THE NEW NORTHERN BORDERLANDS: AN OVERVIEW OF MIDWESTERN CHICANO HISTORY

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Chicano/a historical literature, mostly focused on the Southwest, has not yet incorporated the Midwest into its conceptual mainstream. Investigation of the region is sparse and uneven.[1] The lack of publications is itself largely a consequence of the relatively brief presence of Mexicanos/as in the region and the nature of the northward migration—by and large a movement of workers and not of formally educated people. This migration is just now producing a cadre of Midwestern scholars to recover the past. Midwestern Chicano/a historians, however, have faced additional problems because of sharp class and ethnic biases from within the dominant academic world from which they received their formal training. Most had to work against the current of major history departments in the region, which have tended to scorn their work and discourage their interest in Chicano/a history. Notwithstanding the problems in developing a historiography, these scholars have demonstrated the centrality of the Midwest on Chicano/a history, and its value as a corrective to many serious conceptual distortions in mainstream United States historical literature on immigration, ethnicity and race..

This essay provides a framework for Midwestern Chicano/a history. It has two major sections. The first examines how the Great Lakes Midwestern experience fits conceptually into scholarship on immigration history and Chicano/a studies theory. The second delineates a periodization for Midwestern Chicano/a history and some of the important themes discussed in recent scholarship.

A Conceptual Framework

Midwestern Chicano/a historiography to date has focused mostly on the social and labor history of a limited number of communities between World War I and World War II. It has not yet probed deeply into broader issues regarding the place of Midwestern Mexicanos/as. Two current approaches have been to discuss it within the context of foreign immigrants as part of immigration history, or as minorities within the framework of Third World colonialism.

Recent scholarship on United States immigration history has been erratic in its efforts to include Chicano/a history within its boundaries.[2] Chicano/a urban and social historians addressing immigration have compared the fate of Chicanos/as with European immigrants in the Southwest. They have effectively demonstrated that Mexicanos/as of the Southwest had an immigration history much different from that of the European-born. Although Mexicanos/as preceded European immigrants in the Southwest, they did not enjoy similar paths of mobility. Europeans moved upward and ahead of recent Mexican immigrants as well as United States-born residents of Mexican descent.[3]

Early twentieth-century Chicano/a history in the Midwest has more parallels to European immigration history than in the American Southwest. Like European immigrants, Mexicans arrived in the region as newcomers in a foreign land, but unlike Mexican immigrants in the Southwest, they found no buffer provided by a long-settled Spanish-speaking population. Furthermore, the Great Lakes region had a very diverse European immigrant population. The internal mechanisms that many nationality groups developed in dealing with each other were much more complicated than in the Chicano/a heartland where people of European background are less distinctive from each other physically or culturally. The widespread use of the term Anglo when referring to Euro-Americans in the Southwest reflects their greater commonality and weaker ethnic awareness than in the East and the Midwest. In the ethnically fragmented urban communities of the Midwest, the different European groups had to acknowledge each other and to a certain degree leave each other alone. Midwestern Mexicanos/as

also were an immigrant group who contributed to the diversity of the region. That diversity allowed them, especially in the cities, to lead lives that were in many ways less restricted and segregated than in southwestern communities.

Although they had similarities, midwestern Mexicans also had many different experiences than their European predecessors. For one thing, they were the last of the immigrants to the region; for another, they faced greater discrimination in housing and employment than Europeans. In many neighborhoods they were denied housing because they were Mexican and throughout the region they faced a wider range of hostile responses than did other immigrant groups. Furthermore, many employers who willingly hired Europeans refused to employ Mexicans. As Paul Taylor concluded in his study of Chicago in the late 1920s, Mexicans were "a race and class apart."[4]

Another midwestern reality was that the second- and third-generation population of Mexican descent could not shed its physical and cultural distinctiveness rapidly, as did the Europeans. The sharp differences were reinforced by immigration patterns. European immigration subsided after World War I, while Mexican immigration was just beginning. Later, it increased rapidly, and immigrants continued to represent a major portion of the Mexican-descent population. European ethnic diversity in the Midwest did not precude a white identity shaped by the presence of a large Black population. Dominant color perceptions thus tended to be viewed in a dual framework in which Mexicans did not fit and were seldom perceived as a threat because of their comparatively small numbers. While Mexicans in urban settings were less sharply segregated than Blacks, they were not accepted as readily as the European ethnic groups. They were excluded from most neighborhoods by custom and because of financial considerations.

