Mexican identity in Clark County, Nevada: A visual ethnohistory, 1829-1960

Corinne Escobar

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Mexican identity in Clark County, Nevada: A visual ethnohistory, 1829–1960

Escobar, Corinne, M.A.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1990

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MEXICAN IDENTITY IN CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA:
A VISUAL ETHNOHISTORY
1829-1960

by
Corinne Escobar

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Anthropology
Anthropology Department
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 1990
The thesis of Corinne Escobar for the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology is approved.

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 1990
ABSTRACT

Mexicans were present in southern Nevada since 1829 but their history is not well documented. Being a small population, several Nevada histories have included Mexicans on a cursory level and often misrepresented their cultural identity. This thesis establishes a written and photographic documentation of the Mexican population in southern Nevada between 1829 and 1960, using Clark County as a geographic boundary.

Mexicans contributed to southern Nevada's social and economic development primarily by providing a labor force for railroad, mining, and agricultural industries. Their role and experience is described by identifying interactive behavior between Mexicans and Euro-Americans using a four-fold typology that expands the definition of ethnicity to include the nature of interethnic relations between two or more ethnic groups. This model, known as the four types of ethnicity, describes interactive behavior as being complementary, competitive, confrontational and colonial, with each defined in terms of power, exploitation of environment, and ingroup/outgroup ascriptions. The ideology for the four types of ethnicity allows for transformations in relationships as well as more than one type existing concurrently as a result of changing social and geographic stratifications. This makes it a dynamic processual model for general and specific application of theory.

Melville (1983) formulated and applied the four types of ethnicity to the general Mexican and Euro-American population in the Southwest from 1820 to the 1980s. This thesis compares and contrasts the types of ethnicity existing in the Southwest, as defined by Melville, with the interactive behavior existing in southern Nevada, as defined by this study. The predominate types of ethnicity in Clark County were colonial and competitive.
Rural Mexicans experienced colonial ethnicity (an inequitable relationship) more consistently and for a longer period of time—through 1960 and beyond. Urban Mexicans experienced a competitive ethnicity (an equitable relationship) by the 1950s, although colonial ethnicity continued to be the predominant relationship between the majority of Mexicans and Euro-Americans through 1960. The findings of this study generally parallels interethnic relations between Mexicans and Euro-Americans in the Southwest, with some differences in Clark County due to an isolated and significantly smaller Mexican population in comparison to other Southwest cities.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many histories have been written about southern Nevada and Las Vegas (Squires 1955; Paher 1971; Jones and Cahan 1975; Edwards 1978; Roske 1986; Moehring 1989). Mexicans, being an historically small ethnic population in southern Nevada, were included in these histories on a cursory level and, in some cases, misrepresented. The purpose of this study is to establish a documented presence of an historical Mexican population between 1829 and 1960 and describe their role in Clark County’s social and economic development through the interethnic relationships which resulted from contact between Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Euro-Americans. These relationships are identified using a theoretical framework formulated by Melville (1983), which expands the definition of ethnicity to include the nature of relationships experienced between interacting ethnic groups. This theory is based on four types of ethnicity: complementary, competitive, confrontational and colonial and will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Two. Figure 1 illustrates the geographic boundary of Clark County in which the four types of ethnicity are applied.

The historical background, found in Chapter Three, describes how the Mexican culture developed through the hispanization process of Native Americans in Mexico. This chapter further shows how the fierce competition for Mexico's northern territory was the basis for a combative, derogatory, and mistrustful relationship between Mexicans and Euro-Americans that persists to this day. This historical foundation in Chapter Three explains how the social structure created by the Spanish, and the superordinate position of
Figure 1. Geographic boundary for Clark County, Nevada.
Euro-Americans in the United States relegated the majority of Mexicans arriving in Clark County, Nevada, to the labor class.

Chapter Four demonstrates how Mexicans in early southern Nevada history have been represented in Nevada history books. The essence of Mexican identity is missing in these works. This chapter identifies and clarifies Mexican identity in southern Nevada prior to Euro-American settlement in 1855.

Because a variety of historical sources on Mexican people in early Clark County does not exist, Chapter Five offers an in-depth description of how the term Mexican was used through a review of the two main sources of information, newspapers and census records. This chapter lays the foundation for the analytical section of this study (Chapter Eight), which argues that in Clark County the term Mexican had a pejorative value attached to its use and that the racial category for Mexicans was generally perceived by Euro-Americans as "non-white." This negative perception of Mexicans created social barriers which slowed their upward mobility within the community.

In spite of limited sources, labor, social interactive behavior, and general Mexican lifeways from 1905 to 1960 are described in Chapter Six. During the 1950s, one of the highest concentrations of Mexicans in Clark County was the migrant labor population in Moapa Valley. For this reason, Chapter Seven focuses on migrant labor lifeways.

Chapter Eight synthesizes the previous chapters into a chronological framework with historical stages and time periods identified. By applying Melville's four types of ethnicity, interethnic relationships are identified in each stage and period. Chapter Eight will show that some interethnic relationships that existed in Clark County parallel the general relationships in the Southwest as identified by Melville. Some types of ethnicity in Clark County, however, contrast with the prevailing relationships existing in the rest of the Southwest, showing that the general theory of interethnic relationships in the Southwest must provide for the uniqueness of a specific locality within its boundary. Melville's
framework allows for possible differences between the general and the specific application of theory.

METHODS

This thesis is intended to be a broad overview of the ethnohistory of Mexican identity in Clark County, Nevada from 1829 to 1960. Because of the vast time span and the scarcity of information sources, every topic or issue presented cannot be examined in detail. Some topics appear to be treated superficially. This does not imply a lack of importance, but rather a lack of resources (and time) that would allow greater scrutiny. Rather than attempt an exhaustive study on every issue germane to Mexicans in Clark County at this time, it is hoped that this work provides the foundation for future scholars to expand on specific topics through research.

Information about Mexicans in Clark County was obtained from approximately 200 newspaper accounts between 1905 and 1960, census records between 1910 and 1930, and oral histories. The newspapers, Las Vegas Age, Las Vegas Sun and Review Journal are hereafter referred to as the Age and Sun and Review Journal. After 1940, oral histories are the predominate source of information. When dealing with these types of sources there is an element of subjectivity that cannot be ignored. Although there is no reason to doubt the veracity of each participant in this study, it must be emphasized that the information offered is not proof of historical conditions, but, rather, are representations of how they are recollected. The subjective nature of these sources, however, does not negate the importance of their contribution. The "truth" may be forever elusive, but it is possible, in dealing with subjective sources, to observe consistent and reoccurring themes that allow the researcher to reasonably reconstruct a general representation of the past.

Twenty individuals of varying ages, social, and economic backgrounds were formally interviewed. Many more were approached on a casual basis. Fifteen individuals of Mexican identity were formally interviewed. This is a small and very select sample.
Finding long-time Clark County residents with Mexican origins was difficult, and even more so was to find those willing to share their life stories. The majority of participants agreed to have their names published. Some identities, however, were withheld when using their direct quotations. There may be individuals in Clark County who might have been willing to participate in this study, had they been asked. It is with deep regret that these people have been missed. As research continues beyond the scope of this thesis, it is hoped more individuals will recognize the value of this work and volunteer their histories and photographs so that the history of Mexican origins in Clark County may be better documented.

An important aspect of this project included collecting a photographic record of Mexicans in Clark County which, until now, was almost nonexistent, save for the collection donated by Celia Rivero Grenfeld to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library. Because this collection provides the only Mexican identity photographs available to history writers, the Rivero family was the archetype representation of Las Vegas Mexicans in the few histories that portray Mexicans. Approximately 150 photographs were copied during fieldwork, but only a select sample are included in this study. The majority of these photographs are the quality of amateur snapshots, which make them all the more interesting because of the identities they are reflecting. These were Mexicans taking pictures of Mexicans. This is the only record available of Clark County Mexicans documenting their own histories through portraits of family and friends and photographs of housing, occupational, and recreational activities. Individuals and places in these photographs are identified where permission has been granted by the owners of the photographs. Unfortunately, representations of railroad activities are still noticeably absent.

DEFINITIONS

A difficult aspect in ethnicity studies is that of nomenclature. An ethnic group label not only defines members of a group as individuals sharing common cultural
characteristics, but also attaches a label that is a bio-political inference. These positive or negative inferences can change through time by both ingroup and outgroup ascriptions. Consequently, what was an appropriate term two decades ago can now be not only inappropriate but even offensive, or alternatively, what was inappropriate may not be so at present. A particularly difficult challenge in discussing Mexican ethnicity in the United States is the myriad of labels applied to the people of Mexican descent both historically and currently. These labels include inferences of political orientation, cultural identification, social strata, skin color, and race. The academic literature has been no less affected by the number of terms available to describe both Mexicans and non-Mexicans. Some authors try to seek the "appropriate" term to collectively describe people of Mexican descent by showing the accuracy of one term over another (Campa 1979: 3-9). This study does not advocate one appropriate term to the exclusion of all others. For the sake of clarity, a list of definitions is provided for these terms as they are applied in this study.

**Mexican Identity.** This is a collective term referring to people of Mexican descent, born in the United States or Mexico, when nativity or citizenship is irrelevant to the conditions being described. It is necessary to adopt this term because historical data does not always provide information on nativity or citizenship, making it impossible to differentiate between the Mexicans who were native born Americans, naturalized Americans, or Mexican nationals.

Mexican identity does not infer a culture or a race exclusively. Rather, it is a dual concept, encompassing both cultural and physical diacritics. This term, therefore, includes those who have a cultural identity (a Spanish surname, speak Spanish, observe Mexican traditions) but not necessarily a physical identity (stereotypical dark skin and hair, short stature, strong teeth, coarse hair), or the reverse. People of Mexican descent, no matter how many generations in the United States or how well assimilated, educated, or mainstream they are, will either maintain a Mexican identity by choice, or have one
imposed upon them, simply because they look Mexican. Because of the strong negative attitudes that are associated with dark skin colors, the physical identity is as important, if not more important, than the cultural. As one 14 year old Mexican girl stated, "When you're light, people can forget you're Mexican." From personal experiences and observations, informants consistently acknowledged that skin color directly impacts one's ability to integrate into the mainstream of the community. The term Mexican identity is used because it is inclusive of all those who have some type of connection, ascribed or prescribed, culturally and/or physically, to Mexican origins. For this reason, Mexican identity is a more powerful term than Mexican ethnicity, which could exclude those who do not necessarily share common cultural characteristics, but still identify in some way with Mexico. Mexican identity is also preferable to "Mexican descent" as many families have intermarried with Euro-Americans sufficiently so as to lose both Mexican cultural and physical identities. Although of Mexican descent, these people are outside the realm of the "Mexican experience" because they need not acknowledge themselves nor be acknowledged by others as Mexican. Realizing provincial label preferences exist throughout the Southwest, Mexican identity is also preferred as a collective term because it has a more value-neutral meaning than do others.

Native Mexico. In this study, it refers only to the time and culture of Mexico prior to the Spanish arrival.

Tejano. One who is from Texas before it became United States territory. Tejanos were both Anglo and Mexican.

Mexican. This term also refers to people of Mexican identity collectively, regardless of nativity. The reason for this is that the majority of informants associated with this study who have a Mexican identity call themselves "Mexican" despite being born in the United
States. In the historical account of this study, covering the period between 1821 to 1848, the term usually refers to those born in Mexico. The Clark County historical material makes little differentiation between American born and Mexican born when using the term "Mexican." The terms to differentiate when nativity is relevant to the conditions being described after 1848 are "Mexicans from Mexico," "Mexican nationals," and "Mexican Americans." These terms are prescribed by the author rather than being indicative of any preferences given to those of Mexican identity.

The term "Mexican" historically has been value-pejorative, used to describe poor, infamous, and dark-skinned people of Mexico. In the past it has also inferred a "non-white" race. For example, the U.S. Census stated (1930:2), "Persons of Mexican birth or parentage who were not definitely returned as white or Indian were designated Mexican in 1930 and included in the general class of 'Other Races.'" This policy permitted regional or even individual expression (either by the census taker or informant) to classify Mexicans as non-white or of a different race than white. The term currently (1990) maintains a value-pejorative meaning to those, generally in the United States, who wish to be called Spanish, Hispano or Hispanic, and by other non-Mexican identity groups. In the Clark County area, however, research has shown there is a Mexican identity constituency who view the term as value-positive, although historically it has been value-pejorative to non-Mexicans and to some Mexicans who prefer other ethnic labels such as Spanish or Hispanic.

**Mexican American.** This has been a popular term to identify Americans of Mexican descent. The popularity of its use goes back to the beginning of this century, but also was concurrent with the more militant term "Chicano" during the 1970s. It therefore infers more conservative, mainstream attitudes, despite the fact that those calling themselves Mexican Americans were primarily low-income or jobless, and victims of discrimination, but did not necessarily recognize themselves as such. If they did recognize their condition, they did not seek militant means to remedy their situation. Mexican Americans maintained
the attitude that one will get ahead if one works hard enough in spite of the evidence being to the contrary (Blauner 1972; Acuña 1981). From 1848 to the 1960s, the majority of Mexican Americans, unlike European groups, did not improve collectively, no matter how hard they worked (Acuña 1981).

In Clark County the term is rarely used in historical material, although it has been in common usage since the 1960s. For the purpose of this study, and for simplicity, it is used only when necessary to indicate nativity or citizenship. It is not meant to imply political attitudes.

**Spanish.** This term is used to describe those whose origins come from Spain. Since most Mexican descent individuals have origins that include Spain, there are a significant number of people in the Southwest (both Mexican and non-Mexican identity), who have preferred to use this ethnic label, particularly from about 1850 to 1950. It is still prevalent today. Arguably, those who stress their Spanish past, by using the term "Spanish American," have a Spanish identity rather than a Mexican identity. However, it can be shown "Spanish" is a misnomer (or synonym) for "Mexican" (Vigil 1980:161). Those who still purport to be pure-blooded Spaniards are few in number with doubtful genealogies (Frakes and Solberg 1971:3). Social scientists agree that "Spanish Americans" show no differences in physical or cultural characteristics, or racial origins, than those called Mexicans or Mexican Americans (Campa 1970:3). For these reasons, those who call themselves "Spanish," or are so called in historical literature, yet were born in North America or were at one time citizens of Mexico, are included in Mexican identity as defined for this study.

"Spanish" infers European (or more commonly "white") stock more than "Mexican" ever did. "Spanish," therefore, implies a light skin color (whether it is such on an individual level), and includes an inference to middle class or affluent social strata (Vigil 1980:161). "Spanish" historically and currently is still value-positive. For example, until
as recently as the 1970s, Mexican food was sold in "Spanish" restaurants throughout the Southwest (Campa 1979:4). Particularly in New Mexico, but also elsewhere in the Southwest, several families publicly insist they are pure Spanish descendents of the Conquerors. This premise is interpreted by some scholars of Mexican identity as an attempt to disassociate with the negative aspects of what is "Mexican" (Acuña 1983; McWilliams 1968; Campa 1979:4; Vigil 1980:161).

The application of "Spanish" in this study is restricted to referring to the intrusive Spaniard immigration and domination in Mexico prior to 1821, the year of Mexico's independence from Spain, except when used by informants to describe their own experience, or the few instances it is quoted in the historical material in reference to Mexican identity. After 1821 all individuals who lived in or were from Mexico are referred to as Mexicans, or of Mexican identity in this study.

**Hispanic.** This term was popularized in the 1970s by the Nixon Administration. It is used as a catch-all or generic term for government classification of those who have origins from south of the United States border and were hispanicized by the Spanish Conquest, including the Portuguese Conquest in Brazil. This term is probably a derivative of "Hispano" (from Hispanoamerica), an historical term still used currently in the Southwest. According to Campa (1979:6) it "connotes common cultural characteristics of people from Colorado to Mexico...Hispanicized Indians, as well as Mexicans, New Mexicans, colonials, and Californios [term adopted in the 19th century by affluent Mexicans in California to avoid being called "Spanish" or "Mexican"], are part of the inclusive 'Hispano'." The United States government, however, uses it even more inclusively.

During the 1980s, using the term "Hispanic" in lieu of "Mexican" gained popularity among Mexican identity people. Because of its generic nature, it can be perceived as value-neutral. Since it is used in preference over a term that is historically value-pejorative, "Hispanic" is actually value-positive by those who wish to be defined as such. Yet it is still
associated as being a label for a minority group, which indirectly infers a lower social strata. It does not infer a definite polarity towards light or dark skin colors, but it does infer an identification and acceptance of Spanish enculturation (hispanization) on Native Americans. The term also infers political conservatism, since other labels are available to the more liberal or militant, such as La Raza (the race), or Chicano.

In Clark County, the term has been in common usage during the last decade. Since there was no reference to it in the historical material, nor usage of it by informants describing their experiences prior to 1960, or even in reference as to what they call themselves, it is not applied as a descriptive term in this study.

Chicano. Prior to the late 1960s, this term had a self-deprecatory connotation which described the underprivileged status of Mexican identity people (perhaps the equivalent of "whites" calling others "white trash"). By the late 1960s, however, it was adopted by the founders and leaders of a militant movement that was born out of the the mid-1960s farm worker strikes. This militant movement sought to raise the consciousness levels of both Mexican identity and Euro-Americans regarding socio-political subordination suffered by people of Mexican identity (Acuña 1983; Vigil 1980). The Chicano movement was vocal and aggressive. Its sometimes violent nature received a great deal more attention than did the more passive "Mexican Americans." By 1970, Chicano was in common usage, particularly in the media and government offices, and by the participants of the militant movement, but not accepted by the majority of Mexican identity people in the Southwest (Campa 1979:7).

Chicano is a political more than a cultural label, but it is an attempt to define their cultural niche. Realizing they were neither Mexican nor accepted as Americans, Chicanos wanted to rename Mexican identity Americans to reflect their unique position. As one Texas Chicano said, "I think like an Anglo and I act like an Anglo but I'll never look like an Anglo. Just looking at me, no one could tell if I am an American or one of those blasted
Mexicans from across the river. It's hell to look like a foreigner in your own country" (Madsen 1964:8 as cited in Vigil 1980:163). Chicano is now defined as an American born citizen of Mexican identity. It was adopted by some Mexican Americans that identified more with the poor and discriminated dark skinned members of that group, the position of the majority of Mexican Americans. Further, it was meant to identify with their Indian rather than their Spanish past. "Chicano" is a derivative of "Mexicano" in which the Aztec pronunciation of the "x" is "ch." Its meaning is perhaps less militant now than in the 1970s, but the term still infers liberal political orientations and a recognition, but not acceptance, of subordination to Euro-American dominance.

This term was not as popular in Clark County in comparison to other Southwest localities. It does not appear in the historical material, nor has it been used by informants for this study. For these reasons it is not used as a collective descriptive label as some scholars of Mexican identity have done (Vigil 1980, 1988; Butterworth 1981; Velez 1982; Smic 1979; Swadesh 1980). Even though its usage appears after the time frame of this thesis, it merits inclusion in this list of definitions, since the Chicano movement specifically addressed the needs of agricultural workers. The Chicano concept is necessarily addressed in the discussion of general conditions in Moapa Valley post-1960.

White. This is a common term as well as an official government classification for people who are not African American (Black), Asian, Native American, or Hispanic. It refers to people of European stock. This term appears in both popular and academic literature, but its use is restricted to quotations or references in literature or by informants in this study.

Anglo. This is a term used to refer to Anglo-Saxon origins, a combination of British and German peoples from England. Specifically in the Southwest, in both popular and academic literature, Anglo is short for Anglo American. Webster defines Anglo as: "[Southwest] a white person of non-Mexican descent" (Guralnik 1980:53). People of
Anglo stock settled in northwest Mexico, now the southwestern United States. This study employs the term Anglo as it was used in academic literature to differentiate between the Euro-American and the Mexican groups in the Southwest.

**Euro-American.** The preferred term in this study for non-Mexican groups with European origins who are commonly referred to as "white."

**African American.** This is a contemporary term referring to a people historically labeled "colored," "Negro," and "Black." The historic terms are used in direct quotations and are not indicative of any classification by this author.

As a final explanation of terms, this study does not utilize "New World." The more appropriate term is Western Hemisphere, because "New World" is a reflection of ethnocentric attitudes that Europeans and Euro-Americans perpetuate about world history and civilization in the Western Hemisphere. Mexicans and the native people before them did not come from a "New World," yet they are repeatedly referred to as being native to the "New World" in academic and popular literature with the usual implication that their inferiority to European civilization allowed them to be conquered. The socio-political and technological conditions that existed in Mexico at the time of the Spanish Conquest are too complex to enumerate here. Let it suffice to say Mexican civilization has a history that can be subjectively called both gracious and barbaric, just as the European civilization could be defined. While the Aztec rulers were ceremoniously sacrificing the hearts of their young virgins to their gods, the Europeans were publicly quartering and beheading their citizens. To refer to the Americas as the "New World" in academia is to perpetuate the ethnocentric notion that Europeans were superior, and the history of the world, with its intellectual and scientific development, can be analyzed and categorized only from the European viewpoint. It was a "New World" for Europeans, the victors who were in a superordinate position to
write history, but not to the millions who were native to the Western Hemisphere. For many Native Americans today, the arrival of Columbus, which brought the subsequent Spanish Conquest and the concept of "new world," is not something to celebrate. As an anthropological study with a cultural relativity viewpoint, it is inappropriate to use the European concept of a "New World" in an ethnohistory meant to impart a Mexican perspective. Technically, Mexicans existed before hispanization. The Aztecs called their homeland Mexico (Miller 1985:71).
CHAPTER TWO

THE FOUR TYPES OF ETHNICITY

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

During the second half of this century, social scientists advanced various theories on ethnicity and ethnic relationships. Melville (1983) provides a capsulated history of the concepts and taxonomies written on ethnicity, which include conflict theory (Wirth 1945), Park's evolutionary pattern (1950), migration (Lieberson 1961), and ecological factors (Shibutani and Kwan 1965; van de Berghe 1978). Also included are power stratification (Schermershorn 1970), self-ascription, and ethnic identity (Barth 1969; Spicer 1971; Galaty 1982). These studies influenced and contributed to the concepts applied to Mexican ethnicity studies in the United States, which include the assimilationist perspective (Murray 1954; Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970), the colonial perspective (Blauner 1972; Acuña 1981), the six C's (Vigil 1980), and the four types of ethnicity (Melville 1983).

Assimilation studies, as exemplified in Murray's work, tend to be descriptive and quantitative in terms of how much a given group has assimilated. For those who espouse the colonial perspective, assimilation is an expected and desirable goal, and expresses an ethnocentric attitude of its advocates. For example, Blauner (1972) addresses the minority experience in the United States as one of oppression at the hands of the dominant Euro-American group. In his introduction he discusses "the assimilation bias" that has dominated racial studies. Advanced by Park (1950), the race relations cycle describes three
successive stages that occur when dominant and minority groups come into contact: competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. American social scientists, dominated by the pervasive ethnocentric belief that assimilation is the desired and most likely end product of an immigrant group have crippled social scientists who espouse this theory from recognizing there are alternatives available to the minority. Wirth (1945) acknowledged that separation, cultural pluralism, or militant dominance may also be goals of a minority group, but stressed that assimilation was the only viable goal. This has been the standard belief among many social scientists (Blauner 1972: 6). Blauner (1972:6) also stated there is an "ideological repressiveness implicit in the assumption that the cultural traditions of people of color are either nonexistent or less valuable than those of the dominant society." Indians' and Mexicans' long history of resisting total assimilation is either ignored or distorted by social scientists. Further, most scholars have not addressed the "possibility that racial minorities might prefer to build their own cultures and community institutions rather than choose absorption into the mainstream" (Blauner 1972: 7). Blauner also criticized Park and Wirth for not identifying the dynamics of going from one stage to another in their race relations cycle.

Because assimilation need not, or perhaps should not, be a condition before Euro-Americans will allow ethnic groups to share an equitable position in the community, and because the concept tends to have a Euro-American bias, other theoretical approaches are more appropriate. Blauner analyzed the minority experience in terms of the colonial perspective making structural parallels between systems of racial control in the U.S. and systems that "undergirded overseas colonial regimes." He asserted that gained privileges are the motivation for oppression, and states, "privilege is the heart of racial oppression...the colonizer's privilege was the essence of the colonial relationship" (Blauner 1972:7). Oppressed means burdened and pushed down into the lower levels of the social order. Privilege is defined as having unfair advantage, or a preferential situation.
Acuña (1981) gave an historical account of how Mexicans, indigenous to the Southwest, came to be Chicanos, Mexicans in a foreign land. He portrayed the historical events that led to the United States' taking of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, which were all part of the Mexican Republic, and then chronicled the relationship Mexicans in the Southwest had with their "conquerors" up through the 20th century. This relationship is described in terms of social class, labor and political participation.

Acuña acknowledged in his first edition (1970) he adopted "the internal colonial model." Since that time he claimed that he and the Chicano movement had experienced "dramatic changes." After restudying the Chicano position in 1983, he felt the colonial model is applicable only to the 19th century during which time Americans invaded and occupied Mexican territory. In his preface he did not state what his theoretical position is for the 20th century except that he now takes an historical approach, stating his goal was to provide "sufficient data so that readers can arrive at their own conclusions rather than my deducing the conclusions for them" (Acuña 1983: viii).

