Specialists in the ethnic history of the United States increasingly have come to recognize that persons of Mexican descent constitute a truly national minority whose presence extends far beyond the traditionally defined "Spanish Borderlands" region. In the Midwest and Great Plains, for example, significant Mexican\(^1\) colonias have existed in Chicago, Detroit, Gary, Omaha, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, and numerous smaller urban areas for as long as 75 years. Despite the number and longevity of these communities, scholars have undertaken relatively few systematic examinations of their history and internal dynamics. One historian recently decried the lack of a comprehensive history of people of Mexican descent in the Midwest; he challenged his colleagues to revise and reexamine existing studies, seek additional sources of information, and develop research models in order to produce a more accurate and comprehensive history of this group.\(^2\) Before such an encompassing synthesis is possible, however, considerably more spade work in specific localities throughout the region is necessary. An examination of the foundation and early development of the Kansas City\(^3\) colonia between 1900 and 1920 provides insights into the patterns and processes which marked the rise of significant Mexican immigrant settlements throughout the Great Plains, the Midwest, and elsewhere beyond the borderlands. This period witnessed the arrival and settlement of thousands of Mexican immigrants who, despite an alien and frequently hostile environment, survived prejudice and hardship, created institutions
which enabled them to maintain their cultural identity, and established an enduring ethnic community.

Although a few Mexicans lived in the Kansas City area during the 1800s, significant settlement did not occur until the twentieth century. This settlement was part of a broader pattern of Mexican migration to the interior of the United States. Before and after the turn of the century, Mexicans in their homeland experienced an oppressive combination of peonage, population growth, concentration of land ownership, stagnant wages, inflation, and general economic instability. These social and economic pressures annually forced thousands of campesinos to seek employment in the United States. Concomitantly, the rapid expansion of American agriculture, mining, and industry, and growingly restrictive immigration policies created increasing demands for unskilled labor not only in the contiguous southwestern border states but also in the Plains and the Midwest. Mexicans conveniently and willingly filled these requirements.

The Central Plateau region in Mexico—which includes the populous states of Guanajuato, Michoacán, Jalisco, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí—most sharply felt the effects of Mexico’s problems and provided the vast majority of Mexican workers and settlers in Kansas City and the Midwest during and after the period under consideration. Several Mexican railroad lines extended from the Central Plateau to Laredo and El Paso, Texas—major recruitment centers for Mexican labor along the border. When they reached the border, however, natives of the Central Plateau discovered that their countrymen from northern Mexico had saturated the labor market. As a result, labor agents recruited and dispatched them via the United States railway network to more distant distribution points. Kansas City emerged as the major interior employment and distribution center, feeding Mexican workers throughout the Plains, Midwest, and elsewhere.

Three major waves of immigration between 1900 and 1920 created the Mexican community in Kansas City. The first group of new immigrants came between 1900 and 1910 and consisted primarily of solos (transient, unaccompanied males). They usually worked for railroads, industries such as meatpacking, or in agriculture and typically returned to the border after completing their labor obligation. Since the Kansas City labor market could
not sustain most of these workers on a year-round basis before World War I, the number of Mexicans in the city fluctuated greatly. During this prewar period, however, the permanent barrios of Kansas City originated. After their contracts expired, some workers remained in the city. Railroad companies such as the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (Santa Fe); Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific (Rock Island); St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco); Missouri, Kansas and Texas (Katy); and Chicago, Burlington and Quincy (Burlington) permitted their workers to live in boxcar settlements. Other Mexicans in the urban area secured employment which allowed them to stay continuously, while some agricultural workers from the Plains and Midwest chose to winter in Kansas City rather than return to the border.

After the Mexican Revolution erupted in 1910, a second element, comprised of refugees seeking security, asylum, or economic opportunity, joined the migratory stream. The violence of the revolution discouraged many Mexicans from returning home or to the border and increased their tendency to remain. The upheaval, furthermore, expelled a more affluent class of Mexicans whose migration did not depend upon the labor market. Many of these immigrants were of the hacendado class or professionals, who commonly brought their families with them. Although they sometimes sought remunerative jobs during their stay in Kansas City, they did not engage in migrant labor and consequently augmented the more permanent Mexican population.

The third and most significant wave of Mexicans settled in Kansas City during World War I. After the outbreak of hostilities, immigration from Europe virtually ceased. Labor shortages and higher wages, plus an intensification of civil strife in Mexico, served to attract increasing numbers of Mexicans to Kansas City. The exemption of Mexicans from the Immigration Law of 1917, which had imposed a literacy test and a head tax, and assurances that Mexican men would not be required to serve in the armed forces of the United States further encouraged Mexican migration.⁶

During the war years, opportunities for better-paying, secure, and steady employment in meatpacking plants, construction, steel and automobile production, and other industries opened to Mexicans. Evidence suggests that this period was also an important
era of family migration and stable, long-term settlement in Kansas City. Judith Fincher Laird demonstrates that the social composition of the Argentine, Kansas, barrio changed dramatically as the relative proportions of females to males and children to adults increased sharply after 1915. She notes that children under eighteen comprised approximately 15 percent of the Mexican population in Argentine in 1915; ten years later it would reach 44.5 percent. Further indication of significant change in settlement patterns is the fact that in 1915 over 82 percent of the Mexican males in Argentine were boarders. By 1925, only 19 men in a total population of 566 held that status. After 1915, therefore, family units and extended family groups comprised the bulk of the Mexican settlement in Argentine. It seems reasonable to surmise that other barrios in Kansas City reflected similar characteristics as well.

