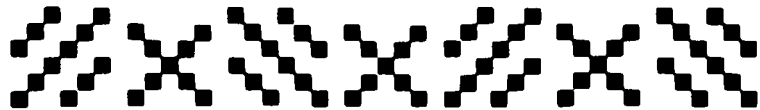


Mexican Immigrant Experience in the Urban Midwest: East Chicago, Indiana, 1919-1945

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and

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Most theories and models in Chicano history have been based on the experiences of Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Perhaps the most enduring interpretation in this field was set forth in the 1940s by Carey McWilliams, who argued that the annexation of Mexico's northern provinces in 1848 reduced the indigenous people of this area to a colonized status. Furthermore, the McWilliams thesis relegated the large number of Mexican immigrants to the United States after 1848 to the same subordinate status because Mexican institutions, attitudes, and relations with other ethnic groups were molded by the establishment of United States political rule. With the recent revival in the study of Mexicans in the United States many scholars have echoed the colonization thesis, while others have criticized it and put forth alternative theories describing Mexican settlement in the United States.¹ This debate, however, remains centered on the Southwest and is of limited usefulness to the study of the Mexican colonies that emerged in midwestern industrial cities. Because they came to an area where there was no indigenous Mexican population the experience of Mexican immigrants to the Midwest resembles in many ways the experience of European immigrants to urban America, although it also retains some of the unique features of general Mexican immigration to the United States.

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¹ For example, Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1949); Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco, 1972); Juan Gómez-Quinones, "Toward a Perspective on Chicano History," *Aztlán*, II (Fall, 1971), 1-49; David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque, 1973). For an opposing view see Arthur F. Corwin, "Mexican-American History: An Assessment," *Pacific Historical Review*, XLII (August, 1973), 269-308.

A close study of the emergence of the Mexican *colonia*² in the highly industrialized city of East Chicago, Indiana, is suggestive for the Chicano experience generally in the Midwest. While detailed studies are not available for every midwestern city to which large numbers of Mexicans immigrated, available sources suggest that the broad outlines of development found in East Chicago were similar in Chicago, Detroit, Gary, and other cities.³ The first twenty-five years of the East Chicago *colonia* included the historical experience of the old *mexicano* group, those who came to the area before or during the 1920s; the termination of the study at 1945 is based on the recognition of that point as the end of an era for the old *mexicano* communities of the urban Midwest, since subsequent migration of Puerto Ricans and southwestern Chicanos greatly altered the social and cultural composition of the *colonias*.

East Chicago, Indiana, lies on the southern shore of Lake Michigan, a few miles east of Chicago. By the late nineteenth century the area was the site of a variety of industries, including steel foundries and an oil tank works. The extension of railroads into the area enhanced its natural potential for industrial development and induced the Inland Steel Company and the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company to build large plants in East Chicago.⁴ From the beginning heavy industry's need for an expanding labor force was met by an influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Most numerous were the

² The Mexican community in United States cities, not a defined neighborhood.

³ Among the studies of Mexican communities in the Midwest are three articles by Norman D. Humphrey, "The Migration and Settlement of Detroit Mexicans," *Economic Geography*, XIX (July, 1943), 358-61, "The Detroit Mexican Immigrant and Naturalization," *Social Forces*, XXII (March, 1944), 332-35, and "Mexican Repatriation from Michigan: Public Assistance in Historical Perspective," *Social Service Review*, XV (September, 1941), 497-513; Neil Betten and Raymond A. Mohl, "From Discrimination to Repatriation: Mexican Life in Gary, Indiana, During the Great Depression," *Pacific Historical Review*, XLII (August, 1973), 370-88; Mark Reisler, "The Mexican Immigrant in the Chicago Area during the 1920's," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, LXVI (Summer, 1973), 144-58; "'Little Mexico' in Northern Cities," *The World's Work*, XLVIII (September, 1924), 466; Anita Edgar Jones, "Mexican Colonies in Chicago," *Social Service Review*, II (December, 1928), 579-97; *Aztlán*, VII (Summer, 1976), is devoted to contemporary and historical issues in midwestern communities; Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, "Mexican Chicago: Chicano Assimilation Aborted, 1939-1954," in Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones, eds., *The Ethnic Frontier: Essays in the History of Group Survival in Chicago and the Midwest* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1977), 293-328.

⁴ Powell A. Moore, *The Calumet Region: Indiana's Last Frontier* (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. XXXIX; Indianapolis, 1959), 216-56; Indiana Writers' Project, *The Calumet Region Historical Guide* (Gary, Ind., 1939), 213-26.

Poles, who constituted about one quarter of the city's population; there also were many Serbs, Croats, Slovaks, Rumanians, Italians, Hungarians, and Lithuanians. By 1920 over 80 percent of East Chicago's population was foreign born or of foreign-born parentage.⁵ Most immigrants worked in the steel mills and other industries under harsh conditions at low wages. In steel, for example, the twelve-hour day and the seven-day week prevailed until the early 1920s. Such conditions made native and immigrant workers receptive to the union organizing efforts which culminated in the great steel strike of September, 1919.⁶

Prior to the steel strike Mexicans accounted for only a small proportion of East Chicago's labor force. Some were employed by railroads operating in the area, and in 1918 approximately ninety worked for the Inland Steel Company. During the 1919 strike Inland recruited several hundred Mexicans to replace striking workers, housing and feeding them within the plant gates. After the collapse of the strike many Mexicans continued to work at Inland, although their numbers decreased during the recession of 1921. With recovery, the company embarked upon a large expansion program; at the same time the steel industry's abandonment of the twelve-hour day compounded the need for new workers. Because of the curtailment of European immigration and the satisfactory experience with Mexican labor during and after the strike, Inland made extensive efforts to recruit Mexicans locally employed on railroads and from states as far away as Kansas, Texas, and Pennsylvania. Between 1919 and 1925, some 3,600 Mexicans were hired; the highest level of Mexican employment at any time was in 1926, when some 2,526 Mexicans worked at Inland. Throughout the 1920s, approximately 30 percent of Inland's seven thousand employees were Mexican, making the firm the nation's largest employer of Mexican labor. By the mid-1920s the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company also employed several hundred Mexicans at its East Chicago plant.⁷

⁵ Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, volume III: *Population, 1920* (Washington, 1923), 297; Moore, *Calumet Region*, 344-99; Indiana Baptist Convention, *The Foreign Problem in Northwest Indiana* (n.p., n.d.), 2-15.

⁶ Moore, *Calumet Region*, 496-524.

⁷ Hammond *Lake County Times*, October 22, 1919; Personnel Data Cards, Employment Office, Inland Steel Company, East Chicago, Indiana; "Inland Steel Co. and the Shorter Work Day," *The Iron Age*, CXII (August 9, 1923), 333; "Easier Labor Conditions Help at Chicago," *ibid.*, CXII (September 20, 1923), 773; Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region* (University of California Publications in Economics, Vol. VII, No. 2; Berkeley, 1932), 36-37, 117, 182; David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (New York, 1960), 254-55.

