



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 45  
Issue 2 June

Article 9

---

2018

## Will We Build A Wall? Fear of Mexican/Latino Immigration in U.S. History

Emilia E. Martinez-Brawley  
*Arizona State University*

Paz M.-B. Zorita  
*Arizona State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Martinez-Brawley, Emilia E. and Zorita, Paz M.-B. (2018) "Will We Build A Wall? Fear of Mexican/Latino Immigration in U.S. History," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol45/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

# Will We Build A Wall? Fear of Mexican/Latino Immigration in U.S. History

Emilia E. Martinez-Brawley  
*Arizona State University*

Paz M.-B. Zorita  
*Arizona State University*

*A presidential election was won on the strength of a nativist philosophy which asserts that the U.S. must build a wall of separation with its closest neighbor to the South. The current president has voiced not only his frustration and prejudices but the nativist sentiments of the public. The emphasis on “building the wall” and the antagonism expressed towards Mexico have deepened the centuries-old sense of fear and separation felt by members of the Mexican/Latino immigrant group. Can we look at history in search of plausible explanations? This paper examines past and contemporary reasons that might explain the observable antagonism to the Mexican/Latino population in the U.S. today.*

*Key words: immigration, U.S. Mexicans, nativism, ethnocentrism, historical discrimination, civil rights*

A presidential election has just been won on the strength of a nativist philosophy that asserts that the U.S. must build a wall of separation with its closest neighbor to the South. President Trump’s anti-Mexican statements during the campaign and after the inauguration have been amply chronicled by the television and the press in 2017. The dangers of President Trump’s rhetoric and performance are clearer after one year of his presidency than they were before. As he himself states, he has not “evolved” in understandings (Sullivan, Haberman, & Davis,

2018). When his Chief of Staff attempted to soften some of his prior statements, the president responded to his political base: “the wall is the wall, it has never changed or evolved from the first time I conceived of it ... The wall will be paid for directly or indirectly ... by Mexico...” (Sullivan et al., 2018, para. 4). He was relentless in his contradiction of his Chief of Staff, who had said that “a 50 foot wall from sea to shining sea isn’t what we’re going to build” (Sullivan et al., 2018, para. 14). The President was giving voice to his frustration and prejudices as he captured what many citizens still wanted to hear. Given these feelings among the public—that many liberals may have thought had been overcome—the time is ripe for looking at history in search of plausible explanations for such an ingrained anti-Mexican sentiment. This paper will examine past and contemporary reasons that might explain the observable antipathy to the Mexican/Latino population in the U.S. today.

## The Historical Roots of Anti-Mexican Attitudes

Many people associate anxiety about Mexican/Latino immigration in the U.S. exclusively with very recent Mexican and Latin American migrations. This is not the case. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, at the same time that the Spanish were settling in Mexico and other parts of North America, the British, the Dutch and the French were also trying to compete for lands in the continent. The *Black Legend* about the Spanish “race” as a “brutal, sanguinary and sadistic” group of abusers was being propagated and taking root (Fuentes, 1992, p. 132). Even decades later, in the colonial territories, those who were moving inland, heirs to the Puritan thinking about the Spanish influence, sensed according to De León (1987) “an ‘errand into the wilderness’ and felt a compelling need to control all that was beastly—sexuality, vice, nature, and colored peoples [sic]” (p. 1).

Order and discipline had to be rescued from the wilds in the name of civilization and Christianity. Moving westward with this mission uppermost in their minds, whites psychologically needed to subdue the external world—forests, beasts, and other peoples—for the rational had to be ever in command. (De León, 1987, p. 1)

Today, the anxiety and fear of Mexicans persists after centuries and many waves of migrants.

## The Spanish Legacy: A Long-focus-lens View

Spanish explorers were “the first Europeans to traverse much of the United States” (Daniels, 1990, p. 96) before the frequently described arrival of the Pilgrims to Plymouth Rock in 1569. After his ship wrecked in 1536, Cabeza de Vaca walked across what is now the western country from Galveston, Texas to Culiacan in Mexico. From the city of Santa Barbara in Mexico, the Spanish explorers and missionaries were lured north into what are today New Mexico and Arizona. New Mexico was settled in 1598 (in fact, before the founding of Jamestown in Massachusetts in 1610). From Santa Barbara in Mexico, “Spain hurried to lay claim to Texas” for at least two reasons: to resist threats from the French and to Christianize the Caddo Indians in the “kingdom of Teja,” ca, 1680s (Iber & De León, 2006, p. 57. See also Stewart & De León, 1993).

