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**Transcending Borders**  
**Mexican Experiences with Migration, Race and Identity, 1910-1965**

Marissa Nichols

Submitted in Partial Completion of the  
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in History

Bridgewater State University

May 13, 2014

Dr. Erin O'Connor, Thesis Director

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## Introduction

Mexican migration to the United States has remained one of the largest movements of people in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Throughout this period, migratory patterns fluctuated in response to certain events such as the Mexican Revolution, the Great Depression, and World War II. Government policies in both the United States and in Mexico also varied depending on the state of each country's economy, the politics of the day, and global events. Despite such fluctuations, Mexicans remained the largest migrant group in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Historians today often portray the vast number of individuals who comprised this group as a mass of passive victims suffering from global economic and political issues. These sweeping historical narratives overshadow the individual experiences by describing a single type of immigrant and a single experience with migration. However, as fluctuations in official policies and certain key events denote, Mexicans and Mexican experiences with migration displayed remarkable variation in the first half of the twentieth century. Individual narratives indicated that Mexicans and Mexican migrants were not simply passive victims of global problems, but rather active agents who made conscious decisions in conjunction with their various immediate realities.

This thesis works to personalize and complicate the stories of Mexican migrants. It encompasses a variety of topics in order to illustrate the diversity of Mexican experiences in both Mexico and the United States. Within Mexico, inhabitants belonged to complex racial hierarchies that held contempt for indigenous peasants and *campesinos*<sup>2</sup> practicing traditional ways of life. This scorn for indigenous culture was heightened following the Mexican Revolution

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Beyond La Frontera The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xix.

<sup>2</sup> In Latin America, the term *campesino* generally refers to a member of the rural poor, which could include peasants, estate workers, or unskilled laborers.

when nation builders emphasized a transition to modernity. The resulting focus on the creation of a national identity had profound implications for Mexicans who crossed the border into the United States where issues of class, as in Mexico, had an effect on migrant experiences as well. In sharp contrast to the porous racial hierarchies seen in Mexico, twentieth century immigrants like Mexicans challenged the traditionally rigid black-white dichotomy in the United States as historians Neil Foley and Natalia Molina previously discussed in their respective works *The While Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* and *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. Thus, issues of race, nation, and class were common in both Mexico and in the United States. However, notions of each were prescribed by elites and negotiated by Mexicans in distinctive ways.

For individual migrants who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border any number of times, economic, ethnic, gender, and regional identities varied drastically despite a popular focus on poor, male *campesinos* from the borderlands in Mexico. While this demographic did comprise the majority of migrants who crossed the border to work in the agricultural sector, an inclusive study of migration across the U.S.-Mexico border demands an examination of minority experiences as well. Female migrants for example, more specifically domestic workers, were included in this work where they are often absent from others. To examine often conflicting experiences alongside one another, it is necessary to include other diverse experiences with migration. More specifically, instances of permanent immigration, both legal and illegal need to be compared with the crossing of sojourners for seasonal or even daily work. The forced migration of lower class refugees, fleeing the Mexican Revolution or even political violence in Central America also requires consideration alongside the forced migration of upper-class

individuals and families. The inclusion, or at least consideration, of such individuals provides a more comprehensive examination of Mexican migrants in the beginning of the twentieth century.

In conjunction with this diverse target population, the ensuing work also follows a transnational approach, a popular method among historians in recent years. Migration history is an obvious choice for transnational study; however, obstacles do exist. Within the secondary literature, historians largely focused on the experiences of permanent Mexican immigrants in the United States. Gabriela Arredondo's *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation*<sup>3</sup> and George Sánchez's *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*<sup>4</sup> are examples that both explored similar themes in two very different cities. While each work had much to contribute to the study of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States, they focused solely on the destination, on the U.S. side of immigration, as is typical of immigration historians. The Mexican side of Mexican migration was thus overshadowed by the works' primary interest in post-migration experiences. A transnational approach provides a more comprehensive study, but deviating from traditional themes of assimilation and modernization in the United States does provide a number of obstacles. For example, primary source materials, especially those of impoverished Mexicans, are extremely difficult to obtain, if they even exist. Thus working within the silences becomes a challenge for historians examining the other side of Mexican migration.

Along with an examination of both sides of the story of migration, this thesis also studies the history of Mexico and the United States in an integral manner. The increasing movement of Mexicans across the border as well as the shift of Mexican territory to U.S. possession following

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<sup>3</sup> Gabriela F. Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation*, 1916-39 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900- 1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the Mexican-American War made Mexico and its migrants an inextricable part of the history of the United States. Today, many U.S. citizens prefer to think of Mexicans as “the other,” an unwanted dependant on a paternal United States. However, Mexicans and Mexican Americans have been key participants in the development of the United States.<sup>5</sup> Mexican and U.S. histories were tangled, not just because of the shift of the border in 1848, but because Mexicans have continually provided key economic support in times of U.S. need. They have come to comprise a large portion of the ethnic composition of the United States today, and thus contribute, both culturally and ethnically, to the diversity of the nation. For these reasons, Mexican and U.S. histories are one and the same and must be examined together in a study of Mexican migration.

While this study explores the diverse personal stories and perspectives of Mexicans in both Mexico and the United States, it also aims to place such individuals into the broader context of the twentieth century. Section 1 thus examines the “official” account of migration. It includes the constitutions and laws political elites created, in first the United States and then in Mexico, to contextualize the lived experiences of indigenous peasants and migrants workers. U.S. immigration laws, the influence of eugenics on racial hierarchies, and the state level revolutionary changes in Mexico are all incorporated. Section 2 then moves from post-revolutionary Mexico at the state level to the lived experiences of peasants and elites. It explores the ways in which the Revolution changed, or failed to change, the lives of poor Mexicans, and also looks at the effects of this unstable period on migration to the United States.

Section 3 begins the study of specific migrants and migrant groups. This particular section focuses on *bracero*<sup>6</sup> workers who entered the United States as temporary agricultural

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<sup>5</sup> John Tutino, *Mexico & Mexicans in the Making of the United States*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>6</sup> The term *bracero* is used to refer to guest farm workers from Mexico. It is literally translated to one who uses his arms and roughly translated to a manual laborer.

laborers during World War II. It examines the diverse backgrounds of the migrants who crossed the border, legal agreements between *braceros* and employers, actual cases of exploitation, and eugenic practices utilized at the border. In order to provide an inclusive study of Mexican migrants, Section 4 considers female domestic workers and their experiences with race, class, nation, and gender at the borderlands in the United States. With a focus on the women who commuted daily from Mexico to the United States, this section demonstrates increasing employer demands in terms of daily tasks and also increasing expectations at the state level in the form of education. It emphasizes the active decisions of females to become wage earners and to continue living in Mexico, despite the popular belief that all Mexicans wanted to permanently immigrate to the United States.

Finally, Section 5 explores various U.S. perceptions through an examination of migration and tourism in Mexico. It begins with the Mexican laws that affected migrants and tourists, and then integrates a variety of guidebooks generated by U.S. citizens for potential visitors. In this section, perplexing and at times contradictory images of Mexicans are displayed, but the research illustrates that there was no single image of Mexico. Instead, Mexico was portrayed as a dirty, backwards place, an exotic paradise, or a perfect destination for inexpensive living depending on writers' agendas. Incorporated with the previous sections, this work illustrates the complex ways in which Mexican and U.S. histories were tangled in the first half of the twentieth century. With the intention of reaching the personal stories of Mexicans, it examines notions of ethnicity, class, gender, and nation as prescribed by the Mexican and U.S. governments. It also studies the effects of such constructs on the lives of individual Mexicans in both the United States and in Mexico.

Through the placement of such narratives into a broader context, this work reveals separate yet parallel U.S. perspectives of Mexican migrants and Mexican perspectives of

indigenous peasants. Each government viewed migrants and peasants as an inferior group, one that was in need of paternal guidance in order to lift them up to changing national standards. Figures in positions of power, such as employers, teachers, labor contractors, or border patrol officers thus reinforced these negative perspectives of Mexican migrants and indigenous peasants. They viewed Mexicans as lazy, backwards, degenerate, uneducated, and dirty, and worked to counter each negative attribute through a variety of cultural and social reforms. Such attitudes towards peasants and migrants as well as the methods used to lift Mexicans up to national standards inevitably shaped Mexican experiences with migration, identity, and ethnicity in both Mexico and the United States. Mexicans confronted such standards, either embracing, rejecting, or reinventing these prescribed notions, and actively worked within such constraints to negotiate their own path in either Mexico or in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century.



## **Section 1- The “Official” Account of Mexican Migration**

In order to understand the marginalized individuals who lived in Mexico as well as those who migrated to the United States in the twentieth century, it would seem almost counterproductive to examine the constitutions and laws created by political elites. These documents simply do not reach the personal stories and perspectives of Mexicans and fail to illustrate the ways in which Mexicans constructed identities, formed relationships with governments, and felt the influence of social constructs such as race throughout their lives. However, while these state-generated documents only explain one aspect of a much larger story, it is important to include a discussion of the “official” account in order to contextualize the lived experiences of indigenous peasants and migrant workers. Because it is within the parameters and expectations set by the state that Mexicans shaped the events of their own lives in Mexico and in the United States, only through the inclusion of these documents can one fully understand the complexities and contradictions that existed in the relationships between a government and its people, the negotiation of identity in response to state pressure, and the influence of ethnicity within Mexican life.

While political and diplomatic policy typically focuses on national borders, the individuals affected by shifting borders are often forgotten in the legal discussion that determines the placement of this line on the map. In the history of the U.S.-Mexican border, the most significant change occurred after the Mexican-American War with signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. While this treaty concluded the war, it did not mark the end of Mexican involvement in the development of the United States. Instead, it resulted in Mexico’s loss of extensive portions of its northern territories to the United States. In fact, the 1848 treaty determined that “Mexicans now established in territories previously belonging to Mexico, and

which remain for the future within the limits of the United States, as defined by the present treaty, shall be free to continue where they now reside...”<sup>7</sup> Thus, tens of thousands of Mexicans metaphorically crossed the border in their sleep. While many moved back within the boundaries of Mexico, others stayed in their homes and within the United States. For this reason, the treaty significantly altered the subsequent development of both countries. Mexico and Mexicans forever remained a permanent part of U.S. history, as sections of Mexican territory shifted to U.S. possession. In fact, as John Tutino demonstrated in *Mexico & Mexicans in the Making of the United States*, “Mexico and Mexicans have been and remain key participants (among many and diverse peoples) in the construction of the United States.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, simply because of this official shift of the border, Mexicans are not the “other” as they are so typically portrayed, but instead an inextricable part of U.S. history who have contributed both economically and culturally to its development. This is a critical point to remember when examining the U.S. stance towards immigration from Mexico throughout history and in understanding the diverse composition of peoples, ethnicities, and identities in the United States today.

The general response of the U.S. government to immigration has fluctuated throughout history. However, in the forty years immediately prior to and following the turn of the century, U.S. immigration policy reflected a general desire to limit immigration into the United States. One significant moment that demonstrated this intent was the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. With this law, the United States began the era of restriction that barred immigrant movement into the United States on the basis of race or ethnicity as well as nationality. The act stated, “Whereas in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within

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<sup>7</sup> The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, February 2, 1848, Article VIII.

<sup>8</sup> John Tutino, *Mexico & Mexicans in the Making of the United States*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 3.

the territory...”<sup>9</sup> This fear of the “endangerment” of the United States by incoming immigrants was an explicit reflection of nativist sentiments, a concept that at various points in history characterized not only immigration policy, but U.S. reactions to and relationships with incoming migrants. Although over the course of U.S. history, nativism was limited to a small, but vocal group, it did gain more popular support during periods of political turmoil or economic downturns, on a domestic or global scale. At these moments, immigrants became the scapegoats for broader issues. While in the Chinese Exclusion Act the Chinese comprised the group blamed by nativists and restricted from entry into the United States, U.S. immigration policy soon restricted the entrance of a number of ethnic groups.

In the same year as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the United States produced another restrictive policy that limited the influx of immigrants into the country, the Immigration Act of 1882. Different from the Chinese Exclusion Act, this policy excluded individuals not based on country or region of origin, but on their supposed inability to contribute to society. It first required duty payment for any non-citizen entering the United States, but more remarkably excluded “any convict, lunatic, idiot or person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge.”<sup>10</sup> This vague statement applied to any number of individuals, including the poor, pregnant women, the mentally ill, or anyone with a criminal record. It reflected a growing fear of incoming “undesirables” who “endangered” the existing population of the United States and posed a threat to the general wellbeing of a nation and its people. Combined with the Chinese Exclusion Act of the same year, both pieces of legislation demonstrated the first influences of the eugenics movement on U.S. immigration policy. Although these policies directly impacted only a small number of immigrants, the impact of the

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<sup>9</sup> The Chinese Exclusion Act, May 6, 1882, Section 1.

<sup>10</sup> The Immigration Act of 1882, August 3, 1882, Section 2.

movement on legislation in this year foreshadowed later laws and practices that targeted Mexican migrants more specifically.

