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BEYOND THE BORDERLANDS: MEXICAN LABOR IN THE CENTRAL PLAINS, 1900-1930

MICHAEL M. SMITH

The northern and central plains states, lying well beyond the Spanish borderlands and containing no great urban metropolises, have received scant attention in published studies of Mexican migration to and Mexican labor in the United States. Although this region did not attract Mexican immigrants in large numbers, compared to California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado and such cities as Chicago or Detroit, there was a dramatic increase in the number of Mexican immigrants to the plains states between 1900 and 1930. These persons filled a vital, yet generally ignored, role in the economic life of the region.¹

This study examines Mexican migration to Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Such a spatial limitation permits a survey of migration and labor beyond the borderlands and outside the large industrial centers while providing an opportunity to investigate Mexican labor in a geographically compact area. The rising tide of Mexican migration to the northern and central plains states after the turn of the century, when conditions in both Mexico and the United States encouraged immigration, and the Great Depression, which witnessed the ebb and finally the outward flow of the vast majority of Mexicans from the region, have determined the chronological parameters of the study. This is a general spatial and occupational survey that does not attempt to present a detailed account of social conditions or wage scales.

CAUSES OF MEXICAN MIGRATION

A variety of factors coalesced during the first three decades of the twentieth century to stimulate massive migration of Mexicans across the border and subsequently into the central and northern plains. During the latter years of the nineteenth century, the Mexican peasantry had faced an oppressive combination of land-ownership concentration, debt peonage, demographic pressure, static wages, and a rising cost of living. Faced with the chilling alternatives of flight or starvation, migration was the only liberation for hundreds of poor campesinos who roamed Mexico in search of

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employment. The inhabitants of the populous Central Plateau—including the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas—most sharply felt the effects of the social and economic problems that beset Mexico, and they comprised the largest proportion of Mexican immigrants to the plains region. Between 1900 and 1910, perhaps as many as 500,000 Mexicans entered the United States. Immigration increased even more rapidly between 1910 and 1930. The Mexican revolution and its attendant physical destruction, social upheaval, agricultural collapse, and inflation produced widespread suffering and drove people from the land. Although traditional studies have credited the revolution with causing the massive exodus of Mexicans to the United States in the twentieth century, more recent works have shown that it merely intensified a movement that had been under way for over a decade.²

Concomitant with the expanding supply of highly mobile Mexican labor was the economic development of the American West and Southwest. Railroad construction and maintenance, mining, and the enormous expansion of agriculture in this area of low population density created a mushrooming demand for workers. American laborers, whose wages and standard of living were rising rapidly at this time, disdained these opportunities when they could find more attractive and more remunerative employment elsewhere. While American workers refused to take these jobs in the West, traditional sources of foreign labor progressively diminished during the period. The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the “Gentleman’s Agreement” with Japan (1907) effectively excluded Orientals. The outbreak of World War I and the Immigration Acts of 1917, 1921, and 1924 curtailed the immigration of Europeans. As a result, railroad, mining, industrial, and agricultural interests grew increasingly dependent upon laborers from Mexico. Many employers considered Mexicans as the ideal solution to their labor problems. The Mexicans’ pattern of working for brief periods in the United States and then returning home seemed to pose no threat to the “American way of life.” Prior to the Great Depression, Mexican workers were routinely exempted from the restrictions imposed upon others by the various immigration acts.³

The presence of Mexicans in the plains states was closely associated with the railroads, which provided the major arteries of migration from Mexico to the United States and were the major employers and distributors of Mexican labor throughout the region. By 1904 railroad lines bridged the desert between the Mexican heartland and the Texas border towns of El Paso, Eagle Pass, Laredo, and Brownsville. As immigrants crossed the Rio Grande, agents obligingly facilitated their contact with a variety of employers, who either sent their own recruiters to the border or utilized private agencies that were exclusively engaged in securing Mexican workers. El Paso, which had direct rail contact with the Central Plateau as well as the mining centers across the border, was the paramount recruiting center. The primary railroads of Oklahoma and Kansas—the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (Santa Fe); the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific (Rock Island); the St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco); and the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (Katy)—all had direct or indirect connections with El Paso and Laredo and drew heavily upon the pool of cheap, unskilled labor there. In an eight-month period between 1907 and 1908, six El Paso companies supplied almost 16,500 Mexicans to various railroad corporations. By 1928 the Santa Fe alone employed a total of 14,300 Mexicans. With a turnover rate that once reached 300 percent annually, the Santa Fe required a constantly renewable supply of workers. Thousands of Mexicans were shipped every year from El Paso to Kansas City, which became the major distribution center of Mexicans in the Midwest. Thus, the web of railway lines facilitated the dispersion of Mexicans throughout the plains states and fed labor to employers in the region.⁴

