

Repatriation Beyond the Borderlands: The Impact of the Depression of 1921 on Kansas City's
Mexican Immigrants During the Great Depression

by

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Abstract

During the Great Depression, federal, state, and local authorities throughout the United States utilized large-scale deportation raids and repatriation to eject an estimated 400,000 Mexicans and Mexican-Americans from the country. While previous studies of Mexican repatriation during the Great Depression focus on larger communities near the U.S.-Mexico border, there are very few academic discussions of what repatriation looked like in the Midwest and beyond. The Kansas City metropolitan area contains one of the largest communities of Mexican immigrants in the United States outside of the borderlands. Unlike in Los Angeles, San Antonio, or even Chicago, authorities in Kansas City used large-scale Mexican repatriation in Kansas City prior to the Great Depression, and ultimately learned that repatriation is a temporary solution to a perennial issue. This senior thesis analyzes how Kansas City authorities used repatriation during the Depression of 1921, the ineffectiveness of repatriation in slowing the growth of the Kansas City barrio, and the community-building that took place between 1921 and 1929 that proved crucial to the staying power of Mexicans in Kansas City through the Great Depression.

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Virginia Pimentel de Madrigal stepped off the train at Union Station in 1920. Her husband, Procopio Madrigal Zamora, had worked for the Santa Fe railroad for three years and finally saved enough to afford Virginia's train fare north. The pair grew up together in Tangancícuaro, Michoacán, a tiny village in the central highlands of Mexico. Over the next ten years, the couple would have four American-born children. Then the stock market crashed in 1929. Like all Mexican citizens living and working in the United States during the Great Depression, the Madrigals had a choice to make. While many neighbors chose to stay in Kansas City and ride out the Depression, the Madrigal family returned to Mexico to stay with friends. Eight years later, Virginia returned to Kansas City as a widow. This personal story of displacement and loss is not an isolated incident. In fact, it opens the door to greater discussion of the social repercussions of twentieth-century repatriation on today's Mexican American communities.

During the Great Depression (1929-1939), American federal, state, and local authorities pursued the mass deportation of ethnic Mexicans. At every turn, authorities claimed that they were acting in the interest of American-born workers, spurning the generations of ethnic Mexicans who crossed the border or had been incorporated into US territory through land deals and warfare. While official American government documents claim they deported around 80,000 people in the years between 1929 and 1939, the Mexican government, diligent about counting the number of people in need of federal services and transportation, estimated over 400,000 repatriates, overwhelmingly children.¹ Even that number may be a low estimate, as the United States-Mexico border stretches for over 2,000 miles, the vast majority of which was unmonitored at the time by a nascent Border Patrol. There is no telling just how many individuals crossed the border without

¹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations"; Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 3.

being counted on either side.² For the most part, repatriates arrived by train in northern Mexican border cities, such as Juárez, Chihuahua, and Tijuana, Baja California, and either stayed in those cities, switched over to government transports headed toward the central highlands, or joined the handful of small farming colonies built by the Mexican government in previously undeveloped rural areas.³

Repatriation is the process of restoring or returning someone or something to the country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship. The use of this particular word implies the supremacy of legal citizenship over the roots laid down by diaspora communities. In U.S. legal history, ‘repatriation’ effectively functions as a slightly more favorable alternative for ‘deportation.’ Rather than simply painting migrants as outsiders in their American communities, official use of ‘repatriation’ highlights that migrants belong *more* in their communities south of the border. In studies of Mexican repatriation, other historians make distinctions between forced repatriation and self-repatriation, i.e., the idea of whether individuals had complete control of their decision to leave the United States or whether it was made for them by other entities. In the case of Kansas City, I believe that this duality is reductive. Implying that Mexican families who chose to return to Mexico as individuals did so without any external pressures negates the history of labor discrimination and social segregation that left them with no support system to rely on in the United States during economic downturns. Repatriation, both forced and self-initiated, will be treated as one phenomenon in this paper.

Compared to previous studies of Mexican repatriation, which focus on border cities and locations with significantly higher Mexican populations, this paper will demonstrate how the

27. ² Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press),

³ Hoffman, 137–39.

Kansas City metro area's relationship with repatriation was vastly different from other regions. The main contributor to this distinction is the actions taken during and after the Depression of 1921, when Kansas City charities, governments, and the local Mexican consulate split the cost of repatriating over 800 Mexican citizens.⁴ The previous use of repatriation as a population control tool, its failure to curb Mexican immigration, and the heavy costs incurred seem to have put Kansas City officials off of the choice to repatriate during the Great Depression, as later sections will elaborate. Part of this change is the dedication from within the Mexican community during the inter-Depression years to eschew reliance on official, city-run aid organizations, and instead focus on mutual aid and self-sufficiency, ensuring that outside actors could not pull the safety net out from underneath them. As the largest Mexican community, or *colonia*, outside of the borderlands during this period, the study of Kansas City offers a valuable insight into the varied history of Mexican American community-building during the 1920s.⁵

The first section of this paper will offer background and context to Kansas City's position as a railroad hub, when and how Mexican immigrants arrived, and the institutions built by and for the Mexican community. The second section will introduce the 1921 Depression and compare the experience of Mexican *barrios* during this economic downturn across the country, pointing out how Kansas City's choice of action was vastly different from other regions.⁶ The third and longest section will discuss the rising nativism ramping up to the Great Depression, the federal government's choice to pursue repatriation nationwide, and how Kansas City rejected this directive.

⁴ *Kansas City Star*, "Mexicans Back to Mexico. A Special Train Carries Several Hundred from Here," June 1, 1921.

⁵ Smith, "The Mexican Immigrant Press Beyond the Borderlands."

⁶ Translation: neighborhood, often directly translated into English as 'colony'

For the purposes of this paper, ‘Kansas City’ refers to parts of both Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri. My specific focus is the neighborhoods of Argentine, Armourdale, and Rosedale on the Kansas side and the Westside neighborhood in Missouri. These communities are too interconnected to cleanly separate, despite the complications of two state and municipal governments. Ethnic Mexicans on both sides of the state border attended the same churches, worked in the same railroad crews and packhouses, and utilized the same mutual aid organizations and charities. I will clarify when I am discussing state-specific governments and policies.

