Social Life and Nativism

in La Colonia del Harbor

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INTRODUCTION

A large percentage of the literature on the Chicanos in the Midwest reflects a certain ideological bias which I term the "problem hang-up." Historians have had a propensity to view the Chicano experience as an abnormal one in American history. Since the Chicano experience is not considered a normal American experience, therefore it is seen, like that of most minorities, as a "problem." The Black or Negro "problem," the American Indian "problem," the Puerto Rican "problem," and the Mexican "problem" are familiar terms in our society.

It is my contention that to understand the Chicano experience in the Midwest, the "problem hang-up" that is part of the ideological baggage of many scholars must be discarded. This "hang-up" has produced too much ethnocentric literature at best, much of it simply racist. The Chicano experience cannot be isolated as a problem. It must be viewed as part of the whole. The Chicano experience in the Midwest is not an aberration in American history but indeed an integral part of American society. Many Americans prefer to ignore this part of the society because it does not fit the mythology that Americans believe describes America. That is, the land of the free and home of opportunity and justice for all. When scholars are forced to come to grips with the Chicano experience, then it is described in terms of a "problem."

In honest attempts to describe that reality scholars have developed analytical models: the "culture of poverty" model by Oscar Lewis is a good example. These models are usually adequate in describing part of reality. Most of the time the models dwell on that which is abnormal, or foreign to the researcher; inevitably the word "problem" becomes prominent in such studies.

In order to do meaningful history of Chicanos the "problem hang-up" must be tossed aside. The scholar cannot rely on such models or purely written sources produced by outsiders. If reality is to be perceived in the Chicano experience, such sources will give distorted pictures. Only when the student is ready to accept the documentation produced by the insider, which at this point is in the form of oral history, as genuinely valid, will history portray Chicanos as they are.1

La Vida Social

By 1928 Indiana Harbor was the site of one of the largest urban colonies in the Midwest. In fact, the single largest employer of Mexicanos in the United States, Inland Steel Company, was located there. 1 A leisurely walk down Pennsylvania or Block Avenue on a spring Sunday morning about 11:00 o'clock gave a "feel" for the colonia. Little children and their dogs played on the wooden sidewalks and dirt streets. Small groups of young workers gathered on street corners to pass the time of day. Teenage boys sought out their friends and headed for "B.A.B." (bare ass beach) on Lake Michigan for a day of swimming and fun. Others walked to and from the small tiendas buying food stuffs for their Sunday meals. A few were already boarding their Model T's and on their way to Wisconsin or Michigan City for a día de campo (picnic). 3 On the whole, life in la colonia appeared very alive and happy.

It was not uncommon to see a young man looking intensely down both sides of the street keeping an eye out for policemen. In the back, towards the alley, the yelling of men and screeching of cocks attracted several spectators. Cockfights were against the law but in a society where the significance of the law became blurred, pleasure took precedence. The fight and the betting continued until there were no more cocks or a policeman appeared at the end of the block. Then everybody disappeared and life went on as if nothing had happened in the alley. 4

Every once in a while El Ray del Motorcycle (Ray of the motorcycle) would race his motorcycle down the block, attracting

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everyone's attention as he swerved from side to side on the street. Sometimes he would stand up on the cycle and let go of the handlebars. The younger, more adventurous types admired and considered him fearless, the more conservative just thought of him as el loco (the crazy one). In any event, he brought excitement and laughter to many.3

The social life of the colonia reflected the variety of ideas and values of its residents. Although most of the residents were considered workers or wage laborers, there were certain class differences that separated one group from another. The social activities of the different groups in the colonia reflected these differences.

El Círculo de Obreros Católicos “San José” was made up of persons who, because of educational preparation and level of social class in Mexico, considered themselves somewhat above the rest of the workers. They were la gente preparada (the educated people). Although they were forced to work like obreros, they did not see themselves in that category. Several of the members of the Círculo lived outside of the Block and Pennsylvania Avenue area, although not far from the colonia. Unlike the other societies whose leaders were considered gente instruida (knowledgeable people) but not their membership, all of the members of the Círculo were considered preparados (educated).

El té (tea) became one of the more common social activities of la gente preparada. The ladies organized pink, blue, black, white, and other colored teas. That is, they came dressed in the color designated by the organizer: these were usually long, elegant dresses. The men were expected (as etiquette demanded) to come, well dressed with suits and ties. The dances at these tés were muy ordenados (very orderly).4

One of the more important social activities of the Círculo was the preparation and performance of dramas. A large number of people became involved in the Círculo’s Cuadro Dramático (drama group) and its activities.