Vigil (1980) also took an historical approach. Indeed, he determined it is impossible to discuss Mexican ethnicity without doing so. Vigil proposed a new model that enabled Mexican (Vigil prefers the term "Chicano") identity in the United States to be described and analyzed much more comprehensively in terms of class, culture, color, conflict, contact, and change (1980:4). By doing so, issues of assimilation and colonial relationships are included, among others, rather than being the emphasis of the study. Vigil identified four historic periods and assigned to each a stage equivalent to human growth, but applied in terms of Mexican cultural maturation: 1) Pre-Columbian, pre-1519: embryonic and early infancy; 2) Spanish Colonial, 1521-1821: childhood; 3) Mexican Independence and nationalism, 1821-1846: adolescence; and 4) Anglo, 1846-1960s: early adulthood (1980:5). Within each period he listed the characteristics of each "C" category and shows both a synchronic relationship between the six C's as well as a diachronic relationship through time.
Vigil acknowledged he took a bio-social evolutionary approach with which he identified a progression from one stage to another. He did not imply one stage is qualitatively better, only more complex. He stated his goal is "the establishment of a mechanism to draw parallels and make comparisons...of whether mature, evolutionary progression characterizes various stages of Chicano history or whether the long experience has set Chicanos further back" (Vigil 1980:3). Vigil's model is a method of organizing data; both historical facts and the interpretation of those facts. It enables him to show the socio-political condition of the Mexican/Chicano at any given time in history as well as to portray changes in their condition through a long period of time.

Melville (1983) formulated a taxonomy and framework which consolidated and clarified some of the definitional problems associated with the several ethnic identity and relationship studies. Recognizing that previous studies consider a multitude of variables to account for conditions and interethnic relationships but, in essence, were too complex and problematic, she created a framework that distinguished four different types of interethnic relationships already found in the literature and identified basic variables inherent in each type. She simplified and consolidated the concepts and taxonomies presented by the social scientists before her. This framework consists of the four types of ethnicity: complementary, competitive, colonial and confrontational.

Melville took an historical approach but confined her analysis to describing the condition of Mexican Americans (her preferred term) through their interethnic relationships with "Anglos" and Mexicans from Mexico. The nature of these relationships are referred to as types of ethnicity. Unlike Vigil, she did not include Native Mexico in her time frame, but, rather, confined her study to the Southwest beginning in 1820 and ending with the 1980s. She identified seven historical stages: preconquest, 1820-50; conquest, 1850-1910; consolidation, 1910-29; depression, 1930-45; post-World War II, 1950s; the movement, 1960s and 1970s; and the decade of the Hispanics, 1980s. Within these stages the four types of ethnicity were identified. By so doing, Melville added a new dimension
to the definition of ethnicity. She included the nature of interactive behavior, and socio-political position culture groups have in relation to each other as descriptive characteristics to be used in identifying and defining an ethnic group. Assimilation is not a stage or process in her scheme, and it included basic concepts formulated by Blauner, Acuña, and Vigil. This framework is more accurate in describing ethnicity and interethnic relationships because ethnicity types may exist concurrently depending upon geographic, economic, and power stratifications. It also allows for change in relationships, making it a dynamic processual model.

Vigil's six C's model serves well to describe conditions and relationships during the Spanish colonial period as discussed in this thesis. However, for study in southern Nevada, Melville's four types of ethnicity is the theoretical framework that will be applied to study a specific population in a concentrated area, namely, Clark County, Nevada. Instead of six categories to organize, Melville's approach has only four, making it more concise and accomplishing virtually the same goal as Vigil's. It will describe the socio-political position of Mexicans in Clark County, Nevada, and will show changes, if any, through time. Melville applies the four types of ethnicity to a general Mexican/Euro-American population in the Southwest. This thesis will test whether it is applicable to a specific population in southern Nevada. It will also make parallels or contrasts between Melville's general conclusions on interethnic relationships in the Southwest, and the specific conclusions for Clark County, Nevada.

Important elements in Melville's framework are the utilization of three sets of binary concepts: 1) ingroup/outgroup ethnic ascription (ethnic identity) by at least two interacting ethnic populations, 2) superordinate/subordinate power relations, which are then analyzed in relation to, 3) same/different environments. Research has shown that ethnic identity is value-laden or value-neutral and that it changes through time (Melville 1983:272). This positive, negative, or neutral value covaries with changes in environmental and power relationships; therefore, shifts in ethnic identity can occur and cause a shift in the type of
interethnic relationship. The definition of environment is drawn from the ecological niche concept that involves the principle of competitive exclusion, meaning "two species cannot coexist if they utilize one or more resources that are essential for their survival and are also limited in quantity with respect to the ability of the species to exploit them" (Ricklefs 1973:522 as cited in Melville 1983:276). Ecological niche is defined by a species activity in a habitat, both in terms of geographical extension and itemized resource exploitation.

Melville calls this a specialized environment defined as a circumscribed geographical area from which a particular human population, by means of its own direct efforts, extracts and utilizes certain resources that are essential to its way of life, while ignoring other resources that either do not contribute to its way of life or that may be difficult to exploit due to technological, demographic, or political limitations, or because of cultural notions of propriety and social status. When one population exploits the resources of an environment by exploiting another population, the first population is actually part and parcel of the specialized environment of the second population (1983:276).

Melville also makes a distinction between ethnic populations, ethnic identity and ethnic groups. An ethnic population is an objectively defined set of individuals sharing common ethnic characteristics. "These common characteristics are real or putative, descent-related cultural features used by members of one population, group, or category to distinguish them from another such population" (Melville 1983:275). An ethnic identity is the self-ascription to an ethnic category, and an ethnic group is made up of persons who have the same ethnic identity as a primary principle of social organization. This study utilizes the term Mexican identity. The use of "identity" may infer a self-ascriptive label, but it is actually used to encompass the many separate ethnic identity terms used by individuals with Mexican origins, into one collective term.

Melville claims that, "by associating in a fourfold table the variables of symmetric versus asymmetric power relations between two ethnic populations, and the utilization of the same or different environments by these two populations," she would be able "to show that most interethnic relationships can be categorized according to a fourfold typology,"
Table 1. ETHNICITY (Melville 1983:276)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of a different environment</th>
<th>Symmetrical power relations</th>
<th>Assymetrical power relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of the same environment</td>
<td>COMPLEMENTARY</td>
<td>COLONIAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COMPETITIVE</td>
<td>CONFRONTATIONAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. VARIATIONS OF ETHNICITY (Melville 1983:277)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ingroup ascription</th>
<th>Outgroup ascription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Complementary ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Competitive ethnicity (initial stage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Competitive ethnicity (final stage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Colonial ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>X (could be 0)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Confrontational ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance of signs: 0 = Value-neutral ethnic ascription. 
+ = Value-positive ethnic ascription. 
- = Lack of concern for ethnic identity. 
X = Value-pejorative ethnic ascription.

meaning the four types of ethnicity (Melville 1983:273). Table 1 demonstrates the interrelationship of the variables which form the four categories. Table 2 shows variations in ethnic ascription in terms of neutral, positive, and negative values.
TYPES OF ETHNICITY

Complementary ethnicity occurs when two culturally distinct groups with more or less equal, or symmetrical, social power exploit two distinct specialized environments and use the resources to form a mutually beneficial economic relationship. Ethnic ascription is value-neutral. Both groups perceive cultural distinctions based on objective techno-environmental capabilities. Consequently, ingroup and outgroup ascriptions occur simultaneously, and are both value-neutral. The ethnic boundary between them is maintained over time because both groups perceive the mutual advantages of so doing. The we/they dichotomization is primarily a function of their cultural differentiation, rather than a result of interethnic tension. Individuals can cross the ethnic boundary from one group to the other, but are a small minority, causing little concern or threat to either group.

Melville defines competitive ethnicity as two culturally distinct populations, perceiving themselves as more or less equal in terms of social power, or believing that power plays no part in defining their relationship, coming together to exploit the finite resources of a single specialized environment. Contact must be nonconflicting, such as unopposed migration due primarily to the perceptions on both sides that the environmental resources are relatively infinite and that their power relationship is largely symmetrical or irrelevant. It is important that both groups perceive competition for resources as equitable, although it actually may not be the case. Because of an equitable perception, competition occurs with relatively low levels of conflict. Although cultural differences may exist and be recognized, ethnic identity is not pertinent. Passing the boundary between groups is not considered a problem, and is, in fact, encouraged. This process is commonly referred to as acculturation. "To pass" is a valid strategy for bettering one's economic condition and social status. The encouragement and process of "passing" in this initial stage of competitive ethnicity is what, according to Melville, has given rise to the "great melting pot" ideology so pervasive in the American social system. During this stage of competitive ethnicity, there is a lack of concern for ethnic ascription.
In spite of the appearance of a somewhat equitable relationship, this type of ethnicity is inherently unstable. Economic resources are finite, causing competition to be potentially intense between the two groups.

As one population gains a noticeably more successful advantage due to relative numbers, technology, or nonmaterial culture, it more overtly emphasizes its advantageous position preventing dilution of resources no longer perceived as infinite. If the more successful population is capable of limiting access to environmental resources by the less successful population, we have the beginning of a change in the specialized environments for both populations, as the transition to a new type of interethnic relationship gets underway. Members of the less successful group will harbor the illusion that if they only try harder, they will be successful too. They continue to attempt to pass, down play their distinctiveness, by imitating the cultural diacritical characteristics of the latter. The subordinate population, particularly in reference to those segments and individuals attempting acculturation, loses much of its capacity for idiosyncratic social organization as it becomes a disadvantaged part of the dominant society. Thus positive ingroup ascription becomes important for the dominant group as a means of maintaining its social integrity and advantage, while pejorative outgroup ascription by them of the disadvantaged population operates to prevent members of the disadvantaged population from passing and diluting the former's power and resources. Ingroup ascription by the disadvantaged population is very weak or non-existent, and it is thought to be only a matter of time before everyone, or at least their children, will be assimilated as integral members of the more successful population (Melville 1983:278).

In the final stage of competitive ethnicity, when limited resources appear to be nearly exhausted, both groups cannot continue to exploit the same resources competitively; one group must relinquish its exploitation to the other. Power relations change from symmetrical to asymmetrical. Unequal power relations result in colonial or confrontational ethnicity.

Colonial ethnicity occurs when two ethnic groups, asymmetrical in terms of political (organizational) and physical (military-police) power, exploit two different specialized environments. Their differing techno-environmental abilities to exploit their environment may be a result of historical processes that occurred long before their encounter with each other, or they may be the result of the dominant group's efforts to force the subordinate group to produce goods and services desired by the dominant group
and which they are unable or unwilling to produce for themselves. Conquest is the common cause of colonial ethnicity

but it can also be the product of a process of competitive ethnicity developing over time wherein members of the subordinate group are refused, or do not recognize, the options of isolating themselves from the dominant group or of politically organizing themselves in opposition to the dominant group. Such a situation not only occurs when the dominant group is unwilling to exploit a particular specialized environment, but also when it is numerically inferior to the subordinate group and thereby recognizes the potential threat to its position posed by any attempts of the subordinate group to organize itself politically. By contrast the subordinate group might not recognize the interrelationship as excessively or entirely exploitative, or it may feel that political organization in opposition to such exploitation is fruitless in view of the profound asymmetricality of their political power resources. Colonial ethnicity can be the result of the evolution of competitive ethnicity rather than a consequence of military conquest (Melville 1983:279).

"Internal colonialism" is often the term used by social scientists (Acuña 1983) to describe the subjugation of an ethnic group within the borders of a nation-state rather than as the result of a military conquest. Colonial ethnicity includes both internal and external processes by which one group is made subordinate to another.

Confrontational ethnicity occurs when two ethnic groups, one superordinate and the other subordinate, interrelate within the same specialized environment. An asymmetrical power relationship is recognized by both groups. Confrontational ethnicity is a result of competitive ethnicity that is allowed to develop over time with an increasing gap in political and economic advantage between the two populations, or as a result of the political organization of the subordinate population in a colonial interethnic relationship. The members of the disadvantaged ethnic category come to recognize the relative inequality of access to the environment's resources, while realizing that passing is the solution for only a small minority of its members. Their only option is isolation from, or organized opposition to, the dominant group. This type of action is considered militant and is associated with the Chicano movement of the 70s. Passing is discouraged by both groups, and is viewed by the subordinant group as a solution for only a small minority of its members. Ingroup
ethnic ascription becomes value-positive for members of the subordinate group, while making value-pejorative outgroup ascriptions toward the dominant group. The transition from colonial to confrontation requires charismatic leadership to guide individual support for confrontations in which ethnicity is a basis for collective action and/or pragmatism. The evolution of colonial ethnicity to confrontational ethnicity is dependent upon ingroup value-positive/outgroup value-negative ascription by the subordinate population (Melville 1983:279).

To apply these types of ethnicity, an historical account must first be presented showing the interactive behavior between the groups in question--Euro-Americans and persons of Mexican identity. It is important to understand the long chain of events that made Natives of Mexico "Mexican." Doing so, will uncover the reasons why Mexicans were initially relegated to the labor class in Clark County.

The history of Mexicans, even as specific as those in Clark County, has at its foundation the time prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in the Western Hemisphere and the resulting Spanish Conquest. The Aztecs called their homeland Mexico (Miller 1985:71), but the Spanish conferred upon them, and all natives of the Western Hemisphere, the term "Indian."
CHAPTER THREE

INDIANS TO MEXICANS:
EARLY HISTORY

THE SPANISH INTRUSION

The Columbus "discovery" paved the way for Spanish Conquistadores. The most pertinent to Mexican history was Hernán Cortés. The Cortés conquest of Mexico, beginning in 1519 and completed by 1521, enabled Spain to colonize this territory and impose entirely new social system on Native Mexico. One common feature was the fact both societies were highly stratified. Save for some of the most elite Aztec, the new system stripped the native inhabitants of land, rights and privileges (Miller 1985:71).

The new social structure consisted of peninsulares (natives of the Iberian peninsula) who were the utmost elite in New Spain society. Their children were the criollos, or creole, who were pure Spanish but born in America. Those mixed with Spanish and Indian blood were the mestizo, or la gente de razón (people of reason). The peasantry and lowest in the social order were Indians and African slaves.

The majority of immigrating Spaniards were poor, or commoners, who viewed immigration to Mexico as a means of achieving social and economic improvement (Miller 1985:139). The Spanish Crown offered males $4.00 a month and a parcel of land in the form of a trusteeship. Initially, Spain did not allow massive private ownership. Only the peninsulares could hold high administrative positions in the new kingdom whether secular, church, military or university positions.

The criollos still enjoyed social prestige, but they could not attain the power or right to govern as the peninsulares. Initially, criollo identified the natives of New Spain who were pure Spanish, however, eventually it referred more to the socio-economic
position one enjoyed and less to racial origins. The term identified affluent Mexicans and included racially mixed offspring of wealthy Spaniards, although the ideal of being considered "Spanish" still remained. It was even possible to purchase criollo status (Miller 1985: 139). Criollos were the lawyers, physicians, teachers or land owners. Both the peninsulares and criollos comprised the elite. Only those belonging to these social classes were permitted to ride horseback during official processions, wear distinctive fine cloth such as silk, linen, velvet, or lace, and were addressed with Don (Sir) or Doña (Lady) as a prefix to their names.

The initial lack of single Spanish women led many Spaniards to mate with local Indian women. Although the Catholic Church originally disapproved, it finally recognized inter-racial marriages in 1541. The children that resulted from interbreeding were known as mestizos. At the start of the colonial period, mestizos initially were spurned by both Spaniards and Indians, but as their numbers grew, they took a position in the middle rung of Mexico's social ladder. Although technically a mestizo meant one of Spanish and Indian blood, it also eventually referred more to a social, rather than a racial position in Mexican society. It was used to indicate those belonging to the middle class regardless of true racial origins. The mestizos were the artisans, shopkeepers, labor foremen or cowboys. An Indian who had assimilated into the Spanish culture was also regarded as a mestizo (Miller 1985:140). Both the criollo and mestizo classes represented the racial and cultural blending of Spain and Mexico.

The Indian groups that managed to maintain tribal identity and black African slaves were the lowest in the social strata. Indians were the peasantry of New Spain and remained in the lowest social strata even after Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821. During the early colonial period they were the principal labor class, but the native population in central Mexico declined from twenty-five million to one million during the first century after the conquest (Miller 1985:141), depleted by disease. In the three centuries of Spanish occupation it is estimated 200,000 African slaves (Miller 1985:142)
were brought into Mexico to augment the Indian population. Their genes blended with both Spaniard and Indian creating another dimension in Mexico's genetic and cultural plurality. Mulattos were mixed Spaniard and African while Zambos were mixed Indian and African. With the passage of decades, even centuries, those of the criollo and mestizo groups came to be known as Mexicans. This Mexican culture was neither Spanish nor Indian but a syncretism of the two.

The Europeans brought with them an obsession with social class and racial purity which became an integral part of Mexican culture (Vigil 1980:82, 113). Some social scientists insist on perpetuating a myth about Spanish tolerance toward those who were non-Spanish. Campa states,

Race consciousness was not very significant during Spanish colonial days in the Southwest, first, because the Spaniards had been conditioned to the presence of other racial strains on the Iberian Peninsula, and second, because they tolerated a person's right to be tall, short, black, or white (1979:3).

Campa further argued that race consciousness was an Anglo American phenomenon. Frakes and Solberg (1971:3) claimed the Spaniards and Mexicans were more tolerant and had an unbiased attitude toward racial differences which the English colonists did not. But to exemplify that social scientists do not always recognize their own biased attitudes and even demonstrate denial, Frakes and Solberg in the next paragraph go on to say:

Greater tolerance and acceptance of non-Hispanic people in California did not mean, however, that minorities were necessarily the social and economic equals of Spaniards...There was, however, opportunity for upward social mobility, because in the Spanish colonies a wealthy person of Indian or black ancestry could legally delete his true origins and gain Spanish status (1971:3).

If an unbiased and tolerant attitude actually prevailed, it would not have been necessary to delete one's true origins. Unequivocally, the Spanish instilled into the Mexican culture the concept that anything less than "Spanish" was inferior.
Spaniards, with their racial superiority obsession, established a pyramidal social structure where very few elite were at the top and the majority of the native population was in the lower classes. The labor systems the Spaniards employed further reinforced and perpetuated the inequitable social structure. As Spain forged a new empire, the natives were forced to supply the needed labor for Spanish interests. Both the Spanish gentleman and poor Spaniard in the early colonial era generally abhorred manual labor (Zamora 1977:22; Miller 1985:140), so several types of labor systems were devised by the Spaniards to develop a labor force by exploiting the Indian population. These systems not only provided Spaniards with low cost labor, but also firmly established in New Spain society the socio-economic niche to which Indians, and the majority of their racially mixed offspring, were relegated for centuries. These systems also firmly established and perpetuated a society in which the majority of the population belonged to the peasantry, peon, or labor classes even long after Mexico gained independence from Spain.

During the early years of conquest, slavery was the method used to extract Indian labor, but this met with disapproval from the priests. Four other economic-labor systems were then established. Priest and monks were the first to found the congresiones, Indian villages where natives labored for the Church while converting to Catholicism. Living in close quarters, the Indians were more susceptible to disease, and often whole villages were decimated by epidemics. Second was the encomienda, a system in which a conqueror or settler (encomendero) was given a parcel of land in the form of a trusteeship. The crown maintained ownership of the land, but the settler was entitled to utilize the services and tribute payments of Indians living on the allotted parcel. The settler was responsible for the care of his Indians' physical and spiritual well-being, but abuses caused concern among the clergy as to the very survival of the Indians. In 1549, wanting to avoid a confrontation with the Pope, the Spanish crown ruled that encomiendas no longer included the right to Indian labor and that Indians were vassals of the crown which then required their paid
tributes be sent to Spain. These laws caused the encomienda to eventually become less profitable resulting in its demise as a labor system.

The third system was the repartimiento, which was an attempt by the Crown to improve working conditions for Indians, but abuses surpassed those of the previous systems. Colonists had to apply to royal officials in order to hire the Indians as paid employees, but the geographic distance from Spain made enforcement difficult if not impossible (Zamora 1977:24), and no one in particular was held accountable for their welfare as under the encomienda system.

The fourth system, the hacienda, became most predominant in Mexico's northwest (the United States Southwest) by the 17th century and continued into the early 20th century. This system directly affected the social position of the majority of Mexicans entering the American Southwest at the turn of the 20th century. In the beginning years of colonization, the Spanish government refused to allow its settlers private ownership. However, by the 1600s, the Crown sold land in its new kingdom as a source of needed revenue. Wealthier colonists bought vast land tracts. These hacendados' (land owners) livelihood was not based on crops or mining but, rather, ranching. Livestock required immense areas for grazing, and, in order to provide for their labor, hacendados developed a feudal system in which workers were invited to settle on the estate. Long after Mexico's independence, the hacienda system served to keep the majority of her population in complete peonage. Usually workers were not paid a salary; instead, they were given a plot of land to care for and grow their needed food, and were provided protection under the hacendado's rule. Workers were Indians or poor Spaniards and mestizos. It was also not uncommon for a hacendado to "attach neighboring Indian lands to their tracts and thus bring entire communities under their control" (Samora 1977:38), which provided a sure source of labor. These tenant farmers were constantly in debt to the hacendado for food, tools, livestock, fodder, and seed. Because they were not paid a wage, what extra food they grew and sold was not enough to cover costs. The workers were thus tied to a
hacendado all their lives. Sons inherited their father's debt thereby tying whole families for generations to the hacendado, whom they ultimately depended upon as their provider and protector (Samora 1977:38). The hacienda was a labor system and a social system where the majority of individuals were relegated to the lower class without hope of upward mobility.

As the Spanish expansion moved northward, there was increasing trouble with Indian resistance. The Apache were particularly difficult to subdue, as they made the roads accommodating the silver mining and transport to Mexico City unsafe. In 1598 the Spanish Crown took the northern territory bordering New Spain and created the Kingdom of New Mexico in an effort to create a buffer state between raiding Indians and the well colonized New Spain. It took almost a 100 years to completely subdue the Pueblos, yet the Spaniards were successful in establishing colonies in the Kingdom of New Mexico. Out of this territory the American Southwest, of which southern Nevada is a part, eventually emerged.

THE AMERICAN INTRUSION

When Mexico gained independence from Spain August 24, 1821, her boundaries in the far north were already diminished by the land acquisitions of France and the United States. Mexican territory in 1821 extended only through Texas, part of Colorado and Wyoming, all of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California. This land, however, was eventually lost to the United States as a result of the Mexican-American War and a small section acquired through the Gadsden Purchase. The manner in which this territory was transferred between the two countries is important because the events surrounding this transfer laid the foundation for much of the racial animosity that exists today between Euro-Americans and Mexicans.

During the 1820s, Mexico encouraged foreign settlement in its northeastern territory. Thousands of Anglo Americans, primarily from the United States south,
migrated into Texas, many bringing slaves with them. They were given land tracts on the condition they became Mexican citizens and converted to Roman Catholicism. The Anglos agreed, at least on paper. Anglo-Tejanos thrived in Texas; by 1834 they numbered 20,700 compared to the 4,000 Mexican-Tejanos (Miller 1985:212). Concerned about the number of Americans settling in Texas, the Mexican government closed its borders to new Anglo immigrants in 1830. This, however, did not stop the Anglo flow. Many continued to cross the Sabine River illegally and were technically "wetbacks" in Mexico.

This disproportionate number of English-speaking people to Spanish speakers made Texas society more like its United States neighbor than the Mexican country to which it belonged. The Anglos were Protestants at heart and were culturally and politically tied to the United States making a clash with the Mexican government inevitable. The Anglos also did the majority of their trade with the United States, causing Mexico to restrict this activity by forcing Texas to trade with Mexico rather than the United States. But Anglo smuggling in and out of Mexico continued to be a major problem for the Mexican government. African slavery was another problem. The Mexican Congress outlawed slavery in 1829, much to the consternation of the Anglo-Tejanos who depended on slavery for their livelihood.

Resenting Mexican regulation and believing they were inherently superior racially and culturally to Mexicans and their laws, the Anglo-Tejanos blatantly paid little heed to the Mexican government (Samora 1977, Miller 1985, Acuña 1983). Tensions exploded in 1835 in a rebellion. Texas went to war to secede from Mexico. The most celebrated battle took place at an old mission in San Antonio, the Alamo. General Lopez de Santa Ana arrived in San Antonio in February 1836 with 6,000 ill-prepared men to squelch the Tejano revolt. The Tejanos evacuated San Antonio with the exception of 187 men positioned inside the Alamo. When he was refused a surrender, he ordered an all-out attack in which no one in the Alamo was spared. The tide changed on April 21, 1836 near the San Jacinto River when General Sam Houston defeated the Mexican army and captured Santa Ana.
Texas' split with Mexico was complete, although Mexico did not recognize Texas independence. Severe internal stresses prevented the Mexican government from mounting a prolonged campaign to stop the secession. Mexico was still struggling to heal from the socio-economic and political ravages of her own revolution against Spain when the conflicts with Texas arose, and she continued to struggle long after Texas gained independence. The Tejanos were essentially left to govern themselves until the republic became part of the United States nine years later.

When the United States Congress invited Texas to become a state in a joint resolution March 1, 1845, Mexico suspended diplomatic ties with the United States. Mexico's President Paredes considered this an act of aggression against Mexico and asked his Congress to declare war on the United States to be effective upon the annexation, or invasion, of Texas. Not only did the United States want Texas, but it was claiming its southern boundary was the Rio Grande located 150 miles farther south than the Nueces River which had been the well documented and undisputed southern boundary for Texas for over two hundred years. In addition, the United States claimed the western border of Texas extended into nearly half of what is now New Mexico. When Texas was annexed, General Zachery Taylor and his troops were sent to occupy the Nueces River. When negotiations between the two countries failed, Taylor was ordered to move his army to the Rio Grande and build a fortress across from Matamoros. President Paredes declared Mexico must defend herself from the American invasion and considered Mexico at war against the United States even though the official declaration of war did not come from the Mexican Congress until July 1846.

An altercation between the two countries occurred near Matamoros causing President Polk to demand a declaration of war from Congress stating, "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil" (Miller 1985:221). The veracity of Polk's position is highly questionable, but nonetheless, the Mexican War began and did not conclude until February
2, 1848 with the signing of a treaty in the Mexican village of Guadalupe Hidalgo with the United States as the victor.

As a result of this war, the United States army penetrated and occupied Mexican territory as far west as Monterey, California and as far south as Mexico City. During the American march to the Mexican capitol, the animosity between these two groups intensified. To the Americans, Mexicans were "greasers." To the Mexicans, Americans were "los gringos." (McWilliams 1968:115) and to this day these names still carry the same derogatory meanings.