Eugenics, the social movement that focused on the genetic improvement of human populations or more simply—“better breeding,” played a large role in immigration dynamics at the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite popular opinion that might associate this movement with images of Hitler and Nazi Germany, eugenics played a key role in U.S. society long before the onset of World War II. In fact, as a scientific field of thought, eugenics was widely accepted among academics, politicians, and the public. At the turn of the century, it was deeply engrained in society and considered especially important in protecting, preserving, and improving the dominant, preexisting social groups in the U.S. population. As a scientific movement, eugenics both reflected and was driven by social interests. It thus manifested itself in social structures such as U.S. laws, especially those involving immigration, as well as the culture that the state provided and the public demanded. Exhibits, for example, traveled to major cities across the country and attracted crowds from every state. They promoted ideas such as “Some people are born to be a burden on the rest”<sup>11</sup> and spread a general feeling of “exclusivity” to the far reaches of the nation. Immigration law reflected the specific phrasing used by eugenicists such as “to be a burden” or “the betterment of society.” Specifically, the Immigration Act of 1882, which barred any immigrant “unable to take care of himself or herself,” displayed this native fear of “endangerment” by incoming “undesirables.” At the time, laws and education informed by the eugenics movement was seen as an introduction of new social ideas and innovative policies. In reality, eugenics introduced a form of scientific racism.

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<sup>11</sup> “Found in The Archives: America’s Unsettling Early Eugenics Movement,” Image of a “Eugenic and Health Exhibit,” courtesy of the American Philosophical Society, NPR, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/pictureshow/2011/06/01/136849387/found-in-the-archives-americas-unsettling-early-eugenics-movement>.

In the United States in the early twentieth century, race was a highly relational concept. In other words, the “race” of one group of people typically could not be understood without identifying it in relation to another group.<sup>12</sup> While it was traditionally understood as a rigid, white-black dichotomy, the arrival of new groups from varying ethnic and national backgrounds necessitated the renegotiation of race in order to accommodate the new arrivals. Racial groups thus competed with each other in order to move up racial hierarchies and defined themselves in opposition to lower groups to make clear the distinction between the two.<sup>13</sup> While this certainly shaped emerging racial hierarchies in certain regions, one fact remained—white was still at the top of the hierarchy and black at the bottom.<sup>14</sup> Thus, any attempts to eliminate racial hierarchies did not succeed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Modern scientific movements such as eugenics in fact reinforced preexisting notions and simply masked racial hierarchies with scientific rhetoric. This rhetoric was trusted by policy makers in their creation of immigration laws, and influenced the parameters in which migrants negotiated and defined their identities in the United States in the early twentieth century.

Both racial perceptions and eugenics continued to influence U.S. immigration policy in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Following the immigration acts implemented in 1882, many politicians lobbied for a literacy test as an additional requirement for incoming immigrants. While it was vetoed by a number of presidents, President Woodrow Wilson’s second veto was overruled by Congress in 1917. The resulting Immigration Act of 1917 again barred certain “undesirables” from entering the United States who now included, “idiots, imbeciles, epileptics, alcoholics, poor, criminals, beggars, any person suffering attacks of

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<sup>12</sup> Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Gabriela F. Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America*, 3.

insanity, those with tuberculosis, and those who have any form of dangerous contagious disease, aliens who have a physical disability that will restrict them from earning a living in the United States...”<sup>15</sup> This legislation again showed the influence of a scientific movement on immigration policy. It barred those individuals who might not contribute to society or whose physical and mental health could “endanger” its improvement in any way. The portion of the legislation that required a literacy test was similar in its promotion of exclusivity. Those who lobbied for it pointed to the idea that literacy rates were low among “inferior races” not welcome in the United States. This increasing amount of legislation influenced by eugenic and nativist ideas in U.S. immigration policy displayed the overall attitude and official policies that affected migrants, including Mexicans, in this era. It also indicated a general trend that would continue to bar migrants from entering the United States in the coming years.

The following decade continued to promote the exclusive selection of immigrant entry into the United States. The 1924 Immigration Act most notably affected southern and eastern Europeans by capping immigrant numbers. Historian Natalia Molina wrote that nativists sought to limit the large numbers of immigrants from this region “because they were believed to pose social, political, and cultural, and economic problems to the United States.”<sup>16</sup> While this specific act did not directly affect Mexicans, it also did not signify their acceptance as immigrants. Instead, the lack of a quota law explicitly limiting the number of Mexican migrants coupled with the fact that most Mexicans came as labor migrants revealed a different interpretation. Mexican labor was necessary to fill the shortage of easily accessible and inexpensive labor that the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 created in the Southwest. Therefore, while it may seem that the lack of a quota law pointed to acceptance of Mexican migrants, this was not the case. Mexicans

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<sup>15</sup> The Immigration Act of 1917

<sup>16</sup> Molina, *How Race is Made in America*, 20.

simply filled a need for cheap, temporary labor that was vacated by Asian migrants in earlier decades. Their culture, language, identity, and very presence were no more accepted by nativists than any other groups. In fact, Mexicans faced selective policies in other ways, especially at the border itself and once in the United States.

U.S. policies and laws created at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth demonstrated both the constraints and the atmosphere of exclusivity Mexicans encountered once in the United States. Yet as much as these policies influenced Mexican migrants, the expectations and policies set by their own government first shaped the lives of native Mexicans. For example, the effects of the Revolution set the political atmosphere that many lived through or fled from in the beginning of the twentieth century. Even state notions of race and Mexican identity constructed in the 1920s permeated local and national borders and reached Mexicans of all backgrounds. However, even though Mexican policies greatly affected its people, U.S. policies also shaped the context in which the Mexican government functioned. As a powerful and influential country, the actions of the United States affected the politics and culture of foreign governments, especially those of a close neighbor like Mexico. Thus it is important to examine the policies of one in the context of the other despite clear distinctions in political approaches towards Mexicans in order to understand fully the influences of state-generated constraints on Mexican life.

Perhaps the most impactful event to consider when examining the parameters and expectations set by the Mexican state in the early twentieth century was the Revolution. The years leading to the upheaval and the Revolution itself had a profound effect on the subsequent development and formation of the nation of Mexico. This period marked a breaking point for the Mexican people in their tolerance of inequality seen during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. It

revealed a lack of faith in the current government and indicated that the state did not meet the people's expectations. While many historians often associate the Revolution with a peasant demand for land, Mexicans also called for social and political rights. These demands were rooted in agrarian concerns; however, they more generally reflected the instability of the state and the effects of threats to property rights made by political bosses and state authorities.<sup>17</sup> While the demands for land reform and social and political rights were common among most revolutionaries, no single movement existed. Instead, the Revolution was pluralistic in nature, a reflection of the social dynamism of the period, and resulted in a number of movements driven by various groups, regions, and demands.

Participants in the Revolution certainly felt hope and a sense of purpose for a time, but others did not wish to stay in what they increasingly saw as a failed state in Mexico. This is evident from the increase in migration both within Mexico and to the United States as well. After 1907, when situations worsened with poor living conditions, lack of work, and the onset of political violence more Mexicans were motivated to migrate. Migration to the United States grew from less than 78,000 in 1900 to more than 250,000 in 1910.<sup>18</sup> The number who migrated within Mexico increased as well, as individuals and even whole villages moved from one region in Mexico to an entirely different one. This internal mobility perhaps had an impact on the number of individuals who made the short leap from crossing internal borders to national ones. For those who had moved once within Mexico and found no better situation in their new home, the United States likely seemed a welcome alternative. This combined with the increased presence of U.S. labor agents and campaigns created to attract Mexican laborers inevitably increased the number

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<sup>17</sup> Alicia Hernández Chávez, *Mexico: A Brief History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 204.

<sup>18</sup> Hernández Chávez, *Mexico: A Brief History*, 210.



of Mexicans moving throughout the region.<sup>19</sup> Whichever the destination—a new home within Mexico or the United States, the Revolution certainly had an impact on Mexican migration.

The Constitution of 1917, implemented towards the closure of the Revolution, clarified and codified the fundamental demands of the Revolution. This constitution, quite advanced for its time, called for a number of reforms including social security, child labor laws, limits on work days, the secularization of the government, an education driven by the love of country, and most importantly for many peasants, the restoration of the ejido system.<sup>20</sup> The ejido system, first used under Aztec rule in Mexico, was a system in which the government promoted the use of communal plots of land for farm labor. In theory, it most benefited landless farmers working under the exploitative rule of wealthy landlords. Such peasants often had no other way of escaping destitute situations and for this reason many fought for the restoration of this practice during the Revolution. The Constitution of 1917 stated, “The nation shall have at all times the right to impose on private property such limitations as the public interest may demand...”<sup>21</sup> This article thus entrusted the federal government with an enormous amount of power. In the name of the public good, any sections of unused land could be designated to the ejido system. The practice was not actually reestablished until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas; however, its presence in the Constitution of 1917 demonstrated that it was a resounding demand emerging from the Revolution. In general, the administrations in place following the revolution did not have the institutional mechanisms necessary to implement all the reforms of the constitution. However, their simple presence in the ratified Constitution pointed to the official desires of a post-Revolutionary Mexico.

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<sup>19</sup> Origins and Problems of Texas Migratory Farm Labor, A Brief Prepared by the Farm Placement Service Division of the Texas State Employment Service, September 1940.

<sup>20</sup> 1917 Constitution of Mexico

<sup>21</sup> 1917 Constitution of Mexico, Article 27

The portions of the 1917 Constitution implemented during the presidencies of Carranza and Obregón further demonstrated the priorities of the state following the Revolution. Specifically the Obregón administration (1920-1924), focused on the educational and cultural practices of the nation. This administration desired the spread of equality as well as the idea of an inclusive national identity and sought to do so through public education. José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio, the Secretary of Education and an influential intellectual respectively, both worked to officially encourage a Mexican national identity through a cultural and educational revolution. Vasconcelos, for example, encouraged Mexican painters like Diego Rivera to paint murals that displayed the history of Mexico, the ideals of the Revolution, and the future of the nation. In Rivera's *Epic of the Mexican People* located in the National Palace in Mexico City, Rivera painted the history of Mexico in an attempt to create a collective, imagined past. This set of murals spanned from pre-colonial times to Mexico "Today and Tomorrow" and in all conveyed the glorification of Mexico's history as well as the modernity of its present. The strategic placement of murals like this one was also intentionally positioned to reach the maximum number of people. It thus attempted to create a sense of pride among all Mexicans, regardless of varying cultural, linguistic, and regional origins. The glorification of an imagined past as well as sense of national inclusion was promoted by not just Vasconcelos, but by Gamio as well. Together, the two intended to forge a new national culture in post-Revolutionary Mexico based on post-Revolution ideals.

Through Mexico's post-revolutionary focus on the creation of nationhood, race became another component of the cultural and educational revolution driven by José Vasconcelos. While Vasconcelos worked as the Secretary of Public Education, race was crucial in to his attempt to

include the country's indigenous peasants in the newly constructed national identity. Clearly seen in the goals of one government run boarding school, the Casa del Estudiante Indígena had

“the fundamental objective of eliminating the evolutionary distance that disconnects the Indians from the present era, of transforming their mentality, tendencies, and customs, in order to add them to civilized, modern life and incorporate them integrally within the Mexican social community.”<sup>22</sup>

The goals for this school reflected the state-held conception of indigenous peasants as inferior individuals that needed to be taught the modern way of life. Vasconcelos and the Department of Public Education tried to “uplift” indigenous peasants and assimilate them into the newly forming national identity. In their eyes, indigenous peasants were dirty, backwards, uneducated, and in need of cultural change. Certain reforms, such as the creation of the Casa de Estudiante Indígena, demonstrated the desire to uplift and assimilate them into modern Mexican culture. This desire to eliminate “the evolutionary distance that disconnects the Indians” was clearly a reference to eugenic influences, which while influenced by U.S. movements, manifested itself differently in Mexico than in the United States. It reflected Mexico's deep concern with the education and racial makeup of its country, another component of Vasconcelos' plan for the nation, as well as the scientific trends of the period.

In José Vasconcelos' essay, *The Cosmic Race* (1925), the racial dynamics that emerged in post-revolutionary Mexico became quite clear. In this essay, Vasconcelos demonstrated the desire for racial hybridization, a different form of eugenics that originated in Mexico. Different from other eugenic movements that saw “better breeding” as the mixing of only white populations, in *The Cosmic Race*, Vasconcelos required

“the increasing and spontaneous mixing which operates among all peoples in all of the Latin continent; in contrast with the inflexible line that separates the Blacks from the Whites in the

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<sup>22</sup> Julia Cummings O'Hara, “Bettering the Tarahumara Race”: *Indigenismo* in Mexico, 1906-1945,” in *Documenting Latin America* by Erin E. O'Connor and Leo J. Garofalo (NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011), 150.