Conferencias (lectures) were given on a regular basis in the different meeting halls used by the colonia. All of the residents were invited to these lectures. Sometimes they took the form of one lecture or a conferencia semanal, weekly conferences that carried a particular theme. Usually the leadership of the different societies sponsored these conferencias. For example, the society Benito Juárez sponsored a weekly conference that started in Feb-

ruary of 1926. The first lecture was given by Licenciado (attorney) A.F. Mercado.7

The velada literaria musical was another popular form of social life in the colonia. At the veladas, musical pieces, poetic readings, and patriotic speeches were the most common form of entertainment. Some of the musicians who wrote original pieces presented their compositions at the veladas. Many of the speeches dealt with the state of the colonia; for example, Señor V. Delgado gave a fervent speech on the Unificación de la Comunidad (the unification of the community). At times speakers were brought to these functions from outside the Harbor. In November 1925, the board of directors of the Cruz Azul Mexicana (Mexican Blue Cross) brought in Señorita Elena Landazury, a known Mexican conferencista (lecturer) to speak on the subject Moral, Cultura y Unión (Moral, Culture, and Union).8

The highlight events in the social life of the colonia were the fiestas patrias (Mexican national holidays).

If a stranger from the Eastern seaboard got off the train in Indiana Harbor, Indiana at midday on September 16, 1926, he would have been in for a strange surprise. On a regular work day, not an American holiday, the streets of the Harbor were filled with people in the midst of a celebration. Red, green, and white banners adorned the telephone poles and shops all along the streets. Hundreds of brown, Mexican faces waited eagerly on the sidewalk for the parade. The stranger would probably be confused as to what was happening, but to the residents of the Harbor it was a customary celebration of El 16 de Septiembre, México’s Independence Day.

On that day the colonia was celebrating the 116th anniversary of the independence of México. At the head of the parade Mayor Hale rode with a police escort. Children were attracted to the man on horseback, but unlike other parades, these riders were not dressed as American cowboys but rather Mexican charros. Some 2,500 persons took part in the activities of the day. School children took for granted that although their non-Mexican classmates were expected to be in school, they, because they were Mexicanos, were not expected to attend. The next day headlines of the local newspaper read, “Mexican Parade Takes City By Storm.” The article ranked the colorful “pageant” equal to “any civic celebration held in the city.” The float that depicted the
torture of Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor, was proclaimed the most popular exhibit of the parade.9

The celebration had started on the evening of the fifteenth with the coronation of the Queen. At a big ball, where the Mayor of the city and the Mexican consul from Chicago, Illinois were present, Señorita Refugio Ramírez was given the honors. The Queen's court was composed of three beautiful young ladies: Perpetua Pacheco, Maria Valdez and Andree Peña. Most of the 3,500 members of the different Mexicano organizations that organized the celebration were present at the event.10 The celebration of fiestas patrias was one of the highlight social events of the colonia.

Early in the decade the celebrations were simple and usually private in nature. But by the middle of the decade la junta patriótica (elected yearly) took over the duties of preparing the festivities. As early as two or three months prior to the 16th, the sociedades came together and elected the junta. The leadership of the junta was usually composed of the leaders of the different societies and clubs.

By the beginning of August the contest for the Queen of the pageant was well underway. Several of the sociedades proclaimed young ladies as candidates. Each candidate sold tickets that were used to defray the cost of the celebration and some charitable cause. The young lady able to sell the largest number of tickets was then proclaimed Queen of the pageant. In 1929 eleven girls competed for the honors with the winner, Señorita Elena Valdez, receiving 11,489 votes while the third runner up received only 633. In this manner everyone interested could vote and also contribute to the success of the celebration.11

A typical 16th of September was usually packed with activities. For example, the 1928 celebration commenced at 10:00 a.m. with a concert by the Banda de Obreros Mexicanos (Mexican Workers Band). After the concert, at 11:30 a.m., the parade began with the band marching at the head followed by a float carrying Queen Evalia Herrera. Six floats representing societies and places of business made up the bulk of the parade. After the parade, a playoff baseball game was the center of attraction at the park. At 6:00 p.m. the fiesta started at the park. The Orquesta México (The México Orchestra) was the feature attraction. The celebration was quickly brought to an end when a storm from across the lake drenched all the celebrants.12