The founding of St. Augustine by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565 provided an entry for Spain to respond militarily to French Huguenot settlement in South Carolina (Daniels, 1990). Florida was in Spanish hands for over two centuries from 1565 to 1819. At the same time the Spanish were settling in Mexico and other parts of North America, the British, the Dutch and the French were also trying to compete for lands in the continent. The Spaniards had established themselves in Cuba, where “encomiendas” had been developing. Bartolomé de las Casas, who had been an “encomendero,” began speaking out against the treatment that representatives of the Spanish Crown were giving Indians. De las Casas became a Dominican Friar and moved to Mexico, where he continued to speak out indicting the Spaniards for their behavior. His indictments quickly became the bases for a broadly encompassing *Black Legend* about the Spanish “race.”

In 1769, Junípero Serra founded twenty-one missions in California and the accompanying regiment to his expedition established a fort in San Diego (Daniels, 1990). And these locations were only the most significant ones. Except for Florida, New Mexico, Arizona, California, parts of Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma and Kansas remained part of Mexico until 1848

when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo annexed them after the U.S. War with Mexico. Florida was acquired after many years of disputes and negotiations in 1819. In the west and southwest of the U.S., the Spanish/Mexican population was not, for a very long time, an immigrant population but rather an autochthonous one.

An atmosphere permeated very early that transferred the sentiments towards the Spaniards to the Spanish/Mexicans once the first had left. The cruelty ascribed to the Spanish colonists also existed among other colonists but the fears that the Black Legend had spread among Anglos fueled attitudes specifically about Mexicans, which were different from the attitudes about other foreign nationals arriving in the U.S. Rosales (1997) describes this entrenched Anglo attitude:

Anglo-Americans held negative views even before confronting Mexicans on New Spain frontiers where the encounter itself deepened prejudices and provided at least one important rationale for 'Manifest Destiny.' The violence of the Texas Rebellion and the Mexican War further fueled the antipathy. (Rosales, 1997, p. 5)

Additionally, with the arrival of African slaves to the new world, racism took complete hold of the minds and hearts of the White population. Racist attitudes in the U.S. persisted from the antebellum South until the Civil Rights movement and beyond. Even today, we can easily identify them in many policies, if not federal, passed by state legislatures. Racist attitudes and policies colored immigration in the U.S. from the start as illustrated by the "yellow peril" legend forbidding Chinese immigrants and by the internment of Japanese American citizens during WWII.

Texas played an important role in shaping the attitudes of Anglos toward Mexicans. In 1821 the Mexican government granted the Missourian entrepreneur Moses Austin colonization rights in Texas. He and his son Stephen and hundreds of followers moved into Texan territory. Austin's ambitions included "his sole and only desire ... to redeem it from the wilderness—to settle it with an intelligent, honorable and enterprising people" (Stephen Austin, quoted by de León, 1987, p. 3). De León further comments that it was clear that Austin's and other politicians' desire was to Americanize Texas, "settled by

a population that will harmonize with their neighbors on the *East*, in language, political principles, common origin, sympathy, and even interest" (de León, 1987, p. 3). In other words, the Americanization of Texas did not have room for native Mexicans who were deemed neither civilized nor capable of being anything other than field hands. However, current scholarship shows that Mexicans were never peripheral to their history, particularly in Texas, where they participated actively in state and local government and "undertook a conscious effort to modernize the society of Texas" after the Texas war for independence in 1836 (Stewart & de León, 1993, p. 99).

In looking for historical explanations of the disdain with which Mexican immigrants are regarded, one cannot ignore the early religious clashes between Roman Catholicism (Spain and its colonies being the main inheritors) and Henry VIII. The English saw the Spanish as heartless, and Spanish and Spanish Americans as the embodiment of racial impurity, exemplified by *mestizaje* with the Moors and the Indians. In Protestant Christianity they saw native Catholicism as pagan and demonic. Although the anti-Catholic feelings in colonial America were to some extent rhetorical because few members of the public had ever seen a Catholic, they persisted with unusual strength. By the end of the colonial period in the Eastern border, there were "only about 25,000 practicing Catholics ... and almost all of those in Pennsylvania and Maryland" (Daniels, 1990, p. 109).

Another major factor that persisted far beyond the colonial period, and can even be detected today, is hostility to the language. The maintenance of the English language became a much stronger issue in the new nation. After the annexation of the various Spanish territories in the Southwest, Spanish remained predominant in many areas. For example, Rosales (1997) states that Texan local politicians delivered speeches in both English and Spanish well into the early 20th century, and of course the New Mexican legislature conducted business in Spanish until they became a state. Part of the statehood discussions as to whether New Mexico and Arizona could be joined pivoted on language and what the Arizonians called "racial differences." Arizonian's fears were summarized in a protest presented to Congress in 1906, which suggested that any amalgamation with New Mexico had little chance of success. Finally, by 1912, after a long and protracted debate over language in Congress,

President Taft signed the New Mexico Statehood Proclamation. This proclamation settled, at least temporarily, the language issue, as it recognized the state's constitution, which stated: "For the first twenty years after this constitution goes into effect all laws passed by the legislature shall be published in both the English and Spanish languages" (State of New Mexico, 1911/2017, Art. XX-12).