United States, and the laws, each time more rigorous, for the exclusion of the Japanese and the Chinese from California.”<sup>23</sup>

In this section, Vasconcelos not only called for the intermixing of all races within Mexico, but he also called attention to the racial constructs that shaped immigration policy in the United States. He saw this assimilation of all races, or an absorption of the “lower” races like indigenous peasants into the “higher” ones, as a better plan for prescribing the racial makeup of the country. Biologically, it united Mexicans in “a superior mestizo or ‘cosmic’ race”<sup>24</sup> and aided in the desires to create a single, unified nation. In this instance, Vasconcelos used a negation of U.S. racial values as well attempts to direct reproduction “to create a satisfactory myth of nationhood at a time of profound social disunity and political turbulence.”<sup>25</sup> This was his way of creating a unified nation out of a disjointed revolutionary Mexico.

In the creation of a national identity, the rhetoric used by José Vasconcelos indicated a desire to uplift indigenous peasants into a modern society, one that was composed of a single “cosmic race.” However, the steps taken to achieve this goal, such as the establishment of the Casa de Estudiante Indígena, were not intended to bring equality to the lower classes. Instead, the rhetoric only masked paternal control over the lives of the indigenous peasants. Post-revolutionary leaders still wanted to control the lives of the lower-class masses, and did so through education and the formation of a national identity. This national identity claimed inclusion of all Mexicans, regardless of class or race, but in reality provided leaders with a reason to establish controlling institutions. This contradictory nature of the written and practiced goals among post-revolutionary leaders thus created a complex space within which Mexicans lived and migrated. Such attempts to direct the development of the nation in a tumultuous time

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<sup>23</sup> José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Leys Stepan, “*The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*,” (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Stepan, “*The Hour of Eugenics*,” 147.

provide the parameters within which Mexicans lived in the 1920s. This context is necessary in order to examine individual experiences with the Revolution and the Mexican government alongside migrant experiences in the United States.

## **Section 2- The Impact of a Revolution: A Study of Life in Mexico**

Historians have often portrayed the Mexican Revolution, one of the greatest upheavals of the twentieth century, as a people's movement. This armed conflict began in 1910 with an uprising led by Francisco I. Madero who cried for equal access to government in the response to the long administration of Porfirio Díaz. The rise of various movements in distinct geographic regions complicated the events of the subsequent years. The original motivators of the Revolution, rural unrest, economic hardship, and political discontent, all remained factors throughout the decade; however, each region's revolutionary hero championed distinct causes. Madero, then Victoriano Huerta, Francisco "Pancho" Villa, Emiliano Zapata, Venustiano Carranza, and Alvaro Obregón all played major roles in the successes and failures of each movement. Despite alliances with individual leaders, life in Mexico changed dramatically for civilians and militants alike with the outbreak of the Revolution. For invested revolutionaries, the successes and failures of the multiple movements affected active participants in complex ways. Most common was the feeling of disillusionment when leaders were defeated or when the promises of the Revolution, even those codified in the Constitution of 1917, failed to reach all in need. In other cases, Mexico simply became too dangerous and so the United States became an outlet for those fleeing political violence or looking for more stable economic conditions. Thus, there was no single experience with the Revolution. However, Mexicans were collectively invested in its outcomes. All engaged in and coped with the Revolution differently, but collectively understood the conflict and its outcomes in the ways that it affected their own lives. And so, it was within this context that Mexicans understood the official discourse of the period and reacted to the change, or lack thereof, occurring in Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A fuller understanding of the ways in which Mexicans experienced the Revolution requires a close examination of their individual realities. In the highland village of Azteca, the Martinez family lived in one of the poorest barrios, San José. As part of anthropologist Oscar Lewis' case study of poor peasants titled *Five Families*, the members of this family participated in various interviews and were all observed by Lewis for an extended period of time. The resulting account revealed a startling glimpse into life in Mexico as a poor peasant and confirmed certain experiences with the Revolution. For instance, it quickly became apparent that this family lived in state of cyclical poverty, constantly in debt in order to pay for basic necessities. At the beginning of his study, Lewis mentioned the father, Pedro's, accumulating debt; he wrote,

“Pedro couldn't remember a time when he hadn't been in debt. Early this past year, after he had come out of the hospital where he had had surgery, he had borrowed 300 pesos from the widow Isabel to pay medical bills. Then... he had borrowed 150 pesos from a wealthy politico to help pay her back, and 300 pesos from Asunción to pay other bills. And all this time he was paying back, at eight per cent monthly interest, a loan of 200 pesos from the previous year. At times it seemed as if he were walking forever in a treadmill of old obligations. ‘The debt remains; only the creditors change.’”<sup>26</sup>

For poor peasants living in Mexico, this daunting amount of debt did not make life easy. The Martinez family was not the only one who felt such hardship. Many others experienced this same cycle. The Revolution only made it more difficult to subsist as the prices of goods increased, and many families, like Pedro's were forced to feed Revolutionary soldiers when they had no food for themselves. Such situations pushed individuals to migrate to the United States in search for better economic opportunity. For others, fighting in the Revolution and demanding changes was a better option.

Mexicans who participated in the Revolution both supported specific leaders and desired certain changes. Pedro Martinez supported and believed in Zapata, who championed the

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<sup>26</sup> Oscar Lewis, *Five Families*, (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 40.

redistribution of land. While Oscar Lewis did not outline Pedro's reasons for joining the cause, Pedro understood the Revolution as it affected his own life. Lewis wrote, "...for Pedro the revolution was a failure. He believed that he did not live much better than he had under the pre-Revolutionary government of Porfirio Díaz."<sup>27</sup> In this moment, it is clear that Pedro was not content with the outcomes of the Revolution. His own situation had not improved following the conflict as certain changes made in the Constitution of 1917, like the ejido<sup>28</sup> system, did not reach his own family. In *Five Families*, Pedro acknowledged that "some fortunate peasants received ejido land reclaimed from the haciendas."<sup>29</sup> Thus some individuals did benefit from the official changes, but not all were fortunate enough to receive such benefits. As a result, not all peasants were equally satisfied with the outcomes of the revolution. Instead, many like Pedro showed discontent and were not fully invested in the emerging nation.

Other Mexicans, like Rubén Jaramillo, firmly believed in the Revolution and never gave up on its promises, even when they became disillusioned. Jaramillo, a campesino leader from Morelos, believed in the Zapatista causes of land reform and liberty for the rural poor outlined in the Constitution of 1917. Unfortunately for many poverty-stricken peasants like Pedro Martinez, the division of large haciendas and restoration of this system did not truly begin until the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Under his administration, the government distributed 44 million acres among peasants, but even then the policy did not reach all in need.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes politicians also believed that ejidos were all peasants needed to survive and be happy,

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<sup>27</sup> Lewis, *Five Families*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Ejidos were communal lands used for agriculture. Peasants could petition the Mexican government for rights to specific parcels. Once given the rights to said parcel, campesinos could use the land indefinitely, and pass the rights on to their children as long as they did not fail to use the land for more than two years. Ejidos dated back to a similar system used by the Aztecs.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, *Five Families*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Henderson, Timothy. *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 58.



when this was not the case. Jaramillo wrote in his autobiography about an instance in which he was questioned and intimidated for his political views. At gunpoint, Jaramillo supposedly questioned the interrogator about his own contradictory claims,

“You say I claim that the campesinos suffer greatly while you maintain that they are the luckiest, happiest men in the world with the parcels that the Revolution gave them. I ask you: why did you leave your own plot abandoned, all covered with weeds and gone to waste, forgetting the happiness that the ejido gave you?”<sup>31</sup>

Here, Jaramillo questioned a fellow campesino who rose within the ranks of the opposing movement. Specific instances such as these might not have actually happened, but it does not discount the value of Jaramillo’s autobiography. The work is still representative of one man’s reactions to and experiences with revolutionary Mexico and reflected one Mexican’s political views. For example, in this excerpt, it is clear that while Jaramillo pushed for the restoration of the ejido system, he did not believe that it was the only necessary component of revolutionary change and ideology. He saw the corruption within the system and the fact that many politicians refused to listen to peasant demands. For this reason, Jaramillo stood out for the power of his written statements regarding the Revolution and the subsequent decades.

Despite this irregularity in implementing reforms following the Revolution, individuals like Rubén Jaramillo continued to believe in the ideology of the Revolution and the Constitution of 1917. For example, Jaramillo questioned the rise of any prominent political figures who posed a threat to progress made towards reform under Cárdenas’ administration. In his autobiography, the campesino leader wrote about the doubts felt with the announcement of Manuel Avila Camacho’s potential rise to presidency. He noted,

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<sup>31</sup> Rubén Jaramillo, “Struggles of a Campesino Leader” in *The Mexico Reader* edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 488.

“Their (Manuel Avila Camacho & followers) history in the State of Puebla is doubtful with respect to our revolutionary ideology ... the workers and peasants are revolutionaries, and if Don Manuel deviates from that, we won’t stay with him.”<sup>32</sup>

This sense of loyalty to a specific leader as well as the ideals of the Revolution was common among Mexicans. Pedro Martinez also believed in Zapatista ideals. Oscar Lewis wrote, “Yes, Pedro felt defeated. For him the Revolution had ended with the death of Zapata.”<sup>33</sup> Through these two instances, it is clear that experiences with and loyalties to the Revolution mattered to Mexicans. But, while Jaramillo and Pedro were both Zapatistas, the extent of their faith differed with varying lived experiences. Unlike Pedro, Jaramillo was faithful to his political views until the end of his life, which was cut short by the intervention of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI- Institutional Revolutionary Party).

Following the Cárdenas presidency, heavy concentration of the power in the presidency and in the PRI defined politics of the era. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Mexican government thus became more supportive and protective of corporate relationships, its economy, and relations with the United States than of its own workers or peasants who continued to suffer. The PRI worked to quiet discontent among peasants, at whatever costs. This was seen in the case of Rubén Jaramillo, who wrote in the months before his death, “Jaramillo remained uneasy. He was constantly glancing over his shoulder due to the threat from the government, the director’s gunmen, and the campesinos corrupted by politicians, both large and small.”<sup>34</sup> Jaramillo knew about the threats because the PRI was so blatant in its attacks. He did not take bribes and continued to demand changes following Cárdenas’ administration. For this, he paid with his life. The PRI killed Jaramillo along with his pregnant wife and three sons on May 23, 1962.<sup>35</sup> This

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<sup>32</sup> Jaramillo, “Struggles of a Campesino Leader,” 483,484.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *Five Families*, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Rubén Jaramillo, “Struggles of a Campesino Leader, 489-490.

<sup>35</sup> Rubén Jaramillo, “Struggles of a Campesino Leader, 482.

instance shows the mixed results following the Revolution. Jaramillo believed in the ideals of the revolution and saw increased prosperity as a result of the ejido system. However, another individual, Pedro Martinez, saw no change in his immediate reality as a result of the revolution. In his situation, it failed to improve his life in any meaningful way. Jaramillo, unlike other political figures, also did not flee and migrate to the United States. Migration, however, was a common response to the threat of political violence seen in Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century.

The Revolution and ensuing political violence forced many Mexicans to migrate to the United States in order to save the lives of themselves and of their families. Frank Galvan Jr. and his family fled to the United States during the Revolution. While not in the same economic situation as destitute individuals like Martinez, the Galvan family demonstrated the diversity of individuals migrating to the United States during the Revolution. In 1973, Galvan was interviewed by Texas A&M for their Oral History Program and his testimony revealed how disruptive the Revolution was for some families. He indicated that his family left Mexico in the middle of 1913 because their father was a federal government employee. Because Galvan's father worked for Porfirio Diaz, it was too dangerous for him to stay. He first went to the United States by himself. Of this, his son wrote,

“He left the family all in the town of Santa Barbara, Chihuahua. We had a home; a two story home, and while he was away—it looked to me like it was years—we were penniless, poverty-stricken and had to exist by converting the upper story of the house into a rooming house.”<sup>36</sup>

The Galvan family's hardships did not end there. It was a long road to the border through revolutionary Mexico where the effect of the Revolution on other individuals was equally evident. In another instance, the family fled insurgent fighting and experienced the following,

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<sup>36</sup> Frank Galván, interview by Mary Lee Nolan, March 14, 1973, Mexican Revolution Project, Oral History Collections, Cushing Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, 1.

“In Conchos we got sheltered in an old abandoned grocery store. There was a man in the grocery store lying in a bed with about eight or ten stab wounds in his upper breast and chest. We heard the story with great admiration and fright about his being assaulted the night before by a gang of rebels.”<sup>37</sup>

The violent atmosphere that existed during the Revolution was a factor that drove many Mexicans to the United States during this period. Violence was typical, especially for individuals like Galván’s father who were targeted for their previous association with the Porfiriato. However, this family’s experience differed immensely from the two previous individuals. The sole reason the Galvans left Mexico was because they were in fear of their lives. They did not seek economic opportunity in the United States like so many other Mexican migrants did, but instead sought refuge across the border. As a wealthier family within Mexico, the Galvans were thus in a better social and economic position at the beginning of their lives in the United States. This accounts for the immense prosperity the family experienced, especially apparent among the third generation.

