ETHNIC MEXICANS' LABOR ACTIVITY IN TEXAS: CLASS, CITIZENSHIP, AND AMERICANIZATION IN THE 1930s

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A Thesis

Presented

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in

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by

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Junko Miura

Summer 2011

APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH

_____
Katie Milo, Ed.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

_____
Susan M. Green, Ph.D., Chair

_____
Jeffery C. Livingston, Ph.D.

_____
Paul Lopez, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

ETHNIC MEXICANS' LABOR ACTIVITY IN TEXAS: CLASS, CITIZENSHIP, AND AMERICANIZATION IN THE 1930s

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The Pecan Shellers' Strike occurred in 1938, in San Antonio, Texas, with the participation of laborers who had been forced to work at a lower wage and under poor working conditions. Many scholars have pointed out the significance of this strike from several perspectives. As those studies argued, the strike has been considered historically important as the greatest victory of labor unions in Texas. Moreover, by focusing on the fact that the laborers who forced this strike were Mexicans, scholars attribute this event not only to their labor activity, but also to the ethnic Mexicans' political and civil rights movement. Although Mexicans' labor activities in San Antonio have been critically argued by many scholars, previous perspectives do not shed light on the overlapping functions of labor activity with immigration issues and ethnic identification with Americanization. Therefore, the purpose of the thesis is to reexamine the attempt of ethnic Mexicans to stimulate their labor activities in San Antonio, Texas, and their

perspectives toward the immigration question and Americanization issues. This thesis reevaluates the link between ethnic Mexicans' labor activities and the effort to encourage their Americanization. The controversy which questions the complex linkage between labor activity and the civil rights movement still leaves room for explanation in light of the diversity of ethnic Mexicans. The central goal of this thesis is to reconsider the ethnic collective identity through the lenses of ethnic Mexicans' labor activities. This illuminates the understanding of how America constructed ethnic and class differences to define what America was in the 1930s.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Pecan Shellers' Strike occurred in 1938, in San Antonio, Texas, with the participation of laborers who had been forced to work at a lower wage and under poor working conditions. Many scholars have pointed out the significance of this strike from several perspectives. As those studies argued, the strike has been considered historically important as the greatest victory of labor unions in Texas. Moreover, by focusing on the fact that the laborers who forced this strike were Mexicans, scholars attribute this event not only to labor activity, but also to ethnic Mexicans' political and civil rights movement.[1] The diverse meanings of the strike including both class and ethnic struggles reveal the contention: why Mexican laborers who joined the strike choose labor activity to claim their class and ethnic interests?

The purpose of the thesis is to reexamine the attempt of ethnic Mexicans to stimulate their labor activities in San Antonio, Texas, and their perspectives toward the

[1] Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005; Patricia E. Gower, "Unintended Consequences: The San Antonio Pecan Shellers Strike of 1938." *Journal of South Texas* 17, no. 2 (September 2004): 88-104; Matthew Jerrid Keyworth, "Poverty, Solidarity, and Opportunity: The 1938 San Antonio Pecan Sheller's Strike," (master's thesis, Texas A & M University, 2007); Richard A. Garcia, "Class, Consciousness, and Ideology: The Mexican Community of San Antonio, Texas: 1930-1940,"*Aztlán* 9 (Fall 1978): 23-69; Gabriela González, "Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca: The Politics of Benevolence and Radical Reform," *Frontiers; A Journal of Women Studies* 24, nos.2/3 (2003): 200-229. I have been careful to use terminology to describe various subgroups of the Mexican-origin population. Thus, when I refer to immigrants from Mexico, I use the term "Mexican immigrant." The term "Mexican American" refers specifically to those individuals who are legally American or label themselves as such. I also use the term "Mexican national" if I am specifically highlighting their Mexican nationality. Finally, I employ the term "ethnic Mexican" when referring to the total number of residents who were Mexican in origin and who had a sense of cultural and historical belonging to Mexico, regardless of their American citizenship, class, and nationality.

immigration question and Americanization issues. By focusing on the Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 and one of its central activists, Emma Tenayuca, this thesis reevaluates the link between ethnic Mexicans' labor activities and the effort to encourage their Americanization.

Zaragosa Vargas provides insights on this issue discussing that "the labor struggles of Mexicans were inseparable from the issues of civil rights, because whether the worker upheavals succeeded or failed, the labor movement set in motion important changes."[2] By shedding light on the struggle of Labor during the 1930s, Vargas regards the status of Mexican laborers and Mexican Americans as congruent. He defines the movement as a precursor of the early civil rights movement of the postwar years, which formed the foundation of the modern Chicano movement.[3]

However, the direct link between the civil rights movement and labor activity, which Vargas provides in his study, does not shed light on the overlapping functions of labor activity with immigration issues, and ethnic identification with Americanization. As many scholars point out, internal distinctions within ethnic Mexicans in the United States, which involve the differences of class, nationality and citizenship status, have deeply divided them and forced them to consider their collective ethnic identity.[4] For example,

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[2] Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, 5.

[3] Ibid., 6.

[4] David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American; Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Gender perspective also provide the deepning the discussion about the disparity within ethnic Mexicans. Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexican Women of Dogs Allowed; the Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press,

David G. Gutiérrez argues, "Mexican Americans had always been deeply divided over the immigration issue."[5] The views of those studies offer a crucial aspect of the history of ethnic Mexicans' political and social participation in the United States. Ethnic Mexicans have faced difficulty in constructing their ethnic collective identity. In accordance with U.S. immigration policies, which question who rightly should be considered a fully vested member of the American community, they faced the problem of seeing themselves in American society: either legal or illegal, a citizen or an alien, an American or a foreigner.[6] Therefore, the connection between labor activity and the civil rights movement must be examined critically from the perspective of the social context where immigration questions and Americanization issues were discussed.

In addition, in terms of the relation between labor activities and immigration issues, the languages of Americanism and Americanization were at the center of the political consciousness of American workers in the post-World War I period.[7] Examining the French Canadians' labor movement in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Gary Gerstle discusses that class conflict in the 1930s was expressed in a language of "Americanism," and ethnic identity was a potent element intersecting with class and national identities in complex ways.[8] His argument illuminates the importance of the connection between ethnic group's labor activities and politics of Americanism. In the

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2009).

[5] Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 7.

[6] Ibid., 211.

[7] Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 331.

[8] Ibid., xiv.

case of ethnic Mexicans' labor activities, class struggle needs to be interpreted in accordance with their way for Americanization in local and historical contexts. The controversy which questions the complex linkage between labor activity and civil rights movement still leaves room for explanation in light of the diversity of ethnic Mexicans. Therefore, this thesis reevaluates how ethnic Mexicans embraced labor activities and created a way to pursue their class and ethnic interests in San Antonio in the 1930s.

This thesis reconsiders ethnic Mexicans' labor activities in the 1930s in the following Chapters. Chapter Two provides the reason why Mexican laborers who joined the strike chose labor activity to proclaim their class and ethnic interests. To examine the reason why Mexican laborers who joined the strike chose labor activity to proclaim their class and ethnic interests, this chapter provides an overview of the social settings of San Antonio in the 1930s as the background where ethnic identities and class consciousness of Mexicans were constructed.[9] Based on the social context, the chapter explores the conditions Mexican laborers faced economically, socially and politically.

Chapter Three reexamines the general interpretation of the Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 as a victory, differentiating between Mexican laborers as strikers, and the United Cannery, Agricultural Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), as its organizer. By considering the organized structure of the union and the agent of the strike separately, this chapter provides a multitiered analysis of the strike in accordance with the way the union treated ethnic Mexicans.

Referring to the arguments provided in Chapters Two and Three, Chapter Four

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[9] E. K. Francis, "The Nature of the Ethnic Group," *American Journal of Sociology* 52, no.5 (March 1947): 393-400; Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," *Radical America* 23, no.4 (October-December 1989): 9-22.

places the attempt of ethnic Mexicans' labor activity beyond the framework of labor unionization. Focusing on Tenayuca's discourses, which aimed for improvement of social, economic, and political prejudice against ethnic Mexicans, this chapter examines the ethnic and social aspect of the strike, and ethnic Mexicans' labor activities during the 1930s in relation to immigration questions and Americanization issues.

The central goal of this thesis is to reconsider the process of constructing ethnic collective identity through the lenses of ethnic Mexicans' labor activities and the way in which they found and recreated their position within America, socially and politically. This illuminates the understanding of how America constructed racial, ethnic, and class differences to define what America was in the 1930s. To address these issues, this thesis reevaluates the process of ethnic Mexicans' Americanization in relation to their attempts to maintain their rights as Labor and Americans.

CHAPTER II

MEXICAN LABORERS IN SAN ANTONIO IN THE 1930s

The economic growth and the development of transportation networks, such as railways at the turn of the twentieth century, changed San Antonio from a provincial city in Texas to a metropolis in the American Southwest. The advent of the railroad to San Antonio in 1877 brought capital and economic opportunities to the city from outside the state. Major railroads crossed at the city, and San Antonio became a center of trade and shipping for all parts of the country.[10] World War I also encouraged its economic development. The War economy made markets of construction and maintenance at the military bases around the city. It also demanded rapid and immense agricultural productions.[11] Although the major production of Texas revolved around the cotton agribusiness, and the value of manufactured and agricultural productions in San Antonio was less than those in Dallas and Houston, San Antonio served an important role as a central market for material flow, labor, and information.

The development of the city was driven by the influx of immigrants from inside and outside of America. As the "metropolis of the Southwest," San Antonio

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[10] Sam Woolford, *San Antonio: A History for Tomorrow* (San Antonio: Mayor Company, 1963), 32-40; *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1927* (Dallas: The Dallas Morning News, 1927), 61-62; *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1929* (Dallas: The Dallas News, 1929), 45; Foley, *The White Scourge*, 42; Francis Jerome Woods, "Mexican Ethnic Leadership in San Antonio, Texas" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1949), 17-8.