## Nativism and Flooding Immigration

The financial panic of 1873 began an anti-immigrant period that was to last almost until WWII. Labor strikes, unemployment and overall financial distress were serious problems. In 1894, a group of Harvard graduates formed the Immigration Restriction League, a pressure group that argued for fundamental changes in the immigration policies.

According to one of its founders, Prescott F. Hall, the question for Americans to decide was whether they wanted their country 'to be peopled by British, German and Scandinavian stock, historically free, energetic, progressive, or by Slav, Latin and Asiatic races historically downtrodden, atavistic and stagnant.' (Daniels, 1990, p. 276)

Within the spirit of restricting immigration, a large number of bills made their way through Congress (1895, 1897, 1913, 1915), sometimes getting to the presidents, who typically vetoed them, until 1917. These bills had a common theme, which was literacy. Presidents Grover Cleveland, Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson stated, as many do today, that the U.S needed labor and that the immigrants were here to do work Americans did not want to do. (Yet, as we well know today, factual labor needs do not overcome the assumptions of loss of even undesired employment opportunities experienced by many in the native populations.) A bill was finally passed in 1917, but by then, European immigration had decreased due to the war in Europe. The 1917 law was in essence a literacy bill that was eventually proven not to have had the desired effect of restricting immigration. (Daniels, 1990; Lukens, 2012; U.S. Immigration Legislation Online, n.d.).

In 1910 the Mexican Revolution erupted, and in 1914 WWI was declared. American soldiers fighting in the War created a

labor shortage in the U.S. and Mexicans that had been coming to this country as a consequence of the Mexican Revolution were encouraged to work in the USA. The restrictive 1917 Immigration Law did not fundamentally affect residents of some countries of the Western Hemisphere, including Latin America because, in spite of the literacy restrictions in the bill, waivers were given for temporary agricultural and railroad workers. However, the restrictive measures emboldened the nativist spirit that continued to prevail. In 1921, the Emergency Immigration Restriction Act established an immigration system based on quotas related to the percentage of the population who had originated in given countries. However, it provided a loophole for many Europeans who moved to Western Hemisphere non-quota countries before coming to the U.S. This led to the laws of 1921 and finally to the Act of 1924 which related quotas and birthplace (McSeveney, 1987). The way quotas were determined favored the Northern European countries that had been represented in the U.S. population for a long time. In a recent *New York Times* article, Stapinski (2017) vividly discusses the consequences of the 1924 immigration Act that closed doors for the poorest and neediest Italians.

As we have just seen, during the peak of the Nativist debate, Mexican laborers had been granted temporary entry to work primarily, but not exclusively, in the fields. However, after 1924, the Immigration and Naturalization Service tightened the enforcement of border crossings, and Mexicans were often deported without due process. The 1929 Immigration Act was a victory of nativists and resulted in the deportation not only of Mexican nationals but of many native Mexican-Americans from industrial cities like Chicago where they had been working in the car industries. As the economic situation deteriorated, the popular imagery and the political talk often referred to “half-breeds” and many other racial epithets and criticized their inability to become citizens.

Between 1929 and 1936, at least six hundred thousand Mexican nationals and their children, many of whom were born in the U.S., returned to Mexico—this represented about one third of the U.S. Mexican population. Economic downturns had been a constant factor in their lives, but nothing compared to the suffering created by this crisis. (Rosales, 1997, p. 49)

## The Bracero Program

Between 1942 and 1965, a very important development took place. Given the scarcity of labor created by WWII, the U.S. and Mexican governments signed a formal agreement for the recruitment of workers. There were two types of workers recruited by the so called Bracero Agreement. Part of the agreement was for agricultural workers. As part of the agreement, 4.6 million contracts were issued between 1943 and 1965. The second part of the agreement related to railroad maintenance workers, and 69,000 authorizations were issued between 1943 and 1945 (Alarcón, 2011). The important thing to remember in relation to this government-to-government agreement is that both the U.S and Mexico promised to apply the protections of the law (labor laws, public health, fair treatment, etc.) to the “bracero” workers. The governments also agreed to withdraw a certain amount of savings (about 10%) from the workers’ salaries. These monies would be returned to the workers at the end of the contract, generally by the Mexican government. However, no savings were initially returned and the controversy over the issue continued until a settlement was reached in a California court in 2008 (Belluck, 2008). The final blow to the Bracero Agreement was dealt by the U.S and the Mexican governments when, in 1947, they targeted for return undocumented immigrants from California and Texas. Finally, in 1954, through Operation Wetback, more than one million workers from the West Coast were deported. Many other laws and mass deportations followed in the 1950s, targeting undocumented workers, but the impact of the “braceros” became indelibly registered in the public psyche.

