

## “Farewell Homeland” (1993)<sup>1</sup>

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Carlos Almazán was born into a world on the brink of monumental change. The occasion of his birth around 1890 was undoubtedly celebrated throughout the estate near Zamora, Michoacán, where the Almazán family had resided for as long as anyone could remember. Neighbors congratulated his parents for having another strong boy, one that would, as he grew older, certainly improve the family’s economic situation. The Almazáns made their living from the land, and in a late nineteenth-century Mexican community dependent on agriculture, every healthy child proved indispensable to the family’s economic subsistence.

Unfortunately, tragedy soon struck—Carlos’s father died. Señora Almazán had no choice but to carry on the farm work by herself with young sons. Although she struggled to maintain ownership of the land, the small farm gradually slipped from her hands. Like many others in the region, she became a sharecropper. As Carlos and his brothers grew older, they learned to plant corn and other grains, using old plows that had been passed from generation to generation. Farm work completely occupied their lives. With the help of her sons, who had been propelled by misfortune into early manhood, Señora Almazán gradually managed to stabilize her economic situation after the difficult decade following her husband’s death.

But Carlos, now a teenager, grew restless. Tired of the backbreaking work in the fields, he decided to go to Mexico City. Such a decision would have been improbable only a few years before. Zamora and its surrounding communities had been relatively isolated until a newly constructed railroad connected the region to the nation’s capital. This transportation network allowed Carlos to leave with high hopes and seek his fortune in the city. It was not long before Carlos made a promising start selling meat and other foods on the streets. He soon married and had children. Yet his prosperity was short-lived. How could he have predicted that Mexico would soon be embroiled in a revolution that would leave him bankrupt? Defeated, Carlos and his family returned to Zamora, but not for long. At the urging of his older brother, Carlos once again made a momentous decision regarding his future: he boarded a train for the north, leaving his homeland for the United States in 1920.

Carlos became part of a massive movement of individuals and families who crossed the Mexican border to the United States in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Approximately one and a half million Mexicans migrated northward between 1900 and 1930, most settling in the Southwest. This process eventually made Mexico one of the largest single sources of immigration to the United States. For Mexico, the migration resulted in the loss of about 10 percent of its total population by 1930.

Most scholars who have analyzed this movement north have focused almost exclusively on the socio-economic factors involved in this migration. This chapter will review those issues, but will also put into context the larger cultural questions raised by such a massive movement of people between two nations with unique histories. The railroads not only led to economic growth

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in Mexico and the American Southwest, they also facilitated the transmission of cultural values and practices between the two countries.

By concentrating on cultural transformations occurring in Mexican villages, this chapter will also examine the beliefs and traditions that immigrants to the north brought with them. The structure of authority in the village, the rise of Mexican nationalism, and the adaptations in familial customs in this period all played a role in defining the outlook of Mexican immigrants. Finally, this chapter will explore the very decision to migrate itself, one which was clearly driven by economic considerations but also culturally conditioned. This examination will stress that the culture Mexican migrants brought with them, rather than being a product of a stagnant “traditional” society, was instead a vibrant, rather complicated amalgamation of rural and urban mores, developed in Mexican villages during half a century of changing cultural practices.

Recent scholarship has made clear that migration to California is not merely a twentieth-century phenomenon. Ever since Mexico had lost its northern territories in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War, there had been movement of Mexicans into the United States. With the discovery of gold in 1848, perhaps as many as 20,000 experienced miners rushed to California from Sonora and Zacatecas, only to be driven out of the mines by the early 1850s. Yet despite the many returnees, this migration probably still signified a larger movement north to California than any other during the entire Spanish (1771-1821) and Mexican (1821-48) eras.

While Mexicans drifted across the border during the remainder of the nineteenth century, most located in the mining towns of southern Arizona or the ranches and farms of south Texas, where they were within easy reach of their homeland. These two states alone accounted for over 80 percent of the 103,393 Mexican-born residents of the United States in 1900. Despite the heavy gold-rush migration to California, the 1900 census reported only 8,086 inhabitants of that state who were born in Mexico. This figure is striking when compared with the approximately eight to ten thousand noted at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Although migration had occurred in the last half of the nineteenth century, it paled in comparison to the mass exodus of Mexicans in the first thirty years of the twentieth. This time California, which in particular had received relatively few Mexican immigrants before 1900, experienced a dramatic rise in the proportion of new settlers.

No historian of the period disputes the notion that the American Southwest held strong economic attractions—often characterized as pull factors—for such immigrants. The mining industry in Arizona and New Mexico had encouraged Mexicans to cross the border even in the late nineteenth century. After 1900 the growth of mines in these states, as well as in Colorado and Oklahoma, induced more workers to flock to the area. Mexicans also played a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of southwestern railroad networks. In addition, railroad work provided the transportation by which job seekers moved from site to site throughout the Southwest.

However, it was the expansion of agriculture which created the most pronounced demand for labor, particularly in California. Irrigation revolutionized California farming, allowing arid land to be converted into vast new farms. By 1929, California became the largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the Southwest, a region generating 40 percent of the total United States output. Meanwhile, Mexicans rapidly replaced the Japanese as the major component of the agricultural labor force.

