LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

# We Are Better for Having Survived:
# Tejanas in World War II

A Dissertation Submitted
by
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**Abstract**

The contributions of women during World War II were significant to the Allies' success. Women in the United States took on responsibilities that were typically not within their traditional roles. Latinas also impacted the war efforts, and their contributions have garnered less attention. Specifically focusing on the Mexican American women in Texas, this paper uses oral histories from archives located in Texas colleges, universities, and public libraries to highlight the ways these Tejanas were essential to society during wartime, how it challenged their traditional and cultural identity, and how that change inspired them to organize to fight for their communities after the war was over. The shift in their cultural identity can be recognized by analyzing their traditional values and upbringing and comparing them to their experiences in the workforce, the military, and, in other ways, on the home front during wartime. The war experience challenged Tejanas' traditional values, and while those experiences changed them, their commitment to their communities also contributed to their conflicting feelings about maintaining their cultural structure. World War II provided a way for Tejanas to break down barriers but also challenged them to maintain their connections to their community. They went through all the changes and tragedies everyone else in the United States was experiencing while also breaking barriers on two fronts: as women and Mexican Americans. Texas has had a complicated relationship with Tejanos, and Mexican Americans have traditionally relegated women to gender-specific roles. The World War II era showed Tejanas that they were essential to the country's success and capable of standing up for themselves.

**Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to express a thank you to my supportive spouse and my sons who have been on this entire journey with me. Without their support, encouragement, and sacrifice I would not have been able to complete this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Carey Roberts for guiding me through the selection of this topic and encouraging me to take it on. My chair, Dr. Kenneth Bridges, offered guidance throughout the way. Lastly, I would like to recognize all the amazing women who shared their stories and the interviewers who took the time to record these experiences. Without them, these stories may have never been told. This project has been very important to me, and I feel like I have indirectly gotten to know some amazing women over the course of my research.

## Contents

## Abbreviations

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| FEPC | Fair Employment Practice Committee |
| LULAC | League of United Latin American Citizens |
| MCWR | Marine Corps Women's Reserve |
| OWI | Office of War Information |
| PLM | Partido Liberal Mexicano |
| POW | Prisoners of War |
| SMOM | Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana |
| SPAR | "Semper Paratus—Always Ready," United States Coast Guard Women's Reserve |
| USO | United Service Organization |
| WAAC | Women's Army Auxiliary Corps |
| WAC | Women's Army Corps |
| WASP | Women's Airforce Service Pilots |
| WAVES | Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services |

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

For many Americans, World War II was a turning point in the United States that helped shape modern society. This period had multiple meanings for those who experienced it. The long-term effects can still be seen today in diplomatic relationships, policy, strategy, technology, and many other ways. Interest in the Second World War and its societal impact has not faded, even as the generation with first-hand memory disappears. Historians have recorded, researched, and analyzed the experiences, policies, and war strategies to bring an abundance of works that center on this topic from various angles, with interests continuing into the next generations. World War II is a topic covered by historians at length from its occurrence. As early as 1945, there have been attempts to provide an early comprehensive analysis of the Second World War, such as Henry Steele Commager's book *The Story of the Second World War*.[1] Topics today can include those titles from historians who offer a more diverse perspective, including the 2023 book *National Perspectives on the Global Second World War* that offers essays from authors of different nationalities.[2] Even as scholarship has shifted to be more inclusive of others' experiences, there is much work needed to represent the diversity of the United States in history.

The experiences of people of color, and of women are an important perspective to consider. This project began with research on women's lived experiences in the World War II era as they encountered significant social change by taking on positions previously closed to them out of necessity. Researching and reading about these experiences exposed a noticeable gap in scholarship on the participation of Latinas in the war efforts during the 1940s. Extensive research

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[1] Henry Steele Commager, *The Story of the Second World War*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945).

[2] *National Perspectives on the Global Second World War*. Ashley Jackson, ed., (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023).

is available on women's experiences in the United States in this era, but these works tend to focus on White women.[3] While Latinos, in general, have had some acknowledgment for their efforts during the war, Latinas tend to be absent or addressed with little frequency.[4] Further, when looking at geographic location, there tends to be less focus on Texas than in other regions.[5] The historical narrative less frequently represents Mexican American women in Texas. However, they also encountered significant changes, and their stories are just as valuable to the American story.

This project will focus on a minority group with a unique use of terminology. Some of the terms in this project will include the word "Anglo," which will refer to White, English-speaking Americans who are not of Hispanic descent. The term "Hispanic" was widely used in the United States beginning in the 1970s when organizations representing the Spanish-speaking population lobbied to have their community identified on the United States Census as a unique ethnic category. The term refers to people who are culturally related to Spain or Hispanidad. While this is a widely used term, some people of Spanish-speaking origin in the Americas prefer the term "Latino" instead. The issue with the word "Hispanic" is that it groups Spanish speakers with a single race or ethnicity linked to Spain, a country appropriately defined as European that had colonized countries in Latin America. Instead, "Latino" refers to a person with ancestry in

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[3] Including: Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II,* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Jeffrey S. Suchanek, *"Star-Spangled Hearts:" American Women Veterans of World War II,* (Frankfort: Broadstone Books, 2011).

[4] Including: Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and Emilio Zamora, eds., *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas,* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993); Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II,* (College Station: A&M University Press, 2009).

[5] Including: Elizabeth R. Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front,* (Chapell Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Sarah McNamara, *Ybor City: Crucible of the Latina South,* (Chapell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023).

Latin America regardless of their language or origin and excludes people from Spain.[6] "Latina" references the feminine version of "Latino," referring to women or girls originating from Latin American countries. This project will also include the term "Tejana," the feminine derivative of "Tejano." The term "Tejano" refers to someone who is a resident of Texas, culturally descended from the Mexican population. The term "Chicano" was established during the Chicano movement to identify people of Mexican descent born in the United States. It is usually associated with activism and has become popular as a symbol of pride. Finally, "machismo" refers to the toxic and often sexist masculine energy that exerts aggressive pride and overbearing control of a wife or children. These terms are crucial for discussion on identity.

The unique situations of Tejanas link to the stories of all women during World War II. Women experienced social changes in the 1940s as they took on nontraditional roles. In 2003, Sarah Herrington analyzed the participation of women in various capacities using propaganda posters in her article "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters."[7] Women worked in factories and the defense industry. Herrington analyzed posters aimed at women who maintained their roles as housewives to show how they contributed to the war efforts. Women threw themselves into the task at hand while maintaining home and family life. The posters connected a woman's daily tasks to the action on the front lines. The housewife was just as important to war efforts as anyone else at the time, and the posters emphasized their responsibilities within their traditional roles.

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[6] Mark Hugo Lopez, Jens Manuel Krogstad, and Jeffrey S. Passel, "Who is Hispanic?," *Pew Research Center*, September 5, 2023.

[7] Sara Harrington, "Women's Work: Domestic Labor in American World War II Posters," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 22, no. 2, 2003: 41-44.

In earlier years, female scholars highlighted women's experiences in a historical context where society had previously forgotten them. During the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, women asserted themselves in the narrative. In 1978, Leila J. Rupp compared the role of the housewife in the years leading up to World War II to the ideology of Nazi Germany of the same period in the article "Occupation: Housewife:' The Image of Women in the United States."[8] Using a periodic of broadly circulated material from the years between the World Wars (1918-1941), Rupp drew parallels between Nazi and American ideologies of cultural tradition. Rupp explained that the "woman question" came up in the United States much more frequently than it did in Nazi Germany, contemplating whether a woman could successfully combine a professional career with her duty to become a wife.[9] It was only suitable for a woman to work until she found a husband. Combining career and marriage was an unsolvable problem. Rupp argued that while society shifted during the war out of necessity, no change resulted from these experiences. She argued that traditional gender roles had been reinforced by comparing Nazi and American ideologies of cultural tradition.

While Rupp believed that the mobilization of women in this era had little impact on changing women's lives, others have suggested otherwise. In her 1982 work "Redefining 'Women's Work," Ruth Milkman discusses the mobilization of women as a temporary shift in the location of boundaries in what was considered "men's" work and "women's" work, but it did not eliminate the boundaries.[10] Milkman claimed that feminists had idealized the experiences of women working during World War II as challenging the ideology of a "woman's place;"

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[8] Leila J. Rupp, "Occupation: Housewife': The Image of Women in the United States," In *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda,* 1939-1945, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978): 51-73.

[9] Rupp, 61.

[10] Ruth Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work': The Sexual Division of Labor in the Auto Industry during World War II," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2, 1982: 337-72.

however, it was not a result of the feminist campaign. Instead, it resulted from the need for workers.[11] As men went to war and the number of available men to fill positions depleted, employers simply needed fill-ins to take their place until they returned. Milkman explained that employers were resistant to hiring women in the first place because it threatened family stability, and even wartime images of women in the workplace portrayed women's work in industry as a temporary extension of domesticity.[12] Women who were not there before poured into the labor force because it was their duty. Still, women taking care of the home was an expectation because, at the time, their duties included the workforce until the men returned. Women in industry were merely necessary at the time, and there were no intentions of changing the role of women in society.

For all women, the wartime atmosphere made a significant impact. Although it was clear that women's work in industry was temporary, Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith explained in their article "U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II" that women's lives changed in other significant ways. In evaluating letters from the time, they found that women expressed how wartime affected their overall lives and perspectives. Women were doing things that they had not done before, and this was not limited to the workforce. They noted that women's new sense of self was a significant theme in the letters. Women had become more self-reliant as they learned to manage a budget, raise children alone, travel to see their husbands, and grapple with feelings of loneliness.[13] While their place in the workforce may have been temporary, their overall experiences and the changes they adjusted to were impactful. Although brief, women learned

[11] Milkman, 335.
[12] Milkman, 340.
[13] Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, "U.S. Women on the Home Front in World War II," *The Historian* 57, no. 2 (1995), 357.

how to become more independent and to take care of things on their own that they may not have had to do before. This was also true for Latinas, though they faced additional obstacles.

As women began to record their own histories during the liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, their experiences were assumed to be homogenous, but that was not the case. Latinas faced barriers as women, but they also experienced discrimination as they faced hurdles on two fronts. While there was a general sense of inclusion during the war efforts, racial tension on the home front remained. In the 1993 book *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II,* a series of letters were put together to show how many Black people thought that this period would lead to significant social change once the war was over.[14] Black women broke barriers and experienced significant changes on two fronts, as well as other minority females. The 2018 book *Glory in Their Spirit: How Four Black Women Took on the Army During World War II* showed how Black women were also experiencing the same social challenges that Latinas were and were determined to improve their social standing.[15] This was a period of change, but while Latina's encounters may have had some mutuality with others of various demographics, Tejanas had their individual intersectional ties that made their experiences their own. While women of color faced additional challenges and had to break down racial barriers, Latinas further faced the challenges of a language barrier in some cases.

Along with the social changes that were taking place, Latinas also faced challenges within their culture. Parents sheltered the Latinas of the 1940s for their own protection, and when they went out in public, they usually had a chaperone. Once they went out on their own to work, go to school, or as men became less available to accompany them to social gatherings, they

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[14] Phillip McGuire, ed., *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters From Black Soldiers in World War II,* (Lexington, The University of Kentucky Press, 1993).

[15] Sandra M. Bolzenius, *Glory in their Spirit: How Four Black Women took on the Army During World War II,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

experienced a newfound freedom and breakdown of the confines of familial control. [16] Sometimes, these newfound freedoms led to interactions with others for the first time, including interactions with Anglo women and men outside their communities.

This project will evaluate these social and cultural changes experienced by Tejanas during World War II and how they led to organizational efforts after the war. They simultaneously experienced a liberating and limiting time in their lives. The overarching questions presented in this project are: How did Tejanas confront traditional barriers in World War II society and within their culture? How did a new female identity emerge that contributed to organizational efforts after the war? Organization efforts were taking place in Texas even before the outbreak of war; however, as many Latinos had experienced inclusivity during the war period, they were unwilling to move backward. They also struggled with their traditional place in their communities. Tejanas were war workers, students, volunteers, respectable young women by their parent's standards, and sometimes even rebellious. They had a complex identity that was acceptable in some circumstances while rejected in others. Their changing environment exposed tension between their opportunity for growth and their limitations in their surroundings.

Their new encounters during wartime made it possible for them to grow, change, and make demands as the war ended, which threatened to take away the new freedoms they had experienced. Answering these questions will heavily rely on the available archives of interviews from Latinos conducted by scholars from Texas schools. Finding sources on Latino participation in the World War II era published before the 1990s is difficult. However, there was an oral history project at Lee Community College in Baytown, Texas, that conducted interviews as far

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[16] Joanne Rao Sanchez, "The Latinas of World War II: From Familial Shelter to Expanding Horizons," In *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero*, Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and Emilio Zamora, eds., (University of Texas Press, 2009): 63–89, 65.

back as the 1970s, with even further records in the Portal to Texas History archive itself.[17] This is likely because as the Chicano movement rapidly expanded in the 1970s, efforts to preserve Mexican American history grew as well. During this time, historical literature was Eurocentric and androcentric, leaving much to desire for the perspective of Latinas. As Chicanos de-colonized their own histories, they had yet to recognize the unique experiences of their female counterparts.

Significant works of Latino historians have become more widely available, and these publications have contributed to a more extensive understanding of the experiences of the Latino population. A significant contributor has been Zaragosa Vargas, Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, whose early work includes *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933,* published in 1993.[18] His most significant publication widely recognized has been *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era* published in 2010.[19] The *Crucible of Struggle* is widely used as a textbook in Mexican American history courses. These are essential works that offer a valuable outlook on the Latino community, and while *Proletarians of the North* provides a specific perspective on Mexican workers' experiences, *Crucible of Struggle* provides a more general view of the Latino experience.

Like Vargas, Emilio Zamora, Professor of History at the University of Texas, showed a close pattern with his works, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (1993) and, more notably, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas* (2009) where he did focus on Texas

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[17] "Lee College Oral Histories Project," *The Portal to Texas History*, University of North Texas.

[18] Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933,* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1993).

[19] Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era*, (Oxford University Press, 2010).

experiences.[20] Even as their research contributes to the Latino contributions, neither of these historians added much to the understanding of Latina encounters during this time. It was not uncommon for men in the Latino community to dismiss Latina contributions. While some Latinas spoke up about the lack of acknowledgment, others were less willing to call out machismo because it was part of their traditional cultural identity. Although women had gained a new understanding of their capabilities, their traditional values often led them to be more submissive to males, and their cultural identity was usually more valued than their gender identity.

Interest in including the Latina experience began around the turn of the century. This could be because around the year 2000, more Latinas began to attend college in more significant numbers, and this is when there was a greater interest in analyzing the unique experiences of Latinas in a historical context. According to the Pew Research Center, in the year 2000, Latino enrollment in higher education institutions increased to 10% of all enrollments, compared to 4% in the 1980s. This number has continued to grow.[21] In the year 2000 and each year since, the college enrollment rate for young people between eighteen and twenty-four was higher for Latinas than Latinos, according to the National Center of Education Statistics.[22] The increasing number of Latinas enrolling in higher education could play a part in the increased interest in analyzing the Latina experience.

With the entry of more Latinas into academia around the turn of the century, they began to expose the significant contributions and experiences of the women before them. This also led

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[20] Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas,* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993); Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II*, (College Station: A&M University Press, 2009).

[21] Lauren Mora, "Hispanic enrollment reaches new high at four-year colleges in the U.S., but affordability remains an obstacle," *Pew Research Center,* October 7, 2022.

[22] National Center of Education Statistics, "College Enrollment Rates," *The Condition of Education,* 2020.

to Chicanos releasing revised versions of their previous works to be more inclusive of the Latina experience. For example, the earlier versions of Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* did not focus much on gender, though later versions, beginning with the third edition, explored issues of gender throughout the text.[23] As more Chicanas enter academia in the coming years with the number of Latinas enrolled in higher education continuing to rise, the amount of works available that are more inclusive of the Latina experience, or revised versions of previous works, is also expected to increase.

In 1999, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, an Associate Professor of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, founded the *VOCES Oral History Project*, a project that dedicated time to preserving the stories of United States Latinos, with a significant portion of its recordings, including the stories of women archived at the University of Texas.[24] Her project's efforts has helped to preserve the stories of Tejanas, a valuable resource heavily used in this work. While she does not have any series of comprehensive publications, she has worked to bring various primary and secondary sources to publication on the topic of Latinos in World War II. Her published work includes an oral histories book with various first-person accounts of American Latinos in World War II, which she contributed as an editor titled *A Legacy Greater Than Words* (2006).[25] In 2009, Rivas-Rodriguez worked with Emilio Zamora as editor of the book *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero,* which includes essays from various historians surrounding the topic of Latinos in World War II.[26] Then in 2014, she was editor of *Latina/os and World War II* along with B. V. Olguín, an Associate Professor of Literature and Creative Writing in the English

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[23] Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1987).

[24] *VOCES Oral History Project*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas.

[25] Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Juliana Torres, Melissa Dipiero-D'Sa, and Lindsay Fitzpatrick, eds., *A Legacy Greater Than Words: Stories of U.S. Latinos & Latinas of the World War II Generation*, (Austin: U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, 2006).

[26] Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and Emilio Zamora, eds., *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero*, (University of Texas Press, 2009).

Department at the University of Texas at San Antonio.[27] Her publications include the Latina experience in the World War II era.

A broad Latina experience has been researched by Vicki L. Ruiz, Professor of History and Chicano/Latino Studies at the University of California, Irvine, in her 1998 book *From Out of the Shadows.*[28] In this book, she provided a general overview of the experiences of Latinas in the United States. Though she did not focus on a particular era of the twentieth century or a specific region of the United States, it was one of the first comprehensive works available specifically on Mexican American women. Years later, in 2003, Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten, both historians and advocates of Texas women's history, published the book *Las Tejanas*, which specifically included the experiences of Latinas in Texas, but still without sufficient attention paid to a particular period.[29] It only briefly covered the decades between 1940 and 1960, with much more focus on the earlier years of Texas as a part of Mexico and with some significant time dedicated to the Chicano movement and more recent years. Patricia Portales wrote a chapter called "Tejanas on the Home Front" in the book *Latina/os and World War II* about the Tejana experience in World War II.[30] However, it compared one woman's experience in San Antonio with literature of the time rather than a collective historical analysis.

Historians focused on the Latino experience specific to a geographic location within the United States. Richard Santillán, professor emeritus of ethnic and women studies at California

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[27] Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and B. V. Olguín, eds., *Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, and Ideology*, (Carol Stream: University of Texas Press, 2014).

[28] Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[29] Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten, *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

[30] Patricia Portales, "Tejanas on the Home Front: Women, Bombs, and the (Re)Gendering of War in Mexican American World War II Literature," *Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, and Ideology*, Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and B. V. Olguín, eds., (Carol Stream: University of Texas Press, 2014), 175-196.

State Polytechnic University, focused on Mexican American women in the Midwest in the 1989 article, "Rosita the Riveter."[31] Other historians have tended to center in California, particularly in Los Angeles. The experiences of young Latinos in general during World War II in Los Angeles were analyzed by Luis Alvarez, Associate Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego, in the 2008 book *The Power of the Zoot*.[32] This book focused on youth culture, with much attention given to Black and Brown young men. Another source crucial to the understanding specifically of Latinas in World War II and how their experiences changed their lives is the 2013 book *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits* by Elizabeth R. Escobedo, Associate Professor of Latino History at the University of Denver.[33] This book described the experiences of Latinas as they broke barriers, confronted racism and challenged traditionalism. While this remarkable book put these crucial exchanges to the forefront, again, it focused on the experiences of women in California and, most notably, in Los Angeles. The riots in this area were influential and have been the subject of further analysis. While this is valuable for the Latino experiences of the time, there is far less research and analysis available for Tejanas.

While the racial tension in Los Angeles was crucial during World War II, racial tension in the United States heightened in World War II, particularly regarding enemy aliens. Anne C. Schenderlein explained in the 2020 article "The Enemy Alien Classification, 1941-1944" that immigrants felt pressured to show support for the United States, explicitly referring to German Jewish immigrants. She explained that many of them desired to be unified as Americans and fight against Hitler but were classified as enemy aliens by the government after the United States

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[31] Richard Santillán, "Rosita the Riveter: Midwest Mexican American Women During World War II," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 2, (1989).

[32] Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*, (Berkely: University of California Press, 2008).

[33] Elizabeth R. Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

entered the war.[34] Those who were not considered enemy aliens had a different experience. As explained by Peter J. Kellogg in the 1979 article, "Civil Rights Consciousness in the 1940s," the United States in this period had to reconceptualize ideas about race as they battled tyranny in Europe with a national discomfort with Nazism. Lawmakers passed civil rights laws in several states by the end of the forties, and hundreds of interracial committees formed.[35] The shifting landscape regarding race and gender allowed Latinas to exercise their power over their own lives, usually for the first time.