The Mexican government and its people were demoralized and powerless to deny the United States' demand for Mexican territory. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico agreed to give up all claims on Texas, with its southern boundary being at the mouth of the Rio Grande to the southern boundary of New Mexico, and west to the Pacific just south of San Diego, California. Ceded to the United States was land that now incorporates Arizona, California, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. In return the United States agreed to pay $15 million and assume the outstanding claims American citizens had against the Mexican government. The treaty also made the occupants of the newly acquired territory United States citizens with the option of moving to Mexico should they desire to retain Mexican citizenship.

The loss of lives and territory to the United States was devastating to the people of Mexico. Yet, due to internal instability, they had little chance to protect themselves from a strong and encroaching power such as the United States. Since its independence, Mexico was divided by constant political turmoil and overrun with despotic leaders. Even though the people of Mexico continually sought a democracy, and reformations, Mexico's political culture was inured in a tradition of dictatorship with a democratic facade. During the Mexican-American War alone, President Paredes was imprisoned and followed by seven presidents; the Constitution was changed; six successive generals directed the campaign
against the United States; and only seven of the nineteen states of Mexico contributed money and men to the national defense (Miller 1985:229).

The Alamo episode sparked bitter Anglo hatred for Mexicans even though Mexican-Tejanos also fought for Texas independence. Anglo politicians, newspaper writers, and historians recounted the Texas saga with a racial bias (Acuña 1983). Mexican cruelty and ferocity against the American "defenders of democracy" has been the general slant in the majority of Anglo history books. Acuña (1983:25) and McWilliams (1968:111-114) point out this bias and dispel many of the myths that portray Mexicans as the only bad guys in the war. American history writers herald the Texas Rangers as defenders of the faith, and protectors of democracy, yet the atrocities they committed are subdued by the historical emphasis given to the wrongs done by Mexicans. Acuña and McWilliams also clarify the kind of treatment Mexican civilians endured at the the hands of the Americans during the Mexican War occupation, and the continued persecution and discrimination after the conflict. In Texas especially, the United States legal system did not protect the hundreds of Mexicans who were shot, lynched, and deprived of their ancestral lands. Atrocities were committed on both sides but, being "the winners," Anglo Americans had the advantage of writing history with an Anglo bias. This bias has been perpetuated in the educational system within the very territory lost through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and taught to the progeny of the Anglos and Mexicans that became U.S. citizens through that same treaty. The Anglos, unfortunately, were the only ones in their history books who came out as the "good guys," and the uncivilized, wild people from south of the border were "Mexicans."

A contributing factor to the Anglo bias was an ethnocentric belief in their "manifest destiny" to occupy North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The United States had its eyes on Mexico's northern territories long before the Texas secession. Mexico's northern territory had already been quietly explored by United States agents, the most recent being John C. Frémont, before the outbreak of the Mexican-American war (Elliot
The Euro-American concept of manifest destiny was a justification for racism and illegal encroachment on Indian land and, later, Mexican land. Euro-Americans felt the Indians and the Mexicans would not, or could not, use their land to its highest potential, which further justified a violent and aggressive takeover.

Although the area now called Nevada was claimed by Spain for three centuries, and then by Mexico for 49 years, they did not colonize this area. According to Spanish law, the Indian groups native to the area were vassals of the Spanish Crown and then later Mexican citizens. But because neither Spain nor Mexico colonized this area, the Paiute, Washoe, and Shoshone groups maintained their tribal identity in relative isolation compared to the Indian groups of other Southwestern states. At the time of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, there were no Mexicans, in the true sense of the Mexican culture, residing in Nevada. Unlike Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, which had a native Mexican population at the time of the Treaty, Mexicans gradually migrated to the area to live and work after it had become United States Territory. The "pull" factor, particularly at the turn of the 20th century, had been the accelerating economic development in the Southwest which propagated a need for unskilled labor. The "push" factor was political turmoil including revolution, and economic hardships in Mexico. Regardless of the many problems in Mexico, a labor force was one commodity Mexico had as a direct result of her socio-economic structure nurtured by the hacienda system. Miller states

Between 1883 and 1894, one-fifth of the entire area of the republic was conceded by the administration to a few companies and individuals. By 1910 about eight hundred hacendados owned more than 90 percent of the rural land; fewer than 10 percent of the Indian communities had any land; and less than 3 percent of the agricultural population owned any land whatever. The 1910 census revealed that of Mexico's total population of 15,160,000, there were 864 hacendados and between 9 and 10 million landless peasants (3,143,271 peones and vaqueros plus their families). Clearly, the hacienda became the principal form of land tenure; at the same time it was also a social system (1985:272).
Given these statistics, it is apparent why United States companies found a ready and willing labor market from Mexico. The historical relationship between Euro-Americans and Mexicans, and the economic position of the majority of laborers out of Mexico, explains why the Mexican worker was initially relegated to the labor class in southern Nevada.
CHAPTER FOUR

MEXICAN: AN IDENTITY LOST

1829-1905

A family of Mexicans is encamped on the creek in a picturesque wickiup. The premises are kept clean and orderly and the adult members of the family are industrious and sober. The two women of the little household are Santas Mercado and Yerma Cassadi whose husbands are working on the round house. Yerma Cassadi has two bright children Tomas and Tomasa, who have acquired a few words of English. Their quiet and courteous behavior is, indeed, worthy of emulation by their Americano neighbors (Age 1905:Vegas).

The first newspaper account of Mexicans living in Las Vegas appeared just eighteen days after the city's founding on May 15, 1905. Mexicans had actually plied the valley as travelers for decades prior to this time, but this was not well documented or acknowledged in any of Nevada's history books. Nevada historians are collectively inconsistent in representing the ethnicity and identity of Mexicans during the early years of the Las Vegas area. They were following the example of historians before them (Hill 1930; Hafen and Hafen 1954) and Mexicans themselves were inconsistent about Mexican identity.

The Spanish and Mexicans did not occupy southern Nevada, but Mexicans were aware of Las Vegas (the meadows) as early as 1829 (Dahl 1969:5; Roske 1986:21; Jones and Cahan 1975:6; Pahe 1971:11). The 1776 Spanish explorers Garcés and the Domínguez-Escalante party did not enter present day Nevada (Pahe 1971:12); consequently, Las Vegas was not even a resting stop for travelers until Mexican trading caravans began traveling from Santa Fé to California beginning in 1829 on the "Old Spanish Trail." The Old Spanish Trail, however, is a misnomer. Not only did the Spanish not use the trail, they were not the principal contributors to its creation. The trail forged by
the Spaniards only led to the Great Basin from the east and south; it did not go through it (Hill 1930). The "Old Spanish Trail" as used by the Mexican trading caravans was created by the combined efforts of several individuals--some of whom did not have Spanish ancestry.

There are disagreements among southern Nevada historians as to the actual routes taken by the various trail blazers. It is not the purpose of this study to identify routes, but only to clarify the Mexican identity of the participants who contributed to the making of the "Old Spanish Trail." This identity was certainly present but misrepresented in southern Nevada history books.

Elliott (1973:33) claims that Garcés passed through the southern tip of Nevada, but Paher disagrees (1971:12). Regardless, the Spanish did not travel though The Meadows, and did not establish a route between Santa Fé, New Mexico and Monterey, California. Garcés reached Los Angeles, but he went much farther south than what is popularly referred to as the "Old Spanish Trail." Winter snows forced Escalante and Domínguez to return to New Mexico. The complete trail, which involved crossing southern Nevada, included Ewing Young's 1829 trip from Barstow to Los Angeles; Antonio Armijo in 1829-30 from Las Vegas (Wash) to Stump Springs; and William Wolfskill and George C. Yount in 1830-31 making the Utah connection and a variant route through Needles, California. The combined efforts of these men established a route which became known as the "Old Spanish Trail" and which provided the first charted track across the Great Basin (Elliott 1973:38). According to Roske (1986:23), however, it was not until sometime in the 1830s that an "unknown, venturesome caravan shifted its route through the Pahrump and Las Vegas valleys via a crossing at the Muddy River" and travelled "to the Big Spring Oasis" (Las Vegas).

Armijo's exploration in 1829 was significant because his commercial caravan inaugurated the steady flow of Mexican trading caravans every year thereafter until 1848 when the territory became part of the United States (Hafen and Hafen 1954:171-194).
These caravans transported trade goods from Santa Fé to Los Angeles and back. The Mexican caravans were the principal users of the trail until it became known as the Mormon Trail (or Road) (Myhrer, et al. 1990). Most probably, Mexican teamsters named the oasis between the Muddy River and the Colorado "Las Vegas," for its springs which provided the only water for miles.

The terms that historians used to describe Mexicans travelling through southern Nevada were not entirely inaccurate, but their connotations allude to something non-Mexican such as European, Spanish, Caucasian, and white. A review of how these terms were used demonstrates this point.

Jones and Cahlan (1975:6) state that a "Spaniard" or "Mexican" gave Las Vegas its name. The caravans occurred after 1821 which made the travelers Mexican citizens, not Spaniards, although the Mexican caravans did not consist solely of Mexicans. Euro-American trappers and adventurers migrated into New Mexico while it was still a Mexican state and also participated in the Mexican caravan trade between Santa Fé and Los Angeles (Hafen and Hafen 1954). Further confusing Mexican identity, Jones and Cahlan used the term Caucasian to describe individuals from Mexico (1975:6). Squires (1955:10) referred to Armijo as "the Spaniard...who explored a trail from Utah southwestward across the state to California." Paher (1971:12) cited Rivera, a member of Armijo's expedition who possibly scouted the Las Vegas Valley (see Warren 1974 for a different interpretation in Armijo's route), as, "sent to look for water holes, Rivera probably spotted the acres of verdant growth nurtured by Las Vegas Springs. If he stopped at the water he was the first white man to do so." Warren (1974:5) asserted that "The first European known to have passed over the hostile desert between the Colorado River near Las Vegas...was Antonio Armijo of Santa Fé, New Mexico." Moehring (1989:1), following the example of earlier historians, cited Armijo as among the first white men to enter Nevada.

Edwards (1978:45) did not mention a cultural identity for Armijo, which is preferable to using a term that alludes to something non-Mexican, but he did insist that as
Armijo's scout, Rivera made his way "up the Vegas Wash and southwestward across the Valley, [and] he was without doubt, the first Caucasian to look upon and traverse the Las Vegas Valley." At no time is a Mexican identity mentioned.

The assertions that Armijo and Rivera were "white" creates ambiguity as to their ethnic identity. If Armijo did not make his journey until 1829, he and Rivera were Mexican, not Spanish citizens. Identifying these individuals as "white," or of European ancestry, as Roske (1986:21) has done, is correct but incomplete. Using only the terms, "white," European, and Spanish, causes the essence of Mexican identity to be lost. "White" ethnic groups are of European ancestry too, but there is a sharp contrast in historical representations between "whites" and Mexicans. Popular definitions of what is Mexican do not include the term European or "white" (Personal interviews). It is biased to say they are Mexican of European ancestry because they are Mexican of Indian ancestry as well.

There is a general tendency in post-1821 historical literature on the Southwest to use the terms Spanish, European, Caucasian, or "white" for accomplishments by Mexican citizens to be admired, and the term Mexican for notorious deeds such as slave trading, horse thieving, animal abuse, or for simply being poor (McWilliams 1968:37). Southern Nevada histories also exemplify this bias. For example, Roske (1986:21) stated, "Some have claimed for him [Rivera] the honor of being the first person of European ancestry to visit the Las Vegas area." Roske did not mention Armijo was Mexican, but he did later state, "Rivera...A Mexican and experienced scout..." (1986:21). Roske excluded Armijo, the leader of the expedition, from Mexican identity, while one of his subordinates is clearly referred to as Mexican. Further, Roske emphasized their European ancestry which only perpetuates the notion it is historically more significant than Indian ancestry.

Jones and Cahlan noted:

Although Spanish Padres and early American trappers and explorers are known to have touched several points in southern Nevada in the area of the
Colorado River and even Las Vegas Wash, the Spanish traders who established a route from Santa Fé, New Mexico, to Los Angeles are generally credited with being the first white men to camp at the Las Vegas Springs (1975:6).

These Spanish traders were actually Mexican citizens, and should be referred to as Mexican traders. This is an example of using terms other than "Mexican" for positive representations. Jones and Cahlan used "Mexican" negatively when referring to the caravan traders that drove their cattle to exhaustion.

The Mexicans were notorious for their brutality and indifference to the welfare and needs of their stock, and hundreds of the animals died of thirst and hunger in the punishing drives over the desert (Jones and Cahlan 1975:8).

Laborers from Mexico, or of Mexican ancestry, are also commonly referred to as Mexican laborers, not Spanish, "white," or European laborers. It is inappropriate and even racist to define light-skinned, and/or upper class or notable citizens of Mexico as Spanish, European, Caucasian, or "white," while dark-skinned, and/or lower class, and even infamous citizens are defined as Mexican, which is what some historians (Hafen and Hafen 1953:28) have done. After 1821, all individuals born in Mexico, or having Mexican origins, are Mexican in this study, and represent the cultural and genetic plurality of that country just as Americans do in the United States, regardless of social status. "Mexican" is not a definition of one particular race, ancestry, or socio-economic class any more than is the term "American."

A contributing factor to this inconsistent definition of who is and is not a Mexican is that Mexicans themselves were and continue to be inconsistent with their own descriptions. Before leaving Mexico (Peninsulares fled or were driven out by 1821), the Spanish had centuries to ingrain into Mexican society the concept that "Spanish" racial purity was necessary to be part of the elite. Long after Spanish rule ceased, Mexicans continued to adhere to the social classes imposed upon Native Mexico which became integral parts of their culture. As a result, many Mexican descent individuals in the Southwest still prefer to
be called Spanish, or Hispano—anything rather than Mexican. Acuña (1983) pointed out that many Mexicans view the use of the term Spanish by other Mexicans as a pretentious act, to disassociate from the lower class inferences associated with the term Mexican. Those interviewed for this study also expressed similar feelings. Although some "Spanish" families in the Southwest contend they are indeed Spanish and have records to prove it, one must remember marriage behavior should not to be confused with mating behavior. The Spanish settlers of the Kingdom of New Mexico interbred with the local Indians just as the Spanish had done wherever they conquered. Although official records may state one is of Spanish origins, the reality is that Spanish records cannot be depended upon for veracity of origins (Frakes and Solberg 1973:3). For a price, non-Spaniards deleted their true origins on official Spanish documents. American historians, as well as the public, perpetuated the concept that "Spanish" was better and more respectful than "Mexican." Despite these arguments, many individuals with origins from Mexico still prefer to be called Spanish.

This review of the historical use of terms is not an argument for appropriate classification of race, but for cultural identity—the Mexican identity which is lost in southern Nevada history books. Myhrer, et al. (1990:11) are the first to contribute to Armijo's Mexican identity in an historical review of the "Old Spanish Trail" without attempting to qualify his ancestry, race, or socio-economic position. They simply state, "In 1829 Antonio Armijo, a Mexican, and a party of 31 men departed Abiquiu, New Mexico, to find a trade route to California."
CHAPTER FIVE

MEXICAN: AN IDENTITY IN CLARK COUNTY
CENSUS RECORDS AND NEWSPAPERS

Though not settled by Mexicans, The Meadows had hosted Mexican caravans since 1829 and was Mexican Territory until 1848. Then in 1855, the first non-Indian settlers arrived from Utah Territory—an Anglo American religious group of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly referred to as Mormons. They abandoned their settlement in 1857 after internal disputes and returned to Utah. In 1865 they again settled in southern Nevada, only this time in the Muddy (Moapa) Valley, northeast of Las Vegas Valley. All of southern Nevada was eventually populated predominantly by other Euro-Americans.

Before the founding of Clark County in 1909, the area was part of Lincoln County with Pioche as the county seat. One of the earliest historical records indicating a Mexican presence in southern Nevada is found in the Pioche Weekly Record. In 1874 there were evidently enough Mexicans in the area to celebrate Mexico’s Independence (Pioche Weekly 1874: Independence). The newspaper also commented on the celebrations conducted in Los Angeles. By 1879, however, the Pioche Weekly reported the Mexican population was too small to support an Independence Day celebration (Pioche Weekly 1879: Independence). This decrease in population reflected the boom-bust nature of Pioche’s mining economy during the 1870s.

What had attracted Mexicans to Las Vegas and surrounding areas were the booming mining and railroad industries and later, farm work (Miranda 1987:36). Information about Mexicans in the Las Vegas area during the early 1900s is scanty. The 1900 federal census does not indicate that nearby ranchers employed Mexicans prior to the 1905 founding of
Las Vegas. But they were probably present in the area in 1904 to assist with the building of the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad, whose construction began about 1901 in California (Roske 1986:53). Support for this assumption comes from records documenting the employment of Mexicans by the railroad as early as 1901 in Pomona, California, where track-laying crews edged eastward toward Nevada (Signor 1988:33).

Before 1905, The Meadows and surrounding areas hosted only a few ranches. In 1902 Helen J. Stewart, whose land included the original Mormon settlement, sold her ranch to a former Montana senator, William Clark. The purchase of this land and its water rights enabled Clark and his brother J. Ross, to complete their San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad in 1905. The SPLA & SL created a subsidiary, the Las Vegas Land and Water Company, to develop the remaining acreage into a townsite. This, however, was not the first townsite in Las Vegas. John T. McWilliams purchased eighty acres from Helen Stewart a year before and established "the Original Las Vegas Townsite," that quickly became known as "Ragtown"--a community of about 1,500 by 1905 (Roske 1986:55). McWilliams surveyed his townsite with the anticipation it would become a boomtown once the railroad was completed. Unfortunately for McWilliams, the railroad ignored his townsite on the west side of the tracks and opted to reap greater rewards by auctioning off company owned land in Clark's Townsite on the east side. For the May 15-16, 1905 auction, the railroad company offered discounted round-trip tickets from Los Angeles and Salt Lake. A crowd of about 3,000 (Roske 1986:555) was on hand to witness and participate in the founding of Las Vegas.

Mexicans were probably present at the auction because they were employed during the construction of the railroad. Upon its completion, "thirty men, mostly Mexican and Chinese" with three African Americans "remained in Las Vegas to maintain and operate the roundhouse" (Miranda 1990a:62). The earliest documentation of Mexicans residing and working in Las Vegas is the newspaper article about the two families living along side the Las Vegas Creek, just eighteen days after the great railroad auction of city lots (Age 1905:
Vegas). Photograph 1 shows a probable Mexican family residing along Las Vegas Creek, c. 1904. Figure 2 maps the locality of the original and Clark's townsites.

Although a Mexican presence at the auction is not supported by the photographs and newspaper accounts of the event, they were in the vicinity of the founding of Las Vegas. Unfortunately, the 1910 census and newspaper accounts are the only sources of information on Mexicans in early Clark County history.

MEXICAN IDENTITY IN THE CENSUS

Census records provide invaluable information about populations from an earlier time. The information they contain, however, must be treated with caution. Accuracy depends on the efficiency, conscientiousness, and sometimes the intelligence of the enumerator (Glass 1966). It also depends upon the truthfulness of those enumerated. In Clark County, one must further consider the effect of a 1910 flood upon the census results. The United States census for 1910 was conducted beginning April 18 through May 14. On January 1st of that year, 100 miles of the SPLA &SL Railroad was washed out by a massive flood in the Meadow Valley Wash in Clark and Lincoln Counties. Train service did not resume until the middle of May (Haraway 1990). The significance of this event to the census is that train travel to the small railroad section communities beyond Moapa was impossible; in fact, they probably temporarily ceased to exist while the track was waiting for repair. Both tracks and roads were destroyed between Moapa and Caliente. It is not known how soon after the flood that roads once again made Meadow Valley Wash accessible. During this early phase in Clark County history, Mexicans were primarily employed by the railroad, often as section hands. The 1910 census does not indicate if the section communities along the track toward, and into Meadow Valley Wash were enumerated. The local Mexican population may have been absorbed into the Las Vegas, Moapa, or Caliente (Lincoln County) populations since it is probable that section workers could not live in Meadow Valley Wash until the tracks were repaired. Figure 3 shows the
Photograph 1. "Indian Palace, Las Vegas Creek." Despite its title this is probably a Mexican encampment, c. 1904 (photograph courtesy of Lake-Eglinton Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library).
Figure 2. Las Vegas map showing locality of the McWilliams' and Clark's townsites.
Figure 3. Communities along the SPLA & SL Railroad.
Clark County communities along the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad, including Meadow Valley Wash. Some crew workers were indeed living in Meadow Valley Wash while repairing the track (Age 1910: Double). On April 16, two days before the census, the Age reported that a "large number of Mexicans" were headed towards Las Vegas to work at the "front" (Age 1910: Number). "Front" was a term used for the farthest point being constructed. The train transporting the Mexicans was derailed and it delayed their arrival; however, it indicates Mexicans were on the Meadow Valley Wash repair crew, but it is unclear whether they were enumerated in the Clark or Lincoln County census, or if at all. It is certain Mexicans were living in Meadow Valley Wash by December because altercations were recorded between Mexicans living in "Hoyt's camp about a mile south of Vigo siding" (Age 1910: Mexican Dec. 3), and also at the Leith siding (Age 1910: Murder). There is a question as to the accuracy of the total count of Mexicans in Clark County in 1910 because of the uncertainty caused by the flood.

In Clark County 122 individuals were enumerated in the 1910 census as born in Mexico and/or having at least one parent born in Mexico. A deficiency in this particular census is that if those enumerated were born in the United States and had parents born in the United States, but were of Mexican identity, they were not counted as Mexican. This census ignored the ethnic identity of American born citizens. A Spanish surname, if provided, is the only evidence of possible Mexican identity if a person, and/or the individual's parents, came from Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California, and even Nevada. Not all Mexicans had Spanish surnames indicating Mexican identity. For instance, a woman by the name of M. von Bramblila, a widow, was born in Mexico, as were both her parents.

The census form allowed for ethnicity or cultural identity in the "place of birth" column, but only if birthplace was a foreign country. For example: "Ire-English," "Can-English," "Scot-English," "Can-French," "Den-Danish," "Nor-Norwegian,"
"Ch-Chinese," "Jap-Japanese," "Hol-Dutch," and so on. Mexicans were listed as "Mex-Spanish" or "Mexico-Spanish."

Table 3 demonstrates the Mexican population summary for the 1910 census for Clark County. The English column in Table 3 indicates those who were able to speak English, all others indicated their language was Spanish. The inquiry on the census form was, "Whether able to speak English, or if not, give language spoken." There was no allowing for bilingual ability, so it is impossible to determine if the United States citizens could speak both English and Spanish, or which was their mother tongue.

The literacy column indicates those counted who answered yes to the inquiries "Whether able to read" and "Whether able to write." The approach to determining literacy was changed in the 1920 census when the Census Bureau classified as literate anyone over ten years of age who could write, regardless of ability to read (U.S. Census 1920:10). These vague interpretations of literacy indicate that information supplied to the enumerator was highly subjective. For the 1910 census it is not known just how well one had to read and write to be considered literate. It is assumed for this study that residents were literate in the language they specified as their spoken tongue. The literacy questions were

Table 3. MEXICAN IDENTITY POPULATION, 1910 CENSUS: CLARK COUNTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precinct</th>
<th>Pop.</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Citizen</th>
<th>Home Owner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arden</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottonwood</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodspg</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Spg</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moapa</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potosi</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searchlight</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
consistently answered as dual affirmatives or negatives. None within the Mexican population answered yes for one and no for the other. Of the 122 enumerated, 84, or 69 percent of the Mexicans in Clark County claimed to be literate but only 21 percent could speak English. As with all census questions, the accuracy of the literacy statistic depends upon the veracity of the informants.

The 1910 census in Mexico indicates that 80 percent of its population was illiterate (Miller 1985:276). As in the United States, it is uncertain what level of proficiency constituted literacy. The 20 percent literate in Mexico were land owners, doctors, lawyers, government and church administrators, and well-off merchants. Consequently, the high percentage of literacy among Clark County Mexicans indicates one of two things: either the informants were not telling the truth (no matter what the decade, then or now, it is difficult to admit to being illiterate) or, those who came to Clark County by 1910 were from conditions in Mexico that allowed for some type of education.

If the 69 percent literacy of Clark County Mexicans is correct, then a somewhat educated group of men labored for the railroads. Supporting the literacy statistic is the fact that by occupation, there was more literacy among railroad workers than mine, mill, or quarry laborers. This might reflect the hiring standards of the railroad company, as opposed to other industries. Additionally, although Mexico had an 80 percent illiteracy rate in 1910, research has shown besides laborers and peasants, professionals and skilled workers also immigrated into the U.S. between 1910-1917 in a steady stream (Martínez 1979:120-121 as cited in Melville 1983:283). In a statistical analysis by Hall (1982:26), 92 percent out of 89,745 documented Mexicans who immigrated to the United States between 1912 and 1920 were unskilled workers. The other eight percent were professionals (lawyers, doctors, architects, actors, clergy, teachers, and musicians) and certified registered workers (bakers, carpenters, barbers, assemblers, miners, metallurgists, tailors, weavers, and photographers). The professional occupations alone only made up 1 percent of the entire 89,745. In all probability, a higher illiteracy rate occurred among the 92
percent unskilled workers. The chances of Mexicans with occupations in the eight percent group filling the railroad labor positions in Clark County is not impossible, just not probable. Still, the fact that railroad workers show more literacy than other types of laborers suggests that some type of selectivity occurred. They either decided to lie collectively, or the railroad company was in a position that enabled it to hire Mexicans with some level of education. In early Clark County, there is little to indicate the majority of Mexican workers had any choice other than labor work, irrespective of education. Table 4 indicates occupations listed for Mexican males in the census.