Although certainly paid less than Anglo Americans, a Mexican worker could earn a wage in any of these three industries far above the 12 cents a day paid on several of the rural haciendas of central Mexico. For example, clearing land in Texas paid 50 cents a day, while miners earned well over \$2.00 per day. Most railroad and agricultural laborers were paid between \$1 to \$2 a day.

The demand for labor created by the expansion of southwestern industry in the early twentieth century was compounded by the curtailment of Asian and European immigration; the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the 1907-8 Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan, and, finally, the Immigration Acts of 1917, 1921, and 1924 all effectively limited other sources of cheap labor. Employers began to look longingly toward Mexico as a source of labor for their steadily increasing needs. Not surprisingly, immigration restrictions directed against Mexicans were at first consistently deferred under pressure by southwestern employers and then, when finally enacted, were mostly ignored by officials at the border. American administrators, in effect, allowed migrants to avoid the head tax or literacy test—instituted in 1917—by maintaining sparsely monitored checkpoints even after the establishment of the border patrol in 1924.

More characteristic of prevailing American attitudes toward Mexican immigration before the 1930s, however, was the elaborate network of employment agencies and labor recruiters stationed in border towns such as El Paso. These networks provided the workers for the railroads, factories, and farms throughout the West. Although the contract labor provision of American immigration law strictly prohibited the hiring of foreign workers before their emigration, agents often traveled undisturbed to the interior of Mexico and to towns along the border to search out likely candidates.

The pull factors represented by a burgeoning southwestern economy and a federal government willing to allow undocumented migration through a policy of benign neglect were factors which contributed to mass migration across the border during the early years of the twentieth century. But there were complicated “push” factors as well. Changes in the Mexican economy under the thirty-five-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz were perhaps even more important than American industrial development in bringing Mexicans to the United States.

The Díaz administration followed a land policy which encouraged the growth of large haciendas at the expense of small farmers and communally owned lands, or *ejidos*. While the more productive haciendas grew significant quantities of sugar and coffee for export, thousands of rural poor were left landless. Previously independent peasants were forced into debt peonage or into joining the growing migratory labor stream. At the same time, the shift to export crops severely decreased the production of maize, the staple food in the Mexican diet. Along with other governmental policies, this decline in production boosted the cost of living. Simultaneously, wages fell because of the labor surplus created by both the land policy and the population boom of the late nineteenth century. By the time of the Revolution of 1910, these factors had combined to bring the rural masses of Mexico to the brink of starvation.

Although the violence and economic disruption brought about by the revolution did not alone cause Mexican emigration to the United States, they certainly played a crucial role in stimulating movement. While *campesinos* crossed the border fleeing for their personal safety, hacienda owners often fled for fear of reprisals from their employees. Warring factions also destroyed farmland and railroads, bringing much of the economy to a halt. Unemployment rose

along with inflation, forcing many to leave Mexico simply to survive. For other agricultural workers, revolution severed the bonds of debt peonage, emancipating workers from their haciendas and freeing them to move north.

Migration occurred before, during, and after the revolution, but became practical only after the development of a railroad transportation network in Mexico linking the populous central states with the northern border. Indeed, a clearer understanding of the role of the railroads in creating the exodus reveals that Mexican immigration to the United States cannot be viewed simplistically in push-pull terms. The process was a great deal more complex. The creation of the Mexican railway system was both a product of and had consequences for not just one, but both sides of the border. Accordingly, classifying the factors contributing to emigration into “American” and “Mexican” ones can mask the unique relationship between these two neighbors—a relationship shared by no other country that has contributed masses of immigrants to American society.

Railroad development in Mexico occurred almost entirely during the *Porfiriato*—the reign of dictator Porfirio Díaz from 1876 to 1910. The year before he took office, Mexico had a mere 663 kilometers of railway lines in service. In contrast, when Díaz resigned in 1910, Mexico’s railroad network stretched 19,748 kilometers, representing a thirtyfold increase in thirty-five years. More important, the rapid expansion of the rail system linked central Mexico to the northern border with completion of the two major railroads of the nation, the Mexican Central and the Nacional (see Map 1).

Díaz hoped that the erection of a national railroad system would unify the nation and modernize its economy. Consequently, he aggressively encouraged foreign investment, since Mexico itself lacked the capital needed to finance construction on such a grand scale. By 1911, American investments in Mexican railroads totaled over \$644 million, 61.7 percent of the total capital in support of the system. This amount more than doubled the total American investment in any other Mexican industry. Many influential Americans were involved in railroad promotion in Mexico, including such prominent figures as former President Ulysses S. Grant and the utopian reformer Albert Kimsey-Owen.

Quickly, however, the same financial magnates that controlled the Southern Pacific, Santa Fe, and other railroads in the American Southwest became the major shareholders in Mexican railroads. Financiers J. Pierpont Morgan, Jay Gould, Collis P. Huntington, Thomas Nickerson, and Thomas A. Scott dominated investment in railroads on both sides of the border. As one journalist predicted upon seeing the Southern Pacific begin to build an extension into Sinaloa, “Mountainous Tepic...and aristocratic, languor-loving Jalisco...are about to be swung upon the railway chain that Uncle Sam swings from his belt. Rather than creating the strong, independent economy that he had hoped for, Díaz unintentionally made Mexico an economic appendage of the United States. By 1911, the United States received more of Mexico’s trade than all European nations combined, and between one-fourth and two-fifths of all American foreign investments went to Mexico.