[11] Richardo Romo, "The Urbanization of Southwestern Chicanos in the Early Twentieth Century," *New Scholar* 6 (1977): 185-86. San Antonio was a city with six U.S. army installations. Keyworth, "Poverty, Solidarity, and Opportunity," 39; Mark Louis Rybczyk, *San Antonio Uncovered* (Plano: Woodware Publishing, Inc., 1992), 78.

became the meeting point for several kinds of people from different cultural backgrounds and created a multicultural social space.[12] During the first decade of the twentieth century, the population increased more than 80 percent. In the next twenty years, this number expanded further. By 1930, it was almost quadruple its population in 1900.[13] The rapid population growth reflected the increase of immigrants from countries such as Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe. Also, Mexican immigrants who came across the border, black people from the Deep South, and Chinese immigrants who had labored in railroad construction in the late nineteenth century, made the demographics of San Antonio more diverse. The characteristic of San Antonio was in no sense homogeneous.[14] By 1930, the actual foreign-born, constituted a substantial proportion of the city's population; approximately one-fifth of the population were of foreign origin.[15]

As the city grew, the racial and ethnic diversity in San Antonio marked its growth. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a large influx of immigrants from Germany contributed to the development of the city's cultural institutions. By 1900, one fifth of the population was German-born or were offspring of German immigrants. They established schools, auditoriums for musical performances, and founded both Catholic and Lutheran Churches. German immigrants successfully adapted to San Antonio society

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[12] William T. Chambers, "San Antonio, Texas," *Economic Geography* 16, no.3 (1940): 293.

[13] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population*, Vol.4, part.1 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 1039-40.

[14] *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1927*, 61-62; *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1929*, 45

[15] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population, Characteristics of the Population*, Vol.2, part.6, 1056; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population, General Report*, Vol.2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 258; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population, General Report,* Vol.2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 753.

as part of the middle-class, occupying jobs with specialized skills and knowledge.[16] Though their cultural and economic institutions were not as influential as German Americans', immigrants from other countries in Europe and blacks from other regions within the United States also contributed to the building of the city's cosmopolitan atmosphere.[17]

By 1910, the ratio of immigrants changed dramatically. Stemming from various factors, the number of immigrants from Mexico exceeded the number from Germany.[18] During the first decade of the twentieth century, the population of ethnic Mexicans in Texas increased by seventy-five percent, then its number raised by eight times that of the average increase of the period from 1860 to 1900.[19] This dramatic influx of ethnic Mexican's population was due to several factors such as the Mexican Revolution, the demand for agricultural labor during World War I, and the establishment of the immigration restriction Acts of 1917, 1921, and 1924, which banned the entrance

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[16] Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 27-33; Christine M. Totten, "Elusive Affinities: Acceptance and Rejection of the German Americans," Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three Hundred Year History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985): 187; Gunter Moltmann, "Roots in Germany: Immigration and Acculturation of German-Americans," Theodore Gish and Richard Spuler, eds., *Eagle in the New World: German Immigration to Texas and America* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1986), 3-25; Mark Sonntag, "Fighting Everything German in Texas, 1917-1919," *Historian* 56, no.4 (Summer 1994): 1-2

[17] D. W. Meinig, I*mperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 64-65; Richard Amado Garcia, "The Making of the Mexican-American Mind, San Antonio, Texas, 1929-1941: A Social and Intellectual History of an Ethnic Community" (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 1980), 30; Harold Arthur Shapiro, "The Workers of San Antonio, Texas, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1952), 60.

[18] Carey McWilliams, "Mexicans to Michigan," *Common Ground* 2 (Autumn 1941): 5.

[19] Texas State Employment Service Division, *Origins and Problems of Texas Migratory Farm Labor* (Austin: Texas State Employment Bulletin, 1940), 8-9.

of immigrants, but did not apply to Mexican immigrants.[20] During the 1910s and 1920s, more ethnic Mexicans resided in San Antonio than any other city in the United States. According to Census data, almost half of the ethnic Mexicans living in San Antonio in 1930 entered the United States after 1911.[21] In response to the burst of Mexican immigrants, one congressman commented on the furious influx: "the recent Mexican immigrants are making a re-conquest of the Southwest."[22]

San Antonio was a multiethnic place, which served as a meeting point for several cultures. They intermingled on the main streets and plazas.[23] These cultures and customs also colored the city, each with sharply different diet and dress, language and religion. Among the wide range of cultures, San Antonio was identified symbolically as the "Mexican Capital of Texas."[24]

The influx of ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio was not a spontaneous phenomenon. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 spurred migration to the United States. It was estimated one to two million people crossed the border to enter the United States in pursuit of a better life and opportunities of employment, escaping from Mexico's economic, political, and social chaos.[25] At the same time, the soaring demand for labor

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[20] Erika Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no.3 (Spring 2002): 37.

[21] Max S. Handman, "Economic Reasons for the Coming of the Mexican Immigrant," *American Journal of Sociology* 1, no.35 (January 1930): 605.

[22] 71st Cong., 2nd Sess., HR Report No.898, *Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 4.

[23] Woods, "Mexican Ethnic Leadership," 17.

[24] *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1927*, 61-62; *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1929*, 45; Foley, *The White Scourge*, 42.

[25] Vicki L. Ruiz, *From out of the Shadows; Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*

arising from World War I drew Mexican immigrants into America. The enforcement of the immigration restriction Acts in the 1920s limited the number of immigrants from countries in Eastern Europe and turned the recruiting ground of labor toward Mexico.[26]

The geographical location of San Antonio also served as a gateway for Mexican immigrants. Furthermore, as Carey McWilliams noted, for Mexicans who crossed the border, there was no border; they were just moving "north from Mexico.[27]" Until the mid-1910s, cultural bonds, which ethnic Mexican in America felt with Mexico remained a significant factor in their lives in Texas under the system of mutual assistance, which aimed to negate the influence of the changing social structure. The history of this system dates back to the initial Spanish possession of the territory. Starting in Mexico, *mutualistas* spread throughout Texas, and eventually all over the American Southwest after the 1870s.[28] Despite the deterioration of the *mutualista's* economic position and political influence, both of which were affected by the rapid transformation from ranch society to commercial agricultural farming controlled by a nation-wide market economy, ethnic Mexicans managed to preserve the function of the *mutualista*, which protected

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(Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8; Samuel Bryan, "Mexican Immigrants in the United States," *Survey* 7 (September 1912): 726-7; Keyworth, "Poverty, Solidarity, and Opportunity," 16; United States Presidential Report of the Commission on Migratory Labor, *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), 37; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 180; Ricardo Romo, "Responses to Mexican Immigration 1910-1930." *Aztlán* 6, no.2 (Summer 1975): 173-8; Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 24-116.

[26] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 106-109.

[27] McWilliams, *North From Mexico*.

[28] Arnold de Léon, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900* (Dallas: Southwestern Methodist University Press, 1982), 195; Orozco, "The Origins of LULAC," 32; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 95; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 194-95; Douglas Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 53-62.

them from economic and social difficulties.[29] As well as the geographical setting of Texas as a borderland State, San Antonio had a long history as a center of Mexican culture in the United States. Since the seventeenth century when a few Franciscan Friars christened this area by the name "San Antonio," the city had been associated with Spanish Mexican traditions. These Spanish-oriented influences persisted throughout the history of the city.[30] San Antonio was known as the city where American and Mexican customs were in complete contrast.[31] For Mexican immigrants, this setting of San Antonio provided cultural adjustment to enter the American way of life.

As stated previously, San Antonio served as a labor market where recruiters from companies in widespread areas of the United States ventured to find their labor force and where newly arrived immigrants, mainly people from Mexico, gathered in search of jobs. San Antonio attracted capitalists in both agribusiness and industry with its potential location of a cheap labor supply. Additionally, Mexican immigrants were the main segment of the unskilled and the semi-skilled low wage laborers and farm workers in the Southwest.[32] The inflation of farm values in the post-World War I era intensified the demand for cheap labor. Owners of farms and ranches in Texas contended that:

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[29] *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide for 1927*, 60; Foley, *The White Scourge*, 28; Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, 88-92; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 34-41.

[30] Meinig, I*mperial Texas*, 55; Timothy M. Matovina, *Tejano Religion and Ethnicity: San Antonio, 1821-1860* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Jesús F. de la Teja, *San Antonio De Béxar : A Community on New Spain's Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

[31] San Antonio Municipal Government, *San Antonio: Where Life is Different* (San Antonio: Municipal Information Bureau, circa 1930), 1-3.

[32] American Corporation, "Our Minority Groups: Two Spanish Speaking People," *Building America Bulletin* 8, no.5 (1943): 146.

> [f]arming is not a profitable industry in this country, and in order to make money out of this, you have to have cheap labor. In order to allow land owners now to make a profit off their farms, they want to get the cheapest labor they can find, and if they get the Mexican labor, it enables them to make a profit.[33]

For the development of industry, Mexican cheap labor was in high demand. The San Antonio Chamber of Commerce advertised the potential of large numbers of Mexican laborers inducing industry to the city, stating that there was an "abundant supply of efficient and contended skilled and unskilled labor available for manufacturing purposes at reasonable wages."[34]

The treatment of Mexican laborers in San Antonio's labor market was discriminatory and segregated. Mexican laborers had been labeled as being unable to rise above the unskilled labor level. Traditionally, Mexican laborers had been paid less than other racial/ethnic workers who did the same work.[35] Employers could not hire American workers at the low wages and bad working conditions that Mexican laborers accepted. To keep cheap labor available constantly, employers distinguished between jobs for Americans and Mexicans.[36] Mario T. García explains the economic discrimination and segregation against Mexican laborers by using the term "racial dualism":

Racial dualism"…meant the second-class subordination of the Mexican at every

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[33] T. N. Picnot, *Address on the Socio-Economic Status of Low Income Groups of San Antonio* (San Antonio: n.p., circa 1942), 170.

