

DECADE OF CHANGE: ORIGINS OF A MEXICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY IN
TEXAS, 1910-1920

THESIS

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by

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In 1992, at the age of eight, I randomly grabbed a book from the shelf of my school library, a biography about Hernando de Soto that unknowingly impacted the future direction of my higher education. That book initiated a passion within me for history, and ever since then I have invested myself in understanding the past. This Thesis is the culmination of those efforts, but I never would have reached this point if it were not for a number of people that helped me along the way.

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PROLOGUE

The tumultuous events of the 1910s in Texas such as the displacement of Mexican landowners, Anglo land acquisition, border uprisings, and general racialized violence combined with the Mexican Revolution, World War I, and the draft laid the foundation of a Mexican American identity based on citizenship. During the first decade of the twentieth century, an Anglo-American dominated farming society developed in the border region of Texas. That new order instituted strict concepts of segregation and racial superiority towards people of Mexican descent based on Anglo attitudes of their own racial superiority.¹ By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century separate and inferior facilities for Mexicans in education, entertainment, and work were commonplace within farming communities across Texas. Members of the Texas-Mexican community initially reacted with a push for solidarity in 1911 with *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*. The conference was organized by the Texas-Mexican community to find a way to respond to the inequality and segregation. Delegates at the conference proffered a very nationalistic Mexican identity in their speeches and rhetoric, and called for unity by using Mexican symbols and examples in their struggle for civil rights. The events of the 1910s, however, resulted in divisions within the Texas-Mexican community

¹ There is a certain clarification that is necessary in regards to the terminology used for the identification of the different groups of Mexican descent in this paper. A “Mexican” refers to any person of Mexican descent regardless of their citizenship, and “Texas-Mexican” indicates a person of Mexican descent that lived in Texas, regardless of their citizenship. The term, “Mexican national,” refers to a person of Mexican descent who was a citizen of Mexico, and a “Mexican American,” is a person of Mexican descent that was a citizen of the United States.

that undermined unification efforts and led Mexican Americans to pursue a separate identity from Mexicans more generally, as they struggled for civil rights based on their citizenship to the United States.

The 1910s were a turbulent decade for Texas as anxiety and distrust between the Anglo-American and Texas-Mexican community intensified. Numerous immigrant Mexican nationals entered Texas to escape the Mexican Revolution and a series of violent raids led by Mexicans occurred along the border in 1915 and 1916 that targeted Anglo-Americans in retaliation for segregation and racial injustices. World War I also created distress as some Mexicans, who enjoyed few of the benefits of U. S. citizenship, avoided the draft, and the press propagandized about a German-Mexican conspiracy. Mexican Americans loyal to the United States, who had denounced the actions of fellow members of the Texas-Mexican community during the 1910s, found themselves lumped together by many Anglo-Americans as Mexicans, a pejorative word at the time that implied a person of lower standing who could not be trusted. As a result many Mexican Americans distanced themselves from the Texas-Mexican community during the 1920s, and developed an identity based on the emphasis of their citizenship to the United States.

Many early Mexican American civil rights leaders were World War I veterans and they formed Mexican American organizations that demonstrated a loyalty to the United States through the patriotic use of American cultural symbols and the English language. The *Orden Hijos de America*, the Order Knights of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens were all Mexican American organizations founded in the 1920s to uplift the Mexican American community in Texas by ensuring the rights granted to them as citizens of the United States. These efforts, though, were a result of the fear and

tension that had permeated Texas during the 1910s, the racism that still prevailed after the war, and led to the emergence of a Mexican American identity based on citizenship.

Previously, the Mexican Revolution, the border raids, and WWI led members of the Texas-Mexican community to choose an identity that was based either on an identification with Mexico or the United States. Throughout the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the southern border of the United States had not constituted a solid barrier between the U. S. and Mexico. The U. S. Border Patrol did not even come into official existence until the Immigration Act of 1924. People moved freely across the border between Texas and Mexico with few restrictions placed on railroads and foot traffic.² A relatively open border existed between Mexico and Texas, with an easily passable river as the only physical barrier that separated two sides that bore little differentiation. The border region of Texas was culturally very similar to northern Mexico throughout the nineteenth century and residents of Mexican descent, the majority, did not have to choose a loyalty or identification to only one side of the border. The arrival of numerous Anglo-American farmers during the first decade of the twentieth century, transformed the traditional ranching society in the region, and helped cause the events of the 1910s that, in turn led to the emergence of a Mexican American identity and the development of a more stringent border as a cultural divide.

After Texas Independence in 1836, Anglo-Americans bought up massive amounts of land for ranching in the border region in Texas where the Mexican ranching culture dominated. Mexicans remained the majority population along the border during the

² George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49; Zolberg, Aristide R. *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America*. Cambridge (MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 266.

nineteenth century and Anglo ranchers learned and understood the Mexican cultural practices. There were clear social stratifications that were typically understood by the Anglo-Americans between land owning, educated Mexicans, and landless, uneducated Mexicans. The ranching society of Texas and the relationship between Texas-Mexicans and Anglo-Americans eroded during the first decades of the twentieth century as an Anglo-American farming society developed that did not recognize or honor the cultural practices of Mexicans.

Anglo-American farmers from across the United States migrated to South Texas during the first decade of the twentieth century, some with rigid concepts of segregation and discrimination. Ranches in South Texas were broken up as railroads and irrigation canals were to make way for the development of agricultural fields situated around newly established farm towns. The farming communities that sprung up were different than the traditional nineteenth century ranching communities of South Texas. Mexican Americans found themselves in an unequal Anglo-American dominated farming society that instituted not only segregation towards migrant Mexican nationals that worked in the agricultural fields, but whose policies targeted the Texas-Mexican community as a whole. Along with segregation, Anglo-Americans often reacted harshly towards the Texas-Mexican community and assaults and intimidation with the help and complicity of local authorities was common. As a result, a minority of Mexicans turned to violent resistance against the new Anglo-American social order.

In 1915 and 1916 a series of violent raids occurred along the border region of Texas and Mexico led by Mexicans, some of whom were Mexican Americans unhappy with the prevailing segregation and intimidation by Anglos towards the Texas-Mexican

community. Small semi-organized groups of Texas-Mexicans and Mexican nationals staged several raids mainly in South Texas, targeting Anglo-Americans. Authorities in Texas, Anglo-American civilians, and the Texas Rangers retaliated with assaults, murders, and lynchings against Mexicans. A sense of trepidation developed between the Anglo-American and Texas-Mexican communities that continued throughout the second half of the 1910s.

Initially, World War I remained in the background for most residents of Texas during the Border Uprisings. When the United States edged closer to entering the war in 1917, a sensationalized German-Mexican conspiracy theory developed and added to the angst that already festered between Anglos and Mexicans. Alleged German agents in Mexico and the Zimmerman telegram in 1917 perpetuated the conjecture of a German-Mexican conspiracy in Texas. The exodus of mostly Mexican nationals hoping to avoid the draft in 1917 compounded the suspicion that existed in Texas. Anglo-Americans accused all Mexicans, including Mexican Americans, of being traitors and unpatriotic towards the United States.

Anglo reprisals for the Border Uprisings and hostility over Mexicans avoiding the draft drove a divide in the Texas-Mexican community, as Mexican Americans looked for a way to separate themselves from the characterization of an untrustworthy, violent, and unpatriotic "Mexican." The concept of citizenship became a key element in the ability of Mexican Americans to recreate their identity as a unique and independent identity from Mexicans who identified with Mexico more than the United States. During World War I Mexican Americans fought alongside men of many different ethnic backgrounds all of whom were citizens of the United States. Mexican American veterans declared their

citizenship when they returned from the war. They pointed to their service and sacrifice, and demanded the privileges and rights that their fellow comrades in the army were granted as loyal citizens of the United States. During the 1920s many Mexican Americans fought in World War I and chose to invest their identity in the formation of organizations exclusively for United States citizens of Mexican descent. Members of these newly developed Mexican American organizations, *Orden Hijos de America* and Order Knights of America, displayed their citizenship and identity as Americans to the greater Texas society through their goals and the use of culturally American symbols like the song, “Star Spangled Banner” and a prayer written by George Washington.

The reactions and responses of both the Mexican and Anglo communities in Texas to the Mexican Revolution, Border Uprisings, and World War I in the 1910s is essential to understand how Mexican Americans were able to create a new identity for themselves in the 1920s. The events of the 1910s led to divisions within the Texas-Mexican community, new strategies for inclusion in an Anglo dominated society, and a Mexican American identity based on citizenship that emerged during the 1920s.

CHAPTER ONE: DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

Agricultural Revolution

The twentieth century in Texas ushered in an economic change, as open ranch land disappeared under the plowed crop land. Large commercialized ranches in Texas, according to historian David Montejano, sold huge tracts of land to farmers largely migrating from the Midwest of the United States. New farming dry farming and irrigation technologies emerged at the turn of the twentieth century that allowed for the cultivation of larger, more commercialized farms in the drier climate of South Texas. The majority of land that made up South Texas had only been suitable for ranching and small scale, non-intensive farming before the twentieth century.¹

Anglo-American farmers immigrated to Texas to buy up farmland while Mexican nationals immigrated northward to find low paying jobs in the new farming communities that developed at the start of the twentieth century. The border region, mainly in South Texas rapidly changed during the first decade of the twentieth century as market demand for agricultural products and a diminishing land supply in the United States caused many ranch owners in Texas to sell their vast tracts of land. The position of Mexican Americans within the newly developed agricultural society rapidly changed from

¹ David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans: In the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987), 103.

previous social positions within the ranching society of the nineteenth century, as they faced segregation, inequality, and racial stereotypes by Anglo “newcomers.”

At the start of the twentieth century two major railroads ran through Texas. The Texas and Pacific line, built during the 1870s, connected Fort Worth and El Paso, and allowed access for Texas to the United States and Mexico. In the following decade the International and Great Northern line was built between San Antonio and Laredo, and quickly emerged as a major commercial and passenger route between the United States and Mexico. Both of these rail lines traversed fairly “barren territory,” that lacked agricultural interest due to minimal water supply and poor soil.² The railroads gave the cattle industry quicker and cheaper access to the markets of the United States, but South Texas remained largely unaffected since the rail lines did not cross the Rio Grande Valley. These initial railroad lines eventually brought commercial opportunities that opened up Texas to the United States and Mexico, but the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway initiated a rapid regional change in South Texas in irrigation, population growth, and land development during the first decade of the twentieth century.

The development of an agricultural industry in South Texas occurred as a direct result of the penetration of the railroad into the Rio Grande Valley. Land in South Texas had been unprofitable for anything other than the livestock industry due to an inability to effectively and quickly ship goods out of the area, and cattle had the ability to walk themselves to the market. The potential to sell land in South Texas depended on several developments before South Texas could be turned into an agricultural area. The first initiative came when a railroad line between Brownsville and Corpus Christi was financed by a group of South Texas ranchers and businessmen at the beginning of the

² Frank C. Pierce, “Railroad Surmise,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 24 May 1904.

twentieth century. Corpus Christi served as the hub for the Missouri-Pacific railroad these ranchers and businessmen understood that it had the potential to link South Texas with the rest of the United States. With the ability to efficiently ship goods out of the Rio Grande Valley, the fertile soil of South Texas that previously could only be used for livestock could then shift towards agricultural use.³

The St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway, completed in July 1904, opened up South Texas to the rest of the United States and brought forth sweeping regional changes, particularly in the counties of Nueces and Cameron. This line was also known as the Lott Railroad because of the president and promoter of the railway, Uriah Lott.⁴ Lott had arrived in Texas from New York in 1867 and soon after started the Corpus Christi, San Diego and Rio Grande Narrow Gauge Railroad with the financial backing of South Texas ranchers, Mifflin Kennedy and Richard King in 1875. Lott's first railroad project in Texas established a rail line from Corpus Christi to Laredo and took seven years to complete. Contrary to the vision of Lott the rail line from Corpus Christi to Laredo was not financially lucrative for the counties it crossed. The line from Brownsville to Corpus Christi, in contrast saw rapid financial gains for the counties it crossed.⁵

The city of Brownsville, the final destination of the Lott Railroad before it was connected with the Mexican railway), 106-107.stem, provides a strong example of the change that the Railroad brought. Throughout the first part of 1904, the excitement and anticipation for the coming railroad in the city was very high and could easily be seen in

³ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 106-107.

⁴ "Important Land Deal," *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 23 May 1904.

⁵ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Lott, Uriah," s.v. "Corpus Christi, San Diego and Rio Grande Narrow Gauge Railroad."

the local newspaper, the *Brownsville Daily Herald*. Progress of the railroad was posted weekly and the majority of front page articles made reference to the railroad in some way. In anticipation of the railroad the city of Brownsville itself underwent a transformation. M. C. Dart, a clerk for the United States court stated when asked by reporters that “the city of Brownsville [was] very much improved” since a previous visit. Dart recounted that within five months several two story brick buildings were constructed, there was “not a vacant house in town,” and that a new rice mill had been built that was “said to be the finest and most complete of any rice mill in Texas.”⁶

Simultaneously with the construction of the Lott Railroad the extension of a Western Union Telegraph line to Brownsville from Robstown (a town outside of Corpus Christi) facilitated instant communication to the rest of the major urban centers of Texas by 1904. The first train on the Lott Railroad arrived in Brownsville at 7:20pm on 5 July 1904 to fireworks, music, and a crowd of Brownsville residents and distinguished guests.⁷ Brownsville awoke from a sleepy ranch town and transformed into an economic and urban center with the arrival of the Lott Railroad, and in the words of Dart, “Brownsville country [was] going to be a great country and those who [were] on the ground floor, [would] get the cream.”⁸

After the completion of the Lott railroad farmers from all across the United States migrated to South Texas to capitalize on the abundant and cheap land of South Texas. Along with the Railroad, the creation of an extensive irrigation system transformed the

⁶ “Bright Picture of Brownsville,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 27 May 1904.

⁷ “Lott Road Notes,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 24 May 1904; “The First Train,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 5 July 1904.

⁸ “Bright Picture of Brownsville,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 27 May 1904.

barren cattle ranches of South Texas into populated agricultural fields.⁹ It was believed by many that once irrigated the land in South Texas would become extremely productive and fertile. A reporter from Rio Grande City emphasized this with a statement in June 1904:

We have before us a valley containing thousands of acres of good soil where frosts are unknown and in which something can be kept growing every month in the year and through which a river flows with sufficient amount of water to irrigate the whole of it, with a little engineering skill in laying out canals.¹⁰

With the recognition of potential profit to be made in South Texas, irrigation companies began to prepare the land for agricultural use, and the eventual migration of farmers. The Llano Grand Land and Irrigation Company was established by several businessmen from San Antonio with an initial capital stock of \$250,000, a large sum of money in the 1900s.¹¹ Major efforts were extended to irrigate South Texas in order to keep the transition of land to agricultural purposes on pace with the development of the Lott Railroad. Extensive irrigation canals were built to funnel water from the Rio Grande to different parts of South Texas with the outlook that if water was made available for irrigation then farmers would happily resettle in South Texas. A canal that distributed

⁹ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 106-107; Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, Vol. 6 of *University of California Publications in Economics* (1930; repr., New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1970), 1:295.

¹⁰ Sumner B. Taft, "Irrigation Conditions," *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 10 June 1904.

¹¹ "A New Irrigation Company Chartered," *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 7 March 1904; S. Morgan Friedman, "The Inflation Calculator, S. Morgan Friedman, <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/> (accessed 19 May 2009)." Using Consumer Price Index statistics the Inflation Calculator equated the amount of \$250,000 in 1904 to \$5,916,747.73 in 2008.

water to five thousand acres of land outside of Brownsville was described by a passerby as a “small river leaved at the sides...running full head on.”¹² The census bureau in 1902 collected data on irrigation efforts across the United States and provide an insight into the scale of development that occurred. Specifically in Texas the bureau concluded that there were 9,157 irrigated farms and 489,199 acres that received water from the Rio Grande River. In total it was believed that there were 1,089 irrigation systems supplied by the Rio Grande that created 3,178 miles of irrigation ditches, and resulted in a net cost of \$6,282,215 in 1902.¹³ A lot of money was put into the irrigation of land throughout South Texas by many different investors who foresaw an agricultural future for the Rio Grande Valley.

After the irrigation systems had been dug to distribute water across South Texas and before the train tracks were even finished being laid new agricultural towns were formed and ranches were broken up to make way for farms. With the creation of the Lott Railroad twenty-one stations had to be placed along the tracks in what had previously been sparsely inhabited countryside dedicated to the raising of livestock. Twenty-one stations meant that twenty-one towns had to be built to make way for the coming train, and these towns were set up and developed by different ranchers and land developers as new farming communities.¹⁴ South Texas quickly became a hotspot for investment in the development of real estate that involved many different individuals and companies.