The colonia in Kansas City encompassed six principal barrios—three in Kansas and three in Missouri. On the Kansas side, the largest was the Santa Fe railroad camp in Argentine. A second settlement arose along the tracks in the West Bottoms and Armourdale. A third was located in the old milling town of Rosedale, where the Frisco and the Katy railroads had established boxcar camps for their track workers. On the Missouri side, the barrios also had close ties to the railroad industry. The most important was an urban settlement on the Westside bluffs, overlooking the Kaw River. Mexicans first came to this area in 1909 to work on the construction of Union Station and continued to reside there after it was finished. The other barrios included a small railroad camp in the Burlington yard in North Kansas City and another in the eastern Sheffield district along the Blue River.

It is impossible to determine precisely the number of Mexicans residing in Kansas City during the period under consideration. Laird's excellent study of the Argentine barrio clearly demonstrates the deficiency of federal and state census data. These decennial statistics serve only as rough approximations of population and immigration trends. In 1900, federal census takers reported that 27 Mexicans lived in Kansas City (three in Kansas and 24 in Missouri). The total rose to 335 in 1910, with 102 on the Kansas side and 233 in Missouri. By 1920, the official count had reached 3,836—2,039
in Kansas and 1,797 in Missouri. Laird believes, however, that the censuses of 1910 and 1920 significantly undercounted Mexicans, and she convincingly argues that a more accurate total for the metropolitan area in 1920 would be approximately 10,000.9

Contemporary Anglo10 observers uniformly depicted members of the colonia as representatives of the unlettered, impoverished, peon class. Even a longstanding spokesman for Kansas City Mexicans would later remark that his compatriots were "illiterate laborers who eked out a living by working for the railroad, in the packing plants, and at the most menial jobs."11 Colonia residents, however, represented rather heterogeneous social and economic backgrounds. Though the large majority came from the campesino and laboring classes, Mexican immigrants included minor clerical, military and political functionaries, skilled miners and railroad employees, artisans, petty merchants, and other self-employed individuals. After 1914, a growing number of landowners, physicians, lawyers, engineers, and educators settled in Westside and elsewhere in Kansas City, Missouri.12 Except for a fortunate few, however, migration imposed broad social levelling. Even those of the "middle class" seldom spoke English; few professionals could pursue their careers, and employment was available in only the least desirable jobs. One writer has noted that "whether they had lower or middle-class backgrounds, Mexican immigrants, with the exception of a handful of professionals, were virtually reduced to the same level."13

The Anglo majority perceived Mexicans in distinctly unfavorable terms. The comments of municipal welfare agents, private charitable and religious organizations, even elite members of the colonia itself, project a patently negative stereotype of the Mexicans' low status, appearance, personal habits, and general lifestyle. Dr. Thomas E. Purcell, a Catholic layman who devoted much time and effort assisting the Westside barrio, later reflected upon his initial encounter with Mexicans in 1914:

"They were of the Peon class . . . . Their . . . clothing (the men) consisted of a pair of rough shoes, overalls, a shirt and a sombrero. It was their dress everyday of the week, including Sunday . . . they were curiosities, often not shaving or getting a haircut for weeks at
a time. The hovels in which they lived did not provide bathing facilities and with their dark coloring, they looked dirty and probably were.\textsuperscript{14}

In August 1913, the Board of Public Welfare of Kansas City, Missouri, published a report delineating the city's major social problems. The report described the colonia as being

commonly composed of a class of people who are shiftless and improvident . . . not acquainted with American language and customs . . . . Other workmen hold a prejudice against them on account of their racial characteristics. When injured they usually do not receive sufficient treatment in hospitals . . . . They frequently do not receive justice at the hands of the police and courts because they do not have an interpreter of their language. They do not readily become acquainted with American institutions and customs because there are not sufficient means available for them to learn our ideals and incentives for right living.\textsuperscript{15}

In surveying the "McClure flats" section of the city, the report stated that Mexicans were "for the most part, of low civilization . . . . They mingle and cohabit freely with negroes of the lowest type and frequently get into the courts."\textsuperscript{16} A group of volunteer social workers hoped that their activities would help the Mexicans "see standards of neatness and cleanliness" because "their ignorance and backwardness had affected their level of living, and values they placed upon hygiene of home and person needed to be raised."\textsuperscript{17}

Since Mexicans were the last major immigrant group to arrive in Kansas City, they competed with or ultimately displaced other ethnic groups in certain low-wage occupations in transportation, industry, and agriculture. Contemporary accounts, recent studies, and interviews with long-standing residents of the colonia demonstrate that almost all Mexican men worked for a railroad at one time or another. Prior to 1914, they typically held short-term, seasonal contracts. As a group, Mexicans comprised the lowest-paid strata. They performed menial, dirty, repetitive jobs, gradually replacing both the "old" and "new" European immigrants as well as native-born workers, who disdained such unappealing tasks. Since the construction of most major railroad lines had been completed prior to the influx of Mexican workers, they came to monopolize track
maintenance operations. Initially filling positions on extra gangs, they shuttled from place to place. Extra gang employment, however, frequently led to more stable positions on a section crew. Less often, Mexicans obtained work in the yards and shops. Despite the fact that railroads paid higher wages beyond the borderlands, many track workers became dissatisfied with their nomadic life style, deserted the railroads, and took other unskilled jobs in the region.

