

The Ideology and Practice of Empire: The U. S., Mexico, and the Education of Mexican Immigrants

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INTRODUCTION

Although the imperialist dimensions of 20th century U. S. history are generally ignored in academia, historians have made a strong case for arguing that an economic hegemony distinguished U. S. and Mexico relations at the turn of the century. In step with the emergence of U. S. economic domination (or economic colonization), a widely promulgated imperial ideology appeared highlighting a pathological Mexican culture and concluded that a "Mexican Problem" existed for foreigners, mainly Americans, to resolve. Crafted by travelers, journalists, government officials, academics, corporate administrators, Protestant missionaries, retired engineers, and business people, their published accounts written for an American audience ultimately found their way into the popular culture and government bureaucracies of the U. S. That body of literature legitimized and justified an on-going economic domination by the United States over Mexico.

This study examines that imperial ideology that flowed freely from the pens of American authors and the public policy that this body of thought elicited. The evidence demonstrates a close interconnection between that systematic imperial mindset constructed by American writers and the educational history of the Mexican immigrant community. Thus, the ideology of empire flows back into the U. S., a transnational ideology that contributed significantly to the shaping of public policy, in particular public education, towards Mexican immigrants. In the final analysis, Chicano educational history and the economic colonization of Mexico are inseparable and critical for explicating the educational experience of the Chicano community. This study is limited to the educational experience although the transnational ideology impacts broadly upon the community.

"THE PEACEFUL CONQUEST": THE UNITED STATES EMPIRE AND MEXICO

As the American Gilded Age came to a close, the forcible acquisition of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, the "peaceful" annexation of Hawaii, and the plunder of Panama presaged a new era in U. S. foreign policy. Mexico, on the other hand, rose to prominence in U. S. foreign policy not as an annexed territory, but as an economically conquered territory, an example of imperial relations of a new type. A firm upper hand within the Mexican economy reflected in the rhetoric coming from the U. S. Terms like "conquest" and "invasion" and even "colonization" defined the increasingly dominating

presence of U. S. capital in Mexico. Capital conquest soon became the accepted approach to acquiring Mexico. F. E. Prendergast writing in an 1881 edition of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* expressed claims that many thought reasonable: "it is evident that any progress in Mexico must come through colonization by some higher and more progressive race, or by the introduction of capital in large amounts to develop her natural resources by the aid of native races."¹ Like many of Prendergast's contemporaries, both annexation and a "peaceful conquest" meant the same thing. Ten years later Nevin O. Winter described the role of "outside capital" as "another foreign invasion but with a pacific mission."² Winter's contemporary Charles R. Enock alluded to the "ubiquitous American," a "noticeable feature of Mexican business life, what may be termed the Anglo-Saxon--or rather the Anglo-American--invasion." At the eve of the 1910 Mexican civil war, the U. S. governed the Mexican economy controlling a billion dollars in investments, amounting to nearly two thirds of all investments. Moreover, outright foreign ownership of companies operating in Mexico (led by the U. S.) was "estimated at half the national wealth." In the first decade of the century, U. S. concerns invested \$324 million in mining alone while Mexican investors, junior partners for sure, held but \$15 million. Corporate entities like Southern Pacific, International Harvester, Anaconda, Phelps Dodge, American Smelting and Refining, and Texas Oil, and personages like Doheny, Hearst, Huntington, Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and Morgan were woven into the interstices of the Mexican economy.

Contrary to popular thought, the 1910 civil war (the Revolution) did not derail nor significantly threaten the strategic position held by the U. S.; on the contrary, the latter emerged from the war not only unscathed but also even stronger. Historian Alan Knight notes that U. S. economic interests "emerged from the Revolution more concentrated and more powerful." The predominant form of Mexican revolutionary nationalism "was happy to coexist with large and rising doses of U. S. direct investment. . . ."³ Consequently, the ties binding the Mexican economy to the U. S. deepened rather than deteriorated in the post-rebellion period. Substantial increases in Mexico's percentage of imports from the U. S. occurred between 1910-1911 and 1924, from 55.2 percent to nearly 73 percent. Other data corroborates the increasing subordination of the Mexican economy to the, by then, northern world power. By 1930, U. S.-based interests controlled the most important sectors of the Mexican economy. "In most areas," according to Robert Freeman Smith, "the United States expanded its presence."⁴

Following the 'invasion' of Americans and their investments, a wave of publications on contemporary and historical Mexico that highlighted culture, archeology, art, economics, and history appeared primarily in those countries conducting business, i.e. investing, in Mexico. A new genre of published works appeared in the U. S. simultaneously with the rising presence of U. S. capital and personnel in Mexico. In 1881 the first works of travelers appeared in journals like *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* and *Collier's*. Hubert Howe Bancroft's *History of Mexico* (1880) began a modern tradition of studies, popular and academic, devoted to Mexico (the forerunner of modern Latin American Studies in academia). By 1900 a defined literature devoted to Mexico assumed a substantial niche among the reading interests of Americans. However, that imperial ideology constructed upon a debasement of Mexico and Mexicans and an exaltation of all

things American reflected a maturing national political and cultural identity shared by the broad numbers of people of the United States.⁵ That identity seldom, if ever, separated itself from the ongoing process of a cultural *and* economic colonization, termed Americanization in the literature, of Mexico.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT FOR CREATING THE "OTHER"

By the time American writers began to engage topics on Mexico a substantial modernization process fostered by U. S. capital had taken root. New forms of production and social relations wrought by play of foreign capital changed the social face of Mexico and provided the material that fashioned writers' thinking. Beginning in 1880, initial large-scale contacts between Americans and Mexicans formed as railroads were in process of construction. Estimates of the number of laborers required to lay track and maintain them ran as high as 40,000 per month working under the supervision of U. S. foremen, engineers, and supervisors. With the completion of the rails connecting Mexico City with the northern border in the mid-1880s, mining flourished such that by the turn of the century 140,000 mine and smelter workers were regularly employed. Countless more found employment in foreign owned oil fields, power plants, textile factories, cotton farms, coffee fincas, and road construction.

By 1900 a massive shift had taken place in the demography of Mexico as settlements formed within economic zones under the control of American corporations. Altogether, an estimated 300,000 Mexicans migrated from southern and central states to establish new residences in the north (and eventually migrate into the U. S. as the same companies recruited them over the boundary).⁶ As Mexicans migrated within Mexico, immigrating Americans entered in force; altogether an estimated 40,000 Americans settled in the largest cities and in the new settlements formed as a consequence of foreign inspired economic activity. From Mexico City to the railroad town of Torreon, the smelting center of Monterrey, and the border towns from San Diego to Brownsville, and the Tampico oil fields, Americans formed the largest contingent of foreigners on Mexican soil.

Across the northern tier of states new communities mushroomed in response to mining, oil exploration, and railroad expansion developed by U. S. capital. Within these cities, towns, and remote mining, railroad, and oil camps, a new type of social relation was introduced into Mexico distinguished by a social and economic segregation separating Mexican laborers (and Mexicans in general) from American personnel and their families. The latter founded exclusive 'clubs' and professional associations throughout the Republic. Mexico City had its highly visible American colony numbering about 6,000 with its obligatory private club and a Women's Club reserved for English speaking residents. The colony enjoyed residences styled in the American motif and lounged in their clubs' recreational facilities. An author for the *National Geographic* found the colony active and growing in 1902. "It sustains a well-equipped club, an excellent hospital, and has all the paraphernalia of a well-ordered society intent upon getting the most out of life, such as golf links, base-ball, women's clubs, afternoon teas, literary circles, etc."⁷ Two societies circulated within Mexico City, Americans and

Mexicans lived separate lives and in doing so mirrored their separate and unequal functions in the foreign dominated modernization process.

Analyzing class relations requires that we contextualize the proletarianization of the Mexican population. In mining, oil, and railroad camps and towns across northern Mexico the two nationalities inhabited strictly separate quarters. The foreign minority comprised a class to itself, the handsomely rewarded corporate employees and managers who worked for, and answered to, a board of directors in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago. In short, a sharply segregated community emerged, defined by workers' huts (sometimes provided by the company) at one end. At the other, an American colony easily distinguished by roomy houses for married personnel and modern dormitories for single men, an ever present and active 'club' with tennis court, sometimes a golf course, and a school for American children run by an American teacher.