On a local level, the coming of the railroad drove up land prices and led to increased concentration of land ownership among the *hacendados*. Communal village property was expropriated and small landowners found it extremely difficult to hold onto their plots. It is probable that the railroad that eventually took Carlos Almázan away from Zamora played an

important role in forcing his mother into sharecropping. Porfirian officials encouraged this new concentration of landownership because they believed that only large-scale agricultural production would lead to “progress.” Villages which had existed for centuries with systems of widespread land ownership saw this traditional form of equilibrium disintegrate in favor of a highly stratified society.

The railroads also introduced new ideas and material goods, producing other profound changes in Mexican society. Some Mexican intellectuals referred to this uprooting of culture as the “Americanization” of Mexico. Yet despite such dissent, most of the Mexican elite welcomed the sudden appearance of American and European goods into the middle-class markets of Mexico City and other regional centers. Many claimed that this process would lift the largely Indian nation out of its “traditional backwardness” and pull Mexico into the twentieth century.

Such attitudes were reflected in legislation passed by several states banning the *pantalón*, the traditional baggy cotton pants worn by the men of the central plateau. Euro-American style slacks, made readily available by the railroads for purchase throughout the region, became the preferred fashion. Significantly, beer replaced tequila as the most popular beverage in northern Mexico. American railroad workers on Mexican lines introduced baseball in urban centers throughout central and northern Mexico, while D. S. Spaulding opened sporting-goods stores in Mexico City in 1888. As baseball became the most popular sport in the northern state of Sonora, the loss of spectators forced bullrings in the region to close.

Of course, this penetration into Mexico of Euro-American culture was uneven. Many villages remained relatively isolated, especially if they were bypassed by the railroad lines. Those communities located directly in the path of the railroads retained established ways of doing things even as they instituted innovations. One American commentator, for example, pointed to the irony of seeing women and burros carrying heavy loads to markets on the very roads which followed the paths of the trains. In Tepoztlán, a modern mill stood idle as women continued to grind their own corn, despite the additional time and effort the task required.

On the other hand, sewing machines rapidly appeared in the modest homes and isolated villages of central Mexico. The machine itself became a status symbol among villagers, while it provided the necessary tool for an alternative source of income through clothing manufacturing. According to Ernesto Galarza, who grew up in the isolated mountain village of Jalcocotán, Nayarit, the sewing machine was so esteemed that only his mother was allowed to touch it. However, all could marvel at the “remarkable piece of machinery” —this product of modern civilization—to see “the treadle see-saw dizzily, the belt whip around the balance wheel, the thread jerk and snake from the spool, and the needle stab the cloth with incredible speed.”

The railroad, however, could as easily close off certain options for income as open others up. In northwestern Michoacan, the coming of the railroad to one agrarian town in 1899 displaced many different kinds of workers. Muleteers, who had previously provided the backbone of the local transportation network, were the first to be driven from the scene. Wheat stopped being milled locally since it became cheaper to ship it to Mexico City, Toluca, or Irapuato—larger urban centers—for processing, thereby displacing other laborers. Traditional handicraft workers and other artisans who had provided most goods for local consumption saw their modest fortunes evaporate as new city-made goods were introduced into

town. Finally, as the railroad and increased irrigation made more intensive agriculture possible and profitable, the demand for sharecroppers diminished.

The Mexican immigrant during this period most often came from these unsettled communities exhibiting both customary modes of thought and behavior and recently arrived examples of machinery and culture. Map 2 shows that most were born in areas within a day's walk from the railroad lines, while many saw the trains pass right through their own villages. Although a significant group came from urban centers such as Mexico City or Guadalajara, areas which were heavily influenced by Euro-American culture, most were representatives of smaller towns and villages in transition. A large group of immigrants came from the northern border states, particularly Chihuahua and Sonora, which maintained constant, ample contact with their American neighbors. Few came from areas, such as the tropical southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, that were relatively isolated from the profound changes taking place in Mexican society.

To describe adequately the culture that immigrants from Mexico brought with them to the United States, careful attention must be paid to these communities in transition. Fortunately, the work of pioneer anthropologists such as Robert Redfield and Manuel Gamio provide us with descriptions of early twentieth-century village life in central Mexico. More recently, historians of Mexico such as Luis González and Carlos B. Gil have written "microhistories" of several municipalities, works which resemble the community studies that have been written over the last two decades by American social historians. Studies by other social scientists working in Mexican villages in the post-World War II era, such as Erich Fromm and George M. Foster, can, if used selectively and carefully, provide additional insights into the social and cultural life of earlier migrants to the United States.

Too often Mexican culture during this important period of change has been portrayed as static and "traditional." This description is rooted in the work of social scientists, particularly anthropologists, who ventured from the academies of the United States or Mexico City in search of the traditional Mexican countryside—the antithesis of modernity and industrial society. Their picture of Mexican culture among the peasantry, therefore, was usually set in sharp contrast to the society of the observer. In truth, substantial interaction with urban and industrial society characterized much of rural Mexico during this period. A few anthropologists in the period recognized this situation and incorporated this interaction into their models and descriptions. Robert Redfield, for example, developed the anthropological definition of "acculturation" based on his fieldwork in the Mexican countryside with villagers in contact with modern society." Rather than simply abandoning a world characterized by cultural systems passed from generation to generation, Mexicans who eventually came to the United States in the early twentieth century were products of a vibrant, rapidly changing society, one which was coming to terms with what in the future would be both modern *and* Mexican.

