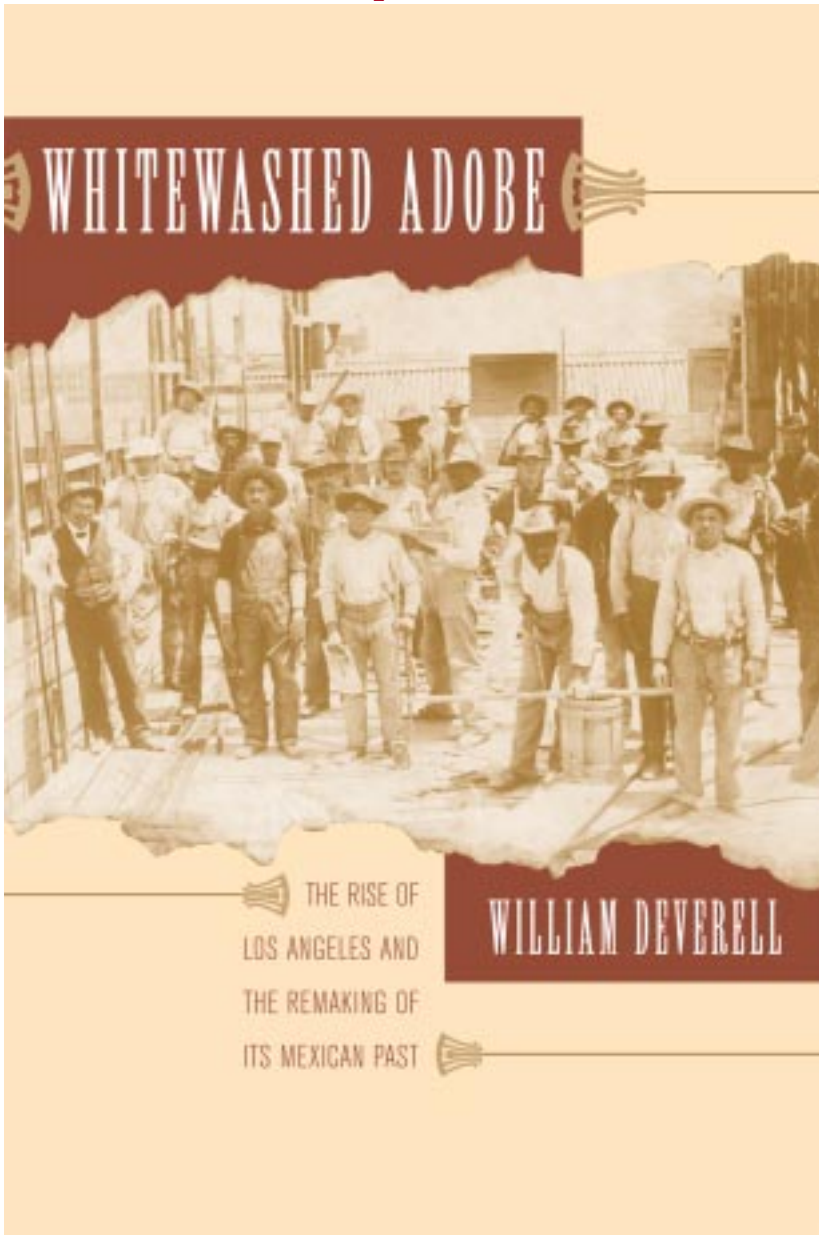


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The Unending Mexican War

The Mexican race now see, in the fate of the aborigines of the north, their own inevitable destiny. They must amalgamate and be lost, in the superior vigor of the Anglo-Saxon race, or they must utterly perish. They may postpone the hour for a time, but it will come, when their nationality shall cease.

Democratic Review, February 1847¹

We accuse Californians and Sonoreños of being enemies to us—they are so in fact and in detail. And what wrongs are theirs? Where are their lands, their cattle and horses, and their money? Gone! They are nearly all paupers. And the mercenary avarice of American gamblers has made them such.

WILLIAM WALLACE, diary entry, 1857

The cut-throats of California and Mexico, naturally met at Los Angeles, and at Los Angeles they fought.

HORACE BELL²

Ugly reflexive characterizations about Mexicans are deeply rooted in the California past. The expressions of 1820s and 1830s American visitors such as the sailor Richard Henry Dana anticipate the racial and ethnic presumptions of later generations. Once imperial designs upon Mexico had been put into motion (exactly what Dana meant by his California commentary, “In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be!”), it became an act of patriotism to refer to Mexicans in explic-

itly racist terms.³ The 1846–1848 war against the Republic of Mexico—a nasty, brutal affair—drove home Manifest Destiny’s darkest assumption that racial and national supremacy went hand in glove.

Scholars have disagreed about the chicken and egg quality to such a perspective: was racial hatred followed by expansionist determinism or vice versa? Tensions within this binary could seem subtle given the euphemistic language of Manifest Destiny rising in the early-to-mid-1840s. Softened by references to God’s hand in all this, expansionist aggression could be painted in phrasings of divinity, glory, and the inevitability of Christian (read Protestant) triumph. But any blessed sweetness fell away as the project was rendered stark and grim by warfare and the lusty “All Mexico” cries of antebellum expansionists. “The truth is,” declared one U.S. senator in 1847, “the Mexicans are a rascally, perfidious race.”⁴

Taken as mere fact, such perceptions of a nation, a place, and a people had obvious ramifications in the far West. California, after all, was dragged to the brink of statehood by Manifest Destiny’s crude racial determinism. First came the quixotic Bear Flag Rebellion against Mexican California by John C. Frémont and confreres, followed by outright warfare between the United States and the Republic of Mexico. But surrenders and treaties hardly put a stop to the violence of racial enmity—not General Robert Stockton’s capture of Los Angeles in early 1847 nor the 1848 signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

For one thing, territorial aggrandizement continued, not limited to the 1853 Gadsden Purchase, with its addition of 29,000,000 acres to what would become lower Arizona and New Mexico. Not long after peace, the adventurer and land pirate William Walker rehearsed his later invasion of Nicaragua with paramilitary campaigns in Baja California and Sonora. Walker was hardly alone. The Mexican Republic faced invasion by land and sea numerous times after 1848, and these expeditions often began in California and continued, oddly enough, well into the latter part of the century. As historian Robert May has written, “the racist strains of Manifest Destiny survived the peace with Mexico and helped inspire post-war filibustering.” Californian Horace Bell, a follower of Walker in Nicaragua, fondly recalled the postwar era: “What wild schemes, what adventurous plans were concocted overnight in those early years of the Golden State!”⁵

What happens to our understanding of California or Los Angeles history if we suggest that, diplomatic or treaty assurances to the contrary, the Mexican War did not end in 1848? “Poor Mexico!” an Angeleno confessed in his diary between filibustering raids in the mid-1850s. “It is supposed that

she will now be permitted to breathe freely several times, before the next heel is placed upon her neck.”⁶

It had all seemed so direct and simple, California moving step by step toward its rightful American future. “The war between our government and Mexico, in a short time after, ceased to exist,” the California chronicler Benjamin Truman wrote. “California became a Territory of the United States, and, legally, Los Angeles was no longer a Mexican pueblo, but a ‘burg’ of the great Yankee nation.”⁷ But as early Los Angeles historian James Miller Guinn wrote in 1901, in a phrase succinct and on target, the “process of Americanizing the people was no easy undertaking.” Laid atop the Mexican War and its violent, racist exuberance were the postwar brutalities of the Gold Rush, the beatings, the criminalization, and the lynchings of resident Mexicans, most of whom had, at least by treaty, become Americans. “To shoot these Greasers ain’t the best way,” declared one California vigilante in the Gold Rush period. “Give ‘em a fair trial, and rope ‘em up with all the majesty of the law. That’s the cure.”⁸

What’s more, the none-too-subtle extortions imposed by the “foreign miner’s tax” stood as frontier-era precursors of more recent California public referenda aimed at ethnic others. Such legal expressions of racial malice make the ever-widening ripples of ugly discriminatory ideas and behavior even easier to spot and track on the historical landscape. They also suggest a posture that the Mexican American War had made all too obvious to whites in California. Mexicans and Mexico were to be approached with arms and martial readiness. “This southern California is still unsettled,” wrote field scientist William H. Brewer in 1860. “We all continually wear arms—each wears both bowie knife and pistol (navy revolver), while we always have for game or otherwise, a Sharp’s rifle, Sharp’s carbine, and two double-barrel shotguns,” hardly the paraphernalia of peacetime. Did the Mexican War end?⁹

Horace Bell, soldier of fortune, rancher, journalist, and memoirist all rolled into one, remembered 1850s Los Angeles as an immensely violent place. First came vigilante action aimed at the sons of prominent rancher José del Carmen Lugo (the vigilantes came up on the short end of that deal). Then in 1851, with the lynching of a Mexican man named Zavalete, again the “Los Angeles mob raised its horrid head.” Things only worsened with time, as Bell notes with irony unchecked.

