



Adopting the American Racial Lens: A history of Mexican migration to Chicago from the town of Arandas, Jalisco¹

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Introduction: Migration and Its Effects on Notions of Race and Community

During his interview with researcher Paul S. Taylor in November of 1931, a young man who had recently returned to the Mexican town of Arandas, Jalisco after working for the steel industry in Chicago was asked if the people of his community were good people (*buena gente*). “Yes, they are”, he responded, “and that is because they are white”. Similarly, another

returning migrant also cited whiteness when reminiscing about his baby boy who had been born and died in the United States: “He was good— he was white.”² In the notes accompanying his interview transcripts, Taylor observed that the terminology employed by both of these individuals indicated a direct American influence upon their racial outlook. These men of predominantly “Spanish type”, as Taylor described them, used the familiar distinguishing term “white” (or *blanco*) as it was customarily employed by white Americans to describe themselves in the Spanish language while in the presence of large numbers of Mexican laborers.³

1 A special ‘thank-you’ to Mrs. Carol Montag and the Montag Family for their generous award which made possible my study of the Paul S. Taylor Manuscript Collection at the Bancroft Library of the University of California Berkeley in the summer of 2011. I would also like to acknowledge Thomas C. Holt and Darryl Heller for their careful revisions of initial drafts of this project.

2 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933), p. 18-19.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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The fact that neither of the men used the term “Spanish” or “European”⁴ (as was customary in Arandas) when referring to those of lighter skin suggests that, as Taylor suspected, the two were affected by U.S. racial discourse and American racial practices and norms. Something about their experiences in Chicago had led these individuals to shed the verbal customs of the townspeople of Arandas. Taylor’s interviews evince crucial alterations in the racial thought of these returning migrants and connote their appropriation of the American black-white racial lens as a tool by which to analyze the “goodness” of a community. Manifesting an internalization of the American black-white racial order, the two men identified themselves, their peers, and their progeny by means of the racialized American usage of the Spanish term *blanco* (meaning, literally, “the color white”).

The impact of migration on the racial thought and communal ideology of these men remains largely misunderstood within its historical context— that is to say, within the living framework of its respective time and spaces. This is because historians of Mexican migration to the United States have not comprehensively approached the issue of migrant racial identity, both individual and collective, through a transnational lens of analysis that takes into consideration the racial cultures, systems, and attitudes of early-twentieth-century Mexican society and its American counterpart. Furthermore, there is currently little historical examination of the manner in which notions of race and community *within* groups of Mexican emigrants were altered by the movement of people to, and eventually back from, racially polarized host societies in the United States. This paper looks to thoroughly address this issue, which has been largely neglected by previous historical inquiry on the topic of migration to the United States from Mexico.

The analyses offered in traditional migration histories tend to represent migration as a linear phenomenon; one with a stationary origin (i.e. a “home society”), a clear trajectory, and a fixed end point (the “host society”). In the case of Mexican migration to the United States, the home society represented is either Mexico at large (which is too vast a historical space to offer clear examination), or certain regions or states of Mexico (which are also large and diverse). The trajectory across the border is usually portrayed as both a one-way trip and a one-time journey ending in American rural or urban centers. Given that the bulk of historical examination tends to focus on the migrants’ experience in the host society, migration historians usually forgo any substantial examination of social conditions in specific home societies.

As a result of their emphasis on the conditions of migrants in their host society, most traditional migration historians documenting the mass movement of Mexicans into the United States tend to write accounts that pay little to no attention to key developments in particular communities in Mexico that eventually produced the bulk of U.S.-bound

migrants. Instead, their histories focus only upon a handful of basic, yet crucial, themes pertinent to Mexican migrant communities within the United States. Heavily discussed topics include broad (as opposed to more local or regional) historical factors influencing the movement of Mexican emigrants, the occupational and residential patterns of migrants within American cities and/or agricultural areas, and their reception by those already living in the United States— white and non-white, American and foreign. Though these subjects of inquiry are diverse, the majority of historical accounts treating the topic of Mexican migration to the United States follows a standard formula when addressing these themes and rarely ventures outside of its bounds.

Furthermore, traditional migration histories examine in great detail the manner in which Mexicans, as a whole, moved from their home country to certain regions of the United States. They do so by delineating complex “push” factors that instigated emigration from Mexico and “pull” factors that inspired immigration north of the Rio Grande. Looking past the plurality of factors influencing the movement of individuals, families, and entire communities, these historical accounts produce general overviews that are, at times, too vague to produce a history that truly captures the nuance inherent to the migration of specific communities (like that of the townspeople of Arandas) to particular localities (i.e. the Chicago stockyards). Though such conventional accounts of Mexican migration offer thoughtful examination, they nevertheless possess a combination of linearity and generalization that cannot yield a truly comprehensive understanding of the complex migratory phenomenon.

The originality and significance of my study thus arise from the scarcity of scholarship devoted specifically to the understanding of migration as a *circular* phenomenon between countries; an ongoing process through which historical actors evolve and change in terms of social outlook, racial ideology, and worldview. My project’s main focus is the transnational analysis of the constant evolution of racial identity as it pertains to one *particular* community of Mexican migrants— mainly, those emigrants who left Arandas, Jalisco for the city of Chicago in the 1920s and eventually returned to their hometown amidst American repatriation campaigns in the early 1930s. This paper thus engages in the type of transnational migration micro-history that places itself in direct opposition to the traditional, U.S.-centric macro-histories that have dominated late-twentieth-century migration scholarship. The narrower and more focused scope of my work lends a more nuanced portrayal of Mexican migration to the United States, as well as its subsequent effects upon individual and collective racial identities.

This essay aims to better understand the manner in which certain aspects of immigrant life in Chicago transformed prevalent conceptions of race, “whiteness”, “blackness”, and community that were held by Mexicans migrating to Chicago from the town of Arandas. In this study, I focus primarily on the period ranging roughly from 1919 to 1929— the first decade of heavy Mexican migration from Arandas, Jalisco to

4 “Español” or “Europeo” in the Spanish language.

the Chicago area. In terms of historical space, a comparative transnational approach is crucial to this study in order to fully comprehend the relationship between perceptions of race and community held by Mexican immigrants prior to, and after, migration to the United States.

By examining changing racial dynamics *within* a particular group of Mexican migrants and the effects of transformations in racial outlook upon notions of community, my study goes beyond the customary practice of analyzing racial tensions between Mexican immigrants and other ethnic groups. Thus far, historians have primarily focused on examining the complicated relationships that existed between Mexican migrants and white Anglo-Americans in rural and urban settings. The information gathered from Paul S. Taylor Manuscript Collection at the University of California Berkeley is pivotal to my investigation. Taylor, a prominent economist from Berkeley, conducted extensive field research in both Mexico and the U.S. pertinent to the issue of Mexican labor in the United States and the surge in Mexican migration during the two decades prior to the Great Depression. Though chiefly economic in focus, Taylor's studies of Mexican laborers in cities like Chicago and in towns like Arandas, Jalisco are filled with rich anthropological material useful to any historian of labor and Mexican migration. Taking the shape of extensive interview collections, manuscripts, field notes, maps, charts, etc., Taylor's findings on this subject offer invaluable historical insight into issues of nationality, class, gender, and race.

Through their respective remarks, the two returning migrants interviewed by Taylor in the fall of 1931 demonstrated a conscious intellectual appropriation of North American racial attitudes and ideas that differed greatly from those of their native land. This essay looks to elucidate these differences in racial outlook through a comparison of Mexican and American racial cultures, and to determine the precise effects of Chicago's urban experience upon the racial attitudes of newly-arrived Mexican immigrants from the town of Arandas, Jalisco. Mexican immigrants in industrial Chicago adopted America's negative perceptions of 'blackness' as a result of (1) their relative inexperience with a black-white racial order prior to migration to the U.S., (2) the lack of any major acknowledgment and employment of conceptions of 'blackness' by the Mexican government, and (3) the pervasive influence of racially motivated labor and housing practices that instigated polarization among ethnic communities. Given that Chicago's unique racial climate during the 1920s presented a situation in which the racial identity of Mexicans became "ambiguous" to American eyes, Arandian migrants ceased regarding race as a biologically-determined concept. Instead, migration to Chicago transformed the concept race, and therefore conceptions of 'whiteness' and 'blackness', into something that could be determined by one's engagement in certain kinds of community activity.