The other big holiday for the colonia in the Harbor was the celebration of the Cinco de Mayo (5th of May). The 5th of May commemorated the Mexican victory on that date at Puebla in 1862. Although not as important as the 16th of September, the Cinco de Mayo was also an all day event. Usually, if it fell on a week day, its celebration was put off until the weekend. Instead of a parade, the big attraction for this holiday was a velada literario musical (musical and literary night meeting). The meetings were made up of patriotic speeches, recitation of poetry, and musical numbers. Each society was asked to present two or three numbers.13

One of the most popular groups that provided entertainment throughout the decade was the Banda de Obreros Mexicanos (Mexican Workers Band). It came into being in 1924 with twenty-three members. Due to economic conditions and constant change in membership, the band was not a stable organization. During brief periods of strength they put on concerts in the local halls, traveled to Gary and Chicago, and gave open air concerts in the park by the lake. They were also able to purchase uniforms and march in parades on fiestas patrias.14 Some of the many marches in their repertoire were: "Overture Levin Picture Dabley," "Vals Mello Moon Chenette," "Fox Besos y Cervezas Clara," and "Marcha Unión Confrada." The Banda de Gary (Band from Gary, Indiana) was also very popular in the Harbor and constantly made concert trips to the colonia.

Dances were probably the most popular form of entertainment for most of the people in the community. They not only provided a form of entertainment for the residents but a source of income for the church, the organizations, and the sports clubs. Some of the dances were accompanied by jamaicas (bazaars) which were also a source of revenue.

The pool halls of the colonia became social institutions. Since many recreational facilities in the Harbor were off limits to Mexicanos, pool halls filled this vacuum. Recreation and socializing attracted many of the workers, especially the salas, to the halls. Some of the workers spent hours and hours in the company of friends there. In the winter months the halls were more regularly
frequented. The worker found friendship, conversation, recreation, news, advertising, employment, etc. through the pool halls. Most of the political and ideological exchange among workers was done in the pool hall. Although many Americans viewed the pool hall as a den of vice, for many Mexicanos it was like a second home.

Baseball became one of the major forms of recreation during the spring and summer months. The rise of baseball as a spectator sport in the "colonia" simply reflected the rise of mass spectator sports in the nation. Several sports clubs were organized and leagues came into being. One of the first clubs that had the backing of many sport enthusiasts was El Club Azteca. It was organized in the spring of 1927 with Silvestre Navarro as President and Clayton M. Flores as Secretary. That year the baseball season commenced with Dr. R.P. Hale, Mayor of the city, throwing the game ball in the presence of thousands of spectators. The teams that played that afternoon were the Aguilas Mexicanas (Mexican Eagles) vs. San José (St. Joseph).

The number of spectators increased wherever out-of-town teams came to the Harbor. When teams from Chicago or Gary came to play the hometown team, many from out-of-town colonias were present. For example, Los Aztecas de Chicago came to play the first week of June in 1927 and the paper estimated a crowd of 3,000 persons present.

With the popularity of baseball increasing, comerciantes (businessmen) became increasingly interested in the sport. Some teams received support for uniforms from local businesses. Sr. Joe Lamon, one of the more successful comerciantes, offered a cup to the championship team in 1927. He also set two conditions that the teams were to meet if they were to qualify. All members of the team were to be Mexicanos and the captain of the team was to present a list of the players prior to the championship game.

Sundays became baseball days. The once abandoned field at the end of Block Avenue was converted into El Parque AnaHuac. At ten o'clock Sunday mornings the games started, and usually by sundown the last innings of a game were still being played. The schedule for Sunday, July 31, 1927, was typical. The Nacionales (Nationals) played the Piratas (Pirates) at 10:00 a.m.; the Aguilas (Little Eagles) and México at 12:00 p.m.; and Aztecas de Chicago and Círculo de Obreros Católicos San José at 3:00 p.m.

One of the more elaborate and organized sports clubs during the decade was El Club Deportivo Internacional (International Sports Club). The club came into being with nine officials and three committees. There was a committee for fútbol (soccer), baloncesto (basketball) and béisbol (baseball). Although there were some soccer and basketball activities, most of the action revolved around baseball. In Gary there was a Club Español (Spanish Club) made up of mostly Spanish immigrants that had a soccer team which played the Harbor team frequently, but the sport never reached the popularity of baseball. El Club Internacional was also involved in activities that were humanitarian in nature. Consequently, it was popular with a large following.