Another important variable which was a determinant of the historical discrimination towards Mexicans, and to some extent of their self-perception, was the conflicting messages sent by the Bureau of the Census in its counting practices and the equally conflicting messages sent by some of the early Latino organizations in relation to race among Mexican Americans. The first time the Census identified Mexicans in its population counts was in 1930. Until 1920, the Census had not identified Mexicans; however, the enumerators tended to note the presence of Spanish surnamed “mulatos” in the Western States (Ortiz & Telles, 2012, p. 4). The 1930 Census provided specific instructions for the counting of Mexicans, identifying them as

a very mixed group belonging primarily, if not totally, to the laboring classes. According to Ortiz and Telles (2012), the use of 'laborers' in the first line of the Census instructions "suggests that class may have played a role into the use of Mexican in that laborers might have been classified as *Mexican* but higher status Mexicans might have been classified as *White*" (Ortiz & Telles, 2012, p. 4). This caused the Mexican government and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to protest about using *Mexican* as a racial category, and from there on, until the 1980 Census which allowed for self-identification, Mexicans who may have marked "other" in the Census form were classified as *White*. In looking at the LULAC advocacy effort, one may say that it was based more on pragmatic rather than unprejudiced considerations.

An interesting significant event, which involved a number of well-known civil rights attorneys and LULAC in the post WWII period, addressed race/class classification in a criminal case which made it to the Supreme Court. The case, *Hernandez v. the State of Texas*, was about a migrant cotton picker accused of murder in a small town in Jackson County, Texas. The lead defense attorney, Gustavo Garcia,

envisioned the Hernandez case as a challenge to the systematic exclusion of persons of Mexican origin from all types of jury duty in at least seventy counties in Texas. It was not surprising to him when Hernandez was found guilty and the decision was upheld by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. (Allsup, 2010, para. 1)

When the Supreme Court finally heard the case in January, 1954, under Chief Justice Warren, the defense attorney, Garcia, argued that the 14th Amendment guaranteed protection not only on the basis of race but of class. The State of Texas contended that the 14th Amendment covered only race, Whites and Blacks, not class, and that Mexican Americans were *White*—at least at that moment. However, the Supreme Court, ordering the reversal of conviction, "accepted [recognized] the concept of distinction by class, that is, between white and Hispanic, and found that when laws produced unreasonable and different treatment on such basis [class differences], the constitutional guarantee of equal protection is violated" (Allsup, 2010, para. 2). This was a great

triumph for the concept of "other white" applied to Mexicans, a concept that persisted until the 1970s.

These changing classifications fueled Mexicans' own problematic definition of self and influenced the public images of the group. Given the complex intersection of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other dimensions in the modern world, it is not surprising to find that members of many groups find themselves confused by the Census and sometimes the courts, which, by default, required until very recently single classifications. The question of any individual's racial classification among Hispanics is left to the individual. "What am I?" a person would ask. The answer could be Hispanic and White, for example, or Hispanic and Black, etc.

### Does History Explain the Continued Disdain and Fear of the Mexican Immigrant?

Although the history of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. has been characterized by complicated policies since there was a border, the history of other groups can be said to be similarly complex. However, disdain appears to have remained unabated for Mexicans even though, in many cases, they had been fluidly moving across the diffused southern border of the U.S. since 1848. It must be recognized that Filipinos, Chinese and Japanese Americans were also victims of discrimination and repatriation, but after WWII, and after the Civil Rights efforts, their situation was much improved.

After WWII, Mexicans and Latinos had continued their struggle, primarily in the area of land rights and the labor front, struggle that gave rise the most significant Chicano civil rights movement of contemporary times. The 1960s was a time of civil rights struggle. The movement involved many leaders and many goals, ranging from the struggle for the rights of workers (led by César Chávez) to the return of land in New Mexico (led by Reies Lopez Tijerina). Reies Tijerina took a bold approach with the *Alianza Federal de las Mercedes* that proposed separatism and militancy on the bases of lost land and language. César Chavez, the icon of today, a Ghandi-like leader, focused on the defense of the work place. Strikes and unionization, which had not been the tools of migrant workers before, became the call

of Chávez' resistance. For César Chávez, the Braceros, who continued to enter the U.S. providing cheap labor for the agricultural fields, represented an unrelenting impediment to the improvement of the living and working conditions of the Chicanos already living here. Iber and De León (2006) state that "for millions of ordinary Americans, mostly oblivious to the terrible plight of migrant workers, the activities and efforts of the late César Chávez (and, ultimately, those of the United Farm Workers, the UFW) served as an introduction to the Chicano/a movement" (pp. 266–267). Chicanos had entered the public discourse. As long as there were unorganized Mexicans who followed the crops in the West, there was plenty of room for disdain, disempowerment and rejection. The harsh living conditions in which these workers lived and labored insured the perpetuation of poverty, poor education, isolation, bad health conditions, etc., all of which created a caste-like group, a target of unjustifiable rejection. Today, in spite of progress and changing public attitudes, many examples of continued rejection are endorsed from the highest levels of government.

