

# “FAITHFUL HARD-WORKING MEXICAN HANDS”: MEXICANA WORKERS DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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When you think of the streets that have been paved, the ditches that have been dug, the clothes that have been washed by faithful hard-working Mexican hands in this town, how can you imagine the town without them?<sup>1</sup>

When El Paso writer Anna Brand posed this question to readers of the *El Paso Herald Post* in the winter of 1931, the Great Depression was well under way. Two years into the Depression, El Paso, the “Queen City of the Southwest” and the most important port of entry for Mexican immigrants since the latter part of the nineteenth century, was suffering. Boasting the third largest concentration of Mexicans in the United States and the highest population of any U.S. border city, El Paso had experienced considerable prosperity through the 1920s, due in large part to a booming industrial economy and the expansion of commercial agriculture. Employers could not imagine themselves without Mexican workers. Brand had not overstated her point—Mexican workers had indeed built the city.<sup>2</sup>

Immigrants had been drawn to El Paso’s increasingly industrialized economy since the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the city’s proximity to the largest Mexican border city, Ciudad Juárez, just across the river, made accessible a significant population of commuter workers as well. As the city grew and prospered, the employment opportunities also swelled. Mexican women found work primarily in the service sector, as domestics, laundresses and seamstresses. Increasingly, however, they also took manufacturing jobs, particularly in the textile and clothing industries. Because Mexicans were most visible in their role as workers, debates over identity and struggles for equality often revolved around issues of work. These debates, carried on both outside the Mexican community as well as within it, took on new meanings as the Great Depression brought tremendous social, economic, and demographic changes.<sup>3</sup>

The Depression was a decade of transformation for the Mexican community in the United States. Almost half a million Mexicans and their U.S.-born children repatriated, both voluntarily and under pressure. Spurred on by changing demographics, issues of identity crystallized within El Paso's Mexican community. Already a heterogeneous mix of both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, the community incorporated additional levels of complexity because of its location on the international border. Alliances within the community were multiple; its members often advocated opposing views based on economic class, self-identity, and a variety of other factors. Paradoxically, while the Depression would worsen the economic conditions of Mexican workers, taking them "a step backward" as one scholar has contended, it also created new opportunities and challenges for the Mexican community in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

El Paso and its people felt the effects of the 1929 economic collapse deeply—high unemployment, dwindling local resources, poverty, and the massive problems brought on by the city's new role as the most important port of exit for repatriating Mexicans. Although Anglo American antagonism towards Mexican workers had existed for decades, the economic crisis aggravated the conflict. Increasingly, Mexican workers were branded as the cause of unemployment. Ironically, similar sentiments existed within the Mexican American community itself as frictions arose between Mexican American workers and immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

El Paso's labor force, long dependent on the work of Mexican men and women, reflected the make-up of the state's labor force. In 1930, more Mexican women and men were employed in Texas than in any other state; California, its nearest competitor, came in a distant second. Mexican women composed a significant portion of the local labor force. By 1920, immigrant women represented almost half of the female labor force in El Paso, and even this statistic understates their importance, since it does not take into account U.S.-born Mexican women workers nor the number of women commuting daily from Juárez to work in El Paso.<sup>6</sup>

Although heavily concentrated in personal and domestic service, some Mexican women had found employment in El Paso's manufacturing sector since the turn of the century. As manufacturing grew, so did the number of Mexican women working in the factories. By 1930 Mexican women were entering industry in larger and larger numbers, but working conditions for many of these

women were dismal. In 1933, the Texas Department of Labor investigated the claims of a local physician, M. Hernández Ballados, that some manufacturers were paying their employees as little as ten cents per week. The doctor argued that this situation was not unusual for women who were paid on a piece-rate basis. According to some workers, the highest paid employee in the factory earned ninety cents; check stubs were produced to verify the claim. The Department of Labor's investigation found that approximately 2,000 women were paid less than five dollars for six days' work. In addition, the department determined that some employers were violating state law, working women for nine hours a day. The women, fearing their employers would blacklist them, were hesitant to complain to the authorities.<sup>7</sup>

