RED-BLOODED AMERICANS: RACIAL IDENTITY AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN CRUSADE FOR EQUAL EDUCATION, 1924-1946

by

RUTH EMILY DAVIS

(Under the Direction of Pamela Voekel)

ABSTRACT

This thesis primarily looks at Mexican immigrants' and Mexican Americans' resistance to school segregation in southern California from 1924-1946. Particularly, it examines how these individuals used race to make claims for educational equality. By charting a shift in activists' rhetorical use of race during these years, it suggests that Mexican Americans' conceptions of their own racial identities diverged substantially from those of their largely Mexican-born parents. The thesis further suggests that the Chicano Movement's celebration of a non-white identity perhaps had its roots in the racial conceptions of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement.

INDEX WORDS: Mexican-American Generation, School Segregation, Activism, Racial Formation, Immigration, National Identity, California, Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: FROM EQUALLY WHITE TO EQUALLY AMERICAN

By the 1930s, a vast majority of Mexican-American students across the Southwest were educated in segregated facilities. Most commonly, they were separated into "Mexican schools," or schools solely designed for Mexican Americans under the guise of language acquisition and Americanization.[1] Though the practice of segregating Mexican-American students was enacted on a highly localized level, segregation was a fairly uniform experience for Mexican-American schoolchildren across the Southwest.[2]

In 1931, a parents' group in Lemon Grove, California posed a legal challenge to Mexican-American segregation. The segregated students were "entitled to equal rights and privileges with other American born children of the caucasian race," they countered.[3] To the plaintiff, students' segregation constituted racial segregation; this was unwarranted since Mexican-American children were legally white. The defendant countered that segregation was not racial, but was designed to help students acquire fluency in English.[4] Ultimately, segregation

[1] Sometimes they were segregated in schools with "non-white" minorities (such as African Americans or Asian Americans). Also, they sometimes went attended the same campus as Anglo students, but were segregated into classrooms with only other Mexican-American students. However, the majority Mexican-American students in the 1920s-1940s received their education in schools built to serve only Mexican-American students. Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. and Richard R. Valencia, "From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to Hopwood: The Educational Plight and Struggle of Mexican Americans in the Southwest," *Harvard Educational Review* 68, no.3 (1998), 370; Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia: The Balch University Press, 1990), 21. Ward William Leis. "The Status of Education for Mexican Children in Four Border States" (masters thesis, USC, 1932), 30.

[2] Rubén Donato and Jarrod S. Hanson, "Legally White, Socially "Mexican": The Politics of De Jure and De Facto School Segregation in the American Southwest," *Harvard Educational Review* 82, no. 2 (2012), 203-204, 221.

[3] Superior Court of the State of California, San Diego County, Petition for Writ of Mandate. Lemon Grove Historical Society.

[4] Superior Court of the State of California, San Diego County, Answer to Petition for Writ of Mandate. Lemon Grove Historical Society.

was overturned on an argument related to English acquisition, rather than Mexican-American racial identity.[5] Nonetheless, Mexican-American whiteness was central to the plaintiff's argument to counter what these parents correctly perceived as segregation on the basis of race.

Fifteen years later, another group of parents in Orange County, California, challenged their children's segregation in the *Mendez v. Westminster* case. Here, their legal team used the same basic argument that would successfully overturn racial segregation in the *Brown v. Board* case; that separate educational facilities for Mexican Americans violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In the case's original hearing in 1946, Mexican-American whiteness was not used in the arguments against segregation, and the plaintiff's central claim prevailed.[6]

Unfortunately, the case was appealed the next year, and the court struck down the more powerful argument in favor of one that did not threaten racial segregation – that Mexican Americans were segregated without cause and in violation of state laws. Interestingly, Mexican-American whiteness appeared in this court case; however, in this ruling it primarily undermined the more potent 1946 ruling. Because Mexican Americans were white, along with several other factors, school administrators had no cause to segregate them, the judge maintained. Here, Mexican-American whiteness was not only unimportant to the plaintiff's original argument, but it undercut the plaintiff's potentially meaningful challenge to racial segregation.

[5] It was ruled that segregation would hinder, rather than help, English acquisition. Donate, "Legally White," 215.

[6] Mexican-American whiteness is not mentioned, but vaguely implied when the judge mentions that the segregation does not constitute racial segregation – nonetheless the case makes clear that students were separated on the basis of ethnic and racial signifiers such as last names and skin color. United States Court of Appeals, 9th circuit. No. 11,310. *Westminster vs. Mendez*, April 14, 1947; Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 28, UCLA Library Special Collections; United States District Court, Southern District of California Central Division, no. 4292-M., *Mendez v. Westminster*, Retrieved National Archives OPA 10/15/2014

In the fifteen year period between these cases, attitudes regarding racial segregation had shifted in the United States. After fighting Hitler's theories of racial supremacy in Europe, many Americans were more hesitant to explicitly and unequivocally voice white supremacist sentiment. Mexican Americans in California successfully challenged race restrictions at swimming pools, parks, and even schools after the war. Furthermore, nine years after World War II, the *Brown v. Board* case would successfully challenge racially segregated education nationally. However, while *Mendez* reflected the growing national antipathy toward *de jure* segregation following World War II, it also revealed a shifting conception of Mexican-American racial identity both within the United States and Mexican-American community itself. These two case's differing treatment of Mexican-American whiteness show how educational activism can provide important insight into minority groups' own racial identity. While there is a rich literature on Mexican-American activism for educational equality, few scholars have commented on the way in which this activism reflected Mexican Americans' conceptions of their own racial identities prior to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s.[7]

This thesis chiefly explores how members of the Mexican *colonia* and Mexican Americans discussed their own racial identity in their crusade for more equal education in southern California in the 1920s-1940s.[8] The study primarily contrasts how predominantly first-

[7] See Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *Brown Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2001) and Steven H. Wilson and Ariela J. Goss "Brown over 'Other White': Mexican Americans' Legal Arguments and Litigation Strategy in School Desegregation Lawsuits," *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 145-194 for discussions of Chicano racial identity and the struggle for equal education in the 1960s. Rubén Donato's and Jarrod Hanson's "Legally White, Socially 'Mexican,'" discusses the way in which racial identity was shaped by court cases related to segregation. However, the article does focuses primarily on the degree to which Mexican Americans were racialized as non-white, rather than racial identity within the Mexican-American community.

[8] For the purposes of this paper I will refer to the activists of the 1920s & early 1930s as Mexican immigrants or refer to the group as a whole as the Mexican *colonia*. These persons identified themselves as "Mexican" and their community at large as the "*colonia*." They largely did not consider themselves as nationally American. Also, many of the persons I will discuss came to the United States as adults in the 1910s and 1920s with the large wave of Mexican immigration to southern California in the years surrounding the Mexican Revolution. However, I will refer to their children who experienced segregation in the 1920s and 1930s, and later fought against

generation Mexican immigrants and their Mexican-American children used race to make claims for greater educational equality. Paradoxically, it finds, like historian Benjamin Johnson has suggested, that *colonia* members largely did not consider themselves racially white, and instead often identified with the *mestizaje* of Mexican racial ideologies. However, they were more likely than their predominantly American-born children to use whiteness when making claims for educational equality. Paradoxically, members of the Mexican-American generation, who had largely grown up contending with the racial binary of the United States, were much less likely to hold up their white identities when making claims for educational equality. Instead they began to cooperate with legally non-white groups, such as African Americans, in civil rights struggles to a greater degree than their parents had and continued to resist self-identifying as white. In this way, this thesis argues that the process of "becoming Mexican American" that scholars George Sánchez and Mario T. García situate in the 1930s and 1940s, involved a complicated, and surprising, negotiation of racial identity. Rather than clinging to the legal protections of whiteness, many members of the Mexican-American generation began to make claims for greater equality on the basis of an American identity that was not white, or even one that was non-white.[9] In this way, the project suggests that Mexican Americans' self-categorization as non-white, key to the brown power ideology of the Chicano Movement, had its roots in the racial conceptions of the Mexican-American generation.[10]

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this segregation in the 1940s, as Mexican Americans. Young activists in the 1940s conceived of themselves as Americans and often identified themselves as "Mexican American." This terminology accords with Sánchez's and García's understanding of this latter group as the "Mexican-American Generation."

[9] I say not white here because, like their parents, Mexican Americans often thought of themselves as racially *mestizo* (neither white, nor non-white). However, I also say non-white, because by the 1940s, Mexican Americans began to reject whiteness and instead identify themselves as racial minorities.

[10] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Cutlure, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Benjamin H. Johnson, "The Cosmic Race in Texas: Racial Fusion, White Supremacy, and Civil Rights Politics," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011): 404-419.

This project will examine racial formation through resistance to school segregation. Importantly, the schools represented a space in which Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American children were racialized as well as Americanized, and thereby theoretically taught to adopt "white" social habits. In this thesis, analysis of Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American resistance is situated between two key events, the Immigration Act of 1924 and the 1946 *Mendez v. Westminster* court case. Although Mexican immigration was not restricted by the Immigration Act of 1924, many disgruntled nativists actively voiced their resentment towards this omission, and Mexican immigrants became one of the more visible immigrant groups in southern California. As anti-Mexican sentiment grew over the course of the 1920s, a system for segregating Mexican-American children consolidated. The 1946 *Mendez* trial, in turn, represented a total departure from the whiteness strategy employed by activists in the 1920s and 1930s; as a consequence, the case delivered the ruling that would ultimately defeat race-based school segregation nationwide.

The first chapter discusses the Mexican *colonia's* resistance against educational discrimination from 1924-1929. This period was characterized by heightened anti-Mexican sentiment. In these years, the *colonia* emphasized Mexican patriotism and relied on its connections to the Mexican government to demand more equal education. The second chapter examines activism between 1929 and 1931. In these years, government officials posed several threats to the *colonia's* legal whiteness. The *colonia* responded by making some of its first legal challenges to school segregation. In these instances, *colonia* members had to engage with the racial binary to preserve the advantages of legal whiteness. Unsurprisingly, they held up their white identities when making claims for better education. The third chapter chiefly analyzes early resistance efforts by members of the Mexican-American generation from 1937-1941. Here,

youth leaders leaned heavily on their identities as Americans when decrying educational discrimination while simultaneously moving away from whiteness. This tendency intensified as the United States became more involved in the war effort. The final chapter explores efforts from 1941-1946. Primarily it examines how two particularly visible manifestations anti-Mexican hysteria during World War II, the Sleepy Lagoon Trial and the Zoot Suit Riots, impacted Mexican-American struggles for educational equality. Following these two instances, Mexican Americans moved further from their white identities when demanding educational equality. Instead they began to actively identify as racial minorities and often joined with African Americans to struggle for equal education.

This project draws from an excellent literature on Mexican-American identity, racial formation, and segregation. George Sánchez and Mario Garcia, for instance, both historicize, in different ways, the consolidation of a Mexican-American identity. Furthermore, Stephen Pitti, Natalie Molina, and Stephanie Lethwaite provide meaningful insight into the racialization of Mexican Americans, particularly in California. Moreover, Gilbert Gonzalez and Judith Rafferty eloquently detail the role of the public schools in this process of racialization. However, Zoe Burkholder's study demonstrates that individual educators made anti-racist, although sometimes patronizing, interventions in the schools during World War II. Neil Foley and Ariela Goss, in turn, show the efforts taken by persons of Mexican heritage in the United States to secure legal and social whiteness and its protections. Lisa Ramos and Carlos Blanton also explore how Mexican-American leaders' focus on preserving legal whiteness stifled meaningful cooperation between Mexican Americans and African Americans. Despite Mexican Americans' legal whiteness strategy, Rubén Donato and Jarred Hansen detail its limits within the schools. However, Benjamin Johnson and Julie Weise critically challenge scholars' emphasis on Mexican

Americans' commitment to legal whiteness. This project will likewise propose that whiteness played a smaller role in Mexican-American civil rights efforts than previously understood. Moreover, it will suggest that the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s began to privilege a non-white identity that the Chicano Rights Movement would more fully embrace in the 1960s and 1970s.[11]

[11] Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; Garcia, *Mexican Americans*; Neil Foley. *The White Scourge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Neil Foley, "Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and Whiteness" in *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg, 55-65. (New York: Worth Publishers: 2005); Ariela J. Goss "Texas Mexicans and the Politics of Whiteness," *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 195-205; Stephanie Lethwaite. *Race, Place and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2009). Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014); Stephen Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Lisa Y. Ramos, "Not Similar Enough," in *The Struggle in Black and Brown: African American and Mexican American Relations During the Civil Rights Era*, ed. Brian D. Behnken (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011). Kindle Edition; Carlos K. Blanton, "George I. Sánchez, Ideology and Whiteness in the Making of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement, 1930-1960," *Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 3 (2006): 569-604; Donato, "Legally White,"; Johnson. "The Cosmic Race in Texas"; Julie M. Weise. "Mexican Nationalisms, Southern Racisms: Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. South," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 749-777.

CHAPTER TWO

"MEXICANIZING OUR LITTLE ONES": RESISTANCE IN THE *COLONIA*, 1924-1929[12]

"It is almost impossible to Americanize these people," fumed an angry parents' organization at the Los Angeles City School Board.[13] They were concerned that by enlarging the Palos Verde school district, a district to which Anglo parents had frequently transferred their children because it was "entirely composed of white children," many Mexican-American students might be included. Such an action, the group maintained, was "unfair" to children "of the Caucasian race" that might attend school with these Mexican-American schoolchildren.[14] Despite parents' pleas, the board denied this overtly racist request. The California School Code only permitted the segregation of Asian-American and American-Indian students.[15]

Yet, many contemporary educators agreed that placing Mexican-American and Anglo students together was unjust. According to one researcher, such an action would retard Anglo intellectual development while overwhelming Mexican-American pupils who possessed "about 85 percent of the mental capacity of whites." [16] Due to their alleged intellectual inferiority, these experts maintained, Mexican Americans ought to be separated.[17] Moreover, while

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[12] "*mexicanización de nuestros pequeños*"; "Escuela mexicana en Clearwater," *La Opinión*, August 23, 1927.

[13] Minutes of the L.A. School District Board of Education, June 23, 1927. Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records, 1875-2012, LSC 1923, box 59, UCLA Library Special Collections.

[14] Minutes of the L.A. School District Board of Education, June 23, 1927, box 59.

[15] The organization would later protest another action by the Los Angeles City Board of Education that might place Anglo and Mexican-American students together. Minutes of the L.A. School District Board of Education, July 7, 1927, August 8, 1927, October 24, 1929, and November 13, 1929, box 59 and box 69; California Assembly Bill no. 433, January 19, 1931. Government Documents, San Francisco Public Library.

[16] Rollen H. Drake, "A Comparative Study of the Mentality and Achievement of Mexican and White Children," (masters thesis, USC, 1927), 6.

[17] Eunice Elvira Parr, "A Comparative Study of Mexican and American Children in the Schools of San Antonio, Texas" (dissertation, Univerisity of Chicago, 1926), 50-51.

