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The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 To 1928

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[\[Tables\]](#)

On November 16, 1928, four masked men tore into a hospital in Farmington, New Mexico and abducted one of the patients as he lay dying in bed. The kidnappers drove to an abandoned farmhouse on the outskirts of the city where they tied a rope around the neck of their captive and hanged him from a locust tree.¹

The dead man, Rafael Benavides, had been admitted to the hospital with a serious gun wound less than twenty-four hours earlier. His wound was inflicted by a sheriff's posse pursuing him for an assault upon a farmer's wife. According to one newspaper, "the fiendishness and brutality of his acts were such that the postal laws will not permit us to print them."² The abduction and execution of Benavides therefore elicited the approval of many local citizens relieved at the removal from their community of this dangerous menace. In the frank opinion of one newspaper editorial, "the degenerate Mexican got exactly what was coming to him."³ Others were nonetheless more circumspect in their assessment of the lynching. While they did not dispute the guilt of the dead man, they contended that his due punishment could only be determined by a court of law. The *Santa Fe New Mexican* responded to the precipitous action of the mob by stating that it would "take San Juan County a long time to live down the bad name received by this lawless act."⁴ Such an opinion reflected a new racial sensibility among many Anglos in the Southwest. For decades lynch mobs terrorized persons of Mexican origin or descent⁵ without reprisal from the wider community. The more critical attitude taken by the Anglo establishment created a political climate less tolerant of extra-legal violence. Although acts of lawlessness continued, Rafael Benavides became the last Mexican in the United States to be lynched in such blatant defiance of the judicial system.

Although widely recognized in the Mexican community on both sides of the border, and among some scholars, the story of mob violence against Mexicans remains relatively unknown to the wider public. Two recent popular works on lynching—James Allen's *Without Sanctuary* and Philip Dray's *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*—reveal the extent to which the historical narrative of racial violence in the United States excludes Mexicans. In January 2000, the photographs that would later be published in James Allen's *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* went on display at the Roth Horowitz Gallery in New York City. This widely acclaimed exhibit, which was later shown at the New York Historical Society and the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, contained 54 separate images and several artifacts relating to lynching. Forty-five of the images depicted the corpses of African American lynching victims. Seven other photographs showed Anglo fatalities. Images and artifacts relating to the mob murder of Sicilian, Jewish and Chinese immigrants were also included. **[End Page 411]** Yet neither the exhibition nor the accompanying book contain any reference to Mexicans. Although photographic evidence of numerous Mexican lynching victims exists, its omission created a false impression that Mexicans had not been the targets of organized racial violence.⁶ Similar criticisms can be made of Philip Dray. In 2002, Dray published the first national overview of lynching in the United States in more than a half-century. His book, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, was a bestseller and winner of a major literary award. Dray rightfully focuses upon the thousands of African Americans who perished at the hands of Anglo mobs in the Southern United States. Although the book contains some discussion of other ethnic groups, not once in more than five hundred pages does it mention Mexicans.⁷

These popular works of history highlight the extent to which the public is unaware of the lynching of Mexicans. More problematic still is the fact that, despite the recent flourishing of academic literature on lynching, scholars also persistently overlook anti-Mexican violence. Recent years have witnessed an outpouring of new publications on lynching, including studies by Leon Litwack, David Grimsted, Grace Hale, Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., Mark Curriden and Leroy Phillips, Jr., Monte Akers, Michael Fedo, and Christopher Waldrep.⁸ These works, however, focus overwhelmingly on black victims of lynching in the South. Historians, sociologists, and scholars in a variety of disciplines have been deploying exciting new models and theories to help us understand white-on-black mob violence, but they have not thought to include racial violence against Mexicans in their analysis.

Borderlands scholars, by contrast, have been writing about anti-Mexican mob violence for decades. Although no comprehensive work on the lynching of Mexicans was ever produced, several historians have addressed the subject of mob violence against Mexicans in more general terms. Despite the extensive documentation of anti-Mexican mob violence provided by these scholars, historians of lynching continue to ignore the brutal repression of Spanish-speakers in the United States. One reason is that no scholar has attempted to provide an actual count of Mexican lynching victims. Discussions of African American lynching victims in the South have rested upon an actual count of individual cases since the

turn of the twentieth century. The treatment of Mexican lynching victims, by contrast, often rests upon impressionistic estimates. In 1949, Carey McWilliams wrote in *North from Mexico* that "vast research would be required to arrive at an estimate of the number of Mexican lynchings." Over the past fifty years, many scholars of Mexicans in the United States and of life in the American West have echoed McWilliams. According to L.H. Gann and Peter J. Duigan, the number of Mexicans murdered by lynch mobs was "considerable"; in the opinion of Arnoldo De León, it was "amazing." ⁹

There are, of course, good reasons to emphasize estimates over counts. It is obviously true that no amount of historical research will ever reveal every single lynching victim—no matter their race and ethnicity—that is anywhere near the actual number of victims. When introduced and described carefully, precise, well-documented statistics can nonetheless have great value. For better or worse, they play an important role in both academic and public discourse. Certain academics and many members of the public receive estimates of mob violence [End Page 412] with great skepticism. People tend to disbelieve in great tragedies, especially those in which they are complicit. Statistics based upon actual counts also allow comparison between groups, for example, among black lynching victims and Mexican lynching victims.

This essay seeks to expand upon the existing work in the fields of lynching studies and Mexican American history by providing the first systematic analysis of Mexican lynching victims. Our study is based upon extensive archival research that adds to the number of previously documented cases of anti-Mexican mob violence. For instance, the files at Tuskegee Institute contain the most comprehensive count of lynching victims in the United States, but they only refer to the lynching of fifty Mexicans in the states of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. Our own research has revealed a total of 216 victims during the same time period.

This massive undercount is not the only problem. It is not easy to find even the fifty cases included in Tuskegee's records. In every publication and data summary of the Tuskegee materials, the lynching victims are divided into only two categories, "black" and "white." This neat binary division belies historical reality since the list of "white" victims actually included Native Americans, Chinese immigrants, Italians, and Mexicans. In order to determine that 50 of the victims recorded by Tuskegee as "white" were actually of Mexican descent, one has to peruse the original archival records. Tuskegee's binary division of blacks and non-blacks has been widely adopted by other groups collecting lynching data and by the scholars who have written about lynching. The central aim of this study is to broaden the scholarly discourse on lynching by moving beyond the traditional limitations of the black/white paradigm. Placing the experience of Mexicans into the history of lynching expands our understanding of the causes of mob violence and the ways in which individuals and groups sought to resist lynching and vigilantism.