Such was the plane of civilization to which our people had attained in the early period of the city’s American history. . . . American rule had

certainly demonstrated to the benighted sons of Mexico the superiority of our civilization. We had evolved a very simple rule for the classification of the population. A man was either a manhunter, or he was one of the hunted. That is, if he amounted to anything at all. If in neither classification, then he was a mere nonentity. The decent minority—for there was such a group of nonentities—wondered when and where it would all end. It was barbarism gone to seed.¹⁰

By the middle of the decade, tensions between “Americans” and Mexicans threatened to explode. Judge Benjamin Hayes, whose Los Angeles diaries offer an especially illuminating glimpse into the years he called “a transition state to better order and more perfect security,” felt the pressures of his times and judicial duties. In sentencing a Mexican man to death for murder, Hayes made certain to have his remarks translated into Spanish, read aloud, and then published. This was not for the condemned, he argued, so much as for “his young countrymen, who are betraying too many signs of hostility to *Americanos*.” Yet wasn’t such hostility justified, given the legal system’s propensity for racial profiling, ca. 1850? After all, as an attentive journalist of the period noted, “punishment seems to be graduated by the color of the skin, and not the color of the crime.”¹¹

Itinerant schoolteacher and newspaperman William Wallace traveled three times from New England to Southern California in the 1850s. His journal, kept with meticulous care in small leather-bound books, is a barometer of the social and ethnic tensions of the period. Looking out across the expanse of the Los Angeles basin in the early spring of 1855, Wallace could barely contain his excitement at being back in the West. His entries foreshadow the later effervescence of Los Angeles boosters. “I love the country, the climate is incomparable, the scenery is grand, the plains are beautiful, the flowers are everywhere.” Yet natural beauty could not fully mask the difficulties and the violence, “the dangers, the vices, the self-sacrifices, the cold-blooded crimes through which the pioneers have guided this unformed and malformed community.”¹²

Wallace felt the social hangover brought about by the recklessness of American occupation, warfare, and statehood. “We are now like fast boys upon their travels, and our imprudences have brought us into trouble,” he mused. Rapid change marked everything. “The California of ten years ago is not the California of to-day,” he noted. “The old country, with all its simple manners and customs, [has] all departed; everything has become new, and is as yet unformed.” Riding out from the village center to teach school

near the San Gabriel Mission, Wallace encountered Gabrielino Indians trying to maintain some semblance of their former lives and folkways. But the racial future of Los Angeles would not likely tolerate such appeals to tradition, he figured. "Fashion and folly are working their way in here—and by and by all these Indians will be shaped like white folks."¹³

William Wallace feared the power of these mysterious social and racial forces which could recast ethnicity, just as he admitted that he was afraid of Divine Retribution revealed in the earthquakes that occasionally threw him to the ground. He believed that the vengeance of God would offer rebuttal to the blood sports of 1850s ethnic conflict. All the signs pointed in that direction. Social niceties, which had seemed so much a part of everyday life, now went unperformed and unsaid. Many of the genteel *Californios*, those Latino rancho elites grappling with seismic marketplace changes and quickening political obsolescence, displayed unusual, though largely unspoken, hostility toward Americans. It was rumored that they washed their hands after touching American money, "to wipe away the stain from them before they are laid away." "The curses upon the Americans are deep and bitter," Wallace noted, and "there is little sympathy between the races."¹⁴

In the summer of 1856, a Los Angeles deputy marshal named William Jenkins killed unarmed Antonio Ruiz over "a petty two dollars." In the ensuing turmoil, William Wallace expected civil war to erupt as the companion to natural disaster, a full-blown resumption of the Mexican American War. The incident provoked thoughts on Wallace's part of the propensity of Anglos to cast Mexicans as enemies and to use such categorizations to justify the wrenching transitions of the era. "We accuse Californians and Sonoreños of being enemies to us—they are so in fact and in detail. And what wrongs are theirs? Where are their lands, their cattle and horses, and their money? Gone! They are nearly all paupers. And the mercenary avarice of American gamblers has made them such."¹⁵

Wallace no doubt agreed with contemporaries who described Los Angeles in the first years of California statehood as wracked by race war.¹⁶ The place also witnessed a curious conflict over names—wherein disputes over naming reveal deeper antagonisms. What had been the Mexican American War only a few years earlier became a war against Mexican Americans. The treaty that ended the U.S.- Mexico War had been explicit about the citizenship consequences of peace. Mexicans who stayed would become Americans.¹⁷ But diplomatic assurances have rarely meant less on the ground. As the historian David Gutiérrez has noted, Guadalupe Hildago "could do little to



Figure 1. Sonoratown, the "Spanish part" of Los Angeles, ca. 1870s. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento

transform the biased views of Mexicans that Americans continued to entertain." In some ways, enmity only increased, as "Americans" and "Mexicans" still existed worlds apart, treaty or no treaty.¹⁸

Despite *de jure* citizenship status, Mexicans could not exercise the franchise with anything close to the same ease as lighter-skinned Angelenos. On the contrary, the poorest among the Indians and Mexicans of the village might get literally corralled and violently coerced into casting bought votes, as Wallace's diary for 1857 detailed. "All shades of dark colors (the 'piebald classes') were there, half breeds, Indians, Soñorenses. . . . They were plied with bad whiskey, and when they became riotous were knocked on the head." Such civic obscenities further emphasized a paradox. Mexicans were not Americans, even though they were.¹⁹ Mexicans, as Figure 1 suggests, did not even live in Los Angeles. Mexicans still lived in Mexico, in Sonora or Sonoratown, in "homes for the defeated." Both logic and geography argue that 1850s Sonoratown, north of the plaza, not far from the banks of the Los Angeles River, was in fact *in* Los Angeles, *in* California, *in* the United States. But logic and social reality do not of course always operate in tandem. Sonora and Sonoratown *were* Mexico in the popular perceptions of many an Anglo Angeleno, a Mexico gradually becoming surrounded by an Americanizing Los Angeles (which, as the dominant spatial and political category, did not need a corresponding "Anglo town" reference).²⁰

Word again. Weren't the 1850s all about exchanging one Californian, the elite Mexican, for another, the Anglo?²¹ Who would become the Californians of the new state? Californian, *Californio*: these *had* had specific contextual meanings. They had once been direct references to the region's Latin population in the vernacular of the pre-American period and just afterwards (the references were even class coded, the latter being the elite designation). By decade's end, the sad conclusion could be offered: *Californios* "have passed away like our foggy mornings. There is nothing to show for their existence." William Wallace's diary entry might have been premature: *Californios* would continue to exercise some authority, mostly social, in Southern California for another generation. But his instincts were right; the transition had begun and little could stop it.²² Within a few short decades, drought, legal entanglements, intermarriage, the imposition of a new political economy, outright thievery, and the removal of *Californios* from positions of political power had turned the world upside down. California, the spoils in both place and name, belonged now to the victors. Nor could these former elites play much of a role or profit by the nostalgic renderings of the California past (which, ironically, placed them at the center of much of the romance). "Contained by Anglo newcomers and cut off from a reservoir of native folk traditions," the historian Charles Montgomery has observed, the *Californio* gentry "was forced largely to cede California's Spanish revival to the imagination of Anglo promoters." "Perhaps never since Adam fell from Eden," wrote a sympathetic visitor to nineteenth-century California "has there been a sadder realization of Paradise Lost than is afforded by these native Californians."²³

Not long after William Jenkins killed Antonio Ruiz, friends of the murdered man gathered at his fresh grave. The *Los Angeles Star* called them "among the lowest and most abandoned Sonorians and Mexicans." When they filled the streets, threatening violence against the Americans in the village, William Wallace must have thought his fears of civil unrest prophetic. Nor was he alone in such trepidation. Judge Benjamin Hayes, the same man who had recently ordered a hanging as a public deterrent to ethnic violence (despite the fact that his act was precisely that which he hoped to curtail), fairly quaked with fear. "It must be admitted that about midnight a deep apprehension of disastrous consequences did settle upon the minds of the people," he wrote.²⁴ Trouble broke out. A melee, a horse shot and killed, Marshal William Getman wounded. Rumors flew: three hundred or more armed Mexicans had gathered to lay siege to the town. Whites mobi-

lized. Ozro Childs, a local tinsmith, volunteered to ride east about ten miles to El Monte, local capital of anti-Mexican word and deed, for help from the El Monte boys, local ruffians always spoiling for a fight.²⁵

With the arrival of several dozen heavily armed El Monte reinforcements, white Angelenos quickly organized a Committee of Safety. William Wallace lamented what he saw as the final breakdown of a society pinned between the retributions of nature and the havoc of racial enmity. "It would seem as if heaven and hell were in league against us. The drought is increasing on the plains and by the roads we are almost cut off from the world except by water or across almost impassable deserts. But the worst feature of all is the moral depravity and the propensity to fight which increases among all classes. . . . the rifle and revolver are our trust."²⁶

"Blood flows in the streets—justice weeps," Wallace wrote in his neat hand. "All is anarchy." Matters got even worse. In the early months of 1857, Wallace penned eyewitness accounts of two critical moments in village history, powerful symbols of the period's ethnic turmoil and violence. In late January, the steamer *Sea Bird*, anchored off the coast at San Pedro, dropped off one hundred men under the command of one Henry A. Crabb. Crabb arrived in Los Angeles by way of Northern California and a recent failure to win a seat in the U.S. Senate (he had been in the California statehouse representing the San Joaquin Valley). "Colonel" Crabb's band of men included what were likely underemployed and unlucky gold miners from the northern mines, as well as a smattering of former members of the California legislature. They came to Los Angeles with a plan as ambitious as it was misguided, having something to do with recently vanquished Mexico.

"What do these men want in Sonora?" Wallace asked himself. Soon all became clear. Crabb aimed to take a big chunk of what remained of northern Mexico after the territorial surgery performed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Gadsden Purchase. The men of the little army wished, as did many of their filibustering contemporaries, to then turn their prize into a slave-holding region. Crabb had tried, impotently, the same thing a year or so earlier. Now he and his band meant business.²⁷

