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The Ku Klux Klan and their Influence on the Education of Mexicans in Kansas City, Kansas, 1922-1925.

This article examines the development of education for Mexicans in Kansas City from 1922-25 and the role of Ku Klux Klan members and sympathizers. The Kansas City Kansas School District provided segregated education for Mexican students after the Anglo residents of Argentine, Armourdale, and Rosedale threatened to obstruct integration by resorting to threats of violence. Significant numbers of those residents were members of the Ku Klux Klan. School board member Dr. Karl C. Haas, Judge Don C. McCombs, and County Attorney Harry Hayward, were all significant Klan actors in segregation efforts and exemplified the public legitimacy of the Klan in this time period.¹ Newspaper accounts reconstructed how this segregated system developed, and were influenced by Klan members in positions of responsibility in editor and advertising, who never made any connections between Klan beliefs and segregation efforts.² Klan sympathizers Dr. David E. Clopper and Assistant Superintendent of schools, Frank L. Schlagle, had significant influence in the development and maintenance of segregated education. In comparison to other Kansas communities, the development in Kansas City was unhampered by the lack of legal statutes, and demonstrated the rigid nature of racial separation in Kansas City.³

Two key events in 1924 and 1925 galvanized the Anglo community against Mexican school children. In the Major Hudson case, objections to four children attending school with white students on September 11, 1924 generated a "miniature race riot" in the neighborhood of Rosedale.⁴ During the fall

¹ "Ku Klux Klan Membership Roster," November 13, 1922, Henry J. Allen Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.: This list contains over 900 names of members of the Wyandotte Klan No.5; Timothy D. Rives, The Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City, Kansas, 1921-1930. Master's thesis. Emporia State University, 1995.

² Managing editor Carl E White, and George G. Akerstrom and Herbert F. Barclay in advertising appeared in this list; Rives, 37.

³ Rubén Donato and Jarrod Hanson, "'In These Towns, Mexicans Are Classified as Negroes': The Politics of Unofficial Segregation in the Kansas Public Schools, 1915-1935." American Educational Research Journal 54 (April 2017): 53S-74S.

⁴ "Solves Racial Problem," Kansas City Kansan, 17 September 1924, 10.

of 1925, four students who attended Argentine High School that fall were removed by their parents due to agitation and threats by Anglo parents in what is known as the Alvarado case.⁵ The Mexican community organized to protest and resist attempts to put them in a segregated structure and achieved minor success. As undocumented immigrants without access to the court system, they agitated for change by lobbying the Mexican Consulate to intervene with Federal and local officials on their behalf. While parental support for a year-long boycott of segregated options appeared to be effective in the Alvarado case, the links with the rise and fall of the influence of the KKK present a new explanation. The KKK's rise in influence corresponds directly with an increase in segregation and their fall with the eventual option of a high school education for Mexican students in an integrated school with white students in the Argentine district of Kansas City.

In this study I will provide evidence that education for Mexicans in Kansas and in the Southwest reveals that the education provided in three particular neighborhoods of Kansas City during 1916-1951 was unique in these areas: duration, in that the period of segregation was longer by age group than in other communities; lack of applied educational theories, in that the linguistic abilities of Mexican-American students were of minor consideration in justifying segregation; and race-based, in that the overriding concern of Anglo parents was that Mexicans constituted an undesirable racial group and therefore should remain separated. The significant membership and activities of the KKK in these neighborhoods, including threatening Superintendent of Schools Mathew Pearson in 1922, and threats of violence from parents in 1924 ensured that inequality continued.⁶ Members of the KKK were instrumental at every step of the history of segregated education for Mexican students. The

⁵ Loren L. Taylor, The Consolidated Ethnic History of Wyandotte County. (Kansas City, Kans.: Kansas City Kansas Ethnic Council, 2000), 474.

⁶ Timothy D. Rives, The Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City, Kansas, 1921-1930. Master's thesis. Emporia State University, 1995; "Solves Racial Problem," 10.

membership roster of Klan members in Wyandotte County exposed the motivation of public figures in a way that has not been presented in the primary or secondary accounts of the history of this time.

The link between activities of the KKK against Mexicans has been noted throughout the Southwest during the early 1920s. F. Arturo Rosales documented incidents of violence and cross burnings directed at Mexicans in Arizona, California, Oklahoma, and Texas.⁷ Rubén Donato's study of Colorado documented extensive harassment of Mexican communities by the KKK, as well as their attempts to influence educational policy via membership on school boards.⁸ Rives provided the fullest account of Klan activities in Kansas City, Kansas, but found no direct connections between the Klan and their campaigns against the Mexican community. He did note that King Kleagle George T. McCarron, who led the Wyandotte Klan No. 5, worked with civic leader Dr. K.C. Haas, who would be a key protagonist in the development of a segregated school for Mexican students.⁹

Historical Background and Literature Review

Railroad companies looked to Mexico for cheap labor after 1900, but the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the years of unrest that followed discouraged repatriation, and single Mexican men looked for other work in the winter.¹⁰ In the Argentine district of Kansas City in 1915, two hundred of the three hundred Mexicans living there worked for the railroad, 12 percent were women and another 12 percent were children. By 1920 families increased in the Argentine section. They lived in boxcars provided by the Santa Fe Railroad, or in boarding houses that catered to Mexicans, and a few families lived in actual homes.¹¹ The establishment of a permanent Mexican community attracted much more attention from

⁷ F. Arturo Rosales, *¡Pobre Raza!: Violence, Justice, and Mobilization among Mexican Lindo Immigrants, 1900-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 25, 72-73, 91, 112, 114-115.

⁸ Rubén Donato, *Mexicans and Hispanos in Colorado Schools and Communities, 1920-1960*. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007), 51, 122.

⁹ Rives, 2, 12.

¹⁰ Juan R. García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press), 6.

¹¹ Valerie M. Mendoza, "The Creation of a Mexican Immigrant Community in Kansas City, 1890-1930." (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 142-143.

Anglo residents than other immigrant groups, such as recently settled Croatians and Poles. The main difference between Mexican and Eastern European groups was racial.

The Anglo community in Kansas City in the early twentieth century welcomed European immigrants to take jobs that earlier immigrant groups such as the Irish and Germans no longer wanted. Americanization programs popular in the United States during this time were also active in the city. The school district supported night schools for the adults, encouraged the pursuit of American citizenship, and educated their non-English speaking children. When faced with the same obligations for the children of Mexicans, race became a great concern. Anglos could not envision accepting Mexicans as their future equals in society, and took the same steps to exclude them as they had with African-Americans.

The main historical debate among scholars of the subject of segregated education for Mexicans revolved around determining why educators agreed that it was appropriate and needed. Historians Meyer Weinberg and Gilbert Gonzalez maintained that the segregated education of Mexican children was part of a national educational policy, and not due to local pressure.¹² The evidence gathered for this study, however, demonstrates that pressure for segregated education arose primarily at the local level, and was not guided by national educational practice.

The scholarly literature on Mexicans in Kansas is growing but not extensive. Only one scholarly article considered exclusively the issue of education for Mexicans, as has been done for states in the Southwest.¹³ Monographic studies of Mexicans in the Midwest have appeared in the last few years, but only

¹² Gilbert G. Gonzalez, Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation. (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1990), 21; Meyer Weinberg, A Chance to Learn: The History of Race and Education in the United States. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1.