Historical and Comparative Contexts

Between 1848 and 1928, mobs lynched at least 597 Mexicans. Historian Christopher Waldrep has asserted that the definition of lynching has altered so much over the course of

time as to render impossible the accurate collection of data on mob violence. ¹⁰ It is therefore essential to familiarize the reader from the outset with the interpretation of lynching used to compile the statistics in this essay. The authors regard lynching as a retributive act of murder for which those responsible claim to be serving the interests of justice, tradition, or community good. Although our notion as to what constitutes a lynching is clear, it is still impossible to provide a precise count of the number of Mexican victims. We have excluded a significant number of reported lynchings when the sources do not allow for verification of specific data such as the date, location or identity of the victim. The statistics included in this essay should therefore be considered a conservative estimate of the actual number of Mexicans lynched in the United States.

Even when one considers the methodological problems in compiling accurate data on lynching, it is clear that Mexicans suffered from mob violence in smaller **[End Page 413]** numbers than African Americans. Between 1882 and 1930, it is commonly noted that at least 3,386 African Americans died at the hands of lynch mobs. Our research reveals, however, that the danger of lynching for a Mexican resident in the United States was nearly as great, and in some instances greater, than the specter of mob violence for a black person in the American South. Because of the smaller size of the Spanish-speaking population, the total number of Mexican victims was much lower, but the chance of being murdered by a mob was comparable for both Mexicans and African Americans.

Comparative data on Mexican and African American lynching victims are unavailable for the years between 1848 and 1879. However, it is still possible to place the number of Mexican victims during this time period in context. As [Table One](#) shows, between 1848 and 1879 Mexicans were lynched at a rate of 473 per 100,000 of population. This statistic is astounding even when compared with African American victims during the period scholars claim was most rife with mob violence—1880 to 1930—and in the most lynch-prone states in the South. During these years, the highest lynching rate for African Americans was in Mississippi, with 52.8 victims per 100,000 of population. On the basis of such comparison, the Mexican population of the United States between 1848 and 1879 faced unparalleled danger from mob violence. The growth of the Mexican population at the turn of the twentieth century and a decline in white-on-Mexican violence led to a substantial decline in the lynching rate after 1880. Nevertheless, the figure of 27.4 Mexican lynching victims per 100,000 of population for that period exceeds the statistics during the same time for black victims in some southern states and nearly equals that in others. Between 1880 and 1930, for instance, the lynching rate for African Americans in South Carolina and North Carolina respectively was 18.8 and 11.0 per 100,000 of population. In Alabama, the figure was 32.4. These figures suggest that Mexicans faced a similar risk of lynching as African Americans in some states of the Deep South. (Further information on how these statistics were calculated can be found in the [Appendix](#).)

Statistics alone can never explain lynching in the United States. More than other Americans, blacks and Mexicans lived with the threat of lynching throughout the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The story of Mexican lynching is not a footnote in history but rather a critical chapter in the history of Anglo western expansion and conquest. If the story of lynching is essential to understanding the

African American experience, then lynching is equally important to the story of the Mexican American experience.

As [Table Two](#) demonstrates, the lynchings occurred most commonly in the four southwestern states where Mexicans were concentrated in largest number. Lynching patterns varied significantly within the southwestern states. A comprehensive **[End Page 414]** treatment of the subject would emphasize the distinctive patterns of mob violence that developed in each of the four states. Mob violence in Texas, for example, differed significantly from lynching in California. Furthermore, lynching varied within state borders as well. Differences between Northern and Southern California, without question, impacted anti-Mexican violence. In spite of the significant differences among states and regions, certain patterns do emerge.

Limitations of Traditional Frontier Violence Theories

Western historians have traditionally portrayed extra-legal violence as an essential function of the frontier. According to this interpretation, the economic and demographic development of the frontier rapidly outpaced the growth of legal and governmental institutions. Faced with the absence or impotence of proper legal authorities, frontiersmen were forced to take the law into their own hands. Vigilantism therefore served a legitimate purpose in the settlement of the American West, preserving the fragile order and security of frontier communities, and paving the way for the establishment of a formal legal system. ¹¹ The historian Richard Maxwell Brown is the most well known exponent of this interpretative model. In his opinion, vigilantism "was a positive facet of the American experience. Many a new frontier community gained order and stability as the result of vigilantism that reconstructed the community pattern and values of the old settled areas, while dealing effectively with crime and disorder." ¹²

Frontier conditions undoubtedly fostered the growth of vigilantism in general. Nonetheless, the conventional interpretation of western violence cannot be applied to the lynching of Mexicans. The most serious criticism of the "socially constructive" model of vigilantism espoused by Richard Maxwell Brown is that it legitimates the actions of lawbreakers. There is an implicit presumption in the civic virtue of the vigilantes and the criminal guilt of their victims. In **[End Page 415]** truth, the popular tribunals that put Mexicans to death can seldom be said to have acted in the spirit of the law. According to Joseph Caughey, vigilante committees persisted in their activities "long after the arrival" of the law courts. ¹³ However, Anglos refused to recognize the legitimacy of these courts when they were controlled or influenced by Mexicans. Determined to redress the balance of racial and political power, they constructed their own parallel mechanisms of justice. This is precisely what occurred in Socorro, New Mexico during the 1880s, when an Anglo vigilance committee arose in opposition to the predominantly Mexican legal authorities. ¹⁴ These committees showed little respect for the legal rights of Mexicans, executing them in disproportionately large numbers. Their actions therefore amounted to institutionalized discrimination. ¹⁵

Another crucial factor to consider is that only a small number of Mexican lynching victims—64 out of a total of 597—met their fate at the hands of vigilante committees acting in the absence of a formal judicial system. Most were summarily executed by mobs that denied the accused even the semblance of a trial. These mobs acted less out of a rational interest in law and order than an irrational prejudice towards racial minorities. Their members expressed contempt for the due process of law by snatching suspected Mexican criminals from courtrooms or prison cells and then executing them. In June 1874, Jesus Romo was arrested for robbery and attempted murder near Puente Creek in California. Romo was grabbed from the arresting officer by a gang of masked men who tied a rope around his neck and hanged him. Such was the presumption of his guilt in the minds of the mob that it precluded the need for him to stand trial. The *Los Angeles Star* commended the decision to dispense with legal formalities, declaring that Romo was "a hardened and blood-stained desperado, who deserved richly the fate which overtook him."¹⁶ In this and other instances the mob was motivated by unsubstantiated assertions and an impulsive instinct for vengeance. Their actions therefore did not so much uphold the law as oppose its proper implementation. A similar incident occurred in April 1877 when Andres Martinez and Jose Maria Cordena were arrested for horse theft in Collins County, Texas. The two men never saw the inside of a courtroom but were instead seized from the custody of the authorities by ten masked men and shot dead.¹⁷

