MASCULINITY IN THE ABSENCE OF WOMEN:
THE GENDERED IDENTITIES OF LOS
SOLOS IN MEXICAN CHICAGO, 1916-1930.

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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December, 2008
MASCULINITY IN THE ABSENCE OF WOMEN:
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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As work-seeking Mexican migrants passed by, contract labor agents courted the predominantly-male workforce with colorful signs, cajolery, and outright mendacity. In Chicago, arriving *mexicano*\(^1\) referred to these men as *enganchistas*, a disparaging designation translated literally as “one who hooks or ensnares.” These labor agents used a diverse set of methods to arrest the attention of prospective workers; however, some *enganchistas* were better-suited for the task than others. One employment agency on Chicago’s Madison Street utilized a relatively-unsuccessful labor recruiter as its mouthpiece, yelling “*amigo*,” “*companiono*,” or “*pepe*” until he had induced a group of *solos* to stop. Upon realizing that he had momentarily piqued the interest of prospective Mexican laborers, this *enganchista* would clasp the worker’s arm and unleash an excited flurry of questions: “Where do you want to go? ….Do you want to board with a *compania* or by yourself? We can give you anything you want. Here is one of our cards; always keep it. Go upstairs and sign up for a *salida* tonight. You will be working in the

\(^1\) In many Chicano histories and this study as well, this term signifies a Mexican citizen in the United States.
morning, and have nice place to sleep tonight.\textsuperscript{2} Overtures in English, however, were generally greeted with less derision than those in broken Spanish. One “Italian” enganchista, whose “Spanish speech [was] atrocious,”\textsuperscript{3} created several signs fraught with misspellings and grammatical errors, such as one sign which read “Un trabajador ser por la ciudad.”\textsuperscript{4} Even if unskilled Mexican workers stopped and listened to this agent’s speech, they often did so while hiding smirks and skeptically winking at one another.

Successful labor recruiters were often Mexicans themselves, each possessing a salesman’s power of persuasion coupled with the perceived solidarity of mexicanidad\textsuperscript{5}. One successful enganchista, who “spoke Spanish like an ‘old-timer’ from the Rio Grande” and was more aggressive in his recruiting practices. Not content with a stationary method of procuring labor, this agent traversed Madison Street and accosted various groups of migrant men. This tactic had considerable merit as one observer recalled an instance in which this man led no fewer than eighteen men into an employment agency. Implicit within such a high degree of success is the ability, whether genuine or contrived, to instantly project oneself as being trustworthy. Though this contract labor agent briefly enjoyed “the confidence of the men on [Madison Street] more than any other,” he soon thereafter served a prison term for larceny. Other enganchistas promoted questionable labor schemes with the legal recognition afforded by a signed

\textsuperscript{3} Taylor, Mexican Labor, 65.
\textsuperscript{4} This phrase should be “Un trabajador para estar cerca de la ciudad.”
contract. One solo complained that he “once signed up with an enganchista who spoke no Spanish and paid him 8$ for the job when I had already paid him 1$. He told me to sign something, and I did.”

Throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, Chicago’s Madison and Canal Streets served as the labor epicenter for young, unaccompanied male Mexican migrants, or los solos. These two adjacent streets, which housed over seventeen employment agencies and many more enganchistas, bustled with underground capitalist activity. By the early 1920s, local railroad companies and Michigan-based sugar beet growers were the primary industries served by Madison and Canal Streets’ employment apparatus. However, other types of businesses appeared as well, with each being more focused on serving, rather than employing, the waves of solos flocking to the Windy City.

Several employment agencies converted unused offices into boarding rooms, a practice which can be characterized as pragmatic, and sometimes, paternal. Although there were some “steady roomers,” these rooms were customarily occupied by “men [who were] in town after leaving one job who in a day or two will be leaving for another.”6 A more common use of vacant office space was sub-leasing it to the proprietors of Mexican restaurants, some of which served “generous portions” of “comidas nacionales”7 to mostly-Mexican customers. Track-laying mexicano migrants, many of whom sought an eventual return to Mexico and the preservation of an unadulterated Mexican cultural identity, often basked in the taste and comfort of tacos and tortillas. As idle railroad workers frequented these restaurants, they did so while

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5 “Mexican-ness”
6 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 65.
complaining about the boxcar “camp commissary, the cook…the foremen, the roast beef, and the [dry food].” Finally, several buildings on these streets housed pool halls, a favorite recreational pastime for *solos* and a site of masculine, fraternal communion. Pool halls fulfilled a variety of functions, social and otherwise, for young transient Mexican men. All under one roof, *solos* could sometimes eat a meal, sit down for a haircut, take a bath, buy a cigar, and shoot a game of pool. They also entertained the pitches of *enganchistas* and a few young *mexicanos* smoked and sold marijuana harvested in distant transnational places, from Mexico to Grand Rapids, MI.8

A simple description of fast-paced daily life in 1920s Madison and Canal Streets highlights the contested nature of *solo* masculinity within this remarkable urban landscape. Arriving in Chicago as either young bachelors or unaccompanied by their wives and children who chose to remain in Mexico, these young men entered Chicago with the omnipresent need to assert their gendered identities in the large-scale absence of Mexican women. Furthermore, these migrants’ physical bodies and masculine self-definitions were in constant motion, and thus the daily production of their cultural identities took place in the foreground of shifting geographic landscapes. As evidenced by the competitive nature of employment agencies and their staff, *solos* regarded vocational choice (and later the act of quitting itself) as an expression of masculine

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7 “National Foods.”
agency. If a job description or the job itself was unappealing, migrant men simply walked away in defiance, an act which some have labeled “voting with their feet.”

Another common site of reaffirming solo “manliness” in the absence of mexicanas is embodied in the ineffectual advances of the Italian labor agent, as well as the reciprocal disdain evoked by his butchery of Spanish. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Chicago famously continued to serve as a prominent destination for colliding, diasporic peoples. Eastern European immigrants, especially Polish and Italian, entered the city in large numbers until the National Origins Act of 1924. African-Americans traded the American South’s violent brand of race-based subjugation only to find some unwanted similarities in Chicago. Finally, the smoldering Mexican Revolution and a critical American labor shortage due to World War I facilitated the movement of mexicanos into the Midwest, and Chicago in particular. As African-Americans competed with Mexican, Polish, and Italian immigrants for city space, place, and wages, subsequent encounters between Chicago’s male newcomers became more contentious and violent. Masculinity, feminine “Othering,” and honor were central to these conflicts as asserting the “manliness” of Mexican men required “feminizing” the city’s “others.” Occasionally, this process even included Mexican immigrants who pursued U.S. citizenship and “whiteness.” In Mexican Chicago, conflicts between greenhorn men, coupled with the economic and political hegemony of “white” masculinity, meant that to demean one’s

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“whiteness” was to demean one’s masculinity\textsuperscript{11}. This racial power structure played into the hands of the Eastern Europeans and lighter-completed Mexican (im)migrants, who enjoyed a prospective whiteness, or the presumption of future assimilability. Thus, the construction of gendered hierarchies in a multi-ethnic city played a pivotal role in how \textit{los solos} asserted their manhood.

\textit{Solos} also re-affirmed their personal masculinity by seeking out the company and comradeship of Mexican men. The third primary vehicle for claiming a manly identity in the Midwestern metropolis existed in social interactions within Mexican Chicago’s pool halls and in a gendered-male, fraternal Mexican nationalism so prevalent in Revolutionary Mexico. As noted by historians Zaragosa Vargas and Gabriela Arredondo, pool halls were a major source of recreation for both immigrant men and \textit{los solos}; they provided a space for commiseration, companionship, and a much-needed respite from the toils of migrant labor. By 1928, a mere twelve years after the initial appearance of large-scale Mexican (im)migration\textsuperscript{12} into the greater Chicago area, there were no less than 76 pool halls operating under Mexican ownership. Further enhancing the \textit{billaria’s} primacy to the Mexican community (and \textit{los solos} in particular) was that many doubled as restaurants, bars, barbershops, as well as serving other community functions\textsuperscript{13}. Within the walls of these businesses, Spanish was almost always the language of currency, and migrant men both debated and reflected the nation-building exercise underway in


\textsuperscript{12}I use this bracketed word to highlight the mixed composition of the Mexican diaspora in the United States. Throughout this paper, the trope “[im]migration” will be used to encapsulate both Mexican migrants and immigrants within a single, umbrella term.
Mexico. These discussions, however, were not localized to pool halls, as both married and unmarried migrants sought the “manly” refuge of patriotic celebrations. Mutual aid societies and newspapers facilitated large celebrations commemorating important dates within the life of the Mexican nation-state, such as the birthday of national “liberator” Benito Juarez or the anniversary of Mexican independence. Most of these celebrations were dominated by men and reflected transnational events in “the motherland” as well as the defensive solidarity engendered by the “racialization” project within Chicago’s evolving ethnic order. Fervent patriotism was both a defensive shield against American racism and a reflection of the migrant’s outlook toward his travels in the United States.

This study should be situated within several recent historiographical developments. I owe much to Gunther Peck’s pathbreaking book *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930*. Published in 2000, Peck argues that much of the extant immigration histories have focused on immigration rather than transient migrant labor. Such a framework has limited the field’s explanatory power by focusing on fixed geographic polities (i.e. Chicago or New York) and immigrants who seek cultural integration, “assimilation,” and often, whiteness. As Peck, cultural theorist Ali Behdad, and anthropologist Nicholas de Genova point out, this approach often reinforces American exceptionalism by portraying

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the United States as a harmonious “nation of immigrants” and as an asylum for the world’s “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” The sub-field’s frontier lies in the study of highly-mobile, transnational migrants whose cultural identities are forged somewhere between the United States and their respective country of origin.

Like Peck’s Greek and Italian transients, Mexican *solos* did not sojourn to Chicago with the intention of permanent settlement. An extensive system of remittances linked Chicago primarily with cities and pueblos in the Mexican states of Michoacan, Jalisco, and Guanajuato. Furthermore, as reflected in the Spanish-language newspapers *El Nacional, Mexico*, and *La Noticia Mundial*, migrants remained keenly-interested in Mexican current affairs, such as the Cristero Revolt. Thus, even though this paper’s geographic focus is Chicago, IL, “Mexican Chicago” is a transnational space with indivisible cultural ties to not only the aforementioned Mexican states, but also to the sugar-beet fields of Michigan, steel mills in Kansas City, and the “boxcar communities” of El Paso. Mobility and the corresponding shifts in social landscapes were formative to the *solos’* self-articulated forms of manhood.

This study also seeks to partially fill Chicano historiography’s yawning discrepancy between studies of Chicago and the [U.S.-]American Southwest. Although rich monographs and ethnographies exist on the city’s European immigrant enclaves, comparatively little has been written about Chicago’s vast Mexican-origin population. In 1960, the Windy City became the United States’ third-largest “Mexican” city, trailing only Los Angeles and San Antonio in total population. It has currently overtaken San

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Antonio with the 2000 census counting over 1.1 million persons of Mexican-descent living in the greater metropolitan area. Even the Midwestern metropolis’ surrounding suburbs display Mexican Chicago’s diversity and civic import. The growth of predominantly Mexican-origin suburbs on Chicago’s southwestern side, such as Cicero and Berwyn, seem to represent the expansion of pre-existing Mexican neighborhoods within city limits. Other suburbs on the northwest side have large populations of third and fourth generation Mexican-Americans. When examined in totality, the growth and evolution of Mexican Chicago has simply outpaced corresponding scholarship.

To be sure, several important historical monographs have been published since 2000, especially Gabriela Arredondo’s *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939*. Arredondo refuted the long-standing, “assimilationist” notion that early Mexicans in Chicago were “just another immigrant group” in a city with a long tradition of incorporating foreigners. A distinct brand of urban racial formation consigned incoming *mexicanos* to jobs, wages, and a status beneath that of their contemporaneous Eastern European counterparts, yet slightly above that of African-Americans. By 1939, Arredondo argued, Mexicans in Chicago had been coded as non-white and permanently foreign. My work will humbly attempt to dialogue with some of Arredondo’s important findings.


Yet even if a few lonely historical voices have recently made exciting contributions to this field, early Mexican Chicago remains fertile territory for additional inquiry. Though he may be guilty of exaggeration, Ray Hutchison’s 1999 assessment of the “Historiography of Chicago’s Mexican Community” remains fairly accurate:

The Mexican community in Chicago may be one of the best-kept secrets in ethnic studies...Standard works in Chicano studies...make only passing reference to Chicago and the Midwest. Although the new field of Chicano studies has produced important research and theoretical contributions over the last several decades, and there are many studies focusing on the Mexican community in other parts of the country, there is virtually no published material on the Mexican community in Chicago.

In order to more effectively assess where Mexican migrants “located their manhood on the move,” this paper’s second chapter is a broader synopsis of initial Mexican (im)migration into the Chicago area. Throughout the years preceding and following World War I, a heterogeneous group of young itinerant men dominated the transnational flow of Mexican (im)migration to Chicago. Some were married and sought to eventually reunite their families in the United States, whereas other solos were bachelors escaping what they regarded as a stifling degree of paternal control. Throughout the 1920s, more women and children increasingly joined this migratory stream destined for and/or passing through Chicago. Nevertheless, as the Great Depression and a 1930 National Repatriation campaign loomed, Mexican Chicago remained highly-mobile and masculine in character.

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20 In the last 20 years, historians have published several important studies on Mexicans in the Midwest during the early twentieth century. See Vargas’ Proletarians of the North, Garcia’s Mexicans in the Midwest, Arredondo’s Mexican Chicago, and Dennis Valdes’ Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1990.  
21 Hutchison, “Historiography of Chicago’s Mexican Community.”  
22 Peck, Reinventing Free Labor, 117.
After defining and positioning the Mexican solo within the parameters of early Mexican Chicago, Chapters III, IV, and V will survey several recurring masculinities embraced by male migrants. Separation from Mexican women and family structures strained traditional avenues for asserting “manliness,” thereby forcing single migrants to adapt and change the nature of gendered self-identification. As Peck observed was the case with Greek, Italian, and Mexican engachados (the hooked ones), Chicago’s solos conflated quitting and short-term occupational choice with dignity and masculine resistance. Within the cultural outlooks of many Mexican men, the freedom of movement enabled by extensive railroad travel was, by itself, an act of presumed masculinity. Such beliefs help to explain why Mexican migrants in Chicago sometimes abruptly “invalidated” their short-term labor contracts, though quitting solos cited some reasons more often than others. Many quickly grew to dislike and revile their foremen and the labor contractor who had initially “ensnared” them, citing dissatisfaction with wages, hours, boarding conditions, and the prompt realization that a duplicitous enganchista had verbally misled them for the purposes of securing their written consent.

Chapter IV surveys some of the gendered tensions which occurred within Chicago itself. These unique conflicts reflected the remarkable conditions endemic to the urban environment and early twentieth-century industrial capitalism itself. In this era, young Mexican men fought verbally and physically with competing Poles, Italians, and African-Americans. Sometimes inter-ethnic discord developed over women themselves, as the numerical proportion of solos greatly outnumbered that of solas. However, regardless

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23 Peck, Reinventing Free Labor, 134.
24 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 193.
of the immediate causes, Mexican men regularly championed their manifest masculinity while labeling Chicago’s “others” as effete and unmanly. The construction, maintenance, and re-affirmation of this masculinity thus played an indispensable role in how and why Mexican migrants clashed with both Eastern European immigrants and Southern Blacks.

Chapter V considers how some solos formulated their manhood in “homosocial” environments by forging pseudo-fraternal relationships and participating in Mexican patriotic celebrations. For these men, a presumed “manliness” rested in the company of other men. Playing pool in one of Chicago’s many Mexican-owned pool halls gave relaxing solos the chance to interact socially with other mexicano migrants. The obvious popularity of this pastime reflects the overall demographic composition of early Mexican Chicago, with large numbers of young men comprising the majority. Another type of fraternal masculinity claimed by many solos was that of celebrating the symbols, heroes, and mythology of the Mexican nation. Undoubtedly cultural static from the nation-building process underway in Mexico, migrant workers who harbored little or no desire to “Americanize” naturally fixed their gaze on la Patria’s current events. Celebrations of lo mexicano in Chicago, whether animated as Mexican Independence Day or in the exaltation of “indigenous” types of pottery, were often tantamount to Mexican gender construction.

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25 Peck, Reinventing Free Labor, 137.
26 An expression meaning “that which is Mexican.”
Several primary sources formed the backbone of this study. Paul S. Taylor’s *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumnet Region* remains as indispensable today as it was to Zaragosa Vargas in his pioneering 1993 study *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933*. Taylor’s work consists primarily of countless interviews with *mexicanos* in Chicago as well as those who intimately interacted with the city’s colony; obviously, this essay will presume that Mexican descriptions of Mexican Chicago are more insightful and authentic. Yet Taylor’s remarkable work conducted in the United States was not his only relevant contribution to the study of early Mexicans in Chicago. In 1933 Taylor sojourned to the small *pueblo* of Arandas in the Mexican state of Jalisco to study the effects of return migration from the United States. Entitled “A Spanish-Mexican Peasant Community: Arandas in Jalisco, Mexico,” this highly-localized source is more problematic than his 277 page study on Chicago. Nevertheless, consulting this rarely-used source will enable us to have a more transnational perspective on migration and gendered self-identification. Ciro Sepulveda’s doctoral dissertation “La Colonia Del Habor: A History of Mexicanos in East Chicago, Indiana 1919-1932” contains important oral interviews from residents of that heavily-male enclave. Finally, *Masculinity in the Absence of Women* will draw on Spanish-language newspapers printed in Chicago, especially the venerated bi-weekly *Mexico*. Each of these periodicals addressed, to varying degrees, concerns about gender and Mexican migrants.

