

# ***F\*\*\* Your Racist History***

## ***E109: Juan Crow: Anti-Latinx Racism in America***

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### **Show Notes**

In the aftermath of the Mexican-American war, the anti-Latinx violence that continued to dominate Texas became state-sanctioned as it seeped into federal policies. During the early 20th century, Mexican citizens began to migrate into the United States to seek refuge from the Mexican Revolution's violence and turmoil. In response, the U.S. government sent Texas Rangers and soldiers to the border. Thousands of Mexican-Americans were lynched, burned alive, or brutally murdered by local ranchers, vigilante mobs, law enforcement, and the Army. "Juan Crow" laws codified discrimination against Latinx people in voting, employment, housing, education, and other key areas of life. And in the 1950s, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's "Operation Wetback" program deported as many as 1.3 million Latinx immigrants, including 25-percent of all immigrants in Texas. For decades, U.S. health authorities also used noxious, often deadly chemicals like Zyklon B (the same chemical gas used to kill Jews during the Holocaust) to delouse Mexicans seeking to cross the border into the United States. Our story includes the account of the 1917 Bath Riots at the Santa Fe Bridge, when Carmelita Torres decided to fight back, and it sparked a massive resistance. We also trace the history of other violence and discriminatory policies targeting Latinx peoples and the continued anti-immigrant sentiment that still exists towards them today.

## **EPISODE SCRIPT**

### **Introduction**

“Come and Take It”: it’s the slogan that adorns a simple black and white flag featuring a cannon and the signature Texas “Lone Star.” Although the phrase has roots dating back to antiquity, Texans adopted it during the 1835 Battle of Gonzales that kicked off the Texas Revolution, winning Texas its decade-long independence as a republic. Current Senator Ted Cruz of Texas recently brandished this same imagery and slogan on a medical face mask while traveling to sunny Cancún, Mexico, giving his constituents back at home the cold shoulder as their pipes froze this past winter. While the hypocrisy seemed lost on the senator, his critics quickly pointed out the long and tumultuous history between Texas and Mexico ever since the “Come and Take It” Battle of Gonzales flag was first flown.

On December 29, 1845, following a decade of its self-declared independence as a republic, Texas officially became the twenty-eighth state in the Union. However, Mexico never recognized Texan independence and threatened the United States with war should it annex the Lone Star State, which is exactly what happened. From 1846 until 1848, an armed conflict between the two nations, known as the Mexican-American War, raged. When all was said and done, nearly 42,000 soldiers and civilians were dead, including 17,000 Americans. The U.S. declared victory over Mexico, and talk immediately turned to debate over the treaty terms.

With Manifest Destiny in mind, some conservatives (which were called Democrats at the time), like Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois, aligned themselves with the All Mexico Movement and supported the total annexation of Mexico. However, others, like Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, opposed it on racial grounds. In a speech he delivered to Congress in 1848, he proclaimed:

“We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race—the free white race. To incorporate Mexico, would be the first instance of the kind, of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half of the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes. I protest against such a union as that! Ours, sir, is the Government of a white race...Are we to associate with ourselves as equals,

companions, and fellow citizens, the Indians and mixed race of Mexico? [Mr. President], I would consider such a thing fatal to our institutions."<sup>1</sup>

Instead, an alternative was proposed and passed. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo reduced Mexico's landmass by more than half. It included parts of modern-day California, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Kansas, and, of course, Texas.

The newly defined border along the Rio Grande River wouldn't prove easy to cross in either direction. Some of the first border patrols were slave catchers looking to capture self-emancipated people from crossing into Mexico, and the Texas Rangers, first formed in the 1820s, who focused on removing Native Americans from West Texas. Following the Mexican-American war, armed with a larger budget, the Texas Rangers began attacking various tribes in the region. They didn't stop until almost every Indigenous tribe was driven from Texas.

The Rangers then focused on "keeping the peace" by implementing violent vigilante "justice" against innocent people of Mexican descent. The exact number of people the Texas Rangers lynched between 1910-1920 is unknown. One surviving record from 1915 states that Rangers executed over 300 Tejanos (Mexican-American inhabitants of Texas), who they suspected of being Mexican citizens, without verification of wrongdoing or even trial.<sup>2</sup> Texas Rangers took pictures (early selfies, I suppose) on horseback standing over the bodies of those they had just murdered and turned them into postcards.

Eventually, the State of Texas launched an investigation that disbanded some of the Texas Rangers units and implemented more stringent procedures. But the damage was done.

This is episode 9 of *F\*\*\* Your Racist History: Juan Crow: Anti-Latinx Racism in America*.

## White Texas

If you listened to episode 7, "White Homeland: Part 1," you already know racist sentiment toward Mexican and Latinx people in white America was rampant throughout the United States before the Civil War, especially in the South. The Knights of the Golden Circle wanted to create

<sup>1</sup> "A Southern Senator Opposes the 'All-Mexico' Plan · SHEC: Resources for Teachers," shec.ashp.cuny.edu, n.d., <https://shec.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1273>.

<sup>2</sup> "TEXAS RANGERS," Bullock Museum, n.d., <https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/campfire-stories/texas-ranger>.

a slavery empire by invading Mexico and enslaving every person of Mexican descent. They believed, as did many everyday white Americans at the time, that Mexicans were akin to Native Americans and African Americans, and therefore racially inferior to whites.

As new railroads along the Mexican border began to usher in generations of white people to U.S. border towns in the late 19th century and their populations boomed, these racist attitudes and tensions didn't improve despite a growing American dependence on non-white labor.

Let's look at the Texas City of El Paso and her Mexican neighbor Ciudad Juarez, for example. At the turn of the 20th century, El Paso's population was just 15,000, and Juarez just 8,000. By 1920, their respective populations had increased to over 77,000 and 20,000.<sup>3</sup>

El Paso, on the U.S. side, relied heavily on a workforce of Mexican laborers who crossed the border each day to work as domestic servants, railroad employees, and other semi-skilled workers, and then went home to Mexico each night. Citizens of El Paso and neighboring towns could reap the benefits of these Mexican laborers without having to coexist with them as residents in the city. But, in 1910, the 31-year regime of Mexican President Porfirio Dias came to an end, and Mexico was plunged into revolutionary chaos. These border towns in the United States became landing zones for Mexican citizens fleeing the violence. One-tenth of Mexico's population came to the United States during the decade of 1910-1920.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of quickly developing population diversity, fearful white Texans ushered in familiar racist laws like segregation, poll taxes, and legal maneuvers to keep Latinos from owning land. "Whites Only" signs also went up in establishments across Southern Texas and California. This is an era in America referred to as Juan Crow, a twist on the somewhat more familiar Jim Crow; it had the same racist formula as the Reconstruction-era laws that affected Black Americans in the South, but was aimed squarely at Latinx people looking for a better life in the Land of the Free. Once again, white Americans weren't having it.

