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Abstract:

Much of the research on the generation of Mexican Americans who came of age during World War II has characterized that cohort’s orientation as culturally and politically assimilationist. A survey of the state of Mexican American commercial theatre in San Antonio during the period complicates this picture. Although flag-waving patriotism and strident support of the war effort were important themes on the city’s stage, San Antonio’s Spanish-speaking audiences did not abandon their cultural identity. Instead, the military alliance between the U.S. and Mexico against the Axis powers made the symbols of Mexican exile nationalism that had developed during the 1920s and 1930s available to the war effort, and fundraising techniques originally developed for mutual aid societies were channeled into war bonds and outright military recruitment. At the same time, newly assertive Mexican American entrepreneurs moved into the business of recruiting touring acts from Mexico, challenging the dominance of Anglo impresarios and the situation of internal colonialism that had reigned in the industry. Although much of the content of theatrical entertainment of the day reflected an increasing militarization of Mexican American claims to U.S. citizenship, there were counter-currents that used grotesque humor to challenge the disembodied loyalties and antipathies that made industrial-scale warfare so distinctly awful.