The spatial distribution of Mexican lynchings also confounds those who suggest that remote locations forced vigilantes to take extralegal action. Many episodes of anti-Mexican mob violence involve lynch mobs that broke into jails to retrieve their victims. To be sure, there were times when lynch mobs operated in isolated mining camps, in out-of-the-way gulches, or on sparsely-settled ranchlands. Even in these cases, however, lynch mobs often sought out these remote locations in order to avoid the negative attention that a more public lynching would generate. On July 13, 1877 masked men in San Juan, California seized Justin Arajo, a Mexican arrested for the murder of an Anglo, and took him to a remote roadside where they hanged him from a willow tree.¹⁸

The lynching of Mexicans not only occurred in areas where there was a fully operating legal system but often involved the active collusion of law officers themselves. In February 1857 a justice of the peace assembled an unwilling audience of Mexicans outside the San Gabriel mission to watch as he decapitated Miguel Soto and then stabbed repeatedly at the corpse.¹⁹ The most systematic abuse of legal authority was by the Texas Rangers. Their brutal repression of the [End Page 416] Mexican population was tantamount to state-sanctioned terrorism. Although the exact number of those murdered by the Rangers is unknown, historians estimate that it ran into the hundreds and even thousands.²⁰ In March 1881, Rangers crossed the border into Mexico and illegally arrested Onofrio Baca on a charge of murder. Baca was returned without extradition orders to the United States where he was handed over to a mob "and strung up to the cross beams of the gate in the court house yard until he was dead."²¹ The terrorizing of Mexicans continued well into the twentieth century. On October 18, 1915, Mexican outlaws derailed a train travelling towards Brownsville, killing several passengers. Some who survived the crash were robbed

and murdered by the bandits. The Rangers exacted brutal revenge. Two Mexican passengers aboard the train were shot for their supposed assistance of the raid. The Rangers then executed eight suspected Mexican criminals along the banks of the Rio Grande. ²²

The reality is that the legal system not only failed to protect Mexicans but served as an instrument of their oppression. Only under pressure from the federal government were local and state authorities willing to investigate acts of mob violence. Even when these investigations were carried out, they inevitably failed to identify those responsible. As a result, almost no white man was ever made to stand trial for the lynching of a Mexican. As the U.S. Consul in Matamoros, Thomas Wilson, testified to Congress, "when an aggression is made upon a Mexican it is not much minded. For instance, when it is known that a Mexican has been hung or killed...there is seldom any fuss made about it; while, on the contrary, if a white man happens to be despoiled in any way, there is a great fuss made about it by those not of Mexican origin." ²³

Race and Conquest

The traditional interpretation of western violence will clearly not suffice. It is instead our conviction that racial prejudice was the primary force in fomenting mob violence against Mexicans. This perspective on western violence has suffered undue neglect from scholars. In a recent essay, one of the foremost historians of western violence writes that there were six essential "beliefs" that underpinned acts of physical conflict throughout the region. Race is not one of them. ²⁴ This tendency to downplay the influence of race is also apparent in a study of two frontier communities by Roger McGrath. In the absence of any serious racial conflict within these communities, he confidently asserts that "it would seem that the frontier, instead of representing America at its worst may have, in many respects, represented the nation at its best." ²⁵

Only with the emergence of the New Western History has there been recognition of the pervasive influence of racial prejudice. As Patricia Nelson Limerick asserted in her seminal work *The Legacy of Conquest*, the history of the West has been characterized by a continuing contest for cultural dominance between Anglos and non-white minorities, a contest that has bred brutal acts of violence. ²⁶ In recognition of this, Arnolde De León has declared it is time that "historians should revive the issue of 'race' as an analytical frame of reference for understanding western history." ²⁷

The lynching of Mexicans underlines the centrality of class and race in the American colonization of the American West. The bitter racial enmity of the **[End Page 417]** U.S.-Mexican War had an enduring legacy long after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established nominal peace. Well into the twentieth century the majority white culture continued to utilize extra-legal violence against Mexicans as a means of asserting its sovereignty over the region. The lynching of Mexicans was one of the mechanisms by which Anglos consolidated their colonial control of the American West. Mob violence contributed to the displacement of the Mexican population from the land, denial of access to natural resources, political disfranchisement, and economic dependency upon an Anglo

controlled capitalist order. ²⁸

The racial identity of Mexicans was to a considerable degree determined by their class status. The earliest Anglo settlers to the Southwest saw the native ruling elite as a superior racial group to the mass of Mexican laborers. Travellers such as Richard Henry Dana asserted that the ruling classes could trace a direct line of descent from the Spanish colonists of the seventeenth century. Their racial purity elevated them to a position of social superiority over the majority of the Mexican population. As Dana put it, "each person's caste is decided by the quality of the blood, which shows itself, too plainly to be concealed, at first sight." ²⁹ While most Mexicans were restricted to a status of permanent racial subordination, a small minority were therefore able to secure the social advantages of whiteness. Their position as whites acted as a protective shield against mob violence. Although the elite often suffered assaults against their property, they seldom experienced injury in person. On occasion, Anglos even invited their involvement in vigilance committees. ³⁰

In contrast to the elite, lower class Mexicans were classified as a distinct and inferior racial other. Mexican lynching victims were overwhelmingly members of the impoverished laboring class. The majority of Mexicans occupied a liminal position within the racial hierarchy of the southwestern states. The law classified them as white. However, the social antipathy of Anglos undermined their de jure status. The contemporary discourse on race relations perpetuated the notion that lower class Mexicans were a hybrid of Anglo, Indian, Spanish and African blood. Their impure status pushed them to the margins of whiteness, precluding their entitlement to many of its social privileges. As a track foreman interviewed in Dimmit County, Texas observed in the late 1920s, "They are an inferior race. I would not think of classing Mexicans as whites." ³¹

The racial attitudes of Anglos resulted in disastrous consequences. Mexicans found themselves dispossessed of their land by a combination of force and fraud. The new urban economy of the late nineteenth century afforded them few opportunities, confining them for the most part to poorly paid manual labor. The combined forces of economic discrimination and racial prejudice in turn restricted Mexicans to their own ethnic neighborhoods, or barrios, which became breeding grounds for poverty, disease, and crime. ³² This spatial separation from Anglos compounded what the sociologist Roberta Senechal de la Roche describes as the cultural and relational distance between Mexicans and Anglos. The two peoples spoke a different language and practiced different forms of religious worship. ³³

The physical and psychological boundaries between the two races therefore resulted in mutual misunderstanding and suspicion. In particular, it helped to **[End Page 418]** perpetuate the racial stereotyping of Mexicans as a cruel and treacherous people with a natural proclivity toward criminal behavior. As one Anglo author observed, "The Spanish Americans are held in sovereign contempt by citizens, and are stigmatized with being filthy, ignorant, lazy and vicious." ³⁴ These stereotypes instilled the conviction that Mexicans constituted a violent threat to the established social order. This in turn provided Anglos with the pretext for acts of repressive violence. In the words of California gold prospector Elias

