LORAIN: OHIO'S FIRST *COLONIA*
A BLUEPRINT FOR MIDWESTERN MEXICAN MIGRATION

by

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ABSTRACT

ELIZABETH KING. Lorain: Ohio's First *Colonia,* A Blueprint for Midwestern Mexican Migration. (Under the direction of DR. JURGEN BUCHENAU)

Within this piece, I am arguing that Mexican migration to the Midwest in the early twentieth century is highly overlooked in literature. Most often, the historiography deals with characteristics that typify the Southwest, and I assert that Mexicans in the Midwest differ in several crucial ways – particularly, the choice of an urban area to resettle, industrial employment, the higher rate of women and children accompanying the male laborer, integration into the local community, and relative lack of racism experienced. The bulk of my work deals with Lorain, Ohio – the first Mexican *colonia* in the state. Lorain existed as a blueprint for other similar *colonias* in the region, and can be used to understand Mexican migration to Midwest more broadly.

DEDICATION

To my family, for their unconditional support in this process

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1902 – The National Reclamation Act is passed in the United States, fundamentally changing the Southwestern landscape and opening the region to significantly increased Mexican migration.

1910 – Francisco Madero publishes the *Plan de San Luis Potosí,* calling for rebellion on 20 November against Díaz, heralding in the Mexican Revolution.

1911 – On 25 May, Díaz resigns from power and is exiled to France while the Revolution and its violence continue throughout the nation.

1917 – The Constitution of 1917 is proclaimed in February, and its author, Carranza, is Elected president in May.

1917-1918 – First Mexican immigrants arrive in northern Ohio as part of Toledo's Continental Sugar Company.

1921 – The first Mexican immigrants resettle in Lorain, Ohio as part of the transient group who worked for the B&O Railroad.

1923 - Mexicans are recruited from Texas to work at the National Tube Company, Catalyzing the creation of the Lorain *colonia*

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1926 – Calles Laws passed in Mexico, overwhelming the already widespread resentment for the government's anti-clerical policies. This led religious figures to take up arms against this religious persecution, leading to the outbreak of the Cristero War. Violence and clashes between rebels and federal troops quickly spread through several states.

1929 – Peace is finally brokered between the government and the Church, and all arms have been laid down by September, ending the Cristero War.

INTRODUCTION

"Those who managed to get away from this condition gravitated to the frontier, in many instances…and many crossed the international line to seek work on the ranches of Texas or New Mexico…From the border ranches these migrants took jobs as track workers on railroads, and gradually they were brought further into the country…

-George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*

The Mendez family arrived in Lorain, Ohio in 1925. They arrived shortly after the most destructive natural disaster the city had ever experienced – an F4 tornado that struck in late June 1924. The town was still in the midst of reconstruction, but luckily the city's main source of Mexican employment – the National Tube Company – remained unscathed. Natividad and Felicitas Mendez had five children travelling with them, and they were the first of their extended family to relocate to Lorain. Their circuitous journey to Lorain began between 1916 and 1920, when Felicitas left Michoacán with her parents, Maria Tovar and Juan Silva, and her brother, Manuel. The family experienced instability in their town from the revolutionary government, and saw the considerably higher wages offered in Texas as an opportunity. Natividad, part of the armed civil defense for the Carranza government, fled a nearby city in Michoacán around the same time, barely escaping with his life when anti-government rebels appeared at his family's door. Natividad and his family had no opportunities for social or economic advancement in their hometown, so even without the appearance of *guerrilleros*, it's likely Natividad may have eventually left home anyway.

Felicitas and Natividad met shortly after they arrived in Glidden, Texas, marrying at the end of 1920. They had four children in four years, and lived along with Manuel and Maria inside a cramped, converted railroad boxcar - at the mercy of the elements in the bitter winter and sweltering summer. Natividad had an acquaintance who had moved

to Lorain, and the family decided on the city as their final destination. Many Mexicans initially migrated to Texas, but over time, chose to leave. Jobs were increasingly scarce with more and more Mexicans streaming in, and the promise of midwestern jobs lured them north. With such a long and expensive journey ahead of them, they had to make the trip in stages. They left Texas in 1925, heading first from Glidden to Fort Worth, TX by train. While travelling from Fort Worth, Manuel met his future bride, part of another Mexican migrant family, moving from Texas to Nebraska. While her family left for Nebraska, the Mendez clan travelled to Iowa. Iowa was elected as their stop for its location – a halfway point – but also so Felicitas could give birth in the midst of their journey. She gave birth to her last child in October, and they departed Iowa for Lorain in December, arriving at the very end of 1925.

Natividad quickly chose the National Tube Company for employment. Manuel had left the family for Nebraska, to marry Andrea. Once Natividad started work, he sent word to Manuel and Andrea of the opportunities in Lorain. He also contacted Felicitas's sister, Jesus and her husband. Jesus had married young at the age of fifteen, remaining in Mexico with her husband when the rest of the family migrated to Texas. Her husband, Agapito, regularly traveled back and forth to the United States for work, while she stayed with her mother-in-law and he sent money to support her. After the birth of their first child, they decided as a family to head to the Midwest, where they had heard jobs were plentiful. In 1923, they packed up and moved to Iowa for work in the sugar beet fields. After just one harvest season there, they continued north to Michigan, resettling in early 1924. Here, they had their second child, and lived through excruciatingly cold winters in a converted boxcar.

Within a few short months, the rest of Felicitas's family joined them in Lorain. Manuel and Andrea used money that Natividad provided to travel to Michigan, and met up with Jesus and Agapito. In Michigan, the two families pooled their finances, and bought a used Model T to travel to Lorain together. They all arrived to their new home in January 1926. Manuel joined Natividad at National Tube, but Agapito, a rare exception, worked for the railroad instead of the steel mill. While Lorain offered higher wages to the laborers, and the family afforded significantly better housing, life was not necessarily easy for the family. Felicitas perished from kidney problems in 1928, leaving Natividad to care for their five children. Manuel died two short years later from an untreated malignancy on his neck. The matriarch, Maria Tovar, worked hard to navigate the social and legal agencies in Lorain to ensure the children were cared for, and by 1940 the family finally achieved relative financial security.[1]

The story of Maria Tovar and her children's journey from Michoacán to Lorain exemplifies the long and roundabout routes that brought Mexicans to their final destinations in the midwestern United States. Each of the families involved had their own motivations for leaving Mexico. But, their story displayed the way that family and friends heavily influenced the decision of immigrants on their final destinations within the United States. Their stories highlight the journey of a midwestern migrant family. Their journey began in Texas, led them throughout the Midwest, and they finally settled in a community that they discovered through an acquaintance of one family member. They were one of thousands of extended families that made their way from rural Mexico into Lorain and the Midwest in the 1920s.

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[1] This whole story comes from Frank Mendez's story of his family. Frank, the fifth child of Felicitas and Natividad, wrote an account of his family's travels to Lorain, entitled "*From Michoacán, Mexico to Lorain, Ohio,"* available only at the Western Reserve Historical Society Research Library.

The Tovar family's migration story is important because it opposes many widely held beliefs about Mexican immigration in the early twentieth century. The group includes a proportionately high number of women and children – they actually outnumber the male laborers of the group. This displayed that family units traveled together, and migrant groups in the Midwest were composed of more than unaccompanied men. Their story also revealed trends in migration patterns. Theirs was not a simple story of random location for solely economic reasons. Instead, the prospect of employment played a role, but the precise resettlement came from joining acquaintances and family members. While the group worked in agriculture initially - likely a familiar occupation, hailing from the Mexican countryside – their final location included industrial employment. The Midwest had a selection of Mexicans who chose agricultural work – particularly sugar beet fields – but they predominately worked in various types of factories. The Tovar story diverges greatly from tales told about early Mexican migrants, and they exemplify the differences of midwestern Mexicans.

The Midwest has a long and fascinating history of Mexican migration, although most literature still deals with the border states. Mexicans resettled in the heart of the United States over a century ago, and have lived throughout the region since. I argue that Mexican migration to the Midwest is frequently overlooked. Because of this, the perception that most people gain about Mexican immigration comes from characteristics that only typify certain parts of the country – particularly the Southwest. Few authors focus on the region overall, and the best comprehensive volume for the period, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932,* by Juan García, was published over twenty years ago.[2] Other monographs deal with specific locations throughout the Midwest, like Gabriela

[2] Juan Ramon García. *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

Arredondo's *Mexican Chicago*, or Dionisio Nodín Valdés's *Barrios Norteños*, but even those works are scarce[3][4]. The Midwest's rich history contains many untold stories about numerous Mexican *colonias*, and each contributes to understanding the region as a whole.

Lorain, Ohio, was the first Mexican *colonia* in the state of Ohio. It developed in 1923, and the population quickly escalated to an estimated 2000-3000 Mexicans in a matter of years. However, the story of Lorain has never been discussed at length in any literature. I argue that telling the story of migrants in Lorain holds value in itself, but particularly because the city is paradigmatic for the Midwest. By telling the story of Lorain, I am extending the scholarship about the Midwest, and building on those who have written previously on the region. There are specific differences that exemplify midwestern Mexican migration from other regions – particularly the oft-cited Southwest – and Lorain displayed each of them. My work helps to further establish the ways that one location can contain its own attributes, but also contribute to the understanding of a broader region. For this reason, the story needs to be examined to more deeply comprehend the Midwest's Mexican origins.

Mexican immigration to the United States exploded following a combination of factors within both Mexico and the United States. In the late nineteenth century, the long-standing dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz brought many aspects of modernization to Mexico. While these measures did not benefit each constituent equally, change arrived nonetheless. One dramatic shift came from the privatization of land. This development forced *los campesinos* off the communal property they had worked for centuries. Not

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[3] Gabriela Arredondo. *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity and Nation, 1916-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008). Dionicio Nodín Valdés. *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

only did they lose their livelihoods, but also their homes. Díaz provided more positive change to Mexico in the form of railroads. Mexico's railroad mileage sharply increased, primarily through foreign investment. Landless peasants whose families had lived in their villages for centuries now experienced potential mobility.

The potential for travel reached outside of Mexico. A railroad terminal in El Paso – just over the border from Mexico's Ciudad Juárez - opened in 1884 and offered travel to the United States for those throughout the countryside. The world's first international terminal allowed landless peasants significantly more travel prospects. If they had sufficient funds, Mexicans could now cross their northern border to find work. This transportation revolution coincided with an agricultural revolution in the United States; migrants now had means and motive to cross their northern border.

The United States passed the National Reclamation Act in 1902 – so named for the 're-claiming' of land for agricultural purposes. This multi-faceted government action allowed for the creation of dams and other reservoirs mainly for the purpose of irrigation. Previously unusable, arid terrain throughout the U.S. Southwest transformed into arable land. Agricultural production in the region skyrocketed. Grains, fruits, and vegetable production changed the southwest into a "winter garden" for the world.[5] Refrigeration for railroad cars, coupled with improved drying and canning techniques allowed for products to be shipped over much further distances. In an area where both people and crops had been scarce, the drastic increase of one required an increase of the other.

The colossal increase in agricultural production within the U.S. Southwest initially required seasonal labor to accommodate the harvest. With few native-born people available to fill this need, migrants were the most viable option. The Chinese

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[5] Kelly Lytle Hernandez. "Mexican Immigration to the United States." *OAH Magazine of History* 23, no. 4 (2009): 25.

Exclusion Act of 1882 and limits on Japanese migration prevented typical immigrant labor from filling the void; Filipinos were also eliminated for their reputation of being "troublesome" for their attempts at organized labor.[6] Southwestern farmers saw Mexicans as the economical choice. For historical and work reasons, they already existed in the region and could be paid literal pennies on the dollar compared to a citizen worker.[7]

Typical Mexican migrants to the southwestern United States shared several characteristics. One standard commonality came from their type of employment – most worked in agricultural in Mexico, and found similar positions in the United States. A certain demographic also characterized migrants in the region. The most common workers in the border states were unattached males. Sometimes they were truly single (unmarried) and other times they left behind a wife and children in Mexico. Women and children rarely came to the region. This combination of bachelor or pseudo-bachelor status, combined with geographical proximity to the border allowed increased mobility. Migrants would travel home and return back to the United States – perhaps multiple times per year. Mexicans in the Southwest also faced high levels of racism. People in the area did not view them as white, and the racial distinction caused negative treatment. These characteristics did not illustrate the experience of every Mexican, but these features did typify a great number.

Following the agricultural revolution, the number of Mexicans within the United States exploded. Negligible numbers on the U.S. Census skyrocketed to over 1.5 million Mexicans residing within the United States by 1930. While it is true to say that a

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[6] Hernandez, 25.

[7] Henderson cites on page 18 of *Beyond Borders* that railroad workers for Mexico were paid approximately 12-15 cents for every dollar paid to a worker that was a U.S. citizen in the early 20th century.

significant proportion of this population continued to inhabit border states – particularly Texas and California – Mexicans also began to relocate outside of the Southwest, as far as the Midwest. This geographic expansion occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century – particularly after the first World War. Due to a variety of factors, the Midwestern immigrant experience fundamentally differed from that of the southwestern migrant. However, after an entire century of history in the region, Midwestern Mexicans are still frequently overlooked. Both literature and popular opinion continues to characterize Mexican immigration by Southwestern standards.

The historiography repeatedly exemplified the Mexican experience within the United States by features most commonly seen solely in the southwestern border states. However, several crucial deviations existed between Mexican immigrants in different regions of the U.S – specifically the Midwest in this case. Therefore, the experience of the migrants cannot be summarily stated across the nation. Migrant differences can particularly be seen areas of choice of destination, employment, demographics, community involvement, and reception.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, only 1,200 Mexicans lived within the entire Midwest. The twentieth century saw a surge of migration, particularly to this area.[8] This shift occurred for numerous reasons. One of the first came from the availability of cities in the Midwest. Many immigrants – Mexicans included – chose to relocate to large cities. This diverged from the Southwestern model. Cities did not encompass the majority of destinations for Mexicans migrants as they did in the Midwest. Metropolitan areas offered things for immigrants that rural areas did not – particularly a wider range of employment options.[9] Furthermore, cities offered more stability, better

[8] Rubén O. Martinez. *Latinos in the Midwest* (Michigan: Michigan State University, 2011), 4.
[9] Valdés, 2.

educational opportunities for children, and more social and cultural variety.[10] Some of the relocation to the Midwest was by chance and decision, but much of it came through direct recruitment, then the pull of family and friends.

The average Midwestern immigrant came to the area for employment, specifically. Some of the population continued to engage in agricultural work, but the majority of Mexicans pursued – or were recruited to - industrial work. Companies that experienced difficulty filling their employment ranks sometimes turned to recruitment efforts. They targeted different groups in these endeavors – sometimes, the aim was to recruit Mexican labor. Through this process, Mexican labor found itself linked to specific cities throughout the Midwest. Recruitment was the defining feature in bringing the initial group of Mexican migrants to Ohio in unprecedented numbers. Mexicans filled the void in thousands of unskilled labor functions throughout midwestern factories.

The majority of Mexicans in the United States to work were men. This fact holds true in the Midwest as well – predominately young, unattached males relocated to the region. However, the belief is that very few women went to the region during this time period.[11] In several communities throughout the Midwest, statistically significant numbers of both women and children existed alongside these men. In certain communities, the population of children exceed men or women (separately), reaching a proportion of almost 50%. This greatly departs from the idea that only men resettled in the country. Perhaps because of greater distance from home, a significantly higher ratio of men also had wives and children with them in their new midwestern homes.

These Mexicans – whether unattached or family units – found ways to navigate their new homes through various institutions. In the Southwest, Mexicans continued to

[10] Valdés, 2.
[11] García, vii-viii.

traverse back and forth across the border – sometimes several times per year. This likely prevented meaningful assimilation into the local society. In the Midwest, this was not the case. Mexicans formed *colonias* – cohesive groups of people who navigated a foreign land together. They established churches, held cultural celebrations, sent their children to local schools, created societies, and more. They did not remain aloof and uninvolved, but rather engaged themselves wholeheartedly in their communities.

Mexican *colonias* made themselves at home in the Midwest, and also experienced a welcome quite unlike their border-state counterparts. In the southwest, the origin of the Mexican story in the United States, whites perceived them negatively, and treated them accordingly. In southern states, Mexicans were racially classified with African-Americans, and treated poorly alongside them. In the Midwest, Mexicans fared much better, and experienced general acceptance by most. I believe Dionicio Nodín Valdés asserted correctly in *Barrios Norteños* that the European-based assimilationist models are useful in understanding the reception of Mexicans into the Midwest.[12] This phenomenon stemmed from the chronology of immigration to the region. Because large-scale Mexican resettlement occurred after European migration to the Midwest, they entered almost as a last group of migrants, simply joining the rest.[13] Waves of immigrants were already arriving from southern and eastern Europe and flows of African-Americans making their way north in the Great Migration, and "Mexicans arriving…were immediately swept into this tumult."[14] The greatest division in the Midwest came between African-Americans and Caucasians, not Caucasians and Mexicans – and this reflected their experience in the region. While Mexicans were judged as white under the

[12] Valdés, 17.
[13] Valdés, 16.
[14] Arredondo, 7.

law and by census standards, native whites in the United States often expressed difficulty seeing them as such. However, treatment varied by region, and in certain instances, native-born whites extended an active welcome to the newcomers.

The differences between the Southwest Mexicans and Midwest Mexicans in relation to their experiences were stark. While the population had a shared heritage, this commonality did not extend to their experience within the United States. Differences abounded between the regions. Characteristics of Mexican migration within the Midwest can be viewed in several larger and smaller cities throughout the area. One of these, Lorain, Ohio, is a lens through which to view Mexican migration to the Midwest as a whole.

The *colonia* in Lorain, Ohio, developed similarly to other midwestern Mexican communities. It occurred in an urban area, and the initial catalyst for migration resulted from industrial employment. The National Tube Company, a subsidiary of the prevalent U.S. Steel, existed as a significant economic force in Lorain, Ohio. During the era of the *colonia,* the 1920s, the company employed around 9000 men – much of this number composed of immigrant labor. Mexicans, a previously untapped source of labor for the company, became the target of recruitment efforts in the early 1920s. After travel to San Antonio and Fort Worth, National Tube gained up to 1300 Mexican workers to add to their payroll. From this point in 1923, numbers of Mexicans within Lorain quickly expanded. More and more workers arrived to work for the steel mill, making it the central destination for Mexican immigration to Ohio.

The group quickly integrated themselves into the region, joining a local Catholic parish, enrolling the children in schools, and engaging in services offered by the Neighborhood House and the Mexican Mutual Society. They found themselves in the

midst of numerous immigrant groups, and often received comparisons to Hungarians – the most prevalent Europeans in Lorain. Their experience revealed stark differences between themselves and the so-called 'negro' population in town. Mexicans experienced a welcome, and were institutionally treated as white – often the fundamental opposite of the African-Americans.

The experience of the Lorain *colonia* revealed several similarities to the Mexican experience in Midwest. This group can be viewed as a model for midwestern Mexican migration – a singular example that describes a broader overall pattern. While much of the *colonia* reveals precedents for the Midwest, certain features were also particular to Lorain. They stand out in a few noteworthy ways – previously undiscussed in literature.

Structure & Methodology

The Lorain *colonia* existed as the first noteworthy group of Mexicans in the whole state of Ohio. Despite this groundbreaking fact, it has rarely been discussed at length in the literature. A local independent historian and second-generation Mexican in Lorain, Frank Jacinto, wrote a short piece that briefly described the history of Mexicans in the community. However, the *colonia* has never been discussed at length, nor has it been analyzed in terms of its relationship to the broader region. My goal here is to mine underused and unused sources to provide a comprehensive picture of this remarkable group that brought Mexicans to Ohio to stay. Furthermore, I will use Lorain as a stepping stone to shed light on facets that characterize Mexicans throughout the Midwest.