Distinct treatment of Mexicans as an ethnic group also surfaced during times of economic downturn, including 1920-1921, 1929-1933 and the early 1950s. They were the only foreign population group to be singled out for repatriation or deportation during "Operation Wetback" in 1954. Still another feature is that as a group Chicanos/as achieved comparatively limited upward social mobility. Late in the twentieth century, Mexicans continued to dominate the

most visible step of the bottom rung of the proletariat—farm workers. Part of the explanation is demographic. Unlike the Southwest, where Mario Barrera notes that a "subeconomy," or immigrant enclave makes possible a substantial petty bourgeoisie, such an entrepreneurial group historically has been very small in the Midwest.[5]

Another distinctive characteristic of midwestern Mexicanos/as has been their low level of formal schooling on arrival and relatively slow improvement in this area in succeeding generations. Even among children born in the region, the number attending institutions of higher learning has remained infinitesimal. As a result of political pressures generated during the 1960s and early 1970s, a handful of students finally entered the region's institutions of higher learning. However, since the Supreme Court's Bakke decision in 1977, Chicano/a academic programs and the number of students in higher education has again declined. Even in the 1970s and 1980s many major universities in the region did not have a single Chicano/a faculty member, thus indicating that midwestern Mexicanos/as have not assimilated to the degree of European immigrants and their descendants.[6]

A Third World-oriented colonial perspective helps inform us about many features of past and present Mexicano/a life in the Midwest. "Internal Colonialism" models, relating to minorities within the nation's boundaries, have long been discussed, applied and modified by students of Chicano/a history. Recently, these models have been in retreat. Some have criticized internal colonial models as being useful only as metaphors, but it is wise to remember, as literary critic Terry Eagleton has observed, that "all language is in a way, 'metaphorical.'"[7] Metaphors are the lifeblood of historians. Furthermore, an understanding of the Third World and of colonialism is essential to understanding Mexicanos/as in the United States. Many features of the colonial experience apply to the Midwest, a region where one might not expect them to serve any explanatory purpose. Cities throughout the region have districts that Mexicanos/as have referred to as *colonias* since their arrival in the early years of the century. In this sense the internal colonia is a central feature of Chicano/a life throughout the region.

If viewed from both national and international perspectives, colonialism applies directly to midwestern Chicano/a history. A neo-colonial viewpoint helps explain the migration of Mexican immigrants to the urban Midwest in the 1920s and in the 1980s. The labor migrations organized by capitalist employers in the Midwest, the Southwest and South Africa were similar in many ways. They received low wages and usually worked in the North for short periods, while their families remained in Mexico or Texas. Their lives were largely restricted to the confines of work. The cost of their reproduction as a labor force in Texas or Mexico was much lower than in the industrial heartland of the nation. Family members separated from them produced a major part of the total subsistence and received the rest from those who worked in the Midwest. Labor migration based on reproduction in a distant territory is an essential feature of midwestern Chicano/a history and of colonialism.[8]

A colonial perspective applies even more directly to the labor migration and continued presence of the large Mexican farm worker population in the region since World War I. It corrects popular perceptions that the midwestern Chicano/a experience has been overwhelmingly urban. Workers of Mexican birth and descent migrated north from their permanent homes in a low-wage region where they sustained their families. They left their "homelands" for temporary, seasonal work at wages that were below the accepted level of poverty. During their stay in the Midwest they remained separated from the permanent resident population, residing in special housing and camps for workers. Employers, with the assistance of government authorities, consciously isolated them from permanent Euro-American residents.

As farm workers they were denied by law and custom many of the explicit rights of permanent resident citizens, including New Deal legislation on welfare, insurance, health care and the minimum wage. They were also exempted from other legislation that guaranteed payments at regular intervals, as well as safe and healthy working conditions. Farm workers residing in camps did not have rights that other tenants enjoyed, and their landlords were not subject to the same responsibilities. Unlike other renters, their homes typically were barred to outside visitors and guests without

the owners' express permission. Migrant workers seldom ventured into town for fear of encountering unfriendly local residents, police and sheriff's deputies. Truant officers failed to enforce mandatory school attendance laws for their children, contrary to the letter of the law. Yet once the work season ended, police and other authorities helped the growers make sure the workers left their camps, using force when necessary, to ensure that they would not become permanent residents or receive welfare and other benefits to which they were entitled. In sum, the *campesinos* worked, maintained a separate social life, remained isolated and did not enjoy the legal rights of permanent residents during the long period they remained in the region each year.[9]

In the case of farm workers in the Midwest, an internal colonial model has greater applicability in some ways than in Texas, California, and other parts of the Southwest. In those settings large numbers of farm workers eventually settled and gradually became part of the economic, social and political life of agricultural towns and nearby cities. In the Midwest, settling in small towns and establishing a visible presence was much less frequent. The farm workers who stayed in the Midwest usually chose less hostile settings in larger towns and cities. Details of the patterns of the immigrant and colonial models will be further delineated in the periodization that follows.

World War I and the 1920s

Midwestern Chicano/a history begins in the twentieth century, when the region's population was growing more rapidly than any other in the country. Already known as the "Breadbasket of Europe" for its grain production, it soon became the industrial heartland of the United States as well. Several cities, among them Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and St. Paul, grew at phenomenal rates. By 1920 Chicago and Detroit were the second and fourth most populous cities in the nation. Urban residents included immigrants from dozens of language and nationality groups from all parts of Europe. As late as 1920 more than one-third of the population of the major cities was foreign-born. This demographic feature had an important bearing on the

Mexicans who came to the region. The urban locations where they worked and lived were populated mostly by European immigrants and their children rather than citizens whose ancestors were long rooted in the United States.

