Mexican American repatriation during the Great Depression

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MEXICAN AMERICAN REPATRIATION DURING
THE GREAT DEPRESSION

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty
of the Department of Mexican-American Studies
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Richard Ruben Ramirez

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Chicano Center
Ramirez, Richard Ruben.
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PREFACE

In the course of this century a great many books, articles, and studies have been written about the Mexican American in the United States. Equally important, among these inquiries, various topics have dealt with the historical and sociological realities shared by two countries, Mexico and the United States.

However, few serious inquiries can be found dealing with the repatriation of Mexican Americans from the United States. This event, a tragic part of American history, resulted in the repatriation of approximately half a million Mexicans, including native-born Americans who left the country either by their own volition or by coercion.

This case deals with federal and local policies responsible for the expulsion of Mexican Americans during the Great Depression. While the study limits its investigation to the Southwest section of the United States, in particular the Los Angeles area, it does take into account that this repatriation movement was a national phenomenon. Also, the overwhelming repercussions that repatriation had on both sides of the United States-Mexican border and inner cities of Mexico are included in the investigation.
On the whole, very few writers have critically written about this historical event. Among these writers, historian Abraham Hoffman is the major contributor to this field of American history. Also, Carey McWilliams, another historian, wrote valuable pioneering works dealing with repatriation during the Great Depression.

Mexican repatriation studies, for the most part, have been ignored by most American historians. Specifically speaking, they "have approached the study of immigration from a European orientation and have almost totally ignored immigration from the Western Hemisphere." Because of this approach, Mexican immigration and Mexican repatriation studies are practically nonexistent.

This episode in American history, nonetheless, tragically affected approximately half a million people from Los Angeles to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Even though hundreds of thousands of people were repatriated from the country, nevertheless, Mexican American repatriation during the Great Depression has been previously omitted from American history books. Such an omission is "a forceful indictment of neglect given to the historical presence of


2Ibid.
the Mexican American people."\(^3\) Most importantly, today many Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals, who are aware that Mexican American repatriation did occur, wonder if a similar incident will ever happen again during their own lifetime.

\(^3\)Ibid.
CHAPTER ONE
Background: Mexican Emigration to the United States

From a historical perspective, some of the oldest and newest Americans are from Mexico. As early as 1525, Spanish exploration unfolded on the Western Hemisphere—north from Mexico. This exploration eventually focused and settled, for the most part, in the area now identified as the southwest section of the United States. What soon followed were Spanish settlements, whose inhabitants would later become American citizens as a direct result of the Mexican-American War.

The establishment of these isolated outposts was attributed not only to Spanish efforts, but to the efforts and contributions of both Mexicans and pueblo Indians. Moreover, in California the dedication and labor of the Mexican colonists and indigenous groups later helped immensely in establishing the most significant outposts of the Mexican empire.3

3 Ibid., pp. 27, 34.
In the end, thriving Indo-Hispanic communities were firmly established in the Southwest. They extended along the rim of the seacoast from San Diego to San Francisco, existing within twenty-one missions in California, four presidial towns: San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco; and two pueblos: San Jose (1777) and Los Angeles (1781). Attempts were also made to establish communities in the valleys of California, except hostile Indians made this feat impossible. Other settlements in Texas numbering some twenty-five missions were also founded, although "their principal and ultimately their only settlements between the Sabine and the Rio Grande were San Antonio (1718); Goliad or La Bahia; and Nacogdoches." For almost 300 years, since the initial exploration in the early 1500s, Mexico's northern province would be dominated by Spanish heritage. Historian Leonard Pitt described the strong Spanish provincialism which existed in California, even after Mexico's independence and confrontation with Americans:

In 1826, California's Spanish heritage was still in strong evidence. Only one generation separated California from the pioneer stage, a fact still obvious in the crudity and sparseness of settlement.

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4 Ibid., p. 25.
5 Ibid., pp. 25-26.
Stretched along a 500-mile coastline, the "nationals," the gente de razon, numbered about 8,000 and in Monterey, the capitol, 300. From the beginning, California had been little more than an outpost of empire, a remote frontier. Since the province lay at the farthest reaches of New Spain, itself a Spanish colony, California's colonial status was twice removed. This geographic and political isolation bred provincialism. An essentially medieval and clerical society, California had twenty-one Franciscan missions which subordinated all and sundry to their will. Neither the military officers at the presidios, nor the civilians in the pueblos and ranchos, could rival the power of the padres in their heyday.7

This provincialism prevailed throughout the isolated geographic and political outposts of Mexico for nearly 150 years. Strong ties to the motherland, New Spain, and unflinching Spanish-Mexican influence helped further to maintain the colonial dogma. However, because of a series of political events in Mexico between Mexicans and Spaniards during the early 1800s, these provincial territories--referred by Carey McWilliams as the fan of Spanish-Mexican influence "North from Mexico"--experienced social and political unrest.8 This unrest ultimately ended with Mexico's independence from Spain.

It would be only a short time after Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821 that a new series of political and


8McWilliams, North from Mexico, p. 48.
geographical occurrences would unveil. This time Anglos, not Spaniards, would contribute to the social and political unrest in the northern provinces of Mexico. Moreover, increasing political and cultural conflicts between Anglos and Mexicans gradually opened the gates to the once isolated frontier of Indio-Hispanic societies. In addition, the conflict caused mass changes to the salient features of a long history of Spanish-Mexican influence and, likewise, among the inhabitants.

Before Mexico's independence, cultural and political contact between Anglos and Mexicans was limited. However, increasing westward-pressing Anglos entering the provincial Indo-Hispanic society soon altered the status quo. Thus, Yankee expansionistic attitudes of Manifest Destiny began to permeate Mexico's northern frontier, which inevitably put Mexico on the defensive as antagonism escalated between both groups.

Unquestionably, antagonism between Anglos and Mexicans existed prior to Mexico's independence. However, the hostility between Americans and Mexicans in Mexico's northern provinces became even more pronounced after


10 Ibid.
Mexico gained its independence from Spain and continued to allow Moses Austin and later his son Stephen Austin to establish colonies in east Texas. Eventually tens of thousands of Anglos entered into this Mexican outpost. Later, as the number of Anglos increased, Mexicans were outnumbered by five to one; inevitably conflict followed.  

In 1826 the Mexican government attempted to seize control of Texas, although it proved unsuccessful. As a result, Mexico prohibited further colonization by Anglos, but Anglo sentiment to this restriction led to armed conflict in the successful Texas Revolution of 1836. Consequently, after the Texas Revolution, nine years of tension and sporadic guerrilla warfare between Anglos and Mexicans followed. Most importantly, by this time, "Texas was always threatened by the possibility of Mexican reconquest."

Another important factor that contributed to Anglo and Mexican antagonism pertained to the United States'
unsuccessful endeavors to purchase territory within Mexico's isolated province during the early 1820s. What later followed was a policy of confrontation persuaded by the United States against Mexico.\textsuperscript{15} Convinced that they were the chosen race, the Yankees pursued, with the utmost, their theory of Manifest Destiny: "to control and settle the area from the eastern seaboard to the Pacific Ocean."\textsuperscript{16}

Hence, this philosophy of Manifest Destiny led to the annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845, and one year later the outbreak of the Mexican-American War followed.\textsuperscript{17} The latter event eventually ended by a peace treaty---The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Most importantly, this treaty signed by the United States and Mexico in 1848 fulfilled the Yankees' yearning to control Mexico's isolated area north from Mexico.

The end result of the Mexican-American War proved fatal to Mexico, because half of her national territory was acquired by the United States.\textsuperscript{18} From this newly acquired territory, the United States created what now forms the states of California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Texas, New

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Meier and Rivera, La Raza}, p. xv.
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Grebler, Moore, and Guzman}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos}, p. 70.
Mexico and various sections of Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming.\textsuperscript{19} In addition, the United States acquired 1 percent of Mexico's population. According to historians Matt Meier and Feliciana Rivera,

Nearly all 80,000 Mexican citizens living in the ceded territory eventually became citizens of the United States; about 2,000 moved southwest across the new political border to retain their Mexican citizenship.\textsuperscript{20}

The vast difference between Mexicans who became United States citizens and those who did not was partly due to provisions prescribed in the treaty. Basically, under the terms in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, these new citizens living within the ceded domain had one year to decide to maintain their Mexican citizenship, or to retain their new citizenship of the United States.\textsuperscript{21} Another chief provision of the treaty provided specific guarantees for the property and political rights of the "native" population and attempted to safeguard their cultural autonomy, that is, they were given the right to retain their language, religion, and culture.\textsuperscript{22}

Consequently, most of this new ethnic population, Mexican Americans, became outcasts of this new, but

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.; Sowell, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{20}Meier and Rivera, \textit{The Chicanos}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{21}McWilliams, \textit{North from Mexico}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
familiar, land. For example, in comparison to the larger majority, the small Spanish and Mexican population, which remained in the new southwestern part of the United States, became victims of prejudice, violence, and corrupt officials. Also, many of those who had possessed land during Mexico's earlier land reform programs lost their land, regardless of the provisions prescribed in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. 23

Consequently, Anglo and Mexican conflict continued long after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. . . . For this peace treaty, like the earlier formal agreements was merely an ineffective stopgap in a continuing history of conflict. 24

Therefore, unlike other ethnic groups in America, the Mexican American population continued its legacy of a long history of political and diplomatic conflict. Thus, the conflict, for the most part, ended in group clashes between the conquerors and the conquered. 25

Push and Pull Factors

Over half a century after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the frontier north from Mexico played another vital role in both American and Mexican

23 Sowell, p. 247.

24 Grebeler, Moore, and Guzman, p. 40.

25 Ibid.
history. This time, however, the issues encompassed an array of social, economic, and political causes, rather than solely Yankee expansionistic ideals.

Prior to 1900, Mexican immigration north from Mexico "had been a trickle . . . to the borderlands: Texas had an immigrant population of 71,062 in 1900; Arizona, 14,172; California 8,096; New Mexico, 6,649."26 Yet, one estimate held that from 1900 to 1920, an excess of a million Mexican immigrants came to the United States, and, for good reason, concentrated in the Southwest.27

It is generally agreed that after 1900, the great wave of Mexican immigration to the Southwest brought nearly 10 percent of Mexico's total population. Moreover, "the industries in which Mexicans were concentrated . . . were those vital to the economic development of the Southwest."28 The catalyst for this mass immigration was triggered by Mexico's deplorable social and economic conditions that existed prior to the 1910 revolution.29

During this period, most of Mexico's formidable condition was brought about by the ideology of one man--

26 McWilliams, North from Mexico, p. 163.
27 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 123.
28 McWilliams, North from Mexico, p. 164.
29 Meier and Rivera, La Raza, p. 3.
Porfirio Diaz. As a young mestizo officer, Porfirio Diaz led a successful revolt that took over Mexico, which resulted in his assumption of the presidency from 1876 to 1910.\textsuperscript{30} Under his dictatorship, he unveiled a new ideology to restore Mexico's already unstable government. His ideology, in essence, which included a number of proposed guidelines and plans to make Mexico a strong nation, was based on the teachings of the positivists, who were followers of the French philosopher, Auguste Comte. The goals set out by these positivists

known in Mexican history as "los científicos," \textsuperscript{31} planned and worked for a modern scientific Mexico, which would take its rightful place among the nations of the world.

From the beginning of his dictatorship in 1876 to his overthrow in 1911, Porfirio Diaz' prime concern focused in controlling both the government and the economy. This concern, however, did not include the bulk of the Mexican majority—peones (unskilled laborers) and Indians. Instead his liberal policies, the political stabilization, and domestic tranquility all encouraged peace, opportunity, and

\textsuperscript{30}Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 117.
prosperity for a selected few. Most of them were foreigners, and

by the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexico had become known as the stepmother of Mexicans and the mother of foreigners, as European and American businesses extended their economic and political control over Mexico.33

These foreign investors, in general, had focused their interests on the railroad subsidies, government support of mining and oil development, and federal lands.34 Nevertheless, both foreign and domestic investors made their impact on Mexico with serious consequences for a societal socio-economic equilibrium.35

The burden of Porfirio Diaz' political, social, and economic ills were mostly felt in the local and rural levels, where Diaz' system of government treated the majority of Mexico's people with contempt and disdain. These racist attitudes and conditions were enhanced further by Diaz' failure to recognize their socio-economic interests, especially his neglect to adequately prepare the "underdog" for democratic participation in their government.

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33 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 117.

34 Ibid., p. 116.

35 Ross, op. cit., pp. 27, 29.
during his long tenure in office.\textsuperscript{36} The following explanation by Stanley Ross, a writer of Mexican history, provides additional information concerning the woeful conditions among the neglected Mexican majority, under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz:

The people of Mexico also suffered from a lack of equity in the administration of justice. Justice, like security and opportunity, was the prerogative of the few. The state of education was disgraceful. Schools were built, but the number was inadequate and the distribution uneven. Outside the capital and key provincial cities, facilities were practically nonexistent. Even accepting official statistics, the illiteracy rate was shocking and showed only a slight decrease by the end of the period. In 1895, 86 percent of the population was unable to read and write, and after the close of Diaz' regime four out of every five persons were still illiterate. Health conditions were equally discouraging. There was a high incidence of enteritis, pneumonia, malaria and venereal disease.\textsuperscript{37}

For the most part, these serious and dreadful living conditions affected the peon and Indian majority. Furthermore, because of Diaz' haughtiness toward the bulk of Mexico's people, the rural area remained isolated, and neglected geographically and culturally, from national life, whereas the great cities prospered and contained all the necessary facilities required to function accordingly.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 27-28.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
In addition to the insurmountable obstacles already inflicted on the myriad of Mexico's underdog, Diaz' agrarian policy made matters even worse. Unlike earlier reformers, motivated by ideals of liberalism and individualism who sought out to destroy the feudal pattern of Mexican landholding, Diaz' agrarian policy opposed these aspirations. To illustrate, his policy ignored the efforts of these reformers and their efforts during the mid-nineteenth century reform movement, which resulted in la ley de desamortizacion (law of expropriation) of 1856. This law was a well-intentioned effort to advance the Indian economically by making him an owner of private property, to develop the ranchero (small farmer) class as a counterpoise to the large estate owners, and, by achieving both these goals, to make possible real democracy in Mexico.39

Diaz' stance, unfortunately, only added to the landholding struggle among the privately owned estate, the semifeudal hacienda, and the communal landholding village.40

With this Spencerian theoretical dogma of making Mexico a mighty modern and industrial nation, Diaz and his followers unleashed new legislation which broke up the communal lands and manifested disdain toward Mexico's Indian population. By enforcing Reform Laws against

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39 Ibid., pp. 28-29.
40 Ibid., p. 29.
communal villages and decreeing that all communal lands must be divided, one estimate indicated that from 1889 to 1890 over two and a quarter million acres were allotted to individuals—with most of the acreage going to large landowners, speculators, and land companies. Because of further wholesale attacks by Diaz' government and its series of colonization laws, the equilibrium of native society and the majority of Mexico's mass population suffered tremendous mental and physical anguish.

Eventually, the majority of people, including the small landowners, were left landless and forced into peonage. In short, debt peonage rose to alarming new heights—because of the large haciendas' pathetic low wages that amounted to less than twenty cents per day, and the result of the exploitive operation of the large landowners serving as creditors to their hired helpers. The debts of the peones were rarely paid off; hence, future generations usually inherited them, literally keeping them in bondage to their respective hacendado.

Finally, because foreign and large landowners took advantage of Diaz' new legislation, the hacendados controlled half the land and rural population and over

41 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
42 Meier and Rivera. The Chicanos, pp. 117-18.
four-fifths of the rural communities by the end of Diaz' regime. By this time, they were able to dominate politically, economically, and socially the lives of Mexico's mass population. Thus, the agrarian policy of Diaz' government which brought victory to the hacienda resulted in a new generalized form of agrarian feudalism throughout Mexico.43

Unfortunately, neither a real democracy nor the theory of making Mexico a strong, modernized, and industrialized nation developed under Diaz' dictatorship. Instead, his government fervently practiced economic discrimination based on race and color for foreign and domestic investors alike. Such practices led to economic, social, and political injustices to Mexico's mass population; and ultimately contributed to Diaz' downfall and the 1910 revolution.44 Yet, "the most tragic aspect of the material progress and prosperity of Porfirian era was the fact that the mass people did not participate," but only contributed to its despair.45

Without any hope, a slow but steady influx of Mexicans, mainly from the central and eastern states, left

43 Ross, pp. 29, 31.
45 Ibid.
Mexico to seek a better livelihood in the United States Southwest. This small scale immigration became the fore-runner of the two other great waves of Mexican immigration to the United States: the first, from 1900 to 1920; the second, from 1920 to 1930. Later, the first major waves of Mexican immigrants totaling approximately one-tenth of Mexico's population soon followed prior to her 1910 revolution. The 1910 revolution, directly linked to Diaz' regime and his precipitated downfall by Francisco I. Madero's political campaign for president, was the most significant "push" factor for the onset of this mass immigration.46

Other "push" factors responsible for Mexico's mass exodus depended upon this essential fact: Mexico's population was increasing, whereas its economic opportunities were decreasing. It was estimated that Mexico's population increased from 9,400,000 in 1877 to 15,200,000 in 1910. During this period, wages consequently remained the same, while prices rose rapidly. Because of the rising cost of food and the decline in real wages, a large percentage of the rural lower classes were dying of hunger throughout

Mexico. Persons engaged in mining, commerce, and industry experienced similar hardships.\textsuperscript{47}

Next, from 1880 to 1910, Mexico constructed 15,000 miles of railroad which allowed numerous Mexican laborers seeking employment to travel by coach from such cities as Chihuahua, Sonora, Nuevo Leon, Zacatecas, Durango, and San Luis Potosi to communities or cities north of the United States-Mexican border. Furthermore,

the old borderlands immediately south of the United States-Mexican border offered no very great inducements for people to stay there... Mexicans could be easily induced to cross the border in search of work, the more so since crossing the border involved no great problems and the trip was not expensive.\textsuperscript{48}

Then, of course, the inception of the revolution by Mexico's president Francisco I. Madero on November 29, 1910, resulted in a decade of inflation, violence, and internal upheaval in Mexico.\textsuperscript{49} Finally, the major goals of revolution, such as land redistribution, were not fully accomplished by its leaders and supporters.


\textsuperscript{48}McWilliams, loc. cit.; Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 118.

\textsuperscript{49}Cardoso, op. cit., p. 400; McWilliams, The Mexicans in America, pp. 9-10.
In regard to the "push and pull" theory of migration, the Mexican revolution continued to be the most significant "push" factor; it caused thousands of people to seek refuge. On the other hand, the increasing demand for labor in the Southwest, roughly coinciding at the time of the Mexican revolution, became the vital "pull" factor which encouraged this northward migration to the United States.

Below Matt Meier and Feliciana Rivera address some interesting and crucial points concerning the first wave of Mexican immigrants to the United States:

In addition to thousands of ordinary peasants uprooted by the revolution, many soldiers and supporters of revolutionary leaders like Villa, Obregon, Carranza, and Zapata immigrated into the United States. Also included in this mass movement were supporters of the government in power. Because many fled political persecution, this wave of migrants came from more varied backgrounds than those of any other Mexican migrations before or since; included in this group was a large percentage of women, children, and older people. These displaced people greatly increased the population of Mexican Americans towns and barrios. Despite plans to the contrary, most of them never returned to Mexico, as they found acceptance and cultural security in the familiar milieu of the Mexican American communities in which they settled.50

Middle and upper class refugees, who likewise felt threatened by Mexico's turmoil, were also among the first wave of immigrants. Some refugees from this nobility managed to escape with capital. And, unlike peons, their

survival was not as dramatic after arriving into the United States. In fact, some of them later went into business for themselves along the border. Nonetheless, opportunities for the peons were very few; they had to accept menial agricultural and industrial work in order to survive.⁵¹

Commonly, the mode of transportation for these refugees was the rail lines. Thus, the bulk of Mexicans entering the United States by train came from a group of states in the Mexican Central Plateau, particularly the states of Jalisco, Michoacan, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, and Zacatecas.⁵² Traveling by train from central Mexico to U.S. border towns cost ten to fifteen (U.S. dollars) per person.⁵³ Once reaching the border, the route commonly used by many Mexicans to enter the United States occurred through Texas. After residing temporarily in Texas, many later continued their journey, usually to Arizona and California. "Others also went by way of Nogales, Arizona

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⁵¹Ibid., p. 124.


and in the late 1920s through Calexico, California and Mexicali, Baja California.\textsuperscript{54} Ironically, once they crossed the border many of these immigrants were recruited by U.S. railroad agents or by other labor agents called enganchadores.\textsuperscript{55}

Historically, Mexican labor was used in the United States before the Mexican Revolution of 1910. As early as the 1880s Mexicans toiled on the transcontinental railroads—normally under a six-month work contract—at a dollar a day.\textsuperscript{56} They worked on construction and maintenance crews, and as section hands. Furthermore, Mexican labor was employed to extend rail lines through the harsh desert regions of the Southwest by Southern Pacific and Santa Fe Railroads. Carey McWilliams stated that it was no east feat to push rail lines through the rugged, semi-desert, mountainous terrain. There were few points at which materials could be assembled; the isolation of the region impeded construction. But fortunately, cheap Mexican labor, both resident and immigrant, was available in large quantities.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54}Romo, op. cit., pp. 174-176.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., p. 177.


\textsuperscript{57}Kirstein, op. cit., p. 2; McWilliams, The Mexicans in America, p. 10.
Many of the early enclaves of Mexicans—usually in the form of boxcar housing or, later, in rows of company housing—could be found along major rail lines of the Southwest in such states as Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and, as far away as, Illinois.\textsuperscript{58}

Most importantly, resources were unlocked in the Southwest because of the railroad. Thus, industries, such as sheep, cattle and mines prospered by the turn of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{59} Although Mexican labor was initially imported to construct the new rail lines; nevertheless, it played a key role in the development of all these industries and the new entering economic phase in the Southwest by this time.

Meanwhile, the primary impetus for the first waves of Mexican immigrants in the twentieth century was the rapid agricultural expansion in the Southwest. As a result, job opportunities in various agricultural states became available and economically inviting for this influx of immigrants. For example, openings to pick various crops in California's Imperial Valley and San Joaquin Valley, the Salt River Valley of Arizona, and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, indeed, attracted thousands of unskilled

\textsuperscript{58} Hoffman, loc. cit.; McWilliams, \textit{The Mexicans in America}, p. 10; Kirstein, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{59} McWilliams, \textit{The Mexicans in America}, pp. 10-11.
and farm workers to the States.\textsuperscript{60} The sugar beet industry in the states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Colorado also encouraged the Mexican northward migration in a similar manner. Of course, as the cotton industry expanded in the Southwest, Mexican labor came north to meet it.\textsuperscript{61}

One of the most significant keys that unlocked the agricultural industry in the American Southwest was the Reclamation Act of 1902, which resulted from the Federal government cooperating with private, city and state-owned corporations. Hence, major projects directly promoted by this irrigation act came about in the region. To illustrate, main projects such as the Roosevelt Dam in Arizona and the Elephant Butte Dam in New Mexico when completed increased thousands of previously untilled acres for farming.\textsuperscript{62} A large percentage of these irrigated lands eventually had to give way to the large-scale cotton farming in the states of Arizona, California, and especially, Texas--where cotton farming began as early as the 1890s. Gradually Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas became major centers for cotton production.\textsuperscript{63}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{60} Hoffman, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{61} McWilliams, \textit{The Mexicans in America}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{62} Meier and Rivera, \textit{The Chicanos}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{63} McWilliams, \textit{The Mexicans in America}, pp. 11-12.
\end{flushleft}
The impact of this economic mobilization greatly
accentuated the labor shortages in both agricultural and
industrial areas within the Southwest prior to World War I.
Even though domestic and foreign labor was available,
evertheless it proved to be insufficient for meeting the
economic development of both industry and large commercial
farms. Moreover, rapid changes of immigration from Asia
duced by Congress passing the Chinese Exclusion Act of
1882, and, later, by the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan
of 1907, created and augmented a serious vacuum in western
labor by 1910. Largely, Chinese and Japanese had supplied
much of the seasonal, foreign, low-wage labor in the
Southwest until Mexican labor became more desirable. How­
ever, when the severe depression of the mid-seventies
struck the country, nativistic-oriented unions raised the
issue of "yellow peril" which inevitably pressured the
United States Congress to pass the Immigration Acts
previously mentioned. These acts unwittingly aided the
demand for Mexican laborers.64

Because of the changes in Chinese and Japanese
immigration and the increased demand for American farm and
fiber products brought on specifically by World War I,
labor shortages rose dramatically in the agricultural

64Romo, p. 175.
Southwest and in many industrial areas around the country. In addition, the conscription of American citizens for military service and the wartime boom increased the availability of industrial jobs in cities, such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York. Soon thousands of poor white and black laborers, especially from the deep south and southwest regions of the United States, flocked northward seeking better paying jobs. Ultimately, American farm laborers emigrating from the country to the cities decreased the manpower in agricultural areas. Hence, in many farming areas, only old women and children were available for stoop labor in the fields.65

Growing numbers of commercial farmers began complaining about the alarming losses of employees leaving their farms to war-related industries and the military. Since they could not compete with the more lucrative wages and year-round employment offered by most of these industries, many farmers claimed they were helpless to cope with the problem. Under these circumstances, American farmers demanded government assistance.66

65 Cardoso, p. 401.

Immediately some farmers suggested to the government that opening the gates at the Mexican border was an ideal solution to fill the serious labor vacuum. Farmers also supported this suggestion by stating that they "needed the Mexicans to plant and harvest the crops and the Mexicans desperately needed the work to keep from starving." Other favorable conditions, such as "the proximity of Mexico to the United States, the already established reliance of American Southwest on Mexican nationals for stoop labor," were expressed by them as well. At the same time, their boisterous protests pressured the government not to take their case too lightly.