This study occurs in three parts in order to provide a comprehensive view of the background and lives of the migrants of the Lorain *colonia*. The first chapter gives background on Mexico and the United States within the time frame. In Mexico, this means examining the events that forced people from their native land. The two most important factors came from the massive upheaval across the country – the Mexican Revolution, from 1910-1920, and the Cristero War, spanning 1926-1929. These two events caused turmoil, violence, health crises, food shortage, and more. People were forced literally and metaphorically from their homes, and often lacked other viable options besides migration. The first chapter also examines what drew Mexicans into the Midwest. This involves a discussion of immigration policies and previously existing immigrant numbers in the region. It also examines what commonalities existed across Mexicans in the Midwest. Historiographical sources are supplemented with primary

research and census material to show specific numbers of Mexicans throughout the United States and in particular locations.

The second and third chapters focus specifically on Lorain, both as a unique first Mexican colony within Ohio and as a lens into midwestern Mexican immigration. They look closely at the initial *colonia* founded by Mexicans in Lorain, Ohio in the early 1920s, and how this group represents a larger pattern. Chapter two first examines why they chose Lorain, and the factors surrounding that decision. It also looks at how these people made themselves at home in a new community. This means both literally, as well as what institutions and celebrations they participated in that involved them within the town. Chapter three studies the racial position of Mexicans within the Lorain community, and their relationships with other minority and immigrant groups in the town. I also establish the variety of ways the group experienced welcome into the community. The bulk of this information has been under-utilized. Lorain has established its own history and the contributions of Mexicans, but in a cursory manner. A truly in-depth study of the first *colonia* in Ohio has yet to be written.

One important note must be explained about the terminology used herein. I alternate between the usage of 'immigrant' and 'migrant' and all related derivatives. An immigrant denotes a person who arrives in a new country with the intention of taking up permanent residence.[15] The word migrant embodies a singular and crucial distinction from its immigrant cousin. Migrant means a person who moves regularly in order to find work (especially in agriculture).[16] Therefore, an immigrant moves to a new country to

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[15] *Merriam Webster, s.v.* "Immigrant," accessed 15 November 2018. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/immigrant.

[16] *Merriam Webster, s.v.* "Migrant," accessed 15 November 2018. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/migrant

stay forever, whereas a migrant is coming for a temporary stay – often based on employment reasons. However, arguably many people begin as migrants and plan to return home, but eventually change their settlement to permanent. This is not to say that some Mexicans who arrived in the United States did not have full intention to stay. However, proximity between the two countries allowed for a transient nature not afforded by other immigrant groups. Therefore, these terms are presented interchangeably here, because a proportion of both types of newcomers from Mexico existed.

I encountered many important sources for the Lorain Mexican community. Church records, both from present day St. Frances Xavier Cabrini – descendant of St. John's and Our Lady of Guadalupe churches – as well as the Cleveland Catholic Diocese, shed significant light on the *colonia*. A personal interview with Mr. Joel Arredondo, current head of Lorain City Council and also President of the Mexican Mutual Society assisted significantly with information on the society as well as providing information on his family – some of the first Mexicans to the city.

One man's sources proved invaluable, and need a bit of explanation. George Edson, an employee in the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor, set off to survey the "northcentral" states to survey Mexican labor. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any information on him personally, outside his workplace, but his summary of his endeavors provides some context. Edson wrote a summation of all his findings in an over 200-page piece, entitled *Mexicans in the Northcentral States* (what today we would consider the Midwest, primarily). Only two copies exist – the original and a microfiche replica. He surveyed fifty-one separate locations throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, and a few other states in the late

1920s. After a visit to each site, he produced a report that he sent back to the Department of Labor. I only have the report for Lorain, Ohio, which is around twenty-five pages; presumably the others are similar in length. Within his reports, he covered a wide range of topics – employment and pay, race relations, reasons for immigration, community involvement and institutions, and much more. His viewpoint is that of a white man in the 1920s, meaning many things he considered acceptable to judge and say differ greatly from what would be socially acceptable today. Throughout his writing, he displays bias, and at times even an unfavorable view of the Mexicans he studied. This disparity notwithstanding, the information he provided is precious and offered incredible insight into early Mexican *colonias* within the United States.

CHAPTER ONE: VÁMONOS: LEAVING MEXICO FOR THE U.S. MIDWEST

"Meanwhile, the struggle between various leaders for control of the revolutionary movement continued. As they fought for power, their contending armies looted, burned, raped, and committed other atrocities in the name of the Revolution."
- Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans*

"Mexicans have always shown a reluctance to come very far into the States. They learned to fear the Americans after the war of 1846-47, and the Texas cowboys and Rangers did not better their opinion in the years that followed…he rode the magnificent wilderness with a fine unconcern for the distant humming of the wheels of industry and progress. But gradually, the troubles of the world came insistently bothering him."
- George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*

Contentious, perhaps, may be the one of the most accurate adjectives to sum up the long and tumultuous relationship between the United States and Mexico. The two nations presently share a 1,954-mile border, but mileage alone cannot adequately describe the complexities that have occurred along the aforementioned boundary-line. Renata Keller described the most complicated aspect of the two nations' interactions – the "original sin" of the relations – the Mexican-America War (1846-1848).[17] This conflict fundamentally altered both nations – geographically and otherwise. In the peacekeeping accord at the end of the war, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States gained 55 percent of Mexico's territory. Through this conquest and the subsequent Gadsden Purchase, Mexico lost Texas (a significant point of contention between the countries leading up to the war), as well as modern day Arizona, California, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah, as well as parts of Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming. Most important, however, was the alteration in the balance of power between the two nations. The war and its aftermath "further distorted" the unequal balance of

[17] Renata Keller, "U.S.-Mexican Relations from Independence to the Present." In Oxford Research Encyclopedias. Oxford University Press, 2016. Accessed 10 October 2018. Doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.269

wealth and power between the two countries – something that persists to the present day.[18]

While territory and conquest have been significant aspects of the U.S.-Mexico relationships, one of the most controversial points has been and continues to be immigration. Mexican immigration is perceived and treated differently than other foreign groups who enter the United States. Mexicans, particularly, received accusations of refusal to assimilate properly to American culture, although most immigrant groups over time in the U.S. have experienced similar claims.[19] However, Mexican immigration distinguishes itself from other forms of immigration in several crucial ways. As mentioned, a large portion of the United States used to actually be Mexico (meaning those residing in that area have often continued to keep Mexican culture alive), Mexican immigration numbers are higher than other nationalities, and Mexicans have been tainted by the accusation of illegal residence far more than any other group.[20]

Pinpointing the origin of Mexican immigration would be nearly impossible, especially considering the geographical shifts that have occurred. However events and circumstances within Mexican history undoubtedly propelled citizens from their native homes and into the United States. While economics played a role – when jobs were scarce in Mexico, they sought employment across the border – concerns about safety and security also factored in. From the end of the Mexican-American War until early in the twentieth century, the border states housed most of the Mexican migrants. Over time, parts of the Mexican immigrant population decided to travel further inland and resettle – as far as the Midwest.

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[18] Keller, 4.
[19] Timothy Henderson, *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley & Blackwell, 2011), 2.
[20] Henderson, 3.

This group travelled much further than those who chose to remain just north of the Rio Grande. Most frequently, the offer of steady employment drew Mexicans so far into the interior. At times these jobs were agricultural – similar to the U.S. Southwest – but as cities increasingly industrialized, factory jobs held the most appeal. Some Mexicans travelled to the Midwest by choice; they hoped to find work. Others found themselves recipients of targeted recruitment efforts by expanding companies. European immigrants streamed into Midwestern cities for decades, creating a vast labor pool to support work in mills, factories, and plants. However, as immigration laws narrowed and quotas arose, recruiters sought help from Mexicans to fill their employment ranks.

Lorain, Ohio displayed one such recruitment effort. The *colonia* that began there specifically stemmed from the opportunity for steady employment in a factory. The National Tube Company, a subsidiary of prominent US Steel, opened its doors in Lorain in the late nineteenth century. With changing times and difficulties with various employees, they sought a new labor force in the 1920s. Representatives recruited around 1,000 Mexicans from Texas so they could avoid hiring local unionized laborers[21]. This combination of poor and deteriorating conditions in Mexico and the potential to make a good living led immigrants to flee their country and head America's heartland – the Midwest.

La Violencia: Mexican Conditions in the Early Twentieth Century

Jobs drew Mexicans into their respective locations in the United States– but what catalyzed their departure in the first place? To some extent, the explanation comes from poor economic conditions. When land became privatized under Porfirio Díaz, *campesinos* lost their land throughout the countryside. Some quickly took this as a cue

[21] Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 45.

for migration. They utilized the newly developed railroad system to enter the United States via El Paso's international station or through other entries. Those that stayed behind did not quickly forget the sins against them. Their anger simmered for years, until it finally boiled over during the Mexican Revolution. The Revolution itself accounted for a full decade – 1910-1920. However, the nation never fully resettled, and found itself enflamed in another war from 1926-1929 – the Cristero Rebellion. Both these conflicts embroiled the country in violence. The chaos and upheaval alone sent migrants fleeing for their safety across the border. Unintended consequences of the disputes forced thousands more from their homes – factors like disease and hunger. Therefore, motivation to immigrate cannot be reduced to strictly economic factors. Census data and studies by sociologists and historians prove that migrant flows greatly increased from Mexico into the United States during this period of great conflict.

The *Porfiriato,* or the dictatorship under Porfirio Díaz, existed in Mexico from 1876-1910. Revolutionary agitations flourished under Díaz. William H. Beezley, in *Judas at the Jockey Club*, described the ever-widening gap in society that the Porfiriato exacerbated. Mexican society, like many other nations, included two different divisions, but during the Porfirian regime these segments transformed into two completely contradictory cultures.[22] The groups, who became known as *los de arriba* and *los de abajo,* (the elite and the underclass), had exceptionally different experiences through Díaz's rule. The upper classes began formal education, infrastructure improvements, and more, leading to wealth limited to 7,200 hacienda owners and roughly 45,000 rancheros – a negligible percent of the rural population.[23] While the Porfiriato heralded modernity as

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[22] William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 6.
[23] Douglas W. Richmond and Sam W. Haynes, editors, *The Mexican Revolution: Conflict and Consolidation, 1910-1940*. (Texas: University of Texas at Arlington Press, 2013), 1.

its legacy, those outside the elite were poorer than ever. *Campesinos* tied to the hacienda continued to struggle for survival. The former benefits that paternalism had provided vanished; wages significantly depreciated as well.[24] Independent peasants also struggled over availability of land. The government targeted "corporately-held village land," especially where cash crops flourished.[25] Urban workers fared no better; wages and working conditions continued to deteriorate at the beginning of the twentieth century.[26] Frustrations mounted against the Porfiriato. When Díaz rigged an election instead of ceding power in 1910, his challenger – Francisco Madero – called for revolution.

Local uprisings began rapidly on the chosen day – 20 November 1910. The Porfiriato collapsed within months, but the Revolution had only just begun. Without common goals within the coalition which fought Díaz, a power struggle commenced. Several diverse groups vied for supremacy after Díaz's demise, and instability and violence reigned supreme throughout Mexico.[27] *La violencia* characterized the movement – vicious and often life-endangering violence. Rebels and leaders on both sides looted, kidnapped, slit throats and committed numerous other atrocious acts that left people fearful, and rightfully so.[28] Several significant battles occurred throughout the country. Fourteen are cited as "major battles of the Mexican Revolution." They occurred in: Puebla, two in Chihuahua, Morelos, México City, two in Coahuila, Sinaloa, Veracruz, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Guanajuato, New Mexico, and Querétaro.[29] These states experienced

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[24] Gilbert M. Joseph. and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 25.
[25] Joseph and Buchenau, 26.
[26] Joseph and Buchenau, 26.
[27] Joseph and Buchenau, 54.
[28] Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution – Volume II (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 399-401.
[29] Lionel Sosa, Ed., *The Children of the Revolution: How the Mexican Revolution Changed America* (San Antonio: University of Texas Press, 2012), 27.

particular devastation, as the surrounding ones likely did as well. An estimated one in eight Mexicans perished during the worst years of the Revolution, but with so much upheaval, estimating the exact number of casualties of the violent rebellions proved difficult.[30]

Violence alone frightened Mexicans into leaving the country. However, *la violencia* also triggered unintended consequences that forced Mexicans to flee – possibly to a greater extent than the actual fighting. The uprisings, as well as new policies enacted by a stream of ever-changing leaders, upset the normal agricultural patterns across the country. In many regions, empty fields abounded, and crops went unplanted.[31] People began to go hungry, and those who relied on agriculture for their livelihoods fell more deeply into poverty. Survival often meant migration. Another unintended consequence involved public health. As conditions deteriorated, Mexico became ripe for epidemics.[32] People scavenged through trash and discarded items, which caused a myriad of illnesses. Outbreaks of smallpox, measles, typhus, and more ravaged the countryside.[33] In 1918, influenza surged throughout the world, and Mexico was no exception. Death tolls continued to rise. Violence, deprivation, and illness culminated in miserable living conditions for Mexicans. Economic conditions also rapidly declined in the face of adverse circumstances in all arenas of life.

The Mexican Revolution significantly catalyzed migration. The numbers of Mexicans cited in the census skyrocketed within the years of the Revolution. In 1910, the census claimed 224,275 Mexicans lived in the United States. Just a decade later, this

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[30] Sosa 36.
[31] Knight, Volume II, 371.
[32] Knight, Volume II, 419-20.
[33] Knight, Volume II, 420.

number expanded to a whopping 651,596.[34] Other sources cite similar themes, showing that two decades of unrest (1910-1930) brought almost a million Mexicans into the U.S. seeking refuge.[35] Statistics like these revealed the drastic increase in immigration caused by political upheaval in Mexico. When things go poorly in a country, they often push people out, seeking improved conditions elsewhere. Many migrants and immigrants also send remittances to family in Mexico – surplus money earned to help family members who need it, and for whatever reason, did not also travel to the United States for work. This often occurred when the family's patriarch left for the United States, but left a wife and children behind. The amount of money remitted during the period in question revealed a significant departure from earlier trends, showing the Revolution altered immigrant immensely. A notably higher number of Mexicans (who would typically have returned to Mexico) chose to stay in the United States.[36] A four-million dollar increase in remittances coincided with the same time period.[37] Therefore, people likely feared the violence and instability awaiting them if they returned home, and knew to make the simpler and safer choice and stay in the U.S.

The Mexican government created a new Constitution in 1917, but numerous historians of the Mexican Revolution maintain that the armed phase continued until 1920.[38] When the violence subsided, citizens hoped for peace and stability. Unfortunately, only a few brief years transpired between the Revolution and a new war. Despite a new, revolutionary government in control, they could not prevent "simmering

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[34] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America (*New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 52.
[35] Lionel Sosa, Ed., 8.
[36] Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 163.
[37] Gamio, 163.
[38] Knight, *Volume II,* 329.

discontent" throughout the nation.[39] The time period even revealed active rebellion, particularly in states with heavily indigenous populations.[40] The men in power, all *Sonorenses*, strongly asserted their control – often through violence. Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Calles had no patience for recalcitrant opposition. Calles assumed power in 1924, and immediately set off on a path of reformation. It began with land redistribution, but several other reforms accompanied it. Of particular importance was the aptly-named Calles Law that actively restricted the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church engaged with Mexican society since the time of conquest, and remains a significant influence to this day, with almost eighty-four percent of Mexicans claiming Catholicism as their religious affiliation[41]. The church played a significant role, shaping events, policies, and citizens. Previous attempts to limit the Church's power came in the mid-1850s under Benito Juárez's liberal reforms, but had stagnated under the Porfiriato. After the Revolution, people wanted a complete negation of everything related to Porfirio Díaz, and for better or worse, this included the Catholic Church. The Revolution's influence expanded, until it nearly stifled Catholicism.[42] The Constitution of 1917 included several anticlerical articles, but Obregón attempted to avoid blatant persecution during his presidency, since Catholicism enjoyed widespread adherence.[43]

The Calles Law of July 1926 triggered the true rupture in Church-State relations. Tensions mounted immediately, and the Church leadership elected to meet the

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[39] Joseph and Buchenau, 93.
[40] Joseph and Buchenau, 93.
[41] Joel Morales Cruz, *The Histories of the Latin American Church: A Handbook* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 384.
[42] Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church: 1910-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 22.
[43] Joseph and Buchenau, 100.

opposition, and show their own influence within Mexico. They ignored the decree for clergy to register, as well as completing suspending all church services until Calles rescinded his law.[44] Within weeks of the clergy's withdrawal from churches, Catholics armed themselves in defense of their religion against government intimidation.[45] The violent three-year guerrilla war cost Mexico an additional seventy thousand lives between 1926-1929, when peace was finally brokered.[46] Beyond lives lost, Mexican grain production and Mexico's economy compounded additional casualties to society. Violence occurred mainly in the 'breadbasket' of Mexico, causing a 40 percent decline in production.[47] It also precipitated an eight-year period of "recession and stagnation."[48]

During the period leading up to the Cristero Rebellion as well during the actual war, many faithful Catholics migrated to the United States. Motivations varied – some resented the increasing restriction on their faith, others feared the return of widespread violence, and more required new circumstances from continually deteriorating economic conditions. Most chose their departure, but other Catholics (clergy, particularly, but laypeople as well) relocated due to exile. Mexican migration to the United States underwent changes before the outbreak of the Cristero War, but it contributed to further alterations. In areas of worst friction and violence like Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato and other west-central areas, towns were "emptied of their working-age inhabitants."[49] More intense fighting occurred in these places because of how deeply entrenched Catholicism had been since colonial times, so even more migrants left their homes.

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[44] Quirk, 169.
[45] Quirk, 188.
[46] Joseph and Buchenau, 102.
[47] Joseph and Buchenau, 102.
[48] Joseph and Buchenau, 103.
[49] Julia Grace Darling Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War* (England: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.

The early decades of the twentieth century in Mexico were predictable only in their constant chaos and upheaval. Uprisings, persecution, and peasant movements characterized almost a full two decades (1910-1929). This "starvation and terror" in Mexico greatly catalyzed immigration.[50] Despite the U.S. paying little attention to the troubles occurring in Mexico, "in their distress, many Mexicans decided to come to the United States to work and earn money to send to their families."[51] This combination of political and religious turmoil escorted unprecedented levels of migrants to the United States. People from all over Mexico, primarily in the countryside where *la violencia* reigned most intensely, desperately needed to escape their unsafe circumstances. Many fled their environments voluntarily, with clergy facing involuntary expulsion. Some of these migrants left forever – choosing permanent resettlement in the United States. Others planned on temporary relocation, but fewer and fewer returned home during the Revolutionary years.

Mexican Immigration to The United States

Early in the history of the United States, few regulations or laws existed to limit immigration. By law, the country welcomed anyone, but resentment regularly permeated everyday society. Regardless of hostilities, groups of immigrants regularly arrived over time. In 1882, the U.S. passed the Chinese Exclusion Act as a result of anti-Asian racism, as well as "economic fears of white working men in the Far West."[52] New groups of people experienced welcome or exclusion in this period. Following the completion of the short but powerful Spanish-American War in 1898, the U.S. acquired new territories. Hawaii's people became citizens immediately, and by 1917, Puerto Rico had completely

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[50] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 16.
[51] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 17.
[52] Roger Daniels and Otis L. Graham, *Debating American Immigration: 1882-Present,* (Oxford, Rowan and Littlefield, 2001), 8.

transitioned.[53] However, the U.S. also procured the Philippines, but the government did not grant citizenship to the Filipinos. Despite this blatant prohibition, continued exclusion of the Japanese and Chinese left Filipinos (as American nationals) the only Asian group with freedom to come to the United States to work.[54] These restrictions removed one of the common groups used for labor in the southwestern United States. Limiting Asian immigration actually instigated the initial increase in Mexican labor to support agricultural production in the Southwest.

