

THE "BOX BILL": PUBLIC POLICY, ETHNICITY, AND ECONOMIC
EXPLOITATION IN TEXAS

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For Oliver.

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INTRODUCTION

Attention to the Mexican-American civil rights movement usually begins in the years following World War II with returning G.I.s, but the first steps of the movement began nearly two decades earlier when previously competing civil rights groups began to form strategic alliances in response to racist, eugenics-based attacks. Mexican-American spokesmen defended themselves, and Mexicans in general, against prejudice constructed primarily out of false but convenient cultural tropes depicting Mexicans as indolent, unhygienic, and criminal. Meanwhile, unskilled Mexican immigrant labor was quietly contributing to local communities through consumer spending. This process has been largely ignored in the historical literature that has focused on the exploitation of Mexican labor and generally portrays the Mexican immigrant population as unable to spend or save money due to poor living conditions.

This thesis argues that the Mexican-American civil rights movement coalesced around three main issues. First, nativists inadvertently helped spur the activism of early Mexican-American civil rights organizations which resisted negative stereotypes directed against Mexican immigrants because those characterizations degraded all people of Mexican descent. Secondly, while the established middle-class Mexican American community in Texas had ambivalent feelings about Mexican immigrants and often sought to distinguish themselves from the socially subjugated immigrants, their resistance to racist depictions led to a broader ethnic politics that eventually worked on behalf of immigrants and citizens alike. And third, Mexican immigrant workers navigated a

system of economic exploitation in ways that nativists, ironically, would have considered uniquely American by working hard and contributing to the growth and prosperity of their communities through consumer spending.

John Box, a nativist Congressman from the small town of Jacksonville, in East Texas, proposed the first quota measures on immigrants from Mexico in 1926. John C. Box represented a Congressional district in East Texas that was “a stronghold for small Anglo farmers.”¹ The price decreases made possible by imported Mexican labor combined with racism predisposed East Texas farmers against immigration. The region had seen considerable violence against Mexicans by Anglos, such as when oil workers in Mexia clubbed Mexican workers and threatened to kill their families in 1921.² The Ku Klux Klan had a strong presence in North and East Texas in its first incarnation in the 1860s. After the group reappeared in 1915 it found a foothold in Texas, gaining a membership estimated to be around 100,000.³ Box formed his policy proposals in this milieu of small farmers, racist sentiment, and Anglo violence.

Box’s bill, House Resolution 6741 of the first session of the 69th Congress would amend the Immigration Act of 1924 by limiting immigration from Mexico to 2% of the Mexican population of the United States as recorded by the 1890 Census, which would add Mexico to the list of quota countries. He inadvertently helped raise Mexican-American political consciousness and the creation of Mexican-American civil rights

¹ David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas, 1987), <http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/2027/heb.00601> (accessed August 11, 2011), 186.

² Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 189-90.

³ Christopher Long, "KU KLUX KLAN," *Handbook of Texas Online* published by the Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vek02> (accessed September 29, 2011).

organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) which was founded in 1929 in Corpus Christi. The “Box Bill,” by proposing to limit a low cost labor supply, forced businesses and their defenders in government of such exploitation to provide representatives of LULAC a national podium from which they would be able to state their case: that Americans of Latin American descent and Mexican immigrants could make exemplary citizens even in the face of economic and social violence.⁴

LULAC took its first strategic steps on the national stage in 1930 in response to Box’s rhetoric. Box portrayed so-called Mexican traits as “undesirable” and LULAC countered with accomplishments of the Mexican-American community which, ironically, often reinforced eugenics arguments.⁵ Most Anglos at the time saw Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as an undifferentiated mass, so by defending Mexican-Americans, LULAC representatives also spoke out for Mexican immigrants, who were quietly contributing to the economic foundation of the Rio Grande Valley by performing most of the agricultural labor and by spending their meager earnings and savings on local goods.⁶

The “Box Bill” provoked a discussion of race, economics, and politics involving Mexicans in Texas that would span all regions, social classes, and industries across the

⁴ For a thorough overview of the history of economic and social violence toward Mexicans in Texas, please see part three of David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*.

⁵ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Imported Pauper Labor and Serfdom in America: Statement of Hon. John C. Box*, 67th Cong., 1st sess., 1921, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/congcomp/getdoc?HEARING-ID=HRG-1921-IMN-0004> (accessed August 11, 2011): 17.

⁶ The term “Anglo” describes a white, non-Hispanic person from the United States. It is a social construction with few objective conditions and is used operationally to define white people that are not of Spanish or Mexican descent. For my purposes the word Anglo is used to describe an individual who would self-describe as white, who others would describe as white, and who would not have known Spanish or Mexican ancestry. I use the word “Mexican-American” to describe an American citizen with one or more Mexican citizen parents, and of course “Mexican” is intended to describe a Mexican citizen. I use the term “African-American” to describe an individual who would be socially considered to be a black person. In reality, all of these terms merely stand in for an enormously complex hereditary and geological set of attributes that human beings have reduced to simple, fallible labels.

state. Large cotton concerns, other agricultural interests, the Chambers of Commerce that they helped fund, and the surrounding industries weighed in to support Mexican labor. Unions, small farmers, Anglos in border towns, and middle-class Anglos from North and Central Texas hoped to stop the influx of Mexican immigrants on economic and racist grounds. The battle lines between capitalists and nativists would produce various racial characterizations that contributed to false stereotypes, elements of which survive today.

During the 1920s, Anglos in unskilled and semiskilled positions in agriculture and railroads in the Southwest United States found themselves being displaced from their jobs by Mexican immigrants. They also found their efforts to collectively challenge their employers for better wages thwarted when employers imported large groups of Mexican immigrants who could served as strikebreakers.⁷ Anglos in North and Central Texas urban areas increasingly came into contact with Mexican immigrants leaving agricultural work and began to form racist views of them due to competition for employment, cultural differences, and economic stratification that placed recently-arrived Mexicans at the bottom. Meanwhile, Anglos who lived in the borderlands and across the valley, including those in skilled positions, were worried that they would see their wages fall as a result of the incorporation of Mexican immigrants in the labor pool.⁸

⁷ Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1997), *eBook Collection, EBSCOhost*, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=6869&site=ehost-live> (accessed 11 August 2011): 69.

⁸ David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), *eBook Collection, EBSCOhost*, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=21201&site=ehost-live> (accessed August 11, 2011): 59.

Anglo privilege was the norm in Texas. Anglo institutions along with increased industrialization and infrastructure subdued Mexicans, Indians, and African-Americans. Industrial progress favored Anglos unfairly. In general, Anglos held a majority of skilled labor positions. The middle class of Texas was mostly Anglo along with established enclaves of Mexican-Americans and African-Americans. Anglos were sensitive to any threat to their position in society both from cultural and economic standpoints and the exploiters of labor who came to Texas primarily used Anglos as managers and skilled laborers.⁹

Immigrants found themselves positioned between hostile camps: on one side were the agriculturalists who wanted their long hours and low wages and on the other were resentful working-class Anglos. In the middle were middle-class and professional Mexican-Americans seeking to assimilate and be accepted in the larger society and sometimes excluded immigrants from their efforts to gain social capital for their ethnic group. LULAC, for example, decided to exclude immigrants from their organization. Most Anglos were unsophisticated in their understanding of ethnic differentiation of various Latin American groups, and lumped Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans together. Mexican-American civil rights groups forming in the 1920s, by speaking to Anglos unaware or unconcerned with class or cultural differences within the Latin American community, took it upon themselves to speak for all people of Mexican descent and ended up defending Mexican immigrants.

Meanwhile, Mexican immigrants were becoming a more integral part of Texan society through integration into the economy. Cheap labor provided by Mexican

⁹ Many recent histories of the Southwest discuss Anglo privilege. Two of the best treatments I have found are David Montejano's *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas* and Neil Foley's *The White Scourge*.

immigrants contributed to higher levels of production in the burgeoning cotton industry. While cotton growers overproduced, Mexican immigrants, many of whom who were transported across the border by labor agents working for agricultural firms, provided a growing consumer spending base that supported the nascent retail businesses and infrastructure of the Rio Grande Valley. Entire regions of Texas developed from virtual wastelands into established towns in a few decades. On the other end, and beyond the scope of this paper, overproduction of cotton would eventually lead to a crisis for the industry during the thirties, as it did with other industries that had overproduced but underpaid for labor.

This thesis is a small part of a vast body of work about the Texas-Mexico border, and the evolution of the relationship between Mexican immigrants, Mexican-Americans, and Anglos. Historians have been fascinated with the region and these social relationships since the first large groups of immigrants that came to region after Texas independence. From the moment these groups arrived, researchers took an interest in the social and economic impact that their coming would bring. As more Mexican immigrants crossed the border into the United States in the 1910s and 1920s, Anglo researchers such as sociologist Emory Bogardus began to study the implications of Mexican immigrant entry into the region as national legislation was being passed to restrict their passage. The driving narrative behind early studies was determining to what extent immigrant populations could “assimilate” into American culture. Bogardus was concerned about Mexicans becoming a hostile segregated colony, stating of the Mexican that “his loyalty to Mexico is not to be treated lightly... Americanization as it is

sometimes proclaimed does him more harm than good.”¹⁰ His overriding concern was the “Americanization” of immigrants, a common preoccupation for academics and policy-makers from the turn of the Century until the 1930s.

Beginning in the 1930s, journalist, activist, and historian Carey McWilliams began his lifelong study of Mexican immigrant groups and ethnicity, and his book, *North from Mexico* is considered a fundamental work in the field. *North from Mexico* covers the Mexican population from the Spanish conquest, and examines the system of seasonal labor that attracted workers to the fields of the American Southwest, the systems of economic and social oppression, the violence that took place in the region, as well as the living conditions of farm laborers in the Rio Grande Valley throughout the 1920s and 30s, lived in dirt floor shacks, raised a few barnyard animals, and were in constant debt to their landowners.¹¹ McWilliams was one of the first to focus on the demographic changes to the region based on the need for cheap labor. He noted early on the resistance of the Anglo working class in integrating Mexican workers.¹² He also countered the common cultural trope of Mexican workers being the only ones willing to do certain backbreaking labor, pointing out instead that wage rates influenced the ethnic composition of employment patterns.¹³ He understood that employers sought out ethnic groups that would accept a lower pay scale and have more difficulty organizing in

¹⁰ Emory S. Bogardus, “The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation” *American Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 1 (July 1930), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2767225> (accessed August 11, 2011): 77.

¹¹ Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: the Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1949 reprint New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), <http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/2027/heb.01969> (accessed August 11, 2011): 85.

¹² Carey McWilliams, “America’s Disadvantaged Minorities: Mexican-Americans” *The Journal of Negro Education* 20, no. 3 (Summer, 1951), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2966005> (accessed August 11, 2011): 304.

¹³ McWilliams, “America’s Disadvantaged Minorities”, 305.

resistance to working conditions. He was one of the first to attempt to chart the number of Mexican immigrants that came into Texas between the years of 1900-1930. Nearly one-tenth of the population of Mexico ventured into the United States during those years.

In 1926 and 1927, sociologist Manuel Gamio performed numerous interviews to study immigrants as they adjusted to the realities of entering the economic and social world of the United States.¹⁴ Of all the sociologists studying Mexican immigration in the 1920s, Gamio was the most objective and truly scientific, though in the final analysis he was still advocating ways to “Americanize” the Mexican. He also collected a good number of subjective immigrant stories from immigrants themselves and provided the most thorough information about the community available today. Gamio’s was the most extensive study of quotidian immigrant life performed at the time and some of the results of his studies make up primary source material for my thesis, and have contributed to the most important works in the field, such as David Gutiérrez’s *Walls and Mirrors*, David Montejano’s *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, and Neil Foley’s *The White Scourge*, all of which I discuss later. Gamio’s interviewees revealed their thoughts about Anglos, life in the United States, and their impressions of the system that exploited them. Gamio also studied remittances to Mexico and determined population estimates and migration patterns from different regions of Mexico and into different regions of the United States.

In the 1960s and 70s, historians began to more closely examine the racist nativism as it related to the immigration issue and the different ways that ethnicity was constructed in such an environment. Writing in the 1970s, Mark Reisler investigated perceptions

¹⁴ Manuel Gamio, *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), <http://solomon.imald.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/cgi-bin/asp/philo/imald/getvolume.pl?S9637> (accessed August 11, 2011).

Anglos held of Mexican immigrants during the 1920s.¹⁵ He noted that, during the 1920s, “political controversy over Mexican immigration reached fever pitch.”¹⁶ Reisler observed that both nativists and non-restrictionists established similar stereotypes of the Mexican and that Anglos characterized Mexican immigrants as Indian peons who were “docile, indolent, and backward.” Reisler summarized the debate: while nativists viewed these negative traits as a threat to American life, business interests viewed these traits as desirable.¹⁷ While nativists believed that these traits violated their ideal of an American who triumphed through diligence and entrepreneurial spirit, agriculturalists argued that these traits made for good workers who would not be a threat to society or its institutions. Strict economic self-interest explained the business leaders’ views: low wage levels and the lack of political representation made Mexican immigrants desirable. Pseudoscientific arguments about desirable cultural traits were self-interested attempts to prevent any immigration legislation harmful to agriculture.

Reisler was one of the first researchers to examine the economic origins of early Mexican immigration, and its impact across the United States in his 1976 book *By the Sweat of their Brow*.¹⁸ He explored the connection between Mexican community building and politics. Reisler accessed some of the same primary sources that I make use of, such as the Box letters located at the Rare Books Room of the Benson Latin American

¹⁵ Mark Reisler, “Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen: Anglo Perceptions of the Mexican Immigrant during the 1920s” *Pacific Historical Review* 45, no 2 (May 1976) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3638496> (accessed August 11, 2011).

¹⁶ Reisler, “Always the Laborer”, 232.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁸ Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976).

Collection at the University of Texas, and the congressional documents from the 1920s concerning immigration and agriculture. *By the Sweat of their Brow* covers some of the same topics as this paper, such as the urbanization of the Mexican immigrant population, Box's importance as an anti-immigration figure, and Anglo attitudes toward Mexican laborers.¹⁹ Reisler, however, did not attempt to make a connection between Mexican immigrant labor, Anglo opposition, and the rise of the Mexican-American civil rights movement.

In 1987, David Montejano wrote his definitive work on the social configurations of Anglos, Mexicans, and Mexican-Americans and the evolution of the economy of South Texas over time.²⁰ His book contextualizes the events discussed in this thesis in the broad expanse of Mexicans in Texas history. Montejano characterized the period from 1900-1920 as a "reconstruction," a change in the Texas economy from cattle ranching and sharecropping to industrial agricultural operations built on the foundation of technological and infrastructure advancements. Montejano placed restrictionists and pro-immigrationists in two easily-definable camps, with restrictionists being represented by small farmers, progressives, labor unionists, and eugenicists, and pro-immigrationists being mostly large-scale growers, railroad executives, and businessmen. He explored what he called the "social costs" of immigration and emphasized that the business concerns who desired Mexican immigration were, in many cases, more likely to resort to racist rhetoric than nativists. Montejano summarized the situation by stating that

¹⁹ For more information about the urbanization of the Mexican population, see Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow*, "Chapter Five: The Mexican Worker in Urban-Industrial America." For more about Box, see Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow*, 64-7. For more about Anglo attitudes, see Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow*, "Chapter Six: The Anglo Perception of the Mexican Worker."

²⁰ David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas, 1987), <http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/2027/heb.00601> (accessed August 11, 2011).

“agribusinessmen, after all, only wanted laborers, not neighbors or fellow citizens.”²¹

That agribusinessmen were only interested in Mexican immigrants for labor supply is true in general, but I show in chapter three that this was not always the case in certain social contexts and that Anglos realized the two things were not mutually exclusive.

Montejano focused on the violence meted out by the Border Patrol and the vast system of labor controls that Texas farmers employed to restrict the movement of Mexican farm laborers. Physical violence directed toward Mexican immigrants is important, but many historians have explored the topic in great detail so my focus lies elsewhere. My argument compliments such research by exploring the conditions within which Anglo and Mexican immigrant relationships could develop along non-violent lines.

In the 1990s, Juan Gomez-Quiñones and Emilio Zamora published studies of the nascent Mexican labor movement in agriculture, mining, and the railroad industry across the Southwest. Their overriding concern was placing Mexicans and Mexican-Americans within the context of nascent, exploitative bonanza-capitalism. Gomez-Quiñones’s major contribution was to illustrate repeatedly, and in no uncertain terms, that Mexican labor was far from pliable, and that both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans took many steps to mobilize and try to improve their pay and conditions. He contextualized the movement in the macroeconomic circumstances present during the advent of industrialization, a situation in the United States in which “over 10 million lived in poverty” and “1 percent of the families owned seven-eighths of the wealth.” He also described general labor conditions at the turn of the century: “working conditions were poor, wages were low, and employers and local officials often used questionable methods to thwart workers’ efforts to better their situation.” He delved into the struggles that Mexican workers faced

²¹ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 186-7.

in Texas with organizing and facing the American Federation of Labor, an organization that attempted to restrict non-Anglo workers.²² I only briefly mention organized labor throughout my paper, because in the period I discuss, Mexican immigrants were typically rejected from officially-recognized groups of organized labor. During my research, I employed Gomez-Quiñonez's understanding of the fundamentally profit-driven and brutal nature of the capitalist system in general and also as it specifically applied to Texas agriculture.

Emilio Zamora's book *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, suggests that congressmen like Box exaggerated the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States in order to instill fear in the general populace.²³ The Texas State Federation of Labor (TSFL) also lobbied for immigration restriction. Ultimately, the TSFL would cooperate with the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) in attempting to convince the Mexican government to work toward a decrease in immigration into the United States, a relationship examined in Gregg Andrews' *Shoulder to Shoulder? The American Federation of Labor, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1924*. Although opposed to large-scale immigration, the TSFL worked to selectively incorporate Mexicans and Mexican-Americans into their union.²⁴ Zamora's study, however, does not look at Box and those who supported him and their criticism of the economic order.

²² Juan Gomez-Quiñones, *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), *eBook Collection, EBSCOhost*, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=22632&site=ehost-live> (accessed August 11, 2011): 66.

²³ Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/utexas/docDetail.action?docID=10455995> (accessed August 11, 2011):17-18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

David Gutiérrez's *Walls and Mirrors* is a thorough analysis of the Mexican immigrant experience in the United States. His estimates place the influx of Mexican immigrants at 1.5 million from 1890 to 1929. Gutiérrez also agrees with the general assertion that Anglos viewed the Mexican community as one mass, rather than distinguishing between recently-arrived Mexicans and Mexican-Americans because most Anglos did not generally come into direct contact with Mexican communities.²⁵ Gutiérrez also examined construction work, of which Mexican immigrants made up 75% of the unskilled workforce by the late 1920s.²⁶ Gutiérrez examined the struggle between agribusiness and nativists, arguing that nativists had forced large-scale farmers to tread a fine line in their defense of the Mexican worker.²⁷ Gutiérrez saw how restrictionists used landowners' own arguments against them, arguing that the docile and tractable nature of the Mexican workforce would make them poor citizens.²⁸ Gutiérrez also noted, along with Gomez-Quiñonez, that the desire for such large-scale immigration was to serve what Gomez-Quiñonez calls "bonanza capitalism" that featured mass exploitation of cheap labor and led to higher production.²⁹ By the late 1920s, such a system, combined with an estimated unemployment figure of six million, would mean that production outstripped consumption and wages plummeted.³⁰ Similar overproduction and underconsumption

²⁵ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

cycles would lead to the Great Depression and the repatriation measures intended to relieve unemployment into the 1930s.

Gutiérrez detailed the problematic position that Mexican-Americans found themselves in inside Anglo society and described how Mexican-American civil rights groups were forced to deal with certain contradictions. There was a split between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans that was complicated all the more by the fact that both groups co-existed even within families, let alone communities. Mexican-American groups occasionally adopted racist Anglo rhetoric about Mexican wage laborers to attempt to differentiate themselves, while at the same time defending their Mexican heritage. Gutiérrez tends to stress how Mexican-American groups became antagonistic to Mexican immigrant workers, but the evidence I present in this paper asserts that the relationship was more complex. Mexican-American civil rights organizations like LULAC made a tactical decision to only allow American citizens in order to be more effective, but still recognized the need to assist Mexican immigrant communities. A major point of contention between this paper and Gutiérrez's interpretation in *Walls and Mirrors* is that he believed that the LULAC contingent went before congress in support of immigration restriction.³¹ I illustrate how, not only did their representatives go before Congress to oppose the "Box Bill," but that their decision to fight the bill changed the direction of the organization and led to the censure of two important members and the expulsion of one.

