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**MEAT STRIKERS ENDORSE HENRY WALLACE**

*Striking CIO packinghouse workers line up in front of union headquarters in Chicago to sign a petition endorsing the nomination of Henry Wallace and Senator Glenn Taylor to the presidential ticket of the Independent Progressive Party in 1948. (Photograph courtesy the author.)*

## In the Years of Darkness and Torment

THE EARLY MEXICAN AMERICAN STRUGGLE FOR  
CIVIL RIGHTS, 1945–1963

*Zaragosa Vargas*

World War II was a turning point for Mexican American workers. Their demands for equality in the workplace and in the nation made them major participants in the Mexican American struggle for civil rights. As with their Black working-class counterparts, this heightened civil rights consciousness grew out of the opportunities for political and economic advancement afforded by New Deal labor legislation, the government's patriotic wartime propaganda, the president's Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) hearings on discrimination, and the bloody interracial violence that swept America's cities in 1943. The entry of Mexican Americans into CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) unions and their fight against shop-floor discrimination was an important catalyst in the unfolding struggle for social and political advancement by this fast-growing, urban working-class population. As always, Mexican American women worked alongside men in mobilizing and

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### List of Acronyms

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FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Committee
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
NFLU	National Farm Labor Union
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
AFL	American Federation of Labor
CSO	Community Service Organization
CRC	Civil Rights Congress
ACPFB	American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born
AGIF	American G.I. Forum
LULAC	League of United Latin American Citizens
UPWA	United Packing Workers of America
Mine-Mill	International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers
ANMA	Asociación Nacional México-Americana
UFWA	United Farm Workers of America
FTA	Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers Union
ILWU	International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union
USWA	United Steel Workers of America
ILGWU	International Ladies Garment Workers Union
IPP	Independent Progressive Party
ACSSP	American Council of Spanish-Speaking People
MAPA	Mexican American Political Association
PASSO	Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations

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leading the struggle for civil rights. Defying the postwar atmosphere of anti-communism and racist antiforeign hysteria, Mexican Americans aggressively championed the cause of labor and civil rights.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, several developments impeded the Mexican American civil rights movement: the rise of the Cold War, McCarthyism, the CIO purge of left-wing unions (many with sizable minority memberships), and the deportation frenzy created by the McCarran-Walter Act and "Operation Wetback." Progressive labor and civil rights leaders faced growing persecution. Harassed, intimidated, and denounced as subversives, these men and women paid a high price for their resolve to fight for Mexican American equality. Meanwhile, traditional Mexican American civic leaders who shunned direct action were similarly put on the defensive by McCarthyite reactionaries and hard-line civil rights opponents. The pursuit of respectability and acceptance by these Mexican American public figures made them conservative and cautious; some even embraced anticommunism and opposed the membership of Mexican Americans in organizations and labor unions they deemed radical.<sup>2</sup>

What follows is an interpretation of the early Mexican American civil rights movement in the post-World War II years. During this time working-

class Mexican American activists helped to achieve equality and civil rights for their national community, the second largest and second most disadvantaged minority group in the United States. The struggle to attain civil rights was not a coordinated national campaign, although national organizations and leaders emerged. Rather, the effort was a locally based movement for social change mobilized by Mexican American working men and women. Those organizations displayed a wide range of objectives, tactics, and ideologies that reflected the aspirations of the participants. In this article, I address several subjects: labor's response to racial issues and civil rights; Cold War ideology that helped to spawn bigoted attacks on American- and foreign-born Mexicans and to foster Operation Wetback; and the goals, strategies, and problems of early Mexican American political activism. Drawing from oral histories and the abundant secondary literature on this subject, I reconstruct a defining moment in the course of the Mexican American struggle for equality in the United States. Hopefully this article will deepen historical understanding of the origins of the Mexican American civil rights movement in the 1960s.

### Postwar Mexican America

During the postwar era the Southwest's Spanish-speaking population grew nearly 50 percent from 2.29 million in 1950 to 3.46 million in 1960. Sixty percent of this population expansion took place in California. The internal migration of working-class Mexican Americans from other parts of the Southwest to California contributed to this population growth. Despite the massive relocation to the Golden State, Texas still had the nation's highest density of people of Mexican descent. One and a half million people, or 45 percent of the total Mexican and Mexican American population living in the United States, resided in the Lone Star State. Ninety percent of this population was working class and made up one-fourth of the Southwest's workforce. Although Mexican Americans had made noticeable social and economic inroads since the war, 34.8 percent of the Spanish-surnamed population lived in poverty, the degree of which varied by state and metropolitan area. By 1960, annual incomes averaged less than three thousand dollars. For the relatively advantaged but numerically insignificant Mexican American business and professional classes, the postwar years brought prosperity and upward mobility, but economic segregation limited their mobility as it did that of their Black counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

Continuing a process that had begun during World War II, Mexican Americans were leaving poverty-stricken rural areas to reside in cities. By 1950, 80 percent of Mexican Americans resided in urban centers. The demand for labor during World War II allowed Mexican Americans, Blacks, and women to obtain a moderate share of the well-paying factory jobs formerly held by Anglo men. But the highly modernized industries of the postwar era were no longer able to absorb laborers displaced by the mechanization of agriculture and low-wage labor imported from Mexico. Few Mexican Americans secured jobs in the newer factories located in the suburbs outside high-tax city jurisdictions for they generally possessed little education and few skills and unions blocked their entrance into training programs. Instead, they took low-paying jobs in old industrial-core factories and in the service sector. The new arrivals quickly discovered that discrimination permeated not only the workplace but urban social life as well.<sup>4</sup>

In 1960, one-third of the U.S. population lived in poverty, and growing racial and economic inequality excluded most Mexican Americans from the economic boom and domestic affluence of the postwar years. Urban renewal devastated and disrupted Mexican American lives. Like Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and poor Whites, they were driven into overcrowded, deteriorating industrial working-class neighborhoods—areas of glaring poverty, physical decay, and increasing abandonment. Federal housing policy, private banks, and “White flight” encouraged racial segregation in site and tenant selection by local authorities, while the nonenforcement of fair housing, equal access, and other antidiscrimination laws limited minority residential mobility. Mexican Americans and other minorities who sought to buy homes in White neighborhoods were refused mortgage insurance. White neighborhood associations and homeowners used regulations and restrictive covenants to exclude minorities and resist integration. For instance, in 1952 a string of anti-Black, anti-Jewish, and anti-Mexican bombings shook Los Angeles and threats of further incendiary terror chillingly promised retaliation against all efforts at residential desegregation. Despite the dynamic economic growth of the Southwest, Mexican Americans faced confinement to low-paying and unskilled factory work in declining traditional industries like auto, steel, and meatpacking and wretched living conditions characterized by expensive poor-quality housing, educational deficiencies, racial discrimination, and high incidences of crime. One scholar soberly concluded that Mexican Americans were “the only ethnic group for which a comparison of the characteristics of the first and second generations fails to show a substantial intergenerational rise in socioeconomic status.”<sup>5</sup>

Mexican Americans suffered the worst social and economic conditions in Texas—the peripheral South—where nearly half of the nation’s Mexican American population resided. As elsewhere in the South, Anglo Texans united to defend the color line through Jim Crow rule. The separation and control of Mexicans and Mexican Americans was especially acute in the Río Grande Valley, where they had lived in poverty for generations. The destructive measures and effects of Jim Crow were: low wages and pervasive poverty; residential confinement to rural and urban slums; a tuberculosis rate seven times that of Anglo Texans; a high infant-mortality rate; segregated schools and public places regardless of U.S. citizenship; an average third-grade educational level; and the denial of the rights to vote, serve on juries, and own real estate in racially restricted areas.<sup>6</sup>

In an article published by *The Nation* in 1959, novelist John Rechy, himself a Mexican American from Texas, revealed the dreadful plight of many of his people. Rechy had grown up in the grinding poverty of postwar El Paso where working-class Mexican Americans were crowded into the Southside and Eastside, two of the city’s harshest neighborhoods. Rechy recalled several examples of anti-Mexican and anti-Mexican American racism: Anglo Texans disparagingly referring to them as “greasers”; signs announcing, “We Do Not Serve Mexicans, Niggers, or Dogs”; and Anglo Texans declaring matter-of-factly that they never touched their food in the presence of their servants. The writer also remembered movie houses that used segregated seating. Recalling his own working-class roots and that of many other Mexican Americans in Texas, Rechy wrote of his consciousness of “the ever-present tinge in belonging to a group largely comprising of maids and laborers who must mouth ‘sir’ and ‘ma’am’ to others, while they themselves are invariably called by nicknames.”<sup>7</sup>