Table 4. MEXICAN IDENTITY OCCUPATIONS, 1910 CENSUS: CLARK COUNTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1910 Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miner, Lead-Zinc</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miner, Gold</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miner, Gypsum Quarry</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, Gypsum Mill</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, Gypsum Mill Railroad</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, grading crew</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, Ice Plant</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, Railroad</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section hand, Railroad</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamster</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd Jobs</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None (Adult males only)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An article that demonstrates the literacy of one railroad worker, and is also a sad commentary on the lonely life of a foreigner, appeared in the Age. José Carillos committed suicide at the "Erie Siding." Among his belongings were found:

two note books and a piece of straw board about eight inches square, all having writing in the Spanish language. The note books were well filled with stanzas of Spanish songs, poems, etc. One of the note books was opened to a page on which was Spanish writing which being translated, read "Will go near house to find a place to die." On the piece of straw board was written, "I have found a place. Remember me who feel sorry for me. Good bye. I am alright to kill" (Age 1916: Suicide).

The Citizen column in Table 3 indicates of the 122 Mexican identity persons, 14 were American-born citizens. There were no naturalized citizens. The Mexican American
citizens were born in Washington, Arizona, California, Texas, and Nevada, while two were born in the United States but they did not specify where.

Two of the five Mexican home owners in Clark County were a 35-year-old gold miner, Frank Luniga, and his wife, Helen. Together with three children, they lived on Second Street. They owned the house free and clear of any mortgage. Frank immigrated in 1895, and Helen in 1906. Frank could speak English and could read and write, which was probably an asset in becoming a successful miner. He indicated he had steady work the previous year through April 15, 1910. Helen spoke Spanish and could also read and write, but their eldest son, eight year old Frank, who immigrated in 1906, did not attend school. The two younger sons, Julian, 3, and Carmel, newborn, were U.S. citizens born in California and Nevada respectively.

The other Las Vegas home owner was 80 year old Mary Marino who lived on Main Street with her daughter-in-law, Francis. Although her parents were born in Mexico, Mary was a native of California. She was born before it was United States territory and was made a citizen of the United States through the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. She spoke English and could read and write. Francis was also a native of California, but spoke Spanish and could read and write. Both women indicated they were married, not widowed, but their husbands were not enumerated with them. Mary also owned the house free and clear of any mortgage.

The two home owners in Cottonwood were actually ranch owners, the brothers Tweed and James Wilson, Jr. (Photographs 2 and 3). The elder James Wilson owned a ranch in Cottonwood with his partner George Anderson, about 1876. Anderson left the ranch and his two sons "sometime in the 1800s" in Wilson's care (Roske 1986:47). Tweed and James took Wilson's name and inherited the ranch when Wilson died in 1906. Roske stated the boys were half-Indian (1986:47), but they informed the census-taker they were born in Nevada and their father was born in Mexico. The enumerator wrote their father was "Spanish" as that was the ethnic term used in 1910 to describe a Mexican. If an
Anglo was born in Mexico, the enumerator wrote, "Mex-Am An" for "Mexico-American Anglo." Their mother was also born in Nevada. Tweed was born in 1866 and James in 1870 which means these boys could have been anywhere from 10 to young adult age when Anderson left. Because these boys were "left in Wilson's care" they were probably under 18 which suggests Anderson departed sometime in the 1880s. Why he abandoned two boys thought to be his sons is unknown. It is probable he was not the father born in Mexico. In the "Race" inquiry on the census form, a "W" for white was written for both Tweed and James. Most other Mexicans were enumerated as "OT," meaning other than white. Because they indicated they had Mexican parentage, they are regarded in this study as having a Mexican identity.

The 1900 Census for Lincoln County indicates that those with Spanish surnames from Mexico were counted as "W" for white. Race is ambiguous in the 1910 Clark County sample of Mexicans because "W" (white), "SP" (Spanish), "OT" (other races), "Mex" (Mexican), and "ID" (probably Indian), were used to describe race for Spanish surnamed individuals with Mexican origins. In the Las Vegas precinct the enumerator wrote "SP" in the race column but "OT" was prominently written over the "SP" for 53 of those counted from Mexico. The enumerator was evidently confusing a cultural identity with race in the race column. One Mexican in Las Vegas was counted as "W," Mary Marino, the home owner from California whose parents were Mexican. Two others remained "SP." They were immigrants from Mexico working in the Ice Plant.

The Wilsons in Cottonwood were counted as "W." One in Searchlight was counted as "Mex" in the race column while eight of his Mexican neighbors were indicated as "OT." Mexicans in Moapa, Goodsprings, Potosi, and Arden were all enumerated as "W" even though they and their parents were from Mexico, and most spoke Spanish, with the one exception of a young man only known as Francisco (no last name). He was counted as "ID" (perhaps for Indian) even though he, his father, and his mother were listed in the place of birth columns as "Mex-Spanish," same as the others.
According to the 1910 Abstract of the Census, "the classification by color or race distinguishes six groups, namely, white, negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and "All other" (consisting principally of Hindus and Koreans)" (United States Census 1910:77). Mexicans, then, should technically have been listed as "W," but those that were listed as "OT" are represented in the total count for "All Others."

Of the 122 Mexicans enumerated, 114 were males with an average age of 28, and 101 of them were single. Eight females were counted, but none with an occupation were listed. Ten males were married but seven lived without their families. Only three families which contained a husband, wife, and children, were listed in the census. With such a relatively large population of young, single men, it is reasonable to assume prostitutes were also present. Previous census records in other parts of the state have designated prostitutes with a variety of occupational labels, such as "harlot," "whore," "prostitute," "courtesan," "hurdy" (slang for buttocks), or simply, "keeping house" (Glass 1966; Goldman 1978). Prostitutes, by any of those terms, were not designated in the 1910 census for Clark County. Yet, prostitutes were commonly associated with saloons (Age 1912: Report). The census did show there were some saloon proprietors that did have female boarders with their occupations listed as "none." There is only one instance recorded in which a "non-white" female proprietor of a saloon had a female Mexican boarder with no occupation listed. The first reference to a Mexican prostitute in the newspaper did not appear until 1913 (Age 1913: Poor). The only other instance of minority women associated with a saloon in the census is a group of four African American women listed as boarders with an African American proprietor and his wife on First Street in Las Vegas.

The year 1910 was significant because the Mexican Revolution caused many to flee Mexico. Mexicans were specifically recruited by the American railroad companies to provide cheap labor years before the Revolution actually broke out in full force. The political turmoil and economic hardships during the years prior to the actual break out of the Revolution prompted many to accept work in the United States. Table 5 shows the number
of Mexicans enumerated in the census that immigrated to the United States for each year between 1890 and 1910. The majority of immigrants in Clark County came to the United States between 1900 and 1910.

Table 5. MEXICAN IMMIGRATION, 1910 CENSUS: CLARK COUNTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Population schedules in the U.S. census subsequent to 1910 are not yet available to the public. The abstracts for 1920 and 1930 do offer limited information on Mexican populations. The 1940, 1950, and 1960 censuses counted Mexicans as "white" and did not indicate them as separate populations. In 1970 and 1980 the Census Bureau grouped Hispanics in one group as "Persons of Spanish Language," and so a distinct Mexican population is still indiscernible. Although the 1920 census also classified Mexicans as "white," Nevada recorded 1,169 individuals were born in Mexico. The 1930 Census Abstract breaks down Nevada's 1920 Mexican population to an estimated total of 1,297, that included Mexicans born in the United States and Mexico. From this figure, 189 Mexicans in Nevada were born in the United States. County distribution is not provided.

The census in 1930 is the first that officially classifies Mexicans as "Other races." It is also the first census in which the Department of Commerce took great pains to count Mexican populations in every state. This new concern to count Mexicans in the United States coincided with repatriation programs that sprouted in major cities all over the
country. Thousands of Mexican identity individuals who were in the U.S. legally, were intimidated or forced to return to Mexico during the Depression decade. This was viewed as a way to reduce the relief rolls and provide more jobs for Euro-Americans (Hoffman 1974). Repatriation programs had already begun by the time the 1930 census was taken, consequently the Mexican population count must be viewed with caution in terms of it representing a realistic number of Mexican people residing in a given state as late as 1929 (Hoffman 1974:13). As yet, there is no solid evidence in the newspapers or personal interviews that a repatriation program existed in Clark County. The 1930 Mexican population for the whole state of Nevada was counted as 3,090 out of a total state population of 91,058. Out of this count, 171 individuals in the state were born in Mexico. Subtract this figure from the 3,090 and the difference shows 2,919 Mexicans in Nevada were born in the United States. There were 2,221 Mexican males to 869 females. In Clark County, there were 657 Mexican identity individuals—the highest concentration per county in the state. Table 6 shows the Mexican population in Nevada from 1910 to 1930.

Table 6. MEXICAN POPULATION IN NEVADA, 1910 TO 1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population in Nevada</td>
<td>81,875</td>
<td>77,497</td>
<td>91,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexicans in Nevada</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>1,297</td>
<td>3,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population in Clark County</td>
<td>3,321</td>
<td>4,859</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexicans in Clark County</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>657</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MEXICAN IDENTITY IN NEWSPAPERS

From what can be gleaned from the Age and the Review Journal between 1905 and 1940, Mexicans were identified as a particular group, separate from the Euro-American, or "white", Asian, or Indian groups living in the area. There is little indication whether these Mexicans were born in the United States or foreign born, and perhaps it did not matter with
regard to their social and economic status. The 1910 Census schedules indicate that the majority of Mexicans living in Clark County were foreign born.

Writers for the *Age* clearly demonstrate a "them-us" dichotomization in Clark County's early history. "Whites" were identified as such only in the context of differentiating them from non-whites. The reader may assume individuals were Euro-American unless specified otherwise. Mexicans, however, were not the only group isolated in terms of ethnic identification. Asians, Italians, Greeks, Austrians and black African Americans (called "colored" or "negro") were also separated in terms of group identification, as was commonly done in newspapers throughout the United States.

The *Age*, founded in 1905, is the primary source of information available about Mexicans in early Las Vegas history. Researching and evaluating articles in the *Age* was facilitated by the fact the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society maintains indices on subjects and persons appearing in the newspaper between 1905 and 1940. The *Review Journal* is currently indexed between 1930-1953. From these indices, articles were gleaned in which the term Mexican was used, making a total sample of 96 articles from 1905-1940. Although articles referring to Mexicans exist after 1940 in the *Review Journal* and the *Sun*, these were not included in this sample. The *Review Journal* is not yet indexed between 1954 and 1972 and the *Sun* is indexed only since 1983 by the Clark County Library District. Consequently, it is not possible to extract in a timely manner a representative sample of articles after 1940 from these two newspapers.

There are many articles in the *Age* and *Review Journal* about individuals who are Spanish surnamed, but the term Mexican is not used. Although research from other sources indicated these individuals with Spanish surnames were Mexican, these articles were excluded from this particular newspaper analysis. Research has shown that not only South Americans but also Indians and African Americans with Spanish surnames were present in Las Vegas (*Review Journal* 1938: Vegas Indians; *Age* 1929: Negro Admits; *Age* 1920: Two New Prisoners; Woodlawn Cemetery). Although it is possible, one cannot be
sure these people had a Mexican identity. Using articles in which a Mexican identity is not specifically stated could potentially skew the results of this study, therefore articles in this sample are confined to those utilizing the term Mexican. The only exceptions are three articles in which "Spanish" was used in lieu of "Mexican." These were accepted because the term "Spanish" was used in a Mexican culture context, i.e., in reference to Mexican food. The 96 articles were then separated by content. The categories created were 1) crime, 2) vocation, and 3) social interaction. The crime-related category consists of articles in which Mexicans were guilty of, or victims of a crime. The vocation category deals with articles that specifically described the vocational environment for Mexicans. The social interaction articles consist of social events, or information that imparted a social relationship between a Mexican, or Mexicans, and the community at large. Crime was not included in this category as the high frequency of crime articles warranted a separate identification.

Figure 4 demonstrates the total frequency of articles in the sample referring to Mexicans per year between 1905 and 1940. Figures 5, 6, and 7 show the respective frequencies for the crime, vocation, and social interaction categories. There is an obvious bias in the manner in which Mexicans were portrayed in the newspapers. Information extracted from all three categories indicate Mexicans were working hard to support their families, were civic-minded, law abiding citizens, with some bar room brawling laborers—no different from any other city at the time. But there is a preponderance of articles reporting the negative, even sensational aspects in the lives of these people. The highest concentration of negative articles occurs between 1905 and 1915, the period in which the majority of Mexicans were single male laborers. Mexican families living in the Las Vegas area became more frequent after 1915.

Within the crime category, there are 68 articles from 1907 to 1938. The profile of the Mexican male in these articles is that of a murderer, with a knife as the principal
Figure 4. Total frequency of articles using the term Mexican, 1905-1940.

Figure 5. Total frequency of crime articles using the term Mexican, 1905-1940.
Figure 6. Total frequency of vocation articles using the term Mexican, 1905-1940.

Figure 7. Total frequency of social articles using the term Mexican, 1905-1940.
weapon, or a thief, drunk, or wife beater. It is also in this category that the term Mexican was used more often to describe an individual rather than as a collective group identification. The following exemplifies this:

In block 16 Saturday night one Mexican was stabbed by another. Constable Gay was called to the Colorado Sunday afternoon to take a wicked looking knife away from a drunken Mexican who was looking for trouble (Age 1907: Other Sports).

During the evening an altercation occurred at the Union Hotel bar between Garcia, Blas Lopez and another Mexican...over Garcia's alleged attentions to a Mexican girl. All were in a drunken condition... (Age 1914: Drunken Brawl).

A gory tragedy was enacted in the section house just south of Las Vegas on the Salt Lake railroad Friday afternoon about 3 o'clock. A Mexican by the name of Modesto Raveno killed his wife by hacking her to pieces with a dagger, inflicting many ghastly wounds, and then in a last frenzied effort drove the dagger through his own heart" (Age 1910: Ghastly Tragedy).

A drunken Mexican was arrested...after he had threatened to carve up his family with a dangerous looking knife (Age 1926: Drunken Mexican Jailed).

Mexican Killing: Arden, scene of tragic events Sunday afternoon. The usual combination of wine and women seems to be at the bottom of the affair, although the real motive -- if there be one aside from that furnished by dago red mixed with violent language -- is obscure" (Age 1910: Mexican Killing).

Sam Gay has arrested the leader of the band of Mexican shoplifters who have been taking small articles from the counters in the stores (Age 1910: Shoplifting Mexican).

A bad Mexican, Jose Bonita by name, walked into Petty's Jewelry Store the other day and asked to be shown some watches. After his departure Mr. Petty missed a gold filled watch case. The Mexican was soon apprehended. Jose...plead guilty and was given 30 days (Age 1911: Hombre Malo).

The reoccurring themes within the crime category are: 1) murder or attempted murder with a knife (36 percent); 2) murder or attempted murder with a gun (19 percent); theft (15 percent); fighting (11 percent); rape or assault (5 percent); drunkenness (3 percent); and other (11 percent). "Other" includes one article each on breaking and
entering, prostitution, arson, selling liquor to a minor, kidnapping, forgery, and marijuana use. The statistics are slightly misleading because one article may contain more than one theme, but could not be counted twice as it would skew the statistical relationship between themes. For example, wife beating occurred often but was counted in the murder with a knife theme. Drunkenness appears with many of the murder with a knife or gun, and fighting themes as well. Excluding the murder and fighting themes, drunkenness accounts for 20 percent of the articles that represent Mexicans. Excluding the knife and gun factors, the murder/attempted murder theme comprises the largest within the crime category—55 percent.

Information extracted from the entire sample of articles indicates criminals were not the only type of Mexican living in Las Vegas and surrounding areas. The question is, why is there a preponderance of criminal representation of Mexicans? Is it a fact that the majority of Mexicans were unruly or criminal in nature, or is this sample of articles an example of the "absence of presence" factor associated with the history of minority ethnic groups (Fitzgerald 1987)? For example, hard working, law abiding, civic minded Mexicans were present, and perhaps even predominant within the group, but were not represented in the media because they did not fit the standard stereotype of the day. Without representation in the media, it would appear to readers that the lawful Mexican did not exist in Las Vegas and surrounding areas, or at least was the exception to the rule. A reasonable explanation for this "absence of presence" is that the regular Mexican man and woman—working, going to church, watering the lawn, feeding the dog, and essentially living quiet lives—did not participate civically or socially in a way that was considered newsworthy to the media, and so did not appear as frequently in the newspapers. But a crime is always sensational news, even entertaining to the readers. The combination of the entertainment factor with the stereotype of the Mexican as a wild man factor, explains the over abundant representations of criminal Mexicans.
The 1910 Census indicates 101 of 122 Mexicans enumerated were single males. Ten men were married but seven were living without their families. All of them had labor-type jobs. Whether or not this is a factor for explaining the high frequency of crime articles is not the issue, but rather, it shows that few Mexicans living in Clark County around 1910 had a social status higher than laborer, and therefore were not participating with the community on a level that was considered newsworthy other than their involvement with crimes. This trend in the newspaper persisted for several decades. The majority of Mexicans were not criminals although the majority of newspaper articles about Mexicans portrayed them as such. The newspaper articles, including those outside the sample, indicate that during the late teens and 1920s decade there was a growing population of Mexican families that made Clark County their permanent home. This is particularly demonstrated by the first documented organization of Mexicans on a social level in the community, the 1914 celebration of Mexican Independence Day. But in spite of the growing population of Mexican families, the newspaper article frequencies indicate that Mexicans were predominantly reported as criminals through 1936, which indicates the majority of Mexicans remained members of the lower class socially and economically for several decades in Clark County, and were not socially recognized by the Las Vegas community.

The social category consists of 15 articles, from 1905 to 1939, that are neither crime nor vocation related, but indicate some type of social interaction existing between themselves or with the general community. In this category there should be stories about civic activities, social clubs, school events, personal accomplishments or tragedies. That is what was discovered, though in very small quantities. The profile of Mexicans in this category is that they are civic minded, have jobs, have personal events announced (marriage, birth, death), and celebrate Mexico's Independence. Included in this category is the feature story of the Mexican families living along the Las Vegas Creek (Age 1905: Vegas).
Of the 15, the most reoccurring theme was Mexican Independence Day celebrations. Between 1914 and 1930, 5 articles appeared featuring the activities planned by the Mexican residents to celebrate Mexico’s Independence. For example:

The celebration of September 16, the anniversary of Mexican independence was celebrated in glorious style by the resident Mexicans. The affair was held at the ball belonging to the Union Hotel, on First and Bridger Streets. The room was handsomely decorated in the national colors of the United States and Mexico combined, and a large throng enjoyed themselves until an early hour of the morning of the 17th. The entertainment was begun by a flag march in which a bevy of children carried flags of the United States and Mexico, making a very pretty appearance. This was followed by a musical and literary program, consisting of music by the orchestra and addresses by A. G. Gonzales, E. Briggs, P. Solis, C. Revino, and others.

The affair was arranged under the direction of Tomas Perea, A. G. Gonzales and D. Pecetto. Angel Lopez acted as floor manager for the grand ball which followed the literary program. Many Americans were present as invited guests of the Mexican people and spent a very enjoyable evening. We extend thanks for an invitation and are glad to have attended (Age 1914: Mexican Independence).

The Mexican residents of this section will stage their customary celebration of the Mexican Independence Day, September 16th, by a series of pleasant events beginning Saturday the 15th and continuing through the 16th. The business men of Las Vegas are contributing to the expenses of the celebration to show their appreciation of this important element of our population.

A. Hoguin, C. Morales and R. Brambila, members of the committee have the celebration in charge [sic] and are busy with arrangements which promise the finest celebration of the day ever seen in Las Vegas.

Ladd's Resort will be the scene of the festivities which will honor the memory of Hidalgo's declaration of independence from Spain September 16, 1810 (Age 1928: Mexican Day of Independence).

The 1919 celebrations were announced with a small one paragraph article. Celebrations for 1928 were evidently a big event as the Age announced the event on the 6th and again on the 15th of September. The 1930 festivities were described as including a dance in the Elks hall and "a colorful parade" down Fremont Street on the 16th, where participants cried "Viva la Patria, Viva Mexico" (Review Journal 1930: Vegas Mexicans in Celebrations). Figures 8 and 9 depict the 1919 program for the Independence Day
Figure 8. Mexican Independence Day Celebration program (front cover), 1919. Demonstrates group identity and civic organization (courtesy of Judge John Mendoza).
Figure 9. Mexican Independence Day Celebration program (inside cover), 1919 (courtesy of Judge John Mendoza).
celebrations indicating this event was an important and highly organized civic activity sponsored by Mexican identity individuals in Clark County.

The representation of the social interaction of Mexicans within their respective communities is misleading in this sample. Mexicans were reported frequently in terms of personal accomplishments (school, sports, military, work) but these articles did not express they were of Mexican identity, and so could not be counted in the sample. This is not to argue that the newspapers should report ethnicity, but to point out that the majority of Mexicans since 1905 were not bar room brawling, murderous drunks as readers might think from the sample of articles that use the term Mexican. A review of the name indices at the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, and personal interviews of some of those reported in the articles, indicate there was a fair representation of Spanish surnamed individuals in the Age and Review Journal, who marry, die, make birth announcements, divorce and achieve honors, although statistical information is not calculated. The first death announcement for a baby of a Spanish surnamed family appeared in the Age in 1910 (Died: Martinez). The frequency of personal feature stories on Spanish surnamed individuals, as indexed by the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, increases significantly about 1925. There is a high probability that the majority of the Spanish surnamed individuals reported were of Mexican identity.

The vocation category consists of 17 articles from 1905 to 1939. Although vocational information has been extracted from all three categories, these articles were isolated because they specifically described working environments for Mexicans without any references to crimes committed. In these articles the term Mexican is most often used to refer to this group collectively. From this category, the profile of the Mexican (assuming the articles are referring to males, since there are no references to gender) is that of a hard-working laborer for the railroad and mining industries. Mexican restaurants, or restaurants serving Mexican food existed as early as 1909 (Age 1909: Local Notes; Age 1911: Oasis; Age 1931: Mission Tamale; Review Journal 1939: Mexican Kitchen), so there were a small
number of jobs available to the Mexicans that were not labor-oriented. However, even this
limited alternative is not apparent in this group of articles. Indexed articles in which
Mexicans are described as farm laborers do not appear until 1942 in the Review Journal
and are not part of this particular newspaper sample. Examples of vocational references
are:

The front camp of the Tonapah and Tidewater Railroad is about 8 miles
below China Ranch. It is expected that the construction camp will be
moved a distance of three miles in almost two weeks. Heavy rock work is
being encountered in the canyon. Nearly a thousand men, mostly Mexicans
and Italians, are employed on the line... (Age 1907: Tonapah and
Tidewater).

The railroad "quarries," he says are worked day and night by hordes of
Mexicans, who dislodge the rocks on the steep slopes of the canyon sides,
with the assistance of gravity... (Age 1907: Rainbow Canyon)

Manager Crooks of the Diablo Grande has a gang of Mexicans busily
building a road from Devil Mountain to the railroad (Age 1909:
Goodsprings Notes).

There is no indication from these articles that local Mexicans maintained profes­
сиональ or semi-professional occupations, i.e. medicine, law, or skilled crafts, between 1905
and 1930. However, even employers considered laying track and farming to be jobs that
required "skilled or experienced" labor (Review Journal 1930: Boulder). Again, the
implications of the frequency of articles in this category is misleading. Further research of
articles and other sources that were not included in this sample indicates that after 1910
Mexicans continued to work for the railroad, but not necessarily as hard laborers laying
track or building roads. By the 1930s they were obtaining foreman positions (Personal
interviews). Cleto Aguirre, owner of the "Spanish Restaurant," which opened in 1909,
was Mexican, and among the "more prominent members of the Spanish-American colony"
(Age 1923: Breaks). By 1930, other Mexicans also owned restaurants, and were not just
employed in them (Review Journal 1930: Notice). One Spanish surnamed individual
owned and operated a tailor shop on 118 South First Street (Age 1931: Two New Firms).
Mexican identity women, in the entire sample of "Mexican" articles, have been portrayed primarily as victims of a crime such as murder, beating, or rape, usually by the hand of their own men. They were often cited as a cause for a bar or street brawl between jealous men, or they were portrayed as "fallen women" and prostitutes. For example:

In that part of the district [Block 16] approaching one of the best residential districts we saw houses that reported to us as being houses of prostitution in which white, black and Mexicans lived together, and in which offenses had been committed, such as shooting and explosions (Age 1912: Report to Grand Jury).

Just before going to press, we are informed that a Mexican woman, an inmate of a resort in block 16, attempted to commit suicide because of the loss of a lover. According to well authenticated accounts, she took three shots at herself, but only succeeded in wounding herself in the knee. Hard luck, Liz (Age 1913: Poor Markswoman Ship).

...an altercation occurred at the Union Hotel bar between Garcia, Blas Lopez and another Mexican...over Garcia's alleged attentions to a Mexican girl. All were in a drunken condition (Age 1914: Drunken).

Witnesses testified that she was not really the wife of Fernandez, but of another in Mexico, and that the present excursion is merely an impromptu honeymoon (Age 1915: Justice Court).

Della Hernandez was brought before Judge Breeze charged with disorderly conduct as the result of a row among several Mexican women. She was fined $25 which she paid (Age 1925: Municipal Court).

Section Hand Stabs Common Law Wife, 16, In Back As She Protects Her Seven-Months Old Baby. Jesus Bernal, Mexican section hand...rushed into his home in Byron, five miles this side of Moapa evening before last, intent upon stabbing to death Antonia Lara, his common law wife (Age 1929: Man Tries to Show).

He lived at Arden...with a Mexican woman who was not his wife... (Review Journal 1930: Dirk Plunged).