The Home Society: Examining the Racial Lens in Mexico and Arandas, Jalisco

Mexico: A Historically Complex Racial System

Prior to their arrival in Chicago, Mexican emigrants departing from the town of Arandas had little experience with the type of bipolar system of racial categorization that existed in the United States. One explanation for this is the fact that, as a whole, Mexico had historically been home to a significantly small Afro-Mexican⁵ population and was therefore incapable of developing a solidified black-white racial order similar to that emerging in the U.S. as a result of massive slave importations in the late eighteenth century. Some estimates like those put forth by Odile Hoffman of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* suggest that Mexico received not even five percent of Spanish slave shipments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶

In the colonial era, Mexico's mostly-arid landscape failed to produce large amounts of profitable plantation crops, such as sugar cane and rice, whose cultivation required the labor and toil of enslaved Africans. During decades marking the height of slave importation by the Spanish Crown, therefore, the number of imported Africans in Mexico paled in comparison to the black populations of other Spanish colonies like Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Colombia. As decades passed, physically-distinct communities of Afro-Mexicans gradually disappeared because of their intermingling with Spaniards, Mestizos⁷, and Native Americans—the latter representing the more common of the three combinations by a substantial margin.⁸ Some historians thus estimate that, by the end of the nineteenth century, Afro-Mexican individuals who remained relatively untouched by marital or sexual associations with other racial groups comprised less than one half of one percent of Mexico's total population.⁹

Given the prevalence of interracial mixture among Mexico's historically small Afro-Mexican population, the Spanish term *Negro* (meaning, literally, "the color black") was not an adequate label, nor did it become a customarily utilized

5 Here, the term "Afro-Mexican" (a product of modern academic discourse) is used to reference the descendants of African slaves brought to Mexico by the Spanish Empire. The label serves as an umbrella term under which fall older racial categorizations pertinent to African slave descendants in New Spain and Mexico that will be further explored in this essay. These labels include the terms "Mulatto" (Spanish-Negro mixture), "Zambo" (Indian-Negro mixture), "Morisco" (Spanish-mulatto mixture), and "Lobo" (Spanish-Indian-Negro mixture) among others.

6 Odile Hoffman, "Negros y Afromestizos en México: Viejas y nuevas lecturas de un mundo olvidado", *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 68, no.1 (Jan.- March 2006) p. 103.

7 The term "Mestizo" denotes people of mixed Spanish and Native American ancestry.

8 Odile Hoffman "Negros y Afromestizos en Mexico", p. 110.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 107-10.

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designation, by which to identify the Mexican descendants of African slaves. Instead, Spaniards and Mexicans of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries contrived various labels of racial categorization that contested notions of universal “blackness” by placing emphasis on biological and physiognomic differences among individuals of African ancestry. Through their usage and distribution, these racial classifications ultimately served as descriptors of the historical biological mixtures that occurred between the progeny of African slaves and members of Mexico’s three dominant racial groups: the Spaniards, Indians¹⁰, and Mestizos. Early Mexican society thus saw the emergence of numerous black identities and a corresponding array of racial labels by which to arrange them.

Church records accumulated by Spanish officials in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attest to the appearance of a diverse series of terms within the Spanish racial nomenclature to describe individuals of mixed-race heritage. The word “Mulatto”, for instance, referenced baptized infants who were of Spanish and black ancestry, while the designation “Lobo” distinguished those who were of combined Spanish, Indian, and African descent. The term “Zambo” marked an African and Indian mixture while the label “Morisco” denoted the presence of both Spanish and Mulatto blood within a child.^{11 12}

Because Mexico’s black population had been historically minute and racial intermixture was prevalent, the Mexican racial system emerged as one that was far more complicated and nuanced than the American black-white racial binary of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In highlighting the differences that appeared within Afro-Mexican populations as a result of their mixture with Mexico’s three dominant racial groups, the aforementioned Mexican terms of racial categorization inadvertently linked Afro-Mexicans to the country’s historic, trichotomous *mélange* between Spaniards, Native Americans, and Mestizos. Since this combination represented the monumental mixture of people grounding Mexico’s national identity, the argument can be made that, unlike their American counterparts, Mexico’s racial labels indirectly incorporated Afro-Mexicans into the historical identity-narrative of their home society.

Mexico: The “Negro” Race in Government Records

In the “Critique of the Official Statistics of Mexican Migration to and from the United States”, Paul S. Taylor noted

10 The terms “Native American” and “Indian” will be used interchangeably.

11 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico* (Berkeley California: The University of California Press, 1933), p. 15.

12 For a fuller history of these racial categories and their origins consult María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008).

that, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, Mexican individuals who claimed any sort of African descent were *not* classified as “Negro” in the Mexican government’s census and migration records.¹³ Instead, wrote Taylor, Afro-Mexicans were grouped together with Indians and Mestizos as a result of their mixture with indigenous populations. “The Mexican race”, Taylor claimed, “has thus come to be defined in government statistics as being solely comprised of the mixture of European and Indian blood”.¹⁴ Both the minimal presence of African slaves in Mexico and the ubiquity of mixture between Afro-Mexicans and other racial groups served as the foundation of another historical phenomenon accounting for the relative inexperience of the people of Arandas with an established biracial system of classification: By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Mexican government did not recognize “the black race” as one which remained wholly separate from and untouched by white Spaniards, Native Americans, and mixed-race Mestizos. Although the category of “Negro” did appear in national census and migration records, the label was notably inaccurate in its portrayal of Mexico’s black citizenry because a majority of Afro-Mexicans were not classified as “Negro”. Mexican officials tended to classify most Afro-Mexicans as either “Indian” or “Mestizo” due to the prevalence of mixed-race physical features and characteristics within Afro-Mexican communities.¹⁵

As demonstrated in Arandas’ baptismal records and the Mexican government’s statistics, Mexicans regarded race as the outcome of complex biological combinations that produced a diverse array of individuals. Given the lack of an established Mexican practice of classifying most Afro-Mexicans as strictly “Negro”, Arandians migrating to Chicago in the early twentieth century did not possess the same kind, or degree, of black-white race consciousness that was prevalent throughout the United States. Though more binary racial relationships did exist among individuals of Spanish, Indigenous, and African descent in the more ethnically diverse sectors of Mexico City and the Mexican southern states¹⁶, the collective racial thought in predominantly Spanish-white Mexican towns like that of Arandas, Jalisco greatly differed from the American binary racial system that pitted black against white. Furthermore, the fact that the Mexican government largely refrained from utilizing ‘blackness’ and the term “Negro” as a tool of classification suggests that there was little room in Mexico for prejudice

13 Paul S. Taylor. “Critique of the Official Statistics of Mexican Migration to and from the United States,” in *International Migrations, Volume II: Interpretations*, ed. Walter F. Willcox, (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1931), p. 581-590.

14 *Ibid.*, p 587.

15 Odile Hoffman “Negros y Afromestizos en Mexico”, p. 110.

16 For a fuller history of the more binary racial divisions that emerged in some parts of Mexico consult Neil Foley, *Quest for Equality: The Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010).

against Afro-Mexican individuals to become institutionalized and socio-politically embedded, as was the case with segregation and discrimination against African-Americans in the United States.

Race in Arandas, Jalisco: A Predominantly Spanish-White Township

Throughout centuries of imperial rule, and even decades after the attainment of independence, black Mexicans failed to penetrate the country's inlands and populate Mexico's northern and central plateau¹⁷. The latter region, which includes the town of Arandas, comprised an area of predominantly white European settlement. By and large, African slaves in Mexico confined their inhabitation to small sections of the eastern seaboard regions in what later became the coastal states of Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, and Yucatán, as well as small port settlements in the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca in the Mexican southwest. Although independence from Spain in 1821 brought about the emancipation of slaves and the rise of prominent Afro-Mexican leaders like President Vicente Guerrero in 1829, Mexico's minute Afro-Mexican population confined itself to life in coastal territories. Some settlements like those in Costa Chica, Oaxaca and Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero, for example, housed Afro-Mexican populations that managed to retain some African customs well into the nineteenth century.¹⁸

As consequence of this history, Arandas' 7,000¹⁹ inhabitants circa 1921 generally regarded themselves as "being of Spanish stock". The great majority of them possessed a light skin color that was often accompanied by blue eyes and physical characteristics (such as height and build for the men, and fair skin for the women) that were telling of a predominantly Spanish ancestry.²⁰ In his unpublished manuscript "The Mexican Peasantry of Los Altos", Paul S. Taylor noted that the women of Arandas demonstrated "delicate and strong Spanish and mixed Mexican types of beauty". Taylor even voiced agreement with the local custom of referencing the women of Jalisco as *reinas moliendo*, or "queens grinding corn".²¹

Though documentary evidence of their origin in Spain remains lacking, inquiries by Taylor of persons who knew this particular region of Mexico and who claimed to have known Spanish types indicated that the ancestors of the people of Arandas had come from Northern Spain. These statements



The People of Arandas, Jalisco. Men and women of Spanish ancestry in the town of Arandas, Jalisco as pictured by Taylor (circa 1921). Taken from Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, p.48.

hold considerable veracity, as the region's colonial name of "Nueva Galicia" (meaning "New Galicia" in Spanish) denoted settlement by Spaniards from the northwestern Spanish province of Galicia. So extensive was the Spanish colonization in Nueva Galicia, and so prolific were the colonists, that the racial composition of the region's population was calculated in 1810 by Mexican historians Navarro and Noriega to be 32 percent Spanish, 33 percent Indian, and the remaining balance of mixed castes. These figures represented the highest proportion of Spanish stock reported in any of the heavily populated parts of New Spain.²²

Despite the predominance of Spanish ancestry and Spanish physical features in Arandas, however, a noticeable segment of the population was comprised of individuals who bore traces of Indian, Mestizo, and Mulatto heritage. According to one of Taylor's interviewees, some of these men and women possessed strong Indian attributes while others expressed physical traits, such as light pigmentation and eye color, indicating a mixed background. "Occasionally, but less often", wrote Taylor, "one also sees Negro characteristics among the people".²³

The earliest statistical data on races in the population of Arandas was found in church archives. One table from

17 Area of Mexico that included the largely populated Mexican states of Michoacán, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, the Federal District, the state of Mexico, and Jalisco. See map above.