The steel mills became the focal points around which the Mexican community grew. At first Mexican workers lived in company-operated bunkhouses, but they soon found lodgings outside the plant along the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks on Block and Pennsylvania avenues and immediately adjacent to the mill entrance on Michigan and Watling streets. By 1930, some 5,300 Mexicans were concentrated in this area. Although none of East Chicago's neighborhoods were completely populated by any single ethnic group, distinct residential patterns existed. For example, there were areas of several city blocks in which most of the residents were Poles; other sections were populated almost entirely by old-stock native Americans; and blacks were concentrated in particular neighborhoods. Other ethnic groups lived in distinguishable parts of the city, although not to such an extent that they could be considered solid enclaves. *Mexicanos* were distinctly concentrated in one area, although they shared it with other groups, primarily the Rumanians.⁸

Life for the Mexicans who first arrived was grim. Throughout the 1920s the ratio of Mexican men to women was heavily weighted against the *solos* (single men). Approximately seventy percent of the *mexicanos* hired by Inland Steel between 1919 and 1925 were single or had left their wives in Mexico, Texas, or one of the other stops they had made before arriving in East Chicago.⁹ Since most regarded their stay in East Chicago as temporary they were satisfied with maintaining their families far from the icy shores of Lake Michigan. The loneliness due to the absence of women and families was compounded by the radical change of environment. The cold winters of the Calumet Region required considerable adjustment for people used to the temperate climate of west central Mexico. Regular Mexican food was not readily available to the early immigrants, and although merchants imported some essentials of the Mexican cuisine, a great deal of improvising was necessary. For example, wheat flour tortillas replaced the familiar maize-based product because American corn was not suitable to prepare this staple. A pleasant surprise was the discovery that *nopales*, an

⁸ Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1930*, volume III: *Population*, part 1 (Washington, 1932), 720; residential patterns based on map plotting of approximately 2,000 addresses of Mexicans and other ethnic groups obtained from employment records, city directories, newspapers, church records, and interviews.

⁹ Personnel Data Cards, Inland Steel Company.

edible cactus common to Mexico, grew wild in the nearby Indiana dunes.¹⁰

Because of the preponderance of single men and the constant influx of new arrivals the area in which the *colonia* was located took on the atmosphere of a frontier town. Speakeasies and bars in private homes, serving bootleg or home-brewed liquor, sprang up along the west end of Block and Pennsylvania avenues. Houses of prostitution were numerous, providing one outlet for the many frustrations of the *mexicanos*. Some two dozen Mexican poolrooms provided another diversion for single men in the early years of the *colonia*. Violence was the natural result of such an environment. Fistfights, shootings, and knifings were common occurrences. For the most part violence in the *colonia* was an intra-group phenomenon, often based on feuds which had their origins in Mexico. Immigrants from Michoacan, for example, continued feuds that had begun in remote mountain villages thousands of miles to the south.¹¹

There were, of course, more socially acceptable diversions. One was the cinema, which in its silent era transcended language barriers. Many *mexicanos* patronized the city's several theaters, although they were segregated in some of them. It was also possible to take a train or bus into nearby South Chicago or Gary, where similar Mexican *colonias*, centered around steel plants, were rapidly growing. The transportation system facilitated travel along the shore of Lake Michigan and allowed for a great deal of interaction between the several *colonias* in the Chicago area.

If the social environment provided little direction and few familiar points of reference for Mexican immigrants, their jobs imposed a rigid structure to which they had never been exposed. In Mexico the exploitive *hacienda* system and agricultural village life had been based on regular and natural rhythms. Each peasant went to work at the same time each day and slept at night. Celebrations and religious festivals provided scant relief from the monotony of the peasant's meager existence, but on these occasions everyone participated as all economic activity ceased. The *patron*, however authoritarian, was a visible man who personally assigned tasks and dispensed

¹⁰ Numerous interviews including those with José Anguiano, Sister Cordelia Marie Bahl, Consuelo Figueroa, Basil Pacheco, Hilario Silva, Martín Blanco, and Concepción González.

¹¹ *Ibid.*; of forty-four arrests of Mexicans reported in the East Chicago *Calumet News* in 1925, thirty-one involved alcohol, prostitution, or concealed weapons; all of five serious crimes of violence were intragroup incidents.

rewards. Patterns of life in industrial East Chicago contrasted radically. Long hours, strict timetables, and assignment to unfamiliar and unpleasant tasks became the basis for the reordering of life. Days off might be scattered throughout the week and a man might be scheduled to work any of three shifts in a constantly changing pattern; the familiar time structure based on night and day, Sundays and feast days, became irrelevant. In contrast to the visible structure of authority in Mexico, an impersonal hierarchy of bosses existed, with the Mexican worker's contact restricted to his immediate foreman. Insecurity became a constant element in a worker's life: a pink slip attached to his paycheck might at any time communicate the message that his labor was no longer needed. The patterns of life focused around steel production schedules meant a standard of living and a variety of experiences unknown to the peasant in Mexico; they also brought a radical departure from the security and order of the *hacienda* where generations of one family had lived, worked, and died.¹² The contrast was nearly as great for Mexicans who came from urban centers, for few cities in Mexico could compare to the Chicago area in industrialization.

Some of the harsher aspects of life in the *colonia* were mollified by growth and adjustment in the late 1920s. Many of the men sent for their families and others for brides. With families came girls of marriageable age, who, although guarded jealously by their parents, presented potential matches and aroused intense competition. For the first time significant numbers of educated and middle-class Mexicans arrived, partly as a result of the Cristero Counterrevolution centered in Jalisco and Guanajuato. Respectable family men were no longer satisfied with the social and cultural life of the *colonia*, which had evolved to serve the needs of a society of single men. To meet the need for more sophisticated forms of cultural and social activity, as well as to provide burial insurance and other benefits to members, a number of mutual aid societies developed. By 1929, eleven such Mexican organizations, the most important of

¹² The problems of adjustment for Mexican immigrants were quite similar to those of Europeans as described in Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston, 1951); see also Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago, 1930) and *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life-Story* (Chicago, 1931); Herbert G. Gutman in *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976) describes a similar adaptation process.



CIRCULO DE OBREROS DE SAN JOSE, 1927

MEMBERS OF ONE OF THE MEXICAN COMMUNITY'S
MANY MUTUAL AID SOCIETIES

Courtesy Father Timothy Hunt, East Chicago.

which were the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana, the Sociedad Mutualista Benito Juárez, El Círculo de Obreros Católicos, and La Sociedad Cuauhtémoc, were among the several hundred ethnic associations in East Chicago.¹³

The Obreros Católicos, formed in 1925, became the most prestigious mutual aid society. It concerned itself with maintaining a high degree of Mexican cultural awareness, as well as promoting Catholicism and love for the *patria* (Mexico). The Obreros organized a fund-raising drive to build a Catholic church to serve the *colonia*, a necessity in a city where an ethnic group of any considerable size had its separate parish church. The Obreros also attempted to combat the efforts of Baptist missionaries, who had succeeded in converting a substantial number of *mexicanos* and many members of other traditionally Catholic immigrant groups. From 1925 to 1930 the Obreros published a weekly newspaper, *El Amigo del Hogar*, devoted to religion, literature, and news of events in Mexico. Indicative of the elite nature of the Obreros was their theater

¹³ Spencer Leitman, "Exile and Union in Indiana Harbor: Los Obreros Católicos 'San Jose' and *El Amigo del Hogar*, 1925-1930," *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, II (Winter, 1974), 50-57; Francisco A. Rosales, "Mexicanos in Indiana Harbor During the 1920s: From Prosperity to Depression," *ibid.*, V (Fall, 1976), 81-91.

group, El Cuadro Dramático, which each year presented several plays. The director, a former professional actor from Mexico City, often staged plays that were still being performed in the Mexican capital. Further indicative of the cultural sophistication of the *colonia's* elite was an exhibition of original works by artist Alfaro Siquieros at a time when he was achieving international fame. More regularly, the Obreros held poetry readings, cello concerts, and similar events which could compare favorably with upper-middle-class functions in Mexico.¹⁴