In response to these pressures, the United States Congress in May, 1917, instituted special regulations allowing the entry of temporary farm workers from Mexico. Under these regulations Mexican workers were exempt from the eight-dollar head tax, a literacy test, and quota, which, otherwise, were required for admission of regular immigrants prescribed in the Immigration Act of 1917. Paradoxically, the 1917 Immigration Act enacted by Congress

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
only three months earlier was considered to be the most restrictive Immigration Act in American history.\textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{The Emigration Phase}

Exemptions to the 1917 Immigration Act lasted for three years. During this period, approximately 50,000 Mexicans emigrated north of the international border on a temporary basis. However, it is estimated that at least another 100,000 entered the United States illegally.\textsuperscript{71}

Under the conditions set forth to the special Mexican labor program, Mexican workers could be admitted into the country only after an official certification verified that an individual employer demonstrated a need for them. Also, the employer had to "enter into specified contracts with them, and accept responsibility for returning them to the Mexican border."\textsuperscript{72} Further rules and regulations set by the Labor Department required all Mexican workers to be photographed and issued identification cards. These workers were also restricted only to agricultural work, and to those employers with whom they had been certified. Other specific requirements included that Mexican workers were not allowed to bring any dependents with them to the

\textsuperscript{70} Kiser and Kiser, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{71} Meier and Rivera, \textit{The Chicanos}, p. 130.

\textsuperscript{72} Kiser and Kiser, p. 10.
United States, and upon completing their work contract they had to return to Mexico. As a guarantee that the laborer would return, twelve and one-half cents (American currency) were deducted from each day's wages and deposited in a savings account with the United States Postal Savings Bank until a sum of fifty dollars was accumulated. The sum and interest earned were then returned to the worker after his contract, normally a six-month period by law, had ended. 73

Even though the Labor Department established elaborate guidelines and regulations in order to maintain control of the special Mexican labor program, these rules for the most part were not enforced. For instance, many workers abandoned their employers for whom they had been certified and took advantage of other jobs available in various industrial companies and nonfarm work. George C. Kiser and Martha Woody Kiser, American historians, wrote "there was no systematic mechanism for compelling employers to comply with contracts, and claims of labor shortages were not carefully investigated." 74

Besides this veracious attempt by the Labor Department to watchdog what is generally agreed to as the first bracero program, on a broader level the American and

73 Martinez, p. 43.
74 Kiser and Kiser, p. 10-11.
Mexican governments did not make any agreements or guarantees concerning employment, or living conditions for these workers. Thus, large numbers of workers unfortunately lived in poor housing and earned low wages.\(^ {75}\)

Shortly after the Immigration Act of 1917 was passed, which later included the waivers for Mexican farm workers as noted previously, other economic interests for labor support in addition to farm-related employers, began to express their concerns. For the most part, the reason these interests voiced their concerns was due to the sharp drop of immigration from southern and eastern Europe by almost 50 percent, which directly resulted from the war and the 1917 Immigration Act. Hence, large numbers of other unskilled workers for hire in nonfarm and farm industries were deeply cut. As noted by Lawrence Cardoso,

sugar beet growers and refiners in Colorado, for example, were no longer able to hire German and Russian workers. Farming interests in California were deprived of Italian, Slav, Greek, and Portuguese immigrants. . . . In 1914 persons entering the United States totaled 1,218,480; for the remainder of the war the annual numbers of immigrants hovered around the 300,000 mark. By 1918, after the implementation of the 1917 legislation, the annual number of newcomers was less than 10 percent of that in 1914.\(^ {76}\)

\(^{75}\)Meier and Rivera, *The Chicanos*, p. 130.

\(^{76}\)Cardoso, p. 402.
By this time Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson, who earlier had authorized the exemptions for Mexican agricultural workers on May 23, 1917 from any and all tests imposed by the 1917 Immigration Act, was being confronted by railroad, mining, and industrial interests also expressing their need for Mexican workers--in the name of national defense. 77 For example, Cardoso mentioned that a spokesman for the United States Railroad Administration during this wartime emergency period "asked governmental permission to secure 50,000 track laborers from Mexico." 78 To illustrate further, Cardoso suggested that similar sentiments were echoed by other industrial interests. For instance "one industrialist, apparently expecting a long war, suggested that 1,000,000 Mexicans be recruited by the government to fill factory jobs throughout the United States." 79 Due to these interests and employers, the Secretary of Labor in July, 1918, extended his waiver to include nonagricultural workers. Soon afterwards, Mexican laborers were found working in railroads, mining, construction, and other nonrelated farm industries, such as

77 Ibid., p. 403.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
government construction projects, particularly in the building of army camps.\textsuperscript{80}

Consequently, the United States war-induced labor shortage began to have deleterious domestic effects on Mexico. Most of Mexico's complaints centered on the depopulation and industrial and agricultural retardation.\textsuperscript{81} Strong expulsionary forces, such as Mexico's domestic situation and the United States domestic demand, played key roles behind Mexico's social and economic setbacks during the first few decades of the twentieth century. However, by now, the most serious problem contributing to Mexico's socio-economic retardation, indeed, was the massive emigration of her fellow countrymen to the United States. Officials of the Mexican government, including employers and nationalists, realized the grave situation facing their country's social and political equilibrium which was caused by this immense immigration.\textsuperscript{82}

On the other hand, some opponents who felt indifferent towards this immigration problem began to express their beliefs that social and economic benefits were indirectly gained for Mexico by the direct contact between Mexican

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid.; Meier and Rivera, \textit{The Chicanos}, p. 131.

\textsuperscript{81}Kirstein, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{82}Cardoso, p. 404.
Nationals and American civilization and culture. Others compared unfavorably the former working conditions that thousands of Mexican immigrants experienced in Mexico in contrast to their working conditions in the United States. Unlike the primitive conditions in Mexico which encompassed a great deal of starvation or brutal treatment by Mexican employers, the working conditions with American employers were not so likely to occur. Other observers alluded to the cultural benefits gained from America, such as Manuel Bonilla, Madero's secretary of development, who acknowledged that "the experience of being in contact with an advanced culture aided emigrants in improving their own life styles." Lawrence Cardoso pointed out that an editor from El Universal, one of the leading dailies in Mexico City, believed that the peasantry learned how to be temperate, to dress well, to eat properly, to speak English, and to employ the latest agricultural techniques. When the migrants returned to their homeland with their new skills, they would be cultured persons and a progressive element for Mexico.

Still, opponents were clearly speaking out against emigration from Mexico. Those totally opposed to the numbers of emigrants leaving were the majority of literate Mexicans. Likewise, patriotic Mexicans, particularly

83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
revolutionary nationalists, asserted that the severe problems their country was undergoing, such as the frustrated economic growth and national security, directly came about from Mexico's underpopulation. Additional comments by nationalists went as far as insinuating that emigrants were traitors to the fatherland. "Just when their own nation was in need of their labor and support," wrote Cardoso, "they deserted Mexico and went to provide benefits for the Yankee colossus." These nationalists, Cardoso went on to explain, "also believed that the flight of labor had weakened industrial development because of the exodus of much-needed technicians." 

In spite of conflicting opinions, the continuous flow of Mexican emigrants to the United States grew in number. Even though the Mexican government did not view its citizens abandoning their country favorably; nevertheless, some national political leaders agreed that emigration was necessary. At this time Mexico was still in the midst of her civil war problems: chaotic conditions prevailed throughout her whole nation. Other realities included Mexico's inability to provide jobs or political stability for its citizens. All those reasons only encouraged

85 Ibid., p. 405.
86 Ibid.
thousands of her people to seek basic needs, something most of them hope they would find in America. 87 Moreover, many emigrants after finding work in the United States would send back money to relatives in Mexico to help alleviate their poverty there. Matt Meier and Feliciano Rivera indicated that "the dollar income that emigrants were sending back to Mexico—between $5,000,000 and $10,000,000 per year—was a vitally needed addition to the Mexican economy." 88 Furthermore, it was also generally agreed that Mexican administrators were inclined to believe emigration acted as a safety valve. 89

Mexican policy toward emigration was not always viewed favorably. In fact, Mexico's policy became confusing and contradictory. To illustrate, "On one occasion," wrote Lawrence Cardoso, "even Carranza's government officially praised the cultural benefits and progressive attitudes supposedly manifested by returning nationals." 90 However, "when braceros became involved in difficulties of a serious nature," stated John Martinez, a Mexican historian, "their government then expressed its basic disapproval and for a

87 Ibid., Romo, p. 185.
88 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 147.
89 Ibid., Cardoso, p. 404.
90 Cardoso, p. 404.
short time endeavored to discourage emigration to the United States. Likewise, on another occasion, President Venustiano Carranza with assistance from the Departamento de Migracion went as far as offering free passage on Mexican railroads to all who desired to work in America. Nevertheless, the Mexican government was disconcerted because it was unable to take care of her own people, as evident by the citizens who were literally leaving their homeland to seek a better livelihood in the United States.

Regardless of Mexico's vacillating policy on emigration, Mexican Nationalists and employers continued to urge the Mexican government to discourage its citizens from leaving the country. In response, Mexican officials implemented various methods to deter Mexicans from emigrating. Warnings regarding difficulties encountered by Mexican emigrants in the United States were issued by the government. Ricardo Romo mentioned that the *Times*, a leading paper in Los Angeles, commented in March of 1920 that the Mexican government had warned the workmen not to leave Mexico, stating that they would receive no protection from the American

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91 Martinez, p. 42.
92 Ibid.
93 Cardoso, p. 404.
government, that justice would be denied them, and that they would become victims of mob violence if they went to the United States.94

Romo also added,

the Times stated that the exodus to the United States was causing alarm. Northern Mexican states sent news that there was serious danger to numerous industries in northern Mexico through non-use and to large areas of farm land through lack of cultivation.95

Perhaps the best example of a middle course in policy imposed to deter Mexican emigrants from the United States was Carranza's government intensive propaganda campaign. The crux of this policy instructed governors of the northern border states to advise would-be emigrants of prejudice and exploitation faced by Mexicans in the United States.96 In the form of a publicity campaign, governors of northern Mexico pursued their efforts to curtail the emigration. Consular reports were commonly used for propaganda. For example, after a consular's propaganda report received approval by the Secretary of Foreign Relations, it was then circulated through several Mexican newspapers. Most reports had the same bottom line; penalties and miseries awaited braceros across the border.97 Federal

94 Romo, p. 185
95 Ibid.
96 Cardoso, p. 406.
97 Ibid., p. 407.
workers, largely from the Secretary of Interior's Department of Migration, also gave similar warnings to would-be emigrants. 98

Carranza's propaganda campaign, nonetheless, failed. The rising tide of emigrants continued to cross the United States-Mexican border. Part of the campaign's failure was that despite the dismal publicity written by Carranza's government, Mexicans preferred taking a chance of finding employment and better living conditions in the United States than face the hardships in Mexico. 99 Furthermore, the vast majority of Mexicans, especially in the rural areas, were illiterate. Thus, the grapevine served as a significant medium for these Mexicans. "Returning workers," Lawrence Cardoso explains, "painted glowing pictures of better living and working conditions across the border." 100 He commented further on the general opinions of workers toward their government during this period:

Besides, the typical worker distrusted the government, whose agents seemed always to exploit him and yet to protect the employer class. Why, now, should one believe in the protective efforts of untried revolutionary regimes? Why stay at home and face possible starvation or violent death? If United States employers and officials occasionally abused Mexicans, the workers' experiences with employers and

98 Ibid.
99 Romo, p. 185.
100 Cardoso, p. 408.
officials in their own country had taught them how to deal with such treatment.101

Ironically, because of the Selective Service Act of 1917, thousands of Mexicans were returning to Mexico shortly after the thrust of Carranza's propaganda campaign was initiated. Under the provisions of this act, set into law on May 18, 1917, American born males twenty-one through thirty years of age had to register for the wartime draft. Similarly, foreign residents who had taken steps to become naturalized were required to register as well. However, due to rumors concerning the status of foreign nationals, mainly Mexican, thousands of Mexican Nationals thought they were subject to the draft. This havoc largely occurred when the state and federal governments neglected to inform Mexican Nationals of their status. Moreover, Selective Service officials in the absence of clear guidelines from Washington regarding proof of nationality and certificate of birth made matters worse. Thus, it was estimated that nearly one month after the Selective Service Act of 1917 became law, approximately 9,851 Mexican workers had returned. With thousands of laborers voluntarily returning to Mexico, the United States immediately took steps to halt the reverse flow of these workers.102

101Ibid.
102Ibid., pp. 413-14.
Despite Mexico's own problem with emigration at this time, Mexican officials cooperated with American representatives to help curtail the loss of needed workers for the United States' domestic war effort. Strategies advising Mexican Nationals of the minimal requirements under the 1917 Selective Service Act were carried out most conspicuously. "On telephone poles, billboards, train station walls, and stores, Spanish language posters informed braceros that not one of them would be drafted."\textsuperscript{103} Moreover, in this extensive effort, parish priests read (official) letters to their Mexican communicants to provide additional assurance from being drafted. In addition to these letters, Cardoso mentioned that "priests, together with 'friendly Mexican officials,' visited farm, mining, and rail camps to explain the position of the United States government."\textsuperscript{104} He concluded by stating,

\begin{quote}
this latter effort had a marked effect in quieting fears about possible difficulties with selective service personnel. By August 17, calm was restored and the number of braceros in the United States approached those of pre-draft times.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., p. 414.
\textsuperscript{104}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105}Ibid.
In the meantime, Mexican Americans also felt the socio-economic burden of Mexican Nationals. By 1917, Mexican Nationals became literally the prime source of cheap labor for the American Southwest, especially in California and Texas. Their prominence, moreover, prevailed in other western states, mostly because of their satisfaction with low-wage, minimal housing, and primitive working conditions per se. On the other hand, Mexican Americans, particularly along the border areas, were displeased by the increased low-wage competition Mexicans created in industries, such as agriculture, mining, and railroad. Because of this competition and wartime opportunities within industrial centers, Mexican Americans for the first time began to migrate to midwestern and northeastern cities during the wartime period.\(^\text{106}\)

Though Mexican Nationals could be found working in similar industrial jobs held by Mexican Americans, their numbers in such jobs were far less than Mexican Americans; the difference was mainly due to the amount of acculturation Mexican Americans had with Anglo society as compared to the less assimilated Mexican in general. Notwithstanding Mexican and Mexican American wartime job opportunities for the most part were hazardous, dirty, unskilled, or

\(^\text{106}\) Meier and Rivera, *The Chicanos*, p. 130.
arduous. Regardless, individuals from either nationality could likely benefit monetarily by swaying from the more traditional menial jobs in agriculture and on railroads. Thus, their economic position at least was improved to some degree.

Socially Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals shared a synonymous identity by now. The former, who considered themselves Americans were largely labeled by Anglos as Mexicans. It should be noted, also, that although the unfounded and half-truth rumors associated with the Selective Service Act of 1917 had presented a serious problem for Mexican Nationals, many Mexican Americans, nevertheless, were more than willing to sign up for the draft. In spite of urgings by some community members to do otherwise, "many thousands of Mexican Americans," as noted by Matt Meier and Feliciano Rivera, "served valiantly in the Army and Navy, where their record for voluntary enlistment was proportionately greater than that of any other ethnic group." They commented further on the Mexican American's patriotism by stating,

107 Ibid.
109 Ibid., pp. 131-32.
although Mexican Americans proved their loyalty by excellent armed services records and civilian support of the war effort, their patriotism was frequently questioned, and they continued to suffer discrimination.110

Discrimination not only plagued the milieu of Mexican Americans throughout the war but Mexican immigrants also. Reports of hardships and abuses encountered by thousands of Mexicans from American employers and American immigration officials were definitely overwhelming. In 1917 the Mexican paper *El Excelsior* reported that four thousand Mexicans had been incarcerated in Arizona and New Mexico, apparently for using violence during strikes against mine operators instigated by the Industrial Workers of the World.111 Moreover, in other parts of the United States similar reports of abuses and mistreatment toward Mexican workers were many and varied. Because of such facts and other related problems, Mexico actively attempted to resolve any and all problems her compatriots faced to and from the United States.112

A policy by Carranza's government to protect Mexican Nationals abroad was the use of Mexican consuls in the United States. As early as November 10, 1916, these

110 Ibid., p. 132.
111 Martinez, pp. 44-45.
112 Ibid., p. 44.
diplomats were ordered to use, if necessary, the full powers of their offices and all legal recourses as a last resort to protect or aid their Nationals. Part of the consul's duties included visiting migrants in jail to inform them of their legal rights under local law, making sure those rights were carried out fairly. Only under extreme circumstances surrounding any migrant's case were federal courts to be used to investigate any foul play by state and local judicial bodies. Other measures went as far as instructing these diplomatic representatives to inform, then, Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations Candido Aguilar as well as the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C., if any trial was handled by their opinion unjustly. It was only "after each case was studied on its merits," Cardoso explained that "a decision would then be made as to presentation of a formal protest."\(^{113}\)

This policy of consular protection unfortunately suffered from numerous handicaps. Consuls encountered problems involving illegal migrants who feared making themselves publicly known; hence, incidents of unfair treatment among these Mexicans by employers or otherwise went mostly unreported. At the same time thousands of Mexican migrants simply "tended to distrust the whole

\(^{113}\)Cardoso, p. 411.
Limited funding also dampened the consular effectiveness. Funds for paying legal fees were frequently unavailable. Furthermore, as a result of the consular districts being commonly large and inadequate office staffing, any given area to be policed was greatly reduced. According to Cardoso, "there were never more than several dozen consuls at a time when Mexican Nationals in the United States numbered in the hundreds of thousands."  

In spite of these severe limitations, Mexican diplomats continued fervently to protect and educate their fellow Nationals abroad. An excellent example of consul intervention under the protective policy occurred at Spreckles Sugar Company in California. According to the intervener Consul General Teodulo Beltran, in May 1918, he found sugar beet field hands at the company working under conditions which closely resembled those suffered by Porfirian peons. He acknowledged in a report sent to the Mexican government that company treatment near slavery, unduly extended work hours, irregular pay, poor food and housing, and even armed guards within the work camps to ensure submission were typical conditions Mexican workers

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114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.
faced every day there. However, after a formal complaint against the company was filed with the proper United States authorities by Beltran, he and company officials immediately began to negotiate some imperative changes. The result of the deliberation ended with a new labor contract, which included a $2.25 wage for a nine-hour day with an additional 25 cents an hour for overtime, better food, and housing. Company officials also agreed to eliminate the armed guards. Lastly, workers were entitled to enjoy complete personal freedom after work hours, including holidays.116

Notwithstanding some success, Carranza's government was still unable to solve the emigration problem. By now Mexico wanted to stand up to the United States to express its discontent, suggestions, and ideals regarding unregulated emigration, "even at the expense of the United States if necessary."117 However, because of its past dealings with the United States, Mexico was very much aware that any formal protest to her American counterpart during the domestic wartime effort would only be greeted with apathy. It occurred

116 Ibid., p. 412.
117 Ibid., p. 415.
only when its own national interests were threatened in the draft scare of 1917 did the government in Washington allow its agents to deal with Mexican officials on this matter.118

Though the above quote is in reference to wartime waivers for Mexican emigrants, this American sentimentality contributed greatly to Mexico's failure in effectively implementing any program to help curtail her dilemma of emigration, specifically during World War I.

118 Ibid.
Both the United States and Mexican governments generally agreed that Mexican workers who were used as a temporary expedient for wartime purposes would return to Mexico when the war ended. Yet, after the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918, migration continued fervently from Mexico to the United States. One estimate noted that from 1918 to 1920, approximately 250,000 Mexicans legally crossed north of the border. Consequently, thousands of Mexican laborers were affected socially and economically by the labor problems due to the end of World War I.

Among the most important labor issues facing the United States at this time were the millions of soldiers expected to return home seeking employment. This issue ultimately ended with the Department of Labor enacting exigent orders on December 18, 1918, notifying all foreign emigrants admitted legally for emergency wartime labor to

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leave the United States and return to their respective countries. By deporting these alien workers, the Department of Labor assumed that immediate employment, particularly in agricultural areas, was to be made available for the home-bound soldiers. However, according to John Martinez:

Soldiers could not be discharged in time and in sufficient numbers during the spring and summer of 1919 to provide the necessary manpower. Farmers who anticipated a labor shortage protested and petitioned the Department of Labor strongly enough to get the immigration provisions waived again for the year 1919. It was mainly the cotton growers of Texas and the other states of the Southwest who most strongly urged the continued use of braceros. The Congressmen from these states formed a committee and persuaded Secretary of Labor W. E. Wilson to allow further use of Mexican labor.

Unfortunately, tens of thousands of Mexican workers were deported before the 1919 immigration provisions became effective. These deportations, furthermore, began as early as one week after the war ended and resulted in thousands of Mexicans being stranded at towns along the border. "Eagle Pass and Matamoros were two main centers through which the deportations were made." Moreover, because many of the deportees did not have money, they were not able to leave the border area; thus, many of them were literally

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2Martinez, p. 34.

3Ibid., p. 44.
left stranded along the Mexican border without food or shelter. In short,

they suffered greatly in the desert areas south of the border. Many died as a result of being thrust across the frontier. Fatigue and starvation took a sure toll.4

El Excelsior reported that the Sub-secretary of Foreign Relations, Garza Perez, exclaimed that

the deported Mexicans could not remain at the border, for there was nothing for them to do there. [And] that trains would be made available to transport these people to the states of Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Durango, and Zacatecas, where it was hoped the mines would absorb them.5

For this reason, the Mexican government did express overtones of discontent toward the United States' handling of the deportation. However, like previous formal protests, the results were fruitless.6

At the same time that Mexicans were being deported, one source pointed out that over 300,000 soldiers were returning monthly to civilian life--to civilian jobs.7

Even though mounting pressure by interest groups inevitably caused the Department of Labor to extend the Exclusion

4 Ibid., pp. 44-45.

5 Ibid., p. 44; Excelsior (Mexico, D.F.), 24 December 1918.

6 Martinez, p. 44.

Clause of the Immigration Act of 1917; nevertheless, thousands of Mexicans holding civilian jobs were left jobless. While Mexicans working in the urban areas were hit hardest with layoffs, a great demand for Mexican labor still prevailed in agriculture, transportation, and mining.  

Mexican workers continued to be a vital labor force regardless of the "normally prosperous times" the United States was experiencing after World War I. This reasoning largely stemmed from the fact "war veterans were not sufficient to replace Mexican . . . labor even when they did accept farm and other kinds of 'stoop' labor." In addition, disagreements on wages, working conditions, food, and housing were quite common between an American employer and his American employee, especially in rural farm areas. The outcome usually ended with the latter leaving his place of employment, creating a job opening which would quickly be filled by a more cooperative Mexican worker.

Paul Taylor, a prolific writer on Mexican labor in the United States, described a general attitude that some American employers were developing as their preference for choosing Mexican laborers instead of American laborers. To

8 Ibid.
9 Martinez, p. 34.
illustrate, a proprietor of several hundred acres of cotton
land stated the following:

I would rather have Mexican tenants than either Negroes or whites. You can't tell the whites so well what to do. They think they are on an equality with you and they want to live in a house about like you do. They are always wanting better clothes and more provisions. The Mexicans have bigger families and more labor to get out a big crop.10

Notwithstanding, preference for Mexican labor went beyond just the veteran question, or for that matter the discretionary practices of hiring used by different employers. Many of the explanations had to do with the economic stimulus brought on by the war—crop productivity of cotton and sugar beet that exceeded the American agricultural labor supply. Equally important, the fruit and vegetable industries in both southern California and Arizona also reached new records in crop production. On the whole, all four of these products not only expanded to new heights but they, also, became exceptionally profitable.11 Hence, employers in such industries who realized the potential profits to be made became very much aware that a labor shortage still existed, and by and large


agreed that Mexican workers could help alleviate the belated labor vacuum.