Dramatic shifts in immigration occurred in at the turn of the twentieth century. Numbers of immigrants began to swell after 1900; in the first fifteen years of the new century, over 15 million immigrants entered the United States. This shift was compounded by a change in the types of people arriving to the U.S. Before 1900, most newcomers knew how to speak English, and easily assimilated into their new homeland. After the turn of the century, most new arrivals came from places like Italy, Poland, and Russia – places in southern and eastern Europe that had significantly different language and culture from the United States.[55] Americans did not accommodate this shift well, as immigrants already regularly received accusations that assimilation did not occur rapidly enough.

Mexicans entered the United States at higher rates in the midst of this shift, although it bears explaining that technically, Mexicans had been in the country for about fifty years already. The Mexican-American War ended in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. From this conquest-driven war, the United States gained roughly

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[53] Daniels and Graham, 8.
[54] Daniels and Graham, 11.
[55] "Immigrants in the Progressive Era." Library of Congress, accessed 26 October 2018. http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/progress/immigrnt/.

half of Mexico's original territory in the Mexican Cession. Therefore, the first noteworthy wave of "immigrants" never even left their homes. The current borders between the United States and Mexico have stayed roughly the same since the Gadsden Purchase of 1848. The Southwest became the original site for increased migration to the United States. Significant development in railroad mileage in Mexico coincided with the conversion of land in the U.S. borderlands. The National Reclamation Act led to millions of acres of land transforming from arid to arable. Without the availability of Asian immigrants to help harvest, southwestern farmers sought a new labor source. This development converted Mexicans into the go-to working class in the region.[56]

The demand for labor (especially cheap labor) created an opening for Mexican immigrants who wanted or needed to find better circumstances outside of their homelands. The United States offered a crucial opportunity that led many through its doors legally, and later illegally as well. One of the ironic twists to the resentment of Mexican migration to the United States is the pure and simple fact that much of the immigration from Mexico is a "creature of American capitalism."[57] A significant advantage for American businessowners to using immigrant workers came from their non-union status. Because Mexicans had no protection from unions like American workers, they could be paid less, hired and fired indiscriminately, and be forced into the worst shifts and jobs offered. Not only did some Mexicans pursue employment after they entered the country, but many employers actively recruited them. "A very large proportion of Mexican immigrants were imported, often under contract, by particular employers, for employment in particular industries at particular tasks."[58] Several types of

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[56] Henderson, 19.
[57] Henderson, 4.
[58] Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 215.

corporations used this type of recruiting, particularly large-scale industries like factories, railroads, and agriculture.[59] Typically, corporations did not recruit individuals, but groups of Mexicans together. The dependency on Mexican labor in the early twentieth century cannot be overstated. American corporations testified to the Immigration Committee of the House of Representatives that so much of their development was owed to Mexican labor that if immigration ceased (or even lessened by much) they would be on the brink of declaring bankruptcy.[60]

The number of Mexicans within the United States increased greatly over the first few decades of the twentieth century. After the initial establishment of migration to the Southwest, turmoil in Mexico only served to increase migration. Areas with the most upheaval tended to send the most migrants. During the Revolution, terrible violence characterized the north-center states, and became some of the primary sending locations. Most notable were Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, Jalisco, Durango, Zacatecas, and Guanajuato.[61] Once the Cristero Rebellion began, central states continued to send high numbers of people, but they shifted somewhat to the west. The primary sending states included Jalisco, Michoacán where the violence raged most intensely – in some cases, the towns emptied of their working-age inhabitants.[62] Guanajuato, also chief contributor of migrants, resulting from its position as a church stronghold, was more centrally located.

Within the United States, as companies shifted their perspective to Mexicans as a potential labor source, they actively recruited workers. In 1900, only 103,393 Mexicans had settled within the United States.[63] By 1910, this had more than doubled, up to

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[59] McWilliams, 215.
[60] Gamio, 30.
[61] Henderson, 23.
[62] Young, 7.
[63] United States Census Bureau. Population Census. "Country of Birth of the Foreign Population: Mexico." 1900.

221,915 people.[64] Between 1910, and 1920, the chaos of the Mexican Revolution proved a catalyst for increased immigration, and by 1920 Mexico ranked 10th in terms of world nations for sending immigrants to the United States (up two from a decade prior).[65] The number of Mexicans within the country leapt to 486,418.[66] In 1930, when Mexico shifted towards stability, 639,017 Mexicans had settled within the United States for census purposes, although most believe the number was closer to at least one million.[67] Others estimated that the number actually stood closer to between two and three million, with 500,000-750,000 in the interior portion of the nation.[68] Therefore, in just a thirty-year period, the population of Mexicans within the United States multiplied at least six times higher than at the beginning of the century – possibly closer to more than ten times higher. These numbers are likely imperfect and even understated. However, by 1928, an estimated one of every ten Mexicans resided north of the Rio Grande.[69]

The Mexican population increase came in the midst of an immigration shift,; they joined many other groups who also did not speak English or have a similar culture. The quotas established by the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act technically left Mexican immigration unrestricted –the entire Western Hemisphere gained exemption from the legislation. However, Mexicans in some parts of the United States still found limitations placed on them nonetheless. These things included things like border-control policies and new visa requirements.[70] As Mexicans moved into the interior, they joined various ethnic and cultural groups from all over Europe, adding to the diversity of cities

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[64] United States Census Bureau, "Country of Birth of the Foreign Population: Mexico." 1910.
[65] United States Census Bureau. "Foreign Born Population of the United States, by Country of Birth: 1920."
[66] United States Census Bureau, "Foreign Born Population of the United States, by Country of Birth: 1920."
[67] United States Census Bureau. Population Census. Table 3, "Urban and Rural Population of the United States: 1880-1930."
[68] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 4.
[69] Vargas, Armies in the Fields and Factories, 47.
[70] Ngai, 7.

throughout the Midwest. Other differences also characterized Midwestern Mexicans, like employment, demographics and more. While literature frequently overlooks Mexicans in the Midwest, their migration to the region occurred only a few decades later than the Southwest. Migration rooted in the heart of the U.S. around the time of World War I.

Mexicans in the Midwest

Mexican migration to the United States showed a drastic increase in the early twentieth century. This phenomenon was nationwide – no one area received all the migrants. Since increased Mexican migration began in the Southwest with agricultural work, that region continued to welcome the most people, but numbers in the Midwest continued to steadily increase.[71] Migration to the Midwest truly took hold around the end of World War I. Labor became scarce following a combination of war mobilization and early immigration restrictions in 1917, leading employers to seek new help elsewhere.[72]

Mexican immigrants formed *colonias* within the United States –communities of migrants within cities, usually centered on mutual employment. These tightly knit *colonias* became more extensive as Mexicans obtained long-term employment. It cannot be overstated how crucial these *colonias* became. Mexican labor forces would gravitate towards them when seeking employment, which led to their rapid expansion within midwestern cities.[73] One of the largest communities formed within Chicago. By the end of WWI, 4,000 Mexicans existed in the Chicago *colonia*, and it continued to grow.[74] By 1930, Chicago transformed into a Mexican stronghold of roughly 25,000.[75] While the

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[71] Zaragosa Vargas. "Armies in the Fields and Factories: The Mexican Working Classes in the Midwest in the 1920s. "*Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1991), 47.
[72] Juan R. García. *Mexicans in the Midwest: 1900-1932. (*Arizona, University of Arizona Press, 1996), 29.
[73] Linda Allegro., and Wood, Andrew Grant. *Latin American Migrations to the U.S. Heartland: Changing Social Landscapes in Middle America* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 35.
[74] Meier and Ribera, 115.
[75] McWilliams, 184.

preponderance of Mexican immigrants continued to settle in the 'typical' states of the Southwest, Illinois and other Midwestern states gained profound numbers of Mexican newcomers in the early twentieth century. Over 58,000 Mexicans found homes in Midwestern cities in the fifteen year period between the end of WWI and the onset of the Great Depression.[76]

Their *colonias* differed drastically from the groups who remained in the border states. Mexicans chose this Midwest region for a few significant reasons – mainly the rapidly growing cities and the employment opportunities they offered. At the beginning of the twentieth century, few Mexicans made their home within the region; only 1,200 Mexicans lived within the entire Midwest. By 1920, per the census, all states had increased their populations, but only six of them exceeded 1,000 Mexicans. Illinois had 4,032, and Kansas shockingly numbered 13,770. Ohio fell right in the middle of the Midwestern states, with 952 Mexicans, five states exceeded it, and five fell below.[77] Levels continued to climb even higher by 1930, but when the Depression hit, they sharply fell. Within just few decades, Mexico's and the United States' demographics shifted at a momentous level. (For a state-by-state breakdown, see the chart below). World War I increased Mexicans throughout the Midwest, but changes in national immigration law solidified it. Mexicans offered an alternative, cheap, and available source of labor when other groups became unavailable.

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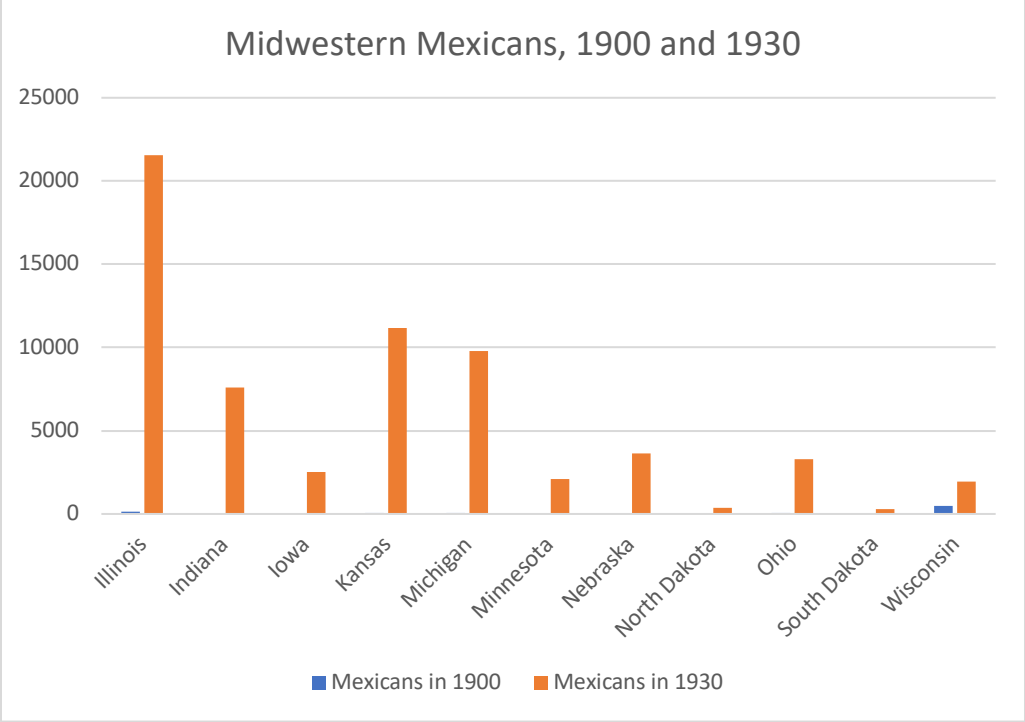
[76] Vargas, 1.
[77] United States Census Bureau. 1920 Population Census. Table 7, "Country of Birth of Foreign-Born Population, by Division and States: 1920."

Table 1: *Midwestern Mexicans, 1900 and 1930*



Mexicans came from a variety of locations within Mexico. Many of those in the Midwest arrived from the central states in Mexico, which contained the most people.[78] Most entered the country through a few different stations in Texas – Laredo, El Paso, and Eagle Pass, via the two central railroad systems that stem from Mexico's heart.[79] Each colony in the Midwest contained people from different homelands. Typically, once the migration began to a site in the Midwest, more people arrived from the same states, which only served to reinforce the demographics of each *colonia.* This idea of string migration or chain migration – different sources use different terminology – predominated in the Midwest. As employment opened up in specific cities throughout the region, it stimulated further migration by friends and relatives of those already there. In this way, enclaves of people from certain locations in Mexico gathered within cities

[78] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 181.
[79] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 181.

across the Midwest.[80] For instance, Lorain, Ohio, contained those mainly from Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato per Edson's findings. Detroit, a very large colony, had a population from Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Nuevo Leon – northern Mexican states. Gary, Indiana had most from Michoacán, and remittances reflect that. Overall, large numbers arrived from Jalisco, Guanajuato, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, with slightly lesser numbers from Zacatecas and Sonora.[81] Very few came from Mexico City. States with high sending proportions often coincided with the violence and chaos of the Revolution. Unsurprisingly, the more difficult the conditions in Mexico, the more willingness people had to leave.

In the Midwest (which frequently held the title of 'northcentral' states at the time), George Edson studied the region for the Department of Labor. He identified and divided the 'northcentral' states (roughly translated into what we consider the Midwest) into four divisions, based off the nature of the industries and the history of the settlements of Mexicans in four distinct phases.[82] He also considered them based on the jurisdiction and location of each local Mexican consul. His boundaries and regions do not line up perfectly with traditional geographic boundaries, because he selected them based on his own purposes for his research, so there are deviations. His divisions were:

1)Western Pennsylvania and southern Ohio – under the supervision of the Pittsburgh consul

2) Most of Michigan and northern Ohio – under the control of the Detroit consul

3) Northern Indiana, Illinois, the upper peninsula of Michigan, and Wisconsin – under Chicago

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[80] García, 68.
[81] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 181.
[82] Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States,* 1.

consul control

4) Minnesota, and North and South Dakota – under the charge of the Milwaukee consul.[83] He described the number of Mexicans living within each region – men, women, and children. He calculated the breakdown as 39,672 men, 7,961 women, and 16,147 children within this group. He considered these numbers "more or less permanent."[84]

Table 2: *Mexicans In the Midwest By Region*

REGION	**NUMBERS OF MEXICANS**
Pittsburgh Region	4,250
Detroit Region	20,900
Chicago Region	29,050
Midwest Region	9,580
	TOTAL: 63,780

These numbers were substantial. Edson's reports came in the late 1920s, meaning the region shifted from 1,200 to 63,780 in about a quarter-century. This is an explosive demographic increase - the population multiplied over fifty-three times its original size. Despite the idea that Mexicans resettled in border states, these figures clearly reveal that a noteworthy proportion deviated from that location. While Mexican migration to the region existed in strong numbers and for over a century, few lengthy pieces of literature describe how it diverged from the Southwest.

One significant variance came from where Mexicans chose to live. The influx of Mexicans into the region occurred for a few different reasons – but a primary motivation

[83] Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States,* 2.
[84] Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States,* 2.

for choosing the Midwest came from the recent and explosive growth of its cities. Urbanization occurred rapidly within the Midwest following industrial expansion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[85] Cities within the Midwest saw extensive population growth. At the turn of the century, seven of the seventeen metropolitan centers containing over 250,000 people existed in the Midwest – Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and St. Louis.[86]

Urban areas, especially within the Midwest, offered opportunities not seen in the rural countryside of the United States. First and foremost, they presented a wider range of employment options.[87] Numerous jobs in the railroad and sugar beet industries after 1915 allowed for "permanent enclaves" in Midwestern cities.[88] The sugar beet industry, in fact, was first to draw Mexicans into the Midwest and Heartland states, at least in noteworthy numbers.[89] This industry first hired Mexicans at a plant in Kansas, and it rose to represent the largest employer of Mexican labor during WWI and directly after.[90] After industrialization, other new industries flourished in cities across the United States. The Midwest welcomed growing business ventures in steel, automobile, meat-packing, and more. Many of these businesses recruited Mexican labor to fill their employment ranks. High wages offered by steel mills, railroads, and other industries that supplied needs for World War I particularly required increased labor.[91] As the recipient of the high number of Mexican migrants, several Texas cities served as "staging areas" for Mexicans headed for work in the Midwest.[92] However, not all migrants fell within the

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[85] Valdés, 22.
[86] García, 4.
[87] Valdés, 2.
[88] García, 33.
[89] Allegro and Wood, 34.
[90] Allegro and Wood, 34.
[91] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 15.
[92] Vargas, Armies in the Fields and Factories, 49.

category of contracted laborer. Some Mexicans struck out into the area by themselves, or with just a small group or friend.[93]

Beyond the material gains offered by stable employment, cities also offered more stability, better educational opportunities for children, and more social and cultural variety.[94] While the Southwest offered the familiarity of agricultural production in a rural setting, Midwestern opportunities centered on the ability to live within cities with flourishing industries. Over 85 percent of Mexicans in the Midwest in 1927 were either unskilled or semiskilled factory workers.[95]

Cities offered opportunities for children and families unseen in rural areas. This held importance for Mexicans at the time, because the Midwest population more frequently brought their wives and/or children with them. In the majority of cities, men still made up the largest proportion of the *colonia.* However, proportions varied across the region. In the Pittsburgh region, Detroit region, and Chicago region, women numbered around 10-12 percent of the population. However, in the Midwest region[96], they regularly comprised more than 20 percent of the *colonia.* In the Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Chicago regions, children numbered around 20 percent of the group. In the Midwest region, fifteen of the sixteen cities contained over 40 percent children – roughly equal to or outnumbering the adult male population for the location.[97] These numbers greatly diverge from the conception that only men came to the region. While each city experienced a difference in proportions of men, women, and children, most *colonias* had at least 30 percent women and children – with some as high as about 60. While these

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[93] García, 33.
[94] Valdés, 2.
[95] Vargas, Armies in the Fields and Factories, 51.
[96] As a reminder, Edson refers to cities here primarily in Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois.
[97] These numbers all come from Edson's demographic breakdown on pages 6-8 in *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*.

numbers may seem small, they are not statistically insignificant. Unfortunately, no reason is given for men choosing to have their families accompany them. One potential explanation could be the distance from the border making regular travel back and forth to Mexico cost-prohibitive.

Employment in factories represented another major divergence of the Midwest compared to the Southwest. As cities in the Midwest expanded, so did their industries. Instead of a significant draw to do agricultural work, Mexicans primarily came to the midwestern U.S. for factory work. One business that quickly gained traction throughout the region was steel – as seen in the case of Lorain and many others - but businesses like railroads and foundries flourished as well. Mexicans occupied positions left by European immigrants who no longer arrived in high enough numbers to fulfill the demand for rugged and inexpensive workers.[98] Though machinery had replaced portions of the need for labor, a number of jobs remained that required the human touch, but no particular skill.[99] Mexicans came to the region for the steady pay offered by these jobs – frequently better money than most achieved at home. These companies often recruited actively. Representatives of industries – iron, steel, cement, glass, leather, and the like travelled from locations in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois across Texas during labor shortages and hired men.[100] Companies supplemented this straightforward hiring method by luring regional workers away from their current jobs, enticing them with higher wages.[101]

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[98] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 4.
[99] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 4.
[100] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 20.
[101] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 20.

Despite the value of these workers, employers actually felt quite reluctant to pay good wages for this class of work, although this was not necessarily Mexican-specific.[102] Most of the workers – Edson estimated 30,800 throughout the Midwest in industrial work – never achieved more than the "common labor rate."[103] The pay for Mexican workers in industries throughout the region varied. Steel mills paid the most, followed in succession by tanneries, cement/brick plants, packing houses, highway and building construction, and then railroads – who actually employed the most Mexicans in the country. Below is a table, reproduced from Edson's findings, that describes the pay received for various industrial work by Mexicans in the Midwest.[104]

[102] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 4.
[103] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 4.
[104] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 5.

