

Chapter 11

World War II: The Betrayal of Promises



Learning Objectives

11.1 Analyze the importance of global caste system to American and European Empires, on the eve of World War II.

Until recently any criticism of the United States' role in World War II was said to detract from war atrocities of the Nazis and the contributions of American families. The official story was that Germany and Japan were imperial powers intent on ruling the world. Only until recently has the official story been challenged and a more balanced narrative has emerged that the blame for the war at the feet of empires intent upon expanding their realms.¹

In 1993, Pulitzer Prize winning historian John Dower wrote:

Even while denouncing Nazi theories of "Aryan" supremacy, the U.S. government presided over a society where blacks were subjected to demeaning Jim Crow laws, segregation was imposed even in the military establishment, racial discrimination extended to the defense industries, and immigration policy was severely biased against all nonwhites. In the wake of Pearl Harbor, these anti-"colored" biases were dramatically displayed in yet another way: the summary incarceration of over 110,000 Japanese-Americans.²

Works such as Dowers impacted a small number of Americans because it was ignored by public education a lack of exposure prevented a counter narrative from forming. The context for the war was ignored. Forgotten was that the war followed the racist deportation of Mexicans during the 1930s, as well as a history a history of lynching Black and brown³ people, and the genocidal European colonial occupations in India, Asia, and Africa. It is no surprise that Americans would not remember this even after confronted with the fact that 44 percent [of British subjects] were proud of Britain's" history of colonialism, with 21 percent regretting it happened and 23 percent holding neither view."⁴

11.2 Describe the impact of the growth of second generation on the Mexican struggle for political and socioeconomic rights.

Most Americans believe that World War II began in 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. A minority believe the war began in 1939 in Europe. The more informed believe it began in 1919 when the punitive terms of the Treaty of Versailles led to the rise of Adolph Hitler. They forget that the causes of any major historical event, including World War II, are more complex than a single episode. The tensions between the U.S. and Japan began long before the attack on Pearl Harbor and it was the culmination of a chain of events with roots in the U.S. encroachment of the Japanese sphere of influence.

When English colonials subjugated the Indigenous People, they made claims of "cultural legitimacy, property rights, and Indian savagery."⁵ As shown in previous chapters, from the beginning, the rhetoric was of "the legitimacy of the conquest." Colonists based this legitimacy on the rule of law such as Papal Bulls.⁶ Until recently the right of conquest was recognized in international relations as a justification. It was so from the early sixteenth century almost to this century. The right of conquest was based on a European world view and it received legitimacy from The Doctrine of Discovery that legitimized the colonization of lands outside of Europe. It gave European nations the right to seize the Indigenous Peoples' lands. When conquered, the previous owners quite simply lost any claims to their land.⁷ The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) stipulated that only non-Christian lands could be legitimately colonized, based on the authority of Pope Alexander VI's 1493 Papal Bull that sanctioned the Spanish conquest of the New World. The document supported Spain's exclusive right to the lands discovered by Columbus.⁸

These justifications, along with the religious doctrine of predestination (Manifest Destiny) are important to the

creation and maintenance of an empire. The justifications for Imperialism were, the whims of the conquerors. British critic social scientist J.A. Hobson, has succinctly put it, Imperialism exists for the sake of “forced labour.”⁹ Rooted in the history of expansion the moral dilemma is: Does a nation or people have the right to invade another nation and use its people’s labor and resources as if they were their own?

Mexican Americans

11.1 Analyze the importance of global caste system to American and European Empires, on the eve of World War II.

On the eve of World War II, Mexican Americans suffered a grinding poverty stemming from hostile and indifferent public attitudes and institutionalized racism. There were few signs that these conditions would soon change: within months of the onset of hostilities, government officials felt obliged to acknowledge the community’s existence and address its complaints. Authorities began to speak of a “Spanish-speaking,” “Hispanic,” or “Latin American” community—in effect constructing, for political purposes, an ethnic group from diverse elements of Mexican and Latin American origin.¹⁰

Some 60 percent of Mexican Americans lived in cities; 10 years later 70 percent did. The war years dramatically accelerated urbanization, greatly affecting the identity of the Mexican-origin population. Because of pressure from Mexican American organizations, the U.S. Census again listed Mexicans as “white” in 1940 as it had in 1920—that is, unless they looked Indigenous or of another color. The Census counted 132,165,129 residents in the United States, of which, according to the best estimate, 5.6 percent were Latinos—overwhelmingly of Mexican-origin people. Most Mexicans lived in the Southwest; however, some moved to the Midwest and Pacific Northwest as well. Repatriation and deportation of 600,000 to 1 million Mexicans tipped the balance to the second- and third-generation Mexicans. A slowing down of Mexican immigration to the United States during the Depression years affected this movement. This change was more noticeable in the Midwestern states of Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan, which saw a decline of 72 percent, 52 percent, and 62 percent, respectively, in the Mexican population—California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico lost 33 percent, 40 percent, 49 percent, and 45 percent, respectively, during the Great Depression.¹¹

As with most wars, the poor paid a disproportionate cost. According to Robin Scott, during the war, 375,000–500,000 Mexican Americans served in the armed forces. In Los Angeles, Mexicans composed an estimated one-tenth

of the population, yet accounted for one-fifth of the war casualties.¹²

World War II caused the reformation of the Mexican family system. More women worked outside the home, and the departure of soldier fathers and husbands made them more independent. Not all the changes were positive. The removal of male role models encouraged youth vagrancy that—when combined with poverty—led to a lessening of social control; these changes and the pressures of urban life proliferated the number of gangs, a made-in-the-USA institution phenomenon. Within this racially charged environment, most Mexican Americans wanted to retain their identity as Mexicans—a gut-level response to the racism of the white-dominated society that physically isolated the group.¹³

World War II and the Mexican

Steven Spielberg filmed *Saving Private Ryan* in 1998, and Tom Brokaw published *The Greatest Generation* that same year. Ken Burns in 2007 produced an award-winning documentary, *The War*. What these works had in common was that they ignored the contributions of the Mexicans and Mexican American soldiers despite the fact that the ratio of Mexicans among buck privates serving in combat was one of the highest. Raúl Morín, in *Among the Valiant*, wrote that 25 percent of the U.S. military personnel on the infamous Bataan “Death March” were Mexican Americans. Forced to march 85 miles, 6,000 of the 16,000 soldiers perished. Twelve Mexican Americans won Medals of Honor during World War II; proportionately, this number was higher than that for any other ethnic group. José M. López of Brownsville, Texas, received the Medal of Honor for bravely holding off the advancing Germans until his company was able to retreat.¹⁴

Many Los Angeles Mexicans were ambivalent about the war when they heard that the United States had declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941: “*Ya estuvo* (This is it),” said one. “Now we can look for the authorities to round up all the Mexicans and deport them to Mexico—bad security risks.” At first, some Mexican American soldiers dissociated themselves from the war, saying that their loyalty was to Mexico, not to the United States, but in the end they went into the service. Many Mexican Americans witnessed the repatriation and the discrimination and second-class citizenship experienced by the community and were bitter.¹⁵

Most Mexican American soldiers were 17–21 years old, and some were even younger—like my cousin Rubén Villa, who lied about his age and enlisted in the Navy at 16. Apart from the soldiers’ machismo of having to prove themselves,

pressure to prove the statement “I will prove that my race knows how to die anywhere” represents the injustice of sending people with unequal rights and opportunities to war. Educational and economic status, race, and gender all play a role in determining equality.

The song *El Soldado Raso* (the buck private or peon) became a rallying cry for Mexican Americans in World War II. They often sang it before going into combat. It was an expression of the racial and communal pride of Mexican Americans who endured American racism and were at the bottom of the barrel. The underlying message was the illusion that he was proving himself to his people, and to his mother, and that he would be a good American by shedding his blood. The popularity of *El Soldado Raso* carried over to the Vietnam War. A disproportionate number of Mexican Americans who sung this haunting song were teens.¹⁶

Guy Gabaldón: Discrimination

Guy Gabaldón, who served in the Western Pacific, captured hundreds of Japanese prisoners. His Navy Cross citation read, “Working alone in front of the lines, he daringly entered enemy caves, pillboxes, buildings and jungle brush, frequently in the face of hostile fire, and succeeded in not only obtaining vital military information but in capturing well over 1,000 civilians and troops.” Gabaldón learned the Japanese language as a child in East Los Angeles, where two Japanese American brothers befriended him. Gabaldón visited their home and eventually moved in with them. When he turned 17, he joined the Marine Corps. After the war, Gabaldón harbored resentment toward the U.S. Marines’ decision to award him the Silver Star instead of the Medal of Honor. The Navy upgraded his citation to the Navy Cross after the release of the film *Hell to Eternity* (1960), which documented Guy’s war experiences. The movie, however, did not mention that Gabaldón was a Mexican, and a blonde, blue-eyed actor played his character.¹⁷

Gabaldón accused the Marines of racism toward Mexican Americans, pointing out that he captured more prisoners than the legendary World War I Sgt. Alvin York, who received the Medal of Honor after killing 25 German soldiers and capturing 132 in France in 1918. He ridiculed the Corps’ response that another recipient of the Medal was Hispanic: “Although Gabaldón deserved the medal, the Marine’s father was of Portuguese descent and his mother was Hawaiian.”¹⁸

The Story of Company E: The All-Mexican Unit

Raúl Morín, when he began writing *Among the Valiant*, was semiliterate and had little research skill; nevertheless, he wanted to tell the neglected story of the Mexican American military contribution to World War II. One of his

most dramatic stories was that of Company E of the 2nd Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th Infantry Division, which consisted of men who had grown up in El Paso together, and has served and trained in the Texas National Guard together. Company E was an all-Chicano company that had a high *esprit-de-corps*, and was selected during basic training to receive Ranger training. Many of its members were related: three brothers, Juan, Andrés, and Antonio Saucedo served in Company E. Many attended Bowie High School.