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In order to best understand the fundamental nature of gender to the movement of *los solos*, a broader perspective is needed on the Mexican migratory stream destined for “Middle America.” The following section will demonstrate the persistent salience of youthful masculinity throughout Mexican Chicago’s early years. Initially enticed and transported by transcontinental railroad companies, Mexicans began to establish a notable presence in Chicago around 1916. The colony’s pioneers were almost exclusively young men, yet their reasons for emigrating were varied and sometimes overlapping. In addition to working on “the track,” early *solos* entered Chicago following stints in the sugar-beet fields of Minnesota, Iowa, and Minnesota. As the 1920s progressed, some of these Mexican emigrants entered Chicago’s famous stock yards and steel mills, working alongside Polish and Italian newcomers. Most young *mexicanos* coveted the wages, status, and stability accompanying work in these heavy industries.

With notable exceptions in 1923 and in this studies’ bookend year of 1930, Chicago’s sojourning *mexicanos* found employment opportunities while still being subjecting to increasing racism and non-acceptance from both greenhorn European immigrants and older, “whitened” Chicagoans. This certainly did not curtail the continued entrance of unaccompanied young men into the city, and the Mexican community in Chicago remained heavily peripatetic and male. Yet even as these men remained a formidable force within Mexican Chicago’s body politic, some established *solos* ended their familial isolation in the United States. Feeling as though they could

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30 Many *solos* referred to track construction and track maintenance as simply working on “the track.”

reliably support their Mexican families, these men reclaimed a particular masculinity by welcoming wives, sons, daughters, and occasionally sisters and parents, to their Chicago lodgings. This increase in migrant families complicates my study by creating a separate category of masculinities; to be sure, most masculine identities are often deeply intertwined with the bonds of familial kinship. Although this topic remains important, my work is more concerned with masculinities arising in the absence of Mexican women. The story of Mexican Chicago’s beginnings necessarily begins with the extension of railroad lines into Mexico’s interior.
CHAPTER II
THE MIDWESTERN POSSIBLITIY

In North America, the railroad has often been the initiating agent of modernity. Interconnection with a rail network carries with it a host of consequences, welcome and unwelcome, for local communities: a local increase in low-paying jobs, the facilitation of rapid resource movement to distant markets, and increased possibilities of human migration. Such a scenario accurately describes the railroad’s effects on many Mexican pueblos. In 1877 Porfirio Diaz, Mexican president, dictator, and loyal “friend” of private U.S. investment, launched an ambitious series of rail-building projects spearheaded by American companies. General Diaz was quite successful, as from 1880-1900 total Mexican railway increased from over 700 to 12,000 miles.¹ These rail depots connected and shrank vast geographies, ensuring that Chicago’s businesses could subsequently recruit labor as far south as the Mexican interior. The ease of transnational movement would greatly influence the outlook and identity of Mexican migrants, as one Mexican in

Indiana Harbor remarked that “[Many Mexicans] don’t want to be citizens. The countries are close; it is only two or three days to Mexico.”

The railroad’s expansion in Mexico, however, explains more than just the solos’ preferred medium of transportation. Recognizing the increasingly interconnected nature of Mexico’s rail infrastructure with that of the neighboring United States, several transcontinental railroad companies began to seek Mexican labor crews for track creation and maintenance. By 1907, a few such companies utilized seasonal Mexican labor “even into Chicago,” and three years later the Southwestern-based Santa Fe, Rock Island, and Burlington railroads all included mexicanos on their payrolls. The Santa Fe Company, which emblazoned an unmistakable “red cross” insignia across many of its cars in order to appeal to the supposedly hyper-religious sensibilities of potential Mexican workers, served as the principal means by which large numbers of Mexicans entered Chicago.

As an attractive draw for job-seeking solos, it is important to note that Chicago and the Midwest were relative late-comers. In his classic monograph Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920, historian Mario Garcia argued that the extension of railroad lines in and around El Paso, TX was equally critical to Mexican movement into

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2 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 19.

3 Taylor interprets this phrase as meaning the general Chicago area rather than Chicago proper. This is an important distinction as Taylor and Arredondo view 1916 as the year in which Mexicans established a more permanent colony and tangible presence within the city.

4 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 28.


6 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 33.
that border city. An 1894 Spanish language newspaper in El Paso mused that easy access
to railroad jobs encouraged large-scale Mexican immigration. El Paso, in a manner
similar to that of Chicago twenty years later, was simultaneously final destination and
launching pad for scores of Mexican men.

Around 1900, the border city’s enganchistas and employment agencies supplied

[First we] heard only of the states of Texas and California…After a while we
heard of New Mexico and Arizona, but beyond that there was no more United
States to us. I remember distinctly with what great surprise we received word in
our pueblo from a Mexican who had gone to Pennsylvania. ‘Oh, where can that
be! That must be very, very far away. It must be farther than New York, close to
England.’ It was not till years after the War that we heard of St. Louis, then of
Chicago and Illinois. Things were very good, I heard, so I came direct from
Laredo.8

Another testimonial offered by one Mexican spotlights the railroad’s significance to early

Mexican Chicago:

We came here on November 23, 1916; we were 17 solos on box cars. But the box
cars had bedbugs and were cold, so I got an apartment. I met a Mexican family
named E--- at 816 S. Clinton. They were acrobats in a circus and had lived in
Chicago for many years….I bought the furniture of a Mexican married to an
American who was getting a divorce, and we hired a cook and started a boarding
house for Mexican laborers at 415 S. Halstead…Some of my young boarders
went south after they made some money [but soon] returned to Chicago. They
rented places they found empty near us, and started boarding houses. Some of
their boarders did the same, and that is the way the Mexican colony was built
there.9


8 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 73.

9 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 57.
Boarding houses were thus an integral part of Mexican Chicago’s early physical plant. Although entire families would sometimes shoehorn themselves into boarding houses, this ephemeral housing arrangement suited single men quite well as many solos were unsure as to how long they might work in a given locale. It is not insignificant that this (im)migrant enclave developed around male-dominated, short-term occupations. Arredondo observed that “the great majority of these jobs were slated for men provides one indicator of how seemingly gender-neutral information is in fact very gendered, in this case, gendered-male.” Furthermore, although mexicana migration increased steadily throughout the 1920s, by the end of the decade there were still three times more Mexican men than women in Chicago. 10

Although the lion’s share of Midwestern-bound solos would work on “the track”, other migrants did not look to maintain or install railroad ties for a living. Many mexicanos actually entered Chicago following stints in local agriculture. A fledgling new enterprise, the grueling tasks of harvesting and refining of sugar beets, had previously staffed its facilities with European migrant labor. World War One interrupted this employment pattern, as sugar beet companies looked to Mexican (im)migration to fill labor shortfalls created by the trans-Atlantic return migrations of Russian, Bohemian, and Slovak workers. During the harvest season, solos and entire families of migrants (called betaboleros) wielded huge knives in separating foliage from enlarged, ripe beets. Primarily concentrated in the upper-Midwestern states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Iowa, beet work was usually seasonal and many solos alternated between the railroads

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10 Arredondo, Mexican Chicago, 16.
and the sugar beet fields. The increasing stream of migration to Mexican Chicago did not thus have a single conduit, but rather was comprised of many tributary sources.

Companies such as the Continental Sugar Beet Company and Great Lakes Sugar initially stationed *enganchistas* to tap the Mexican labor pool in Laredo, San Antonio, and Fort Worth. Reflecting local xenophobia and anti-Mexican sentiments, these companies and their agents originally prized young, unmarried men as they believed *solos* more likely to return to Mexico after harvest season. This assumption, however, would prove to be fallacious. Even more so than migrant families, *solos* sought the perceived stability and higher compensation of urban heavy industry, making Chicago’s steel making and meat-packing industries attractive possibilities.

Throughout the 1920s, Mexican Chicago continually received beet workers from neighboring states. Enterprising sugar beet companies quickly realized this and began recruiting operations in the city. One method of filling labor shortages was to use the unregulated, “underground” machinery of Canal and Madison Streets by hiring a persuasive labor agent. Great Lakes Sugar signed unemployed workers to contracts and soon shipped them to Saginaw, MI. Other companies bought advertisements in local papers. In East Chicago, Indiana, sugar beet companies took advantage of the local steel industry’s summer “downsizing” by advertising in the Spanish-language newspaper *El*

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The Michigan Sugar Company told the 1925 reading audience of Chicago’s *Mexico* that it “need[ed] men who are single and with families to work in [our] sugar beet fields in the state of Michigan.” Interested parties would receive “$23.00 per acre” and the company also boasted that it “[gives] free trips from this city to our fields.”16 Newspaper advertising thus demonstrates the importance of the sugar beet industry to the growth of Mexican Chicago, and a third advertisement’s call for “men who are single and with families” reflects the increasing size and heterogeneity of the local Mexican community.

As married *solos* established themselves in Chicago, many of these men wanted to bring their Mexican families to the city. For these migrants, masculinity existed in the daily interactions of family life and often in the assertion of patriarchal authority over wives and children. The perceived “duties” of patriarchy changed the ways in which migrant men formulated their identities. For instance, married men were less likely to abruptly quit a job in the face of emasculation or discontent. One migrant “like[d] the work at the steel mills,” a “hot and heavy” job but nevertheless one that “pays well.” Like many others, he was laid off and “did not have work for three months.” Desperate and concerned about the well-being of his children, he “landed [on the tracks]” where he remained “for four years.” He continued:

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16 Advertisement. *Mexico* (Chicago), April 4, 1925.
The track work does not pay so well but it is steady. Out here we get our coal and water free. That makes it very nice in the winter. In the summer we have ice and that is a great luxury. We have no rent bill to pay and that makes it very much better than in town. There is always plenty of fresh air and sunshine and the children like it here because they can play in the open country.\textsuperscript{17}

This \textit{mexicano} was certainly not alone in balancing masculinity with practical considerations; however, the physical presence of his family made him far less likely to quit than a \textit{solo}. While acknowledging that migrant families thus comprised a notable chunk of the total migrant population, masculine self-definition rooted in the daily presence of a nuclear family is not the central focus of this essay. Indeed, a “\textit{solo}” ceases to be just that when reunited with his Mexican family.

Chain migration and the increasing presence of \textit{mexicanas} changed the character of Mexican Chicago throughout the 1920s. Arredondo notes that these women entered the United States as wives, sisters, and daughters rather than as young, highly-mobile \textit{solas}. Such a distinction is not insignificant, as the Mexican government itself decreed, but unevenly enforced, that travelling women must carry with them “letters from a male family member[,] usually the head of house, whether her husband, father or brother[,] affirming that her travel was ‘approved’ by the family.”\textsuperscript{18} In some respects, this law and its underlying gendered presuppositions ensured the masculine character of Mexican migration.

Exceptions withstanding, Mexican Chicago was still heavily masculine and transient, on the eve of the 1930 deportations. These were not David Roediger’s immigrants “Americanizing” over several generations. Much of Chicago’s \textit{mexicano}

\textsuperscript{17} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 97.

\textsuperscript{18} Arredondo, \textit{Mexican Chicago}, 28.
community were young men ready to work and play in a foreign land, and each exercised their masculine agency by choosing different ways to express their gender. As I will argue in the next section, a solos’ decision to initially migrate northward and throughout the United States was, given Mexican gender norms, an inherent statement of manhood. So was the act of quitting a job.
CHAPTER III
QUITTING AND “LIV[ING] LIKE BIRDS OF THE AIR”

In order to better understand the Spanish language and Mexican culture, this past summer I participated in a language-immersion program at the Universidad Internacional in Cuernavaca, Mexico. At the same time, I obviously remained keenly interested in the subjects of Mexican masculinity and the socio-cultural milieu, both past and present, of mexicanos in Michoacan, Jalisco, and Guerrero. Much as they did in the case of early Mexican Chicago, these states continue to be the launching point for scores of Mexican emigrants. By 2001, Chicago’s Mexican-origin population included over 250,000 citizens from Michoacan alone. In their photographic anthology of Mexican Chicago, authors Rita Arias Jirasek and Carlos Tortolero noted that even “if immigrants from Michoacan were counted separately from other Mexicans, they would constitute the second-largest Latino group in Chicago.”

During the course of conducting several informal interviews in Cuernavaca, one oral interview in particular, gave me serious pause. Professor Alejandro sat on the opposite side of a long, rectangular desk as the topic of conversation turned to Mexican manhood

1 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 183.
2 Arredondo, Mexican Chicago, 97.
and my master’s thesis. Folding his arms and drawing a shallow, yet audible, breath, Alejandro grinned and said “The reality is that Mexico remains a machista country, even more so than the rest of the world that we live in. I can only imagine what you are finding about the 1920s, and my God, in [Michoacan]!” My next question was rapid and reflexive, as I sought to understand the emphasis he placed on that specific Mexican state: throughout his personal experiences (including 38 years of teaching), what were “some anecdotes that might help an outsider understand the workings of gender relations in the mesa central?” Without hesitation and with palpable disdain permeating his deep voice, Alejandro recounted a phrase that he heard twenty years ago on a local radio station: “Women [from Michoacan] are best-kept loaded like an old rifle, and they should always remain working behind closed doors.”

This contemptible quote, uttered by a sexist radio announcer in the mid-1980s, obviously should not be cast as an accurate characterization of family size and gender roles in the Revolution-era mesa central. However, it does highlight some contextual elements relevant to assessing the masculine identities of Chicago’s solos. The speaker’s reprehensible metaphor that these women “should be like an old rifle” graphically evokes the image of a muzzle-loading rifle to connote female pregnancy, signifying that they should be perpetually pregnant so as to rear large families. Some family units in this region were indeed strikingly large, although this was related more with agricultural subsistence than to the machista stereotype of feminine fecundity. As is often true for many agricultural societies, families who live for the harvest are often larger than those

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3 In the context of this quote, the host used the term “old rifle” to mean “muzzleloader.”

who live within urban settings. To better examine the circumstances surrounding Mexican emigration in a specific Mexican pueblo, I will look at Paul Taylor’s 1933 study on transnational migration from Arandas, Jalisco.

Taylor’s volume on the small community noted that until 1900, the pueblo’s population had grown steadily from the time of Spanish conquest, with the primary cause being natural increase due to large family size: “[birth rate] is great: families of ten or twelve children are common, and some have over twenty.” Early marriages, observed Taylor, “[were] the rule,” as from 1825-1930 the average marriage age for men and women was 23.05 and 18.45, respectively. Family traditions fueled the flight of young men, as “it has long been customary for one or more of the family to leave Arandas in search of greater opportunities elsewhere.” As “push” factors for Mexican (im)migration to Chicago, a finite supply of arable land, coupled with rapid population growth, ensured that many young men looked for economic opportunities outside of Arandas.

Building on some of Taylor’s prescient observations, Gabriela Arredondo recently made an indispensable observation about the motivating factors for early Mexican migration into the United States. For some solos boarding trains in Mexico bound for the

5 Taylor was also careful to avoid the pitfall of overgeneralization regarding emigration and family size. Not all Mexican (im)migrants were part of large ranching or farming families: “It is noteworthy that not only laborers have emigrated to find work elsewhere, but persons of all occupations have gone, finding employment not only in labor and commerce, but attaining to a notable degree, places of importance in the cultural, professional, and political life of the republic.”

6 Taylor, A Spanish Mexican Peasant Community, 9.

7 Arredondo, Mexican Chicago, 27.
United States, the act of moving *itself* represented a rupture of patriarchal authority. This type of move could be characterized as a “coming of age” act in which many young men sought to break free of what Vicki Ruiz referred to as a “family oligarchy.” On his day off from steelwork, one *solo* briefly explained to Taylor that “In Mexico *mi padre* is boss; Here I am boss. If I go back to Mexico, then *mi padre* will be boss again until I get married. There I worked on my father’s ranch and he got all the money.” For young men such as this *solo*, the fires of the Mexican Revolution possibly served as a pretext, rather than as a direct catalyst, for migrating to Chicago. It is not insignificant that in some of Taylor’s interviews with *solos*, many described their outlook as *vagando y aventurando*, or “wandering and adventuring.” Undoubtedly enabled by the railroad and Mexico’s geographic proximity to the United States, this “push” factor of young men seeking a short adventure could be unique within the historiography of U.S.’ (im)migration. For a field still influenced by the idea than incoming (im)migrants are “tired, weak…poor…and huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” Arredondo’s point is quite significant. Her finding also illuminates the primacy of simple mobility to the masculine identities of *los solos*.