¹³ See the previously cited article, Donato and Hanson, "In These Towns, Mexicans Are Classified as Negroes': The Politics of Unofficial Segregation in the Kansas Public Schools, 1915-1935."; for a study of segregated education for Mexican-Americans in Texas, see Guadalupe San Miguel, "Let All of Them Take Heed": Mexican-Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); for California, see Charles Wollenberg, All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975. (Berkeley:

two dissertations and one self-published book have been written exclusively about Mexicans in Kansas. Judith Laird's dissertation on the Argentine community provided the bare facts of education for Mexican children in the community. Valerie Mendoza's dissertation provided information on the attitudes of Mexican parents on education in the Kansas City metropolitan area, but did not attempt to trace the history of education for Mexicans. Cynthia Mines' work covered Mexicans generally in Kansas, but did not cover education.¹⁴

Initial Development of Segregated Education

This article focuses on three neighborhoods located within Kansas City, where Mexican immigrants and their descendants settled. Argentine was the neighborhood that spearheaded the drive for segregated education. The Santa Fe railroad was the major employer in Argentine, and employed the majority of the Mexican workers who lived there.¹⁵ Armourdale was situated across the Kansas River to the north of Argentine. Investigators who studied Armourdale in 1918, concluded that its citizens were almost exclusively "an industrial class of people" and "and of the best American stock," because 90 percent were native born.¹⁶ Rosedale was situated directly to the east of Argentine, on the southern side of

University of California Press, 1976) and Gilbert Gonzalez, "Segregation of Mexican Children in a Southern California City: The Legacy of Expansionism and the American Southwest," Western Historical Quarterly 16 (January 1985): 55-76; for Colorado, see Rubén Donato, Mexicans and Hispanos in Colorado Schools and Communities, 1920-1960. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007); for a study of the entire Southwest, see Gilbert G. Gonzalez, Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation. (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1990); for a significant review of the education of Mexican-Americans see Meyer Weinberg, A Chance to Learn: The History of Race and Education in the United States. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and for a chapter on segregated schools for Mexican-Americans in a single community in California, see Martha Menchaca, The Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization and Discrimination in California. (Austin: University of Texas, Press 1995).

¹⁴ Judith A.F. Laird, "Argentine, Kansas: The Evolution of a Mexican American Community, 1905-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1975); Mendoza, "The Creation of a Mexican Immigrant Community."; Cynthia Mines, Riding the Rails to Kansas: The Mexican Immigrants. (S.l.: Mines, 1980).

¹⁵ Donald H. Simmons, ed., Centennial History of Argentine, Kansas City, Kansas, 1880-1980: includes the History of Argentine, Turner, and Shawnee Township. (Kansas City, Kans.: Simmons Funeral Home, 1980), 16. Since the focus of this study is on Kansas City, Kansas, "Kansas City" will refer to the Kansas side unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁶ Taylor, The Consolidated Ethnic History of Wyandotte County, 60; University of Kansas. Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Armourdale, a City within a City: The Report of a Social Survey of Armourdale, a Community of

the Kansas River. After the establishment of the first railroad in 1865, industries such as the Rosedale Coal & Mining Company, Thor Iron Works, and the Kansas Rolling Mills developed to supply needed materials.¹⁷

These three neighborhoods shared a similar history of development. All had established industries that required unskilled labor, and the initial work force was provided by various European ethnic groups. In the 1870s and 1880s, the principal groups were Irish, German, Scandinavian, English, Scots, and Welsh. In the 1890s, eastern European groups such as the Polish, Croatian, Serbian, and Slovenian filled the need for industrial labor.¹⁸

The normal pattern of settlement in the Midwest saw Mexican communities developing in areas dominated for many years by Anglos. As Mexican immigration to the United States increased following the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, immigrants traveled further north to find work. As they became established in an area, incidents of discrimination intensified and institutional racism developed. Mexican school children were educated in separate facilities throughout Kansas, beginning in the 1920s.¹⁹ In Kansas, the Mexicans were the immigrants; however, the Anglo response to them was the same as in Texas, where they had been an indigenous population. At various times, particularly during times of recession and the Great Depression, Mexicans were perceived as an economic threat to the white population in Kansas.²⁰ But in the post-World War I period, when prejudice was at its height in the Argentine, race, as determined by skin color, was the overriding reason behind Anglo parents' insistence that their children not be educated with Mexican students in Kansas City. While not minimizing the importance of economic and political factors, one scholar has asserted that "racism is

12,000 People Living in the Industrial District of Kansas City, Kansas. (Topeka, Kans.: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1919), 8, 12, 90.

¹⁷ Margaret Landis, "Winding Valley and the Craggy Hillside": a History of the City of Rosedale. (Kansas City, Kans.: Landis, 1976), 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, 65-68.

¹⁸ Taylor, The Consolidated Ethnic History, 64, 72-73.

¹⁹ Juan R. Garcia, Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 122.

²⁰ Judith A. F. Laird, "Argentine, Kansas: the Evolution of a Mexican American Community, 1904-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1975), 203.

also personal and social in origin.” Racism is a “learned behavior, passed from generation to generation,” which has been applied to all nonwhite groups.²¹ This would point yet again to a strong, psychological response as the fundamental element responsible for responses to people perceived to be of a different race. The motivations of economics only served to reinforce and inculcate racism against Mexicans.

Emory Bogardus, a sociologist who wrote extensively about the Mexican community in the United States, asserted that in such places as Kansas, where Mexican labor was needed, “friendly attitudes toward them flourish.”²² Subsequent studies of Mexican communities displayed no friendliness on the part of Kansas Anglos. Various scholars of the Mexican experience demonstrated that despite the low numbers of Mexicans in Kansas, compared to the Southwestern states, discrimination against Mexicans was common. Jim Crow-style segregation was prevalent throughout Kansas and extended into many areas of public life. Mexicans were forced into segregated sections in housing, movie theaters, parks, churches, hospitals, work facilities, and trains. They were completely excluded from swimming pools, gymnasiums, and business establishments such as funeral homes, barbershops, restaurants, and many types of retail stores.²³ Segregated education was also common, with some variations, and as the institutionalized form of racism toward Mexicans, was the element needed to create “cradle-to-grave” discrimination.²⁴

²¹ Peter Loewenberg, “The Psychology of Racism,” in The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America, Gary B. Nash and Richard Weiss, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), 186.

²² Emory Stephen Bogardus, Immigration and Race Attitudes (New York: D.C. Heath, 1928), 163.

²³ Robert Oppenheimer, “Acculturation or Assimilation: Mexican Immigrants in Kansas, 1900 to World War II,” Western Historical Quarterly 16 (October 1985): 429-448; Laird, “Argentine, Kansas: the Evolution of a Mexican American Community, 1904-1940”, 192; Irene Ruiz Interviews, Magdalena Rodriguez; Manuel Gamio, The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant: Autobiographic Documents Collected by Manuel Gamio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 176-177; “Trabajo y Cultura,” slide/tape show. (Kansas City, Kans.: Vertical file, Argentine Public Library), 11.

²⁴ Esperanza Amayo, personal interview, November 18, 2000.

Kansas City Anglos applied their constructions of race in various ways. Through newspapers, law enforcement officials, school boards, and parents, they articulated their racism. When pressed with a need to justify their actions, they provided examples that confirmed perceptions of Mexicans as an unworthy race. When initial demands for segregated education for all Mexican students were not met, Anglos lobbied for and built a case for its justification.

It would be difficult to discuss education for Mexicans without describing the atmosphere in which the “burden” of educating these students was perceived by the Anglo community. Local newspapers of the twenties and earlier, created impressions of particular races or ethnic groups by printing the news and especially the crimes committed by these non-Anglo groups. The criminal element was thus often allowed to represent the group to Anglo society.²⁵ In the Argentine and Kansas City newspapers of the period from 1916-1922 this practice was very evident.²⁶

In an editorial, possibly written by E.W. Wells, Ku Klux Klan member and editor of The Republic, the link between race, hygiene, and education was made explicit. The author began by asserting that the “race problem” was more serious in the United States than in any other country of the world, and Argentine, like other towns, was not exempt:

To require little children coming out of the clean and well-kept homes of the town to enter into close school room association with other children who are filthy and unclean, is not a fair thing to do. But it is also true that this condition is not only found among colored races but among the white race as well. And filth is filth whether the skin be brown, black, or white. The big problem is a problem of sanitation.²⁷

²⁵ Bogardus, 70.

²⁶ For detailed descriptions of these newspaper accounts, see Robert Cleary, “The Education of Mexican-Americans in Kansas City, Kansas, 1916-1951” (master’s thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2002). A sampling of citations is revealing: “Kansas Mexicans are Buying Arms,” The Republic (Kansas City, Kans.), 29 June 1916, 2; “Not Cream at All,” Kansas City Kansan, 27 May 1920, 1; “Say Little Mexico is Troublesome,” Argentine Republic, 27 March 1919, 1; “Caught Stealing Chickens,” Argentine Republic, 19 April 1919, 2.

²⁷ “Ku Klux Klan Membership Roster,” 3; “The Race Problem,” The Republic, (Kansas City, Kans.), 30 November 1917, 4.