Americanization was not "impossible" to these educators, many believed Mexican-American students should be separated for "Americanization" education before entering classrooms with Anglo schoolchildren.[18] Such arguments for segregation prevailed and segregation expanded over the course of the 1920s. Indeed, by 1935, one contemporary educational survey found that over eighty-five percent of school districts across the American Southwest segregated Mexican-American students.[19]

When segregation and Americanization increasingly defined Mexican-American students' educational experiences over the course of the 1920s, their parents quickly challenged this educational inequality and its racializing implications. They predominantly responded in ways that emphasized Mexican nationality and patriotism. Although in the 1920s, Mexican immigrants began to establish community organizations in southern California, such as chambers of commerce, *comítes de beneficencia*, and mutual aid societies, they retained close ties to the country they left behind. Many even planned to return to Mexico. Moreover, in the years following the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican government was anxious "to extend official domestic policy" and influence "into the emigrant community."[20] Consequently, Mexican government officials quickly defended their socioeconomically ostracized compatriots. By uplifting their Mexican identities to fight racialization in the schools, Mexican immigrants and their Mexican allies conformed to popular Mexican racial ideologies.[21]

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[18] Leis, "The Status of Education," 75; Charles Clifford Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation versus Non-Segregation of Mexican Children," (masters thesis, USC, 1935), 59.

[19] Minutes of the La Ballona School District Board of Education. June 2, 1927. Minutes of the L.A. School District Los Angeles Unified School District August 27, 1924; August 4, 1927; November 13, 1929. Superintendent's Conference Notes, November 2, 1933. Board of Education Records, 1875-2012, LSC 1923, box 821, UCLA Library Special Collections; Rafferty, *Land of Fair Promise*, 114; Gonzalez, *Chicano Education*, 21.

[20] Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Houston: University of Texas Press, 1999), 1.

[21] Arturo F. Rosales, *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996), 58-59.

When Mexican immigration to the United States increased in the years surrounding the Mexican Revolution, anti-Mexican sentiment grew. The Immigration Act of 1924, while not wholly restricting Mexican immigration like it did for other immigrant groups, brought with it the border patrol and the illegal alien category. After 1924, persons entering the United States from Mexico without authorization were liable for deportation. Consequently, following these new regulations, thousands of Mexican immigrants were forcibly repatriated in the 1920s. Many of those repatriated had entered the United States prior to 1924 and therefore should have been exempt from the new law; however, authorities often pressured them to leave. Moreover, in the late 1920s, state politicians submitted several bills to restrict Mexican immigration.[22]

Those who supported increased restrictions promulgated insulting characterizations of Mexican immigrants. According to one nativist, Mexican immigrants "[drained] American charities, [formed] a large part of the jail community," and "[affected] the health of the community."[23] For the president of the Commission on Immigration and Housing, Mexican immigrants were "mentally low and generally very unhealthy" and frequently "[knew] little of sanitation."[24]

Often commentators' arguments against Mexican immigration, particularly those centered on hygiene, were class-based. For instance, several writers argued that Mexican

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[22] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 46. John Weber, "Homing Pigeons, Cheap Labor and Frustrated Nativists: Immigration Reform and the Deportation of Mexicans from South Texas in the 1920s," *Western Historical Quarterly* 44 (2013), 167-168; Mae M. Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *Journal of American History* 68, no. 2 (1999): 67; Rodolfo Uranga, "Glosario del Día," *La Opinión*, May 12, 1929; "Confer on Box Law: Portes Gil and Morrow Consider Its Effect on Mexicans," *New York Times*, May 19, 1929; Rodolfo Uranga, "Glosario del Día," *La Opinión*, May 13, 1929; "Archbishop Asks Ban on Mexicans," *Daily Herald*, March 11, 1926; Speech of John C. Box of Texas in the House of Representatives, 69th Congress, 1st sess, (June 7, 1926), California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

[23] "Archbishop asks."

[24] Commission of Immigration and Housing of California to Samuel M. Shortridge, February 24, 1926. March 11, 1926. California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

immigrants were fundamental filthy due to the allegedly unsanitary conditions of labor camps.[25] Moreover, border patrol agents often used psychologically and physically painful delousing and sanitizing practices on Mexican immigrants entering the United States because they appeared to be laborers.[26] Conversely, for several writers, Mexican immigrants were primarily valuable because they provided inexpensive labor. Despite the alleged sanitary, moral, and racial threats Mexican immigrants posed, businessmen needed their labor to produce food and profits. Indeed, for one California congressman, Mexican immigrants "should be returned to Mexico at the completion of the harvest." [27]

While these arguments about mental and physical deficiency, dirtiness, and class implicitly racialized Mexican immigrants, some of the reasoning against Mexican immigration explicitly used race to justify their exclusion. For instance, one commentator argued against unrestricted Mexican immigration on the grounds that it "[diminished] the percentage of our white population." The American government should also limit Mexican immigration because Mexicans were "indians" and, correspondingly, "seldom [became] naturalized," the writer averred.[28] Another critic more delicately referenced Mexican non-whiteness when intimating that the policy of allowing more "men of northern European descent" to immigrate could ensure that future U.S. citizens would "have the qualities…[that] will give security to our civilization."[29]

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[25] "Housing and Sanitation Among Immigrants," [n.d.], 2-3; "Archbishop Asks," California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

[26] Alexandra Minna Stern, "Buildings, Borderlines, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, no. 1 (1999), 72.

[27] Henry E. Barbour to Rev. E.J. Hanna, March 2, 1926; "The Mexican in the United States" [n.d.], 1. California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

[28] Commission of Immigration and Housing of California to Samuel M. Shortridge.

[29] "Hanna Tells Problems of Immigration," *Los Angeles Examiner*, May 25, 1926. California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

Commentators also deplored the alleged social burden created by these Mexican immigrants' school-age children. Indeed, pro-restrictionists often cited Mexican-American youths' so-called delinquency problem and drain of public school resources as cause to curtail Mexican immigration.[30] However, perhaps the most salient manifestation of this discrimination was an increased effort to segregate Mexican-American schoolchildren by Anglo parents and school administrators.

Because the California School Code only permitted the segregation of Asian-American and American-Indian students during this period, school officials often denied requests to separate Mexican-American students on the basis of nationality alone.[31] However, aforementioned assumptions about Mexican physical and intellectual inferiority justified Mexican Americans' separation for Anglo educational experts. Educators also frequently cited language as a reason for segregating Mexican Americans. Furthermore, students were often segregated due to residential segregation or discriminatory districting. As a result, the localized, but pervasive, practice of segregating Mexican-American students expanded over the course of the 1920s.[32]

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[30] "Hanna Tells"; "Archbishop Asks,"; Commission of Immigration and Housing of California to Samuel M. Shortridge; California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

[31] Minutes of the L.A. School District Board of Education, July 7, 1927, August 8, 1927, October 24, 1929, and November 13, 1929, box 59 and box 69; Assembly Bill no. 433.

[32] The character of Mexican-American segregation during this period has been contested by various scholars. For instance, Neil Foley and Ariela Goss argue that Mexican Americans faced de facto segregation that was "based on custom rather than statutory authority." However, Gilbert González argues that Mexican-American segregation in this period represented an instance of "de jure segregation" because "although there were no laws" educators utilized "state power granted to school administrators" to create educational policies geared toward "the special needs of a linguistically and culturally distinct community." Rubén Donato and Jason Hanson refine the argument that Mexican Americans experienced de jure segregation in their "Legally White, Socially "Mexican": The Politics of De Jure and De Facto School Segregation in the American Southwest." Here, like González, they argue that since "school officials" enacted policies "that resulted in the intentional segregation of students," the segregation of Mexican-American students during this period constituted de jure segregation. Moreover, they argue that classifying this segregation as de jure best indicates the racialized nature of this segregation. However, because these laws were enacted on such a local level and were applied inconsistently labelling this system as *de jure* segregation, which echoes the Jim Crow segregation of the South, is somewhat misleading. This formulation of

Simultaneously, teachers and administrators across the Southwest championed efforts to "Americanize" Mexican-American students. In fact, arguments for Americanization often rationalized segregation. In addition to their conviction that Mexican-American students universally had little or no knowledge of English, proponents of Americanization argued that Mexicans possessed inferior moral and hygienic habits. Because of these qualities, some educators argued, Mexican-American students should not only be Americanized, but Americanized in isolation from Anglo students. In the name of Americanization, teachers and administrators sought to reform Mexican-American students' language, clothes, food, and even hairstyles. [33] For these educators, Mexican Americans were, if not biologically inferior to Anglo students, as some scholars implied, certainly culturally deficient. In sum, Anglo reformers championed the segregation and Americanization of Mexican-American students on the assumption that these students were wholly distinct from and inferior to their Anglo counterparts. This segregation, which mimicked that of legally non-white groups, implicitly racialized segregated students as non-white.

However, members of the Mexican *colonia* in Southern California, many of which had arrived in the tumultuous years surrounding the Mexican Revolution, did not think of themselves as non-white. Rather, their racial self-identification rested outside of the confines of the U.S. racial binary. Following the Mexican Revolution, Mexican leaders struggled to unify the

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Mexican-American segregation as *de jure* is further complicated by the fact that some administrators, such as those in Los Angeles, adhered to a particularly colorblind ideology when contemplating the question of segregating Mexican-American students. Nonetheless, this segregation was enacted through localized ordinances which explicitly used race and nationality to separate these students. In this way, it is also somewhat inaccurate to label this form of segregation as *de facto*. Instead, I refer to this system of segregation as one that was non-uniformly enforced at the local level, but, nonetheless, widespread. For this reason, this form of segregation seems to rest somewhere between *de jure* and *de facto*.

[33] Leis, "The Status of Education," 75; Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 59.
See Judith Rosenberg Rafferty, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools, 1885-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) for more discussion on the ways in which Americanization classes tried to reform immigrant children.

Mexican people around their vision of a modern Mexico. Reflecting this desire for national cohesion, many Mexican leaders championed racial ideologies which minimized racial difference among Mexicans. José Vasconcelos – Mexican Secretary of Public Education from 1920 to 1924 and 1928 presidential hopeful – was one of the largest proponents of Mexican racial homogeneity.

In his *The Cosmic Race*, Vasconcelos argued that Mexicans, and indeed Latin Americans more generally, would soon become dominant world actors because of their mixed racial identities. Due to their more lenient attitudes toward miscegenation, Latin Americans were beginning to form a "fifth race" or "cosmic race" imbued with the "genius and blood of all peoples."[34] Accordingly, his essay celebrated *mestizaje* and challenged the United States' denigrating depiction of "mongrelization." He also decried the "violent supremacy" of the United States expressed through Jim Crow and anti-Asian immigration laws. [35] Yet, his racial ideologies fell short of effectively indicting white supremacy; he continued to provide a more favorable depiction of whites than non-whites in his essay.[36] This formulation of Mexican racial identity as universally mestizo was reiterated by prominent Mexican intellectuals such as anthropologist Manuel Gamio.[37]

When fighting against discrimination in the United States, Mexican immigrants and their supporters upheld their *mestizaje* when demanding greater equality. For instance, one member of the *colonia* in Los Angeles took issue over the fact that the Archbishop of San Francisco referred to Mexican Americans as non-white when advocating for restrictions on Mexican immigration.

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[34] Johnson, "The Cosmic Race in Texas," 20.

[35] José Vasconcelos, "Mestizaje," in Ilan Stavans *José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 71.

[36] For instance, he describes whites as rational and clear-headed, while characterizing non-white groups as "full of lust," mysterious, and forgetful. Vasconcelos, "Mestizaje," 66.

[37] Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 58.

If not white, were they, she asked, "yellow or black?"[38] "Our blood is Indian," she continued, but "noble and clean."[39] Through this alleged connection to Aztec nobility and Spanish ancestry, Mexicans were racially comparable to whites both due to their European and indigenous heritage. Moreover, she challenged the pretensions of the Archbishop for excluding members of the Mexican *colonia* as "always foreigners," while African Americans, members of the "most…despicable race," remained American.[40] In this instance, this *colonia* member refused to be identified as non-white and even denigrated African Americans. She recognized that Mexican *mestizaje* could not fit within the confines of the U.S. racial binary. Instead, she countered, Mexicans' *mestizaje* connoted a form of racial superiority; as a consequence, the *colonia's* exclusion was perplexing. In this way, she used claims about the superiority of racial mixture inherent to popular Mexican racial ideologies to counter anti-Mexican sentiment.

Moreover, even some advocates from outside the *colonia* used similar arguments to combat discrimination. For instance, one writer cited the *mestizaje* of successful Mexican leaders, such as President Calles, to counter the notion that Mexican racial mixture "naturally [degenerated]" the Mexican people.[41] Here, Mexican ideas about racial mixture and "fitness" began to inform non-Mexicans' evaluation of the *colonia's* racial identity.

When members of the *colonia* challenged the school segregation and Americanization efforts that racialized their children, they did not invoke race as explicitly. Rather than situating

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[38] "*amarillos o negros*" (unless otherwise noted, translations are mine); Una Mexicana to Mr. Edward J. Hanna. March, 1926. California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

[39] "*[nuestra] sangre es india*"; "*azúl y limpia*"; Una Mexicana to Mr. Edward J. Hanna.

[40] "*siempre extranjeros*"; "*raza más…despicable*"; Una Mexicana to Mr. Edward J. Hanna.

[41] The author is not listed, however, they definitely seem to be speaking from outside the Mexican community. The source comes from the Department of Industrial Relations, so it is possible that it was written by an employee of this department.
"Some Notes on the Mexican in Southern California," [n.d.]. California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

themselves on either side of the racial binary, they emphasized their identities as Mexican to make claims for greater educational equality. Consequently, by using their Mexican identities, instead of legal whiteness, to fight educational inequality, Mexican immigrants reflected the fusion of racial and national identity popular after the Mexican Revolution. By creating patriotic "Mexican Schools" and promoting Mexican nationalism in the very schools that shamed and racialized Mexican-American students, members of the Mexican *colonia* used their Mexican identities to make claims for educational equality.

In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, Mexican politicians optimistically looked towards the school as a source of national cohesion. The 1917 Constitution had severely weakened the Catholic Church's role in education, allowing the State to assume primary organizational and ideological leadership. While government officials expanded and regulated educational services, they also upheld Mexican patriotism as the primary end of state-sponsored education. The Secretariat of Public Education sent elite urban teachers deep within the countryside to destabilize the Catholic Church's power and motivate poor Mexicans to place their hearts and labor behind the state's modernizing impulses. While vigorously promoting the policies of the new government through reformed schools across the country, Mexican officials contemplated extending this education northwards.[42]

In 1926, the Mexican Secretary of Public Education found an opportunity to bring this educational project to schoolchildren within the southern California *colonia*. The Mexican Chamber of Commerce had established an extracurricular "Mexican school" in the Belvedere community. The Mexican Secretary of Public Education generously supported the project,

[42] Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1982), 134, 152, 159; Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 4, 25, 35.

providing an assortment of school supplies including books and maps. He even arranged for a Mexican teacher with training in civics and psychology to lead instruction at the school. With the education they obtained at the Mexican school, Mexican-American children who might go back to Mexico could "continue their studies in that country in official schools, without needing to take any previous exam."[43]

Shortly after it opened, the school encountered setbacks. The Chamber of Commerce "had never helped the Mexico School" after it set it up. It neglected light bills and the teacher's paycheck. Chamber members only occasionally visited to "publically" show other businessmen "WHAT THEY WERE DOING TO BENEFIT THE MEXICAN COLONY AT BELVEDERE," fumed a journalist for *La Opinión*, the primary Spanish-language periodical in Los Angeles.[44] Consequently, the founder ceded control to the consulate and the Secretariat of Public Education. This school would be the first of several "Mexican Schools" that the Mexican consul and the Secretary of Public Education would maintain in California.[45]

In the next three years, Mexican officials established several more Mexican schools in other "communities of countrymen" in or adjacent to Los Angeles such as Clearwater, Watts, Edendale, San Bernardino, and Van Nuys.[46] The schools offered instruction in areas such as Spanish language and Mexican history and geography. Children also learned popular Mexican games and songs. In addition to forming schools, Mexican officials also helped set up libraries

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[43] "*continuar en aquel país los estudios en las escuelas oficiales, sin previo examen*" (unless otherwise noted, translations are mine). "La Escuela 'México' de Belvedere," *La Opinión*, February 17, 1927; Gilbert G. González. *Mexican Consuls*, 53.