Table 3: *Industrial Work*

Kind of Employment	Number Engaged	Wages Per Hour (Cents)					Hourly Average
		30-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	Over 50	
Steel Mills & Foundries	17,295	0	144	8,632	4,164	4,355	$0.4973
Railroad	7.572	77	7,070	339	60	26	$0.3914
Highway and Building	3,727	0	3,540	66	35	2	$0.4026
Packing Houses	1,011	57	68	692	180	14	$0.4269
Cement & Brick Plants	663	39	142	288	190	2	$0.4465
Tanneries	559	0	6	425	115	13	$0.4627
TOTAL:	30,827	173	10,970	10,442	4,744	4,412	$0.4561

Through his travels and observations, Edson also uncovered nearly 8,000 Mexicans he encountered working at various odd jobs – without steady employment. He was unable to determine their pay rate. He also met over 1,000 men – to include elderly gentlemen – unable to work, or in the process arriving to the United States or leaving it.[105]

Despite a wide range of nationalities working in these industries, Mexicans typically received the same pay as any other immigrant or worker in this in this class of employment.[106] They also worked the same shifts as any other employee of the corporation. Both these elements show the ability of Mexicans to join the immigrant

[105] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 5.
[106] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 6.

culture of Midwestern cities. Often, they experienced little differentiation from other European groups. The men typically engaged in eight-hour work days. Railroads and a portion of the steel mills kept to this standard shift.[107] However, some worked ten-hour days in the steel mills as well. While wages and shifts appeared standardized, the employment itself was not guaranteed. Often, Mexicans were hired on a short-term or temporary basis, possibly due to the fact that many often worked in the sugar beet fields in the summer months.[108]

The highest number of Mexicans in the region worked in steel mills, including Lorain, Ohio. The United States Steel Corporation, a major steel producer, expanded into the largest steel company within the nation, as well as the largest industrial organization of all kinds worldwide.[109] The corporation started branches and subsidiaries throughout the Midwest, as well as the country more broadly. Steel and its production increased rapidly after technological advances from the Industrial Revolution made it feasible. While the United States Steel Corporation began in New Jersey and incorporated there in 1901, the heart of steel fabrication found its home around the Great Lakes. Abundant deposits of iron ore existed around Lake Superior and coal veins supplied the power from their veins in Pennsylvania.[110] These plentiful natural resources combined with the concentration of fresh water in the Great Lakes which offered easily and affordable transportation routes.[111] Due to these fortuitous environmental factors, the steel industry found its home within the Midwest. The American steel industry quickly became the

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[107] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 6.
[108] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 9.
[109] Kenneth Warren. *Big Steel: The First Century of the United States Steel Corporation, 1901-2001* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 7.
[110] John Steele Gordon. *An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).
[111] Gordon

largest in the world despite only producing half of the United Kingdom in the 1880s.[112] Before U.S. Steel declared itself the preeminent steel producer, Federal Steel and Carnegie Steel claimed the titles of "major integrated companies."[113] These two companies established smaller finishing companies throughout the Midwest, particularly along the Great Lakes – principally cities within Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois.

The National Tube Company has a complex background. The Lorain location began as a smaller independent company entitled 'Lorain Steel Works.' In 1898, Federal Steel formed by combining Lorain Steel Works, Minnesota Iron Company, Illinois Steel Company, and a few smaller companies at the head of Lake Michigan[114]. The Lorain location of the company sold billets to other Ohio plants of the National Tube Company. National Tube was separate at the turn of the twentieth century and had just been formed by twenty-one separate companies in 1899.[115] With the introduction of so many new companies to the industry, talks began which considered combining portions of the steel industry into larger groupings. In 1901, Carnegie Steel, Federal Steel, and a third company, National Steel, coalesced into the singular United States Steel Corporation. At its incorporation, U.S. Steel included 213 separate manufacturing plants, with one hundred of them in Pennsylvania, fifty-one in Ohio, fifteen in Illinois, twelve in Indiana and twelve in New York.[116] They quickly absorbed the National Tube Company (all its sites) into this company. In 1903, National Tube took over the facility in Lorain, changing its name and production from Lorain Steel Works into the National Tube Company.

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[112] Warren, 7.
[113] Warren, 10.
[114] Warren, 11.
[115] Warren, 12.
[116] Warren, 28.

U.S. Steel played an important role outside of Lorain as well. The corporation quickly became the leading employer of Mexicans in the steel industry for the Midwest, with thousands hired to work in plants in Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New York, and Ohio. Gainful employment in the steel industry enticed immigrants to the region, leading to the creation of one of the largest Mexican communities in the state of Ohio in the early decades of the twentieth century. A significant change came from the introduction of Mexicans into foundries, steel mills, packing houses, and auto plants in the Midwest. The shift into industrial employment marked the movement of Mexicans from "the fringes of the American working class to full participation."[117] Through this process, it becomes clear that Mexicans experienced a different level of participation in society than in the Southwest.

Throughout the United States, Mexicans had a different experience than other immigrants. In 1930, only 9 percent of Mexican men were naturalized citizens, while 60 percent of eastern and southern European men were, and 80 percent of northern and western Europeans.[118] Immigration laws and census laws categorized Mexicans as white, so under the law they were technically such. For example, in court cases, they were legally judged as white.[119] However, the treatment and experience of Mexicans was a different thing. In practice, Mexicans were often judged as non-white. While they could claim legal whiteness, this did not align well with "scientific or popular ideas about Mexicans' color status."[120] In other words, while the law said Mexicans were white, people (especially in certain regions of the U.S.) did not view them as such, and tensions

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[117] Vargas, 1.
[118] Cybelle Fox and Irene Bloemraad, "Beyond 'White by Law': Explaining the Gulf in Citizenship Acquisition between Mexican and European Immigrants, 1930," *Social Forces* 94, No. 1 (2015): 181.
[119] Fox and Bloemraad, 184.
[120] Fox and Bloemraad, 184.

mounted. These viewpoints and subsequent friction drastically decreased Mexican likelihood of becoming citizens among other things.[121]

Different regions in the country exhibited variations in treatment of Mexicans. In the border states, the bulk of Mexicans experienced unfortunate resentment based solely on color and status. This represented a fear many held, and in certain regions it came true.[122] "Race…in southern states caused the Mexican peons to be classed by many folks with the "n***ers."[123] In the Southwest, Mexicans existed as one of the few sources of immigrant labor. While farmers needed them desperately, they represented something very separate from the white Southern landowner. Because they perceived Mexican migrants as the 'other,' they treated them poorly – akin to African Americans. While race relations did not exist in perfect harmony in the north, the reception went much more smoothly. Much like Julie Weise argued in *Corazon de Dixie,* instead of the segregation practices adopted in the Southwest, places like the Midwest and South saw Mexicans differently. Racial ideas about Mexicans were "less entrenched," making them fall somewhere lower than whites, but far above African-Americans.[124] Particularly in cities, Mexicans existed in tandem with thousands of European immigrants, and received similar treatment. For the most part, these Europeans had no objection to living and working among the Mexican population, and "certainly the antipathy [was] not akin to the racial odium felt toward a Jap or negro."[125] Therefore, the Mexican laborer and his family received a relative welcome, especially as compared to racial minorities - quite a different situation from border states. This only changed in some larger cities as rural to

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[121] Fox and Bloemraad, 181.
[122] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 13.
[123] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 13.
[124] Julie M. Weise. *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South Since 1910*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 219.
[125] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 33.

urban migration continued. “Farm boys” moved to the city for work, some of whom felt spite against the Mexican population.[126]

The Midwest exhibited less overt racism and more positive treatment, which can be seen through relatively equal pay to their coworkers, along with a level of acceptance unseen in the Southwest. However, that did not mean their experience was free of difficulties. Mexicans encountered a staggering number of new and shocking challenges upon entrance to the United States – particularly in the Midwest. Just the sights and sounds of the average city would have been shocking – tall buildings and numerous automobiles included.[127] Not only did stark differences exist between urban Mexico and U.S. cities, but most Mexicans migrants hailed from the rural countryside. Midwestern cities likely astonished Mexicans upon arrival. Furthermore, Mexicans lived among a population of Spanish-speakers at home. As new American settlers, they encountered not just English as the primary language, but a plethora of other languages and dialects spoken by other immigrants from European and Asian countries. In Lorain, roughly thirty other nationalities existed in the community where they lived and worked. Mexicans lacked familiarity with non-Spanish speaking people for the most part, but now interacted daily with African Americans, Polish people, Irish, Italians, and more.[128] Another seemingly trivial disparity that actually played a profound role in assimilation was weather. Perhaps parts of the Southwestern U.S. shared a similar climate to Mexico, but the Midwest decidedly did not. The northern latitude of the region favored cooler temperatures and harsher winters, hindering the adjustment of the Mexican immigrant.[129]

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[126] George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*, 33.
[127] George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 87.
[128] Arredondo, 3.
[129] Gamio, 14.

Some male migrants even cited the harsh winters as a reason for not bringing their families with them.

One way Mexicans chose to feel at home within a strange and foreign land came from their rapid community involvement. Regardless of assimilation pressures, Mexicans in the region chose not to be "passive victims."[130] They navigated their new homes by establishing and participating in a variety of organizations. Most of these groups shared a singular, common goal – loyalty to Mexico and the welfare of Mexicans in the United States.[131] One primary way Mexicans found home in their new communities came through churches. Just as other European immigrants discovered that religious spaces served as a way to form and develop community, Mexicans found this as well.[132] Many *colonias* pursued church membership, and in certain cases established churches of their own. Social activities also often centered around the Catholic Church.[133] Religious activism also increased in displaced Mexicans during the Cristero War. The Cristero refugees often discussed their persecuted brothers and sisters still in Mexico. They initiated the publication of Spanish-language newspapers, organized public lectures informing migrants about Calles and his actions against Catholics, and became active in organizations like the Knights of Columbus and more.[134]

Other examples of community participation came through settlement houses and mutual aid societies. Important distinctions exist between these organizations. While they shared similar purposes – welcoming and assisting the immigrant population, settlement houses were typically established by native citizens of the U.S., while mutual

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[130] García, viii.
[131] García, viii.
[132] Sergio M. González. *Mexicans in Wisconsin*. (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2017), 19.
[133] García, 164.
[134] Young, Chapter 3.

societies came from Mexicans, for Mexicans. As Juan García established in *Mexicans in the Midwest,* in the unfamiliar and foreign terrain of the Midwest, Mexicans recognized that the best way to support each other came from the establishment of their own "self-help organizations."[135] *Sociedades mutualistas* were the most common type of organization – generally created to assist with economic hardships that the migrants experienced.[136] Settlement houses also cropped up throughout the region – but often served a wider immigrant community than solely Mexicans. They served several purposes; providing classes in English or other topics, mediating between Mexican and other ethnic communities, and overall helping resettle these newcomers.[137]

Conclusion

Early Mexican immigration to the United States flowed primarily from the landless peasants who sought agricultural jobs in the Southwest – fairly straightforward economic motivation. This rapidly shifted with the extreme chaos that overtook Mexico beginning in 1910. People now left their homelands to escape violence, starvation, disease, and an overall dismal situation that exacerbated the poverty of the *campesinos.* In the 1920s, restrictions on the influential Catholic Church forced devout parishioners to leave their homelands, and resulted in exiled clergy that often relocated in the U.S. In this period, Mexicans began to travel outside the Southwest in large numbers.

Waves of migration to the United States have ebbed and flowed over the preceding centuries. Mexicans already began relocating to the Midwest when stricter immigration laws passed in the. United States that limited European labor. When factories wanted for more labor, employers looked for a new source to fill the gap. This

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[135] García, 159.
[136] García, 159.
[137] García, 207.

often meant active recruitment of migrants. In this case, Mexicans became the target for factories throughout the Midwest – nearly 31,000 worked in industrial jobs in the late 1920s.

While the midwestern United States stood geographically much further than border areas with concentrated Mexican settlements, it remained a destination for a significant influx of migrants. As the region grew rapidly, immigrants primarily resettled in city environments for the benefits they offered. With precipitous growth, these cities also exploded with new industries, which offered the employment opportunities immigrants sought. These factors caused a divergence between Southwest Mexicans and Midwest Mexicans. Those in the Midwest also experienced far less racism, and even a veritable welcome in some circumstances. Families also frequently accompanied those in the Midwest. Children made up a significant proportion of *colonia* numbers – over 40 percent of in several cities across the region. These men and their families quickly integrated themselves into local society in a variety of ways.

The Lorain *colonia* exemplified a typical midwestern Mexican enclave. In the 1920s, Lorain was not a large city by today's standards, but it certainly qualified as urban. The Mexicans relocated to Lorain almost exclusively to work at the National Tube Company, a prominent steel mill. The numbers of women and children are on the lower side when compared to other Midwestern *colonias,* but they still made up around 30 percent of the group's numbers in 1926, and continued to grow from there. The community was racially complex, and Mexicans joined many European immigrants already residing there. The Lorain *colonia* also quickly and wholeheartedly engaged in the community. They quickly attended church, and then helped to start their own Spanish-speaking parish. They participated in community activities, as well as

continuing to celebrate their own Mexican heritage through celebrations. Looking at Lorain will help provide an up-close perspective of how Midwestern migration has an enduring and unique history when compared to other regions across the United States.

CHAPTER TWO: LORAIN, OHIO: A MIDWESTERN *COLONIA*

"Not many countries offer second chances. The U.S. gave me that."
Jorge Ramos

"I want you to assure your people that my heart is with them, and that I pray that the day may not be far distant when peace and order will return to the country, and the long suffering Church of Mexico will triumph over persecution."
- Bishop of Cleveland to Rev. Clemente Vilorio

In my research for this piece, my initial search for significant numbers of Mexican migrants in Ohio took place in Cleveland – the largest city in northern Ohio. However, I quickly learned that Cleveland did not house any significant *colonias* of Mexicans in the early twentieth century. In fact, only about three hundred Mexicans reportedly lived throughout Cleveland in 1926, in "scattered bunches and living in various places."[138] The Lorain community, however, gained traction in 1923, and by its peak just a few years later numbered an estimated 2000-3000 people. This significant group of Mexicans left their homeland for numerous reasons – some unknown, but many certainly upset by the chaos of the 1910s-1920s in Mexico. What is exceedingly clear, however, was that employment with the National Tube Company served as an enticement to relocate.

The Lorain *colonia* serves as a lens to understand midwestern Mexican migration. It exhibited all the characteristics that I argue made the Midwest Mexican population different from other regions throughout the United States – particularly the early southwestern migrants. However, as one would expect, there are still facets of Lorain that display unique characteristics. Not every location within the Midwest was identical. However, the five predominant characteristics observable across the region are all demonstrated in the *colonia*.

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[138] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Mexicans at Lorain, Ohio,* by George Edson. 1926. Pg. 17.

This chapter deals with a few of these aspects. I delve into why Mexicans ended up in Lorain, and show that industrial employment played a singularly important role in the *colonia'*s establishment in the city of Lorain, specifically. This section also describes the numerous ways Mexicans involved themselves into the community. The most significant example of community involvement came in the establishment of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the newly-created Spanish-speaking church, created for the benefit of the rapidly expanding Mexican population.

A Combination of Factors: Being Pushed from Mexico to Lorain

Before jumping into the fascinating story of the Lorain *colonia,* it is crucial to determine what factors comprised the motivation to leave Mexico in the first place. The Revolution (1910-1920) virtually destroyed parts of the country through the ravages of destruction, disease, and more. Just after the nation began to recover, the tightening leadership of the presidents brought about new laws that limited Catholicism and its power throughout the nation. Resistance to this domination of the Church led to the Cristero War from 1926-1929. Certain states experienced the most detrimental effects of these conflicts. Unfortunately, several of the same states suffered deeply through both – sending people fleeing from the country.

The Mexican states that faced overlapping violence from both chaotic events were Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato. These states often sent a higher number of people into the United States because of the serious problems facing the regions. Lorain was no exception to this trend. Multiple sources corroborate the sending states for the *colonia.* However, because the group in Lorain predates the Cristero War, the actual violence of the war cannot be presumed as the initial cause of immigration. Mexicans arrived in significant numbers to the city in 1923 – three years before the outbreak of the Cristero

Rebellion. However, networks of migration already in place may have been influential for those who desired to migrate a few years later. The laborers often wrote to their brothers, cousins, and other relatives in Mexico – convincing them to migrate to Lorain as well. In this way, people from the same area in Mexico became attached to specific sites within the United States.

In his report, George Edson described his encounters with the Mexicans in Lorain, and cited that nearly all the Mexicans he met "came from the three Mexican states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato."[139] He does not explain how he learned this – whether it came up in conversation, or if he examined the personnel records to determine this.[140] However, church records in Lorain help to corroborate and expand on this finding. Marriage records from the local parish (established for Mexicans) in the community have a column to list the baptism location of both parties involved. In the Catholic Church, baptisms are typically performed shortly after the birth of the child. This means the location listed for baptism is quite likely the birthplace of the parties involved as well.

The parish register of Our Lady of Guadalupe contains records for twenty-eight marriages that occurred between November of 1927 and April of 1931. Of these records, thirty-seven people from Mexico have baptismal records that can be examined.[141] Guanajuato was cited as the location of baptism for ten of the people entering into marriages. Jalisco was listed as the baptismal site for seven of the parties. Surprisingly, San Luis Potosí (undiscussed by Edson) was also claimed by seven people as the location

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[139] Edson, "Lorain," 3.

[140] Edson described reading the personnel records at National Tube and viewing the point of entry into the United States for most of the Mexican men who were employed there.

[141] A few of these records are nearly illegible by photograph, and a few of the couples contained a person who was *not* marrying someone born in Mexico. Three couples contained one party born in Texas, and one contained someone born in Lorain.

of baptism. Michoacán was cited in four instances. Zacatecas was listed by three people, and Coahuila by two. Finally, the location of baptism was listed as Aguascalientes, Morelos, Tamaulipas, and Nuevo Leon by one person each.[142] These states are fairly well grouped together within Mexico. Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and San Luis Potosí are all centrally located within the nation. Three states were cited less frequently, and they all border the United States – Texas, specifically.

Major battles in the Mexican Revolution occurred in Zacatecas, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and– three of the sending states to Lorain. While no major battles occurred in the others, like Michoacán or San Luis Potosí, they were virtually surrounded by the mayhem and brutality that certainly accompanied these skirmishes. The destruction that arose from the Revolution rapidly sent people across Mexico's northern border. Since the recruiters from the steel mill in Lorain recruited from Texas, the likelihood that some revolutionary refugees fled just north of the border (into Texas) is quite high. Many immigrants sought safety just within the borders of a new nation, but relocated later. The Revolution and its far-reaching consequences forced upwards of a million people into the United States in just a decade – from the southernmost border all the way to a final destination in northeastern Ohio and beyond.

Since the creation of the *colonia* predated the Cristero War's violence, it becomes difficult to pinpoint it as a cause of migration to Lorain, specifically. However, anecdotal evidence at least suggested that the increasing church restriction leading up to the Rebellion also caused migration to the United States. Joel Arredondo, a second/third generation member of Lorain's Mexican community, knows the specific reasons his relatives travelled to Lorain in the first place and the circumstances surrounding their

[142] Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish Records, *Matrimoniorum Registrum*, Pages 1-3, 1926-1931.

immigration.[143] Mr. Arredondo's grandfather worked as an overseer on a hacienda owned by a woman named Mrs. Mendoza. Approximately 200 families resided on the hacienda in Guanajuato. However, when the Constitution of 1917 removed the Catholic Church as a landholder in Mexico, a Bishop approached Mrs. Mendoza. They asked if she would consider donating her land to the Church. As a very devout woman, she happily agreed to give all her property to the Catholic Church. A few years later, Mr. Arredondo's uncle, Mauro, desired to be married within the Catholic Church. However, in the era of increasing religious regulation in Mexico, the process of marriage transferred from a religious to a civil contract. This upset those who desired to be married in the Church or in the eyes of God. For this reason, Mauro and his soon-to-be wife left their home in Guanajuato to work in the steel mill and get married around 1923. Later, they returned to Mexico. When they did, Mauro's brother – Mr. Arredondo's father – desired to return with them. Against Mauro's protests that his brother was too weak to work in the steel mill, he returned with his brother and sister-in-law, and resided with them for fifteen years (1927-1942) until his own marriage.[144]

Mr. Arredondo's family provides the perfect example for one of the major concepts at play in the Lorain *colonia* – migration networks. For a myriad of reasons, Mexicans left Mexico. Some chose to leave because of the Revolution and its violence, some resented the tightening control of the state over the Catholic Church, and some likely did simply seek better work and living conditions. They migrated north – either into Texas or some directly to Lorain. When the National Tube Company desired more Mexican labor, the easiest method proved to be pulling in more friends and relatives of

[143] Mr. Arredondo is listed as both second and third generation Mexican in Lorain because his father came to Lorain as an adult, but his mother arrived as a very young child with her parents. Therefore, on one side of his family he is second generation, but technically third generation on his mother's side.
[144] Joel Arredondo INTERVIEW 2 March 2019.

the workers who already lived in Lorain. In this way, since some in Lorain came from states fraught with Cristero violence, it is likely that some who wanted to escape chose Lorain because of their relationship to migrants who already resided there. In this way, the push and pull of immigration decidedly existed outside the realm of economics. The push came from violence, and the pull came more from family the knowledge of a safe haven than job security.

