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"GO AFTER THE WOMEN"

Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915–1929

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> The Americanization of the [Mexican] women is as important a part as that of the men. They are harder to reach but are more easily educated. They can realize in a moment that they are getting the best end of the bargain by the change in relationships between men and women which takes place under the new American order. . . . "Go after the women" should become a slogan among Americanization workers, for after all the greatest good is to be obtained by starting the home off right. The children of these foreigners are the advantages to America, not the naturalized foreigners. These are never 100% Americans, but the second generation may be. "Go after the women" and you may save the second generation for America.
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> —ALFRED WHITE, AN AMERICANIZATION TEACHER OF MEXICAN GIRLS, 1923

One reaction to Mexican immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century was the establishment of programs aimed at Mexican women explicitly for the purpose of changing their cultural values. Americanization programs directed toward Mexican immigrants during one of the periods of massive movement across the border are an important contrast to the debates in Congress and among the American public on the utility of unrestricted Mexican immigration. These programs attempted to transform the values of the Mexican immigrant after arrival and encouraged them to conform to the American industrial order in

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a prescribed manner. Older Mexican women were seen as primary targets because of their important role in homemaking and child rearing, but when they proved difficult to Americanize these programs refocused their efforts upon the adolescent American-born Chicana.

The Mexican immigrant woman, therefore, was confronted with the reality of integrating two conflicting cultures. She would be attributed with both the positive and negative sides of "La Malinche"—both mother of the Mexican people and traitor to the Mexican race—by members of her own community. Anglo-Americans also classified her as the individual with the most potential either to advance her family into the modern, industrial order of the United States or to inhibit them from becoming productive American citizens. Solutions to the "Mexican problem" were placed squarely in her lap.

Paradoxically, the Chicano family has traditionally been viewed as the one institution in Mexican American life that has consistently resisted the forces of assimilation in the United States. According to the argument advanced by Chicano scholars, the stability and insularity of the Chicano family has acted as a fortress against alien cultural values. Chicanas, in particular, have been seen as the "glue" that keeps the Chicano family together, and they have been designated as the individuals responsible for the maintenance of Mexican tradition. The tenacious insistence of social reformers that Mexican women could cast off vestiges of traditional culture calls this assumption into question.

This study will examine the nature of the "problem" of Mexican immigrant women as defined by Americanization programs in California during the period 1915–29. It will also examine the "solutions" offered by these programs, and the relative success or failure of reformers to carry out their mission of Americanizing Mexican immigrant women in the 1920s. The study is based on the writings of Americanization instructors who worked with Mexican immigrant women during the period and on the literature produced by the California Commission of Immigration and Housing, the primary governmental body involved with the state's immigrant population. I have analyzed this literature in order to assess the assumptions these reformers made about the role of women, the family, and work in Mexican culture and American society in the years before the Great Depression. Prior to that, however, Americanization programs must be placed in the context of Mexican immigration to the United States and the variety of responses to it.

The Nature of Mexican Immigration

The movement of Mexicans across the border into the United States increased substantially in the early twentieth century, although immigration from Mexico had

been growing since the late 1880s. At its peak from 1910 to 1930, Mexican immigration increased by at least 300 percent.[1] The industrial expansion of the economy in the Southwest created an escalating demand for low-wage labor, and Mexicans took advantage of the economic opportunities available. The development of a transportation system in northern Mexico in the early part of the century facilitated the movement by connecting the populous central plateau of Mexico with the American Southwest. This railroad connection provided the means by which many migrants could escape the political, economic, and social disruption of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. World War I drew workers into war industries and the military, and the subsequent labor vacuum created an additional incentive for American employers to encourage immigration from Mexico. In fact, employers were able to pressure the federal government to establish a temporary admissions program for Mexican workers which served as a catalyst for increased immigration from 1917 to 1920. Although this enlarged flow was temporarily slowed during the recession of 1921, it grew to unprecedented levels during the rest of the decade as restrictions upon European and Asian immigration forced more employers to turn to workers from south of the border.[2]

The volume of this migration was nothing less than staggering. Approximately 100,000 persons of Mexican descent or birth lived in the United States in 1900; by 1930, this figure had climbed to 1.5 million. More than one million Mexicans—about 10 percent of Mexico's population—had entered the United States from 1910 to 1930. In 1930, 94 percent of the foreign-born Mexicans living in the United States had immigrated since 1900, and 64 percent had entered since 1915.[3]

Movement into the urban centers of the Southwest and Midwest from the countryside characterized this population shift. The Mexican population in Los Angeles more than tripled during the 1920s, making the Los Angeles barrio the largest Mexican community in the world outside of Mexico City. The Mexican populations of San Antonio and El Paso (and Texas in general) experienced between 50 and 100 percent growth in this decade. Even more dramatic was the establishment of completely new centers of Mexican population in the Midwest. The combined Mexican population of Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan experienced a 669.2 percent growth in the 1920s, almost all of it concentrated in urban areas, particularly Chicago and Detroit. By 1930, one of every two Mexicans in the United States lived in an urban setting.[4]