Alarcón (2011) suggests a circular migration pattern for undocumented workers across a porous border. The flow of temporary workers continued even after Operation Wetback in 1954. It was clear that the border was porous and that any control of immigration would require legislation. Up to 1968, Mexicans were able to enter the U.S. without numerical restriction (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). However, in 1968, the Western Hemisphere cap of 120,000 was applied, and Mexicans had to compete for a limited number of visas. But Massey et al. (2002) also suggest that the hemispheric limitations coincided with the end of the Bracero program that had provided temporary opportunities to many agricultural workers. Thus, the limitations imposed on Mexicans were felt very keenly, and illegality became a real (and perhaps the only) option for a country with a long history of labor exchanges with the U.S.

Many other important pieces of legislation followed the 1968 measures and restricted the number of legal entries from Mexico and Latin America (e.g., the 1976 country-based quotas; the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, IRCA, and many others). No one expected the dire repercussions of these policies. Scholars comment on the paradoxical nature of the U.S. immigration policies which were not intended "to create a large

undocumented Latino population living north of the border," but which unleashed a chain of events with compounding dire effects through a succession of positive and negative measures (Massey & Pren, 2012, p. 6). The exponential growth of the Latino population between 1970 and 2010 was often ascribed only to the undocumented, and that situation caused tremendous damage to the legality of Mexican/Latino immigrants.

César Chávez's explanation still provides a valid rationale for the negativism experienced by the immigrant Mexican today: as long as there is heavy movement of people across the border who can be easily exploited for their labor, it will continue to be possible to devalue natives, old-time residents, and recent arrivals.

### The Latino Threat Narrative

The large and continued number of Mexicans and other Latin Americans entering the U.S, often undocumented, had become a preoccupation of the public even before 2001. The September 11, 2001 attack, although not related to Latinos, brought about the reappearance of overt anti-immigrant sentiments that, while focusing on the Muslim population, quickly spread to all immigrants. Immigration problems became recurrent in the public narrative. In 2008, the economic crisis intensified anti-immigrant public feelings. Mexicans and Hispanics were associated primarily with labor areas where unemployment was high (construction, hospitality industries, service professions, and others). This aggravated the hostility of low paid native workers. Yet, the immigrant population, particularly of illegals from Mexico and Latin America, continued to grow, and by 2010, reached 50.5 million. Rather than attempting to find real solutions, a demonization of the Hispanic population generally (not exclusively the Mexican) emerged in very public ways. These sentiments were exploited to garner political support and agency resources, as examples for border security and control.

The result was a self-perpetuating cycle in which rising border apprehensions were manipulated to produce a conservative reaction that demanded more enforcement measures, which in turn produced more apprehensions, which then produced more conservatism and even harsher enforcement

measures, which generated more apprehensions (Massey & Pren, 2012, p. 6).

But as we have discussed, it was not hard to blame Hispanics, whether Mexican or others. Their very presence fueled old notions of criminals, sex offenders, drug dealers and other people living outside the law. Specific cases of a criminal act were reported, and the public clamored for radical measures to be taken against this “despised” group which was living in the midst of white America. For example, in August 2016, *Time Magazine* reported Trump stating that “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best .... They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems [to] us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” And, attempting to soften the statements, he added: “And some, I assume, are good people” (Reilly, 2016, pp. 3, 7). The narrative was intense and journalists spoke of a drowning of the culture, alien hordes, and the flooding of the U.S. (Andreas, 2000; Chávez, 2001). Massey and Pren (2012) have suggested that it is not easy to document the rise of xenophobia because it is not asked in surveys, but they trace it to the rise of border apprehensions and the rise of conservatism in the U.S., which are reliably measured. Reporting the results of a recent Gallup survey, McCarthy (2015) suggests that “the treatment of Hispanics, particularly of immigrants, takes on special significance as the nation continues to debate immigration reform” (p. 4). Very pointedly, he reports on the gravity of the issue which has been highlighted by Donald Trump, not only during his presidential election campaign, but also as his presidency began and executive measures were implemented.

### The Current Situation in the U.S.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2011), the number of immigrants annually leaving Mexico for the U.S. declined by 60% between 2006 and 2010. A decline was also reported by the Migration Policy Institute in 2016, which stated:

In the last decade and a half, the Mexican share among all immigrants dropped from 29.5% in 2000 to 27.6% in 2014 ... Mexico is no longer the top origin country among the most

recent immigrants to the U.S. In 2013, China and India overtook Mexico as the most common countries of origin of immigrants who have resided in the U.S. for one year or less. Furthermore, more Mexican immigrants have returned to Mexico than have migrated to the U.S. since the end of the 2007–2009 Great Recession. (Zong & Batalova, 2016, pp. 1–2)

This decline, however, did not alter the anti-immigrant public discourse brought about by the political campaigns since 2012.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA 2007–2012) was the immigration policy that allowed some minors who entered the country with their undocumented parents to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and to be eligible for work, study or service in the armed forces. The cause of these “dreamers,” as they were known, was highlighted during and after President Obama’s re-election campaign in 2012. These events activated the same nativism that had historically plagued the U.S.