[44] "*públicamente*"; "*LO QUE ESTABA HACIENDO PARA EL BENEFICIO DE LA COLONIA MEXICANA DE BELVEDERE*," "La Escuela 'México.'"

[45] Similar "Mexican Schools" were also established in Texas. González, *Mexican Consuls*, 53.; "La Escuela 'México": Rosales, "Chicano!," 81. Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. *Brown Not White*, 39.

[46] "*núcleos de compatriotas*"; "Quedó establecida una nueva escuela Mexicana en California," *La Opinión*, January 6, 1928.; "Escuela mexicana"; "En San Bernardino, Calif., funciona una escuela mexicana," *La Opinión*, January 2, 1928; "Quedó abierta la escuela de Van Nuys, Calif.," *La Opinión*, November 3, 1928.

with books in Spanish and on Mexican history and culture in southern California *colonias.*[47] Mexican immigrant parents hoped to provide their children with an "exclusively Mexican" education.[48] Both the Mexican officials who established the schools and the Mexican immigrant parents sending their children to them hoped the community institutions would accomplish "the task of mexicanizing our little ones in" what one Los Angeles journalist referred to as "*foreign lands*."[49]

However, while these schools represented an effort to resist public schools' Americanization programs, they were also attempts to gain more equitable education for Mexican-American children. Mexican officials maintained that while Mexican-American children easily mastered English for "practical necessities," they struggled, for "ethnic and psychological reasons," to learn lessons that would "help them in their intellectual advance or social behavior" in this "new language."[50] Accordingly, by instructing children in Spanish and providing an education that emphasized their Mexican heritage, Mexican-American schoolchildren could learn skills that would enable their long-term success. Mexican officials hoped that these schools would help Mexican-American children achieve at a comparable level with Anglo children, who easily learned such lessons in the American public schools.

In this way, while California school teachers and administrators sought to Americanize Mexican-American children, Mexican immigrant parents, with the assistance of Mexican officials, provided educational facilities with curricula emphasizing Mexican patriotism. For those who established and ran these Mexican Schools, children's American identity was

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[47]"Biblioteca mexicana en Belvedere," *La Opinión*, November 26, 1926.

[48] "*exclusivamente mexicana*"; "Quedó establecida"

[49] "*mexicanización de nuestros pequeños en el extranjero*" (emphasis mine); "Escuela mexicana"; González, *Mexican Consuls*, 54.

[50] "*las necesidades de la vida práctica*"; "*razones étnicas y psicológicas*"; "*ayudarlos a su adelanto intelectual y su comportamiento social*"; "Un reglamento para escuelas de españoles," *La Opinión*, May 27, 1929

subordinate to their Mexican one. In fact, the Mexican consulate set up many of the schools with the assumption that children might one day return to Mexico.[51] However, for the founders of Mexican schools, children's Mexican patriotism not only allowed them to defend against the shame Americanization efforts inspired, but also allowed them to achieve goals, both academically and socially, comparable to their Anglo peers.

Moreover, while the schools challenged Mexican-American students' ostracization in the public schools, they also helped unite the *colonia* in southern California at large. Particularly, the work of operating the schools themselves strengthened local leadership. By 1929, the Mexican Department of Education had scaled back its involvement with the Mexican schools and allowed Mexican civic organizations in southern California to set up and direct the schools.[52] Accordingly, the schools and local Mexican civic organizations were often closely intertwined. The Mexican School at Belvedere, for instance, also served as headquarters for a Mexican organization, "Ignacio Zaragoza," – likely a mutual aid society. The group, named for a Mexican war hero, organized patriotic events and provided aid to members of the *colonia* experiencing crisis.[53] The nationalist project of these schools represented an important source of empowerment for the *colonia*.

During the wave of Mexican immigration in the 1910s, Americanization efforts increased in southern California schools. Americanization curricula touched on a wide array of subjects including language, public health, history, and civics. Americanization efforts targeted not only non-Anglo schoolchildren, but also their parents. In the wake of the first Red Scare, government

[51] This possibility was not at all remote. Thousands of Mexican immigrants, often with their American-born children, were repatriated in the late 1920s. During the Great Depression, repatriation efforts increased dramatically and two million were repatriated, many of which were American-born children of Mexican immigrants.

[52] Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls*, 53.

[53] "Festival de la Sociedad 'Ignacio Zaragoza,'" *La Opinión*, March 22, 1928.

officials were anxious to ensure that working-class immigrants conformed to middle-class Anglo ideals. Americanization classes reinforced U.S. superiority and often disparaged students' heritage or that of their parents.[54] The *colonia* fought both the reforming and denigrating impulses of Americanization by staging patriotic Mexican events in the very schools that insulted their backgrounds.

The Brooklyn Avenue Branch of the Utah Street Evening School was an Americanization school. Located in the East Los Angeles neighborhood, which contained a large Mexican community, it provided Americanization classes for both adults and children. Members of the neighborhood – "a group of Mexicans" – held meetings at the school which worked to "uplift" the Mexican *colonia* in that area. In May of 1926, they decided to put on a program in Spanish to raise money for the organization.[55]

The Mariana Avenue School was also an Americanization school. In 1928, the Mexican Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of Zeferino Ramirez, organized a Mexican "literary and musical program" that was held in this school's auditorium.[56] The event was a fundraiser to benefit the *colonia* in Santa Paula, California, who were victims of a recent flood.[57]

In these instances, the Mexican *colonia* utilized institutions meant to strip them of the influence of their Mexican heritage to foment Mexican patriotism. Consequently, such programs posed an obvious challenge to the Americanizing mission of the public schools. Furthermore, through such events, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans expressed their solidarity

[54] Borden, Timothy G., "The Salvation of the Poles: Working Class Ethnicity and Americanization Efforts During the Interwar Period in Toledo, Ohio," *Polish American Studies* 56, no. 2 (1999), 40 and 44; James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (1992), 997.

[55] Minutes of the L.A. City School District Board of Education, May 13, 1926 and August 11, 1927, box 53 and box 59.

[56] Minutes of the L.A. City School District Board of Education, March 22, 1928, box 62.

[57] Minutes of the L.A. City School District Board of Education, August 11, 1927, box 59.

with both members of their particular *colonia* and, in the case of the program at Mariana Avenue, *colonias* throughout the state.

In 1924, Mexican immigrants in San Fernando requested to use San Fernando High School auditorium for a "patriotic Spanish program." This program would raise money for "the needy sick among the Mexicans."[58] Two years later, a Mexican mutual aid society, "Melchor Ocampo," named for a Mexican politician, petitioned the board to use the high school's auditorium for a Mexican "literary and musical program."[59]

Unlike the Brooklyn Avenue School or Mariana Avenue School, San Fernando High School was not an Americanization school. However, in the early 1920s, the area had informally become a "Mexican" school district. In these functionally segregated schools, teachers often stressed Americanization, as administrators frequently claimed that Mexican-American children's perceived need to be Americanized justified their segregation. Moreover, both through the experience of segregation itself and the Americanizing compulsion of these segregated schools, Mexican-American children were made to feel ashamed of their Mexican heritage. Consequently, when Mexican immigrants organized patriotic events in San Fernando High School that brought together and held up the Mexican identities of *colonia* members across the Los Angeles, they provided a powerful challenge to the racist work of the school's teachers and administrators.[60]

In 1930, "Mexican" would become a separate racial category on the census. As anti-Mexican sentiment grew in the late 1920s, Mexican identity became increasingly racialized. This

[58] Minutes of the L.A. City School District Board of Education, September 8, 1924, box 806.
[59] Minutes of the L.A. City School District Board of Education, September 19, 1926, box 53.
[60] Minutes of the L.A. City School District Board of Education, August 27, 1924 and September 9, 1924. Board of Education Records, box 44 and box 806..; Rafferty, *Land of Fair Promise*, 114 and 171.

process was perhaps nowhere more obvious than within the public schools where segregation and Americanization efforts expanded.

During this period, the Mexican *colonia* in southern California primarily resisted the humiliation Mexican-American children experienced in the schools peripherally rather than directly attacking the practice of racial segregation. In response to school authorities' increasing denigration of their children's Mexican identities, Mexican immigrants worked to inspire a sense of Mexican patriotism within their children by opening Mexican schools and bringing Mexican programs to the very schools degrading them. By using their Mexican identities to resist this racialization, the *colonia* conformed to popular Mexican racial conceptions fusing Mexican nationality with a homogenized racial identity.

CHAPTER THREE

CONFRONTING THE RACIAL BINARY: CHALLENGING SEGREGATION, 1929-1931

In 1929, anti-Mexican sentiment boiled in California. Thousands of Mexican immigrants faced repatriation. When the country sank into economic depression later that year, hundreds of thousands of Mexican immigrants, and often their American-born children, reckoned with the possibility of being forced out of the United States. In the early 1930s, state and national officials tried to strip the *colonia* of legal whiteness and its protections. This compulsion was readily apparent in the public schools.

When local and state officials redoubled their efforts to separate Mexican-American and Anglo schoolchildren, the Mexican *colonia* began to turn toward the courts to challenge segregation. In these instances, the *colonia* relied upon its ties to Mexico to fight segregation. However, it departed from Mexican racial ideologies when resisting segregation. While *colonia* members fought officials' efforts to deny them whiteness, they had to wrestle with the racial binary of the United States. For this reason, the *colonia* insisted on its whiteness when demanding the same educational opportunities as Anglos.

One of the first instances in which the *colonia* threatened legal action occurred in May 1929 at San Bernardino. In this case, school officials made plans to remove Mexican-American children from the schools they currently attended. Instead, Mexican-American students would attend two schools currently under construction, where they would be separated from their Anglo classmates.[61] This action outraged the *colonia* as well as the Mexican people. Already angry over

[61] "Respuesta a una nota de nuestro país," *La Opinión*, May 15, 1929.

the suspect implementation of the Box Law – a measure which facilitated more deportations, especially in instances where immigrants committed crimes – college students in Mexico City organized a protest against the discrimination faced by *colonia* members.[62] Protestors highlighted the segregation at San Bernardino. The school board was not only separating Mexican-American children from Anglo students but placing them in schools with "negroes and orientals," protestors insisted.[63] For these college students, the action would undo the positive effects of Charles Lindbergh's so-called good-will tour to Mexico – a flight he took a year earlier in an effort to relax tensions between the two countries.[64]

The day after the protest, administrators at San Bernardino defended themselves to the local Spanish-speaking press. While it was true that Mexican-American students would be separated from their Anglo peers, this separation was solely designed to help them learn English, they stated. The notion that Mexican-American students would be segregated with African Americans and Asian Americans was "absolutely false," huffed the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District. The two new schools would not serve any non-white minorities. Administrators assured the *colonia* that they did not consider "Mexican children within the ranks of blacks and orientals."[65]

Regardless of whether or not their children attended segregated schools with African Americans and Asian Americans, the *colonia* and its supporters recognized that school segregation undermined the protections of legal whiteness. During this period, the California

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[62] Speech of John C. Box of Texas in the House of Representatives, 69th Congress, 1st sess, (June 7, 1926), California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, 1912-1939, BANC-MSS C-A 194, carton 4, Bancroft Library.

[63] "Mexico City Students Rap California Plan" *New York Times* May 15, 1929, 26

[64] "Protesta de los alumnos de una escuela de la Ciudad de México," *La Opinión*, May 15, 1929; "La Prepara El Gobierno de México: La motiva de expulsión de compatriotas en Texas y Arizona; También se protestará por el distingo a los educandos mexicanos," May 14, 1929; "Lindbergh Adds a New Chapter to His Saga," *New York Times*, February 19, 1928.

[65] "*los niños mexicanos dentro del rango de los negros y los orientales*," "Respuesta a una."

School Code only permitted the segregation of legally non-white groups, such as Asian Americans and American Indians. While African-American students were no longer formally segregated, they had been previously; moreover, African Americans still experienced *de facto* segregation. Although Mexican-American children similarly faced growing *de facto* segregation, unlike either of these groups, they had never been formally segregated due to their legal whiteness.[66] Similarly separating Mexican-American students suggested that they were not white. This implication did not miss one journalist for *La Opinión* who speculated that Mexican-American students were segregated for "their brown color." Parents and protestors understood that the racial implications of segregation could justify vastly unequal educational opportunities.[67]

Moreover, the description of students as "brown" by the local press indicated that many members of the *colonia* likely did not consider themselves as wholly white, a notion that conformed to the *raza cósmica* ideology. However, the *colonia* chafed at the implication that it was non-white by decrying the possibility of attending segregated schools with legally non-white groups. This attitude reflected the uneasiness towards non-white groups expressed within *raza cósmica* ideology.[68]

Ultimately, the *colonia's* legal whiteness prevented segregation at San Bernardino. When members of the *colonia* threatened legal action, certain authorities in San Bernardino determined that such segregation was unwarranted; Mexican-American students were white so their

[66] See footnote 32 for clarification on Mexican-American segregation as de facto/de jure.

[67] Daniel Martinez HoSang, "The Changing Valence of White Racial Innocence: Black-Brown Unity in the 1970s Los Angeles School Desegregation Struggles," in *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition*, ed. Josh Kun and Laura Pulido (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 118.

[68] See chapter one for more discussion of *raza cósmica* ideology. Johnson, "The Cosmic Race in Texas," 404; José Vasconcelos. *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 20.

segregation lacked precedent.[69] In this way, the Mexican *colonia* and its supporters conceived of whiteness predominantly as a tool for safeguarding against segregation. In fact, protestors did not stress legal whiteness when resisting segregation, but rather fought against the implication that Mexican-American students were non-white. In this way, the Mexican *colonia* and its supporters perceived Mexican immigrants as neither white nor non-white, consistent with the *raza cósmica* ideology. Yet, in this instance, the *colonia* confronted the racial binary and situated themselves on one side to effectively defy segregation efforts.

However, the 1930 census directly challenged the *colonia's* perception of its own racial identity. While persons of Mexican descent living in the United States had been tenuously legally classified as "white" since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the 1930 census for the first and only time included a "Mexican race" category.[70] Importantly, during this period, social scientists had frequently classified members of the *colonia* as belonging to the "Mexican race." Indeed, in the early twentieth century, notions of racial identity in the United States were closely tied to nationality.[71] With the influx of Southern and Eastern European immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Anglo Americans distinguished themselves from more recent "white" immigrants by claiming that they were of a different race. Persons of Italian, Jewish, and Eastern European heritage were categorized as members of "other white races." This classification, which also often included persons of Mexican heritage, recognized these persons' legal whiteness, while also distinguishing them as inherently racially different and inferior to Anglo

[69] "Mexican Strike Still Going On," *San Diego Sun*, February 11, 1931. Lemon Grove Historical Society; Francisco A. Rosales, *Chicano!*, 71.