One can accurately describe Mexico during the Porfiriato as a nation of villages, albeit villages undergoing profound social and economic change. Mexico in 1910 had only 68 cities over 10,000 in population, while the United States contained 601 in the same year. Outside of Mexico City and Guadalajara, no other city in Mexico had over 100,000 inhabitants. Like other predominantly agricultural nations, a great number of smaller centers with several hundred or a few thousand people dotted the Mexican landscape. Unlike the United States, the largely agricultural Mexican population almost never lived on isolated farms, but rather congregated in

small towns. Even the urban areas in Mexico, defined as communities with a population of over 2000, resembled overgrown villages.

In almost every village and barrio, the plaza acted as the community's center. Here one found the local church and the marketplace, surrounded by the shops and dwellings of those who provided services and leadership. Built into the weekly schedule were periods of relaxation from the drudgery of work in which both men and women used the plaza to do their shopping, attend religious worship, or simply meet with friends. At these times, villagers shared their feelings about community issues and hopes for and fears of the future. Ironically, community affiliation among Mexicans and the role of the plaza were strengthened as railroads solidified the importance of central markets and urban centers of exchange. Even individuals who lived outside of the town proper periodically came into the plaza to exchange their goods, using the opportunity to reestablish ties to the villagers. Such centers acted as a "focus of culture," encouraging the display both of a refined social etiquette and of agrarian folkways. As migrants left Mexico for the north, they attempted to recreate these centers of communication.

Within each village, authority was divided among a variety of individuals. Traditionally, elderly men were respected for their wisdom and contribution to the community over many years. In Jalcocotán, Nayarit, Don Cleofas, the oldest person in the pueblo whom everyone called "Tata," provided the village with its history, passing down orally to the younger generations the stories of *jalcocotecanos* fighting Spanish conquistadors and French soldiers. Moreover, these men were usually patriarchs of a large constellation of families living in the village and surrounding communities. Older women, like Doña Eduvijes of Jalcocotán, often gained the respect of the younger generations with their tales of the supernatural. Others, like midwives, played important roles in life cycle events, thereby exercising a certain community-wide respect.

Respect, however, did not necessarily translate into power, either economic or social, in Porfirian Mexican society. In particular, women who had been restricted by the edicts of the Catholic Church and the dynamics of a communal family economy now found themselves increasingly separated from the emerging cash-focused economic order. Unlike the description of increased female power in New Mexican village communities provided by historian Sarah Deutsch, women in Mexican villages along the railroad route quickly lost whatever standing they had possessed because the entire village was absorbed into a network where mobility became fundamental for economic survival. This transformation led to changes in community-held values, changes which stressed access to outside information and economic opportunity, while women's place continued to be circumscribed to household and village activities. Women continued to be active in productive work and providing village stability, but this very activity was rapidly devalued in the new mobile order.

In Naranja, Michoacán, for example, women along with men had previously engaged in part-time weaving of straw mats and hats to supplement a subsistence economy of intensive agriculture and fishing. Once Porfirian hacienda agriculture was instituted, which used a developed railroad network to get grain to other parts of Mexico, women were forced to weave "with ever greater intensity" during all waking hours of the day, "and even while walking." Every opportunity to make additional income had to be intensified since subsistence agriculture rapidly disintegrated as an option for survival. Moreover, younger and female children replaced the men alongside women weavers, since husbands and older male children were now looking for day

labor. The practice of women aiding the effort of fishing or farming at crucial times in the harvest cycle diminished, except if the entire family was engaged in sharecropping. Tortilla-making had previously engaged two older women for one to three hours a day because of the time required to grind the corn and pat out the tortillas; increasingly, poverty began to be judged by the inability of women to provide enough tortillas for their families because of lack of time and the unavailability of maize.

With changes in the economic and political order, novel influences intruded on older lifestyles. Accentuated class divisions increased the leverage of the wealthier sectors of many communities. Despite general social intimacy in all relationships in Mascota, Jalisco, Carlos Gil found strict social protocol practiced when addressing someone of higher economic status. For example, Rosendo, the indentured plantation worker, always referred to Ascensión, the merchant, or Ponciano, the landowner, “as *usted*, invariably prefixing their first names with the title don.” “Rosendo never became don Rosendo to anyone” and was invariably addressed with the informal *tú*.

The gradual advent of literacy complicated these social dynamics. Those who provided the previously isolated, often illiterate, villagers access to the larger Mexican nation and the outside world also became important local figures. In the town of San José de Gracia in Michoacán, the influence of the schoolmasters expanded as villagers were divided into those who had access to the printed page and those who did not. The middle-class merchant who traveled to distant markets earned much respect from the village by bringing back news and goods from the city. The mule driver, or *arriero*, who ventured into the mountainous region of Mascota after having passed through populous Guadalajara, ancient Ameca, or strategic Puerto Vallarta returned with important information, especially during revolutionary periods. Along with merchants and muleteers, rancheros, artisans, state employees, and teachers were the largest beneficiaries of increased schooling during the Porfiriato. For communities largely dependent on word-of-mouth communication, these individuals were critical intermediaries linking together a mixed literate/illiterate network of discourse.