The second aspect of this announcer’s statement is the gendered juxtaposition of one prominent form of *solo* masculine expression in 1920s Chicago, IL. His view that women “should remain working behind closed doors,” not only attaches femininity to home maintenance and child-rearing, but it also insinuates that women should be sedentary and immobile, with their physical bodies tied to the fixed geographical space of a *pueblo* and “the home.” For Mexican migrants operating within traditional gendered discourses, the act of unaccompanied transnational movement from the interior of Mexico to the Midwest was an intrinsic expression of masculinity. Subsequent migrations, whether from within Chicagoland’s job market or between American cities such as El Paso and Los Angeles, are also endemic expressions of youthful manhood as such sojourns were mostly unavailable to young Mexican women. Women did not often wade into the murky waters of Canal and Madison Streets’ *enganchistas*, searching for quick work in Chicago’s hinterlands. Arredondo’s research corroborated this finding in that Mexican law facilitated male oversight over the movement of unaccompanied women. However, the remarkable mobility exhibited by these young men was also tied to quitting unsavory jobs, an act which reaffirmed a *solo*’s personal sense of masculinity.

This section will argue that *los solos* frequently located part of their masculinities both in their remarkable, long-distance sojourns, as well as in the act of quitting itself. The mere act of unfettered movement throughout the U.S.’ underground economy was an expression of masculinity, as hegemonic Mexican gender roles consigned women to the home. Furthermore, most young *solos* set sail for larger Mexican cities and the United States hoping to secure their families’ financial well-being and thus fulfill their perceived, “manly” obligations as familial “breadwinners.” However, their Mexican
dependants might not include a wife. In the event of the premature death of a father, many older brothers now felt the responsibility of stepping into the role patriarchal role previously occupied by a Mexican father.

The manhood inherent in remarkable rates of mobility often overlapped with the act of quitting jobs. In the eyes of many young men, quitting jobs was an act of manly resistance. Reasons varied greatly for what many migrants referred to as “laying off,” as some detested the long hours and breakneck pace of industrial capitalism. Others judged that the supervision of foreman and other superiors was intolerable, a marked contrast from the contrived amiability of their enganchista. Although certainly an overgeneralization, one “Railroad [employer]” remarked to Taylor that “If the Mexicans don’t like the foreman, wages or job, they just walk away.” Of course, many local employers encouraged mexicano transiency with pre-orchestrated “downsizing” periods, creating misery and despair amongst Mexican colonies. The final factor contributing to migrant mobility has hitherto not received enough attention within Chicano historiography: many solos, as young men who felt that they would eventually return to Mexico, regarded their time in the United States as a finite adventure, or “odyssey.” Such an adventure within “El Norte” was an ideal antecedent for a young man ultimately wishing to return to Mexico with experience, skill, and hopefully, carrying fistfuls American currency.

Patriarchal “responsibility” and the decline of a family business brought one Mexican from Chihuahua to the Windy City. When Taylor interviewed him, he was

12 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 122.

“employed for fairly high wages at a foundry.” On the way, however, this man toiled “in cities, on the railroad, on farms.” In describing his journey and life story, this man’s family had previously enjoyed some social status in Mexico: “Our family lived in Chihuahua for many, many years. My father had a good business of his own till the time of the revolution. In those days of trouble he grew sick and passed away.” As the oldest surviving son in the family, he now immediately felt “the charge of keeping up the family. There were two other brothers and my baby sister. I could have well remained in Mexico and made a bare existence for all of us. But that was not enough. We had lived well and I thought by coming to the United States I could do better. 14"

This solo headed for California, and “Los Angeles was the first place that [he] remained for some time. There were a lot of Mexicans there…[but] the city held no attraction for [him] even though the colony was gay then as it is now. [He] left and went to the country. [He] went from place to place, wherever there was work. [He] would work on the track, then later on [he] would be on a farm, and that is the way it went.” By “1914 [he] was in San Francisco, having worked [his] way north from job to job,” and by “1916 [he] went to Colorado and in 1917 [he] was in Illinois.”

The following year this man was utilizing his English by “working for [a local] steel company.” Like many migrants, especially those conversational in speaking English, this solo probably prized steel work for its high wages, acting as a “translator for the few Mexicans that were there and for the company.” The mostly-immigrant workforce at the mills “had been ready to go on strike but waited until the end of the war.” Facing an acute labor shortage, steel companies dispatched this man as an
enganchista, sending him “to get our Mexicans to work for [the company]. [He] got some at Chicago, others at Omaha, Kansas City, a few at St. Louis. [He] even went down to El Paso and some cities in Texas.” A coal strike shut down steel production in some mills one year later, with steel companies responding by “releasing” Mexican workers, thus dispersing unemployed *mexicanos* to vocations far and wide: “Many Mexicans were released and went back to Mexico, some went to the railroads, and some to the beet fields.” In the biting cold of Chicago, after having worked in various capacities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Kansas City, St. Louis, Colorado, and Omaha, this *mexicano* added that he hoped Chicago would not be his last stop: “I like California very much and one day I hope to be there again.”

The preceding example was common for early male, migrant laborers in early Mexican Chicago. Many migrants arrived at Chicago following extensive travels through other locations, both north and south of the border. As Taylor observed, some *solos* arrived in Chicago after having returned “to Mexico, then upon arrival again at the border, choosing a different route northward.” The decision to move to an unexplored city was usually related to finances or family---or a happenstance encounter with an *enganchista*. Yet many of these young men also wanted to maximize their venture into the United States by experiencing a wide breadth of possible jobs and regions. A “young [Mexican]” from Michoacan articulated this desire near the end of his brief testimonial.

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16 Taylor, *Mexican Labor*, 76.
17 Taylor actually characterized this Mexican as a “Young-Indian type.”
Interestingly, as the oldest son in his family, the impetus for his migration also seemed to be gender-based, as he too sought to fulfill the perceived duties of being his families’ new patriarch.

“When my parents died in 1912, I went from my home in Michoacan to Mexico City and got work to support my two younger brothers. In 1917 we heard about the United States, so I came. I went to work on the Pennsylvania Railroad, then returned to Mexico. But I returned to the United States and went to California. I returned again to Mexico, and came back to the United States. This time, in order to see a new place, I came to Gary.”

The youthful outlook of some Mexican migrants in Chicago can be observed myriad ways. One “railroad worker on Canal Street” seemed to abruptly terminate his conversation with Taylor as the trappings of Chicago’s night life seized his attention. Outlining his personal vision of a desirable “section” on local rail lines, he claimed that “It is always good to get out in the section near some river or creek where you can go bathing or swimming and clean up.” He next informed Taylor that their interview was over because he “had to go out tonight, I don’t know where, but just so I see more of this country before I settle down to a good job some place.” Similarly, another Mexican quit his job rather than face with the prospect of an unexciting night life: “I did not like to work nights, so, when the week came for me to work nights, I laid off. I suppose some other needy fellow with a family worked in my place. I did not work for then I would lose out on the dances and parties.” A “steel worker [interviewed] in South Chicago”

18 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 76.
19 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 260.
20 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 107.
21 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 257
recounted a humorous incident in which a night of revelry in Chicago ended when he woke up in a boxcar in Denver: “I got in with some friends from Jalisco and we celebrated our reunion. We went to some saloons and other places and I just don’t know what happened but I woke up in Denver sleeping in a box car.”

Of course, the dual lashings of poverty and vociferous racism defined solo life in Mexican Chicago more so than the pursuit of hedonistic vice. Mobility, however, remained a near-constant for these young men. Employing a meaningful piece of hyperbole, “a seasonal track laborer” emphasized his willingness to exchange geographies for work: “If things are good here in the United States we come here to work, if they are better in Panama, or Columbia, or Peru, tomorrow or the next day we will go down there. We are here only for a short time. When things get well in Mexico we go there not only because the work is good but also because that is our home and our final resting place.” Another mexicano migrant who served in the U.S. Army during World War I, had worked in Texas and the steel mills of Pennsylvania. He preferred a steadier life in the city proper, yet remained aware of the relative ease with which he could locate new work on the move, claiming that “…if he want[ed] to do rough and unskilled work [he could have] always ship[ped] out any night or day to the railroad camps or the beet fields.” Others, such as another solo who had worked his way from “Texas to Michigan” in five years, seemed to value sunshine above most other

22 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 258
23 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 275.
24 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 97.
considerations in evaluating the quality of a job: “Track Work is nice in the summer but I would rather be down south in the winter. I usually land a job down there during that season. You can always get a job on the section or extra gang, so I don’t worry.”

Taylor claimed that the aforementioned example was somewhat representative of many “solos on the track, many of whom like to move about the country with the seasons.”

For other solos, the specter of rapid movement manifested itself within decisions pertaining to food. Unaccompanied men often choose to minimize their expenses by living together in “cooperative boarding houses,” which Taylor defined as a place “where expenses and attendant labor of board are shared, or where each individual of the group boards himself.” Such a housing scheme carried the advantage of enabling rapid movement. One “Mexican in Gary” described his housing arrangement in terms of communal decisions regarding the purchase of victuals, while also extolling his newfound cooking ability in gendered terms:

“I did not know how to cook when I came here, but now I know how to cook better than a woman. We six men all buy our groceries and keep them each in a separate box. We all use the same kitchen…On payday our six boxes of food make this kitchen look like a store. I would like to buy food wholesale, but the other men will not agree. They are too irregular in buying and do want a large supply because they want to be free to leave at a moment’s notice.”

It is important to note that los solos were unaccompanied but not always single, as some mexicanos paid close attention to their families living in Mexico. For most of these

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25 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 106.

26 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 105.

27 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 183

28 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 183-184
men, their gender role as the families’ major source of income was a masculine responsibility to be taken seriously. An ex-farmer from near Zamora, Michoacan arrived at Gary, Indiana on June 3rd, 1927, declaring that he had “no other outlook than to keep working until [he] died.” He originally left Mexico because “the revolution was muy fuerte\textsuperscript{29}; I could not make a living for my wife and six children.”

The raging Cristiada pushed him and many solos to the United States in the hopes that they might avoid what became a protracted guerilla civil war between followers of the Catholic Church (known as the cristeros) and followers of the Mexican Government (revolucionarios).\textsuperscript{30} This man’s sympathies clearly lied with the cristeros, as he continued his personal narrative by explaining that “Our [place] has more believers in the teachings of our forefathers [Catholics]; for this reason the revolution is stronger in Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Michoacan.\textsuperscript{31}” For him and many other mexicanos in early Mexican Chicago, the question of allegiance during the Cristero War continued to be an explosive wedge issue, hindering attempts at forging solidarity. One Mexican “who was trying to bring unity to the [Mexican] societies” expressed his frustration at the complicated and divisive issue, lamenting that “Another difficulty is the conflict between the Catholics and the anti-clericals…The anti-clericals may be Catholics, too, but not in the political sense.\textsuperscript{32}”

\textsuperscript{29} “Very Strong”


\textsuperscript{31} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 257.

\textsuperscript{32} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 136.
As for the aforementioned *solo* from “near Zamora, Michoacan,” this was at least his second stint in the United States, as from 1916-1921 he worked as a “roadmaster” in Dodge City, Kansas. “Work was plentiful at that time, and when I left there, I did not intend to ever return to the United States but was forced to do so.” Reiterating the fundamental importance of paternal “responsibility” in ordering his movements, this man hoped that his “boys [would] learn trades in Mexico so that they won’t have to come here.” Finally, this man poignantly summed up his condition: “We live like birds of the air…Any place is good to live in if there is plenty of work. As long as there is work in the steel mills, we stay; when work closes down, we are away to any place we hear of steady work.”

In this chapter, I have thus far examined how the perception of paternal responsibility and the “manliness” inherent within high levels of migrant mobility both underscore the importance of gender---specifically male--- in ordering the movements of *los solos*. In Paul Taylor’s voluminous study of Mexican Chicago, there may be no greater example of the latter than the story of a migrant who had opened “a barber shop by 1928.” In the brief span of 15 years, one man had traversed North America, leaving an interior Mexican state to work in an Alaskan cannery and the U.S. states of New Mexico, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas, Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, California, and Indiana. His entire account, told in third-person, is reproduced below:

> Came from Jalisco in 1913, *a la ventura*. First came to El Paso and for three months sold clothes for a Mexican tailor. Then he learned the barber trade. In 1915 he left for the American Army camp in New Mexico where he remained for five months. In 1916 he went to Pittsburg, where there were only seven to ten Mexicans who were working on the Pennsylvania Railroad. He went to Pittsburg

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because his brother was working in a machine shop there; for six months he also worked in the shop. In 1917 he returned to Guadalajara for six months. Then he returned to the United States via Laredo and San Antonio, remaining fifteen days in the latter place. Then he came to Chicago for a month. In 1918 he went to Omaha where he remained for fifteen days. Mexicans were in the railroad camps there at that time. Then he went to Cheyenne, Wyoming. Until 1922 he was a machinist’s helper, and left Cheyenne because of a shopmen’s strike. Then he came to Salt Lake City and worked in a barber shop with a Japanese for nine months. He joined the Mormons in the second ward. In 1923 he went to Pocatello, Idaho, and set up his own shop to cater to Mexicans in and around Pocatello in the beet fields, sugar factories, and on the track. There he remained eight months to the end of 1923. Then he went to Portland, Oregon, from where, after a few days, he shipped to the Alaskan canneries and went to New Sagak, Alaska. The workers were mainly Mexicans, Spaniards, and South Americans. This work lasted four months.

In 1924 he returned to Portland and then went to San Francisco where he worked in a pipe plant in South San Francisco for four months. In 1925 he went to Oakland where he worked with a Spaniard in a barber shop. He remained there six months, then went to Los Angeles where he worked in a barber shop for two months. Then he went back to Guadalajara for two months. In 1925 he came to Indiana Harbor; he had friends in Chicago but not in Indiana Harbor. Here he has his own barber shop.34

Even for a demographic noteworthy for its mobility, this is certainly an extreme example. However, a far more common pattern emerged in some of Taylor’s interviews and statistical studies. In the midst of their remarkable odysseys throughout the United States, many mexicanos came to covet relative steadiness and high wages of steel and meat-packing jobs. These solos often entered steel work from the railroads, and one of Taylor’s large statistical studies corroborates this.

Questioning them as to their “previous employment,” Taylor polled 2,423 Mexicans then employed at the “Chicagoland”-area meat-packing plants of Armour and Company and Swift and Company, and also at the local steel plants of the Illinois Steel

34 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 263.
Company, Gary and South Works, and the Wisconsin Steel Works. Of course, not all of these men could accurately be described as solos or migrants in that some had transported their families whereas hoped to remain in the United States permanently. However, several important patterns emerge from his table. Of the 2,423 mexicanos working at these five plants, 981, or 40.5%, began working in these high-wage jobs after last working with railroad companies. Between 116-187 (4.8% to 7.7%) came from sugar-beet farms, and 34.8% previously worked in other steel or meat-packing plants. One may logically assume that many mexicanos who had previously worked as steel workers and meat-packers wanted to continue working in this same capacity, as over 1/3 or all workers polled by Taylor sought the same job that they previously held. Some mexicanos coveted these jobs despite the searing heat, notoriously-demanding foremen, and sporadic “downsizing” periods practiced by local steel and meat-packing companies. However, almost 1 of every 2 (45.3%) steel workers previously worked on the railroads and sugar-beet farms. Many of Taylor’s testimonials echo this finding as it was common for migrants to trade life on “the track” for Chicago steelwork.

Such was the case for a railroad worker interviewed by Taylor on Chicago’s Canal Street. At the time of Taylor’s interview in 1928, this man had only been in the United States for a year, having arrived in Texas in 1927. He “knew no English and had to take the first work that [he] could. That was on the railroad. It was very hard work in Texas last summer and the foreman was a Bulgarian. Most of us were Mexicans and he


36 These plants often periodically fired Mexican workers in order to increase profits.
had to treat us well.³⁷” After two months, this man left Texas to work in Kansas City and Lincoln, Nebraska “for a short time.” Subsequently, he “came to Chicago about nine months ago because [he] heard there were a lot of Mexicans here and since then [he has] worked on different sections around here to see the country and wherever the work was best.” This solo’s dual rationale of looking for work where “it was best” but also where he could “see the country” is not insignificant as it resonates with the outlook of other young, male Mexican migrants. He continued to explain his mobile outlook: “For that is our lot. We don’t know the language and we have no ready was of learning it so we go place to place, wherever we can get the best and get along. If things are best for me in the steel mills I go there, if they are best in the section I go there.”

Perhaps further considering the comparative question of Chicago’s possible vocations, this man next expressed his general preference for “The work in the steel mills.” He explained that “while it is very hard is very good. It is hot, it is heavy work, but if it were regular work I would prefer it there. ..The packing houses are good to work for but they always take the most experienced men.” Perhaps with some resignation, he closed out the interview by saying that “…you see the only thing left for us is the section or the beet fields…”³⁸ Even a migrant who had been in the United States for less than a year and could not speak English expressed a desire to work in Chicago’s often-bustling steel industry.