As seen through the experiences of Rubén Jaramillo, the Martinez family, and Frank Galvan, the Revolution was an explosive and disruptive period in Mexican history. This stimulated a coinciding literature movement that often reflected an author’s own experience with various realities such as revolution, poverty, and migration. As a part of a region’s cultural heritage, literature reflects the political context in which it was written as well as the broader society that informed the work. Novels written during and after the period thus inform historians of the ways in which authors interpreted their own realities. Those written in the tradition known as “la novela de la revolución mexicana” like Mariano Azuela’s *The Underdogs* provide readers with an interpretation of the Revolution that displayed important historical, racial, and class perspectives of the first decades of the twentieth century. This was especially true for *The*

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<sup>37</sup> Frank Galván, 3

*Underdogs* as Azuela was himself a participant of the Revolution. As an educated doctor, Azuela struggled with the horrors of the Revolution and documented his own pessimistic views through *The Underdogs*.

*The Underdogs* was first published in 1915 in a U.S. newspaper. The first wide audience, U.S. readers, were thus informed of “actual experiences” with the Mexican Revolution through this novel. The plot followed Demetrio Macías, a campesino leading a rebel group fighting in the name of the Revolution. Although today the novel is widely celebrated and “required reading in Mexican schools,”<sup>38</sup> it did not gain popularity in Mexico until the 1920s when Mexican intellectuals began to celebrate their collective past, both real and imagined. As a whole, throughout *The Underdogs* Azuela portrayed instances that demonstrated typical experiences with and varying effects of the Revolution. For instance, the novel began with a startling scene in which Demetrio fled from Limón, his small ranch, because of incoming enemy forces who at one point set his home on fire. This first section contextualizes the immediate danger of political violence caused by the Revolution. It shows one of the reasons why so many individuals migrated both within Mexico and across the U.S. border and also why many individuals fought in the name of the Revolution. The novel also informed U.S. perspectives of Mexicans as it was first published in the United States. The questionable morality of the actions of the group involving drinking, prostitutions, theft, and violence thus shaped the ways in which U.S. readers viewed Mexicans as well as the Revolution.

Ambiguous and stereotypical ideals conveyed in interpretations of the Revolution were scattered throughout *The Underdogs*. For instance, the well educated Luis Cervantes who switched sides once captured by Demetrio’s rebels tried to defend himself by pointing out to

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<sup>38</sup> Ilán Stavans, introduction to *The Underdogs*, by Mariano Azuela (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), x.

Demetrio that they were “coreligionists” with the same ideals and same causes. However, when asked, “What causes are we defending?” Luis Cervantes, disconcerted, could find no reply.”<sup>39</sup>

Generally, the characters in this novel were not all able to give a reason for fighting the Revolution, a position in which some Mexicans certainly found themselves during this period. Those that did give reasons in this novel defended the “sufferings of the underdogs, of the disinherited masses...”<sup>40</sup> and generally fought against tyranny itself. This was a typical stance seen among many non-elites. As Demetrio articulated, “The Revolution benefits the poor, the ignorant, all those who have been slaves all their lives, all the unfortunate people who don’t even suspect they’re poor because the rich take their sweat and blood and tears and turn it into gold...”<sup>41</sup> Here, Demetrio, like many other revolutionaries, reacted against the inequality which was growing in Mexico in the nineteenth century and desired change. However, this section reinforced the conception of poor Mexicans as ignorant and in need of a patriarchal figure to guide them. Instances such as these were common in the novel and reflected some of the prevalent conceptions of the revolutionary era.

A similar phrase used in revolutionary rhetoric was seen in Rubén Jaramillo’s autobiography. Jaramillo desired meaningful change, and had specific reforms in mind when defending his reasons for his revolutionary beliefs. However, in his autobiography he wrote that “our revolutionary ideology... is what we hope will bring our nation out of its backward state.”<sup>42</sup> This mentality and the notion of a “backward” Mexico reflected Jaramillo’s curious inclusion of the official rhetoric of the period. It showed that official policies affected even individuals like Jaramillo. Like in the previous section of *The Underdogs*, which reinforced the idea that

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<sup>39</sup> Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Jaramillo, “Struggles of a Campesino Leader”, 483.

Mexicans were in need of guidance to lift them up, this comment showed that the political rhetoric of the period informed by racial notions described in the first section of this thesis influenced Mexicans. Jaramillo's comment, however, does not signify that official ideas of the state dictated his life. Instead, this leader held strong opinions regarding the policies of the emerging nation and its leaders and actively engaged in politics despite existing notions of his supposed inferiority.

One historically accurate point that *The Underdogs* commendably emphasized was the plurality of the revolutionary movements. The rise of varying factions during this period was a common feature, specific to the Mexican Revolution, and was accurately reflected in the novel. At one point, when attempting to determine which leader to follow, Demetrio exclaimed, "Villa? Oregón? Carranza? What do I care... I love the Revolution like I love the volcano that's erupting! The volcano because it's a volcano; the Revolution because it's the Revolution!"<sup>43</sup> Here, Demetrio conveyed the love that many felt for the Revolution, for its explosive and exciting yet destructive nature. His misspelling of Obregón, however, again displayed a negative view of uneducated Mexicans. While in the novel, the characters did not care about the leaders, in reality Mexicans strongly believed in specific ideologies of the Revolution, as seen in Jaramillo and Martinez's writing.

Towards the end of the *The Underdogs*, Demetrio and his rebels returned to Limón and to his wife and child after two years of combat and questionable moral decisions. Once reunited, Demetrio's wife said, "Thank God you've come back! ... Now you'll never leave us anymore, will you? ... You'll stay with us always?" Demetrio's face clouded over. Both remained silent, lost in anguish."<sup>44</sup> Demetrio loved the Revolution, and continued to go out and fight until his

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<sup>43</sup>Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*, 131.

<sup>44</sup>Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*, 147.

death at the end of the novel. The wife and child, left alone at home demonstrate a situation in which many revolutionary wives found themselves, similar to the situations where sojourners left their families. With Demetrio's death, the wife was left alone, and readers were left questioning what these rebels really desired or accomplished and if the cost was too high. Revolutionary historians often study these questions, which remained present throughout the novel. The parallels between the two reflected the nature of literature and showed how the politics and the society in which it was written affected the work, making it an important piece to consider when examining the culture of this period.

In all, the experiences of Jaramillo, Martinez, Galvan, and those characters portrayed in *The Underdogs* showed that there was no single experience with the Revolution. The plurality of the movements led to much confusion, but even uneducated campesinos understood the different ideologies of each leader. They supported specific movements based on their own immediate realities, and looked forward to the change that the Revolution promised. When this promised change did not provide any benefits in their own lives, Mexicans became disillusioned. This motivated Mexicans to migrate to the United States, if the conflict of the Revolution had not already done so, and inevitably shaped Mexican experiences in the United States.



### Section 3- Across the Border: Life as a *Bracero* in the United States

The bracero program is the unofficial name of the series of legal arrangements between the U.S. and Mexican governments that recruited Mexican men for temporary agricultural work in the United States. The program began in 1942, during World War II, and lasted until 1964; however, the beginnings of the program can be traced back to the First World War. Coupled with earlier U.S. laws that limited Chinese migration to the United States, wartime need demanded a new source of cheap labor for the agricultural and railroad businesses. Mexicans thus filled this position and in 1917, the Mexican government asked that the United States guarantee the contracts of immigrant workers. This request, which the U.S. government ignored, was a precursor to the later bracero laws created during World War II.<sup>45</sup> It demonstrated an attempt made by the Mexican government to aid its migrants in the United States and to improve their situations. Mexico's initiative also coincided with the goals of the Revolution and demands for labor rights codified in the Constitution of 1917. While the United States ignored this request, Mexico's Congress passed legislation in 1931 that called for the regulation of foreign employment. This law required written contracts between employer and employee and determined that basic necessities such as housing and medical service included in the contract would become the responsibility of the employer.<sup>46</sup> Such legislation pointed to the Mexican government's concern for the protection of its citizens abroad, and was likely implemented in response to migrant complaints. The legislation failed to have any real effect on employees in the United States because it was passed during the Great Depression, a period where there was actually an exodus, both voluntary and forced, of Mexican and Mexican-American laborers from the United States. The Mexican legislation did, however, coincide with legislation that

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<sup>45</sup> Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 173.

<sup>46</sup> Meier and Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans*, 173.

created the bracero program in later years and reflected the Mexican government's desire to improve the situation of its citizens abroad.

Specific legislative agreements beginning in 1941 between the United States and Mexico that stipulated the legal terms under which Mexican migrants could enter the United States created what became known as the bracero program. Like the Mexican law passed in 1931, the agreements between the United States and Mexico required written contracts as well as basic necessities for employees. According to a revised act from 1951, male Mexican workers were allowed to enter the United States “For the purpose of assisting in such production of agricultural commodities and products as the Secretary of Agriculture deems necessary...”<sup>47</sup> The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture therefore determined whether it was necessary for the program to be renewed, depending on the state of agriculture each season. Mexican “guest” workers legally entered the United States through the bracero program starting in 1942. Such workers were allowed to live and work in the United States under the assumption that they were there only temporarily, and would return to Mexico when their labor was no longer necessary. However, many migrants remained in the United States after the program was over, creating implications as well as benefits for various actors on both sides of the border.

Under the provisions of the bracero agreements, employers and employees were required to abide by certain rules. First and foremost, a contract was necessary for the validation of employment “under the supervision of the Mexican Government”—meaning that contracts had to be written in Spanish, although in most cases appeared in both languages. This specific instance of legal migration into the United States along with increasing restrictions at the border meant that the millions of Mexican migrants entering the United States legally required contracts

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<sup>47</sup> 1951 Public Law 78- Extension of the Bracero Program S. 984; Pub.L. 82-78; 65 Stat. 119. 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress; July 12, 1951

and identification cards or passports.<sup>48</sup> This explained the large number of written records of this sort left behind, especially numerous in bracero archives.

Bracero contracts followed a standard pattern stipulated by the laws that created the program. The employer paid transportation and subsistence expenses for the worker and his family, as well as all other expenses originating from the point of crossing the border. Contracts stated that the employer pay the worker the full salary agreed upon, without any deductions. Finally, Mexican workers were given “hygienic lodgings, adequate to the physical conditions of the region... and the medical and sanitary services enjoyed also without cost to them...”<sup>49</sup> Whether the provisions stipulated by both the bracero contracts and U.S. law were actually satisfied varied from case to case. Generally, attempts to obtain fair treatment for bracero workers did not succeed. In fact, Meier and Ribera in *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans* contended that “The bracero agreements did not eliminate exploitation; they merely set limits to it.”<sup>50</sup> This idea, that the bracero contracts only legalized the exploitation of destitute Mexicans workers was certainly true in many cases, and is evident in both historical record and memory.

Before examining the specific situations of braceros in the United States, it is important to consider the broader demographic information recorded in Mexico to contextualize specific experiences. Migrants often came to the U.S. from economic destitution, searching for better wages and in many cases a better life. In examining their backgrounds, the majority were young, single males from rural villages who had already migrated into a larger Mexican town. However, the economic and social backgrounds of Mexican migrants were overwhelmingly diverse. As anthropologist Manuel Gamio recorded in his work, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, the states from which Mexicans came varied greatly. He recorded the number of money orders

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<sup>48</sup> Identification Cards, Passports in Bracero History Archive, <http://braceroarchive.org/items>

<sup>49</sup> Revised Clause, Bracero Agreement, April 26, 1943.

<sup>50</sup> Meier and Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans*, 175.

sent from the United States back to Mexico in the summer of 1926. Such data reflected the origin of sojourners, as these sums of money regularly sent back were likely sent to support sojourners' families. Most were not actually sent to the border states, but to the more populous states of Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Distrito Federal.<sup>51</sup> This showed that while individuals living close to the U.S.-Mexico Border did migrate to the United States, the majority came from elsewhere. Even this broader demographic record demonstrated that while there were trends among migrant workers, the situations of individual migrants varied. Generalizations and oversimplifications cannot fully explain the origins of Mexicans migrating to the United States as they could have been peasants, members of ejidatarios, revolutionaries, urban laborers, or campesinos from any number of regions.

Migrants' economic situations and social motivations for crossing the border differed from case to case. However, many migrants came to the United States from destitute situations in search of economic opportunity and promises of a better life. In Mexico, unemployment was common, pay was below subsistence levels, and work conditions were poor despite the pledges of the Constitution of 1917. This placed braceros in a vulnerable position, as they were desperate for even the lowest of wages, which were at least better than those in Mexico. It was therefore easy for U.S. employers to exploit their workers, providing substandard housing and poor wages. This was especially common in areas like Southern California where braceros were overabundant, a result of the popularity of the program as well as over-recruitment. Because of over-recruitment, if braceros demanded more, employers could easily replace disgruntled workers with other Mexicans. This showed how the bracero program simply legalized the exploitation of Mexican workers, as Meier and Ribera noted. It was also evident in the research of Manuel Gamio, who wrote the following of migrants in the United States: "Although the

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<sup>51</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, (New York: Arno Press Inc., 1969), 13.

immigrant often undergoes suffering and injustice and meets many difficulties, he undoubtedly benefits economically by the change.”<sup>52</sup> Gamio made it clear that while migrants benefited from working in the United States, economic improvement came at a price and often coincided with disillusionment, similar to the experience of some Mexicans during the Revolution.