As in many sectors of the southern industrial labor market, the Anglo work force (and managers) in Texas believed in White supremacy. The consequence was that non-White working people, segregated from White laborers, worked in separate departments, punched different time clocks, visited their own pay windows, and used separate drinking fountains, bathrooms, and bathing facilities. Some union locals protested such common workplace discrimination. However, given the virulent backlash against civil rights among Anglo union members (who often held membership in White Citizens’ Councils or belonged to the Ku Klux Klan) and labor’s weakened civil rights advocacy position, most union locals negotiated labor contracts that included company-segregated job categories and work areas. Rechy astutely observed

that Jim Crow wore a sombrero in Texas and much of the Southwest in the postwar era, and rendered Mexican Americans second-class citizens. Moreover, the growing presence of Mexican contract labor challenged the meaning of Mexican American ethnic identity and citizenship. The alarmingly high influx of illegal Mexican labor, particularly in the ten-year period from 1944–1954 (referred to as “the wetback decade”), helped to foment and exacerbate a hostile antialien environment.<sup>8</sup>

Mexican Americans comprised the bulk of cheap labor in the increasingly mechanized agricultural sector. Most toiled as migrant workers whose poverty bred dreadful living conditions and poor hygiene and who were rendered undesirable by Anglo racism. More than 100,000 Mexican American farm workers migrated within Texas and an additional 58,000 migrated to other states; approximately 70,000 Mexican Americans harvested crops in Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming; and Mexican Americans made up more than 70 percent of the 150,000 field laborers in California. Farm workers’ dismal plight was the same everywhere: entire families worked long hours at stoop labor for low pay. Shacks, tents, and even stables served as “home.” Appalling living conditions triggered epidemics of diphtheria, dysentery, tuberculosis, and other so-called totalitarian diseases. Among this migrant population, death rates soared from 125 to 250 percent above the national average. Rootless, uneducated, and politically impotent, the Mexican American migrant worker was also invisible to the rest of the United States. Although the President’s Commission on Migratory Labor issued its lengthy report in 1951, the U.S. public only discovered the plight of Mexican American farm workers and other poor Americans in 1962 with the publication of Michael Harrington’s *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*.<sup>9</sup>

### Braceros, *Mojados*, and Operation Wetback

Throughout crop-growing areas in the South and West, the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) and later the Agricultural Workers’ Organizing Committee supported farm workers’ labor struggles. In battles against large-grower interests, Mexican American workers tried to obtain social security, housing, health care, and educational benefits. However, the presence of legal and illegal labor from Mexico undermined the working conditions and labor organizing of Mexican Americans, whose unionization efforts were already crippled by the migratory nature of their labor. Their biggest obstacle was competition from contracted Mexican labor imported to the United States



under the auspices of the Bracero Program, originally a short-term solution to agricultural labor shortages during World War II. However, over the next twenty-two years approximately five million Mexicans entered the United States for seasonal agricultural employment primarily in Texas, Arizona, and California. With little congressional oversight, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) developed and administered the Bracero Program. Upon the expiration of their work contracts, the INS returned the braceros to Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Additional competition for Mexican American workers came from the huge numbers of Mexican *mojados* (“wetbacks” or undocumented workers), who with braceros eventually performed almost all field labor and part of the unskilled labor from the Lower Río Grande Valley to the West Coast. For example, there were between 100,000 to 500,000 *mojados* in Texas alone, and in 1950, 21,000 crossed into California every month. These workers from Mexico endured unsanitary living conditions, were denied medical treatment, and suffered police brutality and other abuses. They performed arduous labor-intensive fieldwork at starvation pay, which widened the gap between farm and industrial wages by 60 percent. The small gains made by Mexican Americans in Texas during the war years were wiped out by the *mojado* invasion. The influx of cheap labor combined with the existing discrimination based on language and skin color made the economic situation for Mexican Americans even more hopeless. The endless flow of *mojados* from Mexico also undermined the farm-labor and civil rights movements. Unions and civic organizations consequently turned their attention from organizing agricultural workers to campaigning aggressively against the Bracero Program.<sup>11</sup>

“[California] was flooded with braceros while we were on strike, and before and after [a] strike,” recalled the consummate labor organizer, Ernesto Galarza. As an organizer for the NFLU, he participated in twenty California strikes between 1948 and 1959, working against powerful adversaries in corporate agriculture and the federal government. His organizing strategy was to move into areas with large numbers of braceros and *mojados*. When business interests pressured the U.S. Border Patrol to avoid apprehending *mojados*, NFLU members made citizen’s arrests of these illegal workers and guarded border crossings to stop their re-entry. Outraged by NFLU intervention, the grower-government alliance countered by bringing in braceros to replace the removed *mojados*. Time and again, illegal immigrants were

immediately legalized or “dried out” by federal agents who put the strike-breakers to work.<sup>12</sup>

The complacent American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the grower-government alliance hindered the efforts of Mexican American labor organizers. Facing their stiff resistance, the frustrated Galarza began to rethink his organizing strategy. For the remainder of his farm-labor activism, he stressed terminating the Bracero Program and bringing attention to the problem of illegal labor. Galarza’s widely published findings documented violations of the guest-worker program and the intrinsic corruption and scandal that accompanied it. However, his enemies had the final say. Like others who attempted to restrict employers’ access to bracero labor, Galarza was smeared as a communist conspirator. His wife Mae, a teacher in the San Jose public school system, was perniciously red-baited.<sup>13</sup>

The development of large-scale agriculture in northern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest produced this large flow of low-cost labor. Northern Mexican agribusinessmen brought large numbers of Mexicans to the border to offset the equally great numbers of Mexican workers who, drawn by the higher American wages, crossed clandestinely into the United States. Each year, between 100,000 and 400,000 entered Texas illegally and an equally large number crossed into California’s Imperial Valley. The lucrative smuggling and trafficking of *mojados* was another factor contributing to the growth of illegal entry into the United States.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, the large surplus of *mojado* labor compounded the dearth of employment opportunities for Mexican Americans in Texas, who were already handicapped by the low-wage structure, the absence of well-paying jobs, Anglo union resistance, and seasonal agriculture employment. Unable to provide for their families, many Mexican Americans in border communities migrated out of the state to search for work, many relocating to urban slums in the West and Midwest. Work-starved *mojados*, wading, swimming, or rowing across the Río Grande, replaced those Mexican Americans.<sup>15</sup>

In the economic recession of the mid-1950s American unemployment doubled. Pressured by labor unions, the U.S. Department of Labor finally intervened to offset the massive flow of *mojados* into the United States. On 9 June 1954 the department initiated Operation Wetback, a nationwide deportation drive directed at illegal Mexican aliens. The McCarran-Walter Act served as the legal foundation of this effort. Through this massive endeavor organized by the INS and with the full cooperation of county and state authorities, the United States deported over one million illegal Mexican work-

ers, or the equivalent of nearly two Mexicans per minute, twenty-four hours a day in 1954.