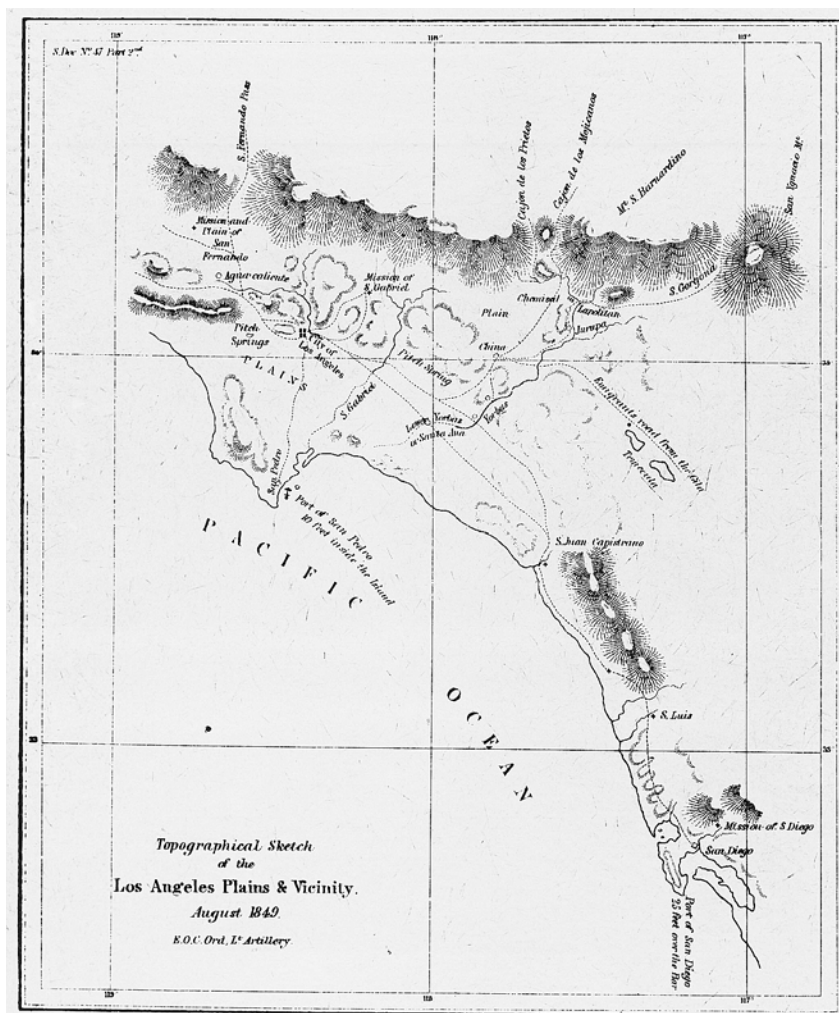
Crabb and his soldiers (the harmlessly euphemistic "Arizona Colonization Society"), rumored to be just the advance team of a force twelve to sixteen hundred strong, simply refused to believe that the Mexican American War had ended nearly ten years earlier. Chronology's truths meant nothing against adventuring promise. Heeding Manifest Destiny's earlier "All Mexico" rallying cry, they went about stockpiling weapons, wagons, and

supplies in Los Angeles and the nearby hamlet of El Monte. There they were delayed for several weeks, tending to the wounds of one of their own who had been shot by his comrades aboard the steamer coming south from the Bay Area. Hindsight suggests this as an apt omen of things to come for Crabb and company.

Local men itching for glory, or those with nothing to lose, signed up for the fateful journey, joining one of the various infantry “companies” (A, B, C, etc.) or the “artillery.” Confidence ran high. Judge Hayes noted that one of the filibusters had neglected to inform his wife back in Kentucky what he was up to; he preferred that she know of his plans after Crabb and his followers had attained glory in Mexico. The judge was less sanguine. “I knew more of Sonora and Sonorians than he did,” he later wrote.²⁸

“They gained no sympathy here,” declared William Wallace, adding that “the community felt relieved at their departure.” An official comment from the United States government offered the succinct assessment that the “expeditionists have certainly chosen an unfortunate time for their movements as regards the interests of the United States in their relations with Mexico.” Once encumbered with weapons and supplies, most of the would-be heroes inexplicably refused to purchase horses or mules, apparently preferring the more spectacularly martial, not to mention exhausting, alternative of marching to Mexico all the way from Los Angeles. Once there, Crabb and his “pedestrian crowd” expected, as Wallace delicately phrased it, “to arrange the internal dissensions of the people,” albeit “at the sword’s point.” Again, hindsight suggests this as dangerously wishful if not downright stupid. Wallace hinted as much in his descriptions of the civilian army. “Though gentlemanly in their manners, they did not appear like men accustomed to Hardship.” Time would prove that assessment prophetic. For now, though, Wallace surmised that the “fact that they find it unprofitable to remain longer in California is pretty good evidence that our social condition must be improving; although at our neighbor’s expense.”²⁹

But William Wallace was wrong. Even Crabb-less, the Los Angeles social condition showed little sign of improvement. The local ramifications of heightened ethnic tension revealed themselves in newspaper headlines only a day after Crabb’s departure. The bodies of Los Angeles County sheriff James R. Barton and several of his constables had turned up south of Los Angeles near Mission San Juan Capistrano. Barton and his men had been murdered by a roving band of outlaws under the leadership of Juan Flores, a recent escapee from San Quentin. Despite the shock, Wallace thought



Map 1. Southern California, ca. 1850

that the murders, said to done from ambush, might just be the tonic Anglo Los Angeles needed in order to spring to life and claim the region once and for all. "It is fortunate that Barton and confreres were killed—it needed as great a calamity to move the selfish Anglo blood, that is here only greedy for money."³⁰

"Will the people rise in their might, and sweep the villains and murder-

ers from the face of the earth?" asked the *Los Angeles Star*. "Or will the present deep feeling be allowed to exhaust itself in idle complainings? Time will tell." Authorities trundled the coffins containing the bodies of the martyred lawmen back toward Los Angeles. A large crowd met the cortege at the banks of the Los Angeles River. The blood of the victims, the *Star* mourned, "cries from the ground for vengeance."³¹ No surprise: violence begat violence. At the San Gabriel Mission (as much a regional central place in this era as the plaza in Los Angeles), four men, supposedly members of the Flores band, soon faced a hanging judge. At a hastily arranged hearing, the judge asked those present if they believed the men in custody should be hanged. Hands shot up all round, including that of the judge himself. Justice will be done. But the grim affair was quickly botched. As one execution went forward, the hangman's rope broke, whereupon the judge himself attempted to shoot the man who tumbled to the ground. The gun misfired, prisoner seized both judge and gun, fired a harmless shot, and was shot dead by the phalanx of well-armed bystanders.

Then another rumor. Local Indians in league with the Mexican population had mounted a violent conspiracy against the whites of the basin. "Lock the doors and bolt the windows," warned one frightened man, firm in the belief that the bandit Flores and company "were on their way to Los Angeles, to murder the white people."³² The darker races supposedly had a plan of violence, rape, and destruction. Horace Bell had no doubts about the ambitions of Flores; he believed the Mexican War to have flared anew. Flores would "go to Los Angeles, raise the standard of revolt and rid the country of the hated gringos."³³

Dusk brought dire predictions of impending doom. "All the [white] women and children at dark were seen rushing into central houses," William Wallace wrote. Four paramilitary companies, themselves ethnically delineated, formed to defend Los Angeles whiteness: the Dutch (the Dutch!), the British, the Irish, and the French. They spent time cleaning, loading, and firing their weapons. "There were very few calm men," Wallace noted. "Some cursed their guns . . . others wanted guns. Some blustered and cursed the Californians." Word went quickly to Fort Tejon in the mountains to the north: *send soldiers*.

The four companies of white sentinels, after leaving behind a detachment to guard women and children in the center of town (twelve men hurriedly answered the request for six guards), marched in formation to the Montgomery Hotel, "where we expected to be sent directly against the enemy." Nothing happened. Los Angeles remained quiet under a bright moon.

Within a day, the men, sagging under the weight of their pistols, rifles, muskets, and knives, organized themselves into a military cordon. Some now feared that the little town would be attacked by an armed force of as many as six hundred Mexicans bent on retribution. With pickets stationed thirty paces apart, they surrounded the entire upper (white) portion of Los Angeles. The standoff, Wallace noted, was ethnically explicit, between “the Americans” and “the Californians.”

In eerie foreshadowing of the notorious Zoot Suit affair during the Second World War, house-to-house searches in the lower part of the city and down at the Los Angeles River revealed hiding Mexican men and boys who, some forty in number, were detained, jailed, and then visited by frightened and tearful Mexican women. “There is much anxiety among the Californians,” Wallace noted. “What a joyous time we will have hanging the rascals!” With the arrival of Fort Tejon’s United States troops, the “thirst for blood” only increased. “If human sacrifices can give rest to the unquiet souls of the dead, they will soon be at ease, for a hecatomb of victims are in readiness,” Wallace somberly predicted.³⁴

White leaders convinced *Californio* Andres Pico to chase down those “ruffians” left in the countryside, because “it was believed by many that . . . the face of a Californian was the only one that could operate.” Armed improbably with lances, Pico’s men went out into the hills, determined to demonstrate to Anglos that a difference between “Californians” and “Mexicans” yet existed. Pico, at the head of this “show of California force,” did his work well, with, according to Wallace, biblical efficiency. “He came upon them in their fastnesses, and slaughtered them and captured them in detail.” Pico killed some of his prisoners and chopped off their ears as trophies. Others lived and told of the ambush of Barton. The sheriff had been shot from his horse, they said; he had fallen into a sitting position and continued to fire his weapon. Juan Flores had yelled out, using both Spanish and English, “We have got you now . . . God damn you.” Barton fired his pistols and a shotgun until his ammunition was exhausted. He threw the empty pistols at his attackers and returned the insult, “Now kill me God damn you.” They did.

With the capture of Flores, who was marched to the city jail tied hand and foot, a rope around his neck, calls for retribution only increased. “Americans are not amenable to the people,” Wallace wrote, while admitting that “there are as many villains among them as the others.” Vigilante posses fanned out across the Los Angeles basin and north toward Santa Barbara, and “a broad distinction is made between Californians and Ameri-

cans.” Posses hanged captured men from whatever height convenience offered. Others were beheaded. Estimates of the body count ranged to well over a hundred. Vigilante Louis Mesmer claimed that seventeen men were hanged in seventeen days. A rumor swirled about that the El Monte boys had been seen bowling with the head of a murdered Mexican.³⁵

With the aid of the curate at Mission San Buenaventura, one of the captured signed a confession before he and ten others were executed for the Barton murders. Teenager Jose Jesus Espinosa, “fully convinced that after a few hours I shall have ceased to exist, and shall appear before the presence of God,” stated that, the rumors notwithstanding, there were only a handful of “thieves and murderers” loose in the region. From Espinosa’s confession, it was unclear if the band of men so described even took part in the murder of Barton and his deputies.

