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# THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT PRESS BEYOND THE BORDERLANDS

THE CASE OF *EL COSMOPOLITA*, 1914-19

MICHAEL M. SMITH

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, a variety of factors—overpopulation, endemic poverty, inflation, stagnant wages, peonage, and, especially, the Mexican Revolution of 1910—drove hundreds of thousands of Mexicans from their homeland and into the United States. Although most of these migrants settled in the contiguous southwestern American states, tens of thousands proceeded north into the Great Plains and the Midwest, establishing dozens of *colonias* (settlements) in railroad centers, mining camps, industrial districts, and agricultural encampments. From 1900 until the Great Depression, the creation of these cultural islands of Mexican immigrants in such places as Oklahoma City, Kansas City, Omaha, Chicago, Gary, and Lansing enriched the social fabric of those regions of the United States beyond the borderlands. Unlike their compatriots

who settled in the Southwest, immigrants in the Great Plains and Midwest found no receptive Mexican communities or barrios. More than a thousand miles from home and facing an alien, often hostile, environment, they encountered an unfamiliar language, cultural tradition, and legal system. To cushion the shock of migration and to help satisfy their fundamental need for community life, Mexicans created their own national institutions. One of the most significant products of ethnic institutional development was the immigrant press. Denied access to information in American newspapers by their inability to speak or read English, Mexicans depended upon their native tongue for news not only of this country and their adopted communities but also, and more important, of their homeland and their own people.

This study will examine the history, functions, and vicissitudes of *El Cosmopolita*, published in Kansas City between 1914 and 1919.<sup>1</sup> The four-page weekly is significant for several reasons: it was the first newspaper established in and for a Mexican community outside the borderlands; its contents offer intriguing insights into the conditions, attitudes, and dynamics of an evolving heartland colonia; and it provides a broader understanding of the role

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and ideological tone of the immigrant press during a critical period in Mexican and Mexican-American history.

#### THE KANSAS CITY COLONIA

Between 1900 and 1920, the Kansas City colonia in which *El Cosmopolita* arose became the first substantial urban concentration of Mexicans outside the Southwest.<sup>2</sup> Kansas City's position as a major railway hub made it the principal interior distribution point of Mexican workers destined for myriad locations throughout the Great Plains, Midwest, and elsewhere, and its increasingly extensive commercial and industrial development had attracted approximately ten thousand Mexican immigrants by 1920. Initially comprised of *solos* (transient, unaccompanied male laborers under short-term contracts), immigrants typically held low-status, poorly-paid positions in railway transportation, meatpacking plants, construction projects, and municipal and private services. They lived in crude boxcar camps, overcrowded residences, unsanitary tenements, and cheap boarding houses. Prevailing cultural and racial attitudes commonly debarred them from certain residential areas, businesses, churches, municipal services, and social and recreational facilities. Mexicans suffered overt segregation, personal affronts and mistreatment, police harassment, judicial inequities, and crass exploitation by Anglos and their own countrymen.

After 1913, the unremitting violence of revolutionary upheaval and attendant social and economic dislocations forced many Mexicans to remain in Kansas City for extended periods of time, but the circumstances of their daily existence only served to strengthen their attachment and loyalty to their native land. Immigrants persisted in considering themselves Mexican nationals, seldom learned English, resisted overtures to "Americanize," and refused to become citizens of the United States. Responding to their physical and social isolation from the dominant society, Mexicans created their own ethnic institutions, including a number of social, patriotic, and *mutualista* organi-

zations, churches with Spanish-speaking Catholic priests or Protestant ministers, and dozens of Mexican-operated businesses. Among these enterprises were several short-lived newspapers of which *El Cosmopolita* was the most enduring and significant.<sup>3</sup>

#### FOUNDING *EL COSMOPOLITA*

In August 1914, Manuel A. and Juan M. Urbina founded *El Cosmopolita* as an independent weekly newspaper dedicated to "news, entertainment, and information." The brothers were well educated—Manuel attended nearby William Jewell College—but apparently neither possessed abundant financial resources. The Urbinas were active in local Mexican affairs and during the preceding month had joined several members of the Westside barrio to establish a patriotic and mutualist society, the *Unión Mexicana Benito Juárez*. Their announced goals for the paper coincided closely with those of the *Unión Mexicana Benito Juárez*—the promotion of ethnic solidarity and national pride and the defense of colonia interests.<sup>4</sup>

Despite its altruistic aims and philosophy, *El Cosmopolita* was a commercial enterprise dependent for survival upon subscriptions and advertisements. But like the vast majority of Spanish-language newspapers of the era, *El Cosmopolita* was not a profitable endeavor and probably operated at a loss throughout its half decade of existence.<sup>5</sup> Many of its potential readers were illiterate even in Spanish, and it is unlikely that the profits of local Mexican businesses were sufficient to generate the needed advertising revenue. The Urbinas struggled unsuccessfully to keep the paper operating, and in December they were forced to sell out to their business manager, Manuel P. Martínez. Martínez, however, could not surmount the financial difficulties. In February 1915, he sold *El Cosmopolita* to three Kansas City Anglos, who formed El Cosmopolita Publishing Company. The new owners promised to maintain the paper's goals and orientation and continued to employ Mexicans for its editorial, newswriting, and production staffs. Shortly thereafter, Jack Danciger (fig. 1), a

Spanish-speaking Anglo entrepreneur and *El Cosmopolita*'s leading advertiser, became a partner in the venture and ultimately acquired sole ownership of the publishing company.<sup>6</sup>

#### JACK DANCIGER

Danciger's access to more substantial economic resources than those available to the previous Mexican owners allowed him to place *El Cosmopolita* on a secure financial footing. He and his several brothers managed a highly successful family corporation that, in addition to real estate and mineral and petroleum properties, included several enterprises directly tied to the Kansas City colonia and Mexican settlements throughout the region and the Southwest. The Dancigers' Royal Brewing Company sold beer on both sides of the border; their Harvest King Distilling Company imported and bottled a variety of Mexican alcoholic beverages, which were distributed through Danciger Brothers Wholesale Liquor Company; and their Bernardo López Mercantile Company imported and marketed a wide assortment of Mexican items.<sup>7</sup> More than likely, the Dancigers acquired *El Cosmopolita* not as another business investment but as an instrument to control and facilitate the promotion of products they sold to a predominantly Spanish-speaking clientele. Danciger improved the paper's technical and journalistic quality and greatly increased distribution. By 1918 weekly production reached 9,000 copies, making *El Cosmopolita* the second largest Spanish-language newspaper in the United States. Only San Antonio's *La Prensa* claimed a larger circulation.<sup>8</sup> Although Danciger continued to publicize colonia activities, he broadened the paper's focus to attract a wider national Mexican readership. At the same time, the newspaper became the principal advertising outlet for the family's Mexican-oriented commercial interests.