Low wages and poor working conditions were the rule, not the exception, in other areas of women's work as well. After 1900, laundries became increasingly important employers of Mexican women. And while they provided employment opportunities for these Mexican women, the inadequate pay and poor working conditions also provided the impetus for early unionization efforts. El Paso's laundries, long strongholds of the dual-wage system, had employed distinct "Mexican" and "American" wages. Testifying before the Texas Industrial Welfare Commission in 1919, the manager of the Acme Laundry argued that the wage differentials were warranted by cultural differences between Anglo American and Mexican workers.<sup>8</sup>

We are confronted with the deep seated differences in temperament existing between Anglo-Saxon and mixed Latin races, the differences between the progressiveness, initiativeness and energy of the former and the backwardness of the Mexican.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding this testimony, however, in that same year, Mexican women demonstrated the very initiative and energy they had been deemed lacking—they organized a laundry workers' union. Despite the American Federation of Labor's longstanding opposition to both unskilled and women workers, the laundry workers' union organized under its auspices in 1919.<sup>10</sup> The union, in keeping with the AFL's anti-immigrant policy, differentiated between Mexican immigrant women and Mexican American women. As *The Labor Advocate* reported, the union's membership comprised mostly Mexican American women, "residents of El Paso and citizens of the nation."<sup>11</sup> Inevitably, the failure to

organize immigrant and commuter workers as well undermined the union's work and its efforts were short-lived. There were always other women, sometimes by the hundreds, willing to take the jobs, regardless of the low pay and poor working conditions. This fact was not lost on employers. On the eve of the Depression, some laundries were sending buses to the border daily to pick up commuter workers.<sup>12</sup>

Conditions in the laundries did not improve in the decade and a half following the 1919 formation of the laundry workers' union, and in the fall of 1933, workers again organized in an effort to better their situation.<sup>13</sup> Union organizer and Mexican American activist Charles Porrás characterized the laundries as "the worst offenders of any of them when it came to cheap wages." Porrás recalled that one county commissioner lost his political office when it became known that he ran one of the offending laundries.<sup>14</sup> Although any mention of the laundry workers' union soon disappeared from the pages of local newspapers, it is fair to assume that this Depression-era union confronted the same obstacles as its predecessor—a huge surplus of women available to take work at extremely low wages.

It is telling that one of the union's earliest actions was to organize a benefit to establish an employment bureau for domestic workers. Along with laundries, domestic service provided the greatest source of employment for Mexican women in El Paso. Historically, the two occupations have played very important roles in the work history of many groups of women. First, both occupations have been widely available to women with little education and few other options. Secondly, women often found it beneficial to alternate between the two occupations based on the difficulty of the work and the wages being offered at the time.<sup>15</sup> In fact, because these occupations were considered "women's work" and furthermore "Mexican work," many Mexican women found their opportunities quite limited despite their talents or education. In a 1932 letter to the editor, a woman signing herself "R. Luna" protested that despite her skills in speaking and writing both English and Spanish fluently,

I might as well know nothing at all, and I'd be far much better off, but I do hope that the time will come when a woman like me will have her rights and be able to find a job that isn't house-keeping.<sup>16</sup>

Domestic work was firmly fixed in the minds of many people as a "Mexican"

occupation. By the 1930s, Mexican maids had become a fixture in many households, and the extensive use of Mexican women as maids perpetuated the perception of domestic work as a particularly “Mexican” profession. In turn, the firmly held belief that domestic work was only for Mexicans limited the opportunities for Mexican women.<sup>17</sup>

The connection made by employers between Mexicans as a group and domestic servants as an occupation was clear. As early as 1910, Grace Franklin of the Woman’s Charity Association wrote,

Mexicans are here and every family in El Paso comes into close contact with them, therefore if El Paso wishes to improve her *servant* class she must improve the homes from which this class comes.” (emphasis added)<sup>18</sup>

Such concern for improving the living and working conditions of Mexican domestics, at best benevolent and paternalistic, nonetheless betrayed the fact that such solicitude stemmed from a desire to make Mexican women, “the servant class,” better workers. As the decades wore on, employer attitudes remained similar.