[34] San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, *You Can Manufacture for Less in San Antonio* (San Antonio: San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, 1934), 3.

[35] McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 215-16.

[36] Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 49; Robert Garland Landolt, *The Mexican-American Workers of San Antonio, Texas* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 215.

> level of activity: occupational distribution, residential patterns, political representation, participation, and social-cultural relationships. Such a duality based on the supposed racial and cultural "underdevelopment" of the Mexican served to maintain the economic advantages as well as social privileges which the Anglo-American population derived from a large pool of surplus Mexican labor.[37]

Despite the demand for cheap labor, Mexican immigrants were not favorably accepted into San Antonio's society.

It was generally agreed in San Antonio that ethnic Mexicans were the city's social problem. In the 1920s, the "Mexican Problem" was understood as a significant social issue in the American Southwest.[38] McWilliams defines the "Mexican Problem" in terms of the social consequences of Mexican immigration.[39] At that point in time, Mexican immigrants, whose numbers had been increasing at a rapid rate starting at the turn of the twentieth century, were in a difficult position. They were indispensable cheap laborers fueling economic growth and yet were simultaneously subjected to exclusion from society. In 1926, a sociologist named Max S. Handman offered a solution to this problem, commenting that "the only road open to him [ethnic Mexicans] is to form a third, separate group, on the borderline between the negro and the white man."[40] Popular thought also tended to treat all ethnic Mexicans as homogeneous regardless of their citizenship status. In short, the "Mexican problem" served as the "common sense" that denied Mexican immigrants the ability to become American and to be integrated into

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[37] Mario T. García, "Racial Dualism in the El Paso Labor Market, 1880-1920," *Aztlán* 6, no.2 (Summer 1975): 198.

[38] McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 206-226; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 123-82; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 179-96.

[39] McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 206.

[40] Max S. Handman, "The Mexican Immigrant in Texas," *The Southwestern Political and Historical Science Quarterly* 7, no.1 (June 1926): 40.

society.[41]

The Great Depression in 1929 intensified the segregation of ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio. Socially marginalized, ethnic Mexicans gathered at the west side of the city and created a Mexican slum, or barrio, called the "Mexican Quarter."[42] Many Mexican laborers who had worked at farms and ranches lost their jobs and began heading for urban areas.[43] In response to the influx of unemployed laborers from outside of the city, the Mexican Quarter became one of the most extensive slum areas found anywhere in the United States.[44] Because more than 100,000 ethnic Mexicans lived in this very limited area, and because the majority of its inhabitants were the poor who worked as cheap labor, living and hygienic conditions in the Mexican Quarter were their worst feature. Houses in the slum consisted of floorless shacks, which were crowded by two or three families. Usually these shacks had no toilets, no running water, and no drains or sewers.[45] As a result, tuberculosis and intestinal diseases caused debilitating health problems and a high death rate among the inhabitants.[46] Reflecting such situations, San Antonio had the distinction of being the second highest ranking city in death rate among

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[41] Ian F. Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 118-22.

[42] Sam Woolford, *San Antonio: A History for Tomorrow* (San Antonio: Naylor Company, 1963), 10.

[43] Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Women of the Great Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1984), 17-18.

[44] Audrey Granneberg, "Maury Maverick's San Antonio," *Survey Graphic* 28, no.7 (July 1939): 423.

[45] Ralph Maitland, "San Antonio: The Shame of Texas," *Forum and Century* 1, no.2 (August 1939): 53.

[46] H. T. Manual, "The Mexican Population of Texas," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 15 (1934): 48.

the five largest cities in Texas.[47]

As Ralph Maitrand, a resident in Texas, reported, the condition of the Mexican Quarter was "the shame of Texas;" the Mexican Quarter and Mexican laborers who lived there were stigmatized as a negative aspect of San Antonio society. After the Great Depression, the United States Bureau of the Census discovered the prolonged stagnation of the economy in San Antonio: the lowest median income in the entire country for the thirty-three cities with more than 250,000 residents.[48] T. N. Picnot, industrial engineer for the San Antonio Public Service Company, explained the reason for the backwardness of San Antonio's economic recovery and blamed ethnic Mexicans for its cause stating that "[t]his does not indicate our general wages were low, but that the over-all wage structure included over 30,000 Latin-Americans, who constitute a group earning low incomes."[49]

The social circumstances, which ethnic Mexicans faced in San Antonio during the 1930s, were structured by both economic and social discrimination, exploitation, and segregation. The racial dualism with which the society in San Antonio labeled ethnic Mexicans, bolstered this discriminatory structure. First, Mexican laborers were treated as cheap labor who undertook jobs general American workers did not. Second, they were physically identified with Mexican immigrants who would never be American. The ideologies justifying economic injustice and social marginalization which Mexican laborers experienced, were intricately linked with each other. For those Mexican laborers

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[47] Garcia, "The Making of the Mexican-American Mind," 99-100.

[48] Shapiro, "The Workers of San Antonio," 234.

[49] Picnot, *Address on the Socio-Economic Status of Low Income Groups of San Antonio*, 9.

who were considered an un-American aspect of San Antonio, the opportunity to claim their civil rights was limited and just not realistic. In fact, only about five percent of Mexican immigrants naturalized in the period between 1910 and 1930, and the number of Mexican nationals living in San Antonio continued to increase at a rapid rate.[50] Thus, advocating for the improvement of discriminatory treatment in society through civil rights activism, was next to impossible for ethnic Mexicans. The discrimination and antipathy toward Mexican laborers increased strongly in accordance with the increase of Mexican immigrants.[51]

[50] Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 129.

[51] Acuña, *Occupied America*, 50, 132; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 43-44; Clare Sheridan, "Contested Citizenship: National Identity and the Mexican Immigration of the 1920s," J*ournal of American Ethnic History* 21, no.3 (Spring 2002): 4-13; Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930).

CHAPTER III

THE PECAN SHELLERS' STRIKE IN 1938

To begin from the outcome of the event, the Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 ended in a victory for the union activity driven by UCAPAWA. As a result, the strike brought about higher wages and better work environments for laborers in San Antonio's pecan shelling industry. Particularly, the victory of the union brought an increase in wages by one-half cent per pound, and closed-shop contracts signed by the Southern Pecan Shelling Corporation (SPSC). This event illustrates one of the greatest examples of labor union success in Texas.

However, the evaluation of the strike as a "success" did not provide substantial and continuous improvement for living and economic conditions of Mexican laborers. Proposed wages, which UCAPAWA and SPSC agreed upon, went into effect if the company was exempted from the minimum wage standard set by the Fair Labor Standards Act.[52] SPSC was not exempted from this Act by defining pecan shelling as part of agriculture, not industry.[53] As a result, SPSC returned to mechanization, which

[52] This act forced the industry to pay a minimum wage of twenty-five cents per hour. Shapiro, "The Workers of San Antonio," 135; Victor B. Nelson-Cisneros, "La Clase Trabajadora En Tejas, 1920-1940." *Aztlan* 6, no. 2 (1975):254; "Decision of the Board of Arbitration in San Antonio Pecan Strike," (April 13, 1938), AR36, Folder.1-4, Food, Tobacco, Agricultural Workers Union of America, CIO Texas Locals records, 1934-1947 [hereafter cited as CIO Texas Local records], Labor History Archives, University of Texas at Arlington, Texas [hereafter cited as UT Arlington].

[53] The pecan shelling industry designated an agricultural enterprise by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Referring to this, Seligman did not accept government codes that fixed pay scales for nonfarm work at a higher rate.

displaced about 70,000 Mexican laborers and added to the unemployed.[54] Social economist Selden C. Menefee at the Works Progress Administration (WPA) presented various questions regarding the victory of the strike:

> …How many pecan shellers are back at work now in the San Antonio shellers? …Has the number gone any higher than this subsequently, and how does it stand now?…How is the daily output of pickers running now in the mechanized plants?…How many shellers are running now?…Are the hand-work shelleries still operate? How many of these are there? How many shelleries in all are in operation?…What are the prospects for the shellers who are still unemployed getting back to work?[55]

There was a gap between UCAPAWA, who claimed a union victory, and the Mexican laborers, who still faced unsolved problems. This gap raised questions. Who was the winner of the strike and what kind of benefit did they enjoy? Who was the agent of the strike and what was their intent?

The only industrial production in San Antonio which achieved national and international recognition, was pecan shelling. Although developed as a center of commerce in the American Southwest, San Antonio's portion of industrial and agricultural production was less than those of in Houston and Laredo. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the G. A. Dueler Manufacturing Company formed modern pecan shelling in San Antonio by introducing new technologies and new processes. However, during the Great Depression, the pecan shelling industry reversed its moves toward mechanization and began to use large numbers of un-skilled Mexican laborers in place of

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[54] Zaragosa Vargas, "Tejana Radical: Emma Tenayuca and the San Antonio Labor Movement During the Great Depression." *Paficil Historical Review* 66, no.4 (November1997): 565.

[55] Selden C. Menefee to George Lambert, May3, 1939, AR.36, Folder.1-3, CIO Texas Local records, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

mechanization.[56] By using this method, SPSC became dominant in the pecan industry, and in the country at large. By the early 1930s, SPSC handled almost fifty percent of the total pecan industry in the United States.[57]

For Julius Seligman, "Pecan King" founder and president of SPSC, the keys to his success were the contract-labor system and exploitation of abundant Mexican laborers with cheap wages. SPSC's hand-shelling method flourished under the contract-labor system.