A peculiar characteristic of Mexican workers in the northern and central plains was the “leapfrog” nature of their migration. Reaching
the American border, natives of the Central Plateau found that their compatriots from northern Mexico had already taken the jobs in that area. Thus, they comprised the vast majority of those who traveled beyond the border directly to the plains states. Studies of Mexicans in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and North Dakota confirm this phenomenon.\

Mexicans in the plains states differed markedly from their European counterparts in their generally transitory residence. Land ownership held an overpowering attraction for many European immigrants. They frequently established themselves in rural ethnic enclaves, bought farms, and became permanent residents and citizens. Mexicans, on the other hand, because of the nature of their employment and their own preferences, rarely became landowners. As migrant or temporary workers, they came for the season and then returned to the border or their homes in the interior. At first most came as solos—bachelors or married men traveling alone—who took back or sent money to support their families who remained in Mexico. The proximity of their homeland and the practice of railroad companies and other employers to provide free or reduced-rate transportation to the border encouraged transience. Although conditions in Mexico and, later, the railroads' attempts to secure a less volatile labor force often induced them to bring their families north and prolong their stay for many years, most Mexicans in the plains states were visitors who rarely became settlers and citizens.

DISTRIBUTION IN THE PLAINS STATES

The accompanying table and maps show that significant numbers of Mexicans were present in the northern and central plains states between 1910 and 1930. These figures must stand, however, as estimates rather than precise statistics. The published federal and state censuses did not always include Mexicans as an enumerated group in all states and in all years under examination when reporting inhabitants by county or in the smaller cities.

MEXICANS IN THE GREAT PLAINS STATES: 1900-1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>70^b</td>
<td>2,645</td>
<td>6,884</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>8,429</td>
<td>13,770</td>
<td>19,150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
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<td>289</td>
<td>2,452</td>
<td>6,312</td>
<td>1,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total       | 182  | 11,384| 23,201| 34,240| 8,452|
| Total in U.S.| 103,393| 221,915| 486,418| 1,258,317| 377,433|

^aThe 1930 census figures reflect the "Mexican-stock" population.
^bTotal for Oklahoma Territory only, Indian Territory contained 68 Mexican-born.

SOURCE: United States Census
FIG. 1. Distribution of Mexicans in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska by County, 1910.

and towns. In addition, federal census data represent only those Mexicans counted at a particular place on a specific date at ten-year intervals. Little significant data exist for the intervening years. The timing of the census was also unfortunate for establishing precise counts of Mexicans in the region. Censuses for the key years of 1910, 1920, and 1930 were taken in the months of April, January, and April, respectively. Mexicans typically would be visiting their homeland during the winter and early spring. Undoubtedly many more Mexicans were in the plains states during the summer, when track maintenance was at its peak, and during the fall harvest seasons. It is generally believed that the federal census and the Kansas state census, the most valuable of its kind for the region, represent considerable undercounts of Mexicans.9 Finally, there is no way to assess accurately the number of Mexicans who were in these states illegally and evaded the census takers.

Federal census data clearly indicate the significant increase of Mexicans in the region and
general patterns of their distribution between 1900 and 1930. In 1900 federal enumerators found only 182 Mexicans in the five-state area. By 1910, however, the Mexican population had risen to more than 11,000, with approximately 8,500 in Kansas and 2,600 in Oklahoma. The 1920 census recorded an even more dramatic increase. Kansas reported nearly 14,000 Mexican-born (the seventh-largest Mexican-born population in the United States), while Oklahoma counted almost 7,000 and Nebraska nearly 2,500. Although the first shock waves of the Great Depression had already rippled through the plains states by the beginning of 1930, the Mexican-stock population surpassed 34,000 in the five-state region. Well over half—19,150—resided in Kansas. In addition, there were more than 7,000 Mexicans in Oklahoma, 6,300 in Nebraska, 800 in South Dakota, and 600 in North Dakota. By 1940, however, only about 8,500 Mexican-born remained.10