Because such postwar labor shortages remained in a number of economically important American industries, tens of thousands of Mexicans migrated across the border with the hope of finding some work. They entered along the border towns located in the states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. For example, El Paso, Texas, was commonly used, like earlier antecedents, as a main port of entry by thousands of Mexican migrants. This was mainly due to Mexican rail lines which ran from various cities in Central Mexico north to the city of Juarez. Despite whatever means of travel or entry used by migrants, one estimate noted that in the year 1920 alone, nearly 138,050 Mexicans legally crossed the United States-Mexican border.12 A larger percentage of women and children, unlike before, were also among the thousands crossing the border into the United States.13

To attract Mexican migrants to the Southwest, California farmers in the Imperial Valley for the first time in 1920 paid to have Mexican workers imported with the

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13 Romo, p. 177.
promise of a return passage to Mexico. Mexican wages per day, based normally on nine working hours, varied in California depending on the region or occupation. Most Mexicans, however, earned from $1.50 to $7.00 a day; the higher wages were generally earned by those working in factories.¹⁴ Notwithstanding, the trend of paying for imported Mexican labor in numerous industries mushroomed throughout the American Southwest. In fact, it was estimated that Mexican workers, imported or not, did 80 percent of the menial labor in the Southwest by 1920.¹⁵

Without the assistance from American labor contractors, emigrating north of the border would have been impossible for thousands of Mexican migrants. Lack of transportation and capital were major obstacles which prevented a number of migrants from reaching the border; therefore, many traveled by foot or found some other means to reach the border. Yet, to assure that a sufficient quantity of Mexicans would reach the border, American farmers and other interested employers often hired "Mexican citizens to recruit labor within Mexico and to transport them to the border where the American labor agents awaited

¹⁴Martinez, p. 35; El Universal (Mexico, D.F.), 4 July 1920.

¹⁵Servando I. Esquivel, "The Immigrant from Mexico," Outlook, 125 May 1920, p. 131.
them.16 Once across the border, American labor agents issued money payments and had migrants sign a work contract before delivering them to employers.17

Naturally, some Mexican migrants did not benefit from the activities of enganchistas or American labor contractors. Promises made within Mexico to migrants by labor contractors were not always fulfilled upon reaching the border; consequently, many Mexicans were literally left stranded. Among those stranded were the old, young, and diseased. Of course, the dreadful fate of the young and diseased was not entirely attributed to labor contractors activities, because by now, immigration laws prevented American border officers from permitting the diseased and children under sixteen unaccompanied by parents to enter the United States.18 Nonetheless, the labor contractors' avid behavior was initially to blame for the untimely destiny of many Mexican hopefuls:

since these labor contractors were paid by American employers so much a head for each laborer, they indiscriminately took old, young, diseased, and anyone who listened to their promises.19

16Martinez, p. 36.
17Excelsior (Mexico, D.F.), 15 March 1920.
18Martinez, p. 46.
19Ibid.
Postwar activities to recruit Mexican labor for American employers were not carried out by labor contractors alone. For example, American employers, particularly cotton farmers in Texas and Oklahoma and sugar beet growers in the Northwest, who clearly understood the value of migratory labor for their expanding agricultural economy, incorporated various devices to attract and simultaneously to hold Mexican labor.\textsuperscript{20} One popular device used by farmers to attract and maintain migrants, was to provide each interested male worker with a piece of land for himself and his family.\textsuperscript{21} American employers generally agreed at the time that married men and their families were more stable and permanent.

In Texas, the practice of tying Mexican families as well as single workers to the land was widely used on cotton farms.\textsuperscript{22}

As cotton moved west from east Texas . . . the sharecropping and tenant system operated by Negroes and "whites" gave way to Mexican workers. While Mexicans in no way became sharecroppers, they were given their "shacks" to live in and a piece of ground plus a money wage.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{21}\textit{El Universal} (Mexico, D.F.), 4 July 1920.

\textsuperscript{22}McWilliams, \textit{loc. cit.}

\textsuperscript{23}Martinez, p. 37.
The major reason why so many American employers resorted to this type of practice was simply to reduce the inconvenience and expense of recruiting labor each required season.24

Despite American employers' and labor contractors' practices for attracting and holding Mexican labor, stagnation of European immigration during 1919 and 1920 played another key factor for the continued dependency on Mexicans in industries which demanded them. Even though an abundance of industries was affected by postwar levels of available European immigrants, nevertheless, one of them most touched both economically and traditionally was the sugar beet industry. Such economic and labor problems particularly affected the sugar beet industries located in the Northwest and Middle West regions of the United States, where traditionally the use of Germans, Belgians, and Russians were used as the primary source of labor for the beet fields prior to World War I.25 Nevertheless, the stagnating effects of European immigration after World War I as well as the other reasons previously mentioned, only necessitated the dependency on Mexican labor in those much needed industries.

24 Ibid., p. 36.

In brief, the labor demands, which followed shortly after the war ended, drew tens of thousands of Mexican migrants in numbers as never before to the United States. Moreover,

it became fairly clear . . . that Mexican labor had become a necessary and integral part of the economy of the Southwest rather than just a temporary expedient as theretofore considered.26

Most importantly, Mexican migrants had become a crucial and valuable source of inside and outside labor for the United States during the immediate postwar years.

Migration, 1921 to 1924

By the beginning of 1921, the tide of Mexican migration began to decline and reverse its direction. The reasons for these changes were several. However, the foremost cause notably was the United States Economic Recession of 1921, which greatly reduced the demand for Mexican labor throughout agricultural and industrial areas. Consequently, as a result of the recession's drastic effect on labor reductions, Mexicans by the thousands had no other choice but to return to their native land. Yet, no matter what influence the economic crises had on Mexicans already here at the time, few Mexican migrants, nonetheless, still

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continued to cross north of the border in search of employment.

Unquestionably, as the economic crises got worse during the early months of 1921, Mexicans from either side of the border found out that finding work in the United States was nearly impossible under such economic circumstances. One estimate holds that during this economic recession, roughly 35,000,000 people were affected by it in some way or another. Moreover, "there was scarcely an area of the country or segment of the population that was unaffected."\(^{27}\) Finally, amid the crisis-stricken population, there were about five to six million unemployed.\(^{28}\)

Because the economic crisis was mainly an industrial one, the areas with the highest levels of unemployment occurred in the urban-industrial centers located in such cities as Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and New York.\(^{29}\) Unemployment in such centers was a solemn reality for millions of people, Americans and aliens alike. However, Mexicans did manage to locate or be employed in some type of work. But Mexican workers as compared to American

\(^{27}\)Ibid., p. 53.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., p. 52.

workers were generally the first to be laid off and the last to be hired. For example, Mexicans who suffered most severely from unfair labor practices were those engaged in coal, railroad, steel, and textile industries. It was in these industries where thousands of Mexican laborers vicariously lost jobs to their American counterparts. Although many of the Mexican layoffs were directly linked to the recession being chiefly industrial, public outcry against Mexicans working in the recession-inflicted industries resulted in thousands of Mexicans losing their jobs as well.30

Similar issues and circumstances, which plagued Mexican workers in the urban-industrial centers, pertained to Mexican laborers within rural-agricultural areas as well. For instance, before the economic crises, Mexicans had constituted the majority of the 60,000 to 80,000 workers who helped harvest wheat in the grain belt, which passed through the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas.31 But, because of the scarcity of jobs and public outcry, Mexicans were displaced in great

30 Martinez, p. 52.

numbers by "unemployed Americans brought into the grain belt by the United States Employment Service." 32

Besides the activities of the American Employment Service, California's growers, particularly the Valley Fruit Growers of Fresno, also pitched in to help provide employment for their fellow countrymen. Representatives from this growers' association pleaded with their members to hire only Americans, not Mexicans for farm labor. Therefore, many of these farmers were hesitant to hire American labor, because

housing and boarding facilities had to be provided them while the Mexicans boarded themselves and camped out under the fruit trees. But in 1921 American labor moved about the state in automobiles and like the Mexicans agreed to "camp out." 33

Since American migrants were more flexible and less demanding with farmers during the crises, American farmers became very ardent and willing to hire them instead of Mexicans. 34 It is generally agreed that this preference and enthusiasm for American labor gradually swept throughout the American rural-agricultural areas.

32Martinez, p. 53.


34Martinez, p. 53.
As unemployment and layoffs in agricultural and industrial areas worsened with each passing month of the recession, the plight of Mexicans residing in the United States became grimmer. Historically, unlike ever before, Mexican Consulates located all over America were inundated by tens of thousands of Mexicans asking to be repatriated. One source claimed as many as 400,000 during the 1921 recession.\textsuperscript{35} Mexican consuls did righteously attempt to answer as many requests as possible in the form of financial aid and repatriation assistance, but thousands of requests went unanswered. Even though some Mexicans, especially those who lived closer to the border, were able to repatriate themselves, nevertheless, the thousands of Mexicans still seeking repatriation at the time was by and large an unrealistic task for the limited resources these consulates had to work with.\textsuperscript{36}

Because of the unfavorable consequences the 1921 recession was having on Mexican consulates and compatriots throughout America, the Mexican government now under the presidency of Alvaro Obregon took active measures to assist its citizens abroad. One such measure imposed under Obregon's administration to assist the already overburdened

\textsuperscript{35}El Universal (Mexico, D. F.), 3, 11 May 1931.

\textsuperscript{36}Martinez, p. 53.
consuls was the creation of three new Mexican consulates for the states of Idaho, Oklahoma, and, at that time, the territory of Alaska. Obregon intended to provide consulate service in these areas for the thousands of Mexican workers spread about within the sugar beet and railroad industries of Idaho, the railroad and cotton industries of Oklahoma, and the fish canneries of Alaska. President Obregon, furthermore, authorized his consulates to pay for the train passage and food costs to the United States-Mexican border for Mexicans wishing to return home. Once across the border, Mexicans were then transported on Mexican railways, free of cost, to their respective states.37

Another strategic measure implemented by Obregon to assist Mexicans in the United States was his creation of the Departamento de Repatriacion. Lorenzo Jaracho, an appointee of Obregon, headed this new agency. Incidentally, since the agency did not carry full cabinet rank due to its temporary status, "it was placed under the authority of the Secretary of Foreign Relations"; thereby it limited Jaracho's power to some degree during his service in the new agency.38 Notwithstanding, the

37 Ibid., pp. 74-74.
38 Ibid., p. 75.
Department of Repatriation's main purpose was to coordinate the activities of Mexican consulates present in the United States. Thus,

more funds and personnel were made available for consulates which were harder pressed than others either because of their large Mexican population or because so many braceros passed through their areas of jurisdiction.39

Other vital factors in the Mexican repatriation relief program were the Society for Repatriation, La Alianza Hispano-Americana, and Comisiones Honorificas or Commissions of Honor. Though each of these Mexican societies contributed much of its time and assumed several essential functions in assisting with the Mexican relief program, the society most instrumental and most recognized for its success, notably by Obregon's administration, was the Commission of Honor. Members of this society basically consisted of U.S. landowners of Mexican nationality who had charters located in districts throughout America. The first charter was founded at Los Angeles by Eduardo Ruiz, a Mexican consul.40 At the time the Honorificas, as they were popularly called, began initially helping destitute Mexicans return home. Their services, however, soon expanded to include such activities as educating, feeding,

39 Ibid.

40 El Universal (Mexico, D.F.), 5 March 1921.
and providing both financial and moral support for indigent Mexicans. In recognition for the Honorificas' superlative patriotism, they were regarded as auxiliaries to consulates and empowered with a semi-official capacity by the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Relations.41

Mexican-affiliated organizations and governmental bodies were not the only sources which assisted indigent Mexicans during this recession. American employers also became actively involved. Henry Ford, for example, paid transportation costs to the border for nearly 3,000 destitute Mexicans in Michigan, who were on his payroll before the economic setback.42 In addition to Ford's assistance, cotton growers in Texas and other agricultural employers from the Southwest performed similar deeds. Yet, the motive in some instances was not benevolence, but rather a desire to be rid of a sizable idle alien population which inevitably drew upon local authorities and charities and posed serious social problems.43

By the time the crises ended, the number of Mexican repatriates resulting from the 1921 economic recession was estimated at about 100,000. This figure excluded hundreds

41Martinez, pp. 74-75.
43Martinez, p. 54.
of Mexicans who were deported by American immigration authorities. Matt Meier and Feliciano Rivera mentioned a pertinent statistic:

The Mexican government spent $2,500,000 in aiding stranded persons returning to Mexico with food and transportation for the trip from the border back to their native towns and villages.

Some criticism from members of Obregon's administration prevailed regarding the costs and abuse of funds used for the large-scale repatriation of Mexican citizens. For example, General Plutarco Elias Calles, who headed the Departamento de Gobernacion, complained that the availability of funds by way of Mexican consulates in America for repatriation only encouraged emigration from Mexico. Moreover, he felt that, in many cases, braceros emigrated to the United States when no jobs could be found, but at the same time knowing aid could be received from Mexican consuls, if needed. In Spring 1922, Calles planned to recommend to President Obregon as a solution to these issues surrounding Mexican repatriation, that the appropriations allotted for repatriations be rescinded.

In contrast, history clearly points out that no such recommendation to eliminate repatriation funds was ever

\[44\text{El Universal (Mexico, D. F.), 24 October 1921.}\]
\[45\text{Meier and Rivera, op. cit., p. 147.}\]
\[46\text{Martinez, p. 76.}\]
approved by Obregon. Besides, the Mexican government really had no other alternative under the circumstances, but to proceed with the appropriation of funds to assist its distressed citizens engulfed in a crisis abroad.

Meanwhile, the American government had taken steps to abate its domestic economic problems. Since America's major question at the time was directed to rampant unemployment, the Department of Labor carried out one of the first measures to alleviate the crises at home. The action taken by this department entailed the canceling of the special stipulations under the terms of the 1917 Immigration Act that had exempted Mexican immigrants from a $8.00 head tax, literacy test, and quota. As previously noted, Secretary of Labor W. B. Wilson had approved these exemptions during and after World War I, for the specific use of Mexican labor in agricultural and industrial areas. Even though agricultural and industrial employers were able to secure the special exemptions for Mexican emigrants until March 1921, nevertheless, the revocation of the provisions had adverse effects on Mexican emigration to and from the border. John Martinez pointed out that

the revocation was not merely to stop more Mexicans from entering the United States, but there was also a

stipulation to the effect that all Mexican aliens were to be returned to Mexico.47

Shortly after the Department of Labor revoked the special provisions of the 1917 Immigration Act, Congress implemented measures to lessen the issues associated with the crises. Hence, on May 19, 1921, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1921, which became the first immigration quota law in the history of the United States. This 1921 Immigration Act placed limits on the number of entrants admitted annually to the United States to 3 percent of the number of foreign born of that nationality already residing here according to the census of 1910. However, Mexicans and Canadians, as well as other immigrants from the Western Hemisphere, were exempt from the 1921 quota act.48

During the discussions in Congress over the 1921 immigration law, proponents suggested that the same quota stipulations which were being applied to European nations should also be placed on Mexico. If approved by Congress, this law would have allowed about 1,500 Mexicans to enter annually into the United States. In addition, advocates recommended to Congress that Section 3 of the 1917

48Marion T. Bennett, American Immigration Policies (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1963), pp. 41-42; Romo, p. 188.
Immigration Act—which allowed the Secretary of Labor to grant inadmissible alien workers permission to emigrate to the United States—to be rescinded. 49

Mexico's reaction to the proponents' recommendations in Congress to include its nation into the quota stipulations of the 1921 Immigration Act was received unfavorably. Thus, the United States Congress was assured by President Obregon that if Mexico was placed on a quota as prescribed by the 1921 quota law, his government would enact a similar law to exclude foreign workers, specifically Americans. The American government realized that a comparable quota law applied to American workers, even though they were few in numbers, could have a serious effect on American investments in Mexico. Because of this reasoning, Congress did not take Obregon's proposal too lightly. Although,

Mexico also might have suffered from excluding Americans, it was hoped that if Mexico's position regarding the immigration quota were made clear such a law would not be necessary. 50

Despite Mexico's position on the immigration quota, arguments for and against on open Mexican immigration to the United States were presented by pro-interest groups and


50 Martinez, pp. 76-77; El Universal (Mexico, D.F.), 3 March 1921.
restrictionists to Congress before the 1921 quota act became law. Restrictionists contended that it was inconsistent to shut off Europeans while the "illiterates," the "diseased," the "criminal," and "racially inferior," from Mexico were allowed practically free access to the United States.51

Many advocates came from agricultural areas along the border states located in the Southwest where Mexicans worked in larger numbers as compared to other regions throughout the continental states. But most advocates were from the East Coast, where the core of the Restrictionist movement "concerned itself with the non-nordic European groups such as Italians, Jews, Slavs, and Greeks."52

Pro-interest groups, on the other hand, who favored open quotas for Mexico argued in Congress that Mexican immigration to the United States, as compared to European nations, revealed a smaller percentage of legal immigrants. Ricardo Romo indicated that from 1911 to 1921, Mexican immigration constituted less than 4.0 percent of the total immigration to America.53 Other interest groups expressing their stance on open Mexican immigration contended that "Mexicans returned to Mexico much like 'homing pigeons.'"54

51Martinez, p. 55.
52Romo, p. 188.
53Ibid.
54Ibid.
Still others argued that "the Mexican was less visible in the United States because he was geographically isolated and therefore did not present a racial problem to society."\(^{55}\) The majority of the pro-interest groups were from Texas, Arizona, and California where more than 90 percent of the Mexicanos lived within these three states.\(^{56}\)

In spite of the polemical contentions for and against immigration quotas on Mexico, John Martinez briefly discussed that when the Senate committee asked pro-interests groups, particularly agricultural representatives from the Southwest why American labor could not be used instead of Mexican labor in these fields of work—especially with widespread unemployment—they replied that local labor would not do that kind of work. The unemployed in the industrial areas were too far from the border and the farmers could not afford to transport them that far. Moreover, Mexicans were practically native to the area and could work in the intense heat of the arid sections in the Southwest.\(^{57}\)

On the whole, the ardent protest presented to Congress by agricultural interests and testimonies by Congressmen, such as Representative Hudspeth from Texas, contended the importance and dependency on Mexican labor for expanding

\(^{55}\)Ibid.

\(^{56}\)Ibid.

agricultural industries within the southwestern states. Likewise, Congressman W. H. Knox, who represented the Cotton Growers Association of Arizona and Southern California, pointed out how many of the cotton industries in the Southwest benefited from Mexican labor and became dependent on it. Such testimonies served as important influential factors in deterring Congress from making Mexican quotas a reality in the United States. Still, the diplomatic problems involved in singling out Mexico and not the other American Republics perhaps was even more influential a factor in not placing an immigration quota on our southern neighbor than the contention of farmers.

Nonetheless, the 1921 Immigration Act was passed by Congress and used as a temporary stopgap until a more rigid quota law could be worked out. Furthermore, this act had a profound impact on alien immigration to the United States. Marion T. Bennett, who did some excellent studies on American immigration policies, reported that in the fiscal year 1921 there were 805,228 immigrant aliens admitted to the United States. In the following fiscal year, when the 1921 law was fully effective, there were 309,556 admissions, a reduction of 495,672. Nonimmigrant admissions, i.e., those not

58Martinez, p. 56.
59Ibid.
60Ibid.
coming for permanent residence, were 122,949, a
decrease of 49,986 from the previous year. Rejections
and deportations remained about the same. 61

Because of the 1921 Immigration Act having signifi-
cantly reduced alien immigration to America, the harvest
season creating jobs, and the thousands of destitute
Mexicans repatriating themselves, the situation of Mexicans
who remained in the United States during the crises began
to improve by summer and fall of 1921. As for America, by
the closing months of the economic recession, agricultural
and industrial areas were gradually showing signs of
recovery. All the same, not until two years after the
1921 crises ended did the industrial prosperity and
continued agricultural expansion in the Southwest begin to
reach their normal operating levels. Moreover, because of
this economic improvement in the United States, the tide of
Mexican migration once again reversed its direction
northward. 62

A unique aspect about Mexican migration to the United
States after the 1921 crises—continuing until the latter
months of 1924—was its composition. During this period,
migration from Mexico was not only composed of Mexican
immigrants alone. By now, due to the provisions in the

61 Bennett, pp. 41-42.
62 Meier and Rivera, pp. 142-43; Martinez, p. 75.
Immigration Act of 1921, other alien immigrants, mostly Europeans, who could not or would not comply with the 1921 quota act began entering the United States through Mexico.63

Part of the explanation why many European immigrants chose Mexico as a means of entry into the United States was due to the advantages and alternatives it provided as compared to the regular channels with U.S. immigration officials. For example, immigrants from the Western Hemisphere were exempt from many restrictions imposed on Europeans under the terms of the 1921 Immigration Act and only had to comply with a head tax, literacy test, and one year's residency requirements. Therefore, many Europeans who otherwise could not legally enter the United States gained entrance to America through Mexico.64 However, as a sheer effort to counteract the increasing surreptitious entries through Mexico and other Western nations, e.g., Canada, and to reduce the volume of all legal alien immigration to the United States, Congress once more took active measures to strengthen the immigration restrictions by passing the Immigration Act of 1924, on May 26, 1924.65

63Martinez, p. 58


65Bennett, p. 51.
After the 1924 Immigration Act was passed, its effects on alien immigration became even more technical and lengthy than the previous Immigration Act of 1921. But most of all the 1924 law made the issue of Mexican immigration only more complex. "Opponents of Mexican immigration became adamantly concerned about the failure of Congress to include the Mexican on the quota list," Ricardo Romo said. Moreover,

As the Restrictionists gathered strength, representatives from agriculture and railroad companies took an active role in defending the free flow of Mexican laborers into this country.66

Predepression Years

By the mid-1920s, the open-border policy for Mexicans had become the single most important polemical conviction among Americans either for or against it. Labor unions, eugenicists, and racists were just part of the factions who voiced strong opposition toward unrestrictive Mexican immigration, while agricultural and railroad interests as well as business associations mainly argued in favor of open-border policy. Between both factions, their amount of support, writings, and speeches were plentiful on this policy. Moreover, both factions had politicians in their

66Romo, p. 189.
Furthermore, as the controversy over restricting Mexican immigration reached even greater depths during the predepression years, proponents and opponents aggressively accepted any opportunity to uphold their position before representatives in state and federal government.

One very aggressive proponent for placing Mexico under the so-called "quota system" was Congressman John C. Box, a Democrat from Texas. Congressman Box, who became an avid spokesman for such labor organizations as the American Federation of Labor and the California State Federation of Labor, repeatedly tried to have the 1924 Immigration Act amended by presenting bill after bill to the House of Representatives. His initial effort was aired in committee hearings during January and February 1926. Box and other restrictionists in general concurred that by amending the 1924 law to include Western Hemisphere nations (Mexico as their primary target), it would not only reduce Mexican immigration but also any unwelcome consequences Mexican immigrants had on American society. Even though Representative Box did present his bills several times

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68 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
before and after 1926 to Congress, they often died in committee and always ran into heavy opposition.

Perhaps one of Box's strongest opponents at the time was Samuel Parker Frisselle, a lobbyist against restriction of Mexican immigration. Frisselle, himself a farmer and proprietor of 5,000 acres of California land, was convinced that if Box's bill became law, the immigration quota applied to Mexico would have detrimental results on the agricultural growth in the American Southwest. Therefore, he contended before Congress that in order to harvest crops grown in the West, large quantities of labor were needed; "white men would not or could not do the work, and the only source of labor came from Mexico." He added,

We must have labor; the Mexican seems to be the only available source of supply, and we appeal to you to help us in the matter, imposing upon California the least possible burden.

Besides Frisselle taking the stand, farmers from the states of Arizona, Minnesota, Texas, and other states gave testimonies pleading to Congress not to approve any Mexican


Even before the above congressional debates had reached their zenith, the Mexican "quota issue" had caused anxiety among some United States officials. Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson's successor, James J. Davis, like Congressman Box agreed that an immigration quota on Mexico was extremely necessary. Though total Mexican immigration fell from 89,339 in 1924 to 32,378 in 1925, which was said to have resulted from the $10 visa fee, $8 head tax, and literacy test required under the terms of the 1924 Immigration Act, Secretary of Labor Davis and other opponents of unrestricted Mexican immigration generally agreed that Mexico—not being limited by the 1924 law was largely responsible for the increase of both legal and illegal crossings over the United States-Mexican border.

Illegal traffic across the international border was, as has been mentioned, a major issue prior to the passage of the 1924 quota legislation. Commissioner General of Immigration, Harry E. Hull, in his 1923 annual report

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71 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 27.


stated: "It is difficult, in fact impossible, to measure the illegal influx of Mexicans over the border, but everyone agrees that it is quite large." In addition to the illegal entry of Mexicans, the smuggling of Asian and European aliens over the Mexican border was another matter that the Commissioner General and his subordinates had to deal with. An inspector in charge of a San Antonio district in Texas, while commenting on the illegal and attempted illegal entry of Europeans, had this to say in part concerning the professional smuggler:

The Mexican border smuggler is an extremely dangerous person to deal with. He goes "armed to the teeth" and does not hesitate to fire upon officers at sight. A number of federal and state officers have been killed on this border in the recent past by these smugglers, and it has been more luck than anything else that many of our men have not been killed. There is hardly a week goes by that they are not fired upon.