In 1997, Neil Foley published *The White Scourge*, which addresses how the Texas cotton culture affected race relations between Anglos, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and African-Americans. Foley described the transformation of small, family-sized farms

³¹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 85-6.

into industrial farms run by managers overseeing sharecroppers.³² Foley found that “poor whites focused on the perceived danger of race mixing and the alleged inferiority of Mexicans rather than on the competitive business practices of commercial farmers.” My research shows that poor whites were aware that they, too, were victims of “absentee landlords” who were taking over vast stretches of land to drive out competition.³³ Foley concentrated on the construction of race in Texas in the context of the rise of industrialized cotton. He examined attitudes that different races had for each other, but especially the Anglo attitudes toward African-Americans, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and poor whites (“white trash”). Foley saw the introduction of Mexican immigrants into a Texas society built on a “black and white” paradigm as problematic for Anglos.³⁴ He discusses how Anglo eugenicists used pseudoscience to justify their theories of Anglo supremacy, and that one even argued for ending cotton agriculture to drive out poor whites. Foley argues that the concept of “whiteness” itself stood in the way of social and economic equality and that “whiteness” was equated with privilege. Foley importantly notes that Texas was made up of many different ethnicities that fell under the umbrella of the term “Anglo,” even though they were culturally very different. Similarly, the term “Mexican” is problematic because it obscures different groups of Mexicans, from illiterate Mexican immigrant laborers to *agringados*, or those claiming whiteness. Foley describes the difficulty in the term “black” because it too has been simplified because of a lingering belief that any African heritage confers on its ancestors

³² Foley, *The White Scourge*, 37-8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

an African-American ethnic identity.³⁵ His acknowledgement of the true complexities of race is essential to any historical understanding of the area, because each blanket term used to describe any racial group is by nature a gross oversimplification.

Foley conceptualized the farm labor system as an ethnically-based ladder that allowed a farmworker to transform themselves from a farmhand to a farm owner. He described how Anglos and blacks could be sharecroppers or more-respected tenant farmers, but that Mexicans generally remained field hands and only occasionally would even become sharecroppers.³⁶ Foley also describes how, by 1920, half of all Mexican immigrants were women and children.³⁷ Their stories are mostly lost to history, as almost none were recorded in any official record. Foley noted how immigration officials and the Border Patrol worked in league with cotton growers to allow immigrants to pass the border into the United States during harvest season.³⁸ Foley, along with many other researchers, emphasizes the various groups' attitudes about race and ethnicity, so I will not spend as much time on it in this study. Foley vividly presents the era's construction of the idea of "whiteness" and delves into the pseudoscientific justifications of the racist attitudes prevalent at the time. In this thesis, I wrestle with the complicated relationship that LULAC founders had with "whiteness", and how they varyingly accepted or rejected the paradigm.

The Mexican-American civil rights movement has its own historiography, but the major work in the field that influenced my paper was Benjamin Marquez's *LULAC: the*

³⁵ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 6-9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

*Evolution of a Mexican-American Political Organization.*³⁹ Marquez focused on LULAC's early development from 1929-1940 in his article "The Politics of Race and Assimilation."⁴⁰ Marquez discusses how LULAC was a group that prioritized assimilation into Anglo society. He describes how LULAC was primarily a middle class group, made up of professionals, academics, and skilled workers. Marquez recognized that LULAC fought for their economic interests and were not necessarily opposed to the economic status quo, but that they did push for civil rights for all Mexican-Americans. My assertion in this work is that, because of the Anglo tendency to group Mexicans and Mexican-Americans together, that LULAC was often, if unintentionally, defending Mexican immigrants from Anglo racism as well. LULAC's strategy was similar to W.E.B. DuBois's for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: to form an elite vanguard and uplift others of their race, including recent immigrants.⁴¹

This paper deals with the initial phase of the LULAC in the context of the first legislation directed at Mexican immigrants. Chapter one deals with some of the nuances of the public policymaking, and unlike other works, focuses on the nativist assault on the economic system that underpinned Mexican immigration. So while John Box was a racist involved in pseudoscientific explanations of human genetic variation, he was incisive about the economic system of exploitation in place. The first chapter also deals with different Anglo interpretations of Mexican-American immigration. The primary

³⁹ Benjamin Marquez, *LULAC: the Evolution of a Mexican-American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

⁴⁰ Benjamin Marquez, "The Politics of Race and Assimilation: The League of United Latin American Citizens 1929-40" *The Western Political Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (June 1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/448359> (accessed August 11, 2011).

⁴¹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 77.

sources for this section were the Dillingham Commission hearings, Albert Johnson's Immigration Commission hearings, the records of a Senate hearing from 1920 allowing Mexican citizens to bypass aspects of United States immigration regulation, letters to John Box referencing his legislation, and the early papers of the different groups that later became LULAC.

Chapter two of this paper covers how LULAC was formed at least partially around the principal of defending the Mexican "race" against attacks from John Box and other nativists in front of the Immigration Committee discussing the proposed "Box Bill," and how civil rights could be gained even in the face of economic repression. Before this event, Mexican-American groups in Texas were divided based on different regional areas and social groups. In the initial charter of the conference that would become the event that created LULAC, the "Box Bill" was mentioned by name in one of its first resolutions. The "Box Bill" helped fuse different early civil rights groups into LULAC, which became a strong and lasting Mexican-American civil rights organization that still operates today. While LULAC leaders ostensibly desired to improve the conditions of immigrants, it was clear the group was overwhelmingly focused on Mexican-American issues. Still, their defense of their Mexican background was in many ways a defense of immigrants that helped to defeat the "Box Bill." The second chapter is based primarily on the materials from the letters to Congressman Box, House and Senate Immigration hearing records, and records of the Texas Federation of Labor and newspapers the day.

The final chapter deals primarily with the Mexican immigrant community and how they saved and spent their meager earnings to improve their social position, and the strategies they employed to survive in a hostile environment. This is an aspect of

unskilled Mexican immigrant labor that has received little attention from most scholars, with the exception of Richard Garcia's *Rise of the Mexican-American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941*. Observers of the era seem to assume that unskilled laborers lived hand to mouth and therefore neglect the important role they played as consumers in emerging agriculture centers. Retailers in Texas began to cater to them and, over time, Mexican immigrants became the foundation for the commercial development of areas throughout the Rio Grande Valley. Even though on an individual level these laborers did not have a lot of economic power, as a group they had an important impact. Because Mexican immigrant labor was a hidden population it is difficult to accurately assess their spending patterns, but there are certain important records remaining. Sociologist Manuel Gamio observed certain spending patterns that point to their possible economic impact. Mexican-American newspapers in Texas also observed the development of the Rio Grande, especially in a series of essays by geographer and historian Enrique Santibañez. Estimates of earnings on individual levels were determined through estimates of sociologists working at the time, politicians who studied the issue, and estimated wages given before Albert Johnson's committee. Major demographic and economic trends were determined by an examination of Census records, made much easier by the services provided by socialexplorer.com, which allow for quick retrieval and analysis of Census records.

There are many themes to explore when dealing with the Texas-Mexico border because it has been a politically explosive and balkanized zone for hundreds of years. With greater attention to the economic and social agency of the Mexican immigrant laboring class, new ideas can be explored of the dual methods of civil rights advocacy

and economic integration into local communities that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans used to thrive in a hostile environment. Many of the secrets of their success will be found much earlier than previously expected – in the first furtive and brutal years of backbreaking agricultural labor.

CHAPTER I: The “Box Bill” and Contradictions of the Mexican Immigrant in Texas, 1924-1930

In 1924, Congressman John Box introduced an immigration bill that would, for the first time, apply a quota to immigration from Latin America. The bill failed but became a catalyst for a national discussion of the role of Mexican immigrants in the economic development of Texas that has persisted ever since. While Box presented the Eugenicists' view to attack the influx of cheap labor from a racist perspective, large agribusinesses decried what they interpreted as their perpetual lack of labor as white, black, and experienced Mexican workers left farms to find work in the cities. Mexican immigrant laborers became the issue rather than the economic system and the industries that came to exploit them.

In the 1920s, Mexican immigration was on the scale of large European migrations of the late 19th Century.¹ Up to 1.5 million may have come across in total from 1890 to 1929.² The typical explanation for this rise in immigration is that there were “push-pull” factors that drove Mexicans to escape the economic hardship and revolutionary violence in their home country and seek out economic opportunities in another. The “pull” factors, though, far overpowered the “push” factors. Technological advances (such as large public and private irrigation projects, the expansion of the railroads, refrigerated

¹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 40.

² *Ibid.*

railcars)¹ and a concomitant rise in cotton prices, produced a bonanza capitalist environment in which large landowners and other capitalist interests required a substantial low-wage labor force to work large acreages and produce high volumes of high value crop that had to be worked by hand.² One such “pull” factor was the railroad itself, upon which Mexican immigrant laborers were shuttled in by labor agents hired by large cotton producing firms. Railroad track in the Southwest grew from 7,436 miles in 1880 to 36,000 in 1920.³ By the mid-1920s, cotton production in Texas constituted between 35 and 42 percent of the United States crop and from 20 to 30 percent of the world crop.⁴

Agriculturalists fought vigorously for the continued free admission of Mexican laborers. The owners of large cotton growing concerns were not easily identifiable. Even recent research devoted to industrial, large-scale agriculture only yields occasional specific examples. Cotton farmers typically supplied other industries and thus were not as involved with marketing themselves as retailers would be. There were a few that had recognizable corporate names, such as those associated with the King Ranch, the Kenedy Ranch, the Driscoll Ranch, the Weil Ranch, the Dobie Ranch, the Taft Ranch and Sharyland Farms.⁵ The structure of agricultural companies was difficult to establish, because different sections of land under large ranch holdings could be controlled by a

¹Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 41.

²Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 103.

³Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 41.

⁴Ibid., 42.

⁵General information concerning these agricultural firms was obtained in Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, pages 108, 111, and 250. The Taft Ranch is mentioned in Thad Sutton and Dan K. Utley’s book *From Can See to Can’t: Texas Cotton Farmers on the Southern Prairies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997): 45.

different family or group. The Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company is one of the few readily-identifiable corporate farming concerns in the Rio Grande Valley, having numerous land holdings surrounding Corpus Christi.⁶ In general, corporate groups were represented by individuals or hid behind umbrella groups such as the Texas Farm Bureau Cotton Association, the Cotton Association of Texas, and various Chambers of Commerce.

Agriculturalists encountered opposition to Mexican immigration to the United States in general dating back to the “Box Bill,” a piece of legislation proposed in 1926. The substantial Dillingham Commission study, undertaken at the turn of the century, viewed Mexican labor as an established, almost-invisible labor force and could not have predicted the “Box Bill” in any way. The “Box Bill” was designed to contravene the unimpeded immigration in the Western Hemisphere that had been the national policy up until that point. House Resolution 6741 of the 69th Congress, 1st session, proposed to amend the Immigration Act of 1924 by applying the quota guidelines of that law to Mexico (and other Western Hemisphere countries), thus reducing immigration in the United States to 2% of the Mexican population recorded in the 1890 Census.⁷ The bill, aside from a misguided eugenics effort, was an expression of opposition to social and economic changes that were tied to large scale Mexican immigration to those regions of Texas that featured large agribusiness, typically cotton-growing firms. Profits for these businesses were partially contingent on cheap labor under very harsh conditions.

⁶ The Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company and its methods to attempt to control its labor pool is explored in Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, 38.

⁷ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Seasonal Agricultural Laborers from Mexico on H.R. 6741, H.R. 7559, H.R. 9036*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., 1926, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/congcomp/getdoc?HEARING-ID=HRG-1926-IMN-0004> (accessed August 11, 2011): 1.

Congressman John Calvin Box was from Jacksonville, Texas, approximately 50 miles south of Tyler in East Texas. The region had not seen the ethnic strife between Anglos and Mexicans that prevailed in the Rio Grande Valley.⁸ Box was a member of the Democratic State committee from 1908 to 1910 and was appointed one of the original trustees of Southern Methodist University in 1913. He was elected as a Democrat to the Sixty-sixth Congress in 1919 and served there until his unsuccessful run for re-election in 1930.⁹

Once elected, Box was placed on Albert Johnson's House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization. Johnson, president of the Eugenics Research Organization, one of many such pseudoscientific, nativist groups, had tasked his committee with extending quota measures for different immigrant groups.¹⁰ The effort was a continuation of the work of the Dillingham Commission, which had worked to create quota measures for immigration from certain parts of the world, particularly Southern and Eastern Europe.¹¹

The stated purpose of the quota system was to ensure "that immigration be such both in quality and quantity as not to make too difficult the process of assimilation."¹²

⁸ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 105.

⁹ Anne W. Hooker, "BOX, JOHN CALVIN," Handbook of Texas Online published by the Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbo54> (accessed May 16, 2011).

¹⁰ Albert Johnson's connection to eugenics is discussed in Neil Foley's *The White Scourge*, 57.

¹¹ U.S. Congress, *The Dillingham Commission Reports*, 61st Cong., 2nd and 3rd sess., 1911, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/stanfordimmigrationdillingham/home.action> (accessed May 19, 2011).

¹² U.S. Congress, "Brief Statement of the Investigations of the Immigration Commission, with Conclusions and Recommendations and Views of the Minority," *The Dillingham Commission Reports*, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1911, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/stanfordimmigrationdillingham/docDetail.action?docID=10006604&p00=mexico> (accessed May 19, 2011): 45.

What this really meant was that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (who were considered less “white” than those from Northern Europe) would be weeded out through quota measures, head taxes, and literacy tests. Still, the commission represented an early, crude attempt to apply the social sciences to a legislative concern.

The final recommendations of the Dillingham Commission offered generally economic and social explanations, though the records of the commission report are rife with crude racial stereotypes. The commission in its ultimate analysis recommended against the lowering of the national standard of living through a sudden expansion of industrial capacity and the accompanying immigration of unskilled laborers. Box picked up on this theme when proposing his legislation, and various Chambers of Commerce and other representatives of agribusiness would argue against his restrictionist stance.¹³

The Dillingham Commission discussed Mexican immigration in brief sections of its report but the recurring theme was to compare “new” and “old” immigration. The “new” being immigration coming from Asia, Southern Europe, and Eastern Europe and the “old” being primarily from Northern Europe and the Netherlands.¹⁴ The theme of the entire report was a grouping of ethnicities along a scale of acceptably “white” attributes. The report did not mention “Mexico” or “Mexicans” in any chapter headings but did account for them on various charts and in its “Dictionary of Races.”¹⁵ The main reason for this lack of focus was likely because Mexican immigration had not reached the heights that it would in later years.

¹³ U.S. Congress, “Brief Statement of the Investigations of the Immigration Commission,” 45-6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

The Dillingham Commission found that 77,645 Mexican immigrants had entered the entire United States from 1820 to 1910.¹⁶ That number would roughly equal the total population of South Texas around 1900.¹⁷ Other figures show the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States to have been 103,393 at the turn of the century, more than doubling every decade afterward until the 1930 census.¹⁸ In 1920 the Mexican-born population of the U.S. had reached 486,418 and by 1930 it stood at 641,462, according to census figures.¹⁹ There was undoubtedly a greater number, due to the inefficiency of government agencies tracking the counts. Up to 1.5 million may have come across in total from 1890 to 1929.²⁰ For perspective, the 1920 Census placed the population of the United States at 107,438,625.²¹

The Johnson Committee would be responsible for the Immigration Act of 1924 that capped immigration from any country at 2% of 1890 U.S. Census figures. Countries of the Western Hemisphere were excluded from these quota provisions, and this is what the “Box Bill” sought to remedy. The bill served as a catalyst for a national conversation about Mexican Immigration that revealed certain contradictions in how different groups

¹⁶ U.S. Congress, “Statistical Review of Immigration, 1820-1910: Distribution of Immigrants,” *The Dillingham Commission Reports*, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1911, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/stanfordimmigrationdillingham/docDetail.action?docID=10006581&p00=mexico> (accessed May 19, 2011), 13.

¹⁷ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 109.

¹⁸ Haines, Michael R., “Foreign-born population, by country of birth: 1850–1990,” Table Ad354-443 in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition*, ed. Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch and Gavin Wright (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/10.1017/ISBN-9780511132971.Ad256-949> (accessed August 11, 2011): 1-604.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 40.

²¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/1921-02.pdf> (accessed August 22, 2011): 39.

viewed immigration, its purpose, and its long term affects. As one observer put it, “the whole country is aroused on this subject. Everywhere I go I find it being discussed.”²²

Large-scale farmers and their allies still wanted open borders between the United States and Mexico. Bankers, Chambers of Commerce, and businessmen were aligned with such farmers and also ultimately benefitted from the labor supply. On the other hand, urban workers and unions believed that the present population could fill the jobs and work the land. Mexican immigrant laborers were working and attempting to establish themselves in communities. They did not have a voice in the debate that has survived in any form of documentation. Commercial farmers who relied on their labor successfully lobbied to remove the Western Hemisphere from any immigration quotas in the national Immigration Acts of 1917, 1921, and 1924.²³

In the 1920s restrictionists included Anglo labor unions, small Anglo farmers, some retailers, eugenicists, and progressives. Many of these were from the Rio Grande Valley and the border, which had already started becoming an enclave for Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans, though a sizeable portion of restrictionists were lower- and middle-class Anglos from urban areas in Central and North Texas such as Austin, Dallas, Houston, Fort Worth, and San Antonio. The Anglo middle class was generally in support of Box’s efforts to restrict Mexican immigration. Eugenicist groups also decried incoming Mexican groups, and racism typically played a part in restrictionism. On the other hand, small farmers, unions, and some retail groups opposed

²² Letter from Marrius H. Lewis to John Box, 20 March 1924, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 2, page 18, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

²³ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 182-3.

Mexican immigration on mostly economic terms as a threat to the wage scale, decrying the exploitation of Mexican working people.

Workers' unions across Texas (but especially in borderlands and urban areas), including those having members sharing some ethnicity with the influx of immigrants, saw that Mexican immigration completely transformed the economy. Immigration introduced a subsistence-level subordinate class that allowed for large-scale agribusiness operations. These operations threatened wage levels as a whole and reduced employment options, as they mostly excluded Anglos and African-Americans as employees.²⁴ While Chambers of Commerce and agribusiness claimed a labor shortage due to labor leaving Texas for other parts of the country, many working class Anglos complained that they could not find jobs. An Anglo from Brownwood, a central hub of the developing Rio Grande Valley, echoed a typical sentiment, remarking that there was "plenty native labor to gather all the crops."²⁵ It would be difficult to assess real unemployment levels, as such measures only began to be used in the 1930s and are still open to controversy. Generally speaking, active union members and officials in affected regions of Texas were more concerned with the economic consequences of cheap labor rather than a racist disregard for different ethnicities, and this was coupled with a presumption of Anglo privilege in the realm of labor.

Economic mobility for Anglos and African-Americans in agricultural work was already slowing down as independent farm owners increasingly became tenant farmers. From 1880-1930, farm tenancy (rather than ownership) increased from around 37% to

²⁴ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 104-5.

²⁵ Letter from R. L. Williams to John Box, 6 January 1926, John Box Correspondences in the Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 4, page 56, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

60%.²⁶ There was a displacement of white and black tenants by Mexicans that accompanied the evolution in Texas agriculture from family-sized farms to large managed farms worked by tenants.²⁷ The other restrictionist measures passed by congress, the Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924, by restricting European and Asian immigration, actually increased the desire for Mexican labor.²⁸

A petition from the Corpus Christi carpenters' union to various congressmen, including Box, stated the position of the Anglo wage earner succinctly: "We feel no animosity...toward the workers of Mexico. While we know that they are wanted for purposes of exploitation, we are also fully aware of the serious economic wrongs and injuries that are being inflicted on wage-earners of the United States." The union representative continued by stating that "it is truly remarkable to see that practically no organizations of farmers are demanding cheap Mexican labor." Corpus Christi had a large and established Mexican-American population that became the birthplace of LULAC and was the home town of its President, Ben Garza. There was a clear distinction between the typical "farmer" as referred to by the union representative and large agricultural operations.²⁹ The fact was that by the late 1920s, Mexicans made up around 75 percent of the unskilled construction workforce.³⁰ The Fort Worth and

²⁶ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 64-5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁹ Letter from Local Union Number 1423, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America to John Box, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 9, page 186, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³⁰ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 45.