In this way, Lorain proved itself unique as a *colonia.* The motivation to come to the community encompassed a variety of purposes. The Revolution and its cruelty, restrictive Church laws, and migration networks all served as reasons the initial Mexicans chose to leave their homes and relocated to Lorain. One common thread between the vast majority of the Mexicans in Lorain was their choice of workplace. While the only motivation for relocation was not economic, nearly all of the *colonia* chose employment at the National Tube Company – Lorain's massive steel mill.

Starting A *Colonia:* Recruitment by The National Tube Company

Before a significant community of Mexicans existed in Lorain, there were some Mexicans scattered throughout northern Ohio. However, they only predated the *colonia* of Lorain by a few short years. The first Mexican immigrants to northern Ohio arrived around 1917 or 1918 to the Toledo area. A.R. Wiggins of the U.S. Immigration Office in Cleveland, Ohio attested to the fact that they were brought into Toledo by the Continental Sugar Company.[145] They spent their time in the actual sugar factory, but also in the agricultural field working on beets. The very first Mexicans in Lorain, Ohio arrived around 1921 – but this was a very small group, consisting of just two or three families. These newcomers likely came to the United States for work, possibly as part of the

[145] Edson, "Lorain," 1.

transient groups who travelled with the B & O Railroad [146] This railroad reached as far north as early as 1872 (although called the Tuscarawas Valley and Wheeling Railroad at the time).[147] These migrants do not fit the Midwestern mold per se. Without the consolidation of a *colonia,* the patterns and trends that typify the Midwest were not as strong. The few railroad families who settled early in the 1920s likely remained in Lorain for improved working conditions and higher pay.[148]

Mexicans truly became a force in Lorain just a few years later – 1923; they selected an urban area with industrial employment, very similar to other midwestern *colonias*. The story and situation were described in detail by George Edson, a Department of Labor official. He visited sites throughout the Midwest describing the Mexican labor he encountered at each location. Edson described how the National Tube Company can be traced as the chief reason for such an influx of Mexicans to this 42,000 person suburb west of Cleveland. As in other midwestern cities, industrial employment constituted the chief motivation for resettlement in this specific place. Instead of Cleveland, perhaps more expected, the community established itself in a less dominant city– but due exclusively to the steel mill. The National Tube Company recruited many different ethnic and racial groups to fill the ranks of such a large company. "Hungarians and Slavs" were noted by the Chief Employment Officer, John A. Hoffman, as being in great number at the factory, and being hard workers.[149] At the time, Lorain had significant portions of their population that claimed Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian, and Italian heritage – some residing in the community for nearly 20

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[146] Frank Jacinto. *The Mexican Community in Lorain, Ohio*. (Avon, Ohio: 75th Mexican Anniversary Committee, 1999), 1.
[147] Wendy F. Marley and Nicholas J. Zentos, *Ethnic Communities of Lorain Ohio: A History and Directory* (Elyria, Ohio: 1999).
[148] Jacinto, 2.
[149] Edson, "Lorain," 2.

years.[150] Therefore, other recent immigrant groups also worked for and were recruited by the National Tube Company. Officers within the steel mill also recruited "negro" workers from Mississippi, but claimed problems with high turnover of their African-American workers.[151]

National Tube was a large steel mill – both in physical size and labor force. The building itself extended roughly five miles next to the railroad tracks, and they employed around 9,000 men. In 1923, the company decided to branch out in its search for more labor, and recruit a new ethnic group as workers – Mexicans. John Hoffman traveled to San Antonio and Fort Worth, Texas in 1923 to recruit a significant number of workers. However, Hoffman employed an assistant who also served as an interpreter, George L. Jánez, who claimed the number was actually much closer to 1,000 people initially recruited.[152] Hoffman described the rigorous process that these men went through to become National Tube employees. "We had physicians examine the men whom we selected. The number rejected because of having venereal diseases was less than 2%; the doctors said this was below the average for American youths."[153] All the men were required to be legal migrants, although the process at the time was much simpler than it is today. Anyone who wanted to enter the country merely had to pay a head tax at the border, so many Mexican nationals resided in Texas.[154] This made the recruitment process for Hoffman relatively straightforward.

If the workers stayed for ninety days with the company, National Tube would reimburse them their travel expenses to Lorain. Eighty-seven percent of the men

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[150] Edson, "Lorain," 5.
[151] Edson, "Lorain," 2.
[152] Edson, "Lorain," 18.
[153] Edson, "Lorain," 2.
[154] Jacinto, 2.

remained, and had their expenses paid back, quickly giving Mexicans a reputation as "good stayers."[155] The number of Mexicans expanded quickly at National Tube. At the beginning of 1924, payroll had record of 591 Mexicans on payroll. The following year, 1925, there were 837. At the beginning of 1926, the number declined to 590. However, this was counteracted by the hiring of 285 Mexicans. Some quit, but at the writing of Edson's labor report, there were still 809 on payroll.[156] Hoffman attested to this "sticking" or "staying" power of Mexicans. (The overall number of employees was reduced the previous year, which also reduced the number of Mexicans overall).

George Edson described the system for recruiting Mexican labor at the National Tube Company as both "an organized and camouflaged system."[157] Mexicans were directed to labor here in an organized manner that ensured a "plentiful supply of cheap labor."[158] What he described was essentially the company's covert implementation of string migration. However, it remained hidden for several key reasons. If the system wasn't publicized, National Tube could avoid labor union criticism, imitation by other industries, and interference by the government.[159] This seems a shrewd commentary by a Department of Labor official. He is not unclear on the reasons the corporation employed Mexican immigrant labor. The person he emphasized as integral in this process was the translator on National Tube's payroll – George Jánez. He was described as "a Mexican who knows his stuff, and [serves] as a go-between between his company and his countrymen [to] spread the news that there is room for a few more Mexicans."[160] The easiest way for this process to occur came by letter writing to brothers and cousins to

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[155] Edson, "Lorain," 2.
[156] Edson, "Lorain," 2.
[157] Edson, "Lorain," 18.
[158] Edson, "Lorain," 18.
[159] Edson, "Lorain," 18.
[160] Edson, "Lorain," 18.

recruit more workers for the company. They simply had to make it known that employment opportunities existed, and circumstances and conditions were such in Mexico that there were some men willing to migrate. Jánez himself held plans for the *colonia.* Instead of taking a lucrative job offer with another company, he chose to remain with National Tube so he could solidify the Mexican colony and "free it from the domination of the Spaniards."[161]

An important aspect of the steel mill's pull on immigrants came from their improved living conditions as compared to Mexican standards. Overall, in Mexico, the laboring class experienced a decline in their standard of living beginning in 1870 – and then it stagnated for several decades into the twentieth century.[162] Even though Mexicans did not gain access to union membership in the United States, their pay at National Tube still entailed a considerable improvement. The lowest wage the mill offered was forty-four cents per hour. However, according to Mr. Hoffman, many received higher pay shortly after arrival. He cited three-fourths of the Mexican employees earning closer to sixty or seventy cents per hour.[163] This pay actually lined up closely to average wages for manufacturing overall in the United States at that time – despite being non-union labor. Average hourly earnings for manufacturing jobs in 1923 earned about fifty-two cents an hour. In 1924, 1925, and 1926 the two number rose almost imperceptibly, landing at almost fifty-five cents per hour.[164] If Hoffman's word is accurate, many of the Mexican workers actually earned above the national average at sixty-seventy cents per

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[161] Edson, "Lorain," 18.
[162] Moramay López-Alonso. "Growth with Inequality: Living Standards in Mexico, 1850-1950." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007), 83. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4491777.
[163] Edson, "Lorain," 2.
[164] U.S. Department of Labor. Division of Manpower and Employment Statistics. Employment and Earnings: Table C-1: Gross Hours and Earnings of Productive Workers in Manufacturing 1919 to Date. 1960.

hour. The jobs in the steel mill likely would have been comparable to day laborer jobs in Mexico, in the sense that they were not skilled work.

Without the National Tube Company, Lorain never would have become a representation of a midwestern *colonia.* The United Steel Corporation's decision to include the steel mill in Lorain as one of their subsidiaries fundamentally altered the course of the city's demographics and by extension their overall trajectory. The National Tube Company's creation and expansion generated a need for labor that did not exist previously. Obviously, there were not enough laborers free in Lorain to fill the company's ranks, which led workers like John Hoffman to recruit a wide-range of immigrants and ethnic groups. While immigrants like Hungarians arrived first and in higher numbers, for the purposes of this research, it opened up a space for one very specific migrant group to enter - Mexicans. Because of this specific employment opportunity, a rather unobtrusive western suburb of Cleveland became the only Mexican *colonia* of import in the entire state of Ohio. The noteworthy part of this is that one would expect to find large groups of immigrants in larger cities in the state – such as Cleveland - a city of nearly 800,000 in 1920. Cleveland had a thriving immigrant population at the time, but very few Mexicans. Instead, the placement of a very specific asset in Lorain allowed this precise location to flourish as an area with a thriving Mexican community. Without the National Tube Company, this town would never have been transformed by the addition of a Mexican population.

At Home in Lorain: Mexicans Settle In

Just as *colonias* across the Midwest had residents who quickly integrated into their community, the Mexicans in Lorain established a true home for themselves. They quickly put down roots by finding ways to maintain familiarity and heritage despite being

in completely unfamiliar territory. These were not a people who came only to work. Beyond the necessary housing, Mexicans and their allies even established institutions to make the community feel more familiar. They integrated themselves fully into the Lorain in numerous ways. Within a few short years, a local Catholic parish created a separate church (both service and location) for Mexicans. Some created businesses - although, as mentioned, the vast majority worked for the National Tube Company. Some of the immigrants who also had families with them in Lorain had children who attended local schools – both Catholic/private and public. They settled into the city beyond the typical portrayal of Mexicans in the U.S. While continuing to celebrate their native heritage, they made themselves at home in a new country.

Mexicans fit into South Lorain, because its population consisted primarily of immigrants, analogous to cities across the Midwest where Mexican communities joined waves of European immigrants. South Lorain was not a separate municipality from Lorain itself, but a part of "Lorain proper"- located about three miles southeast of the businesses district of Lorain.[165] The Mexican *colonia* had its own specified location within South Lorain. It existed "between East 28th and East 31st streets north and south and between Seneca and Vine Avenues east and west, extending in places a block west form Vine Avenue on East 30th Street."[166] This area, comprised of about a half-mile of territory, made up "the fairest residential part of South Lorain."[167] Not coincidentally, this section of the city lay just south of the National Tube Company, located along East 28th Street. This made the location convenient for those who worked for the Company – the majority of Mexicans in the city. The dominant feature of South Lorain was the

[165] Edson, "Lorain," 1.
[166] Edson, "Lorain," 1.
[167] Edson, "Lorain," 1.

massive structure of the steel mill itself. Several hundred Mexicans resided in this area of the city.

In Edson's thorough examination of Mexican labor in Lorain, he was unable to discover a 'rooming-house' operated by a Mexican. Most of the rooming houses where Mexicans resided within South Lorain had operators of other nationalities. The hundreds of single Mexican laborers in Lorain flocked to housing here. Brick buildings existed along East 28th Street, with businesses on the bottom floor and rooms for rent in the stories above, typically run by Spanish men and women.[168] In one home on the street, twenty-five to thirty Mexicans roomed at that singular location. A boarding house nearby with a Spanish landlady had a mixed population of both Spanish and Mexicans in residence…"and so on along the street."[169] For the most part, these renters paid eight dollars a month per head, but occasionally only paid seven dollars.[170] Behind East 28th Street, similar housing existed – run by Spaniards, but also Italians, Serbians, and more.[171] These houses did not differ much from the others on East 28th, except for "better scenery."[172] Rent along this street also approximated eight dollars per month.

The renters condensed as many men into one room as space permitted. Edson described his encounter with one man who lived with four others within one room. All of the men were related – three were his own brothers, and one his brother-in-law. Each of the men had a wife in Mexico, but resided in Lorain alone.[173] This small encounter and descriptions of the boarding houses fit with overall perceptions of migration in the time period. For the most part, men relocated to locations throughout the United States

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[168] Edson, "Lorain," 12.
[169] Edson, "Lorain," 12.
[170] Edson, "Lorain," 12.
[171] Edson, "Lorain," 13.
[172] Edson, "Lorain," 13.
[173] Edson, "Lorain," 12.

without families for the exclusive purpose of earning money through stable employment. This fact that most men arrived alone does not mean the decision came without difficulty. The same aforementioned man relayed to Edson that he and his brothers all strongly debated bringing their families to reside with them in Lorain. In the end, however, they decided they likely would not – as it would cost at least $100 for the head tax (per person), and "it was a long way for a woman and children to travel and winter here was not agreeable to them."[174] The women, who had families ["parents and sisters"] to reside with in Mexico, could more easily reside there "cheaply and healthfully."[175]

Across the Midwest, noteworthy numbers of women and children joined the male laborers in their new homes; Lorain was no exception. Edson's report on Lorain did not provide specific statistics on the breakdown of men, women, and children, but his synopsis of all fifty-one cities did. In 1926 (which came before the peak of the *colonia)* cited 962 men, 125 women, and 243 children. These numbers reveal strikingly similar proportions to cities within the Pittsburgh region (as defined by Edson). Per these numbers, women comprised 9.3 percent of the population, and children 18 percent. The Pittsburgh region contained three other cities (Detroit, Pontiac, and Flint) with nearly identical numbers. Overall, these numbers actually reflect lower family percentages compared to other midwestern cities, but still revealed that single men were not the only migrants across the Midwest. Other sources support the percentages calculated by Edson. Evidence appeared through parish baptism records the high number of both marriages and baptism that took place. Also, Edson did describe the educational efforts of people who brought older children to the United States with them.

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[174] Edson, "Lorain," 12.
[175] Edson, "Lorain," 13.

At Our Lady of Guadalupe, twenty-eight marriages were performed within its brief but powerful existence – 1926-1931. Almost all the couples consisted of a man and woman who were both of Mexican or Mexican-American descent. Therefore, a reasonable number of unmarried women immigrated to Lorain as well – perhaps daughters or sisters of men who came to work. A more telling statistic arrived through the number of children born while in Lorain. In the baptismal records, between 17 October 1926 and 14 December 1931, 224 children were baptized. Birthdates are provided for the infants, and each one listed was within a few months of age at the time of the sacrament. Presumably, this also indicated the children were born in Lorain since they were so young. Even though some of the children share last names (meaning they could be siblings, extended family, or simply families with the same last name), at least 112 different last names exist in the baptismal records. This meant a significant portion of the migrants in Lorain comprised family units – not just single men in town to work.

Education provided a different perspective on family units within Lorain. Older children, likely brought (not born there), further reveal the high number of family units that also made up the *colonia.* Several schools existed in Lorain in the 1920s. St. John's, the church most Mexicans initially attended in Lorain, had a parochial school attached. While it closed before 1930, it still existed at the time of Edson's report, and had eight Mexican children in attendance.[176] Father Vilorio, priest of the mission church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, noted forty-seven children of school age in the Mexican population. That meant the majority of them did not attend the school affiliated with St. John's parish. A teacher provided a brief interview in Edson's report. In the interview, it was stated that the children were "not difficult", but sometimes displayed a "stubborn

[176] Edson, "Lorain," 5.

disposition – a desire to do things in their own way."[177] The teacher further explained that they sometimes entered school later than was appropriate. There is a chance this resulted from when the families arrived in Lorain. They may not necessarily have come in time to start the children on time. Also, it was not uncommon for the families to leave for several months a year (to go work in the beet fields) which no doubt disrupted education as well.[178]

Around fifteen more of the school-aged children from Mexico attended Lowell and Lincoln grade schools, attested to by Prof. G.F. Creamer – the principal.[179] He stated that a few other schools located in the city had a few Mexican children attending as well.[180] Overall, Creamer's outlook on the motivation and pursuit of education by Mexicans in Lorain was quite negative. He also provided a particularly unfavorable impression of the children he interacted with. He described that the schools he presided over reach the sixth-grade, but he does not believe Mexicans ever continue past that grade anyway.[181] He held no hope that Mexicans sought to educate their children to a higher level. He further discussed a night school class (presumably for adults) created five years prior, to teach English to immigrants. He stated that around twenty-five Mexicans began the course, but the number steadily declined, until he indicated with certainty that no more continued to take the classes at all.

His dismal outlook worsened when he stated, "they are a backward, indolent race. Their attitude toward school work is one of utter indifference. The children try to quit,

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[177] Edson, "Lorain," 5.
[178] Edson, "Lorain," 10. He noted many families left for Kansas and Nebraska to work the beet fields from about May through November.
[179] Edson, "Lorain," 9.
[180] Edson, "Lorain," 9.
[181] Edson, "Lorain," 9.

and they lie, play hooky and come tardy in an exasperating way."[182] This opinion starkly differs from the teacher at the parochial school, who noted nothing more than a stubborn streak. Creamer's opinion did not end with their behavior. "The children come to school ragged, dirty, and lousy…their parents live in the utmost squalor." Not only did Creamer think negatively of the attitude and behavior of Mexicans, he also criticized their appearance. He also referred to them as the poorest immigrants in the city, but little sympathy arose from that judgment.[183] He claimed that a letter appeared in a local paper a few years prior; within it, a Mexican who claimed to be the leader of the *colonia* stated the group never planned to become citizens or stay in the country.[184] This seemed to be partially the source of Creamer's negative opinions. He did not understand the purpose of coming here for a short time, or trying to teach children who would only leave again. His interview finished with a curt statement that if his job was to only teach Mexicans, he would resign.[185]

Education likely challenged Mexicans in Lorain. The entire environment was foreign – from the physical climate to the language spoken in the classroom. While today, children often speak English for their Spanish-speaking parents, it seems unlikely this was the case so early on. Furthermore, some of the children left the school year early and returned late so their parents could travel to work in the beet fields. This surely only exacerbated educational difficulties. Having teachers and principals with such strongly negative opinions likely did not assist the children as much as possible, either. Educational difficulties notwithstanding, the *colonia* persisted in joining the educational community for the opportunities it offered.

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[182] Edson, "Lorain," 9.
[183] Edson, "Lorain," 10.
[184] Edson, "Lorain," 10.
[185] Edson, "Lorain," 11.