Danciger redirected *El Cosmopolita*'s ideological focus as well. While the Urbinas claimed political independence, they did consistently support the Mexican Revolution. Their accounts of the conflict suggest a preference for

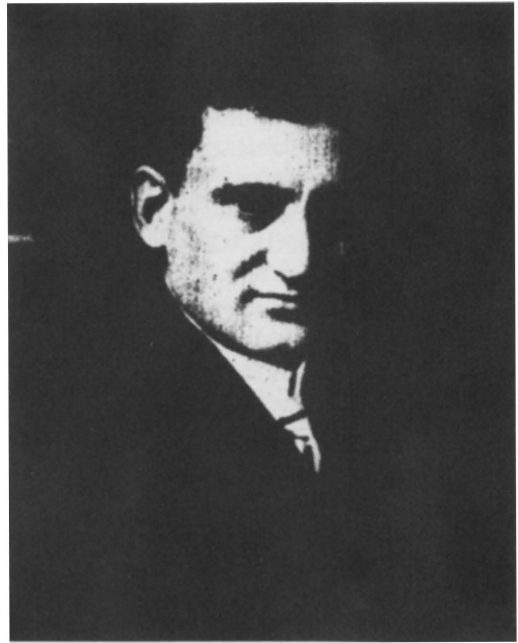


FIG. 1. Jack Danciger, *El Cosmopolita*. Reproduced courtesy of Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

General Venustiano Carranza's Constitutionalist movement to those of his chief rivals, Francisco "Pancho" Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Under Danciger, however, *El Cosmopolita* became stridently pro-Constitutionalist, reflecting both his own connections to Carranza and his family and the political affiliation of the Mexican editors he employed. In July 1915, Danciger had granted Colonel Sebastián Carranza, Jr., nephew of Venustiano Carranza, the Royal Brewing Company franchise in Eagle Pass, Texas, and rights to sell the beer throughout northern Mexico.<sup>9</sup> At the suggestion of his new business associate, in August Danciger met Venustiano Carranza at his Veracruz headquarters and immediately became an ardent convert to Constitutionalism. Danciger later used his influence with leading Missouri and Kansas politicians to obtain a meeting with President Woodrow Wilson and personally lobbied on behalf of Carranza's recognition by the United States. In September Carranza rewarded Danciger's support by appointing him Mexican

Consul for the Kansas City District, a position he held until June 1916.<sup>10</sup>

It is possible that Danciger also became a paid publicist for the Constitutionalist government. Carranza's confidential agents, consuls, and unofficial representatives were engaged in an intense effort to curry favor among Mexican immigrants, the North American public, and government officials. They established or subsidized Spanish-language newspapers in the United States and engaged the services of American publicists and journalists. Danciger was personally acquainted with George F. Weeks, the American who headed the Veracruz office of the Mexican News Bureau, a propaganda agency that promoted the Constitutionalist cause in the United States.<sup>11</sup> While there is no explicit evidence that *El Cosmopolita* received a subvention, the paper uniformly extolled Carranza and denigrated his adversaries.

Although Danciger was frequently listed as editor of *El Cosmopolita* and occasionally contributed pro-Constitutionalist pieces, he probably assigned day-to-day management and editorial responsibilities to Mexican associates. His duties as vice president of the Harvest King Distillery, vice president of the Danciger Oil and Refining Company, general manager of the Bernardo López Mercantile Company, and other business interests must have occupied most of his time and attention. At least five Mexicans served as editor of *El Cosmopolita* during the time that Danciger maintained his closest ties to the paper. All of these men were avid Constitutionalist, and two had previous newspaper experience in Mexico and the United States. Arturo Alcocer (1915-1916) served as Danciger's private secretary in the Kansas City consulate and later held a similar position in the Mexican embassy in Washington. Pedro Ferreira (1916-1917) was chancellor of the Mexican consulate in Kansas City in 1917 and 1918. Miguel Corona Ortiz (1917) had been a journalist in Mexico as well as in Laredo and San Antonio, Texas. Trinidad Meza Salinas (1917) had worked on newspapers in Mexico and New Mexico, and Carlos Ferreiro, the son of Pedro Ferreiro, was a Constitutionalist functionary in

Mexico before becoming editor of *El Cosmopolita* in early 1918.<sup>12</sup> It is not possible to ascertain the impact of *El Cosmopolita*'s pro-Constitutionalist campaign upon the Mexican community in Kansas City. Members of the colonia were both socially heterogeneous and politically diverse, and available evidence suggests that many Mexicans disagreed with the paper's ideological position.<sup>13</sup>

By late 1918, Danciger's direct involvement with *El Cosmopolita* greatly diminished. During World War I the growth and profitability of the Danciger Oil and Refining Company and related investments required his increasing attention. In 1918 the mercantile company was closed, and Prohibition destroyed the liquor-related businesses. With the demise of these enterprises, Danciger's commercial relationship with Mexicans largely ended as well. In addition, by that time Carranza had consolidated his presidency. There were, therefore, no impelling economic or political reasons to maintain an intimate association with the paper.