Heightened nationalism and continued experimentation with the design of the United States census led to a drastic change in the 1930 national census’s racial categorization. Unlike previous censuses, in the 1930 Census, ‘Mexican’ is a racial category rather than a marker of national origin.⁷ The state of Kansas had previously experimented with a Mexican racial category in the 1925 census, and the same politicians who pushed for this change in Kansas were elected to Washington by the time the 1930 Census took shape.⁸ As modern conceptions of Latino identity acknowledge a multiracial ethnic group, there is a good chance that many of those with lighter or darker skin tones than the stereotypical Mexican *mestizo* were enumerated in other racial categories, making an exact count of the 1930 population of Mexican descent in Kansas City impossible.⁹ Another complication of 1930 is that, at least informally, repatriation had already

⁷ United States Bureau of the Census, “Fifteenth Census of the United States,” 1930.

⁸ Arthur Capper, “Arthur Capper Papers” (Kansas State Historical Society, n.d.), Kansas State Archives, Topeka.

⁹ Hochschild and Powell, “Racial Reorganization and the United States Census 1850-1930.” Racial categorization was up to the discretion of the enumerator. *Mestizo* is the largest racial category in Mexico, considered the brown-skinned offspring of white Europeans and indigenous Americans. In the twentieth century, Mexican state authorities promoted the idea of a hybrid culture and that *mestizos* are the “true” Mexicans, both indigenous and European. Historically, Afro-Mexicans have been disenfranchised and discriminated much like Black Americans. In local oral histories, multiple respondents claimed that white business owners in Kansas City would discriminate against darker-skinned Mexicans and use racial slurs against them. For more information, see: Medina (2009) *El mestizaje a través de la frontera*.

begun by March 1930, when the census was enumerated, meaning those who left the country in the first months of the Depression were not counted.

As the organization of census categories implies, documents from the period of repatriation use the label ‘Mexican’ to refer to both Mexican citizens who immigrated to the United States and their American-born children. I will clarify when I am discussing citizens and non-citizens from a legal standpoint. Still, as repatriation happened to ethnic Mexicans regardless of legal status, I will primarily use the language of the period. I acknowledge that there is a deep nuance to questions of citizenship and self-identification, as I will point out when discussing applications for naturalization in Part 1.

Sources and Previous Literature

Local newspaper archives allow examination of the debate surrounding immigrants, immigration reform, and repatriation throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The *Kansas City Star* and *Kansas City Kansan* showcase the mainstream public representation of repatriation or lack thereof. Meanwhile, Spanish-language papers, including local *La Cosmopolita* and national *La Prensa*, allow a view into what information Mexicans received about local government and federal actions, including Mexican repatriation in other regions.

Local oral history projects have been an invaluable source of information. There was a boom in local history during the 1970s and 1980s when multiple Kansas City organizations conducted interviews with residents, many of whom had been children during the Great Depression. Laurie Bretz, Irene Ruiz, and Robert Oppenheimer, all local historians, captured nearly a hundred testimonies from Mexican Kansas Citizens. As most of these subjects have since passed on, these interviews, which are available online through the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, the Kansas City Public Library, and Kansas City, Kansas, Public Library, provide

valuable first-hand accounts of life in Kansas City before, during, and after the Great Depression, from residents whom both stayed and left during the period of repatriation.

Abraham Hoffman is primarily considered one of the earliest scholars in repatriation studies under the umbrella of Chicano Studies. His 1974 book, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939*, was the first significant study of Mexican repatriation. Focusing on Los Angeles, *Unwanted Mexican Americans* follows the historical pressures from federal and municipal authorities as they organized widespread deportation raids, fearmongering press releases, and threatened to separate American-born children from their parents.

As Hoffman devotes no more than a handful of sentences to either Kansas City or the 1921 Depression, I will utilize this source to offer a national context to repatriation. Hoffman employs sources available in 1974 that are no longer accessible to the public. Most notable among these are the records of the Mexican Migration Service (SMM), which include the papers of the Mexican officials processing new arrivals, a count of how many total migrants crossed the border, and demographic information on how long repatriates had lived in the United States and whether they had American children. These records are housed in the Mexican National Archives (*Archivo General de la Nación*), but the AGN privatized the SMM records to protect the personal information of all migrants, including Great Depression repatriates.¹⁰

Judith Fincher Laird's *Mexicans in Santa Fe Town* (1981) is the source most closely guiding my project. In a revised version of her 1975 doctoral thesis, Fincher Laird tracks the historical development of the Argentine neighborhood from 1905-1940. While Fincher Laird dedicates a substantial portion of her work to the early years of the Argentine *barrio*, her coverage

¹⁰ Yankelevich and Chenillo Alazraki, "El Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración," 26.

of the Great Depression is minimal. What sets Fincher Laird's work apart from other authors is her discussion of the 1921 Depression in Kansas City.

While Hoffman (1974) and subsequent general studies of repatriation written by Balderrama & Rodriguez (1995) and Enciso (2017) dedicate a cumulative five paragraphs to a discussion of the 1921 Depression, Fincher Laird highlights the importance of 1921 to Kansas City's Mexican community at the time. However, even Fincher Laird fails to highlight what this earlier example of repatriation meant to those who experienced it going forward into the Depression era. It is only from newspaper articles written during the 1921 repatriation that the full scope of it can be ascertained. From there, oral histories of those who underwent one or both of these repatriations highlight the relationship between these two events.

These previous studies of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States are products of the boom in cultural studies and Chicano studies in the mid-1970s. Subsequent revisions of Hoffman have not strayed outside of the border area to Mexican *barrios* in the Midwest. While Fincher Laird focuses on the Midwest, she does not study repatriation. By shifting the focus of repatriation studies to Kansas City and opening the focus period to include 1921, this paper will analyze the broader reach of repatriation outside of the border zone and open the door for further study of Midwest *barrios* and their distinction from the borderlands.

Community Foundations

The first Mexican presence in Kansas City came long before the *barrio*. Due to a high concentration of railway companies with business in Mexico, the Mexican government established a consulate in Kansas City, Missouri, during the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ As time passed and

¹¹ The earliest mention of the consulate in local newspaper archives is in 1883. However, it was likely established before that point. For reference, Kansas City Southern de México was founded in 1887 and the Kansas City, Mexico and Orient Railway started in 1900.

laborers began to arrive in Kansas City, the consulate allowed Mexican citizens to petition their government for assistance as they navigated life in America.