Despite the economic crisis brought on by the Depression, El Paso’s households continued to employ domestic workers who were predominantly Mexican. Their concerns, like those of earlier employers, centered around getting the most work out of their maids. Late in 1934, Carmelita Pomeroy cautioned employers in an editorial letter titled, “My little servant, do I love her?” Critical of the harsh working conditions endured by many domestics, Pomeroy advised employers that:

Much more can be got out of them through kindness and praise than one imagines. . . They are little children, love them as such and receive your reward in faithfulness and loyalty to you and your children.<sup>19</sup>

The activities of Mexican domestics during the Depression, however, would challenge this employer-held image, and hope of child-like loyalty and faithfulness. Domestic work became an arena for debates within the Mexican American and Anglo American communities regarding identity and fairness.

The case of the Asociación de Trabajadoras Domésticas illustrates the increasing complexity and the changing nature of labor relations on the border. In the fall of 1933, domestics organized this union under the leadership of

Charles Porras, José Conde García and Cleofas Calleros of the Brigada Mexicana de Propaganda de la NRA (National Recovery Administration), appointed by the local Chamber of Commerce to act as a liaison between the Mexican community and the local Anglo-run NRA committee. Its leadership included physicians, social workers, businessmen and government employees. Like its Anglo American counterpart, the organization was all male. Within a month, however, a separate women's committee had been created, its leadership largely reflecting the same middle-class composition as the men's organization.<sup>20</sup>

In the fall of 1933, the Brigada outlined its philosophy in a series of articles published in the local Spanish-language newspaper, *El Continental*. According to these editorials, Mexican families had a particular interest in supporting New Deal programs such as the NRA. Brigada leaders argued that Mexicans had been particularly affected by the economic crisis because of their poverty; therefore, any governmental measure intended to end the Depression would benefit them the most. Furthermore, as residents of the United States, Mexicans were obliged to obey the law. Their arguments must have rung true within the Mexican community as a variety of individuals and groups had already responded favorably to the NRA. According to one source, even street vendors hawking tortillas had signed the NRA pledge.<sup>21</sup>

The increasing intervention of the federal government in the relationship between employers and employees during the Depression created new opportunities and options for both the Mexican American working class and the middle class. With the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, which gave workers the right to organize and bargain collectively, free from employer interference, Mexican workers continued their longstanding tradition of organizing unions with increased vigor. The laundry workers' and domestic workers' unions, composed almost exclusively of Mexican women, were among the first fruits of this renewed effort at unionization.<sup>22</sup>

In the long run, Mexican Americans received little material benefit from the passage of New Deal legislation such as the NRA. Its importance, however, lies not in the material changes but in the attitudinal changes wrought by its passage. A nascent Mexican American identity, distinct from the immigrant culture from which it evolved, began to express itself in new terms during the Great Depression, given momentum by the promises of the New Deal. The middle class was most vocal publicly in expressing the idea that Mexican Ameri-

cans belonged in and to the United States, always with the assumption that they had the right to demand justice as Americans. These new ideas, however, were not the sole domain of the middle class. The working class, too, acted upon them.<sup>23</sup> This new identity, however, was not without its contradictions.

Throughout the Southwest, unemployed Anglo Americans displaced Mexicans from their traditional jobs. Blamed for the massive unemployment, both locally and nationally, Mexican workers were often the target of hostility, resentment and violence. Early in 1931, the Unemployed American Voters League organized in El Paso with the expressed purpose of convincing employers to dismiss immigrant workers. Organized labor in El Paso had a long history of antagonism towards immigrants. Earlier in the century, the American Federation of Labor had unsuccessfully struggled to terminate the employment of immigrant workers in the city, but it was not until 1930 that the city council finally passed an ordinance barring immigrants from city-funded construction projects. In 1931, the Central Labor Union, organized by the AFL in 1909, issued a report recommending that all immigrant workers in both public and private employment be dismissed.<sup>24</sup>