In July 2016, a document from the Migration Policy Institute Transatlantic Council on Migration suggested that anti-immigrant sentiment all over the world is not necessarily changed by the reality of numbers. Nothing could have been truer for the status of the Mexican immigrant in the U.S.

Anti-immigrant sentiment does not reliably correspond to an increase in the volume of newcomers, either in absolute or relative terms. Sharp reaction—such as significant legislative changes, symbolic signs of exclusion (e.g., banning minarets), and (in extreme instances) anti-immigrant violence—have occurred in places *without* large or sudden increases in the immigrant population. Meanwhile, several countries and regions that have recently received sizeable unexpected inflows have not experienced social disorder. (Papademetriou & Banulescu-Bogdan, 2016, p. 6)

During the 2016 presidential campaign, the fear and anxiety about Mexican and Latin American immigrants reached peak expression in the language of Donald Trump, who aspired to tailor his message to large numbers of displaced workers whose situation had deteriorated in the past decade. A 2016 MPI report suggested that “economic concerns that lead to the perception of immigrants as competition for scarce resources and

opportunities ... can be particularly acute in areas less accustomed to migration and where segments of the native population are experiencing economic hardship" (Papademetriou & Banulescu-Bogdan, 2016, p. 1). This clearly played out in the election in 2016, as Trump's message appeared to make an impact upon his intended target audience.

The nativist discourse of the current President of the U.S. is frequently offensive to American citizens' values, but crowd approval of many aggrieved workers fuels his slogans. The anti-immigrant and pointedly anti-Latino views were evident in his comments on former candidate Jeb Bush, whom Trump said had to "like the Mexican illegals because of his wife" (Kaplan, 2015, para. 2). Unfortunately, Trump's constant harping on the border wall and his apparent conviction that Mexico would pay for it continued to ignite the nativist flames of his followers. But beyond personal insults, even before Trump's election, Mexico was the target of inaccurate public speech intended to humiliate. Mexican immigrants were framed as usurpers of American jobs, even though the business community attempted to correct the record, suggesting that immigrants were doing jobs that Americans would not or could not do.

Another point to which we have referred in the historical narrative was that the American public at large had never fundamentally acknowledged the contributions of Latinos, particularly Mexican immigrants and their descendants, to the culture and fiber of the U.S. (Fuentes, 1992; Griswold del Castillo & de León, 1996; Sheridan, 1986). As César Chávez feared, the Mexican immigrant, unlike the European, had been seen as a laborer (a *bracero*) and little else (Rosales, 1997). Even today, Mexican immigrants are seldom the object of admiration in the way that other immigrants are recognized when "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps." Some efforts of Latino actors are recognized and gain a level of popular support and understanding (e.g., Edward J. Olmos's Films, such as *Stand and Deliver* [Labunka, Law, & Muska, 1998]) but they are often popular because of the actor's stardom. Even the "dreamers" who have become well-known because of their accomplishments now worry about their future. The issue of ending the protections of DACA reached unforeseen proportions with the "shutting down of the government" in January 2018.

## Various Forms of Remediation Were Attempted

During the Civil Rights period, the issue of broadening the basis of the Chicano movement beyond the plight of the agricultural workers had been pursued by Reies Tijerina with the *Alianza Federal de las Mercedes* (1963–1970). The *aliancistas* had always been more openly combative in pursuits beyond the rights of workers. They wanted lands returned and had some success when El Chamizal, the disputed border area of the Rio Grande, was returned to Mexico in 1963 through a treaty signed by Presidents Kennedy and Lopez Mateo. Chávez had looked towards the unions as support for the field workers and looked to peaceful means to solve the problems of workers. On the other hand, some members of the *Alianza*, Tijerina in particular, upholding a strong sense of entitlement, believed that confrontation might get them further afield. The *aliancistas* projected self-assurance and did not shy away from confrontation. But they quickly became associated with violence in the minds of the authorities and the public tended to reject the perceived strength of their movement.

LULAC (1929—today), the oldest of the Latino organizations, was committed to a more legalistic agenda and weighed in, as we have seen in the Hernandez case, in civil rights cases. LULAC attempted to develop a cooperative relationship among the various Latino, Black and white groups, to develop an agenda for all Latinos and to respond to challenges through a well-thought out platform of political and legal action that has often been compared to the NAACP. In fact, the cooperation between LULAC and the NAACP and a number of California attorneys advanced greatly the cause of school desegregation which had begun with the well-known California case of *Mendez v. Westminster*. In a recent book about this little known and successful case before the CA Supreme Court in 1947, Strum (2010) writes:

All parties agreed that Mexican ancestry, not race ... was the crux of the matter. But counsel for the many parents who joined in the suit laid the groundwork for a far broader assault on arbitrary classifications and discrimination against one people because they happened to share a heritage. The heritage was not only Mexican; it was also Spanish-speaking. For school boards, assumptions about language skills,

cleanliness, ability to learn, and “Americanness” were code words for long-established anti-Latin-American prejudices. *Mendez* exposed these to the light of social science and law and found them wanting. (Strum, 2010, p. IX)

What the variety of approaches and philosophies that have been involved in the long struggle for Mexican recognition shows is that in spite of the efforts and successes, the Mexican-immigrant and even the Mexican-American remained more marginalized and disparaged than other immigrant groups.