#### THE DEMISE OF *EL COSMOPOLITA*

Although Danciger retained a financial interest in *El Cosmopolita* Publishing Company, by the end of 1918 he relinquished management of *El Cosmopolita* to a group of twenty members of the colonia, headed by Reverend R. G. Estill, pastor of the Protestant *Instituto Cristiano Mexicano*, located in the heart of the Westside barrio. Estill served as business manager, and Rafael Rentería, a Mexican journalist, became managing editor. Proclaiming that "this group is not comprised of capitalists" but rather was "made up of people of modest means," the new management vowed to improve the moral, material, and intellectual conditions of the Mexican community. The group also established the Cooperative Commercial Trust, an enterprise that would provide translating services and legal advice, cash checks, transfer money and parcels to Mexico, and offer other forms of assistance. They would charge a "just and moral fee" for their services and use a portion of the profits to subsidize the newspaper. The offices of *El Cos-*





FIG. 2. *El Cosmopolita*, 16 September 1916. Reproduced courtesy of Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

*mopolita* and the Commercial Cooperative Trust were located in the same building that housed the *Instituto Cristiano Mexicano*. Neither the newspaper nor the cooperative prospered. Few local Mexican businesses advertised in *El Cosmopolita*, and circulation plummeted.<sup>14</sup>

Several factors may account for the new management's lack of success. Their capital resources were probably minimal from the outset, and the subsidy from the cooperative venture never materialized. It appears, however, that *El Cosmopolita's* decline and diminished appeal can be traced principally to its management's decidedly anti-Catholic position. Scathing editorials criticized the traditional role of the Catholic Church in Mexico and charged that priests had always served the interests of an oppressive conservative elite. They ridiculed the Catholic clergy in Kansas City, declared that priests discouraged Mexican children from attending public schools "because they [were] Protestant," and alleged that nuns and the priest

at the Mexican Catholic school in Westside cruelly disciplined their students. Since Mexicans in the colonia were predominately Catholic, such sectarian acrimony probably offended most potential subscribers and advertisers.<sup>15</sup>

In July 1919, J. Barrios de los Ríos assumed management of *El Cosmopolita*. He declared that the paper would enter a "new life" and rejoiced that for the first time in five years it had come under the direct responsibility and management of Mexicans. Barrios decried both the religious sectarianism of the preceding regime and the political partisanship of the Danciger years, but he failed to make the publication a successful enterprise. He was forced to abandon the venture a month later.<sup>16</sup> Carlos Ferreiro, former editor of *El Cosmopolita*, was unable to stem its fatal decline. By October, the paper had become little more than a four-page broadsheet of advertisements; it contained little news and few articles. *El Cosmopolita* expired, quietly and apparently unnoticed, on 15 November 1919, with its two hundred and seventy-fifth issue.

### EL COSMOPOLITA

An examination of *El Cosmopolita's* content and focus demonstrates that, throughout its five-year existence, its directors consistently endeavored to: 1) furnish news of immediate interest to the Mexican immigrant, 2) provide a variety of important social services to the Kansas City colonia, 3) cultivate an appreciation for esthetic pursuits and encourage self-improvement, 4) promote ethnic solidarity and national pride, 5) defend the interests of the Mexican population of Kansas City and the surrounding area, and 6) support the Mexican Revolution, particularly the leaders, principles, and goals of the Constitutionalist movement. The remainder of this essay will analyze each of these principal functions.

### A PAPER FOR MEXICANS

The editors of *El Cosmopolita* uniformly promoted the publication as a Mexican newspaper—"the only Mexican newspaper published

north of Texas"—and considered Mexican immigrants their primary audience. In this respect, *El Cosmopolita* reflected the concept of "*México de afuera*" (Mexico outside Mexico) and was dedicated to serving a group that resided only temporarily outside the fatherland. As a result, news coverage focused largely upon Mexico, while local and national news not directly affecting the lives of Mexicans in the United States was minimal. An analysis of *El Cosmopolita*'s content shows that principal concerns, in descending order of importance, were Mexican affairs (mainly political events and military campaigns); news related to Mexicans in Kansas City and elsewhere in the United States; Mexican and Hispanic culture, history, and literature; and United States-Mexican relations. In this regard, *El Cosmopolita* conformed to the orientation of the Mexican immigrant press in general.<sup>17</sup>



FIG. 3. *El Cosmopolita*, 18 September 1915. Reproduced courtesy of Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

#### SOCIAL SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

*El Cosmopolita* provided a wide variety of social services for the Kansas City colonia. Community leaders used the paper as a forum to announce myriad activities such as the *fiestas patrias*, meetings of patriotic and social organizations, religious services, charity bazaars, concerts, and poetry readings. *El Cosmopolita*'s management sponsored or publicized fund-raising drives to aid needy families. They maintained a "Department of Assistance," which supplied free legal and translation services to help subscribers make bank deposits, cash checks, send money orders, and obtain back pay or compensation for work-related injuries. Through *El Cosmopolita*'s "Personal" column, lonely hearts sought companionship, shy suitors expressed their affection, furtive lovers planned elopement, and estranged mates sought reconciliation. Revealing the personal heartbreak and tragedy of the era, an "Inquiries" section contained pleas for information about individuals whose relatives had been killed in the revolution, sons long absent, brothers separated for years, or runaway teenage daughters.

Since Kansas City was a major labor distribution center, announcements concerning job opportunities were of particular interest to its working class readers. Through company-paid advertisements and an "Employment Section," *El Cosmopolita* reported positions—typically in railroad construction, track maintenance, public works construction, and agriculture—available throughout the United States. The ads often detailed not only the type and location of work but also the wage scales, conditions of employment, and designated labor agents.

Another important service of *El Cosmopolita* was the publicizing of dozens of commercial enterprises owned or operated by Mexicans for a Mexican clientele. Rooming houses, hotels, pool halls, restaurants, barbers, painters, musicians, linguists, and many others reached their customers through its classified section. The advertisements and announcements of *casas de cambio* (banking and money exchange companies) which arranged for the international

transfer of funds were especially important since many colonia residents regularly sent money to support family members in Mexico.

Furthermore, editors announced and interpreted confusing or complicated local ordinances, state regulations, and national laws. They warned against violating statutes concerning the transportation or consumption of alcoholic beverages and those prohibiting the carrying of firearms or other dangerous weapons. They regularly reported changes in United States and Mexican immigration laws or federal tax regulations. After the United States entered World War I, the editor of *El Cosmopolita* explained to alarmed Mexican males that although they must comply with military registration requirements, they would not forfeit their Mexican citizenship nor would they be forced to serve in the United States armed forces. When, in fact, local authorities arrested approximately two hundred Mexicans who had not registered and sent them to military training camps, representatives of *El Cosmopolita* helped secure their release.<sup>18</sup>

#### ESTHETICS AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT

The directors of *El Cosmopolita* actively sought to cultivate an appreciation for esthetic pursuits and promote self-improvement. The weekly issues routinely contained a page devoted to "Literature and Entertainment," and editors encouraged readers to submit stories, articles, poems, and songs for publication. The principal feature of this page was poetry, frequently that of local authors but most commonly works of well-known Mexicans such as Amado Nervo, Ignacio Ramírez, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, and Luis Gonzales Urbina. Also included were brief literary pieces and poems by important international writers including Rubén Darío, José Santos Chocano, Leo Tolstoy, and Victor Hugo. Short historical items, such as an account of the founding of Tenochtitlán or biographical sketches of Mexican national heroes, were popular inclusions. In a lighter vein, *El Cosmopolita* printed jokes, humorous stories, and satirical commentaries on affairs or personalities in the

colonia.