Along the border, outbreaks of Typhus, a disease prevalent in crowded living conditions with poor sanitation, only made things worse.

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<sup>3</sup> "Texas Almanac: City Population History from 1850–2000," 2010, <https://texasalmanac.com/sites/default/files/images/CityPopHist%20web.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> "The History of Racial Violence on the Mexico-Texas Border," Refusing to Forget, February 15, 2018, <https://refusingtoforget.org/the-history/#>.

## 1917 Bath Riots

Several years before the Customs and Border Control Agency was created for the Mexican-American border, politicians in California and Texas deployed stringent health regulations to control immigration. This almost exclusively impacted Mexicans coming to and from Mexico. In 1915 and 1916, typhus outbreaks along the border sent American health officials into a frenzy. Before antibiotics, the disease could quickly get out of control in crowded communities, causing flu-like symptoms that often progressed to liver and kidney failure, internal bleeding, and even death. Typhus is spread among people via lice, fleas, and mites infected with the disease.

Driven by racist stereotyping and endorsement by medical professionals who claimed Mexicans, in general, carried the disease, inhumane delousing procedures, examinations, and forced vaccinations soon became the norm for transient Mexican workers crossing into the United States.<sup>5</sup>

By January 1917, the mayor of El Paso, Tom Lea, a notorious germaphobe riddled with paranoia over catching typhus, called for a full quarantine against all Mexicans crossing the border; he even sent a telegram to President Woodrow Wilson in Washington, D.C. Given that Mayor Lea's city was completely dependent on Mexican day-laborers to keep the local economy running, a full quarantine was ill-advised, so extreme delousing procedures were employed instead.<sup>6</sup>

Let me paint a picture for you of what this was like:

You are living in a home south of the United States border. Each day, you cross into the United States to work a job—it's well known that Americans at the time were desperate for foreign workers to cook, clean, and maintain their railroads for them. They pay higher wages in the U.S. than in Mexico, so you go willingly. When you get to the border, you are greeted by stern-faced border guards who look you up and down before directing you to a "bathhouse" to be inspected

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<sup>5</sup> "Race and Health Law," Fordham Law, November 5, 2020, <https://digital.law.fordham.edu/faculty-spotlight-2020/race-and-health-law/>.

<sup>6</sup> "The Bath Riots: Indignity along the Mexican Border," Npr.org, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5176177>.

by one of the doctors on staff. Only after a rigorous inspection and inhumane hygiene regimen will you be allowed to continue down the road to your job.

Once inside the bathhouse, you are instructed to strip off your clothing alongside other members of your same gender—men in one room, women in the other. If you are male and the doctor inspecting you says you have lice, they will shave your head, force you into a chemical bath, and put your clothes in a steam dryer. The dyers were often so hot they melted your shoes. If you are a woman, they wash your hair in kerosene and vinegar, a mixture believed at the time to kill bugs.<sup>7</sup> Your clothes are then doused in a cyanide-based “disinfectant,” such as Zyklon B, the same chemical that Hitler’s Nazis deployed in lethal quantities in concentration camp gas chambers in the 40s to murder Jews, and then you are sent on your way in your melted shoes, hair dripping with kerosene.

To make matters worse, there were rumors that border security employees had been secretly photographing the Mexican women naked while they were being deloused and then circulating the pictures around town.

A violent clash erupted between a group of Mexican people and border officials on January 28, 1917, when a 17-year-old domestic worker named Carmelita Torres decided she’d had enough of the kerosene baths and exploitation.

At 7:30 am on Sunday morning, a public streetcar full of Latina domestic workers was stopped at the U.S. border by guards who told them to get off for a health inspection before they could cross. Knowing that this meant being “disinfected” with a kerosene bath and the risk she might be secretly photographed, Carmelita refused and rallied the other women to join her in protest. In just under an hour, over 200 women had joined her on the Santa Fe International Bridge into El Paso; by noon, over 1,000 men and women who had had enough of the humiliation and despair crowded the bridge and stopped all traffic from going into Texas. The situation turned into a full-blown rebellion.

The Mexican protesters started throwing rocks while jeering at the border guards. Streetcar drivers were unceremoniously dragged from their vehicles; those who tried to run were

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Fischer, “Mobility and Morality at the Border — a Lefebvrian Spatio-Temporal Analysis in Early Twentieth-Century Ciudad Juárez and El Paso,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 38, no. 3 (145) (2013): 176–96, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23644531>.

pummeled in the streets or thrown over the bridge into the Rio Grande River. When troops were dispatched to break up the protestors, people on the ground responded by grabbing the bridles of the horses and pulling the soldiers from their saddles.

The unrest lasted for two days and the crowds eventually dispersed on their own.

## Immigration Acts

As tensions kicked up along the border, Congress was busy pushing through sweeping immigration reform. The Immigration Act of 1917 included a provision that U.S. presidents had been vetoing for decades: literacy tests.

As early as the 1880s, nativists like the Know Nothings had proposed requiring immigrants to prove they knew how to read before they could gain entry into the country. They saw this as a way to keep out undesirables, or anyone who wasn't white or who was poor. U.S. presidents like Grover Cleveland and William Howard Taft consistently vetoed immigration bills that included literacy tests because most people agreed the practice was discriminatory.<sup>8</sup> Woodrow Wilson again vetoed an immigration bill in late 1916 that included such a provision, but by that time, there were enough proponents of the measure that Congress was able to override his veto. The Immigration Act of 1917 was officially passed on February 5, 1917.

Who did this affect, and why are we talking about this in our episode about Latinx discrimination? Well, though the Immigration Act of 1917 specifically reinforced elements of the Chinese Exclusion Act and excluded immigrants from Asian countries, the literacy tests it imposed coupled with the increased Head Tax, i.e. you had to pay a fee to Customs to actually get into the country if you were a foreigner, directly impacted poor Mexicans and other Latinx people who spoke mostly Spanish.<sup>9</sup> It expanded the list of "undesirables" not allowed in the country to include them and helped bolster racist nativist sentiment throughout the country.

The 1917 act was followed up by the 1921 Emergency Quota Act, which limited the number of each foreign nationality allowed to enter to 3-percent of the overall total U.S. population. After that, the Immigration Act of 1924 reduced the quotas to 2-percent for each nationality, plus it

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<sup>8</sup> <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/1917-barred-zone-act/>

<sup>9</sup> "Major US Immigration Laws, 1790-Present," migrationpolicy.org, 2019, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/CIR-1790Timeline.pdf>.

established the Customs and Border Control Agency, which took over governance of immigration along the Mexican and Canadian borders.

## **Standing Up to the Texas Rangers**

Racist and extreme hygiene regimens and literacy tests were not the only injustices inflicted upon people of Mexican descent on this side of the border in the early 1900s. As the Mexican Revolution raged between 1910 and 1920, and various rebel groups led by leaders like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata attempted to take control of Mexico, thousands of refugees fled the war-torn countryside and made their way north into the United States. As this happened, bands of Mexican raiders also began crossing into the United States and attacking border towns, pilfering food and supplies, and then escaping back across the border.