While many Latinos were relieved that the 2001 terrorist attack did not involve any immigrants from the Americas, the term “immigrant” began to escalate public suspicion. The situation of the Mexican immigrant became further aggravated with the economic downturn of 2008. Immigrants became the obvious target of hatred, and Mexicans being the closest, most numerous and poorest, fitted the public search for a scapegoat.

The building of a wall announced during the 2016 Presidential campaign became a rallying cry for those who had harbored not just populist philosophies but xenophobic and chauvinistic points of view. Steve Bannon, until recently one of Trump’s most influential advisors and driving force behind right wing *Breitbart News*, made no bones about banning all immigrants; his ties to the KKK were never hidden, receiving endorsement by its leader, David Duke. In spite of hopes that Trump’s election would extinguish the racist fires, now President Trump’s rhetoric and anti-Hispanic actions could continue unobstructed.

From a post-election vantage point, it has become clear that candidate Trump’s campaign views about Judge Gonzalo Curiel of the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of California, or his views on DACA, or the Wall, or for all matters related to Hispanics, did not necessarily change after his election. His views about a whole cultural and linguistic tradition continued to be made explicit in almost daily behavior.

The racism at the core of Trump’s agenda was laid bare when he pardoned former Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who was awaiting a prison sentence for defying a court order that barred him from racially profiling Latinos. As a result of the August 25 pardon, Arpaio, who rose to national prominence

for his anti-immigrant tactics in Maricopa County, will never be held accountable for his years of unconstitutional conduct. (Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC], 2018, "Promoting a racist agenda," para. 10)

## Concluding Comments

Researchers have looked into linguistic differences, religious beliefs, perceived threats to norms and values of the receiving society and many elements that can hinder openness to immigrants. The general consensus is that no single factor can be directly correlated to outbreaks of public dissatisfaction with new arrivals of any immigrant group (Papademetriou & Banulescu-Bogdan, 2016). And yet, each of those factors appears with frequency and is used often as explanation for why a particular group is not fitting into the nucleus of a specific society. What the research literature shows is that a predilection for groups that blend easily into the host society has been a historical and sociological fact.

Nativist and xenophobic dialogues have ebbed and flowed in the public discourse in the U.S., with different groups being targets at different historical periods. These historical periods usually were the result of, or predicted, global crises. For example, the strength of movements such as the KKK or the Know Nothing Party at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century was a result of primarily southerners losing their grip on slavery at the same time that they were overwhelmed by outsiders--Catholics and foreigners, all people deemed different. The sequelae of slavery and the unabated fear of Blacks has always been a factor that, by extension, served to continue anti-Mexican sentiments and behaviors. Mexicans were darker and were viewed as a threat to the expectations of the community. Spikes or "perceived spikes" of undocumented immigrants can "harden attitudes toward immigration ... particularly when substantial shares ... of flow originate from the same country or sub region" (Papademetriou & Banulescu-Bogdan, 2016, p. 9), in this case, Mexico and Latin America.

One can continue to search for explanations of how and why the negative perceptions about Mexican immigrants have survived with such persistence. We have shown how Mexicans in particular have been a targeted immigrant group in the U.S.

In spite of the fact that, as the popular saying goes, "they did not really cross the border but the border crossed them," the massive size and economic power of the North was a magnet that caused large numbers of immigrants to arrive to fill labor needs throughout the decades. The constant flow was made up of both documented and undocumented persons. Mexico was, as Porfirio Díaz, controversial seven-term President of Mexico, is reputed to have said, "too far from God and too close to the United States." Mexicans were a constant presence in the host country and never appeared to gain stability or to blend with the natives.

Mexicans/Latinos were not helped to identify as Americans with ease. It was not until second and third generations had served in the military and received schooling that made them feel less separate from peer groups that they claimed more readily their American identity. It would appear that Mexicans/Latinos, if not fully despised, were certainly not highly regarded, desirable or fully appreciated as a community. Recently, the current emphasis on "building the wall" and the antagonism expressed towards Mexico and its leadership have deepened the sense of fear and separation felt by the members of the Latino immigrant group. Thus, it can be said, that the ghost of the Black Legend has risen again. Linguistic, religious and social differences that fueled animosity and contributed to the distancing of the early immigrant groups continue today, feeding mutual suspicion. The current political leadership and its xenophobic inclinations fuel sentiments that may have been dormant in the general public.