At first, many poor Mexican migrants in both the United States and in Mexico placed faith in the reforms and changes promised by both the Mexican and U.S. governments at the beginning of the twentieth century. This faith, however, often turned to disappointment when broken promises characterized the typical experience. In Mexico, many revolutionaries hoped for political and social change, but were disappointed when reforms made at the state level did not affect their daily lives. For Mexican migrants, crossing the border came with hopes of a better life and for the fulfillment of the American dream. However, many braceros faced conditions far worse than they imagined. In *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, historian Deborah Cohen wrote of the “exploitative and unsanitary conditions in which braceros were forced to live in the United States.” They were “abused by growers, maltreated or neglected by state officials, and humiliated by racial discrimination.”<sup>53</sup> This was certainly not what many Mexicans expected before crossing the border.

The poor treatment of braceros is evident in both historical memory and in the long trail of paperwork left by those who believed in the program. The bracero program itself was created to regulate the migration of agricultural workers into the United States. One aim of the Mexican government in agreeing to this program was to protect its citizens abroad. However, these intentions and the promises made to the braceros were not always fulfilled. One law called for

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<sup>52</sup> Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 11.

ten percent of wages to be withheld from braceros and then deposited in Mexican banks. Much of this money often disappeared, and workers never received their ten percent back. The large number of registration forms filled out by braceros requesting the wages owed to them indicated that poor peasants did believe in the government to an extent.<sup>54</sup> They utilized procedures provided to them and when the money promised to them did not appear, their dissatisfaction was apparent.

Frustration, specifically with the Mexican government, was reflected in both the testimonies of bracero workers and in historical memory documented through interviews with bracero descendants. One daughter of a bracero wrote about her father and said, "He and his compatriots were paid \$1 an hour for their efforts, with ten percent retained for their pensions. However, this pension money is now in litigation... My father is currently 87 years old, and not likely to ever see his pension."<sup>55</sup> Mexican migrants expressed dissatisfaction not only with the withholding of ten percent of wages. Because of the immense popularity of the program, enormous numbers of Mexicans crossed the border with high hopes. They all went to the United States desiring change in their lives, but as one Mexican American, Juan Martinez Jr., wrote in regards to the dedication of the Bracero Memorial Highway,

"Braceros helped to feed many nations around the world. They sacrificed so much, for so long, for so many, for so little, yet, were segregated from those they helped to feed, while often times they had little for their own table; and Whereas, for 22 years, Braceros' strong arms and backs contributed to helping make... The United States of America the Most Powerful Nation in the World."<sup>56</sup>

This excerpt revealed the economic struggles Mexicans faced. No immediate help existed in the United States to correct the injustices and errors committed by those who held enormous power

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<sup>54</sup> Registration Forms in Bracero History Archive, <http://braceroarchive.org/items>

<sup>55</sup> Silveria Arizona Ballaron. "My Papa the Bracero," in Bracero History Archive, Item #3070, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3070> (accessed October 8, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Juan D. Martinez, "Bracero Memorial highway," in Bracero History Archive, Item #3220, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3220> (accessed October 16, 2013).

over Mexican migrants, especially since the Mexican government could do little to pressure the United States. As Martinez indicated, bracero workers made many sacrifices to support their own families, but their labor also aided the United States immensely during World War II. In this period, Mexicans in the United States were largely excluded in all aspects of life, despite such contributions to U.S. prosperity. Historian Deborah Cohen acknowledged this fact as well in her work, *Braceros*. She wrote, "...the very agricultural practices and labor regimes used in the valley... helped make California the nation's preeminent agricultural state."<sup>57</sup> And so, while there are many aspects of the bracero program that affected workers themselves negatively, the program largely benefited the development of the United States

Bracero workers who migrated to the United States during World War II made significant contributions to the development of the nation. However, the program also aided Mexico with some of its own problems as well. It first helped take pressure off of the government to enforce the increase of minimum wages and work conditions specified in the Constitution of 1917. Without the resources to enforce all of the provisions of the new Constitution, the bracero program acted as an outlet for the many citizens who the government could not reach. It also satisfied Mexican immigrants in the United States who turned to the Mexican government with their struggles as exploited workers. Mexico's interaction with the United States thus acted as a political acknowledgement of their citizens across the border, and was one of Mexico's solutions for its citizens calling out for help. Finally, migration to the United States also aided in fulfilling the goals of a post-revolutionary Mexico. The United States became an informal source of education which helped familiarize the lower classes with modernization, thus aiding nation makers in Mexico following the Revolution who wanted to bring modernity to the nation.

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<sup>57</sup> Cohen, *Braceros*, 8.

Following the Revolution, prominent leaders such as José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio, both introduced in Section 1, desired change within Mexico, namely among the lower classes. Modernization was one of these desired changes, and the United States served as the ideal location to send temporary migrants who would later return to Mexico carrying modernity and improvement. This was, as Deborah Cohen phrased it, “an explicit goal rather than an incidental outcome.”<sup>58</sup> Through an examination of José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio’s work, this certainly becomes evident. Gamio wrote that U.S. civilization was “modern, integrated, and homogeneous civilization, with material and intellectual characteristics shared by all the people...”<sup>59</sup> In this piece, Gamio praised the homogeneity of civilization in the United States along with the general modernity of all aspects of life. This portrayal of the U.S. as a homogenous and modern nation contrasted sharply with Gamio’s view of indigenous populations in Mexico. Of them he wrote,

“Ancient aboriginal civilization, different in type from the modern, and much simpler, that is, with fewer material and intellectual culture elements. It represents the type of social groups still in relatively inferior states of development. In Mexico the majority of Indians and a minority of *mestizos* are included in this cultural group. From this group comes a fairly large proportion of the immigrants...”<sup>60</sup>

In this excerpt, Gamio clearly saw indigenous populations as inferior to not only to the U.S. population, but also to white Mexicans and cultured mestizos. Sending such Mexicans to the United States to become modernized and cultured was thus a benefit in the eyes of government officials such as Manuel Gamio.

For both Mexican and U.S. officials, modernity was synonymous with science. As Section 1 outlined, policy makers emphasized cleanliness and physical health in the legislation of the period. However, the incorporation of science was not just limited to official policies; it was

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<sup>58</sup> Cohen, *Braceros*, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 57.

<sup>60</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 57.



also an expected aspect of everyday life. Manuel Gamio wrote of the close relationship between science and modernity. He concluded,

“A person truly identified with modern civilization interprets his individual experiences and the phenomena around him scientifically... If he becomes ill, he goes to a doctor and is cured scientifically. If he must defend himself or his family from social attack, he goes to the law to remedy his situation... The farmer who fears loss of crops because of floods, frost of hail consults the meteorologist in order to protect his crops from any such impending evil.”<sup>61</sup>

Gamio intended for science to become a part of everyday life, as in his eyes it was an indicator of modernity. Here, he explained the incorporation of science in everyday life as a simple, logical decision. However, such decisions were much more complex. The use of Western doctors for example was an often unpleasant experience for Mexicans in both the United States and in Mexico. For many indigenous peasants, Western medicine was different from traditional forms of healing, and transitioning to new practices was not always easy. Western clinics established in Mexico were typically staffed by white foreigners. Thus, lower class Mexicans struggled with the immense power doctors held in their offices, a discomfort that was not felt with healers of the same ethnic and class background. In their own country, Mexicans could choose to avoid Western medicine entirely and continue seeking out traditional healers for medical treatment. However, when Mexicans legally crossed the border into the United States, Western practices were forced upon them.

For Mexicans crossing the border into the United States, health examinations and procedures to ensure both cleanliness and physical health were commonplace. In the 1920s, with increasing restrictions at the border, the newly formed Border Patrol utilized discriminatory practices that coincided with ideas of racial hygiene. Mexican migrants, including *bracero* workers, experienced horrible procedures when crossing the border and were mandated to

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<sup>61</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 74.

undress in front of officers and take baths of harsh chemicals intended to eliminate lice and diseases. One janitor from El Paso said,

“At the customs bath... they would spray some stuff on you. It was white and would run down your body. How horrible! And then I remember something else about it: they would shave everyone’s head... men, women, everybody. They would bathe you again with cryolite. That was an extreme measure. The substance was very strong.”<sup>62</sup>

As late as 1958, Mexican immigrants, including *bracero* workers experienced these humiliating and harmful bathing procedures. One descendent of a *bracero* said they “fumigated him with a powder to disinfect him. That powder... can cause cancer and many other illness.”<sup>63</sup> These types of negative experiences were common at the United States’ southern border and were not performed at any other point of entry into the United States. This reflected a particularly negative view towards Mexicans, as backwards and degenerate, an unclean and diseased people that needed to be sterilized before entering the United States. This revealed a correlation between race and hygiene and indicated that the political agenda of the United States was to prevent any “socially degenerate” individuals from crossing its border. For some, it was a precursor to difficult and racist experiences in the future.

The U.S. stance towards immigration from Mexico has fluctuated throughout history. At some points, increased regulations hindering movement across the border defined immigration policy, and at others, the government created programs to encourage Mexican workers to migrate. The *bracero* program was clearly an example of the latter policy. However discriminatory practices, demonstrated by the practices of the Border Patrol and agricultural employers, still occurred despite the legality of Mexican presence between 1942 and 1964. The result of these coinciding and contradictory attitudes resulted in an overall disconnect between

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<sup>62</sup> Jose Burciaga in “The Bath Riots: Indignity Along the Mexican Border,” [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org).

<sup>63</sup> Claudia Brunet, “Mi Abuelo el Bracero, My bracero grandpa,” in Bracero History Archive, Item #3180, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3180> (accessed October 8, 2013).

Mexican hopes and dreams and their realities once in the United States despite varying social and economic backgrounds in Mexico. This disillusionment was similar to the experience within Mexico following the Revolution and showed a continuity of experience for Mexicans in Mexico and in the United States in the twentieth century.

#### **Section 4- Women and Domestic Work Across the U.S.-Mexico Border**

Male agricultural workers comprised the majority of Mexicans who crossed the border from around 1900 to 1964, but they were not the only demographic who entered the United States for work. Women also came to the United States in significant numbers. While in some cases women followed male migration patterns, particularly bracero workers, these instances were not representative of all female experiences with migration. Instead, female laborers, particularly domestic workers or “Mexican maids” as they were often called, also composed a significant portion of Mexicans who migrated to the United States. They were determined and encountered all the same obstacles as bracero workers in the 1940s and 1950s. However, unlike agricultural worker, domestics faced higher Mexican and U.S. standards in terms of formal education and employer demands that reinforced negative race and class stereotypes. As a result of the vulnerability experiences in intimate relationships with employers in a home setting, domestic workers also faced more complex challenges in the workplace than agricultural workers in this period. Their continued migration despite such challenges illustrated the ways in which females were not passive victims left in Mexico by breadwinning males to wait for money. Instead, women were migrants, active agents who also searched for better opportunities on the other side of the border.

As with braceros, Mexican domestic workers faced a number of obstacles, namely strict expectations, humiliating practices at the border, and the possibility of abusive employers in the United States. However, a domestic servant’s work space within a U.S. home as well as the tasks they were assigned came tangled with issues of class, race, and nation in ways that agricultural workers did not experience. For Mexican employees, daily interactions with a family exposed differences in national identity, and U.S. employers often considered their nationality superior,

contributing to their sense of power over employees. The same was true of race and class as employers of domestic workers were always of a higher economic position and often held identifications with whiteness that their employees could not. Many women working in domestic service along the border also did not settle permanently in the United States. Instead, such individuals made the decision to continue living in Mexico and to cross the border daily, becoming what sociologist Christina Mendoza termed “long-term commuters.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, the Mexican women who became wage-earners in their households and continued migrating despite its increasing difficulty demonstrated the determined and active nature of Mexican migrant women crossing the border into the United States.

In response an increasing focus on hygiene and family health in both the United States and in Mexico, the occupation of domestic service saw a rise in expectations related to the two subjects. Along with José Vasconcelos educational reforms of the 1920s, discussed in Section 1, the number of programs for domestic workers increased as a result of these two factors. The ensuing education that Mexican women received inevitably shaped their experiences with domestic service in the United States, and for this reason demanded a closer examination. In the state of Querétaro, a focus on domestic education was evident in the laws that specified program requirements for the Women’s Industrial School. “Law Number 7” introduced courses for domestic training where they did not previously exist. The law stated “That the education of the queretana woman has always been very limited and a lesser goal, mainly for the lower classes of society... it has become necessary to introduce domestic training so the school be the source of

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<sup>64</sup> Christina Mendoza, *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border*, (El Paso: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2011), 5.

creating many well prepared domestic servants...”<sup>65</sup> This written statement, outlining the purpose of newly established courses for lower class females, illustrated the shifting focus of a post-Revolutionary Mexico. It emphasized not only higher standards for domestic work, but also an attempt to “uplift” the lower classes. Namely, this law pointed to the government’s dissatisfaction with traditional lower-class domestic practices and worked to lift them to a modern national standard. While such laws aimed to modernize the lives of the lower classes, it often only reinforced class and racial hierarchies since the only individuals perceived as potential students were of lower social positions. Class and racial hierarchies were also reinforced in the classroom themselves, through the relationships between indigenous peasant students and teachers of higher social positions.