The contract-labor system had three steps. First, SPSC managed the whole process of pecan shelling. Secondly, SPSC contracted out the unshelled nuts to contractors at a fixed price. Third, contractors worked through small plants scattered throughout the West Side of the city, utilizing cheap Mexican laborers.[58] Some contractors paid less than others in order to make a small profit when selling the nuts back to SPSC.

The margin of profit SPSC allowed its contractors was narrow: contractors were lucky if they made ten dollars a week.[59] In proportion to the low profit contractors

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[56] Texas Civil Liberties Union, *San Antonio: The Cradle of Texas Liberty and Its Coffin?* (Austin: Texas Civil Liberties Union, 1938), 3; Pecan Workers Relief Committee and Pecan Workers Local No.172, *Lowest paid Workers* (San Antonio: Pecan Workers Relief Committee and Pecan Workers Local No.172, n.d.), AR.36, Folder.1-6, CIO Texas Local records, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

[57] Shapiro, "The Workers of San Antonio," 116; Landolt, *The Mexican-American Workers of San Antonio*, 226.

[58] Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Women of the Great Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1984), 104-5; Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), 55; Patricia E. Gower, "Unintended Consequences: The San Antonio Pecan Shellers Strike of 1938." *Journal of South Texas* 17, no. 2 (September 2004): 89-90.

[59] Texas Civil Liberties Union, *San Antonio: The Cradle of Texas Liberty*, 3.

earned, wages were reduced for Mexican laborers working at the periphery of this system. Moreover, this system hindered the opportunity to develop solidarity between laborers by keeping them physically and systematically separated.[60] A. J. Drossaerts, Archbishop of San Antonio, depicted the desolation of the Mexican laborers in the pecan shelling industry. He mentioned that "the Negro slaves before emancipation were a thousand times better of than these poor, defenseless people."[61]

Hygiene conditions in the workplace also needed to be improved. George P. Lambert, one of the central figures in the CIO activities suggested the workplace conditions in the pecan shelling industry were below the criteria established by the ordinance to promote the health conditions of the city, which was passed and approved by the Texas State Board of Health in 1914. Lambert recommended to C. K. Quinn, Mayor of San Antonio, that he immediately enforced an ordinance for the pecan shelling industry as follows:

> No person, firm, association or corporation shall engage in condition pecan shelling industry or similar business without first having applied for and obtained a permit from the Board of Health to operate same. Any building occupied and used for the purpose of shelling, storing, collecting or displaying of pecans or pecan shelling products…must conform to the standards and requirements prescribed by the Board of Health…must be equipped with a sterilizing plant approved by the Board of Health.[62]

In most circumstances the ventilation and illumination in workplaces were inadequate,

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[60] Cassmore and Manefee, *The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio*, 9; Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, *Findings and Determination of the Presiding Officer* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 3.

[61] George Lambert, "Toledano Speaks in San Antonio," 2, AR36, Folder.1-6, CIO Texas Local records, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

[62] George P. Lambert, "Be it Ordained b the Commissioners of the City of San Antonio," AR127, Folder.27-9, George and Latane Lambert Papers, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

and it was not until 1936 that inside flush toilets and running water were found in most establishments.[63]

In addition to the poor working conditions, almost all of the Mexican laborers engaged in the pecan shelling industry were generally confined to the poor living environment of the Mexican Quarter.[64] The report prepared by WPA detailed the squalid conditions of the Mexican Quarter as the reality Mexican laborers faced.[65] The impoverished conditions for the Mexican laborers were a direct result of the low wages they received. Even though SPSC made a large profit, SPSC only paid laborers an average wage of approximately $0.05 an hour or $2.50 per week in 1936.[66] The working conditions of the Mexican laborers compounded both home and workplace problems. For them, living and working conditions in the 1930s were as primitive as could be found in the nation.[67]

Facing economic exploitation and social segregation which stemmed from a structural mechanism of discrimination for ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio, Mexican laborers in the pecan shelling industry began to unite laborers and opposed SPSC's

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[63] Stuart Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin no.836 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945), 278-80; Harold Arthur Shapiro, "The Workers of San Antonio, Texas, 1900-1940," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1952), 115-16. See also Selden C. Cassmore and Orin C. Manefee, *The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio: The Problem of Underpaid and Unemployed Mexican Labor* (Washington D.C.: Work Progress Administration, 1940),

[64] Amado Garcia, "The Making of the Mexican-American Mind," 132-33.

[65] Ibid., 24-29, 33, 44.

[66] Ibid., 23; Arthur Harold Shapiro, "The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio, Texas," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 32 (March 1952): 230-33.

[67] Cassmore and Manefee, *The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio*, 44; Roger C. Barnes and Jim Donovan. "The Southern Pecan Shelling Company: A Window to Depression-Era San Antonio." *South Texas Studies* 11 (2000): 51.

systemized exploitation system. Before the arrival of UCAPAWA, Mexican laborers voluntarily engaged themselves in activities against social and economic discrimination. In the early 1930s, two labor organizational activities attracted ethnic Mexicans and called forth the creation of ethnic solidarity in their minds.

In early 1933, an independent labor organization called *El Nogal* tried to organize Mexican laborers in the pecan shelling industry. Although *El Nogal* claimed a membership of nearly 4,000 between 1933 and 1936, this attempt was short lived due to the lack of funding. Lilia C. Caballero, secretary of *El Nogal*, admitted that half the members did not pay the monthly dues of five cents.[68]

Simultaneously with *El Nogal*, the Pecan Workers Union in San Antonio emerged, led by Magdaleno Rodríguez. Rodríguez claimed there were between 10,000 and 12,000 members in his organization during 1934 to 1935. Anita Perez, a former Mexican laborer in the pecan shelling industry in San Antonio, remembered that Rodríguez exercised dictatorial control over the union members and charged weekly union dues, which were higher than that of *El Nogal*.[69] For almost all of the members of Rodríguez's organization, it was impossible to pay such high dues every week. To improve the union's financial situation, he accepted financial support from Seligman in exchange for assisting SPSC's protest against the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which tried to establish a uniform wage code for the pecan shelling industry. He insisted that the proposed minimum wage of fifteen cents per hour would double labor

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[68] Kenneth P. Walker "The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio and Mechanization," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* July 1965 (1965): 49; Shapiro, "The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio," 2331-33

[69] Anita Perez, interview by Glenn Scott and Maria Flores, OH116, Special Collection Division, UT Arlington.

costs in San Antonio and put contractors out of business.[70] As a result, Rodríguez made a lot of money collecting dues, but he failed to protect the Mexican laborer's interests.[71] As well as failing economically and strategically, these two organizations also were not recognized by the city's authorities as official labor unions. *San Antonio Weekly Dispatch* referenced Rodríguez stating "there is a sort of parasitic 'jefe politico' who collects twenty cents per month from these unfortunate shellers for what purpose we don't know, and we have been reliably informed that he is an alien also."[72]

General views toward ethnic Mexicans' attempts to organize themselves just saw Rodríguez as "a fugitive from justice, a citizen of Mexico and a labor agitator who betrays his workers."[73] However, these activities left behind several positive effects. Although these activities did not succeed, they introduced large-scale organizations and offered an opportunity for Mexican laborers to participate in strike and labor activities. Rodríguez designed his union dividing the Mexican Quarter into districts, formed committees with elected presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, and treasurers, and held general meetings.[74] Ethnic Mexicans experienced collective consciousness through this labor organization.

During the lull, after the failure of *El Nogal* and the Pecan Workers Union in San Antonio, ethnic Mexicans' attempt at organizing laborers to claim their social and

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[70] *San Antonio Light*, November 16, 1934.

[71] Perez, interview.

[72] *San Antonio Weekly Dispatch,* September 18, 1936.

[73] *San Antonio Light*, December 7, 1934.

[74] Alberta Snid, interview by Maria Flores, OH116, Special Collection Division, UT Arlington.

economic interests reignited again in early 1938. Seligman announced a wage cut amounting to almost twenty percent. For Mexican laborers, the wages decreased approximately from fifty cents to forty cents per one hundred pounds.[75] Mexican laborers decided it was better to strike and starve, than to work. In response to a wage cut, more than 5,000 quit the factories and set up a picket.[76] A veteran of the strike named Alberta Snid looked back on the beginning of the strike in 1938 and reflected that they "were hungry, and there was no place to go get a job. The wages were so low that we had no other recourse but to go on strike."[77] On January 31, 1938, at the height of the pecan shelling season, almost 8,000 laborers started to walk out, protesting a pay cut and bad working conditions.[78] Not only laborers who worked at the pecan shelling industry struck, but also their families, neighbors, and relatives who shared in the economic and social discrimination.[79]

Ethnic Mexicans who joined the strike asked Emma Tenayuca, a young activist, to represent them. She emerged as an influential leader of the strike and became known as "la passionaria."[80] According to Latane Lambert, Tenayuaca was San

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[75] Pecan Workers Relief Committee and Pecan Workers Local No.172, *Lowest paid Workers*.

[76] George Lambert, "The Jersey City of the South," 2, AR36, Folder.1-6, CIO Texas Local records, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

[77] Snid, interview.

[78] Jamieson, *Labor Unionism*, 141-49.

[79] U.S. Mediation and Conciliation Service, Report of District 3, *UCAPAWA Year Book 1938*, 22, Case File 195-114, Record Group 280, National Archives; Blackwelder, *Women of the Great Depression*, 141; David Lewis Firewood, "Tejano Revolt: The Significance of the 1938 Pecan Shellers Strike," (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, Arlington, 1994), 24; Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 62; Vargas, "Tejana Radical," 566-67.

