THEY CAME TO TOIL:
NEWS FRAMES OF WANTED AND UNWANTED MEXICANS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor in Philosophy in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Chapel Hill
2012

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ABSTRACT

MELITA MARIE GARZA: They Came to Toil: News Frames of Wanted and Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression
(Under the direction of Dr. Barbara Friedman)

The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 coincided with pivotal events in US immigration history. These included the first law criminalizing entry into the United States without legal permission, renewed and vituperative national debates calling for the restriction of Mexican immigration, and, in a little known historical episode, the instigation of Mexican repatriation programs, many sponsored by local US governments, that led to an exodus of about 500,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

This study comparatively analyzes news coverage of Mexicans, repatriation, deportation, and immigration in independently owned English- and Spanish-language newspapers in San Antonio, Texas, during the deepest recessionary period of the Great Depression, 1929 through 1933. By examining the similarities and differences in newspaper coverage in the state that experienced the most repatriations, this study illuminates how the media’s symbolic annihilation of the Mexican and Mexican American experience during this period contributed to an episode of invisible civil rights history.
DEDICATION

To my parents, Linda Rosa Caballero Hinojosa Garza and Carlos Mario Garza Ortiz, who lived the American dream.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“There is no creation without tradition; the ‘new’ is an inflection on a preceding form; novelty is always a variation on the past.”

— Carlos Fuentes  
1928 - 2012

There is also no creation without support and inspiration. My deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Barbara Friedman, who worked thoughtfully and tirelessly to better this dissertation. Gratitude also goes to the other members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Frank Fee, Dr. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Dr. Zaragosa Vargas, and Dr. Betty Houchin Winfield. Their outstanding scholarship, precision of thought, and genuine interest in my work were invaluable in my graduate school career.

I am also grateful to several financial benefactors: the Triad Foundation and Roy H. Park, whose generosity made my graduate studies possible; the Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and J. Walker and Joy D. Smith, whose generosity financed my summer dissertation research; and the gracious funders of the Joseph L. Morrison Award for Excellence in Mass Communication History.

Thanks also to Dr. Jean Folkerts, former dean of the University of North Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communication, who lobbied incessantly on my behalf. Dr. Anne Johnston, the journalism school’s former assistant dean for graduate education, provided important guidance and support.
I extend a special note of gratitude to Dr. Terry Karl, my undergraduate thesis adviser at Harvard College, and my longtime mentor and friend, who unswervingly believed I belonged in graduate school.

Finally, I’d like to thank my indefatigable proofreader, my mother.
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Well, I came from my homeland
  Intending to work
  In San Antonio, Texas
  And I could not stay…
  The Crisis, Sir, the Crisis,
Everyone says as they go by…
  We all look for money
  And we all love money
But the money belongs to
  Rockefeller and Henry Ford¹

--excerpt from La Crisis/The Crisis
Mexican folk ballad from the 1930s

Chapter 1

The Crisis: They Came to Toil . . . But They Could Not Stay

Introduction

In December 1929, Mexican deportee Carlos Espinosa re-crossed the border into Laredo, Texas, and waited on the road for the US Border Patrol to apprehend him. He preferred prison in Webb County, USA, for illegally re-entering the country over unemployment, and presumably hunger, in Mexico, he told the border patrolmen who finally showed up.² Espinosa was front-page fodder for San Antonio’s Spanish-language daily, La Prensa. “The day a civilized government replaces Mexico’s tyrannical one . . . most Mexicans … will return promptly to their native soil,” La Prensa opined. “With the


² “Un Mexicano Deportado Volvio a Texas Sabiendo Que Le Esperaba La Carcel,” La Prensa, December 8, 1930, 4.
repatriation of Mexicans ‘living on the outside,’ competition with North American workers that has lowered salaries will cease.”\(^3\) The *La Prensa* columnist saw Espinosa as the prototypical Mexican, caught between political chaos in Mexico and the demand for cheap labor in the United States, law or no law. The *Express* editors considered Espinosa less newsworthy, placing a news report of his apprehension on page nine, next to a story about a survey showing brunettes were more popular than blondes.\(^4\) The *San Antonio Express* didn’t consider the broader implications of Espinosa’s predicament, dwelling instead on the surprise of the border patrol.

Espinosa’s “capture” on the verge of the Great Depression poignantly encapsulated the dilemma of the Mexican, as persons of Mexican descent were then called, whatever their nationality. The decade-long economic crisis blended with nativist sentiments to create a new chapter in US immigration history.\(^5\) Literacy, hygiene, and financial tests were enforced with renewed vigor to keep Mexicans out as new laws restricting immigration from south of the border were debated in Congress. In 1929, for the first time, crossing the border without proper documents became a federal crime.

Meanwhile, Mexicans living in the US, including long-time residents and US citizens,

\(^3\) “Glosario Del Dia,” Rodolfo Uranga, *La Prensa*, December 17, 1929, 1.

\(^4\) (Special Correspondent), “Man Prefers County Jail to Mexico: Deported Alien Pleads to Be Taken Back to Laredo,” *San Antonio Express*, December 7, 1929, 9. The *Express* referred to him as Espinoza, while *La Prensa* wrote his last name as Espinosa. “Brunettes Are More Popular Than Blondes,” *San Antonio Express*, December 7, 1929, 9.


By December 1929, the United States was in the fourth month of a 43-months-long economic contraction, according to the NBER, an independent economics agency that is the official arbiter of recessionary periods. Though the business cycle contraction ended in March 1933 many scholars define the recession era from 1929 through 1939 or through 1941. See, for example, Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America 1929-1941*, rev. ed. (New York, Times Books, 1984; New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2009).
were targeted in immigration crackdowns as the Hoover Administration sought to keep more jobs for Americans. When Congress failed to pass Mexican quota laws, the government turned to administrative tools such as deportation to control the Mexican population. Mexicans accounted for more than 46 percent of all those deported between 1930 and 1939, though they represented only one percent of the US population.6

By the time of Espinosa’s encounter with the US border patrol, Mexican troubadours had written, performed, and recorded corridos, or folk songs, in music studios from New York to Los Angeles about the plight of Mexican deportees and workers.7 Music, along with language and customs, is one of the “intangible cultural expressions” that migrants carry with them, unlike material possessions they might be forced to discard, noted Martha I. Chew Sanchez, a global studies scholar.8 Moreover, “corridos are an important archive and outlet of the cultural memory of Mexicans, New Mexicans and Texans along El Camino Real,” also known as the Old San Antonio Road.9 These songs chronicled a story sketchily reported in US English-language newspapers: the repatriation tale of about one half million people of Mexican descent, including US citizens. Desperate and denied relief, many voluntarily returned. Some were rounded up

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8 Martha I. Chew Sánchez, Corridos in Migrant Memory (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 8.

9 Chew Sánchez, Corridos in Migrant Memory, 10.
and “returned” to Mexico, a nation many of them had never seen.\textsuperscript{10} Many who feared deportation left on their own or with the help of mutual aid societies or local governments.\textsuperscript{11} The voluntary and forced returns to Mexico swept Mexicans from their homes in Anchorage, Detroit, and Chicago, and other northern points, as well as from southern borderlands such as Laredo, San Diego, and El Paso.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Repatriation refers to an immigrant (and sometimes US citizens) leaving the country either voluntarily, or formally through a federal government action to remove impoverished immigrants. Repatriation may also have been organized by local private and public welfare agencies. The Mexican consulate and/or the local Mexican community may have organized repatriations. Finally, Mexicans and US citizens of Mexican descent living in the United States may have been forcibly repatriated. Deportation refers to a federal government action to remove an immigrant under warrant proceedings or for the immigrant to leave voluntarily without the warrant proceeding. For more on the definition of repatriation, see Abraham Hoffman, \textit{Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939} (1974; repr., Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1979), 166. All citations refer to the 1979 printing.

\textsuperscript{11} Hoffman, \textit{Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression}, 83. Also see, for example: “300 Mexicans Leave Ohio,” \textit{New York Times}, March 20, 1934. The voluntary return of 300 Mexican men from Lucas County, Ohio was facilitated by the state of Ohio, which covered each man’s fare of roughly $15 per person so they could board “a special train bound for the Mexican border.”

\textsuperscript{12} Abraham Hoffman, “Mexican Repatriation Statistics: Some Suggested Alternatives to Carey McWilliams,” \textit{The Western Historical Quarterly} 3, no. 4 (October 1972), 399. Hoffman’s 1972 article finds fault with scholars such as McWilliams who have failed to provide evidence to support repatriation statistics. See Table 1 of page 399 of Hoffman’s article, in which Hoffman provided Mexican government statistics that the US government relied on as more reliable and accurate than those the United States collected. The month-by-month statistics extend from 1929 through 1937, and documented 458,023 repatriated persons. Hoffman notes that there were myriad reasons Mexicans returned, including the conclusion of the \textit{Cristero} Rebellion in Mexico. The high-end estimate of one million repatriated Mexicans comes from Balderrama and Rodriguez, \textit{Decade of Betrayal}, 151. See also David G. Gutiérrez, \textit{Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the Politics of Ethnicity} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 72, in which the author discusses the reliability of statistics concerning Mexicans during the period and suggests that as many as 80,000 Mexicans and US-born children may have been repatriated annually between 1929 and 1937. See also pages Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Ribera, in \textit{Mexican Americans/American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 154-155, in which the authors cite Mexican government statistics that show 458,000 Mexicans returned between 1929 and 1937. Meier and Ribera say that Texas had the most returnees, 132,000.
Abraham Hoffman’s 1974 book, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures 1929-1939*, made the topic a staple of Chicano studies programs, an interest that was revived with *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* by Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, first published 20 years after Hoffman’s seminal work. Labor historian Zaragosa Vargas examined the way policies to deny relief to Mexican agricultural workers during the Great Depression made Mexicans disposable labor. Vargas concluded that the injustice helped spur repatriation and the development of the modern Mexican labor rights movement. In 2005, the state of California issued a public apology for violating the civil rights of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, some of whom were coerced to leave and defrauded of property. Despite the more recent scholarly attention and California’s official apology, repatriation remains a civil rights issue unknown to most Americans, in part because it falls outside the black-white binary through which such issues are traditionally viewed. The media’s role in interpreting these events has been little studied.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine and compare media frames in English- and Spanish-language newspaper coverage in San Antonio, Texas, about

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Mexicans, repatriation, and immigration in the aftermath of the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the deepest years of the Great Depression, 1929 to 1934. San Antonio is an ideal site for this exploration; It had a thriving independent Spanish-language daily newspaper as well as a locally owned English-language daily newspaper and it was located in a state that would ultimately report more repatriations than any other.\textsuperscript{16} San Antonio, while not a literal border town, is a powerful figurative one that embodies Mexican and Anglo culture nowhere more strongly than in the once-sacred Spanish structure, the former Franciscan mission remembered for the Battle of the Alamo.

As historian Richard Garcia put it, during the Great Depression years, "San Antonio was at the crossroads of Texan, Mexican, and US myth, memory, and identity, as well as trade, commerce, and geography."\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, as historian John Bodnar pointed out, the 1930s were a time when recovering the past became increasingly important to Americans. With the economy in tatters, communities retrieved and rebuilt public memories of their pioneer heritage, finding comfort in memorializing past glories, conquests, and victories.\textsuperscript{18} San Antonio was no different. The city exulted in the legacy of the early eighteenth-century Spanish-speaking immigrants who founded San Antonio. Paradoxically, Spanish-speaking immigrants of the Depression era were on contested terrain and often met indifference, vitriol, or expulsion.

This dissertation explores questions that resonate strongly with our own times as the US economy sputters in the aftermath of the Great Recession. The National Bureau of

\textsuperscript{16} Hoffman, \textit{Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression}, 118.


Economic Research calls this 18-month downturn, which ended in June 2009, the longest since World War II.\textsuperscript{19} Crises, including periods of financial stress, often heighten tensions between individuals and groups and the nation-state and may serve as catalysts for xenophobia and intolerance. Consider that Arizona, which shares a 370-mile border with Mexico, passed a law in 2010 that, among other things, required police to verify the legal status of any person they stop or arrest if they have “reasonable suspicion” the individual entered the country illegally.\textsuperscript{20} Arizona’s statute, which was quickly challenged, led to a spate of similar state laws, five by August 2011.\textsuperscript{21} The US Supreme Court ruled on the constitutionality of Arizona’s law in June 2012, upholding this key “show me your papers” provision.\textsuperscript{22} The court left open the option to challenge the provision on the basis that it amounted to racial profiling. It also invalidated three other provisions, including two that barred persons illegally in the country from looking for work. A provision that permitted police to arrest anyone they suspected was deportable was also invalidated. These legislative and judicial actions eighty years after the Depression reprise the debate about immigration and US-Mexico relations for a new era of economic strife.


This dissertation is significant beyond how it might inform immigration policy of the past and present. This examination of English- and Spanish-language news coverage of Depression-era repatriation helps illuminate an episode of invisible civil rights history. Repatriation is one of many incidents involving Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States omitted from this country’s dominant civil rights narrative. This traditional civil rights saga, as enunciated by Bayard Rustin, among others, has all the satisfying elements of narrative. This includes an iconic hero, Martin Luther King, Jr., and a plot that starts in 1954, with the NAACP victory in Brown v. Board of Education. The story picks up with Freedom Rides and protest movements, and concludes with enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has sought to re-frame the black struggle for equality more expansively as the Long Civil Rights Movement. “By confining the civil rights struggle to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon decade, and to limited noneconomic objectives . . . it prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time,” Hall stated. Hall posited that the media played a role in creating and perpetuating this myopic view through a largely sympathetic, but selective and thus distorted view of events. Early civil rights histories followed this limited news narrative, “replicating its

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24 Ibid.


26 Ibid., 1235, 1236.
judgments and trajectory,” Hall wrote. Yet, in Hall’s assessment, a wider view of the civil rights movement is more in keeping with the thinking of Dr. King, who saw race in America as “not a sectional, but a national problem.”

Yet, the omission of repatriation and other Mexican American civil rights issues cannot be explained by geographic and time period constraints alone. Driving the omission of these civil rights issues is their occurrence outside the black-white race binary, a lens that perceives race in America consisting “either exclusively or primarily of only two constituent racial groups, the Black [sic] and the White [sic].” This binary guides racial discourse, limiting how academics, the media, government officials and others gather facts, investigate, report, think, and write about civil rights, in the view of legal scholar Juan Perea. Many are unaware of their unconscious enlistment of this paradigm, but whether aware or not, the effect has been to ignore or marginalize other racialized groups, including Asians, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans, among other Latinos.

**Background**

The Great Depression-era issues were rooted in tensions between Mexican and Anglos from the prior century. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ended the

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27 Ibid., 1236.

28 Ibid., 1234.


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 335-336.
bloody war between the United States of America and Mexico. It also launched a new chapter in complex and contested relations between the people of both countries as Mexico ceded one-third of its land mass, including Texas and land that now comprises all or part of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.32 The treaty theoretically protected Mexicans annexed into the United States, stating that their legal rights and property would be preserved. They were permitted to opt for US citizenship or legal residency if they remained, though hostility persisted toward Mexicans, particularly in Texas. The treaty failed in practice and many lost property and other rights, nonetheless.33 As historian David Gutiérrez noted, the 100,000 or so Mexicans who remained were eventually “relegated to an inferior caste-like status in the region’s evolving social system.”34 Mexicans became “strangers in a strange land, a minority struggling for acceptance in a sea of Americans” as Vargas put it.35 This turn of events was all the more peculiar because San Antonio, the most Spanish and Mexican of cities, had become the leading city in the Republic of Texas.36

Overshadowed by waves of European immigrants and geographically isolated, Mexicans in the United States lived in relative obscurity until a confluence of late nineteenth-century events facilitated increased economic and cultural integration with

32 Gutiérrez, Walls and Mirrors, 13, 40.

33 Ibid.,17,18.

34 Ibid.,13.


36 Garcia, Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class, 16.
First, the development of railroads and irrigation, especially in California, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah, coupled with political chaos in Mexico (which included the Mexican Revolution of 1910), sped Mexican immigration. Mexican immigrants also benefitted from laws that restricted Asian laborers: first, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the subsequent Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908, which restricted Japanese immigrants prior to World War I. Many Japanese were ousted after they moved from contract farm labor and formed cooperatives, bought their own land and competed with their former employers. Mexicans were perceived by some, such as *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler, as a rung above Asians on the hierarchy of color; and the US quest for cheap, docile, and mobile labor led US business to look to its own continent.

But the oil-fueled boom that led to suburban expansion in the 1920s, rising sales of automobiles and mechanization of the nation’s farms, brought turmoil to the rural economy. Whereas the 1920s produced prosperity for much of America, it represented

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37 Ibid., 39.

38 Ibid., 41.


40 “Statement of Harry Chandler, President Los Angeles Times Co,” *Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Western Hemisphere Immigration 71st Congress, 2nd Session*, 1930, 61, 63-75. See, for instance, page 61: “So you have to consider fundamentally that these Mexican men are practically Indians, they are of Indian blood, these peons who come in; and there is no more problem with them than with our original Indians. And we Americans who look back to the time we were among the Indians know there were fewer problems then. But they were not Americans, and they were not our race. They did not make the problem that the negro has made or that the Filipino would make if we brought him in.”
the start of nearly two decades of recession on the nation’s farms.墨西哥人很快成为多余的劳动力。几乎三分之一的美国人口仍然生活在1920年代的农场或牧场。他们在第一次世界大战期间过得很好，当时欧洲无法养活自己，进口了大量粮食。然而，到1920年代初，欧洲的农业经济正在复苏，导致美国农民的产量急剧增加。这些农业经济压力有助于推动移民限制运动，导致1924年《移民法》。一战之后也标志着一个鲜为人知的遣返事件，这 preceded the larger diaspora during the Great Depression. The practice of repatriation began even earlier, at the end of the Mexican War, with Mexicans fleeing Austin, Seguin, and San Antonio, among other places. Discrimination, violence, and competition with Anglo Americans for land and resources forced many to return to Mexico during the last half of the nineteenth century. Violent episodes continued to stoke enmity between the US and Mexico in the early twentieth century. These included President Woodrow Wilson’s invasion of Veracruz in 1914. Two years later, Pancho


42 Ibid.


44 Ibid.

Villa’s rebel forces raided Columbus, New Mexico, provoking another Wilsonian intervention south of the border—General Pershing’s Punitive Expedition that failed to capture Villa.\textsuperscript{46} By mid-1916 the bulk of US combat forces were deployed along the border. Skirmishes among Pershing’s troops and Villa’s rebels and Mexican government soldiers nearly escalated into all-out war between the United States and Mexico.\textsuperscript{47} The fighting waned over the next six months.\textsuperscript{48} Bowing to diplomatic pressure, Wilson in early 1917 ordered the withdrawal of Pershing’s expedition.\textsuperscript{49}

Two years later, in 1919, with memories of these events still fresh, one of the most notorious opponents of Mexican immigration, John C. Box, an East Texan from Jacksonville, was elected to Congress. Box came from an area better known for small-scale tomato farming than large-scale cotton growing, then Texas’s biggest crop.\textsuperscript{50} Box’s constituents viewed low-cost Mexican labor as an economic threat. In 1928, Box and Sen. William J. Harris of Georgia, who represented another cotton-growing state, sponsored bills to restrict Western Hemisphere immigration. Their efforts failed, but Box and Harris did succeed at stoking national debate that elicited unflattering depictions of

\textsuperscript{46} Friedrich Katz, “Pancho Villa and the Attack on Columbus, New Mexico,” \textit{American Historical Review} 83, no. 1 (February 1978), 101.


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} McLynn, \textit{Villa and Zapata}, 332.

Mexicans. A Saturday Evening Post article expressed the ensuing anti-Mexican sentiment: “Mexican exclusion,” the Post editorialized, “is [the American worker’s] only salvation.” It was June 1929 and the Great Crash was four months away. The Saturday Evening Post, which had a circulation of three million by 1936, was also a renowned anti-immigrant publication, according to Gutiérrez.

Less well known is the view of Mexicans and immigration found in a cradle of the old Spanish colonial empire—San Antonio—particularly in English and Spanish news coverage at the dawn of the Depression decade of economic woe. This view is important because as communications scholar Michael Schudson asserted, “the American newspaper” is “the most representative carrier and construer and creator of modern public consciousness.” Moreover, Schudson made a case for investigating the qualitative difference of the ethnic press: “When minorities . . . are authors of news as well as its readers, the social world represented in the news expands and changes.” There is no focused, comparative analysis of the English- and Spanish-language press’s mediating role in construing and creating an American consciousness of Mexicans, Mexican

51 Balderrama and Rodríguez, Decade of Betrayal, 21.
55 Ibid., 37.
Americans, and immigration during the Great Depression. This dissertation helps fill that void.

**Literature Review**

The conceptual framework for this dissertation is drawn from an understanding of the news narrative and the social construction of reality, and the qualitative use of media frame analysis. Memory studies provide additional concepts that have bearing on this study. Newspapers’ interpretive function is integral to the media’s role in constructing ideas about Mexicans, Mexican Americans, immigrants and their relationship, if any, to the dominant US culture. Media framing theory illuminates the way news narratives are constructed and helps contextualize the news stories. This study seeks in part to fill a historical gap and reposition this episode of repatriation and immigration in the public memory and in the study of the long civil rights movement.

**Newsroom Processes and the Social Construction of Reality**

This study holds an expectation that English- and Spanish-language news constructs differing visions of reality. News represents an exchange of shared meaning, a “historic reality” that represents “a form of culture invented by a particular class at a particular point in history,” communication scholar James W. Carey wrote.\(^\text{56}\) “Our minds and our lives are shaped by our total experience—or, better, by representations of that experience.”\(^\text{57}\) Carey viewed communication as “a symbolic process whereby reality is created, shared, modified, and preserved.” The news does this in story form, using either words or photographs or both, and in a narrative style it shares with fairy tales and the

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 26.
gospel, according to communication scholars Gaye Tuchman, Bonnie Brennen, and Hanno Hardt. The news narrative is successful at imparting reality because it is a comforting convention, whose shape conforms to culture. Simultaneously, the words, language, and narrative of newspapers may also envision culture via editorial content that constructs or attempts to construct a community reality.

Stuart Hall’s notion of culture, or “shared meanings,” supports the premise that news coverage in different languages may construct reality differently. Hall’s shared meanings are produced and circulated through interaction between people and groups and media, particularly modern mass media, in a “circuit of culture.” Cultural meanings might be produced in narratives, stories, photographs, fantasies, music, body language, and other non-linguistic forms of communication. These are “systems of representation,” because they use some means to stand for or represent the ideas people seek to express, Hall wrote. Importantly, Hall argued that language is a signifying practice that is indispensable to creating identity, including national identity and culture. Contrary to


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., “Chapter 1,” 17-19.

64 Ibid., 5.
the conventional view, “things” do not have an intrinsic, immutable meaning subsequently represented through language. The cultural interpretation stated the reverse: the meaning is culturally constructed through language.\textsuperscript{65}

Stated differently, words and language are the building blocks of narrative story and history, which makes them the building blocks in the construction of social reality. For sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, language constructs symbolic skyscrapers of representation thatloom over daily reality.\textsuperscript{66} One such towering construct is the black-white race binary, which underpins a theme of this dissertation: Mexican Americans and invisible civil rights history. Sociologist Teresa Guess built on Berger and Luckmann’s concept to show how the black-white race binary came to be socially defined and embodied in groups and individuals through the language of the media. Guess showed how Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory (institutionalization) explained the construction of a racialized society. She traced the binary’s development from colonial times, when race roles were first interpreted, and then showed how the white power structure institutionalized its domination of the non-white through Jim Crow and other stratagems. Her argument relied on the work of labor historian David Roediger, whose \textit{The Wages of Whiteness} explored the role of media, including historical writings, folklore, song, and language, in constructing an American white identity.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 5.


“Put simply, through language, an entire world can be actualized at any moment,” wrote Berger and Luckmann.68 For Mexican Americans, who figure prominently in this study, language has almost a mystical significance, according to Armando Rendon, the author of the *Chicano Manifesto*.69 In a poetic restatement of Stuart Hall’s idea, Sabine Ulibarri, the poet and Spanish professor, asserted that the link between language and culture was inextricable: “The language, the Word, carries within it the history, the culture, the traditions, the very life of a people, the flesh. Language is people. We cannot even conceive of a people without a language or a language without a people. The two are one and the same. To know one is to know the other. To love one is to love the other.”70

This dissertation, therefore, is informed by the idea that a comparative analysis of newspapers in two languages implicitly offers the potential to study differing cultural and narrative interpretations of news and issues. Language is only part of the difference, according to historian George Lipsitz. “Because their history identifies the sources of marginality, racial and ethnic cultures have an ongoing legitimate connection to the past that distinguishes them from more assimilated groups,” Lipsitz wrote.71


Journalists working in any language are integral to the newspapers’ construction of social reality, reporting news stories that “impart a public character” to daily happenings. Their reports are “given the status of reality” and considered no less valid than direct observation, wrote Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee. Journalists “do not make up the news but begin with what they deem an empirically graspable external reality,” according to sociologist Herbert Gans. They grasp reality only through concepts of their own making, “and therefore always ‘construct’ reality.” This holds equally for photojournalists, whose news images are another way to interpret the world. Media photos are part of a pictorial discourse that upholds the social and political power structure, asserted Brennen and Hardt. At the same time, the privileged position of the photographer suggests that the photos have “truth-value,” posited Peter Hamilton, a visual sociologist. The truth of the photo, like the truth of the written narrative, is nonetheless socially constructed. This dissertation analyzes photographic and written editorial content to assess how English- and Spanish-language newspapers constructed the reality of Mexicans and immigration during the Great Depression.

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72 Tuchman, Making News, 4.


75 Ibid., 80.

76 Brennen and Hardt, Picturing the Past, 7.

In part, this requires an analysis of the journalists’ news-telling convention, their narrative of social reality. News-telling conventions help the message “fit” the social world of readers and writers,” making them readable, posited Schudson. In part, this is because the news account, like the fairy tale, is publicly available and drawn from culture, media scholar Gaye Tuchman pointed out in *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality.* “Both take social and cultural resources and transform them into public property,” Tuchman wrote. The narrative style, argued historian Hayden White, helps bridge some of these cultural differences. “We may not be able to fully comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively little difficulty understanding a story from another culture.” This dissertation analyzes the way English- and Spanish-language newspapers socially constructed reality in the context of their respective cultures.

News writers and photographers socially construct reality narratives not only in the context of their time and culture but also under the aegis of their news organization. “News in a newspaper or on television has a relationship to the ‘real world,’ not only in content but in form; that is, in the way the world is incorporated into unquestioned and


80 Ibid.

unnoticed conventions of narration, and then transfigured,” Schudson wrote.\textsuperscript{82} In a study of presidential State of the Union messages addresses dating to 1790, Schudson found news coverage first took the stenographic form, in which the address was reproduced in the newspaper verbatim. News coverage then took the chronological form, in which the speech was printed in full accompanied by details of the congressional proceedings and reaction. Gradually, coverage evolved to more interpretive forms of reporting.\textsuperscript{83}

Schudson argued that the narration conventions changed with the prevailing political culture. “If these stories reflect a new political reality, they reflect also a new journalistic reality. The journalist, no longer merely the relayer of documents and messages, has become the interpreter of the news.”\textsuperscript{84} This fits Gans’s notion that journalists make judgments about reality based on values, including assumptions about what is new, what is old, abnormal or normal. These news judgments, read reality judgments, are predicated on composite notions of nation, government, society, and social institutions that reporters carry in their heads.\textsuperscript{85} Journalists make these reality judgments in accordance with the ethos of their news organization, not just drawing on their own values. As Gans suggested, journalists are members of a socio-cultural-political milieu and make news judgments about reality from that position.\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Schudson, “The Politics of the Narrative Form,” 97-112.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Ibid.,104.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Gans, Deciding What’s News, 201.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 201. Gans based his argument on his sociological study of national news organizations, CBS, NBC, Newsweek and Time in the late 1960s and the early to mid-1970s.
\end{itemize}
That journalistic milieu is partly fashioned by newspaper owners and editors, who can seek to build community consciousness through their narrative choices by “deciding what’s news,” as Gans put it.\(^{87}\) The *Chicago Daily News*, which media historian David Paul Nord called the first truly urban newspaper and the first to build a community editorially, is a prime example.\(^{88}\) By 1895 the *Chicago Daily News* sold 200,000 copies of its four-page penny press paper a day, exceeding the circulation of both the competing *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Times*.\(^{89}\) Melville Stone, the self-made *Daily News* founder, articulated an egalitarian, humanitarian, and socially progressive vision for the community by eliminating society gossip, launching investigations, and espousing public works projects and social welfare policies.\(^{90}\) This dissertation considers the social, cultural and political context in which English- and Spanish-language journalists operated and evaluate how narrative choices may have reflected the community vision of newspaper managers and owners.

In sum, the news narrative represents social consciousness in more ways than one. The news form reflects the shape of culture and is shaped by culture. White made a point about narrative history that holds equally true for literature and the narrative news

\(^{87}\) Ibid., title page.

\(^{88}\) Nord, *Communities of Journalism*, 108-112.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 120.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 108-109. See also, Nord, 114, 116. The *Daily News* socially constructed a vision of a public, interdependent Chicago community. In contrast, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Times* advocated more on behalf of private interests, Nord asserted. Although the *Tribune* is the only one of these three papers still publishing, Nord left unresolved which of the newspapers’ socially constructed view prevailed at the time. Perhaps readers lived in separate socially constructed Chicago worlds, imaging themselves in different political economies structured by newspaper culture.
account: “The authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself.”

White asserted that “the psychological impulse” to narrate and to listen to stories satisfies a “universal human need.” We live; therefore, we narrate. This dissertation uses framing theory to analyze the narrative of news coverage in two San Antonio daily newspapers, the *Express* and *La Prensa*, from 1929 to 1934. In so doing, it shows how these two examples of Depression-era journalism socially constructed Mexicans and immigration through the language of newspapers, which represents a proxy for culture.

**News Frames and Media History**

Media scholar Stephen Reese posited that “frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.” News framing, then, provides one way to parse the views represented in editorial content. This theory is particularly suited for a study such as this, which aims to uncover how news characterized specific groups and issues at a particular time and place. Sociologist Todd Gitlin, who described journalists as “symbol-handlers,” defined media frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual.” Importantly, stated Gitlin, frames are

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91 White, *The Content of the Form*, 20.

92 Ibid., 4.


“composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.”95 Framing “offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text,” wrote communication scholar Robert Entman, whose research has demonstrated the ways that mass media frames influenced political debate.96

This dissertation examines news articles in English and Spanish, looking for dominant themes and patterns—frames—in news coverage about Mexicans and immigration in the United States. In this theoretical application, framing represents “cultural choice-making . . . that ties content together within culturally constructed” subjects, such as the economy, diplomacy, immigration, and ethnicity, to name a few topics this study probes.97 Mass media framing has been used to study mass media history in various ways. These include, among others, Harriet Moore’s study of

95 Ibid., 6.


immigrants and epidemics, and Janice Hume’s studies of news coverage of the 1918 influenza epidemic and of newspaper obituaries in various locales and time periods.

Moore’s study informs this dissertation because it analyzed nineteenth-century newspaper coverage of a deleterious national issue, contagion and illness, as it related to immigrants. Moreover, she identified media frames such as exclusion, inferiority, dirtiness, and other negative terms in these news accounts that suggested attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy.98 Significantly, Moore found that “immigrant” became synonymous with “contagion.” Moore noted that less than 2 percent of immigrants were denied entry to the United States for medical reasons between 1891 and 1898, but that number rose to 69 percent by 1915.99 She posited the news frames made the link between epidemics, immigrants, and contagion more salient in the public mind, though she refrained from giving the press responsibility for subsequent laws that policed immigrants on the basis of health.100

Although unrelated to immigration, Hume’s 2000 study of news coverage and the “forgotten” 1918 flu epidemic is relevant to this dissertation for its link between memory, media frames, and shared culture. “The presentation of any type of news story is intrinsically linked to memory, culture, and collective meaning,” Hume noted.101 Seeking clues for why this devastating early twentieth-century epidemiological phenomenon


99 Ibid., 70-71.

100 Ibid., 71.

escaped memory, Hume examined magazine articles published between 1918 and 1920 for frames related to epidemic anxiety. She identified frames such as “mystery,” “helplessness,” and “fear,” among others. Importantly, she found that six national magazines, including Good Housekeeping and Ladies Home Journal, never printed a word about the epidemic. Omission of news coverage, the story’s inherent lack of narrative, and ultimately, the epidemic’s failure to be commemorated, though it caused more American fatalities than World War I, may have played a role in its erasure from memory, Hume concluded.

Similarly, in Obituaries in American Culture, Hume identified four categories journalists used to organize obituary information, and examined how they reflected “certain principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation concerning death and the value of a particular life.” Hume posited that the attributes journalists highlighted “also offer a glimpse in American attitudes about death” because they make a case for what is important to remember. Likewise, this dissertation identifies media frames that suggest American attitudes about Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and immigration, with the expectation that the attitudes may vary in English- and Spanish-language coverage, in part based on what the newspaper managers and their reporters considered important for the public to remember.

Media scholar Barbie Zelizer united the ideas of framing theory and memory, writing that memory is a “a type of constructive activity, the enunciation of claims about the past through shared frames for understanding.” Modern memory studies owe a debt to

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Durkheim acolyte Maurice Halbwachs, who explained how memory might serve as a tool to rebuild the past rather than merely recall it, Zelizer noted.\(^{104}\) This dissertation uses public memory to refer to a “body of beliefs about the past that help the public or society understand both its past and present, and by implication, its future,” as historian John Bodnar put it.\(^{105}\) This differs from personal memory, an individual’s ability to retain and summon facts at will. Instead, public memory implicitly involves a group negotiating, arguing, and determining whether and how something will be recalled. For Bodnar, public memory is a dispute over reality, a mediating force between men and women, the ethnic and the mainstream, and local versus regional or national interests.\(^{106}\) More simply, it is code for what a dominant civic culture remembers, which is the way Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Michael Kammen put it in *Mystic Chords of Memory.*\(^{107}\) Kammen, who borrowed an Abraham Lincoln line for his book title, shared Bodnar’s view that memory is allied with patriotism and national identity.\(^{108}\)

Journalism may help preserve and instill a national memory of the past.\(^{109}\) As Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang put it, “historical ‘reality’ undergoes a continuous

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\(^{104}\) Barbie Zelizer, “Reading the Past,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1995): 214. Collective memory, the shared experience of remembering, has been used across disciplines, and often interchangeably with terms such as popular memory, public memory, and cultural memory.

\(^{105}\) Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 15.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 14.


\(^{108}\) Ibid., 13.

process of construction and reconstruction” and the journalist’s role in mediating that reality is an early step in that process. In this role, journalism becomes what French historian Pierre Nora calls a site of memory, or a lieux de mémoire. A site of memory might be geographical, biographical, literary, architectural or artistic, among other things. Sites of memory then are people, places, monuments, and potentially books or newspapers, the latter of which are integral to this dissertation. In fact, the media might be the prime institution in the cultural construction of “hood”: nationhood, communityhood, and cityhood, as Schudson characterized them.

Memory is a form of historical consciousness and journalism is one way that reality and memory are socially constructed. The past is only visible from the present and is socially constructed in the present to fulfill contemporaneous and future aims. George Lipsitz viewed the newspaper and the telegraph, along with the theater, as refashioners of cultural memory and consciousness in the United States. Nineteenth-century newspapers were another journalistic vehicle through which “ideational American public and cultural places where memories emerged, became legitimized, and settled,” concluded media historians Betty Houchin Winfield and Janice Hume.

Building on Winfield and Hume, this dissertation shows how Depression-era journalism


112 David Thelen, “Memory and American History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989): 1123. As David Thelen noted, the provocative question is “not how accurately a recollection fitted some piece of past reality, but why historical actors constructed their memories in a particular way at a particular time,” 1125.


operated as a site of memory through newspaper accounts that selected, identified and sometimes analyzed events, issues, places, people, and even the past as they related to Mexicans and immigration.

It is a premise of this dissertation that these early twentieth-century newspaper accounts helped their respective readers learn what it meant to be Mexican and possibly Mexican American in US society. The study probes whether the mainstream English- and the ethnic Spanish-language paper shared a different vision of those identities. If newspapers set an agenda for remembrance, then by their omissions newspapers implied what might be forgotten. As Lipsitz noted “mass-media images rarely grant legitimacy to marginal perspectives.”115 Instead, the ethnic community is “surrounded by images that exclude them” and “included in images that have no real social power.”116

**Research Questions**

This dissertation touches on a related early twentieth-century issue: how the United States views and polices immigrants amid national economic calamity. It explores three areas within media history ripe for further study: immigrant and minority news, Spanish-language news, and news coverage of labor and the economy. Specifically, this dissertation seeks to identify frames in news stories, in this case reports concerning Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression. The dissertation then assesses whether newspaper coverage of this Mexican diaspora reflected a US economy divided by culture, with the language of the newspapers serving as a proxy for culture. As

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116 Ibid.
James Carey said, “Journalism is a cultural form, a literary act” and “a symbolic strategy” that “sizes up elements” and tells us how people in the past “grasped reality.”\textsuperscript{117}

The reality is that migration of persons of Mexican ancestry to and from the United States and Mexico occurred at various times before the 1930s. That phenomenon was not new. Most notably, thousands had repatriated during the economic recession of 1920-1921, a smaller scale yet precedent-setting event of voluntary and forced removals.\textsuperscript{118} Repatriation in the 1930s constituted a different order of magnitude and significance. The depth and breadth of the Great Depression, which affected sectors from banking to agriculture to mining and manufacturing, forced the majority culture’s relationship to the “Mexican” into sharp relief. The questions for this dissertation are: What were the similarities and differences in media frames of Mexicans and immigration issues in English- and Spanish-language newspapers in San Antonio, Texas, as the nation embarked on its most storied period of economic privation? Moreover, what did media frames reveal about how English- and Spanish-language newspapers understood and intended their audiences to understand about the “reality” of the Mexican during this period?

**Method**

The dissertation relies on the researcher’s critical evaluation of news coverage in two morning dailies, the *San Antonio Express* and *La Prensa*, during a five-year period from the end of the Roaring Twenties to the onset of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. Microfilm and digital database editions of the *San Antonio Express* and *La Prensa*,


\textsuperscript{118} Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 177.
*Prensa* newspapers were studied from January 1929 to January 1934 to identify editorial content relating to deportation, repatriation and Mexican ethnic issues. Relevant content in *La Prensa* was identified using several keyword search terms. The terms and yield of three keyword search terms were: “*repatriados*” (1,104); “*inmigración*” (1,905); and “*deportación*” (455). A comparable English-language search in the *Express* yielded: “immigration” (1,051); “repatriation” (37); and “deportation” (294).

The dissertation identifies specific frames in editorial content and analyzes them in the context of the time and in terms of the nation’s long struggles concerning immigration, ethnicity, and its relationship to Mexico. Studying the *San Antonio Express* and *La Prensa* permits an apples-to-apples comparison of independent, non-chain operated, local voices that interpreted daily reality through their news pages. This dissertation studies editorial content, including news articles, editorials, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, and photographs retrieved via keyword searches and critical reading of the daily editions of the newspapers.

The January 1929 through January 1934 period was selected because it encompassed the longest official recessionary period during the Great Depression, the 43-month span of declining growth from August 1929 through March 1933, as designated by the National Bureau of Economic Research. This time frame also included the peak

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Most editions of both papers were available, though several dates in each were missing from microfilm and/or digital databases used. The *Express* keyword search was conducted using Ancestry.com’s digital newspaper database, to which the researcher subscribed. The Readex database, Hispanic American Newspapers, 1808-1980, was accessed to conduct the *La Prensa* keyword search. Microfilm editions of the *Express* were also viewed at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas, Austin and ordered through interlibrary loan, though not all gaps in publication were filled.

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period of the repatriation of Mexicans from the United States, which occurred in 1931, according to data from the Mexican Migration Service.\textsuperscript{121}

Previous historical studies of repatriation and unconstitutional deportation drew on newspapers as source material, but not as the focus of study. Balderrama and Rodríguez, the co-authors of \textit{Decade of Betrayal}, the most comprehensive and recent history of repatriation, noted that the phenomenon was widely covered by Spanish-language newspapers in the Southwest.\textsuperscript{122} Balderrama and other historians cited newspapers, including Ignacio Lozano’s \textit{La Prensa}, to supplement other sources and to fill narrative gaps. This dissertation departs from those works in its focus on the newspapers’ interpretive, mediating role, in transmitting news about this epic movement of Mexican people. Furthermore, by comparing the two sets of frames, the research assesses whether the news accounts suggest a view of the economy divided by culture. As Lipsitz noted, “because their marginality involves the pain of exclusion and exploitation, racial and ethnic cultures speak eloquently about the fissures and frictions of society.”\textsuperscript{123}

Implicit in this approach is the notion that these newspapers, which elites managed and wrote for, framed the way everyday people understood their world. A few scholars have made that case for Texas newspapers. Patrick Cox, author of \textit{The First Texas News Barons}, contributed to the historiography of early twentieth-century Texas by illustrating the pivotal role Texas newspapers played in helping modernize the state in

\textsuperscript{121} Hoffman, \textit{Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression}, 174.

