteller Erna Fergusson who profited from the appropriation of Mexican recipes in the 1930’s by selling them to American Restaurants and companies who tried to “Americanize” and commercialize this food.³⁵ The food became an asset to legitimize Americanization even more and demonstrated that everything could blend into the American culture, and that when this happened, those things became better.

Childrearing Methods

Anglo Americans found Mexican’s childrearing methods strange since both cultures raised children differently. In 1919, the *El Paso Herald* published an article in which it questioned the tactics of Mexican motherhood: “the Mexican mother has a tendency of giving watermelon as the first food for the baby, they make their infants thrive on *chile con carne* and other spicy foods that are too strong not only to an adult but to the delicate baby’s digestive system.”³⁶ The parenting style of Mexican mothers was thought to be outdated in the Anglo American’s eyes. At the same time, most of the Anglo American population in the Southwest agreed that Mexicans did not know better and that it was necessary for Americans to teach them the “American Way.”³⁷

³⁴ In this study, “*Señoras Mexicanas*” means “Mexican mothers or ladies from the northern states of Mexico that have migrated to the southwest border of the U.S.

³⁵ Erna Fergusson, *Mexican Cookbook* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1934), 21

³⁶ “The Mexican Mother’s Tendencies and Cinnamon Water” *El Paso Herald*, August 4, 1919, 9.

³⁷ “Mexican Mother’s Tendencies,” 9.

In addition to these “outdated approaches in parenting and nutrition,” there was also a concern for the health and wellbeing of Mexican babies and children. In 1919, the city of El Paso, Texas opened up a free clinic founded by associated charities in order to help Mexican mothers and their children. Throughout the second half that year, the clinic received between fifty and seventy daily cases of sick infants, ranging from newborns to children ten years of age. The physician in charge of the small health center, Dr. W. E. Vandevere, was interviewed by the *El Paso Herald* and argued that most of the cases of sickness in Mexican children were caused by malnutrition or inappropriate ingestion of foods and drinks like cinnamon water.³⁸ “Agua de Canela”³⁹ was used by Mexican mothers as a natural remedy for any sort of illness. If the baby or child refused to drink it because of its odd appearance and flavor, then they would add flour and food coloring, or would just mix it with the milk they were drinking. The method usually worked. Drinking cinnamon water was a generational recipe for upset stomach, symptoms of cold, headaches, and other minor muscle pains. Dr. Vandevere argued that he seldom saw a White mother do this with her child; that for the most part it was just the Mexican population, and that such patterns were no coincidence. They simply meant that Mexican mothers did not know how to treat their children’s illness and utilized severely unhygienic practices.⁴⁰ Once again, the area of nutrition remained as problematic tendencies that eventually led up to issues with health.

³⁸ “Hundreds of Lives Are Saved at Clinic of Associated Charities,” *El Paso Herald*, August 21, 1919.

³⁹ Agua de Canela was a traditional Mexican recipe passed on from generation to generation in which cinnamon sticks were boiled at the highest possible temperature, then the liquid was strained or filtered. The liquid is then given to the sick person. The ill individual is supposed to ingest it as hot as possible to be able to absorb all its nutrients. Such remedy helped with pain, inflammation, and congestion.

⁴⁰ “Many Mexican Babies Given Free Attention,” *El Paso Herald*, August 14, 1919.

Family Environment

The family environment experienced by Mexican families was also different from that of the Anglo American family. For example, a consistent problem in the Mexican community was the issue of deprioritizing education. Mexican parents maintained the belief and conviction that they and their children were destined to work in agriculture or on the railroad field, and that academia was not meant for them but for Anglo Americans. Mexicans in the Southwest U.S. believed that aiming for a higher education was like defying the established functioning equilibrium. These Mexican families had profound necessity. Mexican children needed to work to help their families, Therefore, the priority was not school but survival. In his 1970 sociological study of the Mexican American in the United States, Emory Bogardus analyzed the frustrations of public school teachers during the 1920's and 30's. Teachers described Mexican parents as impediments for the learning of their children and called them "handicap teachers" that instead of motivating them to grow intellectually, advise them to fall into conformity and work in the family labor of sharecropping, agriculture, or railroad construction.⁴¹ This was a situation that originated from the moment that Mexican migrations began in the U.S. Southwest, and it signified a drawback.

A significant number of scholars argued that the problem of the Mexican's educational lag was tied to the family environment. In his book *The Education of Mexican and Spanish Speaking Children in Texas*, the Educational Psychology professor, Manuel Herschel, argued that the low level of income of most Mexican American families created an environment of cultural disadvantage, and that there was a lack of material assets, poverty, and a continuous

⁴¹ Emory S. Boards, *The Mexican in the United States* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970).

cultural conflict that made Mexican Americans feel inferior to the White Anglo.⁴² Herschel questioned whether this sense of inferiority and this awareness of socio-economic distinction should be reason enough to neglect academic growth, progress, and ambition all together. He proposed that instead, this situation should become the driving force and the extrinsic motivation to become better-equipped scholars and citizens.

IQ Tests

The decade of the 1920's marked a pivotal point in the perception of Mexicans in the United States. Media was not the only channel through which Mexicans were being addressed as a concern. Psychological findings continued to play their role in the stratification of the Mexican community that lived in the United States. Once again, scientific premises came to be highly influential to Americanization campaigns, educational approaches, and social treatment to the Mexican individuals in their new homeland. By this time, statistics in intelligence through IQ tests were more than prevalent with many of these exams being done precisely during this period. Nonetheless, in 1924 Thomas Garth, a professor in experimental psychology, published the very first account that documented the application of the Binet exam to Mexicans. The published data revealed that while the average IQ scores for Mexicans ranged between 78 and 89, the scores for Anglos, Germans, Americans, Finns, Swedes, and French ranged from 95 to 108.⁴³ Such results only served to reinforce the already preconceived notions of inferiority that Anglo Americans had of Mexicans. The IQ test was problematic. It was done through the perspective of the white elite academic population, and it was meant to support a public rhetoric

⁴² Manuel Herschel, *The Education of Mexican and Spanish Speaking Children in Texas* (Fund for Research in the Social Sciences, University of Texas at Austin, 1930), 4.

⁴³ Thomas Russell Garth, *Race Psychology: A Study of Racial Mental Differences* (University of Denver, 1931), 121.

against the Mexicans. Also, the IQ examinations were targeted for an American population that had been educated under a certain method for years, the Mexican immigrants had not been under the umbrella of such academic approach back in Mexico. The education systems and their focal points were distinct. Therefore, the use of the IQ tests was a subjective method to measure the intelligence and capabilities of the Mexican population during the early decades of the 1900's in the Southwest border of the U.S.

Socio-Psychological Studies

The constant influx and settling of Mexicans became a national concern and a topic that needed further attention. In 1922, Wallace Thompson, an American psychologist and journalist published his book *The Mexican Mind: A Study of National Psychology*. The Washington Times was amongst the first newspapers to promote Thompson's work on a national scale. In the periodical, Mr. Thompson (as they called him) stated, "the solution to the disconcerting habits and difficulties of the Mexican mind is education of the Mexican masses."⁴⁴ Thompson was an innovator in the field of the Mexican study and was convinced that although Mexican people were interesting, they were underdeveloped and had a lack of imagination and analysis, which made them vulnerable to being intellectually dominated.⁴⁵ Thompson argued that Mexicans were cognitively deficient and that such a problem resembled a genetic predisposition.

Several studies expanded on Thompson's findings, proposing that environmental factors were as important as genetic traits. These new socio-psychological studies suggested that Mexicans as individuals and as families did not allow themselves to be helped. As a result,

⁴⁴ "The Mexican Mind," *The Washington Times*, May 21, 1922, 4D.

⁴⁵ Wallace Thompson, *The Mexican Mind: A Study of National Psychology* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1922), 70.

scholars started embracing the ideology that Mexicans needed support, guidance, and direction in order to become productive members of the American society. Nonetheless, the weakness of the American assistance and its public efforts to acculturate Mexicans were continuously overshadowed by a series of negative or infantile connotations to the Mexican as a persona. For example, many Mexicans who were faced with the necessity to ask for donations and rations to charity organizations in the states of Texas and California were treated with prejudice and biases in these spheres.⁴⁶

Social scientist Alfred White conducted meticulous studies in 1971 that investigated the initial migration of Mexicans in the Southwest during and after the Mexican Revolution, and on the social/educational deficit that they brought with them. White argued that Mexicans never learned the correlation between the things that were worth pursuing and the effort that had to be invested in order to achieve them. In addition, he mentioned that the significant influx of Mexicans coming through the border after the fall of the Díaz regime and throughout the first part of the twentieth century, created a tremendous educational problem that among other things, originated in their resistance to learn English.⁴⁷ In some respects, White's findings and proposal was accurate. In fact, his conclusions were correlated to several questions that this study attempts to answer: Why were these Mexican immigrants not assimilating? why did they struggling and refusing to educate themselves? and why do they prioritize different aspects of their lives in such a distinct way to that of the Anglo Americans?