Chronologically, the Mexicans' arrival occurred after the major European flow subsided during World War I. Facing labor shortages created by the curtailment of European immigration and a wartime boom, many labor recruiters turned to South Texas for replacements. The recruitment continued until 1920, when a severe depression occasioned a return flow of Mexicans to the South. It was a short-lived downturn, and by 1923 employers turned even more enthusiastically to the immigrant Mexicans they discovered during the war. The flow of workers increased rapidly and continued vigorously until the end of the decade. The earliest Mexicans recruited to the urban Midwest were born in Mexico, yet most had experience working elsewhere in the United States before arriving. They came largely as single male workers to replace Europeans in the worst jobs: the generally seasonal and unsteady work in the railroads, packing plants, foundries, shops, automobile factories and streetcar lines. They were attracted by higher wages than those available in the Southwest.[10]

Mexicans faced a much higher cost of living and a more brutal work regimen in the Midwest, which offset those higher wages. Factory employment was unpleasant because it was strictly regimented and physically exhausting. Machines controlled the pace and nature of the workers' movements all day long. Being the most recent arrivals, they were assigned the most unpleasant tasks and the least steady jobs, and were the first to be laid off when there were seasonal cuts in the work force.[11]

In most midwestern industries and factories, Mexicans represented only a small fraction of the total workforce, but there were some exceptions in several railroad companies and certain factories. Inland Steel in East Chicago was one of the few employers in the region that had a company town with a concentrated Mexican population. Henry Ford's automobile plants also hired thousands of Mexicans in their diverse work force. Inland Steel and Ford were the two largest urban employers of Mexicans in the country. In part reflecting their scattered presence in factories,

Mexican neighborhoods were not highly segregated as typically occurred in southwestern cities. Although not numerous enough to dominate entire neighborhoods, they tended to live clustered in ports-of-entry and places close to work. In a large city like Chicago, they concentrated in the Near West End, South Chicago and the Back of the Yards districts. In smaller cities like St. Louis, there were not highly visible pockets of Mexican concentration. In general, they resided in shabby, older districts as neighbors of poor European and Black workers. The heart of the colonia typically was characterized by a handful of small businesses that catered to a local clientele: a pool hall, barbershop, grocery stores, boarding houses and a small Catholic church or chapel inevitably named after *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.* While segregation typically was not rigid, restrictive renting practices, prejudice and financial limitations excluded Mexicans from residing in most parts of the city. Unlike European immigrants, they had great difficulty purchasing homes because of irregular employment and low wages. These same work and residential patterns enabled them and their children to gain facility with the English language more quickly than their counterparts in the Southwest.[12]

Because urban employers were more interested in hiring males than females, most early immigrants were single men. Yet once they found steadier jobs, many sent for their wives or betrothed. Women in the urban Midwest worked outside the home less frequently than the average European woman, in part because of employer hiring practices. Nevertheless, Mexicanas worked at "women's work" in industry, candy factories, canneries and as domestic workers and seamstresses. In general they did not work in heavy industry, where wages were higher. When they worked alongside men, they were part of a dual-wage system. Other women worked in small businesses controlled by families, including boarding houses and restaurants. In spite of the increased numbers of women by the end of the 1920s, midwestern urban colonias remained disproportionately male.[13]

In agriculture, Chicano/a work and settlement patterns in the Midwest and Southwest had much in common. The Chicano/a southwestern experience during the early twentieth century has been portrayed as predominantly rural, the Midwest overwhelm-

ingly urban. In fact, agricultural labor has been a major part of midwestern Chicano/Chicana history since the first World War. Another perceived difference between the two regions is attributed to agriculture in the Southwest being dominated by large ranches and orchards, the Midwest by modest-sized holdings. Midwestern agriculture was based on family-sized and family-owned farms. In the early twentieth century it had neither large ranches nor crops that demanded large quantities of seasonal hand labor, except in the sugar beet industry, the major employer of Mexicans. Sugar beet workers were scattered among farms rather than clustered in large camps. Despite the size of these farms, the sugar beet industry was large-scale, modern and corporate, aggressively adopting scientific methods of planting and cultivation. Until the curtailment of overseas immigration, Europeans dominated sugar beet field labor. Unlike their experiences in midwestern factories, Mexicans quickly took over the beet fields. By the late 1920s they comprised about three-fifths of the total number of *betabeleros* (beet workers) in the region. At the same time Mexicans also took over field labor in other major beet- growing zones in the Great Plains-Rocky Mountain area and California.[14]

The Mexican predominance in the ranks of sugar beet workers was the result of unpleasant working conditions and poor remuneration that discouraged Europeans from staying, and aggressive recruitment by sugar beet companies. It differed from urban employment because it depended on women and children as well as adult men. Women were central to survival strategies. They worked in beet cultivation and harvest, tended gardens and canned local produce for family consumption, and performed other tasks essential to the total subsistence of the family. This gave them a degree of influence less evident than in the city, where the "cult of domesticity" kept most of them from work outside the home. Generally there was a close link between the beet fields and the cities. Sugar beet employment was seasonal, lasting from early Spring until October or November, after which employers discouraged workers from remaining in rural areas. While many people returned to Texas or the Mexican border, increasing numbers headed to nearby cities. If they were still unemployed in the Spring, or they determined it preferable to engage in family

labor, where total earnings could exceed those of men working by themselves at urban tasks, they returned to the fields. Like their European predecessors, they generally abandoned the sugar beets as quickly as possible. But they were replaced by new arrivals of Mexican descent, who continued to perform the labor assigned to the most recent immigrants.[15]