\textsuperscript{122} Balderrama and Rodríguez, \textit{Decade of Betrayal}, 147.

\textsuperscript{123} Lipsitz, \textit{Time Passages}, 135.
the Depression years. This is in contrast to most histories, which credit federal government investment and the petroleum industry for fueling state growth. At the same time, Cox acknowledged the English-language papers in Texas were not consistently forward-looking in their minority coverage. Many papers, including the Express, battled the Ku Klux Klan, but often omitted news about Mexican-American and black success.124

Whereas the *San Antonio Express* and other English-language Texas daily newspapers expressed a modern consciousness for Texans, *La Prensa* and other Spanish-language newspapers operated as transmitters of language and culture, according to historians Richard Garcia and Roberto Treviño. Treviño viewed *La Prensa* “as both mirror and agent of cultural change and continuity” for Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Texas.125 *La Prensa* was an expatriate newspaper, owned and operated by publisher Ignacio Lozano, who had left Mexico in 1908.126 Lozano’s newspaper reinforced a Mexican outlook that was simultaneously elitist and intellectual and supportive of equality for Mexicans in the United States. According to Garcia, Lozano viewed Mexicans in the United States as “still part of a historical consciousness of a Mexican collectivity” even if they failed to return to Mexico to help rebuild it post-revolution.127 Lozano was “the personification of Mexican culture, tradition and gente


decente (good breeding) and this profile, espoused through his news pages, helped make him famous throughout Texas and the Southwest.”128

**San Antonio**

San Antonio’s bicultural, bilingual Mexican-American historical legacy makes it an optimal choice for this case study of a Depression economy. The Spanish first explored the area in 1691. Almost three decades later, in 1718, the Spanish built the San Antonio de Béxar Presidio. But it was not until 55 settlers, most of them teenage or younger, arrived from Tenerife in the Canary Islands in 1731 that the town was incorporated. These newcomers joined the few earlier settler-soldiers, Franciscan missionaries, and Indians in a frequently uneasy co-existence. After Texas gained its independence from Mexico at the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836, the Republic of Texas established Bexar County and made San Antonio its seat.129 Historian David Weber argued that the blood spilt between Anglos and Mexicans in Texas, particularly in the battles at the Alamo in San Antonio, at San Jacinto, and at Goliad, Texas, was unprecedented in the Southwest and West. The violence embittered Anglos toward Mexicans, and at least initially, toward the Spanish too. More than a century later, during the Great Depression, some Anglos were determined to see Mexicans go, while others recognized their importance to the economy.

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128 Ibid., 247.

San Antonio in the early twentieth century was the cosmopolitan heart of South Texas and the recognized gateway to Mexico.\textsuperscript{130} “San Antonio has . . . that intangible but potential asset—the good will and understanding of the Mexican people,” as the \textit{Express} put it in a page-one column.\textsuperscript{131} In part, this was because San Antonio had been a prime commercial and trade center for two centuries. In the 1930s, it was also an important reservoir of Mexican labor, with many agricultural workers using San Antonio as a home hub between jobs elsewhere.\textsuperscript{132}

Little has been written about repatriation in Texas, which is surprising because of its ranking as the largest state staging ground for the Depression-era Mexican exodus.\textsuperscript{133} US Census numbers document the changing demographics of Mexicans during the period. In 1930, Mexican-born residents of San Antonio had risen to 33,146, or 14.3 percent of the city’s 231,542 population.\textsuperscript{134} San Antonio, which had been the largest city in the state until 1920, fell to third place among Texas cities in the 1930 census, trailing Houston and Dallas. The year before the 1930 census, the US government made illegal

\textsuperscript{130} Richard A. Garcia, \textit{Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class}, 1.

\textsuperscript{131} “Think,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, September 1, 1923, 1.

\textsuperscript{132} Garcia, \textit{Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class}, 16.

\textsuperscript{133} R. Reynolds McKay, “The Impact of The Great Depression on Immigrant Mexican Labor: Repatriation of the Bridgeport, Texas Coal Miners,” \textit{Social Science Quarterly} 65, no. 4 (June 1984): 354. See also R. Reynolds McKay, “Texas Mexican Repatriation During the Great Depression,” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1982). See also, Rodolfo F. Acuña and Guadalupe Compeán, \textit{Voices of the US Latino Experience, Vol. II}, 586, “The study of repatriation remains a neglected area of investigation. Indications are that there was a substantial Mexican repatriation from Texas — probably more Mexicans were returned to Mexico from this state than from any other state.”

border crossing a misdemeanor for first-time offenders. Repeat offenders faced felony charges and fines of up to $10,000.135

Expulsions of Mexicans accelerated after President Herbert Hoover appointed William N. Doak to head the US Department of Labor in December 1930. Within a month of his appointment, Doak wrote the Senate that about 400,000 people were illegally living in the United States and at least 100,000 were deportable.136 The number was “a fair estimate, or conjecture,” he wrote in his letter to the Senate. “It is obviously impossible to arrive at any concrete figures as to the number of aliens unlawfully in the country,” he added. 137 By the end of June 1931, more than half of the 22,952 Mexicans who were deported or left Texas voluntarily (in many cases to avoid deportation), were processed through the San Antonio Immigration and Naturalization Service District.138

One of the few scholars to focus on the Texas repatriation described in 1932 how Mexico’s San Antonio-based Consul General Eduardo Hernández Chazarro supervised the return of 2,500 Texas Mexicans to the Laredo border. They journeyed in a caravan of cars and trucks that Mexicans and Mexican Americans in San Antonio lent to the returnees. The scholar, Edna Ewing Kelley, said the 1931 trip had a “fiesta” spirit, “although one man died and six babies were born while the party was en route.”139 Kelley

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135 Hoffman, Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression, 118.
136 “Says 400,000 Aliens are Here Illegally, Doak tells the Senate that 100,000 are Deportable, and Urges Stricter Law,” New York Times, January 6, 1931, 5.
137 Ibid.
138 Annual report of the Commissioner General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor, fiscal year ended June 30, 1931, 71.
did not cite news coverage of the group’s departure, though she called it the single largest
return of Mexicans at one time.

R. Reynolds McKay, another scholar who focused his repatriation research on Texas, documented, among other things, the impact on Mexican miners of the 1931
closure of the Bridgeport Coal Co. in Bridgeport, Texas.\(^{140}\) In contrast to Kelley, he relied
heavily on news accounts to document his study. He cited English- and Spanish-language
press reports of the struggle of the 250 workers and their families, amounting to about
750 people. Their goods were repossessed and for several weeks, many families had only
beans for sustenance. McKay argued that many who returned to Mexico did so
reluctantly after the Mexican consul general in Dallas refused to provide government
assistance to reach the border.\(^{141}\) The Bridgeport Mexicans departed in small groups that
did not receive media coverage, making it difficult to enumerate the repatriated, McKay
asserted.\(^{142}\) While Mexicans left Texas and San Antonio for many reasons during the
Depression, repatriation unquestionably played a role. By 1940, census figures showed
that the Mexico-born population in San Antonio had fallen by approximately one-third, to
22,530 people, or roughly 8.9 percent, out of a population of about 254,000.\(^{143}\)

The Newspapers

San Antonio’s population base was more than ample to support myriad media
voices, despite the population decline. The *San Antonio Express* and *La Prensa* were


\(^{141}\) Ibid., 358.

\(^{142}\) Ibid., 359.

\(^{143}\) US Census, 1940. *Characteristics of the Population*, 1054, 1056. The 1940 Census contains
comparative numbers for 1930.
selected for this dissertation because they were independent daily newspapers operating in the same southwestern city. Their differences were myriad: language, audience, and longevity, to name a few. Both trace their roots to the aftermath of seminal events in Texas-Mexico history. The Express printed its first edition 29 years after the fall of the Alamo and is the longest continuously operating newspaper in Texas, publishing in 2011 as the San Antonio Express-News. La Prensa, the most successful and influential of Spanish-language newspapers in the Southwest, was founded three years after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The Express and its younger sibling, the Evening News, battled William Randolph Hearst’s San Antonio Light for the attention of the English-language reader. The chain-operated Light, an afternoon paper, was excluded from this study to enable a focus on independent, morning daily editorial voices, exemplified by the Express and La Prensa.

The San Antonio Express

The Express was started in 1865 by Union sympathizers and first printed on the presses of the San Antonio Freie Presse für Texas, a German-language newspaper.


146 The Express started the Evening News in 1918 to offer readers and advertisers an afternoon alternative to the San Antonio Light. See Nesbitt, “History of the San Antonio Express, 1865-1965.” The Light was founded in 1880 and bought by William Randolph Hearst in 1924. From “A History of the San Antonio Express-News.”

Frank G. Huntress, who led the paper during the Depression years, was born and raised in post-Civil War San Antonio and started at the Express Publishing Co. at 15 as a “newsboy.” He worked at the paper for 60 years, becoming part owner, general manager, president, and later, chairman.\textsuperscript{148} His holdings were strengthened after George W. Brackenridge, founder of San Antonio National Bank, died in 1920, leaving his fortune, including his one-third ownership in the newspaper, in an estate trust that Huntress ultimately headed. Brackenridge had come with his family as a young man from Indiana. He had been a Union sympathizer during the Civil War and had worked in the Treasury Department of his father’s friend, Abraham Lincoln, a move that may have indicated his willingness to take unpopular stands in his adoptive hometown of San Antonio, which was the headquarters of the Confederacy in Texas.\textsuperscript{149}

Huntress may also have lent unique understanding to the plight of the Mexican, if his mother, the daughter of General Juan Montez, a Mexican rancher and businessman, had any influence. Huntress served as general manager and president of the Express Publishing Co., holding the latter title from 1910 until 1953. He was chairman when he died in 1955. Patrick Cox, author of \textit{The First Texas News Barons}, noted that Huntress’ personal papers have never been found, which makes the extent of his mother’s cultural and linguistic influence on his journalistic sensibilities difficult to discern.\textsuperscript{150}

There is other evidence, however, that he brought a personal and professional understanding to Mexican issues. In 1923, US Rep. Harry M. Wurzbach floated Huntress

\textsuperscript{148} Nesbitt, \textit{History of the San Antonio Express}, 139.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 111-112, 120.

\textsuperscript{150} Cox, \textit{The First Texas News Barons}, 92-93.
as a possible Coolidge appointee for ambassador to Mexico, recognizing Huntress for his “familiarity with Mexican affairs and his ability as a businessman.”  

Huntress’ paternal grandfather had been a New York City newspaperman and his father was a wealthy San Antonio businessman. Huntress, who espoused an anti-Ku Klux Klan policy in his editorial policies, appeared to carry on something of both his parents’ family legacies.

La Prensa

La Prensa, started in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, was a “respected national and international political voice” and arguably the most notable US Spanish-language paper in the first half of the twentieth century. La Prensa targeted Mexican expatriates and long-time Mexican residents, as US citizens of Mexican descent and Mexican immigrants were called then. But it was also the continuation of a long Texas newspaper tradition that began in the early 1800s with the Spanish-language press. The Gaceta de Tejas was purportedly the first newspaper in any language to be published in Texas. The Gaceta, which appeared in 1813, was written in Texas and possibly printed in Louisiana. The Nacogdoches (Texas) Mexican Advocate, which began printing in

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151 “F. G. Huntress is Suggested as Ambassador,” San Antonio Express, September 1, 1923, 1.

152 Cox, The First Texas News Barons, 92-93.

153 “Frank Huntress’s Last Rites Held,” San Antonio Express, August 2, 1955, 1.

154 Garcia, Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class, 4.


1829, is more authoritatively documented as the first Texas-based newspaper. Others followed, including papers in both English and Spanish. *El Bejareño*, a Spanish-language paper published in San Antonio in 1855, predated the founding of the *San Antonio Express* by a decade.¹⁵⁷

*La Prensa* also fits into the category of the alternative, or dissident press, which media historian Lauren Kessler called “the underdogs of their time.”¹⁵⁸ The Spanish-language press in Texas was the alternative press *and* the original press. *La Prensa* was not the first Spanish-language paper, but it was the most successful in the Southwest at creating its own media marketplace. Journalism historian Félix Gutiérrez ascribed three roles to the Mexican American ethnic press. He saw the early Southwest Mexican press used as an instrument of social control, particularly when it was owned and operated by Anglos. He also saw it as an instrument of social activism, particularly when Mexican editors fought community oppression. And he saw it as a reflection of Mexican American life.¹⁵⁹ Carlos Cortés built on that framework, calling Mexican American newspapers “preservers and transmitters of Chicano history and culture, maintainers and enforcers of language, and strengtheners of Chicano pride.”¹⁶⁰

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*La Prensa* was more southward looking than most Spanish-language newspapers with its orientation toward news from Mexico. This quality did not take away from the features it shared with ethnic papers that were more prone to espouse assimilation and bi-culturalism. *La Prensa* was among 203 Mexican American newspapers that were founded in the Southwest in the first three decades of the twentieth century. About ten percent of these were dailies like *La Prensa*.\(^{161}\)

Ignacio Lozano started *La Prensa* with $1,200—his life savings—supported by a brief tutelage at a San Antonio-based Spanish-language magazine, and an earlier stint as a poet for a newspaper in his hometown in Durango, Mexico. With presses rolling three years after the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Lozano became one of several émigré editors who helped shape a Mexican American consciousness that laid the groundwork for a “contemporary intellectual and political movement” that “championed the cause of the non-white peoples of the Third World.”\(^{162}\)

*La Prensa* adopted a role that was “continually cautioning, protecting and educating the Mexican laborer, the illegal alien or the Mexican considering repatriation.”\(^{163}\) Lozano’s *La Prensa* was quick to defend Mexicans from discriminatory US policies, and just as quick to criticize unjust policies in Mexico. His news pages editorialized to desegregate Texas public schools for Mexicans and celebrated the community’s contributions to the United States.\(^{164}\) At the same time, *La Prensa* revered

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\(^{161}\) Ibid., 250.


\(^{163}\) Rios-McMillan, “A Biography of a Man,” 142.

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 137, 139.
all things Mexican, which some asserted was “steeped in elitist notions of a Spanish cultural heritage.” La Prensa and the Express were two papers that had covered the Great War and now were on the cusp of another “Great,” the Great Depression.

**Newspapers in the Great Depression**

During the Great Depression, newspapers in the United States were becoming increasingly streamlined and uniform. By that time, newspaper design had reached a midpoint in its transformation from the Victorian Era to modernism, often marked by USA Today’s debut in the mid-1980s, according to media scholars Kevin G. Barnhurst and John C. Nerone. In 1885, about the time the first press photograph appeared, newspaper front-pages averaged almost 50 items, including stories, ads, and photos, among other things, Barnhurst and Nerone found in a 1991 study. By the middle of the Depression-era in 1935, newspapers were less cluttered, with only 26.8 items on average per front page, most of which were stories. The average number of words on page one fell by almost half, to 6,600 in 1935 from 12,000 in 1885.

The loss of readers and declining advertising during the Depression hastened the national inclination to shorter newspapers. A preliminary study of La Prensa’s page

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167 Ibid.

168 Ibid.

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

count bucks that trend.\textsuperscript{172} The number of pages held steady at 10 through 1929 and into the second quarter of 1930. During the third and fourth quarter \textit{La Prensa} expanded, adding a Sunday literary supplement. Its page count rose to 13.2 pages per issue in the third quarter and 14.1 pages in the fourth quarter. Overall, \textit{La Prensa}’s page count rose 24 percent between 1929 and 1930. During that same period, the \textit{Express} page count dropped 7.6 percent, or approximately 3.6 pages per issue, to 34 pages per issue from 31.4 pages per issue.

\textbf{Selling the News in San Antonio: 1929-1934}

Newspaper owners willed an improved economy amid plummeting sales. In their 1932 meeting, members of the Texas Publishers’ Association, including Frank Huntress of the \textit{Express} and Walter Dealey of the \textit{Dallas Morning News}, projected that “better business conditions will return to Texas.”\textsuperscript{173} Despite this optimism, the \textit{Express} and \textit{La Prensa} both lost circulation from 1929 through 1934, and the \textit{Express} printed fewer pages during that period. As Figures 1 and 2 show, daily circulation of the \textit{Express} fell 9.4 percent from 1929 through 1934, while Sunday circulation fell 17 percent during the same time frame, according to the national Audit Bureau of Circulations. The economic situation cannot fully explain these results because, at the same time, circulation increased for William Randolph Hearst’s \textit{San Antonio Light}, the chief English-language competitor to the \textit{Express}. The \textit{Light}’s daily circulation rose 19 percent and its Sunday circulation rose 5.7 percent.

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\textsuperscript{172} The study was conducted by the author using digital editions of the \textit{Express} and \textit{La Prensa} accessed respectively through Ancestry.com and Hispanic American Newspapers, 1808-1980.
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More devastating for the fortunes of the *Express* was the significant difference in the number of subscribers to the lucrative Sunday edition: 53,050 by mid-1934, versus 79,381 for the *Light*, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations. The *Express* attempted to spin its declining circulation story positively, taking out a full-page house ad in 1934 that stressed the quality of its readers over quantity. “During 1933, the *Express* (morning and Sunday) gained in high-class circulation, among families who have the means to buy your merchandise.”

The *Express* asserted that its *Evening News* also gained in home-delivered circulation. Audited figures show, however, that home-delivery circulation fell almost 10 percent between 1932 and 1933. Between 1933 and 1934, home-delivery circulation of the *Evening News* grew less than 1 percent. Calling themselves, “Texas’ foremost newspapers,” the *Express* (and *Evening News*) declared: “We know, and many advertisers know, that the *Express* and the *Evening News* are SEEN MORE—READ MORE—than any other newspapers in this region.” These assertions were at least true from Monday through Friday. The *Express* sold one-and-a-half times more daily papers than Hearst’s chain-operated *Light*.  

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The Depression hit the *Express* hard, and *La Prensa* even harder. The blow, however, did not stop *La Prensa* from investing in its paper in the hopes of attracting more readers. During the third and fourth quarters of 1930, *La Prensa* added a 20-page Sunday literary and arts supplement. Famed borderlands folklorist Américo Paredes recalled how, during the 1930s, he and a group of poet friends would “pore over the section of *La Prensa* de San Antonio devoted to literature,” reading Spanish-language greats such as Federico García Lorca and Gabriela Mistral. The section also included Spanish translations of classic literature.\(^{179}\)

Yet, despite the enhancement, *La Prensa*’s readership declined precipitously. As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, between 1929 and 1934 *La Prensa*’s daily circulation fell 69.7 percent, and Sunday circulation dropped 49 percent, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations. A June 26, 1932, plea to readers to maintain their subscriptions and pay them in a timely manner appears to have gone unheeded. *La Prensa* explained that the Audit Bureau of Circulations had tightened standards for counting subscribers whose payments were in arrears. “Despite the economic Depression that has affected all businesses, *La Prensa* has remained faithful to its constant improvement program and hasn’t sacrificed any of the services that have given it prestige and popularity.”\(^{180}\)

In 1929, mail subscribers across the United States accounted for approximately one-third of *La Prensa*’s circulation. The newspaper’s almost 8,000 daily national


\(^{180}\) “A Nuestros Suscriptores,” *La Prensa*, June 26, 1932, 3.
subscribers resided in all but seven states.\textsuperscript{181} Table 1 shows the state-by-state readership changes during the study period. By 1934, that daily national mail circulation had dwindled to 1,722 as subscribers lost jobs, returned to Mexico voluntarily, or were deported. Perhaps most telling is the fact that \textit{La Prensa’s} circulation increased in only one segment: foreign sales. Presumably, \textit{La Prensa} readers who could afford to do so continued their subscriptions once they left the United States. Daily foreign subscriptions rose almost ten-fold to 575 in 1934 from 71 in 1929. Sunday subscriptions rose to 2,603, four hundred times larger than the 1929 figure of 71.\textsuperscript{182} For the repatriate, \textit{La Prensa} undoubtedly remained a critical source of news and information about life left behind in the United States. Most importantly, it also connected them, albeit in an attenuated way, to the experiences of family and friends who remained in the North. As Paredes noted, \textit{La Prensa} “attempted to create a bilingual culture for Mexican Americans.” The newspaper was unlike anything repatriates would find in Mexico, for it was Mexican \textit{and} it was American.\textsuperscript{183}

\textbf{Limitations}

The focus on one Southwestern city and two of its newspapers represents a research strength, facilitating depth and context in one local area. Paradoxically, this focus also poses a significant geographical limitation. Future studies might be broadened to consider other regions and markets where English- and Spanish-language print media

\textsuperscript{181} Audit Bureau of Circulations, Chicago, “Audit Report,” \textit{La Prensa}, for the eighteen months ending June 30, 1930. This report includes net paid circulation by states based on December 31, 1929 (Daily) and December 29, 1929 (Sunday).

\textsuperscript{182} Table 1 figures combine the number of mail subscribers and sales to dealers.

\textsuperscript{183} Saldívar, \textit{The Borderlands of Culture}, 125.
competed and where the political economy, culture, and historic relationships between Mexicans and Anglos might inform editorial positions differently.

Access to some primary resources represents another limitation. Some daily editions during some months were missing during the study period. Because the primary goal is not to study individual events and compare the coverage but to identify and analyze general approaches, trends, and styles of reporting related to immigration, Mexicans and culture and ethnicity, the sample is equitable, not equal. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of this identification and analysis limits the study from making broader conclusions about other English-language or Spanish-language newspaper coverage during the period. Finally, the study is limited to one brief, albeit momentous period at the outset of the Great Depression. More research is needed to determine whether media frames shifted as bread lines lengthened and help-wanted ads dwindled in the second half of the Depression decade.

**Chapter Outline**

This study examines news coverage of Depression-era Mexican repatriation, deportation, and immigration chronologically, beginning in January 1929 and ending in January 1934.

*Chapter One The Crisis: They Came to Toil; But They Could Not Stay*

The introduction sets the scene regarding Mexicans and immigration in a nation on the verge of the Great Depression. The chapter also explains the background, literature review, method and justification for the study. The background provides context for the contested border relations between Mexico and the United States and explains the long tradition of American use of Mexican labor. The literature review explains the conceptual
framework for the dissertation, which is drawn from an understanding of news narrative and the social construction of reality, and the qualitative use of frame analysis. Memory studies also have a bearing. The method and justification section explain why the San Antonio Express and La Prensa were selected and how they were studied.

**Chapter Two 1929: To Pave a Way Through Hostile and Barren Lands**

Chapter two begins a chronological examination of the news coverage of Mexican repatriation and immigration as the Roaring Twenties came to an end and new laws criminalizing crossing the US border illegally were enacted. Findings show repatriation was little covered in La Prensa and the Express in 1929. Nonetheless, news frames began to emerge, some of which would recur throughout the study period.

**Chapter 3 1930: A Thousand Times Better Off with Mexican Labor**

This chapter studies news coverage as repatriation escalated through 1930 and analyzes news frames during this period of heightened political controversy over Mexican immigration.

**Chapter 4 1931: The Tragedy of the Repatriated**

This chapter assesses news coverage during 1931, the peak year of Mexican repatriation. During the year, 138,519 Mexicans left the United States for Mexico in 1931 as government and local welfare agencies initiated formal repatriation programs. Among other things, it analyzes reporting on a caravan of thousands of destitute cotton pickers who left Karnes County, Texas, with the support of San Antonio’s Mexican community.

**Chapter 5 1932-1933: A New Deal for American Pioneers**

This chapter examines coverage from 1932 through 1933, as repatriation continued at a slower pace and disillusionment about resettling in Mexico set in.
**Chapter 6 Discussion and Epilogue**

This chapter explores the meanings and implications of the findings of the preceding chapters. How did *La Prensa* and the *San Antonio Express* grasp the reality of the Mexican and Mexican American? What were the similarities and differences in Spanish- and English-language news frames? How were persons of Mexican descent active or absent from the polity and society through the news pages? Did coverage represent a US economy divided by culture? Might similarities and differences in Spanish- versus English-language news coverage have implications for the way repatriation has been documented and remembered or forgotten historically? Are there any conclusions to be drawn about the black-white race binary and the media’s role in maintaining Mexican repatriation as an invisible civil rights issue? What does the exclusion of issues such as Mexican repatriation mean for a truly “long civil rights movement?”
Chapter 2: 1929

To Pave a Way through Hostile and Barren Lands

Not all Mexicans chose jail the way La Prensa’s celebrated deportee Carlos Espinosa did. Most deported Mexicans did not opt to return and face a felony conviction. Many preferred to stay in the United States, which they had seen as a land of opportunity, especially if they had jobs. Nonetheless, Mexicans of varying economic fortunes decided it was time to return. News coverage suggested that at least some of them might have been influenced by acrimonious policy debates over Mexican immigration as well as the new 1929 law that made persons illegally in the country subject to deportation.2

Herbert Hoover was inaugurated president in March 1929, seven months before Black Thursday—the stock market crash of October 24, 1929. The effects of the financial crisis were wide-ranging and, as is often the case during economic slumps, exacerbated tensions over those viewed as “the other” in society. The congressional battle over Mexican labor intensified, but Hoover sidestepped legislative action. He implemented a 1924 law adopted during the Coolidge administration that imposed quota restrictions on countries outside the Western Hemisphere. Chafing at Congressional delay as debate raged over a new quota law to keep Mexicans out, Hoover adopted Coolidge’s tactical use of administrative tools. The 1924 law barred any immigrant likely to become a public

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1 Rodolfo Uranga, “Glosario del Dia,” La Prensa, July 25, 1929, 1.
charge from entering the United States, and Hoover lost no time applying that provision to Mexicans. Hoover explained his action in his 1952 memoirs: “In view of the large amount of unemployment at the time, I concluded that directly or indirectly all immigrants were a public charge at the moment—either they themselves went on relief as soon as they landed, or, if they did get jobs, they forced others onto relief.”³

Businessmen, farmers and ranchers, politicians, and some women’s clubs took stands on the Mexican question, the newspaper coverage showed. Some also took action, trying to help Mexicans already in the country legalize their status. Mexican workers were on tenuous ground, their presence questioned and threatened.⁴ This was not the case with their Spanish colonial forebears, whose four-centuries-old historical legacy in the Southwest was revived, celebrated, and retold in San Antonio and particularly in the Express news pages. This chapter examines news coverage of Mexicans and repatriation, immigration and deportation in 1929, as the nation began to navigate the Great Depression.

Repatriation was little covered in La Prensa, and even less so in the Express in 1929. La Prensa referenced the repatriation of Mexican workers or the term repatriation in forty-two stories.⁵ In contrast, the Express ran a single one-paragraph story using the


⁴ See for instance, “Mexico Protests Illegal Search,” San Antonio Express, November 14, 1929, 1A.

⁵ The author conducted a keyword search for repatriation and repatriate in English and repatriación and repatriado in Spanish in the digital editions of the respective newspapers. After eliminating duplicate stories and stories that were irrelevant or tangential to the repatriation of Mexican workers, 42 remained in La Prensa.
Some Express news coverage simply observed that Mexicans were returning, without using the term repatriate or repatriation. An August 21, 1929, story noted that the Mexican government had provided $100,000 to help about 2,000 Mexicans families in the Valley return. The Express also reported on the October 1929 Texas visit of Felipe Canales, undersecretary of the Mexican Interior Ministry. “The Mexican government is encouraging its citizens to return to Mexico from your country. More than 3,000 Mexicans returned of their own free will last month,” Canales told the newspaper on the San Antonio leg of his trip. The Mexican government paid the returnees’ railroad fare.

**Mexican Frames in 1929**

As the Roaring Twenties came to a close, Depression-era Mexicans emerged as an issue with several discernable frames. Repatriates, immigrants, and deportees were dichotomously framed in news stories as patriots or pariahs. Framed as patriots, returning Mexicans were national heroes expected to boost Mexico’s human capital in the aftermath of a devastating Revolution. These were the repatriates who chose to return, often under the auspices of the Mexican government, which sometimes tried to relocate Mexicans to farming areas set aside for development. Framed as pariahs, repatriates and deportees were pathetic figures whose destitute homecoming threatened the already faltering Mexican economy.

The good-citizen frame documented the Mexican community’s civic and philanthropic efforts to support repatriating countrymen. News coverage filtered through

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7 “2,000 Mexican Families Return,” *San Antonio Express*, August 21, 1929, 16.

a prescriptive frame provided potential repatriates and current immigrants with advice, and sometimes, particularly in editorials, provided instruction to the government and other authorities about the best course of action.

News frames that emerged in 1929 also included a financial frame, viewing the Mexican as integral to the Southwestern and Texan economy; the *somos amigos* or “we are friends” frame, which emphasized diplomatic relations with Mexico and its people; the hierarchy of color frame, which relegated Mexicans to a role in society based on perceived racial status relative to Anglos and other races; and the Spanish nostalgia frame, which resurrected the memory of a Spanish colonial past. These frames were often blended, particularly in immigration policy arguments, and suggested the United States’ conflicted relationship with Mexico.

Immigration, deportation, and repatriation were closely connected topics, and both newspapers reported on the impact new immigration laws and enforcement actions had on the decisions Mexicans made to return to their country. These issues dealt with the role of the Mexican laborer in US society, a role conceived in contested and contrary ways.

**Patriot Frame: Battling Caciques, Caudillos, and Thugs**

News coverage written in the patriot frame associated returning Mexicans with qualities such as “knowledgeable” and “skilled.” These stories often spoke of the repatriates’ “high-quality farm equipment,” their wherewithal to triumph in the strange northern land of the United States, and their noble intent to help “reconstruct” Mexico. A prime holder of this view was Mexico’s provisional president, Emilio Portes Gil, who described repatriates as economic heroes who would supply Mexico with a $50 million
cash infusion. In an article in *La Prensa*, he predicted that 500,000 Mexicans would repatriate with $100 apiece and their superior farm machinery.9

But Rodolfo Uranga, a notable intellectual who wrote *La Prensa*’s “Daily Glossary” (“Glosario del Dia”) column, rebutted Portes Gil for failing to grasp the intrinsic heroic worth of returning Mexicans. Uranga quibbled with the president’s accounting, noting that railroad workers would return with between $200 and $500; and beet harvesters, miners, and workers from St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, and similar metropolitan areas would bring back even more.10

In this way, the repatriates would “compensate for what our little generals and high functionaries wasted on their ‘research’ and pleasure trips to foreign lands,” Uranga wrote. More importantly, according to the columnist, President Portes Gil saw repatriates merely as a $50 million bonanza. In Uranga’s view, they represented much more.11

“Repatriating Mexicans will take with them riches more valuable than dollars, including the habit of constant and productive work, of saving, of preserving, of the tenacity to overcome obstacles and prejudice, to triumph in lopsided battles and to pave a way through hostile and barren lands,” he wrote.12 The other “treasures” the repatriates would take with them to Mexico included “their zeal to be independent, their ideas about freedom of thought, their interest in public affairs, and a hatred for caciques, caudillos,


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.
and thugs,” Uranga wrote. Mexican laborers were not the only ones seeking to return in a climate of free expression. La Prensa reported that Mexico’s political exiles, in the United States, Cuba, and other countries, were pressing Portes Gil to let them return in the aftermath of the Revolution.

La Prensa actively framed repatriation as the ideal—a patriotic act. This was particularly true in the case of knowledgeable and skilled farmers and ranchers with the resources to develop their own lands in Mexico or who agreed to participate in a Mexican government relocation program. Reporting on Mexican farm workers meeting in Harlingen to organize repatriation plans, La Prensa described their intent in a sub-head: “Our countrymen want to repatriate to better their interests and help in the reconstruction of the homeland.”

Moreover, the newspaper also espoused its role as “the farmer’s moral supporter in finding a way to return to the homeland under favorable conditions.” To help achieve that aim, La Prensa asked several Mexican farmers and ranchers in Texas to explain under what circumstances they would repatriate. Ventura Gonzalez, a farmer from Floresville, Texas, a rural town outside San Antonio, told La Prensa: “We do not want to return to our country to work for the hacendados for one or two kilos of corn, as the

13 Ibid.

14 “Se Aboga por la Repatriación de los Desterrados,” La Prensa, February 21, 1929, 1.

15 “Gran Junta de Agricultores Mexicanos en Harlingen,” La Prensa, June 16, 1929, 2.

16 “Condiciones en que estan en los E. Unidos Algunos Agricultores Mexicanos,” La Prensa, April 10, 1929, 6, 9.
saying goes. We want them to give us every guarantee that we can live there the way we have come to live here.”

La Prensa’s farmer-in-the-field interviews were a departure from the government-sourced or expert-opinion based reporting typically found in the newspaper. Commenting on the evolution of the practice of journalistic interviewing, Michael Schudson noted that journalists used the technique, not to show “that the reporter speaks truth to power but that he or she speaks close to power.” In other instances, Schudson wrote, the interview “represents an act of solidarity between a reporter and a source.”

In this case, La Prensa’s reporter used the interview to get closer to the powerless, in keeping with the newspaper’s mission to be the voice of México de afuera, or expatriate Mexico. These interviews are also in line with what sociologist Robert Park asserted was one of the aims of the immigrant press: “to maintain contact and understanding between the home countries and their scattered members.” Publishing in Spanish fulfilled another aim, to prevent the language of the homeland from “disintegrating into mere immigrant dialects,” of “hyphenated English.”

17 Ibid. An hacendado is a land-owning cattle rancher or planter.
19 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
The farmers had their say in La Prensa, though it is not clear the Mexican government listened. La Prensa reported on March 13, 1929, that Mexican officials sought to lay the groundwork for the return of such farmers through its purchase of thousands of acres of land in Mexican territory suitable for colonization. Many Mexican families harvesting cotton in Texas would repatriate with government assistance to work in San Martin, a 150,000-acre tract, according to Mexican Secretary of Agriculture Marte R. Gómez.

La Prensa promoted a noble view of repatriates through news reports and opinion content that highlighted the skills, ideas, and financial resources that Mexicans returning from the United States might offer their homeland. After the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution and the Cristero Rebellion, the bloody battle between defenders of the Roman Catholic Church and the Mexican government that led to the assassination of President-elect Alvaro Obregón in 1928, the time to rebuild the country seemed at hand. But Mexico, like the rest of the world, had yet another foe to fight: the Great Depression.

Pariah Frame: The “Plague” of Repatriates

Idealized optimism about the return of highly skilled Mexicans collided with unforgiving reality. Repatriation was more often reported as a parable of pain in La Prensa, and occasionally the repatriates were depicted as pariahs, not proud compatriots. These stories used terms such as “lamentable,” “pathetic,” “sad,” “poor,” “oppressed,” “starving,” “suffering,” “painful,” and “miserable,” among others, to describe the plight of repatriates.

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23 “Repatriación de Mexicanos para Labores de Campo,” La Prensa, April 13, 1929, 10.

of the hapless repatriates. These stories tended to show Mexicans as pitiful and powerless, and sometimes the object of police and border patrol harassment or community scorn. The dichotomous characterization, as either re-patriot or pariah, is not solely attributable to economic exigencies. As historian Gilbert González noted, repatriation remained a “symbolic expression” and “never assumed a priority status on the agenda of domestic Mexican politics until pressured by US demands.”

The Great Depression had rocked Mexico like an eruption of the volcano Popocatépetl, the snow-capped, 17,887-foot smoking mountain located 45 miles southeast of Mexico City. The economic disruption rattled the country as it struggled to re-order itself in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. Mexican exports fell dramatically, particularly in the petroleum and mining sectors, and the national income fell 25 percent from 1929 to 1933. Throughout Mexico, factories shut down, from mines in Sonora to breweries in Toluca and textile mills in other cities. As Mexican historian Ramón Eduardo Ruiz put it, “Armies of jobless begged for work, while the return of Mexicans expelled from the United States exacerbated their plight.”


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 386, 387.
This was true despite official pronouncements from Mexico’s Secretary of Industry and Labor, Ramón de Negri, who promised “there will be work for everyone,” including “Mexicans returning from the United States,” La Prensa reported. President Portes Gil was studying solutions to the unemployment problem, including the creation of employee-run businesses operating under government supervision, de Negri stated in the September 26, 1929, La Prensa news story. However, the scene was less promising a month later as Mexicans were “returning sad and starving,” in caravans and on foot, “through the inhospitable desert of Northern Mexico,” La Prensa reported on November 2, 1929.

Many repatriates, jobless and without resources in the United States, were returning on their own. Others had been deported after they were unable to provide immigration authorities with documentation required under the new, rigorously enforced immigration law. “It would be impossible to describe in a few lines the suffering of these poor and oppressed people,” La Prensa stated. As the repatriates and deportees

31 Protección a los Obreros Repatriados,” La Prensa, September 26, 1929, 2.

32 Ibid.

33 “Los Mexicanos Deportados Regresan a Sus Hogares Hambrientos y Tristes,” La Prensa, November 2, 1929, 5.

34 Ibid. See also, “Nueva Ley sobre Registros de Nacimientos,” La Prensa, July 20, 1929, 4. This was particularly true for births, which state residents (Mexicans prominently among them) had not always diligently registered. In 1929, the Texas legislature strengthened birth registration laws, requiring the documents to be filed in municipal offices, not in health departments. San Antonio’s municipal secretary, Fred Fries, said Mexicans were the last likely to register their children’s births. “There are many people who are thirty or forty years old who allege they are San Antonio natives, but they can’t prove that easily because the corresponding registration does not exist.”

35 Ibid.
travelled south on foot and in caravans, they found Mexico’s “production centers paralyzed” and many Mexicans starving, the article continued.

They also encountered the police outside Saltillo, Mexico, who were there to monitor them, not to lend them aid. The police patrolled a highway crossroads north of Saltillo to “safeguard the city from the plague” of repatriates, the November 2, 1929, article stated, without attributing the quote. This was just the beginning. A week later, La Prensa reported that “An interminable caravan of fellow citizen laborers have been passing morning and afternoon through the Port of Laredo, headed toward the interior of the Mexican Republic.”

It was not the first time the police harassment aspect of the pariah frame surfaced in La Prensa’s coverage of out-of-work Mexican laborers. Four months earlier, in a front-page July 7, 1929 story, La Prensa warned that the Chamber of Commerce of an undisclosed town outside San Antonio persistently recruited Mexican cotton pickers before the crop was ready. The workers were forced to borrow against future wages for provisions and were becoming deeply in debt to the growers as they waited for harvest time. Many recruits gave up and walked back to San Antonio, the article stated.

They joined “enormous groups” of laborers who congregated daily in the city’s Milam Park. Under the shadow of the statue of Ben Milam, a Texas revolutionary who rallied forces against the Mexican siege of San Antonio, the jobless Mexicans awaited

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36 “Numerosas Compatriotas Trabajadores pasan para México,” La Prensa, November 9, 1929.

37 “Perjuicios a Braceros Mexicanos,” La Prensa, July 6, 1929, 1.

38 Ibid.
opportunities. City police occasionally forced them out as they swept the park of “vagrants,” and “filled the jails with the unemployed,” La Prensa wrote in an article that evinced the pariah frame. The “bitterly disillusioned” workers became so wary of out-of-town recruiters that they turned down railroad work that paid $2.25 a day without food, or a $1.25 with food, for fear that they would only wind up destitute and away from home.

Consequently, “hundreds of laborers” fled to Mexico in “confusion,” fearing deportation, the Express reported. The local Immigration Service office “was deluged with countless inquiries” about the new federal registration law, which permitted immigrants who had entered the country prior to March 3, 1921, the opportunity to become legal residents and ultimately apply for citizenship. William A. Whalen, the local Immigration Service district director, blamed “agitators who have taken advantage of the confusion” for helping push some Mexicans to leave, the Express reported in a June 20, 1929, article.

Complicating the issue was the National Origins Law, a 1924 piece of legislation that was not put into effect until June 1929. That quota law changed the numbers of immigrants permitted to enter legally from European countries, and particularly impeded

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40 “Perjuicios,” La Prensa, July 6, 1929, 1.

41 Ibid.


43 Ibid.
emigrants from southern and eastern European countries. But the law included no quotas for Western Hemisphere nations. In a page-one story, the Express quoted US Rep. John C. Box, an ardent immigration restrictionist, who said the origins law “affects in no way Mexican immigration.” Box had strongly opposed naturalization bills that would have made it easier for Mexicans, and “probably hundreds of thousands” of other immigrants to obtain citizenship. Instead, Box said he would continue to fight for legislation to restrict Mexican immigration, conjecturing that Mexicans were fleeing because they were unable to provide documentation to legalize their status.

The Express reported that Mexicans had reason to fear: “Rumors concerning incoming restrictions against Mexico along the border, which have created near panics among the Mexican laborers, causing them to make hurried departures, much to the despair of American employers, are not without some foundation.”

The Express went on to note that the Coolidge Administration had taken two recent actions to curb legal and illegal Mexican immigration. In the first instance, in January 1929, Coolidge had instructed US consuls general to strictly adhere to visa and passport requirements. The move halved the number of Mexicans that were legally admitted in 1929 in comparison to 1928 figures. The second move was a law passed in March 1929

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45 “Mexican Exodus Held Groundless by Quota Backer,” San Antonio Express, July 2, 1929, 1.