Anti-immigrant sentiment, particularly that revolving around employment, put the Mexican community on the defensive. The anti-Mexican atmosphere clearly affected immigrants, but U.S.-born Mexicans felt the impact as well in a number of ways. First, because the Anglo American public often perceived all Mexicans to be foreigners, whether they were U.S. citizens or not, Mexican Americans became the target of hostility and suspicion. The response of some Mexican Americans was to create as much distance as possible between themselves and immigrants in order to create a sense of safety. Of course, not all Mexican Americans responded this way. While this distancing took place in some segments of the community, another equally important trend occurred along the border as the international character of the Mexican community manifested itself through organizations comprising Mexicans on both sides of the border.<sup>25</sup>

It was within this context that Mexican American maids began organizing in 1933. The union's association with the NRA was clear. "Members are trying to obtain, through reasoning and appeals for fair play, what the NRA has given other groups," union organizer Charles Porrás stated.<sup>26</sup> The women, too, used the NRA to back their demands. One employer complained that a telephone

caller had “bawled me out for not paying more than one dollar a week and board, and threatened to report me to the NRA.”<sup>27</sup>

Within the first month, the organization reported a membership of over 700 workers; they anticipated reaching a total of 1,500. The union’s first action was to send letters to their employers demanding a minimum weekly wage of six dollars. Within a few weeks, the women had the agreement of 169 employers with only one employer refusing the raise.<sup>28</sup> Porras boasted that he was successful in keeping workers away from their employers, while stressing that the union was not a “strike outfit.”<sup>29</sup> Reminiscent of the earlier efforts by Anglo American unions to reduce the availability of commuter workers, Porras convinced officials to decrease the international bridge’s hours of operation. This would give Mexican American maids an edge.<sup>30</sup>

The *El Paso Herald Post* reported that local housewives were alarmed by the anticipated servant shortage; many argued they were unable to pay the minimum wage demanded by the domestic workers. So successful was the union initially that a number of “upper class women” went to the Immigration Service to demand that Porras be deported, despite the fact that he was born in the United States. The association had little long-term success, however, for the international bridge hours were again extended at the urging of influential Chamber of Commerce members, who demanded access to domestics at low wages.<sup>31</sup>

As with the laundry workers’ union, the maids’ union activities illustrate the increasingly complex issue of citizenship and ethnic identity. Demographic changes during the Depression helped create the basis for a new mentality in which the differences between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans were heightened. In 1920, an estimated twenty-three percent of El Paso’s Mexican population was U.S.-born. By 1930, this number had increased to thirty-six percent, reaching sixty-four percent only a decade later. These changes, due in large part to repatriation during the decade, shifted the foundation of the community from immigrant to U.S.-born.<sup>32</sup> Considering the defensive position in which the community found itself during the Great Depression, it is not surprising to find this polarity emerging. “We needed work here, and here were all these people coming from the other side,” Porras recalled. “So, I got the smart idea and organized the Domestic Worker’s Association—all women, local, *from here.*” [emphasis added]<sup>33</sup> Porras’ critics argued that he was anti-Mexi-



can, particularly after he was quoted in the *El Paso Times* as saying:

You claim to be Americans, yet you speak the language of Mexicans so you do not deserve to be classed as anything else but Mexicans. If you are Americans, speak the English language, live like Americans and be proud of it. Teach your children to speak English, bring them up in the knowledge that they are Americans, and make them proud of it.<sup>34</sup>

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) member, M.R. Gameros publicly defended Porras, arguing that Porras helped laundry and domestic workers without regard to citizenship.<sup>35</sup> Just two decades earlier, Anglo American-led unions had emphasized the American citizenship of the laundry workers in order to validate their legitimacy. As the Mexican community in El Paso metamorphosed into a Mexican American community, it too began to make claims based on U.S. citizenship. The success of these claims was limited, however, by the widely-held perception that all Mexicans were the same. Ironically, as Porras criticized Mexican American individuals for not deserving “to be classed as anything else but Mexicans,” Anglo Americans’ efforts to deport him demonstrated that they saw him simply as a “Mexican.”