The activities of other mutual aid societies were directed toward a large segment of the *colonia*. The Cuauhtémoc, for example, according to a founder, was composed of "rustic illiterates," while the Obreros represented the "cream of society." Events staged by other groups, such as bazaars, dances, and Mexican-style vaudeville, had wide appeal to *mexicanos*. The organization of baseball teams and the building of a baseball park with night lights provided one of the most popular forms of recreation. During the summer months games attracted as many as three thousand spectators. *Mexicano* teams achieved a semi-professional status, recruiting players from as far away as Texas. The most elaborate cultural event, and one which involved all levels of *mexicano* society, was the celebration each September of Mexican Independence Day. The elaborate two-day festival featured parades, dances, carnivals, and the election of a festival queen. Although some of the cultural activities of the mutual aid societies were restricted to an elite, their net effect was felt throughout the *colonia*. By the end of the 1920s a rich, varied, and intensely Mexican cultural and social life flourished, reinforcing traditional values and reminding the *mexicanos* that their residence in East Chicago was only temporary.¹⁵

In spite of the rich social and cultural life, the *colonia* remained politically and economically weak. Wages of Mexican industrial workers provided the economic foundation of the *colonia*. Hourly rates of Mexican steelworkers ranged from forty to

¹⁴ *El Amigo del Hogar*, May 2, 16, 1926; May 15, July 10, 24, 1927; October 7, 1928; East Chicago *Calumet News*, January 8, 29, 1926; Mary Helen Rogers, "The Role of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in the Adjustment of the Mexican Community to Life in the Indiana Harbor Area" (M.A. thesis, School of Social Work, Loyola University, 1952), 14-34; Nicolás Kanellos, "Mexican Community Theatre in a Midwestern City," *Latin American Theatre Review*, VII (Fall, 1973), 43-48.

¹⁵ *El Amigo del Hogar*, June 12, July 10, 1927; April 8, 1928; East Chicago *Calumet News*, September 18, 1925; interviews with Consuelo Figueroa, José Anguiano.

fifty cents, and in periods of full employment a worker could earn as much as thirty-five dollars a week, a vast improvement over the subsistence standard of living prevalent in Mexico. However, even during the prosperous 1920s temporary layoffs were frequent, offsetting periods of high earnings.¹⁶

Virtually all Mexican families rented their living quarters; as late as 1930 only thirteen of East Chicago's 934 Mexican families owned homes. While rents paid by Mexican families averaged perhaps only thirty dollars a month, living conditions were poor as families crowded into damp basements, shacks behind larger homes, or one- or two-room apartments. Overcrowding was aggravated by the economic necessity of taking in boarders and the need to accommodate recently arrived relatives. Almost 40 percent of East Chicago's *mexicano* families had one or more boarders living with them.¹⁷ Housing for single men was worse than that for families. In some cases two or three men, assigned to different work shifts, shared the same room and bed. In 1926 a social worker found seventy-five Mexican men living in a basement with a ceiling so low one could not stand.¹⁸ In the same year the city's police chief made a survey of housing conditions on Block and Pennsylvania avenues in the core of the *colonia*: "We went into places where we could hardly get the door open. Sometimes there would be three beds in one little room, and in one place we found 11 Mexicans sleeping."¹⁹ In part these dismal conditions resulted from the inability of housing construction to keep pace with the city's rapid population growth; but in part they were a result of the informal but distinct pattern of residential segregation that prevented Mexicans from renting in most areas in the city. Movement was possible into an area a few blocks south of the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks along Main, Deodar, and Elm streets, and it was here that many of the more affluent members of the *colonia* lived by 1930. Housing was less crowded than in the core of the *colonia*, and it represented a distinct improvement for those able to afford the move.²⁰

¹⁶ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the Calumet Region*, 77-80; *El Amigo del Hogar*, March 13, 1927.

¹⁷ Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930—Population: Special Report on Foreign-Born White Families by Country of Birth of Head*. . . . (Washington, 1933), 211, 213, 217.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the Calumet Region*, 185-86.

¹⁹ East Chicago *Calumet News*, February 5, 1926.

²⁰ Interviews with Vincent Soto, Miguel Arredondo, Consuelo Figueroa; addresses of high-status *mexicanos* as determined from social columns of *El Amigo del Hogar* and lists of officers of mutual aid societies.

EL AMIGO DEL HOGAR.

ORGANO DEL CIRCULO DE OBREROS CATOLICOS "SAN JOSE"

SEMANARIO DE LA COLONIA MEXICANA.

AÑO III. INDIANA HARBOR, INDIANA. JULIO 24 DE 1927. NÚM. 34.

ONOMASTICO.

Ayer fue el día del Santo del muy respetable y estimado Sacerdote D. Apolinar Santacruz que tan grandes simpatías ha sabido grangearse en el seno de nuestra colonia, no solo por sus relevantes virtudes como sacerdote, sino por que ha sabido darnos como mexicanos, muy grandes ejemplos de civismo y de como se ama a la Patria.

Nuestra Institución, que ha recibido de él las preferencias mas delicadas, d. ja escapar del corazón de todos y cada uno de sus miembros, el voto mas ferviente de filial cariño por su Felicidad, y pide a la Providencia derrame en su alma atribulada los consuelos que necesita en el destierro.

EXCITATIVA A LOS CATOLICOS DE LA COLONIA MEXICANA

El día 31 de los corrientes se cumplirá un año de que los Sacerdotes mexicanos, con el alma hecha jirones, clausuraban los cultos públicos en nuestra amada patria, obligados por las inicuas leyes de sus Gobernantes.

Los que nos preciamos de no haber renegado de la santa fe heredada de nuestros padres, debemos conmemorar el primer aniversario luctuoso en la Historia de nuestro amado país, celebrando actos públicos religiosos de desagravio, imitando de la Piedad Divina la clemencia para tantas desdichas. Para este objeto y de acuerdo con el Párroco de nuestra colonia, celebraremos un

TRIDUO DE DESAGRAVIO

Evitando a todos los fielos a que concurran con verdadero espíritu cristiano. La celebración indicada se efectuará en la forma siguiente:

VIERNES 29
A las 8.30 a. m. Misa cantada en honor del Sacratísimo Corazón de Jesús.

SABADO 30
A las 8.30 a. m. Misa cantada en honor de Ntra. Señora de Guadalupe.

DOMINGO 31
A las 10.30 a. m. Misa cantada en honor de la Preciosa Sangre de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo.
Los tres días a las 7 p. m. Ejercicio de penitencia.
Apolinar Santacruz, Pbro.

NOTAS BREVES Relativas a Mexico

MAS TEORIAS. Cierta publicación que juzga semioficial en Washington dice que los Estados Unidos para reconocer a un gobierno han tomado como regla "que se encuentre basado en el consentimiento de sus gobernados", para de otro modo "no merece el nombre o las prerrogativas de gobierno". Bellísima teoría que lleva día a la práctica, sería el gran factor de la felicidad y la paz en todos los naciones americanas.

Pasa a la segunda plana.

QUEDO ORGANIZADA LA JUNTA PATRIOTICA

El lunes último, previa citación de la Comisión Honorífica de este lugar, se reunieron representantes de las Sociedades "Benito Juárez", "Círculo de Obreros Católicos "San José", Cruz Azul "Morelos" y Banda Obreros Mexicanos con objeto de nombrar el Comité Patriótico que se encargue de organizar la celebración de las próximas fiestas patrias.

Con asistencia de 14 delegados se procedió al nombramiento de Directiva, resultando electo para Presidente, por

Continúan las Afrentas en el GARDEN para los Mexicanos

El Domingo ppdo. "El Amigo del Hogar" dio su primer clarinada, para hacerle ver a nuestros compatriotas, la vergonzosa posición en que se nos coloca al señalarmenos injustamente un lugar aparte en dicho Teatro, ofendiendo la dignidad y el decoro de nuestra nacionalidad y de nuestras familias por mas que alguno de los nuestros se halla hecho acreedor de tal desprecio por su mala conducta, que la inmensa mayoría de nosotros reprobamos.