47 “Mexican Exodus Held Groundless,” San Antonio Express, July 2, 1929, 1.

48 Ibid. The San Antonio Express quoted the following State Department figures illustrating the decrease numbers of Mexicans granted legal US entry: In January 1929, there were 2,700 entries
that for the first time made entering the United States illegally a federal crime, punishable by a $1,000 fine or a year in prison, or both. “Although this has been the law since last March, many apparently believe it was to go into effect today,” the *Express* stated.49 The article included no quotes from Mexican immigrants or their employers attesting to the direct role the law played in spurring the impetus. The phrase “much to the despair of their employers” suggests that businesses reliant on Mexican labor made the link between the law and the flight of their workers to Mexico. As players in the dominant white power structure, businessmen would also have been better able than Mexican workers to bring their concerns to a mainstream newspaper and influence its coverage.

The stepped-up enforcement had repercussions for San Antonio, particularly when the Eagle Pass, Texas, jail overfilled and the apprehended Mexicans were transported 142 miles to less crowded San Antonio facilities.50 In news coverage demonstrating the pariah frame, the *Express* described the San Antonio federal court appearance of one dozen Mexicans convicted of illegally entering the United States.51

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compared to 3,500 in 1928; February 1929, 2,800 versus 4,100 for 1928; March 1929, 1,800 versus 6,000 in 1928; April 1929, 2,500 versus 6,300 in 1928. See, also Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 61. Daniels describes the stringent application of the “LPC clause,” or likely to become a public charge clause. Applicants would be denied a visa or passport if they stated they had no job lined up in the United States. They would also be denied if they did, under a rule that prohibited “contract labor.” Daniels described this as an “administrative hinge,” which was first used against Mexicans beginning in 1928, and then picked up by Hoover and extended to other nationalities as the Depression progressed.

49 Ibid.


51 Ibid.
Federal Judge Charles A. Boynton sentenced the men to prison, asking them to return to Mexico after serving their terms and inform their countrymen of their punishment.

The Indian-Mexican defendants, small-statured, open-faced men in overalls who waded the Rio Grande in search of work, chorused “Si, senor!” to his request. “No, senor!” to the declaration that the court was sure they would not violate the law again, and “Muchas gracias!” to his expression of good wishes as they retraced their steps to prison. Not one could speak English, and practically all were illiterate in their own language.52

The Express article noted that one defendant, Manuel Zuniga, had “the most unique reason” for entering the country. Zuniga told the judge: “I came across to the United States to earn money to take out my passport.”53

In another example of the pariah frame, a September 18, 1929, Express story reported about how some “wet” immigrants who “waded across the river” into the United States give themselves away to immigration officers because “they had not been in this country long enough to learn to properly handle American clothing.”54 Several illegal immigrants were apprehended “because of their obvious unfamiliarity with shoes.”55 The article attributed these clues to William A. Whalen, who headed San Antonio’s federal immigration office.

One apprehended immigrant had been sent a letter with detailed instructions on comportment necessary to evade immigration authorities. “You must,” the letter read in part, “be very careful to wash your ears and your hands. You must wear American

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 “‘Wet’ Immigrants Get Mail Course From Relatives Here on How to Duck Law After Arrival,” San Antonio Express, September 18, 1929, 7.
55 Ibid.
clothes and be sure to act like you were used to wearing shoes.”\textsuperscript{56} The letter-writer forgot to include information about neckwear, which became the undoing of the immigrant. “He came into Texas wearing a red necktie draped across his shoulders like a serape and was picked up.”\textsuperscript{57}

Government officials often characterized Mexican immigrants as pariahs, irrespective of whether they were repatriates or expatriates, or which side of the border they ventured, the news coverage in both newspapers showed. The pariah frame coverage of the repatriates’ reception in Mexico reflected observations of the American consul at Saltillo, who described municipal authorities there as “noticeably” anxious for the charity-dependent repatriates to move on. Monterrey, Mexico, which had gone bankrupt supporting the repatriates, exhibited “a similar policy,” he stated.\textsuperscript{58}

González, writing in his book, \textit{Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing}, asserted that repatriation as a Mexican policy amounted to little more than an opportunity to generate the rhetoric of revolutionary nationalism.\textsuperscript{59} “High ranking officials were known to have looked unfavorably upon repatriates and considered them undesirable, something akin to unwanted aliens,” González wrote. \textsuperscript{60} While Mexican government officials grappled gracelessly with a policy that was at least in part foisted on them by the United

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\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} González, \textit{Mexican Consuls}, 33.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 31-32.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 32.
States government, ordinary Mexicans and Mexican Americans did what they could on
their own to assist their compatriots.

**Good-Citizen Frame: An Honor Roll of Donors**

Repatriation stories were not framed exclusively in terms of the “unfortunates”
who left the United States. News articles sometimes had a dual good-citizenship frame
that emphasized the charitable work of Mexican civic associations in the United States,
which raised funds and donated clothing and food to assist impoverished returning
Mexicans. As Depression-era repatriation developed as an issue in 1929 news coverage,
stories about related Mexican community self-help efforts also appeared in *La Prensa*. As
González noted, US-instigated repatriation programs were made more effective with
Mexican government support, including from US-based consuls.⁶¹ However, the latter
did not act alone. Mexican consuls were often successful because they were able to enlist
community support, as the good-citizen frame showed. Heeding a call from the local
Mexican consul general in Hidalgo, Texas, for instance, local Mexican Blue Cross
groups, Masonic lodges, and woodcutters, among others, raised $200 to help 100
Mexican, men, women, and children repatriate to Mexico, *La Prensa* reported on May 9,
1929.⁶² The US Border Patrol had apprehended the Mexicans and detained them in an
Edinburgh, Texas, jail under deportation orders because they lacked necessary
documents.⁶³ The civic group bargained with the Mexican National Railroad Commission
and obtained a 50 percent discount on their railroad tickets to return to Mexico. *La

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⁶³ Ibid.
*Prensa* listed the deported repatriates by name, including the children, along with the cost of their respective tickets, as though the families had made the honor roll. Listing the costs also demonstrated the lengths the Mexican community was willing to go to support down-on-their-luck compatriots.64

*La Prensa’s* evolving good-citizen frame coverage presented a Mexican and Mexican American community with agency and solidarity. The appearance of such stories gave credence and legitimacy to the idea and power of the Mexican community. News coverage defined the Mexican and Mexican American “community,” and in so doing, leaders emerged, agendas took shape, and at least some goals were achieved. Governments on both sides of the border might enforce, imprison, deport, tax, regulate, legitimate, and impose all manner of restrictions and requirements. But electing to assist, volunteering time, donating services, and giving what little money and resources they might have, were ways that ordinary Mexican Americans and Mexicans might support one another, and in so doing, support themselves. Just as newspapers kept readers abreast of opportunities to make a civic contribution, it also served as a source for official help and advice.

**Prescriptive Frame: News the Mexican Community Could Use**

Stories that offered counsel, warnings, advice, and other information that helped Mexicans understand what was expected of them whether they remained in the United States or repatriated, voluntarily or otherwise, fit a prescriptive frame. Some prescriptions were not directed at the Mexican community, but at authorities either in the United State or Mexico, as was often the case in opinion pieces.

64 Ibid.
La Prensa wrote sympathetically about the plight of working class and poor Mexicans in San Antonio during the period. But the paper went beyond pointing out problems; it also prescribed solutions. Newspaper editors and owners, including those of the ethnic press, have always been community builders and La Prensa’s publisher, Ignacio Lozano, was no different.65 One of Lozano’s early twentieth-century peers, Carlo Barsotti, founder of New York’s Italian newspaper, Il Progresso, exemplified this role. Barsotti used his press to campaign for funds to build monuments to Italian pioneers, such as the explorers Giovanni da Verrazano and Christopher Columbus.66 In San Antonio, Mexicans might claim many memorials, from the Alamo to the Governor’s Palace, without trying. Lozano focused not on material constructions of remembrance, but on then-current human needs of the ailing community. These were myriad, but La Prensa prescribed a figural and literal remedy to the suffering: a health clinic dedicated to Mexicans.

Yet La Prensa’s campaign to build the Mexican Clinic, as it was called, was not universally applauded. At least one local Mexican reader complained to the newspaper that efforts such as the Mexican Clinic made life easier for Mexicans in San Antonio and would deter repatriation. Uranga defended the founding of the clinic, pointing out in a February 16, 1929, column that many Mexicans wanted to return to their homeland, but


were waiting until they found a possibility for “work, liberty, and security” in Mexico.\textsuperscript{67}

In the meantime, “the Mexican colony was filled with illness and miseries that needed tending right away,” Uranga wrote.\textsuperscript{68} Most importantly, Uranga extended the notion of what was meant by the Mexican community:

Some Mexicans will always remain here [the United States]. And these people, along with thousands of North Americans of Mexican origin, residing in Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, California, etc., will always be members of our same race, of the Hispanoamerican race that in this continent has a great future, although we may be distant, although a border may divide us geographically and politically, we will not be divided in the spiritual, in the sentimental, in the traditional, in the language and in religion; their past and ours are the same; their future and our future are also the same; because they and we have been, are actually now, and will always be brothers, in the fraternity of our language and blood. For them and for us, we founded the Clinic.

Uranga closed his column writing “There will always be Mexicans in the United States, whether temporarily or permanently based. Even though some anti-Mexicanists and anti-foreignerists shout furiously for the removal and the exclusion . . . they will not achieve it because it is no longer possible in our century.”

Mexican Clinic or not, Mexicans did repatriate. Early in 1929, \textit{La Prensa} was already publishing prescriptive articles that aimed to give returning Mexicans as much information as possible about the repatriation process. One front-page news story in this prescriptive frame informed its readers of potential impending improvements to the Mexican government’s customs procedures. “It appeared that the Mexican government would seriously address problems created by the need to repatriate so many countrymen found in bad straits in the United States.”\textsuperscript{69} Among other things, the article explained that

\textsuperscript{67} Rodolfo Uranga, “Glosario del Dia,” \textit{La Prensa}, February 16, 1929, 1, 10.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69} Facilidades para la Repatriación,” \textit{La Prensa}, February 27, 1929, 1.
Mexico’s secretary of housing had ordered customs officers on the border to permit repatriates to bring their household goods and work tools into the country duty-free.\textsuperscript{70}

But returning to Mexico was not as simple as packing a suitcase and boarding a train, or walking across the border. On March 17, 1929, \textit{La Prensa} warned Mexicans planning to return that they must first obtain a certificate of repatriation from their local Mexican consul general or face delays at the border.\textsuperscript{71} Most repatriates at the time lacked such certificates. Moreover, \textit{coyotes}, that is, criminals who exploited migrating Mexicans, often enticed or entrapped them into taking automobiles and other goods illegally across the border using their duty-free status.\textsuperscript{72} Others repatriates lacked resources to make the trip, leading the Mexican consuls general in San Antonio and El Paso to bargain for a 50 percent discount for indigent Mexican returnees.\textsuperscript{73} \textit{La Prensa} broke the news in a page-one story on November 6, 1929, informing its readers that they could obtain half-price tickets from the Southern Pacific Lines, the Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railway Co., and the Panhandle and Santa Fe Railway Co.\textsuperscript{74}

In another example of the prescriptive frame, some Mexicans living in the United States politically mobilized to obtain government support for repatriates. A California-based group of “Vasconcelistas,” or followers of Mexican presidential candidate José

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} “Los Mexicanos que Deseen Repatriarse Deben Obtener Certificado de Residencia,” \textit{La Prensa}, March 17, 1929, 8.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} “Las CIAS. Ferrocarrileras dan Facilidades a todos los Repatriados Pobres,” \textit{La Prensa}, November 6, 1929, 1.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Vasconcelos, urged the noted intellectual to formulate a “methodical repatriation plan” that would place returning Mexicans in irrigated agricultural colonies to avoid inflating the number of jobless already in Mexico. For Mexicans based in the United States, Vasconcelos, if elected, should establish government-funded language and cultural programs to teach grammatical Spanish to Mexican youth, the group urged. They also sought more protection for Mexican women, who were “the most exploited” in the United States, they asserted.

Some stories blended frames, including one in which the prescription punctured the notion that Mexico needed its most adept, heroic farmers living in the United States to return. For Mexican repatriation to succeed, Mexico should forget about attracting former residents who had acquired advanced agricultural techniques and modern farm equipment, the agronomist M. R. Vidal Jr., advised in a January 27, 1929, article in *La Prensa*. “Our rural economy is one thing and that of the United States is another,” Vidal wrote. The notion that US-trained Mexican farmers were the antidote for Mexico’s ailing agricultural sector was a “very frequent story in the press,” Vidal noted. “But it is false.”

Vidal’s concerns manifested in both the prescriptive and financial frames. Much of Mexico’s farmland would not permit the use of fertilizers and heavy equipment that

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75 “Un Plan Vasconcelista a Favor de los Mexicanos que Residen en este Pais,” *La Prensa*, April 12, 1929, 2.

76 Ibid.


78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.
were more suited to US agriculture. Vidal wrote that instead of reclaiming its best and brightest, Mexico should focus on recalling its less sophisticated day laborers from the United States.\(^80\) Mexican presidential candidate Pascual Ortiz Rubio articulated similar concerns in his political convention speech, which \textit{La Prensa} published March 6, 1929.\(^81\) Ortiz Rubio called for a stepped-up modern irrigation program and a modernized agricultural sector as the only way to successfully integrate repatriated Mexicans in the farm economy.

The business community also offered prescriptions, often exhorting the government to change its immigration policy. As the number of Mexican immigrants began dwindling, business also took action to protect and defend Mexican workers in the United States. The \textit{Express} reported that the executive committee of the state’s sheep and goat industry association passed a resolution condemning Federal authorities for “harsh practices” and for using “various stratagems to lure Mexicans to return to their native country.”\(^82\) Judge C. C. Belcher of Del Rio, Texas, said the “tactics . . . serve to show just how undesirable the Box bill would be.”\(^83\) Similar concerns roiled the rest of the borderlands and precipitated organized business efforts to “prevent a serious shortage of labor in this section,” the \textit{Express} reported on May 11, 1929.\(^84\)

\(^80\) Ibid.
\(^81\) “P. Ortiz Rubio Ofrece Seguir la Politica de Calles y Obregón,” \textit{La Prensa}, March 6, 1929, 5.
\(^83\) Ibid.
City and regional business groups across south Texas aggressively organized to guide and protect their Mexican workforce—and thereby, their harvests and profits. The Laredo Chamber of Commerce sent out thousands of bulletins outlining steps necessary to help Mexicans in the country become legal residents and the Valley Chamber of Commerce reproduced thousands more as communities organized meetings with Mexican workers, according to a May 11, 1929, *Express* story.\(^85\) In Brownsville, the Mexican consul general and the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce instructed about 500 local Mexicans how to legally remain in the United States, the *Express* reported.\(^86\) By July 20, 1929, J. E. Bell, the secretary of the San Benito Chamber of Commerce, exhorted the local Kiwanis Club that 25,000 Mexicans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley were at risk for deportation “and quick action must be taken . . . to save this labor for the Valley.”\(^87\)

Meanwhile, *La Prensa* offered the front-page prescription: “It is indispensable that Mexicans who wish to enter the United States and those who already entered illegally, understand the new law that went into effect last March 4.”\(^88\) The article described the fines and penalties for illegal entry and urged Mexicans to pay the passport fees and enter the United States at official border checkpoints, presenting the necessary documents. Otherwise, Mexicans risked deportation, a predicament that faced at least

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\(^85\) Ibid.

\(^86\) Ibid.

\(^87\) “25,000 Mexicans May be Deported,” *San Antonio Express*, July 20, 1921, 11.

\(^88\) “Muchos Mexicanos son Capturados en el Valle por no tener Pasaporte,” *La Prensa*, April 19, 1929, 1.
forty Mexicans already apprehended and imprisoned in Harlingen, Texas, for swimming across the river into the United States.

The *Express* also reported stories that offered prescriptions directly to Mexicans. A November 14, 1929, news story relayed a warning from the Mexican Embassy in Washington to Mexicans living in Texas. The Embassy advised Mexicans to refuse immigration officers entry into their homes unless they wielded search warrants. The advisory came after Enrique Santibañez, the Mexican consul general in San Antonio, forwarded to the embassy “numerous alleged complaints, especially from the Lower Rio Grande Valley, that border patrol inspectors were forcibly entering homes in search of illegally immigrated Mexicans,” the article stated. The *Express* elicited comment from William A. Whalen, district supervisor of immigration in San Antonio, who said, “the severe procedure of the border patrol has been modified.”

One story of such abuse, published November 6, 1929, involved Emilio Martinez, a 14-year-old who was arrested by the border patrol while working in Weslaco, Texas. Martinez was held in jail for three months, even though he had a birth certificate stating he was an American citizen. The border patrol officers contended he had been born in Reynosa, Mexico. The case was only resolved through the intervention of Col. Samuel A. Robertson, the railroad builder and founder of San Benito, Texas. Learning of the boy’s

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89 “Mexico Protests Illegal Search,” *San Antonio Express*, November 14, 1929, 1A.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 “Mexican Youth Freed by Court,” *San Antonio Express*, November 6, 1929, 19.
situation during a border fact-finding trip by F. Stuart Fitzpatrick of the US Chamber of Commerce, Robertson had himself appointed the boy’s guardian. 93

The Great Depression did not officially start until August, the third-quarter of 1929. 94 Yet news in the prescriptive frame showed a sense of emergency already pervaded business and government at this early stage of the economic recession. *La Prensa*’s prescriptive reportage carried its own urgency. In keeping with the practices of the ethnic press it did more than simply pass along useful advice and information, the newspaper’s management not only prescribed, but also actively instigated solutions, as in the case of the Mexican Clinic. 95 On the other hand, the prescriptive news frame in the *Express* strikingly illustrated the extent to which restrictive US government immigration policy threatened the iron triangle of business interests: the agricultural sector, railroads, and banking, all of which had a stake in efficient, low-cost labor. The advice and legal prescriptions the *Express* hastened to offer Mexican workers were an effort to protect their own economic interests as well.

**Financial Frame: The Burden and Bounty of Mexican Immigrants**

News coverage in the financial frame conceived Mexican labor as integral to the financial success of the southwestern economy, if not that of the nation. The financial frame often argued that Mexicans were “indispensable,” and “needed,” particularly in

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farming, ranching and industrial work. Conversely, and dichotomously, some articles in the financial frame characterized Mexicans as, either “cheap” laborers who undermined the American wage, or as a drain on public resources.

If *La Prensa*’s English-language counterpart had any idea of the enormity of the Mexican repatriation that was to come, they did not disclose it to their readers in 1929. The *Express* used the term repatriation in a single one-paragraph item, which ran on July 18, 1929. The article was published below the fold and near the fine print stock tables. If it was news at all, it was business news. The AP story, datelined Mexico City, noted that representatives of Texas Mexicans had arrived in the Mexican capital to negotiate with President Portes Gil for aid in obtaining agricultural land.96 *La Prensa* published the identical story—on its front page.97

The contribution of Mexican laborers to US farming constituted a core argument often manifested in the financial frame. A *La Prensa* news analysis honed in on its inherent contradictions. “One view classified Mexicans as undesirable, and this view led to legislative efforts to restrict Mexican immigration,” wrote Andrés Landa y Piña, head of the Mexican Migration Department’s technical section, in an October 11, 1929, article.98 “The other viewpoint, on the contrary, sought to emphasize that the Mexican worker was irreplaceable, showing that agriculture and industry in a certain region of the


97 “Repatriación de Mexicanos se llevará a cabo si se obtienen Facilidades y Ayuda de Portes,” *La Prensa*, July 18, 1929, 1.

United States would be seriously hurt if the Mexican labor contingent were absent.”

Thus, news coverage framed Mexican immigrants dichotomously: they were wanted, yet unwanted, irreplaceable and undesirable.

Maintaining a Mexican workforce in the United States was a paramount concern for the San Antonio Express in 1929, even if Mexican repatriation was not. “Virtual Exclusion is Not Sensible ‘Restriction,’” the Express admonished in a February 1, 1929, editorial that welcomed the House Committee on Immigration’s failure to pass the Box bill out of committee. “The [Mexican] influx can be kept within proper bounds” with literacy and health tests, as Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg asserted, the editorial stated. Similarly, La Prensa published a page-one story on January 26, 1929, that led with the US State Department’s view that a Mexican immigration quota was unnecessary because vigorous enforcement had effectively blocked entrants from south of the border. The Express, however, took up the cause of “farmers, cattlemen, truck-growers, orchardists and other employers of seasonable labor throughout the Southwest,” all of whom had a “hope that the tests . . . will not keep out indispensable workers.”

Southwestern agribusiness, railroad and banking interests were not alone in viewing quota restrictions through a financial frame. Quota proponents also mustered commercial and labor interests to their side and linked the cause of keeping Mexicans out

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99 Ibid.

100 “Virtual Exclusion is Not Sensible ‘Restriction,’” San Antonio Express, February 1, 1929, 12.

101 Ibid.

102 “Disminuye la Inmigración Mexicana a Estados Unidos,” La Prensa, 1.

103 Ibid.
of the country with patriotism. New York restrictionist Demarest Lloyd filed 500 petitions endorsing Mexican quota restrictions with the US Senate Committee on Immigration, the *Express* reported on January 19, 1929. Lloyd collected more than 30,000 signatures representing some “50 patriotic and American organizations,” including the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

“The astonishing thing about these petitions is that, in most instances, the persons circulating them were business men or women and the signatures are largely those of business men and women,” Lloyd said. Among these was the “general superintendent of one of the largest corporations in the United States,” who turned in 200 signatures from company officers and employees. News of Lloyd’s anti-Mexican immigration petitions merited page-six coverage in the *Express*. For *La Prensa*, however, Lloyd was front-page news.

Arguments in the financial frame that opposed Mexican immigration were flag-draped. Yet, notions of patriotism gave restrictionists a patina of nobility; labor’s discourse was less lofty. This was illustrated in a May 25, 1929, *La Prensa* story headlined: “The Undersecretary of Labor Says We Don’t Like Cheap Workers.”

C. White, the Labor under-secretary, explicitly expressed his antipathy to continued

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104 “30,000 Ask Quota for Mexican Immigrants,” *San Antonio Express*, January 19, 1929, 6.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 “30,000 Personas Piden que se Establezca la Cuota para Mexicanos,” *La Prensa*, January 20, 1929, 1.
Mexican immigration: “This country doesn’t have anything cheap, not its institutions, not its traditions, not its schools, not its progress; consequently we don’t want anything cheap, not even labor.”

Although commercial interests in the South and West Texas border areas were generally opposed to the Box bill, the view was not monolithic. *La Prensa* gave prominent Box bill supporter O. W. Killam, president of the South Texas Chamber of Commerce, page-one play on January 30, 1929. “Declaring that the prosperity of South Texas depends on the lower class is a grave error, in my conception . . . If there is no limit or Mexican immigration to South Texas continues, educational and welfare spending will be a heavy burden on the American population.”

As 1929 unfolded, *Express* news coverage in the financial frame depicted the Texas agribusiness and ranching industries increasingly in turmoil over Box and the various efforts to bar Mexican laborers from the country. The Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers’ Association “consistently opposed” the proposed Box bill, reiterating their condemnation in a December 1929, executive committee resolution, the *Express* reported. They added their voice to the Sheep and Goat Raisers’ Association of Texas, who at their meeting in July 1929 had “raked Representative John Box and his pet Mexican immigration quota bill over the coals for nearly three hours,” the *Express* reported.

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109 “De Nuevo Presentara Box la Iniciativa a Contra la Inmigración de Mexicanos,” *La Prensa*, January 30, 1929, 1.


111 “Box and His Bill Scored At Del Rio,” *San Antonio Express*, August 1, 1929, 12.
US Rep. Claude Hudspeth attended the Sheep and Goat Raisers’ meeting and explained Box’s position, according to the August 1, 1929, *Express* story. “John Box,” Hudspeth said, “is from East Texas, where there is plenty of negro [sic] labor. Consequently he is for the Box bill.”

Hudspeth made it clear that nothing less than a full public relations campaign was needed to fight the restrictive legislation, and the industry association’s resolution “couched in terms as strong as they see fit” against the Box bill was merely the first step, Hudspeth stated. “I believe we can get the press of the Nation [sic] to wake up and offset some of the slanderous statements from the Box bill camp.”

Several Texas chambers of commerce pressed the United States Chamber of Commerce in Washington to investigate the issue, leading to a meeting in October 1929, in San Antonio between F. Stuart Fitzpatrick, manager of the DC-based chamber’s civic development department, and Felipe Canales, Mexico’s under-secretary for the interior, the *Express* reported on October 22, 1929. Fitzpatrick discovered divided sentiment in San Antonio. Farmers were generally opposed to the Box bill, as were the women’s clubs of San Antonio. The American Federation of Labor favored curbing Mexican immigration, a view reinforced by W. L. Hoefgen, editor of the *Weekly Dispatch*, San Antonio’s union newspaper. Some prominent, unnamed local businessmen also told

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112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.


115 “Immigration Quota Quiz Shifts to Brownsville,” the *San Antonio Express*, October 23, 1929, 2.
Fitzpatrick they favored the Box bill even though they expected it might make it harder for them to do business.\textsuperscript{116}

The dichotomous financial frame was rooted in separate visions of the political economy. Most southwest Texas ranchers and farmers, as well as railroad and banking interests, viewed the Mexican laborer as the lynchpin of the agricultural and industrial sectors. Organized labor and some other business interests viewed Mexican labor as a financial threat, whereas some patriotic organizations cast Mexicans as a threat to America. This latter depiction might seem more of a cultural frame, than a financial one. However, business support for Mexican quota legislation enabled Demarest Lloyd and other restrictionists to cloak their arguments in credibility. For those who opposed deportation, repatriation, or any kind of restriction of Mexican immigration, financial arguments were only one way to frame the issue. Diplomacy, neighborliness, and American friendship with Mexico represented others.

\textit{Somos Amigos/We are Friends Frame: Sharing the Hope of Prosperity}

“Amity,” “understanding,” “friendship,” and “comrades,” were among the watchwords of the \textit{somos amigos/we are friends frame}. This news frame couched an understanding of the role of the Mexican in US society under the rubric of diplomacy and the proper relationship between neighboring countries on friendly terms. The \textit{Express} exhibited this frame in its editorial opposition to the Box bill. The newspaper opined that House inaction would put more decision-making authority into the hands of President Hoover “who . . . is concerned with promoting understanding among New World

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
peoples.”\textsuperscript{117} The newspaper’s position echoed its January editorial, which noted that Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg viewed the Box bill as “a serious threat to international amity.”\textsuperscript{118}

The \textit{Express} consistently provided coverage of the Box bill in this frame, despite, as the newspaper noted, a divided Texas delegation that mostly favored the bill.\textsuperscript{119} In so doing, the \textit{Express} represented its Southwest Texas constituency, the bankers, the railroads, and the larger-scale growers for whom San Antonio was a hub. In an August 24, 1929, Washington-dateline story the newspaper argued that the Box bill faced even stiffer opposition in Congress than it had previously.\textsuperscript{120} Administrative actions and new laws had successfully restricted immigration “without causing the bad feelings in South and Central America the proposed Mexican quota law would cause,” the story stated.\textsuperscript{121} Moreover, the \textit{Express} reported that Mexican immigration to Texas decreased more than a third to 24,930 in fiscal year 1929 from 36,608 in 1928. Meanwhile, 5,311 Mexicans emigrated from Texas to Mexico in 1929, 55 percent more than in 1928, when 2,352 returned.\textsuperscript{122}

Similarly, a subsequent Washington-dateline story emphasized “agitation for loosening of the present restriction on the ground that many Mexicans who have lived in

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\item \textsuperscript{117} “Virtual Exclusion is Not Sensible ‘Restriction,’” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 1, 1929, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Preferable to Quota Basis for New World Immigration, \textit{San Antonio Express}, January 19, 1929, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{119} “Opposition to Box Bill Grows,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, August 24, 1929, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 4.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Texas and other Southwestern states for many years, and have made good citizens, are being deported.”¹²³ The article also noted allegations that Texas-born Mexicans were being deported, which the Immigration Service denied. This story did not equate citizenship with labor, positing simply that Mexicans of long-standing US residence should be considered citizens. The sub rosa argument, however, suggested that Mexicans with significant tenure in Texas were self-supporting and contributors to the economy.

La Prensa also emphasized the somos amigos/we are friends frame, particularly in stories that dealt with diplomatic aspects of immigration policy. A January 19, 1929, front-page story related that US consuls general would soon meet in Mexico to discuss the new US State Department policy to tighten passport requirements for Mexicans seeking US entry. Unlike the Box bill, the State Department plan would restrict Mexican immigration in “a way that would not destroy the good relations that existed with Mexico.”¹²⁴

The Express editorial page blended the somos amigos/we are friends frame with the financial frame. A prime example was an August 25, 1929, editorial, which rued the prospect that Box, ranking minority member on the House Committee of Immigration, would reintroduce his bill.¹²⁵ The Express editorialist foresaw that in a new debate “some speaker will utter ill-considered words, which will create a bad impression among New World peoples.”¹²⁶ Passage of the Box bill would make Hoover’s recent goodwill tour of


¹²⁴ “Habra una Conferencia de Consules Americanos,” La Prensa, January 19, 1929, 1.

¹²⁵ “Added Reasons for Turning Down the Box Bill,” San Antonio Express, August 25, 1929, 8.

¹²⁶ Ibid.
the Americas seem a hollow gesture and impede commercial relations. “Besides, the intensely practical considerations which moved Texas market gardeners, cotton farmers, and stockmen to oppose the Box bill remain unchanged.” Furthermore, the Box bill “would create a disastrous labor shortage,” and “advocates of the measure never have pointed to any adequate, dependable substitute supply.”

Just two months later, on October 27, 1929, the short supply of workers made page one in an *Express* story headlined: “Immigration Law Begins to Pinch Southwest Farms.”

The *somos amigos/we are friends* frame also had a patriotic element, in which the local American Legion, in contrast to the national organization, expressed solidarity with Mexicans. The Sam Jackson American Legion post in San Benito, Texas, was a prime example. The legionnaires invoked the collective memory of their forebears’ treatment by the English in eighteenth century Canada, and their own more recent memory of serving in European combat with Mexicans. The post wrote an open letter to area Mexican workers, advising them to remain “with us, your friends,” rather than flee the United States in fear.

In the letter, which *La Prensa* published September 17, 1929, the Sam Jackson legionnaires said they acted with concern for the economy and out of friendship. “We

[127]Ibid.

[128]“Immigration Law Begins to Pinch Southwest Farms,” *San Antonio Express*, October 27, 1929, 1.

[129]“En Defensa del Bracero Mexicano,” *La Prensa*, September 17, 1929, 1. The San Benito legionnaires defense of the Mexican community was predicated, at least in part, on the Mexicans’ participation in military service, which historically has been linked with notions of citizenship. See for instance, James Burk, “Citizenship Status and Military Service: The Quest for Inclusion by Minorities and Conscientious Objectors,” *Armed Forces & Society* 21, no. 4 (June 1995): 503-529. Burk argues that the link between military service and citizenship was strongest in the United States prior to World War II.
recall that some of your sons were our comrades in the World War,” they wrote. “We will fight for your rights with the same vigor that we fought against the German Kaiser . . . ,” the letter stated. But the Sam Jackson American legionnaires had an even more profound sense of history that compelled them to take action:

The way the immigration law is interpreted leads the government to commit an injustice as grave as the English government did in 1755, when it deported French Canadians to Louisiana. We, as American Legion members, can never forget that event because some of us are descended from those Frenchmen. We can’t permit our government to commit a similar stupidity.

The legionnaires urged the Mexicans to “stay calm, plant their crops and keep their children enrolled in the schools of our country.” The school district director, World War veteran Frank Pierce, was a fluent Spanish speaker who had grown up in the area with Mexican families and who would treat their children well, the letter said. Moreover, the legionnaires warned that the Mexican government planned to relocate them to land that lacked irrigation. “You could eek out a mere existence in the province you came from, but you would not have the hope of prosperity like you have here.”

The somos amigos/we are friends frame news coverage grounded a defense of Mexican immigrants and laborers in fraternity, proximity, and amity. Driving out Mexican and Mexican American families of long-standing was not only undiplomatic and unneighborly, according to the Express, but it came at tremendous financial cost. La Prensa’s coverage of the San Benito legionnaires took the frame beyond the realm of abstract policy and dramatized the extent to which at least some Anglos and Mexicans

130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
were truly friends. Although Texas was a former confederate state, a place where the black-white race binary was operative, there was no question that friendships between Mexicans and Anglos crossed some form of a color line, however ill-defined.

**The Hierarchy of Color Frame: No Race Other Than the Mexican**

Congressman Box was a highly visible proponent of the idea that Mexicans were an inferior caste relative to whites. A racial palette in which white was the primary color, informed his rationale for curtailing Mexican immigration. Box spoke for eugenics adherents, who had lobbied for restrictions under the aegis of scientific racism that flourished in the Progressive Era. These views helped gain passage of the 1917 Immigration Act, which required immigrants to pass literacy and health tests. They also provided impetus for approval of the 1924 Immigration Act, which imposed quota restrictions based on national origin, limiting southern Europeans’ entry to the United States.

Park Avenue patricians and state university scholars were among the diverse voices arguing that Mexicans were “other” and should also face quota restrictions. New York socialite and zoologist Madison Grant’s 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, categorically proclaimed that races do not blend.\(^\text{133}\) Texas tenant farmers also shared this view, as historian David Montejano shows in his book, *Anglos and Mexicans In the Making of East Texas, 1836-1986*. Academicians joined the fray. University of Texas

sociologist Max Handman, among others, decried the influx of Mexico’s “partly colored races,” suggesting they “may mean trouble.”

In a December 4, 1929, story that depicted Mexicans undesirables on the hierarchy of color, Box announced his plan to reintroduce a new version of his bill to curb the Mexican “menace.” The “influx of Mexican peon laborers and their families into the Southwest” had displaced American industrial and farm workers, he concluded after a fact-finding tour of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and the Mexican border. He found the “Mexican peon population . . . increasing rapidly”:

Injuring farmers and farm life and working and middle class Americans of every group, injuring public health, burdening charities, raising another big race question, aggravating corruption in politics in many localities and increasing every mischief which our immigration laws and policy are designed to check.

Box dismissed business supporters of Mexican immigration as interests that were “temporarily profiting” from their labor, including “large railroads, mining, beet sugar, and other employers, including some cotton manufacturers.”

Some who sought to protect Mexicans from deportation, such as Col. Samuel Robertson, the railroad builder, interpreted the hierarchy of color frame to the benefit of Mexicans. In the June 24, 1929, La Prensa, columnist Rodolfo Uranga lauded Robertson for writing hundreds of identity cards for Mexicans in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Robertson attested to the Mexicans’ long tenure living in Texas and their excellent work


135 “Box Will Revise Immigrant Bill,” San Antonio Express, December 4, 1929, 9.

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.
records. “If in the United States there were more people such as Col. Robertson, Mexicans would have nothing to fear,” he wrote. Uranga quoted Robertson dismissing criticism that Mexicans were a weak, inferior race:

Neither the Americans of the pure white race, Englishmen, Welshmen, Italians, Germans, Irishmen, not even the negroes could have opened these lands, infested with snakes, coyotes and vermin; no race other than the Mexican has been macerated in the hands and legs, by the strong spines of the cactus; these workers of Indian blood are forgotten heroes who have made civilization possible in this Valley.  

Robertson concluded by posing a rhetorical question to the Welsh-born Secretary of Labor Davis. “Why do you try to deport foreigners born in Mexico and not in Wales?”  

The hierarchy of color frame, therefore, was also inherently dichotomous. Whites had long stood atop the hierarchy of color in the United States, while Indians, blacks, Mexicans, and others were stigmatized and ranked as lower order. Countering the view of Box and his fellow eugenicists, who saw Mexicans as innately inferior, others, such as San Benito’s Robertson, recognized that Mexican labor made the southwest viable.  

Box’s views were reported in both the Express and La Prensa, but only La Prensa chronicled Robertson’s praise of the Mexicans. In showcasing this defense of the Mexican people on page one, La Prensa actively fought discrimination and sought to boost community morale, once again fulfilling a typical advocate role of the Spanish-

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138 “Glosario del Dia,” La Prensa, June 24, 1929, 1, 8.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 For more on Box and his views about the Mexican place in the hierarchy of color, see, Neil Foley, The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture (1997; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), especially pages 40-63.
language and ethnic press.\textsuperscript{142} No such defense was required for the first Spanish-speaking immigrants to San Antonio, the Franciscans and Canary Islanders who founded the settlement two centuries earlier.

**The Spanish Nostalgia Frame: Recalling “Heroism Unsurpassed”**

The past has many uses, most often to serve the present. In the 1930s, there was no place like the past. Resurrecting ineffable moments—and monuments—became the pastime of the nation.\textsuperscript{143} Many Texans recognized their heritage and economy were inextricably bound with Mexico, knowledge that didn’t change the focus of their cultural appreciation, which was on the remnants and artifacts of the Spanish empire in America. Spaniards had once been vilified, especially in Texas. Their deeds were retold as the Black Legend, which painted them as cruel and bloodthirsty. Now the Spanish were venerated, even in Texas, where they had been most hated, according to historian David Weber.\textsuperscript{144}

The conquistadors represented a pioneer legacy of derring-do in Texas. Their crumbling missions, decaying Alamo, and worn-out El Camino Real were manifestations of a proud past that offered economically shaken Texans something to believe in. To paraphrase Bodnar, powerful political interests, in this case Anglo Texans, excavated long-buried historical memories and reshaped them into something that would be of


service to their present and their future, as well as their past. Ultimately, the Spanish colonial legacy would help springboard San Antonio’s transformation into a tourist Mecca, a civic strategy that the Express fully supported.

Hispanophobia began to give way to awe of the Spanish legacy in the late 1800s, especially in California. The shift was spurred in part by a romanticized Mission Revival style of architecture displayed at the 1893 World’s Fair. As Weber noted, the “Spanish Revival’s evocation of sense of place beguiled many Americans.” Cities with little original Spanish influence, such as Kansas and Dallas, during the 1920s and 1930s abounded with buildings, public and private, designed in the Spanish-style. San Antonio, however, boasted original and authentic Spanish architecture. The city found itself on the cutting edge of a national trend; one that the powers-that-were, including the Express, sought to exploit for commercial gain.

During the Depression years in Texas, the Express ran articles and numerous editorials supporting Spanish cultural preservation when it was assailed or otherwise endangered. In 1929, this trend became increasingly discernible. The Express coverage highlighted the city’s pioneer heritage, something that many communities tried to profit from during the hard times, as Bodnar noted. But Spanish nostalgia more than buoyed morale for San Antonio; it meant money. Express coverage bolstered development of the city’s recreation and tourism industry, a role in keeping with the newspaper’s booster function.

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145 Bodnar, Remaking America, 15.
146 Weber, 343.
147 Ibid., 353.
148 Ibid.
The day after New Year’s 1929, the *Express* detailed the San Antonio’s city attorney’s efforts to track down the records of every former owner of the old Spanish Governor’s Palace. The city had issued bonds in 1928 to finance the purchase of the $55,000 palace, though it had raised no money for renovations. “History includes many characters later famous, who passed over the threshold of the governor’s palace on official business,” the *Express* reported.

One of the better-known stories about the palace came from the journals of Col. Zebulon Pike, who visited both Mission San Jose and then Governor’s Palace. Pike met with then Governor Cordero, who was “famed in history for his statesmanship, his diplomacy and his social polish. It was this governor who did so much to establish the brilliant court life in the frontier settlement.” Later, Texas revolutionaries convened at the palace to draft many notable documents. But, “after the Revolution, the glory of the foreign power passed away, and the old building was ultimately almost forgotten in time,” the *Express* article stated. Civic interest in the palace had ignited to the point that two groups fought to control how the structure would be re-imagined.

Two organizations—the Daughters and Sons of the Heroes of Texas and the Texas Historical and Landmark Association—petitioned San Antonio’s mayor, saying “they alone were responsible for keeping alive the history and tradition regarding the old

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149 “Abstract of Title Shows Old Spanish Governor’s Palace in Private Hands Since 1884,” *San Antonio Express*, January 22, 1929, 22.

150 “Old Spanish Palace Board Divides Work,” *San Antonio Express*, February 12, 1929, 12.

151 “Abstract of Title Shows Old Spanish Governor’s Palace in Private Hands Since 1884,” *San Antonio Express*, January 22, 1929, 22.

152 Ibid.
building.” Mayor C. M. Chambers denied their request, saying he would make his own appointments. The *Express* covered the drive to retrieve authentic information about the mission like the historical mystery that it was, reporting the story of each piece of evidence that was uncovered. These included an oil painting from the 1800s, found in the San Antonio home of the painter’s descendents, which depicted elegantly dressed couples at the palace dancing a Spanish *jota*. The newspaper also covered San Antonio historian Frederick Chabot as he delved into archives statewide to find accurate details needed for the restoration of the building. The search extended to the Bexar County archives at the University of Texas in Austin. Librarians there translated portions of the 1803 will of Luis Menchaca, an *alcalde*, or powerful mayor, of San Antonio, whose references to the palace might offer clues to how the building might be authentically restored.