Despite unionization efforts, the wages and working conditions of Mexican domestics, both commuters and residents of El Paso, remained poor. In 1934, the El Paso League of Women Voters conducted a survey of employers of Mexican domestics; their investigation uncovered continuing abuse. One family employed a domestic for fifteen cents a day. These fifteen cents, representing the family’s sole income, forced the family of five to subsist totally on bread. In another case, the wife of a “well-paid executive” paid her Mexican maid the wages of ten cents daily for over two years.<sup>36</sup>

The following year, in the fall of 1935, the Texas State Department of Vocational Education studied the working conditions of domestic workers in El Paso. Their report concluded that “long hours of drudgery and starvation pay are the rule rather than the exception” among domestics employed in El Paso’s more prosperous homes. The survey indicated that the highest reported wage came to seven dollars a week. Full-time maids from Juárez could be hired, according to the Department of Vocational Education, for one dollar a week. Part-time domestics received fifty cents a week.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the apparent ease with which employers could find women forced

by poverty and desperation willing to work for such low wages, debates raged in local newspapers regarding the shortage of Mexican American maids. According to the writers, this shortage had two causes: first, the availability of relief for Mexican American women and secondly, the propensity of employers to hire women from Juárez. Many employers alleged that Mexicanas preferred to receive “handouts” rather than to work as domestics. These allegations were bolstered by reports early in 1935 from the United States Employment Bureau that sixty-five percent of the 500 domestics registered with the Bureau were on relief.<sup>38</sup>

When the YWCA joined the Employment Bureau in complaining that Mexican American women no longer *wanted* to work as domestics, employers’ fears appeared justified. According to the YWCA, their staff were having trouble filling requests for domestics. They complained that of the 215 requests for domestics made during a one-month period, they had only been able to place 185 women, 156 of whom were Mexican. According to the *El Paso Herald Post*, housewives were “losing” their maids to the relief rolls despite the fact that the employers claimed to be paying from five to eight dollars weekly, plus three meals a day and one and a half days off.<sup>39</sup>

In a classic move, employers began pressuring the local government to tighten the relief system in order to ensure that Mexican women would be available for employment. Relief systems have historically worked to control the poor, first by giving them some aid in order to squelch disorder but also by requiring that they act in specific ways, particularly by working.<sup>40</sup> These tactics had been utilized against Mexican families earlier in the decade during several cotton pickers’ strikes. Within two months of the Employment Bureau’s report, the local relief board ruled that any woman refusing to accept a job would automatically be cut from the relief rolls. Accepting a job, however, also meant being cut from relief. Without a guaranteed minimum wage, many Mexican women were placed in the position of accepting starvation wages or nothing.<sup>41</sup>

Opinion varied in the Anglo American community regarding the newly imposed restrictions. Proclaiming that “the servant class has been vastly more sinned against than sinning,” a *Times* editorial voiced support for the domestics. “Who can blame a girl if she prefers dependable relief status on a budgetary basis to being paid for a week’s hard work with 50 cents and a bundle of shabby clothes which she neither wants nor can use?”<sup>42</sup> Despite such voices of

compassion, however, Mexican women found little material change in their working conditions during the decade.

Paradoxically, while Mexican American women were criticized for refusing to work for low wages, Mexican women across the border were equally criticized for their willingness to do so. The commonplace practice of hiring “cheap” maids from across the border was blamed for the high numbers of Mexican American women on relief. As one writer warned in a 1934 letter to the editor, employers who believed they benefitted from the employment of commuter maids were not aware of the true costs. The writer cautioned that such employers were subject to potential fines and jail sentences for hiring undocumented maids. Furthermore, he advised housewives “to set their houses in order without delay.”<sup>43</sup> Despite this admonition, however, Mexican maids remained and continue to be a tradition in many El Paso homes.

The Great Depression was a decade of paradox for the Mexican community in El Paso. The Depression brought enormous changes; yet, change appeared minimal. Although Mexican women had been employed in the service and manufacturing sectors since the nineteenth century, the Depression created new expectations and a new sense of identity for some workers. These changes helped maintain old arguments about work and power, yet they also created new ways for women workers to participate in the debate. Increasingly, Mexican American women and men challenged the racist characterizations of the “Mexican worker.”