Brownwood Junior Order of United American Mechanics were also in favor of restricting immigration, including for farming.³¹

The Secretary of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 583 from El Paso estimated that the average wage for a Mexican worker was \$1.65 per day with “an unlimited supply available.”³² Likewise, a representative of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen No. 757 from El Paso posited that the average wage for Mexican labor was \$1.40 to \$1.75 per day and that “the American people that have no trade to rely upon cannot make a living in this town, because [companies] will not hire them.”³³ The Kleberg and Nueces Counties District Council Carpenters and Joiners of America, based out of Corpus Christi, also supported the “Box Bill,” stating that “about 90% of all the Cement Finishers (in San Antonio, Brownsville, Corpus Christi, and Laredo) are of Mexican extraction and that they work for about half the regular scale of Cement Finishers that belong to unions throughout Texas.”³⁴

The Central Labor Union of El Paso also decried the high level of Mexican immigrant employment in industrial plants, implying that immigrants would overtake

³¹ Letter from R. L. Williams to John Box, 7 June 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 141, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³² Telegram from James Desautels to John Box, 25 February 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 8, page 159, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³³ Letter from J. P. Dennis to John Box, 29 February 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 8, page 159, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³⁴ Letter from F. W. Cottingham to John Box, 8 February 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 8, page 173, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

skilled jobs in the long run.³⁵ The Union went as far as to officially support the “Box Bill.”³⁶ They claimed that up to 95% of the industrial workforce of certain plants was of Mexican descent.³⁷ Ora Pool, President of the Central Labor Union of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, an organization representing 16 unions, also officially supported the “Box Bill” because he argued that “there can be no prosperity in any community where the workers are employed at far less than a living wage.”³⁸ The Lower Rio Grande Valley was being transformed by Mexican immigrant labor, and Anglos there were already outnumbered by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. An Anglo middle class skilled worker stated that “hundreds of tradesmen such as brick layers, carpenters, plasterers, etc have been compelled to leave their home and families here to go out and hunt work at their trade, almost all because of cheap, Mexican laborers.”³⁹ In Buda, Texas, a company building a pipeline between San Antonio and Austin laid off their white workers and brought in Mexican labor because they could work for a dollar a day less. When an

³⁵ Letter from Jack S. Guin to John Box, 17 November 1927, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 9, page 194, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

³⁷ Letter from Jack S. Guin to John Box, 17 November 1927, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 9, page 194, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³⁸ Letter from Ora Pool and Thomas Menton to John Box, 17 January 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 9, Page 195, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³⁹ Letter from M. J. Frederick to John Box, 24 February 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 149, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Anglo applied for a job he was told that the Mexican laborers “worked for less and were better at a lower scale than the white man.”⁴⁰

Imported Mexican labor was used to break strikes. Box reported to Johnson’s committee on the use of Mexican immigrants as strikebreakers. During a Longshoreman strike in Galveston, Mexican labor was brought in to load ships “by bands of labor exploiters who hired them to pick cotton.” The Dock and Marine Council of Galveston, a labor group made up of various Longshoreman organizations, also expressed to Box that Mexican laborers “flock to the cities and enter into competition with American labor at reduced wages and are thus exploited by unscrupulous employers to keep wages down.”⁴¹ The Fort Worth Local, No. 37, International Association of Oil Field, Gas Well, and Refinery Workers of America, adopted a resolution that condemned industrial firms for bringing in Mexican agricultural labor “for the purpose of lowering wages and the standard of living.”⁴² Box presented a newspaper clipping sent to him by the Fort Worth Lodge No. 23, Brotherhood of Railway Car Men of America, concerning Mexican laborers stranded in Fort Worth and seeking employment.⁴³

Historian Neil Foley reiterated the oft-observed phenomenon that “poor whites focused on the perceived danger of race mixing and the alleged inferiority of Mexicans

⁴⁰ Letter from Henry Black to John Box, 24 February 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 10, page 202, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴¹ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Imported Pauper Labor and Serfdom in America*, 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

rather than on the competitive business practices of commercial farmers.”⁴⁴ Anglos typically expressed racist invective, but their overriding concern was sometimes unemployment and other economic consequences of cheap labor. Race mattered because Anglos presumed privilege and access to desired jobs. Working class and poor Anglos resented Mexican labor, as they blamed their inability to find work on the influx. One Anglo “lost his job... and hasn’t been able to get another up to date” and expressed a sentiment that many would echo, stating that the government should “keep out not only Mexicans but all foreigners till [sic] every white-man has a job.”⁴⁵ Another Anglo in Seguin, Texas, could not find work in San Antonio.⁴⁶ Some poor Anglos found that immigration enforcement was inadequate. One stated that “here close to my place were 3 Mexican [sic] and I reported the same but the Immigration service never downe [sic] anything about it after I showed them there [sic] men.”⁴⁷

Anglos living in urban areas such as Austin, Dallas, Houston, Fort Worth and San Antonio also saw reduced employment opportunities and wages. George B. Terrell, Commissioner of Agriculture, took an interest in the immigration issue and changed his opinion on the matter, finally concluding that the demand for Mexican labor came from large planters but that Texas was “being developed rapidly enough,” and that “the

⁴⁴ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 50.

⁴⁵ Letter from T. J. Hawkes to John Box, March 17 year unknown, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, page 26-7, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

⁴⁶ Letter from Ralph A. Parrish to John Box, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 136, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴⁷ Letter from Andy J. Sweeney to John Box, 23 March 1926. John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, Page 50. Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

importation of further Mexican farmers” would “lower the standard of living” and “lower wages and... be detrimental to the best interests of the entire State.”⁴⁸

An Anglo in Houston claimed that “both white and negro labor are suffering very much and even the white girls to the extent of at least 70% have been put out of employment in all of the larger stores and all laundries in San Antonio.”⁴⁹ San Antonio had become a hub for more industrial uses of Mexican immigrant labor and was considered “the Mexican capital of Texas.”⁵⁰ Another Anglo from a small town outside of Dallas said that immigration restriction would create “a greater demand for American labor and better prices to be paid.”⁵¹

An Anglo from Texarkana in North Texas summarized the issue, asking “I wonder what price [the Secretary of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce] thinks a man ought to get who toils 14 hrs. a day in the furrow – be he a Mexican or otherwise.” He went on to state that “it is too true that great industries have been built by cheap labor – one man make [sic] a million dollars and five thousand live as paupers.” This same

⁴⁸ Letter from George B. Terrell to John Box, 30 January 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 4, page 52, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴⁹ Letter from S. D. Matthews to John Box, 21 January 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, page 45, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

⁵⁰ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 42.

⁵¹ Letter from Curtis L. Salyer to John Box, 31 October 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 5, page 93, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Anglo was concerned that wages would end up being lowered for other, more skilled trades such as carpentry and plumbing.⁵²

An Anglo lawyer from Houston reported that Mexican labor “is holding down wages around these [saw] mills to an average of \$1.50 per day” and that “you can see a long line of Texas boys striving to obtain employment even at those prices.”⁵³

A steel worker from San Antonio complained that businesses used “the Mexican laborer as a means of lowering wages to where white people cannot compete,” and that they move to cities like San Antonio where “the wage scale and standard of living is slowly but surely brought down.”⁵⁴ Another middle class Anglo from Dallas, Texas complained that Mexican laborers “have supplanted the place of many a young white man – who reasonably expects a reasonable wage so he may become a good citizen and house-holder because they will work for a pittance and live in squalor.”⁵⁵

Small farmers all over Texas welcomed Box’s legislation as a way to continue to turn a profit in the face of rapid expansion of large cotton growing concerns. Some saw the entire effort for open immigration as a way for wealthy investors to increase their profit margins. One such person, an Anglo from San Antonio, claimed that “35% of [Texas farmers] are heavily mortgaged” because cotton land “sells for \$150 to \$200 an

⁵² Letter from C. E. Miles to John Box, 10 May 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 127, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵³ Letter from K. C. Barkley to John Garner and John Box, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 134, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵⁴ Letter from R. T. Glenn to John Box, 5 March 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 11, page 240-1, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵⁵ Letter from W.M. Bond to John Box, 11 November 1926, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, page 40, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

acre.” He estimated that most Texas farmers’ equity only reached about 40% of value, and that this distributed wealth to bankers and other investors not directly concerned with farming.⁵⁶ An Anglo farmer from Mercedes, near McAllen, Texas, stated: “Now the large companys [sic] and corporations or [sic] the ones who advocate the Mexican Labor as they can take some advantages...”⁵⁷ An Anglo farmer from Reagan County, Texas, outside of Odessa, calculated that “we need the Mexican labor just a little less every year” because of the end of sheep herding (due to barbed wire) and because of overproduction of cotton.⁵⁸

Occasionally the proprietor of a larger farm operation opposed massive Mexican immigration to Texas for the sake of the local working class. E. Clemens Horst, a farmer of 8,000 acres, supported Box because he argued that the importation of a large amount of immigrant labor for certain short periods of the year drove out native year-round workers.⁵⁹ While Horst owned a sizeable amount of land, it did not compare with the larger agribusiness companies like the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company.

Box also mentioned the antagonism that small farmers and Anglo laboring classes felt toward the influx of immigrant labor and produced examples of letters he received from his constituency. One farmer stated that “the influx of Mexicans into this State not

⁵⁶ Letter from William A. Black to John Box, 31 May 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, page 41, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵⁷ Letter from A. J. Hunt to John Box, 31 January 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 11, page 250, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵⁸ Letter from J. T. Gotcher to John Box, March 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 11, page 242, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵⁹ Letter from E. Clemens Horst to John Box, 27 February 1928, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 12, page 254, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

only tends to make the Mexicans peons, but it will drive the small landowners and the white tenant from the farms.”⁶⁰ An Anglo from Winfield, Texas, reported that “Mexicans are beginning to be felt in N.E. Texas by moving in large tenant farms, crowding out the white renters.”⁶¹ North Texas had not yet experienced the same large influx of Mexican laborers that farmers in the Rio Grande Valley were already becoming accustomed to.

Many working- and middle-class Anglos from the Rio Grande Valley saw the impact of the influx of labor firsthand. A county judge from Raymondville, TX, a small town outside of Brownsville, who also served ex-officio as school superintendent, mused that an influx of Mexican immigrants “force our native Mexicans out of work,” suggesting that new Mexican low wage labor was a repeated process that squeezed even relatively recently imported immigrant labor.⁶² Brownsville was fast becoming a central urban hub for Mexican immigrants that came to the Rio Grande Valley.

It was clear that Anglos expected to have overriding access to skilled labor positions. W. L. Strait, an official from Robstown, outside of Corpus Christi, complained that Mexican workers “have practically all the jobs, and many of them are working as skilled laborers.”⁶³ An Anglo worker echoed this sentiment, stating that restricting Mexican immigration “would be one of the greatest blessings to the white laboring man

⁶⁰ Letter from E. Clemens Horst to John Box, 27 February 1928, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 12, page 254, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

⁶¹ Letter from Belton W. Homer to John Box, 9 February 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 12, page 252, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁶² Letter from A. B. Crane to John Box, 10 March 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 9, page 176, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

⁶³ Letter from W. L. Strait to John Box, 9 February 1928, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers in John Box Correspondences, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 140, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

that could be brought about.”⁶⁴ An Anglo miner and mechanic, who had moved from Arizona to the Rio Grande Valley, complained that the “railroad shops on the border have fired all their white help possible and work Mexicans” and that “the corporations used the Mexicans to break strikes, and lower wages and force down the American standard of living.”⁶⁵ An Anglo who lived in Falfurrias, outside of Corpus Christi, stated that “the South Texas Chamber of Commerce propaganda is all bunk, there’s plenty of labor in this State to take care of all the crops raised and more, the idea is to flood the country with a lot of cheap labor.”⁶⁶ An Anglo working on the docks in Galveston claimed that cotton was actually being overproduced and that businesses were lying to congress when saying they would go bankrupt without an influx of workers, stating that “thousands of bales of cotton are being stored in all the available warehouses of Galveston the reason given is there is no market for it.”⁶⁷ Some argued that cheap labor did not enhance the prosperity of the country. As N. G. Heslep, an Anglo from Houston put it, “if cheap labor is such an advantage to a country why isn’t Mexico in a better condition today?”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Letter from W. S. Gordon to John Box, 30 January 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection Box 2 Folder 5, page 81, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁶⁵ Letter from R. L. Williams to John Box, 6 January 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 4, page 55, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁶⁶ Letter from Lindsey Lester to John Box, 12 February 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 6, page 123 Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁶⁷ Letter from Louis Peden to John Box, 26 February 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 133, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁶⁸ Letter from N. G. Heslep to John Box, 12 January 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 11, page 249, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Occasionally Anglo farmers were honest about the disadvantaged economic position of immigrant laborers. When John H. Davis, a farmer from Laredo, stated “we can not [sic] get a more desirable citizen to occupy the place that [Mexican labor] can occupy,” Chairman Johnson countered, asking “that is, a No. 2 place?”⁶⁹ Davis answered with the cold reality of the foundation of the capitalist system on peon labor, stating, “to occupy the place that somebody must occupy...”⁷⁰ In answering this way, Davis was asserting that the existence of a low wage laboring class was necessary to sustain agriculture.

Large farming concerns overwhelmingly opposed Box’s pending legislation. In general, capitalists represented by organizations like the Lower Rio Grande Valley Association stuck to a series of stock arguments for continued access to the cheap labor force. These arguments were that agriculture constantly faced a labor shortage as laborers left for the cities and other industries (wages were rarely factored into this analysis,) that agricultural labor in the Texas was too brutal for Anglos to tolerate, and that Mexicans were somehow genetically suited for agricultural work because they were unintelligent and “tractable.”⁷¹ Mexican immigrants were tractable, not for any pseudoscientific reason elaborated by eugenicists, but because they were in a position that afforded them little to no social capital, because of language differences, cultural differences, racism, and economic repression.

⁶⁹ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers: Hearings on H.J. Res. 271*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 1920, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/congcomp/getdoc?HEARING-ID=HRG-1920-IMN-0005> (accessed August 11, 2011): 88.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 46.

La Prensa was an important journalistic institution for the established Mexican-American community in San Antonio. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans turned to the newspaper to follow events in Mexico and Mexican-American organizations counted on the newspaper as a mouthpiece. The newspaper was a proponent for Mexican culture and society.⁷² In an article published in *La Prensa* in 1930, Arthur Merkel discussed an editorial published in the *Washington Post* that advised that immigration quotas should not be arbitrarily created but rather developed as the result of a conference of agricultural firms of the Southwest. These were the sort of firms that fought hardest against Box's measure. The article related that the State Department feared a backlash in relations with Latin American countries if a quota was employed. Merkel also discussed the need for cheap labor of the agricultural firms of the Southwest, a typical refrain from such businesses.⁷³

In another article in *La Prensa*, published February 11, 1930, the author described the Lower Rio Grande Valley Association, Inc, established in San Benito, Texas to protect Mexican workers in the Rio Grande Valley from new immigration laws. The article listed some of the prominent members: John Shary, President of the Texas Citrus Fruit Growers Exchange from Mission, Texas, J. C. Paxton, director of the telephone company from McAllen, Texas, Tom Hester from Donna, Texas, A. B. Waldron, Executive Manager of the railroad from Missouri to the Pacific Valley from Harlingen, Texas, Frank C. Ludden from San Benito, manager of the Central Valley Power and

⁷² Nora E. Ríos McMillan, "LA PRENSA," Handbook of Texas Online, published by the Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eel03> (accessed September 12, 2011).

⁷³ "La Restricción a la Inmigración Mexicana," 23 January 1930 in Newspaper clippings, 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 1 Folder 22, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Light Company.⁷⁴ The organization was not a grassroots movement created for the benefit of immigrants but by capitalists such as those represented by the Texas Farm Bureau Cotton Association to protect a labor supply.

That Texas had just recently been a part of Mexico was a fact that helped large farmers argue against the “Box Bill.” A member of the Texas Cattle Raisers’ Association interestingly argued that agribusiness firms should be granted unlimited access to Mexican labor because “Mexicans lived in Texas before white men came there... We are asking you to give us nothing more than what we have had through all the years of the past, to enable us to take care of a great productive need which, without the Mexicans, will not be filled at all.”⁷⁵ When asked why farmers do not pay their laborers a higher wage to keep them from going to the cities, he said that “it is not the wage question alone, but it is the bright lights that take them to the city.”⁷⁶ He would also not answer how many hours of picking it would take in order for an average laborer to make \$3 a day at the rate of \$1 per 100 pounds of cotton.⁷⁷ According to the farmer, the head tax and literacy requirements that applied to immigrant labor on February 5, 1917, were avoided through emergency war measures until the 1920 immigration hearings. He admitted that the labor was “cheap labor” and went on to state that every industry that relied on such labor should be granted it and that “the productive interests of the country deserve first

⁷⁴ “Defienden a los Braceros Mexicanos los Delegados de la Ciudad de El Paso,” Newspaper Clippings, 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 1 Folder 22, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁷⁵ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁷ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 43.

consideration.”⁷⁸ Miller believed that this biggest problem his industry faced was dealing with higher wages in the city.⁷⁹

Fred Roberts, a cotton farmer from Corpus Christi, complained that governmental agencies hindered him from putting together his labor force. Roberts approached the government employment agency requesting laborers and was told that they did not have any and that they usually could furnish 15. Roberts had permission for 85 from an official with the immigration service in San Antonio, which the official with the government employment agency tried to get denied.⁸⁰ Roberts admitted to the immigration committee that he went through a private agent who he paid, along with railroads (at the cost of 2 cents per mile), in order to receive 115 laborers that he and the committee characterized as “wet backs.” Roberts believed that Mexican citizens should be allowed to enter and leave the United States at will.⁸¹

A farmer from Beaumont in East Texas, claiming ownership of 1,740 acres of land echoed many of the basic arguments and sentiments of advocates of open borders, decrying that “the average Texan or American man of the last 25 to 40 years is not inclined to buckle down to farm work” and that without an influx of labor, land would go to waste and standing crops would fall to ruin. He pointed out the rapid attempts at development of the region and “hundreds of thousands of cut-over pine lands lying idle for lack of development.” The farmer blamed the labor shortage on a mass influx to cities

⁷⁸ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 28-9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

due to higher wages and the amusements that cities offer.⁸² Even those who were anti-immigration agreed with such assessments, stating that Mexican workers “do not stop at the border but go to every state in the union.”⁸³ A representative of the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railroad Company based out of Beaumont, Texas, reiterated that there was not enough labor to meet productive capacity and that “cotton had to stay in the fields so long that it depreciated in value and some of it was low grade when picked.”⁸⁴

The Cotton States Protective League, another umbrella group that represented agriculturalists, based out of Dallas, warned that the “Box Bill” “would mean ruin for South Texas agriculturally and industrially” because it would only exacerbate labor shortages created by “the continuously increasing exodus of our Mexican labor to the North and East.”⁸⁵ A county judge from Willacy County, in the Rio Grande Valley and near the border, confirmed this, stating that Mexican laborers “go North into the big labor centers.”⁸⁶

Large cotton growing concerns also fed money and labor to surrounding and related industries, and thus those industries also opposed Box. A representative of an

⁸² Letter from C. L. Wallis to John Box, 23 January 1924, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Box 2 Folder 2, page 9, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

⁸³ Letter from J. E. Fuquay to John Box, 25 May 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, page 42, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁸⁴ Letter from J. A. Glen to John Box, 11 January 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 6, page 110, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁸⁵ Letter from W. B. Yeary to John Box, 9 November 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 4, page 67, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁸⁶ Letter from A. B. Crane to John Box, 10 March 1928, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 9, page 177, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

East Texas cooperage company complained that Box was under the sway of lobbyists representing unions and industries, and stated that farmers could not survive without the six to nine months in which Mexican laborers would cross the border to make a couple hundred extra dollars in order to return to Mexico. The representative went so far as to say that a majority of Texans agreed with his position and would be carefully watching the actions of congress and voting accordingly. As was typical of the argument of business in regard to labor, the representative went on to state that Anglos would not perform roadwork or other tasks necessary to build up the state's infrastructure.⁸⁷

A manufacturer of food products said there was a "need of immigrants to develop our wonderful resources," and that Texas could support a population increase of 5 million.⁸⁸ Professional organizations such as the Rotary Club of El Paso, opposed the "Box Bill" because it did "not carry out traditional immigration policy" and it created "a crisis in the commercial progress of the United States."⁸⁹

Judge Walter F. Timon of Nueces County (which includes Corpus Christi) repeated a typical argument of proponents of open immigration when he said "unless we can get that labor the clearing of the land is going to cease, the development of our country is going to cease, and that is the condition we are going to be confronted with."