¹² “Bright Picture of Brownsville,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 27 May 1904.

¹³ “Systems of Irrigation,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 14 June 1904; S. Morgan Friedman, “The Inflation Calculator,” S. Morgan Friedman, <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/> (accessed 19 May 2009). Using Consumer Price Index statistics the Inflation Calculator equated the amount of \$6,282,215 in 1904 to \$148,681,125.35 in 2008.

¹⁴ Evan Anders, *Bosses Under Siege: The Politics of South Texas During the Progressive Era* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1978), 390; “Stations on the Lott Railroad,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 4 March 1904; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 107. Some of the new towns that were created in the 1910s by the Lott Railroad in South Texas were Robstown, Coldris, Julia, Kingsville,

With the recognition of the economic potential in South Texas the Lott railroad as it neared completion in 1904 was integrated in to the Frisco System. This was a major railroad system in the United States that traversed nine different states and was owned by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Company. Soon after the Lott Railroad was incorporated by the Frisco System, agents were sent to survey the countryside of South Texas to find out the full economic potential of land there. After their tour of South Texas the agents for the Frisco System concluded that with the new railroad the countryside of South Texas was poised to become the best land in the United States. The agents were so confident in their assessment of South Texas that they declared that “ten acres of land in Brownsville country will produce more cash than two hundred acres in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.”¹⁵

Benjamin F. Yoakum, chairman for the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Company, known as the Frisco System, believed that the development of Texas was the single greatest endeavor in agriculture in the United States. After a tour of the territory that the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad passed through, Yoakum was quoted by a reporter proclaiming that the agricultural development of South Texas would “dwarf advances made by states of the northwest.” Yoakum’s belief in the productive capabilities of South Texas was more than just rhetoric, and in May 1904 Yoakum participated, along with four other businessmen, in the purchase of half the interest in the Brownsville Land and Town Company. Started by James B. Wells and A. D. Childress, prominent residents of Brownsville, the Brownsville Land and Town Company developed

Richard, Spohn, Sarita, Mifflin, Turcotte, Katherine, Norias, Rudolph, Yturria, Raymondville, Lyford, Stillman, Combe Harlingen, Bessie, Fordyce and Olmito.

¹⁵ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Frisco System”; “Frisco System Colonization,” *Laredo Times*, 24 March 1904.

2600 acres of land that ran west from Brownsville to the Rio Grande. The development resulted in an addition to the city of Brownsville, a new township four and half miles west of Brownsville, and divided farmland in between.¹⁶ Yoakum's dedication and belief in South Texas was evident in his railroad and land investments during the 1910s, but he was not the only person who came to the Rio Grande Valley to capitalize on future agricultural prosperity.

Special tours were created for merchants and businessmen across the country to tour South Texas and witness the possibilities for investment. One such tour took "bankers, capitalists, merchants, farmers, and real estate men from Missouri, Arkansas, and Wisconsin" across South Texas by stage coach and the unfinished railroad. Interestingly in a newspaper article on this tour, the reporter stated that there was not anything for these people to see except barren landscape, but the prevalent belief that huge potential returns were to be made outweighed the actual reality of a barren land that was still waiting to be developed and inhabited. The belief and hype of a future South Texas prosperity is what attracted so many people to invest in its development during the 1910s, which in turn gave ranchers an incentive to divide and sell off their land.¹⁷

With the development of an agricultural infrastructure in South Texas, ranchers eagerly divided up their land into plots that encompassed ten to forty acres for agricultural use. As the land development companies descended upon South Texas "the temptation to sell substantial shares of their holdings" by ranchers reached unprecedented proportions, according to historian Evan M. Anders. Anders recounts that at the turn of

¹⁶ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Yoakum, Benjamin Franklin"; "B. F. Yoakum Reports," *San Antonio Express*, 12 May 1904; "Important Land Deal," *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 23 May 1904.

¹⁷ "Touring Capitalist," *San Antonio Express*, 25 May 1904; "The Lott Railroad," *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 11 April 1904.

the twentieth century ranch land in South Texas was only worth two dollars an acre. When the railroad was built the land was worth anywhere from five to fifty dollars an acre, after irrigation, the price of land rose to three hundred dollars in 1912.¹⁸ The land developers who bought the ranch land quickly went to work to get the land ready to sell to prospective farmers.

Whole towns were erected in only a few years by developers along the Lott Railroad to facilitate the new train stations and farming communities. Although the development of several of the new towns was contingent on the sale of several different ranches, some of these towns were constructed completely with the money and land from a single ranch. The ranchers who created massive cattle industries in South Texas during the nineteenth century allocated a portion of their ranch land to create new farming towns along the Lott Railroad.

Ranchers benefitted greatly in the construction of these towns by owning all the municipalities that served these towns; Kingsville is a prime example of this. Robert Kleberg II ran the King Ranch during the first three decades of the twentieth century and set aside a portion of the ranch to build the town of Kingsville at a designated stop on the Lott Railroad.¹⁹ Kingsville was created under the direction of Kleberg, and almost all facets of the town were owned and directed, according to Montejano, by the King-Kleberg family; “Kleberg Bank, the King’s Inn, the Kingsville Ice and Milling Company, the Kingsville Publishing Company, the Kingsville Power Company,” and other companies that serviced the town. Although Kingsville was not the only town built and controlled by a single ranching interest, it was not the norm and many ranchers simply

¹⁸ Anders, *Bosses Under Siege*, 390-391; “The Lott Railroad,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 11 April 1904; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 107; “Texas Land,” *The Brownsville Herald*, 15 June 1907.

¹⁹ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Kleberg, Robert Justus (II).”

sold their land and let developers build and manage the new farm towns.²⁰ Regardless of how or who built the towns and divided the land up for agriculture, people flooded into South Texas during the first decade of the twentieth century and bought up homes and farms all across the Rio Grande Valley.

Advertisements were sent out across Texas and the rest of the United States by agencies from “Chicago and Kansas City” that were hired by land developers in South Texas to attract potential buyers.²¹ The advertisements that filled newspapers encouraged people to move to Texas with boasts of an “inexhaustible supply of pure water,” “no finer climate in the world,” and “this land...will double in value in one year.”²² Half page ads were printed in newspapers continuously for months that advertised the new townships. A half page ad that offered farm land for sale in the new town of Olmito, situated nine miles northwest of Brownsville, ran for an entire month in the Brownsville Daily Herald.²³

The persistence of the newspaper ads, agencies, and developers worked because people came from all over the United States and purchased land to establish themselves in the new towns of South Texas. Historian Benjamin Johnson accurately emphasizes this southward migration of Anglo-Americans in his expression that “for the first time, thousands of Anglos moved to the lower border region, flooding Cameron and Hidalgo counties in particular.”²⁴ Anders states that there were 22,900 people that lived in

²⁰ “Kingsville is Growing Fast,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 8 March 1904; “Progress at Kingsville,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 24 March 1904; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 111-112.

²¹ Anders, *Bosses Under Siege*, 391.

²² “Lands and Homes for Sale,” *The Homestead*, 1 August 1907.

²³ “Olmito,” *The Brownsville Daily Herald*, 4 April 1904 – 5 May 1904.

²⁴ Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 31.

Cameron and Hidalgo counties in 1900, the southernmost counties of Texas and by 1910 there were 41,900 inhabitants.²⁵

In actuality the population was even higher because the statistics do not account for the influx of Mexican nationals that arrived from south of the border. Migrant Mexicans crossed the U.S.-Mexico border and found work on the new farms in South Texas at the same time Anglo-Americans traveled southward and purchased farms and land in South Texas. The use of inexpensive Mexican labor was one of the reasons that also made farm land in Texas so appealing to Anglo-American farmers who wanted to re-establish themselves in Texas. Problems emerged in South Texas between the new agricultural society and the old traditional ranching society that had given way for the latter group to flourish as numerous Anglo-Americans and Mexican nationals arrived. South Texas had been a frontier ranch land for over a century, and within a decade railroads, irrigation, and land developers transformed it into an agricultural land with bustling farm towns that dotted the previously barren landscape. The pace of change resulted in the creation of new problems for the Texas-Mexican community as a steady immigration of Mexican nationals and Anglo-Americans led to the development of a harshly segregated society.

Immigration from South of the Border

As farmers arrived in South Texas from different parts of the United States to cultivate the newly divided and irrigated ranch land, Mexicans also arrived from south of the border and went to work as laborers in the new agricultural fields. The Lott Railroad

²⁵ Anders, *Bosses Under Siege*, 393.

opened up South Texas to Anglo-American farmers from other parts of the United States, but it also opened up South Texas to Mexican immigrants from the interior of Mexico. Citizens of Mexico and the United States had continually crossed the border in both directions, but as the railroad systems of Mexico and the United States became integrated the U.S. was opened up to Mexicans who previously had been confined to the interior and southern portions of Mexico.

The construction of a rail line from Brownsville to Monterrey by way of Matamoros meant that the normal three day journey over treacherous roads in a stagecoach was transformed into a less than nine hour journey “in a comfortable and luxurious [train].”²⁶ The completion of a railroad system that could transport large numbers of people between Mexico and the United States allowed for an intense migration of Mexican laborers into the United States.

As the region developed into intensive agricultural farms, it was more cost efficient for South Texas farmers to hire migrant Mexican laborers to work the new fields. They took lower wages than Anglo-Americans and African-Americans, and Anglos often did not want to work in a wage labor system, but preferred tenant positions. As tenant farmers Anglo-Americans occupied and worked rented land using their own tools and seed. The tenant farmers then sold their crop at the end of the season and paid a portion of the profit to the owner of the land. Mexican laborers often did not have enough capital to fill any position other than a hired field hand. Euleterio Escobar, a Mexican American, was hired at twelve years old as a farm hand in 1906 and received

²⁶ “Anticipating the Monterey Extension,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 7 April 1904; “Brownsville to Tampico,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 29 April 1904; “Crosses at San Miguel,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, 16 June 1904.

only forty cents a day.²⁷ A typical wage for a Mexican field worker in South Texas after WWI was around a \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day. A ranch manager interviewed by Frank Pierce in the 1920s said that an Anglo-American did not work for anything less than \$2.50 a day, and typically would not work for very long on that amount of money. As cheap as Mexican labor was in comparison to Anglo-American labor, some growers felt that a \$1.50 was too high to pay Mexicans and that they should in actuality have been paid a dollar or less. An owner of a large onion farm stated that “a Mexican should be paid...just enough to live on...if he is paid any more he won’t work so much.”²⁸ Due to the demand for Mexican labor from farmers in South Texas there were many actions that were pursued by farm communities to ensure a steady and constant labor supply from Mexico.

Education, or more importantly the lack of education, was a major part of ensuring cheap Mexican labor by Anglo-Americans. Concepts of institutionalized segregation were implemented in the new farming communities of South Texas that were epitomized in segregated schools. The schools that were set up for Mexicans were vastly inferior to the schools that were established for Anglo-Americans. Euleterio Escobar recalled that as a Mexican American child in Pearsall, Texas, he attended a segregated school for Mexicans during the 1910s. The school was “a dilapidated one room frame building” that only taught children up to a third grade level. Looking back Escobar remembered that he “never saw that any of [his] mates ever reached the sixth grade.”²⁹ Not all Texas-Mexicans were uneducated though, many went on to higher education, but

²⁷ Eleuterio Escobar Papers, 1906-1971, B1:F5, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁸ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 444-445.

²⁹ Eleuterio Escobar Papers, 1906-1971, B1:F5, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

most of these educated Texas-Mexicans came from higher socio-economic status than the migrant Mexican workers. Texas-Mexicans with a higher socio-economic status had the ability to attend Catholic private schools that allowed for a quality education in comparison to the Mexican public schools.³⁰ Anglo-American farmers often thought the ability to keep Mexicans uneducated was the proper way to ensure a domicile and cheap labor class. The owner of a large farm in Texas, interviewed by Paul Taylor during the 1920s, provides an insight into one Anglo-American's view of Mexican education:

“Some of them are bright and get a good education at San Marcos or some other institution, and are fine people. They should be taught something, yes. But the more ignorant they are the better laborers they are...if these [Mexicans] get educated, well have to get more from Mexico.”³¹

Segregation extended to many different aspects of society in South Texas. There were clearly established Mexican and Anglo areas of towns. In order to ensure that Mexicans did not venture into the Anglo parts of town, restaurants, drugstores, and entertainment facilities practiced segregation, and in the view of David Montejano, “Mexicans now found themselves treated as an inferior class.”³² These facilities sometimes served Mexicans, but they were not allowed to remain on the premises after a purchase was made. An owner of a drugstore in Texas explained how he refused to serve Mexicans from the soda fountain, but would serve Mexicans Coca Cola in bottles that they could take with them. Interestingly this drugstore owner went on to state how

³⁰ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 47; Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 385-396.

³¹ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 444.

³² Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 114; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 46-47.

important the business he received from Mexicans was to his store and that he did not “know what [he] would do without the Mexicans [business].”³³

Restrictions and rules placed on voting rights in Texas during the first decade of the twentieth century resulted in the exclusion of many Mexican Americans from the political process. A poll tax was instituted in 1902 for any citizen that was under the age of sixty. Mexican Americans working as hired field hands often did not earn a large enough wage to pay their poll tax. The Terrell Election Laws that were put in place in 1905 further ensured that poor Mexican Americans would not be able to participate in the voting process by making it a misdemeanor for a person to pay another person’s poll tax. This measure was created to curb the corrupt political practice of rounding up poor voters, paying their poll tax, and then having them vote for a certain candidate. The end result was that Mexican Americans who did not receive a substantial wage could not vote because they were unable to pay their poll tax or receive help from a friend or family member to pay their poll tax.³⁴

Mexican labor became such an important resource for farmers in South Texas that they strongly resisted any infringement on their Mexican labor pool. Often any legislation on immigration restrictions sent alarm throughout the farming community in Texas. John C. Box a Texas Representative for Texas’s second district, situated east of Houston, tried throughout the 1920s to have stronger legislation put in place restricting immigration into the U.S. The prerogatives of Representative Box scared many farmers in South Texas who worried about a diminished labor supply from Mexico. In response

³³ Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, 445.

³⁴ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Donna, Texas”; “Terrell Election Law,” *Michigan Law Review* 7 (1909): 599-600; W. R. Davie, *The Terrell Election Law: Embracing All Amendments to Date* (Austin, TX: Von Boeckmann Jones Co., 1908), 8.

many people in the agricultural industry of Texas sent letters to Representative Box, that emphasized that Mexican labor was crucial to the economy of Texas and that the agricultural sector would not be able to survive without it, but still discussed the social depravities of Mexicans and their inferiority. J. H. Powell from Navasota, Texas, wrote to inform Representative Box that he was “very badly in error” and that there were six to nine months in the year “that the State of Texas as well as the Southwest could not get along were it not for the Mexican labor that drifts into Texas.”³⁵ Letters were not the only means by which farmers reacted to an infringement upon their Mexican labor supply; sometimes violence was used to keep others from threatening the Mexican labor supply.

Donna was a farming town founded in 1907 in Hidalgo County, Texas, along the border of Mexico, as a station for an extension of the Lott Railroad. In 1918 Pedro Tamez and Arturo García, Mexican nationals, arrived separately in town, but allegedly working for a company in Louisiana that hired them to recruit Mexicans for labor in agriculture and industry. When the local residents of Donna learned of Tamez and Garcia they were quickly arrested. In jail is where Tamez and Garcia briefly met, but they were soon taken out of the jail by local residents, and in the words of Sam Bernard, a Donna resident, were released and then warned “that if they did not want any trouble not to attempt to take any more laborers out of [the] community.”³⁶

The story that Tamez related to the Mexican Consul in Brownsville showed a much more violent warning by the residents of Donna towards Garcia and himself.

³⁵ J. H. Powell to John C. Box, 29 January 1926, *Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932*, B2F3, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, the University of Texas at Austin; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 186-187.

³⁶ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Donna, Texas”; Statement of Sam Bernard, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 189-190.

Tamez stated that he and Garcia were taken from the jail by local residents around nine at night and were forced into a car and driven outside of Donna. Three miles outside of town Tamez and Garcia were told to get out of the automobile and run. After being told twice they reluctantly got out of the vehicle, and as they walked away the residents shot at them. Tamez was able to disappear into the brush but Garcia was shot in the leg and collapsed on the ground, at which point the residents of Donna got back into their automobile and returned to town.³⁷ The residents of the farming community of Donna took very seriously any threat to their labor supply and they were not afraid to use violence to send a message to outsiders that disrupted their labor.