Tenemos el deber de protestar energicamente por tan grande injusticia, que es a la vez una pública ofensa, absteniendonos de asistir a sus espectáculos, hasta conseguir que se nos respete en nuestros derechos, que son tan preferentes y sagrados como los de cualquier otro pueblo civilizado de la tierra.

AUDICION MUSICAL

Nuestro estimado amigo Sr. Manuel Arco nos comunica que la Banda de Música Obreros Mexicanos, correspondiendo a las muestras de simpatía que le ha demostrado nuestra colonia, para HOY

ofrece una lucida Serenata de 5 a 9 P. M. en el parque "Lincoln, sito entre las calles Butternut y Alder.

Esperamos que el galante obsequio, despierte remembranzas queridas en todos los componentes de nuestra colonia, para que premie con su asistencia y entusiasmos el mérito de ese grupo artístico de compatriotas, que ha sabido elevarse por su propio esfuerzo.

Valiosa Oferta AL ELEMENTO DEPORTIVO.

El Sr. Joe Lamon conocido comerciante de esta ciudad y distinguido amigo de nuestra colonia es una de tan



"El Amigo del Hogar" engalana hoy sus páginas con el retrato de los que forman el Team C. O. C. "San José" a quienes la ofrece como una muestra de regocijo y felicitación por su triunfo.

De izquierda a derecha primera fila: Sontados: José Medina, Manuel Lucero, Tomás Ramirez, Mr. Harris, Joaquín Cañamar, Federico Rivera. Parados: Víctor Guerrero, Manager; Umpire, Luis G. Duran, José Peña, Toribio Jimenez, Capitán; Faustino Zaragoza, Aristeo Torres, Félix Cañamar, F. Parra, S. Kper.

poseído de los entusiasmos más vivos y caureros parece dominar en la gran cifra de mexicanos de la localidad, y queriendo manifestar una prueba evidente de su sincera adhesión y a fin de estimular entusiasmos que tanto celebra, tomando en cuenta que los teams C.O.C.S.J. y "Águilas Mexicanas" son las dos novenas más potentes de este lugar galantemente ofrece obsequiar una artística copa de plata con capacidad de medio galón, teniendo 11 pulgadas de alto por 5 de ancho, a cualquiera de estos dos teams que resulte vencedor en una serie de tres juegos que se sujeten a las condiciones siguientes:

I.- Las novenas no deberán tener elementos que no sean mexicanos.

II.- Los Capitanes deberán presentar con anterioridad las listas de sus

El Domingo ppdo. fue uno de esos grandes días en que todo conviata para las emociones. Una bella tarde, estival invitaba a las multitudes amantes del Deporte hacia el Parque "Anahuac," en donde se disputaban el dominio del bate los T s a m s "C. O. C. San José" de este lugar y C. D. M. de Gary, que no contento con los aleteos bien dados que recibiera de los "Águilas Mexicanas" en juegos anteriores, quiso desquitarse con los del C. O. C. S. J. A la hora indicada 4 p.m. las localidades estaban ocupadas completamente, viéndose en ellas multitud de Damas y Sritas, que poseiend un sello de belleza al cuadro, resultó el siguiente

The earnings of Mexican steelworkers also provided the capital and the clientele for a small but growing business community. While a few entrepreneurs had arrived in East Chicago with enough capital to start small businesses, most Mexican-owned enterprises were financed by savings from employment in the steel industry. By 1928 there were sixty-seven Mexican commercial establishments, mainly restaurants, barber shops, pool halls, and grocery stores. Only a few Mexican-owned businesses were of a type requiring more than a modest outlay of capital; among these were two print shops and two retail stores which dealt in clothing, typewriters, radios, and phonographs. In 1926, a nationalistic appeal was made for Mexicans to invest in a movie house which would exhibit Spanish-language films, and it met with at least moderate success. Generally, however, *mexicano* businesses were small and served the special needs of the *colonia*. As late as 1929 only three of the more than one thousand members of the East Chicago Chamber of Commerce were Mexican. The isolation of the *mexicano* business community reflected the isolation of the *colonia* as a whole from the mainstream of East Chicago life.²¹

From the outset relations between the *colonia* and the rest of the community were strained. Resentment against Mexicans for their role in the 1919 strike persisted for many years even though most *mexicano* steel workers had come to East Chicago some years later. Hostility toward Mexicans did not derive solely from their image as strikebreakers but was compounded by racial and cultural prejudices. Most East Chicagoans viewed the *colonia* as a source of immorality and crime. The city's leading newspaper, the *Calumet News*, reflected this view in its reporting; crimes committed by Mexicans were given prominent coverage, often with headlines identifying the ethnicity of the offender, while scant notice was given to the many cultural and social events of the *colonia*.²²

Animosity and prejudice were manifested in other ways: fights between Mexicans and members of other ethnic groups were frequent; some movie houses maintained segregated seating for Mexican patrons; and police were often harsh and arbi-

²¹ *El Amigo del Hogar*, February 21, January 24, 1926; Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the Calumet Region*, 168; "New Members," *East Chicago, Indiana*, June, 1926, p. 189; October, 1926, p. 280; April, 1928, p. 174.

²² In 1925, for example, of forty-eight news items concerning Mexicans, forty-four involved reports of crime while only four dealt with cultural, religious, or social events. The same pattern of reporting continued into the early 1930s. Interview with José Anguiano.

trary in dealing with the *colonia*.²³ The extent of prejudice against Mexicans can be judged by the results of a study conducted for the East Chicago Chamber of Commerce by a Chicago consulting firm. One purpose of the study was to learn why so many persons employed in East Chicago lived outside the city; 24 percent of those responding to a questionnaire indicated that they did not want to live in East Chicago because of the city's many undesirable residents, especially Mexicans and blacks. Significantly, the author of the report suggested that city officials work through leaders of the *colonia* to restrict Mexicans to one area of the city, thereby assuaging the fears of other potential residents.²⁴

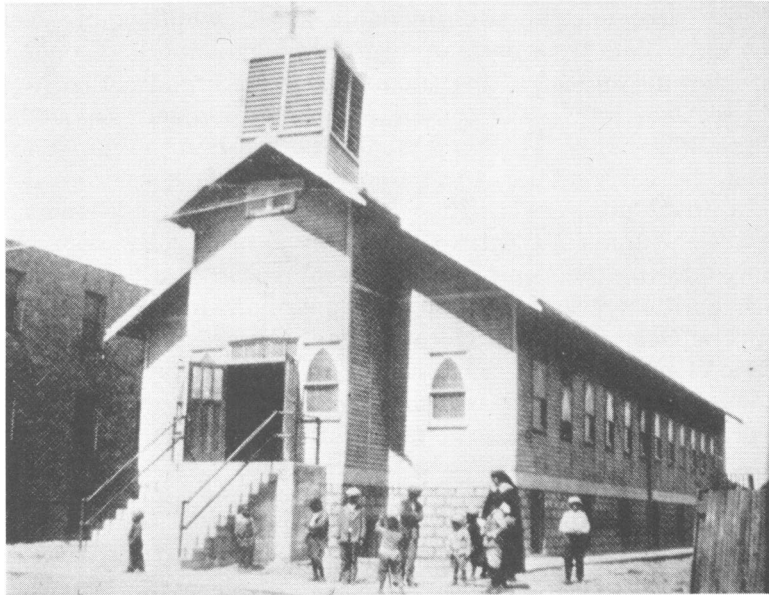
The response of the *colonia* to discrimination and hostility was varied. On one hand the *colonia*'s elites frequently urged *mexicanos* to conduct themselves in a way so as to gain social acceptance; on the other hand, even those urging a higher standard of behavior recognized that much of the discrimination was unwarranted and supported efforts to combat unfair treatment. Several times during the 1920s the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana, supported by other mutual aid societies, organized boycotts of theaters practicing segregation. To deal with problems with the police the *colonia* solicited the aid of Chicago's Mexican consul, who discussed complaints of illegal searches with the chief of police and arranged for a mass meeting between *mexicanos* and police officials. Despite these efforts segregated seating continued until the late 1930s, and relations between the *colonia* and the police remained hostile.²⁵