Beginning in 1910, most of these border towns were garrisoned with U.S. soldiers to protect white landowners from the offshoots of revolutionary violence. Conflicts between Mexican revolutionaries and the Army during the next decade would become known as the Mexican Border War. In Texas, the famous police force known as the Texas Rangers, who by then had been in existence for almost 100 years, was expanded and deployed to protect the interests of white Texans. New agents known as “Loyalty Rangers,” were sworn in to sniff out any hint of disloyalty within their communities, and their addition increased the regular border force from 150 men to over 800.<sup>10</sup>

Tensions were exacerbated when a plot known as the San Diego Plan was discovered by officials in 1915. The document, discovered inside a jail cell in San Diego, Texas detailed an elaborate series of actions designed to help Mexican rebels take back territories in Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. According to the plan, rebels would supposedly kill all white American men over the age of 16, sparing only the women, children, and elderly, and make the lands a haven for Mexicans, native tribes, and Black people.<sup>11</sup> The author of the plan is unknown, as is the scope of who was involved, but the discovery of the document was all the ammunition white supremacists at the time needed to whip the American public into a frenzy. What followed was some of the worst racial violence in the region’s history.

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<sup>10</sup> “The Texas Rangers and World War I,” Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, n.d., <https://www.texasranger.org/texas-ranger-museum/history/general-texas-ranger-history/the-texas-rangers-and-world-war-i/>.

<sup>11</sup> “The History of Racial Violence on the Mexico-Texas Border,” Refusing to Forget, February 15, 2018, <https://refusingtoforget.org/the-history/#>.

Lynchings and mob violence became rampant. It's estimated that the number of people of Mexican descent who were lynched along the border during the decade of 1910 to 1920 is anywhere from 200 to several thousand. According to the organization RefusingToForget.org, "Extralegal executions became so common that a San Antonio [Texas] reporter observed that 'finding of dead bodies of Mexicans, suspected for various reasons of being connected with the troubles, has reached a point where it creates little or no interest.'"<sup>12</sup>

Who perpetrated this violence? Local law enforcement and white vigilantes, but the real boogie men of the era, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, were the government-sanctioned Texas Rangers. In fact, the conduct of the Texas Rangers toward Mexicans and other minorities during this period was so suspect that it prompted a state investigation into the entire force in 1919.<sup>13</sup>

Texas State Representative José Tomás Canales, the only Mexican-American serving in state government at the time, launched the investigations on the charges that certain Texas Rangers had threatened the life of a Mexican-American constable, ordered the deaths of numerous Mexican men, tortured men in order to obtain confessions, and murdered suspects while in their custody rather than turning them over to the court system. During the two-week hearing, a joint committee of the Texas State Senate and the House of Representatives interviewed 80 witnesses and produced over 1,000 pages of transcript.

The interviewees ranged from cattle farmers to ranch hands to Army Colonels; their testimony varied between steadfast love for and loyalty to the Texas Rangers and stating that it was common knowledge that the Rangers harassed, beat, and murdered people believed to be Mexicans.<sup>14</sup>

During the investigation, Rep. Canales was repeatedly harassed and threatened for bringing charges against the Rangers. A very famous Texas Ranger, Frank Hamer, who is known best for taking down outlaws Bonnie and Clyde during the Great Depression, reportedly stalked Canales and his family, eventually prompting Canales to introduce a bill to overhaul the Texas Rangers completely. In spite of the shocking testimony heard at the hearing and Hamer's

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Online Collections | Texas Digital Archive- 1919 Canales Investigation," [tsl.access.preservica.com](https://tsl.access.preservica.com), n.d., <https://tsl.access.preservica.com/tda/other-online-collections/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

behavior toward Canales, Canales's bill failed, and the investigation was closed with the Texas Rangers being exonerated of any and all misconduct.<sup>15</sup> Frank Hamer was made to apologize to Canales for harassing him but remained in good standing on the force.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the failure of the bill, there were some reforms that came about because of Canales' bravery. He saw the end of the "Loyalty Rangers," and there were more stringent qualifications put in place for future Ranger candidates. In general, there was a greater air of accountability within the fighting force...for whatever that is worth.

## Zoot Suit Riots

The aftermath of the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1920 resulted in political instability; many who had survived the decade-long revolution migrated north into the United States. They wanted peace. They wanted opportunity. They wanted a bloodless future for their children. Unfortunately, these Mexican immigrants intent on accepting America as a new home were not met with a warm welcome.

By the 1940s, the Latinx population in Los Angeles was pushing 250,000. Tensions between Mexican-Americans and whites in L.A. had been simmering for nearly a decade by the time the Zoot Suit Riots erupted from June 3rd to June 8th in 1943.

"Zoot Suits" became popular among younger generations of Latinx Americans enamored with jazz music and dance halls in the 1930s. They called themselves "Pachucos," and they fought against their Latin culture's forced assimilation into white America. Their stylish dress suit, inspired by Black jazz singers of the time, consisted of an oversized jacket that went down to the wearer's knees, baggy pants, and dress boots. Over time, the suits became associated almost exclusively with Black and Latino men, and unsurprisingly, a racist stereotype of criminality was pinned to their lapels. Zoot Suits became a symbol of juvenile delinquency, and wearers were harassed in the streets.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "1919 Canales Investigation," Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, accessed July 14, 2021, <https://www.texasranger.org/texas-ranger-museum/researching-rangers/1919-canales-investigation/>.

<sup>16</sup> Monica Martinez, "Perspective | How 'the Highwaymen' Whitewashes Frank Hamer and the Texas Rangers," *Washington Post*, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/03/31/how-highwaymen-whitewashes-frank-hamer-texas-rangers/>.

<sup>17</sup> Marisa Gerber, "Zoot Suit Riots: After 75 Years, L.A. Looks Back on a Violent Summer," *latimes.com* (Los Angeles Times, June 4, 2018), <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-zoot-suit-riots-anniversary-20180604-story.html>.

The actual cataclysmic event that ignited the Zoot Suit Riots is still hotly debated. Some say the murder of a Latino youth named José Diaz, often called the Sleepy Lagoon Murder, during which the young man was found unconscious on a sidewalk after a fight at a party and later died, was a precursor to the riots. However, the murder occurred a full year before the riots, and the trial that convicted 17 Mexican-American boys for the murder ended in January 1943.

Others argue the five days of violent clashes were the result of an incident that occurred on May 31, 1943. As the story goes, a group of twelve U.S. servicemen were walking down a street in Los Angeles when they spotted a group of Latina women. Eleven from the group crossed the street to talk to them, while another, Seaman Joe Darcy Coleman, continued down the sidewalk alone. He walked past a group of young Mexican-American men (presumably) wearing Zoot Suits. A comment was made, a punch was thrown, and Coleman ended up in the hospital. The sailors claimed the zooters started the fight, and the pachucos said the soldiers instigated it.