Farmers during the first several decades of the twentieth century took very seriously any threat to their labor supply of Mexicans. Through letter writing and intimidation South Texas farmers vehemently tried to ensure their way of life and their access to Mexican labor. The Mexican consul in Brownsville also reported that in some cases the attempt to control Mexican labor by farmers resulted in a restriction of movement for Mexican workers. Farmers often did not allow the Mexican laborers they hired to leave their farms during the agricultural season, and without the ability of free movement for Mexican laborers, farmer were able to force them to “work for...smaller wages than was paid in neighboring towns.”³⁸ Through different methods farmers in South Texas worked hard to retain the labor and social position of Mexican workers in Texas.

The arrival of farmers from other parts of the United States and the Mexican nationals who worked the new fields, created many tensions between Anglo-Americans

³⁷ Statement of Pedro Tamez, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 188.

³⁸ Statement of Thomas Hester, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 191.

and the Texas-Mexican community that had lived in South Texas before the agricultural boom arrived in the twentieth century. Mexicans that lived within the ranching society that developed in Texas during the nineteenth century did not understand or accept the new norms and practices of the emerging farm society. The Texas-Mexican community had a hard time adjusting during the first decade of the twentieth century because of the differences between the old ranching society and the new farming society.

The new practices and developments of a farming society in Texas and the rapid pace that it developed shocked many Texas-Mexicans and Anglo-Americans that lived in Texas. Comfortable within a ranch society many people in Texas had trouble adjusting and understanding the newcomers that settled across different parts of Texas. Ranching society was not by any means an equal or egalitarian society, but it had different norms and standards that in many ways were opposite to the new practices of the farming society.

Anglo-American ranching society developed throughout the nineteenth century. It often resembled and mimicked the hacienda system that developed during Spanish colonialism and continued after Mexican independence. This system of ranching was based on “patriarchal and paternalistic relations” between the owners and managers of a ranch and the people who worked on the ranch. Anglo-Americans gained control of the majority of ranches in Texas by the end of the nineteenth century. Landless Mexicans, many of whom were Mexican Americans, found positions as ranch hands and often worked on a single ranch for their entire lives. There were Mexican American elites that

owned ranches, but by the end of the nineteenth century they were mostly concentrated in South Texas and the border regions.³⁹

There were class distinctions between Anglos and Mexicans in Texas ranching society, but it was understood that there were responsibilities and expectations for both ranch owners and ranch workers. Anglo and Mexican American ranch owners provided access to food from their general stores, decent living quarters, schools, churches, and even took care of ranch hands that grew too old and were not able to work in the field. Ranch workers in turn dedicated themselves to the rancher they worked for by providing their labor and defending their boss's property when necessary. Anglo-Americans learned Spanish, respected Mexican culture, and often intermarried with the Mexican American elites.⁴⁰ Ranching society in Texas was based on a mutual loyalty between the Anglo-American bosses and Mexican workers, a loyalty that did not exist in the new twentieth century farming society of Texas.

With the development of new farming towns and societies in Texas that were populated by "new-comers" and migrant Mexican nationals, Mexican and Anglo relations changed. Farmers preferred to hire seasonal Mexican wage labor, because they then did not have to support workers during the off season. The loyalty between Anglo bosses and Mexican workers quickly disappeared as Anglo-American farmers relegated Mexicans to a much more inferior position in society than what had existed in the Ranching society. Segregation was institutionalized in the new farming communities and "new-comers" typically did not attempt to learn Spanish or understand the Mexican culture. The Mexican American elites and their social position within Texas society was not respected

³⁹ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 110-112.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

or recognized in the farming communities, and David Montejano suggests that to the farmers “a Mexican was simply a Mexican.”⁴¹ The Texas-Mexican community that remembered and recognized the old ranching society quickly became disgruntled as it watched their rights and social position rapidly erode in the new farming society of the twentieth century.

El Primer Congreso Mexicanista

The Texas-Mexican community searched for a way to respond to the racial inequality and segregation the transition from a ranching society to one based in agriculture created in Texas due to an influx of Anglo-American farmers laden with racial stereotypes. That response took form in a call for the unified alliance of the Texas-Mexican community, regardless of citizenship, that was initiated in January 1911, through the weekly newspaper, *La Cronica*. In a series of articles in *La Cronica* during 1911, editor Clemente Idar expressed a need for Texas-Mexican organizations to hold a conference to form a clear plan of action that addressed racial discrimination and segregation towards people of Mexican descent in Texas. The efforts of Idar and many others resulted in “the largest ethnic Mexican civil rights gathering held to date,” *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, a conference held in Laredo for Texas-Mexicans in September 1911.⁴²

Preceding the conference, Idar and his colleagues used a network of Mexican fraternal lodges to gather delegates of Mexican descent from across Texas regardless of

⁴¹ Ibid., 114-115.

⁴² José Limón, “El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911: A Precursor to Contemporary Chicanismo,” *Aztlán* 12 (Fall 1981): 91; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 52.

their citizenship.⁴³ Idar advertised the goals of *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* to different Texas-Mexican organizations with articles that expressed a strong “Mexicanist sense of unity and purpose.”⁴⁴ Appealing to the cultural identity of being Mexican, Idar was able to gather a large number of delegates from the Texas-Mexican community to address the many concerns that Texas-Mexicans faced in an increasingly Anglo dominated and run society during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ The delegates overwhelmingly expressed an interest in the formation of coalitions and organizations based on a Mexican culture and history, and not on citizenship, as the way to improve conditions for the Texas-Mexican community.

During the conference the attending delegates expressed a strong identification with Mexican nationalism and pride through a series of speeches and debates. These Mexicanized speeches and debates focused on the unification of Texas-Mexicans through a progressive appeal for an organized movement with the goal of gaining rights and privileges for people of Mexican descent within the segregated Texas society. The delegates chose strong Mexican symbols for their speeches that exonerated and emphasized their Mexican identity.⁴⁶ Examples of “Mexican patriots and political movements” were used to rally listeners at the conference to the formation of organizations that were opposed to racial discrimination in Texas.⁴⁷ The patriotic and nationalistic Mexican stories and references served as a link to a homogenous cultural identity for Texas-Mexicans regardless of their social or political status. An idea of a

⁴³ Limón, “El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911,” 211-214.

⁴⁴ Emilio Zamora, *The World of The Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 97.

⁴⁵ Sylvia A. Gonzales, *Hispanic American Voluntary Organizations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 176.

⁴⁶ Limón, “El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911,” 94.

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 53.

Mexican identity emerged from the conference vested in culture and heritage that lacked the clear concept of citizenship that a decade later became a central facet of identity for Mexican American organizations in the 1920s.

The conference only lasted for a short period of time, but the legacy of *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* was apparent in the call to establish new Texas-Mexican organizations under a league known as *La Gran Liga Mexicanista de Protección y Beneficencia*. The purpose of *La Gran Liga Mexicanista* was to carry the goals that were discussed in the speeches and debates of the delegates beyond the conference.⁴⁸ Although based in lofty ideals and calls for unity the reality of the organizations that formed under this progressive league were generally found to be unsuccessful. The branch organizations under *La Gran Liga Mexicanista* were factionalized, too regionally specific, and lacked the proper funds to be able to produce a unified change for Texas-Mexicans. The organizations did not produce any long lasting or drastic effects on segregation towards the Texas-Mexican community, but their existence brought forth a new perspective on the changing identity of Texas-Mexicans during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The branches that formed after the conference under *La Gran Liga Mexicanista* took on many different characteristics and positions to address the needs of the different Texas-Mexican communities they served. Historian Julie Pycior points out consistently that the biggest benefit of these organizations to people of Mexican descent was the mutual aide that they offered to the Texas-Mexican community. The provision of mutual aide, although beneficial, did little for the purpose of rights and equality within the segregated society of Texas. Within the Texas-Mexican community mutual aid

⁴⁸ Limón, "El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911," 97.

organizations had already been in existence long before the establishment of *La Gran Liga Mexicanista*, and were often more effective than the newly formed organizations. The importance of the establishment of *La Gran Liga Mexicanista* therefore lies in precedence it set in the legal help that was provided to their members in the fight against racial discrimination. The legal application of *La Gran Liga Mexicanista*, although minimal, was the manifestation of the goals for the Texas-Mexican community that had been debated in *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*. Under the guidance of the principles established at the conference, *La Gran Liga Mexicanista* provided Texas-Mexicans with money for legal troubles, explanations of different government institutions, and legal help against laws based on racial discrimination.⁴⁹ The legal function of these organizations was a precursor to the important legal goals that the founders of Mexican American organizations in the 1920s advocated in their struggle against racial discrimination.

La Gran Liga Mexicanista de Protección y Beneficencia and its branch organizations came into existence during a very turbulent time for people of Mexican descent within a society that had rapidly changed during the first decade of the twentieth century. The 1911 call for a unified coalition at *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* of Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals in a fight against racial discrimination and segregation was affected by the Mexican Revolution, violence in the border region of Texas, and World War I. All of these events that occurred throughout the 1910s played crucial roles in the formation of panic and anxiety between Texas-Mexicans and Anglo-American communities, that led to divisions between people of Mexican descent and the

⁴⁹ Julie L. Pycior, *La Raza Organizes: Mexican American Life in San Antonio, 1915-1930* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1980), 145-155.

eventual failure of a unified Texas-Mexican community. The culmination of events in the 1910s and the failed unity called for at *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* allowed for the formation of a new identity as Mexican Americans recognized their United States citizenship.

CHAPTER TWO: WAR AT HOME AND ABROAD

Revolution in Mexico

The Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910, and several battles took place in northern Mexico. Residents of the United States were not really threatened by fighting that took place south of the border, but many in Texas were not able to ignore the events in Mexico because of the growing number of Mexican nationals that fled across the border as refugees to escape the fighting. In a letter to the adjutant general of Texas, Edward M. Matson, Captain of the 2nd U. S. infantry stationed in Laredo, reported the “rush of refugees” to cross the Rio Grande into Texas when federal troops evacuated Nuevo Laredo in anticipation of Carranzista forces. There was little Matson could do to stop the influx of Mexicans except guard the Laredo Armory. Interestingly Matson guarded the armory not from the incoming refugees, but from the citizens of Laredo, because the mayor of Laredo worried that the U.S. citizens would react with violence against the Mexican refugees. A new panic gripped the border as Anglo-Americans worried that the instability and radicalism of the Revolution in Mexico would spill over on to the U.S. side of the border.¹ Many of these fears were perpetuated as Texas residents bore witness to the violent revolution taking place on the other side of the river. Capt. Matson explained in his letter that when the Carranzista forces took Nuevo Laredo

¹ Matson to Adjutant General, 4 May 1914, Roy Wilkinson Aldrich Papers, 3P157, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

they “consumed a quantity of mescal and began shooting in the air,” which persisted throughout the night and alarmed many of the residents of Laredo, who repeatedly called into the Armory where Matson was stationed.²

Concern escalated to the point that Texas representatives approached President Taft with a request to have the United States Army put on active duty along the Texas-Mexican border. The trepidation that emerged in Texas was based largely on rumors and speculation. The *Dallas Morning News* reported that no incidents had occurred towards citizens of the United States but “their safety [was] said to be at the caprice of mobs that [had] overridden authority.” Sensationalized journalism and a lack of trust towards Mexican workers in Texas by newly arrived Anglo-American farmers created an unsubstantiated presentiment that at any second “a popular explosion [would be] directed against [Anglo-Americans].”³

The Mexican Revolution caused an intensified immigration of Mexican nationals into Texas during the first part of the 1910s and helped create a volatile situation between Anglo-Americans and people of Mexican descent. Traditionally, migrant Mexican workers arrived in Texas, worked in the fields, and then returned home, but a new wave of Mexicans entered Texas with no intention of returning. There were concerns in the Anglo-American community that there were radicalized individuals amongst the newly arrived Mexican immigrant population. As a result, members of the Texas-Mexican community, regardless of their citizenship or how long they had lived in Texas were often the target of Anglo-American frustrations and suspicions. Local authorities in Texas often instigated unlawful attacks on the Texas-Mexican community as a reaction to local

² Ibid.

³ “Urge Mobilization of Army in Texas,” *Dallas Morning News*, 17 February 1912.

animosity and prejudice during the 1910s. The most notorious law enforcement agency amongst Mexicans was the Texas Rangers because of their heavy-handed form of justice that was often directed towards the Texas-Mexican community.

Texas Ranger Justice

There were many different law enforcement organizations in Texas during the 1910s. The U.S. Army was stationed on the border because of the Mexican Revolution, and there were local police for the towns and cities along with county sheriffs. The Rangers constituted a unique law enforcement agency. The local and county authorities were held accountable by the citizens they served, and the army was accountable to the federal government. The Texas Rangers represented a frontier form of law enforcement that had developed as a result of the ranching society in Texas and had left little oversight of Ranger companies in the field. They were unique in that they were only accountable to the Adjutant General of Texas. Grievances about Rangers that were reported to the adjutant general were often not given proper attention, because, as charged by J. T. Canales, a prominent lawyer in Brownsville and representative in the Texas House, the investigating officer of the Texas Rangers, W. H. Hanson, appointed by the Adjutant General, conducted all investigations on the premise of proving the Rangers innocent.⁴ An attorney from San Benito in Cameron County described the Texas Rangers as a completely “independent force,” that conducted their work and investigations on whoever they pleased. Anglo-Americans often felt that the ability of the Texas Rangers to act

⁴ Dayton Moses, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 392; “Expect Peace on Border,” *Dallas Morning News*, 10 October 1915.

independently was important in their work on the border, but the Texas-Mexican community was often the target of those independent actions of the Rangers.

Rangers were often recognized as having a specific look to them that set them apart from other law enforcement officers and civilians. They wore boots, typical Stetson cowboy hats, and they always carried a gun.⁵ Ed Hamner, a lawyer from Sweetwater strongly emphasized that Rangers did not “present credentials” when investigating someone. They wore their guns in plain view, everyone knew who they were, and if they wanted to question someone they simply walked up and questioned them.⁶

Members of the Texas-Mexican community were often treated harshly by Rangers who did not make a strong distinction between immigrant Mexican nationals and U.S. born Mexican Americans. It was often easier for a person of Mexican descent to actively avoid contact with the Rangers stationed or working within a county than risk a possible encounter with an unrestrained Ranger. Confrontation though, was often unavoidable and sometimes resulted in the mistreatment of innocent members of the Texas-Mexican community. For example, Jesse Pérez, a deputy sheriff and Texas Ranger recalled a story from 1906 when he was working as a county sheriff in conjunction with Company B of the Texas Rangers in Rio Grande City. Pérez took some boots to a Mexican shoe-maker, apparently the only shoe-maker in town. Reluctantly the shoe-maker turned Pérez’s business down because he said he did not “do any work for Rangers.” Upon Pérez’s return to camp he related what the shoe-maker had said to him to the Rangers of

⁵ A Stetson cowboy hat may not seem out of the ordinary in modern conceptions of Rangers, but it was a definitive indication of a Ranger in a town or city during the early twentieth century. Town and Cities became urbanized, Automobiles and department stores were a big part of society and the everyday person in a city did not dress as if they were on a ranch.

⁶ Ed J. Hamner, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 392; “Expect Peace on Border,” *Dallas Morning News*, 10 October 1915.

Company B, after which Ranger Sam McKenzie decided to return to the shoe-maker with Pérez. When McKenzie was refused service he knocked the shoe-maker unconscious with a pair of boots he was holding. Pérez also recounts that “a few weeks after [the incident] this Mexican Shoe-Maker [used] to go and get our boots and shoes to [fix] them.” Subservience was often the consequence of the fear that resulted from an encounter with the Texas Rangers for people of Mexican descent. An even greater indication of Ranger attitudes is the way in which Pérez recounts this story in his memoirs. It is almost with complacent joy that he writes about the incident, a hint of satisfaction at getting the shoe-maker back for denying him service.⁷

The association of Pérez with the Texas Rangers presents certain problems with the ethnic makeup of the organization and the Anglo-American agenda that was pursued, in the fact that Pérez was of Mexican descent. There were other Texas Rangers during the first two decades of the twentieth century that were of Mexican descent and carried out unlawful actions against the Texas-Mexican community. To understand why these individuals joined an organization that often crippled the rights and equality of the Texas-Mexican community, it is important to recognize the social stratification that developed in Texas since its beginning as a ranching society.