The rapid increase in the numbers of Mexican urban dwellers completely transformed the Mexican communities that had existed before the turn of the century. Pressures on available housing in the barrios led to overcrowded, unsanitary living conditions and eventually forced many residents to move away from traditional centers of Mexican settlement. Barrios expanded rapidly during the World

War I years, and newcomers from Mexico no longer entered a well-defined, tight-knit community.[5] The fact that most Mexican migrants to the cities came from the ranks of Mexico's rural poor added burdens on community resources. In addition, the economic position of these migrants in the cities was tenuous at best. At the conclusion of World War I many Mexicans lost their new-found industrial jobs to returning servicemen, and the 1921 depression encouraged rural workers to seek refuge in urban areas already burdened with unemployment.[6]

The nature of Mexican immigration also recast the dynamics between men and women in the barrios. Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, men outnumbered women among Mexicans traveling northward at an average ratio of five to four. The greater the distance from the Mexican border and the more rural the community, the lesser the presence of Chicanas and the fewer the number of Chicano families. Chicago by 1930, for example, had 170 Mexican males for every 100 Mexican females, while El Paso had a Mexican male-to-female ratio of 86/100 in the same year. Urban communities as a whole by 1930 had a Mexican male-to-female ratio of 116/100, compared to a 148/100 ratio in rural communities. Los Angeles in this period maintained a fairly even sex ratio, attracting many Mexican immigrant families and balancing single-male immigration from Mexico with male out-migration into California's rural areas.[7]

Cities in the American Southwest also served as focal points for the reconstituting of Mexican familial constellations and the construction of new families north of the border. Los Angeles was often the end point for a reunification of extended families through a chain migration that saw a male head of household venture out alone for work in the United States and, once settled, send for his wife and children, and frequently other kin such as brothers, sisters, cousins, and parents. These extended family networks were crucial both in dealing with the disorienting aspects of migration—finding jobs, living in temporary homes, and possible sickness or death—and in reinforcing native customs, values, and institutions from Mexico.[8] Although few single women emigrated to Los Angeles alone, single Mexican males—known as "solos"—often established themselves in the city, married American-born Chicanas, and began families of their own. One study of 769 Mexican households in Los Angeles during the 1920s revealed a high birthrate in Mexican families compared to Anglo-American families, and an average number of children per family of 4.3.[9] Clearly, the lives of most Mexican immigrant women and men centered on their families in the early twentieth century.

"The Mexican Problem"

The response of Anglo-Americans to this influx of Mexican migrants ranged widely. Restrictionists, consisting primarily of organized labor and nativists, sought to limit the migration; employers fought to keep Mexican immigration unrestricted; and a third group, whom I shall call "Americanists," viewed the restrictionist debate as a secondary concern to the Americanization of the migrants to ensure their cultural allegiance to the United States after arrival.[10]

The most vocal respondents were the restrictionists, who wanted to see Mexican immigration contained, stopped, even reversed. Organized labor, under the auspices of the American Federation of Labor, viewed Mexican immigrants as cheap labor who would compete with "American" workers. Samuel Gompers urged Congress to include Mexico in the quota restrictions, arguing that Mexicans would not be content with farm labor and would soon attempt to enter the trades in the cities. Only months before his death in 1924, Gompers expressed concern that in Los Angeles "it appeared to me that every other person met on the streets was a Mexican.[11]

In addition to economic interests, racial attitudes influenced restrictionist sentiments. Nativists, including Anglo-American politicians, academics, reporters, and others who believed in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, waged the longest and most virulent campaign against unrestricted Mexican immigration. After successfully pushing Congress to severely limit immigration from Asia and southern and eastern Europe in 1920, nativists were dismayed to discover that immigration law still allowed for the widespread introduction of "foreigners" whom they considered just as, if not more, unassimilable and undesirable. These nativists called for restriction on racial grounds based on the "Indian" or "Negro" makeup of the Mexican, the social threat to "American standards of living," and a view of the Mexican as an unstable citizen in a democracy.[12] Kenneth L. Roberts, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post,* expressed the nativist sentiments clearly when he stated that in Los Angeles one can "see the endless streets crowded with the shacks of illiterate, diseased, pauperized Mexicans, taking no interest whatever in the community, living constantly on the ragged edge of starvation, bringing countless numbers of American citizens into the world with the reckless prodigality of rabbits."[13]

In contrast to the restrictionists, southwestern employers, particularly railroad, agricultural, and mining companies, defended unrestricted Mexican immigration on economic grounds. They were no less racist in their attitudes but stressed the economic advantage of Mexican labor, arguing that "white" laborers would not and should not perform this work. According to these employers, Mexican labor provided the most desirable option for filling their labor shortages and was vital for the

survival of their industries. To counteract the racial and political arguments that restrictionists were making, employers stressed that the undesirable traits outlined by nativists actually benefited American society; the Mexican worker, they argued, provided the perfect, docile employee, had no interest in intermixing with Americans, and in fact returned to Mexico once their labor was no longer needed. W. H. Knox, of the Arizona Cotton Growers' Association, belittled nativist fears by asking, "Have you ever heard, in the history of the United States, or in the history of the human race, of the white race being overrun by a class of people of the mentality of the Mexicans? I never have. We took this country from Mexico. Mexico did not take it from us. To assume that there is any danger of any likelihood of the Mexican coming in here and colonizing this country and taking it away from us, to my mind, is absurd."[14]