El Parque AnaHuac was being used for several years prior to its destruction. It became a small stadium the summer of 1929. After the spectator stands were erected by the members of El Club Internacional, the park had a seating capacity of 500 seats with room for several thousand more. In July of 1929, the park was officially incorporated.

The baseball field at the eastern end of Block and Pennsylvania Avenue was destroyed in the winter months of the Depression years. During the latter part of the decade, it had become the center of attraction for the sports activities of the colonia. Night games and semi-professional teams attracted thousands to its stands. But those were only memories when the final destruction came. First the wooden spectator stands began to disappear. As the winter months got colder and the need for warmth became greater, more and more stands were chopped up into firewood. One day someone discovered that beneath the surface of the "diamond" there were deposits of coal. Apparently a coal company or the railroads had left it there. The news spread quickly and soon the leveled desolate field became a center of activity with men, women, and children with shovels and sticks digging for the precious coal. By 1932 it would have been difficult to imagine that the field full of bumps and holes had one day been a respectable baseball stadium.

NATIVISM

People rushed to the street or looked out windows when they heard the commotion outside. The noise was that of cursing.
policemen and the cries of a helpless man. The incident was not uncommon for the residents of the colonia. In this particular case, El Caballito (nickname, literally meaning the small horse) was being beaten by officers of the peace. Anger and indignation became apparent in the faces of all those watching the spectacle. They thought, surely he had not done anything so horrible to deserve the brutal treatment he was receiving. Many felt like physically stopping the beating but circumstances inhibited such actions. So the beating and dragging continued until the policemen finally reached the end of Pennsylvania Avenue and turned left on Michigan Avenue.

El Caballito was well known by most of the residents of the colonia. He was the town thief. Everybody considered him harmless although he made a living by shoplifting and reselling whatever he stole. This time the police caught him in the act and chased him into a buck alley on Pennsylvania Avenue. Frightened, he pulled out his gun and shot at them. He missed and the police were able to get the gun and drag him out into the street.

The attitudinal relationship that existed between Mexicanos and non-Mexicans in the colonia is clearly illustrated in this incident. Policemen in the harbor were very discriminatory with Mexicanos: Mexicanos were sent to jail for insignificant acts. In one incident, a Mexican was shot in the back walking away from a policeman. The policeman laughed as the body was thrown into the patrol wagon. Policemen often put out their hands to Mexicanos who were supposedly "caught" committing an offense, saying sabe (you know), and expecting a five dollar bribe. Paul Taylor, an economist who did several studies on Mexican labor in different regions of the U.S., suggests that Mexicanos in the Calumet region protested more frequently and specifically against law enforcement authorities than any other area he studied. This relationship between police and Mexicanos reflects the attitudes that were apparent throughout the city.

Since the introduction of Mexican workers into the harbor as "scabs," residents considered the Mexican one of the major problems of the city of East Chicago. The European strikers disliked Mexicanos for their role in the 1919 strike. Although, as time passed those who lived closer to Mexicanos were less susceptible to these negative feelings, the racist attitudes persisted throughout the decade.

These attitudes that were prevalent in the harbor reflected the intolerant atmosphere of the nation. The one hundred percent Americanism movement that manifested itself in the beginning of the decade characterizes the authoritarian and nationalistic attitude in the country. On January 2, 1920, J. Edgar Hoover "sent his agents into thirty-three cities to make more than six thousand arrests—the most massive single violation of civil liberties in American History." In May, at a public gathering in Washington, D.C., a sailor fired three shots into the back of a man who refused to stand for the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner." When the man fell, the crowd burst into cheering and hand clapping. These incidents reflect the intolerant atmosphere of the times.

It is not surprising that such attitudes were adopted by Americans considering the theories propagated by American intellectuals. Dr. William Macdonald, professor of psychology at Harvard, argued in his book 'Is America Safe for Democracy' (1921) that Anglos were usually Protestants rather than Catholics because they are more self-reliant. He also believed that Anglos got an extra portion of curiosity, a characteristic which makes good scientists and inventors. Dr. Michael F. Guyer, professor of zoology at the University of Wisconsin, voiced in theory the feelings of many Americans by condemning race mixture. Dr. Henry Fairchild, professor of sociology at New York University, clearly illustrates attitudes common in America in the twenties among the intelligentsia when he wrote that there "can be no doubt that if America is to remain a stable nation it must continue a white man's country for an indefinite period of time to come."