Company E fought in North Africa and took part in the opening of the Italian Campaign. When the Company reached Italy’s Rapido River near Monte Cassino monastery, 5th Army Commander General Mark Clark needed a diversionary attack to prevent the Germans from attacking the main Allied invasion force landing at Anzio. Units of the 36th infantry division were deployed and in less than 48 hours, the division lost more than 1,700 men—more than half its number. After the Rapido River assault, Company E regrouped and received replacements for the badly depleted squads. The unit fought in the Cassino area and then at Anzio, helped liberate Rome from the Germans, and landed in southern France to take pressure off allied forces preparing for the invasion of Normandy in France (the backdrop of the famous Sgt. Ryan movie).¹⁹

Morín wrote about the little-known incident that was a prelude to the Rapido massacre: The 5th Army command had ordered a platoon from Company E on a suicide mission to scout the Rapido Crossing. The patrol was led by Sgt. Gabriel Navarrete and was composed almost entirely of Mexican Americans. The Germans seriously wounded Navarrete, and killed or captured most of his patrol. Navarrete, knowing that the Company would lead the assault, reported his findings and pleaded that “his boys” not be again sent on a suicide mission. Navarrete closely identified with the men, who were mostly from El Paso *barrios*. The commander ordered the badly wounded Navarrete to the battalion hospital. Still, Navarrete insisted that Company E not be sent back across the river; he cautioned Battalion Commander Major Landley that if Company E was sent across, disaster was certain. Landley responded that the U.S. Army was not taking orders from an “incompetent” lieutenant “who was badly wounded and talked incoherently.” Navarrete reportedly told Landley, “I will stand court martial as I am not worried for myself. But remember this, Major, if the plans are not changed and you sacrifice my E Company, you are going to answer to me personally; I will be looking for you and I will be armed.” On January 21, 1944, Company E again spearheaded the crossing of the Rapido River. The crossing was a complete fiasco. Morín argues, among other things, that Gen. Clark picked Company E, the all-Mexican company, for the most dangerous jobs.

When Navarrete learned of the tragedy, he jumped from his cot and went gunning for the major. The high command immediately transferred the major out of the unit and ordered Navarrete—elevated to the rank of captain—back to the United States. “The Army brass tried to hush up the incident.” Meanwhile, the army rewarded Gen. Clark with another star, over the 36th Division Association objection. The involvement of Company E and the disaster was kept under wraps, and Navarrete was ordered to keep quiet. Navarrete earned a Distinguished Service Cross, a Bronze Star, two Silver Stars, and seven Purple Hearts, told the story to Morín. In a way, Navarrete detracts from the extraordinary exploits of the all-Mexican Company E. However, his bravery and that of the rest of the men of Company E cannot be doubted.²⁰

Racism at Home and Abroad

Leo Avila of Oakdale, California, a stateside instructor in the Army Air Corps B-29 Program, said, “I view the service and World War II, for me and many others, as the event that opened new doors. I was from a farm family. When I went into the Air Corps and I found I could compete with Anglo people effectively, even those with a couple of years of college, at some point along the way I realized I didn’t want to go back to the farm.”

Throughout the war, many white Americans treated Mexicans as second-class citizens. For example, Sergeant Macario García from Sugar Land, Texas—a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor—could not buy a cup of coffee in a restaurant in Richmond, California. “An Anglo-American chased him out with a baseball bat.” And the García incident was not an isolated occurrence. Louis Téllez of Albuquerque was the only Mexican American in his platoon: “I’ll never forget the first time I heard [a racial slur], it really hurt me. You can’t do anything about it because you are all alone.”

A more subtle form of racism persists to this day; for example, the exclusion of Chicanos and Chicanas from the war narrative. As mentioned, Ken Burn’s PBS documentary, *The War* (2007), leaves out the Chicano/a participation in World War II.²¹ Movies are important and many have been produced about white American families about more than one white family member in the war; however, white Americans were not the only ones making sacrifices. This was pretty much the rule in many Mexican American households. Rosaura Morales from Anthony, New Mexico, prayed that her five boys would return safely. She was fortunate they all came back alive—even though the odds did not favor Raul, Armando, Catarino, Ricardo, and Esequiel Morales’s safe return. Rita Sánchez tells the story of the five Sánchez brothers from Bernalillo, New Mexico. Four served in the armed forces, and the oldest Leo, 40, tried to enlist but was rejected because of age and medical reasons. Counting the Sánchez’s extended family, dozens

of kin served in the armed forces, fighting in Europe and in the Pacific. The Sánchez family was not as fortunate as the Morales family, Severo was killed during heavy fighting on the Island of Leyte.

Lita De Los Santos’s eight brothers served in the war: Charlie, the eldest brother, was killed on Omaha Beach during the invasion of Normandy. Another De los Santos brother was shot down in France and taken as a prisoner of war in Germany. Another, Cano, served in Italy, where a piece of shrapnel got lodged in his heart. Ray was wounded in France, and Jesse and Pete were in combat in New Guinea and the Philippines, respectively. It is incredible that the so-called historians such as Ken Burns missed these sacrifices in their narratives.²²

Chicanas in the Military

The song *El Soldado Razo* also dramatizes mothers’ role during the war. If a family had a serviceman, they would hang a blue star in their window.²³ For every family member killed in the war, the household hung a flag with gold star. The sea of blue turned gold in the Mexican districts during the war. Sara Castro Vara had six sons who went into combat. Rudy Vara fought with Gen. George Patton and was in the first wave of soldiers of the first soldiers to help liberate the Nazi concentration camps. The Téllez family of Albuquerque sent six young men and two young women to the service.

Mexican women joined the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) as well as, the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) (also known as the U.S. Navy’s women reserve) and Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) units. Women went overseas as nurses and accepted other opportunities that the war opened to them. For example, Anna Torres Vásquez of East Chicago, Indiana, volunteered for the WAAC, serving as an air-traffic controller at a Florida flight school. Rafaela Muñoz Esquivel, from San Antonio, was the second oldest in a family of 15 children; as a child, Rafaela worked in the pecan-shelling industry in San Antonio. During World War II, she was an army nurse in the United States and then served in France, supporting the 82nd Airborne Division, and was stationed in Germany near Coblenz, about 5 miles from George Patton’s 3rd Army. Three children in the Muñoz family served overseas during the war.²⁴

A Profile of Courage

Not all sacrifices were made by soldiers. Ralph Lazo epitomized such a profile in courage. Lazo was raised among Asian Americans in the Temple–Beaudry neighborhood of Los Angeles, which included whites, Jews, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Mexican, and Chinese residents. Ralph attended Central Junior High and Belmont High School, where he interacted with students of all races. He played

basketball on a Filipino Community Church team and learned Japanese at his friends' homes; he also took Japanese language classes. His father, John Houston Lazo, a house painter and muralist, was a widower and raised Ralph and his sister, Virginia by himself.

In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, sending 110,000 Japanese Americans to internment (concentration) camps on the West Coast. Ralph Lazo, 16, joined his Los Angeles Japanese American friends and was taken with them to the Manzanar internment camp. Lazo was the only non-Japanese in any of the internment camps. A local newspaper caustically wrote, "Mexican American passes for Japanese." Lazo's father, respecting his son's decision, made no effort to bring him home. The young man graduated from Manzanar High School and was drafted into the Army in August 1944. Lazo served in the South Pacific, was among the troops that liberated the Philippines, and was awarded a Bronze Star for heroism in combat.

Lazo maintained close ties to the Japanese American community until his death in 1992. He was one of 10 donors contributing \$1,000 or more to the class action lawsuit against the U.S. government, which was filed to financially compensate Japanese Americans who were interned in concentration camps. At a Manzanar High School reunion years later, his classmates paid tribute to Ralph, saying, "When 140 million Americans turned their backs on us and excluded us into remote, desolate prison camps, the separation was absolute—almost. Ralph Lazo's presence among us said, No, not everyone."²⁵

Scapegoats

With the Japanese gone, Mexicans became the most convenient scapegoats; further American casualties of war (even though many of them were of Mexican origin) fueled public hatred against foreigners. Despite the fact that most Mexican Americans were U.S. citizens, they were considered "aliens." Their color was their Star of David (the religious symbol Jews were forced to wear in Germany to identify them).

In Los Angeles, segregation was common, and many recreational facilities excluded Mexican Americans.²⁶ They could not use public swimming pools in East Los Angeles and in other Southland communities. Often, Mexicans and Blacks could swim only on Wednesdays—the day the county drained the water. In movie houses in places like San Fernando, Mexicans sat in the balcony.

A minority of Mexican youth between the ages of 13 and 17 belonged to barrio clubs that carried the names of their neighborhoods—White Fence, Alpine Street, *El Hoyo*, Happy Valley. The fad among zoot-suiters (gang members), or *pachucos* as they were called, was to tattoo the left hand, between the thumb and index finger, with a small cross with

three dots or dashes above it. When they dressed up, many pachucos wore the so-called zoot suit, popular among low-income youths at that time. Pachucos spoke Spanish, but also used *Chuco* among their companions. *Chuco* was the barrio slang—a mixture of Spanish, English, old Spanish, and words adapted by the border Mexicans. Many experts suggest that the language originated around El Paso among Mexicans, who brought it to Los Angeles in the 1930s.

Before the 1943 Zoot Suit riots there was little knowledge about the pachuco. Mexican poet Octavio Paz wrote in *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*:

The pachucos are youths, for the most of Mexican origin, "who form gangs in Southern cities; they can be identified by their language and behavior as well as by the clothing they affect. They are instinctive rebels, and North American racism has vented its wrath on them more than once. But the pachucos do not attempt to vindicate their race or the nationality of their forebears. Their attitude reveals an obstinate, almost fanatical will-to-be, but this will affirm nothing specific except their determination—it is an ambiguous one, as we will see—not to be like those around them. The pachuco does not want to become a Mexican again; at the same time, he does not want to blend into the life of North America."²⁷

Octavio Paz was a poet, playwright, essayist, editor, and diplomat. He was awarded a Nobel Prize in literature. In the above quote, Paz comments on Mexicans on life "north from Mexico." His observations, while beautifully written are too general and lack knowledge of the forces in American society that produced the pachuco. His remarks appear profound, but they are uninformed. The pachuco, a product of racism and a reflection on American society that was common among the so-called gente decente, comprised a sizeable number of second-generation Mexican Americans in the barrios of the 1940s gente decente.²⁸

Many first generation Mexicans had an obsession with being civil and well behaved they fit into the caste. Social control in the second generation broke down and the second generation rebelled against their immigrant parents' conformity. Their fathers and mothers worked. By white standards, their fathers were failures; they spoke little English and their jobs were menial. The young Mexican peers replaced the role of the father. They joined gangs that took the name of local barrios. Feeling security in numbers, many youths wore a uniform—the zoot suit. Trousers were called drapes, and were worn high above the waist, the knees wide, pegged to 12 or 14 inches at the cuff. The jacket had padded shoulders, and was worn very long, with the hem reaching below the fingertips. Disaffected Blacks and Filipinos also wore the uniform. It represented a badge of resistance.

White authorities saw it as defiant and a challenge to their power—a manifestation of rebellion and moved to put Mexicans in their place. Many white Americans saw it as unpatriotic and fretted over the large amount of material

the pachucos wasted in making the zoot suit. They said that white Americans were sacrificing for the war effort and cutting off their pant cuffs to save material for the war effort. The zoot suit was just plain un-American and soldiers would go without a uniform as a consequence. Many also resented the new car culture that brought Mexicans into white American spaces.