The reality is that a multitude of conflicts paved the way to the Zoot Suit Riots; in fact, there were several other incidents of servicemen traveling in packs to hunt down Zoot suiters in the months leading up to this; some estimates put the clashes between U.S. military personnel and young Latinx civilians at once a week.<sup>18</sup>

The difference between these previous incidents and the full-blown Zoot Suit Riots was the length of time this unrest continued for, as well as the incredible nationwide press coverage that was clearly in favor of the servicemen hunting down brown-skinned kids and young men.

On June 3rd, 50 sailors left the Los Angeles Naval Reserve Center with revenge on their minds.<sup>19</sup> They took a blitz of taxi cabs into downtown, and every time they saw a Latino in a zoot suit, they leapt from their cars, beat the wearer to a bloody pulp and stripped him naked in the streets. Soon, hundreds of servicemen were trolling the streets looking for Latinos to beat up. Some of the brutalized pachucos were as young as 12 years old.

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<sup>18</sup> “Zoot Suit Riots Timeline | American Experience | PBS,” [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org), n.d., <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/zoot-suit-riots-timeline/>.

<sup>19</sup> History.com Editors, “Zoot Suit Riots,” HISTORY, August 21, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/zoot-suit-riots>.

Military commanders eventually barred servicemen from entering certain areas in Los Angeles where violence was the worst, but only after several nights of fighting. Hundreds of people were arrested. It was bloody chaos, but the papers played a very one-sided blame game.

Most of the newspaper headlines during the riots touted that servicemen were simply taking revenge against the so-called violent zoot suiters. One *L.A. Times* headline on June 7, 1943, read: "ZOOT SUITERS LEARN LESSON IN FIGHTS WITH SERVICEMEN."<sup>20</sup>

What did the police have to say about this rash of violence against the Latinx population? Well, according to newspapers like the *Wisconsin State Journal*, police at the time said the servicemen were just "raising a little hell."<sup>21</sup>

The fighting calmed down after the 9th of June, and serious questions were publicly raised about the racial motivations behind the attacks. On June 10, Mayor Bowron of Los Angeles issued a statement saying that there was no racial discrimination involved in the zoot-suit-gang riots.

"I informed the State Department that assurances could be given to the Mexican Embassy that the occurrences in this city are not in any manner directed at Mexican citizens or even against persons of Mexican descent. There is no question of racial discrimination involved."<sup>22</sup>

Right. Just cleaning up the "undesirables" again, I suppose.

## **The Bracero Program and "Operation Wetback"**

As tensions between middle-class whites, police, and Latinx youth reached a boiling point in Los Angeles, the United States government was looking for a solution to a possible labor shortage brought on by our entrance into World War 2 in 1941. As American men were drafted into the Army and sent to Europe and the Pacific, women and people of color stepped up to fill factory jobs, but what about infrastructure jobs that required hard manual labor? World War 2 was a time of progress for women in the workforce, but putting a woman on the side of the road with a

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<sup>20</sup> "Wisconsin State Journal at Newspapers.com," Newspapers.com, June 8, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/396766754/?terms=Zoot%20Suit%20Riots&match=1>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "10 Jun 1943, 2 - the Los Angeles Times at Newspapers.com," Newspapers.com, June 10, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/380743346/?terms=Zoot%20Suit%20Riots&match=1>.

pickaxe in hand was going a little far. Rosie the Riveter was one thing—Rosie the Railroad Worker was quite another.

The United States' solution was something called the Bracero Program, an agreement between the American and Mexican Governments to supply able-bodied Mexican men under short-term labor contracts to come and work in the United States. During its 22-year run, over 4.6 million labor contracts were signed under the Bracero Program.<sup>23</sup>

On the surface, the program looked progressive. The official plan promised good housing, affordable quality meals, fair wages, and transportation back to Mexico when their contract ran out. But in practice, employers exploited their Mexican laborers by providing substandard housing, starvation wages, and rancid food while reaping the financial rewards of a cheap labor force.

In addition to over-promising and underdelivering on their working conditions, the Bracero program mandated intensive physical inspections akin to the border hygiene practices happening in border towns like El Paso. Mexican men applying to the Bracero program were subjected to not one but two physical examinations that included chest x-rays, invasive tests for sexually transmitted diseases, psychological evaluations, and of course, a toxic chemical bath.<sup>24</sup> Many of the Braceros were processed in facilities around El Paso, Texas and transported across the border in railway cars used for cattle. Once there, they would be stripped, hosed down, and deloused.

While importing these temporary migrant workers, the United States was also deporting millions of people back to Mexico with the federal deportation initiative officially called (no joke) "Operation Wetback." After President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Attorney General, Herbert Brownell, Jr., visited Southern California in 1953, he made it his mission to deport all undocumented workers, many of whom were being transported into the United States by employers looking to pay cheap laborers under the table. The Mexican government was also leaning on the U.S. to stem the flow of people leaving their country.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Bracero History Archive | About," Braceroarchive.org, 2019, <http://braceroarchive.org/about>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Depression, War, and Civil Rights | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives," @USHouseHistory, 2012, <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/HAIC/Historical-Essays/Separate-Interests/Depression-War-Civil-Rights/>.

The Eisenhower administration launched Operation Wetback in 1954. Upon the initiative's inception, many undocumented workers went back to Mexico on their own, largely in part due to effective media campaigns overestimating the might of the Border Patrol and terrorizing Mexicans in the process. In Texas, 63,000 people were repatriated to Mexico without Immigration and Naturalization Service (or INS) involvement. The INS even touted that their Operation Wetback initiative was so effective, they were able to deport upwards of 1.1 million people, while substituting Bracero laborers in any vacated jobs for employers who had lost workers because of the initiative.<sup>26</sup>

This initiative received a lot of support, especially from the Mexican government, which was losing its valuable labor force across the border at a rapid pace, and to U.S. labor groups who claimed undocumented laborers were driving wages down and decreasing the standard of living for naturalized citizens.

Illegal immigration didn't cease to be a thorn in the side of the American Government, however. After the cancellation of the Bracero program in 1964, Latinx people desperate for higher-paying work and better living conditions again began coming across the border in greater numbers than ever before. American politicians have been unable to find a solution ever since, though there have been many efforts to punish these immigrants as a deterrent to undocumented migration.

## **Proposition 187**

In 1994, in the face of an economic downturn, California legislators and Republican activists were looking for a scapegoat.