Reflecting the Santa Fe's growing dependence upon Mexican workers and an alarming turnover rate, in 1912 the company began to provide more suitable living quarters on railroad property for Mexican laborers and their families. The following year, the Santa Fe issued English-Spanish dictionaries to all foremen in order to facilitate better communication with their crews. By 1917, wartime labor shortages had boosted the wages to $2.25 per 10-hour day, and some railroad companies paid as much as $3.00. Opportunities increased for Mexicans in the higher-status, steadier shop positions as well. During the war, the Santa Fe and Rock Island even employed Mexican women as unskilled shop workers and track laborers. All of these developments stimulated more permanent residency in Kansas City.

By 1910, Mexicans had also gained employment in Kansas City meatpacking plants. Although Mexican workers would not be numerous until after 1920, one investigator has aptly noted that meatpacking, as well as railroad employment, was "basic for Mexicans" in Kansas City. Again, wartime labor shortages increased opportunities for work in packing houses, which generally held the added advantage of year-round employment. Mexicans in Kansas City also found work in a wide variety of private and municipal construction projects, on the traction lines, with the terminal company, on nearby farms and ranches, in stock yards and rendering plants, in mills, and in sundry service jobs. In some instances, they brought indigenous crafts to Kansas City. In 1915, at least 15 immigrants worked for one of their countrymen producing and selling Mexican hammocks.

Thousands of itinerant Mexicans utilized Kansas City as a base for cyclical migratory work patterns throughout the interior of the United States. Kansas City-based labor suppliers and company-
operated employment agencies dispatched Mexicans to Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Colorado, Oregon, Texas, and all points in between for work in railroad construction and maintenance; cotton, wheat, corn, sugar beet, and fruit harvests; public work projects; and a variety of industrial jobs. After completing contractual or seasonal obligations, Mexican laborers returned to Kansas City to await the next assignment.

The place and nature of employment and economic realities determined the location and quality of the Mexican immigrant's residence. In general, they occupied the worst types of housing in the least desirable sections of town. Most lived in or near the bottom lands between the two cities. This rugged district contained railroad yards and shops, packing houses, oil refineries, mills, stockyards, and soap and glue factories. The air lay heavy with noxious odors, smoke, dust, and noise.

Most railroad workers typically lived in boxcar camps. In these crude settlements, situated in the yards or on sidings, workers slept on straw or rough bunks. Even the "improved" housing which the Santa Fe furnished for its workers after 1912 consisted of uncomfortable shacks made from scrap pieces and cheap, second-hand materials including old ties, rails, and sheet metal. The company supplied no furniture, plumbing, or electrical facilities. Workers assigned to the yards often lived packed together in a single large building called a section house; others crammed into small two-room section huts. Initially, their peripatetic work life, low wages, and free or cheap housing restricted them to the railroad camps. Often, however, they were prevented from obtaining habitations outside the encampments. For example, the Burlington railroad provided boxcar quarters for its Mexican workers, but it did not permit them to live in a working-class residential district adjacent to the yard built by a concern of which the company was part owner.

The less spacially-segregated workers, who were not employed by the railroad companies, gradually replaced or joined other immigrant groups and a substantial Negro population in nearby neighborhoods, where they occupied small houses, tenements, cheap hotels and other flophouses. Many solos took lodgings with other Mexicans and their families. Public welfare officers in Kansas
City, Missouri, were appalled at the conditions in which Mexicans lived. In 1913, they determined that most Mexicans resided in "plague spots . . . cursed with crime, immorality, disease and contagion, bad housing and other evils." Former one-family residences were filled with as many families as they could accommodate. In November 1907, the growing slum conditions in areas Mexicans inhabited had moved the West Side Council to request that police visit the houses and arrest those found living in unsanitary circumstances. A police raid of one residence resulted in the arrest of 13 Mexicans. This action prompted an immediate protest from the Mexican consul. He complained that landlords refused to spend the money required to upgrade their substandard properties and ameliorate the miserable living conditions. He extracted a promise from the district attorney to prevent any similar raids in the future.

The worst living conditions existed in the cheap flophouses that Mexican transient laborers often patronized. These establishments were uniformly overcrowded, unclean, and unsanitary. They lacked privacy, bathing facilities, and toilet accommodations. With no place but their beds or cots to spend their idle hours, the men collected on corners and curbs or passed their time in pool halls and saloons. The Westside barrio was a district that lacked paved streets, adequate garbage collection, and sewers. Along Twenty-Third and Twenty-Fourth Streets—the heart of the barrio—city welfare investigators reported:

... we find Mexicans living with their families. As their standard of living is so much lower than ours, the landlord keeps them feeling perfectly at home by lowering the standard of housing to that to which they are accustomed .... Needless to say, everything is filthy.

Low status, endemic poverty, poor living conditions, language barriers, an alien environment, and general insecurity led to sporadically aggressive, often violent, behavior. Although criminality was perhaps no greater among Mexicans in Kansas City than it was among the city's other groups in similarly depressed circumstances, robberies, assaults, murders, and other social disturbances were common in the colonia. Most reports of aggressive behavior involving Mexicans reveal that the conflicts arose among
fellow countrymen. A recent study of 43 violent incidents occurring between 1914 and 1920 indicates that only 13 cases involved one or more non-Mexican participants.  

Personal conflicts frequently had tragic results because many Mexican men carried some kind of weapon, usually a knife or pistol. Such a practice was a violation of local laws, and Kansas City judges imposed heavy fines upon transgressors because the incidents were so common. In 1916, the Mexican consul secured the release of several groups of Mexicans who had been arrested by convincing the authorities that the men were ignorant of the laws. He announced, however, that he would not continue to intervene if Mexicans continued to violate the law.  