S. Ketcham, "many persons who are prejudiced, say they are all alike, a set of cut throats + should be exterminated, or drove out of the country." ³⁵

The primacy of racial prejudice is underlined by the acts of ritualized torture and sadism that accompanied the lynching of Mexicans. As [Table Three](#) shows, 52 of the Mexican lynching victims recorded in our data suffered some act of physical mutilation. The most common forms of maiming were the burning and shooting of bodies after they had been hanged, although there were more extreme examples. In February 1856, the body of a Mexican horse thief was discovered in a ravine near the Californian Mission San Gabriel. The dead man had been shot four times, his body hacked by a knife blade, and his tongue cut out. ³⁶ Vigilantes in Virginia City, Montana, similarly dismembered a suspected Mexican murderer. Joe Pizantia was hanged and his corpse first shot and then burned. ³⁷ Although Anglos also suffered at the hands of lynch mobs, their executions occurred without elaborate ceremony. By contrast, in turning the lynching of Mexicans into a public spectacle, Anglos sent a powerful warning that they would not tolerate any challenge to their cultural and political hegemony.

A similar conclusion can be made with regard to the high number of multiple lynching cases. Accusations of criminal misconduct by an individual Mexican resulted in indiscriminate acts of retribution. The identity of the victim was therefore of less consequence than the symbolic message contained in the mob's violent reassertion of Anglo sovereignty. In September 1919, two Mexicans were lynched in revenge for the murder of a local police officer by a mob in Pueblo, Colorado. Later it was disclosed that the prisoners awaiting trial for the murder had been removed for their protection to another jail. As one newspaper observed, "the mob with its usual lack of discrimination and reasoning simply took two Mexicans found in the jail and hanged them." ³⁸ In total, of the 285 acts of mob violence recorded in our data, 113 involved multiple lynchings. These figures include some of the largest lynchings in the United States. In July 1877, for instance, Anglos in Nueces County, Texas, avenged the murder of Lee Rabb by randomly slaughtering as many as forty Mexicans. ³⁹

Racial prejudice alone cannot account for the lynching of Mexicans. An **[End Page 419]** assessment of the supposed crimes committed by Mexican mob victims indicates the additional importance of gender. As [Table Four](#) shows, Anglos lynched only nine Mexicans for alleged transgressions of sexual norms. Among these victims was Aureliano Castellón, murdered by a mob in Senior, Texas following an attempted assault on a fifteen-year-old girl. ⁴⁰ This was nonetheless an exceptional incident.

An explanation for this phenomenon is to be found in the gendered construction of Mexican racial identity. The dominant discourse of the nineteenth century drew distinctions between "masculine" and "feminine" races. Mexicans were classified according to the latter category. ⁴¹ Anglo stereotypes of Mexican males therefore emphasized their supposed lack of traditional masculine virtue. Mexican men were denied the attributes of honor, honesty, and loyalty. Instead they were defined as unprincipled, conniving, and treacherous. "The men are tall and robust," wrote Theodore T. Johnson in 1849, "but appear effeminate in their

fancy serapas, under which they invariably conceal their ready and cowardly knife." ⁴² The effeminization of Mexicans encouraged Anglos to accuse them of such crimes as cheating at cards or cowardly acts of murder. At the same time, it also diminished their sexual menace to whites. As the economist Paul Schuster Taylor observed, Mexicans were less commonly seen as carnal predators than were African Americans. ⁴³ [End Page 420]

Mexican women as well as men suffered from racial stereotyping. Anglos drew distinctions between Mexican women on the basis of class and race. ⁴⁴ The earliest Anglo settlers to the Southwest sought to increase their access to political control and possession of natural resources through intermarriage with the native ruling class. In order to encourage social acceptance of such unions, Anglos claimed that elite Mexican women were the racially pure descendants of the Spanish conquistadores. This emphasis upon a shared European cultural and biological heritage allowed Anglos to claim the social privileges of whiteness for their Mexican spouses. Popular literature romanticized elite Mexican women as uncommonly beautiful, graceful, and sophisticated. As Alfred Robinson, who married into an elite Californio family, affirmed: "perhaps there are few places in the world where, in proportion to the number of inhabitants, can be found more chastity, industrious habits, and correct deportment, than among the women of this place." ⁴⁵

Mexican women of the lower classes were less immune to pejorative racial stereotypes. Anglo attitudes toward the mass of Mexican women were conditioned by their own ethnocentric notions of proper female behavior. The "cult of domesticity" delineated the appropriate social role of women as that of home maker. Women were perceived as the personification of moral propriety and entrusted with the responsibility to impart that virtue to their husbands and children. Anglos judged lower class Mexican women by this culturally specific standard, and found them wanting. The racial discourse of the nineteenth century portrayed Mexican women as the inverse reflection of their idealized Anglo counterparts. While Anglo women were considered pious and chaste, Mexican females were seen as depraved and sexually promiscuous. The popular stereotype of the Mexican prostitute gained powerful cultural currency during the California Gold Rush. Anglos asserted that Mexican women in the mines turned to prostitution as a result less of their marginalized economic status than of their innate moral degeneracy. According to the authors of a contemporary history of California, "The lewdness of fallen white females is shocking enough to witness, but it is by far exceeded by the disgusting practices of these tawny visaged creatures." ⁴⁶ The bestial status of Mexican females was also stressed by a prospector who wrote home to his wife that "Most of the women of this country are Mexican, just about half as good-looking as cows and just about as neat as cows." ⁴⁷

The classification of Mexican women as an inferior racial other legitimized their execution by lynch mobs. This is clearly illustrated by the hanging of a Mexican woman named Josefa Segovia in Downieville, California on July 5, 1851. Josefa was accused of the murder of Frederick Canon, who had drunkenly attempted to assault her after breaking into her home. Had Josefa been an Anglo woman, she would have been praised for defending her honor. However, her degraded racial status ensured that she was seen as the criminal aggressor. ⁴⁸

Racism was also intertwined with another determining factor in mob violence against Mexicans, economic competition. Anglos considered Mexicans an innately lazy and unenterprising people who had failed to exploit the rich natural resources of the Southwest. Thus it was the manifest destiny of the superior Anglo to develop the economic potential of the region. Mexican rivalry for land [**End Page 421**] and precious metals was therefore considered an unacceptable challenge to the proprietary rights of Anglo pioneers.