Mexican laws and practices regarding domestic service also reflected an increasing number of employer demands following the Revolution. As the Mexican government increased its focus on family health and new opportunities opened for middle-class women in the workplace, domestic servants’ duties only increased. In *Domestic Economies*, Ann Blum wrote that “Privileged women could focus on the emotional aspects of mothering and delegate the more arduous tasks to their domestics, including live-in wet nurses, nannies, and servants, some of whom were scarcely older than the employers’ own children.”<sup>66</sup> These “arduous tasks” could include cooking, cleaning, washing the laundry, doing the shopping, and taking care of the children. This demonstrated that middle-class women depended on domestic workers taking over household chores and child care in order to embrace new opportunities.

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<sup>65</sup> “Ley número 7 que amplía el programa de instrucción de la escuela industrial femenil, instalando cursos libres de enseñanza domestica,” (Queretano: Talleres Linotipograficos del gobierno, 1922), 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ann S. Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884-1943*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), xviii.

In Querétano's Women's Industrial School, the state standards outlined specific skills for domestic workers depending on their intended position within a home. Women trained for various positions such as cooks, maids, nannies, or governesses, and were all required to finish the program with an understanding of etiquette and morals, the "national language," basic math, the domestic economy, science, and technical skills depending on their intended occupation.<sup>67</sup> Proper etiquette and morals were crucial lessons for indigenous peasants who were perceived as improper, immoral, and dirty. A similar perception was held by U.S. employers who viewed Mexicans, regardless of their ethnicity, in the same negative way. In Mexico, Spanish was the national language and seen as a key feature of a collective national identity. Indigenous Mexicans who did not speak Spanish as a first language or at all were thus required by the state's educational standards to learn the national language. In the United States, the same was true with English. State assimilation programs and employers required Mexican migrants to learn English or they faced the possibility of daily degradation from U.S. citizens who frowned upon the use of Spanish.

Domestic work was a common occupation for Mexican women at the U.S.-Mexico border, especially for those looking to earn wages as undocumented migrants. While domestic workers did not create legal contracts with their employers like *braceros*, rising employer demands created a contract-like atmosphere in the home. Similar to the increase in domestic education in Mexico, U.S. employers expected their employees to complete more tasks. They required the same jobs to be completed in a more scientific way as in Mexico, and educated their employees through creative means. Guidebooks for example provided employees with the knowledge required to become a successful worker. One bilingual manual for Mexican domestic

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<sup>67</sup> "Ley número 7 que amplía el programa de instrucción de la escuela industrial femenil, instalando cursos libres de enseñanza domestica," (Queretano: Talleres Linotipograficos del gobierno, 1922), 6.

servants entitled *Your Maid from Mexico* by Gladys Hawkins, Jean Soper, and Jane Henry revealed the attitude and expectations for Mexican employees from a U.S. employer's perspective. Written in both Spanish and English with drawings to reinforce various points, this manual was intended to educate both employers and Mexican employees on proper etiquette, duties, and even language to be practiced within the home. Written in a very simple style, the creation of such guidebooks reflected the assumed ignorance of Mexican women. While the written testimonies of domestic workers are absent from this particular section, the presumptions of guidebooks like *Your Maid from Mexico* at least demonstrated the attitudes, expectations, and perspectives of Mexicans that domestic workers had to endure.

Domestic workers did not necessarily sign contracts with employers like *braceros*, but certain requirements and policies were listed very precisely in *Your Maid from Mexico*. Employers were also expected to comply with specific conventions. For instance, the number one responsibility of the employer was to uphold verbal agreements. "If you promise [your maid] a raise in salary, either give it when promised or explain why you do not or cannot do so."<sup>68</sup> Since this was highlighted in the guide, it suggests it was a typical issue addressed between employee and employer. As with *bracero* workers, Mexican domestic workers often faced exploitation by U.S. employers. For border laborers, this was even more common as many of women working in the borderlands were undocumented migrants commuting from Mexico.<sup>69</sup> With rising demands, Mexicans were often paid the same for more work, and even experienced situations where they did not receive the pay promised to them. Employers simply retained complete control over the worker economically and held a position of power over their

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<sup>68</sup> Gladys Hawkins, Jean Soper, and Jane Henry. *Your Maid from Mexico*, (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1959), viii.

<sup>69</sup> Christina Mendoza, *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border*, (El Paso: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2011), 6.



employees. If the worker did not fulfill duties to the satisfaction of the employer, they could pay domestic workers less or to not pay them at all. Thus, for both *bracero* workers and domestic servants, employers held a certain power that was difficult to dispute.

Power relations between employers and employees became even more complex as issues of race, class, and nationality were ever-present in the domestic servant's work environment. In Mexico, issues of race and class were noticeable as wealthier women hired poor employees who held inferior racial positions within Mexican society. The same was true in the United States, but as Christina Mendoza observed in *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border*, "Since women working in domestic service... typically do not have legal authorization to work in the United States, their nationality significantly impacts the ways in which inequalities of race, class, and gender are embedded in this occupation."<sup>70</sup> Thus, identities based on nationality only added another layer of racism to employer-employee relationships in the United States. Along with nationality, new ideas about personal health and hygiene complicated domestic worker experiences with race and class. First seen at the crossing of the border, migrants of all genders and occupations were forced to undergo humiliating procedures such as undressing in front of border patrol officers and taking baths of harsh chemicals intended to eliminate lice and diseases. This reinforced the U.S. perception of Mexicans as poor and dirty, which domestic workers also experienced in their work environment. Ann Blum observed that "concerns about family health also promoted homemakers to maintain higher standards of domestic and personal hygiene..."<sup>71</sup> Such higher standards applied to servants as well, and again reinforced negative race and class stereotypes. Overall, it showed a continuity of strict

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<sup>70</sup> Christina Mendoza, *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border*, (El Paso: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC), 2011, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ann S. Blum, *Domestic Economies*, xix.

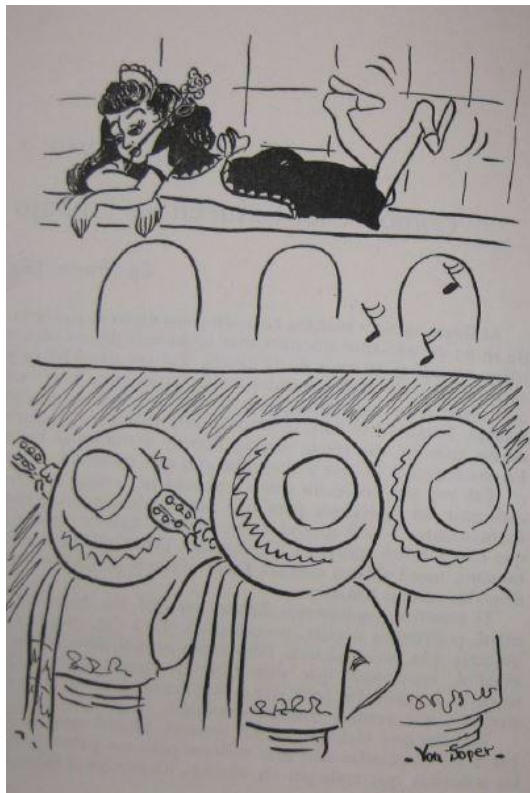
requirements regarding race and cleanliness that transcended gender as well as national borders and impacted the everyday experiences of Mexican migrants.

The new standards held amongst the elite in the United States were also evident in instruction manuals such as *Your Maid from Mexico*. The intent of this handbook was to provide a short, readable guide for both U.S. mothers and Mexican women to refer to while working together. It indicated that domestic workers were expected to be “loyal, honest, neat, willing, hard-working, and dependable.”<sup>72</sup> The inclusion of such requirements in the guide indicated a U.S. assumption that Mexican women were not any of these things. Since the writers felt the need to explicitly list the desired traits, Mexicans were likely perceived as disloyal, deceitful, dirty, unwilling, lazy, and undependable. Following the list of standard qualities, the first duty of a domestic worker was to maintain a certain level of hygiene. This priority given to cleanliness

enforced a U.S. generated conception of Mexicans as dirty and unkempt, which paralleled a similar Mexican view of poor indigenous maids. It was so prevalent in the minds of the writers that precautions were taken to warn employers before hiring an employee.

Employers had to be certain to hire a girl with proper hygiene since she would come in contact with much of a family’s home.

A focus on cleanliness was also reflected in the drawings included within the text. They showed the Mexican maid as poised, tidy, and well kept in any



<sup>72</sup> Hawkins et.al., *Your Maid from Mexico*, xv.

situation. Each image enforced a U.S. perception of the “typical” domestic servant as beautiful and exotic, but also with a tendency towards loose morals, as is reflected on the previous page.<sup>73</sup>

In this image, typical Mexican campesinos were shown serenading a maid. Neglectful of her duties, this image warned employers of the wandering focus of Mexican women. The guide noted that employers had to be careful in hiring women with a proper set of morals, also a priority in the Mexican Female Industrial School. These presumptions again indicated a negative U.S. view of Mexican women.

U.S. employers also viewed Mexicans as backwards. The image to the right depicts a maid about to put the cat into the washing machine.<sup>74</sup> The speech bubble reads, “Yes, Maria, wash everything in the machine.” This image pokes fun at the assumed ignorance of Mexican women. It shows a comical interpretation of mistakes domestic workers made because they were unfamiliar with modern devices like washing machines. It again reflected an image of Mexican women as



backwards and in need of exposure to modernity. These common thoughts among U.S. mothers and employers coincided with conceptions related to race and gender reflected in the hygiene practices of the era. Overall, it showed a continuity of strict requirements regarding race and

<sup>73</sup> Hawkins et.al., *Your Maid from Mexico*, 90.

<sup>74</sup> Hawkins et.al., *Your Maid from Mexico*, 129.

cleanliness that transcended gender as well as national borders and impacted the everyday experiences of Mexican migrants.

For domestic workers in the United States, interactions among Mexican migrants and English-speaking individuals occurred daily. This inevitably resulted in encounters involving language and, in some cases, prejudicial attitudes. Because of the language barrier between Spanish and English speakers, exchanges in the United States sometimes came with misunderstandings resulting from this obstacle. At the border itself, situations involving misinterpretations were common and for some it indicated future experiences of the same sort. In one instance, an immigration inspector's lack of Spanish-ability acted as a source of ridicule for Mexican border-crossers. A translator witnessed the inspector, who thought he could speak Spanish well, interacting with a Mexican:

“He walked up to one fellow and asked:  
—¿Cómo se llama yo? (What is *my* name?)  
—Pues quien sabe, señor. (Well, who knows, sir.)  
And then he turned to me and said:  
—How stupid can these people be, they don't even know their own names.”<sup>75</sup>

Instances such as these were common not only at the border but even after settling in the United States. U.S. citizens often pointed to ignorance as the source of the problem when in fact, their own intolerance for the use of foreign languages caused both miscommunications and tension. Another similar situation was included in *Your Maid from Mexico*. Here, a Texas matron speaks to her maid:

“Hello, Maria,” she shrieks. ‘*Bueno* to you too! *Yo* am *aquí*, —*si*. in the Statler-Hilton, *si*. The *niños* are *Bueno*?... *Bueno*! Wait just a *momentito*. Don't speak so *racio*!...She puts the phone back on the hook and sighs deeply. ‘Maria's just wonderful, but she's awfully dumb on the telephone. Lucky thing I can speak Spanish.’”<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 55.

<sup>76</sup> Gladys Hawkins, Jean Soper, and Jane Henry, *Your Maid from Mexico*, (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1959), vi, vii.

Clearly, these situations were common among all migrants entering different regions of the United States, regardless of race or gender. Barriers fostered the development of negative racial assumptions directed towards Mexicans. These racialized stereotypes often meant negative experiences for migrants within U.S. communities as command of the English language was typically associated with citizenship. For those who could not communicate and did not speak like “Americans,” this meant in some situations either a unification among Mexicans, often only highlighting differences and leading to more conflict, or an increasing desire to learn English.