[70] Donato, "Legally White," 207. Also, I say that Chicanos were "tenuously" white before 1930 because Chicano legal whiteness was sometimes legally challenged in this era (Donato, 206).

[71] See Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom* for an excellent discussion on this topic.

Americans. However, the "Mexican race" census category separated members of the *colonia* from the legal whiteness and its advantages.[72]

Census enumerators' instructions reveal how persons classified as "Mexican" were racially and socially separated from whiteness by this new category. In this section, the bureau stated that:

> Practically all Mexican laborers are of a racial mixture difficult to classify, though usually well recognized in the localities where they are found. In order to obtain separate figures for this racial group, it has been decided that all person born in Mexico, or having parents born in Mexico, who are not definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese, should be returned as Mexican ("Mex").[73]

Here, officials imagined the "Mexican race" as one that was wholly distinct from existing racial categories, and, therefore, definitively non-white. Moreover, the instructions undermined Mexican-American citizenship by associating this category with Mexican nationality. Furthermore, this description revealed Anglos' desire to bracket the *colonia* by its social class. In this instance, this category identified members of the "Mexican race" as "laborers." Additionally, the racial category emerged at a time when the Census Bureau tried to quantify America's unemployed at the beginning of the Great Depression. Schedules were organized so that statisticians could easily compare unemployment with factors such as race.[74] In this way, the addition of this "Mexican race" category further distinguished the *colonia* from Anglo-American bourgeois identity.

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[72]For an excellent discussion on the genealogy of racial categorization of European immigrants during this period see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
Donato, "Legally White," 212.; Michael Aaron Calderón-Zaks. "Constructing the "Mexican Race": Racial Formation and Empire Building, 1884-1940," (PHD diss, State University of New York at Binghamton), 56, http://search.proquest.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/pqdt/docview/89199177/fulltextPDF/30C125CB2033426APQ/1?accountid=14537.

[73] "1930 Census: Enumerator Instructions," Minnesota Population Center, last accessed 5 April 2014, https://usa.ipums.org/usa/voliii/inst1930.shtml.

[74] Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 135.

Prominent leaders in the *colonia,* like those in the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a legal aid organization formed only months prior to the census enumeration, reacted harshly to the new census category precisely because they understood how it identified the *colonia* as a racialized underclass.[75] This symbolic separation of the *colonia* from whiteness would inform Mexican-American struggles against school segregation during this period.

In the first years of the 1930s, the practice of segregating Mexican-American students expanded. While the census overtly racialized Mexican Americans with its addition of the new "Mexican race" category, educational experts increasingly racialized them and, consequently, demanded their exclusion. For several researchers, children of Mexican descent should be segregated because they were biologically inferior. For instance, educators extensively employed IQ testing to determine that Mexican-American students exhibited a "racial difference" because they allegedly naturally possessed a "lower mentality" than Anglos.[76]For this reason, educators argued, Mexican-American segregation was essential.[77] Another researcher conflated public health concerns with biological difference when stating that Mexican Americans were "of a weaker race" and more susceptible to disease; consequently, their presence threatened Anglo schoolchildren.[78]

However, by the 1930s, biological notions of race were beginning to lose popularity among social scientists.[79] Instead, educational experts argued that inherent cultural differences warranted segregation. Nonetheless, these supposed cultural distinctions similarly racialized Mexican-American students.

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[75] Hochschild, Jennifer L. and Brenna Marea Powell "Racial Reorganization and the United States 1850-1930: Mulattoes, Half-Breeds, Mixed Parentage, Hindoos, and the Mexican Race," *Studies in American Development* 22 (2008), 81.

[76] Drake, "A Comparative Study," 47.

[77] Leis, "The Status of Education," 70. Parr, "A Comparative Study," 50-51.

[78] Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 81.

[79] Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom*, 30-34; Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education,* 68.

Many commentators, for instance, justified segregation on the assumption that Mexican-American students had poor hygiene. Desegregation would force dirtier Mexican-American children in proximity to their neater Anglo classmates, argued one writer. The *colonia* and its children simply valued cleanliness less than Anglos, opined another educator, and consequently should be segregated.[80] While Anglo scholars conceded that poverty bore some responsibility for this alleged uncleanliness, they often argued that poor hygiene was culturally-based. For instance, due to their limited means, "Mexican" families were forced to share a bedroom, or even sometimes a bed, noted one researcher.[81] Nevertheless, he indicated that this "unhygienic" habit, although picked up out of necessity, also pointed to a cultural tendency to devalue the importance of both moral and physical cleanness.[82] Another writer suggested that the impoverished condition of many Mexican-American students' homes compromised the "cleanliness" of their families.[83] However, the writer also surmised that cultural defects, such as the *colonia's* purported belief "that bathing will make you sick" and their alleged "morbid curiosity to see sickness and death," strongly contributed to their perceived dirtiness.[84]

Educators further concluded that Mexican-American students were not only physically filthier, but also morally filthier than their Anglo classmates. Researchers documented more frequent "delinquent" behavior among Mexican-American schoolchildren.[85] For example, one

[80]For a contemporary retort to this argument by an Anglo "expert" see Borgardus's "Second Generation Mexicans."
Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 146, 22; Leis, "The Status of Education," 75.

[81] William Nathan Wilson, "An Analysis of the Academic and Home Problems of the Pupils in a Mexican Junior High School." (masters thesis, USC, 1938), 57.

[82] Wilson, "An Analysis," 4, 50, 57, 59, 75.

[83] Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 11.

[84] Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 11.

[85] Interestingly, one contemporary New York Times article points to the frequency of this equation of higher rates of crime among foreign-born Americans. While this article cites a study that, in fact, overturns this notion and argues that crime is more prevalent among Native-born Americans, it cites that this idea was very common (and indeed, cites this study's finding as a shock). The article goes on to say that this reflects the nativistic attitudes that prevail during this period.

writer argued that the disruptions of poverty, the death of at least one family member (which many Mexican-American students experienced), and cultural conflicts between Mexican immigrant parents and their American-born children might contribute to behavior problems. Nonetheless, writers also faulted Mexican cultural norms for serious behavior problems. [86] According to some educators, Mexican heritage habituated one to "lying [and] deceit" and the "Mexican habit of *mañana*" or laziness.[87] For one researcher, this moral inferiority was quasi-biologically embedded. In his view, Mexicans were "unable to develop mentally" due to the "result of years of oppression" and the "heritage of generations who have been forced to adapt themselves to bitter poverty and insupportable tyranny."[88] Here, the writer naturalized cultural stereotypes by confusing historical structural poverty with biological determination. In other words, pro-segregation researchers naturalized Mexican cultural inferiority, thus racializing Mexican-American students.

Seemingly more innocuously, some commentators championed segregation on the grounds that Mexican-American students spoke very little English. It was certainly likely that many Mexican-American students did in fact struggle to acquire fluent English as a second language. In fact, many Mexican-American students' families primarily spoke Spanish at home.[89] However, Mexican-American schoolchildren frequently knew more English than these contemporary educators pretended. Most Mexican-American schoolchildren were either

"Wickersham Board Frees Foreign-Born of Big Crime Blame," *New York Times*, August 24, 1931, 1; Wilson, "An Analysis," 50.

[86] Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 80. Wilson, "An Analysis," 75.

[87] Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 59, 77; Helen Summers, "An Evaluation of Certain Procedures in the Teaching of the Non-English-Speaking Mexican Child," (masters thesis, UCLA, 1939)," 5; Florence Gordon Mason, "A Case Study of Thirty Adolescent Mexican Girls and Their Social Conflicts and Adjustments within the School" (masters thesis, USC, 1929) 74; Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 10.

[88] Summers, "An Evaluation of Certain Procedures," 5.

[89] Wilson, "An Analysis,"75.

American-born or had grown up in the United States.[90] Moreover, despite their insistences to the contrary, school officials separated Mexican Americans through ethnic signifiers, such as their last name or "look," rather than an evaluation of students' English proficiency.[91] Accordingly, just as Anglo educators surmised that Mexican Americans were stupider, dirtier, and more immoral than their Anglo counterparts, writers assumed a Mexican-American language handicap.[92] Needless to say, this belief naturalized Mexican Americans' status as alien.

Furthermore, educators' insistence on the necessity of segregation for students' Americanization provided an obvious manifestation of how this pro-segregation rhetoric emphasized students' foreignness. For instance, one writer stated that segregated Mexican schools ought to teach "American ideals by the use of many patriotic programs."[93] By presuming Mexican Americans' ignorance of "American ideals," this researcher presented Mexican-American students as nationally Mexican, regardless of whether or not they were American-born. In another instance, parents solicited the Los Angeles City School Board to segregate Mexican-American students because "it [was] impossible to Americanse these people."[94] In this instance, Mexican-American segregation was justified due their complete, and apparently hopeless, distance from American nationality.

Such arguments informed the Lemon Grove Board of Trustees' decision to bar Mexican-American students from Lemon Grove Grammar School. Confident in the fundamental immorality and dirtiness of Mexican-American students, the board secretly decided in August of

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[90] Drake, "A Comparative Study," 8, 19; Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation," 3.

[91] Carey McWilliams, "Is Your Name Gonzales?," [n.d.], 1. Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 28, UCLA Library Special Collections.; "Mendez v. Westminster: Paving the Way Toward School Desegregation," *Bill of Rights in Action* 23, no. 2 (2007), http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-23-2-c-mendez-v-westminster-paving-the-way-to-school-desegregation.

[92] Drake, "A Comparative Study," 6.

[93] E.E. Chamness, "A Comparison of the Educational Achievements of Mexican and American Children in Weslaco, Texas," (masters thesis, SMU, 1930), 84.

[94] Minutes of the L.A. City School District Board of Education, June 27, 1927, box 59.

1930 to begin building a separate Americanization school for the Mexican-American students currently attending Lemon Grove Grammar School. Separating these students from their Anglo peers benefitted both groups, the board maintained.[95]

Unaware of this plan for several months, Mexican-American students returned to Lemon Grove Grammar School after the winter holidays to find their principal blocking the schoolhouse door. They would no longer attend this school, he informed them. Instead, they would go to an Americanization school seven blocks away. Humiliated, seventy-two of the seventy-five students returned home, refusing to set foot in the new school across the railroad tracks.[96] The so-called Americanization school was tiny, its two-room facility visibly inferior to Lemon Grove Grammar School's five-room school house. While the board of trustees claimed the facility was newly built, a parent of several segregated students observed that the building was just an old house that was smaller than the board claimed.[97]

The parents of these segregated students responded immediately. They organized, forming The Committee of Neighbors in Lemon Grove, California. Most importantly, they quickly contacted the Mexican consul in San Diego, Enrique Ferreira. Ferreira immediately assumed a leadership role in the resistance at Lemon Grove. He encouraged parents to boycott the Americanization school, though he denied involvement in the so-called "strike" to the press. He urged committee members, underemployed because of the current economic crisis, to solicit the southern California *colonia* at large for assistance with legal costs. Ferreira also enlisted

[95] Minutes of the Lemon Grove Board of Trustees, August 13, 1930, Lemon Grove Historical Society.

[96] "Speech Given by Helen Oldfield, President, Lemon Grove Historical Society on Mar. 9, 2007 at the Dedication of Roberto Alvarez Auditorium at Lemon Grove Middle School," Lemon Grove Historical Society. Superior Court of the State of California, San Diego County, Petition for Writ of Mandate. Lemon Grove Historical Society.

[97] Nick Ceseña was one of the only parents who did not encourage his children to participate in the boycott of the Americanization school. D.L. Heyser, "My Mexican Friends and the Incident at Lemon Grove"; Superior Court of the State of California, San Diego County, Petition for Writ of Mandate. Lemon Grove Historical Society.

support from top Mexican officials, such as the Secretary of Public Education, and tried to persuade local authorities to stop the segregation at Lemon Grove.[98] He also spoke out against the situation at Lemon Grove in the local paper. "There is no precedent to uphold segregation," he stated, because "Mexican children…are not considered with the black, yellow or Indian race."[99]

The plaintiff's argument in the ensuing trial, *Roberto Alvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District*, more directly employed the argument that Mexican-American students' whiteness legally prevented their separation. Segregated students were "entitled to equal rights and privileges with other American-born children of the Caucasian race," the plaintiff argued. Moreover, while *white* Mexican-American students were segregated, non-white Japanese-American students were allowed to continue at the school – a fact that seemed to frustrate the plaintiff. It implied that the Mexican-American and Anglo schoolchildren, both of the "white race," shared more intellectually than non-segregated Japanese-American students when stating that: "notwithstanding the *difference in racial parentage,* all [the children who attended Lemon Grove Grammar School] attended…on an equal footing."[100]

The *colonia* also insisted that its children were socially white. While the board of trustees secretly supported Mexican-American segregation for presumed misconduct and poor hygiene –

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[98]Importantly, the consulate agreed to pay for an attorney if the group did not receive adequate financial support.
[letter from parents of segregated students, recipient unspecified, February 11, 1931]; Enrique Ferreira to Juan M. González, José Lieras, and the other Signaties, January 16, 1931. Lemon Grove Mexican-American School Desegregation Case Documents. Mandeville Special Collections; "No Admiten a los Niños Mexicanos," *La Opinión*, January 25, 1931; "Lemon Grove Strike Still Going on," *San Diego Sun*, February 11, 1931. "Mexican Pupils go on Strike in Lemon Grove," *Lemon Grove Evening Tribune*, January 8, 1931, Lemon Grove Historical Society; Francisco E. Balderrama. *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936.* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 60-61.

[99] "Lemon Grove Strike Still Going On," *San Diego Sun*, February 11, 1931. At this point, it was still legal to segregation Asian American and American Indian school children. It was no longer legal to segregate African Americans, but had been previously.

[100] Emphasis mine. Superior Court of the State of California, San Diego County, Petition for Writ of Mandate. Lemon Grove Historical Society.

publicly they claimed this segregation was enacted to facilitate English acquisition and to provide a facility closer to students' homes – the plaintiff insisted that one of the segregated students was "in good health" and "a person of good habits and character."[101] Moreover, although the board of trustees emphasized segregated students' foreignness, the plaintiff highlighted that students were "American-born" and therefore entitled through their citizenship to equal education. Furthermore, it indicated students' status as permanent community members when stating that their parents were property owners.[102]

Ultimately, the court ruled against segregation on the grounds that it would hinder Mexican-American students' English acquisition, rather than because they were white. However, Mexican-American whiteness was central to the plaintiff's argument against segregation. Moreover, segregation opponents held up students' social whiteness to counter contemporary educators' construction of Mexican-American non-whiteness.

American citizenship was also central to the plaintiff's argument. Unlike the *colonia's* previous efforts to counter discrimination through Mexicanization, the *colonia* insisted that their children receive equal education because they were "American-born." However, the *colonia* leaned heavily upon its Mexican ties when fighting against the Board of Trustees. Indeed, Mexican consul Ferreira primarily orchestrated the *colonia's* resistance to the segregation at Lemon Grove.

Only weeks after Mexican-American students were barred from Lemon Grove Grammar School, California Assemblyman George R. Bliss severely threatened Mexican-American legal whiteness with the introduction of a new bill. Through this legislation, he aimed to amend the

[101] Superior Court of the State of California, San Diego County, Answer to Petition for Writ of Mandate. Lemon Grove Historical Society.