The families also lived in a slightly different location than the single men. While they all lived in South Lorain in a few block radius, the location and setup of the homes were different. No Mexicans in Lorain owned their own property at this time – all rented. Edson described the area where the families lived, and his verbiage revealed his feelings on this part of the *colonia* (or at least its appearance). "As one walks westward, the houses more huddled and pleading for paint and the general aspect more inglorious until a few blocks further on the street ends in a drab failure…sad to say, this miserable blur is where the Mexican families have picked their roots."[186] This acerbic description precedes more general information on the area. Mexican families who resided together in Lorain inhabited roughly a dozen brick tenement houses – all identical, and none containing a bathtub. Each two-story home contained four apartments per floor, allowing accommodations in these twelve houses for the roughly one hundred families in town.[187] These tenement houses, notably, were also not run by a Mexican landlord. Instead, they were built by a Jewish man (by the name of Goldberg), and later sold to a Hungarian-German named Arthur Binder – but the buildings still carry the name "Goldberg's Flats."[188] Each of the residents in these homes paid twenty-five dollars a month for their eighth of the house.

With just this small bit of financial information, it is evident that those with their families accompanying them in Lorain likely faced more of a financial struggle. With most men making similar wages at the steel mill, those with families paid more than three times the amount in rent every month. While they likely had fewer remittances to send back to Mexico, their living expenses would certainly have also been higher to support an

[186] Edson, "Lorain," 13-14.
[187] Edson, "Lorain," 14.
[188] Edson, "Lorain," 14.

entire family. Assuming an average pay of sixty cents per hour, the men would have made approximately twenty-four dollars per week. Therefore, a full week's pay had to go to housing, whereas the single man's rent (eight dollars) made enough to cover rent three times over in a week of work. This financial statistic shows how much leftover money would have been available to the 'bachelor' worker to send back to family members in Mexico. The banker in Lorain noted the high number of men who banked with him that sent remittances back home. The man, R.L. Rankin, estimated at least four hundred Mexicans held accounts at his branch of City Bank – controlled and owned primarily by the steel mill. He described that a large number made pay-day deposits, and that most of them remitted money back to Mexico.[189]

The Lorain *colonia* made themselves a literal home in Lorain quickly. Their situation displayed unique characteristics from the beginning. Representative of midwestern Mexicans, the group arrived for work outside of agriculture - and they pursued industrial work. This employment took them to a city, not the largest in the area, but an urban area nonetheless. Furthermore, significant evidence existed that families played a large role in the *colonia.* While the men of the group most often worked in the steel mill, unattached men were not the only demographic in Lorain. Instead, marriages took place, babies were born and baptized, and children entered local community schools. The Mexican population continued to integrate themselves into the community with their organizations, celebrations, and entrepreneurship.

Navigating the Community

Just as *colonias* around the Midwest navigated their new homes, Mexicans in Lorain began a similar process. After the *colonia* established employment and homes for

[189] Edson, "Lorain," 5.

themselves, they branched out into society. This took many forms. While most men in the community worked for National Tube, some became entrepreneurs and sought to start their own businesses within Lorain. This was a small group, but a much larger proportion of the population became rapidly involved in the Catholic church in Lorain. Initially, they attended a non-ethnic specific local parish – St. John's – but the Mexican population grew so significantly that they established a daughter parish. Our Lady of Guadalupe had a membership of approximately 2000 souls at its peak – showing a deep commitment to being involved in a religious community in a new country. One of the interesting aspects of Edson's report that he discussed at length was a community celebration of Mexico's Independence Day that occurred on September 16 – perhaps an annual celebration. While integrating themselves into their new home, Mexicans remained committed to their Mexican heritage. The more profoundly the Mexican population became involved in Lorain, the more they diverged from the typical picture of working immigrants. These were people who invested themselves and their families in society, without forgetting their heritage.

While the vast majority of Mexicans in Lorain sought employment with the National Tube Company, a few also became businessowners in the community. Edson noted several cases of Mexicans who opened their own shops, and dealt "almost exclusively with their own countrymen."[190] All the businesses Edson explored and discovered cropped up on East 28th Street, quite near the homes of most Mexicans. A few different types of businesses existed. Several were in food service – two separate restaurants and a bakery. Mexicans also ran two different tailor shops in the area. Edson described his encounters with the two tailors in the community, both surnamed Alvárez,

[190] Edson, "Lorain," 5-6.

but unrelated to one another. The first, owner of Alvárez y Hijos, lived in the United States for seven years at the time of the interview, and his competitor, Rubén Alvárez, six. Porfirio Cejas ran a barber shop in Lorain.[191] He learned the trade in Mexico, and arrived two work at the National Tube Company in 1924. Cejas had an opportunity to work in a barber shop restaurant combination, and when it split, he took on the barbershop alone. Edson stated he did not have much business, as most Mexicans went to the nicer barbershops run by Spaniards in town.[192]

While the Mexican business owners described numbered just a few, there are important conclusions to be wrought from them. Laborers of the National Tube Company, particularly the single men, had no reason to commit to staying in Lorain. Those who left families in Mexico presumably intended to return at some point, and did not necessarily engrain themselves in the local society. However, those who opened businesses created roots in the community. They invested time and finances into the construction of an enterprise that helped them as well as their fellow Mexicans. Edson implied that the businesses created by Mexican immigrants were sometimes short-lived, but the existence of these small companies still show a divergence from the typical laborer and migrant.

Around the Midwest, the social life of the Mexican community often centered around church. Therefore, one of the most important aspects in making Mexicans feel at home in Lorain came from the establishment of a church. The foreseeable aspect of this phenomenon stems from how the Catholic Church played a historically and personally significant role for most Mexicans in this era. For this reason, the Mexicans migrants who came to the United States (within and outside of Lorain), sought a church to call

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[191] Edson, "Lorain," 6.
[192] Edson, "Lorain," 7.

home. This was especially the case for Revolutionary and *Cristero* migrants who did not necessarily desire to leave Mexico. Undoubtedly, they sought the familiarity of religions even more wholeheartedly in such a foreign place. In the case of Lorain, most of the Mexican population elected to attend services at St. John's Parish, a Catholic church close in proximity to the National Tube Company.

St. John's Parish arose as the fourth church in all of Lorain. It directly resulted from the re-location of the steel mills into Lorain in the late 1890s.[193] Bishop Ignatius Horstmann requested that Father Charles Reichlin, a pastor at another church in Lorain (St. Joseph), located a site for an English-speaking parish. The location chosen, almost directly next to the mills at the time, earned the moniker "the steel plant church."[194] Its congregation included a wide variety of immigrant members. An early roster revealed a high number of Irish, Slovak and Polish names, with others possibly of Hungarian or Slovenian origin.[195] Friction transpired between some of the various nationalities, since it was such a blended church. Because of this conflict, daughter parishes appeared in the community - the first being Saints Cyril and Methodius, created to serve Slovenians in 1905, just five short years after St. John's establishment.

One Father, Patrick Logan, began serving St. John's in 1914, and served until 1928. The parish struggled financially throughout this period, primarily because so many other churches existed close to the steel mill. Each additional church caused the unintended consequence of reducing St. John's membership. Ignoring declining numbers, the Diocese expected each Catholic parish – to include St. John's – fell under

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[193] Cleveland Catholic Diocese. Schrembs – Parishes. Lorain: St. John the Baptist, 1921-1930. History of St. John Church, Lorain.
[194] Cleveland Catholic Diocese. Schrembs – Parishes. Lorain: St. John the Baptist, 1921-1930. History of Saint John Parish..
[195] Cleveland Catholic Diocese, History of St. John Church, Lorain.

the expectation to offer Catholic education to the children of its members, unless something prohibited this.[196] Father Logan began the ecumenical parochial school to serve St. Johns, as well as other neighboring parishes and two Greek Orthodox churches nearby.[197] As the congregation diminished, the introduction of Mexicans into Lorain by National Tube brought a transformation and hope. For reasons unclear, the Mexican migrants found their church home with St. John's, beginning in in 1923.[198] Interestingly, the church history cited they began attending the church in 1925, but letters concerning Mexicans in the congregations predate this estimate by at least a year.

In a letter dated March 21, 1924, Father Logan requested to the Bishop Joseph Schrembs of Cleveland to allow him to start having a second mass for the Mexican *colonia.* At the time, he said approximately five hundred Mexicans attended St. John's parish, and he wanted to hold a separate service for them. He also desired to make arrangements to conduct a mission during the week of Easter to ensure the Mexicans had the opportunity to comply "with the law of the church concerning the Easter duty."[199] Within a month, Bishop Schrembs granted both requests. Father Logan told George Edson that he learned enough Spanish to perform mass, as well as the sacraments of marriage and baptism.[200] Documentation does not reveal if this arrangement changed, but presumably, it continued on for the remainder of 1924 and all of 1925 as the Mexican population in Lorain and St. John's swelled. The *Status Animarum,* or "state of souls" reported by each Catholic parish yearly, discussed a significant shift in 1926. On the

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[196] On the *Status Animarum*, submitted by each local Catholic parish to the Diocese of Cleveland annually, there was a section that requested a 'School Report.' If there was no school as part of the church, it requested a reason why.
[197] Cleveland Catholic Diocese, History of Saint John Parish.
[198] Diocese of Cleveland. *Status Animarum*. St. John's, Lorain, Ohio. 1926. 2.
[199] P.A. Logan to Right Reverend Joseph Schrembs, D.D., March 21, 1924.
[200] Edson, "Lorain," 4.

back of the report, labeled 'Notable events during the year 1926,' the report for St. John's read as follows. "The Spanish-speaking people who had been attending St. John's church for about four years left St. John's for their new parish Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe. About 1500 came from Mexico, and about 500 came from Spain."[201]

Bishop Schrembs purchased a building (referred to as the 'Hayes property'), located at the corner of Clinton Avenue and E. 31st Street in Lorain. It was a corner lot, and contained a roughly 3000 square foot two-story building for $16,000. The building contained eight rooms, and previously served as an automobile-painting shop.[202] The name for the church fits with the population of the parish. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the title in Spanish given to the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, and significant religious figure in Catholic life. She was said to have made a miraculous appearance to a man outside Mexico City, further solidifying her importance in Mexican society. Therefore, the use of this as the name for the local Lorain parish fit with the parishioners planning to attend.

When the separate parish was established for the Spanish-speaking congregation, the Chancellor in Cleveland appointed a Spanish-speaking priest to guide this church. Reverend Clemente Vilorio was assigned to the task, and was to work under the direction of Father Logan, and stay with him. Clemente Vilorio, a native of Spain (and therefore fluent Spanish-speaker), came to Lorain by way of expulsion from Mexico. In his own words (as told to Edson), he spent roughly three and a half years in Mexico before being exiled.[203] His presence brought a few links to the Cristero War. President Calles expelled all foreign priests under the aptly-named Calles Law, which ended up leading Vilorio to the Ohio *colonia.* Without the priesthood restrictions on Mexico, the group

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[201] *Status Animarum*, 1926, 2.
[202] Edson, "Lorain," 4.
[203] Edson, "Lorain," 4.

would have never received a Spanish-speaking priest to help them with their services. Furthermore, in a letter dated 2 June 1928, the Bishop of Cleveland regretfully rejected an invitation to a ceremony taking place at Our Lady of Guadalupe. In his response, he told Father Vilorio that his "heart is with them, and that I pray the day may not be far distant when peace and order will return to their country [Mexico], and the long suffering Church of Mexico will triumph over persecution."[204] While most in the United States remained ignorant of the events in Mexico, clearly the Catholic hierarchy remained acutely aware of the terrible circumstances with their southern neighbor. After the appointment of Father Vilorio, the Chancellor from the Diocese noted that he was "very much pleased with the devoted interest" the priests took for the group in Lorain, and prayed that God would bless their endeavors.[205]

Following Father Vilorio's arrival, he compiled a report for Bishop Schrembs detailing the number of parishioners he cared for.[206] As of May 1926, he listed seventeen Spanish families, with a total of 235 Spaniards in Lorain. He stated that 113 Mexican families resided in Lorain. He said 760 people were over the age of twelve, and 140 children were under the age of twelve. He listed 400 "men who are at work," for a total of 1,300 Mexicans in 1926. He also named a total of sixty-nine school-aged children - forty-seven Mexican and twenty-two Spanish. This statistic demonstrates an interesting concept, that suggests family units were more prevalent among the Spanish-population. Spaniards had less than 20% of the population that Mexicans had in Lorain, but almost half the population of school-aged children. Due to the significant traveling distance, it

[204] Bishop of Cleveland to Father Vilorio, June 2, 1928.
[205] Chancellor to Father Logan, May 1, 1926.
[206] Clemente Vilorio to Rt. Reverend Joseph Schrembs, D.D., May 22, 1926.

appears likely that more Spaniards migrated together and planned to remain in the United States, whereas many Mexicans came alone, and planned to return home at some point.

The Chancellor ordained the first service of Our Lady of Guadalupe to take place July 18, 1926. The building was blessed, and Mexican children confirmed a few weeks later on August 8. The Diocese in Cleveland hoped for success for the new parish, as it was the first (and only) one for Mexican or Spanish people in the Diocese.[207] Two services were held every Sunday, at eight and ten A.M.[208] As was typical in other Catholic churches, Vilorio also heard confessions, baptized infants, and performed marriages when the situation called for it.[209] When Our Lady of Guadalupe split from St. John's, they took the vast majority of the congregation with them. In the *Status Animarum* from 1927, the first year Our Lady completed such a form, their 'total number of souls' lists them at 2000 members. The membership of St. John's for that same period was only 300. The numbers from Our Lady continued to suggest a majority of single men as members. While Our Lady's overall membership greatly outstripped St. John's, their numbers of marriages and baptisms are barely any higher, and in fact confirmations and First Communions were much higher at St. John's.[210] These statistics continued to suggest that the many parishioners continued to be men without families accompanying them.

The *Status Animarum* for Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. John's revealed several important trends. Between 1927 and 1928, the membership numbers declined from the cited 2000 in 1927 to 1347 members in 1928. While Our Lady never opened a school –

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[207] Chancellor to Rev. Clemente Vilorio, August 16, 1926.
[208] Edson, "Lorain,"4.
[209] Edson, "Lorain," 4.
[210] The *Status Animarum* for St. John's lists: 27 baptisms, 9 marriages, 161 confirmations and 68 first communions. For the same period at Our Lady of Guadalupe, there are listed: 41 baptisms, 10 marriages, 80 confirmations, and 1 first communions.

they had no money to run such an operation - St. John's also lost theirs at this time. Before it closed, Father Logan actually wrote to the Bishop in Cleveland, providing another tangential link to the Cristero War. He asked if the Diocese could spare the sisters [nuns] exiled from Mexico to run St. John's school. He said they could reside in the home Father Vilorio occupied, and he was willing to move. He stated the sisters of Notre Dame were eager to give up the school.[211] The annual State of the Souls declared that there were no teachers to run the parish school, there were also "bad conditions" the "parish could not support it" listed as reasons.[212] In 1928, both Father Logan and Father Vilorio left the churches, and the Father David Ramos, a Spanish Franciscan took charge of both parishes. In order to make this work, service times changed, with Our Lady dropping down to a single service at 9:30. In 1929, the *Status Animarum* lists 1157 members of the mission church, and in 1930, down to around 800.[213] While overall numbers continued to fall, baptisms actually began to increase. Since the Catholic Church administers the sacrament of baptism on infants primarily, this suggests that those parishioners who left were likely the unattached men, and those who stayed behind were increasingly families.

The backside of the *Status Animarum* from 1930 revealed a sad truth:

> "On account of the terrible business depression, most and the best members of the Mexican colony went back to Mexico and so now it is almost impossible to keep the church. The Mexicans left here are too poor to support the church or because they are not used to, they do not care to support it. The Sunday collections now are about $3.00 and $6.00 per Sunday. About ten pay $1.00 monthly. The best

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[211] Father Logan to the Right Reverend Bishop, May 28, 1927.
[212] *Status Animarum,* St. Johns. 1927-1928, 1.
[213] *Status Animarum,* Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1929-1930, 1.

> income for the church is the rent of the rectory that brings in around $45.00 per month. The church not being able to pay neither pastors nor assistants wages has been considered as a mission, all during this year, St. John's paying the salary of the assistant who is the one in charge [of] the Mexican church and this paying just his board."[214]

That year (1930) ended the *Status Animarum* reports for Our Lady of Guadalupe.

In 1931, Father David Ramos hand-wrote a letter to the Chancellor of the Diocese of Cleveland reiterating this disappointment. He stated that he had been trying for nearly three years to continue the work of God at Our Lady of Guadalupe, but that now he "had to give up."[215] At this point, he cited only around 600 Mexicans left in Lorain, and that most of them were starving.[216] The parish was unable to pay for its own building. Ramos suggested reverting to the previous procedure of holding a singular Spanish mass at St. John's – bringing the remainder of the Mexicans back into the fold. While membership numbers remained high, Ramos states that the Our Lady was never self-sustaining, and required financial assistance from St. John's for the entirety of its existence; Father Vilorio left around $3,000 in floating bills when he left the parish.[217] While never explicitly stated, the numbers in the *Status Animarum* of St. John's suggested the reintroduction of Mexicans back into the parish. In the 1931 report, the church reported 283 souls in the congregation. In 1932, this jumped up drastically to about 900.[218] This also fits with the marriage and baptismal records obtained in the

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[214] *Status Animarum,* Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1930, 2.
[215] Father David Ramos to Rev. Chancellor of the Diocese of Cleveland, June 1, 1931.
[216] Ramos to Rev. Chancellor, June 1, 1931.
[217] Ramos to Rev. Chancellor, June 1, 1931.
[218] *Status Animarum,* Saint John's, 1931-1932, 1.

Matrimonium Registrum and *Ecclesia* registries from Our Lady of Guadalupe. Both sets of records only spanned 1926-1931.

Our Lady of Guadalupe experienced a rapid zenith and equally hasty undoing. The route experienced by the parish mirrored the unfortunate trajectory of the Mexican population overall in Lorain. Shortly after arriving in Lorain, the Mexican migrants quickly resettled and increased the population. This allowed a large church to be created just for the *colonia.* Unfortunately, the onset of the Great Depression halted any progress the church or colony made. With the dire economic circumstances, workers were forced to leave, while then also ended the church.

Pursuing and maintaining their Catholic faith while in the United States clearly played an important role for the *colonia.* The group pursued and helped achieve their own mission church for Spanish-speakers, however brief its span. The Mexican population continued to seek other ways to maintain their culture within their new community. Edson described another way they accomplished this goal. On 16 September 1926, he attended an anniversary celebration of Mexico's independence. He described himself as the only American in attendance at this ceremony.[219]

Edson described the ceremony and its events at length. He estimated around 300 people assembled for about three hours. This gathering included women and children – not just men.[220] The group dressed their best for the occasion. Edson even noted that "except for their faces I doubt that any of them would be suspected of having been a sandaled and sombreroed peon in the hills in Mexico a year or two ago."[221] He even compared their appearance to being present at Sunday school. Clearly, this description

[219] Edson, "Lorain," 20.
[220] Edson, "Lorain," 19.
[221] Edson, "Lorain," 19.

revealed the extent that the group had joined the community – at least in appearances. There is a fascinating juxtaposition here of American style while celebrating Mexican heritage. This coincidence continued with the presentation of both the Mexican and U.S. national anthems. These aspects of the ceremony further demonstrated the deep involvement in their new community while maintaining the most important aspects of the Mexican culture.

The celebration included several presenters – a man named J.F. Ortiz who worked in Cleveland but was also honorary consul of Mexico, as well as "the leading lights of the Lorain colony."[222] The invitation-only ceremony occurred entirely in Spanish. Edson's complimentary nature ended, and he criticized the "feeble" nature of the whole celebration.[223] He stated that it took encouragement to get the audience to clap, and "there wasn't enough fire in the whole thing to scare a toothless tiger." Edson insinuated part of the festivities included not-so-subtle propaganda to convince the *colonia* to not completely switch their allegiance to the United States; they should maintain love of "*la bandera Mexicana*!"[224] However, he disparaged this aspect of the day. He felt the leadership of the ceremony ought not to dissuade them from love of their new country – a place the group found peace, plenty, and "a modicum of happiness."[225] Commentaries aside, the occurrence of the ceremony itself spoke volumes about the mindset of the *colonia.* The group continued to integrate itself deeper into Lorain. This is further seen through the inclusion of modern fashions and the Star-Spangled Banner. However, with such a recent departure (at most, likely three years) from home, the people desired to continue celebrating their homeland's liberation from Spain.