The INS launched the military-like Operation Terror shortly after midnight on 17 June 1954. During this second deportation campaign the Mexican American community was subjected to blatant violations of human rights.<sup>16</sup> Massive raids using low-flying airplanes, armed motorized patrols, and well-timed sweeps deployed into agricultural fields and cities in northern and southern California. However, in California Operation Terror focused on the Mexican community of Los Angeles. Without search or arrest warrants, flying squadrons of nearly a thousand federal immigration agents and temporary personnel swept through factory districts and hunted down Mexicans. Government agents also invaded homes, business districts, and places of entertainment. In the Midwest, the INS established a "Chicago-to-Mexico airlift" to expedite the deportation drive. The raids especially targeted labor and community activists who were long-time residents of the United States but not U.S. citizens. In the context of the nationwide anticommunist fervor, Mexican American labor and civil rights activists were also exposed to the terror and subject to deportation.<sup>17</sup>

The Community Service Organization (CSO), the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), its offshoot American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (ACFPB), and progressive labor unions spoke out against the raids at meetings, union gatherings, and organized mass protests. In Los Angeles INS agents prepared a detention camp at Elysian Park near the Los Angeles Police Academy to detain Mexicans for processing and shipment to Douglas, Arizona. While trade unionists set up a picket line, the CRC distributed an English-Spanish pamphlet, "Stop the Deportation Drive . . . Know your Rights." Thousands of Mexican immigrants and their American citizen families were processed for deportation without hearings or access to legal counsel. According to civil libertarians, the Gestapo-like apprehension of Mexicans resulted in the greatest coerced mass movement of people in America's history. At a time when Americans were increasingly concerned about race, class, and ethnic divisions and in the same year of the monumental *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Operation Wetback silenced the nation's second largest racial minority group. The two nationally based Mexican American civil rights organizations, the American G.I. Forum (AGIF) and the conservative League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) at first endorsed the arrests and deportations. While the former protested the widespread government suppression, the latter group remained

a relatively passive observer to the persecution of Mexican American citizens caught in the dragnet.<sup>18</sup>

The federal deportations dovetailed with the ongoing crusade to drive suspected Mexican American communists out of the labor movement. The expulsions were an important element of the government's crackdown on subversives and fed off the antialien prejudices Mexican Americans suffered in the postwar years. The domestic intelligence-gathering apparatus of the FBI, the INS, and other government agencies collaborated to target labor activists and community leaders for surveillance. In 1954 Anna Correa Bary and her husband, Colorado Communist Party chairman Arthur Bary, along with four other party members were indicted and tried for violation of the Smith Act. The daughter of Mexican American labor organizer Jesús Correa, Anna was a member of Local 21 of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA). During the nationwide UPWA strike against the large packing companies in 1948, Anna and other workers defiantly laid down on the railroad tracks to prevent the company from moving meat products. The CRC contacted over 140 lawyers to find someone to take the Correa Bary case; all refused to defend her. Her bail was set at twenty-five thousand dollars. The federal indictment of the six party members relied on the testimony of four paid witnesses who joined the party at the request of the FBI to spy, make reports, and furnish evidence to convict the defendants.<sup>19</sup>

Two long-time Spanish-speaking labor activists tracked down by INS agents were Refugio Martínez of Chicago and Humberto Silex of El Paso. Martínez was a staff member of the UPWA. During the late 1930s he had been a member of El Frente Popular Mexicano (The Mexican Popular Front) and the communist-led Vicente Toledano Club. Originally from Nicaragua, Silex served as secretary, treasurer, president, and national delegate of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill) Local 509. Both Martínez and Silex were supporters of the left wing Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA). The Police Labor Detail of Chicago arrested Martínez for his involvement in the UPWA, which was organizing the Wilson, Armour, and Swift plants in that city. A twenty-seven-year resident of the United States, Martínez was deported under the McCarran-Walter Act because he had joined the Communist Party in 1932.<sup>20</sup>

Silex fared no better in the crackdown. He had legally entered the United States, served in the United States Army, and had six American-born children. On 6 June 1946 the INS arrested Silex during a strike at the El Paso Phelps Dodge refinery on the charge of aggravated assault. During his de-

portation hearing, the INS never questioned Silex about the crime with which he was charged. Instead, all questions probed Silex's union activities and his alleged membership in the American or Mexican Communist Parties. Such draconian measures reinforced the government's vise-like control over Mexican labor and undermined attempts at unionization. As one observer noted, the threat of deportation "served as a very effective weapon to keep the Mexican people as a whole in bondage. . . . As soon as a leader arises . . . deportation proceedings are immediately used to remove [them] from leadership."<sup>21</sup>

Despite red-baiting, Mexican American and Anglo members of the ACPFB and the CRC fought against the government's deportations. Under government investigation for alleged communist ties, these organizations, along with the American Civil Liberties Union, defended over two hundred individuals charged under the Walter-McCarran law for membership in the Communist Party or left-led unions and various antifascist organizations such as the League Against War and Fascism mobilized in the 1930s. According to the ACPFB, these deportation cases were part of a nationwide campaign to harass and intimidate union activity among the foreign-born, many of whom were war veterans, and to create a smoke screen behind which reactionaries hoped to pass antilabor legislation.<sup>22</sup>

The right-wing suppression of progressive organizations and persecution of alleged subversives were poignantly summed up by Anita Alvarez, a leading voice in the ACPFB:

In a land founded on freedom and justice, a mother of a war veteran is aroused in the morning and torn from her home. A father of a dead war hero is waylaid on his way home from work and snatched away from his family. . . . What is their crime? Where is the evidence? The accusation is "You believed—you thought—you spoke."<sup>23</sup>

The federal deportation campaign demonstrated that labor rights and civil rights were inseparable in the Mexican American struggle for social justice.

### The Struggle for Mexican American Labor Rights

Embroiled in jurisdictional disputes, AFL and CIO affiliates provided little assistance to Mexican American union organizers in industries such as the railroads, packinghouses, steel mills and foundries, and auto plants. The national federation allowed some AFL locals to bar Mexicans from membership.

For example, the constitution of the New Mexico Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen contained the following passage: “[Members] shall be white . . . no less than sixteen years of age, and be able to read and write the English language and understand our constitution. Mexicans or those of Spanish extraction are not eligible.” Mexican American and Black working men were confined to hard, unskilled, and dead-end jobs regardless of seniority. Anglo workers and union leaders were indifferent to these racist conditions or put up stiff resistance to minority bids to change them. The exceptions were the left-led unions—the United Electrical Workers Union, the United Furniture Workers of America (UFWA), the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (FTA), and Mine-Mill. These progressive unions, some with large minority membership, upheld their reputations for effective bargaining and for promoting civil rights. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, however, impeded Mexican American union organizing. Reflecting the rise of business influence in the first Republican Congress since 1930, Taft-Hartley outlawed the closed shop, jurisdictional strikes, secondary boycotts, and national-emergency strikes. The act also required union officials to file affidavits swearing that they were not communists.<sup>24</sup>

During the purge of left-led unions within the CIO and the mass blacklisting that marked the postwar Taft-Hartley years, Mexican American unionists and civil rights activists took great personal and political risks in the struggle for social justice. Red-baiting was a special hazard. The federal government attempted to link communism to illegal Mexican immigration and the organizing work of the CIO along the U.S.-Mexican border. As in the cases of Anna Correa Bary, Refugio Martínez, and Humberto Silex, an important weapon against the left-led unions was detaining and interrogating leaders about so-called subversive activities promoted by the Communist Party. Leaders suspected of embracing the iron law of class struggle paid the price of denaturalization and deportation. Despite this state-sponsored corporate assault on labor, Mexican American labor leaders continued to struggle. They contested job and wage discrimination and demanded seniority provisions, a key issue in their fight to achieve economic parity with other American working men. Their immersion in unionism and the day-to-day struggle against shop-floor exploitation and racism instilled in these leaders the intrinsic belief that unionism would advance social equality and empower their followers. Moreover, the ardent unionists clearly understood that civil rights issues were economic ones as well. These men and women were staunchly committed to bettering the lives of their fellow Mexican Americans.<sup>25</sup>

In the metal industries of the Southwest and Mountain states, Mexican Americans constituted nearly half the work force. Because of racially prescribed custom, they received lower wages than Anglos, were denied access to higher-paying jobs, and used separate facilities. Mexican Americans comprised 15 percent of the membership of the independent Mine-Mill union and served as leaders of their locals. Mine-Mill registered Black voters in Alabama, fought segregation in the North, and championed the civil rights cause of downtrodden Mexican American labor in the Southwest. The union was eventually successful in breaking the so-called "Mexican wage scale." This progressive organization's campaign to eliminate the notorious two-tiered wage system included pressuring the government for equal job opportunities. Mine-Mill secured hearings on anti-union conditions before the National Labor Relations Board, and remedied grievances and won compensation on behalf of its Mexican American members through appeals to the director of conciliation in the Department of Labor.