While Latinos were in the United States long before settlers from Northwestern Europe arrived, and some Mexicans came in the last years of the nineteenth century to manage business affairs, the first significant wave of Mexican citizens immigrating to the Kansas City area were young male laborers recruited by railroad companies. Railroad representatives would travel around rural Mexico, advertising high wages and company-provided housing. According to Kansas historian Valerie Mendoza:

The railroad needed laborers in large part due to World War I. The war impacted the labor force in two ways. First, it virtually halted immigration from Europe, and with it, the unskilled laborers that the railroad hired. Second, and most importantly for Kansas City, working age men joined the armed services and left job vacancies. Finally, the US did not restrict migration from Mexico as it did migration from other countries such as China, Japan, and European countries, making Mexican laborers readily available.¹²

During the war, several hundred Mexican workers arrived in Kansas City to work in the yards for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company, including Procopio Madrigal Zamora, who arrived in 1916.

While the promise of better-paying jobs in the United States alone could have served as a strong enough pull factor for immigrant workers, the ongoing Mexican Revolution and a rising cost of living in the Mexican countryside pushed young men north. In 1910, a revolution to overthrow the military dictator Porfirio Diaz swept through the country, essentially pitting an indigenous rural peasantry against a ruling class of European descent. Over the next seven years, over a million Mexicans, both civilians and combatants, died in the conflict, with a new government taking power in 1917 under President Venustiano Carranza.¹³ Even as the Constitution

¹² Mendoza, "Kansas City's Guadalupe Center and the Mexican Immigrant Community."

¹³ Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*, 13.

of 1917 came into effect, and the government enacted major land-ownership reforms, violence between different factions of revolutionaries continued in the countryside, claiming thousands more lives while Mexican federal authorities pursued a return to normalcy.

The Revolution was deeply traumatic for many Mexicans, particularly in rural villages where neighbors fought neighbors for control of fertile land. At the same time, the disruption of everyday supply chains raised rural Mexico's material cost of living by a factor of seven in just a decade.¹⁴ Under normal circumstances, young men could have worked the land or traveled to growing industrial centers to earn wages to meet these high prices, but this was not possible in wartime. In oral history interviews conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, Mexican residents of Kansas City described revolutionary gangs coming through small villages, searching houses, and kidnapping young men for military training. To avoid being conscripted into the militias, many young men covertly signed on with American companies to secure passage north of the border.¹⁵

In addition to Madrigal Zamora, the overwhelming majority of the Mexican migrant community in the Argentine, Kansas, neighborhood came from the same northern region of Michoacán. Migrants from Tangancícuaro, known as *Tangas*, formed an intense kinship network in the *barrio*, living in tight quarters, cooking for each other, and ultimately, once joined by their wives and children in Kansas City, using religious institutions like godparenthood to formalize the bonds between them.¹⁶ This tight-knit community and the growing external pressure from neighbors left the Mexican *barrio* increasingly isolated as the years passed.

There was a local Spanish-language newspaper in the early years of Mexican immigration to Kansas City. *La Cosmopolita* operated between 1914 and 1919. While the paper struggled

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Madrigal and Madrigal, Laurie Bretz Interview with John and Pascual Madrigal.

¹⁶ Laird, *Mexicans in Santa Fe Town*, 169.

financially and printed at a loss for its half-decade of circulation, *La Cosmopolita* was wildly popular within the Mexican community. In 1918, circulation reached 8,000 copies a week, second only to San Antonio's *La Prensa* in terms of Spanish-language papers in the United States.¹⁷ For newly arrived immigrants, a paper in their native language was essential for navigating the Kansas City metropolitan area. The paper regularly featured advice, such as which businesses to avoid based on discrimination towards Mexicans or how to access public services, creating an information network that could reach further than word of mouth and connect all literate Spanish speakers in Kansas City. However, the nature of being a Spanish-language paper in a city where Spanish speakers were a small minority of the population limited the overall reach of the paper. With such a small local audience, however devout, and the high costs associated with shipping copies around the country, the profit margins for *La Cosmopolita* were thin. In 1919, owner and Mexican consul Jack Danciger closed the paper.¹⁸ Thus, former *Cosmopolita* subscribers shifted to *La Prensa* for news on both Mexican government decisions and updates on ongoing American legal debates. Subscriptions to *La Prensa* allowed for even more connection between Mexican communities, as subscribers ranged from the upper Midwest to Central America. *La Prensa* regularly promoted the idea of "México de afuera" or "Mexico from the outside," which drew links between all Mexicans in the diaspora and called on Mexicans abroad to resist assimilation into their host communities.¹⁹

Building Resilience

The Depression of 1921 hit the United States hard and fast. Economists cite many reasons: wartime industries were no longer needed, returning soldiers created a labor surplus, and the

¹⁷ Smith, "The Mexican Immigrant Press Beyond the Borderlands," 73.

¹⁸ Ibid, 74.

¹⁹ Chronicling America, "About La Prensa. [Volume] (San Antonio, Tex.) 1913-1962," accessed December 11, 2022, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045395/>.

Spanish Influenza outbreak was taking lives throughout the country.²⁰ Nationwide, unemployment peaked at 11.7% percent.²¹ While the economy recovered to pre-recession levels within only two years, the sudden drop made employers react swiftly, cutting workers it deemed unnecessary. In Kansas City, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway cut track and section men's wages by 8.5% in 1921.²² So even those workers lucky enough to keep their jobs faced lower pay and high inflation that cut into their purchasing power.

On June 1st, 1921, a Missouri Pacific train carrying 800 Mexicans left Union Station for El Paso. At the border, passengers changed tracks onto a Mexican transport into Ciudad Juarez.²³ Referring to Argentine as a "foreign colony," Kansas City officials spent three months leading up to this transport searching for a way to provide aid to residents brought to the United States by railroad companies that had since lost those jobs.²⁴ In early April, Kansas City, Kansas, charities paid for a photographer to tour the boxcar houses and take passport photos.²⁵ M.M. Morales, the Mexican consul in Kansas City, told the *Kansas City Star* on April 19 that approximately 2,500 Mexican citizens had already appealed to the consulate for transport back to Mexico.²⁶ Thus, the Mexican government and the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce split the \$30,000 cost of the June 1st repatriation.²⁷

Many 1921 repatriates returned to their home communities in Mexico, waited out the United States' poor economic conditions, and then returned to Kansas City within a few years. At

²⁰ Jensen, "The Causes and Cures of Unemployment in the Great Depression," 559.

²¹ Romer, "Spurious Volatility in Historical Unemployment Data." For comparison, the employment rate during the 2008 Financial Crisis peaked at 10% in the United States.