One of *El Cosmopolita*'s recurring themes was the utility of education as a means of self-improvement. The editors maintained that the major cause of the Mexicans' low-status employment, poverty, susceptibility to fraud and abuse, and negative stereotypical image lay largely in a single defect—the average immigrant's lack of education. In both news stories and editorials, writers stressed the need to capitalize upon the educational opportunities available to the immigrant and his family. Children should attend school and acquire useful business and technical skills. Editors emphasized that many of the immigrants' problems resulted from their own ignorance of the language, laws, and customs of this country. They also complained that too many Mexicans wasted their time and money in pool halls, cantinas, and other centers of vice when they should have been trying to improve themselves. Editors advised Mexicans to attend night schools offering special classes in English, civics, and practical education to ease their adjustment to the United States. They could then take advantage of new opportunities and obtain better employment.<sup>19</sup>

Many of these recommendations parallel the ideas and programs of contemporary Progressives throughout the United States. By promoting "Americanization" and acculturation, Progressives hoped to transform immigrant groups into productive United States citizens. At no time, however, did *El Cosmopolita*'s editors encourage assimilation or naturalization. They never suggested that Mexicans abandon their loyalty to Mexico or renounce their nationality. One writer ruefully noted that the discrimination, prejudice, and abuse to which Mexicans were subjected did not constitute attractive inducements to become citizens.<sup>20</sup>

#### ETHNIC SOLIDARITY AND NATIONAL PRIDE

A common motif throughout the pages of *El Cosmopolita* was that Mexicans were in this country only temporarily and that ultimately they would return to Mexico, where they would



apply their strength and energy to help reconstruct the nation and exploit its resources for the benefit of its citizens. Editors noted that although more than a million immigrants had left Mexico, they still carried in their hearts an intense desire to return to the *patria*. Mexicans suffered many travails in the United States, yet even the coarsest workers were transformed by their experiences. Realizing their lack of education, many had taught themselves to read and write. They had acquired new skills and, perhaps, a new consciousness. In the future, these same Mexicans would increase the productivity, enhance the progress, and contribute to the prosperity of the homeland. Returning immigrants would "carry the light" and teach others so that Mexico could reap the fruits of their knowledge and labor.<sup>21</sup>

*El Cosmopolita* heightened such patriotic sentiments through the promotion of ethnic solidarity and national pride. Editors exhorted Mexicans to forget class and social distinctions, ignore political differences, and work together for the common good by establishing *mutualistas*, labor agencies, commercial cooperatives, and savings unions. They carefully noted the creation of such organizations as the *Unión Mexicana Benito Juárez*, National Benevolent Society, *Club Mexicano*, and *Club Recreativo*. The paper encouraged readers to become members, extensively publicized meetings, printed schedules, and summarized association activities. To engender a more positive image of Mexicans, editors of *El Cosmopolita* urged readers to avoid behavior that confirmed negative stereotypes. They admonished Mexicans to work hard, obey the law, and generally deport themselves in a manner that brought honor and respect to themselves and to Mexico. News stories reporting colonia assaults, murders, drunkenness, or sexual misbehavior frequently editorialized that the misdeeds of a few reflected poorly upon all Mexicans. Writers often demanded that the consul seek deportation of miscreants, particularly those who preyed upon their own countrymen.<sup>22</sup>

The social prescription of education, hard work, and lawful behavior is consistent with the



FIG. 4. *El Cosmopolita*, 11 October 1915. Reproduced courtesy of Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

goals espoused by all groups that controlled *El Cosmopolita*; it also reflects the programs of colonia organizations such as the *Unión Mexicana Benito Juárez*. Although there does not appear to be an official connection between *El Cosmopolita* and any of the various national societies, editorial positions echoed the sentiments of the elite that led such groups; editors of *El Cosmopolita* formed part of that elite. Thus, while colonia leaders sought to promote the idea that Mexicans were an educated, cultured, and law abiding people, they also condemned actions that belied that image and diminished their own status in the eyes of the Anglo majority.

*El Cosmopolita* promoted pride in a common Mexican heritage through extensive exploitation of national symbols and concepts. Pictures of the Mexican flag, patriarchs such as Hidalgo and Morelos (figs. 2 and 3), and revolutionary leaders Francisco Madero and Venustiano Carranza commonly emblazoned the front page. Editors provided broad coverage of the various

*fiestas patrias* commemorating important dates in Mexican history such as the *Dieciséis de Septiembre* and *Cinco de Mayo* and quoted extensively from the nationalistic recitations, speeches, and reenactments presented on those occasions. In addition, the paper contained numerous editorials extolling patriotic virtues and poems dedicated to nationalistic themes.

