The Great Migration

The dominant theme of Mexican American history in the twentieth century is migration

 Motives for immigration

 End of European immigration and need for labor

 Mexican Revolution

 "Life in Mexico more oppressive than life in US"

 "Indians reduced to working as peons on large haciendas, where they lived in squalor as virtual slaves, one of the most disruptive effects of the rapid incursions made by capitalism into Mexican agrarian society."

 This didn't exist before the capitalistic development of the Porfiriato?

 And if capitalism was the reason why Mexicans left for the US, then why did they go to a more capitalistic society and country?

 Gonzales says that growing racism in the Western world led to greater anti-Indian prejudice

 Growing racism is only a perception as more ethnicities interacted with each other

 That the revolution began in the North suggests American influence

 The Magón brothers exiled to Laredo and the San Antonio where they organized rebellion in Mexico as early as 1906

 In 1911 they made an unsuccessfully attempt to invade Baja California from California

The 1920s witnessed the greatest migration out of Mexico

 From Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán

 Migration began in 1880s

 The main destination of migrants was Texas and the Southwest

 Mexicans were attracted to this region because of the existence of pre-existing Mexican colonies

 Also railroads played a large role

 Mining also played an important role

 Sonora, Arizona, and New Mexico

 Agriculture was also an influence

 Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902

 Factory farms [?]

 By 1920s Mexicans dominated the labor of the southwest

 Asians displaced

 Migrant labor

 Cotton

 Texas, Arizona, California

The immigrant

 Immigrants typically arrived at El Paso and made their way to various points in the Southwest

 Morales' ancestors went to Texas Panhandle to work on railroads

 Many went to other parts of Texas including the Rio Grande Valley as agricultural workers

 This way of life was traditional since many immigrants had come from a rural agricultural heritage

 Eventually these farm workers became part of migrant labor stream that went from South Texas to California to Colorado, Nebraska, and Idaho, and to Michigan

The contratista

 Ethnicity or race contributed to the isolation of the Mexican American community from mainstream American society

 This is a typical experience of all arriving immigrants

 An effect of this isolation is an intensification of ethnicity among immigrants because they do not have extended families they can rely on for social behavior and cooperation

 Gonzales says that there was discrimination and abuse within the immigrant community as some Mexican immigrants served as labor contractors or intermediaries between laborers and their employers

 This abuse developed as the contractor was given a lump sum of money and they would parcel out the wages over the harvest season to make sure that the work got done

 They would devise ways to withhold wages from the laborers by under-weighing sacks of harvested produce

 They sometimes also owned other businesses that workers would patronize

 However, Gonzales says that the contratista would also do favors for workers

 Provide transportation to work, for shopping, to church, etc.

 Write letters to relatives

 Provide bail from jail

 Gonzales criticizes this behavior saying that the contratista did these favors for a price

Rural life

 Most Mexican immigrants initially lived in rural areas of the Southwest associated with their migrant labor lives

 This rural life was highly transient, work was seasonal, and work could be varied as workers would work for the railroad, for the farms, and in the mines at various times of the year

 Even immigrants that lived in urban areas such as Los Angeles also worked in these occupations associated with rural life

 Los Angeles at the time was not as it is today in terms of development

Beyond the Southwest

 The 1897 tariff against the importation of sugar promoted the development of the sugar beet industry

 Sugar beet (betabel) production expanded across the Rocky Mountain west from Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington

 Midwestern states such as Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas also experienced the arrival of Mexican immigrants as they worked in the beet fields

 By the 1920s most of these workers to places beyond the Southwest were born in the US, and most had originated from Texas

 San Antonio, El Paso, Fort Worth, Dallas, and Houston were all major recruiting locations for sugar beet farms and processors

 A major contributor to the recruitment of Mexican labor from Texas was the unionization of European immigrant farm workers in the Midwest

 By the 1930s, major midwestern cities had growing Mexican barrios

 Chicago and Detroit

 Most Mexican immigrants in the Midwest ancestors had originated from the central plateau of Mexico corresponding to the general trend of Mexican immigration in the early twentieth century

Comparison to European immigration

 The Mexican immigrant experience in the US is similar to the general immigrant experience during the early twentieth century

 The contratista had its counterparts in other immigrant communities as certain individuals acted as intermediaries between the immigrant and mainstream communities

 Alleviates isolation of immigrant communities

 The Mexican immigrants also relied on mutual benefit societies and connections associated through family and especially ethnicity

 Intensification of the identification with ethnicity

 Some of the areas of contrast between Mexican and European immigrants

 The proximity of Mexico

 Made it easier to return home

 Some migrant farm workers even lived in Mexico along the border

 The geographical location of Mexico

 Influenced the development of the rural lifestyle that characterized the Mexican American community

 The economic development of the Southwest was based mostly on industries associated with a rural life

 The lack of a development of property ownership

 Unlike many European immigrants (by no means all), Mexican immigrants had little tradition associated with the ownership of private landed property

 Many Mexican immigrants came from the feudalistic social system of the hacienda

 Also, Mexican immigrants arrived at a time in the US when the number of farmers was in steep decline due to the application of modern technology to agriculture and the transformation to an industrial economy

 Race or ethnicity

 Gonzales says that race was an obvious difference between Mexican and European immigrants and that European immigrants were more easily integrated into American society

 The reason why this was the case was because after the second generation it is difficult to tell most European ethnicities as distinctive based on physical characteristics alone

 This is not the case with the vast majority of Mexican Americans

 Ethnicity and history both played roles in contributing to discrimination against Mexican Americans

 Gonzales says that "while the Irish, Italians, and Jews have been absorbed into the middle class, Mexicanos, possibly as many as three-quarters of them, continue to be predominately working-class people."

 Part of this is explained by tradition

 Mexican immigrants did not have a strong tradition of education or an association with a modern industrial economy and society

 Also there has been less intermarriage among Mexican Americans and Americans although the trend over the twentieth century is greater intermarriage and assimilation