The martyred sheriff took it upon himself to clear up some of the confusion. Wallace, a devoted table-rapping spiritualist, noted in his journal that “we have had several spiritual meetings at which Barton appeared and related his inward life.” It had taken the sheriff about six hours to realize that he was indeed dead and had “passed into the world of shadows.” “His condition is much better than when here, but his feelings of revenge are so powerful that he regrets death. He is strongly excited because he was killed by such worthless outlaws. . . . Barton, like all spirits, advises decent men to leave this country.”³⁶ The Los Angeles future looked grim to both the quick and the dead.

On Valentine’s Day, 1857, a triangle rung in the downtown plaza summoned people from Los Angeles and its hinterlands to the trial of Juan Flores. Officials read aloud the charges against him in three languages (presumably English, Spanish, and French), and the presiding judge, dispensing with legal niceties, declared that the will of the majority would prevail. The vote was for hanging. “This, I think, was one of the most magnificent spectacles ever witnessed by man,” Wallace wrote. “The whole people, of all colors, rose up together as one man, and shouted: ‘Let him be hung.’” The crowd marched to the city jail, seized Flores (who had been “expecting this visit”), and hanged him “like a dog” on gallows overlooking the village.³⁷ The hangman did his job poorly. Flores struggled with the rope, had his arms restrained, and strangled to death.

Meantime, Henry Crabb and his filibustering associates (the *Star* called them, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, the “Gadsden Purchase settlers”) successfully navigated the desert, made it to Fort Yuma, and punched into Mexico. They soon found themselves in deep trouble. The trip across the desert had

been harsh and taxing. Of course, Crabb brought the travails upon himself. In a letter to a Mexican official, he wrote disingenuously (and perhaps a bit nervously?) of his surprise at the hostile reception he had received from the Mexican people. He came in peace, he said, "with the intention of finding most happy firesides with you . . . with the intention of offending no one." Crabb shrugged off concerns about the weapons that weighed heavy on the arms and shoulders of him and his men. "You know that it is not common for Americans, or any other civilized people, to go unarmed." Indians were about, Crabb wrote, so his men were naturally well armed. "I learn with surprise that you are adopting measures of indignation, and are collecting a force to exterminate me and my companions."³⁸

That was true. Mexican authorities moved rapidly to repulse the Crabb invasion, drumming up support from the local citizenry by recalling the recent state of war between the United States and Mexico. "Let us fly, then, to chastise, with all the fury which can scarcely be restrained in hearts full of hatred of oppression, the savage filibuster who has dared, in an evil hour, to tread on the national territory, and to provoke—madman!—our anger. No pity, no generous sentiments for that rabble!"³⁹

American consular officials in Mexico City had gotten wind of the incursion, and predictions regarding the fate of Crabb and the adventuring Americans were dire. John Forsyth of the United States delegation assumed that in "the natural course of the conflict between the invaders and the Mexican troops, some of our misguided countrymen will fall into the hands of the latter, and will, doubtless, be summarily dealt with." He was right. The "Arizona Colonization Society" got pinned down by a force of Mexican soldiers and citizens at Caborca who sang out "long live Mexico!" and "death to the filibusters!" Mexican authorities had insisted to the Mexican military that they, in the words of one official, "punish the audacity of those pirates who think to outrage with impunity the honor of the Mexican republic by taking possession of one part of it like bandits. . . . they will pay dearly for their rash enterprises."⁴⁰

Crabb remained ever defiant. "If blood is to flow, with all its horrors," he wrote to Mexican official José Maria Redondo, "on your head be it, and not on mine. . . . I shall go where I have long intended to go, and I am only waiting for my emigrants. I am the principal head, and I intend to act according to the dictates of natural law and self-preservation." Events would soon prove Crabb's unfortunate choice of leadership metaphors—casting himself as principal head—particularly ironic.

Soon surrounded, cut off from their supplies, and with many wounded,

Crabb's men opted for a white flag. They tossed aside their daggers, pistols, and rifles. But surrender meant nothing without a state of actual war. Mexican authorities responded by lining up the captives ("some of California's brightest ornaments," wrote an American, "men of intelligence, refinement, and character") before a dawn firing squad. "The news from Sonora is not at all flattering to the revolutionists," Wallace noted with admirable precision. "All of this class are shot without mercy—the Sonorenses having no use for prisoners."⁴¹ Hapless Henry Crabb ought to have remained a California office-seeker. Mexican authorities cut off his "principal head" and stewed it in a jar filled with vinegar. Some said that the grim totem was sent back to Los Angeles as a very tangible warning against further efforts at rearranging the Mexican border with the United States. Maybe Crabb, or part of him, did come back to Los Angeles, maybe not. The critical fact remained: Crabb brought the enduring Mexican War with him into Mexico.⁴²

Hundreds of miles north in San Francisco, a young adventurer named Charles Edward Rand, out to make his California fortune, sent home word of Crabb's demise to his parents: "Poor fellows, they met a horrid death. It has caused a great deal of excitement here," he wrote. He then made a frightening prediction. The "feeling of revenge [though] smothered will break out sooner or later and then woe to [the] 'poor Mexican' 'mongst the crowd." As one vengeance-minded journalist wrote, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."⁴³

Blood did flow in Los Angeles, the putative "city of angels." The place, historian James Guinn declared, was nothing but an "ungodly city." Morrow Mayo, following in Guinn's footsteps, suggested that the "town's angelic name was too ridiculous for such a hell-hole." More fitting yet was the sobriquet tossed about in the 1850s and 1860s. Los Angeles? No. Los Diablos.⁴⁴

"A FOREIGN TOUR AT HOME": RECASTING HISTORICAL ROLES

The bloody 1850s sent Los Angeles spinning with such ethnic hatred that it has yet fully to recover. It may take some digging, some excavation beneath the city's contemporary social and political structures, but the 1850s are still with us. The murderousness of that decade slowly faded, the rage that Anglos adopted vis-à-vis Mexicans and, especially and overwhelmingly, against Indians lessened, softened by a variety of economic and demo-

graphic factors. Declining populations of nonwhites, in either absolute or proportional terms, rendered seeming threats less palpable. The region's Native American population, worked to death, chained to logs outside jails and places of labor, and struggling with unyielding demographic collapse, fared the worst. Not even in death could they expect respectful treatment. Mid-century Indian deaths, even if foul play was indicated, might be written off as the result of a mysterious "visitation by God." This did make grim sense, in a way, given Manifest Destiny's assurances that expansion and racial triumph went hand in hand, legitimated as if through holy writ.⁴⁵

The number of Mexicans, too, fell off, at least in proportion to whites arriving in the Los Angeles basin. Whereas Mexicans in 1850s Los Angeles may have accounted for as much as 80 percent of the total population, the figure had plummeted to something like 20 percent in just a generation, a flip-flop of stunning magnitude and speed.⁴⁶ The American ascendancy in Los Angeles—represented by such diverse moments as the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad (1876) and simultaneous disappearance of Mexicans from electoral office (the last Mexican mayor of Los Angeles left office in 1872)—made the "boom of the eighties" an almost entirely racially specific affair.⁴⁷ These processes and benchmarks help to create a new version of both "the Mexican" and the "Mexican problem" in Los Angeles.

Part of the Los Angeles ascendancy came about through rewriting history. In other words, to create the language of American-era, skyward trajectory—in commerce, in outlook, in urban enthusiasms—some merely resorted to casting even the recent past as the dark ages. Anything, then, would be substantial improvement upon what came earlier. "A wonderful change has come over the spirit of its dream, and Los Angeles is at present—at least to a great extent—an American city," wrote Benjamin Truman in his exuberant *Semi-Tropical California*, typical of the genre.⁴⁸ Truman's use of the dream metaphor was also common; Los Angeles resembled nothing so much as Sleeping Beauty to legions of observers in the 1870s and 1880s. And versions of this fairy tale did the work of racial pedagogy along the way. Whereas white Los Angeles (always cast as feminine) would awaken to embrace her future, the Mexican presence of old had fallen comfortably asleep. Somnolence within the ethnic population occupied the attention of Los Angeles writers, as "sleepy" became the watchword historical descriptor of town, region, people, as if statehood and the transitions thereof simply exhausted everyone, man, woman, and child alike. And of course the adjective stood in for all manner of other descriptions: pre-capitalist, pre-modern, lazy, primitive, Catholic. A few examples should suffice. "I first vis-



Figure 2. The corner of Aliso and Los Angeles Streets in downtown, 1886.
Author's Collection

ited Los Angeles in 1867,” wrote Benjamin Truman. “Crooked, ungraded, unpaved streets; low, lean, rickety, adobe houses, with flat asphaltum roofs, and here and there an indolent native, hugging the inside of a blanket, or burying his head in a gigantic watermelon, were the, then, most notable features of this quondam Mexican town.”⁴⁹

Angeleno Andrew Copp noted in his autobiography that the “half Mexican” population of 1870s Los Angeles “were reported to walk in their sleep most of the twenty-four hours.” Just like Richard Henry Dana long before him, Copp alluded to the promise and potential of the region, attainable if, and only if, “the people would ever wake up and develop them.”⁵⁰ In accounts such as these, Mexican Los Angeles—“the lethargic going to and fro of a somnolent collection of human beings”—always gives way to Anglo Los Angeles sometime in the 1870s: “an awakening came, and behold a transformation appears.”⁵¹

The Los Angeles problem was of course not sleepiness or some kind of weird village-wide narcolepsy. The “problem” was race and the nagging symptomatic persistence of the so-called Mexican problem. That is, there were too many of *them* for Anglo arrivistes, as yet uncertain in these pre-industrial years if Mexicans could be cast as permanent laborers, yoked to immutable Anglo presumptions about their place in the society.⁵²