Latinos had practiced exercising power years prior, especially when establishing their place among Anglos. Attempts to organize the Latino community in Texas were significant, with the period after World War II making notable waves. Mexican American organization occurred before the 1940s out of necessity. Texas had a long residency of Mexicans before it had become part of the United States. In 1992, Richard Griswold del Castillo explained in the book *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* that Texas was a territory that had previously belonged to Mexico, with Mexican residents, along with Anglos who had settled from the United States. Once Texas declared independence from Mexico in 1836, Texas became its own republic and remained home to a significant amount of former Mexican nationals, particularly in South Texas. Once the United States annexed Texas, war began between the United States and Mexico. Nearly half of what was Mexico became part of the United States, including the Mexican inhabitants.[36] The Mexicans who occupied Texas displayed foreignness, which complicated the racial identity among Texans, although many Tejano inhabitants had settled in Texas before the Anglos.

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[34] Anne C. Schenderlein, "The Enemy Alien Classification, 1941-1944," *Germany on Their Minds: German Jewish Refugees in the United States and Their Relationship with Germany, 1938-1988,* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 53.

[35] Peter J. Kellogg, "Civil Rights Consciousness in the 1940s," *The Historian* 42, no. 1 (1979): 18-41, 22.

[36] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Treaty of Conflict,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

Further, Kelly Lytle Hernández explained in her 2022 book *Bad Mexicans* that during a revolution in Mexico, Mexican residents fled to the safety of the United States.[37] Some returned to Mexico once rule was re-established, and others returned as the Great Depression made conditions difficult in the United States, but many remained in the United States, where they considered themselves to be home. Mexican Americans were generally well established in the United States, particularly in Texas, before the United States entered World War II.

The identity of Mexicans in Texas was complicated as some held ties to Mexico, and others only had connections to Texas. In 2009, Cynthia Orozco, Professor of History and Humanities at Eastern New Mexico University, published the book *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed.*[38] In this book, Orozco explained how, in the 1890s, Mexican Americans had to construct their own identity in relation to Mexican immigrants. The immigrants tended to maintain their allegiance to Mexico and resisted Americanization. They were essentially Mexicans living outside of Mexico's border. At this time, the identity emerged of the Mexico Texano, who identified themselves as Texans, with more of an identity with Texas than the United States. They did not express an American identity, though they usually voted in federal elections, fought in United States wars, and participated in civic endeavors.[39] Tejanos had a unique identity where they saw themselves as Texans first as they struggled with their own American identification with ties to Mexico and the United States but without roots in either.

Orozco also discussed the origins of the activist group League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), founded by men in 1929 in Corpus Christi, Texas. The membership grew

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[37] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022).

[38] Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

[39] *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed,* 41.

after the war. She described how the organization constructed what it meant to be Mexican American in the early years in Texas but also limited involvement from Latinas, isolated to their own chapters. In 2020, Orozco published the book *Agent of Change: Adela Sloss-Vento*, about the life and activism of Adela Sloss-Vento, a forgotten Latina leader in South Texas's Lower Rio Grande Valley and a supporter of LULAC. Sloss-Vento wrote several articles about the women in Ladies LULAC. However, she never joined, and she never spoke out against the segregation of women within the organization.[40] Sloss-Vento became one of the leading faces of female activism as politics transformed South Texas. Orozco's work is essential to understanding the role of Latinas in the early years of activism.

The chapters in this project will discuss the various sectors that Tejanas contributed to the war effort and how those experiences changed their overall outlook. Most of the interviews took place decades after the war, and most of the women interviewed were teenagers or young adults at the time. They grew up during a major conflict and it shaped their lives. Chapter two will discuss the identity of Tejanos and how it was comparable to what it meant to be Tejana before the war. Chapter three will then discuss Tejanas in the workforce and how they challenged traditional roles in society and within their communities. Chapter four will move on to Tejana military efforts as they had similar experiences as their White counterparts navigating a sector that they were formerly not welcomed, but also as their gender presented another obstacle. Chapter five will explain all the other contributions Tejanas made on the home front, such as maintaining the home, purchasing war bonds, and writing letters. Finally, chapter six will discuss how Tejanas had changed by the war's end and how they maintained their traditional values with loyalty to their communities and challenged them with their activism.

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[40] Cynthia E. Orozco, *Agent of Change: Adela Sloss-Vento, Mexican American, Civil Rights Activist, and Texas Feminist,* (Austin: University of Texas press, 2020).

This project will be different from others because it will highlight the experiences of Mexican American women during World War II in Texas as they struggled to balance their traditional upbringing with the newfound freedom of their wartime experiences. It will also examine the barriers faced in society as they navigated that world for the first time on their own, and how this new sense of identity inspired their activism in the years that followed World War II. Their experiences were different from their Anglo counterparts because as they faced the challenges placed on them for their gender both in society and culturally, they also struggled with racial and sometimes language barriers as well. It will uncover conflicting feelings of liberation, the importance of preserving traditional values, and how those conflicting ideas translated to a new identity that pushed boundaries while maintaining a specific cultural normative that allowed them to remain loyal to their communities to protest despite their struggles with gender inequity.

## Chapter 2

## The Tejana Identity

What does it mean to be a Tejana? The identity of a Tejana goes beyond being a Mexican American woman from Texas. Texas has a complicated history of a back-and-forth understanding of the land's original inhabitants. Texas was once a region where Mexican citizens inhabited but morphed into a place where they were perceived to be the invaders. Tejanos have had a unique experience dating back to the early years of Spanish colonization, as they never had a true connection to the Spanish government and had little to do with the fight for Independence from Spain in the formation of Mexico as a Republic.[1] The inhabitants of Texas found themselves in a situation where they were physically and politically distant from the rule of Mexico City, and influenced by American ideology from the Anglos they encountered more regularly. They did not fit into the structure of Mexico with allegiance to the Republic but did not necessarily fit into the racial atmosphere of American acceptability. Many Anglos saw them as Mexicans, while Tejanos did not necessarily align themselves with the Mexicans with deeper cultural ties.

Tejanas were also in a unique category of their own as their gender separated them in their Mexican culture by providing them with a specific part to play in their community while also separating them in Anglo society for being more favored in some cases than their male counterparts and less favored in others. They faced a complex identity that separated them, which also pushed them toward an obligation to commit to their people. They held the responsibility of doing their traditional part to hold their community together while also

[1] Rudolfo A. Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, Ninth Edition, (Boston: Pearson, 2020), 23.

attempting to show men that they were individuals as well that should have equal respect and opportunity.[2] This chapter reveals the complicated position had by Tejanas as they were held to traditional standards as Mexican women, while also emerging their own identities as women stuck between two cultures.

Mexican Americans have lived in Texas for generations from the early days of the development of relationships with the Indigenous people. The Spanish colonized Texas in the eighteenth century, and the result was a mixture of Spanish and Indigenous peoples called *mestizos.* Mainly found in the southernmost region of Mexico, currently the Republic of Mexico, they managed to migrate north into the Texas region, mainly in the Southwest. The Spanish lived amongst the Indigenous peoples, converted them to the Catholic faith, and mixed within the society. These people are what came to be the Mexican people in the territory that would eventually become part of the United States' southwest borderlands. The people in this region, sometimes called Aztlan by Chicano activists, were there for a significant amount of time before the American Anglos would arrive. [3] While the history of the western borderland of what is known as the United States is less discussed than other parts of the country, it has a vast and meaningful history. This region served as a place with a mixture of cultures and languages that continues to be displayed today.

Anglos from the United States began to migrate to Texas around 1822 with the permission of the Mexican government. According to the contract for a second colony between Stephen F. Austin and the Mexican government, Austin was allowed to bring 500 additional families to Texas after 300 families established the first colony. The lands were specified, and

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[2] Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten, *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

[3] Acuna, 30.

there was the stipulation that the families must be Catholics of good morals. They were also required to correspond with the government in Spanish and build Spanish-speaking schools.[4] The Anglos were allowed to settle in the Texas territory but were expected to follow Mexican customs. Anglos were typically willing to do this to have access to the rich soil and vast lands in the Texas region, mostly to expand their already growing cotton kingdom of the United States. Jesus F. de las Teja noted in the article "Discovering the Tejano Community in 'Early' Texas" that the Mexican government also saw this as an opportunity to expand their own access to the lands and populate the region to have more control of the Native populations that dominated and attacked the area.[5] The agreement was mutually beneficial to the Anglos and the Mexican government.

The Anglos and the Tejanos lived amongst each other in Texas territory for some time with rarely an issue. The Tejanos and Anglos shared their ways of life to form a unique culture in Texas different from what was found in deeper parts of Mexico or the United States. They shared things such as a sense of fashion and wore homespun and self-tanned hides due to the lack of an efficient commercial network. The isolation of Texas encouraged the settlers to adapt to their surroundings. Visiting Mexicans came to Texas and concluded that Anglos influenced Tejanos because they witnessed Tejanas wearing dresses that mirrored American women's dresses. Men's apparel in Texas necessarily took on a more Mexican look with a simple ranchero attire that included a white shirt and a large brim hat for working in the heat. Housing was also similar, including simple, labor-saving, inexpensive homes that were easy to abandon and rebuild when

[4] "Stephen F. Austin's Contract to Bring Settlers to Texas, 1825," *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*.

[5] Jesus F de la Teja, "Discovering the Tejano Community in 'Early' Texas," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 73-98, 82.

they were under threat from Indigenous tribes in the area. [6] The Anglos and Tejanos intermingled and co-existed in the early years of settlement.

The connection between the Anglos and the Tejanos likely had to do with the growing divide between the Tejanos and the Mexicans. Texas was a significant distance from the governing powers in Mexico City. Because the Mexican inhabitants lived in the Texas region for generations, the children of Mexicans who had lived in urban Mexico became distant from the cultural ties found there. Cassandra Rincones explained in her dissertation "Confronting the Unknown" that the Tejanos felt as if they were separate from the Mexicans because Mexican officials did not see Tejanos as equals, only as subjects that they could control.[7] As the Mexican government learned about the emerging Texas culture, it grew concerned that Texas had more of an American influence than a Mexican one and attempted to intervene by having a more significant presence. The Mexican government prevented Anglos from further migrating from the United States into Texas, and this made many of the Anglo Texans angry. Tejanos also felt this was a mistake as the Anglos had significantly contributed to the economic growth of Texas. While the Anglos were ready to go to war with Mexico quickly over what they felt to be an overstep by the Mexican government, the Tejanos were more apprehensive, opting to only separate Texas from Coahuila, a part of Mexico connected to the Texas government system. Eventually, the Tejanos supported the decision for revolution, and they fought side by side.[8] They established a community that worked together well and took on the overstepping Mexican government.

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[6] De la Teja, 83-84.

[7] Cassandra Rincones, "Confronting the Unknown: Tejanas in the Transformation of Spanish and Mexican Texas, 1735-1836," Order No. 3731042, (Texas A&M University, 2015), 131.

[8] Rincones, 142.

Once Texas won independence from Mexico, the relationship between the Tejanos and the Anglos took a turn. The Anglos could no longer distinguish between the Mexicans they had fought against and the Tejanos they fought alongside, seeing them as one and the same. Anglos regarded Tejanos as foreigners invading on their established land and ultimately, did not fulfill the promises to communicate and publish laws in English and Spanish.[9] Americans traveling through Texas began to take note of the differences between themselves and the Tejanos. Arnoldo De León noted in the book *They Called Them Greasers* that in 1837, a traveler noticed from a bridge in San Antonio that Mexican women and girls would bathe in the water entirely nude, laughing and talking, seemingly unbothered by the presence of observers. [10] Their behavior prompted canvas-covered bath houses to be placed in the city to acculturate the Mexicans whom Anglos saw as less civilized than themselves. The once cordial relationship between the Anglos and the Tejanos was deteriorating. It only became increasingly intolerant as the latter half of the nineteenth century continued.

Though Anglos were highly critical of the Tejanos, they could separate males and females when it favored them. Anglo-male observers of the Tejano population usually made fewer critical remarks regarding Tejanas than their male counterparts. Tejano males were the target of stereotyping, and they were assumed to demonstrate violent behavior. They were also often seen as predatory, and insinuations suggested that they may sexually assault Anglo women if the opportunity provided. The concept of Tejanos as a violent and predatory people was usually only meant for the male population and did not typically extend to the females. The Tejanas had redeeming qualities, such as charm, kindness, and generosity. Anglo men were attracted to them

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[9] De la Teja, 97.

[10] Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 38-39.

and even sexualized them, which made it convenient for them to separate Tejano males and females to meet their own needs and justification for their sexual attraction. Some indicated pleasure in the idea that Tejanas would prefer Anglo men to Tejanos, demonstrating their superior mindset that allowed them to believe that they were a preferred race. There was some distinction in the minds of Anglos between the Tejanas and other people of color that would allow them a different classification in society.[11] There existed at least some indication that Tejanas could be accepted and assimilated into White society by the Anglos in Texas.

Texas maintained its independence for nearly a decade, which the United States recognized, although Mexico refused to recognize it and often led unsuccessful invasions into Texas to reclaim it. In 1845, the United States Congress passed a resolution of annexation, which many of the Anglo Texans who held much of the political power had voted for, making Texas part of the United States.[12] Some Tejanos and Mexicans saw it coming from the beginning of the rebellion against Mexico. Mexican official José Maria Tornel y Mendivil warned the Mexican government immediately after the loss of Texas that the United States would see the loss of Texas as an opportunity to expand its territory. He insisted that "The loss of Texas will inevitably result in the loss of New Mexico and the Californias. Little by little our territory will be absorbed, until only an insignificant part is left to us."[13] Many believed that the Anglos would act on their so-called manifest destiny and seize control of an empire.

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[11] De León, 40.

[12] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Treaty of Conflict*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 8.

[13] José Maria Tornel y Mendivil, "Relations Between Texas, The United States of America and the Mexican Republic" (Mexico, 1837), trans. and ed. Carlos E. Castañeda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution* (Dallas: P.L. Turner Company, 1928): 358-61, 370-71.

Not all Tejanos were happy about the annexation because their identity was increasingly becoming complicated and lost. It was only 24 years before the annexation of Texas by the United States that Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Mexicans had embraced their identities and became their own Mexican people, free from the monarchy rule of tyrannical Spain for a short time before the Tejanos were suddenly finding themselves to be Americans.[14] Once war broke out between Mexico and the United States over the border dispute of Texas, the foreshadowing by José Maria Tornel y Mendivil had manifested itself. The United States accumulated the Texas territory at the war's end, and nearly half of what was once Mexico. This territory expanded from Texas to the west toward California in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo between the United States and Mexico.

Article IX of the Treaty states "The Mexicans who, in the territories aforesaid, shall… be admitted at the proper time… to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to the principles of the Constitution."[15] The Tejanos and all Mexicans residing in the other parts of the newly acquired territory were to be considered citizens of the United States if they chose, and protected under the same laws as United States citizens. They had one year to decide whether to be United States citizens or return to Mexico, and the majority favored United States citizenship by the end of the year. By giving these former Mexican nationals citizenship, the United States implied that the Mexicans would be considered White by law. In 1790, the United States Congress defined eligibility and naturalization as limited to those who were "free

[14] Griswold del Castillo, 9.

[15] "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 2/2/1848", *Perfected Treaties, 1778 – 1945*, General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

White persons" under the law.[16] This did not mean that the new Americans were treated equally by the Anglo citizens of the United States.

Not long after the United States annexed Texas, Tejanos expressed their feelings of mistreatment. Juan Seguin, a significant supporter of the Texas Revolution against Mexico, expressed how he had become a foreigner in his own homeland, where his family had resided for generations. He explained how he "embraced the cause of Texas at the report of the first cannon which foretold her liberty; filled an honorable situation in the ranks of the conquerors of San Jacinto, and was a member of the legislative body of the Republic."[17] He went on to express his disappointment that in 1858, he found himself "in the very land, which in other times bestowed on me such bright and repeated evidences of trust and esteem, exposed to the attacks of scribblers and personal enemies."[18] He described his anger as his land that he had acquired was being taken from him by more Anglo settlers as they poured into the region. He had a tarnished reputation that he had spent his life building, and his contributions to Texas were being ignored and forgotten. He did not recognize the Texas he found himself in at that time. Tejanos, at this point, were in a situation where they were not people of Mexico and were also not treated equally as people of the United States.

Land was a common dispute amongst Tejanos as they found their lands stripped away from them, but they also increasingly lost political power in Texas. As Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten explained in *Las Tejanas,* Seguin had played a significant role in Texas politics during and after the Revolution. He was the mayor of San Antonio and donated grain and

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[16] United States Congress, "An act to establish an uniform Rule of Naturalization" (March 26, 1790), *Immigration History*.

[17] Juan N. Seguin, *Personal Memoirs of John N. Seguín* (San Antonio, 1858), Digital History by the University of Houston.

[18] Seguin.

livestock worth $4,000 to the cause of Texas Independence. He was at the Alamo and left to call in reinforcements. He fought alongside the Anglos at the Battle of San Jacinto, and none of that saved him from the anti-Mexican sentiment that appeared after the war. Eventually driven out of San Antonio, Seguin, and around 200 additional Tejano families, settled in South Texas or decided to go to Mexico. By 1856, San Antonio's Tejano population was cut in half where it was once thriving.[19] The Tejanos who had helped the Anglo Texans win independence for Texas from Mexico were being discriminated against and essentially thrown away.

In South Texas, Tejano families found themselves to be the majority, and Anglos traveled South regularly for recreation. For a time, Anglo men who mostly traveled alone attended fandangos commonly where they observed Tejanas dancing what they described as sensually, wearing uncorseted and low-cut dresses that they considered immodest.[20] They continued their observation of Tejanos as morally indecent and criticized their lack of modesty, while also watching the women dance and attending the questionable functions. The observers chastised the indecency and depicted the Tejanas as promiscuous, although they also rarely noted that unmarried daughters were chaperoned and monitored closely at social gatherings.[21] Regardless of the immodest depictions previously given of the Tejanas, the Anglo men were still interested in marrying them in the years that followed.

By the 1850s, the Anglos and Tejanos relationship shifted again as they formed marriage alliances, and there was very little expressed racial hostility at the time. Many Anglos adapted themselves to the existing conditions by learning the Spanish language, accepting the Catholic

[19] Acosta and Winegarten, 46-47.
[20] Acosta and Winegarten, 54.
[21] Acosta and Winegarten, 55.

religion, and Tejano culture in general.[22] The marriages between Tejanas and Anglos created a vital power base, mainly because Tejanas could legally inherit land in Texas, a law brought from the Spanish before them, and customarily Mexican daughters could inherit land on an equal basis to Mexican sons. Marriages could unite Tejano land wealth with the ever-growing Anglo political influence. Some of the Anglos may have even looked to marry a Tejana specifically to pocket the Mexican vote.[23] By the 1880s, South Texas began to shift again as the Anglo population increased. They began to have more political influence resulting from the marriages and land grabs.[24] Tejanas seemingly had more value to the Anglos during this period than Tejano males because they could be used to gain land and power in politics in the Texas region, especially in the South.

By the turn of the century, Tejanos were the dominant population in South Texas as they were being pushed out from other regions by migrating Anglo-Americans. At the same time, the Anglos continued to increase in size in the other regions of Texas and the new American West. The proximity to Mexico prompted the Tejanos to keep updated on the political climate that was growing turbulent across the border. In Mexico, revolution broke out as the Mexicans attempted to overthrow the power of Porfirio Diaz in 1910, the President at the time. Many of the Mexicans grew hostile to Diaz because they felt he valued Mexico's economic relationship with the United States, which benefitted the wealthy rather than what was suitable for the working-class people of Mexico. Mexican women had become increasingly involved in politics and wanted to see Diaz successfully overthrown.[25] Women brought a feminist perspective to the revolution, which

[22] De León, 41.
[23] Acosta and Winegarten, 52.
[24] De León, 41.
[25] Acosta and Winegarten, 74.

prompted a larger revolutionary cause that included the idea that no longer would women's abilities and concerns be ignored.

In 1904, the major opposition political party in Mexico, Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM), established an operation in Texas. PLM leaders Ricardo Flores Magó and his brother Enrique were imprisoned for several years for their political activity but eventually fled to Texas. Tejanas in the border cities and San Antonio welcomed the PLM, often opening their homes to the fleeing activists. Poet and political activist Sara Estela Ramírez offered her home as the headquarters for the ongoing PLM activities. She worked as an activist in the Tejano community and wrote essays that supported the working class.[26] She wrote poems such as "¡Surge! A la mujer" to encourage women to stand up as "queen of the world" and arise "to life and activity."[27] Her work has displayed the significance of the Tejana's role in society and revolutionary politics of the period.

The revolution created a period during which women nurtured their own revolutionary cause as they wrote essays and edited their own articles criticizing the dictator and championing a new position for women. They discussed important issues, including that during the revolution in Mexico, thousands of Mexicans left their homeland and crossed the border into the United States to a region that was formerly Mexican but relegated to an inferior socioeconomic status that affected all areas of their lives. As explained by Emma Pérez in the book *The Decolonial Imaginary,* the Magó brothers established *Regeneración.*[28] This newspaper represented the PLM, and they often wrote essays that addressed women's rights and their duty to the revolution, but

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[26] Acosta and Winegarten, 74.

[27] Sara Estela Ramírez and Ines Hernandez, "Sara Estela Ramírez: Sembradora," *Legacy* 6, no. 1 (1989): 13–26.