Women in this newspaper sample, though barely mentioned (11 articles), are not favorably represented. This sample demonstrates common stereotypes of Mexican men being overbearing, drunken wife beaters, and Mexican women as either weak and helpless, or wild and passionate and without the morals conventional for the time. Articles outside
this sample indicate there were indeed stable, business minded, and family oriented Mexican women living in Clark County. In the 1910 census, most of the Mexican women enumerated were family women, and although no occupations were cited for them in the census or newspapers (with the exception of prostitutes), other articles indicate a Mexican woman in Las Vegas, Marie Aguirre, purchased and operated a beauty salon as early as 1913 (Age 1913: Buys Cochran). Another, Lenore Rivero, owned and operated the Elko Rooms from the 30s through the 50s, while another, Carmen Sabedra owned the Hidalgo Cafe (Review Journal 1930: Notice). One Mexican woman, Cleto Aguirre's first wife, advertised sewing services on First and Lewis, Las Vegas (Age 1910: Local Notes).

Other stereotypical or even derogative attitudes taken from the newspaper sample are demonstrated in statements such as:

Night Policeman Mitchell escaped being skunked in the first month of his service as an officer by making an arrest Tuesday night. It was only a Mexican intent on inserting the point of his knife between another Mexican's ribs...but he counts just the same. If it should be seriously considered a crime for Mexicans to carve each other when so inclined, the county jail will soon have a juicy grist for the grand jury (Age 1911: Night Policeman).

In Justice Harkin’s Court Friday morning Juan Juan (probably modern form for Don Juan) was given a hearing on the charge of having raped Bassilio Morales, claimed as wife by one Fernandez (Age 1915: Justice Court).

The fact that it doesn't take long for a Mexican to lose his freedom and land in the state penitentiary was proved this week when Etasinilado Diaz consumed too much whiskey Monday evening and stabbed Ramon Villanuiba... (Age 1927: Knifing Affray).

Lopez, McCubrey [under-sheriff] says, is the vagrant type of Mexican... (Review Journal 1930: Dirk Plunged)

You see miners in khaki...Mexicans in striped trousers and brilliant shirts, lounge against sunny walls and stare at slim blonde girls in smart roadsters (Review Journal 1930: Picturesque Quarter).

It [marijuana] is grown in Las Vegas for use among Mexicans who make it into cigarettes. Its use is not, however, restricted to that portion of our population. Because of the ease with which the drug can be obtained -- the
harmless appearance of the Mexican cigarette -- it is especially dangerous (Review Journal 1938: From Where I Stand).

All these statements served to reinforce the myths that Mexican men are lazy, drunken criminals. Granted all the examples given were written by a few staff members of a newspaper and may or may not reflect the attitude of a whole community. But the important factor to remember is that this is what the community was reading about Mexicans; the ones they knew and the ones they didn't know. The over abundance of negative representations compared to the very few positive representations of Mexicans in which this term is used must have formulated opinions of what most Mexicans were like. Instead of being the makers of public opinion, these articles may very well have been the reflection of it. It is difficult to say which. This also leaves one to wonder what effect this had on the Mexican's perception of himself.
CHAPTER SIX

MEXICAN LIFEWAYS IN CLARK COUNTY

1905-1930

Labor interaction

Nevada has a long history of discriminating against the Chinese, Japanese, African Americans, and other "non-white" groups while integrating the Jews, Italians and other ethnic groups of European origins remarkably well (Coray 1987; Magnaghi 1981; Stern 1982; Fitzgerald 1987b). Despite their European origins, Mexicans have also experienced discrimination, but not to the extent that integration with the community was impossible. Clark County exemplifies the attitudes that have created social barriers for non-Euro-Americans, and specifically Mexicans.

Newspapers provide little information about the daily lives of Mexican laborers or businessmen. But some idea of Mexican lifeways in early Clark County history can be generalized. The majority of Mexican males enumerated in the 1910 census were single laborers for the railroad and mines. Newspaper sources indicate that Mexican businessmen were the minority among Mexicans by the frequency in which they are mentioned between 1905-1930. Mexican families began settling in Las Vegas in the late teens, as evidenced by oral histories, civic organization for Mexican Independence celebrations, and the fact Woodlawn cemetery records indicate Mexicans begin to be represented significantly after 1919. Prior to this time it was more common to bury the single railroad laborer along side the tracks, or elsewhere outside the city (Photographs 4 and 5) (Signor 1990).
The lonely lifestyle, and back breaking labor of the Mexican railroad worker has gone virtually unnoticed in Nevada history books. Their important contribution to the economic growth in the southwest was first underscored by McWilliams:

In every state in the [Southwest] region, the modern phase in its development dates from the arrival of the first passenger or freight train. Largely built by Mexican labor along routes first explored and mapped by Spanish-speaking people, the railroads of the Southwest have been maintained by Mexicans from 1880 to the present time. All the products of the region,—copper, cotton, lettuce, produce, wool, beef, and dairy products,—[sic] move to markets on desert lines dotted at regular intervals by small, isolated clusters of Mexican section-crew shacks lost in time and space (1968:168).

This observation is also true for southern Nevada.

Prior to the founding of the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad in 1900, the Southwest railroads already had a long history of primarily employing Mexicans. Between 1880 and 1930, Mexicans comprised 70 percent of the section crews and 90 percent of the extra gangs on the Southwest's principal lines (McWilliams 1968:168). It is therefore little wonder that the Clarks also recognized the advantages of plentiful, cheap Mexican labor.

Not surprisingly, the Mexican laborer's life was apparently difficult. His options were usually limited to grading, track laying or section repair work. During the 20s, other types of railroad work became available to Mexicans, although they did not generally achieve high ranking positions. Railroad workers in general worked hard for long shifts. In 1907 the United States Congress passed a law, limiting the number to 16 continuous hours a railroad employee could work in a shift (Age 1907: 16 for Railroad). According to the law, workers were to have at least 10 hours rest between shifts. An employee worked more hours than he rested in a 24 hour period if he was required to work the entire limit of hours. If this law was enforced, the employee could not possibly have worked the same shift every day. Starting and ending time would change daily. If employees had daily
work, even for short periods of time in a given month, this would have been a difficult schedule.

Besides long hours, safety standards were lacking on the SPLA & SL. Reyes Hernandez, a Mexican, was killed when he came into contact with live wires in the "transfer pit." He had been cleaning weeds out of the pit and loading them into a wheelbarrow. The coroner's jury found that Hernandez met his death because "in said pit, said wires were carelessly exposed by the San Pedro, Los Angeles Railroad Company" (Age 1915: Instant). Others, Mexicans included, lost their lives or limbs on the track (Age 1910: Black Man; Age 1911: Moapa).

Wages hardly compensated for the danger. Moreover, inequities in pay between Euro-Americans and Mexicans began early in Las Vegas history. In 1905 "white" railroad laborers were paid $2.25 per day while Mexicans were paid $1.75 (Age 1905: Extend Payment). Mexicans were not necessarily doing the same jobs as Euro-Americans (1910 census), but the Age was more preoccupied with the railroad fulfilling its promise to build machine shops, which would provide jobs and transform Las Vegas into "a large city," than with the disparity in wages. When two culture groups arrive in southern Nevada at virtually the same time with inequitable income, the group with less pay will perpetually fall behind the dominant group. It took nearly six decades in Clark County before Mexicans began to bridge the economic gap between them and Euro-Americans.

The founders of the SPLA & SL Railroad relied heavily upon Mexican labor during the initial construction years and for maintenance in the ensuing years. However, as Clark County, and particularly Las Vegas, grew with primarily a Euro-American population that reflected the racial prejudices of the whole nation (Fitzgerald 1987), sentiments against "non-white" labor intensified. Indeed, the Union Pacific Shop Federation expressed a clear and uncompromising stance on "non-white" and foreign labor:

We the Americans of the entire shopcraft of all departments in the shops and yards on the L.A. & S.L. request that no man without their Citizen Papers
be hired. And that none other than American Citizens be promoted or permitted to learn a trade. And that none but white men be promoted as we feel that it is not fair for us to be compelled to work with them in shops (Age 1919: Union).

This clearly demonstrates resentment against Mexican, Asian, and African American labor. Even Mexican Americans, particularly those with a dark skin (who could be differentiated more distinctly from "white") must have felt this exclusionary attitude, due to Clark County's historic ambiguity about the "white" status of Mexicans (they were sometimes called "white" in the census but never in the newspapers).

Although discriminatory attitudes against alien and "non-white" labor were significant factors excluding Mexicans from upward mobility, one must recognize that in 1910 most Mexicans did not speak English--a barrier which prevented most from qualifying for better jobs. Lack of income, in turn, reduced their political leverage to protest inequities in salary and advancement opportunities. After the first and second generations were born in Clark County and language was no longer a barrier, some still found it difficult, but not impossible, to break social barriers that would allow them to enter mainstream community life (Personal interviews).

The few Mexicans who were not laborers for the railroad or mines owned small businesses. These businesses, however, did not become apparent until the mid 20s—reflecting the same general trend for Mexican populations in large American cities throughout the country (Hoffman 1976:12). The first documented Mexican identity business owner in Clark County is Cleto Aguirre (photograph 6) who opened his "Spanish Restaurant" in October of 1909. Originally from Colorado, he came to Las Vegas with his first wife and set up permanent residency. The locality of his residence is not clear because the 1910 census failed to enumerate him and his wife, although newspaper articles suggest he continued to reside in Clark County through 1910 (Age 1910: Local Notes), and lived there until 1933. Aguirre was bilingual and became further involved with the community as an interpreter for the courts (Age 1910: Bills; Age 1913: Interpreter). He was a
Photograph 7. Frank Rivero, c. 1924 (photograph courtesy of Celia Rivero Grenfeld Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library).
Photograph 8. Lenore Rivero at right, with niece, Alicia Rivero in Las Vegas, Nevada, c. 1925 (photograph courtesy of Celia Rivero Grenfeld Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library).
prominent member of the "Spanish American community" (Age 1923: Breaks In), and was "commonly called a "Spanish gentleman" (Age 1933: Aguirre). He owned the Colorado Club in 1927 (Age 1927: Unknown) as well as "considerable Las Vegas real estate worth $25,000...giving him a monthly income of $600, and... $500 per month from the gambling business operated by him" (Age 1930: Cleto). Regardless of his success, the newspapers were more interested in his turbulent marriage and drinking problems. Aguirre left Las Vegas about 1933, but was still a "well-known member of the Las Vegas Mexican colony" in 1935 (Review Journal 1935: Cleto). He died that same year in a automobile accident in Glendale, Arizona (Review Journal 1935: Aguirre).

The Rivero family arrived in Las Vegas c. 1917, from Aguascalientes, Mexico. Francisco "Frank" Rivero (Photograph 7), owner of Frank's Café, established himself in the early 20s with a small restaurant before opening Frank's. Frank's café was a local gathering place for Mexican and Euro-American clientele, both businessmen and laborers. Adjacent to Frank's was the Elko Rooms, a hotel owned by his sister Lenore (Photograph 8, 9), who married Aguirre on May 5, 1920. The Elko Rooms housed primarily Mexican laborers. Born in 1896, she became affluent through her and Aguirre's business ventures. Although they separated in 1933, Lenore remained in Las Vegas till her death in 1979. Carlos Rivero, brother of Frank, owned and operated the Hidalgo Café during the early 30s. A few Mexicans were known to have other small businesses as well, but they are not represented in the newspapers as frequently as those committing crimes.

Social Interaction

The ethnic diversity of Las Vegas around 1910 was as mixed as any cosmopolitan city in the country, particularly in Blocks 16 and 17--the two areas in the Las Vegas townsite where liquor was lawfully dispensed. Europeans from Norway to Romania, Euro-Americans, Japanese, Chinese, African Americans and Mexicans were all present. A concern over the unwholesome conditions on Block 16 led to an investigation by a grand
jury in 1912. The report stated that "inmates" in saloons and houses of prostitution were "white, and black, nationalities mixing indiscriminately" (Age 1912: Report). About this time Mexicans were apparently not prohibited from patronizing any business establishments, at least certainly not in Block 16.

Residential patterns in the 1910 census and early newspaper accounts show that non-Euro-Americans were located in the approximate localities as Mexicans, indicating there was a general confinement of minorities to housing along First and Second Streets. Mexicans, however, were not as restricted as African Americans and Asians. The highest concentration of Mexicans in the Las Vegas precinct was located at the labor camps. In these camps there were nineteen Mexicans, but its locality is not specified. There were ten housed in the SPLA & SL construction cars. Again, specific locality is not mentioned; however, considering the localities enumerated before and after the labor camp and construction cars, they were probably located opposite Main Street near the railroad yard. The second highest concentration was on Main Street with thirteen. The remaining were scattered on First Street (one), Fremont Street (one), Stewart Street (two), and Second Street (five). Only one lived in McWilliam's original townsite, called Ragtown in the census. The other precincts do not indicate street names, making it impossible to determine a residential pattern, although the Mexicans were consistently enumerated as a group rather than randomly, or intermixed with Euro-Americans. Seven African Americans lived on First Street, a saloon owner and his wife with four female borders, and one male tailor. Eight African Americans lived on Second Street, a porter and his laundress wife, a laborer with his laundress wife and two children, and two male laborers. One African American female laundress for a private family lived on Third Street. Two Chinese, a restaurant owner and his cook, lived on First Street. One Japanese laborer lived on Main Street. Two Japanese, a cook and porter, lived on First Street and twelve Japanese laborers lived in the SPLA & SL construction cars. The Japanese railroad workers were closely grouped with
the Mexican laborers. The other three Japanese that lived on the city blocks were adjacent to Mexican neighbors.

In 1909, the Las Vegas Land and Water Company, a subsidiary of the SPLA & SL Railroad, attempted to restrict African Americans and Mexicans to residing in Block 17. F. A. Waters wrote on August 3, 1909, in a letter to Walter Bracken of the Las Vegas Land and Water Company, that Block 17 should be turned "into a residence district which would be the district desired by colored people and Mexicans, etc." (Fitzgerald 1987a; Walters 1909). Block 17 was adjacent to the notorious Block 16, thus Waters was implying it would be best to restrict as early as possible, certain people to the area least wanted by Euro-American families. Block 17 was intended for the "undesirables," a term used historically in Las Vegas newspapers for individuals who were not wanted in the community for one reason or another (Fitzgerald 1987a). Bracken pursued the issue by writing to the vice president of the company, H. I. Bettis, "Block 17 could be converted into a residence district for a certain class of people which is badly needed here in Las Vegas, so that they will not be scattering around town" (Bracken 1909; Fitzgerald 1987a). Mexicans were the only minority group that by 1910 had begun to be "scattered around town," as some were living on Fremont and Stewart in addition to Main, First and Second Street. These early attempts at housing restrictions did not succeed (Fitzgerald 1987a), however, economic exclusions did have an effect on Mexican residential patterns. The fact that Mexicans were discriminated against by lower wages and restricted opportunity within the railroad company at the start prohibited their economic advancement and thereby was a controlling factor in their residential pattern being concentrated more on Main Street and later, McWilliams original townsite, or the Westside as it came to be known.

By 1920, Mexican families began to establish themselves in McWilliam's original townsite, (Personal interviews; Age 1921: Criminals). This area did not develop as quickly as the Clark township. Provisions for electricity and sewage, for example, fell behind the development in Clark's township. Consequently, housing was less expensive and yet
relatively close to the railroad, which, along with mining, continued to be the main source of employment for Mexicans. Newspaper accounts and public opinions (Personal interviews) indicate there was a common belief that a Mexican "colony" existed in the Westside prior to its preponderance of African American residents. Terms such as "Spanish American colony" (*Age* 1923: Breaks), "a picturesque old Mexican quarter" (*Review Journal* 1930: Picturesque), "Mexican colony" (*Age* 1919: Mexicans; *Review Journal* 1939: Mexican Consul), all give the impression there was a strictly Mexican neighborhood. Research has shown this was a false perception. Mexican residents were concentrated more on the Westside than other areas in Las Vegas, but entirely Mexican neighborhoods did not exist in the Westside, and Mexicans were not restricted from living in other areas of Las Vegas, at least not ostensibly restricted. Several Mexicans continued to live on Main Street as well as Carson (*Age* 1923: Knife). Personal interviews of individuals living in the area during the 20s and 30s indicate the streets on the Westside where Mexicans resided also contained families of mixed ethnicity that included Euro-Americans and African Americans. Actual documentation of this observation can only be derived from the 1920 through 1950 census records when made available. In spite of ethnic groups living in concentrated areas, the schools were integrated (Photograph 10). Through the 20s, 30s and even 40s, newspaper accounts indicate railroad towns, or sections, through Clark County, continued to maintain a Mexican population (*Age* 1929: Man; *Age* 1930: Mexican Girl; *Review Journal* 1936: Gossip).

For recreation, Mexicans obviously frequented Block 16, even those who lived in the railroad section communities (*Age* 1909: Beats Up). The train made Las Vegas accessible to even the more remote sections. There is a possibility that some resorts were frequented by Mexicans more than others. The 1910 census indicated Anneta Burt, age 38, owned a saloon on First Street and had a female boarder, M. von Bramblila, age 32. Burt declared she had one child living, but that child was not enumerated with her. Additionally, Burt's ethnicity is unclear. The enumerator first wrote "Sp," meaning
Photograph 10. Alicia Rivero, second from left, and classmates of mixed ethnicity attending Las Vegas Grammar School, c. 1925 (photograph courtesy of Celia Rivero Grenfeld Collection, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Library).
Spanish, the common census term for one from Mexico, but then he crossed it out with an "OT" for "other." Burt was listed as born in Michigan and her parents born in England. For some reason, she was not considered "white," and was at first thought to be a Mexican. Whatever her ethnicity, she probably had a skin color too dark to pass for "white." On the other hand, M. von Bramblila, who was a widow with no children, was born in Mexico as were both her parents. Von Bramblila immigrated to the U.S. in 1899 and was listed as having no occupation. Because Burt was "non-white" and von Bramblila was Mexican, it is highly likely Burt's saloon on First Street was a gathering area for Mexican laborers. Mexicans, however, were not confined to just this saloon because they were known to make "their rounds of the resorts," and stop in at "the Shady Cafe for dinner" (Age 1909: Beats Up). Another probable gathering place for Mexicans, if it is not the same one owned by Burt, was the Arcade in Block 16. Lucia Martínez, Pilar Santa Cruz, and Ester Florez were associated with the Arcade (Age 1919: Several Bootleggers). It was also known to have a Spanish surnamed boarder, José Ochoa, and probably had others. Five African American women were also associated with a saloon owned by an African American, and was another place Mexicans might have frequented. There were only four other African American men in Las Vegas around 1910; hardly enough to keep an establishment open if it was restricted to catering only to African Americans. In actuality there were no restrictions in Block 16, as "white and black mixed indiscriminately" (Age 1912: Report). It wasn't until the 30s that brothels were segregated (Moehring 1989:174).

Goldman (1978), in her analysis of prostitutes on the Comstock Lode, indicated ethnicity was, among others, a determining factor as to a prostitute's social status, the price she could command, and the type of clientele to which she was available. Foreign-born French, German, British, and American-born women ranked the highest, and Chinese and "Black" women the lowest. "Non-white" prostitutes were segregated from "white" prostitutes. Mexican women could only work in "Spanish houses" or "bars hiring only brown harlots" (Goldman 1978:113). "White" customers patronized prostitutes of color,
while "white" prostitutes were rarely available to "non-white" men. From this study, Goldman determined that "the status of an ethnic group within prostitution reflected its status in the larger occupational structure" (1978:114). There is a question as to whether a similar conclusion can be drawn for Clark County in 1910. Mexican and African American prostitutes were not segregated from Euro-American prostitutes in Las Vegas (Age 1912: Report). Mixing occurred, and Euro-American clientele could easily make use of the African American and Mexican prostitutes. But the results of Goldman's study suggest the structure of community social relationships between ethnic groups is so strong as to also be reflected in prostitution, at least in early Nevada history. Negative racial attitudes against Mexicans did exist in Las Vegas and were manifested in the occupational structure of the community; consequently, the restricted social relationship between Mexican men and Euro-American woman probably also existed as it did on the Comstock. It may have been one thing for a Mexican to buy a drink in Block 16, yet another to buy a Euro-American woman.

Other forms of recreation included group celebrations by the Mexican community that began in the mid-teens with celebrating Mexico's Independence Day, and continued on past the 30s. Mexican dances were also organized by the late 20s and were held on Saturday nights at the Economy Hall on Fremont Street (Age 1930: Dirk).

Since Catholicism was the state religion in Mexico, most Mexicans residing in Clark County were probably Catholic. The first established Catholic parish in Las Vegas was in 1908. St. Joan of Arc was offering services by 1921. Because the church was established so early in Las Vegas, it is assumed Mexicans were able to attend these for their spiritual needs. The Catholic church did not provide a social outlet for Mexicans that perpetuated Mexican traditions, such as dances, or fiestas. These types of traditions were reinforced at the family level (Personal interviews). Pastor F. C. Moreno began an all Spanish service for the Westside Gospel Mission in January of 1930 (Review Journal 1930: All Spanish).
1930-1960

Labor interaction

On a national level, the 1930s were significant to those of Mexican identity because the economic pressures of the Depression caused many states to intensify border patrol and deportations of illegal Mexican entrants, as well as pressure those who were in the U.S. legally, including by birthright, to repatriate to Mexico. If uncooperative, Mexicans and Mexican Americans were threatened with deportation or stoppage of relief funds. Whether in the U.S. legally or illegally, thousands of Mexicans were processed through city and county offices to have their transportation provided to Mexico (Grebler 1970:523-529; Hoffman 1974). The fact many Americans had their rights violated by being coerced into moving to Mexico was not addressed by Euro-American, nor Mexican American citizens. A few repatriated Americans did seek redress in the United States Supreme Court, with positive results beginning in 1955 (Grebler 1980:525-26).

Repatriation was a means for removing job competition with Euro-Americans and for relieving the welfare rolls. A few studies exist on repatriation programs in Texas, Arizona, and California that exemplify the experience of the repatriados. There are, however, other states in which repatriation occurred but has not yet been investigated (Hoffman 1976:xiii). In Nevada, it is not clearly determined if repatriation occurred or not. A more detailed investigation is recommended before completely ruling out a repatriation process in Clark County or in Nevada as a whole. There is evidence that deportation of Mexicans was apparent enough to be recorded in the newspaper for the first time in 1930. The article stated that "several Mexicans who are not American citizens are known to quit their jobs on the Union Pacific to leave supposedly in order to avoid deportation" (Review Journal 1930: Two Aliens). Perhaps some sort of crack down on illegal entrants was occurring at that time. Informants for this study do not recall a program in Clark County to "assist" Mexicans to repatriate to Mexico; however, they were not even sure of the meaning
of the word, or aware of its historical occurrence in other parts of the country. If some sort of repatriation process existed in Clark County, it was not known, or recognized, by that term. But, as the evidence shows, Mexicans were working in Clark County during the Depression. Mexicans who were residing in Clark County legally and had established themselves in the community with small businesses or had jobs with the railroad and mining industries above that of laborer, demonstrated a trend in which they called themselves "Spanish" (Personal interviews; Age 1923: Breaks In). The repatriation process of the 30s targeted the indigent Mexican and emphasized the "foreignness" of the Mexican American. Those that called themselves "Spanish American" in Colorado and New Mexico were not affected by repatriation even though the majority from these areas were "directly dependent on the Federal government during the Depression" (Grebler 1970:526). When the 1930 census was taken, over half of New Mexico's population spoke Spanish, but this group called themselves Spanish, which enabled them to be enumerated as "white." This was an attempt "to separate old-line residents from recent immigrants" (Hoffman 1974:13). For this reason the Mexican population in New Mexico was vastly undercounted (Hoffman 1974:12). If "old-line" Mexican residents in Clark County were calling themselves Spanish around 1930, this might suggest one reason repatriation was not apparent in Clark County.

In addition, pressures that incited repatriation to occur in other states may not have existed in Clark County. Nationwide, repatriation perhaps resulted more from severe competition for relief funds than for jobs. Clark County had an indigent fund that was depleted in 1933 and quickly relied on federal money to handle the tremendous influx of families hoping to find employment on the dam (Moehring 1989:19). If Mexicans were not significantly represented on the welfare rolls, they were not competing with Euro-Americans for relief money. The Mexican population was substantially lower than other large cities in the country and thereby did not present as visible a threat, although Euro-Americans were still quite vocal in their resentment of Mexican labor.
The year 1930 ushered in a new era for the entire nation. Known as the Depression decade in which even the lower echelon jobs were at a premium nationwide, job competition intensified between the dominant and minority groups. In Clark County, significant job sources in which competition occurred included the construction of Boulder Dam (Fitzgerald 1987a) in addition to the railroad and mining industries. Gaming was legalized in 1931, paving the way for jobs in casinos and hotels; however, Las Vegas did not begin to become a resort city until 1941 with the opening of the El Rancho—the city's first luxury hotel and casino.

It is commonly believed that sentiments against alien labor, particularly during the depression and after WWII, had to do with protecting jobs for American citizens. But Mexicans were still permitted (even if on a more limited basis) to work the lowliest jobs whether citizens or not. During the Depression business owners could pay Mexican laborers lower wages, making this work force more cost-effective. If it were not true, American unions would not have made banning alien labor one of their missions.

The Nevada Federation of Labor filed a strong protest against aliens working on Boulder Dam. They appealed to the American Federation of Labor to use influence to prevent the employment of alien labor, citing that "cheap foreign labor" could only be stopped with national legislation (Review Journal 1930: Alien Labor Ban). Prior to 1930 it was common for businesses to recruit Mexican nationals to work all over the country (Hoffman 1976:11). Even though the 1924 Quota Act prohibited immigration from eastern Europe and Asia (other sources of cheap labor) the Western Hemisphere was not restricted, making Mexico the most accessible source of cheap foreign labor. Long before the Boulder Dam project, the American Federation of Labor had been politically active in lobbying Congress to prohibit Mexican immigration for the purpose of providing labor, and continued their efforts when Mexico was not included in the 1924 Act (Hoffman 1976:26). The hiring policy of Six Companies, who built the dam, indicates protests against alien labor were successful. The Six Companies contract with the government
stipulated that only American citizens were to be hired with preference given to veterans (Fitzgerald 1981:255; 1987a: 27; Stevens 1988:176). Local Nevadans as well as Six Companies, however, interpreted this policy to mean "white" American citizens as indicated when the Review Journal reported "White Labor for Dam Work Urged" (Stevens 1988:176; Review Journal 1930: White Labor). Asians, called "Mongolians" in the contract, were the only racial group specifically prohibited from working at the dam. African Americans and Mexicans, however, were inhibited, but not entirely excluded.