Robbery was a principal motive for serious crime in the colonia. The amount of money stolen was often trifling—one Mexican was fatally shot for the three dollars in his pocket. On occasion, however, the sum was as high as one hundred dollars or more. Mexican workers' inexperience and inability to speak English often discouraged them from utilizing banking institutions. Consequently, they carried all their money with them—perhaps an entire season's savings—and were tempting targets. Since Mexicans commonly wired money by postal money order to support their wives, parents, or other dependents who remained in Mexico, such losses threatened not only the workers' own means of survival but also that of their families at home.  

Other causes of violence in the colonia included romantic rivalries, family disputes, and drunkenness. Drinking was a pastime which frequently led to conflicts. There were a number of cantinas in or near the Westside barrio, and they, along with billiard parlors, became the scenes of recurrent confrontations. A favorite gathering place among Mexicans was the Hotel Paraiso in Westside. The fact that a number of American prostitutes made the establishment their headquarters undoubtedly added to its popularity. Police raided the "Paradise" on repeated occasions and arrested numerous Mexicans on various charges. Its history of scandal and drunken revelry ultimately led local authorities to close the hotel in 1916. Twenty-Fourth Street in Westside was another area which prompted considerable police attention and vigilance. Residents of the colonia, however, complained that overzealous law enforce-
ment officers mistreated Mexicans, accosted and frisked them without due cause, and harassed women and children. 38

Negative stereotyping, prejudice, and exaggerated reports of criminality engendered discrimination and segregation. Although the barrios were never completely enclosed ethnic islands, Mexicans remained physically and culturally isolated from the Anglo community at-large. They routinely faced exclusion from certain residential areas, restaurants, theaters, churches, and recreational facilities throughout the city. A Protestant missionary group working among the Mexicans declared that "they were hounded and ostracized, and no one apparently took any interest in either their moral or social welfare.... 39 Another contemporary commented that "they were not accepted by American society even in its lowest form." 40

The Mexicans' dark skin subjected them to racial discrimination analogous to that which Negroes experienced. In Kansas City, Kansas, Bell Memorial Hospital placed darker complexioned Mexicans in Negro wards and lighter skinned Mexicans in "white" units. 41 In Kansas City, Missouri, Mexicans bitterly resented their assignment to Negro wards or annexes in the city's hospitals and clinics and the custom of burying Mexicans in segregated cemeteries. In January 1916, after the Mexican consul's intervention, Mayor Henry J. Yost proclaimed that such practices would terminate. Mexicans rejoiced that the "inhuman practice of treating Mexicans like Negroes" had ended, but they pledged further protests against the insulting portrayal of Mexicans in moving pictures and the actions of "police chiefs and judges who mercilessly mistreated" Mexicans. 42 The new guidelines evidently did not endure. In the early 1920s, hospitals and clinics still refused to admit Mexicans as "white" patients. The institutions' personnel declared that the Mexicans' inability to speak English, rather than their race, had determined the policies. 43

Despite the fact that Mexicans were almost uniformly Roman Catholic, Catholic authorities responded belatedly and ambivalently to their spiritual and physical needs. Initially, religious officials did not promote membership in local churches. Established parishes lacked Spanish-speaking priests, and parishioners did not welcome the newcomers. Some Mexicans refused to attend Mass because
Anglos regarded them as curiosities and laughed at their dirty or unusual dress and disheveled appearance. A year after he ultimately gave permission for a priest to begin a mission in Westside, Bishop Thomas E. Lillis revealed both a general ignorance of their circumstances and a clear intention to provide separate facilities for Mexicans. In response to the Spanish Discalced Carmelites' request to create a foundation in Kansas City, he stated:

I do not know how the priest is doing here with the Mexicans . . . . I will be glad to have you build a church and house to be for the benefit of the Mexicans. The church should be in the midst of the Mexican Colony and for them only . . . . There must be a great many of them in and around Kansas City.

In spite of widespread exclusion in other respects, Mexican children freely attended public and parochial schools in or near the barrios. Dr. Purcell commented that the two public schools near the Westside barrio were "filled with Mexican children." After 1920, Mexican youngsters in Missouri continued to attend their neighborhood public schools, but Kansas City, Kansas, established rigidly segregated educational facilities for them.

One salient result of such prevalent discrimination and isolation was the colonia residents' marked disinterest in seeking United States citizenship—a common characteristic of Mexican immigrant behavior in other parts of the United States as well. In Kansas City, only Greek and Russian immigrants had a lower naturalization rate than Mexicans. Local government officials were clearly aware of this phenomenon. In 1919, a federal court officer in Kansas City, Kansas, stated that the naturalization of Mexicans was virtually an "unheard of proceeding." He estimated that only two Mexicans a year applied for first papers. Prior to 1920, not a single Mexican became a United States citizen through the federal court in Kansas City, Kansas. Apparently only about a dozen did so in the Missouri federal court during that same time. This refusal to acquire United States citizenship placed Mexicans outside the local political processes and deprived them of an opportunity to exert pressure on local authorities to protect their rights.
Given the segregation and discrimination that citizen minorities—most notably Blacks—experienced in the Kansas City, Mexicans could not reasonably expect that naturalization would mitigate the prejudice and exclusion they experienced in housing, jobs, and social life. The few who did seek naturalization encountered ridicule and harassment from their countrymen. Even the Mexican consuls discouraged naturalization, believing that Mexicans enjoyed greater protection as aliens than as citizens.