While the battle between restrictionists and employers raged in legislatures and newspaper editorial pages, a third group took a different approach in dealing with the "Mexican problem." Initially, the base of support for the "Americanist" position came from progressive social reformers, many of whom were middle-class Anglo-American women dedicated to the social settlement movement and the Social Gospel tradition. These individuals felt that society had an obligation to assimilate the Mexican immigrant and hoped to improve societal treatment of immigrants in general. However, as World War I heightened anxieties concerning immigrants, nativist sentiment began to affect Americanization efforts through the "100 Percent American" movement, which wanted to ensure the loyalty of the immigrant to the United States. Additionally, big business took an interest in the Americanization movement, since it wanted a method to combat radicalism among foreign-born workers. Employers supported efforts to produce loyal, obedient employees, with at least one ultraconservative business group in Los Angeles encouraging a "superpatriotism," which included upholding the "open shop."[15] With this uneasy alliance of support, Americanization activities spread throughout the country in the late 1910s and 1920s, and programs situated in the Southwest had as a primary target the Mexican immigrant.

In California, such "Americanists" first wielded power with the election of a Progressive governor, Hiram Johnson, in 1910. Johnson secured passage of legislation in 1913 establishing a permanent Commission of Immigration and Housing, which investigated the working and living conditions of all immigrants in the state and spearheaded efforts to teach English to foreigners and to involve them in Americanization programs.[16] Though governmental bodies and private organizations in other states also sought to Americanize Mexicans, California's program was the most complete attempt to bring together government, business, and private citizens to deal with the "problem of the immigrant" in a scientific and rational fashion. The commission successfully recruited university academics, religious social workers, government bureaucrats, and middle-class volunteers.

Unlike the restrictionists and the employers, these reformers considered the Mexican immigrant to be similar to European immigrants in California at the time. In their eyes Mexicans might have presented a greater challenge than did Italians or Jews, but they found nothing endemic to the Mexican character that would prevent their eventual assimilation into the "American way of life." What distinguished such Americanization efforts from the social settlement response to European immigrants before World War I, however, was the lack of a focus on "immigrant gifts" to American society.[17] In the 1920s, little value was given to Mexican culture in Americanization programs; rather, Americanists saw immigrant traditions and customs as impediments to a rapid, thorough integration into American life.

Americanizing the Mexican Woman

As the commission expanded its Americanization programs, commissioners began to center their attention on the Mexican immigrant woman and her potential role in the cultural transformation of her family. In 1915, the state legislature had passed the Home Teacher Act, which allowed school districts to employ teachers "to work in the homes of the pupils, instructing children and adults in matters relating to school attendance, . . . in sanitation, in the English language, in household duties, . . . and in the fundamental principles of the American system of government and the rights and duties of citizenship."[18] In the war years, the home teacher became the centerpiece of Americanization efforts aimed at the Mexican family.

Why did the Mexican immigrant woman become the target of Americanization programs? First, Mexican women were seen as being primarily responsible for the transmission of values in the home. According to the strategy advocated by the Americanists, if the Mexican female adopted American values, the rest of her family would certainly follow suit. Pearl Ellis, who worked with Mexican girls in southern California throughout the 1920s, stressed the important "influence of the home" in creating an employee who is "more dependable and less revolutionary in his tendencies. . . . The homekeeper creates the atmosphere, whether it be one of harmony and cooperation or of dissatisfaction and revolt."[19]

Motherhood, in fact, became the juncture at which the Mexican immigrant woman's potential role in Americanization was most highly valued. By focusing on the strategic position of the mother in the Mexican family, Americanization programs hoped to have an impact on the second generation of Mexicans in the

United States, even if the immigrant generation itself turned out less malleable than expected. Since the father's role in parenting was assumed to be minimal, cooperation of the Mexican mother was crucial. Americanization ideology was undeniably infused with the traditional American belief in an exalted role of the mother in shaping the future political citizenry of the republic.[20] In the most grandiose visions of Americanists, the role of the mother loomed incredibly large: "As the mother furnishes the stream of life to the babe at her breast, so will she shower dewdrops of knowledge on the plastic mind of her young child. Her ideals and aspirations will be breathed into its spirit, molding its character for all time. The child, in turn, will pass these rarer characteristics on to its descendants, thus developing the intellectual, physical, and spiritual qualities of the individual, which in mass, are contributions to civilization."[21]

Besides creating a home environment that fit in an industrial order, the Americanization of Mexican women was valued for the direct benefits American society might gain from labor-force participation of female immigrants. Mexican women were seen as prime targets for meeting the labor need for domestic servants, seamstresses, laundresses, and service workers in the Southwest. Black and European immigrant women had not migrated to the American Southwest in large enough numbers to fill the growing demand in these areas. Ironically, in 1908 a Bureau of Labor inspector had regretfully noted that Mexican "immigrant women have so little conception of domestic arrangements in the United States that the task of training them would be too heavy for American housewives."[22] A decade later, Americanization programs were busy training Mexican women to fulfill these tasks.