If the Mexican experience during the 1920s reflected, in a limited way, the prosperity of the era, life during the early 1930s reflected the Great Depression in its fullest severity. Between 1930 and 1932 steel production declined from approximately 90 percent of capacity to 15 percent nationally. While no one was untouched by the resulting unemployment, *mexicano* steelworkers were disproportionately effected. The economic gains of the 1920s were quickly wiped out. At least half of Mexican businesses folded, and *El Amigo del Hogar*

²³ *El Amigo del Hogar*, November 22, 1925; East Chicago *Calumet News*, July 23, 1929; Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the Calumet Region*, 144-55.

²⁴ James Walker, "Planning for the Future of East Chicago: A General Survey of Its Social and Economic Problems, Prepared for the East Chicago Chamber of Commerce, 1926," 121-22 (East Chicago Public Library, East Chicago, Indiana).

²⁵ Hammond *Lake County Times*, April 15, 1924; *El Amigo del Hogar*, November 22, 1925; January 17, 1926; July 17, 24, 1927; East Chicago *Calumet News*, July 23, 1929.



OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE CHURCH, EAST CHICAGO

Courtesy Father Timothy Hunt, East Chicago.

ceased publication, as did most ethnic newspapers in the 1930s. Many unemployed *mexicanos*, especially *solos*, left East Chicago; those who remained survived as best they could.

Aid for the unemployed in Indiana was largely the responsibility of the trustee's office in each township. In East Chicago some Mexican families obtained grocery orders and rent vouchers from the North Township trustee. Others were aided by private charitable groups such as the Katherine House of Christian Fellowship, a Baptist organization, and the Mt. Carmel Mission, affiliated with Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Many families combined households and pooled meager resources. Such expedients, along with private and public relief, allowed for a bare subsistence level of existence. The Mt. Carmel Mission, for example, regularly fed several hundred Mexican families from food donated by supermarkets; in most cases this was food that could not be sold, like stale bread and over-ripe bananas. The necessity of using whatever food was available compelled Mexican families to survive on such unfamiliar and often unpalatable fare as pumpernickel bread and canned clam chowder. On one occasion the mission distributed several hundred pairs of high-heeled women's shoes that had

been stored in a warehouse some twenty-five years. Women eagerly accepted the unfashionable shoes, while young boys who wore them from necessity were more reluctant.²⁶ Economic hardship also forced a severe curtailment of organized cultural and social activities. Of the eleven mutual aid societies active in the 1920s only the Cuauhtémoc and the Benito Juárez survived the early years of the Depression, and these were dormant until after 1933. The elaborate Mexican Independence Day celebrations of the 1920s gave way to modest banquets and dances during the Depression, and sophisticated cultural events such as the presentations of the Cuadro Dramático ceased.²⁷

The Depression not only weakened the economic and social fabric of the Mexican community but also precipitated a mass exodus which reduced the *colonia* to half its pre-1930 size. Depression-related Mexican repatriation began as a voluntary movement of individuals and families returning to Mexico at their own expense. The initial involvement of local social agencies was on a humanitarian and voluntary basis. Mexicans desiring to return to Mexico but unable to afford the move were often provided with railway tickets by the Mt. Carmel Mission, the Emergency Relief Association, or other agencies. At times relief organizations helped avert family tragedies by arranging transportation for the families of Mexicans being deported as illegal aliens. Those returning to Mexico at their own expense were far more numerous than those helped to relocate by social agencies. It was not until 1932, when the Depression was at its worst, that repatriation ceased to be completely voluntary and became primarily a program financed by local government and involving an element of coercion.²⁸

As the Depression deepened, the existing hostility toward Mexicans was reinforced by a growing belief that aliens were contributing to the severity of the economic crisis, either because they were on relief rolls or because they displaced citi-

²⁶ East Chicago *Calumet News*, December 23, 1930; June 5, October 9, 23, 30, 1931; interviews with Concepción González, José Anguiano, Sister Cordelia Marie Bahl, Basil Pacheco; Rogers, "Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish," 36-46; Walter J. Riley, *The Story of Unemployment Relief Work in Lake County, Indiana* (n.p., n.d.); Oswald Garrison Villard, "Hammond and Gary Face the Disaster," *The Nation*, CXXXVI (March 29, 1933), 343-44; Moore, *Calumet Region*, 558-70.

²⁷ Interviews with José Anguiano, Consuelo Figueroa, Sister Cordelia Marie Bahl, Basil Pacheco.

²⁸ East Chicago *Calumet News*, April 25, 1930; April 21, 1931; interviews with José Anguiano, Sister Cordelia Marie Bahl; Rogers, "Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish," 39-44.

zens from jobs. In May, 1931, for example, a cartoon in the East Chicago *Calumet News* depicted an "American Citizen" standing sadly outside a shoproom while a mustachioed "Undesirable Alien" worked within; a figure in an Uncle Sam suit admonished the alien to "Get out and give this workman a chance—he deserves it!" An October editorial complained of the burden placed on relief organizations by the city's unemployed aliens.²⁹

Anti-alien and anti-Mexican sentiment was given concrete expression when a coalition of relief officials and civic groups organized a massive repatriation campaign. An East Chicago American Legion Post played a leading role in the movement for repatriation, working closely with the North Township trustee's office and the Emergency Relief Association of the Community Chest. The basic rationale of the organizers of repatriation was similar to that expressed in cities such as Los Angeles, Detroit, and Gary. Unemployed Mexicans, they felt, were a tremendous burden on public and private relief agencies, while those still employed indirectly harmed the rest of the community by depriving citizens of jobs. As one of the leaders of the repatriation effort put it, "the most effective plan of relief for this community would be the removal of the nationalists [sic], especially the Mexicans."³⁰

In September, 1931, the American Legion announced a program to combat the Depression which included the repatriation of indigent aliens. The North Township trustee pledged cooperation if needed funds could be secured. In a lengthy letter to William Doak, who as secretary of labor had overall control of federal immigration and deportation policy, a Legion official detailed the case for repatriation. High unemployment had strained relief resources to the breaking point, he wrote, but the situation could be alleviated by removal of the city's Mexicans: "Here is our problem—to rid this community of Mexicans. . . . By them leaving, our unemployment problem here in this city, and in fact of almost the entire Lake County would be solved." Secretary Doak, himself an advocate of alien repatriation as a means of combatting the Depression, expressed interest in the plan, but a labor department survey

²⁹ East Chicago *Calumet News*, May 12, October 31, 1931.

