

MEXICAN AMERICANS IN KANSAS: A SURVEY  
AND SOCIAL MOBILITY STUDY, 1900-1970

by

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## PREFACE

This study was undertaken knowing full well that there were few documentary sources of information about the Mexican ethnic group in Kansas. The writer appealed to various agencies in the State, but found that little information was available that might shed light upon the subject. Consequently, numerous Mexican Americans were interviewed in order to gain information and historical facts about the Mexican people themselves. This method of gaining information might be questioned by some observers because of the possible biased attitudes of the Mexican Americans and their education, or lack of it. Yet, much of this data was screened and substantiated, wherever possible. It should also be remembered that in the pursuit of information about many minority or ethnic groups, source material is extremely scarce, and therefore, all possible avenues of inquiry must be explored.

No deliberate effort was made in this study to compare the Mexican ethnic group with other nationality or ethnic groups. But where appropriate in order to clarify, attempts were made to differentiate between members of this ethnic group in Kansas and those in other geographical regions of the United States.

I also wish to take this space to thank all those who have been of assistance in the preparation and writing of this thesis. The staff of the Kansas State Historical Society deserves special thanks for its help in making newspaper collections and census data available, and the Kansas State University Interlibrary Loan Department merits praise in obtaining source material.

I extend my appreciation to Dr. Homer Socolofsky and members of my committee who provided guidance and advice which was helpful

during the course of this project. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Mexican American community in Kansas, especially those who welcomed me into their homes and were kind enough to respond to my questions.

Acknowledgement and appreciation are expressed to my family who was understanding and thoughtful while this study was in progress.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aims of this thesis are twofold. Since the location of Mexican settlements in Kansas has been determined by their occupation, the first and major portion of this thesis (a general survey) will deal with Mexicans in Kansas until about 1940. This section will be in terms of the first generation immigrant almost exclusively and point to its origins, distribution and occupations. Until World War II Mexicans were largely confined to railroad construction and maintenance, meat-packing, salt and sugar beet production.

The latter section of the thesis will present a study on the Mexican ethnic group in Topeka, Kansas. Here an analysis will be made of the economic and social climate which either retarded or stimulated advancement. To what extent social mobility has been exhibited will be the prime emphasis of this section, and it will include post World War II data.

The term Mexican, as used in this paper, refers to persons with Spanish surnames who come from Spanish-speaking parentage. As might be expected, the term also means a person born in Mexico and a child or grandchild or later descendants of such an immigrant. In speaking of the southwest the word Anglo is here employed to refer to anyone who is not a Spanish-speaker or an Indian. Hispano or Spanish American is used in describing those persons whose ancestors have lived in the southwestern region for 300 or more years. The term Mexican American is employed for the period of World War II and the post-war period; when many became naturalized citizens. All these terms are used without emotional connotations.

Most of the studies on the Mexican ethnic group have been undertaken in the American southwest and California where the largest

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concentrations of this group reside. The literature that deals with the Mexican in the Midwest, and Kansas in particular, is extremely limited. In terms of the arrival of other immigrant groups, the Mexicans were the latest stock to arrive in Kansas.<sup>1</sup> Only recently has there been a revival of interest in the life of the Mexican in the United States. By virtue of its size, social position and dynamic character this minority group merits detailed and comprehensive study. It is for this purpose that this study was undertaken.

Topeka was the site selected for the social mobility research. This community has long been noted for its connection with the railroad, an industry which was instrumental in bringing Mexican labor to the State of Kansas. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad in particular was conspicuous in the development and growth of this city. Track lines of the Santa Fe Railroad traverse this community, and a large railroad shop is also a physical feature of this city. Any study of the Mexican ethnic group must include its role in the building and maintenance of the railroads in the Southwestern and Midwestern sections of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Though Mexican communities are established in other cities of Kansas, it was felt that this city would be representative of other cities in Kansas where railroad employment was widespread that have a Mexican population. Again, the selection of Topeka was partially

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<sup>1</sup>J. Peale Carman, "Foreign Language Units in Kansas," Vol. II, (unpublished manuscript at the University of Kansas and the Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas), p. 215; John D. Bright, ed., Kansas: The First Century, Vol. I, (New York, 1956), p. 366.

<sup>2</sup>Garry McMillen, North from Mexico (New York: E.P. Dutton Company, 1948), pp. 223-224.

chosen because of the limited available time and energy in collecting data, the proximity, and most importantly, the fact that this city received an influx of Mexican immigrants in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Consequently, this city developed a sizable colony of Mexicans who have remained fairly stable in population to the present period.

As the Mexican gained permanent residence in the Midwest he was obliged to make complex adjustments to the economic and social patterns of the American urban culture. The nature of this transformation and the processes of adjustment are largely unstudied. The growth and stability of the Mexican population in the city of Topeka seemed a promising setting for research of the Mexican ethnic group.

Unfortunately, few written records have been left or maintained in the Mexican ethnic communities. Written testimony by Mexicans is rare, owing to the fact that the majority of Mexicans have been and continued to be until very recently, extensively illiterate,<sup>3</sup> but one source of information about the economic and social condition of the Mexican is the Decennial Census of the State of Kansas. This Census, which was last taken in 1925, provides data on the entire population of a community; occupation, place of birth, literacy, property holdings and other useful information. These facts supplemented by contemporary newspapers, local parish and school records make it possible to delineate the differences between the two generations studied. To supplement this data, specific information was obtained from interviews with various members of the Mexican American

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph Navarro, "The Mexican-American and History," The Journal of Mexican-American History I (Fall, 1970), p. 44.



communities. From this primary material it was possible to establish the social and economic position of the Mexican.

Particular attention has been paid to social and occupational mobility of various immigrant groups in the United States. The major sources of such mobility appear to be interrelated processes of industrialization, urbanization and migration.<sup>4</sup> Though these processes cannot be separated entirely, it is possible to demonstrate how the Mexican ethnic group was affected by the industrial and urban society of the United States.

Since the Immigration Quota Acts of 1921 and the National Origins Act of 1924 slowed the influx of immigrants from European countries, diplomatic and economic circumstances allowed a free flow of Mexican labor. The bulk of the Mexican population thus represents part of an immigration pattern formerly dominated by Europeans. Just as the demand for cheap unskilled labor had drawn the European peasants to the cities of the East and North, expansion and specialization in both agriculture and industry in the American southwest attracted inexpensive and mobile labor. The Mexican peon was the labor supply to fill these needs. Internal Mexican political and economic conditions served as expulsive forces complimenting the economic requirements of the Southwest.

The Mexican first underwent a transition from a rural peasant to a migrant laborer. When the Eastern and Midwestern cities began to exhaust their cheap labor resources, they were forced to draw upon the labor reserves of the Southwest and Mexico. Thus, the Mexican began the transition from a migrant labor to an urban

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<sup>4</sup>Seymour B. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, Social Mobility in Industrial Society (Berkeley, 1954), p. 204.

industrial worker.

The economic and social situation of the Mexican immigrant in the first three decades of this century was qualitatively different from that which existed before 1900. Generally, the European immigrant

entered the life of the United States at a status equal to that of the older resident. So far as law and the formal institutions of the nation were concerned, the newcomers were one with those long settled in the New World. The immigrants could not impose their own ways upon society; but neither were they constrained to conform to those already established. To a significant degree,<sup>5</sup> the newest Americans had a wide realm of choice.

By the time the Mexican peon contacted the midwestern urban area and found it expedient or desirable to remain there, the class and economic structure had taken on more rigid social and economic characteristics: fluidity and rapid expansion had been appreciably slowed. The peon from rural Mexico was abruptly recast as an urban laborer.

The Mexican worker had his genesis in a rural peasant culture with scant contact with traditional stabilizing forces. He was in but not of the American culture. Constantly in search of employment, and outside normal acculturation, the "American style of life" remained largely unknown to him.

The Mexicans' traditional habits, customs and culture were subject to modification over a period of time in the United States. Their peasant background in Mexico and migratory employment in the American southwest meant that family, education, religion, economic, housing and other cultural patterns would undergo a transformation

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<sup>5</sup>Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951), p. 5.

over several generations. The social and cultural structures of the Mexican ethnic group has undergone modifications as may be seen by a comparison of the migrant generation and their progenitors.

There can be little doubt that the Mexican immigrant experienced frustration, disappointment and criticism in his adjustment to the industrial and urbanized society in the United States. Unlike the European immigrant whom he often replaced in industrial and agricultural employment, his adjustment had just begun. One of the pioneering scholars in immigration history noted in the 1930's that the "problem of the European immigrant" had disappeared by the immigrants' constant adjustment to American society.<sup>6</sup> The enactment of the quota laws in 1924 and depression in the same decade cut off the Atlantic immigration drastically, and consequently these immigrants "ceased to be a problem."<sup>7</sup> Replacing the European immigrant was the Mexican whose efforts at accommodation and conciliation conjured up feelings of hostility for those with whom the Mexican came in contact.

Many problems of adjustment for the first generation immigrants were passed on to their offspring. Language, religion, customs and family life could hardly be modified because their home had been moved two thousand miles northward. The gap between the generations widened as sons and daughters failed to conform to their parents dictates. Essentially the problem of the second generation was that of inhabiting the world of their parents and the world of

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<sup>6</sup>Marcus L. Hansen, "The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant," Augustana Historical Society Publications (1938), p. 109.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

American culture; an age-old problem much the same as encountered by earlier non-English speaking immigrants.

## CHAPTER I

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE MEXICAN IN THE UNITED STATES

Although itinerant Mexicans were found in Kansas before 1900, few Mexican families settled in the State until the twentieth century. As late as 1900 immigrant Mexicans were seldom found more than a hundred miles from the Mexican-American border, but by 1908 the distribution of Mexicans was far more widespread.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the first decade of this century unskilled Mexican laborers could be found as far east as Chicago and as far north as Wyoming and San Francisco.<sup>2</sup> This widespread distribution which resulted in an increase of the Mexican population in Kansas from 71 in 1900 to 8,429 in 1910 can be attributed not only to conditions in Mexico but also to those in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

The differences in the economic development of two countries which are closely related to one another by a lengthy common border are necessary conditions for substantial population movements between them. In the case of Mexico and the United States, although such conditions were present for some time, major migration between them did not take place until the twentieth century. There are two reasons for this delay. First, the Mexican society was not conducive to large demographic movements until the railroad system was developed to link Mexico with the world market, which was

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<sup>1</sup>Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States," Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor, XVII, (1908), p. 466.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Manuel Camio, Mexican Immigration to the United States (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 24.

accomplished about the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Also, the demands of the American economy, at various stages of development, was satisfied by the historic pattern of European immigration. The developing demand for labor in the United States coincided with the availability of Mexican migrants who arrived in largest numbers between 1900 and 1930. Thus, Mexican immigration into the United States was fundamentally an economic phenomenon, "the automatic result of increasing demand for labor in the one country and available supply of laborers in the other."<sup>5</sup> Immigration was not only attracted by the United States but was likewise propelled by conditions in Mexico.

The most constant propelling force appears to be the "chronic economic misery of the lower classes that make up the bulk of the population."<sup>6</sup> These classes were completely dominated by the Spaniards for three centuries, and were then controlled by a greedy clergy who imposed the Inquisition until it was abolished early in the nineteenth century. The Inquisition placed in the hands of the Catholic hierarchy a powerful weapon. This was a vital factor in enabling the Church to amass vast wealth and secure all sorts of special privileges.<sup>7</sup> The net result of this exploitation, coupled with a feudal economic system, produced mass debt peonage in Mexico. Though peonage rested solely upon custom rather than legal sanction,

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<sup>4</sup>Frank Tannenbaum, The Mexican Agrarian Revolution (New York: 1928), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>Gamio, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>7</sup>Arturo M. Elias, The Mexican People and the Church (New York: n.d.), p. 8.

the peon was bound in debt to the large estates in Mexico until he escaped this relationship by sacrifices -- such as the sale of livestock or crops or by loans of money from a patron or relative. It was the members of this class who most frequently left Mexico and immigrated to the United States.

These immigrants were predominately the descendents of the Indian tribes whose highly developed civilizations were so disrupted by the Spanish invasion that they retained only vestiges of their former culture, which was replaced by a peon culture largely based on agriculture. Only a small proportion of the population of Mexico was of European origin and few of this group migrated. The physical characteristics of the mestizo population, which represented sixty percent of the population of Mexico in 1921,<sup>8</sup> resulted through intermarriage between the native Indian races in Mexico and the Spanish population. The mestizos physical features are primarily Indian. These features and dark color of their skin point to a high degree of ethnic visibility when set down in the United States.

Not only was the immigration selective in terms of the mestizo class, but immigrants came in largest numbers from the Central Plateau region of Mexico. This region comprised the group of states northwest of the Valley of Mexico. It was in the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Zacatecas and Aguascalientes that the agricultural situation was most unfavorable to the peon,<sup>9</sup> even though this area was the most fertile and densely populated region of

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<sup>8</sup>Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States: Migration Statistics (Berkeley: University of California, 1929).

<sup>9</sup>Gamio, p. 35.

Mexico. Here the peon was submerged in indebtedness and lived a life of misery that bordered on starvation. There was little wonder why the Mexican in this region looked northward for better and more secure employment with more remunerative wages offered.

Wage differentials, especially common labor, were so great between the two countries, that many persons could make more money by working three months in the United States than in a whole year in Mexico. Wage rates before the Revolution in 1910 were as low as twenty-five cents a day with little hope of advancement.<sup>10</sup> Interwoven with this purely economic advantage was family attraction, most commonly observable in cases where a successful immigrant urged other members of his family to journey north to share in the great opportunities.

The expulsive forces in Mexico were more varied and less significant. They include political disorders, religious disturbances, grinding poverty and the tremendous obstacles the Mexicans encountered in attempting to advance themselves. These forces coincided with periods of prosperity and high wages for labor in the United States and, therefore, are difficult to measure. Most important of these forces were the internal political disturbances.

The violence of the Mexican revolutionary movements provided an additional incentive to migrate. As the railroads linked the two countries, Mexican immigrants found they preferred the freedom and opportunity in the United States. Some, influenced by American workers, agitated for reforms to improve the economic and social position of the peon in Mexico. When these desired reforms were not forthcoming, a series of revolutions ensued, developing from

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 159-163.



north to south, from the direction of their United States source.<sup>11</sup> The Revolution that erupted in 1910 lasted for approximately seven years,<sup>12</sup> and during this time many people left Mexico as they grew tired of such widespread disorder and uncertainty. Furthermore, times were hard in Mexico and employment was scarce, a situation "that caused hundreds of thousands to cross over into the United States to engage in seasonal labor or to establish themselves permanently."<sup>13</sup>

Though the bulk of this movement was to the border states adjoining Mexico, many migrants moved northward into the eastern and midwestern states to fill the demand for unskilled labor. Facilitating this northward migration was the railroad which had developed slowly in Mexico because of the revolutions prior to 1877 and the diplomatic rifts between Mexico and the United States. The discovery of gold in California sent the tide of immigrants elsewhere, further contributing to the late introduction of the railroad to Mexico. However, once begun, the railways in Mexico grew rapidly.

Needing unskilled labor for their construction and maintenance, the Mexican railways drew upon the agricultural population along the lines. After this source of labor was exhausted, they drew upon the workers of the more populous regions of Central Mexico.<sup>14</sup> This constant movement of labor northward inside of Mexico itself

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<sup>11</sup>Howard F. Cline, Mexico: Revolution to Evolution, 1940-1960 (New York: 1963), p. 24.

<sup>12</sup>Mary Williams, The People and Politics of Latin America (New York: 1945), p. 501.

<sup>13</sup>Clark, p. 470.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

supplied the growing demands of the less developed states, and this supply was ultimately absorbed by the still more exigent demand -- as expressed in wage rates -- of the border states of the United States. Examples of this movement are evident in the statements of officials of the National Railroad of Mexico. In 1907 it was noted that "about 1,500 laborers had been brought north to work on the upper section of the road, but practically all of them had ultimately crossed over into Texas."<sup>15</sup> Besides this, there was doubtless some recruiting, direct or indirect, by the representatives of American employment agencies and business concerns. The contract labor and immigration laws of the United States were designed to apply to seaports and to overseas immigrants, therefore, these provisions were not difficult to evade, because they were so inapplicable to conditions on the Mexican border.

It is difficult to ascertain precisely how many Mexicans came to the United States in the period from 1900 to 1930 but it is generally agreed that the number was in excess of a million.<sup>16</sup> Prior to 1900, the Mexican who immigrated settled in the American southwest, and nine-tenths of the post-1900 immigrants also settled in this region. The rapid increase of Mexican immigrants in the border states and as far away as Kansas, can be seen in the following table.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> McWilliams, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population Vol. II, III, 35.

TABLE 1

POPULATION OF MEXICANS IN FIVE  
SOUTHWESTERN STATES AND KANSAS

	1900	1910	1920	1930
Arizona	14,171	29,987	61,580	114,173
California	8,086	33,694	88,881	368,013
Colorado	274	2,502	11,037	57,676
New Mexico	6,649	11,918	20,272	59,340
Texas	71,062	125,016	251,827	683,681
Kansas <sup>a</sup>	71	8,429	13,770	22,500

<sup>a</sup>Hector Franco, "Mexicans in the State of Kansas," Unpublished Master's thesis, (Wichita State University, 1950), p. 53.

On the national level, it is estimated that the Mexican population in the United States by 1930 was just under 1.5 million when one includes the illegal immigration figures.<sup>18</sup> Arriving in poverty, unable to speak English, and facing the anti-Mexican prejudice engendered decades before,<sup>19</sup> the Mexican was at a disadvantage and greatly in need of assistance upon his arrival in the United States.

The attitude of Americans in the southwest toward the Mexican that arrived after 1900 had long been established. In retrospect one sees the Anglo pushing westward into what was to become the State of Texas as early as 1822. These Anglos who eventually dominated the southwest were unsympathetic toward Mexican culture.

<sup>18</sup>Manuel Servin, "The Pre-World War II Mexican-American: An Interpretation," California Historical Society Quarterly XXXV, (December, 1966), p. 327.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

In general the attitude of the Anglo settlers toward the people of the conquered territory which had belonged to the Republic of Mexico until 1848 was hostile. Former Mexican citizens were treated as aliens in a land which had been their own.

As the number of Anglos in this region increased, Mexicans became ever smaller a minority proportion of the population. They thought, spoke, dressed, acted and had all the anatomical characteristics of the defeated Mexicans. Were they not still "Mexicans" from the point of view of Anglos even though they were United States citizens by virtue of the military defeat and treaties that gave sovereignty to the United States? The Mexican minority could be viewed as the deviants against whom all manner of aggressions could be unloaded. Unfortunately such attitudes often existed.

The consequent development of the southwest after 1848 points to the rapid changeover of personal land ownership in the area from Mexican to Anglo hands, the relative decline in Mexican population, and their rapid decline in social status. By 1900 most were independent, non-landed, low wage, employee positions. Mexicans became almost a caste at the bottom of the social structure.

The wave of post-1900 migrants from Mexico were incorporated into an already thoroughly structured, thoroughly defined, social situation. They were summarily treated according to established social practices and expectations as members of a lower caste.

Groups which could have given assistance to the post-1900 Mexican immigrant offered no help. The Spanish-speaking aristocracy and the Roman Catholic Church did little to lessen the plight of the Mexican immigrant. The former not only ignored but despised the immigrant, while the clergy, aside from building churches, did

little to aid materially or socially.<sup>20</sup>

Occupationally, they became concentrated in those industries which were vital to the economic development of the southwest. Their story can largely be told in terms of menial labor in truck farming, cotton and sugar beet production and on the railroads.

Although the mechanization of farming tended to reduce the labor necessary in American agriculture, this was not the case in the southwest. It was noted that "cotton . . . requires much hand labor; and the increase in truck gardening, the shutdown of European immigration, and the immigration of the Negro to industrial centers have created a need for labor."<sup>21</sup> This labor became a tool to be exploited under the supervision of the southwestern farmer and cotton growers. These growers had recruited labor from Mexico whenever they needed it and became firmly convinced that they had vested rights in this "cheap" labor.

The employment of Mexican laborers in the sugar beet industry also points to their exploitation by American employers. The employment of Mexican laborers in mass numbers as early as 1916 forced many European immigrant laborers out of work. The efforts of the Mexican in this industry reveals a picture of low earnings, poor health, miserable housing conditions, widespread use of child labor, much sickness and disease.<sup>22</sup>

Also in the railroad industry exploitation of Mexican laborers was rampant. The prevailing wage for section hands in the southwest

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>21</sup>Max S. Handman, "Economic Reasons for the Coming of the Mexican Immigrant," American Journal of Sociology, XXXV (November, 1929-1930), p. 601.

<sup>22</sup>McWilliams, p. 180.

was a dollar a day -- considerably below the rate paid for similar labor on the midwestern and eastern lines.<sup>23</sup> (As early as 1880 and as recent as World War II Mexican labor "made up seventy per cent of the extra gangs on the principal southwestern lines which regularly employed between 35,000 and 50,000 workmen in these categories."<sup>24</sup>

The railroads stimulated immigration because many Mexicans were eager to earn the \$1.00 a day wages of the time, as this represented a considerable increase over what they earned in Mexico. Since section and maintenance work was seasonal, there was a high turnover. In off-seasons, the workers sought other jobs. The railroads were then forced actively to recruit replacements as they reluctantly fed workers to other industries.

As the southwest grew, the railroads expanded and aided further growth. The peak came in 1912 as Mexicans also worked the lines of Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and the states of the Pacific Northwest. In the southwest, communities often grew along the rail lines. In other areas of the country the Mexican railroad laborer characteristically settled along the tracks, on the fringe of an urban area. Built largely by Mexicans along routes first explored and mapped by Spanish-speaking people, the railroads in the southwestern portion of the United States have been maintained by Mexican labor from the first decade of the twentieth century almost to the present period.

In perspective one sees that the Mexicans were unaided by their own group and unable to obtain work in their previous

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

occupations. In most instances these immigrants were forced to take the lowest-paying jobs as well as the hardest manual work. In the agricultural areas of Texas, Colorado, and California they became neglected, underpaid, and exploited migratory workers. In the north-central areas of the nation they performed various forms of low-paid unskilled labor. In Chicago and the Calumet area, for example, they worked on the railroad sections and in the meat-packing plants. In Minnesota they worked in the sugar beet industry. And, as far removed as Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, they became unskilled steel workers. Thus, were the Mexicans consciously relegated to the lowest working position.<sup>25</sup> The classical example of such a policy was best expressed by an executive in the Chicago and Calumet area who bluntly stated the hiring policy found in the area: "We use no Mexicans. We have more refined work and have not had to resort to greasers. They [other industries] use them for rough work and around blast furnaces."<sup>26</sup>

From all indications it is quite apparent that on the national level the first generation Mexicans were beginning their existence in the United States at the lowest rung of the socio-economic scale. What were the social and economic conditions in the midwestern State of Kansas that the first Mexican immigrants faced? More importantly, the question to be asked is how well and to what extent were the members of this ethnic group able to adjust to the complex economic

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<sup>25</sup> Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States (Berkeley: University of California, 1928-1932). Dates of these publications range from 1928 to 1932 and show vividly the work the Mexican performed and the conditions which he worked under.

<sup>26</sup> Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Economics, 1932), Vol. VII, p. 80.

and social patterns in the cities of Kansas where Mexicans settled. First, though, mention will be made of the sources and motives of the Mexican immigrant.



## CHAPTER II

### IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT: KANSAS SOURCES AND MOTIVES OF IMMIGRATION

Mexicans in Kansas were few in number until after 1900. The most apparent reason for their absence was the distance from the Mexican-American border region, and the unwillingness of those in the southwest to venture beyond an area where their cultural and family ties were strongest. It has frequently been noted that the largest influx of Mexican immigrants came into the United States after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution and the implementation of the National Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924 which restricted the flow of European immigrants,<sup>1</sup> but this was hardly the case for the State of Kansas. Nearly as many Mexican immigrants arrived in Kansas in the third decade of the twentieth century as those coming in the initial decade.<sup>2</sup>

The origins of the Mexican immigrant in Kansas was not unlike the origins of the general population of the Mexicans in the United States. While it is true that the largest percentage of Mexicans came from the Central Mesa region northwest of Mexico City, many came from the northern states of Mexico. Yet, others immigrated from the southwestern border states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, but the fewest numbers came from the states south of Mexico City.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for the lack of immigration from the

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur F. Corwin, "Mexican Emigration History, 1900-1970," (paper read at the American Historical Association annual meeting, December, 1971 in New York), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>See Table 1, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Clark, p. 468; Gamio, p. 19-21; Domingo Ricart, "Just Across the Tracks," (unpublished manuscript at the University of Kansas and the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas),

latter region were the relatively high wages paid tropical plantation labor, greater distance and less direct communication.

( Many of the Mexicans who came to Kansas in the first three decades of this century were from the Central Mesa region or the northern and middle states of Mexico. They jumped from the interior of Mexico to the interior of the United States, literally passing through and beyond their compatriots from the Mexican northern border states who had made the shorter migration to an adjacent area. )

The states most frequently mentioned by first generation immigrants as their native state in Mexico are Guanajuato, Jalisco and Michoacán.<sup>4</sup> Other states in Mexico mentioned as place of residence prior to immigration include Zacatecas, Durango, Nuevo León, Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, San Luis Potosí, Coahuila and the Federal District.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that Mexicans did not come from other states in Mexico, but there can be little doubt that the majority of the first immigrants in Kansas came from north and west of Mexico City.

It is more difficult to determine to what extent Mexicans came directly from Mexico or spent time in other regions of the United States prior to coming to Kansas. In Emporia, data from the 1915 census indicated that for the Mexicans who were not born in Kansas, the last previous residence was distributed as follows:

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<sup>4</sup>Carman, vol. 3, p. 886-1105; Franco, p. 35, and personal interviews by author with 31 Mexican Americans from 1970-1972.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Mexico 24, Colorado 1, Iowa 7, New Mexico 2 and Texas 78.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, similar data for Topeka indicates that a large majority of the immigrants came directly from their homeland in Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

TABLE 2

LAST PREVIOUS RESIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES OF  
252 MEXICANS WHO WERE LIVING IN THE CITIES OF  
TOPEKA, HUTCHINSON, AND EMPORIA IN 1925.  
CLASSIFIED BY STATE.<sup>a</sup>

State	Number	Percent by States
Texas	112	44.4
New Mexico	32	12.8
Arizona	24	9.5
Colorado	20	7.9
Nebraska	12	4.7
Missouri	11	4.3
Iowa	9	3.5
Oklahoma	8	3.1
Wisconsin	5	1.9
Minnesota	4	1.5
California	2	0.7
Wyoming	2	0.7
Indiana	1	0.3
Arkansas	1	0.3
Utah	1	0.3
Michigan	1	0.3
Illinois	1	0.3
Unknown	6	2.3

<sup>a</sup>State of Kansas, Decennial Census of the State of Kansas 1925, Topeka, Vols. 211-213, Emporia, Vol. 127, Hutchinson, Vols. 178-179.

<sup>6</sup>1915 Decennial Census, Emporia.

<sup>7</sup>Peter Earle, "The Mexicans of Topeka," (unpublished typescript in the possession of J. Neale Carman, University of Kansas: Lawrence, Kansas), p. 3, 1953. The census data on all the Mexican colonies in Kansas is far from complete and it is therefore difficult to generalize on what percentage for a given period came directly from Mexico. A partial figure might be derived from the hiring policies of the Santa Fe Railroad who relied largely upon supply companies in El Paso; unfortunately these records have not been located within the Santa Fe system.

( It was not an unusual phenomenon for entire villages to become depopulated as Mexicans emigrated from Mexico.<sup>8</sup> A large portion of Topeka's Mexican colony originated from the village of Silao, Guanajuato, in 1907, and other evidence suggests group departures from Mexico. Mexican families in Garden City and Lyons had known one another in Mexico as neighbors.<sup>9</sup> A study conducted in the 1920's in Topeka estimated that at least 80 percent of a then Mexican population of over 800 came from the State of Guanajuato.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the vast majority of immigrants from Mexico who arrived in Kansas probably came in small groups (enganches) or as solos. )

( This outpouring of the interior population began during the closing decade or two of the last century when Mexican railways first afforded easy opportunity and inducement for movement. The labor demands of the railways of both Mexico and the United States, augmented by some industries, notable mining in Northern Mexico and sugar beets in the United States soon scattered Mexican laborers afar. The stream which built up the Mexican colonies of Kansas in the early part of the twentieth century flowed largely along channels that had been established one or two decades earlier from the original sources of emigration. )

( Motivation for immigration into these channels of movement northward varied with time and circumstances. In the central states of Mexico agriculture was most unfavorable to the peon

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<sup>8</sup>S.I. Esquivel, "The Immigrant From Mexico," The Outlook, 19 May, 1920, p. 131.