Who better to blame for economic hardship than undocumented workers? Republicans, who were exceedingly popular in the state at the time, soon started a campaign for Proposition 187, a measure that would bar all undocumented residents from using state-sponsored programs. This included public health clinics, public schools, and welfare programs. The law also required public servants to report people's immigration status to the state's Attorney General's office. That included teachers and doctors.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Support for Proposition 187 received 59-percent of the vote, but the day after it was approved, civil rights groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund hurled lawsuits at it to keep it from taking effect. After three years of legal limbo, Proposition 187 was stalled by a federal judge who ruled it unconstitutional and issued an injunction. To this day, the case against it has never officially been dismissed and is instead under a permanent federal injunction.<sup>27</sup>

The introduction of Proposition 187 proved to be detrimental to the Republican Party in California. The state's large number of Latinx and Asian voters were neither reliably Republican nor Democratic, but their allegiance turned blue after Proposition 187 was introduced. California is largely considered a Democratic stronghold now, and that's partly thanks to opposition for Proposition 187.

## Conclusion

Illegal immigration and the situation at the United States-Mexican border has remained the subject of heated political debate for decades. Once again, the United States' southern border became a point of national interest during Donald Trump's 2016 Presidential campaign.

Trump's promises around immigration extended well past a physical border wall. He promised to remove millions of "criminal" immigrants, who were in the country both illegally and legally,<sup>28</sup> as well as removing protections for over 740,000 Latinx immigrants and their U.S.-born children. DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, is an Obama-era policy that has allowed some individuals who were unlawfully brought into the U.S. as children to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit.<sup>29</sup> Trump attempted to end DACA, but the Supreme Court ruled the move unlawful in 2017. However, on July 16, 2021, U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen ruled in favor of Texas and eight other conservative states that had sued to halt the DACA program. Those who are already

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<sup>27</sup> "California Proposition 187, Prohibit Undocumented Immigrants from Using Public Healthcare, Schools, and Social Services Initiative (1994)," ballotpedia.org, n.d., [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Proposition\\_187\\_Prohibit\\_Undocumented\\_Immigrants\\_from\\_Using\\_Public\\_Healthcare\\_Schools\\_and\\_Social\\_Services\\_Initiative\\_\(1994\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_187_Prohibit_Undocumented_Immigrants_from_Using_Public_Healthcare_Schools_and_Social_Services_Initiative_(1994)).

<sup>28</sup> Hirschfeld Davis, J., & Preston, J. (2021). What Donald Trump's Vow to Deport Up to 3 Million Immigrants Would Mean (Published 2016). *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/us/politics/donald-trump-deport-immigrants.html>

<sup>29</sup> Holpuch, A. (2016, November 11). *Immigrants fear Trump deportations: "This election changed my optimism."* The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/11/donald-trump-immigration-policy-deportations-build-wall>

enrolled won't lose protection, but the decision bars the processing of new applications. It also restricts President Joe Biden, who has been committed to protecting DACA, from keeping it or a similar program in place. Another federal judge in Texas had previously barred enforcement of Biden's 100-day stay on most deportations. This new ruling puts further pressure on Congress to act on needed immigration policy reform.<sup>30</sup>

Although he tried with great support from his Republican colleagues, Trump may not have delivered on all his promises during his time in office, but his administration certainly made some headway, the effects of which we're still seeing.

Following Trump's election, xenophobia, racism, and violence directed at Latinx people increased astronomically in the United States. The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, found that in the two weeks following the 2016 election of Donald Trump, hate crimes targeting Latinx people increased by 176-percent over the previous year's daily average. And those are just the known incidents; many people polled said that they were too afraid to report incidents of violence against them for fear they or a loved one might be deported or targeted further.

In August 2019, a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas was the target of one such heinous hate crime. A 21-year-old white man named Patrick Crusius walked into the store with a rifle and started shooting shoppers. He had driven over eleven hours from his home near Dallas, Texas and had selected the store specifically because it was often used by people from the Mexican-American community. Less than 20 minutes before he walked into the building, he posted his manifesto on a popular white supremacist website. The document is a racist rant about a so-called "Hispanic invasion of Texas." The store was busy that day with families shopping for school supplies and a fundraiser for a youth soccer league. When the gunman walked back out of the Walmart, 20 people were dead, two more would die in the hospital, and a further 26 were left wounded.<sup>31</sup> Crusius turned himself in to Texas Rangers and confessed to the shooting immediately. In February 2020, he was charged with 22 counts of committing a hate crime resulting in death, 22 counts of use of a firearm to commit murder, 23 counts of a hate

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<sup>30</sup> Astrid Galvan, "Judge Orders End to DACA, Current Enrollees Safe for Now," AP NEWS, July 16, 2021, <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-immigration-f01fc0f485a8983b5f072e7af324c43f&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1626479775800000&usg=AOvVaw2T19JSM8yr8zYdYVSL0xId>.

<sup>31</sup> Romo, V. (2019, October 10). *El Paso Walmart Shooting Suspect Pleads Not Guilty*. NPR.org. <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/10/769013051/el-paso-walmart-shooting-suspect-pleads-not-guilty>

crime involving an attempt to kill, and 23 counts of use of a firearm during a crime. At the time of this recording, prosecutors are seeking the death penalty. This attack is one of the deadliest anti-Latinx hate crimes to date.

Systemic discrimination against the Latinx community in the United States clearly continues today. Modern-day government-sanctioned border patrols often utilize violence and unethical practices against migrants— offenses that remain in a gray area under U.S. law, or so they would like us all to believe. By hiding behind the shield of the person’s immigrant status, Border Patrol and Homeland Security agents appear to use the U.S. Constitution selectively, notably when denying the right to a trial and ignoring the protection from unreasonable search and seizure under U.S. law. Mass overcrowding at border detention facilities coupled with the lack of access to basic necessities poses a serious threat to many immigrants’ health and safety. A recent American Civil Liberties Union article<sup>32</sup> details how detention centers run by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials take advantage of those protesting the abhorrent conditions with hunger strikes. With little else to take away from detainees, protesters in these detention prisons are often met with violence, like pepper spray, rubber bullets, solitary confinement without access to running water, and involuntary medical procedures.

## **Vigilante Tourism**

Sanctioned Border Patrols and other official/approved government agencies are not the only ones patrolling the southern border. Vigilante groups and white-supremacist militias also regularly go to some of the most sparsely protected areas along the border and run their own operations. Often, they are volunteers who pay their own way to hunt down Latinx people trying to cross over into the United States. A group called the Arizona Border Recon has claimed they are there to help the U.S. Border Patrol to stop smugglers bringing drugs into the country. Their mission (and the mission of groups like them) is to “do the job that the government should be doing and can’t or won’t.” The former Trump administration emboldened anti-immigration supporters and racists alike, lifting to the fore many of these unsavory characters. Still, despite an increase in xenophobic and racist behavior and rhetoric, there has been pushback. Humanitarian and advocacy groups actively work to shed light on the violence that continues along the border, where immigrants and asylum seekers are unnecessarily detained and as

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<sup>32</sup> Cho, E., & Naples-Mitchell, J. (2021, June 29). *ACLU News & Commentary- Cruelty and Coercion: How ICE Abuses Hunger Strikers*. American Civil Liberties Union. <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/cruelty-and-coercion-how-ice-abuses-hunger-strikers/>

thousands of children remain separated from their parents and families today.<sup>33</sup> As of June 8, 2021 the Biden administration had only reunited seven children (out of 2,127 *identified*) with their families, despite best intentions to try to fix some of the damage done during the Trump administration.<sup>34</sup>

## Good Samaritans

Additionally, in sharp contrast to the vigilante and militia groups, “Good Samaritan” groups of regular citizens can sometimes be found offering water, food, clothing, and first aid to those in need. They provide support for asylum seekers and immigrants, including legal assistance and emergency shelter.