When the ranches of South Texas were initially established in the eighteenth century by Spanish land grants there was a clear division between “two social classes,” those who owned the land, *patrones*, and those who worked the land, *peones*. The social stratification was evident in the homes that the two groups lived in. The landowners lived in homes that resembled a rudimentary form of Spanish architecture and were built

⁷ Jesse Perez, *Memoirs of Jesse Perez, 1870-1927*, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, TX, 55-56; Sam McKenzie, A. G. O Form 21, *Enlistment, Oath of Service, and Description Ranger Force*, Texas Adjutant General Service Records 1836-1935.

of sandstone or caliche. The workers lived in jacales, a Native American form of housing that usually consisted of four corner posts that had “walls of brush, mesquite, rivercane...plastered with mud.”⁸ Ranch owners had permanent dwellings and offered sanctuary to their workers during attacks by Native Americans and fierce weather. In the colonial Spanish frontier of Texas, ranch owners acted as caretakers to those who were below them on the social ladder.

During the nineteenth century there was a clear separation in hierarchy between Anglos and Mexicans within the ranch society. Anglos inserted themselves into the landowning class, as *patrones*, and therefore placed themselves above the landless Mexican laborers in the social spectrum of the ranching society. There was an understanding that it was the obligation of the Anglo bosses to take care of their Mexican workers and treat them fairly in the same way that the landed Mexican elite did. The exception in the social hierarchy was the land owning Mexicans who were not seen as inferior and were often referred to as Spanish. Montejano points out that the majority of “merchants and officials,” were able to recognize “the distinction between the landed ‘Castilian’ elite and the landless Mexican.”⁹ The land owning class of Mexicans also intermarried with Anglo-Americans during the nineteenth century, and further separated themselves from the working class Mexicans. This conception of a social hierarchy amongst Mexicans persisted into the twentieth century, although it was often not recognized by the newly arrived farmers.

⁸ Joe S. Graham, “The Spanish and Mexican Origins of Ranching in Texas,” *The Journal of Big Bend Studies* 10 (1988).

⁹ David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans: In the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987), 82-85.

Many people of Mexican descent that worked for the Rangers easily could have considered themselves to be of a higher social standing than the landless Mexican workers that they frequently came in contact with. The act of joining an Anglo institution, such as the Rangers, also served to further emphasize their association with an Anglo identity and their rejection of the Texas-Mexican community. Sergeant John Edds was a Ranger of Mexican descent that spoke fluent Spanish and had a dark complexion, but when asked if his mother was Mexican he replied that “she [was] Spanish, not Mexican.”¹⁰ In a five word answer, Edds absolved himself of any association with the Texas-Mexican community and in a way explained how he could be a member of an organization immersed in an Anglo-American identity.

Many Rangers did follow proper due process and acted accordingly and in conjunction with the law and fellow authorities. Many residents of the border region during the 1910s stated a need for the Ranger service, but felt that it needed proper oversight and more stringent regulations on the recruitment of its members. Since the formation of the Texas Ranger service in November 1835, its members consisted of volunteers who simply stated an intention to join the force. There was no extensive background check, the pay was meager, and the job was dangerous, so anyone who wanted to join was given commission papers and sent to the headquarters of the Ranger Company they were appointed to.¹¹ There was also a classification of “Special Ranger” that the Adjutant General of Texas could bestow upon anyone which gave power of law with even less oversight. The Texas Cattle Raisers' Association commissioned its inspectors as Special Rangers in order to give them the power to hunt down cattle thieves,

¹⁰ John Edds, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 501; John Edds, A. G. O Form 21, *Enlistment, Oath of Service, and Description Ranger Force*, Texas Adjutant General Service Records 1836-1935.

¹¹ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Texas Rangers.”

which resulted in an officer of the law that was in the direct pay and service of an organization or business.¹²

It is apparent that during the first two decades of the twentieth century the Ranger service had become an organization based largely on social and familial connections. Applications for membership largely consisted of family members and friends of already commissioned Rangers. In a letter to General Walter F. Woodul, Assistant Adjutant General of Texas, William Hanson asked for a commission as a Ranger, and concluded the letter by stating the he “would prefer Company 'A' under Captain J. J. Saunders, as he is a lifelong friend.”¹³ Hanson quickly received his commission and was appointed a Texas Ranger in the Company he had requested.

Company A of the Texas Rangers under the command of Captain J. J. Saunders was a notorious Ranger Company during the 1910s. The headquarters of Company A was at the town of Alice in Jim Wells County, less than a hundred miles from the border. Under Capt. Saunders, Company A was widely known as tough Rangers who accomplished their objectives by any means they deemed necessary. Although Company A's reckless and harsh imposition of independent, vigilante justice received a lot of praise from members of the Anglo-American population in South Texas, it also alienated members of both the Texas-Mexican and Anglo-American community.

In testimony provided during an investigation of the Rangers in 1919 it is apparent that the motives of Rangers were often reactionary and a result of their own

¹² Dayton Moses, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 392; “Expect Peace on Border,” *Dallas Morning News*, 10 October 1915.

¹³ Hanson to Woodul, 24 December 1917, Texas Adjutant General Service Records 1836-1935. Within the letter Woodul refers to a Capt. J. J. Saunders, of which there is no record, but the Adjutant General Service Records denote a Capt J. J. Sanders of Company A. There seems to be a typographical error between the service records and written documentation. I am certain that J. J. Saunders and J. J. Sanders is the same person, based on both the time of service, and description of assignment.

interpretation of justice, as a way to protect their fellow Rangers and the organization itself. The latter motivation of the Rangers manifested in an experience that Judge Thomas Hook of Kingsville experienced in 1916. Judge Hook was approached by a group of respected men from the Texas-Mexican community when two Mexicans disappeared after they were arrested. The group of men asked Judge Hook to write a petition in order to ask for action from higher authorities that could protect the Texas-Mexican community in Kingsville. Judge Hook agreed and wrote a petition to President Woodrow Wilson and Texas Governor Ferguson.

A few months later when Judge Hook was at the courthouse in Falfurrias, he was approached by two men he had never met before, one of whom asked to speak to him in the hallway. In the hallway the man that had spoken to Judge Hook in the courthouse, Capt. Saunders, asked Judge Hook if he was “the son of a bitch that wrote that petition at Kingsville.” The question did not illicit a response as Capt. Saunders pulled his pistol from the holster and began to hit Judge Hook in the face with the butt of the pistol, while the other man tried to restrain Judge Hook from defending himself. It was not until men from inside the courtroom came into the hallway that Capt. Saunders halted his attack. Charges were never brought forth because Capt. Saunders stated that he did not realize that Judge Hook was unarmed and the refusal of local authorities to hear the case.¹⁴ A person’s reputation and position in society did not serve as ample protection from Capt. Saunders’s and the Rangers that served beneath him. Intimidation was a key part of Capt. Saunders attack on Judge Hook, and was not a method reserved exclusively for Company A of the Texas Rangers, but for the many different members of the organization.

¹⁴ Judge Thomas W. Hook, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 261.

R. B. Creager, a lawyer from Brownsville, recalled that on election days Rangers were often stationed at polling stations by local political candidates in order to intimidate “Mexican voters and the ignorant class among the white voters.” If a problem arose and the “ignorant class of voters” did not follow the party line that the Rangers were aligned with, then “on the slightest excuse they [would] arrest...the adverse faction and put [them] in jail.”¹⁵ The reckless violence, heavy handed tactics, and harsh justice of the Texas Rangers reached an apex in the mid 1910s with the start of the Border Uprisings.

The Border Uprisings

The unsubstantiated suspicion of Anglo-Americans of dangerous and radicalized Mexicans received substantiation in June of 1915 as several border raids in South Texas directed at Anglo-Americans and their property occurred.¹⁶ Initially the raids were not seen as a coordinated rebellion, but as disjointed bandit raids from Mexico. It was not until the Plan de San Diego was made public that United States citizens viewed the Border Uprisings as an orchestrated military rebellion. The Plan de San Diego originally came into the hands of U.S. authorities in February 1915 when Basilio Ramos was arrested in Hidalgo County trying to recruit men for an uprising outlined in the plan that Ramos carried in his belongings.¹⁷ Within the plan a proclamation called for the liberation of Texas and several other states that had been lost by Mexico to the United States. The plan also called for the formation of a revolutionary army to carry out the

¹⁵ R. B. Creager, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 388-389, 409.

¹⁶ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 118-119.

¹⁷ Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 71-74.

objectives of the rebellion. Even more shocking to Anglo-Americans was the explicit race element that was embedded within the articles of the Plan de San Diego, which called for a “Liberating Army for Races and Peoples,” to be created by Mexican and “individuals of the black race,” to participate in the overthrow of “yankee tyranny.”¹⁸ The conspiracy that Anglo-Americans had suspected Mexicans of was manifested through the Plan de San Diego and the Border Uprisings gave substantiation to their abhorrence of the Texas-Mexican community.

An editorial subject line in the *Dallas Morning News* on August 1915, “seizure of states bordering Mexico and death to Americans the object,” summed up the Anglo-American anxieties regarding the Plan de San Diego. The article said “more than 3,000 Mexicans pledged,” to the rebellion and that the forces gained new members every day.¹⁹ The sensationalism of the media helped to perpetuate Anglo-American fears in South Texas. Frank C. Pierce, a lawyer and historian who documented and published an account of the Border Uprising in 1917, never mentioned any raid to have had more than a couple of hundred men. Typically, in Pierce’s accounts of the raids, only a couple dozen men participated.²⁰

Even more detrimental to Anglo-Mexican relations was the inability and unwillingness (knowingly or unknowingly) of Anglo-Americans to distinguish between the actions of Mexican nationals or Mexican Americans. Instead, reporters grouped all

¹⁸ F. Arturo Rosales, “El Plan de San Diego,” In *Testimonio: A Documentary History of the Mexican American Struggle for Civil Rights* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2000).

¹⁹ “Plan of San Diego Back of Border Raids,” *Dallas Morning News*, 12 August 1915.

²⁰ Frank C. Pierce, *A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company, 1917), 89-96.

Mexicans together and published conspiracy articles that told of how secret lodges in support of the Plan de San Diego had “been established in every Mexican Community.”²¹

Regardless of guilt or innocence many Anglo-Americans in Texas viewed all people of Mexican descent in Texas through the same xenophobic lens. Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, and naturalized Mexicans were judged as one homogenous group. Dayton Moses, an attorney from the Texas Cattle Raiser's Association, expressed the sentiments of many of his colleagues when he stated that because “[Mexicans] are of the same race,” they may be innocent, but “they harbor men who are...violators of the law.”²²

People of Mexican descent were ordered to hand over their weapons and ammunition to local authorities, and then were told to provide information and aide in the suppression of the rebellion.²³ These actions did not calm qualms regarding the Texas-Mexican community and massive retaliatory killings of Mexicans resulted, largely because of the Rangers. Without any sort of oversight by the government in South Texas, the Texas Rangers hunted down and often killed anyone they suspected of being a participant or compliant in the Border Uprisings.

Proper channels of jurisprudence were rarely followed in the apprehension of Texas-Mexicans by the Texas Rangers and local authorities. People simply suspected of participation in the raids, although without evidence, were rounded up by the authorities. R. B. Creager mentions in his testimony that the Rangers and local authorities carried a “black list” with them of people suspected of participation in the border raids who were

²¹ “Plan of San Diego Back of Border Raids,” *Dallas Morning News*, 12 August 1915.

²² Dayton Moses, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1.

²³ “Many Mexicans Surrender Arms,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 5 September 1915; Louis Brulay, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 559.

subsequently hunted down.²⁴ If arrested, suspects did not receive the protection of the law but instead often “evaporated,” as it was so eloquently put by J. C. George, a lawyer from Brownsville.²⁵

During the start of the Border Uprisings in 1915, Rodolpho Muñoz was arrested by Daniel Hinojosa, who later became a Ranger of Company A, and the City Marshall in San Benito, on the basis that Muñoz was a “suspicious Mexican character.” Hinojosa and the marshal proceeded to take Muñoz by automobile to the county jail in Brownsville, but Muñoz never made it to jail and instead was found “hanging to a tree with his body riddled with bullets.” It was also reported by J. T. Canales that Muñoz was tortured before he was shot and hung to the tree. After the body was found, Hinojosa reported that men stopped the Marshall and him on the road and made them hand over Muñoz. Regardless of whether it was the mob or Hinojosa and the Marshall that killed Muñoz, the fact remains that a man arrested solely for being a “suspicious Mexican character” was strung up and killed without any due process. J. T. Canales testified that after the Muñoz incident Mexicans that were charged with a crime refused to submit themselves for arrest because they did not feel “the officers of the law would give them the protection guaranteed to them by the constitution and the laws of [Texas].”²⁶

Soon after the Muñoz incident a group of U.S. soldiers and deputies led by Jeff Scribner, who had a personal feud with Anicento Pizana, went to the Pizana family ranch, Las Teulitas, on 3 August 1915. The soldiers and the deputies surrounded the house and a fight ensued with members of the Pizana family. The incident resulted in the death of

²⁴ R. B. Creager, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 399.

²⁵ J. C. George, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 399.

²⁶ William G. B. Morrison, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 33; J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 217.

Pizana's son, and his brother, Ramón, was arrested and sent to jail for fifteen years. After this incident Anicento Pizana and many of his family members became leaders in the Border Uprisings. More Texas Rangers were also stationed in South Texas along with a U. S. Army force of 25,000 men under the command of General Parker to deal with the escalation of the Border Uprisings.²⁷

In a daring raid on 18 October 1915 a group of organized Mexicans north of Brownsville derailed a train on the Lott Railroad. The bandits attached wire to the rail lines and pulled it off the tracks right before the train crossed it. After the train crash had settled the bandits entered the wrecked train and shot several Anglo-American men and looted various items from the passengers. The Brownsville train raid sent waves of panic across South Texas due to the scale of the raid, and the fact that the very symbol of progress and modernization in South Texas, the railroad, had been destroyed so easily by the Mexican bandits eleven years after it had been completed. Local residents responded with outrage and the Rangers swiftly searched for any suspects they could find.

Within twenty-four hours of the attack the Rangers under the direction of Captain Ransom, took into custody seven suspects, four of which never made it to jail. Three of the Mexicans arrested were put under the custody of the Cameron County Sheriff, W. T. Vann, and four were kept under the custody of Capt. Ransom. After the arrests were made and the Mexicans had been tied up Ransom approached Vann and told him that he was "going out to kill [those] fellows," and then proceeded to ask Vann if he was going with him.²⁸ Frank Pierce concluded that the four suspects were killed by the Rangers

²⁷ J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 217-220; James B. Wells, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 72.

²⁸ Captain W. T. Vann, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 587-599; Oscar Dancy, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 572-573.

because of their “alleged complicity in the” train attack.²⁹ Even more interesting is William G. B. Morrison’s account of the incident, that the four suspects “found dead four miles north of Brownsville...were arrested by the Rangers on the very scene of action.”³⁰ Morrison’s account implies that the suspects did not leave the scene of the crime even though the border could not have been more than seven or ten miles away, but instead remained in the area where they were arrested by the Rangers. The U. S. Army and local authorities could not locate any suspects following the incident, but the Rangers were able to capture seven suspects within the time frame of a day.

The violence continued to escalate throughout 1915 as sporadic groups of Mexicans raided different parts of South Texas, and the Rangers continued their “systematic manhunt.”³¹ Local Authorities helped perpetuate the situation by ignoring the unrestrained killings that the Texas Rangers and local citizens carried out on Texas-Mexicans. At the end of 1915 James B. Wells drove down a road outside of Brownsville and came across “four dead men, Mexicans, lying there side by side...evidently been shot and killed, carried in [the brush] from the public road.” After Wells and several of the men he was with conducted a search of the area, eleven Mexicans were found in the brush that had been shot and killed.³² On another occasion the Justice of Peace in Cameron County, H. J. Kirk, was approached by several residents of a neighborhood because of Mexican bodies that had begun to emit an odious stench in their vicinity. Nathan Lightborn, a Mexican, soon after approached Kirk and asked him to accompany him to that neighborhood so he could retrieve and bury the bodies of his brethren. When

²⁹ Pierce, *A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley*, 97.

³⁰ William G. B. Morrison, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 30.

³¹ Pierce, *A Brief History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley*, 96-97, 114.

³² James B. Wells, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 59, 72-73.