As a measure to combat the large numbers of illegal entrants and illegal activities of smugglers, Congress in 1925 appropriated $1,000,000 dollars to the Bureau of Immigration for the creation of the Border Patrol.

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75 Ibid.

Abraham Hoffman briefly discussed some of the obstacles and changes the Border Patrol and Commissioner General of Immigration Harry E. Hull underwent from its conception until mid-1928.

Handicapped at the start by lack of uniforms, inadequate and unqualified personnel, and a high turnover rate, the Border Patrol soon developed high standards of efficiency and morale. At first the Patrol had insufficient officers and equipment; areas which required attention twenty-four hours a day were covered for eight at the most, if at all. In 1926, with 472 men in the Border patrol, the Commissioner General of Immigration . . . requested a force of 660; in 1927, with the force grown to 632 employees, he asked for at least 1,000. By mid-1928 the Border Patrol numbered 791 employees, of whom 700 were patrol inspectors. The service attracted veterans and men with a sense of dedication.77

Dedication of these few hundred men of the Border Patrol was still not enough to deter thousands of aliens from illegally crossing over the United States-Mexican border. Although the Border Patrol had captured over 100,000 illegal aliens and more than 3,600 smugglers attempting to cross aliens over the border within a seven year period following the Patrol's creation, nevertheless, illegal entrants continued to run rampant. Moreover, during this period, fifteen men were killed while serving the Patrol, twelve of them along the border. In spite of the occupational hazards, as well as lack of funds and personnel, the Border Patrol helped deliver the message

77 Ibid.
that the United States meant business in stopping the surreptitious entry over the international border. 78

Beginning in August 1928, the United States initiated further steps to control the influx of both illegal and legal Mexican migration across its border. One step imposed specifically to deter illegal crossings was Congress passing a law which made illegal entry a punishable crime. Furthermore, President Herbert Hoover ordered consular officers to enforce the provisions of the 1917 Immigration Act, "which in effect denied entry to most Mexicans who applied for visas." 79 Mexicans desiring entry into this country were denied for three basic reasons. The first was illiteracy; the second, the liability of becoming a public charge (LPC); the third, the issue of contract labor. 80

For the most part, the last two reasons proved the most unfavorable for thousands of Mexican applicants. For example, under the "LPC" rigid interpretation,

if the consul decided that a visa applicant might become indigent in the United States the visa was refused, even if the applicant possessed funds at the time of his interview with the consul. 81

78 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
79 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 30.
80 Ibid., p. 32.
81 Ibid.
With reference to the question of contract labor, if the applicant indicated an advance commitment for employment in the United States, his visa could be denied on the grounds that the commitment violated the provision of the 1917 legislation forbidding the entry of contract labor. 82

Most importantly, President Hoover had endorsed these measures as a way to avoid any quota legislation on Mexico or in any way be insulting to the Mexican government. 83

The year 1928 also witnessed a number of heated congressional debates on issues for and against Mexican labor. At this time, Congressman Box once again reintroduced his quota bill to Congress amid speculation of it passing, or at least being heard. The Senate committee did agree to the first hearing of the bill on February 1, 1928, while the first House date was set for three weeks later. Meanwhile, lobbyists against Box's bill began laying out strategies with one aim in mind—-influence the Senate to oppose his bill. 84 Included among the lobbyists were Senator Samuel Shortridge and Congressman Joe Crail of California, as well as some members of the southwestern

82 Ibid.


84 Ibid., p. 39; "Mexican Immigration and the Farm," Outlook, 7 December 1927, p. 423; "Protection for Skilled Labor," Saturday Evening Post, 7 January 1928, p. 32.
business communities, representing agriculture, railroads, and industry. This group of lobbyists, Hoffman stated, even went as far as to vote its sentiment into writing:

The agricultural interests through the border and mountain states are a unit opposing this bill, realizing that it will interrupt and embarrass agricultural production throughout these states.

Hoffman added, "the men pledged that their 'whole endeavor, therefore, should be to kill it if possible.'"

In addition to the southwestern lobbyists, George P. Clements, a leading spokesman for Mexican labor, became actively involved with the struggle against restricting Mexican immigration before the Senate hearings. His involvement and support were carried out by sending to senators and congressmen mimeographed copies of anti-restriction propaganda. He emphasized in the copies that since the Mexican was an alien he could be deported; whereas Negroes, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans, if brought into the Southwest to do agricultural work, would be there to stay.

Other contemporaries shared similar viewpoints as Clements' on the importation of Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, and Negroes

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., p. 40.
to the American Southwest. For instance, Journalist George Marvin wrote in the *Independent* during 1928:

> If white men cannot and will not perform the manual labor of the Southwest, and willing Mexicans *en bloc* are prohibited from doing it, who is going to do the work? To import negro labor from the southeastern states in sufficient quantities to attempt the varied manual industry now satisfactorily performed by Mexicans would not solve the economic problem but would add a formidable social and political problem. On a small scale it has already been tried and proved an expensive failure. Importation of Porto [sic] Ricans or Filipinos would be open to the same objections. If the neighboring Indians of Mexico are objectionable, how could black negroes, brown Filipinos, or *cafe au lait* Porto [sic] Ricans be made more acceptable simply because the Stars and Stripes flies over their being?89

Factions for restricting Mexican immigration made their preparations to meet the challenge as well.

Nativist, novelist Kenneth L. Roberts wrote a series of articles during the early months of 1928, which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, a strong partisan of alien immigration restriction. The crux of Roberts' articles dealt not only with the historical aspects of immigration, but also on the American Southwest development and the issue whether "the economic value in the Southwest's proposal to provide hypothetical profits for some farmers and manufacturers in 1928" was worth "the expense of

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saddling all future Americans with a dismal and distressing race problem."90 Abraham Hoffman noted that

the Post also strongly editorialized on January 7, 1928 that 'Every consideration of prudence and sound policy indicates that Mexican immigration must be put under quota restrictions.'91

The Senate hearings on restriction of Western Hemisphere countries finally came to order on February 1, 1928, with opening discussions led by Congressman Box's counterpart, Senator William J. Harris. Senator Harris began his deliberations by introducing S. 1437, a bill to place all Western Hemisphere nations except Canada under restrictive quotas.92 Lobbyists against the Harris bill and Box's bill were present and ready. Among them were representatives of agricultural interests from Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming, including lobbyists from the cattle, mining, and railroad interests.93 On the whole, the opposition to these bills was more than the restrictionists had bargained for. Even though leading spokesmen, such as Chester B. Moore of the Vegetable Growers of Imperial Valley and Ralph


91 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 28.

92 Ibid., Bennett, p. 63.

93 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 28.
H. Taylor, executive secretary of the Agricultural Legislative Committee of California, who represented nearly 175,000 farmers, orchardists, grape growers, milk and poultry producers, were "interrupted any number of times by House or Senate committee members, their testimony and the statements of the other lobbyists carried the day."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 28-29.} Lastly, these bills never got out of committee during 1928.\footnote{Ibid., p. 29.}

After 1928, the controversy of unrestricted Mexican immigration still continued ardently between proponents and opponents. Factions from both sides continued to defend their stance on Mexican immigration by delivering speeches, writing articles, and petitioning their representatives in all levels of government. Magazines and newspapers likewise upheld their position on the polemical immigration issue. The Saturday Evening Post, with a total circulation over 2.7 million, periodically printed its strong partisan editorials opposing unrestricted quotas for Mexico.\footnote{Ibid.} Still others had their own reasons either for or against the Mexican question. Some even believed that illegal migration to the United States was sufficient to meet the
country's labor needs; and good enough reason "why the legal entries should be restricted."97 Others warned of the dangers of miscegenation, or the flooding of non-assimilable aliens across the border.98 Still others simply felt there was no end nor near solution to this quota controversy.

However, by 1929 the Mexican immigration controversy had brought forth some new developments. By now, due to President Hoover's tightening up the enforcement of the 1917 immigration legislation, illegal entry being punishable by a year in prison or a fine up to $1,000, and the Border Patrol policing its side of the international border, the northbound movement from Mexico had significantly declined. Some restrictionists viewed the Mexican immigration decline as a partial victory while a number of anti-restrictionists, particularly in the southwestern states, sought ways to maintain their Mexican labor. Texas, in particular, passed the Texas Emigrant Agent Law of 1929, which prevented companies from recruiting (Mexican) laborers in its state without paying a tax. Although, this


law did keep Mexicans from leaving and spreading into a new territory and at the same time dampened any agitation for a Mexican quota;92 the Texas law haphazardly proved outdated shortly after its passage. During the autumn of 1929, the stock market had collapsed; thus, the United States and other countries in Asia, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere entered the Great Depression.

CHAPTER THREE
The Great Depression: Campaign Pressures

Immediately following the 1929 crash, the accompanying Great Depression brought economic misery and new social problems to Mexicans and other people residing in the United States. The first critical socioeconomic problem to stir millions of lives in America was rampant unemployment. Unemployment went from four million to thirteen million from 1930 to 1933, and, by 1933, nearly 25 percent of the American labor force was unemployed. Millions were also literally underemployed: wages dropped from 35 cents to approximately 14 cents an hour.¹

Mexican workers, in particular, were detrimentally affected by this economic collapse. For example, they were among the first to be fired from their jobs.² Moreover, since these jobs were traditionally ill paid, most Mexicans were unable to accumulate a financial reserve. Hence, large numbers without work or savings went on some type of


private or public relief program. Americans were no exception, because they also applied for local or state relief just as many broke and hungry Mexicans after the drastic depression struck the country. Nevertheless, a widespread belief then among many Americans was that "the majority of Mexicans had become public charges on the American taxpayer." This sentiment against Mexicans especially prevailed in the Southwest.

Another unfavorable condition brought about by the depression that harmed Mexicans both socially and economically was discriminatory job practices. Evidence of such practices were signs reading: "Only White Labor Employed" and "No Niggers, Mexicans, or Dogs allowed." Even though Mexican workers had proved themselves reliable, nevertheless, racists' attitudes caused worthy Mexicans to be "left stranded without much possibility of getting employment." Moreover, Mexicans who had to compete harder for the few available jobs with unemployed Americans usually discovered that the latter group got the jobs.

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3 Meier and Rivera, op. cit., p. 159.
4 Ibid
5 Ibid., p. 154.
This competitiveness for jobs was particularly evident in the industrial areas, the midwest, and the Hispanic villages of the Rio Arriba region in New Mexico and southern Colorado.\textsuperscript{7}

Eventually, the conditions of the Great Depression became too much to tolerate for thousands of unemployed Mexicans. Although federal relief programs were available to Mexicans who could meet the eligibility requirements, thousands of eligible Mexican males chose not to apply because of their pride and attitudes termed \textit{machismo}.\textsuperscript{8} Instead, thousands thought that the only solution to their social and economic problems was to return to Mexico. Thus, the first repatriates to leave the United States occurred during the winter of 1929-1930. Contrary to popular belief, all repatriates were not destitute because many of them returned with material possessions, such as automobiles and furniture.\textsuperscript{9}

American consuls duly noted the increasing numbers of Mexicans moving southwardly. In February 1930, Consul General William Dawson reported that over 5,000 Mexicans had assembled near San Antonio, Texas, preparing to return

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7}Meier and Rivera, p. 151.
\item \textsuperscript{8}Ibid., p. 158.
\item \textsuperscript{9}Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," p. 54.
\end{itemize}
to Mexico. Robert Frazer, Dawson's successor as Consul General, later noted that approximately 2,700 repatriates had passed through the border station of Nuevo Laredo during the first two weeks in December 1930. By August 1930, Consul W. P. Blocker at Ciudad Juarez found out that the Mexican Migration Service had announced that a special train would provide transportation to any Mexican desiring to leave the United States. Blocker further noted that the train was capable of transporting 2,000 people at one time from the border to central states in Mexico, and that two such trains had departed within a ten-month period. He added that the special Mexican trains greatly reduced the excess population of Ciudad Juarez. 10

Besides Ciudad Juarez, Mexicans were able to board a similar train in Nogales. By early 1931, large numbers of would-be repatriados flooded the Mexican border stations. Consequently, the Mexican government changed its occasional special train service at least on a weekly basis. 11 Border stations, moreover, located at Nogales and Ciudad Juarez witnessed other dreary outcomes associated with the southward Mexican movement. Ciudad Juarez municipal


government, for example, was burdened with the task of feeding nearly 200 people a day. Regardless, consular dispatches continued to describe a torrent of people passing through their border stations, an amalgam of repatriado and deportee, with a growing percentage of them penniless and hungry.

Repatriados passing through the border stations, for the most part, did not bother to record their departure with American authorities. This led American consuls to believe that "at least half and perhaps more of these repatriates were illegally in the United States." Although additional theories were speculated by American consuls, the truth of the matter was that Mexicans were crossing south of the international border illegally or legally. For example, the total number of Mexican repatriados from January 1, 1930 to April 30, 1933 was 290,051. Once across the border approximately 80 percent of these repatriados went back to their native communities; 15 percent to the large cities, 5 percent to Mexican repatriation centers.

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., pp. 55-56.
For some repatriados who returned to their native villages or towns, the homecoming was well received by their respective family groups. According to Mexican custom, shelter and food were shared with returning relatives, "even though no work or additional food was immediately available."\textsuperscript{16} On the other hand, repatriados who chose the big cities to seek work found their welcoming far less from being customary in the traditional sense. Many Mexicans, after reaching the cities, experienced few job opportunities and had great difficulties coping with metropolitan conditions. Emory Bogardus said this about one such city dweller:

A repatriado who had lived fourteen years in the United States... who worked temporarily as a painter on the National Theater in Mexico City... said to the writer: "I have made a terrible mistake. I should have stayed in the United States. Opportunities here (Mexico City) are fewer than in the United States."\textsuperscript{17}

Meanwhile, Mexicans who remained in the United States were undergoing social economic hardships as well. "In fact, conditions were about to worsen considerably for the many thousands who had not yet considered the idea of Repatriation."\textsuperscript{18} The United States government, concerned

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 170.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 170-71.
\textsuperscript{18} Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," p. 56.
about the large number of aliens in the country, decided that the nation take measures to rid itself of these foreigners, especially the illegals, during a period of economic disaster. In short, the federal government commenced an active drive on illegal aliens in the United States. Even though the anti-alien campaign pressures were directed at illegal aliens in general, both Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans found themselves the prime targets for the Department of Labor's Bureau of Immigration.¹⁹

The Federal Deportation Drive

Heading the Labor Department's Bureau of Immigration was William N. Doak, who replaced Secretary of Labor James J. Davis. Appointed by President Herbert Hoover, Doak took office on December 9, 1930, and very quickly the new labor secretary made his position clear concerning aliens holding down jobs that could be used for American-born citizens. Doak asserted that "the only way to provide work for unemployed Americans was to oust any alien holding a job, and to deport him."²⁰ He also announced that out of the

¹⁹Ibid.

400,000 illegal aliens in the country, nearly 100,000 of these aliens were deportable under the immigration acts. 21

By the beginning of 1931, the federal deportation drive spearheaded by Secretary Doak was in full swing. Moreover, by this time, Doak's immigration agents had carried out their hunt for deportable aliens zealously.

"They raided private homes and public places in a search that extended from New York to Los Angeles." 22 In New York City, for instance, Doak's agents raided a dance party held by a local Finnish organization. As reported in the New York Times, during this event all exits were blocked by twenty Department of Labor agents and ten New York policemen. Next, 1,000 guests were lined up. Thereafter each one was ordered to show proof that he had the right to be in America. "All but sixteen men and two women passed the test. These were taken to the West 123rd Street Police Station and then to Ellis Island for deportation." 23

Doak's dragnet methods, in various cases, were harshly criticized by defenders of civil liberties. Objectors included liberal journals such as the Nation and New

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Republic, which ran a series of editorials denouncing arbitrary arrests and semi-secret procedures they claimed were used by Doak's department. Still, Doak's attitude for promoting the federal deportation drive was best described in this manner:

If the people don't like our methods they ought to adopt registration. We're about the only country that hasn't it [sic]. Most of the European countries have. They ought to make all these people give us their thumb prints and hand prints when they come into the country and we'd keep records of them. Then we'd be sure where to find them and wouldn't have to raid dances. 

Paradoxically, although Doak's controversial raids were conducted for the sole purpose of reducing the national unemployment problem; nevertheless, many of his targets were "literally jobless and on relief." 

While liberals and civil rights activists were protesting Doak's deportation policy, the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (also known as the Wickersham Commission) was adopting an intensive and highly critical report concerning the immigration policies under President Hoover's administration. President Hoover, from the onset of the depression, clearly supported Doak's policies and their enforcement. Hoover, like Doak, also

24 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 39.  
25 Jackson, op. cit., p. 296.  
26 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 40.
believed that aliens were taking away and holding down jobs that should belong to Americans. Moreover, he supported the curtailment of both legal and illegal entries, and, simultaneously, got rid of the undesirable aliens in the country. Notwithstanding, because of Doak's departmental activities, public protests concerning illegal immigration procedures, and contradictory pronouncements by officials, the Wickersham Commission earnestly carried out its investigation regarding Hoover's policies. 27

Upon completion, the Wickersham Commission's report was of modest size, a compilation of statements and findings by its eleven member committee, and a detailed study on the enforcement of the United States deportation laws submitted by Reuben Oppenheimer from the Baltimore bar and retained by the Wickersham Commission. In brief, the Commission greatly approved of Oppenheimer's report, which filled most of the Commission's report. Moreover, they found out that the deportation system was radically defective. For example, the Commission pointed out the following:

It lacks efficiency and works injustice to the alien. It results in cruel abuses and unnecessary hardships, and many aliens are deported, who, if their cases were

heard by an impartial tribunal, would be allowed to remain in the country.28

Even though the Wickersham Commission report disclosed valid flaws within Hoover's immigration policies, nevertheless, Doak's deportation campaign continued. Moreover, Doak protested the findings of the Commission. As far as he was concerned, the public and federal support he was receiving gave him credibility, far more important than the Commission's investigation. He stated, "Never has congressional support for our deportation activities been so strong."29 In addition to congressional support, President Hoover publicly assured Secretary Doak that he would not lack funds for his deportation campaign.30

Assisting Doak in his anti-alien deportation drive was Colonel Arthur Woods. Appointed by President Hoover as the national coordinator of the President's Emergency Committee for Employment (PECE), Colonel Woods wrote to cities throughout the country offering his support and advice. At the same time he requested "information on individual local


29Jackson, p. 295.

30Ibid.
relief efforts so that the PECE could act as a clearing house."31

PECE became particularly interested in the city of Los Angeles where the relief committee was praised by PECE for having "tackled the problem of unemployment in an affirmative way."32 Woods' agency also discovered that the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had implemented the first active measures to help relieve the city's unemployment problem. Upon receiving this information, the PECE suggested to Los Angeles authorities that a general city committee be organized composed of local officials and representatives from several social agencies in order to help combat the city's unemployment and socioeconomic problems.33

Thus, on the eve of December 24, 1930, the local coordinating committee in Los Angeles became a reality. The Los Angeles Citizens Committee on Coordination of Unemployment Relief included Mayor John C. Porter, County Supervisor Frank L. Shaw, Los Angeles Times publisher Harry Chandler, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce President

31Erving P. Hayes, Activities of the President's Emergency Committee for Employment, 1930-1931 (Concord: Rumford Press, 1936), pp. 41-42.

32Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 42.

33Ibid.
John C. Austin, and numerous city officials and businessmen. It had been organized into two committees: a city committee and county committee. The county committee, headed by Harvey C. Fremming, a labor official from Long Beach, handled the affairs of all unemployed people who were not residents of the city of Los Angeles. Charles P. Visel, on the other hand, had been appointed director of the city committee. Visel's plans for his committee were to "contact all government, industrial, and private sources of labor with a view toward creation of employment." Although both committees planned to work together, the city committee became the center of attention and controversy shortly after its organization. Visel's uncanny plans for unemployment relief were the basis of this controversy.

According to Abraham Hoffman, "Visel soon placed a curious interpretation on his responsibilities" after learning of Doak's statement that 400,000 illegal aliens resided in the country. Hence, he sent a letter to Colonel


36 Ibid., p. 208.
Woods on January 6, 1931, informing him that it was his belief that 20,000 to 25,000 of Doak's estimated illegal aliens were situated in Southern California; and with proper manpower they could be apprehended. At the time, Charles P. Visel was very much aware that a mass arrest and deportation campaign could be a very large task for the local immigration office with its very limited personnel. So, Visel appropriately indicated in his correspondence to Woods that local police and sheriff personnel would cooperate if their services were requested. He further stated, "You advise please as to method of getting rid. . . . We need their jobs for needy citizens." 37

On January 8, 1931, Visel received Woods' reply. Woods confirmed that "there is every willingness at this end of the line to act thoroughly and promptly." 38 The PECE national coordinator, furthermore, asked Visel to contact Labor Secretary Doak and clarify to what extent local law enforcement authorities would assist federal immigration officials. Visel immediately sent a telegram to Secretary Doak on January 11, 1931, pressing him to send agents from various cities to California. Visel's intent


was to produce a psychological gesture, if and when the agents did arrive. Visel promised Doak that "this apparent activity will have tendency to scare many thousand deportables out of this district which is the result desired."