Sadly, there is little change at the border from a government perspective, even though there is support among registered voters for providing pathways to citizenship. In a June 2021 poll, 72-percent of respondents said they support the DREAM Act (the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act), which would provide a pathway to citizenship and protection from deportation for Dreamers, or undocumented people who came to the country as children and have grown up in the U.S. Sixty-three percent of voters support not only a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, but also for immigrants who work in essential industries, and Temporary Protected Status holders who face violence or natural disasters in their home countries.<sup>35</sup>

So far, Congress and the current administration has made little progress with the real change needed, and there are so many lives that continue to be affected by current policies, including, but not limited to Title 42, a Trump-era policy still in effect which blocks asylum seekers from entering the country due to Covid-19. Since President Biden took office over 400,000 migrants and asylum seekers have been turned away as of the end of June 2021.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *US: 2,100 migrant children may still be separated from parents.* (2021, June 8). Aljazeera.com; Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/8/us-2100-migrant-children-may-still-be-separated-from-parents>

<sup>34</sup> Soboroff, J. (2021, June 8). *More than 2,100 children separated at border “have not yet been reunified,” Biden task force says.* NBC News; NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/more-2-100-children-separated-border-have-not-yet-been-n1269918>

<sup>35</sup> *New Poll Shows Majority of Voters Support the Dream Act, Want Citizenship Legislation Included in Recovery Package.* (2021). American Civil Liberties Union.

<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/new-poll-shows-majority-voters-support-dream-act-want-citizenship-legislation>

<sup>36</sup> *Guardian staff reporter.* (2021, June 22). *Migrants turned away at border under Biden face shocking abuse in Mexico.* The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jun/22/migrants-mexico-us-title-42-human-rights-report>

It should surprise nobody that even generations after the Battle of Gonzales, the Zoot Suit Riots, or Carmelita Torres' Bath Riots, that people like former president Donald Trump and his supporters would still revel in the unfounded idea of people of Latinx origin being sinister or so-called "subhumans" because of the color of their skin.

It's also not a big leap from those racist and irresponsible words, uttered on American television by a sitting U.S. president only a few years ago, to rhetoric in a statement by the El Paso shooter who said in his manifesto: "If we can get rid of enough people, then our way of life can be more sustainable." And it's not a far cry to think that words like "rapists," "criminals," and "invasion" might continue to be a call to violent action. These slurs against Latinx people, in one form or another, have been inspiring racist violence for a very long time.

While America has arguably made some progress, the pity, of course, is that we've had to spend a half-millennium fighting white supremacy from within just to get to where we are now, still struggling with many of the same age-old issues. Unjust treatment at the border, such as the denial of basic civil rights like due process and extended detention in unsafe facilities, are just a few of them today. But, there are many more.

No podcast can cover the expanse of racism that America has levied against Latinx-Americans and people of color. But, I hope ours sparks a curiosity in you to want to learn more, just as it did for me. I have to warn you, though, once you get started down the path of discovering the truth behind these issues, they are like Russian nesting dolls: you pull one apart and find more hiding within. We can't make or measure progress without knowing the truth of how and where it all began.

It's time we figured that out and faced up to it.

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<https://peoplefortheamericanway.medium.com/white-supremacist-terrorism-and-the-history-of-anti-latino-racism-in-texas-d0f6ec950bff>

- El Paso gunman posted this before the shooting: “This is an attack in response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.”
- Texas has a long history of anti-Latino Racism.
- 77 white supremacist groups in Texas
- “Texas independence was sparked by American settlers’ racist desire to legalize slavery in a territory owned by Mexico, which had already abolished the practice.”
- Early 20th century, Mexican’s fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution started crossing the border into the US. Texas Rangers and the Army put up an electric fence to keep them out.
  - “Thousands of Mexican Americans were lynched, burned alive, and brutally murdered by local ranchers, vigilante mobs, and Texas Rangers and Army soldiers.”
- Eisenhower’s “Operation Wetback” deported 1.3 million immigrants to Mexico. This included 25% of all immigrants in Texas.
- Post-911: Creation of ICE to “strengthen public safety.”

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5176177>

- U.S. health authorities use poisonous chemicals to delouse Mexicans crossing the border.
- “Before being allowed to cross, Mexicans had to bathe, strip nude for an inspection, undergo the lice treatment, and have their clothes treated in a steam dryer.”
- There was a concern over “Mexican Typhus,” and gasoline killed lice who carried it.
- Bath Riots of 1917: Carmelita Torres (17) refused to take a gasoline bath, and soon, many people joined in the protest.
- “Inside a brick disinfectant building under the bridge, health personnel had been secretly photographing women in the nude and posting the snapshots in a local cantina.”
- Baths and fumigations continued for decades after this.
- US border agents sprayed Mexicans with Zyclon B- Nazi doctors later praised this in a 1938 article.
- 1917- the year the border between Juarez and El Paso shut down for good.
- Revolt on the Santa Fe Bridge: It all started with a 17-year-old who refused to be deloused in chemicals yet again. Papers called her an “Auburn-haired Amazon.”
  - “The “Amazon” was Carmelita Torres, a 17-year old Juárez maid who crossed the Santa Fe International Bridge into El Paso every morning to clean American homes.”
  - “At 7:30 a.m. on January 28, 1917, when Carmelita was asked by the customs officials at the bridge to get off the trolley, take a bath and be disinfected with gasoline, she refused. “
  - She got off the bus and 30 women got off with her
  - By 8:30, 200 Mexican women had joined their protest. By noon, “several thousand.” They blocked all traffic going into El Paso.