Importantly, the conflict between the private responsibilities of American women to their homes and families and the public roles women began to play as workers and citizens in the 1920s were not addressed in Americanization programs.[23] Americanists were too interested in the contribution Mexican women could make in the transformation of their families from a rural, preindustrial people to an urban, modern American unit to worry about "women's proper place." Herbert Gutman, in his important book *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America,* has examined the "recurrent tension" produced when immigrant men and women new to the American industrial order came in contact with the rigorous discipline of the factory system.[24] Because the Southwest lagged behind the rest of the nation in industrialization, local reformers were anxious to introduce Mexican women and men as rapidly as possible into a growing industrial society and to inculcate Mexican families with a "Protestant work ethic." To achieve these ends, the public and private responsibilities of women were blurred, and in fact Americanists discovered a peculiar way in which to economize their energy by taking care of both issues at once. By encouraging Mexican immigrant women to wash, sew, cook, budget, and mother happily and efficiently, Americans would be assured that Mexican women would be ready to enter the labor market while simultaneously presiding over a home that nurtured American values of economy.

Americanists viewed the ability to speak English as the most fundamental skill necessary for the assimilation of the immigrant, both female and male. English instruction was intended to provide the immigrant with much more than facility in the common language of the United States; it also sought to imbue the foreigner with the values of American society. The commission recommended in 1917 "that employers of immigrants be shown the relation between a unified working force, speaking a common language, and industrial prosperity."[25] In 1918, Mrs. Amanda Matthews Chase, a home teacher in southern California working for the commission, developed a primer for teaching English to foreign-speakers by covering "the most essential elements in the home teaching curriculum" and by associating these "with the pupils' own lives and affairs."[26] For example, home teachers were instructed to teach the following song to immigrant women (to the tune "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching"). The song was intended to instruct them about women's work while they learned twenty-seven new English words:

> We are working every day,.
> So our boys and girls can play.
> We are working for our homes and country, too;
> We like to wash, to sew, to cook,
> We like to write, or read a book,
> We are working, working, working every day.
> Work, work, work,
> We're always working,
> Working for our boys and girls,
> Working for our boys and girls,
> For our homes and country, too—
> We are working, working, working every day.[27]

Despite the concerns of reformers, Mexican women continued to lag behind men in learning the English language. A study of 1,081 Mexican families in Los Angeles conducted in 1921 found that while 55 percent of the men were unable to speak English, an overwhelming 74 percent of the women could not speak the language. Similar gaps existed in English reading and writing.[28] Americanists blamed the patriarchal, outmoded nature of the Mexican family for this discrepancy. "The married Mexican laborer does not allow his wife, as a rule, to attend evening

classes," reported Emory Bogardus, a sociologist at the University of Southern California.[29]

Getting the Mexican woman out of her home became a priority for Americanization programs because Americanists saw this as the only avenue available for her intellectual progress and, of course, the only method by which Americanists could succeed in altering her values. Americanists consistently criticized the alleged limitations placed upon the Mexican wife by her husband as traditional and unprogressive. Home teachers visited each Mexican home in their districts individually in order to gain the trust of family members and gradually encourage the husband to allow his wife to attend English-language classes. The scheduling of alternative classes in the afternoons for wives and mothers facilitated this process.[30] According to one Americanization instructor, if left in the home, the Mexican woman's "intellectual ability is stimulated only by her husband and if he be of the average peon type, the stimulation is not very great." The Mexican home, according to the same teacher, "being a sacred institution, is guarded by all the stolid tradition of centuries."[31] If the Mexican home remained such a fortress, Americanists would not be able to accomplish their mission among the Mexican immigrant population.

Americanization programs did not, however, intend to undermine the traditional Mexican family structure; rather, these programs depended on the cohesiveness of the Mexican family to achieve their goal of assimilation. Home teachers, even when they did get Mexican women out of the house to attend class, encouraged the acquisition of traditionally feminine skills which could then be utilized within the confines of the household. The conscious strategy of these reformers was to use the Mexican woman as a conduit for creating a home environment well suited to the demands of an industrial economy. In the ditty "The Day's Work," for example, home teachers utilized the following sequence of English phrases to emphasize a woman's contribution to this new order:

> In the morning the women get breakfast.
> Their husbands go to work.
> Their children go to school.
> Then the women get their houses in good order.
> They give the baby its bath.
> They wash, or iron, or cook.
> They get the dinner.
> After dinner they wash the dishes.
> Then they sew, or rest, or visit their friends, or go to school.
> The children must help to cook the supper and wash the dishes.[32]