Mexicanos were the object of nativist feelings throughout the decade. The words of F. Simpich express these attitudes clearly: "The high percentage of Mexicanos in the jails, asylums, and hospitals of the southwest proves that we are getting too many of Mexico's worst." Another opinion that expresses these feelings is: "My contribution to the Mexicanos at this Christmas time is the suggestion that we ship them all across the border where they belong, and build a wall so high they can never get back."

Several factors worked against the integration of Mexicanos into American life: (1) nationality, (2) race, (3) language, and (4)
religion (most were Catholics). Consequently, American nativist attitudes towards Mexicanos were part of the “American Way.”

The strong nativist feelings of the epoch ran deep in the state of Indiana. In the 1920's it is said the most powerful man in the state was probably David Curtis Stephenson, the purple prince of the invisible empire of the Ku Klux Klan. In 1928 the empire was able to congregate over 100,000 person in white, flowing robes at a political meeting in a field near Kokomo, Indiana. In the Calumet region the Klan was considered strong in political affairs. Along with the anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, and anti-Negro feelings, there was a degree of anti-labor sentiment in the organization. As early as 1921 the order was said to have a membership of 2,500 in Lake County. The Klan met regularly in East Chicago churches. In 1923, in nearby Hammond, 5,000 Klan members marched through the streets fully attired. Most of their political influence was within the Republican Party.

In the Harbor the Klan was not as strong as in other parts of the state. The reason for this was the fact that most of the residents of the Harbor were not old Americans. Many were Eastern Europeans and Catholics, the very people the Klan was fighting against.

Since their arrival in the Harbor, Mexicanos were faced with racist attitudes wherever they went. Housing was restricted to the areas of Pennsylvania Avenue and Block. Since the residents of the Harbor did not consider them as belonging to the white race, they were relegated to the same experiences as Blacks. In the local theaters Mexicanos were segregated to the balconies or the back rows. The public baths in Washington Park were off limits to Mexicanos. Many restaurants and barbershops did not permit their entrance.

In 1926 the local Chamber of Commerce hired an engineer to do a study on East Chicago. The purpose of the study was to survey the community and find out why so many persons lived outside of the city and were not willing to make East Chicago their home. They also wanted to know what to do so that in the future the city would be a more attractive place to live. The results of the study were evident. Approximately 25 percent of the persons interviewed gave racial reasons for not living in East Chicago. Some of the answers were: “Too many Negroes and Mexicanos are not separated from the Americans.” “Wife refuses to live in East Chicago on account of Negroes and Mexican element.”

After this study was terminated, several recommendations were made by the authors of the project. Local and federal agencies used the report extensively; it was also passed on to council members, various boards, and other officials. The City Planning Commission also made extensive use of the document.

In our opinion, the unforward influences of these persons can be minimized by segregation to particular portions of the city. If this can be accomplished in such a manner as to assure persons contemplating taking up their residence in East Chicago that such segregation is reasonably permanent, the objections to their presence will be minimized.

...after mature consideration of the subject, we are of the opinion that such can be accomplished through the force of public opinion

Although it is unclear what specific steps were taken to segregate Mexicanos and Blacks, the results were very effective. Segregation of non-whites continued for many decades to come.

There were many reasons why Mexicanos were considered undesirables. Many believed that they were given to fighting more often than the average American. They annoyed their neighbors, were dirty and bad housekeepers, racially undesirable, depreciated property value, and took white women. These negative opinions were not restricted to residents of the Harbor only. Employers also had definite reasons for discriminating against Mexican laborers. One factory employer commented, “one reason for not hiring Mexican women is that they are very dark, they look dirty.” Other comments were, “We take the light colored ones; we want to avoid anything that isn’t first class and looks as though it might be colored.” “Our Mexicanos are white,” “Dark ones are like the niggers.”

American nativist attitudes contributed greatly to the limited status of Mexicano laborers in the Harbor. These attitudes not only restricted mobility but also influenced the attitudes of Mexicanos. Racialist attitudes were not limited to the non-Mexicanos but also became part of the behavior of Mexican workers. This behavior was learned from childhood. Vernon Fernandez, an eleven year old, and his friends, were reinforced
with these attitudes at the American Baptist Church in 1929. He had always admired the Boy Scouts and dreamed of the day when he could become one, when he would wear that uniform. Finally the opportunity came when the local paper announced that a new troop would be forming at the Baptist church. When the day to join came, Vernon and his two friends hurriedly walked to the church. They followed all of the boys to the basement of the church and stood in line for their turn. At last their turn came. But the people at the table, instead of jotting their names down, just looked at each other in astonishment. Finally, they pulled themselves together and told the three little boys they could not join because they were Mexicanos. To this day Vernon remembers the incident."