Since African-Americans, as the “black” race, were safely segregated from elementary to high school throughout the Kansas City Kansas school district, it was obvious that the “brown” race, Mexicans, were of great concern to the writer. But the problem was redefined from one of race to one of hygiene. Wells asked whether or not teachers had the authority to exclude “filthy” children, and exhorted teachers to exclude children with “vermin visibly in the open,” a condition which perhaps would apply more to one race than another.²⁸ The editorial clearly depicted popular race thinking at the time: that Argentine Mexicans were a separate non-white race and their hygiene was a serious problem for the greater community. While adult Mexicans could be effectively excluded from Anglos in public life, the means to accomplish this for Mexican children would remain a controversial subject for the next nine years.

A report of the meeting of the Seventh Ward Improvement Association of Argentine appeared in the same edition of the newspaper and raised the same concerns:

One of the interesting questions brought up for discussion was the question of the admission of Mexican children from the families of illiterate Mexicans to the schools with the children from the white families. The children, who were not objected to on the account of their color [sic] but because of uncleanliness in person and dress. This subject led to a warm discussion and question was finally dropped without any action.²⁹

That Mexican parents were illiterate in English and also Spanish was possible, but in this context the modifier appeared as merely a slur, as if to confirm Mexican inferiority.³⁰ Studies on language learning have shown that Mexican children, just like foreign children from non-English speaking countries, learned English quickly in the United States.³¹ Any implication that the Mexican children were likewise

²⁸ “The Race Problem,” 4.

²⁹ “Big Feed is Planned,” *The Republic, (Kansas City, Kans.)*, 30 November 1917, 1

³⁰ Larry G. Rutter, “Mexican Americans in Kansas: a Survey and Social Mobility Study, 1900-1970” (master’s thesis, Kansas State University, 1972), 57. This assumption was also expressed in the title of a congressional hearing. See U.S. Congress. House, Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Hearings on the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican laborers, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 1920.

³¹ México. Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Memoria de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Vol. 2 (México: La Secretaria, 1931), 1790. This report described one study in Arizona that found that Mexican students learned English in one year.

illiterate, and that this was an educational problem, was not pursued in subsequent discussions. It is clear that the overriding concern was one of “uncleanliness” and hygiene.

The world-wide influenza epidemic of 1918 focused further attention on Mexicans in Argentine. In a report in the Argentine Republic entitled, “The Influenza Situation,” two columns appeared: one for the “Mexican Situation” and one for the rest of Argentine and Armourdale. The writer reported that the Mexican population had increased, and occupied the box cars provided to them by the Santa Fe railroad, yet “were making big money and are able to provide themselves with good houses could they be found.”³² This was an odd statement on two counts. Mexican laborers were employed in Argentine precisely because they would take the low-paying jobs that Anglos would not. Their salaries could not be considered “big” by any means.³³ Mexicans experienced residential segregation as well, a fact that the author acknowledged when he observed that there was “strenuous objection” to Mexican purchases of houses in the city. One ad that appeared in the Argentine paper in 1921, listed a proper as “suitable for Colored/Mexican.”³⁴ Mexicans found themselves in a difficult situation, encountering discrimination if they tried to move out of the boxcar settlement, but blamed for the spread of influenza because of their unsanitary living conditions in the Santa Fe yards.

The Santa Fe Railroad responded to the epidemic by setting up boxcars as a makeshift hospital and provided nurses for Mexican workers. Heat was provided to the boxcars, an amenity never provided to standard Mexican housing of this type. A local doctor, David E. Clopper, in his position as physician for the Santa Fe Railroad, gave talks to workers on hygiene during the epidemic.³⁵ He would later become,

³² “The Influenza Situation,” Argentine Republic, 18 October 1918, 1.

³³ Valerie M. Mendoza, “The Creation of a Mexican Immigrant Community in Kansas City, 1890-1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 68.

³⁴ Kansas City Republic, 29 April 1921, 7.

³⁵ “Carlins & Couplin’s,” Argentine Republic, 25 October 1918, 5; City Directory of Kansas City, Kansas, Kansas City, Mo.: Hoyer Directory Co., 1920, 1925, 1929, 1932; “Loses All of the Toes on One Foot,” Argentine Republic, 14 June 1918, 1. This article described an accident to a “small Mexican boy” and named Clopper as the attending doctor.

in his role as a prominent community advocate, a central figure in the creation of an exclusive school for Mexicans in Argentine.

All Mexican children were educated in basement rooms in the Emerson school in Argentine and the John J. Ingalls School in Armourdale when classes resumed in the fall of 1918.³⁶ The initial segregation of Mexican students in basement rooms was sufficient to placate the fears of parents of Argentine school children. The student-teacher ratio of one-to-forty and the grouping of all eight grades together regardless of proficiency in English established a structure of inferior, race-based segregation for all Mexican students.³⁷

Racist Ideology and KKK Influence in Kansas City

Ideas on race did not exist in a vacuum in Argentine. Eugenics, or Social Darwinism, was a popular movement in the early twentieth century. Heredity was the key component for those thinkers concerned with American social progress. The increasing racial diversity of the United States population created concerns that racial mixing would diminish American “stock.” Dr. Clopper, in a talk on education with the local Hawthorne Club, presented his views on eugenics, stressing that “we need not more babies but beter [sic] babies.” The reporter went on to mention that Clopper believed that laws would eventually “prevent reproduction by unfit individuals and thereby eliminate much crime and insanity.”³⁸ The same Dr. Clopper, who lectured Santa Fe workers on hygiene and local mothers on supervising their children’s play, also appeared to hold the views of Social Darwinists of the times. While he left no testimony verifying his exact role, the written record indicates that he attended meetings and

³⁶ “State Officials into Mexican Pupil Row,” Kansas City Kansan, 17 October 1925, 5.

³⁷ “Emerson School,” Argentine Republic, 13 February 1920, 6; “Show Increased Enrollment,” Kansas City Kansas Republic, 24 September 1920, 1.

³⁸ “Dr. Clopper Addresses Hawthorne Club,” Kansas City Kansas Republic, 31 March 1922, 1.

discussions on the issue of education of Mexican students, as a member of the Seventh Ward Improvement Association and its successor the Argentine Activities Association.

Dr. Clopper was identified as a member of the Ku Klux Klan, but he did not appear on the Ku Klux Klan membership list. Based on the oral history of Mexicans who remembered the circumstances under which segregation was effected, the Ku Klux Klan was perceived to have considerable influence.³⁹ When an anti-Klan meeting was initiated by the Kansas City police department in 1921, police surveillance noted the presence of “prominent citizens” at Klan meetings, which was corroborated by the editors, judge, attorney, and doctor already noted in this study to be on the list.⁴⁰ The Klan was very active and growing throughout the Midwest from 1922 to 1925, initiating 40,000 people in Kansas from 1915 to 1944.⁴¹ As it grew in membership, the organization broadened its racist appeal by denouncing immigrant groups, as well as newly-freed African-Americans. They moved into eastern Kansas in 1922, and initially concealed its activities by meeting as the “Sunflower Club” of Wyandotte County. In 1923, five Kansas City men sought to incorporate the Klan in Kansas, in order to combat the state’s attempt to oust the Klan as a foreign corporation.⁴²

That the Klan was very active in Wyandotte County during the 1920s was clear. One thousand people representing local chapters in Wyandotte and Johnson counties met at the Woodford Manor Estate, east of Overland Park, to initiate two hundred new members. One hundred in the audience “wore the Klan uniform but were not masked,” which was an example of the level of public acceptance of their ideas and activities.⁴³ The pages of the Kansas City Kansan during 1921-24 were filled with

³⁹ Robert Oppenheimer Interviews, Joe Amayo et al.; Taylor, A Short Ethnic History, 2:260-261.

⁴⁰ Taylor, The Consolidated Ethnic History, 96.

⁴¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930, The Urban Life in America Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) 162,237.

⁴² Lila Lee Jones, The Ku Klux Klan in Eastern Kansas during the 1920s, Emporia State Research Studies, vol. 23 no. 3 (Emporia, Kans.: Emporia State College, 1975), 10-11, 13.