18 Odile Hoffman, "Negros y Fromestizos en México", p. 124-26.

19 Figure taken from Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, p. 20.

20 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, p. 14.

21 Paul S. Taylor, "The Mexican Peasantry of Los Altos", p. 3. Taken from Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 5, Folder 6.

22 Paul S. Taylor, "The Mexican Peasantry of Los Altos", p. 2.

23 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, p. 14.

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the *Registro de Bautismo de la Capilla de Arandas, Nueva Galicia*²⁴ presented the racial castes of children baptized during the six years immediately following the establishment of the congregation of Arandas—roughly, the period between 1768 and 1774. According to the records, well over two-thirds of children baptized during the six-year span were classed as “Spanish”. Contrastingly, less than one in seven infants was categorized as “Mestizo” while only one in every ten was labeled as “Mulatto”. The respective categories of “Zambo”, “Morisco”, and “Lobo”, all referencing children who possessed some type of African ancestry, were utilized to identify less than one percent of the infants baptized at this time.²⁵

During the last decades of Spanish imperial presence Nueva Galicia, intermixture between the races of Arandas was also documented in records kept by the chapel’s marital registry on legal marriages between persons of different racial backgrounds. Between May of 1802 and May of 1806, one in seven marriages in the town of Arandas were of mixed race.²⁶ The chapel’s statistics demonstrate that the town’s sizeable Spanish community intermingled heavily with minority populations. From forty-nine mixed-race marriages in Arandas recorded between 1802 and 1806, twenty-eight matrimonies joined individuals of Spanish descent with Mestizos, Indians, and Mulattoes.²⁷ Though the great majority of mixed marriages involving Mulattos linked the descendants of African slaves with Native Americans, figures indicate that the absorption of all minority groups in Arandas by the town’s dominant Spanish-white community was proceeding at a rapid rate, even by legalized racial intermarriage alone.²⁸

Although one can and should scrutinize the ability of marital and baptismal data obtained from the *Capilla de Arandas* to adequately represent the township of Arandas, it must be noted that the populations of all racial castes in the town were so thoroughly Catholic in the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries that the *Capilla*’s records should be regarded as accurately representing the community at large. Aside from the prevalence of Spanish ancestry and Spanish physical features throughout the town, harmony among the races (both historical and contemporary) was a key feature of the township of Arandas circa 1921. More important than the town’s religious uniformity, occupational diversity attested to the peaceful coexistence between the races. Men of every racial background were found in all of the town’s occupations and, therefore, in each of the town’s social strata—though this had not always been the case.

Though eventually Arandians of all racial backgrounds progressed economically, Arandas’ predominantly ranch-based

economy historically favored Spanish-born colonists who served as overseers to a lower class of indentured laborers and slaves comprised of *Criollos*²⁹, Indians, Mestizos, and a small number of Africans and Mulattoes. Once independence was attained and the slaves were emancipated, the dichotomous old order was virtually destroyed by the new Mexican government’s practice of granting land to peasant workers. As a result, the racially diverse lower class that had been forced to toil under the abuse, corruption, and favoritism of Spanish *Peninsulares*³⁰ was given a chance to attain wealth and capital.³¹

Unlike their oppressed African-American counterparts in Chicago and the United States, Afro-Mexicans in turn-of-the-century Arandas effectively owned land and were employed in almost all of the township’s different occupations. Furthermore, the participation of Afro-Mexicans in certain lines of employment appears to have been proportional to the size of their community, as statistics gathered by Taylor show that the number of Afro-Mexican *rancheros* present in Arandas—i.e. black males who owned land and employed workers—accurately represented their share of the general population.³² The same appeared to have been the case for Native Americans, Mestizos, and Spaniards, as each group was represented across the occupational spectrum in accordance to its size.

Although occupational diversity within each race-group served as a stabilizing force among Arandas’ numerous ethnic cohorts, the chief factor preventing the formation of polarizing ethnocentric factions was the town’s interracial cultural alignment. Exerting equally as much influence (if not more) over the citizens of Arandas as their common Catholic faith and their shared Spanish ancestry were the prevalent social values, customs, and leisure activities of people in the township. Shaped by *both* of the aforementioned forces, these elements of collective culture acted as a potent adhesive that exerted its power in all aspects of quotidian life.

In the *Ensayo Estadístico de la Municipalidad de Arandas* (1889), Mexican anthropologist and geographer Ramón Sánchez described the township of Arandas as one whose inhabitants were unified not only by their religion and language, but also by their customs, pastimes, ideologies, education, and character. “The people of Arandas are lovers of morality, intellectual development, and material progress”,

24 “The Registry of Baptism from the Chapel of Arandas, New Galicia”

25 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, 15.

26 *Ibid.*, 16.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 The term “Criollo” denotes a social class in the Spanish colonial caste system constituted by individuals of pure Spanish ancestry that were born in the Americas.

30 The term “Peninsulares” references Spanish colonists’ origins in the Iberian Peninsula.

31 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, p. 26.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

wrote Sánchez, “who also regard vice with repugnance”.³³ Sánchez observed that the prevalence of vice in Arandas was miniscule when compared to that of other towns. He attributed this to the fact that townsmen dedicated most of their time to their work, mothers kept a watchful eye on their children, and police authorities zealously persecuted crime, gambling, and drinking.

In terms of family life, Sánchez noted that most men held some capital and were thus able to provide for their wives and children. Regarding recreation, he described the manner in which more than one thousand Arandians congregated in the town square every Sunday to listen to serenades while others (mostly boys and young men) engaged in foot races and friendly games of billiards.³⁴ When describing Arandas’ schools, Sánchez remarked upon the fact that the town had allocated public funds for the establishment of two separate institutions—one for boys and another for girls. The former held courses in reading, writing, arithmetic, algebra, grammar, geometry, geography, cosmography, history, and ethics. The latter offered classes in the same subjects as well as courses in natural history, drawing, calligraphy, English, Italian, music, and embroidery. Both genders attended a parochial school on the weekends to be instructed on religion and morality.³⁵

In the end, the rich customs and traditions of Arandas, as well as the high moral values of its citizens, led Sánchez to conclude that the township was home to “citizens of distinction”. Emigration from Arandas to other parts of Mexico, he thought, served only to notably enrich the country. “It is no idle compliment paid the people of Arandas, nor a mere expression of political or religious sympathy,” wrote Sánchez, “when other Mexicans exclaim of them *The best people in the Republic*”.³⁶ Despite slight differences in racial make-up, the people of Arandas had engendered a united community with a unified collective culture.

The analysis presented in this section exposes two phenomena that are vital in order to understand the changes in racial ideology that occurred within migrant communities as a result of migration from Arandas to Chicago. The first, as explored in the sections on Mexico and the Mexican government, is the emergence of *mestizaje*³⁷—the process by which Mexico’s political and intellectual elites sought to forge one Mexican identity out of the historical Spanish-Indian mixture so as to effectively incorporate all of its diverse ethnic groups into one socio-political identity myth. The second

phenomenon, as seen in the recurring theme of bloodline ancestry in Arandas’ church records, is the collective tendency to perceive race and racial identity as concepts determined by mixtures of blood. Borrowing from their Spanish predecessors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the centuries-old notion of *pureza de sangre*³⁸, the Catholic citizens of Arandas were trained to regard race and ethnicity as fixed entities inherent to one’s biology. As Arandians made their way through Chicago’s racially charged neighborhoods and work environments, however, racial ideas crucial to Arandian identity would be tested and shattered.

The Migrants: Origins, Demography, and Destinations

According to the results of a research study conducted by Taylor titled *Mexican Labor in the United States*, approximately 73.7 percent of Mexicans settling in Chicago from 1919 to 1929 held origins in the central plateau region of Mexico.³⁹ This area covered hundreds of thousands of kilometers in land and included the largely populated Mexican states of Michoacán, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, the Federal District, and Jalisco among others. Of the five, Jalisco was home to approximately 20 percent of the Mexican immigrants who settled in Chicago from 1919 to 1929.⁴⁰ Jalisco, the state in which the town of Arandas is located, thus became the largest contributor to Chicago’s Mexican population in the decade prior to the Great Depression.