Kirk asked why he could not do it himself Lightborn responded that “he was afraid that the Rangers would shoot [him]” if he went by himself.³³ Local authorities during the Border Uprisings rarely performed “serious investigations of the killings of Hispanic suspects,” and even on occasion were reported to have joined in the killing of Mexicans accused of being bandits.³⁴

Blame for the massive killings that occurred in South Texas did not fall only on the Rangers and local authorities. Civilians were often caught up “in the excitement,” to help Rangers and local authorities round up and kill suspected participants in the Border Uprisings. William Morrison surmised that “the citizens killed just as many as any Ranger,” and that some of those killed “probably [were] innocent people.”³⁵ R. B. Creager, the lawyer from Brownsville, concluded that “the conduct of the Rangers and ill advised local constabulary that followed the lead of the Rangers,” simply escalated the violence and the raids in South Texas. The killing of an innocent Texas-Mexican, in Creager’s opinion, pushed members of that person’s family to join the bandits, because there was no protection for them from the authorities.³⁶

The unrestrained vigilantism of the Texas Rangers created a paradox in South Texas, as Texas-Mexicans found themselves caught in the crossfire of the Border Uprisings and the retaliatory killings. Texas-Mexicans risked losing their lives and positions in society if they joined the Border Uprisings, but they also risked their lives and positions in society by doing nothing because of the harsh and unlawful methods of the Rangers. It was a noted practice that when questioned by Rangers, “Mexicans...slow

³³ H. J. Kirk, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 626.

³⁴ Evans. Anders, *Boss Rule in South Texas: The Progressive Era* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 225.

³⁵ William G. B. Morrison, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 22.

³⁶ R. B. Creager, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 401.

to explain their identity and purpose...forfeited [their lives].”³⁷ The actions of the Rangers in response to the Border Uprisings, which were organized as a response to racial discrimination and the unjust treatment of Mexicans only resulted in an even harsher and more dangerous environment in Texas for people of Mexican descent. The consequence of the Border Uprisings was the death of “between three hundred and five thousand Mexicans...compared to only sixty-two U.S. civilians and sixty-four soldiers.”³⁸

The Border Uprisings persisted into 1916, although at a diminished level. A direct correlation in the downturn of the Border Uprising was the consolidation of power in Mexico under Carranza and his pledge to end “Texas bandit troubles.”³⁹ In recollecting the Border Uprisings, Creager commented that before the Mexican Revolution, people existed in a friendly and peaceful manner on both sides of the border due to cooperation between Mexican and American authorities, which meant that bandits could not evade the law by the simple act of slipping across the border. Creager says that the Border Uprisings were largely continued due to the lack of communication between authorities on the border and the “policy” of terror that the Rangers used on people of Mexican descent in South Texas. The atrocious actions of the Rangers, local law enforcement, and Anglo-American citizens on the Texas-Mexican community resulted in the non-responsive efforts of Mexican officials in the pursuit of bandits that crossed into Mexico.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Corpus Christi Caller and Daily Herald*, 14 August 1915.

³⁸ Elliott Young, *Catarino Garza's Revolution on the Texas-Mexico Border* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 311.

³⁹ “Expect Peace on Border,” *Dallas Morning News*, 10 October 1915.

⁴⁰ R. B. Creager, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 392.

At the end of 1915 and through 1916 American and Mexican authorities worked in conjunction with each other and suppressed the Border Uprisings. The United States government began to listen to the Carranza government, and in an effort to show his commitment to the U.S., Carranza placed a new commander, General Eugenio López, in Matamoros and ordered him to aid in the fight against participants of the Border Uprising. General Nafarrata, the previous commander at Matamoros exercised a complicit if not supportive attitude towards the bandits in the Border Uprisings, and received much criticism from U.S. officials and citizens. General Lopez quickly proved his dedication to the cooperation of Mexican and U.S. authorities with the arrest of several members of a key group that had planned and participated in many of the raids into Texas.⁴¹ Without the ability to freely cross into Mexico and find sanctuary the participants of the Border Uprisings were not able to operate with the same effectiveness that they had during the months of June through September, 1915.

The Border Uprisings created uneasiness across Texas in many different communities. The violence and radicalism of the Mexican Revolution that had seemed so far away, suddenly manifested itself in the border region of Texas. Born out of the racial strife imposed by the transition to agriculture, the raids specifically targeted Anglo farmers and drove a divide between the Anglo-American and Texas-Mexican community. The uprising also divided the Texas-Mexican community as all people of Mexican descent were subjected to the consequences of Anglo-American angst. The unity that had been called for at *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* in 1911 appeared counterproductive to many Mexican Americans trying to assert their civil rights in 1916, whom found

⁴¹ R. B. Creager, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 392; "Expect Peace on Border," *Dallas Morning News*, 10 October 1915; Louis Brulay, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 560, 563.

themselves associated by Anglo-Americans with the Mexican nationals and small number of Mexican Americans who participated in the Border Uprisings. The violence of the Border Uprisings and the Mexican stereotypes that resulted, forced many Mexican Americans to make an active choice in where their loyalties existed. Numerous Mexican Americans denounced members of the Texas-Mexican community that participated in the raids and rejected the Mexican nationalistic appeal that had been prevalent only five years earlier at *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*.

German-Mexican Conspiracy

Although the majority of the Border Uprisings ended in 1916, and any notion of an overthrow of the government along the border lost any validity, a climate of disquietude persisted among Anglo-Americans towards people of Mexican descent. Article seven of the Plan de San Diego, which explicitly stated that “every north American over 16 years of age shall be put to death,” was burned into the minds of farmers and U.S. citizens.⁴² Continued anti-American rhetoric that occurred in Spanish-language newspapers also perpetuated the Anglo-American conception of a radicalized and violent Texas-Mexican community.

Ricardo Flores Magón, a radical liberal from Mexico, and the head of a radical Mexican revolutionary organization the *Partido Liberal Mexicano*, that had generated a large amount of support among Texas-Mexicans in the years preceding the Mexican Revolution and the first part of the 1910s, wrote harsh criticisms of Anglo-Americans and the United States in his Spanish-language newspaper, *Regeneración*. An article was

⁴² F. Arturo Rosales, "El Plan de San Diego."

published in *Regeneración* by Magón shortly after the Border Uprisings occurred that praised what Mexicans were doing in Texas and offered a report of the harsh conditions that Anglo-Americans had imposed in Texas.⁴³ The newspaper that Flores Magón published was not the only newspaper writing about the racial injustices that Anglo-Americans had committed against people of Mexican descent. Almost every city in Texas with a large Mexican population had several Spanish-language newspapers that covered a wide range of ideological positions, some of which criticized the United States.

With World War I dominating the media and minds of many people in the United States and Texas, a concern over German agents in the border regions of Texas quickly emerged in South Texas. Newspapers ran several stories about German propaganda and agents working along the border. It was thought that German agents were in South Texas to disrupt the “production of livestock and agriculture,” by targeting Mexican laborers and influencing them to not work.⁴⁴ A fear of a German-Mexican conspiracy against the United States quickly reverberated across Texas.

As residents of Texas searched for an explanation as to why the Border Uprisings had occurred, the German-Mexican conspiracy was quickly seen as a reasonable answer. A theory emerged that the Border Uprisings were initiated by Carranza at the behest of German ambassadors. It was even believed that the Plan de San Diego had been written or partially written by German agents in Mexico. German agents were believed to have conceived of the Plan de San Diego as a way to disrupt economic production along the border and as a distraction from subversive German activities in South Texas.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ricardo Flores Magón, “Los Levantamientos en Texas,” *Regeneración*, 2 October 15.

⁴⁴ Louis Brulay, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 562.

⁴⁵ J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 295; “Many Germans in Mexico,” *The San Antonio Light*, 1 March 1917.

Newspapers perpetuated the theory that Germans were behind the Border Uprisings during 1915 and 1916. Several accounts were published by newspapers that German agents along the border in Mexico were working in collusion with the Mexican government. One published in the *Dallas Morning News* claimed during the Brownsville train raid on October 1915 that Germans on the derailed train were specifically overlooked by the Mexican bandits and not executed due to the fact that they were German.⁴⁶ James B. Wells a prominent citizen of Brownsville stated in 1919 that “German gold” was distributed in Mexico to the bandits to encourage them to continue their raids into Texas and “stir up all the trouble they could in the United States.” Wells even referenced Luis De la Rosa, a leader in the bandit raids, and said that Secret Service agents in San Antonio had told him that De la Rosa “was wearing a \$300.00 diamond ring,” that was given to him as a present by German agents.⁴⁷

The apex of a German-Mexican conspiracy was revealed on 1 March 1917, when the Zimmerman Telegram was released to the public. The telegram was sent by the German Foreign Minister, Zimmerman, in Berlin to the German minister in Mexico City, Von Eckhardt on 19 January 1917 and was quickly intercepted by U.S. agents. The purpose of the telegram was to propose a military alliance between Germany and Mexico. If Mexico accepted the alliance, then they would have been given financial support from Germany to attack the U.S., and would have received the territories that had been lost to the United States: New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas.⁴⁸ Coincidentally the proposal in the Zimmerman Telegram for Mexico to regain lost territory paralleled the Plan de San Diego and its call to annex territory that had been lost to the United States.

⁴⁶ “Testimony Taken on Plan of San Diego,” *Dallas Morning News*, 23 January 1920.

⁴⁷ James B. Wells, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 79-80.

⁴⁸ “Germany Plots War on United States,” *The San Antonio Light*, 1 March 1917.

The Zimmerman Telegram deepened the suspicion of a German-Mexican conspiracy along the border. Nine days after the Telegram was revealed in the newspaper, another front page story was ran in *The San Antonio Light* that reported a very “powerful radio station,” was being constructed near Mexico City “under the direction of German engineers,” in order to, in the belief of the reporter, “establish direct communication with Berlin.”⁴⁹ The telegram served as proof to many residents of Texas that the rumors of a German-Mexican conspiracy were true.

The suspicion of a German involvement along the border became so great that in December of 1917, after the United States Cavalry chased a group of Mexican bandits across the border, Col. George T. Langhorne specifically issued a statement that expressly denied any German involvement in the Border Uprisings that had occurred prior to this incident.⁵⁰ Langhorne’s statement is interesting in that it shows a repudiation of the association of Mexican banditry with German influence. Many Anglo-Americans in Texas believed that there truly was a German-Mexican conspiracy and in turn were suspicious of any Mexican as being a possible agent for the Germans. An attorney in Cameron County, Oscar C. Dancy, strongly believed that the Mexican consul in Brownsville was “in sympathy with Germany,” to the point that it affected his actions as an attorney. He refused to have an examining trial brought forth against the Rangers Saddler and Sittre for the death of Florencia Garcia who disappeared while in their custody. Garcia’s body was later found between Brownsville and Port Isabel with bullet holes in it. Dancy refused to pursue the case against Saddler and Sittre on the basis that the Mexican Consul had requested a copy of the testimony, who he thought was a

⁴⁹ “Building Near Mexico City,” *The San Antonio Light*, 10 March 1917.

⁵⁰ “U.S. Soldiers Chase Bandits into Mexico,” *Dallas Morning News*, 28 December 1917.

German agent. Dancy believed that the Mexican Consul would then pass the testimony on to German agents to be used for anti-American propaganda amongst Mexican laborers in South Texas. Therefore, Dancy never brought these Rangers to trial and they were never held accountable for the death of Florencia Garcia.⁵¹

The fires of conspiracy and suspicion of a German-Mexican collaboration continued to burn throughout South Texas during the second half of the 1910s. Anti-American Spanish-language newspapers and Anglo newspapers both helped to fan the flames of anxiety regarding a German-Mexican conspiracy. The revelation of the Zimmerman Telegram in 1917 helped to solidify distrust amongst the Anglo-Americans and the Texas-Mexican community in an already tense situation following the Border Uprisings. The Texas-Mexican community was often targeted by Anglo-Americans as not being loyal to the United States, and in turn, sympathetic to Germany.⁵² The development of a German-Mexican conspiracy theory deepened the divisions in the Texas-Mexican community that had emerged during the Border Uprisings. Once again Mexican Americans were accused by Anglo-Americans of being loyal to Mexico and not to the United States and therefore sympathetic to Germany. Mexican Americans again had to choose where to invest their loyalties and commitments. The ambiguous border concept of being a part of Mexico and the United States disappeared as the Border Uprisings and the German-Mexican conspiracy caused border residents to draw lines of separation between Mexico and the United States. The separation between Mexico and the United States increased as a belief in an anti-American Mexican population by Anglo-Americans in South Texas grew in 1917 as many Mexicans fled across the border to

⁵¹ Oscar C. Dancy, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 565-571.

⁵² Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 123.

avoid the draft. World War I and the draft also increased the line of separation between Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals, as Mexican Americans tried to avoid negative stereotypes placed on Mexican nationals and the Texas-Mexican community as a whole.

World War I and the Draft

As uneasiness grew in Texas between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans during the 1910s, the United States edged closer to entering World War I. The Zimmerman Telegram and the unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany aided in the decision of the United States government to finally get involved in World War I.⁵³ The entrance of the U.S. into the war became official on the afternoon of 6 April 1917, when a resolution passed by Congress was signed into effect by President Woodrow Wilson that officially declared that the United States was at war against Germany.⁵⁴

Soon after the declaration of war on Germany and the U.S. entrance into World War I, the Army War Bill, drafted and edited by the U.S. Congress, was signed into effect in May 1917 by President Wilson. The number of soldiers in the military in 1917 was not sufficient to fulfill the needed manpower for America's participation in WWI. Voluntary enlistment increased after President Wilson announced war on Germany, but still the number of enlisted soldiers was smaller than what the military and government needed for an army at war. Therefore the Army War Bill allowed the government to establish

⁵³ "Germany Plots War on United States," *The San Antonio Light*, 1 March 1917.

⁵⁴ "Army War Bill Is Ready For The President," *The San Antonio Light*, 18 May 1917; "President Calls Upon Nation to Bear Arms," *The San Antonio Light*, 6 April 1917.

“selective conscription,” or a draft, “in increments of 500,000 men.”⁵⁵ Every male resident in the United States between the age of twenty-one and thirty had to register for the draft on 5 June 1917. The penalty for any person, who did not register for the draft that was required to, was imprisonment.⁵⁶

Registration for the draft, as stipulated in the Army War Bill applied to every resident of the United States. Therefore a person that was not a U.S. citizen was still required to register if he was a male between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. This did not mean that non-U.S. citizens were going to be drafted into military service, but they were still required to register. All requests for exemption from the draft, including non U.S. citizenship status, had to be filed after the draft was called into effect and a person was officially drafted.⁵⁷ For many of the Mexican laborers in Texas this provision of the Army War Bill confused and alarmed them. After the Army War Bill was signed into effect in May 1917, and all eligible men in the United States were then required to register on 5 June 1917, there was an exodus from the United States into Mexico by Mexicans who dreaded conscription into the military.

The Mexican nationals that had come to work in the agricultural fields of South Texas left in huge numbers to avoid registration and the draft. James B. Wells recalled that the Mexican nationals that were in South Texas to “temporarily [make] a crop,” left in such massive numbers that “the roads were just black with them and their families going into Mexico.” Wells also recalled that a lot of the Mexicans who left the United

⁵⁵ “Army War Bill Is Ready For The President,” *The San Antonio Light*, 18 May 1917.

⁵⁶ “Registration Is Compulsory,” *The San Antonio Light*, 26 May 1917; Raymond H. Banks, *Births, 1873-1900; Part of an Ongoing Compilation of Male Birth Information as Found in the Civilian Draft Registration Cards from World War I*, Special Collections, Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁵⁷ Raymond H. Banks, *Births, 1873-1900*; “Army War Bill Is Ready For The President,” *The San Antonio Light*, 18 May 1917.

States and went to Mexico were not properly informed as to what registration meant, and did not understand that they could be exempt from the draft. Many Mexicans thought that every “able-bodied man would be put in the army” and it did not matter if they did not want to go or if they were not a U.S. citizen.⁵⁸ Although there were many Mexican nationals who did not have the potential of being drafted and still left because they did not understand Army War Bill, there were also many Mexican Americans that crossed the border to specifically escape their conscription into the U.S. military.

Some Rangers took advantage of the situation in South Texas by rounding up men for draft/registration evasion. It was reported that Rangers went into ranches and farms to arrest all the “ignorant Mexicans” that worked there and had not registered for the draft, either because they did not know to or they had recently arrived in the U.S. The Rangers often arrested these Mexican nationals because they received a fifty dollar reward for every “draft dodger” that they turned in, which was almost equal to the amount that Rangers were paid in a month, not including their living expenses. This practice only perpetuated the problem of the Mexican exodus, because many Mexicans were not able to prove where they were born due to the destruction of records within Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. Therefore Mexicans arrested for draft dodging told other Mexican laborers of their incarceration, who then became scared and crossed back into Mexico to avoid a similar fate.⁵⁹

There were many men who were eligible for the draft that crossed into Mexico to avoid the possibility of conscription. During World War I there were around 350,000 men that did not fulfill their obligations to the draft when selected for conscription. In

⁵⁸ James B. Wells, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 78.

⁵⁹ J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 271-272.