²² Laird, *Mexicans in Santa Fe Town*, 182.

²³ *Kansas City Star*, "Mexicans Back to Mexico. A Special Train Carries Several Hundred from Here."

²⁴ *Kansas City Star*, "Federal Aid for Mexicans. Officials Here Will Investigate Conditions in Foreign Colony."

²⁵ *Kansas City Star*, "Camera A Step Towards Home"; *Kansas City Star*, "Get Passports for Mexicans."

²⁶ *Kansas City Star*, "Camera A Step Towards Home."

²⁷ *Kansas City Star*, "Get Passports for Mexicans"; "\$30,000 in 1921 to 2022 | Inflation Calculator." Adjusting for inflation, the 2022 value of this expense is \$497,000.

the same time, of the supposed 2,500 appeals to the Mexican consulate, only 800 people were returned to Mexico in June 1921. This signifies that the majority of Mexicans living in Kansas City had witnessed the failure of this repatriation to solve their immediate resource issues. Many of these repatriates returned within a few years or were soon replaced by new arrivals. The issue of resource allocation for these immigrants persisted.

In fact, repatriation did not stop the growth of the Mexican community in Kansas City. After roughly a decade of railroad work, many Mexican workers had saved enough wages to afford the fare north for their wives and children. This second wave of immigration caused the community to grow exponentially, from 500 Mexican residents in 1915 to over 2,500 by 1930, and this growth brought unique challenges. Railroad companies, who provided housing to workers, suddenly had to accommodate a significantly larger population of family units, rather than single young men, necessitating a switch away from barrack-style housing. What companies ultimately decided to do was to build family houses out of unused freight cars. As one might assume, railroad cars are not exactly ideal housing, and these homes were freezing in the winter and boiling in the summer. One car could end up housing multiple families. The cardboard walls between apartments did not keep cars well-insulated and limited families' privacy. Many years later, community members recalled running after trains to collect coal to heat their homes and using newspaper as makeshift insulation during the winter.²⁸ These tight quarters, combined with large, multigenerational family structures, led to poor health conditions in these neighborhoods. Disease rates, especially for communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, were very high in the Mexican *barrios*, and organizations like the Wyandotte County Health Department had to step up to meet the needs of these communities. However, even those with the best intentions used racist language to describe communities where

²⁸ Quiroga, Laurie Bretz Interview with Melquiades Quiroga.

Mexicans lived as “infected” and attributed poor health targets to Mexican cultural practices rather than the social determinants of public health, like inadequate heating, limited access to clean drinking water, and cramped quarters.²⁹

Combined with the need for medical care, Mexican immigrants often needed assistance meeting their material needs. This is how Catholic charities, primarily led by upper-middle-class white women in the community, became a significant source of aid to Mexican immigrants. Dorothy Gallagher, who was heavily involved with the Catholic Charities of Kansas City, rented a house in the Westside neighborhood for the parish to create the Guadalupe Center in 1922. Together with Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, which opened in 1920, the Guadalupe Center helped Mexican immigrants gain their footing in the United States.

Modeled on the settlement houses in Chicago and led initially by a combination of priests and the wealthy white patronesses of the Agnes Ward Amberg Club, the Guadalupe Center provided early childhood education, sewing classes, typing classes, English conversation groups, and children and teen programming including baseball, drama, and dance classes. The Center quickly outgrew the small house on Summit Street, and in 1926, the diocese purchased a larger house around the corner. The Center’s stated purpose was to demonstrate to Americans that the Mexican culture, and thus Mexican people, was not so different from American traditions, while simultaneously holding “Americanization” classes for the newly arrived immigrants.³⁰

As the first church in the diocese that catered specifically to the Mexican community with Spanish-language mass and a community center that embraced Mexican cultural festivals, the Guadalupe Center was and continues to be a focal point of the community. Of all of the services

²⁹ Judith Fincher Laird, *Mexicans in Santa Fe Town* (San José, Costa Rica: Judith Fincher Laird, 1981), 202.

³⁰ Kansas City Public Library, “Guadalupe Center Collection SC20,” accessed September 19, 2022, <https://kchistory.org/islandora/object/kchistory%253A63992>.

provided to Mexicans by the Guadalupe Center, none was more important than the medical clinic housed in the basement. As previously stated, the *barrio* had serious community health issues. The Guadalupe Center hired six doctors with various specializations and accepted both appointments and walk-ins. The most-utilized service they offered was infant care, which proved vital to lowering the infant mortality rate for the community and helped to prevent outbreaks of communicable diseases in the cramped neighborhoods.³¹

While these Catholic charities, the Guadalupe Center in particular, offered valuable assistance to households and potentially life-saving medical care to the *barrio*'s children, they did so with a mentality that Mexicans were incapable of helping themselves. In newspaper articles, the charitable services were described as a "privilege," and the white women who dedicated their time and energy as volunteers were described as saints and martyrs.³² This patronizing attitude and sense of superiority feed into another facet of 1920s Kansas City: the high membership in multiple white fraternal orders, including the Ku Klux Klan.

The second iteration of the Ku Klux Klan arrived in Kansas City during the summer of 1921. Within a few years, membership was up to several hundred, with multiple chapters, including Wyandotte, Argentine, Armourdale, and Rosedale.³³ Several prominent city officials of the time were Klansmen, including Kansas City, Kansas, Mayor Don McCombs and Argentine civic leader K.C. Haas. Haas was instrumental in organizing the social segregation of the Argentine neighborhood as the Mexican population grew. This included segregation within Catholic churches, refusals from local businesses to serve darker-skinned Mexicans, and restrictive housing policies that kept Mexican home ownership in the heavily polluted industrial zones of Kansas City.

³¹ Mendoza, "Kansas City's Guadalupe Center and the Mexican Immigrant Community."; 2017.

³² *Kansas City Star*, "'Adios' to Rich Years: Miss Dorothy Gallagher Leaves Guadalupe Center."

³³ Rives, *The Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City, Kansas*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2019), 92-93.