Demographic change could briefly recast that “problem” as an opportu-

nity toward the end of the nineteenth century. During the boom period of the 1880s and 1890s, Los Angeles boosters championed the city to tourist and settler alike, and part of that lure was precisely the region's Latin past, or at least a carefully restricted version of it. As migrant Anglos became, Carey McWilliams writes, "obsessed" with the Spanish Fantasy Past, Mexicans became (if temporarily) picturesque in Anglo eyes—especially when they could stand in for those Spanish who had not lived on Southern California ground for nearly a century. This phase of Los Angeles history, critical to the growth juggernaut of tourism, allowed easterners to luxuriate in the Southern California so brilliantly advertised: exotic, semi-tropic, romantic. Los Angeles offered, as one tourist come-on promised, "A Trip Abroad in Your Own America," as well as all manner of chances to see the quaintness of ethnicity. In this imagery, a Mexican boy posed atop a burro selling flowers becomes less an indication of urban poverty than an unwitting actor in a period romance. "Here you will find true foreign color in your own United States." Come to Los Angeles, boosters insisted, and enjoy what one writer called "A Foreign Tour at Home."⁵³

Demography certainly played a role in this recasting of Mexicans as something other than the violent threat that they had supposedly constituted in the 1850s. So, too, did Anglo expectation of further population dips. Mexicans were actually *supposed* to fade away, through both national deference and epidemiological determinism like that assigned to the region's Native American populations. First the Southern California Indians were to drift aside, then Mexicans, nodding silent and permanent good-byes to the audience of tourists and newcomer settlers now occupying the city's and history's center stage. The region, a booster pamphlet in search of Los Angeles investment capital proudly (if euphemistically) declared, "has less of the old California character than any other part of the State." Chronicler Jackson A. Graves devoted an entire chapter of his important autobiography to just this wishful expectation. "The Passing of the Dominant Race" explores exactly those transitions, both real and imagined, in local demography. And of course the assessment has more to do with the ascendancy of the Anglo Saxon than it does with the passing of the Latin.⁵⁴ It was, in the words of historian George Sanchez, the coincident coalescence of ideas into a nifty plan. "By depicting the city's Latino heritage as a quaint, but altogether disappearing element in Los Angeles culture, city officials [and others of similar status] inflicted a particular kind of obscurity onto Mexican descendants of that era by appropriating and then commercializing their history."⁵⁵

Recall James Miller Guinn's comment that "the process of Americanizing the people was no easy undertaking." In other words, Guinn knew full well that one could date the American period of Los Angeles from early 1847, when Robert Stockton captured Los Angeles or shortly thereafter when Andres Pico capitulated to John C. Frémont. But, Guinn well understood, military or diplomatic "Americanization" was a blunt cultural marker, more indicative of process than culmination. The actual "transformation of the old pueblo from a Mexican hamlet to an American city continued through at least three decades after the conquest," Guinn suggested to his friends in the Historical Society of Southern California.⁵⁶

The point is a subtle and important one, and it invites us to examine the transitions at about 1880 every bit as closely as those of the 1850s, when Los Angeles shuddered from the violence born of a sudden change in nationality. The signs are there: greater Anglo demographic presence to be sure; far less bilingual communication in the public sphere, in journalism, or in city documents; fewer, far fewer, Latino municipal officials; less intermarriage of elite Anglos into the once-elite *Californio* families, who had run out of land, money, and prestige at a fast clip.

There are other ways to judge the transitions. The mere presence of the Historical Society of Southern California, a distinctly white enterprise, is testament to some kind of transition in local culture, some maturation of a sort. Begun rudely in a dank police court office, the Historical Society nonetheless went about its work in earnest. *Save everything*, the society's president urged the membership in 1884, everything that will create a physical memory that the 1880s were important. No need to concentrate on earlier periods, another society official advised. After all, the future did not belong to the Mexicans of those early years. They had lost in the blood sports of war and politics, and thus deserved their place as quaint occupants of an ancient past. "A score or two of names, a few crumbling adobes, and all is told," offered the society's president in pithy dismissal. "Our civilization developed along the lines of early England, and still earlier Angeln [*sic*], and Saxony; from the tribe and its chosen leader, not by the transmission from a superior to an inferior race." A publication of the era put the matter even more bluntly. Los Angeles had been founded by the "very scum of Mexico." Why celebrate that past and those founders, except when the strains of make-believe and fantasy could render the racially unpalatable somehow romantic?⁵⁷

By the 1880s, with the real estate boom and swelling population of Anglo arrivistes, that imagined past had started to exhibit its soothing potential.

What had been once only “sleepy” was now attractive, mysterious, even exotic. “The City of the Angels is a prosperous city now,” wrote Helen Hunt Jackson. “It has business thoroughfares, blocks of fine stone buildings, hotels, shops, banks, and is growing daily. Its outlying regions are a great circuit of gardens, orchards, vineyards, and corn-fields, and its suburbs are fast filling up. . . . But it has not yet shaken off its past. A certain indefinable, delicious aroma from the old, ignorant, picturesque times lingers still, not only in byways and corners, but in the very centres of its newest activities.” One would not, could not, truly know Los Angeles, Jackson declared, unless one could penetrate the outward reserve of the “few remaining survivors of the old Spanish and Mexican *regime*.”⁵⁸

There is the merest suggestion of racial mixing in but a few of such observations, a notion that the diversity of peoples in Los Angeles might provide a bulwark against unforeseen evil. This is perhaps carrying the notion too far, especially since little mention is ever made of the violence of the 1840s and 1850s. But E. W. Jones, president of the Historical Society in 1889, felt it. “The blending of the races here is a theme of great significance. It seems at first sight as if the pioneer race, who brought the arts of civilization to these shores, is being extinguished by the flood of immigration which has prevailed for the last few years.” But this was not the case, Jones said. “The blood of these adventurous people, strong in body and mind, still coursing through the veins of thousands among us, will not fail to tell powerfully upon the final homogenous race which is to occupy this region.” Perhaps it was all an exercise in dissonance and deliberately poor memory. Yet read one way, Jones’s comments are a radical call for miscegenation. He later congratulated Southern California’s “mixed and fraternized races” for creating a population marked by “manhood, patriotism and ability.”⁵⁹

This is a rare observation to be sure, intellectually tantalizing precisely because it stands out in such sharp relief from the record. Others, Historical Society stalwarts among them, remained perfectly content in their belief that the non-Anglo races could not compete and would just slip silently away. As one tourist saw it, Mexicans lurking in the “obscure corners” on “the edges of the displacing civilization” were disappearing, “as if a blight had fallen upon them.”⁶⁰ Or at least they would be outnumbered and hence rendered quaint in the process of becoming a less visible minority. “The old-time Spanish settlements found here and there appear like islands in the sea of modern American progress,” sighed one representative tourist pamphlet.⁶¹

But the emphasis was on *complete* disappearance, wishful though it might

have been. Thomas Kenderdine, who had first come to Los Angeles in the 1850s, discovered forty years later that the “one time Mexican tenants” of the plaza district had “mainly died away.”⁶² By 1900, according to Angeleno Mary Mooney, one could look “in vain, and in vain!” for Mexicans on the streets of the city. “One by one they faded away,” wrote Jackson Graves in his autobiography. Yet the requiems of course came too early. Mexicans in Los Angeles and the Southwest did not disappear from history’s stage. Even someone like Graves knew it. On the contrary, the pull effects of an expanding industrial economy in Southern California, as well as the push effects of early twentieth-century revolutionary turmoil in Mexico, reversed population and demographic downturns. “Their children,” Graves writes of the land grant class of *Californios*, “became day-laborers.” He may not have been precisely correct, in that *Californios* maintained some social prestige and, in a few cases, money enough to live well even after their land was gone. But Graves knew enough to know that Mexicans had not melted away. “Largely written off as a ‘vanquished’ element,” McWilliams writes, “the Mexican population of Southern California began to increase after the turn of the century,” first through the labor demands of the agricultural hinterland and then in response to the workplace needs of early Los Angeles industrialization.⁶³

The dominant Anglo society set about creating certain cultural and physical boundaries by which to contain this expanding population, the sheer size of which troubled whites. Labor segmentation, which welded class to ethnicity, had virtually assured a lasting Mexican presence in the roughest ranks of manual or agricultural labor. But even that was not enough to mitigate Anglo discomfort. “From 1907 to 1940,” McWilliams reminds us (with concise though too-brief precision), “‘the Mexican problem’ was a hardy perennial in Southern California.”⁶⁴

Part of that so-called problem revolved around culture and cultural space. Anglos found it difficult to describe the growing population of Mexican workers who supplied much of the required labor in metropolitan Los Angeles as “picturesque” any longer. A single workman, a scattered few: these might be romanticized with relative ease. But the gathered dozens, hundreds, thousands of Mexican day laborers looked every bit the shape and size of a proletariat. How could that be pictured in the quaint rhymes and images of Los Angeles boosterism?

Weren’t new categories thus required? Did Anglo Los Angeles have to recast Mexican space and Mexican stereotypes once again? We would be wrong to underestimate the dimensions and ambitions of the program

that Anglo Los Angeles, consciously or not, embarked upon to answer such queries in the affirmative.