⁴³ “Klan Holds Big Initiation,” Kansas City Kansan, 31 August 1924, 1.

stories of violent Klan skirmishes in other states in the Midwest and the South, as well as reports of William Allen White's anti-Klan campaign for Governor in 1924. Yet in Kansas City the Klan appeared to have reached a level of respect. In 1922, hooded Klansmen interrupted a church service in Rosedale to donate \$ 25 to the pastor along with a letter of appreciation "for his services to the community." The letter was read aloud to the cheers of the congregation.⁴⁴

The Klan's development in Kansas City evolved as a result of Americanization movements and a continuation of earlier organizations such as the anti-Catholic American Protective Association (APA). Civic pride and a rivalry with Kansas City, Missouri created an interest in school affairs along with all other aspects of life in Kansas City, Kansas.⁴⁵ Wyandotte Klan No. 5 donated \$ 200 to Wilson High School in 1923, which needed money for teachers' salaries. In the enclosed letter, the Klan stated their wish to "further the good work of the school." The donation was "accepted by the school authorities and parents."⁴⁶ While the contribution did not prove a direct link between the Klan and their influence on school affairs, it did indicate that the school officials were wary of any backlash from a link to the Klan.

Superintendent Mathew E. Pearson had an early experience with the KKK that undoubtedly influenced his approach to requests to provide segregated education to Mexican students. His plans to integrate a parade with black and white children generated discussions that involved "punishment" but ultimately included resulted in a home visit from a delegation who convinced him to cancel the "mixed parade."⁴⁷ The official stance of Americanization was the public rationale often cited by school officials, to disguise the segregationist intent of local school boards. Americanization was a social-work based movement that gained popularity in the United States beginning in the early part of the twentieth

⁴⁴ "Klansmen Give Pastor \$25," Kansas City Kansan, 11 September 1922, 1.

⁴⁵ Rives, 11-15.

⁴⁶ "Parents Contribute to Save Wilson H.S.," Kansas City Kansan, 30 January 1923, 3. The title of this account implies that the Klan members were also parents.

⁴⁷ Rives, 33-34.

century.⁴⁸ In stark contrast to the race-based views of Eugenicists or the Ku Klux Klan, advocates of Americanization simply viewed Mexicans as another foreign-born, non-English speaking group, similar to Croatians or Poles. The goal of these programs was to turn these new groups into loyal Americans.

In a pamphlet prepared by the Kansas City Kansas Schools, the Chamber of Commerce and the University of Kansas, the design of such a program for the city was described. “The problem” was defined in terms of Mexican employees in packing plants, whose numbers grew as European groups stopped immigrating during and after World War I. In the next paragraph, the separate room at the Ingalls School in Armourdale was mentioned in terms that would lead a reader to believe that Americanization and not segregation was the goal: “one whole room is given over to the Mexican children, and there is a considerable sprinkling of Mexican children in the grades at Cooper and Bancroft.”⁴⁹ The reality was that the Armourdale parents demanded their separate instruction, and had no concerns for the Americanization program.⁵⁰ One scholar maintained that the only substantive Americanization program for Mexicans began in 1921, and was administered by the Mexican Methodist Mission in Argentine, not by any of the organizations who were in charge of the program described in the pamphlet.⁵¹

In the same spirit of Americanization, one of the few references to the language issue in all of the primary materials appeared in a report from the Ingalls School: “The Mexican room has seventy-two little people who are struggling with the task of learning the American language.”⁵² Struggling perhaps

⁴⁸ George J. Sanchez, “Go After the Women’: Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929,” in Unequal Sisters: a Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 284-297/

⁴⁹ Kansas State Historical Society, “Program of Americanization, Kansas City Kansas, 1920-1921: a Program of Americanization for Kansas City Kansas, Under the Direction of the Kansas City Public Schools, the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce and the University of Kansas.”

⁵⁰ “State Officials into Mexican Pupil Row,” Kansas City Kansan, 17 October 1925, 5.

⁵¹ Laird, “Argentine, Kansas: the Evolution of a Mexican American Community, 1904-1940”, 191.

⁵² “John J. Ingalls School Notes,” Kansas City Kansas Republic, 18 March 1921, 4.

because their teacher spoke no Spanish, was certainly not trained in teaching English as a second language because no such program existed, and possibly enforced a no Spanish-rule on the playground in order to promote language learning.⁵³ The student-teacher ratio of one-to-seventy-two would change, but absent from this report was that the Mexican classroom at Ingalls was located in the basement, an over-crowded space reserved for students, bathrooms, and a coal room.⁵⁴

Mexican children in one Kansas City School, Cooper, situated in the West Bottoms neighborhood adjacent to the Kansas River, were educated along with other foreign groups. The evidence confirms that there was a true Americanization program for all foreign students in this school. Mexican students were not segregated, presumably because the parents of Anglo children did not demand it. The Cooper School was a notable exception to the general practice of segregated education. Interestingly, when it closed in 1939, Mexican students attended the integrated Riverview School.⁵⁵ Thus, segregated education for Mexican students in Kansas City was not “rigidly enforced” by the school board.⁵⁶ Local pressure on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood coerced the school board to make these arrangements. The contiguous neighborhoods of Armourdale, Argentine, and Rosedale were unified in their approach to educating Mexican students. This unity was reinforced by strong Klan membership. In Armourdale, 269 Klansmen resided along with 120 in Argentine.⁵⁷ In 1923, five Klansmen entered the school board race and George Durham won.⁵⁸ When forced to deal with Mexican students, educators in Kansas City were faced with reconciling Americanization goals with the influence of the Ku Klux Klan on their patrons.

⁵³ Later oral history from students in segregated schools in the forties confirmed this practice.

⁵⁴ Kansas City Kansas Schools. “John J. Ingalls School History, Architectural Floor Plans.”

⁵⁵ Kansas City Schools, “Cooper School History.”

⁵⁶ Michael M. Smith, “Mexicans in Kansas City: the First Generation, 1900-1920,” Perspectives in Mexican American Studies, 2 (1989): 29-58. This was Smith’s opinion based on his reading of Laird’s study.

⁵⁷ Rives, 62.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 29; Armourdale and Argentine are joined by viaducts over the Kansas River and Rosedale is directly east of Argentine. The West Bottoms is east of the Riverview section, which is north of Armourdale.

Development of Institutionalized Segregated Education

Civic groups from Argentine and Armourdale formally initiated an effort for a separate school on October 11, 1922. Representatives from the Emerson School Parent-Teachers Association, the Argentine Activities Association (A.A.A.), and the school board planned to meet with the Mexican consul “to solicit his help in putting the proposition before the Mexican residents of the district. Members of the Parent-Teacher associations objected to their children mixing with the Mexicans on the playground.”⁵⁹ The next step in planning for the separate Mexican school came less than a week later. Dr. Karl C. Haas, Klan member representing the A.A.A., and Nancy Bishop, of the Emerson P.T.A., met with the Mexican consul and obtained his “sanction” for a separate school in Argentine. Mrs. Bishop mentioned that the school board “promised a school ... near the Mexican mission in the Argentine district.” According to the article in the Kansas City Kansan: “crowded conditions due to the 100 Mexican children in attendance at the Emerson school led the Parent-Teacher association to take steps to bring about relief.” The language used in this report implied that this was being done for the benefit of the Mexican children, who would get a “school of their own with the blessing of the Mexican consul.”⁶⁰ The article did not state why the Mexican consul approved the separate school.

The “relief” sought by the Anglo parents, and mentioned in the previous account, reflected that the increase of students from forty in 1921 to one hundred increased the possibility of “mixing” on the playground. The civic groups gained the confirmed consent of the school board on December 2, 1922, for a separate school for Mexican children. This report claimed that this was the culmination of a “four-year fight” first started in the fall of 1918 by the Emerson P.T.A. and subsequently taken up as a project by the A.A.A. The A.A.A. was given credit for having lobbied to get the school board’s consent to build

⁵⁹ “Seek Mexican School,” Kansas City Kansan, 11 October 1922, 7.