As fraternal orders had long been in the Kansas City area, especially the Freemasons and the Oddfellows, the Klan fit into this niche and quickly overtook other fraternal organizations in popularity, especially among young men returning from the First World War. For example, a cross-examination of Klan historian Timothy Rives' list of members in Kansas City, Kansas, with a membership roster from Armourdale Masonic Lodge 271, confirms that twenty-one lodge members in 1960 were former members of the Klan. And that is just one of the dozens of Masonic lodges in the Kansas City area.³⁴

One of the ways in which these nativist attitudes came to a head in Kansas City was in the public schools. As the second wave of immigration brought an influx of Mexican children into the neighborhood, white neighbors quickly made attempts to stop Mexican parents from enrolling their children in public schools. When four Mexican boys were barred from enrolling at a new school in Rosedale and harassed by a group of white adults, parents petitioned the Mexican consul to step in. In a letter to Kansas Governor Jonathan Davis, the Mexican consul asked for full reparations to the children and their families, and for continued goodwill between Mexico and the state.³⁵ Ultimately, with financing from the consulate, the school district chose to build a new facility specifically for Mexican children rather than integrate existing ones: the Clara Barton School.³⁶

The choice to name the school of Mexican children after the founder of the American Red Cross further exemplifies the patronizing attitude of white Kansas Citians when it came to interactions with the Mexican community, and the framing of any slightly positive event as an act

³⁴ Rives, *The Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City, Kansas*, 137–47; Armourdale Lodge 271, "Member Roster and Bylaws," 1960.

³⁵ B Cantu to Davis, "Mexican Consul to Governor Jonathan M. Davis," September 19, 1924.

³⁶ KCUR, "How The 1951 Flood Ended The 'Shameful Legacy' Of Segregation In Kansas City, Kansas," 2019.

of charity. The Clara Barton School was not a donation from the state of Kansas or the city of Kansas City to Mexican families. It was a half-solution to appease racist parents, at the expense of the community being discriminated against. It was presented as humanitarian aid, and although paid for by the Mexican government, the school was given a purely white, American, name.

The case of the Clara Barton school demonstrates the advantages migrants had in remaining Mexican citizens even after years of U.S. residence. As Hoffman states, naturalization rates around the country were extremely low for Mexican immigrants in particular. Over the decade and a half between 1920 and 1932, fewer than a dozen Mexicans applied for naturalization in Kansas City.³⁷ There are many reasons for this: the right to return to Mexico, the belief that European Americans would discriminate against Mexicans regardless of legal citizenship, and as in the case of the Clara Barton School, the way that the Mexican consulate would step in to help Mexican immigrants when they faced discrimination.³⁸ In fact, the consuls themselves discouraged naturalization for Mexicans, often citing nationalistic rhetoric about the diaspora being temporary and “Mexico’s sons” finding their way home.³⁹ However, this low naturalization rate and the continued identification of Mexicans as “aliens” in Kansas City continued to isolate them as a “foreign colony” and set them up as easy scapegoats when times of trouble came.

Social service agencies missed the mark when it came to helping the Mexican community during the Depression of 1921 and instead pushed for repatriation so that they could devote more of their budget to those of European descent. And in the years following, these agencies still cherrypicked which families were “deserving” of aid. *La Prensa* reported that, in Kansas City, Mexican women and children were left to starve by aid organizations during the winter of 1925

³⁷ Laird, *Mexicans in Santa Fe Town*, 196.

³⁸ Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*, 35.

³⁹ Kansas City Star, “Old Spirit Up in Mexico: Nationalistic Campaign Near Crest of Enthusiasm.”

when their husbands and fathers left them without an income to support them.⁴⁰ Rather than face starvation and discrimination from local authorities, Mexicans banded together in mutual aid organizations to ensure that they would be self-sufficient in the face of another economic downturn. The largest of these in Kansas City was the *Sociedad Morelos*, which collected a portion of each man's paycheck to support families that fell on hard times, providing insurance, legal counsel, benefits to sick and injured workers, as well as social programs.

In many ways, Mexican mutual aid societies mirrored the fraternal orders who organized against them. However, very little of their physical footprint survives while organizations like the Freemasons or the Klan fill the collections of archives around the country. As historian Arturo Rosales found when researching the *Unión Benéfica Mexicana*, the largest surviving Mexican mutual aid society in the country, the records of these organizations, if they still exist at all, are hiding in someone's basement or attic, gathering dust. Archives do not seek out the materials of these organizations, despite their importance as vehicles for community-building and social benefits. The name and role of the *Sociedad Morelos* in Kansas City survive in oral history interviews, but there is no physical footprint of the organization in local archives. Based on mutual aid societies in other Midwest *colonias*, such as Gary-East Chicago, Indiana, we can extrapolate what services the society offered and the basic structure. But oral histories offer the greatest look into how the community organizations founded between 1921 and 1931 had a meaningful impact on the community, and strengthened the ties that kept the Kansas City *barrio* afloat as the Great Depression came.

⁴⁰ Valerie M. Mendoza, "Kansas City's Guadalupe Center and the Mexican Immigrant Community," in *Wide-Open Town*, ed. Diane Mutti Burke, Jason Roe, and John Herron, Kansas City in the Pendergast Era (University Press of Kansas, 2018), 221, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv8pzdvm.16>.

The creation of these internal institutions and the community's acceptance of the Guadalupe Center as a center point for the Mexicans on the Westside highlight what changed in Kansas City that altered the course of trajectory for the entire *barrio* in the years to come. Kansas City's city welfare organizations, at least partially influenced by future Ku Klux Klan members, pulled out the support system for Mexicans during the Depression of 1921 and forced the Mexican government to engage in the repatriation of eight hundred of its citizens. In the years that followed 1921, the combination of the Guadalupe Center and the Sociedad Morelos together replaces the need for a city welfare organization. Residents could not only access food and clothing drives or ask neighbors for monetary help with expenses, but they could also send their children to pre-school, attend evening classes, obtain medical care, and attend Mexican cultural events without having to rely on city authorities, whose motivations could change with each election cycle. Certainly, politicians around the country were ready and willing to find a solution to what they deemed the 'Mexican Problem.'

Defying the Odds

Repatriation during the Depression of 1921 served as proof that repatriation could control the number of Mexican laborers living and working in the Kansas City area, but only for a limited time. Likewise, the immense economic downfall which necessitated repatriation in 1921 was difficult to replicate. So, in the meantime, Kansas politicians advocated for policies that would limit the power of growing immigrant communities to make immigration more difficult and less appealing.

Throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, three Kansas politicians were especially important to this effort: Senator Arthur Capper, Representative Charles Sparks, and Representative William Lambertson. Together, these three Kansas politicians worked for over a decade in

conjunction with right-wing anti-immigrant organizations, to draft legislation that sought to amend the United States Constitution. Their goal was to amend Section 2 of the 14th Amendment:

Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State, excluding Indians not taxed.⁴¹

These congressmen hoped to amend this wording so that rather than apportioning seats in the House of Representatives based on the whole population of a state, apportionment would be limited to only the number of citizens in a state.⁴² Senator Capper, the original author of this bill, tried for over twenty years from the late 1920s to mid-1940s to get the amendment through Congress, and regularly corresponded with right-wing, white supremacist organizations such as the American Eugenics Society and the American Protestant Alliance (later American Christian Alliance).⁴³ Together, under the guise of protecting Prohibition, Capper and these organizations worked to diminish the political weight of aliens within the United States while also warning of the rising threat of aliens' American-born children as an electoral power.

The rise of politicians like Capper laid the framework for the massive undertaking that would become Mexican repatriation in the Great Depression. In 1928, Congress held hearings on potentially subjecting Latin American nations to the same immigration quota system as Europe, as previous US foreign policy had claimed Latin America as an extension of the United States and tied US hegemony to the free flow of Latin American labor and capital across the southern border. Reversing over a century of foreign policy was no small ask. Thus, politicians framed the

⁴¹ "Constitution of the United States of America." Article 1, Amendment 14, Section 2.

⁴² Arthur Capper, "Arthur Capper Papers," Kansas Historical Society.

⁴³ The AES was founded in 1926 with a mission statement that "the dangerous and defective were reproducing too quickly, while the normal and advantaged of [the United States] reproduced too little." The ACA, previously known as the American Protestant Alliance, was founded by William Anderson, a member of the Anti-Saloon League. Its letterhead read "Protestant Americanism in action for self-defense." Both were 'dry' organizations that saw alcohol as a drug for foreign Catholics (including, but not limited to, Mexicans) to use in excess, ultimately becoming welfare dependent. Under the guise of Prohibition, both of these organizations pursued hardline anti-immigrant policies and lobbied Congressmen like Capper to champion pre-drafted legislation.

immigration crisis as an existential threat. Kansas Secretary of Labor Sparks called Mexican labor “the greatest scourge facing Kansas.”⁴⁴ Testimonials from organized labor officials, state and local chambers of commerce, and Secretary of Labor Davis repeatedly evoked stereotypes of stupid, lazy, Mexicans who had more children than they could provide for and became public charges.⁴⁵ Though the particular bill on the docket during these hearings did not pass, in early 1929, Congress passed the Undesirable Aliens Act, which criminalized border crossings outside of official ports of entry.⁴⁶

Even as the Undesirable Aliens Act went into effect, in the eyes of some politicians, it did not go far enough. In August 1929, as the US economy began to show signs of imminent collapse, Senator Capper introduced a bill to Congress to deport “criminal aliens” from the country. In correspondence with Secretary of Labor Davis, and the American Eugenics Society, he discussed the feasibility of a mass deportation apparatus, to remove “needy” immigrants from relief rolls.⁴⁷ While Capper’s Law did not pass, the sentiment of wanting to limit the methods of immigration that remained legal persisted. As the Depression came on, the number of visas granted to Mexican citizens began to drop. While the average number of visas granted annually between 1923 and 1929 was 62,000, by the start of 1930, there were only 2,500 issued, with none going to “common laborers,” unless they had already lived in the United States. As the economic situation grew more dire and unemployment began to surge, the aggressive methods that Capper wanted began to take shape.

⁴⁴ United States Senate, Seventieth Congress, “Restriction of Western Hemisphere Immigration.” He would later be elected as a member of Congress.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Eric Fish, “Race, History, and Immigration Crimes | Iowa Law Review - The University of Iowa,” accessed February 7, 2023, <https://ilr.law.uiowa.edu/print/volume-107-issue-3/race-history-and-immigration-crimes>.

⁴⁷ Arthur Capper, “Arthur Capper Papers.”

The first of what would become the indicative repatriation raids of the Great Depression happened on February 26, 1931, at La Placita Park in Los Angeles. The plaza was a common meeting place for manual laborers as they stopped for their midday meal. In the middle of the afternoon, nearly 400 people were in the park to play music, eat, and socialize together. Suddenly, around four o'clock, immigration officials sealed off all of the exits to the park. They demanded every "Mexican" in the park line up and show their papers. Dozens were arrested, and many of them were deported. Families were separated, and the introduction of new immigration laws in the late 1920s meant that for some, these separations were permanent, as noncitizen parents were prohibited from returning to the United States with a deportation on their record. These raids became commonplace, particularly in cities near the border in Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, but did happen in cities further from the border, with immigrant populations of a similar or smaller size to Kansas City, like Portland and Indianapolis.⁴⁸ Raids, and the threat of them, pushed many to take themselves across the border, an action known as "self-repatriation".⁴⁹

News of repatriation was delayed in Kansas City. While Spanish-language newspapers like *La Prensa*, came from border towns where repatriation was already underway and warned Mexicans around the country of the raids taking place, local papers did not take up the lead. In 1930, there was one *Kansas City Star* article in March about criminal deportation, but nothing on the plans forming in Washington to widen the scope of deportation to everyday immigrants. In December 1931, as repatriation was peaking in other parts of the country, the *Star* published an

⁴⁸ Mexico Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de ... a ... presentada a la H. Congreso de la Unión.*, *Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de ... a ... presentada a la H. Congreso de la Unión.* (Mexico: La Secretaría, 1928).

⁴⁹ Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (University of Arizona Press, 1974), 51.

article describing caravans crossing the border at El Paso, where middle-class repatriates were overburdened with the material goods they had accrued in the United States and ready to return to Mexico as the *nouveau riche*.⁵⁰ This level of material wealth was, of course, not the experience of most Mexicans living in the United States, as Kansas City railroad workers had just achieved homeownership over railcar housing by the start of the 1930s. By 1932, the *Star* was reprinting entire press statements from the Mexican consulate, stoking the nationalist fires and calling Mexicans home.⁵¹ Those were the only two articles written by the *Star* about Mexican repatriation as it was underway.

There were certainly individuals in Kansas City who wanted to make repatriation happen. And Kansas officials, particularly Capper and Sparks, advocated for repatriation and raids at home and around the country. In Kansas City, however, the Mexican community banded together within churches and the *Sociedad Morelos* and pooled their monetary resources to stay afloat during these early years of the Depression, avoiding the same internal pressures that ultimately led city officials in other parts of the country to organize repatriation on a large scale.