- They started throwing rocks at the border guards and soldiers dispatched to break up the protest.
- “The protesters laid down on the tracks in front of the trolley cars to prevent them from moving. When the streetcars were immobilized, the women wrenched the motor controllers from the hands of the motormen. One of the motormen tried to run back to the American side of the bridge. Three or four female rioters clung to him while he tried to escape. They pummeled him with all their might and gave him a black eye. Another motorman preferred to hide from the Mexican women by running into a Chinese restaurant on Avenida Juárez.”
- El Paso Mayor Tom Lea wanted a full quarantine at the border for Mexican people.
  - "Mayor Lee (sic) wants an absolute quarantine against Mexico. When Mayor Lee gets excited he always wires someone in Washington. The last time this occurred he sent a message to the President," complained Dr. B. J. Lloyd, the public health service official stationed in El Paso."
- Lloyd advocated for delousing instead.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/05/united-states-immigration-exclusion/618390/>

- Zyklon B was used as a ‘disinfectant’ in mandated government baths. From 1917 until 1930, most immigrants from the southern border were made to bathe at government offices. If there was a suspected lice infection or a person’s clothes did not look clean enough an additional mixture of kerosene and vinegar was used.
- “From the 1930s through the 1960s, border agents sprayed DDT onto the faces of more than 3 million guest workers as they crossed the southern border.”
- In 1790, the first American Congress decided that only free white people who had been in the country for two years (or more) were eligible for citizenship. Note- white did not extend to Italian or Jewish people.
- TAKAO OZAWA v. UNITED STATES in 1922 upheld that citizenship should old be extended to “only to those whom they knew and regarded as worthy to share it with them, men of their own type, white men.”
- “In the early 20th century, the term *progressive* became synonymous with preserving or improving the racial “stock” of the country—and that meant keeping it white.”.
- “Harry Laughlin, whose work would provide a model for Nazi Germany’s sterilization laws, served as the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization’s “expert eugenics agent.” In 1922, he presented evidence of the “hereditary feeble-mindedness” of nonwhite immigrants. Laughlin categorized the subjects of his research into overlapping subgroups that included “the criminalistic,” “the diseased,” and “the dependent.” Two years later, Congress passed the “progressive” Johnson-Reed Act, which established immigration quotas based on national origin. Adolf Hitler hailed the law as a model to emulate. “Compared to old Europe, which had lost an infinite amount of its best blood through war and emigration, the American nation appears as a young, racially select people,” he wrote.”

- “The historic Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 did away with the quotas based on national origin and instead allowed citizens of the United States to petition for family members to join them.”

<https://refusingtoforget.org/the-history/>

- Turn of the 20th century, Mexican-Americans made up less than 5% of Texas’ population, but along the border, the towns were predominantly Mexican. Plenty of Latinos owned land, voted, and held office, and Anglo-Americans who moved there early on assimilated into these communities rather than the other way around.
- This all changed as railroads were built in the Rio Grande Valley. These railroads caused a surge in white populations in the areas, and they brought with them segregation, poll taxes, and legal maneuvers to strip Mexicans of their lands. In turn, lands went from Mexican hands to Anglo hands, and the former landowners became laborers on these same farms and plantations.
  - As a Laredo newspaper observed in 1910, “The lands which mainly belonged to Mexicans pass to the hands of Americans...the old proprietors work as laborers on the same lands that used to belong to them.”
- The Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1920 caused tensions to boil over. People were fleeing revolutionary violence across the border. Pancho Villa was attacking American farms along the border and pilfering supplies.
  - Over the course of the decade, nearly a tenth of the Mexican population would perish and another tenth would flee to the United States, setting into motion a pattern of migration that endures a century later.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/history-racism-against-mexican-americans-clouds-texas-immigration-law-n766956>

<https://tsl.access.preservica.com/tda/other-online-collections/>- Online collection of Canales Hearing Documents- contains descriptions of Ranger violence perpetrated on Mexican Americans.

Fischer, R. (2013). Mobility and Morality at the Border — A Lefebvrian Spatio-Temporal Analysis in Early Twentieth-Century Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 38(3 (145)), 176-196. Retrieved July 8, 2021, from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23644531>

- Ciudad Juarez and El Paso were dependent on each other in the 19-teens: El Paso was desperate for laborers, and Ciudad Juarez “was desperate for investment capital.”
- Every day, hundreds of Mexicans would cross the border into El Paso to work their jobs in the United States before returning home to Ciudad Juarez where they lived.
- Sunday, January 28, 1917- Hundreds of Mexican men and women marched to the international bridge to protest the protocols of the border guards between Juarez and El Paso.

- “Between 1900 and 1920, the population of Ciudad Juarez increased from 8,000 to 20,000. El Paso even exceeded these numbers by growing more than five-fold between 1900 (15,000) and 1920 (77,000) (Wood 2001, 494).” (Page 4)
- “In addition to the mostly economically determined migration to the two cities, the border region was also subject to the perils of the Mexican Revolution. Especially in 1911, 1914, and 1917, when due to battles in Juarez many Mexicans fled to El Paso, the city functioned as a safe harbor for the Mexican refugees.” (page 5)
- 1915- officials began “cleaning up El Paso” because of a typhus outbreak.
  - “Suddenly, racial barriers were not only erected but enforced to distinguish between white Americans and Mexicans or American Mexicans.” (Page 5)
- Border hygiene regimens were established subjecting people crossing into the US to examinations, vaccinations, and disinfection. This predominantly affected Mexican people from Juarez. It also made the daily commutes much longer and more difficult.
- El Paso relied on its Mexican workforce for the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the city. Mexican people were largely relegated to these jobs because of negative stereotypes as being “lazy and docile.”
- “After the quarantine was erected at the border by the United States Public Health Service in the night of January 27-28, 1917, all persons desiring to cross the border from Mexico were regarded as potentially infectious and had to be cleaned before entry. They were separated into male and female groups. While their clothing was being sterilized, they had to strip naked in order to undergo a shower and an examination for lice, a vector of typhus. If positive, the hair of the men was cut short and the hair of the women was bathed in kerosene. If deemed necessary, vaccination against smallpox was carried out. In addition, the immigrant had to submit to an interrogation. The aim was to exclude any person with mental or physical defects (Stern, 1999, 45f).” (page 14)
- There were rumors that naked pictures snapped of women in these quarantine bath stations were being circulated all over Juarez.
- Women (mostly domestic servants) who paid to ride a streetcar from Juarez to El Paso were stopped and told to go to the quarantine baths. They refused. By 8 am hundreds of people crowded the bridge and started throwing rocks at the border guards.
- Mexican troops were dispatched to disperse the crowds but the people on the bridge grabbed the horse’s bridles and disarmed the soldiers.
- The riots lasted for about two days then broke up when the crowds saw people were passing through the bath centers unmolested.