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[222] Edson, "Lorain," 19.
[223] Edson, "Lorain," 20.
[224] Edson, "Lorain," 20.
[225] Edson, "Lorain," 21.

Conclusion

A combination of factors brought Mexicans to the Midwest, and Lorain specifically. Due to the locations of most significant battles and violence of the Revolution coinciding with some of the most prominent sending states to Lorain, it is a logical assessment that the Revolution played a significant role in moving these people from their homes. Some initially relocated to Texas, but later ended up in Lorain after National Tube's recruitment, just as industrial employment pulled Mexicans in across the region. The tightening restrictions on Catholicism also encouraged people to leave their homelands. When chaos continued in the form of the Cristero War, networks of migration encouraged resettling to a common location – Lorain. Once in the community, the *colonia* quickly found ways to navigate within Lorain. They found homes, employment, and quickly established institutions and celebrations to make themselves a home in a new land. Church played a particularly important role, as observed across the Midwest as well. The immigrant group was comprised of more than just men – many families came as a part of the community. While statistically, Lorain contained a smaller proportion of women and children than other midwestern *colonias,* it still comprised around 30 percent, and baptismal records even reflect further family growth once in Lorain.

The *colonia* was noteworthy for these reasons. It diverged from commonly held thoughts in literature about the groups being solely comprised of unattached men who remained aloof in a community and worked within the agricultural sector. The Mexican

population in Lorain made concerted efforts to navigate and enjoy a new home while still maintaining the most essential pieces of the cultural heritage.

CHAPTER THREE: RACE RELATIONS AND RECEPTION IN LORAIN OHIO

"The population of South Lorain is largely Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian and Italian: these people have been here as long as 20 years, own many good homes, engage in many businesses, have built several Greek Catholic churches, a large hall, some business blocks, and are political and numerically in control. In this conglomeration the Mexican apparently feels that he has as much right as anybody, and as a rather liberal spirit prevails nobody is ready to gainsay him."

- George Edson to the U.S. Department of Labor

"Even in the northcentral part of the United States the people do not look upon him as foreigner, and his presence is taken in about the same way as a sea gull whom the winds have blown far inland. They seem to think that he will go back."

- George Edson, *Mexicans in Our Northcentral States*

While exhibiting similarities to the Midwest, one of the Lorain *colonias* most unique aspects stemmed from the complex race relations within the community. While the relative lack of racism that characterized the region occurred in Lorain as well, the specific details make the city distinctive. Throughout the United States, a wave of anti-foreign sentiment crashed in the arena of public opinion. Across many states, this resentment included Mexicans. While immigration technically flowed unrestricted throughout the Western Hemisphere, other specific policies targeted Mexican migration in hopes of enforcing limitations. However, in a time that typically did not offer a warm welcome to Mexican immigrants – Lorain displayed the midwestern exception. This is not to say that every person in the community held a positive opinion. Universal acceptance of any group is a rare occurrence. It is especially important to note the lens of Edson and those he interviewed differed from today. Words and perspectives considered currently inappropriate were the norm in the early twentieth century, so we must examine the viewpoint for its own time – not in hindsight. Also, Edson's own perspective and purposes may have colored his reporting on Lorain and the region at large. As a white man in the early twentieth century, he may not have observed the nuances and racial

tensions that sometimes underscored relationships of the time. Furthermore, as a government agent, he likely had an agenda that did not include reporting on conflict amongst races, and downplayed any hostilities he discovered.

Overall, most Mexicans experienced relatively little outright bigotry. Particularly compared to the "negro" population, they were actually favored. Similar to other cities in the region, Mexicans fit in with the wave of European immigrants that inundated the Midwest. When their numbers reduced due to legislation, Mexican numbers increased, and the Lorain community viewed them akin to other immigrant communities. Of particular note was also the relationship with the small but powerful Spanish population in Lorain. While they shared a common language, that did not guarantee instant fidelity amongst them. The community navigated South Lorain, an area comprised of almost exclusively minorities and immigrants, and found their place.

Organizations, inspired by others throughout the country like Jane Addams's settlement home in Chicago, inspired similar phenomenon in across the Midwest. While some offered help for all immigrant groups, others were uniquely aimed at the Mexican population. These homes and clubs attempted to give help to the *colonia* in numerous forms – medical, educational, and in the form of assimilation and better citizenship. Lorain held their own version of the two most popular types of organizations – a settlement house and a mutual aid society. Their names were: the Lorain Americanization Association (later the Neighborhood House) and the Mexican Mutual Society. Both organizations provided a variety of services to the immigrant populations that display the entirely welcoming nature of Lorain by some members of society.

A Complex Hierarchy of Race Relations

The Mexican population entered Lorain in the early 1920s, in the midst of a multicultural society with numerous European inhabitants. Comparable to other midwestern cities, the Mexican population entered communities as another migrant labor source – not the sole minority. In Lorain, various ethnic groups and minorities migrated to the area over roughly the past quarter-century. Most people Edson interviewed were white, so there is a bit more difficulty pinpointing the relations between the immigrants and minorities themselves for the most part. However, a modicum of acceptance must have occurred, because intermarriages occurred between Mexicans and Italians, Hungarians, Croatians, Slovakians, Spanish, and African-Americans.[226] However, what rose out of Edson's interview of landlords, supervisors, religious leaders and more appeared to be a perceived hierarchy. Native whites in Lorain showed a preference for Hungarians as an immigrant group. However, there was at least an acceptance of Mexicans – especially when compared to the African-American population. Very little positive commentary occurred regarding the so-called "negroes." Mexicans fell in with the majority of the European immigrants. A few had negative comments, but mostly they considered them a decent and hardworking group. However, it must be noted that even those who expressed more favorable ideas about the newest migrant group often included verbiage or sentiments that would today be considered derogatory; they are articulated without reticence.

In the early decades of the twentieth-century, the city of Lorain became increasingly multicultural. With the rise of new industries (and therefore employment)– particularly the National Tube Company – Lorain became a desirable suburb or

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[226] Robert W. O'Brien. "The Mexican Colony in South Lorain, Ohio." Master's Thesis, Oberlin College, 1930.

Cleveland for immigrants to inhabit. In Lorain in 1920, just under one-third of the population was foreign-born, numbering 11, 941.[227] They helped grow the city's population significantly. In 1900, Lorain only had just over 16,000 inhabitants – jumping up over 20,000 people in twenty years.[228] The 'Northwestern European' countries on the census had few members in Lorain – each numbered under 400, but the majority fell under 100. The largest immigrant groups outside of the *colonia* came from Poland (1,486), Austria (2,591), and Hungary (2,732).[229] Another important facet of the population to consider is the 'Negro' Population, as they are listed in the census. In 1920, Ohio had a population of 5,759,394. The vast majority of these citizens were white – 5,571,893, while 186,187 were African-American.[230] This meant 'negroes' comprised 3.2% of Ohio's population – a relatively small percentage. The urban/rural split of the races revealed interesting trends. Just over three million whites lived in urban areas – about 61 percent of the white population. However, around 155,975 African-Americans resided in urban areas, nearly 84 percent of their population. Just over two million whites lived in rural areas, but only around 30,000 African-Americans did. Lorain had 24,815 native whites in 1920, but 11,165 of them had foreign-born parents. Only 552 negros are listed on the census for the same year.[231] This means when Mexicans arrived, they rapidly outnumbered the existing African-American community.

Within Edson's report, the most commonly discussed groups were Mexicans (since the report concerned their labor, primarily), but also negroes and Hungarians.

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[227] 1920 Census. Table 17 – Country of Birth of Foreign Population from Cities Having From 25,000-100,000 Inhabitants: 1920, 764.
[228] 1920 Census. Table 51 – Population of Incorporated Places, 1920, 1910, and 1900, and Population of Wards of Incorporated Places Having 5,000 Inhabitants or More, 1920. 274.
[229] 1920 Census, Table 17.
[230] 1920 Census, Table 12, Race, Nativity, and Parentage, With Decennial Increase, By Divisions and States: 1920, 1910, and 1900, 40.
[231] 1920 Census. Population – Ohio. Table 10. Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Cities of 10,000 or More: 1920, 784.

Upon discovery that Hungarians numbered highest for immigrants in Lorain, perhaps it is unsurprising they were mentioned so frequently by various interviewees. Most (presumably white) people consulted by Edson appeared to be familiar with immigrants in Lorain. They frequently compared Mexicans to their European counterparts. – particularly Hungarians. John A. Hoffman, employment chief at the National Tube Company, stated that they mill employed a "great number" of Hungarians and Slavs, and called them "more intelligent and steady than the Mexicans."[232] Professor Creamer, principal of two grade schools in Lorain, made similar comments in favor of Hungarians. In the discussion of night school that offered English classes, he said, "other foreigners went after [the class] like hot cakes. The Hungarians are the keenest foreigners we have here: they get up and go right along."[233] The apartments where the Mexican families resided, known as 'Goldberg's Flats,' was owned by a Hungarian-German man. Edson interviewed him as well – one of the few noted immigrants interviewed (making it seem all the more likely the rest of those interviewed were white). Binder said that the Hungarians, Austrians, Albanians, Germans, and more "all those kindred peoples made good Americans."[234] He was on the fence about Mexicans still – describing that he had only known them a year, but had yet to throw any of them out of his properties.[235] However, he cited the laundry hanging outside their homes as an indicator of them being clean and decent people.[236]

Attitudes indicate a tacit acceptance of Mexicans. Some (like Binder) had nothing specifically negative to say, while a few exhibited more explicitly bigoted

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[232] Edson, "Lorain," 2.
[233] Edson, "Lorain," 10.
[234] Edson, "Lorain," 16.
[235] Edson, "Lorain," 16.
[236] Edson, "Lorain," 16.

opinions towards the newcomers. An important aspect to consider, however, was the fact that these comments came from the white population to a white man – assumedly somewhat common ground. To the actual Mexican population, no evidence exists that suggested negative comments or threats to the people of the *colonia.* Frank Jacinto, author of two Lorain histories and a second generation Mexican in the city, stated that "when the families arrived the problems they encountered as newcomers and as a distinctly identifiable minority were minimal when compared to similar situations in other parts of the country. This was due, in part, to the fact that there were some thirty other cultural or national groups in Lorain at that time."[237] The wide mix of ethnic groups assisted in the acceptance of Mexicans as 'just another' immigrant group - a significantly different experience by others in the Southwest.

In the social pyramid of the community, Mexicans fell high above the negro population. Again, numerous interviews throughout Edson's report revealed this prevalent attitude. In their discussions with Edson, several describe a kind of social hierarchy. In view of the 'other,' Mexicans appeared less desirable than a group like Hungarians, but they existed above the negro population. In the descriptions provided here, it seemed the darker the skin, the more problems people found with that race.

When discussing workers at the steel mill, John Hoffman described that the recruitment of Mexicans occurred far more successfully than that of negroes from Mississippi. He explicitly stated that Mexicans "are far superior to the negroes, and we have practically quit hiring any more negroes."[238] He cited issues with retention, saying that a significant amount of the group quit working for them – part of why they expanded

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[237] Frank Jacinto, *Emergence of the Hispanic Community in Lorain, Ohio (*Lorain, Ohio: Coalition for Hispanic Issues and Progress, 2001), 2.
[238] Edson, "Lorain," 2.

their recruitment efforts. Edson also learned through his travels in Lorain about the cafeteria at the National Tube Company. Mexicans had access to the entire area – free to sit where they pleased. Negroes, however, were required to eat on one side of the dining room.[239] This fact alone revealed the racism that Mexicans did *not* experience. The *colonia* had a varied ethnic makeup – 23% of the Mexicans were Indian, 74% were mestizo, and 3% were white – but they were grouped with the other European immigrants at the steel mill.[240] While areas around the nation displayed racism towards *colonias,* National Tube's policies only directed racial policies towards the African-American sect of employees.

Binder, owner of Goldman's Flats where many Mexicans resided, also contributed to the sentiment that Mexicans were superior to negroes. After exclaiming that he never evicted any Mexicans, he went on to say, "But n***ers! I had to evict 17 negro families last month…the negroes won't work; they are dirtier than hogs and are thieves and crooks…I wish there wasn't a negro in the state of Ohio."[241] He described the way that the "negroes" damaged his rental properties – leaving him with a distinctly negative impression. However, since he incurred no damages from his recent Mexican tenants, he considered them a much better renter and maintained a fairly positive outlook towards the *colonia's* people.

The African-American population, resented by most in the community, harbored their own bitterness. When describing the "miserable blur" that is the area where the Mexican families reside, Edson noted that Mexicans "are waging a winning fight with the negroes for supremacy."[242] While he meant this metaphorically, African Americans

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[239] Edson, "Lorain," 8.
[240] Jacinto, 3.
[241] Edson, "Lorain," 16.
[242] Edson, "Lorain," 14.

perceived a very real threat, and some in the community resented the Mexicans to an extent. Edson interviewed a negro man, Stephen Harris – freed from slavery by the Emancipation Proclamation in Mississippi, who felt indignant about "these birds of a strange feather that are rooting out the colored men."[243] He described that Harris attributed the loss of jobs for black men on the recruitment of Mexicans by National Tube. Harris told Edson that the negroes and Mexicans had several battles between them, "but one big fight was decisive. The Mexicans wanted the colored men's women, it seems…"[244] After several physical fights between the races, the Mexicans lost each one, and finally ended the fight.

Woven between the hierarchy appeared numerous other racial complexities. One such example came from the relationship of the relatively small Spanish population in Lorain and the *colonia.* An estimated 235 Spaniards lived in Lorain in 1926, significantly smaller than the roughly 2000-person Mexican community that had developed.[245] Some of the migrants had associations with Spanish immigrants in Lorain, and mixed opinions abounded in that regard. When settling into Lorain, Mexicans encountered the Spanish population. While the two ethnic groups share a language, that commonality did not necessarily engender warm relations between the parties. Edson described the mixed relationship between the Spanish and Mexicans in various areas throughout his report. On one hand, Edson also described a conversation with a Spanish shopkeeper, Julio Vivas, who described his take on the relationship of the races. He stated that "Mexicans like the Spaniards because they speak their language and protect them from more unconscionable robbers, so we like Mexicans and look out for them to a

[243] Edson, "Lorain," 14.
[244] Edson, "Lorain," 14.
[245] In 1930, the U.S. Census only cites 87 Spaniards in Lorain, so it is difficult to know if Father Vilorio overestimated, or if the number changed by 1930 with the onset of the Depression.

large extent."[246] The two groups also often resided together within boarding houses. These small perspectives suggest the existence of an amicable relationship between the Spaniards and Mexicans.

However, other examples noted by Edson revealed a contradictory aspect to their affiliation. He also stated that "the Spaniards are fast and smooth talkers and they lead the Mexicans around."[247] An illustration of this point included in the report came from the Spanish shopkeeper, Julio Vivas. While he noted the somewhat paternal relationship between Mexicans and Spaniards in Lorain, he also expressed a level of distrust. His business sold "men's furnishings, trunks, etc.," with a significant portion sold to Mexicans specifically[248] While this clearly supported Vivas's business, he expressed distrust of Mexicans. He called Mexicans "liberal spenders," and described his reticence about allowing charge accounts with them.[249] "When they pay up on pay day, they want credit right away again, claiming they have no money left. And when one goes away he usually leaves his last account unpaid. Between 60% and 75% of them spend their money as fast as they earn it. Many of them drink a good bit."[250] He also revealed no problem with broad generalizations of the group, when he said they never saved their money to "get ahead," drink too much and gamble away their money.[251] These broad generalizations display that a common language did not guarantee fraternity between the Mexicans and Spaniards in the small town. While on one hand, Vivas promoted the idea that Spaniards assisted Mexicans, it appeared a level of cynicism remained. While

[246] Edson, "Lorain," 11-12.
[247] Edson, "Lorain," 7.
[248] Edson, "Lorain," 11.
[249] Edson, "Lorain," 11.
[250] Edson, "Lorain," 11.
[251] Edson, "Lorain," 11.

Spaniards lived in Lorain in smaller numbers, it seems they still considered themselves superior to this newer group of Spanish-speaking immigrants.

The feelings of mistrust, it seems, were reciprocated. George Jánez, the National Tube Company's interpreter, expressed resentment towards the paternalistic relationship of Spaniards and Mexicans in Lorain. When Jánez received an enticing offer for employment with another company, he turned it down. This rejection of such a lucrative ($180/month) proposition came for ambitious reasons. He desired to accomplish two missions – to solidifying the *colonia* in Lorain, as well as rid it of Spanish domination, "on the ground that the latter are sometimes radical in ideas and influence." The use of the word domination revealed Jánez's true opinion. Regardless of any help provided, Mexicans also felt an amount of antipathy towards Spaniards. In the case of Jánez, he seemed to feel the guidance of Spaniards could actually lead Mexicans astray – perhaps morally, behaviorally, or just mentally. He clearly felt he had better ideas on how to guide the *colonia,* and believed himself to be somewhat of a leader for the group.

Perhaps all relationships are fraught with contradiction, but that idea defined the Spanish-Mexican relationship in Lorain in the early twentieth century. The rift and resentment of the two communities had historical roots in Mexico. Post-independence, relations never truly warmed between the two groups; when colonialism disappeared, the social order that kept Indians and mestizos down remained.[252] They shared a language, which linked them together in a commonality unshared by other immigrant groups. Both sides acknowledged a certain reliance and dependence of Mexicans on Spaniards. However, underneath that layer of assistance, resentment abounded from both sides.

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[252] Richmond, Douglas W. "Confrontation and Reconciliation: Mexicans and Spaniards During the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920." *The Americas* 41, no. 2 (October 1, 1984), 215.

While the assistance Spaniards provided in helping Mexicans settle in to Lorain, and guide them, this did not translate into completely harmonic relations.

Other complexities stemmed from various attitudes towards the Mexican population. Outside the hierarchy that appeared, others in the community expressed a variety of opinions towards the group - they were not always juxtaposed between other immigrants. Often, statements made on the *colonia* and its people appear discriminatory by today's standards. Examples of this run the gamut from ignorance of other races to more overt examples. At times, even 'friends' of Mexicans or supposed neutral parties committed offenses. However, at the time, sentiments were expressed very matter-of-factly. The racial situation within Lorain, while fairly positive when compared to other communities, proved quite nuanced.