[28] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*: *Theories of Representation and Difference*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 57.

the newspaper also addressed working class issues, which included many of the Mexicans in Texas. [29] The revolution became a transnational movement as activism blurred the lines of the border.

The working class in Texas consisted of newly arrived Mexicans who fled Mexico, as the United States was simultaneously facing a labor shortage with their entrance into World War I. Brian Gratton and Emily Klancher Merchant explained in the article, "An Immigrant's Tale," that the U.S. placed fewer restrictions on immigration to the U.S. by Mexicans as the need for labor grew, and the number of European immigrations declined. At the same time, conflict increased in Europe during the war era.[30] In the early 1900s, immigration from Mexico did not have the same stringent quotas that immigration from Europe had, but it did become more tightly regulated. Entry requirements included fees, literacy tests, and medical inspections, but border procedures did not result in high rejection rates. Mexicans during this time enjoyed open access to the U.S. not typically afforded to other national groups after 1921.[31] The labor shortage in the United States and the availability of Mexican workers who fled the violence in Mexico increased immigration rates and allowed the population of Mexicans in Texas and across the nation to grow.

The working class had grown amongst the Tejano population, who had already lived in Texas in the previous decades. As more Tejanos found themselves without land, they had to become a part of the larger workforce in Texas to make ends meet for their families. Landless Tejanos had to work as ranch and farm hands; sometimes, they worked on the land that had once

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[29] Pérez, 57-59.

[30] Brian Gratton and Emily Klancher Merchant, "An Immigrant's Tale: The Mexican American Southwest 1850 to 1950," *Social Science History* 39, no. 4 (2015): 521–50, 528.

[31] Gratton and Lancher, 530.

belonged to their families. Tejanas often took up wage labor as well to contribute to their family expenses, with jobs in domestic labor as housekeepers, cooks, servants, laundresses, and sewists.[32] Revolutionary ideas spoke of relieving the socioeconomic conditions for Tejanos. However, women were crucial for their families' economic security and the success of their cause.

Jovita Idar was an influential Tejana activist in this Progressive era. The Progressive Era in the United States was a period of social activism and political reform to create a better society to protect the vulnerable population. Activists looked to change the living conditions of immigrants, people experiencing poverty, and to provide better working conditions for the working class, among other vital issues. Jovita Idar was a Tejano Progressive from a prominent family famous for their activism, who fought for economic and educational opportunities for the Tejano population. She and other Tejano Progressives saw education and economic growth for Mexicans as a method to combat the Anglo racism present on the borderlands.[33] She also politicized gender by writing about women's rights. She was a leader in suffrage rights for Latinas, which made her activist activities different from other Tejano Progressives.

She was a journalist for the political newspaper *El Progreso* (Progress), which circulated along the Texas-Mexico border. The paper was controversial as it tended to criticize the United States for its interference with Latin America, and this often made the editors and journalists of the paper targets of raids by the Texas Rangers, leaders in Texas law enforcement. The Texas Rangers went to the offices of *El Progreso* to shut it down after a particular article that criticized

[32] Acosta and Winegarten, 57.

[33] Elizabeth Garner Masarik, "Por La Raza, Para La Raza: Jovita Idar and Progressive-Era Mexicana Maternalism along the Texas–Mexico Border," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 122, no. 3 (2019): 278–99, 284.

President Woodrow Wilson. The Texas Rangers were known to violently punish Tejanos for even minor infractions at the time, enforcing Anglo dominance in the region. On this occasion, Jovita Idar stood up to the Texas Rangers in front of her, blocking the doorway and citing her First Amendment right to the freedom of the press.[34] As a crowd drew, and knowing Idar's prominent status in the area, the Texas Rangers decided to back off. Jovita Idar was able to prevent the shutdown for the moment. The Rangers returned the following day, smashed the printing presses, and arrested the employees while Idar was away.

Conflicts with the Texas Rangers, such as this one, characterized the Texas borderland at the time. During the Revolutionary period in Mexico, the Texas Rangers, and the vigilantes they mobilized, killed countless innocent Mexicans along the border, numbering in the hundreds or even thousands. They were responsible for fueling prejudice, driving tens of thousands of Tejanos out of Texas, and increasing the abuse of power at the hands of Anglo authorities. Amid the heightened fears of Mexican Revolutionary activity, around 300 Tejanos and Mexicans were murdered at the hands of Texas Rangers and the vigilantes at the height of the conflict between 1915 and 1916.[35] Historically, Texas Rangers had treated Tejanos and the incoming Mexicans as second-class citizens. Still, the trouble in Mexico heightened ethnic tension and violence toward Mexicans and Tejanos, as well.

After World War I, the United States' nativist attitudes grew as people in the country experienced a period of fear of immigrants and their dissidents, especially those who promoted socialist, communist, or anarchist ideas. There were few deportations from the United States before the 1920s, but that number increased drastically in the years after World War I. During

[34] Masarik, 280.
[35] Masarik, 283.

this time, law enforcement began conducting raids that targeted alleged communist and anarchist supporters. Raids led to the arrests of thousands of alleged anarchists, trials with very little evidence, and convictions that led to the deportation of hundreds.[36] While Mexicans were not the leading targets for these raids at this time, considering many of them targeted change in Mexico and not the United States, the idea that they aligned themselves with socialist groups promoting workers' rights led to increased hostility in the political arena with women placing themselves in a critical role.

Texas women developed political character, but they aimed to serve the nationalist ideals. The male leaders of the cause idolized revolution and took charge by laying out the responsibilities of women to serve the cause, which would also serve the workers of the world. Ricardo Flores Magón published "A La Mujer" in *Regeneración* in 1910, which depicted a woman knocking on the nation's door and taking a stand.[37] It called for women to be brave by representing half of the human species. He recognized that women were workers, typically paid less than men and made to work harder. He established that throughout history, women had been considered inferior to men. He stated that the chains of tradition had bound women and that marriage for women was motivated by economic security rather than love, stating that marriage for women is "but another form of prostitution."[38] Magón also explained that it was a woman's duty to help men by encouraging him, to "stand by his side when he suffers…" and "Demand that your husbands, brothers, fathers, sons and friends pick up the gun."[39] While Magón

[36] Mae M. Ngai, "The Strange Career of the Illegal Alien: Immigration Restriction and Deportation Policy in the United States, 1921-1965," *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 69–107, 74.
[37] Ricardo Flores Magón, "A La Mujer," *Regeneración*, September 24, 1910.
[38] Magón.
[39] Magón.

displayed the need for women to take a stand and how she had been affected, he also defined her crucial role in the process.

Another PLM leader named Praxedis Guerrero published an article in *Regeneración* in 1910 that criticized feminism. In his work "Las Revolucionarias," he perpetuated the idea that women who were feminists did not want to be equal to men; they wanted to be men themselves. He claimed that "in the name of rational feminism she wants to embark upon the ugly duties that are only for men" and that "there is nothing attractive about a masculine female who is divorced from her sweet mission as a woman."[40] He explained that true equality would not and should not make men out of women. However, it would instead "enforce equal opportunities without disturbing the natural order between the sexes."[41] While Guerro encouraged women to fight for the cause and demand equality, he still reinforced the idea that women had a natural place in a traditional order.

Tejanas were responsive to the call to order. Two significant women crucial to the time were sisters Teresa and Andrea Villarreal. In the pages of *Regeneración,* they played their feminine part in encouraging men to fight. They ordered men in "Que Hacéis Aquí Hombres?" published in 1911, to "go to Mexico to conquer for us and for our children," while they also claimed they had the right as women to "demand strength from those who hesitate to fight."[42] In San Antonio, the sisters published *El Obrero* (The Worker) where they embraced the solidarity of the international workers and *La Mujer Moderna* (The Modern Woman) which championed women's rights.[43] The Revolution in Mexico became about liberation for women to the Tejana

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[40] Praxedis Guerrero, *Regeneración*, 6 November 1910.
[41] Guerro.
[42] Andrea and Teresa Villarreal, "¿Qué hacéis aquí hombres? Volad, volad al campo de batalla," *Regeneración*, January 1911.
[43] Acosta and Winegarten, 79.

activists. However, the male members could not move beyond their traditional view of women as nurturers whose job was emotionally supporting men. For the time, it seemed the Tejana also accepted her place as a woman in the traditional social structure but with the power to use her voice to enforce change. Her place in the traditional structure would be a reoccurring spot for many Tejanas as they struggled for decades to remove themselves from the role forced on them and move into a new position.

As Tejana activism increased, women all over the United States were asserting themselves into national politics with the passage of the nineteenth amendment granting women the right to vote. As explained by Cynthia E. Orozco in the book *Agent of Change,* although women relentlessly fought and earned the right to vote, there were still expectations that women would take a back seat to male voters and politicians.[44] Social assumptions still asserted that women were intellectually inferior, physically weaker, and were also more morally pure. Anglo women organized beginning in the 1920s to run for public office, and they won; however, Tejanas were slow to enter politics. Their communities expected them to organize with other women and still focus their attention on domestic issues.[45] The cultural norm for people of Mexican descent followed a societal and domestic standard that only allowed for women to associate with other women and for men to socialize with other men.

For Tejanas, the challenge of fighting gender discrimination and racial discrimination at the same time proved to be a difficult task. Texas increasingly imposed Jim Crow laws, meant to segregate White and Black society, but often that included Mexicans in their racial restrictions. The violence of the Mexican Revolution only heightened Anglo prejudice, especially as some

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[44] Cynthia E. Orozco, *Agent of Change: Adela Sloss-Vento,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 24.
[45] Orozco, 24.

Texans could hear the gunfire and screaming happening just across the river in Mexico from their homes. Stray bullets at times would hit people or property, and this caused many Anglos to police Tejanos as if they were dangerous Revolutionaries as well.[46] Again, it was difficult for the Texans to see any difference from the Tejanos who had been a part of the society, usually peacefully for generations, and the dangerous Mexican Revolutionaries on the other side of the border.

Though what was happening in Mexico at the time was essential to many Mexicans, not all people in Mexico were Revolutionaries. Some opted to flee Mexico because of the chaos they were experiencing, with the violence of the revolution forcing thousands of Mexicans out of Mexico to seek the safety of the United States. Melesio Gómez left behind his home in San Luís Potosí, a city in Mexico, for a new life in Houston, Texas, after the Mexican Federal Army had repeatedly ransacked his home. In one instance, he was set for execution in the plaza for withholding his support for the government agents, but his daughters pleaded with the officers for his life. They took pity on him and let him go. After surviving the ordeal, Gómez decided it was time to flee. He accepted contract work with the Southern Pacific Railroad as many men in his situation had done.[47] While Gómez was forced to abandon his home in Mexico, he found a place of belonging in Texas through community organization around those who were also displaced.

In 1920, Gómez sent for his wife and daughters to join him, and soon, he developed prominence in the Houston area by opening the first tortilla factory and Mexican restaurant in what later became the Mexican business district of Houston. When his daughter, Estela was a

[46] Masarik, 283.
[47] Pérez, 76.

teenager, she helped to organize el Club Feminino Chapultepec, a social club for young women.[48] Groups for the social gatherings of people in a new homeland to form a sense of community eventually replaced the anti-Diaz clubs that once dominated Texas as a source for the activism of the displaced Mexicans. They found a new home and decided that they needed to band together.

While the young women in el Club Feminino Chapultepec attempted to assimilate into their new environment, they were surprised by the reactions they received from the community. They quickly experienced racism and were forced to form a new identity out of a need for survival. The club held dances at the Young Women's Christian Association in Houston because Anglo ballroom owners refused to allow them to rent a space. When the club became more popular, they needed a larger meeting place, but the club still faced resistance. Estela Gómez suspected that it was because Houston newspapers only reported stories on Mexicans as violent, knife wielding criminals, who like to drink and cause trouble, and because the Anglos did not read Spanish, they could not read the Spanish publications to know that most of them were good people.[49] They quickly realized that the community support that they were building was with one another and not with the people of Houston at large.

The Spanish-speaking population also noticed the differences among themselves as well. There was a divide between the Tejanos who had been in Texas for generations, and the Mexicans who had recently arrived. Groups such as the one Estella was a part of, el Club Feminino Chapultepec, were organized by Mexicans who emphasized cultural pride in being Mexican. They were recent arrivals to the United States who still held ties to the country they

[48] Pérez, 77.
[49] Pérez, 85.

left. The group considered other names, but the club's name had a significant meaning. Estella Gómez explained that the group members chose the name to keep their Mexican culture, not lose it. The group also chose to hold meetings in English and Spanish to retain their bilingualism.[50] Historian Carlos Keven Blanton argued that this type of effort was usually made by those who had come from Mexico and retained their cultural identity.[51] They were the first set of Mexican Americans often identified by historians. They were what he called the "Mexicanist Generation," and he characterized them as those who emphasized a cultural pride in being Mexican.[52] This generation was much less removed from Mexico and less willing to give up their home culture than the seasoned Tejanos.

The generation that came after them, the Mexican American Generation, was more likely to embrace cultural assimilation much as the Tejanos had done. Mexicans who arrived in Houston after the revolution in Mexico, the Mexicanist Generation, tended to stay within their social circle. Maria Villagomez came from Mexico to Houston with her family in April 1918 and noticed some differences between herself and the Tejanos who had already lived there. She explained that the Tejanos "were different, their ways were different, their language was different. We were Mexicanos, you see, so there's quite a difference."[53] Villagomez explained that the Tejanos used a type of slang in the Spanish they spoke, sometimes using English words that combined with a Spanish form. It offended them because it was not the correct way to say the word. With time, she reflected on that period and concluded that "I suspect that we did have a

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[50] Pérez, 85.

[51] Carlos Kevin Blanton, "The Citizenship Sacrifice: Mexican Americans, the Saunders- Leonard Report, and the Politics of Immigration, 1951-1952," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2009): 299–320, 300.

[52] Blanton, 300.

[53] Maria and Ralph Villagomez, interview by Thomas Kreneck, 16 April 1979, *Houston Metropolitan Research Center*.

tendency to look down on the Tejanos. I think so, because we thought we knew better."[54] Assimilating to the culture around them took time, and they were not far enough removed from their homeland to experience the same transition as those who had always lived there. Even if people of Mexican descent saw a distinction between themselves, it did not always mean that the Anglo population did as well.

Although the Tejanos and the incoming Mexicans were legally considered White in the United States, it was solely because they were not considered Black. Practically, they were categorized somewhere between Black and White. As explained by Thomas A. Guglielmo in the article "Fighting for Caucasian Rights," all federal and Texas laws either implied that Mexican people were considered White, or at least refrained from defining them as "colored."[55] In theory, and sometimes in practice, Mexicans and Tejanos could legally attend White schools, travel on White rail cars, marry a White person, adopt a White child, or even serve time in a White prison. While this may be true in legal terms, when compared to Anglos, Mexicans and Tejanos generally received lower wages, worked more difficult occupations, attended poorly funded schools separate from White children, lived in less desirable neighborhoods, were not well represented in politics or court, were more prone to racial violence, and were subject to exclusion in public spaces.[56] Even while Tejanos and the incoming Mexican people could recognize the differences between themselves, they were classified similarly in Texas and all across the United States. Anglos saw them all the same.

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[54] Villagomez.

[55] Thomas A. Guglielmo, "Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas," *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (03, 2006): 1212-37, 1215.

[56] Guglielmo, 1216.

In the 1930s, as the nation and much of the world faced an economic crisis in the Great Depression, it became even more evident that, to Anglos and authorities, there was no difference between a Mexican immigrant from Mexico, and a person of Mexican descent who was born and lived in the United States. As explained by Marla A. Ramírez in the article "Gendered Banishment," under current law, an American citizen cannot be deported or repatriated from the United States.[57] However, during the Great Depression, banishment practices were allowed and often encouraged to save the federal government money for having to provide any financial assistance. In times of crisis, race and ethnicity have shown a tendency to outweigh nationality. During this time, Mexicans and Mexican Americans were either forcibly removed or coerced to leave the United States. While the nation faced nearly 25 percent unemployment during the 1930s, politicians, journalists, and the public blamed immigrants for the economic crisis.[58] Mexican people, regardless of status, were seen as foreigners and sent to Mexico whether they were born in the United States or not. Those who refused to go were threatened with a lack of financial assistance and forced to decide between being sent to a country they essentially had no ties to or starving.

A bill was proposed in Congress to restrict Mexican immigration, and this prompted a national sentiment of Mexicans and their labor as a threat to national economics. Moreover, Mexican women posed as a more significant threat to the economic crisis than men. Women, in general, were seen as economically dependent on their fathers or husbands, regardless of whether they were wage earners or not. They were usually seen as non-labor contributors and would more than likely to receive public assistance if they did not have a man to support them. Once set for

[57] Marla A. Ramírez, "Gendered Banishment: Rewriting Mexican Repatriation through a Transgenerational Oral History Methodology," *Latino Studies* 20, no. 3 (09, 2022): 306-33, 311.

[58] Ramírez, 312.

deportation, wives likely faced deportation with their husbands. Women of Mexican descent, dismissive of their citizenship status, were also seen as a threat because of their ability to produce children who were United States citizens with political rights. Branded as overproducers of children and a threat to the economy, they needed immediate removal from the country.[59] All of these conceptualized fears and stereotypes contributed to policies that laid the groundwork for mass removal regardless of whether it was right, wrong, or even Constitutional.

Legal status made no difference in the decisions of the removal of Mexican people. As stated in a 1931 federal report on the enforcement of deportation laws, immigration officials apprehended suspects "to the length of forcibly detaining groups of people many of whom are aliens lawfully in this country, or even United States citizens, without any warrant of arrest or search."[60] There did not need to be a reason for officers to detain someone, and the color of their skin made them a target. The violation of the rights of Mexicans and Mexican Americans made little difference to the enforcing authorities. All Mexicans faced racial targeting with no regard to their legal status, their birthright citizenship, the amount of time they had been living in the country, nor their contributions to the society that sought to have them removed.

Mexican American women saw a series of immigration laws aimed at them that established regulations of public charge, meaning the amount of money they would cost the American taxpayer, which usually included themselves as they were generally also taxpayers. The Immigration Act of 1882 mandates that immigrants unable to care for themselves without financial assistance were inadmissible to the United States. Then, in 1917, the Act was amended to extend the time to three years of residence that an immigrant could be deemed a public charge.

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[59] Ramírez, 312.

[60] US G.O.P. 1931, *Report on the Enforcement of Deportation Laws of the United States,* Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

At that point, they risked a flag for removal. The change made in 1917 justified the mass removal of immigrants. If the head of the household was a Mexican-born male and classified as a public charge, the entire family faced removal, even if they were born in the United States. [61] The actions were justified as preventing a wife from applying for relief for herself and her children without a husband to support the family. However, they were Americans needing support, just like millions of other Americans. Labor and welfare systems classified people along gender lines, with males as wage earners and females as economic dependents, which led to the coerced removal of American women of Mexican descent to Mexico along with their American-born children.

In the 1930s, activist organizations to help the conditions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans emerged, particularly in Texas, where relations had not seen improvement in some time. In 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), founded in Corpus Christi, Texas, sought to represent the rising middle-class Mexican Americans in Texas to battle racism and discrimination that had been heavily present for an extended period. They wanted to improve educational opportunities for their children and believed that reform would rectify the injustices people of Latin American descent might suffer in the United States. In 1935, the women's auxiliary began outlining plans for a Ladies LULAC Council in Houston, but it did not officially activate until the 1950s.[62] After the World War II period, there was an increase in activist activities.

More organizations gathered at this time to focus on other issues that plagued the Mexican American community, such as access to healthcare. La Cruz Azul Mexicana (the

[61] Ramírez, 314.
[62] Pérez, 95.

Mexican Blue Cross) was a volunteer organization established in Texas to provide this care to the Mexican American community in the United States. The volunteers regularly made house calls to lower-income Mexican residents who could not afford to see a doctor. The organization frequently received calls from those who feared deportation during the raids that were occurring at this time.[63] During the Great Depression, this service was essential to provide families with medical attention when it was difficult to find, and particularly to the Mexican communities who were terrified of being removed from the country for any reason or feared being a considered a charge to the American taxpayer.

Money was a critical issue for Mexican American families who were losing their jobs at higher rates than Anglo Americans during the Great Depression. This issue was complicated further by the fact that the United States government actively sought to avoid paying any assistance to people of color if possible. Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana (SMOM) is a mutual-aid society founded in 1932 that assists families of Mexican descent in crisis.[64] One of the founders of the women's auxiliary to SMOM was Angie Morales, who moved to Houston in 1932 and opened a funeral home with her husband, Felix. In interviews with Emma Perez and Thomas Kreneck, she explained that she was the first woman in the City of Houston to become a certified embalmer. She persuaded the Mexican community to utilize her services by ensuring them that no man would ever touch the bodies of their female loved ones.[65] It was a good selling point for the more conservative Mexican American community. In a later interview, the couple's granddaughter explained that they opened the funeral home when Felix's father passed away. They realized that no funeral homes in the area provided services according to their Mexican

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[63] Pérez, 97.
[64] "About SMOM," *Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana*.
[65] Pérez, 95.

customs.[66] A funeral home that could provide the Mexican American community with a traditional option was important.