Following the crude mid-nineteenth-century period of explicit ethnic violence (which of course had its own imperatives regarding ethnic boundaries), a sort of cultural backing and filling took place. Some of this was undoubtedly related to changes in Anglo perspectives about Mexico. As such, we should briefly visit the heirs to Colonel Crabb's filibustering adventures. As in, Later Los Angeles perspectives, narratives, and images about Mexico reveal ideas similar to those of the 1850s as regards Mexicans (on this side of the border or that). Territorial filibusters from Los Angeles would continue to raid northern Mexico, though no longer on foot, and presumably with more wariness and less hubris than Henry A. Crabb.⁶⁵ To be sure, as journalist Harry Carr pointed out in the 1930s, "Los Angeles has always been conscious of the fact that it is next door to Mexico," and that international proximity (as well as the definitions of that "door" and its placement) makes up an important part of the story told in this book. The ubiquitous early twentieth-century Chamber of Commerce term "Greater Los Angeles" takes on a whole new meaning if we consider it as a territorial description every bit as much as a qualitative one. Such Angelenos as those who sat in the Chamber of Commerce had long coveted Mexico, just as they expressed simultaneous discomfort with Mexicans on either side of the international boundary.⁶⁶

In thinking of Mexico, elite Anglos deliberately muddled the distinctions between what is "ours" and what is "theirs." Much of this, by the turn of the century at least, was imperialism of a different stripe from Henry Crabb's quixotic incursion. But there are obvious semantic and cultural parallels to such possessiveness. For instance, the turn of the century marks the arrival of Southern California's somewhat startling geographic discovery: "Our Mexico." Nurtured in tandem by parlor writings and sophisticated appraisal of northern Mexico's raw land, raw minerals, and raw oil, this diplomatic fiction became a commonplace corollary to the regional conceit that painted Southern California as "Our Italy" or "Our Mediterranean."⁶⁷

Ownership claims connoted by "Our Mexico" continued through the violent cycles of the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century, when many a Southern Californian thought little of the conceit (not to mention Crabbean danger) in ignoring the border to protect invested dollars. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, Southern California businessmen and their allied organizations firmed up the notion that what was south across the border might as well be considered part of Los Angeles. It was almost as if a kind of



Figure 3. Racial types of “Life in the Feudal Era” of nineteenth-century Los Angeles. From Boyle Workman’s 1936 history, *The City That Grew*

geographical fulcrum had been balanced. Los Angeles had once been Mexico (and, in parts, like downtown’s Sonoratown, might be still); why not make Mexico into Los Angeles? After all, as one realty publication phrased it, “Western Mexico is in reality a hinterland to California.” Not to be outdone, another agency heard its spokesman tell of his efforts to “solidify still further the supremacy of Los Angeles in the upbuilding of Mexico. . . . [Mexicans] know that Los Angeles is anxious to grasp their hand.” Another representative business publication of the era, noting that Los Angeles would be “where western civilization is reaching its ultimate goal,” declared that Mexican, even all of South American, commerce “belongs to Los Angeles by origin and heritage.” In other words, Los Angeles was Latin enough to create cords of commerce, but the city would nonetheless see the ultimate conclusion of Manifest Destiny’s racial promise! Topping the sentiment off, a powerful Chamber of Commerce leader offered his certainties regarding Mexican politics in the mid-1920s. Of the candidacy of Alvaro Obregon for president of Mexico, Chamber president William Lacy said that it was simply “impossible for him to lose” if the Chamber offered its weighty endorsement.⁶⁸

And what of the Mexicans in, and continuing to arrive in, Los Angeles? Were they “ours,” too? Much like darkroom alchemists, who fix and immobilize an image in time, place, and space, Anglos tried diligently to do the same to the Mexicans in their midst, to fix them in space and around a particular set of characteristics or traits tied ubiquitously to a social and ethnic category known as “the Mexican,” or the even more reflexive “Our Mexican.” The specificity of the reference revealed tacit Anglo American agreement about representation, about representativeness, and about typicality, and it was predicated upon distinct presumptions about ethnicity.⁶⁹

How did these societal tendencies work? What did they mean? From the odd, brutal days of racialized adventuring in the 1850s, turn the years forward but a single lifetime and come meet some important characters in the drama of Los Angeles history.. It is a weekday evening in the mid-1920s or thereabouts. Settled in for a quiet night in their Pasadena bungalow are the husband and wife whom journalist Harry Carr refers to as “Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles.”⁷⁰ Or maybe we are in Hancock Park or Glendale this evening, behind the wrought iron gates of a mission-style home, whitewashed stucco walls rising from a newly paved asphalt driveway. Arrivals of no more (and probably less) than a generation ago, the couple has on this particular evening been to dinner, seen a show, or maybe a motion picture. Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles are mildly prosperous. They are white. He is “a newspaper artist on a good salary” and works in a seven-story office building in downtown. Mrs. Los Angeles belongs to several clubs. They have many friends, three children, two cars. When they pronounce the name of their new home, Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles say “Loss An Guh Leez.” Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles do not think much about Mexicans. But when they do, their thoughts are programmed by unexamined assumptions and reflexive representations.

These people are the city’s Babbitts, not the “folks” as referred to by the bitter 1920s student of Los Angeles, writer Louis Adamic. They are more prosperous than the hardscrabble folks, more powerful, and less worn out. Adamic’s “folks” were those people who turned 1920s Los Angeles into “a huge, exaggerated village; an Iowa or Kansas small town suddenly multiplied by five hundred and some of its Main Street buildings grown twelve stories high.” “Racially fatigued,” Adamic called them, these people who made Long Beach into a small version of Los Angeles and Los Angeles into a large version of Long Beach.⁷¹

Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles live above this weariness. They go to the theater with regularity. They drive to the Pasadena Playhouse on El Molino Avenue. When they have out-of-town guests, they like to venture across town to San Gabriel to see, for the fifth or sixth time, the *Mission Play*, the nation’s most popular theatrical production in the years before the Second World War. Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles sometimes drive out to the Little Theater of Padua Hills in Pomona. They especially like the Mexican Revue that the Padua Players put on once a month, which one of their acquaintances recommended to them. “Every Mexican that I have ever known,” he



Figure 4. A page from an early twentieth-century diary of a mission-to-mission tour. Author's Collection

told them, "was born an artist and these shows are colorful, clever and delightful."⁷²

Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles explore the Southwest. They read the Auto Club's *Touring Topics* with interest. They drive to Palm Springs frequently in the winter, where Mr. Los Angeles enjoys a round of golf or two. Mr. and

Mrs. Los Angeles drive an hour east to Riverside to spend weekends at Frank Miller's famous Mission Inn, and they make exploring pilgrimages to "Ramona country" outside San Diego, where they take in the annual Ramona Pageant. They have seen a half dozen of California's missions, and they try to visit Mexico (Agua Caliente for car races, Tijuana for shopping and horse races) at least twice a year.

On the Fifth of May, Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles go to Olvera Street "for the hilarities of Cinco de Mayo," and they also enjoy watching Mexicans celebrate September 16 and the revolutionary heroism of Miguel Hidalgo. When they think about the California past, and they do (they are barraged with mission motifs in everyday advertising, city signage, etc.), they think through the mist of romance. A cultural scrim hangs between them and the Southern California past, smoothing the painful edges of a sad and bloody history. The mission, they know, "was like one great family." If anything intruded on the myth, it was Mexicans themselves who, through anticlericalism or revolutionary zeal or both, destroyed the beautiful necklace of coastal missions. But even that ancient era of Mexican California shimmered with romance. Everyone was happy then, everyone carefree. This is what they believe. And they agree with their favorite *Los Angeles Times* reporter Harry Carr, the man who wrote that Los Angeles was "an epic—one of the greatest and most significant migrations in the long saga of the Aryan race."⁷³

There are tens of thousands of such people in Los Angeles in the first decades of this century. Identified with the racial and growth trajectories of their city so much so as to share its name, Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles constitute an apparently typical Anglo sensibility about culture, commerce, and the metropolitan landscape. They think they know the Mexican present, and they are sure that they know California's "Spanish" past. It is an era they think of as "a lost civilization."⁷⁴

MEET JUAN GARCIA

My typical Juan Garcia knows no boundary. He does most of the manual labor of the Southwest, and unless the quota bars him, he will soon be standing beside the wheels in every industrial plant, working on every section of the railroads, and bending in toil on every farm. He is accomplishing a labor penetration of the United States.

ROBERT MCLEAN, *That Mexican!*, 1928⁷⁵

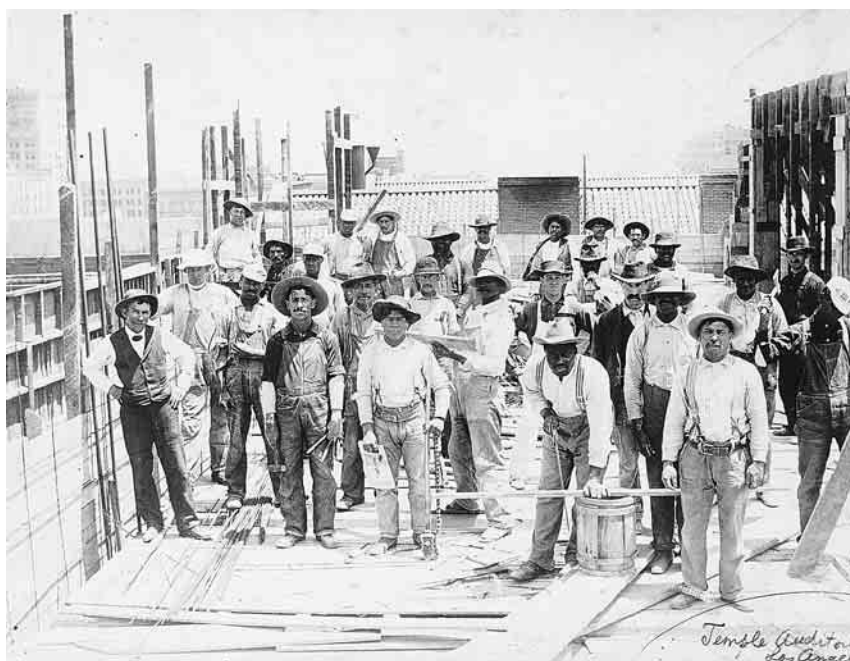


Figure 5. Building Los Angeles, ca. 1910. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

It must be recognized . . . that the Mexican whom we find in Los Angeles is, as a class, of relatively low mentality; he is probably best fitted for work demanding ability of an inferior grade.

S. H. BOWMAN,

"A Brief Study of Arrests of Mexicans, 1924"⁷⁶

There are other typical people in the Los Angeles of seventy-five or eighty years ago. They are a bit harder to find. Down flat against the banks of the Los Angeles River, adjacent to a grimy repair yard of the Southern Pacific Railroad, sits an old railcar on a rusted spur track covered by weeds. A small, neatly tended vegetable patch lies nearby. Smoke rises from a crude chimney pushed through the roof of the car. A steep five-step ladder drops from the wide freight door to the ground. So do, this same imagined evening in the late 1920s, several dark-eyed children, rushing to meet their father, who trudges toward them along the track after a day's work. A woman leans



Figure 6. Mexican workers in downtown Los Angeles, early twentieth century

from the doorway, whispers a greeting to her husband. He smiles and climbs the ladder into his home.⁷⁷

Meet Juan Garcia and family. Juan Garcia is a laborer and a Mexican. He works on a railroad section gang. The railroad allows him to live rent-free in the railcar home. Other laborers live nearby in small shacks and shanties. The railroad may move him to another section, another county, another state, at a day or two's notice. The railroad might just lay him off when the track work is finished. Juan Garcia works in a brickyard, molding clay into bricks, carrying heavy pallets into the sun to dry. Juan Garcia melts and pours asphalt on roads of dust. Juan Garcia does roadwork with pick and shovel. He cleans streets. His work is unskilled, hard, and hot.