In Bayard, New Mexico the predominantly Mexican members of Mine-Mill Local 890 engaged in one of the most famous struggles for labor and civil rights in the 1950s.<sup>26</sup> In 1950, amid a climate of growing conservatism and union-busting in the United States labor movement, and as Mexican Americans once again found themselves over-represented in combat units in the unfolding Korean War, the members of Local 890 waged a hard-fought but successful battle against the segregation and discrimination in working and living conditions of the Empire Zinc Company. The film *Salt of the Earth* chronicled the fifteen-month strike of these New Mexican mine workers. Harassed by the FBI and the INS, the film crew and cast, as well as union leader Juan Chacón and other Mexican Americans drawn from the community completed *Salt of the Earth* with great difficulty. The Hollywood film industry blacklisted director Herbert Biberman, producer Paul Jarrico, writer Michael Wilson, and actor Will Geer, and the federal government deported Mexican actress Rosaura Revueltas. Distributors avoided *Salt of the Earth*, but the film attracted its own audience outside commercial movie houses at private screenings such as those held in New York's Black Harlem. The success of *Salt of the Earth*, however, reflected more the individuals who made the film than the militant mine worker's struggle. Notwithstanding, the strike action received considerable help from progressive Mexican American and Anglo unionists as well as from Mexico's Miners' Union in the form of fundraisers, political rallies, and leafleting.<sup>27</sup>

Mexican American workmen also made inroads against job and wage discrimination through their respective locals of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), and the United Auto Workers of America. On the other hand, the attitude of Anglo rank and file toward civil rights was rooted in years of racial competition and conflict. In the postwar years, they remained reluctant to commit themselves to civil rights for minorities and women. Because of the fine line between their job consciousness and race consciousness, Anglo workmen sabotaged the hiring and promotion of Mexican Americans and other racial minorities. When unions forcibly desegregated lunchrooms, bathrooms, and other company facilities, Anglo workers branded this action a communist conspiracy. In the backlash, Anglo workers staged wildcat strikes and some all-White locals separated from international unions. Some Anglo workmen even withdrew from union activities altogether. The contracts that the CIO bargained and signed with employers excluded civil rights provisions. Racial divisions in the workplace limited job opportunities for Mexican Americans and Blacks, and they were the first to lose their positions whenever jobs were mechanized.<sup>28</sup>

### The Struggle for Mexican American Civil Rights

The postwar era witnessed grassroots efforts by Mexican Americans for voter registration as well as desegregation of schools, housing, and public facilities. These activists also forged alliances with Blacks and with other Latinos to achieve these goals. The CSO and newly formed Mexican American political and civic organizations aided the cause by launching voter education and registration drives. Fighting job discrimination was an important contribution of these organizations, whose support of Mexican American unionists garnered them political support. Mexican American workers and local union leaders put to use wartime experiences with community activism in their challenges to Anglo privilege in the workplace. Mexican American unionists in southern California like Bert Corona from the ILWU, María Durán and Hope Mendoza Schecter from the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), and Mexican American members of the UFWA and the USWA—all worked with progressive organizations for universal education, fair housing, restoration of civil rights and civil liberties, and labor-related issues. East of Los Angeles and in California's rural areas, Mexican American blue-collar workers, many of them war veterans, formed Unity Leagues with



the assistance of the American Committee on Race Relations. They launched voter registration drives to elect Mexican Americans or progressive Anglo candidates to office and dealt with local problems such as installing street lights, paving streets, and building sidewalks. In New Mexico coalitions of Mine-Mill unionists formed alliances with other Mexican Americans to help re-elect U.S. Senator Dennis Chávez. Broad-based coalitions in Arizona led by Mine-Mill exercised their political power in four victorious campaigns for state governor.<sup>29</sup>

Working through the California-based CSO—an offshoot of Saul Alinsky's Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council—Mexican Americans from Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles undertook a voter-registration campaign to elect Edward Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council. Although Roybal lost the campaign (by only three hundred votes), the CSO embraced numerous community issues and helped nurture a well-organized grassroots political movement among working-class Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, and in Chicago and the Calumet area in the Midwest. After launching a nonpartisan voter registration campaign that gained fifteen thousand new voters and created seventeen new precincts, organizers from the CSO aided Roybal's second bid for a council seat, which he won in 1949. Crucial to Roybal's success were the dozens of Mexican American women who spearheaded this door-to-door organizing drive. While holding down full-time jobs and caring for their families, women organized meetings, made phone calls, and distributed campaign literature during their days off work, in the evenings, or on weekends. During the campaign the climate of McCarthyism menaced CSO members: police shadowed them; their homes were ransacked; canvassers received threatening phone calls; their car tires were slashed; and fliers and posters were torn down. On election day Mexican American voters were harassed at the polls with taunts such as "Mexicans go home" and "aliens can't vote"; in some cases they were prevented from voting altogether. Above all, CSO organizers exhorted Mexican Americans to "vote for whom-ever you please, but register to vote." Labor's support for Mexican American political equality through the national CIO Political Action Committee (PAC), the ILGWU, and the USWA was undoubtedly instrumental in securing Roybal's election victory.<sup>30</sup>

The early Mexican American civil rights struggle for equality drew enthusiastic support, financial aid, and political assistance from Jewish Americans and their organizations. African Americans also cooperated with Mexican American labor and civil rights activists. In 1948, for example, striking CIO

Mexican American and African American meatpacking workers in Chicago came out in support of the third-party campaign of Henry A. Wallace despite opposition from the national union office. In 1955 the local chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Alianza Hispano Americana from El Centro, California filed a class-action suit in federal court to end school segregation in California. In 1958 the all-Black Democratic Minority Conference organized and funded a successful three-month voter-registration drive among African Americans and Mexican Americans, resulting in thirty-five thousand new registered voters. At its 1960 national convention, the AGIF passed a resolution in support of the sit-in demonstrations organized by Black college students and spreading across the South. During the 1960s Mexican Americans and African Americans continued to cooperate in the civil rights movement, antiwar activism, and the broad-based fight for Black, Chicano, and Third-World liberation movements. Toward decade's end both minority groups rejected the integrationist approach that marked the earlier civil rights period.<sup>31</sup>

The CSO's Mexican American working-class movement also tapped nonresident Mexican workmen for community action. CSO leaders from the labor movement supported a minimum wage, unionization, and medical service for migrant workers. In this effort, the CSO personnel established the Labor Relations Committee to educate the Spanish-speaking community about the importance of union organizing, in particular the campaign for a permanent FEPC. The CSO encouraged migrant workers to stand behind union activities by donating money and food to striking workers and by buying union-produced goods. Mexican American workers applied their experience in voter registration drives to other struggles for civil rights, such as the fight against restrictive housing practices, school segregation, jury exclusion, and police brutality against both Mexicans and Mexican Americans.<sup>32</sup>

During the 1940s and 1950s the CSO strove to protect the rights of Mexican migrant workers. Mexican American trade unionists worked through the CIO's Committee to Aid Mexican Workers to secure their access to employment in the defense industries and accommodation in federal housing projects. Working to obtain U.S. citizenship for Mexicans was an important CSO activity in the postwar years. The CSO's Immigration Committee organized this effort following attempts by the Japanese American Citizenship League to include a section in the McCarran-Walter Act permitting U.S. residents of more than twenty years to become naturalized in their own language. The Immigration Committee helped Mexicans with five or more

years of residence in Los Angeles County acquire the necessary documentation. The CSO had established 450 citizenship classes in California by 1955 and had helped over forty thousand Mexicans become U.S. citizens by 1960. Mexican Americans in the CSO were also active in municipal issues such as neighborhood improvement and the protracted defense of working-class housing from destruction by urban renewal and freeway construction projects. These battles against urban development were not always successful. For example, in Los Angeles, after the defeat of the Proposition 10 public-housing referendum, the ethnically mixed working-class districts in Bunker Hill and Chávez Ravine were torn down to make way for corporate offices and the new Dodger Stadium. In Chicago, construction of the Dan Ryan and Eisenhower Freeways led to the displacement of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans from the city's Near West Side, the location of the largest barrio in the Midwest. Hundreds of blue-collar Mexicans and Mexican Americans lost their homes in Southwest Detroit to urban renewal and the construction of the Fisher Freeway.