[80] "Labor: La Passionaria de Texas," *Time*, February 28, 1938.

Antonio's most persistent organizer:

> …[A]s in any movement, you would take the ones who were the most articulate, who appealed to the crowd, and she was a good speaker. It was right she would be called la passionaria because in her shrill little voice would make your spine tingle.[81]

Tenayuca was born to Spanish descended mother, and Indian father, in San Antonio in 1916.[82] From a young age, her grand father taught her to be an activist, raised in a politically-active environment, which was affected by the factions of the Mexican Revolution. She learned Carranzista, Maderista, Villista, and Magonista movements from Mexico, and disputes among them in America from her family, particularly her grand parents and their generation, who were still active in San Antonio.[83] Realizing the connection between discrimination toward ethnic Mexicans and exploitation toward laborers, Tenayuca began to make a commitment to communism. As a member of the American Communist Party, an organizer for the Workers Alliance, which was affiliated with the WPA, and an ethnic Mexican, she led ethnic collective actions.[84]

Under her direction, the strike intensified with advancing opposition from the city's authorities. Reflecting the social discrimination toward Mexican Americans,

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[81] George Lambert, interview by George Green, OH19, Special Collection Division, UT Arlington.

[82] Roberto R. Carderón and Emilio Zamora, "Manuela Solis Sager and Emma Tenayuca: A Tribute," in *Chicana Voices, Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender*, eds. Teresa Córdova, Norma Cantú, Gilberto Cardenas, Juan García, and Christine M. Sierra (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 34-5.

[83] Blackwelder, *Women of the Great Depression*, 147; Gabriela, "Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca," 209.

[84] *People's Press*, August 14, 1938; Firewood, "Tenajo Revolt," 70-73; FBI report, December 6, 1941, Houston, Texas, Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts, Subject Emma Beatrice Tenayuca [hereafter cited as Tenayuca FBI file]; Green Peyton, *San Antonio: City in the Sun* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946), 169; Gabriela, "Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca," 209-12.

Mexican immigrants, and also Mexican nationals in San Antonio, the claims of the strike went beyond mere relief for Mexican laborers. The strike also demonstrated the need to fight against ethnic discrimination and segregation in order to pursue the radical reform of a system that victimized ethnic Mexicans.[85] The strike grew into a collision of ethnic Mexicans and the authoritative powers which controlled San Antonio society.

San Antonio police chief Owen W. Kilday forbade the strike by exercising violent law enforcement techniques Kilday condemned Tenayuca as a paid agitator sent to stir up trouble among the ignorant Mexican laborers. After the first arrest of Tenayuca, her attorney presented her petition for release from jail. However, Kilday denied her petition, saying "[s]he belongs in jail, Let her stay there. She's been raising too much hell around here anyhow…She's nothing but a damned Communist and ought to be sent to Russia."[86] Using the argument that the Mexican mob was not a strike, but an un-American revolt agitated by Tenayuca, Kilday justified the police tactics used to crack down on the strike.[87]

The police tear-gassed pickets and jailed the strikers. Also, Kilday organized a riot squad to patrol the Mexican Quarter. As many as 250 policemen and firemen patrolled the areas where ethnic Mexicans lived and policed their activities.[88] The police

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[85] Emma Tenayuca, interview by Gerry Poyo, February 21, 1987, Institute of Texas Cultures Oral History Program, The University of Texas, San Antonio.

[86] *People's Press*, July 24, 1938.

[87] Firewood, "Tejano Revolt," 72; Irene Ledesma, "Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers' Activism, 1919-1974." *Western Historical Quarterly* 26, no.3 (Autumn 1995): 318-9.

[88] "Pecan Plant Strike," *San Antonio Light*, January 31, 1938; "Pecan Strike Open Hearings Ordered," *San Antonio Light*, February 12, 1938; "Kilday Lauds 2-Way Radio Use in Strike," *San Antonio Light*, February 24, 1938; "Police Drive on Pickets Continues," *San Antonio Light,* February 17, 1938; "Police Tear Gas Routs 300 Strikers," *San Antonio Light*, February 11, 1938; "Pecan Pickets Tear-Gassed

arrested ethnic Mexicans in the name of a variety of offenses such as unlawful assembly, blocking the sidewalk, carrying a sign without a permit, and vagrancy. As a result, the Bexar County jail overflowed so that it came to be known as "the Black Hole of San Antonio."[89] Designed to hold not over sixty prisoners, this portion of the jail held over three hundred men. It had been impossible for them to sleep or even to sit down at the same time. When they protested such inhumane crowding to the jailer, Kilday ordered that the fire hose be turned on them to quiet them down.[90] Concerned with the police's severe suppression of the strike, the Mexican government protested to the State Department asserting that Mexican nationals had been victimized by police sadism in San Antonio. This was the first time that a foreign government had protested the actions of city police in the United States.[91]

Although everyone else in San Antonio and most of the country knew that a strike was in progress, the city authorities denied the existence of the strike. Seeing it as a communist revolution, the city authorities stated that it was their duty to subdue this dangerous insurrection immediately.[92] The Catholic Church also attacked the upheaval by Mexican laborers. Father Lopez of the National Catholic Welfare Council announced

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by Police," *San Antonio Light*, March 2, 1938; *San Antonio Express*, 4 February 1938; *La Prensa*, February 12, 1938; Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, to J. W. Madden, Chairman of the National Labor Relations Board, March 11, 1938, Case File 1935-48, Record Group 25, National Archives.

[89] Pecan Workers Relief Committee and Pecan Workers Local No.172, *Lowest paid Workers*.

[90] Texas Civil Liberties Union, *San Antonio: The Cradle of Texas*, 9; "Strike Boosts City Jail," *San Antonio Light*, February 28, 1938.

[91] Lambert, "Toledano Speaks in San Antonio," 6, AR36, Folder.1-6, CIO Texas Local records, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

[92] Texas Civil Liberties Union, *San Antonio: The Cradle of Texas*, 6; Firewood, "Tejano Revolt," 92.

that the strike was unauthorized and amounted to nothing more than an attempt by radicals to gain control of the uninformed workers.[93] San Antonio Mayor Quinn further discouraged Mexican laborers from striking. He told Mexican laborers he was convinced that they "will not be able to receive a fair and calm and dispassionate hearing if you permit Communistic Leaders to excite and agitate your people."[94] Under pressure from city authorities, which did not regard ethnic Mexicans' labor activities as a proper strike, the strike could not succeed.

Soon after the strike, a drastic shift occurred when Tenayuca stepped aside to avoid hurting the strike's public image, and UCAPAWA took center stage in the strike. In November 1937, a representative of UCAPAWA came to San Antonio to enlist laborers in the pecan shelling industry into the CIO.[95] UCAPAWA in San Antonio had only added sixty local members by the end of January, and its influence was limited. However, this organization was an officially authorized union. Supporting ethnic Mexicans' labor activities, UCAPAWA expanded its influence gradually.

As the oppression from city authorities toward ethnic Mexicans heightened, removing a Mexican leader such as Tenayuca from a visible leadership role seemed the sound route for the success of the strike.[96] After the change of leadership away from

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[93] *San Antonio Express*, February 3, 1938.

[94] *San Antonio Express*, February 4 and 5, 1938.

[95] Lambert, "The Jersey City of the South," 7; Roberto Calderon and Emilio Zamora, "Manuela Solis Sager and Emma Tenayuca: A Tribute," ed. Teresa Cordova, Norma Cantu, Gilberto Cardenas, Juan Garcia, and Christine M. Sierra (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, 1986), 32-33; "CIO Prepares Drive to Dorm Pecan Union," *San Antonio Light*, January 29, 1938.

[96] Richard Croxdale, "The 1938 San Antonio Pecan Shellers' Strike," in Women in the Texas Workforce: Yesterday and Today, ed. Richard Croxdale and Melissa Hield (Austin: People's History in Texas, Inc., 1979), 24-5; Tenayuca FBI File, Tenayuca, interview by Gary Poyo.

Tenayuca, an ethnic Mexican, to UCAPAWA, ethnic Mexicans' labor activities turned to UCAPAWA's strike. On March 9th, Quinn, Seligman, and representatives of UCAPAWA sat around a table and signed an agreement recognizing the Pecan Workers Local No.172 of the UCAPAWA as the sole collective bargaining agency for the laborers in the pecan shelling industry.[97]As a result of the consultation, the Pecan Workers Local No. 172 signed contracts calling for re-opening factories, increasing wages, and the establishment of a check-off and grievance system was set up.[98]

Temporally, ethnic Mexicans' attempt to pursue the strike and UCAPAWA's goal in unionizing workers overlapped. For example, both ethnic Mexicans' activities and UCAPAWA's in San Antonio, were influenced by communist ideologies and were in close connection with the Communist Party in Mexico and America. Although the size of the Texas Communist Party had only around 500 members, it had been active since 1930 and was supported by ethnic Mexicans and UCAPAWA locals.[99] Also, cooperating with Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM), an organization in Mexico formed by Mexican communists, UCAPAWA promoted radical labor uprisings in Texas. CTM attempted to train cadres as union organizers for the labor movement in Mexico and in the United States. Tenayuca was one of the young Mexican Americans who went to Mexico to study organizing laborers with a scholarship from the CTM. In fact,

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[97] Texas Civil Liberties Union, *San Antonio: The Cradle of Texas*, 10; Jamieson, *Labor Unionism*, 278-80;Victor B. Nelson-Cisneros, "Ucapawa Organizing Activities in Texas, 1935-50." *Aztlan* 9 (Spring, Summer and Fall 1978): 77-8.

[98] Joe Wright to P. F. Kennedy, Executive Secretary, Texas State Industrial Union Council (November 15, 1938), AR36, Folder.1-6, CIO Texas Local records, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington; Jamieson, *Labor Unionism*, 278-80.