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, it was also difficult for families to bury their loved ones because the expense was too great. Funeral costs in 1935 were around $18.50 to $75.00, which was too much for many families at the time to afford. Harris County initiated an allocation of funds to any funeral home that could bid low enough to bury indigents in the City of Houston, and the Morales couple was able to bid the low price of just ten dollars by building their own caskets and sewing burial clothing themselves. Winning the bid for the county contract was a milestone for the Tejano community because it meant they would be burying Anglos as well, something that would not have happened before for a Mexican American business. Most Anglos did not like the idea of being buried in the same areas as Mexicans and would opt only to use Anglo-owned businesses. A newspaper journalist wrote a column that protested the county awarding the bid to Mexicans. However, the county had to turn the contract over to the lowest bidder.[67] The Morales couple were native Tejanos, though they were called Mexicans, and the county could find no reason to pull the contract awarded to them.

While it was a victory for the funeral home to receive the contract to work with the Anglos, many Tejanos did not want their loved ones buried in the same county graveyards as Anglo indigents because they were wary of the issues it may cause. They did not want their final resting place among people who did not want to be near them. When these issues occurred, SMOM was able to step in and provide funds for the burials to Mexican American families who wanted their loved ones buried elsewhere. SMOM benefitted the community and contributed to

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[66] Christina Morales, Interview by Sandra Enriquez and Samantha Rodrigues, 30 June 2016, *The Portal to Texas History*, UNT Libraries.

[67] Pérez, 96.

the concept of Latinos sticking together, but Angie Morales also expressed discontent with the society's male members. She had been instrumental in establishing the women's auxiliary and was angry when the male members voted to have a male present at each women's meeting. To Morales, it was as though the men did not trust them to stay on track and wanted to watch over them to ensure they were performing correctly.[68] The women gathered to discuss their own agenda and provide their own solutions separate from the men and did not appreciate the insinuation that they were only socializing to gossip with one another. The women worked hard to have the auxiliary in the society because there were specific issues that they wanted to address for women. However, they still had to conform to what the men wanted them to address instead.

It is essential to consider that the interview with Angie Morales was conducted in 1979, several decades after the incident. With age, time, and distance, she may have looked back on the situation differently than when it happened. It was also during the 1970s that a launch of a full activist campaign amongst Chicanos for equal rights in the United States, with a dual campaign within the movement for Chicana feminist activism.[69] Morales is speaking during this interview in a period where acceptance of her vocalized frustration was more acceptable than the time the incident occurred. It is possible that she felt more comfortable airing her grievances during the interview rather than during the period she was experiencing it.

For any woman in the early twentieth century, gender was an obstacle in activism. The separate spheres ideology separated gender roles and prohibited women in the public and political realm. Men sometimes dismissed women as too emotional or downplayed their actions

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[68] Angie and Felix Morales, interview by Thomas Kreneck, 5 February 1979, Angie and Félix Morales Collection, *Houston Metropolitan Research Center*, Houston, Texas.

[69] Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 43.

and contributions. Women had their place in the home, which was just as true for Anglo women as for Tejanas. Along the borderlands, the idea of women's proper behavior followed many of the same constructs of patriarchy as was followed in Mexico. Machismo, or extreme male dominance, was combined with the idea of extreme female submission. Young brides often heard from their elders that they should keep in mind that men's duties in society were superior to those of women.[70] That is not to stereotype Mexican men alone because Mexican and Anglo society were both highly patriarchal. Politics for women in Texas functioned around a paradigm of racial and gender patriarchy.

Mexican American women held a traditional place in the center of the familial role of the internal arrangement of the community. Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo explained in her book *Mexican American Women, Dress and Gender* that the Christian religion and moral tradition of Mexicans have created a behavioral code for Mexican American women that perpetuates them as silent, respectful, enduring, and proud of their culture. [71] The role of the mother is the only role possible for her, maintained by the idea that the family is the nucleus of the internal arrangement of the community. It makes her role in the community necessary and important but also keeps her in her place without room to enter the public space, adding to a feeling of obligation to maintain that role for the safety of the family and the community. Gender roles are clearly marked and accepted, with women as the domestic and private figures preserving the continued communal value system. Mexican American women were not meant to stand out in the crowd but to keep only to themselves and to the people in their communities for the sake of all.

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[70] Masarik, 287.

[71] Amaia Ibarraran-Bigalondo, *Mexican American Women, Dress and Gender: Pachucas, Chicanas, Cholas*, (London: Routledge, 2019), 3.

For Mexican women, and most women in capitalist societies, the home was the personal, intimate, and private space for the woman. At the same time, the man operated the public space of labor, commerce, and politics. Women's work in the home was considered just as essential to family life as the wage her husband earned. As explained by Joanne Hershfield in her book *Imagining la Chica Moderna,* even after women in Mexico played their part in the revolution, the 1917 Constitution granted women pregnancy and childbirth benefits but did nothing to address any labor issues for women, such as equal opportunity, childcare, or maternity leave.[72] Women in the revolution period fought for more educational opportunities. They had some success in this venture, but young girls were provided more education in areas that concerned the disciplines of home economics and family health care.[73] Young girls were instructed on modern methods of keeping a home and raising good children for the betterment of the nation, a sort of republican motherhood also seen in the Anglo society. They were not necessarily provided with an education on a level with young boys.

Education for many of the young Mexican American girls was not valued. Many of them entered the labor market instead of attending high school, often going to work directly after or sometimes before completing eighth grade. Mexican American historian Vicki Ruiz explained in her book *From Out of the Shadows* that many Mexican factory workers were young, unmarried daughters whose wages were essential to the economic survival of their families. [74] Their wages were often given to their elders to contribute to the family income, and they would sometimes resent the lack of personal autonomy. Still, the young women usually felt obligated to help their

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[72] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 77.

[73] Hershfield, 77.

[74] Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America,* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 63.

families as they knew their families depended on their labor for their own economic survival.[75] This was a continuous cycle as the young women in Mexican culture felt obligated to care for the family, even if that meant taking on a masculine role, such as providing economic security, without getting the same outcome of earned respect as she would get if she were a male.

Ruiz interviewed a young woman named Erminia Ruiz, who explained her financial obligation to financially support her family.[76] In the case of Erminia Ruiz, she was the sole financial provider in her family after the death of her father. Familial obligation dictated that she become the breadwinner to her mother and younger sisters. She worked at a cafeteria in a business college when the opportunity presented itself to allow her financial support to finish high school and eventually go to college. Ermina dreamed of becoming a teacher and was eager to have the chance to chase her own dreams. She had her dreams shattered, however, when her mother refused to allow her this opportunity, explaining that all her mother would say is, "I need her to work!"[77] Sacrificing her life for financial stability was expected.

Aside from work, when it came to young women in public settings, she was often accompanied by an older family member. This situation was not unique to Mexican culture, as chaperoning young women in public has existed for centuries on both sides of the border. Ruiz described this practice as an attempt by elders of a family to dictate the activities of the younger generation for the sake of family honor. A woman's purity was part of the social standing the family would have in their community. For Mexican immigrant families, the enforcement of chaperones was an even greater urgent need.[78] Mexican families were in a new environment full

[75] Ruiz, 63.
[76] Ruiz, 63.
[77] Ruiz, 69.
[78] Ruiz, 52.

of temptations, and the young women were vulnerable in the new atmosphere that demanded shelter. Ironically, they could have been the most vulnerable in society because they were also the most sheltered.

For any teenage girl, pushing the boundaries set by the family's elders was a common occurrence, and for young girls who were trying to find their place in a society their parents did not understand, it could be difficult. Mexican American families often chastised young women for their appearance if it pushed the boundaries of the traditional dress. During the 1920s, America experienced a period of extreme consumerism, and this included the Spanish-speaking population. Advertisements encouraged young women to buy makeup, clothing, and feminine hygiene products while promising affection if the proper products were purchased. English advertisers sometimes published in Spanish-language magazines that infused American popular culture with the young Mexican American girls looking for their place in American society. Tejano newspapers conveyed American norms to their potentially assimilable readership. Advertisements insinuated that buying certain Anglo products could potentially give Mexican women the same degree of power over their men as their Anglo peers allegedly had.[79] Spanish-language press conveyed symbolic American norms to a readership that was adaptable to the American way.

For young women at the time, clothing choices were a way to fit in with the crowd and express their femininity. It was a way to express their personality and choice and conform to traditional gender roles by complying with modest, feminine standards. If clothing was a way to express implied acceptance of gender tradition, it could also be a means of resistance to the

[79] Ruiz, 57.

dictate of social mandates.[80] A popular style in 1920s America was the "flapper" style for women that included cutting hair to a short length known as a "bob." The short length of a woman's hair was a controversial issue that spanned class, religion, and ethnic boundaries as it was unaccepted in all categories. It was uncommon for a young girl to convince her Mexican family to allow it. The heavy makeup the girls applied was equally controversial to the Mexican culture that compared the girls to a piñata.[81] Conforming to American popular culture was concerning to many Mexican families, and the control they exerted among the youth usually prevented adolescents from pushing the boundaries.

Preserving traditional looks for Mexican women was a deep concern for Mexican men, and they expressed to each other and in letters written to the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* that they disapproved. Women were becoming more influenced by American culture and adopting some styles, such as short hair. The consensus amongst Mexican men was that their disapproval was the reflection of all of Mexico's true "national character" because Yankee cultural imperialism threatened to "shave Mexico's character."[82] The consumer culture created a way for young women to express themselves by either conforming to the expectations placed on them by society or to resist them. Mexican men rejected women's fashion trends not to protect women but because the behavior challenged masculine authority. Mexican men could adjust their fashions to replicate those of the Anglos with no consequence, and it was never a concern.

Advertisements heavily influenced young women and what they saw, read, and watched in movies, particularly surrounding the idea of dating. This influence was a point of contention

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[80] Ibarraran-Bigalondo, 15.

[81] Ruiz, 55.

[82] "Un reprobable atentado contra las pelonas," *Excelsior*, July 23, 1924; "Un atentado que deshonra la ciudad," *Excelsior*, July 24, 1924.

between parents and their daughters as the parents monitored their daughters' behavior toward young men. It was common for young Mexican women to be escorted to dances by their mothers They were also strictly disciplined for any perceived improper behavior, such as talking to a young man in broad daylight or walking home with a boy.[83] Mexican families were strict, and young women could either comply with the rules set for them by their family or find a way around the boundaries of the traditional standard. Most young women complied, usually because they had no other option. Being sneaky was out of the question. The neighbors and relatives helped to keep a close watch on the adolescent women and report any unsavory activity to the parents quickly.[84] It was difficult for a young girl to get away from the watchful eyes.

The immigrant parents of the young women encountered an entirely different culture in the United States than they had experienced in their youth. For them, courtship occurred in open spaces where young women and young men gathered in public places under the watchful eyes of their elders. Exchanging meaningful glances at a stranger could very well lead to engagement implications. They were now witnessing their daughters apply makeup, dress in fashionable clothing, and resist traditional boundaries.[85] This only served to reaffirm the need to chaperone their daughters and protect them from the more modern society that they were not used to. Wilhemina Vasquez from McAllen remembered her chaperoned dates. She said, “There was no such thing as honking the horn- this is not curb service! You have her home by 9 or she’s yours!”[86] Their dates had to be chaperoned or held at their home with their brothers present. On a date with her future husband, Vasquez remembered sitting on her family’s front porch with the

[83] Ruiz, 59.
[84] Ruiz, 60.
[85] Ruiz, 65.
[86] Wilhemina Vasquez, phone interview by Kim Lupe, 29 March 2006, Folder 488, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

window open. If the swing started to squeak, her father came out to check on them.[87] Chaperoning was a way to preserve the purity of their daughters, but it was not just a way to monitor their activities; it also served to mold them into sheltered women free of outside influence of any other type of lifestyle that may be available to her.

For some young women, early marriage was a form of rebellion. Some of the young girls found an escape from parental control by marrying at the young age of fifteen or sixteen. While some parents were on board with their daughter starting her life with a young man and fulfilling her duties as a woman, some were apprehensive about giving up their control. Rebellion was strong for some young women, and even if the girl's parents would not allow her to marry, it was not uncommon for her to run away and get married in secret, desperate to escape parental supervision. Elopement was a frequent occurrence because often, parents would not believe any young man to be a good match for their daughter.[88] Extreme forms of control would often lead daughters to trade supervision by their parents to a life of marriage strictly performing duties as wives.

In many cases, the young women of Mexican descent were essentially exchanging one form of supervision for another, with wives expected to be submissive to their husbands, and the added responsibility of having children of their own to take control of. Aida Hurtado and Mrinal Sinha explained the contradictions of the male position in the community in the book *Beyond Machismo.*[89] They suggested that Latinos held a contradictory position as they often faced discrimination as people who generally appear to be non-White, while they also held a position

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[87] Vasquez.
[88] Ruiz, 61.
[89] Aida Hurtado and Mrinal Sinha, *Beyond Machismo: Intersectional Latino Masculinities,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 12.

of privilege as men in a patriarchal system. Although men cannot experience women's patriarchal oppression, they can empathize with their own experiences with oppression.[90] Yet, women of Mexican descent had lived through a system that valued them as submissive beings to their husbands. From a young age, Mexican families socialized women into *marianismo*, or traditional gender roles. They were raised with a sense of responsibility to their family to conform to feminine behaviors, which included acts of submissiveness, weakness, reservation, and virginity.[91] They were expected to be submissive and deferential to their husbands and to perform self-sacrificing services to benefit their families.

In the 1930s, it seemed even more necessary to shelter the young women as people grew increasingly concerned over deportations during the Great Depression. Even when the deportations dwindled, segregation was still restrictive. Segregated schools increased between 1930 and 1950, neighborhood covenants restricted Mexicans and other people of color from purchasing homes in certain areas, and many restaurants, theaters, and public pools discriminated against Spanish speakers. In small towns, it was even more common for businesses to hang signs in the windows indicating that they would only be serving the Anglo population.[92] These practices were bitter reminders that the Mexican community had second-class citizenship status. These actions caused the communities to band together often, leaving them to associate with people outside of their own cultures rarely.

Mexican Americans were in a complicated place where they maintained a cultural connection to a country in which they no longer held a physical space. They came to a location

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[90] Hurtado and Sinha, 12.

[91] Carolyn A. Mendez-Luck and Katherine P. Anthony, "Marianismo and Caregiving Role Beliefs Among U.S.-Born and Immigrant Mexican Women," *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences* 71, no. 5 (2016): 925-935, 927.

[92] Ruiz, 68.

where people looked like them and retained some of the same cultural aspects but had no physical ties to the country they had once belonged.[93] Tejanos lived in the same place they had lived for as long as they could remember but found themselves somewhere that no longer existed for them. Tejanos had been in Texas for generations and had long adjusted to the American lifestyle and the hostility that came with it.[94] They were different from the Mexicans who came across the border but treated the same as those with more ties to Mexico. The newly arrived Mexicans struggled to maintain their culture in an area where their children saw influence in their surroundings, experienced racial hostility, and separation from a community that looked the same as them but who had already lost some pieces of their Mexican identity as they conformed to become more accepted in their own home.

There were challenges to their traditional values, and Tejanas faced even greater challenges as they struggled to form a place for themselves on multiple fronts. On the one hand, they valued their cultural identity, maintained loyalty to their family and community, and wanted to do what benefited them all. On the other hand, they wanted their own freedom and the privilege of having the life that they would get to choose. Their place in society as women was important, and at a young age, they learned that it was their obligation to maintain that traditional structure.[95] They had been given permission to rebel against racial prejudice and injustices but were also ordered to take a seat to male authority.

Tejanas were placed into a category as a “Mexican” because, to Anglos, they were all the same, but they also knew that in their community, those who had come across more recently displaced them. As more generations became further removed from their cultural ties to Mexico

[93] Acuna, 23.
[94] De la Teja, 97.
[95] Ruiz, 55.

and became more deeply submerged into American society, influenced by American ideals, they would evolve once again.[96] As they found new freedom in the war period and an opportunity to experience a life not generally meant for them, they would become a new woman that would change their attitudes and willingness to compromise.

If they had once been willing to accept their place in a male-dominated society that told them how to behave and how they should stand up for themselves, they would have been less willing to conform once they were less sheltered and exposed to a new way of life. They saw that they could be more and that they were capable of more. While they may have prioritized the struggle of their race over their struggles as women, they were less willing to compromise than their mothers and pushed the boundaries even further. The Tejanas of the World War II era set the stage for Latinas, blowing the door open for la raza in the Chicano movement that followed.

[96] Mendez-Luck and Anthony, 927.

## Chapter 3

## The Tejana in the Workforce

"We Can Do It!"[1] The image and motto of the iconic Rosie the Riveter encouraged women to join the workforce in World War II in larger numbers than ever before. Women had generally been in the workforce before her; however, in smaller numbers and primarily in approved industries for their gender.[2] Her outstretched arm, bandana on her head, and feminine appeal allowed women to believe they could do it all. She could be strong, work hard, do her part to contribute to the struggling workforce while the men were away, and still manage her duties as a woman with a smile on her pretty face. Women were ready and willing to show their capabilities, though many had no idea how much strain that it would have on them. They had to learn to rely on each other and their families for support. Women were the vital resources the United States needed to win the war and were more than willing to do their part.

Mexican American women also had the potential to showcase their abilities and patriotism, but leading a life outside of parental control was a challenging task to manage. As discussed in the previous chapter, young Tejanas had been sheltered and monitored throughout their lives, and getting out from under the thumb of supervision was difficult to navigate. Many of the older generations had experienced harsh racism themselves or were immigrants from Mexico and feared what would happen to their daughters without their protection. The young girls rarely had the opportunity to navigate the social environment outside of their communities for themselves. Even when they could convince their elders to allow them room to develop a skill and do their part for the war effort, they entered a society that had largely been shut off to

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[1] War Production Co-ordinating Committee, "We Can Do It! Rosie the Riveter," *Library of Congress,* 1942.

[2] Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change,* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 8.

them.[3] They were exposed to the harsh realities that they were targets in the real world both for their gender, as well as their skin color.

As they stepped out into the wider world, away from the sheltered life they had been living, they experienced true freedom and a sense of belonging for the first time. It was not always pleasant, but there were benefits that they could only have imagined before. They were more resilient than their parents gave them credit. They faced discrimination, just as their parents feared, but learned to overcome situations and find their place in society. They found a way to navigate their way through the realities of the world. They managed to develop a sense of purpose and, at the same time, create new relationships that allowed them to grow and allowed others to grow as well by learning that they were all not so different.[4] This chapter will explore how Tejanas entered the workforce, the difficulties and benefits of a Tejana's new life experiences during World War II, and how they managed a new way of living they were not raised to have.

Though the United States was not initially involved in the physical World War II conflict, they supplied the Allies with the available war materials. Once the United States officially joined the Allies after the bombing at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the war materials produced were not sufficient for the new role the Americans assumed in the conflict. Seemingly overnight, auto factories switched gears by significantly increasing production and producing aircraft. In addition, shipyards expanded, and factories sprouted very quickly to meet the demand.[5] Within a short time, employers needed more workers to fill vacant positions as the additional factories and

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[3] Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America,* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 52.

[4] Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows,* 63.

[5] Gluck, 9.

increased production took hold. Demand for manpower expanded as men left for combat just as quickly.

Womanpower was a clear solution, but employers were reluctant to hire women or other minorities to fill those positions. President Franklin Roosevelt addressed this issue in his October 12, 1943, Fireside Chat number 23.[6] He explained that he went on a trip to inspect camps, training stations, and war factories and was impressed by the large portion of women who were employed in the factories, doing skilled manual labor. He was sure that the number of women in these positions would only increase as the male population steadily began to enter the armed forces. He also stressed the importance of "stepping up our production," but added that "we have had to add millions of workers to the total labor force of the Nation. And as new factories came into operation, we must find additional millions of workers."[7] He addressed some obstacles that prevented the fulfillment of much-needed manpower, stating, "In some communities, employers dislike to employ women. In others they are reluctant to hire Negroes. In still others, older men are not wanted. We can no longer afford to indulge such prejudices or practices."[8] This was a larger issue that needed to be dealt with as the United States no longer had the luxury of providing jobs only to the people they deemed worthy. Changing the social acceptability of hiring women and minorities into industries that were previously closed to them would be a difficult task.

Women had worked before World War II but mostly in lower-paying jobs deemed suitable for women, such as clerical, service jobs, or manufacturing. This changed during wartime as the demand for workers increased, and women entered fields previously exclusive to

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[6] Franklin Roosevelt, "Fireside Chat 23: On the Home Front," *National Archives,* October 12, 1942.
[7] Roosevelt.
[8] Roosevelt.

Anglo men. As explained by Sherna Berger Gluck in the book *Rosie the Riveter Revisited,* women did not need much convincing to change the fields that they were in because news of good pay quickly spread by word of mouth. [9] At first, the jobs were only open to Anglo women. However, as the demand increased even further, and Black women and men pushed for inclusion, others joined the efforts.[10] War jobs created an opportunity for people to take on roles that were previously closed to them, though people of color sometimes had to force their way into those vacancies, even with the national shortage of available workers versus the increasing number of available jobs. Convincing employers of these changes would require a significant effort and desperate circumstances.