On occasion, writers condemned actions they deemed insulting to Mexican national honor. In March 1916, for example, *El Cosmopolita* reported that Gabriel M. Hernández, Honorary Consul of Honduras and Uruguay in Kansas City and professor of Spanish at the local Polytechnical Institute, had affronted Mexico and its citizens by removing the national flag from his classroom. In protest, the staff of *El Cosmopolita* spearheaded a letter-writing campaign demanding that municipal and school officials order Hernández to replace the banner. The paper later reported that Hernández had returned the flag, admitted the insult, and humbly apologized for his action.<sup>23</sup>

In a related vein, editorials in *El Cosmopolita* long decried the poor quality of Spanish language instruction in Kansas City high schools. After receiving numerous complaints, in 1915 the paper announced that a six-member committee, headed by noted Mexican educator Gilardo Aviles, had received permission from the Board of Education to conduct an investigation. After visiting four city secondary schools, the committee reported that teachers were poorly trained, could not speak the language, were ignorant of modern pedagogical methods, and used outdated textbooks. A three-year effort to remedy the situation apparently resulted in a number of welcome curricular reforms.<sup>24</sup>

#### DEFENDING THE IMMIGRANT

One of *El Cosmopolita's* most essential functions was to defend the Mexican immigrant from discrimination, abuse, and exploitation. Racial prejudice and segregation were characteristic of Kansas City's ethnic milieu in the early decades of the twentieth century, and articles in the paper frequently decried instances of mistreat-

ment. Mexicans complained that their typically dark skin often caused them to suffer indignities that local blacks were forced to endure. Mexicans in Kansas City, Missouri, were commonly assigned to black wards or annexes in hospitals and clinics and were buried in segregated cemeteries. Hospital administrators in Kansas City, Kansas, divided darker-complexioned and lighter-skinned Mexicans between "Negro" and "white" units. When the mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, announced on 1 January 1916 that the custom would cease in his city, *El Cosmopolita* rejoiced that the "inhuman practice" had ended, and in the future "Mexicans [would] be treated as white people." The editors promised, however, to "work to eliminate the negative image of Mexicans . . . and get better treatment from the police and judges."<sup>25</sup>

The paper often publicized allegations of police abuse and harassment. In March 1915, the editor firmly endorsed the action of a delegation of Mexicans who lodged a formal complaint with the Kansas City (Missouri) Police Commissioner. The group demanded that he order police officers to stop harassing Mexicans along Twenty-Fourth Street, the heart of the West-side barrio. Stories in *El Cosmopolita* supported their charge that patrolmen accosted Mexicans without cause, "frisking, detaining, and arresting them and even molesting men out for a stroll with their wives and children." The paper publicized a similar protest by a group of twenty-six Mexicans from Herington, Kansas, who alleged that local police "illegally broke into their residences in the middle of the night, abused and ridiculed them, and tried to compel them to move into a black neighborhood."<sup>26</sup>

*El Cosmopolita* also publicized complaints that Mexicans received inadequate consideration in judicial actions. They often faced biased magistrates, were not clearly informed of charges against them, and usually had no interpreter or Spanish-speaking lawyer. Articles condemned examples of prejudicial attitudes and language during court proceedings. The paper cited a case in which the judge allowed the lawyer of a man accused of killing a Mexican to justify a plea of self-defense because "the Mexican possessed the

inborn desire to murder that is characteristic of his race."<sup>27</sup>

The major employers of Mexicans in Kansas City were railroad companies, and stories in *El Cosmopolita* repeatedly denounced their treatment of Mexican workers. The Achison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad was the single largest employer of Mexicans, and *El Cosmopolita* was especially critical of that company. In April 1916, the paper condemned the Santa Fe's abuse of its Mexican employees, declaring that the company considered itself the "owner, body and soul" of its Mexican workers and treated them like "caged animals." Workers were urged to desert the Santa Fe for jobs with other railroads hiring in Kansas City, and the paper highlighted advertisements of competing corporations that offered higher wages and better working conditions.<sup>28</sup>

A perusal of *El Cosmopolita* clearly confirms its editors' commitment to expose abuses and defend colonia interests. Highly editorializing front-page stories detailed the plight of Mexicans who were victims of prejudice, fraud, robbery, and callous treatment. Writers condemned *enganchadores* ("hookers" or labor contractors) who exploited Mexican workers and publicized the deceptive practices of insurance companies. They alerted readers to disreputable *casas de cambio* that charged exorbitant fees for their services or stole the unsuspecting victim's money and warned of unscrupulous railroad companies or other employers who attracted workers by falsifying information about wages, conditions of employment, and benefits.<sup>29</sup>

#### SUPPORT FOR THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Perhaps *El Cosmopolita's* most striking characteristic was its unflagging support of the Mexican Revolution. Although editors decried the relentless violence and selfish intrigues of rival military chieftains, they uniformly interpreted the upheaval as necessary to eradicate the social, economic, and political inequities of Porfirio Díaz's thirty-five-year dictatorship. In 1915 Jack Danciger transformed the paper's ideological tone from an initially independent neu-

tralism to a zealously partisan Constitutionalism (fig. 4). During the years that he controlled *El Cosmopolita*, virtually every issue contained articles or editorials extolling Carranza and his program. The front page featured photographs and biographical sketches of leading *carrancista* officials, military officers, and diplomats; news stories frequently reflected the latest bulletins from Carranza's propaganda office. As previously noted, Danciger employed Mexican editors who not only sympathized with Carranza's program but also held positions in the Constitutionalist administration. Even under the Estill-Rentería group, *El Cosmopolita* reflected an uncritical acceptance of the new regime.

Editorials in *El Cosmopolita* portrayed Carranza as a man who possessed the essential qualities of political leadership—high character, patriotism, serenity, and spirit of justice. He respected individual liberties, freedom of the press, effective suffrage, and workers' rights. His Constitutionalist agenda promised a new social order that would foster material improvement and mutual respect among all classes. Writers exalted the revolutionary Constitution of 1917 as the key to lasting reform. Harmonizing the venerable precepts of the Constitution of 1857 with the needs and complex problems of modern society, the new charter enshrined the precept of "Mexico for Mexicans" as the basis for national reconstruction.<sup>30</sup>

The newspaper lauded Carranza as the staunch defender of Mexican honor and integrity against the machinations of internal and external enemies. According to *El Cosmopolita*, "mindless anti-Constitutionalist military chiefs," Mexican reactionaries, foreign interests, and the "yellow press" posed the most serious threats to reform and stability in Mexico. Pancho Villa was derided as a puppet of Mexican conservatives and American capitalists and characterized as a "bandolero," "traitor," and "caveman whose only logic came from the barrel of a gun." Emiliano Zapata was depicted as "savage" and "ignorant"; the renowned "Attila of the South" could not even speak proper Spanish. One editorial charged that Mexican reactionaries desired to recreate the hated *Porfiriato*, regain their

wealth and power, and stifle reform. The author condemned these *científicos* for their willingness to sacrifice the nation to their own selfish ends.<sup>31</sup>