[99] Vargas, "Tejana Radical," 563.

UCAPAWA members were also greeted with hostility by anti-communist hysteria in society.[100]

However, there was a definite division between ethnic Mexicans' activities and UCAPAWA's unionization goals. For ethnic Mexicans, the primary purpose in pursuing labor activity was not just economic. They pursued their ethnic interests through the strike. On the other hand, ethnic Mexicans' interests were not the primary issues for UCAPAWA. For union organizers, ethnic interests were secondary to unifying unorganized groups and expanding its unionization through agriculture into industry.[101] To create a strong, influential, and empowered union, UCAPAWA realized the importance of incorporating racial minority groups if it was to achieve the aims of unionized labor.[102] P. F. Kennedy, Vice-President of the CIO suggested the importance of the strike at Local No. 172:

> …all affiliated unions should make every effort to contribute as much as possible in the way of financial aid to the Pecan Workers Union, Local No.172…The Board urges that every organization give all possible to support the strike and help work out an amicable settlement. This strike in San Antonio, will break a vicious, racketeering political ring, and save the CIO unions in the State of Texas from discredit of a strike being broken by these various groups, including the Regional Director.[103]

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[100] Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare!: Right Wing Hysteria, Fifties and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 27-30.

[101] *Official Proceedings, Forst national Convention of United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America* (July 10 to 12, 1937), AR.36, Folder.1-11, CIO Texas Local records, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

[102] "An Appeal to All Texas Organized Labor: Declaration of the Third Annual State Convention of CIO Unions," AR110, Folder.16-7-4, Texas State CIO Council Record, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

[103] *Minutes: Texas Council of CIO Unions, Executive Board Meeting* (February 20, 1938), 2, AR110, Folder.16-1-7, Texas State CIO Council Record, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

Mexican laborers' ethnic interests and UCAPAWA's aims of unionization were not identical, even if some of their goals overlapped and cooperation was possible. In fact, similar to the general public's view of ethnic Mexicans as aliens ineligible for American citizenship, some UCAPAWA organizers would not induct Mexican laborers into their union as full members. For example, B. M. Egan, a regional director of the CIO in San Antonio, collaborated with police authorities, SPSC, and other detrimental forces in a red-baiting campaign against ethnic Mexicans.[104] Although almost all of the UCAPAWA members in San Antonio developed a friendly attitude toward ethnic Mexicans, ethnic Mexicans in UCAPAWA were not regarded as real workers: they were Mexican laborers which the union needed to handle. Unfortunately, some of the union leaders, even though they felt they were progressive, still clung to the old idea of white supremacy.[105]

The Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 began as an ethnic Mexicans' labor activity and ended as a UCAPAWA union victory. This shift shows that ethnic Mexicans' labor activities changed form, and their collective agency turned in response to their social environment. In addition, this shift was also a result of the choices which Mexican laborers made. Although Mexican laborers gathered under their leader, Tenayuca, they also needed useful resources to maintain the strike. A Mexican laborer who participated in the strike called for help to build a union that could protect them and get wages on

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[104] Ibid., 1.

[105] "Report on FTA's Activities in Fields of Racial Discrimination, Migratory Workers, and other Minority Labor Groups in Texas during the Past Year and Some Recollections of Similar Work in Other Southern States in The Past," 6, AR66, Folder.1-3, Harry Koger Papers, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

which they could live decently:

> Every cent we pay in dues means that we have even fewer tortillas and beans to eat than we would have if we did not pay dues and we never have enough to eat at any time. We need a business agent to handle our grievances and help us solve our problems…We need not only to feed our people during the strike, but to defend them when they are jailed—make bonds and pay attorney's fees.[106]

To win the strike and to gain a realistic advantage, Mexican laborers selected to put themselves under UCAPAWA's supervision. After UCAPAWA president Donald Henderson decided to remove Tenayuca from the center of the strike, she disappeared from the UCAPAWA controlled strike.[107] Despite her popularity among ethnic laborers, UCAPAWA failed to acknowledge laborers' ethnic interests, which were represented by local and ethnic leader Tenayuca.[108] UCAPAWA in San Antonio had fallen to a membership low of 800 by 1942, and the victory of the union in 1938 proved unsustainable.[109] Lambert pointed out the importance of considering ethnic Mexicans' interests as follows:

> Please realize that seasonal work, transient labor, low pay, and extreme illiteracy of the workers here make this an exceptional problem which cannot be handle solely from a trade union angle, and cannot be judged from trade union standard alone.[110]

During the course of the strike, leadership shifted from ethnic Mexicans to UCAPAWA. This transformation of leadership meant that the primary purpose of the

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[106] *Lowest Paid Workers.*

[107] Croxdale, "The 1938 San Antonio Pecan Shellers' Strike," 31.

[108] Ibid.

[109] George Lambert, Interview by George Green, OH19, Special Collection Division, UT Arlington.

[110] George Lambert to Donald Henderson, July 18, 1938, AR127, Folder.27-9, George and Latane Lambert Papers, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

strike shifted from ethnic consciousness, based on Mexicans' interests, to class and economic consciousness, based on trade unionism. At the same time, the central agents of the strike shifted from Mexican laborers to UCAPAWA members. For ethnic Mexicans, UCAPAWA was not "we," but "they."[111]

[111] Snid, interview.

CHAPTER IV

THE "MEXICAN PROBLEM" AND ETHNIC AMERICANIZATION

The victory of the strike did not create actual improvements for ethnic Mexicans socially and economically. However, its ideological impact inspired their ethnic collectivity and resistance to society, which was then passed to the younger generation in the future.[112] Some scholars argue that the strike was a breakthrough event for the 1960s Chicano movement.[113] If their interpretations are correct, what kind of effects did ethnic Mexicans' labor activity produce? What objectives did ethnic Mexicans pursue through the strike? And why did they choose labor activity as a tool to pursue their aims? Beyond the scope of labor unionization, this chapter examines the ethnic and social aspects of ethnic Mexicans' labor activities during the 1930s.

For both ethnic Mexicans and UCAPAWA, social image was an unavoidable matter in terms of delineating the direction of their progress. San Antonio society negatively perceived ethnic Mexicans as similar to Mexican immigrants and as ineligible for American citizenship. Tenayuca provided her insights in regards to this matter in her essay titled "The Mexican Question in the Southwest."[114] Co-authoring with her husband Homer Brooks, a fellow communist, Tenayuca wrote this article in a span of two weeks

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[112] Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*; Gonzalez, "Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca,"; Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*.

[113] Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 6.

[114] Emma Tenayuca and Homer Brooks, "The Mexican Question in the Southwest." *Communist* March (1939).

during the height of the Pecan Shellers' Strike.[115] The essay presented a program for social change, demanding that the citizenship rights of U.S. born Mexicans be respected and the citizenship process for non-U.S. born Mexicans to be facilitated. To support these demands, Tenayuca called for unification with African Americans and support for illegal immigrants.[116] This required considering the language and culture, as well as the day-to day needs of the oppressed minorities, such as ethnic Mexicans and African Americans. It also included eliminating the dual-wage labor system, preventing confiscation of small landholdings, promoting bilingualism in the public schools, and eradicating Jim Crow segregation and political repression through a revision of government regulations regarding citizenship.[117]

According to her, the social situations which both Mexican laborers and Mexican immigrants faced were the same because both had earned a place in American society by virtue of their countless contributions toward the development of the U.S. Southwest, regardless of citizenship.[118] Such circumstances, which disallowed their citizenship, were also shared by African Americans. Tenayuca provided direction for such action for ethnic Mexicans' labor activities, including the strike in 1938:

> The Struggle is directed…[a]gainst social oppression for laws making illegal the various forms of Jim-Crowism, segregation in living quarters, schools, parks, hotels, restaurants, etc…The majority of the Mexicans are American-born. The problem is, therefore, one of enforcing their citizenship right. This means demanding that all

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[115] Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 144; Douglas Monroy, "Anaquismo Y Comunismo: Mexican Radicalism and the Communist Party in Los Angeles During the 1930s." *Labor History* 24, no.1 (Winter 1983): 42-44.

[116] Tenayuca and Brooks, "The Mexican Question," 265.

[117] Ibid., 264.

[118] Ibid., 267-8.

> legal and extra-legal restrictions to the free exercise of the ballot be removed … Those who are foreign born must join with all of the immigrant groups in the United States to secure the democratization of the federal regulations pertaining to length of time, cost, and language conditions required for citizenship.[119]

The final phrase of the quotation shows Tenayuca's sharp criticism of the established structure justifying social discrimination against ethnic Mexicans regardless of their citizenship status. Tenayuca indicated that there was a deep-rooted prejudice in dealing with Mexican immigrants as un-Americanized immigrant. She pointed out that such intolerance also served to explain the need for social segregation against Mexican Americans. Mexican immigrants could be said to be a cause of intensifying discrimination against ethnic Mexicans.

Due to the heavy demand for cheap labor, Mexican immigrants were not restricted by the previous successive immigration acts. However, restrictionists pointed out that not only immigrants, but all ethnic Mexicans, were socially and culturally rejected. This was reason enough to restrict them. For example, the Texas Congressman, John C. Box, one of the central figures in restrictionism, characterized ethnic Mexicans as:

> … a mixture of Mediterranean-blooded Spanish peasants with low-grade Indians who did not fight to extinction but submitted and multiplied as serfs. This blend of low-grade Spaniard, peonized Indian, and negro slave mixed with negroes, mulattoes, and other mongrels, and some sorry whites already here.[120]

One of the supporters of Box's bill advocated the early adoption of restrictions against Mexican immigrants because:

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[119] Ibid., 264.