⁶⁰ “Mexican School Planned,” Kansas City Kansan, 16 October 1922, 1.

the school. Representing the A.A.A. at this meeting was Dr. Clopper, former president of that organization and former Mayor of Argentine during 1903-05.⁶¹

The Mexican school was finally constructed in 1923, at a cost of \$ 7,000 from surplus funds. At three rooms, the student-teacher ratio was 1:42, and the building was described as “white stucco, in mission style, very appropriate for the Mexican students.”⁶² At the beginning of the 1923/24 school Superintendent Pearson stated that “Mexican children of all grades in the Argentine District will attend the new Mexican School at 24th and Cheyenne.” An examination of the teacher’s assignments that appeared in the Kansas City Kansan that same day listed the teachers for the school. No separate assignments to teach Mexican children in the Kansas City District appear, almost implying that there were no other Mexican children in the entire district.⁶³ Mexican students were educated in the basements of other schools in the district.

What was not reported at the time was the fact that Armourdale parents and their “Mexican problem” had somehow been left out of the plans, even though they were initially involved in talks in October 1922. Mexican workers in Armourdale primarily worked in the packing plants and their children were segregated in the basements of Fiske and Ingalls Schools. As the Mexican population in Armourdale grew, parents in that district lobbied the school board for a separate building, starting in 1922.⁶⁴ The school board’s response was to create another three room building on the site of the Ingalls School. This measure addressed a request by Anglo parents, to take their children out of basement rooms of the Ingalls School, which were described as “dark ... cold and damp,” and a “detriment to

⁶¹ “School for Mexican Children is Assured,” Kansas City Kansan, 12 December 1922, 6; Simmons, 90.

⁶² “Fund Surplus Pays for Mexican School,” Kansas City Kansan, 23 September 1923, 1-8.

⁶³ “School Districts of City are Announced,” Kansas City Kansan, 5 September 1923, 6; “Grade Teachers are Assigned to Schools,” Kansas City Kansan, 5 September 1923, 6.

⁶⁴ National Archives. Records of the Department of State. Record Group 59. Decimal file 1920-1929, Box 3573, File 311.1215/Kansas City. “In the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation at Kansas City, Kansas.” Affidavit from M.E. Pearson to W.C. Ralston, October 21, 1925, 1-9; “Teacher’s Salaries to Match Positions,” Kansas City Kansan, 23 September 1924, 1.

public health.”⁶⁵ Building a separate annex on the grounds was a sufficient solution in Armourdale, and a line was drawn to separate Anglo from Mexican students on the playground. Increasing numbers of Mexican students in Armourdale required the use of the basement as well.⁶⁶

The creation of the Clara Barton School (named in 1924) in Argentine and the annex at Ingalls in Armourdale did not “solve” the Mexican “problem.” Plans had been made to combine the Melville and Greystone schools in the Rosedale district to make the Major Hudson School, for grades 1-8. Rosedale had been incorporated into Kansas City in 1922 and was situated directly east of Argentine. The school opened in May 1924, and despite the demand from Anglo parents in Rosedale, that four Mexican boys who were in the fifth grade not attend the new school, they did. At the same time, the old Melville school was used exclusively for Mexican children for grades 1-4 and eventually for grades 1-6 by the beginning of the 1924 school year.⁶⁷

The Major Hudson Incident

The same four Mexican boys enrolled in the new Major Hudson School with the Anglo children on September 6, 1924 and by the afternoon, 200 Anglo parents encircled the building in protest. By threatening “bodily injury” to the Mexican children, they forced school officials to remove the four boys from the school. Police escorted the Mexican children to their homes as a result.⁶⁸ Rives did not calculate the percentage of Klan members residing in the Rosedale neighborhood, as he did for Argentine and Armourdale. Rosedale did have their own Klan chapter, No. 17, and their “Exalted

⁶⁵ “Mothers Protest Schools,” Kansas City Kansan, 3 September 1921, 1.

⁶⁶ Irene Ruiz Interviews. Frank Hernandez (19 May 1977).

⁶⁷ National Archives, “in the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation,” 2-3.

⁶⁸ McGuinn, “The Kansas City Kansas School System,” 357; National Archives, “in the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation,” 2-3.

Cyclops” (President) Lawrence E. Wilson ran for the school board in 1923.⁶⁹ Threatening violence regarding integration of the schools had worked before and worked again in the Major Hudson incident.

After this incident, the Mexican parents removed their children from school entirely, rather than allow them to attend the Mexican Annex. The Major Hudson conflict inspired the beginning of resistance to segregated education, and the Mexican consul in Kansas City, Missouri, and the *Union Cultural Mexicana* to lobby the major and the school board for admission to the integrated school.⁷⁰

The school board had planned in advance what they were going to do with the majority of the Mexican children in the Rosedale neighborhood when the new Major Hudson School was built. What was different was that the school board provided an educational reason for the separation: English proficiency. They resolved in April 18, 1924, that the Mexican children in the lower grades would be separated on the basis of “their defective knowledge of English,” and that they could progress better if separated from the native children, who would be “at a like disadvantage if many pupils unfamiliar with English are placed in their classes.”⁷¹ At no time was the question of English proficiency a stated issue in either Argentine or Armourdale; race was the issue. This resolution revealed the main concern and the bias of the school board; that Anglo students would suffer educationally from the presence of students who were not proficient in English. They assumed that teachers would take the extra time with the Mexican and slow down the entire class. That these Mexican students were all deficient in English was also an assumption. No attempt to test these children in English was mentioned. Even in 1920, Mexican students in the 2nd and 3rd grades in Emerson School received excellent marks in reading and writing.⁷²

⁶⁹ Rives, 29.

⁷⁰ National Archives, Manuel Téllez to Charles Hughes, November 6, 1924, File 311.1215/Kansas City; Paul Ming-Chang Lin, “Voluntary Kinship and Voluntary Association in a Mexican-American Community” (master’s thesis, University of Kansas, 1963), 103.

⁷¹ National Archives, “in the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation,” 6-7.

⁷² “Emerson School,” Argentine Republic, 13 February 1920, 6.

The inspiration for segregation was racism; linguistic deficiency was a common, but unfounded justification for doing what the community wanted. Pressure from the national and state levels motivated Superintendent Pearson to manufacture a more complex explanation. The Mexican consul in Washington appealed to the State Department on behalf of the Major Hudson students, which referred the matter to the Governor of Kansas, Ben Paulen. "Pro-Klan Republican" Paulen asked that the Superintendent be deposed by State Assistant Attorney General W.C. Ralston.⁷³ Pearson's descriptions of why Mexican students received segregated education in Argentine, Armourdale, and Rosedale reflected a reluctant school board eventually yielding to the wishes of their patrons. What he did not mention was the influence of the KKK in the person of school board member George Durham and earlier intimidation efforts he personally experienced. Pearson took pains to stress that the school board resisted initial demands for separate Mexican schools. The actions taken in Rosedale in 1924 were no different, but experience had taught school officials to offer some type of educational reason for segregation, when national and state attention turned to Kansas City. Citing linguistic deficiency, Pearson gave the impression that the school administration did not share the racism of their patrons. Given that Pearson was not listed as a KKK member and his earlier effort to integrate a school parade, it would be fair to say that he did not share the KKK's views.

In this deposition, Pearson displayed an inexact knowledge of what constituted English proficiency. He revealed an inconsistent relationship of English skills to the education of Mexican children in the district. Pearson stated that Mexican children were allowed to attend with the native children above the fourth grade and believed that language problems were not resolved until the "fourth or fifth grades." Yet all of the Mexican children in Argentine attended Clara Barton up to the

⁷³ Kristofer Allerfeldt, "Jayhawker Fraternities: Mason, Klansmen and Kansas in the 1920s." Journal of American Studies 46 (November 2012): 1035-1053.

eighth grade, and up to the sixth grade in Old Major Hudson and Ingalls.⁷⁴ His interlocutors did not catch or did not want to pursue the discrepancy. The school system representatives who used the same arguments in the Lemon Grove, California, segregation case in 1931, were criticized by the judge for failing to distinguish between those who were proficient and those who were not. The school system in Lemon Grove was not allowed to segregate Mexican children as a result.⁷⁵

Pearson's testimony implied that the Kansas City School system had an official policy that allowed Mexican children who were proficient in English to be educated with Anglo students. In practice, this did not happen. As late as 1950, Maria Torrez noted that the Clara Barton School had no P.T.A, piano lessons, or long recesses, as was customary at the white-only Emerson School. When she asked to enroll her children at Emerson, Superintendent Frank L. Schlagle denied her request.⁷⁶ Schlagle was the principal of Argentine High School in 1919, and would become the assistant to Pearson in 1924. He became Superintendent in 1932, a position he would retain until 1962.⁷⁷

The school system did not initially segregate Mexican students on linguistic grounds as policy. This was clear from the fact that small numbers of students attended school with Anglo students in other areas of the district. Fifty-three Mexicans attended the Cooper School in the West Bottoms neighborhood, which had many foreign students, and eight and seven students attended Morse and Riverview Schools with Anglo students.⁷⁸ No specific linguistic program was setup for these students. They simply learned English as most children can easily do at a young age. Their teachers knew no

⁷⁴ National Archives, "in the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation," 5.