Discrimination against the Mexican American reached a crescendo. The first-generation Mexicans accepted a secondary status because they were concerned with earning a living for their families and not making waves. The feeling among many first-generation Mexicans was that they would save money and return to Mexico. The second generation felt less attached to the old country, and were willing to express their feelings of rejection.

World War II and the mass media further alienated the youth. The majority society became more defensively aggressive about their white institutions and what seemed to them a lessening of its social control. The pachuco did not fit the all-American mold and their growing presence challenged U.S. hegemony. During 1942 and early 1943, insecurity and fear about the war's outcome gripped many Americans.

It mattered little that white gangs existed in white neighborhoods. Indeed Americans celebrated white boy gangs in the mid- and late-30s with movies such as *The Dead End* (1937), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *Hell's Kitchen* (1939), and *They Made Me a Criminal* (1939) and in the mid-40s with the spinoff *The Bowery Boys*.²⁹ White Angeleños called gangs a Mexican problem, ignoring that urbanization, poverty, and Americanization caused the gang phenomenon. The *Los Angeles Times*, not known for its analytic content, reinforced this stereotype and influenced the public with stories about "Mexican hoodlums." Sociologist Joan Moore attributes the growth of gangs in Los Angeles to many conditions including poverty and war. The White Fence clique evolved into a gang as role models such as fathers and older sons went off to war. Other than the territorial nature of the gangs, their most distinctive feature was their individuality. Location and the class background of the gang members played a role. For example, during the war the White Fence gang emerged in Boyle Heights, developing around La Purissima Catholic Church. In the Heights, residents were skilled workers in the brickyards, railroads, packinghouses, and other industries. Unlike Maravilla, Boyle Heights was racially integrated. In 1936, the Lorena Street School was only 22 percent Mexican; the Euclid Street School was 70 percent Mexican.³⁰

Forgotten in this historical narrative was the voice of Mexican American females whom the press and the public ravaged. Catherine Sue Ramírez has resurrected documents of the painful memories of how Mexican girls were stereotyped as being as bad as the males. The press characterized them as "girl hoodlums" and "Black Widows" who

were infected with venereal disease. Young Mexican girls were offended, and they protested the allegations. The press scapegoated Mexican parents; the use of Spanish and their low standard of living were held to be at fault and were contrasted with the self-perceived "wholesome" American. Mexican women were portrayed as passive, as violent, and as having loose morals, all at the same time.³¹

The Sleepy Lagoon Trial

The name "Sleepy Lagoon" was from a popular melody played by bandleader Harry James. Unable to use public pools, Mexican youth used the name of the tune to romanticize a gravel pit they frequently used for recreational purposes. On the evening of August 1, 1942, members of the 38th Street Club in South Central Los Angeles were jumped by another gang. When the 38th street members returned later with more of their friends, the rival gang was not there. Noticing a party in progress at the nearby Williams Ranch, the 38th street gang crashed in, and a fight followed. The next morning José Díaz, a guest at the party, was found dead on a dirt road near the house. Díaz had no wounds and could have been killed by a hit-and-run driver. Authorities suspected that some [i don't know, they blamed the gang and by inference all Mexicans] members of the 38th Street Club beat him to death, and the police immediately jailed the entire gang. The press portrayed the Sleepy Lagoon defendants as Mexican hoodlums, sensationalized the story. The police flagrantly violated the rights of the suspects, and authorities charged 22 members of the 38th Street boys with criminal conspiracy. Two others demanded a separate trial and the court dropped charges against them.³²

Shortly after Díaz's death, a special committee of the grand jury accepted the report of Lieutenant Ed Durán Ayres, head of the Foreign Relations Bureau of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. The report attempted to justify the gross violations of the defendants' human rights. Although the report admitted that admitting that there was discrimination against Mexicans in employment, education, schooling, recreation, and labor unions was common, it concluded that Mexicans were inherently criminal and violent. According to Ayres, Mexicans were "Indians," who in turn were "Orientals," who had an utter disregard for life. Therefore, Mexicans were genetically violent. The report also stated that Mexican Americans were descendants of the Aztecs who it said sacrificed 30,000 victims a day.

Ayres wrote that "Indians" considered leniency a sign of weakness, pointing to the Mexican government's treatment of the "Indians," which he maintained was quick and severe. He urged that the courts imprison all gang members and that all Mexican youth over the age of 18 be given the option of working or enlisting in the armed forces. Mexicans, according to Ayres, could not change their spots; they had an innate desire to use a knife and let blood, and

this inborn cruelty was detonated by liquor and jealousy.³³ The Ayres report, which represented official law enforcement views, goes a long way in explaining the events that subsequently took place around Sleepy Lagoon.

Henry Leyvas and the 38th Street gang were charged with Díaz's murder. Most of the defendants lived in what today is South Central Los Angeles, and many of them had attended McKinley Junior High and Jefferson High Schools—which were predominately African American. Their life experiences differed from those of Mexican Americans elsewhere in Los Angeles. The African American population was more aware of its rights, and influenced their Mexican neighbors. Mexican students saw African Americans challenge unjust teachers—"talk back" as they called it—and this attitude influenced many Mexican American students to question unfairness as well.

The Honorable Charles W. Fricke abetted numerous irregularities during the trial. The defendants were not allowed to cut their hair or change their clothes for the duration of the proceedings. Fricke denied them the right to consult counsel and seated them in a separate section of the courtroom. Despite all these irregularities, the prosecution failed to prove that the 38th Street Club was a gang, that any criminal agreement or conspiracy existed, or that the accused had murdered Díaz. Seventeen of 22 accused were found guilty. Witnesses testified that considerable drinking had taken place at the party *before* the 38th Street members arrived. If the conspiracy theory had been applied logically, all the defendants would have received equal verdicts. However, on January 12, 1943, the court passed sentences, three defendants were guilty of first-degree murder; nine, of second-degree murder; five, of assault; and five were found not guilty.³⁴

The recent repatriation of hundreds of Mexicans and the disproportionate number of heads of households inducted into the armed forces weakened the Mexican community. Mainstream Mexican American organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the *mutualistas* remained silent.³⁵

Under the leadership of LaRue McCormick, supporters formed the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. Carey McWilliams, a noted journalist and lawyer, chaired the committee. The parents of the defendants, especially the mothers, helped raise funds through tamale sales and by holding dances. Hollywood notables Anthony Quinn, Rita Hayworth, Orson Welles, and many other actors and actresses contributed money. African American leaders such as Carlotta Bass, editor of the *California Eagle* newspaper, condemned the injustice fearful of another Scottsboro case, in which nine Black men, ages 14–21, were tried without competent counsel for the alleged rape of two white women in Alabama in March 1931 they were hastily convicted.

Meanwhile, the press and police harassed the committee, red-baiting McWilliams and the members. Police

raided their meetings, and threatened to take away the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles's tax exemption if it allowed meetings to be held there. The California Committee on Un-American Activities, headed by State Senator Jack Tenney, investigated the Sleepy Lagoon committee, charging that it was a Communist-front organization and that Carey McWilliams had "Communist leanings," because he opposed segregation and favored miscegenation. The FBI also viewed the committee as a Communist front, stating that it "opposed all types of discrimination against Mexicans."³⁶

On October 4, 1944, the Second District Court of Appeals reversed the verdict of the lower court in a unanimous decision, holding that Judge Fricke conducted a biased trial, and that he violated the constitutional rights of the defendants. The court also found no evidence of a conspiracy to commit murder or assaults with intent to commit murder, nor any evidence tying the defendants to José Díaz. By not allowing the defendants to challenge coerced statements made at the time of arrest the upper court held that Fricke had erred. He also erred in refusing the defendants the right to consult with counsel. The court found that Fricke's conduct was biased and unfair and that he had admitted prejudicial evidence. Incredulously, the appellate court concluded that there was no evidence of racism. The sentences were reversed; however, the individuals were not retried and, hence, did not have the opportunity to prove their innocence. The ordeal emotionally scarred the Sleepy Lagoon appellants and many returned to prison for other offenses.

Compounding the travesty was the imprisonment of five of the female friends of the Sleepy Lagoon defendants, Bertha Aguilar, Dora Barrios, Lorena Encinas, Josephine Gonzales, Juanita Gonzales, Frances Silva, Lupe Ynostroza, and Betty Zeiss who were charged with rioting, and made wards of the state under the Department of Health and Human Services. Even more outrageous were the actions of the California Youth Authority who persuaded the parents of five girls to commit their daughters to the Ventura School for Girls, which according to Alice McGrath (aka Alice Greenfield in Luís Valdez's film *Zoot Suit*), had a worse reputation than San Quentin at the time, though San Quentin was a maximum-security facility that housed California's death row. The judicial system had not convicted of them any crime; their only crime was guilt by association. They remained institutionalized until the age of 21.³⁷

Mutiny in the Streets of Los Angeles

In the spring of 1943, several minor altercations broke out in Los Angeles. In April, marines and sailors invaded the Mexican barrio and black ghetto in Oakland, assaulted the people, and "depantsed" zoot-suiters. Skirmishes continued

through the month of May. The “sailor riots” began on June 3, 1943. Allegedly, Mexicans attacked a group of sailors for attempting to pick up some Chicanas. The details are vague; police did not try to get the Mexicans’ side of the story, but took the sailors’ report at face value. Fourteen off-duty police officers, led by a detective lieutenant, went looking for the “criminals.” They found no actual evidence, but made certain that the press covered the story.

That same night, sailors went on a rampage. They broke into the Carmen Theater, tore zoot suits off Mexicans, and beat up the youths. Police again arrested the victims. Word spread that pachucos were fair game, and that military personnel could assault them without fear of arrest. Sailors returned the next evening with some 200 allies. In 20 hired cabs, they cruised Whittier Boulevard, in the heart of the East Los Angeles barrio, jumping out of the cars to gang up on neighborhood youths. Police and the sheriff maintained they could not find the sailors. Finally, they arrested nine sailors but released them immediately without filing charges. The press, portraying the sailors as heroes and the youth as delinquents, slanted the news stories and headlines so as to arouse racial hatred.

Encouraged by the press and the “responsible” elements of Los Angeles, sailors, assembled on the night of June 5 and marched four abreast down the streets, warning Mexicans to shed their zoot suits or they would be stripped. On that night and the next, servicemen broke into bars and other establishments and beat up Mexicans. Police continued to abet the lawlessness, arriving only after damage had been done and the servicemen had left. Even though sailors destroyed private property. When members of the Mexican community attempted to defend themselves, police arrested them.