In the yearly *Diario Oficial de Estadística de Migración*⁴¹ published by the Mexican government, the demography of Mexican emigrants traveling to the United States was sharply delineated. Each year, the Office of the Mexican Secretary of the Interior (*Secretario de Gobernación*) would put forth a collection of lists, tables, and charts that grouped emigrants exiting Mexico according to their state of origin, sex, occupation, literacy, and racial make-up. Other categories of classification included age, marital status, country of destination, and reasons for leaving Mexico that year.

In the 1926 *Diario Oficial*, Mexican border officials counted approximately fifty-eight thousand emigrants of Mexican birth, both male and female, entering the United States.⁴² Out of these fifty-eight thousand Mexican migrants, approximately 9500 (or 16 percent) held origins in the state of Jalisco, the largest single-state contributor of Mexican

33 Ramón Sánchez, *Ensayo Estadístico de la Municipalidad de Arandas*, (Publisher M. Pérez Lete: Guadalajara, 1889), p. 56. Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 1, Folder 27.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

36 *Ibid.*

37 The term “Mestizaje” literally refers to the process of becoming Mestizo, the Spanish-Indigenous mixture.

38 Meaning “purity of blood”.

39 Paul S. Taylor, “Chicago and the Calumet Region” in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, vol. 7 of *University of California Publications in Economics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), pp. 48-50.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Translates to “Official Diary of Migration Statistics”

42 Taken directly from the *Diario Oficial de Estadística de Migración 1926* found in Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 13, Folder 14 “Migration Study, Statistics 1926”.

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emigrants to the U.S. that year.⁴³ Of those 9500 Jalisco emigrants, a little over 7800 (82 percent) were men from which approximately 5900 (or 62 percent) held ages between 21 and 45.⁴⁴ Of the 7800 male emigrants, about 7600 (80 percent) were literate while only 130 (1.6 percent) knew how to speak English.⁴⁵ Furthermore, well over 4,000 of the 9500 Jalisco men were married (approx. 54 percent) and 7,016 of them (90 percent) claimed to have left Mexico “in search for work”.⁴⁶

Regarding occupation, 80 percent of Jalisco’s male emigrants had prior experience in agriculture. Contrastingly, 15 percent were classified as “domestic servants” and barely 2 percent boasted past employment in industry— e.g. railroads, chemical plants, textiles, oil, etc.⁴⁷ In terms of race, 53 percent of Jalisco’s emigrants, male and female, were classified as being “Spanish-white” while 47 percent were deemed “Mestizo”. Virtually no Jalisco emigrant was classified by Mexican officials as being “Indigenous”, “Negro”, or “Yellow”.⁴⁸

The surge of Mexican migration to the United States followed the displacement of President Porfirio Diaz in 1910. From 1905 to 1910, the U.S. Immigration Service had reported an estimated 21,732 immigrants from Mexico.⁴⁹ Between 1915 and 1920, however, the number rose to 91,075.⁵⁰ The Mexican Revolution, U.S. entry into World War I, and the enactment of quota laws in the 1920’s limiting immigration from Europe stimulated migration from Mexico. As a result, the number of recorded Mexican immigrants reached 238,527 between 1925 and 1930— ten times the number that had come 20 years earlier.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the tightening of border controls and the Great Depression brought heavy return movement to Mexico. The time period between 1930 and 1935 thus saw emigration *from* the U.S. expand while migration from Mexico fell to a low of 19,200.⁵² The level of Mexican immigration to the United States would not increase again until the 1950s.

Mexicans statistics published in the 1926 *Diario Oficial* matched their American counterparts, as U.S. government officials claimed that 58,423 Mexicans had entered the United States that year.⁵³ Within a six-year span (1924-1929), the peak of Mexican migration to the U.S. occurred

in 1927 when well over 77,000 Mexicans entered the United States.⁵⁴ Despite a steady flow of yearly migration showing approximately fifty-five to sixty thousand Mexicans entering the U.S. yearly in 1924, 1925, 1926, and 1928, the lowest point of migrant movement during the six-year period came in 1929 when barely 40,000 Mexican emigrants made their way across the border.⁵⁵ Though the tide of migrants traveling from Mexico to the U.S. fluctuated throughout the decade, the *Diario*’s published from 1924 to 1931 presented figures similar to those of 1926: Despite changes in numbers, the overwhelming majority of Mexican migrants to Chicago and the rest of the U.S. remained literate, “white-Spanish” males from Mexico’s central plateau region (in particular, the state of Jalisco) who held work experience in agriculture.

Among those who migrated from Arandas to labor in the United States, almost all occupations and classes in the community were represented. Although wealthier merchants, professional men, *rancheros*⁵⁶, and *hacendados*⁵⁷ largely refrained from joining the ranks of the emigrants, it would often be the case that their sons, driven by economic incentive, would become part of large regional migrations to the United States.⁵⁸ The occupational groups most frequently represented among migrants, however, were those of small street vendors, small *rancheros*, craftsmen, and agricultural day laborers with little to no property. Though most Arandian migrants were not married, they coincided with fellow Jalisco emigrants depicted in the *Diario* in terms sex, age, literacy, and race. Arandian emigrants were predominantly single, young, “white Spanish” males who knew how to read but did not speak English.⁵⁹

Although a complete list of the places and jobs at which Mexican migrants from Arandas worked during the 1920s is yet to be obtained, Taylor provided an illuminating summary while studying a representative sample of Arandian migrants in *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*. According to Taylor’s findings, Arandas Mexicans had found employment in twenty-four U.S. states scattered throughout the American west coast, the Southwest, the Great Plains, and the Midwest.⁶⁰ Although employment in the railroad industry was the most common experience shared by Arandian emigrants, large numbers of Arandians also performed hard labor in the meat and steel plants of Indiana Harbor and Chicago. As the decade progressed, Chicago and the Calumet region became the most common destination for migrants from Arandas and Jalisco at large.⁶¹

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 5, Folder 6.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 13, Folder 14 “Migration Study, U.S. Statistics”.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 “Rancheros”- term denoting ranch owners

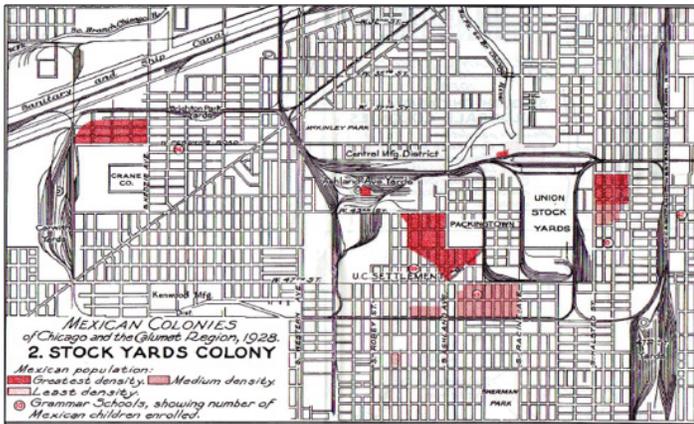
57 “Hacendados”- term denoting large property owners

58 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, p.35.

59 Ibid., p. 36.

60 Ibid., p. 41

61 Ibid., p. 42.



The Chicago Stockyards. Map of the Chicago Stock Yards; includes Mexican neighborhood in Back of the Yards (shaded area immediately west of the union stock yards). Ashland Ave. (the location of the Blanco and González attacks) runs through from North to South. The map also includes the neighborhoods of Canaryville (east of the stock yards), and Brighton Park (farther west). Taken from Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*.