At the site of the El Ebano oil field, famous for its tremendous output, 7,000 workers were segregated from the American technical and administrative personnel. The Mexican Petroleum Company, for example, provided housing for the permanent "peon" employees, most of which were recruited from the central plateau region, "two room cottages all wooden, neatly painted." However, beyond the limits of the company built houses, the "floating" labor supply, those usually working for an independent contractor, lived as best they could in the style of the "ordinary thatched huts of the Tampico natives."⁸ Company owner, Edward Doheny's description of the married American employees' housing contrasted sharply with the simple one bedroom houses of the common workers: "five room cottages, well kept, well cared for and presenting very attractive appearance." Single American employees lived in "exceedingly attractive" dormitories and enjoyed "the most complete" clubhouse in Mexico. According to Doheny, the single men "have reading rooms, game rooms, billiard tables, tennis courts and complete bathing facilities. The clubhouse is arranged for general receptions as well as for the ordinary living conditions of its inmates." Doheny asserted that his company made every effort "to keep their American employees contented."⁹

The same social divisions obtained at the mining camps. At Guggenheim's Velardena smelter workers paid \$2.00 to \$2.50 a month depending on size. And nearby stood a company store that invariably ruined local merchants and gouged the worker through vouchers handed out at payday redeemable only at the store. One unusual mine operator from Sinaloa recalled that the "greatest injustice worked upon the laborers was the system of company stores. Especially this was true of the mining companies."¹⁰ One report estimated that three-fourths of the miners' wages were spent for food and supplies at the well-known and very successful silver mine at Batopilas in Chihuahua.¹¹

In the remote countryside, on mountain peaks, valleys, and *barrancas*, the mining camps with their American and Mexican quarters stood as vivid reminders of class bifurcation, an extension of impressive modern mining facilities and smelters and of U. S. hegemony. The Mexican town generally enjoyed minimal sanitation, often the mining, oil, or railroad company supplied a school, a handball court, perhaps a theatre, and always a hospital. Hospitals were as much a part of the landscape as the housing allowed

the miners. Accidents routinely jolted the camp. One engineer wrote that "Accidents are altogether too frequent. . . ." This certainly was the case at the Santa Gertrudis mine in Chihuahua; 39 men were killed in underground accidents occurring in the three-year period, 1915-1918. Some accidents caused massive casualties. At the San Andres mine in Durango, over 100 men were killed in an explosion in 1901. In nearly all cases the men were held responsible alleging that the men were too careless and irresponsible.¹²

The company manager served as the camp's administrator and held significant clout to enforce rules and regulations governing the "Mexican town." The head of Guggenheim's operations in Mexico confided that the smelting and mining conglomerate "found Mexican labor as a rule satisfactory. We have always taken a sort of paternal interest in them."¹³ At the Tampico oil fields, one writer noted that the boomtown "is a monument to the genius and faith of the Americans who made it great." Here in the newly born social atmosphere, he continued, "the swaggering, free-money, noisy, busy atmosphere of the frontier, of the oil fields, of the white man on his bully-ragging, destructive, inconsequential "education" of the dark brother round the world, permeates the place."¹⁴

Relations between Americans and Mexicans, in all of its manifestations, provided the real, material context that greatly influenced writers as they traveled through Mexico. Mexico after all was not just Mexico; Americans were now more important to the Mexican economy than were Mexicans. Writers never lost sight of that fact and orchestrated their stories to justify that powerful presence. However, the average American knew next to nothing about Mexico which inspired a heavy didacticism among writers. For most writers, informing about Mexico's indigenous past seemed a perfect place to begin their story.

MAPPING MEXICO'S HISTORICAL RECORD

Narratives, from professional and academic articles to travelogues and other books, commonly opened with a section, chapter, or chapters, accounting for the origins of Mexico and its people. Here we see the use of history to serve as argument for the neo-colonial project, a process that integrated fiction and fact into an imperial narrative. Historical genealogy invariably began with the Pre-Columbian era with such introductory chapter titles as "Ancient History of Mexico," "Aztec Land," "Ancient Mexico," "Prehistoric Mexico," or "The Dawn of Mexico: Aztecs and Toltecs." Particular attention accrued to the Aztecs and their imperial relations with other societies before the coming of the Spaniards. Discussions of religious practices (particularly the human sacrifices), costumes, traditions, music, economic life and their archeological remains must have riveted the attention of the average reader. Journeys to the ruins at Teotihuacan, Mitla, or Cholula provoked extensive passages attesting to amazement that such monuments could be contemplated much less completed. Narratives then proceeded to the Spanish conquest and finally the National period. Here the cultural and genetic origins of Mexico as well as the economic presence of the U. S. alongside Mexican forms of production were positioned. Accounts of the Spanish conquest identified the institutions planted by the conquerors and reviewed an alleged record of cruelty and oppression against the Indian populations. Without fail, the key to explaining contemporary Mexico originated with the

ruin of the indigenous societies at the hands of Spaniards and the subsequent birth of the syncretic, new Mexico. After three centuries of Spanish colonial oppression by the landed *criollos* over servile Indians, the Mexican nation emerged.

A view of contemporary Mexico inevitably precipitated. The story went something like this: Over the centuries, Mexico formed a cultural and biological hybrid, a cross between Indian and European that exemplified the worst of both worlds. In the words of one author, "it must be confessed that [*mestizos*] often exhibit the well-known tendency to follow the vices and weaknesses of both sides of their ancestry rather than the virtues."¹⁵ To be sure, some dissonance appeared now and then in the assessment of Mexico's population. "In the opinion of most observers," added a more optimistic foreign service hand, "[the *mestizo*] is an improved stock as compared to the aborigines, quick to learn but inconstant in the applications of lessons taught."¹⁶ Indians and *mestizos*, 80 to 90 percent of Mexico's population, neither of which were of the "better types," formed Mexico's historical and contemporary dilemma.

Nothing seemed as important to understanding Mexico then its racial lines, which, depending on the source, came out to be something like 12 percent white (however tainted by Spanish "blood" inheritance), 33 percent *mestizo*, and the rest Indian. Only the top 12 percent were worthy of leadership, except in cases of "exceptional" ability on the part of individual *mestizos* and Indians. That was the social side of Mexico. Writers focused keenly on the material or natural side, describing Mexico as a land of vast untapped resources, minerals, soils, timber, climate, and cheap labor attractive to American investors who "blessed" Mexico with a billion dollars of their investment capital. A chapter or two on mines, cattle ranches, plantations, and a long discussion on railroads underscored the significant place that foreign capital, particularly U. S. capital, held in the Mexican nation.

But there was much more to the analysis than that of breaking Mexico down into its essential parts, a society composed of whites, "mixed breeds" and "full-blooded" Indians living atop the richest natural resources in the world. Narratives examined the behavior patterns fixed within each component of the Mexican nation and eventually distilled the base qualities that made Mexico unique among nations of the world.

"THE LATIN MIND IS ESSENTIALLY ORIENTAL"¹⁷

In scrutinizing Mexico's historical record, and after traveling to its hinterlands and cities, authors quickly found the word "Oriental" ideal for cutting to the essence of the contemporary Mexican national character. Oriental allegedly defined Mexicans and their culture and appeared in enough accounts to suggest that it had become a standard measure for comparing Mexicans to other cultures, particularly that of the United States. For certain, readers' attention responded to the expression. "Oriental" conveyed an image of an exotic, poor, strange, appealing, possibly loathsome, and for sure a subordinate people practicing an impenetrable culture. George B. Winton set the tone of his 1913 training guide for Protestant missionaries from the United States with a quote opposite the first page:

Now with regard to the character of the people, they are as Oriental in type, in thought, and in habits as the Orientals themselves. We find that they are genuine Asiatics. They have some of the fatalism, the same tendency for speculation on the unpractical side of life and religion, the same opposition to the building of industries, the same traditionalism and respect for the usages of antiquity.¹⁸

"It is all Oriental," gushed one journalist for the *Boston Globe* (1888), "even to the barking dogs that howl through the streets"¹⁹ George B. Winton found that "Mexicans have much in common with the people of western Asia and northern Africa. So manifest is the resemblance to the latter that, taken with certain traits of the stone and architecture of the pre-European period, it has suggested a racial connection with Egypt." Mary Barton expressed surprise at finding examples of an Orientalism that compared to the Far East. "The way the women do their hair," she exclaimed, "is Mongolian, and brought back memories of women I had seen on the great Tibetan frontiers, the women of Nepal, Sikhim, and Bhutan; many of the Mexican women have the same jolly laughing mien and the same short, squat type of figure."²⁰ Not one author defined with any precision the meaning of Oriental when applied to Mexico. Oriental could be a mere similarity, while for some Oriental meant an identity with direct links to the "Orientals" themselves. And so they left the reader with vague references to Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Ambiguity seemed to suffice.

The absence of a consensus as to the exact qualities that gave to the Mexican an "Oriental" presence seemed not to deter authors. Seemingly, the Oriental discourse engendered in Europe and applied by Americans as they related tales of economic conquest appeared a distraction rather than a central and defining point for explaining Mexico. Oriental was more literary and abstract than substantive and descriptive. When it became obvious that a variety of general qualities went beyond Oriental and required a terminology that delved deeper (and more "accurately") into the cultural uniqueness of Mexico, Oriental receded into the background but certainly did not disappear. Authors did not need to search long for a more appropriate descriptive term; they found it in the Spanish word *peon*, meaning common laborer. The language of empire, one unique to the American experience, took on a life of its own.