For example, most Mexicans in the Southwest U.S remained resistant to the idea of acculturation, they saw it as a threat to their cultural roots, they thought of it as a process that

⁴⁶ George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 122.

⁴⁷ Alfred White, *The Apperceptive Mass of Foreigners As Applied to Americanization, the Mexican Group (1923)* (The University of California, 1971), 8.

included the renunciation and abandonment of their customs. Up to an extent, Mexicans were not wrong; this was a significant component to it. However, some other Americanization reformers argued that although this was a fundamental part of the ambitious undertaking, it was only temporary or transitional until Mexicans could become and prove that they were “American enough.” In turn, being “American enough” entailed a much more civilized way of eating, dressing, speaking, and acting in public, not to mention, a complete use of the English language in every single sphere of their lives. On the other hand, Alfred White’s conclusions are incomplete in the sense that although Mexicans did not prioritize learning English or the pursuit of academic degrees, they placed a significant effort on their professions as farmers, railroad, and construction workers. It seemed that Mexicans did understand (at least to a certain point) the importance of effort and consistency in work. After all, they had the financial need and did not have many options to choose from because of their lack of education and the language barrier. Yet, most Mexicans tried to be as honest as possible when it came to their work ethic.

The ideas of Americanization emphasized hygiene, eating habits, proper social conduct, academic education, and a sense of civic pride towards the United States. However, there was even more to this process: the opportunity to diffuse a sense of modernity. In his article, “The Americanization of Mexico,” Edward Conley argued that Modernization and Americanization were synonymous, and that there was no way to divorce one from the other, at least during the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ Along with the ideas of modernization, there was also the consistent rhetoric that Mexicans were a problem for the United States. Although they served as an important labor force, their ways of living and thinking were inferior compared to those of

⁴⁸ Edward Conley, “The Americanization of Mexico,” *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 32 (1907): 724.

Americans, and that this “Mexican Problem” derived from a peon mentality that was expanding throughout the Southwest border.⁴⁹

Newsman and entrepreneur Clarence Barron also agreed with the ideas of Bogardus in regards to a Mexican complication. In his case study titled “The Mexican Problem,” Barron argued that Mexicans could only be redeemed through the invasion of American businesses. However, it was imperative for Mexicans to remain in Mexico since they were sending multitudes of peons and infantile migrants to the Southwest, altering the equilibrium of the American way of life.⁵⁰ Barron, like many other newsmen and scholars, criticized the conduct of Mexicans and voiced their concerns on the risk of having more and more individuals with such mentality and behavioral patterns in the United States. It is important to understand that the term “Peon” had a completely different connotation for Americans during the massive Mexican migration to the U.S. in the first half of the twentieth century. As a result, the Mexican population became Orientalized and depicted as a population of “otherness” that possessed an unambitious, oversexed character, that they were prone to violence and overconsumption of alcohol,⁵¹ and that they guided their lives by the “Mañana syndrome.”⁵² Sociologists, psychologists, newsmen, publicists, authors, and historians had collectively constructed the social stigma towards Mexicans. The motives behind such stigmas varied from genuine concerns to pre-conceived notions to debates on citizenship and who had the right to be the recipient of such title in the U.S. Southwestern border.

⁴⁹ Emory Bogardus, *Essentials of Americanization* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1919), 33.

⁵⁰ Clarence Barron, *The Mexican Problem* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1917), 15.

⁵¹ Velazquez, *Beyond La Frontera*, 47.

⁵² In this study, the “Mañana Syndrome” refers to the constant, cultural, and traditional Mexican tendency to postpone things for tomorrow or for later on. It can also be referred as a habit of procrastination in all areas of his or her life.

Other scholars began to connect the personal aspect with the socio-political situation of the new immigrants who kept arriving in the southwestern border by the hundreds and thousands. In his extensive study titled “The Mexican Problem,” Clarence Barron explored the deficient malignant mismanagement of the Porfiriato and how this led to the Mexican Revolution. Barron then took his argument a step further by briefly examining the arriving Mexican population to the Southwestern border. In a sense, Barron both condemned and praised U.S. involvement in the Mexican Revolution. He condemned it for interfering with socio-political affairs that were supposed to be “fixed from the inside.” On the other hand, he did acknowledge that American interference contributed to social reformation. From an intellectual standpoint, Barron proposed something appealing to those who were in favor of Americanizing the Mexican masses, but which seemed to give him credibility. Barron agreed that Mexico needed a strong helping hand, and that it was only through Americanization that it would obtain the necessary aid to be truthfully redeemed.⁵³ Although it can be argued that Barron’s contribution was an indirect policy of Americanizing Mexican Americans in the Southwest, its main arguments relied on the notion that Americans had the solutions to the problems of Mexicans (at least during that time). His rhetoric was supported by sociological evidence. To many, however, he became another voice who felt the urgency to civilize immigrants and refugees.

Eugenics

In addition to intense government involvement in the institutionalization of a Mexican stereotype, the research of the Mexican mind continued to take place throughout the 1920’s in

⁵³ Barron, *The Mexican Problem*, 16.

the United States. Such fieldwork did not come from a single area of study. It was interdisciplinary, rigorous, and based on empirical and social evidence. For example, in his book *Race and Class in the Southwest*, Mario Barrera used the Biological Deficiency Theory to explain why Anglos disdained Mexican immigrants. This theory classified specific populations as racial minorities. According to this theory, the Mexican population from the U.S. Southwest fell into this category due to a low I.Q and intellectual inadequacy.⁵⁴ This was not the first time that the Mexican populace had been placed in such predicament. The department of education had begun the segregation of different Mexican schools across California, Texas, and Arizona. Their argument was that the Mexican child was limited in intellectual ability and highly compatible with industrial and vocational education instead of academic training. Consequently, school administrators and school districts shaped the school curriculum to the reality of a Mexican industrious worker instead of a scholar or professional.⁵⁵ The findings of social scientists were having a significant impact on the approach that education was taking with these Mexican children. After all, there was an academic justification to do it.

The American sociologist, Emory Bogardus, delineated the degree of difficulty a Mexican (both child and adult) had in educating themselves.⁵⁶ On top of this, there was also the lack of emphasis on education, which was a habit that came from home which was correlated to the excessive parental labor mobility of Mexican families. Findings like Bogardus formulated were fascinating in nature because they were based on statistics, tangible data, and social patterns. However, they were extremely harmful to the Mexican population since these findings

⁵⁴ Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 97.

⁵⁵ Los Angeles City Schools, Department of Psychology and Educational Research, *Los Angeles Educational Research Journal 16* (February, 1923).

⁵⁶ Emory S. Bogardus, "The Mexican Immigrant" *Journal of Applied Sociology* (May-June 1927): 472.

resonated and echoed the concerns that the American people, press and government started to publicize with more and more liberty as the twentieth century progressed

Another situation that was simultaneously developing, was the full-blown idea of progressivism. As the decade of the 1920's made an entrance, progressivism and nationalism became stronger ideologies in American society and they were the cornerstones of major social and scientific movements. Nativists were a direct product of this era and this movement. They became advocates for the cessation of Mexican immigration and any other immigrants from Europe or Eastern Asia that, according to them, were of inferior status genetic makeup. The group led publicity against immigrants and efforts that placed an emphasis on segregation and exclusion more than Americanization.

The Nativists' main concern remained with the Mexican immigrants since they represented a greater threat to the idea of a pure race.⁵⁷ This was because Mexicans were darker, shorter, and had more notorious intellectual limitations. Along with these principles, the set of beliefs known as "Eugenics,"⁵⁸ emerged with tremendous fervor throughout the nation. Eugenics proposed the idea that genetic make-up could be improved through the restriction of immigrants from countries that distorted or diminished the good stock of the United States, and through the welcoming of immigrants that fit certain attributes and characteristics. As a result of the popularity of eugenics, the 1920's witnessed an increased psychological awareness of the importance of social background for the receptiveness and intelligence of individuals and a

⁵⁷ Natalia Molina, "In a Race All Their Own: The Quest to Make Mexicans Ineligible for U.S. Citizenship." *Pacific Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (2010): 167-201.