Since Mexicans came into the northern and central plains as migrant or temporary workers,
labor needs dictated their distribution in the region. By 1910 the dispersion of Mexicans in Oklahoma and Kansas was already indicative of later patterns of distribution as well. Mexicans in Oklahoma lived primarily in the counties and towns along the state's four major railroads—the Santa Fe, Rock Island, Frisco, and Katy. The coal-mining district in southeastern Oklahoma and the cotton-producing southwestern quadrant of the state also contained significant numbers of Mexicans. The railroads—principally the Santa Fe and Rock Island—were the primary employers of Mexicans in Kansas. The importance of the Santa Fe is illustrated by the fact that more than 68 percent of the state's Mexican-born resided in the 28 counties (of the state's 105) through which that company's lines passed. In addition, Mexicans worked in meat-packing plants in Kansas City, Wichita, and Topeka, in and around the southwestern sugar beet center of Garden City, and in the salt mines of central Kansas. The census of 1920 demonstrates the movement into Nebraska as well. More than 600 Mexicans lived in the railway and meat-packing center of Omaha, while thousands more were employed by the Union Pacific and Burlington railroads and in the sugar-beet-producing North Platte valley in western Nebraska. By 1920, growing concentrations of Mexicans resided in the region's important cities. Oklahoma City, Topeka (where the Santa Fe had its national headquarters), and Wichita each contained about 800 Mexicans. More than 2,000 lived in Kansas City. The census of 1930 reveals the full extent of the distribution of Mexican labor in the region. Tens of thousands worked in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. In addition, hundreds of Mexicans labored in the sugar beet fields in and around Belle Fourche in western South Dakota and in the Red River valley of North Dakota, more than 1,500 miles beyond the border.\footnote{11}

**MEXICAN LABOR AND THE RAILROADS**

By far, the primary employers of Mexicans were the railroads. Mexicans began working on railroads as early as the 1880s and 1890s in Oklahoma and by 1902 in Kansas. The vast majority of Mexican-born male residents interviewed in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska have stated that they were railroad employees at one time or another. Although construction of the major portions of the region's railways had been completed prior to the heaviest migration, Mexican workers ultimately developed a virtual monopoly over track maintenance operations. Railroads needed track labor from March to October, and most Mexicans came intending to work only for the season. They signed contracts for six- or nine-month periods and received transportation back to the border if they fulfilled their agreement. Many Mexicans returned annually to work for the same railroad and often in the same geographical area.\footnote{12}

Mexicans initially filled positions on extra gangs. Their principal jobs were ballasting, laying ties, and ordinary pick-and-shovel work.
Most came as *solos*, since life on the extra gangs was extremely nomadic. Laborers were constantly shuttled to locations requiring emergency or temporary work. They lived in dilapidated boxcars that were converted into crude shelters and parked along sidings. Even though railroad wages in the plains states were higher than those for similar work along the border, many laborers broke their contract and drifted into other unskilled jobs in the region. The unsteady nature of employment, the constant moving about, and a desire to be nearer their families were the principal reasons for abandoning railroad work.

Extra gang employment frequently led to securing a position on a section crew, that is, a maintenance group assigned to a specific portion of the track line. In major railroad centers, Mexicans also found employment in the shops, roundhouses, and yards. They almost always filled the low-level ranks, seldom advancing to positions as section foremen or to the skilled and more responsible jobs in the shops. The reasons most frequently given for excluding Mexicans from the better positions were their lack of requisite skills and their inability to speak English. Many Mexican workers, however, clearly perceived that prejudice in a racially conscious society also obstructed their advancement. Since few had year-round employment, many Mexicans returned to the border after completing their contract. Others, however, saw little advantage in going home and sought alternative jobs until the railroads needed them again. Many track employees worked the Texas and Oklahoma cotton harvest, which began almost at the same time of year that their contract period ended. Some found work in mines and industries, on farms and ranches, or as municipal employees. Others joined the great migrant agricultural pool and followed the sugar beet, tomato, strawberry, wheat, and corn harvests in the plains states or beyond to Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and elsewhere.