Soon, the demand was so high that the number of women working as defense workers was still insufficient to fill the increasing need for workers. This was likely because most of these women had already been in the workforce but in other positions. Industry had to find a way to convince more women to join the workforce who had not entered it before. Young women, particularly those just graduating from high school, were an obvious choice of new workers. Recruiters highlighted that factory jobs paid more than clerical work, and they used themes of patriotism to appeal to them. They reminded the girls that their boyfriends and brothers were off fighting a war, and the least they could do was work a factory job.[11] Their personal relationships were used to convince them that it was their obligation to help, and recruiters appealed to their sense of duty. War jobs were glorified and convinced young women it was their job to take on the work that the men left behind. They were assured of their duty to take care of the home front

[9] Gluck, 10.
[10] Gluck, 10.
[11] Gluck, 11.

while the men were away, which included the defense industry jobs. The World War II era shifted Americans' role in society using various tactics.

The government convinced women that they could work in industries previously exclusive to men because the tasks women would take on were like those they did regularly. For example, the newsreel *Glamour Girls of 1943* suggested that cutting the lines of a dress, something most women did often, was a similar act to cutting the pattern of an aircraft part.[12] It further explained, “Instead of baking cake, this woman is cooking gears to reduce the tension in the gears after use,” and “this woman can operate a drill press just as easily as a juice extractor in her own kitchen.”[13] These skills were transferable in times of need in the defense industry. The film also allowed women to explain why they chose to do the jobs they were performing. One woman explained that she wanted to bring her dad home sooner. Another revealed that she had a husband in the Navy, and she wanted to “do a job that means more than working in a department store.”[14] The jobs that women were doing were seen as essential and a way for women to display their efforts in winning the war for their loved ones who were sacrificing their lives.

The American government used several tools to shift public perception of women’s role during wartime. Maureen Honey analyzed how magazine advertisements targeted women to recruit them for filling traditionally male-dominated positions in the article “The Working-Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda in World War II.”[15] Honey explained that to make war work more attractive to women, magazines romanticized the fulfillment women felt as they entered the defense industries and performed important work for the country. They displayed

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[12] Office of War Information Bureau of Motion Pictures, *Glamour Girls of 1943,* Associated Press Archive.
[13] Office of War Information Bureau of Motion Pictures.
[14] Office of War Information Bureau of Motion Pictures.
[15] Maureen Honey, “The Working-Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II: Class Differences in the Portrayal of War Work,” *Signs* 8, no. 4 (1983): 672–87, 677.

pride in their work and overall joy. In addition, working women were portrayed positively during the war compared to the negative depiction in the pre-war period. Women received praise for bravery, loyalty, intelligence, and competence. For months, government recruitment agencies prominently displayed the image of the heroine defense worker.[16] The images of women workers were continuously promoting praise for their dedication to complex jobs and adorned by their communities to convince them that working in these industries was the right thing to do.

Praise was a stark contrast to the image of working women in the years before the war, where there was significant resistance to women going outside of the traditional boundary of home. In the 1930s and early 1940s, society expected married women to become housewives, and there was minimal variation from that. The public typically viewed married, employed women as selfish and destructive to the family unit because of their lack of time to perform their duties to take care of their families. In contrast, working women during wartime were notably seen as someone who had no trouble coping with both family and work.[17] Recruitment campaigns resulted in a positive image of the female worker capable of doing it all. Women were proud of their war work. Media glamourized women with power and authority, which women did not actually have. They were pleased with their contributions to the success of their country and were willing to do their part.

Advertisements did much to change public perception, but radio also played a significant part. Gerd Horton analyzed the role of radio during the era in the book *Radio Goes to War*.[18] He explained that in September 1942, the womanpower campaign was underway. Radio soap operas

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[16] Honey, 677.
[17] Honey, 678.
[18] Gerd Horton, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II,* (Berkely: University of California, 2002).

supported the changes on the surface.[19] Horton pointed out the number of shows that replaced male professionals called for active duty with female professionals, such as *Bachelor's Children*. Shows portrayed women going out on the town and enjoying their newfound freedom and economic opportunities. Some shows, such as *Today's Children*, had women discussing war work and how they would feel awful for just sitting at home while the country needed them.[20] These shows effectively changed public ideas of women's role in the workforce.

Spanish radio also encouraged men and women to join the war efforts. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez discussed Spanish language broadcasting in the chapter "Embracing the Ether" in her book *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero.*[21] Spanish radio had the same purpose as English-language broadcasts: to encourage the public to take their place in wartime society, but she explained that Spanish language radio played mostly Spanish music instead of the soap operas and newscasts found on many English-speaking stations. Music created multi-national superstars that influenced the Spanish speaking public and role models to young people. The songs usually had patriotic themes, such as "Ya me voy para la Guerra" (I'm Going to War).[22] Spanish-speakers enjoyed listening to music in the same way that English speakers did. Catchy music was an excellent opportunity to promote war activities to this demographic.

The Spanish language was difficult to navigate then because of the Americanization movement taking shape during the war years. There was a general sentiment that U.S.-born and foreign-born residents should adopt American ideals, including speaking only in English.

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[19] Horton, 155.
[20] Horton, 155-160.
[21] Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, "Embracing the Ether: The Use of Radio by the Latino World War II Generation," *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of a Generation,* Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and Emilio Zamora, eds., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 24.
[22] Rivas-Rodriguez, 24.

Immigrants were encouraged to forsake their own language and culture to embrace their new American way of life. The United States government attempted to combat this by demonstrating that democracy and tolerance were a viable alternative to fascism and racial totalitarianism. The government launched a campaign to turn the ethnic diversity of the nation into a strength, and the Roosevelt administration pursued a campaign to boost the patriotism and integration of ethnic Americans by assigning foreign-language radio a part of the government effort.[23] Although they made the effort, Americans did not always follow through. Even if it looked to the outside world that Americans were inclusive and worked well with its ethnic diversity, that was not always the case, and some Americans saw speaking a language other than the English language as a display of behavior opposite of a patriotic American.

Though speaking Spanish was considered un-American by the general population, Spanish speakers listened to Spanish language radio for their own needs. For some Mexican Americans, speaking Spanish was the only way they knew to communicate as they never found a need to speak English in their tight-knit communities. Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez revealed that her father spoke little English before the war because he operated primarily outside of English-speaking circles, and this was not because he grew up in a foreign land. Though the Rivas family could trace their ancestry back to eight generations in Texas, and he attended public school, he and his family remained in their own communities where Spanish was the only spoken language.[24] Despite the English language being the most common spoken language of the United States, some people operated their entire lives by speaking the Spanish language within the United States. The English language was not the only American language, particularly in regions

[23] Horton, 67.
[24] Rivas-Rodriguez, “Embracing the Ether,” 32-33.

with a population of Spanish speakers before the land became part of the United States, and this concept was against what many Americans believed.

For Mexican Americans, the war was a way to display their patriotism and commitment to the country they called home. For Tejanos, the issue of loyalty had been a long issue, including conflicts at the Alamo and the Mexican American War. Tejano national allegiance had been suspicious to Anglos for an extended period. Anglos had used their suspicion against Tejanos for many years to rationalize the theft of land, liberty, and their lives, and many Tejanos felt the need to display their American loyalties during the war. For example, Elena Peña Gallego from Fort Stockton remembered an incident that occurred in 1941 when she was thirteen years old.[25] After having sodas at the drugstore, Gallego, her sister, and friends went to the theater across the street. The ticket seller convinced himself that she was Anglo because of her light complexion and her perfect English and refused to sell her a ticket on the balcony where all the Latinos were allowed. He sold her a ticket to the main floor, away from her friends. During the movie, an usher told her that the theater manager wanted to see her, and the manager also happened to be her high school principal during the day. She was ushered out of the theater for sitting in the wrong section, though she attempted to explain that the ticket seller would not allow her to purchase a balcony seat. Ultimately, it did not matter to the manager.[26] During the war, Tejanos found an opportunity to show their commitment and dedicate their time and lives to the United States. They could display their patriotism for the country to which they belonged. Tejana's allegiance was just as important, and the women found themselves with more opportunities to display their American commitments.

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[25] Elena Peña Gallego, interviewed by Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, 09 March 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[26] Gallego.

Demand for workers grew as the war continued, and factories and other industries had no choice but to open their doors to more women. In Texas, the newspaper *San Antonio Light* pointed out in November 1942 that just weeks prior, no women were employed at the Friedrich factory to use machinery with exception of the typewriter, and "Now 70 women work there," some of them Tejanas, "and they are doing everything from turning lathes in the company's mill room to assembling the complete motor that makes the boxes run."[27] The article continued to compare the household duties that women performed previously as the potential cause of the women's ability to adjust well to these new positions. The article stated that women knew how to do things with their hands, such as "washing dishes, running the family sewing machine, cooking a meal," and that this was likely what helped them perform tasks such as to "turn the lathes, varnish the paint, connect up to the one hundred parts of a motor."[28] The article acknowledged women's capabilities. Still, it failed to recognize that women had long worked in other industries that demonstrated skill by only comparing women's abilities to household chores. Women had long learned valuable skills in different professions, not only domestic labor.

Some women had worked before the war in other industries, but there was usually no room for advancement available for women at the time. Julia Rodriguez Aguillon was a Tejana from Loredo who found an opportunity to grow in her industry during wartime.[29] This would have been more difficult before the labor shortage. She lost her father at a young age, and her family relied on her at times for financial stability. She wanted to go to college after she graduated high school in 1937 but lacked the means to go. Instead, she worked as a salesclerk at

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[27] "Women Handle Man-Size Jobs in S.A. Factory: Perform Highly Complicated Tasks," *San Antonio Light*, Portal to Texas History, 8 November 1942.

[28] "Women Handle Man-Size Jobs in S.A. Factory."

[29] Julia Rodriguez Aguillon, interviewed by Yolanda Urrabazo, 25 October 2003, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

Kress Stores. In 1942, there was a shortage of men to fill specific jobs, and Aguillon earned a promotion to the receiving clerk position. In this role, she received merchandise and checked invoices, and she could also take Saturdays off. She held this job for five years and was proud of the opportunity she had even without an education.[30] Finding steady employment was a satisfying way to contribute to her financial stability, and the chance for advancement offered Aguillon pride in her work, and a better ability to provide financial security for her family.

Women in the workforce changed significantly during the war period, but the experiences varied, particularly when comparing ethnic experiences. Richard Griswold del Castillo explained in his book *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights* that before the war, in the 1930s, women, in general, were entering the workforce increasingly in white-collar jobs.[31] Still, most women remained homemakers, even during the war, but there were ethnic differences in the number of women who worked outside the home. When comparing White women to Mexican American women, proportionately fewer married Mexican American women worked outside the home for a wage.[32] This can be attributed to the solid patriarchal authority and cultural limits on Mexican American women working outside of their family and community control. Griswold del Castillo continued to explain that World War II loosened the limits of traditional patriarchal control. The emphasis on war work as a patriotic duty, combined with the attraction of higher wages, worked to force men to make exceptions for their daughters and wives to leave home to go to work and socialize with those outside of the family.[33] The war was a justification for the modification of limits because of the emergency condition that the country was facing.

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[30] Aguillon.

[31] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 63.

[32] Griswold del Castillo, 63.

[33] Griswold del Castillo, 64.

For Mexican Americans, work in agriculture was prominent on the eve of World War II. Around five hundred fifty thousand farm workers in Texas were of Mexican descent, and around fifty thousand labored in the packing sheds of South Texas, usually in processing, packing, and shipping. The family wage was a common financial strategy for Mexican American families that maximized their earnings. Families would often work together, with each member contributing to the family's earnings. It was not always easy, as sometimes the promises of their total earnings were not honored. Temporary employment along with low wages were obstacles at times.[34] Mexican farm workers in South Texas were often the most exploited and poorest group in the state during the first half of the century, and Texas created a reputation for being the most exploitative state in the United States. Family earnings were typically the only way a family could survive, and Texas farmers often took advantage of the labor.

Agricultural work remained a prominent source of labor for Mexican American families during wartime. As explained by Otey M. Scruggs in the article "Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947," Mexican Americans had worked in the United States's agricultural industry for decades before the war. Still, wartime demand on the state's economy triggered growth and expansion.[35] The need for agricultural workers during this period grew significantly. Even the large Mexican American population in South Texas could not keep up with demand, especially when some workers were taking the opportunity to enter other fields. The United States and the neighboring country of Mexico agreed to send Mexican farm workers to work in agriculture across the country in the Bracero program. The issue with the Bracero program was that Mexicans and Mexican Americans were sensitive to the discrimination they faced in the United

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[34] Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II,* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 31.

[35] Otey M. Scruggs, "Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947," *Pacific Historical Review* 32, no. 4, (August 1963): 251-264.

States, particularly in Texas, where it was more prevalent than in any other region.[36] Workers feared how they would be treated in Texas and opted not to go. That only increased the demand for labor. Texas had to take some action to show that it was willing to embrace the United States' wartime pledge of domestic solidarity with Mexico.

To combat the image of Texas as an intolerable state for Mexicans, the governor at the time, Coke Stevenson, passed the "Caucasian Race" resolution on May 6, 1943, that affirmed the rights of Caucasians in Texas to equal treatment in public places.[37] This allowed the state to give equal treatment to Mexicans while still excluding African Americans. Mexicans in Texas had long been considered "Caucasian" in the United States since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Still, they also faced discrimination and were never treated the same as the Caucasian race. Governor Stevenson then departed on a goodwill tour around Mexico, where he assured the people that he would take steps to ensure fair treatment for Mexicans. On August 6, 1943, the plan appeared to have worked as the Mexican government entertained the request to send 5,000 workers at the request of the State Department, though still wary about the decision.[38] Mexicans and Mexican Americans remained subject to widespread discrimination and segregation, but the resolution allowed for changes later as Tejanos fought for equal treatment.

The United States was determined to fight the appearance of discrimination that people were aware was a reality in American culture. The Office of War Information (OWI) attempted to create a semblance of togetherness by creating a poster that implied all workers were welcome in the workforce. Posters targeted women, African Americans, and other marginalized groups in the United States to make an outward appearance of acceptance in the multi-ethnic American

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[36] Scruggs, 254.
[37] Scruggs, 255.
[38] Scruggs, 255-256.

society. One of the posters that became a symbol of the acceptance of Mexican Americans was the "Americans All/ Americanos Todos" poster released in 1943 by Leon Helguera.[39] The poster displays a patriotic symbol of an Anglo arm with a hat in its hand decorated in stars and stripes, next to another, slightly darker arm, with a traditional Mexican sombrero in its hand. The message is in English and Spanish, saying, "Americans all. Let's fight for Victory/ Americanos todos. Luchamos por la victoria."[40] The poster generalizes that Mexican American workers are accepted and assume credit for their efforts and importance during wartime.

Agriculture was still a major source of employment for Mexican Americans, and Texas began producing cotton, cattle, and vegetables at a previously unimaginable rate, which provided improved earnings for farm workers. The demands of war offered new and expanding operations, including large vegetable and citrus processing plants added to the Rio Grande Valley.[41] Opportunities expanded in agriculture but were also growing in other industries. Defense jobs became more widely available as the increase in demand coincided with the labor shortage, and these industries paid significantly more than other opportunities. Many Mexican Americans moved out of the farms and found better employment in urban areas, though many families, particularly in South Texas, remained largely dependent on agriculture. It was difficult for a family to move outside of the field they were most comfortable in for fear of discrimination.

While agricultural work was a significant part of life for many, war work offered Mexican American women an opportunity to earn a larger income than any opportunity they had

[39] Leon Helguera, "Americans all, let's fight for victory/Americanos todos, luchamos por la Victoria, 1943," *Office of War Information, Division of Public Inquiries,* UNT Digital Library.
[40] Helguera.
[41] Zamora, 26.

before. Henrietta Lopez Rivas was a young Tejana from San Antonio during the war.[42] She began working as a migrant worker at 14, then returned to San Antonio to clean houses. When the war changed the economy in 1942, she began working in Civil Defense. She had spent years in school around her peers who spoke English as she struggled with the language. Now, as a bilingual woman, she had the opportunity to work as an interpreter to help inform Spanish speakers of Civil Defense responsibilities. It gave her a sense of equality, and she increased her earning potential by increasing her salary from $1.50 per week to $90 per month. Her culture made her valuable, and she recalled, "It made me feel equal, more intelligent because what I did, very few Anglos could do."[43] Her experience allowed her to have a sense of belonging and self-confidence. She was proud of herself and her achievements when she had not always had that opportunity.

While defense jobs offered an excellent opportunity for young women to work with good pay, for young Tejanas, convincing their elders that it was a good decision was difficult. For many young girls, working outside of the home meant that they would be breaking the traditional boundaries placed on them at birth. Vicki Ruiz explained in her book *From Out of the Shadows* that working outside of the home and away from the eyes of their chaperones allowed greater freedom of activity for these young women and more assertiveness in the family.[44] Their new role as a wage earner and contributing the financial well-being of the home allowed for an increase in trust and respect from their parents.[45] They merged into the public space typically allowed only to the males, and it drew them away from watchful family members who could

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[42] Henrietta Lopez Rivas, interviewed by Veronica Flores, 6 June 1999, Folder 48, *VOCES OHPA,* Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[43] Rivas.

[44] Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows,* 62.

[45] Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows,* 63.

control their exposure to the outside world. It also allowed them to make more decisions for themselves.

They had a better sense of freedom with work outside the domestic sphere, but they still needed permission to go and had to work within certain perimeters placed by their parents. Delfina Cooresman Baladez from San Antonio learned to negotiate with her father for more opportunities to grow.[46] She received one of the three highest test scores for Civil Service, allowing her to choose the location she wanted to work. She had initially looked to work in Washington, D.C. However, her father would not allow it and expressed his concern about men taking advantage of a young woman. She obeyed her father and took a position at nearby Kelly Field in San Antonio.[47] Baladez was intelligent and had the potential to progress in a world that was becoming more available to her. Still, she also knew how to remain within the boundaries placed on her.

Not only did Baladez open opportunities for herself, but she also opened opportunities for her younger sister. Wilhemina Cooresman Vasquez dropped out of school at fifteen when the war began to pursue her own interests by working with her sister.[48] The sisters worked as aircraft mechanics at Kelly Field, and they each earned a good wage. Though they could not remember the exact number of their earnings, Vasquez recalled that it was "more than what we had ever earned."[49] The sisters earned a good wage but were still sending their pay home, minus their living expenses. They had freedom and opportunity in some respects but were still limited in

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[46] Delfina Cooresman Baladez, interviewed by Brenda Sendejo, 28 July 2005, Folder 489, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[47] Baladez.

[48] Wilhemina Cooresman Vasquez, interviewed by Brenda Sendejo, 28 July 2005, Folder 488, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[49] Vasquez.

others. While they may not have been able to keep all their income, the opportunity to provide and have some freedom was something they had not experienced before and likely would not have been able to do in other circumstances.

Another Latina at Kelly Field was Aurora Gonzalez Castro of San Antonio.[50] Aurora claimed that Kelly Field offered more opportunities to Mexican Americans who were not well off. She became a secretary at Kelly Field and eventually advanced to a supervisor of military service records. She reflected on her time, stating that the experience "did change our lives. We didn't have money… we didn't have a nice house," and she later added that it changed her life because "We have everything we need now."[51] She was aware of the transformative effect that the opportunity had for her and her family.

Mexican Americans had integrated with the Anglos in Texas many years prior, and that relationship changed after the Texas Revolution. Tejanas were accepted into Anglo society and married many Anglo men in Texas. Yet, during the Mexican Revolution, all people of Mexican descent were lumped together as violent revolutionaries, whether they had been in Texas for generations or came across to avoid the dangerous conditions. Then, they were displaced again by society during the Great Depression when they were sent to Mexico, whether they had ties there or not or were born in the United States. In the World War II era, they saw another shift in their place in society as they experienced a sense of equality. In the book *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas,* Emilio Zamora explained that at the beginning of the war, employers were apprehensive about giving a job to Mexican Americans.[52] Those who did give employment

[50] Aurora Gonzalez Castro, interview by Anna Zukovski, 25 October 2003, VOCES OHPA, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
[51] Castro.
[52] Zamora, 54.

typically restricted them to common or unskilled labor, regardless of their ability, training, or qualifications. Several industries limited employment opportunities for women and restricted their advancement. As the war progressed, employers had little option but to give Mexican Americans a chance to work, though with much reluctance.[53] Vacancies left by male Anglo workers created pressure on employers to integrate the workforce. Eventually, they had no other option.

The labor shortage in the workforce, particularly in the defense industry, caused a multiracial workforce that contributed to a cross-cultural breakdown of traditional racial boundaries. As explained by Elizabeth R. Escobedo in the book *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits,* welcoming women of color into defense work had consequences that afforded them both a status of respectability and a claim to Whiteness at times.[54] There is no way to know how many women of Mexican descent contributed to the war efforts by working in the defense industry because records do not accurately reflect the total number. The defense industry categorized Mexican American workers as "White" as opposed to "non-White" on official documents. Since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans had been considered White, but their legal status was usually only theory. Still, they had some claims to certain privileges of Whiteness that were unavailable to their Black counterparts. For women of Mexican descent, the patriotic symbol associated with war work represented a way to garner esteem that placed them firmly on the White side of color lines.[55] They held some power during this crisis. They were labeled as White when it was convenient and discarded when it was not.