The most striking illustration of this is the California Gold Rush. According to one estimate, as many as 25,000 Mexicans migrated to the mining regions of California between 1848 and 1852. The Mexicans not only arrived in the mines earlier than many Anglo prospectors, but brought with them superior expertise and skills. Their rapid prosperity aroused the bitter animosity of those Anglos who believed in their own natural sovereignty over the mines. As the *Alta California* observed, Anglos reacted to "the superior and uniform success" of their ethnic rivals "with the feeling which has for some time existed against the Mexican miners, one of envy and jealousy."⁴⁹ The introduction of a Foreign Miners' Tax in April 1850 fueled ethnic violence since it sanctioned the expulsion of prospectors who could or would not pay.⁵⁰ In total, at least 163 Mexicans were lynched in California between 1848 and 1860. Countless others were driven from the mines in fear of their safety. According to a meeting organized by miners at Rodgers' Bar in August 1850, "Many persons of Spanish origin, against whom there had not been a word of complaint, have been murdered by these ruffians. Others have been robbed of their horses, mules, arms, and even money, by these persons, while acting as they pretended under the authority of the law."⁵¹

Mob violence became a common method of Anglo settlers as they sought to secure their control over the incipient capitalist economy of the southwestern states. The Texas Cart War of 1857 is a potent example. During the 1850s, Tejano businessmen developed a freight-hauling service between Indianola and San Antonio. Anglos resentfully turned upon the Mexican rivals whose lower prices had beaten them out of business. According to a report by the Mexican Embassy in Washington, posses of armed men "have been organized for the exclusive purpose of hunting down Mexicans on the highway, spoiling them of their property and putting them to death."⁵²

There is one further factor that accounts for the phenomenon of mob violence: diplomatic hostilities between the United States and Mexico. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo secured formal peace between the two countries, tensions persisted as a result of the turbulence along their mutual border. As [Table Five](#) shows, the most serious outbreaks of anti-Mexican mob violence occurred during the 1850s, the 1870s, and the 1910s, decades characterized by intense ethnic strife in the borderlands. Diplomatic relations between the two nations deteriorated as each blamed the other for the troubles. As diplomatic tensions increased, so the violence in the borderlands became even more intense. Thus there was created a downward spiral of recrimination and violence.

After a period of relative stability during the American Civil War, the 1870s witnessed a

renewed era of conflict. Much of the cause rested with the creation of a free trade zone. Smugglers and cattle raiders from both sides crossed the border in blatant defiance of the law. Mexican raids culminated in March 1875 when a large band of outlaws crossed into Texas near Eagle Pass and spread eastwards toward Corpus Christi in pursuit of cattle. Anglos retaliated by terrorizing local Mexican settlers, burning their homes, and shooting them in cold blood. As a **[End Page 422]** US Army officer testified, "there is a considerable Texas element in the country bordering on the Nueces that think the killing of a Mexican no crime." In total, at least 147 Mexicans were lynched during the 1870s, more than in any other decade. [53](#)

A similar situation arose during the Mexican Revolution. Between 1911 and 1920, Anglos lynched at least 124 Mexicans. The resurgence in mob violence resulted from incursions into Texas by Mexican bandits and revolutionaries. Anglos also became increasingly alarmed about the loyalties of the Mexican population within their midst, suspecting them of supporting revolutionary extremists who sought to reannex the land lost to the United States in the nineteenth century. Determined to secure their territorial boundaries, Anglos launched a series of brutal counter-offensives. Hundreds of Mexican families fled Texas in search of safety. According to one official who assisted the repatriation of these families, "they cannot live any longer in the State of Texas, as they are denied protection and many have been killed by irresponsible armed posses who have killed innocent people without reason." [54](#)

Mexican Resistance to Mob Violence

Scholars have in recent years given increasing emphasis to black resistance against mob violence. Their research has demonstrated how African Americans constructed a "culture of opposition" through actions that spanned the spectrum of political insurgency. Historians are nonetheless cautious about the need to strike a balance in their analysis between the personal agency of blacks and the oppressive political and economic constraints imposed by the Jim Crow system. As Leon Litwack asserts, African American resistance remained "spontaneous, unorganized, individualistic, and quickly and ruthlessly suppressed." [55](#) Not until the establishment in 1910 of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) did African Americans possess the permanent institutional base upon which to push for federal anti-lynching legislation. [56](#)

Mexicans also implemented numerous strategies of resistance that challenged the legitimacy of mob law in the southwestern states. The discussion of this resistance **[End Page 423]** that follows is necessarily episodic, highlighting particular individuals and events. Resistance, particularly armed self-defense by individuals and localized groups, was nearly constant throughout the period. Protest by regional civil rights organizations and by the Mexican government occurred less regularly, though with increasing frequency in the twentieth century. The analysis that follows does not pretend to be comprehensive but seeks instead to outline the most common forms of resistance employed by Mexicans in the United States and to suggest something of the efficacy of these acts of protest.

Without recourse to local or state authorities, it was inevitable that Mexicans should themselves assume responsibility for avenging the victims of mob violence. Frustration at the indifference and delay that dogged official investigations fueled the thirst for vigilante justice. In May 1885, the *San Antonio Express* reported that a white ranch overseer had been murdered in retaliation for the lynching of Mexicans in Laredo. "No one is ignorant of the late and numerous assassinations perpetrated upon the persons of Mexicans. We do not say, nor do we believe, that Mr. Murtrie had taken part in the assassinations, but he is a compatriot of the assassins, and he who gave him the death blow, as is believed, is a compatriot of the assassinated Mexicans." ⁵⁷

Most acts of armed resistance were localized and ephemeral. Once the perpetrators had accomplished their purpose to correct an abuse of justice, their forces dispersed and the social order was restored. Yet occasionally the cumulative impact of white violence stirred such bitter resentment as to incite a coordinated counter-offensive. The conflict between Mexican outlaws and Anglo authorities in particular assumed the characteristics of a race war. While his actual historical identity is still contested by scholars, the most infamous of these outlaws was undoubtedly Joaquín Murietta. Murietta was one of the thousands of Mexicans driven from the gold mines of California. Although he attempted to establish an honest trade around the camps as a merchant, he was accused of horse theft and severely whipped. His half-brother was hanged for the same offense. Twice a victim of white brutality, Murietta turned to violence until his death several years later. ⁵⁸ Other notorious bandit leaders included Tiburcio Vásquez and Juan Cortina, who between 1859 and 1873 engaged in a series of bitter and bloody confrontations with the U.S. military.