Events climaxed on the evening of June 7, as thousands of soldiers, sailors, and civilians surged down Main Street and Broadway in search of pachucos. The mob crashed into bars and broke the legs off stools using them as clubs. The press reported 500 zoot-suiters ready for battle. By this time, Filipinos and Blacks had also become targets. Mexicans, beaten up and their clothes ripped off, were left bleeding on the streets. The mob surged into movie theaters, turning on the lights, marching down the aisles, and pulling zoot-suit-clad youngsters out of their seats. Police arrested more than 600 Mexican youths without cause and labeled the arrests “preventive action.” Seventeen-year-old Enrico Herrera, after being beaten and arrested, spent three hours at a police station, where his mother found him, still naked and bleeding. A 12-year-old boy’s jaw was broken. Through all this, many Los Angeles whites cheered the servicemen and their civilian allies.³⁸

At the height of the turmoil, servicemen pulled a Black man off a streetcar and gouged out his eye with a knife. Military authorities, realizing that the Los Angeles law enforcement agencies would not stop the brutality,

intervened and declared downtown Los Angeles off limits for military personnel. Classified naval documents prove that the Navy believed it had a mutiny on its hands. The military shore patrols quashed the rioting—something the Los Angeles police could not or would not do.

For the next few days, police ordered mass arrests, and raided a Catholic welfare center to arrest some of its occupants. The press and city officials continued to agitate residents. An editorial by Manchester Boddy in the June 9 *Los Angeles Daily News* urged the city to clamp down on the “terrorists.”³⁹ During the assaults, the *Los Angeles Daily News* and the *Los Angeles Times* cheered servicemen on, with headlines such as “Zoot Suit Chiefs Girding for War on Navy” and “Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fight with Servicemen.” Three other major newspapers ran similar headlines that poisoned the environment and generated a mass hysteria about zoot-suit violence. Radio broadcasts also inflamed the frenzy.

On June 16, 1943, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story from Mexico City, headlined “Mexican Government Expects Damages for Zoot Suit Riot Victims.” The article stated, “the Mexican government took a mildly firm stand on the rights of its nationals, emphasizing its conviction that American justice would grant ‘innocent victims’ their proper retribution.” Federal authorities expressed concern, and Mayor Fletcher Bowron assured Washington, D.C., that no racism was involved. Soon afterward, Bowron told the Los Angeles police to stop using “cream-puff techniques on the Mexican youths,” while simultaneously ordering the formation of a committee to “study the problem.” City officials and the Los Angeles press became exceedingly touchy about charges of racism. When Eleanor Roosevelt commented in her nationally syndicated newspaper column that “longstanding discrimination against the Mexicans in the Southwest” caused the riots, the June 18 *Los Angeles Times* responded with the headline “Mrs. Roosevelt Blindly Stirs Race Discord.” The article denied that racial discrimination had been a factor in the riots and charged that Mrs. Roosevelt’s statement resembled propaganda used by the Communists; it stated that servicemen looked for “costumes and not races.” The article went on that Angelenos were proud of their missions and Olvera Street, “a bit of old Mexico,” and concluded, “We like Mexicans and think they like us.”

Governor Earl Warren formed a committee to investigate the riots. Participating on the committee was Attorney General Robert W. Kenny; Catholic Bishop Joseph T. McGucken, who served as chair; Walter A. Gordon, Berkeley attorney; Leo Carrillo, screen actor; and Karl Holton, director of the California Youth Authority. The committee’s report recommended punishment of all persons responsible for the riots—military and civilian alike. It took a slap at the press, recommending that newspapers limit the use of names and photos of juveniles. Moreover, it called for

better-educated and better-trained police officers to work with Spanish-speaking youth.⁴⁰

Mexicanas Break Barriers

Throughout the nation, Mexican American women—like other Americans—supported the war effort, making sacrifices and writing to their boyfriends, husbands, and fathers in the armed forces. They formed support groups throughout United States. In March 1944, Mr. Rosalio Ronquillo established the Spanish-American Mothers and Wives Association. Unlike other women's and men's organizations, the association was open to all women regardless of their socioeconomic class. Some 300 women—mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and fiancées—and a handful of men, joined the organization. Rose Rodríguez edited its newsletter, *Chatter*, which the association sent to servicemen. Members wrote letters to their loved ones, bought war bonds, rolled bandages, and raised money for a postwar veterans' center. Although women ran the organization, they made what seemed to be strategic concessions to males.

Ronquillo acted as the association's permanent director. Women held the offices of president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. The *Chatter* newsletter, originally called *Chismes*, was a lifeline to the soldiers. Although a male chaired the organization, according to Julie A. Campbell, the structure of the association encouraged women to get out of the house, get involved in planning events, and be networked with other women. The organization also acted as a support group when the members' husbands or sons were wounded or killed in action. The women also got the support of leading businessmen, receiving economic assistance from merchants and a no-fare ride to meetings in *los buses de Laos* (referring to buses of the Old Pueblo Transit Company, founded in 1924 by Roy Laos Sr., primarily serving the Mexican community (the south and west sides). The association also networked with other organizations for fund-raising or co-sponsoring events. Although the group planned to stay together after the war and raise money for a community social center, the association faded after the war ended.⁴¹

Elizabeth Rachel Escobedo wrote that the Depression and war changed many aspects of the Chicanas and hastened their acculturation. The push to assimilate was more intense among the second generation. The war gave them economic opportunities and weakened the institutions of social control. During the Depression, many lived under fear of deportation, and during the war, labor shortages increased the demand for workers temporarily breaking down racial barriers. Escobedo theorizes that the Sleepy Lagoon females challenged their jailers for violating their civil rights by resisting efforts to make them conform. One detention authority said that the young ladies were "very clannish" with other Mexican girls, continuing to speak

Spanish "in spite of repeated requests not to do so." Escobedo writes: "Ultimately the *pachuca* became both part and a symbol of the changing ethnic and gender landscape of World War II."⁴²

Changes also took place as women came into contact with other races in the workplace. Andrea Pérez, a Mexican American, and Sylvester Davis, an African American, met while working at Lockheed in Burbank, California. Owing to biases of both families, it was at first a clandestine relationship. After the war they applied for a marriage license; the County Clerk of Los Angeles turned them down citing that Pérez listed her race as "white," and Davis identified himself as "Negro." California law listed people of Mexican origin "Mexican," unless it was convenient for public officials to list them as white. The denial of the application was based on California Civil Code Section 60: "All marriages of white persons with Negroes, Mongolians, members of the Malay race, or mulattoes are illegal and void . . ." Pérez petitioned the California Supreme Court for an original Writ of Mandate to compel the issuance of the license. Pérez and Davis were Catholics; they argued that the Church was willing to marry them, that the state's anti-miscegenation law infringed on their right to participate fully in the sacraments, and that they were being denied the fundamental right of marriage and thus were subjected to the violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The California State Supreme Court sided with the plaintiffs in a narrow 4–3 decision, making California the first state in the twentieth century to hold an anti-miscegenation law unconstitutional. Pérez and Davis enjoyed a long and happy marriage; she later worked as an elementary schoolteacher in San Fernando, California.⁴³

Rosita the Riveter⁴⁴

Even before World War II, Mexican American women began to question the notion that a woman's place was in the home. Mexican American women were involved in the traditional roles of volunteering, wrapping bandages, and writing letters but with time, it changed. During the war, women in greater numbers worked for the male-dominated Southern Pacific Railroad. Pressured by the shortage of male workers, the railroad hired women to do maintenance and even to fire up locomotive engines. The *Susanas del SP* was the Mexican version of "Rosie the Riveter." Women also became miners in mining camps such as Morenci, Arizona, where they were often harassed and labeled "prostitutes." Other women went to work in the defense plants and toiled in what was until then considered men's work.

In recognition of these contributions, The University of Texas at Austin runs an oral history project called "U.S. Latinos and Latinas & World War II," which is preserving this narrative. The collective stories of Chicanas paints a mixed picture as to the impact the war had on the lives of Mexican women. For example, Josephine Ledesma—age

24, from Austin, Texas, and mother of a small child—was trained as an airplane mechanic. This training improved her earning power; before the war, Josephine had trouble finding a job in a department store. However, the war did little to improve race relations. At the height of the war, Josephine and her husband were asked to leave a restaurant in Big Spring, Texas; the proprietor would not serve Mexicans. “Big Spring was absolutely terrible with Mexican Americans and Blacks,” according to Josephine.

The war improved the prospects of Henrietta López Rivas of San Antonio. At the age of 15, she dropped out of the ninth grade, and joined her family as migrant farmworkers. They worked in the tomato and wheat fields of Ohio and Michigan. Upon returning to San Antonio, Henrietta took up cleaning jobs at houses and barnyards, earning \$1.50 a week. In 1941, Henrietta found employment with the Civil Service Department as a Spanish-speaking interpreter; her income jumped from \$1.50 a week to \$90 a month. Later she was offered a better civil service job at Duncan (now Kelly) Air Force Base.

Elisa Rodríguez, 21, of Waco, developed strong opinions about her country and discrimination. While working at a local department store, Elisa attended night school and learned shorthand, typing, and other clerical skills. After graduation, she applied for a job at Blackland Airfield, which turned her down because she was Mexican. After Elisa got a lawyer friend to call the company and remind the owner that the company received defense contracts, the boss said, “send her over.” Having a defense contract meant that the employer was required to follow federal anti-discrimination laws. Soon afterward, she got a job at Blackland, earning about \$2,000 a year; she was the only Latina at the base, and she routinely experienced discrimination. Eventually, Elisa became the equal employment opportunity coordinator. Nevertheless, she paid the price; she was never promoted.⁴⁵

The Federal Employment Practices Commission

The war cast a bright spotlight on inequality. Executive Order 8802 forbade discrimination of workers in defense industry. President Roosevelt established the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) in response to pressure from African American and Mexican American organizations and individuals. New Mexico Senator Dennis Chávez played a leadership role in the Senate subcommittee hearings on the FEPC, with the commission hearing cases from the Southwest to the Midwest and Pacific Northwest.⁴⁶

However, the law is one thing and getting people to comply is another, as is apparent in the testimony of Los Angeles attorney Manuel Ruiz. Proving poverty, discrimination and inequality was, and still is, an expensive proposition. Ruiz knew that discrimination existed, but there was a lack of data about Mexican Americans. Even the Census

was deficient of hard data on U.S. Mexicans, and this had become more complicated with their designation as white. When Ruiz testified before the commission, he could not cite specific statistics proving discrimination toward Mexicans. Any reasonable person could walk out the door and witness discrimination and inequality, but there were few studies that proved it. Indeed, outside Texas, few scholars researched the Mexican American population. The citing of data was critical to making a case for equal treatment. Without solid evidence, the FEPC could avoid enforcing the presidential executive order.⁴⁷

Besides the collusion of governors and local officials, the State Department also evaded the executive order by obstructing the collection of data; when the FEPC planned hearings at El Paso, the State Department pressured the agency to call off the hearings. The State Department held that admitting racism existed was bad for the U.S. image. The President participated in the charade, subordinating the FEPC to the War Manpower Commission (WMC). Overall, the administration had little respect for the concerns of U.S. Mexican leaders. Employees of the FEPC told historian Dr. Carlos E. Castañeda, a field investigator for the agency, that when the war “was over the Mexican American would be put in his place.”⁴⁸

Despite the lack of enforcement of non-discrimination laws, Mexican miners continued to organize under the auspices of the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) locals. CIO hearings showed that Mexican Americans were at the lowest end of the pay scale, and that white workers often refused to work alongside Mexicans; yet the copper barons refused to acknowledge there was discrimination against Mexicans.