MEXICO: LAND OF "SLEEPY PEONS AND SAD EYED BURROS"²¹

The *peon* supplied a favorite subject matter for many a writer's ruminations. "Peon" came from the Spanish *peon* literally meaning someone who walks rather than rides a horse (a *caballero*), a definition that writers gladly supplied for readers. Peon (in the English pronunciation) more easily connected to the realities of Mexico and replaced the old standby "greaser" that surfaced with the pre and post-1848 contacts between Americans and Spanish-Mexicans of the old Southwest. Even the newly found "Oriental" was eclipsed, but not eliminated, in the growing discourse on Mexico. As the literature grew, peon eventually encompassed everything that exemplified Mexican and not remotely American, the preferred measure for comparing the Mexican to the American. Writers ultimately placed peon, Mexican, and mestizo on an equal par.

Percy F. Martin author of several works on Mexico, assured the reader of *Mexico of the Twentieth Century* (1907) that the "great deterrent to the complete regeneration of Mexico has been the character of the native peons."²² A frustrated observer writing for the *Independent* (1926) asked, "Who are these peons? What is their physical and mental condition? Are they any better, or worse, than Orientals or many races?"²³ Mining engineer Allan H. Rogers, unlike those who found Oriental a fitting description, expanded the range of analogies by comparing the peon with the plantation blacks of the U. S. South. He defined the peon on the following terms:

of mild and humble nature, much like the southern plantation field hand before the war. Like the Southern darkey, he lived in quarters at the home ranch or at outlying ranches under the supervision of a majordomo and from working constantly under the sun his skin, naturally dark, was blackened to the hue of the African.²⁴

Comparing the peon to the "Southern darkey" re-appears in various forms in the literature, and the alleged qualities residing within the former slave and Mexican peon were strikingly similar. More often authors devoted considerable attention to the quality of labor similar to those descriptions of black labor in the U. S., as did the editor of the *Engineering and Mining Journal* in the June 9, 1906 issue. "The Mexican peon," he wrote, "is characteristically a docile laborer with only simple wants, which are easily satisfied."²⁵ Some saw in Mexican labor a knack for taking the "easy way" to the degree that the habit established a barrier to any satisfactory relationship between American employers and Mexican labor. A journalist for the *Nation* concluded that the Mexican harbors "a complete disregard for the basic need of work [and] regards it as an evil."²⁶ Engineer J. Nelson Nevius minced no words: "The Mexican laboring classes have a highly developed lazy strain in their blood."²⁷ That description was but one step removed from making the conscious comparison of the American blacks to peon labor. Thus an author of a *National Geographic* article borrowed from the American experience, alleging that the "Mexican peon knows that he is born to serve, as did the old southern darky."²⁸

The vast army of unskilled laborers (although many were experienced miners) working on the modern forms of industrial production and transportation were invariably known to American bosses as peons, men and women who formed a new class of wage workers in Mexican society. A long litany of pathologies allegedly afflicted the cheap labor uprooted from their lands, then recruited, shipped, and employed willingly by U. S. companies. The roll call of pathological conditions was inconsistently explained although no one bothered to notice. Peon laborers and their families, whether Indians or "half-breeds," were purported to be prone to excessive drinking and promiscuity, were lethargic, unambitious, docile, unintelligent, fatalistic, superstitious, cowardly, cruel, uneducated but trainable under the right influence. As clarification for the nation's social conditions authors often referred to one or all of three factors: the racial inheritance of defective genes, centuries of Spanish colonial oppression, and/or the effects of inhabiting tropical climates or oxygen-rare altitudes.

Writing for the U. S. Department of Labor, Walter Weyl observed, "The most salient characteristic of the native labor is apathy[;] on the whole it is sufficiently general to be considered a national characteristic of great importance in everything pertaining to labor."²⁹ Twenty years later Wallace Thompson, author of five books on Mexico and Latin America and editor of the journal *Ingenieria Internacional*, arrived at the same conclusion in his economically motivated psychological treatise, *The Mexican Mind: A Study of National Psychology* (1922). Among a formidable lineup of defects, Thompson found that apathy held the key to explaining Mexico's genetically determined economic doldrums: "Forever the lack of ambition for aught save idleness; forever the promise of "manana" and the great things of tomorrow--these drag upon the wheels of what might be. Apathy remains, outstanding as a characteristic of Mexico [*sic*]."³⁰ E. D. Trowbridge, general manager of the American-owned Mexican Light and Power Company and employer of many a "peon," chimed in: "The peons have little initiative [but] work well under supervision."³¹

Not infrequently, mean and vicious metaphors debased the subject peoples. "Mexicans are restless. The peon likes to ride," wrote Frederick Simpich in the *National Geographic* (1920), "Whenever they have saved money from a few days' work they swarm to town, running to and fro apparently as aimless as the inhabitants of a disturbed ant hill."³² Hubert Howe Bancroft said as much thirty-two years previous. The "least possible labor provides for these wants, and careless for the morrow, they squander the surplus on drinking."³³ By 1930 such thinking had become conventional wisdom. Peon easily segued into images of children and in the scramble to define the Mexican, peon and childlike served well enough.

The Mexican-as-child theme appears frequently in narratives suggesting that from the perspective of the observer Mexican customs and norms were inherently determined sets of actions and ideas. Perhaps no other commentator stated it as clearly and vehemently as did the racially obsessed Wallace Thompson in his *The Mexican Mind: A Study in National Psychology* (1922). After Thompson cited compulsive sex drives as the Mexican norm he engaged the matter of maturity. "The Mexican," he confidently professed, "seems to have a child's or a savage's unwavering grasp of the details of desire and of the things he hopes for,--a heritage from the Indian which centuries of white rule and oceans of white blood have never eradicated."³⁴ He then extended the racially determined maturation thesis using the example of Mexican humor: "There is indeed true humor and a great deal of it in the Mexicans, although it is accented by but little levity, and is more often childlike and wantonly cruel."³⁵ Thompson was hardly original (but when it came to the discourse on Mexicans few, if any, were); four decades earlier Hubert Howe Bancroft asserted a similar line of thought:

The Mexican--the mestizo now being dominant and representative--has remained in a state of adolescence, as indicated by his capricious, thoughtless, and even puerile traits.³⁶

Children by nature required supervision or parental control, and commentators explicitly linked the two. Listen for a moment to the paternal prodding of Marie

Robinson Wright, who applied a twist to the father figure role: "The United States is the elder brother among American republics" and "the civilizing influence of the American people can be made of great benefit to them [Mexicans]." [37](#) The absence of those civilities deemed prerequisites for modernization (industrial modernization equated civilization) enjoined observers to generalize around a grand theme, the "Mexican Problem." In an address at a conference on Mexico at Clark University in 1920, Professor George Blakeslee affirmed what others had felt for some time: "The outstanding fact is that there is a genuine Mexican Problem." [38](#) A year later sometime diplomat Chester Lloyd Jones pointed out that "a generation ago few Americans recognized that Mexico was a problem." [39](#) But by the twenties, the Mexican Problem had become an issue around which Americans closed ranks.

Blakeslee defined the problem by the question: "How may it [Mexico] develop into a law-abiding, capable nation?" Commentators answered in unison. The resolution to a society governed by boundless pathological behaviors originating from a childlike mental inheritance required paternal intervention, possibly permanently, by a higher authority. The "Mexican Problem" was for the United States to resolve, a burden placed by destiny upon its shoulders. Cultural defects rooted in faulty genetic material, in part, created the "Mexican Problem" to be attended to by public and private individuals and organizations from the United States. But beneath all of the racialized and paternalist rhetoric, observers were asking: What are the internal prerequisites for optimal economic and political relations between Mexico and the United States? Or as Jones put it (in a chapter aptly titled "Why Mexico is a Problem"), "The great natural wealth of Mexico makes it a region in which the adjustment of its political and economic relations with the rest of the world is of great importance." [40](#)

"THE AMERICANIZATION OF MEXICO" [41](#)

Americans gladly promoted themselves as the saviors of Mexico. A legion of authors maintained that relief for a society burdened by an inferior civilization required a rigorously observed open door investment policy. Economic hegemony constituted the bedrock of the redemption process or so thought U. S. citizens managing operations in Mexico. Mexico, it was commonly alleged, languished under the weight of masses of peons, Indians, and mestizos (terms often used interchangeably), who reproduced not only themselves to excess, but an abject culture as well, which in turn bred archaic and moribund economic institutions and violence-laden political practices. Reformation, that is, Americanization, meant adjusting Mexico to continued infusions of U. S. capital for the exploitation of Mexico's resources and labor power.