Midwestern Mexicans were not simply the last of the immigrants in a European tradition. They were the first major foreign-born population to migrate to the region from a Third-World country. Unlike European immigrants, particularly Germans and Scandinavians, they had little money to buy homes and farms or start up businesses immediately. Few were able to follow the more typical European pattern of working and saving for a few years with the subsequent purchase of homes and businesses in the cities or farms in the country.[16] Even those with middle-class backgrounds in Mexico seldom had sufficient funds to start up businesses. As a result, Mexicans had a much smaller merchant or entrepreneurial class to form social and cultural groups characteristic of other urban ethnic communities. These cultural functions were fewer in the Mexican colonia, and were more often created by groups of workers through their *mutualistas* or the Mexican consulate. Mexican mutualistas and groups like the *Cruz Azul* also had an essential economic purpose in the local community, to provide for welfare and similar needs. They were necessary since Mexicans typically were excluded from public assistance.

Mexicans had less success in establishing their own churches than Europeans. The chapels dedicated to *La Virgen Morena* could not compare with the massive and powerful institutions founded by European immigrants. Mexicans faced a further complication in the form of Protestant missionaries who were convinced that they had to be converted to "Christianity." In effect, neither their efforts nor those of the Catholic Church had much impact, as midwestern Mexicans remained generally alienated from church organizations dominated by Euro-Americans and Europeans.[17]

Mexicans were further distinguished from most European groups in that they were largely migrants who continued to live outside the Midwest. Mexico and Texas served as labor reserves for the North, where costs were much higher. Their conditions of work

and social life suggest a much lower degree of upward social mobility than that of the European working-class immigrants in Stephan Thernstrom's *The Other Bostonians* and other similar studies.[18]

Within the context of Chicano/a history, the Midwest was an entirely new experience, a story of foreign immigrants in a world of immigrants. It was unlike the Southwest, which according to Barrera was not qualitatively different in the early twentieth century than in the nineteenth. In this sense, the Midwest had more in common with Nebraska and Northern Colorado, where Mexicanos and Mexicanas were also beginning to migrate as a result of employment in beet fields and cities.[19]

The 1920s in the Midwest were a period of great expansion of the Mexican population in agricultural and urban employment. Many urban neighborhoods were formed and began to stabilize, and by the end of the decade had a much more permanent Mexican presence than even a few years before. They would again experience a rapid upheaval as a result of the economic turbulence of the early 1930s.

The Great Depression

As in other areas of the country, the Mexican-descent population of the Midwest was profoundly affected by the Great Depression. It was a time of retreat. As industrial production declined, unemployment rates rose sharply. In places where urban workers retained their jobs they were reduced to two or three days of work a week. In the sugar beet industry, Mexicans had to accept lower wages and work smaller acreages. When anti-Mexican nativism surfaced, as it did in the Southwest, it focused on Mexicans who, as a highly visible group, were particularly vulnerable to attacks. They were mostly foreign-born and had the lowest rates of naturalization among immigrant groups in the region. As a result of the economic turbulence of the decade, the Mexican-descent population in the region changed sharply.[20]

Midwestern industrial employers fired Mexicans first, often under pressure from public welfare agencies trying to reduce their rolls

by finding work for citizens. Unemployment among urban midwestern Mexicans was much higher than that of the population in general, which typically fluctuated from about one-fifth to one-third of able-bodied workers. In Mexican urban communities unemployment often rose to rates of 80 and 90 percent. Survival for Mexicans was even more difficult than for others because so few owned land that would have provided subsistence plots for gardens and animals.[21]

As unemployment rose, many midwestern Mexicans quickly left the region permanently. Departure was easier for individuals with weak ties, particularly single or married men supporting families in Texas and Mexico. Those who remained soon encountered increasing pressure from welfare agencies and police, who busied themselves encouraging repatriation in Mexican communities throughout the region.

Repatriation pressures in the Midwest, as in other parts of the country, were localized and selective. Within the ethnically diverse Midwest, Mexicans were the only group singled out for removal, as is evident from repatriation brochures and bulletins that appeared only in English and Spanish bilingual editions. Welfare workers and police were particularly active in informal and unsystematic efforts to encourage Mexicans to leave. They also became involved in a number of formal deportation drives, as in the Southwest. The repatriation programs further confirm that public sentiments in the Midwest against Mexicans were more hostile than against any European group.[22]