In Arizona, FEPC hearings confirmed what everyone else knew—that the copper barons in Arizona *did* discriminate against Mexicans. The Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union supported a policy of non-discrimination. However, mining companies such as Phelps Dodge set the tone by officially condemning discrimination, while doing nothing to stop it. Complaints of discrimination toward Mexicans registered by individual Mexican miners and by the union kept rolling in. Nevertheless, Castañeda’s efforts to get the FEPC and other agencies to respond to discrimination were futile. Unable to decide whether to enforce the law or not, the Roosevelt administration did nothing. This charade cast doubt on the FEPC’s and the government’s commitment to equal employment.⁴⁹

Defense factories hired few Mexicans and even fewer rose to supervisory positions. Alonso S. Perales testified before the Senate Fair Employment Practices Act hearings in San Antonio in 1944 that Kelly Air Force Base in that city employed 10,000 people, and not one Mexican held a position above that of a laborer or mechanic’s helper. According to Perales’s testimony, 150 towns and cities in Texas had public facilities that refused to serve Mexicans—including servicemen.

At the same hearings Frank Paz, president of the Spanish-Speaking People's Council of Chicago, testified that 45,000 Mexicans worked in and around Chicago, mostly in railroads, steel mills, and packinghouses. The overwhelming majority worked as railroad section hands. The railroad companies refused to promote Mexican Americans. In fact, they imported temporary workers (*braceros*) from Mexico to do skilled work as electricians, pipe fitters, steamfitters, millwrights, and so forth. According to Paz, between 1943 and 1945 the railroads imported 15,000 *braceros*. The Railroad Brotherhood refused membership to Mexicans and Blacks who worked in track repair and maintenance. The Operating Brotherhoods of the Southern Pacific never consciously admitted Mexicans to the union until the early 1960s—making them ineligible for skilled jobs and promotions.

Paz verified the discrimination against steelworker Ramón Martínez, a 20-year veteran, who was placed in charge of a section of Spanish-speaking workers. When he learned that he was being paid \$50 a month less than the other foremen, Martínez complained. The reasons given for the wage differential were that he was not a citizen and that he did not have a high school education. Martínez attended night school and received a diploma, but the railroad company still refused to pay him wages on par with other foremen.⁵⁰

Castañeda offered in evidence that in Arizona, Mexicans comprised 8,000–10,000 of the 15,000–16,000 miners in the state, but that the copper barons restricted them to menial labor. According to Castañeda, Mexicans throughout the United States were paid less than Americans for equal work. In California, in 1940, Mexicans numbered about 457,900 out of a total population of 6,907,387; Los Angeles housed 315,000 Mexicans. As of the summer of 1942, only 5,000 Mexicans worked in the basic industries of that city. Further, Los Angeles County employed about 16,000 workers, only 400 of whom were Mexicans.⁵¹ FBI records provide data on the underrepresentation of Mexican Americans in the defense economy. A confidential report of January 14, 1944, titled “Racial Conditions (Spanish-Mexican Activities in Los Angeles Field Division),” claimed that only a couple of thousand Mexican Americans worked in the Los Angeles war plants. The same account reported that the Los Angeles Police Department employed 22 Mexican American officers out of a force of 2,547; the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department had 30 Spanish-surnamed deputies out of 821. The probation department employed three officers of Mexican extraction. Sadly, Mexicans were better represented in combat units, recruited to fight in a war ostensibly to ensure human rights abroad, something that they themselves were denied at home.⁵²

Elizabeth Escobedo sheds more light on the topic. Though the FEPC brought attention to the question of equality and institutional racism, it did little to correct the problems. For instance, it did not address gender inequality

in the workplace. After the war, Mexican American women were driven from the workplace, and the better-paying jobs went to returning white male veterans. Nevertheless, reports show that women during the war years were very active in using the due process of law to protect their rights, which implies that they were the object of disparaging and rude remarks by fellow workers. According to Escobedo, FEPC complaints filed in the Los Angeles area by Mexican Americans far outnumbered those of all other national-origin groups; in December 1944 alone they filed some 93 cases. Employers admitted to hiring only lighter-skinned Mexicans. Escobedo recorded a trove of case studies such as that of Guadalupe Cordero, who complained about Mexicans being replaced by inexperienced American “girls.”⁵³

Cold War Politics of Control

During the Cold War years that followed World War II, U.S. corporations consolidated huge fortunes made from war profiteering.⁵⁴ In 1945, the United States was an Empire and controlled more than an estimated 40 percent of the world's wealth and power. In comparison, the British Empire, at its peak, controlled 25 percent. Its global strategy for the war gave the United States a more global viewpoint of the world, which continued during the postwar years when the United States played a decisive role in “military, political, and economic questions in all regions of the world.” The preeminence of the United States gave the military and the citizenry the mindset of seeing the whole world as “our” oceans, “our” skies, and “our” empire.⁵⁵ Most capitalists left behind the memories of and the lessons from the Great Depression, forgetting that the New Deal saved their system, and that war made them richer by trillions of dollars. These capitalists felt that the “free world” needed a coherent ideology to successfully resist the Communist and waged a “Cold War” both internationally and nationally, and free-market capitalism suited their worldview perfectly. “After 1945 the major corporations in America grew larger.”⁵⁶

During the war, wages were frozen, while profits went unbridled. After the war, organized labor adopted a confrontational and militant posture; many industrialists blamed the unions—especially the CIO—for work stoppages. The captains of industry acted as if *they* won the war and equated worker demands with Communism, extending the Cold War to unions. Through generous contributions to politicians' campaigns, the industrialists pressured many locals to drop radical organizers, accusing them of being Communist or at best fellow travelers. Their main target was to stop the CIO, which gave workers, control over the workplace.

In 1947, Congress passed the Taft–Hartley Act, which neutered the Wagner Act of 1935 and its National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). It gave the states authority to pass right-to-work laws. No longer did workers have to abide by the will of the majority of workers if they wanted a union.

It gave anti-union forces the power to petition for another election. Further, the U.S. president could enjoin a strike, if he thought the walkouts imperiled national security. It empowered the courts to fine strikers for alleged violations of the injunction and to establish a 60-day cooling-off period. It prohibited the use of union dues for political contributions and required all labor leaders to take a loyalty oath swearing that they were not Communists. If labor leaders refused to take the oath, the law denied their union the services of the NLRB. Thus, Taft–Hartley empowered employers and weakened the collective bargaining.⁵⁷ Its purpose was to destroy labor unions and take control of government, and return to the Gilded Age, the late 1800s to the 1920s, when business leaders accumulated titanic fortunes.⁵⁸

These measures came at a time when Mexican Americans were just beginning to make gains in industrial unions. Luisa Moreno, elected vice president of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), was in charge of organizing food processing in Southern California. Mexican American women in increasing numbers became members of negotiating teams; more Latinas found their way in as shop stewards, and many became union officials as did their male counterparts. This increased involvement of Mexican Americans leadership roles led to the organization of more Chicano workers and CIO locals. Because of the growing influence of the CIO among Mexican American workers, the Teamsters Union, encouraged by the AFL, launched a jurisdictional fight with UCAPAWA, which had become the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (FTA).⁵⁹

Red-baiting and thuggery characterized the Teamsters' campaign. The state and the Catholic Church joined the campaign to clean out the Reds. The California Committee on Un-American Activities (better known as the Tenney Committee) called hearings and charged the leadership of progressive unions with being Communists. By 1947, Luisa Moreno retired to private life, and by the end of the decade, only three FTA locals survived. The Loyalty Oath, Taft–Hartley, and mechanization all took their toll. Soon afterward, immigration authorities deported Moreno because of her activism.⁶⁰

The state also hounded Josefina Fierro de Bright. Josefina was involved in social activism at the age of 18, while a student at UCLA; her mother and grandmother were Magonistas. She married screenwriter John Bright, a founder of the Screen Actors Guild, and soon became a community organizer. By 1939, she was an organizer for *El Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española* (Spanish-speaking congress). Through her Hollywood connections, she was able to raise money for Mexican American causes. While active in *El Congreso*, she was involved in the defense of the Sleepy Lagoon defendants, and continued her association with Luisa Moreno. Under the leadership of Josefina, the

Congreso attacked the Sinarquistas (The National Synarchist Union), a Mexican fascist group. She also criticized the schools for the treatment of Mexican children. In 1951 she unsuccessfully ran for Congress, supported by *la Asociación Nacional Mexico-Americana*, which was founded the year before; soon afterward she left for Mexico.⁶¹

The Communists Are Coming

Mexican Americans earned their rights with their blood during the war. Their patriotism—like that of Japanese Americans—and their loyalty were questioned.⁶² If they did not agree with the government and the excesses of capitalism, they were assumed to be disloyal. The G.I. Forum, LULAC, and most Mexican American organizations protested these charges. Yet they were under suspicion by default. Political scientist José Angel Gutiérrez is pioneering research in police surveillance. Under the Freedom of Information Act, he obtained documents proving that the FBI had spied on LULAC and on the G.I. Forum. In 1941, the FBI's Denver Office reported on a Colorado chapter of LULAC. Its officers included a county judge and a town marshal. The FBI also investigated leaders such as George I. Sánchez and Alonso Perales, reporting that Sánchez earned the distrust of the Mexican community when he converted to Reformed Methodism.

In May 1946, the FBI infiltrated a Los Angeles meeting of LULAC. An informant claimed without proof that participants had a long history of Communist activity. Again in the early 1950s, the FBI investigated LULAC. It was under suspicion because it had demanded racial integration.