Changing Family Habits

Two particular areas in which the Mexican female was regarded as crucial in transforming outdated practices in the home were diet and health. Americanization programs encouraged Mexican women to give up their penchant for fried foods, their too frequent consumption of rice and beans, and their custom of serving all members of the family—from infants to grandparents—the same meal. According to Americanists, the modern Mexican woman should replace tortillas with bread, serve lettuce instead of beans, and broil instead of fry. Malnourishment in Mexican families was not blamed on lack of food or resources but on "not having the right varieties of foods containing constituents favorable to growth and development."[33]

Food and diet management became tools in a system of social control intended to construct a well-behaved citizenry. A healthy diet was seen not only as essential for proper health but as fundamental for creating productive members of society. In the eyes of reformers, the typical noon lunch of the Mexican child, thought to consist of "a folded tortilla with no filling," became the first step in a life of crime. With "no milk or fruit to whet the appetite," the child would become lazy and subsequently "take food from the lunch boxes of more fortunate children" in order to appease his or her hunger. "Thus," reformers alleged, "the initial step in a life of thieving is taken."[34] Teaching immigrant women proper food values would keep the head of the family out of jail, the rest of the family off the charity lists, and save taxpayers a great amount of money.

Along with diet, health and cleanliness became watchwords for Americanization programs aimed at Mexican women. One of the primary functions of home teachers was to impress upon the minds of Mexican mothers and mothers-to-be "that a clean body and clean mind are the attributes of a good citizen."[35] Reformers working with Mexican women were warned, however, that their task would be a difficult one. "Sanitary, hygienic, and dietic measures are not easily learned by the Mexican. His philosophy of life flows along the lines of least resistance and it requires far less exertion to remain dirty than to clean up."[36] The lack of cleanliness among Mexicans was blamed for their poor state of health, and this connection was the main reason why the stereotype of the "dirty Mexican" brought concern to the Anglo urban dweller. According to an eminent sociologist working with Americanization programs, Anglo-Americans "object to the presence of Mexican children in the schools that their children attend, for fear that the latter will catch a contagious disease. A relatively permanent form of racial antipathy is the result."[37]

The ability of Americanization teachers to inculcate "American" standards of diet, health, and cleanliness among Mexican women was not considered the only

essential component in creating a healthy home environment, however. All of the gains made by these programs would be lost if the Mexican female bore too many of these nascent citizens. Americanists worried that without limiting family size, the Mexican mother would be unable to adequately train each individual member of her household.

Control of immigrant population growth was a long-standing concern both of those who defined themselves as progressives and of nativists. Fears of "race suicide" had existed in the Anglo-American mind since the late nineteenth century, when Americans had first encountered immigrant groups who exhibited a greater propensity to repopulate themselves than native-born Americans. When this fear was applied to the Mexican immigrant, both nativists and Americanists shared a common concern: the nativist wanted to control Mexican population growth for fear of a "greaser invasion," while Americanists viewed unrestricted population growth as a vestige of Old World ways that would have to be abandoned in a modern industrial world.

Mexican women, according to Americanization strategy, should bear the brunt of the responsibility for family planning. Americanists gave a variety of reasons for the presumed inability of Mexican women to control reproduction: (1) lack of training in sex matters and a primitive sexuality; (2) early marriage of girls because of tradition and the "inherent sentimentality" of the Mexican female; and (3) religiously based opposition to birth control.[38] Despite these barriers, Americanization teachers reported that Mexican mothers were beginning to exhibit discomfort with large families, occasionally inquiring about birth control measures, and warning other women to delay marriage on the grounds of "much work, too much children."[39]

The Mexican Woman as Worker

Americanists viewed such evidence of changing attitudes as a hopeful sign, because limited reproduction opened up new opportunities for Mexican women inside and outside the home. Inside the home, Mexican women could devote more time to the "proper" raising of fewer children and the creation of an "American" home environment. Outside the home, it enabled new possibilities for female employment by freeing Mexican women from the heavy burden of constant child rearing. Traditionally, Mexican women had not engaged in wage labor outside the home because of their duties to reproduce and maintain the family unit. If a

Mexican immigrant woman worked, it was usually before marriage in her late adolescent or early adult years.[40]

The new demands of the industrial American Southwest, however, created a need for low-paid, low-status labor at tasks that had traditionally been performed by women inside the home. The labeling of domestic service, clothing manufacture, laundry, and food service as "women's work" presented a problem to employers in these industries in the Southwest. Employers were forced to search for an alternative female labor supply because of restrictions placed upon Asian and European immigration, the paucity of black migration to the Southwest, and the growing demands of Anglo middle-class families for these services. Despite all the traditional objections to Mexican women working outside the home, Americanization programs actively sought to prepare Mexican immigrant women for entrance into these sex-segregated occupations.[41]

The fact that these employment opportunities were in occupations that utilized traditionally female forms of labor made it easier for Americanists to advocate instruction in these tasks without upsetting the traditional social order within the Mexican family. For example, skill at needlework was viewed in Americanization programs as an inherited trait among Mexican women, passed down through generations. Americanization teachers were directed to "strive to foster it in them [so] that we may not lose this valuable contribution to our civilization with the passing of time." This form of encouragement, according to reformers, should be started as early as possible—by the third year in school at least—since Mexican girls were apt to drop out of school at an early age and would "miss out" on this opportunity to gain "greater respect for the school and for our civilization."[42]