Publications confidently recommended the continuance of an ongoing process of economic and cultural Americanization of Mexico. "Modernization and Americanization are almost synonymous terms in Mexico," declared Edward Conley in an article aptly entitled "The Americanization of Mexico." Conley listed the salubrious "effects of the American invasion":

We have been the leaven in the loaf as it were[;] we have taught the Mexicans banking and the use of banks. We have built hydraulic power plants and taught the Mexicans how to utilize the enormous amount of energy which was going to waste in their waterfalls. We have, by our example and our commercial products taught the peon to wear shoes and a hat, and have increased his wages all over the republic.[42](#)

Not only banking, clothing, and wages, but the family structure as well "will be on the American basis." Conley optimistically concluded that "each year the American way of living is taking a deeper hold on the Mexican people."[43](#)

Although Mexico was on the path toward a U. S.-inspired template for modernity, not all observers felt that the tide had turned, or that equality was achievable. Most thought that Mexico was still enthralled to ancient customs that outlived their usefulness and posed obstacles to modernization. University of California scholars working for the Doheny Research Foundation, for example, concluded in 1918 that "In Mexico the problem for the great mass is to provide the means for awakening sluggish minds and bodies that are suffering for the most from *manana* [*sic*]. They have first to learn to labor well and dutifully; which means an interest must be awakened to the satisfactions to be realized from settled industry and its fruits."[44](#) Thompson used slightly different phrasing: "The desire to 'get things done' which spurs the Anglo Saxon is missing." In a similar vein of thought, sociologist Edward A. Ross introduced his account with a terse warning: "what a paradise this Mexico might be if it possessed the moral character and the social institutions of the descendants of the Puritans. Nature has done her part. It is man that does not fill out the picture."[45](#) Invariably authors prescribed continued cultural instruction proffered by the U. S. for the sickly nation.

James Carson unequivocally insisted on reliance upon American influences to solve the "Mexican Problem," a pattern of defects rooted in the Indian, "the dregs of a once powerful and progressive race." "The great need of the people today," he counseled, "is for vocational training, and the genius of the American for organization will supply this if he is given an opportunity to help the Mexican develop the vast riches of the country. This is the only kind of intervention that is imaginable."[46](#) Not all found the task easy or possible of success; pessimism seeped in. Nevin Winter lamented that "Things cannot be changed to Anglo-Saxon standards in a year or two years, or even a generation. To Americanize Mexico will be a difficult if not impossible undertaking."[47](#) An equally discouraged William Joseph Showalter argued "It will be a long, long climb until its population, four-fifths Indians and half-breeds, will reach that point in their national destiny where they can possess a government like our own."[48](#) Nevertheless, thought others, the course must be kept. One ex-engineer with years of experience in Chihuahua mines reminisced that Americanization was not an easy task but that it was possible and that it must be carried out. He claimed that though it "takes four years to make an American out of him [the Mexican]" the task cannot be jettisoned: "Make an American out of him or leave him to his happy indolence."[49](#)

That desired systematic intervention became the North American version of the "white man's burden." Americans declared loudly and proudly that economic predominance carried with it the responsibility for guiding that nation from a degenerative state to a higher level of civilization and into the 20th century. Duty, or better self-interest, commanded that Americans assume the task. The solution to Mexico's backwardness, the "Mexican Problem," could be nothing short of an economic and cultural re-construction of Mexico, a version of Americanization on an international scale. Then, exclaimed Wallace Thompson, "Mexico will be a white man's land, more truly than she has ever been."⁵⁰ As a Mexican's land, Mexico would inevitably languish in a tangle of pitiful behavioral patterns.

All of these efforts, it should be pointed out, stood well within the economic policy concurred with by the governing elites of Mexico and administered by their senior partners and self-appointed mentors, U. S. corporations. Formal and informal U. S. policy toward Mexico sought nothing less than a cultural and political adaptation of Mexico to the exigencies of the dominant economic interests then operating in Mexico. Americanization consequently never envisioned a politically independent person or nation via Americanization reforms. Much like the educational programs designed by European powers for their colonial possessions, Americanization never envisioned the promotion of equality between colonizer and colonized.⁵¹ Instead it meant to secure the relation through the reiteration of the need for a long term "civilizing mission." Seldom, if ever, were Mexicans complimented for intelligence, inventiveness, or any other quality that might ensure an independent economic and political development. No one dared claim that Mexicans were the racial or cultural equals of Americans, or that they could go it alone without US capital in the economic driver's seat. Mining engineer Franklin Wheaton Smith spoke for a great many "Mexico hands" when he surmised that "Mexico is not yet strong enough to undertake unaided its own development."⁵²

Observers concluded that Mexicans were salvageable if given the right training, and to the degree that their inveterate or cultural natures allowed. Americans insisted that they were capable of, and the lone party responsible for, leading them to redemption. That redemption, however, never contemplated the severance of the economic ties binding Mexico to the United States. Rather, cultural Americanization strengthened the hegemonic economic position of the United States. Thompson concisely summed the heart of the matter in *The People of Mexico* (1922), a work touted by Chester Lloyd Jones and Edward A. Ross for its "excellence." Thompson frankly admitted that American anxieties emanated from a single source:

Her [Mexico's] resources, her gold and silver and oil, her henequen and rubber and coffee and lumber, her great labor supplies that wait so surely upon education and uplift, are forces which the white world cannot ignore. Mexico cannot live in isolation, for her lands lie in the very heart of the world and her resources are sorely needed.⁵³

The scenario is loaded with traditional perspectives of morally (and socially) acceptable gender relations: the Strong Male, Uncle Sam, and the Weak Female, Mexico,

could not live apart, nor could they live as equals. Mexico must, by nature, subsume "herself" to the regional alpha male. But the analogy that Thompson applied rather unconsciously figured decidedly within international relations saturated with political and economic power. Chester Lloyd Jones, for example, placed the Mexican Problem in a broader global context, one in which "the shortcomings of the weak are problems for the strong." Contextualized within the existing imperial relations between, or as Jones put it euphemistically, weak states and strong states, Jones explained the "Mexican problem" within a framework of those European nations sharing a vital interest in the Middle East, the Far East, and Eastern Europe. In the sphere of European interests as in that sphere eyed by the U. S., "the problem of the protection of foreign interests promises to be most important." As for the United States, which had established protectorates in Cuba, Panama, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Haiti, and the Philippines, the relations with Mexico, "the most important of the Latin Republics," comprised "the outstanding factor in American international policy in the next decade."⁵⁴ America's problem centered on managing to maintain its vital control over economic resources of Mexico, an economic protectorate, while diplomatically dealing with the latter subjectively as if an independent sovereign nation. That objective, the creation of an internal order in Mexico compatible with foreign capital, consumed vast amounts of the U. S. Department of State's energy. The United States opted for a high wire act, maintaining hegemony shrouded by policy of "reciprocity."

From Porfirio Diaz (1880-1910) through FDR, the open-door investment policy continued its historical course, the message remained the same while the messenger changed. Through the administrative changes and policy nuances in Washington, economic facts and figures demonstrated that as regards U. S.-Mexico relations, no substantial break occurred either in policy objectives or in economic relations between 1880 and 1930. Mexico remained an object for cultural and economic Americanization. Ideological practices and economic empire expanded in tandem. Without the economic conquest that body of imperial thought would have little purpose, no objective relation. Generalizing about Mexico and the Mexican people, labeling them lazy, indolent, and apathetic, in need of uplift made sense only in relation to the material economic conquest by the United States. Ideology of empire did not inspire a desire for empire, an over-supply of capital and decreasing rates of profit propelled economic conquest. Ideology justified the accomplished conquest and persuaded the American public that they were obligated to the task of conquest.

IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY AND CHICANO EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

The ideology of empire, like the corporations that inspired it, transcended the border as the migrants traveled north and into the labor camps and *colonias* across the southwest and mid-west. The same corporations that had employed and housed Mexican labor would now do the same north of the border. Carey McWilliams noted that the two sides of the border held many geographic similarities such that migrants would feel as if they had never left their homeland.⁵⁵ However, more than the similarity of the border region greeted the migrating peoples. Mexicans worked for the same corporations that used their labor power in Mexico; the ideology that justified the exploitation of Mexico's labor and

resources greeted them as well in the new environment. Mexican work meant the same in the U. S. as in Mexico, the poorest paid and lowest category of labor. Migrants often lived in labor camps sponsored by the same mining, railroad, and agricultural corporations operating in Mexico. Rigid segregation north of the border reproduced the social relations dividing American from Mexican in the labor camps, towns, and cities within Mexico. Mexican migrants did not necessarily find an entirely novel environment in the U. S. Many had experienced various dimensions of it in their country.

Unfortunately, the literature on Chicano history overlooks the imperial context. The example of the educational experience of the Chicano community is a case in point. Despite many advances in the literature on the educational history of Mexican immigrants and their descendents a full treatment on the topic has not yet appeared. Not only has there been a lack of interest in the subject, the approach taken ensures problematic results. For the most part, extant studies tend to focus solely upon national theoretical and practical issues and, consequently, remain strictly within an U. S.-bound perspective. The resulting historiography (not only in education studies but in general treatments as well) is incomplete and, furthermore, overlooks the deeper origins of the educational experience of the 20th century's most important immigrant community. In the bargain, the full accounting of U. S. educational history falls short. Chicano history, in particular the educational experience of the Chicano community, cannot be explained apart from the imperial economic domination exerted by the U. S. over Mexico.