FBI files show that it also conducted extensive surveillance of Los Angeles Mexican Americans during the Sleepy Lagoon Case and the so-called Zoot Suit Riots. The Bureau, highly critical of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, red-baiting its members, and singling out Eduardo Quevedo, chair of the Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth, and M. J. Avila, secretary of the Hollywood Bar Association. (The FBI contradicted reports of police malfeasance and praised local police who the FBI claimed bent over backward to get along with Mexicans.) The FBI also targeted the “Hispanic Movement” within the Catholic Church.⁶³

Postwar Opportunities

11.2 Describe the impact of the growth of second generation on the Mexican struggle for political and socioeconomic rights.

Opportunities ended for most women at the end of the war as the government embarked on a policy of removing women from the workforce so that they would make room for returning veterans and have more babies. From 1946 to 1963, the U.S. birthrate showed a marked upswing—a

phenomenon that social scientists labeled the “Baby Boom.” For many Mexican American males, the war became a leveler—many became leaders in combat. They had great expectations, but the dominant U.S. society was not ready to accept them as equals. Hence, they became much more demanding and exercised their vote; how active depended on where they lived. For example, in Boyle Heights, California, Mexicans lived within proximity to Jewish Americans during an era when Jews were leading the fight against racism and for civil liberties. At the time, Boyle Heights housed a sizeable Jewish American community, and many of its more liberal members played a role in politicizing the Mexican American community. In 1948, many in the Boyle Heights community campaigned for the Independent Progressive Party (IPP), which supported Henry Wallace for president. The IPP recruited many Mexicans to its ranks.⁶⁴

Though male job and education upward mobility, the ability to take advantage of these openings depended on their education and/or financial status. For instance, Californians received large windfalls of money from both the federal and state governments and benefits such as the G.I. Bill as well as establishment of the California State College System, which improved educational opportunity. In 1940, the white adults in California attained 9.8 years of schooling on average; the number rose to 11 by 1960. By contrast, Blacks achieved 8.1 grades in 1940, rising to 9.4 in 1960. Latinos had a median of 5.6 in 1940 and 7.7 in 1960. White American college graduates increased from 7.2 percent in 1940 to 10.4 in 1960 and to 21.2 in 1980, whereas the number of Black graduates grew from 2.6 percent in 1940 to 3.6 in 1960 and to 11.2 in 1980. The Latino graduates (mostly of Mexican origin) sputtered from 1.6 to 3.2 and to 5.4 percent in the respective years.⁶⁵

In education, Texas was a disaster: The median number of years of education was 3.5 for Mexican Americans in 1950—half that of California—compared with 10.3 for whites and 7.0 for non-whites. In San Antonio, the median number of years of education for Mexican Americans was 4.5, half that of the general population of the city. Cities like Tucson mirrored California where “By 1940, nearly 75 percent of the Mexican work force was still in blue-collar occupations [in Tucson], compared with only 36 percent of Anglo workers,” who held 96.5 percent of the white-collar and professional positions. Mexicans made up 54.5 percent of the unskilled labor, although they comprised only 30 percent of the city’s workforce. Tucson in 1950 mirrored the rest of the Southwest: The median number of school years completed by Mexican Americans in the city was 6.5. Many returning Mexican American veterans felt that their community simply did not have the educational human capital to take advantage of the new opportunities.⁶⁶

The positive trend was that the upward growth in population proved that numbers mattered. The U.S. Census reported that in 1940 Mexicans numbered 1,346,000 or 0.9 percent; in 1950, they numbered 1,736,000 or 1.0 percent;

and the 1960 Census counted 3,464,999 Spanish-surnamed persons. By 1970, Mexican origin population was estimated to be under 5 million. That number grew to 8,740,000 or 3.9 percent in 1980.⁶⁷ These figures are flawed and represent a serious undercount; at the same time, they suggest the power of numbers making the point that the numbers become more accurate with the growth of power of a particular group.

Toward a Civil Rights Agenda

In 1946, Judge Paul J. McCormick, in the U.S. District Court in Southern California, heard the *Méndez v. Westminster School District* case and ruled the segregation of Mexican children unconstitutional. Gonzalo, a Mexican American, and Felicitas Méndez, a Puerto Rican, took the leadership in filing the case. On April 14, 1947, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed the lower court decision, holding that Mexicans and other children were entitled to “the equal protection of the laws,” and that neither language nor race could be used as a reason to segregate them. In response to the *Méndez* case, the Associated Farmers of Orange County launched a bitter red-baiting campaign against the Mexican communities.⁶⁸

On June 15, 1948, in another segregation case, Judge Ben H. Rice Jr., U.S. District Court, Western District of Texas, found in *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* that the school district had violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection rights of the Mexican children. The *Mendez* and the *Delgado* ruling set precedents for the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954. They also set precedent for the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954), which held that the Fourteenth Amendment protected Mexican Americans. Yet the court found that Mexican Americans was not an identifiable ethnic minority.⁶⁹

Considerable interaction existed between LULAC and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the 1940s and 1950s. In November 1946, in Orange County, California, LULAC, with the assistance of Fred Ross (who later helped launch the Community Service Organization), initiated a campaign supporting Proposition 11 of the Fair Employment Practices Act, which prohibited discrimination in employment. LULAC chapters went door to door registering people to vote. This organizational work was crucial in ensuring the civil rights that Mexican Americans and other Latinos take for granted today. The downside was that in 1947 the district attorney pressured LULAC to get rid of Ross, red-baiting him; Ross left for Los Angeles.⁷⁰

The American G.I. Forum

Returning Mexican American war veterans were denied many services because of their race. For instance, the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars chapters refused to admit Mexicans as members. Recognizing the lack of service for Mexican American veterans, Dr. Hector

Pérez García founded the American G.I. Forum in Corpus Christi, in response to the refusal of a funeral home in Three Rivers, Texas to bury Pvt. Felix Longoria, who had died in the Philippines during World War II. This outrageously racist act attracted thousands of new members to the G.I. Forum, all demanding justice; the incident was very important in politicizing new generation of activists. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson intervened and, with the cooperation of the Longoria family, had Longoria's remains buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full honors.⁷¹

Forum members insisted Longoria should be buried with full honors in his hometown, and the compromise of burying him in Arlington Cemetery was wrong. Tejanos vowed that never again would they accept second-class citizenship. Meanwhile, Texas officials claimed that they never denied Longoria a proper burial and accused the Forum of exploiting the controversy. At hearings of the state Good Neighbor Commission, Dr. García and the Forum's attorney, Gus García, did a brilliant job of proving the Forum's case by presenting evidence of "Mexican" and "white" cemeteries and racist burial practices in Texas. However, the all-white commission found that there had been no discrimination. The blatant bias of the commissioners further strained race relations, and from that point on the Forum became more proactive. "Unlike LULAC, whose policy was not to involve itself directly in electoral politics, the Forum openly advocated getting out the vote and endorsing candidates."⁷² The Forum did not limit membership to the middle class and those fluent in English, like LULAC did. It was less accommodating to the feelings of Americans.⁷³

Like most of the other Mexican American organizations of the time, the Forum stressed the importance of education. The G.I. Forum's motto was, "Education is our freedom, and freedom should be everybody's business." This new aggressiveness of Mexican Americans in Texas and elsewhere signaled a new intensity of involvement in civil rights (see Chapter 12).

Controlling Mexicans

During the 1940s in California, Mexican American Movement (MAM) membership dropped as it evolved from a student organization into a professional association. After the war, Mexican Americans looked beyond single issues, and veterans became more involved in local politics. By the 1950s, Mexican Americans were also increasingly involved in national politics, as a response to the expanding powers of the federal government. Certainly the fact that there was more opportunity in California to assimilate may also have played a role in the declining membership of MAM. A more probable explanation for the decline of MAM is that the youth of the 1930s were now older and also veterans, and integrated themselves in national organizations such as LULAC, the G.I. Forum, and emerging organizations such as the Community Service Organization. Influenced by

leaders such as Saul Alinsky and Fred Ross, more Mexican Americans began to think of community organizing as a path toward political power.⁷⁴

Changes in Mexican American community went unnoticed by the rest of the society, which continued to perceive them as foreigners. Americans ignored the number of lives sacrificed by the Mexican Americans during World War II, which were disproportionate to their numbers. Although the Mexican American leadership continued to claim they were white in order to qualify for equal rights under the constitution, racism remained an issue. The war did not end racism; the Mexican American youth were still targeted.

As large numbers of U.S. Mexicans moved into the cities, police harassment increased. Many police officers resented the use of Spanish language and what they perceived as the "cocky demeanor" of second-generation Mexican youth. Lupe Leyvas, the sister of Henry Leyvas, recalled an incident that marked a change in her attitude towards her rights. She and her family would sit on the porch of their South Central home, and every time a police car cruised the neighborhood, her mother would order everyone inside the house until one day Lupe rebelled and said, "Why should we go inside, we are not doing anything wrong."

The stigma of the pachuco continued into the postwar era—law enforcement officers treated all Mexican youth as delinquents and wanted them to look down when spoken to. In July 1946, a sheriff's deputy in Monterey Park, California, shot Eugene Montenegro in the back; the 13-year-old was seen climbing out of a window of a private residence and did not stop when the deputy ordered him to. Eugene was 5'3," unarmed, and an honors student at St. Alphonse parochial school. The press, covering the incident, portrayed Eugene's mother as irrational because she confronted the deputy who had mortally wounded her son.

In September 1947 Bruno Cano, a member of the United Furniture Workers of America Local 576, was brutally beaten by the police in East Los Angeles. Cano attempted to stop police from assaulting three Mexican youths at a tavern. Local 576, the Civil Rights Congress (CRC),⁷⁵ and the American Veterans Committee (Belvedere Chapter) protested Cano's beating. One of the officers, William Keyes, had a history of brutality; earlier in 1947, he shot two Mexicans in the back. Keyes faced no disciplinary action either in those shootings or in Cano's beating.