Cameron County alone, there were 6,708 men that registered for the draft during WWI and 757 of those men did not report for service when drafted.⁶⁰ With so many people fleeing across the border in 1917 and 1918, some of whom went to avoid the draft, a belief emerged from the suspicion of a German-Mexican conspiracy that there were German agents in Texas behind the mass migration southward.

The San Antonio Light reported that there were German agents on the border who were using propaganda to “encourage resistance to army registration and the selective draft.” The article went even further and reported that there had been eleven indictments of people sympathetic to Germany who had aided in the denouncement of the U. S. Government and the draft board.⁶¹ Wells testified that there were Germans and Mexicans who worked together to spread the anti-U.S. message that any resident in the U.S. capable of serving in the army would be drafted regardless of citizenship. It was also reported that German propaganda claimed that Mexicans who were drafted would not be treated as equals and instead would be treated like “dogs.”⁶²

The concern of a German-Mexican conspiracy continued in Texas because of the draft law. There were also fears that German agents easily crossed the border into Mexico with the intention of working against the United States. The secret service in San Antonio informed Wells that German agents worked in Northern Mexico and had established a printing press for anti-American propaganda. Printed materials were then smuggled across the border into the U.S. that denounced the draft and encouraged Mexicans to leave their places of work and return to Mexico. It was also reported in *The San Antonio Light* newspaper that the Department of Justice had revealed that a German

⁶⁰ Raymond H. Banks, *Births*; J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 336, 341.

⁶¹ “Government To Deal Severely With Slackers,” *San Antonio Light*, 29 May 1917.

⁶² James B. Wells, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 81.

organization, originally created “for the purpose of co-operative buying,” fell under the influence of German propaganda, and had adopted a goal to sabotage the draft registration. This German organization reportedly bought “high powered rifles” with the purpose of intimidating both the registration officials and the men that tried to register.⁶³

With the large numbers of people, mostly Mexicans, that crossed the border into Mexico during 1917 and 1918, and the belief of a German-Mexican conspiracy to disrupt registration efforts, law enforcement in Texas cracked down on draft dodgers. An underground market for smuggling draft dodgers out of the U.S. and into Mexico emerged as a consequence of the draft. Major points of entry between the U.S. and Mexico were carefully monitored by the military. Therefore smugglers, who were often residents of the U.S. along the border, used their knowledge of back trails and the brush country in the border area to smuggle draft dodgers secretly into Mexico.

Jesús Villareal owned a small ranch near Copita in Duval County and was also a Constable for Duval County. In September 1917 he was stopped by John Edds and a man by the name of Hutchinson, both Rangers of Capt. Ransom’s D Company, along with two army scouts, as he drove along a back road towards Rio Grande City. Villareal had three boys of Mexican descent in his car that he claimed to be taking to Rio Grande City. The Rangers and Army scouts took Villareal out of his car and according to Villareal, they began to choke him to get him to confess to smuggling draft dodgers. After Villareal refused to speak they stuck a cocked pistol into his mouth and told him that they were going to kill him unless he confessed. The story of this incident is wholly different when it was reported by John Edds, although there are essential points that are the same and are

⁶³ James B. Wells, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 79; “Government To Deal Severely With Slackers,” *San Antonio Light*, 29 May 1917.

pertinent to understanding the situation on the border in 1917 and 1918 regardless of whether Villareal actually was a smuggler. The three Mexican boys were arrested for evading the draft and Villareal was arrested for aiding in draft evasion, but the inherent flaw in the arrest of these men was that none of them had technically committed a crime.⁶⁴ Regardless of whether or not they were going to cross the border they had not evaded the draft because they were arrested seven to eight days before registration occurred. The Rangers did not have a warrant and they arrested these Mexicans for a crime that would have been committed in the future, and could not have been committed at the time of their arrest.

The draft and subsequent movement of Mexicans across the border to avoid it divided the Texas-Mexican community. As Mexican Americans crossed the border to avoid the draft they aided in the stigmatization of the Texas-Mexican community as being unpatriotic and not loyal to the United States. Many Anglo-Americans in Texas looked distastefully upon all members of the Texas-Mexican community as they watched Mexican Americans they had known all their lives disappear across the border to avoid the draft. Sheriff J. B. Scarborough of Kleberg County recalled that after the United States entered World War I, a Mexican friend of his and who had been a deputy of his for many years took his sons, all of whom were Mexican Americans, and headed to Mexico to avoid their conscription into the military.⁶⁵ Scarborough was shocked and angered by the actions of his long-time friend whom he had considered a good citizen. It was also noted by Scarborough that his friend was not the only good Mexican American that left,

⁶⁴ Jesús Villareal, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 487-491; John Edds, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 514-517; John Edds, A. G. O Form 21, *Enlistment, Oath of Service, and Description Ranger Force*, Texas Adjutant General Service Records 1836-1935.

⁶⁵ J. B. Scarborough, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 281.

but instead he clearly expressed that there were many Mexican Americans that left South Texas to avoid the draft.

J. T. Canales a prominent Mexican American lawyer in Brownsville employed a young Mexican American, Gustav Durán, as his stenographer in his office. Duran was a friend of Canales and when Duran was drafted Canales worked to secure an exemption for him. The results of the exemption are unclear, but Duran eventually slipped across the border and escaped to Mexico to avoid the draft. In his recount of this event, it is clear that Canales was upset about being betrayed by Duran who had been his friend, but he quickly denounced Duran and declared that he “would have no dealings with a man who acted the way (Duran) had.” As a Mexican American living in Texas during World War I who was loyal to the United States, Canales distanced himself from any aspects or members of the Texas-Mexican community that were anti-American or disloyal to the United States. Canales and his family in South Texas officially denounced family members that had gone to Mexico to avoid the draft “as being absolutely unworthy of [their] relationship.”⁶⁶

With the Texas-Mexican community being attacked as unpatriotic and German sympathizers because of draft dodgers and the phobia of a German-Mexican conspiracy, divisions deepened in the Texas-Mexican community, largely between Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals. It became increasingly important to U.S. citizens of Mexican descent during the war to distance themselves from their brethren who were increasingly considered unpatriotic. Even though there were Mexican Americans that went to Mexico to avoid the draft, there were numerous Mexican Americans who actively volunteered for military service in Europe. World War I provided an opportunity for

⁶⁶ J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 341, 345-346.

Mexican Americans to assert their identity as citizens, prove their loyalty to the United States, and separate themselves from negative Mexican stereotypes formulated by Anglo-Americans. Many Mexican Americans from Texas shipped off to fight in World War I to prove their “loyalty as U.S. citizens,” and fight for the ideals that had been promised them by their birth, but not realized by the actions of their brethren and Anglo-Americans.⁶⁷

As trouble arose along the border between Texas-Mexican communities and the Anglo-American communities more Mexican Americans signed up for military duty in Europe. José Luz Sáenz and Eleuterio Escobar were Mexican Americans from South Texas who “enlisted voluntary in the army” before the Army War Bill was signed into law. Both Luz Saenz and Escobar served in the 90th Division and in the 1920s became advocates for Mexican American rights.⁶⁸ Numerous other Mexican Americans enlisted in the army and answered their draft notices to serve in the war. Two Texas representatives were even approached by S. A. Robinson of San Benito with the request to create an exclusive Mexican American unit in the United States Army.⁶⁹ Although this request was never realized, the 36th Division of the U.S. Army received the majority of its recruits from Texas and many of these recruits were Mexican Americans from the border of Texas. The 36th Division had an exemplary record throughout World War I and it was

⁶⁷ Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), p. 245.

⁶⁸ Eleuterio Escobar Papers, 1906-1971, B1:F5, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin; José de la Luz Sáenz Papers, 1908-1998. Benson Latin American Collection. The University of Texas at Austin.

⁶⁹ “Mexican Americans Ready,” *Dallas Morning News*, 5 April 1917.

stated by Captain Ben H. Chastaine that “no division in the army could boast better personnel than that of the Thirty-Sixth.”⁷⁰

Responding to Anglo-American enmity towards the Texas-Mexican community that emerged as a result of the Border Uprising and the conjecture of a German-Mexican conspiracy many Mexican Americans distanced themselves from non-patriotic elements within the Texas-Mexican community during the second half of the 1910s. Divisions emerged in the Texas-Mexican community as Mexican Americans, loyal to the U.S., traveled to Europe to fight in World War I, and Mexican nationals along with some Mexican Americans fled south of the border into Mexico to avoid the draft. Mexican Americans that avoided the draft and went to Mexico faced imprisonment if they ever returned to the United States as a result of the penalty for draft dodgers. The violence that erupted across the border region of Texas did not subside with the entrance of the U.S. into World War I, but instead persisted into 1918. Alongside the violence and fear during the second half of the 1910s, the segregation and racial discrimination that had developed in the new agricultural societies continued in Texas throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s. As a result, when Mexican American veterans returned to a segregated and divided Texas they looked towards their new-found concept of citizenship to guide their demands for equality and justice in the development of their identity as Mexican Americans in the 1920s.

⁷⁰ Captain Ben Hur Chastain. *Story of the 36t: Experiences of the 36th Division in the World War* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1920), 17; Captain Alexander White Spence, *The History of the Thirty-Sixth Division, USA, 1917-1919*, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

CHAPTER THREE: CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY

Continued Violence

Anxiety over a German-Mexican conspiracy continued throughout 1917 and 1918 as the United States entered World War I. Violence also continued in the border region in 1917 and 1918 between Mexican ‘bandits’ and Texas law enforcement, and was not confined to any specific part of the border region. The Border Uprisings and the Plan de San Diego lost momentum in 1916 and raids by bandits during 1917 and 1918 tended to be more isolated and less coordinated. The raids that took place after 1916 also did not specifically target Anglo-Americans with the intention of killing them, but instead were for looting purposes. Even though the organized Border Uprisings that had started in 1915 were thoroughly suppressed in 1916, many Rangers and other Texas law enforcement agents continued to enforce a brutal form of frontier justice. With little oversight the Rangers continued to patrol the countryside and there were several incidents of violence that occurred between Rangers and the Texas-Mexican community in 1917 and 1918, and Mexican Americans continually found themselves as innocent victims of a harsh Anglo-American response to the atrocities of Mexican bandits; raids, looting, smuggling, and murders.

The unrestricted reign of the Rangers in South Texas continued after the Border Uprisings had ceased to be a threat. Rangers operated freely with little oversight during

the Border Uprising, and local law enforcement agencies tended to aid the Rangers in their pursuit of Mexican bandits, but after the Border Uprisings ended in 1916 Rangers and local law enforcement agencies clashed. George Hurst and Daniel Hinojosa, Rangers from Company A, were reported by Constable Ventura Sánchez in San Diego, Texas to be drunk and shooting their guns on 16 November 1918. A month later, on 24 December 1918 Sánchez was approached by a drunken Hurst on the streets of San Diego, the conversation that took place between Sánchez and Hurst culminated with the declaration that Hurst was going to “shoot the hell out [Sánchez].” Soon after the incident Hurst started to follow Sánchez at night in his automobile, for the purpose of what Sánchez felt was intimidation.¹ A clear disregard for local authority and the law itself was prevalent amongst some Rangers following the Border Uprisings.

On 25 December 1917, around forty-five Mexican bandits raided the Brite Ranch in the border region of Presidio County on Christmas day to pillage the post office and general store on the ranch. A mail carrier, Mickey Welch, arrived on the scene while the Bandits were in the process of raiding the post office. Welch had two passengers in his car that were killed, and Welch himself was dragged from the car and his throat was cut after he was hung by the bandits. Neighbors overheard shots and called the local authorities who in turn got the local cavalry detachment to chase the bandits back across the Rio Grande.

Rumors were spread after the raid that the Bandits were members of Caranza's army. This was reminiscent of claims made during the Border Uprisings that Caranza

¹ Ventura R. Sanchez, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 360. It is important to note that there was no “on” or “off” duty for a Ranger at these times. A Ranger was always considered to be on duty at all times, and it becomes very obvious while reviewing the Joint Committee Investigation of the Texas State Rangers, that drunkenness by a Ranger was a grievous offence that was grounds for removal from the force.

was behind the uprising, and could be linked to the German-Mexican conspiracy about the Border Uprisings.² There were many similarities between the Brite Ranch raid and the Border Uprisings, but the goals of the bandits in the Brite Ranch raid were different. Material gain is what motivated the bandits in the Brite Ranch raid, and is evident in their attack on the post office and general store, whereas the goals of the Border Uprisings were ideological and targeted Anglo-Americans. Regardless of the motive, the repercussions of the Brite Ranch raid upon the Texas-Mexican community indicated the level of reactionary violence reached by the Rangers in their response.

On 29 January 1918, eight Rangers from Company B under the direction of Capt. Fox went to the town of Porvenir in Presidio County following a lead that the bandits responsible for the Brite Ranch raid resided on a ranch outside of Presidio. Around midnight the Rangers along with several Anglo-American ranchers went into the homes of fifteen Mexicans and disarmed and arrested them. A contingent of the U.S. cavalry under Capt. Henry H. Anderson accompanied the Rangers during the arrest. The men were taken into the brush country off the premises of the ranch to be interrogated. Capt. Anderson's cavalry unit remained on the ranch and did not accompany the Rangers. The disarmed Mexican men, some of which were U.S. citizens, were then shot by the Rangers.³

Officially the Rangers stated that while they were interrogating the men, several Mexicans started to shoot at them from the bushes and the fifteen men were killed when

² "U.S. Mail Carrier Killed by Bandits," *The Galveston Daily News*, 26 December 1917; "100 Bandits Raid Postoffice and General Store," *Brownsville Herald*, 26 December 1917; "Troops Guard Canyon Held by Mexicans," *The San Antonio Light*, 26 December 1917; C. B. Hudspeth, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 320; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Brite Ranch Raid."

³ Letter to Adjutant General James A. Harley from unknown, 18 February 1918, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 195; Letter to Governor Hobby from Capt. Anderson, 26 March 1918, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 207-209.

the Rangers returned fire. Capt. Anderson recalled the situation differently and stated in a letter that there were no bandits in or around Porvenir, and that the Rangers simply took them into the brush and shot them all. Capt. Anderson also stated that many of the men killed, were not even in Presidio County when the Brite Ranch raid occurred, but were instead in Reeves County where they farmed in 1917. The families of the fifteen men left their homes in Porvenir and fled to Mexico. The conclusion of Capt. Anderson in regards to the reports given by the Rangers about the incident was that they had been “white-washed.”⁴ After the Porvenir shootings Company B of the Rangers was disbanded in June 1918 and Capt. Fox was forced to resign after the Mexican consul complained to Governor Hobby of Texas and started his own investigation of the incident.⁵

The attitude of a swift, unrestrained, and often violent justice by Rangers became commonplace after the Border Uprisings. Many Anglo-Americans citizens felt that a strong hand was the only way to deal with the Texas-Mexican community and any criminal elements that operated in the border region of Texas. A shoot before shot culture emerged among the Ranger force and many Anglo-Americans who lived in the border region during 1917 and 1918. This concept is best exemplified in a statement made by Claude B. Hudspeth, a Texas Representative for the United States Congress from El Paso: “...as a man familiar with those conditions out there, a Ranger cannot wait until a Mexican bandit behind a rock on the other side shoots at him three or four times...you have got to kill those Mexicans when you find them, or they will kill you...”⁶

⁴ Letter to Governor Hobby from Capt. Anderson, 26 March 1918, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 207-209.

⁵ Governor W. P. Hobby, General Order No. 5, Texas Ranger Force, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 197; Letter to Capt. J. M. Fox from Adjutant General James A. Harley, 3 July 1918, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 200-201.

⁶ C. B. Hudspeth, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 327.

A feeling of animosity and distrust towards Mexicans by Anglo-American made many members of the Texas-Mexican community flee their homes in order to escape the violence of the Rangers, civilian mobs, and local law enforcement agents after the Border Uprisings. Dilar Villa Real a Mexican American lived on a piece of land in South Texas for over thirty years, but after the Border Uprisings, a Ranger along with several men set fire to Real's house. After his house was burned down the Ranger then ran Real off his land and into Mexico, a country Real never lived in because of his U.S. citizenship. An injunction was filed by Brownsville attorney J. C. George against the Ranger, but it was never brought to court.⁷ The experience of Real was a common incident in South Texas during 1917 and 1918 as empty ranches and homes, burned by Rangers, local authorities, and civilians became a common sight.⁸

In response to the grievous actions of the Texas Rangers during the 1910s an investigation was held by a committee of both the Texas Senate and House members at the beginning of 1919. The Joint Committee Investigation of the Texas State Ranger Force was brought about by the initiative of J. T. Canales, a Mexican American representative from Brownsville, for the purpose of removing "objectionable characters...and to reorganize the force on a higher level."⁹ Basically Canales felt that the Texas Rangers had performed unlawful actions towards the Texas-Mexican community from 1915 to 1918, and therefore the Rangers needed stricter regulations and oversight. The underlying debate throughout the Investigation was whether or not the Rangers had to adhere to the same due process of law as other law enforcement agencies. A definitive conclusion was not reached in the investigation. It was recognized that

⁷ J. C. George, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 288.