Scholars commonly describe these Mexican outlaws as "social bandits." ⁵⁹ Their criminal behavior was specifically conditioned by the racially oppressive climate of the Southwest. Dispossessed of their economic resources and their political rights, the outlaws launched a direct retaliatory assault upon the Anglo populace. Anglos refused to distinguish between general lawlessness and legitimate acts of resistance, indiscriminately labelling any challenge to their legal and political power as "banditry." Although some "bandits" did engage in indiscriminate acts of lawlessness, others explicitly assumed the mantle of political revolutionaries. Juan Cortina proclaimed that he was an instrument of divine retribution, sent to avenge those Mexicans murdered and dispossessed by whites. As he once observed: "There are to be found criminals covered with frightful crimes, but they appear to have impunity until opportunity furnish them a victim; to these monsters indulgence is shown, because they are not of our race, which is unworthy, as they say, to belong to the human species." ⁶⁰ [End Page 424]

The confrontational tactics pursued by Mexican outlaws proved counter-productive. White authorities utilized the full enforcement power of the law in response to these raids, beating, arresting, and murdering suspected criminals. This in turn strengthened the bitter resolve of the outlaws. A vicious circle of violence and retribution was therefore created. In October 1859, Texas Rangers lynched Tomás Cabrera, a leading member of the Cortina gang. An enraged Cortina immediately launched a bloody assault on white settlers near Brownsville.

Whites retaliated by assaulting innocent Mexicans throughout the region.⁶¹ As this episode suggests, the persistence of outlaw raids appeared to confirm Anglo prejudices about the innate lawlessness of the entire Mexican population. Rumors spread throughout the borderlands that Mexicans secretly conspired with insurrectionists on the other side of the Rio Grande. Mexicans were therefore warned that unless they controlled the outlaws within their midst, they risked brutal reprisals. As the *Weekly Arizona Miner* exclaimed in September 1873: "Cut throats from Mexico have commenced another bloody crusade against American citizens, and we call upon our Government to take measures that will, forever, put a stop to the diabolical crimes of the half-civilized, semi-devils of the accursed land of Montezuma. Nothing short of the conquest of Mexico, by our government, can cure the disorders of that paralyzed country or quench the thirst of its miserable people for American blood."⁶²

Nothing more dramatically illustrates the futility of armed retaliation against whites than the Plan of San Diego. In January 1915 a small band of Mexicans signed a revolutionary manifesto calling upon the racial minorities of the southwestern states to violently overthrow white rule in the region. In its wake the insurrectionists sought to establish separate borderland republics for Mexicans, Indians, and African Americans. "Yankee arrogance has reached its limit," asserted the authors of the plan; "it is not content with the daily lynching of men, it now seeks to lynch an entire people, a whole race, an entire continent. And it is against this arrogance that we must unite." Under the leadership of Aniceto Pizana and Luis de la Rosa, the insurrectionists undertook a series of bloody raids. The authorities responded by indiscriminately slaughtering unknown numbers of innocent Mexicans in a manner reminiscent of Russian pogroms. As one scholar has suggested, "open season" was declared "on any Mexican caught in the open armed or without a verifiable excuse for his activities."⁶³

Although brutally repressed, the actions of Mexican outlaws served an important psychological purpose. As Manuel Gonzales observes, they provided the Mexican population with a potent symbol of resistance against their oppression.⁶⁴ The mere existence of men such as Tiburcio Vásquez and Juan Cortina constituted a direct challenge to the legitimacy of white mob rule. In the words of one Anglo, Cortina "was received as the champion of his race—as the man who would right the wrongs the Mexicans had received."⁶⁵ While perceived as ruthless and unrepentant criminals by Anglos, Mexicans therefore hailed the "bandits" as folk heroes. Their lives became immortalized through the corridos sung on the southwestern border. These tales of heroism enabled a disempowered Mexican population to strike back at least rhetorically against those who sought to crush ethnic dissent. The spirit of cultural resistance implicit in the corridos is reflected in a first person narrative about the life and legend of Joaquín Murrieta: **[End Page 425]**

Now I go out onto roads
To kill Americans
You were the cause
Of my brother's death
You took him defenseless

You disgraceful American. [66](#)

Armed resistance was not the only means by which Mexicans sought to counter Anglo aggression. Spanish-language newspapers such as *El Clamor Público* and *El Fronterizo* published numerous anti-lynching editorials that articulated the anger and frustration of their readers. The white mainstream press continued to accept the actions of lynch mobs largely without question. Mexican American newspapers therefore provided an important counternarrative to the conventional discourse on ethnic violence. [67](#)

It was not until the early twentieth century, however, that Mexicans organized in formal defense of their civil rights. One incident in particular appears to have provided the catalyst. In 1911, Antonio Gómez, a fourteen-year-old boy, was arrested for murder in Thorndale, Texas. Gómez was seized by a mob of over a hundred people who hanged him and then dragged his corpse through the streets of the town. Mexicans acknowledged the need for urgent collective action through the establishment of new civil rights organizations. In June 1911, Mexican activists established a new organization named La Agrupación in order to provide legal protection against Anglo aggressors. Three months later, in September 1911, four hundred representatives assembled at El Primer Congreso Mexicanista in Laredo, Texas. The delegates denounced the brutal oppression of their people that had continued unchecked since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Out of these discussions it was agreed to establish a new civil rights organization with the express purpose of protecting its members against white injustice. La Grán Liga Mexicanista de Beneficiencia y Protección intended to attract the support of wealthy philanthropists and the liberal press in order "to strike back at the hatred of some bad sons of Uncle Sam who believe themselves better than the Mexicans because of the magic that surrounds the word *white*". [68](#) Another civil rights organization, La Liga Protectora Latina, was founded in Phoenix, Arizona in February 1915. [69](#)

How successful these incipient civil rights groups were in their struggle to end lynching is difficult to assess. Mexicans were able to coordinate their resistance against lynching through the creation of a permanent organizational opposition. Yet the defense agencies also operated in a politically repressive environment which seriously impeded the momentum of their anti-lynching campaigns. In 1929, Mexicans founded another defense agency, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). The observations of one LULAC organizer underline the difficulties of mobilizing Mexican Americans, especially in small towns and remote rural areas. Like many of his colleagues, the organizer was confronted with a paradoxical problem. The only way to prevent further lynchings was for Mexicans to rally in protest. Yet it was the very fear of mob violence that frightened them into silence. "The Mexican people were afraid of coming into town for a meeting," observed the organizer, "because they thought they [End Page 426] were going to be shot at or lynched if we had our meeting at the courthouse. The courthouse to them was just a medium or a means of being punished. Most of the time, even when they were innocent of what they were being accused of, somebody would just find a goat for something, and the goat would be a Mexican." [70](#)