In March 1948, Keyes and his partner E. R. Sánchez shot down 17-year-old Agustino Salcido. According to Keyes and Sánchez, Salcido offered to sell them stolen watches. Instead of taking Salcido to the police station, they escorted him to "an empty, locked building," and shot him. At the coroner's inquest, Keyes claimed that unarmed Salcido had attempted to escape during interrogation. Witnesses contradicted Keyes, but the inquest exonerated him.⁷⁶

The Los Angeles CIO Council and community organizations held a "people's trial" attended by nearly 600 Mexicans. Film star Margo Albert (María Marguerita Guadalupe Teresa

Estela Bolado), who acted in the film *Lost Horizon*, and was married to actor Eddie Albert, played a leadership role with the CRC. The mock trial found Keyes guilty. On top of Keyes's notoriety, pressure mounted on Judge Stanley Moffatt to accept the complaint. Meanwhile, Guillermo Gallegos, a witness to the shooting, was harassed and his life was threatened, and Judge Moffatt was red-baited by defense attorney Joseph Scott. The *Hollywood Citizen-News* accused Moffatt of being a Communist because he ran for Congress on the Henry Wallace ticket. The jury was deadlocked—seven for acquittal and five for conviction.⁷⁷

In a new trial, Keyes appeared before a law-and-order judge. Keyes waived a jury trial and was acquitted because the judge found insufficient evidence to convict him. Yet the prosecution had proved that Keyes and Sánchez pumped bullets into Salcido, that Gallegos saw him fire the gun at Salcido, and that Keyes's gun killed Salcido. Between 1947 and 1956, the L.A. Community Service Organization conducted 35 investigations of police misconduct.⁷⁸ Enrique Buelna makes connections between the Salcido case, the *Amigos de Wallace* (Friends of [Henry] Wallace) and the pivotal role the case played in bringing together the activist community of the time. Besides the Salcido case, the battles over the FEPC, the Taft–Hartley bill, the Wallace Presidential Campaign in 1948, and the formation of *la Asociación Nacional México Americana* (ANMA) in 1949 gave rise to a new current of activism among Mexican Americans, which included activists such as the Luna sisters, Julia Mount and Celia Rodríguez, Luisa Moreno, and Josefina Fierro de Bright. In addition to this radical core, returning veterans joined the Community Service Organization, which was pursuing a political agenda.⁷⁹

Texas housed an estimated one million Mexican Americans. During the postwar era, Mexican American organizations sponsored anti-poll tax drives, pressured local and state officials to investigate cases of police brutality, challenged segregation, and struggled to eliminate inequality in the education system. Mexican Americans would often challenge the refusal of local barbers to offer their services to them and many suffered savage beatings in return. LULAC and the G.I. Forum used the judicial process to effect changes, with the view of achieving equal protection under the law.

Alonso Perales documented dozens of cases of segregation and police malfeasance. In his book, *Are We Good Neighbors?* Perales lays out his case. Discrimination demoralized the U.S. Mexican community. For example, in February 1945, Reginaldo Romo was playing dice in a saloon after-hours. August Zimmerman, a peace officer in Ugalde, pistol-whipped him. In San Angelo, Texas, Pvt. Ben García Aguirre, 20, was beaten unconscious by about 15 Americans in September 1945. Authorities apprehended none of the assailants. In February 1946, Felipe Guarjado, Antonio Hinojosa, and Pascual Ortega were driving from San Antonio to Laredo. In Devine, Texas, they entered the

Monte Carlos Inn, where Americans beat and robbed them. They filed a complaint, but the Justice of the Peace instead filing charges against the perpetrators filed charges against them. In another instance of police brutality, in March 1946, Sheriff E. E. Pond of Zavala County and two of his officers beat Manuel Delgado, 22. Delgado asked Pond not to push him, whereupon the sheriff ripped off his shirt. The other officers beat and arrested Delgado, whom the court fined \$63.⁸⁰

Colonel Homer Garrison Jr. was appointed the new director of the Department of Public Safety, which gave a boost to the Texas Rangers. Garrison appointed Rangers as plainclothesmen, detectives, and Highway Patrol officers. In World War II, they rounded up “enemy aliens” to protect the “homeland.” *Los Rinches* (a pejorative reference to Texas Rangers) were the symbol of American control—especially after World War II, when they ensured Mexicans and labor were kept in their place in the caste social order. The *Rinches* made certain that labor organizing did not survive in the Valley. Despite this obstacle, unionization continued in Texas; in 1953, the combined membership of the Texas State Federation of Labor (TSFL) and the CIO reached 375,000.

The war extended occupational opportunities beyond agriculture to Mexicans. After 1940, there was a massive relocation of Mexicans to the city. In the Fort Worth area, Mexicans moved into service jobs such as busboys, elevator operators, and other service workers. Still, the better-paying corporations such as Consolidated Fort Worth and North American Aircraft of Dallas were out of reach and hired only a limited number of Mexican American workers. In the postwar era, rapid unionization of industries had a limited impact on Mexican workers because unions relied on the seniority system and few Mexicans qualified for membership in trade unions; thus, fewer were promoted.

Farm Labor Militancy

On November 18, 1948, Bill Dredge wrote an article in the *Los Angeles Times* titled “Machines and Men Bringing in Cotton.” San Joaquin Valley planters were starting to use robots to pick cotton. Nevertheless, during the transition, 100,000 farm laborers were still needed to pick the cotton crop. Although Filipinos and other ethnics were involved, by 1948 it was still a Mexican affair. Yet as important as the Mexicans were, they were still considered “standby.” Farmworkers had fewer opportunities. Agribusiness was very successful in lobbying government for subsidies and exemptions from worker protection regulations under the National Labor Relations.⁸¹

In the face of the awesome power of agribusiness, and despite its ability to create huge labor pools, and the use of the *bracero* to depress wages and break strikes, farmworkers continued to organize. In October 1947, at the Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation at Arvin, California, workers picketed the

Di Giorgio farm. The National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) Local 218 led the strike. Joseph Di Giorgio was a power house, refused the union's demands. *Fortune* magazine dubbed him the "Kublai Khan of Kern County"; in 1946, Di Giorgio earned \$18 million in sales. When Di Giorgio refused the union demands, the the union struck.

As with other agricultural strikes, local government, the chambers of commerce, the American Legion, the Boy Scouts, the Associated Farmers, and the Farm Bureaus, lined up in support of Di Giorgio. Hugh M. Burns of the California Senate Committee on Un-American Activities and the reactionary State Senator Jack Tenney held hearings investigating Communist involvement, but they failed to uncover any evidence. Through the media, Di Giorgio controlled the narrative. In November 1949, a subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor held hearings at Bakersfield, California. Representative Cleveland M. Bailey (West Virginia) presided, and Representatives Richard M. Nixon (California) and Tom Steed (Oklahoma) joined him. The two other members of the subcommittee, Thurston B. Morton (Kentucky) and Leonard Irving (Missouri), did not attend the hearings. The proceedings took two days, hardly enough time to conduct an in-depth investigation. The Di Giorgio Corporation filed a \$2 million libel suit against the union and the Hollywood Film Council, for the controversial film *Poverty in the Land of Plenty*, produced in the spring of 1948 Di Giorgio wanted the subcommittee to prove the documentary libeled him. In the 1947 Arvin strike case, the subcommittee found nothing, so Congressman Bailey made no move to file an official report on the strike. Nor did he mention the controversy between the union and Di Giorgio in the report that the subcommittee eventually made to the committee.

In March 1949, Di Giorgio—still intent on an official condemnation of the union—commissioned Representative Thomas H. Werdel from Kern County to file a damaging report, signed by Steed, Morton, and Nixon, in the appendix of the *Congressional Record*. The appendix serves no official function other than giving members of Congress a forum to publish material sent them by constituents. The report, "Agricultural Labor at Di Giorgio Farms, California," claimed that the strike was "solely one for the purpose of organization" and that workers had no grievances, for "wages, hours, working conditions, and living conditions have never been a real issue in the Di Giorgio strike," and concluded that *Poverty in the Land of Plenty* was libelous.

The phony report dealt a deathblow to the NFLU. The California Federation of Labor (CFL) leadership ordered Local 218 to settle the libel suit (the CFL would not pay defense costs) and demanded that the strike be ended. Di Giorgio agreed to settle the suit for \$1 on the conditions that the NFLU plead guilty to the judgment, admitting libel; that they remove the film from circulation and recall all prints; that they reimburse the corporation for attorney

fees; and that they call off the strike. Werdel, Steed, Morton, and Nixon all knew that the report had no official status and was, at best, an opinion. They knowingly deceived the public in order to break the strike.⁸²

From this point on, the NFLU was powerless. Every time workers stopped production, growers used *braceros* and undocumented workers to break the strike. The departments of Labor, Agriculture, Justice, and State acted as the planters' personal agents. Even liberal Democratic administrations favored the growers, with little difference existing between Republican Governor Goodwin Knight and Democratic Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr.

Renting Mexicans

After placing the Japanese Americans in concentration camps, the United States had two alternatives: simply open the border and allow Mexican workers to enter the United States unencumbered, or negotiate with Mexico for an agreed-upon number of Mexican *braceros*. The Mexican government, however, would not permit this practice, insisting on a contract that protected the rights of its workers. In 1942, the two governments agreed to the Emergency Labor Program, under which both governments would supervise the recruitment of *braceros*. The program was literally an emergency program and no one complained.⁸³

The *bracero* contract stipulated that Mexican workers would not displace domestic workers, exempted *braceros* from military service, and obligated the U.S. government to prevent discrimination against these Mexican workers. The contract also regulated transportation, housing, and wages of the *braceros*. Under this agreement, about 220,000 *braceros* were imported into the United States from 1942 to 1947.

At first, many farmers opposed the *bracero* agreement, preferring the World War I arrangement under which farmers recruited directly in Mexico with no government interference. Texas growers in particular wanted the government to open the border. During the first year, only a handful of U.S. growers participated in the program. States like Texas always had all the undocumented workers they needed, and they wanted to continue controlling the "free market." They did not want the federal government to regulate the Mexican workers' wages and housing. Growers disliked the 30¢ an hour minimum wage, claiming that this was the first step in federal farm-labor legislation that would inflate wages. Texas growers thus boycotted the program in 1942 and moved to avoid the agreement.

The executive branch did not receive congressional approval for the *bracero* program until 1943, when Congress passed Public Law 45. This law began the "administered migration" of Mexicans into the United States. Initially, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) oversaw the program; later, due to grower pressure, the president transferred supervisory responsibilities to the War Food Administration.

Under section 5(g), the commissioner of immigration could lift the statutory limitations, if such an action was vital to the war effort. Almost immediately, farmers pressured the commissioner to use the escape clause, and to leave the border unilaterally open and unregulated.

Mexicans flooded into border areas, where farmers eagerly employed them. The Mexican government protested this violation of the agreement. However, Mexican authorities were persuaded to allow the workers who had already entered outside the contract agreement to remain for one year; but it was made clear that, in the future, Mexico would not tolerate uncontrolled migration.

In the summer of 1943, Texas growers finally agreed to recruit *braceros*. But the Mexican government refused to issue permits for Texas because of racism and brutal transgressions against Mexican workers. Governor Coke Stevenson, in an attempt to placate the Mexican government, induced the Texas legislature to pass the so-called Caucasian Race Resolution, which affirmed the rights of all Caucasians to equal treatment within Texas. Since most Texans did not consider Mexicans as Caucasians, the law was not relevant. Governor Stevenson attempted to relieve tensions by publicly condemning racism. The Mexican government seemed on the verge of relenting when they learned of more racist incidents in Texas. On September 4, 1943, Stevenson established the Good Neighbor Commission of Texas, financed by federal funds, supposedly to end discrimination toward Mexicans through better understanding.