³⁰ Untitled article on repatriation in American Legion Repatriation File (East Chicago Historical Society Collection, East Chicago Public Library). For a more complete account see Daniel T. Simon, "Mexican Repatriation in East Chicago, Indiana," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, II (Summer, 1974), 11-23.

showed that most of the Mexicans in East Chicago could not be deported because of immigration law violations.³¹

Faced with the inability of the federal government to finance their plan, advocates of repatriation turned to local sources for funds. The East Chicago Manufacturers Association agreed to advance the necessary money in exchange for scrip which could be used to pay local tax assessments, and arrangements were made with several railroads for special group fares from East Chicago to the Mexican border at Laredo, Texas.³² A "Repatriation Committee" now began compiling lists of repatriates. While many *mexicanos* were eager to return to Mexico, coercion was involved. As in other American cities relief authorities made it easier to accept repatriation than to obtain assistance. While the township trustee continued to aid many Mexican families, help was given grudgingly; at times, according to a Catholic missionary active in aiding Mexicans, relief officials made applicants "feel like something slimy." On other occasions relief was denied to those refusing repatriation. Whatever the relative importance of coercion and voluntary repatriation, by the end of May, 1932, the Repatriation Committee had compiled a large list of returnees, which it submitted to the Mexican consul in Chicago to be certain that each repatriate would be accepted by the Mexican government.³³

Between June and October six trainloads of repatriates, each in the charge of a Legionnaire, departed for Laredo. The 1,032 repatriates involved in this program represented 112 families and 382 single men. Most of them were destined for one of the three west central states—Guanajuato, Michoacan, and Jalisco—which had provided the bulk of Mexican immigration to the Midwest.³⁴ Those departing under the Legion program brought the total number of East Chicago's *mexicano* residents who left during the first three years of the Depression to approximately three thousand, a reduction in the size of the *colonia* to somewhat less than one half its pre-Depression size.³⁵

³¹ Paul Kelly to William Doak, March 4, 1932, Doak to Kelly, March 15, 24, 1932, American Legion Repatriation File; East Chicago *Calumet News*, September 18, 1931.

³² R.R. Flynn to Paul Kelly, June 1, 1932, correspondence with various railroads, April, 1932, American Legion Repatriation File; Hammond *Lake County Times*, May 3, 10, 19, 21, June 14, August 23, 26, 1932.

³³ Paul Kelly to Rafael Avalyra, July 15, September 15, 1932, American Legion Repatriation File; interviews with Jesse Villalpando, José Anguiano, Sister Cordelia Marie Bahl, Concepción González.

³⁴ List of repatriates in American Legion Repatriation File.

³⁵ Riley, *Unemployment Relief Work*, 10; Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Migration Statistics, IV* (University of California Publications in Economics, Vol. XII, No. 3; Berkeley, 1934), 43-48.

An examination of the East Chicago addresses of the repatriates indicates that most came from the old core of the *colonia*, the traditional first area of residence for new arrivals. This, together with the large proportion of single men in the group repatriated by the Legion program, suggests that repatriation was largely a movement of the most recently arrived and least rooted members of the East Chicago *colonia*.

The mass exodus of the early 1930s wrought profound changes in the demographic composition of the Mexican *colonia*. The departure of many transient Mexicans, especially *solos*, stabilized the population socially and sexually. The extent of the change can be measured by a comparison of population characteristics in 1930 and 1940. In 1930 there were approximately seventy-six Mexican men in East Chicago for every twenty-four women; fewer than 30 percent of the men had wives in East Chicago. By 1940 this imbalance was far less severe. The ratio of adult Mexican males to females was approximately fifty-eight to forty-two, and fully half the men had wives. Further indicative of the change is a higher proportion of children in the Mexican population in 1940.³⁶ By the end of the decade social stability was more characteristic of the *colonia* than in its earlier stages of development. The vice and violence that had been prevalent when the *colonia* was largely made up of single men declined considerably, and with the absence of in-migration Mexican families were more rooted in East Chicago since most had been in the city at least ten years.

The new socialization patterns for youth that developed in the 1930s represented a further departure from Mexican traditions and norms than had been the case during the 1920s. The decline of Mexican cultural events and the increasing isolation of the *colonia* from direct contact with Mexico strengthened the influence of American institutions and cultural values. In contrast to the 1920s, by 1940 a large proportion of Mexican students were completing high school and participating in extracurricular activities such as sports. New Deal programs were likewise important in exposing young *mexicanos* to the larger society. Many Mexican youths participated in the recreation

³⁶ Figures for 1930 are based on the federal census, which classified Mexicans, wherever born, as a separate race; use of the 1940 census to obtain detailed figures was impossible because Mexicans were classified as Caucasians. Consequently, figures for 1940 are based on the city directory for that year. The 1940 directory indicates that 880 Spanish-surnamed male heads of household were married, while 65 male heads of household were single. At the same time, this contrasts radically with the 1930 census, which showed a male-to-female ratio of 26:10.

program that the National Youth Administration established at the Mexican Catholic Church, various activities sponsored by the Works Progress Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. The cultural change that took place is exemplified by the gradual shift in the musical tastes of many young Mexicans. During the 1920s dances featured Mexican-style orchestra music; by the late 1930s *mexicano* bands were playing the popular swing music of the era.³⁷

While New Deal programs were an important influence on the youth of the *colonia*, they were of less importance to adult *mexicanos*. The Home Owners Loan Corporation, for example, aided many East Chicagoans but had little effect on Mexicans because few were homeowners. The various WPA projects, which provided employment for about four hundred of the city's jobless during most of the Depression, were of less benefit to Mexicans than to most other groups. During the early years of the WPA some two dozen *mexicanos* were employed, but increasing congressional restrictions on the employment of non-citizens after 1936 made it difficult for Mexicans to obtain WPA jobs. At the same time improved conditions in the steel industry, especially after 1938, brought the reemployment of much of the working-age *mexicano* population. By 1940, only six of 381 WPA employees were *mexicanos*.³⁸

Another development of the later 1930s was increased political activity by *mexicanos*, generally along lines similar to those followed by earlier immigrant groups. Throughout the history of East Chicago ethnic political clubs had been a vehicle for political mobility. Since the early years of the century groups such as the Polish White Eagle Democratic Club, the Rumanian American Political Club, the Croatian-Adriatic Political Club, and numerous others were active in city politics, often enabling leaders of ethnic communities to win elective office or to secure patronage appointments. In the 1920s little such activity existed among Mexicans in East Chicago. Although some signs of political interest were evident by 1929, political development was impossible during the early 1930s, when the *colonia* was disrupted by massive unemployment and

³⁷ National Youth Administration, "A Survey of Juvenile Delinquency in East Chicago, Indiana, Final Report, June 15, 1937," 20-24; East Chicago *Globe*, December 30, 1938; East Chicago *Calumet News*, December 29, 1938; May 23, 1940; interviews with Eduardo Peralta, Donoseo Muñoz, Basil Pacheco.

³⁸ Interviews with Teodoro Navarro, Victor García, Hilario Silva, José Anguiano, Basil Pacheco, Martín Blanco; list of WPA employees in 1940 city directory; Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York, 1943), 65-66, 303-18.

repatriation. In the later New Deal years partial economic recovery, the social changes resulting from the Depression, and the greater contact of youth with American institutions produced increased interest in electoral politics. In 1938 the "First Mexican American Political Club" was formed by a group of native-born and recently naturalized *mexicanos*, many of whom held white-collar jobs or union leadership positions. The stated goals of the organization were to unite the *colonia* as a voting bloc, to participate actively in all campaigns, and to assist Mexicans who desired to become United States citizens. One club member unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for state representative, while another was a Republican precinct committeeman. The club's efforts brought little success because relatively few *mexicanos* were eligible to vote and because the club was divided on political issues. Nonetheless, it marked the beginning of active *mexicano* participation in the electoral process.³⁹ During the late 1930s, for the first time significant numbers of East Chicago *mexicanos* became naturalized U.S. citizens.⁴⁰

Another experience of the Depression years that brought the *mexicanos* of East Chicago into the wider orbit of American life was the evolution of the labor movement in the steel industry. Following the split between John L. Lewis and other American Federation of Labor leaders over the proper approach to organizing industrial workers, Lewis formed the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC). By early 1937 SWOC had enrolled a substantial portion of the nation's steelworkers and was recognized by United States Steel, the industry's largest producer.