The next day, Doak wired Visel thanking him for his suggestions and efforts. 39

Visel's deportation campaign against aliens in Southern California was based along a few simple tactics. First, he would provide local newspapers, especially foreign language newspapers, with publicity releases announcing the anti-alien deportation drive and emphasizing that the local Bureau of Immigration office would receive assistance from nearby districts. Next, with the help of both local police and deputy sheriffs a few aliens would be arrested. Then, accompanying these arrests would be as much publicity as possible with pictures. Finally, Visel hoped that due to the overwhelming press coverage of the deportation campaign, along with the publicity of alien arrests, "some aliens would be frightened into leaving and that others would steer clear of Los Angeles." 40

From the very beginning, large numbers of Mexican aliens residing in Southern California, particularly in the

39 Ibid.

40 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 43-44.
city of Los Angeles, were the "primary" targets of Visel's deportation campaign. Moreover, since Visel was well aware that Los Angeles had within its population the largest number of Mexican Nationals outside of Mexico City, including Mexican Americans. Furthermore, Visel knew that compared to other minority groups, such as Orientals or aliens from Europe, Mexicans outnumbered these groups by far during the economic depression.41

Mexicans in California had other peculiarities that had a profound impact on their lives. For instance, many had entered the country illegally during the years when the Immigration Bureau was lenient or before exigent laws were passed; therefore, they were quickly made aware of their vulnerability by officials. Mexican Nationals, for example, were barred from employment on public works projects. Their exclusion, mainly in Southern California, directly resulted from state legislation endorsed by both the Los Angeles City Council and the County Board of Supervisors.42

Specifically, the legislation endorsed by the civic elements in Los Angeles called for restricting illegal aliens from "establishing a residence, holding a position,


42 Ibid.; Los Angeles Record, 24, 25 November; 17 December 1930.
or engaging in any form of business.\textsuperscript{43} Supervisor John R. Quinn was particularly supportive of any law which banned illegals from government projects. Quinn believed that by ridding and barring illegal aliens—whom he honestly felt totaled between 200,000 and 400,000 in California alone—from federal or state projects, a sort of cure-all for all problems caused by these aliens would come about. He supported his claim with the following statement:

\begin{quote}
If we were rid of the aliens who had entered this country illegally since 1931... our present unemployment problem would shrink to the proportion of a relatively unimportant flat spot in business. In ridding ourselves of the criminally undesirable alien we will put an end to a large part of our crime and law enforcement problem, probably saving many good American lives and certainly millions of dollars for law enforcement against people who have no business in this country.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Meanwhile, along the same lines as Supervisor Quinn, Visel also felt certain that his anti-alien campaign would solve the unemployment problem plaguing his districts. Therefore, he continued to pursue his plans for ridding Los Angeles of undesirable aliens. Consequently, on January 19, 1931, Visel sent a copy of his news release that he planned to have local newspapers publish on Monday, January 26, to Colonel Woods for examination. Moreover,

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans}, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid.
accompanying Visel's publicity release was a letter requesting that a strong follow-up story, which could be used later, and if needed, be wired by the Labor Department to his office. Visel, likewise, informed the PECE national coordinator: "It is the opinion of the immigration authorities here that these articles will have the effect of scareheading many thousand deportable aliens." 45

Some controversy, however, did come about from Visel's claims that local immigration officials wholeheartedly supported his deportation and publicity plans. Most of the dispute centered on and stemmed from statements noted in Visel's letter to Colonel Woods on January 19, 1931, which were allegedly given by the Los Angeles District Director of Immigration Walter E. Carr to Visel during an interview between the two of them. Mr. Carr stated—according to Visel's version of this interview—"that there are undoubtedly many thousand aliens illegally in this section (mostly Mexicans and Japs [sic])," and "that the machinery set up for deportation would be entirely inadequate on a

45 Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," pp. 67, 69; see also Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 170–71, for verbatim copy of "Visel's Publicity Release."
large scale." 46 Visel also reported in his letter to the
PECCE coordinator that Carr had mentioned the following:

   With a little deportation publicity, a large
number of these aliens, actuated by guilty self-
consciousness, would move south and over the line of
their own accord, particularly if stimulated by a few
arrests under the Deportation Act. 47

After Carr found out about his alleged statements
sent by Visel to Woods, he firmly denied making any such
assertions or endorsements calling for the deportation of
one particular ethnic group. Abraham Hoffman, interestingly,
made this observation: "It would seem that Visel set down
in print what he had wanted to hear rather than what he had
heard." 48 Also, Woods carelessly read the contents of
Visel's news release:

   He failed to consider how Visel's words might be
interpreted in a city that, except for Mexico City,
contained within its population the largest number of
Mexican nationals. 49

Instead, Colonel Woods contacted Labor Secretary Doak and
informed him of Visel's plans. Immediately, Secretary Doak
sent a special officer and a number of federal agents from

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., p. 69.
the Department of Labor to investigate the presence of illegal aliens in Los Angeles. 50

Decentralization, Target on Los Angeles

On January 26, 1931, Visel's publicity release was published by the local newspapers of Los Angeles. In many cases, the text had been printed according to the way each newspaper saw fit. Some newspapers printed sections of Visel's news release exactly as written, while others paraphrased and summarized. The Los Angeles Examiner, for example, announced, "Deportable aliens include Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese, and others," without an in-depth explanation or qualifying details. Embellishments were used, such as "Aliens who are deportable will save themselves trouble and expense by arranging their departure at once," as suggested by the Illustrated Daily News. In addition to Visel's release, information regarding the impending arrival of Doak's special agents and the assistance from adjacent districts was published. Moreover, Visel had provided this information to the Los Angeles press. 51

50 Ibid.

Mixed reactions toward Visel's news release were expressed by other civic elements shortly after its publication. The Evening Express, a local Los Angeles newspaper that had a reputation for being "Mexican baiters," applauded Visel's anti-alien drive and went as far as running an editorial that "endorsed restrictionist legislation and called for compulsory alien registration."\(^5^2\) Still, some local newspapers criticized Visel's deportation plans. La Opinion, Los Angeles' leading Spanish-language newspaper at that time, ran an article on January 29, 1931 that spread across its front page condemning Visel's publicity campaign. The headline combined direct quotes from Visel's news release and its previous versions published by the Illustrated Daily News and Los Angeles Times. The article emphasized that those of Mexican nationality were the main targets of Visel's deportation drive.\(^5^3\)

Two days later, the La Opinion again ran an extensive front page article dealing with Visel's scare campaign; however, this time it had a different bottom line. Specifically, the article reported that the major objective

\(^5^2\)Los Angeles Evening Express, 28 January 1931; Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 49.

of the federal government's deportation drive was to apprehend aliens with criminal records and was not directly aimed at Mexicans alone. This assurance had been clarified by Walter E. Carr, the district director of immigration in a press release in which he stated:

It has never been the policy of the State Department [sic] to direct its forces against any one race. We are treating the Mexicans on exactly the same basis as we treat the Canadians, neither of whom are under quota provisions.54

He also asserted:

If we have aliens who have committed crimes we are going to spend all available funds, if necessary, to deport them before we deport honest laboring people who may be in this country illegally because of some technicality.55

Equally important, Carr had given this interpretation of the deportation campaign to all Los Angeles newspapers the day before La Opinion printed its article. Yet, for the most part, the press failed to clarify the intention of Carr's immigration department. "If anything, the bureau's motives were confused and misinterpreted all the more."56

Carr's press statement resulted from an investigation conducted by the Mexican government. To illustrate, after the Mexican government learned of Visel's deportation

54Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 50.
55Ibid.
56Ibid., p. 49.
campaign, Mexico's department of Foreign Relations contacted Consul de la Colina and "instructed him to send a report describing the possibility of a large number of Mexican residents in Los Angeles being deported."\(^{57}\)

Meanwhile, Consul de la Colina, who had been working on the idea of repatriation plans with city officials and the Mexican government, objected to any plan which called for deporting their countrymen in large numbers. Thus, the Mexican consul contacted George P. Clements, an advocate of Mexican labor and member of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in order to ask him to urge all persons directly involved in the publicity to "restate and clarify their intentions in the newspapers."\(^{58}\)

Thereafter, Clements followed up on the Mexican Consulate's request. Clements immediately visited de la Colina's office and discussed the deportation issue further. During his visit, Clements discovered that "the consul had the definite impression that the deportation campaign in Los Angeles was to be aimed specifically at the Mexican community."\(^{59}\) Clements, however, assured the consul that no such plan existed. Moreover, Clements found

\(^{57}\)Ibid., p. 48.

\(^{58}\)Ibid.

\(^{59}\)Ibid., p. 49.
out that additional telegrams sent from Mexico City were received by Consul Colina ordering him to carefully investigate and report on the activities of Visel's deportation drive. Only a few weeks earlier, Arthur G. Arnoll, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce's General Manager, had warned Visel to keep his publicity "from upsetting the whole Mexican population by wholesale raids which are misunderstood by the Mexican," and which might also disturb the communities that served California's agricultural labor needs.

At any rate, Clements left the Mexican consul's office with the intent of making Visel aware that the "scare campaign was ill-advised in its application to an entire ethnic community." Later, Clements went to see Visel at City Hall. After he arrived at the relief coordinator's office both men began reviewing Visel's publicity release. Hoffman writes, "Either the coordinator recognized the misinterpretations possible in his publicity, or else he was made aware of its potential by Clements." Afterwards, Clements and Visel visited Carr at his office for additional input. During

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60 Ibid.
61 Hoffman, "Stimulus to Repatriation," p. 211.
62 Ibid.
this meeting Carr agreed that a statement be issued to the press, as soon as possible, which denied any deportation drive aimed at Mexicans only. Still, as noted earlier, Carr's statement, which was used to clarify his department's intentions, was treated unfairly by the press. Also, "when undertaken, the actual campaign proceeded on lines rather divergent from the direction promised by Carr." 64

Doak's federal agents from Washington, D.C., finally arrived in Los Angeles on Saturday, January 31, 1931, to assist with Visel's anti-alien campaign. Supervisor for this special group of agents was William F. Watkins of the Bureau of Immigration. Shortly after Supervisor Watkins' arrival, a meeting was called at the local Immigration Bureau office. Present at this meeting were Sheriff William Traeger, Chief of Police Roy E. Steckel, and, of course, Walter E. Carr and Charles P. Visel. The agenda was mostly centered on Visel restating his reasons for requesting federal assistance from Labor Secretary Doak to help rid Los Angeles of deportable aliens. Visel also pointed out to the group of officials that it was his belief that 20,000 of Doak's estimated 400,000 deportable aliens were concentrated in Southern California alone. In addition, he assured special agent Watkins that both local

64 Ibid., pp. 75-77.
police and Sheriff's officers would aid immigration personnel in apprehending illegal aliens.\textsuperscript{65}

Watkins, however, soon learned that Visel's affirmation—that Los Angeles alone housed approximately 20,000 deportable aliens—had no basis.\textsuperscript{66} Because Visel's assertion lacked reason, Supervisor Watkins concluded "that there cannot be 5 percent of the total number of the deportable aliens in the United States situated in this locality."\textsuperscript{67} Before making this statement, Watkins had pointed out that although Doak did maintain a number of 400,000 deportable aliens, the labor secretary had qualified his comments by stating that under the current immigration laws only 100,000 were eligible for deportation. Evidently, Visel had either overlooked or was not aware of the latter figure given by Doak. Hoffman inferred that the ambiguity underlying Visel's reasoning in bringing Watkins all the way from Washington, D.C., apparently agitated the special agent. Watkins was quoted as saying, "it serves to illustrate the viewpoint and attitude of Mr. Visel toward this matter in general."\textsuperscript{68}

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\textsuperscript{65}Hoffman, \textit{Unwanted Mexican Americans}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{66}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68}Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Visel's plans to scarehead aliens, mainly Mexicans, out of the Los Angeles area without the use of formal deportation hearings was criticized by Watkins as well. Notwithstanding, Watkins was quite aware of the sophism behind Visel's deportation scheme. Watkins later wrote in his report of the meeting with city officials that the success of such an idea is, of course, open to question, as doubtless many aliens who have wilfully and knowingly entered the United States in violation of law would not choose to so easily forfeit their improperly acquired privileges here, and would more likely move further from the border rather than toward it, as a result of these deportation activities.69

Inevitably on February 3, 1931, Watkins and immigration agents had commenced their deportation activities in the Los Angeles area and its suburbs. After the first few days, Watkins and his agents together with the assistance of local police and sheriff deputies had apprehended thirty-five aliens.

Of this number, eight were immediately returned to Mexico by the "voluntary departure" method, while an additional number chose to take the same procedure in preference to undergoing a formal hearing. Several aliens were held for formal deportation on charges of violating the criminal, immoral, or undesirable class provisions of the immigration laws.70

Meanwhile, press coverage was extensive; Los Angeles

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69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., p. 53.
newspapers covered every step of Watkins and his men's activities. 71

Watkins did not necessarily view his press coverage favorably. His animosity was clearly expressed during a meeting in Chief Steckel's office on February 2, 1931, where Watkins blamed Visel's publicity policy for much of the unwelcome news coverage. Furthermore, he was very displeased with the practices of Los Angeles journalism. For instance, before Watkins actually began his drive on aliens, he insisted that no pictures be taken of his agents or any information be released concerning his plans in the press. But, on the initial day that Watkins commenced his campaign on deportable aliens, several newspapers published news releases anyway. The Examiner, in particular, printed across its front page, "U.S. AND CITY JOIN IN DRIVE ON L.A. ALIENS." 72

In addition to the English-language press, local foreign language newspapers, such as Italian, Japanese, Mexican, and other ethnic periodicals, ran similar headlines and editorials regarding statements made by

71Ibid., p. 53.

Watkins, including those given by Chief Steckel.\textsuperscript{73} One editorial contained a profound statement made by Steckel, it read: "When an arrest is made, attention will be paid not only to the person under arrest, but to all members of his family."\textsuperscript{74} Steckel also stated in another editorial the following:

Most of our crime problems are caused by aliens without respect for the laws of the country. Many of them are open to deportation. Now, with the full cooperation of the government, we will give particular attention to their status as citizens. In cases where there is doubt the Government will be immediately notified and will have ample time to investigate.\textsuperscript{75}

Besides the press's activities, Watkins also became dissatisfied with the amount of assistance he was receiving from local authorities, mainly Chief Steckel and Sheriff Traeger. Hence, Watkins asked Steckel and Traeger to inform him if they were going to help his campaign according to the manner in which Visel had promised earlier in his letter to the Labor Department. Watkins received a reply from Steckel and Traeger shortly after making his request. Later, Watkins reinterpreted their response into his own words:

\textsuperscript{73}Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," p. 81.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., p. 80.

\textsuperscript{75}Los Angeles Examiner, 3 February 1931.
Their inability to undertake any such campaign, and . . . for them to attempt such a drastic move, involving indiscriminate apprehension of aliens by their officers who are admittedly unqualified to determine the question of deportability of aliens, and the delivery of aliens wholesale merely on the suspicion that they might be illegally in the United States in order that they shall be examined by immigration officers to ascertain deportability, following which they would be released or held, as the facts warranted, would not only have no jurisdiction in law but [would] render them liable to numerous damage suits for false arrests, etc.76

Regardless of the less than enthusiastic and unqualified support of local officials, Watkins continued his earnest efforts to apprehend deportable aliens in Southern California. However, it became very apparent to Watkins, nearly one week after he began assisting with Visel's deportation campaign, that "the semi-secret nature of the work involved in detecting illegal aliens had been seriously compromised by all the publicity."77 Watkins' viewpoint was elaborated further in his report to Assistant Labor Secretary White, dated February 8, 1931:

Though the representations made to the Secretary concerning the alien situation here be discounted, it is my opinion that a very fertile field exists hereabouts for energetic and intelligent activity on the part of the immigration service toward accomplishing the expulsion of deportable aliens. The force regularly attached to this office appears to be too small to adequately care for the deportation work which I believe can be developed. It is my belief

76Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 53-54.
that several months [sic] effort on the part of the augmented force will be necessary to accomplish the desired results in connection with the deportation of aliens hereabouts. We will, of course, devote our best efforts to that end.78

During February 1931, county officials witnessed a concerted drive on deportable aliens in Southern California. Although Carr had previously assured the ethnic communities that the Bureau of Immigration was primarily interested in apprehending aliens with criminal records and was not directing its drive at any specific ethnic group, "the aliens questioned, arrested, or detained in the drive could only have made the Mexican community wary of official statements." 79 A series of raids in the Mexican community became further evidence of Carr not keeping his promises. On February 13, 1931, for example, immigration agents plus thirteen sheriff's deputies under the command of Captain William J. Bright staged a raid in the El Monte district. Approximately 300 people were questioned; thirteen were incarcerated. Of the thirteen people arrested, only one person had a criminal record; the other twelve, who happened to be all Mexicans, were arrested simply because they not prove legal entry. 80

78 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
The *Times* and *Examiner* gave the El Monte raid prominence in their Sunday editions. The *Examiner* published the names, ages, occupations, birth places, years in the United States, as well as years or months in Los Angeles county of the thirteen people arrested. On the other hand, the *Times* was more discreet by printing their names only.\(^{81}\) Again, Watkins complained about the practices of Los Angeles journalism. In a report sent to Assistant Secretary White, dated February 21, 1931, Watkins wrote about the coverage:

Unfortunate from our standpoint, because the impression was given by the articles that every district in Los Angeles County known to have aliens living there would be investigated. Our attitude in regard to publicity was made known to the authorities working with us in this matter . . . but somehow the information found its way into the papers.\(^{82}\)

Notwithstanding the publicity of the El Monte raid, Watkins continued his quest for aliens in Los Angeles County. Except, after numerous raids into the East Los Angeles area, Watkins and his men found that their job had become increasingly more complicated. His agents would find the streets deserted, even though Watkins had commented to White in a letter on February 21, 1931, that

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\(^{81}\) Los Angeles Examiner, 15 February 1931; *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 1931.

the Belvedere section of East Los Angeles had approximately 60,000 Mexicans concentrated there. Likewise, "in the rural sections of the county surveyed by Watkins men, whole families disappeared from sight." 83

The aliens in hiding did not discourage Watkins from carrying out his searches, but it did cause him to look elsewhere for them. Thus, Watkins assigned several of his agents to the county jail in search of aliens who might have committed other crimes. In the jail investigation, 200 prisoners were questioned; from this number, 19 were found to be deportable. They were charged with such crimes as prostitution, procuring, and fraud. 84 In addition, during the first three weeks of February, 1931, thousands of people had been stopped and questioned at various locations across Los Angeles County by immigration agents of whom most spoke Spanish. Abraham Hoffman indicated that by late February,

some 225 aliens subject to deportation has been apprehended. Sixty-four of them agreed to depart voluntarily and were taken to the Mexican border by truck, while the rest were held for formal warrant proceedings. 85

He added, "The latter category, of course, held a number of

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
Chinese, Japanese, and Caucasians, but in Watkins words, it was 'the Mexican element which predominates.'

Unquestionably, the Mexican community became furious with Watkins' uncanny investigations. As a result, a group of over one hundred members from the Hispanic business community called a meeting on the evening of February 16, 1931, to voice their complaints and concerns. Platforms stemming from merchant problems to nationalistic pledges were discussed at this assemblage; advice and assistance was provided as well. The meeting also resulted in the organization of the Los Angeles Mexican Chamber of Commerce, which was to be geared at protecting the business rights of Mexican and Mexican American merchants. The Mexican Consul, Rafael de la Colina, was also invited as a guest at this meeting. He warned all persons present to carefully check the credentials of anyone soliciting funds for charity or issuing affidavits of legal entry. In addition, de la Colina vowed to "uphold the rights of his compatriots before the pressures of immigration officials who acted in so arbitrary a manner." 87

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid., pp. 214-215; Los Angeles Evening Express, 17 February 1931; La Opinion (Los Angeles), 16, 17, 19, and 18 February 1931; Los Angeles Record 24 February 1931.
A short time after the February 16 meeting, immigration officials stopped their raids for a few days. During this period, Watkins and Carr issued a new statement to convince and assure the ethnic communities that the activities of the Immigration Bureau were aimed at no particular group. The statement also emphasized that only illegal aliens were to be deported from the United States. Abraham Hoffman noted the following: "This statement may be contrasted with the one released to the papers by Carr on January 30." Furthermore, he speculated that the Hispanic community "must have found the contradictions baffling, as official pronouncements of fair treatment alternated with intensive prosecutions." He concluded by stating that even the Express, after it changed ownership in mid-February

presented an editorial regretting the current impression "among Mexican residents of Los Angeles that they are the particular object of search of federal and local officials, and that irrespective of the manner of their entrance into the country they are liable to deportation."

The federal deportation drive once again became the center of controversy in Los Angeles on February 26, 1931.

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., Los Angeles Evening Express, 19, 23 February, 1981.
On this day, Watkins' men and over two dozen police officers raided the downtown plaza during the late afternoon. These men apparently had surrounded the city plaza and detained for over an hour nearly 400 people. It was reported in the *La Opinion*, on February 27, 1931, that eleven Mexicans, five Chinese, and a Japanese were taken into custody. In passing, the Spanish-language newspaper, besides giving the event extensive coverage, was the only Los Angeles metropolitan paper that did not ignore this foray.91

After the city plaza raid, Watkins found it necessary to change his method of investigating for illegal aliens. Watkins decided that his searches, which were usually conducted at fixed places, proved, for the most part, unsuccessful in a city where it was uncommon by now to find a significant number of aliens grouped in one location. Instead, he ordered his men to carry out their investigations in small groups throughout the county's outlying districts; he also directed them to be as discreet as possible. Incidentally, Watkins was assigned to "District No. 31," which covered an area from San Luis Obispo south to the Mexican border and eastwardly from the Pacific Ocean to Yuma, Arizona. Also working with Watkins in District

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No. 31 were Carr, the director of the district, and Carr's subordinate, Inspector Judson Shaw who was in charge of the Los Angeles city office.92

In most cases, Watkins' arresting procedures were conducted according to the immigration laws at the time. In other words,

the procedures that Watkins followed in detaining aliens, holding them without benefit of counsel, and telegraphing for a warrant of arrest after a provable case was found, were standard methods in 1931.93

Although Watkins did report to his superiors in Washington, D.C., that every effort was being made by him to release innocent people quickly as possible, many of the suspected aliens were detained for a number of days anyway. In essence, these aliens had no civil liberties. In fact, it took until 1933 to make changes in labor laws which granted some basic civil rights to aliens.94 Still, Watkins' procedures and the federal anti-alien drive on the national level were greatly criticized by liberal journals and American Civil Liberties groups.95

93 Hoffman, Stimulus to Repatriation, p. 216.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
Despite the protest of civil libertarians and others, Watkins proceeded with the anti-alien drive as usual. By early March 1931, however, the numbers of alien arrests had noticeably declined. This decrease was largely attributed to concealment and elopement of aliens. Nonetheless, Watkins did manage to locate and arrest a significant number of aliens during this period. Briefly after these arrests were made, he wired Washington, D.C., requesting warrants to be used in formal deportation proceedings. On March 7, 1931, Watkins received a total of 138 such warrants. These warrants were used to deport 80 Mexicans, 19 Japanese, 8 Chinese, and the rest for other nationalities. Besides these aliens, approximately 80 other deportable Mexicans were allowed by Watkins to leave the country under the voluntary departure option. The federal government also provided the Mexicans with transportation to the southern border.96

In early March, a series of raids was carried out by Watkins and his agents located in areas outside of Los Angeles and its nearby suburbs because alien arrests had noticeably declined within the county limits. Therefore, "Watkins dispatched eleven inspectors to visit other parts of the district, and went himself to Bakersfield for

96 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 64.
further investigatory work. 97 These investigations resulted in twenty-seven Mexicans being arrested. In addition, they all agreed to leave the United States voluntarily. Most importantly, soon after these arrests were made, the federal deportation drive in Los Angeles, technically came to an end. But, on the local level, deportable aliens were still being arrested by immigration agents as part of their "routine tasks." 98

On the whole, 230 aliens were deported from Southern California by formal proceedings; of this number, 110 were Mexicans. However, 159 additional Mexican aliens returned to Mexico under the voluntary departure option. According to Hoffman, the overall figure of 389 deportations listed by Watkins on April 22, 1931, indicated that seven out of ten persons deported were Mexican. Lastly, he noted that in order to apprehend 389 deportable aliens, Supervisor Watkins and his agents rounded up and questioned from 3,000 to 4,000 people. 99

Notwithstanding the federal deportation campaign still failed to solve the unemployment problem in Los Angeles. Instead, "it created new tensions and accelerated hostile

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
The coordinator of the Citizens Committee for Coordination of Unemployment Relief, however, was pleased with the work Watkins and his men performed in ridding the city of undesirable aliens. The following is an excerpt from a letter sent by Visel to Secretary Doak on March 19, 1931, which clearly expressed the city coordinator's enthusiasm for Watkins' deportation activities:

Six weeks have elapsed since we have received... Mr. Watkins, in reply to our request for deportable alien relief in this district. We wish to compliment your department for his efficiency, aggressiveness, resourcefulness, and the altogether sane way in which he is endeavoring and is getting concrete results.

The exodus of aliens deportable and otherwise who have been scared out of the community has undoubtedly left many jobs which have been taken up by other persons (not deportable) and citizens of the United States and our municipality. The exodus still continues.

We are very much impressed by the methods used and the constructive results steadily being accomplished.

Our compliments to you, Sir, and to this branch of your service.

The Los Angeles coordinator never did receive a personal reply from Secretary Doak. Instead, Doak's assistant, W. W. Husband, answered Visel's endorsement letter. Doak's main intention for having his assistant acknowledge Visel's letter was to avoid any further

100 Ibid., p. 218.

publicity directed at him because he feared it to be
detrimental to his already over-publicized department.
Eventually, Visel received a letter on March 27, 1931, from
Husband. He stated,

It is the purpose of this Department that the depor-
tation provisions of our immigration laws shall be
carried out to the fullest possible extent but the
Department is equally desirous that such activities
shall be carried out strictly in accordance with
law.102

Husband also clearly brought it to Visel's attention that
from the viewpoint of the federal government it was
the local authority that was supposed to respond to
the federal government's initiative in the enforcement
of federal laws, not the other way around.103

By the beginning of March 1931, the federal govern-
ment's deportation drive in Los Angeles officially ended.
However, the impact this deportation drive had on the
Mexican community was without doubt, a devastating one.
This was especially true for those community members who
had entered the United States when immigration laws were
lenient. Thus, in most cases, they never regularized their
illegal entry. As a result of this technicality, many of
them even after years of working and living in the country
found themselves being deported against their will.
Although the Mexican community made every effort to adapt

102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., p. 98.
to the pressures of the federal anti-alien campaign, this campaign unfortunately became the least of their worries. Just when the federal deportation was about to end, local city officials in Los Angeles implemented a repatriation program which ran concurrently with the government's drive. Tens of thousands of Mexicans, consequently, were repatriated from the country under the Los Angeles repatriation program. Included in these thousands were American citizens as well. One estimate noted that by the end of 1931, from 50,000 to 76,000 Mexican Americans and Mexican Nationals were repatriated from Los Angeles.¹⁰⁴ This city's program, however, was just the beginning. Soon afterwards, repatriation programs sprung up throughout the country; and Mexicans, without question, became the main target of these programs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Repatriation Pressures and the Mexican Community

From 1931 on, repatriation programs in the United States became an unwelcome reality for the Mexican community. Such programs, for the most part, were conducted under the auspices of social agencies in cities and counties throughout America. Furthermore, because local governments were faced with major socioeconomic problems, specifically low income from taxes and a dramatic rise in relief costs, local and state agencies began to pressure Mexicans to return to Mexico. By this time, the majority of Anglos, particularly in the southwestern states, commonly believed that Mexicans in general were taking away jobs from unemployed Americans and overburdening the welfare rolls. In addition, many considered Mexicans as only foreign, short-term labor; thus, they had no right to receive welfare. As a direct result of these credences, most Americans concluded that the only logical answer to the Mexican problem was simply to repatriate Mexicans from the country.1

Generally, American officials shared the attitude that Mexicans had a propensity to return to Mexico anyway. Officials also generally agreed that if the cost for the Mexicans' departure was provided by the government, they would be even more willing to leave the United States. Local governments became very supportive of this rationale, especially after many of them had calculated and discovered that transportation costs to the United States-Mexican border were cheaper than the annual welfare payments of all their Mexican residents. Thus, local and state governments became convinced that this service would not only reduce their economic burdens, but would also reduce their swollen welfare rolls.  