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[53] Zamora, 54.

[54] Elizabeth R. Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 74.

[55] Escobedo, 74.

Working with Anglos exposed Mexican American women to life outside their communities, which their parents usually sheltered against. Josephine Ledesma Walker from Kyle was a young woman who worked at Bergstrom Airport in Austin, working on the planes' engines as a general mechanic. She recalled, "Oh I loved it! I thought I was just doing a real big thing."[56] She worked with two other women whom she got to know. She learned that one had once been a secretary, and the other was a schoolteacher until they found better-paying positions at the airport. She worked some eight-hour shifts, but shifts could sometimes be up to twelve hours, depending on the labor needed.

At Bergstrom, she said, "Our motto was 'keep 'em flying."[57] She then transferred to Big Spring, Texas, later, where she worked with other women, but she was the only Mexican American woman there and the only woman who could work on repairing aircraft. She said, "There were about five or six and they were all Anglos," but they "were in the sheet metal department."[58] The type of work she did was tightening fuses and running wires to other parts of the plane. She explained that "they like for women to have it, because they had smaller hands, and they could get more nearer to it."[59] She found a new opportunity to work for good pay during wartime but also met Anglo women whom she would not have encountered routinely before the war. As explained by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez in the book *Mexican Americans in World War II,* the war years were the first time in their lifetime that Mexican Americans were participating in full mainstream society. They worked alongside Anglos and discovered that

[56] Josephine Ledesma Walker, interviewed by Monica Rivera, 17 February 2001, Folder 58, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
[57] Walker.
[58] Walker.
[59] Walker.

White Americans were humans, no worse and no better than they were.[60] This shift in views of Mexican American women allowed them to experience equality for the first time in their lives, and once they had, it was challenging to return to anything other than that.

Mexican American women also met men that they would not usually have encountered. María Isabel Solís Thomas had dated other Mexican American men until she met her husband, James, an Anglo sailor in the Navy.[61] She kept her relationship a secret because she feared her parents would disapprove. Her parents reacted as expected when she finally revealed their relationship to them. They ultimately supported her decision to marry James.[62] Wartime employment exposed Mexican American women to other cultures, not just Anglos. Thomas looked back on her experience and remembered meeting and building relationships with women of Italian, Portuguese, African American, and Anglo descent throughout the war, something she never would have done prior. They grew close enough to trade supplies and even clothing with one another as if they were "one big, happy family."[63] The bonds the women developed were surprising as they had not known how much they would bond with others who were not outwardly like them after spending their lives exposed to people in their own communities.

Mexican American women had a different experience from African American women because of their ability to blend within Anglo society. Color barriers were different in employment situations, because often, Anglo women refused to work with African American women. When this happened, employers would typically assign a Mexican American woman to

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[60] Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans & World War II,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), xvii.

[61] María Isabel Solís Thomas, interviewed by Anna Zukowski, 13 October 2003, Folder 420, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[62] Thomas.

[63] Thomas.

work with Anglo women instead. [64] Thomas remembered an instance where she found an African American mother crying as she thought of her boys. Thomas hugged and kissed the woman, to her surprise. The mother asked Thomas where she was from, and when Thomas replied that she was from Texas, she said the mother told her, "You shore different from those Southern gals."[65] Thomas explained that during that time, "We treated each other as good friends. Black, White, yellow- it doesn't matter your color, your creed, your religion; we're all the same."[66] These types of exposures created a network of cross-ethnic and interracial friendships with Mexican Americans forming bonds with women of other racial backgrounds for the first time. They had no prior prolonged exposure to African American or Anglo women with whom they worked, and many of them were surprised to find that they could get along and had similarities.

Though there were general positive sentiments of belonging, their experiences were not always good. Education for women had increased during the war years as they trained for new positions, and Apolonia Muñoz Abarca from Mission had gone to nursing school during the war.[67] Abarca had been sheltered much of her life but always had dreams for herself and believed she would accomplish them. Her father did not allow her to work in the family's meat market because he was a traditional man and thought girls should not work. She was only fifteen when she found her calling to be a nurse when she spent much of her time volunteering in her community. She explained that she had gotten permission from her father because education for his ten children was his primary goal.

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[64] Griswold del Castillo, 67.
[65] Thomas.
[66] Thomas.
[67] Apolonia Muñoz Abarca, interviewed by Erica Martinez, 18 Aug. 2001, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

Abarca arrived at the Fred Roberts Nursing School in Corpus Christi in June 1941 and was surprised to discover that she was the only Latina in her class. In addition, she found that her roommate, from Virginia, was frightened of her. Her roommate heard that Mexicans were violent and would kill her. Eventually, the fear subsided, and the two became friends. Abarca reflected on what it was like as a Mexican American at the nursing school, and it was mostly good, but she also recalled, "We always had to work a little bit harder to prove ourselves. But that was all."[68] Abarca initially experienced racism, which was a shock to the sheltered young lady. Still, as the girls came to know each other outside of the comforts of being around the people who looked like them, they found they were not as different as they once thought.

There were more opportunities for Mexican Americans during the war in the workforce, but racial disparities still existed. For example, in the refineries in Baytown, located on the outskirts of Houston, a group of Mexican workers claimed that Humble Refinery had discriminated against Mexican laborers. The claim said laborers received $0.765 per hour for doing the same job as Anglo laborers, for whom the company paid $0.895 an hour. While Mexican orderlies in the company's hospital received $137 monthly, the Anglo janitors made $180 monthly. Mexican workers around the acid tanks made $0.795 compared to Anglos performing the same job at $0.925. The company also assigned them to the labor department without promotion opportunities.[69] Mexican Americans were aware of their lesser status and called attention to the issue, hoping to create a more equitable environment. The United States had attempted to develop legislation on this issue, and Mexican Americans thought that it could benefit them.

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[68] Abarca.
[69] Zamora, 166.

Unfair treatment was a known practice, and while President Roosevelt understood this and attempted to remedy the situation, that did not always happen. The Roosevelt administration developed an agency that was supposed to implement Executive Orders 8802 and 9346 prohibiting various forms of discrimination by the defense industries and other employers. The Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) examiners investigated the claims.[70] The company's superintendent, Gordon L. Farned, responded to the complaint and cautioned the FEPC against disrupting the custom of discrimination in favor of gradual change to avoid Anglo hostility. He stated that until there was a change in public sentiment, "it is an undeniable fact that Anglo American workman and the public generally, exclusive to the Mexicans themselves, do set themselves apart and do consider themselves to be superior," and then suggested later that it would be "to the best interests of the Mexicans to make haste slowly, to make social and economic gains gradually, to educate the populace at large gradually," or else it will lead to profound hostility.[71] Anglo opposition to the fair treatment of Mexican workers was strong. The FEPC was ineffective at combating the discrimination that faced in the defense industries.

Investigations revealed Humble's hiring practices. Company officials confirmed that they hired Anglos more frequently and without subjecting them to language and education requirements than were often subjected to Mexican applicants. Even when applicants spoke fluent English or had a better education than an Anglo applicant, they still were denied employment. No matter how skillful a Mexican applicant was, the employer favored the Anglo worker. Though initially part of the argument, officials also failed to prove that Anglos could perform the same tasks with better ability. No records or data collection could corroborate that

[70] Zamora, 167.
[71] Gordon L. Farned to Cramer, January 26, 1943, *Johnson Collection*, Records of the FEPC.

assumption. The company openly claimed that the livelihood of Anglo workers would be threatened by welcoming Mexicans with more frequency and that it would open the door to also welcoming African Americans as well.[72] The FEPC delayed any action, had little enforcement power, and Humble kept the agency at bay with minimal compliance.

Even with labor shortages, compliance laws, and some effort from the federal government, it could still be difficult for Tejanos to get jobs, though some used the laws to their advantage. María Elisa Reyes Rodríguez from Waco recalled getting her first government job at the age of 21 in 1943 at Blackland Army Airfield.[73] She had been working during the day at a local department store and taking night classes to learn shorthand, typing, and other skills that would allow her to become a secretary. Her dream of going to law school was not possible, but being a secretary was the next best thing and an attainable goal in her eyes. When she told people her dreams, they pointed out that Mexicans in an office setting were uncommon, but she insisted that she would achieve her goals. She explained that most Mexican American women "were working in clothing stores because that was as high as you could get. There weren't too many opportunities offered to Mexican American women."[74] She never let discouragement deter her.

The first job she applied for was at a defense company in McGregor, Texas. She arrived with a letter of recommendation written by a family friend, a lawyer named Mr. Earl, to apply for a position advertised in Waco newspapers for weeks. When she arrived, the director immediately told her the position had already been filled, although she found that odd. She was suspicious of this abrupt reaction and asked the man if he was unwilling to hire her because of her nationality.

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[72] Zamora, 167.

[73] María Elisa Reyes Rodríguez, interviewed by Ryan Bauer, 10 May 1999, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[74] Rodríguez.

She said his response was, “Yes, if I hire you, the other secretaries will quit… We just have White secretaries.”[75] She was understandably outraged by his bold statement.

At that point, Rodríguez stood with her arms crossed and told the director that she refused to keep quiet about the situation. Before going home, she stopped by Mr. Earl's office, and he called the company. The president of the company immediately took his call. Mr. Earl explained to the president that he hoped this was not true. He would notify Washington to have the company’s defense contract broken with the government if valid. The company's president told Mr. Earl to send Rodríguez back again, but she opted to go home for lunch instead. When she arrived home, she checked the mail and saw that she had received a letter from Blackland Army Airfield. She decided to go there instead, where she got the secretary job she applied for, and worked there for the next two years without discriminatory interactions.[76] She was proud of standing up for herself. However, she also acknowledged that it would be difficult for others to do the same without her support system.

While it was difficult for Latinos in the United States because of general racism, the exposure to others allowed experiences to form. For Imogene “Jean” Davis Avalos, exposure to a new culture was shocking.[77] As an Anglo woman, she was unaware of the discrimination faced by Mexican Americans until she experienced it for herself. She met photographer Alfred Avalos on her first day as a clerk at Eckmark Photography Studios in Mineral Wells, Texas. They married three weeks after their first date, and it was after their marriage that she experienced the discrimination her Mexican American husband had known for years. The newlywed couple set

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[75] Rodríguez.
[76] Rodríguez.
[77] Imogene “Jean” Davis Avalos, interviewed by Karin Brulliard, 18 Oct. 2003, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

out to find an apartment, and she found that people treated Latinos differently from Anglos. She recalled, "He was Hispanic and I wasn't, so I could get an apartment and he couldn't."[78] She continued, "It was such a shock to me… I wasn't taught that there was two different kinds."[79] She had grown up in Crystal Falls where she played and attended school with Mexican and Mexican-American children and even learned some Spanish. After her marriage, she encountered raised eyebrows and disapproving stares, though she learned to ignore it.[80] Racism was new to her but not to her husband, and she had to adjust to life without the privilege of being an Anglo woman in American society.

Tejanas were aware of the racial hostility and had their own experiences, although some had better experiences than others. Once Abarca entered the hospitals, she noticed the racial animosity that still existed during the era. She worked in the operating and emergency rooms in the newly opened Corpus Christi Memorial Hospital. There, Abarca said she witnessed "lots of discrimination in the hospital wards" as the hospital frequently segregated Latinos and Blacks into their own units. She never experienced racism herself, however, and explained, "I think because I was a little White, I didn't have any problems. They thought that I was Anglo."[81] She did well for herself in the medical field and attributed that to her lighter skin tone but still advocated for Latino patients. By 1946, she became the hospital's director of services for the outpatient clinic that mainly served Latinos and the poor, the only Latina professional employed by the clinic then. She said she felt lucky because she "always ended up with administrative jobs. I never had to do bedside nursing, which is very unusual, especially for a Latina."[82] Mexican

[78] Avalos.
[79] Avalos.
[80] Avalos.
[81] Abarca.
[82] Abarca.

Americans had been typically relegated to low pay and more physically demanding jobs, but Abarca had found an opportunity during the war to achieve further success integrating into the Anglo society.

Although Mexican American women had found themselves adjusting to Anglo society and had generally found new opportunities in the workforce, they still faced some of the sexism that had always existed in industry. In the article "Rosita the Riveter," Naomi Quiñonez explained that sexual politics was still prevalent in the workplace, even though the acceptance of women had transformed significantly during the war.[83] She found that campaigns had generally succeeded in changing attitudes, as displayed by a 1935 poll that revealed how 80 percent of Americans believed it was wrong for a married woman to work, compared to a similar 1942 poll that indicated that only 71 percent of Americans continued to share that sentiment.[84] The United States government successfully campaigned to change the attitudes of Americans so that they could combat the labor shortage with the endless campaigns found in everyday life. Women were needed in the workplace for the United States to beat the enemy successfully, and they showed up in droves.

Seeing women in the workforce was more acceptable, though they continued to face equity challenges. Quiñonez revealed that men continued to provide a hostile and sexist work environment even as women began taking on more male-dominated fields and showing great efficiency in doing so. Often, male supervisors yelled at the women or promoted men over women, though there were more women employed in certain factories at various times than there were men. Promoting women into higher positions was rare, but on occasion, it could happen if

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[83] Naomi Quiñonez, "Rosita the Riveter: Welding Tradition with Wartime Transformations," *Mexican Americans in World War II,* Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 247.

[84] Quiñonez, 247.

the woman was an exceptional worker and was willing to point out her abilities over her male counterparts.[85] Women had to work twice as hard as men to get any recognition for her performance, and often had to aggressively force their supervisors to acknowledge the work they achieved for an opportunity to advance. It was difficult for women to earn advancement opportunities reserved for men, even if they were not as well equipped to do the job.

Upon entering Kelly Field, Baladez recalled feeling the tension between herself and her male coworkers. She noticed the attitudes and shifts in language when speaking with her compared to other males. She believed the men would refer to her and other women as “girls” on purpose to establish their dominance. She also recalled how she often heard people around her getting promoted, including people she had trained, while she did not. The situation upset Baladez as she felt it did not matter how well she performed; she would not have the same opportunities. She accepted that that was the case for herself and many other women.[86] Sexism was still prevalent in the workplace, and women's competency did not usually change their unequal status to their male counterparts. Some women challenged this idea, while others did not see a point in challenging the well-established system.

Not only was the inequity of the sexes evident in the workplace, but the work's value also saw division. Employers hesitated to invest in training for women in skilled work, even in the largest defense plants in the country. They were skeptical of a woman’s ability to work in the physically demanding positions they were taking on because they were not sure women’s bodies could maintain the demand for long periods. Employers also wanted to pay them less for the work they performed with the same ability as their male counterparts. Women were paid less

[85] Quiñonez, 255.
[86] Baladez.

than men for the same work throughout the country, usually by manipulating job titles that implied lesser work to justify the lower pay. For instance, women who managed to gain positions in management were typically labeled as "trainees" or "assistants" so employers could avoid paying the salary typically awarded for that position.[87] Women were efficiently performing the demanded work. However, they rarely received the same respect or financial compensation as the men performing the same duties.

Rodríguez was bypassed for promotions on multiple occasions while at Bergstrom Airforce Base in Austin. She explained that her salary reflected the fact that she was a secretary, but she also took on the role of an equal employment opportunity coordinator with the promise that she would be promoted in the future and make more money; however, that never happened. She explained, "Some people don't believe what goes on. Up 'til this day, it's still the same. You work. You're trying to get up in the world, but they bypass you."[88] She was aware of the difficulty of getting ahead as a woman. She put faith in her employer that they would do the right thing if she worked hard enough and showed her value, but she also noted the double obstacle of being a Latina and how she never really stood a chance.

Pay reflected the general segregation of work by sex. Ruth Milkman compared the sexual division of labor in the article "Redefining 'Women's Work" which revealed that although women earned higher wages in wartime jobs, such as in the auto industry, their wages were still far below men's earnings.[89] Offering equal pay would encourage women to continue employment even when their labor would no longer be needed. Employers had no interest in

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[87] Quiñonez, 248.
[88] Rodríguez.
[89] Ruth Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work': The Sexual Division of Labor in the Auto Industry during World War II," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2, (1982): 337-72.

feminizing their industries, which was apparent when Milkman explained that even during the Great Depression, labor industries did not hire women at a lower rate than men. They continued to distribute work according to gender roles, even if it would have garnered them more profits.[90] Even in the face of extraordinary economic circumstances, employers were not interested in eliminating the general ideology of gendered work division.

Some employers noted the physical limitations of women as the reason behind their lesser pay, though women demonstrated a remarkable ability throughout the war. For the automotive industry, a newsletter claimed that "compensation in production processes must be made to allow for the fact that the average woman is only 35 percent muscle in comparison to the man's 41 percent."[91] The lack of muscle power a woman had compared to a man justified the lesser pay women received for the same jobs performed by men. However, new technologies and tools, such as lift belts, made job demands more equitable for women and safer for men and women overall. The newsletter explained that a "woman is not just a smaller man," to emphasize the physical differences.[92] There were clear contradictions in the idea that women were expected to receive a lower wage. However, they were trained and performing the same task that was exclusively meant to be done by a man. Their performance was comparable to men, and in many cases, women worked even harder to demonstrate that they deserved a place on the job.

As if the demands and conditions of the jobs that women were taking on were not enough, society expected that they maintain a feminine image and balance the needs of their families at the same time while also being subjected to catcalls and general disrespect by men.[93]

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[90] Milkman, 342.

[91] "Provisions in Plants for Physical Differences Enable Women to Handle Variety of War Jobs," *Automotive War Production 2,* Library of Congress, September 1943, 7.

[92] "Provisions in Plants for Physical Differences Enable Women to Handle Variety of War Jobs."

[93] Quiñonez, 248.

In the article "You Weren't Taught That With the Welding," Penny Summerfield and Nicole Crockett explained that sexual harassment at work was a technique used by men in the workplace to prevent women from entering fields that were previously only open to males, or to control women in the workplace.[94] The disruption of war and the encouragement of women to step out of their gendered role could have caused men to assert their sexual authority. Women were pushing traditional boundaries by wearing trousers, taking on unfamiliar roles, earning money, and displaying general independence.[95] Men used sexual harassment as a source of control to regulate women's wartime activities and to keep them in their place beneath men. Women in the workplace were a threat to their dominating traditional structure.

In entertainment programs during the war, comedians often made jokes that insinuated that women who worked in defense work were manly and therefore, undesirable. For women taught that their goal in life was to get and keep a man, that was discouraging and a viable threat to their livelihood. Gerd Horton referenced numerous comedy routines in the book *Radio Goes to War* that depicted men who attempted to hide the occupation of the women they were dating as not to be ridiculed by their male friends, or they would make jokes about women who worked in the defense industry with crude and unfeminine traits and behaviors.[96] Men were consistently at odds with the idea of women taking on jobs that were traditionally male and attempted to put them back in their place through various forms of harassment and ridicule.

Even when employed, the idea that they were women first, whether single, married, or mothers, bombarded them. As stated by Bilge Yesil in the article "Who Said This is a Man's

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[94] Penny Summerfield and Nicole Crockett, "You Weren't Taught That With the Welding': Lessons in Sexuality in the Second World War," *Women's History Review* 1, No. 3, (1992): 435-454, 441.

[95] Summerfield and Crockett, 441.

[96] Horten, 164-166.

War?" women were not primarily workers but women who just happened to work.[97] Patriotism fueled most of the motivation to work and the desire to win the approval of men. However, she had to maintain her feminine appeal for being attractive, no matter how hard she worked.[98] Men were not under the same pressure to work their hours-long shifts and still look desirable by the end while maintaining multiple responsibilities outside the workplace. Advertisers were aware of the multiple duties that women were maintaining at the time and pushed the idea of having it all. An advertisement for Revlon promoted their Revlon Nail Enamel by commenting that it could "take the punishment of running a home with one hand, doing war work with the other."[99] Despite the changing role of women during this time, there continued to be pressure on women to maintain much of the traditional standards that they had prior to wartime.

The dramatic increase in female workers who were married during this time raised tension between women's commitment to marriage and children and their status as a member of the paid workforce. Walker explained that she was married when she went to work and had a five-year-old child. She often relied on her mother and sister-in-law to help care for her son, but she still struggled to balance her time. She recalled, "It's hard to raise a family and work and try to keep house."[100] While women were willing to do what was needed during wartime to help in the success of the country, maintaining the balance of home and work, while also maintaining beauty standards was a struggle. Though struggling was common, society constantly bombarded women with the idea that they could do it all, leaving some women to question why it was difficult for them.

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[97] Bilge Yesil, "Who Said this is a Man's War?': Propaganda, advertising discourse, and the representation of war worker women during the Second World War," *Media History* 10, No. 4, (2004): 103-118, 108.

[98] Yesil, 108.

[99] Revlon, *Ladies' Home Journal,* (March 1942), 45.

[100] Walker.