⁷⁵ México. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Vol. 2. (México: La Secretaría, 1931), 1784-1787.

⁷⁶ Taylor, The Consolidated Ethnic History, 470;

⁷⁷ McGuinn, "The Kansas City Kansas School System," 404, 470. Schlagle did not appear on the list of Klan members.

⁷⁸ National Archives, "in the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation," 5.

Spanish and enforced “no Spanish” rules on the playground as the sole means of teaching English by discouraging Spanish.⁷⁹

Newspaper accounts did not mention English proficiency as an issue. In the local context, there was no compelling need to provide a theoretical justification for racism in education. In a Kansas City Kansan account entitled, “Solves Racial Problem,” the incident at the new Major Hudson School was referred to as “a miniature race riot” that “broke out among the white patrons of the school, who objected to” Mexicans “attending at that place.” School board officials “assured the objectors that separate educational facilities would be provided.”⁸⁰

In a follow-up report dated September 23, 1924, Superintendent Pearson stated that ten new Mexican students had enrolled at the old Major Hudson School. He then mentioned that more Mexican students were expected and that there were “ten too many Mexican children” at the Ingalls School in Armourdale, who would have to be transferred to the basement of John Fiske School.⁸¹ The school system may have provided transportation for these students, but they were clearly also controlling attendance on racial lines, not English proficiency. This practice illustrated yet again the extent of the school system’s role in maintaining a segregated system for Mexican students.

No newspaper account provided details of the “miniature race riot” in subsequent editions. When the event was revisited during his deposition in 1925, the only clarification that Pearson offered was that “a near race riot was averted by calling out the police and giving special protection.”⁸² That police protection was needed for Mexican grade school students, who were being threatened by the Anglo P.T.A., demonstrated the very poor state of race relations in Rosedale. If the incident at Major

⁷⁹ Irene Ruiz Interviews, Magdalena Rodriguez, n.d.; Irene Ruiz Interviews, Mrs. Maria Mora, 3 August 1978.

⁸⁰ “Solves Racial Problem,” 10.

⁸¹ “Teachers’ Salaries to Match Positions,” Kansas City Kansan, 23 September 1924, 1.

⁸² “State Officials into Mexican Pupil Row,” Kansas City Kansan, 17 October 1925, 5.

Hudson School was any indication, racial conditions for Mexicans in Rosedale were as oppressive as they were in Argentine.

Mexican families who lived in Rosedale were clustered in an area called "La Colonia," and their fathers worked for the Saint Louis and San Francisco Railroad.⁸³ It was a small community and the children of these families presumably attended the Melville School with Anglo children before 1924. The pattern established in Argentine and Armourdale was repeated in Rosedale. The school district allowed a few Mexican children until the Anglo parents, including Klan members and sympathizers, forced them to make other arrangements. White parents in Rosedale perhaps knew that Argentine and Armourdale parents had been successful in gaining segregated facilities and did not want to wait until the numbers of students grew larger than four in the upper grades to take action.

Superintendent Pearson believed he had no choice but to educate the Mexican children in the annex, regardless of their proficiency in English. Rather than accept enrollment at the Mexican only school, the Mexican parents kept their children out of school, with the result that they were brought into local court under the Compulsory Attendance Law. The judge, Klan member Don C. McCombs, in this case ruled that these students could go to any school except the new Major Hudson School, unless the United States Department of State ruled on the matter.⁸⁴ One scholar who reviewed the State Department file concluded that the State Department refused to rule on the matter and left it up to the local authorities.⁸⁵ The school board claimed that they did not prevent these children from attending the new Major Hudson School, the parents did, yet they used the attendance law to force them to attend a segregated facility. The local judge ruled that they could not attend an integrated school by deferring to

⁸³ Taylor, *Consolidated Ethnic History of Wyandotte County*, 452-453; Laird, "Argentine, Kansas: the Evolution of a Mexican American Community, 1904-1940", 44.

⁸⁴ "Ku Klux Klan Membership Roster," 3; National Archives, "in the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation," 3.

⁸⁵ Garcia, 122-123.

the State Department, which declined to express any clear opinion. There was no connection made between the English proficiency of these four students – the only issue was racial.

An incident that occurred across the Kansas River in Armourdale in August 1925 continued the sporadic but violent trend that had developed in race relations. On either the night of August 21st or 24th, a group of fourteen Mexican men were assaulted by a mob of 100 Anglos, while they attended a fair in Shawnee Park. They were able to escape with the help of the police, who told them “that they should stay at home if they did not want trouble with Americans,” and declined to arrest the offenders.⁸⁶ The Mexican men appealed to their local Consul who requested an investigation from the United States Department of State. After proceeding through the channels at various levels, an investigation of the incident was made by the Wyandotte County Attorney’s office. The investigator, Klan member Frederick R. White, interviewed only police officers, only looked at records for the police station in the area and only inquired about August 21st not August 24th. He concluded that the incident did not take place or that the assaulted Mexicans did not inform the authorities in a timely manner.⁸⁷ The methodology of this investigation expressed the disdain in which Mexican citizens were held. The police never took the complaint seriously and obviously sympathized with the racial prejudices of the Anglo assailants by their lack of action.

The numbers of Mexican children in the district attending any school after the sixth grade revealed a sharp drop-off following these incidents. Central Junior High was the designated school for children graduating from Ingalls, Clara Barton or Major Hudson and only 15 attended in 1925 out of what could have been almost 200 who graduated from the sixth grade. There could have been many

⁸⁶ Kansas State Historical Society, Manuel Téllez to Frank B. Kellogg, September 11, 1925, File 201-Aliens, Attorney General of Kansas.

⁸⁷ Kansas State Historical Society, Frederick White to Harry Hayward, September 28, 1925, File 201-Aliens, Attorney General of Kansas. A search of the [Kansas City Kansan](#) revealed no account of the incident. Harry Hayward also appear on the list of Klan members.

reason for the lack of continuing students. It arose, in part, due to the ambivalent attitudes toward education held by many Mexican parents. Gender attitudes dictated that Mexican boys were encouraged to attend school. Parents of Mexican girls thought that an education was not necessary to be a wife and mother or they needed help caring for younger siblings. Economic considerations determined that families needed the income from older sons' labor to survive.⁸⁸ The great discouragement of the Anglo community was also a contributing factor. The fear of violence no doubt added the Mexican parents' disillusionment with the value of education. Pearson stated that no objection to Mexican students at Central Junior High School had been raised.⁸⁹ This would not be the case when four Mexican graduates of the Clara Barton School began attending Argentine High School in 1925.

The Alvarado Case

Superintendent's Pearson theories regarding substantial English proficiency could not be applied to the four Mexican graduates of the eighth grade from Clara Barton School in Argentine in 1925. They were enrolled in Argentine High school for approximately one week when the objections of Argentine parents, and the threat of physical violence, forced the parents to remove the children a few weeks later. In an attempt to reach a compromise preserving segregation, the school board offered the parents a separate room and teacher, or carfare and tuition to a Kansas City, Missouri, high school. The parents refused both of these options. A petition signed by over 200 Anglos from the Argentine district was produced as evidence that the children were not wanted.⁹⁰ As was typical, no specific reason for their

⁸⁸ Mendoza, "The Creation of a Mexican Immigrant Community," 192-193.