*El Cosmopolita* equally disparaged the "dollar chasing" foreign capitalists who wanted the United States to intervene in Mexico, establish an obedient government, and protect their lands, mines, and petroleum. Articles accused the "ignominious oilmen of Wall Street" of using their money to subvert the loyalty of Mexicans and financing anti-Constitutionalist military factions and murderous bandits. The paper charged that the "yellow press" in the United States was a tool of both Mexican reactionaries and American interventionists. *El Cosmopolita* repeatedly excoriated the "venal" Hearst newspaper chain, describing it as an "implacable enemy of Mexico." Countering those Americans who clamored for military intervention "to end violence and restore civilization in Mexico," the editors suggested that the United States first solve its own problems. To emphasize the point, they published scathing editorials decrying the lynching of blacks in the American South.<sup>32</sup>

Danciger's political sympathies and personal admiration for Woodrow Wilson undeniably muted criticism of the president's handling of United States-Mexican relations. Despite Wilson's sanction of the occupation of Veracruz in 1914 and hostility towards post-Díaz regimes, he was portrayed as a man sincerely committed to a policy of peace. An editorial celebrated Wilson's reelection in 1916 because the president was "a noble and prudent friend of Mexico." Although Wilson had committed mistakes in his policy towards Mexico, such errors "neither discredited nor diminished his expressions and demonstrations of good will." *El Cosmopolita* blamed the State Department, not Wilson, for diplomatic failures in Mexico.<sup>33</sup>

Sympathetic treatment of Wilson persisted even when he ordered the Punitive Expedition into Mexico after Pancho Villa raided Columbus, New Mexico, in 1916. One article declared that Wilson's decision "did not constitute intervention or anything like it." Another explained that the president's action had legal precedent in the nineteenth century, when the

United States and Mexico allowed mutual border crossing by soldiers in pursuit of marauding Indians. Obviously seeking to minimize the severity of the crisis and to maintain order in the colonia, editorials counseled patience and tranquility. *El Cosmopolita* affirmed that the presence of American troops in Mexico was no cause for alarm, that Wilson and Carranza would negotiate a mutually satisfactory solution to the crisis, and that Mexican citizens in the United States had no reason to fear for their safety. Editors warned Mexicans not to be deceived by the enemies of the *patria* who encouraged them to return to Mexico and combat the American invaders. They declared that while it was praiseworthy to fight for an ideal, struggle to extirpate social evils, and defend the homeland when it was in danger, it was likewise criminal and suicidal for Mexicans to sacrifice their lives for "some multi-millionaire who only wanted to increase his fortune."<sup>34</sup>

*El Cosmopolita's* editors affirmed that the Constitutionlists had established the only legitimate claim to leadership and called for an end to all violence and recrimination in Mexico. Peace, cooperation, and national reconstruction were of paramount importance. Declaring that allegiance to the nation must supercede all other political loyalties, one writer prophesied that in the future there would be only one political party—"the Collaborationist Party"—to which all Mexicans would belong. He proposed that the first step toward national reconciliation be the granting of amnesty to all oppositionist factions, including expatriated members of the old regime. Thus, all who truly loved Mexico would combine their energy and talent to begin the moral regeneration and material reconstruction of the *patria*.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the vicissitudes of managerial continuity, financial stability, and ideological orientation, *El Cosmopolita* maintained a high degree of fidelity to its original commitments. The newspaper served as an organ of ethnic unity, cultural reinforcement, and national pride. *El Cosmopolita* furnished news of the immigrant's homeland in his own language, offered a multiplicity of social services, contributed

to the cultural life of the community, and defended colonia interests. *El Cosmopolita* provides insights into the lives of Mexicans in Kansas City during the colonia's formative stage of development and remains a key research tool readily available to scholars interested in the Mexican immigrant population of the area prior to 1920.

#### *EL COSMOPOLITA* AND THE SPANISH-LANGUAGE PRESS

*El Cosmopolita's* place in the history of the Spanish-language press in the United States is more difficult to ascertain. Despite the fact that hundreds of Spanish-language newspapers have been produced in this country, scholars have largely ignored their contribution to the Mexican-American experience. A few recent studies partially rectify this oversight, but they focus almost entirely on newspapers published in the Southwest. No work directly addresses the Mexican immigrant press beyond the traditionally-defined Spanish Borderlands. Available studies, however, do provide a point of departure.<sup>36</sup>

Manuel Gamio's classic *Mexican Immigration to the United States* offers a model for the Mexican immigrant press. He notes that these papers were generally short-lived, local in circulation, and, with the exception of four or five, "reflected the cultural deficiencies of the great masses of immigrants and of the Mexican American laborers by whom and for whom this press is made." Gamio states that these newspapers devoted the greatest amount of attention to political events in Mexico, discussed local affairs only as they related to the interests of "La Raza," glorified Mexico, defended Mexicans from the abuses of Anglo society, and highlighted the activities of their national organizations. Robert E. Park's standard, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, gives little attention to the "Spanish press," but his views generally coincide with Gamio's. He indicates that the immigrants were mainly concerned with problems in their home country and were highly nationalistic. He writes that Spanish-language papers were "provincial" in character and typ-

ically published in small towns. They had limited circulation and suffered a high mortality rate.<sup>37</sup>

Félix Gutiérrez and Richard Griswold del Castillo offer additional interpretations. Gutiérrez maintains that southwestern Spanish-language newspapers have played three fundamental roles. They have served as institutions of social control, as instruments of activism, and as reflections of Chicano life. In his study of borderlands newspapers during the Mexican Revolution, Griswold del Castillo demonstrates that the press offers widely divergent examples of philosophical interpretation and political support. Some papers consistently opposed the Revolution and longed for a return of the dictatorship. Others held *magonista*, *maderista*, *huertista*, *villista*, or *carrancista* sympathies. Some editors' loyalties fluctuated with the fortunes of war, while others adamantly refused to make any ideological commitments whatsoever.<sup>38</sup> A point by point enumeration is unnecessary to confirm that *El Cosmopolita* conforms in many respects to models that both Gamio and Parks suggest. It is also clear that the paper lends itself to Gutiérrez's main avenues of analysis and broadly fits the roles that he identifies as characteristic of the Spanish-language press in the Southwest. And finally, Griswold del Castillo's essay confirms that *El Cosmopolita's* ideological commitment to the Revolution was not remarkable.