Racial Ambiguity: A Lesson to Mexican Migrants from the Chicago Race Riot of 1919

On Wednesday, July 30th, 1919, two Mexican men, José Blanco and Fidencio González, were attacked in Chicago’s Back of the Yards neighborhood⁶²— a predominantly Polish and Lithuanian neighborhood just west of the Chicago stockyards district. The two separate attacks occurred along Ashland Avenue within an hour of one another during the afternoon work hours. This was the fourth day of the Chicago Race Riot, by which time white residents in Back of the Yards had largely succeeded in clearing their neighborhood and workplaces of African-Americans.⁶³

The descriptions of both attacks offered by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* suggest that the assaults occurred as the two Mexican men were returning home from work in the stockyards. The incidents endured by the men, claimed the *Daily Tribune*, mirrored attacks made on blacks over the previous two days. Fidencio González was attacked first, within a block of his home between 42nd and 43rd Streets. The nature of the attack— a large group of men attacking an isolated victim with bricks and other weapons— closely paralleled similar attacks by whites on blacks during the race riot. Within an hour after González’s attack, José Blanco was accosted in nearly the same location by a single attacker whom Blanco managed to stab with a knife.⁶⁴ According to *The Negro*

in Chicago⁶⁵, the time was approximately 5:00 or 5:30 when a white man named Joseph Schoff accosted Blanco repeatedly while he walked along Ashland Avenue. “Are you a Negro?” Schoff asked. Receiving no response, Schoff swung at Blanco with his fist, leading Blanco to stab Schoff under the heart and walk on before being arrested by the police.⁶⁶

According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the two Mexicans were attacked by white mobs because they had been confused for blacks. “González’s white attackers,” stated the paper, “mistook Gonzalez, a Mexican, for a Negro on July 30 and assaulted him.”⁶⁷ Similarly, Spanish-speaking newspapers in Chicago attributed the attacks to a chaotic, city-wide state of “racial confusion”. As a result, they urged Mexicans to be wary of their behavior and surroundings.⁶⁸

The arrival of Mexican immigrants in Chicago coincided with a period of pronounced racial tension between the city’s black and white populations marking the consolidation of a binary racial order. The most visible and dramatic indicator of this tension was the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. The fact that two of the roughly 365 victims of white violence were Mexican is often forgotten and overlooked by most accounts of the race riot. Though this figure may initially appear relatively insignificant, the two Mexicans attacked (González and Blanco) represented the only non-African-American victims of white racial violence during the riot.⁶⁹

The attacks González and Blanco during the Chicago Race Riot dramatically exposed the dangers faced by Mexican migrants at the moment of their arrival in Chicago. The possibility of being mistaken for African-Americans made Mexicans of all ethnicities (even “Spanish-white” Arandians arriving years later) vulnerable to racial violence affecting the city’s black population. Given Mexican migrants’ racial ambiguity in the eyes of white Chicagoans, imprecise distinctions were made between Mexicans and blacks regarding their position in Chicago’s racial hierarchy. Stories like those of González and Blanco, in fact, reveal that Mexicans’ racial status in Chicago’s black-white order was anything but certain. Media portrayal of the Blanco-González attacks as incidents induced by Mexican migrants’ racial ambiguity instilled a valuable racial lesson in migrants’ collective consciousness: In Chicago, race and “blackness” mattered.

62 See map for location.

63 Michael McCoyer, “Darkness of a Different Color: Mexicans and Racial Formation in Greater Chicago, 1916 to 1960” (Northwestern University: Chicago, 2007), p. 96.

64 Ibid., p. 97.

65 Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *Negro in Chicago*, p 662 as cited in Michael McCoyer, “Darkness of a Different Color: Mexicans and Racial Formation in Greater Chicago, 1916 to 1960”, p. 99.

66 Michael McCoyer, “Darkness of a Different Color: Mexicans and Racial Formation in Greater Chicago, 1916 to 1960”, p. 98-99.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., p. 102.

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Anti-Mexican Sentiment and Racial Disunity: Lessons from Chicago Neighborhoods

In an interview with Taylor in 1927, an American living in the Back of the Yards neighborhood discussed friction that had fueled physical clashes between Mexican laborers and other segments of the population. “Each group has snubbed the newest comer”, he began, “first the Poles, then the Italians, and now the Negroes and the Mexicans”.⁷⁰ According to the man, the Poles were frustrated with the Mexicans because they were taking their jobs in the stockyards. He went on to claim that, as a result, the Poles had been “knocking down” isolated Mexicans and “leaving them unconscious on the street.” Taylor’s informant then went on to recount a story:

One night, a wild shot from a Mexican killed a Pole. This angered the Poles and they decided to clean the neighborhood of Mexicans because the Mexicans had been attacking Polish kinsmen and taking Polish jobs. The Poles called in the ‘42s’, a gang from 12th Street and Ashland. Police had to step in to prevent a riot.⁷¹

Similarly, when speaking to Taylor of tensions with the Poles, a Mexican woman who had migrated to the same neighborhood from Arandas also complained that she had a great deal of trouble with Polish gang violence. A group of Polish boys had been beating up her teenage son for frequenting a Polish woman.⁷²

Unlike the town of Arandas, the city of Chicago in the 1920s could not boast widespread interethnic harmony. Physical encounters like those in the testimonies of Taylor’s interviewees involved violence between Mexican men and their Polish, African-American, Irish, and Anglo-American counterparts. Criminal incidents usually included assaults on Mexicans and, less often, shootings or knifings by Mexicans themselves.⁷³ Though robbery was occasionally the motive behind interracial violence, economic competition and interracial sexual relations were the main cause of racial violence.⁷⁴

Deemed as residential “invaders”, Arandas’ young male migrants and other Mexican immigrants arriving in Chicago during the 1920s experienced active resistance to their entry into certain neighborhoods. As conflicts over jobs and women resulted in escalating individual hostilities, personal prejudices quickly evolved into ethno-racial antipathies that were adopted by male aggressors, landlords, real estate agents, and even police officials. Exemplifying the latter, an Irish policeman told Taylor the following when interviewed in 1928:

The Mexicans depreciate property values and take the jobs and women of others. That’s why when the Mexicans come in, the others say they want to get out.⁷⁵

Though individual animosities against Mexicans were rampant, institutional antagonism to Mexican residence in Chicago neighborhoods also emerged from landlords; particularly those who resided in a locality being freshly entered by Mexicans. Other modes of formal resistance came from real estate men who were largely moved by neighborhood hostilities toward Mexicans, and from organizations (i.e. churches, urban leagues, etc.) representing nationalities or ethnic groups already predominant in a specific area.⁷⁶ Violence against Mexicans included direct physical assaults and property damage. Other techniques of discrimination included the refusal to rent or sell to Mexicans either by individual landlords or by entire neighborhoods, and the charging of exceptionally high rents to prospective Mexican tenants.⁷⁷

Though reasons for opposition were diverse in nature, objections to Mexican residence, and even that of “Spanish-white” Arandians, were frequently founded upon charges that Mexicans, *as a race*, were “Niggerish” (i.e. aesthetically “too dark”) and thus undesirable.⁷⁸ Frequent accusations brought forth against Mexicans attempting to move into a new neighborhood included their tendency for fighting and failure to assimilate, as well as the depreciation of property values.⁷⁹ The prejudices behind these powerful charges, however, were fueled by tensions over women and the appearance of newly-arrived Mexicans as job competitors in the community.

Violent friction involving Mexican immigrants was noticeably most frequent in neighborhoods inhabited by Poles, as the most vigorous opposition to Mexican residence was encountered from Polish residents in the Back of the Yards neighborhood and Polish laborers in the meatpacking industry.⁸⁰ In living spaces like Back of the Yards, the competition for jobs drove Poles to develop a vehement hostility toward Mexicans despite the two groups’ shared Catholic faith. It was often the case, in fact, that Polish residents looking to exclude Mexican migrants from moving into predominantly Polish neighborhoods formed alliances with local churches whose congregations were chiefly Eastern-European in origin.

According to a social worker’s testimony⁸¹, for example, the summer of 1926 witnessed numerous violent attacks against Mexicans from Poles as a result of Mexican residential expansion west of the union stock yards (i.e. the zone west of

70 Paul S. Taylor, “Chicago and the Calumet Region” in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 229.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 229.

73 Paul S. Taylor, “Chicago and the Calumet Region” in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 231.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 220-21.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

Ashland Avenue along 46th Street). As Mexicans continued to settle in Back of the Yards and Polish laborers began to fear unemployment in nearby meat-packing plants as a result of cheap labor, Poles and Lithuanians allied themselves with nearby Catholic churches on 45th and 48th Streets. Together, Polish residents and Eastern-European church congregations posed strong institutional resistance to Mexican penetration west of Ashland Avenue. Ultimately, the Catholic churches coerced Irish-American landlords to decline any rental of property in the area to Mexicans.⁸²

Regarding tensions between Poles and Mexicans over women, a 1925 anecdote shared by “Miss Dennis”, an employee at the University of Chicago settlement in the Back of the Yards neighborhood on 46th Street, illustrates the manner in which Polish men feared any prospect of sexual relations between Polish girls and Mexican males.⁸³ Though liaisons between Mexicans and Poles existed, Polish women rarely became the partners of Mexican men and vice versa.⁸⁴

We decided to have a dance to which some young, upper Mexicans were coming— clerks mostly, rather than laborers. But shortly before the dance, a young Polish male said ‘*No decent Polish girl would dance with a Mexican, whatever his occupation may be... Mexicans are all dirty and dangerous. They [the Mexicans] will steal the [Polish] girls and rape them if they dance.*’⁸⁵

Given the Pole’s remarks in Miss Dennis’ account, a conflation between social stereotype (the Mexican male as a thief) and sexual myth (the Mexican as a dangerous sexual predator) becomes evident. Ultimately, this type of negative racial imagery produced the prejudices that fueled resistance to Mexican residency in certain neighborhoods. Though Miss Dennis resolved the conflict by inviting University of Chicago sorority girls to dance with the Mexican men, this particular situation stood out from others like it. Incidents involving socially inappropriate sexual relations between Mexicans and Poles usually ended in violence and death.⁸⁶

82 For a fuller history of the role of Chicago’s Catholic churches in exacerbating and/or preventing segregation consult John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

83 Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 11, Folder 32, “Chicago and Calumet Area Field Notes-Typescript 1928”.