[120] J. E. Farnsworth to John C. Box, April 22, 1927, Box. 2, Folder. 8, ODWC, LULAC Archives, BLAC.

> [i]n [the nativists'] eyes, Mexicans were racially inferior to southern and eastern Europeans since they were of predominantly Indian stock….The addition of hundreds of thousands of 'low-grade' Indian-Spanish hybrids to the United States could result only in disaster for the nation's future racial integrity.[121]

Again, another supporter stated in a letter to Box that "[t]hey are a problem for this country culturally, economically, and also racially. Their minds are completely un-American … They rejects to use English and moreover, they will never be American [sic]."[122] In this way, restrictionist discourse denied all ethnic Mexicans, not just immigrants, the possibility to Americanize. During the Great Depression and the upheaval of ethnic Mexicans' labor activities, social tensions with ethnic Mexicans were heightened, stemming from those restrictionist arguments in the 1920s.

Furthermore, social perceptions identifying ethnic Mexicans as alien, unable to Americanize, were incorporated into both Federal and State politics in a different form. During the 1930s, ethnic Mexicans constituted half of all the people deported from the United States.[123] Since the Immigration Service was housed within the Department of Labor, it might be surmised that the Service had a vested interest in getting rid of as many ethnic Mexicans as possible. The deportation of more ethnic Mexicans meant more jobs for "real" Americans.[124] During the Depression, the United States government began to exercise strict control over ethnic Mexicans, seeing them as aliens living illegally in the

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Roddis Lumber and Veneer Company of Missouri in San Antonio to John C. Box, February 22, 1928, Box. 2, Folder. 8, ODWC, LULAC Archives, BLAC.

[123] U.S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service, RG 85, Folder.10a-39, National Archives.

[124] Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 53.

United States. While the Federal government targeted its campaign at aliens in general, ethnic Mexicans, those in the country legally and illegally, were to find themselves prime targets for the Department of Labor's Bureau of Immigration.[125]

At the scene of the Pecan Shellers' Strike in San Antonio, tactics targeting ethnic Mexicans as aliens who needed to be deported were seen very often. When San Antonio police arrested hundreds of strikers without a warrant, the U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) joined in the fray and began arresting ethnic Mexicans.[126] Similar to police regulation, the INS also investigated ethnic Mexicans for deportation purposes. The most frequent cause of deportation was entering or being in the United States illegally.[127] Since immigration authorities commonly served as accusers, judges, and juries, they had a vested interest in not volunteering any information. Violations of citizenship and human rights were a common occurrence.[128] Ethnic Mexicans, and particularly as a famous activist, Tenayuca, daily confronted police forces and the INS's investigations designed to suppress their civil rights.[129]

At the state level, the pressure to deport and repatriate ethnic Mexicans accelerated. Using not only the INS, the Texas Rangers also played a critical role in policing "illegal" ethnic Mexicans. The Texas state government threatened to call the

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[125] Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans*, 37.

[126] AR66, Folder. 3-8, Harry Koger Papers, Texas Labor Archives, UT Arlington; AR127, Folder.9-1, George and Latane Lambert Pepers, Texas Labor Archives, UT Arlington; Ledesma, "Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers' Activism," 318; Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 141.

[127] D. H. Dinwoodie, "Deportation: The Immigration Service and the Chicano Labor Movement in the 1930s," New Mexico Historical Review 52, no.3 (Summer 1977): 193-203.

[128] Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 50.

[129] "Labor: La Passionaria de Texas," *Time* (February 28, 1938).

Texas Rangers to restore social order in San Antonio when the strike grew heated.[130]

The linkage between the Texas Rangers and the anti-Mexican immigrant hysteria in Texas was constructed during the 1910s and 1920s when immigration restrictionists and capitalists bounced their interests off each other. During 1914 to 1917, Texas State Governor James E. Ferguson asked the state legislature for ten thousand dollars to increase the Ranger force that operated along the Rio Grande from Brownsville to Laredo, and ranged as far north as Corpus Christi.[131] The strength of the Ranger force impressed on Americans that ethnic Mexicans should be segregated and excluded from American society. Ferguson explained the reasons why Texas should beware of all ethnic Mexicans because "[t]he problem with the Texas Mexican population is that their sympathies are with Mexico, and they never extend any cooperation to our authorities but are continually aiding and abetting the lawless element overrunning our country from Mexico."[132] Ferguson himself was a businessman in Texas; therefore, he had an interest in ethnic Mexicans as cheap labor, so there had been no motive to thoroughly restrict Mexican immigrants in state law.[133] Instead, he tried to justify segregation of ethnic

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[130] Blackwelder, *Women of the Depression*, 142; Firewood, "Tejano Revolt," 114-15; Jamieson, *Labor Unionism*, 281; Amado G. Gonzales to WPA Administration November 29, 1938, WPA Central Files, State, 1934-1944 Texas 641 N-2 1937-1938, San Antonio, RG69, Folder.2618, National Archives.

[131] Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 26; James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism, and the Plan of San Diego, 1904-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 86; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 66; Rodolfo Rocha, "The Tejano Revolt of 1915," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History, Selected Essays*, eds. Emilio Zamora, Cynthia Orozco, and Rodolfo Rocha (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000): 115.

[132] Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponara, *Border Fury: A Picture Postcard Record of Mexico's Revolution and U.S. War Preparedness, 1910-1917* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 122.

[133] Foley, *The White Scourge*, 92-93; T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and*

Mexicans under the assumption that Mexicans could never be true Americans.

During the Great Depression, the role of the Texas Rangers as border patrollers transformed due to various problems in society. According to Harold J. Weiss Jr., after the Great Depression, the Texas Rangers transformed from the "Ferguson Rangers", which protected the frontier and used their force on ethnic Mexicans at the border regions, to the modern police movement in the cities.[134] In 1935, Texas State Governor James V. Allred and the state legislature created a Department of Public Safety. This new institution, which included the Texas Rangers, the Highway Patrol, and a Headquarters Division, was designed to act as a modern center for the science of detection. The Texas Rangers now maintained law and order in disputes between labor and management, and they investigated criminal cases that required working with other lawmen in Texas and across the nation.[135] Although the transformation affected an institutional change, a distinctive feature of the Texas Rangers remained: they used their force against ethnic Mexicans. Additionally, the transformation of the Texas Rangers' duties shifted the border between ethnic Mexicans and American society inside the urban area, not at the rural periphery.

The public image of Mexican immigrants as illegal aliens created a rift within ethnic Mexicans. For Mexican Americans, it hurt their aim of assimilating into American society to be seen the same as Mexican laborers and immigrants whose citizenship status was in question. The gaps in economic and social status among ethnic Mexicans enabled

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the Texans (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1968), 636-39.

[134] Harold J. Weiss Jr., "The Texas Rangers Revisited: Old Themes and New Viewpoints." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97, no.4 (1997): 622, 635, 637.

[135] Ibid., 638.

them to create ethnic solidarity, because they shared cultural, linguistic, and emotional backgrounds. Internal disparities within ethnic Mexicans during the 1930s appeared in the form of conflict between different types of organizational activities. Other than labor activities, civil rights organizations, which stressed Mexican Americans' assimilation into American society, were also active.

One of the attempts which ethnic Mexicans created was the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). It was founded in Texas on February 17, 1929. LULAC limited its membership to American citizens, and it had a strict assimilation policy.[136] Alonso S. Perales, one of the founding members of LULAC, explained their decision to exclude ethnic Mexicans without American citizenship from their institution:

> The most powerful reason, to my mind, is one of the motives expressed by the Consul Cantu Lara; that is, that although the Mexican citizen is naturalized, he is still considered as a Mexican. And those of us who live in Texas know that being considered a Mexican signifies contempt, abuses, and injustices. The Anglo-Saxon of Texas harbors a very marked racial prejudice against persons of Mexican origin, whatever be [*sic*] their citizenship.[137]

As seen in Perales's explanation, it was filled with painful challenges for Mexican Americans to claim their citizenship status. In fact, ethnic Mexicans as a category concealed vast differences in class and nationality, and the relationship between Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, and Mexican laborers in America was not equal.

In addition, there was also a deep disconnect between Mexican Americans' legal standing as American citizens and the reality of their rights being frequently

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[136] Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 95-99.

[137] Alonso S. Pelares, "La Unificación de los México-Americanos: III," *La Prensa*, September 6, 1929.

violated. As J. T. Canal, a key member of LULAC stated, "I did not know it [that I was a U.S. citizen] until I began to study the law."[138] Mexican Americans had trouble realizing that they actually were Americans. To avoid having the stigma of being an alien ineligible for citizenship derived from the social image commonly held of Mexican immigrants, LULAC decided to separate their Mexican American identity from the image of immigrants and laborers.

Because of class diversity among ethnic Mexicans, LULAC also exalted Mexican Americans over Mexican laborers and Mexican immigrants. Justifying themselves as middle-class and educated, LULAC tried to provide the majority of ethnic Mexicans with the appropriate goals of assimilation.[139] LULAC's policies in the 1930s encouraged Mexican Americans to distinguish themselves from Mexican immigrants of foreign birth and to combat the stereotype of cheap labor by presenting themselves in the best possible light.[140] LULAC's strategies primarily involved assimilating Mexican American citizens into society. Based on these implications, LULAC did not adopt a cooperative attitude toward ethnic Mexicans' labor activities and opposed its strong ties with communists. They supported the repatriation campaigns by the U.S. Border Patrol and called for suppression of the strike by the police.[141]

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[138] House Committee on Immigration, Hearings on Western Hemisphere Immigration, 71st Cong., 2d sess., 1930, (Testimony of J.T. Canales), 171; Orozco, *The Origins of the LULAC*, 122-23.

[139] August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 192; Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 77.