Whatever success Americanization programs had in promoting greater standards of cleanliness and efficiency in home management were seen as having a double benefit for American society. For example, Americanists stressed the ability to set a table and to serve food properly. Table etiquette not only encouraged Mexican women to aspire to arrange their family's meals by American standards but also discouraged "sloppy appearance and uncleanliness of person [that] would not be tolerated in a waitress and would be the cause of no position or losing one already obtained."[43] Americanists also reasoned that the burden on a private citizen employing a Mexican woman as a domestic servant would be lightened if that woman had already been adequately trained through their programs. As one social worker stated in the late 1920s: "Americans want household help for two or three days a week, and they can, if they will, take Mexican women and teach them. It requires patience to be sure, but there are large numbers of Mexicans who can fill the household gap if the proper conditions are made."[44]

Additionally, encouraging Mexican women to engage in hard work was viewed as an important facet in "curing" the habits of the stereotypical "lazy Mexican." According to one Americanization teacher, "Quien sabe?" (who knows) was the philosophy of all of Mexico, and the inability of Mexicans to connect the things that are valued as worthwhile to the effort necessary to obtain them made Mexican laborers inefficient.[45] Another felt that "the laziness of Mexicans" was due to "climate conditions and inherited tendencies" which only hard work could root out.[46] Consequently, putting Mexican women to work would have the effect of promoting discipline in them, which in turn would encourage them to pass on a similar level of self-control to their children.

The Failure of Americanization

Did these programs, in fact, change Mexican family practices and produce "citizens of the republic" who adopted American values and customs? Certainly Americanization programs did produce Mexican converts to the American way of life. Many immigrant women flocked to programs that promised greater social freedom for them, and healthier, more contented lives for family members. By and large, however, Americanization programs failed to change the fundamental cultural practices of Mexican immigrant families for two principal reasons: (1) Mexican immigrants in the 1920s never fully committed themselves to integration into American life. Even when changes in cultural practices did occur, Americanization programs had little role in directing this evolution. (2) The various forces behind Americanization programs never assembled an optimistic ideological approach that might have attracted Mexican immigrant women. Instead, they presented a limited, inconsistent scheme that could not handle the demographic realities of the Mexican immigrant community.

Indeed, most Mexican immigrant families remained unaffected by Americanization efforts throughout the 1920s. A government study in 1930 found that the Mexican immigrant population in California, who had the lowest rate of naturalization of any immigrant group in the state in 1920, actually experienced a decline in the ratio of naturalized Mexicans among the total alien Mexican population from 1920 to 1930.[47] Mexican women remained very unlikely to pursue American citizenship or to encourage family members to do so. In fact, in a study conducted in 1923, 55 percent of the Mexican immigrants surveyed considered it their duty to remain politically loyal to Mexico, while almost all of the rest refused to answer the question.[48]

Within the home, little cultural change among the Mexican population was

evident. A Mexican sociologist, Manuel Gamio, found that although material possessions often did change, Mexicans immigrants retained their ethics, culture, and loyalty to Mexico to a very large extent.[49] In fact, as the Mexican barrios grew extensively during the 1920s, the need for Mexicans to interact with Anglos lessened. Mexicans were more likely than ever to retain their own cultural values, because they experienced minimal contact with Anglo institutions.[50]

The one area in which change is apparent is that of female employment. Textile factories, laundries, hotels, wholesale and retail stores, and bakeries all seem to have been successful in recruiting Mexican women as employees during the 1920s in Los Angeles.[51] Few of these women, however, entered these industries as a result of Americanization efforts; rather, most had little choice in the matter. A study of Mexican women working in Los Angeles industries conducted in 1928 concluded that 62 percent of the women interviewed entered their occupations because of poverty or economic necessity. Moreover, nine-tenths of these women were unmarried, most were under the age of twenty-three, and two-thirds had been born in the United States.[52] It appears that unmarried older daughters would be the first women to seek employment, rather than older, married Mexican women, because this pattern was more familiar in Mexico and more acceptable in the family and community.[53]

Americanization programs did seem to encourage acculturation among the second generation, although not always in exactly the manner intended. The change in cultural values among children born or raised in the United States often led to conflict with Mexican immigrant parents. The sociologist Emory Bogardus noted that during the late 1920s and early 1930s Mexican girls often ran away from home in order to seek pleasure or to avoid parental discipline and control.[54] One Mexican immigrant mother explained: "The freedom and independence in this country bring the children into conflict with their parents. They learn nicer ways, learn about the outside world, learn how to speak English, and then they become ashamed of their parents who brought them up here that they might have better advantages." Another Mexican mother placed the blame squarely on American values: "It is because they can run around so much and be so free, that our Mexican girls do not know how to act. So many girls run away and get married. This terrible freedom in this United States. The Mexican girls seeing American girls with freedom, they want it too, so they go where they like. They do not mind their parents; this terrible freedom. But what can the Mexican mothers do? It is the custom, and we cannot change it, but it is bad."[55]