Childcare was a significant obstacle for married women with children, and the federal government attempted to relieve that stress to help the war effort. To help with the childcare issue, the federal government passed the Community Facilities Act that sponsored childcare centers for working mothers. In the article "There's No Place Like the Childcare Center," Jessica Enoch explained that women had a difficult time finding safe childcare options when they went to work, sometimes leaving them no choice but to leave children without proper supervision at home or leaving them in their car during their shifts.[101] Great thought went into planning the facilities to ensure the most benefit to the mothers. Located near war plants for convenient pick-up and drop-off, the facilities offered twenty-four-hour coverage, and some offered cooked meals for mothers to take home after working all day. Though the idea was there and offered a great alternative to the lack of other childcare options that some women had, mothers were hesitant to enroll their children in these facilities given the previously negative perception of childcare facilities in the past. Previously, all studies and advertisements were in favor of the traditional family home.[102] The social stigma that was associated with women leaving their children at a facility was sometimes worse than not having adequate childcare at all. Some women opted for the unsafe alternative rather than admitting their children were in daycare.

The general idea was that the home was the best place for children, even if improperly supervised. Many women preferred their children to be at their home rather than in a facility where they believed the children would be in an environment that was essentially a custodial institution. To combat the resistance, local agencies published signs and posters on street cars and employment offices that informed the public of these reliable services that were available to

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[101] Jessica Enoch, "There's No Place Like the Childcare Center: A Feminist Analysis of Home in the World War II Era," *Rhetoric Review* 31, no.4 (Aug 2012): 422-442, 425.

[102] Enoch, 425.

them and safe for their children. War plants also published newsletters that advertised their plant-based childcare facilities. They celebrated them as a great opportunity for women and their children to receive extended school services.[103] Like many other things during wartime, the public perception had to be changed. Officials had to convince the public that the change could be beneficial.

For Mexican American women, childcare was a more challenging situation to navigate. Mexican culture had dictated that family was the number one priority in a woman's life, and that was especially true for her children. These young women knew that finding childcare was their responsibility, and even if their husbands supported their employment, they had to find care for their children. No matter how hard officials pushed the idea, many available childcare facilities would not be acceptable. In her book *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives,* Vicki Ruiz explained that Mexican American women differed from their parents from Mexico.[104] They integrated into American life, and many of their parents' voiced concerns over their lack of respect for tradition. Mexican American women had some of the same childcare concerns as their Anglo co-workers, and they often had to organize themselves to arrange childcare options.[105] Mexican American women typically relied on family members to help care for their children as home was still primarily seen as the better option for the children of working mothers. However, some had no choice but to use the childcare facilities available in the plants.

Though the need for childcare was an important issue for women, Mexican American women often had a more difficult time maintaining employment during the war era in Texas and,

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[103] Enoch, 427.

[104] Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950,* (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1987), 34.

[105] Ruiz, 35.

thus, were less dependent on using childcare facilities. Data collected from the United States Employment Service Offices showed that while Mexican American women comprised 18 percent of the population in major cities, less than 5 percent comprised the number of registered workers. These numbers compared to Anglo women, who made up nearly 73 percent of the population with 81 percent registered as workers.[106] Most employers preferred hiring Anglo women over minorities and only considered the recruitment of others when Anglo women rejected the job. Most Anglo women declined night shift work and lower-wage jobs, leaving these types of work more available to others. In one instance in Big Spring, an employer requested Anglo women but was convinced to hire Mexican American women because they were the only workers available in the area at the time.[107] Fewer Mexican American women had opportunities, especially in the earlier years of the war. Most of the Mexican American women who did work outside the home were usually without children because of the childcare hardship and the traditional boundaries that were common.

Many of the Tejanas with children during wartime had to rely on the help of their families. As explained by Joanne Rao Sanchez in the chapter "The Latinas of World War II" from the book *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero,* Latinas often endured exacerbated circumstances compared to Anglo women because of their sheltered upbringing.[108] Because they were not allowed to learn to take care of themselves and take on responsibilities outside of the family, and because they typically were in financially dire situations, Tejanas raising a family had to live with their parents or in-laws during wartime at least part of the time. They also had to work in

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[106] USES Labor Market Reports for Texas, May 15-June 15, 1942, *Texas State Library and Archives Commission,* 111.

[107] Zamora, 55-56.

[108] Joanne Rao Sanchez, "The Latinas of World War II: From Familial Shelter to Expanded Horizons," *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of a Generation,* Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and Emilio Zamora, eds., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 75.

some situations because their families relied on their financial support.[109] Though most Latinas did not work outside the home during this time, the ones who did depended on support or had others relying on their support. Where they would usually rely on their husbands to take on the full financial obligations of the family, they now had the opportunity to offer financial support as well. Not only did they not have to be utterly reliant on their husbands and brothers for financial support, but their families would no longer fully depend on that support. Tejanas who worked outside the home took on jobs to provide more financial stability to them and their extended families. During World War II, Tejanos had multiple opportunities to become financially more secure.

When mothers did not live with family, they found it nearly impossible to keep up with the tasks placed on them. Childcare became a topic in the various plots of soap opera radio programs during the war. There was a rise in tension between marriage and career and between working outside of the home and working as a stay-at-home mother.[110] The narrative, though sometimes contradictory, usually always reinforced women's duty in the domestic sphere and that her appropriate function was within the home with her family. At times in these soap operas, the grandmother of the children would tell her daughter that she could not watch the children for her and shame the daughter for not fulfilling her obligation as a mother. At the same time, the daughter would attempt to explain that she wanted to do her part to bring her husband home more quickly and that she was doing her part for her family.[111] If women could not maintain their rightful duties to their family, they could not perform their patriotic obligations in the workforce. Women were in a constant struggle between the expectations of them in the domestic sphere and

[109] Sanchez, 75.
[110] Horton, 106.
[111] Horton, 164.

their new duty as the force that would bring their men home more quickly. This problem was a central struggle for women to comprehend and manage, yet there were rarely solutions to combat that issue.

Women did not generally receive the services they needed to balance an eight-hour workday in a six-day workweek job while raising children, cooking, cleaning, and shopping for their family's needs simultaneously. While strategically placed childcare facilities near defense factories helped with childcare, war production centers were generally located in isolated areas away from restaurants, banks, transportation, and shopping, so there was no way to get tasks done during breaks or on their off time. The exhaustion in the routine likely caused a high turnover rate and job absenteeism. By 1943, more than 44,000 childcare facilities were available, but the need for childcare exceeded them. Nearly 16 percent of mothers in war industries claimed they had no childcare arrangements.[112] Women with children were necessary for the workforce as the availability of women who were single or without children was insufficient to keep up with the demand at the time. While they wanted to commit to their patriotic duty, social constraints and a lack of resources made it nearly impossible. Officials sold them the idea that they could do it all without the necessary resources to make that possible.

Defense jobs during the war offered significant opportunities for women during the time, including room for growth in some fields, entry into other fields previously closed to them, and more money than they would have been able to make prior to the war. Though these were positive signs for women's advancement in society, they still faced significant obstacles, such as being passed over for promotions, experiencing sexual harassment, or the lack of resources to

[112] Quiñonez, 248.

maintain their responsibilities outside of the workplace. While they were far from equal, they experienced a general sense of equality they never would have been able to experience prior to wartime.[113] Some struggled with the added responsibility. Still, others flourished in the new environment that they never would have had the chance to encounter at any other time. Women generally had a good experience, and their perception of their societal importance ballooned compared to other periods.

The federal government tried convincing society that changes must happen for the country's success, but they only meant temporarily. Though there were significant strides that took place during wartime to create a more equitable environment for women and minorities in the workforce, too much change too quickly was always a struggle for society in the United States to adjust to very well.[114] The benefit of this period is that certain groups were able to show their strengths and capabilities, and the policies that took shape for more rights during wartime would provide a building block for activism that would form after the war was over. Though many Americans would have liked the country to return to the social structure it had always been, that would be difficult for those who received a taste of how equality would look. They were worthy of being seen as more and showed that they deserved it.

For Tejanas, there were additional barriers that they had to navigate, including racial animosities and cultural boundaries that were difficult to cross. They had known for a significant amount of time that they had a particular place in society, and their parents had tried to protect them from experiencing the outside world that was not always so kind to them. Although it was an adjustment, and they suddenly became exposed to the unpleasant side of society and how it

[113] Gluck, 10.
[114] Gluck, 11.

viewed them, they adjusted quickly.[115] They developed relationships that they normally would not have been able to build in other circumstances and found a strength that they did know they had to fight the obstacles they faced. They mainly experienced equality that they never would have known before.

Tejanas developed a sense of purpose and a patriotic duty during wartime, allowing them to show the United States they were worthy of citizenship. They were necessary for the war effort and contributed to the country's success. Tejanas were exposed to the harsh realities of racism and sexism and persevered, showing that they could take on a new role in society and take their place amongst the respected masses. Once they had gone through the trouble of proving themselves, it would be difficult for anyone to take that away from them and return to the traditional boundaries they had experienced before the war. There was a stirring that was taking shape, and these women would be more capable than their mothers to stand up for the rights of their daughters, and change was bound to take place.

[115] Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows,* 63.

## Chapter 4

## The Tejana in the Military

When the topic of World War II becomes active in conversation, rarely is the discussion on the women who served in the armed forces, and even less commonly acknowledged are the Tejanas who served. Women who worked in male-dominated industries during wartime are well known. While their work received some recognition at the time, and women acquired praise for their loyalty for stepping up in the country's time of need, defense work was far from their only significant contributions. They met with appreciation from their communities, and recruitment posters displayed their images as heroines of the era for their work in what were previously deemed manly positions.[1] Women in the military had a more difficult time navigating scrutiny because the military was deemed too masculine. Women displayed their patriotism in various ways, and while convincing women and their employers that work in the defense industry should be open to them was difficult, public approval of women in the military during World War II proved to be an even more challenging task.

Military service was honorable and appreciated by all the men who served; however, recognition of that sacrifice was harder to obtain for some groups. Mexican American men served in the military in great numbers during the conflict. Up to 750,000 Mexican American men served in World War II and were more decorated in proportion to their number than any other ethnic group in the United States.[2] Still, their bravery and contributions have been mainly overlooked in American society in the decades after the war. Mexican Americans showed loyalty and devotion to a country that had not always been kind to them. The United States had

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[1] Maureen Honey, "The Working-Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II: Class Differences in the Portrayal of War Work," *Signs* 8, no. 4 (1983): 672–87, 677.

[2] Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans in World War II*, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 2.

conducted mass raids and deportations on them just the decade prior. Despite their legal status or birthright, thousands of Mexican Americans were sent to Mexico during the Great Depression because Anglos viewed them as a threat to the American economy.[3] Yet, they served and were proud to serve, not only to prove that they were worthy of full American citizenship and recognition but also that they were willing to sacrifice for the country that did not always see them as equals.

Tejanas faced the challenge of proving themselves as women and Mexican Americans, which was not always easy. While the Tejanas on the home front continued to face discrimination and sexism at home to some degree in the defense industries, Tejanas in the military experienced some level of racial equality. However, their gender was a continuous obstacle.[4] Their experiences were challenging, but they learned a lot and proved that they had tremendous courage. This chapter will reveal the honorable Mexican American women of Texas who served in the military during World War II and how their experiences contributed to the evolution of a new generation of women seeking the recognition they and their communities deserved.

When World War II began, United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act on September 16, 1940.[5] This was a preemptive measure because the United States had not yet entered the war. The law initially required men between the ages of 21 and 45 to sign up for the draft, and it was the first time the United States had enacted a draft during peacetime. With war raging worldwide, the United States was sure to demonstrate its

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[3] Marla A. Ramírez, "Gendered Banishment: Rewriting Mexican Repatriation through a Transgenerational Oral History Methodology," *Latino Studies* 20, no. 3 (09, 2022): 306-33, 312-14.

[4] Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and B.V. Olguin, eds., *Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, and Ideology*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

[5] David Vergun, "First Peacetime Draft Enacted Just Before World War II," *United States Department of Defense News*, April 7, 2020.

preparedness should it be needed. Preparation proved to be a wise decision once the United States entered the war in December 1941. At that point, Congress amended the act to include all able-bodied men between 18 and 64 for military service.[6] The United States entered the war later than other nations, and the need for manpower only grew as the war continued. The United States provided the needed troops to the Allied forces.

The United States had a policy of neutrality at the beginning of the conflict, but that effort eroded on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor. On December 8, sixty million people gathered around their radios when President Roosevelt declared war on Japan. In the following days, Germany and Italy reactively declared war on the United States, and the country engaged in a full-scale war.[7] Before the attack at Pearl Harbor, the young people of America gave little thought to what was happening in Europe and the Pacific. Army posts often featured swimming pools, horseback riding, and tennis courts. The officers' club offered activities, such as formal dances and picnics. [8] There was no reason to concern themselves with what was happening worldwide, and they filled their time with recreation.

Although newspapers and magazines published details about the wars in other parts of the world, young people ignored them. Elsie Schaffer Martinez from San Antonio explained, "when you're 19, 20 years old, 21, 22, you're really not scared."[9] However, when she heard about what happened at Pearl Harbor, she remembered eating breakfast when President Roosevelt announced the attack. She added, "you want to find out what's going on."[10] Maria Sally Salazar

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[6] Vergun.

[7] Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change,* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 3.

[8] Barbara Brooks Tomblin, *G.I. Nightingales: The Army Nurse Corps in World War II,* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 13.

[9] Elsie Schaffer Martinez, interviewed by Raquel C. Garza, 28 September 2002, *VOCES OHPA,* Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[10] Martinez.

from Loredo echoed the sentiment and stated, “The war in ‘41 woke us up. Everyone was talking about it. Everyone wanted to go.”[11] The surprise attack awakened young people to become more aware of foreign conflict and made them realize their safety's importance.

To wage a sustainable war that lasted nearly four years, the entire population had to mobilize, and that included the efforts of women and minorities. The United States needed manpower, and for that, they needed womanpower. As explained by M. Michaela Hampf, the shifting need for more administrative and technical support during World War II changed the military structure.[12] The military could employ women to perform clerical functions, providing more opportunities for men to serve in combat. Their jobs in the military had similarities to their jobs as civilians. However, they were more reliable in an auxiliary because the government could control military personnel at all hours. Lawmakers suggested that women could potentially perform certain duties better than men, and they should not overlook the opportunity to replace men with female personnel. This idea garnered more support to pass the bill that established a women’s division.[13] Women became the solution for filling much-needed vacant positions in the workforce. Now, they were also available to take positions that would assist the need for more men to serve in combat.

American women had not served in the military in large numbers before World War II, except for the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, or as Yeomanettes and Marinettes in the Great War. During the prior war, women had some part in aiding the military. However, they did not receive recognition as a traditional part of the armed forces. Laurie Scrivener explained in the article

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[11] Maria Sally Salazar, interviewed by Nicole Cruz, 28 September 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[12] M. Michaela Hampf, “Dykes” Or “whores”: Sexuality and the Women's Army Corps in the United States during World War II,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 27, no. 1 (2004): 13-30, 15.

[13] Hampf, 15.

"U.S. Military Women in World War II" that in the interwar period, the Army began some planning to mobilize women for another war, but the plans were lost and not recovered until the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was six months old.[14] The earlier planning included the idea of developing a women's core for service in the Army rather than auxiliary to it. However, it also indicated that military leaders were uncomfortable with the idea of women in the military. In 1941, with another world war looming, a bill was prepared to establish an auxiliary to the Army without full military status as a compromise. With an auxiliary status, the WAACs were not entitled to military rank, could be paid less, and were not eligible for military benefits.[15] Giving women a quasi-military status seemed to be the solution to ease the concept of women in the armed forces.

WAAC, the first permanent military for women, was created by an act of Congress on May 15, 1942. Oveta Culp Hobby, a Texan, wife of former Texas governor William Hobby, and former chief of Women's Interest Section of the Bureau of Public Relations in the War Department, became the first director of WAAC. Hobby was a slender, attractive, feminine woman who posed no threat to the men in charge. She put together a compromise to give women only partial military status, yet the public was uncomfortable with the idea of women dictating orders to male personnel. When Congress converted the Auxiliary Corps into the Women's Army Corps (WAC), which was then an official part of the Army and entitled women to full military status on July 1, 1943, the public grew increasingly concerned about the changing role of women.[16] While male officers and political leaders accepted women's entrance into the Army

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[14] Laurie Scrivener, "U.S. Military Women in World War II: The SPAR, WACS, WAVES, WASP, and Women Marines in U.S. Government Publications," *Journal of Government Information* 26, no. 4 (1999): 361-383, 363.

[15] Scrivener, 363.

[16] Hampf, 15.

under the banner of expediency, many civilians and military groups had conflicting outlooks on the vision of a female soldier. The public would need much more convincing.

The military was an inherently masculine institution. Marilyn E. Hegarty explained in the book *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes* that the military had difficulty safeguarding the manliness of the armed services as a place where boys become men while also forced to camouflage that it relied on womanpower to function.[17] The issue became further complicated when insinuations of promiscuity arose. The military demanded that the armed services receive protection against potentially promiscuous women who could destroy military power by spreading venereal diseases. Popular belief insisted that masculine morale in the military depended on access to good, disease-free women.[18] The public and military professionals were afraid that giving women the freedom to be more masculine would allow them to act the way men do, such as engaging in sexual activity with multiple partners. This concept places much of the blame for immoral behavior on women themselves while ignoring that men were equally responsible for the spread of venereal diseases.

Contrary to popular belief at the time, WAACs were generally not the cause of the spread of diseases. Emily Yellin revealed in the book *Our Mothers' War* that the truth was that WAACs had such a low rate of contracting venereal diseases that it was virtually non-existent, while in contrast, men had a relatively high rate.[19] Women were also never issued contraceptives or taught about using them, unlike men who had an extensive program that issued condoms at all military installations. In fact, the pregnancy rate among WAACs was meager, and estimates reported that

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[17] Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II*, (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 86.

[18] Hegarty, 87.

[19] Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II,* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 131.

more than half of the extremely low rate of pregnancies were among those who were married and had seen their husbands on leave.[20] Men and women had different levels of responsibility. Women were subject to criticisms that involved immoral behavior associated with taking on less traditional roles, while men encountered portrayals as the victims of women's changing behaviors.

Rumors were persistent in American society, and the federal government had to find a way to relay more accurate information to the public to prevent conflict with their own needs. The federal government established the Office of War Information (OWI) to help neutrally distribute information.[21] As explained by Kathleen M. Ryan in the article "Don't Miss Your Great Opportunity," there was a common opinion amongst the public that military participation was only suitable for men. Public opinion also included the insinuation that women were only to be in the military as available sexual objects for men.[22] Women in the military were either labeled as more masculine or promiscuous.

Their sexuality was a concern that contributed to rumors, as well. Leisa D. Meyer suggested in the article "Creating G.I. Jane" that the public's impression was that a women's corps would be a breeding ground for lesbianism.[23] There was a widespread belief at the time that women who dressed more masculine in appearance were homosexual, and women who wanted to look like a soldier had to have the desire to look masculine. Meyer explained that the idea of women becoming independent from men was terrifying in the same way that women's

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[20] Yellin, 132.

[21] Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II,* (Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 30.

[22] Kathleen M. Ryan, "Don't Miss Your Great Opportunity': Patriotism and Propaganda in Second World War Recruitment," *Visual Studies,* Vol. 27, No. 3, (November 2012), 251.

[23] Leisa D. Meyer, "Creating G.I. Jane: The Regulation of Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in the Women's Army Corps during World War II." *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 3 (1992): 581–601, 583.

suffrage had implied a masculinization of women. This new place in society could potentially give women power over men.[24] Women were at risk of becoming uncontrollable and independent, a stark contrast from their prior expectations.

Rumors spread quickly in public about women in the military, including the idea that 90 percent of WAACs were prostitutes and 40 percent had gotten pregnant while servicing male troops.[25] Another rumor claimed that women who maintained their purity during their evaluation received an immediate rejection.[26] The public convinced themselves that women were only needed in the military to be sexual objects for male soldiers, as though they could serve no other purpose. The American public was unwilling to accept notions that women could serve in the military and keep their traditional feminine qualities. This speculation concerned the federal government because families grew reluctant to allow their daughters to serve when it needed their service the most.

The gossip spread rapidly as insinuations about the function of women on military bases continued. As the rumors grew out of control, the OWI established a specific category for WAAC rumors in its Division of Propaganda Research. Some of the rumors found in this collection include speculation from an insurance agent who heard, “The WAAC’s are getting drunk out at the roundhouse and men don’t know what to do with them.”[27] The public widely assumed that women displayed more masculine behaviors as members of the military but were unsure of how to treat them. Another woman revealed that “There are an awful lot of dirty jokes about the

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[24] Meyer, 584.
[25] Meyer, 584.
[26] Yellin, 129.
[27] “Military: Woman Auxiliaries, World War II Rumor Project Collection,” *Library of Congress,* 1942-1943, Manuscript- Mixed Material, 8.

WAAC's."[28] The jokes could only lead to further speculation that the purpose of the WAACs was to service the male servicemen. A Tejana named Concepcion Alvarado Escobedo from Southton explained, "Several of the women in the Army had a wild reputation, so people didn't think well of women in the service. I kind of had to prove that I was a good person, that I was not a wild person."[29] The overall sentiment about women in the military had to be changed for recruitment to be successful. The federal government faced a significant challenge.