Mexican immigrants and their families began entering the United States in large numbers soon after 1907-8. After settlement into *colonias* across the Southwest and Midwest, immigrant children outside of rural agricultural regions were obligated to attend public school. As educators searched for guidelines for educating these children, they came across the many of the works discussed above. By the mid-1920s this literature had provided a theoretical foundation for the educational programs designed for the Mexican community. An identical list of cultural and genetic pathologies, the same "Mexican Problem" and need for Americanization filtered through to boards of education, teacher training schools, administrators, and school teachers. Ironically, the ideology of empire flowed back into the United States and provided the "expert" opinion that shaped the educational policy applied to Mexican children and adults. At the service of public schools that transnational ideology constructed a transnational Mexican Problem. As in the case of the Americanization of Mexico, the Americanization of the immigrant community was expected to preserve the social relations of subordination and domination.

THE TRANSNATIONAL "MEXICAN PROBLEM"

In the late 1940s Carey McWilliams continued his tireless campaign to correct public and private injustices committed against minorities, in particular the Mexican American community. His classic *North From Mexico: The Spanish Speaking Peoples of the United States* (1949), offered the first historical account of the Mexican American people and served as a model for historians of the Chicano experience who followed his path. Combining a scholar's penchant for research with a political perspective that can be

described as a democratic radicalism, McWilliams documented the oppressive conditions shouldered by Mexican Americans. Correcting a history of racialized oppression motivated McWilliams to engage various activities on behalf of minorities. His research demonstrated that the political struggles undertaken by the Mexican community (which he actively supported and participated in) contributed to democratizing the culture and public policy of the United States.

McWilliams argued that a major factor in establishing the syndrome of oppressive public policies exemplified in segregated schools, disproportional rates of arrest for juvenile delinquency, and the general prejudice that infected the dominant society, was the continual recourse to "The Mexican Problem." So pervasive was this comprehensive conceptualization of the Mexican American community that McWilliams selected it for the title for the eleventh chapter of *North From Mexico*. He observed that "In the vast library of books and documents about ethnic and minority problems in the United States, one of the largest sections is devoted to "The Mexican Problem." McWilliams noted that a surge of publications on "The Mexican Problem" appeared in sync with the settlement of Mexican immigrants throughout the southwest. Armed with volumes of "data," social workers, educators, the courts and the police, concluded "that Mexicans lacked leadership, discipline, and organization; that they segregated themselves; that they lacked in thrift and enterprise." McWilliams pointedly mentioned of a "mountainous collection of master's theses" and dissertations that reported on alleged (and oft repeated) inferior intellectual, cultural, or biological qualities of Mexican adults and children.⁵⁶ Unfortunately for those who learned their first lessons in Chicano history from McWilliams none thought to investigate the origins of the "Mexican Problem." He explained that

As early as 1908 one finds mention of a "Mexican Problem," not in a specific way, rather in an indirect fashion. Victor Clark, for example, writing for the Department of Labor in 1908, commented on the cultural separation between the United States and Mexicans: "The Mexican laborer is unambitious, listless, physically weak, irregular and indolent. On the other hand he is docile, patient, usually orderly in camp. If he were active and ambitious, he would be less tractable and would cost more."⁵⁷

The references to the "Mexican Problem" were everywhere. Militaristic sounding language encased in articles and books with catchy titles peppered the literature, and these frequently suggested a quick spreading social/racial problem. Frederick Simpich, for example, opened "The Little Brown Brother Treks North" with a picturesque sketch of migrating Mexicans honeycombed with traditional stereotypes. Simpich's depictions of migrants crossing the border mirrored popular conceptions of the period: "Strumming their guitars and wearing five gallon hats, invading our country in a vast army." He later described the "army" as "hordes crossing the Rio Grande" escaping the "impoverished peon class."⁵⁸ Writing about the "Pressing Race Problems of Texas," Texas A&M professor William E. Garnett declared that the "problems associated with the Mexican invasion of the State are the most pressing race questions now confronting Texas."⁵⁹ Anthropologist Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn followed a similar theoretical path at the

1951 annual meeting of the American Association of Schools of Social Work. The Mexican, she warned (or so it seemed),

In every respect is different. His time orientation is neither the future nor the past but the present. Individualistic relationships have almost no meaning for him. He accepts what comes in whatever situation with small thought that he as any power or will to overcome or master obstacles. The good person to him is not the successful one, the one who achieves, but rather the one who obediently and graciously plays out the role defined for him.[60](#)

Even "sympathetic" authors found the culture of the Mexican community lacking in those basic substances that guaranteed successful assimilation into American life.

McWilliams rightly pointed out that "The Mexican Problem" only covered up the core issues, the racial domination that established the relations between the Mexican community and the dominant society. However, while McWilliams correctly identified a critical academic and public policy slogans that only served to "muddy the water," he overlooked the transnational origins of "The Mexican Problem." Here we must look to the authors who formulated the ideology of empire. The evidence shows conclusively that materials written about "The Mexican Problem" within the U. S. were deeply influenced by those authors who designed "The Mexican Problem" in reference to Mexico.

As the Mexican community formed in the early 1900s, policy makers and academics lacking information, expertise, and direction that would inform public policy in relation to Mexican immigrants tapped into the materials written about Mexico. In fact, in the "mountainous collection of master's theses" referred to by McWilliams, there is a heavy reliance upon the materials written about Mexico examined earlier in this chapter. No less than 25 theses and dissertations written on the Mexican immigrant community between 1912 and 1957 either cited authors like Wallace Thompson, George B. Winton, Edward A. Ross, Joseph K. Goodrich, and Percy F. Martin, among others, or they simply made a case of a "Mexican Problem," a cultural catastrophe awaiting Americanization.

Some, such as Jessica Hayden (who taught Americanization in southern California for a generation), frequently recited nearly verbatim Thompson's *The Mexican Mind: A Study in National Psychology*. Among the quotations sprinkled through her 1934 master's thesis on the education of the Mexican community, she included the following from Thompson (she actually plagiarized Thompson here):

There is an outstanding characteristic of the Mexican apathy [*sic*], which remains an infirmity of the will; forever the promise of manana--the great things of the morrow. It is this apathy of the will which drags upon the wheels of such progress as might exist. The yoke of this custom also lies upon the Mexicans everywhere with a weight which is impossible to explain to the American or European.[61](#)

Thompson said the same somewhat differently:

But for all this altruism and this concentration upon self as well, there is apathy. Forever the lack of ambition for aught save idleness; forever the promise of "*manana*" and the great things of the morrow--these drag upon the wheels of such progress as might be--an infirmity of the will, an inability to stir out of that helpless drifting. Apathy remains, outstanding as a characteristic of Mexico.[62](#)

The well-known sociologist Emory Bogardus of the University of Southern California, who specialized in the study of Mexican immigrants, gained a national reputation through that specialization. Trained by the eminent sociologist Robert E. Park at the University of Chicago, Bogardus ventured west with sparkling credentials. One of his first publications, *Essentials of Americanization* (1919) contained chapters on each immigrant group in the United States. In the rather short chapter on Mexicans Bogardus demonstrated little originality of thought. His opening sentence highlighted an unquestioned conceptualization widely discussed across the southwestern U. S.: " 'the Mexican problem' has developed rapidly since 1900."[63](#) The same litany of pathological conditions contained in the extant literature on Mexico found expression. However, Bogardus realized that his short three-page examination of the "Mexican problem" left much unsaid. He desired that his work direct educators toward works that would shed greater light upon the qualities that made for a Mexican. For each immigrant group examined he listed a short bibliography and in the Mexican section Bogardus listed only eight works. However sparse the reading list, all were about Mexico and all written by experts on Mexico and Mexican culture which only underscored the importance of studies of Mexico for "understanding" the Mexican immigrant. Among the cited works were Charles R. Enock's *Mexico*, Joseph K. Goodrich's *The Coming Mexico*, Frederick Starr's *In Indian Mexico*, and George Winton's *Mexico To-Day*.

Bogardus followed *Americanization* with *The Mexican Immigrant: An Annotated Bibliography* (1929). Here we find the full expression of the by then general reliance upon the literature on Mexico. According to Bogardus the "literature on the Mexican immigrant falls somewhat naturally into three classes."[64](#) The first were those relative to cultural background, the second were materials relating to Mexican communities in the U. S., and the third were those relating to "interracial adjustments." In the first category focusing on culture, Bogardus listed 37 books and 50 articles. all written about Mexico and Mexicans in Mexico. Particularly telling was Bogardus' short descriptions of each work and provides an insight into the reception given those works by a growing body of specialists on the Mexican immigrants and their community. A few examples demonstrate the manner through which these materials became standard texts for understanding the Mexicans. Of Frederick Starr's *In Indian Mexico*, Bogardus commented, "An eminent anthropologist gives a first-hand, reliable picture of one part of Indian Mexico after another, until the reader begins to feel at home among all the peoples who are described. An outstanding work, depicting culture traits clearly."[65](#) It mattered not that, among other things, Starr described the Otomis indigenous peoples as having "ugly dark faces." Of Edward A. Ross's *The Social Revolution in Mexico*, Bogardus

offered a similar assessment: "Through the keen eyes and rich cultural backgrounds of an eminent and trained sociologist [*sic*] the Mexican people are portrayed." Wallace Thompson's virulent anti-Mexican stream of consciousness, *The Mexican Mind: A Study of National Psychology* was described simply as "An analysis of the Mexican mode of thinking, their racial characteristics, habits of thought, and of action."⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, only three books relative to the Mexican immigrant community were available at the time. The overwhelming majority of pertinent sources available to interested parties were written by individuals who had little, if any, concern for the "Mexican Problem" affecting the American southwest. Nonetheless, these works soon entered into the academic and public policy mainstream and helped to flesh out then promulgate the "The Mexican Problem" critiqued by McWilliams.