Los Angeles laboring work, a 1920s report forthrightly declared, was "the occupation of the Mexican." "The drudgery of county and city has been his," in the words of a social worker. But fortunately for Southern California, Juan Garcia showed an "indifference to physical hardships and a supreme satisfaction in doing the menial." He works for the city's water department, clearing debris from waterways. Juan Garcia is "the unskilled laborer of the Southwest." He makes, if he's fortunate, between two and



Figure 7. caption TK

three dollars a day. Maybe he doesn't live with his family cramped into an old boxcar, though it is widely believed that Mexicans will "put up with almost any sort of living quarters." The family might all live in a camp for unemployed Mexicans that the Catholic Church has set up over in Griffith Park (there's a white camp in the giant park as well, but the two groups are separated, "the great difference in diet necessitating such separation."⁷⁸

Social workers call the Garcias "peons" and "peasants" to drive home their non-American status and reinforce the perception of these people as "industrial assets." Or they make lists of people in Los Angeles, singling out Mexicans in taxonomies of visitors and Southern California types, as in the "Mexican, the tourist, the health seeker, the migratory laborer, the settler."⁷⁹ The Garcias live in a rusty boxcar or cheek by jowl in an overcrowded house or courtyard apartment (a "cholo court," they are often called). Their house court has one toilet for every six or eight families. Tuberculosis lives with them. Juan Garcia might live with other single men—some who have left their wives and families in Mexico—in a cheap boardinghouse. The ceilings are low. The walls are uncovered, maybe even unplastered. "What should be done for Juan Garcia?" wonder reformers of one stripe or another.⁸⁰



Figure 8. “Greasers in Embryo”: Early twentieth-century tourist photograph of Mexican boys in Los Angeles. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento

The Garcias and people just like them do not have the same name as the city they live in. They could never be “Mr. and Mrs. Los Angeles,” even though they helped build Los Angeles, paved it, cleaned it, made it. Legions of white Angelenos have never met, and will never meet, Juan Garcia, his wife, their family. Some try to forget that they share the same city, believing as one social worker described the prevailing attitude that “the Mexican is a problem of tomorrow.”⁸¹ Others judge “Juan Garcia” as a latter-day Juan Flores, the social bandit of the 1850s, with a racial propensity toward criminal behavior. Mexican boys are but “greasers in embryo,” as far as many are concerned, just as they were to a young Anglo man who captioned his 1907 snapshot of Los Angeles Mexican boys with just this ugly flourish.⁸²

A few whites, imbued with the optimistic Progressive-Era gospel of Americanization, reach out to people like the Garcias from complex motives mixed of compassion and ethnocentric nationalism. Perhaps someone had been to the railroad camp this same hypothetical day, one of the Americanization movement’s front-line warriors, the home teacher. A

woman teaching sewing or English stopped by, instructing in phrases such as “Swat the fly!” or “I scrub, I scrub.” If they think about it at all, white Angelenos do not believe that the Garcias can be assimilated.⁸³

Los Angeles in the 1920s is no less polyglot than it was in the 1850s. On the contrary, ethnic diversity had increased. But even more pronounced change had occurred in ethnic proximity over the intervening two generations. The strictures on ethnic behavior and place are such that the intimate ugliness of 1850s-era tensions has receded into segregated distances for the bulk of the Los Angeles population.⁸⁴ There are tens of thousands of Juan Garcias in early twentieth-century Los Angeles, most of them recently arrived from Mexico, but most Angelenos would not know it and would not care in the least.⁸⁵ The name—Juan Garcia—had by then become an accepted, unquestioned representation by Anglos of the *EveryMexican* caught somewhere between picturesque and proletarian. The identification of the Mexican laborer as Juan Garcia even suggested that individuation of Mexicans into persons need not take place. Three-fourths of the Juan Garcias in Los Angeles, in California, indeed in the entire American Southwest, work as unskilled laborers.⁸⁶

What Juan Garcia and his family most assuredly are not is Californian, much less *Californio*. The former label had gone over fully to whites by now, the product of transitions in the political economy of the region dating back to the 1870s and 1880s. The latter identifier had ceased to mean much in the twentieth century: there just weren’t many *Californios* around any longer. They’d long ago run out of land and power.

Nor is Juan Garcia white. Though the U.S. Census Bureau may persist in calling the Garcias white, few others do.⁸⁷ Nor is Juan Garcia a Spaniard. That descriptor has drifted away as well, victim of the twentieth century’s belated realization that, lo and behold, few Spaniards called California home any longer. Of course, there could yet be Spanish features in the region, even typically so—places, roofs, buildings, or other nonpersons graced by romanticism and decidedly non-Mexican attributes. It was a game, in effect, an ugly game in which false definitional precision and arbitrary attachment of meaning carried real cultural weight. *That was Spanish, this is Mexican.* Juan Garcia was Mexican. A Mexican. *The Mexican.*⁸⁸

Boosters got into the act, as boosters will. “In an effort to preserve the historical aspects of the Plaza and its immediate vicinity,” the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce decided in the 1920s “to establish a typical Spanish village surrounding the park, which was the birthplace of the pueblo that has come to be the biggest Metropolis in the Western Americas.” Making

the plaza Spanish, then, could make it less Mexican—by definition. Or so the logic of commercialism and racial typicality went.⁸⁹

The possibilities were endless! Following the manufacture of the typical Chinese village, “China City,” Chamber leaders set their sights on the next ethnic population. “Can we work with [the Japanese population of Los Angeles] to set up in their section a typical Japanese city wherein their native home life and artistic ability could be developed in their own interest and in the interest of the community?” the Chamber eventually wondered, as it contemplated a metropolis of theme-park ethnic subdivisions; an “it’s a small world, after all” congregation imagined into being by notions of Los Angeles multiculturalism, 1930s-style.⁹⁰

How does one group of people isolate and draw borders around another group of people? The constellation of behaviors and ideas that make up an Anglo cultural stance toward Mexicans (including legal, political, social, occupational, spatial, and other strictures) worked as a kind of cultural cryogenics. This allowed, even insisted, that the dominant society freeze Mexicans in time and space, and that it describe them in particular ways: childlike, simple, quick to anger, close to nature, primitive, hard-working, lazy, superstitious, possibly criminal.⁹¹ They were, as a policeman put it with firmness, bathed in a “decidedly unfavorable light.” It is instructive to consider how Anglo society made claims of ethnic Mexican representativeness and to remember how it profited by such arguments.⁹²

By the early decades of this century, reliance upon a descriptive reflex (i.e., what was *typical*) had become an unquestioned trope in Los Angeles images and in the self-actualizing descriptions of Los Angeles growth.⁹³ The examples themselves are legion. Always, there was the weather: a typical day in Southern California, as depicted in photographs, on citrus crate labels or other ephemera: a clear vista, perhaps orange trees set against a snowy mountain backdrop. The built environment also attracted the “typical” label. Sprawling, luxurious tourist hotels became “typical tourist hotels.” Palm- or oak-lined streets in wealthy neighborhoods became “typical Southern California boulevards.” Postcard after postcard depicted lofty Tudors, giant bungalows, or stately mission revival mansions as “typical Southern California homes.” And for each of these typical houses there existed an equally prosaic “typical garden,” though one perhaps ambitiously landscaped, touched with expensive Japanese flourishes, or thick with transplanted cacti and succulents.

No better example of this reflex can be found than in the publications and ephemeral paperwork of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in

the first two or three decades of the twentieth century. A representative pamphlet—"Facts About Industrial Los Angeles, Nature's Workshop"—put out by the Chamber's Industrial Department in the 1920s aptly illustrates the typical appeal. Glossy pages and crisp black-and-white photographs invite the reader (investor, tourist, settler) into a world of redundant images, scenes, spaces, and places. Here we find in neat and stark representation the city's "typical skyline," its "typical textile plants," "typical views of clay products and glass plants," even the odd industrial juxtaposition of "oil and oranges—a typical refinery." Here, too, are "typical workingmen's homes," where, presumably, contented workers return after what could be nothing other than a "typical day."⁹⁴

This is an important cultural tapestry that told a simple story. "Los Angeles is most typically American," wrote a booster reporter for the *Los Angeles Examiner* in 1922—but added the wishful, decidedly atypical declaration that "there are no poor in Los Angeles."⁹⁵ Southern California was, then, a paradise where everyone, men and "typical women" alike, could conceivably have a typical life.⁹⁶ To do so meant, of course, understanding the unstated in the images, especially those that associated great displays of wealth with the mundane and everyday. In Southern California, almost everyone could have workers working for them. There were, after all, apparently those typical workers who went to those typical worker jobs and lived in those typical workingmen's homes.⁹⁷ And there was also Juan Garcia, so typically a Mexican that he had an everyname synonymous with Mexican ethnicity. Of course his was not the "typical workingman's home" as much as it was what social reformers and others codified as the "typical Mexican home." And there was a profound difference: in housing quality, in regional geography, and most assuredly in the operation of local restrictive housing covenants. Even Olvera Street, that 1920s shops-and-stores invention complete with picturesque Mexican troubadours and pushcarts, can be found in the typical litany. An early promotional newspaper (the "*Olvera Street News: The Magazine from the Birthplace of Los Angeles*") proudly referred to the avenue as "probably the most typical street in America."⁹⁸