The pseudo-solution claims of the lower branches of governments as a cure-all for their economic woes contributed to the complexity of the Mexican repatriation question, both ethically and legally. For example, Mexicans were repatriated from the country, although hundreds of thousands of them had contributed to the North American prosperity with their blood, sweat, and tears. Moreover, after living and working in the United States for decades they were repatriated because of their illegal status. To complicate the problem, many of them had

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American-born children who otherwise could not be legally deported. Matt Meier and Feliciano Rivera noted that at least half of the Mexican repatriates throughout the 1930s were American-born citizens. Both of them also stated that when these children later wished to come back to the United States in the belief that they were citizens, many found that they had unwittingly lost their citizenship by serving in the Mexican army or by voting in a Mexican election.3

Consequently, Mexicans were affected by the technicalities of U.S. immigration laws. Without question, they became the victims of ethical considerations and civil rights violations. Even though, formal deportations were required and, in many cases, fulfilled for thousands of these illegal entrants; nevertheless,

the surprising aspect of repatriation is that very few Americans spoke out in defense of the constitutional rights of their fellow citizens, and a majority condoned these repatriation programs.4

The United States government contributed to these injustices due "to the failure on the part of government officials" to inform them of their rights.5

Mexico repatriates were basically classified into three distinct categories during the Great Depression: those who were deported under formal proceedings by the

3Ibid., pp. 160, 163.
4Ibid., p. 160.
5Ibid., p. 163.
federal government, those who repatriated themselves, and those who underwent "coercive" repatriation. For example, the latter category was used to pressure the majority of repatriates into leaving the United States.\textsuperscript{6} To illustrate, one apparent method of pressure used by county officials was to notify Mexicans on relief that their welfare payments would be withdrawn if they did not agree to return to Mexico.\textsuperscript{7} Another method employed official announcements concerning free transportation to the Mexican border; inducements to persuade Mexicans to leave by direct threats of physical removal were not uncommon either.\textsuperscript{8} As a result of these categories, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans returned to Mexico.

Still, Mexican repatriation during the depression directly resulted from the widespread beliefs held by Americans that Mexicans had become public charges on taxpayers and from "actual or potential competitors for


\textsuperscript{8}Kiser and Silverman, p. 149; Meier and Rivera, \textit{The Chicanos}, p. 161.
scarce job opportunities." However, less popular but powerful interest groups opposed it. Their reasons, which were other than humanitarian, mainly came from growers and ranchers from the southwestern states. They opposed repatriation because they saw it as a direct threat to an adequate supply of cheap Mexican labor for their farms and ranches. So, by the mid-thirties, many of them continued to resist the curtailment of Mexican immigration by introducing much legislation to Congress. Their efforts eventually resulted with Congress passing legislation which extended the quota system for Mexican labor. This extension was definitely looked upon as a victory by southwestern ranchers and growers. Still, many Mexicans who were hired by these interests, specifically greedy growers, later found themselves being repatriated by the same ranchers and growers who requested them.

During the depression, repatriation programs were largely regarded as a local and state affair by the federal government. For example, Hoover's administration, as suggested by historians George Kiser and David Silverman, feared that any intense and apparent involvement at the

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national level would disunite southwestern farming interests and would hurt American and Mexican diplomatic relations. As a result of federal policies, the repatriation process became a very decentralized one. For this reason, the federal government maintained a low profile. Thus, local and state governments were allowed much flexibility in carrying out their repatriation programs.\footnote{Kiser and Silverman, p. 157.}

On the other hand, the federal government still kept close tabs on the northward movement of immigrants from Mexico. American immigration statistics after the 1929 crash clearly indicated that Mexican immigration underwent some drastic changes. One source noted that "from 1931 to 1940 inclusive, only 20,000 Mexicans legally immigrated to the United States." Likewise, "as a percentage of all immigration to the United States, Mexican immigration dropped from 20 percent in 1927 to about 3 percent in the mid-thirties."\footnote{Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 159.} As a whole, the rapid and massive change in the northward direction of Mexican migration chiefly resulted from the American consulate in Mexico reducing the number of visas issued to Mexicans, and the border patrol
increasing its surveillance along the international border for surreptitious entrants.\textsuperscript{13}

It should also be noted that there were some parallels between the economic depressions in the 1920s and 1930s, such as the continuous efforts by the federal government to curtail Mexican immigration as described above. In addition, the variety of arguments either for or against Mexican labor that prevailed were accompanied by the blatant racism of Anglos toward Mexicans in general. Both eras also had similar uncontrollable socioeconomic influences which drastically altered the milieu of Mexican communities throughout the United States. However, the social and economic influences during the 1930s were more pronounced in industrial areas located in the northern enclaves. Industrial regions, for instance in such states as Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, were hardest hit by the depression. So many of the Mexican population, mostly Mexican Americans, became unemployed in the three states. Inevitably, the Mexican unemployment problem in these midwestern states ended with thousands of Mexicans being repatriated. Matt Meier and Feliciano Rivera pointed out that one-half of the total number of persons of Mexican descent from these states underwent repatriation. Paul

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.; U.S., \textit{Congressional Record} 71st Cong., 2d sess., 1930, pt. 8: 8748; Kiser and Silverman, p. 141.
Taylor also observed that in just three years, from 1930 to 1932, over 32,000 Mexicans were repatriated from Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio.  

Southwestern states, mainly Texas and California, had ample percentages of Mexican repatriates, as evidenced in Texas, which had the largest Mexican and Mexican American population during the 1930s. One estimate notes that the Texas Mexican population totaled some 700,000 in 1930. Taylor also specified that approximately 132,639 people of Mexican ancestry were repatriated from the Lone Star state between 1930 and 1932. Most of them were first and second generation Texans who before being repatriated, either voluntarily or forcibly, had been located in the southern half of Texas in order to work as tenant farmers and migrant laborers. In spite of the fact that Texas led the country in repatriations, "its percentage of returnees


to Mexico was not large enough to reduce significantly Texas' Spanish-speaking population.\textsuperscript{16}

For California, repatriation figures totaled some 52,946 from 1930 to 1932.\textsuperscript{17} To illustrate, during the 1930s, most Mexicans in the Golden State underwent repatriation from the County of Los Angeles, which initiated the first county-organized repatriation programs, and served as a prototype of such programs that other cities and counties ultimately embarked on across the United States. Moreover, because of the uniqueness of repatriation in Los Angeles such as the total number of Mexicans repatriated, expenses administered, methods used, and media involved, a special case study of Los Angeles repatriation programs during the Great Depression follows.\textsuperscript{18}

Los Angeles Programs

Repatriation programs in Los Angeles began as early as the winter of 1930-1931; however, they were not all county-sponsored. In fact, months before county-sponsored programs had been officially implemented by local


\textsuperscript{17}Taylor, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{18}Hoffman, op. cit., p. 122.
officials, Mexicans were repatriating themselves from the "City of Angels." Part of the explanation for self-repatriation—besides poverty, discrimination, mass unemployment, and issues concerning the status of Mexicans—was mainly due to the assistance indigent Mexicans had received from such groups as the Catholic Welfare Bureau, La Sociedad de Damas Catolicas or the Society of Catholic Ladies, the Midnight Mission, and the Comite de Emergencia or the Emergency Committee. Even though funds raised by these organizations were largely used for local distribution, nevertheless, nearly 10 percent of these funds was applied for repatriation purposes. Another significant reason for this self-repatriation occurred when Mexicans were allowed by the Mexican government duty-free admittance of personal vehicles and farm equipment.19

On the other hand, Mexicans without personal transportation were able to board a train headed to El Paso, Texas, by paying a charity rate just under $15.00 per passenger.20 This rate was made possible through the efforts of Mexican Consul Rafael de la Colina with the

19 Ibid., pp. 124-25.

cooperation of both William H. Holland, Superintendent of the County Department of Charities, and Southern Pacific railroad officials. The number of Mexicans who took advantage of the special fare by signing up with Consul de la Colina varied each week, from as low as twenty to as high as a hundred or more, in the winter of 1930-1931. Once the train reached El Paso, it made a connection at Ciudad Juarez; thereafter, repatriates would be transferred to a Mexican train bound for the central states of Mexico.  

Carey McWilliams witnessed Mexican repatriates leaving via trains from Los Angeles during early 1931. He asserts:

I watched the first shipment of "repatriated" Mexicans leave Los Angeles in February, 1931. The loading process began at six o'clock in the morning. Repatriados arrived by the truckload--men, women, and children--with dogs, cats, and goats; half-open suitcases, rolls of bedding, and lunchbaskets.  

Although informal arrangements aided Mexican repatriates, the local government of Los Angeles was still confronted with a major unemployment problem and, to make matters even worse, a relief load in an access of $2,000,000 a year. However, Frank L. Shaw, Supervisor of  

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Los Angeles County's Second District, first proposed the idea of a county-organized repatriation program, which he was certain would at least help reduce the relief load. Thus, by early 1931, Shaw, who also chaired the Board of Supervisors' Charities and Public Welfare Committee, began inquiring into the legality of such a program fully materializing. As a matter of fact, California state law made it possible to pass such legislation in order to allow the use of county funds for transporting destitute people out of Los Angeles. 23

After the legal and political barriers were removed, plans for the first county-sponsored repatriation program were set in motion. Shaw together with the Board of Supervisors' Charities and Public Welfare Committee undoubtedly became instrumental with the active preparations. Their plans mainly focused on ways to induce Mexicans on relief (from 9 to 11 percent Mexican born) to undergo the repatriation option being offered by the County of Los Angeles. Inducements, for instance, included free transportation, food, clothing, and medical aid. Abraham Hoffman also noted that officials evidently gave repatriates hints: "accurate or not, that a return to the United States would

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be possible after an improvement in economic conditions."24

Assisting Shaw and the Board of Supervisors with the repatriation plans were various social agencies, Consul de la Colina, the Southern Pacific Railroad (which extended the charity rate mentioned previously), and, of course, the Mexican government which offered repatriates free passage on its national trains from border towns to Mexico's interior. The Interstate Commerce Commission was involved with Supervisor Shaw's plans as well. This commission simply "agreed not to question the fare prices as long as the cost was borne by a county or municipal."25 Notwithstanding, the first organized county plan was completed by mid-February 1931. Under this plan, February 18, 1931, was the date set for the first trainload of Mexicans to leave Los Angeles in which nearly 350 Mexicans were expected to participate. However, because certain factors had been overlooked during the planning stage, the train departure was canceled. Hoffman explained that the cancellation stemmed from officials being uncertain about

how many of the repatriates were going to be men, women, or children, whether food for the travelers would be purchased in Los Angeles or on the trip, and what the exact expenses would be.26

25 Ibid., p. 128.
26 Ibid., pp. 128-29.
In spite of the postponement, local authorities rescheduled the first trip for March 23, 1931. On that date, about 300 from the estimated 350 Mexican men, women, and children who signed up for the previous trip boarded the county-sponsored trains and departed from Los Angeles—their destination, El Paso, Texas. Once at El Paso, repatriates crossed the Rio Grande to Ciudad Juárez, where they were transferred to Mexico's National Railroad headed for the interior. The Los Angeles Department of Charities thereafter launched fifteen other special repatriation trains on different monthly dates from 1931 to 1934: the trainloads averaged from as low as 412 to well over 1,000 Mexicans each. 27

On April 24, 1931, the second county-sponsored repatriation train was launched. A total of 1,150 Mexican repatriates had participated on this day, out of which 800 had their passage paid by the County of Los Angeles, while the remaining 350 either paid their own train fare or made other arrangements. Nonetheless, some confusion existed on part of the observers of the second departure. Apparently, observers mistakenly confused county-sponsored repatriation

trainloads with those which were not. Abraham Hoffman wrote,

This was understandable, since the same train might be carrying repatriates whose fares were being paid by the county, repatriates paying their own fares, others assisted by the Mexican consulate, some undergoing the Bureau of Immigration's practice of voluntary departure, and a few deportees being removed, the last two categories being at the federal government's expense.28

Adding to the confusion were weekly trains that occasionally carried large numbers of Mexicans repatriating themselves without county assistance. This enigma gave others the impression that the county has sponsored at its expense another repatriation program.29

Likewise, the terms repatriate and deportee caused further confusion concerning the county's repatriation program. For example, this was particularly the case in Mexico, where these terms were used interchangeably by the press. For instance, the American consul in Mexico City, Robert Frazer, remarked in his report to the Department of State on July 14, 1931, that Mexican newspapers did not differentiate between Mexicans who were or would be deported because of their illegal status and Mexican repatriates who had legal status in the United States. He also reported that the Mexican press gave the impression

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29 Ibid.
"that nearly every Mexican entering Mexico from the United states has been deported, and under the most trying circum­stances for the deportee."\(^{30}\)

In the United States, the press also helped increase the amount of confusion over the Mexican repatriate. For the most part, the added havoc centered on repatriation figures published in certain Los Angeles newspapers approximately two months after the second county-sponsored program had been embarked. For example, the totaled figures of Mexican repatriates who left Southern California since the beginning of 1931 announced in such newspapers as the Los Angeles Times and Record were very different from the county totals. The Times published on June 7, 1931, that 40,000 Mexican repatriates had left Southern California, yet the figures given by the county were 1,350 repatriates for the same period. Then on June 16, 1931, the Record announced that only 29,000 Mexicans had left Los Angeles.\(^{31}\)

The problems and confusion stemming from the first two county-sponsored trains were eventually resolved by county officials and the press. Meanwhile, figures of Mexican repatriates from Los Angeles increased further due to the


\(^{31}\)Los Angeles Times, 7 June, and Record, 16 June 1931.
third organized repatriation program implemented on August 17, 1931. The totaled figure of Mexican repatriates for the third program was approximately 899. Consequently, the routine of the third trip ultimately became the same one used for all other county-sponsored departures that followed. However, unlike the two previous train departures, the scheduled destination from the third trip on sometimes included the border towns of Nogales and El Paso.

In short, by mid-1931, the county's repatriation routine included as many as three Southern Pacific trains and a representative from the Bureau of County Welfare who was in charge of properly distributing county-provided food, assured that health and safety conditions were upheld for repatriates, and, of course, made sure that all repatriates remained with the train until they reached Nogales or El Paso. In addition, Consul de la Colina would occasionally send his own representative to accompany these trains headed for the Mexican border. This was the case when Representatives Philip J. Robinson of the Charities Department and Mexican Vice Consul Ricardo Hill accompanied the second train that left Los Angeles on April 24, 1931.

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33 Ibid., p. 137.
As previously mentioned, when the county-sponsored trains reached the proper destination, repatriates would then be transferred to the Mexican National Railroad. Again, the trip to the border for most repatriates was paid for by the County of Los Angeles.³⁴ (Appendix A has an itemized listing of the total cost of each repatriation from Los Angeles.)

It should also be noted that Robinson and two other representatives, Horace D. Roberts and G. A. Elderson, were sent by the Board of Supervisors to accompany the third county-sponsored train that departed from Los Angeles in mid-August. However, on this particular trip, Robinson and Roberts saw to it that repatriates safely arrived as far away as Mexico City. On the other hand, Elderson only supervised the processing of repatriados through the border station at El Paso, Texas. Mexican Vice Consul Hill also accompanied the third trip to the border.³⁵

Some evidence indicated that Mexicans were being deceived by county officials during the third train

³⁴ Los Angeles Evening Express, 24 April 1931; Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 93-94.

³⁵ Los Angeles Times, 17 October, and La Opinion (Los Angeles), 19 August 1931; Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," p. 138. Also, Abraham Hoffman noted that because of "incomplete country records for early 1931," the identities of person(s) who accompanied the first repatriation train on March 23, 1931, is not available.
departure on August 17 as well. George P. Clements, a member of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce who also witnessed the first two county trains to leave Southern California, discovered that on this departure Mexican repatriates were issued what seemed to be "innocuous" departure cards by officials. Furthermore, he reported to Arthur G. Arnoll, the chamber's general manager, that "most of them had been told that they could come back whenever they wanted to. I think this is a grave mistake, because it is not the truth." \(^{36}\) The truth revealed that the face of the card asked for identification data—which seemed harmless—"but the back of the card had been stamped 'LOS ANGELES COUNTY/DEPARTMENT OF CHARITIES/COUNTY WELFARE DEPT. [sic]/By ________.'"\(^ {37}\) Consequently, any Mexican born who unwittingly signed this card could be denied readmission by United States officials under the Liable to Become a Public Charge (LPC) Clause of the 1917 Immigration Act.\(^ {38}\)

Clements also observed that on August 17, many of the would-be repatriates were American citizens. In his report sent to Arnoll on that same day, he substantiated this observation by stating that "the vast majority of


\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., pp. 135-36.
repatriates spoke the English language."\(^{39}\) However, on the following day, the *Los Angeles Evening Express* ran an article which claimed that "few of them spoke English"; but it did admit that "many of the repatriates being described as Mexicans were actually American citizens and that 'most of them were born here.'"\(^{40}\)

Most of the American citizens in question were children. According to Clements nearly 60 percent of the total Mexican children being repatriated were American-born. Clements, who became moved by this percentage, went on record by stating that

> No child could return, even though born in America . . . unless he had documentary evidence and his birth certificate and was able to substantiate this, the burden of proof being placed entirely on the individual.

He added, "This means that . . . these children are American citizens without very much hope of ever coming back into the United States."\(^{41}\)

Clements' assessment of the Mexican American children was disputed by the Bureau of County Welfare. Apparently, the bureau's request to the County Board of Supervisors for

\(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 139.

\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 139; *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 18 August 1931.

the third county-sponsored repatriation had mentioned that "All of these people [which included children] are at present receiving aid from the County Welfare Division and none of them are American citizens." Abraham Hoffman suggests that even though the County Welfare's request maintained a greater degree of reliability as compared to the offhand observation by Clements and the reporter from the Express,

logic demands that some of the children out of the 469 officially counted minors under age 12 (and the Express estimate of 700, which included non-charity repatriates) would be American-born, the more so when Clements, reporting his having interviewed a number of the adult repatriates, said that many of the men admitted they had been in the United States at least ten years.

The problem surrounding the question of citizenship increased further due to a standard practice used by the County Welfare officials for categorizing Mexican children on relief. It was very common for local welfare agencies to define Mexican American children along cultural rather than national lines. As a result, these children were classified either Mexican or foreigner regardless of their legal status. These agencies, moreover, did not view its

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42 Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans*, p. 95.

endorsement of sending Mexican Americans back to Mexico as being anyway wrong.44 Hoffman stated the following:

By thus mixing nationality and culture, Los Angeles County—and many white Americans across the country, as well as the Southwest—was able to exclude from its mind the thought that Mexican-American children whose parents were on relief in a period of economic depression might some day become productive American adult citizens.45

Additionally, by the third repatriation trip, the Charities Department was, for some time, being investigated by the grand jury—unfortunately not for the department's unscrupulous policies but for its "financial irregularity." The grand jury investigation resulted with the resignation of William H. Holland, Superintendent of Charities, on August 25, 1931—he pleaded ill health. Holland's successor was William R. Harriman, who prior to his new appointment was Superintendent of the County Farm. Ironically, Holland's assistant, A. C. Price, was appointed as Superintendent of the Bureau of County Welfare, regardless of some criticism. Consequently, "no change in policy in the repatriation program occurred, though the bookkeeping seemed to have improved."46

44 Ibid., pp. vii-viii.
46 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 96; Los Angeles Evening Express, 4 July, 16, 18, 20, and 28 August; and Los Angeles Record, 25 August 1931.
Despite the problems, controversy, criticism, and post changes the County Department of Charities experienced by the third shipment, preparations for the fourth county-sponsored repatriation trip, scheduled for October 29, 1931, were already underway by early autumn. The months of September and October witnessed county officials signing up as many Mexicans as possible for the fourth county trip. Their efforts ended with approximately 1,200 repatriates registered for the trip, out of which 1,059 were charity cases. Notwithstanding, when the repatriation trains departed on October 29, some county officials had expected a greater number of repatriados. Yet the less than expected turnout, slightly over a thousand, did not cause much alarm among officials. For example, statements given to the press by Supervisor Frank Shaw assured the public that a tremendous saving to the county had resulted from its fourth organized repatriation program.47

The fifth county-organized repatriation trip did not occur until January 12, 1932. As the previous trip, nearly three months earlier, the number of Mexican repatriates, expenses, county representatives, and routine for the fifth

departure were basically the same. For the most part, the routine for carrying out such a departure required a written request from the superintendent of charities to the board of supervisors, confirming the tentative date of departure, estimated number of repatriates expected to leave, and the total cost to cover food and transportation. In addition, the superintendent's request indicated which welfare officials would accompany the repatriates bound for Mexico. Interestingly, during 1932, the sixth trip, on March 8; the seventh, on April 29; the eighth, on July 7; and the ninth, on August 18; were also similar to each other in the number of repatriates, costs, chaperons, and, of course, shipment procedures. 48

Still, the succeeding repatriation trains which left Los Angeles specifically between October 1932 and April 1933 were unmistakably different in total numbers of repatriates and costs. All and all, four shipments of repatriates had departed during this period: first, on October 6, 1932; second on December 8, 1932; third on February 8, 1933; and the fourth on April 14, 1933. These departures included 868 relief cases totaling 3,150 men.

women, and children. The total cost to the county was approximately $48,521.49

Before the thirteenth movement of repatriates took place on April 14, 1933, the issue as to whether the county still wished to continue or discontinue its repatriation programs was discussed by officials. This discussion was directly brought about by President-elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933. Because soon after Roosevelt became president, his administration changed federal policies which helped provide federal funds for county relief; however, the conditions stipulated that those funds be not used for transporting destitute people out of any county in the United States. Therefore, the only alternative officials in Los Angeles had to continue the repatriation programs was the sole use of county funds. Obviously, since the thirteenth departure occurred the question of continuing Mexican repatriation from Los Angeles did not go unanswered.50

By the beginning of August 1933, the fourteenth repatriation shipment carrying some 453 people departed from Southern California. And, by mid-December, the

49 Ibid., p. 105. See also Appendix A for the date, cost, and number of individuals for each Los Angeles County repatriation departure.

50 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 105.
fifteenth shipment followed with only 412 Mexicans departing. Clearly, these figures show that Mexican repatriations were declining as 1933 came to an end. With the close of that year, Los Angeles welfare officials decided to evaluate the county repatriation program thus far. The means used for part of the evaluation was statistical. The statistics revealed that, by the end of 1933, nearly 3,145 county relief cases, totaling 12,668 repatriados, were sent back to Mexico on county-sponsored trains. Furthermore, the amount spent by the Bureau of County Welfare to cover all costs of shipment of repatriates was approximately $182,575. In terms of financial savings to the county, the total figure was nearly $435,000.51

Qualitative evaluations were also prepared by the Department of Charities. The evaluations, which were sent to both the Board of Supervisors and Mexican consulate, included discussions on such areas as the "origins, procedures, success, and the future of the repatriation program."52 But, most importantly, these reports disclosed to welfare officials that the number of new volunteers for the county-sponsored repatriation program had definitely declined. Officials, moreover, simply believed that, for

51Ibid., p. 106.

52Ibid., p. 107.
the most part, the decline of volunteers occurred because of the relief assistance being provided to the county by the federal government.\textsuperscript{53}

Unquestionably, the role of the federal government was largely accountable for the ebb of repatriates from Los Angeles. Again, much of this decrease had been credited to President Roosevelt's administrative philosophy. He earnestly believed that the "government was responsible for the economic and social welfare of its citizens."\textsuperscript{54} The major principal elements of the New Deal program—relief, recovery, and reform—surely clarified the position of his administration. Roosevelt's programs, such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Federal Civil Works projects, indeed, contributed to the sudden decline of Mexican repatriates.\textsuperscript{55} The bottom line is that these programs provided employment and additional relief to many destitute Mexicans; thus, many would-be repatriates had good reasons not to leave the country or, for that matter, Los Angeles.