Five years after the 1929 bibliography appeared, Bogardus published *The Mexican Immigrant in the United States* and included a chapter on the literature. He announced that selections were "made of those which are deemed the most important," and that an "understanding of the Mexican immigrant rests directly on knowing his culture traits." Listed were the same works found in his earlier bibliography, plus many more written since the earlier publication relative to Mexico.⁶⁷ By the mid-thirties the "Mexican Problem" had become a standard for addressing the ills wrought by the "invading army" settling into Mexican *colonias* across the southwest and mid-west.

PEONISM, THE ORIENTALISM OF THE U. S. EMPIRE

We now begin to understand that the authors of the many theses, dissertations, articles and books on the Mexican community mentioned by McWilliams sought direction and information on their subjects from the literature on Mexico. This also explains why the Mexican immigrant was continually referred to as a "peon," a hybrid of Indian and European "stock," a group burdened with the same syndrome of cultural disorders described in the literature on Mexico. In the main, writers on Mexican immigrants traversed the same ideological path taken by writers on Mexico.

Not surprisingly, essays and articles introduced their subject with a reference to the *peon* and hybrid origins of Mexican immigrants. Graduate of the Sociology at the University of Southern California, John Keinle, retraced the "blood lines" in his 1912 thesis "Housing Conditions Among Mexican Population of Los Angeles." Citing Charles R. Enock's *Mexico* as authority, Keinle reported that the hybrid character of Mexico produced an undigested mixture of the European, the *mestizo*, and the *peon*.⁶⁸ Grace Reeves cited a host of works on Mexico in her 1929 thesis, "Adult Mexican Education in the United States," and it comes as no surprise that she would write, "the Mexican is a composite of two ethnic groups: Spaniards and Indians. Modern Mexico may be divided into three parts, racially speaking [those] purely European; the part that is Indian; and the mixed portion."⁶⁹ A graduate of the University of California Department of Economics advised in his 1914 thesis, "A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles," that "The Mexicans considered in this study are the peons and are the source of nearly all the serious problems."⁷⁰ In step with an emerging trend, the author relied extensively on

works on Mexico, including that of Charles R. Enock (*Mexico*) and Percy F. Martin (*Mexico of the Twentieth Century*).

Frank Callcott's 1929 article, "The Mexican Peon in Texas," opened with "There are two classes of peons in Texas, those who intend to make the state their home and those who come only for the cotton picking."⁷¹ In her 1932 master's thesis, "Methods of Teaching Mexicans," Betty Gould reported that Mexican parents in the schools she researched "were not of the better class of Mexicans. They represent, rather, the very lowest type, the day laborer, or peon."⁷² In an article titled "Mexican Immigrants and American Citizenship" (1928) social worker Helen Walker noted that the "larger per cent of the Mexican population of Southern California represents the peon class." Naturally, as Walker and her contemporaries had read, peons were a people apart. She recounted an old theme: "The Mexican peon dislikes work. Work is work; joy is joy. The two are not the same. There is joy in play but not in work."⁷³ A school superintendent of a southern California school district argued that the peon background explained much about the intelligence of Mexican children. "The educational status of Mexican peon parentage is very low," asserted the future Americanization teacher, "and the average pupil of Mexican peon parentage has less ability to do the work commonly offered in our schools than has the normal American pupil."⁷⁴ Moreover, maladapted parents reproduced Mexico's cultural pathologies within the family setting. Such were the reasons that Emory Bogardus offered when he recommended to his readers that "It is necessary to first of all to consider the Mexican immigrant in light of the family culture traits of the peon classes of Mexico."⁷⁵

These and many more articles and studies not examined here varied imperceptibly, their script provided by their sources. Peons were a hybrid people infected with a cultural virus that rendered them a major source of America's social problems. The list seemed infinite: Mexicans were docile, violent, promiscuous, shiftless, thriftless, unambitious, unhygienic, fatalistic, imitative, clannish, superstitious, and shunned labor; they undervalued education, lacked leadership abilities, and were intellectually inferior. On the other hand, and to their credit, they were generous, happy and carefree, rhythmic, poetic, good with their hands, artistic, courteous, and responded well to authority. The bad, however, outweighed the good.⁷⁶

One future school administrator defined the Mexican immigrant question on an economically unequal international plane. "Standards of conduct," she wrote, "and personal ideals in Mexico are very different from those in the United States. It is only natural to assume that a country that has progressed more rapidly than Mexico, has also a higher goal in personal ideals and standards of conduct."⁷⁷ Anthropologist Florence Kluckhohn posed a similar assumption 30 years later. Mexicans, she stated, follow a culture foreign to the United States, "a culture radically different from our own," and that "some of the differences are obvious because they are so extreme."⁷⁸

Noteworthy references to an alleged childlike nature appeared as well. Vera Sturges, an official with the southwestern branch of the YWCA, spoke on the "Adjustment of Mexicans to U. S. Life" at a national meeting of social workers. "Intellectually," she

concluded, "[Mexicans] are children."⁷⁹ Another student of the "Mexican Problem" concluded that Mexican immigrants were a "child-like, timid, carefree people."⁸⁰ Bogardus concurred in his oft cited *The Mexican Immigrant in the United States* and claimed that the immigrant "is somewhat like a small child brought up in a paternalistic home."⁸¹ One school superintendent underscored the critical factor of parentage in his a manual on methods for the education of Mexican adults and children. He noted that "Mexican peons laborers are a group of second-graders." Experts held that Mexicans as a group were children, beset with all the problems that children bring to parents, and required a paternal supervision.⁸² Readers were also informed that "the children of the Mexican peon laborers do not have a home environment that is conducive to good health, to good morals, or to educational advancement."⁸³ A second school superintendent managing a district with a large Mexican population, resonated with this lament:

Almost all their parents are in the peon class and their standard of living is far below that of the average American family; their customs are much different from American customs; and probably most important of all, their intelligence as a whole is inferior to the average American's intelligence.⁸⁴

No amount of training could repair the intellectual deficit, but not all was lost.

AMERICANIZATION

A stern dose of Americanization via the public school system seemed the only remedy available for eliminating, or at least controlling, a potential social scourge. Los Angeles Schools Superintendent Susan B. Dorsey advised a 1923 gathering of district principals that, "We have these Mexicans to live with, and if we Americanize them we can live with them."⁸⁵ The preferred method to achieve cultural cleansing was the segregation of Mexican children and adults into a coerced socialization process suited to their "temperament." The requirement for "success" in the U. S., as Florence Kluckhohn and a host of others explicitly proposed, was the forced-feeding of those standards capable of overcoming the "orientations of Mexicans in this country."⁸⁶ Wherever a sizable Mexican *colonia* appeared, school districts devised Americanization programs housed within state-mandated segregated schools.

By 1920 the Mexican school had become a fixture in *colonias* and played a central role in the life of both the Mexican and Anglo communities. On the surface segregated schools appeared as neighborhood schools, but in reality they functioned as special schools designed to train Mexican children and adults in patterns of behavior and thinking compatible with those standards guiding the "successful" society. Schools for Mexican children taught a separate curriculum, emphasized English and American standards of conduct, vocational education over academic work, group discipline over individuality and logically, lower expectations. Indeed, segregated schools were administered as a separate school system within a larger district. Here, distinct sets of educational criteria functioned.

Mexican schools were generally under budgeted and overcrowded, administered and taught by inferior personnel, and embraced a different set of goals. In rural school districts the Mexican school operated on a separate schedule to allow children to join their parents in the fields or orchards. In some school districts, especially those in Texas, migrant children were simply too important to the agricultural economy and were denied entry into schools. But in those districts where Mexican schools were the norm, the successful child was one who ceased to act like a "typical" Mexican, spoke English, thought in English, and acted like an "American." Those who successfully shed the Mexican's "peculiar" habits were rewarded with better grades and a show of teacher's respect. And in the dominant society such an Americanized individual earned the distinction "different Mexican" to set him/her apart from the unreformed Mexican, the carrier of the "Mexican Problem."[87](#)

Reforming the immigrant's community culture reached beyond the usual targets of children and adults to focus on women. The State of California adapted its program to the division of sexual labor by emphasizing the role of women as potential Americanizers. The State made extraordinary attempts to apply a program designed to make Americanization agents of Mexican women. Presumably, once Americanized, that is, once a mother/ housewife kept a home, fed and raised her family, and tended a garden on the "American plan" she would then automatically Americanize her family. And many Americanized Mexican women would lead the entire community toward cultural redemption.[88](#)

Despite the rhetoric about the linkages between Americanization and success, on the one hand, and Mexican culture as the cause of the Mexican's "failure" on the other, the Mexican school seldom if ever posited social change as a goal. As in the case of the Americanization of Mexico, the Americanization of the immigrant community was expected to preserve the social relations of subordination and domination, relations that derived from the economic order. Moreover, in the minds of theorists and practitioners Mexicans could never resolve their historically conditioned shortcomings without supervision. As in the case of a Mexico depicted by writers as dependent on U. S. capital and know-how, Mexican immigrants became objects for the theory and practice designed by the architects of state policy.