<sup>9</sup>Franco, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup>José M. Garcia, personal interview, Topeka, Kansas. 10 March, 1972.

class. The land there had long been monopolized in large holdings.

Prior to the Mexican Revolution in 1910 motivation for removal was largely economic, and later other factors warrant consideration. Grinding poverty, over-population and life bordering on starvation, were reasons enough to send the Mexican peon north in search of a livelihood.)

Those who left Mexico prior to 1910 emigrated because of the desire to gain the bare necessities of life. These necessities Mexico itself could not promise before the Revolution but; it alone gave added incentive for emigration. Not only was economic motivation magnified by the Revolution, but political and religious persecution was added to the growing list of grievances that afflicted Mexico.

The land problem has been one of the keys to Mexico's many ailments. Mexico has been an agricultural country. But who owned the land? One third of all valuable real estate was in the hands of the church, and another third of all arable land was in the hands of a few, the wealthy or favored class. "Some haciendas reached fantastic size . . . one family in Chihuahua, the Terrazas, owned thirty million acres, which is the area of the state of Mississippi."<sup>11</sup>

Most people of Mexico never owned the land. Hacienda life was nothing more than the feudalistic situation that existed during the Middle Ages in Europe except that it continued in Mexico until 1911 without a change. Haciendas were large farms where fifty or more families lived in abject servitude for generations dependent

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<sup>11</sup>John Gunther, Inside Latin America, (New York: 1941), p. 68.

completely upon the owner. For this reason the excess population of the prolific peon class had been obliged to emigrate periodically. This region, "because of its fertility and great production of cereals, and its excess population, has rightly been called the granary and peon purveyor of Mexico."<sup>12</sup> Most of the laborers who entered the United States prior to 1910 from El Paso or westward, with the exception of a few miners from Sonora, were from Chihuahua, and "were originally in peonage, though they may have escaped from this relation some time before migrating north."<sup>13</sup> One such person described conditions through which he lived at one time in a hacienda, "I actually worked for six cents a day and a little food handed to me, just the amount of corn my two hands could hold, that was my daily ration."<sup>14</sup>

Another migrant who arrived in Topeka in the first decade stated that poverty was the rule rather than the exception in the state of Guanajuato.<sup>15</sup> He and his family were near starvation when they began their journey northward towards El Paso.<sup>16</sup> Numerous accounts tell of immigrants from Mexico who were destitute, without money or clothing and how many Mexican laborers that were contracted by the railroads "were weak on account of being underfed, but after being here a month or so they fill out and get

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<sup>12</sup>Gamio, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup>Clark, p. 467.

<sup>14</sup>Franco, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Mack Torrez, personal interview, Topeka, Kansas, 17 April, 1970.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

strong enough to do the work."<sup>17</sup>

( The following account provides a vivid picture of the life that the Mexican immigrant left in Mexico after the onset of the Revolution and gives insight into the perils one faced as he traveled north to the "promised land."

In 1912 I was in such poverty that I decided to come to the United States, as everybody else was. On the train on which we were coming there must have been at least a thousand passengers. Nearly all, like myself, were headed for the United States, to find a new life. For a day and one half I listened to their stories, stories of great anticipation. . . . For two years the Mexican Revolution had worked havoc up and down the country. Bandits had broken loose and spread pandemonium wherever they went. Trains were stopped, passengers robbed, and some times the trains were simply blown up with dynamite. . . . On the second day we notice that the train had come to a sudden stop. The reason? The rails had been torn away and the train could not go any further. The train conductors advised the passengers not to go ahead as bandits were reported to be north of that location. But as we were too close to our destination the passengers would not go back and instead they decided to walk. They walked on the tracks all day for long, weary hours. At night they slept out in the open. There were a lot of women and children too. . . . The following day we got an early start because we wanted to reach Chihuahua as soon as possible. Government troops were stationed there and trains were running on schedule from there. Late in the afternoon, however, as we grew hungrier and more tired, we were suddenly met by government troops who thought we were rebels and they had their 30-30 rifles and machine guns trained on us. As we got closer and they saw we were civilians they came to meet us and when informed of our destination the leader of the army advised us not to go ahead, it was dangerous. The group decided to go

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<sup>17</sup>M. Ganley, "Mexican Track Laborers," Santa Fe Employees Magazine, January, 1913, p. 86; "The Mexican as a Track Laborer," The Railway Age, Vol. 53, 1912, pp. 527-535; Fall Committee Reports "Investigation of Mexican Affairs," Testimony before a Committee on Foreign Relations. Vol. 2. U.S. Senate, (Washington, 1920), pp. 2143-2164.



ahead. They were so close to the United States nothing was to prevent them from reaching their new haven. As the leader of the soldiers saw our determination to go ahead, he finally telegraphed to Chihuahua City for a train to pick up our group. . . . When the train came there were only five cars for the passengers. One thousand people squeezed in, and we made the trip standing up, packed as closely as sardines, but that is how we finally reached this country. We were all tired, hungry, but happy that we reached our goal. . . . I was so hungry that the first thing I did was to sign a contract with the first man that offered me one. I wanted to be shipped out as soon as possible so that I could start making money so I could eat. Then another man came and offered me a contract and offered to feed me right away. I signed the second contract and so did others who had also signed with the first contractor. The same day we took the train and we landed at Olathe, Kansas. From there I<sup>18</sup> came to Wichita and I have been here ever since.

That the economic motivation for immigration was paramount is beyond question. Though political and religious persecution are factors worth mentioning, these motives were held primarily by the middle and creole classes who come in small numbers when compared to the peon class.)

The Mexican people were exploited by foreigners as much as by their own countrymen. They were overrun by the United States in 1845-1848, sold out by Santa Anna, ruled by the French in 1860 and plagued by illiteracy, disease and extreme poverty. All this made the people very sensitive, shy, fatalistic, extremely religious bordering on superstition, skeptical of all politicians and distrustful, with a pessimistic view of life.

These are the people of Mexico who looked northward for employment and escape from poverty as well as the vicissitudes of warfare from the Revolution during the second decade of this

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<sup>18</sup>Quote of Miguel Avila in Franco, pp. 32-34.



century. Their arrival at the Mexican American border was readily welcomed by the contractors of the large agricultural and industrial concerns who most eagerly sought their recruitment and subsequent distribution where their services were most needed. The Mexican peon was indeed a person in need of a new lease on life.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS OF MIGRATION AND RECRUITMENT

The Mexicans who came to Kansas in the first quarter of the twentieth century were making their first trip to the United States or were making a second or third seasonal visit from the interior of Mexico.

One informant noted that he had left his home state of Michoacán initially in 1907 and arrived in Bisbee, Arizona, in the same year. He eventually "worked" his way to Kansas and contracted to work for the Rock Island Railroad near Peck, Kansas, for the remainder of 1907 and the year of 1908. In late 1908 he returned to Mexico because he was homesick, this being his first trip away from home. The next trip to the United States for this laborer occurred in 1914, but he remained in the United States only for a brief period working in Arizona until he returned once again to his family in Michoacán because of sickness in the family. The final trip for this emigrant was in 1917. After this date he remained in the United States, never to return to Mexico.<sup>1</sup> This constant movement across the United States-Mexican border was typical of many Mexican emigrants in the first three decades of this century.

Many of those who emigrated, both before and after the Revolution, did not consider settling on a permanent basis. Many came only as temporary laborers who would work on a six or nine month contract and return to their home in Mexico prior to the winter season in the United States. This ebb and flow of movement and

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<sup>1</sup>Sotero Gil, Abilene, Kansas: personal interview, March 28, 1972.

the methods of migration, recruitment and eventual settlement was a complex process, but one that must be told, if only briefly.

Needing unskilled labor for the construction and maintenance, the Mexican Railways<sup>2</sup> gave the opportunity and the inducement for many to emigrate. These railways first drew upon the agricultural population along their lines, at first for a few days or weeks of temporary service between crops and later for extended periods. At first the peon was unwilling to leave his home and would not work "where he could not sleep under his roof, gradually he became bolder and could be prevailed upon to work for a month or so a hundred miles or more up and down the line."<sup>3</sup> These laborers became accustomed to having silver in their pocket occasionally and found it would exchange for items he had not before thought of having for his personal use. He became attached to cash wages in about the same degree that he became detached from his home surroundings. The railways brought a greater variety of wares and made it possible for mercantile shops to become established in railway towns. Consequently, the railway laborer became more of a spender and also a more persistent earner. Even at desert sidings, often with nothing but an adobe hut in sight, laborers boarded the trains in numbers to buy commodities from the train peddler. The railways thus attracted labor and held it more and more permanently from a consistently widening area along their lines.

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<sup>2</sup>The two most important railroads in Mexico that acted as a conduit for the northward movement were the Mexican Central Railroad that was completed from Mexico City to El Paso, Texas, in 1884, and the Mexican National Railroad that operated from Mexico City to Laredo, Texas. The latter was completed in 1887.

<sup>3</sup>Clark, p. 469.

The railroads that entered Mexico from the United States run for several hundred miles from the border through a desert and very sparsely settled country. Along the northern portion of these routes resident labor was so scarce that workers were brought from the south as section hands and for new construction. This carried the central Mexican villager a thousand miles from his home and within a few miles of the United States border. The American employer, with a gold wage to offer, had little difficulty in attracting the Mexican across the not very formidable dividing line separating the two countries.

Not only were the railroads of Mexico instrumental in supplying labor for the United States, but mines in northern Mexico had to import labor from central Mexico; they too steadily lost labor to the United States. One observer at the border region in 1907 noted that one mining concern in the State of Chihuahua had brought to that vicinity within the year approximately 8,000 mine laborers from Zacatecas and older mining districts of central Mexico only to lose 80 per cent of them to industries in the border States of Arizona and New Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

The combined activities of railroading and mining in Northern Mexico literally brought thousands to the border cities of El Paso and Laredo before the Revolution. This mass movement before the Revolution was indicative of the larger and more sustained movement that occurred after 1910. Previous to 1900 the influx of Mexicans was comparatively unimportant, but by 1908 serious attention was given to the large number of Mexicans entering the United

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 470.

States.<sup>5</sup> Yet, prior to 1917, the year in which the literacy test and head tax were first applied to Mexicans, there were few restrictions placed upon their entrance into the United States. Passports were not even required until 1918. Quite often immigration authorities did not require Mexicans to have money, and they were admitted into the United States freely when there was any demand for their labor. The Mexicans were "usually practically or absolutely without funds."<sup>6</sup> It appears that many penniless Mexicans who would have been rejected at an eastern port were admitted without question at the Mexican border. The restrictions that did exist prior to 1917 were lowered between the period 1917-1921 because of the acute need for laborers in this country.<sup>7</sup> The total number of Mexicans admitted during the period 1917-21, inclusive, was 72,862. Of this number, it was reported June 30, 1921, that 34,922 had returned to Mexico: 414 had died; 494 had been examined for permanent residence, had been found eligible under the laws, had paid head tax, and had been admitted; 21,400 had deserted their employment and disappeared; 15,632, so far as could be ascertained,

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<sup>5</sup>Samuel Bryan, "Mexican Immigrants in the United States," The Survey Vol. 28. September 7, 1912, p. 726-727; Charles P. Howland, ed. "Mexican Immigration," Survey of American Foreign Relations (Council of Foreign Relations, Yale University Press, 1931), Vol. IV, p. 202-203; United States Department of Commerce: Bureau of Immigration, Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908 and 1909).

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate, Reports of the Immigration Commission, Immigrants in Industries, Part 25: Japanese and Other Immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States. (61st Congress, 2nd session, Senate Documents; Vol. 85, part 3, June 15, 1910), (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 27. (Hereinafter referred to as the Dillingham Commission Reports).

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Immigration, Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 12.

were still in the employ of their original importers.<sup>8</sup> This marked increase of Mexicans into the United States for the 1917-1921 period was also indicated in the State of Kansas for the same period. Table 3 gives a representative view of this phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

TABLE 3

DATE OF ARRIVAL FOR MEXICANS ENTERING  
THE UNITED STATES WHO WERE  
RESIDING IN FOUR CITIES  
OF KANSAS, 1925.

Kansas City		Dodge City		Wichita		Newton	
Date	Number	Date	Number	Date	Number	Date	Number
1898-1899	3	1902	7	1898-1900	5	1901-1902	9
1900-1902	11	1905-1908	9	1901-1904	17	1903-1906	3
1903-1905	20	1909-1912	23	1905-1908	64	1907-1910	20
1906-1908	22	1913-1917	44	1909	4	1911-1912	10
1909-1911	71	1918-1921	58	1910-1913	90	1913-1914	27
1912-1914	101	1922-1924	14	1914-1916	96	1915-1916	41
1915-1917	243			1917	67	1917-1920	89
1918-1920	350			1918-1921	194	1921-1922	19
1921-1923	233			1922-1924	56	1923	31
1924-1925	140					1924	19
						1925	9

Roughly half of the Mexicans who immigrated to the United States for the 1917-1921 period had not returned to Mexico by June 30, 1921. This percentage of illegal immigrants represents a similar trend that characterize the entire movement of Mexicans northward until the late 1920's. The movement of illegal Mexicans

<sup>8</sup> Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration, 1921, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> State of Kansas, "Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1925," for the cities of Wichita, Newton, Kansas City and Dodge City.

was hardly clandestine when permitted by the immigration officials at border points such as El Paso. Yet, illegal entry away from the official border crossings appears to be the rule rather than the exception, but those who wanted immediate employment usually turned to such cities as Laredo, Eagle Pass or El Paso.

After entering the border city of El Paso, the most important city for distribution into the United States because of its direct railway communication, the Mexicans were met by representatives of American employment agencies. These agencies stood ready to advance board, lodging and transportation to a place where work was to be gained and "immigration officials have usually deemed no Mexican likely to become a public charge so long as this was the case."<sup>10</sup>

(The agencies which recruited Mexicans for railroad work in Kansas were mainly of two types. Some were employment agents who shipped Mexicans for a fee, and often this was paid by the railroad rather than by the immigrant. Other agencies were commissary companies which supplied men as a secondary line of business. These latter companies were interested in keeping the extra gangs up to authorized strength in order to maintain at a high level the receipts from sales on commissary goods. Some of these companies did not charge fees; others did when conditions in the labor market enabled them to do it. The two commissary supply companies which had contracts with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway were the Holmes Supply and the Hanlin Supply companies.<sup>11</sup> Other

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<sup>10</sup>Bryan, p. 727.

<sup>11</sup>Dillingham Commission Reports, pp. 12-13; The Newton Kansan, 22 August 1922, pp. 22-23.



southwestern and western railway companies, including the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific, also relied upon similar companies to supply them with Mexican laborers.<sup>12</sup>

(As early as 1902, the Santa Fe Railroad made a contract with the Holmes Supply Company to furnish them Mexican laborers.<sup>13</sup> For many years prior to 1902 it was difficult for the Santa Fe to secure any kind of labor through the desert country of New Mexico, Arizona and California, for common labor used in the track department especially; but in that year the Mexicans began an exodus to this country from Mexico, and the Santa Fe readily sought the employment of this new class of labor.<sup>14</sup> Shortly before 1900, harsh economic conditions in Mexico and increasing labor demands in Texas combined to give a new impetus to the immigration.<sup>15</sup> Long before 1900, the Santa Fe employed miscellaneous whites, Indians, Mexicans (largely native or "New Mexicans"), Japanese, and some Chinese, but these groups had largely withdrawn from railroad work

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<sup>12</sup>Dillingham Commission Reports, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 13. The Holmes Supply Company was a very strong organization that had stores scattered along the Santa Fe mainline between El Paso, Texas, almost to San Francisco. Its stores were located, other than the above points, at Isleta, New Mexico; Williams and Winslow, Arizona; Needles, Barstow, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Cocoran, and Fresno, California.

<sup>14</sup>J.C. Rockhold, "Passing of the Indian Sectionman," The Santa Fe Employees Magazine, June, 1909, p. 748.

<sup>15</sup>U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Interstate Migration, (76th Congress, 3rd Session, Part 5, Oklahoma City Hearings, September, 19, 20, 1940) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940), p. 1802. Incorporated into these hearings is a vivid and extensive history of immigration of Mexicans into Texas and the despersion of migratory workers from Texas to other states. (Hereinafter referred to as Interstate Migration, Oklahoma Hearings).



and followed other pursuits.<sup>16</sup>

Evidently, the performance of the Mexican laborers became an overwhelming success and met all the expectations of the Santa Fe officials. One official, R.A. Rutledge of La Junta, Colorado, a graduate from the University of Kansas and Chief Engineer of the Santa Fe, stated in the mid 1920's that "We have let the Greeks and Italians go, ninety per cent of all our track men from the coast to Chicago are Mexicans. . . . The Mexicans were an experiment at first. We gave them poor section shacks made of ties piled up and plastered; but now we are giving them good concrete or tile houses. The Mexicans cannot be driven like the Negro, but anyone who knows how to manage Mexicans can get more work out of them than any other class. They must be kept contented. Many will not stay until they get their families from Mexico. Mexicans are not all peons."<sup>17</sup>

The Holmes Supply Company provided the Santa Fe with Mexican laborers and commissary supplies for its extra and section gangs west of Albuquerque. This company must have performed such a superb job for the Santa Fe on its "coast lines" that Santa Fe officials desired a similar service for its systems to the north

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<sup>16</sup>It appears that the Chinese became too scarce to employ; the Anglos found employment elsewhere that could pay better wages than those received by maintenance of way laborers; the Indians became "unsteady and prone to leave employment after a short time;" the Japanese for a short period (1900-1901) constituted three-fourths of the common laborers from Albuquerque west to the coast, but were "less strong and less satisfactory than the Mexicans." Furthermore, the latter "were unsuited to the climate and unsatisfactory in other ways." Dillingham Commission Reports, pp. 12-13.

<sup>17</sup>Vernon McCombs, From Over the Border, (New York: Council of Women for Home Missionary Education Movement, 1925), p. 22.

and east of El Paso.<sup>18</sup> Such a service was not long in coming.

What eventually became the Hanlin Supply Company, which was incorporated in 1908, started out in 1905 as a one commissary car operation on the middle division of the Santa Fe system.<sup>19</sup> By 1906, this business venture had grown considerably and "more

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<sup>18</sup>The author has tried three different locations on the Santa Fe system to obtain records or other data which he felt would be pertinent to this research topic. What was specifically desired were payroll and personnel records which would have given some idea as to the relationship that existed between the Santa Fe management and its Mexican employees. Secondly, the author desired data pertaining to the exact relationship between the companies that supplied them Mexican labor and commissary goods for their gang laborers, e.g. Hanlin Supply. Regretfully, none of this data was obtained. In seeking this information, the first location, the Emporia division office of Santa Fe replied that what history they had (on the Mexicans) was by no means complete as Santa Fe "did not begin to keep records on them to any extent until the last few years." Letter to the author from the Emporia division superintendent dated January 25, 1972. The second location, Topeka offices, informed the author that they had no suggestions as to where information on this subject might be located at Santa Fe. Letter dated March 10, 1972 to the author from the public relations office. Later, in an interview with the regional manager and assistant of the public relations department on March 14, 1972, the author was informed that "only recently has the corporation adopted a policy of central record keeping," and that "in the early periods of the Railroad's operation each department was autonomous and retained or discarded records as they saw fit." Finally, the author gave up on trying to obtain information from a corporation that employed members of this ethnic group by the thousands. This decision was reached only after writing to the executive offices of Santa Fe which are located in Chicago. From this source he was informed that data and records which would have been beneficial, "had not been retained." It was also pointed out that "complete file retention for a 100-year old company of the size of Santa Fe is not practical." The author concurs. Letter dated June 27, 1972 from the president of the Santa Fe Railroad, John S. Reed, to the author.

<sup>19</sup>The Newton Kansan, August 22, 1922, pp. 22-23. The middle division of the Santa Fe at this time was that system of track that run west of Newton, Kansas, to La Junta, Colorado and included part of Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle.

[commissary] cars were requested for other divisions."<sup>20</sup> In 1908 a contract was entered into between this supply company and the Santa Fe "whereby the Hanlin Supply Company was to supply commissary for all extra gang labor on the railway company's lines between Chicago and El Paso."<sup>21</sup> This Company also maintained a special labor bureau for the handling of Mexican track workers for the Santa Fe at its El Paso offices.

There can be little doubt that this supply company recruited thousands of Mexican laborers at El Paso for the Santa Fe system, and eventually many of these same laborers were employed throughout the State of Kansas on the Santa Fe lines.<sup>22</sup> They were principally used in extra gangs at first, but a considerable number became section hands and settled permanently in Kansas.

The Santa Fe Railroad could have also been supplied Mexican laborers from other supply companies working out of El Paso other than the two previously mentioned. One of these larger companies supplied from El Paso no fewer than 6,474 Mexican labors to four

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., presumably requested by the Santa Fe.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., this commissary company had branch offices and ware houses in the following cities: Fort Madison, Iowa; Pueblo, Colorado; Amarillo, Texas and El Paso, Texas. Its main office was in Newton, Kansas, which has long been a division point for the Santa Fe. The Hanlin Supply Company, now defunct, went out of business in the 1950's. Letter from Mrs. H. Kirk, former secretary to the President of Hanlin, to the author, July 12, 1972.

<sup>22</sup>Interviews -- Numerous informants have told the author of their acquaintance with this commissary company when it operated at a peak in the 1920's and 1930's. This supply and commissary company was supplying the Santa Fe with laborers as late as the 1950's. Russ Cuellar, Newton, Kansas, personal interview, April 23, 1972. In the 1950's the Santa Fe Railroad stopped using extra gangs on its lines for the primary reason that they had mechanized their track repair work and often used labor from towns adjacent to the area where work was being done. These changes did not necessitate the use of extra gangs any longer. Letter dated July 12, 1972 from H. Kirk, Newton, Kansas to the author.

large railroad companies during the period between January and September, 1907, and six companies supplied, 16,479 Mexicans to various railroad companies for an eight month period from late 1907 into the year 1908.<sup>23</sup>

The need for laborers was so acute during and immediately after World War I, that all sorts of inducements were offered. Employment agents, contractors or enganchistas, as they were known to the Mexicans, were at the border to offer contracts to Mexican men as soon as they crossed the line. These contractors competed with one another and received a bonus in proportion to the number of contracts obtained. In their eagerness to secure more workers these contractors even crossed the border into Mexico advertising the wonderful opportunities in the United States and the big wages being paid.<sup>24</sup>

Enganchistas played an important role in the movements of many, particularly in their longer moves. This mobility was pointed out by an informant to Paul Taylor in 1932.

In 1920, I happened to be in Ciudad Juarez right across from El Paso. There I fell in with an enganchista from the Santa Fe (Railroad). I went to work for the Santa Fe and in a year's time I was in Kansas City. When

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<sup>23</sup>Bryan, pp. 727-728. It is pure conjecture to attempt to realize what company supplied so many Mexican laborers to which railroad for a given period. During the period from 1900 to 1915 the largest railroads other than the Santa Fe, running into El Paso include the Southern Pacific, Western Pacific, Colorado and Southern, Denver and Rio Grande Western, Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific, and El Paso and Southwestern. Other smaller railroads operating in this region also used Mexican employees quite extensively.

<sup>24</sup>Fall Committee Reports, pp. 2144-2145. This method of procuring labor was in operation prior to the Mexican Revolution and continued into the 1920's. For the early period see Clark, p. 471 and Gamio, pp. 204-207, for the operations in the post war period.

the work gave out there I went back to El Paso. There, in the spring of 1923 I fell in again with another enganchista. He represented some steel mill people in Illinois. I came to Illinois in a special train with hundreds of other Mexican laborers who had been picked up like myself.<sup>25</sup>

Illegal entrance into the United States carried with it the constant risk of deportation, but the consequences of being deported hardly deterred those who were determined to cross the border.

(In view of the poverty, timidity and general inexperience of the immigrants, and the racial prejudice which existed against them in the American border states, illegal entrance could not have been so prevalent were it not for other and more decisive factors. The immediate forces which moved illegal immigration were, first of all, the smugglers or "coyotes" who facilitated illegal entrance to Mexican immigrants, and the contractors or enganchistas who provided them with work. The smuggler and the contractor were an intimate and powerful alliance from Calexico, California, to Brownsville, Texas. Second, but indirectly, the origin of illegal immigration was to be found in the farmers and ranchers, and railroad, mining, and other enterprises to which Mexican labor was supposedly indispensable.)

(For the period 1900-1930, the activities of private employment agencies and labor agents dominated the Mexican migrant labor situation in the southwest practically unchecked. Though soliciting labor from one side of the Rio Grande River to the other was contrary to both Mexico and United States laws, for years, as late as

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<sup>25</sup> Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and Calumet Region, p. 75.

the early 1930's, it went on under cover. "Just across the river [Rio Grande] were stationed the offices of contractors or enganchistas, who made or clinched the final labor bargains, and the contractors were paid from 50 cents to \$1.00 for each worker they supplied to soliciting ranches, railroads, or other enterprises."<sup>26</sup>

(Testifying before a select committee of the House of Representatives in 1940, an official of the Texas State Employment Service noted that, "smugglers at times were employed by big commercial, industrial and agricultural enterprises, and that when labor [Mexican] was scarce, they paid the smugglers so much for each worker imported; when labor was plentiful, they maintained the smuggler on a salary basis."<sup>27</sup>)

One victim of this activity stated that when he had reached the United States-Mexican border in Texas in 1917, rather than enter legally and possibly be denied entry because he might not be able to meet entry requirements, he and his father sought the services of a smuggler who successfully brought them to the United States side of the border, but in the process "we were overcharged two dollars from what it would have cost had we entered at the appropriate port of entry."<sup>28</sup> Such were the risks of those who sought to enter this country illegally. No doubt many Mexicans who arrived in Kansas choose this method of entry rather than risk being denied entrance through legal channels.

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<sup>26</sup> Interstate Migration, Oklahoma City, Hearings, p. 885.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Chencho Alfaro, Newton, Kansas, personal interview. March 4, 1972.



Between 1900 and the depression period in the United States these laboring immigrants came, worked six or nine month periods, and then went back to Mexico if they desired. If one was employed on the railroad gangs he worked for a specified period of time and was returned to the border. Some Mexicans quite frequently came to the United States with the expectation of returning home after a short time. The railway companies realizing this desire, returned the Mexican to the border without charge or at reduced rates.<sup>29</sup> One railway official in southern Kansas stated that they "had to send a man every spring to Rio Grande to get men for the summer. . . . We have to keep our engagements with them, or we can't get any men the next year."<sup>30</sup> In this manner, many Mexicans were employed continuously from one season to the next for the same railroad and quite frequently in the same geographical location.

Usually it was the males, married or single, who ventured north in search of employment. Sometimes if the railroad men were single they might return to their homes in Mexico or might venture into other employment. In the period prior to the Revolution the Mexican laborer usually migrated only for short periods:

When the rains begin, usually about May, he must be at home to plant his crop. After that he is willing to work during the growing period, leaving his family to attend to irrigation and weeding; but he must be at home for the harvest. From that time until the

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<sup>29</sup>Dillingham Commission Report, p. 28; testimony of E.E. McInnis, p. 105. The Santa Fe policy was, upon compliance with certain conditions, to give the Mexican laborers free transportation to the point where he was employed. In most cases the compliance was that one had to be employed nine continuous months and then would be returned to El Paso.

<sup>30</sup>Clark, p. 477.

fiestas ending when the December holidays are over, the labor market in Mexico is tight; from January to May the workman is willing to go anywhere provided it is not too cold. This seasonal variation in the labor supply accounts in part for the comparatively short periods for which immigrants come to the United States. Many of those passing through El Paso have made the trip from central Mexico to Arizona or to Kansas City for a second or third time, but after a number of such trips the home tie loosens, and it is not unusual for the family ultimately to accompany the husband, thus taking the next step toward a permanent removal,<sup>31</sup> either across the border or to its vicinity.