Timon was not wrong. Mexican immigrants were building up the infrastructure and

⁸⁷ Letter from J. H. Powell to John Box, 27 January 1926, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Box 2 Folder 9, page 47, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

⁸⁸ Letter from Jule B. Smith to John Box, 1 December 1923, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Box 2 Folder 1, page 1, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

⁸⁹ Clipping from *The El Paso Times*, 8 January 1926, attached to a letter from William Branch to John Box, 11 January 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, page 32-3, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

allowing for the cultivation of previously-fallow lands. They also provided for the economic development by spending their wages. Timon also posited that Mexican labor would be welcome in North Texas and that “the entire people of Texas favor the incoming of Mexicans.”⁹⁰ Anglo business owners wanted Mexicans for their labor value, but generally Anglos did not welcome continuing immigration. In the Rio Grande Valley, though, Mexican immigrants were becoming a welcome part of the community.

C. A. Jones, the manager of the Freeport Sulphur Works, claimed that about 14% of his 700-person workforce came from Mexico. Freeport is about 180 miles Northeast of Corpus Christi. Additionally, Jones repeated the common complaint that Anglo labor was unwilling to do the work because of the sulphur fumes. The Sulphur Works paid both Mexican and Anglo labor \$3.60 for each 10 hour workday.⁹¹ Undesirable jobs such as this provided a space for Mexican immigrants to improve their wage levels and graduate from the lowest levels of farm labor, while allowing new immigrants to occupy their former positions.

Fred Roberts, a farmer from Corpus Christi who spoke before Johnson’s immigration committee in 1920, stated that Mexican farm labor was “not in competition with American Federation of Labor; they are doing work that no one else in the world will do.”⁹² Roberts further stated that closing the border and enforcing immigration restriction would put his farm out of business.⁹³

⁹⁰ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 75.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁹² House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 63.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

Box summarized what agriculturalists like those represented by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Association wanted from immigration law: removing the literacy test, the head tax, and contract labor prohibitions. Box believed that agricultural companies disliked the literacy test because they wanted to recruit the uneducated, who could be more easily controlled. Eliminating the head tax would constitute the relief of a business expense for them, and these businesses did not want to have to create and honor contracts with their employees.⁹⁴

Chambers of Commerce naturally represented their business constituencies, and a member of the Dilley Chamber of Commerce in the Rio Grande Valley proposed a solution to the immigration question that would have undoubtedly been considered peonage, by suggesting that “a rider should be attached to the ‘Box Bill’ to allow supervised Mexican workers to stay on farms,” adding that “they should be monitored.” He, like many business owners, decried his lack of labor, stating that “the loss to Frio County this year due to scarcity of labor costs us at least \$200,000” and that “agriculture is losing its labor to the industries...”⁹⁵ The representatives of the Chamber of Commerce in Port Arthur, Texas echoed that “these laborers were of vital importance in

⁹⁴ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Imported Pauper Labor and Serfdom in America*, 6.

⁹⁵ Clipping, letter from W. T. McClean to Earle Mayfield, in a letter from Earle Mayfield to John Box, 31 December 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 5, page 83, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

the gathering of our cotton crop,⁹⁶ while R. H. Smith, Secretary of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce also disapproved of the “Box Bill.”⁹⁷

The Beeville Chamber of Commerce invited Box and other restrictionist congressmen to a conference in Austin to meet farmers who needed Mexican labor in their operations. Beeville is a town deep in the Rio Grande Valley close to the Mexican border. The Secretary of the Beeville Chamber of Commerce wanted restrictionists to meet “the President of the Agricultural Organization in this county... who is himself an actual dirt farmer, desired Mexican agricultural laborers to enter this state” and that “we will have actual dirt farmers there for the purpose of discussing the proposition from their angle.”⁹⁸ Box did not attend and the meeting was called off “because very few, if any, Texas Members of Congress had signified their intention to be present.”⁹⁹

There were Anglo progressive groups who opposed the “Box Bill” strictly due to Box’s racist invective, and who also struck at the racist roots of immigration regulation. The Pan American Round Table, a women’s organization in San Antonio that took in refugees from the Mexican Revolution, strongly rebuked Box’s stance, stating that in regard to immigration, he “spoke in a manner not befitting a congressman.” Florence

⁹⁶ Letter from Al Burge to John Box, 7 January 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 5, page 95, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁹⁷ Letter from C. E. Miles to John Box, 10 May 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 127, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁹⁸ Letter from I. F. Cherry to John Box and Eugene Black, 20 April 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 5, page 99, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁹⁹ Letter from Eugene Black to John Box, 20 April 1927, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 5, Page 100, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Griswold, the organization's founder, went on to state that "the Mexican has always been an asset and never proven a menace" and that "the same can't be said of Europeans."¹⁰⁰

A Spanish-language article published on June 23, 1930, entitled "*La Restricción a la Inmigración Mexicana*" discussed the committee hearings on immigration. The author determined that Secretary of Labor James J. Davis would publically support the anti-immigration measures, knowing that the bills would pass the Senate. The author stated that Davis would recognize that large industrial and agricultural firms would suffer without Mexican labor and noted that President Hoover himself was opposed to such quotas.¹⁰¹ The article went on to state that other nations of the Western Hemisphere would react poorly to any sort of quotas of their citizens. The author stated that Pascual Ortiz Rubio, the incoming president of Mexico, saw high levels of emigration from Mexico as a serious threat to the rebuilding of the country in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. The article blamed the massive migrations on a lack of capital investment due to the radicalism of the Querétaro constitution, particularly articles 27 and 123. These two articles nationalized all land and water in Mexico and provided for certain labor rights. According to the conservative author of the article, enforcement of those sections of the Mexican Constitution led to an increase in unemployment in the industrial and agricultural sectors, and that if the Mexican government encouraged investment, the

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Florence T. Griswold to John Box, 2 February 1926, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Box 2 Folder 3, page 48, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

¹⁰¹ "La Restricción a la Inmigración Mexicana," Newspaper Clippings, 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 1 Folder 22, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Mexican workforce would return to Mexico and there would be no push to restrict Mexican immigration to the United States.¹⁰²

John Box, the man behind these contentious debates, was a problematic figure. While his language and invective was frequently troubling, such as when he compared Mexican immigrant laborers to “superior white people of Mexico,” his analysis of American economic history and capitalism’s reliance on low wage labor was compelling.¹⁰³ Box repeatedly asserted the lack of freedom of movement that Mexican laborers suffered at the hands of farm owners and supervisors. A farmer from Corpus Christi, testified before Johnson’s committee of the various methods that employers would use to tie laborers to their land, among which was taking their shoes and pants and giving them back in the morning. Roberts also explained that he would hire people to stand watch overnight to ensure that nobody left the property.¹⁰⁴

Box occasionally delivered racist rhetoric about the “undesirability” of Mexicans but also decried the economic system that relied on peon labor and presented a statement to the Immigration Committee to that effect. Anglos speaking before the U.S. House of Representatives referred to Mexicans as “dirty”, “filthy”, and “lazy” during congressional hearings that characterized Mexican immigrants in the very title of the hearings as

¹⁰² “La Restricción a la Inmigración Mexicana,” Newspaper Clippings, 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 1 Folder 22, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

¹⁰³ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings on H.R. 8523, H.R. 8530, H.R. 8702*, 71st Cong., 2nd sess., 1930, 590-1.

¹⁰⁴ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 59.

“illiterate!”¹⁰⁵ Box entered letters into the records of such hearings that contained racist language in order to have others speak for him. In one case, he placed before the committee a letter characterizing Mexicans as “the most worthless of all” “low-type foreigners.”¹⁰⁶

In his statement, Box criticized slavery of Africans in America without commenting on the humanitarian aspect of it. Instead, he noted how slavery had complicated the ratification of the Constitution, brought social discord, and caused the Civil War. He also argued that slavery led to ongoing wage slavery systems.¹⁰⁷ Box pointed out that the Dillingham Commission investigated peonage among immigrants and found that employers participated in the practice in every state but Oklahoma and Connecticut.¹⁰⁸ In fact, slave owning Anglos who arrived in Texas decades earlier began to hold anti-Mexican sentiment “based on the belief that peons imperiled the institution of slavery.”¹⁰⁹ A former sugar beet farm operator inadvertently lent support to Box when he stated before the immigration committee that all such businesses were held accountable to the federal government in tracking and keeping their labor, at which point Box asked how such responsibility would be enforced. This line of questioning led another member of the committee to ask whether or not this would create a system of

¹⁰⁵ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Imported Pauper Labor and Serfdom*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 105.

peonage.¹¹⁰ Box compared Mexican immigrant workers to slaves in that their mobility was prevented by their employers. He referenced orders from the Secretary of Labor in 1918 to the effect that “aliens... are allowed to enter temporarily upon the understanding that they will engage in none other than agricultural labor; and any who... abandon employment of that kind... shall be promptly arrested and deported to the country whence they came.”¹¹¹

Box was naïve in his analysis of the immigration question, even though he recognized that “to effectively administer any law which confines [immigrants] to labor, to specific kinds of labor, or to the service of certain classes of employers, would require a vast and expensively organized force to check and follow them up, as they come in tens or hundreds of thousands, and scatter throughout the interior.”¹¹² What Box failed to recognize was that agribusinesses already were building a system of controls to more effectively limit the mobility and wages of their workforce, and they were employing the state and federal government to assist them in this effort.¹¹³ Box took his argument further, stating that “if such supervision be maintained, it will be in support of a great

¹¹⁰ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 25.

¹¹¹ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Imported Pauper Labor*, 6.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ For an in-depth look at government involvement in agricultural labor controls, see David Montejano’s *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), <http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/2027/heb.00601> (accessed August 11, 2011): 197-219.

system of serfdom, with immigrants or aliens as its immediate victims.”¹¹⁴ Such a system of serfdom was already being developed and enhanced all across Texas.¹¹⁵

An agribusiness representative illustrated clearly the lengths to which he would be willing to go to keep his easily-exploited labor force.

*In case the [Box] Bill became a law we would suggest that an Agricultural Rider be attached permitting the entrance of Mexican laborers into the harvest fields of Texas during seasons when needed; that these laborers be under the strict supervision of the Immigration officials and that each farmer be responsible to the Immigration Service for the return of these Mexican laborers, and that a limit be set on their stay on American soil, or be permitted to shift from one scene of agricultural activity to the other by proper transfer of authority directed by the Immigration officials.*¹¹⁶

This solution would have constituted captive forced labor regulated and consented to by the Federal government. Capitalists, such as those represented by the Cotton Association of Texas, wanted Mexican labor and were willing to create whatever monstrous regulatory mechanism to preserve it. In their desperate attempts to defend the established system of economic exploitation, they aroused a nascent Mexican-American civil rights movement. Ironically, because Anglos distinguished little between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, this movement would evolve to serve as an aid to both groups. At the same time, then, Mexican immigrants were resented by Anglo, African-American, and Mexican-American labor. Throughout the 1920s approximately 25,000 Mexican

¹¹⁴ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Imported Pauper Labor*, 18.

¹¹⁵ For more information on the system of controls established by agriculturalists to contain their Mexican immigrant workforce, see Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*.

¹¹⁶ Letter from W. T. McClean to Earle Mayfield, enclosed in a letter from Earle Mayfield to John Box, 28 December 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 5, page 83, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

immigrants entered the country, increasing competition for jobs, reducing wage rates, and serving as strikebreakers.¹¹⁷

Box recognized that administrative controls were useless without enforcement, which was not only a logistical impossibility, but in many cases were ignored by the authorities charged with enforcement.¹¹⁸ The United States Immigration Service, the Chamber of Commerce of Calexico, and the Associated Labor Bureau of Imperial Valley of California set up a “gentleman’s agreement” that was a sort of circumvention of poll tax and literacy laws that allowed farm interests in the Imperial Valley to continue efficient operation of their farms.¹¹⁹ The United States Immigration Service made a deal whereby incoming immigrant workers would be put on a payment plan to pay \$3 per week in order to pay back the \$18 entrance fee to a local bank and would be issued a booklet containing their payment information.¹²⁰ The purpose of the booklet was manifold: it was a form of control over the workforce that established whether or not they were “legal” and it would stave off Border Patrol agents who were zealously expelling immigrants. The scheme was thought up by I. F. Wixon, chief supervisor of the United States Immigration Service in response to new Border Patrol personnel in the area who began massive deportations.¹²¹ Imperial Valley farmers financed the operation and the

¹¹⁷ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 69.

¹¹⁸ *Cong. Rec.*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., 1926, “Every Substantial Purpose of the Immigration Laws is Defeated by this Agreement”, Speech of Hon. John C. Box of Texas, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 28, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

payment plans were administered by local banks.¹²² Under the plan, Mexican immigrants would register with a local Chamber of Commerce that would issue them a “registration card.”¹²³ When the \$18 fee was paid, the immigrants would be taken to a border station and be allowed to remain in the United States. Farm operators argued that, by using the plan, there would be more compliance than normal, indicating that normalcy involved regular non-compliance with regulations.¹²⁴

Box blamed the United States Department of Labor and specifically Commissioner General Harry Hull and Secretary of Labor James J. Davis for lending support to such a plan, which technically violated the law at the time. The Immigration Restriction League, a eugenics association that had Albert Johnson as its President, sent a letter to Hull and Davis asking if the “gentleman’s agreement” did exist and if Davis defended the system. Box called this nothing less than “disregard of the deportation laws in the interest of law violators.” He was frustrated that the Department of Labor, the sole office in charge of enforcing immigration law, was creating a system to avoid it. He argued that any official that would neglect their duties in this way would also perform other malfeasance.¹²⁵

Box read the violated sections of the immigration law at the time (passed in 1917) into the Congressional Record in order to shame the Department of Labor. He pointed out

¹²² *Cong. Rec.*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., 1926, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, pages 28-29, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

¹²³ *Cong. Rec.*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., 1926, “A “Gentlemen’s Agreement” Not to Deport Smuggled-In Alien Mexicans”, 29.

¹²⁴ *Cong. Rec.*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., 1926, “Every Substantial Purpose of the Immigration Laws is Defeated by this Agreement”, 28.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

that immigration law provided that immigrants who entered the United States “by land at any place other than one designated as a port of entry... or without inspection shall, upon the warrant of the Secretary of Labor, be taken into custody and deported.” The immigration act also provided that any immigrant inside the United States who had been found to have not undergone inspection was supposed to be deported as well.¹²⁶ Importantly, the Secretary of Labor was granted power to issue the warrant, complicating the issue.

Box wrote to Assistant Secretary of Labor Robe Carl White and Harry Hull informing them of the “gentlemen’s agreement” through a newspaper clipping and asking by what regulation such an agreement had been rendered. Box went on to ask whether or not similar agreements were arrived at on behalf of other groups of immigrants. He further asked that, if such a regulation could not be found, how violators of the law would be dealt with. Box also illustrated how the law was applied differentially, mentioning two large deportations in El Paso and San Antonio where the farmers did not have recourse to a “gentlemen’s agreement.” Hull replied to Box’s letter stating that he “can conceive of no way in which this plan does violence to the immigration law.” Box took issue with the fact that the “gentlemen’s agreement” threw aside the system of passports and visas that apply to every country and allowed immigrants to pay their fees to a commercial firm rather than to the government agency responsible. Box believed that the central tenet of the law was that “no immigrant of any nationality shall be admitted to the United States unless such immigrant shall present to the proper immigration official at the port of arrival an immigration visa duly issued and authenticated by American

¹²⁶ *Cong. Rec.*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., 1926, “A “Gentlemen’s Agreement” Not to Deport Smuggled-In Alien Mexicans”, 29.

consular officer” and that it was this tenet which was being ignored. He considered the “gentleman’s agreement” a reward for illegal entry into the United States, ignoring that employment agents were typically responsible for transporting immigrants to waiting farms.¹²⁷

By confronting the Department of Labor in this way, Box did a number of things. First, he reiterated his view of Mexican immigrant labor as undesirable peons who would undercut the wage scale and damage the fabric of society in the United States. More importantly, he showed the complicity of the government and agricultural capitalists like the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company in perpetuating the economic system of exploitation of Mexican immigrant labor. Box forced these businessmen to respond thoroughly, both by making arguments for the benefits of immigrant labor to the American economy and by justifying their use of such labor. It was in this context that early Mexican-American civil rights activists would make their case for full inclusion and equal rights.

¹²⁷ *Cong. Rec.*, 69th Cong., 1st sess., 1926, “A “Gentlemen’s Agreement” Not to Deport Smuggled-In Alien Mexicans”, 29.

CHAPTER II: The Defense of Mexican-American Identity on a National Stage and the Formation of LULAC

The “Box Bill’s” threat to the economic system that drove cotton production in Texas became an important catalyst for the formation of LULAC. Mexican-American leaders in the group took advantage of their access to a national forum to argue for improvement of their status in society. This, in turn, worked in the interests of agribusiness because ethnic divisions could be used to obscure the economic exploitation of the laboring class in general. Capitalists represented by Chambers of Commerce and Farm Bureaus protected their interests and favored immigration while Mexican-Americans began to fight effectively to influence public policy. In this case, the advancement of LULAC would find its foundation in the challenge to the economic exploitation of vast numbers of Mexican Immigrants. Historian Zaragosa Vargas explored the evolution of the relationship between civil rights and labor power that occurred from the Great Depression onward in his book *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, arguing that labor rights were integral to civil rights.¹

Mexican-American groups challenged discrimination with the aim of improving their standing in society throughout Texas. The *Order Knights of America* (OKA), founded in 1927, was a social organization for Latinos that preceded the *League of United Latin American Citizens* (LULAC), formed in 1929. Early in its formation LULAC and the groups that preceded it were able to provide arguments against Box’s

¹ Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican-American Workers in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

racism in order to bolster their ethnic identity on a national stage and to help coalesce the nascent Mexican-American civil rights effort. These groups also advocated for recently-arrived Mexican immigrants by defending Mexican ethnicity and opposing immigration restriction.¹ One of LULAC's first resolutions was to address the congressional Committee on Immigration formed to debate and discuss the "Box Bill."² The founders of LULAC illustrated how important they believed it was to defend themselves from Anglo racism and made this defense a keystone of the group's formation. LULAC was primarily interested in Mexican-Americans and took an oppositional stance toward recent immigrants. One of their goals early on was to become representatives for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans by gaining social recognition first but they would become antagonistic as anti-immigrant pressure increased throughout the Great Depression. They intended to "Americanize" their membership in order to better navigate Anglo society.³

The Order Knights was established in 1929 but had been coalescing from different San Antonio-based organizations such as the League of Loyal Americans and the *Order Sons of America* (OSA) for nine years previously.⁴ The Order Knights began as a splinter group from the OSA and took as its mission to "educate members about

¹ More information about these early groups can be found in Foley, *The White Scourge* and Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*.

² Resolution, presented by J. T. Canales to the Supreme Council and the Delegates of the various councils of the United Latin American Citizens' League, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³ For more about LULAC's relationship with Mexican immigrants, see Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*. LULAC found themselves in the uneasy position of defending their ethnicity while also valuing Anglo society.

⁴ Preface, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, M.C. Gonzalez Papers, Folder 1: Assorted Documents, page 3, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

rights and obligations as citizens or inhabitants of the United States.”⁵ The group was composed of small businessmen, professionals, and members of the Mexican middle class of San Antonio. This meant that the OKA was not a labor rights group but a civil rights group. The OKA was not concerned with bread and butter economic issues as much as social ones.

The *Order Sons of America* was formed in 1921 and had a more pro-labor mission in that it was not merely a civic group. The OSA was formed as a mutual aid society, a civic group, and a political organization. The OSA had chapters across Texas, but the San Antonio chapter would not become a part of LULAC and would not send a delegation to the Corpus Christi convention in 1929. In the end, LULAC would be formed in 1929 by a conglomeration of four organizations: the Corpus Christi council of the OSA, the Alice council of the OSA, the *Order Knights of America*, and the *Latin American Citizens League* from the Rio Grande Valley and Laredo.⁶

These social organizations were mostly comprised of semi-skilled, skilled, and professional workers, but they concerned themselves with the plight of Mexican agribusiness workers. Their newsletters estimated Mexican citizens to comprise 80% of cotton workers in 1929.⁷ These organizations had different designs for Mexican agricultural workers than did John Box and Anglos who thought along the same lines, but

⁵ “The Mexican Youth”, *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 2, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁶ Basic information about the group was obtained from Cynthia E. Orozco, “ORDER OF SONS OF AMERICA,” Handbook of Texas Online, published by the Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/veotu> (accessed July 11, 2011). For a more detailed look at the Order Sons of America, see Jeffrey T. Lambert’s “Decade of Change: Origins of a Mexican American Identity in Texas, 1910-1920” (master’s thesis, Texas State University, 2009).