Rather than providing Mexican immigrant women with an attainable picture of assimilation, Americanization programs could only offer them idealized versions of American values. In reality, what was achieved turned out to be little more than

second-class citizenship. The most progressive assumptions behind Americanization programs were never fully shared by the government or business interests involved, and thus they could never be fully implemented. One Americanization teacher who spent the decade working with Mexican immigrants noted with disappointment in 1923 that the newly elected governor of California had eliminated financial provisions for the Americanization program in the public schools from his budget.[56] At least one historian has concluded that the "love affair between the progressive and the businessman" in California inevitably led, in the 1920s, to a blunting of "the cutting edge of progressive social reform."[57] By 1927, the ambivalence of the reformers became apparent when the Commission of Immigration and Housing itself sided with restrictionists, called for an end to unlimited immigration from Mexico, and blamed immigrants for "causing an immense social problem in our charities, schools and health departments."[58] Caught in the middle of a growing debate surrounding Mexican immigration, social reformers were never able to argue forcefully for their own particular program for dealing with the "Mexican problem."

The halfhearted effort of administrators of Americanization programs limited available personnel and resources and ensured that the programs would never be able to cope with the volume of Mexican migration. The barrios expanded so quickly in the 1920s that any single Americanization teacher found it impossible to keep abreast of the number of new Mexican families in her district who needed a resumption of her program from scratch. Newer areas of Mexican settlement were usually beyond the reach of established Americanization programs entirely. Furthermore, Mexicans experienced a high degree of geographic mobility in this period that easily wiped out whatever progress had been made by programs in a given community. According to the historian Richard Romo, fewer than one-third of Mexicans present in Los Angeles in 1917–18 were present in the city one decade later.[59] The Americanization teacher Amanda Chase acknowledged the extent of this problem when dealing with Mexican women: "I have had in my class record book this year the names of about half as many Mexican women as there are Mexican families in the district. But a third of them moved to other districts."[60] Mexican women could not hope to develop allegiances to the United States when the economic condition of their families forced them to migrate repeatedly in search of an economic livelihood.

In the end, Americanization programs never had the time to develop sufficiently to offer a solution to the problems of Mexican immigrants in the United States. With the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression of the 1930s, all attempts to Americanize Mexican immigrant women came to an abrupt end. Rather than searching for ways to assimilate Mexican immigrants, American society looked for methods to be rid of them altogether. About 500,000 Mexicans left the United States during the 1930s under strong pressure from the government, and up to one-tenth of these individuals had resided in Los Angeles.[61] Americanists joined in these efforts to repatriate Mexican residents; their commitment to improving the conditions of the Mexican female had no place in an economically depressed America.

However short-lived, Americanization programs offer us a unique opportunity to examine the assumptions made about both Mexican and American culture and to scrutinize the values of the Progressive Era in its waning moments. For a time, a certain group of American citizens felt that the Mexican immigrant woman could be fit into American society, but only in a particular fashion. Her role in the creation of a new industrial order would be to transform her own home into an efficient, productive family unit, while producing law-abiding, loyal American citizens eager to do their duty for capitalist expansion in the American Southwest. Furthermore, once she had learned proper American home care, she would help solve "the servant problem" in Anglo-American homes by providing a cheap but efficient form of domestic labor. Americanists felt that they were offering Mexican women an opportunity that they could ill afford to turn down. Apparently most Mexican women in the United States did just that.

NOTES

1. Jose Hernandez Alvarez, "A Demographic Profile of the Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1910–1950," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 25 (1983): 472.
2. Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900–1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp. 14–17, 41–42, 55–58.
3. Richard Romo, "Responses to Mexican Immigration, 1910–1930," *Aztlan* 6, no. 2 (1975): 173; Romo, "The Urbanization of Southwestern Chicanos in the Early Twentieth Century," *New Scholar* 6 (1977): 194.
4. Romo, "Urbanization," pp. 194–95; Reisler, *Sweat*, p. 267.
5. For Los Angeles, see Richard Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 77–79; for El Paso, see Mario T. Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880–1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 141–43.
6. Romo, "Responses," p. 182; Reisler, *Sweat*, p. 50.
7. Alvarez, "Demographic Profile," pp. 481–82; Romo, "Urbanization," pp. 195–96.
8. Mario T. Garcia, "La Familia: The Mexican Immigrant Family, 1900–1930," in *Work, Family, Sex Roles, Language: The National Association of Chicano Studies, Selected Papers 1979*, ed. Mario Barrera, Alberto Camarillo, and Francisco Hernandez (Berkeley: Tonatiuh-Quinto Sol International, 1980), pp. 120–24.
9. Romo, *East Los Angeles*, pp. 52, 83; Alvarez, "Demographic Profile," p. 482.