[102] Petition for Writ of Mandate.

wording of the California School Code. Instead of simply authorizing the segregation of "Indian children," the amended code would permit the separation of "Indian children, whether born in the United States or not."[103] The change constituted an obvious attempt to segregate Mexican-American students because, according to one journalist, "there are no other youngsters of Indian blood in sufficient numbers to be segregated, and not born in this country."[104] Moreover the bill reflected a broader effort among some California politicians to racially reclassify Mexican Americans through segregationist legislation. Several months earlier, for instance, the California State Attorney had vocally supported Mexican-American segregation on the grounds that "Mexicans were Indians and thereby subject to the state law allowing their segregation." [105]

Labelling Mexican-American students as "Indian" constituted a direct threat to their legal whiteness. Unlike the ambiguous "Mexican race" category, which only appeared as a legal racial group in the 1930 census and was vaguely analogous to the "other white race" classification, "Indian" remained a non-white racial category since the 1870 census.[106] In this way, although the Bliss Bill met its demise at the hands of the State Senate's Committee on Education, it spoke to contemporary Anglo anxieties regarding Mexican-American racial classification.[107]

Moreover, the Bliss Bill apparently inspired legislation that more thoroughly racialized the *colonia*. According to a *La Opinión* article, one state senator introduced a pro-segregation bill

[103] Assembly Bill no. 433.

[104] "Hegira of Mexicans Bothers California: 75,000 Expected to Leave South End of State, Affecting Labor Situation," *New York Times* April 19, 1931, 58.

[105] Gilbert González, *Chicano Education*, 23; Alvarez, Roberto R., Jr. "The Lemon Grove Incident: The Nation's First Successful Desegregation Case," *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1986), http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/86spring/lemongrove.htm.

[106] Donato, "Legally White," 212.

[107] California Legislature. 49th Session. Final Calendar of Legislative Business, p. 214. Government Documents. San Francisco Public Library. Alvarez, "The Lemon Grove," http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/86spring/lemongrove.htm.

legally sanctioning American Indians' and Mexican Americans' segregation on public transportation and entertainment facilities while lawmakers were still considering the Bliss Bill. Mexican consul of Los Angeles, Rafael de la Colina, rather accurately referred to the proposed legislation as a "Jim Crow" law.[108] In this way, the educational bill prompted more extreme measures to racialize the *colonia*.

Unlike the Lemon Grove incident, protest against the Bliss Bill did not emphasize Mexican-American whiteness. Indeed, one non-Mexican commentator, Mr. Ed Duran Ayres emphasized Mexican-American racial difference when he voiced opposition to the bill on the assumption that Mexican-American and American-Indian children could become resentful and violent if not given the opportunity to attend schools with Anglos and, importantly, assimilate to Anglo-American culture.[109] While the *colonia* applauded Ayres's resistance to the bill, it expressed dismay with its implications. *Colonia* members agreed that "assimilation…[was] good"; however, they retorted, assimilation to "any culture" could be positive. Moreover, they insisted that the "bloody fights and the violent revolutions" in Mexican history instead arose from "social and economic problems" rather than some inherent cultural defect like Ayres had suggested.[110] In this way, writers attempted to destabilize racializing cultural stereotypes by contextualizing violence in Mexican history within socioeconomic structural failures.

Instead, *colonia* members countered Ayers's reasoning with their own argument against the proposed plan for segregation – which they called "racial segregation.[111] They argued that

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[108] "Un nuevo proyecto anti-mexicano," *La Opinión*, April 24, 1931.

[109] "Aciertos y desaciertos," *La Opinión*, April 29, 1931; Balderrama, *In Defense*, 65.

[110] Ed Duran Ayers' belief that Mexicans were naturally violent would play an important role in the unfair conviction of seventeen young men in the Sleepy Lagoon trial. He presented "statistics" proving that Mexicans were more dangerous than their Anglo counterparts due to their Aztec ancestry in the court shortly before the jury made its "guilty" decision. See chapter four for more on this.
"Aciertos."

[111] "Aciertos"

colonia citizenship did not justify its children's separation. "To say resident," one journalist argued, "is to say contributor." The "Mexican father of the family" whose children might be segregated "had sacrificed the energies of his body in the development of the region, through very hard labor."[112] As valuable and contributing community members, the Mexican *colonia* was entitled to "rights to the services provided by the State."[113] In this way, *colonia* members challenged the image of the Mexican *colonia* as alien with the image of the community "resident"; according to these writers, contributing residency conferred many of the characteristics attached to citizenship. Furthermore, most of the Mexican-American students potentially segregated by the Bliss Bill were American-born. Consequently, *colonia* members argued, just as Mexican Americans were required to obey the law, they were also entitled to its protections. In this way, the Mexican *colonia* combatted the racialization of Mexican nationality by insisting that both the *colonia* and its children were members of U.S. communities and even citizens.

In their opposition to the Bliss Bill, the *colonia* largely did not employ arguments centered on whiteness. Indeed, Consul Rafael de la Colina allied himself with other non-white community leaders in an effort to defeat the bill. Moreover, he also decried the bill's treatment of American Indians, who he called "the first Americans," in addition to that of the Mexican *colonia*.[114] Furthermore, many *colonia* members opposing the bill lamented the inherent immorality and anti-democratic precedent of all racial segregation.[115]

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[112] "*decir residente es decir contribuyente*"; "*un Mexicano padre de la familia*"; *ha sacrificado energias corporales en el desarrollo de la region, en los trabajos más duros*"; "Aciertos"

[113] "*derechos a los servicios que se imparten por el Estado*"; "Aciertos"

[114] "*Los primeros americanos*"; "Un nuevo proyecto."

[115] "Un nuevo proyecto"; "Aciertos"

Nevertheless, the *colonia* actively resisted their potential classification with a legally non-white group. The consul, for instance, recognized that the bill could condemn Mexican Americans to a form of legally-sanctioned second-class citizenship when he compared certain senators' propositions to Jim Crow segregation. Moreover, the *colonia's* resistance to the Bliss Bill countered Anglos' prevailing racialized perception of the *colonia* as alien by holding up *colonia* members' identities as citizens and community members; in this way, the *colonia* more closely aligned itself with Anglo-American identity.

However, although *colonia* members' actions against the Bliss Bill highlighted their more permanent presence within U.S. communities, *colonia* members continued to rely upon the support of the Mexican government, and particularly the Mexican consuls. For instance, Rafael de la Colina, the Mexican consul in Los Angeles, helped promote unfavorable sentiment toward the Bliss Bill by soliciting civic organizations in Los Angeles. He also spoke out against the measure in the local papers. Furthermore, the consul of San Francisco, Alejandro Lubbert, ultimately "persuaded the Senate Education Committee to reject the measure."[116] In this way, for the Mexican *colonia*, justice for Mexican-American children continued to rely upon Mexican nationality and its protections.

Consequently, in the late 1920s, the Mexican *colonia* in southern California made some of its first legal challenges to segregation. When challenging segregation before the law, the Mexican *colonia* had to wrestle with and situate itself within the racial binary of the United States. For this reason, it often relied upon legal whiteness when demanding the same educational opportunities as those for Anglo schoolchildren. During this period, U.S. officials attacked legal whiteness, the *colonia's* primary bargaining chip for social mobility or even

[116] Balderrama, "In Defense," 61.

simply social stability, as hundreds of thousands of *colonia* members were deported during this period. For this reason, civil rights groups, such as LULAC, threw their efforts behind the preservation of legal whiteness. While *colonia* members relied heavily on their ties to Mexico to ensure equality for their children, the anti-Mexican sentiment they faced forced southern California *colonia* members to wrestle with U.S. racial norms.

CHAPTER FOUR

"LET US BE AMERICANS OF MEXICAN DESCENT": THE FIGHT AGAINST UNEQUAL EDUCATION, 1938-1941[117]

In 1938, several Mexican-American college students published the first issue of *The Mexican Voice*. The first few issues were written entirely in English for Mexican-American youth across the Southwest, though the magazine itself was based in Los Angeles. Through the publication, magazine editor Félix J. Gutiérrez and his colleagues hoped to inspire "pride in our race."[118] The periodical also served as a mouthpiece for the Mexican Youth Conference – a conglomeration of Mexican-American youth organizations across the Southwest that worked to expand educational and vocational opportunities for Mexican-American youth.[119] For *Mexican Voice* writers, access to quality education was a top priority. Advocating a path towards equality that emphasized individualism and respectability, these young writers urged Mexican-American youth to avail themselves of U.S. educational opportunities that would allow them to occupy positions of leadership. The evidence of Mexican-American exceptionalism resulting from this strategy could effectively confront Anglo racism, according to several Mexican-American writers.[120]

As the magazine's numerous stories on local clubs suggested, a large network of Mexican-American youth civic organizations had developed in southern California, as well as

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[117] Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 4, 14.

[118] Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican American Voice* (1938), 10.

[119] Félix F. Gutiérrez, "The *Mexican Voice* Goes to War: Identities, Issues, and Ideas in World War II-Era Mexican American Journalism and Youth Activism," in *Latinos in World War II: Mobility, Agency and Ideology*, ed. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and B.V. Olguín (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 115.

[120] Paul Coronel, "Analysis of Our People," *The Mexican Voice* 1, no. 5 (1938), 2; Manuel Ceja, "Are We Proud of Being Mexicans?," *The Mexican Voice* (1938), 9.

across the Southwest. By the late 1930s, many of those demanding educational equality were the same individuals who had experienced segregation first hand in American public schools in the 1920s and 1930s. These individuals primarily demanded educational equality by virtue of their American citizenship. While many activists continued to use whiteness to buttress their demands for better education, they also began to reject their white identities when advocating on behalf of the Mexican-American youth.

These individuals belonged to the so-called Mexican-American generation; this generation chiefly distinguished itself from previous generations of persons of Mexican descent living in the United States because "on a larger scale than ever before a majority…were U.S. born and raised."[121] Moreover, the childhood they shared under the Great Depression and young adulthood during World War II motivated them to simultaneously struggle for civil rights and embrace American nationality to a greater extent than those who preceded them. During the Great Depression, these individuals experienced harsh anti-Mexican sentiment in the form of massive repatriation drives, increased school segregation, and efforts to deny economically desperate *colonia* members access to welfare relief. As a consequence, Mexican Americans became "keenly aware of the fragility of their social situation."[122] Nevertheless, New Deal "optimism" and World War II patriotism – notably displayed by the large quantity of Mexican Americans who fought in World War II – prompted these individuals to accept and celebrate American nationality. Through these experiences, the Mexican-American generation's conceptions of citizenship and nationality, and the privileges they guaranteed, radically departed from those of previous generations.[123] Likewise, individuals of the Mexican-American

[121] García, *Mexican Americans*, 2.
[122] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 12.
[123] See Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans*; Mario T. García, "Americans All: The Mexican-American Generation and the Politics of Wartime Los Angeles," *Social Science Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (1984), 278-289; and

generation departed from the conceptions of racial identity previously articulated by *colonia* members.

For instance, *Mexican Voice* writers expressed ambivalence towards Mexican-American whiteness. In several early issues, writers decried their peers' habit of self-identifying as Spanish.[124] At this time, middle-class Mexican Americans often called themselves "Spanish" to distance themselves from the connotations – such as poverty, dark skin, and poor education – associated with the term "Mexican." Anglos, likewise, employed it to differentiate persons of Mexican heritage who, perhaps due to their class status or lighter complexion, did not fit Anglos' racialized conception of Mexicans. The custom was foolish, countered one young Mexican-American leader; "a Mexican must be a Mexican."[125]

Furthermore, some young Mexican Americans celebrated their *mestizaje* and even their indigenous heritage. For example, to one writer, Mexican Americans' "rich" combination of "Aztec and Spanish blood" gave them a particular refinement and proclivity towards the arts.[126] In another instance, one *Voice* writer partially attributed his accomplished peer's success to her "unique blend of Aztec culture."[127] Furthermore, the *Voice* also explored Mexican Americans' indigenous heritage in articles such as "The Advice from an Aztec Mother to Her Daughter," and "The Significance of the Name Quetzal."[128]

Mexican-American contributors to the *Voice* also expressed some discomfort with intermarriage between Mexican Americans and Anglos. Importantly, the editor, Félix Gutiérrez,

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George J. Sánchez. *Becoming Mexican American* for a more thorough examination on the creation of the Mexican-American generation.

[124] Ceja, "Are We Proud," 9; Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 5, (1938), 15; Paul Coronel, "Social Conditions of the Mexican in General," *The Mexican Voice* 2, no. 1, 3.

[125] Ceja, "Are We Proud," 9.

[126] Ceja, "Are We Proud," 9.

[127] "Miss Dora Ibanez," *Mexican Voice* (December 1938), 2.

[128] Bert Corona, "The Advice from an Aztec Mother to Her Daughter," *Mexican Voice* 2, no. 5 (1939): 5-6; Stephen Reyes, "The Significance of the Name Quetzal," *Mexican Voice* 2, no. 4 (1939): 4-5.

lauded increased intermarriage as a symbol of greater assimilation and "being taken for what we are worth individually." Yet, he was frustrated that these marriages more frequently occurred between Mexican-American women and Anglo men than the opposite. The loss of Mexican-American women to Anglo men signified that Mexican-American men "[were] going down."[129] "You can't blame [Mexican-American women]," he argued; Anglo men could offer them better opportunities. While logical, he conceded, the phenomena threatened the social status of Mexican-American men. In contrast, for Gutiérrez, intermarriage between Mexican-American men to Anglo women simply occurred because high-achieving Mexican-American young men more frequently socialized with Anglos. The periodical, which was primarily written by and focused on men, encouraged its readers to pursue educational, civic, and vocational opportunities where they would be surrounded by their white peers.[130] In this way, marriages between Anglo women and Mexican-American men were simply evidence of successful racial uplift by the efforts of individuals. However, for Gutiérrez, when Mexican-American women married Anglo men allegedly for social mobility, successful Mexican-American men were threatened.[131]

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[129] Manuel de la Raza, (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice*, no. 5, 18-19.

[130] Although the magazine included a few female writers and ran stories directed at female audiences, the contributors, subjects, and readership remained predominantly male.

[131] This attitude towards intermarriage represented a somewhat bizarre departure from Mexican ideas about "whitening." The strategy of "whitening," or promoting increased intermarriage between whiter and less-white individuals – often facilitated by encouraging greater European immigration – in an effort to "whiten" a country's population, lost some popularity after the Mexican Revolution. However, the idea still had Mexican champions following the Revolution, like Vasconcelos. An important outcome of the creation of the *raza cósmica*, he argued, was that the "negative qualities" of "inferior" non-white groups would be mitigated by intermarriage with whites. As a consequence, intermarriage between whiter and less-white persons was, in and of itself, a strategy for racial uplift. Yet, to these Mexican-American writers, intermarriage with Anglos solely reflected racial uplift when it evidenced the respectability of the Mexican-American partner in this union. In other words, respectable Mexican Americans' marriage to Anglos signified that these Mexican American individuals had achieved a comparable social status with Anglos before marriage. Because Mexican Americans needed substantial educational and leadership opportunities, which were less often available to Mexican-American women, to reach the status Gutiérrez described, this idealized intermarriage predominantly excluded Mexican-American women. Consequently, when, allegedly mostly Mexican-American women, proverbially "married up" with Anglo men, they implicitly betrayed Mexican-American men. In this way, while Vasconcelos evaluated intermarriage with whites through a quasi-biological lens, young Mexican Americans looked at it purely socially. Importantly, aspiring towards social whiteness through intermarriage with Anglos often excluded Mexican-American women.