⁷ “The Mexican Youth”, *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 2, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 2, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

they shared some of the same preconceptions. A newsletter published by Henry Cañamar of the OKA featured an article written by Manuel C. Gonzales, a World War I veteran who had become a prominent lawyer and civil rights advocate. The article portrayed Mexican agricultural workers as “constant and consistent breeders,” a sentiment that Box would have echoed. Gonzales additionally stated that Mexican agricultural workers had a “lack of economy” in an attempt to blame Mexican laborers for their own poverty by focusing on their inability to manage money rather than their poor wages.⁸ In this way, the group made sweeping statements of judgment similar to nativists but with the aim of improving the lot of the Mexican immigrant by defining their situation and considering solutions. The OKA differed from exclusionists like Box in that they worked to ameliorate the conditions of the Mexican agricultural worker rather than simply abandon them. So the Order Knights found themselves in a war to create an ethnic identity for Latinos that acknowledged redemption for farm workers, and their plan centered on education and money management.⁹ Further, the organization recognized that Anglo landowners would not concern themselves with Mexican workers as they would with Anglo workers.¹⁰

David Gutiérrez also explores the rift between Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans in *Walls and Mirrors*, stating that Mexican-Americans “began to chafe at the

⁸ “The Mexican Youth”, *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 2, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 3, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁹ “The Mexican Youth”, *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 2, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 2, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

¹⁰ “The Mexican Youth”, *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 2, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 3, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

thought that Americans were equating them with immigrants...”¹¹ Occasionally, Mexican-American civil rights figures would tout certain aspects that they believed the “white” race possessed, but they typically also emphasized an allegiance to their ethnic background. Whatever they felt about Mexican immigrants, it was these very immigrants who, by finding better wages in the United States, provided Mexican-American groups a national platform. While Mexican immigrants faced racism from Anglos, they faced classism from both groups, and it was their position in the economic hierarchy that provided a catalyst for negative stereotypes from Anglos and the Mexican-American middle class in Texas.

To a vast majority of Anglos, however, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were an undifferentiated mass.¹² This was a potentially threatening situation for Mexican-Americans, who, as Gutiérrez pointed out, did not want to be equated with “immigrants who, in many cases, had just recently entered the United States from the interior of Mexico.”¹³ Mexican-Americans began to believe that these new immigrants were putting them in a more precarious social position in Texas society.¹⁴ Mexican immigrants, of course, were in the most tenuous position but some found methods to survive and sometimes thrive as they contributed their labor and spending.

¹¹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 74.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

What the OKA recognized above all was the constant resistance to Mexican-American inclusion on the part of Anglos.¹⁵ Mexican immigration was a popular topic in the late 1920s and, for this reason, the OKA felt Mexican immigrants would need to be given the tools for self reliance. The Order Knights were careful not to push for direct assistance from Anglos, but did make the argument that Mexican agricultural workers would bring about a greater standard of living for the population as a whole and greater producing power for the state if their social and economic conditions could be improved.¹⁶ Some Mexican immigrants *were* finding higher wages and methods to integrate economically and socially. Dr. José Luz Sáenz, one of the founders of the Order Knights and an educator, spoke about the differences between Latino children born in the United States in relation to their counterparts born in Mexico, and encouraged a sense of commonality among them all.¹⁷ Sáenz advocated for a sense of community in search of a common goal. The very fact that Dr. Sáenz felt the need to emphasize community indicates that there was turmoil between the two communities.

In 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was formed from the Order Knights of America and the League of Latin American Citizens to the

¹⁵ "Join Us", *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 3, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 7, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

¹⁶ "Join Us", *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 3, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 7, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

¹⁷ Alocución Pronunciada por el Sr. Prof. J. Luz Sáenz, Ante un Grupo de Maestros de Habla Inglesa en la Junior High School de Peñitas, Texas, la Tarde del 2 de Febrero de 1928. *Diogenés*, 18 February 1928, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, League of Latin American Citizens, 192-?, Box 1, Folder 3, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

exclusion of the Order Sons of America.¹⁸ One of the organization's resolutions was primarily concerned with the manner in which nativists and representatives from the American Federation of Labor were basing their support of the bill on a belief in Mexican ethnic inferiority.¹⁹ The organization sent a delegation consisting of their Honorary President and co-founder of LULAC Alonso S. Perales, General President and LULAC co-founder Ben Garza, and LULAC co-founder José Tomás (J.T.) Canales with the primary purpose of defending their ethnic identity from the assaults by Box and others.²⁰ Gutiérrez, in *Walls and Mirrors*, found that Alonso Perales and Ben Garza lent support to restrictive immigration measures, but the record shows that their testimony was intended to impede it.²¹ Gutiérrez claimed that leaders of LULAC “offered their organization’s qualified support of restrictive immigration legislation,” but LULAC was overwhelmingly pro-immigration and would expel a prominent LULAC leader over his anti-immigration stance. When Garza stated before the House Immigration Committee that he would approve of immigration restriction if the “Box bill’s” sponsors could prove “that Mexicans- that is Mexicans from Mexico- are a menace to the American working man because... they... lower wages,” he was doing so as a rhetorical device and not

¹⁸ Letter from Jose Tafolla to Oliver Douglas Weeks, 25 October 1929,, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Sons of America Papers, 1922-1929, Box1, Folder 1, page 1-2, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

¹⁹ Letter from Jose Tafolla to Oliver Douglas Weeks, 25 October 1929,, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Sons of America Papers, 1922-1929, Box1, Folder 1, page 1-2, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

²⁰ Resolution, presented by J. T. Canales to the Supreme Council and the Delegates of the various councils of the United Latin American Citizens’ League, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

²¹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 85-6.

making a claim about LULAC's position concerning immigration.²² He took it as obvious that the claim could not be proven, and that it was evident that business relied on Mexican labor. The ouster of Idar would make this clear.

Controversy appeared in the newly-formed group when it appeared before Johnson's immigration committee to respond to the "Box Bill." Manuel C. Gonzalez, former Vice President of the OKA and secretary of LULAC along with Clemente N. Idar, author of the OSA constitution and labor organizer in Laredo, contacted William Green, the President of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) stating that Perales and Canales did not have the right to speak for LULAC, though this was not the case.²³ This act indicated that Gonzalez and Idar were hesitant to have representatives from LULAC speak before the committee, possibly because Gonzalez and Idar wanted to appease the AFL, which had an interest in restricting Mexican immigration. Gonzalez and Idar were subsequently tried by LULAC. Congressman Albert Johnson, possibly with the aim of embarrassing the group, put forth the information about the telegram before the congressional committee and was asked by LULAC to remove references to the event from records of the committee hearings.²⁴ Additionally, the LULAC ruling council requested that Gonzalez and Idar make the same request for expunging the congressional record, along with a published and publicized apology in English and Spanish. LULAC

²² Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 85-6.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Resolution, presented by J. T. Canales to the Supreme Council and the Delegates of the various councils of the United Latin American Citizens' League, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 2, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

also resolved to put both members on trial within the organization.²⁵ Had Garza and Perales gone to Washington to support anti-immigration measures, this controversy would have had no basis.

At a meeting in San Diego, Texas, on February 16, 1930, the governing board of LULAC accused Gonzalez and Idar of hiding their affiliation with the AFL until the two were forced to reveal their stance regarding the immigration hearings. The accusation went so far as to claim that Gonzalez and Idar wished to make LULAC a subsidiary group of the AFL. When Canales gave Idar a chance to speak in his own defense, Idar used the opportunity to insult Canales. The resolution to repudiate Gonzalez and Idar passed 17 to 0 with 4 members abstaining. The four members abstaining did so because they were from Idar's district. After the telegram from Idar and Gonzalez was made part of the record of the immigration committee, William Green became implicated as the recipient, so Canales sent a telegram on behalf of LULAC that called Idar and Gonzalez "unscrupulous henchmen" of the AFL and "traitors."²⁶ As a Mexican-American, to be associated with Gompers's AFL was problematic, as Gompers had repeatedly obstructed unions with Mexican membership.²⁷

²⁵ Resolution, presented by J. T. Canales to the Supreme Council and the Delegates of the various councils of the United Latin American Citizens' League, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 3, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

²⁶ Resume of Proceedings, 16 February 1930, San Diego, TX, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

²⁷ Gomez-Quinonez, *Mexican American Labor*, 77.

The impeachment hearing records of Idar and Gonzalez mention the “Box Bill” as a catalyst for the hearings that would eventually lead to Idar and Gonzalez’s censure.²⁸ The telegram sent by Idar and Gonzalez to William Green, then President of the AFL, advised him that testimony by J. T. Canales should be disregarded because of his employment by Southern Texas Growers. Idar also claimed that Ben Garza, president of LULAC, was not given authority by the League to speak on their behalf at the committee. Idar and Gonzalez also claimed that Perales, whose residence was in Washington, D.C., was not given specific permission to speak on the matter before the immigration committee and that the subordinate leagues were not aware of the activity taking place in Washington. Idar and Gonzalez asked to make their claims known both before the committee and to Perales as well. The telegram became part of the committee records on page 218 of hearing No. 71, 2, 6, January 28 to 30, 1930.²⁹

The LULAC board served Idar and Gonzalez with articles of impeachment for contacting other organizations and for violating their oaths.³⁰ At the LULAC trial in Alice, Texas, on March 16, 1930, Gonzalez was not impeached because he complied with the request to repudiate his own previous telegram and issue a notice to the press to the same effect and so remained a member of the group.³¹ Idar did not appear to answer to

²⁸ Resume of Proceedings, 16 February 1930, San Diego, TX, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

²⁹ Statement of Facts. Charges of Impeachment of M.C. Gonzales. Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ In the Matter of the Charges Filed by Alonso S. Perales against M.C. Gonzales. Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

the charges or repudiate the telegram and so he was expelled from LULAC and barred from readmission.³²

Idar had always been primarily a labor organizer. He had formed unions across Texas and Mexico, and had helped Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles to organize workers.³³ Idar had also articulated the intricacies of race and class in his appearances at the conferences of the Texas Federation of Labor, repeatedly warning of the consequences of the incoming Mexican immigrant labor force.³⁴ Idar spoke at length before the federation, addressing the high levels of Mexican unemployment in Houston and the attempts by the Obregon administration in Mexico to limit the numbers of workers crossing into Texas. Idar spoke of how “a large influx of Mexican immigration would eventually leave large numbers of them stranded in different sections of the United States, without money, friends or employment...” and that these workers “blame employment agents all over the State of Texas for much of the suffering among them and misleading information given to them...”³⁵ Idar also chastised another member of the federation for making a racist remark about ethnic Mexicans, playing a role that Garza,

³² In the Matter of the Charges Filed by Alonso S. Perales against C.M. Idar. Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

³³ Cynthia E. Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," Handbook of Texas Online, published by the Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffd04> (accessed July 11, 2011).

³⁴ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention*, Texas State Federation of Labor, (Cleburne, TX: Littlefield Fund, 1924), pages 34-5, Offsite Library Storage from Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

³⁵ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention*, Texas State Federation of Labor, (Cleburne, TX: Littlefield Fund, 1924), pages 34-5, Offsite Library Storage from Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

Perales, and Canales would take on during the Immigration Commission hearings.³⁶ Idar continued and pointed out that Americans “are a cosmopolitan people, drawn from the vast expanse of the civilized world to this country to do their part in the upbuilding of this nation...”³⁷

To Idar and many others involved through the Texas Federation of Labor in the labor movement, the goal was to limit new waves of Mexican labor to protect Anglo and Mexican-American labor. A resolution was passed stating that “immigration from the Republic of Mexico into the United states... affects the general welfare and economic condition of native American wage-earners and Mexican bona-fide residents” and that “systematic efforts are being made... by large industrial, agricultural and business interests to promote a larger and less restricted immigration of cheap labor from Mexico to the continued detriment and lowering of the standardized wage-earning and living conditions that American labor in general seeks to maintain in this country for all kinds of workers.”³⁸ By sending delegates to fight the “Box Bill,” LULAC forced Idar either to change his stance toward labor, which he could not politically do, or to distance himself from the organization. Idar chose the latter.

Manuel C. Gonzales’s involvement in the Immigration Committee telegram incident is more difficult to understand. He was not involved in the labor movement like Idar. It seems likely that he would have supported the decision to send Canales, Garza,

³⁶ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Convention*, Texas State Federation of Labor, (Cleburne, TX: Littlefield Fund, 1925), pages 25-6, Offsite Library Storage from Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Convention*, Texas State Federation of Labor, (Cleburne, TX: Littlefield Fund, 1925), page 33, Offsite Library Storage from Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

and Perales to Washington on behalf of LULAC. Addressing nativism, Gonzales had used his platform in the OKA newsletter to contradict the eugenics-based attacks on Latino ethnicity. Gonzales wrote an editorial in the OKA newsletter of January 1928 responding to a news article that reported on the finding of Sociologist Max Handman that “the problem of the Mexican [was] racial rather than environmental.” Gonzales mostly criticized Handman but agreed with the statement that “the Mexicans in their organizations for self-help often find themselves confronted with the opposition of the Americans when they come into contact with them.” Gonzales concluded his article by pointing out the small sample size of Handman’s study and by asserting that Handman had made sweeping generalizations that did not apply to everyone with a Latino background.³⁹

The LULAC trial of Manuel C. Gonzales took place in Alice, Texas on March 16, 1930. Gonzales avoided being expelled by following the punitive resolutions put forth by the LULAC Supreme Council at San Diego, Texas on February 16th, 1930 that required him to repudiate the telegram that he and Idar had sent earlier and by claiming that he would not have sent the telegram if he had known that Perales and Garza were speaking before the committee in order to defend their ethnicity.⁴⁰ Gonzales was eventually absolved of all guilt. When Idar was removed from LULAC, he lost his title of Honorary President and was barred from readmission into the League. In a letter from Canales to Professor Oliver Douglas Weeks, who was researching LULAC at the time,

³⁹ “Join Us”, *OKA News*, Volume 1, No. 3, 1927, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Order Knights of America Papers, Box1, Folder 2, page 7, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴⁰ In the Matter of the Charges Filed by Alonso S. Perales against M.C. Gonzales. Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Canales wrote that Idar and Gonzales were traitors and he sent a copy of the resolution to John Nance Garner, a powerful member of the House of Representatives who would become Vice President under FDR. Canales also told Weeks that he had told the committee to force Idar to retract the insults that he had thrown at Canales because “otherwise my friends would have beaten him to a pulp.” Canales went on to say that Idar left “without saying a word, like a whipped dog.” He emphasized that the expulsion of Idar was also a rejection of the AFL’s influence in the League.⁴¹

Perales was consistent with LULAC’s vision in article 7 of its constitution that stated that LULAC members would “solemnly declare for now and for ever [sic] to maintain a respectful and sincere veneration for our racial origin, and we pride ourselves in it.”⁴² Perales wrote a series of articles that appeared in the newspaper *La Prensa*, Ignacio Lozano’s notable San Antonio-based Spanish-language newspaper. Published on September 4, 1929, it was entitled “The Unification of the Mexican-Americans” and detailed the goals of LULAC.⁴³ LULAC’s constitution specifically makes clear that the League did not have as its purpose to Americanize Mexican citizens located in Texas, but that, by improving the conditions of Latinos with United States citizenship, they would be able to help Mexican citizens in Texas.⁴⁴ LULAC was opposed to direct involvement of non-citizen immigrant workers but had a paternalistic aim of improving their

⁴¹ Letter from J.T. Canales to Oliver Douglas Weeks, 18 February 1930, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, LULAC Correspondence, minutes, resolutions, 1929-30, Box 1, Folder 6, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴² Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales, "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part I" from *La Prensa*, 4 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 2, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴³ Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales, "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part I" from *La Prensa*, 4 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

conditions. Perales quoted a prior article in *La Prensa* that was published in May of 1922 that discussed the idea that Mexicans migrating to the United States could rely on those Latinos who had already arrived to instruct them on how to acclimate themselves to the country, but that those Latinos had been so discriminated against as to not have the power to do so either.⁴⁵ Perales was either unaware or disregarded the fact that Mexican immigrants were joining Mexican-American communities and helping to form ethnic enclaves, searching for higher wages, and otherwise improving their lot economically and socially throughout the Rio Grande Valley. According to Gutiérrez, in *Walls and Mirrors*, LULAC's leaders emphasized the American side of their Mexican-American identity in an attempt to become a progressive and enlightened leadership elite.

Although Gutiérrez, in *Walls and Mirrors*, stated that Mexican-Americans “concluded that the only way to stop... indiscriminate lumping of American citizens with newly arrived Mexican immigrants was to take a stand against continuing large-scale immigration from Mexico,” the vast majority of LULAC's leaders did not take that stance, and stated as much in front of Johnson's congressional committee. On the other hand, LULAC had chosen only to allow American citizens in its organization. Perales, in part three of his series of articles to *La Prensa* (this, published on September 6, 1929) addressed why LULAC as an organization chose not to allow Mexican citizens as members. The main impediment was seen to be the impracticality of such an organization, as Americans of Mexican origin already constituted a distinct cultural group with aims of becoming ideal United States citizens as opposed to Mexican citizens, who

⁴⁵ Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales, "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part I" from *La Prensa*, 4 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 5, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

Perales saw as a group that had no interest in “Americanizing.”⁴⁶ Perales went on to state that the reason for this was that many Mexican citizens saw no point in becoming Americans because of how poorly they were treated by Anglos regardless of their actual citizenship.⁴⁷ *Walls and Mirrors* describes the tumultuous consequences of the decision to exclude Mexican citizens and the strategic political justifications for doing so.⁴⁸ Many LULAC members’ family members were not American citizens, so it was a difficult decision to exclude them. LULAC’s leaders desired to create a group that could better fight for Mexican-Americans and, I argue, Mexican immigrant rights.

Part four of Perales’s series of articles, published in *La Prensa* on September 7, 1929, discussed the intellectual preparedness required for Americans of Mexican descent.⁴⁹ He encouraged them to learn the political and economic history of the United States and to also learn to specialize in a trade.⁵⁰ In part five, published in *La Prensa* on September 9, 1929, Perales discussed the importance of voting with a purpose to elect leaders who will work with Latinos.⁵¹ Alonso Perales was familiar with the United

⁴⁶ Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales, "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part III" from *La Prensa*, 6 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴⁷ Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales, "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part III" from *La Prensa*, 6 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁴⁸ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 82.

⁴⁹ Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales: "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part IV" from *La Prensa*, 7 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵⁰ Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales: "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part IV" from *La Prensa*, 7 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 2, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵¹ Transcript translations of articles by Alonso S. Perales: "The Unification of the Mexican-Americans: Part V" from *La Prensa*, 9 September 1929, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, page 1, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

States' diplomatic relationship with Latin America, having worked alongside U.S. delegations to various international conferences and as legal counsel in various commissions involving Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Paraguay.⁵²

On January 29, 1930, representatives from LULAC would have a chance to speak before Johnson's immigration committee to "refute charges of undesirability of Latin American citizens which have been made by sponsors of the proposed bills."⁵³ LULAC's representatives referred to themselves as Latin American citizens in order to differentiate themselves from newcomer Mexican immigrants, but there is no record of any member of their Anglo audience acknowledging a difference between immigrants and Mexican-Americans. The first to speak before the committee was J. T. Canales. Canales appealed to the deterministic and pseudoscientific beliefs of nativists and agricultural interests, claiming that the Rio Grande Valley featured such extreme climactic conditions that only those people whose ancestors had worked the land for "a thousand years" would be acclimated and perform satisfactory work.⁵⁴ This was a brilliant rhetorical move, as it employed the same sorts of geologically deterministic arguments that nativists and other "patriotic societies" had employed against Mexicans.

Canales attempted to distinguish Mexican-Americans from Mexican laborers on a racial basis in a manner similar to nativists. He testified that he was white and came from

⁵² Biography of Alonso S. Perales. LULAC Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Austin, TX.