After World War II, hundreds of experienced Mexican American union members worked tirelessly to mobilize their communities for social change. These men and women were a major force in the early Mexican American civil rights movement and also worked in electoral politics. In 1948 Mexican American workers supported the social democratic vision promised by third-party presidential candidate Henry A. Wallace of the Independent Progressive Party (IPP).<sup>33</sup> Under the banner "Amigos de Wallace," Mexican Americans from Mine-Mill, the UFWA, the FTA, and the UPWA, along with leftist community activists, helped organize the IPP. This coalition ran the grassroots campaign for Wallace and other candidates running on the IPP ticket. Wallace spoke out against racism and called for integrated housing and education. Wallace's advocacy of the FEPC and the Good Neighbor Policy was well received by Mexican Americans who were just as concerned with U.S. foreign policy in Latin America as they were with equality in the workplace. Support for Wallace was strong among blue-collar Mexicans in southern California. A "Wallace for President" rally in Lincoln Park in East Los Angeles drew ten thousand Mexican Americans. Although Wallace lost the election in part because of persistent red-baiting from the Democratic Party, President Truman, the media, and CIO leaders, his campaign politicized many Mexican Americans. The left-led unions that stood behind Wallace's prointegrationist stance and opposition to U.S. foreign policy drew the wrath of the national CIO leadership. In January 1948 the CIO executive council

passed a resolution rejecting Wallace's presidential candidacy. Soon afterward, the council called for the expulsion of the left-led unions from the CIO. The national organization even took away the charters of the California and Los Angeles CIO councils. This action, combined with raids by newly chartered union rivals, destroyed the progressive base of the left-led CIO unions.<sup>34</sup>

The IPP received considerable support from the ANMA, a progressive organization at the forefront of the early Mexican American civil rights struggle. Founded in 1948, the ANMA had four thousand members by 1950, mostly trade unionists led by veteran union organizer Alfredo Montoya. Dedicated to civil and economic rights for Mexican Americans and advocating women's equality, the ANMA built coalitions with other racial and ethnic minorities and with progressive organizations like the ACPFB, the Progressive Citizens of America, and the CRC. In Phoenix and Denver, the ANMA joined the CRC in the drive for a local FEPC and in the battle against police brutality against Mexican Americans, Blacks, and Native Americans. In Denver, as part of "Bill of Rights Week" during the busy 1950 Christmas shopping season, fifteen African American, Mexican American, and White members of the CRC dressed as minutemen. To fife and drum, they carried American flags and paraded through that city's downtown streets with banners declaring, "Repeal the McCarran Act." In Los Angeles, the ANMA and the CRC also fought police brutality against Blacks and Mexicans, who were routinely stopped and searched without cause, and then arrested on false charges. The two progressive organizations also protested the *Los Angeles Examiner* publishing articles that falsely blamed "rat-packs" and "pachucos" for a crime wave in that city.<sup>35</sup>

Despite charges of communism and other forms of red-baiting, the ANMA provided funds and clothing to Mine-Mill Local 890 strikers at Bayard, New Mexico. The organization also supported agricultural workers' right to form unions and earn a minimum wage of one dollar an hour. Although critical of the Bracero Program, the ANMA helped organize bracero workers in strike actions. In 1951 the organization appealed to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to investigate workers' miserable plight as the rented slaves of growers. The ANMA protested the mass deportations of legal and illegal Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans under the McCarran-Walter Act. The progressive body encouraged an international consciousness in its work with industrial unions and workers, for its leaders believed that

Mexican Americans and Latin Americans should unite to fight their common enemy, the North American capitalist.

The ANMA also advocated change in the foreign policy arena. The organization criticized U.S. intervention in Guatemala and support of dictatorships in Latin America and the Middle East. The ANMA declared its solidarity with the Cuban revolutionary movement of Fidel Castro and sought an alliance with Puerto Rican nationalists struggling for an independent Puerto Rico. Becoming part of the peace movement, the ANMA opposed the worldwide nuclear proliferation, joining the Stockholm Peace Appeal initiated in the late 1940s by leaders of various progressive church and civic organizations.

In light of the anticommunist fury and domestic suppression, the ANMA came under increasing government scrutiny. The House Un-American Activities Committee investigated the ANMA's allegedly subversive activities, which included criticizing U.S. foreign policy and opposing the Korean War. Paid informants infiltrated the ANMA and provided the FBI with membership lists and background information on officers and members. The U.S. Attorney General's Office labeled the ANMA a subversive organization with ties to the Communist Party. By the mid-1950s the ANMA was silenced and virtually destroyed by the anticommunist crusade.<sup>36</sup>

The nation's largest Mexican American civil rights organizations had a different strategy for political action. In contrast to the ANMA's direct-action protest linked to national and international struggles, the AGIF and LULAC followed more moderate paths to achieving equality, including voter registration drives and court litigation. The AGIF was an organization of World War II and Korean War veterans based in Texas. LULAC's civil rights activities focused on legal responses instead of community action. LULAC represented the interests of the small Mexican American middle class, which valued conformity in the pursuit of the American way of life. The organization also prided itself on the professional composition of its membership and their ability to speak English. LULAC supported the federal government's anticommunist and anti-immigrant campaigns because they did not want to risk losing the modest economic gains made by its middle-class membership.<sup>37</sup>

The AGIF and LULAC undertook numerous court actions to eliminate discrimination against Mexican Americans, starting a wave of litigation that, after 1951, was coordinated by the Texas-based American Council of Spanish-Speaking People (ACSSP). The purpose of the short-lived ACSSP was to gain remedy through the courts for the violations of Mexican Americans'

civil rights. These cases confronted many of the problems that Mexican Americans faced in the 1950s: public housing desegregation in Texas; school desegregation; the *Hernández v. State of Texas* jury exclusion case; police brutality in San Antonio and Los Angeles; the deportation of an alleged communist alien in California; and public facilities desegregation in Arizona. From 1955 to 1957 the ACSSP funded school desegregation cases in Carrizo Springs, Mathis, Kingsville, and Driscoll, Texas. While weakening de jure segregation, court cases and other judicial interventions failed to undo the prevailing de facto racism Mexican Americans faced in the postwar years. In Texas the AGIF later shifted its focus to the political arena. In 1955 and 1956 it launched, with the AFL-CIO and the Texas Brotherhood of Railroad Workers, “Get out the vote” and “Pay your poll tax” drives to register Mexican American voters in Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy counties in the Río Grande Valley. In this region Mexican Americans made up three-fourths of the population.

These two organizations fell victim to the racist anticommunist climate of the Southwest during the 1950s. Despite its status as a patriotic veterans’ organization, the AGIF failed to escape the wrath of the enemies of social change. Anglo Texans smeared the forum as a subversive organization and vehemently condemned its leader, Dr. Hector García, as a red-tinted agitator. In the climate of extreme right-wing backlash in Texas following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, many White Texans labeled efforts to protect civil rights efforts “communist inspired.” As civil rights scholars maintain, the *Brown* decision collapsed southern racial opinion into two poles, integrationists and segregationists. By the end of the 1950s White Texan segregationists mobilized resistance against integration, a reflection of White southerners’ anger toward federal government interference in race relations in the South. The national office of LULAC became quiet on civil rights issues, apparently to retain what remained of the patronizing good will of the larger Anglo Texan society.

As the civil rights movement erupted into U.S. society, LULAC atrophied. Petty feuding ensued, membership in the organization dropped off, and those who remained were drawn to the organization wholly for social activities. During the 1960s LULAC continued its drift away from the larger Mexican American community. Like organized labor, LULAC had been put on the defensive by the rhetoric of McCarthyism. In Texas, a LULAC stronghold, McCarthyism had unfurled an assortment of southern-style, radical right-wing patriotic committees formed to guard against communists, athe-

ists, and integrationists who threatened the “American Way of Life,” which was reserved for Whites only. Despite the efforts of these two Mexican American organizations, their goals remained unfulfilled: the Mexican American vote had yet to be mobilized; only seventy-five school districts in Texas had been desegregated by 1957; and segregation still reigned in privately owned public facilities.<sup>38</sup>