More than any other form of resistance, it was ultimately the diplomatic protests of the Mexican government that proved decisive in the decline of mob violence. The Mexican government made repeated protests as early as the 1850s against the "unjustly depressed and miserable condition" of its citizens.⁷¹ Diplomatic appeals became louder and more persistent with the election of Porfirio Díaz to the Mexican presidency in 1877. By the time Díaz assumed office, relations between the United States and Mexico had been stretched almost to breaking point as each nation blamed the other for the lawlessness along their mutual border. Díaz was determined to reduce the deepening diplomatic tensions between the two nations in order to facilitate trade links. To this end, he instructed the appropriate consuls to compile reports on the condition of Mexican nationals along the Texas border. The reports documented numerous acts of brutality and abuses of justice. Yet despite the hopes of the Díaz administration, this initiative did not instigate a new era of mutual cooperation with the United States. The authorities in Washington declined to involve themselves even indirectly in the internal affairs of Texas.⁷²

During the next two decades, Mexican officials continued to draw the attention of the U.S. State Department to the suffering of their citizens. Even so, their outrage was ignored. In 1881, the Mexican Ambassador reported to Secretary of State James Blaine the lynching of an alleged horse thief in Willcox, Arizona. Although Blaine conceded that the man was hanged illegally, he also observed that he and his accomplice "were probably outlaws" and that he therefore deserved his fate. This conclusion was based entirely on the testimony of local sheriff R. H. Paul. According to Paul, "The southeastern portion of the Territory has been under the control of the worst and most desperate class of outlaws," and "an example was needed in order to put an end to so deplorable a state of affairs."⁷³ The uncritical acceptance of this testimony was typical of the investigations conducted by the State Department. Rather than send its own representatives to the scene of a lynching, it relied entirely upon reports written by local officials who condoned the actions of the mob if indeed they were not actual members of it.

It was not until the 1890s that the protests of Mexican officials finally started to receive a positive response from the State Department. On August 26, 1895, a mob stormed the jailhouse at Yreka, California and seized four men awaiting trial on separate murder charges. The prisoners were hauled into the courthouse square and hanged from an iron rail fastened into the forks of two trees. One of the victims, Luis Moreno, was a Mexican.⁷⁴ The Mexican government demanded that those responsible be punished and that a suitable indemnity be paid to the heirs of Moreno. Although a grand jury failed to return any indictments against members of the mob, President McKinley did recommend to Congress the payment of a \$2,000 indemnity.⁷⁵ The Moreno case established a precedent for the later lynchings of Mexican nationals in the United States.⁷⁶ [End Page 427]

After the repeated failure of the federal government to respond to Mexican protests, what provoked this change of policy? By the late nineteenth century the United States was receiving criticism from governments throughout the world for its inability to protect foreign nationals on its soil. Although it continued to insist that it had no authority to

intervene in the affairs of individual states, the federal government did endeavor to resolve any incipient diplomatic crises by providing financial compensation to the families of lynching victims. This occurred after the massacre of Chinese miners at Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1888 and again following three separate attacks on Sicilian immigrants in Louisiana during the 1890s. The indemnities paid to the families of Mexican lynching victims should therefore be seen in the context of efforts by the federal government to safeguard the international reputation of the United States. ⁷⁷

The diplomatic protests of the Díaz administration must also be seen as a response to growing grassroots pressure from the Mexican people. By the early twentieth century, the regime faced rising criticism for allowing the massive investment of U.S. capital to undermine Mexican economic autonomy. ⁷⁸ The Díaz administration therefore protested American mob violence as a means of demonstrating its protection of Mexican national interests. A case in point is the lynching of Antonio Rodríguez in Rock Springs, Texas. On November 3, 1910, a mob broke into the local jail where Rodríguez was awaiting trial for murder, smothered his body with oil, and burned him at the stake. According to local residents, "the action of the mob was justified as the lives of the ranchers' wives had been unsafe because of the attempted ravages of Mexican settlers along the Rio Grande." Newspaper reports, however, revealed that there was no evidence to connect Rodríguez with the crime. ⁷⁹

The lynching provoked a storm of protest throughout Mexico. Rioting erupted in Mexico City on November 8 as angry demonstrators stoned the windows of American businesses and tore and spat at the United States flag. Three days later, rioters in Guadalajara wrecked similar damage against American property. In Chihuahua, American citizens were openly mobbed on the streets. Tensions along the Rio Grande were so strained that an estimated two thousand Texans armed themselves in advance of a suspected Mexican invasion. Although the Díaz administration denounced the violence, it reacted to popular pressure by imposing an economic boycott of U.S. imports. ⁸⁰

Whether or not the Díaz administration had ulterior motives in protesting the lynching of Antonio Rodríguez, diplomatic pressure prevailed. It was now increasingly evident to the United States that Mexico would not tolerate the continued abuse of its citizens. As *The Independent* asserted, the people of Mexico had risen "in righteous wrath" against Anglo oppression. Diplomatic tensions would deteriorate still further unless the federal government took decisive action to protect the rights of Mexican nationals. ⁸¹

The persistence of international protests undoubtedly played a key role in the eventual decline of Mexican lynchings. At the same time several other forces conspired to facilitate change, not only in Washington but throughout the Southwest. The end of the Mexican Revolution induced a new period of stability in the turbulent southwestern borderlands. It should also be stressed [**End Page 428**] that lynching in all its forms was in decline by the 1920s. The regional campaigns of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching worked in conjunction with the national lobbying of the NAACP to mobilize liberal opposition to mob violence.

Although the protests of these civil rights organizations had little immediate impact upon the Southwest, their efforts served to delegitimize lynching throughout the United States. [82](#)

Acts of racial violence against Mexicans continued sporadically throughout the 1920s. Yet where earlier administrations had signally failed to secure justice for the families of Mexican lynch victims, the federal government now took tough interventionist action. Perhaps the most telling example of the impact of Mexican protest is the case of four Mexicans lynched in Raymondsville, Texas in September 1926. Initial reports of the lynchings were wildly contradictory. According to Sheriff Raymond Teller, the Mexicans had been arrested for the murder of two of his officers. Teller was taking the suspects from jail out into the countryside in search of their cache of arms when he was ambushed. The prisoners were killed in the resultant gunfight. Yet according to other testimony, Teller and his officers had themselves tortured and then shot the Mexicans. For decades the State Department had, in its investigations of Mexican lynchings, invariably taken the reports of local law officers on face value. These reports repeatedly failed to identify those responsible for the lynchings, instead concluding vaguely that the victims had met their deaths at the hands of persons unknown. This case demonstrated a new determination to avoid diplomatic tensions with Mexico over the lynching of its citizens on American soil. Not only did the State Department reject the conclusions of the Sheriff's report, but Teller and his fellow officers were tried for murder. [83](#)

Conclusion

In 1916 a Wisconsin newspaper observed: "That there are still lynchings in the far west, especially along the Mexican border, would hardly seem to be open to question, although they escape the average collector of statistics. The subject is one that invites searching inquiry." [84](#) During the course of more than eight decades, the lynching of Mexicans continued to elude systematic analysis. While the literature on mob violence against African Americans continued to expand in scope and sophistication, there was relatively little scholarly interest in Mexican lynchings. As a result, the explanatory models for mob violence constructed by scholars were restricted in terms of their narrow racial emphasis upon African Americans and their regional emphasis upon the South. Analysis of the lynching of Mexicans emphasizes the need to expand the analytical parameters of lynching studies. Only then will scholars be able to assess with more accuracy the real historical scale of mob violence in the United States.