Recognizing an obvious non-representation of African Americans on the labor force for the dam, local blacks organized a political group, the Colored Citizens Labor and Protective Association of Las Vegas on May 5, 1931, to formally protest discrimination and rally support from the NAACP and others to pressure the Six Companies to cease their discriminatory hiring practices (Fitzgerald 1981:257-258; Stevens 1988:176). Their efforts were rewarded with the hiring of only ten African Americans out of a labor force of 4,000 to 5,000 men.

Integrated labor was minimally practiced in the preliminary dam projects such as construction of the road from Las Vegas to the Dam site, bringing power lines in from Southern California, and the building of the railroad spur to the dam site (Fitzgerald 1987a:6). Integrated labor for the actual Dam project was in effect only in "other projects further down the Colorado River and on into the Imperial Valley of California" (Fitzgerald 1987a:6). The laborers in these areas were not provided with a place to live in a "comfortable, and sanitary fashion" which is what the government wanted to provide by building Boulder City for "all the people connected with the construction of the dam" (Fitzgerald 1987a:6). Boulder City was created only for the workers at the dam site, where integration policies were not practiced. The government, and Six Companies that built the dam, practiced an exclusion policy on hiring minorities to work the dam; thus, it was no accident that Boulder City was an all Euro-American community (Fitzgerald 1981). Harold Ickes, Interior Department Secretary, however, responded to reports of continued hiring
discrimination and humiliating treatment of the few African Americans who were on the labor force. Boulder City was strictly off limits to these men and they were subjected to "petty regulations as separate water buckets" (Stevens 1988:177). Ickes claimed he could not enforce the hiring of more African Americans due to the language of the government's contract with Six Companies. He did, however, decree that the 11 African Americans on hand be allowed to live in Boulder City (Steven 1988:177). "No black worker on the dam, however, did in fact live in Boulder City" (Fitzgerald 1990).

During the entire construction of the Dam the number of African Americans on the work force averaged about twelve, in comparison to 4,000 to 5,000 total employees (Fitzgerald 1981:260). For a brief period there were as many as 24 employed (Stevens 1988:177). According to Fitzgerald, the African American community in Clark County had become "better organized and more vocal in the assertion of their rights," which facilitated the hiring of even the few African Americans that were on the dam. Had it not been for this political organization, they would not have been hired at all (Fitzgerald 1981:260).

In the 1930s local Mexicans did not have this type of political organization to serve their economic and political interests. Unlike the African American struggle for representation on the dam work force, which was recorded in the local newspapers (Fitzgerald 1981), there is little to indicate Mexican Americans banded together to assert their right to also be represented at the dam. There is also no indication that Mexican Americans joined in the ban attempt of cheap foreign labor since it would logically deprive them of jobs as well.

Evidence to support the position that Mexicans were not welcomed, but not completely prohibited from working at the dam site, was the fact that one John B. Costello changed his name from Castilla, "it is said, ...in order to obtain employment on the dam" (Age 1932: Knife Wounds). Just how many Mexican Americans were employed on the dam is not known, nor is it known how many Mexicans from Mexico were on the work force, if any. If they had to change their last names to be hired, we may never know. The
fact is, a few Mexicans did work at the dam site, and probably were the first minority
group to find employment there (Fitzgerald 1987a:8). It was reported to Fitzgerald that
there were several Mexican Americans digging the diversion tunnels. They were called
"muckers" because they put up a rock and dirt dam to get the river going through the
tunnels. Later they had to clean out the river bed. One former Mexican American
employee at the dam stated they lived in Las Vegas or McWilliams townsite (Westside) and
had never stayed in the dormitories in Boulder City. Former employees recall "some
limited Mexican involvement in the work force, [but] none recall any Mexican American
residents of Boulder City during that period" (Fitzgerald 1987a:8). Other Mexicans
(Personal interviews 1989) and a news article also support the fact that Mexicans working
at the dam did not live in Boulder City (Age 1932: Knife Wounds).

One long time resident of Las Vegas, who at that time was 19 and from Mexico,
remembers applying for a job at the dam. He had previously worked for the railroad in
Kansas and New Mexico. When the job was over he took his free train pass and opted to
go to Las Vegas, Nevada.

When I come to Vegas, no job, no nothing. A lot a people get hungry and
at that time nobody helped the guy that got hungry. In 1931, they build
Boulder Dam. I go make application over there in Boulder Dam when I was
19 years old. That guy look at me, a pretty husky kid. He said, "I give you
a job, only pay about $.60 an hour. I said, "What I got to do?" He said,
"You pretty husky kid, you're gonna be one of the Jackhammers." I see the
guy hanging there over the cliff. No good safety rope, you fall down and
then down the river, lost. You don't come back. I went back to Vegas
again looking for a job, but no job (Favela 1989).

Evidently it was possible for a Mexican to apply at the dam and perhaps even be
employed; however, this person was only offered the most dangerous job on the dam—the
high scaler—and when that was refused, he was not offered any other. High scalers scaled
the cliff walls to remove loose debris, and were subjected to intense heat and falling debris
overhead, while carrying heavy equipment. They were supported by a slender line of rope
"with nothing but air between them and the canyon floor far below" (Stevens 1988:104).
As Stevens put it, "high scaling was not for the weak, the clumsy, or the faint of heart" (1988:103). Surprisingly, finding men willing to be a high scaler was not difficult in spite of it being an extremely dangerous and difficult job. Perhaps for just these reasons many men were attracted to high scaling, and would perform stunts when the foreman wasn't looking (Stevens 1988:106). The fact that it wasn't difficult to fill the high scaling jobs, with risks and all, leaves a question as to why a Mexican, who was "a pretty husky kid," was offered only this type of work.

Although Mexicans were minimally represented at the actual dam site, they were significantly represented in the labor crew for building the Boulder Branch Railroad. Concern over the hiring of Mexican labor for this railroad was very evident in the newspapers and was a serious issue. Mexicans had a long tradition of railroad building skills, and the company preferred experienced over inexperienced workers to reduce accident risks; consequently, there was a significant representation of Mexicans hired to build the Boulder Branch Railroad that was to facilitate building the dam. "All but eight of the forty-one men" employed to build a section of the railroad were Mexican (Review Journal 1930: Boulder Branch). When the crew had to be enlarged to about 120 men, there was enough concern over the issue that the foreman made a statement that, "he would give preference to white men in adding to his force, other things being equal, although he has laid down no restriction concerning employment of Mexicans" (Review Journal 1930: Boulder Branch). At that time, these workers were paid $3.04 per eight hour day (Review Journal 1930: Boulder Branch).

Racial tensions increased seriously within a few months. The Review Journal reported, "To forestall possible trouble said to be brewing between Mexican and white laborers on the Boulder Dam branch railroad job, county and railroad officers today toured the entire job, taking stock of the situation and warning all the workers against violence" (Review Journal 1931: Sheriff). Part of the trouble was resentment over the hiring of a Mexican foreman from California, L. Rodriquez, who was in charge of a ballasting gang of
80 men. The ballasters laid the rock and gravel in preparation for the railroad ties. The Euro-American workers threatened to riot if Rodriguez wasn’t replaced immediately (Stevens 1988:176). When Euro-American workers became aware the company was soon to increase the force, some of them posted phony job announcements in two gambling halls, saying 50 men were wanted on the railroad. When their hoax was discovered they explained they "wanted to see plenty of white men on hand so that the bosses would not put a preponderance of Mexicans" on the work force (Review Journal 1931: Sheriff).

There were three working stations for the Boulder Railroad: "Boulder Junction, the ranch out on the old highway to Los Angeles, and at Railroad Pass" (Review Journal 1930: More Materials). E. R. Higbee, foreman, had a crew of about 30 teamsters and graders camped at the ranch, which was located about seven miles from Las Vegas. A Mexican national, having previous railroad experience, and a former employee of the Boulder Branch Railroad recalled his experience in applying and working for the railroad:

I got a friend in Vegas. We looked for jobs. I said, "Augustine I heard they’re going to hire to build the Boulder Dam railroad. Let’s go make a job [application]. We start walking all the way to where you see the cross track where you go to Los Angeles. The camp is on the side over there. We go about three o’clock in the morning. We make a little fire because it’s cold. The guy working is already in this little car, living over there, the railroad car for the extra gang. Pretty soon the guys lighted that little place, they started to make something to eat. I said, "Look the guys already wake up. Knock on the door maybe they will offer something to eat, a cup of coffee, or little tortilla or something like that."

The guy [railroad employee] said, "Yeah, I hear Elias, the boss is going to hire a bunch of guys because they are short on men." He offered us some coffee. I don’t say no because we never eat for a whole two days, hungry see. Seven o’clock coming up and that Mexican guy gave a good recommendation for me and the other guy. He said, "You see those two guys over there, they came early in the morning, about one o’clock in the morning. Maybe you hire them." Well, the guy came with a little book. He said, "You and you," he pointed at me and my friend, "you’re hired, you guys can start working today." Oh, we’re tickled than hell. We maybe paid $2.00 or something like that a day, not much but better than nothing.

We worked on the railroad putting the gravel down, to Boulder City. The extra gang moved us. There was about six guys in each car. They gave us a little place to live [in the car]. You got a little mattress. You make your own food. The guy had a commissary. You could buy everything from the guy and you cooked it. He got a little book, everything you get, he write in the book. Every 15 days he took it from your check.
See, pretty good. I worked all the way to Boulder Dam on the extra gang (Favela 1989).

Even though Mexicans did difficult labor work for the railroad, there was still a considerable amount of resentment from Euro-Americans. The competition for jobs during the Depression, particularly if related to the dam, was intense.

Mexicans were also not welcomed to work in the casinos, an industry individuals could work and get ahead economically without having more than a high school education, if that. The state legislature passed a law stipulating aliens were not permitted to operate gaming houses or gambling games. Sentiments on this issue were expressed as "...certain gaming establishments have non-citizens conducting some of their games, while American citizens are looking for work. 'We won't allow aliens to operate gambling devices in Clark County'" (Review Journal 1931: Aliens Banned). This is an obvious discriminatory practice, to permit and even encourage non-U.S. citizens to work in lower echelon jobs for the railroad, mines, and later farms, dairies, kitchens and laundries, but not in the promising gaming industry that would permit economic advancement with minimal education. This practice undoubtedly had a negative effect on the upward mobility of the Mexican American as well as the Mexican from Mexico. Banning alien workers made a statement that even the Mexican American who looked like an alien had "his place" in the work force. Mexican Americans had not been a visible part of the gaming work force through 1960.

Although other job sources existed in Clark County from 1930 to 1960, the railroad and mining industries continued to be the principal employers of Mexican labor, even through the Depression. The locality of these industries had a direct bearing on Mexican residence patterns through out Clark County. By the mid 1930s the railroads had been built, so Mexican employment primarily involved track maintenance, although Mexicans did continue to work at the roundhouse (Mummey 1990). Section crews, mostly comprised of Mexicans, were housed in 15 mile increments, or sections, along the track in
Clark County. Life on a railroad section was a lonely experience, particularly for the single male. One Mexican recalls working a section in 1932.

"I find a little job on the railroad section...in Jean. I worked there about two months. I don't like it because I was young [20]. I never play, just come from work from the section. Just like a prison, come to my room, cook my stuff and go to sleep. I woke up early, about four or five in the morning, make my food to take [for lunch] (Favela 1989)."

According to this section worker, in 1932 all the employees on the section in Jean, except for the foreman, were Mexican. He did not know if they were from Mexico or the United States. The section house was larger than the row housing, and was reserved for the foreman and his family. Section employees were housed in concrete duplex structures. The number of structures ranged from three to five. Families of the workers were also housed in these structures, so it was common for a section community to consist of both men, women, and children. Some dwellings were partitioned into four sections rather than two. This individual's dwelling was a duplex. His room did not include a sink or running water, nor was there electricity. Well water was obtained from an outside pump. A wood stove was provided, as were railroad ties for fuel. He lit his room with a kerosene lamp.

"The Union Pacific don't give you nothing. You buy your own bed, like the kind in the army, a cot. No furniture, you only got a place to sleep and one chair and table. You got to buy everything in Vegas (Favela 1989)."

His room was about 20' X 14' with two windows in the front, facing the tracks, and two windows in the rear. The outhouse was for communal use as was the shower. He washed his clothes with a tub and washboard and hung them on an outside clothes line. Because of the relative isolation, he opted to quit after two months and shortly thereafter obtained employment with the U.S Lime Company in Sloan. He stayed with this company for 42 years, married and reared his family there (Favela 1989).

The mining industries at Arden and Sloan contained labor camps which were mostly Mexican, although they did tend to represent mixed ethnicity. These company
townsites demonstrated segregated residential patterns in which the Mexicans lived in one section and other Euro-Americans in another section. The company administrators generally lived at the townsite, but apart from all these groups. Arden typified this arrangement in the 1920s; however, the Mexicans and Italians were clustered in a group together, separated by a dike from other Euro-Americans. The supervisors also had their own area. As a company townsite for the Gypsum Mine, it also contained a commissary, cook houses, bunk and row houses, and a brothel, among other structures (Sprague 1989).

In 1932 Sloan had approximately 35 families living in the labor camp consisting of both Euro-American and Mexican Americans. The company provided housing in which the employees did not pay rent, or utilities. Most lived in big, long structures that were partitioned to allow two to three families to a dwelling. When Mike Favela, a Mexican national, married in 1932 the company provided building materials so he could build his own house. He chose to build in the Mexican section.

About 35 families, Mexican and white, lived in separate parts of the camp. The white guys lived in this side, and Mexicans on the other. [They were] separate because people could build where they wanted. A lot of the Mexican guys, they don't want to build on the other side because...well, the white guys were pretty good people (Favela 1989).

Favela demonstrated a hesitancy to discuss unpleasant discriminatory behavior among those with whom he worked. This, however, is a common characteristic among the majority of informants who participated in this study. Being a fair skinned, blond Mexican--sometimes called "the huero"--he managed to integrate into the company fairly well, although he remained a laborer, pounding rock with a 16 pound hammer for 20 years (Photograph 11). He later became a powder man, setting up and igniting dynamite, and was working in this capacity when he retired after 42 years of service (Vincent 1974). Evidence that things were not equitable among the workers is the fact that not only the residential pattern, but also job assignments were delineated by ethnicity.
(Photograph courtesy of Mike Favela).
Sometimes there would be 300 people in the camp. White guys worked in the mill and Mexicans worked in the quarry because the quarry is pretty hard working, and the American guys didn't make it. Couldn't take it. That's why he [the Euro-American] got the mill, a different kind of job, easy. The white people worked in the mill where they cooked the lime. The Mexican guys worked in the quarry at the top of the quarry, because it's hard work and the American guys can't make it up there, too hard working you know (Favela 1989).

This type of attitude reflects the American myth that Mexicans were physically better suited for hard labor than Euro-Americans (Hoffman 1976:10). Somehow Favela was convinced this was true as well. He demonstrated a subtle pride in his physical ability. It was something he had that the Euro-Americans did not. An ethnic division of labor existed, but it is not known if there were any inequities in pay. Favela did state he started out at 43 cents an hour, breaking rock with a 16 pound hammer.

Favela, who was originally from Mexico, views his experience with the company as a positive one. "I lived pretty good in the camp," he stated. In spite of the Depression and WWII, he and his family survived those difficult times unscathed. Before obtaining employment with the company he had experienced jobless starvation while in pursuit of work. He was grateful for his job at the quarry.

During the depression and the war, they don't hurt me because I work for the company. We got all the groceries you could get in the commissary, pretty cheap too. We had a good commissary with U.S. Lime. It [was] the best place I've ever seen in my life. I got a check for about $60 to $70 every two weeks, it's a lot of money. Sometimes we come into town...and I see a lot of Mexican people over there hungry, you know, the depression (Favela 1989).

Favela, with his wife and family of six children (one deceased), remained at the labor camp until 1968 when the company decided to close the camp due to insufficient water for both the plant and the camp. By then he was in a position to purchase a modest home in Las Vegas, which was an improvement over the two bedroom house in Sloan. His children were educated in the local schools, and demonstrate an economic and social upward mobility.
In addition to railroad and mining, Mexicans were involved in agricultural labor "in past years" prior to 1942 (Review Journal 1942: Labor); however, it wasn't until the American labor shortage, caused by WWII, that Mexicans were documented in the newspapers as farm laborers in Moapa and Virgin Valleys. The reason for this sudden appearance in the newspapers is that to many, Mexican labor was preferable to Japanese labor in 1942. The presence of Japanese in Moapa Valley was not new. A few Japanese families had been in the Moapa Valley since the mid-1920s and were relatively well accepted in the community (Russell 1988). But as a result of WW II, anti-Japanese feelings erupted nationwide, including in Clark County. The Pacific Fruit Produce Company of San Jose supplied Moapa Valley (60 miles north of Las Vegas) with American born Japanese workers who were essentially contracted labor (Review Journal 1942: Japs) and had received "full clearance from the state department" (Review Journal 1942: Importation). The Clark County Civilian Defense Council and the Moapa Valley Council, however, viewed these people with suspicion and strongly protested their presence to the state defense headquarters and to Governor Carville. Their fear was that the Japanese Americans were agents of Japan seeking to sabotage Boulder Dam via Lake Mead, which is adjacent to the valley (Review Journal 1942: Importation). Moapa Valley's farm labor committee, however, argued in favor of the Japanese. They needed workers to harvest the fields and felt there was no danger of sabotage since the ten Japanese that had arrived thus far were "under supervision and strict regulation of the United States Employment Service (USES), [and] checked in with the sheriff's office and FBI office" (Review Journal 1942: Japs). The defense council backed down somewhat by asserting they would not oppose temporary help, but vehemently opposed settlement "of any foreign people who are dangerous to our national defense, Japanese or otherwise" (Review Journal 1942: Japs). The defense council continued to make protests because the farmers intentions were to bring in as many as 100 Japanese workers if they couldn't get labor from other sources. Other sources, however, were sparse. The Depression and repatriation policies of the 30s
caused a shortage and hindered availability of Mexican labor. Furthermore, even though the Depression prompted many Americans to enter the migrant labor work force, WWII created a demand for industrial-military labor, causing migrant workers to quickly leave the migrant circuit for better paying, war-related jobs. In 1940 there were over one million domestic migrant workers, but only 60,000 by 1942 (Garcia 1980:3). Farmers all over the country had to compete for this pool of 60,000 migrant workers; consequently, during the fervor over the Japanese in Moapa Valley, there was an obvious shortage of farm labor. For American farmers, competing for labor would result in having to pay higher wages. In fact, there would not have been a farm labor shortage if the agriculture industry paid wages comparable to other industries. But to do so during the war implied they would have to continue even after the war, thus "undoing many years of effort to keep wages at a minimum and maintain a large but malleable labor pool" (Garcia 1980:18). Farm growers across the country had organized to protect their interests against unionization, and had become formidable political entities (Garcia 1980:20).

The shortage of labor for low level jobs prompted the United States agricultural industry to look toward Mexico for inexpensive labor. Initially farmers wanted the U.S. to simply relax immigration laws at the southern border so they could hire as many as needed when they were needed. The Mexican government would not permit this; to do so was tantamount to ensuring their citizens would be exploited by wages lower than that paid to Euro-Americans, and usually included poor housing conditions. The rejection and humiliation of repatriation was still fresh in their memories, and they wanted to ensure their citizens were going to be housed, fed, and paid fairly (Garcia 1980:21-22). Mexico insisted on a contract, but even still had reason to be wary. During WW I a shortage of labor prompted the U.S. to contract with Mexico for temporary laborers. The American employers, however, consistently violated conditions stipulated in the contract between the two governments and the U.S. did little to stop discriminatory behavior against Mexicans (Garcia 1980:22). Regardless of these reservations, Mexico agreed to enter a contract with
the United States government, hoping this labor program would benefit the Mexican economy. An agreement that became known as the bracero program was signed by Mexico on July 23, 1942, and was ratified by the U.S. Congress in August, 1942 as a war emergency measure, but it wasn't until 22 years later, in December 1964 that the program was terminated, mainly as a result of Mexican American protests that it undermined their efforts to unionize and improve their wages and working conditions.

Growers and other business owners in the United States were not supplied with braceros upon demand. The United States Employment Service certified braceros to enter the country only after it had ascertained that domestic labor, even if from another state, was unavailable in sufficient numbers to meet the demand for labor.

Nevada had braceros working for the railroad and farms during the 40s. At the conclusion of the war, at least approximately 2000 Mexicans were sent home from Nevada when their railroad contracts expired (Review Journal 1945: Job's Over). Meanwhile braceros continued as contracted farm labor in Moapa Valley (Review Journal 1945: Moapa; Review Journal 1947: Moapa). In 1953 braceros were known to have grievances regarding their living conditions in Moapa Valley. Protests were vocal enough as to require mediation through a local county labor office. Deputy District Attorney John Mendoza was asked to interpret for the braceros and recalls complaints had to do primarily with poor housing (Mendoza 1989).

Social Interaction

Social activities and recreation for Mexicans involved community celebrations of Mexican Independence Day, Cinco de Mayo, and Mexican Days. Long-time Las Vegas residents recall these activities most predominantly during the 30s, although some continued into the 40s. The attendance for these celebrations ranged from 50-100, with a few Euro-Americans also attending (Personal interview 1990). Saturday night dances also
continued to be popular. There was no professional band to provide music. Usually locals who knew how to play an instrument performed for the dances.

There was this old Mexican guy. They were old-timers close to the track, by the Salvation Army. They lived there for years and years. He used to play banjo, mandolin, violin, and guitar. Walk in his house and you would see instruments hanging on the wall. He was one of the few that got to play at all the dances; his name was Pilar Vasquez. When anything went on, they would look for him. When it was time for a dance, these guys got together to play (Chavez 1990).

1945 is the first apparent advertisement for a Spanish-speaking movie at the Palace theater. "Así Se Quiere En Jalisco" was shown for one day only "for the students of Spanish—the Spanish speaking people and for those whom do not understand the Spanish language" (Review Journal 1945: Advertisement). There was also a very small theater which catered to a Mexican clientele. Mexicans patronized both the Palace and the El Portal theaters but not without experiencing discriminatory practices.

During World War II, even before, Mexicans could sit anywhere in the theaters. After World War II they began to segregate. At the El Portal theater, they segregated us to the left and back. At the Palace theater, we were segregated to the upstairs. That was caused by the GIs that came in. Many were from Texas or the South who didn't want to sit with Negroes or Mexicans, so in order to stop any type of confrontation, they said, "You guys sit here" (Mendoza 1989).

Segregation practices continued longer at the El Portal than the Palace, but that was only because the Palace employed a Mexican assistant manager that did not enforce a segregation policy. Segregation tendencies cannot be solely blamed on the influences of GIs. During the 30s Lorenzi Park was not available to people of color. A Mexican and long time Las Vegas resident remembers Lorenzi Park in 1930 when he was 19 years old.

There was so much discrimination for the colored. My friend, a little dark Mexican guy, would go with me. The owner of the Lorenzi Park wouldn't let him go in. I passed for nothing because I used to be so white, blond, blond hair. My friend could never go. Once I felt bad because I went with some girls and their brother, the Santa Cruzes. I asked, "You been swimming over there?" The girls said, "No, I would like to go." The
guard at the door, as soon as he sees the little Mexican girls a little dark, he wouldn't let them go through. He let me go through. I asked the guard why. He said, "Because my boss don't want people like that." Too much discrimination.

There's a dance hall by the swimming pool. After three or four dances I don't go because they never let my friend go. My friend was a Mexican guy. He come from the same place in Mexico. The guys don't say nothing, they just walk away (Favela 1989).

Another Mexican simply stated, "Mexicans just didn't get in" (Personal interview 1989).

This policy, however, did not last. By the mid-40s Mexicans were enjoying the swimming facility as another place for recreation.

Incidents of segregation and discriminatory behavior existed, but they were not necessarily felt by everyone. As one Mexican, who had been in Las Vegas since the early 20s, recalls, "We went everywhere in town. We never had any problem with segregation. I heard sometimes Mexicans wouldn't be served, but I never had a problem" (Chavez 1990). Celia Rivero Mummey remembers conditions during the 30s and 40s:

I don't recall having any problems. If anyone had problems here it was the Indians and colored people. Some people didn't like eating with other kinds of people, and there would be trouble. My father had such a good heart, though. He didn't want to turn anyone away. He would feed the Indians and the colored people. He just told them to go around to the back. We had a big table in the back of the café that my parents used to feed us [kids]. I remember many times there would be Indians or coloreds. He would say gently, "Yeah, just come around to the back (Mummey 1990).

Mummey remembers her father, Frank Rivero, expressing sympathy for the plight of the African American and even rented a house to an African American family in Las Vegas Heights (Westside) in 1942, in spite of neighborhood protests. It wasn't until a group of Euro-Americans in the neighborhood stormed his property and demanded he evict the African American family, that he gave in to their pressure.

For those who were the second generation in Las Vegas, school was another forum for social interaction. Mexican informants who attended school in Clark County generally agree it was a good experience for them, although some did experience racial taunting on the playground. They all stated they never felt they were treated differently by their
teachers. Mexicans became involved in sports and other extracurricular activities. The Las Vegas sixth grade basketball team was noted for being a "championship team...composed mostly of Mexican youths: Fernando Hernandez, Joe Sandoval, Martin Rodriguez, Carlos Rios, Nick Jiminez, Raul Macias, Lyman Evans and Lloyd Whitney" (Review Journal 1936: Vegas 6th). Other Mexicans became outstanding athletes at Las Vegas High School (Review Journal 1940: Chavez; Mendoza 1989).