[140] Gonzalez, "Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca," 210.

[141] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 244; Filewood, "Tejano Revolt," 86-88.

The leaders of ethnic Mexicans' labor activities also rebelled against LULAC's policies. Tenayuca said "this is what really made me rebel against the LULAC. No matter how clean you were, how well-scrubbed your neck was, if you had a name like Garcia, it was bad."[142] Ethnic Mexicans needed to unite, not divide on the basis of citizenship, class, or any other social status, to create ethnic solidarity. In reality, it was impossible for ethnic Mexicans who participated in labor activity to divide themselves by class, citizenship, or any other social marker. Partaking in the activities were Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, middle class and poor working class, new arrivals and old residents, and men and women. In terms of gender, women, as well as immigrants, became "illegal aliens" on the grounds of their participation, according to LULAC.[143] Women made up the majority of the pecan shellers. In fact, many women who joined the strike did not naturalize.[144] Moreover, the work of sheller was feminized in some ways on the basis that men should not work in such an "un-manly" position. Snid, a former pecan sheller, recalled the time when her father began to work with her:

> …. later on as the Depression progressed, men had to come in and sit next to the family to do the work …. I think that as a last resort he had to go in and shell pecans. He was a very proud man, but he had to leave his pride behind him and to go in there and sit next to us to earn a living because there was nothing else.[145]

Those who were categorized as prospective "illegal aliens" according to LULAC were

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[142] Tenayuca, interview with Emilio Zamora with the Participation of Oralia Cortez, June 1986, San Antonio, Texas, MSS 420, Box.11, Folder.5, The Women's Collection, Texas Women's University, Denton, Texas.

[143] Carol Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics*, 3; Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexican Women or Dogs Allowed; the Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 217.

[144] Orozco, *No Mexican Women or Dogs Allowed*, 197.

[145] Snid, interview.

made up of Mexican laborers in San Antonio's pecan shelling industry.

In light of the fact that ethnic Mexicans were discriminated against by the American society systematically at both the State and Federal levels, and differentiated from middle class Mexican Americans who primarily pursued their assimilation into American society as proper citizens, the issues involved in the immigration question and Americanization were at the center of ethnic Mexican's labor activities, both ideologically and practically. Practically, labor activities came to the forefront of the debate concerning the improvement of discrimination toward ethnic Mexicans, as an alternative to LULAC. Incorporating Mexican immigrants, women, and Mexican laborers into its activities, the strike provided ethnic Mexicans who were excluded from civil rights and the Americanization movement, an opportunity to claim their interests.

More importantly, labor activities also evoked an alternative rhetoric of radicalism that contributed to the emergence of new possibilities for ethnic Mexicans to recognize their own ethnic identities and political and social autonomy. In her essay, Tenayuca explicitly rejected LULAC's stance for Americanization through assimilation. Instead, she insisted that American society should regard the ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest as part of the American nation regardless of their class, or presence or absence of citizenship.[146] She insisted:

> … the Mexican communities exist side by side with Anglo-American communities within a territory where the populated districts are separated by large but thinly populated mountainous and arid region. Should … therefore, be drawn that the Mexican people in the Southwest constitute a nation—or that they form a segment of the Mexican nation [South of the Rio Grande]? Our view is no.[147]

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[146] Tenayuca and Brooks, "The Mexican Question in the Southwest," 262.

[147] Ibid.

Neither being separated from American society, nor assimilating into it in the manner of LULAC, Tenayuca proposed that ethnic Mexicans should be recognized by American society with their cultural and linguistic, customs, and traditions intact, which were essentially different from those of the rest of the country.[148]

Further, to acquire proper recognition from American society, Tenayuca clearly stressed that such claims must be sent by "the proletarian base of the Mexican population, its overwhelming majority."[149] She argued that American society should recognize and accept the importance of Mexican laborers who had bolstered the development of the region, although the influence of communism in her ideology had a enhanced the tendency to see Mexicans' labor activities as un-American. To prevent such perceptions, Tenayuca used the term "democracy" to justify their activities and claimed that "[t]he Mexican people's movement in the Southwest will constitute one more important and powerful link in the growing movement for the democratic front in the United States."[150] Under such rhetoric, ethnic Mexicans' labor activities served as an alternative perspective toward the immigration question and Americanization issues, and as an alternative strategy to reaffirm their ethnic collectivity and identity.

Tenayuca's vision toward Americanization was different from LULAC's assimilation policy. Through labor activities made by ethnic Mexicans, which included both American citizens and un-naturalized Mexican nationals, she tried to define the

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[148] Ibid., 257.

[149] Ibid., 265.

[150] Ibid., 268.

meaning of "democracy" in America in terms that suited ethnic Mexicans' ends. Referring to the Bill of Rights, which guaranteed freedom of speech, and the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. constitution, Tenayuca justified her communist ideology.[151] For her, being communist did not deny one's Americanness. Rather, She insisted that ideologies influenced from progressivism, radicalism, and communism, contributed to reform of economic and social systems based on class and ethnic discrimination. In addition, by expanding the definition of "democracy," she set not only Mexican Americans but also Mexican immigrants and Mexican nationals into the sights of Americanization activities.

For Tenayuca, ethnic Mexicans' labor activities were a challenge to assimilation policies and redefined their ethnic Americanization, which enabled them to combine their ethnic, class, and civic interests at the same time. Although the strike ended as a victory for the union, which failed to acknowledge laborers' ethnic interests, ethnic Mexicans' labor activities remained a great achievement. Snid, a former pecan sheller reviewed the attempt of ethnic Mexicans' labor activities:

> Maybe we didn't win that much as far as money was concerned, but we learned that being united is power regardless … A single person cannot do anything. Alone we could not do anything. People are power … I think we learned how to even defend ourselves more … Afterwards it was entirely different.[152]

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[151] "Subject: Civil Liberties in San Antonio, Statement by Maury Maverick, Mayor of San Antonio," AR127, Folder.16-10, George and Latane Lambert Papers, Labor History Archives, UT Arlington.

[152] Snid, interview.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The aim of ethnic Mexican's labor activity in the 1930s went beyond the goal of unionization. Ethnic Mexicans' labor activity was not merely an activity against economic oppression, but an attempt at social reform of a system that victimized and marginalized them. The Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 in San Antonio is an example of such dynamism and diversity in the meaning of ethnic Mexicans' labor activity.

Facing the economic exploitation and social segregation which stemmed from structural discrimination against ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio, Mexican laborers in the pecan shelling industry began to unite and opposed the SPSC's exploitation. Guided by Emma Tenayuca, the strike intensified with the advancement of opposition from the city's authorities. However, because of the harassment from the city authorities, an ethnic-based strike was untenable.

The transformation of the leadership of the strike from ethnic Mexican to UCAPAWA meant that the primary purpose of the strike shifted from ethnic consciousness, based on ethnic Mexicans' interests, to class and economic consciousness, based on unionism. At the same time, the central agent of the strike changed from Mexican laborers to union members leadership. The most critical reason that caused the gap between ethnic Mexicans and UCAPAWA was immigration questions and Americanization issues.

Also, in regards to those matters, the separation between ethnic labor activities and the civil rights movement deepened its split. The social image of Mexican immigrants as "illegal aliens," enhanced by the politics of State and Federal institutions officially and unofficially, made it difficult for both UCAPAWA and Mexican Americans to incorporate Mexican immigrants and laborers into their activities. Although the strike in 1938 was not a victory for ethnic Mexicans' labor activities, their efforts created an alternative perspective toward immigration and Americanization, and alternative strategies to reaffirm their ethnic collective identity.

During the 1930s, ethnic Mexicans participated in several kinds of activities, some of them claimed their citizenship as Americans, and others searched for their rights as laborers and immigrants through their activities. Each individual selected, accepted, and chose Mexican American, Mexican immigrant, Mexican laborer, Mexican, or some combination of them, to construct their own identity and to place themselves in American society.[153] Ethnic Mexicans' labor activities show one of those processes by which ethnic groups found a way to be accepted by American society and to acquire fair treatment. The Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 demonstrates a critical debate that emerged during the 1930s about immigration and Americanization. This thesis shows that ethnic Mexicans' labor activities created an alternative way to force the acceptance of ethnic Mexicans into American society. It was an alternative way to Americanize ethnic Mexicans, which differed from the assimilation policy like that of LULAC. As David Gutiérrez noted, those decisions which ethnic Mexicans made in the 1930s, were to

[153] Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 19.

define the shape and direction of Mexican Americans', Mexican immigrants', and Mexican laborers' involvement in the American political arena for the next half century.[154]

In addition, it should be noted that ethnic Mexicans' fluctuating identification overlaps with the process of constructing national character and selecting immigrants who were eligible for citizenship. The growing demands of ethnic Mexicans to pursue their interests paralleled the heightening motive of American society for institutionalizing the social status of Mexican laborers and immigrants as un-Americanized aliens, which separated them from America. It was not a coincidence that the U.S. government innovated the labor contracting system called the Bracero Program in 1942. The Bracero Program created a new social status as guest worker who could stay in America temporarily to perform consistent labor. This system detached newly arrived Mexican immigrants from the rest of the American working class and Mexican Americans who had American citizenship.[155] As a result, immigration questions further became an obstacle for Mexican immigrants and laborers to developing ethnic and class solidarity with both Mexican Americans and other ethnic and racial groups. For ethnic Mexicans, claiming their labor rights and civil rights were joined, but never directly linked with each other regarding immigration. Reexaming the historical importance of the Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938 provides a significant contribution to the debate about ethnic Mexicans' class, identity, and civic interests.

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[154] Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 71.

[155] Justin Akers Chacón, "The Bracero Program: A Twentieth-Century Caste System," in *No One is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, eds., Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 140.

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