During the 1950s Catholic organizations provided some political leadership to Mexican Americans, largely due to the work of a few Anglo parish priests trying to retain the loyalty of their Spanish-speaking flocks. However, the prejudice and discrimination of most Anglo clergy and parishioners forced Mexican American Catholics to attend de facto segregated congregations throughout the postwar years. Bishop Patricio Flores of San Antonio recalled that many Catholic churches in the Southwest at this time had signs reading “Mexicans not allowed” or “The last four benches reserved for Mexicans.” Other churches did not permit Spanish-language masses or the use of parish halls by Mexican Americans; if a facility was loaned to Mexicans, it would later be “fumigated to deodorize it of the . . . Mexican odor.” The Church was one of many powerful American institutions that had embraced the anticommunist consensus on foreign and domestic policy, joining its fight against the labor movement to its protracted and effective holy war against domestic communism. The Catholic hierarchy attacked Mexican American labor activists involved with progressive unions such as Mine-Mill, the FTA, and the ILWU. To help maintain the loyalty and control of the Mexican American community, the Church called for the promotion of its parishioners’ religious, cultural, and political rights. Nonetheless, the growing turn to social activism by individual parish priests made the Catholic Church a base for recruiting Mexican American community and farm labor organizers. Despite resistance by some Catholic officials, Mexican Americans in Texas, through the Bishop’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking, took up public housing and health issues, the unionization of bus drivers, and the plight of migrant workers. Framing social issues in terms of Christian morality, priests encouraged Mexican Americans to become involved in the affairs of their respective communities. In this way, the Catholic Church figured prominently in forging a new identity among elements of the Mexican American working classes.<sup>39</sup>

The Church’s influence was especially evident during the 1960 elections when Mexican Americans, organized through the *Viva Kennedy Clubs*, helped fellow Catholic John F. Kennedy win the tight presidential race. In

fact, Kennedy could not have won the Lone Star State without the Mexican American vote, despite the presence of a Texas favorite son, Lyndon Johnson, on the ticket. Civil rights leaders viewed Kennedy as the least attractive of the five candidates for the Democratic nomination, for his national priorities focused heavily on Cold War foreign policy matters, tax cuts, and Medicare. During his administration, Kennedy did not advocate enduring civil rights legislation and the Justice Department failed to challenge the civil rights violations of Mexican Americans. Nonetheless, Mexican American workers benefited from the administration's enforcement of antidiscrimination laws aimed at federal contractors through the creation of the president's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Until his assassination, Kennedy would continue to see civil rights primarily in terms of conflicts between Whites and Blacks.<sup>40</sup>

Despite a series of reversals for Mexican Americans within organized labor in the late 1950s, the union movement contributed to the advancement of civil rights. The 1955 merger of the AFL and CIO subdued the drive for interracial unionism and helped White union members regain their privileged position in the American labor movement. Furthermore, the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act, expanding Taft-Hartley restrictions on union mobilization, imposed additional restraints on labor activism. While the antilabor policies of corporations and the federal government silenced the progressive elements within the labor movement and while Anglos continued to cripple integration efforts, Mexican Americans embarked on a strategy for political change and blue-collar workers played a prominent role. In 1959, Mexican Americans in California founded the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). In the following year activists in Texas formed a counterpart to the California MAPA, the pro-Democratic Mexican Americans for Political Action, and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO). The latter group, a more inclusive organization, sought to attract other Latino groups besides Mexican Americans. Although soon overshadowed by the *Viva Kennedy* experience, these political groups educated Mexican Americans on political issues, registered them to vote, and began to pressure the major political parties to nominate Mexican Americans for office or as advisors to elected officials. Despite resistance from White union local members, much of this electoral politics initiative came from state CIO councils through the CIO PACs. In factories and in workshops CIO PACs educated Mexican American working people on industrial relations and



democracy and helped pioneer the way for the 1960s Mexican American civil rights movement.

Mexican American political organizations enjoyed some electoral success in the early 1960s. In 1961 MAPA helped elect Henry B. González of San Antonio to the U.S. Congress. The following year Mexican Americans in California aided by MAPA helped secure Edward Roybal's election to the U.S. Congress and won the election of two other Mexican Americans to the California state legislature. In 1963 Mexican American and Anglo unionists from the Teamsters and the state CIO, assisted by PASSO, mobilized canneries and farm workers in Crystal City, Texas, to elect five Mexican Americans to the city council. Despite intimidation by the Texas Rangers, Jim Crow obstacles to non-White voting, and other forms of repression, Crystal City's Mexican Americans went to the polls and voted. With the assistance of organized labor, which viewed local community conflicts as civil rights issues, Mexican Americans gained control of city hall for the first time since 1910. Mexican American voters strengthened the Democratic Party, but the party failed to capitalize on this infusion of veteran union and civil rights activists. Just as it did with African Americans, the Democratic Party defaulted on its promises to Mexican Americans as long as it remained in the control of White southern Dixiecrats.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

During the early postwar years Mexican Americans mobilized to fight for political control of their communities and higher goals of social justice. They embarked on a major struggle to free Mexican Americans from the burden of oppression—namely rampant poverty, illiteracy, high crime rates, increasing unemployment, and other social maladies caused by racial discrimination. Many activists were workers who came out of the CIO union movement, which during World War II had served as a center and training ground for civil rights activism. These deeply committed union activists and other Mexican Americans created civil rights organizations such as the ANMA or transformed others into stronger political actors. These groups employed several strategies to pursue a broad range of labor and civil rights: grassroots electoral politics, civil lawsuits, and support for inclusive unionism. These efforts flourished in the postwar years, but the anticommunist and antialien climate engendered by McCarthyism stifled them. Nevertheless, this early Mexican American civil rights struggle sowed the seeds for the activism of the

1960s and early 1970s, when Mexican Americans built a larger movement for social change throughout the Southwest and Midwest. Militant Mexican American youth would be at the forefront of the new multifaceted movement for civil rights, which included the farm workers' struggle, educational reform, third-party politics, antiwar activism, and the forging of a new social identity. Like their predecessors of the postwar years, the predominant body of these participants in the broad Chicano alliance came from working-class Mexican American backgrounds.

## Notes

1. Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988): 786–87; Michael J. Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *The Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 88; George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 19, 36; Nelson Lichtenstein, "Class Politics and the State during World War II," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 58 (Fall 2000): 268–69; Luis Leobardo Arroyo, "Chicano Participation in Organized Labor: The CIO in Los Angeles, 1938–1950, An Extended Research Note," *Aztlán* 6 (Summer 1975): 277–303; Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in California: A History of Mexican Americans in California* (San Francisco: Boyd and Fraser Publishing Company, 1984), 74; and Ralph Guzmán, "Politics of the Mexican-American Community," in *California Politics and Policies*, ed. Eugene P. Dvorin and Arthur J. Misner (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1966), 368.
2. Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 164–65; Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations," 91; and Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930–1960* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 51.
3. Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor, 1790–1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 170–71, 204; and Guzmán, "Politics of the Mexican-American Community," 358–60. Mexicans accounted for 11 percent of the Southwest's population in 1950 and 12 percent ten years later. In Texas border cities the Mexican population increase averaged 75 percent. El Paso's Spanish-speaking population increased 112 percent from 130,485 residents in 1950 to 276,687 in 1960. Leo Grebler, Joan Moore, and Ralph Guzmán, *The Mexican American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 107. One contemporary observer noted, "The Mexican American business or professional man . . . must depend on his own group for his income. If he (or she) is a teacher, it is for a 'Mexican school.' If he operates a store, it is for Mexican-Americans; if a newspaper, it is for them, too . . . doctors and lawyers find their most dependable source of income among their own group. . . ." From Ruth Tuck, *Not with the Fist* (New York:

- Harcourt Brace, 1946), 182, quoted in Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 148–49. Data from the 1960 U.S. census showed that Mexican Americans held a lower percentage of professional and managerial positions as well as lower-paying positions within these occupational categories. “Symposium: Minority Rights,” *California Law Review* 63 (May 1975): 722. This and other primary evidence for the period under examination strongly challenges the assumptions of some Chicano historians who argue for the existence of a flourishing Mexican American middle class.
4. Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 170–71; Camarillo, *Chicanos in California*, 76–78; and Nancie L. González, *The Spanish Americans of New Mexico: A Heritage of Pride* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 125–26. For example, the 1960 census reported that one of every twenty-eight Mexicans in Los Angeles were on relief and lived in segregated and substandard housing. In the predominantly Mexican community of Boyle Heights, absentee landlords owned 70 percent of the houses, three-fourths of which had been built before 1939. Arturo S. Almanza, *Mexican-Americans and Civil Rights* (Los Angeles: Commission on Human Relations, 1964).
  5. Marty Jezer, *The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945–1960* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 183–84, 201; Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 258; Arnold R. Hirsch, “‘Containment’ on the Home Front: Race and Federal Housing Policy from the New Deal to the Cold War,” *Journal of Urban History* 26 (January 2000): 158–59; Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946–1956* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 337; Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States Since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 152; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 203; and Guzmán, “Politics of the Mexican-American Community,” 360. For a discussion of the vulnerability of Mexican Americans to racial and anti-immigrant prejudices, see the 1947 report by Isabel Gonzales, *Step-Children of a Nation: The Status of Mexican Americans* (New York: American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, 1947).
  6. Alan Draper, *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South, 1954–1968* (Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, 1994), 39–40; Américo Paredes, “Texas’ Third Man: The Texas Mexican,” *Race* 4 (1963): 49, 54; David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 263, 265, 281; and Ricardo Romo, “George I. Sánchez and the Civil Rights Movement, 1940–1960,” *La Raza Law Journal* 1 (Fall 1986): 355.
  7. John Rechy, “Jim Crow Wears A Sombrero,” *The Nation* 189 (10 October 1959): 211–12.
  8. Draper, *Conflict of Interest*, 98; Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 276; Paredes, “Texas’ Third Man,” 51; and Eleanor M. Hadley, “A Critical Analysis of the Wetback Problem,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 21 (Spring 1956): 334. On the conundrum of ethnic self identity among Chicanos, see David G. Gutiérrez,

*Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

9. Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican Labor*, 234; Pauline R. Kibbe, *Latin Americans in Texas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1946), 198–99; President's Commission on Migratory Labor, *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1951), especially chaps. 8–11; and Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), especially chap. 3. Michael Harrington's examination of American poverty "amidst affluence" inspired the domestic policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, which included the massive, federally funded War on Poverty.
10. American C.I. Forum of Texas and the Texas State Federation of Labor, *What Price Wetbacks?* (Austin: American C.I. Forum and the Texas State Federation of Labor, 1953), 1–59. The American C.I. Forum was founded in 1948 after the family of S.Sg. Félix Longoria, a Texas Mexican American killed in action during World War II, was denied the services of a funeral home in his hometown of Three Rivers, Texas. The American C.I. Forum and LULAC, joined by state representative J. F. Gray, aided the Longoria family's discrimination claim. After intervention by Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson, Longoria was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Alfredo Cuéllar, "Politicization of Mexican Americans," in *Readings on La Raza: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 152; Kaye Briegel, "Alianza Hispano-Americana and Some Mexican-American Civil Rights Cases in the 1950s," in *The Mexican Americans: An Awakening Minority*, ed. Manuel P. Servin, 2d ed. (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1974), 169–70; and Romo, "George I. Sánchez and the Civil Rights Movement," 356–57. In 1947 Mexico lifted the ban on the use of braceros in Texas, but despite the new agreement racial discrimination against Mexican Americans still prevailed in Texas. In 1950 George I. Sánchez persuaded the state governor to create the Texas Council on Human Relations whose mission was to focus on segregation and discrimination against Mexican Americans in the Lone Star State. Along with Blacks, Mexican Americans made up one-third of the state's population. However, the Council on Human Relations was powerless and merely served as an advisory board to the governor. Little was done therefore to alleviate de facto discrimination and segregation faced by Mexican Americans in Texas. Romo, "George I. Sánchez and the Civil Rights Movement," 351–53; and Juan Gómez-Quíñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality & Promise, 1940–1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 37.
11. Hart Stilwell, "The Wetback Tide," *Common Ground* 9 (Summer 1949): 3–14, 242; Ernesto Galarza, "They Work for Pennies," in *Readings on La Raza: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 184; James C. Foster, "Mexican Labor and the American Southwest," in *American Labor in the Southwest: The First One Hundred Years* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 167; and Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), 129–30.

12. Ernesto Galarza, interviews with Gabrielle Morris and Timothy Beard, 1977, 1978, and 1981, pp. 15–16, transcript, “The Burning Light: Action and Organizing in the Mexican Community of California,” Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and Joan London and Henry Anderson, “Man of Fire: Ernesto Galarza,” in *Chicano: Evolution of a People*, ed. Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav L. Seligmann (Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston, 1973), 280–81.
13. Galarza, interview, pp. 16–17; London and Anderson, “Man of Fire,” 282, 285–86. When the school superintendent publicly called Galarza a “red,” Galarza brought suit and won.
14. President’s Commission on Migratory Labor, “Illegal Alien Labor,” in *Readings on La Raza: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 189.
15. Paredes, “Texas’ Third Man,” 55–56; Pauline R. Kibbe, “The Economic Plight of Mexicans,” in *Ethnic Relations in the United States*, ed. Edward C. McDonagh and Eugene S. Richards (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1953), 190–91; and Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 273. In California braceros similarly displaced Mexican American agricultural workers. By 1962 about 143,462 braceros worked the jobs formerly held by Mexican Americans in domestic and farm work. Almanza, *Mexican-Americans and Civil Rights*.
16. Patricia Morgan, *Shame of a Nation* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, 1954), 35; and Louise Pettibone Smith, *Torch of Liberty: Twenty-five Years in the Life of the Foreign Born in the U.S.A.* (New York: Dwight-King Publishers, 1959), 423.
17. Ralph Guzmán, *Roots Without Rights: A Study of the Loss of United States Citizenship by Native Born Americans of Mexican Ancestry* (Los Angeles: American Civil Liberties Union, Los Angeles Chapter, 1957), 47–66; Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 162–63; Mario T. García, *Memoirs of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 181; and Margaret Rose, “Gender and Civic Activism in Mexican American Barrios in California: The Community Service Organization, 1947–1962,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 187.
18. Smith, *Torch of Liberty*, 421–22; Horne, *Communist Front?*, 329; Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible*, 181; Guzmán, “Politics of the Mexican-American Community,” 365; and Henry A. J. Ramos, *The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948–1983* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1998), 72. In San Diego the Civil Rights Congress circulated English-Spanish flyers to inform Mexicans of their rights and to frustrate the INS raids in the Spanish-speaking community: “Attention Mexican Workers—These Are Your Rights. . . . Do Not Talk . . . Do Not Sign . . . Do Not Consent [to voluntary deportation]. . . . Demand An Interpreter. . . . Demand To See a Search Warrant. . . . Demand To See a Search Warrant For Your Arrest. . . . Demand The Right To Notify Your Family, A Friend or a Lawyer. . . . If You Do Not

- Have a Lawyer [call CRC]. . . Demand Bail . . . Demand a Hearing.” Horne, *Communist Front?*, 334.
19. Horne, *Communist Front?*, 320; *Bary v. United States*, 248 F2d 201 (10 Cir 1957); *Bary v. United States*, 292 F2d 53 (10 Cir 1961); Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago’s Packinghouses, 1904–1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 227–28; Morgan, *Shame of a Nation*, 22–23; and Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 174. The Smith Act, or the Alien Registration Act of 1940, required the annual registration and fingerprinting of aliens, made it a criminal offense to impair the morale of the armed forces, and outlawed advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government. See Fried, *Nightmare in Red*, 53–54.
  20. Morgan, *Shame of a Nation*, 39–48; Smith, *Torch of Liberty*, 418–19; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 173; García, *Mexican Americans*, 214; Smith, *Torch of Liberty*, 347, 419; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 139, 186; and House, *Communist Political Subversion: The Campaign to Destroy the Security Programs of the United States Government*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, H. Rept. 1182, p. 57.
  21. Horne, *Communist Front?*, 314; and Frank Arnold, “Humberto Silex: CIO Organizer from Nicaragua,” *Southwest Economy and Society* 4 (1978): 11–13.
  22. Horne, *Communist Front?*, 314.
  23. Ira Gollobin, *Winds of Change: An Immigrant Lawyer’s Perspective of Fifty Years* (New York: Center for Immigration Rights, Inc., 1987), 9.
  24. Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 157–79; and Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 78.
  25. García, *Mexican Americans*, 176, 182; and García, *Memories of Chicano History*, 175. For example, in March 1946 in El Paso labor negotiations with ASARCO and Phelps Dodge collapsed, triggering a three-month-long strike by eleven hundred smelter workers, 80 percent of them being nonresident Mexicans. INS officials questioned many of the men about their citizenship status. Over a two-year period the Justice Department tried to deport strike organizer Humberto Silex because of a half-hour visit he made across the border. Silex won his case for citizenship in the Federal District Court in Texas. García, *Mexican Americans*, 186–89.
  26. García, *Mexican Americans*, 186–89.
  27. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 263; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 183–86; García, *Memories of Chicano History*, 175–77; and Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 309–58. The best study of the Empire Zinc strike remains Jack Cargil, “Empire and Opposition: The ‘Salt of the Earth’ Strike,” in *Labor in New Mexico: Unions, Strikes, and Social History Since 1881*, ed. Robert Kern (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 183–267. For the problems faced by the *Salt of the Earth* crew, see James J. Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).
  28. Lichtenstein, “Class Politics and the State during World War II,” 268; Nancy Quam-Wickham, “Who Controls the Hiring Hall? The Struggle for Job Control in the ILWU During World War II,” in *The CIO’s Left-Led Unions*, ed. Steve Rosswurm (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 59–66; Myrna Cherkov