In 1907 the emigrating months along the Mexican Central Railway were February, March and April; September and October were the months in which Mexicans returned. After the Revolution began the economic, social and political situation was altered considerably, and many of the Mexicans who left after 1910 exhibited little desire to return to their homeland until normal conditions prevailed once again.<sup>32</sup>

(Though conditions in Mexico had stabilized by the early 1920's, many Mexicans in Kansas chose to remain on a permanent basis. A great many of them did not have relatives left in Mexico, and some had lost track even of their friends during the Revolution. Many also remembered how much they had suffered when they had lived in Mexico. The fact that conditions had changed did not make an impact in their thinking; to them, Mexico was still the same.)

(Others had become somewhat adjusted to life in the United States and some had children born here. When these various factors

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 473-474.

<sup>32</sup>Manuel Gamio, The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), passim.



were taken into consideration many had little desire to return to their homeland. In many cases temporary employment gave way to permanent work, which led in turn to settlement.)

## CHAPTER IV

### PATTERNS OF DISTRIBUTION

(The Mexican immigrant was introduced into Kansas mainly by the railroads. An observer noted in 1907 that "Kansas City, Missouri, is given as their destination by many Mexican arrivals at El Paso, and that city is resorted to by them as an employment center."<sup>1</sup>) The printed State census of 1905 did not at that time have a category that could include those born outside the country. Persons born elsewhere were evidently entered under the heading "not stated": it included such groups as Orientals as well as Mexicans. For three cities "not stated" in 1905 there was recorded: Kansas City 35, Topeka 23, Wichita 52; the figures for the counties of Wyandotte, Shawnee and Sedgwick was 54, 34 and 67 respectively. The census was taken as of March 1, when the railroads had not yet sent out the extra gangs to their summer's work. Such gangs made up of Mexicans were probably at work in Kansas as early as 1902-1903.

(Railroad employment occupied most of the 8,429 Mexicans in Kansas who were born in Mexico according to the United States Census of 1910, but sugar beet production was already under way in the Garden City area and salt mining had recently increased greatly at Hutchinson, Lyons and Kanopolis. Also there was work in the meat packing plants, particularly in Kansas City, but the Topeka and Wichita plants also had a labor demand. Until the period of World War II there were few Mexican workers outside of these occupations.)

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<sup>1</sup>Clark, p. 475.

Not all the rail lines employed many Mexicans in Kansas, but at least six major lines employed them as late as 1930<sup>2</sup> and no doubt employed them during World War II. The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railways were the two railroads most instrumental in the employment of Mexicans and consequently in the movement of Mexicans from the southwest into Kansas. As some became unhappy with railroad work they drifted into other kinds of unskilled labor positions. Mexicans would leave a job frequently after working a few days and "are constantly lured away from railways by farmers and ranchers."<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 1907, 30 per cent of those employed by the railroads in southern Kansas were said to have deserted to work in the wheat fields.<sup>4</sup> No doubt the principal reason for leaving railroad work for other occupations was the unsteady employment for the railroads and the desire by Mexicans to be near their families. It should also be remembered that in most industries, the menial laborer, the pick and shovel man, was the easiest hired and the quickest fired.

The turnover of track laborers was constantly high on the railroad, at least until the depression period. The Santa Fe Railroad, which may be taken as fairly representative, employed a total of 14,300 Mexicans on all its lines in 1928, and it had

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<sup>2</sup>Governor C.M. Reed, Mss. Kansas State Historical Society, Mexican Labor Files, Topeka, Kansas. Letter dated 20 November 1930 of Clyde M. Reed to the presidents of the following railroads: Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe; Missouri Pacific; Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific; Union Pacific, Missouri-Kansas-Texas and the St. Louis-San Francisco.

<sup>3</sup>Clark, pp. 471-472.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

a turnover of 300 per cent each year among these laborers.<sup>5</sup>

(Those who did not remain with the railroads were fed into other occupations throughout the State or returned via El Paso or Laredo to Old Mexico. From all the railroads there appeared to be a drift outward, sometimes a true exodus, to other work, but the southwestern railroads, such as the Rock Island and Santa Fe, could tap the supplier on the border with such ease that losing Mexican laborers did not disturb them too greatly.)

(Prior to permanent settlement in Kansas many Mexican laborers worked on extra gangs throughout the state. These men were usually solos who were quite nomadic much to the liking of the single men who had left their families behind, but some mention is made of men in extra gangs who had their families with them.<sup>6</sup>)

(The work of these men was not conducive to permanent settlement in communities as they had no permanent place of abode. They (extra gangs) "live in cars adopted as living quarters and the commissary goes with the cars . . . that is taken across country here to a place where an embankment has washed out and major repairs are required . . . the work being through, they either may be laid off or transferred up here to straighten a curve or reduce a grade, or transferred for the purpose of moving a track to get it away from high water or lay new track or to put in double track. . . . It is here today and yonder tomorrow. . . . It does not know

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<sup>5</sup>Robert M. McLean, That Mexican: As He Really is North and South of the Rio Grande (New York: F.H. Revell Company, 1928), p. 134.

<sup>6</sup>Clark, p. 480.

where it is going to be today or where it is going to be tomorrow."<sup>7</sup> Seldom did these men have contact with communities nearby and only gradually, when the railroads felt this type of laborer was indispensable, did they encourage their permanence.<sup>8</sup> )

( Quite frequently extra gang employment led to work on section gangs, that is, on maintenance crew assigned to specific sections of the track line. This type of work led to the first Mexican communities in the State of Kansas, but other employment with the railroads, principally the Santa Fe, led to the same result. )

( Mexican labor gangs at round houses and shops (equipment, repair or construction points) were common in Kansas by 1910. Most of the Mexicans in Topeka prior to this date were not employed on section or extra gangs but in the Santa Fe Shops.<sup>9</sup> Other communities in Kansas with these facilities included such cities as Kansas City, Wichita, Newton and Emporia. Only gradually did stable Mexican communities evolve, and this came generally with employment on railroads or in the employment at salt or sugar beet processing centers. But even in the latter areas of Garden City, Hutchinson and Lyons, Mexicans were also employed as railroad laborers. )

( The patterns of distribution in Kansas of Mexicans were largely dictated by the needs of the railroads. These settlements varied in size and location considerably; they might range from a small

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<sup>7</sup>Statement of E.E. McInnis, General Solicitor Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway System, before Committee on Immigration, U.S. Senate, Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration. Seventeenth Congress, 1st session. February 29, 1928, p. 105. (Hereinafter referred to as Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration)

<sup>8</sup>L.C. Lawton, "Erecting Mexican Laborer's Houses," The Santa Fe Employees Magazine, September, 1911, p. 75.

<sup>9</sup>Peter Earle, "The Mexicans of Topeka," p. 1.

settlement of section workers practically in the open country as at Barclay, which is between Emporia and Osage City, or to a larger number who lived adjacent to Melvern, Kansas, or to large division points such as Newton where hundreds were employed in the Santa Fe shops as early as 1925.)

The argument against not dealing with the small Mexican communities statistically and with the early immigrants to large settlements is well illustrated by a note of 1905 written by a census taker at Herington: "I find a class of railroad men that it is impossible to get any information in regard to their names, age or birthplace . . . [part are] laborers in bunk cars that make head quarters here and are in and out, this being a division point."<sup>10</sup>

The larger Mexican groups assembled at railroad division points or at the terminal of branch lines. Though some of these collapsed with the decline in the fortunes of the railroads in 1930's and 1940's, especially those along the Rock Island lines, the Mexican colonies in general persisted in these towns.

Geographically, Mexican immigration in Kansas differed from other immigrant groups in approaching the state from the south. Occupational opportunities in Kansas City drew many in that direction, and that city acted as a distribution center for Mexican movement north and east.<sup>11</sup>

(Immediately west of the coal fields in southeast Kansas many Mexicans established themselves in such cities as Chanute, Parsons,

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<sup>10</sup>State of Kansas, "Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1905." Dickinson County, City of Herington.

<sup>11</sup>Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States, Chicago and the Calumet Region, Vol. 7, p. 63 and 67.

Coffeyville and Independence largely because this area in the days when the local gas fields were productive had industrial development that brought railroads much business. Throughout the state the settlements became important where the Santa Fe and Rock Island Railroads served the communities with the greatest variety of economic productivity along their lines. This to a certain extent was in the Kaw and the Arkansas River Valleys. The settlement at Emporia provided an important intermediary between the valleys, those at Herington and Florence were others.

( To the north and west of Kansas City and Topeka the Mexican in railroad centers such as Horton (shops) and Phillipsburg (engine change) on the Rock Island may be regarded as a feed back from the former cities as the railroad network provided no direct access from Mexico. Consequently, the Mexican colonies remained relatively small when they did establish themselves in that part of the state and never profited by the general movement of Mexicans toward larger towns when railroad employment decreased.)

Distribution of Mexicans throughout the state can be better told by the State and Federal Census reports, but census reports on Mexicans appear to be unreliable in some instances. Yet, Kansas census reports on Mexicans are more reliable than for the Southwestern states because there was no question of confusion with older Spanish-speaking groups.

The census figures, which appear in Table 4, taken by the State of Kansas in 1915 and 1925, are believed unreliable because of under enumeration. They show fewer Mexicans in both those years than the United States Census show in 1910, 1920 and 1930. Over enumeration appears not to be the case of 1910, 1920 and 1930 because witnesses to the growth of individual Mexican commu-

nities agree that there were more Mexicans in Kansas in 1915 than in 1910, and probably more in 1925 than in 1920, certainly more than in 1930 when the tide had begun to recede slightly.

The 1930 census reports did not distinguish the foreign born among "Mexicans" from their children. Then, "Mexicans" were classified with "other Races," that is, not white or Negro, and were defined as persons of Mexican birth or parentage who were not definitely reported as white or Indian.

TABLE 4

MEXICAN FOREIGN BORN OF 1915 AND 1925 KANSAS CENSUS AND OF UNITED STATES CENSUSES, INCLUDING "MEXICANS" OF 1930 CENSUS.<sup>a</sup>  
(FOR COUNTIES OF PRINCIPAL INTEREST)

1905	1910	1920	County	Principal Mexican Settlement	1915	1925	1930 <sup>a</sup>
..	169	449	Butler	Eldorado	62	113	351
..	62	141	Chase	Strong City	..	122	387
..	..	..	..	Saffordville	..	..	..
..	87	379	Cowley	Arkansas City	60	48	470
..	..	..	..	Winfield	..	..	..
..	125	257	Dickinson	Herington	104	245	341
..	107	62	Edwards	Kinsley	..	53	140
..	67	96	Ellsworth	Kanopolis	52	122	229
..	137	234	Finney	Garden City	134	268	571
..	366	369	Ford	Dodge City	196	240	614
..	47	236	Franklin	Ottawa	..	46	209
..	395	387	Harvey	Newton	119	373	595
..	9	229	Labette	Parsons	8	88	287
..	224	428	Lyon	Emporia	232	207	591
..	133	406	Marion	Florence	233	182	369
..	230	328	Montgomery	Coffeyville	313	143	358
..	..	..	..	Independence	..	..	..
..	46	496	Neosho	Chanute	41	70	420
..	456	467	Reno	Hutchinson	168	303	473
..	109	191	Rice	Lyons	22	159	318
..	35	167	Saline	Salina	31	145	334
67	562	893	Sedgwick	Wichita	357	741	1444
34	376	915	Shawnee	Topeka	469	962	1864
10	837	307	Sumner	Wellington	101	210	510
54	152	2209	Wyandotte	Kansas City	506	1752	2911

<sup>a</sup>"Mexicans" as earlier defined.



Other counties with more than 100 Mexicans in 1930 were Barber 158, Barton 165, Brown 463, Elk 355, Gray 103, Morris 119, Osage 173, Phillips 102, Pottawatomie 154, and Scott 107. The people of Elk county reported that Mexicans were never numerous among them. The 1930 count there has been explained by the presence of an extra gang. Similar explanations probably apply to Barber, Gray, Pottawatomie and Scott counties. Mexicans in Barton, Morris and Osage counties were distributed in several points, though the county seats contained the largest numbers.

As the figures indicate in Table 4 and in Table 1 (page 14) Mexicans in Kansas were very conspicuous by 1910 and by the early 1920's their number had doubled. It was not until 1929-1930 that a reduction in numbers occurred, but by this date definite and stable communities had been developed. No doubt extreme geographic mobility of the Mexicans, at least that exhibited by those employed in extra gangs of railroads, accounts for some of the discrepancies that appear in the census figures. It should be remembered also that many of these first generation immigrants arrived in the state as aliens and maintained this status for many years. Consequently, it was often difficult for them to develop "roots" or a liking for a given community, and this might frequently result in movement into a new community or a different state, possibly a new occupation.

Yet, one can detect the patterns of Mexican distribution in the State of Kansas for the period 1900-1930. By and large it was determined by their employment with the railroads and to a lesser degree by the demands of the salt, sugar and meat packing industries. Also because of the few skills which the Mexican immigrant possessed to a certain extent dictated his position in the available

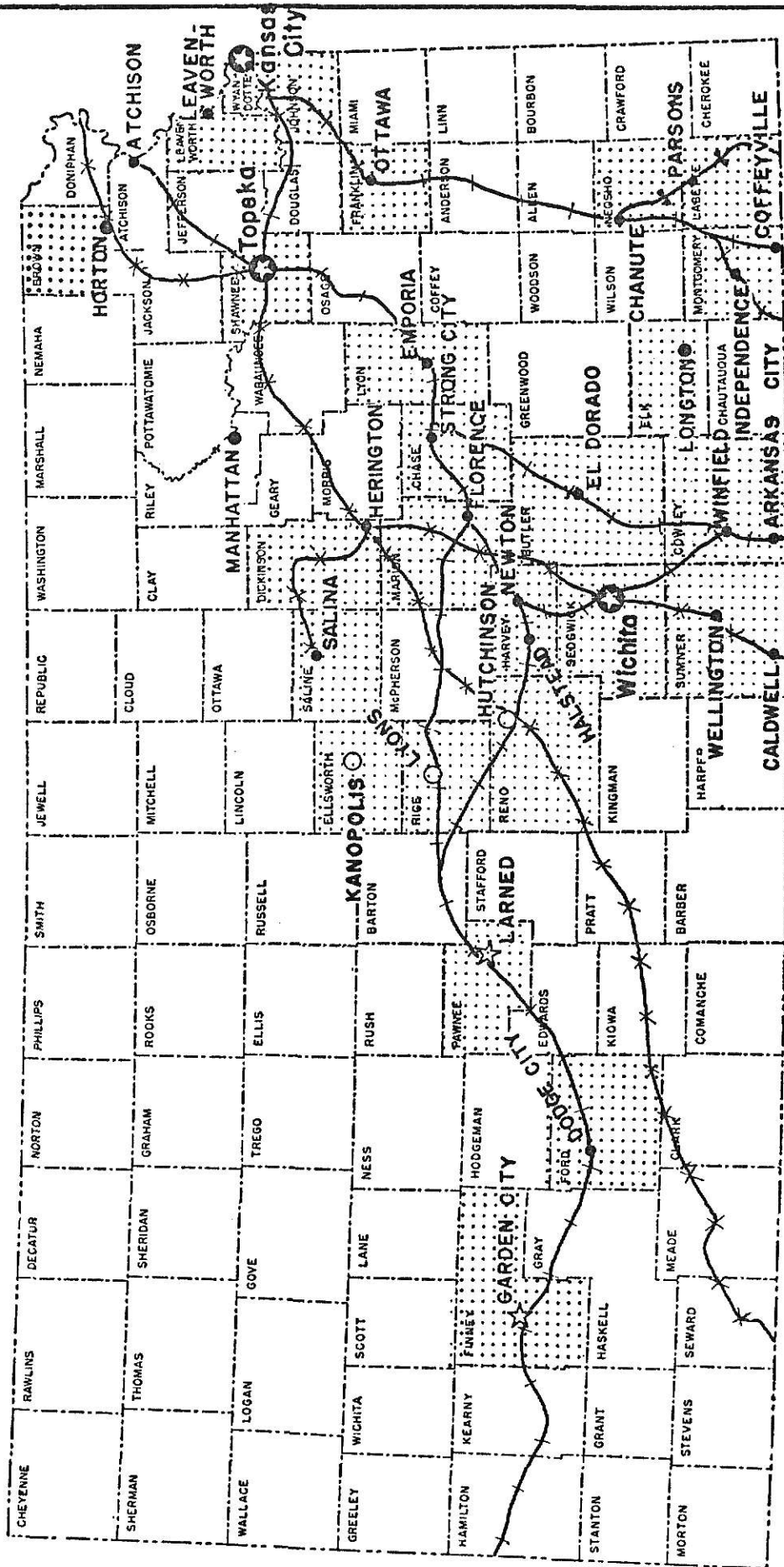
labor market of Kansas and his consequent place of settlement.

The various steps taken by the Mexican, from the actual process of immigrating from Old Mexico to eventual settlement in Kansas, was for some a long and arduous experience, for others short and requiring less adjustment, but for all a new and alien environment with which to cope.

**THIS BOOK  
CONTAINS  
NUMEROUS PAGES  
WITH DIAGRAMS  
THAT ARE CROOKED  
COMPARED TO THE  
REST OF THE  
INFORMATION ON  
THE PAGE.**

**THIS IS AS  
RECEIVED FROM  
CUSTOMER.**

# Mexicans in Kansas



**Shaded counties contain 190 or more Mexicans — 1930**

● R.R. Center      ★ R.R. & Packing center      ○ Salt Mine      ☆ Sugar center

— A.T.&SF — \* — C.R.I.&P. — — M.K.T.

From: Carman, J. Neale, Foreign-Language Units of Kansas:  
I. Historical Atlas and Statistics, Lawrence, Kansas:  
University of Kansas Press: 1962 (p. 40).

## CHAPTER V

### MEXICANS IN KANSAS: 1900-1940

#### EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

(The migrant generation, the generation of the 1900-1940 period, had its cultural orientation and loyalties invested in Mexico for obvious reasons. Upon arriving and settling in Kansas it experienced the normal nostalgia that all immigrants tend to have for the old country, but in addition it met harsh social rejection and isolation that made the cultural loyalty all the stronger. As a group the Mexicans up until World War II occupied in Kansas a role of separation often stigmatized with inferiority.

The non-employing groups in the various Kansas communities and cities often treated the Mexicans with less consideration than their direct employers. At best, their welcome was generally as laborers, rather than as people.

In the summer of 1910 a group of Mexican gang laborers journeyed to Kinsley, Kansas, to work at railroad track maintenance. When their train arrived nearly the entire town was there to see them. Undoubtedly, it was quite a novelty to see the "new foreigners." Their garments and their race marked them, they were picturesque with their characteristic clothing and broad palm sombreros.<sup>1</sup> The arrival of the Mexicans was no doubt a curiosity to the citizenry of Kinsley, but this introduction was probably the normal reaction as additional members of this ethnic group made their way into numerous communities across Kansas in the first quarter of the twentieth century.)

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<sup>1</sup>Franco, p. 32.

Many of these Mexicans would return to their homeland, but a large percentage would remain and seek permanent settlement because their services were in demand by the railroads and agricultural interests. Others would work in such industries as meat packing and salt mining while some would toil for a limited period in the coal mines<sup>2</sup> of southeastern Kansas, but the greatest number, initially attracted toward railroad employment, would until World War II and immediately thereafter remain as the primary element in the upkeep and maintenance of railroads in Kansas.

In the rural Southwest, Mexican labor has been the dominant element in the supply practically ever since intensive agriculture developed. Indeed, in smaller numbers the Mexican preceded agriculture, serving originally as vaquero and pastor for dueños of his own nationality or as an independent owner of his own flock or herd.

In Kansas, however, he was, relatively speaking a latecomer compared to other immigrant groups, what industry there was in such larger cities of Kansas City, Topeka and Wichita had already reached a high state of development, and had been accustomed to receiving immigrant laborers from Europe. With the exception of the meat-packing industry and railroads in these cities, the demand for Mexican laborers was almost nonexistent. Had there

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<sup>2</sup>Little evidence points to the employment of Mexicans in the coal fields. A national study conducted by the U.S. Immigration Commission in 1911 makes little mention of Mexican workers in the coal producing area of southeastern Kansas, but this study does point out that Mexicans were employed by the hundreds in the adjacent coal fields of Oklahoma. Slight mention is made of Mexicans employed in the Kansas coal fields by J.W. Carman in his unpublished work on "Foreign Language Units in Kansas." See especially Volume II, p. 223 to note the declining significance of Mexicans between 1910-1930 in Crawford County.

been a great demand for his services it is doubtful if the Mexican could have qualified because of his limited education and the language barrier. Because of these handicaps, the Mexican had little choice but to accept employment that bordered on menial labor and was largely unskilled. The positions that the members of this ethnic group came to occupy had long been beginning points for older immigrants and work that many Anglos looked down upon because of the low wages offered and the poor working conditions. In essence, the Mexican in Kansas filled the vacuum that existed because of the lack of unskilled labor.)

( Arriving from a society whose economy was based essentially upon agrarian standard, the Mexican had few credentials to offer in the way of education. The Díaz Administration, that which ruled Mexico from 1876 until its downfall in 1910, did not establish a single school for the lower classes or Indians. As late as 1910, seventy per cent of Mexico's rural population were illiterate.<sup>3</sup> It should similarly be noted that "nothing in Mexico can be understood without bearing in mind that until a few years ago the Indians [and most Mestizos] were economically enslaved, intellectually disinherited and politically eliminated."<sup>4</sup>)

( Coming from a culture that did not prize mass education, finding it necessary to put even his elementary-age children to work, and perhaps feeling frustratedly that an education would not help him overcome the prejudices and disdainful treatment he received, the Mexican failed drastically to take advantage of the educational

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<sup>3</sup> Henry B. Parkes, A History of Mexico (Boston: 1970), p. 398.

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey, "Mexico's Educational Renaissance," The New Republic XLVIII, No. 616, (September, 1926), p. 116.



opportunities open to him in the United States. Of all the groups listed in the United States Census of 1930, he had the lowest percentage of school attendance<sup>5</sup> a factor of course that in the long run militated against him and his future advancement.)

(In Kansas, an equal negative portrayal of the Mexicans' achievements can be noted. The immigrant parent, after arrival in the State, had little chance for formal education. With a few exceptions, if education was considered at all, it was in terms of education for his children, and this was dependent upon the attitude of the parent as to the immediate value of an education. Quite often Mexican children supplemented the family income by working beside the parent in the sugar beet fields of Western Kansas. Such employment was looked upon as a family endeavor, totally divorced from everything but the all-important monetary effort to be gained.)

(In the railroad industry, elementary-age boys were employed as waterboys in and around railroad shop areas. Other work categories were also filled by Mexican adolescents in railroad work. Many children who attended school had to leave before graduation "in order to supplement the meager family income with their earnings."<sup>6</sup>)

(By using literacy rates and school attendance as criteria, it can be determined that in 1925 a vast majority of Mexicans in Kansas were in need of acquiring the English language and children

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<sup>5</sup>1930 U.S. Census: Population, 2: 1094-1095.

<sup>6</sup>Ricart, p. 40; see also Paul S. Taylor for an overview of education of Mexicans in the United States, Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region (Berkeley: 1932), vol. 7, p. 172.



of school age were not receiving an education. In Topeka, ninety-two percent of the first generation Mexicans were listed as illiterate and only a little over fifty percent of their offspring of school age were attending school.<sup>7</sup> Data for the Mexican communities at Emporia and Hutchinson indicate similar results. For the former city, eighty-five percent of the adults were illiterate and only fifty-six percent of their offspring of school age were attending school while the respective figures for Hutchinson are eighty-two and sixty-two percent.<sup>8</sup> Yet, numerous efforts were being made during World War I and the postwar period to alleviate illiteracy and educate the adult population for citizenship.

One of the earliest of such programs began during the late stages of World War I and extended into the 1920's in Kansas City, Kansas. Various charitable and benevolent institutions in Kansas City sponsored these programs and geared their efforts at "making the aliens loyal American citizens."<sup>9</sup> Although some Mexican children were being indoctrinated in the educational system at this time the greatest efforts were directed toward the Mexican adults then employed in the various meat packing plants. Noonhour meetings were established and class study groups set up to accommodate various alien workers along with the Mexican, who had recently arrived from Mexico. Similar efforts were sponsored by the

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<sup>7</sup>State of Kansas, "Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1925," Topeka, Vols. 211-213, Ward 2.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Emporia, Vol. 127 and Hutchinson, Vols. 178-179.

<sup>9</sup>"Program for Americanization," Kansas City, Kansas (1920-1921) (Pamphlet located at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas).

Methodist churches in the Argentine Mexican Mission.<sup>10</sup>

By the mid to late 1920's other church and charitable organizations in cities and communities throughout the state of Kansas were becoming conscious of the presence of Mexicans and were undertaking programs to indoctrinate Mexicans for United States citizenship. The Topeka Public School System and Provident Association, the Emporia Public School System and Womans Christian Temperance Union and in Wichita the Presbyterian Church and YWCA sponsored classes which were conducted in reading and writing of the English language.<sup>11</sup> These religious affiliated organizations also aided the Mexicans in such tasks that ranged from securing furniture and caring for sick children to lessons in a proper diet and the preparation of American dishes.<sup>12</sup> The end result of most of the citizenship drives were negative except for a token few. It would not be until World War II that the majority of Mexican adults would become American citizens, and then, often only at the insistence of their employers.

Of course the intangible results of the night classes for English language instructions and citizenship cannot be measured, but it must be concluded that any exposure of the Mexican to Anglo social contact was beneficial from the standpoint of breaking down isolation between the two groups and easing mutual misunderstandings.

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<sup>10</sup>For many years in Kansas City, Kansas, there were two distinct Mexican settlements. One located in the Armourdale section served the meat packing plants while the Argentine Mexican settlements were primarily employed with the railroads.

<sup>11</sup>For Topeka, see the Topeka Daily Capital, November 31, 1930; for Emporia, the Emporia Daily Gazette, December 9, 1947, and for Wichita, Franco, pp. 71-72.

<sup>12</sup>Franco, pp. 71-72.

Formal education for the first generation Mexican was not achieved. He constituted a class of unskilled labor<sup>13</sup> and only occasionally would one arise above the position of hand laborer into skilled positions. Yet, there are notable exceptions.<sup>14</sup> Each wave of immigrants that have come to the United States have usually started at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. In time its abler or more fortunate members have moved up the ladder, some slowly, some rapidly, some one way, some by another. The schools have provided the route by which many have changed their occupational levels, but this is dependent on time and is at best achieved by the third generation, sometimes by members who represent the second generation. The extent to which the Kansas public and parochial schools enabled Mexican children to alter their inherited status as hand laborers before World War II must be viewed at this stage.

In the towns and communities of Kansas where the Mexicans settled, there was a noticable tendency, particularly where they were present in numbers, for Mexicans to live in groups. Sometimes the colonies were at the edge of town in a distinct quarter, as at Emporia, Newton and Hutchinson, or even completely removed

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<sup>13</sup>John C. Russell and W.D. Broadnax, "Minorities in Kansas; A Quest for Equal Opportunity," (Topeka: 1968), p. 58 and Ricart, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup>Even though there are probably numerous other Mexican Americans in Kansas of the first generation who on their own initiative and own time attended educational classes and took correspondence courses to better their economic position, it was beyond the author's resources to locate others. The three following people are only examples of some who moved from unskilled to skilled positions or even became entrepreneurs. For biographical sketches see the Topeka Daily Capital, June 12, 1966 for the career of José Garcia; the Hutchinson Daily News, November 24, 1968 for Jim Martinez, and the Garden City Telegram, June 14-15, 1971 for Pete Sandoval.

from the habitations of the townspeople as at Garden City.<sup>15</sup> Such settlement patterns had no preconceived design, but were largely dictated by those who employed the Mexican, and most importantly, by the Mexicans themselves. Such residential restrictions limited the Mexican to his own group but these were not so often imposed by the community as sought by the Mexican himself. It was only natural and customary for new-comers to settle in an already established Mexican district for protection, understanding and companionship.

(These settlement patterns which resulted in segregated Mexican communities allowed them to remain aloof from Americanizing influences. Only slowly did Mexican children associate with Anglo children in public and parochial school, thus causing the barrier between them and the general culture of the community to break down. It can be noted with little hesitation that education for the pre World War II Mexican children was based upon segregation.<sup>16</sup> This in itself inhibited the advancement of the Mexican ethnic group to better social and economic positions.)

With few exceptions, Mexican children attended parochial schools at the primary level.<sup>17</sup> The Catholic church has maintained at times at least a dozen national parishes in Kansas for Mexicans,<sup>18</sup> and credit must be given to it for offering to the Mexican child its initial indoctrination in education. Mexican

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<sup>15</sup>Carman, Vol. 2, pp. 440-441.