As the official representatives of the Mexican government, the consuls were to look after Mexican citizens and business interests within their jurisdiction. Located in Kansas City, Missouri, the consular district included a portion of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Since Kansas City had only limited business contacts with Mexico, especially after the outbreak of the revolution, the consuls' single most important duty was to oversee the needs of their compatriots.

The consuls performed this task with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success. After 1910, protracted political turmoil in Mexico and strained relations with the United States caused frequent changes in consular officials, reflecting the kaleidoscopic character of the Mexican government itself. This factor of instability alone limited the consulate's effectiveness in dealing with local conditions. Prior to 1914, consuls apparently concerned themselves with problems in the colonia only infrequently. In September, 1914, a group of Mexicans in Kansas City successfully petitioned the government of Venustiano Carranza to remove Consul Eduardo Velarde, charging that he was a counter-revolutionary and an opponent of the Constitutionalist program. More importantly, they complained that he was indifferent to the plight of Mexicans in Kansas City, "despised" and "did not appreciate" his own people, did nothing to combat the economic abuse of Mexican workers, used the consulate as a business office and commercially exploited his countrymen, and refused to promote patriotism in the colonia or cooperate with Mexicans who were trying to do so.

The petition clearly outlines what the colonia expected of the consuls. Some of these officials were active in their support of local Mexican organizations and helped sponsor patriotic celebrations.
They also provided interpreters for Mexicans involved in court proceedings, helped secure insurance payments or indemnities for injured laborers and their families, supplied employment information, held money for safekeeping, and performed a variety of other services. The colonia residents clearly viewed the consul as their principal spokesman in Kansas City and official liaison to their homeland. It appears that most Mexicans were not so much concerned about a consul's particular political affiliation as his effectiveness and willingness to represent the interests of the colonia. They recognized that he, more than anyone else, had an access to the local power structure that no other Mexican possessed. Although consuls often did serve as effective intermediaries between the colonia and local officials and did help resolve particular disputes or seek redress for specific grievances, they did not measurably alter the essential status or condition of Mexicans in Kansas City.

The attitudes and conditions that diminished their opportunities to interact with Anglo society forced colonia residents to turn inward. Between 1900 and 1920, they relied primarily upon one another to seek and share the rewards and benefits of community life by developing their own ethnic institutions and activities. The arrival of Spanish-speaking priests, who had fled the virulent anticlericalism of the Mexican Revolution, prompted the creation of the first Mexican Catholic parish in Kansas City. In 1914, Father José Muñoz, a Spanish priest who had escaped hanging and fled Mexico the previous year, and Father Cirilio Corbato, an exiled Spanish Discalced Carmelite, established a storefront church in a vacant house in Westside. When their cramped facilities could not accommodate the growing number of communicants, members of the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Men's Club helped the priests acquire a larger building. Attendance at Mass soon grew to several hundred, as Mexicans from throughout the city "filled the street and adjoining yards and knelt during the entire ceremony on the sidewalk and pavement." In 1917, the Men's Club acquired a second building to serve as a parish school. In September, two Mexican members of the Sisters of St. Joseph opened the school for 54 children in grades one through six. Female Catholic public school teachers offered English classes for children and adults in
the evenings and on Saturdays. In 1919, the Men's Club purchased the vacant Swedish Immanuel Lutheran Church building in Westside and converted its large basement into a three-room elementary school. Dedicated on October 5, 1919, Our Lady of Guadalupe became the principal religious and educational center of the colonia.

In 1919, a group of Catholic laywomen founded the Agnes Ward Amberg Club, inspired by a Chicago woman's work among Italian immigrants. Devoted to both religious and social purposes, the club worked closely with Our Lady of Guadalupe parish, organized a Sunday school, taught English classes, conducted a health clinic and home visit program, created a lending library, and distributed food and clothing to needy families. They oversaw a variety of recreational and handicraft activities for Mexican children including sports, sewing, weaving, clay modeling, music, and folk dancing.

Various Protestant denominations also responded to the religious and social needs of the colonia. During the especially severe winter of 1912-1913, when many Mexican families suffered unemployment, hunger, and cold, a group of women associated with the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) of the Fifth District in Kansas City, Missouri, opened a soup kitchen in an abandoned store on Twenty-Fourth Street. They fed hundreds of men, women, and children and conducted a Sunday school. In 1917, the group established a permanent mission with the creation of the Mexican Christian Institute (commonly called the Instituto Cristiano) in Westside. Reverend and Mrs. R.G. Estill, a Spanish-speaking Anglo minister and former missionary in Mexico, oversaw the institute's activities. In addition to the customary religious services and classes, the institute supplied interpreters, offered job referrals, provided food, clothing, medical and dental assistance to the needy, and wrote letters for the illiterate. By 1920, membership in the congregation reached about 50. Other Protestant churches established specifically for Mexicans included Westside's Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana; the Protestant Evangelical Misión Mexicana in the Sheffield area, which offered religious services, Sunday school, English lessons, and sewing classes; and the Iglesia Evangélica Mexicana in Armourdale.
services apparently heightened religious tensions within the colonia. An Anglo Catholic layman noted derisively that

The non-Catholic church workers of the whole city were engaged in trying to save those poor ‘benighted’ people by trying to get them into their churches. Am glad to say that their converts were few and not of a type that were a credit to the Mexican people.60