Porfirio Díaz’s educational policies, however, had uneven consequences throughout Mexico. Although the number of public primary schools doubled and enrollments tripled during the Porfiriato, 68 percent of all Mexican adults still could not read in 1910. Moreover, gender differences in literacy expanded in the period, with only 13 percent of women in 1910 capable of both reading and writing, compared with a 33 percent male literacy rate. The gap between female and male literacy fifteen years earlier had been only 7 percent. Outside of the Federal District, most of the central plateau of Mexico, especially in the rural villages, experienced only minimal advances in schooling and literacy. In Mascota, Jalisco, educational institutions existed “despite enormous odds and only at the behest of enlightened municipal authorities or private parties who supported them.” The Catholic Church continued to organize most schooling, since it was not until 1921 that a constitutional amendment permitted the federal government to provide public education for all its citizens. A comprehensive rural school program was not established until 1934.

On the other hand, states in northern Mexico spent the most on primary schooling, enrolled the highest percentage of school-age children, and achieved the highest rates of adult literacy: an average of 45 percent, as compared with 27 percent in the center and 14 percent in

the impoverished south. This advancement was made possible because this region was relatively commercially prosperous and revenue-rich, thereby allowing a greater expenditure on education. Public education dominated in the north, representing 90 percent of primary schools in Sonora, for example, as compared with one-half to two-thirds in the north-central states. Moreover, the gender gap in literacy in the north was much smaller than that which existed farther south. According to the 1910 census, the gap between male and female literacy in both Sonora and Chihuahua was less than 3 percent; in the central state of Michoacán the gap widened to 5 percent; while next door in Guanajuato an 8 percent gap existed. These differences between regions would prove vital to making a distinction between migrants to Los Angeles from the north and those from the central states of Mexico.

Despite the changes occurring in the countryside, the local priest continued to stand out as the most important authority figure in most Mexican villages of the period, particularly in central Mexico. He represented to the populace the elaborate institutional network of the Catholic Church, beginning with the bishop to whose jurisdiction he immediately answered. In San José de Gracia, “Padre Othón was the highest authority” who “presided over all social ceremonies; he prescribed them, embellished them, and saw that children and adults alike took part in them.” According to an anthropologist studying another village in Michoacán, the priest’s support in the community was the result of his role as intercessor between God and the villagers. Armed with the threat of withholding the favor of God, the local priest was able to coerce individuals to take certain actions in decisions far removed from purely religious matters.

In contrast, government officials were usually seen as outsiders, interlopers in community affairs, and interested only in milking the village of its resources through taxation and graft. Barely tolerated by the villagers, few officials emanated from the communities they served and most listened more readily to their superiors in the state capitals and Mexico City than to local sentiment. There existed a general distrust of government and its representatives, and most villagers were happy to have minimal contact with people holding any formal office. Even when a certain town was transformed by the national government into a political entity of importance, such as San José de Gracia’s promotion from a *ranchería* to the seat of a tenancy, tension often continued to exist between local political *leaders* and higher authorities.” According to Luis González, villagers in that area felt “if there were so many taxes...if there were no jobs...If the courts were corrupt...it was all the fault of the authorities, who had no fear of God.”

This situation suggests that Porfirio Díaz’s plan to unify the nation and promote patriotism was far from successful. While the railroads did link many important regional centers with the nation’s capital, many communities remained isolated and uninterested in the national politic. The people of Tepoztlán, living only fifty miles from Mexico City, did not celebrate the anniversary of the signing of the Mexican constitution because most had no notion of what the national patriotic fiesta meant. Their definition of patriotism extended only to the borders of the mountain-walled valleys of northern Morelos. In contrast, however, in San José de Gracia political arguments did arise. Some undoubtedly were fueled by articles in *El País*, the national Catholic newspaper, or by discussions among the seminary students who had traveled outside the immediate surroundings. About the budding nationalism of San José’s villagers, Luis González has written:

On the eve of the revolution their lives were beginning to be affected by nationalistic sentiments, an interest in politics, an awareness of the outside world, curiosity about new inventions, and the desire to make money. Whether they liked it or not, the social elite were coming to realize, to feel, and to welcome the fact that they were inscribed in the diocese of Zamora, the district of Jiquilpan, the state of Michoacán, and the Republic of Mexico. The better-informed citizens know who Porfirio Díaz, Aristeo Mercado, and the prefects of Jiquilpan were; but the majority were unaware of the move toward nationalism, or even toward regionalization.

Most Mexicans who came to the United States in this period were from areas experiencing this maturing, yet uneven, national sentiment. Yet most remained full of distrust of central authority.