The *Express* also asserted that it was time to remember the Alamo, and editorialized on January 18, 1929, in favor of the state legislature appropriating $1 million in funds to build a memorial park around the site of Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie’s last stand. “Texas is most fortunate in possessing so rare a treasure as the Alamo—‘scene of heroism unsurpassed.’” By April 18, 1929, the Texas Senate had

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156 “For a Memorial Park Around the Alamo,” *San Antonio Express*, January 18, 1929, 12. The newspaper covered all permutations of the Alamo legislative debate. For example, see also, “San Antonio’s Counsel Okehs [sic] Alamo Bill,” *San Antonio Express*, January 31, 1929, 16; “Alamo Park Purchase Bears Signatures of House Senate Bill to be Offered Thursday,” *San Antonio Express*, January 17, 1929, 5; “Alamo Park Land Purchase Bill Appropriating $1,000,000 Passed by Senate with but One Vote of Nay,” *San Antonio Express*, January 30, 1929, 4.
approved the measure and it was pending in the House. “No public spirited Texan rejects
the appeal that the Alamo—shrine of Texas liberties, relic of a heroic past—be
safeguarded from the encroachments of trade and provided with an environment worthy
of its glorious traditions.” The bill passed, but fell victim to Gov. Moody’s sweeping
veto of appropriations bills. The Express described that action: “As the State prizes the
sacrifice of Travis, Bowie and Crockett, and the example they set to posterity, it should
show a proper respect to their memory. To consecrate the ground hallowed by their
deeds, to rescue it from a commercial encroachment, would be a relatively small
service.”

The Alamo was just one among many artifacts of history the Express worked to
help revive. The newspaper supported the restoration of other Franciscan hewn buildings.
By the end of 1929, the Franciscan Missions on the city’s South Side became the focus of
another civic campaign. The newspaper’s page-one “Think” column endorsed the
movement, noting: “Old Franciscan Missions on the South Loop are among the
community’s principal attractions for the tourist. Besides, these structures are priceless
architectural works and historical monuments.” The columnist complained about the
commercial signage cluttering the missions, especially around famous Mission San Jose,

157 “Alamo Memorial Park Bill at the Special Session,” San Antonio Express, April 18, 1929, 16.
158 “The Alamo—Texas’s Shrine and all the State’s Concern,” San Antonio Express, July 10, 1929, 10. See also, “Alamo Bill Veto Shocks Mayor, San Antonio Express, July 10, 1929, 8.
159 “Think,” San Antonio Express, December 12, 1929, 1. See also, “Mission Drive Improvement Plan Advanced,” San Antonio Express, December 13, 1929, 8.
which had a tacky “hot dog” stand for a neighbor. “Surely these fine old structures
deserve a setting altogether worthy of the spirit that built them.”

The San Antonio Conservation Society thoroughly agreed and announced plans to
restore the old granary, built adjacent to Mission San Jose in 1720, and turn it into a curio
shop. “It presents the appearance of somewhat disorderly rock pile at the present time,
though if efforts of the conservation society bear fruit it will one day present the
appearance the toiling hands of the padres once gave it,” the Express reported. The society previously purchased the original granary doors, and then displayed them in the
city’s Witte museum, which opened in 1926.

The Express-supported restoration drive also extended to colonial transportation
routes. The Express editorial page called for rebuilding the Camino Real, an important
colonial communication line. “It should be made a primary route and maintained by the
State Highway Commission,” the newspaper opined. The February 23, 1929, editorial
noted that the Daughters of the American Revolution had endorsed the project.

Preservation extended not just to the roads themselves, but also to their names. In
December 1929, when citizens petitioned to rename newly paved Zarzamora Street to
Aviation Boulevard because the name was “difficult to spell and of no historical value,”
the Express covered the ensuing dispute. The San Antonio Conservation Society
campaigned to preserve the name, saying the city’s original Spanish settlers christened

160 Ibid.

161 “Granary Built About 1702 to be Made into Curio Shop,” San Antonio Express, December 8, 1929, 2A.

162 “The Old San Antonio Road,” San Antonio Express, February 23, 1929, 10.

163 “Zarzamora St. Name Change is Protested,” San Antonio Express, December 22, 1929, 1A.
the street in honor of the native dewberry bushes they found on the land. “Zarzamora is a name of beauty and rhythmical in sound,” the Express reported. “Its structure tells the story of the Spanish colonist’s adaptation of his language to a new environment,” the committee members told the Express. The conservation society won and the city declared its opposition to renaming any other streets bearing historic names.

At the onset of the Great Depression, San Antonians (mostly, though not exclusively, Anglos) fought a second battle of the Alamo as they sought to preserve remnants of a glorious Spanish colonial past. Historical preservation in San Antonio, and elsewhere in the nation, did not start with the Great Depression, but it became increasingly significant as fearful Americans sought inspiration from storied, successful pioneers. While the first Spanish-speaking settlers were celebrated, the progeny of that past, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, faced a more uncertain fate. The Express reported on both topics, without appreciating how these issues, and the newspaper coverage, represented a “dichotomy” tantamount to “a schizophrenic mania,” as crusading journalist Carey McWilliams later put it.

*La Prensa* manifested no such dichotomy. The Spanish-language newspaper was a daily homage to the Mexican and Spanish heritage. A prime example was its December 31, 1929, article that traced how Spanish colonists incorporated many words from the

164 “Society Asks Street Name be Unchanged,” *San Antonio Express*, December 25, 1929, 6.

165 “City Thanked for Refusing to Change the Name of Zarzamora,” *San Antonio Express*, January 4, 1930, 22.


Aztec language, helping shape the Spanish spoken in Mexico. *La Prensa* framed the complexities of Anglo, Spanish, and Mexican cultural heritage, recognizing Indian contributions as well.\(^1\) \(^{168}\) *La Prensa*, therefore, represented an important site of memory, in the parlance of French historian Pierre Nora. The newspaper worked to construct important public memories of the languages and cultures that constituted what it meant to be Mexican.

**Conclusion**

News frames about Mexicans, immigrants, and repatriates in 1929 were often marked by dichotomy. Repatriates were framed as patriots or pariahs. Sometimes, as in the *Express*, they were barely visible. Mexicans were either financial burdens on US society or irreplaceable labor that buttressed the economy; and Mexicans were either a noble race on the hierarchy of color, or, more often, an inferior hue to be rubbed from the palette. The *somos amigos/we are friend* frame was evinced in distinctive *La Prensa* and *Express* stories that revealed a common thread: neighborliness and familiarity. *La Prensa* documented how the San Benito legionnaires felt an allegiance to families who had lived and worked in the area for years, and whose sons and fathers had fought overseas with them.

Likewise, the *Express* defended Mexicans as long-time residents who made good citizens by virtue of their well-established presence. The *Express* was most prolific in its coverage that framed Mexicans as an economic benefit and it editorial page was unequivocal in disputing as “baseless” and “unfair” arguments that suggested Mexicans

\(^{168}\) “De Cómo han Influído Entre si el Castellano y el Nahuatl y en la Lengua que se habla en México, *La Prensa*, December 31, 1929, 3.
posed an economic threat. In this stance, the paper operated as a proponent of the financial interests that made the city and the region successful: banking, railroads, and agriculture. Its coverage helped construct a vision of Mexicans as the laboring lynchpin to success in virtually every field that involved unskilled and semi-skilled labor.

The Spanish nostalgia frame, however, evoked a proud public memory of eighteenth Spanish-speaking immigrants at a time when their descendants were viewed as illegal trespassers or, at best, mere utilitarian labor. While literature on the ethnic press frequently noted its role in fostering community solidarity, the Spanish nostalgia frame illustrated one way the mainstream press unquestionably fulfilled the same function for its readers. Through its 1929 news coverage and editorials that articulated a reverence for San Antonio’s Spanish, Catholic, and Indian founding, the Express did its part to animate the spirits of the city it served. The first full year of the Great Depression loomed ahead and it was unclear whether the allure of a memory of the past would carry San Antonio through.
Chapter 3: 1930

A Thousand Times Better Off With Mexican Labor

Three months into 1930, the number of unemployed in the nation more than doubled, to 3.2 million from 1.5 million, the level recorded prior to the October 24, 1929, “Black Thursday” stock market crash. Hoover cast for answers, forming the President’s Emergency Committee for Employment, a group that sought a private-sector solution to the rampant joblessness. With quota restrictions in place for immigrants from other parts in the world, Congress re-ignited debate about the role of Mexican labor in the United States. Once again it considered legislation, including the Box bill, to impose a quota restriction on Western Hemisphere immigration.

The Hoover administration continued its policy to restrict Mexicans administratively and to deport as many as possible. The impact of this policy played out on the pages of La Prensa in 1930, in articles such as “More Mexican Families Deported.” La Prensa made it personal. They listed the names of the “repatriates” returned to Mexico on October 25, 1930. Among them were Candelario Peña and Manuela R. de Peña and their children, Manuel, Maria Luisa, and José Lorenzo, who


were seven, six, and three years of age, respectively. The children likely were US citizens, though they were listed as deportees. Mexicans may have been unwanted in the United States, but that was not the case back home. Through *La Prensa*, Mexican expatriates received a formal invitation from President-elect Pascual Ortiz Rubio welcoming their return.

Living conditions for many Mexicans in San Antonio were bleak. By 1930, the largest concentration of Mexicans was in the city’s West Side, with most arriving between 1910 and 1930. West Side Mexicans lived in substandard homes with dirt floors, and no indoor plumbing or electricity. Tuberculosis and gastrointestinal diseases were major causes of death for Mexicans, at rates disproportionate to those affecting blacks and whites. As historian Richard Garcia noted, Depression pressures, including unemployment, fear of deportation, the quandary of repatriation, and rampant health problems, among others “upset the socioeconomic equilibrium of the Mexican family” in San Antonio. Poor Mexicans sought relief; the middle class relied on self-help; and the rich carried on.

Garcia also describes a socially isolated community, in which those lucky enough to remain employed often worked on segregated work teams or separate shifts. This included Mexican women, who were largely limited to industries such as garment making, pecan shelling, and household service work. These segregated living and labor

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4 “Se Deporta a Mas Familias de Mexicanos,” *La Prensa*, October 26, 1930, 4.

5 “Ortiz Rubio Invita a Regresar a la Patria a Todos Los Mexicanos Residentes en Los Estados Unidos,” *La Prensa*, January 14, 1930, 1.


7 Ibid., 123.
situations, argued García, left Mexicans feeling even less American. Beyond that, these conditions also created a constituency ripe for social action and an audience for Spanish-language media. For the literate in the mother tongue, this included La Prensa.

Several frames, most of them familiar, permeated San Antonio newspaper coverage of Mexicans during 1930. The new quantification frame marked the escalation of the return migration. This frame sought to define repatriation and deportation by numbers and statistics, tools popularized during the Progressive Era and prescribed by journalist Walter Lippmann to describe the dimensions of an issue. Frames already evident in 1929 included the patriot frame, which depicted Mexican immigrants as returning heroes of skill, acumen, and means, whose repatriation would ameliorate their revolution-ravaged homeland. Another was the financial frame, which saw Mexican labor as the sustenance of the Southwest and Texas economy, and was arguably the most pervasive frame during the study period. This was understandable given the financial implosion and the demands of agribusiness.

Other observable frames in 1930 were:

- The hierarchy of color frame, justifying the role of the Mexican in society based on racial status relative to Anglos and other racial groups;
- The *somos amigos*, or “we are friends” frame, which emphasized diplomatic relations with Mexico and its people;
- The pariah frame, which depicted returning Mexicans, whether deportees or repatriates, as hapless victims, failures, outcasts, and sometimes outlaws;

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8 Ibid.
• The prescriptive frame offered advice, solutions, instructions, and warnings to immigrants, governments, and politicians;

• Finally, the Spanish nostalgia frame resurrected the memory of a Spanish colonial past.

The *Express* and *La Prensa* did not share all frames, though they shared many in some form. This chapter explores and illustrates each of these frames.

**Patriot Frame: The Nucleus of a Repatriation Movement**

The 1930s saw a continuation of the patriot frame in immigration news related to repatriates, particularly for returning agricultural workers. Words associated with this frame included “strength of character,” “know-how,” “bravery,” and “heroism,” among others. These Mexicans were also sometimes seen as resilient and accomplished, and depicted returning with abundant possessions, including farm implements and home furnishings. President-elect Pascual Ortiz Rubio’s invitation to repatriate made page one of *La Prensa* on January 14, 1930. Speaking to the Mexican community in Los Angeles, Ortiz Rubio exhorted expatriates to return to Mexico with their northern acquired skills to rebuild their country.¹⁰

No necesito recordar a ustedes hasta que punto necesitamos para esta obra reconstructiva de México y de consolidación de las conquistas de la Revolución, del concurso de todos los mexicanos y muy particularmente de aquellos que, como ustedes por su lucha en media de civilización material muy avanzada, han adquirido nociones y virtudes de carácter que los capacita para ir a enseñar a sus hermanos de México lo que la experiencia y el trabajo constante y el contacto diario con una vida de perfeccionamiento en el campo industrial y agrícola haya podido dejarles gravado.¹¹

¹⁰ “Ortiz Rubio Invita a Regresar a la Patria a Todos Los Mexicanos Residentes en Los Estados Unidos,” *La Prensa*, January 14, 1930, 1.

¹¹ Ibid., 1, 5.
Rubio’s comments translated into English were:

I don’t need to remind you that at this time in Mexico’s reconstruction work and in the consolidation of the successes of the Mexican Revolution, we need the collaboration of all Mexicans and particularly those, who like you, have struggled in a more advanced society and have acquired ideas and strength of character that enable you to go and teach your Mexican brothers what you have absorbed through your daily work experience in state-of-the-art industrial and agricultural sectors.\(^{12}\)

Some Mexicans heeded the formal call. The migration was most visible at the border, where the returnees passed through government checkpoints. But it was socially constructed for San Antonio readers of the *Express* in articles such as a February 1, 1930, story headlined: “Many Mexicans are Returning.” The *Express* reported that “the nucleus of a repatriation movement” had become apparent with 50 families crossing the border from Laredo. Most had been tenant farmers in the United States, where they had lived for 25 or more years and were now returning with their duty-free farm vehicles and equipment to work on newly irrigated Mexican land.\(^{13}\) The phenomenon continued throughout 1930, with, for instance, *La Prensa* reporting from Laredo, Texas, on October 24, 1930, that “the Exodus of Mexicans to the Homeland Continues.” Most of these repatriates were returning with their household goods, trucks, farm animals, and horses, and were headed to government-sponsored agricultural colonies, the *La Prensa* article stated.\(^{14}\)

This autonomous diaspora occurred amid continued acrimonious immigration policy debates and intensified deportation efforts. The diaspora gained momentum in

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., 1, 5. English translation by the author.

\(^{13}\) “Many Mexicans are Returning,” *San Antonio Express*, February 1, 1930, 9.

\(^{14}\) “Sigue el Exodo de Mexicanos a la Patria,” *La Prensa*, October 24, 1930, 4.
1929, which was also the year Mexican Americans in Texas formed the League of United Latin American Citizens, known as LULAC. The group was styled in the thinking of W. E. B. Du Bois, the historian and black civil rights leader, and it used the courts to fight poll taxes and school segregation throughout the Southwest. Ignacio Lozano, publisher of La Prensa, used his newspaper to champion those causes.

News coverage of repatriates in 1930 was most likely to assume a patriot frame; deportees were depicted with a pariah frame. The deportation case of Carlos Gutierrez Sifuentes, a 7-year-old El Paso boy, was an exception. To win the boy’s right to remain in the United States, his adoptive mother, the widow of World War I American Army hero Private Marcos B. Armijo, testified before the immigration judge, and La Prensa covered the story. She recounted the story of her husband’s bravery: In 1918, during a battle in France, a German shell blew off Private Armijo’s legs. Unable to walk, he calmly rolled cigarettes and smoked them while he exhorted the remaining American forces to keep fighting.

Armijo’s widow testified that her US-born adoptive son had a Mexican mother. The mother was forced to work day-in and day-out to support her children after her husband abandoned the family. Armijo’s widow, who was never identified by first name in the newspaper’s coverage, told the immigration judge that she was certain her adoptive son was born in the United States because she had been present at his birth. With her ample government pension, she agreed to help the boy’s mother by adopting the child and educating him. La Prensa reported that once she identified herself as Armijo’s widow, she insured that the child would not be deported. “The entire official world holds the deceased Armijo in high esteem, who is considered one of the best examples of the
Hispano-American race in the United States and is the most famous hero of the World War in this region. The highest circles of power in Washington had recognized Armijo’s valor,” the article concluded.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, the president of the United States posthumously awarded him a Distinguished Service Cross.\textsuperscript{16} As explained by \textit{La Prensa}, the bar to avert deportation was high, personified by the family of a patriot who paid in blood.

The newspaper framed Mexican expatriates as valuable, productive, and stalwart. These were individuals the Mexican government needed to do nothing less than transform a nation riven with strife. These were more than workers. These were citizens, with strength of character and knowledge to share. This was entirely different from the vision of Mexicans in the United States, whose place in the American imagination typically existed at the margin. \textit{La Prensa’s} coverage, in particular, suggested none were more marginalized in 1930 than deportees, many of whom were US citizens or residents of long-standing unable to document their presence. Marcos B. Armijo’s widow was able to prevent one child from being unjustly deported, but few could claim a war hero’s wife as a sponsor. News and editorial coverage, particularly in the \textit{Express}, however, framed Mexicans as having an intrinsic monetary value for several US business sectors in the Southwest.

\textbf{Financial Frame: Immigration Policy for the Southwest Economy}

Stories in the financial frame treated the Mexican immigrant as either an economic benefit or an economic drain. This frame was often a staple of policy-related

\textsuperscript{15} “Las Hazañas de un Heroe Mexicano en Francia,” \textit{La Prensa}, January 13, 1930, 1,6.

stories, suggesting the intertwined worlds of business and politics. The most contentious immigration-related federal policy dispute in 1930 centered on Mexican quota restrictions, and the Box bill represented one Texan’s view. The New Year of 1930 opened with old arguments. John C. Box, the East Texas congressional Democrat who had failed in his quest to set quotas on Mexican immigration in the 1920s, reintroduced the measure, the San Antonio Express reported in a page-one Associated Press story. Box, the ranking minority member on the House Immigration Committee, offered a competing bill to that of Committee Chairman Albert Johnson of Washington State. Box said his measure would treat all countries equitably, though provisions easing entry for “habitual English speakers” favored Canada.

The Express ran four editorials in the space of two months arguing that the financial security of the state of Texas and “almost any other area in the Southwest” was imperiled by the potential cut-off of low-wage Mexican labor that would ensue if the Box bill or other similar measures were passed. Interestingly, the frame reflected sentiments of larger growers, bankers and big business, not the view of the small farmers who dominated Box’s region. Like-minded regional colleagues, such as US Rep. Wright Pitman, from the northeast border town of Texarkana, joined Box in the fight, the

17 “Box Proposes New Alien Limit,” San Antonio Express, January 14, 1930, 1.
18 Ibid.
19 “No Call For New World Immigration Quota,” San Antonio Express, January 15, 1930, 14; “Sound Objections to the Box and Johnson Bills,” San Antonio Express, January 24, 1930, 12; “Widespread Opposition to the Box Bill,” San Antonio Express, January 29, 1930, 14; “Most Obnoxious of the Quota Bills,” San Antonio Express, February 19, 1930, 12; “Fresh Immigration Blunders,” San Antonio Express, February 25, 1930, 12.
Express reported. Pitman introduced a bill in February 1930 to make hiring or contracting with an illegal laborer a felony. Violators would face a maximum of $20,000 in fines and 10 years in jail.21

The Express editorial writers were no fans of Box’s position. The Express was explicit about the opportunities for Mexican labor in the United States: “plowing, sowing, and reaping; chopping and picking cotton, transplanting onions and lettuce, digging potatoes, gathering and packaging spinach, tomatoes, oranges, and so on.”22 In short, Mexican labor was used to do the work “machinery” could not and that “native white men generally will not do.”23 Mexicans also had their industrial work cut out for them and were “needed to lay pipes, dig ditches, put down pavement, grade rights-of-way, and build railroads,” the editorial argued.24 The Express also made a link between the financial frame and the hierarchy of color frame, which is discussed in greater detail later.

The Express did more than frame the immigration debate; it culturally and racially mapped unskilled labor as Mexican, outside the bounds of what a white person would do. This is a prime example of an early twentieth-century media social construction of race. This time, however, the language of the media found in the Express coverage defined white identity in opposition to brown, that is, Mexican and Mexican American identity. This is in contrast to the prevalent paradigm, elaborated by sociologist Teresa Guess, among others, that traces the media role in constructing and institutionalizing racial roles


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.
in a black-white binary.\textsuperscript{25} In keeping with the way sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann conceived social reality, this Express news coverage helped construct a symbolic skyscraper of representation for Southwest Texas society.\textsuperscript{26} In other words, racial ideas in San Antonio were typeset.

The Express covered the Mexican quota restriction hearings in Congress assiduously, framing the debate as a policy clash whose outcome would determine the future of the southwestern economy. In a February 1, 1930, Express article: “Hearing of Alien Bill in Uproar,” the paper reported that California Rep. Arthur Free called Frances I. Jones, director of the US Employment Service, a “propagandist and a theorist” for arguing that Mexican labor was not needed in the United States.\textsuperscript{27} A few days later, on February 4, 1929, under the headline “Mexican Quota Fight Continues,” the Express noted that the “negro” congressman from Chicago’s South Side, Oscar Stanton De Priest, questioned F. S. Fitzgerald of the US Chamber of Commerce about the number of jobless in the United States. When Fitzgerald was unable to supply the number, De Priest volunteered “there were four million men out of work at present.”\textsuperscript{28} The appearance of De Priest, who was not a member of the immigration committee, might indicate that at least certain segments of the black community considered Mexican immigrants competition for jobs.


\textsuperscript{27} “Hearing on Alien Bill in Uproar,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 1, 1930, 5.

\textsuperscript{28} “Mexican Quota Fight Continues,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 4, 1930, 4.
Sen. William Harris, Republican of Georgia, most likely did not have De Priest’s constituents in mind when he contended that Mexican workers took jobs from Americans and contributed to the poverty of native-born American children. The *Express* vigorously disputed that notion on the editorial page May 30, 1930.\(^\text{29}\)

Senator Harris attempts to paint a distressing picture of native American children deprived of bread because a million Mexicans have taken potential jobs from their parents! The Georgia Senator points to the average influx of 58,000 from Mexico during the past five years, and asserts that “every Mexican who comes into this country takes earnings from an American laborer and his family.” That statement is as baseless and unfair as the figures used to sustain it.\(^\text{30}\)

Moreover, the *Express* continued, most unemployed Americans are urban industrial workers “who would scorn to follow the plow, swing a pickaxe, or wield a spade under a burning sun.”\(^\text{31}\)

The *Express*, through its editorial, once again defined the white and the Mexican in terms of what work they were willing to do. This media espousal of white rejection of stoop labor was a powerful construction of reality, appearing as it did in the desperate days of the Depression. The *Express* editorial voice was consistent in its denunciation of limiting Mexican immigration, and it employed classic editorialist tools: persuading, interpreting, and appraising.\(^\text{32}\) The newspaper’s audience included influential thought leaders. As George Fox Mott noted in *Outline of Journalism*, first published in 1937, “editorials appeal particularly to the leaders in the various social, economic, and political

\(^{29}\) “As to ‘Depriving Americans of Employment,’” *San Antonio Express*, May 30, 1930, 10.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

groups, and through these leaders find their way to all levels of the population.” Aware of bitter divisions on the issue of Mexican immigration, in the Texas delegation, as much as nationally, the *Express* used the power of its editorial page to urge action: defeat of legislation that posed economic peril to the region.

The anti-restrictionists had powerful political Texas muscle in their corner. US Rep. John Nance Garner, who would serve as Speaker of the House in 1931 and later as Franklin Roosevelt’s vice president, spoke out against the Mexican quota restriction bills, according to a March 2, 1930, *Express* story. Garner argued that the proposed quota bills needed a clause to permit seasonal labor to cross the border freely during a 90-day period when farmers needed their help most, the *Express* reported in a March 2, 1930, story.33

*La Prensa* also covered news through a financial frame. *La Prensa* editorialized that it was “evident that capitalists in the southern United States opposed establishment of a Mexican quota because cheap labor was a convenience to them; By the same token, Mexico received millions of dollars in remittances from the Mexican laborers in the United States.”34 Agribusiness in the 1920s successfully blocked restrictions against Mexican immigration. Now, in the 1930s, they feared profits would walk out the door with the Mexican labor force. And, noted *La Prensa*, Mexico had much to lose as well.

*La Prensa*’s reports also reflected a financial counter-frame, making economic arguments the *Express* did not. *La Prensa*’s coverage of a January 10, 1930, Rotary Club luncheon speech, attended by Lozano, the paper’s publisher, typified this counter-

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33 “Garner to Carry on in Immigration Fight,” *San Antonio Express*, March 2, 1930, 10.

34 “Aspectos Del Mejico Emigrado,” Marco Polo, *La Prensa*, May 1, 1930, 2.
frame. William Knox, San Antonio’s school sub-superintendent, addressed the business group, revealing results of his then-recent economic study that showed Mexican cotton-pickers earned $11 million a year. This multi-million dollar combined Mexican income flowed back to San Antonio’s local businesses, housing markets, and tax base.

The proof was in the year-round success of San Antonio businesses, a phenomenon unknown in Texas cities that were less welcoming to Mexicans, Knox said. This counter-frame is significant in that it attested to a Mexican permanency, and whether they were citizens or not, if they paid taxes, owned homes, and sent their children to schools, Mexicans had more than a stake in the US system. They were here to stay and contribute, the counter-frame showed. The Express, in contrast, framed Mexicans as convenient, cheap, and transient labor.

Both papers gave front-page treatment to Box’s losing bid for the congressional Democratic nomination in July 1930. “Box’s defeat will have an important effect it is likely, on the fight in Congress in connection with Mexican immigration quotas,” the Express reported in its news story on July 28, 1930. If re-elected, and the House Democrats had gained control, Box would have become committee chairman.36

The agribusiness-driven financial frame evinced in the Express and La Prensa fits James Hertog and Douglas McLeod’s idea that the political economy—the interplay

35 “Los Mexicanos Constituyen uno de los Valores Economicos mas Importantes con que Cuenta San Antonio,” La Prensa, January 12, 1930, 1.

36 “Box Bill Author Loses his Race in 2nd District,” San Antonio Express, July 28, 1930, 1. See also, “With the Primary Defeat of Representative Box,” San Antonio Express, July 29, 1930, 8. “El Congresista Box Pierde su Reeelección, La Prensa, July 29, 1930, 1.
between law, politics, and economics—produces public policy-related frames. In this case, the political economy of Southwest Texas helped frame the issue of restrictive Mexican immigration in a way that was evident in both newspapers. *La Prensa* editorials revealed a pragmatic understanding of the utilitarian role Mexican labor played in both the US and Mexican economies. Both *La Prensa* and the *Express* shared an aversion to quota restriction legislation, and to Box’s version of it in particular. Box’s arguments were not predicated solely on economic implications alone. Box’s effort to stem Mexican immigration was just as much based on his aversion to a people he deemed racially inferior.

**Hierarchy of Color Frame: Inferior to Any Other Race in the World**

The hierarchy of color frame pegged Mexicans in the social and economic order on the basis of skin color and ethnicity as compared to whites and other races. Stories in this frame were often characterized by terms such as “inferior,” “menace,” and “threat,” and epithets such as “peon.” Box continued in 1930 to lace racial rhetoric through his arguments to impose quota restrictions on Mexicans seeking entry to the United States. *Express* coverage of the Western Hemisphere Immigration Committee Hearings touched on a number of these racial issues. A January 30, 1930, article concerned testimony by “two American citizens of Mexican ancestry—J. T. Canales and Alonso Perales.” The latter served with General Pershing, who had sought to resolve the Tacna-Arica dispute between Chile and Peru, the story noted. Before the committee, Perales “made an eloquent defense of Mexicans as a race,” the *Express* reported. “I most emphatically deny

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that Mexicans are inferior to any other race in the world,” as those sponsoring the quota restriction bills argue, Perales said. Canales argued that the State Department and immigration officials “were unjustly deporting many Mexicans, who either were American citizens or had resided north of the Rio Grande for many years and had proven their ability as workers,” according to the Express.38

With Asians excluded from immigration, agribusiness and industry saw few alternatives to Mexican labor. Filipinos, who began immigrating mostly as single men to work on the West coast in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War of 1898, were not favored.39 Filipinos were viewed as oversexed and at the same time effeminate, and considered akin to the undesirable Chinese caste whose legal entry would be barred from the country until 1943.40 Filipinos were seen as “other,” even in comparison to the more family-oriented Mexican and Japanese.

Anti-Filipino violence on the West Coast erupted on the eve of the Great Depression, with nativists provoked by Filipino men dating white women, among other things.41 Racial animus directed toward Filipinos accelerated a US move to promote Philippine independence, making the country a separate legal entity and blocking Filipinos from the US citizenship they might have expected under commonwealth status, which Puerto Rico retained. Later in the Depression, Filipinos were also repatriated, though the 2,000 shipped back were far fewer than the estimated one-half million

38 “$100,000 Refused for Immigration,” San Antonio Express, January 30, 1930, 18.
40 Ibid, 105, 110.
41 Ibid., 113.
Mexicans who returned to their home country.⁴² Perhaps more than anything, Filipino willingness to organize collectively and strike for higher wages dimmed their appeal to growers.⁴³

*Los Angeles Times* Publisher Harry Chandler explained where Filipinos stood in his hierarchy of color in a January 25, 1930, Associated Press article that ran in the *Express* under the headline “Mexican Quota Plan Opposed.” The sub-head filled out the news frame: “Much Better than Filipinos, Harry Chandler Tells Committee.” Chandler, president of the California-Mexico Land & Cattle Co., and controlling owner of the Tejon Ranch in Los Angeles and Kern Counties, made his comments in testimony before the House Immigration Committee.⁴⁴ In sum, he called Filipino workers “quarrelsome” while in contrast, the “Mexican peon creates no social problem because he is an innocent friendly individual.”⁴⁵

In eschewing English-speaking Filipinos and favoring Mexicans, Chandler did not endorse the entire Spanish-speaking labor pool. Chandler said he would prefer not to hire “Porto Ricans [*sic*]” even though they were US citizens and were suffering economic strife on the island. “I should rather make a contribution (for their relief) . . . and I should

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⁴² Ibid., 122.

⁴³ Ibid., 107. For instance, in 1928 asparagus workers in Stockton, California, organized to press wage demands. In 1930, Filipino lettuce workers in Salinas, California, struck for higher wages.

⁴⁴ “Statement of Harry Chandler, President Los Angeles Times Co.,” *Hearings Before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Western Hemisphere Immigration 71st Congress, 2nd Session*, 1930, 63-79.

rather use the peon . . . than to bring in the Porto Ricans [sic],” Chandler told the Committee.46

Box made it clear that whatever Chandler’s views, Mexicans did not rate on his color gradient. “Practically all of the Mexicans that come to the US are peons, illiterate, ignorant; not good material for American citizenship” and not from “Mexico’s Caucasian ruling class,” Box said in a radio address that La Prensa covered.47 Mexicans that came to the United States segregated themselves in “little Mexicos” and “lived in conditions of bad health and hygiene, spreading illness and epidemics,” he continued.48 Moreover, they were “more prone to crime than other immigrants who face restricted immigration,” Box said.49

La Prensa columnist Rodolfo Uranga disputed the inferior race assertions Box propounded in his radio speech. “It is the immigrant class, the one who leaves his country in search of adventure, that in all cases is the more energetic, the more enterprising, the more audaciously intelligent and hardworking. The timid ones stay home.”50 What’s more, La Prensa said, “there is no such thing as a pure race, either in Mexico or Europe.”51 Box was more than wrong, he was also disingenuous, the columnist

46 Ibid., 72.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
suggested, because Box had helped pass the Immigration Act of 1917 that barred sick, illiterate, and criminal Mexicans from the United States.

The color war extended to Mexican school children, a group that often missed classes during harvest seasons to join their parents in the fields. Their frequent absence was the rationale that some Texas school districts used to house Mexicans in separate facilities.\textsuperscript{52} That seemed about to change in 1930. La Prensa’s March 25, 1930, edition highlighted a significant Mexican civil rights victory, a court ruling that forced the Del Rio, Texas, public schools to desegregate and admit Mexican students.\textsuperscript{53} The League of United Latin American Citizens, the Association of Latin American Parents and Teachers, and other groups had sued and won access to the schools, a decision at odds with pressures from farmers who discouraged school administrators, particularly in rural areas, from enforcing compulsory attendance laws.\textsuperscript{54}

The ruling was one of ten major stories La Prensa ran on the topic of segregated schools during 1930, most published on page one. The coverage brought literacy and academic achievement to the forefront of the community, mapping Mexicans and Mexican Americans as thinkers and potential citizens, not just material for manual labor. Mexicans did the work that whites would not do, as the Express had asserted. But the La Prensa coverage underscored that Mexicans and Mexican Americans were capable of much more. The newspaper’s construction of Mexican as thinkers was powerful at a time

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\textsuperscript{53} “Se Suspendio La Separación De Los Escolares Mexicanos, Un Triunfo De La Raza En Del Rio, Tex.,” La Prensa, March 25, 1930, 1.

\textsuperscript{54} Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 191-196.
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when Mexican youth were frequently treated as ignorant inferiors. They were often 
required to attend segregated schools, which were of poor quality. The aim was to keep 
Mexicans separate and subordinate to maintain a manual laborer workforce, according to 
historian David Montejano. In his book, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 
1836-1986*, he described a persistent pattern of segregation in southernmost Texas in the 
1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{55}

But *La Prensa*’s March 25, 1930, story documented that Mexican American 
parents had merely won the battle. The Del Rio public schools went on to win the war. 
The Texas Court of Appeals found that the separation in the Del Rio case was based on 
pedagogical, not racial reasons. Nonetheless, the court ruled that arbitrarily separating 
Mexicans from “other whites” was illegal, a decision that recognized Mexicans as a 
distinct white “race.”\textsuperscript{56} *La Prensa* followed the case all the way to the US Supreme 
Court, which, in 1931, announced that it refused to consider its constitutionality. The 
news ran in a bold, all uppercased, banner refer above the nameplate of *La Prensa*’s front 
page on November 24, 1931: “The Segregation Case is Definitely Lost.”\textsuperscript{57}

In news coverage, the hierarchy of color frame depicted race as a caste system, 
though there was little agreement on the place of Mexicans in it. Box put Mexicans at the 
bottom, with all races of color. Chandler, the rancher and publisher, put Mexicans 
paternalistically below whites, and above other non-white races. Mexican racial 
ambiguity may have played a role in these conflicting visions. “As a racially mixed

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} Neil Foley, “Over the Rainbow,” 449.

\textsuperscript{57} “Se Perdio en Definitiva el Asunto de la Segregacion,” *La Prensa*, November 24, 1931, 
1.
group, Mexicans, like Indians and Asians, lived in a black-and-white world that regarded them neither as black nor white,” in the view of historian Neil Foley.⁵⁸ *La Prensa*, and Mexican Americans such as Canales and Perales, saw Mexicans as equal to other whites, a position they recognized many whites did not share. Although the positions were different, all parties used the hierarchy of color to support their policy positions in news coverage. Whites exerted primacy. Mexicans petitioned for equality, and *La Prensa* covered the community’s effort to take its rightful seat in the schoolhouse, in keeping with advocacy role of the ethnic press. However, news coverage in 1930 showed that not all whites ascribed to the hierarchy of color frame. Some Anglos also considered Mexicans neighbors and friends. Their ideas were manifested in a news frame in which the golden rule trumped real and perceived racial differences.

**Somos Amigos/We are Friends Frame: To Know Them is to Love Them**

The *somos amigos/we are friends* frame drew on personal and cultural ties between Mexicans and Anglos as well as political and diplomatic ideals, such as Pan-Americanism and the Monroe Doctrine. Knox, the San Antonio school superintendent did more than bolster *La Prensa*’s financial counter-frame with his economic statistics. He also provided grist for the *somos amigos/we are friends* frame. Knox concluded his Rotary luncheon speech with the comment: “Those that don’t appreciate Mexicans, don’t know them. When they get to know them [Mexicans] well and understand them, that changes, and they love them.”⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ “Los Mexicanos Constituyen uno de los Valores Economicos mas Importantes con que Cuenta San Antonio,” *La Prensa*, January 12, 1930, 1.
The subtext for this frame is evident in testimony Los Angeles Times Publisher Harry Chandler made before Washington immigration policy makers the same month. The comments were not included in the Associated Press story the Express published, an omission that excised Chandler’s personal—not just pecuniary—connection to the Mexican community. “A good many of my friends were Mexicans and I worked with Mexicans . . . and have an appreciation of them,” he stated. 60 The City of the Angels was “about 60 percent Mexican” 50 years earlier when he had moved there, he noted. 61 “Our traditions and background are mostly Mexican, and all of the old timers who . . . lived with the Mexicans . . . had a little different attitude toward them than the rest of the Americans,” the publisher and industrialist said. 62 Chandler’s cultural frame of reference was shared by Knox, who reminisced about his San Antonio boyhood in the 1860s, when many Mexicans lived in the “best houses” and owned “hundreds of irrigated acres in the well-watered valley.” 63

The Express took up the somos amigos/we are friends frame Chandler and Knox invoked. This frame hinted at a cultural divide, driven by geography. “The Southwest’s objections,” to Mexican immigration restrictions, the Express wrote, “are not entirely selfish.” 64 That is because, “More clearly than people who live at a distance, (Southwest) residents perceive the bad effects which the restrictive legislation would have upon

60 “Statement of Harry Chandler.”
61 Ibid., 64.
62 Ibid.
63 Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 92.
64 “Widespread Opposition to the Box Bill,” San Antonio Express, January 29, 1930, 14.
Mexican-American relations.” Restrictive legislation would “gratuitously offend the New World peoples,” the Express added, reiterating a point in its earlier January 24, 1930, editorial. 65

The Box bill carried a pretense of Western Hemisphere neutrality, which was betrayed by its preference for English-speaking immigrants. Sen. William J. Harris, who authored Georgia’s bill—which the Express called the “Most Obnoxious of the Quota Bills”—didn’t pretend, making Canada and Newfoundland exempt from quota restrictions. Harris also proposed cutting Mexican immigration more than 96 percent, to about 1,500, from 40,000 in the prior fiscal year. This “patent attempt to play favorites” with Canada made the Harris Bill “more obnoxious” than three related House bills, the Express said. 66

If the Express saw a cultural divide driven by geography, it wasn’t exclusive to the Southwest borderlands. On February 25, 1930, the Express republished a St. Paul Pioneer Press editorial, which demonstrated that media views 460 miles from the Canadian border at Winnipeg were equally at odds with Washington policymakers. The Minnesota paper’s editorial “Fresh Immigration Blunders” objected to a Senate compromise to restrict all Western Hemisphere immigration except that from Canada, which earned an exemption from the Senate because of the “high quality of its immigrants.” 67 Such favoritism “would spell the finish of the Monroe Doctrine,” the editorial said, and “if the policy is going to be one of rude exclusiveness, the way to keep

65 Ibid.

66 “Most Obnoxious of the Quota Bills,” San Antonio Express, February 19, 1930, 12.

neighborly resentment at a minimum is to be thoroughly and consistently rude."\textsuperscript{68} The editorial concluded “If Congress does not have the courage to treat Canada the same as Mexico, or the wisdom to treat all immigrants on the Canadian rule, it had best not tamper with Western Hemisphere relations at all.”\textsuperscript{69}

The US State Department also weighed in, as \textit{La Prensa} reported in a page-one news story under the banner headline: “It is Not Necessary to Impose a Quota on Mexican Immigration.” The March 16, 1930, story, datelined Washington, explained that the US State Department and the US Department of Labor disagreed on the need for a Mexican immigration quota. The State Department opposed it as superfluous because Mexican immigration was already dwindling.\textsuperscript{70} Mexican immigration to the United States fell almost one quarter in 1929 compared to the number admitted a year earlier, \textit{La Prensa} reported. Stricter requirements for entry meant that only one or two out of every ten who applied were admitted in 1929 for a total of 44,511.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{La Prensa}’s coverage backed up the trend. By August 1930, \textit{La Prensa} proclaimed that the “Exodus of Mexican Workers to the US has already Ceased.” The front-page story reported that the US consulate in Laredo only issued 15 visas to Mexicans in July.\textsuperscript{72} Meanwhile, as many as 1,596 Mexicans, migrating from California, 

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{70} “No es Necessario Imponer Cuota a La Inmigracion de Mexicanos,” \textit{La Prensa}, March 16, 1930, 1.

\textsuperscript{71} “Son Los Que Pasaron en 1929, por 58,883 que entraron en el año de 1928,” \textit{La Prensa}, January 13, 1930, 5.