On the other hand, after a group of Protestants (Mexican and Anglo) acquired ownership of the colonia’s newspaper in 1919, they initiated a scathing attack upon the Catholic church and clergy. One article condemned the Mexican practice of "rendering homage to the Catholic clergy." It charged that the church in Mexico had always cooperated with the great landowners to oppress the people, that priests had uniformly discouraged education and preached fatalistic submission to oppression and blind adherence to church dogma, and that priests were "enemies of the progress of our race" and desired only to keep the people "oppressed, ignorant, and passive."61 The paper accused priests in Kansas City of forbidding Mexican children to attend the public schools "because they are Protestant." It also charged that discipline in Our Lady of Guadalupe’s parochial school was cruelly harsh: "We have seen three or four children with their little faces . . . red and inflamed as a result of the mistreatment received at the school." The paper claimed that the "black robes" wanted to withdraw the children from public schools in order to "continue holding this poor race, who has so long supported them, in ignorance."63 Although these sentiments reveal that religious differences did create divisions among Kansas City Mexicans, the paucity of available data on the subject does not permit a clear understanding of their extent or ultimate impact upon colonia society.

Despite such intra-ethnic conflicts, enforced isolation from Anglo society and institutions spurred Mexicans to establish a number of patriotic, mutualista, and social organizations to meet their fundamental needs for recognition, fellowship, recreation, and economic security.63 In July 1914, during a celebration commemorating the death of Benito Juárez, a Westside group decided to establish the first exclusively Mexican national society, the Unión Mexicana Benito Juárez (UMBJ). They rented a place on Twenty-
Fourth Street and recruited members from throughout the colonia. The UMBJ later added two women’s auxiliary groups—Las Hijas de Juárez and the Sociedad Mexicana de Señoras y Señoritas—and at least one branch organization in Topeka. Although its leadership was comprised largely of affluent professionals and their families, the UMBJ professed the manifold goal of aiding Mexicans in distress, protecting their countrymen from abuse, combatting negative stereotypes, and promoting ethnic unity.

At the UMBJ’s regular Sunday afternoon meetings, which commonly attracted 100 or more participants, members sang patriotic and popular Mexican songs, presented recitations, speeches, and musical shows, discussed literary works, and heard lectures on such wide-ranging topics as psychological disorders, personal hygiene, venereal diseases, the evils of alcohol, and infant care. The group held a variety of charity and fund-raising activities such as dances, concerts, and dinner parties. Although the organization did collect money for the needy, its leading members apparently required little charity themselves. Another major activity of the UMBJ was the organization of festivities recognizing Mexican national holidays such as the Cinco de Mayo and 16 de Septiembre (Mexican Independence Day). Hundreds of Mexicans from throughout the colonia attended these demonstrations of national celebration and allegiance.

Consistent with its goals of defending the rights of Mexicans and the honor of their homeland, over the years the UMBJ actively protested the Santa Fe railroad’s mistreatment of Mexican workers, encouraged Mexicans to join labor unions, and established a commission to improve the teaching of Spanish in the public schools. Although evidence indicates that the organization achieved few, if any, of its immediate aims in Kansas City, one of the group’s initial activities did bring prompt, tangible results. In September 1914, the UMBJ spearheaded the movement to replace Consul Eduardo Vélarde with someone more sympathetic to colonia needs. A petition drive seeking Vélarde’s removal was organized by Manuel A. Urbina, president of the UMBJ. The petitioners asked the Mexican government to appoint as consul Dr. Pedro F. Osorio, the principal founder and later president of the society. In October, the Constitutionalist government acceded to
the demand by naming Osorio to head the Kansas City consular district.\textsuperscript{70}

A variety of other exclusively Mexican societies were formed before 1920. In 1917, the Kansas City chapter of the National Benevolent Society began to offer sickness and death benefits to its members. The \textit{Sociedad Mutualista Mexicana}, established in 1918, provided its nearly 200 members similar services. The \textit{Casino Mexicano}, which had well over 200 members, was an essentially elite social club. The \textit{Club de Madres Mexicanas} studied English, sewing, and modern housekeeping methods. Women in the \textit{Círculo Literario} discussed recent works written in both English and Spanish. The \textit{Club Mexicano de Kansas City} (Kansas) held weekly dances, sponsored national celebrations, and established a small library.\textsuperscript{71}

Although there does not appear to have been any attempt to unite these various groups into a single, more powerful organization, it is likely that there was considerable overlapping membership. The orientation and content of UMBJ meetings and the activities of such groups as the Casino Mexicano and the Club Literario, however, suggest a degree of educational and economic privilege enjoyed by only a small elite and inconsistent with the status of the vast majority of colonia residents. Except for the strictly \textit{mutualista} activities, therefore, most Mexican organizations represented the interests of only a small segment of colonia society. The petition drive to replace Velarde does indicate, however, that the elite could marshal the support of their working-class compatriots. Many who supported the drive to remove the consul were illiterates who had someone else sign the petition for them. It is not clear at this time how long any of the various organizations endured, but they were, significantly, the only institutions in the colonia whose creative initiative came wholly from the Mexicans themselves.