In early Mexican Chicago, news from la patria regarding the current state of government, politics, and the ongoing Mexican Revolution often gripped the

³⁷ Taylor, Mexican Labor, 260.
³⁸ Taylor, Mexican Labor, 260.
consciousness of the city’s Mexican population. Even a cursory examination of the featured stories and editorials of *Mexico* reveal that many closely covered day-to-day happenings in the homeland. It was thus not surprising that Taylor found a steel worker in South Chicago “talking politics in a small Mexican news shop.” Unlike a previous testimonial who referred to the *cristeros* as his “forefathers,” this *solo* favored the Mexican government’s continued prosecution of the war against the *cristeros*, whom he referred to as “religious rebels.” Furthermore, he also denounced the “bad government” of dictator Porfirio Diaz. This young man had worked his way across different railroad sections until ultimately finding employment in a local steel mill. Like many contemporary Mexican (im)migrants, he hailed from “a *rachería* in Jalisco near the town of La Quemada...[In 1910] I went to Matamores in the state of Tamaulipas where I worked on a farm till 1915. One night I crossed the border in the dark and I was in the state of Texas. No one bothered me, there were plenty of Mexicans there...”

In Texas, his “first job was on the track. I worked there for one day at $1.25 a day. The work was too hard and the pay was not enough. Before returning to “track work,” he displaced an “Italian blaster” at a quarry “where they paid me $1.35 a day and I only had to work 9 hours.” He next worked his way across the “north country,” which he liked, as he traveled, “around working on the railroads in the states of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho.” Employed “for the Union Pacific where they had Japanese and on the Chicago and Northwestern,” this man soon “drifted east on this road and got into Chicago in 1922...In 1924 I went to work for the steel mills and I have been there ever since.”

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A desire to “wander and adventure” through different parts of the United States sometimes helped order the movements of los solos; however, migrants also in response to unforgiving foremen, long hours, and low wages. Knowing that there was an enormous demand for migrant labor throughout America, these men invested their personal masculinity in the act of quitting. This immediately removed them from undesirable conditions, yet it also served as a way in which solos redeemed a masculine identity from an emasculating circumstance. As Gunther Peck noted in his pathbreaking study of Greek, Italian, and Mexican migrant workers, many of his transnational subjects “claimed their manhood in mobility, quitting jobs at the drop of a hat in North America." 41

While many solos were indeed always ready to quit their job, their grievances were nevertheless quite real. A “Spanish-American on Canal Street,” seated atop an ash can in his “denim overalls and jacket,” spoke to Taylor about his experiences in the United States. Taylor deduced that this man was then carrying all that he owned, including “his good suit” partially concealed beneath his jacket. His perch on enganchista-laden Canal Street and general outlook on employment seemed to suggest that he was an unaccompanied migrant: “He was going to work soon, how soon he did not know.” 42

Born “on a farm near Albuquerque, New Mexico,” this man grew up in an area in which Spanish---not English---was the vernacular language. “Everyone around us spoke

41 Peck, Reinventing Free Labor, 118.

42 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 259.
and read Spanish…Most of my friends never learned English and I had no occasion to use it till I came to Chicago two years ago.” As it has for many people of Mexican-descent living in Texas, his experiences in the Lone Star State left a deep and scarring imprint on his outlook. In many regions throughout Texas and the American Southwest, Mexican “racialization” occurred with the dominant class of Anglos transplanting the famous “white-black” binary of racial classifications. Mexicanos were thus forced into the supposedly monolithic category of “black”. The Chicago bi-weekly Mexico mentioned on September 25th, 1926, for instance, “the lynching of four Mexicans in Raymondville, TX.43” Such treatment was not altogether uncommon, as the Spanish-American recounted that he worked in Texas and that “there the Texans were bad. I have seen many people treat Mexicans bad but they are the worst of all. Whenever I was out on the range riding bareback, they stopped me, asked me who I was, where I lived and where I worked, and if I did not answer fast enough they hit me with a whip.” Naturally, such treatment in a former Mexican state enraged this man while he bemoaned his inability to fight back: “I had no gun or I would have killed some sometimes.44”

He left Texas “because it was a hard life there and came to Chicago. I came by working on the different railroad sections from that state here. It is very hard work and I do not like it. The beet fields are hard work, too, and I shall stay away from there.” Because he did not like these jobs, this man next found employment in an unusual spot, leaving behind the racism and frenetic pace of work that he despised. “I went to work in a candy store then as a porter and dishwasher for a while. Then I met a man who works

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43 “On Mexican Life” (Para la Vida Mexicana). Mexico (Chicago), September 25, 1926.

44 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 259.
at the Stevens Hotel and he took me there when he heard that there was a job open. It was a nice…But the work was at night and it was for ten hours.”

Even *enganchistas* found recruiting in Texas to be difficult, with some concocting elaborate schemes to prevent workers from leaving soon after agreeing to work in a given industry. Many *mexicanos* agreed to work in Texas under the idea of using the state’s railroad as a launching pad for the Industrial Midwest. A *tejano* labor agent, who had “previously been a labor scout for farmers near Laredo,” recalled his time there with a dose of frustration. He “used to try and get cotton pickers in Laredo, but now all they have got in their heads is Chicago or Detroit; they won’t stop in Texas for a 10$ job.”

Even when this man resorted to paying the cost of “passports for Mexicans in Nuevo Laredo,” they still left after a day after receiving the daily wage of 2 ½ cents for cotton picking. At times, the temptation to work in the Midwest transcended a *mexicano*’s attachment to their shoes, hats, and sometimes, their spouses:

“We used to take their shoes and hats and put them in another house, but they got away from us anyway in 1919, and we used to even guard each door of the houses they slept in on a big farm. We used to put the wives separate from the husbands, but the men left their wives to come north.”

A Chicago-area “Roadmaster” had a similar problem, though he at least appreciated the Mexicans’ forthright protocol for quitting: “The Mexicans find out what has been paid, and if they like the job, they accept it. If they are dissatisfied and quit,

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45 As Taylor noted, this *tejano* was inflating this wage for the purpose of making a point. Taylor’s words: “[of course none were offered at this exaggerated figure.]”

they ask for their time and leave without bothering the others. In other occasions, wages and job-type were secondary considerations to an unfavorable climate. One solo, who crossed the bridge between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso with 40 cents in 1915, used El Paso’s employment agencies to find “work on the Santa Fe at Barr, Kansas, near Topeka.” After a previous attempt to find work there failed due to his youthful appearance, he returned “covered in cement” in an attempt to “conceal” his identity. This time, he “gave his age as 21 to get the job [working] on the section. In the winter I was transferred to Melbourne, Kansas…It was too cold; we didn’t have coal to heat our cars; so I had to run out, and went to Emporia…Then I found work in the roundhouse unloading coal.”

As these solos reached Mexican Chicago, some quickly began to loath their foremen and superiors as well; in Chicago, many of these men were second-generation European immigrants from Southern Italy and Poland. One mexicano recalled that his “Polish foreman is a devil. He will work the Mexican like a dog. We get all the hard work to do and the Europeans get all the easy work. They are mean and swear at us all the time. They will not let us go to the toilet between hours. The Europeans do what they want.” Much as they did in Texas, mexicanos expressed their defiance by simply walking out.

Punctuated by short anecdotes, a conversation between “Two laborers from Canal Street” vividly illustrated this point. One said to the other:

47 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 85.
48 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 265.
49 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 114.
Do you remember that foreman who had us work in his garden and clean up the house after hours? If you didn’t do it you didn’t have to, but you certainly paid for it on the job the next. He never asked the Italians or the Irish to do it. It was always us and he called us ‘amigos!’ He certainly was a hard one to get along with; I left him after the first week.

The second responded in kind:

Do you remember the old Irishmen we worked for on the ____? You remember how we would work us for ten, fifteen minutes over, each night, and it would never show on our check. Well, the last fellow I left on the ____ did the same thing. I stayed only four days with him; I should work for nothing! They can’t get away with it with me any more.50

Solo masculinities collided not only with foremen, but also with those of Chicago’s other new arrivals. The possibility of employment lured scores of young men to the city, namely Great Migrants from the American South and Eastern European ethnics. Competition amongst these men for women and a limited number of work opportunities heightened the importance of masculine honor in this extraordinary urban terrain.

50 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 103.
CHAPTER IV
WOMEN, GENDERED HIERARCHIES, AND THE “FEMINIZED” EUROPEAN “OTHER” IN CHICAGO

Like its northeastern counterparts Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, Chicago has always been a magnet for internal migrations and foreign newcomers. The combined effects of the [U.S.-American Industrial Revolution with European periods of civic unrest, religious persecution, and potato famine attracted flocks of German and Irish immigrants the city during some periods of the nineteenth century. By 1900, over $\frac{1}{4}$ of all Chicagoans were born in Germany or had a parent born there.\(^1\) A mere thirty years later, however, an enormous Polish migration that began in 1850 and ended in the early 1920s meant that Polish immigrants and their children had supplanted the cities’ Germans as the most populous immigrant group in Chicago\(^2\). Italians, mostly comprised of peasants from the mezzogiorno region of Southern Italy, also began to enter Chicago around 1850, with their numbers accelerating around the turn of the century as well. The city also received smaller numbers of Bulgarian and Lithuanian emigrants as well, with


the latter having received some notoriety with the publication of Upton Sinclair’s muckraking classic *The Jungle*.

In the years between World War I and the Great Depression, the city was a heterogeneous ethnic cocktail with complex, and sometimes contradictory, systems of racial formation. A wartime labor shortage in 1916 opened the door for Mexican (im)migration and greater inclusion for the local African-American population, which had hitherto been relegated to the role of “strikebreakers.” As *mexicanos* and Great Migrants entered the city, they also competed with European immigrants for a limited number of jobs. This competition also fostered a more general struggle for belonging and acceptance, as the contest for race, place, and identity in Chicago took place in immigrant newspapers, shared city spaces, and within the minutiae of everyday interaction.

For many men, Mexican and otherwise, this struggle was especially notable for its violence. As Arredondo noted, “Conflict, competition, and sometimes violence characterized these primarily male-to-male interactions.” Thus, identity contestation within the Windy City had a largely gendered component, as written and violent acts of masculine self-affirmation aimed to “feminize” other men. Faced with the emasculating circumstances of migratory labor in the large-scale absence of their Mexican family, *solos* in Mexican Chicago often re-affirmed their own unstable sense of manliness by “othering” men from other ethnocultural groups. *Solos* increasingly reviled the “feminine

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characteristics” of Poles, Italians, “Americans,” Blacks, and “gringoized” Mexican immigrants.

Occasionally, these types of gendered attacks located the male “other’s” presumed femininity in the ways that European males interacted with women. Mexican men regarded the behavior of women as a reflection of male honor, from working outside the home to public displays of sexuality. The words and types of gendered insults wielded by solos reveal thus more than just insight into the process of identity construction in early twentieth-century Chicago, IL. When read backwards, the basis for “feminizing” another immigrant male reveals much about how los solos viewed the role of Mexican women in the workplace, marriage, and the home.

Women themselves emerged as a major impetus for gendered conflict in Chicago. The dearth of young mexicanas in Mexican Chicago changed the ways in which single men related to women, as inter-ethnic courtship and marriage became more common than in Mexico. For some Mexicans, taking a Polish bride was seen as an affront to the honor of all Polish immigrants, and other solos regarded the converse to be true as well; probably rooted in ideas about the necessity of Mexican male guardianship or “chaperonage,” many felt the purity of Mexican “flowers” was to be protected at all costs. In this way, gender values and women themselves became sites of inter-ethnic, honor-based conflict which mirrored the larger struggle between Chicago’s diasporic peoples.

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5 Migrants and Mexican nationals use the disparaging word “agringado” to describe chicanos and Mexican-Americans who have absorbed American cultural characteristics.

6 Ruiz, From Out of the Shadows, 51.
In other cases, however, the struggle for a “manly” self-identification exposed class differences and the fissures dividing Mexican Chicago. *Solos* often reviled Mexican immigrants who bore the cultural markers of “Americanization,” especially those who spoke only English or who claimed a “Spanish” identity in order to avoid the racializing forces consigning “Mexican-ness” to subaltern status. The motivation for those who denied their Mexican citizenship by claiming that they were Spanish was pragmatic in that many simply wanted a job in an oft-segregated labor market. Of course, the decision to claim a “Spanish” heritage often carried the price tag of considerable guilt. Taylor considered the following statements of “two Mexicans” to be representative: “I am ashamed to say that to get work which wasn’t on a railroad I used to say that I was Spanish. I had to do this near the municipal pier in Chicago. While I was there they fired four Mexicans [when] the foremen found they were Mexicans.” The second also used the word “ashamed” in describing his decision to disavow his Mexican heritage, though he tragically used the word to describe his reluctance to tell the man that he was Mexican: “I was ashamed to tell the employment man I was Mexican; I was afraid.”

While some migrants used this tactic, many others did not, and the latter group hurled aspersions on the first. The latter sentiment appears quite clearly in a Mexican *corrido* from Michoacan called *El Enganchado*. Corridos are folk ballads set to simple melodies, and the subjects can be anything from personal stories, impressions, or

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8 Literally, the words *el enganchado* translates to “the one who is ensnared.” In this context, Taylor correctly translated the words to mean “the contract laborer.”
historical accounts. For over a century, Mexican emigrants have sung these songs on both sides of the border, and some of these cultural texts can be said to accurately reflect the sentiments of both singer and audience. A corrido such as El Enganchado would not have achieved popularity and probably would not have been recorded if it did not resonate with its audience.

One scholar of Mexican folk culture has argued that the corrido’s place of origin was, in fact, “musical Michoacan,” and that the medium subsequently spread throughout Mexico with the migrations of michoacanos themselves. Americo Paredes disputes this contention, though he does acknowledge that “the music” of this popular artistic expression has been “enriched through their undeniable genius.”

The song begins by describing a scene which was quite familiar for many solos in early Mexican Chicago, and here again the shadowy enganchista and his “contracts” fundamentally shaped the movements of Mexican migrants. The subject of the song began his migratory odyssey in Morelia, Michoacan, a city which is now the capital of the Mexican state. “I came under contract from Morelia,” began the song, continuing that this man’s dream was “To earn dollars [which] they told me…were scattered about in heaps. There were girls and theaters And…here everything was good fun.” The reality of Mexican racialization and migrant life soon shattered his rose-tinted appraisal of life in the United States. “A shoemaker by trade…[in America] they say I’m a camel…And good only for a pick and shovel.” Couched in gendered rhetoric, the middle verses of the corrido express his disdain for acculturated Mexican immigrants who do not speak “the

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language their mother taught them,” as well as those who claimed the aforementioned “Spanish” heritage. “Many Mexicans don’t care to speak…The language their mothers taught them…And go about saying they are Spanish…And denying their country’s flag.10"

Yet in this corrido, adopting a fictive and unadulterated “Spanish” ancestry was more than just a treasonous act. For many solos who anticipated their stint in the United States to be impermanent, naturalization was an act of cowardice supposedly fit for a woman. “Some [mexicanos] are darker than chapote (black tar)…But they pretend to be Saxon…They go about powdered to the back of the neck…And wear skirts for trousers.11” Taken to its logical end, this corrido equated the negation of la raza and one’s own native ethnicity with a craven feminitity. By contrast, the proud, “manly” Mexican must follow the example of Jose Vasconcelos in exalting and revering la raza. Such hyper-patriotic rhetoric and ethnic nationalism was not uncommon during the Mexican Revolution, and the nation-building upheaval in Mexico was never totally confined the country’s geographic boundaries.

The narrator’s lyrical disgust did not end with the feminization of those Mexicans who claimed whiteness. “Flapperized” Mexican women, flaunting their bodies, “bobbing” their hair, and dancing the Charleston were equally intolerable affronts to his “mexicanidad:” “The girls go about almost naked… And call la tienda ‘estor…”They go around with dirt-streaked legs….But with those stockings of chiffon.” The changes

10 Taylor, Mexican Labor, V.
11 My emphasis added.
wrought by small forms of cultural hybridization sent the disgusted narrator back to the mesa central, as he was “tired of all this nonsense. I’m going back to Michoacan.”

The reaffirmation of solo masculinity took other forms as well. In addition to ridiculing “gringoized” mexicanos, some solos also scorned the gender dynamics of older, “whitened” Americans as well. The primary targets for “feminization” remained the men of Chicago’s newly-arrived, first and second-generation European immigrants, with the city’s Poles receiving the worst of it. Nevertheless, mexicanos also lashed the masculinity of American men, and in both cases the supposed gender insubordination of women provided the grist for these attacks. An editorial in Mexico entitled the “Flapperization of the World” attacked American men because their wives did not always home-cook meals for them, as one author “observed” that “…an American friend who in his own house can’t even open his mouth to order a couple of fried eggs (because he is already finding out things about his wife (sic)). She shoves him out to a restaurant, because according to her, she did not get married to be a cook for any Tom, Dick, or Harry, including her husband, my friend.”