By 1912, railroad companies were already endeavoring to attract Mexicans on a more permanent basis both because of the difficulty of keeping track workers and in recognition of their positive performance. To encourage employees to bring their families and settle more permanently, the Santa Fe built crude houses on railroad property and rented them for a low fee. Constructed of scrap pieces and cheap, second-hand materials, these dwellings provided minimally adequate shelter. Not all workers, however, enjoyed even these rudimentary accommodations. Many continued to occupy boxcars and tents pitched along the right-of-way. The companies encouraged those who did not live along the right-of-way to settle nearby. They preferred that the labor force reside in a compact unit so that the entire crew of a section could be summoned immediately in case of an emergency. This residential pattern established Mexican settlements “across the tracks” in almost all major centers in the plains states.

The Great Depression significantly affected the employment of Mexicans by the railroads in the region. Pressured by federal officials, congressional committees, labor unions, and unemployed citizens, railroad corporations drastically reduced the number of their Mexican employees or removed them from their payrolls entirely. A major exception to this pattern was the Santa Fe in Kansas, which maintained a large Mexican labor force throughout the period.

**MEXICANS AND THE SUGAR BEET INDUSTRY**

The sugar beet industry ranked second only to the railroads in the concentrated employment of Mexican laborers in the northern and central plains states. The protection that the Dingley tariff offered American sugar interests in 1897 stimulated the production of sugar beets throughout the United States. Farmers had raised some beets in the Arkansas valley of southwestern Kansas and in the North Platte valley of western Nebraska as early as the 1880s and 1890s. The proven profitability of the crop led to the construction of the first sugar beet mill in Garden City, Kansas, in
1906. In 1908 the Great Western Sugar Company (the largest producer of beet sugar in the United States) began growing beets in Nebraska and built a factory at Scottsbluff in 1910. Later, farmers turned to raising beets on the northern plains in the Belle Fourche region of western South Dakota and in the Red River valley of North Dakota. By 1928, Nebraska had become the second-largest producer of sugar beets in the United States.18

Mexicans began to replace other immigrant laborers in the beet fields as early as 1910. When World War I caused a severe shortage of labor in the industry, the United States lifted all restrictions on the importation of Mexican agricultural workers. Between 1918 and 1920, about 20 percent of all the hand laborers came directly from Mexico. In the latter year, the Great Western Sugar Company spent $360,000 to recruit workers all along the Rio Grande. The company shipped them north on special trains, paid their fare and meals, and then distributed them to farmers who needed field hands. In 1926 the Great Western spent another $250,000 to supply more than 14,000 workers.19

Sugar beet production required arduous and monotonous labor. Usually the head of a family contracted to work a specific number of acres for a stipulated wage per acre. An experienced hand could tend about ten acres, while a very skillful one might handle as many as fifteen. By 1927, the average wage per acre was from $23 to $24. The six-month work cycle, which ended in November or December, was comprised of three separate operations—blocking and thinning, hoeing and weeding, and pulling and topping. Entire families worked in the fields together, as women and children aided in the hoeing and pulling chores. Employment was not continuous over the entire season, however, and the field hands' total work days averaged only about 50 percent of the whole cycle. Between operations, they had to seek temporary jobs elsewhere.

By the 1920s “beet workers” and “Mexicans” were nearly synonymous terms in many areas of the plains states. In 1927 one writer reported that from 75 to 90 percent of the beet field hands in the north central states were Mexicans. Another observer stated the following year that 5,000 Mexicans were working in Nebraska’s North Platte valley. When congressional committees in 1928 and 1929 conducted hearings to consider stopping the flow of migrant workers from Mexico, representatives of the sugar beet interests testified that if they could not continue to use Mexicans, their industry would be ruined.20

The following statistics reveal the close relationship between the sugar beet industry and Mexicans in Nebraska and the Dakotas. In 1920 the leading beet-producing counties of Nebraska contained 20 percent of the state’s total Mexican population; by 1930 they held over 50 percent. In the latter year, the two major beet-producing counties of South Dakota registered 77 percent of all Mexicans in the

Mexican boys working in the Kansas sugar beet fields, 1922. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.
state, and the four principal beet counties of North Dakota reported over 80 percent of all Mexicans.  