84 Paul S. Taylor, “Chicago and the Calumet Region” in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 230-31.

85 Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 11, Folder 32, “Chicago and Calumet Area Field Notes-Typescript 1928”.

86 Paul S. Taylor, “Chicago and the Calumet Region” in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 230

In contrast to their counterparts in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, Arandians and other Mexicans living in the Hull House area⁸⁷ experienced less animosity. Located in a relatively depopulated area, the Hull House neighborhood’s great demand for tenants mitigated residential competition.⁸⁸ Furthermore, when Mexicans entered the area, Italians represented the largest single nationality group among Hull House inhabitants. Since the languages and cultures held by Italians and Mexicans were significantly close to one another, the possibility for interracial tension diminished greatly.

Despite cultural and linguistic ties, nonetheless, Italian hostility to Mexican settlement in the Hull House neighborhood persisted. An Italian woman interviewed by Taylor on De Koven Street near Halstead Avenue, for instance, claimed the following:

We don’t like to have Mexicans moving in. Some people are afraid of them. It is better for each nationality to live by itself.⁸⁹

An Arandian woman in the same neighborhood described the difficulties she faced as a result of Italian resistance:

We came to this side of town on account of the Italians. They were very bad to us and some of the other Mexican families had trouble with them. They were always trying to do something to us. They called us dogs and threw things [at us] when we were not looking. They would crowd us off the sidewalks and make insulting remarks about us when we were not looking.⁹⁰

However bitter the conflict among Mexicans and Italians in the Hull House neighborhood, Italian resistance in this area to newly-arrived Mexicans was less vigorous than Italian opposition to African-Americans; the latter group being forced to remain south of Roosevelt Road.⁹¹ This phenomenon reflected the existence of a perverted racial ladder in Chicago’s neighborhoods; a hierarchy accounting for the preference of (and resistance against) certain ethnic groups in particular residential areas. Though the racial order was powerful in Chicago’s neighborhoods, Arandians and other Mexican migrants learned that the hierarchy did not confine itself to the living place. Instead, Chicago’s racial hierarchy also manifested itself, and thrived, in the industrial workplace.

87 See map on page 41.

88 Paul S. Taylor, “Chicago and the Calumet Region” in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 221.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., p. 222.

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Mexican Ambiguity in the Racial Hierarchy: A Lesson from the Chicago Workplace

When describing a typical start to his workday at a Chicago steel plant, Enrique Rincón, a Mexican migrant from Arandas, Jalisco, detailed the manner in which employers instructed workers to stand in line while supervisors hand-picked laborers to work for the day:

I line up with the rest of the Mexicans... the Negroes with the Negroes, the Poles with the Poles [etc.]... Sometimes we [the Mexicans] are chosen to work and we are usually paired with the Negroes. Even if we work with the Negroes, we still don't like them and they don't like us...⁹²

Similarly, Juan Pérez, an Arandian migrant employed by a local meat-packing plant, described the way in which employers divided different types of work amongst laborers:

The Poles, Czechs, and Lithuanians are picked first for the easier jobs while the Mexicans, the Negroes, and some Italians usually get the difficult work... In the plant, the Poles work with the Poles and the Czechs work with the Czechs even if they have the same job... The Mexicans always work in stations with other Mexicans...⁹³

Through their testimonies, Rincón and Pérez offered a glimpse to some of the complex racial dynamics at play in the Chicago workplace. In his description of laborers lining up according to ethnicity and nationality, for example, Rincón spoke to the existence of deep racial divisions among migrant groups. Likewise, in recounting the way in which laborers opted to work alongside those of similar background while knowing that workers of other ethnicities performed similar tasks, Pérez attested to the predominance of racial and ethno-national allegiances over a universal labor-related identity.

Regarding Chicago's racial hierarchy, Pérez's distinction between "easier jobs" and "difficult work" delineated the manner in which the city's racial ladder functioned. Whereas white-Americans and white migrants claimed the top spots in the employment ladder, those of darker skin had no choice but to perform physically strenuous labor in exchange for significantly lower wages. Though this perverse division of labor could have potentially engendered a sense of solidarity between Mexican laborers and their African-American counterparts, Rincón's observation of animosity between Mexicans and blacks proved that images of worker cohesion did not accurately represent reality. Unlike the union-led and Depression-motivated

multi-racial collaboration of the 1930s and 40s, the Chicago workplace in the 1920s was a racial free for all.

Despite their relatively low position in the employment hierarchy and their frequent pairing with African-Americans, Chicago's lighter-skinned Mexican migrants were sometimes allowed access to jobs that were above the occupational norm. This was especially the case after the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which limited the annual number of Eastern and Southern European migrants who were allowed to enter the United States. As a consequence of the immigration law, several white Arandians circa 1927-28 boasted employment in upper-level industrial jobs. Those migrants who learned English even obtained traditionally-white managerial positions.⁹⁴

Rather than provide clarity to the racial dilemma faced by Mexican migrants, however, the dynamics of the Chicago workplace only affirmed Mexicans' racial ambiguity. Whether they worked in management or alongside African-Americans as strikebreakers, Mexican migrants of all skin tones (including "Spanish-white" Arandians) continued to hold a precarious position in the city's racial ladder. As Mexicans made their way through Chicago's various industries, they learned the ways of their American employers by picking up on their racial prejudices. Arandian migrants and other Mexican immigrants ultimately adopted negative perceptions of blackness so as to advance through the city's racial hierarchy and procure their standing as superior laborers.

Adopting Negative Perceptions of "Blackness" in the Workplace

In his study of Chicago and the Calumet region, Taylor recorded an interview from 1925 with the superintendent of a bedding factory that employed a high proportion of Mexican women on its sewing machines. This particular employer found the Mexicans to be "rapid workers" and claimed the following:

The Mexicans are as good as any nationality except possibly the Germans. I like them better than the Italians. On the same machine we are now getting 35 percent more output than we did in 1910... The Mexicans don't have to be driven as much as the others. For this reason I prefer the Mexicans to the Italians, Croatians, Serbs, etc.⁹⁵

Similarly, the manager of a confectionery factory cited characteristics he deemed intrinsic to Mexicans (as opposed to other ethnic groups) when maintaining that:

The Mexican men are either very good or very poor; they stay well or not at all. They are not so clannish as the Italians. Unlike them, they don't form gangs and fight among themselves. They work in heat, which

92 Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 11, Folder 32, "Chicago and Calumet Area Field Notes-Typescript 1928".

93 Ibid.

94 Paul S. Taylor, "Chicago and the Calumet Region" in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 99.

95 Ibid., p. 81.

they stand well.⁹⁶

As illustrated by these statements, race-consciousness and racial motivation figure prominently in the employment practices of Chicago industrialists. The latter regarded the abilities of their workers as something that was inseparable from, and determined by, the racial make-up of laborers. The claims put forth by these two employers speak for the larger, widespread tendency of industrialists in Chicago to associate a worker's ethnicity or nationality with their level of output. The remarks also attest to the inclination of labor managers to make generalizations about the character of their laborers along racial lines, and the predisposition of supervisors to use these abstractions as a way of measuring the productivity of the rest of their employees.

Regarding the comparisons made between Mexican and African-American labor by Chicago industrialists, it is crucial to pay attention to the observations made by employers in the meat-packing and steel industries. This is because Chicago's steel and meatpacking plants witnessed significant increases in both Mexican and African-American presence in the period ranging from 1915 to 1930. A steel plant studied by Taylor, for example, saw its Mexican labor population increase from less than 1,000 employees in 1916 to well over 6,600 by 1928.⁹⁷ Whereas Mexicans comprised approximately 4.5 percent of the plant's total workforce in 1916, they grew to represent 29.9 percent twelve years later. In 1929, Taylor noted that the make-up of a meat-packing plant's labor population changed from being virtually 0 percent Mexican in 1916 to 23.3 percent Mexican in 1928.⁹⁸ That same year, Taylor estimated that 29.5 percent of laborers in the meat-packing industry at large were African-American while 9 percent were Mexican. Furthermore, he approximated that 12.3 percent of workers in the steel industry were black while their Mexican counterparts comprised 9.4 percent of the industry's labor force.⁹⁹

In his interviews with the employment managers of two meat-packing plants in Chicago, Taylor recorded the industrialists' impressions of the labor of Mexican immigrants in contrast to that of their black counterparts. One of them expressed the following sentiment:

The Mexicans seem to have less absenteeism than the Negroes and to have a little more ambition than the low grade colored. The colored are satisfied with two or three days' work per week, but the Mexican wants more... The Mexicans don't go South as readily as the Negroes. We also don't have much trouble with the Mexicans as we do with Negroes because of lack of sobriety.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 40, 42.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

Similarly, the employment manager of one of Chicago's largest steel works generalized along racial lines and claimed:

The foremen like the Mexicans because of their unsatisfactory experience with the Negroes. They say 'Give us some more Mexicans'. The Mexicans are better than the Negroes; the Negroes are no good. We replace the Negroes gradually by Mexicans because the Mexicans are grateful and honest.¹⁰¹

The supervisors' statements reveal that Chicago industrialists were race-conscious insofar as they regarded the abilities, attitudes, and work habits of their laborers as qualities determined by racial make-up. The remarks also demonstrate the tendency of employers to rely on racial observations to make racially motivated judgments; the former acting as a lens through which industrial employers determined which group of people deserved to work in their plants.