The voices of the employers and bureaucrats come to us clearly across the decades, discussing the best ways to control Mexican women workers, praising them for their faithfulness, or pleading for them to be treated with more compassion. The voices of the middle-class Mexican men also ring clearly, taking credit for creating women’s unions, explaining the importance of obeying the law, delineating the new identity politics. If we listen carefully, however, we can still hear the women themselves, coming together to find ways to help each other, confronting the desperation of feeding their children only bread day after day, refusing to work for starvation wages, hoping against hope “that the time will come when a woman like me will have her rights . . .”<sup>44</sup> If we listen closely we can still hear them.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The term *Mexicana/o* and Mexican are used synonymously and do not necessarily imply nativity. Mexicano was the most common self-referrant in El Paso during the period under study, regardless of the person's citizenship. The term Mexican American is used when U.S. citizenship is clear. Most frequently, the term Mexican immigrant is used to denote a person's birth in Mexico.  
Anna Brand's comments may be found in the *El Paso Herald Post*, December 15, 1931.
- <sup>2</sup> Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 8; Francisco E. Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 5; Oscar Martínez, *Border Boom Town, Ciudad Juárez Since 1848*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 161, 80-81; Mario García, *Desert Immigrants*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 33-64.
- <sup>3</sup> García, *Desert Immigrants*, 65-109.
- <sup>4</sup> Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 111.
- <sup>5</sup> The massive repatriation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression is one manifestation of this antagonism. See Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1979); Balderrama, Francisco and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995; Guerin-Gonzales, Camille, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation and California Farm Labor, 1901-1935*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994); D. H. Dinwoodie, "Deportation: The Immigration Service and the Chicano Labor Movement in the 1930s," *New Mexico Historical Review* 52: 3 (1977), 193-206; Daniel T. Simon, "Mexican Repatriation in East Chicago, Indiana," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 2:2 (Summer 1974), 11-23; Neil Betten and Raymond A. Mohl, "From Discrimination to Repatriation: Mexican Life in Gary, Indiana, During the Great Depression," *Pacific Historical Review* 42:3 (August 1973), 370-388; R. Reynolds McKay, "Texas Mexican Repatriation During the Great Depression," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1982). For a discussion of repatriation from a psychological approach see Mauricio Mazón, "Illegal Alien Surrogates: A Psychohistorical Interpretation of Group Stereotyping in Time of Economic Stress," *Aztlan* 11:2 (Summer 1975), 305-324.
- <sup>6</sup> *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 95; *Desert Immigrants*, 76.
- <sup>7</sup> *Desert Immigrants*, 78; *El Paso Times*, April 12, 1933; *El Paso Herald Post*, April 10, 1933. For further discussion of Mexican women in El Paso's workforce see also, Mario García, "The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880-1920; A Case Study," *Pacific Historical Review* 44 (May 1980), 326.

- <sup>8</sup> *Desert Immigrants*, 91-93.
- <sup>9</sup> *Desert Immigrants*, 92.
- <sup>10</sup> *Desert Immigrants*, 98-99.
- <sup>11</sup> *Desert Immigrants*, 98.
- <sup>12</sup> *Desert Immigrants*, 78.
- <sup>13</sup> *El Continental*, September 8, 1933.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Charles Porras conducted by Oscar J. Martínez, November 18, 1975, deposited in Special Collections, University Library, University of Texas at El Paso.
- <sup>15</sup> *El Continental*, September 8, 1933; *El Paso Herald Post*, September 23, 1933. For further discussion of women's participation in both occupations see David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week; Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3-43.
- <sup>16</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, March 11, 1932. In a 1972 interview, long-time El Paso activist Cleofas Calleros expressed the same sentiments when he said, "What was the use of a Mexican going to high school when he couldn't get a decent job?" Calleros was active in organizing both domestic workers and laundry workers. See the interview with Cleofas Calleros conducted by Oscar J. Martínez, September 14, 1972, deposited in Special Collections, University Library, University of Texas at El Paso.
- <sup>17</sup> *Desert Immigrants*, 76; for a discussion of the contemporary situation of domestics in El Paso, see Vicki Ruiz, "By the Day or the Week: Mexicana Domestic Workers in El Paso" in *Women on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. by Vicki Ruiz and Susan Tiano, (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 61-76.
- <sup>18</sup> *El Paso Herald*, June 20, 1910.
- <sup>19</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, November 19, 1934.
- <sup>20</sup> *El Continental*, August 31, 1933, July 18, 1933, August 21, 1933, August 23, 1933; *El Paso Times*, August 28, 1933.
- <sup>21</sup> *El Continental*, August 21, 1933, August 23, 1933, September 3, 1933. *El Paso Herald Post*, July 10, 1933.
- <sup>22</sup> Both the domestic workers' and the laundry workers' unions organized in the fall of 1933. Other groups organized as well, including barbers and printers.
- <sup>23</sup> See Harvard Sitkoff, "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners" in *The New Deal and the South*, ed. James C. Cobb and Michael V. Vamorato (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 117; and David Maciel, *La clase obrera en la historia de México*, vol. 17 (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1984), 19-21 for discussion on the effects of the New Deal on African Americans and Mexicans in the United States. Both authors