However, the Los Angeles County's Department of Charities, in an effort to increase the number of

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54}Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 156-57.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., pp. 156-57.
repatriates, staged an intensive recruitment drive prior to the fifteenth trip. Yet, after the campaign was completed, the department only registered 120 relief cases, totaling 412 men, women, and children for the trip. This figure when compared to totals of the fourteenth trip decreased by 2 relief cases and 41 individuals. Likewise, the same figure when compared to all totals of shipments and costs from 1931 to 1933 was far below average.56

Besides trying to increase the numbers of Mexican recruits, the Charities Department commenced the reduction of its repatriation costs. The department's first recommendations made towards this aim were to eliminate the food and medical attention for Mexican repatriates—once they crossed the border. According to Abraham Hoffman:

Each repatriate was to be given the illusion of possessing his own financial resources. A repatriate would receive a financial allotment covering himself and his family; 25 percent of this was to be paid to the repatriate at the branch of the Bank of Mexico of his choice, either in Nogales or Juarez. This would permit the repatriate to cash the check at a rate of exchange favorable to him. It was then presumed that the repatriate would use this money to obtain the services that previously had been provided by the county, a point assured by the continuing accompaniment of county officials... on the repatriation trains. The repatriate received the remaining 75 percent of the allotment when he

56 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 107.
disembarked from the train, so that he did not automatically arrive as a public charge. The average amount per family of the cash allowance was ninety pesos.\textsuperscript{57}

Superintendent Price estimated that the new procedures would save the Bureau of County Welfare approximately $32,000 for the proceeding year; therefore, on April 19, 1934, the procedures were applied to the sixteenth repatriation shipment. On this shipment 172 relief cases, totaling 664 people, underwent repatriation to Mexico. Once the Mexican repatriates reached the border, financial allotments were properly distributed to them by county officials according to the new policies.\textsuperscript{58}

After the sixteenth shipment, no new county-sponsored repatriation trains departed from Los Angeles. However, a seventeenth trip, scheduled for March 20, 1935, had been attempted by county officials. The Board of Supervisors had proposed a plan that would use state emergency relief administration funds to carry out the trip for March 20. Yet when the plan was submitted to the superintendent of charities, it became bogged down in bureaucratic red tape. Eventually, legislation was approved for future repatriation programs, but

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., pp. 108-9.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., p. 109.
intensive recruitment of prospective repatriates was expressly forbidden by a policy stating that no coercive measures were to be directly or indirectly used on any alien in order to obtain his consent to being returned to Mexico.59

This policy undoubtedly made it very difficult for county officials to realistically carry out the seventeenth trip. By 1935 Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans on relief were, nonetheless, less responsive to the Bureau of County Welfare's invitation to leave Southern California. Their lack of interest was chiefly attributed to the federal relief programs permitted under the New Deal program. In essence, the New Deal program allowed for a higher relief allotment to the County of Los Angeles, which greatly reduced the financial burden on the Bureau of Welfare. Moreover, because of the federal program, major construction projects like new roads, bridges, viaducts, and tunnels directed by the Civil Works Administration and Works Progress Administration were undertaken by the county as well—such projects put thousands of people who were on relief to work. Although projects under the former and latter administrations gave preference to Americans for employment, the "prospect of employment on them" was a major reason why Mexican Nationals, as well as Mexican

59Ibid., p. 112.
Americans, shunned repatriation from Los Angeles by the mid-thirties.  

In the end, surveys were conducted to see just how much the county had actually saved and accrued by repatriating Mexicans on relief. Rex Thomson, who had been made the new Superintendent of Charities, revealed that in one such survey during early 1935 approximately 3,317 relief cases were removed from the welfare roles through the county-sponsored repatriation programs. In a survey, conducted during March and April, 1934, Thomson had also reported to John A. Ford, a member of the Board of Supervisors, that

the cost per Mexican case aided averages $25.23 per month. Applying this cost to the period these cases have been removed from relief, shows that a total saving has been effected amounting to $2,187,138 to September 30, 1934.  

According to Abraham Hoffman, the latter figure was debatable if based on the assumption that

the relief case would have continued through the entire period of repatriation had the family not returned to Mexico, that a case that did return was on relief at the start of 1931, and that costs were static.

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60 Ibid., p. 113; Meier and Rivera, *The Chicanos*, p. 157.
Hoffman concluded by suggesting that, realistically, the financial saving to Los Angeles was around $500,000. This figure was also estimated by Harry M. Baine, another member on the County Board of Supervisors.63

Such savings to the County of Los Angeles unquestionably did vary in different given reports. For instance, some mentioned that the county, indeed, saved substantial amounts of money by removing Mexican relief cases through repatriation, while others disclosed that many of these same cases were only reopened by other Mexicans who took the place of those who left. Hence, the percentage of these cases remained basically constant.64 Notwithstanding, Los Angeles County's repatriation programs were unique as well as effective in solving, to some extent the problem of swollen welfare rolls plaguing the "City of Angels." But most important, while Los Angeles was executing its programs, other cities and counties across the United States were also attempting to reduce their relief load and other socioeconomic problems by repatriating Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression.

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
Repatriation Across the United States

For the most part, the greatest number of Mexican repatriates were from the states of Texas, California, Illinois, Indiana, Arizona, and Colorado during the early years of the depression. One estimate, for example, holds that from 1930 to 1932 over 200,000 Mexicans were repatriated from the above states alone. Commonly, the transportation mainly used by these repatriates to Mexico were rail lines and vehicles; however, in some instances, returnees had no other choice but to walk there. Large border towns such as Nogales, El Paso, and Laredo experienced their share of returnees; smaller towns such as Brownsville and Eagle Pass, Texas, and Douglas, Arizona, attracted many repatriates as well. Equally important, major cities, mainly Chicago, Detroit, Denver, and, of course, Los Angeles, including other cities, all served as processing centers for hundreds of thousands of Mexican repatriates.

Most notably, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois had a substantial percentage of repatriates during the depression because at least one-half of their Mexican population was repatriated. Part of the explanation for this percentage

65Taylor, p. 45.

was based on the assumption that northern industrial states were hit hardest by the economic depression. As a result, thousands of Mexicans employed in the meat-packing, automobile manufacturing, railroads, steel, and mining industries, unfortunately, lost their jobs. In addition, the Mexican population in these areas "had immigrated more recently and thus were more likely to consider returning to Mexico than those in the Southwest."  

Thousands of Mexicans eventually returned to Mexico from northern enclaves. Such a movement was observed in the city of Detroit because during the depths of the depression, Detroit embarked on an extensive repatriation program. In many ways the reasons were similar to those of Los Angeles. Again, as in the Los Angeles case, welfare officials spearheaded the program in Detroit: Detroit's Mexican Consul, Ignacio Batiza, became actively involved in the repatriation program. Moreover, Consul Batiza's initial efforts to organize and establish a relief program for destitute Mexicans evolved as a program of repatriation for that city; thus, in 1932, Detroit's department of public welfare

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67 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, pp. 151, 162-63.
established a Mexican bureau to assist the city in repatriating Mexicans back to Mexico.68

The role of the Mexican Bureau was mainly to convince all Mexican relief applicants through interviews conducted by social workers that their socioeconomic problems could best be solved by repatriation. Nevertheless, Detroit's Mexican colony discovered that the case workers, as well as the relief efforts of the Mexican agency, were far from being benevolent to Mexican relief applicants: The methods of persuasion practiced by the bureau's case workers on Mexican clients on numerous occasions included "threats of deportation, stoppage of relief (wholly or in part, as, e.g., in the matter of rent), or by means of trampling on customary procedures."69

Norman D. Humphrey, who did some serious research on Mexican repatriation from Michigan commented:

When knowledge of the actual functions of [the Mexican Bureau] became widespread in the colony, resistance appeared even to the point of refusals to go to the agency. . . . [Also] persons who were naturalized citizens, and children who were born citizens, were subjected to scrutinizing inquiry for purposes of

68Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, pp. 524-25; McWilliams, North from Mexico, p. 184; Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 120.

"repatriation." In one case the worker strongly insisted that the possibility of continued dependence was grounds for repatriation, despite the fact that the head of the family had been naturalized.70

In spite of the bureau's unethical procedures, the agency (assisted by Consul Batiza) and Detroit's Department of Public Welfare did manage to repatriate some 1,500 Mexicans from the state of Michigan by the end of 1932. Abraham Hoffman stated that Consul Batiza had claimed that as many as 40,000 Mexicans were repatriated from Michigan in all. This figure, however, was based on these assumptions: unemployment, lack of opportunity, and pressure from welfare officials. Notwithstanding, Mexican repatriates from Detroit were transported to the border on trains chartered by the Bureau. (The train fare was $15.00 for each passenger, which included a meal as well.)71

Another midwestern state with substantial repatriation was Indiana. Most of the repatriados were from the state's two northern industrial cities, Gary and East Chicago. In both these industrial cities, a sizable Mexican colony quickly developed during the 1920s. Moreover, the majority


of Mexicans migrated to these cities to work in the steel mills. By the mid-twenties, for instance, East Chicago's Inland Steel Co., employed some 2,526 Mexican workers, a figure which constituted nearly 35 percent of its labor unit. Mexicans were, also, employed on local railroads in the Gary and Chicago area, but the unit percentage was much smaller than the former. Most importantly, the 1930 census reported that approximately 9,007 Mexican-born immigrants had settled in Lake County, Indiana, with most of them living in Gary and east Chicago. Consequently, when the economic depression struck the country, the hostile attitudes of Indiana's native residents toward outsiders served as a catalyst for the repatriation movement from the two northern cities.

Repatriation from Gary, Indiana, underwent two distinct phases—one voluntary; the other, involuntary. The first phase lasted from 1931 to May 1932. During this period many Mexicans for good reasons left Gary to Mexico on their own volition. One of the major reasons for self-repatriation occurred


73 Ibid., p. 134.
when the Mexican government invited its nationals to return, implying that they would improve economically by doing so, many immigrants readily took this avenue of escape from the destitution brought on by the temporary collapse of the American economy.74

This reason alone resulted with the first group of repatriates leaving Gary in trucks, automobiles, and, in some cases, by foot during the summer of 1931.75

Shortly after the first repatriates left, Gary's International Institute became actively involved with the city's repatriation process. The Institute's involvement was brought about by reports of hardships that repatriates had experienced due to inadequate transportation while attempting to reach Mexico. In one report, the Institute asserted that

many are returning in trucks, such a large number going on one truck they have to stand, and only a few days ago one of the Mexicans who left Gary in this way was thrown from the truck and killed before the border was reached.76

These hardships propelled the Institute to seek free transportation for repatriates from Gary's Council of Social Agencies but their request was denied. The Institute, nevertheless, was able to obtain passes, free of charge, for voluntary repatriates on the National Railroad of

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., p. 135.
Mexico with assistance from Chicago's Mexican Consul, Rafael Aveleyra. It should be noted, also, that many Mexicans from Gary had applied for subsidized voluntary removal during early 1931 from the Immigration Office. However, according to the files of the International Institute, the Immigration Office by June 1951 still had not received any appropriation in order to fulfill these requests. 77

Consequently, the activities of the International Institute were questioned by its major office, the YWCA Department of Immigration and Foreign Communities. Evidently, the national office was alarmed with its agency's involvement in repatriation, particularly the complaints of the Institute's executive secretary, Isabel Rogers, to the Immigration office regarding appropriation funds for voluntary repatriates. In response to the Institute's activities, Aghavine Yegenian, a representative of the YWCA's national board wrote to Rogers. Yegenian stated that "Our experience from other places had been that immigration authorities are only too eager to sent [sic] all eligible applicants and order their removal." 78 She also mentioned that

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
in some places it had been reported to us that Mexicans have been forced against their will to go when they have applied for relief to city departments of public welfare. 79

Rogers' reply back to Yegenian was that "we know of no instance here that the Mexicans . . . have been forced against their will to go when they have applied for public relief." 80

However, by early 1932, Gary's public relief policy deteriorated, leading to an involuntary policy. During this year, a coalition of groups, which included businessmen, nativists, and township trustee officials, began promoting forced repatriation. The motives of these groups, as described by historians Neil Betten and Raymond Mohl, were "mixed and sometimes conflicting." 81 Simultaneously, group members felt certain that Mexican repatriation would eliminate costly relief charges to the city, a rationale which had been first presented to them by "a local branch of the American Legion, original sponsors of publicly financed Mexican repatriation in northwest Indiana." 82

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., pp. 135-26.
The local press, likewise, supported the financial benefits of this rationale by publishing editorials connected with the first repatriation trips and those thereafter sponsored by the local coalition groups.83

Largely, the first publicly financed trips were made possible by individual contributions, settlement houses, and private fund-raising events. For example, an event sponsored by repatriation advocates was a stag party which featured gambling and other attractions; providing the facilities for the happening were the Knights of Columbus. Again, the local press supported the cause. The Gary Post-Tribune, for example, implied that

housewives and others who might object to all the men in town devoting a part of this night to community uplift will be urged to make the sacrifice as a civic and patriotic duty.84

In the end, funds were raised to repatriate Mexican women and children by trains and men by truck. Average transportation cost per family to the border was estimated at $37.50. This sum, when compared to the annual relief cost of $336 for one family only, resulted in a savings of

83Ibid., p. 136; Gary Post-Tribune (Gary, Indiana), 14 January and 4 February 1932.

84Betten and Mohl, p. 136; Gary Post-Tribune (Gary, Indiana), 5 and 27 February, and 16 March 1932.
nearly $300 a year for the township, the Post-Tribune suggested.85

By the end of March 1932, the publicly financed repatriation program ended due to exhausted funds. Still, two months later, the township elite devised a more sophisticated plan for raising funds to get rid of destitute Mexicans from Gary. This plan called for local business interests to provide repatriation funds to the near-bankrupt public assistance office, which Calumet township trustee Mary Grace Wells headed. In turn, business interests who contributed repatriation funds would be reimbursed with scrip, which they could use later to pay their local taxes. Therefore, this plan not only gave local interests some obvious tax advantages, but it also assisted Wells with repatriation efforts. As she pointedly stated, "It will mean a great saving to the township."86

Township officials, indeed, approved the repatriation plan. The first response of the Lake County commissioners was to authorize "the removal of every Mexican family receiving public assistance."87 In addition, they agreed

85Betten and Mohl, p. 136.
86Ibid., pp. 136-37.
87Ibid., p. 137.
to issue county scrip--bearing 6 percent which could be used for paying taxes--to business interests who contributed funds for repatriation purposes. After officials put their plan into action, it resulted with several trainloads of voluntary repatriates leaving Gary by mid-1932. Similar to practices in Los Angeles, each train was accompanied by a county representative to the border. Not all repatriates, however, were county cases because some left Gary by their own means. "The International Institute reported that some returned by car after gasoline money was raised, others in a freight car, and some hitchhiked."88 Some Mexicans who worked in the steel mills were allowed to work extra days in order to pay for their transportation cost to Mexico. In 1932, Chairman Walter J. Riley of the Lake County Relief Committee reported that under the plan approximately 3,300 Mexicans were repatriated, out of which half had their trip financed by local government, whereas the remainder returned on their own or through aid provided by private relief agencies.89

After May 1932, the second phase--forced repatriation--became pronounced in Gary. The township trustee's office, which was now fully in charge of the repatriation program,

88Ibid., p. 137.
89Ibid.
directed its full attention toward removing from Gary, Mexicans who were reluctant to leave. Immediately, the trustee's office began applying repressive measures against reluctant Mexicans. These measures undoubtedly forced many to return to Mexico. After a few days, the International Institute noted that the measures took effect. Over a hundred Mexicans left Gary and in some cases very unwillingly. It also reported a personal account of a Mexican American girl's reaction to her forced removal:

This is my country but after the way we have been treated I hope never to see it again. . . . As long as my father was working and spending his money in Gary stores, paying taxes, and supporting us, it was all right, but now we have found we can't get justice here.90

In addition, the Gary Institute received numerous complaints from distraught Mexican families. Many of them informed the Institute that their welfare payments were canceled because they had refused to participate in the trustee's repatriation program.91

By January 1933, the trustee's repatriation policies underwent some changes, which were basically brought about by Mexicans protesting to county officials about one investigator's refusal to issue aid to unwilling repatriates. Although this action resulted in his resignation,

90 Ibid., p. 139.
91 Ibid., pp. 138-39.
"it seemed discrimination had ended, since the township office reinstated several Mexican families previously stricken from relief rolls." Incidents such as harassment of unemployed Mexicans by township trustees, nevertheless, continued thereafter. The Institute, for instance, reported that a welfare investigator had demanded that a Mexican relief applicant "surrender his 'first papers' (for citizenship) when he refused to return to Mexico," even though he had "lived in the United States many years and had married an American woman."

Such incidents of harassment and discrimination against remaining Mexicans in Gary, as well as throughout the state of Indiana, became part of the norm by the second phase. Moreover, this standard increased the deplorable socioeconomic conditions of Mexicans and their families in that city and state. They were denied jobs on state and federal work projects. Also, most Mexican Americans were treated by Anglo residents of Indiana as second class citizens; consequently, this treatment only added to their troublesome hard times. All and all, over 3,000 Mexicans were repatriated from East Chicago and Gary, Indiana, during the economic depression. Other northern enclaves

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92 Ibid., p. 139.

93 Ibid.
added to this figure, too. St. Paul, Minnesota, had over 400, and the state of Ohio repatriated approximately 300 Mexicans from Lucas County. In essence, relief officials in all northern industrial states mentioned had virtually the same reasons and method of removal as those used by officials in the state of California.  

Besides the southwestern and northern states discussed, Arizona was the only state which did not develop an organized repatriation program. However, the stream of Mexican migration through the state via its border stations resulted in a significant number of repatriates during the 1930s. Paul Taylor reported that approximately 18,520 Mexican repatriates departed from Arizona between 1930 and 1932. Many of them had left that state from the Salt River Valley, a farming region where a sizable Mexican population developed in 1930. In fact, by 1930, Arizona's Mexican population reached over 114,000. Many of them found employment in the cotton fields of the Salt River Valley, while most found work in the state's agriculture, mining, and railroad industries.  

On the whole, over 500,000 Mexicans were reported to

94 Ibid., p. 140; Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 120.

95 Taylor, p. 45; Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 122-123.
have left the United States between 1929 and 1935, 
according to figures supplied by the Department of Labor 
and statistics submitted to the State Department. Still, 
this total as compared to the "overall totals for 
repatriates" documented and reported by the Mexican 
Migration Service is viewed by many historians and others 
to be less accurate. It appears that 

the U.S. Department of Labor figures for Mexicans, 
both repatriated and deported, are at considerable 
variance from those compiled by the Mexican Migration Service of all Mexicans returning to Mexico. The 
Labor Department files [also] do not include the many numbers who were repatriated of their own volition.96 

In addition, the State Department figures only included 
those Mexican repatriates who were assisted back to 
Mexico by different government agencies. On the other 
hand, the Mexican government commonly recorded all persons 
entering Mexico through its border stations, regardless of 
their status at the time of entry.97 

For the same period indicated above, the Mexican 
Migration Service reported that a total of 438,403 Mexicans 
had returned to Mexico.98 Though this figure is below the 
American total, it was generally agreed to be a more accu­rate and more reliable calculation. Other inconsistencies 

97 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 162. 
98 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 174-75.
between American and Mexican repatriation figures can be found in totals for returnees during 1932 to 1933 cited by the Labor Department and Mexican Migration Service. The Labor Department, for example, during the fiscal year, July 1932 to June 1933, reported that "7,750 Mexicans were deported, while it effected the voluntary departure of 10,347 Mexicans." On the other hand, for this same period, the Mexican Migration Service counted 53,767 returnees. Further, the Labor Department figures for the following fiscal year, July 1933 to June 1934, totaled 8,910 Mexican repatriates, but according to reports of Mexican officials, for the same period, approximately 24,228 repatriados had returned to Mexico.

In spite of the differences between American and Mexican overall totals for repatriates, the truth of the matter is that a total of about half a million people returned, either voluntarily or coercively, to Mexico from the United States during the Great Depression. Although their departure was viewed by the majority of Americans as a positive move in eliminating some of America's social and economic problems plaguing her cities and counties, the hundreds of thousands of Mexican lives uprooted from the

99 Ibid., p. 125.
100 Ibid.
country ultimately posed a serious dilemma for the government and people south of the Rio Grande. Mexico's role in welcoming its returnees was, in many respects, benevolent in nature. But this lofty approach, as evidence points out, unfortunately could not provide the basic social and economic needs for the lives of the thousands of Mexican repatriados from the United States.
CHAPTER FIVE
Mexico's Role and the Repatriados

The role of the Mexican government during the depression in encouraging Mexicans to leave the United States, as well as aiding them back to Mexico, should not be underestimated. Throughout the 1930s Mexico's repatriation policy was clearly aimed at convincing Mexicans in the United States that a better life awaited them in Mexico. Initially, this policy was only rhetoric; however, it soon was implemented. The Mexican government's promises of employment, colonization projects, and land offering, indeed, influenced many to leave America and return back to Mexico. Still, most returned because they simply preferred, for good reasons, Mexico to the United States during the economic hard times. Once back in Mexico, the majority of repatriados realized that the chances of creating a better life for themselves and their families were few, if any. Yet, in the end, the Mexican repatriation policy was "successful in some respects while a failure in others."¹

Mexico's decision to become actively involved with the plight of the repatriados was due to the serious socio-economic problems, which the thousands of returnees were creating for that country and its people. Such problems as rampant unemployment and an already large labor surplus were critical key factors for its involvement. Other important reasons contributing to Mexico's entanglement were the added demands repatriates had on relatives and friends. In addition, Mexican relief agencies, as a result of limited financial resources, could not adequately care for the thousands of homeless, hungry, and penniless repatriates. Moreover, reports of abuse and mistreatment of Mexican Nationals in the United States contributed to Mexico's involvement as well. Thus, the repatriados' destitution ultimately challenged the Mexican government to provide some positive measures to help them, as well as solve its own domestic dilemma. 2

The Mexican Nation's first earnest measure toward solving the repatriation problem was the establishment of the National Repatriation Committee. Still, nearly two years before this committee had been actually established, Mexico's government adopted some key policies which were

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chiefly centered on partially easing the financial burden and providing transportation for repatriates. For example, one policy allowed Mexicans duty-free admittance of material possessions. In another instance, fees ordinarily charged by local consuls for processing legal documents of entrants were rescinded. In another case, free transportation from the border to the interior of Mexico was provided. This assistance was provided by the government to decrease the congestion in border towns, which resulted from the thousands of repatriates seeking relief from townspeople, mainly in Ciudad Juarez and Nogales. These policies, including others, did serve as a partial solution for some of the problems associated with the repatriados during the early 1930s. However, some completely failed to work or did not work out as planned. 3

During the early 1930s, several annual conferences were also held by the Mexican Migration Service of the Ministry of Interior to discuss the larger problems and propose resolutions regarding the repatriados to the Mexican government. The first conference, in 1930, focused on the migration problems resulting from the repatriates. The second one, in 1931, called its attention to the

seriousness of the repatriation problem and transportation recommendations for repatriates. In 1932, the third meeting proposed the establishment of a colonization commission to institute agricultural colonies for the Mexican repatriates; a tax on private property in an effort to raise funds for these colonies was proposed as well. Most importantly, during the third conference, the recommendation of the colonization commission inspired one Mexican official, Andres Landa y Pina, to conceive the idea of a Repatriation Committee to handle the grave circumstances surrounding the thousands of repatriados.

Landa y Pina, Chief of the Migration Service, wholeheartedly believed that an organized Repatriation Committee could provide for the needs to solve the inherent problems of the Mexican returnees and that such a committee, in part, could become a governmental operation. However, the involvement of private and public organizations became essential for its success, too. Obviously, after pursuing his idea through the proper channels, Landa y Pina finally witnessed the launching of the Repatriation Committee on November 23, 1932, during a meeting in which he presided. The official name given to this organization at the meeting


5 Ibid.
was the National Repatriation Committee. Members included Alfredo Levy of the National Chamber of Commerce, Red Cross representatives, delegates from both the Department of Public Health and the Ministry of the Interior, and, of course, Landa y Pina. Included as a member of the Repatriation Committee was Jose Gonzales Soto, a wealthy Spanish citizen who invested his time and money in creating this committee, and who had considerable investments in the Mexican Nation.6

One of the primary goals of the National Repatriation Committee was a subscription campaign to raise 500,000 pesos to help with its operation costs. Gonzales Soto had been among the first pledgers; he contributed 1,000 pesos to meet the committee's goal. Other contributions soon followed. Moreover, only six weeks after the campaign was embarked, approximately 86,000 pesos were collected. Adding to this amount was a contribution of 5,000 pesos donated from Mexico's President Abelardo Rodríguez. Other donations totaling some 17,000 pesos were contributed from government workers and officials also. Special programs, such as a bullfight, resulted in an additional 25,000 pesos towards the set goal. Mexican radio stations, particularly XEW and XEB, donated air time for campaign pledges. The

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6Ibid., p. 200.
campaign and the National Repatriation Committee, unquestionably, was enthusiastically received by the Mexican people, the contributions serving as an indicator of this popularity. Even though the committee served as evidence of an ostentatious display, nevertheless, it failed to define its mission and goals.  