In his documentation of interviews with Mexican laborers, Taylor noted that Arandians quickly became sensitive to the importance of the color line in American employment practice. Given the divisive and racially motivated labor practices of Chicago employers, Arandas' migrants adopted negative attitudes toward African-Americans and the concept of 'blackness' as a means by which to advance in the city's racial hierarchy. "In some cases", wrote Taylor, "the Arandas Mexicans recognize that the strong antipathy toward Negroes by Americans actually increased their employment opportunities".¹⁰²

Given the racially ambiguous situation of Arandas migrants and other Mexicans in Chicago and the presence of the city's racial hierarchy in the minds of both employers and workers, Arandians went to great lengths to elude the race handicap they could potentially be subjected to if grouped together with African-Americans. Such measures included distancing themselves from blacks in the workplace and developing new ideologies regarding their place in the racial ladder. "Characteristically," noted Taylor, "the Mexicans felt themselves as natives of the American continent and thus entitled to preferential treatment over Negroes and Europeans rather than adverse discrimination". One Mexican worker exemplified this notion by claiming:

We get the worst jobs and no chance to go ahead; the others get it. We that are next door neighbors and from the American continent are slighted in favor of Negroes and Europeans.

Ultimately, a large portion of Mexicans in Chicago came to adopt racial antipathies toward African-Americans. One Mexican in a steel plant who had migrated from Arandas,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 109.

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Jalisco expressed the following sentiment:

When I come to Chicago from Mexico in 1920... there were a lot of Negroes and I did not like it. Since then I have never liked them and I try never to get work near the Negroes. They are *gente mala y grosera*.^{103 104}

Similarly, another migrant worker from the township of Arandas working in the meat-packing industry conveyed discontent toward his African-American counterparts:

I don't like the Negroes one bit... The boss says they're lazy when it comes to their work and so it must be so... I try my best to get away from them because I don't want to be mistaken for a Negro... The work of a Mexican is clearly superior¹⁰⁵

Although the workplace provided a breeding ground for racial animosity between Mexicans and blacks to flourish, a great deal of Mexican prejudice toward African-Americans arose from Chicago's neighborhoods. As competition for employment and residential tensions ingrained and emphasized the powerful consequences of race (particularly "blackness") in the collective consciousness of Arandians, communities of Arandian migrants began to prioritize separation and disassociation from African-Americans in all aspects of everyday life. Ultimately, everyday community activity became a means through which Arandians minimized interaction with blacks and established racial isolation.

Appeals to "Whiteness" in Chicago Neighborhoods

As Arandians moved into neighborhoods in South Chicago¹⁰⁶ throughout the mid-1920s, workplace hostilities toward African-American laborers translated into enmity towards black neighbors. "The Negroes are very dirty and always disorderly", said one Arandian migrant who worked for the steel industry and lived on 89th street, "the house across the street was a pretty good house until the Negroes moved in."¹⁰⁷ Given that Mexicans and African-Americans shared living spaces in the more restricted and poorer localities of South Chicago, violence erupted frequently between the two groups as a result of conflict over housing. A Mexican clergyman recalled frequent shootings along 87th and 90th Streets as a result of constant infighting between Mexicans and African-Americans living in the same housing settlement. "A few Mexicans have been shot and a few Negroes have been cut up," claimed the clergyman, "sometimes that can be ascribed to

moonshine [alcohol], but that is rarely the case."¹⁰⁸

Although the attitudes of employers served as a catalyst for Arandians and other Mexicans to distance themselves from African-Americans in Chicago's meat-packing and steel plants, the effects of industrialists' racially-driven judgments were not confined to the workplace or the workday. Instead, the weight of racial attitudes associated with the city's workplace racial hierarchy merged with powerful housing tensions and neighborhood violence to further implant the wedge between Mexicans and their black counterparts. Throughout their everyday lives, Arandians and other Mexican migrants expressed their aversion to association with African-Americans through their engagement in community activity.

In a 1924 interview session with Taylor, for instance, José Rodríguez, an Arandian migrant, asked a fellow Mexican from Jalisco named Andrés Frejias why he had married an African-American woman. Frejias responded: "I asked a Mexican girl and she wouldn't, and I don't know any whites, so I married a Negress."¹⁰⁹ To this, Rodríguez replied: "We the Mexicans don't like to see our people getting involved with Negroes. They are inferior, they perform inferior work and don't live like us... we don't want to degrade our race."¹¹⁰

The exchange between Rodríguez and Frejias exemplified the type of racial ideology that Arandians and other Mexican migrants in Chicago developed after settlement and employment. In their mind, Mexicans came to represent a race of their own and looked to prolong racial fitness by marrying, and only having sexual relations with, other Mexicans. If this could not be achieved, then "white" Anglo-Americans (*not* white migrants; i.e. Poles, Lithuanians, etc.) embodied a suitable, though not highly desirable, alternative. Any form of romantic or sexual involvement outside those boundaries was deemed inappropriate by the majority of Mexican migrant communities. Individuals like Frejias were ostracized for their choice of spouse.

The desire of Arandians and other Mexicans to establish a firm separation between themselves and their black counterparts extended well beyond the realms of sex and marriage. Arandian migrant Manuel Doran, for example, claimed that he was not fond of living in Chicago because "here they try to make me sit with Negroes in the street cars when I go to work."¹¹¹ Another Arandian, Miguel Sánchez, fervently complained about having to eat in the same restaurants as Negroes on account of their smell. "I only eat with Mexicans now," stated Sánchez, "because the smell of the Negroes made

103 Translated by Taylor as "Bad and coarse people".

104 Paul S. Taylor, "Chicago and the Calumet Region" in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 115.

105 Ibid.

106 Area labeled as number "3" in the map on page 34.

107 Paul S. Taylor, "Chicago and the Calumet Region" in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, p. 224.

108 Ibid., p.230.

109 Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 11, Folder 32, "Chicago and Calumet Area Field Notes-Typscript 1928", p. 35.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., p. 36.

me lose my appetite.”¹¹² Like Doran and Sánchez, Arandians and other Mexican migrants longed to use communal spaces (e.g. streetcars and restaurants) and corresponding community activities (like traveling to work or eating lunch) to distance themselves from African-Americans. Community activity, therefore, became an important agent in influencing racial status.

As racial animosities held by Arandians and other Mexicans toward African-Americans heightened, Mexican migrants began to make appeals to “whiteness” in order to affirm their racial superiority to blacks. When forced to sit with African-Americans in a movie theater, for example, Arandian migrant Agustin Angel exclaimed, “but I am white in my ways!”¹¹³ Similarly, fellow Arandian Felipe Ibañez identified his enrollment and participation in a Hull-House English class as an attempt to rapidly assimilate into the white world. “Being white here is good and that is what I want,” claimed Ibañez, “the only way one can achieve that is by learning the proper English of whites and speaking it with them [white Anglo-Americans].”¹¹⁴

The appeals to ‘whiteness’ made by Angel and Ibañez reflected the manner in which Arandians began to shed their regional and national allegiances for the sake of a white identity that guaranteed advancement in employment and better social treatment. As Chicago’s racial climate exposed Arandians to their racially ambiguous position in the city’s racial ladder, life in neighborhoods and the Chicago workplace conveyed negative perceptions of blackness to newly-arriving Arandian laborers. The message that Arandians received was clear: In Chicago, race and ‘blackness’ mattered, and being black was a detriment to social mobility. Arandians and their Mexican compatriots thus opted to pursue whiteness through everyday relationships, activity, and speech so as to distance themselves from the difficulties that ensued from association with African-Americans. Nevertheless, though this approach appeared to be strategically advantageous, it eventually ruptured Chicago’s community of Arandas migrants.

The interethnic unity documented in Sánchez’s 1889 anthropological work on the township of Arandas died in Chicago sometime during the 1920s. As Arandians became obsessed with procuring whiteness in order to attain the benefits that came with an advantageous racial status, they sowed the seeds of division among themselves by doing that which they had failed to do in Mexico: they began to discriminate against their own on the basis of color, ancestry, physiognomy, etc. As had been the case with African-Americans, community activity once again became the medium through which the new “white” Arandians (having abandoned the label of “Spanish-white”

and adopted the term *blanco*) distanced themselves from their fellow townsmen and other Mexicans. Race had thus become something that could be determined by one’s engagement in certain kinds of community activity, and ceased to be a fixed and inherently biological entity.

