World War Two and the Post-War Mexican American Community

Interesting statement by Gonzales:

"In the annals of American history, the Second World War was probably not as momentous in its consequences for many Americans as has been the Great War a generation before, but such is not the case for Mexicanos in this country."

Really?

A large number Mexican Americans at the time of WWII were children of immigrants. Second generation immigrants

It was these second generation Mexican Americans that began to experience the social and economic mobility associated with the beginning of the development of "middle class" life in the US

Mexican Americans service in the military during the war contributed greatly to the integration, assimilation, and homogenization of the community into the US

Mexican American were particularly enthusiastic to serve in the war

Patriotism

Offered opportunities

Machoism [?]

Mexican Americans were well represented in the armed forces and served in all theaters of war

250,000-750,000 out of a population of 2.7 million

Most drafted, but many volunteered

Famous Mexican American soldiers include:

Guy Louis Gabaldón of Los Angeles

Raised by a Japanese American family

Served in the Marines in the Pacific

José M. Lopez of Brownsville

Won Medal of Honor

Fought in Europe

Killed more enemy soldiers than anyone in WWII

After the war the GI Bill was instrumental in providing veterans with opportunities in education and business

One of the major trends during the war period is the intensification of urbanization

This was already occurring

Intensified during this time because of war related jobs

Gonzales say that this had an impact on the stability of the family

There appears to have been an erosion of tradition associated with rural Mexican life associated with Americanization

One of the effects of this breakdown of the family was the development of street gangs

Pachucos (may be a term that refers to a resident of El Paso)

Children who felt alienated from their parents

They expressed an exaggerated Americanism in their dress

Zoot Suit Riots

Clashes between Pachucos and Military in San Diego and LA

Sleepy Lagoon case (1942)

Increased ethnic tension

Interesting case in that the murdered victim and the perpetrator were Mexican Americans

The case became interpreted as outside criticism of the Mexican American community and an example of racism of American society

However one example of such racism was characterized by a police officer of Mexican descent

Edward Durán Ayers

This case is much more complex than what we have been led to believe

An important development during the war was the implementation of the Bracero Program (1942-1964)

Official US program to recruit Mexican workers for wartime production

Manpower shortage

Especially in agriculture

Many Mexican American farm workers had moved to the city

This was an official program of the US and Mexican governments

The Mexican government recruited the workers

Farmers provided housing, transportation, and work

Mexican social security and food costs were deducted from paycheck

Estimated 4.8 million braceros during program's existence

Eventually the Bracero Program was dismantled

Unions especially were decidedly against the braceros

And there was a lack of support from farmers who could hire cheaper undocumented workers

Plus, there was little support for the program in the Mexican American community

A development that went along with the Bracero Program was Operation Wetback

The contract bracero labor system contributed to undocumented immigration

Operation Wetback was a response to this development to ensure that the Bracero Program was being followed

Mexico was losing out on undocumented immigration too

Over a million people apprehended

Once Bracero Program terminated undocumented immigration exploded

No incentive for Mexico to control the immigration

Rise of the Mexican American middle class

Native-born, second generation that identified with US more than Mexico

Organizations that represented the ideals of the Mexican American generation were LULAC and GI Forum

Founded in 1921 as Orden Hijos de America in San Antonio, it eventually became LULAC in Corpus in 1929 when Alonso Perales, Manuel Gonzales, and Ben Garza broke away

The point of LULAC was to instill American values in its members including English as its official language

After the war LULAC became active in combating prejudice in Texas

Especially active in fighting segregation in schools

*Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* (1948)

The GI Forum was formed in Corpus in 1948

The Forum admitted veterans and was committed to assimilation

Started in Texas and spread to other areas of the country

Hector Garcia provided longtime leadership

The Forum campaigned against discrimination

In fact, the organization was formed as a result of the celebrated Felix Longoria case from Three Rivers (1948)

The Forum fought for desegregation in all contexts

Some more radical organizations were also formed in California and West

Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española (1938) in LA

Left wing organization associated with labor unions

Gonzales says there was a marked communist influence

Active working for economic and civil liberty issues

Lasted about 3 years

Community Service Organization (1947) in LA

Emerged from the Unity League founded in 1946 from community protection organizations that sprung up during the war

Grew out of efforts to elect Edward Roybal to LA City Council

Decidedly active in politics and influenced by radical political and community organizers Fred Ross and Saul Alinsky

Focused on voter registration drives, educational issues, and police issues

Became seen as too radical and lost influence by the 1960s when it was transformed into a mutual-aid society

Asociatión Nacional Méxicano-Americana (1949) in Phoenix

Organized by the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers

Leftist organization that only lasted to 1953

Worked for various rights issues

Gonzales says the ANMA worked through an alliance with the communist party, even though he says that charges of communist affiliation were unfounded

Mexican American Political Association (1960) in Fresno

Set up as a political organization to support Mexican American candidates to office

Supposed to be bi-partisan, but mostly supportive of Democratic Party

Collapsed in 1960s after internal infighting

Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (1961)

Emerged from the Viva Kennedy Campaign

Started in Texas

Sought to unify all Mexican American organizations for political purposes

Hector Garcia was instrumental in its organization

But it ran into regional problems, as organizations in different parts of the country were unwilling to work together

Why the difference in orientation between Texas and California and Western Mexican American organizations?

The difference reflects the activities of labor unions in the different regions

California and West much more influenced by Midwestern and Eastern style reformist Protestantism, Progressivism, and labor union organization

Texas much more conservative based on Southern traditions

Gonzales points out that Mexican American were relatively unsuccessful in politics during the Mexican American generation for several reasons

Negative attitude towards politics

No legacy of democracy in Mexico

Legacy of corruption

Mostly no tradition of political activity in a republican democracy