Organized repatriation took place in cities such as St. Paul, Gary, East Chicago and throughout Michigan and Ohio. Local, regional and state police and welfare agencies often cooperated with federal immigration officials and prominent local citizens. Inspiration for local campaigns varied from one city to another. In East Chicago, the American Legion played an important role in repatriation in the highly visible, densely concentrated community. Largely because of efforts by local reformers affiliated with the settlement project at Hull House, who opposed repatriation, no formal plan emerged in Chicago. Detroit Mexicans, on the other hand, faced the best coordinated campaign, partly because the city's economy suffered so badly and because Mexicans were concentrated among a

handful of employers. In relative terms, repatriation in the Midwest was about three times more effective per capita than in the Southwest. Still more striking was the effect of the Depression farther east. Many small communities that formed after the outbreak of World War I in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and New York simply collapsed after workers departed in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Most midwestern communities were severely weakened and fragmented, but did not totally disappear.[23]

The impact of repatriation on midwestern Mexicans during the Depression was countered by the sugar beet industry. Beet companies suffered in the early years of the Depression, but reorganized and survived. They actually hired more beet workers in the 1930s than in the 1920s. The domestic sugar industry expanded production as a result of securing a higher tariff for imported sugar in 1930. As a result, sugar beet acreage in the Midwest increased by roughly one-third during the early years of the Depression. Simultaneously, midwestern beet companies reduced individual acreage allotments by approximately a third to spread the work to more people and further reduce wages. Many unemployed Europeans returned to the beet fields, but because of the sharp decline in earnings, others were reluctant to leave the cities even when unemployed. Beet wages fell to a point where people who received relief payments or secured employment on government work projects earned roughly the same as individuals employed by sugar beet companies. Furthermore, welfare and relief projects were steadier, and offered a higher total annual income. The alternatives were not available to Mexicans, for county welfare agents in the beet districts established a policy of excluding them from receiving benefits. They had to return to the beet fields each year if they wanted to remain in the region and survive. Many former betabeleros who lived in the cities and lost their factory jobs also returned to the farms. In the early years of the Depression, city dwellers, both European and Mexican-born, replaced out-of-state migrants. They performed beet work during the season and returned to their permanent homes nearby in the late fall.[24]

Because of the increase in jobs and the reluctance of Europeans to take them, the number of Mexicans who worked in the sugar beet industry did not change sharply from the late 1920s. This

short-distance migration between the cities and fields helped ensure the survival of many urban colonias. After the threat of repatriation subsided in the mid-1930s, they joined urban Europeans in unionization efforts in the midwestern fields. The multicultural alliances represented an opportunity for a stabilization of the agricultural work force, but employers thwarted them. In 1938, the corporations successfully broke the major beet worker organizational efforts in the region and intensified recruitment in Texas, which enabled them to flood the fields with thousands of Mexican American workers. The corporations thus initiated another transformation of the beet worker force.[25]

The End of the Depression to the 1960s

Shortly before the United States' entry into World War II, the Midwest entered a long period of prosperity, and for much of the time it had the highest per capita income of any region in the nation. In order to prevent it from rising even higher, midwestern employers once again recruited workers from poorer places. They were able to find a readily available source of workers in a belt of states extending from Arkansas and Texas to Georgia. The new migrants included Blacks and Whites, who were much poorer than the more established Europeans. They could be distinguished culturally, and formed visible segments of the midwestern working class. Mexicans from Mexico and Texas augmented this native-born labor pool, and often worked alongside the newcomers in agriculture and industry. The growth of available opportunities and the greater number of contacts resulted in an increasing diversity of social and work relations for midwestern Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

These changes signalled a new phase of Chicano/a history in the Midwest. If measured by the recovery of migration from the South, it began in 1938 with the entry of the Texas strike breakers. By 1940 recruiters in urban industry also turned to the South for workers. One feature of this phase was the continued massive migration from Texas and Mexico to meet the demands of a booming economy. Another was a shift in the cultural tolerance of the mid-1930s that made possible multi-ethnic worker organizing

efforts in the beet fields. Nativism gained strength during the War and intensified with the coming of the Cold War.

With the wartime boom and urban industrial expansion, workers from the South began to enter packing plants, foundries, automobile plants and related feeder industries and shops. During the war many companies recruited workers directly from Texas. In later years workers came increasingly because of expanding networks of family and community that linked Texas and Mexico, or via agricultural work.[26]

Employment in agriculture increased sharply due to expanded plantings of labor-intensive fruits and vegetables. By the end of the 1930s southwestern Michigan already proclaimed itself "America's Fruit Bowl," while other locations also grew fruits and vegetables for the region's fresh produce market. In addition, canneries appeared throughout the region, packaging sweet corn, peas, tomatoes, asparagus, pumpkins and many other fruits and vegetables for national consumption. Agricultural employers, with the help of an expanded Farm Placement Service of the United States Department of Labor, devised an elaborate system of recruiting workers of diverse backgrounds from local and distant sources. Those who came from the outside included southern Whites and Blacks, individuals from the British West Indies, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Texas. Between the late 1930s and the mid-1960s, the number of Mexican nationals and Mexican American seasonal farm workers increased in absolute and proportionate numbers, from under ten percent of the smaller workforce of the 1930s, to more than three-fifths of the total by the early 1960s. By the end of the period there were about a quarter of a million out-of-state farm workers employed seasonally in the Great Lakes region.[27]