⁵⁸ In this study, the term "Eugenics" will refer to the notion and study that believes in the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species or a human population by discouraging the reproduction of those who are thought to have genetic defects, or presumed to have inheritable undesirable traits.

consistent cooperation with psychiatrists (alienists) in the increment of institutional care.⁵⁹ The fears of receiving immigrants that were “feeble-minded” increased significantly and the government started to look at science in order to avoid detrimental consequences to the genetic composition of the American society. Legislative campaigns for immigration restriction started to be successfully formed and the growth of racial attitudes justified by scientific assumptions came to fruition like never before in the United States.⁶⁰ More than ever, the U.S. government could conduct more movements and campaigns with the justification that they would be supported by science.

⁵⁹ Mark Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 82.

⁶⁰ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 25.

Chapter 2: Americanization through Education and Home Infiltration

The increase in Mexican migration to the U.S. did not reduce the established prejudices Anglos harbored towards Mexican immigrants. The nativists' feelings in states such as California continued to be a problem not only because of the continuous struggle to educate Mexican children and adults but also because of the lack of adaptation that these immigrants demonstrated when it came to linguistics, customs, hygiene, and behavioral skills. In this study, the term nativist refers to an individual of high local status (through money and/or political influence) that is vocal about his or her opinions about Mexican, Asian, and Eastern European immigrants in the U.S. The Nativist's comments and publications in newspapers tended to be negative and detrimental to the acceptance and assimilation of such newcomers. This group of people had a significant influence on the decisions and the perceptions that the American government took in regards to immigrants. Similarly, propaganda through newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and exhibits did their part to vocalize the need for an educated Mexican community. California and Texas were among the states that saw the most growth in the Mexican population, but this increase in numbers was not consistent with the level of acculturation and Americanization.

Education

Mexican communities along the Southwestern border were subject to designations that made them "different" and in need of a helping hand. A significant asset in the process of categorizing and differentiating Mexicans in the United States was education. Newspapers such as *The Grenade Sentinel* from Arizona argued that, "Mexican education was very focused on and

controlled by religion while being available only to the elite groups.”⁶¹ The ideas about restricting Mexican education to a few, and the insufficient diffusion of academic knowledge to their people served as a stereotype of the Mexican educational system. Simultaneously, as conflicts with the schooling of Mexican children were unraveling. Americans⁶² not only discredited Mexican education, but they also vocalized the supremacy of their educational structure. Anglos publicized in newspapers and pamphlets such as the *Los Angeles Herald* that “American education was on par with that of Europe, but that if there still remained people who wanted to send their children to study abroad, to send them to American schools in Paris, Germany, and Switzerland where the same standards were ensured.”⁶³ Americans were confident in their educational methods and their emphasis on science and modernization. In addition, Americans constantly motivated their nationals and foreigners to pursue their institutions if they wanted their children to receive the best training possible. Initiatives such as these, demonstrated that concepts of cultural differentiation and of superiority were already in place. One could also argue that the educational and social reforms of the Progressive Era starting in 1915 provided a fresh optimism to the American community and thereby, promoted elitist ideas on their educational structure.

Nonetheless, the U.S. public education was not the exception to opinionated views in regards to Mexicans. The research of scholars like Julian Nava concluded that “Mexican American school children posed a great problem to the public education, and that their level of education attainment was even lower than that of African Americans. Nava’s findings also

⁶¹ “The Mexican Education Model” *The Grenade Sentinel*, March 27, 1907.

⁶² The term “American or American Community will be used in this study to depict the existing white population of the United States prior to the arrival of the Mexicans throughout the 20th century. This term should not be confused with the native of the American continent in general.

⁶³ “American Education Abroad,” *Los Angeles Herald*, February 24, 1907.

identified that these immigrant students lessened the status of the schools that received them and like craters on the moon, Mexican children dotted the Southwest of the United States.”⁶⁴ It was evident that the constant issues with Mexican children and adolescents in public schools only reinforced the confidence in the American way of doing things, of living, of teaching and of learning. When discussing education for the Mexican population in the United States, Mario Garcia had argued that education was the factor that ultimately determined if the Mexican American would be a productive and fruitful member of the American system. He argued that education was the one and only asset that could truly redeem the Mexican people.⁶⁵

American scholars were not the only ones that tried to rationalize the Mexican problem, that conflict of learning and proper conduct in the private and the public sphere. The U.S. government used state legislatures and schools (both public and private) to become significantly involved in the acculturation, civilization, and reformation of the incoming Mexican immigrants. For example, the campaign of “The Other Mexican” revolved around Americanization rooms. These “Americanization rooms” were specific classroom settings in Elementary schools where Mexican children were taught through compulsory and intensive Americanization coursework during their first two years in the country. Such curriculum placed a heavy emphasis on the development of American patriotism, increasing English fluency, and improving proper conduct inside and outside the home. The result was a reformed and redeemed “Other Mexican” that was liberated from the baggage of ignorance and Mexican customs: a renovated student that now dressed, behaved, and spoke like any other average American child.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ John H. Burma, “*Mexican-Americans in the United States: A Reader*” (Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc. 1970) (Fragment of Nava, Julian *Cultural Backgrounds and Barriers that Affect Learning by Spanish-Speaking Children*).

⁶⁵ Garcia, Mario. *Desert Immigrants: The Mexican of El Paso, 1880-1920*. (Yale University, 1982), 119.

⁶⁶Los Angeles School District Journal 16. (February,1923).

In 1926, several high schools in California faced a dilemma with educating Mexican children. In his 1934 study of the Mexican, sociologist Emory Bogardus mentioned that many of these children had parents that depended on agricultural labor in order to sustain themselves. One of the major issues with this pattern of labor was that parents had to be constantly moving from place to place according to the seasons for crops. With each relocation, there was always an interruption in the education of their children who in turn, were not able to complete entire school years.⁶⁷ In response to this situation, the Chaffey Union High School, amongst others in California, established traveling ambulant schools in January 1926 for the labor camps of several districts in order to ensure that all Mexican children had the opportunity to have a continuous education regardless of the nature of movable labor that their families were subjected to.⁶⁸ This situation contributed to the fabricated nature of Mexicans as being unstable, uneducated, and inconsistent. On top of this, the roaring twenties were about to bring a series of ideologies, events, and initiatives that would compromise the assimilation of the Mexican community in the U.S. even more. The second decade of the twentieth century brought ideas of eugenics, and a psychology based on race, as well as institutionalized notions legality and illegality. It took long period of time before Mexicans began fulfilling higher academic achievements and degrees. Even as this started to happen, it was difficult to erase the judgmental nature that placed them in the spotlight of “unfit” and “unworthy” for such a long time.

⁶⁷ Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States*, 58.

⁶⁸ Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States*, 58.

Segregation and Punishment

Mexicans continued to migrate to several cities throughout the Southwest. As the 1920s progressed, education was affected by the development of new racialized ideas, legalities, and initiatives. The years after 1924 set in place initiatives that castigated Mexicans who were pursuing their education. Such measures were not actual laws but rather local informal efforts to separate Mexicans from Anglo Americans in all possible sectors of society. These initiatives were aggressive with some of them including verbal and physical punishment and leading in many places to outright segregation in border cities such as El Paso. The Mexican population in El Paso, Texas grew dramatically starting in 1914 with the political refugees from the Mexican Revolution. Mexican migration to El Paso, Texas did not cease even after the revolution reached its climax in 1920. By 1920, 43% of the population in El Paso was Mexican or foreign born.⁶⁹ As a result, the only high school in El Paso, El Paso High School, was not sufficient to school all the young people of the city. In 1927, Bowie High School was founded in order to aid in the growth of population of the city. However, Bowie's purpose was not only that of serving as the second public high school that could alleviate with the exponential growth of population. It did not take long for Bowie to become the Mexican High School, the one place where adolescents of Mexican descent all attended. It was a different space, with distinct demographics, and expectations for a largely Mexican population.⁷⁰ In a way, Bowie High School was a purposely-crowded space for Mexicans, an institution that hoped to maintain as many Mexicans as possible in it so that they would be strategically separated from the rest of the high schoolers of El Paso.

⁶⁹ Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007) 121.

⁷⁰ Mario T. Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexican of El Paso, 1880-1920*. (Yale University, 1982), 125.

Also, it was no coincidence to see the proximity that the building had to the border with Ciudad Juárez. It only seemed logical for Mexican parents to send their kids to the closest school possible, or at least to the one that seemed more familiar. However, it is important to address that although this institution provided greater familiarity for students, in other words, an atmosphere of commonality between Mexican adolescents in terms of language, appearance, wardrobe, and customs, it was by no means a haven or a safe space for Mexicans to express themselves. Spanish was forbidden and Americanization was a priority for the administrators and teachers. Spanish was forbidden in most schools in El Paso until the 1990s.