\textsuperscript{72} “Ceso Ya el Exodo de Braceros a los EE. UU.,” \textit{La Prensa}, August 11, 1930, 1, 4.
Colorado, Illinois, and Texas, repatriated in July, leaving the United States at El Paso, Texas, and crossing into Ciudad Juárez. Most left voluntarily, unable to find work in the failing US economy. But 226 were deported.  

Diplomacy, friendly relations between countries, exemplified the somos amigos/we are friends frame. The editorial the Express reprinted from the St. Paul Pioneer Press advanced the Monroe Doctrine from President James Monroe’s original intent, which was to dissuade European powers from re-colonizing the Americas. Without using the exact term—Pan-Americanism—the Minnesota paper reflected a perception in line with that of former US Ambassador to Argentina Charles Sherrill. The ambassador’s 1916 book, Modernizing the Monroe Doctrine, suggested the newer understanding of the policy. “It matters little how much the republics concerned differ in racial traits,” Sherrill wrote. “Pan-Americanism makes for a broader and deeper type of patriotism, because it adds a consideration for the viewpoint of other nations.”

The Express transmitted this view to its readers on May 22, 1930, when it published an Associated Press story about the reaction of Mexico’s El Universal newspaper to the Box Bill. El Universal invoked Pan-Americanism in its editorial against the Box quota restrictions. “To return now to a policy of the closed door is to destroy the last fundamentals of Pan-Americanism and the hope of a cordial understanding and good will between nations,” the Mexican newspaper editorialized. Two months later,

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73 “1,596 Repatriados Entran por Juarez,” La Prensa, August 11, 1930, 4.
76 Ibid.
the *Express* covered a speech by Salvador Urbina, a Mexican Supreme Court Justice, who called the Monroe doctrine “an infantile theory used to foster imperialist polices in Latin America.” Urbina called the doctrine “dead” and suggested that discarding it would help improve relations with Mexico.\(^{77}\)

These conflicting ideas about the Monroe Doctrine, evidenced in news coverage of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the 1930s, belie its multiple meanings. Historian Jay Sexton, writing in his 2011 book, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America*, explained that there were as many US applications of the doctrine as there were US foreign policies.\(^{78}\) President James Monroe originally conceived the doctrine in 1823 as a declaration against the intervention of European powers in the American continents.\(^{79}\) The Monroe Doctrine, then, was first and foremost about US national security, for which border security is a prime component. The idea that the Monroe Doctrine was moribund did not originate in the Depression with Mexican Supreme Court Justice Urbina. President Woodrow Wilson, who was inaugurated in 1913, acknowledged to a group of Mexican newspaper editors that the doctrine was problematic because it unilaterally transformed the United States into Mexico’s “big brother.”\(^{80}\)

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\(^{79}\) Ibid., 3.

Wilson was unable to live up to such progressive rhetoric, much less maintain it. The Express, however, was relatively consistent. The newspaper reported on the relationship between the United States and Mexico from a vision of Texas—and San Antonio, in particular—as a “border province between the South, the West, and Mexico.” Not only had Texas once been part of Mexico and colonial Spain, the newspaper editorialists understood that Texas and Mexico were interdependent neighbors, and there were rules for the treatment of neighbors.

The *somos amigos*/we are friends frame was predicated on multiple histories, the personal histories of civic figures with a breadth of experience in former Mexican territories, including Chandler, the publisher, and Knox, the educator. The frame also derived from American interpretations of fair play and foreign policy. The disparate treatment some policy makers accorded Canadian and Mexican immigrants on the basis of language was emblematic of an insensitivity the Express made clear it did not share toward Mexico. Despite the fond personal remembrances of a few influential Americans, and the economic interests of certain commercial and industrial sectors, many Mexicans lacked the means, ability, and legal standing to stay. The country abounded with the unemployed, and Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans were a visible, expendable “other.” Remaining in the United States was often a trial; leaving the United States was often a far greater tribulation.

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**Pariah Frame: Confronting Inquisitors and Coyotes**

The pariah frame painted Mexicans as “mournful” victims, individuals at the mercy of authorities, whether the border patrol, immigration officials, the police or employers. Deportees were often depicted in this light and *La Prensa* went so far as to describe them as subjected to medieval style cruelty by US immigration authorities.

Perhaps nothing was more evocative of the Dark Ages than shipping children out of the country without their parents’ knowledge. That was the cruel fate of more than 500 pupils who were deported en masse from county schools in El Paso, *La Prensa* reported in a page-one story March 27, 1930. *La Prensa*’s El Paso correspondent interviewed the deported children’s parents, many of them long-time residents who had settled in Texas prior to enactment of new immigration laws. Many said they were unaware or had forgotten their children’s birth needed to be registered with US authorities. In this frame, the deportees and their parents were hapless victims of poorly conceived, or at least poorly implemented, US policy.

The deportations had an impact on El Paso classrooms quickly, with *La Prensa* reporting 7 percent fewer students in the county public schools by March 30, 1930. Some in the Mexican community wondered whether educational authorities shared information from a school-conducted census under a “secret agreement” with immigration officials. Or perhaps they were obeying a plan designed by “high circles in Washington, DC to intensify ... their deportation campaign aimed at all foreigners, especially Mexicans,” *La Prensa* reported. In exposing this tragic practice, the newspaper reportage gave voice to

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83 “500 Escolares Mexicanos Deportados,” *La Prensa*, March 27, 1930, 1.

Mexicans’ fears that longstanding, law-abiding years in the United States counted for nothing; Mexicans would always be targeted.

Later that year, desperate Mexicans in northern California turned the deportation process on its head. By October 22, 1930, the *Express* reported that Mexicans were asking to be deported “in such large numbers” the immigration officers were swamped.\(^\text{85}\) Mexicans were pariahs that were now portrayed as operating with agency, engineering their own deportations before officials forced them to leave. But the numbers of Mexicans turning themselves in strained the government funds available to send them back, leading J. D. Nagle, the commissioner of immigration, to limit deportations. Only illegal immigrants who had committed a crime or fallen into poverty or illness and become public charges would be deported. “Self-supporting law abiding aliens, even if in the United States illegally, are being put off when they apply for deportation,” the *Express* reported.\(^\text{86}\) The nation’s massive deportation policy had costs and consequences the Hoover administration had not considered.

In border areas, however, Mexicans remained easy and unfortunate targets for deportation. *La Prensa* depicted deportees as “unfortunate countrymen” whose treatment by the US Border Patrol was “tantamount to that suffered during the Inquisition.” In an August 11, 1930, story the newspaper described how many were apprehended during the Border Patrol’s “daily sweeps through the most populous Mexican neighborhoods.” The deportees were detained in the basement of the immigration office, “in a humid, dark, and

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\(^{85}\) “Aliens Seeking to be Deported Swamp Immigration Men,” *San Antonio Express*, October 22, 1930, 1.

\(^{86}\) Ibid.
uncomfortable” holding area. There they were photographed, fingerprinted, subjected to thousands of requirements, questioned, and much more.**

*La Prensa* also continued to follow the fate of repatriates as they left the United States, and in an August 25, 1930, story described a repatriation train of 24 railcars carrying 1,600 people as “an immense mournful caravan of people down on their luck.” The travelers included repatriates and deportees, all of whom had been massing near the border, at Torreon in the Mexican state of Coahuila. They had no money to continue their journey home. The Mexican government paid their fares and sent them on their way. The local chamber of commerce, and the state and municipal governments donated funds to purchase food for the caravan, which included 800 sardine tins, one thousand pieces of bread; two sacks of sugar, six cartons of cookies, and forty kilograms of coffee.**

Adding to the financial woes facing repatriates was their victimization and exploitation by *coyotes*, criminals who helped illegal immigrants enter the country and often preyed upon them. *Coyotes* operating in the United States, *La Prensa* reported, had swindled repatriates traveling through the Midwest. The *coyotes* convinced repatriates they were required to exchange their US currency for Mexican money before leaving the United States. When they finally reached the Mexican border, they discovered they were penniless: The *coyotes* had exchanged their dollars for decommissioned Mexican money.** *La Prensa*’s coverage provided more than news, it provided cautionary tales that increasingly portrayed returning to Mexico as a bleak exercise.

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**89 “Los Repatriados son Explotados por ‘Coyotes,’” *La Prensa*, October 26, 1930, 8.
The pariah frame in 1930 continued to depict Mexicans, whether deportees or repatriates, as hostages to forces outside their control, whether government authorities or crooks, such as the coyotes. Some of this treatment was antediluvian, including a deportation sweep in a school and the dehumanizing treatment that some immigrants were subjected to during the deportation process. Once they crossed the border into Mexico, they frequently became charity cases, dependent on handouts of bread, sardines, and free transportation, notwithstanding the invitation Ortiz Rubio issued to its expatriates. To ease the onerous way, newspapers—La Prensa in particular—published articles with advice and suggestions about various facets of the immigration and repatriation process.

**Prescriptive Frame: Perpetual Battles and Lands without Water**

Prescriptions often took the form of instructions, best practices, and advice for immigrants, business, or the government. For example, a February 20, 1930, story in La Prensa suggested that potential repatriates might want to await the outcome of a government measure to modify Mexican customs law, that, if approved, would permit Mexicans to take all their possessions back to Mexico duty-free, rather than just a select few.90 Some goods were more problematic than others, given the “frequency with which repatriates were arriving at the border with their firearms,” La Prensa reported in a November 11, 1930, story. The newspaper instructed them to ensure they obtained

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90 “Varios Diputados piden que se den Facilidades a los Mexicanos que se Repatrien,” La Prensa, February 20, 1930, 1.
authorization from the Mexican consulate before attempting entry into Mexico with weapons.91

The abundance and confusion of paperwork and permits did not end once the repatriates and deportees crossed the border into Mexico. On the contrary, the deportees and repatriates were required to fill out the same paperwork once they returned to their homeland, as La Prensa proclaimed in a banner headline: “Deportees Must Present Themselves to Immigration,” referring to Mexican immigration. Repatriates who failed to do so would be required to pay customs duties on their goods.92

Not everyone wanted to help Mexicans leave the country. Agribusiness used the media to announce their own prescriptions, and often these were ways to help maintain the Mexican labor force in the United States. In a March 19, 1930, United Press story datelined Corpus Christi, La Prensa reported that the South Texas Chamber of Commerce, which lobbied on behalf of the Rio Grande Valley business community, advised their members the Mexican immigration quota was “inevitable.” Growers should “get the peons’ passports so that they would be in order when the quota was vigorously enforced.”93

Prescriptions were also sometimes warnings. La Prensa published a December 6, 1930, op-ed article that aimed to dissuade Mexicans in the United States from accepting a Mexican government offer to repatriate. Life in the homeland would not offer better

91 “Importante Indicación a los Compatriotas que Regresan al País,” La Prensa, November 22, 1930, 4.

92 “Los Deportados Deben Presentarse a Inmigración,” La Prensa, July 7, 1930, 2.

living conditions, the op-ed declared. “What are they going to give to the colonies of repatriating Mexicans?” the opinion writer, Miguel Ruelas, asked rhetorically. “Nothing but the threat of perpetual battles or the ownership of lands without water.”

News and commentary in the prescription frame aimed in myriad directions in 1930. Prescriptions shifted rapidly as policies changed, or threatened to change. The prescriptions ranged from practical ways to get one’s belongings across the border to how to think about the issue of immigration and repatriation. Prescriptions were also sometimes contradictory. News coverage of Mexican President Ortiz Rubio’s call in 1930 for Mexicans to return and restore their homeland represented an ultimate prescription, as much as it framed repatriates as patriots. Yet, it took little time for La Prensa to caution its readers about the perils of repatriating to Mexico. Farmers, businessmen, and repatriates struggled to discover the optimal way to negotiate a crisis precipitated by the one-two punch of a decimated economy and draconian enforcement of immigration laws, both new and old. Despite occasionally conflicting prescriptions, Mexicans and Mexican Americans left the United States in a magnitude of much-disputed dimensions.

**Quantification Frame: A Male-Dominated Exodus**

The tide of humanity on the move during the Great Depression was not easy to tally. As more and more Mexicans—and La Prensa readers—departed for Mexico, the newspaper used a data-driven frame to make the massive demographic changes comprehensible to readers. The quantification frame helped establish an important news value, an event’s “magnitude, importance and prominence,” as Willard G. Bleyer, wrote

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94 “¿Que se les Va a Dar?” La Prensa, December 6, 1930, 3.
in the 1932 edition of *Newspaper Writing and Editing*, his classic textbook.\(^\text{95}\) The large numbers established repatriation, deportation, and immigration as a major story. However, these articles sometimes conflated repatriates with deportees. In its common definition, a repatriate is anyone returning to his home country, whether deportee or not. In the jargon of the Mexican government’s bureaucracy, however, repatriates were those who had made their return to Mexico official by registering at a Mexican consulate in the United States.

The failure of news organizations to define repatriation when it was used in a story did nothing to help clarify the nature of the returning immigrants. A prime example was the June 27, 1930, *La Prensa* article: “Help for 5,000 Mexicans.” The story recounted Mexican government efforts to secure free rail passes to repatriate 5,000 Mexicans found in “difficult circumstances” in Los Angeles and other parts of California. The article did not state whether these were officially registered repatriates or Mexicans who simply wished to return home.\(^\text{96}\) While the repatriates waited for government aid, deportees continued to cross the border. *La Prensa* reported that same day that eighty Mexicans from Kansas, a number of them ex-convicts just released from the federal penitentiary in Fort Leavenworth, had returned. The article noted that it had become the custom throughout the United States for prisoners to be deported once they had completed their terms.\(^\text{97}\)


\(^{96}\) “Ayuda a Cinco Mil Mexicanos,” *La Prensa*, June 27, 1930, 1.

\(^{97}\) “Llegan Mas Deportados,” *La Prensa*, June 27, 1930, 1.
The newspapers’ use of imprecise terminology to classify categories of returnees contributes to a contested aspect of Depression-era repatriation: the number of people who were officially repatriated through programs instigated by local US governments, relief agencies, and/or the Mexican government. While historian Abraham Hoffman provided what are generally regarded as the most reliable numbers—just under 500,000—based on statistics from the Mexican Migration Service, historians Francisco Balderrama and Ray Rodriguez extrapolated the number as high as 2 million. *La Prensa* reported government statistics, both from the Mexican government and the US government, and occasionally questioned their completeness and reliability.

Numbers and categories, such as repatriate, voluntary repatriate, deportee, and returnee without government or charitable assistance, matter because they help explain the depth, dimension, and character of a mass migration. The boundaries between these groups were sometimes blurred, making the human-interest news coverage particularly important in illustrating what it meant to be traveling to Mexico to begin a new life, or resume a former one, regardless of official immigration status.

Some stories were more detailed numerically, providing a sense of the “average” repatriate. A prime example was the July 9, 1930, *La Prensa* article, which ran under the banner headline: “4,980 Mexicans were Repatriated in Three Months.” The figure, calculated by the Mexican Migration Service, referred only to those repatriating through Nuevo Laredo during April, March, and June. Describing Nuevo Laredo as “a barometer for immigration and emigration” for the entire border, the article drew a demographic picture of repatriates during the second quarter of 1930. The repatriates were overwhelmingly male, numbering 3,411. Women numbered less than half that—1,569.
Those without family constituted the bulk of the repatriated—4,368. Only 612 returned with a family. Children under 15 years old accounted for 978 of those returning. By far the biggest age group, those between 15 and 50, numbered 3,805. Persons over 51 years old were least represented among the repatriates, numbering only 202. During the same period, only 1,713 emigrated from Mexico into the United States.  

A clear demographic portrait emerged from the numbers in the news story: Repatriates were more likely to be men under 50 traveling alone. News coverage, however, sometimes muddied other important characteristics of returnees, including the distinction between repatriates and deportees. A prime example is an August 16, 1930, article published with the banner, entirely uppercased headline, “1,600 MEXICANS WILL BE REPATRIATED MONDAY.” US immigration officials “deported” the Mexicans, “who were jobless and afflicted” and were set to be transported in 25 railcars into the Mexican interior, La Prensa reported. The numbers of repatriates and deportees continued in the thousands as the year wore on. In some instances, La Prensa did make a clear distinction between immigrants and deportees. For instance, a November 13, 1930, article reported that 1,437 repatriated voluntarily in October, crossing from El Paso into Ciudad Juárez. During the same month, US immigration officials deported 114 Mexicans, the article stated.

These articles, which mostly appeared in La Prensa, provided a sense of proportion—one that was increasingly of a biblical-scale exodus. From January 1930 through the end of October 1930, 18,140 repatriated and deported Mexicans passed

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98 “4980 Mexicanos se Repatriaron en Tres Meses,” La Prensa, July 9, 1930, 4.

99 “1600 Mexicanos Seran Repatriados el Lunes,” La Prensa, August 16, 1930, 1.
through El Paso, Texas, into Mexico. Repatriates represented four-fifths of the total, *La Prensa* reported. On December 4, 1930, a *La Prensa* banner headline proclaimed: “4,782 Mexicans Returned through Nuevo Laredo.” Attempting to put this number in context, the article reported that the figure, which represented November departures, was 500 more than had repatriated the prior month through the same port of entry.\(^{100}\)

The movement was also increasingly one-way as *La Prensa* pointed out in a page-one story, “Mexican Immigration Diminishing.” Only 2,400 Mexicans crossed the US border at Laredo in fiscal year 1929-1930, compared to 9,500 who entered in 1928-1929, *La Prensa* reported on November 13, 1930.\(^{101}\) *La Prensa* put the crisis in the Mexican community in context with the greater economic debacle pervading Depression-era America: rampant homelessness, joblessness, and hunger. The newspaper published a three-column photo across the top of the page that depicted more than a dozen men in fedoras, newsboy caps, and overcoats lined up on a New York City sidewalk to receive sandwiches, coffee, and money from Franciscan priests.\(^{102}\) Most of the men averted their faces from the camera. It seemed that everyone was looking for help in 1930.

Prominent names make news, but magnitude is a news value, too. *La Prensa* showed the massive scale of Mexican repatriation and deportation in stories that framed the phenomenon quantitatively. The *Express* rarely ran such stories. *La Prensa* published stories from various ports of entry, detailing the Mexican exodus on a monthly, quarterly, and a fiscal-year basis. The Mexican Migration Service and the US Immigration Service

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\(^{100}\) “4,782 Mexicanos Regresaron por N. Laredo,” *La Prensa*, December 4, 1930, 4.

\(^{101}\) “Disminuye la Inmigración de Mexicanos,” *La Prensa*, November 13, 1930, 1, 5. The numbers were reported on a fiscal year basis.

\(^{102}\) “Padres Franciscanos Alimentan a los Desocupados,” *La Prensa*, November 13, 1930, 1.
were the primary sources, but precise distinctions between repatriated and deported Mexicans weren’t always made, making the nature of the exodus difficult to characterize. Nonetheless, *La Prensa*’s point was clear: Mexicans were moving out of the United States in massive numbers and few were entering. The coverage conveyed the harsh reality of the unwanted Mexican. Planters, harvesters, bricklayers, carpenters, autoworkers, steelworkers, cotton pickers, canners, pecan shellers, and the unsung seamstress, laundress, cook, and maid, among others, seeded, weeded, forged, fed, built, mended, stitched, and cleaned the United States. For their service, they were expendable. This was not the reality for the first Spanish-speaking immigrants to San Antonio, however. They were venerable.

**Spanish Nostalgia Frame: Remember the Alamo**

Efforts to recover and re-imagine the Spanish colonial past carried over from 1929 to 1930. Most often, news written in the Spanish nostalgia frame dealt with retention of the manifestations of the Spanish conquest in North America, Spanish street names, and significant structures such as the Alamo and the Franciscan Missions.

In late 1929, the preservationists protested an effort to rename San Antonio’s downtown Zarzamora Street, arguing to retain the moniker the Spanish colonial settlers had given the thoroughfare. Four days after the new year of 1930, the *Express* covered the preservationists’ victory. Despite the *Express* story, which explicitly reported the city’s declaration to maintain all of its Spanish street nomenclature, a group of businessmen petitioned to eliminate yet another Castilian street name. The businessmen sought to re–christen Losoya Street with a name better known in New York than San Antonio—Broadway. The conservationists won again, noting that the name Losoya had a
“musical cadence” and a historical significance: it honored Jesus Losoya, an early resident killed by Indians.¹⁰³

Street names weren’t the only cultural markers the Express fought to preserve. Buildings remained one of Spain’s most potent legacies. The Express, whose editorial ethos started with the mandate to “Keep San Antonio first always,” updated its editorial plank in the New Year. In 1930, for the first time, the newspaper added the objective: “Protect the Alamo from commercial encroachment and beautify its surroundings.”¹⁰⁴ San Antonio had a slew of structures worthy of preservation—most notably its historic Spanish missions. Preserving the missions emerged as a theme in 1929 and the Express continued to editorialize on the topic. The missions “are beyond appraisal—but they are worth even more as the embodiment of . . . the Franciscan Fathers’ devotion to the service of mankind.”¹⁰⁵

Citizens and city officials continued to commemorate San Antonio’s most famous Franciscan-built structure: the Alamo, the site of a momentous battle of the Texas Revolution. The January 30, 1930, Express published a photo of an artist’s model of a $30,000 electrified fountain that Mayor Chambers of San Antonio wanted to erect at Alamo Plaza and dedicate to “Bowie, Crockett, Travis, Houston, and other Texas heroes.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ “Steffler Opposes Losoya Street Change,” San Antonio Express, January 25, 1930, 22; “Losoya to Remain as Street Name,” San Antonio Express, January 26, 1930, 1A.


¹⁰⁵ “Provide a Worthy Setting for Priceless Possessions,” San Antonio Express, January 9, 1930, 12.

¹⁰⁶ “Memorial for Texas Heroes,” San Antonio Express, January 30, 1930, 15.
La Prensa covered many of these stories too, though not as assiduously. Perhaps the concerns of present-day Mexican immigrants were more pressing than those of the past. Perhaps it also reflected a more ambivalent Mexican perspective on the meaning of the Alamo, with Mexicans and Mexican Americans often bearing the brunt of an Anglo grudge over the ignominious defeat. This was true even though persons of Mexican descent also perished alongside Anglos in pursuit of Texas independence. The economist Paul S. Taylor documented the extent to which Alamo history aroused Anglo antipathies toward Mexicans. In his 1934 book, an American-Mexican Frontier, he quoted a white cotton picker:

The study of the Alamo helps to make more hatred toward the Mexicans. It is human nature, if a man does you wrong—slaughters your kinsmen. In fact, I just ain’t got no use for a Mexican and I am in favor of not letting Mexicans come over and take the white man’s labor.\(^\text{107}\)

As Taylor noted, public memory and myth played against economic strains to exacerbate historical tensions among some in Texas.

La Prensa might also have considered Alamo news coverage less compelling because the city’s Anglo elite drove the conservation and preservation efforts, with little participation from members of San Antonio’s Mexican American community.\(^\text{108}\) But preserving the Franciscan Missions was among the stories La Prensa reported, especially


\(^{108}\) Laura Hernández-Ehrisman, *Inventing the Fiesta City: Heritage and Carnival in San Antonio* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 96. Hernández-Ehrisman writes, for instance, that the Anglo women organizers of San Antonio’s bicentennial celebration planned to play the part of the first immigrants, the Spanish-speaking Canary Islanders, and expressed surprise when the Canary Islander’s descendants wanted to play the part of their own ancestors. See also page, 84, where Hernández-Ehrisman writes that the Anglo dominated San Antonio Conservation Society, known as SACS, “operated within a space between the Spanish fantasy and the Mexican reality. To some extent they embraced Mexicano culture and Mexicanos’ presence but wanted to supervise their role in the city’s public culture.”
the plans of the Mission Road Improvement League. On the eve of the 200th anniversary of the 1731 arrival of the Franciscans in San Antonio, *La Prensa* reported that the league intended to “honor the memory of the Franciscan friars who defied the hostility of the Indians to complete their work of civilization and concord, sowing the seeds of the Catholic faith, and constructing temples to provide protection.”

Mission preservation was of such importance to *La Prensa* that the “mysterious disappearance” of a small bell from Mission San Jose merited coverage. Used by the Franciscans since 1736 during the Mass, the bell was presumably taken by a tourist, *La Prensa* reported. The bell should be returned to the Mission “so that it can be integrated with all the works the first Franciscan fathers have left to posterity to record for the world their stay in Texas, when the region was inhabited by savage Indians,” the article stated.

Preservation coverage by the *Express* was far more comprehensive. Among other things, the newspaper strongly reiterated its support for efforts to recreate “the Old San Antonio Road.” The paper’s editorial romanticized the route, which ran from Nacogdoches through San Antonio to the Rio Grande, noting it was followed by “Early Spanish explorers, French traders, Franciscan Mission-builders, colonists from the States, Indian Fighters, soldiers of fortune” and “gray-clad warriors.” But the *Express* did not

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111 “Recreating the Old San Antonio Road,” *San Antonio Express*, January 27, 1930. The *Express* editorial writer expressed a clear sense of the significance of San Antonio’s Spanish colonial past, writing: “The reconstruction task follows ancient precedent. Don Antonio Cordero, Spanish Governor of San Antonio, ordered the road—then called El Camino Real—or King’s Highway—
stop there, and on May 21, 1930, it editorialized enthusiastically about the Texas State Highway Commission’s decision to commemorate the Chisholm Trail. Famed University of Texas folklorist J. Frank Dobie studied what was left of the trail, whose path was in dispute, and proposed resurrecting two Chisholm Trails, with San Antonio included in both.

The two roads also will preserve the name of a man who was the cowmen’s friend—Jesse Chisholm, pioneer of the Western plains before the Civil War, Indian scout, guide interpreter and trader. He not only blazed a trail for Texas cattlemen, but won for them the Indians’ friendship, which made possible the 1,000-mile drive from Texas to Kansas and Missouri markets.112

The *Express* extolled this long-overdue memorial to the Texas cowboy, without recognizing that the first cowboys, or *vaqueros*, were Mexican.

Yet Spanish nostalgia ruled in many civic activities, including San Antonio’s Battle of Flowers parade. The parade tradition began in 1891, and prominent women in San Antonio society were its first organizers. Historian Laura Hernández-Ehrisman described the parade as a paradox of San Antonio’s entry into modernity, grounding its future in its past.113 In 1930, the Battle of Flowers association organizing the event announced that floats for that year’s annual parade must be decorated with “the ornamentation representative of that period of Spanish history when Ferdinand and Isabella reigned,” the *Express* reported on February 19, 1930.114

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112 “Marking the Chisholm Trail,” *San Antonio Express*, May 21, 1930, 12.


114 “Floats to Carry Spanish Theme,” *San Antonio Express*, February 19, 1930. 8.
Conclusion

San Antonio’s Iberian glorification stood in sharp contrast to the harsh reality of Mexican life in the Alamo City during the Great Depression. The *Express* celebrated and nurtured the city’s Spanish past, even as it advocated that the empire’s colonial descendents, Mexicans, remain in lower status jobs, doing the backbreaking work “whites would not do.” The newspaper continued to reflect Anglo society’s “absurd dichotomy between things Spanish and things Mexican,” as Carey McWilliams characterized such disparate views.¹¹⁵

The first full year of the Depression was riven with federal public policy debates about Mexican immigration. These debates were manifest in the financial frame, particularly in the *Express*, which illustrated the investment that growers, railroad owners, and bankers, in Texas and California, among other places, had in low-cost, dependable, and mobile Mexican labor. US Rep. Box and other opponents generally viewed such labor as an economic threat. However, the hierarchy of color frame illustrated that restrictionists such as Box also often cloaked their arguments in racial animus. The same was true for some proponents of an open border with Mexico, such as Harry Chandler, the *Los Angeles Times* publisher, who testified before Congress that the United States was “a thousand times better off with Mexican labor” than that of any other hue.

While the *Express* focused on policy, *La Prensa* attempted to document the swell of Mexican humanity, as depicted in the quantification frame. Along with the prescriptive

frame, this news coverage might be seen as an effort to bring order to a chaotic story, in which Mexicans and Mexican Americans were increasingly at risk of running afoul of government regulations and the Border Patrol. *La Prensa’s* focus on the pathos of the immigration and repatriation story, as exemplified in the pariah frame, among others, constructed a more complete image of Mexicans and Mexican Americans than the *Express*: They were people, not mere policy widgets.

Despite differences in news coverage, both newspapers stood together against restrictive immigration policy-making that roiled the nation’s capital. If there was a political economy divided by culture, it was a division between Texas and Washington, DC. When it came to understanding the importance of Mexico and Mexican labor, as the *Express* put it: Southwest residents could “more clearly see than people who live at a distance.”

116 Nonetheless, even San Antonians likely didn’t envision that 1931, the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the city’s first Spanish-speaking immigrants and founders, would coincide with the largest annual Depression-era outflow of Mexicans repatriating from the United States.

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Chapter 4: 1931
The Tragedy of the Repatriated

Remember, reader, that family that ventured through the desert of Sonora and left cadavers of loved ones along the lost path. Remember the one who committed suicide, feeling completely unloved when he returned to the doors of his home. Did you know that recently a repatriated couple had to say farewell to their son in Mexico City, after he froze to death on the way to their hometown? And finally, the press in the capital picked up the news that 25 small, repatriated children, and some women, and elderly, died from starvation during this time. How will this tragedy end?

--La Prensa, November 25, 1931

The United States entered its second full year of the Depression in 1931, a year of continuing woe recounted on the pages of the San Antonio Express and La Prensa, and newspapers nationwide. The financial decline was unabated. For the second consecutive year investment in the United States plummeted 35 percent. A food riot in Minnesota required 100 policemen to quell; an unemployment protest at Ford Motor Co.’s River Rouge, Michigan, plant left four dead; and the country’s largest bank failure, involving the Bank of the United States in New York and the loss of $200 million in deposits, were among the more graphic manifestations of economic and social unrest in 1931.

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1 “La Tragedia del los Repatriados,” La Prensa, November 25, 1931, 3.
Banks also closed in Texas. In San Antonio, the Texas State Banking Department took control of the City-Central Bank and Trust Co., which had almost $900,000 in City of San Antonio and Bexar County funds on deposit. The announcement of the state takeover of the bank, made on Sunday night September 27, 1931, created a “sensation” in San Antonio. The next morning, hundreds of account holders milled outside the bank, which had disconnected its phones, reported La Prensa. The Express described a more sedate scene: Patrons congregated in the early morning and then dispersed as “A uniformed policeman stood guard at the door warning away customers.” La Prensa also reported that numerous businesses and individuals in the city’s Mexican community had money in the bank, a fact the Express stories omitted.

Despite the more benign description of the bank closure in the Express, San Antonio’s financial institutions were ailing. The Great Depression would ultimately push one-third of the city’s twenty-one banks into insolvency. But it was “the failure of City Central Bank and Trust Company that shook San Antonio to its core,” according to historian L. Patrick Hughes. The Reconstruction Finance Corp. helped the bank’s seven hundred largest depositors reconstitute the institution as South Texas Bank and Trust.

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9 Ibid.
The liquidation and restructuring took more than a year, a critical period during which depositors, including the City of San Antonio, could not access their money. In the meantime, unemployment in San Antonio, which amounted to 6 percent in the 1930 census, was almost twice the 3.3 percent state average. The city’s Unemployment Relief Committee, a private group, received more than 3,000 applications for relief work from heads of households by mid-January 1931.

The economic debacle nationwide was devastating to many with the best options. It was a disaster for those on the margins, including many Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The entire city of San Antonio endured privation during the Great Depression. The collapse of banking, trade, and retail, as well as declines in manufacturing, construction, and other industries, left as many as 20,000 people without jobs and on relief for much of the decade. On the West Side, which had the largest Mexican population, residents dwelled in crude huts constructed with cast-off boxcar wood and tin cans. Hunger, illness, and poverty were the norm. The neighborhood was predominantly populated with unskilled and semi-skilled laborers, and their jobs all but evaporated during the economic crisis.

Perhaps unsurprising, then, more Mexicans were repatriated in 1931 than any year during the Depression, according to historian Abraham Hoffman. He relied on statistics

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11 Hughes, “Beyond Denial.”


13 Ibid.
from the Mexican Migration Service, which the US government considered the most reliable. The number of repatriates rose to 138,519 in 1931, double the year earlier. These repatriates accounted for 30 percent of all Mexicans who returned between 1929 and 1937. The returnees crowded into almost every available conveyance: train, automobile, airplane, and ship. Some walked.

President Herbert Hoover accelerated the exodus with his appointment of William N. Doak as Secretary of Labor. Carrying out Hoover’s mandate to create more jobs for Americans, Doak informed the US Senate that he needed the authority to sign arrest warrants that would permit field officers to apprehend the 400,000 immigrants illegally in the country. Doak called 400,000 “a fair estimate, or conjecture.” He added: “It is obviously impossible to arrive at any concrete figures as to the number of aliens unlawfully in the United States.” He declared that experience informed him that only about 25 percent, or 100,000 would be deportable and called for strengthening the nation’s deportation laws.

Doak-initiated immigration sweeps enveloped Mexican communities in fear, particularly in the Southwest. Doak’s agents seized the mandate to round up illegal immigrants with “dedicated zeal,” raiding public areas and private homes in the process. In Texas, families of Mexican origin who could not “satisfactorily” prove their

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15 “Says 400,000 Aliens are Here Illegally,” New York Times, January 6, 1931, 5.

length of residency felt “great anxiety over the aggressive methods the [Texas] ‘rangers’ adopted everywhere in the Rio Grande Valley,” *La Prensa* reported on October 27, 1931. “This contributes to the escalating exodus toward Mexico.”¹⁷

These pressures likely spurred reluctant Mexicans to cooperate with local US welfare agencies, which in 1931 undertook repatriation programs. Los Angeles County initiated the largest among them.¹⁸ As Hoffman put it, “The idea that aliens were holding down jobs and that by giving those jobs to Americans, the depression [sic] could be cured, runs through the depression [sic] years as a cure-all with little foundation in fact.”¹⁹

Myriad forces contributed to the escalating Mexican diaspora. Joblessness went hand-in-hand with Jim Crow, at least in California, where the state legislature discussed implementing a law that would require Indians and Mexicans to be taught in separate public schools, *La Prensa* reported.²⁰ The newspaper’s coverage informed the Mexican community how local policies were designed to make remaining in the United States untenable. One Los Angeles-based journalist for the *New York Times* called the effort to legalize segregation of Mexicans a contributing factor to the massive repatriation underway in California. The reporter described the migration as “the greatest hegira of modern times,” drawing a parallel between the departure of the Mexicans and the flight of Muhammad from Mecca in AD 622.

¹⁷ “Sigue el Éxodo de la Region del Valle,” *La Prensa,* October 27, 1931, 2.


²⁰ “Una Ley Contra los Mexicanos y los Indios,” *La Prensa,* April 25, 1931, 1.
More than 10,000 Mexicans, men, women, and children are leaving every month for the motherland, where the welcome sign is not too conspicuously displayed. Pressed by economic adversity, stirred with fear at recently renewed activities of immigration authorities and perplexed by what they regard as anti-Mexican sentiment, the Mexicans have been leaving Southern California in amazing numbers for more than three months.21

Labor Secretary Doak took much of the credit. On the Fourth of July, 1931, six months after making his New Year’s resolution on deportation before the Senate, he declared victory. The Express reported the news under the headline: “Labor Freed of Alien Menace.” Doak explained that “fewer immigrants are now being admitted than at any time during the last hundred years,” the article stated. He went on to compare immigration in May 1931 with immigration in May 1914, when 30 times more foreigners were admitted to the United States. “The number of aliens leaving the country of their own volition now considerably exceeds the number coming, and the exodus is further increased by deportations,” Doak stated.22

Despite the record number of Mexican departures in 1931, the Great Depression did not lift, and would not lift for years to come. Scholar Edna Kelly compared the convoys of retreating Mexicans and Mexican Americans to a “fiesta” or an adventurous campout, but news coverage in the Express and La Prensa suggested otherwise. Predominant news frames in 1931 included the financial frame, in which Mexico and Texas border cities weighed the financial impact of Mexican workers; and the quantification frame, which gave numerical representation and significance to the repatriation and deportation story. These frames were extant as Texans, along with the


rest of the world, sought to adjust to the new economic order wrought by the Great Depression. News coverage showed that Mexicans had their useful places in better times, working difficult and laborious jobs north of the border, and sending some money back to their depleted homeland. In 1931, however, repatriates continued to be framed dichotomously, as they had been since the start of the Depression. They were sometimes conceived as patriots; a frame that portrayed returning Mexicans as valuable social and economic tools for post-Revolutionary Mexico. However, in 1931, as it became clearer that Mexico could not successfully absorb all its returning compatriots, the pariah frame, which depicted repatriates as luckless, labor-force detritus, gained primacy.

The mass migration inspired other Mexicans and Mexican Americans to acts of philanthropy, and the good-citizen frame captured their work, particularly that of women, who were active community agents committed to supporting repatriating Mexicans. Finally, the Spanish nostalgia frame was ostentatiously manifest in 1931, San Antonio’s bicentennial year. The six-day celebration reenacted and commemorated San Antonio’s founding 200 years earlier by Spaniards from the Canary Islands and Franciscan missionaries. In short, San Antonio’s bicentennial festivities memorialized the arrival of the first Spanish-speaking immigrants to the territory at a moment in history—the Great Depression—when their descendants were vigorously, and in some cases, forcefully, expelled from the land they pioneered.

Financial Frame: Taking Jobs from Americans

The comings and goings of Mexicans and Mexican Americans had financial implications for both the United States and Mexico. Words in news coverage associated with this frame included “commerce,” “moneyed,” “indigent,” and “consumers.” Not
every American city was happy to see Mexicans go in 1931, and not every Mexican city was happy to see them arrive. Many Mexican repatriates and deportees discovered that they might have to weave their own welcome mat. Mexico was mired in its own economic crisis, which was “aggravated by the repatriation of thousands of Mexicans that had been deported from the United States because they were jobless,” La Prensa reported on January 20, 1931.

Struggling to cope with the waves of repatriates, Mexico instituted a classification plan for the returnees, the La Prensa article stated. In the first group were those who returned with money, farm tools, and capability for work. The second group included those who wished to return to their home in Mexico, had family they could count on, and resources with which to live. The third were the indigent. Mexico’s plan was to provide the first groups with cultivable government-owned land, with the hope that the better-equipped repatriates would succeed and hire members of the last, or indigent, group.23

While Mexico attempted to put repatriates to work solving the unemployment problem, cities on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border were reaping the financial consequences of a less than hospitable attitude toward Mexicans in the United States. The border city of El Paso was among the municipalities to feel the economic impact of anti-Mexican sentiment. In a March 22, 1931, story, La Prensa reported that the chamber of commerce in Monterrey, Mexico, and business groups from other nearby cities initiated a boycott against El Paso, “owing to the bad treatment toward Mexicans.” The El Paso Chamber of Commerce replied with a letter “to our friends in Mexico,” assuring

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23 “Clasifican en 3 Grupos a los Repatriados,” La Prensa, January 20, 1931, 1.
Mexicans they were welcome. *La Prensa* described the businessmen’s statement as “very natural,” because “without Mexican consumers, local commerce would be ruined.”

Despite the El Paso chamber’s declarations of “friendship and goodwill,” there are many Mexicans complaining of humiliations and discourtesies on the international bridges and in immigration offices,” the article continued. The page-five story contained first person observations. “And in effect, this correspondent has seen that some North American immigration agents demonstrated brusqueness and arrogance toward Mexicans, especially those from humble and poor classes.” The reporter left the lingering idea that El Paso’s businesses would continue to decline. “The businessmen might not treat their Mexican clients badly, but they had no control over the US Department of Immigration, where many Mexicans had to suffer a thousand penalties, humiliations, stupid questions, etc.,” the article stated.

In the *Express*, the financial frame continued to be evinced, and by 1931, some stories had begun to reflect the impact of the immigration crackdown. A prime example was a February 2, 1931, article in which O.W. Killam, president of the South Texas Chamber of Commerce in Laredo, argued that a 93 percent decline in Mexicans entering the country, along with decreases in European immigration, made “emergency legislation to relieve the unemployment situation” superfluous. Killam, who was part of special committee reporting to the US Chamber of Commerce, said the State Department’s administrative actions and existing laws had alleviated the problem of immigrants

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25 Ibid.
entering and competing for jobs.\textsuperscript{26} The threat that immigrants posed to the job market was palpable. The topic had popular currency in San Antonio as evidenced in another \textit{Express} article, a newspaper brief inviting residents to attend a YMCA public discussion on “Immigration and the Unemployment Problem.”\textsuperscript{27} Sentiment was intense, however, in border cities such as Del Rio, Texas, where the American Legion took a survey of highway workers between Del Rio and Eagle Pass, finding that only 2 out of 12 Mexicans on the job were US citizens, the \textit{Express} reported in a February 8, 1931 article. The publication of the survey results left “many Mexicans” thinking “that the Legion post is after their scalps.”\textsuperscript{28} The survey was spurred by the lingering unemployment of 40 ex-military men in Del Rio, according to Legion Commander Art Kramer, who organized a “secret committee” to check up on the citizenship of workers. Kramer defended the tactic: “Laborers who come over the line on that basis rob naturalized citizens of Mexican descent of their jobs as well as native-born American citizens and there really isn’t much which can be done about it until the immigration laws are tightened to some extent.”\textsuperscript{29}

The financial news frame that emerged in \textit{La Prensa} in 1931 illustrated the complex role of Mexicans in the border economy and the uncertain role they might play as repatriates in Mexico. Mexican government officials sought to bring order to its rapidly burgeoning repatriate population with a classification system that inherently acknowledged the poorest and least prepared would find few opportunities in post-revolutionary Mexico. Shopkeepers on the Texas side of the border were dismayed to

\textsuperscript{26} “Alien Laws OK Killam Reports,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 2, 1931, 15.
\textsuperscript{27} “Discussion Group Will Hold Meeting,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 5, 1931, 8.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 8, 1931, 11. The article appeared without a headline.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. .
lose some of their best customers, and blamed the aggressive, undiplomatic, and in some cases, abusive, actions of the US Border Patrol. Businesses situated along the border stood on the front lines of US immigration policy, and became economic casualties as a result.