⁸⁹ National Archives, "in the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation," 5, 7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3-4; "State Officials into Mexican Pupil Row," Kansas City Kansan, 17 October 1925, 5; "Mexican Row in K.C. Schools Up to State Dep't," Kansas City Kansan, 24 October 1925, 1.

objections was offered. The Mexican parents again pursued diplomatic channels for their case, and after a year of struggle, Mexican students were free to attend the Argentine High School from 1926 onward.

A mural completed in 1998 on a concrete wall in Argentine depicts the community's history from the days before Europeans arrived through the twentieth century. In one frame, the Ku Klux Klan appears in the background of a hierarchical pyramid which serves as a metaphor for race relations. African-Americans and Mexican-Americans appear at the bottom of the pyramid and white Americans at the top. Another panel shows a Mexican boy and girl being turned away by a school official. That image recalls what locals today call "the Alvarado case," a 1925 incident involving four Mexican students.⁹¹ When their children were forced out of high school, the Mexican parents refused to accept segregated alternatives. The resistance of the Alvarado, De Leon, and Pérez parents focused attention on the Kansas City Kansas school system at the federal and state levels of government. The end result was that the Mexican consulate intervened to pressure both Washington, D.C. and Kansas City officials to investigate and explain segregation. At no time was a link between the Klan and the Anglo parents perceived by any government officials, yet principal actors in these events were Klan members.

The tendency to defer charges of racism to another authority characterized nearly every response from bureaucrats at federal, state, and local levels in the United States. The Mexican consul involved in the Major Hudson case sent complaints to Washington, starting in November, 1924. Authorities at the state level in Kansas offered to "make no distinction between the Mexican children and the American or any other children," but local school systems maintained the status quo. In a letter to the Secretary of State Charles Hughes, Mexican Consul Manuel Téllez stated the children could not attend school, because of the lack "of the needed guarantees" – referring to the fact that the school system claimed that the children were free to attend the integrated school, yet would not provide the

⁹¹ "Mural Stirs Vivid Images," Dos Mundos, 20 August 1998, 1.

security needed to prevent another race riot. Téllez charged that the school system's solution of a segregated school created a "disparaging difference" between Mexican students and those of other nationalities. He asked that the United States guarantee the "rights of equality and reciprocity that should belong to the Mexicans residing in the United States."⁹² The response came from Acting Secretary Joseph Grew, in which he reiterated that he understood what the Mexican government requested, but chose to wait for a report from the Kansas authorities, which he asked for on the same day.⁹³

After receiving no response, the Mexican Chargé d'affaires José Benitez wrote to the State Department in January, 1925. He stated that the parents of the children had kept their children out of school, with the result that the school system took steps to prosecute the parents under the compulsory attendance law. Grew then sent a telegram to the Governor of Kansas, restated the demand of the Mexican Embassy that "Mexican children be admitted to the public schools without discrimination," and mentioned the court date, which was the next day. Superintendent Matthew E. Pearson testified at a later date that Klan member and Judge Donald C. McCombs advised against prosecuting the parents under the Compulsory Attendance Law until the Federal Government ruled on the matter, something which they never indicated they would do.⁹⁴ Judge McCombs did stipulate that the Mexican students needed to attend somewhere, prompting Benitez to renew his request for Mexican children to be given equal protection under the law and not be made subject to "special discriminatory orders." The link between race and truancy was made clear in a newspaper article entitled "School Racial Row Over." On

⁹² National Archives, Manuel C. Téllez to Charles E. Hughes, November 6, 1924, File 311.1215/Kansas City, 1-2. Department of State translation.

⁹³ National Archives, Joseph C. Grew to Manuel C. Téllez, November 19, 1924, File 311.1215/Kansas City, 1. Department of State translation; National Archives, Joseph C. Grew to the Governor of Kansas, November 19, 1924, File 311.1215/Kansas City, 1. The Governor of the time was Jonathan Davis.

⁹⁴ Kansas State Historical Society, Joseph C. Grew to the Governor of Kansas, January 12, 1925, File 201-Aliens, Attorney General of Kansas; National Archives, "In the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation," 3.

February 3, 1925, Judge McCombs ordered six students to either attend the Old Major Hudson School or the Mexican rooms at Ingalls. They chose the Ingalls School, but did not report the next day.⁹⁵ By using the truancy law, school authorities emphasized that they would not tolerate any resistance to segregated education for Mexican-American students, no doubt encouraged by Ku Klux Klan members in positions of authority, such as Judge McCombs.

The Major Hudson case diplomatic correspondence ceased at this point, until a different set of four Mexican students were prevented from attending Argentine High School in September 1925. As a result of diplomatic pressure, Superintendent Pearson was questioned by the Assistant Attorney General of Kansas, W.C. Ralston, on October 21, 1925. Pearson revisited the Major Hudson case, asserting that the school board did not prevent the students from attending. He reported holding public meetings to “quiet the feeling in the neighborhood,” and concluded that they stayed out school because they were afraid.⁹⁶ This statement was disingenuous on his part, because the decision of the school system to apply the truancy law led to Judge McComb’s decision to force the children into a segregated school. His conclusion did not acknowledge that their non-attendance was an act of resistance. Nor did he address the Mexican Consul’s complaints that the “necessary protections” were not provided to allow the children to attend integrated schools. The school system’s use of the compulsory attendance law to enforce segregation rendered any good intentions moot: they did not want at any time to convey to officials at higher levels that they enforced segregation not supported by law, yet they were at no time going to force integration against the wishes of Anglo or Klan parents. Superintendent Pearson was not on trial at the time he was questioned. Thus, any confusion or deception in his testimony was not

⁹⁵ National Archives, José Benitez to Charles E. Hughes, February 4, 1925, File 311.1215/Kansas City, 1-2. State Department translation; “School Racial Row Over,” Kansas City Kansan, 4 February 1925, 4.

⁹⁶ National Archives, “In the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation,” 3.

pursued, since segregated education was not on trial in 1925, but tolerated as simply something that Anglo/Klan society required.

The fate of the Major Hudson students was soon eclipsed by the Alvarado case. This incident inspired responses, albeit minimal, at the federal and state levels of government, and attracted a fair amount of publicity in the local newspaper. Four students who graduated from the all-Mexican Clara Barton School in 1925 enrolled in the all-Anglo Argentine High School that fall. While they experienced few problems in dealing with their classmates, Anglo parents were extremely agitated over their presence. Newspaper accounts described the four as girls, but they were actually two boys and two girls: Jesus and Luz Alvarado, Marcos De Leon and Victorina Pérez.⁹⁷ The tactics the Anglo parents employed were similar to those used in the Major Hudson incident. After the first week of the school year, Anglo parents asked the board directly to remove the students, and presented a petition with several hundred signatures. The school board refused to comply. Public and private meetings in Argentine created much tumult. This time Argentine residents conveyed the threat of violence to the Mexican community, without inciting an actual race riot.⁹⁸ The Mexican parents responded with tactics they employed previously without success, by withdrawing their children from school, registering their protests with the Mexican consul, and refusing all suggested compromises that enforced segregation.

The school board revealed its strong commitment to segregated education in its response to the Alvarado case. Despite the initial public refusals to meet the demands of the Anglo parents, accommodating the white community quickly became very important. Since the Alvarado case involved high school age students, the school board could not use the arguments of linguistic deficiency to justify

⁹⁷ Jesus F. Alvarado, "[Statement]." Photocopy. This undated document consists mainly of verbatim newspaper accounts of the incident that appeared in the Kansas City Kansan.

⁹⁸ National Archives, "In the Matter of the Investigation of the Mexican School Situation," 4, 8. The newspaper accounts listed the number of signers as over 200; "Mexican Row in K.C. Schools Up to State Dep't.," 1; Alvarado, [Statement], 9.

segregation. When they met with the parents of the children, they maintained that they did not object to integrated schools and emphasized their difficulties as mediators of the dispute. Their refusal to provide security failed to address the needs of the Mexican population, and simultaneously appeased the Anglo racists.