Not all *braceros* worked on farms; by August 1945, 67,704 *braceros* held jobs with U.S. railroads. The work was physically demanding and often hazardous. Records show deaths resulting from railroad accidents, sunstroke, and heat prostration. Abuses of the contract agreement were also frequent. Employers did not pay many of the *braceros* their wages, or when paid, involuntary deductions were made—for example, for unsolicited meals. Some growers worked the *braceros* for 12 hours while paying them only for eight. In December 1943, the *braceros* went on strike at the Southern Pacific at Live Oaks, California, protesting the dismissal of three of their comrades.

From 1943 to 1947, Texas growers continued to press for the importation of more *braceros*; the Mexican government refused because the Texas growers continued to mistreat them. Finally, in October 1947, the Mexican government relented and agreed to issue permits to Texas. Meanwhile, U.S. authorities had shipped some 46,972 *braceros* to Washington, Oregon, and Idaho during the first four years of the program. Mexican workers often were ill-prepared for the cold winters of the Yakima Valley and the Northwest; and managers at the prison-like camps did not speak Spanish. Food-poisoning incidents also occurred frequently. Townspeople, overtly racist, posted “No Mexicans, White Trade Only” signs in beer parlors and pool halls. *Braceros* frequently revolted and, throughout World War II, they struggled to improve these conditions. By 1945, the demand

for Mexican *braceros* decreased as Mexican Americans began infiltrating the Northwest from Texas.

Labor shortages ceased after the war, but the *bracero* program continued. The U.S. government acted as a labor contractor at taxpayers’ expense. It assured nativists that workers would return to Mexico once they finished picking the crops. Growers did not have to worry about labor disputes and always had a large supply of rented workers. Government authorities, in collusion with the growers, glutted the labor market with *braceros* to depress wages and to break strikes. Border enforcement was often slackened to allow more workers to enter. This was done by limiting government allocations to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), thus controlling the number of border patrol officers. This ensured an open border to permit a constant flow of undocumented laborers into the United States.

After the war Mexico lost control of the process; when negotiations began to renew the contract, Mexico did not have the same leverage it did during the war. Its economy was dependent on the money brought back by the workers. The United States, now in a stronger negotiating position, pressured Mexico to continue the program on U.S. terms, with less emphasis on wages and working conditions. The 1947 agreement allowed U.S. growers to recruit their own workers. The Mexican government bargained for recruitment from the interior of Mexico and wanted more guarantees for its citizens. Few of its demands were met. Meanwhile, the U.S. government permitted growers to hire undocumented workers and to certify them on the spot.

In October 1948, Mexican officials finally took a hard line, refusing to sign *bracero* contracts if Texas farmers did not pay workers \$3 per hundredweight (cwt) for picked cotton instead of the \$2 per cwt offered by growers in other states. The Mexican government, still concerned about racism in Texas, continued to press for recruitment from the interior rather than at the border. Border recruitment compounded hardships on border towns, with workers frequently traveling thousands of miles and then not getting selected as *braceros*. Border towns grew in population by more than 1,000 percent since 1920. Unemployment rates remained extremely high, and the border towns continued to function as employment centers for U.S. industry.

The Truman administration sided with the ranchers. During a presidential whistle-stop tour in October 1948, El Paso farm agents, sugar company officials, and immigration agents apprised Truman of their problems with Mexican authorities. Shortly after Truman left, the INS allowed Mexicans to pour across the bridge into the United States, with or without Mexico’s approval. Farmers waited with trucks, and a Great Western Sugar Company representative had a special train ready for the *braceros*. The United States’ unilateral opening of the border destroyed Mexico’s bargaining position. It could only accept official “regrets” from the United States and continue negotiations. A new

agreement reaffirmed the growers' right to recruit *braceros* directly on either side of the border.

From January 23 to February 5, 1954, the United States again unilaterally opened the border. There was nothing Mexico could do to prevent the flood of unemployed, hungry workers into the United States. Left with little choice, Mexico signed a contract favorable to the United States. The gunboat diplomacy of U.S. authorities flagrantly violated international law and caused bitter resentment in Latin America at the United States' reliance on the "big stick" policy and Mexico's obvious humiliation over its failure to control its border and its citizens. Opening the border ended the labor shortage, and served notice to Mexico that it should negotiate because the United States had the power to get all the workers it wanted from Mexico—agreement or no agreement. The United States would act unilaterally, and it completely controlled the *bracero* program. In fact, many members of Congress suggested that the government

abandon the pretense of the *bracero* program and simply open the border.

The steady decline of *braceros* beginning in the 1960s marks a convergence of several factors working against the program: resentment of the Mexican government, grievances of the *braceros*, increased opposition by domestic labor, and—probably the most important—changes in agricultural labor-saving techniques and in the U.S. economy. It was clear that the farmers' claim that they could not find sufficient domestic labor was a pretext. The 1958 recession intensified organized labor's opposition to the *bracero* program, and the election of a Democratic president in 1960 moved the executive branch and Congress toward a pro-labor position. The AFL–CIO also put pressure on Democrats to end the *bracero* program. Congress and the Administration, confronted with massive lobbying from labor and from Mexican organizations, allowed the *bracero* contract to lapse on December 31, 1964.⁸⁴

Conclusion: The Consequences of World War II

Historian Dennis Nodín Valdés writes, "Stimulated by World War II, corporate agriculture in the Midwest established an increasingly sophisticated mechanism to recruit, hire and employ workers to meet expanding production and offset the tighter labor market."⁸⁵ As a consequence, Texas Mexicans moved in larger numbers to the Midwest. Housing and medical care was primitive, and entire families, including children, worked. Many of the agricultural interests were huge. For instance, in 1950, Michigan Field Crops, Inc., organized during World War II, included as members 8,767 beet growers, 6,800 pickle growers, and an estimated 3,300 growers of miscellaneous crops. That year alone they imported 5,300 Texas Mexican farmworkers. The corridor leading from Texas had been worn even before the war, as contractors transported Mexicans laborers north. Once they got the hang of it, large numbers migrated on their own. The war did little to improve opportunity for Texas Mexicans in the Midwest, with many depending on seasonal work as pickers in cherry, cucumber, tomato, and the familiar sugar beet farms. The grower associations used the reserve army of *braceros* to discipline domestic labor.

Concurrently, Texas Mexicans migrated in larger numbers to the Pacific Northwest. The war helped forge the corridor to the Yakima Valley in southern Washington and other farm areas, spilling over to urban areas as well. By the 1940s, Chicano communities in the Yakima Valley were formed, and by the end of the decade this region supported a Spanish-language radio. Erasmo Gamboa points out that over 20 percent of the 220,640 *braceros* shipped to the United States between 1943 and 1947, a total of 46,954, were sent to the Pacific Northwest to work in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon.⁸⁶ By contrast, in the late 1940s California received

8 percent of the *bracero* contract labor, and Texas, 56 percent. Many Texas Mexican workers were pushed out by cotton growers who abused the *bracero* program and created surplus labor. This led to a lowering of cotton wages in Texas by 11 percent, accelerating the Mexican-origin migration to the Midwest and the Northwest.⁸⁷

Besides taking Mexicans north, labor contractors hauled workers throughout the state of Texas. They followed the migrant stream, picking cotton along the coast, throughout Central Texas, and into West Texas. Many migrants, whether they went north or remained in Texas, returned for the winter to their base town where many owned small shacks. They would work at casual jobs until the trek began again. By the postwar era, these South Texas towns were interwoven by a network of contractors who furnished cheap labor to growers. Organized labor and Mexican American organizations in Texas frantically attempted to stop the manipulation of the *bracero* and undocumented worker by grower interests as the number of *braceros* contracted in Texas increased from 42,218 in 1949 to 158,704 five years later.⁸⁸ Thus, the escalation of the *bracero* program and World War II contributed to the geographic dispersal of Mexican-origin laborers. By the late 1940s, significant numbers were moving out of the Southwest.

In all of their new locations, Mexican Americans deeply rooted their communities, changing the cultural landscapes of their new homes.

Fighting for Education as a Right

A disturbing statistic was the low education achievement of most Mexican Americans that in turn limited the cumulative benefits that the community was entitled to as a

consequence of its service to the country during World War II (1941–1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953). The G.I. Bill or Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 gave educational benefits to mostly white male veterans but capped them for those with less than a high school education. Discrimination and a lack of access to these entitlements gave rise to the American G.I. Forum (1948).⁸⁹

“As recently as 1950, 34 percent of the total population 25 or older had completed four years of more of high school”⁹⁰ This problem was addressed, and by the year 2000 80 percent of Americans achieved a high school education. It did not escape Mexican American leaders that the end of the war brought new opportunities to white citizens that were denied to African Americans and Latinos and Latinas. For instance, the G.I. Bill and the development of the California State College System gave millions of Americans the means to go to college.

In California, white people had achieved a median education of the eleventh grade, qualifying just under half its population for higher education—blacks achieved a median of 9.4 grades in 1960 and Latinos had a median of 7.7 in 1960. Texas was even worse: the median number of years of education for Latinos was 3.5 in 1950—half that of California—compared with 10.3 for whites and 7.0 for nonwhites. In San Antonio, the median number of years was 4.5 for Latinos, half that of the general

population of the city. Cities like Tucson, Arizona, mirrored California. In 1950, the median number of school years that Mexican Americans completed in the city was 6.5. Many returning Mexican American veterans felt that their community simply did not have the educational human capital to take advantage of the new opportunities.⁹¹

Mexican Americans recognized that a lack of educational attainment was a barrier to their equality so the postwar period saw a proliferation of national education conferences. The First Regional Conference on Education of the Spanish-Speaking People in the Southwest took place at the University of Texas at Austin on December 13–15, 1945, focusing on school segregation and bilingual education. George I. Sánchez, Carlos E. Castañeda of the University of Texas at Austin, A. L. Campa of the University of New Mexico, and San Antonio attorney Alonso S. Perales took the lead. Delegates from the five southwestern states attended. The *Santa Fe New Mexican* reported that Sánchez chaired a New Mexico conference that dealt “specifically with fundamental problems in the education of Spanish-speaking people.” Carey McWilliams keynoted the event. In the next two decades, Sánchez helped define Mexican American education and other civil rights issues. Education became the prime goal of the Mexican American or the GI generation. They were in large part second-generation the survivors of the repatriation and World War 2.

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