At the same time, forces moved to convince Mexicans to leave on their own, without the Community Chest having to pitch in on the cost. The Mexican government began to push a message through the consulates that jobs and land were waiting for Mexicans who chose to return, and that once “Mexico’s sons” had returned from abroad, they could all “work toward the rehabilitation of [their] glorious homeland.”⁵² The consulates would then feed this information to newspapers and aid organizations, who began to spread the word of how wonderful life would be

⁵⁰ Kansas City Star, “A Vast Show in Exodus: Border Daily Has Spectacle in Parade of Mexicans,” *Kansas City Star*, December 27, 1931.

⁵¹ Kansas City Star, “Old Spirit Up in Mexico: Nationalistic Campaign Near Crest of Enthusiasm,” *Kansas City Star*, August 2, 1932.

⁵² *Ibid.*

for repatriates. The Kansas City consulate confirmed in letters back to Mexico City that, while the consulate had helped the few families that chose to leave on their own terms when they lost a source of income or heard of raids in other parts of the country through Spanish-language press, there were no raids or any other mass-organized repatriation project in Kansas City. In a compilation of various consular reports, the Mexican Foreign Secretary said the following:

The work of the consulate in this respect, has been arduous and constant, presenting two phases: the repatriation of Mexicans prevented from pursuing their goals abroad, and the protection of the interests they have built there.⁵³

As repatriation reached a fever pitch elsewhere, Kansas City stayed relatively the same. Unlike cities with factory- or agriculture-based economies, where work was hard to come by, the railroad was functioning as ever, and manual laborers, by and large, managed to keep at least some income flowing, which was then distributed through the established mutual aid network to most, if not all, Mexican households.

As stated earlier, railroad companies were the largest employer of Mexican laborers in Kansas City. When Kansas Governor Reed put out a directive to the railroads to ‘hire American’, the railroad companies’ bottom line was at stake. In a November 1930 letter to Kansas Governor Clyde Reed, W.B. Storey, the president of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway, explicitly stated that Santa Fe had already sent foreign workers back to the border for the winter and that all Spanish-speaking “Mexicans” on the tracks were actually American citizens born in New Mexico.⁵⁴ This was a blatant lie on the part of Storey, when ATSF internal records confirm that nearly all laborers with Spanish surnames in Kansas City and other Kansas railroad towns

⁵³ Mexico Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de ... a ... presentada a la H. Congreso de la Unión.*, 11. “La labor consular a este respecto, que ha sido ardua y constante, presente dos fases: la repatriación de mexicanos de mexicanos incapacitados para continuar desarrollando sus actividades en el extranjero, y la protección de sus intereses fincados en él.”

⁵⁴ William Benson Storey, “Letter to Governor Clyde Martin Reed,” November 22, 1930.

immigrated directly from Mexico during the 1910s and 1920s.⁵⁵ But the lie highlights that the railroad industry in Kansas was not falling to the Great Depression quite like other industries.

In 1931, ATSF was still able to purchase five hundred new refrigerator cars, with a total cost of \$1,767,063 in 1931 money.⁵⁶ The addition of these new refrigerator cars means that the railroad was not falling headfirst into the economic abyss, and was still able to invest in growth, and that there was an increased demand for ice plants in Kansas City, which similarly employed many Mexican workers. In the ice plants of the early 1930s, men worked fifteen to twenty-hour days, moving up to a thousand three-hundred-pound ice blocks per shift. It was backbreaking work, but earning a paycheck during a time when manual laborers around the country were struggling to stay at work was necessary for survival.⁵⁷

The fact that rail work and the related industries were not in as dire straits as other industries around the country made Kansas City a unique case for Great Depression repatriation. The primary justification for repatriation in other parts was that Mexican laborers were reliant on public welfare, partly due to labor discrimination causing Mexican workers to be the first fired during the early years of the Depression, and a lack of an internal support system to keep families afloat once they lost an income. Local government officials would cite a lack of budget and argue that they were supporting Mexican immigrants at the expense of ‘more-deserving’ citizens, organize advertisements for repatriation, and if those failed, call in labor and immigration officials to escalate. In Kansas City, the railroads and associated plants not only stayed in business, but they continued to operate at roughly the same levels, meaning that even as wages were docked and the

⁵⁵ Fincher Laird, *Mexicans in Santa Fe Town*, 210.

⁵⁶ Spencer Research Library, “Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Miscellaneous Files,” Kenneth Spencer Research Library, accessed September 22, 2022, https://archives.lib.ku.edu/repositories/3/resources/5147/collection_organization.

⁵⁷ Melquiades Quiroga, Laurie Bretz Interview with Melquiades Quiroga.

economy deflated, Mexican laborers still received a paycheck. Combined with the ability to receive aid from unofficial sources like Catholic charities, Mexicans in Kansas City were in a unique situation.

The demographic composition of the Mexican population in cities also impacted how the stress of the Great Depression strained the effectiveness of community solidarity. In larger border cities, it was far more likely that Mexican immigrants would be from all parts of the country and from distinct social strata and did not know each other at all, despite American officials lumping them together in the 'Mexican' category. In Kansas City, neighborhoods functioned as large extended families, where most of the immigrants came from the same regions, if not the same small villages in Mexico. This built-in kinship structure transferred readily to a shared community identity and the establishment of mutual aid societies after the Depression of 1921. In some ways, the Depression of 1921 was to the Kansas City Mexican community what the Great Depression would become for the birth of a national Chicano identity.

In no case were these community links more real than that of the Guadalupe Center. As the Great Depression ran its course, leading to wage drops and increased financial insecurity, the center continued to host their annual neighborhood fiestas, drawing crowds of over a thousand in both 1932 and 1933. Community members spent days preparing the necessary food, and the events were crucial to keeping morale high when wages were low, while at the same time allowing donors to interact with the community. In photographs, children in traditional Mexican dress sing and dance, surrounded by parents wearing coveralls from the railroad. At the same time, members of the Amberg club are running tables for concessions and raffles. In the midst of a period where food

and clothing were hard to come by, the pooling of resources to put on this event indicates how community organizations brought people together, and boosted morale during hard times.⁵⁸

Also in 1933, the director of the Guadalupe Center, Dorothy Gallagher, took advantage of the wealth of trained manual laborers out of jobs with the railroad and the deflated value of building materials and commissioned local workers to construct a new facility for the Center's headquarters. The new building, designed in the style of a Mexican mission, is located at Avenida Cesar Chavez and Bellevue, with space for a full industrial kitchen, conference rooms, an auditorium, and an outdoor patio capable of housing a full stage for events. The construction of the new Guadalupe Center not only indicated a need for larger facilities as families relied on the Center for necessary medical care but also the beginning of the Center's transition from a charity run by outsiders to a community center run by the Mexican community.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Very few of the Kansas City families left for Mexico during the Depression. But Procopio Madrigal Zamora and his wife Virginia Pimentel chose to take their four children and go. They left the small house they rented in Argentine and made their way south, ultimately returning to their village of Tangancícuaro, in the highlands of Michoacán. The Madrigal family home had been sold to a new family, so they ended up in the small house on the ranch next door, helping out family friends with their cattle. There, they welcomed two more children, Mexican citizens, in 1934 and 1936, further blending the lines in their family of who was, and who wasn't American.