⁵³ "Ben Garza Goes to Washington to Aid in Fight on Immigration Bills," Andres de Luna Collection, 1924-1955, Personal Papers, Correspondence and Records, 1929-1941, Box 1, Folder 8, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁵⁴ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings on H.R. 8523, H.R. 8530, H.R. 8702*, 71st Cong., 2nd sess., 1930, page 377, in Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, U.S. House of Representatives papers, Box 1, Folder 7, Louis Wilmot Collection, 1927-1976, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

“the Gothic type of men” who “did not mix with the Indians, because the Indians at that time were savages, like ours; whereas the Indians in the central part of Mexico were civilized.” He also stated that he came from people who “have blue eyes and brown.” He appealed to section four of the Treaty of Guadalupe in describing the dilemma that many Mexican landowners faced after the war with the United States. He argued that many Mexicans in that position fled into Mexico because they did not know that they could become American citizens, so they became people without a country.⁵⁵ According to Canales, people who had lived in the United States for ten to fifteen years were left without representation on either side of the border, and that border officials would supersede court decisions.⁵⁶ He also testified that some people would be taken across to Mexico while their families and property were in the United States, but that they would not be allowed to cross because they would be determined to become “a public charge.”⁵⁷

Canales described how industries and other agricultural interests transported Mexican farm workers from cotton fields in the Rio Grande Valley to other parts of the country, and it was here that Canales and Box found some measure of agreement, as both saw the practice as somewhat barbaric. Canales, an owner of a 30,000 acre cotton farm, commended Texas labor laws that kept Mexican laborers bound to valley cotton farms.⁵⁸ At the Canales farm, laborers were imported to replace the laborers taken by employment agencies to other parts of Texas. Canales argued that the people working at his farms that were taken to the North did not compete for jobs with Anglo workers until they were

⁵⁵ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 379.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

taken away. Canales also argued that the Texas-Mexico border was too vast to be effectively monitored.⁵⁹

Alonso S. Perales was called next and took it upon himself to defend the Mexican as a whole. Rather than make an appeal to whiteness, as Canales did, Perales stated that he “was as proud of my racial extraction as I am of my American citizenship.” Perales went head-to-head with many of the nativist arguments about Mexican inferiority. He discussed racism in Texas, saying “we have received very little encouragement to forge ahead and become useful American citizens. On the other hand, attempts have been made to keep us down.”⁶⁰ For Perales, the only justification for immigration restriction would be to protect American workers, but he believed that such competition did not really exist.⁶¹ Perales stated that, while the basis of the “Box Bill” was partly due to economic conditions, it was also “a desire on the part of the American citizens of Teutonic or northern extraction to just simply exclude any other people who do not belong to that extraction.”⁶² Perales also separated the idea of race from the idea of patriotism and informed the committee of the importance that LULAC placed on being loyal to American ideals of citizenship and he emphasized the importance of learning English for members of the organization.⁶³

Perales’s written statement to the committee challenged the pseudoscience of the eugenicists, by pointing to any lack of scientific evidence regarding American Indian

⁵⁹ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 385-6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 390.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 388.

races, either positive or negative. He made a point to use only evidence provided by ostensibly Anglo scientists in his written statement, mentioning one researcher's argument that the "aborigines" of Central Mexico displayed "architectural and engineering monuments revealing... inventive genius and mechanical skill to prove them a people apart from, and above in culture, the roving Redmen of the North."⁶⁴ Perales also referenced contemporary researcher Carlton Beals' conclusion that the Mestizo "is a type that promises ultimately to be more tenacious, progressive, and peaceful than the purely Latin races, and more adaptable to modern civilization than the pure Indian."⁶⁵ So, Perales used pseudoscientific eugenics-based arguments as a defense for Mexicans.

Perales's written statement also drew from Frank Tannenbaum's book *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution* in describing the relationship between the Spanish and Mesoamerican civilizations at conquest. Perales astutely included a history of wage levels for Mexican laborers in Mexico to account for labor and economic conditions in Mexico over a long period of time. The different regions of Mexico varied somewhat in wage levels in the early 1920s. Agricultural workers in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Durango, Tabasco, Veracruz and Tamaulipas earned from about the equivalent of up to \$.33 to \$1 U.S. dollars per day.⁶⁶ In Sonora, Sinaloa, and Lower California, the upper end wage was the same but the minimal wage was the equivalent of \$.50 U.S. dollars. In Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, and Michoacan wages were the equivalent of between \$.33 and \$.50 U.S. dollars for adults. In Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas workers

⁶⁴ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 391.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 392.

earned between \$.25 and \$.50 per day. In the states of Guanajuato, Queretaro, Hidalgo, Mexico City, Morelos, Tlaxcala, and Puebla, farm laborers could earn the equivalent of up to \$1.25 U.S. dollars per day. Workers in the Yucatán Peninsula, Yucatán, Campeche, and Quintana Roo could earn the equivalent of \$2 U.S. dollars.⁶⁷ By quoting these figures, Perales was illustrating how Mexican immigrant workers were making a strategic economic decision that had costs and benefits, using the best information available to them.

Perales also referenced Mexican cultural norms as studied by contemporary researcher Lewis Spence in his book *Mexico of the Mexicans*, discussing the strong family ties and influence of the mother in Mexican families. Spence tellingly described the Mexican woman as possessing “natural charm and influence” that English women abandoned. Perales also referenced Spence’s assertion that Mexican culture emphasized courtesy. Spence also claimed that Mexico was in an evolutionary stage in which it could not compete with the major political powers of the world, but that it would evolve economically due its abundance of natural resources and geography. Spence compared the Mexican “race” to Anglo-Saxons, who “did not appear as a European power of any magnitude until the beginning of the sixteenth century.”⁶⁸

Perales also employed contemporary researcher Robert N. McLean’s book *That Mexican* to argue that Mexico was seen to have a special relationship with the United States by other Latin American countries. McLean argued that the Mexico-United States relationship would determine U.S. strength in the Western Hemisphere. McLean also

⁶⁷ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 392.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 393.

made an argument that has stood the test of time; namely, that the U.S. was a nation of immigrants and that it was essentially anti-American not to welcome them.⁶⁹

Another work Perales placed in the written record, a report to the International Reform Bureau in 1921, stated that “there are no two countries in the world so close from a geographical standpoint that are so far apart in sympathy, friendship, and mutual understanding as the American and Mexican people.” The same report estimated that up to 90 percent of the Mexican population in the Border States of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California belonged to the “laboring class.” Interestingly, Perales’ written statement contained a similar explanation for Hispanic racial weakness in the United States, namely, that the ignorance, lack of thrift, and improvidence of Mexicans were borne of centuries of bondage under the Spanish church and landowning elites.⁷⁰ These stereotypical traits did not take into account the constant struggle that characterized the lives of Mexican immigrants, some of whom were diligently and intelligently finding avenues to improve their pay and to become a viable part of communities throughout South Texas. Perales’ statement argued that the Mexican community was “ignored, treated as aliens, and often shown less consideration than the Indians, or even the Negro.” Being culturally isolated, many children born in America of Mexican parents did not consider themselves American citizens and did not return draft notices for that reason.⁷¹

Perales continued, saying that Spanish-speaking children excelled in school once they were taught English, and exceeded other American children at writing, drawing,

⁶⁹ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 394.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 395.

music, and “other artistic work.” Spanish-speaking children were also more easily disciplined in the classroom setting.⁷² In doing this he was attempting to create a stereotype that countered the belief of many Anglos that Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans did not perform well in an educational setting.

Perales mentioned a prescient argument presented in a book called *Your Mind in Action* written by Dr. Fred A. Moss in 1929 that states that “if tests were designed in terms of the civilization of the Negroes and Indians, the boasted superiority (of Anglos) might be changed to inferiority.” This argument is still debated today; namely, that the dominant culture creates a value system that favors itself and thus any attempt to reach social equality would need to recognize the bias of even presumably unbiased measures of ability.⁷³

Ben Garza, President of LULAC, asked to be called back before the Immigration Committee the next day, January 31, 1930.⁷⁴ He addressed how peoples’ ethnic backgrounds could become confounded with their citizenship, and that this confusion led American citizens of Mexican extraction to assume that they were not American citizens. Garza reiterated that Mexicans in the United States were not encouraged to excel in Anglo society.⁷⁵ Garza discussed the efforts of LULAC to educate Mexican people in the English language in order that they advance in American society. He went on to argue that a quota on Mexican citizens would be an economic disaster for Texas, a topic that I explore further in Chapter Three. Garza believed that Anglos would not perform the

⁷² House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 395.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 396.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 398-9.

agricultural labor and could not work in the climactic environment. Upon questioning, Garza discussed Corpus Christi's influx of 4,000 to 5,000 Mexican workers during harvest periods, and that LULAC did not attempt to reach these people. By the close of Garza's testimony, even nativist chairman Albert Johnson proclaimed that he was "doing a good work" in attempting to improve the social condition of Mexican-Americans.⁷⁶

Countries in the Western Hemisphere were excluded from quota provisions because agriculturalists and Mexican-Americans believed that Mexicans would not become permanent residents, but rather temporary agricultural workers that were deemed necessary by agricultural interests. Some in Congress thought that if quotas were imposed on Mexico they would have to be imposed on Canada as well. During debate over the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, the Senate voted against using quotas on immigrants from the Western Hemisphere 60 – 12. Mexicans who stayed behind in what later became the American Southwest and gained social prominence repeatedly made the argument that "white" was a reflection of social standing rather than the natural accident of having darker skin.⁷⁷ This argument was used to retain the right to vote for Mexicans who had stayed and become de facto American citizens.⁷⁸ Although Anglos generally viewed Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as an undifferentiated group, this was far from the case. Throughout the 1920s, Mexican-Americans began a process of distinguishing themselves from the Mexican immigrant community through the press (such as community newspapers) and civil rights groups, who insisted on only allowing United

⁷⁶ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere*, 403.

⁷⁷ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 115.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

States citizens. Still, the defense of their ethnicity was a valuable effort to coalesce the middle class Mexican-American community.⁷⁹

Defending the Spanish language itself was also a task taken on by LULAC representatives. Congressmen Box and Johnson's attacks on the Spanish language were countered by a commission of congressmen from the Southwest who had studied Mexican immigration. The author of a newspaper article about the commission described a response to Box and Johnson that the Spanish language had been spoken in the Southwest for a long time by upstanding members of the community. The article concluded by repeating that Spanish was an official language of New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona and that Spanish-speakers of the region were good citizens, some of whom fought and died in World War I.⁸⁰

Even nativist John Box's racism could not survive personal contact with those he desired to be left out of the United States. "In remarks I have made in discussing this on the floor of the House, I have undertaken to make it plain I am not reflecting on that court or on anybody I saw. They looked to me like a hardworking set of men." As an adjudicator he did not deport immigrants, stating "I did not find it in my heart to want to be harsh to those fellows." He summed up his personal feelings on the matter by saying, "It is not a feeling of unkindness to the people, but it is a question of whether we are getting people in here and making a sham of Americanizing them" and "of those who do

⁷⁹ Roberto R. Treviño, "Prensa y Patria: The Spanish-Language Press and the Biculturalization of the Tejano Middle Class, 1920-1940," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Nov 1991), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/970986> (accessed August 11, 2011): 451.

⁸⁰ "Defienden a los Braceros Mexicanos los Delegados de la Ciudad de El Paso," Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, LULAC Papers, Clippings, etc, Box 1, Folder 22, Benson Latin American Collection Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

come here, and are trying to be good Americans, that toward them I have not the slightest impulse of unkindness.”⁸¹

Many other Texans in regions with a growing Mexican-American population like the Rio Grande Valley who came into close contact with Mexican immigrants ultimately had a similar experience as Box and began to accept the group into their communities in limited ways. This level of acceptance was far from the norm, however. Anglos views of Mexican populations in their towns will be discussed in the next chapter. In any case, Box’s fear that a Mexican influx would weaken communities or lead to the downfall of “American” ideals was without merit, as these immigrant groups contributed economically and socially to the areas in which they lived.

LULAC’s early representatives defended their culture but shared some similarities with nativists. In asserting their social status they occasionally turned against recent immigrants and occasionally claimed “whiteness” for the benefits such a claim would confer. Like nativists, they valued “Americanization” and believed that immigrants were excluded from that process. They sought recognition from Anglo society for Mexican-Americans, sometimes at the expense of recently arrived immigrants and to establish a level of respectability in the dominant culture for people of their ethnic background.

⁸¹ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 311-312.

CHAPTER III: Mexican Immigrant Spending and the Economic Development of the Rio Grande Valley, 1910-1930

While Mexican-American members of LULAC were forging an identity that would bolster their civil rights movement for decades, Mexican immigrant laborers were helping contribute economically to South Texas communities through their consumer spending. In the process, a small minority were able to move up the economic ladder as they helped develop the region. While Mexican immigrants did not have the platform that LULAC or Congressman Box had with which to plead their case, they did find ways to survive and occasionally thrive in America. As Carey McWilliams noted as early as 1948, “South Texas was one of the first areas in the borderlands to develop a Mexican-American middle class.”¹

While the Mexican and Mexican-American populations of the Rio Grande Valley were hidden either by never being recognized by any administrative structure such as agents of the Census Bureau or by classifying themselves as “white”, the region still saw trending changes in macro-social and –economic indicators. One way to understand the vast growth from 1910 to 1930 is to look at the major trends explored by the United

¹ McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 87.

States Census Bureau.¹ The population of the region was 111,268 in 1910, 150,033 in 1920, and exploded to 285,417 by 1930. The urban population in 1910 considered towns with populations over 2,500 stood at 30.2% and increased to 41.8% by 1920 and had become the majority, 51.6% of the population by 1930. The foreign born Mexican population recognized by the Census was 31.3% in 1910, 33.6% in 1920 and possibly much more by 1930, but they were not required to provide their country of birth. The 69,241 people who self-identified as foreign born represented 24.2% of the population and it is safe to say that most of that number were from Mexico.²

Macroeconomic numbers provided by Census research shows how the Rio Grande Valley evolved over time. The average value of all farms in the Rio Grande Valley in 1910 was \$11,220, and \$19,857 in 1920. The value of all crops in 1910 was \$2,443,937, rose to \$15,559,122 in 1920 and hit \$218,724,668 by 1930. By 1930, 55% of all land in the Rio Grande Valley was being farmed. In 1910, 32.4% of all farms were farmed by tenants, of which 25.5% were sharecroppers. By 1930, tenancy had reached 52.4%, of which about half were sharecroppers.³

The Census Bureau, beginning in the 1920s, also attempted to calculate other factors of economic growth by looking at the amount spent in the material costs of

¹ All U.S. Census Bureau information was gathered via an internet application at socialexplorer.com. For all information concerning the 1910s, I used the following source: U.S. Census Bureau, Rio Grande Valley, 1910, Prepared by Social Explorer, <http://www.socialexplorer.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu> (accessed 7 Aug 2011). For all information concerning the 1920s, I used the following source: U.S. Census Bureau, Rio Grande Valley, 1920, Prepared by Social Explorer, <http://www.socialexplorer.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu> (accessed 7 Aug 2011). For all information regarding the 1930s, I used the following source: U.S. Census Bureau, Rio Grande Valley, 1930, Prepared by Social Explorer, <http://www.socialexplorer.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu> (accessed 7 Aug 2011).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

production, the amount of manufacturing plants, the value of manufactured goods. The total value of all farm machinery in the Rio Grande Valley in 1920 was \$3,946,376, which reached \$9,020,198 by 1930. There were 113 manufacturing establishments in 1920 and 195 by 1930. The total wages earned in manufacturing in the Rio Grande Valley in 1920 was \$544,294 and had exploded to \$1,552,962 by 1930. The value of manufacturing product output in 1920 was \$2,582,179 and reached \$11,721,421 by 1930. Value added by manufacturing in 1920 was \$1,246,605 and by 1930 was \$6,006,624.⁴

In 1930 the Census Bureau studied general wholesale sales figures. In 1930, net wholesale sales equaled \$76,916,175. Consumer spending was made possible partly from salaries and wages paid in wholesale establishments, which totaled \$3,771,218 for the Rio Grande Valley. The value of wholesale stocks on hand at the end of the year in 1930 was \$4,039,738,000, indicating the effects of massive production. There were 3,474 retail distribution stores in 1930, employing 7,123 full-time staff members. Net sales of retail distribution stores in 1930 equaled \$85,797,000. Retail stock at end of year in 1930 was only \$15,390,000 which was an indicator that the wholesale stores of goods would become a problem in the 1930s. The total full-time and part-time payroll of retail establishments in the Rio Grande Valley in 1930 was \$7,558,000.⁵

The large agribusiness concerns represented by Chambers of Commerce and Farm Bureaus that lobbied so forcefully against the “Box Bill” to retain the right to import masses of immigrant labor had many reasons for doing so. The most obvious was simply to have a cheap labor force. Almost as importantly, though, was having a repressed labor

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Rio Grande Valley, Prepared by Social Explorer.

⁵ Ibid.

force that would not have the social or political capital to fight to improve wages.

Another reason was to have a readily available labor force that could be brought in when needed and disposed of when finished. Tied in with all of these reasons was the goal of increasing production in order to drive out small farmers. The big growers accomplished this by increasing production which, in turn, would cause the value of the crop to sink.

Once the value of the crop dropped, small farmers were driven out. The problem with the approach of big growers was that more production demanded more productivity in order to realize profits.

In 1926, a group of bankers relieved the pressure by buying out cotton and putting it in long term storage and arranging with growers to grow 25% less of the crop in the coming year, thereby protecting the banker's investment. Some producers broke ranks, which meant that the decrease in production was only around 11 percent nationwide, which was a typical variance for a low-value year.⁶ From 1928 to 1932 cotton production expanded and the overproduction proved disastrous to growers. They eventually engaged in massive crop destruction through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration during the Great Depression in order to recover.⁷ Cotton producers were not alone. A similar economic cycle occurred with other goods.

⁶ Keith J. Volanto "Burying White Gold: The AAA Cotton Plow-Up Campaign in Texas" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 103, No. 3 (Jan., 2000), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30239222> (accessed August 11, 2011): 328.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 328-356.

A small cotton planter complained about the cost, saying “the price is inadequate and experts all seem to agree cotton production must be curtailed.”⁸ Regardless of what experts said, there were larger competitive forces at work. Even farmers who did not want to transform their operations to large scale cheap labor plantations were forced to do so by lower prices and competition. A small-scale cotton farmer in South Carolina compared Mexican peon labor to the slavery system just as Box had done, stating that “unless a plantation owner had enough money then to buy a large tract of very fertile land and to buy a large number of slaves, he could not produce cotton in competition with the rich, large-acreage and slaveholding plantation owners, any more than many now unable, like Mr. Chandler, to buy thousands of acres and get thousands of Mexican laborers can now compete successfully with the big large-scale cotton producers of the southwest.”⁹

Where once the land was worked by tenant farmers, large operations took over employing large numbers of Mexican immigrant labor until, by 1930, an observer realized that “there has been taking place in the last few years a pretty definite replacement of the American tenant-farmer by the Mexican.”¹⁰ The United States Department of Labor acted as an occasional labor recruiter and was responsible for an average of 160,000 job placements a month by 1920.¹¹

⁸ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply: Hearing on S.J. Res. 86*, 71st Cong., 2nd sess., 1930, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/congcomp/getdoc?HEARING-ID=HRG-1930-AFS-0001> (accessed August 11, 2011): 51.

⁹ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply*, 51.

¹⁰ Handman, “Economic Reasons,” 606.

¹¹ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 283.

Agricultural production increased across the board. According to sociologist Max Handman, writing in 1930, production increased for many agricultural products. From 1921 to 1926, lettuce production grew from 7,799,000 crates to 17,236,000 crates. From 1919 to 1926, bushels of onions increased from 14,548,000 to 20,625,000. From 1919 to 1926, cabbage production increased from 646,000 short tons to 999,000 short tons. From 1910 to 1926, beet production increased from 3,910,000 tons to 7,588,000 tons. Similar increases were seen for other agricultural products such as asparagus, oranges, lemons, grapefruit, cantaloupes, dried fruits and canned goods.¹² From 1920 to 1927, carloads of vegetables from the Lower Rio Grande Valley increased from 6.5 to 14.5 thousand tons.¹³

Albert Johnson, chairman of the House Committee on Immigration, noted that production cycles were self-reinforcing because increased production led to lower prices, which led to higher demand for labor, which necessitated increased production, which continually lowered prices. He stated “it is dangerous to encourage that [agricultural] section... to go ahead and increase the population of fruit and vegetables, even to the 40 per cent of car shipments that has been referred to.” He was concerned that further importation of labor would continue to exacerbate the problem, saying, “If we bring in more Mexican labor, at the rate the producers are going they will bring that up to 60 per cent.” He summed up the cycle as follows:

With all due respect to these very energetic people from that country, they are driving the game at the highest possible pressure. The supply will increase in quantity as they get more labor, and that will necessitate still more labor. In a year they might need 40,000 seasonal laborers from our sister Republic to the

¹² Handman, “Economic Reasons,” 604.

¹³ William T. Chambers. “Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas” *Economic Geography*, vol. 6, no. 4 (October 1930), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/140529> (accessed August 11, 2011): 367.