<sup>16</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, December 18, 1961.

<sup>17</sup>Ricart, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup>Carman, Vol. 2, p. 226.

graduates from high school were rare prior to World War II, but a pointed increase appeared in the post-war period.<sup>19</sup> )

(That the educational development of the Mexican was not high for the period under discussion is not difficult to explain. If the first generation immigrant had little or no education why should his offspring?<sup>20</sup> Little in the way of education was needed for section or extra gangs on the railroads who drove spikes, laid ties, and reworked roadbeds. Likewise, in the sugar beet fields, formal education was no prerequisite for hoeing or thinning sugar beets. Such rationale might point to the lack of motivation but other factors must also be taken into consideration. Though it is true that many of the second generation children followed the same line of employment as their fathers, it was a decision hardly based on choice, and quite often had little to do with the amount of education one had.<sup>21</sup> )

Some of the low educational status can be explained in terms of difficulties encountered with bilingualism, high mobility necessitated as transient workers, and perhaps a culture that values "living"<sup>22</sup> rather than schooling. First, high geographical mobility was for many years a detriment to a stable way of life for the Mexican. This, perhaps as much as any other factor inhibited the education for members of this ethnic group. The railroad

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<sup>19</sup>Ricart, p. 39-40; Carman, Vol. 2, pp. 950-951 on the Wellington Mexicans and The Topeka Capital Journal, December 19, 1961.

<sup>20</sup>This sentiment was expressed by several Mexican Americans who were interviewed by the author. The interviewees designated that their identity remain anonymous.

<sup>21</sup>The Victoria Daily Gazette, December 10, 1947.

<sup>22</sup>The Modern Mexico Essay, ed. José L. Martinez, (Toronto: 1965), "The Character of the Mexican," José E. Iturriaga, pp. 486-487.

and sugar beet industry were the two agencies which more than others served to draw the Mexican into Kansas and scatter him throughout the country.

It is worth noting that the railroads wanted him, as a rule, from March to October, and the beet grower, roughly, for the same period. What he did the rest of the year did not as a rule interest many of them. The Mexican was often criticized as a rover; here today and somewhere else tomorrow. Yet, from all observations it would appear that the Mexican's habits were not inherently migratory, but the habits of the industries which furnished him a livelihood most certainly were.

(As late as 1950 it has been noted that in Kansas "the majority of the Mexican families still use Spanish as their habitual language."<sup>23</sup> The poor school attendance record and limited average grades completed by the Mexican in part can be attributed to their inability to speak English. More than often the case was to discourage the use of the Spanish language by Mexican students. Failure to learn the English language within a prescribed period of time quite often resulted in class failure at the primary level; thus encouraging dropouts.) Within the family structure itself mutual suspicion must have developed when there was the inability of either generation to comprehend verbalization.

Indeed, the Mexican found himself at a considerable disadvantage in attaining an education prior to 1941. The American culture has traditionally placed a premium on the amount of schooling an individual attains. This concept ran counter to the Mexican immigrants' life-style. After all, the culture from which the

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<sup>23</sup> Ricart, p. 20; for an opposite view see Franco, p. 48.

Mexican had left had been geared to an agricultural tempo, and after his arrival in the United States the conflict which he encountered between rural and urban values only impeded his educational achievements.

In migrations to centers of population and industrial and economic prosperity the Mexican was not prepared educationally to understand and blend into the industrial society in which he was moving. This is no better illustrated than to view the various occupations which he became embedded in until World War II. Unskilled manual labor was to be almost exclusively his method of earning a livelihood.

The industries in which he labored were meat-packing, salt mining, sugar beet and railroads. In terms of the numbers employed in each industry, the fewest were employed in meat packing and the majority were occupied in railroad track maintenance.

The meat packing centers were largely confined to Kansas City, Wichita and Topeka. Of the three cities, Kansas City was easily the most important in the slaughtering and processing of meat. Senate investigations in 1909 found only thirteen persons of Mexican descent among the 7,023 employees of meat packing firms in Kansas City.<sup>24</sup> A statement in 1907 "that Mexicans in El Paso frequently gave Kansas City as their destination and that it was an employment center for them"<sup>25</sup> could apply only to the railroads and for distribution to extra and section gangs. However that may be, the railroads and later the packing houses were long the main

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<sup>24</sup>Dillingham Commission Reports, "Immigrants in Industries," Vol. 75, part II, p. 271.

<sup>25</sup>Clark, p. 475.



employees of Mexicans in both Kansas Citys. A number of the packing plants reported that before World War I they employed few Mexicans, but by 1921 from twenty to thirty Mexicans were employed in six packing houses, located primarily in the Armourdale district.<sup>26</sup> The employment of Mexicans at Armour Meat Packing did not become important until 1921 when they were used as strike-breakers.

(In Topeka, employment in the packing houses occupied some Mexicans, but the supply of other foreign labor did not allow the Mexican contingent to reach the same importance as in Wichita. The Morrell Meat Packing Company in Topeka employed the most there, and at one period from 75 to 150 Mexicans were employed.<sup>27</sup> Mexicans in Wichita were long separated into two distinct groups. Those in the "south" colony settled near the railroad tracks and were employed by the Santa Fe Railroad. The "north" colony on the other hand was a larger settlement, and there most of the Mexicans were employed in the packing houses.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, few Mexicans were employed in meat packing in comparison to the total number of Mexicans. Many Mexicans in this industry held semi-skilled positions and received better wages than their counterparts in other industries. Another positive feature of this industry was the steady year around employment. Many considered work in this industry as much to be preferred over work by the railroads.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup>"Program for Americanization," Kansas City, Kansas, (1920-1921).

<sup>27</sup>Carman, Vol. 2, p. 930.

<sup>28</sup>Ricart, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup>Carman, Vol. 2, p. 894 and Paul S. Taylor, Mexicans in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region, p. 155.



numerous advantages found in this industry were largely absent for those employed in the salt mining industry.)

(The mining of salt in Kansas was a relatively new industry, when the Mexicans arrived in Kansas; having begun approximately ten to fifteen years previously.<sup>30</sup> This industry is located in south central Kansas and has long been associated with the cities of Hutchinson, Lyons, Kanopolis and Little River. In each of these cities Mexican colonies were formed before 1920.<sup>31</sup> The Mexicans were introduced to these communities by the railroad and were consequently siphoned off for salt mine employment. Unlike the railroads, little evidence exists to suggest that Mexicans were recruited in Mexico or El Paso for the express purpose of employment in the salt mines,<sup>32</sup> but an expansion of salt mining in Lyons in 1918 brought a great influx of families to that community.<sup>33</sup> This industry became a principal source of employment for Mexicans in Hutchinson and Lyons until mechanization displaced many of them after World War II.)

(Throughout the 1900-1940 period Mexicans were employed by the hundreds in this industry. Perhaps the largest number employed in any one community was at Lyons where a total of approximately 200 labored for the American Salt Company during World War II.<sup>34</sup> In the early 1920's about 150 were employed at the Morton Salt

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<sup>30</sup>W.F. Zornow, Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 292.

<sup>31</sup>Franco, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup>The Lyons Daily News, June 26, 1972.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Company in Hutchinson, but a shooting incident which involved two Mexicans forced company officials to discontinue the hiring of Mexicans.<sup>35</sup>)

(The strenuous and dangerous character of work in this industry forced some Mexicans into other areas of employment; more than one Mexican was known to have been killed "in the hole."<sup>36</sup> Also, wage differentials which favored Anglo salt miners doing the same type of work created animosity and resentment among the Mexican salt employees.<sup>37</sup> Yet, in spite of the dangerous character of this work and the wage discriminations, many Mexicans sought work in this industry because of the steady employment it offered.)

(If employment in the meat-packing and salt mining industries were on a steady year around basis, this hardly was the case for Mexicans who sought work in the sugar beet fields of western Kansas. The sugar beet industry, which for many years was entirely dependent upon Mexicans for field labor, could only offer temporary employment for several periods of the year.)

(Like the salt industry, sugar beet processing was also a relatively new industry when Mexicans arrived in Kansas. Until the 1950's, this industry was confined to the southwestern counties of Kansas; Garden City being the processing center. Nationally, Mexicans "have been identified with the sugar-beet industry almost since its inception,"<sup>38</sup> and although Kansas was not considered one of the principal growing areas, Mexicans have long been

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<sup>35</sup>Chencho Alfaro, personal interview, Hutchinson, Kansas, March 4, 1972.

<sup>36</sup>Gorman, Vol. 2, p. 192.

<sup>37</sup>Franco, p. 89.

<sup>38</sup>McWilliams, p. 180.

part and partial of this industry.)

Labor in the beet fields has long been referred to as "stoop labor" because of the physical back-bending process required in thinning, hoeing and topping of sugar beets. The hand labor requirements of the crop were exceedingly large as compared with other crops. One observer in 1919 noted that "more than 10 times as much hand labor is required to raise an acre of beets as to raise an acre of wheat, over 5 times as much as to raise an acre of corn, and more than twice as much as to raise an acre of potatoes."<sup>39</sup> The most pressing problem of the sugar beet farmer was for many years the procurement of an adequate labor supply. This labor was not available in the sugar beet areas, and many sugar companies assumed the responsibility for recruiting such laborers. Not only the individual farmer's inability to recruit the necessary labor, but the desire of the sugar companies to obtain contracts for beets motivated this action. Furthermore, "many farmers were loathe to work a crop which required large amounts of hand labor, and they disliked the idea of performing the type of work necessary in the hand operations, which are among the most difficult and unpleasant of agricultural operations."<sup>40</sup>

(To fill this void in the expanding beet industry in Kansas after 1900 were German-Russians who preceded the wide scale use

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<sup>39</sup> Frank S. Harris, The Sugar Beet in America (New York: 1919), p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, National Defense Migration, (76th Congress, 1st Session, Part 19, Detroit Hearings [Agricultural Section], September 23, 24, 25, 1941), (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 7865. (Hereinafter referred to as the Holan Committee Reports.)

of Mexicans labor by about fifteen years.<sup>41</sup> The employment of German-Russians was diminished by World War I and the immigration laws, also many former German-Russian laborers became themselves either tenants or owners.<sup>42</sup> Thus the Mexican ethnic group came to the rescue of the sugar beet farmers and companies.)

( The rapid influx of Mexican laborers into the sugar beet fields is quite evident for the 1915-1930 period. In 1915 there were but 134 Mexicans residing in Finney County and 6 of those were railroad laborers.<sup>43</sup> By 1925 and again in 1930, their numbers had increased to 413 and 571 respectively,<sup>44</sup> some left Garden City and the sugar beet industry for greener pastures, but many held on to toil in the fields for there was no lay off of Mexican workers during the depression.<sup>45</sup> )

( The advantages of working in this industry were few, if any, and the negative features were manifold when compared to other areas of employment that occupied Mexicans. To mention but a few of these features were poor health and housing, child labor and low earnings. Average annual earnings in the United States for the Mexican workers entirely dependent upon sugar-beet employment

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<sup>41</sup>Carman, Vol. 2, p. 440 and Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States: Valley of the South Platte Colorado, (Berkeley: 1929), Vol. 6, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup>Taylor, p. 105.

<sup>43</sup>State of Kansas, "Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1915," Finney County.

<sup>44</sup>"Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1925" Finney County. Much of the sugar beet labor was transient and some permanent which makes it difficult to determine exact numbers in Census Reports for any given period.

<sup>45</sup>Franco, p. 61.

for the period 1916 through World War II was from \$500 to \$600 per family.<sup>46</sup> There is little reason to believe that the Mexican laborer in Kansas fared any better financially. In fact, figures from the Department of Agriculture indicate that for the period 1931-1940 the sugar beet industry in Kansas paid the lowest wage per acre for eight of these nine years when compared to the other fifteen leading sugar beet producing states.<sup>47</sup>

The Garden City Sugar Company has long been the company of vast prominence in Western Kansas. To what extent it recruited labor is difficult to determine, but one observer noted in the 1960's this company "was still sending trucks to bring them from Texas."<sup>48</sup> Permanent colonies of Mexicans in the sugar producing areas were slow in forming since this work was only seasonal, usually from spring to fall. These Mexican transients left the beet fields after the harvesting season, usually in late fall, if they had earned enough to make the trip from where they were recruited. Quite often these migrants were left stranded to "winter" in quarters near where they had worked. One who pastored Mexican churches in western Kansas prior to the depression noted

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<sup>46</sup> McWilliams, p. 183.

<sup>47</sup> Tolan Committee Reports, p. 7883.

<sup>48</sup> Carman, p. 441. In the Arkansas River Valley to the west in Colorado and the South Platte region, the Great Western Sugar Beet Company recruited Mexican labor as early as 1916 from Southern Colorado and New Mexico. Shortly thereafter, El Paso became the principal place of recruitment for Mexican sugar beet workers in the Rocky Mountain region. San Antonio, Texas, became the center from which they were recruited for the midwestern states. See McWilliams, p. 181. The Garden City Sugar Company became a subsidiary of the Great Western Sugar Beet Company of Colorado. See Franco, p. 42. But this author was unable to determine when the two companies became affiliated, probably in the 1920's or 1930's when Franco was a pastor at Garden City.

that, "in a normal year, many of them are so far in debt [to the company] at the end of the beet season that they can't get back home."<sup>49</sup> Thus, to a certain extent Mexican colonies developed where Mexican labor had been imported for sugar-beet employment. Of all the Mexicans who were employed in Kansas prior to 1940, there is little doubt that those who labored in the sugar beet industry were subject to more hardship than others. The domination of the sugar beet companies over their Mexican employees easily led to exploitation that was not near as discernible in the railroad industry that employed the vast majority of the Mexicans prior to 1940.

If the Mexican ethnic group has been identified with the sugar beet industry on the national level as was noted by one of the leading spokesman for Mexican Americans,<sup>50</sup> this minority in Kansas was long synonymous with the railroad industry. It was in this industry that Mexicans were literally employed by the thousands and all the railroads that traversed Kansas between 1900 and 1940 employed Mexican labor.<sup>51</sup>

In the 1900-1940 period most of these men were employed as common laborers and worked at unskilled jobs in track maintenance, but others could be found at round houses and shops at such locations as Topeka, Emporia, Newton and Wellington on the Santa Fe

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<sup>49</sup>Franco, p. 42.

<sup>50</sup>McWilliams, p. 180.

<sup>51</sup>Governor C.H. Reed, Mss. Kansas State Historical Society Mexican Labor files, Topeka, Kansas. Letter dated 20 November 1930 of Clyde M. Reed to the presidents of the railroads operating in Kansas; and Franco, p. 32.

system.<sup>52</sup> In Topeka, where one of the largest Santa Fe shops is located, it was not until the late 1930's that Mexicans could join labor unions or work in skilled labor.<sup>53</sup> On the other railroads in the State Mexicans worked in the same capacities as those on the Santa Fe System but were fewer in number, primarily because of the larger network which the Santa Fe maintained in Kansas. Again, only those railroads that had access into the southwest, as at the El Paso port of entry, employed Mexican labor to any great extent. These two railroads which operated in Kansas and had access to Mexican labor were the Rock Island and Santa Fe. The latter used far more Mexican labor than the former in Kansas. For the time period under discussion it has been practically impossible to obtain figures on the number of Mexican laborers on any one railroad for any given period or year in Kansas. In 1930, in response to a letter from Governor Reed to the presidents of the six largest railroads operating in Kansas to dismiss Mexican aliens from their employment in favor of unemployed Anglo workers, it was reported at that time there were between 6,000 and 8,000 Mexicans employed on Kansas railroads.<sup>54</sup> Figures released in 1928 by an officer of railway executives gives some indication to the extent that Mexicans were employed by railroads nationally. These figures, presented in table 5, include only those railroads

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<sup>52</sup>Other railroad shops and repair centers in Kansas where Mexicans were employed are as follows: Rock Island shops at Horton, Herington, Caldwell and Pratt; Missouri Pacific shops at Hoisington, Wichita, Coffeyville and Conway Springs. The Topeka Improvement Survey, "Industrial Conditions in Topeka," Zenas L. Potter. (Russell Sage Foundation: New York, 1914).

<sup>53</sup>Auto Morales, Topeka, personal interview, April 25, 1970 and José Garcia, Topeka, personal interview, March 10, 1972.

<sup>54</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, November 21, 1930.



operating in Kansas, with the exception of the Southern Pacific which employed the greatest number of Mexicans of all railroads in the United States.<sup>55</sup>

TABLE 5

EMPLOYMENT OF MEXICANS AS  
SECTION LABORERS ON  
SIX RAILROADS, 1928

Railroad Company	Miles of Main Track	Section Laborers			
		Normal		Peak	
		Mexican Total		Mexican	Total
Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe system	13,980.02	6,868	10,579	8,620	13,667
Chicago, Rock Is- land and Pacific	7,889.00	1,036	4,433	1,515	5,609
Missouri, Kansas and Texas	2,916.00	560	2,086	659	2,714
Missouri Pacific system	2,622.00	1,500	2,770	1,890	3,292
Union Pacific system	10,380.00	2,954	7,048	4,271	8,930
Southern Pacific system	14,377.66	9,622	11,456	11,314	13,344

Figures released by the same source indicate that for extra gang laborers, Mexican employees comprised about 90 per cent of the total in this work category.<sup>56</sup> In 1927, an estimate of Mexican railroad workers and their families was approximately 250,000 persons.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration, p. 90.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>57</sup> Robert H. McLean, That Mexican: As He Really Is North and South of the Rio Grande (New York: 1928), p. 159.



Mexican railroad laborers were introduced into Kansas as early as 1902-03, and perhaps sooner. They increasingly became important in terms of the labor vacuum that existed in Kansas and were hired in indiscriminate numbers to the extent that one Santa Fe official in 1911 reported that, "until the recent war in Mexico [Mexican Revolution], Mexican peons were used almost exclusively on the Santa Fe."<sup>58</sup> The turbulence which resulted from this conflict in Mexico evidently hampered the supply of Mexican laborers that the Santa Fe heretofore had easy access to. This same official noted that, "they still are used when they can be secured."<sup>59</sup> In fact, the inception of the Mexican Revolution affected Mexican railroad laborers already in Kansas. In the Santa Fe's official company organ, it was pointed out that, "numerous Mexican laborers had left their construction work on the Santa Fe in Kansas and had joined the revolutionary forces in Mexico."<sup>60</sup> Apparently, some were not long in returning to the subdued way of life on the Kansas prairies. One man had joined a party of thirty revolutionaries in Chihuahua, but on the "second day of his enlistment he encountered a troop of Mexican regulars . . . he at once retreated in good order toward the United States, and did not stop until he had reached a Santa Fe work train in Kansas, where he exchanged his lieutenant's uniform for overalls and a shovel."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> L.C. Lawton, "Erecting Mexican Laborer's Houses," Santa Fe Employees Magazine, September, 1911, p. 75.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> J.F. Farrell, "Along the Lines," Santa Fe Employees Magazine, January, 1911, p. 90.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

( Up until 1910, no systematic effort was made by the Santa Fe to retain Mexicans on a permanent basis, but by 1911, because of the scarcity of railroad workers for track maintenance, and due to the positive performance of Mexicans on this railroad's coast and western division, efforts were under way to "obtain a better trained and steadier class of [Mexican] laborers."<sup>62</sup> Plans were made to construct housing "for these laborers in a way not before attempted to any extent by the Santa Fe" so that men with families could locate on each railroad section.) Two basic reasons necessitated this decision by Santa Fe officials. One argument pointed out the semi-nomadic life of the laborer without housing who quite frequently "developed into a vagrant class, quite similar to the American hobo."<sup>63</sup> Secondly, it was emphasized in 1911 that, "the few families that have been employed previously have constructed their own dugouts, or tie houses with mud roofs, similar to those usually found in New Mexico, but there is no earth in Kansas which will water or stand up like the adobe in the arid country, and it has been common after a heavy rain for the occupants of these dirt-roof homes to leave, the railway thus losing its section labor."<sup>64</sup>

( This policy of providing housing for Mexican laborers on the Santa Fe was initiated prior to World War I and continued into the post World War II period. Such a policy plan attracted Mexican immigrants into this industry, though it was not excluded from the sugar beet and salt mining industries. This housing, which bore

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<sup>62</sup>Lawton, p. 75.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

the occupational stamp of its Mexican employees, was constructed on railway property, and rental fees for the Mexican employees was usually only a minimal charge of from \$1.00 to \$2.00 a month.<sup>65</sup> In itself, this policy indicated a benevolent and paternalistic attitude adopted by the Santa Fe railroad which was maintained with its Mexican employees over many years of their relationship.)

As early as 1910, Mexicans were to be employed all over the Santa Fe system, and by 1913, with the displacement of other ethnic groups in track maintenance by the Mexicans it was apparant to officials that the language differences between the Anglo foreman and Mexican track laborer had to be overcome.<sup>66</sup> This deficiency in communication was signalized in 1913 when the Santa Fe issued Spanish dictionaries to all its track foremen. At this time it was noted by roadmaster Al West of the Newton division that, "almost all the section work on the Santa Fe is now done by the 'Hombres,' and this [dictionary] is to assist the foremen in giving his orders as the Mexican laborers will understand what is wanted if the command is given in their native tongue better than if it is given in English."<sup>67</sup> West went on to emphasize that, "almost all the foremen can speak a sort of Mexican lingo, but the book will be a help to those who have not mastered some of the tongue twisters."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Sotero Gil, Abilene, personal interview, March 28, 1972 and Ramon Pedrosa, Newton, personal interview, April 23, 1972.

<sup>66</sup>L.L. Waters, Steel Rails to Santa Fe (Lawrence: 1950), p. 327.

<sup>67</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, p. 1, November 21, 1913.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

Regardless of the communication gap which was not completely overcome, especially for many Mexican laborers who were continually plagued by their inability to master the English language because of the habitual use of Spanish in their segregated communities, usually nothing but warm praise was elicited from Santa Fe officials when speaking of the performance of its Mexican employees. Of course some of the early attitudinal assessments were skeptical of a new labor element that had not been thoroughly tested, but with the passage of time little but the best traits and qualities of the Mexican were noted.

Late in the nineteenth century when the governing policy between private industry and the federal government was one of laissez-faire, a similiar policy existed between railroad management and their employees. The railroads then had little interest in their employees except as a certain necessary part of the machine. One railroad historian has adequately noted that during this period, "the only phases in which they [railroads] were interested were whether the work [of employees] was done satisfactorily and whether the rate of pay was sufficiently low."<sup>69</sup> This old individualistic concept of the relations between employer and employee showed signs of breaking up during the period when Mexican emigrants began working on American railroads, but it would yet be some time before railroads began to realize that satisfied workers were the one good guarantee of satisfactory work. This same attitude which governed the relations between management and labor was reflected by an official of the Rock Island as late as

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<sup>69</sup>Robert E. Riegel, The Story of the Western Railroads (New York: 1926), p. 240.

1917. Speaking on the subject of labor efficiency in maintenance-of-way work, this engineer pointed out that, "labor, or laboring men have too often been looked upon as cogs or spokes in the wheel, when it should have been borne in mind that each and every individual has his own personality, his own feeling, his own indifference, his own ambitions."<sup>70</sup> This disinterestedness and lack of understanding on the part of management toward Mexican laborers is reflected in the early assessments of this ethnic group. To expect otherwise in a period of racial intolerance would have been exceptional indeed.

One railway official in 1907 spoke on the problem of Mexican workers and noted that his company's chief difficulties were due to ignorance of the language, "and the rough ways of our foremen -- who sometimes frighten the Mexicans so they won't work."<sup>71</sup> The tradition among foremen that "rough ways" were the only means of getting work out of the Mexicans was widespread in an industry where mild ways were hardly customary. Supervisors fired and hired easily, and employees quit or risked dismissal as easily.

Prior to their use in Kansas on a large scale, the Mexicans had proven their value as laborers when they had surpassed the efforts of the Navajo and Mojave Indians and the Japanese in the desert southwest. In a rather biased article, entitled the "Passing of the Indian Sectionman," which was published in 1909, it was noted that, "the Mexicans are satisfied any place where they have the meanest shelter and their daily portion of chili con carne,

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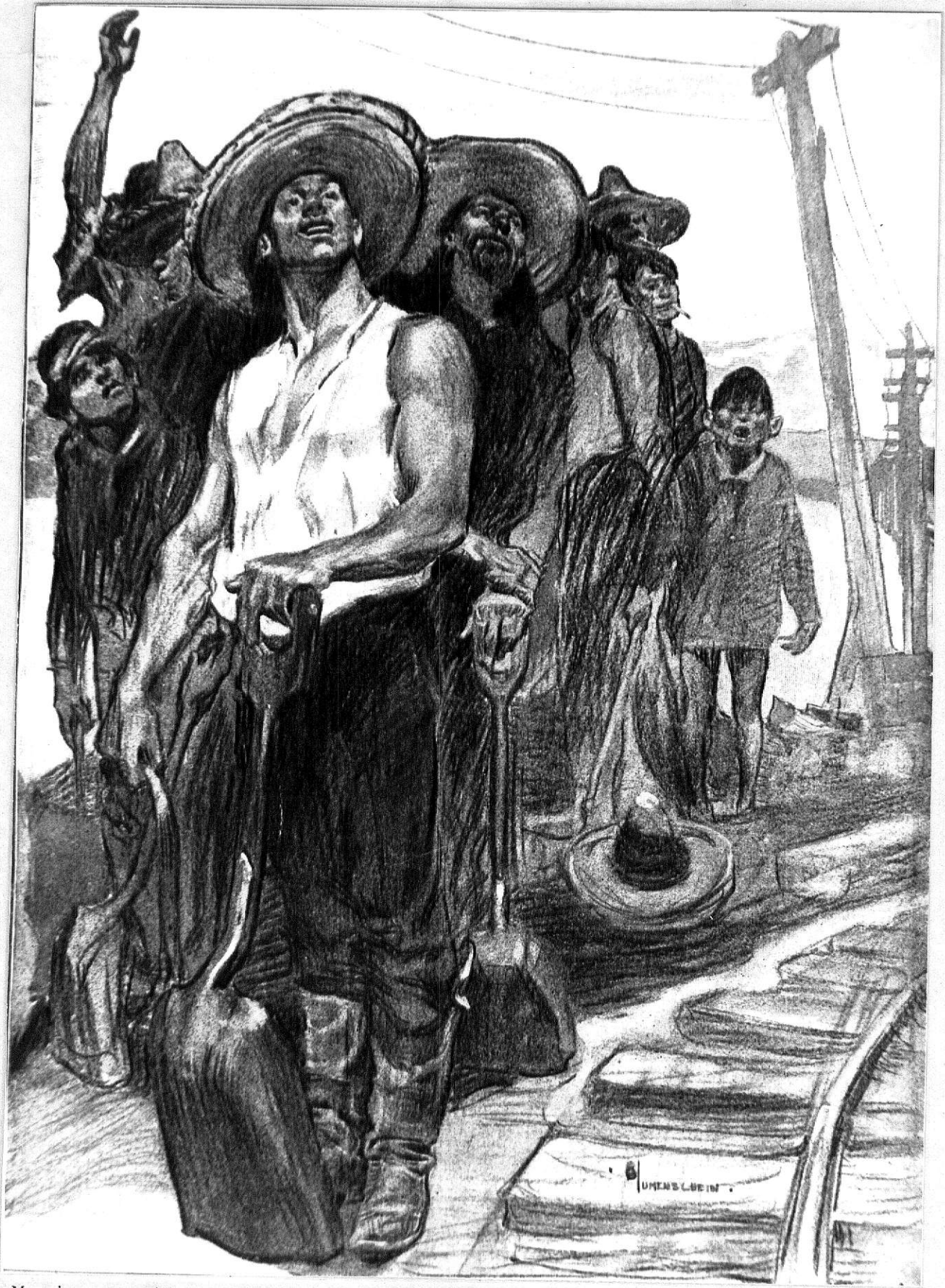
<sup>70</sup>E. Wanamaker, "Purchase and Maintenance of Labor on Railroads," The Railway Age, August 31, 1917, p. 391.

<sup>71</sup>Clark, p. 478.