That so many individuals charged with administering and designing public policy affecting the Mexican immigrant community were dependent upon articles and books written about Mexico underscores the significance of empire for understanding the Chicano experience. The "Mexican Problem" resonated on both sides of the border to become a transnational Mexican Problem. The interface of the "Mexican Problem" with the immigrant "Mexican Problem" was not lost on at least one writer. In *That Mexican! As He Really Is North and South of the Border* (1928) author Robert McLean reviewed the general characteristics of Mexican immigration with no unusual conclusions. Little ambivalence marked the commentary on the Mexican Problem; a seeming unity of opinion as well as a sizable literature indicated that the pressing matter was well fleshed out by the time McLean's book appeared. Like so many of his contemporaries with an interest in Mexican immigrants, McLean appropriated a thick body of information on

Mexico and applied it to the immediate questions of Mexican immigrants. Understandably, then, McLean chose C. W. Barron's *The Mexican Problem* as the first entry in his book's brief bibliography. The script was well rehearsed and the conclusions were inevitable. Barron wrote in conventional tones about the Mexican character, contending that "the larger part of the good people of Mexico are children who want to be in debt and at the same time carefree."⁸⁹ But McLean, unlike the majority of his peers who failed to make the connection between the two "Mexican Problems," went beyond merely parroting off the immigrant's cultural ills to insightfully detecting the transnational scope of the "Mexican Problem." He closed a chapter with a paragraph titled "The Problem of That Mexican," (a variation on the theme) stating:

With his inherited ignorance, his superstition, his habits of poor housing, his weakness to some diseases, and his resistance to others, with his abiding love of beauty, he has come to pour his blood into the veins of our national life. "That Mexican" no longer lives in Mexico; he lives also in the United States. The "Mexican Problem" therefore reaches from Gopher Prairie to Guatemala.⁹⁰

Despite McLean's prescience, most observers continued to think of the "Mexican Problem" in strictly national terms. The evidence, however, strongly suggests that the politics of empire and national political life intersected at critical points.

CONCLUSION

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion. First, an ideology of empire framed by nationalistic writers in the United States paralleled classical European imperial thought of the late 19th century. Secondly, that ideology developed in relation to the construction of the U. S. economic empire and therefore not in imitation of European thought. Thirdly, that ideology impacted significantly on national political life in the U. S. The ideology of empire within the sphere of socialization institutions demonstrates how Chicano history unfolds inseparably from that of the U. S. empire. Unfortunately, this vital component of U. S. social history and Chicano history is silenced. Consequently, explanations for the differential outcomes between Chicanos and the dominant society are incomplete. The interconnection of the Chicano historical experience with the economic and political hegemony exerted by the United States over Mexico and of the ideology which that domination inspired needs to be placed on the research agenda.

ENDNOTES

[1](#) F. E. Prendergast, "Railroads in Mexico," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. LXIII (1881), p. 276.

[2](#) Nevin O. Winter, *Mexico and Her People Today*, Boston: L. C. Page, 1907, p. 53.

[3](#) Alan Knight, *U. S. Mexican Relations, 1910-1940*, San Diego, CA: Center for U. S. Mexico Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987, p. 26.

[4](#) Robert Freeman Smith, *The U. S. and Revolutionary Nationalism in Mexico, 1916-1922*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 34.

[5](#) David Spurr notes a similar discourse in European colonization projects. His work illustrates how imperialism is basically similar regardless of widely differing contexts. See David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, Chapter 5.

[6](#) Moises Gonzalez Navarro, *Historia Moderna de Mexico, El Porfiriato*. Vol. 4, Mexico City: Editorial Hermes, 1957, xviii, p. 25; see also Friedrich Katz, "The Liberal Republic and the Porfiriato, 1867-1910," in Leslie Bethel, ed. *Mexico Since Independence*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 89.

[7](#) John W. Foster, "The New Mexico," *National Geographic Magazine*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1902), p. 24; also, Ralph McA. Ingersoll, *In and Under Mexico*, New York: The Century Company, 1924, 138-139. Ingersoll recalls that the American women at Monte del Cobre mines, most of them wives of office personnel, "all wanted more than anything else to be back in that rarefied air that they had left, and were obviously putting up with things at Monte [del Cobre] and making the best of a bad deal."

[8](#) Second Interview with Mr. E. D. Doheny, May 20, 1918. Interview 503. Doheny Research Foundation, Occidental College Special Collections.

[9](#) Second Interview with Mr. E. D. Doheny, May 20, 1918. Interview 503.

[10](#) Doheny Research Foundation. "Labor in Mexico." Box K, Interview with Mr. Lewis Scott of the Batopilas Company, Interview no. 486, 1918, Occidental College Special Collections.

[11](#) Arthur R. Townsend, "The Ocampo District, Mexico." *The Engineering and Mining Journal*, vol. 77, no. 13 (March 31, 1904), p. 515.

[12](#) See Compania de Santa Gertrudis, SA. Campaign Against Accidents. Report for the Month of December 1917. Doheny Research Foundation Collection, Occidental College Special Collections; "Mexico," *The Engineering and Mining Journal*, vol. LXXI, 2

(January 12, 1901), 65; "Coal Mining in Mexico," April 13, 1918. Doheny Research Foundation Collection. Occidental College, Special Collections; Interview with Mr. Requena. May 18, 1918. Interview 489. Doheny Research Foundation Collection, Occidental College Special Collections.

[13](#) "Labor in Mexico." Interview With Mr. Morse. Interview no. 485. Box K, Doheny Research Foundation.

[14](#) Wallace Thompson, *Trading With Mexico*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1921, p. 207.

[15](#) Chester Lloyd Jones, *Mexico and Its Reconstruction*, New York: D Appleton, 1921, p. 18.

[16](#) Robert McClean and Grace Petrie Williams *Old Spain in New America*, New York: Association Press, 1916, p. 134.

[17](#) Geoge B. Winton *Mexico Today: Social, Religious, and Political Conditions*, New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1913, p. 2.

[18](#) Ibid.

[19](#) Mary Elizabeth Blake "Picturesque Mexico." in Mary Elizabeth Blake and Margaret F. Sullivan, *Mexico*, NY: Lee and Shepherd Publishers, 1888, 39. Co-author Sullivan added: "As the mystic symbols on the monuments of Egypt have only begun to yield their secrets to the archeologist, we need not despair of yet knowing something of the antiquity of a country whose age is beyond present estimates, and whose earliest civilization, as indicated by her superstitions, architecture, costumes, and myths, was Oriental." pp. 199-200; A spurious Charles Reginald Enock, wrote, "it has been said that, from his head-dress to his sandalled feet, the native Mexican is Hispano-Egyptian." Charles Reginald Enock, *Mexico*, p. 35.

[20](#) Mary Barton, *Impressions of Mexico With Brush and Pen*, London: Methuen and Company, 1911, p. 20.

[21](#) William Joseph Showalter "Along Our Side of the Mexican Border." *National Geographic*, vol. 37, no. 1 (July 1920), p. 71.

[22](#) Percy F. Martin, *Mexico of the Twentieth Century*, London: Edward Arnold, 1907, x.

[23](#) Frederick Simpich, "The Little Brown Brother Treks North." *The Independent*, vol. 116, no. 39 (1926), p. 238.

[24](#) Alan H. Rogers, "Character and Habits of Mexican Miners." *Engineering and Mining Journal*, vol. Vol. 85, no. 14 (April 14, 1908), p. 700.

[25](#) "The Riots at Cananea." *The Engineering and Mining Journal*, vol. 81, no. 23 (June 9, 1906), p. 1099.

[26](#) Eva Frank "The Mexican 'Just Won't Work'." *The Nation*, vol. 125, no. 3241 (July 17, 1927), p. 156.

[27](#) Letter to the Editor by J. Nelson Nevius, *Engineering and Mining Journal*, p. 213.

[28](#) Frank H. Probert, "The Treasure Chest of Ancient Mexico." *The National Geographic*, vol. 30, no. 1 (July 1916), p. 43.

[29](#) Walter Weyl, "Labor Conditions in Mexico." Bulletin of the United States Department of Labor, No. 38, (January 1902), p. 12.

[30](#) Wallace Thompson, *The Mexican Mind: A Study of National Psychology*, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1922, p. 41.