The financial frame as evinced in the *Express* in 1931 constructed a different reality, one in which American citizens, and veterans, no less, were allegedly cheated out of jobs by Mexicans illegally in the country. The *Express* narrated this story viscerally, using terms such as “secret committee,” in quotation marks, to describe the American Legion’s vigilante effort to police the legality of construction workers. Alluding to the figurative “scalping” of Mexicans highlighted how the financial impact of immigrants ignited the passions of Anglos desperate to sustain themselves in an unsustainable time.

**Quantification Frame: Scientifically Picturing Mexican Immigrants**

The Mexican government did more than classify repatriates and immigrants in groups. It counted them, and even the US government considered the Mexican Migration Service the most accurate in its tallies. *La Prensa* covered the numbers from as many border cities as possible. The increasing prevalence of the quantification frame in 1931 fit with journalist Walter Lippmann’s argument, propounded in his 1922 book *Public Opinion*, that news must convey correct representations of the world so the citizenry might form an effective viewpoint. 30 Lippmann was a proponent of scientific management and the other expert-oriented ideas first popularized in the Progressive

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Era. These ideas, as communications scholar James Carey noted, were integral to Lippmann’s conception of journalistic practice. Lippmann posited that the only way news organizations might provide true renderings of reality was to refer to expert agencies, such as the National Bureau of Standards. In this case, the US government asserted that the Mexican Migration Service provided the empirical evidence that constituted accurate representation. Beyond that, relying on the Mexican Migration Service data offered La Prensa an important tool to illustrate the significance of repatriation and deportation stories in 1931. In contrast, the Express infrequently published stories that numerically characterized Mexican repatriates and deportees.

The movement of repatriates entering Mexico through Nuevo Laredo “grew notably” in the latter half of 1930, amounting to 21,000, La Prensa reported January 3, 1931. Four times more Mexicans repatriated in December 1929—4,000—than in July 1929, when 1,000 Mexicans returned through the Port of Laredo, the article stated. The article failed to define repatriates, an omission that blurred the impetus for the exodus. Were the repatriates returning voluntarily, eager to rebuild their homeland? Or were they pressured to leave in the prevailing anti-Mexican climate? Or did they return for lack of


33 Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression, 126.

34 “21,000 Mexicanos Repatriados Durante los Ultimos Meses, por Nuevo Laredo,” La Prensa, January 3, 1931, 1.
resources? Or were they deported for a real or presumed violation of immigration law? A definitive answer to these questions would lend depth and dimension to the civil rights and race relations aspects of the repatriation and immigration story La Prensa reported to its readers during the 1930s.

La Prensa sometimes made these distinctions explicit. Almost 14,000 Mexicans returned to Mexico through Ciudad Juárez during 1930, with most of them repatriating voluntarily, La Prensa reported on January 20, 1931. “Only 1,700 compatriots were deported,” the article stated. In other words, only a little more than 12 percent of the returnees were deportees. Repatriates moved continuously across the border at Ciudad Juárez. At the same time, deportees averaged twenty a day as US immigration authorities accelerated deportations of Mexicans unable to prove legal US residency. More than that, La Prensa stated, immigration officers had begun sweeping up Mexicans under their recently implemented “L.P.C. (Liable to become a public charge)” policy under which jobless Mexicans were increasingly vulnerable.35

Despite the incessant stream of deportees, La Prensa continued to show they represented only a fraction of repatriates departing from various border cities. Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, recorded the repatriation of 1,999 Mexicans during April 1931. A little more than 5 percent of that number, 110, were deported, according to La Prensa. Mexicans emigrants to the United States that month numbered 255, underscoring the overwhelmingly one-way direction of Depression-era migration between the two countries.

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35 “14,000 Mexicanos Repatriados por Ciudad Juárez,” La Prensa, March 20, 1931, 4.
The trend continued into the summer of 1931. US immigration authorities deported 292 Mexicans from El Paso, Texas, during July. At the same time, far more Mexicans—2,167—repatriated voluntarily from the same border city, according to La Prensa. The area director for the Mexican Migration office in Ciudad Juárez was the source for the statistics, according to the August 12, 1931, story.\(^{36}\) Clarifying the different streams of Mexican returnees provided a sense of immigrant agency, at least in this case, because far more Mexicans elected to repatriate in July through El Paso than were forcibly deported. Despite this occasional precision, La Prensa often referenced an unrelenting and incalculable procession of Mexican people returning. “Hardly a day passes when special trains with more or less numerous groups of repatriates do not pass through this city, coming from diverse cities and regions of the United States. The largest numbers of repatriates come from the state of California.”\(^ {37}\)

Numbers stories about repatriates, deportees, and other immigrants were an important editorial tool for La Prensa. Such articles were little published in the Express. Quantifying the repatriation and deportation saga suggested its scale but stripped the story of soul. And souls—and their suffering—were the story. The true repatriation tale could only be told through other news frames that looked at the people behind the numbers. The dichotomous patriot and pariah frames were a prime way the newspapers, particularly La Prensa, accomplished this.

**Patriot Frame: Back to Mexico in a “Little Ford” Car**

In 1931, the patriot frame was largely absent in immigration news, particularly of repatriates. This frame, which depicted returnees as saviors of a poor, war-torn, and

\(^{36}\) “292 Mexicanos Deportados el Mes de Julio,” La Prensa, August 12, 1931, 8.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
economically ravaged country, was drowned out by stories that focused on the struggles of returnees. La Prensa editorialized that repatriates were mostly returning with “laurels of victory” and not necessarily compelled by the “humiliation of deportation.”

The voluntary repatriate returned not as “a public charge” but as “a possessor of a modest fortune, with agricultural tools, household goods, a little Ford car, and some savings.” For that reason, then, the newspaper argued, the voluntary repatriate’s “re-integration in the homeland will have providential results for Mexico in the present moment in the search for national reconstruction through work.” Likewise, the Express in 1931 also characterized the “back-to-Mexico” movement in glowing terms, according to a special correspondent’s report from the Laredo border, published July 1, 1931. “Many of these Mexicans repatriates responded to the call of Mexico for her native sons to return to develop the great agricultural resources of that country and engage in other pursuits,” the correspondent wrote, describing returnees who crossed the Laredo border between June 1930 and June 1931.

The Express article acknowledged that “the business depression throughout the United States might have contributed to some extent to this heavy repatriation movement,” but reported that “few” reached the Laredo border without funds during the year-long period. “Most of the repatriates returned to their native country well supplied

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38 “El Regreso a la Patria,” La Prensa, January 7, 1931, 3.
39 Ibid.
40 “40,000 Mexicans Return to Homeland,” San Antonio Express, July 1, 1931, 13.
41 Ibid.
with worldly goods,” the Express article stated.\textsuperscript{42} Others “went on trucks loaded with household goods, radios and all that go to add to the comforts of home.” Citing data from the US Immigration Service, the article noted that 39,000 of the 40,000 Mexicans who crossed the Laredo border in this period were voluntary returnees, and only 1,000 were deportees. Despite these auspicious descriptions in La Prensa and the Express, 1931 news coverage concerning repatriates, which was mostly found in La Prensa, told a different story. The tale of a glorious return to Mexico undoubtedly held some truth, but it also may well have reflected successful Mexican government propaganda and the allure of a happily ever after narrative carried for newspapers. The return of successful Mexican immigrants, heroically helping rebuild the homeland was inspiring at a time of severe economic distress on both sides of the border. Grim reality interceded in 1931, however, and the news coverage primarily framed Mexican repatriates and deportees as pariahs, that is, as needy, downtrodden cast-offs returning to a financially beleaguered Mexico.

**Pariah Frame: Convoys of Misery**

The pariah frame was pervasive throughout 1931 news coverage of repatriates and deportees, a topic frequently found in La Prensa and rare in the Express. Words associated with this frame included “tragic,” “unfortunate,” “poor,” “miserable,” “starving,” “suffering,” and “desperate.” La Prensa chronicled their stories, including published reports from correspondents based in Mexico, who reported on the fate of repatriates and deportees from railroad stations, customs houses, hospitals, docks, and roadsides.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
Many of these returnees arrived at the Mexican border in wretched condition in 1931. Those who were fortunate enough to have amassed household goods, furniture, farm animals, and agricultural equipment, often had to sell those at a steep discount at the border because they lacked transportation to continue on their journey with these possessions. Some arrived with quilts, sheets, and other necessary linens, which some Mexican immigration officials confiscated and burned to halt the spread of infectious disease. Some left family members behind. One Mexican man arrived at the border town of Nuevo Laredo with a baby in his arms and clutching children by the hand. He told immigration officials that his wife had “adapted to the foreign customs and refused to return.” The Mexican government provided the father and his children free rail passes to Monterrey, his hometown.

Typical was a group of 1,500, agricultural workers, mainly from California, who filled forty railcars of a single train, La Prensa reported on January 22, 1931. Some were also from New Mexico and Arizona. “Misery, at its most touching level, had made them victims, in such a manner that in the city of Chihuahua they were received by the Red Cross, which gave them money and bread,” La Prensa reported. The article ambiguously described them as both repatriates and deportees. Once the train reached

43 “600 Repatriados Obtuvieron Pases en el Tren,” La Prensa, October 23, 1931, 4.
44 “Queman los Colchones de los Repatriados,” La Prensa, October 7, 1931, 2.
45 “600 Repatriados Obtuvieron Pases en el Tren,” La Prensa, October 23, 1931, 4.
46 “1,500 Deportados Arribaron a Aguascalientes,” La Prensa, January 22, 1931, 5.
Aguascalientes, Mexico, the government handed them “abundant bread, prepared meats, and some amount of money,” the article stated.\textsuperscript{47}

As 1931 went on, \textit{La Prensa} described an unremitting parade of human need descending on Mexico from every corner of the United States. This included nine jobless and “unfortunate \textit{paisanos}” from Boston. The Mexican consul general in New York City provided free transportation aboard a vessel bound for Tampico, Mexico, where the repatriates arrived in “truly sad state” on January 27, 1931, \textit{La Prensa} reported.\textsuperscript{48} The Mexican consulate later announced it would fund the return voyage of as many as 500 Mexicans to Tampico, the \textit{Express} reported on September 25, 1931.\textsuperscript{49} In some cases, private industry facilitated the Mexicans’ return. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway Co. provided free train passage and food to 80 deportees, including women and children, traveling from Saginaw, Michigan, to the Laredo border.\textsuperscript{50}

Most repatriates returned via train or automobile, not on ships. Many also remained in the border area, “constituting a serious problem for the [Mexican] government,” according to a March 17, 1931, \textit{La Prensa} article. Ciudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso, Texas, was filled with thousands of repatriates who were “without jobs and resources, suffering from hunger and miseries, with only the hope that the federal government would quickly allot them free rail passes,” the article stated. The

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} “9 Mexicanos Arribaron a Tampico, en Estado Verdaderamente Triste,” \textit{La Prensa}, February 1, 1931, 7.

\textsuperscript{49} “Repatriation Planned of Jobless Mexicans,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, September 25, 1931, 4.

\textsuperscript{50} “El Missouri, Kansas, Texas Facilito los Transportes a unos Deportados,” \textit{La Prensa}, September 29, 1931, 2.
news story did not attempt to provide concrete numbers, though it mentioned that many of the Mexicans had “voluntarily” repatriated, using quotation marks around voluntary to suggest the contrary: “that they had been obligated to leave because they did not have jobs.”

The *La Prensa* journalist’s jibe at governmental jargon such as “voluntary repatriation” highlighted the inadequacy, and perhaps the hypocrisy, of the official classification system for returnees. It all depended on one’s definition of “voluntary.” Historian Abraham Hoffman’s groundbreaking 1974 account of Mexican repatriation in the 1930s relied on administrative, legal, and bureaucratic classifications, which led him to characterize most repatriation as “voluntary.” Some faulted this as “history . . . written from the top down.” The *La Prensa* reporter, however, offered no documentation or empirical evidence to support his allusion to the non-voluntary nature of repatriation. Nonetheless, the *La Prensa* reporter was an eyewitness to unfolding events, and from that vantage point challenged the neat government labels imposed on repatriates. Voluntary or not, Hoffman did note the paradoxical illogic of the Hoover administration’s stated strategy: Repatriating and deporting unemployed Mexicans failed to create jobs for Americans because Mexicans had no jobs.

News coverage showed that repatriates were subjected to shabby treatment on both sides of the border, particularly if they were impoverished. One repatriate made it 150 kilometers south of Ciudad Juárez to the town of Villa Ahumada, only to be detained

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by a customs inspector because one of his documents lacked a proper signature. The repatriate was forced to return to Ciudad Juárez to correct the paperwork, *La Prensa* reported. According to “reliable sources” customs inspectors were frequently peremptory with repatriates and deportees of little means. The reception was entirely different when well-to-do Mexicans presented themselves to officials. “These same zealous customs officers do not demonstrate much zeal, but no, to the contrary, they display much courtesy and attention when they deal with moneyed people or those of high official position.”

Mexican customs officials also were accused of taking financial advantage of repatriates. Some, as in the case of the customs administrator in Nogales, Mexico, were under investigation by the Mexican government for charging customs duties on repatriates’ vehicles when they were exempt from doing so, according to a March 17, 1931, *La Prensa* article. “Exploiters are taking advantage of this circumstance to acquire at cut-rate price the possessions of repatriates who cannot afford to pay the duties.” The article didn’t speculate whether the Nogales customs administrator was complicit in the effort to acquire the repatriates’ goods at low-cost or was merely inept or otherwise corrupt.

The Mexican Migration office in Ciudad Juárez was “constantly full of repatriates,” *La Prensa* reported on April 1, 1931. Within three weeks, Mexican immigration officials handed out 2,700 free rail passes. The local medical facility, Civil Liberty Hospital, was inundated with repatriates and deportees seeking food, medical

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care and attention. Cars and trucks of every class and size, loaded with returning families and their furniture, utensils, and other household goods, clogged the patio outside of the Mexican customs office awaiting approval “to continue their sad march into the interior of the country.”

Some US government officials not only treated Mexican immigrants as pariahs, they plainly characterized them as such. One “high North American government bureaucrat” declared “There were ‘lunatics,’ demented people, and prostitutes among the 1,500 Mexicans deported the prior month through El Paso,” La Prensa reported on May 18, 1931. The negative depiction provided a veneer of justification to the deportations. Mexican Consul General Renato Cantu Lara, however, sharply challenged the veracity of the statement, protesting that only a minority of the deportees fit that description.

One La Prensa correspondent encountered a group of forty desperate California repatriates in the northern Mexican city of Guamúchil, Sinaloa, on June 12, 1931. They demanded to ride the train for free and when the stationmaster refused, they shouted: “We are repatriates and the government offered to help us.” Then they forced their way onto the roof of the train. The journalist found them there, and when he introduced himself as a representative of the Lozano newspapers, the men began shouting “Viva el señor Ignacio E. Lozano y La Opinion y La Prensa.” Their refrain underscored the reach of the Lozano press and its fame as an advocate for the Mexican community. The men, carrying their humble baggage, traveled from nearby towns where they had been looking for work for more than a week. “Most of them were in horrifically miserable condition,”


57 “Protesta el Consul,” La Prensa, May 18, 1931, 6.
the reporter wrote. Despite their destitution, they exuded fraternity. When two men explained how hungry they were to the reporter, other repatriates instantly handed them tortillas, the article stated.

*La Prensa* correspondents captured many similar scenes of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in desperate straits as they attempted to return to their homeland and carve out a life under inhospitable circumstances. Often these were sad anecdotes captured in brief one- or two-paragraph stories on interior pages. Some were more visceral and spectacular page-one stories, such as “A Repatriate Killed Himself on the Train.” The story, which ran September 27, 1931, recounted how Amador Lopez shut himself in one of the bathrooms in the second-class coach and “swallowed a strong poison.” According to *La Prensa*, “Whatever obliged the compatriot to kill himself remains unknown, although presumably he felt obligated to do so by the bad economic conditions that befell him.”

The year 1931 also provided the single largest and most visible example of the pariah frame in coverage of the two-months-long saga of the repatriation of approximately 4,000 impoverished Mexicans and Mexican Americans from Karnes City, Texas, to Mexico. *La Prensa* reported on every facet of the project, from its planning stage in September 1931, to the repatriates’ arrival at the border in mid-October 1931, and into Mexico. The *Express* coverage concluded with an October 18, 1931, page-one story, published the day the caravan was to pass through San Antonio and pick up 300

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58 Repatriados que Van en el Techo de los Trenes,” *La Prensa*, June 16, 1931, 4.

59 “Un Repatriado se dio Muerte en el Tren,” *La Prensa*, September 27, 1931, 1.

60 “Salida de los Repatriados de Karnes City,” *La Prensa*, September 29, 1931, 1.
more Mexican repatriates. The *Express* detailed the trip logistics, noting that Hernandez Chazaro had organized returnees in groups of 150 to 350 people, each with a designated leader and a departure time from Karnes City. The *Express* described the wait.  

Hundreds of children run about and play among the heaps of personal belongings ranging from rolls of bedding to crates of poultry that mark the only worldly goods these people have to bring from their adopted home to their place of birth. The women sit stolidly by their belongings while the men pace the ground or gather in groups to discuss the trip. Some few who have prospered in the past are travelling homeward in dilapidated automobiles which they own. The largest percentage is traveling in trucks furnished by the Mexican government through its consulate in this city.  

The odyssey had moments of triumph and tragedy. Five children were born on the 157-mile journey to the Laredo border and one man died. The man was a volunteer, not a repatriate. He had stopped to help a returnee repair his vehicle and was struck by an oncoming car as the repatriates’ convoy traveled between Karnes City and San Antonio, during the 47-mile first leg of the trip.  

Cotton was the downfall of the Karnes City repatriates. The cotton market was among the most depressed in the agricultural sector. That was true even though only one-third of the available cotton acreage in Texas had been planted in 1930, *La Prensa* reported. The Cotton Stabilization Corporation, a unit of the Federal Farm Board, was created in June 1930 and took the cotton cooperatives’ product off the market to bolster prices. For various reasons, including the relatively small number of farming cooperatives, the strategy failed. Farmers were left to plant the 1931 crop when it

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61 “250 Mexican Families Start Trip to Homeland in Trucks and Autos from Karnes County via this City,” *San Antonio Express*, October 18, 1931, 1.

62 Ibid.

63 “Hubo 5 Nacimientos en la Caravana,” *La Prensa*, October 20, 1931, 1; “En Hebbronville sera Inhumado el Mexicano que Pecocio en la Caravana de Repatriados,” *La Prensa*, June 16, 1931, 1.
averaged 9 to 10 cents a pound and harvest it when prices had fallen to 5.3 cents a pound.  

The “few Mexican laborers who had obtained work earned a miserable 30 cents a day, which hardly kept a family from starving,” La Prensa explained in a September 27, 1931, page-one story. The result: 800 penniless families, amounting to 4,000 people, faced the prospect of walking back to Mexico unless the Mexican community pitched in and lent the Karnes City compatriots cars, trucks, and other modes of transportation, according to Eduardo Hernández Cházar, the San Antonio-based Mexican consul general. Members of the Mexican community throughout the state lent not only cars, but small buses, and horses. As the motley caravan passed through San Antonio’s South Side, the streets were lined with well-wishers from the Mexican community, waving on their compatriots.

On October 19, 1931, the patio and adjacent areas outside the customs office in Nuevo Laredo, across the border from Laredo, Texas, swirled with almost 2,000 of the Karnes City repatriates hauling their household goods, in cars, trucks and carts, transporting chickens, cows, and beasts of burden, La Prensa reported. The Express estimated a slightly lower number, 1,500, describing the “destitute hungry horde” as “refugees of economic disorder.” Mexican immigrations worked late into the weekend processing their documents. La Prensa photographed a jumbled mountain of brown-bag

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65 “800 Familias Mexicanas se Disponen a Emprender a Pie a su Viaje a la Patria,” La Prensa, September 27, 1931, 1.

66 “1,500 Mexicans Cross Rio Grande,” San Antonio Express, October 19, 1931, 3.
lunches that volunteers in Laredo, Texas, assembled for the repatriates, calling it only a “partial view” of the packets prepared for 4,000 repatriates.\textsuperscript{67} The more than ample lunch supply suggested that the Laredo aid workers were prepared to assist many other repatriates who did not travel in the extended caravan of 2,000.

The \textit{Express} coverage cogently captured the repatriates’ predicament, describing them as flotsam and jetsam of an economic debacle. The article was almost comparable to many \textit{La Prensa} stories, which captured a sense of the people that quantification stories would never measure. Although thousands of other repatriates had left Texas earlier, their sporadic, independent, and often solitary departure in individual vehicles garnered comparatively little news coverage in the \textit{Express}. The extended roundup of Mexicans from every pocket of the country, from Los Angeles to Saginaw and New York and San Antonio, represented a massive dislocation of “unfortunates” who in many cases had worked a quarter-century or more in the United States. \textit{La Prensa} followed their story over the border, but the \textit{Express} failed to venture outside the United States. Through \textit{La Prensa}, members of the Mexican community followed more thoroughly the predicament of the repatriates, and as good citizens, often stepped forward to help.

\textbf{Good-Citizen Frame: Giving 2,000 Loaves of Bread}

Repatriation was not merely a story of passive victimization or reliance on government authorities. The mass exodus of Mexicans and their concomitant suffering roused local Mexican American communities throughout Texas to launch fundraising drives and other forms of support. Women, who largely drove these efforts, were often the focus of these repatriation-related news stories in \textit{La Prensa}. Words frequently

\textsuperscript{67} “Nuevo Laredo Ayudó También a los Repatriados,” \textit{La Prensa}, October, 21, 1931, 4.
associated with this frame included “assistance,” “generosity,” “donations,” and “abundance.”

Laredo, Texas, was among the border cities in which Mexican Americans actively raised money for the repatriates. Among other activities, “the good society” conducted a special fundraising drive that netted goods and money amounting to $2,000 in value, or almost $30,000 in 2012 dollars, specifically for the repatriates who had left Karnes City, Texas, for lack of work. 68 La Prensa’s November 1, 1931, article about Laredo’s efforts gave prominent mention to the women’s role, noting in a sub-headline that the fundraising committee “was integrated” by women. 69 La Prensa also noted that “all classes of Mexican society” donated time, if not money or goods, to ministering to or preparing the way for repatriates. 70

Donors were listed by name, filling up three newspaper columns. In part, this was likely an effort to encourage more donations because Laredo residents were able to see that their neighbors had contributed. Laredo businesses also adopted a philanthropic stance toward the repatriates, led by the example of the Cuauhtémoc Mutual Society of Bakers, which donated two thousand loaves of bread. 71 Their work matched the efforts of women across the border in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, where women organized, raised funds, and solicited services, including free medical attention, and hotel rooms for female repatriates who gave birth on the journey. They also collected clothes and groceries “to

68 “La Gran Ayuda de Laredo a los Repatriados de Karnes,” La Prensa, November 1, 1931, 4.
69 Ibid.
70 “Quedó Cerrado Ya el Comite de Auxilios,” La Prensa, October 21, 1931, 4.
71 “La Cooperación del Comercio Fue Tambien muy Valiosa, Espontanea y Oportuna,” La Prensa, November 1, 1931, 4.
help improve, in part, the afflicted situation of their compatriots,” according to an October 28, 1931, La Prensa story.

The men did their part too. The Rio Grande City, Texas, local baseball team “City Drug Store,” challenged the Donna, Texas, “Cardinals” to play a benefit game for the repatriates. The Mexican Honorific Commission and the Rev. James Smith of Saint Joseph’s Church in Donna, raised almost $85.00, the equivalent of almost $1,300 in 2012 dollars, from their friends and the baseball competition. They traveled to San Antonio, meeting with La Prensa staff and the Mexican consul general, Eduardo Hernández Cházaró.72 Across the border in Nuevo Laredo, Arnulfo de los Santos, the chief of Mexico’s Migration Office, organized a benefit bullfight for the repatriates, which was presided over by “distinguished senoritas from the society of both Laredos,” La Prensa reported.73

The El Paso Mexican community’s support for the San José Home, an institution run by nuns who were expelled by the Mexican government, ranked among its most important charitable work. The San José Home was built like a typical Mexican convent, with long lateral corridors, many rooms, and an ample, wide patio. The religious women cared for women and children who were subject to deportation, providing food, clothing, and medical care to “hundreds” of them each month. Previously, they had been forced to stay in the county jail, in “very bad conditions,” but numerous protests led US immigration authorities to enlist the help of the nuns. The US government paid the nuns a

72 “Viajeros de Donna, Tex.,” La Prensa, October 28, 1931, 6.

small amount to cover the costs of food for the women and children, who had to serve a short “technical” sentence in the institution before they were formally deported.\textsuperscript{74}

The good-citizen frame was most evident in \textit{La Prensa}. In the \textit{Express}, the frame was prominently referenced in the page-one story the newspaper published about the Karnes City repatriates as they neared the Laredo border. The article reported that ubiquitous volunteers approached vehicles all along the caravan, providing food to adults and children, and milk for babies. The \textit{Express} story also mentioned that the Mexican community from San Antonio and elsewhere lent many cars, trucks, and buses to the repatriates. The good-citizen frame was also evident in \textit{Express} news coverage of the longer-term impact of repatriates on the Laredo, Texas-Nuevo Laredo, Mexico border. A December 13, 1931, \textit{Express} article stated, “the people of Nuevo Laredo have acted nobly during the great rush of Mexicans repatriates, and especially the destitute ones, in caring for these itinerants” who had amassed at the border, lacking funds to move on.\textsuperscript{75} The frame was also evinced in a February 13, 1931, \textit{Express} article that described efforts by the Mexican Blue Cross in Del Rio, Texas, to raise funds for the needy, including repatriates.\textsuperscript{76} The \textit{Express} also published a three-paragraph story reporting on the Mexican community in Eagle Pass, Texas, partnering with neighboring Piedras Negras, Mexico, to hold a bullfight and a ball to raise money to help repatriates.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} “Unas Religiosas Dan Asilo a Las Mujeres y Niños Mexicanos que Van as Ser Deportados,” \textit{La Prensa}, August 12, 1931, 4.

\textsuperscript{75} “Help for Repatriates by Mexico Exhausted,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, December 13, 1931, C11.

\textsuperscript{76} “Blue Cross in Drive,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 13, 1931, 13.

\textsuperscript{77} “Amateur Bull Fight and Fiesta Planned,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, March 6, 1931, 23.
The good-citizen frame of Mexicans helping themselves and engaged in social action was a challenge to the views of eugenicists such as US Rep. John Box because such news showed the Mexican and Mexican American community as far from “uncivilized.” The good-citizen frame was observable—though far from ubiquitous—in the *Express*. However, it was more fully constructed and elaborated in *La Prensa*. By showing the generosity and compassion of the community, *La Prensa* constructed the ingredients of good citizenship and defined Mexicans as more than good workers. This coverage is in keeping with sociologist Michael Schudson’s ideas that the media are central to the construction of civic fabric, including defining norms of communityhood.78 Beyond its effort to mold good citizens, the newspaper performed a more straightforward public service, dispensing help and advice.

**Prescriptive Frame: Take it? Or Leave it?**

The prescriptive frame was persistent throughout 1931, though there were fewer of these “how-to” stories than a year earlier. Stories written in this frame tended to exhort, admonish, or caution immigrants, policy makers or other authorities to pursue certain actions. Words and phrases associated with this frame included “advise,” “should not,” “do not,” “must,” and “have to.” A prime example was a January 7, 1931, editorial in which *La Prensa* counseled the Mexican government on the best method to rehabilitate the nation’s agricultural sector. Among other things, it must continue to help landowners hire and accommodate day laborers who “were exposed to so much misery and to the

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possibility of becoming public charity cases without government protection,” the newspaper stated.79

Advice targeted at repatriates had a distinct “news you can use” flavor. “Useful Recommendations for Repatriates to Avoid Difficulties,” was the headline on a prescriptive story La Prensa published April 25, 1931, on page one. In an interview, Luis Mena, a customs official in Nogales, and a well-known poet, warned repatriates that tariffs on clothing, cars, radios, and other items were only excused if the items were used. He recounted how a woman tried to return to Mexico with a bolt of silk cloth and was forced to pay duties on it. Some items could not be brought into the country at any price, Mena warned. Firearms, including hunting rifles, would be confiscated if the repatriate failed to apply for the proper permits.80

These prescriptive articles made it clear that repatriates’ every possession would be scrutinized and susceptible to customs duties upon entry to Mexico. Regulations, sometimes arbitrarily applied, made the wrenching act of repatriation all the more wearisome. In a June 12, 1931, La Prensa article, repatriates were warned not to mail their clothing home to Mexico and not to attempt to bring extra tires for their car beyond one spare, unless they wanted to pay duties on these items.81 These rules exacerbated the onerous journey for repatriates because 1930s motorists traveling any distance had to contend with cheaply constructed tires that frequently failed on the nation’s poor roads.

79 “El Regreso a la Patria,” La Prensa, January 7, 1931, 3.

80 “Utiles Recomendaciones a los Repatriados pare que Se Eviten Dificultades,” La Prensa, April 25, 1931, 1.

81 “Un Importante Consejo a Los Repatriados,” La Prensa, June 12, 1931, 5.
Likewise, repatriates traveling by train or car would have had little room to carry many possessions or articles of clothing.

*La Prensa* continued in its role of tutoring Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the ways of navigating life in the United States, including efforts to smooth their way out of the country. In so doing, *La Prensa* adopted one of the primary roles of the Mexican immigrant press, functioning as an instrument of social control. By spreading official government information, they acted as guardians of their readers, even if it meant facilitating their transformation to former readers and former subscribers. As then present-day Mexicans exited Texas and the United States, their Spanish-speaking immigrant forebears were basking in a new-found acceptance.

**Spanish Nostalgia Frame: Catholic, Castilian American Pioneers**

San Antonio residents could not have grasped that 1931 would mark the second full year of what would become a decade-long slump known as the Great Depression. The way forward was blurry at best, with aspirations dissolving as quickly as bank accounts. The opaque prospect of the future, and the gritty reality of the present, merely made the heroic past more enticing. Moreover, 1931, the city’s 200th anniversary, presented the perfect occasion to look back. Spaniards from the Canary Islands and Franciscan missionaries founded San Antonio in 1731, more than two centuries after Juan Ponce de León made landfall on the Florida coast. The Spanish-speaking pioneers’ resilience, fortitude, and exploits in the harsh Texas outpost of the Spanish colonial empire were a powerful survival tonic for the struggling city of San Antonio.

The city’s bicentennial was also a great news story. The *San Antonio Express* and *La Prensa* extensively covered the six-day extravaganza. The *Express* published related
articles and photos daily, and La Prensa omitted coverage only one day. The dedication of the newly restored Spanish Governor’s Palace was the kickoff for the bi-centennial celebration, an event both newspapers gave front-page coverage.

In a graphic illustration of the “absurd dichotomy” between things Spanish and things Mexican, in the terms of journalist Carey McWilliams, La Prensa published its story with a headline that ran across seven out of eight columns of the first page: “Yesterday the Governor’s Palace was Inaugurated.”82 But the day’s banner headline story was reserved for present-day Mexican immigrants: “Dining Rooms and Dormitories for the Repatriates.”83

La Prensa noted that Archbishop Patrick Cardinal Hayes of New York, accompanied by the archbishops of Santa Fe and San Antonio, and the Bishop of Tulsa, blessed the newly renovated palace. Their “benediction consecrated the palace for all time, converting a sanctuary to worship the colonizers who gave us a country into something that perpetuates the Spanish inheritance the adventuresome and conquering [King] Carlos V left us,” La Prensa wrote.84

The inaugural coverage radiated pride in the Spanish heritage of Texas. At the same time, on the same page, La Prensa described the fate of remnants of that heritage, penniless repatriates and deportees who had voluntarily or forcibly left the United States. At that moment 1,765 destitute Mexican returnees were milling at the border and a caravan of another 600 was on the way from California, according to the article. To cope

82 “Ayer fue Inaugurado el Palacio del Gobernador,” La Prensa, March 5, 1931, 1.

83 “Comedores y Dormitorios Para Los Repatriados,” La Prensa, March 5, 1931, 1.

84 “Ayer fue Inaugurado el Palacio del Gobernador,” La Prensa, March 5, 1931, 1.
with their needs, Mexico planned to establish dining and lodging facilities in four border cities. Their plight went unobserved in that day’s *Express*.

The *Express* interpreted the news of the Governor’s Palace inauguration somewhat differently. The *Express* quoted extensively Texas Gov. Ross S. Sterling, who figuratively lassoed Spanish colonial history and tied it to United States history and his own contemporary political aims.

Since the Anglo-Saxon civilization in Texas is so young and we are accustomed for that reason to think of it as a young State, it seems [a] little strange to be celebrating the 200th anniversary of an epoch in Texas history. The people of Texas and the Southwest can point to the settlement of this section with as much pride as can those of the New England colonies, for it was nearly the same time each were beginning to develop.

Sterling continued, turning the story of the Franciscan missionaries and their efforts to educate “the minds of the ignorant Indians” into a parable to promote more investment in the Texas educational system. The “padres” worked indefatigably to teach “Indians those things which mean the difference between ‘men and brutes,’” the governor said. He then urged Texans to commit to the state’s education system with the dedication and discipline of the founding Franciscans.

Education in Texas is not nearly all that it should be. There is still room for improvement until we can assure every child, rural and urban, a fair chance for an education. The schooling of every Indian meant one more potential civilized being to develop this frontier land of early Texas. Similarly the education of every Texas child today and tomorrow, for ignorance is the breeding ground of crime.85

Sterling’s argument belied the reality of Texas education for many Mexicans and Mexican Americans. A year earlier, in 1930, the Texas Court of Appeals ruled that Mexican American children might legally attend segregated schools if they lacked proficiency in English or they participated in seasonal migratory labor that would limit

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85 “Spanish Palace Dedicated Amid Setting of 1731,” *San Antonio Express*, March 5, 1931, 1
their school attendance. The court stated it would be illegal to exclude Mexicans from schools attended by other whites merely on the grounds they were Mexicans.  

In the view of legal scholar Juan Perea, “Whites were interested in educating Mexican Americans only for the purpose of teaching them to believe in their own inferiority and to be satisfied with roles as manual laborers.”

*La Prensa* published its final San Antonio bicentennial story March 10, 1931, on page one. Once again, readers were presented the “schizophrenic” reality of the Mexican and the Spanish. The 200th anniversary celebration article ran above the fold, and below a less than celebratory banner headline that proclaimed: “1,600 Repatriates Will Arrive in Mexico Today.” *La Prensa*’s anniversary story noted the “installation of an enormous boulder in the Main Plaza,” which was dedicated to the memory of the Canary Island emigrants who in 1731 founded the town of San Fernando, “now transformed in the beautiful and progressive city of San Antonio.”

Mayor C. M. Chambers and County Judge William W. Wurzbach made official comments before a crowd of 4,000, extolling the “Spanish race and its descendants,” *La Prensa* reported. Chambers “sang the praises of the Spanish race and stated that the growth of San Antonio was owed in large part to the descendants of that race.” Wurzbach also lauded the Franciscan friars who accompanied the first settlers. He “declared that the

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87 Juan F. Perea, “Buscando America: Why Integration and Equal Protection Fail to Protect Latinos,” in *The Latino/a Condition*, 604.


89 Ibid.
Latin colony in San Antonio was the best in the United States owing to its ties of blood and tradition that united it with the intrepid and valiant Spaniards, to whom San Antonio’s existence is indebted.  

These expressions of validation directed toward persons of Spanish ancestry in San Antonio sharply contrasted with the continuing saga of the unwanted Mexicans leaving Texas and the rest of the United States, a contingent of which was to arrive in Mexico City that day aboard special federally sponsored trains, La Prensa reported in its lead page-one story. The 1,600 Mexicans were among those who had been detained and deported in the United States for lack of resources. Many were stranded for lengthy periods in Mexican border towns, leading the Mexican government to attempt to redistribute them throughout the country. While La Prensa did not comment or editorialize on these divergent front-page articles, the visual juxtaposition of the San Antonio bicentennial and the Mexican repatriate stories highlighted the contradictory logic and sentiment they represented.

By comparison, the Express ran its story on page 10, in one column along the upper left side. Headlined “Stone Dedicated to City Founders,” the story was adjacent to two photos of the final bicentennial ceremony. The article presented a chronicle of the day’s events, which included, among other things, the San Antonio Archbishop’s blessing of the boulder, an address by a descendant of the Canary Islanders, and an assembly of Our Lady of the Lake College students dressed to resemble the Spanish pioneers. The

90 Ibid.
91 “1,600 Repatriados Llegaran Hoy a Mexico in Mexico Today,” La Prensa, March 10, 1931, 1.
92 Ibid.
San Fernando Cathedral bells tolled at 11 a.m. as factory whistles blew throughout the city. Planes from the Air Corps Training Center zoomed overhead in formation. The *Express* mentioned Wurzbach and Chambers, though it quoted only the latter, choosing a markedly different quote than the one *La Prensa* selected. According to the *Express*, Chambers stood near the boulder draped with the Spanish flag, and said, in part:

> It is fitting that the monument to the memory of the Canary Islanders should be placed within a few yards of the county and municipal buildings and San Fernando Cathedral, the very heart of our fair city. For years to come our children and our children’s children will stop here to do homage to these settlers. Now after many years, San Antonio, the birthplace of Texas liberty, pays tribute to our own heroes and I gratefully accept the boulder for the city in honor of those who did so much for San Antonio, Texas, Christianity and civilization. As long as God reigns may it stand as a perpetual memory to those brave settlers of church and State 

In the socially constructed reality of the *Express* news story, the direct link between the founding Spaniards and their progeny, the Mexican people, was never made. Instead, Chambers drew a connection between the Canary Island pioneers, patriotism, and state formation with his reference to San Antonio as “the birthplace of Texas liberty.” Moreover, by highlighting the proximity of the boulder, the symbol of Spanish conquest, to key institutions of local government and religiosity, Chambers sought to imbue San Antonio’s present day civic and religious institutions with a patina of Spanish pioneer spirit.

*La Prensa*, in choosing to highlight words of Wurzbach and Chambers that elevated the role of San Antonio’s Mexican community, performed two classic ethnic media functions. The newspaper preserved and transmitted Mexican American culture.

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93 “Stone Dedicated to City Founders,” *San Antonio Express*, March 10, 1931, 10.
and helped instill Mexican community pride. However, *La Prensa* did much more.

Through its editorial judgment, that is, through its selection of which bits of reality to present, it showed, as historian John Bodnar put it, that it was “fully capable of creating a culture and, consequently, a memory separate from that which exists in dominant society.”

These newspapers documented San Antonio’s 200th anniversary in distinct social constructions of reality, drawn from a memory of the past, that added “perspective and authenticity” to their disparate representations of the past and the present. The *Express*, as a defender of what Bodnar might call official interests, and *La Prensa*, as a defender of vernacular interests, both “selectively retrieved from the past” to reinforce their views of the present.

The commemoration provided a rare comparable display of the newspapers’ interpretation of San Antonio history and the role Spaniards and Mexicans played in it. For the most part, however, the newspapers talked past each other. The comments of Wurzbach and Chambers vindicating Mexicans and Mexicans Americans as important, essential members of modern San Antonio civic society were absent in the *Express*. Instead, the *Express* excerpted and presented the idea that San Antonio’s legacy rivaled that of New England, which had long claimed title to the nation’s colonial past.

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96 Ibid., 15.

97 Ibid.
Conclusion

News coverage in 1931 continued to illuminate the trends of the first two years of the Depression. Immigration policies promulgated in distant Washington and Los Angeles County, among other places, had a profound effect on San Antonio and throughout Texas, wherever repatriates and deportees made their way. This was a reverse biblical exodus, a dispersion from the promised land of the United States to Mexico, a place where almost no promises were made and even fewer kept. If anything, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, at least to some degree, found they could count on their own community for basic support in extreme need. *La Prensa* provided an extensive account of this calculus of suffering and succor, and even the *Express*, with its more limited repatriation and immigration coverage, noted the Mexican community’s philanthropy.

Amid the City-Central Bank and Trust Co. calamity, the frustration over fewer jobs, and ever more frequent business failures, the City of San Antonio staked its future to its past. San Antonio spent almost a week in 1931 consecrating itself to its Spanish colonial heritage. The city celebrated the lives of the first immigrants, the Spanish Canary Islanders and the Franciscan missionaries, while their transcendent blood, embodied in Mexicans, drained from the country in the corpus of repatriates that crossed the border.