Mexican social clubs or organizations are not apparent through the 20s. The Spanish Club was formed in 1934 "to promote social and athletic activities among the younger members of that group" between the ages of 18 and 25 (Review Journal 1934: Spanish Club). Meetings were to be held in the American Legion hall, but the club loses all visibility after its founding. In November of 1948, the Club Latino-Americano was founded (Review Journal 1948: Organization) by local entrepreneurs. Dr. Francisco Villaigran, consul general of Mexico in Los Angeles was the guest of honor, among other "distinguished" guests, at the opening celebration. Its membership boasted 150, including "both Latins and Americans," and was created with the intent of promoting "Latin" culture and commerce. The GI Forum, founded by Judge John Mendoza and others in 1957, specifically addressed Mexican veteran issues but was not politically visible until after 1960 (Mendoza 1989). Other Hispanic organizations that addressed Mexican issues did not become a significant presence in Clark County until after 1970 (Miranda 1990b).

An organization such as the Club Latino-Americano demonstrates that by the 1950s, some Mexicans were established as a middle-class, politically non-confrontational group--a slow process that began in the 20s. The majority of Mexicans were still railroad and quarry workers, but they were also owning their own businesses, and established at least one social organization.

In spite of a growing Mexican middle class, they were still experiencing discriminatory behavior. Mexicans reported they experienced difficulties during the 50s in obtaining business loans, entrance into vocations that required union membership and even
joining Euro-American organizations such as the Elks Club (Personal interviews 1989).
They acknowledged these things happened, but there is no historical evidence to show
Mexicans developed a collective political voice to protest violations of their civil rights.
Rather than accentuating cultural and physical differences, Mexicans through 1960 appear
to have concentrated on "passing" as members of the dominant culture. As one Mexican
woman who had lived in Clark County since 1923 stated, "I can't tell you anything about
Mexicans; I didn't associate with them." The intent here is not to place a value judgement
on Mexicans' self perceptions, but to show that through 1960 the process by which
Mexicans sought to integrate into the Clark County community was assimilation rather than
confrontation to demand equitable treatment regardless of physical and cultural differences
that may have existed between Mexicans and Euro-Americans. To acquire the cultural
characteristics of the dominant group and cross or pass cultural boundaries is a valid
strategy to improve one's social and economic condition. To confront, however, was
common among the lower-class Mexicans in the Southwest. Historical confrontational
behavior of Mexicans in other states is well documented (McWilliams 1968:190, 193; Vigil

It is true that the immigrants were at first pleased with the new opportunities
which they found in the border states. But as they came to realize that the
occupations assigned them and the conditions under which they worked
were regarded by American urban labor as undesirable and substandard,
they began to show signs of restiveness. Not only were they set apart as a
caste,—stereotyped, segregated, and regarded as an inferior "race,"—but the
discrimination which they encountered in most...communities had the effect
of stimulating them to organize in self-protection (McWilliams 1968:190).

Mexicans were involved in labor strikes in the United States as early as 1883, and
continued in a series of strikes through the 1920s and 30s in California, Arizona, Idaho,
Washington, Colorado, Michigan, and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas
(McWilliams 1968:190). These strikes usually were in the agriculture industry and
involved migrant labor. There is no indication that Mexicans went on strike between 1905
and 1960 in Clark County. The railroad experienced a serious strike in 1922, but that was on a national level and not intended to specifically address Mexican grievances.

During the 1950s, a large influx of Mexicans arrived annually in Moapa Valley, as agricultural migrant laborers who seasonally flooded the valley and then departed when the work was over. But a small number made the valley their home base through the 50s, 60s and beyond. No one interviewed recollects Mexican migrant workers striking, although their wages were low and housing substandard. After 1965 the need for migrant labor in Moapa Valley declined. Government regulations forcing the upgrading of migrant housing across the country in the early 60s was an expense many farmers could not bear, and production decreased considerably by 1970 in comparison to the Valley's heyday of the 40s and 50s.

Since 1960 there has been a growing number of Mexicans living in urban Clark County. The long time, established population of Mexican families diminished in comparison to new Mexican residents as they arrived in Clark County from other areas. The majority of these more recent arrivals filled the lower echelon jobs in Clark County (Miranda 1987:39) causing the Mexican middle class to be a minority within their group identity. Photographs 12 through 21 are portraits of the early emerging Mexican middle class in Clark County, as well as examples of housing and living conditions between 1920 and 1950.
Photograph 13. Francisca and Mary Méndez in Las Vegas, Nevada, 1920 (photograph courtesy of Mary Mendoza Chavez).
Photograph 14. Celia Rivero in buggy, sister Alicia standing behind, with neighborhood friends. Mother, Margarita Rivero at door in background. House was on First Street (lot behind The Mint), c. 1928 (photograph courtesy of Celia Rivero Mummey).
Photograph 17. John Mendoza, 1942 (photograph courtesy of Mary Mendoza Chavez).
Photograph 18. Alma Chavez (Sprague), Ben Chavez, Virgina Chavez (Culley), Las Vegas, Nevada, c. 1937 (photograph courtesy of Alma Chavez Sprague).
Photograph 20. Antonio Chavez, resident of Las Vegas in Reno parade. Attended UNR and member of ROTC, 1933 (photograph courtesy of Alma Chavez Sprague).
CHAPTER SEVEN

MEXICANS IN MOAPA VALLEY

The Moapa Valley is located approximately 65 miles northeast of Las Vegas. The presence of the Muddy river enhanced the valley's fertile land for agriculture and thus attracted Euro-American Mormon colonists out of Utah in 1865. These were the first Euro-Americans to settle the valley. Prior to their arrival, the Paiute Indians inhabited the area.

Moapa Valley's dominant ethnic group has been Euro-American Mormons for over a century. Mormons are a religious group that settled the Great Basin in 1847 to avoid the persecution they experienced in the East. Basic to their lifestyle in the valley was simplicity and hard work. Eight communities were built but abandoned in 1870 due to economic and political struggles. However, by the 1890s Mormons were re-establishing themselves once again in the valley, with agriculture as their economic base. Communities in the valley are Moapa, Glendale, Logandale, Overton, and Hidden Valley. By the late 1940s the Euro-American population did not exceed 4,000 (Nevada Department of Highways 1948:22). Through 1960 many residents lived on ranches within these communities.

In 1948, an article was published by the Nevada Department of Highways on the productivity of the valley. This valley produced 70,000,000 tomato plants and 20,000,000 celery plants for transplanting, in addition to the "considerable crop yields of onions, radishes, carrots, and spinach" which helped "maintain a prosperous community" (Nevada Department of Highways 1948:24). The ranchers were represented as "rugged and thrifty...just wouldn't be licked...an excellent example of what can be done through wholehearted cooperation, a tenacity of purpose, and labor on the part of a community
working together toward a common objective" (1948:22). Field workers were photographed, but the article did not mention that the source of energy for the valley's productivity was from migrant labor.

A history, "100 Years on the Muddy," (Hafner 1967), is a compilation of Mormon family histories written by the residents of the valley. They wrote of their ancestors' arrival during the late 1860s to the current (1967) members of the families. Much is said about agriculture, farmers, education, church history, and even information on the non-agricultural businesses. What is lacking is including the presence of the hundreds of migrant workers that came into the valley seasonally to work the fields. Some seasons there were as many as 1500 Mexican migrant workers in the valley, yet their presence was not recorded in this history book, not even the few Mexican families that made the valley their home base. The authors of this history might well argue why should the migrant laborers be mentioned; after all the intent was to document the history and contributions of the individuals who wrote the book. Not mentioning the presence of Mexican labor left a historical void in explaining the development of the valley and its agricultural industry. The Euro-Americans could not have possibly accomplished their massive productivity without outside help, yet the historical information represents this community as taking full credit for doing it themselves. This is an example of the Euro-American bias in written history.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Mexicans were probably in the valley since the railroad was built in 1905. They were definitely documented as railroad workers by 1911 (Age 1911: Moapa). Through the 1930s, what Mexican population existed in the valley was due mainly to the railroad. When Mexicans began arriving in the valley as agricultural workers, the Euro-American-Mormon social structure was established and dominant in the valley. This structure entailed basic American culture but also included the unique element of Mormon culture.
As evident in the valley’s history book and any "Moapa Happenings" newspaper articles from the early teens through 1960, religion played an integral part in their social, recreational, civic, and work behavior. Because many social functions were tied to religious functions, an outsider and non-Mormon would not be a likely participating member of the community.

The economic structure in the valley has been primarily an agricultural industry, specifically row crops, from the 1860s until about the 1970s. Since that decade, farming has declined considerably. Currently (1990), onions and alfalfa are planted on a small scale. Other types of employment are small businesses, public services, the Union Pacific Railroad, Simplot Sand Company, and the Nevada Power Company. Hidden Valley, located on the west end of Moapa Valley is a dairy/ranch community with approximately ten to fifteen Mexican families who currently reside and work there. This dairy has employed Mexicans since the mid 1950s. Before a dairy, there was a ranch that also employed Mexicans since before 1950. The Hidden Valley Mexicans were part of the Overton/Logandale Mexican community. That is where they shopped, shared recreational activities, and attended school. Dairy employees who made the valley their home did not have the transient, unstable experience as the migrant laborers, therefore their social position and integration into the community was facilitated by their sedentary residence in the valley. Presently there are several Mexican families living throughout the Moapa Valley as a result of a major influx of migrant farm labor beginning in the 1950s.

LABOR INTERACTION

Newspaper articles in the Age indicate Mexican migrant labor was used since the 30s. As the agriculture industry developed during the 30s and 40s, labor was supplied by local Paiute Indians, high school students, and some undocumented Mexican nationals (Sun 1955: Where; Perkins 1989). Eventually Indian labor became unavailable and high school labor insufficient as the farming industry grew. The valley became increasingly
dependent on temporary migrant labor, which in the 40s was of mixed ethnicity. Bracero workers were used in the valley in the late 1940s to mid-1950s (Review Journal 1945: Moapa, 1947: Moapa; Perkins 1989). They were also employed in Elko, Humbolt, and Washoe Counties "due to an acute labor shortage in Nevada" as a result of WWII (Review Journal 1943: Mexican). These workers were Mexican nationals recruited to work in the United States under a contractual agreement for a limited time. It was common for agricultural organizations in a given locality, to sponsor the recruitment of braceros through the United State Employment Service, or one its state branches, and disperse the workers to individual farms as needed. In 1942 a heated protest over the presence of Japanese farm labor prompted growers in the valley to look for other sources of labor, such as the braceros (Chapter Six), undocumented Mexican nationals, and others who drifted into the valley looking for employment.

The first major wave of Mexican migrant labor who were not braceros occurred during the mid 50s. The majority and most consistent labor came from Mexican Americans and undocumented Mexican nationals who worked as agricultural migrant workers. Although migrant workers throughout the country were of mixed ethnicity, Mexicans eventually became the predominant labor force in Moapa Valley (Perkins 1989). Severe racial tensions with African American workers and a contentious relationship with a private labor contractor made Mexican labor more desirable. They were considered "good help" but the farmers had difficulty by 1955 in obtaining workers through the Nevada State Employment Service. Hank Greenspun in the Sun reported:

In former years, Indians from the nearby reservations and Mexican Nationals were the mainstay of the assistance the farmers needed to pick the fields clean. They were good help, reliable, trustworthy and hard-working. But the Nevada State Employment Service has now refused to certify Mexican Nationals for the job, so the result has been that Arizona now has the pick of the migratory workers, while undesirable help in Arizona is shunted off on the farmers in the Valley. And the term "undesirable" is not pointed at any group, sect or color, but at all persons who would rather spend their time drinking wine, carousing and fighting among themselves while the crops are left in the field. The opinion is almost unanimous in the
Valley that "Negroes get the blame for trouble but it's the trashy white winos who cause it" (Sun 1955: Where).

During the Spring harvest of 1955, 100 African American migrant workers were reported to be working in the valley (Sun 1955: Negroes). Racial tensions surfaced after the arrest of an African American migrant who attacked and knifed an Indian. He was quickly apprehended, but in two weeks time "three unidentified persons" (Sun 1955: Where) burned two crosses outside the dwellings of African American workers. The farmers claimed they heard threats of retaliation and took up arms for over five days and nights to guard their families and homes. The cross burnings and "20 year-old boys and their fathers, with guns in low-slung holsters" (Sun 1955: Where) protecting themselves from attack by "undesirable" workers (Sun 1955: Citizens) were sufficient reasons to cause all the African American workers to leave the valley almost immediately.

Because it was sometimes difficult to obtain enough labor from drifters and government sources, the farmers often went through labor contractors. These men would recruit workers from various states and transport them to the farmers. Labor contractors did not supply braceros to the valley but rather undocumented Mexican nationals and Americans who were usually from Texas and Arizona. Workers from Texas were nearly always of Mexican identity, whereas those from Arizona tended to be of mixed ethnicity. The contractual agreement was between the farmer and labor contractor. The labor contractor agreed to supply the farmer with a specified number of hands; the farmer in turn paid the contractor a lump sum for providing this service. The contractor then paid the laborers their wages, after deducting his costs and a fee for providing them employment and food. It was also common for contractors (and farmers) to withhold a portion of their wages and offer it as a "bonus" in a lump sum if they completed the duration of their contract. Workers forfeited this sum if they were fired or quit. Often laborers made substantially less working through a labor contractor than if they were hired by the farmer directly. Mexicans that did not speak English were especially susceptible to this
exploitation. Often contractors promised far more in wages and housing than could be, or would be, delivered by the farmers. If laborers were discontent with working conditions they were led to believe, by both contractors and farmers, that they could not be released from their contracts. Once contracts had expired it was not uncommon for those who understood the system to apply, and be hired, directly through the farmer (Personal interviews 1988; 1989).

In the midst of the spring 1955 racial upheaval, a labor contractor, O.B. Henderson, was accused of bringing in the "undesirables" that were causing all the trouble. The laborers he brought in were mostly from Phoenix and had "been described by the local ranchers as "skid row" types; "floaters who won't stay on the job" (Sun 1955: 120 Farmhands). The African American who had attacked the Indian was a member of Henderson's labor crew. Mads Jorgansen, a major producer in the valley who had contracted with Henderson evicted him and 120 of his laborers, claiming Henderson did not "live up" to his end of the bargain by bringing in help that was not "qualified" to work in the fields. The ranchers wanted "properly skilled help," but they did not define just how skilled one had to be to do stoop labor (Sun 1955: 120 Farmhands).

Henderson was out of favor with both ranchers and his labor crew. He was known to abuse the labor system on both ends, which made him an easy target to be blamed for burning the crosses to incite the African Americans to quit, and thus keep their wages. Whether or not this is true is not the point. The Deputy Sheriff informed a few of the African Americans of the possibility of a cross burning. Two cross burnings occurred and were not prevented in spite of prior knowledge by a law enforcer (Sun 1955: Where). The Deputy also stated "three unidentified persons" were responsible, yet no one claimed to have seen who ignited the crosses (Sun 1955: 120 Farmhands). The fact remains one African American commits a crime against an Indian and is apprehended, but interethnic relations were so contentious that all African Americans fled the valley. With the departure
of the African American workers and all of Henderson's laborers, a serious lack of labor to finish Jorgansen's harvest resulted.

Evidently not all of Henderson's men were skid-row types. Jorgansen offered employment to those who were free and clear of Henderson and wanted "good jobs" on his ranch (Sun 1955: 120 Farmhands). But he was still in dire need of labor. The local farmers attempted to apply for braceros, but the Nevada State Employment Agency refused to certify Mexican nationals on the grounds there was available Apache labor in Arizona, but the farmers did not want them because "they can not do the job" (Sun 1955: Mexican).

According to the recollection of a former migrant worker, it was about 1955 when a foreman for one of the farmers went to Texas to recruit labor. That was how the worker learned that migrant employment was available in Moapa Valley. He and several other Mexican identity men went back to Moapa Valley with the foreman. After that, word of mouth about work in Moapa Valley spread and hundreds of independent migrant workers made the valley one of their regular seasonal stops.

Migrant workers traveled throughout the year to meet the growing seasons within certain states that were on their circuit. Many that worked in Moapa Valley traveled through Texas, Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah, Idaho, and Washington. Many workers came for the spring harvest, stayed three to four months, and left for other states at the end of May to harvest or weed crops, depending on the growing seasons in the other states. Sometimes migrants left prematurely in order to secure the better housing at their next stop, leaving growers in a lurch to find labor for the conclusion of the harvest. This was why they often withheld a portion of the workers' wages to be given at the end of the harvest.

In 1955, migrant workers were paid $.40 per hour, while field workers were paid by the crate (those interviewed could not remember wage per crate). Packing shed workers were paid by the hour, making it a better job. They worked in the shade, and could take
coffee breaks and still make their money for the day. Field workers were not paid if they were not picking, making it unprofitable to take breaks (Photograph 22 and 23).

Foreman was the most prestigious job amongst the farm laborers. He was usually a Mexican, fluent in Spanish and English and was the principal communicator between farmer and worker. Farm owners generally kept the same foreman for years, so there was no upward mobility for migrant workers. Generally, the same people, year after year, worked in the packing shed and the same worked in the field, so field workers could not aspire to anything better within the farm labor system.

Laborers worked seven days a week including holidays if there was a shipment to meet. Sunday afternoon they might have off. Easter Sunday was an important holiday, but they did not always get that day off. Everything depended on the shipment orders that had to be met. The average work day for an adult was ten to twelve hours depending on available daylight. Some were known to work 24 hours without a break, save for lunch, in order to meet shipments. Children often worked side by side with their parents, sometimes as early as six years of age. Mexican migrant labor was usually a family structured system, migrating as a unit from state to state.

The Anderson Dairy in Hidden Valley employed sedentary residents. The nature of the industry did not require migrant labor. The majority of families living and working on the dairy property—about ten to fifteen families—were Mexican identity. The jobs available to them were ranching, caring for the cattle, milk extraction and processing, and general upkeep of the facility (Photograph 24). Foreman was the only job these workers could aspire to for bettering their economic situation.

Immigration raids on the valley were common through 1960. There were no reports of harsh treatment. In fact, it was reported farmers, undocumented laborers, and immigration officers often knew each other. Although Mexicans were deported, the same ones would return to the farm they left, sometimes as quickly as within a week. The presence of undocumented Mexican nationals in the valley was a common sight. One
The dairy in Hidden Valley hired Mexican workers since 1950 to present.

Photograph by Corinne Escobar, 1989.
family managed to hide their status for several years, until they were found out by Immigration authorities.

My father came to the United States originally as a bracero through Mexicali. He broke away from the contract and remained in the country illegally. The rest of us crossed the border illegally to join him. I was nine. We were illegal from 1952 to 1959. I was pretty light and often passed for a gringo. One day Immigration showed up and stopped me. They said they were looking for illegals. I told them, "Well, they live over there." I was trying to get them to go the wrong way. I hurried home and went to my dad. I said, "Dad they're looking for illegals." He said, "Well, if they're looking for illegals, I better wait for them." Sure enough, one [immigration officer] went to the front of the house and another went to the back. Half the family was Mexican and half [of the children] were American citizens. All they could do was tell my father he had to go back to Mexico and fix his papers. So we did. We packed up the Mercury and went. We picked cotton that summer in Mexico. Three months later we had our papers and we went back [to Nevada] (Personal interview 1990).

The fact this family integrated well with the community made leaving for Mexico difficult. The memory of the Immigration authorities' visit was still a painful one.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Contact between Mexicans and Euro-Americans in this small, relatively isolated valley has produced a bi-cultural presence but not necessarily a blending of those cultures. Religious polarization is an important factor. Most Mexicans were Catholic. Whether in name-only or active church goers, being of a different faith than the majority of the Euro-Americans in the community was another factor affecting Mexican integration into the community. "If you think it was tough growing up Mexican in this community, it was tougher growing up Catholic" (Personal interview 1988). Some Mormon proselyting did occur, but not in any significant manner as to convert the Mexican population to Mormonism. A religious polarization existed since the time Mexicans were first arriving in the valley. Even today there is still a sharp ethnic delineation by religion. Before the Catholic church was built, mass was held in a packing shed. Both religions strongly discourage inter-faith marriage, and since religion had an ethnic polarity, interracial
marriage is not apparent even through the 60s. Many Mexicans who did intermarry with Euro-Americans did so generally after 1970 and after leaving the valley.

Contact through residential patterns occurred but remained limited. Housing rentals did not exist in this valley. Even if families could afford rent, and many could have, there was no housing available to rent, consequently housing was provided by the farm owner, rent-free. Migrant housing was located in designated labor camps either on the farm premises or in a locality somewhere in the community. The farmer often provided some furnishings such as a table, chairs, beds, a butane burner, and if needed, cooking and eating utensils. Workers usually brought with them only personal or portable items that could be packed in their vehicle. Having a trailer was not unheard of, but not the usual circumstance.

In the 50s when farming was in high production, some farms lacked enough dwellings to house the workers, requiring many to live in tents. One grower rented space outside his farm in order to have sufficient housing for his workers, yet even still they were not charged rent. In the instance of one Japanese farmer, when a few of his workers were no longer working the migrant circuit and were staying in the valley they remained in the labor dwellings rent-free while working for him.

The dwellings that were provided were "not the best" (Ozaki 1989). They were small, cubicle or long structures segmented into units, that were located on the farm premises or in areas within the community that were designated as labor camps. A single unit within the structures may have had two rooms and would house a whole family. These units seldom had kitchens, consequently areas for food preparation were make-shift counters or shelves for food stuffs (Photographs 25 and 26).

Electricity was always available, but not running water. If water was not available inside the dwellings, or in the rest rooms, it had to be carried in from a community tap that may or may not be located on the farm premises. Rest rooms (and shower, if available) were shared by all tenants. They were separate structures; either out-houses or shower
Photograph 25. Migrant worker dwellings abandoned and in a state of decay, in a former labor camp on Lisbon Street, Overton, Nevada. Photograph by Corinne Eschbar, 1989.
Photograph 26. Interior of migrant worker dwelling, Overton, Nevada, c. 1955
Migrant dwellings often lacked kitchens. Note food preparation area in background
(Moapa migrant worker collection).
houses if they had running water. They were kept clean according to how well the farmer
organized his tenants into cleaning crews that would take turns cleaning the bathroom
facilities. Not all farmers and tenants were fastidious in keeping the facilities clean (Ozaki
1989). When the labor camp was located on the farm premises, it was in close proximity
to the packing shed and the farmer's house. Labor camps that were not located on the farm
premises do not appear to have had any specific pattern as to their location within the
community.

Housing in Hidden Valley was also provided for the dairy workers rent-free. The
older part of the dairy, which is no longer in use, had long housing structures partitioned
into units which provided running water and indoor toilets. There was one family per unit.
Current housing structures are small but sturdy single family dwellings within walking
distance from the now completely modernized dairy. The owner of the dairy lived on a
nearby hill overlooking the facility.

Although contact occurred between the Mexicans and Euro-Americans at work, and
residential patterns indicated they lived in close proximity of each other, social contact or
interaction did not occur very much. Socially, Mexicans tended to keep to themselves as a
result of language, religion, and cultural barriers. The school environment, however was a
forum in which the two groups interacted. According to Grant Bowler, former principal in
the valley from 1935 to 1976, migrant parents were seldom forced or encouraged to see
that their children attended school while on their traveling work circuit. Most Mexicans
from this area that were interviewed said they did go to school while on the migratory
circuit but that the quality of studying suffered tremendously. Moapa Valley's principal
was one individual who insisted migrant children attend school during their stay in the
valley. At the beginning of every harvesting season he visited the camps to tell the parents,
"Your kids are going to school, and if not, I'll be here with the sheriff" (Bowler 1988).
This was usually the initial contact Mexican parents had with the principal, consequently
this act established his position as an authoritative figure within the Mexican community.

He stated,

No one questioned me. I was the top dog. I was a bishop, stake president, and on the Water Board. I was in all these kinds of things, and so I just kind of had a free rein of what I thought would be the thing to do (Bowler 1988).

In fact, his administrative policies had a direct effect on the assimilation processes the non-English speaking children experienced.

Spanish was the first and only language that most Mexican children knew, making it a challenge for the principal, who did not speak Spanish nor had any Spanish speaking staff member, save for the school nurse who interpreted for him on his rounds to the camps, to see that these children were taught something while in the school he so strongly insisted they attend.

When the first trickle of Spanish-speaking children started to attend his school he kept them together, wherever he could find space. When the number grew to large proportions he felt the best way for them to assimilate would be to put them in with the rest of the English speaking children. He figured the children would be learning English within a week, even though none of the instructors nor Euro-American children spoke Spanish. As it turned out, this was the case for most, although a sense of alienation was unavoidable. When asked about friendships with Euro-American children, one Mexican identity individual replied:

The relationships were okay. I didn't feel we were being looked down upon or anything. But I think what we tried to do as Mexican boys and girls was to try not to get too involved. We were a little bit too nervous to get too close or too involved with the white people. In my personal experience I was afraid something about myself was going to have to be revealed sooner or later if I started to be his pal. He was going to want to come over, or I was going to be invited to go do something with them and I wasn't going to know how to conduct myself or wasn't going to know what's to be expected at that party or event or something, and I was going to be embarrassed to bring him to my house, because we lived in only two rooms (Personal interview 1988).
The principal targeted the young children to attend school. His personal feeling was that the older child, 14 or 15 years of age, would not be able to fit in a school situation. It was his opinion that these older children had not been attending school much due to their parents migratory work and would only be difficult to handle. "I couldn't get them to go to school even if I wanted to," he said, "they're not interested in school, why they're working by then like an adult." Because of this policy, some adolescents did slip through the cracks. One Mexican identity individual recalls at 15 not attending school because she "didn't have any clothes." The principal visited the home to find out why she had not been in school.

When I answered the knock at the door, he asked to see my parents. They weren't home but I invited him in, but he just waved his hand and said, "Oh that's alright." He said, "I noticed you had not been coming to school and I came to find out why," I told him it was because I didn't have any clothes. He just says, "Oh, alright," and walked away. I was stunned. I watched him go away. That's when I realized I hated white people. Why, why didn't he talk to my parents, do something to get me in school? [She broke into tears]. If he had told my parents to buy me clothes, they would have listened to him. You know, I never went back after that" (Personal interview 1988).