Schools such as Bowie High started to become more hostile towards the use of Spanish and took more drastic measures to promote English usage and Americanization ideals by using corporal punishment. In a previously published interview of former Bowie High School student, Fred Morales, Morales recalls experiences at two levels of education. In elementary school, Morales mentioned that he was assigned after school detention with a teacher for whispering something in Spanish to another student. The ironic part, as he mentions was that this was a Spanish class. In Bowie Intermediate (Middle/High) School, Morales addressed that there were several forms of corporal punishment for speaking Spanish such as being hit in the hand with a ruler, being forced to do push-ups in front of the whole class, and being swatted. Morales also recalled that at times, parents were called to discuss the “bad conduct” of their child with the principal that implied not speaking English.⁷¹ In a way, speaking Spanish was a form of insubordination.

The main concern over language and punishment, the legal impediments for Mexicans to continue emigrating, and the social connotations that described Mexican immigrant in the U.S.

⁷¹ Fred Morales, “Interview no. 211,” interview by Oscar J. Martinez, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, 1975.

Southwestern border became crucial elements in their definition as educational institutions. In another published interview with Guillermo Villareal, Villareal shared his story of immigrating at the age of eight or nine to El Paso with his family and being classified as “refugees.” Villareal recalled that his father always told him that there was no sense in aiming for something bigger, that he was never going to be a lawyer, or rich, that he was not going to be someone important, saying “...you will never get out of this kind of life because this is just our way of life, this is the way you are born to it and this is the way it is going to stay... just make up your mind that when you grow up you are going to be working for a living for somebody.”⁷² Villareal also remembers his father telling him that he could not go to El Paso High School because he was not an Anglo American and he did not belong there.⁷³ These patterns of thought are examples of how Mexicans started to embrace and appropriate Anglo prejudice. Many Mexicans such as Villareal’s father became part of the problem; they became active agents of this vicious cycle that was determined by ethnicity rather than by personal merit. In other words, Mexicans had embraced the idea that they were part of an “otherness” that was not as intellectual adept. They considered themselves as permanent foreigners and as individuals that belonged to the bottom sector of society.

It is important to understand that precisely this segregation was one of the most obvious ways in which the United States assimilated and acculturated the “new” Mexican community. Although it might have seemed ironic, segregation was the safe way to incorporate these new immigrants. It can be argued that Bowie High School was a place of transition to Americanism for Mexicans who would one day become Mexican Americans. This poses several questions. Did

⁷² Guillermo Villareal, “Interview no. 482,” interview by Oscar J. Martinez, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, 1975.

⁷³ Villareal, interview.

these incoming Mexicans need a connecting point between Mexican and American cultures? Was an educational institution like a high school, the guarantee to a successful transition? Was a middle ground or an intermediate temporary zone of learning necessary? And if so, was it the best place to initiate a process of acculturation or citizenship? And assuming this was the most prudent approach, for how long were Mexicans supposed to be in this transitional sphere? How much time did a Mexican need to complete the process of Americanization and acculturation? On the late 1920's sociologist Emory Bogardus would argue that Mexicans needed a helping hand through the American education system and americanizers in order to take the grand step of Americanization.⁷⁴ Another thing that can be argued is that the United States never intended to assimilate or blend these new immigrants into its population and that the seclusion in schools was one of the most obvious methods to project such intentions. Nonetheless, school segregation and punishment only served to reinforce the social construction of "the other," of the Mexican who was unfit and far from the intellectual and linguistic condition of the Anglo-American.

Home Infiltration

Americanization attempts saw that the low living standards of Mexicans had to be addressed through a wide variety of lessons from home teaching, teachings of a proper diet, teachings Mexican men that women were his equal, lessons in saving money, money administration, and modern business methods.⁷⁵ One of the Southwest cities with home intrusion techniques was Los Angeles, California. In Los Angeles, certified teachers visited the homes of teenage Mexican students to show them how to live a traditional, acceptable American lifestyle. There were cases of teachers going in and trying to persuade the housewives to attend

⁷⁴ Bogardus, "The Mexican Immigrant," 472.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *The Mexican Mind: A Study*, 40.

night or evening English classes. Most of the time, this was not possible since Mexican husbands did not agree with such activity and many of them saw it as irrelevant. From time to time, there were women who managed to “escape” their houses or who actually had the approval and support of their husbands to go to a community center to learn basic English skills.⁷⁶ In these classes, teachers used the traditional roles of an American wife as a sequence of phrases and simple sentence stems. It was a clever method that taught them English while at the same time, showed them the expectations and the roles of an American wife within an American family in an American society. The following is an excerpt of the manuscript written by American author, Idelia Ellis Pearl, in 1929 for the department of Americanization and Homemaking within the Covina City Elementary Schools. Ellis’ work is fundamental in the processes of acculturation for Mexican mothers in school programs.

“In the morning, the women get breakfast.

Their husbands go to work.

Their children go to school.

Then the women get their houses in good order.

They give the baby his bath.

They wash or iron or cook.

They get dinner.

After dinner, they wash the dishes.

Then they sew, or rest, or visit their friends or go to school.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 39.

⁷⁷ Pearl Idelia Ellis, *Americanization Through Homemaking* (Los Angeles: Wetzel, 1929), 31.

It is important to mention that other states in the Southwest border also used vocational courses that Americanized Mexican women, but each state adapted the courses to meet their own needs. For example, the cities of Tucson, Yuma, and Phoenix in Arizona created an Americanization evening school known as “The Mother’s Club.” Such weekly congregations were led by two or three American stay at home parents and were composed of Mexican housewives who had been identified with Mexican welfare work for quite some years. The admission to the club was free and there was no commitment. In fact, women could bring their children with them since there was an indoor daycare available for the sons and daughters of the members. The children were provided with toys and storybooks as well as refreshments. The reunions took place in well-conditioned rooms inside the buildings of associated local charities. Tempting delicacies were prepared in conjunction with lessons on Americanization for women.⁷⁸ It was a safe and welcoming environment for Mexican mothers and their children. It definitely was a clever approach to the process of Americanization; it served as a distraction, as leisure, and as an evening of cultural enrichment. Mrs. Courtney Gilchrist was the general secretary of associated local charities and also the main director of the “Mother Clubs” in Phoenix Arizona. On October 1919, Mrs. Gilchrist was interviewed by the *Arizona Republican* a local newspaper and argued that Mexicans were apt for Americanization but they had to be approached in the right way. The secretary went on to say that “it was hard for Mexicans to change their customs and manner of thinking but that once their confidence was gained and they became convinced that they could better themselves by adopting the methods of Americans, they were quick to adapt themselves to the new ideas.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ “Plan Mexican Mothers’ Club as Step in Americanization.” *The Arizona Republican*, October 5, 1919. Section 2, 14.

⁷⁹ “Plan Mexican Mothers’ Club as Step in Americanization,” 14.

Some scholars would argue that the domestic sphere of the American woman was in concordance with that of the Mexican homemaker. Although domesticity and a docile personality defined them both, the American woman seemed to have more liberty and agency, especially in the area of her social relationships and how often these gatherings took place.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, according to Anglo Americans, the American woman had so much to teach the Mexican woman. The process of Americanization through home infiltration argued that Mexican mothers also had to change their diet and their culinary habits. The Americanization Campaigns in Los Angeles proposed for Mexicans to replace beans and rice with a fresh salad, tortillas with bread, and fried food with steamed food.⁸¹ Women now fulfilled the “Americanizers” or the position of leader of these Americanization campaigns. In turn, the female agents of acculturation not only defended their teachings by saying that they promoted better health but also a more defined sense of what it meant to be an American and what that entailed. When the arguments were not persuading to Mexican woman, American women emphasized that it was not prudent to feed everyone the same kind of food and that every member of the family needed to have adjustments to his or her diet according to their age. For example, grandparents could not eat the same as adults, and children/babies must not have the same eating habits as fully developed people.⁸²

⁸⁰ Velazquez, *Beyond La Frontera*, 197.

⁸¹ Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 56.

⁸² Ellis, *Americanization Through Homemaking*, 34.

Americanization Programs

The mid 1920's saw that education for Mexicans was not only about English proficiency, and Americanization attempts, but also about moral education. By moral education, Americanization advocates referred to proper ethics, citizen integrity, socially acceptable manners and civic pride. The U.S. education system argued that moral teachings had to be placed in the public schools' curriculums in order to create a guideline for Mexicans to follow.⁸³ The idea that Mexicans lacked a moral standard or a moral compass remained one of the most vivid assumptions in the mind of Anglo-Americans during this time. The issue of morality made these Mexicans "unfit" and placed them in a permanent state of "moral turpitude."⁸⁴

Additional events compromised the dilemma of morality in Mexicans even more. Between 1920 and 1933, the United States made the buying and selling of alcohol illegal. This made Ciudad Juárez an alluring haven for Americans who wanted to continue their consumption of alcoholic beverages. Mexicans became "smugglers" at the Southwest Border during Prohibition. In addition, the proximity of Juárez to El Paso promoted the binational smuggling of tequila, beer, whiskey, and cider.⁸⁵ In fact, even seven-year-old Mexican children would take part in this underground network of commerce.⁸⁶ As a direct response to this contraband, the Border Patrol was created in 1924 but changed its emphasis very soon as this study will later explain. Overall, local, state and federal authorities agreed that Mexicans needed to prove that

⁸³ Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States*, 95.