Mexican steelworkers were active in SWOC organizing activities at East Chicago's Youngstown and Inland plants. Many *mexicano* workers had experience in collective action prior to

³⁹ East Chicago *Globe*, March 25, 1938; December 13, 1940; East Chicago *Calumet News*, March 31, November 3, 1938; January 19, 1939; November 14, December 5, 1940; April 9, May 7, 1942; April 27, 1944; Angelo F. Machuca to Sociedad Benito Juárez, April 9, 1942, files of Unión Benéfica Mexicana, East Chicago, Indiana.

⁴⁰ The index card files of the U.S. Immigration Office, Federal Courthouse, Hammond, Indiana, record 148 completed naturalizations by Mexicans in East Chicago between 1936 and 1945, a figure which represents approximately 14 percent of the city's Mexican-born population and suggests a higher rate of Mexican naturalization than for the country as a whole. See also Leo Grebler, "The Naturalization of Mexican Immigrants in the United States," *International Migration Review*, I (Fall, 1966), 17-32; Helen W. Walker, "Mexican Immigrants and American Citizenship," *Sociology and Social Research*, XIII (May-June, 1929), 465-71; Humphrey, "Detroit Mexican Immigrant and Naturalization."

the SWOC drive of 1936-1937: some had been active in the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, and on at least one occasion during the 1920s a group of Mexican workers at Youngstown had left their tools at a worksite as a protest against what they felt to be an unfair calculation of hours worked. While a few influential members of the *colonia* were indifferent or hostile to unionism, most were receptive. The interest of Mexican workers in unionism derived basically from the grievances they shared with other workers, but it was given added force by resentment over the discriminatory practices that relegated them to the least desirable jobs in the industry.⁴¹ In May, 1937, SWOC called a strike at the "Little Steel" plants that refused to recognize the union, including the Inland and Youngstown works in East Chicago. According to an early president of the SWOC local at Inland, Mexican workers were crucial to the success of the picket lines at East Chicago's steel plants, contributing at times three-fourths of the demonstrators.⁴² *Mexicanos* were among the many East Chicago steelworkers involved in the picketing at the Republic Steel plant in South Chicago which culminated in the "Memorial Day Massacre" of 1937. Six of the two dozen East Chicagoans injured in the incident were Mexicans.⁴³

While the Little Steel strike was generally a failure, partial victories were obtained at Youngstown and Inland. The intervention of Indiana governor M. Clifford Townsend brought limited recognition by East Chicago's steel firms of SWOC unions as collective bargaining agents for their members. With the signing of a formal contract with SWOC in 1941 the acceptance of grievance procedures and seniority as a basis for

⁴¹ "Steel Workers' Organizing Committee Report" (ca. 1936), in papers of Samuel Evett, District 31, United Steelworkers of America; interviews with Manuel Trbovich, John Sargent, Basil Pacheco; Francisco A. Rosales and Daniel T. Simon, "Mexican Steelworkers and Unionism in the Midwest, 1919-1945," *Aztlan*, VI (Summer, 1975), 267-75.

⁴² "Examination of Andrew Opincar, Joe Vovetich, Chester Janiszewski, Frank Lawrence, Nick Zamic, and John Chesko, on June 18th, A. D., 1937, at Union National Bank Building, Indiana Harbor, Indiana, by T. G. Lewis, Attorney," in Evett Papers; interviews with John Sargent, Manuel Trbovich.

⁴³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, *Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor*. . . 75th Cong., 1st sess., June 30-July 2, 1937, part 14, "The Chicago Memorial Day Incident," 4707, 4768, 4945-57; *ibid.*, 75th Cong., 2nd sess., November 18, 1937, part 15-D, "The Chicago Memorial Day Incident," 6779-6843 *passim*; "List of S.W.O.C. Parade Members Arrested or Injured on Memorial Day, May 30th, 1937, Republic Steel Corporation Demonstration," Evett Papers; Hammond *Times*, June 1, 1937; interviews with George Patterson, John Sargent, Manuel Trbovich.

promotion followed. These procedures eliminated some of the worst forms of discrimination that had plagued *mexicano* and black workers. It was only after the establishment of seniority sequences that Mexicans could advance to jobs as cranemen or second helpers on open hearth furnaces. That discrimination was not completely eradicated following the SWOC victory, however, is indicated by the subsequent experience of Frank Flores, an East Chicago *mexicano* who in 1939 successfully completed a course in welding but was told that Mexicans would not be hired in this capacity. In addition to reducing some of the barriers to advancement in the steel industry, the union movement provided other opportunities for broader participation in American life. By the early 1940s Mexican steelworkers were serving as shop stewards and standing as candidates for local union posts.⁴⁴

Increased participation by Mexicans in community life did not imply a process of assimilation involving the complete abandonment of traditional culture and values. Rather, *mexicanos*, like other ethnic groups, gradually became involved in the affairs of the larger society while retaining a strong sense of group identity and cohesion. Participation in institutions of the whole community such as unions, schools, or political parties did not preclude the maintenance of wholly Mexican organizations. Thus, with partial recovery from the Depression by the late 1930s mutual aid societies again became important in the life of the *colonia*, and there was a renaissance of cultural activities such as Mexican holiday celebrations. By 1940 there was renewed importation of music from Mexico, although American swing music continued to be an important influence, especially among youth. Mexicans, like other ethnic groups, continued to maintain separate Catholic and Baptist churches.⁴⁵

World War II accelerated the pace of social change within the Mexican community. Approximately three hundred Mexicans saw military service in other parts of the United States and abroad.⁴⁶ At home the war effort further involved the

⁴⁴ Alice and Staughton Lynd, eds., *Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers* (Boston, 1973), 169; East Chicago *Calumet News*, April 9, 1942; June 22, 1944; interviews with Frank Flores, Basil Pacheco, Samuel Evett, Manuel Trbovich.

⁴⁵ East Chicago *Calumet News*, August 27, 1942; September 16, 1943; March 2, 1944; interviews with Hilario Silva, José Anguiano; Correspondence Files, Unión Benéfica Mexicana, East Chicago, Indiana.

⁴⁶ Based on lists of draftees and volunteers appearing in East Chicago *Calumet News*, 1940-1945.

"El Amigo del Hogar"
tiene el alto honor de o-
frecer su adhesión y res-
peto a su graciosa Majestad



Reina de las fiestas pa-
trias organizadas para
celebrar el 118 aniversa-
rio de nuestra Independencia.

EVALIA I.

ELECTA



Señorita MARIA L. PEÑA
Distinguida candidata a Reina, que levantó alabanzas de entusiasmo
entre sus numerosas admiradoras.



SEÑORITA ROSITA BUTRON.
Sin póliza de milita de nuestra colonia que figuró, notablemente, como
candidata a Reina en el presente año.

Episodios Históricas Y TRADICIONES DE MEXICO.

IDEAS LIBERTARIAS.

El Dominio Español se quebranta.
- III -
Confusión

Los acontecimientos de Europa, las
invasiones francesas en España, las agi-
taciones políticas de la Metrópoli y la
profunda división de partidos entre los
españoles, causaron furor de que Iturrigaray
fuera derribado del gobierno por una
revolución hecha por los mismos españoles.

La época descrita marca la primera
España, y el año de 1808 debe conside-
rarse como el primero de una nueva era
en la historia de México: desde enton-
ces la colonia entró en plena revolución,
que fue poco a poco aconteciendo, hasta
promover el 18 de Septiembre de 1810 el
aspecto decidido y resuelto de una guerra
de independencia.