Some of Taylor’s interviews revealed the same, especially the comments of a man “working on a New York Central section.” At a Hull House picnic, a rubber worker named Martinez said that he liked “the American [gender] customs” more, which he perceived as some form of gender parity between men and women. Having overheard Martinez’ comments, another Mexican responded that “European laws are better than

12 Taylor, Mexican Labor, V.

13 In this case, these bracketed words are Taylor’s.

14 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 200.
those of the United States, which gave too much freedom.” His major complaint was that “here in America the woman is over the man. The man is the head of the house. There must be a head; every society has a head. The place of the woman after marriage is in the home taking care of the children.\textsuperscript{15}"

Yet perhaps the most salient feature of \textit{mexicano} life in 1920s Chicago was the struggle with other local subaltern groups, especially Polish and Italian immigrants. The root causes of this conflict were probably jobs, civic integration, and the struggle for the city’s “turf.” It is also worth mentioning that the struggle between Mexican and European ethnics was an uneven conflict. Prior to 1916, second-generation European immigrants already controlled some arms of the local governing apparatus, having achieved strong representation in the police force and courts. Their sense of “whiteness,” however, remained unstable, as judges and policemen continually reinforced their ethnic superiority via their invention of a menacing, “hot-tempered,” and dark-skinned “Other.” One policeman, for example, told Taylor that “The Mexicans are not any worse than the others, but they will kill quicker,” while another justified preemptive action with the Mexican male’s inborn predisposition to violence: “The men downstairs [policeman] have orders to take no chances whatsoever with a Mexican. They are quick on the knife and are hot-tempered, and do the damage before you know it.\textsuperscript{16}"

Polish and Italian immigrants also enjoyed a prospective whiteness which included the possibility of full integration. First legally codified with John Adams’

\textsuperscript{15} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 198.

\textsuperscript{16} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 154.
infamous Alien and Sedition Act, the historical connections between whiteness and U.S. citizenship run deep. In Chicago and many other parts of the American Southwest, *mexicanidad* has been coded as distinctly and permanently non-white. One official at the Chicago Chamber of Commerce clearly articulated this view when he labeled Mexicans as “the scum of the Earth.” For this reason, “many people prefer Negro laborers and neighbors. You can talk to them and they have learned some of the white man’s ways of living.” The Mexicans, however, “are lower than the European peasants. They are not white and not Negro~They are Mexican.”

In such a contested urban space characterized by hostile encounters between men, some *solos* mobilized knives, guns, and the language of masculinity to justify their “superiority” to newly-arrived European immigrants. A *Mexico* editorial published on March 21, 1928 entitled “Mexican Catholics in the United States” took a similar tact to the *corrido El Enganchado* by emasculating an Italian priest. Circumstance in Chicago meant that some practicing Mexican Catholics worshipped in parishes dominated by Italian congregations and priests. Obviously, despite some religious commonalities between the *mexicanos* and *paisanos*, this arrangement sometimes produced a great deal of tension. The author Jesus de Mora attended an Italian mass only to listen to the priest insult his national compatriots, an affront to which he responded by disparaging the priest’s “manliness.” His response conflated woman-hood with a lack of reason, and arguably de Mora also “masculinized” Catholicism by labeling the priest as “woman in plain vintage” *despite* his “robes of distinction:”

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In very poor Spanish and with even worse facts related to the sacred history of the apparitions, he spoke to us about the feelings of the Mexican people; but there was a moment in which he was without doubt guided by some rancor [that] he allowed himself to enter into the terrain of politics...[the part of his sermon] that caused the most bitterness and rage were those wrapped up in these words: ‘The Mexicans are savages, they are brutes and bandits in which some of them rob the others and they cannot remain peaceful.’

From that moment I promised myself that I would not return to that temple where far from speaking to us about piety and forgiveness, we were caused injury by a simpleton who in spite of the respectability given to him by his robes of distinction, reduced himself to the level of a woman in plain vintage\textsuperscript{18}.

\textit{Mexicanos} used a number of strategies to construct their masculinities, and many were slightly more complex than ascribing femininity to men exhibiting undesirable characteristics. In language which often revealed a great deal about Mexican gender roles, some \textit{mexicanos} attacked the ways in which Polish men “allowed” their women to behave. Such gendered vitriol was obviously designed as an affront to the honor and masculinity of all Polish men. It would thus appear that many Mexican men characterized the public comportment of women as a matter of masculine honor. Reflecting her idea of male “chaperonage,” these sources again confirm many of Vicki Ruiz’ findings in \textit{From Out of the Shadows}.\textsuperscript{19} A migrant man attempted to deflect Polish criticism of Mexican Chicago by responding to the charge that:

They [the Poles] say we are drunk and low. They are not better than we, but they are worse. They say we are not fit to associate with. We do not want to associate with them, with people who allow their women to appear drunk in public and act like wild women. They raise hell in this town. The Mexicans do their drinking inside; the Poles go out into the street hollering and cursing. In the house where I live there are some Poles who live on the first flat. There are five women and seven men, none of them married. They get drunk three times a week and raise

\textsuperscript{18} Mora, J. Jesus. “Mexican Catholics in the United States.” Editorial. \textit{Mexico} (Chicago), March 21, 1928.

\textsuperscript{19} Ruiz, \textit{From Out of the Shadows}, 51.
Cain until 3 or 4 in the morning. They bang the chairs on the wall and break the dishes. In the winter if I chop some wood upstairs for kindling the women come upstairs cursing and yelling at me. You never hear of our Mexican women acting that way or swearing. The Poles are a disgrace\textsuperscript{20}.

The wild and supposedly overt sexual behavior of Polish women also caught the attention of several Mexicans in Indiana Harbor. One employed this observation to delineate the local police’s uneven *modus operandi* towards (im)migrants in Chicago. Citing a historical reality, one Mexican man observed that the

…Mexicans take a lot of abuse here in this town [as the] the authorities are always after us. If a Mexican drinks a glass of something and a policeman knows about it, into the calaboose for him. A Pole gets drunk and the policemen takes him home…The others get drunk by their families, carry on brothels, and are never disturbed. If the Mexicans have a party and someone laughs too loud, they raid the place and call it disorderly conduct\textsuperscript{21}.

Here “the others” who “carried on brothels” probably meant Poles and other European immigrants. Pertaining to gender and identity, it also seems important that Mexican men might “drink a glass of something” or “have a party” whereas Polish men might “get drunk by their families” and “carry on brothels.” In other instances, the personal conduct of Polish women was not as important as the fact that Polish men “allowed” their women to work.

One *mexicano* invested Mexican masculine identity with the fact that Mexican women never needed to work regardless of a Mexican families’ financial circumstances. His verb choice of Polish men “[putting] their women to work” reveals the malleability of language, as the few *mexicanas* in early Mexican Chicago mostly regarded wage labor outside the home as a matter of liberation rather than imposed servitude. According to

\textsuperscript{20} Taylor, *Mexican Labor*, 144.

\textsuperscript{21} Taylor, *Mexican Labor*, 150.
this Indiana Harbor man, the “people who make things hard for the Mexicans are the Europeans who have just come over here but claim to be Americans.” Many (im)migrants in Chicago “don’t have a chance to know the real American people. I see the Greeks, Italians, Poles; they are not Americans.” It is the Poles, however, who are “citizens and pretend to be the real American people. Poles are the organizers of distinction against the Mexicans. The Polish people put their women to work; the Mexicans don’t want their women to work even if they are poor.  

Thus, the “feminization” of Chicago’s “others” took a few shapes. In the absence of large numbers of Mexican women, one way in which unaccompanied young mexicanos constructed their masculinity was by ascribing feminine characteristics to men possessing certain undesirable traits, such as acculturated Mexican (im)migrants or to Italian priests who laced their sermons with racial invective. In characterizing these men as effete, solos obviously deployed the language of femininity in a pejorative context. The second common basis for denigrating the masculinities of Chicago’s “others” was in critiquing the way in which men treated “their” women or the way in which these women behaved under the purview of men. Under these gendered critiques, mexicanos found the perceived ascendancy of women over men to reflect a deficit of Polish and “American” masculinity.  

Another primary channel for re-affirming migrant masculinity also emanated from the ongoing contest between Chicago’s subaltern populations: the struggle for women themselves. The demographic disparity between Mexican men and women as well as the preference for “non-Flapperized” mexicanas produced a number of

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22 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 240.
consequences. Undeniably a function of the larger contest for honor amongst Chicago’s subaltern populations, Mexican men often prized the women of Chicago’s other immigrant groups. However, as evidence of some acculturation, these same men rarely sought out African-American women. By parroting common forms of racism against African-Americans, *mexicanos* in early Mexican Chicago hoped to distinguish themselves from the most marginalized group in American history. Although largely successful in this regard, Arredondo points out that “Mexicans experienced separation and segregation that proved the inadequacies of melting pot practices and that only marked them as nonwhite racial others.”

It is important to note that some *solos* did court and marry the small numbers of Mexican women then in Chicago, and that honor-based conflicts also happened between groups *mexicanos*. The situation’s demographics sometimes inverted the common gender custom in Mexico of older men marrying younger women. One Mexican observed that “A number are married to women much older than they. Martinez, for example, is aged twenty-two, and his wife is about fifty. It is just the other way in Mexico; the old men are married to the young woman.” The Mexican man continued by assessing the broader realities of Mexican Chicago:

> Mexican women were very scarce. There were many fights for the ones that were here. Women never stayed single very long except by choice. There was one woman for whose hand three men were killed by rivals. She was married three times without being divorced once; the lovers dispatched all the husbands, thus eliminating the necessity of divorce. Many more Mexicans were stabbed, and that was in the space of a year.

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Exceptions notwithstanding, most solos agreed with the author of *El Enganchado*, who, disgusted with “impure” Mexican women, returned to “his” Michoacan. As one “Young…laborer” succinctly told Taylor, it “is best to get a girl from Old Mexico when one wishes to marry.”  Although not a solo, one “Mexican boy” studying in a “local high school” correctly stated that Chicago’s mexicanos often “say that the Mexican girls of the United States have too much liberty. They want to marry the girls newly from Mexico. Mexican girls here want Mexicans who have been in the United States.”

Another “better-educated Mexican” corroborated these sentiments, saying that “The [Mexican] men prefer to marry girls from Mexico” because “the customs are different and the women are used to having so many liberties here that the well-meaning intentions and safeguards of the husband would be misunderstood by their American wives.”

Further advantages included that it was supposedly “cheaper to go to Mexico and marry than to get a wife here, as the Mexican “girls are so few here that you have to [give a great deal]. Courtship practices in Chicago apparently signified that “you have to bring them all sorts of presents and to cinch the thing you have to buy an automobile.” By comparison, in Mexico all one needed “was a small heart and a good tongue.”

Although some admittedly had large cultural reservations with courting Polish and Italian women, many solos did not. Another corrido named the Corrido Pensilvanio hinted at the possibility of inter-ethnic romance. Composed to describe circumstances in steel-making Bethlehem, PA, the ballad’s lyrics have close commonalities with the

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situation in Chicago. The son begins by affirming that even if married in Mexico, contract laborers usually journeyed from Texas to the Industrial North alone. The demands of *enganchistas* assured this, as the song’s third stanza began: “The contractor said to me…’Don’t take your family…Or you will pass up this job…It’s in the State of West Virginia.” Upon arriving at their destination, these “Three Hundred Mexicans” were greeted with the friendly “curiosity” of Italian women: “When we arrived there…and got off the train…The Italian girls asked us…Where do you come from, Mexicans?”

Many *solos* found the women of European immigrant groups to be quite attractive. A "young Mexican" admitted as much when he told Taylor that he “like[d] I like the Polish women very much. They are physically attractive and their golden hair rather fascinates me.” This *solo* also surmised that these prized Poles “must be very affectionate wives, because they have a lot of children.” In early Mexican Chicago, women themselves were objects of honor-based conflict. There might be no better example of this than the lines which appeared in *Festividades*, a local Mexican pamphlet. Close contact between Mexicans and Poles in “slaughter-houses” produced friction over women, as meat-packing Poles:

> have a very evil opinion of us Mexicans---but it’s different with the Polish girls. In the packing-house district many Poles and Mexicans live; and by virtue of being employed in large numbers at the huge slaughter homes, there is continual association between them. This has fomented a certain intimacy between them; indeed, many Mexican men have already married Polish girls The men disapprove of such a thing, but as for the women who angle for Mexicans, we do

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not know what they have confided to the sisters of their race (probably that we Mexicans are good catches). This has come to put the Polish gentleman in bad humor, and it is rumored that they are preparing a good beating for our countrymen. This rumor has not dismayed our fellow-countrymen...  

Even social workers and “second-generation” Americans found that European women indeed caused violent, honor-based conflicts in Chicago. One of the latter wrote that “In 1922 there were small riots. The Mexicans used to stop Polish girls. They marry white girls and that causes a terrible amount of hatred. People feel they are a different race.” One social worker observed the same while adding that these romantic encounters between mexicanos and Polish women were sometimes contrived in order to justify large-scale violence. Lithuanian and Polish men “claimed the Mexicans molested their women, but it was only a cloak” so that the European groups could “beat up Mexicans coming home at night.” Of course, the real reason lied in suspicions that “the Mexicans came in to lower wages.” Even the honor of European ethnic prostitutes compelled men to physical combat, as “A month ago there was a fight when a Polish prostitute who had had relations with a Mexican accused him in the presence of a Pole.” She later recounted an incident in which “A year or two ago the Mexicans got rocked at Davis Square by a gang of Lithuanians.”

Newspaper articles published similar stories as well. An article appeared in the November 20, 1927 issue of La Noticia Mundial in which “a Pole killed a Mexican who, it was claimed, had given attentions to the wife which the husband resented.”

30 Festividades. Pamphlet, Chicago, November 1, 1925, 7.
31 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 229.
32 La Noticia Mundial (Chicago), November 20, 1927.
supposed-aggressiveness with which Mexican men courted “white” women justified more than just physical conflict. Some “Chicagoland” movie theaters segregated Mexicans from “white” audiences. Practices varied widely, as the real fluidity of skin color within Mexican (im)migration stymied most attempts to impose full-scale segregation on theaters. One Mexican complained that such a “theater [was] owned by Poles. They said the distinction was made because the Mexicans hugged the girls; the movie man also said the Mexicans come in their overalls.33"

Yet as European women emerged as the apples of many Mexican men’s eyes, black women often received converse treatment, as did the idea of black men marrying Mexican women. Mexican immigrants and solos often mimicked American racism towards African-Americans, and matters of gender proved to be no exception. In a sweeping observation, Taylor accurately noted that “the Mexicans, [tejanos], and Spanish-Americans were equally strongly opposed to intimate relations with the Negroes, either because they had acquired race antipathies toward them, or were sensitive to the white American stigma attaching to them because of interrelations, or both.34” A migrant who “came from Mexico in 1910…to New Orleans” did not remember the Southern city well because of its large black population, saying that “There were a lot of Negroes there and I did not like it. I have never liked them and try never to get work near the Negroes. They are gente mala y grosera.35”

33 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 233.
34 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 253.
35 Taylor, Mexican Labor, 115.
Even historical counterexamples underscore the point. *Mexicanos* who married black women often felt the need to justify their actions in terms of the adulterated cultures of Chicago’s Mexican women, or simply in terms of the enormous gender disparity which existed in Chicago. One *mexicano* claimed that:

“Some of the Mexicans who marry colored say it is because there aren’t many Mexican girls and they don’t like the Mexican girls who are here. The Mexican men here say that the Mexican girls of the United States have too much liberty.”

A candid conversation between two *solos* revealed much about Chicago’s ethnocultural hierarchies then under construction, with “Mexican-ness” sandwiching the constructed, monolithic hierarchies of “whiteness” and “blackness.” One Mexican asked a *solo* why he married an African-American woman, with the latter responding that “I asked a Mexican girl, and she wouldn’t, and I don’t know whites, so I had to marry a Negro.”

However, the production of cultural forms is chaotic, inventive, and sometimes contradictory. Reluctant marriages between black women and young Mexican men were infinitely less common than the outright revulsion which many Mexican men exhibited at the mere proposition of such unions. Several quotes littered throughout the text prove this, such as one who objected in avowedly racial terms that other Mexicans “don’t like to see them degrade their race.” Yet another observed the infrequent unions while voicing the same type of fears regarding the pollution of *la raza*: “Many of the Mexicans mix with the colored women, but it lowers the prestige of *la raza*.” The idealized purity of Mexico’s “mixed race” and fears about the racial degeneracy of the United States’

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black population seems to be a transnational cultural amalgam, as Revolutionary discourses converged with American racial classifications.\textsuperscript{38}

For other \textit{mexicanos}, concerns about “miscegenation” were more pragmatic. In a mixture of race-based reservations and practical qualms, one \textit{mexicano} told Taylor that “The Mexicans don’t want to be classed with the Negroes. The Mexicans who marry Negroes are ostracized and regarded as having degraded themselves.” No less opposed to intermarriage than the first, another migrant man was more conscious of the social implications of marrying black women, as he “hate[d] to see other Mexicans marry colored people. They’re human beings the same as everybody but it looks bad among the people.” A third was even more precise, musing that “We have a hard enough time as it is with social discriminations; why [invite] more trouble by marrying Negroes?\textsuperscript{39}”

Much as they did in the case of Polish women, honor-based conflicts also arose over African-American women. A brief article from \textit{Mexico}, Chicago’s most venerated Mexican publication, briefly recounted an incident in which one \textit{mexicano} killed another over claims that the second had a sexual encounter with the wife of the former. It remains unclear from the article’s vague wording whether the core motive for the murder was public dishonor of adultery rather than the deed itself: “A Mexican killed another Mexican because it was claimed that the Negro wife of the first “gave liberties” to the second.\textsuperscript{40}”

\textsuperscript{38} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 254.