According to children of Mexican migrants, they wanted to attend school, but found it a discouraging experience academically. Lack of continuity in a particular area made learning difficult. Teachers showed concern but it sometimes wasn't enough to override the inner struggles the children experienced.

I remember in class, projects and things, I wasn't sure. I remember joining the scouts and being embarrassed over several things that we were instructed to do on an outing and be showing up at the wrong things because I didn't even know what they were talking about. But [two instructors] were probably two of the very few people that ever put their hand on your shoulder and gave it a squeeze and encouraged you. I think everybody else was, "let's move on, let's move on," and I know I can speak for all my friends, all migrant kids around my age, a year or two older or a year or two younger, there was no sense in trying, absolutely not. There was no catching up once you fall behind the first time. There was just no catching up once you were drowned in a bunch of instructions. My goodness, especially in subjects like mathematics; they were a nightmare for
us! I speak for everybody confidently because I remember, I remember it clearly... (Preciado 1988).

This individual eventually became well-educated, currently holds a computer-related job and has experienced upward mobility. Some Mexican students of migrant parents dropped out of high school because not only was it difficult to perform to the school’s expectations, but also their families needed them to work (Personal interview 1989). In spite of struggles, school was an important assimilation process that eventually led some second and third generation migrant children to make the valley their home, where they eventually experienced middle-class social status and upward mobility. Although school was discouraging for many, by the time some Mexican children were in high school, they eventually integrated into the community enough to enjoy the social and academic features that school can offer those who become involved in its structure. This gradual integration into the school environment however, did not begin to occur until after 1965. The problem for the children was two-fold. Migrant children were often not in the valley long enough to be accepted socially by the academic community, and also, Mexican parents often discouraged their children from getting too involved with the school system. One individual described it as the parents feeling it wasn’t their place in the community to be involved with "white" or "Mormon" activities (Personal interview 1988). Children of migrant parents consistently agreed education was not nurtured in the home; instead, work was emphasized. Frank Perez did become student body president in 1964; however, he was not from a migrant family. His family had settled in Hidden Valley, and his academic success was an exception in the Mexican community. Children from Hidden Valley were bussed to the Logandale and Overton schools. During the 50s these were among the very few Mexican families that resided in Moapa Valley year-round, consequently they did not experience disruptions to their education as did migrant children. But coming from a different cultural and linguistic background, they nevertheless experienced struggles. Frank Perez, a former dairy worker recalls his experience in 1953.
When we first came to Hidden Valley I was put into the second grade as a nine year old. I couldn't speak English. I went through some rough times. The kids made fun of me but eventually I developed English pretty well. By the seventh grade I was doing so well I was advanced to the ninth grade. My parents encouraged me a lot. They couldn't help me with my homework and they weren't involved with my school, but they gave me a lot of general support. I was self motivated to do my best. I became junior high and high school student body president, so I felt I was somebody (Perez 1990).

The principal did work hard to provide education to migrant children. He got the school and community involved in providing hot lunches for these children. He expressed bewilderment as to why parents would maintain migratory employment when their children seem to suffer academically. "It gets to be a Gypsy kind of thing," he stated. Although he had a concern for the migrant children's academic well being, he (and other instructors) did not have high aspirations for them. "They need to learn how to read and write and go on to high school and maybe onto a trade school, ...or university, if they're a bright one. They can even do that," he added (Bowler 1988). With the one exception of Frank Perez, Mexicans were not represented in honors for academics or sports in the local schools until after 1965. The principal attributed this to the fact Mexicans came to the valley to work, "not for its schools." Euro-American families, however, stressed education and nurtured the concept in their homes.

Most first and second generation families permanently residing in the valley spoke Spanish as their first tongue. It was the second generation that experienced the most conflict in regard to language. According to one Mexican, although they were not punished, speaking Spanish in school was very restricted (Personal interview 1989). The teachers' purpose was to encourage the learning and mastering of English. By the third generation most spoke English as their first and principal language. Speaking Spanish was one more characteristic that set Mexicans apart from the Euro-Americans. Many workers were either non-English speakers or spoke very little. Often communication between employer and employee had to be translated through the foreman. The language barrier made expressing grievances very difficult. Those who never learned English or never
learned it very well also had a difficult time integrating with the community. The principal, however, contributed to the use of the Spanish language in the valley by making one year of Spanish a mandatory requirement for all students in the secondary school. This did not occur until much after 1960 but it did enable young people to have an opportunity to communicate, even if on a limited basis, in the two predominate languages in the valley.

Social interaction between Mexicans was usually the Saturday night dance. One Japanese farm owner began the trend, and other Euro-American farm owners followed suit. They allowed their workers to clear the floor of the packing shed for dances. Traditional Mexican music was played on a record player and food was also Mexican traditional: frijoles, arroz, pollo. "No finger food, celery sticks, or dip" as one Mexican stated. Other forms of recreation were Spanish speaking movies shown every Sunday night at the movie house called Notrevo, Overton spelled backwards. Holidays such as Easter would sometimes include a pig roast and a tamale making event.

There were no clubs or social organizations for and by Mexicans through 1960. When a club was organized in 1966 its name demonstrated a conflict in cultural and political identity. Moapa Valley Mexicans identified themselves as Mexican, Latino, and Mexican American. There are no Chicanos in Moapa Valley. The term Spanish is frequently used interchangeably with the term Mexican by both Mexicans and non-Mexicans. Its usage is derived from the general belief of Moapa Valley residents that the term Mexican is derogatory. The principal, who was originally from Utah, indicated he learned that to call someone a Mexican was an insult, and so "out of respect, referred to them as Spanish" (Bowler 1988). Considering his influential position in the community, others followed his example.

At the urging of some Chamber of Commerce members, some Mexican leaders were encouraged to form a club of their own. When the founders of the Spanish American Club were trying to decide on a name for their organization, non-Mexican associates
strongly discouraged calling it the Mexican American Club. A principal founder of the club and Mexican community leader stated:

I made a mistake putting [the name] Spanish American Club because Spain, that's another country. I tell Bill [Perkins] I don't like it, but there was another lady, I forgot her name, but she said, "why don't you put Wetback-American?" I said, "what [do] you mean, that's not right, we're not wetbacks." So then I tried to put Mexican Americans, but they said, "no that don't look so right." I said, "well you know we are Mexicans." They said, "no that word not so good on the Club." I said "well okay, what ever you want to do, I'll go with it." So he said, "why don't you put Spanish American Club?" I said okay, so we put Spanish American Club. Spanish was a common language, so that's why we used that word (Garcia 1989).

Political participation was not apparent on a group scale. If there were labor grievances, one's recourse was to go to the foreman. He, however, was usually a long standing employee of the farmer and therefore did not necessarily represent the feelings of the workers. One reason the Spanish American Club was formed was to help Mexican residents have a voice in the community. Mexicans were complaining to the leaders of the Mexican community they weren't being treated right. But since the club was not started until 1966, principal Mexican members of the community would act as spokesman for the Mexicans. One spokesman, however, identified more with an American identity than with a Mexican identity, as demonstrated in the way he was persuaded to avoid the term Mexican in naming the club. Further, he calls himself a Mexican American, and stated,

They thought just because they were migrants they could go drop in to see the doctor [federal funds provided a doctor]. But they did not have an appointment. They would say he took migrant whites before them, but it was because they did not have an appointment and the whites did. I kept telling them, "You got to have an appointment" (Garcia 1989).

In 1957, they screamed discrimination and say the Mormons aren't treating them right. And then we had the first priest in the valley. They had a hearing. I told the father don't go, the people won't back you up. Nobody showed up, just me, the priest, and the nurse, with school officials. The hearing was about the kids not being treated right in school (Garcia 1989).
Mexicans complained but did not demonstrate confrontational behavior. No one recalls the migrant workers striking or making formal protests against unfair treatment. Even after 1960, the Civil Rights movement is not apparent in the valley. There was never any militancy, nor Chicanos. Mexicans from this valley who were interviewed, consistently expressed the presence of discriminatory behavior, but felt for the most part they were isolated cases at the individual level rather than representing a collective interethnic relationship. Most did not express a superordinate/subordinate relationship existed between Euro-Americans and Mexicans. Mexicans who had integrated into the community fairly well made statements such as, "The Anglos treated us really well" (Personal interviews).

Photographs 27 through 42 illustrate lifeways and portraiture of Mexicans in Moapa Valley. Both migrant and diary families are represented. Photographs that were taken within the last two years are included as they reflect both past and present conditions.
Photograph 29. For recreation, migrant workers often crowded in a dwelling with a television to observe 'the fights.' Lacking storage space, tenants hung clothing on walls and ceiling, c. 1955 (Moapa migrant worker collection).
Photograph 30. Lack of storage space and small living space was daily experience for the migrant worker. Note foot locker under bed and eating table at far right. This little boy slept in the main living area, as did most of the family, c. 1955 (Moapa migrant worker collection).
Photograph 33. "Las Barracas" (cabins or barracks), former migrant worker housing, Overton, Nevada. Originally was segmented into units for multi-family use during the 1950s. Now a single family dwelling owned by a Mexican family. Photograph by Corinne Escobar, 1989.
Photograph 38. Frank Perez, age 14, working and living in dairy at Hidden Valley, 1957 (photograph courtesy of Frank Perez).
Photograph 42. Quincenera, a special mass to bless a fifteen year old girl as she emerges into womanhood -- a tradition observed by Catholic Mexicans. This costly rite of passage is rare in the valley and did not occur prior to 1960. Overton, Nevada.
Photograph by Corinne Escobar, 1989.
CHAPTER EIGHT

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN
CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA

Melville, in her diachronic analysis of interethnic relations between Mexicans, Anglos, and Mexican Americans, identified four types of ethnicity that applied to the general population in the Southwest from the 1820s to the 1980s. These ethnicity types are: complementary, competitive, colonial, and confrontational. This thesis tests the applicability of Melville's four types of ethnicity to a specific population within the Southwest, namely Clark County. This area, however, had unique characteristics that did not exist in other parts of the Southwest. Southern Nevada, at the northwest fringe of what is considered the Southwest, had communities which remained relatively small and isolated from other Southwest cities through 1960. The Mexican identity population was a small percentage of the total population in Clark County, and was not native to the area. Other Southwest cities had significant, if not predominant, native Mexican identity populations. Also, the majority of Mexican immigrants went to cities in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California (Hall 1982:33), consequently, there was a continuous influx of Mexican culture into these areas in proportions never experienced in Clark County.

Because of these factors unique to Clark County, the historical stages delineated by Melville are modified to suit the purpose and time frame of this thesis. The nomenclature for this chronology refers to the dominant culture existing at the time.

STAGE I: PAIUTE, 800 B.P. TO 1829.

Prior to the arrival of Mexicans and later Euro-Americans, the Paiute, a native American group, inhabited the area as the dominant culture, exploiting the desert
environment minimally disturbed, if at all, by foreign intrusions. It would be inappropriate to assign a type of ethnicity while the Paiute were not interacting with other groups.

STAGE II: MEXICAN, 1829-1848.

Mexicans did not inhabit the area year round, but they exploited its resources for their own economic gain and physical survival as they traveled through southern Nevada as trade caravans. Their presence became an intrusive element in the Paiute environment. The interethnic relationship between Paiutes and Mexicans was colonial ethnicity. Mexican exploitation of resources included kidnapping or purchasing Paiutes for the slave trade between New Mexico and California (Edwards 1978:52). In contrast, the interethnic relationship with Euro-Americans was complementary ethnicity. Both were exploiting two distinct environments, yet were mutually benefiting from the trade system in Mexico's northern territory (the Southwest), of which the "Old Spanish Trail" was a part (Hafen and Hafen 1954; Edwards 1978:50-54). Interethnic relations between Euro-Americans and Mexicans in the Southwest in general were also complementary (Melville 1983:281). Anglo migration into Texas was encouraged and both groups viewed land resources as plentiful. Outgroup ascriptions by both Mexicans and Anglos were value-neutral. As the Anglo population grew, so did the competition for control over more and more territory. When Tejanos went to war in 1835-36 to secede from Mexico, confrontational ethnicity did not actually exist because Mexicans who referred to themselves as creole, and mestizo landowners also fought for Texas independence. But the consequence of the Texas war led to pejorative outgroup ascriptions by Euro-Americans and Mexicans, which only intensified at the conclusion of the Mexican War in 1848.

Other types of ethnicity also occurred in the Southwest. Colonial ethnicity was evident in the interaction between creoles, and their mestizo and Indian laborers, and was largely manifested through the hacienda system. It also existed between Anglo settlers and their African slaves (Melville 1983:281). Confrontational ethnicity existed between mestizo
populations and Anglo adventurers such as David Bowie, Davey Crockett and others who sought political superiority (Melville 1983:281).

In the Las Vegas area, there were no settlers competing for land unlike the rest of the Southwest. Mexican trading caravans, Euro-American adventurers, and U.S. government sponsored expeditions used the trail through Nevada unopposed. Interethnic relations between Mexicans and Euro-Americans in this area remained complementary through 1848 when it became United States territory. When the caravans discontinued after 1848, cultural continuity from Mexico and the Southwest into southern Nevada also ceased. The presence of Mexican identity did not reappear until 1904 with the completion of the San Pedro, Los Angeles, Salt Lake Railroad, and was not documented in the newspaper until 1905 with the founding of Las Vegas.


Period I: Consolidation, 1905-1929.

Early in this period migration was encouraged by some industries. This normally indicates competitive ethnicity, but this would imply an equitable relationship existed where both groups had equal access to resources. Other factors demonstrate a colonial relationship existed between 1905 and mid-1920s. Their specialized environment was restricted to resources available to those of the lower social strata. The majority of Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals were relegated to menial jobs. Mexicans were highly represented in railroad and mining industries as laborers. The relationship between employers and employees shares similarities of the feudal-like hacienda system that existed in Mexico. Particularly in communities outside Las Vegas, workers were allowed to live on company property rent-free. They depended on food and supplies through the company commissary, and essentially depended on the company to provide for their every need since working for it often meant living in isolated areas. Although rent-free housing appeared to be a benefit, it actually created further dependency on the company, and encouraged the
acceptance of low wages—a system that served well to subjugate employees. For many workers, this type of relationship with an employer existed well into the 50s.

Evidence of disparity in wages between early Mexican and Euro-American railroad workers and protests against "non-white" promotions, indicate Euro-Americans were capable of limiting Mexicans access to environmental resources. Withholding advancement opportunities in an industry highly represented by Mexicans such as the railroad, caused Mexicans to fall farther behind Euro-Americans economically, and inhibited them from becoming competitive. An attitude of refusing to train Mexicans indicates Euro-Americans opposed assimilation. Often Mexicans were perceived as not wanting to assimilate (Hoffman 1976:19), however, in many cases they were not permitted the opportunity, as for example, in the early days of Clark County history.

Euro-American opposition to Mexican assimilation is further indicated by newspaper accounts which demonstrated Euro-American outgroup ascription was value-pejorative. We/they dichotomization is apparent from the Euro-American perspective, and was not as a result of mere cultural differences, but also physical differences. Newspaper articles indicate Euro-Americans considered Mexicans "non-white," which reflected a basic we/they attitude existing throughout the Southwest (Melville 1983:28). The newspaper data did not indicate outgroup ascription by Mexicans. According to Melville's theory, if a colonial ethnicity exists, Mexican self ascription would be value pejorative while outgroup ascription value positive. A woman who attended grammar school in Las Vegas during the 20s recalls,

You know, people then didn't like Mexicans. let's face it. We went to school and everything but they called you 'Mexicans.' They'd find something. But when they called me that, I would fight like heck (Chavez 1990).

Ingroup and outgroup ascriptions toward Mexicans were value-pejorative, thus Mexicans would recognize the advantages of assimilation, or to "pass" through cultural boundaries
and be more like Euro-Americans. Not being allowed to do so made assimilation difficult. In addition, asymmetrical power relationship existed. Most Mexicans in Clark County were not U.S. citizens and could not vote, and many could not speak English which deprived them of a political voice and further hindered assimilation. Either Mexicans were not aware power was an issue in their relationship with Euro-Americans, perceived they were powerless, or sensed it was not in their best economic interest to protest for better pay and better jobs. Considering many left Mexico between 1907 to 1920 as refugees (Hall 1982), the latter supposition is most likely. Although Mexican labor was needed but not accepted culturally, Mexicans in Clark County did not experience unsanctioned "frontier justice," as practiced by the Texas Rangers (Melville 1983:283). Elsewhere in the Southwest, Texas particularly, Mexicans were lynched, shot in the streets, and deprived of land and civil rights (Acuña 1983:25).

By the mid-1920s a small constituency of Mexicans established themselves in the community and experienced the rudiments of competitive ethnicity by owning their own businesses. Prior to this time the majority of Mexicans were transient laborers. Now, Mexican families were moving into Clark County and there was a collective increase in the ability to speak English. The rise of a Mexican middle class was beginning, although they were still behind Euro-Americans in quality of jobs and standard of living. This small nucleus of rising middle class Mexicans consolidating with the dominant culture parallels with a general trend in the Southwest (Melville 1983:283), which also indicated middle class Mexicans developed a strong depreciative class attitude toward working Mexican laborers that was easily transformed into colonial ethnicity between middle and lower class Mexicans. Because of this attitude, middle class Mexicans adopted a strategy of passing to emphasize their socio-cultural distance from poor, and what they deemed as culturally inferior, Mexicans (Melville 1983:283).

In Clark County, there is no strong evidence the rising Mexican middle class shared the same class attitudes as those elsewhere in the Southwest, but there is evidence of a
conflict in identity. Group cohesiveness was demonstrated through Mexican Independence celebrations, yet evidence that Mexicans integrating with the community referred to themselves as Spanish indicates a contradiction in identity was occurring. A small group of Mexicans were calling themselves Spanish, yet were celebrating the day Mexico defeated Spanish rule.

Period II: Depression, WW II, 1930-1949.

The stock market crash of 1929 created intense feelings of competition for jobs between Mexicans and Euro-Americans throughout the United States. Migration was opposed to the extreme reverse: forced repatriation. Although the term repatriation infers a voluntary process, Mexicans were subjected to intimidation to "voluntarily" repatriate (Hoffman 1976). Nationwide, these conditions contributed to the maintenance of colonial ethnicity between these two groups. Both were competing for limited jobs and relief funds. The power structure was such, that Mexicans were forced to relinquish their exploitation of these resources. In the Clark County area, however, there is no strong evidence repatriation occurred or was even an issue. The Mexican population was not significant in comparison to other Southwestern and Mid-western states; therefore, competition for jobs and relief funds was not as intense between the two groups as elsewhere. However, there is sufficient evidence showing covert discriminatory acts and attitudes against Mexicans existed--the same attitudes that existed elsewhere in which repatriation and discriminatory acts were violent. There were vocal and aggressive protests against Mexican labor in Clark County, despite the majority of Mexicans being consigned to menial labor. Further protests were voiced at the mere possibility Mexicans might obtain employment in areas of potential advancement such as casino jobs. Newspaper data indicates Euro-American outgroup ascription of Mexicans remained value-pejorative.

Although the majority of Mexicans continued to be involved in a colonial ethnicity, more Mexicans were achieving independent status economically through entrepreneurial
activities, a trend that began in the mid-twenties nationwide. The only documented civic participation within the community continued to be the organization of Mexican Independence Day celebrations. These few trail blazers began the impetus of changing their asymmetrical power relationship toward a more competitive ethnicity although it was a very slow growing movement. A major setback to this trend was the effect World War II had on the agricultural and industrial labor market. A dearth in American labor caused the United States to reconsider the merits of inexpensive Mexican labor. The federal bracero program was created to bring in a temporary Mexican work force. Unable to bring their families, these workers were contracted to do a specific job for a specific wage during a specified amount of time. Being a labor commodity, they were unable to change jobs, negotiate for better pay or seek opportunities for improvement—at least not legally. Nor were they permitted the usual legal protection afforded U.S. workers. Although these Mexicans were grateful for the work, even accepting their inferior status (Melville 1983:284), the bracero program is an example of colonial ethnicity at its best. The program also revitalized the stereotype of the Mexican as a laborer.

Many Mexicans came to Clark County under the bracero program, particularly to work in the fields. Their relationship with Americans, including working and living conditions, exemplified colonial ethnicity as it did elsewhere in the United States.


A positive result of the war was that Mexican Americans recruited into the armed forces found, for the most part, military life to be an egalitarian experience. Upon returning home they refused to accept the old order of things. Many obtained a college education through GI benefits, enabling them to enter the middle-class. Experiencing competitive ethnicity while in the military helped to transform attitudes that eventually led to a confrontational ethnicity when they returned to civilian life in the Southwest (Melville 1983:284). In Clark County there is some indication Mexicans did serve in the military.
Judging by the lack of confrontational behavior in Clark County during the 50s through 1960, there were evidently insufficient numbers returning from the military to have a noticeable effect, or the need to confront inequitable conditions was not recognized.

Rural Mexicans in Moapa Valley experienced a persistent colonial ethnicity relationship with Euro-Americans in spite of the Civil Rights Movement after 1960. There is no indication whatever that the farm workers participated in the historic unionization of farm laborers throughout the Southwest, although they probably still reaped the benefits of this movement that were manifested in migrant worker programs that provided medical care, child care, and better representation in Congress. In spite of these benefits, only a few permanent Mexican residents in the valley have risen to competitive ethnicity during the 70s.

Through 1960 farm labor was the only available work for Mexicans in Moapa Valley and is perhaps the only reason (save for the railroad) they resided there. This is not the result of an ethnic delineation of labor but indicates the agricultural industry was the main source of employment in the valley. Dairy and migrant workers that made Moapa Valley their home base, continued to depend on the employer for non-rent housing. The fact housing rentals were not available in the valley further prevented independence and inhibited any visible indication of upward mobility as migrant housing had a tendency to be sub-standard. Under these circumstances Mexicans could not compete for better jobs (through 1960 they did not exist), and even if they made sufficient wages to support themselves (and many did as migrant laborers), they continued to live in poor conditions which negatively affected both ingroup and outgroup ascriptions toward Mexicans. These factors maintained asymmetrical power relations, and kept Mexicans in the lower social strata no matter how well Mexicans claimed the Euro-Americans treated them, or how well the Euro-Americans regarded their Mexican workers and neighbors.

Fragmented education further encouraged a colonial ethnicity. Those that chose to overcome the difficulties they experienced in school and obtain an academic credential
managed to achieve competitive ethnicity. Better jobs became available to them both in and out of the valley. This trend, however, absolutely did not manifest in the valley before 1970. By this time the job market in the valley diversified and Mexican families had resided there fifteen to twenty years—the time needed for second and third generation children to become educated and demonstrate an improvement on the conditions experienced by their parents.

Urban Mexicans in the Las Vegas area were achieving more competitive ethnicity than their rural counterparts, despite incidents of discrimination. Mexican American middle-class entrepreneurs were involved in the founding of Club Latino-Americano, whose primary function was to promote commercial enterprises. They avoided the term Mexican, still showing a dichotomization existed between "Latins" and "Americans." These Mexicans did not respond to violations of civil rights with confrontational behavior which indicates they did not perceive political resources as a defining factor in their relationship with Euro-Americans. Attempting to pass was the method of integration, and if this was not entirely possible due to biological diacritics, these Mexicans sought validation through an organization that promoted American cultural ideals and avoided negative inferences to "being Mexican." So strong was the desire to pass and integrate into the community that the Mexican middle-class did not challenge inequitable conditions experienced by them or the lower-class members of their group. Many middle class individuals interviewed for this study refused to allow publication of experiences that might offend their Euro-American friends or business associates, or did so at the request of anonymity. So strong was the colonial ethnicity among poor Mexicans, they were powerless (and leaderless) to confront the dominant group with unfair treatment, and perhaps aspired to quietly pass as well. These two types of interethnic relationships, colonial and competitive, remained static and predominate in Clark County. A more thorough examination of historical sources such as newspaper articles between 1940 and
1960 is needed to better understand the social and political relationship experienced between Mexicans and other ethnic groups in Clark County.

Some confrontational behavior existed within the academic community in the 70s (Miranda 1990b). Confrontational ethnicity emerged in the Southwest during the early 60s. The Chicano movement, in its militant fashion, awoke the consciousness of the Mexican masses, declaring that passing was not the only viable goal for the Mexican American. This movement was not apparent in Clark County on the same scale as the rest of the Southwest, perhaps as a result of a relatively small, and isolated Mexican population in Clark County.

Melville's four types of ethnicity implies that unless two groups are exploiting two different specialized environments, complementary ethnicity is impossible. Competitive ethnicity is the most equitable relationship between two groups vying for the same limited resources. Both groups are in a position to maintain equitable power and access to resources. But because competition implies power struggles it is an inherently unstable relationship that in its final stage must give way to a colonial or confrontational relationship. The majority of Mexican identity individuals in Clark County remain in, or are at the fringe, of colonial ethnicity (Miranda 1987). As Hispanic leaders demonstrate more confrontational (but not necessarily militant) behavior, the Mexican masses may follow suit. In addition, today's Mexican Americans, who have knowledge of the legal system and enjoy competitive ethnicity, would more likely resort to confrontational behavior rather than regress to colonial ethnicity should their equitable position be challenged.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated the four types of ethnicity can be applied to both general and specific populations in the Southwest. It provides a framework in which interactive behavior between two or more ethnic groups can be effectively described. What it does not allow for is the effect skin color and other biological diacritics, have on
integrating into a dominant culture where skin color historically has been a significant factor in interethnic relations. Physical characteristics play a role in colonial, confrontational, and competitive behaviors, but are not addressed in this framework. The four ethnicities are applicable to any interacting culture groups in the world, however, when color plays an important distinguishing factor between the two groups, there should be an allowance for it in the theoretical model. Despite this one weakness, the four types of ethnicity concept has shown itself to be an effective and simple framework in which to describe and identify the interethnic relations between those of Mexican identity and Euro-Americans in Clark County, Nevada.
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