⁸⁴ Clifford Alan Perkins, *Border Patrol: With the U.S. Immigration Service on the Mexican Boundary, 1910-1954* (El Paso, Texas: Western Press, 1978) 40.

⁸⁵ Martinez, *Ciudad Juárez*, 87.

⁸⁶ "Apprehension." El Paso, Texas, 1929. P1S L/R- Unknown Wadsworth and Griffith McBee.

they possessed good character and good intentions in order to earn the right (and almost privilege) of citizenship in any area of the Southwest United States.

The issue of Mexicans and their intellectual capacity started to take more force and gain credibility as the press began to promote Americanization programs that could genuinely aid the Mexicans with their daily lives. In 1917, newspapers such as the *El Paso Herald* started to advertise free English night classes for Mexican adults in the city, claiming that “we have to foster the English language by teaching it to not only children but also adults of Mexican decent, the Mexican Americans of El Paso need to be Americanized if they are to remain in this country so that they can earn more, live better and be the servants who have the premium attribute of knowing English.”⁸⁷ Further campaigns in the next months argued that many Mexican Americans needed the opportunity to go to night school since they were too old for public schools. Several free night schools were opened and made active in El Paso. One of the most popular of these was the AOY Night School. This small network of educators offered English and acculturation classes and as the first month ended, their courses expanded to include arithmetic, writing, and geography. In turn, classes started to get crowded, especially the classes for English beginners, which had fifty-five to sixty Mexican adults enrolled. By request, the *El Paso Herald* started to voice both the success and the concerns of the AOY Night School in El Paso. On the one hand, the institution needed more teachers because of its increasing attendance rate. On the other, its principal A. D. Hull, was thrilled about such improvement in his program and gave credit to the school board for such accomplishment. In addition to that, Hull publicly stated “Mexican residents needed to continue on their process of learning English since this

⁸⁷ “Teach English to Mexicans in Free Classes at Night,” *El Paso Herald*, October 17, 1917.

would help them become better citizens of El Paso and it was an investment that would benefit everyone.”⁸⁸

Over the next months, other propaganda continued to diffuse through newspapers, pamphlets, and by word of mouth. Such publicity shed light on the importance of Americanizing the entire Mexican population of El Paso. In addition, it emphasized that although English was harder to learn than Spanish, the city would be “greatly benefitted if Mexicans learned 300 to 400 words at least.”⁸⁹ These actions were projections of a fervent belief that social order and harmony came from Americanization and that it was the duty of the locals to ensure and conduct such process. In a bittersweet note, these initiatives also represented the local governments’ attempt to educate the Mexican migrant so he or she could pursue a higher social status as distant and precarious as this one might be in comparison to that one from the Anglo.

Americanization program campaigns became popular as more and more people supported them throughout the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. In a sense, Americanization courses promised a rejuvenated Mexican who could redeem himself or herself through the knowledge of American life, the English language, handy skills that did not require a college degree or even a high school diploma, and at times, CPR classes that could make them beneficial and dignified members of society. The Mexican immigrants had to prove themselves and fulfill the requirements of being a citizen of good moral character, well behaved, and a useful asset to the community where he or she lived in order to remain in the country and be somewhat successful.

⁸⁸ “Mexicans Are Learning English at Night School,” *El Paso Herald*, September 30, 1919, 4.

⁸⁹ “Mexicans in Free English Classes at Night.”

The Americanization campaigns were conducted and advertised with invitations through newspapers like the ones in Arizona where the incentive was “folklore music from Mexico” and a union of Phoenix, Tempe, and Glendale instructors in the exhibit. These teachers taught not only English, but also Red Cross Nursing Classes, and Americanization Habits courses.⁹⁰ By the late 1920’s, vocational training had become a prominent tool to make Mexicans seem and be useful in the American society. Journals in New Mexico tried to persuade their citizens to accelerate the trend of vocational education by giving testimony of the successes that Arizona was having with the programs that were now approved by the whole state and becoming more popular.⁹¹

The 1920’s also saw resurgence in civic education. This type of acculturation eased Americanization for Mexicans and other foreign groups. The United States supported the notion that before citizenship could be granted, the individual had to participate in community affairs and local organizations. Once again, the idea that citizenship had to be earned came to be highly evident in these practices. However, one new thing was taking place now, the idea that citizenship had to be constructed and that the process for this construction was long and it required consistency. Only certain people (foreigners and migrants) had to subjugate themselves to this process since the natives of the country had no need to do so or to try to prove anything since they already had the “gift of citizenship,” unless of course, they were setting the example or modeling American conduct for immigrants.

This method of constructing citizenship is intriguing since it poses the question as to whether citizenship was a right, a privilege, or both and what kind of sacrifices had to be made to obtain it. For example, on September of 1920, the economist newspaper *The Labor World*,

⁹⁰ “Americanization Program Will Be of Much Interest,” *The Arizona Republican*, November 4, 1920, 10.

⁹¹ “Vocational Education for Mexican Adults and Children,” *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, April 8, 1929.

prepared a column on Americanization and its benefits to the process of citizenship acquisition. In the article, there were mentions of local entrepreneurs and religious leaders that supported or were being drawn to Americanization programs like Professor John Lapp whom also happened to be the director of the Social Action Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Council. The most interesting part of the article was the argument that Americanization programs promoted social justice and represented the efficient and only way to obtain good citizenship. The account goes on to say that Americanization or “good citizenship” and it treats these terms like synonyms, should be promoted amongst natives and immigrants alike and that English is an instrument through which the ideals of Americanization and citizenship may be acquired.⁹² Publications such as this one, only serve to reiterate the weight that English and American customs had when it came to the acculturation process of an individual. However, it also shows that more than assimilation or an attempt to make Mexicans “fit” in American society; Americanizers were trying to make them a part of such citizenship. Scenarios like these additionally show that citizenship was not an abstract concept during this time. On the contrary, it was attainable if the right approach was taken. In addition, it seems to show that in order to embrace this citizenship, there needs to be a renunciation of previous loyalties, customs, and habits. In a sense, American citizenship was arbitrary and authoritative.

Civil education also served to consolidate this construction of citizens although it left questions in the air. For example, how would one know when he or she has successfully reached the status of citizenship? Will social perceptions and treatment change once this citizenship has been obtained? How would other people know that this citizenship has been appropriated? Is there any way in which one could lose that citizenship or was it a permanent status now? All

⁹² “Sinister Attempts Are Made to Control Americanization Work,” *The Labor World*. September 4, 1920, Labor Edition.

these were concerns that derived from civil education, civil service, and the public processes of acculturation. Most Mexicans were aware of the “unspoken requirements” to become Americanized. Their awareness was actually one of the main reasons why they refused to take part of the process. To a large degree, Mexicans saw socio-political arbitration in the ideas of the Americanizers but there was one thing that Mexicans understood well, civic pride.

Civil education continued to construct ideas of citizenship and also promoted the mastery of English in order to create a civic spirit and target the characteristics of civic pride that came naturally to the Mexican citizen.⁹³ In a sense, this was one of the few attributes that the Mexican migrants had, and it was one of the few constructive things that the Americans felt they could use to the benefit of the country. As the decade unfolded, new legalities arose. These ideals did not only affect the legal, migratory conditions of the Mexican migrants coming to the United States, they also shaped ideological complications to the efforts of Americanization, which were about to become an Americanization problem soon enough.

It is important to emphasize that the Americanization efforts were about to make a transition from, “efforts” into “a social problem.” Alfred White’s study of Mexican immigrants in 1923 argued, “Each race must have a specific remedy for its ailment... and that intensive studies of each race need to be made, just as it has been done with the Mexicans.”⁹⁴ White also begged the question of where and when will the United States obtain the students that can really make the first contribution to real Americanism. When will the first true acculturated Americans rise, how will this process come to be, how long will it take to persuade Mexicans to fully embrace the new American culture and try to civilize themselves in order for them to be at the

⁹³ Wallace Thompson, *The People of Mexico: Who They Are and How They Live* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers), 66.