⁸ R. B. Creager, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 401.

⁹ J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 332.

certain members of the Rangers had been responsible for unlawful crimes against the Texas-Mexican community, but it was also recognized that the Rangers were a vital law enforcement agency to the social stability of Texas. Limited regulations were put into place as a result of the Investigation, and some of the Rangers that had acted unlawfully during the 1910s were purged from the force after the conclusion of the Investigation.¹⁰

Violence continued throughout 1918 across the border region of Texas that often targeted the Texas-Mexican community. Anglo-American trepidation toward the Texas-Mexican community also continued to surface. At the same time, Mexican American veterans began to return home from the battlefields of Europe to the harsh society of Texas. Often viewed as simply Mexicans and refused service at different places in their hometown, Mexican Americans started to distinguish themselves, by their identification with citizenship, from Mexican nationals. Throughout the testimony of the Joint Committee Investigation there is a clear indication that the concept of citizenship held particular importance within Texas society during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and Mexican Americans re-evaluated the importance and understanding of citizenship at the end of the 1910s.

Concepts of Citizenship

In the early twentieth century a clear emphasis was placed on the concept of citizenship within Texas society. Throughout the testimony of the Ranger Investigation several different levels of citizenship are evident in the rhetoric of the people that were

¹⁰ *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 4-10; A. G. O Form 21, *Enlistment, Oath of Service, and Description Ranger Force*, Texas Adjutant General Service Records 1836-1935.

interviewed. Citizenship or the term “citizen” represented a person’s attachment or acceptance to a town, community, county, or nation. Representative Hudspeth during his testimony referred to himself “as a citizen of that country,” when he was referencing the area of West Texas surrounding El Paso.¹¹ The concept of “citizen” held regional connotations at the beginning of the twentieth century. A person who was a resident of a place tended to be referred to as a citizen of that place. The term citizen was also used to refer to the quality or character of a person.

The term “law-abiding citizen” was extensively used throughout the Ranger Investigation by almost every person interviewed, and the committee members. A person of good social standing and quality character was redeemed simply by being referred to as a “law-abiding citizen.” A question that continually emerged throughout the Ranger Investigation in many different forms was whether or not a Ranger in a given situation had exercised his power “towards a law-abiding citizen in an arbitrary way.”¹² The implication of the question was that a Ranger was only in error when he treated a “law-abiding citizen” in a harsh or unjust manner, but if a person was not considered a “law-abiding-citizen” then it was acceptable for him to be treated in a manner that did not fall within the normal constraints of law enforcement.

The case of José Gómez provides a particularly interesting insight into the concept of a “law abiding citizen” and the power that connotation had within the judicial system of Texas during the 1910s. On 3 September 1918 Ranger John Edds and another Ranger, both from Company D arrived at the ranch of Eduardo Yzaguirre in response to the capture of José Gómez, a suspected horse thief by several Mexican cowboys who

¹¹ C. B. Hudspeth, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 326.

¹² Captain W. T. Vann, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 602.

worked for Yzaguirre. Gómez needed to be taken to Hebbronville for incarceration in the Jim Hogg County jail, but Edds was not able to take him there from Yzaguirre's ranch because he had an obligation to return to Rio Grande City for district court. Edds therefore asked Yzaguirre to appoint two men he trusted to take Gómez to Hebbronville. Sabas Ozuna and Federico López, two Mexican cowboys, were given the task, but Gómez never made it to Hebbronville. Instead Ozuna and Lopez shot him in the back, and claimed that Gómez tried to escape. Both Ozuna and López were arrested by Rangers and placed in jail in Hebbronville, but they were quickly released on bond, and soon after the charges against them were dropped.¹³

W. M. Hanson, appointed captain over all of the companies of the Rangers, investigated the killing of Gómez, and concluded that he had been murdered by Ozuna and López. Hanson repudiated Ozuna's and López's statements that Gómez had tried to escape in the bushes and they had shot him to keep him from escaping, by pointing out that Gómez's body was found in the middle of the road with a bullet hole in his back and was not found in the brush. Interestingly Ozuna and López were not convicted for what was deemed as murder by several different people involved in the investigation. Their release can be attributed to the character and social standing of the different men involved based on the denotation of citizenship. Both Ozuna and López were each separately reported by Yzaguirre as having "a good reputation...as a law-abiding citizen" in the counties they lived in. Gómez on the other hand was described as "a very dangerous thief, who had been depredating on the good people of that country for a good while," clearly Gómez was not seen as a good citizen. Capt. Hanson even concluded his report

¹³ John Edds, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 521-522; Investigation of J. J. Edds, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 134-143.

on the investigation of the Gómez killing by stating that “the American citizens including the District Judge, of that District, believe the Mexicans did a good job in killing this man [Gómez].”¹⁴

The Gómez incident is a good example of the importance that was placed on the concept of citizenship and the status of “citizen” within Texas society. Two Mexican cowboys shot an unarmed Mexican prisoner in the back. The man they shot was not considered to be a good citizen and the two Mexican cowboys were, therefore they were not prosecuted over the incident based on the prevailing importance of citizenship within their community. In the Gómez incident the status of a good “law-abiding citizen” allowed for a certain bending of the laws as long as all the men involved were Mexican Americans and it did not affect another person considered to be a good citizen. J. B. Scarborough, Sheriff of Kleberg County even testified that he was “not hostile towards the Mexican population” of his county if they were “law-abiding citizens.”¹⁵ The identification as a “law-abiding citizen” had a lot of power within Texas society, but even more powerful was the identity of a United States citizen, because it went beyond inherent social rights and instead carried legal weight.

Following the Border Uprisings and World War I many Mexican Americans began to more directly assert their identities as United States Citizens. Some Mexican Americans embraced cultural elements that were seen as “American” such as the celebration of Fourth of July, in a way that was seen as strictly “American” without a

¹⁴ Letter to Adjutant General James A. Harley from Captain W. M. Hanson, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 133-134; Statement of Ed. Yzaguirre, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 192.

¹⁵ J. B. Scarborough, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 280.

Mexican style.”¹⁶ Other Mexican Americans emphasized their U.S. citizenship by the placement of greater importance upon their identity as Americans. A Mexican American constable, Ventura R. Sánchez, from San Diego, Texas, exclaimed during the Ranger Investigations that his brother and he “came from Mexican descent and [were] proud of it, but ten times more proud that [they were] American citizens.”¹⁷ When J. T. Canales was asked during the Ranger Investigations if he was a Mexican by blood, he answered “I am not a Mexican, I am an American citizen.”¹⁸ The responses of both Sánchez and Canales showed their identification as United States citizens. This identification as United States citizens of Mexican descent was actively expressed by many Mexican Americans who returned to Texas after their service in World War I.

World War I had provided an opportunity for Mexican Americans to develop and assert their identity as United States citizens and prove their loyalty to the United States. Outside of the segregated society of the Texas border region, Mexican Americans’ experiences during the war shaped their identities and understanding of themselves. While in Europe, Mexican Americans, in contrast to African-Americans, were not segregated in the U.S. military, but instead served alongside other American citizens of different ethnicities and backgrounds. The shared experience of war for Mexican Americans was important in the emergence of a Mexican American identity based on U.S. citizenship. During the war many Mexican Americans saw themselves as Americans fighting for an American cause that did not pertain to one group of Americans,

¹⁶ Paul S. Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier: Nueces County, Texas* (1934. Reprint, New York: Russell & Russell, 1971) 127.

¹⁷ Ventura R. Sanchez, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 368.

¹⁸ J. T. Canales, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 2, 342.

but for all the different groups of Americans that they fought alongside.¹⁹ Through military service during the war a general identity based on U.S. citizenship emerged among Mexican American veterans who no longer looked south of the border for an understanding of who they were, but instead looked to the principles and ideals of the U.S. they had fought for in Europe.²⁰ In understanding the effect that World War I had on Texas-Mexicans it is important to recognize the idea that they in turn used their service in the military as “a weapon in their fight for civil rights.”²¹

José Luz Sáenz offers an interesting perspective into the progressive ideals that Mexican Americans carried with them during and after World War I. Before the war, Luz Sáenz worked as an educator in South Texas where he was exposed to the racial discrimination and segregation of Texas-Mexicans that permeated the area at the beginning of the twentieth century. During service in World War I Luz Sáenz recognized his identity as a U.S. citizen alongside other ethnic Americans, such as Native Americans and Polish Americans who had undergone their own struggles against racial discrimination and segregation to assert their own identities as citizens. More importantly, he recognized the fact that they were all fighting for the same American principles and ideas, which Luz Sáenz felt formed a common bond between them. Representative of the transformation of Luz Sáenz’s identity after he came back from WWI was his use of the term “Mexican American” before it became a common term.²²

As Mexican American veterans returned from the war, the reality they came back to was a harsh reminder of the segregated and racially discriminatory society that existed

¹⁹ Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 161.

²⁰ Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier*, 245.

²¹ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 160.

²² *Ibid.*, 160-161.

in Texas. It did not live up to the ideals and principles that they fought for in WWI. Segregation and violence was rampant in Texas, and many Mexican Americans found that the very legal rights granted to them by their birth as U.S. citizens had been corrupted by Anglo-American practices. Even the right to participate on a jury had disappeared for many people of Mexican descent. In Cameron County in 1919 there was quite a large, if not majority, population of Mexican descent, but the grand jury that convened in January 1919 only had one Mexican on it, the rest were Anglo-Americans. The county attorney, Oscar Dancy stated that most grand juries in his county consisted only of Anglo-American farmers, whom he referred to as “newcomers.” When he was asked if Mexicans served on the grand jury, Dancy responded that it was “almost solidly Americans.”²³ The indication of Dancy’s words is that his consideration of whether or not a person was an “American” was based not on citizenship, but on race and ethnicity, because all members of a grand jury had to be U. S. citizens. Mexican Americans returned home to face a society that did not fully recognize their status as citizens of the United States because of their racial and ethnic background. The shock many Mexican American veterans faced as they returned to Texas is apparent in the words of a Mexican American interviewed by Paul Taylor: “There were a number of men who had served in the war. Then when they came home, they found that they were not served drinks, and were told that ‘no Mexicans were allowed.’ They raised the question then, ‘What are we, Mexicans or Americans?’”²⁴

With the emergence of a new concept of identity that was based on citizenship, Mexican Americans formed new organizations during the 1920s that championed their

²³ Oscar Dancy, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 575, 579.

²⁴ Paul S. Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier*, 245.

new goals and ideals. The development of new organizations specifically for U.S. citizens of Mexican descent gave Mexican Americans the opportunity to use their understanding of citizenship that came out of World War I in a collective effort to gain civil rights. Mexican Americans organized and asserted their identity, civil rights, and equality as U. S. citizens independent from the Texas-Mexican community and the racialized stereotypes caused by Mexican Nationals and disloyal Mexican Americans in the 1910s. Anglo-American reprisals on the Texas-Mexican community that occurred as a result of the Border Uprisings, German-Mexican conspiracy theories, and draft dodgers, led many Mexican Americans to question the concept of solidarity within the Texas-Mexican community that had been expressed in *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* in 1911. Mexican American veterans returned from World War I and actively promoted their allegiance to the United States and their identification with American culture. The events of the 1910s led to divisions within the Texas-Mexican community that pushed Mexican Americans to choose an identity invested in their citizenship to the United States. Mexican Americans choice in their promotion of an identity based on citizenship resulted in the creation of Mexican American organizations during the 1920s for the purpose of uplifting the Mexican American community in a segregated and Anglo dominated Texas society.

Mexican American Organization

Mexican Americans founded several organizations to fight for the legal rights that were granted to U.S. citizens, but had been denied to Mexican Americans by Anglo

Americans. The *Orden Hijos de America* (OHA) was one of the first organizations created in the wake of violence and distrust from the 1910s. On 13 October 1921 several Mexicans-Americans, many of whom were veterans of World War I, founded the OHA in San Antonio, under the premise that “the entire membership shall consist wholly of American citizens of Mexican or Spanish descent.”²⁵ The founders of the organization came together with the purpose of fighting for their place and position within Texas society based on their inherent rights as citizens of the United States. The founding of the OHA occurred almost exactly a decade after a call for unity amongst the Texas-Mexican community had been issued at *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*.

Several other organizations that were similar in their purpose and goals to the OHA were founded soon after the OHA came into existence; the Order Knights of America (OKA) and the League of Latin American Citizens (LLAC). Many of the Mexican Americans that founded these organizations, such as Alonso Perales, José Luz Sáenz, and Eleuterio Escobar, learned to fight for justice and equality during the turbulence of the 1910s in Texas and while overseas in World War I, and they carried that attitude into their organizations as United States citizens of Mexican descent during the 1920s in Texas.²⁶

The OHA was founded specifically on the principles of a Mexican American identity based on U.S. citizenship. The constitution and rites of the organization are filled with constant reminders of citizenship, loyalty, and patriotism to the United States. The

²⁵ Letter to Clemente N. Idar from J. C. Solís, 20 April 1926, Clemente N. Idar Papers, 1875-1938, B8:F4, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin; “Order Sons of America,” Clemente N. Idar Papers, 1875-1938, B8:F4, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin; “Suggestions made by Alonso S. Perales,” Andrés de Luna Collection, 1924-1955, B1:F3, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁶ Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 255.

OHA book of rites under the section titled obligations specifically states that members of the organization are required to give the OHA their full “co-operation to the end that [they] may cultivate and highly develop [their] sense of Nationalism, American citizenship and Love of Country.”²⁷ The constitution and laws of the OHA also state that one of the purposes of the formation of the OHA was to change the lives of U. S. citizens of Mexican descent who did not know or understand their rights as United States citizens, by the development of their intelligence, economics, and political consciousness “en que todos los Americanos normal y habitualmente desenvuelven su vida (in the way every American normally and continually lives their life).”²⁸ Basically the OHA wanted to teach Mexican Americans cultural elements that were from the United States so that Anglo-Americans who felt that all people of Mexican descent were not “Americans” would not be able to alienate Mexican Americans solely on the basis of cultural differences.

The OKA and LLAC were almost identical to the OHA in their organization and goals for the Mexican American community. In the monthly publication, *OKA – News*, there is a paragraph on the title page that states that the OKA was established for the purpose of “educating its members...in their rights and obligations as citizens...along intellectual, social, moral, and physical lines...to elevate and bring about greater progress and general advancement” for Mexican Americans in Texas.²⁹ Inside the publication in a more fervent statement on the purpose of the OKA, Mauro Machado, a committee

²⁷ “Ritual of Order Sons of America; Council No. 1 San Antonio,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁸ “Constiucion y Leyes de La “Orden Hijos de America,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁹ “OKA-News,” December 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F2, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

member of the OKA, responded to critics of the OKA with the announcement that they were established to “demand equal rights for the American citizens of Mexican extraction...[and] to make equal rights the master of might.”³⁰ Eleuterio Escobar, a member of the OKA, is representative of the background of many members of these Mexican American organizations. He grew up in a segregated South Texas town where he was poorly educated and worked as a farm hand. In 1918 Escobar volunteered for military service during World War I, and after he returned he dedicated himself to the cause of getting equal educational opportunities for Mexican Americans: “I am one of those unfortunates who was denied an equal education, and my human and constitutional rights were denied and infringed by our highest state and school officials. This frustration and suffering caused mothers to shed many tears. I said to my God, ‘God if I ever am in a position to help these unfortunate children in my humble way, I am going to do it.’”³¹

The LLAC similarly expressed its goals and intentions in a manual that it published for its members in the 1920s. Under the section that listed the objectives of the LLAC the first goal listed was to clearly define and express, without a doubt, the organization’s loyalty to “los ideales, principios y ciudadanía de los Estados Unidos.” The second stated goal of the LLAC’s manual took a more forward looking approach than the other organizations and declared that it was the LLAC’s responsibility to educate their children in the duties, rights, language, and customs of the United States for their

³⁰ “OKA-News,” January 1928, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F2, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

³¹ Eleuterio Escobar Papers, 1906-1971, B1:F5, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

common good.³² To ensure a better quality of life for future generations of Mexican Americans, the members of LLAC believed they had an obligation to teach their children to understand and exercise their identity as United States citizens. One of the elements that the LLAC believed was necessary for future generations of Mexican Americans was the English language.