After weeks of discussions as to which goals seemed feasible, the National Committee reached a concrete decision to meet its mission. The committee decided that the campaign funds collected thus far were to be used to establish communal agricultural colonies for repatriates and their families. Anthropologist Manuel Gamio maintains that there were three major reasons why the committee proposed this decision. First, unless the skills acquired by repatriates in the United States were properly put to use in centralized locales (thus preventing them from scattering across Mexico), such skills would be lost to Mexico's economy. Second, sending repatriates to colonies far into the interior of Mexico would make it more difficult or less likely for them to return to the United States. Thirdly, the repatriates' removal from the general

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7Ibid., pp. 200-201; El Universal (Mexico, D. F.), 24 November 1932.
masses would decrease the job competition with other Mexicans.⁸

Although the Repatriation Committee viewed its decision as a positive measure toward alleviating some of the problems surrounding the repatriates, their overall plans did encounter some negative feedback by repatriates. For example, a group of repatriates in the Federal District were dissatisfied with the implementation of the committee's proposal to aid repatriates. Basically, the repatriate group was informed by the committee that no money would be directly distributed to repatriates, but instead would be channeled to the proposed colonies with the double goal of providing work for repatriates and expansion of Mexican agriculture.⁹

Stemming from this proposal, the group formed a "Union of Mexican Repatriates," urging that the government rescind its policy of welcoming further repatriates until the repatriates' problems at home were solved. Meanwhile, the committee responded to the group's opposition. It issued a statement to the press emphasizing that Mexico's repatriation problem was not simply a give or take situation.¹⁰

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¹⁰Ibid., pp. 201-2; El Universal (Mexico, D.F.), 9 February 1932.
Notwithstanding, by early February 1933, the National Repatriation Committee was deeply involved with the first phase of developing its proposed colonies. By now, a prospective site for the development of several colonies had been chosen and was located in the west coast region of Mexico. Abraham Hoffman suggested that this site, although considered a hazardous one because of its tropical nature, was capable of being transformed into fertile lands for agricultural use. Excited by the possibility of such development, a team of inspectors and surveyors, composed of committee members and engineers from three ministries, set out to the state of Guerrero in mid-February to determine the suitability of the chosen region for colonization. In the meantime, 500 repatriates were granted work permits for San Luis Potosi by the Repatriation Committee. It also made arrangements to have them transported on train to that state. Lastly, the committee also agreed to pay each of these repatriates a wage of one peso per working day. 11

Repatriation Colonies

Nearly two months after the special party left for the state of Guerrero, two colonies were established and others were being planned. The first colony, designated Colony Number 1, was located at El Coloso, Guerrero, where nearly

11 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 139.
twenty repatriates from Detroit, Michigan, occupied the site. The second, designated Colony Number 2, was organized at Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca. The first occupation in this location were 400 repatriates from Mexico, D.F., who were transported by train from there to Oaxaca on April 19, 1933. By the end of April, another group—consisting of several hundred repatriates and their families from the United States—arrived at the Pinotepa colony. With reference to these two colonies, the Pinotepa colony was favored by officials to be more successful because of its fertile lands, adequate water supply, and small population.12

Furthermore, Anastasio Garcia Toledo, the governor of Oaxaca, was very cooperative in aiding the colonists and the National Repatriation Committee. Repatriates, for instance, were offered land with a clear deed by the governor. Toledo, also, declared

that residents of Oaxaca were willing to donate or loan without charge . . . live-stock and draft animals to aid the repatriates while the first crops were being grown.13

The committee also issued out parcels of land to repatriates, which had houses built from palm trees. In addition, part of the committee's funds, which had increased to about

12 Ibid., p. 140.
13 Ibid.
154,062 pesos by early March 1933, was used to purchase additional land for repatriates. Sections of this land were to be sold by the committee to "repatriates on 'easy, long time terms,'... with the colonists paying back the loans in crops." Likewise, repatriados were assisted with food, tools, farm equipment, and miscellaneous items.

Despite the cooperation and enthusiasm surrounding the colonization projects, especially Pinotepa, repatriates underwent much hardship shortly after arriving at their respective colony. Colonists at Pinotepa, for example, were excluded from policy-making decisions by those in charge of the local governing board. Also, repatriados became very bitter when they learned that their raised crops were to be "fed to farm animals." Still, other troubles affected the repatriados. For example, needed supplies already ordered failed to reach the colony--adding to the colonists' despair. Although food rations were sparingly distributed to repatriates by the local administrators, administrators would harshly discipline colonists who protested. Abraham Hoffman cited that "Armed men accompanied the directors as they made their rounds of the colony." He also added that "much of the abuse seemed to

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.; El Universal (Mexico, D.F.), 16 March 1933.
have arisen after the resignation of Landa y Pina in November.\textsuperscript{16}

Consequently, the harsh circumstances resulted with hundreds of repatriados leaving the Pinotepa colony and two dozen from the El Coloso colony from late 1933 to early 1934. It was estimated that the Pinotepa site had as many as five to seven hundred repatriates from April to May 1933. By February 1934, however, a total of eight colonists remained at the colony—under the dictatorship of fifteen officials.

Many of the repatriados who left the Pinotepa colony departed in a body, making the journey between the Pinotepa Nacional area and Acapulco in twenty-three days, on foot, with great hardship.\textsuperscript{17}

During the journey, many of the former colonists decided to stay in Acapulco, where some residents assisted them; but they were eventually ordered to leave by the municipal authorities. Lazaro Cardenas, who was then running as a presidential candidate, just happened to be present in Acapulco when local authorities gave their order. Learning of the colonists' fate, he generously paid (with his own money) their transportation expenses back to Mexico City.\textsuperscript{18}

\\textsuperscript{16}Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{17}Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," p. 205.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., pp. 205-6.
Fortunately, many repatriados survived their ordeal of the colonization projects. On the other hand, some colonists were less fortunate. At Pinotepa, sixty colonists had sickened and died as a result of the tropical climate. Others became gravely ill from various diseases. Insects such as jejens (small black flies), nihuas (jigger fleas), pinolillo (similar to a microbe), and other parasites contributed to the deplorable living conditions and ill health of repatriates located in the Pinotepa Nacional area. Ironically, the area considered ideal for colonization by Mexican officials was established in the same area where political prisoners were once sent by the Porfirio Diaz regime.\(^\text{19}\)

After much mismanagement and controversy, the National Repatriation Committee officially ended by presidential decree on June 14, 1934. In all, the committee existed for nearly fifteen months. During this period, the "Committee's support went from national praise to ignominious criticism."\(^\text{20}\) Most importantly, at the time of its formal dissolution, President Rodriguez decreed that the Ministry of Agriculture and Development would assume the Committee's total responsibilities and resources. Assisting the

\(^{19}\)Ibid., pp. 206-7.

\(^{20}\)Ibid., p. 207.
Ministry was the Office of Rural Population, National Lands, and Colonization, which was set up to administer the funds raised in the campaign and distributed it among repatriados who participated in the colonization projects.21

However, repatriates did not receive any compensation for their involvement in the colony projects. In fact, the question of the campaign funds was not resolved until March 1935. Still, even months prior to the date that the National Repatriation Committee was officially dissolved, repatriates complained to the committee about its handling of the funds. Eventually, the committee disclosed its records of expenditures and the balance of the funds raised. Though the committee failed to reach the goal of 500,000 pesos, a total of 318,221.65 pesos were raised. Out of this total, 202,777.48 pesos went for expenditures, which included "transportation, food, medical aid, clothing, household items, tools, machinery, and set-up costs for the two colonies." Another 14,008.84 pesos were used for the committee's general expenses. Thus the total balance left was 101,407.09 pesos, which were deposited in the Bank of Mexico.22

21 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 142.

In brief, the colonization projects failed to accomplish the task set up by the committee members. Instead, a small number of colonists were part of an experiment, which was simply destined to fall short. From the start, the experiment did not have a concrete plan; it was only, as Abraham Hoffman writes, a "semi-altruistic intention."23 Yet, at the end of the colonization experiment a positive change occurred; it changed the Mexican government's repatriation policy to one of greater commitment to assist and care for the needs of the repatriados. This commitment, for the most part, included the creation of a new repatriation board. Its ultimate goal was to ferret out answers for the repatriates' problems both home and abroad.24

On July 26, 1934, over one month after the National Repatriation Committee had been dissolved, President Rodriguez decreed the new board. Its official title was the National Repatriation Board. Rodriguez' administration decision to create the board had been chiefly influenced by Rex Thomson, a Los Angeles County official, who claimed that nearly 50,000 Mexicans in Southern California desired repatriation. Thomson's statement was issued during his

23 Ibid., p. 208.
24 Ibid., pp. 208-9.
visit to Mexico, D.F. in May 1934. He also stated that besides California, large numbers of Mexicans in other parts of the United States were potential repatriates. These statements, including his visit, received wide coverage in Mexico's newspapers. In addition, his conferences with prominent Mexican officials, such as Francisco S. Elias, Secretary of Mexico's Department of Agriculture and Public Works, as well as Manuel Gamio, who also worked for the same department, helped expedite the Mexican government's responsibility to the new board and the repatriation issue. 25

The National Repatriation Board, headed by Secretary Elias, consisted of representatives from six ministries. Also, the ministries of Foreign Relations, National Economy, Interior, Public Health, and Labor were included. A representative from the National Bank of Agricultural Credit belonged to the board as well. In essence, the board's purpose was to "coordinate movement, assistance, and settlement of the anticipated resurgence of repatriation, which had been declining ever since the November 1931 peak." 26 Although the scope of the board largely

25 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 109-12, 143; Excelsior 5 May 1934, and El Nacional, 8 May and 21 August 1934 (Mexico, D.F.).

26 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, pp. 143-44.
centered on the repatriation of Mexicans from Los Angeles, California, as often suggested by the board, it was not limited by any means to other areas in Mexico or the United States.27

For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Development was specifically assigned the responsibility of assisting and relocating the remaining repatriados from the El Coloso and Pinotepa colonies. Under its plan, the colonists were removed from El Coloso and Pinotepa and then transported to San Luis Potosi. Once in San Luis Potosi, provisions and tools were given to the relocated repatriates, where it was believed by the Ministry and the board that better opportunities to use them existed. The plan allowed other repatriates to participate too, such as those from the United States. Ultimately, the Ministry's plan called for placing needy repatriates in its agricultural programs and irrigation projects in at least three organized ventures. Others would follow, if the proposed new colonies were a success.28

27 Ibid., p. 143.

The plans of the National Repatriation Board to successfully establish its colonies never became a reality.\textsuperscript{29} In addition, the new board's efforts to create meaningful programs for the repatriados met the same fate. However, because the new board failed to meet its purpose, President-elect Lazaro Cardenas, who had shown a great amount of interest with the plight of the repatriados during his campaign for office, launched his own Mexican repatriation program. This program, which emphasized nationalism, would be directly aimed at attracting Mexicans in the United States back to their homeland.\textsuperscript{30}

The Mexican Repatriation Program

The Cardenas administration was the first one in Mexico during the Great Depression to initiate a repatriation program for Mexicans abroad. The previous Mexican administration, nonetheless, did make earnest attempts. Mexicans in the United States, however, were reluctant to leave and when American agencies proved charitable in assisting them back to Mexico, it only complicated such efforts. Also, American newspapers had the tendency to overplay Mexico's offers of land and assistance as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," p. 211.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 225.
\end{itemize}
absolute; however, it was not long before Mexicans in the
United States understood that such offerings were not guar­
anteed. Still, there were cases when the Mexican govern­
ment would aid stranded Mexicans abroad, because
"neither the United States government nor American busi­
nesses would accept the responsibility of taking care of
them."\textsuperscript{31} Notwithstanding, President Cardenas' adminis­
tration was highly concerned in looking out for the welfare
and insuring the rights of Mexicans in the United States.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus, in October 1937, the first repatriation plan of
Cardenas' administration had been announced by the Mexican
Autonomous Department of Publicity and Propaganda (DAPP).
DAPP reported that under the first plan, the government's
intention was to repatriate its Nationals back to Mexico
before permitting non-citizens to immigrate in the country.
However, Cardenas made an exception to the non-citizen
policy by offering refugees of the Spanish Civil War asylum
to Mexico. This ruling, nonetheless, caused some oppo­
sition to Cardenas' administration by Sinarquistas, members

\textsuperscript{31} Hoffman, \textit{Unwanted Mexican Americans}, p. 152.

of a Mexican reactionary sociopolitical movement. These Sinarquistas, for the most part, wholeheartedly believed that only Mexican repatriates, not foreigners, should be entitled to any lands or assistance that the Mexican government had to offer.

Notwithstanding, at the same time the government's plan had been officially disclosed by DAPP, the plan received its share of publicity, particularly by Mexico City's two leading newspapers, the *Excelsior* and *El Universal*. Yet, any mention of a concrete plan to implement the proposal was not offered in the publicity or by the government. Abraham Hoffman suggested that the reason for this omission was due to the proposal being still at an ineffectual stage at the time the Mexican government announced its repatriation plan. Interestingly, even months after the proposal was published, "one Mexican consul denied any knowledge of an active repatriation program." Even though no funds had been provided to

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35 Hoffman, "The Repatriation of Mexican Nationals," p. 227; *Excelsior* and *El Universal*, 22 October 1937, both of Mexico, D.F.
transport repatriates, nevertheless, Mexico's consul general announced that his government would pay to move repatriates once they arrived in Mexico, with the condition that they would have to make it to the Mexican border on their own. 36

Despite the idiosyncrasies of Cardenas' plan, efforts to lay the groundwork for a proposed repatriation program were continued by DAPP and Mexican officials during 1938. Some officials, for instance, even went to the United States to gather pertinent information on the working conditions of Mexicans residing in that country, particularly in the states of California and Texas. Border states were especially scrutinized by Mexican officials. For example, during one such visit of the border states in November 1938, the Minister of Interior, Ignacio Garcia Tellez, stated that it was his belief that only destitute Mexicans should be the target of the Mexican repatriation program and that prosperous Mexicans in the United States should "remain and foster links of friendship between the two countries." 37

As 1938 came to an end, a conference on population was held in Mexico City to examine the problems of


37 Ibid.
repatriation. At the conference, a proposal was presented which called for the postponement of a large-scale repatriation program. It stressed that "since Mexicans were being returned to Mexico every day, either by deportation or repatriation, talks of programs and plans for additional numbers was unrealistic." Other arguments against organized repatriation or for the postponement of such a program were presented as well during the conference. Regardless, Mexican cabinet officers sought out questions and answers surrounding the repatriation issue. In the end, Cardenas' administration in spring of 1939 announced that a colony, designated "18 de Marzo," would be established near Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Thus this became the first implementation of Mexico's repatriation program.39

Before the "18 de Marzo" colony was actually established, Under Secretary Ramon Beteta was sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a tour through the southwestern cities in the United States. The purpose of Beteta's trip was to visit Mexican barrios or neighborhoods, from Texas to California, and inform Mexicans and Mexican Americans alike of the proposed repatriation

38Ibid., p. 228.

39Ibid.
program of his government. The main points of the program that Beteta intended to discuss with the two groups of people were the new colony at Matamoros, the Mexican government's offers of lands for colonization and cultivation in Sinaloa and Baja California, and the government's willingness to pay transportation expenses for those who wished to undergo repatriation from the United States. Hence, on April 5, 1939, Beteta left Mexico for his journey north of the border.\textsuperscript{40}

Accompanying Beteta on his trip to the United States were Mexican consular officers. Their first stop in the states around mid-April was Texas, where Beteta gave speeches, which were said to be overly generous, to Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans. He spoke about how transportation expenses for repatriates would be paid by the Mexican government and the options repatriates had in choosing between twenty irrigated acres or fifty unirrigated acres of land supposedly available at the new colonization projects located in Tamaulipas, Sinaloa, or Baja California. While in Texas, Beteta and his entourage visited such cities as San Antonio and Corpus Christi, including towns from McAllen to Brownsville by way of the Rio Grande Valley and other places with a large Mexican

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid.
population. Most important, his offerings in these areas were not only made to Mexicans in general, but, in some instances, he extended them to Americans who were not of Mexican ancestry. 41

While Beteta continued his efforts to recruit Mexicans in the United States for the Mexican repatriation program, officials back in Mexico were debating if Beteta's trip would have favorable results. The Ministry of the Interior, for example, expressed that the conditions in the American southwestern states were not so bad that Mexicans would leave the area in order to take advantage of the offerings per se under the Mexican program. Even Beteta during his trip recognized that many Mexicans were hesitant about leaving America, fearing that once across the border they would lose their status as legal residents of the United States. Mexicans who seemed most reluctant to return back to Mexico were businessmen and property owners; Mexican Americans were also reported to have shunned the idea of repatriation for fear of losing their American citizenship and other personal reasons. Nonetheless, Mexican officials continued to argue for or against the Mexican repatriation program during the Under Secretary's visit abroad; however, President Cardenas, 41

41 El Continental (El Paso), 13 April 1939; Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 155.
speaking on the repatriation issue to DAPP during April 1939, ended much of these debates by stating that he wholeheartedly believed that "any temporary inconveniences caused by an influx of destitute repatriates would be more than balanced by an 'increase of the economic potential of the country.'"^42

Finally, President Cardenas and Under Secretary Beteta met to discuss the developments of Beteta's visit in the United States. Their meeting which was held on May 20, 1939, on the presidential train near Ciudad Juarez, lasted approximately two hours. Moreover, after this meeting, Beteta accompanied Cardenas on the president's train for a visit to the west coast states of Mexico. Mexico City's press gave wide coverage of Beteta's meeting with the Mexican president, including the accomplishments of his trip north of the border.^43

After meeting with President Cardenas, Beteta returned to the United States and continued to visit through the barrios of cities in the Southwest. During this trip, Beteta met with California Governor Culbert L. Olson at the governor's home in Los Angeles on July 19, 1939 in order to discuss Mexican problems in the United States, the living


^43Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 156.
conditions of Mexicans in California, and Mexico's repatriation program. Controversy, however, stemmed during this meeting. Consequently, Beteta became a political target of the State Department for allegedly commenting on a "bill pending in the California Legislature that would bar aliens from state relief rolls." Beteta's alleged comments were carefully investigated by the State Department, which further attempted to criticize Beteta's words in the same manner as "U.S. Embassy officials in Mexico had on occasion been criticized for making observations concerning Mexican legislation affecting American interests." Notwithstanding, the whole matter was later dropped after Governor Olson reported the content of the meeting. Thereafter, the State Department decided that "Beteta had not interfered in American internal political matters." After the incident with the State Department, Beteta resumed his journey through the American Southwest. Even though he visited a number of other cities in the Southwest and energetically spoke to Mexican audiences, nevertheless, the enthusiasm surrounding the Mexican repatriation plan had expeditiously subsided by late 1939. By this time,

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., pp. 156-57; Times and Herald-Express, 20 July 1939, both of Los Angeles.
repatriation from the United States was definitely on the wane. 47

The Mexican government, however, did succeed in recruiting a substantial number of Mexicans to participate in its repatriation program. Several hundred families established their homes in the area of Matamoros. It was reported that approximately one hundred families, who partook in the special colonies, voluntarily repatriated from the San Antonio region just in May 1939 alone. Like San Antonio, other cities and towns in the Southwest had their share of Mexicans who elected to return to Mexico and participated in her repatriation program. The Mexican government, nevertheless, anticipated that thousands of Mexican families would participate in its program. The evidence available, however, clearly indicated that no such numbers ever materialized. 48

The Mexican Nation had provided forty million pesos to carry out its repatriation program—with other appropriations promised if needed to bring Mexicans home. But because


Mexico had always been a poor nation and was also a victim of the depression; as a result of her economic conditions she was unable to develop an effective and viable repatriation program.49

Most important, the Mexican government expressed a positive concern for the plight of the repatriados during the Great Depression, but only 5 percent of the returnees took part in the special colonies. Four such colonies were actually developed, one each in the following states: Guerrero, Michoacan, Oaxaca, and Chiapas.50


50 Meier and Rivera, The Chicanos, p. 163.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Mexican American repatriation during the Great Depression was indeed a national phenomenon, which resulted in over 500,000 human beings who, for the most part, were coercively repatriated from the United States. Unquestionably, Mexicans and Mexican Americans who underwent this repatriation process consider it as one of the most tragic chapters in their lives. Additionally, Mexican Americans in particular who are aware that such a mass number of individuals were repatriated from and by the American nation perceive this action as part of the darker side in American history. Generally, many of these Americans, however, simply cannot believe that the United States, a great nation with high principles, could have coercively repatriated hundreds of thousands of people—which also included American citizens—from the country.

Here in the United States, Hispanic scholars are largely the first ones to question that such an event has been persistently ignored in American history books, even though Mexican American repatriation during the years of depression was without question an epic saga in the history of the Western Hemisphere. Despite this omission,
fortunately some Anglo and Hispanic historians presently are among the scholars, who, like their predecessors, are contributing studies in the area of Mexican repatriation. Hopefully, when enough studies have been completed, which are warranted by the importance of this subject, such studies will be included in part into the traditional history of the United States. Meanwhile, such a neglect is undoubtedly a major error in truly understanding the history of the Americas.

Notwithstanding, Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans who experienced or remember repatriation during the Great Depression are probably the only persons who truly understand the social and economic implications it had in their own lives. Unfortunately, there is not enough empirical data at the present to better comprehend, synthesize, and investigate the Mexican experience of repatriation at the vernacular level. Yet, it is safe to speculate that the socioeconomic hardship Mexican repatriates sustained as a result of repatriation was a costly and painful one. Moreover, other analogies such as humiliation, anguish, and despair can also be used to earnestly express the repatriation ordeal in which these people became part of. The experience of despair, especially true for Mexican Americans, contained evidence that points out that many of them, after being repatriated from the United
States and then being displaced in Mexico, held a firm conviction that Mexico was the foreign land; America, their homeland; knowing that they were not wanted in either country.

Obviously many questions surrounding the circumstances of Mexican American repatriation during the Great Depression, as well as after, have yet to be answered. Still, some of the fundamental questions with their respective answers do presently exist on the subject. Commonly, facts such as the provocation, provisions for funding, methodology, and administrators used for this mass movement have been investigated and ascertained by various writers. Their efforts no doubt have provided an invaluable insight in the area of repatriation. Mexican repatriation, nonetheless, is a relatively unexplored historical and sociological topic which definitely still awaits further investigation.

Of course, other studies about Mexican American repatriation will inevitably result with new developments. Legal and ethical questions, for the most part, on the repatriados' role before and after their removal from the United States could well be the major focus of these studies, since little has been written in the area. Studies of this kind could also set forth new and further evidence that thousands of these returnees were removed
unlawfully from the country—particularly in the case of Mexican Americans. In the end, possibly some Mexican Americans who underwent repatriation against their own volition during the years of the Great Depression will be legally entitled to some sort of compensation by the United States government for the punitive damage repatriation has caused them. Moreover, if repatriation studies can be used to prove that their removal was unconstitutional, then the Mexican American repatriation phenomenon will rightfully take its place among the written pages in books about the history of the United States and the Americas.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## APPENDIX A

### REPATRIATION SHIPMENTS AND COST FROM LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$194,501</td>
<td>3,317</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>2,438</td>
<td>13,332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX B

TOTAL REPATRIATION BY MONTHS, 1929-1937

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan.</td>
<td>6,868</td>
<td>3,782</td>
<td>6,508</td>
<td>9,115</td>
<td>3,005</td>
<td>1,786</td>
<td>1,339</td>
<td>1,138</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb.</td>
<td>4,465</td>
<td>3,472</td>
<td>6,145</td>
<td>6,308</td>
<td>3,108</td>
<td>1,607</td>
<td>1,014</td>
<td>1,138</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>4,382</td>
<td>3,391</td>
<td>9,400</td>
<td>5,931</td>
<td>2,979</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>4,333</td>
<td>3,830</td>
<td>10,439</td>
<td>5,987</td>
<td>4,817</td>
<td>2,213</td>
<td>1,275</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>5,592</td>
<td>3,674</td>
<td>7,201</td>
<td>8,327</td>
<td>2,946</td>
<td>1,489</td>
<td>1,232</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>9,768</td>
<td>5,174</td>
<td>9,639</td>
<td>7,614</td>
<td>2,741</td>
<td>1,653</td>
<td>1,271</td>
<td>946</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>7,101</td>
<td>5,788</td>
<td>8,954</td>
<td>8,018</td>
<td>1,851</td>
<td>1,776</td>
<td>1,266</td>
<td>1,129</td>
<td>714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug.</td>
<td>6,285</td>
<td>5,775</td>
<td>14,748</td>
<td>6,071</td>
<td>2,333</td>
<td>1,577</td>
<td>1,369</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.</td>
<td>6,991</td>
<td>7,134</td>
<td>13,826</td>
<td>3,777</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>2,320</td>
<td>1,325</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct.</td>
<td>7,809</td>
<td>8,648</td>
<td>16,448</td>
<td>5,128</td>
<td>2,283</td>
<td>2,976</td>
<td>1,347</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.</td>
<td>7,850</td>
<td>9,560</td>
<td>20,756</td>
<td>5,460</td>
<td>2,554</td>
<td>2,967</td>
<td>1,413</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>1,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec.</td>
<td>7,975</td>
<td>9,899</td>
<td>14,455</td>
<td>5,717</td>
<td>3,236</td>
<td>2,077</td>
<td>1,276</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>1,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79,419</td>
<td>70,127</td>
<td>128,519</td>
<td>77,453</td>
<td>35,574</td>
<td>23,943</td>
<td>15,368</td>
<td>11,599</td>
<td>8,037</td>
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