⁹⁴ White, *The Apperceptive Mass*, 102.

stature of an American? Will the proximity of the United States and Mexico continue to be a problem? Will Mexicans insist on going back to their countries of origin at one point? If so, how can this be avoided? After all, according to a small part of the American population, the real success of Americanization advocates or “Americanizers” relied on the amount of Mexicans that became naturalized even though the number was consistently low.⁹⁵ Above all else, the main concern remained to be: the fabrication of true Americans, of the first hybrids in a sense.⁹⁶ Ironically, the ideas of devotion and determination to become true “Americans” became more vivid as legal connotations and limitations were applied to Mexicans throughout the decade. The construction of citizenship required both a transmitter and a recipient, and it was a complex process where identity was negotiated and redefined.

California Home Teacher Act

As social constructs and perceptions on the Mexican immigrants were being fabricated, the U.S. government decided to intervene in a more rigorous way. Besides promoting education for adults and vocational courses, the government supported individual state laws that could promote a better performance for the children of Mexicans. For example, the California State Legislature approved the Home Teacher Act in 1915. This law allowed district instructors to homeschool students from public schools, and teach them additional curriculums such as sanitation, the American system, the rights and obligations of being a U.S. Citizen and acculturation sessions as to how to behave in different public places.⁹⁷ The innovative

⁹⁵ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 39.

⁹⁶ White, *The Apperceptive Mass*, 70.

⁹⁷ The Home Teacher, Immigrant Education Leaflet No. 5 (San Francisco: State Printing Office) 1916.

characteristic of the California Home Teacher Act was that it was one of the first strategies of home infiltration that the United States government approved of and actually executed into action. As mentioned before, the Home Teacher Act gave the right to certain “Americanizers,” educators or advocates for acculturation, to go into Mexican households (with prior consent) and help children, and sometimes housewives, learn English and the American way of life. The idea that the government could combat ignorance and address the need for education from the inside out became a reality and a constant attempt in the aid to this growing population.

The act was somewhat successful. It led to better hygiene and an improved cleanliness, but it did not eradicate the traditional customs of Mexicans in regards to *machismo*. For example, the conservative dress code in girls and the parental oversee control of their daughter’s teenage life remained intact.⁹⁸ Mexican families continued to be patriarchal with the husband as the head of the household and the oldest son as the one who would be in charge of the wife or mother and sister when the father was absent. The Mexican husband continued to control the finances of the house and his authority superseded everyone and everything else.⁹⁹ The Home Teacher Act also failed to reshape the priorities of the Mexican family since work, labor, and survival often interfered with other areas in the life of their children including education. The traditional Mexican family in the Southwest U.S. continued to place a heavier emphasis on agricultural, construction, or railroad work. They did not regard education as the singular door to opportunity. The Mexican family embraced a position of social subjugation, where they genuinely believed that their place was to always remain below the Anglo American, that the highest they could aspire to was a blue collar-job or a domestic job in which the primary beneficiary was the

⁹⁸ Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States*, 53.

⁹⁹ Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States*, 53.

American. In a sense, there was conformism and mediocrity in the way in which Mexicans started assimilating their role in the American society. Once again, it can be seen how the construction of identity takes place at both ends, it has a transmitter and a receiver, although not everyone assimilates it the same.

Americanization Advocates

Superintendents of schools in Brownsville, Texas also started to voice their concerns about the monolingual schooling curriculum of Mexicans. Brownsville alone saw 92% of the Mexican students entering first grade without knowing a single word of English.¹⁰⁰ Surveys in Los Angeles showed that out of 1081 Mexican families, 55% of their men could not speak English and more than 85% of women could not write in English; worryingly, more than half of these families had been in Los Angeles for at least three years already.¹⁰¹ Both the local government and the school districts identified a cultural pattern of Mexicans. Such pattern consisted in Mexicans holding on to their values, culture, language, lifestyle, and even idiosyncrasies while having a complete apathy or a lack of interest in becoming Americans.

Consequently, the school districts in California and Arizona began to assign Americanization advocates that could oversee the progress of Mexican students and entire families in order to improve the conditions of the Mexican population. In some respects, this can be considered social control and cultural imposition. By the same token, it can be seen as a form of collective acculturation that tried to bring a form of social harmony and hegemony to the country (however racist or judgmental it might have been). The struggle was eminent; it was consistent and engrained in Mexicans. The next question then should be: why did Mexicans

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Russell Garth, *"The Intelligence of Mexican School Children: School and Society"* 1928, 32.

¹⁰¹ White, *The Apperceptive Mass*, 94.

refuse to blend in to this new culture? How persuasive can these advocates for Americanization be to Mexicans, and what other strategies were needed to explore in order to fulfill their mission?

In his work, *Becoming Mexican American*, George Sanchez discussed how these advocates found more efficiency and hope in targeting the wives and children of the household than men alone.¹⁰² In a sense, the culture of *machismo* and patriarchy left no room for the family males to reform their ideas or those of his family in regards to society. It became clear that women, although once thought of as secondary agents, turned out to be excellent affiliations and links to the Americanization of the family. The Mexican mothers were the ones that inculcated values and morals at home and therefore could be easily persuaded that Americanizing was the most convenient route for their children.¹⁰³ The problem was that many of these housewives had limited power over the family since the wives were morally subjugated by their husbands and advised by them to preserve their culture at all costs. Others were scared of tradition annihilation because family was not only a site of cultural inheritance and pride, but also the backbone of the Mexican culture regardless of where this one resided.¹⁰⁴ However, as this study has shown before, American housewives had begun working with Mexican mothers through intimate and seemingly diminutive advices such as how to eat, what to eat, and how to conduct traditional day in the life of a responsible American stay-home mother. These “advices” remained consistent and were well regarded by Americanization advocates who felt that big social improvements always start at home and with the details that no one sees. However, one can also argue that Mexican mothers were in a troublesome position, where they had the responsibility of

¹⁰² Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 144.

¹⁰³ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 146.

¹⁰⁴ Rafael Torres-Perez, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 20.

Americanizing the children and the husband but were also expected to cherish and preserve the traditional Mexican values of past generations. In a way, this was a struggle at both ends. It was a struggle for inclusion but also a challenge to remain loyal to the culture of home. Finding the balance between a well-industrialized nation and the preservation of a culture of home remained to be one of the toughest tasks for Mexican mothers to fulfill. On top of this, there was also the recurrent challenge to Mexican masculinity and to the pre-designed position of men and women in society; this position that was discredited over and over again as the prototype of the American family became more visible to them.

It is important to note that little by little, Americanization Programs were able to give Mexican women another role away from their homes, at least at certain times of the week. Not only did programs remove women from their domestic spheres, but they also relocated them to gender-segregated occupations like sewing stores, Laundromats, dry cleaners, and early forms of catering.¹⁰⁵ Although it can be argued that these temporary jobs were an extension of domesticity and housewife abnegation, the jobs at least opened up new financial and social opportunities for Mexican women. Most importantly, these seasonal occupations gave Americanizers the opportunity to advocate instruction and cultural reformation without appearing to upset the structure of the Mexican family or defy the husbands. It was a subtle, astute, and inevitable approach to Americanization within the workplace. Unfortunately, the fact that these Mexican women held these jobs would eventually be seen as a threat and a contributing factor to the Great Depression in 1929.

¹⁰⁵ Ruth Milkman, "Women's Work and the Economic Crisis: Some Lessons from the Great Depression" *Review of Radical Political Economics* 8 (Spring 1976), 75-78.

Chapter 3: Government Involvement

By the end of 1924 and the beginning of 1925, the Mexican population had grown significantly in highly urbanized areas such as Los Angeles, California. Parallel to this growth, was also the increase of nativism and anti-immigration sentiments that saw Mexicans as a threat to the social status of American society.¹⁰⁶ Nativists such as Samuel Gompers led efforts to contain and reverse the continuous Mexican influx to their cities. By 1928, the feelings had intensified. Newspapers in Los Angeles such as *The Saturday Evening Post* stated that “the streets were crowded with illiterate, diseased, pauperized Mexicans that took no interest in the community while bringing countless numbers of American citizens into the world with the reckless prodigality of rabbits.”¹⁰⁷ Statements as bold as these support the fear of race suicide that started to rise in the United States in the early twentieth century but that took strength as the progressive era unfolded.¹⁰⁸

Border Patrol

As the education department and other vocational evening classes were trying to Americanize Mexicans, the year of 1924 saw the birth of another institution to aid the Americanization process, the Border Patrol. The border patrol started implementing literacy tests in order to determine who was “fit” to integrate into the American society and who was not. This, along with the divisionary line of legality and illegality, became crucial factors and justifiers for selective entrance into the country. Although the institution eventually came to be

¹⁰⁶ Ricardo Romo, “Responses to Mexican Immigration, 1910-1930,” *Aztlan: International Journal of Chicano Studies Research* 6, 1975, 46.