*south. If we limit it to 40,000 for one year, we might need 80,000 the next year on account of the increase in activity that would inevitably follow.*¹⁴

Senator McNary, Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, wanted to clarify Johnson's position and asked him, "You do not believe we should undertake any agricultural activities that our own people will not look after?" By "our people" he meant Anglos. Johnson replied, "I think we should not push this industry so fast."¹⁵

The increased output, though, amounted to a successful business model that pushed small farmers out. Johnson imagined a scenario by which he could alter the agricultural sector of the northeast by bringing 15,000 Chinese workers to Delaware to compete with local farmers to illustrate the impact of the new model to northern Senators. Another Senator amplified Johnson's example, saying "you would not only be in competition with American labor, American men and women, but you would actually put them out of business." A small farmer complained about losing money due "to the fact that the price of cotton is not sufficient to cover its cost of production. Give us a decent price for cotton..."¹⁶ A representative of the American Farm Bureau Federation argued that shifting to producing other goods aside from cotton and fruits and vegetables would create surpluses in those other goods too, ruling it out as an escape valve. Even so, they had changed their stance from anti- to pro-immigration from 1922 to 1933 because they began to recognize the changing nature of agricultural production.¹⁷

¹⁴ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply*, 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

Production levels for many agricultural products other than cotton were extremely high. An onion farmer described how talk of reducing production was unacceptable in the agricultural community, saying:

*The other day I heard an amusing thing from the first fellow I ever heard make the right kind of talk. He was in Alabama two or three years ago and he said that the only way to make farming pay was to curtail production. He advocated underproduction to raise prices, and the farmers kicked him out. The farmers would not stand for that kind of doctrine. It is the best economic doctrine that any man could preach, but I am not advocating it because it will not go in this country.*¹⁸

By 1930, overproduction of cotton was an accepted reality. Not only was the price low, but exports in general dropped by 300 million dollars. Foreign markets were drying up as stricter immigration controls began to be considered and enforced. An essay appearing in the San Antonio newspaper *La Prensa* in 1930 agreed with Congressman Box's estimate of the number of immigrants in the United States being somewhere around 3 million, and warned of dire consequences for both Mexico and the United States if that population remained without work.¹⁹ The article stated, almost threateningly, that masses of unemployed Mexican immigrants would constitute a "*peligro muy serio para la tranquilidad y el orden publico.*"²⁰ During the Great Depression, there were mass repatriation schemes to relocate the Mexican immigrant workforce, but for the decades leading up to the thirties, these farm workers were brought in both overtly and surreptitiously, and the government helped many stay.

¹⁸ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 130-131.

¹⁹ "El Cierre de una Válvula de Escape," *La Prensa*, May 15, 1930.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

To support such a quickly evolving and competitive system, many laborers were needed. The estimate in 1920 was that it would take from 250,000 to 300,000 laborers to handle the sugar beet crop.²¹ A representative of the United States Employment Service of the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that it required 300,000 people to bring in the Texas cotton crop in the early 1920s.²² By 1930, a member of the Federal Farm Board discussed how Mexican labor filled the need, stating “the people [Mexican immigrants] that have been performing this service are skilled people. They have acquired a skill through years of work at it.”²³ Skill was relevant, especially with farming sugar beets, because it directly determined output levels. The Federal Farm Board representative continued, stating that Mexican laborers “are able to perform the service largely on a piece basis where the individual wage is high but the unit cost is low, because they are able to perform and turn out a large amount of work.”²⁴ This Farm Board representative provided another aspect of the bigger picture when he said, “there is not only the problem of labor, but there is a problem of being able to furnish 120,000,000 people their fruit and vegetable supply at a price that they can afford to pay.”²⁵

Estimates on wages varied. A representative from the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, for example, gave a high estimate, stating that “the price of Mexican labor on

²¹ Senate Committee on Immigration, *Admission of Mexican Agricultural Laborers: Hearing for S.J. Res. 66*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 1920
<http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/congcomp/getdoc?HEARING-ID=HRG-1920-SIM-0001> (accessed August 11, 2011): 26.

²² *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention*, Texas State Federation of Labor, (Cleburne, TX: Littlefield Fund, 1926), 24-25 from Offsite Library Storage, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

²³ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply*, 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

the farms when I went to El Paso 26 years ago, was 75 cents and \$1 a day.” That would have been the rate in 1894. He continued, estimating that “now it is \$2.50 and \$3.25 a day.” He also alluded to the improvement in living conditions that they experienced over time: “the laborers are allowed to raise such temporary crops as they need in the way of garden produce for themselves around their houses. Most of them have adobe houses and all have wells. They are prosperous, contented, and we have very little trouble in getting our labor, but it is alien labor.”²⁶

A cotton farmer from Corpus Christi clarified the wages and expenditures of Mexican families who worked the cotton fields in the region. The father would earn \$20 weekly, with the children’s and women’s wages added to that based on poundage of cotton. Of this amount, \$10 to \$12 would be returned to the farm owner for commissary charges. On top of that charge, it would cost the worker \$30 for transportation fees for him and his family. As a result, it would usually take two weeks for a laborer to begin to earn money. By the end of the two month term, which was the typical term of employment, the family would net about \$120.²⁷ Another farmer estimated that laborers averaged \$1.50 to \$2.50 a day not counting board. Highway building earned \$4 a day.²⁸ According a study of agricultural work, the highest wage paid in the Rio Grande Valley was 35 cents an hour, and Anglo workers were sent away.²⁹ On the railroads, Mexican workers averaged 27 cents an hour.³⁰

²⁶ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 254.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90-92.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁹ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply*, 98.

Despite the low wages, hard work, and lack of representation by any union or elected representative, the view of Mexican immigrants as a powerless group is an oversimplification. Neither LULAC nor Box would have realized that Mexican workers were not just a lethargic mass willing to be exploited. While it is true that there was little recourse for the Mexican immigrant laborer in Anglo society, they did not tolerate every offense and organized in ways available to them. Agricultural workers did not just accept poor conditions. For example, one farmworker saw that the owner expected him to live in a former chicken coop, so he threatened to leave. The owner let him leave but called the local sheriff, who then sequestered the family and forced the costs of transportation out of them. The farmworker knew he had no voice in the matter, stating that “the authorities would only pay attention to him, and as they were in league with him they told me that if I didn’t pay they would take my wife and my little children to work.” The farmworker paid and left for urban areas.³¹ Mexican laborers were exploited, but they did leave farms if they were treated in too brutal a manner. As is generally true with the working class, they had little power as individuals but could fight their exploiters by deciding to leave farms where they were mistreated. Neil Foley discussed one technique Mexican immigrant laborers could use to protest poor conditions:

They nevertheless resisted the worst forms of abuse with their feet. Whenever work conditions became unendurable, they often simply walked away from the fields, or in the case of sharecroppers, jumped contract. As individuals Mexican had little bargaining power, but as a group they attempted to set limits on their exploitation. If one worker was mistreated, often an entire group of pickers would desert the farmer.³²

³⁰ Ibid., 34.

³¹ Gamio, *The Mexican Immigrant*, 151.

³² Foley, *The White Scourge*, 49.

Generally, though, Mexican workers dealt with difficult work conditions. There work was also seasonal. Agriculturalists attempted to argue early on that Mexican laborers returned to Mexico except for a small minority, but this was not always the case. One of nativists' main concerns (along with many Anglos) was of Mexican workers remaining in the United States and becoming a permanent part of American society. Box dismissed the agribusiness owners' assertions that only 5% of temporary workers stayed in the United States, placing the number at closer to 60%, and of those 60%, at least 10,691 were "at large" and 22,637 had exceeded their 6 month contract and were still employed.³³ The annual report of the Commissioner General of Immigration compiled in fiscal year 1920 showed that, out of the 50,852 admissions that year, 33,328 remained in the country, and 22,637 continued in the employ of their original contractor.³⁴ A representative of the Cattle Raisers' Association said that "some of them... desire to become permanent tenants, and they do become permanent tenants in my section and stay there."³⁵ Unlike Mexican-American organizations such as LULAC, Mexican immigrants did not make American citizenship a topic of importance. Very few ever became American citizens. Instead, they just attempted to stay. They sought avenues for improvement economically rather than through citizenship. There were a few reasons for this. First, citizenship could leave them without legal recourse, as they would no longer have their Mexican citizenship to seek help from Mexican officials and United States officials would generally not grant them rights in the first place. Second, they still had

³³ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Imported Pauper Labor and Serfdom in America*, 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-8.

³⁵ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 174.

strong ties to their home country and culture. Third, they were more concerned with survival than seeking legal recognition of citizenship.

Mexican immigrant laborers did not remain as unskilled laborers. They moved through society along various paths, some became sharecroppers, others left for nearby cities, and some found work in different industries. Researchers at the time, like Max Handman, realized that the Mexican immigrant community would become economically mobile beyond agricultural work.

*That the Mexican should drift into the industrial areas of Michigan from the Michigan beet-fields, or gradually drift down farther into the industrial region of Chicago and the Great Lakes and finally land in Pittsburgh, is perfectly intelligible in the light of our traditions and habits of mobility, into which the Mexicans will fall the more easily since they come here and live here under the status of migratory labor.*³⁶

Some laborers ventured north to work sugar beet farms in Michigan, which was demanding but better paying work and the close connection with the railroads led many to become involved in the railroad business. Many also made their way to cities and found other employment. According to a Texas onion farmer “a great many enterprises in the city use Mexicans, as truck drivers and people of that kind, and altogether they have taken away apparently the population that has drifted from the farm into the city.”³⁷ Laborers also found their way into the oil fields.³⁸ It is clear that many were not content to simply travel to cotton fields every year for harvest season and then return to Mexico with their meager pay when picking season ended.

³⁶ Handman, “Economic Reasons”, 608.

³⁷ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 123.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

Mexican laborers experienced a process of acclimation over time after arriving in the United States that the Mexican-Americans represented by LULAC had already undergone. A representative of the South Texas Chamber of Commerce described what he typically observed:

The unusual proposition is that they are easily exploited when they first come into the country, being scared, submissive, and ignorant, they tend to work in a dumb way until they learn better. Those who are really worth their salt, soon get wise and journey to the interior, where the wages are better in the industries employing unskilled labor. The others tend to settle in cities and towns of the Southwest, where many of them become an economic and social burden on the community. It is then necessary for the employers and exploiters of these Mexicans to get another lot of green ones to come into the Southwest. Here seems to be the real reason for the insatiable demand for more and more peon immigrants.³⁹

Though Anglos at the time supposed that Mexicans were genetically predisposed to arduous physical labor many were not but were still able to find a place in the United States economy. Mexican workers also moved to road paving jobs, where the stereotype that they worked better in the heat served them well in finding work.⁴⁰

Unlike other LULAC leaders whose parents had established roots in Mexican-American communities like San Antonio, Garza and Perales had very similar life narratives to some of the Mexican immigrants who came to the area. Additionally, prominent members of LULAC found ways to thrive economically in many of the same ways that Mexican immigrants would. Ben Garza, first President of LULAC, only achieved a sixth grade education, starting his career as a waiter before eventually opening an all-night restaurant in Corpus Christi that attracted the local middle class. It was in this social milieu that Garza became more civic-minded, joining the local Chamber of

³⁹ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply*, 115.

⁴⁰ Gamio, *The Mexican Immigrant*, 206.

Commerce and many other groups.⁴¹ Alonso S. Perales became an orphan at six years old but finished public school. He later served on various diplomatic missions and was vocal in his defense of Mexican culture.⁴² While Garza had improved his social situation by close contact with the local middle class, Perales used the educational system to improve his life.

Some Mexican immigrants were forced to abandon low-scale entrepreneurial enterprises before deciding to head to the U. S. Pablo Mares had started a small store in his home town before violence related the Mexican Revolution drove him out. He ended up passing through El Paso and working on the railroads.⁴³ Another worker Gamio interviewed between 1926 and 1927 left a railroad job for a nearby city to find less physically-demanding work, and after receiving help from various people ended up bouncing from job to job until he successfully became a cook at a restaurant.⁴⁴ The path from agricultural work to work on the railroads was fairly common. For example, one farmworker from who worked in a wheat field went to Topeka, the nearest city, and found work on a railroad.⁴⁵

As more Mexicans moved to urban areas and out of back-breaking field work, one observer noted that Mexicans were experiencing a “trend toward Americanization” that “is undesirable, it means loafing and a hunt for white-collar jobs.” In this case “loafing”

⁴¹ Cynthia E. Orozco, “GARZA, BERNARDO F.,” Handbook of Texas Online published by the Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fga85> (accessed August 23, 2011).

⁴² Cynthia E. Orozco, “PERALES, ALONSO S.,” Handbook of Texas Online published by the Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fpe56> (accessed August 23, 2011).

⁴³ Gamio, *The Mexican Immigrant*, 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

meant working jobs that did not require sun-up to sundown backbreaking labor in the hot sun. This same observer noted that “in the main it means a certain amount of mental alertness and the break-up to an appreciable extent of the village-Indian stolidity of the typical Mexican.”⁴⁶ This observer ignored the fact that Mexican immigrants had been an extremely mobile workforce, continually looking for different and better opportunities, in the same spirit that nativists always saw as a positive and particularly American trait. In fact, as Mexicans arrived in the cities, they became increasingly tied to local businesses and local economies and found a measure of acceptance from Anglos and Mexican-Americans.

Congressman Box would have been surprised to learn that some Mexican farmers advanced in their own trade or found ways to become sharecroppers, since poor white tenant farmers occasionally subrented to Mexicans. Black tenant farmers would also sublet their farms with Mexican immigrant farmers, but much of this activity constituted a hidden economy and was not noted in the Census.⁴⁷ A cotton farmer from Corpus Christi kept 60 Mexican workers on his farm full time. Twenty were children. He describes how they had started as planters and moved to sharecropping “on the half.”⁴⁸ As immigrants began to find higher pay or different ways to make money, these “*jornaleros*” began “to profit.” Although “never wholly escaping from a kind of peonage... those who got jobs in the citrus groves and on the truck farms began to

⁴⁶ Handman, “Economic Reasons”, 608.

⁴⁷ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 69-70.

⁴⁸ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 133-134.

purchase small lots in the towns and acquire a measure of independence.”⁴⁹

Independence meant the ability to save money and make purchases, constituting a reinvestment into local economies.

Workers that abandoned agricultural work for jobs in urban areas joined established Mexican communities. Once workers became urbanized, it was rare for them to return to farm work. For urban workers it seemed that there was a definite hierarchy of desired employment, and that work in the fields was squarely at the bottom. A member of the Farm Board complained, saying “Time and time again when we were short of help we would get a hundred men from the cities and bring them out into the agricultural country where the people who were working there were earning good wages, and inside of a week we would not have 5 per cent of them.” This held even when looking at pay differentials. In 1930, one beet farmer said that Mexican workers “will not do [farm work], although they are willing to work for half that wage in the stores or in offices and all sorts of other places.”⁵⁰

Mexican job mobility also led to Anglo (and probably Mexican-American) job mobility. Mexican farm labor made jobs for whites in other areas of agricultural production. According to a member of the Federal Farm Board, Mexican laborers “have made jobs for [Anglos] in the packing houses; they have made jobs in the materials and supplies that enter into the putting up of these products.”⁵¹ Many Anglos incorrectly believed that Mexicans would stay “in their place” at the bottom of the agriculture production system. One Senator stated “when ... beets have been produced, the work of

⁴⁹ McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 87.

⁵⁰ Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply*, 21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

reducing them to the manufactured product comes to the people of our own country.”⁵²

Anglos had “profitable employment ... taking care of and manufacturing these beets into the manufactured product” because “that kind of work ... the Mexican is not allowed to do. It is my opinion that the Mexican should not be allowed on the railroads or the mines, or any other place where our own people will do the work.”⁵³

Albert Johnson, after ten years of studying and fighting immigration alongside John Box, recognized that Mexican immigrant labor had permanently become a part of the fabric of the United States. Even with stricter regulation, more and more immigrants came in, moving into the interior, doing new types of work, and moving from agriculture to railroads.⁵⁴ But, like work in the mines, railroad work paid Mexicans less than Anglos. It was found that the wage for Mexicans on railroads was 27 cents an hour, and for “the white man” 37 or 40 cents.⁵⁵ The Department of Agriculture provided estimates of the urbanization of waves of immigrants, estimating that in 1926 movement of population from farms to cities was 2,155,000, while 1,135,000 moved to farms, making a net movement of 1 million away from farms.⁵⁶ In eventually gravitating toward work in urban centers, Mexican immigrants were following a labor pattern that was seen all over the United States. One senator asked: “the fact is, the American is ceasing to be an

⁵² Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *Agricultural Labor Supply*, 98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

agriculturist per se; is not that true? They are drifting to the cities, preferring the city life to the agricultural life?”⁵⁷ His question was answered in the affirmative.

Mexican immigrants, by spending their wages on local retail goods, built economies and received a greater sense of belonging to a community. Not only were Mexican immigrant laborers finding better paying work, they were spending money for retail goods that they either could not afford or find in Mexico. Some Anglos assumed that such spending was an imitation of Anglos. “Why, [the Mexican farm manager] wants to imitate me and other Americans. He puts on a pair of fine spurs and leggings, and everything else he sees the American wear.”⁵⁸ One farmer who lived north of Corpus Christi had nine tenant sharecroppers who had made enough money to afford and maintain automobiles in 1920.⁵⁹ Mexican-Americans who desired to distinguish themselves from the Mexican immigrant population in cases like this would have more difficulty, as Mexican immigrants became more permanent fixtures in society and had Mexican-American children. Congressman Box would also have been surprised that there were immigrants working in agriculture who made enough money to begin experiencing some of the trappings of middle class life in America at the turn of the century.

Mexican immigrant consumer spending was a well-established phenomenon. One Anglo from El Paso described a group of immigrants crossing back into Mexico: “they all have on new shoes, new overalls, a new broad-brimmed hat, and packs on their

⁵⁷ Senate Committee on Immigration, *Admission of Mexican Agricultural Laborers*, 18.

⁵⁸ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 150-151.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

shoulders, and they go to the bank and change their money into Mexican money, and they then hike for the river and go across.”⁶⁰ Immigrants did not just venture north for better wages, but in order to secure goods that they could not find at home. “...Mexicans knew there was a chance to get food and clothes on this side of the river which they can not get on the other side.”⁶¹ Sociologist Max Handman described the process thus: “The Mexican... ended up finding his condition so greatly improved economically that the United States became a pleasant place to go to, make money, buy an automobile, and go back home to his own pueblo, a gentleman instead of a peon.”⁶²

Mexican consumer spending reached a point where it became a stereotype that nativists and Mexican-American civil rights leaders alike would use of the Mexican as a profligate spender. One Texas farmer said “The Mexicans will spend what they make; they will spend \$1 a yard for silk for a dress, and sleep on a dirt floor.”⁶³ One Texas farmer used the stereotype to correct those who assumed that Mexican laborers were a drain on the economy because they took money to Mexico, saying “And that is the idea that the Mexican comes over here and takes back \$500 or \$600 with him. He does not do it; he hardly takes \$100 with him.” He continued: “Our merchants stock up for cotton-picking time. Thousands of those Mexicans come over and pick cotton, and our merchants begin to lay in a stock that they know the cotton pickers are going to buy.” He went into further detail, stating that “the Mexican takes Saturday off- since we have been paying these high wages; it used to be a half day off Saturday; but now it is all day- and

⁶⁰ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 261-262.

⁶¹ Senate Committee on Immigration, *Admission of Mexican Agricultural Laborers*, 15.

⁶² Handman, “Economic Reasons”, 607.

⁶³ Reisler, “Always the Laborer,” 236.

he comes to town; he cleans up and comes to town and spends that money for stuff that is bright, or something to wear, or for pots and kettles for his home.”⁶⁴ According to vegetable farmer Davis, Mexican laborers “come here with sandals on their feet and they go back with shoes on.”⁶⁵ Mexican labor was important not only to growers but to small business in South Texas, because the money spent on goods meant a greater market and more income for retailers.

Anglos incorrectly assumed that Mexico sold the same goods as could be found in America, but for lower prices. Many goods available in the United States were unavailable in Mexico. When Congressman Raker asked a farmer “Why should he buy stuff in the United States, when he can buy it in Mexico for one-tenth as much?”⁶⁶ The farmer replied that “the Mexican comes over here once a year, picks the cotton, loads himself up with American goods, and goes home, taking nothing but Mexican silver in his belt. And it does not take much down there to last him until the next cotton-picking time.”⁶⁷ One urban correspondent who expressed some agreement with John Box’s racist attitudes that undesirable immigration was unnecessary (“cripple, diseased, illiterate”) but that immigration was needed to develop resources and “consume the great Products of our great bread grain production areas.”⁶⁸ In a rural context, many Anglos believed that

⁶⁴ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 101.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶⁶ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 101.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁸ Letter from Jule B. Smith to John Box, 1 December 1923, John Box Correspondence in Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection, Box 2 Folder 1, page 1, Benson Latin American Rare Books Collection, Austin, TX.

“the Mexican spends all his money in the commissaries....”⁶⁹ In reality, Mexican immigrants saved money when they could and spent strategically. One middle-class professional immigrant explained how a Mexican could never stay married to an Anglo woman, stating that “the American woman is extravagant, and is never willing to adjust her expenditures of money to what her husband receives.”⁷⁰ One general gauge of Mexican consumer power was the amount of remittances sent back to Mexico. Carey McWilliams, in *North from Mexico*, stated that from 1917 to 1927, “Mexican immigrants sent a yearly average of \$10,173,719.31 in remittances to families in Mexico.”⁷¹ This money was on top of the money used in the local economy but illustrated that laborers earned more than subsistence wages.