As historian David Weber wrote, “In our historical imaginations, we have produced multiple interpretations of the Spanish frontier in North America—constructions that have contended with one another over time to transform our understanding.”

*La Prensa* and the *Express* presented contending social constructions of reality of Mexicans in the United States in light of the Spanish colonial past of San

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Antonio. *La Prensa* and the *Express* used the event to bolster, if not transform, readers’ perceptions of themselves. The year of the San Antonio bicentennial—1931—was nonetheless the greatest year of Mexican repatriation. As 1932 approached, *La Prensa’s* question remained unanswered. “How will this tragedy end?”

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Chapter 5: 1932-1933

A New Deal for American Pioneers

When the colonists of New England were building block houses, hanging and torturing witches, and pressing stubborn old Giles Cory to death, in San Antonio, the Franciscan monks were converting the Indians, while they watched in wonder and worship the glorious façade and exquisite rose window of [Mission] San Jose . . . under the inspired chisel of Pedro Huizar. Such Spanish structures and those who erected them have furnished the background of romance and culture for San Antonio.

Anna Ellis, San Antonio Express, February 12, 1933

San Antonio stepped firmly into its third century in 1932, in countless ways still celebrating the glories of two hundred years earlier. The Alamo City found much to look forward to by looking back. Reminiscences about Spanish conquistadors somewhat salved the reality of financial calamity. But remembering that proud history did not dissolve the “dark hour” of the Great Depression that shrouded San Antonio and the nation. And so, in 1933, the city’s dwellers, like those in the rest of the country, were primed to hear from their newly inaugurated leader that they must not succumb to “nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror.”

The years 1932 and 1933 represented the

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3 Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933.
dawn of the New Deal, and the ascent of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In his inaugural address, Roosevelt stated that the “way to recovery” was “recognition of the old and permanently important manifestation of the spirit of the American pioneer.”

Mexican immigrants were one unheralded embodiment of that spirit, and, compared to previous years, fewer chose to return to their homeland in 1932. A page-one article published below the fold in the January 3 edition of La Prensa told the story in its headline: “The Repatriation of Mexicans Diminishes.” It was still unclear in 1932 how and when the tragedy of repatriation would end, but there were signs the great migration would at least, and at last, end.

Mexican repatriation in 1932 fell to 77,453, almost half that of 1931. In 1933, the number decreased once more: only 33,574 Mexicans repatriated to their home country, less than half the number who returned in 1932. In short, by the start of 1932, 63 percent of Mexicans who returned between 1929 and 1937 had already done so. Repatriates still left in the thousands, departing from Chicago, California, and Colorado, among other places, but the numbers decreased each month. During the remaining Depression years, the number of repatriates would never again reach the 1931 peak.

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4 Ibid. Roosevelt stated that his design for economic recovery was “not narrowly nationalistic,” but predicated on a sense of an interdependent United States founded and cohered by the American pioneer spirit. Roosevelt argued that the manifestation of this spirit was the only way to an enduring recovery.

5 “La Repatriación de Mexicanos Disminuyo,” La Prensa, January 3, 1932, 1.


7 Ibid.
The year 1932 marked a pivotal political shift in Texas and the nation. Congress created the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), with up to $2 billion at its disposal to resuscitate banks, bolster insurance companies and other financial organizations, and support railroads. Texan Jesse H. Jones, an entrepreneur who was joint-owner of the Houston Chronicle from 1908 until the eve of the Depression, became RFC chairman. 8 Texas Congressman Wright Patman introduced the “bonus bill,” to enable World War I veterans to receive their promised pay, but it was defeated in June 1932. 9 By this time, as many as 25,000 World War I veterans had camped near the White House in protest over their predicament. When they failed to heed President Herbert Hoover’s ultimatum to evacuate by July 24, 1932, he ordered Gen. Douglas MacArthur and federal troops to dislodge them. Four months later, Roosevelt overwhelmingly defeated Hoover in the presidential election. 10 Texan John Nance Garner, who understood the importance of Mexican labor to the southwestern and national economy, was elected Roosevelt’s vice president. 11

Roosevelt was inaugurated in 1933, the year of the Chicago World’s Fair, “A Century of Progress.” In January, continued bleak news made that slogan seem a vain hope. Among other things, the number of unemployed in the United States had increased


10 Ibid., 102-103, 111, 112, 115.

11 Cox, The First Texas News Barons, 189-190.
to 12 million, according to American Federation of Labor President William Green, the *Express* reported.\(^ {12}\) Then, on March 6, two days after his inauguration, Roosevelt declared a “bank holiday,” shutting the nation’s financial institutions for four days while Congress considered emergency banking legislation.\(^ {13}\) In other news, Frederick Jackson Turner won a Pulitzer Prize in history for his work, “The Significance of the Section in American History.” Turner argued that American politics and society “have been shaped by sectional complexity and interplay, not unlike what goes on between European nations.”\(^ {14}\) This sectional thesis never gained the widespread acclaim among historians as Turner’s frontier thesis, which characterized the West as the incubator of American culture, promoting independence, individualism, and democracy.\(^ {15}\)

The sectional identity of Texas took a turn during the Depression era, particularly during the state’s 1936 centennial celebrations, in the view of historian Patrick Cox. In this period, “the image of Texas as a distinct region apart from the Old South gained its impetus in the public sphere,” Cox stated.\(^ {16}\) That may well be true for the state. For San Antonio, which held its *bicentennial* five years earlier in 1931, the re-imaging and repositioning of the city as a unique cultural entity was already well in the making. These public commemorations, as historian John Bodnar noted, contained “powerful symbolic

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\(^{12}\) “US Jobless Hit 12 Million Mark,” *San Antonio Express*, February 13, 1933, 1.

\(^{13}\) Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 122-123.


\(^{16}\) Cox, *The First Texas News Barons*, 205.
expressions” that united diverse interests in an effort to provide meaning to divergent perceptions of past and present reality. In their own newsgathering, the San Antonio Express and La Prensa played a role in constructing that reality.

**Mexican Frames at the Dawn of the New Deal**

The years 1932 and 1933 represented a declension story for Mexican repatriation. Although the numbers of returnees dwindled, newspapers still made some effort to enumerate the thousands who left. This quantification frame was visible in both the Express and La Prensa during this period. Following the trend set in 1931, returning Mexicans were rarely framed as patriots, as they had been in the first two years of the Depression. The profile of the noble, adept, and patriotic Mexican worker returning to rescue a ravaged home country was supplanted with a downtrodden pariah image. Now, repatriates and deportees were unfortunates, whose impoverished homecoming was a drain, not a boon, to an economically paralyzed Mexico.

In addition, the good-citizen frame documented the Mexican community’s social responsibility to its desperate, returning countrymen, encompassing the generosity of local bakers and famous artists, such as Diego Rivera. Fewer repatriates did not put an end to news coverage in the prescriptive frame. La Prensa, in particular, continued to offer advice to prospective repatriates and current immigrants; and occasionally, the newspaper urged the government to pursue a specific course of action. During this period, it exhorted Mexico to cease and desist its disastrous effort to repatriate Mexicans living in the United States. The Spanish nostalgia frame persisted in the aftermath of San Antonio’s 1931 bicentennial, and the San Antonio Express was at the forefront of

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rebuilding a public memory of San Antonio under the aegis of conquistadors and Canary Islanders. The news frame celebrating the first immigrants to San Antonio, the Spanish-speaking colonists, friars, and soldiers, evinced the way Anglo society reinterpreted the American pioneer spirit Roosevelt urged Americans to summon. As historian John Bodnar noted, the veneration of pioneers was manifest throughout the 1930s, and used as a tool to rebuild confidence in communities nationwide.\(^\text{18}\) Roosevelt blessed a movement already underway. The Spanish nostalgia news frame was a sharp counterpoint to news frames of Depression-era immigrants that dealt with their mass exodus.

**Quantification Frame: Enumerating a Problem and the Problem of Enumerating**

Numbers of repatriates and deportees leaving the United States were the hallmark of the quantification frame, which continued in 1932 and 1933, despite the comparatively fewer Mexican returnees. This frame was in keeping with the journalistic maxim that size, prominence, and magnitude were one way to establish the significance of a news story.\(^\text{19}\) This textbook news value seems axiomatic. But it also coincided with the thinking of Progressives, such as the journalist and empiricist Walter Lippmann, who asserted that scientific data provided the public with the verifiable representations of reality required to understand the world.\(^\text{20}\)

The *Express* provided its readers occasional reports about departing Mexicans in 1932 and 1933, particularly if they left from San Antonio. This also fit another news

\(^{18}\) Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 127.


imperative, that local news commands interest and takes precedence. A one-paragraph story published February 8, 1932 on page 14 ran with the headline: “Over 100 Mexicans go to New Homes in South.” Mexican Consul General Eduardo Hernández Cházaro organized the truck caravan of repatriates to the Laredo border, the Express reported. The numbers were relatively small.

By 1933, a year later, interest in government instigated repatriations continued to wane. Few responded to a joint San Antonio Central Relief Committee-Mexican government plan to repatriate 1,000 Mexican citizens to work on the Mexico-Laredo Highway. The San Antonio Central Relief Committee agreed to pay their railroad fare to the Laredo border, and the Mexican government offered to cover their transportation inside Mexico, La Prensa and the Express reported. The newspapers also noted that the workers would not receive a salary, but would be paid based on piecework.

The articles contained identical content, with the exception that one was in Spanish and the other in English. The other important difference was that the story in La Prensa was published on the front page, on February 6, 1933, while the Express published its version on the edition’s last page, a day later. M. Tomas Morlet, the Mexican vice consul in San Antonio, was the source for the articles, making it likely that he gave La Prensa the scoop.

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21 Bleyer, Newspaper Writing, 48-49.

22 “Over 100 Mexicans go to New Homes in South,” San Antonio Express, February 8, 1932, 14. Also see “125 Mexicans to Quit San Antonio Sunday,” San Antonio Express, February 7, 1932, 3A.

23 “Repartriara el Gobierno Mil Mexicanos,” La Prensa, February 6, 1933, 1; “1,000 Mexicans to be Sent Home,” San Antonio Express, February 7, 1933, 18.
The *Express* followed up the day after their first story with a news article headlined: “Rush to Mexico for Job Fails.” The Mexican consulate had doubled its staff, anticipating Mexicans in San Antonio would line up to accept the job offer. But the day after the announcement, only six had responded. When four days later that number increased to only 40 Mexicans, Oscar Powell, the Central Relief Committee’s general chairman, provided the consulate with one worker to help promote the repatriation opportunity to unemployed Mexicans, the *Express* reported February 12, 1933. Powell perceived the tepid interest as a simple publicity problem. But Mexicans may well have been leery of the piecework payment scheme, the temporary nature of the roadwork, and the predicament of repatriates in Mexico. A week later, 80 workers had registered to form the first contingent to return, both newspapers reported.

This joint effort of San Antonio’s Central Relief Committee and the Mexican Consul General generated a marginal response from San Antonio’s Mexican community. If Mexico’s highway construction required 1,000 workers, they came from somewhere other than San Antonio. Beyond the paltry reply to the road-building call, the stories were significant because they showed how both newspapers diligently covered the local end of the massive, international repatriation phenomenon. The involvement of a major city entity, the Central Relief Committee, made this tale of repatriation a mainstream news event. Although the *Express* stories were relatively short, four paragraphs at most, and they played on interior pages, the coverage was incremental. By giving its readers the

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25 “Few Mexicans Returning Home,” *San Antonio Express*, February 12, 1933, 4A.

play-by-play on this city-backed repatriation effort, it emphasized the importance of the Mexicans’ departure to its community. For its part, La Prensa clearly defined its community as not only San Antonio and expatriate Mexico throughout the United States, but also Mexico. This was but one of many important repatriation stories La Prensa reported. Local news ruled in both the Express and La Prensa. However, La Prensa’s definition of local news was more expansive.

Repatriates and deportees continued to exit various parts of the United States, La Prensa told its readers. No group of departing Mexicans was too small to report, it seemed, including twenty deportees who had been living and working in Montana. They were sent to El Paso in the custody of US immigration officials, according to the October 29, 1932, La Prensa.27 The repatriated included 335 from Lake County, Indiana, who were en route to Laredo, Texas, on June 11, 1932. These repatriates followed thousands of other unemployed steelworkers who had already returned to Mexico ahead of them, the newspaper article stated. About the same time, a convoy of 400 repatriates from Chicago was expected to arrive in Laredo, and a special train with 100 more was scheduled to arrive after that, according to La Prensa.28

Midwestern steel and industrial workers were not the only ones returning in sizeable numbers. More than 4,000 unemployed Mexican sugar-beet workers in Colorado applied to the Mexican consulate in Denver to repatriate, La Prensa reported May 8, 1932. Denver, along with other Colorado counties and cities, established repatriation programs for indigent Mexicans. They relied on funds from the Community Chest, a

28 “335 Mexicanos de Indiana Vuelven a La Patria,” La Prensa, June 11, 1932, 1.
precursor social service agency to the United Way, to transport the returning Mexicans to Ciudad Juárez.\textsuperscript{29} “Specially commissioned agents are even now rounding up the population and making lists of the beet workers who are found not to have work,” according to the \textit{La Prensa} article, which bore the banner headline: “Thousands of Beet Workers Abandon Colorado.”\textsuperscript{30}

Between 1930 and 1935 Colorado cities and counties, with the help of the Mexican government and private charities, repatriated 20,000 people to Mexico, including US born children of Mexican descent.\textsuperscript{31} During this period, according to historian Zaragosa Vargas, Americans of Mexican ancestry, both adults and children, who could not satisfactorily prove their citizenship, were deported. Despite the sweeps, the Great Western Sugar Co., abetted by a new, favorable sugar tariff, worked to maintain a steady Mexican workforce. Vargas described an insidious forced labor system, in which Mexican workers were granted relief to subsist through the winter, only to be excised from welfare rolls when the spring beet harvest demanded low-wage workers.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{La Prensa}, which circulated nationally and internationally, provided news from Mexican enclaves across the country. Beyond these granular stories, the newspaper occasionally also provided readers with an aggregate accounting of departing Mexicans.


\textsuperscript{30} “Millares de Betabeleros Abandonaron Colorado,” \textit{La Prensa}, May 8, 1932, 1.


A case in point was a *La Prensa* news report about Ciudad Juárez, a city across the border from El Paso. The report stated that 24,799 repatriates entered Mexico from the United States in the first ten months of 1932. The newspaper attributed the numbers to the Mexican Migration Service, though *La Prensa* cast doubt on their accuracy. According to “sources,” the true number of returnees was “much higher” because not all repatriates registered with the Mexican consulate before returning, the *La Prensa* article stated.\(^{33}\) This was one of many instances in which *La Prensa* questioned official statistics, suggesting that the Mexican Migration Service data, which the US government considered the most authoritative, may well have fallen short of a true representation of the repatriation reality.\(^{34}\)

Quantification frame stories generally tallied repatriates and deportees. A rare quantification story enumerated returnees who found jobs in Mexico. An August 10, 1932, page-one story announced that Rohl, a construction company based in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, had hired more than 1,300 repatriates from the United States.\(^{35}\) By 1933, quantification frame stories documenting departing Mexicans were routine, sometimes mere one-paragraph items. “A Train of Repatriates is Awaited,” for instance, reported that El Paso, Texas, expected 600 repatriates from Los Angeles to pass through town via the railroad, headed to the Mexican interior.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{34}\) Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexicans in the Great Depression*, 126.

\(^{35}\) “1,300 Repatriados Encontraron Ya Ocupacion,” *La Prensa*, August 10, 1932, 1.

\(^{36}\) “Se Espera un Tren de Repatriados,” *La Prensa*, December 12, 1933, 8.
The quantification frame, with its numerical representation of returning Mexicans, attempted to give scientific precision and definition to the ethnic diaspora. Inadvertently, it gave the story sterility. Immigration statistics might be perceived in the same light as stock market tables, sports scores, or gross domestic product reports. Numbers told part of the story, not all of it, and therefore, were not the true representations of reality Lippmann argued for. As James Carey put it, Lippmann had indulged in “the classic fallacy of the Cartesian tradition,” which was, “the belief that metaphors of vision, correspondence, mapping, picturing, and representation that apply to small routine assertions . . . will apply equally to large debatable ones.”

In other words, numbers were one way to picture the Mexicans exodus. Aside from the issue of the accuracy of government numbers that La Prensa raised, merely quantifying the exodus did not convey how it felt to be starving at the border, did not explain immigration policy and its impact on families and individuals, and did not put the retreating Mexicans into the context of the political economy, workers’ rights, or civil rights. These articles, for the most part, represented de facto acceptance of the presumed inevitability of Mexicans as disposable labor.

La Prensa’s effort to report on the numbers of repatriates and deportees from every corner of the United States illustrated the breadth of its concept of community and


38 See Zaragosa Vargas, Labor Rights are Civil Rights, chap. 1, and particularly 39, 60-61. Vargas states that US business interests deliberately over-hired Mexican workers, a system that during the Great Depression resulted in an excessive labor supply. Vargas agrees with Ernesto Galarza that “repatriation was nothing more than the wholesale disposal of human labor below the border.”
its subscription base. In 1932, *La Prensa* had mail subscribers and dealers in all but seven states. Outside the West South Central region, which included Texas, the East North Central Region, which included Illinois and Michigan, represented its biggest subscriber base.\(^{39}\) In other words, as Table 1 illustrates, *La Prensa* was not just counting Mexicans leaving the United States, it counted readers leaving the United States. *La Prensa* did more than provide a dry statistical picture. The newspaper sent reporters to the scene on both sides of the border, to record the texture that framed the human dimension of the story.

**Pariah Frame: Starving, Sick, and Naked**

News about repatriates and deportees continued to appear in a pariah frame, in which returning Mexicans were victims. Words associated with this frame were “catastrophe,” “starving,” “desperate,” “unfortunate,” “swindled,” “horrible,” “woe,” “lamentable,” “sad,” and “jobless.” In these stories, repatriates and deportees were homeless, hapless, and hungry. During 1932 and 1933, the pariah frame in *La Prensa* more than ever illuminated the government’s role in helping and harming repatriates. Local business groups and private charities besieged the Mexican government with requests to help the starving, homeless repatriates who were amassed on the Mexican side of the border and dying of hunger. “30,000 repatriates were without a roof over their head or bread to eat,” *La Prensa* reported in a page-one banner headline story of February 10, 1932. “In the streets you find hundreds of families, lacking the power to continue their

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\(^{39}\) Audit Bureau of Circulations, Chicago, “Audit Report, *La Prensa*, for twelve months ending June 30, 1932.”
journey for lack of resources, and lacking an idea of where to go because the situation is extremely difficult everywhere with such an immense number of jobless.”

Some repatriates committed suicide. Others committed homicide, including frustrated spouses and parents who murdered their families when they were unable to provide for them. Some were luckless accident victims, including nine repatriates who were killed when the bus returning them to Mexico skidded off the road and into a ravine. Most of the repatriates aboard were from Texas, La Prensa reported in its March 26, 1933, front-page account of the incident.

The returnees were charity cases in a country that had little to give. An effort persisted, however inadequate, to make repatriates a national cause. The Mexican government announced in October 1932 that it would open three public restaurants in the border cities of Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, and Nuevo Laredo. Thousands of repatriates had passed through these cities, and many congregated in them, straining resources. Christmas Day 1932 was designated National Donation Day for Repatriates, and a page-one La Prensa article declared that everyone from the president of the Republic down “to the most humble,” were expected to give money to help the returnees who remained unemployed. In making the repatriates a civic cause, the Mexican government shifted some responsibility for returning Mexicans onto the shoulders of its citizenry. The newspaper didn’t account for all the proceeds, nor did it explain how or whether the

40 “30,000 Repatriados sin Techo y Sin Pan,” La Prensa, February 2, 1932, 1.

41 “9 Fueron Los Repatriados Muertos,” La Prensa, March 26, 1933, 1.

42 “3 Comedores Gratis para Repatriados,” La Prensa, October 25, 1932, 1.

43 “El Dia 25 Sera la Colecta Nacional Pro-Repatriados,” La Prensa, December 4, 1932, 1.
funds were dispersed. However, on January 19, 1933, it reported that congressional legislators in Mexico City donated fifty pesos each.44

News coverage in the pariah frame provided a prime reason that Mexicans in San Antonio, or anywhere else, for that matter, failed to consider an all-expenses paid offer to repatriate compelling. Citing “Mexico City dispatches,” the Express reported that the Mexican Repatriation Union deemed “further repatriation work would only aggravate the economic situation in Mexico.” The union provided anecdotal evidence: the story of a Mexican citizen who returned to Morelia, Michoacan, with his large family. Unable to find work, he sold his possessions to feed his household. “When he had sold his last piece of property he killed his wife and some of his children and himself.”45 Such news of hardship and misery likely deterred repatriates. This may also explain in part why, after three years of the Depression, more than one million Mexicans remained in the United States.46

Similarly horrific stories were more graphically portrayed in La Prensa. On April 26, 1932, the newspaper put a page-one banner headline on a similar story: “A Repatriate Killed His Wife and His Child and Hung Himself.” Juan Serrano lived in Corpus Christi and San Antonio before repatriating to San Luis, Potosí, Mexico with his wife, Florentina Bolaños de Serrano, 25, and his two-year-old daughter, Maria Concepción. He left a note: “Don’t blame anyone, I did it.”47

44 “Los Diputados Ayudaran con Cincuenta Pesos a los Repatriados,” La Prensa, January 19, 1933, 1.

45 “Few Mexicans Returning Home,” San Antonio Express, February 12, 1933, 4A.

46 “Queda Mas de un Millon de Mexicanos en EE. UU.,” La Prensa, June 19, 1933, 8A.

47 “Un Repatriado Mata a su Esposa y a su Hija y se Ahorca,” La Prensa, April 26, 1932, 1.
Serrano had looked for work for months, to no avail, and was increasingly desperate, according to the article. He beat his wife and daughter to death. After they died, he hanged himself from a tree off the patio, but the cord broke and his body fell into some cactus plants, where his mother-in-law discovered him. “The tragedy of the repatriates has caused deep consternation in the city,” La Prensa reported.\(^{48}\) In this way, the pariah frame demonstrated that what happened to repatriates happened to the entire community. The repatriates’ tragedies and tribulations played out in the pages of La Prensa for friends, neighbors, and strangers to read and empathize over. The fates of the repatriates and the community were entwined.

Mexicans who had repatriated had such confidence in La Prensa and its sister publication in Los Angeles, La Opinion, that they turned to the newspapers to reach their compatriots in the United States. For instance, on April 28, 1933, at the urging of the Mexican Repatriation Union, La Prensa published a photo of a group of gaunt repatriates, mostly men. The photo ran above a published letter from the union, which stated the returnees were starving and had only one meal a day. The union sent the photographs and the letter to “let their brothers who live [in the United States] know the truth about things.” Despite much talk about being resettled in agricultural colonies, this never occurred. Their situation “was truly desperate,” the union wrote.\(^{49}\)

La Prensa painted other portraits of misery. The Mexican government was not alone in promising repatriates a thriving livelihood in new agricultural colonies. Swindlers also enticed Mexicans living in the United States with bogus offers to relocate.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) “Venimos a Morir de Hambre y a Causar Lastimas,” La Prensa, April 28, 1933, 1.
in a bucolic paradise in the home country, *La Prensa* reported January 4, 1932. Smooth business operators with “facile tongues” had persuaded 40 Mexican families from Los Angeles to relinquish their homes in the United States and buy lots in an agricultural cooperative. The company undertook an “active campaign” in Los Angeles, distributing pamphlets that promised a “new paradise” in Baja California. There was no paradise, only poorly constructed huts with straw roofs, no irrigation, and no food. “Here and there, women and children, semi-clothed, lined the doorways and looked at passersby with eyes that revealed the terrors of hunger,” *La Prensa* reported.  

Most government-sponsored colonies were also outright failures; incompetence, bureaucratic dithering, and neglect, though not necessarily fraud, were involved.  

An April 18, 1933, page-one story reported that 275 starving, sick, and naked repatriated men, women, and children arrived in Mexico City after departing a presumably failed agricultural colony in northern Mexico. The repatriates were taken to a Red Cross sanitarium where they awaited relocation to the primary agricultural colony for repatriates in Menizo, Oaxaca, according to the article.  

The Mexican government sent clothes and shoes to struggling repatriates in another colony, this one in the state of Guerrero, where the people “were in difficult conditions because they had invested all their resources in planting crops,” *La Prensa* reported July 18, 1933.

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50 “Angustiosa Situación de unos Colonos que Fueron Engañados en California,” *La Prensa*, January 4, 1932, 1.

51 Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexicans*, 139-144.

52 “275 Repatriados Llegan Hambrientos, Enfermos y Desnudos, a la Metropoli,” *La Prensa*, April 18, 1933, 1.

The pariah frame was evident in *La Prensa* because it covered repatriates and deportees on both sides of the border. For the San Antonio and Texas-centric *Express*, once the Mexicans left the city, they were out of sight, out of mind, and out of the newspaper. They were Mexico’s concern. These conflicting social constructions of reality: near invisibility in the *Express* and torrid depiction in *La Prensa*, stem from the newspapers’ differing conceptions of community and readership.

But the conceptions are rooted in something else, because not everything that happened across the border was deemed irrelevant to *Express* readers. Major highway roadwork in Mexico, a matter that had an impact on Texas industry, tourism, and commerce tended to receive attention. On May 3, 1933, the *Express* published a photo of six businessmen in suits and ties. The smiling group clutched fedoras and straw boaters and smiled for the snapshot, taken just before they left for a “goodwill trip to Mexico” to inspect the progress of Pan-American Highway construction. The group included D. H. Martin, a state highway commissioner; Dick O. Terrell, president of the Chamber of Commerce; and Ray E. Lee, who was described as an Austin newspaperman. The state of the roads was a news matter, the state of the road workers, less so.

**Patriot Frame: The Repatriate to the Rescue**

Stories of deep despair did not stop *La Prensa* from occasionally reiterating its idealized perception of repatriates as heroic citizens. Terms consistent with the patriot frame referenced the intelligence, resilience, and character virtues of Mexican immigrants. Mexicans, whether coming or going, were an asset to whatever country they landed in, according to this frame. Editorializing about the departure of 1,500 repatriates

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54 “Goodwill to Mexico,” *San Antonio Express*, May 3, 1933, 12.
from Los Angeles in April 1932, *La Prensa* wrote that repatriates would return with “knowledge unobtainable in Mexico,” including how to use agricultural machinery and how to plant crops more productively and efficiently. Meanwhile, Mexicans who remained in the United States, and there were many “according to the elevated statistics of the US immigration officials,” were model residents because they were self-sustaining, *La Prensa* wrote. “We know that many of our people reside in California, Arizona, and Texas. But we are satisfied that they have never been a cost to society or to charitable organizations. It is not the norm for Mexicans to beg. In their major needs they ask for nothing; and they don’t expect a reward from anyone.”

Some repatriates were unlikely heroes. These included Miguel Jiménez, a native of Jalisco, Mexico, serving a life sentence in the Colorado State Prison at Cannon City. At the urging of the Mexican consul general in Denver, Ismael Vázquez, Colorado Governor Edwin C. Johnson pardoned Jiménez, whose crime *La Prensa* declined to specify. Jiménez had been imprisoned twelve years when Johnson pardoned him on the condition that Jiménez repatriate. “I return to my country full of hope and I resolve to reconstruct my life, dedicating myself to work,” said Jiménez, who had become a silversmith in prison. Jiménez then provided an endorsement for *La Prensa*, noting that incarcerated Mexicans in the Colorado State Prison read *La Prensa* and *La Opinion*, its Los Angeles-based sister paper, to keep up with news about Mexico and the Mexican community in the United States.

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The uniting feature of the patriot frame was perseverance. The prisoner, like the agricultural worker, or the autoworker, might have fallen on hard times in the United States. But he had made the most of his opportunities and would return to Mexico and share his experiences with his compatriots. By 1932 and 1933, this paradigm in news coverage was difficult to discern. The myriad, traumatic trials awaiting repatriating Mexicans had been well publicized, making such a return seem a quixotic enterprise. The patriot news frame was not alone in its noble attribute. It shared that characteristic with another news frame that also captured civic mindedness—this one of Mexicans who elected to remain in the United States.

**Good-Citizen Frame: Constructing an Ethos of Charity and Self-Reliance**

In an era of deprivation, when many had little and even more had nothing, the Mexican community tried to help itself. The good-citizen frame was inherently one of benevolence and a community’s ability to mobilize on behalf of the repatriates. *La Prensa* played a prime role in constructing notions of good citizenship by publishing articles such as one headlined: “The Pro-Repatriados Committee of Laredo Reports on its December Action.” The January 22, 1932, article was published with the sub-head: “Through *La Prensa* thanks to all the mutual and fraternal associations that stood ready to help our compatriots.”

The news story listed donors, and in many cases, recipients by name. One donation of $2.25, for instance, went to “Mrs. Dolores, the widow of Morales, with six children, by order of the Mexican consul general.” The article also documented the extent to which local communities outside of Laredo rallied to support the deluge of repatriates that passed through the border city. Among others, the Society of the Sons of Hidalgo,
from Robstown, Texas, donated $10; the Society of Hidalgo in Brownsville, donated $4; and the Society of Benito Juárez in San Benito, Texas, gave $4.

Mexicans of all backgrounds and social profiles adopted the repatriates’ cause. Most notable was Diego Rivera, “the top mural artist, of worldwide fame,” who took a leading role in helping Mexicans in Detroit repatriate, *La Prensa* reported October 16, 1932. Commissioned by the Detroit Institute of Arts, Rivera spent eleven months, from April 1932 to March 1933, painting murals in what is now the museum’s Rivera Court. Rivera’s frescos were a paean to Detroit industry and its workers circa the 1930s, and they celebrated manufacturing as indigenous city culture.58

Painting was not enough. Rivera commissioned himself to organize the League of Mexican Laborers and Farm Workers in Detroit, and working with the governments of Michigan and Mexico, helped indigent Mexicans repatriate. The officials involved included Michigan Governor Wilber M. Brucker, Detroit Mayor Frank Murphy, and Ignacio Batiza, Mexico’s consul general in Detroit.

Some 5,000 Mexicans planned to leave Detroit in early November, “with their families, their material possessions, if they had any, and their bitter experiences as expatriates,” *La Prensa* reported. Their departure would help Detroit save $3,500 a week,

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58 Detroit Institute of Arts, “Visit Rivera Court: Industry and Technology as the Indigenous Culture of Detroit,” accessed April 16, 2012, http://www.dia.org/art/rivera-court.aspx. Now considered possibly his finest work, Rivera’s murals were not universally applauded at the time. Although Rivera’s role in repatriating Mexicans from Detroit was not evident in the *Express* coverage analyzed in this study, the *Express* did publish a page-one story “Machine Slavery in Rivera Paintings Leads to Protest,” on March 26, 1933. Detroit’s Rev. H. Ralph Higgins, the head of a citizens’ committee, protested that Rivera’s murals were “grossly one-sided, materialistic, and an unfair interpretation of Detroit life.”
the estimated amount Detroit’s Public Welfare Department spent sustaining the 1,128 Mexican families registered to receive aid, the article stated. “With the absence of 5,000 or 6,000 Mexican workers, American citizens would have a better chance to return to the automotive factories in early January 1933,” La Prensa reported. The Mexican government provided free rail transit to Laredo, Eagle Pass, or El Paso, Texas, and Rivera helped supply food for their journey.59 Good citizens were not the only ones offering help to repatriates, the newspapers, and La Prensa, in particular, also provided advice, suggestions, and warnings to compatriots who contemplated returning to Mexico.

**Prescriptive Frame: Urging an End to Mexican Repatriation**

The prescriptive frame was sporadic during 1932 and 1933, reflecting the declining repatriation news cycle as fewer returnees made the pilgrimage to Mexico. Nonetheless, “how-to” stories continued to provide advice and warning to the thousands of returning Mexicans, as well as to the Mexican government, which increasingly proved incapable of absorbing, much less accommodating them. Words and phrases associated with this frame included “advise,” “should not,” “do not,” “must,” and “have to.”

*La Prensa* maintained its role as a cautionary beacon, running page-one stories aimed at preventing returnees from making costly mistakes, such as one headlined: “Repatriates Should not Return with Mexican Coins.” The January 5, 1932, article cited two official sources, the head of customs in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, Manuel Acuña, and the Mexican vice consul in Laredo, Texas, Professor Efrain Dominguez, who advised those returning from the United States to wait and exchange their US dollars after they

had arrived in Mexico. That way, they could avoid entering the country with de-commissioned, or worthless, money, the story said.60

By 1933, La Prensa no longer trifled with advice about small change. Its February 24, 1933, editorial criticized the entire repatriation process and urged that the authorities, the press, and the Mexican consulates in the United States put an end to it quickly.

Effectively, thousands of Mexicans returned to their country during this period, attracted by the promises the National Repatriation Committee threw to the four winds, with all our classic fanfare that favors the dramatic and sensational, without stopping to consider in the cold light of day how it would be possible to realize them. The committee promised to help those who returned, undertook an extensive propaganda campaign, and aroused their sentimental spirits with the possibility of a better life against the backdrop of incomparable Mexican landscapes. The propagandists devised well-turned phrases, and tried to convince Mexicans, that there is nothing, after all, nothing like your own land in which to invest your energy . . . When the repatriates arrived in Mexico, it was logical that they would expect these promises fulfilled . . . The only thing they found was “an enormous mural of total indifference.”61

Nothing could be done about Mexicans who had already repatriated, but it would be “highly shameful to trick the Mexican, who, for better or worse, is earning a sure living outside the country, with a promise that knowingly cannot be fulfilled,” the editorial continued.62 La Prensa reiterated this admonition in a May 1, 1933, editorial, mandating that the Mexican government establish the promised colonies, accommodate the repatriates already in the country, and only after these opportunities were distributed satisfactorily, then consider repatriating more people.63

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60 “Los Repatriados no Deben Llevar Dinero Mexicano en Plata,” La Prensa, January 5, 1932, 1.

61 “El Fracaso de la Repatriación,” La Prensa, February 24, 1931, 3.

62 Ibid.

63 “La Repatriación Engañosa,” La Prensa, May 1, 1933, 3.
endorsed a Mexican government plan to build a new agricultural colony for repatriates on federal land in Baja California. Not only was this land fertile, but also such a colony would “Mexicanize” the region, which was now populated with Japanese, Russian, and Polish settlers, the October 16, 1933, editorial stated.64

La Prensa’s bold critique of the failed aspects of the Mexican government’s repatriation program was in keeping with its founding ethos, articulated on the front page of its February 13, 1913, edition. “Our (editorial) program could be fully expressed in three words: venimos a luchar.”65 The English translation requires four words: “we came to fight.” La Prensa went on to affirm that through its pages it would “honorably combat the (Mexican) government and at the same time signal the errors committed by our grandfathers under arms.”66 In other words, La Prensa was conceived as an instrument to question the policies and practices of the Mexican political system, even while it abided in Mexican pride.

The dire situation repatriates encountered in Mexico in 1932 and 1933 did not deter all Mexicans in the United States, particularly those in equally or more desperate circumstances. The Mexican consul general in Kansas City, Missouri, warned Mexicans planning to repatriate that the government would not pay the freight costs to ship their household possessions, La Prensa reported in a May 4, 1933, article. The consulate also advised repatriates who had to abandon homes that they could give some power of

64 “La Colonización Acertada,” La Prensa, October 16, 1933, 3.

65 “A la Prensa, a Nuestros Amigos y al Publico,” La Prensa, February 13, 1913, 1.

66 Ibid.
attorney to collect rents or sell their home. Some prescriptions La Prensa published came straight from the government in Mexico City. Although La Prensa had previously warned repatriates numerous times to not bring firearms into the country without the proper permits, that did not stop the paper from running another advisory, this one from Mexico’s Secretary of War, reminding returnees that they needed a special permit if they wanted to bring their guns.

The treatment of Mexicans on both sides of the border led La Prensa to endorse building closer ties between “Mexico on the Outside,” or expatriate Mexico, and those who remained in Mexico. A July 19, 1933, editorial hailed “a permanent committee of Expatriate Mexico,” which was a creation of the Mexican Labor party. “Our opinion is that we must enthusiastically foment the solidification of these ties, which unite Mexicans living in the United States, Cuba, and other nearby countries, with those who still live on the ground that holds the ashes of our ancestors,” the La Prensa editorialist wrote. Those sympathetic ties might have led to some help from Mexico for the many Mexican cotton-pickers who had gone on strike in California, and who were now suffering in camps in that state. For instance, the National Committee of Repatriates had a fund of $300,000, some of which might have been used to help the strikers, the editorial stated.

The prescriptive frame was the province of La Prensa, with the Express likely conceding that Mexicans did not turn to its news pages first for advice. La Prensa’s

67 “Recomendación del Consulado en Kansas City,” La Prensa, May 4, 1933, 5.

68 “Guerra Prohibe a los Repatriados Llevar Armas,” La Prensa, October 28, 1933, 1.

69 “La Unión de los Dos Méxicos,” La Prensa, July 19, 1933, 3. The editorial noted that the Labor Party was trying to control 200,000 votes in the next presidential election.
prescriptive frame coverage was in keeping with one of the functions of the ethnic press, to serve as a guardian, solidifier, and watchdog of its group. Importantly, as a Spanish-language newspaper, *La Prensa* was itself a prescriptive frame. *La Prensa* emphasized preservation of the Spanish language and knowledge of Mexican culture in all its permutations, including the Castilian and the Indian. By prescribing Spanish, the paper represented the ultimate Spanish nostalgia frame. The *Express* took a different route.

**Spanish Nostalgia Frame: Restoring a House in Ruins**

Remembering—and—capitalizing on San Antonio’s Spanish colonial heritage remained a pastime and a policy. San Antonio’s bicentennial was over, but there was still no better time for the past than the present. The years 1932 and 1933 represented the latter half of the deepest recessionary period, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research.\(^70\) The 43-month recession expired statistically in March 1933, but the Great Depression’s incalculable human toll persisted through the decade. For the Alamo City, reconstructing the glorious inheritance of the Spanish pioneers was one way to instill faith in a social fabric that was more than badly frayed; it was coming apart at the seams.

This reconfiguration of the past was particularly evident in the pages of the *Express*, which maintained the editorial plank it announced in the first year of the Depression: “To protect the Alamo from commercial encroachment and beautify its surroundings.” The *Express* assiduously covered the progress of the “Alamo park plan,”

the city, state, and privately funded project to create a plaza around the Alamo.\textsuperscript{71} These stories were often procedural. Yet they underscore how significant it was to revitalize the historic property and maintain it, not only as a cultural memory, but also as an iconic physical destination. Anthropologist Richard R. Flores called the Alamo a “master symbol”: “For Anglos, the Alamo serves a sign of rebirth, the coming-of-age for a state, and eventually, a nation in its modern period. It is not quite the same for Mexicans . . . For them . . . It serves as a reminder, a memorial to a stigmatized identity.”\textsuperscript{72} These opposing views of the Alamo may explain why these incremental stories about the Alamo were little covered in \textit{La Prensa}.

Although long secularized, the Franciscan-built Alamo was sacrosanct space to Anglo Texans. Clara Driscoll Sevier, the daughter of a Corpus Christi railroad and ranching magnate, and the private donor who helped fund the “purchase of land adjoining the Alamo shrine,” embraced the Alamo as sacred space. In the early 1930s, the Alamo park project was evolving simultaneously with the development of a new $1.4 million federally financed post office building site nearby. When federal officials suggested trading some land with the adjacent Alamo project, Driscoll refused, saying only the state legislature could agree to that. “The Alamo and its environments belong to the people of Texas,” Driscoll stated in the \textit{Express}.\textsuperscript{73}


\textsuperscript{73} “Crowding Alamo Plan Protested,” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 15, 1933, 3.
Driscoll has been largely credited with saving the Alamo, in part because she was on the winning side of history. Adina De Zavala, the granddaughter of the first vice president of Texas, had undertaken the effort to recover and restore the Alamo beginning in the 1890s. A member of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, she approached Driscoll for help, only to see Driscoll gain control of the project, and pursue what De Zavala considered a historically inaccurate restoration. In another example of the way Mexican Americans in Texas were divorced from constructing public memories of their own heritage, Driscoll’s vision of an Alamo state park prevailed.

The Alamo was not the only Franciscan-built structure the Express wrote about. In a September 22, 1932, editorial, the Express offered support for the restoration of “a new-old schoolhouse at Mission Espada.” Known as the “fourth mission” and named after St. Francis of Assissi, Misión San Francisco de la Espada, had “retained much of the quaint atmosphere belonging to other days” because no major roads had been situated near it, the Express noted. Now, however, new highway construction would change that, and “more than ever before, the spot will be visited by tourists.”

The new schoolhouse would be a reproduction, using original stones to create an eighteenth century external appearance, and new materials, to create a twentieth-century classroom environment: light, airy, vented, and fireproof. In the view of the editorial writer, the project called to mind the scene in which St. Francis heard a voice speaking to him in the Chapel of St. Damian. “Francis, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go

74 Flores, Remembering the Alamo, 92.

and restore it for me.”