¹⁰⁷ “The Docile Mexican,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 10, 1948. 43.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur S. Link & Richard L McCormick, “*Progressivism*” Harlan Davidson Incorporated, The University of California, 1983.

successful later in time, it had serious drawbacks. It is important to mention that the Border Patrol starts with very limited resources and with the goal of prosecuting smugglers (which, for the most part, tended to be Mexicans from Chihuahua, and Sonora). Despite the lack of funding and the fact that it was an isolated institution of its kind, it still worked under preconceived notions and it somewhat saw the preservation of American values as their agenda. One of the main issues with the Border Patrol in the U.S. Southwestern border was that it operated under a racialized idea of “the legal and illegal divide” while it made use of a racial profiling system that defined Mexicans as illegal, poor, rural, uneducated, and brown.¹⁰⁹ As a consequence of these ideals, Mexicans were thought to be ignorant, illiterate, and individuals without prestige or intellect that could contribute to the U.S. society. The Border Patrol also operated under racialized notions of citizenship, social belonging, and appearance, which did not benefit the Mexican immigrants of course.¹¹⁰ For example, Fred D’Alibini was an expert in tracking migration markings and migratory patterns of Mexicans along El Paso and South New Mexico. D’Alibini trained several border agents using the notion that Mexicans were distinctive in their physical attributes: a Mexican was short, those who were thought to be tall ranged between 5’5-5’8, dark brown hair, brown eyes, dark skinned, wearing huaraches, and with an unclean appearance.¹¹¹ D’Alibini went on to explain to writer Peter Odens that Mexicans left a peculiar tracing in their footsteps that no other race or ethnicity left in the border. D’Alibini proceeded to explain that Mexicans for instance, always walked with the outside of their feet using their sides and their heels as support instead of placing their feet flat like Whites do. D’Alibini went on to

¹⁰⁹ Hernandez, *Migra!*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Peter Odens, *The Desert Trackers: Men of the Border Patrol*. Yuma, Arizona, (Published by author, 1975, chapter 3).

¹¹¹ Odens, *The Desert Trackers*, chapter 3.

say that this was also a common walking habit of Indians and it was obvious to see when Mexicans have been passing by.¹¹²

As this study has addressed before, the initial purpose of the Border Patrol was to control the intensive smuggling of alcohol to the United States during the Prohibition Era. In a way, it can be argued that the border patrol was initially seen and used as an asset to mitigate immorality and illegal economic activities in the Southwest Border. Nonetheless, working under the notions of legality and illegality made the institution take a very different direction as the twentieth century progressed. For example, border officials placed Mexicans under a spectrum that became associated with the persona of someone who was dirty, short, dark-skinned, with humble attire, and with the appearance of being always running from someone or from something.¹¹³ The insistence on racial profiling and the social construction of an “otherness” being equivalent to Mexicans only complicated things more for the incoming Mexicans. On the other hand, such differentiation facilitated things for the immigration officers who had more than enough cues to identify and persecute Mexicans throughout the Southwest border of the United States. For better or for worse, the division was clear, and the distinctiveness of the Mexican was now manifested both inside and out, and it was apparent and it had become something from which Mexicans could not dissociate themselves.

Immigration Acts

The factor of hygiene had become more evident earlier in the Immigration Act of 1917 and at the beginning of the 1920’s. Beginning in the year 1917, “bath riots” took place along the

¹¹² Oden, *The Desert Trackers*, chapter 3.

¹¹³ Hernandez, *Migra!*, 14.

Santa Fe International Bridge between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, Texas. During these “baths,” hundreds of Mexicans were stripped of their clothes in order to be sprayed with pesticides and acidic cleaners. They were also deloused, and their belongings (shoes and clothes) were placed inside a big dryer in order to kill bacteria and any virus that they might have brought with them. Other times, Mexicans would be showered with gasoline in order to remove any infectious residue of Typhus, which was the main epidemic that the United States was trying to avoid at the time.¹¹⁴ There was the belief that Mexicans were bringing Typhus into the U.S. and that their lack of sanitation or hygiene could endanger the population of El Paso, Texas. Local border agents were trying to avoid the spread of Mexican germs in American territory. It is necessary to remember that many of these people crossed every day because they worked or had family members in El Paso. The concern for the local government of Juárez and its people was whether or not these crossing immigrants were being treated with dignity or not and the hazards to which they were being exposed. At the end of January 1917, the *Daily Missoulian* Newspaper published a compromising column in which it described the way in which Mexican women were stripped of their clothes and forced to take a bath. The report then expands on how American soldiers took photographs of the naked women as they showered and then made them public. This was a situation that went on every day. The women were domestic workers that were employed in El Paso, Texas. Therefore, they had no other option but to comply with the process.¹¹⁵ Actions such as these depict the American prejudice against Mexicans and pose the question as to whether or not these individuals ever stood a chance. It also shows that the media,

¹¹⁴ David Romo, *Ringside Seat to A Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez, 1893-1923* (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005), 63.

¹¹⁵ “Mexican Women Balk at Cleanliness Requirements of Americans,” *The Daily Missoulian*, January 29, 1917, 5.

the press, and the popular voice had been doing their job in discrediting Mexican people that crossed over to the Southwest border of the United States. Although certain publishers were becoming concerned and disturbed with the consistent and routinely violation of human rights that took place along the border.

The year 1924 marked a before and an after. It brought with it the National Origins Act as a legal attempt to minimize or decelerate the massive immigration of Eastern Europeans and Asians to the country. Although the Mexican population was not the target of this initiative, it could be seen that nativist groups were being successful in influencing government perspectives towards immigrants. This pioneering law intended to preserve the nation's homogeneity (which at this point was already non-existent). The approved bill went further than the Immigration Act of 1917, which required for immigrants to pass literacy tests in order to enter the country. It also went further than the restrictive legislations of 1920, which required Mexican immigrants to pay fees for their visas, pass medical examinations, demonstrate literacy and prove that they would not be or become a public charge to the United States.¹¹⁶ The competence assessments were still being implemented but now the immigration issue had escalated into something more serious. It was in this act, sponsored by Congressman Albert Johnson where the U.S. Congress acknowledged that it had a problem and that it was called the Mexican immigrant. The National Origins Act, which was the official name of the law, set quotas on the number of immigrants coming in but most importantly, it required for all immigrants to enter the country legally, with a passport, or a legal validated visa issued by the United States at the border or at an American Consulate somewhere other than the U.S. The National Origins Act also promoted more restrictions on Mexican labor, asking for them to prove their citizenship or right to work with a

¹¹⁶ Guide to Records of Immigration Census (Part 2) *Mexican Immigration 1906-1930*. Reel 3-5 (0617), (0690), (0779), (0884), (0974).

legal document and it favored Northern European immigration above all others (Chinese, Eastern European, Oriental, Mexican).¹¹⁷

Not only were scholars, social scientists and newsmen making an argument about the problem the U.S. had with immigrants, now it was also the United States government. Mexican, Eastern European, and Chinese immigration was condemned through legal battles in congress. The tendency of correlating migrants and criminality will continue to be a persistent threat throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century. Members of the Senate concluded that even when the immigration of Mexicans and Chinese brought cheap labor to the railroads and benefited the country's economy, that same influx placed the U.S. at danger since the immigrants did not return to back to their homeland.¹¹⁸ The initial thought or hope was for the Mexicans to remain in the U.S. temporarily and then leave back to their homeland. However, such thing did not happened, and when it took place, it involved wealthy prominent Mexican businessmen and politicians that thought they could reclaim their place in the hierarchy as soon as they stepped into Mexican soil.

The National Origins Act of 1924 represented a turning point in the sense that it intensified the tensions towards Mexicans and it antagonized the constant flow of its immigrants to the United States in an official manner. This fabrication of tensions remained vivid well into the late 1920's, and in the early 1930's, it would consummate with the Repatriation Campaigns of 1931. For example, a newspaper from Washington D.C *The Evening Star* published in October of 1927, a section called "An Immigrant Problem." In this column, a journalist argued

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States: 1897-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 70.