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Appendix

Note on Methods

Data Collection and Computation

The statistics cited in this article have been culled from extensive archival research. In order to construct as rich and accurate a portrait of mob violence as possible, we surveyed a broad array of primary sources in both the English and Spanish language. These include diaries, journals, and memoirs; published and unpublished correspondence; speeches and addresses; organizational files and inventories; oral histories and folklore; local government records and criminal case files; newspaper accounts; diplomatic records; government reports; and photographic evidence. We have consulted the collections of numerous libraries and archives, including the Special Collections of Atlanta University; the Archives of Tuskegee University; the Huntington Library; the Bancroft Library; the Center for Southwest Studies at the University of New Mexico; the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin; the Texas Collection at Baylor University; the Library of Congress; the National Archives; the Texas State Archives; Arizona Historical Society Museum, Tucson; Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records; New Mexico State Records Center and Archives; and the Research Library and Chicano Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The data collected have been inputted into a searchable database. The project database is run on FilemakerPro software designed for the Apple platform. Filemaker Pro provides a menu-driven, windowed interface that allows for the retrieval of thousands of records. The database includes the following information:

- Name of victim
- National origin of victim
- Date of murder
- Location of lynching
- Type and size of lynch mob
- Means of execution
- Alleged cause of lynching
- Ethnicity of lynch mob
- Location and Name of Relevant Sources

Comparative Data on Mexican and Black Lynching Victims

Although impossible to determine a precise "lynching rate" for either blacks or Mexicans, we can get a better sense of the hazard faced by both blacks and [End Page 430] Mexicans by comparing numbers of lynching with the total population at risk. Unfortunately, the number of Spanish-speakers living in the United States is difficult to determine. One rough

way to approximate the Mexican population during the period, 1848-1930, is to average the number of Mexican-born residing in the United States in 1850 (13,317) with the number of Mexican and Mexican Americans living in the United States in 1930 (1,422, 533). This number equals 717,925 and is, if anything, a high estimate for average population during the period because all observers concede that the Mexican population of the United States increased sharply during the early twentieth century. Dividing this number by the 597 Mexican American and Mexican national lynching victims yields a figure of 83.2 Mexican lynching victims per 100,000 of population.

This number, however, is only really useful as a comparison with black lynching victims. Unfortunately, such statistics are only available for the period 1880-1930. Figures for African Americans have been compiled in Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 38. Tolnay and Beck followed the same mathematical strategy adopted above. They averaged the African American population of ten southern states and divided that number by the number of lynching victims. Tolnay and Beck's statistics are restricted to only ten Southern states. For a national black "lynching rate," we divided the number of African American lynching victims reported by Tuskegee between 1880 and 1930 by the average black population of the United States between 1880 and 1930. Specific details can be found below.

Because the data from Tolnay and Beck only cover the period 1880-1930, we found it necessary to construct data for that time period for Mexican victims. United States Census figures for 1880 only include persons born in Mexico, so we had to estimate the population born in the United States but of Mexican descent. We did this by using the percentage of U.S.-born persons of Mexican descent living in 1930 (55%) to estimate the "missing" Mexicans in 1880. We then averaged the new 1880 estimate with the 1930 figures to arrive at the best possible average population for this time period. It should be noted that we have always chosen to calculate our statistics conservatively, in a way that would go against our hypothesis that Mexicans suffered great danger from lynch mobs. For example, we feel certain that the percentage of Mexicans born in Mexico is declining between 1880 and 1930 relative to the percentage of persons born in the United States but of Mexican descent. Yet, we used the percentage from 1930 to calculate our 1880 estimate. In any case, the population data that we use and our estimates are included below for future discussion and criticism.

Mexican "Lynching Rate"

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Number of Lynchings</i>
1850 Population of U.S. born in Mexico:	13,317
1880 Population of U.S. born in Mexico:	68,399
1880 Population of U.S. born in U.S. but of Mexican descent (est.):	83,599
1880 Population of U.S. born in Mexico or of Mexican descent (est.):	151,998

[End Page 431]

Mexican "Lynching Rate" (con't)

Decade	Number of Lynchings
1930 Population of U.S. born in Mexico or of Mexican descent:	1,422, 533
1930 Population of U.S. born in Mexico:	641,462
1930 Population of U.S. born in U.S. but of Mexican descent:	781,071
Percentage of Mexican Population not born in Mexico in 1930:	55%
Estimated average Mexican population, 1850–1880:	82,658
Estimated average Mexican population, 1880–1930:	787,266
Estimated average Mexican population, 1850–1930:	717,925
Estimated No. of Mexicans Lynched in the United States, 1882–1930:	216
"Lynching Rate" for Mexicans in the United States:	27.4

Black "Lynching Rate"

1880 Population of African Americans:	6,518,372
1930 Population of African Americans:	11,759,075
Estimated average Black Population, 1880–1930:	9,138,723.5
Tuskegee Estimate of Blacks Lynched in the United States, 1882–1930:	3,386
"Lynching Rate" for Blacks in United States, 1880–1930:	37.1

Population statistics taken from United States Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850. Population*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1853), United States Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Press, 1883), United States Bureau of the Census, *A Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890, Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Press, 1892), and United States Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Population*, 3 vols., (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932).

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- [1.](#) *La Prensa* (San Antonio), November 17, 1928, p. 1; *Farmington Times Hustler*, November 16, 1928, p. 1.
- [2.](#) *Farmington Times Hustler*, November 23, 1928, p. 1.
- [3.](#) *Durango (Colorado) Herald Democrat*, quoted in *Farmington Times Hustler*, November 28, 1928, p. 9.
- [4.](#) *Santa Fe New Mexican*, quoted in *Ibid.*
- [5.](#) Some of the lynching victims described in this article were naturalized American

citizens, others were Mexican nationals resident in the United States. Despite the best [End Page 432] efforts of the authors, it has not always proved possible to determine the citizenship of each individual. The terms "Chicano" and "Latino" are commonly used to refer to all Mexicans in the United States, regardless of national origin or identity. However, the term is a relatively contemporary one and its application here could be considered ahistorical. In the interests of linguistic and analytical clarity, the authors have therefore used the word "Mexican" to refer to all lynching victims of Mexican origin or descent.

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- [17.](#) *New York Times*, April 21, 1877, p. 1.
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Muse	Search	Journals	This Journal	Contents	Top
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