The Mexican-descent workers originated in both Texas and Mexico. The former were largely children or grandchildren of Mexican immigrants who settled in Texas. The difference in earnings between Texas and the Midwest was great enough so that northern capitalists could recruit Mexican Americans as a low-wage reserve labor pool. *Tejanos* frequently came north first as farm workers, deciding one or more seasons later to settle in the region. Unable to sustain themselves on agricultural labor, they seldom remained in the Midwest permanently unless they found additional

employment. Demographically, Texas was the greater source of migration during this period. Historically, migration of Mexicans to the Midwest has funneled through Texas. The predominance of Texas-born newcomers as workers and settlers during this period, however, was an exception to the more common trend in which the majority of those migrating to the region were born in Mexico.[28]

Mexican-born immigrants came to the region under several different arrangements. Between 1943 and 1964 thousands were hired as *braceros*, contract workers under the international agreement of 1942 between Mexico and the United States. During the war some of them were railroad and industrial braceros, but most worked in agriculture. Afterwards the bracero program was restricted to farm labor. Some braceros skipped their contracts and remained in the Midwest while others, impressed by the region if not the work, later returned and became permanent settlers under different arrangements. A larger number of Mexican immigrants went directly to urban centers, gaining employment in shops, factories and at menial tasks in service activities. A few were recruited in Texas, but more came through informal family and community-based networks.[29]

In addition to the new arrivals from Texas and Mexico, a generation of midwestern-born Mexicans appeared, the second- and third-generation children of immigrants from Mexico. With greater numbers and diversity, there was an increase in the variety and size of settlements where people of Mexican descent lived. New colonias appeared in most medium-sized cities and many smaller towns, while many established urban neighborhoods expanded. A general logic could be discerned in the patterns of residential distribution of the different groups. Recent Mexican immigrants commonly moved to the largest cities, into the old colonias or what remained of them after urban renewal and the construction of freeways. In big cities, the heart of the colonia increasingly took on a Mexican character, with more shops and services catering to an ever larger Mexican community. It was characterized by a larger and more visible business district, reflecting the expansion of a business class in response to demands for service from the Mexican-descent population. It took on many of the characteristics of an immigrant enclave. In the larger cities

there were typically several concentrations of Mexican-descent population. In the most important city, Chicago, in addition to new settlements, the port of entry for Mexican immigrants shifted from the Near West Side to the Pilsen district. While immigrants tended to occupy the older and more established neighborhoods, their children, who were born and reared in the Midwest, tended to move into the industrial suburbs, where they found more attractive employment. Mexican Americans from Texas, meanwhile, frequently moved directly into neighborhoods close to work, in large cities, industrial suburbs, medium-sized cities and smaller towns.[30]

An added element in several larger cities beginning in the early 1950s was the appearance of concentrations of other Spanish-speaking immigrants, particularly Puerto Ricans. In some places they shared the same neighborhoods with Mexicans, while in others they moved into adjoining ones. Their presence represented an early stage in the formation of visibly Latino communities that became more clearly defined in later years.

The economic lure contributed to rapid growth and diversification of the population, which was now able to assert itself more than before. Many new social clubs and cultural groups formed to promote activities in local communities. The diversity occasioned internal problems, as natives of Mexico, Texas and the Midwest sometimes had to confront each other because of their differences. The era was a time of identifying with symbols that were American, and midwestern Mexicans also identified as Mexican Americans and Latin Americans. Yet the thrust of this Americanism was nativist, and to the flag-waving Euro-Americans, Mexican Americans were Mexican and not American, and considered foreign and unassimilable. Long-established residents as well as recent arrivals from Mexico faced contradictory pressures to accommodate in midwestern society during this generation. Children of Mexican immigrants, much more numerous than before, were influenced by assimilation and Americanization pressures that encompassed their lives: at school, at work, in the media and in public places. They were immersed in a world where the Mexican world and values did not mesh with the Anglo-American world. Mexican immigrants and migrants from Texas in many ways were more successful in forging a social and cultural world through new organizations for

Mexican Americans or Latin Americans, forming chapters of national organizations like the American G.I Forum or creating local organizations, often through local churches. Louise Año Nuevo Kerr suggests that the nativism of the period and the more visible Mexican presence in the region combined to abort assimilation of Mexicans in the Midwest. Facing conflicting signals, midwestern Mexicans faced a time of uncertain identity.[31]

The 1960s to the 1980s

Between the late 1960s and the 1980s the Midwest was characterized by a general economic decline. Reflecting the hard times, detractors have characterized the region during this period as the "Rust Belt." The region probably suffered more continuously than any other part of the country, because of the rapid mechanization of factory jobs, plant closings and transfers of production to other parts of the country and the Third World. As a result, the demand for factory workers has declined sharply. Thousands of people long established in the region found themselves without employment. A parallel phenomenon occurred in agriculture. It was characterized by accelerated mechanization of planting, cultivation and harvesting and the transfer of production. The demand for farm workers, which had been growing continuously between the late 1930s and early 1960s, fell precipitously. The decline was sharpest in the period from the late-1960s until the mid-1970s.[32]