Another factor that limited the spread of Mexican nationalism was racial diversity. At the end of the Porfiriato, Mexico still had two million Indians who did not speak Spanish, a group cast aside by Díaz's program of unifying the nation. The Spanish elite, concentrated in the urban centers, remained distant and impervious to the needs of the masses. The largest segment of the Mexican population were the mestizos, those containing both Spanish and Indian blood, although exactly where "Indian" ended and "mestizo" began was as often a function of social definition as it was a boundary set by genetic configuration. The source of most of the emigration to the United States was clearly mestizo/Indian, particularly from areas in Mexico that were deemed by anthropologists to be dominated by "acculturated Indians"—that is, where Indians spoke Spanish and blended native and European practices. An indicator of this racial makeup is the complexion of immigrants to Los Angeles as subjectively recorded by Immigration Bureau officials and presented in Table 1. This evidence suggests that the vast majority were either mestizo or Indian.

Social commentators in Mexico often argued that the predominance of this mestizo/acculturated Indian in Mexican society softened racial attitudes in favor of public tolerance. For example, a citizen of Arandas, undoubtedly a light-skinned Spaniard, compared attitudes toward race in Mexico with that in the United States: "There is a more universal spirit here—more a spirit of social distinction and class than of race." Mexican history had unquestionably produced more of a class than caste society by 1910, yet racist thinking drawing on the works of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer influenced liberal thinkers during the Porfiriato at the end of the nineteenth century. The Mexican Revolution turned these ideas on their heads, but did not do away with either racial antagonism in the villages nor racial control by non-Indians in the capital. In fact, color consciousness permeated Mexican culture of the period. As we shall see in later chapters, the attitudes that the largely Spanish elite held toward the mestizo/Indian would shape government policies both toward villages in Mexico and toward immigrants in the United States.

The one institution that all Mexicans valued and the only one that could compete in importance with the village and the church was the family. The strength of the Mexican family was rooted in the formal social bonds that held together individual members, beginning with the rites of courtship and the ritual of marriage. Even these sacred practices, however, were undergoing tremendous change brought about by the rapid economic and social transformation of Mexico. Importantly, fewer parents were able to arrange marriages, since adolescents were sent

off at early ages to earn money, resulting in the loosening of parental control over their behavior. Thus, geographic mobility greatly increased the threat of erosion of parental lines of authority within families. In my analysis of case records of Mexicans who immigrated to Los Angeles before 1940, only 28.6 percent of those marriages occurring in Mexico were between individuals from the same place of birth. Of course, even less parental authority prevailed when young Mexican adults chose their marriage partners after migrating to the United States.

This transformation from parental control of marriage partners to personal choice was indirectly linked to the penetration of capitalist markets and the increased mobility of young adults. Ramón Gutiérrez, in a stunning analysis of courtship and marriage in colonial New Mexican villages, described this development in the nineteenth century:

The displacement of persons through rural landlessness and the creation of wage laborers and petty producers for the market broke down the hierarchical authority relationships between a father and his children and allowed greater personal choice in partner selection at marriage. Freedom from the moral constraints of a village economy through migration for employment and the loosening of patriarchal control due to new material exigencies, allowed persons to behave more as individuals and to choose their spouses on the basis of love.

Nevertheless, in some villages great care was taken by all to institute practices which legitimized parental authority in new ways. George Foster, for example, found that as late as the 1950s in the village of Tzintzuntzan, the act of *robo*, or elopement, was the preferred method of engagement. Rather than the actual “robbing” of a young woman against her wishes, this custom was part of a highly stylized ritual enacted by the young couple to circumvent direct control by the parents of their children’s choice of a mate. At the same time, *robo* was followed by a formal visit of the young man’s father to the home of the young woman to *hacer las paces* (“to make peace formally”), apologize for his son’s conduct, and legitimize the union. Though the woman’s father feigned the proper offended dignity, he rarely objected. Foster suggests that this ritual was made possible by both the lack of real property to pass on that would necessitate more judicious marriage alliances and the desire to preserve a hierarchical family structure.

In many ways, there was nothing new in this maintenance of the social ideals of parental authority in the face of countless demonstrations of individual will by young people in love. Gutiérrez found similar discrepancies in court records as far back as the early eighteenth century between the formal norms established by the state and the church and the actual practices of New Mexicans. What had developed over time was more standard rituals which took the loss of parental authority fully into account. The power of the ideal, therefore, despite tremendous socio-economic changes, was manifested in continued marriage rituals which incorporated supposed “traditional values” as they obviously transformed them.

In this era, couples chose to maintain earlier village practices concerning engagement and matrimony even if their courtship had resulted from the new mobility of the era. Carlos Gil described in detail the formal engagement of twenty-three-year-old farmhand Rosendo Peña to twenty-two-year-old Trinidad Peña (no previous relation) in 1908 in Mascota, Jalisco. Both families walked two hours to the church notary office in town from their respective homes on the

hacienda to arrange a presentación, or espousal, with the local pastor and the church notary. Forms were signed by the parents noting their approval of the union, even though Rosendo himself had initiated the relationship with Trinidad on his own while working as a laborer at a neighboring hacienda. Witnesses confirmed that the betrothed were upright Catholics. Plans for the three-day wedding festivities were carefully described and announced to the entire community.

In Porfirian Mexico, marriage remained a momentous event in the life of a villager. It involved the creation of expectations for economic survival for the new family, and anxiety over its effect on the families of the spouses. In this agrarian society, romance had to be tempered with economic reality. Most marriages in Mascota occurred at the end of the wheat harvest in April or once the corn was gathered in November. Moreover, in contrast to the pervasive myth of widespread teenage marriage in rural Mexico, the seriousness of marriage was reflected in more mature unions. Gil reports that the median ages of grooms in Mascota in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was between twenty-five and twenty-six years, while for brides it was between nineteen and twenty-one years.