\textsuperscript{39} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 254.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Mexico} (Chicago), February 26, 1927.
Fighting over women and manhood took place all over the city, yet Mexican men did not spend all of their time in these pursuits. Another way that solos reinforced their masculinity came from seeking the company of other mexicanos. The modes of interaction ranged from everyday, brief, social encounters to large-scale patriotic celebrations. In spaces with an overwhelming strong imbalance of men to women, Mexican migrants reinforced any masculine insecurity stemming from their dislocation from family and community. Solos celebrated a nostalgic version of Mexico together even as other compatriots relieved some stress over a game of pool.
CHAPTER V

MASCULINITY IN THE COMPANY OF OTHER MEN: MEXICAN PATRIOTISM, POOL HALLS, AND VICE

In a gender identity which often traverses geographies, cultures, and time periods, men have often believed that pure manliness and fraternity exist in the company of other men. Little or no femininity is presumed to exist when women are mostly absent from a situation. The consolidation of American modernity in the early twentieth century saw the proliferations of such homogenous environments, including an gradually increasing standing army, increased participation in union halls or fraternal clubs, football, prize fights and Young Men’s Christian Associations. Lacking capital and operating within a city machinery designed to perpetuate white supremacy, Mexican migrants simply did not have the same array of options in claiming masculine identities within American consumer culture. Most unaccompanied young *mexicanos*, seeking an eventual return to the motherland, harbored little interest in Uncle Sam’s army and spectacles. In the company of other Mexican men, *solos* and otherwise, *mexicanos* often negotiated their masculinities within a wide cultural terrain, alternating between activities which seemed to reify their unvarnished *mexicanidad*.

To construct and maintain their sense of being male, Mexican migrants reflected the hyper-patriotic leanings of mutual aid societies and patriotic organizations. Mutual
aid societies often existed to help and support other members during Chicago’s frequent upheavals and in times of high unemployment. Some groups infused their charters, constitutions, or mission statements with the language of promoting brotherhood and fraternity amongst the displaced “sons” of Mexico. *Solos* also fervently celebrated Mexico’s holidays and “heroes” in parades, parties, and newspaper articles. Logically, the versions of Mexican patriotism espoused by *solos* were a blend of hyperbolic nostalgia for Mexico and laudatory tales of great men performing heroic feats, such as the making the supreme sacrifice on the “altar” of the motherland. In doing so, they eulogized the “feminized” Mexican nation while saying little of the actual contributions made by Mexican women themselves. The nation, like the idealized Mexican home, was an inviting place of comfort and forgiveness. A lengthy article on Mexico’s editorial page entitled “The Odyssey of the Mexican Migratory Workers” made this gendered connection by associating the nation with the female anatomy. Against the background of recurring public and private “repatriation” schemes in the United States, the article hopes that “when the motherland wants to, and when the Mexican government can, it will send a train so that the others, also deported, may return to the mother’s womb.” Returning migrants were sinful and “ungrateful sons,” but “the mother is always the mother, and they will return to her womb although they are the most perverse ones in the world.”

Pool halls, as noted by both Arredondo and Garcia, served as another critical space for the assertion of solo masculinity. By far Mexican Chicago’s most important business type, pool halls were much more than a collection of felt tables and cues under one roof. These were de facto community centers, offering a wide array of services to

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wayward Mexican migrants, ranging from public baths, barbershops, restaurants, and boarding houses. Opportunistic *enganchistas* realized this, turning some of Chicago’s pool halls into informal employment agencies as well. *Solos* doubtlessly enjoyed myriad opportunities for male social interaction in these centers as well. Young migrants could gossip, discuss Mexican politics, and generally commiserate with other young, itinerant men in a foreign land. To best examine the diverse social functions fulfilled by pool halls, this essay will examine several years of business advertising in Chicago’s Spanish-language newspapers *La Noticia Mundial* and *Mexico*.

Yet these newspapers, while frequently printing ads for pool halls, also reviled places like “The Corner of Jalisco,” the “Monte Carlo,” and “Kansas City.” Portayed as a vice-ridden asylums for non-“respectable” *mexicanos*, the writers and editorialists of *Mexico* often linked pool halls to the consumption and sale of marijuana. The publication even penned an article entitled “Our Campaign Against Marijuana.” Indeed, the “pernicious herb” emerged as wedge issue in Mexican Chicago, evidence for the heterogeneity and “striations within” the immigrant community. Nevertheless, the repeated appearance of such appeals is evidence for one neglected aspect of pool halls and the *solo* experience in general: the fulfillment of hedonistic vice. Young,

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3“Our Campaign Against Marihuana,” *Mexico* (Chicago), January 18, 1925, p. 4.

unaccompanied, and looking to enjoy their time *al norte*\(^5\), *solos* in Chicagoland sometimes enjoyed the services of well-organized bordellos or the amusement of cockfighting. Their pursuits reflected both their age and the larger state of lower-class recreation in Chicago. Even as Mexican migrants weathered ethnoracial discrimination, physical assaults, and a tenuous financial standing, some *solos* asserted masculine agency by enjoying the many lures of Chicago’s urban life.

Scholars have generally examined the purposes and relative impact of the many Mexican organizations in early Mexican Chicago. Such organizations ranged from “spiritual clubs,” mutual aid societies such as the Sociedad Benito Juarez, and even a Mexican Masonic Lodge. Vargas writes that the “orientation and goals of the mutual-aid societies and fraternal organizations ranged from mutual welfare and relief to …social, literary, artistic, and religious pursuits.” Yet despite such lofty ends and well-intentioned efforts from society leadership, many factors converged to keep membership totals relatively low. Taylor observed that “the career of many of the societies has been marred by dissension and instability,” and also that the societies’ tendency to disband “diminished further their influence among the Mexicans.\(^6\)” Constantly in need of money and hamstrung by low membership, many Mexican societies were simply unable to stay continuously active throughout the time period in question. Class and education level complicated any attempt at unity, as many *solos* found the organizational leadership to be elitist, or even snobbish. Transient outlooks and Chicago’s severe brand of racism meant that many migrants saw their stays as wholly temporary, and thus memberships for “the

\(^5\) “In the United States.”

\(^6\) Taylor, *Mexican Labor*, 133.
various societies ranged from twenty to one hundred twenty.” It is important to note that most societies’ total members ranged far closer to the lower figure\textsuperscript{7}.

Despite relatively low membership totals and internal strife, it does seem like these predominantly male organizations achieved near-complete success in one regard. In their avowedly nationalist orientations, Mexican societies in Chicago and Indiana Harbor sought to instill patriotism and loyalty to Mexico. They accomplished this by discouraging acculturation amongst members and dutifully observing traditional Mexican holidays and festivals, especially the anniversary of Mexican Independence on September 16\textsuperscript{th}. Unlike Mexican societies of the Southwest, most Chicago groups expressly forbid members to become naturalized American citizens\textsuperscript{8}. It also appears that the Mexican government sought the same ends, viewing Mexican expatriates as “wayward compatriots\textsuperscript{9}” and a lost human resource. Manuel Gamio articulated this view in his formulation that Mexican (im)migrants in the United States constituted \textit{Mexico afuera}, or as a piece of the Mexican nation outside of Mexico. Mexican consuls in Chicago, who directly representing the aims and wishes of the Mexican government, sponsored a variety of cultural events aiming “to keep Mexicans within the national fold even as they lived and worked outside the nation-state\textsuperscript{10}.” Thus, even if few \textit{mexicanos} joined societies or attempted to mediate disputes through consuls, the cultural effects of their coordinated efforts were clear. Most Mexican (im)migrants in early Mexican Chicago

\textsuperscript{7} Taylor, \textit{Mexican Labor}, 133.

\textsuperscript{8} Garcia, \textit{Mexicans in the Midwest}, 162.

\textsuperscript{9} Vargas, \textit{Proletarians of the North}, 150.

\textsuperscript{10} Arredondo, \textit{Mexican Chicago}, 165.
clearly viewed themselves as Mexican citizens sojourning outside of their one true homeland.

Furthermore, Mexican societies, consuls, and local newspapers sponsored a variety of patriotic celebrations which collectively garnered far more enthusiasm than each individual institution. In this regard, each organization was quite successful in solidifying a nationalist outlook among young, transient men. Newspapers, for example, sometimes ran lavish special editions to commemorate Mexican holidays and sometimes directly funded parades or celebrations. In Indiana Harbor, some 2,500 people participated in a 1926 parade organized by a committee of the local society leadership\textsuperscript{11}. Some consuls, at the behest of the Mexican government itself, even founded Mexican organizations themselves, such as the Pro-Mexico Committee or the Mexican Blue Cross\textsuperscript{12}. The sum-total of their efforts is clear: solos, even if each abhorred the idea of joining Mexican organizations or relying on an overburdened consul, reflected and participated in an idealized and gendered patriotism. The fact that so many men attended celebrations or read hyper-patriotic newspaper articles meant that Mexican nationalism itself became an expression of masculinity. Much like the ideology which animates the aforementioned \textit{El Enganchado}, mexicano manliness existed in the preservation and Yet these newspapers, while frequently printing ads for pool halls, also reviled places like “The Corner of Jalisco,” the “Monte Carlo,” and “Kansas City.”\textsuperscript{13} Portayed as a vice-

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\textsuperscript{11} Sepulveda, “La Colonia Del Harbor, 107.

\textsuperscript{12} Garcia, \textit{Mexicans in the Midwest}, 124.

\textsuperscript{13} Advertisement. “Kansas City.” \textit{Mexico} (Chicago), January 18, 1925. The ad was reprinted in the January 24, 1925 edition as well. Advertisement. “Monte Carlo,”
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14 “Our Campaign Against Marihuana,” Mexico (Chicago), January 18, 1925, p. 4.

15 Arredondo, Mexican Chicago, 108.
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\textsuperscript{20} Vargas, \textit{Proletarians of the North}, 150.

\textsuperscript{21} Arredondo, \textit{Mexican Chicago}, 165.

\textsuperscript{22} Sepulveda, “La Colonia Del Harbor, 107.
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As most contemporaneous forms of patriotism were inherently gendered, it should not rank as a surprise that Chicago’s Mexican nationalism was no different. Many nation-states celebrate a national “father,” and many revere the military exploits, sacrifices, and bravery of warring men in service of “the nation.” In such national histories, women are often portrayed as fringe actresses or loyal wives, humbly contributing their part by dutifully backing their husband. In the Mexican Chicago example, ideas of manly or “fraternal” patriotism recognized women themselves as beauty queens. Newspaper articles and public poetry personified the Mexican nation as an attractive and loyal mother, complete with striking natural beauty yet always dutifully providing comfort and love to her “exiled” sons. The history of Mexico, however, was a succession of heroic deeds accomplished by great men, from Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla to Hernan Cortes. Finally, all sources confirm that the intended audience of patriotic

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discourse was almost invariably male, as news articles and rhetoric addressed Chicago’s *mexicanos* as “sons” or “brothers.”

In Indiana Harbor, the 1926 parade commemorating Mexican independence from Spain did have a space for honoring women---as beauty queens. Ciro Sepulveda’s dissertation on the Indiana Harbor colony argued that “the highlight events in the social life of the colony were the (Mexican national holidays).” In the early years of the 1920s, celebrations of Mexican Independence Day and Cinco de Mayo were small, private, and restrained. However, by the middle years of the decade, local Mexican societies such as the Circulo de Obreros Catolicos “San Jose” began to fund and organize lavish parades and celebrations on September 16th. Mexican societies elected an annual board to make important decisions regarding the festivities. An important force in Indiana Harbor life, the Circulo de Obreros Catolicos “San Jose” concerned itself creating fraternal relations amongst wayward “brothers of a race.” In its charter, the organization was more specific, hoping “to foster the desire for a school where our sons may be educated, imparting to them adequate instruction, and teaching them to love and venerate a country whose tradition, heroes, and glories should make them proud to be called its sons.” Such aims offer insight into the organization’s mindset in planning large-scale patriotic celebrations.

Sepulveda based his lurid description of the September 16, 1926 parade on oral interviews with eye-witnesses. On this day, Mexican organizers put the stars and stripes

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26 Sepulveda, “La Colonia Del Harbor,” 70.
in mothballs, instead draping telephone poles and storefronts with red, green, and white banners. Thousands of *mexicanos* crowded the sidewalks, hoping to secure the best possible view of the ensuing celebration. As the parade began, the mayor of Indiana Harbor appeared first, surrounded by a police escort and tacitly blessing the patriotic display. According to Sepulveda, the children in attendance were particularly drawn to the mounted *charro*, or the “gentlemanly” Mexican cowboy. Much like the American cowboy, the *charro* is a gendered symbol connoting man’s mastery of nature. However, the parade’s most popular float was its last. The final float portrayed the torture of Cuauhtemoc, the last Aztec (Mexica) emperor. This exhibit probably reflected the nation-building aspects of the Mexican Revolution, which unevenly sought to incorporate indigenous culture, symbols, and history within the boundaries of the Mexican nation.

In the end, most observers lauded the civic celebration as an unqualified success. A local newspaper headline read “Mexican Parade takes City by Storm,” characterizing the “colorful ‘pageant’ equal to ‘any civic celebration held in the city.’” Apparently, the paper did recount the coronation of the celebration’s “queen.” On the night of September 15th, an estimated 3,500 *mexicanos*, including the mayor and Chicago’s Mexican consul, attended the coronation of Senorita Refugio Ramirez. The Queen was surrounded by “her court,” composed of “three beautiful young ladies: Perpetua Pacheis, Maria Valdez,


The attendance for this event outpaced that of the actual parade the following day. It seems significant that so many Mexican spectators attended an event honoring feminine beauty, and the pageant’s connection with a major Mexican holiday is equally telling. Women became a patriotic, visual spectacle for Mexican men. Parallels exist between such an event and descriptions of the nebulous Mexican “nation” which appeared in the newspaper *La Noticia Mundial*.

In the September 16th, 1927 issue, editors packed the newspaper with articles, poems, and pictures extolling Mexico’s past. One of the articles begins by proclaiming that “Of the two mothers that man has from the earth, the motherland is the first.” However, “The name of the motherland is written with red flowers in the earth, because these flowers have been watered with the blood of heroes and with stars in the heavens, because it is there that the souls of martyrs burn brightly.” After unifying bloody male sacrifice and a common “Mexican” mother, the article continued that “the name of the motherland is a solemn hymn; it is written with blood in the earth and with stars in the sky; and thus this hymn is the universal deification of heroes.” In these passages, the geographic Mexican nation is a timeless feminine entity with little agency in shaping the course of national affairs. Men and martyrs were conversely the driving forces of national history, with and their “heroic” deeds meriting nothing less than “universal deification.”

In another article, author Elfego M. Romero also feminized the Mexican nation while offering a number of prescriptions for Mexican men to achieve national unity.

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Romero labeled Mexico as “a noble and beautiful mother that brought us life on her lap…” Of course, geographic existence does not constitute true nationhood, an act reserved for Mexico’s “fathers.” For Romero, the issue was clear, as “historical truth is incontrovertible. Hernan Cortes is the father of the nationality as the [Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla] is the father of the motherland. “Nationality” here is clearly a euphemism for racial mixture between the Spaniards and natives, thus giving birth to la raza. Despite again seeing Mexico itself as a mother, Romero did not address women as part of his readership, defining national unity as the “harmony of the spirits of upright and ascetic men who have, as if were their credo, respect for propriety and for life. This is here the fundamental basis for patriotism.” Upstanding men formed Romero’s basis for Mexican patriotism, though he did not solely examine issues particular to Mexico. In assessing the lot of mexicanos in Chicago, Romero criticized the (im)migrant community’s “lack of strength and its sad consequences.” To correct this problem, “[Mexican Chicago] must reveal the path which marks the existing cohesion within fraternity and affection.” Gendered values of fraternity and manly self-discipline emerge as the author’s primary vehicles for patriotism and improving the Mexican condition.

Another article actually mentioned an important contribution by Mexican women to the course of national history; however, the sacrifices of Dona Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez and Leona Vicario were framed as important contributions only because they contributed to military triumph. Underneath the massive caption “Mexico’s Heroes,” the newspaper placed a visually arresting spread of photos depicting Benito Juarez, General

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(and future dictator) Porfirio Diaz, and “the Victor of Victors,” General Ignacio Zaragoza. Author Leon Farfan did not see the irony of placing Diaz and Juarez next to one another under the heading of “Mexican Heroes.” Although both are considered to be “heroic” in their defense of Mexico during the War of French Intervention, it was Diaz who would attempt an unsuccessful, 1868 coup d’etat against Juarez’ government. Only 8 years later and following another abortive power grab, General Diaz rose to power, instituting a brutal, thirty-year dictatorship. Revering national heroes in such a way reflects the historical myopia present in so many nation-building projects.

The article lionizes the military triumphs of Guadalupe Victoria in excessive prose, and it seems obvious that the article was tailored for the tastes of male readership. Guadalupe Victoria fought against the Spanish in the War for Independence and would later serve as Mexico’s first President. In a period of Mexican history marred by instability and factionalism, Victoria opposed the creation of a constitutional monarchy in favor of democratic republicanism. Yet Farfan’s piece spoke little of his progressive ideology. Instead, he paints Victoria as a sort of comic book hero who “sow[ed] death in the insurgent armies” and “pil[ed] bodies upon bodies.” His greatest triumph occurred when he “Fac[ed] an impregnable fortress, surrounded by deep moats, [and was] bristled by bayonets.” The warrior responded to his situation by “sowing death in the insurgent armies,” and rallying his charges with his steady demeanor---and raised sword: after “don

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Guadalupe Victoria saw that his soldiers were exhausted and agonizing with fatigue,” he “took out his sword and waved it towards the impregnable wall: (I am going for it)---he cried; and, piling bodies upon bodies, he went….and fulfilled the promise, achieving victory.”