At the beginning of the period, the national Chicano Movement began, and its influence quickly spread to the Midwest. In cities throughout the region Chicano groups organized to pressure city governments and educators to improve their neighborhoods and public facilities, and to establish educational programs where youth could study about Mexican and Chicano culture. They also created new social, cultural and educational organizations, opened schools, and published newspapers and newsletters. In many cases their pressure on universities located near large Chicano/a populations led to the creation of Chicano and Latino academic programs. In rural areas Chicano/a farm workers were also active, organizing several indigenous unions. The most successful was the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), which has survived and served its

members more than 20 years. It won worker contracts in the late 1960s for a brief period, and again in the 1980s. Together these efforts have heightened awareness among midwestern Chicanos/as of their past and present, and contributed to the increasing tolerance for cultural diversity evident during this period. In many midwestern cities the struggles took place through alliances involving Mexican Americans and other Latino groups.[33]

The rising Chicano Movement faced a number of obstacles. One emerged in the challenge to employers over work sites involving control of production and the work force. It has had an important bearing on recent midwestern Chicano/a history. In cities dependent on heavy industry, thousands of people lost their jobs, and many departed. In some locations, work shifted from heavy industry to small non-union shops and circulation tasks rather than production-oriented activities. As a result, some urban communities grew slowly or ceased to expand. It also made available jobs for women in the small, unorganized shops. The consequences of the decline in agricultural employment were somewhat different. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, thousands of agricultural workers from Texas were displaced by the rapid mechanization of cultivation and harvest operations. Government and private employment agencies, reacting to criticism from farm workers and their supporters, became active in efforts to encourage their settling in the Midwest. They developed educational and training programs and sometimes helped to finance the purchase or construction of houses. Many former farm workers found employment in shops and food processing plants in small and medium-sized towns, or moved to established colonias. The economic decline of the region reduced the wage differential between the Midwest and Texas and the attractiveness for worker recruitment. Employers in urban industry and agriculture increasingly turned to Mexico. Consequently, the recent period has seen migration to the region coming more from Mexico than Texas. The Chicano/a population of the region continued to expand rapidly, but mostly by natural increase rather than migration.[34]

The sharp population growth of the period made possible the formation and expansion of larger and more heavily concentrated urban colonias, the most visible in Chicago. The ethnic enclaves

and business districts served both immigrant populations and the larger native-born clientele throughout the metropolitan areas. Many such districts have also become clearly visible in smaller cities and towns throughout the region. Despite the continuing tendency of Mexicans to spread out, central neighborhoods have become more concentrated to serve the demands of the larger population.[35]

The period has also seen more migration from other Latin American countries and the formation of a Latino identity in the region. With greater numbers, Chicanos/as formed many new social organizations, community groups, and educational programs geared toward Latinos/as. Many have been effective in promoting the education, social and cultural concerns of the Mexican-descent population in the region. But this period witnessed a white backlash. One feature that appeared in the late 1970s was the promotion of a "Hispanic strategy," intent on thwarting the aggressive Chicano Movement. By labelling all Latinos as Hispanic, and intruding on self-determination, it has been particularly effective in deflating militants and creating divisions among people of Spanish-language background. The identity crisis that faced previous generations continued into the 1980s, although the rhetoric changed.[36]

Conclusion

A central theme of midwestern Chicano/a history, whether in industrial or agricultural settings, is that people of Mexican birth and descent migrated to the region because of work. They entered a zone of advanced industrial capitalism as a wage-earning proletariat, working in factories and shops alongside European immigrants, and later with Blacks and Whites from the South. They were not accompanied by a bourgeoisie that could quickly establish itself, as were their European predecessors. The formation of an established business class was slow and sporadic, and the immigrant enclave became clearly defined only slowly. The historical experience of Mexicans in the Midwest has included a much smaller number of shopkeepers and businessmen than in the Southwest or in earlier European immigrant communities.

One might have expected greater opportunities in rural settings because the organization of agriculture was different than in the Southwest, where large commercial holdings dominated production. In the Midwest the family farm was the norm and family members performed the majority of the work. Yet very few Mexicans in rural areas were able to achieve the middle-class status of independent family farmers. Throughout their history in the Midwest, Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans have been employees of farmers and corporations, working for wages, or, more recently, "sharecropping," a sophisticated form of wage labor that has hindered farm worker organizing.[37]

The Mexican experience in the region shares many characteristics of European immigrant history. Compared with the migrants to Texas, midwestern Mexicans adopted English more rapidly, their children more frequently attended schools, spoke less Spanish, and associated more with the non-Mexican population.

Yet compared with Europeans, their assimilation was much slower, as they continued to face discriminatory treatment in schools, public places and at work. Labor migration from permanent low-wage regions, a feature of neo-colonialism, continues to influence the Mexican presence in the Midwest. The migrants remained isolated from the majority population. Even after they became permanent residents, they and their descendants remained predominantly in the working class and retained a clear consciousness of their working-class roots. This is not the case with most of their European and Tejano counterparts. After four generations, features of the internal colony have survived in the Midwest.