As many former Mexican immigrants became more or less permanent residents in Texas, new immigrants would blend into established ethnic enclaves. Carey McWilliams noted in *North from Mexico* that “the special adaptability of Mexican labor was related to the presence in the Southwest of a large resident Mexican-American population.” McWilliams also pointed out that the Mexican-American population “greatly facilitated the use of Mexican labor. From this element came many of the foremen, the straw-bosses, and the contractors who recruited, transported, and supervised Mexican labor.” Newcomers from Mexico increasingly found places to establish themselves. “Wherever Mexican immigrants moved in the Southwest, they found colonies of Mexican residents, with Mexican rooming houses, restaurants, barber shops, and stores; and, of course,

⁶⁹ Letter from K. C. Barkley to John Garner and John Box, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, Box 2 Folder 7, page 134, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁷⁰ Gamio, *The Mexican Immigrant*, 189.

⁷¹ McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 186-7.

throughout the entire area they found Spanish-speaking people.”⁷² It is likely that Box was unaware of these communities that over time began to thrive and become a permanent fixture of Texas and the Southwest.

Many Anglos were aware that Mexican labor helped fuel the economic development of Texas. Congressman Bee from San Antonio, Texas said of the Mexican “he does not harm us, but he benefits our section of the country immensely...and he will make our country again prosper...”⁷³ One Anglo went further, stating, “Southwest Texas – that is to say, that portion of the State which lies south of San Antonio, and from Victoria south – an area which is larger than many States of the Union, has been built up upon Mexican labor.”⁷⁴ Brownsville, which was one Mexican hub in the Rio Grande Valley, grew by 87 percent from 1921 to 1931.⁷⁵ Roy Miller, a representative of the Rural Land Owners’ Association and Texas Cattle Raisers’ Association, stated that “Texas has experienced a remarkable development during the past 10 or 15 years by reason of the presence of [Mexican] labor.”⁷⁶

Excelsior, a newspaper published in Mexico City, printed a series of editorials about immigration regulation in the United States that explored the Mexican contribution to the development of the Rio Grande Valley. Enrique Santibañez, General Counsel for Mexico stationed in San Antonio and immigration researcher, studied the question and

⁷² McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 186-7.

⁷³ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 21.

⁷⁴ Senate Committee on Immigration, *Admission of Mexican Agricultural Laborers*, 12.

⁷⁵ Linda Peterson, “From Commerce to History: Robert Runyon’s Postcards of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Brownsville, 1910-1926” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (Oct. 1998), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30241611> (accessed August 11, 2011): 212.

⁷⁶ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 28.

shared his findings. He had circulated pamphlets to educate Mexican immigrants about changes in United States immigration law that warned them of possible punishments due to new measures passed by congress and approved by President Hoover on March 4, 1929.⁷⁷ The law passed at that time sought to punish immigrants who had not undergone health inspection or who had avoided the literacy test (or who had given false identification upon entry to the United States.)⁷⁸ Santibañez met with the Director of the Immigration Service, William Whalen, and attempted to intercede on behalf of Mexican immigrants who had entered the United States around the turn of the century but had never obtained “papers” of any sort nor who had completed literacy tests or health exams upon entry.⁷⁹ He sent a letter to Manuel C. Tellez, Mexican ambassador in Washington, D.C., asking that Mexican immigrants be divided into two groups: those who had been in the United States without ever having to show papers and those who had willingly broken the law in recently coming across.

Santibañez was attempting to protect communities in the Rio Grande Valley from police persecution by providing them information about the various changes in law that affected their movement.⁸⁰ He described how Mexican inhabitants of the valley were able to buy land that agricultural firms chose not to exploit, then irrigated and cultivated

⁷⁷ “Una Circular del Consul Santibañez Da a Conocer en Élla las Últimas Disposiciones Relativas a los Inmigrantes,” *La Prensa*, April 26, 1929.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “Se Dará un Tratamiento Humano y Generoso a los Trabajadores Mexicanos: El Consul Santibañez Obtiene del Inspector de Migración la Promesa de que Hará esa Recomendacion a los Agents en la Frontera,” *La Prensa*, May 3, 1929.

⁸⁰ “Se Continúa Arrestando A Mexicanos. El Consul Santibañez Envía un Mensaje al Embajador en Washington, Sr. Manuel C. Tellez,” *La Prensa*, 9 May 1929.

such lands.⁸¹ Senator Morris Sheppard and Representative John Garner took a trip to the border to investigate deportations at the request of Santibañez and Alonso Perales.⁸² Perales worked as legal representation on behalf of Mexican immigrants who had been arrested and held in unhygienic facilities.⁸³ Santibañez wrote an editorial published in the Spanish-language newspaper *La Prensa*, where he noted that, twenty years prior, the counties of Hidalgo and Cameron, on the banks of the Rio Grande, had been unpopulated and undeveloped.⁸⁴ As of 1930, Santibañez observed small towns connected with asphalt roads full of small stores and thriving communities. From Santibañez's perspective, the United States benefitted from taking in a class of hardworking people. Santibañez criticized immigration laws that were imposed on a group of people who were unaware of those legal processes and who had traditionally been able to freely cross the border. Santibañez found that the penitentiary and legal systems of South Texas were retrograde, limiting the development of the region.

Santibañez found that Mexicans and "Mexico-Texans" made up 40% of the population of the Rio Grande Valley, supporting numerous retail stores, agriculturalists, and industries that relied on their capital. He described the process by which Anglos divided up towns, creating dividing lines and selling real estate on the southern side of town for far less while driving out Mexicans through higher priced real estate in the

⁸¹ Enrique Santibañez, "La Inmigracion Mexicana en los Estados Unidos: los Mexicanos en el Valle Del Rio Grande".

⁸² "Viene a la Frontera el Subsecretario del Trabajo Americano. Senadores y Diputados por el Estado de Texas han Prestado la Atención Debida al Asunto de las Deportaciones. El Departamento de Trabajo ha Escuchado las Gestiones Hechas en Favor de los Mexicanos," *La Prensa*, May 16, 1929.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Enrique Santibañez, "La Inmigración Mexicana en los Estados Unidos: los Mexicanos en el Valle Del Rio Grande," *La Prensa*, November 1, 1929.

north, thereby creating segregated communities. Cities were growing and also growing divided. In 1930, sociologist Emory Bogardus studied Mexican immigration specifically, finding that “every city in the southwestern part of the United States has its Mexican community.” He observed that “often the Mexican community is the original part of the American city.”⁸⁵ This was true throughout most of the Southwest, which was under Spanish or Mexican control for centuries. Mexican parts of town became so self-sustaining that Spanish-speakers could avoid Anglo contact altogether in many cases. In San Antonio, the Mexican community was so well established that one member of the Mexican immigrant middle class stated “It has almost been as if I hadn’t lived in the United States, for I have always worked in businesses where almost only Spanish is spoken. At home meals are prepared our style, my friends have always been exiled countrymen, my wife and one of my daughters play the piano and always play Mexican music so that one doesn’t feel the change”⁸⁶ Historian Neil Foley pointed out that “the eugenicist Harry Laughlin warned in 1928 that Mexicans had destroyed healthy, vibrant white communities throughout the Southwest and replaced them with “alien centers” and “little Mexicos” that were “hard to dissolve.”⁸⁷ Mexican-Americans lived in the Anglo area of their communities if they were economically able to do so, but most lived in the Mexican-American colony. Mexican-Americans on the Anglo side experienced segregation and opposition from Anglos. Box and other nativists would likely have seen Mexican-American districts as the first wave of what nativists feared was an assault on “Americanism”.

⁸⁵ Bogardus, “The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation,” 74.

⁸⁶ Gamio, *The Mexican Immigrant*, 218.

⁸⁷ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 62.

Bogardus described an evolutionary process in the settlement patterns of Mexican immigrants in which they would move away from the poorest areas “beyond the tracks” and settle in a new “much better part of town” that constituted a new district. He described Mexican newlywed couples who could “afford to live in better houses and pay higher rents.” These couples either built houses similar to Anglos or moved to Anglo districts. Occasionally, rents in Anglo areas would decrease, allowing those Mexican immigrants who desired to move in to do so.⁸⁸ Initially Mexican newcomers to an area had to move to certain parts of town because of what they could afford. “Because of low economic status, they congregate in the less desirable and low sections of a city, beyond the railroad tracks, and in other places where average Americans will not live.”⁸⁹

Though Albert Johnson and John Box occasionally resorted to racist invective, and had many supporters, not all Anglos disliked Mexicans as a rule. As Mexican immigrants became active in the economy, as consumers and not just laborers, Anglos accepted them to a greater extent. One Anglo stated that “I would not want to listen to you (Congressman John Box) along that line without proving that undesirable persons were pouring in.”⁹⁰ Representative Claude Hudspeth from El Paso described Mexican immigrants in idyllic terms, stating,

I would like to take you to a town in my section, and I will show you there Mexicans that have been on my ranch 15 or 20 years; men who live in cottages that are ceiled and painted, with good stoves in them, heating and cooking stoves; where there is a little schoolhouse to educate their children, and a victrola in their homes – they play La Paloma and Trip the Light Fantastic and other airs.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Bogardus, “The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation,” 75.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁰ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 253.

⁹¹ Ibid., 142.

Hudspeth welcomed Mexican immigrants, saying “let them come, and if they are good citizens, welcome them; we are willing to have them as citizens of Texas.”⁹² Many Anglos recognized the contributions that Mexican immigrants made to their communities. “There are some [Mexicans] who have been there a good many years who have little ranches and little farms, and many of them develop into very good citizens. In my home town of Corpus Christi we have a permanent Mexican population of probably 2,000 or maybe 2,500.”⁹³ Ben Garza, first President of LULAC, was an example of this, starting as a successful restaurateur in Corpus Christi.

During the Johnson immigration hearings of the twenties, John H. Davis, a vegetable farmer from Laredo, Texas, claimed that many Mexicans became good citizens, and that “half of the officers in our town are Mexicans. Our local politics is controlled absolutely by Mexicans, and it is handled about as well as any other local gang I know of handles matters.”⁹⁴ When Chairman Johnson stated “if we let the Mexican come in, you must be prepared to assimilate him in all the parts of the United States where the climate will permit him to live,” Davis replied, “what objection, if he is a serviceable man, is there to assimilating him?”⁹⁵

There were Anglos who relied on the Mexican immigrant population as a customer base. One Anglo doctor wrote to Congressman Box, “I live in a section where there are many Mexicans. Many are buying land – they really pay me better for my

⁹² House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 161.

⁹³ Senate Committee on Immigration, *Admission of Mexican Agricultural Laborers*, 13.

⁹⁴ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 82.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

services than do the Americans.”⁹⁶ A representative of the Chamber of Commerce in El Paso stated “fifty per cent of our farmers and 90 per cent of our laborers are Mexicans. We do not have any trouble with them.”⁹⁷ Some Anglos preferred dealing with Mexicans than poor whites, such as an Anglo banker from Corpus Christi who stated that the Mexican “is not cheap labor; he is not a fool; he can go to town and get his money’s worth as well as the white man can. He is a good deal better citizen than the “white trash” and has not the vicious traits. As he becomes educated he makes a better citizen.”⁹⁸ He continued, talking about how the Mexican community became successful, saying

*We do have a class of Mexicans who buy land. I will take one particular instance: the man is a renter; he reads and writes well; he has quite a family. He raised some \$8,000 or \$10,000 worth of cotton in 1918. He has a good bank account; we loan him money’ last year we loaned him some. This next year we have arranged to lend him several thousand dollars.*⁹⁹

The banker continued, agreeing with other Anglos from the Rio Grande Valley that he “would much prefer to associate with [Mexicans] in comparison with the low white trash we have if I had to associate with either one, because I could go to every hacienda that is owned by a Mexican family and I could leave my pocketbook there and go away and it would be there when I came back.”¹⁰⁰

As further evidence that it was clear that the Mexican immigrant was considered a desirable population, Mexico attempted to retain such labor, usually unsuccessfully.

⁹⁶ Letter from Conrad Frey to John Box, John Box Correspondences in Oliver Douglas Weeks Papers, LULAC Collection, 23 February 1927, Box 2 Folder 6, pages 108-9, Benson Latin American Collection, Rare Books Room, Austin, TX.

⁹⁷ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 254-5.

⁹⁸ House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 103.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 103-4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

Repeated Mexican administrations passed strict immigration laws to try to retain them. Mexican labor was crucial to the development of the Rio Grande Valley in many ways. Aside from their consumer spending, their labor also provided a support for retailers. As historian Juan Gomez-Quiñones asserted, “It is important to note that immigrant workers profit not only a specific employer but all capital in general. In many ways such laborers give up wages to survive; they subsidize the purchasing power of others and allow them to benefit from what savings they accumulate.”¹⁰¹

This economic expansion was due, in part, to the mass of Mexican immigrant laborers, though little credit was given them except as a mass of cheap workers. Representatives of LULAC distanced themselves from Mexican immigrants while defending their ethnic background while Congressman Box and his ilk desired to reject them altogether. Their hidden power was the consumer spending that accompanied their fight to survive and occasionally thrive in an incredibly hostile social and economic environment. Opposition to their economic contribution also provided the nascent Mexican-American civil rights group LULAC a platform from which to defend their ethnicity and launch their movement. Recent Mexican immigrants faced rejection from nativists and established Mexican-American groups even though their economic contribution to Texas was considerable.

¹⁰¹ Gomez-Quinones, *Mexican American Labor*, 89.

CONCLUSION

The first nativist attempt at administrative and regulatory controls on Mexican immigration provided Mexican American civil rights leaders from the Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio the chance to put forth a defense of their ethnicity in the halls of Congress. Unskilled Mexican immigrant laborers who did not have a public platform like that of Mexican-American groups were bringing unrecognized social value through their consumer spending, their integration into local economies, and their labor.

From 1928 to 1930 sociologist Emory Bogardus developed a conceptual cycle of immigrant adaptation. He identified that Mexicans did not necessarily choose to migrate back to Mexico but also did not become United States citizens.¹ He described the challenges they faced in the U.S. because they were “not wanted as equals but only as laborers.”² Phase three of his cycle, “industrial and social antagonism,” discussed a number of processes that I have explored such as negative propaganda, prejudice, opposition from organized labor, and anti-immigrant politicians such as Box.³ Bogardus described the nativist fantasy of a country overrun with anti-American immigrants. He identified the phenomenon of “white flight” that would become a common pattern later. Bogardus’s called the final phase “second generation difficulties”: a situation experienced by Mexican-Americans such as the representatives of LULAC. This part of the cycle

¹ See Emory S. Bogardus, “A Race-Relations Cycle” *American Journal of Sociology* 35, no.4 (Jan. 1930), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2765930> (accessed August 11, 2011): 612 and Bogardus, “The Mexican Immigrant and Segregation,” 77.

² *Ibid.*, 78.

³ Bogardus, “A Race-Relations Cycle,” 614.

meant dealing with poor education levels and a lowering ethnic identity among the children of immigrants. His research predicted what historians such as Reisler, Foley, and Gutiérrez would later discover in their works on the relationships between Anglos, blacks, Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans. In this study, I have related how ethnic antagonism created by an economic system provided the possibility for two processes that bolstered Mexican-American civil rights. One was business interests inadvertently providing a platform for civil rights leaders. The other was the way recruitment of cheap Mexican labor ended up providing a path for Mexican immigrants to join the middle class and gain greater acceptance as they became integral to supporting local economies.

Historian Juan Gomez-Quinones says that “in periods of economic crisis, antagonism heightens between labor and owners; immigrant workers are made to serve as scapegoats for public discontent through deliberate manipulation, in order to prevent antagonism toward those actually responsible for the crisis.”¹ He argues that immigration “was a means for the state to manipulate wages, inflation, and unemployment to the advantage of the owners of capital.”² While this was true in general, large landholders did have to devise a defense of their system thanks to attacks by nativists like Box, and thus opened the door for Mexican-American civil rights leaders to appear before Congress and build a defense of their racial identity. Gomez-Quinones linked the creation of the Border Patrol with the creation of the idea of “legal” and “illegal” workers, a concept whose roots could be found in Box’s anti-immigration stance, and one

¹ Gomez-Quinones, *Mexican American Labor*, 89.

² *Ibid.*, 90.

which remains as the principal theme of the immigration debate today.³ Despite all of this, Latinos in the United States have become a fabric of social reality, especially across the Southwest.

There is room for further study in a number of different areas explored in this paper. Specifically, there is more to the story of John Box. It is possible that he was in an organization like the Ku Klux Klan, which would add to the contradictions of the successful North Texan who was a Methodist minister and early regent of Southern Methodist University. There is also more to the story of how his legislation was defeated and he was ousted from his seat. The opponent who finally beat him was from an entirely different section of his gerrymandered district and was the son of another well-known Texas politician, and the story is open for exploration. There is also more to discover about the demographics of Box's district and what influenced his legislative efforts.

The interaction between different ethnicities in Texas history is an endless fount of controversy. During my research, I found various differing Anglo views of blacks, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and "white trash." Much of it was deftly explored by Neil Foley in *The White Scourge*, but there is still more to discover and more information that can be added about other ethnic groups and sub-groups. Whenever ethnicity is discussed, it must invariably be simplified, since it is well understood that the social construction of race is full of misunderstanding and inaccuracy when compared to people's actual heredity over centuries.

The chaotic yet regular cycles of crisis in a capitalist system are the drivers of much of the historical processes that I explored, and I believe a cogent argument about

³ Gomez-Quiñones, *Mexican American Labor*, 94.

immigration, labor rights, and economic development could be derived from a study of a longer period of time. From the turn of the century until today, there were various boom and bust cycles that had overwhelming effects on population migration, unemployment, production, and other important social processes. From 1920 – 1921, for example, there was a minor recession that left Mexican immigrants stranded throughout the United States, but I was forced to pass over this short period for the sake of clarity. It is explored in some detail in Mark Reisler's *By the Sweat of their Brow*, in which he discusses some of the short term consequences of this temporary economic downturn.⁴ Similar processes prevail today. As the U.S. entered an economic downturn in 2008, Mexican immigration dropped markedly.

Another area demanding research is a detailed analysis of agribusiness practices with specific examples. It is interesting that the immigration advocates associated with various large capitalist concerns kept their specific associations secret. It was only when questioned that certain participants in congressional hearings would admit that they either had large landholdings or worked for an organization that did, and they never specifically named the firms they belonged to. I found it strange that entire tomes about agribusiness would only mention one or two firms by name. Part of the problem of naming these entities is that their records are either lost or unavailable. Still, some of this information is out there. These firms received regular loans from bankers and bank records may hold some of these documents.

Newspaper propaganda negative toward Mexican communities appeared regularly in across the country and likely overrepresented Mexican criminality and reliance on

⁴ Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow*, 64-7.

social services compared to Anglos. It would be interesting to explore this avenue by comparing actual crime statistics with the numbers of newspaper reports, or to compare the number of recipients of social services with newspaper reports of same. This would be an exhaustive study and require massive research of individual articles, but I believe, based on the newspaper research conducted for this paper, that it would bear fruit.

Similar such propaganda still finds its way into popular media.

In this paper I have shown the Anglo attitudes surrounding the first legislation proposed to limit Mexican immigration, and how this effort provided the impetus for cohesion of LULAC in 1930. I show that LULAC was able to find a national platform to defend the Mexican-American, and in the course of doing so, defended their countrymen working in the farms. I show, contrary to Gutiérrez, that LULAC in 1929 and 1930 went before Congress to defend immigration and even ejected Clemente Idar, a prominent leader, in the process of asserting their platform. I also illustrate that capitalism that featured high production levels and massive numbers of laborers brought in a large number of consumers. I show that some of these consumers, while becoming integrated into the economy, became a part of the larger communities in which they lived. I do not intend to paint a rosy picture. Most Mexican immigrants lived in abject poverty and were confronted by a variety of violent forms of control. Still, they found ways to survive and build local communities.

Although their stories were rarely told, Mexican immigrants built much of the United States, and especially South Texas, with their bare hands, and forever influenced the evolution of Texas society. These immigrants found ways to adapt and occasionally thrive, and their Mexican-American counterparts (many of whom had already established

themselves *vis à vis* Anglo society) found ways to strengthen the possibilities for equal treatment. In an ironic twist, both groups discovered these opportunities specifically because of the racist attitudes that had made their existence in Texas so hostile in the first place.

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