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Mexican railway laborers step aside to let a train pass. Many of the railroads that operated in the Southwest were dependent upon such Mexican extra and section gang laborers from the turn of the century up until the 1930's. Drawing from Scribner's Magazine, Vol. 34, (Summer, 1903) p. 405

frijoles and cigarettes, and all things considered, for the desert especially, they have proven themselves the most dependable and satisfactory class of labor."<sup>72</sup>

By the time of the widespread employment of Mexicans in all the divisions of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1913, other railroads were giving recognition to the Mexican track worker. After listing the several disadvantages of Mexican labor, which included the language barrier, his presence in this country as only a temporary resident and the failure of the Mexican to become acclimated to the hard winters in the Midwestern states, it was pointed out by a division engineer of the Rock Island Railroad, who was then working out of Herington, Kansas, that the advantages of the Mexican laborer "made him perhaps the best class of track labor of all the various classes of foreign labor."<sup>73</sup> The advantages listed by this engineer included the Mexicans refusal to be clannish,<sup>74</sup> so often common among other foreign railroad laborers, his excellance as an extra gang laborer, his ability to do a "full day's work in a warm climate that a northern born man could not stand," and his faithfulness and steadiness as a worker.<sup>75</sup> Yet, these remarks clash sharply with those related by an observer of Mexican labor in 1908.

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<sup>72</sup>J.C. Rockhold, "Passing of the Indian Sectionman," Santa Fe Employees Magazine, June, 1909, p. 749.

<sup>73</sup>L.J. Hughes, "The Mexican as Track Laborer," The Railway Age Gazette, September 20, 1912, p. 528.

<sup>74</sup>Yet, one such case of clannishness might be noted. A Mexican laborer employed on an extra gang for the Santa Fe in Kansas during the teens related to Taylor that a rail inspector at Melvern, Kansas, found a rail one inch distant from the next rail. The inspector fired the foreman, and the Mexican crew all left the job in protest. Taylor's informant found his way to Topeka and later to Chicago. See Paul S. Taylor, pp. 264-265.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 528-529.



Victor Clark, a well-known and astute economist and historical writer during this period, was told that, "Mexicans lacked ambition, were irregular in shop attendance and were known to drink hard after paydays, thus losing part of their time."<sup>76</sup> This lack of ambition could probably be accounted for by the fact that they were kept subordinate to American and European workers by a line drawn in accordance with nationality rather than competency. Clark later would add that the Mexicans strongest point was his willingness to work for a low wage but concluded that he compared favorably with other nationalities in railroad work.<sup>77</sup> Another railroad official who had supervised Mexican labor since 1892 and was employed with the Santa Fe in Kansas both praised and criticized the Mexican worker in 1912, but felt he could accomplish more work with Mexicans than most other classes [foreign] of labor.<sup>78</sup> Not only did the Mexican labor compare favorably with other nationalities in most instances but he surpassed most others in performance.

( In the late 1920's when pressure was applied by labor unions, racist writers and congressional leaders in the southwest to restrict the movement of Mexican nationals into the United States and place the country of Mexico on the quota system as had been accomplished with earlier legislation in the 1920's against European immigration, the prime spokesmen against such a curtailment of Mexican labor were the agricultural interests and railroad industry. Pleading with a Congressional Committee on Immigration

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<sup>76</sup>Clark, p. 480.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 496 and 499.

<sup>78</sup>M. Ganley, "Characteristics of the Mexican," The Santa Fe Employees Magazine, September 20, 1912, p. 529.

in 1928 for a continuance of a policy of free importation of Mexican labor, the Santa Fe solicitor general gave the following reasons: "the severity of the climate; the unavailability of hardships incident to living conditions; the nature of the work to be done and the uncertainty of permanent employment conspire to make this part of work unattractive to white men, and thus the railroads must look to the Mexican."<sup>79</sup> Each of these reasons were essentially correct except that "white men" were employed by the Santa Fe on its section and extra gangs, but not near in numbers when compared to Mexican laborers. Within several years of this Congressional Hearings when the Great Depression was at its height and millions of Americans were unemployed, the "white man" replaced the Mexican track laborers by the hundreds in Kansas.<sup>80</sup> But even then, the Santa Fe System in Kansas found it difficult to retain "Anglo workers" for some left for more lucrative employment in the wheat fields.<sup>81</sup> Yet, the accusation frequently made that Anglo laborers would not work in railroad maintenance, which he felt was beneath him, is unfounded. This might have been the case in the desert Southwest where all labor was scarcer than the Midwest, but not in Kansas.

Again, (when one looks at the wages received by the Mexican railroad workers one must distinguish between wages paid in the

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<sup>79</sup>Statement of E.E. McInnis, General Solicitor, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway System, before Committee of Immigration, U.S. Senate, Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration, p. 97.

<sup>80</sup>Franco, pp. 39-40, and Ricart, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup>Letter dated November 22, 1930 from W.B. Storey, President of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, to Governor C.M. Reed, located in Mss., Governor Reed, Topeka, Kansas.

desert Southwest and wages paid in the Midwest (Kansas). There is no doubt that the Mexican railroad laborer did suffer from wage discrimination in the Southwest, but not in Kansas.<sup>82</sup> In 1911, the Dillingham Commission Reports indicated that of all the laborers employed as maintenance-of-way workers in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States, the Mexicans were the lowest paid.<sup>83</sup> Only 5.3 percent received a wage of \$1.50 or more a day while 86.1 percent received under \$1.25.<sup>84</sup> Percentages from this source indicates that no other ethnic group came close to this low wage paid the Mexican. Data for other ethnic groups which was based on general nativity and race include the English and Japanese. Figures for the English and Japanese laborers on a wage scale of \$1.25 and under, \$1.25 to \$1.50 and \$1.50 and over are respectively: .0, 5.4, 94.6 and 19.0, 80.5 and .5.<sup>85</sup> For the Mexicans this had been the trend since before 1900 when many received a wage of 88 cents a day.

Clearly, the Mexican laborer was considered "cheap labor" in the Southwest for it was noted that the number of Mexican section hands employed in the Western states had more than doubled since

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<sup>82</sup>See McWilliams p. 168 for the difference between wages paid in the Southwest and Midwest. This is not to say there was no discrimination in Kansas by the railroads. Evidence to be presented later points out discrimination against Santa Fe Mexican employees did occur in denying them positions of authority or allowing them to enter skilled labor positions in the shops. Here the author wishes to state that little, if any, indication of wage discrimination existed. This is based largely on interviews with several Mexican Americans in various communities of the state.

<sup>83</sup>Dillingham Commission Reports, Part 25, "Japanese and Other Immigrant Races on the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States." 1911, p. 19.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

1900 and "usually displaced or replaced cheap labor."<sup>86</sup> (In the Midwest though, the Rock Island who were then employing Mexicans, were paying them higher wages, as was the Santa Fe. In this same time period Mexican section hands were receiving \$1.50 a day in Kansas on these two railroads.<sup>87</sup> In the post World War I period to 1940, wages paid Mexican section hands in Kansas were equivalent to those paid Anglo workers; both worked side by side.<sup>88</sup>) In the 1920's, the average daily wage of Mexican railroad section laborers in Kansas was \$2.20,<sup>89</sup> and just prior to 1940, the daily wages fluctuated between \$2.80 and \$3.25 a day.<sup>90</sup> The wage differentials, labor market, and working conditions are clearly evident between the Midwest and the Southwest.

This perspective must be taken into consideration whenever generalizing about the Mexican American for any given period in the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Clark, p. 479.

<sup>88</sup> Personal interviews with Ramón Pedrosa, Newton; Sotero Gil, Abilene; and Paul Torrez, Hoisington, May, 1972.

<sup>89</sup> Manual Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States, p. 39.

<sup>90</sup> Personal interviews with Mexican Americans who were then employed by Santa Fe and yearly statement of earning forms loaned to the author by an employee of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, Paul Torrez of Hoisington; Socorro M. Ramirez, "A Survey of the Mexicans in Emporia, Kansas," unpublished Master's Thesis, (Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia: 1942), p. 26.

United States.<sup>91</sup>

In the railroad industry, the Santa Fe in particular became very popular with the Mexican workers, and work for this company was often sought not only by employees on other railroads because of the better wages and working conditions,<sup>92</sup> but by Mexicans who were making their initial entry into Kansas. A Mexican national who began work with the Santa Fe in Kansas in 1920 as a section hand and was later promoted to timekeeper reported that he was often sent to Oklahoma and Texas to assist in bringing new Mexican recruits to Kansas. In accompanying these new laborers, this informant frequently asked the recruits why they had chosen to work on the Santa Fe, and invariably their answer was the association the new workers made between their religion and the symbol which has long been the official emblem of the Santa Fe.<sup>93</sup> This emblem, which can be found on all of this railroads' rolling stock, is in the form of a circle with an upright bar traversed by a

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<sup>91</sup>This perspective, which pertains to the relative differences between the Mexican residing in the Midwest and those in the Southwest, is a research topic that has not been adequately explored, especially for the interwar period. Two noted writers who wrote extensively on the Mexicans during this period differ considerably when they wrote their pioneering studies. Paul S. Taylor, an economist, accurately makes this distinction when he studied the Mexican colonies in Chicago in 1932. He points out the differences that existed between this region and the southwest in terms of not only working conditions, wage differentials and the labor market but discrimination and social conditions. See his Mexican Labor in the U.S.: Chicago and Calumet Region, p. 25 and pp. 277-78. Manuel Gamio, an anthropologist who wrote before Taylor and might not have had access to as much source material, generalizes considerably about the Mexican in the U.S. and does not draw the sharp distinctions then existing between the two regions. See his Mexican Immigrations to the United States, *passim*.

<sup>92</sup>Beatrice W. Griffith, American Me (Boston: 1948), p. 121; and personal interview with Sotero Gil, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>93</sup>Choncho Alfaro, personal interview, Hutchinson, Kansas.

horizontal one. Many of the new Mexican laborers interpreted this emblem as a cross and felt they would receive better treatment by a company which displayed this emblem. Yet, aside from this instance which only was incidental, there is substance to the fact that the Santa Fe was looked upon as one of the railroads that was more considerate of its Mexican employees.

One author who analyzed the social and economic conditions of the Mexicans in the Southwest in the interwar period has pointed out that, "of the three great western railroads, the Southern Pacific has received the reputation for being the worst in its treatment of Mexican employees, with the Union Pacific running closely behind."<sup>94</sup> She concludes that "whenever possible the men try to get on the payroll of the Santa Fe, for not only does this line have more consideration for the Mexicans it employees, but its pay rates are higher than those of the other two railroads."<sup>95</sup> Such sentiment was expressed in spite of two statements made by Santa Fe employees, one an engineer and the other a general foreman, who hint strongly of exploitation. The engineer reported in the mid 1920's that "anyone who knows how to manage Mexicans can get more work out of them than any other class,"<sup>96</sup> and this same statement runs parallel to that of a general foreman when speaking on "How to Handle Mexican Labor" related that, "when properly handled they are willing to do a great deal for a man, after working for ridiculously low wages or giving the very best of service for

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<sup>94</sup>Griffith, p. 121.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Quoted in Vernon L. McCombs, From Over the Border, p. 51.



common wages."<sup>97</sup> Yet, it would appear that the Santa Fe did have more to offer the Mexican laborer, and this became more evident during the depression crises when thousands of Mexicans were forced or coerced to return to Mexico.

(This depression was acutely severe for Mexicans) because many had little time to adjust to American culture since their arrival in the United States. Many had come during or after World War I, and it is beyond question that many were penniless upon their arrival. Add to these conditions the fact that (most were aliens since few had taken out citizenship papers or had become American citizens. At best, most were classified as temporary residents. Given these conditions and the repercussions of the depression was there little reason to expect that the Mexican could endure the trials and tribulations that taxed even the native American? The fact is that many were not given the chance to endure. A movement which began in the American southwest, particularly in southern California,<sup>98</sup> for the systematic removal and repatriation of Mexican laborers to Old Mexico spread rapidly across the United States and affected Mexican settlements as far removed from the southwest as Detroit, Michigan.<sup>99</sup> Mexicans in Kansas were not exempt from this indiscriminate elimination of Mexicans residing in the United States which by 1933 had accounted for over 300,000

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<sup>97</sup> James P. Craig, "How to Handle Mexican Labor," The Santa Fe Employees Magazine, November, 1914, p. 28.

<sup>98</sup> Carey McWilliams, "Getting Rid of the Mexican," American Mercury, Vol. 28. March, 1933. pp. 322-324.

<sup>99</sup> Norman D. Humphrey, "Mexican Repatriation from Michigan: Public Assistance in Historical Perspective," Social Service Review, (September, 1941), pp. 497-513.

Mexicans to be reabsorbed into the Mexican economy.<sup>100)</sup>

(Many of the laborers in Kansas who were Mexican citizens were returned to Mexico during the depression because of the economic conditions.<sup>101</sup> This occurred in spite of the fact that many wives of these same laborers gave birth to children in the United States which automatically made these children American citizens. Ironically, since many of these births went unregistered because of the Mexicans' ignorance of registration laws at that time, many of these people probably reside in Mexico today not knowing they hold dual citizenships.<sup>102)</sup>

(Mexicans employed in railroad towns and as section hands suffered even more than others at their economic level during the depression because of the larger proportionate contraction of the railroad business. Again, the Santa Fe Railroad lessened the plight of Mexicans from being relieved of work by retaining many of these employees. One observer during the depression noted that of all the railroads in Kansas, "only the Santa Fe, although the number by workers was reduced, never got rid of its Mexican employees."<sup>103</sup> The most evident explanation that the Santa Fe was able to retain many of its Mexican employees is because it failed to comply with recommendations made by Governor C.M. Reed in 1930. Because of the unemployment situation in Kansas, pressure was

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<sup>100</sup>Emory S. Bogardus, "Mexican Repatriates," Sociology and Social Research, Vol. 18, (November, 1933), pp. 169-170.

<sup>101</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, July 30, 1972 and see also Carman, p. 1087; and Franco, pp. 59-60.

<sup>102</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, July 30, 1972.

<sup>103</sup>Franco, p. 60 and see also Ricart, p. 14.



applied by a representative of President Hoover's Employment Commission to rid the State of its non-citizen labor. In a letter to Governor Reed in November, 1930, J.F. Lucey, Southern Regional Director of this Commission, stated the following:

I am informed you have a very large number of transient Mexican labor. This class of labor was brought into Kansas for railroad construction and other work. In some cases they are now a charge upon the city in large numbers. It occurs to me that a request from you as Governor of the State to the railroads responsible for bringing this class of labor into Kansas to return them to Mexico in such a manner that would not render offense to our neighbor on the South would materially help the unemployment situation. In any event, it occurs to me that citizens of our own country should receive preference to employment as against those of a foreign nation.<sup>104</sup>

This information was consequently relayed by the Governor to the presidents of the six leading railroads who operated in Kansas. In addition to this information, the Governor also emphasized that, "the situation at present is one that calls for the maximum use of American labor even to the extent of the displacement of the foreign labor involved."<sup>105</sup> Ultimately, Governor Reed received replies from these railroads in regard to what action was being taken to comply with his recommendations. Most of the railroad presidents answered promptly and informed the governor that they would do all within their power to hire unemployed native Americans rather than Mexican transients, but one railroad in particular expressed reservations. This railroad was the Santa Fe whose

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<sup>104</sup>Letter dated November 20, 1930 from Governor Reed to the presidents of the six leading railroads in Kansas, Topeka, Kansas.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

president in part informed the Governor that, "the Mexican laborers who are still with us are permanent residents who, generally speaking, have been in our service for years, and for the most part are United States citizens, having come from the state of New Mexico."<sup>106</sup>

The first two statements are essentially correct except the word "permanent" should have read "temporary," but the last two statements are clear indications of deception on the part of the Santa Fe management in regard to the citizenship status and origin of its Mexican laborers. That these Mexican employees were United States citizens is completely erroneous. The Kansas Census Reports of 1925 and contemporary observers of the Mexicans in the decade before World War II all note that the great bulk of Mexicans in Kansas, (and the United States for that matter) did not seek citizenship or become United States citizens until the World War II period.<sup>107</sup> Secondly, the statement that "most of these Mexicans employees had come from the state of New Mexico" is clearly negative. True, there may have been some who had resided in New Mexico prior to coming to Kansas, but census reports do not indicate that the bulk of Mexicans in Kansas had come from this state.

This evidence suggests that the Santa Fe railroad was aiding

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<sup>106</sup>Letter dated November 20, 1930 from president Storey to Governor Reed, Topeka, Kansas.

<sup>107</sup>State of Kansas, "Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1925," for the numerous cities where Mexican colonies existed. There is little reason to believe that between the 1925 census and in 1930, when this letter was dated, Mexicans rushed to take out U.S. citizenship. On the contrary, numerous factors, including the depression, forced many Mexicans to leave the state. Most Mexicans remained as aliens until World War II. See also Franco, p. 86 and pp. 89-91 and the Topeka Daily Capital, June 29, 1956. Within the past two years, the author found several Mexican Americans who are retired from Santa Fe railroad employment and still are not legally U.S. citizens, having never taken out citizenship papers.

and abetting aliens by giving them employment and encouraging them to continue in that employment. It also reveals that native Americans, who were citizens, were denied employment on this railroad because of the presence of Mexicans. This altruistic attitude on the part of Santa Fe, for whatever reason, corroborates earlier evidence to confirm that this company went more than out of its way to retain a laboring element that had become most valuable to its operation. Ironically, three histories have been written in this century about the Santa Fe Railroad that have largely ignored this ethnic group. Regretfully, two of these failed entirely to mention this ethnic group in the company's history.<sup>108</sup> The third book,<sup>109</sup> published in 1950, devoted only one-fourth of a page to the Mexicans, and this is only passing reference to Mexicans replacing other foreign laborers on the Santa Fe.

The point to be made is that an apparent contradiction exists in assessing the true worth and value of this ethnic group's performance over the 1900-1940 period within the railroad industry. If these Mexican employees only warranted one paragraph from a total of three authors writing histories of a leading railroad in the United States, why is it that in 1928 the solicitor general of this same railroad went to great lengths before a U.S. Senate Committee attempting to retain this labor source that would have greatly imperilled the operations of this railroad if such labor was cut off? Again, why in 1930 did the president of this same

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<sup>108</sup> Glen Bradley, The Story of the Santa Fe (Boston, 1920) and James Marshall, The Santa Fe: Railroad That Built an Empire (New York, 1945).

<sup>109</sup> L.L. Waters, Steel Rails to Santa Fe (Lawrence: 1950).

company make subtle falsehoods in trying to cover up his company's use of such labor?

The answer to these two questions is quite simply that Mexican labor was a valuable asset, and for the period from 1900 to 1940, made an enormous contribution to an industry that was perennially short on manpower. As members of an ethnic group, they have received only little or inadequate recognition in comparison to their contribution to the building of the economy of Kansas. Excluding their employment on the railroads, a similar assessment can be made of their toil in the packing houses, salt mines and sugar beet industry. Even though representing only a token few in the overall numbers of these first two industries, but comprising almost the entire labor force in the beet fields, the Mexican through his efforts, either directly or indirectly, contributed to the livelihood of most Kansans in a period when the Mexicans were largely ignored and discriminated against by many native Americans of this state.)

It is to this social interaction, or lack of it, and the social conditions of Mexicans that attention will now be turned.

## CHAPTER VI

### SOCIAL CONDITIONS, DEPRESSION AND DISCRIMINATION

The Mexican was of mestizo descent with a great preponderance of Indian blood and dark skin with black hair that set him off in contrast to the Anglo population. This high degree of ethnic visibility, the use of Spanish as a means of communication and the scarcity of working skills set him apart from the Anglo population. This with his low economic status all dictated the social milieu in which he was to exist for many years.

( "Just across the tracks" was where one found the Mexican habitation, removed from the physical and social world of the dominant population. Except for his supervisor or section foreman, rarely did he come in contact with the Anglo population.) Paradoxically, this isolation broke down considerably should the economy fluctuate to the point of depression as it did briefly in 1921-1922 and much more acutely in the 1930's. Such changes failed to bring acceptance; instead it brought a pronounced rejection. During these periods of economic and social stress the Mexican settlements caught the attention of the dominant society to the extent that Mexicans were unemployed, ostracized and even deported to Mexico. Those who stayed on as residents in this State and brushed off the intimidation of the dominant society eventually strayed out from their isolated communities and sought the same services, pleasures and enjoyment as other native Americans. At this stage, overt discrimination displaced covert prejudice as members of this ethnic group were barred from public services, accommodations, entertainment, employment and housing.

That such conditions existed for the Mexican in the State of

Kansas is not so much the fault of this ethnic group as it was perhaps members of the dominant society. The success with which a new population element achieved integration into a previously settled society is often measured by the effectiveness of the two-way process which such a merger inexorably demands. Plan and effort must exist on both sides, as well as the knowledge of underlying differences and similarities. Generally speaking, the burden of proof of failure rests upon the majority group, since it commands the greater strength and resource.

In a real sense, the Mexican was a forgotten person; there was little "assimilation"<sup>1</sup> to the majority society. By 1940, they were still a Spanish-speaking group and generally a deprived minority. As human beings they suffered from social and economic discrimination by an Anglo society who could not appreciate nor realize the contributions this ethnic group could make to American society.

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<sup>1</sup>Carey McWilliams, The Mexicans in America (New York: Columbia University, 1970), pp. 17-18. Long a spokesman for the Mexican Americans, this scholar looks at such concepts as assimilation and acculturation and believes that they are inapplicable to the Mexican immigrant. This author notes that these two concepts were derived from the study of European immigration and they relate to a different "model" when applied to Mexicans. Being cut off from his roots, the European immigrant had no alternative but to "assimilate" the prevailing cultural pattern, that is adopt it as his own. Studies of the European immigration have assumed that "Europe" and "America" are two quite separate cultural identities. But "Mexicans," says McWilliams, "do not have the same feeling for the southwest that European immigrants have for areas in which they have settled." Moving north from Mexico, the Mexican at all times remained in a familiar physical and cultural environment and were able to travel, work and live in these areas while continuing to speak Spanish. The question to consider is whether the Mexican in Kansas can be considered part of the southwest. The answer is yes and no. No in the sense that it is not part of the physical southwest, but yes in the sense that the Mexican in Kansas had close ties to that region and represented an integral extension of that culture.



Speaking of the attitudes of members of the dominant society toward Mexicans in 1948 on the national scale, one spokesman noted that, "no effort whatever has been made to assist these immigrants in their adjustment to a radically different environment . . . . Culturally, racially, linguistically, Mexican immigrants are sharply set apart from the general population. . . . Instead of assisting in a process of gradual acculturation, we have abandoned the people to chance and circumstance."<sup>2</sup> Such attitudes were no less evident in Kansas toward the Mexican resident. If assistance was offered, it was only token and did not alleviate the problems which were often chronic in the Mexican settlements. One such problem that persisted was the housing conditions that reflected the poverty of this ethnic group.

(Housing for the Mexicans was provided in many instances for those employed in the railroad and salt and sugar beet industries,<sup>3</sup> but such housing proved inadequate within a short period of time because of the natural increase of numbers within a household and the failure of the owners to undertake upkeep and maintenance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>McWilliams, North from Mexico, p. 303.

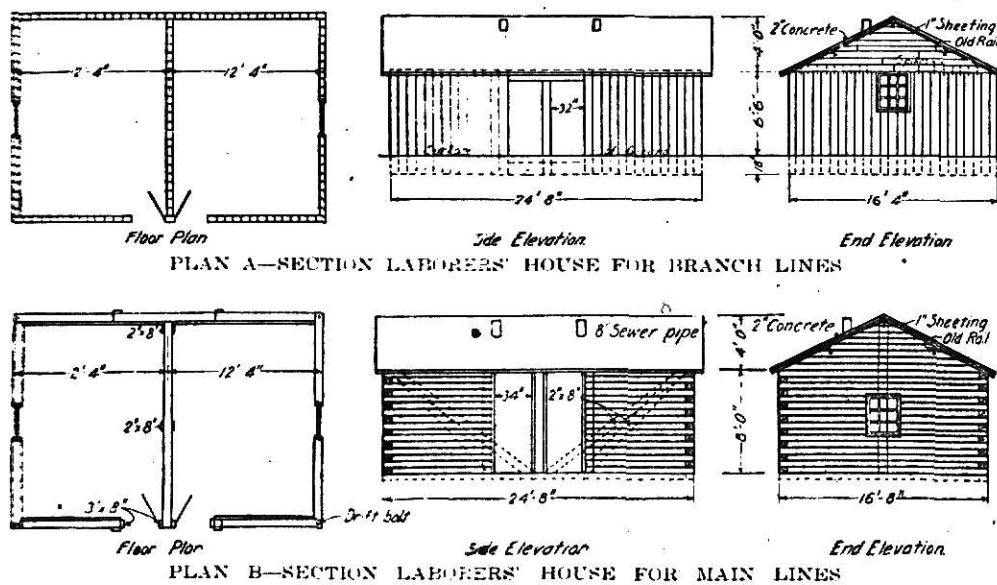
<sup>3</sup>For housing of the Mexicans on the State level, see Franco, pp. 41-42 and 48-50; The Emporia Daily Gazette, "Life in a Company House," December 10, 1947, for the housing of Mexican railroad laborers in Emporia; The Lyons Daily News, June 26, 1972, for the housing of Mexicans in the salt industry and Carman, Vol. II, pp. 440-441 and Franco, p. 41, for housing in the sugar beet industry. The latter observer noted in 1950 that in his five years of residence in western Kansas, "he never found them (Mexicans) living in anything but unsanitary shacks" provided by sugar beet farmers.

<sup>4</sup>Franco, p. 48. Railroad companies other than the Santa Fe also provided housing for their Mexican employees. One indication of this was the company housing provided for by the Rock Island and Missouri Pacific Railroad in Hutchinson. Personal interview with Chencho Alfaro, Hutchinson. There is little reason to doubt that such housing was not provided in other communities by these railroads.



Prior to World War I, the housing provided by the railroads was nothing more than a deteriorated boxcar located on a railroad siding or section houses which were very cheap in construction, as they were made of scrap and second-hand material.<sup>5</sup> The materials used were sawed or hewn railroad ties, old rails for rafters, sheet metal for roofs and mud or concrete used to fill the interstices.<sup>6</sup>

## PLATE II



Layout and design of section houses for railroad workers on the Santa Fe Railroad. Through the World War II period many Mexican families lived in these structures. Other railroads operating in Kansas also constructed similar housing. From: The Santa Fe Employees Magazine, Vol. 5, (September, 1911).

<sup>5</sup>L.C. Lawton, "Erecting Mexican Laborer's Houses," Santa Fe Employees Magazine, September, 1911, pp. 75-76.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. It is interesting to note that two housing plans were implemented by the Santa Fe. One plan called for a better constructed section house on the mainline, and the other plan designated a house of poorer material and construction for inconspicuous places on the mainline and all branch lines. This distinction between these two housing plans suggests a more positive image which the railroad was trying to maintain with the traveling public.

This housing which was typical of many Mexican settlements throughout Kansas had dirt floors and was usually without plumbing and electrical facilities until the mid to late 1930's.<sup>7</sup> Depending upon the Mexican community in relation to the mainlines and the deteriorated condition of these tie houses, brick section houses of more permanency replaced the wooden ones in many communities in the 1930's and 1940's. Such housing remained in use even into the 1950's in some communities,<sup>8</sup> but most frequently fell victim to city ordinances against the inadequate facilities that frequently bred sickness and disease for the Mexican inhabitants.<sup>9</sup>)

Yet, some consideration must be given to the railroad and other industries in the State that did provide housing for its Mexican labor, however crude and rundown they became. Many Mexicans were unable to seek better facilities because of their low economic status which necessitated this dependence upon the employer, but there were exceptions to this dependence.<sup>10</sup> In 1925, at least ten per cent of the Mexicans owned their homes in Topeka and figures

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<sup>7</sup>Personal interviews with Ramon Pedrosa, Newton, and Sotero Gil, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>8</sup>Ricart, pp. 57-60, and Carman, Vol. II, p. 863.

<sup>9</sup>Hutchinson's "little Mexico," comprised primarily of company section houses, was torn down in the late 1920's because of the health hazards it presented for health officials. These efforts were also spearheaded by a police chief who not only wanted the section houses torn down but the Mexican population removed from the city as well. Personal interview with Chencho Alfaro, a resident of Hutchinson since 1920. For the destruction of Topeka's "little Mexico," see the Topeka Daily Capital, January 5, 1939.