*El Cosmopolita* deviates from the models in several ways. The newspaper's consistently educated tone, more extensive focus, and wider circulation distinguished it from the newspapers that Gamio and Park describe. Another salient distinction was its place of publication—far beyond the borderlands. The Kansas City colonia was comprised almost exclusively of immigrants, and it lacked the pre-existing networks and organizations typical of Mexican-American culture in the Southwest. Geography placed the paper and its audience in a particular context. Although its functions were similar to those of its Southwestern counterparts, *El Cosmopolita's* arena of action, immediate concerns, potential impact, and image of immigrant life reflect fun-



damentally different circumstances.

Perhaps *El Cosmopolita*'s most unusual characteristic was Anglo ownership during much of its existence. This circumstance clearly tempered its role as a voice of the Kansas City Mexican community. Jack Danciger's influence on the paper was apparent in several important respects. The strident pro-Constitutionalism of *El Cosmopolita* reflected his own political and commercial ties to Venustiano Carranza. Danciger's connection to the Democratic party, his esteem for Woodrow Wilson, and his desire to avoid further bloodshed in Mexico explain his minimizing the threat to peace that the Punitive Expedition posed. It is also reflected in the call for Mexicans to remain patient and calm and the confident affirmation that the crisis would be resolved by diplomatic means.

It must be recognized, however, that the various Mexican editors held *carrancista* sympathies as well. They likely represented the attitude of Kansas City Constitutionalists as accurately as other pro-Carranza papers reflected similar sentiments elsewhere. While they probably were less ardent in their regard for Wilson and his Mexican policies than Danciger, they did discourage their fellow Mexicans from taking up arms against the United States. Carranza himself, though he staunchly defended Mexican sovereignty, sought to prevent the crisis from escalating into a war between the two countries. Furthermore, both Danciger and his Mexican associates must have realized that the isolated colonia was in a highly vulnerable position. Nationalistic, anti-American outbursts promised only effective, if not fatal, retaliation from local authorities and citizenry.

Many colonias developed outside the Southwest during the era of the Mexican Revolution. An examination of newspapers published in these localities will broaden our knowledge of the Spanish-language press and teach us much about the communities themselves. *El Cosmopolita* may serve as a model to which we may compare other newspapers beyond the borderlands. Did these publications continue to focus on Mexican affairs? What ideological commitments did they reflect? What services did they

provide? What particular problems did specific colonias face, and what role did their newspapers play in their exposure and solution? To what extent did these papers deal with local and national affairs? Did they oppose or encourage assimilation? What do they reveal about intraethnic and interethnic relations? How independent of Anglo influence were they? The study of Spanish-language newspapers such as *El Cosmopolita* enhances our growing appreciation of Mexican immigration as a national phenomenon and Mexican-American history as highly diverse.

#### NOTES

1. Unless indicated otherwise, "Kansas City" will refer to the greater metropolitan area, which includes both Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas.

2. For the purposes of this paper, "Mexican" will refer only to persons born in Mexico. Although there was an indeterminable number of U.S.-born persons of Mexican descent in Kansas City and elsewhere in the Great Plains and Midwest, evidence clearly indicates that the overwhelming majority prior to 1930 were Mexican-born. "Anglo" is used to identify those people who were neither African American nor Mexican.

3. Besides *El Cosmopolita* (hereafter cited as EC), there were at least two other Spanish-language newspapers established in Kansas City before 1920. In October 1915, *El Mexicano* was founded to protest Jack Danciger's appointment as consul. Copies of two issues are contained in "Jack Danciger, su expediente personal," Expediente 31-17-19, Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, México, D. F. (hereafter cited as AHSRE). *El Cosmopolita* announced in September 1918 that Gabriel Ruíz had established *La Voz de México*, but I have found no extant copies. Sources on Mexicans in the Kansas City area include Judith Fincher Laird, "Argentine, Kansas: The Evolution of a Mexican-American Community, 1905-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1975); Larry Rutter, "Mexican Americans in Kansas: A Survey and Social Mobility Study, 1900-1970" (M.A. thesis, Kansas State University, 1972); J. Neale Carman, *Foreign Language Units of Kansas*, vol. 1, *Historical Atlas and Statistics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1962) and his "Foreign Language Units of Kansas," vol. 2, Typescript, University of Kansas Library, Lawrence, Kansas; Robert Oppenheimer, "Acculturation or Assimilation: Mexican Immigrants in Kansas, 1900 to World War II,"

*Western Historical Quarterly* 16 (October 1985): 429-48; Michael M. Smith, "Mexicans in Kansas City: The First Generation, 1900-1920," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 2(1989): 29-57; the "Guadalupe Center Collection" in the Missouri Valley Room of the Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library; and reports of the Kansas City consulate and the personal files of Jack Danciger and of Mexicans residing in Kansas City in the AHSRE.

4. EC, 22 August 1914; 22 October 1914.

5. Robert E. Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1922), pp. 309-24.

6. EC, 26 December 1914; 13 February 1915; 2 October 1915. The principal sources of information on Danciger include Ignacio Richkarday, *Jack Danciger: His Life and Work*, trans. Ann Marie Swenson (1963); Danciger's previously cited file in the AHSRE; and EC, 1915-19, *passim*.

7. "Bernardo López" was an alias Danciger used in Kansas City. See *El Mexicano*, 6 November 1915.

8. N. W. Ayer and Sons, *American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Sons Newspaper Advertising Agents, 1918), pp. 1316-17.

9. EC, 9 October 1915; Richkarday, *Jack Danciger*, pp. 125-28.

10. Although Danciger never held public office, he was associated with a number of important figures in the Democratic party including Kansas City political boss Tom Pendergast; Senator William J. Stone (D.-Mo.), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Senator James A. Reed (D.-Mo.); and Senator William H. Thompson (D.-Kans.). Richkarday, *Jack Danciger*, pp. 130-35, 152-66; Rafael E. Múzquiz to Eliseo Arredondo, México, D. F., 24 September 1915, and Jack Danciger to Venustiano Carranza, Kansas City, Missouri, 22 June 1916, in "Jack Danciger, su expediente personal," AHSRE, 3, 76.