In the summer of 1928, for example, Arandas’ migrant Miguel Pacheco was asked by Hull House staff help organize an annual Fourth of July celebration in his neighborhood. Pacheco, a light-skinned Mexican bank clerk, said the following relative to inviting some of the darker-skinned Mexican laborers from the factory to the settlement party:

I will not invite these men because they are too primitive... At first the Mexicans came in overalls but now we have suits and dress our women in furs, etc. Most Mexicans who ask me about technical school were they can learn auto mechanics, etc. are dark... They [the darker Mexicans] don’t take the English class here because they don’t have good enough clothes to come to class. I don’t want them at the event... they do not dress well or speak any English...¹¹⁵

When analyzed alongside Frejias’ commentary on interracial marriage, Pacheco’s racial reasoning (as illustrated in his selection criteria for the Hull House event) attests to the changing social dynamics present within Chicago’s Arandian migrant community. Whereas Frejias (circa 1924) spoke of a unified Mexican race seeking to perpetuate ethnic purity, Pacheco’s remarks (uttered only four years after Frejias’ interview) revealed the presence of racial tensions *within* Chicago’s Mexican community. Unlike Frejias, a fellow Arandian migrant whose race consciousness seemed to be fixated upon the undesirability of Mexicans to be associated with African-Americans, Pacheco imagined complex divisions among Mexicans based on skin tone. According to Pacheco’s racial logic, a Mexican migrant’s physical traits (mainly, his skin color) served as an indicator of occupation, language proficiency, and material wealth relative that of other fellow migrants.

Taking cues from Chicago’s binary racial order, the racial hierarchy that emerged *within* Arandian migrant communities like Pacheco’s omitted the diverse racial classifications of the home society and overwhelmingly favored North American “whiteness” over “blackness”. As a result, mutual aid societies frequented by Arandas’ migrants like the *Benito Juarez Society*, the *Sociedad Cuauhtemoc*, and the *Obreros Libres* (Free Workers Society) instituted membership requirements that stymied participation by those of darker skin both explicitly or indirectly.¹¹⁶ One organization known as the *Sociedad Hispanoamericana*, for example, required members to pay monthly fees and possess English proficiency while limiting its membership to Mexicans in managerial and/or administrative

112 Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, BANC MSS 84/38 c, The Bancroft Library; University of California Berkeley, Series 3, Carton 10, Folder 8, “Mexican Labor in the United States, Field Notes, Series-E Set I”, p. 72 (582).

113 Ibid., p. 71 (581).

114 Ibid., p. 50 (560).

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., p. 44 (554).

ADOPTING THE AMERICAN RACIAL LENS

positions (i.e. light-skinned Mexican employees).¹¹⁷ The *Azteca Society* went farthest, claiming to admit only “white Mexicans” and denying many self-proclaimed Mestizos (including some Arandian men) access to its services.¹¹⁸ Though the majority of Mexican community organizations did not operate in a discriminatory manner, the appearance of black-white racial divisions within community outlets (i.e. popular organizations, social events) reveals that whiteness had become something for which to aspire. Motivated by their longing for social mobility in a black-white society, Arandians looked to distance themselves from the ethnically diverse peers with whom they had once harmoniously coexisted.

Conclusion: Adopting the American Racial Lens

When describing the selection process by which he hired farmhands to aid him on the ranch in a 1930 interview, Luís García, a land-owning migrant who had recently returned to Arandas from Chicago, noted that he relied upon a laborer’s physical appearance when making judgments about his character. “Sometimes a worker can seem suspicious,” claimed García, “those who look darker and more indigenous than us are not as trustworthy.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, another returning rancher named Ramón Gutierrez admitted to keeping a more watchful eye on “dirty workers” because they seemed more likely to steal from food supplies.¹²⁰

Whether done purposefully or subconsciously, García and Gutierrez employed racial mentalities similar to those of their employers in Chicago’s meat-packing plants. Nevertheless, though both García and Gutierrez made appeals to physical traits (i.e. skin tone) in their formulations of character judgments, García’s employment of the term “us” evinces the emergence of black-white racial division in the town of Arandas. Many more of Taylor’s interviewees made similar distinctions, demonstrating that migrants had indeed adopted the American racial lens and brought it home.

Although not all Arandian migrants were affected by the American racial system in the same manner and degree as García and Gutierrez, it would be incorrect to assume that migration had no direct effect on the many social divisions that arose among returning migrants and fellow townsmen. The influence of migration and changing perceptions of race on growing social tensions was frequently evident, for example, in the attitudes about dress that were adopted by returning Arandian migrants. Upon their return to Arandas, many of those coming from the U.S. wore somewhat better clothes than they would have otherwise. Whether on a ranch or in town, suits purchased north of the border were taken out of trunks and exhibited with pride. One *ranchero* interviewed by Taylor, Emilio Moreno, bragged about his two hats and his

pair of oxfords: “I like good clothes,” he remarked, “but here [in Arandas] nobody wears them... Only those of us who have been to America can truly appreciate their significance.”¹²¹ Juan Martínez, another *ranchero* of a similar migration background, admitted to have excluded “darker, more primitive” Arandians from a social gathering at his ranch on the grounds that people of that particular race-type could seldom afford the proper attire.¹²²

Much like the significance of material wealth and the importance of status symbols (i.e. clothing), the American binary racial outlook was learned from the migratory experience in Chicago and imported to the home society. Unlike race consciousness prior to migration, the latter mentality was more dramatic and aggressive partially because, as evidence by Martínez’s testimony, racial antipathies rapidly became conflated with the emergence of class divisions between non-migrants and those returning from the United States. The stationary biological nature of race became a thing of the past, as García, Gutierrez, and other *ranchero* interviewees replaced their Spanish and Mestizo blood ancestry with a new white identity— one which the individual could create for his or her self by means of social activity, material wealth, and community associations. Though race consciousness had existed in the township of Arandas long before migration to the United States took hold of its citizenry, migration to and from racially polarized communities such as the city of Chicago created and exacerbated new interethnic tensions.

Having left a mark on their home and host societies, the story of Arandas’ migrants and their journey to and from the city of Chicago is one of historical agents acting as transnational citizens and dynamic beings. Throughout the entirety of the migratory experience, the racial ideologies and self-proclaimed identities of Arandian migrants underwent continuous change so as to allow individuals to adapt to new historical spaces and advance in various social contexts. Race and identity thus became all-important tools in the quest for social mobility on both sides of the border, whether in the Chicago’s Back of the Yards neighborhood or in Arandas’ *ranchos*. More importantly, race and identity ceased to be the static, rigid, and biologically determined entities of the migrants’ Mexican past, and were instead transformed into more dynamic conceptions that individuals could mold and reshape by means of their engagement in community activity.

For the first time, an Arandian’s racial identity was no longer strictly bound to complex blood relations, marriages, and centuries-old lineage dating back to the age of Spanish conquest. In the midst of Chicago’s turbulent racial climate, Arandian migrants learned that they too could assume the more advantageous *blanco* (white) identity by taking the right jobs, marrying “the right people”, learning English, dressing in certain ways, frequenting specific places of leisure, etc. Migration, therefore, enabled race to become part of the

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid., p. 45 (555).

119 Paul S. Taylor, *A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico*, p.55.

120 Ibid., p. 56.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid., p 57.

individual experience—that is to say, to become subject to the individual and his or her actions.

In terms of methodology, the history put forth in this essay aimed to establish that a narrower and more nuanced analysis of migration offers the most comprehensive answers to key historical questions. The transnational micro-history presented in this examination of Arandian migration to Chicago, I believe, best captures the essence of what happened to this particular Mexican community during its transnational racial transformation, as well as the manner in which this shift in identity occurred and *why* the change came to be. Furthermore, my approach has now opened the possibility to further explore the reason (or reasons) behind the dominance of migrants' adopted "white" identity over the old "Spanish-white" self even after repatriation.

Ultimately, if historians can develop a more rigorous method of examination by which to better interpret the difficulties of the past, then society will be better equipped to comprehend the daunting challenges of present. Given the complexities surrounding the migration of numerous individual communities from Mexico to the city of Chicago, I strongly believe that a more localized historical analysis of each community's individual migration is an extremely useful approach to understanding the appearance of historical racial tensions between specific Mexican-American communities and other ethnic groups, as well as among Mexican-Americans themselves. Contrary to the ideas that have long dominated migration scholarship and immigration politics, homogeneity in any and all aspects of migration is non-existent. As demonstrated in Taylor's interviews with the townspeople of Arandas in 1920s, each particular migrating community and each individual migrant has stitched their own story in their respective time and historical spaces.

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