Because there were usually few job opportunities during the winter months in the beet regions, most workers returned to the border or to Mexico after the harvest. Although the Great Depression virtually stopped the flow of Mexican workers to the United States, Mexicans and Mexican Americans continued to dominate the beet labor force on the plains during the thirties.

MEAT PACKING, COAL MINING, AND AGRICULTURE

The meat-packing industry in Kansas City, Omaha, Oklahoma City, Wichita, and Topeka also employed many Mexican laborers. Since these cities were important railroad centers, it is difficult to determine precisely the number of Mexicans who worked in the packing houses. Although Mexicans had found employment in Kansas City's packing plants in 1908, a congressional immigration commission report noted only eleven Mexican-born in that industry in 1909. The same survey reported only three Mexican employees in the South Omaha meat-packing district. The number of Mexican laborers in the industry increased sharply during World War I. By 1921, approximately two to three hundred Mexicans were employed in the Armourdale district of Kansas City after they had served as strikebreakers during labor disputes. Many of Wichita’s “north colony” Mexicans found employment in that district's stockyards and packing plants, but somewhat fewer were employed in Topeka. A large number of Oklahoma City's railroad workers lived in the southwestern “Packingtown” neighborhood, and at times several hundred former section laborers worked for the nearby Swift and Wilson companies.

In 1923 Omaha's Mexican population reached nearly one thousand; approximately six hundred resided in South Omaha, which contained the city's three largest packing plants. By 1927 about twelve hundred fifty Mexicans lived in the city. Although many workers from the warmer climes of Mexico disliked toiling in the cold lockers, the work had some advantages. Most Mexican employees were common laborers, but many held semiskilled positions and received better wages than their compatriots in other industries. Packing houses usually offered year-round employment and were therefore much more attractive than the railroads. A study of three Omaha plants conducted in 1927 revealed the relatively permanent residency and steadiness of employment in the meat-processing industry. Mexican employees averaged between six and one-half to eight years of service with those three companies.

A significant number of Mexicans worked in the coal mines of southeastern Oklahoma, principally in Pittsburg County. Mining, which had begun in the 1870s, led to the extension of a line of the Katy railroad through the area. By 1890 Mexicans who had been employed on construction crews began to abandon railroad work for better-paying jobs in the mines. Later, additional Mexicans migrated from coal fields in Texas and Colorado and the gold- and silver-mining districts of central and northern Mexico. In 1910 the congressional immigration commission reported that several hundred Mexicans worked in the area and comprised the fourth-largest ethnic group in the mines. Nearly 50 percent had been miners in Mexico. Coal mining was the only industry employing large numbers of workers in the area, and 100 percent of employed Mexicans worked in the mines. They found employment for between six and nine months a year, averaging about one hundred seventy days annually. Much of the time lost was due to the suspension of operations from April to June. During this slack time, most Mexicans sought work on the railroads and then returned to the mines when operations resumed. The majority were common piece workers, because operators preferred Americans or English-speaking immigrants for the most skilled or responsible positions.

Although Mexicans were not segregated, they preferred the company of their own
countrymen on the job and during leisure hours. The pick-mining system of labor that prevailed in the mines required two-man teams to work in areas often located hundreds of feet from the entrance and isolated from other teams. All miners chose their partners from within their own ethnic group, and therefore it was not only among Mexicans that fathers and sons, brothers, close relatives, and friends worked together.

Mexican miners earned an average of $375 a year, but a few earned over $600. Almost all Mexican families surveyed had to supplement the father's income in some way. About 20 percent of the households took in lodgers or boarders, and women frequently washed and ironed for the single men. No Mexican women, however, worked outside the home. Including all sources of income, the average Mexican family earned about $470 a year in the mining district.24

Between 1920 and 1930 the Mexican population in the coal-mining area increased markedly, with most still residing in Pittsburg County. Average daily wages for Mexicans reached $3.60 in 1917 and as high as $7.50 in 1925. The decline of the coal industry in Oklahoma, however, had already begun by the latter year. The increasing use of gas and oil for fuel and a severe strike between 1924 and 1927 hastened its demise. During the labor disputes, coal companies hired 1,200 Mexican strikebreakers and forced an open shop. By the early 1930s declining wages and deteriorating safety conditions revived the union and caused more strikes. Mexican workers joined the union and supported
its demands, but when the full impact of the Great Depression struck the area, most Mexicans abandoned the mines, moved to Tulsa or Oklahoma City in search of other jobs, or simply left the state.25