U.S. employers highly valued English-language abilities. For domestic workers, this was especially true as they interacted closely with all family members and visitors within the home. Employers sought Mexican women who worked hard for little pay, but also desired those who could translate and speak English well. In recommendations provided by U.S. employers, abilities as a translator were often highlighted along with “cooperation”<sup>77</sup>—signifying someone who worked without complaint, another prevalent Mexican stereotype in the United States. Because English speaking abilities were highly valued, publishing companies embraced the opportunity to mass produce bilingual phrase books and language guides now numerous in archives. Such publications offered the basic phrases necessary for communication, especially within the workplace pertinent to a migrant’s occupation. Thus, guides related to the home, farming, and other industries such as cotton picking were common. One guidebook in Spanish, entitled “English for Braceros and Domestic Workers” provided phrases and instructions specifically for *braceros* and domestic workers, as the title suggests. According to the dedication

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<sup>77</sup> Catarino Casillas Rodriguez, “Letter for employment,” in Bracero History Archive, Item #527, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/527>

“The authors wish to express their thanks for the cooperation provided in the creation of this guide book to the braceros and domestic workers & to the members of the clergy...”<sup>78</sup> Thus, the creators of the phrasebook claimed to utilize the knowledge of those who actually worked in each profession and understood what English phrases were crucial to learn in agriculture and in the home. A few guidebooks also included basic phrases related to time, clothing, body parts, and the hospital. Surprisingly, the first sections listed in the hospital portion were not phrases related to illnesses. Instead, they were listed as follows: “Shall I give you a glass of water?, Please give me the bed pan, the tooth brush, the wash basin, the towel and soap.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, even in a guidebook that provided basic phrases in both English and Spanish, words revolving around cleanliness and servility were listed first, revealing an assumption that Mexican workers of a low economic class were in hospitals the most.

Assumptions related to race and hygiene as well as language made life in the United States difficult for both braceros and domestic workers alike. For domestic workers, the constant, intimate contact with English speakers and racialized expectations meant discrimination and difficult experiences within the United States. Why then did so many women continue to migrate across the border, even on a daily basis, when they faced horrific practices at the border, possible exploitation by employers, and issues with language, class, race, and nation on a daily basis? In *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border*, Christina Mendoza described the reasons so many women made the long commute to the United States. She indicated that,

“For working class women in Mexico, domestic work in Laredo is a coveted occupation that is often preferred over factory work and other occupations available to them in Mexico. Cross

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<sup>78</sup> Bob Porter, “Inglés para los braceros y empleadas domesticas,” in Bracero History Archive, Item #557, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/557> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>79</sup> Bob Porter, “Bilingual phrase book,” in Bracero History Archive, Item #558, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/558> (accessed November 24, 2013).

border workers empowered themselves by choosing to live on the Mexican side of the border and commute to their jobs in the United States.”<sup>80</sup>

Mendoza’s understanding of the decisions that Mexican domestic workers placed females migrants in an active role, contradicting the traditional understanding of Mexican women as passive companions to male migrants. Her research demonstrated that for many women, domestic service across the border was not a last resort. Instead, Mexican women actively chose to migrate to the United States in order to control their own earnings, and thus their own lives. Such women sought employment in the United States in order to earn U.S. dollars, buy consumables before crossing back into Mexico, and then return to their homes in Mexico. The decision to stay in Mexico was another key point of Mendoza’s sociological findings. Her research showed that

“...cross-border workers, who were intimately familiar with life on both sides of the border, preferred to reside in Mexico instead of the United States. These women expressed a sense of community that was not available in cities in the U.S., where people tend to keep to themselves and where neighborhoods are zoned. In addition, they expressed the ‘freedoms’ they experienced by living in their own country...”<sup>81</sup>

And so, Mexican domestic workers actively chose to live in Mexico, contrary to the popular belief that all Mexicans wanted to live in the United States. This instance demonstrates that such women did not work in the United States simply because they wanted to live there, but rather because they could earn better wages in the United States than in Mexico.

The experiences of female migrants, specifically Mexican domestic workers, both diversified and complicated the traditional understanding of migration across the U.S.-Mexico border. It demonstrated that male agricultural workers were not the only demographic entering the United States for economic reasons. Instead, a diverse number of individuals migrated to the United States, and some decided to continue living in Mexico while working across the border.

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<sup>80</sup> Mendoza, *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border*, 158.

<sup>81</sup> Mendoza, *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border*, 157.

This decision showed both the active nature of female migration as well as a preference for life in Mexico. It also contradicted the popular belief that all Mexicans wanted to permanently settle in the United States. Instead, many saw Mexico as a more desirable home than the United States. Female domestic workers thus stayed in Mexico, where they did not have to worry about national belonging and illegal status. They made the decision to become long term commuters in the face of all negative experiences that came with the occupation and were persistent and determined in their migrations. Such women demonstrated that there was no single experience with migration across the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead, experiences with migration across the border were as diverse as the migrants themselves.



**Section 5- “Welcome to Mexico”: Migration, Tourism, and U.S. Perceptions**

Migration between Mexico and the United States did not occur strictly from south to north. Instead, Mexicans frequently migrated in both directions and even U.S. citizens migrated to Mexico. Such individuals from the United States entered Mexico as tourists, businessmen, researchers, and even permanent migrants. Their experiences, as well as the literature produced by and for U.S. citizens, conveyed varying and often contradictory portrayals of Mexico, informing a wider U.S. audience of this country and its people. Such presentations of Mexico and Mexicans also reinforced and manipulated U.S. conceptions based on individual intentions, demonstrating that relations between Mexicans and foreigners in Mexico were always complex. Thus, while the literature presented to visitors and migrants seemed simple and informative, it almost always revealed a number of complex layers that intertwined national identity and more individual identifications among Mexicans and U.S. citizens in Mexico.

The Mexican government's policies towards tourists, foreign researchers, and permanent migrants mirrored its concerns and goals for the nation in the early twentieth century. When compared to the influential ideas of José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio for a post-revolutionary Mexico, the similarities between the goals of the two leaders and the government's official legislation were apparent. Vasconcelos and Gamio both emphasized the creation of a national identity centered on a sense of pride for Mexico, that valued mestizaje and classifications based on race, as discussed in Section 1. Their ideologies revealed a desire to uplift, in a paternal way, the indigenous masses who did not satisfy new standards related to hygiene, culture, education, & language, and emphasized their assimilation into the national whole. Manuals for foreigners and tourists, common forms of literature widely available, also reflected these aspects of the Mexican government's official concerns and goals for the nation. In

one such publication, *The Foreigner's Guide*, Mexican author Carlos A. Echanove Trujillo focused entirely on the laws associated with tourism, migration, nationality, and naturalization. He outlined the general laws related to population and migration, and noted the importance of resolving demographic problems in the legislation. In Article 2 of Mexico's General Population Law,

“The demographic problems whose resolution fills this Law comprises: I. —The increasing population; II. —Its reasonable distribution in the territory; III.—The ethnic fusion of the national groups with each other; IV. —The assimilation of the foreigners to the national average; V. —The protection of the nationals in their economic, professional, artistic or intellectual activities; and VI. —The preparation of the indigenous nucleuses to incorporate them to national life in better physical, economic, and social conditions from a demographic point of view.”<sup>82</sup>

The simple goals outlined at the beginning of the law, quoted in the first pages of Echanove Trujillo's *The Foreigner's Guide*, revealed the Mexican government's official attitude towards incoming tourists, researchers, and migrants. It heavily focused on the distribution of population, as increasing urbanization brought a higher concentration of individuals into growing cities, and again illustrated the official policies of race in the decades following the Revolution.

In Mexico, the government emphasized ethnic fusion, or *mestizaje* as it is more typically referred to, and this too was a focus in the General Population Law for inhabitants and foreigners. The law sought to promote *mestizaje*, and more specifically “To formulate, heeding the suggestions of the Advisory Board, the program of action that will develop the Executive Dependences to carry out the ethnic fusion of the national groups and the growth of *mestizaje* as a means of social benefit.”<sup>83</sup> Here, José Vasconcelos's influence was clearly evident. He saw the promotion of interracial mixing as a definitive goal, one that would eliminate and uplift the inferior races, benefiting society as a whole. Migration policy was thus favorable to the “whiter”

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<sup>82</sup> Carlos A Echanove Trujillo, *Manual del extranjero*, sexta edición, (Mexico: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1949), 1.

<sup>83</sup> Carlos A Echanove Trujillo, *Manual del extranjero*, 2.

races which, in theory, would mix with the inferior races and eventually eliminate them altogether. Echanove Trujillo's compilation of laws also focused on the assimilation of the indigenous population as well as foreigners into "national life." As Article 2 of Mexico's General Population Law described, a main goal was, "The preparation of the indigenous nucleuses to incorporate them to national life in better physical, economic, and social conditions from a demographic point of view."<sup>84</sup> This national life was one that leaders like Vasconcelos dictated in an attempt to create a single national identity as well as a solidifying sense of national pride. Thus, an emphasis on assimilation, similar to U.S. policies, was consistent in Mexican laws regarding migrants as well as its own citizens.

Mexico's official policies also reflected twentieth century U.S. preoccupations related to classification and improvements in health. In both the Mexican Congress's migration and population laws, these two components characterized such legislation. In Article 7 of the General Population Law, these emphases were present along with a racial component that focused on societal benefits. The article stated, "It [the State] will facilitate the collective immigration of healthy foreigners, of good behavior and that are easily assimilable to our average, with benefits for the species and for the country's economy."<sup>85</sup> This short section included a strong emphasis on health, assimilation, and racial betterment were all included. U.S. law used similar language regarding incoming migrants and again pointed to a constant focus on the improvement of the population through migration. Article 7 of Mexico's General Population Law also set the precedent for later sections that focused on the classification of Mexico's own people as well as migrants entering the country. Echanove Trujillo's also quoted the law in his *The Foreigner's Guide*;

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<sup>84</sup> Carlos A Echanove Trujillo, *Manual del extranjero*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Carlos A Echanove Trujillo, *Manual del extranjero*, 4.

“...II.—To collect the facts relative to the identification of the inhabitants of the Republic, Mexicans and foreigners, for the effects of division V of this article; III—To facilitate in a practical and scientific way the recognition and identity of the inhabitants of the country, classifying them according to their nationality, age, sex, occupation, civil state, citizenship and place of residence...”<sup>86</sup>

This Article thus reflected the increasing preoccupation with the systematic classification of Mexico’s populations, specified in much greater detail throughout Echanove Trujillo’s compilation of laws. It attempted to register the populations of Mexico, similar to U.S. laws which documented and registered all incoming migrants, and then classify such individuals based on certain conceptions of ethnic and national groups. For migrants, both foreign and native to Mexico, it meant increased security, documentation, and inspections at the border upon entry and exit. This increase in official border activity resulted from direct U.S. pressure to regulate migration into the United States, but also was also an influence of an increasing sense of nationality and the solidification of borders between nations.

The increasing number of laws the Mexican government established for incoming migrants, tourists, and researchers not only reflected U.S. immigration and Mexican domestic policies, but also indicated a growing need for such laws. A small, but increasing number of individuals began to enter Mexico for various reasons. These temporary visitors and permanent settlers did not cross the border in the twentieth century until relative stability and peace were established in Mexico. This occurred in the 1920s, with the end of the Revolution, and began a process that would only expand over the course of the century.<sup>87</sup> An increasing U.S. fascination with Mexico also pushed individuals to visit Mexico themselves. Thus, Mexico became not only a source of migrants in the twentieth century, but also a destination for tourists, researchers, and permanent migrants.

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<sup>86</sup> Carlos A Echanove Trujillo, *Manual del extranjero*, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 7.

With the increase in movement from the United States to Mexico came a mass of literature produced with the intention of making the trip easier. The sole purpose of Echanove Trujillo's *The Foreigner's Guide* was to compile the specific legislation related to migration and tourism in Mexico, which provided Spanish speakers with reference material related to the topic. Other guides printed by either U.S. or Mexican publishers gave English speakers sources of information for their trip to Mexico, either brief or extended. One such guide, written by Romeo Dominguez Jr. titled *Let's Live in Mexico* summarized the laws and regulations relevant to foreign visitors, but also provided commentary. In the introduction to his work, Dominguez wrote, "In these days of uncertainty and rising cost of living, many of us are wondering what's it all about and perhaps dreaming of a South-Sea-island paradise free from the tensions and worries which beset our generation."<sup>88</sup> Here, in an alluring sales pitch, Dominguez pointed to the reasons for permanently moving to Mexico, economic push and cultural pull factors, and also revealed common perceptions of the country. It portrayed Mexico as an exotic place, with a much slower, relaxing pace and was a destination for "lucky people," as Dominguez referred to them, but required some research and planning before making the move.

For Dominguez, moving to Mexico was an easy choice because of the cultural and economic benefits. However, the specific region to which each individual should move was a choice based on personal preference. He wrote, "There is no doubt that you can live much cheaper in Mexico than in the United States, particularly if you have a 'dollar' source of income."<sup>89</sup> This ability to purchase more in Mexico than in the United States with U.S. dollars was also true for domestic workers at the border. They chose to live in Mexico for a variety of reasons, one of which was the ability to buy more with the U.S. dollar. Dominguez pointed to

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<sup>88</sup> Romeo Dominguez Jr., *Let's Live In Mexico: A Manual of the Laws and Regulations Concerning Aliens Taking Up Residence in Mexico*, (New York: Exposition Press, 1952), 9.