It does appear that the Mexican family at the turn of the century was undergoing a transformation from a highly patriarchal, stable institution with a strict separation of the sexes to a more adaptive and insecure structure forced to conform to increased geographic mobility and economic dislocation. The nature of the relations between the sexes has been a controversial topic in descriptions of family life in Latin America. In particular, the debate concerning to what extent *machismo* permeated male-female dynamics in the Mexican family has yet to be settled.

Although the ideal man might still be expected to possess the characteristics of “physical courage, cleverness, *machismo*, integrity, wealth in money and land and cattle, health, vigor, and, finally, ‘manliness,’” in actuality, men of the peon class had a difficult time providing for their families and maintaining their own well-being under the Porfirian economy. Erich Fromm has called this kind of society the “undermined patriarchy,” in which the attitude of toughness within *machismo* is actually a façade that masks a more pronounced sense of powerlessness. These tendencies which were just beginning to affect Porfirian society were more marked in fluid, mobile environments than in communities that retained their hold over acceptable behavior. The more cavalier and destructive aspects of *machismo*, ranging from alcoholism to wife beating, seemed to be a result of the breakdown of community control, a situation which better characterized the growing urban centers and the northern border communities.

For women, the one ideal most valued was female chastity before marriage, which historically had been linked to the social class system. Unlike the notion of “female passionlessness” in Victorian America, women in Mexico were seen as particularly vulnerable creatures whose honor had to be protected by men. Chastity functioned as less a notion of female responsibility and more as a function of community and social class mores. The rigidity of this code of behavior, however, was differentiated by one’s position in the social hierarchy, with the aristocracy most concerned with preserving female purity. Working-class women, and those of Indian/mestizo background, were less restricted by this ideal, yet their variance from it was clearly used as evidence of their inferiority. During the nineteenth century, the disparity between the ideal of female purity, along with other familial ideals, and the day-to-day reality grew larger

because of increased mobility of the population and the breakdown in effective community control of behavior.

Sex for procreation in marriage, however, was expected and encouraged. Young brides could envision spending much of the next twenty to thirty years bearing children and being primarily responsible for raising them. Most women in Mascota, Jalisco, for example, bore five or more children, with some giving birth to many more. High mortality, particularly for those under the age of five, accompanied high fertility, however. Children under the age of six made up nearly half of those that died in Mascota during the Porfiriato. Seen from another perspective, in this village, approximately one-quarter of all infants did not live beyond the first five years of life, many succumbing to epidemics of smallpox, stomach disorders, or fevers. Despite the prevalence of infant mortality, rural Mexican society in the Porfirian age consisted mostly of youngsters because of the high birth rate and low life expectancies of adults. Nearly 50 percent of the population in Mascota in 1895 was under the age of twenty.

During the revolutionary period, wartime violence and economic upheaval did not escape children. Adolescents were particularly vulnerable to its repercussions. Stories of young females victimized by rape abound in the literature of the period. Left to fend for themselves because fathers and older brothers were off fighting in the war or working in distant fields, girls could be attacked by rebel or government troops or by local men. Oscar Lewis described the experience of Guadalupe, the maternal aunt of the Sánchez children, as an adolescent in revolutionary Guanajuato:

When Guadalupe was thirteen, Fidencio, a man of thirty-two, broke into the house when her parents were away and carried her off at knife point. He lived on the other side of the street and had made advances to her ever since she was nine. He took her to a cave and raped her. She bled profusely and he brought her to his mother's house in Hidalgo. Guadalupe stayed in bed unattended for fifteen days until the hemorrhaging stopped. Her father found her and whipped her so badly she had to be in bed another two weeks. He told her he didn't like girls who were deflowered because they weren't "worth anything anymore," and he forced her to marry Fidencio in church.

Young boys were dragged into military service, sometimes by federal troops and sometimes by opposition forces. When not obligated to fight, they often became the sole supporters of their families as fathers and older brothers were pressed into service. Not surprisingly in this age of violence, many children of both sexes were orphaned when their parents became victims of the revolution.

Tragedies and responsibilities, therefore, were not new to adolescents. Already full participants in a Mexican family's social and economic well-being, older male teenagers were well prepared to contemplate a step as radical as leaving the village to migrate north. Many undoubtedly welcomed the chance to escape the drudgery, the violence, or the boredom that had characterized their adolescence. Data from the sample of Los Angeles migrants indicates that 43.7 percent of the individuals who left Mexico between 1900 and 1930 crossed the border between the ages of thirteen and twenty-four (see Table 2).