Yet writers for the *Mexican Voice* did not surrender all claims to whiteness. For instance, Gutiérrez, decried how Anglos frequently bragged about having American-Indian or Native-Hawaiian relatives. However, they never mentioned their Mexican heritage. The habit was surprising, he claimed, because Mexicans were closer, racially, to the "pure whites" than Americans Indians or Native Hawaiians.[132]

Moreover, Gutiérrez later described a young man's frustration at filling out a social security card. The "American of Mexican descent" apparently shocked his friends when he marked his color as "white" rather than "Mexican." He informed his befuddled companions that "Mexican" was not a color, but a nationality. His "color," instead, was a combination of "white" and "red" blood. However, he informed them that he "couldn't sign the card as Indian because [he was] not." For this reason, "white" provided the only viable alternative. Here, although this young man considered himself racially *mestizo*, he refused to officially identify himself by his non-white heritage.[133] In addition to revealing some Mexican Americans' discomfort with identifying as non-white, the incident spoke to a changing perception of race among members of the Mexican-American generation. While previous generations understood Mexican nationality and *mestizaje* as inextricably tied, this young man argued that "Mexican" identity was wholly unattached to a particular racial identity. Gutiérrez also divorced Mexican nationality from racial identity when reminding the Mexican consul – who advised assimilationist Mexican Americans to "drain their blood, dye their hair, and change the color of their skin" – of the existence of "blond and blue-eyed" Mexicans.[134] In this way, while Mexican Americans resisted

Anthony R. Jerry, "Talking about Mestizaje: History, Value, and the Racial Present," *The Journal of Pan-African Studies* 6, no. 1 (2011), 119.

[132] Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 5, 18.

[133] Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice*, (September 1938), 14.

[134] Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 5, 16.

identification with non-white groups, their understanding of whiteness substantially differed from that of their parents.[135]

Furthermore, Mexican Americans' reluctance to identify as non-white particularly marked the *Voice's* strategy to combat segregation. For instance, when an African American friend Gutiérrez mentioned suggested that African Americans and Mexican Americans join together to fight segregation in public spaces and the schools, Gutiérrez dismissed the idea. "Why should one of Mexican descent join forces with the colored people," he asked. "[We] are of a totally different race….of the same white race that segregates us," he clarified. Because Mexican Americans were white, their segregation was "a challenge, not a combined fight." Consequently, for him, Mexican Americans could most effectively challenge segregation by individual social mobility, achieved through education.[136]

However, in their demands for educational equality, writers for the *Mexican Voice* predominantly upheld their identities as Americans, rather than any racial identity. The magazine promoted "Americanism"; writers urged Mexican Americans to excel in the United States, rather than returning to Mexico.[137] The *Voice* pushed Mexican-American youth to attend local colleges and junior colleges and join community organizations, particularly those like the YMCA where they could have contact with and influence Mexican-American children through their positive examples of racial uplift.[138] By availing themselves of U.S. educational opportunities and inspiring others to do the same, Mexican Americans could transition from "drawers of water and hewers of wood" to "white-collar workers."[139]

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[135] These young men's descriptions of Mexican-American racial identity represent a departure from understanding race as an entity inextricably tied to nationality. Instead, during this period, Americans started to see color as the primary racial signifier. For more on this topic, see Zoe Burkholder's *Color in the Classroom.*

[136] Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 6 (1938), 14.

[137] Félix J. Gutiérrez, "Editorial Comment," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 4 (1938), 5.

[138] Paul Coronel, "Social Conditions of the Mexican People in General," *Mexican Voice* 2, no. 1 (1939), 5.

[139] "The Mexican People of El Paso Show Us the Way," *Mexican Voice* 2, no. 5 (1939), 1.

Moreover, *Voice* writers advised Mexican Americans to subvert their racial identities to their national identities. For example, the editor reminded readers to simply call themselves "Americans" or "Americans of Mexican descent," rather than agonizing over racial categorization.[140] Furthermore, when another contributor described "the young Mexican (or any other red-blooded American youth)," he very deliberately glossed over Mexican-American racial identity in favor of a unified American identity. Here, he used with the metaphor of blood, which commonly referenced racial identity, to downplay Mexican-American racial difference by simply calling these youth "red-blooded" Americans. Moreover, he underlined this phrase, thereby indicating that Mexican Americans' status as "red-blooded American youth" transcended their identities as "young Mexicans." For these writers, Mexican Americans' American nationality entitled them to the free education that served as their primary weapon against discrimination. In this way, although writers for the *Mexican Voice* in the late 1930s occasionally utilized whiteness to deflect anti-Mexican sentiment, they primarily invoked their American identities to resist discrimination. This strategy would become increasingly important as the threat of war loomed large.

When war flared up in Europe in 1939, the American public was called upon to present a unified front for Democracy. Reacting from pressure from LULAC – which assured Roosevelt that the "Mexican race" category violated the "Good Neighbor Policy" he had announced earlier and fractured national unity – the Census Bureau removed this racial category. In 1940, persons of Mexican heritage in the United States would again be classified as white.[141] However, despite the fact that Mexican Americans were now unambiguously legally white, they would continue to

[140] Félix J. Gutiérrez, "Editorial Comment," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 4 (1938), 5; Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 1, no. 4, 14.

[141] Michael Aaron Calderón-Zaks, "Constructing the "Mexican Race": Racial Formation and Empire Building, 1884-1940," (PhD Diss, Binghamton University, 2008), 190.

invoke their identities as Americans, rather than white, when fighting for greater educational equality in the 1940s.

As the eventuality of world war seemed increasingly likely, schools in Los Angeles became more receptive to Mexican Americans' demands for greater inclusivity. In 1941, the Los Angeles School Board passed a resolution mandating racial tolerance in the schools. Racial bigotry, the board stated, threatened national cohesion and the democratic ideals challenged by the Nazi advance in Europe.[142] Moreover, within the Los Angeles schools, many educators even began emphasizing the need for greater inclusivity of racial and ethnic minorities a few years earlier. In the late 1930s and particularly during World War II, educators had faith that the classroom could confront racial prejudice. They participated in a movement for intercultural education. Within this movement, optimistic educators, influenced by the anti-racist work of anthropologists like Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict, were confident that the school played a central role in destabilizing ideas about racial difference. This fairly radical educational project motivated teachers to implement lessons that undermined popular stereotypes and biological notions of race. Unfortunately, in practice, educators often presented essentializing, although positive, depictions of immigrants and racial minorities that largely did not motivate students to critically evaluate their assumptions about racial difference.[143] For instance, teachers attempted to combat student prejudices by planning intercultural activities in

[142]"Statement and Recommendations by the Superintendent to the Board of Education Concerning Attitudes and Practices of Tolerance in the Los Angeles Schools," Minutes of the LA School District Board of Education, April 3, 1941, box 1596.

[143] Importantly, the movement was focused on actively destabilizing notions of racial difference. In this way, it was much more radical than the later multicultural educational movement of the 1980s, which focused primarily on promoting racial tolerance. For more on this see Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom*; Yoon K. Pak, "'If There is a Better Intercultural Plan in Any School System in America, I Do Not Know Where it is': The San Diego Schools' Intercultural Education Program, 1946-1949," *Urban Education* 37, no. 5 (2002): 588-609; Yoon K. Pak, "Teaching for Intercultural Understanding in the Social Studies: A Teacher's Perspective in the 1940s," *Social Education in the Twentieth Century: Curriculum and Context for Citizenship*, ed. Christine Woyshner, Joseph Watras, and Margaret Smith Crocco (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 57-75.

which Japanese-American children performed Japanese dances, Mexican-American children served *tamales*, and African-American children sang spirituals. Nevertheless, although these spectacles were imperfect, Mexican-American parents and children often made claims for educational equality through such programs.[144]

Central Junior High School, a neoclassical schoolhouse located on North Hill Street in downtown Los Angeles, provided an ideal space for intercultural programs. Drawing students from several immigrant neighborhoods, including Chinatown, the area was "ripe in multiculturalism." First or second-generation immigrant students from Japan, China, the Philippines, Turkey, Italy, and Russia attended the school. Among the pupils were also a great number of Mexican Americans.[145]

In 1938, the school organized its first "Mexican Night." This event invited parents to experience Mexican food, music, and skits. It was advertised as an opportunity for Mexican-American parents and students to feel more comfortable with the school's staff and non-Mexican-American parents and their children to experience "the beauty and drama of these customs." After 1938, the school also started to organize events to showcase customs of students of other nationalities.[146] By May 1941, the "Mexican Night" had developed into a popular annual event. In fact, administrators decided to have the event on the same night as the school's open house. While earlier incarnations of the event were simply advertised as an opportunity to

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[144] Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom*, 3, 88.

[145] Ali Haeri, "Los Angeles Chinatown Remembered: Richard Chee," *Chinese Historical Society of Southern California*, last accessed 2 December 2014, http://chssc.org/History/ChinatownRemembered/CommunityMembers/RichardChee.aspx; Sapphos Environmental, Inc., Los Angeles Unified School District: Historic Context Statement, 1870 to 1969," (2014), 69; *The Central Idea* 36, no. 7, (1939), 1. Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 26, UCLA Library Special Collections. Also accessed ancestry.com census records to determine demographic information about the students cited in the 1941 newsletter.

[146] *The Central Idea* 36, no. 7, (1939): 1-7; "To the Parents of Our Mexican Pupils," *The Central Idea* 34, no. 4 (1938), 1. Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 26, UCLA Library Special Collections.

celebrate and explore other cultures, the principal offered a much more assimilationist message when describing the 1941 event. The program, he hoped, would allow Mexican-American students and their parents to reflect on the fact that these children "[were] Americans now, and of America must be true and loyal citizens." Parents should teach their children "the best of [their] Mexican heritage" because their presence made America "the richer."[147]

The "Mexican Evening" event in 1941 was chiefly organized by "Club Hidalgo," a school organization for Mexican-American students. While it was sponsored by two Anglo faculty members, the president and vice president were Mexican American as were most of the students in the organization.[148] To prepare pupils and parents for the event, the newsletter contained a large spread on Mexican culture. While students wrote about food, dances, crafts, and sites in Mexico, they also included a couple sections highlighting Mexicans' contributions to southern California. A write-up on Olvera Street – a section in Los Angeles with buildings from the colonial period, recently revitalized to mimic a Mexican marketplace – lauded the excitement the area brought to the city.[149] Another section praised Fr. Junípero Serra's work establishing missions in southern California when the area was under Spanish colonial authority. Here, these vignettes showed that Mexicans and their history were inextricably tied to the development of southern California.

The newsletter's Mexican spread also included a subtle commentary on Mexican-American racial identity. In a section entitled "Distinction between Mexicans and Spaniards," an Italian-American student corrected those who mistakenly referred to Mexican Americans as

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[147] "Welcome! Mexican Parents and Friends," *The Central Idea* 39, no. 7 (1941), 3.

[148] A description of the skit performed by members of Club Hidalgo contains primarily, though not exclusively, children with Spanish last names. *The Central Idea* (1941), 4, 7.

[149] The woman who spearheaded the transformation, Christine Sterling, had never traveled to Mexico. The area was primarily constructed for Anglo tourists. Nonetheless, city boosters touted the area as an authentic Mexican experience. William D. Estrada. "Los Angeles' Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Spaces," Western Folklore 58, no. 2 (1999), 107-129.

"Spanish." Their only "Spanish" characteristic was the language they spoke, she asserted.[150] By highlighting the differences between "Mexicans" and "Spaniards," she undermined Mexican-American claims to whiteness. She also pointed toward Mexican non-whiteness by claiming that only "Indian languages" could be called "Mexican." Although this student did not come from the Mexican-American community, Mexican-American activists, such as those writing for the *Mexican Voice*, similarly expressed frustrations with the misuse of this term.

Through this event, Club Hidalgo's work portrayed Mexican Americans as valuable community members. According to the newsletter, Mexican Americans should not only be included within the national fabric, but also should be recognized for positively contributing to the country's history. Coupled with this affirmation of Mexican-American students' American identities was a negation of their whiteness. In this way, the popularity of intercultural education programs during this period provided Mexican-American students greater opportunities to make claims for educational inclusion.

Furthermore, Mexican-American youth civic organizations more firmly asserted their American identities when making demands for greater opportunities on the eve of World War II. In 1940, for instance, one fraternity for Mexican-American college students stated that its mission was to "unite young men…in an unquestionable loyalty to America and her institutions."[151] Another organization, in turn, defined its membership as "staunch supporters of American Democracy" that will "render services to [their] *country*, [their] school, and [their] people."[152] Additionally, the 1940 Mexican Youth Conference utilized popular symbols of American patriotism. For instance, it held a "patriotic speech competition" in which members

[150] "Distinction Between Mexicans and Spaniards," *The Central Idea*, 4.
[151] "Phi Sigma Upsilon," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 5 (1940), 10.
[152] Emphasis mine. "Los Charros," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 5 (1940), 3.

presented speeches about President Lincoln.[153] The organization's magazine, *Mexican Voice*, also published an essay lauding Lincoln's accomplishments in conjunction with an announcement of the upcoming conference.[154] Furthermore, in the summer of 1941, the *Mexican Voice* published a list of conference members serving in the military or in the defense industries. Their service, according to the writer, proved "American Mexicans" were "true Americans."[155]

Furthermore, many young activists embraced American exceptionalism, particularly as it concerned education. According to one writer, citizens of this "great nation" particularly benefitted from the free education guaranteed for "all..youth."[156] To young activists, this education provided, at least theoretically, "EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL."[157] Moreover, for conference members, "self-advancement through education" served as the primary means of "salvation" for Mexican-American youth.[158]

Although they professed their loyalty to America and its institutions, young Mexican-American leaders also encouraged their peers to celebrate their Mexican heritage. One writer applauded Mexicans for their "family life, the affection shown in the home, and the unity between members of Mexican families."[159] They repeated their demand that Mexican Americans embrace the "Mexican" component of their American identities by referring to themselves as "Mexican American" – rather than "hiding behind" the "false front" of the term "Latin American" or "Spanish."[160] Furthermore, one Mexican-American teacher associated with the

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[153] "Conference Rally at Santa Ana," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 3.

[154] Albert C. Diaz, "Lincoln…A Man," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 3, 16.

[155] Cosme J. Peña, "We do our Share," *Mexican Voice* (Summer 1941), 3.

[156] "*gran nación*"; "*toda…juventud*"; Paul Coronel, "La obra de la asociación cristiana de jóvenes entre los mexicanos," *Mexican Voice* (September-October 1939), 6.

[157] "*OPORTUNIDADES IGUALES PARA TODOS*," Margarita Thompson, "Educación: Venid y Obtenidlo," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 2, 12.

[158] "Our Platform," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 4 (1940), 5.

[159] "*vida familiar, el cariño que manifestamos al hogar, la unidad que existe entre los miembros de una familia mejicana";* Rebecca Muñoz, "Qué será de nuestros niños," *Mexican Voice* 2, no. 5 (1939), 9.