<sup>89</sup> Dominguez, *Let's Live in Mexico*, 16.

this ability for U.S. citizens as well, but emphasized differing preferences based on individual cases. He wrote,

“If you have not visited Mexico, it will be impossible for you to decide from book research as to the region best suited to your tastes, purposes and finances. By all means, go there first as a tourist in order to obtain firsthand information as to living conditions and expenses in the different regions and localities.”<sup>90</sup>

Thus, while clearly attempting to persuade U.S. citizens to move to Mexico in his writing, Dominguez also encouraged readers to see Mexico for themselves before making the decision. As such, he both facilitated the tourism industry and encouraged his readers to permanently move to the “the promised land,” which many individuals did throughout the twentieth century.

Tourism represented an important, growing sector of Mexico’s economy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that affected the nation in complex ways. According to Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, “...tourism in Mexico represents a \$680 million business with over 21 million international visitors as of 2005.”<sup>91</sup> As a growing component of Mexico’s economy, tourism in the twentieth century warrants further analysis. However, this industry also resulted in complex cultural encounters between inhabitants and visitors of Mexico that provided a unique meeting of multiple identities and individuals from various ethnic, economic, national, and cultural backgrounds. The industry required the creation and promotion of a nation and an identity that lured foreigners to Mexico. This process along with renewed interest in the collective past of Mexicans and indigenous populations paralleled the plans for a post-revolutionary Mexico outlined by both José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio. For this reason, tourism coincided well with the projected cultural trajectory of the nation, and created the context in which the industry flourished in Mexico as the twentieth century progressed.

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<sup>90</sup> Dominguez, *Let’s Live in Mexico*, 16.

<sup>91</sup> Berger and Grant Wood, *Holiday in Mexico*, 2.

In order to reach potential tourists in the United States, guidebooks and advertisements for Mexico became a common source of information for the “average American.” Various actors promoted trips to the country, including the U.S. government. Berger and Grant Wood noted that following the Revolution, relations between the United States and Mexico improved, and so “The U.S. government encouraged Americans to ‘discover’ Mexico in the hope that tourists would help build democratic ties.”<sup>92</sup> However, the promotion of Mexico as a destination for tourists was not limited to the governments of both countries. Instead, various guidebooks compiled by Mexican and U.S. individuals alike informed foreigners of life in Mexico. One such guidebook called *The Pulse of Mexico- Mexico’s Review of Industry, Commerce & Gossip*, compiled by U.S. writers and businessmen but printed in Mexico beginning in 1921, described a variety of aspects of Mexico to potential tourists. *The Pulse of Mexico*, was “for sale at hotels, railway stations, and on all through trains throughout Mexico. It [was] filled in leading clubs and hotels in Mexico, The United States & England, and on passenger steamships plying between Mexico, the United States, West Indies, Europe, Central & South America.”<sup>93</sup> This description provided in the magazine itself pointed to an increasingly interconnected world, one where travel between countries was much easier and tourism was likely to increase.

*The Pulse of Mexico* provided an example of the guidebooks foreigners used when visiting Mexico, either briefly or for an extended period of time. However, it also indicated some of the mixed perceptions of Mexico itself that a broader, foreign audience consumed. *The Pulse of Mexico* professed, that it “comes to you, not simply as a thing of paper and ink but as an acquaintance earnest for your friendship, jealous of your good opinion and ambitious to secure

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<sup>92</sup> Berger and Grant Wood, *Holiday in Mexico* 8.

<sup>93</sup> *The Pulse of Mexico*, November 1921, Mexico City.

your confidence in order that it may become of real service to you.”<sup>94</sup> This interesting self-description indicated the goals of each issue, to be consumed and to gain the confidence of the reader. The editors wanted to present what they believed to be credible information, and hoped that readers in return would accept the information presented to them.

The information presented in *The Pulse of Mexico* portrayed the country in mixed ways. It was written in both Spanish and English, and did not present one language as superior over the other, but rather provided its readers with an understanding of both languages. However, certain portions of the review portrayed Mexico in a very negative light. For example, in the November 1921 edition, *The Pulse of Mexico* incorporated this comment along with an examination of Mexico’s population: “the astounding thing is not that Mexico’s statistics are incomplete, but that she has any statistics at all!”<sup>95</sup> This opinion, typical of the 1920s, saw Mexico as a backwards, undeveloped country. Such comments in *The Pulse of Mexico* reinforced this perception to readers both abroad and in the United States. However, these comments were not unique to the 1920s. What was most interesting about *The Pulse of Mexico* specifically, was that as a travel guide, it also attempted to sell Mexico as prosperous destination worthy of a tourists’ vacation time.

*The Pulse of Mexico* included mixed images of Mexico; however it presented a message that sought to lure readers to the country. In one article written by John Clausen, Mexico, “the land of opportunity,” was described as “rich—immensely rich—and few countries have equal recuperative powers. Its development once set in motion will push forward at an amazing pace and will offer greater opportunities than any other country in the world.”<sup>96</sup> Here, this specific author tried to appeal to wealthy businessmen. Because the guide was printed in Mexico, it

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<sup>94</sup> *The Pulse of Mexico*, November 1921, Mexico City.

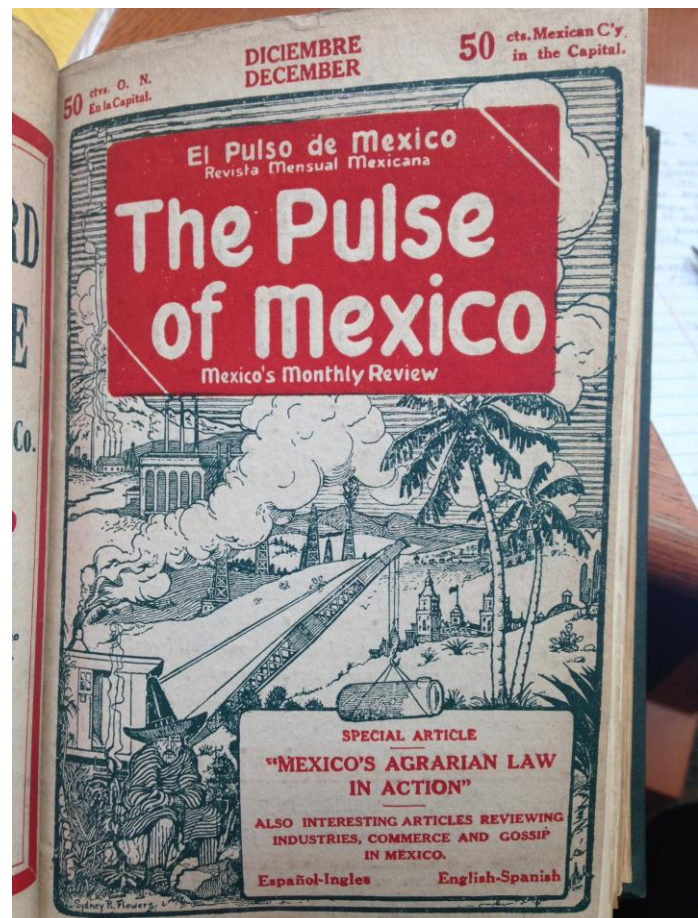
<sup>95</sup> *The Pulse of Mexico*, November 1921, Mexico City, 95.

<sup>96</sup> John Clausen, *The Pulse of Mexico*, November 1921, Mexico City, 101.



comes as no surprise that the country was presented in a positive manner, especially in an attempt to win the investments of international businessmen. Within the same edition of *The Pulse of Mexico*, the editors also incorporated a section called “My Business Creed.” These hymn-like principles for business men, repeatedly expressed “I believe in Mexico,” followed by a specific affirmation. The first few phrases stated “I believe in Mexico, in its present ability to plan and carry out its reconstruction, and in its future. I believe in the tremendous latent resources of this country and that it is to-day the greatest field for the investment on the face of the earth.” Clearly, these sections of *The Pulse of Mexico* tried to appeal to investors who could supply a post-revolutionary Mexico with necessary capital for reconstruction. This, in part, explains a specific portrayal of Mexico in literature consumed by foreigners as well as the varying perceptions of Mexico throughout *The Pulse of Mexico*.

One final perception of Mexicans that *The Pulse of Mexico* specifically conveyed was the ignorance and poor conditions of campesinos. In the December 1921 edition, a special article titled “Mexico’s Agrarian Law in Action” explained the changes made in agrarian policy following the Revolution. The cover of this edition, shown to the left, depicted a poor campesino, surrounded by modern industry, but continuing to suffer in his



solitude.<sup>97</sup> The cover also incorporated exotic elements, two palm trees and a steaming volcano in the back of a tropical landscape. This portrayal of Mexico coincided with the standard view described in earlier editions. It reinforced a negative image of Mexicans themselves, and along with the article, pointed to a negative perception of the nation and its people. The article itself stated,

“It is amazing when one realizes the absolute ignorance regarding Mexico’s recent agrarian legislation. Not only among men affected directly by the decree, relative to the condemning of private property and its subsequent apportioning to peons, but also among numerous persons whose duty it is to positively know the law and its rightful interpretation. As for those indirectly affected—and who, indeed, is not?—there is only the vaguest understanding of how the law operates.”<sup>98</sup>

This description blatantly conveyed a perception of Mexicans as ignorant. The editors of *The Pulse of Mexico* saw Mexicans who did not understand the new laws implemented following the Revolution. The editors believed that foreigners and Mexican inhabitants alike needed an explanation of the law, and so the article went on to describe it in simple terms. This article perhaps mirrored the negative conceptions of indigenous peasants that were prevalent among Mexican government officials. However, it is also possible the writers interacted with peasants that did not understand the law because it had no real impact on their daily lives. As was described in Section 2, the laws created with the Constitution of 1917 did not always reach those it was supposed to aid and so this portrayal of Mexicans may have been informed by such experiences, but also could have resulted from a desire to interpret the new laws following the closure of the Revolution.

*The Pulse of Mexico* and other guides intended to fill a gap of knowledge for those who desired to visit or permanently migrate to Mexico in the twentieth century. The information provided in such literature revealed the biases and perceptions of the writers themselves, and also

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<sup>97</sup> *The Pulse of Mexico*, December 1921, Mexico City.

<sup>98</sup> *The Pulse of Mexico*, December 1921, Mexico City, 71.

pointed to the information writers thought were either necessary for or lacking among their intended audiences. Thus, the information gleaned from *The Pulse of Mexico*, *Let's Live in Mexico*, and *The Foreigner's Guide*, while apparently one-sided in its interpretation, in actuality provided the context into which researchers, tourists, businessmen, and migrants entered Mexico in the twentieth century. They moved into a space that was only beginning to form its own national identity, and so this new sense of nationality following charged the interactions between foreigners and Mexicans following the Revolution. The presentations of Mexico and Mexicans in these guides also informed, reinforced, and manipulated foreign conceptions according to the writer's aims. In some cases, this led to contradictory portrayals of Mexico. For example, the indigenous heritage of a particular region could be the main focus in order to attract tourists, while at the same time, negative portrayals of such heritage could create superior and hostile attitudes towards indigenous Mexicans. Whichever the situation, relations between Mexicans and foreigners in Mexico were always complex. Superficial presentations of "simple" information for visitors and migrants almost always revealed a number of complex layers that intertwined national identity and more individual identifications.

## Conclusion

This thesis illustrated the many ways in which Mexicans were not passive victims of global political and economic problems that only directly affected the Mexican and U.S. governments in the twentieth century. Mexican citizens—whether revolutionaries, migrants, or U.S. inhabitants, poor, rich, male, female, indigenous, or mestizo—all actively negotiated with and against government-prescribed laws and concepts. They did so in the context of their own lives, and demonstrated the diversity of Mexican experiences with migration, nation, and identity throughout this period. Revolutionaries like R ben Jaramillo revealed the strong faith in a specific revolutionary movement and its ideals while others like the family of Frank Galvan actively sought safety across U.S. borders. In the 1940s-60s, bracero workers persevered through a number of obstacles such as racialized practices at the border and employer exploitation. Female domestic workers sought positions in the United States despite even more obstacles. Along with their desire to become wage earners, Mexican women made the conscious decision to continue living in Mexico despite stereotypes that believed otherwise. Finally, Mexican writers actively attracted foreigners to Mexico in the form of investors, tourists, and permanent migrants, portraying the nation however necessary to improve their nation.

Combined, these diverse and numerous experiences provided a complete picture of Mexican migration in the twentieth century that did not just focus on the U.S. side of Mexican migration. Instead, it shifted the focus to the other side of the border and incorporated experiences with nation, ethnicity, and identity in Mexico, before migration to the United States. This examination of migration that emphasized Mexico illustrated the strength and persistence of Mexicans in the twentieth century in the face of so many obstacles. Mexicans continued to migrate or negotiate with their governments in the face of inferior perceptions in both the United

States and in Mexico. Such views, while separated by national borders, paralleled each other in many ways. For numerous Mexicans migrating to the United States this meant continued disappointment, exploitation, and experiences with prejudice. In overcoming such adversity, Mexicans demonstrated just how incorrect many of the prevalent stereotypes were. Mexicans were not compliant, lazy, dirty, ignorant individuals. They did not all desire to permanently immigrate to the United States. In fact, Mexicans were persistent in making changes to their lives. They actively negotiated with the constraints placed upon them, and were an integral part of the development of the United State in the twentieth century, one which must not be forgotten in the context of today's world.

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