County Attorney and Klan member Harry Hayward had been instructed by the State Attorney General C.B. Griffith to work out the means by which “the rights of friendly aliens are protected,” and “to correct the condition ... that exists in Wyandotte County.”⁹⁹ A follow-up report on the meeting, which took place on October 29, 1925, named the “Mother’s Club” of Argentine as the main Anglo group behind the movement to remove the Mexican students.¹⁰⁰ Hayward speculated that a federal injunction might force the Anglo parents to honor the existing treaty between Mexico and the United States. He also named the P.T.A. of Argentine as one of the chief perpetrators of racial segregation.¹⁰¹

After Hayward met with the Mexican Consul in Kansas City, Missouri, the Mexican government renewed their efforts to pressure the State Department for action. Hayward himself concluded that the Anglo parents were “guilty of three grave federal offenses,” and charged them “with having violated the constitution, international treaty rights everywhere recognized, and the promises between Mexico and the United States.”¹⁰² Hayward predicted that a federal injunction against the Argentine would forbid “any further interference with the schools.”¹⁰³ Hayward was the first to state that the Anglo parents’ objections were considered “interference.” This was a view that was never expressed by school officials, whose interests were often one and the same with Anglo parents. Given his Klan membership, his attempt to blame the P.T.A. was an attempt to deflect any suspicion of the Klan’s influence.

⁹⁹ “Mexican Row in K.C. School Up to State Dep’t,” 1.

¹⁰⁰ “Federal Injunction Mexican Possibility,” *Kansas City Kansan*, 28 October 1925, 1.

¹⁰¹ “Mexican Case Up to U.S.,” *Kansas City Kansan*, 30 October 1925, 9.

¹⁰² “Mexican Crisis to Consul,” *Kansas City Kansan*, 2 November 1925, 1.

¹⁰³ “K.C. School Row is Put Before Kellogg,” *Kansas City Kansan*, 3 November 1925, 1.

The last report on the segregation issue to appear in the Kansas City Kansan during this time reflected that Hayward had not heard any further news and would not do anything substantive. He simply reiterated that the Anglo parents need to take some action.¹⁰⁴ His reliance on a federal injunction not in his control was a form of bureaucratic “buck passing.” The standoff remained stalemated for one year, and the four students attended no school, despite the compulsory attendance law. Records that would determine who was mainly responsible for the resolution of the Alvarado case are not available. Diplomatic correspondence and newspaper reports published in either Kansas or México ceased to mention the case after November 1925. Joe Amayo, a contemporary of the Alvarado children who graduated after them, stated that through the efforts of “two doctors, a teacher and an attorney,” Alvarado’s children and Marcos De Leon were admitted to Argentine High School without objections in the fall of 1926, and appeared in that year’s yearbook.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

Based on the evidence presented, the necessity to segregate Mexican students was based on the perception of Mexicans as a distinct race. Segregated education was the norm in Kansas for African-Americans, sanctioned by the laws of the state. The answers provided to a survey from the Supreme Court on state laws in Kansas offer some background. The Territorial legislature of 1855 provided for schools for “white” citizens. The state legislature of 1862 allowed separate schools for “black or mulatto persons.” The statutes in force as late as 1949 permitted segregated schools, but did not require them. The survey goes on to assert that “segregation has never been authorized by law in any field other than public education” and that “separate high schools were authorized” only for Kansas City.¹⁰⁶ The way in

¹⁰⁴ “Next Move Up to Parents,” Kansas City Kansan, 14 November 1925, 1

¹⁰⁵ Robert Oppenheimer Interviews, Joe Amayo et al.; The Argentinian, 1927, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Bernard D. Reams, Jr. and Paul E. Wilson, ed., *Segregation and the Fourteenth Amendment in the States: a Survey of State Segregation Laws 1865-1953*; Prepared for the United States Supreme Court in re: *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* (Buffalo: William S. Hein, 1975), 186-187.

which Kansans worded their initial statute allowed for local decisions to be made, since segregation for African-Americans was not required, as it was in Missouri, but permitted.¹⁰⁷

The 1930s sociologist, Max Handman, described the Mexican “problem” in comparative terms of race, asserting that American “has no social technique for handling partly colored races. We have a place for the Negro and a place for the white man: the Mexican is not a Negro, and the white man refuses him an equal status.”¹⁰⁸ In Kansas City, Mexicans were treated just like African-Americans in terms of separate facilities, discriminatory treatment, and social inequality. The Anglo residents of Kansas City recognized that Mexicans were not African-Americans, but were considered to be “colored” nonetheless. In the movie theatre in Argentine, Mexicans were instructed to sit in the “colored” section and experienced other forms of Jim Crow-style discrimination.¹⁰⁹ The educational experience for Mexicans in Kansas in the twentieth century was a varied one, as no consistent policy on segregation was applied in any city. Compared to other cities in Kansas, segregated education for Mexicans in Kansas City was unparalleled in severity and duration.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 349.

¹⁰⁸ Max Sylvius Handman, “Economic Reasons for the Coming of the Mexican Immigrant,” American Journal of Sociology 35 (January 1930): 609-610.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Oppenheimer Interviews, Josefa Parra, 11-12.

¹¹⁰ For a general surveys of Kansas cities, see Hector Franco, “The Mexican People in the State of Kansas” (master’s thesis, University of Wichita, 1950) and Domingo Ricart, Just Across the Tracks: a Report on a Survey of Five Mexican Communities in the State of Kansas (Emporia, Florence, Newton, Wichita, Hutchinson) (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas, 1950); for Topeka, see Bill Wright, “Education is the Handhold,” in *History of Mexicans in Topeka, 1906-1966*, ed. José M. Garcia (S.I: s.n., 1973), 52-54 and Marian Frances Braun, “A Survey of the American-Mexicans in Topeka, Kansas” (master’s thesis, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1970); for Emporia see Socorro Ramirez, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Emporia, Kansas” (master’s thesis, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1942); for Newton see Claudia Limbert, “The Invisible People: a Study of Mexican American Community in Newton, Kansas” (research paper, Bethel College, 1978); for Hutchinson see Kathie Hinnen “Mexican Immigrants to Hutchinson, Kansas, 1905-1940; How a Temporary Haven Became Home.” (master’s thesis, Southwest Missouri State University, 1998); for Dodge City, see Arthur D. Martinez, “Los de Dodge City, Kansas: a Mexican-American Community at the Heartland of the United States,” *Journal of the West* 24 (April 1985): 88-95 and Galen Floyd Davidson, “The Growth and Development of Public Education in Dodge City, Kansas” (master’s thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, 1953).

The statements of Assistant Superintendent and later Superintendent Frank L. Schlagle revealed that the personal racism of school authorities was an obvious factor in the severity and duration of segregated education in Kansas City. When interviewed by Hector Franco in 1938, Schlagle openly endorsed the board's policy toward the education of Mexicans: "Mexicans have no business moving or living away from the Mexican school. We would rather pay their transportation to the Mexican school than let them attend any other school in the city."¹¹¹ Schlagle did not appear on the list of Klan members and was never named in any of the documentation, yet was clearly a Klan sympathizer.

The Ku Klux Klan developed a structure to provide action to the sentiments of racists. Rives maintained that Klansmen in Kansas City were influential for thirty years. Klan membership was difficult to estimate, but Rives has pointed out that the 1,053 members on the Klan roster list generated voting support from those who supported Klan candidacies. Klansmen Harry Lillich's run for sheriff in 1922 generated 9,000 votes for a successful campaign.¹¹² School district authorities and the County Attorney could effectively hide their own thoughts on race, by placing the responsibility on their patrons. Their willingness to succumb to the pressure of racist parents and Klan members indicated their sympathy with racist thought.

Anti-immigrant sentiment lives on, particularly against Mexicans, almost 100 years after the events in Kansas City, Kansas. The attitudes of people such as Schlagle revealed that the personal racism of school authorities was an obvious factor in the harshness of segregated education in Kansas City. The racism of people involved in the Ku Klux Klan, and their influence on school segregation of Mexican students, lasted until the flood of 1951, when the Clara Barton School was destroyed, and segregation of Mexican students "effectively ended."¹¹³ The disregard for children exhibited in the 1920s now appears

¹¹¹ Hector Franco, "The Mexican People in the State of Kansas," 54-55.

¹¹² Rives, 2, 57.

¹¹³ Laird, "Argentine, Kansas: the Evolution of a Mexican American Community, 1904-1940", 193-194.

in current immigration policy that imprisons and separates families and presents a disturbing commentary on the nature of racism in the United States.