What is even more remarkable about this article is that Farfan did include a brief account of a specific *mexicana* contribution to national history. Most other patriotic pieces from Mexican Chicago never mention specific women in their canon of Mexican heroes. Yet what is apparently memorable from Dona Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez and Leona Vicario’s stories is that they offered their flesh in support of the Mexican Army. In a logjam of commas and doggerel, Farhan wrote that Mexican women “of this era, as if they were feeling moved by the divine spirit of an emancipated motherland, and by the example set by such brilliant military commanders, appear in this heroic scene.” Although inspired by a nationalist spirit, or “the divine spirit of an emancipated motherland,” it is important to note that Farhan also attributes their actions to “following the example of…such brilliant military commanders.” Nevertheless, these:

sublime women, who….in a plaza located in the state of Guerrero, seeing that it was necessary to kill soldiers so that they might be used as sustenance to continue the war, bravely offered themselves so that they would be killed and their flesh fed to the soldiers, disputing all of the honors of being the first sacrificed. 34

Women remain in an auxiliary and supporting role to the true agents of history: men. In the form of voluntary cannibalism, they also seem to have a rather small space for “national” contribution.

This hyper-patriotism is fairly representative of contemporaneous Revolutionary prose and thought. Yet newspapers and parades were not the only mediums for the broadcast and consumption of gendered nationalism. On October 23rd 1926, *Mexico* reprinted a poem that author Jose Nieto “recited….on September 15th, 1926, in Pilsen Park, Chicago.” Entitled “A Short Poem to my Country,” Nieto again addressed a monolithic male audience while still eulogizing the geographic Mexican nation as a ‘beautiful…princess.’ He began with a prayer to his muse and the mandate that “each loving and faithful son” must “awake from [their] dreams….on the Day of the Motherland.” Dedicating his piece to “my motherland and to its Heroes,” Nieto viewed *la patria* as an idealized feminine form. Note his extensive usage of Catholic imagery:

- Virgin of Anahuac! Land of loves!
- Beautiful region of perfumed air!
- Princess of the jungles and the flowers
- Empress of the New Continent!!
- Beloved by Columbus! Vestal virgin of the West Indies!
- Adoration of the Mexican people!
- Of your forests and supreme lakes
- Pearl of the American continent!
- Allow me to approach your altars
- Full of admiration and of fondness

Yet if the “pearl of the American continent” was a pristine virgin with “perfumed air,” September 16th really commemorated the deeds of Mexico’s “father” Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, an “unstained hero” who cast a “sainted shadow.” Nieto continued:

- From our consecrated independence!
- Yes, Mexicans, today full of pride
- We should be patriots and we should be unified
- And bless the Priest of Affliction
- Unstained hero, with a gray head….
- What a sainted shadow, ours of resolution
Oh, Father of the Mexican Motherland!
For you love inflames my chest\textsuperscript{35} …

Mexican Independence Day was not the only instance in which young Mexican men expressed their masculinity by articulating a gendered patriotic discourse. For contending political interests, the rhetoric of Mexican men as “sons” and “brothers” was deployed in support of many disparate causes. An editorial entitled “De-Mexicanification” spotlights concerns that Mexican men in Chicago were losing their cultural identity to the effects of acculturation. As a remedy designed to create new Mexican “soldiers,” the newspaper argued for patriotic education for both men and immigrant children. The obligation fell on parents “to dedicate a short bit of time to speaking to our little ones about the motherland; that we tell them of its glories, its heroes, and its riches.” Patriotic education amongst men should also be pursued “to forge the soldiers who will be the basis of patriotic zeal and honesty, defending the future of Mexico.” Even Mexican Chicago’s newspapers, which were often the mouthpieces of upper-class (im)migrants, seemed to champion such education for the purposes of improving Mexico rather than the United States.

The bi-weekly also exhorted Mexican consuls to create such societies, further demonstrating the nexus between newspapers, consuls and Mexican societies. Committees, such as those bearing the name of “THE PRO-MOTHERLAND COMMITTEE,” should be:

\begin{quote}
dedicated solely and exclusively to the education of our men who are in need of instruction, and to keep alive the patriotic love in the heart of all those who only moderately know our language and our motherland. More than this, we would perfect, there, halfway to saintly harmony, we would sow the seed of good
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} Nieto, “A Short Poem to My Country,” October 23, 1926.
understanding and of fraternity that should rein between every Mexican that truly loves his country.

The editorial reserved its most flowery and jingoistic prose for the children, who were lost in “the arid desert” of the United States and thus desperately thirsted for the “rich waters” and fountains of pure mexicanidad. Patriotic education would promote “fraternal” relations amongst Mexican men, yet it would also “teach those little hearts who, as lost travelers in the arid desert of their parent’s expatriation, would drink open-mouthed the rich waters from the fountains of teaching regarding the motherland.”

The Mexican Revolution presented new chances to re-define the Mexican nation by incorporating marginalized populations under the Porfiriato. Alternately competing and overlapping, urban workers, peasants, indigenous groups, and the small Mexican middle-class staked their claims for greater inclusion in the re-constituted “motherland.” The rhetoric and visual devices deployed for these purposes was similar to that emanating from Mexican Chicago. It is often overtly gendered, addressed to Mexico’s “sons” while extolling nationalistic values such as “fraternity.” Young male migrants, who hoped for an eventual return to Mexico, often consumed and articulated such sentiments. Even of migrants mostly shunned full membership in Chicago’s Mexican societies, it is quite obvious that solos participated in gendered patriotic displays and celebrations. Thus, the cultural ethos of Mexican Chicago’s elite strongly reflected the views of transient mexicanos, and expressions of Mexican patriotism were often inseparable from solo masculinity. Pool halls, however, offered a set geographic space in which migrants could interact with other men in a multiplicity of ways.

36 “De-Mexicanification,” Editorial, Mexico (Chicago), March 7, 1928.
Pool halls were Mexican Chicago’s most important business throughout this time period, reflecting the overwhelmingly young male character of the city’s Mexican community. In the summer of 1928, Chicago boasted an array of Mexican-owned businesses, with none being as prevalent as pool halls. The 76 pool halls in Mexican Chicago comprised one-third of all Mexican-owned businesses, with the majority concentrated in South Chicago, Gary, and Indiana Harbor. The latter had a remarkable 29 Mexican-owned pool halls, and Taylor viewed the Harbor’s disproportionately large cluster as a reflection of the large solo population in the area:

The large number of pool halls in Indiana Harbor as compared with the vicinity of Hull House, is probably the result of the concentration of solos in a newer and growing community, as compared with greater dispersion, [and] high[er] proportion of families.

The extraordinary popularity of pool halls was not entirely due to the competitive and leisurely possibilities afforded by billiards. Some pool halls were de facto employment agencies themselves, populated by skilled enganchistas. As compared to the pressurized and often suspicious environment of Canal Street, the merry atmosphere of the pool hall could have a disarming effect on solos. One young unaccompanied male reached Mexican Chicago following an encounter with an enganchista in a Kansas City pool hall. Senor Villegas left Mexico in 1908 when his wife was pregnant with their first child. No longer able to support his family, Villegas left the village at the urging of an enganchista. The railroad labor agent promised many things to Villegas, and soon he shipped off to El Paso and a hard life dominated by the “pick and shovel.” After working

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in various parts of the Southwest, and following his realization that seven years of railroad labor was enough, Villegas reached Kansas City in 1915. He wanted a change of occupation and found it in the city’s slaughterhouses.

*Enganchistas* in Kansas City, like their counterparts in Chicago, used pool halls to recruit labor. Villegas entertained the overtures of several labor agents in local pool halls, yet his discontent did not translate to immediate trust. He declined several work offers, probably remembering that his initial *enganchista* in Mexico referred to the United States as “the promised land.” By 1919, Villegas had grown disenchanted with his blood-soaked job in the slaughterhouses. He had visited his family only twice since moving to Kansas City and still had not accumulated enough money to move back.

Following a day-time shift at the slaughterhouse and seeking to unwind, Villegas trudged to the “corner” pool hall, where he and several unemployed men met an *enganchista* from Indiana. The patient labor agent worked for the Inland Steel Company in Indiana Harbor, and he spoke glowingly about the opportunities presented by steel work. After an hour of dialogue and promises that the *solos* would receive access to extensive recreational facilities including a pool hall, as well as free passage, good wages, and better housing, Villegas and several other men decided to accept the *enganchista*’s offers. He soon boarded a train for Chicago.

Villegas’ story was not unique, and his chance encounter with an enterprising labor agent was undoubtedly commonplace throughout Mexican Chicago. Labor-needy companies knew that the social space of pool halls attracted *solos*; conversely, young

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40 Sepulveda “La Colonia Del Harbor,” 25.
*mexicanos* often knew that they might find a job while purchasing a haircut, cigarettes, or a meal. In fact, the multitude of services offered by pool halls made each a logical place from which to fill labor shortages. Pool halls, however, were much more than just a job emporium. *Solos* congregated in these businesses because many offered a diverse set of services in addition to the obvious social possibilities of the Mexican-owned pool hall. Historians Juan Garcia, Gabriela Arredondo, and Ciro Sepulveda noted the importance of the pool hall to itinerant young men. Garcia notes that “Most young, single male transients sought recreation in the pool halls,” spaces where:

> Patrons caught up on the latest news and gossip, met new people, renewed old acquaintances, and exchanged political and ideological viewpoints. Men often contributed a few pennies and collectively bought a newspaper so that someone in the hall could read to them. Discussions and heated exchanges over news items or editorials usually ensued after each reading.\(^{41}\)

Using similar terminology, Sepulveda also claimed that these establishments helped to promote masculine kinship. Especially during the “winter months,” the pool halls of the Indiana Harbor colony “became social institutions. Since many recreational facilities in the Harbor were off limits to *mexicanos*, pool halls filled this vacuum. Recreation and socializing attracted many of the workers, especially the *solos*, to the halls. Some of the workers “spent hours and hours in the company of friends there.”\(^{42}\) Like Garcia, Arredondo noted that many pool halls served as impromptu mail centers for their nomadic customer bases. Owners:

> would receive mail for patrons who either had no permanent address or who left the area for work stints outside Chicago. This practice helped to strengthen


\(^{42}\) Sepulveda, “La Colonia Del Harbor,” 106.
informal social networks already at work… as men (primarily) would meet there and exchange tips on employment, housing, travel and so on.\footnote{Arredondo, \textit{Mexican Chicago}, 48.}

To examine these findings, this chapter will scrutinize years of business advertising in \textit{Mexico} and \textit{La Noticia Mundial}. Although many pool halls did not advertize through newsprint, the halls that used Chicago’s Spanish-language newspapers trumpeted an array of services available to young mobile men. A brief examination of 19 ads reveals the diverse functions filled by these community institutions. Interestingly, it also seems that the owners of these businesses changed often, as Mexican entrepreneurs, like their clients, often sought an eventual return to the “motherland.” Shifting ownership also reflects the tenuous economic footing of many Mexican (im)migrants in Chicago, a standing cemented by city’s racializing power structures.

One plain advertisement in a 1929 edition of \textit{Mexico} dangled a pool hall “for sale in the center of the colony with five tables. Located at 839 South Halstead Street, the owners were seeking “a car…as first payment.”\footnote{Advertisement. \textit{Mexico} (Chicago), March 18, 1929.} Another advertisement seemed equally pressed to unload their businesses. Prefacing his ad with the declaration that he was selling because “[he] must depart for Mexico City….in 15 days,” owner Miguel Carillo offered the Zacatecano Pool Hall with the assurance to potential buyers that he “will sell at a reasonable price.”\footnote{Advertisement. “The Zacatecano is being Sold,” \textit{Mexico} (Chicago), January 1, 1928.} Like the naming of many pool halls in Mexican Chicago, Carillo named his establishment the “Zacatecano” for the purposes of courting migrants and solos from the Mexican state of Zacatecas. Carrillo also purchased a more basic ad

\footnote{Arredondo, \textit{Mexican Chicago}, 48.}
in September 16th, 1927 issue of Mexico, although this ad gave no indication of the future business problems which would apparently plague the “Zacatecano.”

Not every newspaper ad sought to sell pool halls with such expediency. In a large ad featuring multiple fonts, Felipe Martinez told the readership of La Noticia Mundial that he would be selling his pool hall “The Casino.” Located at 4330 South Ashland Avenue, “The Casino” was purportedly “the oldest of Ashland and the Colony’s most distinguished.” Under the headline of “Great Opportunity”, the owners of “The Monterrey” also opted for relative simplicity in listing their business. The small ad, positioned in the bottom left-hand corner of La Noticia Mundial’s business section, simply gave the “very-well recognized” pool hall’s location as in “the center of the Mexican Colony.”

The preceding ads for “The Monterrey,” “The Casino,” and “The Zacatecano Pool Hall” show that businesses often changed hands while never diminishing the social primacy of pool halls themselves. It also seems that Mexican entrepeneurs, like solos themselves, frequently viewed their residency in the United States as temporary. Living and working in the “North” was thus a means to an end rather than an end itself. Yet unlike the majority of ads surveyed for this project, these three ads did not overtly list the multiple functions of each pool hall. The rest of the ads, some of which were adorned by visually arresting sketches of women and even poetry, usually displayed the pool hall’s subsidiary businesses. “The Spring,” for instance, doubled as an “Assistance House and

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Barbershop,” offering “Comfort and Care” to the migratory laborer. Editors positioned this ad adjacent to the aforementioned offer to sell “The Zacatecano.” Assistance houses in Mexican Chicago conventionally included the preparation of meals with the price of nightly lodging. Miguel Parra purchased two Mexico ad slots within a ten-day period, offering “Careful Service” to the patrons of “The Lighthouse.” The “Bath House” and “Billiards Hall” at Chicago’s 750 West Taylor Street boasted an “Electronic Device for a haircut and massage.” Given the solo’s propensity to partake in various forms of self-indulgence, it seems interesting that “The Lighthouse” was also a “Bath House” with an “Electronic Device” for a “massage.”

Located in Chicago’s epicenter for solo work opportunities, Canal Street’s aptly-named “Canal Inn” was a bilingual “Barbershop and Billiards Hall” which nevertheless also sought “a barber who speaks Spanish.” Another short-lived business owner in South Chicago gave his business a less generic name: “The Announcer of the Big Prize Lottery.” He lauded his establishment as “The best….in South Chicago for Mexicans,” offering “cleanliness and great service.” According to Arredondo, the establishment was situated in “the central business district for Mexican commercial establishments” and


51 Advertisement. “The Canal Inn,” Mexico (Chicago), March 4 1928

52 Advertisement. “The Announcer of the Big Prize Lottery,” Mexico (Chicago), February 7, 1925. Here, the translation for “El Canton del Gordo” is Arredondo’s.
contained “a barber chair on one side of the room.” The interesting name for the “Restaurant and Pool Hall” might highlight the owner’s previous occupation on a Mexican radio station. A combination “Pool Hall, Barber Shop, and Restaurant” in Joliet, Ill bore the name of Senor Villegas’ last stop prior to entering Chicago. Named “Kansas City,” the business re-printed the apparent endorsement of “Mexican Newspapers:” “When you visit Joliet, don’t forget this place.” The name “Kansas City,” coupled with the example of Senor Villegas’ meeting with a Chicago-area enganchista in the same city, reinforces the intra-national and transnational dimensions of Mexican Chicago. Often facilitated by labor agents and informal social interaction, pool halls provided direct linkages between U.S.’ cities and the Mexican interior. As solos moved around in search of the most advantageous employment opportunities, conversations in pool halls could shape the movements of these young men.

A seemingly-successful proprietor named Cornelio L. Flores bought three ads in both Chicago newspapers to promote his “barbershop and pool hall” named “The Recreation Room.” Flores showed some skill in advertising and promotion. The latest of the three ads contained a small drawing of two attractive young women shooting pool. They are wearing make-up and lipstick with short and stylish hairstyles, signifiers probably designed to reference the now world-famous “bob-haired flapper.” Neither one

53 Arredondo, Mexican Chicago, 53.
54 “The Announcer of the Big Prize Lottery,” Mexico (Chicago), February 7, 1925.
55 Arrendondo, Mexican Chicago, 53.
56 “Kansas City.” Mexico (Chicago), January 18, 1925.
of them seems to be wearing a wedding ring. In using such an image to promote his business, Flores’ intent is unclear. An obvious explanation could be that he wants the newspaper’s readership to believe that they could meet attractive women in “The Recreation Room.” However, unlike other ads for local pool halls, Flores’ goes to great lengths to portray his business as having appeal for all economic “classes.” Most pool halls in Mexican Chicago catered specifically to young transient men, and it is clear that many voices within the (im)migrant community disdained these businesses as disreputable and vice-ridden. By featuring two stylish women in one of his ads, Flores might be trying to differentiate his business from the rest by lending it the aura of respectability.