¹¹⁸ Kristofer Allfeldt, "And We Got Here First: Albert Johnson, National Origins and Self Interest in the Immigration Debate of the 1920's." *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, 2010, 19.

that Canadian migration was much more beneficial than the Mexican immigration in the South, and that there was a problem in admitting people who did not readily become Americans in their ways of life. The journalist went on to point out that while immigrants from England and Northern Europe were being annually excluded even when they were desirable additions to the country, the undesirable Mexican population kept coming in and settling in the Southwest.¹¹⁹ This sentiment of social disdain and exclusion remained active and strengthened as the decade of the 1920's came to an end. The upcoming stock market crash would only add to such notions of prejudice and complicate things more for Mexican immigrants and their families. American newspapers would argue that through the repatriation of Mexican families, the United States would save \$100,000 annually per every state in the southwest (Texas, California, New Mexico, and Arizona)¹²⁰ although there was the belief that the state of California would end up with the most revenue. It would be hard to dissipate these new notions of the Mexican problem; it wasn't only a social, political, racial, and cultural handicap, but now it also represented a financial threat to the United States.

Repatriation Campaigns

As discrimination rose, the year 1930 saw a dark chapter in the history of Mexican Americans unravel. In 1930, a series of repatriation campaigns were conducted and took great force throughout the nation. The American people had made a decision of constructing a scapegoat and the labeling would go to Mexican immigrants. The previous year, 1929 marked the beginning of the Great Depression with the fall of the stock market and a rise of unemployment like never before. The prosperity of the roaring twenties and the ideals of

¹¹⁹ "An Immigration Problem." *The Evening Star*, Washington D.C, October 9, 1927. Page 2, Image 46.

¹²⁰ "Repatriated Mexicans," *The Evening Star*. Washington D.C, April 1, 1934. Page D-4.

progressivism appeared to be in vain or at least insufficient in the avoidance of such a financial collapse. Unfortunately, many companies and masses of general public began to blame the Mexicans as part of the factors that triggered the recession. There were those that argued that Mexicans were taking all the jobs and that the few employment positions that were left should not be given to them but be prioritized for Americans. The state of California itself launched a legislature in August 1931 called the “Alien Labor Act” This law made it illegal for any company (at least any that was working with the government) to employ aliens in public construction projects.¹²¹ Initiatives such as this incapacitated many Mexicans both financially and socially. These actions only served to widen the gap of prejudice that already existed towards them.

The plan for repatriating or relocating Mexicans to the borders of Mexico and Mexico itself had an important financial interest to it. In his Master’s thesis, James C. Gilbert concludes that in the state of California alone, returning Mexicans to the border of Tijuana was much cheaper than providing social welfare for them in the course of a year, with the first option costing about \$155,000 and the second one around \$800,000.¹²² A “repatriado”¹²³ was not only the most tangible and official demonstration of prejudice towards Mexicans in the U.S. Southwestern border but also one of the most immediate solutions to alleviate the economic

¹²¹ Robin, Fitzgerald Scott, “*The Mexican American in the Los Angeles Area, 1920-1950: From Acquiescence to Activity*” (PhD. diss., University of Southern California, 1971), 116-117; *La Opinion Newspaper*, August 14, 1931.

¹²² From data gathered for a Master of Arts Thesis by James C. Gilbert, of the University of Southern California, who spent several months in Mexico in 1933 and 1934.

¹²³ In this paper, the term “repatriado” will be used to describe a Mexican immigrant and even Mexican Americans (Mexicans born in the United States) who were deported or shipped back to Mexico and Mexican borders out of the United States as part of extensive campaigns throughout the early 1930’s that sought to eliminate the Mexican problem and the social, racial, and economic impediment that he or she represented to the United States. It is important to emphasize though that many Mexicans left the country on their own accord through different motives during this time, and thus, are also considered repatriados.

crisis of the nation. In other words, repatriating Mexicans was not as incoherent as it seemed, at least economically speaking. The numbers of repatriados were astonishing with 69,570 in 1930, 124,991 in 1931, 80,648 in 1932 and 36,508 in 1933 not including the ones that left by their own accord and did not get processed or those of whom there are no records.¹²⁴

When putting things into perspective, one can argue that the repatriation had a series of motives that were social, economic, and racial. The ideas of racialized inferiority that drove the removal campaigns and the displacement itself were not a novelty. These ideas had been around for some decades now. Mexicans were intended only to assimilate to the bottom segment of American society, as workers, as a loyal, docile, silent, humble workforce and nothing more.¹²⁵ In 1909, Ellwood P. Cubberley of Stanford University became a leader of California's vision on immigrant education. He argued that the American's task was "...to break up groups of immigrants and make them assimilate to the American/Anglo race by implanting Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, law, order, and popular government in their children."¹²⁶ Although Cubberley does not talk about an alternative in which the attempts to Americanize or Anglicize failed, the outcome of the repatriation and the pre-conceived notions of prejudice that prevailed throughout the first half of the twentieth century are not far-fetched nor do they deviated from the original concept of the Mexican as unreliable, incapable, mongrelized, incomplete, and challenged. The state of New Mexico struggled with this dilemma as this study has mentioned before. The state had to prove that even though it had a large Mexican population, New Mexicans were capable of governing themselves and capable of promoting social order.

¹²⁴ From data gathered for a Master of Arts Thesis by James C. Gilbert, of the University of Southern California, who spent several months in Mexico in 1933 and 1934.

¹²⁵ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 77.

¹²⁶ Cubberley Ellwood P., *Changing Conceptions of Education*, Boston Houghton Mifflin, 1909, 23.

The Aftermath of Americanization Process

Racialized hierarchies were drawn out long before the Repatriation movement, the 1917 or the 1924 Immigration Acts, and even before any of the Americanization approaches that began in the middle of the decade of the 1910's. It is also clear that Mexicans were seen as an impediment to the social development of the United States along with other groups of immigrants. In order to maintain equilibrium in the historical pendulum of events involved in the Mexican migration to the U.S. starting in the Mexican Revolution, several statements are to be discussed. One of the most crucial of these dilemmas was the issue of permanence. Initially, Mexicans were expected to stay in the United States for a temporary amount of time until it was safe again to return to Mexico or until the political landscape of their country had stabilized. At first, this was what the Anglo Americans foresaw, this is what they encouraged, it did not go as planned. Over time, Mexicans started to develop communities, barrios, colonias, and their families began to grow at an accelerated rate. As soon as this situation unfolds, the American public, media, educators, scholars, and government officials began to become alarmed. This took things out of balance and created heterogeneity that a few people were ready for and that even fewer anticipated. In addition, this unexpected and expected turn of events with Mexican immigration presented new challenges in terms of education and social preparedness. As a result, a defensive attitude was constructed throughout two decades until it culminated on a massive expulsion of these individuals, even when they were also American citizens of Mexican decent. What might have started as a benevolent intention to genuinely help the Mexican immigrants, transformed into a complicated dilemma of borderlands, history, race, ethnicity, aptitude, and culture.

The purpose of this study is not to discredit the attempts that the United States government, Department of Education, and local agencies might have fulfilled or at least aimed for with the Americanization programs and their initiatives to Americanize and improve the life of the Mexican immigrant. On the one hand, this research intended (from the very beginning), to shed light on the efforts of Americanization beginning in 1910. On the other hand, it aimed to illuminate on the Anglo American convictions that Mexicans needed to be helped, rescued, and oriented in their educational process-which according to Anglo Americans had to be limited, selective, and precarious due to incapacity and low IQ'S-but equally important, in Mexican's ways of living. It also meant to illustrate the approaches used through different mediums of American society and how pre-conceived notions of racialized profiling drove these. Lastly, this study coincided with the idea proposed by scholar George J. Sanchez that at some point, Mexicans were allowed to integrate to the American society but with the condition that they did so within the bottom realms and segments of the population.¹²⁷

The Mexican Repatriation Act of 1931 (Which was not really an act but rather a collective nativist initiative in several states of the Southwest U.S) did not end the racialization of Mexicans and segregated education. On the contrary, problematic situations continued to emerge for a majority of Mexicans Americans and racial conflicts kept pushing them towards constant demands for civil rights during the 1960's.¹²⁸ The entire twentieth century continued to be the stage for the emergence of new prejudices and discriminatory acts against Mexicans. Americanization efforts remained active and turned out even more vivid with the end of World War II and throughout the course of the cold war. Mexicans in the United States started to

¹²⁷ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 191.

¹²⁸ Manuel P. Servin, *The Mexican-Americans: An Awakening Minority* (Glencoe Press Insight Series, 1970), 52.

consolidate themselves as they graduated from universities and formed leadership movements to mobilize campaigns for equality throughout the whole United States. As the century came to a close, Mexican immigration to the U.S from Mexico increased dramatically and the labeling of Mexicans as lazy, unfit, and detrimental to American society remained contested as well as heated. The current political rhetoric that categorizes Mexicans as intruders and that divides him/her with the line of legality and illegality is an echo of a past social stratification based on racial inferiority and notions of prejudice that insist to shape American society. Today, the recent presidency of Donald J. Trump remains a menace to the Mexican-American community but even worse, to their accomplishments, fulfillments, and identities as American citizens.

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