The use of English was one way in which the LLAC, OHA, and OKA exercised their identity as United States citizens. During meetings, sponsored events, and in publications these Mexican American organizations used English as a way to represent their citizenship and their American roots.³³ If an Anglo-American attended an event they easily understood what went on and felt as if they were at any other fraternal American organization. The OHA organized an event in Corpus Christi in 1927 that was attended by many different members of the Mexican American and Anglo-American communities. James Tafolla and Clemente Idar both gave speeches on “citizenship and patriotism” in English that were raved about in an English speaking newspaper the next day. Both Tafolla and Idar understood that speaking English to an audience of Anglo-Americans emphasized the citizenship and dedication of Mexican Americans to the United States.³⁴ A mastery of English differentiated Mexican Americans from newly arrived Mexican nationals in Texas who only spoke Spanish. Mexican Americans functioned easier within a Texas society that was increasingly filled with Anglo-Americans that did not speak or understand Spanish. Through the use of language Mexican Americans declared that they were not just ‘Mexicans’ but a different group of

³² “Manual for use by The League of Latin American Citizens,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F3, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

³³ Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 257.

³⁴ Ben Garza Collection, 1926-1930, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, Box 1, Folder 1.

people from that of Mexican nationals and therefore had access to more rights and opportunities within American society.

Eduardo Idar, one of the founders of the LLAC is an important example of the importance that was place on English by the formation of these new Mexican American organizations in the 1920s. The use of the English language had a special importance for Eduardo Idar, because he did not learn to write in English until the 1920s. Hand written letters and articles were the form of communication that was absolutely necessary for the spread of ideas in the 1920s. Eduardo Idar recognized his need to write in English in the 1920s and so he taught himself how to do it. He also started to write his correspondence in English even when he was still attempting to master the language, and ended his letters with an apology for the errors in grammar. He also included in a letter to a member of the OHA after apologizing for his errors that he wrote the letter in English because it was the correct thing to do.³⁵

These organizations' dedication to the use of English did not represent a complete rejection of Spanish, but instead recognized the importance of both languages for Mexican Americans. There was an understanding that there were proper places for both languages and a Mexican American should understand when each language was to be appropriately used. A chapter of OHA located in Alice, Texas wrote half of the minutes for meetings during 1927 in English and half in Spanish. Another chapter of OHA located in Corpus Christi wrote all of the minutes in English, but then sent out invitations to dances and events in Spanish. The founding chapter of OHA in San Antonio printed its book of rituals in English but then printed its constitution in Spanish, which originally

³⁵ Letter to James Tafolla from Eduardo Idar, 14 December 1927, Andrés de Luna Collection, 1924-1955, B1:F3, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

had been written in English by Clemente Idar. Both the OKA and the LLAC included English and Spanish articles in their publications. The LLAC often included articles that were first in English and then in Spanish to ensure clarity and understanding.³⁶ Clearly these organizations recognized the importance of language and the need for Mexican Americans to master both English and Spanish, they did not reject their cultural background, but instead broadened their identity to include both an American and Mexican understanding of themselves as U.S. citizens of Mexican descent.

The use of symbols and traditions that were identified as being culturally American by these different Mexican American organizations showed a recognition and importance by their members to understand and incorporate elements of the United States cultural tradition. Identity is often built upon a culture's rituals and traditions and when Mexican Americans incorporated not only Mexican but also American cultural elements within their identity they manipulated and created a new identity for themselves. As citizens of the United States, members of these organizations felt they had a right and obligation to use the cultural traditions of America, and this attitude was a far departure from the attitudes of Texas-Mexicans that overwhelmingly used Mexican nationalistic symbols a decade earlier in *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*.

All of these organizations used different elements and symbols of American society within their rituals and meetings. A prayer that was written by George Washington was used to open the meetings for the LLAC and was noted on the closing

³⁶ Order Sons of America (Council 5) records, 1927, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin; "Ledger of Minutes, 1924-1926," Andrés de Luna Collection, 1924-1955, B1:F1, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin; "OKA-News," Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F2, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin; "Manual for use by The League of Latin American Citizens," Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F3, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

prayer cards for the OHA.³⁷ The songs “America” and the “Star Spangled Banner” were used by these organizations in their functions and meetings. “America” was specifically always used by the OHA to open their meetings. As it was denoted earlier the concept of citizenship also had a built in regional connection to identity, and LLAC recognized the regional context of being a Mexican American in Texas and included the song ‘The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You’ in their manual. The LLAC provide an interesting example in their use of American symbols because they took elements that were specifically rooted in English and the American culture and translated them into Spanish. It was important for the members of the LLAC to not only be able to recite these words in English, but also to understand them. On the front cover of the manual for the LLAC, the ‘Pledge of Allegiance’ is written first in English and then in Spanish, and further in the manual ‘Washington’s Prayer’ is also translated in both languages.³⁸

The OKA monthly news pamphlet printed a very powerful and meaningful American symbol on the front page of every issue. Right below the paragraph that listed the goals of the organization there appeared a picture of the Statue of Liberty holding a scroll that had the words “knowledge is power” written on it. The reason why this symbol was chosen by the OKA is unknown, but it holds several important connotations in its use. The Statue of Liberty is the great American symbol that all immigrants that came across the Atlantic saw as they entered the United States. All the different European ethnic groups that were incorporated into American society and considered to

³⁷ “Order Sons of America,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F1, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin; “Manual for use by The League of Latin American Citizens,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F3, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

³⁸ “Manual for use by The League of Latin American Citizens,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F3, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

be American had passed by the Statue of Liberty; German, Irish, Swedish, Czech, and many more. Mexican Americans and the members of the OKA did not cross the Atlantic and had not achieved the same incorporation into American society as European groups. The OKA still recognized the power of the great American symbol and used it in their organization to emphasize their American identity. Equally important in the symbol are the words “knowledge is power.” Situated right underneath the goals of the OKA the symbol of the Statue of Liberty and those three words sum up the attitude of Mexican Americans that they had to know and understand their American side in order to have power and recognition as United States citizens.³⁹

Using the different elements of American society that the members of these Mexican American organizations incorporated into their identity they then focused upon the use of their citizenship to gain legal rights in the advancement of Mexican Americans in Texas. These organizations used the “ballot box” and legal courts as a way to gain political and social power in their fight against racial discrimination.⁴⁰ J. C. Solis the secretary for the OHA at Corpus Christi, felt that it was very important to mention in a letter to Clemente Idar, who wrote the constitution for the OHA, the accomplishments that his chapter had made, and they were all legal gains attained by their status as United States citizens. Solis, reported that “this council is doing and accomplishing the work that it was organized for..., American citizens of Mexican extraction have been called to

³⁹ “OKA-News,” Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F2, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), 15.

serve in the juries...segregation of our children in the public schools of this town has been done away with," and the organization had not lost a legal case that they were a part of.⁴¹

The Manual for the LLAC specifically mentions the need for Mexican American to use their status as United States citizens to gain legal and political rights. Several articles in the section that lists the goals and purposes of the LLAC emphasized specific legal goals for the organization. Article eight, for example, discussed the need for Mexican Americans to participate in politics on a local, state, and national level for the collective interest of Mexican Americans so long as their character and principles were not compromised. In a direct challenge to Anglo-American practices that limited the voting power of Mexican Americans, the LLAC declared in their manual that they would pay their poll taxes and the poll taxes of their families so that they could realize the rights that were granted to them as citizens.⁴²

The OHA, OKA, and LLAC were all Mexican American organizations that were founded in the 1920s for the purpose of fighting segregation and discrimination based on the legal rights that were granted to United States citizens. The members of these organizations emphasized their use of the English language, American symbols, and the U. S. legal system to establish a better place within Texas society for Mexican Americans. Citizenship became the cornerstone for many Mexican Americans in their fight for equality and their separation from the lawless and unpatriotic characterization of Mexicans that had emerged in the 1910s. World War I Mexican American veteran J. Luz Saenz, founder of the OHA, summoned up the attitudes that many Mexican Americans

⁴¹ Letter to Clemente N. Idar from J. C. Solis, 20 April 1926, Clemente N. Idar Papers, 1875-1938, B8:F4, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁴² "Manual for use by The League of Latin American Citizens," Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, B1:F3, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

had in the 1920s in an article he wrote: “We are as good American citizens as the best, and we have the right to demand fair and complete respect for our inalienable rights and equal share of all privileges and prerogatives granted to other citizens of our country.”⁴³

⁴³ J. Luz Saenz, “Racial Discrimination,” In *Are We Good Neighbors* (edited by Alonso S. Perales, 1948, Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), 29.

EPILOGUE

The creation of organizations for United States citizens of Mexican descent allowed members an opportunity to develop and assert a Mexican American identity independent from the rest of the Texas-Mexican community during the 1920s. The *Orden Hijos de America*, the Order Knights of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens provided a forum for Mexican Americans to renegotiate their position within an Anglo dominated society in Texas. The culmination of events during the 1910s that fractured the Mexican community provided the conditions for the emergence of an independent Mexican American identity based on United States citizenship during the 1920s that served as the foundation for a movement towards civil rights and equality throughout the twentieth century.

A unified Texas-Mexican community, advocated for at *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista* in 1911, never reached fruition because of the antagonisms between Anglos and Mexicans, and within the Texas-Mexican community during the 1910s. Increased immigration of Mexican nationals, revolutionary ideology coming out of the Mexican Revolution, the Border Uprisings, and fears of a German-Mexican conspiracy during World War I resulted in an Anglo-Americans establishment that characterized the Texas-Mexican community as being inferior, dangerous, and unpatriotic. Mexican Americans like Dilar Villa Real, who had lived their entire lives in the United States, found

themselves ostracized as outsiders within their own country. Anglo characterizations and connotations that all people of Mexican descent, regardless of citizenship, were simply “Mexicans” were commonplace during the 1910s, and implied that even Mexican Americans were not considered to be American.¹ During World War I, Mexican Americans avoided unity based on a nationalistic Mexican identity, that had been championed at *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, hoping instead to break free from negative stereotypes by Anglo-Americans that reinforced segregation and inequality in Texas.

An immediate backlash hit the Mexican American community when the United States entered World War I. When Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans avoided the draft in 1917, it only deepened negative stereotypes held by Anglo-Americans towards people of Mexican descent. Mexican Americans were pushed even farther away from being accepted as Americans by Anglos in Texas. The efforts of some Mexican Americans to avoid the draft led some Anglos to question the loyalty of all Mexican Americans to the United States. The most significant result of World War I was not the allegations and negative stereotypes, but the large numbers of patriotic Mexican Americans who volunteered and answered their draft notices for service in the military during World War I, such as José Luz Sáenz and Eleuterio Escobar. Mexican Americans who were shipped overseas were not fighting as simply “Mexicans,” but as Americans of Mexican descent who were loyal to their country and recognized the obligations and duties that were required of their citizenship.²

¹ J. C. George, *Joint Committee Investigation*, Vol. 1, 288.

² Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press), 245.

The concept and importance of citizenship was not new to Mexican Americans when they joined the military during World War I. The concept of citizenship was ingrained within early twentieth century Texas society in many different ways. The word “citizen” elicited several different levels of understanding within Texas society that were based on two main concepts; physical locality – town, region, county, and nation – and social standing within that locality. A person was considered a citizen of the place that they resided in, but more important was the consideration of whether or not they were “good” or “bad” citizens. Negative stereotypes led many people of Mexican descent to be considered bad citizens by Anglos during the 1910s. The labeling of Mexicans as bad citizens gave Anglo-Americans justification for denying them certain rights and privileges, such as education, fair trials, and protection by the law. These rights were often considered to be the privileges of only “good” citizens in Texas. It was within this environment that Mexican Americans were taken out of their small segregated communities in Texas and sent fight in Europe. Mexican Americans served alongside U.S. citizens of many different ethnicities and cultures, and it was during that process that it became clear that they were United States citizens. Mexican Americans also realized that all the rights and privileges granted to “good” citizens in Texas, where rights and privileges that belonged to them because of their U. S. Citizenship. World War I veterans of Mexican descent developed and emphasized a Mexican American identity as citizens of the U.S. and they used that during the 1920s to demand the rights and freedoms granted by the constitution to all citizens of the United States.

Mexican American veterans formed organizations after they returned from World War I; the *Orden Hijos de America*, the Order Knights of America, and the League of

Latin American Citizens, that emphasized their identity as citizens. The incorporation of American cultural practices and traditions, and an exclusive membership of only United States citizens of Mexican descent divorced the members of these organizations from other elements within the Texas-Mexican community. Members of these organizations learned and used patriotic songs such as 'America' and the 'Star Spangled banner, and paid homage to George Washington by using a prayer he wrote to begin their meetings. The importance these organizations placed on the mastery of the English language was crucial in the development of a Mexican American identity independent from the rest of the Texas-Mexican community. Mexican Americans who spoke English fluently could differentiate themselves from the recently arrived Mexican nationals in Texas that only spoke Spanish. By learning and understanding the elements that were culturally important to the United States, Mexican Americans renegotiated their place within Texas society and demanded the rights granted to them as citizens, just as German Americans, Irish Americans, and many other ethnic groups had done throughout the history of the United States.

These Mexican American organizations fought for better educational opportunities, an end to segregation, political freedoms, and the civil rights granted to them by their citizenship to the United States. Members of these organizations had similar goals for uplifting the Mexican American community, but they often did not work in conjunction with each other and even sometimes bitterly opposed each other.

Just as there was tension and division within the Texas-Mexican community in the 1910s, there was tension and division between these Mexican American organizations during the 1920s. They fought over the recruitment of new members and argued about

which organization was better suited to lead the fight for Mexican American civil rights. James Tafolla, a member and officer of the OHA, accused members of the OKA in 1929, of trying “to engender strife, hatred, and to spread poison” against the OHA.³ Even though there were conflicts between the *Orden Hijos de America*, the Order Knights of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens, they recognized that their purpose and goals for the Mexican American community was greater than any single organization itself. This realization caused the *Orden Hijos de America*, the Order Knights of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens to meet in Corpus Christi in 1929, put aside their differences and form a single unified Mexican American organization, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). There were difficulties in the merger of these organizations, but the members understood that unification was necessary “to give the movement equal rights, justice, and more strength.”⁴ LULAC was formed with the explicit purpose of ensuring the rights and freedoms for Mexican Americans granted by their citizenship to the United States. During the twentieth century LULAC became a leading Mexican American civil rights organization in the United States, but other Mexican American organizations also developed as a result of continued divisions within the Mexican American community. Arguments over the direction and methods for the Mexican American civil rights movement emerged within LULAC and the Mexican American community throughout the twentieth century, which were reminiscent of the arguments between Mexican American organizations in the 1920s.

³ Letter to Oliver Douglas Weeks from James Tafolla, 25 October 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, 1922-1932, LULAC Archives, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁴ Eleuterio Escobar Papers, 1906-1971, B1:F5, Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

Other Mexican American organizations were eventually formed because of different opinions over the Mexican American civil rights movement, such as the American G. I. Forum in 1948 and the National Council of La Raza in 1973. There remained a consistent struggle for rights and equality based on the identity of Mexican Americans as United States citizens throughout the sometimes bitter arguments that occurred within the Mexican American community during the twentieth century. The emphasis that Mexican Americans placed on their citizenship to the U. S. and the inherit rights related to that citizenship during the 1920s formed a basis for a Mexican American identity throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

Almost every ethnic group in the United States has struggled to establish recognition of themselves as Americans within the larger society of the United States in order to gain the rights granted to them as citizens. Initially during the nineteenth century Mexican Americans in Texas were able to maintain an independent society and identity from the rest of the United States, due to the relatively slow incursion of Anglos into areas of Texas where the majority of people were Mexican descent. The cultural dominance that Mexican Americans had in Texas dissipated in the first decade of the twentieth century under the rapid immigration of both Anglo-Americans and Mexican nationals. Mexican Americans found themselves in an Anglo dominated farming society that relegated them to an inferior social position and resulted in the denial of rights and freedoms. Initially Mexican Americans responded by seeking a unified solidarity with the Texas-Mexican community as a whole based on a Mexicanist identity. However, the events of the 1910s resulted in negative stereotypes of the Texas-Mexican community by Anglo-Americans that left Mexican Americans disillusioned with the idea of Texas-

Mexican unity. Many Mexican Americans placed their loyalty with the United States and signed up for the military during World War I as a way to separate themselves from the disloyal and unpatriotic elements of the Texas-Mexican community. The experience of World War I led many Mexican Americans to form organizations with the purpose of fighting for their civil rights on the basis of their citizenship to the United States.

Through the manipulation and incorporation of both American and Mexican cultural elements, a Mexican American identity based on citizenship emerged in Texas during the 1920s that provided U.S. citizens of Mexican descent a platform from which to fight for their civil rights and equality within the United States during the twentieth century.

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