Like many repatriates, the family quickly found that life in Mexico was very different from what they had become accustomed to in Kansas City. Particularly for repatriate children, who were American citizens, the difference between city life next to the railroad tracks and the small villages

⁵⁸ Kansas City Public Library, "Guadalupe Center Collection SC20."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

they found full of extended families they had never met embodied the divide between the two cultures. Children whose whole lives had been uprooted because they were Mexican, found themselves isolated in Mexico for being American.

The promises from the Mexican government of land and work went largely unfulfilled, and most repatriates found themselves struggling to integrate into rural life. While news from Mexico had come in Spanish-language press, many also found that the revolution that had pushed them to the United States was still taking place. Militias were still roaming the countryside, high on revolutionary fervor or, more likely, the power they had found harassing their neighbors. One of these militiamen bands rode down Procopio Madrigal Zamora while he was rounding up cattle and shot him dead. Years later, in 1944, after struggles with American immigration officials, Virginia Pimentel returned to the United States with her two youngest children to meet up with their American siblings who had traveled ahead.⁶⁰

Just because fewer families were uprooted from Kansas City during the Great Depression than in other parts of the country does not mean the community was untouched by the trauma of repatriation. While the *Kansas City Star* ran only five articles total about Mexican repatriation between 1928 and 1940, news from the borderlands was plentiful in the Spanish-language papers that arrived in Kansas City. Kansas City residents were not unaware of the national picture of repatriation. This was part of the reason that families like the Madrigals left without being directly forced, but it also contributed to a general atmosphere of anxiety throughout the community as the Depression continued. By the time the *Sociedad Morelos* ran out of money in 1936, the Works Progress Administration was erecting monuments in Kansas City, allowing for new sources of

⁶⁰ US Department of Labor, microfilm record, “‘United States Border Crossings from Mexico to United States, 1903-1957’ Virginia Pimentel Vda De Madrigal, 1944.” n.d., <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XLFY-M2C>.

income. But in the moment, fear was high that the systems built between the depressions would collapse, leaving the Mexicans of Kansas City with no choice but to leave. There was no telling when things would return to normal. In May 1939, the *Kansas City Star* was still spreading puff pieces from the Mexican government promising each family that chose to return several hundred acres and a small house.⁶¹ Repatriates from the early years of the Depression had written back to the United States warning about the Mexican government's failure to keep these promises, so by this point, repatriation was dead in the water.⁶²

Ultimately, it was World War II and the creation of the bracero program that guaranteed the end of the Depression. Many, but certainly not all, repatriates returned to the United States, although their social and economic status was greatly reduced. In Kansas City, the return from Mexico meant returning to the railyards and packhouses, and the same backbreaking manual labor they had performed before and during the early Depression. Despite everything they had just been through, some of the young American citizens returning chose to join the armed forces. When they returned, they found themselves still unwelcome in traditionally white social organizations. But with time and much effort, the community established its own institutions, including the American Legion Post 213 and a railroad union of their own, while taking over organizations like the Guadalupe Center.

Kansas City, and the Great Plains in general, remains an understudied region of Chicano Studies. While this paper lays some of the groundwork for academic conversations about Mexicans outside of the Southwest, much more work must be done to understand Mexican American identity formation in Kansas City. Further study should be devoted to organizing actions taken before the

⁶¹ *Kansas City Star*, "To Aid Mexicans in U.S.: Mexico Will Spend 300,000 Pesos for Repatriation," *Kansas City Star*, May 11, 1939.

⁶² Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*, 200.

Depression of 1921 by the first railroad workers who arrived in the Kansas City metro area and to the development of the surviving Mexican cultural institutions established after repatriates returned to the United States. Repatriation is only the beginning of the story.

While local politicians echoed the nativist sentiments of and corresponded with, the architects of large-scale repatriation on the federal stage during the Great Depression, repatriation did not happen in Kansas City to the same level as in other regions. While multiple factors played into this distinction, the most significant is city officials' prior use of repatriation ten years before, during the Depression of 1921. Repatriates from this earlier action returned to Kansas City shortly after, and the Mexican population continued to grow as the 1920s progressed. During that time, Mexicans banded together in mutual aid societies like the *Sociedad Morelos*, and participated in the programs of the Guadalupe Center, solidifying pre-existing familial bonds into a community network that allowed the *barrio* to stay afloat in the Great Depression when other communities faltered.

While a few Kansas City residents chose to return to Mexico, with sometimes fatal consequences, most chose to stay. This ability to choose was a privilege unknown to *barrios* in other parts of the country. While Mexicans in the Southwest and Upper Midwest were physically forced onto trains or coerced by charities withholding food and clothing, Kansas City's *barrio* emerged from the Great Depression relatively unscathed by repatriation. While material aid was offered with the expectation that Mexicans would assimilate into American culture, Mexicans were able to put pressure back on the Guadalupe Center and transform it into the cultural institution it is today. And as few Kansas Citians had been officially deported by federal authorities and banned from reentry, many repatriates, including Virginia Pimentel de Madrigal and her children, ultimately returned and lived the rest of their lives in Kansas City. Although the decades to come

would provide their own set of challenges with continued discrimination and the Flood of 1951 disproportionately affecting the Mexican community, the Kansas City *barrio* withstood the Great Depression as no city in the borderlands did. In the face of political pressure, economic depression, and institutionalized discrimination, Mexican immigrants in Kansas City demonstrated remarkable resilience, resourcefulness, and solidarity, creating a vibrant and resilient community that not only survived but thrived despite the many obstacles in their path.

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