10. My categories largely correspond with those of John Higham in his discussion of the restrictionist debate surrounding European immigration, with one notable exception—unlike the Mexican community, European immigrant groups themselves often produced political leaders and organizations who joined employers in fighting against restriction; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925*, 2d ed. (New York: Atheneum, 1963), pp. 301–7.

11. Reisler, *Sweat*, p. 169; Romo, "Responses," p. 187.

12. Reisler, *Sweat*, pp. 151–69.

13. Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Docile Mexican," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 10, 1928, p. 43.

14. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Hearings on Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 69th Congress, 1st sess., 1926, p. 191; and ibid., *Hearings on Seasonal Agricultural Laborers from Mexico*, p. 46.

15. Higham, *Strangers*, pp. 234–63; Edwin Layton, "The Better America Federation: A Case Study of Superpatriotism," *Pacific Historical Review* 30 (1961): 137–47.

16. Spencer Olin, *California's Prodigal Sons: Hiram Johnson and Progressives, 1911–1917* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 76–80.

17. See Higham, *Strangers*, pp. 116–23; and Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 84–102, for a fuller discussion of the treatment of immigrants by social settlements.

18. California, Commission of Immigration and Housing (CIH), "The Home Teacher, Immigrant Education Leaflet No. 5" (San Francisco, 1916), p. 8.

19. Pearl Idelia Ellis, *Americanization through Homemaking* (Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing, 1929), p. 31.

20. See Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), for the origins of this ideology.

21. Ellis, *Americanization through Homemaking*, p. 65.

22. See Mario T. Garcia, "The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880–1920—A Case Study," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (May 1980): 326.

23. Interestingly, the clash between domestic duties and work outside the home became a much addressed, yet unresolved, issue in the 1920s among middle-class, college-educated Anglo-American women—the very group recruited to become Americanization teachers. See Carl Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in American from the Revolution to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 411–13; and Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 21–43.

24. Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 13.

25. California, Commission of Immigration and Housing, "A Discussion of Methods of Teaching English to Adult Foreigners, with a Report on Los Angeles County" (Sacramento, 1917), p. 21.

26. California, Commission of Immigration and Housing, "Primer for Foreign-Speaking Women, Part II," compiled under Mrs. Amanda Matthews Chase (Sacramento, 1918), p. 3.

27. Ibid., p. 5.

28. Jay S. Stowell, *The Near Side of the Mexican Question* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), p. 102.

29. Emory S. Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1934), p. 81.

30. CIH, "Discussion of Methods," pp. 12–14.

31. Alfred White, "The Apperceptive Mass of Foreigners as Applied to Americanization, the Mexican Group" (master's thesis, University of California, 1923), p. 30.

32. CIH, "Primer," p. 9.

33. Ellis, *Americanization through Homemaking*, pp. 19, 21, 29.

34. Ibid., p. 26.

35. Ibid., p. 47.

36. Ibid., p. 64.

37. Bogardus, *The Mexican*, p. 33.

38. Bogardus, *The Mexican*, p. 25; Ellis, *Americanization through Homemaking*, pp. 61–62.

39. Bogardus, *The Mexican*, p. 26.

40. Garcia, "La Familia," pp. 124–27.

41. For an excellent discussion of occupational sex segregation in this period, see Ruth Milkman, "Women's Work and the Economic Crisis: Some Lessons from the Great Depression," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 8 (Spring 1976): 75–78.

42. Ellis, *Americanization through Homemaking*, pp. 15, 13.

43. Ibid., p. 35.

44. Bogardus, *The Mexican*, p. 43.

45. White, "Apperceptive Mass," p. 20.

46. Ellis, *Americanization through Homemaking*, p. 43.

47. California, "Mexicans in California: Report of Governor C.C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee" (Sacramento, 1930), pp. 61–74.

48. Evangeline Hymer, "A Study of the Social Attitudes of Adult Mexican Immigrants in Los Angeles and Vicinity" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1923), p. 51.

49. Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (1930; New York: Dover, 1971), pp. 172–73.

50. Romo, *East Los Angeles*, p. 162.

51. Ibid., p. 118.

52. Paul S. Taylor, "Mexican Women in Los Angeles Industry in 1928," *Aztlan* 11, no. 1 (1980): 103.

53. Garcia, "La Familia," p. 127. This pattern is similar to that found among Italian immigrant families. See Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 180–217.

54. Bogardus, *The Mexican*, pp. 56–57.

55. Ibid., pp. 29, 28.

56. White, "Apperceptive Mass," p. 3.

57. Jackson K. Putnam, "The Persistence of Progressivism in the 1920's: The Case of California," *Pacific Historical Review* 35 (1966): 398.

58. California, Commission of Immigration and Housing, "Annual Report" (Sacramento, 1927), p. 8.

59. Romo, *East Los Angeles,* pp. 124–28.

60. CIH, "The Home Teacher," p. 3.

61. Abraham Hoffman, "Mexican Repatriation Statistics: Some Suggested Alternatives to Carey McWilliams," *Western Historical Quarterly* 3 (October 1972): 391–404; Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929–1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974).