By the end of the decade the Mexican problem had turned into the Mexican "Menace." Up until the Depression, Mexican immigrants were viewed by many as an undesirable element in American society, but with the rise of unemployment during the Depression, many began to view Mexicanos as a threat to the stability of the nation. In 1930 two senators, John Booz of Texas and Thomas A. Jenkins of Ohio, decided to conduct a study on the effects of Mexican labor on business. Some of the findings of the "scientific" study were Mexicanos commit more crimes than whites or Negroes, Mexicanos multiply two or three times faster than the average American, and 50% of the cases in many city hospitals are Mexicanos— at the public's expense. All the research they did and the questionnaire they passed out confirmed without a shadow of a doubt that Mexicanos can never assimilate with while Americans. Supposedly, this was the strongest indictment against the Mexican immigrant."

In recent years there has been a certain reaction against ethnic prejudice on the part of historians. In Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism John Higham, a leading scholar on the subject, interprets nativism as an irrational response on the part of the Protestant majority to the legitimate desire of immigrants. Stanley Cohen, in an essay on the Red Scare of 1919, goes even further by denouncing nativism as mental and emotional disorder. Although those positions condemning nativism are noble, they are limited in scope. The history of the Colonia del Harbor shows that nativist feelings were a natural outcome of the forces working in society.

There is nothing irrational about men hating other men who come and take their jobs or about Mexicanos hating "Poilic" (Poles) because of the bad treatment they received from them. That is to say, nativist feelings come from very real and objective situations. In this case, Europeans were set off against Mexicanos and Blacks by industry. It is reasonable to assume that nativist feelings would flourish in this setting.

The attitude of industry in this situation is also very logical. Industry's goal is to increase production. Strikes are not conducive to productivity; consequently, strikes must be broken by any means necessary. Therefore, it was only logical that instead of bringing other Europeans who would sympathize with the strikers, Mexicanos and Blacks, who had been mistreated by Europeans, should be brought in. When men are forced to fight each other, nativist feelings are a logical result. During the Depression, Mexicanos were a very logical and visible scapegoat on which to blame the economic condition of Lake County. In the light of this, nativism is really not un-American but rather an integral part of American society. In other words, nativism is an American institution, encouraged by the capitalist system.

NOTES

3Towards the end of the decade there were approximately 15 cars owned by residents of the colonia. Most of these were owned by persons who also owned a business. Interview, Elder Flores.
4Interview, Señor Prieto; Señor Telesforo Torres; Denial Castillo.
5Interviews, Ray Aguilar; Señor Gonzalez; Elder Flores.
6Interview, Señor Consuelo Figueroa.
7Amigo del Hogar, Feb. 23, 1926.
9Colaborador, Sept. 17, 1926; interviews, Vernon Fernandez; Elder Flores; Consuelo Figueroa; Hilario Silva.
10Colaborador, Sept. 17, 1926.
EL CIRCULO DE OBREROS CATOLICOS "SAN JOSE,"
1925 to 1930
by Juan R. Garcia and Angel Cal*

Studies of Mexican communities in the Midwest have primarily focused upon immigration, employment patterns, and the discrimination encountered by Mexicans in their quest for a better life. In the process we have learned how American society perceived and treated them without developing much of an understanding of how they responded to the challenges before them. This is particularly true with regards to middle class Mexicans who often occupied positions of leadership within those communities.

Mexicans from the middle class quickly learned that their education and background were of little value in helping them achieve a higher standard of living, improved employment opportunities, or respect from members of the host society. As such, they found themselves relegated to unskilled jobs and subjected to the same abuses as other Mexicans. However, as members of la gente preparada, they believed that it was their responsibility to assume leadership within expatriate communities and promote programs that would reflect positively on all Mexicans. Respect and better treatment would follow, they believed, if Mexicans learned to work together and behaved as model citizens. To reach this goal they formed self help or mutual aid societies which stressed religious principles and loyalty to Mexico. In some communities local mutualistas constructed churches which served the social and spiritual needs of Mexicans.

In Indiana Harbor, Indiana, the desire to promote Catholic ideals served as the impetus to the formation of Los Obreros Catolicos "San José," an organization that played an important role in the social and religious life of the Mexican community. Its

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