The characteristics of the Mexican family are important to the history of immigration because the decision to send a member north was usually a family one. Many older sons sought extra income in Mexican urban centers, like the capital or Guadalajara, in the prosperous mines or agricultural fields of the northern states, or as track laborers in Mexico's growing railroad network. Others crossed the border to work in the mines, railroads, and agricultural fields of the American Southwest and sent earnings home. Manuel Gamio was able to trace the dynamics of Mexican immigration to the United States by analyzing money orders forwarded to families by immigrant wage earners in various parts of the United States. In July 1926 alone, 12,321 such orders were sent totaling 592,065 pesos (\$296,033), an average value of 48.05 pesos (\$24) per draft. The amounts ranged from 0.52 pesos (26 cents) to 207.25 pesos (\$103.63) per note. The money received was often used to purchase or to retain land under the threat of dispossession. Other families relied on the extra cash simply to survive the ravages of inflation, crop failure, or revolutionary destruction, all of which had rapidly decreased their purchasing power.

While many migrants were single, fathers also left their families and ventured north. The lack of elder sons or the economic strains placed upon newlyweds often made this decision necessary. In Arandas, Jalisco, Paul Taylor reported "prolonged separations of husbands and families, sometimes commencing almost immediately after marriage and lasting for years, and entailing emotional distress and other inevitable hardships." Though some wives and children were abandoned, Taylor found that the vast majority were supported by remittances from the emigrants.

Women rarely emigrated alone. Like most other immigrant groups in the United States, when women did migrate it was usually with other family members or to join a husband who had settled in the United States. Older daughters were expected to stay close to home until they married, so few were seen crossing the border by themselves. Villages throughout the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato had a comparatively high ratio of women to men, as husbands and brothers left for the United States or other parts of Mexico. According to the census of 1921, overall these three states had a female to male ratio of 106 to 100.

When individuals or families did decide to migrate directly to the United States from their villages in central Mexico (more will be said about this process in following chapters), they often had to overcome widespread negative attitudes toward the United States. One merchantranchero in Arandas told Taylor that "down in their hearts the Mexicans do not like the Americans, collectively...the United States took more than half of this country [Texas, California, etc.]. But [with intense emotion] I tell you, it will be Mexico again, not now, but in hundreds, or a thousand years." Another young man who was herding burros, when asked whether he was interested in migrating north, replied: "No, I don't wish to go; it is too far. This is *mi tierra*."

Given assurances that money could be made in the United States, however, many families facing economic uncertainty in Mexico chose to send family members north in hopes of improving their situation. Such a decision was surely made easier by the belief that the migration would be temporary. The same railroads which took migrants north could just as easily bring them back. Few saw their initial departure as permanent. Even during the revolution after 1910, most hoped that the end of hostilities would allow a return to Mexico." Mexican immigrants did not find their life in the United States altogether foreign, for they usually traveled and worked in the American Southwest, a region that had once been part of Mexico and still retained a strong

tradition of things Mexican. Moreover, they had the advantage that the two countries were contiguous. Working on the rail lines or in the agricultural fields with other Mexicans on the northern side of the border could not have appeared so very different from doing the same a little farther south.

After the first migrants left their communities, others contemplating migration to the United States saw the positive effect migration had on their own villages. Taylor reported that Mexican workers in the United States sent on the average 58,071 pesos (\$29,036) per year to Arandas, Jalisco, between 1922 and 1931 via postal money orders. In addition, almost 90 percent of the registered letters arriving from the United States contained either bank drafts or currency, and the amounts sent in this fashion were probably greater than the funds transferred in money orders. This extra cash was vital for temporarily raising the standard of living for Arandas families. While some were able to purchase land, others bought goods, including American-made radios or sewing machines, making their lives more comfortable. Undoubtedly, the economic distinction between families who could rely on this extra income and those who did not encouraged many to participate in the emigration process.

Not all of the ramifications were positive, however. Prolonged separation of husbands and wives heightened the chances of marital strife and infidelity, not to mention the possibility of permanent abandonment. Moreover, community life was affected by the absence of many of the most industrious young men from the village. Whether the departure of so many individuals made it more difficult for Mexico to recover from the ravages of war and advance into the twentieth century as a democratic nation has yet to be studied.

We must also remember that the vast majority of Mexicans did not migrate to the United States during this era. Even the highest estimates of migratory behavior indicate that 90 percent of Mexico's population did not leave Mexico. Most Mexican migrants opted to improve their family's situation by trying their luck in Mexican cities and larger towns. Arandas sent large numbers of migrants to Guadalajara, León, Piedra Gorda, La Piedad, Pénjamo, Guanajuato, Atotonilco, Venta del Astillero, Hacienda del Plan, and Zapopan. Mexico City grew tremendously during the early twentieth century as a result of internal migration from villages throughout central Mexico. Still others went north to Torreón, Monterrey, Chihuahua, or Ciudad Juárez without ever deciding to cross the border.

Many remained in their native villages and weathered whatever storms approached. For better or for worse, village culture in Mexico was rapidly changing during the Porfirian and revolutionary periods. Few areas remained isolated from the social and economic pressures altering the countryside. Sometimes the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness created by such a transformation found its expression in the subconscious of those who were left behind. One man's dream in a small village in Morelos eloquently reveals the inner struggles which change posed for him and his neighbors: "I dreamt that I was in bed in my house with all my family, all in bed, when I saw a train, an engine that came over all of us. On seeing the engine, I jumped from the bed, yelling to the one driving that he stop his machine and not crush us all." Though this man remained in Mexico, others elected to migrate to the United States and confront the challenges associated with emigration. Yet what would become of them as they ventured northward could only dimly be imagined.