Making Mexicans fit into explicitly racialized containers revealed not only what they *were* ("always the laborer, never the citizen," in the words of historian Mark Reisler) but also what they *were not* as well. And what Mexicans most decidedly were not were Anglo Saxon.⁹⁹ This is not to say that at certain points in its troubling history with Mexicans that Los Angeles did not try to remedy that supposed cultural and ethnic (i.e., genetic) fail-

ing. Los Angeles in the first decades of the twentieth century was one of the most important arenas of eugenics in the nation. Such attempts to de-Mexicanize the Mexican—socially, politically, biologically, culturally—help us to remember the kinds of boundaries constructed around typifying categories of what was or was not Mexican or a Mexican. The work could be pursued by all manner of Los Angeles Anglos, on the left as well as the right. After all, Americanization campaigns of the Progressive Era, at least in some respects, could be seen as a kind of social eugenics.¹⁰⁰

Take the example of Progressive and reform-minded Rev. G. Bromley Oxnam. Like William Wallace fifty years before him, Oxnam kept a steady Los Angeles journal. A man whose brand of muscular Christianity made him something of a Theodore Roosevelt in broadcloth, Oxnam was one of the city's most energetic housing and social reformers prior to the First World War. It is a shame that Los Angeles has forgotten him. Mentored by Rockwell Hunt, James Main Dixon, and Emory Bogardus at the University of Southern California, and by the Rev. Dana Bartlett of the Bethlehem Institute, Bromley Oxnam entered Mexican Los Angeles armed with a few important, archetypal assumptions that he arranged into a kind of social chemistry. From his University of Southern California courses and professors he learned sociology's maxim that a problem defined was very nearly a problem solved. From the social gospel he drew Progressive insights about uplift and noblesse oblige. "Along with our social work," he wrote, "we must not forget the individual. A man is a man, has certain capacities and powers; these factors on the personal element will unite with your reagent of social reform and give a different compound every time."¹⁰¹

Bromley Oxnam also knew about Anglo Saxonism as a way to address what whites in Los Angeles, if they thought of it at all, unconsciously referred to as the Mexican problem. In the spring of 1913, Oxnam devoted every Monday to work in the Mexican house courts of downtown Los Angeles, east of Main Street. The district had tremendous problems: rampant poverty, high infant mortality, illiteracy, and disease. "Truly the problem almost overwhelms me," he admitted, if only to himself: "I hardly know what to do." Oxnam knew, too, of the Anglo tendency to essentialize Mexicans as implicated in their social position. He wrote of encountering a young Mexican boy at one of the courts, a youngster with "an artist's soul." The deck was stacked against the boy, Oxnam knew: "he was but a Mexican boy—fit for streetwork and nothing more—at least so some say." Nonetheless, Oxnam imagine one way to proceed, and "God helping me I'll make those people better."¹⁰²

Within a few days of that private declaration, one of the city's local newspapers devoted a story to Oxnam and his expressly ethnic stratagem for addressing the Mexican problem. "G. Bromley Oxnam's Campaign in Mexican Quarter is Showing Results" ran the caption next to a photograph of Oxnam with four Mexican boys along with another heading: "Me An' Manuel's Knights'[:] Small Boys Foes to Dirt." Oxnam had started a club in a neighborhood where, according to the newspaper reporter, "an American housewife would have thrown up her hands at the floor and the flies." The club was called "The Order of Knights of The Round Table" with Oxnam as the young Arthur. "You believe in being very clean, don't you?" he asked his knights. "Yes, Mam," and "Di Signor" they responded, or so the reporter covering the exchange reported, no doubt somewhat linguistically confused himself.¹⁰³

"I chose Arthur as a model," Oxnam told the reporter, "because he is somewhat of a hero and one that embodies principles of right living in his character." Thus, with Arthur, King of the Britons, and Bromley Oxnam entwined as their models, the Mexican boys of the Rhinehart Street Round Table set to work becoming less Mexican. This transition to an Anglo Saxon future required and was based upon rules: the boys (and they were all boys) would always do right, "because it is right"; they would be "kind to girls and ladies"; they would "not fight except for what is right, but when we fight we will never give up"; they would not lie; they would keep their bodies and their clothes clean; they would keep their houses clean ("Dirty houses make sick people"); and they would "love each other."¹⁰⁴

This was Americanization hard at work, part of the reform juggernaut that hit early twentieth-century Los Angeles every bit as hard as it did Chicago or other better-known Progressive sites. Americanization is a complicated beast, some of it arising out of deep wells of humanitarian regard, and some of it, in Carey McWilliams's apt phrasing, "stupid, morose, and biased." Regardless of motive, certain groups and individuals alike in Los Angeles responded with a tremendously ambitious social and educational program of trying to understand (and "reform") "the Mexican." As Oxnam himself saw it, defining the problem was the critical first step on the journey to solution. As such, the Americanization program in Los Angeles was focused upon study after study of one "Mexican" trait or characteristic after another. Ethnic uplift was no doubt a goal, but so too was the simple scholarship of representation; as one 1920s report on Mexican families in Los Angeles declared, the case study of thirty-five Mexican families "represent[s], to a large extent, the entire group of Mexican families in Los

Angeles.” Mexicans were easy, the logic went, to represent. They fit into boxes and stereotype because ethnicity was fate.¹⁰⁵

As one University of Southern California instructor commented in 1916, “the burden of Americanization falls directly upon Los Angeles.”¹⁰⁶ But this was a program without flexibility, already bounded at the start by the strictures of stereotype. Mexicans, read one early report on labor and housing conditions, were “quick to learn as children but slow when grown up. They are with us to stay; we can mold them as we will, and if we groom our horses, feed them, give them shelter and a bed when they have toiled hard for us at work which we would not do for ourselves—shall we do less for the hard-working stranger within our gates whose sons and daughters will soon be our American citizens?”¹⁰⁷

Just as Bromley Oxnam imagined that substitution of Anglo for supposedly essential ethnic traits could move Mexicans along the path to progress, others opted for strategies more national (or at least semantic) in scope. To be sure, these went together in the larger scheme of things: even if the Mexicans in the house court were American citizens, they would not yet be “Americans.” Birthright citizenship status was, in other words, meant to be earned and learned before it could be incurred. But some Americanizing Anglos apparently did believe that Mexicans could be uplifted simply by being renamed, in a gesture to the waning days of regional obsession with the ancient Spanish past. For instance, the Spanish American Institute, a Methodist vocational school for boys started early in the century in Gardena, ten miles south of Los Angeles, was assuredly not for the benefit of the region’s Spanish Americans. The Institute, which some believed to be “the one great solution of the Border problem,” performed its semantic and national sleight, first turning Mexican youths into Spanish boys, after which it became at least theoretically possible to commit more social chemistry and show off these “Boys as New Americans.”¹⁰⁸

Such sentiments were perhaps as coercive (or even cruel) as they were wishful, in that the dominant society had already organized the urban spaces where Juan Garcia and family lived into obvious architectural expressions of a Mexican periphery attached to an Anglo core. *Colonias* leaning against farmlands; barrios at water’s edge; a railroad shack; the Mexican company town arrangements of a place such as Simons, just outside city boundaries, where Mexican workers (“our Mexicans”) dug clay and made bricks at the world’s largest brickyard. All these were Mexican spaces, and they held fast.

We should not forget the power of Anglo institutions to drive the point home. Company towns, like that at the Simons brickyard, the focus of chapter 4 of this book, were but one, albeit highly effective, way of creating and solidifying Mexican space. Unspoken local custom and codified real estate restrictions also helped etch Mexican space sharp on the landscape. "Race segregation is not a serious problem with us," a Whittier realtor proudly declared in the mid-1920s. "Our realtors do not sell [to] Mexicans and Japanese outside certain sections where it is agreed by community custom they shall reside." A fellow realtor not far away in Glendale mixed patriotism with exclusion, without even the slightest recognition of irony. Through enforcement of "suitable race restrictions, we can maintain our high standard of American citizenship," he wrote. This was, presumably, all the more critical in "an American town like Glendale."¹⁰⁹

Should the crudeness of such redlining present any unlikely moral dilemmas to the community, one could always fall back upon the supposedly essential behavioral characteristics of the Mexican. Too many Mexicans in your neighborhood? "Advocate and push improvements," wrote realtor E. Spurlock of Compton, "and the Mexican will move." "The Mexicans can be well handled," wrote Charles Stewart of the Monrovia realty board, sounding ever so much like a plantation overseer, "and [they] are quite reliable." Barrioization allowed those concerned with segregation to offer that one could even count on the ethnic populations of Southern California to do the work of segregation themselves! "The Japanese, Mexican and colored population have segregated themselves in groups largely according to their own wishes," stated a satisfied realtor from Riverside. Such instances of blindness to the ugliness of exclusion must be examined not simply as indications of dissonance but as examples of the dominant society's conviction that there was such a static social and ethnic category as "the Mexican" ("the Japanese," "the Negro," etc.) which entailed certain traits and behaviors. It made it far easier to explain away barrios and *colonias* as a Mexican habit, than as a response to segregation's iron hand. "We have provided a section expressly for Mexicans and Negroes," wrote realtor R. P. Garbutt, as if the action was an example of community pride or progress, which, for many whites and many communities, it was.¹¹⁰

One "Mr. Los Angeles," an important officer of the city's Chamber of Commerce, said, "Juan Garcia has California agriculture and industry in the palm of his hand."¹¹¹ But no one really believed that: there were too many obstacles placed in their path for the "Juan Garcias" of Southern

California to have much, if any, power to confront the ambitions of the dominant society to keep alive that indispensable “Mexican problem.”



Contemporary Los Angeles yet has its Mexican problem, expressed in continued labor segmentation, in vocal and electoral expressions of discrimination, and in anxious attempts to mitigate or even block the demographic inevitabilities of the twenty-first century. In paying close attention to the roots of that shifting problem, this book suggests that there may be promise embedded in the ethnic future of tomorrowland Los Angeles. But promise can be realized only as the result of difficult, even painful, history lessons. Digging beneath the surface of the city's present is the best way historians know to shape ideas into potential action for the future. It is an action—an excavation—predicated on remembering in hopes of forcing change. In continuing that work, we turn next to the ways Los Angeles tried to remake its troubled past as part of the effort to become the self-conscious city of the future. We turn to memory in and memory about Los Angeles, and the ways in which constructions of historical memory shaped the city's sense of self. We turn to the 1890s, to La Fiesta de Los Angeles, and to history on parade.