<sup>10</sup>One interviewee noted that during the 1920's, when there was a large colony of Mexicans in Ottawa, her father "had more pride than to live in section houses and sought private housing." Personal interview with Mrs. C. Alfaro, Hutchinson. Though this one instance is an exception to the trend, there were probably other Mexicans, for whatever reasons, who lived in housing not provided by their employers.

for the Mexicans who were either renting or owned their homes in the cities of Newton and Lyons are eight and five per cent respectively.<sup>11</sup>

(These homeowners and renters remained within the physical confines of the established Mexican colonies. In the cities of Newton and Wichita these colonies eventually merged into neighborhoods that included Negroes and consequently became mixed.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of the social, economic or educational status that was attained, the Mexicans generally were not permitted to rent or own property except in the Mexican colony or in adjoining mixed quarters.<sup>13</sup> Exceptions to such acts of discrimination was rare in Kansas before 1940.<sup>14</sup>)

(Frequently the Mexican colonies remained on the fringe areas of cities, often in a rural area that might in time be annexed by the city. In the census reports of 1925, the assessors listed the addresses of many Mexicans as simply "Mexican camp," "boxcars" or "stockade," in reference to a portion of the Mexican colony that

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<sup>11</sup>"Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1925," Topeka, Vols. 211-213; Harvey County, city of Newton, Vol. 96; and Rice County, city of Lyons, Vol. 181.

<sup>12</sup>Ricart, pp. 59-61.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>14</sup>One such exception might be noted in the case of Chencho Alfaro who in the 1930's sought to purchase property for a home to the east of the established Mexican colony in Hutchinson. This property, which he eventually purchased, was only a couple of blocks from the colony, but the threats and a petition drawn up by neighbors did not deter him of his right to own property. He persisted and was successful in building himself a home. Over a period of thirty some odd years, he has been able to view with pride and satisfaction the breakup of the old Mexican colony in southwest Hutchinson to the extent that in 1972, the Mexican population there has become largely integrated into white neighborhoods. Personal interview, C. Alfaro, Hutchinson.

resided in a stockyard maintained by the Santa Fe in Emporia and "Santa Fe lumber yards," in reference to a sizable number of Mexicans in Topeka who resided in the southeast corner of the Santa Fe yards.)

These Mexican colonies and their relative physical location to other city dwellers was to a great extent dictated by employers. This was especially true with the railroads who desired compact settlements in cases of emergencies. Then, especially at night, if railroad bridges were washed out or derailments occurred, the entire force of a particular section could be summoned immediately to assist in the emergency. Normally, section gangs consisted of ten men who were responsible for the maintenance of twelve miles of track in a given locality.<sup>15</sup>

These section people had more contact with the townspeople than the extra gang crews who were occupied at extreme distances from communities. The former had to purchase groceries outside their colony, a service most often not provided for in the separate colonies. This minimum of contact itself produced problems for the Mexican in the early period,<sup>16</sup> not to mention the frequent rebuffs

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<sup>15</sup>The Santa Fe in particular maintained such a system, especially on the mainline. For example, to the east and west of Newton were section crews. To the east of this division point were section crews at Walton, Braddock and Peabody. To the west were section crews at Mission, Halstead and Burrton. Of course with the contraction of the railroads in the 1930's, and increased mechanization, such a system became impractical.

<sup>16</sup>This one problem, which became paramount, was the language barrier that was present for the recent immigrant from Mexico. Speaking of one such incident, Franco notes that, "when a wife had to go to the store she took a sample of the food she wanted, e.g. one grain of rice, one bean, a match, a slice of bread, etc." Another example is of a man who wished to buy eggs but had no eggs to take as a sample so he "promptly cackled like a hen, looked behind him, picked up the imaginary egg, showed it to the dumfounded clerk, and called again and again, 'huevos, huevos'." Franco, p. 45.

experienced by the Mexican at a later period. Many of the colonies were self-sustaining except for goods, and most of the public utilities, if provided at all, were taken care of by the companies who provided the housing. Entertainment, leisure-time activities and religious services were long maintained within the colonies. Outside the various benevolent organizations, Protestant missions and the day-to-day contact between the Mexican laborer and his supervisor there was little social contact between members of this ethnic group and the Anglo society in and before the World War I period.

(Meantime, Kansas was accumulating a sizable Mexican population during this period, and they were becoming the subjects of scrutiny that all American immigrant groups have undergone. This became quite evident in 1921 when business began to decline and prices crashed which resulted in a slight depression for a period in 1921-1922. Cutbacks in production resulted in a cutback in employment in many industries. Hundreds of Mexicans in eastern Kansas felt the effects of this depression more acutely than native Kansans. Many Mexicans had been encouraged, and some induced, to enter the country during World War I because of the manpower shortage. In converting the national economy from a war production basis to a peacetime economy, little thought was given to the Mexican who had helped bolster the war production and were to feel the first pangs of this depression. This depression forced many Mexicans out of work with little hope of immediate employment. This hopeless situation presented problems for welfare authorities in the cities of Topeka and Kansas City. A year prior to the depression there was said to have been a population of 10,000 Mexicans situated along

the Southwest Boulevard near the rail center in Kansas City.<sup>17</sup> To lessen the plight of the stranded and unemployed Mexicans, special plans were made between the Mexican consul in Kansas City and local authorities in Topeka and Kansas City for their immediate transportation to Mexico.)

(In early May, 1921, 1,500 of these Mexicans were sent by special trains to Mexico, and a month earlier a total of 20,000 Mexicans in the Kansas City vicinity departed because of their inability to find employment.<sup>18</sup> These were not isolated incidents by any means, the repercussions were also felt in the Mexican colonies in the Chicago area where many Mexicans were forced to leave.<sup>19</sup> This is but one of the first of several instances in this century when Mexican laborers became the victim of an economy that needed them in periods of manpower shortage or prosperity, but were among the first to be abandoned during a depression crisis.)

Yet, this depression was minor in comparison to the one that was to plague the country ten years later. The latter depression was much more severe and damaging to the Mexican population in terms of suffering and displacement. This cataclysm and its effects on the Kansas Mexican was discussed slightly in the previous section, but will be explored more fully here.

(During the depression of the 1930's in numerous towns across Kansas, people demanded that the Mexicans be sent home so that American citizens could have their employment. As the depression became worse, this situation became intolerable for the Mexican

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<sup>17</sup>C.B. Breitigam, "Welcomed Mexican Invasion," New York Times, June 30, 1920.

<sup>18</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, May 8, 1921.

<sup>19</sup>Taylor, Vol. VII, p. 26.



people who could not fully understand the injustice being done to them. In the railroad industry, many of the Mexican laborers were displaced by domestic workers, and the contraction in this industry reduced the number of Mexicans in the railroad communities greatly. If they did not return to Mexico, many tended to gather in large centers. In the sugar beet fields, Mexican laborers were forced to live on starvation wages, and when this did not sustain them, many peddled fruit, patent medicines of Mexican origin and even such items as sewing machines from town to town to supplement their income from beet field labor.<sup>20</sup> In the salt mining industry, the work week was reduced to but two or three days which forced Mexicans in this industry to leave the State.)

(Unlike the American citizens, most Mexicans could not qualify for relief because they were not citizens. Yet, some Mexicans who had acquired citizenship status found work with the Works Progress Administration, but even this was short-lived as the Mexican found humiliation and criticism in their communities where they resided. Such statements and questions as, "send the Mexican back to Mexico," and "why spend what little money we have in the county treasury to feed these foreigners" was heard frequently in various communities where Mexicans lived.<sup>21</sup> As unemployment increased and the welfare rolls grew larger, some states came up with the idea of sending

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<sup>20</sup>Franco, pp. 61-62.

<sup>21</sup>Ricart, p. 14.



Mexicans back to Mexico or coercing them to return.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, once such a policy was adopted, it was often applied indiscriminately and many who were repatriated were native-born Americans.)

Though it would be pure conjecture to attempt to approximate the number of Mexicans who left Kansas during the depression period, the evidence presented suggests that numerous Mexicans were displaced from a way of life in which they had little time to adjust. Again many Mexicans, as had occurred previously in 1921, were ignominiously rejected by a country whom they had assisted during periods of both war and peace.

In spite of these circumstances, it is incredible that in the United States over a million and a half Mexicans remained and endured.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps members of this ethnic group had become conditioned to prejudice and discrimination to the extent that the experiences of the depression period were only another outward manifestation of attitudes and behavior from the Anglo American that were not so pronounced in periods when this country enjoyed prosperity. Perhaps it was the challenges inherent in a free enterprise system that other immigrant groups had met successfully. Again, this endurance could have been part of the Mexican fabric which brought partial success to one Mexican American who attributed it to "persistence and aggressiveness against members of the

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<sup>22</sup>It is not known whether Kansas adopted such a policy officially, but Franco suggests that an unofficial form of persuasion was used in western Kansas to force the Mexicans to leave. See Franco, p. 62. It should also be noted that the midwestern states furnished a relatively higher percentage of Mexican repatriates during the depression than did the states of the southwest. See McWilliams, North from Mexico, p. 55. Along with Illinois and Michigan, Kansas had a comparatively large Mexican population in 1930.

<sup>23</sup>Louis Adamic, A Nation of Nations (New York: 1945), p. 66.

dominant society,"<sup>24</sup> or to the "strength of their inner fortitude, the inheritance of a long-suffering race."<sup>25</sup> Regardless of the reason or reasons for the staying strength of the Mexican during the depression, the fact remains that in whatever form discrimination was directed against this minority group it forced many to leave this country and forced those who remained to withdraw into their ethnic settlements to the extent that many refused American citizenship simply on the grounds that such status would not improve their social and economic position. In many instances American citizenship did not help the material or social condition of the Mexican or lessen the discrimination.<sup>26</sup>

( It is beyond conjecture that discrimination and segregation existed for the Mexican. Citizen and non-citizen, railroad worker, beet field laborer, salt miner, English speaker and Spanish speaker all experienced discrimination to some extent in the 1900-1940 period. It was reflected in their economic and social positions and partially in educational attainment or lack of it, and it was indicative of their failure to rise commensurate to the number of years of service given to their employers. Discrimination was probably most severe in the social relations between the Mexican and townspeople of a given community, but it was also prevalent in the sphere of economic activity.

Discrimination and segregation existed throughout the State regardless of the size of the Mexican colony or the size of a given city in relation to the Mexican population, but it was found that

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<sup>24</sup>Mike Marmalejo, personal interview, Topeka, April 6, 1970.

<sup>25</sup>Quote of José Garcia, The Topeka Capital Journal, July 29, 1956.

<sup>26</sup>Ramirez, p. 29; and Franco, p. 89.

Mexicans in a smaller town or more isolated community were subjected to more social pressure than that which existed in larger cities.<sup>27</sup> Discrimination applied to employment and opportunities for employment, for advancement in employment, to housing and eating establishments. Segregation meant that Mexicans were barred from entering certain public places or from sitting wherever they liked. Such places were theaters, restaurants, recreational facilities, for instance, swimming pools, and even in churches. Add exploitation to segregation and discrimination and one gets an accurate view of life as it unfolded for the Mexican.)

Exploitation usually took the form of an employer inducing the Mexican laborer into employment and later dismissing or firing the laborer for some unjustifiable reason. This happened quite frequently where the turnover of labor was extreme and labor was considered dispensable as there was abundant resources to replace it. Such exploitation occurred repeatedly in the sugar beet and railroad industries. (One instance of this in regard to railroads occurred in Salina, Kansas, in the late 1920's. Upon establishing a Catholic mission in Salina, a college teacher who was assisting the Mexican colony recalled in 1936 that one of the first things she had learned about the Mexicans was that, "various railroads had imported these Mexicans from their native country and, having lured them to a northern climate with promises of continued labor, would

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<sup>27</sup> Ricart especially makes this distinction in his survey of five Mexican communities in east and central Kansas, pp. 48-49. Carman, in his observations of Garden City, also makes this distinction. Here, the predominance of agriculture appears to be a dominating factor. See Carman, Vol. II, p. 452.

lay them off with astonishing regularity."<sup>28</sup> ) It is not known which railroad perpetuated this injustice, but such an act would appear to be other than the Santa Fe whose more considerate treatment of Mexicans has already been noted. The Santa Fe in fact during the 1920's made special efforts to retain their laborers. Rather than return their extra gang laborers to the Mexican border during the winter season, they were quartered during much of this decade at Florence, Kansas, where they were provided for until their services were needed in the spring.<sup>29</sup> Such accommodations were probably rare for most of the extra gang crews though. The working and living conditions of these crews were entirely different from the section gangs and shop crews who did not experience the same kind of discriminatory behavior as the extra gangs.

Life for these gangs was a rather nomadic existence as they might work for weeks far removed from centers of habitation. Their home was the railroad car that had sleeping accommodations with double deck beds. A dining car and usually a commissary (a sort of canteen) accompanied these gangs. When repair work took the gangs too far from the kitchen, dining and bunk cars, lunches were sent out for the noon meals. The commissary cars provided for sale things the men might need, such as shoes, work clothing and various notions. On paydays the amount owed to the commissary was subtracted from the workers check by the railroad who had

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<sup>28</sup>Mary I. Winslow, "Catholic Action in Kansas," The Commonweal, May 15, 1936, p. 69. Work for the Union Pacific may have furnished the impetus for a Mexican settlement that became permanent in Salina, but even there the Santa Fe and Rock Island were present. It is surmised that the Rock Island introduced the first Mexicans into that city. See Carman, Vol. II, p. 923.

<sup>29</sup>Chencho Alfaro, personal interview, Hutchinson, Kansas.

contracted the commissary to supply these needs. This was a simple accomodation for the men, and it worked rather well except for the limitation of choice and the higher prices charged.

The supply and commissary company that supplied the Santa Fe Railroad these services was the Hanlin Company whose headquarters was at Newton. Other railroads used the commissary system in the United States including the Rock Island in Kansas.<sup>30</sup> Grievances were repeatedly made against the commissary company by the Mexican laborers on the Santa Fe. These laborers complained that they were coerced into buying supplies from the commissary and the laborers who refused to patronize the commissary company were sometimes discharged or discriminated against.<sup>31</sup> In several instances it was noted that commissary goods sold from 15 to 20 percent more than the retail prices of the same goods in cities.<sup>32</sup> A railroad extra gang laborer working in Kansas prior to World War I related that, "they [railroad company] only paid us \$1.50 a day for wages and exploited us without mercy in the commissary camp, for they

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<sup>30</sup>L.J. Hughes, "Good Treatment Necessary for Mexicans," Railway Age Gazette, Vol. 53, pp. 58-59. Whether other railroads used the commissary system to the extent that the Santa Fe did was not determined. The Rock Island did in Kansas, at least prior to W.W.I. This is a topic that has received little research, for this writer was unable to find anything of a general nature on this topic.

<sup>31</sup>These complaints were expressed by several Mexican Americans who were interviewed by this writer. These interviewees designated that their identity remain anonymous. Also personal interview with a former office employee of the Hanlin Company, Newton, Kansas, May 16, 1972. For a view of the commissary system as it operated in California, see Mexicans in California: Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact Finding Committee (San Francisco: 1930), pp. 130-131.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

sold us everything very high."<sup>33</sup>

As long as the Mexican men at first, and the families later on, kept to themselves in section houses, or lived in railroad cars, or as long as there were just a few in the community and they lived on the edges of town, little racial prejudice was in evidence except in their contact with fellow railroad workers. Most of the Mexicans who arrived early in the twentieth century were so monolingual that they had to be used as a group and dealt with through their cabo (leader) who knew some English. In Herington during World War I, it was reported that a foreman of German descent and his fellow Anglo workers, "regarded the Mexicans more or less as animals sufficiently tamed to respond to their handler but otherwise to be left alone unless they got in the way."<sup>34</sup> Such an attitude was hardly productive for assimilation, let alone for breaking down the language barrier.

As additional Mexicans arrived in Kansas and their numbers increased, contact between Mexican and Anglo became much more frequent, and prejudice was replaced by race discrimination and segregation. One instance of this was pointed out by a Mexican laborer who was traveling from Kansas City to Topeka in a segregated railroad car containing other Mexican laborers whose destination was a work camp. Enroute to this camp some of the Mexicans desired to pass through an adjoining car that was filled with Americans. When the Mexicans entered the car containing the Americans, this

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<sup>33</sup>Manuel Gamio, The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story (Chicago: 1931), p. 150. In this volume are over 57 interviews with Mexican laborers in the United States who were interviewed by Gamio.

<sup>34</sup>Carman, Vol. II, p. 879. This quote came from a report on the Mexicans in Herington in 1917 that Carman had access to.



Mexican later was to note that, "those fellows (Americans) got up and began to rage against us saying that they didn't want to go in the same car with colored people. . . . but we went on to our car and everything was all right."<sup>35</sup> In many communities throughout Kansas, Mexicans were not only referred to as colored people but classified as Negroes.<sup>36</sup> (A practice condoned at the Bell Memorial Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas, during the 1930's was one of admitting dark-skinned Mexicans to the Negro wards and light-complected Mexicans to the white wards.<sup>37</sup> Most Mexicans highly resented this segregation with the Negroes or the stereotyping tendencies of the majority population because they considered themselves as a race apart from the Negroes because of their distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics. Little did members of these two races have in common except for the similar treatment they received by an Anglo majority.

Promotion and employment opportunities outside of the industries already mentioned were as a rule exceptional for the Mexican during this period. Again, racial discrimination was the cause for this lack of advancement and opportunity. Numerous first generation Mexican Americans have retired after being employed as long as thirty to forty years in railroad work. Most remained as section or extra gang laborers for the duration of their employment. Some were refused foreman or assistant foreman positions because they were told that they lacked leadership qualities, others were denied promotion because they were too inarticulate,

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted from Manuel Gamio, The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story, p. 176.

<sup>36</sup> Franco, p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



even though they had become bilingual, and some were passed over simply because they were "Mexican." One Mexican resident of Topeka was employed with the Santa Fe from 1920 to 1959 as a section hand. In this 39 year span he experienced no occupational advancement and was denied the position of foreman several times because he was told that he was a "Mexican" and was unable to communicate in English properly.<sup>38</sup>)

(In the railroad shops and roundhouses Mexicans for many years held only the position of helpers and were not able to advance into skilled labor positions until the late 1930's. Advanced positions and trades would have been refused then if it had not been for the efforts of the A.F. of L. in introducing a closed shop union at the Topeka shops.<sup>39</sup>)

(The strikes of railway shopmen in the summer of 1922 caused serious repercussions for the Mexicans in some communities. In two instances they acted as strikebreakers in the Newton and Wellington shops, and this action caused deep rooted hostility which lasted for many years against Mexican residents in these cities, often resulting in much discrimination.<sup>40</sup> Yet, despite this hostility in Newton against the Mexicans, they prospered economically more than in other towns because of the availability of employment opportunities with firms not dominated by local prejudices.<sup>41</sup>)

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<sup>38</sup>Mack Torrez, personal interview, April 17, 1970. See also The Emporia Daily Gazette, December 8, 1947 for similar situations.

<sup>39</sup>Nate Morales, personal interview and Francisco Vargas, personal interview, June 7, 1970.

<sup>40</sup>For the city of Wellington, see Franco, p. 39; for the city of Newton the information was obtained by the writer in a personal interview with Ramón Pedrosa.

<sup>41</sup>Carman, Vol. II, p. 917.

The Mexican colony in Dodge City was for many years dependent upon the Santa Fe shops for employment and found it difficult to enter employment elsewhere until World War II. Here segregated housing and discrimination against Mexicans was perhaps the worst in the State. The discriminatory practices in Dodge City and the living conditions were labeled a "disgrace" by one observer.<sup>42</sup>

The most frequent cases of segregation were in theaters, but it was also evident in eating establishments, swimming pools and even in church. In Hutchinson where discrimination and segregation was not so pronounced as in other communities,<sup>43</sup> it was recalled that Mexicans for many years could not even attend public theaters.<sup>44</sup> This total exclusion and barrier for the Mexicans was broken down in the early 1940's largely through the efforts of several concerned citizens of Hutchinson. These efforts were spearheaded by Miss Olga Johnson who for many years helped assist Mexicans in need and led the drive for the acceptance of Mexicans in that city. Partial acceptance in the theater was on a segregated basis in balconies where the Mexicans were further segregated from Negroes who were seated in a separate section.<sup>45</sup> Similar segregation

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<sup>42</sup> Franco, p. 50.

<sup>43</sup> Ricart, p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid; and Olga Johnson, personal interview, Hutchinson, March 4, 1972. This woman for many years has served as an administrator at the Salt City Business College in Hutchinson. In 1972, she was the registrar there. Miss Johnson is of Swedish descent and grew up in the city of Lindsborg. Her "great love and sympathy for the Mexican people" in Hutchinson was largely attributed to her own experiences as a member of an ethnic group, and she could easily identify with the problems that confronted the Mexican minority whom she has assisted.

<sup>45</sup> Mrs. J. Garcia, personal interview, Hutchinson, March 4, 1972.

might be noted in the cities of Newton, Florence, Emporia and Topeka.<sup>46</sup>)

(In cafes and restaurants, total exclusion rather than segregation was the rule, although Mexicans were sometimes allowed to buy food or drink and take it away.<sup>47</sup> At recreational facilities segregation was also experienced by this ethnic group. In Newton, Mexicans were allowed only to swim at nights, and in Lyons, it was recalled that swimming in the public pool was permitted "only on Thursdays, the day they changed the water," and "then we had to swim like hell before the water drained out."<sup>48</sup> In Florence, Kansas, summer swim lessons were organized by the Red Cross one year, but Mexicans were not admitted. Yet, at the same time that these lessons were being conducted, the Red Cross was campaigning for blood donors and the Mexicans were cordially invited to contribute. An observer to this display of tactlessness, noted that, "the people making the appeal were surprised at the rather poor showing of the traditionally generous Mexicans."<sup>49</sup>)

(Segregation in religious services for Mexicans occurred generally in the early period after their arrival but could be found in several communities as late as the 1930's. Before national

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<sup>46</sup>For social discrimination in the Newton and Florence communities, see Ricart, p. 58 and p. 60. For Topeka, see The Topeka Capital Journal, December 20, 1961; for Emporia see The Emporia Daily Gazette, December 16, 1947, and for Lyons, see The Lyons Daily News, June 26 and 29, 1972.

<sup>47</sup>The Lyons Daily News, June 29, 1972; and The Emporia Daily Gazette, December 8, 1947. In several communities Mexicans were refused service in Anglo operated barber shops.

<sup>48</sup>The Lyons Daily News, June 29, 1972.

<sup>49</sup>Ricart, p. 46.

parishes were established and churches constructed, and if the Mexican residents wanted to attend religious services, as many did, they had to attend churches whose congregations were composed primarily by Anglos. The behavior of the Anglos in the cities of Emporia, Florence, Newton and Wichita forced Mexicans to sit in specified pews of the Catholic churches in these cities.<sup>50</sup> The most apparent reason for this segregation was that Mexicans were not welcome because of their racial and cultural differences. This was brought to light by a parish priest in Emporia who pastored there in the 1930's. Writing on the history of the Mexican colony in Emporia at that time, he points out that, "the Mexicans were a local problem and were not desired as fellow parishioners. . . . All of them were of the opinion that Catholic churches, where all Catholics were welcome to worship unmolested, would be as numerous and accessible in the land of their adoption as they were in their native Mexico. . . . When this welcome was not in evidence some of the less fervent thought they had a pretext to be excused from the fulfillment of their ordinary duties as Catholics."<sup>51</sup> When segregation was forced upon the Mexican Catholics in Wichita many resented it so greatly that some of them never went to church again.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>For segregation in religious services see The Newton Kansan, October 16, 1971; Ricart, p. 58 for Florence; Franco, p. 71 for Wichita and "The Diocese of Leavenworth: Historical Sketches of Parishes and Churches Within the Diocese," (1937) Unpublished typescript located at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. For the city of Emporia, see p. 117. These sketches of historical data were written by the individual parish priests. To what extent segregation was practiced in the Protestant churches was not determined.

<sup>51</sup>"The Diocese of Leavenworth," (1937) p. 117. (Hereinafter referred to as "The Diocese of Leavenworth").

<sup>52</sup>Franco, p. 71.

Where segregation existed some Mexicans worshipped in homes until their own churches were built. Of course, this type of discrimination did not exist in some communities or was short-lived in others. Yet, the Catholic Church was to become the most important social institution among the Mexicans in Kansas. Around this focal point centered the parochial school, mutual aid associations, athletic events and even the fiestas, which would become the best known social activity of the Mexicans. In spite of the early segregation in churches in some cities, the church eventually became the life blood of the Mexican colonies that sustained them not only spiritually but socially as well.)

## CHAPTER VII

### RELIGION AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Churches were undoubtedly the most powerful center and cohesive element in the Mexican colony. They deeply penetrated every aspect of their existence and provided a powerful shield against intrusive alien influences. In fact, religion for many Mexicans was a factor making for social isolation. In many instances, the parish priests were the only educated or learned men in the Mexican colonies, a circumstance that normally gave added weight to their edicts and pronouncements. Yet, without the church and such leadership one can only speculate as to how many Mexicans would have endured in a hostile and alien environment. In spite of the criticism that has been hurled against the Catholic church in recent years by members of the Mexican ethnic group,<sup>1</sup> it must be noted that despite its handicaps it was a viable and necessary institution for many members of the first generation. To what extent religion was important for the Mexican immigrant upon his arrival in Kansas can be determined by viewing briefly the influence of this institution in his native country.

From the Spanish conquest in Mexico the religious leadership of the Church was European, not Mexican. The dominance which the Catholic religion held in the daily lives of the inhabitants of Mexico was reflected in the prevalence of churches not only in towns and villages, but also in the countryside. The quasi-theocratic character of the Church lasted through the period of Spanish colonial rule until the nineteenth century when Mexico

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Arturo Carrera, Emerging Faces - The Mexican Americans (San Jose: 1971), pp. 48-52.

was caught up in an intense political-religious conflict between Church and State. This conflict was to continue even into the twentieth century and affected the lives of many of the immigrants who journeyed north to the United States.

Yet, despite this conflict which often resulted in death, deportation, and spiritual deprivation for many Mexicans, almost ninety per cent of the population remained within the Catholic fold.<sup>2</sup> Many Mexicans who arrived in the United States brought with them the controversy between Church and State, and numerous Mexicans were motivated to leave Mexico because of this struggle. A large majority of the immigrants came from the central plateau states northwest of Mexico City where Catholicism was strongest. Many of those who settled in Kansas were from this region, and their allegiance to this faith was still noted by observer in Kansas during the 1920-1940 period. It was noted in the 1940's that ninety to ninety-five per cent of the Mexicans residing in Kansas were followers of the Catholic faith.<sup>3</sup> This high percentage among the Mexicans is rather revealing when considering the hostility the American Catholic clergy directed toward Mexican immigration.<sup>4</sup> The fact that many Mexican Catholics remained true to their native faith during a period of adjustment and at times deprivation reveals the tenacity of the Mexican character. The Mexicans who arrived in

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<sup>2</sup>J. Patrick McHenry, A Short History of Mexico (New York: 1962), p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Franco, pp. 78-79. Franco's population estimate of the Mexican Protestants was 1,500.

<sup>4</sup>Manuel Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States, pp. 118-127.



Kansas were not greeted with open hands by would-be fellow parishioners or the clergy.

( The rather humble beginnings of worship for the Mexicans in Kansas can be noted in several communities. From 1905, with the arrival of the first Mexicans in Newton until 1919, this ethnic group had no formal place in which to worship.<sup>5</sup> In this interim period, the Mexican babies were baptized and other sacraments administered in the separate homes of the Mexicans by the pastor of the St. Marys Catholic Church in Newton. For a considerable period, until the construction of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in 1919, mass was said in the private homes.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of this Mexican national parish was typical of at least eleven other Mexican colonies where national parishes were established between 1914 and the late 1920's.<sup>7</sup>

There appears to have been little systematic design in what or when determined the establishment of these national parishes. In such cities as Chanute, Wellington, Dodge City and Lyons no national parishes were established. Yet, these cities all had a

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<sup>5</sup>The Catholic Advocate (Wichita), December 2, 1971.

<sup>6</sup>The Newton Kansan, October 16, 1971.