The ad is more verbose than most, portraying the “Great Pool Center” as “the largest, cleanest, and best lit [pool hall in Mexican Chicago], equipped with 8 ‘BRUNSWICK’ brand pool tables.” A client might choose from a variety of refreshments and tobacco products, such as “Sodas, Sweets, Cigars, and Cigarettes.” A smaller ad in Mexico promotes a free hour of billiards for its “estimable and numerous clientele. ONE FREE HOUR, 7 to 8 PM, excepting Saturday and holidays.” In La Noticia Mundial, the enterprising Flores advertised a similar deal in which Saturday clients would “receive sodas and service for the pool tables will be FREE.” The word “free” was printed in large, block letters.

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59 “The Recreation Room.” Mexico (Chicago), August 14, 1926.

Not all advertising in *La Noticia Mundial* and *Mexico* was so extravagant. A proprietor named “H. Ramirez” did not the specific name of his business, instead choosing to emphasize the variegated services offered at this establishment. Clearly catering to *solos*, this pool hall had a “barbershop and rooms for rent, serving also as an “Assistance House.” Revolutionary, nationalist rhetoric involving the virtues of the racial mixture helped Julio I. Mena depict his pool hall as “A recreation center preferred by *la Raza*” as well as “A purely Mexican place, where one may spend a bit of time.” Like Flores’ “Recreation Room,” Mena’s business pedaled “Cigarettes, Cigars, and Sodas.” Next to other small ads for Mexican restaurants in the city, the “Monte Carlo” issued two humble and identical advertisements in *Mexico’s* business page. Owner Jose Carrasco targeted men who worked in Chicago’s stockyards, calling his “great pool hall and barbershop…The most appreciated….in the Colony, by virtue of being the only hygienic [close] to the Stock Yards. You must visit is, where you will find perfect service, in addition to the best kind of sweets, sodas, cigarettes and cigars.” *Solos* looking for “distraction and a good bath house” were encouraged to visit Antonio Garcia’s “The Cypress.” Garcia billed this pool hall as a self-styled “Modern Establishment” that served as “a pool hall and barbershop.”

Finally, the most remarkable ad in this newspaper survey used a brief poem to attract the business of young, unaccompanied men. “The Corner of Jalisco” printed two

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61 Advertisement. *La Noticia Mundial* (Chicago), August 21, 1927.

62 Advertisement. *La Noticia Mundial* (Chicago), January 18, 1925.


separate ads imploring readers to “follow the happiness” all the way to 742 Blue Island Avenue. A 1927 ad in La Noticia Mundial told local mexicanos “with good taste” to “visit us and you will find fun and friends.” Pool tables cost “only four cents” per game, with each customer enjoying the benefits of “first-class rails.” Printed only as “Don Benito,” the owner’s name often was peppered in a brief poem divided into five stanzas of four lines. Unfortunately, the surviving edition was damaged and only partially accessible through microfiche, and I was thus unable to ascertain the exact date in which the ad first appeared in La Noticia Mundial:

The Most Popular pool hall
The Most safe and the most moral
Because no one causes trouble
Nor Perverts the heart

[Don Benito] has won applause
And is never diminished in success
By the services that are offered
To the Mexican public

Don Benito has achieved
In three years of labor
To always have a full house
Because of how he has behaved

If you all believe what I offer
Without vanity
You will all come to play at
The Corner of Jalisco

If policemen come arriving
We will respond reasonably
Less for the spectators
Who are always getting in the way

“Don Benito’s” ad claimed that he had “won” applause by “the services offered to the Mexican public,” implying that the “The Corner of Jalisco” had multiple sub-businesses to offer Mexican Chicago. However, the most interesting thing about this poem is the juxtaposition between the possible arrival of police and Benito’s supposedly “safe” and “moral” place where “no one causes trouble nor perverts the heart.” The specter of violent encounters with other immigrant men, especially the hated police force comprised of Irish, Polish, and Lithuanian men, loomed large on the consciousness of solos. “The Corner of Jalisco” was located in South Chicago near the Rock Island Railway, a large employer of young mexicanos. Violence frequently erupted there, and in 1926 the South Chicago police attributed the death of a Mexican woman in custody on “Mexican male brutality.” Curiously, the woman apparently died from a lump on her head which only appeared while in custody.

For our purposes, the burden of guilt in this case is irrelevant. Another reading of the poem might be that Don Benito’s prose served as a “wink” to the sometimes-hedonistic sensibilities of young unaccompanied males. When read this way, labeling his establishment “safe and moral” might be nothing more than deliberate sarcasm. Pool halls in Mexican Chicago served a multitude of purposes, many of which have been detailed above. Solos could congregate with other men in this social space, re-affirming a specific, if quite common, masculine identity. However, the masculine expression inherent within all-male gatherings in pool halls sometimes leaned towards illegal forms of pleasure-fulfillment. In some pool halls, young, “adventuring” migrants could buy, sell, and smoke marijuana, practices which drew the repeated ire of Mexico and led to the

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67 Arredondo, Mexican Chicago, 167.
newspaper’s more general demonization of pool halls. Other solos in Indiana Harbor, like many others in contemporaneous Chicago, purchased sex from elaborate prostitution schemes. Among many complex factors, the frequenting of brothels was due to the general shortage of Mexican women in Chicago.

In the early-twentieth century, the travels of Mexican workers throughout the United States had the unintended effect of circulating marijuana as well. Some mexicanos brought the drug to Texas and New Mexico, purveying pleasure while provoking widespread condemnation from the American public. This demonization, coupled with a national antagonism toward Mexico and Mexican immigrants, spurred legislative action. From 1915 to 1933, popular sentiment forced state governments to pass laws against marijuana usage in California, Utah, Colorado, Texas, Iowa, New Mexico, Arkansas, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Wyoming, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Oklahoma. It is not coincidental that varying amounts Mexican labor existed in almost every single of these states. A 1929 issue of the Montana Standard reveals the widespread association of marijuana with Mexican labor, specifically work in the “beet fields:”

There was fun in the House Health Committee during the week when the Marihuana bill came up for consideration. Marihuana is Mexican Opium, a plant used by Mexicans and cultivated for sale by Indians. ‘When some beet field peons takes a few rares of this stuff,’ explained Dr. Fred Ulsher of Mineral County, ‘he thinks he has just been elected President of Mexico so he starts to execute all of his political enemies. I understand that over in Butte where the Mexicans often go for the winter they stage imaginary bullfights in the “Bower of Roses” or put on tournaments for the favor of “Spanish Rose” after a couple whiffs of Marihuana. The Silver Bow and Yellowstone delegations both deplore these international complications.’ Everyone laughed and the bill was recommended for passage.
In this passage, the notion that marijuana usage caused violent criminal impulses dovetailed neatly with imperial American attitudes toward Mexico. William Randolph Hearst and other news outlets portrayed Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata as hot-tempered, blood-thirsty, and nation-less *bandidos*. Historical reality contradicts such simplistic characterizations, yet the belief that Mexican Revolutionaries were illegitimate pirates prone to violence was quite common. Dr. Ulshner surely reflected and perpetuated these imperial discourses when he claimed that marijuana intake provoked its “beet field peons” to hallucinate that they had “just been elected President of Mexico.” Naturally, this mythical ascension to Mexican government signaled the need to “execute all of his political enemies.”

Yet repressive laws have rarely stopped poor Mexicans from using and selling the drug. In Indiana Harbor, some *mexicano* migrants supplemented their meager incomes by distributing marijuana originally cultivated in Grand Rapids, MI. Given that some *solos* in Mexican Chicago had spent time working in Michigan’s sugar beet fields, it seems logical that the herb could be grown there in a clandestine fashion. Sepulveda noted that many Mexican workers celebrated their “pay day” with alcohol and by smoking marijuana. Several bars in the area sold the drug to their customers, and one local nun even recalled the presence of marijuana. Sister Cordelia Marie “remembers asking several of the young men that ‘hung around’ the church to please stop using it.”

*Mexico*, however, often directly linked the distribution of marijuana to the “vice-ridden” pool halls. The newspaper’s rhetoric was excessively alarmist though quite

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ordinary for the times; in fact, transnational discourses surrounding the drug shared much in common. The excessive tenor of American outrage toward the drug mirrored the attitudes of the Mexican upper-class, who connected marijuana usage with the Mexical lower-classes. In Mexico, smoking marijuana was “identified with the poorest class of laborers; the Mexican professional classes disdained its smokers.” While wealthier Latin Americans wagged their fingers, the United States Government produced the infamous propaganda movie *Reefer Madness* in 1936, introducing viewing audiences to coiffed, middle-class Americans becoming wide-eyed, sexualized “Others” after a few puffs. The film identified the plant as “that drug---a violent narcotic---an unspeakable scourge---the REAL public enemy number one.” It is in this general context of sensationalism that the writings of Mexico’s editorial staff wrote that the herb “posed one of the most serious threats of the modern epoch.” The burgeoning marijuana trade presented “a more serious problem than morphine, cocaine, or heroine, stemming from the fact that the herb is quite cheap and easy to get.” Young boys and “professional musicians” especially liked the drug, which supposedly incited violent tendencies residing within users: “as a result of marijuana use in the form of cigarettes, an elderly man was beaten to death by a boy under the influence of the herb.”

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69 Interview with Ray Aguilar; Interview with Elder Flores; Interview with Sister Coredelia Marie, by Ciro Sepulveda.


72 “The Vice of Marijuana Will be Fought.” *Mexico* (Chicago), February 2, 1930.
Five years earlier, the newspaper penned an article entitled “Our Campaign against Marijuana.” The authors sought to “banish” the “pernicious drug,” which had “made its consequences felt amongst many of our [Mexican] compatriots.” Willing to enlist anyone in this “campaign,” the newspaper issued a “call to all those persons who are interested in helping us exorcise this vice from our countrymen, who …. by life’s circumstances, have used it, and thus forgotten everything.” Notably, the article next explicitly linked marijuana consumption with two separate spaces inhabited primarily by solos: “work centers” and “pool halls.” The authors lamented that:

it is truly painful to see many of [our compatriots] absorbed in such a filthy vice; it is already being done in the streets, in the pool halls, and in the work centers, smoking such indecent “tobacco,” with great harm to their health, to their reputation, and maybe to their own life. ⁷³

A short column called the “Margen Del Director” quoted a “local paper” in saying that ‘Marijuana, a mysterious Mexican herb, from whose dried leaves cigarettes are made, changes those who smoke it into maniacs and criminals, and is used extensively.’ Chicago’s authorities “accuse [Mexicans] of selling it to students, and they say that this drug, the cheapest of them all, is almost always sold by Mexicans.” Of course, from the 1920s to the present, any attempt to form an absolute link between marijuana use and the nation of Mexico is incomplete at best, and misleading at worst. The International Drug Trade obeys the laws of supply and demand, with the United States’ demand fueling the large-scale cultivation of the drug in Mexico’s favorable growing conditions. This fact certainly escaped Mexico’s writers, who opined, in reference to the preceding quotes, “that each and every one of the proceeding assertions is very true.”

⁷³ “Our Campaign Against Marijuana,” Mexico (Chicago), January 18, 1925.
Predictably, these “evil Mexican” marijuana traffickers based their operations from pool halls and brothels. Many *mexicanos* were “dedicated to the commerce of this plant. They walk from pool hall to pool hall or they go to certain places of even worse repute, carrying with them large numbers of marijuana-filled packets that they sell with no scruples.” The newspaper, in keeping with its hyper-patriotic orientation, appealed to its readers’ patriotic duties by invoking the precious name of mother Mexico, asking whether “these evil Mexicans see that apart from selling their merchandise that they are also selling the good name of the motherland?”

Andres Campos, presumably a *Mexico* subscriber, justified the widespread and repressive racism confronting the local Mexican community by blaming the actions of “degenerate” marijuana smokers. How, asked Campos “do our beloved *paisanitos* want to receive respect, if they are the first to behave like uncivil peoples?...They, and no one more than they, are the guilty ones for why they are treated like *los negros*: some for their vices….others for their continual drunkenness and other degeneracies….” His denigrating comparison between Mexican (im)migrants and “uncivil peoples” like “*los negros***” again illustrated the various attempts to claim masculine identities by demeaning African-Americans. Nevertheless, Campos’ letter attributed this treatment to:

> a large number of our compatriots, who only come to this great nation, to dishonor us; they live in the pool halls, they smoke a certain herb that makes many crazy, they get drunk up into the hilt, they do not work and, in a word, they are parasites who live only at the expense of others: of those who work and earn an honorable sustenance.”

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75 Campos, Andres. “Our Readers Think…,” *Mexico* (Chicago), March 1, 1925.
The divisions within Mexican Chicago were laid bare in the newspaper’s “campaign” against marijuana. Even if **solos** participated and reflected many versions of the newspaper’s patriotic sentiments, the continual attacks on pool halls as degenerate spaces embodied the newspaper’s occasional disdain for transient **mexicanos**. Men gathered at pool halls for cheap lodgings, haircuts, food, baths, mail, marijuana, and informal masculine companionship. However, other pre-ordained spaces in Mexican Chicago had similar purposes. Sepulveda’s interviews reveal that some Mexican stores in Indiana Harbor camouflaged nefarious operations centered on prostitution and illegal alcohol consumption. Such activities were not limited to **mexicanos**, as drinking and bootlegging attracted substantial followings in Indiana Harbor. Local historian Powell Moore found that 1910 workers also saw drinking as a form of escapism, with the small city supporting over 110 saloons\(^76\). Twenty-two years later, local authorities uncovered one of the “largest stills in the country” at 2003 Euclid Avenue. The building was two stories high with “the capacity of turning out 300 gallons of alcohol a day.”\(^77\)

Yet even as many types of Americans flaunted prohibition laws, the business of sex attracted a substantial following amongst Indiana Harbor’s Mexican community. Operating under the disguise of a neighborhood store selling “Soft drinks, candy, cigars, [and] magazines,” one store on Pennsylvania Avenue was particularly notable, though much of **mexicano** community knew that store’s second floor was far more interesting. Store attendants pushed a secret button behind the counter after clients uttered the words

\(^76\) Sepulveda, “La Colonia Del Harbor,” 44.

\(^77\) Sepulveda, “La Colonia Del Harbor,” 96.
“quiero ir parriba.” A secret door would thus open, leading Mexican men to the second floor and a veritable bazaar of women “of all sizes, ages, and races.” The popularity of this store inspired the creation of long-range networks dealing in human sex-trafficking. By the mid 1920s, several men were transporting Mexican women from Texas. The store was periodically raided, and in 1930 local authorities found two fourteen-year old girls working as prostitutes. The presence of such young women caused owners Marino and Jean Valdez to be “charged with participating in white slave traffic.”

_Solos_ sometimes visited “houses of ill repute,” together, though sometimes open-air gatherings also attracted Mexicans. Cockfights served a similar purpose, as young men cheered and wagered their hard-earned dollars on the bloody enterprise. Sometime in the middle portion of the 1920s, the back alleys of Indiana Harbor became an occasional space for masculine self-expression. Young _mexicanos_ shouted various forms of encouragement amidst the high-pitched wailing of cocks. The unmistakable sounds and spectacle of cockfighting often attracted the curiosities of additional spectators, and the base activity usually continued until there were no more animals. Local law enforcement unevenly attempted to curb cockfights, yet young Mexican men adjusted to the surveillance. Sepulveda notes that it “was not uncommon to see a young man looking intensely down both sides of the street keeping an eye out for policeman.”

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78 This phrase means “I want to go upstairs.”


Through large and small gatherings of *solos*, Mexican migrants often expressed their manhood by seeking the “fraternity” of other Mexican men. This method of claiming masculine identities took place in pool halls and parades, as well as whorehouses and alleys. Although important for the study of gender, these activities also helped *solos* resist the effects of racialization in the United States. *Mexicanidad* was not just a great comfort to these men. It also served as an incomplete shield.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

In her book “Manliness and Civilization,” Gail Bederman wrote that: “At any time in history, many contradictory ideas about manhood are available to explain what men are, how they ought to behave, and what sorts of powers and authorities they may claim, as men.” This essay has explored three such ideas about *mexicano* manhood. For *los solos* in Mexican Chicago, negotiating their masculinities became complicated stuff in the large-scale absence of Mexican women. The unique, chaotic, and unsettled ethno-racial terrain of Chicago complicated this project. Often feeling emasculated by the tasks they performed, *solos* partially retained their manliness by quitting jobs, noting the effete nature of the city’s “Others,” and congregating with other men.

I make no claims as to the existence of a singular, hegemonic masculinity for young, unaccompanied Mexican men in Chicago. In general, the extraordinary heterogeneity of Mexican (im)migration, reflective of the class and ethnic divisions within Mexico, precludes the consolidation of a hegemonic *mexicano* masculinity.

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Furthermore, this is an incomplete list. Some *solos* dutifully sent money to their Mexican families and worried endlessly about their conditions. Others enjoyed the films of Rodolfo Valentino and vicariously lived through his womanizing, viewing his screen character---and *pantillas*---as representing the idealized Mexican male. The popularity of his films, and the “Sheik” style amongst young itinerant men, should not be overlooked as well. Such masculine modes of gendered expression could intersect or oppose Mexican patriotism, labeling other immigrants as unmanly, or quitting one’s job. Contradictions and complexity define the daily choices that every human makes in claiming their identities as men and women.

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2 Short sideburns worn by the film star and many of his “Sheik” followers.
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