argue that the legislation had little positive effect on these groups and may have, in fact, further reinforced institutional racism. For further discussion of the changing mentality associated with the Mexican American generation, see Mario García, *Mexican Americans, Leadership, Ideology, & Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Richard García, "The Mexican American Mind: A Product of the 1930s," *History, Culture and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980s*, ed. Mario T. García and Francisco Lomeli (Michigan: Bilingual Press/ Editorial Bilingüe, 1983).

- <sup>24</sup> *El Paso Times*, September 26, 1931, September 27, 1931; *Desert Immigrants*, 96, 105; McKay, "Texas Mexican Repatriation," 96, 337, 340; *El Paso Herald Post*, October 8, 1931.
- <sup>25</sup> Perhaps the clearest examples of this international organizing in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez were the efforts to deal with the problems associated with large-scale repatriation, as massive numbers of repatriates passed through the area in the early 1930s. Working with the Mexican consul, Mexican Americans and Mexicans participated in organizations such as the Comisiones Honoríficas and el Comité de Beneficia as well as la Cruz Azul which was comprised entirely of women. *El Continental* reported their activities regularly.
- <sup>26</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, September 23, 1933.
- <sup>27</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, September 23, 1933.
- <sup>28</sup> *El Continental*, August 31, 1933, September 15, 1933, September 24, 1933.
- <sup>29</sup> Porras interview.
- <sup>30</sup> Porras interview. In July 1931, *El Continental* reported that the Central Labor Union had sent a resolution to Washington, D. C., requesting that the international bridge remain closed until 10 a.m. each day in order to cut down on the number of commuter workers crossing into El Paso. See *El Continental*, July 9, 1931, and July 10, 1931.
- <sup>31</sup> Porras interview.
- <sup>32</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso: An Assessment of Progress*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980), 6.
- <sup>33</sup> Porras interview.
- <sup>34</sup> *El Paso Times*, September 19, 1933.
- <sup>35</sup> *El Continental*, October 1, 1933.
- <sup>36</sup> *El Paso Times*, November 22, 1934.
- <sup>37</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, November 6, 1935.
- <sup>38</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, November 27, 1934.
- <sup>39</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, November 24, 1934.

- <sup>40</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward. *Regulating the Poor: the Functions of Public Welfare*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 22.
- <sup>41</sup> Earlier in the decade, the local relief system had instituted similar limitations when cotton pickers went on strike. When cotton growers claimed that striking cotton pickers were moving from the outlying agricultural areas into El Paso in order to receive relief, the relief administrator undertook an investigation, vowing that no assistance would be provided to striking workers. Private relief agencies also joined this effort to ensure a cheap source of labor for the cotton growers. The Red Cross, for example, announced that the distribution of clothing to indigents in the outlying agricultural areas would be suspended until the end of the picking season, "because there is plenty of work." *El Paso Herald Post*, September 16, 1933.
- <sup>42</sup> *El Paso Times*, January 8, 1935.
- <sup>43</sup> *El Paso Times*, January 9, 1935.
- <sup>44</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, November 27, 1934.