As the establishment of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and the UMBJ reveal, by 1920 the Westside barrio had become the focal point of colonia institutions and activities. It occupied a key location beside the railroad and street railway systems and near places of employment in the industrialized lowlands and in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, whose well-integrated Metropol-
itan Street Railway System, which crisscrossed both cities, served to create a unified urban complex and made Westside a central location for all Mexicans in the greater Kansas City area. Since there was little vertical integration of the rail lines on the Kansas side, Mexicans in such places as Argentine could reach Westside and downtown Kansas City, Missouri, more easily than they could downtown Kansas City, Kansas. Colonia residents living in barrios outside the streetcar system could walk to Westside.72

Because of its favorable location, Westside also became the preferred site for scores of Mexican-operated business enterprises that had primarily or exclusively Mexican clientele. The most intensively commercialized district stretched along Twenty-Fourth Street. Here, Mexicans patronized a wide variety of commercial and professional establishments. Hotels and rooming houses offered accommodations. Restaurants, confectioneries, pool halls, and movie theaters provided food and recreation. United States-trained Mexican physicians and pharmacies with Mexican personnel attended to medical needs. Mercantile companies and currency exchanges offered financial facilities. Lawyers, printers, labor agents, transfer and storage companies, bakers, barbers, and tailors supplied their services. Artists, musicians, voice instructors, photographers, book dealers, English and Spanish teachers, and many others sought the patronage of their countrymen.73

The creation of commercial enterprises represents another phase in the transition of the Mexican settlements from a rough collection of work camps to a more unified ethnic community. The availability of goods and services within the colonia's familiar milieu diminished Mexicans' need to interact with the larger community and, as a result, intensified their psychological and physical isolation from Anglo society. Certainly, such separation further inhibited their ability to confront and resolve the problems Mexicans faced in Kansas City. But the nascent social infrastructure provided an environment which nurtured, supported, and protected the immigrants as they struggled to survive in an unresponsive and hostile setting.

El Cosmopolita, a Spanish-language newspaper published in Kansas City, reveals valuable insights into the dynamics of colonia life prior to 1920. In August 1914, Manuel and Juan Urbina founded
this four-page weekly, which for years proudly claimed to be "the only Mexican newspaper" published beyond the borderlands. Reflecting comprehensive objectives of ethnic solidarity, the editors sought to unite the Mexicans in Kansas City, inform their readers of Mexican and international events, protect the interests of the colonia, and defend and uphold the national honor and dignity of Mexico. In addition to news items and editorials, the paper contained a literary page, cultural features, biographical sketches, classified advertisements, announcements, personal ads, and an extensive employment section which listed job opportunities, wages, and contacts throughout the United States. Although its editors consistently claimed to be absolutely independent of any political faction or party, throughout its entire existence El Cosmopolita was a decided, at times strident, supporter of Venustiano Carranza and his Constitutionalist movement in Mexico.

Over the years, El Cosmopolita devoted special attention to affairs in the colonia. Editorializing in front-page stories, the paper detailed the plight of immigrants who were victims of fraud, robbery, abuse, and discrimination. Editors exposed enganchadores (labor contractors) who exploited workers, insurance companies that cheated clients, casas de cambio (money exchanges) which defrauded Mexicans sending money to their families in Mexico, railroad companies that mistreated workers, police authorities who abused and harassed Mexicans, and public and private institutions that discriminated against them.

The paper frequently noted, however, that prejudice and discrimination in Kansas City often resulted from the Mexicans' own ignorance of the language, laws, and customs of the United States. Often adopting a moralistic tone, El Cosmopolita chastised Mexicans for wasting their time and money in pool halls, cantinas, and other centers of vice.

This critical editorial posture suggests that the elite believed that their compatriots' unacceptable behavior contributed to the prejudice and negative stereotyping that all Mexicans experienced. While elite-sponsored organizations and functions underscored their desire to promote the idea that Mexicans were an educated, cultured, and civilized people, the group condemned actions which
belied that image and diminished their own stature in the eyes of the Anglo majority.

Numerous editorial pronouncements in *El Cosmopolita* parallel ideas and programs which the American Progressives advanced at the same time. The paper encouraged immigrant children and adults to take advantage of educational opportunities, learn English, acquire business and technical skills, and develop habits of good citizenship. The ultimate goals of the Progressives were to Americanize the newcomers, open to them a richer life in the United States, and allow them to become productive and participating American citizens. At no time, however, did *El Cosmopolita* actively promote either assimilation into American society or the acquisition of citizenship. The paper's constant theme was that Mexicans were in the United States only temporarily and would consequently return to their homeland. They should utilize their time effectively in order to develop new knowledge and skills that they could employ later to enhance the progress and prosperity of Mexico.

Unfortunately typical of most newspapers established by Mexican immigrant groups at the time, *El Cosmopolita* suffered from a precarious financial base throughout its half decade of existence. Within the colonia, the number of Mexicans literate even in Spanish was small. Local advertising revenue was inadequate, and the newspaper evidently always operated at a loss. During its most vigorous period, *El Cosmopolita* survived only through subsidization by its Anglo owners' other business interests. By early 1919, when yet another group from within the colonia took over its operation, *El Cosmopolita* began a rapid period of decline. In November 1919, the paper ceased publication with its two hundred and seventy-fifth issue.

By 1920, Mexican religious, social, economic, and cultural institutions in Kansas City created a fragile network of relationships which formed the initial bonds of ethnic cohesion. Within this framework the conscious awareness that they shared a common tradition, culture, and lifestyle strengthened their resolve to develop and maintain an increasing degree of unity and fellowship. Between 1900 and 1920, the Kansas City colonia had gradually evolved from a crude collection of transient workers' encampments
to a readily identifiable ethnic settlement. Rapidly changing circumstances in the United States, Mexico, and Europe had provided a unique conjunction of forces that pushed and pulled thousands of Mexican immigrants into alien, and at times inhospitable, surroundings. Although most of these early immigrants ultimately returned to Mexico, a more extensive and permanent movement to Kansas City would follow during the 1920s. The "first generation," however, had marked the way, laid the foundations, and created the institutions that would provide an ambience of familiarity and security. The "second generation" in Kansas City would encounter natives—perhaps relatives and friends—from their own region in Mexico, who spoke their own language, participated in familiar social and religious institutions, and shared an environment that would facilitate permanent accommodation to, if not integration with, the dominant Anglo culture.
NOTES

1 For the purposes of this paper, the term "Mexican" shall refer to both Mexican-born and US-born persons of Mexican descent, unless specifically indicated otherwise. For the period under discussion, evidence clearly indicates that the overwhelming majority of those in the colonia in Kansas City were born in Mexico. Their ranks clearly included an indeterminable number of persons who had been born in the United States—a proportion of the community that would increase greatly in the years after 1920.