Migration to the United States in general, and the Midwest in particular, must also be examined from its point of origin in Mexico. From a Mexican context, the twentieth-century Chicano/a presence in the Midwest represents a new northern borderlands. It is not the first. From the time of the European conquest in the sixteenth century, people from the heartland of Mexico have engaged in a series of northward migrations as workers and settlers. The northern fringes of settlement were frontiers between Mexican minorities and others who preceded them. On the northern frontier, Mexican settlements were sparsely populated

and isolated from each other. Migration from Central Mexico had been taking place for three generations before Mexicans first settled in the upper Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they established many scattered settlements in present-day Texas and California. In the twentieth century they have spread to the Great Plains, the Pacific Northwest and the Midwest.

There have been several common features to these thrusts. The first settlers in the northern borderlands region were migrants who followed material inducements, particularly work or the chance to acquire land. Their early years were tentative and hesitant, accompanied by frequent retreats. After the initial entry, several generations passed before they established firm population bases. The greatest inducements have taken place during the past century, as capital penetration from the United States induced and accelerated the flow of workers north from Mexico.[38] Despite the recent slowing of migration, the intensified flow of capital between Mexico and the United States suggests that the migration of workers from Mexico to the Midwest will not cease.

NOTES

[1] For overviews, see Juan Ramón García, "Midwestern Mexicanos in the 1920s: Issues, Questions and Directions," *Social Science Journal 19*, 2 (April 1982): 89-90; Gilbert Cárdenas, "Los Desarraigados: Chicanos in the Midwestern Region of the United States," *Aztlán* 7, 2 (Spring 1976): 153-86; Gilbert Cárdenas, "Who Are the Midwestern Chicanos: Implications for Chicano Studies," *Aztlán* 7, 2 (Spring 1976): 141-52.

[2] Important efforts to include Chicanos within immigration and ethnic history literature include Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History*. (New York: Free Press, 1983); and John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985).

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[4] Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region* 7, 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), p. 25.

[5] Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 63.

[6] W. Kim Heron, "Study Seeks Reason for Drop in Minority Enrollment," *Lansing State Journal,* April 18, 1979; "Chicano and Hispanic Student Concerns Advisory Committee, Michigan State University, Interim Report," June 1988; Elia Basurto, Doris P. Slesinger, and Eleanor P. Cautley, *Hispanics in Wisconsin, 1980—A Chart Book,* (Madison: Department of Rural Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Cooperative Extension Service, 1985); Kenneth A. Shaw, "Design for Diversity, University of Wisconsin System: A Report to the Board of Regents," April 7, 1988.

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[8] Michael Buroway, "The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor: Comparative Material from Southern Africa and the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 81, 5 (March 1976): 1050-87.

[9] Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region* (Austin: University of Texas Press, forthcoming).

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[11]On the work process, see David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 100 ff.; Taylor, *Mexican Labor*; Francisco A. Rosales, "Mexicanos in Indiana Harbor During the 1920s: From Prosperity to Depression," *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 4, 4 (Otoño 1976): 88-98; Ciro Sepúlveda, "The Origins of the Urban Colonias in the Midwest 1910-1930," *Revista-Chicano Riqueña*, 4, 4 (Otoño 1976): 99-109.

[12]Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, "Chicanos in Chicago: A Brief History," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 2, 4 (Winter 1975): 22-32; John McDowell, *A Study of Social and Economic Factors Relating to Spanish-Speaking People in the United States* (New York: Home Missions Council, 1927); George Edson, "Mexicans in the Northcentral States," (Bancroft Library, 1927); Norman D. Humphrey, "Employment Patterns of Mexicans in Detroit," *Monthly Labor Review* 61, 11 (November 1945): 913-24; Anita Edgar Jones, "Conditions Surrounding Mexicans in Chicago," (Master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1928), p. 76; Francisco Arturo Rosales and Daniel T. Simon, "Mexican Immigrant Experience in the Urban Midwest: East Chicago, Indiana, 1919-1945," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 72, 4 (December 1981): 333-57; Ciro Sepúlveda, "La Colonia del Harbor: A History of Mexicanos in East Chicago, Indiana, 1919-1932," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1976); Robert A. Slayton, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 180-83.

[13]Taylor, *Mexican Labor*, pp. 79, 167, 194, 198-99, 267.

[14]Ricardo Romo, "The Urbanization of Southwestern Chicanos in the Early Twentieth Century," *New Scholar* 6 (1977): 183-201; McDowell, *A Study*; Robert N. McLean, *The Northern Mexican* (New York: Home Missions Council, 1927); Edson, "Mexicans"; Paul Taylor to Irving Kaplan, 28 January 1938, RG 69, f: NBER Misc, National Archives.

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[19]Barrera, *Race and Class*, p. 62. The best extant study of Northern Colorado beets is Sara Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) pp. 127-61.

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[21]Daniel T. Simon, "Mexican Repatriation in East Chicago Indiana," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 2, 2 (Summer 1974): 11-23; Norman D. Humphrey, "Mexican Repatriation from Michigan: Public Assistance in Historical Perspective," *Social Service Review*, 15, 3 (September 1941): 497-513; Zaragoza Vargas, "Mexican Auto Workers at Ford Motor Company, 1918-1933," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1984).

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