[160] Manuel de la Raza (Félix Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 3 (1940), 16.

conference insisted on teaching her Mexican-American students about Mexican language and culture. Indeed, another Mexican-American teacher stated that Mexican-American children must have pride in their Mexican background to become "good Americans."[161]

Furthermore, Mexican immigrant parents also continued their work with the patriotic "Mexican Schools." However, while the "Mexican Schools" of the 1920s primarily focused on inspiring Mexican patriotism within their Mexican-American pupils, the Mexican schools advertised in 1940 often simply stated the goal of teaching Mexican Americans Spanish.[162] Though the schools still offered classes in Mexican history and culture, their advertisements also endeavored to help the *colonia* become more successful in the United States. For instance, one article explained that it was necessary to adopt the habit of shaking hands to greet Americans, despite the fact that some members of the *colonia* apparently found it disgusting.[163] To combat the economic crisis, advertisements for the Mexican schools also constantly instructed members of the *colonia* to be frugal themselves and teach their children this frugality. According to writers, developing this habit would uplift the status of the *colonia*.[164] Moreover, with school names such as "Lincoln y Juarez," these schools now offered a more assimilationist view than they had previously. In this way, although members of the *colonia* continued to run these Mexican schools in the early 1940s, their mission assumed that pupils would remain U.S. citizens, or at least remain in the United States. Consequently, administrators of these schools tried to ensure that American-born members of the *colonia* would not wholly lose their ties to Mexico, and particularly their ability to speak Spanish.

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[161] Manuel de la Raza (Félix Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 5 (1940), 26.

[162] José Ruiz Velis, "La Tracala," *La Opinión*, February 18, 1940; *La Opinión*, March 3, 1940; *La Opinión*, March 10, 1940.

[163] *La Opinión*, January 21, 1940.

[164] *La Opinión*, January 7, 1940; *La Opinión*, January 21, 1940; *La Opinión*, March 3, 1940;

However, despite these efforts by older *colonia* members, young Mexican-American leaders cautiously argued that *colonia* members often inhibited Mexican-American self-advancement through education. Often, writers stated, Mexican immigrant parents encouraged their children to leave school as early as possible to supplement family income because of the family's limited financial means.[165] Furthermore, under-educated Mexican immigrant parents could not adequately support their children's educational needs at home, argued activists.[166] Some writers also asserted that Mexican immigrant parents were rooted in their Mexican customs and, as a consequence, prevented their children from adequately adapting to the expectations of American citizenship.[167] In this way, young Mexican-American activists were confident that they must be at the forefront of the fight for better education. Their status as Americans provided them insight into the American educational system – their primary vehicle for racial uplift.

Months after the United States declared war on the Axis powers, *Mexican Voice* editor Gutiérrez expressed a complicated view of whiteness. Here, he related how Mexican Americans were able to procure work in the defense plants because the draft boards categorized them as white. Prior to this, they would have simply worked as "foundry fools." Though grateful for the opportunity, he claimed that "those of Mexican descent had never thought of themselves as white."[168]

In an edition of the magazine from 1938, Gutiérrez had claimed that Mexican Americans could not join with African Americans to fight segregation because the former group was "of the white race." However, after the United States' entry into World War II, he stated that he did not

[165] Rebecca Muñoz, "Nuestro Privilegio," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 4 (1940), 9.
[166] Margarita Thompson, "Educación!: Venid y Obtenidlo," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 2 (1940), 12-15.
[167] "Seventh Annual Conference," *Mexican Voice* 3, no. 2 (1940), 6.
[168] Manuel de la Raza (Félix J. Gutiérrez), "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* (1942).

identify with the white race. The pleas for national unity that accompanying initial U.S. involvement in World War II motivated Mexican-American leaders like Gutiérrez began to lean on their identities as Americans, rather than their whiteness, when demanding better education. Accompanying this shift was an increasingly uneasy relationship with whiteness.

CHAPTER FIVE

AT WAR WITH WHITE SUPREMACY: MEXICAN-AMERICAN STRUGGLES FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY DURING WORLD WAR II

On Wednesday morning, January 7th, 1943, the courtroom "exuded a sweatiness…an unbearable heat" intensified by spectators' nervousness.[169] After an excruciating six days of deliberation, the all-Anglo jury had finally reached a conclusion. In the case of the murder of José Díaz at the Sleepy Lagoon reservoir, three young men were guilty of murder in the first degree. Nine others received second-degree murder charges. Five faced assault charges.[170] All of the young men charged were Mexican American.

The accused, their families, their attorneys, and the Mexican-American community at large were stunned.[171] The prosecution had made tremendous logical leaps. For instance, no murder weapon had been identified. Important testimonies were ignored. The evidence was simply insufficient, the appellate court would confirm a year later.[172] Instead, these young men were charged due to the Anglo public's conviction that "the whole Mexican people, their children and their grandchildren," were guilty of racial inferiority.[173]

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[169] "*se respiraba una atmósfera sudurosa…un calor insoportable*"; "*los ánimos nervios*"; "*lo que significa un delito de primer grado.*"
"El Juicio de los 22 Toca a su fin ya: El juez entregó ayer sus instrucciones y los jurados se encerraron para deliberar," *La Opinión*, January 8, 1943.

[170] "Jury Convicts 12 in Slaying: Five Others Convicted of Lesser Degree Crimes," *LA Times*, January 13, 1943; Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, & Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 89. "17 de los 22 Jóvenes Mexicanos Culpables," *La Opinión*, January 13, 1943.

[171] Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 82, 89; "17 de los 22 Jóvenes Mexicanos Culpables," *La Opinión*, January 13, 1943.

[172] Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 82.

[173] Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican-American Youth. *The Sleepy Lagoon Case*. 1943, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=605. Although the website claims this document is from 1942, the document references events from the end of the trial in 1943, so it could not have been written in 1942.

The Sleepy Lagoon Incident – what the murder, ensuing media hysteria, and trial would be later called – and the culmination of war time racial anxiety it represented, constituted a pivotal moment in the formation of Mexican-American racial identity. Following the trial, Mexican Americans learned that regardless of working countless hours in the factories to help with the war effort or volunteering to die on the battlefield in Europe, Anglos would still perceive them as racially inferior despite the fact that both were legally white.[174] After the trial, Mexican-American activists in southern California largely turned away from using whiteness to demand educational equality. Instead, they began to make claims as minority citizens and allied themselves with African Americans in the pursuit of educational equality. In this way, they demanded educational equality by virtue of an American identity that was not white.

In the months leading up to the Sleepy Lagoon Murder in 1942, alleged Mexican-American delinquency in Los Angeles received ample attention. For instance, two weeks prior to the murder, one journalist noted that violence among the Mexican-American youth had reached a critical point.[175] However, after the murder, journalists in Los Angeles expressed their anti-Mexican anxiety daily. Indeed, in the months between the murder and the verdict, extirpating the "traitorous" *pachuco* "element" from Los Angeles became an important city-wide wartime campaign.[176] Alarmist *Los Angeles Times* articles used language evocative of war when referring to Mexican-American teenagers caught stealing beer as "gang terrorists" involved in "boy

[174] Importantly, the labor power of many Mexican immigrants, through the Bracero program, in addition to that of Mexican Americans, was required for the successful war effort. In this way, the anti-Mexican hostility was particularly shocking for *colonia* members.

[175] "El Apogeo de la Delincuencia," *La Opinión*, July 15, 1942.

[176] Cullen, Tom. "Mexican Boy Gangs: Jive, Zoot Suits, Tell a Sad Tale," [title illegible], October 5, 1942, Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 16, UCLA Library Special Collections.

wars."[177] Policemen tried to remove these *pachucos* by arresting hundreds of Mexican Americans following the murder.[178]

Journalists, sociologists, and criminologists also battled against *pachucos* by documenting their deviant subculture for a largely Anglo readership.[179] Often, these anthropological reports focused on the appearance of Mexican-American teenagers. For example, one article speculated on the original meaning of the word *pachuco* and how it had come to signify the "zoot-suiters" of the Mexican-American gangs. Perhaps, one journalist mused, the term referenced the long "duck tail" haircut *pachucos* wore – a stark contrast to the crew cuts worn by patriotic soldiers in Europe. He later gawked at the zoot suit wearers' "extreme drape coats…pants hitched up almost to their armpits with peg top bottoms….so tight."[180]

Journalists also found themselves disgusted by the challenges *pachucas*, the "girl friends" of *pachucos*, posed to contemporary gender norms.[181] According to several *LA Times* articles, *pachucas* hit and armed themselves with fingernail files or even knives that they supposedly concealed in their pompadour hairstyles. They also formed gangs of their own with suggestive names such as the "the Cherries" or "the Black Widows."[182]

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[177] "Jury Dives Into Boy Gang Terror Wars," *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1942; "Twenty-three Youths Indicted on Gang Murder Charges," *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1942; "One Slain and Ten Beaten by Boy Gang Terrorists," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1942. "Campaign to Wipe Out Juvenille Games Speeded," *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1942; Cullen, Tom. "Mexican Boy Gangs: Jive, Zoot Suits, Tell a Sad Tale," [title illegible], October 5, 1942, Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 16, UCLA Library Special Collections.

[178] "Police Seize 300 in Boys' Gang Drive," *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1942.

[179] Carey McWilliams. "Mexican Boy Gangs: They're a Problem in Adjustment of Second Generation, Says McWilliams," [title illegible], October 5, 1942, Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 16, UCLA Library Special Collections.

[180] Cullen, "Mexican Boy Gangs: Jive."

[181] "Ofensiva de la Policia – Hace Sensacionales Revelaciones el Sheriff Biscailuz: Los pandilleros y sus amigas fuman marihuana," *La Opinión*, August 4, 1942.

[182] Cullen, "Mexican Boy Gangs."; "Police Seize More Than 300 on Two-Day Drive on Gangs, Holding 170 on Felony Charges," *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1942; "Boy Gangster Subjects Held," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1942. Catherine S. Ramírez. *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). 47. Pagán, *Murder at Sleepy Lagoon*, 106.

Even a writer for *La Opinión*, the mouthpiece of Los Angeles's Mexican-American community, criticized the menacing behavior of Mexican-American teenagers. *Pachuco*s and *pachucas* "went crazy" and "went looking for trouble with members of other gangs" after they smoked marijuana, the article explained.[183] In these reports, fashion, knives, and marijuana made *pachuco* and *pachuca* bodies, notions of gender, and "psychologies" wholly distinct from those of Anglos.[184]

Moreover, *pachucos* also alarmed Anglos, and even some Mexican Americans, because they resembled African-American youth in certain ways. Particularly, the zoot suits many Mexican-American youth wore, which became symbolic of *pachuco* violence, were popularized by African Americans in Harlem. The comparison was not lost on one journalist who compared *pachucos* to Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son***.** Like Thomas, whose experience of racial discrimination motivated him to murder, *pachucos* were like "social dynamite that will someday explode to the injury of all society, unless the conditions that have created them are eliminated."[185] This subculture, and the "flashy clothes," "liquor," and violence associated with it, was purely a product of the second generation, according to one article. Due to cultural conflict and poverty, wrote one journalist, Mexican Americans gravitated toward this "delinquency."[186] In this way, to the Anglo public, Mexican-American youth had assimilated, but the non-white portion of America they had assimilated to was a dangerous one.

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[183] "*se enloquecen*"; "*procede a buscar camorra con los miembros de otra pandillas"* "Ofensiva de la Policia – Hace Sensacionales Revelaciones el Sheriff Biscailuz: Los pandilleros y sus amigas fuman marihuana," *La Opinión*, August 4, 1942.

[184] C.B. Horrall to Ernest W. Oliver. August 13, 1942. Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 26, UCLA Library Special Collections.

[185] Cullen, "Mexican Boy Gangs: Jive"; Pagán. *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 109.

[186] "Mexican Boy Gangs: They're a Problem of Adjustment of Second Generation, McWilliams Says," *Daily News Los Angeles*, September 23, 1942. Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 16, UCLA Library Special Collections.

This widely-disseminated perception of *pachuquismo*, or the *pachuco* subculture, as a racialized national threat guaranteed the seventeen young men's guilty verdict.[187] Evidently, unbeknownst to the defense, jurors had read many of the incendiary tabloids.[188] Moreover, the paranoid report of Mr. Ed Duran Ayres of the Foreign Relations Bureau also convinced jurors of *pachuco* racial difference. Here, he argued that the *pachuco* menace lay not in the clothes, weapons, or drugs used by Mexican-American youth, but rather in their "Aztec" heritage. According to Ayres, the violence *pachuco*s displayed, inherited from the "Oriental…element," was as characteristic of Mexicans as "spots on a leopard."[189]

Following the guilty verdict, the Mexican-American community was shocked. They recognized that the seventeen young men were convicted on the evidence of racial discrimination. In a statement published following the verdict, one unnamed member of the Citizens' Committee for the Defense of the Mexican-American Youth declared, "we are at war…with…Hitler and with his theories of race supremacy…the Nazi logic…set forth by Mr. Ed Duran Ayres."[190] After declaring "war" on "race supremacy," Mexican-American activists in southern California began to move toward greater cooperation with African Americans in their struggle for equal access to education.

While concerns over Mexican-American juvenile crime morphed into city-wide hysteria following the murder, African Americans and Mexican Americans joined together to demand defense industries training classes in their community schools. In February 1941, the president of the student body at Thomas Jefferson Evening High School, a school primarily composed of

[187] Pagán, *Murder at Sleepy Lagoon*, 92-97
[188] Pagán, *Murder at Sleepy Lagoon*, 97.
[189] Ed Duran Ayres. "Statistics," [n.d.]. Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 26, UCLA Library Special Collections.
[190] Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican-American Youth. *The Sleepy.*

African-American students, complained about the Los Angeles School Board's plan for establishing of defense industries training classes. None were offered near African-American neighborhoods. He further complained that African Americans were frequently barred from employment within the defense industries due to companies' discriminatory hiring practices. Consequently African Americans could not find jobs in war industries.[191]

In June 1941, President Roosevelt would sign Executive Order 8802 which prohibited federal agencies, companies, and unions within the war industries from continuing to discriminate against employees on the basis of race. Nonetheless, minority groups in Los Angeles – including African Americans who had previously experienced exclusion in the industries and Mexican Americans who had largely not been explicitly excluded – continued to face many obstacles when trying to find work in the war industries. Particularly, they were still unable to receive the training they needed to qualify for jobs.

On April 22, 1942, the United Victory Committee, a group of primarily African American leaders, reminded the board of an upcoming meeting with leaders of minority organizations. In this meeting, they discussed workable solutions for defense industry training in minority communities.[192] In the April 27th meeting, leaders from the United Victory Committee, the Spanish Speaking People's Committee, and the Minority Groups Branch of the War Production Board met with school board members. Two non-Mexican-American leaders from the Spanish Speaking People's Committee and the War Production Board spoke on behalf of the Mexican-American community in Los Angeles. Both African Americans and Mexican

[191] Manuel Talley to The Board of Education, February 6, 1941; Minutes of the L.A. City School District, February 10, 1941. Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records, 1875-2012, LSC 1923, box 1596, UCLA Library Special Collections; William J. Collins, "Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets," *American Economic Review* 91, no. 1: 272.

[192] The United Victory Committee (Clayton Russell and A.J. Patrick, Secretary) to John F. Dolton, April 22, 1942. Minutes of the L.A. City School District, February 10, 1941, box 1596.