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


"Anglo" is used in this paper to identify those people who were neither Mexican nor Negro.

Kansas City Journal-Post, 26 August 1934.
"Laird, "Argentine, Kansas," 91-100; *El Cosmopolita* contains numerous biographical sketches, personal features, and scattered references which reveal the varied social, economic, and political composition of colonia residents.

"Lin, "Voluntary Kinship," 58.

Thomas E. Purcell, "Mexican Story," Typescript, Guadalupe Center Collection, Part III, File 11, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri, 1.


Carman, "Foreign Language Units of Kansas," 216, 893.

"Laird, "Argentine, Kansas," passim; *El Cosmopolita*, passim.

*El Cosmopolita*, 3 April 1915.


"Laird, "Argentine, Kansas," 47.


*Kansas City Times*, 6 November 1907.

Consulado de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos to Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, Kansas City, Missouri, 7 Noviembre 1907, "Mexicanos. Buenos oficios del Cónsul de Kansas en su favor," Expediente L-E-1398, Archivo
Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter cited as AHSRE), México, D.F., 1-3.

39Board of Public Welfare, Social Prospectus, 6, 36-37, 58, 69, 75.

30Board of Public Welfare, Social Prospectus, 63.


32See, e.g., El Cosmopolita, 20 November 1915; 11 March 1916; and 21 June 1919.

33El Cosmopolita, 20 May 1916.

34El Cosmopolita, 1 January 1917.


38El Cosmopolita, 6 March 1915.


40Kansas City Journal-Post, 26 August 1934.


42El Cosmopolita, 1 January 1916.


44Purcell, "Mexican Story," 1.

"Purcell, "Mexican Story," 1.


"Purcell, "Mexican Story," 1-2; Corbato, "Relación," 11-12; Dorothy Gallagher, "Introduction to Scrapbook of Guadalupe Center, 1922-1944," Typescript, Guadalupe Center Collection, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri, n.d., 3-4; Duncan and Alonzo, Guadalupe Center, 29.

"Purcell, "Mexican Story," 2.

"Purcell, "Mexican Story," 2; El Cosmopolita, 4 August 1917; 29 September 1917.

"Gallagher, "Introduction," 5; Purcell, "Mexican Story," 2-5; Duncan and Alonzo, Guadalupe Center, 21-29.

"The Agnes Ward Amberg Club (n.p.: December, 1919), 1. This bulletin may be found in the Guadalupe Center Collection, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri; Purcell, "Mexican Story," 4-5; Duncan and Alonzo, Guadalupe Center, 31-36; Hoffman, "Services Rendered," 30-33, 46-53.

"Mexican Christian Institute," 1-2; Duncan and Alonzo, Guadalupe Center, 15-20; Kansas City Journal, 22 January 1922; Lin, "Voluntary Kinship," 31-32.

"See scattered announcements and advertisements in El Cosmopolita.

"Purcell, "Mexican Story," 1.

Between August 22, 1914, and November 15, 1919, sixty-six establishments advertised or were mentioned in *El Cosmopolita*. These enterprises included: Rooming Houses (7), Restaurants (5), Pool Halls (4), Mercantile Companies (4), Barbers (3), Pharmacies (3), Spanish Teachers (3), Labor Agents (3), Currency Exchanges (2), Hotels (2), Physicians (2), Lawyers (2), English Teachers (2), Tailors (2), Movie Theaters (2), Transfer and Storage Companies (2), also Second-hand Store, Painter/Decorator, Seamstress, Commercial Cooperative, Bakery, Book Dealer, Voice Instructor, Artist, Musical Group, Photographer,
Grocery Store, Confectionery, Tobacco Shop, Bible Salesman, Printer, Sewing Machine Salesman, General Merchandise Store, and Newspaper—all one each. It is, of course, most likely that a number of other concerns existed but did not advertise in the paper. See *El Cosmopolita*, passim, and Laird, "Argentine, Kansas," 51-53.

"*El Cosmopolita*, 22 August 1914.

"*El Cosmopolita*, 29 July 1916, 22 February 1919, 8 February 1919, 6 March 1915, 1 January 1916.

"*El Cosmopolita*, 25 May 1918.

"*El Cosmopolita*, 7 November 1914; 27 March 1915; 25 May 1918; 4 March 1916; 1 February 1919.

"*El Cosmopolita*, 11 October 1919; 7 October 1916; 15 June 1918.

*Jack Danciger, A Kansas City, Missouri, businessman, owned and/or edited *El Cosmopolita* between October 1915, and January 1919. The vast majority of advertising space during this time was devoted to promoting Danciger’s mercantile company, distillery, breweries, and other enterprises. Danciger had business ties to Venustiano Carranza’s family, actively supported the Constitutionalist government, and served as Mexican Consul in Kansas City between 1915 and 1916. Ignacio Richkarday, *Jack Danciger: His Life and Work*, trans. Ann Marie Swenson (n.p.: 1963) provides biographical data, but it must be used with caution.