It is sad to recognize that there are no complete explanations for the prejudicial sentiments which U.S. citizens have exhibited towards Mexican and Latino immigrants. Changes in attitudes will require a profound cultural transformation. However, on a more hopeful note, there has been a significant increase in the educational, political and business gains made by earlier Latino immigrants and their children. Once the current xenophobic wave passes, this may significantly weaken the historical animosity toward the group. The level of political leadership exercised by Hispanics today is significant, and combined with demographic changes, cannot be ignored.

## References

- Alarcón, R. (2011). U. S. Immigration policy and the mobility of Mexicans (1882–2005). *Migraciones Internacionales*, 6(1), 185–218.
- Allsup, V. C. (2010). Hernandez v. State of Texas. *Handbook of Texas Online*. Retrieved from <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jrh01>
- Andreas, P. (2000). *Border games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico divide*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Belluck, P. (2008, October 15). Settlement will allow thousands of Mexican laborers in U. S. to collect back pay. *New York Times*.
- Chavez, L. R. (2001). *Covering immigration: Population images and the politics of the nation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Daniels, R. (1990). *Coming to America*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- De León, A. (1987). *They called them greasers*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Fuentes, C. (1992). *The buried mirror*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Griswold del Castillo, R., & De León, A. (1996). *North to Aztlán*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Hernandez v. State of Texas. 347 U.S. 475 (1954). Retrieved from <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/347/475>
- Iber, J., & De León, A. (2006). *Hispanics in the American west*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO.
- Kaplan, M. (2015, September 16). Who is Jeb Bush's wife? Donald Trump won't apologize to Mexican American Columba Bush. *International Business Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.ibtimes.com/who-jeb-bushs-wife-donald-trump-wont-apologize-mexican-american-columba-bush-2100488>
- Labunka, I., Law, L., & Musca, T. (Producers), & Menéndez, R. (Director). (1998). *Stand and deliver* [motion picture]. USA: Warner Home Video.
- Lukens, P. D. (2012). *A quiet victory for Latino rights*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.
- Massey, D. S., Durand, J. & Malone, N. J. (2002). *Beyond smoke and mirrors: Mexican immigration in an age of economic integration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Massey, D. S., & Pren, K. A. (2012). Origins of the new Latino underclass. *Race and Social Problems*, 4, 5–17.
- McCarthy, J. (2015, August 20). Immigrant status tied to discrimination among Hispanics. *Gallup News: Business: Workplace*. Retrieved from <http://news.gallup.com/poll/184769/immigrant-status-tied-discrimination-among-hispanics.aspx>

- McSeveney, S. (1987). Immigrants, the literacy test, and quotas: Selected American history college textbooks' coverage of the congressional restriction of European Immigration, 1917–1929. *The History Teacher*, 21(1), 41–51.
- Mendez v. Westminster. 161 F.2d 774 (9th Cir. 1947).
- Ortiz, V., & Telles, E. (2012). Racial identity and racial treatment of Mexican Americans. *Race and Social Problems*, 4(1), 1–19.
- Papademetriou, D. G., & Banulescu-Bogdan, N. (2016). *Understanding and addressing public anxiety about immigration*. Transatlantic Council on Migration. Migration Policy Institute.
- Pew Hispanic Center. (2011). *The Mexican American boom: Births overtake immigration*. Retrieved from <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/144.pdf>
- Reilly, K. (2016, August 31) Here are all the times Donald Trump insulted Mexico. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4473972/donald-trump-mexico-meeting-insult/>
- Rosales, F. A. (1997). *Chicano!* Houston, TX: Arte Público Press.
- Sheridan, T.E. (1986). *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson 1854–1941*.
- Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). (2018, Jan. 19). *America the Trumped: 10 ways the administration attacked Civil Rights in year one*. Retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/20180119/america-trumped-10-ways-administration-attacked-civil-rights-year-one>
- Stapinski, H. (2017, June 2). When America barred Italians. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/02/opinion/illegal-immigration-italian-americans.html>
- State of New Mexico. (1911/2017). *Constitution of the State of New Mexico*. State of New Mexico Compilation Commission. Retrieved from <http://www.sos.state.nm.us/nmconst2017.pdf>
- Stewart, K. L., & De León, A. (1993). *Not room enough*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Strum, P. (2010). *Mendez v. Westminster. School Desegregation and Mexican American Rights*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Sullivan, E., Haberman, M., & Davis, J. H. (2018, Jan. 18). Trump denies changing his position on border wall. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/18/us/politics/trump-kelly-border-wall.html>
- U.S. Immigration Legislation Online. (n.d.). *1917 Immigration Act*. Retrieved from [http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/1917\\_immigration\\_act.html](http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/1917_immigration_act.html)
- Zong, J., & Batalova, J. (2016, March 17). Mexican immigrants in the United States. *Migration Policy Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mexican-immigrants-united-states?gclid=...>