- Donahoe, *Resolving Discriminatory Practices Against Minorities and Women in Steel and Auto, Los Angeles, California, 1936–1982* (Los Angeles: Center for Labor Research and Education. Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, 1991), 9–26; Kibbe, *Latin Americans in Texas*, 161; Draper, *Conflict of Interests*, 102–3; and Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 277.
29. Mario T. García, “Working for the Union,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 9 (Summer 1993): 242; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 167, 202, 235–42; García, *Mexican Americans*, 51; María Linda Apodaca, “They Kept the Home Fires Burning: Mexican American Women and Social Change,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 1994), 65–66; Rose, “Gender and Civic Activism in Mexican American Barrios in California,” 184–85; Guzmán, “Politics of the Mexican-American Community,” 370; and D. H. Dinwoodie, “The Rise of the Mine-Mill Union in Southwestern Copper,” in *American Labor in the Southwest: The First One Hundred Years*, ed. James C. Foster (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 54.
30. Cuéllar, “Politicization of Mexican Americans,” 150–51; Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*, 49; Valdés, *Barrios Norteños*, 187; Apodaca, “They Kept the Home Fires Burning,” 34–35, 41, 74–75; Guzmán, “Politics of the Mexican-American Community,” 367, 372; and Hope Mendoza Schecter, interview with Malca Chall, 1977–1978, p. 79, transcript, “Activist in the Labor Movement, the Democratic Party, and the Mexican-American Community,” Women in Politics Oral History Project, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 168–69.
31. Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 234; Guzmán, “Politics of the Mexican-American Community,” 383; Mendoza Schecter, “Activist in the Labor Movement,” 77; Ignacio M. García, *Viva Kennedy: Mexican Americans in Search of Camelot* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000), 46; and William H. Chafe, “The End of One Struggle, the Beginning of Another,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 134.
32. Apodaca, “They Kept the Home Fires Burning,” 39, 72; Rose, “Gender and Civic Activism,” 182, 185–86. The CSO also held English and citizenship classes for Mexicans who were non-U.S. citizens, and it later worked for legislation granting Mexicans who were non-U.S. citizens eligibility for old-age assistance. Briegel, “Alianza Hispano-Americana,” 167–69; and Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 172. Anglo law enforcement violence against Mexicans was a time-worn experience. In Los Angeles, police officers posed a threat to Mexican Americans, routinely beating them after arresting them. Among the numerous incidents of bad police practices was the savage beating of seven Mexican American youths on Christmas Eve by twenty-two Los Angeles police officers during a drinking party at the Lincoln Heights police substation. In 1951 the CSO undertook an investigation and civil rights violation suit for police brutality. Camarillo, *Chicanos in California*, 78; and Mendoza Schecter, “Activist in the Labor Movement,” 80. For similar instances of police violence against Mexicans in Chicago at this time, see Valdés, *Barrios Norteños*, 156.

33. Guzmán, "Politics of the Mexican-American Community," 377; Mendoza Schecter, interview, 59, 81; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 170; Rose, "Gender and Civic Activism," 192–93; Cuéllar, "Politicization of Mexican Americans," 151–52; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 201; Valdés, *Barrios Norteños*, 183–84; and Camarillo, *Chicanos in California*, 63–65, 81.
34. García, *Mexican Americans*, 200; García, *Memories of Chicano History*, 161–63; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 234; Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers: A Life in the Communist Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 110–12; Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 250–52; and Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 236–37.
35. Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*, 50–51; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 168; Horne, *Communist Front?*, 311, 317, 333; and Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 11–12.
36. Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*, 51; García, *Mexican Americans*, 204–12; García, "Working for the Union," 242; and García, *Memories of Chicano History*, 179–87; and Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 264. On the call in 1950 for a general uprising of the Puerto Rican people by the Nationalist Party, see Nancy Morris, *Puerto Rico: Culture, Politics, and Identity* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1995). For a recent study of the impact of the Cold War on civil rights, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
37. Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 26; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 275, 279; Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 148; Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 57–59; and Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 165.
38. Romo, "George I. Sánchez and the Civil Rights Movement," 342–44; Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 60–61, 74; Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare! Right-wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 276, 284; Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations," 84, 90, 97, 102, 117; and Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 8, 82–83. The 1954 alien deportation case involved Van Camp Sea Food cannery worker Robert Galvan of San Diego, California. Galvan was a thirty-six-year resident of the United States, with an American-born wife, four American-born children, and a stepson who served in the Army overseas during World War II. Galvan was being deported because of his past membership in the Communist Party, which he joined in 1944. Deciding that he no longer wanted to belong to the party, Galvan got out in 1946. Witnesses testified that Galvan had attended meetings in support of the FEPC. Attorneys for the ACSSP won the case when the federal judge ruled that Galvan was a "law-abiding man, a steady worker and family man and loyal to the United States." *Galvan v. Press, Officer in Charge, Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 201 F2d 302 (10 Cir 1954). Remark-  
ing on LULAC's growing apathy in the late 1950s, a former LULAC president re-



called, "We had a good number of queen contests, dances, social gatherings, [and] dinners." Another LULAC member remembered, "Too many [of our] resources went into social events. . . . At our national convention, I planned a series of seminars on employment education, poll taxes, etc.[,] so members could get informed and enthused. I was disappointed that many of the members spent more time in the hospitality room than in the seminar rooms." Quoted in Márquez, *LULAC*, 58. For examples of the disappointment in LULAC among many Mexican Americans in the Midwest, see Valdés, *Barrios Norteños*, 170–71.

39. Moisés Sandoval, *Fronteras: A History of the Latin American Church in the USA Since 1513* (San Antonio, Tex.: The Mexican American Cultural Center, 1983), 366–68; Steve Rosswurm, "The Catholic Church and the Left-Led Unions: Labor Priests, Labor Schools, and the ACTU," in *The CIO's Left-Led Unions*, ed. Steve Rosswurm (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 119–20, 134; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 71–72; Fried, *Nightmare in Red*, 16; Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 169, 173, 241; Saul E. Bronder, *Social Justice and Church Authority: The Public Life of Archbishop Robert E. Lucy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 65–86; and Gonzales, *Step-Children of a Nation*, 3–14. Awareness of the lives of migrant laborers and their families, exploited and living in squalor and disease, increased through Edward R. Murrow's documentary, *Harvest of Shame*, televised on Thanksgiving Day in 1960.
40. García, *Viva Kennedy*, 47–59; Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations," 110–11; Judith Stein, *Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 51–52; Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 84, 88–89; Guzmán, "Politics of the Mexican-American Community," 280; and Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice*, 9.
41. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 276; and Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Labor*, 168–69, 181–82, 196. The Landrum-Griffin Act helped to break the prolonged, violent Tex Son Company strike by Mexican American textile workers in San Antonio, Texas. George N. Green, "The ILGWU in Texas, 1930–1970," *Journal of Mexican American History* 1 (Spring 1971): 147–49; Cuéllar, "Politicization of Mexican Americans," 152–53; Briegel, "Alianza Hispano-Americana," 167, 174–75; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 282–84; Stein, *Running Steel Running America*, 49; Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 84; Armando Navarro, *The Cristal Experiment: A Chicano Struggle for Community Control* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 26–33; and Guzmán, "Politics of the Mexican-American Community," 371, 379–81.