<https://www.ktsm.com/news/special-report-carmelita-and-the-1917-el-paso-bath-riots/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3093266/>

- US Immigration was fairly unregulated prior to 1891 due to the fact that the country needed foreign labor to survive.
- 1891- US Immigration act was passed. (NOTE: The first Immigration Act was passed in 1864, then another in 1882, then the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1888, THEN the 1891 Immigration Act that prevented “feebleminded” or “insane people” from legal immigration. Basically, anyone who might become a public charge was at risk of deportation)

- 1900-1930- the Mexican population in the United States doubled every 10 years.
- Manifest Destiny gained popularity during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848)- provided justification to US expansion.
- “Expansionists argued that after the US takeover, Mexicans and Native Americans would eventually disappear in the Southwest because these peoples were not as biologically fit as Americans.”
- The need for labor in the Southwest United States increased right as the Mexican Revolution began driving refugees to the border.
- “Although immigration laws did not severely restrict Mexican immigration at this time, public health standards helped shape attitudes and regulations directed at this new laboring class.”
- 1917 Immigration Act- imposed a head tax and a literacy test.
- The disinfectant procedures along the US-Mexico border started in California in 1916. There was a typhus outbreak in the area, and Mexicans were associated with spreading the disease. The mayor of El Paso was a germaphobe and implemented his own disinfectant procedures along the El Paso border.
- Official Border Patrol didn’t begin until 1924, so these medical screenings were the first advent of border control.
- Per “Frequency of Tuberculosis among Negro Laundresses,” *Journal of Outdoor Life* 11 (1914): “every individual hailing from Mexico should be regarded as potentially pathogenic.” This author also wrote about the “problem of miscegenation.”
- “In 30 railroad camps in California, health officials were particularly aggressive; they used cyanide gas to destroy lice, ticks, and other pests.”
- During the Great Depression, 1.6 million Mexicans were deported. If you went to a public health facility, you were at risk of being deported.
- Bracero Program- between 1942 and 1964, the US coordinated with Mexico to import Mexican workers to assist on manual labor projects. It started because of the labor shortage caused by WW2
- “The coexistence of the deportations and guest worker program illustrates the pliability of a racial logic that could view Mexicans as liabilities and resources simultaneously.
- “Mexicans seeking to participate in the program [Bracero] were required to pass a physical examination by both US and Mexican public health doctors in accordance with US immigration policies and railroad company regulations.”
- “Officials required every prospective bracero to undergo a physical examination, with chest x-rays to check for tuberculosis, serological tests to check for venereal disease, psychological profiling, and a chemical bath.”
- “In her research, historian Ana Rosas found that men could wait anywhere between 6 and 10 hours to be examined. “
- Bracero workers had to undergo another physical exam once they got to the United States and arrived at the Bracero Camps.
- The War Manpower Commission was created during World War II to balance the labor needs of agriculture, industry, and the armed forces.
- “In the United States, contracted workers underwent a second inspection at USPHS processing centers that duplicated the procedures they experienced in Mexico. USPHS

centers in and around El Paso, Texas, the largest port of entry into the United States from Mexico, processed many of the braceros. “ They processed thousands of men at a time who were transported into the country on cattle cars. They’d be told to strip naked and deloused with white powder.

- Complaints of mistreatment by doctors in camp, coupled with poor housing conditions, poor sanitation in camps, low wages, and spoiled food, the Bracero program was plagued with problems during its entire 20-year tenure.
- “It is also striking that these concerns involved a government program, carried out by the very same government that was enacting laws and policies dedicated to eradicating the diseases that were spawned by the conditions in which the workers were forced to live.”
- Main opponent of the Bracero Program: Rep Edward Roybal, public educator with CA Tuberculosis Association. “Representative Roybal publicly denounced the substandard living conditions in the bracero camps and the poor health of the workers and argued against renewing the Bracero Program.”
- “Thus, although the Bracero Program ostensibly upheld strict health standards, in practice it stigmatized Mexicans as bearers of disease while ignoring the systemic conditions that gave rise to disease.”

<https://digital.law.fordham.edu/faculty-spotlight-2020/race-and-health-law/> - Race and Health Law from *The Oxford Handbook of Race and Law in the United States*

- “Likewise, increasing immigration at the Southern U.S. border stirred xenophobic resentment during the early 20th century and prompted unfounded claims that Mexicans were not only unassimilable and racially inferior, but also carriers of disease. The general sentiment, as articulated by a public health official at the time, was that, “[e]very individual hailing from Mexico should be regarded as potentially pathogenic.” Thus, public health regulations were used to shape immigration policies even before the 1924 advent of the Customs and Border Control Agency; and passage of the 1917 Immigration Act, which sought to exclude immigrants deemed undesirable and targeted Asian immigrants in particular.”
- “During a 1916 typhus outbreak, for example, the U.S. Public Health Service subjected Mexican immigrants to invasive, unsafe, and demeaning baths and physical examinations, while Texas quarantined Mexican laborers at the U.S.-Mexico border. Similarly, Los Angeles, public health authorities quarantined Mexican railroad workers amid concerns about their purported inadequate personal hygiene and propensity toward disease in lieu of addressing the structural problems that caused their circumstances, including the unsanitary living and working conditions that the railroad companies that employed them created and maintained. As Natalia Molina notes, “this preference for making race the organizing principle for understanding typhus also transformed Mexicans from unfortunate victims of a serious disease into active transmitters of deadly germs, thus adding a medicalized dimension to existing nativism.”

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/CIR-1790Timeline.pdf> - Fact sheet/timeline for Major US Immigration Laws 1790-Present

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-zoot-suit-riots-anniversary-20180604-story.html>

Zoot Suit Riots: After 75 years, L.A. looks back on a violent summer

- 10 day riots led by sailors, soldiers, and Marines who hunted the streets in search of Latino youth wearing Zoot Suits.
- American men leaving the country to fight in WW2 created a labor vacuum that was filled by women and people of color. This created mass social anxiety over the welfare of children. This atmosphere of anxiety was the backdrop of the riot.
- “Racial segregation was also a powerful force in L.A., Pagán said, adding that while researching his book he tracked down about 80 police reports from the 1940s in which people called the cops on so-called zoot suiters. The young people hadn’t actually broken any laws, Pagán said, but instead had done things such as refusing to cede a sidewalk to a white person.”
- Zoot Suit- “the drape,” was a signal of defiance. “During that era, the professor said, many young people in Los Angeles were inspired by the art of jazz — by the spirit of defiance against segregation — and they adopted the signature clothing style”
- No surprise, people began associating the clothing with gang violence and criminality. Mexican men and boys associated with gangs were often called Pachecos
- Zoot suiters were attacked and forced to strip in the street.
- No one knows for sure how it started, but as soon as it did, the press started reporting favorably of the sailors and soldiers prowling the streets looking for zoot suiters to beat up and strip in the streets.
- “Later in the month, The Times ran a brief about a news conference at which First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt said the riots had roots in long-standing discrimination. “For a long time,” she said, “I’ve worried about the attitude toward Mexicans in California and the states along the border.””

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/448477584>

“In one instance, 200 service men entered a theater and roused zoot suiters from their seats.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/zoot-suit-riots-timeline/> -PBS timeline of events leading up to the Zoot Suit Riots

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/zoot-suit-riots>

<https://www.texasranger.org/texas-ranger-museum/history/general-texas-ranger-history/the-texas-rangers-and-world-war-i/>

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<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/operation-wetback/>

<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/cas-anti-immigrant-proposition-187-voided-ending-states-five-year-battle-aclu-rights>

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/anti-immigrant-prop-187-approved-in-california>

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<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/mexican/a-growing-community/>

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<https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/what-is-typhus>