The Catholic Church, whom one might imagine as a neutral or even friendly party, also displayed a lack of sensitivity. In multiple letters between the Cleveland Catholic Diocese and Father Logan, the assistance of Mexican immigrants was termed, "the Mexican situation." Father Logan also admitted to Edson that he was unable to tell the difference between the Spaniards and the Mexicans in the parish.[253] In fact, despite a demographic breakdown early on in the church documentation, the group is almost exclusively called Mexicans, regardless of ethnicity. Father Clemente Vilorio, leader of the *colonia's* congregation also expressed similar feelings. He said that Mexicans in Lorain were quite unlike those he encountered in Mexico. "There, everything is organized; here it is helter-skelter."[254] He further commented on the difficulties of getting Mexicans to church. In this 1926 report, he said at only 500 Mexicans, that was not even

[253] Edson, "Lorain," 3.
[254] Edson, "Lorain," 4.

half of those in Lorain. "The rest are indifferent and prefer to spend their money at cards, pool, and dance."[255]

The most surprising source of racial language in Edson's report came from the author himself. Woven between the interviews, Edson provided narration and commentary. At times, this is quite neutral; at other places he seemed to express his own negative views of other races. He compared George Jánez, assistant to John Hoffman, to a devoted servant who began service against her will.. "A Mexican, like the Aztec maiden whom the conqueror Cortés carried away to his camp, generally becomes a very useful and faithful servant to his benefactor."[256] He also took care to note that during their time off from work, he observed men of other nationalities fixing up their homes and working in their yards, but Mexicans never did this – they spent time playing pool, going to movies, and more.[257] He also described a story he was told about, when a Mexican woman had a baby who almost starved, until someone stepped in to help. He finished the tale with, "the moral of this little story being that some Mexicans haven't enough sense to yell when they're starving to death."[258] It seemed his opinion was summed up when he said "Mexicans lack initiative, aggressiveness, and resiliency. They are slow to start, they won't push, and when defeated they won't try to come back...they lack the virile spirit, the spirit of the breeder: they will live content without their women. While the people from middle Europe will fill their homes with children and go on endeavoring to feed, clothe, and educate them better than themselves were fed, clad, or instructed, the Mexicans as yet have shown little disposition to elbow their way in and

[255] Edson, "Lorain," 4.
[256] Edson, "Lorain," 3.
[257] Edson, "Lorain," 13.
[258] Edson, "Lorain," 17.

make room for the progeny."[259] Presumably Edson's reports were meant to be neutral – but in reality, his report was riddled with personal and biased ideas. It's unclear if the opinions come from his own encounters with the actual Mexican people, or as a result of other people's opinions whom he interviewed. However, the comments made make it quite clear he does not view Mexicans in a favorable light.

Throughout the Midwest, Mexicans joined richly diverse communities filled with other European immigrants. South Lorain was no exception – the *colonia* developed amongst Hungarians, Czechoslovakians, Spaniards, and more. Some amount of friction developed both from the native-born white population, as well as between the various ethnicities in the city, but on the whole proved far less than most other areas throughout the United States. As Mexicans settled in, they discovered themselves in the midst of a hierarchy. From all accounts, this stratification of opinions seemed to correlate with (and perhaps even be based on) how light or dark the skin color of a person. While negroes had been in Lorain far longer, they fell to the bottom of the social sphere, with Mexicans being viewed as a significant improvement over that group. Mexicans experienced broad generalizations and assumptions of their behavior, likely a reflection of the time period. While some attitudes presented here seem decidedly apathetic, others in town went out of their way to welcome the Mexican population. Some societies welcomed them, while the Mexican Mutual Society existed specifically for the benefit of the titular population.

The Welcome Wagon: Societies That Promoted Mexican Welfare

Some of the most prominent organizations that promoted Mexican welfare in the Midwest came from mutual societies and settlement houses. Throughout my research, I discovered both these types of organizations offering significant aid and involvement for

[259] Edson, "Lorain," 19.

the Mexican *colonia* existed in Lorain. The first, the Lorain Americanization Association (later the Neighborhood House), and the second, the Mexican Mutual Society, appeared very closely to one another. The Lorain Americanization Association (LAA hereafter), organized in 1926, but evidence suggested the bulk of their work began in 1927-1928. The Mexican Mutual Society (MMS), created in 1928, still exists today – recently celebrating their 90th anniversary. The two groups organized differently, and had slightly different means – but quite similar goals. They aimed to promote the welfare of immigrants in Lorain. While the LAA aimed this at the entire immigrant population and the MMS targeted Mexicans specifically, their existence demonstrated an aspect of welcome and compassion. While these associations were distinctive in the Lorain community, their organizational types represent a common thread seen throughout the Midwest.

A woman named Mary Haskell created the Lorain Americanization Association – sometimes referred to as the Christian Americanization Society of Lorain - and later known as the Neighborhood House. She stated the idea came to her on January 14, 1926, but records reflected more significant activity after 1928. Ms. Haskell, originally from the Lorain area, graduated Oberlin college in the late nineteenth century – no doubt a trailblazer in this regard alone. After her graduation, she travelled to Bulgaria, and served as a missionary and an instructor in a school for girls until 1919, when she returned to care for her mother at the end of her life.[260] In total, she spent 30 years in Bulgaria serving. Upon her return to the Lorain community, the high number of immigrants to the area startled her. Between the time she left and returned, the National Tube Company had expanded and hired thousands of immigrants, transforming the city's

[260] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *Missionary in Bulgaria for 30 Years, Her Record*.

demographic. She viewed these radical changes to her former home, and knew there was room for change. In Haskell's own words, "what will become of American with the native born steadily decreasing, if effort is not made soon to find a common denominator of language and interests and ideas?"[261] She saw the need to help these people integrate into society at large.

Furthermore, she noticed the significant disparities of the immigrant community. Oftentimes, mothers could not communicate with their children after they learned English in school. The night-school programs (to teach English) that existed were inaccessible to women with small children. Few programs existed to educate young children as well – like preschools and kindergartens. Thirty-two different nationalities composed Lorain in the 1920s, and the groups had little assistance and even littler common ground. Mary Haskell decided to open a "Neighborhood House" to improve circumstances for the various peoples inhabiting the city.

The organization had three aims listed on a memo from 1928. They were: that Lorain may be for the upbuilding and not the undoing of those from other lands, that the immigrant may be an asset and not a menace to America, that the brotherhood may prevail.[262] While the verbiage of the documentation surrounding the Neighborhood House resounds a bit with themes of the White Man's Burden (a quote by Kipling even listed on a program from the organization), this does not minimize the efforts. Mary Haskell and her compatriots felt compelled to help those less fortunate in Lorain by welcoming the immigrant community.

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[261] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *The Christian Americanization Society of Lorain, Ohio*.
[262] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *The Aim of the Lorain Americanization Association in a Nutshell*.

The group implemented several services – open to any and all immigrants in town. The Neighborhood House, located at 1752 E 29th St – in the heart of South Lorain – had Bulgarians, Croatians, Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Macedonians, Mexicans, Spanish, Slovaks, and Slovenian children located within a three-minute walk of its front door.[263] The House targeted primarily women and children – the men were often at work, and men and boys also served by the local Y.M.C.A. By 1929, a newspaper article reported 258 regular members who received instruction from the 12 volunteer workers – with ninety-five percent of them wives and children of National Tube workers.[264] The groups enjoyed classes and clubs – music, English, Sunday school, and more. Beyond these classes, the Neighborhood House sponsored home visits to roughly 400 homes, and also served as a liaison between the immigrants and doctors, lawyers, and social agencies.[265] They also assisted in general movements towards health and hygiene. For instance, they supported the cause for vaccinating children, and played a role in hundreds receiving various inoculations. In 1929, they started a kindergarten from that met two hours a day to help the youngest children. They also implemented a well-baby clinic to help young mothers. No monetary aid was provided from the House, but they assisted people to the right places if they required such help.

Efforts by the organization targeted the Mexican, and to a lesser extent, the small Spanish population. Early on, they desperately sought workers who had the ability to speak Spanish. The significant influx of Mexicans to the city made them the second-highest served population by the settlement house several years running, eclipsed solely

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[263] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *The Americanization Center in Lorain, Ohio*.
[264] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *Center's 'Melting Pot' for People from 20 Nations, 6 March 1929*.
[265] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *Center's 'Melting Pot' for People from 20 Nations, 6 March 1929*.

by the Hungarian population, although according to the annual report of the House, the numbers were quite close.[266] They found a Spanish woman who volunteered for a summer teaching classes and communicating with the local Mexican (and likely Spanish) population. She taught many children's classes, but also English for the women. "Eager Mexican women who had come to Lincoln School thru slush and sleet in winter, came more comfortably to the House for English in the summer."[267] The Spanish woman, Mrs. Rembao, learned through her teaching that one of the women had been a teacher for nine years in Mexico. She recommended she receive more training, and the woman returned to work at the Neighborhood House as the newest Spanish-speaking teacher.[268]

As time progressed, the number of Mexicans served changed. They remained second-highest served by the Neighborhood House in 1929. The organization continued to be used to help immigrants, and even began to be used by other organizations as a meeting place. A Mexican Juvenile Club met there on a weekly basis. A few years later, a mother's group called *Las Amigas de Mexico* coalesced through the Neighborhood House. By this point, in 1933, the Mexican population had dropped, making it the fifth-largest population served by the organization. While enrollment overall in the organization skyrocketed, the Mexican population dwindled in Lorain. With a lower population came a lesser need for services.

Another organization came into existence during these same years of the *colonia*, the Mexican Mutual Society – just as similar organizations arose throughout the Midwest. While the Neighborhood House founding came coincidentally during its peak

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[266] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *1928 Annual Report*.
[267] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *The Americanization Center in Lorain, Ohio*.
[268] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *The Americanization Center in Lorain, Ohio*.

years, the Mexican Mutual Society's establishment was quite intentional. The group was founded in 1928 – by Mexicans, for Mexicans. They had a more limited scope of available services due to a more targeted population. However, the nature of the group did not signify a less powerful institution. The Mexican Mutual Society proved to be much longer-lasting – it still exists as a powerful force in Lorain today. Today, the group functions a bit differently. They own and operate a building that is used mostly for social events and other celebrations of Mexican heritage. They just celebrated their 90th anniversary in the fall of 2018.

The president of today's MMS, Joel Arredondo, described its history.[269] He has served as its president two times – the first from around 1977-1981, and then from around 1995 to the present. He is intimately familiar with the founding of the organization as well as its ninety-year history. The organization became incorporated in November of 1928 with the state of Ohio. They were actually not the only Mexican society at the time. Three others existed, but none with the power or influence of the MMS. The other three were named: Pro-Mexico, Club Ideal, and Anahuac. Mr. Arredondo estimated that around the founding of the MMS, around 3000 Mexicans were in Lorain and many claimed membership in one of the four organizations.

The Mexican Mutual Society, in its initial mission statement, listed several goals and intentions for its existence. They included benefiting society, helping Mexican immigrants, assimilating into the local society, becoming better citizens, educating Mexicans, and eventually helping them on the process to U.S. citizenship. They also offered medical assistance and legal advice. They also served as the primary sponsor for social activities for Mexicans at the time of this study, as well as for several decades

[269] Interview – Mr. Joel Arredondo. 2 March 2019.

thereafter.[270] Although it is a bit beyond the purview of this study, the MMS combined with two of the other Mexican organizations in the 1940s. They had higher membership numbers at that time, but the MMS had more financial stability. They continue to thrive today, with the ownership of their own building for social functions and other group activities. Last fall, in November 2018, they celebrated their ninetieth anniversary, and still have hundreds of active members.

While each of these organizations operated somewhat differently, their goals overlapped. While the Neighborhood House served all Lorain's immigrants, the Mexican Mutual Society only served one. However, they offered many similar services, and desired similar results. By welcoming the immigrants into the Lorain community, they hoped to produce a better group of citizens. They hoped to improve the lives of all the people, and help them make a seamless transition into American culture and society. The groups created an ever-more distinctive community by offering a welcome to those who differed from themselves.

Conclusion

Racial demographics in Lorain and around the country shifted rapidly in the early twentieth century. The area quickly welcomed an estimated 25-30+ new nationalities to the community, but when immigration laws changed, *colonias* throughout the Midwest welcomed Mexicans to support labor needs. Mexicans experienced a better reception likely due to these diverse circumstances. While Mexicans around the country experienced persecution, those in Lorain were fairly welcome, although they found themselves in the midst of a hierarchy. Many did not see them in the *most* positive light, but they were considered far better than the negro population that resided there. Overall,

[270] Jacinto, 21.

they faced little outright discrimination, although prevailing attitudes of the era might be considered racist by contemporary standards. With such high numbers of nationalities, little is known about the interaction of Mexicans with their peers. However, evidence revealed a complex relationship between the two Spanish-speaking groups in town – Mexicans and Spaniards. The contradictory bond amongst one of the smallest and one of the largest immigrant groups in town proved a fascinating story.

While not every person in town offered a warm welcome, the discrimination faced was relatively minimal. Some people like Mary Haskell even felt inspired to spend their time and money welcoming those different than themselves. Organizations like the Neighborhood House and the Mexican Mutual Society arose, and helped to serve the Mexican population in many ways. The groups offered a myriad of services to the *colonia*, and helped them further settle into the community and in the United States.

CONCLUSION

"On account of the terrible business depression, most and the best members of the Mexican colony went back to Mexico and so now it is almost impossible to keep the church. The Mexicans left here are too poor to support the church…"
- *1930 Status Animarum,* Our Lady of Guadalupe

"It would appear that acculturation, assimilation and integration are continuing to have a diluting effect on the Mexican Community. The continuing emigration of Mexican nationals who come to Lorain seeking employment and a better life will insure the existence of the Mexican Community well into the future."
- Frank Jacinto, *Emergence of the Hispanic Community in Lorain, Ohio*

Mexican migration distinguished itself in the Midwest. It diverged in at least five important ways when compared to typical southwestern migrants. These people chose to live in cities and engage in factory work – not in the rural areas of border states working agricultural fields. They often brought wives and children alongside them, with some *colonias* containing numbers of children equaling the male laborers. Due to the high prevalence of European labor alongside the Mexicans, they experienced a relatively low level of racism. Whites considered them similar to the other immigrants instead of grouping them with African-Americans in the region. The migrants, whether unattached men or family units, also quickly engaged in community activities. A primary focus came from church membership, but other organizations and celebrations also took place.

Lorain, a city west of Cleveland, became Ohio's first *colonia.* This fact alone begged for a more detailed description of its Mexican history to be written, but its importance goes deeper than that. Lorain perfectly typifies midwestern Mexican migration. It displayed each of the important characteristics that the region exhibited. Of course, each location undoubtedly carried its own unique aspects, and Lorain was no exception. It had relatively low levels of women and children when compared to other cities in the area, and had its own specific history in terms of organizations, etc. The

individuality of a specific location, however, does not negate the value that Lorain carries as a lens into broader patterns and trends. Its numbers quickly declined at the onset of the nation's worst-ever economic crisis, a trend that spread like wildfire across the country.

Lower numbers of Mexicans after the Great Depression began in 1929 typified not only the Midwest, but expanded across the entire nation. Today, schools across the country teach their students the disastrous consequences this had on our nation's ancestors – poverty, high unemployment, and more. What education usually glosses over is the drastic effect this had on immigrants – specifically the ones seen as less desirable. While the Midwest extended a fairly welcome hand to Mexicans, the overall U.S. attitude was far less positive. When the economy increased competition for jobs and scarce resources, even the friendlier region turned on its newest demographic community.

In many parts of the U.S., nativism increased throughout the 1920s. When this combined with the increasing Mexican migration that occurred countrywide, calls came for restriction of Mexican numbers.[271] When the stock market crashed, foreigners of all types were first to be forced out of jobs, and first to be used as scapegoats for the U.S.'s problems.[272] In some cases, white men literally applied for jobs, and when companies had no vacancies, they fired a Mexican and gave the white man his place.[273] Shortly after the onset of the Depression, up to half of the Mexican migrants already lost their jobs.[274] The loss of steady wages led to a portion of the Mexican population to return home voluntarily. They hoped to find work again in Mexico, since job prospects virtually dried up in the United States. However, a large percentage of Mexicans experienced repatriation efforts at the hands of various levels of the U.S. government.

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[271] Henderson, 42.
[272] Henderson, 43.
[273] García, 224.
[274] Henderson, 44.

Repatriation efforts were meant to be seen positively – as a 'bargain' for both sides. Typically, a charity, chamber of commerce, or the U.S. or Mexican government sponsored the cost of a Mexican's return home. It saved the United States the money (and heartache) of supporting the thousands of jobless Mexicans within its borders, and it gave Mexico back some of its lost workers. Repatriated citizens received clothing, food, and free transport back to the border. These efforts even forced legal citizens out of the country – technically stripping them of their citizenship rights. Hope stemmed from the idea that reducing economic competition (via foreign labor) increased employment opportunities for homegrown citizens, and that the economic crisis would cease. No reliable figures exist, but estimates cite at least 150,000 repatriated Mexicans at this time, with a total of around 1.6 million who returned home in total.[275] All efforts in returning Mexicans home showed little relief from the Depression for U.S. citizens.

The Depression hit the iron and steel industries hard – both prevalent across the Midwest. Steel production in some places dropped from 90 percent capacity down to 15 percent, costing Mexicans employed in this field throughout the Midwest their jobs.[276] Due to job loss, many midwestern Mexicans simply chose to leave and return home. If they could afford to pay their way, they left rapidly.[277] Throughout the Midwest, both voluntary and forced repatriation took place – similar to what the rest of the nation saw.

In my research, I found nothing that discussed specific repatriation efforts for the Lorain *colonia.* In fact, the sole reference to Mexicans leaving in the *Status Animarum* insinuated that those who left Lorain did so voluntarily, and without being forced. Other evidence throughout my sources showed a rapid decline of the community's population

[275] Henderson, 46.
[276] García, 225.
[277] García, 228.

after the Depression began– correlating with regional and nationwide trends. The peak of Our Lady of Guadalupe (per the *Status Animarum* numbers) came in 1927. 2000 souls are listed as part of the church. 1928 revealed an unexplained decline down to just 1347. The end of 1929 (after the stock market crash) showed numbers down to 1157. In 1930, the report approximated 800 souls left at Our Lady, with the note printed on its reverse that tithes were so low they struggled to remain open. In 1931, St. John's listed 283 souls (a slight decline after several years of 300 souls) and there was no information on Our Lady of Guadalupe. However, the 1932 *Status Animarum* from St. John's lists about 900 people in the parish. Other documentation indicated Our Lady of Guadalupe dissolved, and its members reabsorbed back into St. John's – the original parish. It seems a safe estimate that the *colonia* numbers dropped to about 600 – a huge decrease from its peak of 2000-3000.

Other church records displayed similar trends. The baptismal and marriage records kept by Our Lady of Guadalupe simply end after 1931. There were no further entries, because the mission church was forced to close its doors due to economic circumstances. Throughout the baptismal book, letters were pressed between the pages involving some of the baptized infants in later years. Typically, they requested proof of baptism so that now, as adults, they could enter into a marriage covenant. One such letter involved Maria Trinitad Gonzalez. Her letter stated that she needed her baptism records (in 1953) because she going to be married. She had been baptized at Our Lady in 1927 – shortly after her birth but "left Lorain, to return to Mexico, at c. 4 years of age" (1931).[278] Neighborhood House records also indicated a population decline of Mexicans. For several years, they received services from the local settlement house at the second highest

[278] Rev. C.A. Heimann to St. John's Parish, January 4, 1953.

rate, under Hungarians. By 1933, Mexicans had fallen to the fifth-highest population served.[279]

Circumstances drastically reduced the size of the Lorain *colonia*, but it was never eradicated. The 1940 census showed 218 Mexicans still living in the city.[280] Organizations like the Mexican Mutual Society experienced a decline in these years, but continued to operate, and eventually flourished as numbers eventually increased. The Hispanic community in Lorain broadened when Puerto Ricans migrated there in 1947. The common heritage of the groups helped them unite into a singular Hispanic community.[281] In 1990, people of Latino origin numbered 12,000 – 2,000 Mexican and 10,000 Puerto Ricans. In the nearly thirty years since that census, the Latino population continued to increase in Lorain. In 2010, the total population was 63,841, and the Hispanic part of the population was 29.4 percent, or around 18,769 people.[282] Though Frank Jacinto has passed, people like him and Mr. Arredondo reveal that many Mexicans in the community today have still trace their roots in the 1920s *colonia.*

Lorain, Ohio – the first *colonia* in Ohio – displayed the essential characteristics of a Mexican community in the Midwest. Mexican enclaves in the region are highly understudied, and immigration still considered by Southwestern standards. By getting a detailed perspective on one community in the area, audiences get the opportunity to more widely understand Mexicans at the time overall.

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[279] Western Reserve Historical Society. Neighborhood House Records. *Milestones: 1926-1936*.
[280] Jacinto, 19.
[281] Jacinto, 19.
[282] United States Census Bureau. *Quick Facts: Lorain, Ohio*. April 2010.

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