This mandate echoed throughout San Antonio and, as historian John Bodnar, noted, the entire country during the 1930s. Restoring and rebuilding the architectural gifts of the past seemed doable, and offered promise to a discouraged population. Restoring and rebuilding the economy of the nation, or for that matter, the city, seemed impossible.

The *Express* did more than editorialize about its connection to the Spanish empire. The newspaper ran a series of full-page advertisements in conjunction with what the *Express* called a “Public Spirited Group of San Antonio citizens.” The ninth ad was published on February 12, 1933, under the headline: “The Army and the Missions have Helped to Build your City.”

Sword and Cross, emblems of war and peace, are inseparable from the history which has made San Antonio unique among cities of America. Cuirassed captains of Spain’s once mighty army found their way across burning deserts to the cooling springs which still bubble beneath their ancient cypresses and live-oaks to feed an ever-flowing river. With the soldiers walked sandaled friars bringing words of peace and promise to the savage Indians. First a fort, then a mission, more missions than at any other settlement in all New Spain, rose along the course of the winding river—de Valero, Concepcion, San Jose, San Juan, Espada, three-quarters of the eighteenth century spent in building them.

The advertisement went on to trace the development of the military presence in Texas, noting that Theodore Roosevelt had assembled his Rough Riders in San Antonio before galloping off to Cuba. The closing paragraphs of the ad exhorted residents of San Antonio to have faith in their city. After all, “Faith in San Antonio has been justified for

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76 Ibid.

77 Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 127.

more than two centuries. From far-off Spain the city’s future was visioned [sic] three-quarters of a century before American independence was won.”

Through the advertisement, the Express sought to coalesce beleaguered San Antonio residents around a notion of progress rooted in the city’s historical significance. Moreover, the ad emphasized San Antonio’s deeper, richer history vis-à-vis that of the Yankee north, monopoly ownership claimant to the nation’s founding story. Not many Anglo settlers of Texas could trace a bloodline to original Spanish settlers, but San Antonio’s powers that be were eager to assume that legacy on behalf of the city’s current dwellers.

In 1933, the Great Depression and the San Antonio Conservation Society created an opportunity for some in San Antonio to build a direct connection to the area’s Spanish colonial structures. Local relief workers were hired to restore and rebuild the old granary, part of the Franciscan-built Mission San José. Their task “preserving one of the city’s prized relics” was described in exalted tones in the February 12, 1933, edition of the Express. It served “to give victims of the depression [sic] some work more interesting and appealing because of a permanent value, than digging ditches and cutting weeds.”

The assertion was not hyperbole. The project was of national significance. The supervising architect was Harvey P. Smith, the recent past chairman of the American Institute of Architects’ national committee for the preservation of historic monuments. Smith had studied Spanish missions in the Southwest and was a specialist in the period.

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79 Anna Ellis, “Unemployed in New Field—Restoring Granary at Mission San Jose,” San Antonio Express, February 12, 1933, D1.

80 Ibid.
The project brought immediate economic uplift to the unemployed fortunate enough to be hired. More than that, the further refurbishment of the Mission San José compound aimed to bring some spiritual uplift to a city that reeled and wobbled under the weight of continued financial distress. San Antonio’s five Spanish missions, of which Mission San José was the largest, allied San Antonio and the state with power, prestige, and a paragon of world order: Spain, the *Express* article explained.

The relics of the ancient Spanish colonization in Texas are monuments of a distinguished period in Texas history. To have even been a remote part of a nation so great that at the time her monarchs gave the law to Europe, when her great expeditions of discovery and war traversed and conquered two hemispheres, is surely no mean honor.81

Looking forward by looking back worked for San Antonio. Preserving the Spanish past became “relief work.” There was no opportunity in the present better than the past.

The irony, or as Carey McWilliams put it, the “absurd dichotomy,” of venerating a Spanish past while disposing of its descendents, seemed lost on the *Express*. The connection between the two immigrants groups was absent from the Spanish nostalgia frame in the *Express*. Separated by centuries, the founders and the Depression-era immigrants were rife with similarity. Spanish-speakers, infrastructure builders, planters, farmers, artisans, Catholics; the commonalities abounded. Like San Antonio’s founders, the Depression-era immigrants often turned to themselves for help, as evinced in the good-citizen frame. For much of US history, the Spanish colonizers were also framed as pariahs, disparaged through the Black Legend, which depicted them as bloodthirsty villains, rather than noble, intrepid explorers. That view of history served its purpose, a justification for Anglo expansion into the Western US, and expulsion of many Spanish

81 Ibid.
settlers, including those with legal land grants. But, as John Bodnar noted, history had other purposes in the 1930s, and the Black Legend reverted to a vision of a proud, Spanish pioneer past. Both groups of immigrants came to toil, but in the 1930s, only those of the past were revered.

Conclusion

The years 1932 and 1933 were the beginning of the end for Mexican Depression-era repatriation. Returning Mexicans, whether deportees or voluntary repatriates, tended to make news in the *Express* when the peg was local, particularly if a city agency, such as the Central Relief Committee, was involved. These news judgments were predicated on the newspaper’s definition of its community and its readership, and its limited understanding of how the Mexican diaspora was connected to the political economy of San Antonio and the Southwest. It was left to *La Prensa*, which circulated in all but eight states in 1933, to document the doings and goings of Mexican enclaves from Detroit, Chicago, Denver, and locales in between and beyond the border. The teeming mass of Mexican workers left the United States in a story that remained largely untold to *Express* readers.

While the Mexican backbone of the industrial and agricultural economy all but disappeared, San Antonio continued the absurd dichotomy of celebrating the Mexican workers’ heroic, Spanish colonial past. To be sure, the *Express* published news stories about local Mexican Independence Day celebrations and editorialized about the famous “Grito de Dolores,” or “Call to Arms at Dolores,” which inspired the Mexican Revolution. But, for the most part, these stories failed to connect Mexico with San

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82 “The Call to Arms at Dolores,” *San Antonio Express*, September 16, 1932, 8. See, also, “Mexicans Plan Annual Festival,” *San Antonio Express*, September 6, 1932, 14; “2 Mexican
Antonio, or the legacy of Mexican Revolution with present-day pride. That work was left to *La Prensa*, which, in 1932, described its mission dramatically different terms than it had almost twenty years earlier during its founding in the crucible of the Mexican Revolution.

*La Prensa* is a spiritual bridge that extends from Mexico to the souls of Mexicans who pilgrimage in foreign lands. It is a call that awakens the countrymen. It is a mountain whose heroic hollows, repeat like an echo, all the yearning of national life. Conscious of the glorious role it has come to represent, *La Prensa* tells its readers: “Never forget Mexico.”

Returning to Mexico might not be practical, or even desirable. But remembering the homeland was possible and *La Prensa* sought to construct and maintain those memories for those who might become permanent expatriates—for those who might become Mexican-Americans. As the Depression wore on, and repatriations and deportations continued, *La Prensa* subscribers found it impossible to forget Mexico. On the contrary, it seemed Mexico had forgotten them.

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Fetes Planned Tonight,” *San Antonio Express*, September 15, 1932, 9; “Sons of America in 5-Day Program,” *San Antonio Express*, September 11, 1932, 2A.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Epilogue

The newspaper which is complete in its every edition . . . all news and advertising included . . . and carefully censors all copy, is the medium that enjoys the confidence of the reader public.¹

_San Antonio Express, September 16, 1932_

The newspaper articles, editorials, photos, and advertisements considered in the preceding chapters illuminate the constructed reality of Mexican repatriation, immigration, and identity at a discrete time and place, early Depression-era San Antonio, Texas. This dissertation asked: What were the similarities and differences in media frames of Mexicans and immigration issues in English- and Spanish-language newspapers in San Antonio, Texas, as the nation embarked on its most storied period of economic privation? Furthermore, what did media frames reveal about how English- and Spanish-language newspapers understood and intended their audiences to understand about the “reality” of the Mexican during this period?

Analysis of the narratives in English and Spanish, representing the independent editorial voices of two morning dailies, the _San Antonio Express_ and _La Prensa_, demonstrate how news frames constructed a reality divided by culture, and reveal that the Spanish-language newspaper devoted far more coverage to the sweeping international story of Mexican repatriation and deportation from the United States. This chapter explores these findings, which implicitly include what news coverage, or lack of

¹ _San Antonio Express, “The Complete Newspaper’s Influence,”_ (advertisement) September 16, 1932, 1.
coverage, implies for public memory and identity. Moreover, the chapter considers the relationship between Mexican deportation and repatriation and the long civil rights movement and the black-white race binary.

**Framing Repatriates in the Cornerstone of Myth and Memory**

Amid dwindling circulation, the news-gatherers’ perspective and objectivity, and that of their editors, continued to shape what appeared on the page. The Spanish-language *La Prensa* viewed itself as a “spiritual bridge” between its readers and Mexico. The newspaper’s great connector was what Stuart Hall described as a key signifier of identity, including national identity and culture: language.\(^2\) The *Express* championed its role as the “complete” voice of the greater San Antonio region, a claim the English-language newspaper could not fulfill. Without question, both newspapers had a storied role in Texas. The *Express* touted itself as the only morning home-delivery newspaper in San Antonio, starting in 1865.\(^3\) *La Prensa*, however, was also a morning newspaper, and was the foremost voice of persons of Mexican ancestry in San Antonio and the nation.\(^4\) During the massive deportation and repatriation of Mexicans from the United States both newspapers were crucial and influential sources of information for the public and policymakers. Overall, a prime difference was that *La Prensa* spoke more often to Mexicans whereas the *Express* spoke about Mexicans or ignored them altogether.

Reading between the lines of the *Express*, Mexicans might see affirmation of their well-


\(^3\) “A Year of Bigger Business for this City and this Region,” *San Antonio Express*, January 1, 1931, 10.

ordered, subordinate role as a laboring class despite their connection to the founding Spanish colonial past of San Antonio.

As stated previously, the phenomenon of Mexican repatriation from the Lone Star State had occurred periodically since the founding of the Republic of Texas. Depression-era Mexican repatriation and deportation, however, was on a scale without equal. Coupled with its occurrence at a pivotal period in the economic and political history of the United States, Mexican repatriation in the 1930s is a class apart from earlier episodes. Ideas and attitudes about the role of Mexicans and Mexican Americans had been forming for years in Texas, and elsewhere in the country, but they were hardened amid the political debates about Mexican immigration quotas and the best ways to create more jobs for Americans. The newspaper articles highlighted in the preceding chapters, provide what James Carey described as a “historic reality,” illuminating “a form of culture invented” in a particular time and place, in this case, Depression-era San Antonio, Texas: the cornerstone of Texan and Spanish-colonial myth and memory.5

This study of news coverage in the years 1929 to 1934 traces an arc of repatriation, immigration, and deportation topics concerning Mexicans, starting with the sometimes vituperative policy debates that characterized the reportage and editorial content of the Express, particularly in 1929 and 1930. As this study has shown, news frames, beginning in 1929 on the cusp of the Great Depression, reveal distinct differences, with repatriation of Mexicans a virtual non-topic in the Express. Moreover, La Prensa provided a dichotomous framing of Mexicans, as patriots who would save the homeland, and alternatively, as pariahs, who were a drag on society, no matter which side

of the border they populated. Some were pitied, though often viewed as no less a problem. These frames were evinced to some extent in Express news coverage as well La Prensa; but the Express was far more preoccupied with Mexican immigration policy than with Mexican people.

La Prensa’s framing of repatriates as pariahs became more pronounced as the Depression years unfolded and the stories of starving, barely-clothed, and ill returnees increased. The newspaper’s initial euphoria over the promise of a newly stable Mexican government was evidenced in their framing of repatriation as a patriotic act. Responding to the Mexican government’s call to help restore the homeland, the re-patriot returned to Mexico in “a little Ford car,” with northern agricultural know-how, a tractor, and $100 in savings, or more, as news coverage in both newspapers showed. La Prensa columnist Rodolfo Uranga argued that these repatriates would return “with riches more valuable than dollars,” most importantly “their zeal to be independent” and “their hatred for caciques, caudillos, and thugs.” In this way, La Prensa remained a critic of the government even as it promoted its repatriation policies.

The patriot frame all but evaporated in both newspapers along with confidence in the Mexican government’s ability to absorb returnees. La Prensa brought the story of the returnee home to readers with human-interest narratives, including a tale about a desperate repatriate who swallowed poison on a train, another about a man who hanged himself from a tree, and others about hordes left destitute at the border. These privations

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occurred for the most part in Mexico, beyond the priorities of the *Express*. For the *Express*, the repatriated were out of sight, over the border, and out of the news frame.

Thus, news coverage had its own borders, and it followed that the *Express* would offer few stories in the prescriptive frame directed toward Mexican immigrants. Instead, the *Express* wrote prescriptions for politicians, including editorials that railed against Congressional legislation designed to stem the flow of Mexican labor into the United States. The *Express* argued for the low-cost workforce that served the interests of ranchers, builders, and manufacturers—a policy that it also perceived was in the best interests of United States-Mexico relations. In contrast, the editorial page of *La Prensa* directed most of its political prescriptions southward, criticizing, among other things, the failure of the Mexican government to properly accommodate repatriates. Ultimately, *La Prensa* advised repatriates to remain in the United States, if at all possible. Both newspapers acted as advisors, and occasionally harsh critics of government, though for the most part, their counsel was directed toward leaders of different countries.

At the same time, *La Prensa* offered prescriptions to readers contemplating a return to Mexico, passing along official Mexican government advice on what to take, and what to leave behind, whether the item was a spare tire, a gun, or a bolt of silk. This was *La Prensa*’s literal, pragmatic guidance for Mexicans and Mexican Americans. *La Prensa*, however, as a Spanish-language newspaper in the United States, was the embodiment of a prescription. In its every word, it exhorted its readers to retain the Spanish-language and culture, even as they navigated a society that could be indifferent or hostile to their background. In this way, *La Prensa* was an important element in the
Spanish-speaking community’s circuit of culture, predicated on language’s “shared meanings,” which Stuart Hall stated are integral to culture.\(^7\)

On a nation-state level, the *Express* was far from indifferent to notions of amity, diplomacy, and neighborliness between Mexico and the United States. These civic values, manifest in the newspaper’s *somos amigos/we are friends* frame, are illustrative of the media’s prime role in the cultural construction of “hood”: nationhood, communityhood, and cityhood, as Michael Schudson characterizes it.\(^8\) The imperative to maintain goodwill with the state’s neighbor to the south was among the reasons the *Express* editorialized against the Box bill and other legislation aimed at imposing quota restrictions on Mexico. This frame, which the *Express* shared with *La Prensa*, faded after the defeat of the Box bill and other similar legislation. *La Prensa*, in its news coverage of a San Antonio Rotary Club meeting, personalized the story. In quoting school superintendent William Knox, *La Prensa* inadvertently highlighted how San Antonio’s highly segregated 1930s society hindered greater understanding between Anglos, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans. As Knox put it: “Those that don’t appreciate Mexicans, don’t know them. When they get to know them [Mexicans] well and understand them, that changes, and they love them.”\(^9\)

Many Mexicans chose not to wait for such an embrace. Their diaspora was scientifically pictured in the quantification frame, a staple of *La Prensa*’s ongoing news coverage of repatriation, deportation, and immigration during this period. Articles

\(^7\) Hall, *Representation*, 1-3.


enumerating the exodus of Mexicans from various Texas border cities were uncommon in the Express, and the relative absence of these stories was another way that 1930s repatriation was rendered invisible to readers of the English-language newspaper. How were readers to grasp the scale and impact of this mass movement if the most important English-language daily failed to convey the fuller story?

The False Equivalence of Disparately Framed News

These disparate renderings of Depression-era repatriation on the part of English- and Spanish-language newspapers may be seen as merely in keeping with the conventions of reporting and the definitions of community as prescribed by their respective news organizations. These conventions and definitions, as Herbert Gans noted, are drawn from constructed notions of nation, government, society, and social institutions that are integral to the journalists’ mindset.¹⁰ These ideas in part also govern how reporting was done. Operating with an international conception of community, La Prensa tapped a wide network of mostly unidentified correspondents who supplied news from various parts of Mexico and cities in the United States with a sizeable Mexican presence. Both newspapers utilized wire services; and, at least for a time, La Prensa had a special correspondent in Washington, DC. Official government sources have long been the primary source for journalists, as media scholars such as Herbert Gans have noted. The same could be said for La Prensa and the Express, though the government officials the newspapers relied on were not the same. La Prensa mainly looked to Mexican government officials while the Express mainly looked to US government officials.

Yet, to accept that these reporting differences merely flow naturally from reporting conventions and community definitions requires a suspension of reality and an acceptance of a false equivalence: Mexican repatriation was a story; Mexican repatriation was not a story. It was a story only for some people living in the same space and time; for others, it was a non-event. This was largely a segregated news story, more completely available to the Spanish-speaking readers of *La Prensa*. The news coverage in the *Express* followed the paradigm enunciated by historian George Lipsitz, who described ethnic communities as “surrounded by images that exclude them” and “included in images that have no real social power.”¹¹ This was explicit in the *Express*, which clearly delineated the role of the Mexican in Southwestern society: “plowing, sowing and reaping; chopping and picking cotton, transplanting onions and lettuce, digging potatoes, gathering and packaging spinach, tomatoes, oranges, and so on.”¹² Neither the machine nor “native white men” could replace the Mexican worker, who was also indispensable “to lay pipes, dig ditches, put down pavement, grade rights-of-way and build railroads,” the editorial argued.¹³ These were not people of power. These were people who did the bidding of the powerful. They came to toil—and they did.

There were similarities in coverage, in particular, that immigration, repatriation, and deportation policies were undeniably news. Most significantly, the *Express* and *La Prensa* shared a financial frame that recognized the primacy of the Mexican worker in the

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¹³ Ibid.
Southwest and US economy. In keeping with that, both newspapers adamantly opposed legislation to restrict Mexican immigration, such as the Box bill. This shared newspaper frame revealed a constructed reality divided by culture, a gulf between the culture of the Southwest and that of Washington policymakers either less cognizant or more wary, or both, of the nation’s dependence on Mexican labor.

But there were more telling differences in coverage. News frames from 1929 to 1934 stemmed from these newspapers’ disparate conceptions of their readership and community; in other words, from their selective understanding of news that served their market. Even the nuances of the financial frame differed: The Express focused on policy while La Prensa focused on people—and the tangible effects of policy on people. By definition then, neither newspaper, nor any newspaper, can be “complete,” as the Express proudly advertised itself to readers and advertisers. As this study shows, the Express provided more coverage of repatriation as the years wore on, particularly when the story had a direct bearing on the city, or involved a municipal agency. Yet a reader who relied exclusively on the Express would have failed to grasp the complex reality of the Mexican exodus from the United States. Missing were the stories La Prensa published from across both countries, sometimes via wire service, but often contributed by special correspondents from places such as Illinois, Colorado, Arizona, and Mexico that documented the widespread impact of Depression-era immigration policies on Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The absence of the broader international story meant that this episode of mass repatriation and deportation, which involved Texas more than any other state, was a virtual non-event for the typical Express reader.
Symbolic Annihilation: Journalism’s Role in Mediating Reality

The omissions of the story from the mainstream newspaper, an important site of memory, may partially explain why this Depression-era dispersion of humanity was neither well noted nor long remembered. As Michael Schudson stated, “the news constructs a symbolic world that has a kind of priority, a certificate of legitimate importance.”14 Outside of public policy debates driven by agribusiness, railroad, and banking interests as reflected in the financial frame, the human-interest dimensions of Mexican immigration, repatriation, and deportation remained largely “un-certified,” and “illegitimate” issues in the Express.

To acknowledge that such editorial decisions were in keeping with the thinking of the times does not obviate, and in fact may validate, the idea that Mexicans in the United States were nothing more than disposable labor, as Zaragosa Vargas and others have argued.15 Journalism may help preserve and instill a memory of the past through the reporter’s role in mediating reality, as Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang noted.16 By implication then, journalism seeds historical amnesia through the reporter’s role in omitting reality, in this case erasing, or at least substantially minimizing, the wider human saga of the Mexican Depression-era diaspora.

The result, evident over time, was symbolic annihilation. In Gaye Tuchman’s expanded definition of George Gerbner’s concept, symbolic annihilation refers to the


trivialization, condemnation, or absence of a social group from media coverage. To weigh the justice of an issue, policy, or action, a democratic society must first be apprised of it. Immigration, deportation, and repatriation news in the *Express*, with its policy-oriented bent, reflected, as sociologist Herbert Gans might say, “the empirically graspable external reality” available to *Express* journalists through their “socio-cultural-political milieu” and that of their editors. Simply put, their decisions about what was news were hewn from their own understanding of the world and the reference points of their own backgrounds and experience. It could not be otherwise. The open question is whether that experience included the Spanish language. A language barrier between the editorial staff of the *Express* and the city’s largest minority group suggests that mainstream journalists’ understanding of Spanish-speaking immigrants was divided by culture as well as experience. Like all journalists, *Express* reporters and editors wrote in the context of their own values and in concordance with the reality judgments of their own newspapers. Their narrative choices, as Hayden White might say, gave those news judgments of commission *and* omission authority.

The media record is only one narrow filter through which reality is constructed, but its mass reach makes it significant. As Michael Schudson noted, our social world

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expands when minorities collect and disseminate the news.\textsuperscript{20} So too, does our historical world expand when minority news coverage, in this case, in Spanish, is examined, rather than overlooked as a primary resource of constructed American reality. \textit{La Prensa} publisher and Mexican expatriate Ignacio Lozano founded his newspaper in 1913 with the goal of challenging the Mexican government’s stewardship of his troubled, beloved country. By 1932, at the height of the Depression, he publicly positioned his newspaper as something more, a cultural bridge between two countries, the United States and Mexico. Lozano was an intellectual, and as a businessman he was conservative. But to serve a language-minority readership and a Spanish-language one at that, in the state of Texas, was inherently a radical act. The state’s original Spanish-language oral and print tradition was a historical remnant.

Later in the Depression, \textit{La Prensa}’s English-language morning competition, the \textit{Express}, saluted the newspaper and Lozano for marking a quarter-century of publishing. In a February 17, 1938, editorial, “Honoring \textit{La Prensa},” the \textit{Express} explained that \textit{La Prensa} “met both a present and growing civic need.”\textsuperscript{21} Describing itself as “the seventy-three-year-old \textit{San Antonio Express},” the newspaper congratulated its “bright, newsy, young neighbor, \textit{La Prensa},” on its twenty-fifth anniversary.\textsuperscript{22} “La Prensa quickly made for itself a place in the community life, and it has filled that place so creditably as to have become indispensable.” While the \textit{Express} might have willingly ceded news coverage of the Spanish-speaking community to \textit{La Prensa}, the English-language daily recognized

\textsuperscript{20} Schudson, \textit{The Power of News}, 37.

\textsuperscript{21} “Honoring \textit{La Prensa},” \textit{San Antonio Express}, February 17, 1938, 6.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
and publicly applauded Lozano’s relatively young newspaper for “giving the people the facts they needed for a proper understanding of what was going on.” The Express also asserted that La Prensa “fostered a better spirit between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking peoples—in the community, the State, nationally, and internationally.”

Lozano’s newspaper gave a voice to the voiceless and supported images of Mexicans as thinkers and professionals that were not frequently seen in mainstream media. By recognizing Mexicans and Mexican Americans, La Prensa empowered them even as it constructed them in opposition to the English-language newspaper.

**Dichotomous News Frames of Spanish-Speaking Immigrants**

In only one respect were Spanish-speaking immigrants celebrated, revered, and widely covered in the English-language Express, and that was in the context of the Spanish nostalgia frame. The Spanish colonial conquest, once vilified as the Black Legend of bloodthirsty barbarism, was remade in the 1930s public memory as an authentic parable of pioneer pride. The Spanish nostalgia frame typified Michael Kammen’s conception of public memory, illuminating how it was allied with patriotism and national identity. Although conservation and preservation efforts were afoot before the stock market crash of 1929, San Antonio’s historic preservation projects flourished anew in a city that in a time of economic privation hungered for at least a past to be proud of. Through its editorials, advertisements, and articles, the Express also demonstrated the civic role the Spanish pioneers might play in refashioning San Antonio as a tourism playground.

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23 Ibid.

Therefore, the past did not merely represent pride; it offered profit. Spanish nostalgia was not to be confused with a Mexican vogue. As historian Laura Hernández-Ehrisman put it, the city’s leading preservation group, the San Antonio Conservation Society, was at the time “more interested in Spanish buildings of the past” and it “neglected Mexicano residents in the present.”

San Antonio may have been the capital of the confederacy in Texas, but it was far from a “Lost Cause.” The city’s history loomed larger than the Civil War, the Revolutionary War, or the Mayflower. Resurrecting and restoring this heroic Spanish past emphasized that San Antonio could stake a claim to a founding world empire that rivaled New England’s, as Anna Ellis asserted in the Express. This view of history dwelt little on the events of 1822, “when Mexico threw off the yoke of Spain,” or of the Mexican people who persisted on the land after the Spanish empire retreated. The selective return to a pioneer history, which John Bodnar noted was prevalent throughout the United States during the Great Depression, infused downtrodden Americans with a reassuring can-do spirit.

The manifestation of the American pioneer spirit that Roosevelt intuitively prescribed to spur national recovery was reinterpreted in Express news coverage as

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26 Historian Gary W. Gallagher described the concept of the South’s “Lost Cause” as “a public memory of the Confederacy that placed their wartime sacrifice and shattering defeat in the best possible light.” For more on this topic, see ed. Gary W. Gallagher, and Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (2000; repr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). For the quote referenced in this footnote, see page one of the introduction. All citations refer to the 2010 edition.


Catholic, Castilian, and conquistador. The *Express* touted this history as an example of
the power of faith, asking economically depleted and spiritually taxed San Antonians to
follow in the footsteps of Spanish soldiers and friars, who had forged a settlement in a
desolate, dangerous land with little more than belief. The *Express* editorialists might have
bolstered their case had their coverage emphasized, or even noted, that the progeny of the
Spaniards, the Mexican people, were modern pilgrims continuing the Iberian legacy as
builders, planters, and harvesters in a new, often hostile land.

*La Prensa’s* Spanish nostalgia news frame was in sharp contrast to that of the
*Express*. This was graphically evident in the two newspapers’ coverage of the city’s
bicentennial celebration. *La Prensa* made the connection between the founders and then
present-day immigrants that the *Express* failed to show. *La Prensa* did so by including
powerful quotations from civic leaders: Mayor C. M. Chambers and County Judge
William W. Wurzbach. Chambers “sang the praises of the Spanish race and stated that
the growth of San Antonio was owed in large part to the descendants of that race.”
Wurzbach asserted “the Latin colony in San Antonio was the best in the United States
owing to its ties of blood and tradition that united it with the intrepid and valiant
Spaniards, to whom San Antonio’s existence is indebted.”29 Such comments made
Mexicans visible—and vital—members of Depression-era San Antonio. The Mexican
community’s connection to the city’s founders and first citizens legitimized their status, if
only in the constructed reality of *La Prensa*. Whereas media scholars Betty Houchin
Winfield and Janice Hume found ideas and memories about American public and cultural
places emerged, were legitimized, and settled through nineteenth-century newspaper

accounts, this study of twentieth century English- and Spanish-language newspapers accounts, found something more.\textsuperscript{30} In La Prensa’s Spanish nostalgia frame, the city’s Spanish colonial founding tied its readers—mostly Mexicans and Mexican Americans—directly to glory, power, and a proud heritage. In the Express framing, the Mexican community had seemingly no connection to the city’s roots and therefore, had no inherent stake, or place, in San Antonio civic life past or present. Meaning and public memory emerged in the twentieth-century San Antonio press, but nothing was settled.

**Constructing the Mexican Good-Citizen through News Frames**

These omissions in the Express rendering of the Spanish nostalgia frame, along with the relative absence in the Express of the pariah frame—of news of the travails of Mexican repatriates and deportees—were not the only examples of missing news coverage. Another was the good-citizen frame, which the Express briefly commented upon, and La Prensa documented with numerous news reports from various Texas communities. This frame highlighted Mexican American and Mexican agency. Geographer Reynolds McKay, in his dissertation concerning Mexican repatriation from Texas, suggested that this degree of social organization was uncommon in Mexican communities elsewhere. In addition to self-help groups, Texas Mexicans had social clubs, patriotic organizations, and committees set up specifically to help repatriates.\textsuperscript{31} La Prensa, however, described this spirit as endemic to Mexicans throughout the country: “One of the immutable characteristics of the Mexican colony in the United States is,


\textsuperscript{31} McKay, 573.
without a doubt, its pure philanthropy.” These ideals were sometimes constructed in pictures as well as words. A prime example of such pictorial discourse was *La Prensa’s* publication of a photo of thousands of lunch sacks filled with food. This portrait of bounty and beneficence in a time of need demonstrated the power of Mexican community volunteers who prepared the meals for repatriates crossing the border. While Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt posit that news photographs uphold the social structure, this photo in the Spanish-language newspaper manifested *La Prensa’s* effort to help build one. In other words, the photo illuminated the cohesiveness, organization, and fraternal nature of a community in opposition to the less powerful images of the Mexican community constructed in the English-language newspaper.

The good-citizen frame of *La Prensa* coverage is an example of that newspaper’s richer, more complete depiction of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in comparison to coverage in the *Express*. Whether reflective of a Texan or a national attribute, the frame illustrates the community’s wherewithal, compassion, and cohesion. Moreover, this frame counters the notion implicit in other coverage of the period that persons of Mexican ancestry lack the capacity for citizenship. In short, the good-citizen frame also presented an image of agency, solidarity, and power, one largely absent in the English-language *Express*.

*La Prensa* embodied this civic image, promoting community fundraisers and exhorting readers to donate to various causes. By naming names, documenting donations,

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and otherwise publicizing philanthropy the community took shape through the news pages. Among other things, the newspaper instigated the construction of the Mexican Clinic in San Antonio, and touted “donations from all parts of the country.”34 The clinic brought affordable health services to poor Mexicans and Mexican Americans. La Prensa’s sponsorship of a project that aimed to produce better health outcomes also helped prepare Mexicans for US citizenship. A healthy Mexican population would challenge US Rep. John C. Box and other eugenicists who argued that Mexicans were not fit for citizenship because, among other reasons, they were dirty, disease-ridden, and a “menace” that was “injuring public health.”35

Invisible Civil Rights History and the Hierarchy of Color Frame

The eugenicists’ image of the Mexican is an extreme variant of the “other.” The subtext of the other, in a more nuanced way, played a role in how Mexicans were covered and/or not covered in the news, according to Latino cultural studies scholar Randy Ontiveros. Part of the explanation lies in the “ambiguous position that Mexican Americans have long occupied within the imaginary of the United States.” This place, an “uncertain, third space,” is somewhere between “native” and “alien,” he asserted.36 In short, Ontiveros described a group of people outside the black-white race binary, the paradigm that traditionally has limited the way government officials, academics, and journalists, among others, pursue fact-finding, analysis, and narratives about civil rights.

34 Ibid.
35 “Box Will Revise Immigrant Bill,” San Antonio Express, December 4, 1929, 9.
Ontiveros made his observations in the context of media coverage of the Mexican American post-World War II experience.

His assessment is equally applicable to the Depression-era Mexican diaspora, whose breadth was unfathomable in the English-language *Express*. Journalists working in any language are integral to the newspapers’ construction of social reality, reporting news stories that “impart a public character” to daily happenings.\(^{37}\) Moving beyond the black-white race binary to a more expansive civil rights narrative requires examining sources and resources that “impart a public character” to events and people not well or widely covered in the English-language media. In this case, that requires examining or re-examining Spanish-language media, among other sources. The mandate for doing so might be better understood if, as historian Maria Cristina Garcia suggested, “we begin the national narrative in sixteenth-century New Mexico rather than the seventeenth-century Virginia.”\(^{38}\) Thus, reperiodizing race relations and civil rights history in the United States as well.

Other recent scholarly research has begun to show the extent to which the black-white race binary has limited the definition of US civil rights issues. Landmark books on American mob violence and vigilante justice such as James Allen’s *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* and Philip Dray’s *At the Hands of Persons Unknown:*


The Lynching of Black America primarily focused on African American victims.³⁹ To the extent that other ethnicities or races are included, none are Mexican, as historians William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb noted.⁴⁰ They defined lynching “as a retributive act of murder for which those responsible claim to be serving the interests of justice, tradition or community good.” Using that interpretation, Carrigan and Webb documented 597 Mexican lynching episodes between 1848 and 1928, significantly fewer than the 3,386 blacks who historians generally agree were lynched between 1882 and 1930. But placed in proportion to the size of their respective populations, Carrigan and Webb concluded that the odds of persons of Mexican ancestry being lynched were roughly the same as for blacks.⁴¹ Texas and California were the states with the most lynchings of Mexicans among the 13 mostly southwestern states included in their study.⁴²

The authors suggested that the black-white binary played a role in making this aspect of Mexican civil rights history invisible. The researchers studied the Tuskegee Institute’s lynching records and found only 50 documented cases of Mexican lynchings. These were not easy to identify, the authors said, because the files provided only two classifications for victims, black or white. The falsity of the “white” category was evident in that it also contained Chinese, Native American, Italian, and Mexican immigrants.⁴³


⁴¹ Ibid., 413-414.

⁴² Ibid., 415.

⁴³ Ibid., 413.
The Mexican Americans, and in some cases, Mexican nationals, targeted in lynchings, were often poor laborers, suggesting that the attacks were economically as well as racially tinged. Victims were sometimes subjected to “ritualized torture,” and were variously, and sometimes in combination, hanged, maimed, tortured, and/or shot and burned. Many of these lynchings were public spectacles that instilled fear in the Mexican community as they asserted the Anglos primacy on the hierarchy of color.44

Legal scholar and critical race theorist Richard Delgado suggested several reasons for the omission. Among other things, Delgado noted that scholars may have encountered information about Mexican lynchings but ignored it as they continued to focus on the prevailing black-white paradigm. The dearth of scholars literate in Spanish may also have stunted research because news coverage of these events was often limited to local Spanish-language newspapers. Many of these events are also documented in corridos, Spanish-language folk ballads, which also are outside the typical range of sources for mainstream historians.45 The failure to record this history and recognize these civil rights violations is an act of symbolic annihilation on top of the physical annihilation.

Lynching is but one aspect of the Mexican American civil rights story overlooked by history. Repatriation, deportation, and immigration issues from earlier and later periods, constitute others. These omissions from the journalistic and historical record confine the civil rights struggle to a matter of black and white, in addition to, as historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall put it, “to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon

44 Ibid., 418-419.

decade, and to limited noneconomic objectives.” The elimination of the binary, along with the geographic and other constraints Hall enunciated, would reveal that discrimination is far more pervasive than the black-white view of race lets us see. To paraphrase Hall, this wider view would enable “one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history” to finally speak effectively to the challenges of our age.\(^{46}\)

To a certain extent, as Hall posited, and this dissertation has argued, “the media played a role in creating and perpetuating this myopic view.”\(^{47}\) Just as early civil rights histories replicated the “judgments and trajectory,” of the limited civil rights news narrative, as Hall noted, it is likely that later ones will also do so.\(^{48}\) To continue with the blinders of the black-white race binary contradicts the spirit and thinking of Dr. King, who saw race in America as “not a sectional, but a national problem.”\(^{49}\)

**The Hispanic: “The New Negro” and the Old Pariah**

While scholars continue to wrestle with defining the parameters of the “Long Civil Rights Movement,” evidence of a grassroots rejection of the black-white race binary has surfaced in the Great Recession’s aftermath. The binary, which recognizes that race is comprised of only two constituent elements, black and white, in part explains why Mexican Americans have been largely excised from the nation’s dominant civil rights narrative. In a state that was a crucible of civil rights abuses, and in a location where one


\(^{47}\) Ibid., 1235, 1236.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 1236.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 1234.
of the bloodiest incidents took place—the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham that killed four girls—Alabama’s first black federal judge, U. W. Clemon, drew a direct connection between the experience of blacks and Latino immigrants.

“The Hispanic man is the new Negro,” Clemon said. “It’s a sad thing to say, and I think it reflects reality.” Speaking later to the Southeast Symposium on State Immigration Law, Clemon added:

The anti-immigration movement in my judgment is just another manifestation of the hatred and disdain on the part of white Republican state legislators for people who don’t look or sound like them. It is completely irrelevant for their purposes that this anti-immigration legislation is irrational, taking its toll on the economy of the state with crops rotting in the fields, construction costs spiraling out of control, new business choosing to locate in less xenophobic states . . . These laws, particularly HB 56 in Alabama, are today’s rendition of the segregation laws of a half-century ago. The old wine of states’ rights and segregation comes today in a new bottle called federalism. We do the nation, and that section of the nation in which we live, a great service, as we look at those laws in the uncompromising light of the equal protection clause and the supremacy clause of the constitution.

Other civil rights leaders echoed Clemon’s rejection of the black-white race binary. Scott Douglas, executive director of the Greater Birmingham Ministries, invoked Dr. Martin Luther King to explain the connection between Latino immigrant and African American causes. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to injustice everywhere,” Douglas said.

Parallels between news frames of Mexicans during the Great Depression resonate to other times of crises. In 2000, led by its African American pastors, the black community in Siler City, North Carolina, protested with Latino immigrants against a


xenophobic public rally that made national news. The keynote speaker, David Duke, the former grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, recalled the effort to fight off the Mexicans at the Alamo as he exhorted Siler City to take a stand against immigration. For the African-American community, “The specter of the rally had opened their eyes to the plight of Latinos in Siler City and they saw their situations were not so different,” according to journalist and media scholar Paul Cuadros.\(^{52}\)

Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, San Antonians, and the now Hearst-owned *San Antonio Express-News*, once again invoked its Spanish colonial past to summon strength. Robert Rivard, the paper’s editor, expressed a modern rendition of the Spanish nostalgia frame. Referring to the city’s great cathedral, Rivard wrote: “San Fernando, on this night when we struggled with images of falling landmarks, stood as a symbol of a united and enduring San Antonio.” The Franciscan-built 300-year-old cathedral is “an old, still-living church in the Southwest, in the center of our city.” As San Antonians suffered with “our wounded East coast,” San Fernando “had renewed itself as a refuge from despair,” Rivard wrote.\(^{53}\)

For the Spanish-speaking immigrants and true believers who founded San Antonio, history had no beginning and no end. For the moment, it lives on in their restored monuments and their resilient descendants, Mexicans and Mexican Americans. A complete understanding of the Spanish colonial legacy in the United States, through the media lens and otherwise, is still in the making. As this dissertation has shown, this

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understanding has been evinced partly through media frames, which varied in English- and Spanish-language news coverage based on what newspaper managers and their reporters considered important to remember. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, prominent African American civil rights leaders U.W. Clemon and Scott Douglas described Latino immigrants as the “new Negro.” But this study of Depression-era repatriation and immigration news coverage has demonstrated that Mexicans are really the “old Negro.” The past is no oracle. But a nation cannot know where it is going if it does not know where it has been.
Table 1

*La Prensa* Circulation by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1929 Daily</th>
<th>1929 Sunday</th>
<th>1934 Daily</th>
<th>1934 Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td>2,284</td>
<td>2,264</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>1,199</td>
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<tr>
<td>East South Central</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central</td>
<td>10,907</td>
<td>19,937</td>
<td>5,005</td>
<td>11,407</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>2,510</td>
<td>2,761</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>872</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska &amp; US Possessions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>2,603</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17,814</strong></td>
<td><strong>27,183</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,732</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,903</strong></td>
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</table>

Audit Bureau of Circulations, Chicago

*Note:* Figures combine the number of mail subscribers and sales to dealers.
Figure 1

San Antonio Sunday Newspaper Circulation
1929 to 1934

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>San Antonio Express &amp; News</th>
<th>San Antonio Light</th>
<th>La Prensa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>63,756</td>
<td>75,076</td>
<td>31,934</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>62,000</td>
<td>74,539</td>
<td>36,209</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>61,179</td>
<td>75,518</td>
<td>25,232</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>58,788</td>
<td>75,691</td>
<td>21,889</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>51,573</td>
<td>72,155</td>
<td>17,429</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>53,050</td>
<td>79,381</td>
<td>16,237</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Audit Bureau of Circulations, Chicago

240
San Antonio Daily Newspaper Circulation
1929 to 1934

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>San Antonio Express &amp; News</th>
<th>San Antonio Light</th>
<th>La Prensa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>79,528</td>
<td>40,506</td>
<td>22,177</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>77,243</td>
<td>41,962</td>
<td>16,508</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>74,632</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>76,697</td>
<td>47,365</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>69,844</td>
<td>45,948</td>
<td>7,850</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>72,052</td>
<td>48,212</td>
<td>6,707</td>
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Audit Bureau of Circulations, Chicago. “Audit Report,” San Antonio Light, for the eighteen months ending June 30, 1930; for the twelve months ending June 30, 1931; for the twelve months ending June 30, 1932, for the twelve months ending June 30, 1933, for the twelve months ending June 30, 1934.

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