Migrant Mexican workers undoubtedly played an important role in the cotton and grain harvests in the central and northern plains. Unfortunately, the paucity of information on the subject makes it impossible to tabulate their number or describe their role precisely. The rapid expansion of cotton acreage in southwestern Oklahoma after 1907 required a large seasonal labor force and attracted Mexicans who had already joined the picking cycle in Texas. An observer reported in 1908 that Oklahoma planters often sent farm managers or foremen to the border to recruit one hundred or more men and their families. They preferred, however, simply to hire their field hands away from the railroads by offering higher wages. In 1907 workers could earn from $0.50 to $0.75 per hundred pounds of cotton picked. By 1925 they were earning as much as $2.00 per hundred. All members of the family participated in the pizca (as Mexicans called the cotton harvest) and, as a unit, could pick from two to three hundred pounds a day. Living conditions during the picking season were primitive throughout the period under study. Large families, often with ten or more children, lived in tents, crude shacks, or canvas-covered carts. They lacked adequate supplies of water and even the most rudimentary sanitation facilities. Still, Mexicans went to the fields annually. In a recent study of Mexicans in Oklahoma, virtually every long-time resident recounted his or her experiences during the harvest season and remarked on the number of Mexicans who labored in the fields.26

It is difficult to analyze the extent to which Mexican laborers participated in the harvesting and thrashing operations in the great wheat belt that extends from north central Oklahoma through North Dakota. Some Mexicans most certainly joined the annual stream of laborers through the plains. As early as 1908, many Mexicans left railroad gangs to work in the grain fields of northern Oklahoma and Kansas. Some railroad contractors reported that they lost nearly one-third of their labor force for that reason.27 Despite the massive shortage of labor for harvests during the war years and the annual requests for tens of thousands of workers in the wheat-producing states, documents reveal little information concerning Mexican laborers during that time.

The foregoing survey demonstrates that Mexicans played an undeniably significant role in the economic life of the plains states between 1900 and 1930. Thousands of Mexicans performed the work that most Americans and other immigrant groups disdained. They worked from the far southwestern corner of Oklahoma to the most distant counties in North Dakota. Several of the region's most important industries—particularly the railroads and sugar beet production—depended almost exclusively upon laborers from Mexico. Yet, for the most part, scholars have ignored their contributions.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

To a large degree this lack of attention may be explained by the relatively few Mexican residents in the area compared to the borderlands, where the massive numbers of Mexicans have made a lasting impact upon the physical, social, and linguistic culture. Mexicans, who were often an "invisible element" in the past, remain a relatively "invisible minority" in the northern and central plains today. Most people in the region are not only ignorant of their contributions but unaware of their very presence.

This spatial and occupational survey provides a starting point for examining the role of Mexicans in a regional context. Corporation and union documents (still extremely difficult to obtain or examine) and state, county, and local records should contain much valuable data. Newspapers, family papers, photographs, and letters will give us a much better idea of life in the plains for Mexican immigrants. The most revealing sources, and certainly the most
exciting from the researcher's point of view, are the immigrants themselves. Unfortunately, scholars may have waited too long before initiating the oral history projects that have been and are being conducted in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. Most of the Mexican-born residents in these states are in their eighties, nineties, or older. Many more of the original settlers have died; let us hope that their history has not died with them. Mexican ethnic enclaves still exist in the major cities of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. The Mexican immigrants' experiences have intimately linked them to the region's past, and they should be incorporated into the body of history that all will share in the future. Mexicans and their descendants still preserve a living culture that greatly enriches the social fabric of life in the northern and central plains states.

NOTES


5. See, particularly, Gamio, Quantitative Estimate, which provides much insight into the origins of Mexican migrants through an


7. There is some evidence, however, that residents of the same town worked in the same area of the plains region and often congregated in significant numbers in Mexican colonies in Kansas. There was a large group of Mexicans from Tangancicuaro, Michoacán, in Argentine, Kansas, Topeka contained numerous Mexicans from Silao, Guanajuato, See Laird, "Argentine, Kansas," pp. 87-88; and Bill Wright, "Heritage of the Colony," *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 17-22, 1961.