[31](#) E. D. Trowbridge, *Mexico: To-Day and To-Morrow*, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1919, p. 273.

[32](#) Frederick Simpich, "Along Our Side of the Mexican Border." *National Geographic* vol. 37, no. 1, (July 1920), p. 63. Simpich was not the first to use the humans-as-ants metaphor. In 1899 Cy Harman published *The Story of the Railroad*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899) in which he described railroad construction laborers on the Mexican Central as "Red ants, fleece clad, from the mountains, naked ants from the Terre Caliente, and Black ants from Sonora." p. 218.

[33](#) Hubert Howe Bancroft *History of Mexico*. vol. XIV, San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1888, p. 611.

[34](#) Wallace Thompson, *The Mexican Mind*, p. 134.

[35](#) Ibid. p. 171.

[36](#) Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, vol. VI, 1861-1887, San Francisco: The History Company, Publishers, 1888, p. 607.

[37](#) Marie Robinson Wright, *Picturesque Mexico*, p. 444.

[38](#) George E. Blakeslee, "Introduction" in George E. Blakeslee, ed. *Mexico and the Caribbean*, New York: Strechert and Company, 1920, viii.

[39](#) Chester Lloyd Jones *Mexico and Its Reconstruction*, p. 1.

[40](#) Ibid.

[41](#) Edward M. Conley, "The Americanization of Mexico." *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, 1909, p. 725.

[42](#) Ibid.

[43](#) Ibid.

[44](#) "Mexico: An Impartial Survey," Doheny Research Foundation Papers (mimeo), (1918), History Archives, Los Angeles Public Library, p. 95.

[45](#) Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Social Revolution in Mexico*, p. 7.

[46](#) James Carson, "Upon the Indian Depends Mexico's Future," p. 38.

[47](#) See Nevin O. Winter, *Mexico and Her People Today*. Winter wrote: "American intelligence and capital have done much toward bringing about the present prosperous conditions and will do much more in the future, Mexico will find their neighbors north of the Rio Grande ready to lend a helping hand." p. 395.

[48](#) William Joseph Showalter, "Mexico and Mexicans." *National Geographic*, vol. 25, no. 5 (1914), p. 493.

[49](#) Ralph McA. Ingersoll, *In and Under Mexico*, pp. 117-118.

[50](#) Wallace Thompson, *The Mexican Mind*, p. 19.

[51](#) See Frederick Cooper and Anna Laura Stoler, Eds. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 7.

[52](#) Franklin Wheaton Smith, "Present Condition of Mining in Mexico," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, vol. 86, 14, (October 3, 1908), p. 655.

[53](#) Wallace Thompson, *The People of Mexico*, p. 407.

[54](#) Chester Lloyd Jones, *Mexico and Its Reconstruction*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1921, p. 4.

[55](#) Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking Peoples of the United States* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott and Company, 1949), pp. 9-10.

[56](#) Ibid. p. 206-297. One example from a doctoral dissertation written in 1942 exemplifies a general trend in the graduate student literature. In his University of Texas doctoral dissertation on the education of Mexicans in Texas, Perry M. Broom described some of the generalized behavior patterns of Mexicans: "Tendencies toward imitation, conservatism, submission to authority, and emotional instability all color the "Mexican" personality." Perry Morris Broom, "An Interpretative Analysis of the Economic and

Educational Status of Latin Americans in Texas," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 1942. p. 167.

[57](#) Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico*, pp. 9-10.

[58](#) Frederick Simpich, "The Little Brown Brother Treks North," *The Independent*, vol. 116, no. 3952, pp. 19, 237-238.

[59](#) William E. Garnett, "Immediate and Pressing Race Problems of Texas," Southwestern Political and Social Science Association, *Proceedings*, 1925, p. 32.

[60](#) Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn, "Cultural Factors in Social Work Practice and Education," *Social Science Review*, vol. 25 no.1 (March 1951), p. 40.

[61](#) Jessie Hayden, "The La Habra Experiment in Mexican Social Education," Master's Thesis, Claremont Colleges, Claremont, California, 1934, p. 27.

[62](#) Wallace Thompson, *The Mexican Mind*, p. 41.

[63](#) Emory Bogardus, *Essentials of Americanization*, Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1919, p. 179.

[64](#) Emory Bogardus, *The Mexican Immigrant: An Annotated Bibliography*, Los Angeles: The Council on International Relations, 1929, p. 1.

[65](#) *Ibid.* p. 5.

[66](#) *Ibid.* p. 6.

[67](#) Emory Bogardus, *The Mexican Immigrant in the United States*, Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1934, p. 99.

[68](#) John Keinle, "Housing Conditions Among Mexicans in Los Angeles," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1912. p. 3.

[69](#) Grace Reeves, "Adult Mexican Education in the United States," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1929. p. 51.

[70](#) William Wilson McEuen, "A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1914. p. 3.

[71](#) Frank Callcott, "The Mexican Peon in Texas," *The Survey*, vol. 44 (June 26, 1920), p. 437.

[72](#) Betty Gould, "Methods of Teaching Mexicans," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1932. p. 3.

[73](#) The Helen Walker, "Mexican Immigrants and American Citizenship," *Sociology and Social Research*, vol. 13, no. 1 (September-October 1929), p. 466. Walker published a series of articles that she derived from her master's thesis written at the University of Southern California in the late 1920s. "Mexican Immigrants" was taken from her thesis.

[74](#) Merton E. Hill, *The Development of an Americanization Program* (Ontario, CA: Chaffey Union High School District Board of Trustees, 1928), 56. Hills study originally appeared as a doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley and was reprinted by his employer.

[75](#) Emory Bogardus, *The Mexican Immigrant*, p. 24.

[76](#) The master's theses and doctoral dissertations which took up various themes concerning the Mexican Problem or cited authors of works on Mexico, numbered no less than twenty-six. Along with those noted in the body of the narrative, the following graduate studies also made one or more of such claims or citations: James Kilbourne Harris, "A Sociological Study of a Mexican School in San Antonio, Texas," Master's Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1927; Mary Lanigan, "Second Generation Mexicans in Belvedere, California" Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1932; Anne Christine Lofstedt, "A Study of the Mexican Population in Pasadena, California," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1922; John N. Kaderli, "A Study of Mexican Education in Atascosa County With Special Reference to Pleasanton Elementary School," Master's Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1938; Emma E. Valle, "The Adjustment of Migrant Pupils in a Junior High School," Master's Thesis, University of Texas, 1953; Grace Elizabeth Reeves, "Adult Mexican Education in the United States," Master's Thesis, Claremont Colleges, 1929; Albert Turner Kaderli, "The Educational Problem in the Americanization of the Spanish-Speaking Pupils of Sugar Land, Texas," Master's Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1940; Charles Dinnijes Withers, "Problems of Mexican Boys," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1942; Marvin Ferdinand Doerr, "Problem of the Elimination of Mexican Pupils from School," Master's Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1938; Charles Clifford Carpenter, "A Study of Segregation Versus Non-Segregation of Mexican Children," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1935; Lawrence Otto Barfell, "A Study of the Health Program Among Mexican Children With Special Reference to the Prevalence of Tuberculosis and Its Causes," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1937; Herman A. Buckner, "A Study of Pupil Elimination and Failure Among Mexicans," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1935; Gladys Riskin Wueste, "A Survey of Factors Relating to the Education of the Children of Migratory Parents of Eagle Pass, Texas," Master's Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1950.

[77](#) Betty Gould, "Methods of Teaching Mexicans," p. 116.

[78](#) Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn, "Cultural Factors," p. 40.

[79](#) Vera Sturges, "The Progress and Adjustment of Mexicans to U. S. Life," National Conference on Social Welfare. *Proceedings* (1920), p. 483.

[80](#) Clara Gertrude Smith, "The Development of the Mexican People in the Community of Watts, California," Master's Thesis, University of Southern California, 1933, p. 9.

[81](#) Emory Bogardus, *The Mexican Immigrant in the United States*, p. 52.

[82](#) Ibid. p. 43.

[83](#) Merton E. Hill, *The Development of an Americanization Program*, p. 65.

[84](#) John Branigan, "Education of Overage Mexican Children," *Sierra Educational News*, vol. 25 (December 1929), p. 37.

[85](#) Susan B. Dorsey, "Mrs. Pierce and Mrs. Dorsey Discuss Matters Before the Principals Club," *Los Angeles School Journal*, vol. 6, no. 25 (March 1923), p. 59.

[86](#) Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn, "Cultural Factors," p. 41.

[87](#) Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, Philadelphia: Associated University Press/Balch Institute Press, 1990; also by the same author: *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

[88](#) Grace C. Stanley, "Special Schools for Mexicans," *The Survey*, vol. 44 (September 14, 1920), p. 715.

[89](#) C. W. Barron, *The Mexican Problem*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1917, pp. 12-13.

[90](#) Robert N. McLean, *That Mexican: As He Really is North and South of the Rio Grande*, New York: Fleming H. Revell and Company, 1928, p. 126.