<sup>7</sup>Carman, p. 226. These national parishes and the date of churches established (if known) are as follows: Topeka, Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1914; Emporia, Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1923; Kansas City, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, 1925; Wichita, Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1926 and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 1927; Garden City, 1917, Kanopolis, Parsons and Deerfield. Much of this data and related material was located in John M. Moeder's Early Catholicism in Kansas and History of the Diocese of Wichita (Wichita: 1937) and "The Diocese of Leavenworth: Historical Sketches of Parishes and Churches Within the Diocese," (1937). Unpublished typescript located at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

## PLATE III



This Mexican chapel was the place of worship for Mexican railroad workers in Newton, Kansas. It was located on West 1st Street near the largest Mexican camp. This simple one-room structure was typical of other Mexican parish churches in several communities throughout Kansas.  
From: The Newton Kansan, August 22, 1922.

relatively large population of Mexicans.<sup>8</sup> The earliest of all the Mexican parishes in Kansas began in 1914 in Topeka. Here as in other Mexican colonies across Kansas, members of this ethnic group worshipped in their own homes, was ministered to by a visiting priest on periodic occasions, or most often, worshipped in already established parishes dominated by Anglo congregations before their own parishes were constructed. If the latter situation existed, the Mexican worshipers status was characterized by segregation.

( In Emporia it was noted that "many Catholics . . . were embarrassed to associate with the Mexicans even in the fulfillment of their Catholic obligations at church . . . As a result it was

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<sup>8</sup>Yet in John Noeder's History of the Wichita Diocese published in 1937, there is no mention of the Mexican Our Lady of Guadalupe church in Dodge City.

deemed advisable to fix up the basement of the Sacred Heart Church where mass was said on two Sundays of each month for the Mexicans."<sup>9</sup> This arrangement for the Mexicans though was short lived. By 1923 enough money had been donated for the construction of a small temporary chapel for the Mexican colony in the southwestern section of Emporia.)

Some of the parishes were slow in developing because of the poor conditions of the Mexican parishioners. In the words of one priest at Topeka it was noted that "their poverty was such that they were unable to help to any extent financially."<sup>10</sup> The limited funds available at this particular parish during the second decade of the twentieth century forced the resident pastor to leave. This lack of financial support might have been the partial reason for the quick succession of parish pastors in several of the Mexican parishes in the early period of their existence.<sup>11</sup> But it should also be remembered that a most difficult task for the first generation Mexicans in this country was that they alone had to support their church which contrasted sharply with the state-supported church in Mexico.

For the smaller Mexican colonies and work camps, mission work was undertaken. The Mexican Catholics in many such communities were visited periodically by Catholic priests who visited particular points along the railroads where section laborers were employed. One priest who had been assisting in the Mexican parish

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<sup>9</sup>"The Diocese of Leavenworth," Emporia, St. Catherine's Church by Rev. Felix Marsinko, O.F.M., p. 118.

<sup>10</sup>"The Diocese of Leavenworth," Topeka, Our Lady of Guadalupe parish by Rev. Quartero, p. 277.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

in Topeka during World War I undertook this responsibility in the Topeka vicinity. It was recalled that as he traveled from one camp or community to another, "he recited the rosary and preached to these people in the vicinity of their shanties on the right-of-way, and taught catechism to their children."<sup>12</sup> At a later period the Recollect Augustinian Fathers at Kansas City and Topeka did mission work among the smaller Mexican communities.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the first Mexican Catholic churches were simple one-room structures that adequately served the purposes of the parishioners in the early years of their existence in Kansas.<sup>14</sup> By the late 1920's and the 1930's as the parishes prospered, additional rooms might be added to the original structures, and rectories, recreation halls and parochial schools were built on properties

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Carman, p. 226.

<sup>14</sup>Much of the financing for the initial parish churches can be attributed to donations within the Mexican colony itself or from parishes where Anglos were predominant. The same method of financing was used in acquiring property on which the churches were built. Some of these churches were built within the physical confines of the colony which again suggests the proximity of the colonies to the railroads. In Newton, ground for the initial church was leased through the Santa Fe, and in Emporia in the 1920's two buildings were obtained from the Santa Fe for purposes of establishing a Mexican Protestant mission. In Topeka, the Santa Fe also from time to time donated money and materials for the construction of various buildings that came to make up the Mexican parish. See Topeka Daily Capital, February 6, 1921. Other acts of philanthropy by the Santa Fe include a donation of \$15,000.00 for park improvements in 1916 that essentially benefited the Mexican colony in the Oakland area of Topeka. This park was later dedicated in 1917 and named in honor of the President of the Santa Fe during this period, John Ripley. See Playground, "Play for the Mexican Population of Topeka, Kansas," Vol. XIII (April, 1919), pp. 26-27.

adjacent or nearby the parish churches.<sup>15</sup> These facilities easily served the spiritual and social needs of most of the Mexican Catholics. Similar facilities and services came to exist for the Mexican Protestants, but the Protestants failed to flourish in comparison to the Mexican Catholics who outnumbered them about 10 to 1.

The Mexican Protestants numbered less than ten per cent of the total Mexican population in Kansas. Mission work by various Protestant denominations began in the early 1920's in many Mexican settlements. The Protestant sects most responsible for these proselytizing efforts were the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterian.<sup>16</sup> Much of this work was a pioneering endeavor since few Mexican immigrants arrived in this country who adhered to the Protestant faith. One who actively worked and pastored in numerous Mexican settlements across Kansas was Hector Franco who has been frequently quoted in this work. Reflecting upon the past in 1950 when his thesis was written, Franco points out that a real challenge existed for the Protestants "whose churches began to realize there was a splendid opportunity for doing missionary work in the 1920's."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The construction of such facilities varied from community to community, e.g. in Hutchinson and Emporia the Mexican parishes were without a parochial school for several years after the construction of the church. In Salina, the initial church for this parish was a frame structure that had been formally a Lutheran Church and an extra addition to it served as a clinic where Mexican mothers with children were assisted and instructed in hygiene and proper diets for infants. See Mary T. Winslow, "Catholic Action in Kansas," The Commonweal, (May 15, 1936), p. 70.

<sup>16</sup>Franco, pp. 74-75; and Ricart, pp. 43-45. On the subject of religion among the Mexicans in Kansas, Franco's emphasis was upon the Protestant movement rather than the Catholic.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 17.



These efforts by Protestant ministers and laymen began as early as 1910 in Wichita,<sup>18</sup> but the real fruits of this mission work did not become evident until the late 1920's when several Mexican Baptist and Methodist churches became a reality in scattered communities across Kansas.<sup>19</sup> Some Mexican immigrants may have become Protestants because they had been helped in some material way by Protestant organizations - almost out of gratitude.<sup>20</sup> Others, perhaps, were disillusioned as to the moral character of the Catholic priesthood, and they expected to find in the Protestant clergy pure, moral, unselfish men.<sup>21</sup> The validity of such conversion to Protestantism might appear doubtful in such instances, but regardless of the type of persuasion employed, Protestant congregations were formed, though their success was slight. The reason that more Mexicans were not converted to Protestantism can probably be attributed to the ostracism and social pressure exerted by the predominately Mexican Catholic community on Protestants. One observer who visited five Mexican communities in eastern Kansas in the 1940's noted that, when referring to the smaller Protestant groups, "they are not strong or prosperous . . . they rather look like the heroic bands of dissenters fighting a losing battle against superior and better organized forces (Mexican Catholics),

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The Methodist Church was active in such places as Garden City, Lyons, Emporia and Kansas City, while the Baptist denomination was conducting and establishing missions in cities that include Wichita, Topeka, Wellington, Hutchinson and Ottawa among others. See Franco, p. 74.

<sup>20</sup> For such charitable work in Kansas see Paul S. Taylor, Vol. VII, p. 135, and in Salina, see Mary I. Winslow's article in The Commonweal, (May 15, 1936), p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> Manuel Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States, p. 117.

including the social pressure of the group."<sup>22</sup> One such Protestant "dissenter," turned critic, later pointed out that, "the Catholics were not inclined to protest . . . they have always been told by the church what to do and were consequently afraid to ask and challenge."<sup>23</sup> This criticism was directed toward members of the Mexican Catholic faith for their failure to rebuff discrimination, but it is not too far off the mark when one views the dominant attitude of the Catholic Church toward the Mexican parishioners.

Many of the parish priests who pastored in the Mexican communities were Spanish-born and did exert a conservative influence upon members of their congregations. In some communities priests resented very strongly any other activity in the colony, or by members of the colony, that was not controlled by them. It appears as if the church, while trying to help Mexicans spiritually, was in fear of their being contaminated by outside influences. Thus priests kept them from associating with Anglo-Americans and from participating in associations and civic groups that eventually would have helped them to break the obstruction that separated them from their fellow residents.

Such sentiment was expressed in one south central Kansas city that has a sizable Mexican population. In this particular case, the priest was of Irish descent who made it known that he was not

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<sup>22</sup>Ricart, p. 43 and p. 57; See the Emporia Daily Gazette, December 9, 1947, for the condemnation in the Emporia Mexican colony. For this Protestant-Catholic cleavage within the Lyons community see The Lyons Daily News, June 28, 1972. Religious divisions and problems within communities resulting from such cleavages were expressed by two Mexican Baptist laymen in the cities of Topeka and Hutchinson. Personal interviews. Also for Topeka, see Gernon, pp. 931-932.

<sup>23</sup>Quote from The Lyons Daily News, June 28, 1972.



much in favor of education for Mexicans, and did not approve their joining any organization that was not church controlled.<sup>24</sup> Some Mexican families, traditionally Catholic and devout, were not welcomed in the church because they belonged to a secular organization, the "Sociedad Representativa Mexicana."<sup>25</sup> One lady of the community who was active among the Mexican population helped mobilize support for this organization, which was largely social in function, but was reprimanded by the same priest several times because, "she was trying to treat the Mexicans like her own Anglo friends," and was also told "to stop her work among the Mexicans because she might lead them astray."<sup>26</sup> Similar inhibiting influences were much apparent in other Mexican parishes.<sup>27</sup>

This benevolent paternalistic attitude on the part of the church leadership contrasted sharply to the advice given the Mexican parishioners in Topeka before World War I. This pastor, an exile from Mexico and the first parish priest in the Topeka Mexican parish urged his parishioners to break their ties which they held with their homeland and readily adopt the culture, customs and

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<sup>24</sup>Ricart, p. 64.

<sup>25</sup>Mrs. J. Garcia, personal interview, Hutchinson; May 4, 1972.

<sup>26</sup>Miss Olga Johnson, personal interview, Hutchinson; May 4, 1972. For a similar account, see Ricart, pp. 64-65.

<sup>27</sup>For Topeka, see Carman, Vol. II, pp. 931-932, and for Emporia, see The Emporia Daily Gazette, December 9, 1947. Like several other topics related to their past, this dominance exerted by the church leadership was not a popular subject when this writer interviewed numerous first generation Mexicans. Younger Mexican Americans were much more responsive to such subjects. This is a rather sensitive topic today among Mexican Americans. In interviewing older Mexican Americans it was apparent that similar conservative influences exerted from the pulpit still exist and have existed for many years in some communities.

language of the United States.<sup>28</sup> An appeal of this nature, which was directed toward an ethnic group whose culture had been rooted in Spanish and Indian traditions for about 300 years, appears startling when viewed against the traditional conservatism of the Catholic Church.

There can be little doubt that the leadership of the Catholic Church exerted itself over Mexican parishioners to the extent that it became the principal agency of ethnic persistence for Mexicans. This dominance tended to reinforce the separateness of the group and consequently retard acculturation.

The church in the Mexican communities was also the hub of social life and related activities for the Mexican. Fiestas as their best known social activity were closely allied to Catholic activities. At the same time the celebration of Mexican Independence Day was usually on September 16, but some have been held on other dates such as Topeka's which was held annually in July. The best known fiestas have been probably those at Chanute<sup>29</sup> and at Our Lady of Guadalupe Center in Kansas City, Missouri.

Anglo attendance was usually large, thus providing an acculturative influence directly counter to the exaltation of Mexican culture and Spanish language that characterized the occasions. Most of the fiestas have usually been held in the larger Mexican communities, but some smaller settlements such as at Lyons annually celebrated the Mexican Independence Day as early as the 1920's

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<sup>28</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, November 9, 1914.

<sup>29</sup>The Kansas City Star, September 18, 1966. This article is devoted entirely to the annual Mexican fiesta in Chanute. It traces the history of this event beginning in 1917, and notes its growth over the years.

with fiestas.<sup>30</sup>

Most of the monies collected from the sale of Mexican food, handicrafts and entertainment stayed in the Mexican community though some on occasion was given to charities. More often the income from this event went toward some project or function associated with the parish church. These occasions were gala events for the Mexicans. One reporter observing the Topeka fiesta in 1938 noted that it was like being transplanted, "if by magic, into a little part of Old Mexico."<sup>31</sup> Native costumes worn by entertainers, Mexican songs played and sung by special groups and such foods as chili con carne, enchiladas, tacos and tostadas all lent much color and gaiety to an event that began as a Mexican celebration but attracted many others.

Other social events within the Mexican settlements were not as elaborate as the fiesta but were enjoyed just as much and were looked upon with favor. For many years in Newton and Wellington, Mexicans gathered for dances and home cooked food after each "rail-road payday." For these events public buildings were rented or recreation halls were used.<sup>32</sup> Mexican clubs could be found in some communities but were not common across the State.<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere, Mexican benefit societies and organizations were

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<sup>30</sup>The Lyons Daily News, June 27, 1972.

<sup>31</sup>The Topeka State Journal, May 10, 1938. The first fiesta in Topeka was held in 1932 and became so popular that it was held annually into the 1950's. The attendance at this two day event in 1938 numbered over 20,000.

<sup>32</sup>Carman, Vol. II, p. 949 and Ricart, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup>The Latin-American Club, organized by the church in Newton, flourished for a few years, but Sociedad Representativa Mexicana in Hutchinson has long been a secular organization that has served the social needs of Mexican Americans in that city.

an expected part of community life.<sup>34</sup> The numbers and power of these associations were quite small and limited and were not considered strong enough to represent a cultural subsystem. Mutual aid societies did perform important functions for members of this ethnic group. Sociedades and Mutualistas were local societies, or lodges of the mutual benefit type customarily set up by Mexicans through the assistance of Mexican consulates in the United States.<sup>35</sup> These societies were supported by small monthly dues and paid modest sick benefits to members. Such organizations provided a forum for discussion and a means of organizing the social life of the community, and for many years represented the only continuous organized life among the Mexicans in which the initiative came wholly from the Mexicans themselves. The importance of these organizations were the aid and welfare it provided Mexican residents who were frequently denied such assistance by similar American institutions.

In summation, the existence of the first generation Mexican in Kansas for the 1900-1940 period was one of constant adjustment and mobility for many. Arriving with few skills and little education, he was forced to work as a common laborer in an increasingly industrial society. His employment was quite frequently that of a stoop

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<sup>34</sup>Some of these societies include Comisiones Honorificas (Honorary Commission) in Topeka, Emporia, Independence, Coffeyville, Garden City, Parsons and Horton; Sociedad Mexicana in Wichita; Sociedad Mutualista Benito Juarez in Topeka and Brigadas de la Cruz Azul Mexicana (The Blue Cross) in Dodge City and Garden City. For other societies consult Gamio's Mexican Immigration to the United States, p. 245.

<sup>35</sup>For many years the Mexican consul for the midwest maintained an office in Kansas City, Missouri. His jurisdiction, other than Kansas, included five other midwestern states. This office occasionally assisted Mexican immigrants and helped them organize societies of the mutual benefit type.

laborer in agriculture or pick and shovel worker on the railroads and in the salt mines. He advanced little, if any, up the social and economic scale. Sometimes advancement was retarded by his own inability to become integrated in an alien society. At other times his upward movement was denied by overt discriminatory behavior on the part of the majority population who had also exhibited such behavior toward other ethnic and racial minorities in the United States.

( Social equality was denied them also. Members of the group could not enter restaurants, barber shops or theaters, nor could they rent houses except in restricted neighborhoods. The usual reason was that Anglos did not do business with Mexicans. Perhaps it is not so important that the first generation did not prosper but rather that they were able to survive in an alien and often hostile environment. Most importantly, the Mexican belonged to "La Raza."<sup>36</sup> Though this generation, the migrants, might have adopted a few of the American customs and the American material civilization, they remained racially, sentimentally, culturally and traditionally one with the Mexicans on the other side of the Rio Grande. )

After all, one must remember the primary motivating factor that forced the Mexican to emigrate to the United States. It was to seek and gain the basic necessities of life. These necessities were gained by many through employment and the consequent earnings

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<sup>36</sup> This term literally translated means the race. This concept means something of a community of origin, language, culture and a sense of common destiny. During periods of stress and travail the Mexicans and Mexican Americans in this country have rallied behind this concept.

that allowed them a "decent living," and these were things their homeland could not offer them. This standard of living was not the equivalent enjoyed by native Kansans who had resided in the State for generations, but it was at least comparable to other first generation immigrant groups who had preceded them.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOCIAL MOBILITY OF MEXICAN AMERICANS IN TOPEKA, 1900-1970

By almost any criterion the first generation Mexican stood at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The extent to which this generation and the second would advance was dependent upon a number of factors. The most important of these variables that measure social mobility are occupational levels, education, language preference, political power and the influence of religion.<sup>1</sup>

The fluidity of the American social structure for any given period of time and space is very tenuous and must be approached with caution. It should also be kept in mind that the myth in American history that the United States has been the "land of opportunity" for the common man belongs to the realm of legend,<sup>2</sup> but it can not be totally divorced from any study of social mobility. To what degree opportunities existed for the Mexican ethnic group and to what extent members of this group were able to exploit these opportunities for their social and economic betterment, are questions this section will attempt to answer about the Mexican Americans in Topeka, Kansas, over a period of three generations.

The heritage of the Mexican colony in Topeka dates back as

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<sup>1</sup>Another factor that will be dealt with briefly will be the rate of naturalization. For recent studies on social mobility of Mexican Americans, see Fernando Pénalosa and E.C. McDonagh, "Social Mobility in A Mexican-American Community," Social Forces, XXXIV (June, 1966), pp. 498-505; and W.V. D'Antonio and Julian Samora, "Occupational Stratification in Four Southwestern Communities," Social Forces, XXXI (October, 1962), pp. 17-25.

<sup>2</sup>Stephan Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City (New York: Atheneum Press, 1969), pp. 1-2.



early as 1903,<sup>3</sup> but it was not until 1907 that this community could be distinguished from the larger Anglo-American community.<sup>4</sup> In 1907 the Santa Fe Railroad transported several families and male laborers from El Paso, Texas, to Topeka, and this party formed the basis of an ethnic group that by 1970 numbered approximately 6,000. Some of these early migrants, who were the first of many to journey to Topeka, were not aware of their destination when they left the Mexican-American border region.<sup>5</sup> It was a policy of the Santa Fe to recruit Mexican workers at the border and transport them wherever their services were most needed.

Without the Santa Fe Railroad's need for low cost manpower, the Mexican colony in Topeka would have been non-existent. It was a welcome blessing for the Mexicans who were seeking employment,<sup>6</sup> but this Railroad eventually became a curse for those seeking income and occupational advancement. Later it appeared as a paradox for members of this ethnic group; an agency to be blessed and cursed.

Around 1910, with the arrival of numerous Mexican families, Mexicans began to build inexpensive, small houses mostly on twenty-five foot lots clustering around the Santa Fe shops, and "little Mexico" was born. The original colony consisted of eight families, approximately forty people. There were thirteen box-car lumber

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<sup>3</sup>State of Kansas, "Decennial Census of the State, 1925" Vols. 211-213, Ward 2.

<sup>4</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, November 9, 1914.

<sup>5</sup>Mack Torrez, personal interview, Topeka, April 17, 1970.

<sup>6</sup>One Mexican American who has spent much of his life in Topeka recalled that what the Mexican people needed upon their arrival "was a job to support themselves and their families, and the Santa Fe Railroad furnished that." See the Topeka Capital Journal, July 29, 1956.

houses, numerous gardens, barns, sheds and garages. There were no modern sanitary facilities, yet there seemed to be little illness.<sup>7</sup> These early migrants were mainly without funds to rent or buy housing and those with money were frequently not permitted to live outside of the colony. The Santa Fe itself in 1909 allowed the Mexicans to reside in the southeast corner of the railroad yards. In 1919, the boxcars which served as housing gave way to boxcar lumber shacks, but for twenty years "little Mexico" thrived in dilapidated shacks amidst gardens, barns, goats, chickens and dogs.

In 1939, "little Mexico" or the area housing Mexicans in the Santa Fe yards, was torn down because of the rundown conditions. Disease stemming from unsanitary conditions was one reason for its destruction.<sup>8</sup> This portion of the Mexican settlement existed with uncertainty and had been subject to banishment on frequent occasions. Appeals were made by various civic groups in Topeka to help clothe and provide housing for those forced out of the railroad yards, but little in the way of aid was received.<sup>9</sup> Numerous Mexicans used the lumber that was available after the housing was torn down to build makeshift housing outside of the Santa Fe yards. For the entire Topeka colony, only six percent owned their homes in 1925,<sup>10</sup> but this situation improved immensely over the years until by the 1960's ninety-five percent of the Mexican community in Topeka owned their

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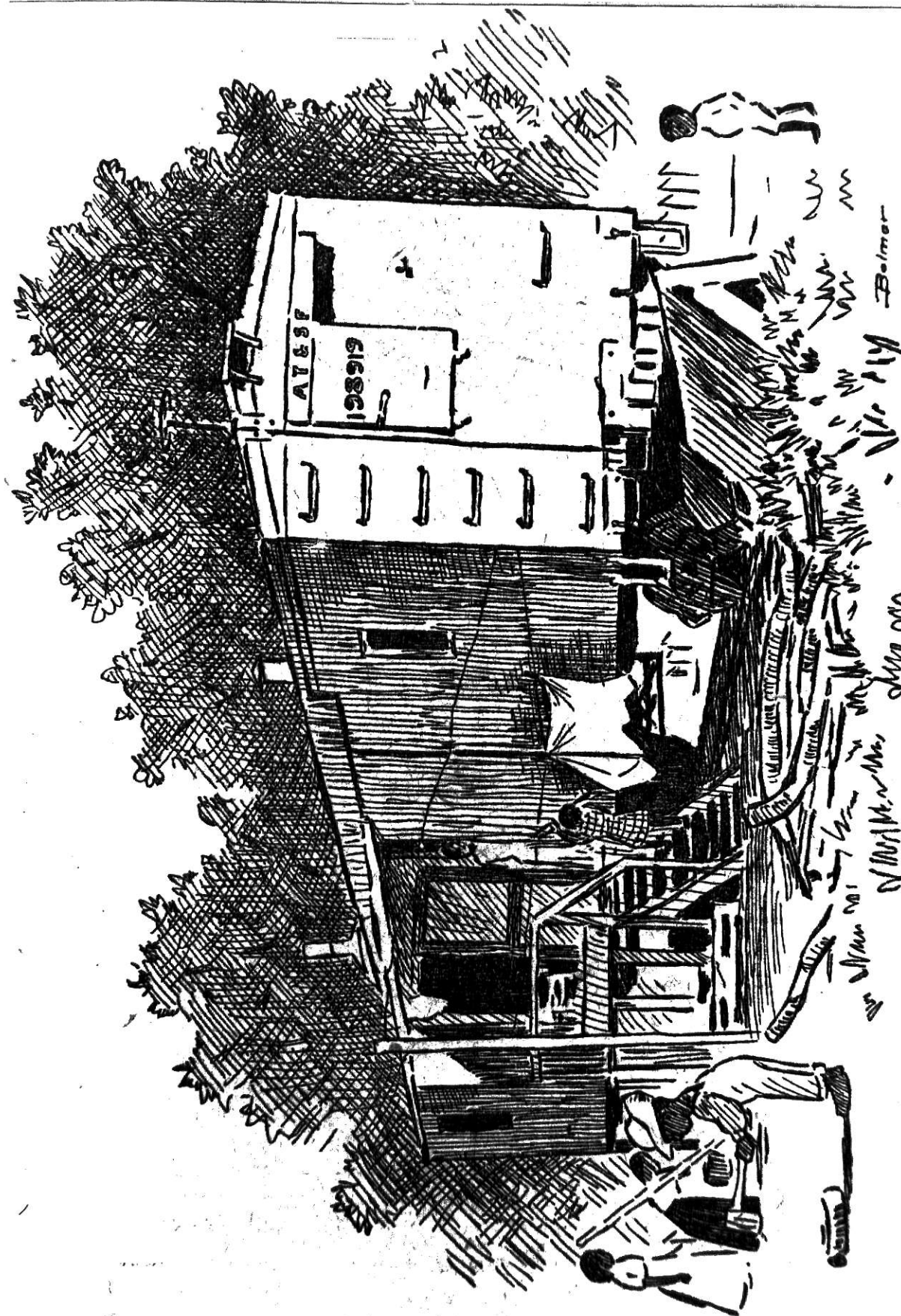
<sup>7</sup> Editorial in Paginas Sociales, Topeka, Kansas, September, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> The Topeka Capital Journal, August 14, 1928.

<sup>9</sup> Nate Morales, personal interview, Topeka, April 25, 1970.

<sup>10</sup> State of Kansas, "1925 Census" Vols. 211-213, Ward 2.

## PLATE IV



Railroad boxcar residence of a Mexican family in Topeka. Many Mexican families resided in these easily converted structures along the right-of-way of railroad tracks across Kansas. From: Topeka Capital Journal, September 1, 1917.

own homes.<sup>11</sup>

Ninety-five percent of the first generation Mexicans were classified as laborers in the 1925 State census; the remaining five percent were employed in the meat packing industry, foundry work, grocery business and one was employed as a police interpreter for the city of Topeka. The Santa Fe laboring class is further broken down into section hands, helpers, (who assisted in the shops and were the largest group) painters and water carriers. Nearly all the Mexicans in Topeka were employed in the shops and yards and not on track section and extra gangs. This situation contributed greatly to the solidarity and permanent nature of the Topeka colony.<sup>12</sup>

Gradually the Mexicans "advanced" from work in the section gangs into the Santa Fe shops where they were employed along with other laborers. During the 1920's and 1930's most of the Mexicans employed in the shops worked in the category classified as "helpers."<sup>13</sup> It was within this unskilled category that the Mexican shop workers remained until World War II. Advancement was frequently denied to these laborers because of their lack of education. Some Mexicans were denied advancement and apprenticeship positions in spite of their meeting the qualifications for better paying

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<sup>11</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, July, 1956, and December 17, 1961. The Santa Fe did not in Topeka, as in many other places, attempt further housing projects.

<sup>12</sup>Peter Earle, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>In order of importance these categories ranged as follows: laborer, high laborer, helper, differential helper, second class mechanic, and first class mechanic. Personal interview with Francisco Vargas, June 7, 1970.

positions.<sup>14</sup> In the early period, after their arrival in Topeka, many of these Mexicans undeniably worked for any wage they could get because it was better than what they could get in Mexico. As the years wore on and many of the Mexicans became embedded in positions where they had been initially placed, they began to have mixed feelings about an employer that denied them advancement.<sup>15</sup> Complaints frequently brought dismissal or suspension from this employment. Consequently, many came to accept this static situation, not so much because of their docility but for reasons of security in an environment where other avenues of employment were closed. These laborers were largely unorganized and had little power to bargain for the simple reason that as aliens in the United States, they were refused membership in labor unions.<sup>16</sup>

As late as 1940, ninety-five of every one hundred Mexicans

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid. Vargas recalled that during the 1920's that the only prerequisite needed for apprenticeship positions in the shops was an eighth grade education. Some Mexicans, including Vargas, met this qualification, but they were denied this position. This discriminatory attitude can only reflect the contempt and distrust that Anglo workers and supervisors exhibited toward the Mexican employee. See Carman, Vol. II, pp. 227-228 for further explanations of discriminatory attitudes.

<sup>15</sup>In the process of interviewing numerous Mexican Americans, most of the first generation Mexicans were rather reluctant to speak out on opportunities denied or hostility directed against them by their employers. In particular, this writer could detect mixed feelings that the Mexicans held about their past. Many would deny that the Santa Fe Railroad, for instance, had exhibited discrimination against them. Others would not deny this. Most though accentuated the positive effects of their relationship with this railroad primarily because it offered them employment, not equal treatment. That the Mexicans were an oppressed ethnic class cannot be denied. Perhaps this condition was best characterized by an elderly Mexican American in Lyons, when reflecting upon the past noted that, "it just took time (for equality) . . . We didn't think we had any rights. . . . We were kind of shoved in a corner and we were glad to be in that corner." Quote from the Lyons Daily News, June 29, 1972.