Americans lacked training classes in their neighborhoods. As a consequence, many members of these communities were unemployed. Mexican Americans and African Americans desired these classes, one representative stated, "to develop themselves to serve their country…[to] do their part as citizens."[193]

In August, 1942, only days after the Sleepy Lagoon murder, the Citizen's Defense Committee requested that the school board provide more defense training classes. The leaders of recently-formed organization were African Americans and many of the concerns expressed within the letter – including frustration at zoning and hiring practices – related specifically to the African-American community. However, the organization called upon the school board to provide defense classes in African-American and "minority" communities – an obvious reference to Mexican Americans since they were the only other "minority" group discussed in these communications.[194] According to group members, establishing training classes in schools in minority communities could both mitigate the "delinquency problem" of the youth who attended them and "win the war."[195]

Several days later, a representative of the Manpower Commission, Guy T. Nunn, who had met with the board in April, again clamored for more defense classes. Like the Citizen's Defense Committee, he argued that defense training for minority youth would "curb gang terrorism," while also providing labor crucial to the success of the war effort.[196] The writer of the

[193] Minutes of the L.A. City School District, April 27, 1941, box 1596.

[194] Although the letter is not dated, the Board of Education replied to the Citizen's Defense Committee on August 14, 1942 to confirm that they had received the letter. They typically responded within a few days after receiving letters. Citizen's Defense Committee (signed by P. Price Cobbs and J.L. Glover) to Los Angeles City Board of Education [n.d.]. C.L. Craig to Citizen's Defense Committee. August 14, 1942, box 1596.

[195] Citizen's Defense Committee to Los Angeles City Board of Education.

[196] "Youth Training Program Urged: Manpower Commission Aide Offers Plan to Curb Gang Terrorism." *LA Times*, August 13, 1942.

LA Times article communicating Nunn's position also simultaneously discussed arrests made in connection to the Sleepy Lagoon murder.

A couple weeks before the Sleepy Lagoon murder case went to trial, Mexican-American leaders met with the school board to discuss their community's interest in and need for training in the defense industries. Manuel Ruiz, Jr., an attorney who would serve on the defense team in the Sleepy Lagoon trial, the Mexican vice-consul, and leaders of Mexican-American youth organizations and presses in Los Angeles were there. Supporters advised the board to use one of the high schools in the East Los Angeles area as a training facility.

In their months-long struggle for adequate training and access to jobs in defense industries, African Americans and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles had helped capture national attention, even that of President Roosevelt. Conferences in Washington were held "in support of extending" defense training programs to minority groups. Ultimately, they were successful. In the face of a national crisis, both federal and local leaders thought it foolish to continue to ignore the "untapped labor power" of minority individuals, and particularly that of Mexican Americans, who did not have the opportunity to receive proper training. Andrew Jackson High School, in the East Los Angeles neighborhood, was converted into the "Pan-American Trade School," a defense industries training school that primarily served minorities. [197]

Although African Americans originally made demands for defense training opportunities in their neighborhood schools, Mexican Americans began to join with them in this fight. Mexican Americans' interest in this struggle grew as the city became more hostile toward Mexican-American youth, particularly following the Sleepy Lagoon Trial. In Mexican Americans' communications with the school board, they were "minorities," and never mentioned

[197] Minutes of the L.A. City School District. October 10, 1942, box 1596.

their racial identities. They frequently grouped themselves with African Americans under this label. Activists called for access to these educational and vocational opportunities because they were Americans who wanted to assist with the war effort. African Americans made the same claims. Moreover, both groups argued that such opportunities could turn the wayward energies of their racialized youth toward national success.

Five months after the verdict from the murder trial was announced, tensions mounted between Mexican Americans and naval servicemen stationed near Mexican-American neighborhoods in Los Angeles. On May 31, a group of Mexican Americans and servicemen threw punches, beer bottles, and rocks at one another. A serviceman was knocked unconscious.[198] Several days later, a group of Mexican Americans jeered at servicemen. A few hours later, a large group of angry military men took to the streets. They attacked Mexican Americans dressed in zoot suits, beating them and destroying their clothes. The riots continued for over a week, with sailors continuing to attack Mexican Americans, African Americans, or occasionally Filipino Americans they encountered wearing zoot suits and ripping up their clothing.[199]

While the riot largely did not cause serious physical injuries, the experience was profoundly demoralizing and traumatic for minority youth. Servicemen seemed to be primarily focused on the destruction of zoot suits – a symbol of racialized youths' supposed criminality that had been crucial to the conviction of the seventeen young men in January. Naval servicemen cut off young minority teenagers' zoot suits and then left them nearly naked in the streets. Furthermore, despite the fact that military men primarily perpetrated the attacks, policemen

[198] Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 164-165.
[199] Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 169.

chiefly arrested Mexican Americans and, to a lesser extent, African Americans in connection to the riot. Local newspapers, even *La Opinión*, placed blame for the riots on minority "gangs."[200]

According to a report by the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, an organization that worked to successfully appeal the ruling of the Sleepy Lagoon Case, the soldiers' plan had been to "first attack the Mexicans – then the Negroes."[201] After sharing in this humiliating and emasculating experience, African Americans expressed their solidarity with Mexican Americans. Shortly after the riots, thousands of African Americas and Mexican Americans joined at the People's Independent Church to protest the painful ordeal.[202]

After the incident, writers for the *Mexican Voice* also "declared war on race supremacy" and moved further away from whiteness. For instance, one writer lamented that anti-Mexican sentiment was seething in Los Angeles while Mexican-American soldiers "[wallowed] in the Jungles of the South Pacific, [froze] in the Attu, [and baked] in India" to "fight for the way of life [they knew] and [had] been accustomed to." After the war, the writer argued, soldiers should apply similar energies to fighting for equal opportunities for the Mexican-American community at home; this sentiment echoed the "Double V" campaign African Americans would adopt over the course of the war.[203]

Contributors also blamed structural racial inequalities for the hardships faced by Mexican-American youth to a greater extent than they had previously. For instance, in earlier issues, youth leaders frequently credited alleged cultural defects, such as the Mexican's habit of "life-wasting…a hangover from a semi-tropical land of siestas" or their supposed propensity for

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[200] See Mauricio Mazón. *The Zoot Suits: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984) for an excellent discussion of the significance of zoot suit destruction.
"Nuevos Combates de Pachucos y Marinos," *La Opinión*, June 7, 1943; Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 180.

[201] Allison Vallarzy. *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside of Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955.* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 152. Kindle Edition.

[202] Vallarzy, *Making a Non-White America*, 153;

[203] "A Challenge," *Mexican Voice* (1943): 2.

vice, for many of the obstacles faced by Mexican-American youth.[204] Following the riots, writers largely did not blame *pachucos* for the riots, but poverty and "cultural clashes." They also maintained that segregation, Anglo bigotry, and "war frenzy" played a primary role in motivating the riots. Moreover, Mexican-American activists charged that Anglos' unwillingness to accept Mexican Americans as equal and American institutions' unwelcome approach toward Mexican Americans motivated the riots and the anti-Mexican sentiment they precipitated to a greater degree than Mexican-American youth themselves.[205] For these writers, structural racism, rather than the character or individual circumstances of Mexican Americans, was primarily responsible for the unequal treatment of and opportunities for Mexican Americans.

In addition to directly confronting racial discrimination, the editor of the publication also firmly challenged Mexican Americans' claims to whiteness. Here, he took the opportunity to remind Mexican-American youth that they should stop calling themselves "Spanish." His tone was more forceful in this article than in others he and his colleagues had previously written on the subject. This habit was "discouraging" and "insulting to our group," he stated. His discussion directly addressed the racial connotations of the word. It was immoral, he argued, for the "fair complexioned…professionals" to try to distinguish themselves from "the very dark…the *pachuco*s" by referring to themselves as "Spanish."[206] By directly confronting systemic racism and moving further from their white identities, the Mexican-American community could more effectively challenge school segregation at the legal level, especially by aligning itself with African Americans, who were similarly segregated.

[204] Paul Coronel, "Analysis of Our People," *Mexican Voice* (1938): 2;
[205] "A Challenge," 2; Paul Coronel, "The Pachuco Problem," 3.
[206] Manuel de la Raza [Félix J. Gutiérrez], "Nosotros," *Mexican Voice* (1943), 8; T. Duane Price, "A Letter to the Editor," (September 1938), 4.

Two years later, when the war drew to a close, residents in Bell Town, a small community in Riverside County, began to organize against segregation. In the mid-1930s, when African Americans initially began to move into the predominantly Mexican-American agricultural community, the established residents had chiefly avoided the newcomers. However, Mexican Americans shortly saw commonalities between themselves and their African-American neighbors. Both groups' children had to attend an outdated small wooden school that had no lunch room. Only African-American and Mexican-American children attended it. The nearby West Riverside School, in contrast, had "a cafeteria, inside plumbing, excellent lighting, and ventilation." The schoolchildren were all Anglos, with the exception of only three Mexican-American children and one African-American child. These four children lived so close to the West Riverside School that the school board could not justify their segregation.[207]

When the West Riverside School got a beautiful six room addition, African-American and Mexican-American parents assumed their children could attend the newly refurbished school. However, when they approached the school board, members informed them that the addition only served "our children," and Mexican-American and African-American children would have to continue at the dilapidated schoolhouse.[208]

In September 1945, infuriated African-American and Mexican-American parents circulated a petition demanding that their children have access to West Riverside School. A couple weeks later, they formed The Bell Town Improvement League, which was made up of and led by both African-American and Mexican-American parents. They struggled for

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[207] [Fred Ross] "No Bigotry for Bell Town" [n.d], 1. Carey McWilliams Papers, 1930-1940, 1243, box 26, UCLA Library Special Collections.
This paper appears to be a draft of this article which would later be published in the August 1946 issue of *Now: The War Worker* and be retitled as "No More Bigotry for Bell Town."
Allison Varzally. *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 268. Kindle Edition.

[208] Ross, "No Bigotry," 2.

recognition from local and state authorities over the next few months. When they faced resistance, League members hastily defended one another's "democratic rights." Over the next few months, the organization filed a "legal complaint" against the Riverside School District.[209] Fearing legal action, the board accommodated their demands and stopped segregating Mexican-American and African-American students in Bell Town. In this instance, Mexican Americans and African Americans together demanded educational equality on the grounds that they were democratic citizens.[210]

In this way, the anti-Mexican hysteria of the 1940s, most clearly represented by the Sleepy Lagoon Incident and the Zoot Suit Riots, profoundly altered Mexican Americans' strategy towards achieving educational equality. Here, Mexican Americans learned that regardless of their commitment to American patriotism, they would never fully enjoy the protections of legal whiteness. Consequently, in this period, activists demanded equality by virtue of the expectations of American citizenship. They actively began to turn away from their white identities and instead identified themselves as minorities and joined with African Americans in their struggle for education. In this way, their activism began to hold up an American identity that was increasingly non-white.

[209] Ross, "No Bigotry," 3.

[210] Although much of the organization against the Riverside School Board occurred in the months immediately following the end of the World War II, Fred Ross, a prominent California activist who became involved with the resistance at Bell Town, related that Mexican Americans and African Americans began to voice their shared discontent in the months prior to the action in September. In this way, their struggle reflected sentiments of solidarity that had built up over the World War II period. Lawrence E. Davies, "Segregation of Mexicans Stirs School-Court Fight," *New York Times*, December 22, 1946, 80.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER

In 1946, Mexican Americans in southern California would again challenge segregation in the courts with the *Mendez v. Westminster* case. However, here instead, the plaintiff argued that students' segregation violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This same argument would successfully challenge racial segregation nine years later in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. In fact, many of the attorneys on the plaintiff's team for *Brown v. Board,* including Thurgood Marshall, also defended the original ruling when the case was appealed in 1947.

Importantly, Mexican-American whiteness was never mentioned in the "Conclusions of the Court" in the 1946 hearing. Instead, it was ruled that separate educational facilities for Mexican Americans were unconstitutional. When the case was appealed in 1947, the ruling against segregation prevailed but the argument that students' segregation was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment was replaced by the argument that students were simply separated without cause in relation to state laws. This explanation undermined the powerful implications – that separate facilities were inherently unequal – of the 1946 trial. Nonetheless, the original ruling produced the primary argument that would legally destabilize racial segregation in the *Brown v. Board* case eight years later.[211] Importantly, Mexican-American whiteness was not

[211] *Westminster v. Mendez*; *Mendez v. Westminster*; *Westminster v. Mendez* "Brief for the National Association of Colored People," http://www.esauboeck.com/index/ThMarshall.html.

directly mentioned in the 1946 trial. Indeed, it was briefly mentioned in the 1947 appeal only to help undercut the more potent 1946 ruling.[212]

This argument represented a substantial departure from the 1931 *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove* case where whiteness had been key to the *colonia's* case against segregation. Over the course of its crusade for more equal education, the Mexican *colonia* and its Mexican-American children had struggled to situate themselves as a racialized national group within the racial binary of the United States while struggling for educational equality. In its early efforts to demand educational equality, the Mexican *colonia* had emphasized Mexican patriotism. By celebrating their Mexican nationality, *colonia* members enlisted the support of Mexican government officials. Furthermore, they vocalized their Mexican pride to counterbalance the denigrating effects of the segregation and Americanization their children experienced. When highlighting Mexican patriotism, *colonia* members expressed a nationalized racial identity as *mestizo* that accorded with popular Mexican racial ideals.

Importantly, U.S. officials posed several threats to the *colonia's* legal whiteness at the onset of the Great Depression; consequently, *colonia* members began to challenge educational discrimination legally. To ensure that they retained legal whiteness, *colonia* members were forced to identify themselves on one side of the racial binary. As a result, while many *colonia* members self-identified as racially *mestizo*, they demanded equal education by virtue of being white.

Conversely, when American-born individuals who experienced segregation first-hand – in opposition to their typically Mexican immigrant parents – began to lead resistance against educational discrimination in the late 1930s to early 1940s, they made demands based on their

[212] See page 3.

American identities. Predictably, their commitment to American nationality intensified as the U.S. became more involved in the war effort. Although Mexican Americans continued use whiteness to make claims for equal education, they were reluctant to identify as white themselves. Moreover, these Mexican-American activists subordinated their racial identity to their American nationality when demanding equality.

However, in civil rights struggles, Mexican Americans in southern California began to meaningfully depart from previous whiteness strategies over the course of World War II. Both the 1942 Sleepy Lagoon Incident and 1943 Zoot Suit Riots affirmed to Mexican Americans that despite their commitment to patriotism, they would never fully enjoy the advantages of legal whiteness. In response to these events, Mexican Americans further disassociated themselves from their white identities. Instead they demanded educational equality, often alongside African Americans, by virtue of an American identity that was obliquely non-white. Consequently, by 1946, Mexican-American activists demanded desegregation on the grounds that segregation was inherently unequal. To champion this argument, Mexican Americans had to move away from the whiteness strategy they had employed in earlier desegregation efforts; instead, they upheld the notion that American citizenship, rather than whiteness, entitled them, and implicitly other racial minorities, to equal education.

In this way, Mexican immigrants' and Mexican Americans' struggle for equal education provides key insight into the formation of Mexican-American racial identity. This history suggests that Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans engaged in a complicated negotiation between Mexican and U.S. racial ideologies when struggling to find ways to articulate demands for educational equality. It further indicates that the preservation of legal whiteness was often merely peripheral to Mexican immigrant and particularly Mexican-American struggles for

educational equality. Furthermore, it demonstrates that many Mexican-American leaders highlighted American identities that were not white, or even non-white, when demanding greater equality, suggesting that racial ideals of the Chicano Movement were highly influenced by the racial conceptions of the Mexican-American generation.

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