A poco de haber llegado Iturrigaray
a la capital, fué a Guanajuato para ac-
tuar la construcción de la alhóndiga de
Granaditas, y recibió de los mineros un
obsequio de 1,000 onzas de oro. El 9 de
Diciembre de 1803 otorgó la estatua ecua-
tor de Carlos IV, obra del ingeniero Tol-
sa, en la que se emplearon 600 quintales
de metal, y cuyo pedestal artificial es sólo
las huesas de otras plazas, notable que ven-
ción profusamente dispendio. Hasta el 23 de
Junio de 1808, no se supo en México la
caída de España por Napoleón y la
Abdicación de Carlos IV. Con este motivo,
el 18 de Julio dirigió el Ayuntamiento
al Virrey una representación en que le
manifestaba que, supuesta la ausencia del
Rey legítimo, debería el mantener el po-
der sin entregarle a ninguna nación, ni
a la misma España, hasta en tanto las co-
sas no volvieran a su estado normal. La
Audencia desaprobad tal disposición, por
lo que, a moción del Ayuntamiento, se ce-
lebró una junta el día 9 de Agosto en la
que el Licenciado D. Francisco Primo de
Verdad, Secretario de la corporación, ac-

tuó como representante de la junta.
Tal idea fué acogida por los Ayen-
tos que la declararon ilegítima y el im-
pudor Bernardo Probo y Ocegueda la declaró
herética y anatematizada.

Los españoles desconfiando de la lealtad
de Iturrigaray, en vista de la difícil de la
situación, fraguaron un complot, a
cabeza se puso D. Gabriel Yermo, rico ha-
ciendado, quien para el efecto hizo venir
de sus haciendas un buen número de hom-
bres bien armados. El Virrey, por otra
parte, temeroso de un golpe inesperado,
mandó llamar al regimiento de Cáliz y
que estaba en Jalisco. Mas como la lealtad
de la tropa fué temporaria, no pudo
enfrentar al Virrey, por lo que se retiró.

ARTICLES IN *EL AMIGO DEL HOGAR* HELPED MEXICANO IMMIGRANTS MAINTAIN THEIR MEXICAN IDENTITY

Courtesy East Chicago Public Library.

colonia with the greater society. The mutual aid societies, which in the past had been relatively isolated from the rest of the community, became active in such war-related projects as bond sales drives, patriotic celebrations, Red Cross campaigns, and civil defense.⁴⁷ Like many of the ethnic clubs in East Chicago, Mexican societies frequently issued statements stressing the importance of their group to the war effort. Such statements became a regular ritual for most of the city's ethnic associations, serving to assert group solidarity while at the same time affirming loyalty to the war effort. In April, 1942, for example, the president of the Sociedad Cuauhtémoc took note of the many *mexicanos* in the military and pledged his organization to purchase \$10,000 worth of defense bonds.⁴⁸ The war also brought changes in the status of Mexican women, many of whom joined the military or labored in the steel mills. Naturalization among East Chicago's *mexicanos* reached a peak during the later years of the war. Perhaps the accelerated pace of social change was most noticeable among those *mexicanos* who served in the armed forces. Many returning veterans began to question the subordinate role to which Mexicans had been relegated and asserted themselves in community life by becoming active in politics or preparing for professional occupations in education, law, or medicine.⁴⁹

Prejudice and discrimination remained a problem for the *colonia*, although by the end of the war significant changes had occurred in the way other East Chicagoans viewed *mexicanos*. The press now reported the activities of the *colonia* in a more balanced way, giving their attention to cultural, religious, and social events. The achievements of Mexicans in the military not only received notice in the press but earned the grudging respect of the rest of the community. In 1944, the American Legion post that twelve years earlier had promoted the nativist repatriation campaign organized a homecoming celebration for a *mexicano* Marine sergeant who had won several decorations for service in the Pacific; as a further irony, immediately following the war the Legion actively recruited Mexican veterans

⁴⁷ P. Jiménez to Victor Guerrero, May 22, 1941, Carmen Fesseria to Sociedad Benito Juárez, June 18, 1942, H.R. Silva to Irvin Lewin, February 8, 1945, files of Unión Benéfica Mexicana; East Chicago *Calumet News*, February 26, 1942.

⁴⁸ East Chicago *Calumet News*, April 9, 1942.

⁴⁹ Correspondence of Latin-American Veterans' Club, 1946-1949, files of Unión Benéfica Mexicana; interviews with Concepción González, Sister Cordelia Marie Bahl.

for membership and staged a "Latin American G.I. Night."⁵⁰ These were to an extent superficial incidents, but they did indicate that discrimination, still all too prevalent in areas such as employment and housing, was no longer as intense and rigid as in the prewar years.

The pattern of development that emerges from the study of the East Chicago *colonia mexicana* contains several elements that appear to be generally applicable to other midwestern cities. The original *colonia* can be traced to what Feliciano Rivera and Matt Meier have termed the second wave of Mexican immigration to the United States, commencing with the Mexican Revolution and ending with the Great Depression. Social and economic disorder in West Central Mexico arising out of the militant phases of the revolution prompted a mass exodus northward. At the same time a growing demand for transportation and industrial labor created employment opportunities which attracted these uprooted people. By the early 1920s a geographically concentrated Mexican community had formed in East Chicago, as in a number of midwestern industrial cities. During the prosperous 1920s the *colonia* attracted many new Mexican immigrants, predominantly single men, from a variety of social classes. The *colonia*, although politically and economically weak, met the social and cultural needs of its inhabitants by providing Mexican-oriented institutions to a population who perceived themselves as Mexican citizens temporarily living in the United States.

The Great Depression altered the development of East Chicago's *colonia*. Economic disruption, the end of immigration, and repatriation severed the close attachment to Mexico. The Mexican population stabilized and contracted as the most transient elements returned to Mexico. New socialization patterns emerged for young people as the lack of new immigrants and economic hardship curtailed reinforcements of traditional culture and values. New Deal programs and industrial labor organizations increased the involvement of *mexicanos* with the larger society. By the end of the decade a greater number of Mexican children were completing high school, the beginnings of political participation were evident, and for the first time significant numbers of Mexican immigrants were being naturalized. World War II intensified this process; many young *mexicanos* served in the military, while at home the war effort further involved the Mexican community with the mainstream

⁵⁰ East Chicago *Calumet News*, March 23, 1944; November 14, 1946.

of American life. The end of the war marks the end of an era for the old *mexicano* communities in East Chicago and in other midwestern urban centers: the migration of new Hispanic elements into the cities soon was to alter the social and cultural composition of the *colonias*.

The experience of the Mexican immigrants who came to East Chicago during the 1920s and their descendants resembles in many ways that of other immigrant groups to this industrial center. By the end of World War II *mexicanos*, like other ethnic groups before them, participated in most aspects of East Chicago life. Also like earlier immigrant groups, they participated in the larger society without giving up their identity or their culture. The comparison between Mexicans and other immigrants, however, cannot be carried too far. For example, *mexicanos* faced a form of racial discrimination to which many European immigrants were not subjected. Nor did most other immigrant groups undergo an experience like the massive repatriation of the early Depression years. In these respects, then, the experience of Mexican immigrants to the Midwest resembled that of Mexican immigrants in the southwestern United States. Following World War II the large influx of immigrants from Texas, Puerto Rico, and Mexico into East Chicago and other midwestern cities inaugurated a new era in the history of Spanish-speaking peoples in the Midwest. The experience of *mexicanos* between 1919 and 1945, however, provided the framework within which these later communities would develop.