<sup>16</sup>Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States, pp. 30-33.



employed by the Santa Fe in Topeka were unskilled laborers.<sup>17</sup> By 1961, four out of five held skilled or semi-skilled positions in the railroad shops.<sup>18</sup> The factors that brought about this drastic change for the Mexican people are several. First, though not directly related to the Mexicans in Topeka, was the general attitudes toward Mexicans as laborers in the 1930's which can be viewed as a transitional period.<sup>19</sup> Though the depression created new economic opposition to Mexican immigration it also helped break down entrenched social prejudice. Significantly, the voices of the uncompromising social restrictionists were, for the most part, heard only during the early part of the decade. The climate of opinion in regard to the value of the Mexican worker was changed in a positive way in the late 1930's. The second factor, and perhaps most important of all, was World War II which became a watershed period for Mexicans in this country.

Unification in a national cause can go far toward alleviating a nation's prejudices against its minority groups. Such was the case in the United States regarding its Mexican American minority during and after World War II. The fissure in the wall of intolerance that began to show itself under the pressures of the depression, widened into a gap through which shown the first hopeful glimmer of a new Anglo-American understanding of Mexican people. This war did not destroy bigotry in the United States, but it impressed upon the nation the primacy of a united people in the face of a

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<sup>17</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, December 17, 1961.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Robert J. Lipsultz, "American Attitudes Toward Mexican Immigration, 1924-1952," Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1962, pp. 80-81.

common enemy. A world tragedy had furnished the mechanism by which the Mexican American could prove himself.

A third factor directly related to the war and bearing upon the Mexicans in Topeka was their entrance into skilled and semi-skilled labor positions in the Santa Fe shops. This was accomplished by allowing the Mexican workers to enter the A.F. of L. union in 1941-1942. By 1953, half of the Mexican employees had machinist ratings, and further advancement occurred in the 1960's as some Mexican Americans entered supervisory positions.<sup>20</sup> Occupational advancement was slow in coming for the Mexican American working in the shops, but it enhanced their mobility significantly.

The World War II labor shortage created a powerful thrust behind this ethnic group's drive to invade skilled trades. The caste-like occupational structure of the Mexican American employed by the Santa Fe was finally broken in 1941, but it had taken over a generation for one to become an apprentice machinist. In retrospect, it is discernible from the 1925 State census that the vast majority of Mexicans in the Topeka colony were at the lowest rung of the economic ladder, and few opportunities existed for members of this group of the first generation working for the Santa Fe.

Many of the second generation followed in their fathers footsteps at Santa Fe, and though deficient in education, they became bilingual and were able to step into apprenticeship positions at Santa Fe during and after World War II. One such example is Francisco Vargas whose father was a migrant worker prior to settlement in Topeka in 1913. Upon completion of his high school education, he stepped into a skilled position at the Santa Fe shops and

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<sup>20</sup> Nate Morales and Francisco Vargas, personal interviews.



until recently was Vice President and a trustee of the Railroad Carman of America Union, and also served as Vice President of the Santa Fe Railroad Employees Credit Union.<sup>21</sup> Such positions in unions were impossible for first generation Mexicans. Intergenerational mobility has been achieved by members of this ethnic group working at Santa Fe.

In 1961, one-fourth of the Mexicans out of a population of over 6,000 were employed at Santa Fe.<sup>22</sup> Since 1940, with the coming of World War II, emphasis upon education, gradual changes in the customs of the people, less geographic isolation, and greater contact both physically and culturally with the dominant society has brought occupational diversification for the Mexican population. These factors and the innovations in technology and machinery that created labor-saving devices has created less dominance upon employment by the Santa Fe Railroad.

Outside of Santa Fe employment, the majority of Mexican Americans are employed in many levels and types of occupations today. Numerous members of this group have acquired white collar status, positions that contrast sharply with the employment situation in the 1920's when "no Topekan of Mexican ancestry could be found at downtown work, except in kitchens."<sup>23</sup> The "primary reason," as recalled by one life-long Mexican resident, "was the challenge in surmounting an archaic picture of Topeka's Mexican Americans as a colony of chicken pluckers and elevator operators."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, December 19, 1961.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., December 20, 1961.

<sup>23</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, December 17, 1961.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., December 20, 1961.

Though this problem has not been entirely surmounted today, in comparison to Mexican Americans in other Kansas cities,<sup>25</sup> and though discrimination still exists in employment,<sup>26</sup> strides have been made to indicate social mobility.

The Mexican American occupations for the male population are variable. In 1961, it was indicated that Mexican Americans in Topeka could be found in the occupations that follow: school teachers, social workers, real estate agent, nurses, policeman, civil engineer, lawyer, comptroller for a printing firm, and one who held a supervisory position at Sears, Roebuck and Company.<sup>27</sup> In addition it was found that numerous members of this group were employed by Federal and State agencies. An additional study in 1970<sup>28</sup> indicated that Mexican Americans were employed in supervisory capacities at the Hill Packing Company, and were employed at the Kansas Power and Light Company, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Hallmark Cards, Inc. and the Merchants National Bank. It also indicated that they were employed in numerous establishments across Topeka as mechanics and carpenters.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of this apparent success of some Mexican Americans which demonstrates in part social mobility, it was pointed out in 1970 that discrimination still existed in employment opportunities

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<sup>25</sup>Carman, Vol. II, p. 930. Carman believes that employment opportunities for Mexicans in Topeka have developed less than in Wichita.

<sup>26</sup>Russell and Broadnax, pp. 69-70; and Marian F. Braun, "A Survey of the American Mexicans in Topeka, Kansas," Unpublished Master's thesis. Emporia State Teachers College, Emporia, 1970, pp. 52 and 62.

<sup>27</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, December 20, 1961.

<sup>28</sup>Braun, pp. 52-54.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

for Mexican Americans. Vicent T. Ximines, Commissioner of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Office, voiced his opinion concerning discrimination at the American GI Forum convention in June, 1970:

It is easier for a person of Mexican descent to become a doctor or a lawyer than to get a job as an electrician. . . . Discrimination has been practiced against Mexican Americans as a group in Topeka. Three companies have employed 7,000 persons among them, and only <sup>30</sup>56 of those are persons of Mexican descent.

For the most part, efforts to establish individual businesses have been stymied by the scarcity of capital, but several exceptions are worth mentioning. One is Manuel J. Vargas, interior decorator and proprietor of Vargas Furniture and Upholstery Company. Joseph Alcala is the owner of La Siesta Restaurant, and Perfecto Torrez is the owner of Perfect's Plumbing and Sewer Service. Augustina Tetuan is the proprietor of the Lucky Five Latin Restaurant. Other Mexican American business establishments are the Tavares Market with Marcelino Tavares as its proprietor; Pedro Lopez Company Inc., owned by Antonio Lopez; and the Ralon Sales Company, owned by Ruben Alonza. All but one of these people are second generation Mexican Americans.

Two additional Mexican Americans who have attained a good amount of success through mobility are Mike Marmolejo and Vincent Serrano, both of whom are of the second generation. The latter is presently employed as a specialist for the State Department of Education after serving several years in the capacity as the Topeka High School Mexican American counselor. He indicated that he was very proud that he did not have to follow in his father's footsteps

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<sup>30</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, June 28, 1970.

as a railroad employee with the Santa Fe.<sup>31</sup> Mike Marmolejo, until late 1970 held a position the equivalent to a supervisor at the Kansas State Revenue Department, attributes his own occupational success to education and "persistance and aggressiveness against members of the dominant society."<sup>32</sup> It is certain that many second generation and a sizable portion of the third generation in Topeka have broken the language and educational barriers which is exhibited in their occupational mobility. Education in these cases were prerequisite for social mobility.

Education is the most powerful weapon to promote change, a change that should eventually erase prejudice and insure increased mobility in the Mexican American community. Yet, education was a goal not easily attained for many members of this group. In 1925, ninety-two percent of the first generation Mexicans were listed as illiterate and only about fifty-five percent of their children were attending school.<sup>33</sup> Little interest in attending school was shown by the Mexicans in the first few years of their settlement. Some instruction was provided in 1907 for Mexican children, and in 1914 with the establishment of a Catholic parish, educational instruction was reinforced. Yet, those who attended this primary school were segregated until 1944.<sup>34</sup> School integration occurred without incident during the World War II period, and today the Mexican American children attend six different primary schools and three secondary

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<sup>31</sup>Vincent Z. Serrano, personal interview, Topeka, March 11, 1972.

<sup>32</sup>Mike Marmolejo, personal interview, Topeka, April 6, 1970.

<sup>33</sup>State of Kansas. "Decennial Census of the State of Kansas, 1925," Topeka, Vols. 211-213.

<sup>34</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, December 18, 1961.

institutions in Topeka. But education for the Mexican American has not been a goal early achieved.

Allen Ecord, principal of Branner and Branner Annex Schools in 1932, gives this description of the school situation.

The impact of all these newcomers on the schools was rather terrific. Very few of the parents and practically none of the children could speak or understand English. The teachers could not speak Spanish. Classes were large, most all of them forty or fifty and, in a few cases, classes of over sixty have been reported. . . . In an attempt to meet this problem, Branner Annex School was started in 1918. It was located at Second and Madison, which placed it near the greatest concentration of the Mexican settlement. There was a footbridge over the tracks in the Branner School area that children from across the tracks in the Branner School area could cross over without danger of trains. Branner School consisted of four portable rooms and two old brick toilet buildings. All Mexican public school children attended this school in kindergarten and the first three grades, by which time it was hoped they would have sufficient mastery of English to proceed in the regular rooms at Branner or Lincoln Schools. None of the teachers had any special training for this type of work, and none of them spoke Spanish. A few Mexican parents were found who could speak both languages and they were often called upon to assist in conferences with parents.<sup>35</sup>

Mr. Ecord stated that they tried to change the curriculum that the schools were offering to include vocational courses, but they did not succeed in doing so. He commented that there was a gradual change in the attitude of the people of Topeka toward the Mexican American citizens. In the early days, they were not accepted either socially or in the business community.

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<sup>35</sup>Allen Ecord, "A Principal Looks at Urban Renewal," an essay written for the Research Department: Menninger Foundation (Topeka, Kansas: April, 1967), pp. 33-5.

By 1953 the illiteracy rate had dropped considerably from the high percentage in 1925. A study in the early 1950's indicated that less than ten percent of the Mexicans in Topeka could not read or write in either English or Spanish,<sup>36</sup> and it was also indicated that fifty percent of those eligible were attending high school.<sup>37</sup> In 1961, 300 Mexicans had acquired high school diplomas out of a total population of approximately 4,000, and thirty were attending college with five studying for the priesthood.<sup>38</sup> In 1970 it was impossible to determine the number of Mexican Americans attending schools in the Topeka public school system,<sup>39</sup> but it was indicated that the drop-out ratio for students in high school was negligible compared to earlier years. Since 1944, with the integration into the public and parochial schools the barrier between the Mexican Americans and dominant culture has tended to break down. Integration was a salient factor associated with ambition, and Mexican American boys in the 1970's aspire to nonmanual occupations that had not been open to them previously. Unfortunately, the American culture places a premium on the amount of formal education that an American attains. Previously, the Mexican American has found himself at a tremendous disadvantage due to the lack of education. This was especially true for members of the first and second generation. In the 1970's it was more apparent that education was

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<sup>36</sup>Peter Earle, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, December 19, 1961.

<sup>39</sup>The Topeka public school system does not classify students by race or ethnic background. This was also the case for numerous firms and businesses that employed Mexican Americans. Withholding information and not having data concerning the number of employees or students by race makes a statistical analysis impossible for this ethnic group in Topeka.



being pursued by the Mexican American youth, and that this attainment has become more than a hand hold for better employment. More than any other factor, it has enhanced their drive for social and economic equality which will likely make social mobility more of a reality.

An integral part of education has been the problem associated with language. That language preference is a gauge of social mobility is apparent from several studies made in the Southwest.<sup>40</sup> Language usage is one of the most sensitive indicators of the degree of acculturation, and the use of English rather than the Spanish language was found to be significantly associated with upward mobility. The first generation's inability to communicate in English forced many to subordinate positions in employment. Even in the 1970's a large portion of the first generation has difficulty speaking or understanding English,<sup>41</sup> but such has not been the case for those of the second and third generation. For these younger groups, Spanish is a second language and is used only when "absolutely necessary."<sup>42</sup> Several of those interviewed were disappointed that so few of the Mexican American children could speak Spanish.<sup>43</sup> When contrasted to their parents and grandparents, few of the third generation today is bilingual, an expected finding among foreign-language immigrants. The extent to which the Spanish language has

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<sup>40</sup>Fernando Penalosa and E.C. McDonagh, p. 501 and 503; and William D. Altus, "The American Mexican: The Survival of a Culture," Journal of Social Psychology, Vol. XXIX (May, 1949), pp. 219-220.

<sup>41</sup>Franco indicated this in his study in 1950. See p. 27. This was also indicated by this writer who interviewed numerous members of the first generation.

<sup>42</sup>Franco, p. 48.

<sup>43</sup>José Garcia and Nate Morales, personal interviews.



become subordinate to English is evident in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church where sermons were given in both Spanish and English as early as 1943.<sup>44</sup> For the second and third generations it would appear that the influence of Spanish language has not retarded the mobility aspirations of the Mexican ethnic group in Topeka.

The church played a significant role in the life of the Mexican American. The beginnings in 1914 were hampered by poverty, but the uninterrupted succession of native Spanish-speaking priests, at least until 1970, has kept the Topeka Mexicans more closely together than is true elsewhere. Until 1923, native Mexican priests who were exiled from that country served the Mexican parish, and Augustinian Recollects since that date have pastored at the parish church. In 1951 it was reported by officials of the Augustinians that their parishioners in Topeka were more conservative in several ways, including language, than the Mexicans in south Omaha.<sup>45</sup> The modest church erected in 1921 was succeeded in 1948 by a much more pretentious structure.

An observer in 1961 gives his impression of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in these words:

Neither the Spanish tile nor the ornamental iron-work can more hint at the intimate embrace in which Our Lady of Guadalupe Church enfolds the Topeka Mexican colony. . . . The dull beige bricks almost melt with the shadow falling from the railroad shops where Crane blunts itself against the Branner overpass. The church facade and bell tower resemble an old Spanish Mission and the delicate colors of the interior add emphasis to the vivid Mosaic mural of the Virgin of Guadalupe behind the altar.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Peter Earle, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup>Carman, Vol. II, p. 931.

<sup>46</sup>This observer was Bill Wright who wrote a series of articles on the Mexican Americans in Topeka. See the Topeka Capital Journal December 18, 1961 for his observations on the importance of the church.

About 600 families worshipped in the church in 1970 according to the parish priest.<sup>47</sup> Baptismal records date from 1914 and were recorded in Spanish along with other church records until 1944, when by superior order English was substituted.<sup>48</sup> Whether the church exercises a strong influence in the Mexican American community is difficult to say, but there can be little doubt that the "religious factor" plays an important role in the rate of acculturation and social aspirations of the Mexican Americans.

The Mexican Baptist Church was organized by thirty-five members of the Guadalupe parish in 1924.<sup>49</sup> There was animosity, even threats of violence, at first, but later relations between Catholic and Protestants became more amicable. Though its membership has fluctuated since 1924, this church is still an active organization today. A portion of the Mexican ethnic group attend other Protestant churches, and Mexican Americans who have moved out of the Mexican community into integrated neighborhoods attend other Catholic churches. In 1970, it was indicated that members outside the influence of the Catholic Mexican church represented about one-sixth of the total Mexican American population.<sup>50</sup> Competition between the Catholic and Protestant faith reveals cleavages in the Mexican population and has become an obstacle to consensus when concerted action is needed to take advantage of civil rights legislation or problems that effect the total Mexican American community.

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<sup>47</sup>Rev. Theophane Mayora, personal interview, Topeka, April 6, 1970.

<sup>48</sup>Earle, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup>José Garcia, personal interview.

<sup>50</sup>Rev. Joseph Lopez, personal interview, Topeka, April 19, 1970.

Such divisions within the Mexican American minority group points to the absence of leadership and lack of organized political action groups.<sup>51</sup>

The Mexican American ethnic group in Topeka has since its settlement, comprised only four to six percent of the total population. Even if all had been eligible to vote their influence would have been small. The language barrier effectively isolated a large portion of the first generation and was an important factor in reducing the rate of naturalization. In 1925 few members of this ethnic group were citizens, most were classified as aliens. Only gradually did they go through the formal channels of becoming naturalized.<sup>52</sup> One reason for delaying their naturalization in this country, and perhaps a most important one, was the proximity and easy accessibility of Mexico to the Mexicans in this country. Unlike the European immigrant, the Mexicans in this country had no wide Atlantic Ocean to cross. The cultural and linguistic ties were constantly reinforced with the new arrival of Mexican immigrants, at least up until the depression period. Many Mexican immigrants arrived in this country with the full expectation of returning to their native land, and consequently, never fully relinquished allegiance to their native country. An article in the Monthly Review of the Department of Justice in 1947 noted that, "it is probably true that both Mexicans and Canadians put off naturalization, since a return to countries close at hand is such a simple process that there would appear to be no reason for permanently

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<sup>51</sup>Russell and Broadnax, "Minorities in Kansas," p. 66.

<sup>52</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, November 4, 1938.

relinquishing allegiance to the country of birth."<sup>53</sup>

Yet, it would appear that many first generation Mexicans became naturalized citizens during the Second World War because many of the best paying jobs were in defense plants which required citizenship status. One observer in Kansas during World War II noted that there was a sharp upswing in the number of Mexican residents who took out citizenship papers during this period.<sup>54</sup>

Politically, it appears that the Mexican American record has been negligible, and only since World War II have they given token attention to this avenue that could bring about achievement. The political arena has been closed to this group and political action on their part has been neglected until recently. Politics, often assumed to have been important channels of upward mobility for immigrant groups, has not provided opportunity for these people. Little ascent of this kind has been noted in Kansas. Essentially, the Mexican American community has been without leadership or organization, and only in the late 1960's, on the national level have leaders developed and this has been in the field of labor.

One obstacle that has not allowed them to forge ahead faster has been their apparent inability to unite or organize.<sup>55</sup> The numbers and power of the Mexican American ethnic associations have been quite small and limited. Several organizations do exist or have

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<sup>53</sup>Helen F. Eckerson, "Our Naturalization Potential," Monthly Review of the Department of Justice. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Vol. IV (June, 1947), p. 156.

<sup>54</sup>Franco, pp. 90-91. It is not known how many Mexicans in Topeka took out citizenship papers or became naturalized citizens. One can only assume that this did happen because of the increased incentives of having this status.

<sup>55</sup>Franco, p. 124, and Russell and Broadnax, p. 66.

existed in the community. One, now largely defunct, is the Alianza Hispano Americana which once had a large membership but offered limited social goals. Though it began as a mutual benefit society, its objectives were changed somewhat in order to bring the Mexican American community closer to the larger Anglo community. It was represented in several different civic, welfare and recreational programs in Topeka.<sup>56</sup> A most active organization, and one of the most recognized, within the community today is the American GI Forum which is made up of Mexican American veterans. It was created in 1948 to combat discrimination against Mexican Americans. Today it has many chapters in the midwest and southwest. Topeka's chapter was organized in the mid 1950's, and it has a membership roll of about 400.<sup>57</sup> Unlike the Alianza organization, this organization hardly functions as an institutional system within this ethnic group.

A more recent organization is UMAVK (United Mexican American Voters of Kansas) which was established in late 1969. The goals of this organization are for "economic, social and political improvement of the Mexican American community."<sup>58</sup> UMAVK is a nonpartisan political group. In 1969, this group, which numbered from two hundred to two hundred fifty across Kansas, endorsed some Republican candidates, but it so happened that the candidates were more susceptible to the Mexican American requests than candidates from the Democratic party. Since its formation, it has assisted persons of

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<sup>56</sup>Russell and Broadnax, pp. 67-70.

<sup>57</sup>A.L. Gonzales, personal interview, Topeka, April 13, 1970. Mr. Gonzales in 1970 was president of this chapter in Topeka.

<sup>58</sup>The Topeka Capital Journal, July 12, 1970.

Mexican descent to become elected or appointed to city and state offices.<sup>59</sup>

Although associations like the mutual benefit societies may have perpetuated a cultural subsystem within the Mexican community in the earlier period, their importance dwindled to the point where they hardly serve the community. Much more attention has shifted to organizations that seek cooperation and stronger ties with the larger Anglo-American community. Thus the drive for achievement and socio-economic goals have been compatible with the aims of the newer Mexican American organizations. Several other organizations exist in the community, but they have not proved viable because of the diversity that exists in the community.<sup>60</sup>

Diversity also characterizes the distribution of the Mexican ethnic group in Topeka today. From the initial decade of settlement in this century up until at least World War II, the Mexican colony remained physically isolated in the Oakland area of Topeka. In 1951 a flood of major proportions inundated a large part of this area forcing some residents to move and others to rebuild. Another shift in spatial distribution resulted after the 1961 urban renewal program when one-fifth of the Mexican Americans were forced out.<sup>61</sup> Consequent resettlement fanned out into all areas of Topeka, but the major drift was to the east and northern sections of the city. Others moved as far south as the Highland Park High School. The

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Russell and Broadnax, p. 67.

<sup>61</sup> For a study of the effects of the urban renewal program upon the Mexican American community, see William H. Key, "When People are Forced to Move," Final Report of a Study of Forced Relocation. Topeka, Kansas: Kansas Menninger Foundation, 1967.

fragmentation of the Mexican community began in the late 1940's and continues in the 1970's, but the impetus for fragmentation of the segregated community occurred alongside and with a marked shift in occupational status.

The Mexican American people have been accused of clannishness which prevents them from cooperating outside the family group. An example of the close family ties concerns a Mexican American family who, before the 1966 Topeka tornado, lived in houses clustered around their parents. After the houses were destroyed in the tornado, they were rebuilt in the same pattern, i.e., the home of the parents in the center and their children's home was rebuilt in the same immediate neighborhood.<sup>62</sup>

Like other minority groups in the United States, World War II was a watershed for Mexican Americans. After the war some began to believe the American ideal of social mobility might be available to them. The younger members of this ethnic group of the postwar period who were in secondary or elementary school - that is the young Mexican descendant - - - born after 1925 or 1926 - encountered entirely different social and economic conditions than his predecessors had. He now became an American, though a hyphenated one. Employment previously denied to this group was open to him. Positions of authority previously unattainable, were much more within his grasp.

Since 1940, with the coming of World War II, the Korean War, with the opportunities in defense industries, participation in the Armed Forces, and the opportunity offered by the G.I. Bill, the situation has changed drastically for at least some of this

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<sup>62</sup>Russell and Broadnax, p. 69.



population. More and more graduated from high school and college, entered the professions and business, and in general, the familiar pattern of mobility seemed to be occurring in Topeka, Kansas. The data presented shows this change in part. The phenomenon does not suggest tremendous shifts in occupations, but it does suggest gradual changes in the life-style of the people, less geographic isolation, and greater contact with the dominant society.

It is difficult to make generalizations in regard to this ethnic groups social mobility in Topeka, but certain patterns and trends are discernible. First, the early Mexican immigrants who settled in Topeka did secure their initial goal of gaining steady employment and earning a "decent living." The Santa Fe Railroad gave the Mexican people more than their homeland could offer them. Few members of the first generation could rise above the level of unskilled labor because of their illiteracy, but discrimination also played a large part in their failure to rise occupationally. This minority group was largely isolated from the dominant community and remained culturally distinct, in a manner similar to most other immigrant groups who arrived after 1900. Other ethnic groups almost inevitably became industrial workers who lived near their work.

The constricted status of the first generation Mexican American offered them little chance to be mobile. Their undifferentiated economic position with Santa Fe points to their social exclusion. Their dependence on Santa Fe for employment in 1925 contrasts sharply with those employed in the 1970's. Those presently employed with the railroad have acquired skilled positions, continuing a trend that started prior to World War II and gained momentum since.

Occupational mobility and diversification occurred with their concern for becoming educated and bilingual, and the second generation was the vanguard for advancement as they derived benefits from participation in the Armed Forces.

In conclusion it would be well to note that despite the advances made by Mexican Americans since World War II, much work needs to be done to bring about social and economic equality for the members of this proud ethnic group in the late Twentieth century. Not least of all the forces to ameliorate this condition would be positive action taken by the Anglo majority that would exhibit fair and equal treatment and an openmindedness that would transcend traditional prejudices.

According to Harry Barron in his book, Selected American Minorities, Anglo-Americans assume that Mexican Americans are their potential, if not actual peers, but at the same time assume that they are inferior.<sup>63</sup> Having become a minority group in the land that their ancestors explored and claimed for Spain, these people have existed in a system dominated by Anglo institutions - - governmental, educational and economic. The greatest problem today is not the assimilation of the Mexican American into the Anglo mainstream, but the acceptance by the Anglo of the Mexican Americans as true fellow Americans.

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<sup>63</sup> Hilton L. Barron, Minorities in a Changing World (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 301.

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MEXICAN AMERICANS IN KANSAS: A SURVEY  
AND SOCIAL MOBILITY STUDY, 1900-1970

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESES

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The data and impressions gathered by the interviews with Mexican Americans in various cities throughout Kansas, and census material and newspaper accounts form the substance of this thesis. Limitations of both quantity and area suggest caution in formulating conclusions and must be kept constantly in mind; nevertheless, the facts and their interpretations in both the survey and social mobility sections of this paper are indicative of certain patterns of possible significance. It is hoped this study will create a better understanding and concern for this group of American citizens.

Additional data, especially material from those who long employed the Mexican ethnic group, would have enhanced this study and rendered less conjecture, but it is felt that an adequate portrayal of the Mexican is given for the formative period of their existence, or until World War II, in Kansas.

The Mexican immigrants came to Kansas for economic reasons or to escape the Revolution in their own country. This movement northward began near the turn of this century and gathered momentum during the World War I period, but by the late 1920's, the Depression and immigration laws of the United States drastically reduced this migration. The Mexican was assisted in this movement by the railroads in both Mexico and the United States, but those that operated in the American Southwest were most instrumental in the recruitment, employment and consequent settlement of many Mexicans in Kansas.

Introduced primarily as temporary laborers in the first decade of this century, the Mexican sought permanent employment and settlement in many Kansas communities by World War I. Their distribution throughout Kansas was dictated by the agencies that employed them. Geographically, the Mexican settlements were confined to the eastern

third of the State, the Arkansas River Valley and isolated communities in the southwestern Kansas. This pattern of settlement is distinctly evident when viewed from the standpoint of their employment.

Until World War II, the overwhelming number of Mexicans could be found as railroad workers in section, extra gang and shop work, but they were also employed in fewer numbers in the sugar beet, salt mining and meat packing industries. The positions that members of this ethnic group came to occupy were menial and unskilled positions that had previously been filled by European immigrant groups. In part, the Mexican came to fill the vacuum that existed in Kansas because of the lack of unskilled labor. They became embedded in these positions until 1940 because of their deficiency in skills and education, language difficulty and discriminatory treatment from the majority population. These factors were also the principal obstacles to their social adjustment in Kansas.

In spite of their low socio-economic position, the Mexican during the 1900-1940 period in Kansas was a valuable asset to several industries that were short on manpower, and they in turn made an enormous contribution to the economy of Kansas that has gone largely unrecorded and unappreciated. Either directly or indirectly, members of this ethnic group contributed to the livelihood of many Kansans during a period when most Mexicans were largely ignored and discriminated against.

Social contacts by Mexicans with the Anglo population were rare or extremely limited prior to World War II and little assimilation is evidenced by this group. Acculturation was extremely slow as long as cultural and linguistic contacts continually reinforced the Mexican life-style in Kansas. During the periods of

economic depression members of this ethnic group experienced considerable displacement and even deportation to Mexico by a country whom they had assisted during periods of both war and prosperity. As a deprived and largely forgotten minority, the Mexican American suffered from social and economic discrimination by an Anglo society who could not appreciate nor realize the contribution this ethnic group could make to American society.

Yet, it would not be until World War II, a period which can be considered a watershed for Mexican Americans, that the climate of opinion conducive to tolerance and an Anglo American understanding of the Mexican people appeared. Along with this change occurred an increased concern on the part of the Mexican community for education and naturalization. These changes on the part of the majority Anglo-American population and the Mexican American minority group has resulted in some socio-economic advancements within the Mexican community in Topeka, Kansas.

Gradual changes in the life-style of the Mexican American, less geographic isolation, increased emphasis upon skilled trades and overall education, and greater contact with the dominant society has been demonstrated in this city. Essentially, more opportunities have become available, and social mobility has been experienced by at least some of this minority population.