11. For information concerning these activities, see Alfredo Breceda to Venustiano Carranza, New York, 22 July 1915, doc. 5009; Luis Bossero to Cándido Aguilar, New York, 1 May 1916, doc. 8280; Luis Bossero to Cándido Aguilar, New York, 2 June 1916, doc. 8993; Pedro Ferreira to Venustiano Carranza, Kansas City, Missouri, 15 November 1916, doc. 11804; all the preceding are located in Manuscritos de don Venustiano Carranza, Fondo XX-I, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, Fundación Cultural de Condumex, México, D. F.; see also Timothy Turner, "Prospectus for the Organization of an Official Bureau of Information of the Constitutionalist Government . . .," New York, 21 July 1915, "Revolución Mexicana durante los años 1910 a 1920. Información diversa de la república y de las oficinas de México en el exterior," Expediente L-E-811,

AHSRE, 15-17.

12. EC, 9 October 1915; 19 February 1916; 8 July 1916; 3, 10, and 24 February 1917; 5 May 1917; 30 March 1918; 23 August 1919.

13. The paucity of information makes it difficult to make more than cursory observations about political affiliations and activities in Kansas City. *El Cosmopolita* never contained a "Letters to the Editor" section nor did it print communications of that sort. Beyond brief and scattered references, there is little data available to measure the community response to *El Cosmopolita's* pro-Constitutionalist position. *El Mexicano* was established in October 1915 to express opposition to Danciger's appointment as consul, but writers largely attacked his character and qualifications for the position. While criticizing the manner in which Danciger promoted the Constitutionalist movement, they never revealed their own specific political affiliation. See, for example, Manuel A. Urbina et al. to Venustiano Carranza, Kansas City, Missouri, 11 Septiembre 1914, "Expediente personal de Pedro F. Osorio," Expediente 4-20-33 (I), AHSRE, 46-47; *El Mexicano*, 31 October 1915 and 6 November 1915; and EC, 21 July 1917.

14. EC, 25 January 1919.

15. EC, 15 and 22 March 1919.

16. EC, 21 July 1919; 23 August 1919.

17. In order to identify the issues to which *El Cosmopolita* gave the greatest attention, all editorials and headlines were read, analyzed, and categorized. Of the 232 editorials appearing between 1914 and 1919, 40 percent related to Mexican domestic events, 16.5 percent to Mexicans in the United States, and 15 percent to U.S.-Mexico relations. Other principal topics include Latin America, United States affairs, and World War I. Thirty-five percent of the paper's headlines related to Mexican news; 17.5 percent to Mexicans in the United States; 17 percent to items of a cultural, literary, or historical nature; and 5 percent to U.S.-Mexico relations. For the Mexican immigrant press, see Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), pp. 136-39.

18. EC, 20 November 1915; 11 March 1916; 20 May 1916; 18 September 1918.

19. EC, 7 November 1914; 27 March 1915; 25 May 1918; 1 February 1919; 4 March 1916.

20. EC, 11 October 1919.

21. EC, 7 October 1916; 15 June 1918.

22. EC, 22 July 1916; 23 September 1916; 4 November 1916; 29 June 1918; 4 March 1916; 13 May 1916; 25 November 1916; 4 March 1916; 10 April 1915; 29 April 1916.

23. EC, 18 March 1916.

24. EC, 22 October 1914; 29 May 1915; 19 June 1915; 10 July 1915; 14, 21, and 28 July 1917.

25. Laird, "Argentine, Kansas," p. 192; EC, 1

January 1916.

26. EC, 6 March 1915; 8 January 1916.

27. EC, 29 March 1919.

28. Laird, "Argentine, Kansas," p. 113-127; EC, 8 and 22 April 1916.

29. EC, 29 July 1916; 22 February 1919; 8 February 1919; 30 September 1916.

30. EC, 18 May 1918; 15 October 1914; 22 July 1916; 3 February 1917.

31. EC, 30 September 1916; 1 July 1916; 9 October 1915; 20 May 1916.

32. EC, 4 September 1915; 6 November 1915; 11 September 1915; 3 July 1915.

33. EC, 15 June 1918; 11 November 1916; 24 April 1915.

34. EC, 18 March 1916; 17 June 1916; 1 and 8 July 1916.

35. EC, 3 April 1915; 4 November 1916; 28 October 1916; 9 August 1919.

36. The older works of Manuel Gamio and Robert E. Park have been noted. On 13 February 1938, *La Prensa* of San Antonio published a list of 451 Spanish-language periodicals that had appeared in the United States. Stanley R. Ross includes a brief discussion of southwestern Spanish-language newspapers in his *Fuentes de la Historia Contemporánea de México: Periódicos y Revistas* (México, D. F.: El Colegio de México, 1965), xxxiii-xliv. Two preliminary surveys, Herminio Ríos and Lupe Castillo, "Toward

a True Chicano Bibliography: Mexican-American Newspapers: 1848-1942," *El Grito* 3 (Summer 1970): 17-24 and Herminio Ríos, "Toward a True Chicano Bibliography—Part 2," *El Grito* 5 (Summer 1972): 40-47, are useful introductions. *Journalism History* 4 (Summer 1977) contains a series of excellent articles on the subject. These include Félix Gutiérrez, "Spanish-language Media in America: Background, Resources, History," pp. 34-41, 65-68; Richard Griswold del Castillo, "The Mexican Revolution and the Spanish-Language Press in the Borderlands," pp. 42-47; Ramón D. Chacón, "The Chicano Immigrant Press in Los Angeles: The Case of 'El Heraldito de México,' 1916-1920," pp. 48-50, 62-64; Juan Gonzales, "Forgotten Pages: Spanish-Language Newspapers in the Southwest," pp. 50-52; and Félix Gutiérrez and Jorge Reina Schement, "Chicanos and the Media: Bibliography of Selected Materials," pp. 53-55. Francine Medeiros, "La Opinión, A Mexican Exile Newspaper: A Content Analysis of Its First Years, 1926-1929," *Aztlán* 11 (Spring 1980): 65-87, is a fine case study of that important Los Angeles paper.

37. Gamio, *Mexican Immigration*, pp. 136-37; Park, *The Immigrant Press*, pp. 135, 270-71, 289, 306-24.

38. Gutiérrez, "Spanish-Language Media in America," pp. 38-41, 65-66; Griswold del Castillo, "The Mexican Revolution and the Spanish-Language Press," p. 43.