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