Other branches of the military also needed female recruitment to expand their manpower. When the U.S. Navy Reserves established their women's branch on July 21, 1942, concern grew that the same stereotypes faced by the WAACs would be present for the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES), too. The way to change public opinion was through a media campaign that set the record straight by explaining the jobs that women in the military would have and why they were important. The OWI guided the media in persuading the public to change their perception of women in the military. They chose to emphasize to women that joining the military would not make them less feminine but would enhance their feminine qualities.[30] Posters were produced to emphasize that they were still young ladies, even in uniform.

The OWI faced the challenge of presenting women as sexually attractive to men in recruitment posters without necessarily implying that they were sexually available. Army propaganda highlighted that women were far from masculine in uniform and that they retained much of their feminine qualities. Often, selling the idea that women were feminine and sexually

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[28] "Military: Woman Auxiliaries, World War II Rumor Project Collection," 57.

[29] Concepcion Alvarado Escobedo, interviewed by Sandra Freyberg, 13 September 2003, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[30] Ryan, 251.

attractive to men worked to both rid the idea of the female soldier as manly while also reinforcing the idea of them as promiscuous. They had to ensure the public that a woman's behaviors in the military would be profoundly different from men's behaviors.[31] Propaganda had to appeal to the public by accentuating the fact that women in uniform would continue to be non-sexual. Women were only needed to fill positions that would leave men available in combat. They had to prey on their patriotic sense of duty.

Patriotic themes presented themselves in advertisements and articles, and military service focused on serving the country for male and female readers. While people were learning about their place in wartime, advertisements had to emphasize the importance of women's military service compared to men's. American newspaper *Coleman County Chronicle* in Coleman printed a story on the opportunity for women to serve. In the article "More Women Needed for War Service," it was explained, "Never in history have American women been offered such a chance to serve their country," and that "every woman, as well as every man must play a part."[32] Men and women were grouped as one to show that everyone needed to participate. Women had their own place to perform specific tasks, allowing them to display their patriotism.

John Falter, an illustrator and painter who enlisted in the Navy in 1943, created most of the posters for the Navy. Norman Rockwell's influence is prevalent in much of Falter's artwork, and he created more than 300 posters for naval recruitment.[33] Falter's posters appealed to the patriotic duty of young people to enlist. In one poster, the image of a young woman in uniform walking proudly by a sign that says, "WAVES Honor Roll" with the caption "Will your name be

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[31] Meyer, 585.

[32] "More Women Needed for War Service," *Coleman County Chronicle* (Coleman, Tex.), Vol. 11, No. 12, Ed. 1 Thursday, March 11, 1943, 6.

[33] Ryan, 252.

there?" emphasized pride in serving.[34] The poster fosters an implication that women will not want to miss out, while also demonstrating the femininity of the character. The young woman wore a Navy uniform that was fitted to her body, accentuating her figure, with a long skirt, pinned hair, and make-up on her face. The uniform promoted the idea that women could serve in the military while maintaining their traditional feminine beauty standards. Another poster featured four women standing side-by-side in various uniforms with pinned hair and make-up with the caption, "For your country's sake today; For your own sake tomorrow."[35] Again, there was an implication that women would miss out on their opportunity to serve for the much-needed success of the country. The image symbolized patriotic duty and a sense of togetherness for women.

In August of 1943, the Air Force launched the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), where women served their country as the first to fly military planes. Molly Merryman explained in her book *Clipped Wings* that the 1,074 women who served acted as test pilots on experimental models before releasing the planes for combat.[36] Their service released men from domestic duties so that they could serve overseas in combat missions. However, their jobs were still dangerous, and that made people uncomfortable. WASPs faced even harsher criticism than other women's branches because of the dangerous and masculine jobs they occupied. These female pilots had to combat assumptions of masculinity by performing a task that countered popular assumptions regarding the capabilities of women. The WASP program was the only component of the military that disbanded before the end of the war. The women who served also had to fight

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[34] John Falter, "Will Your Name Be There?" *US Navy,* 1944, (Naval Historic Center, 70-623-Q).

[35] Steele Savage Recruiting Publicity Bureau, "For Your Country's Sake Today: For Your Sake Tomorrow," *US Army,* 1944, (National Archives, 44-PA-120).

[36] Molly Merryman, *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II,* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 4.

well after the war for recognition as veterans.[37] Women faced the difficulty of acceptability in a more masculine atmosphere but were willing to do their part within the limits of this social acceptability, even if they risked their lives. Soon, the Coast Guard created the SPAR women's reserve unit, an acronym for their motto, "Semper Paratus—Always Ready." The Marine Corps established the Marine Corps Women's Reserve (MCWR). By the end of the war, around 350,000 women had served in the American military. [38] The recruitment campaign had overall been successful in changing public opinion.

While it was difficult to encourage the enlistment of women, Mexican Americans served in great numbers as a method to display their patriotic duty. Locals speculated on several reasons why Mexican Americans served in significant proportions. Thomas A. Guglielmo observed that in Del Rio, the population of Mexican Americans was roughly equal to that of Anglos in the general vicinity. However, the Mexican Americans comprised more than nine of ten draftees.[39] One explanation is that Anglo parents secured deferment for their sons by various subterfuges or substitutions. Other locals suggested that the Anglos sent Mexican Americans to the frontlines to die first.[40] These theories were unverifiable. Regardless of the reason Mexican Americans served in disproportionate numbers, many of them eagerly and willingly served.

Military service was essential for numerous reasons, and while it was patriotic for some, others held some resentment and had something to prove. As explained by Luis Alvarez in "Transnational Latino Soldiering," Latinos had faced a pattern of economic exploitation, racial

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[37] Merryman, 4-5.
[38] Merryman, 4.
[39] Thomas A. Guglielmo, *Divisions: A New History of Racism and Resistance in America's World War II Military*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2021), 59.
[40] Guglielmo, 59.

discrimination, and segregation for a long time in the United States.[41] Mexican American soldiers faced the challenge of second-class citizenship while also fulfilling their patriotic duty. Society expected them to conform to wartime demands in the face of racial hostility. Mexican Americans pursued the politics of worthiness, meaning that they held the burden of proof that they deserved full U.S. citizenship, civil rights, and social benefits aside from the rhetoric that viewed them as unworthy and outsiders to the bounds of national identity in the United States.[42] Still, some Mexican Americans refused to serve a country that did not value them. Salazar mentioned that she had witnessed men who avoided the draft by crossing into Mexico when she lived in Loredo. She said, "A lot of them wouldn't go. Even the man jumped the river."[43] The war was more than a military conflict but also an internal one that revealed very complicated feelings.

For most Mexican Americans, the war was an opportunity to claim the United States as their country and prove their entitlement to equality. In his book, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, Richard Griswold del Castillo explained that Mexican American leaders had encouraged their youth to participate in the war effort less as an opportunity to pressure Americans for their civil rights but more as a credit to their honor that they could cash in after a victory abroad.[44] The war was a way to show the Anglos that they were willing to take responsibility for their country and demonstrate their leadership qualities. They were proud to serve because, for some, the United States had provided them with more opportunities and a

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[41] Luis Alvarez, "Transnational Latino Soldiering: Military Service and Ethnic Politics During World War II," *Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, and Ideology*, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and B.V. Olguin, eds., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 76.

[42] Alvarez, 76.

[43] Salazar.

[44] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 50.

better life than their relatives could have ever had in Mexico.[45] World War II was a chance at a leap of faith to claim the United States as their country, even when it did not always claim them. After this struggle, they would prove they were worthy of citizenship, and their status as Mexican Americans would be different.

As explained by Ronald Takaki in the book *Double Victory,* there was a general sentiment among the Mexican Americans that they had to prove themselves and show that they were more American than the Anglos.[46] They believed that military service was a path toward a brighter future for themselves and their communities. Songs like "Soldado Razo" (Common Soldier) by Pedro Infante inspired these young men to enlist with its message of hope and honor in sacrifice. The song exclaimed, "Here forth goes another Mexican who is willing to gamble his life. I say goodbye with this song. Long live this country of mine." [47] Like other Americans, Mexican Americans were encouraged by a sense of duty and pride in their courage. Escobedo joined the armed forces after she attended a military rally that promoted women in the service in April 1944 in San Antonio. She said, "I felt if I could play some small part in the war, I would want to do it."[48] This was a chance to belong after decades of being treated as outcasts without a real place in society, and at the same time, an opportunity to prove that Mexican Americans had just as much pride in their country as anyone else.

Reasons for enlistment varied for everyone. For some, it was an opportunity to travel; others enlisted for economic reasons. However, for most, an overlapping sense of duty encouraged their enlistment. It was a way to escape a complicated family or a tedious job. For

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[45] Griswold del Castillo, 50.
[46] Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II,* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 82.
[47] Takaki, 83-84.
[48] Escobedo.

some, enlistment was more personal. Some women had a brother or fiancé fighting in the war and felt compelled to do their part. Others lost a family member, and that motivated them to enlist. For example, the newspaper *Las Notas de Kingsville* announced the enlistment of Lupe Garcia along with her two brothers in November 1944.[49] Lucia Rocamontes de Ramirez from Houston was also featured along with her two brothers in the newspaper *La Prensa.*[50] D'Ann Campbell explained in the article "Servicewomen of World War II" that most of the women who enlisted, around four-fifths, were single. Of the few married women, only 31 percent of the husbands were not in the military.[51] Some women met their husbands while serving. However, it was not common for women in the military to marry during the war. There was so much pressure on women to maintain an image of purity that it was difficult for them to develop relationships with men at the time. WACs received their share of "Dear Jane" letters during the war from their boyfriends back home who met and married other women while they were apart.[52] It was difficult for the public to accept women in a non-traditional role, particularly in a masculine military role. Men were less responsive to accept this change than other women, primarily if the men did not also serve.

Women were aware that enlistment in the military carried a stigma, and that people would assume negative things about their enlistment. Nearly half of the women who served reported overcoming opposition from a close friend or relative. They also claimed that only half of their male friends supported their decision to enlist, while 80 percent of their female friends were supportive.[53] It was much easier for other women to understand the desire to enlist than for men.

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[49] *Notas de Kingsville,* Portal to Texas History, UNT Library, November 28, 1944, 3.

[50] "Prestan Sus Servicios en el Ejercito," *La Prensa,* Library of Congress, Sunday, April 25, 1943, 3.

[51] D'Ann Campbell, "Servicewomen of World War II," *Armed Forces and Society* 16, no. 2, (Winter 1990): 251-270, 253.

[52] Yellin, 129.

[53] Campbell, 254.

It was difficult to accept that some women had the same instinct to serve that some men also had. Emma Villareal Hernandez from Pharr explained, "I know in my day people didn't think too much or too hot, I'd say, of women in the service. But we went in there for a purpose. To serve our country, but a lot of people didn't understand that."[54] Forty years after their service, 84 percent of women recalled patriotism as their reason to enlist.[55] Women knew that their skills would be needed, and they were willing to do what they could. Just as men felt a sense of duty to enlist, women had the same desire.

The Tejanas who served faced more than criticism for their gender. Their ethnicity was also a factor in their experiences. During World War II, the military segregated units, but Mexican Americans, because of their legal "White" classification, served in units with Anglos. Because of this, they experienced equality to some degree during their time in the military. Their identity was shifted during wartime as Mexican Americans began to see themselves as just Americans. Occasionally, the lines blurred for them on the difference between Anglos and Mexicans.[56] There was an immense sense of pride that came with service, particularly because they finally experienced what it was like to have an equal status. It would not be easy to return to how things were at home.

Because many of the Mexican Americans who enlisted had "White" classifications, it is difficult to know the percentage of Mexican American women who served. However, in 1943, many local newspapers began recognizing the enlisted Tejanas in their areas. For example, *The*

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[54] Emma Villareal Hernandez, interviewed by Gary Villareal, 1 July 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[55] Campbell, 254.

[56] Richard Griswold de Castillo, "The Paradox of War: Mexican American Patriotism, Racism, and Memory," *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of a Generation*, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and Emilio Zamora, eds., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 13.

*Mission Times* recognized sisters Esperanza and Felicidad Gomez from McAllen, who had joined WAC, in their April 2, 1943 newspaper.[57] *The Brownsville Herald* featured Herminia Garza from Brownsville in March 1943 who joined the WACs as "one of thousands of patriotic women."[58] The publications recognizing the service of these young women displays the pride for their enlisted youth, and shows how much public opinion was persuaded in a short amount of time to accept women in military service.

Displays of appreciation were astonishing because, as discussed in previous chapters, Mexican American women had a sheltered upbringing, and the war experience was something that many of their parents were not interested in their daughter facing. Escobedo remembered that she announced that she wanted to join the service after attending a recruitment rally. Her mother told her that she was too young and "might not know how to behave when you're on your own."[59] Eventually, her mother agreed to sign for her to join, but convincing her parents it was the correct choice was difficult.

For Salazar, the war offered an opportunity to travel, and she was interested in enlisting in the Army, but her parents were against it. At nineteen years old, she did not meet the minimum age of twenty-one for women to enlist without parental consent, and they were not willing to provide that. Instead, she told her parents she planned to visit her older sister. She took her sibling's birth certificate and went to San Antonio to enlist under her older sister's name. When she returned from San Antonio, she attempted to keep her enlistment a secret until her parents intercepted an acceptance letter. Her father was furious and wanted to report her. However, her

[57] "Sisters Join WAAC's," *The Mission Times*, Portal to Texas History, UNT Library, April 2, 1943, 1.
[58] "Port Oglethorpe, Ga," *The Brownsville Herald*, Portal to Texas History, UNT Library, Sunday March 28, 1943, 3.
[59] Escobedo.

mother convinced him not to for fear of the legal repercussions.[60] Salazar was determined to serve and risked facing the consequences of her actions.

Salazer went by her older sister's name, Amelia, the entire time she was enlisted but did not mind as it was an opportunity for her to see the world. She had to hire a lawyer after the war to have her name recognized and receive the benefits to which she was entitled. Unfortunately, she could never achieve her dream of traveling to Europe as expected. Instead, after basic training, Salazar ended up in New Guinea and the Philippines. She was disappointed and explained, "We were stuck in a jungle for a year and a half."[61] While it was not what she expected, and she defied her parent's wishes, Salazar experienced seeing new places and meeting new people.

Guadalupe "Bertha" Rodgriguez Flores from San Antonio also enjoyed traveling and meeting new people during her experience in WAVES.[62] At 22 years old, she explained that traveling to her naval training in New York City was so exciting that she did not want to close her eyes because she did not want to miss a single town along the way. Her father was not enthusiastic about her choice to join, and she recalled that her mother was standing alone on the station platform to say goodbye to her.[63] Many Tejano parents were apprehensive about leaving their daughter unattended to face the outside world.

The military allowed Tejanas to travel and experience new things away from their sheltered upbringing. However, it was also difficult to break away without guilt and to be far away from the comforts of home. For Escobedo, she asked to be stationed close to home at San

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[60] Salazar.
[61] Salazar.
[62] Guadalupe Rodriguez Flores, interviewed by Raquel C. Garza, 4 August 2007, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
[63] Rodriguez Flores.

Antonio's Randolph Field. She was sent to Georgia for basic training but ended up at Randolph Field. Reflecting on her experience, she noticed few Latinas but also recognized that she "was never treated badly. We were all the same."[64] African Americans were segregated into their own units, so they were able to associate and bond with women who had similar experiences. Hernandez recalled, "Blacks have their own barracks, own things, that's the only thing."[65] Because Mexican American parents were more reluctant to allow their daughters to serve in the military, there were significantly fewer of them, which may have facilitated their integration into units with Anglos. The Tejanas had no choice but to develop relationships with Anglo women because there were few Latinas with whom to associate and form a bond.

Escobedo explained that her military experience "opened up my mind to a lot of things," because she was able to "learn more about people and about myself."[66] She recognized that she had always lived amongst other people of Mexican descent, and had never really interacted with Anglos, or people of other ethnicities or nationalities until her time in the service. She stated, "When I was at Randolph Field, a lot of women who were close to me were from the east- New York, New Jersey, northern states. At Randolph Field, I didn't have any Mexican friends."[67] This was common at the time for many women and began to alter their points of view. Where they had once viewed each other in stereotypes popular of the period, they learned that they had more similarities than differences.

All new enlistees were sent to basic training throughout the country, where they shared barracks, joined forces, and crossed paths with people of various cultural and geographic

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[64] Escobedo.
[65] Hernandez.
[66] Escobedo.
[67] Escobedo.

backgrounds. As one of the only "two and a half Mexicans" in her unit, Rodriguez Flores quickly learned that "not all of us think the same."[68] She had always grown up with strict rules and curfews, so when the other girls went out drinking, she only wanted to go out dancing. She explained that some of the Anglo girls came back with stories of drinking and indulgence, but she learned that they were not all bad. She said, "I learned how to tell a good person from one that wasn't, but that didn't stop me from talking to them."[69] She had to learn that some people had a different way of life than she had, and she learned to accept that. She learned, "What little experience I got, I thought it was worth it, both to my country and especially to myself."[70] Her experience helped her grow.

From the moment they stopped being civilians, soldiers encountered new places and people, and their military experience helped to evolve their sense of identity, shaped by their travel and multi-cultural encounters. They saw different parts of the country and had to lean on the others around them to balance the drastic changes in their lives. They were usually quickly able to forge a pan-ethnic friendship that helped them adjust to the unfamiliar surroundings.[71] Felicitas Joyce Cerda Flores from Houston explained that she lived in the barracks for seven months and remembered that she was the only Latina, but "was quite like the other girls."[72] For a time, the military provided a place for people to merge their identities with the dignity of wearing the same uniforms and to display their patriotism, rather than a shared ethnic background and cultural experiences.

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[68] Rodriguez Flores.
[69] Rodriguez Flores.
[70] Rodriguez Flores.
[71] Alvarez, 78-79.
[72] Felicitas Joyce Cerda Flores, interviewed by Paul Rodriguez Zepeda, 2 February 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

Cerda Flores also discussed traveling during her military experience. One event that stood out to her was a trip to Washington, D.C., where she visited with congressmen. She also visited museums, went sightseeing, and found it exciting to learn more about the United States. While her trip to Washington, D. C., stood out to her, she could also travel to other cities across the country. During her time in the military, she expressed appreciation for her experiences and the ability to interact with other WAC members who were also away from home and experiencing things for the first time.[73] The young women could lean on each other for support.

She learned about cultural similarities and differences during her travels and interactions, which she would only have had the opportunity to do with her time in the service. She explained that it was "beautiful" and that she "just fit in real good with the girls, girls from all over the United States."[74] In her experience, the women were all the same. She said it was "put in my head that we were all American, and I learned to get along with people outside of my culture. That helped me in the service."[75] She appreciated the camaraderie, explaining, "Nobody looked down on me. I was one of them. We were all the same, even the captains. No one ever called me Mexican."[76] The military offered a way for Tejanas to broaden their experiences and expose them to different ways of life, shaping them in the future.

While some Mexican American parents were apprehensive about their daughters experiencing life outside of their supervision, Rafaela Esquivel had supportive parents who encouraged her to follow her dream to go to nursing school.[77] Esquivel walked two miles into

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[73] Cerda Flores.
[74] Cerda Flores.
[75] Cerda Flores.
[76] Cerda Flores.
[77] Rafaela Esquivel, interviewed by Joanne Sanchez, 12 April 2001, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

town after graduating high school to inquire information on attending the local nursing school. She informed her father of the cost and clothing requirements and that she had decided that this was something she wanted to do with her life. Her supportive father quickly went into town to gather information on loans to help pay for what she needed to attend Robert B. Green School of Nursing in San Antonio.[78] Esquivel's parents were an essential part of her experience. With their support, she could achieve her dreams and expand her life experience in a way other women could not.

Until World War II, nursing jobs were the only military jobs women were permitted to have. They served in the Army Nurse Corps, permanently established in 1901, and later in the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908.[79] As explained by Barbara Brooks Tomblin in the book *G.I. Nightingales,* women had served as nurses on American battlefields as far back as the American Revolution, though they were not part of the Army. Civilian women signed up for Red Cross first-aid training in significant numbers during World War I, hoping to serve overseas. Even then, women wanted to travel and help in any way they could.[80] Women's significant contributions during the war proved their importance. After World War I, the Army organized the School of Nursing to train students and ensure the Army had adequate nurses moving forward.

The nurses were granted relative rank at this time, which allowed them to take specialized training courses. However, they were never given full rights and privileges as commissioned officers, nor were they given the pay of officers in the same grade. During the interwar period, there was a relative time of peace where army nurses could have quiet routines with the structure of the military and the opportunity to travel. In peacetime, they could report for

[78] Esquivel.
[79] Tomblin, 3.
[80] Tomblin, 3-4.

duty in hospitals at 7 A.M. and then off duty by the early afternoon. This schedule allowed them to explore the places they were stationed, like China or the Philippines. [81] World War I made the American public more aware of the need for nurses, and young women became more aware of their opportunities. Enrollment in nursing schools continued to rise during the interwar period.[82] Women as nurses in a military division were also not seen as threatening, likely because caring for the sick was primarily seen as a feminine duty and would not have threatened gender roles.

Many women served as nurses in the Army Nurse Corps, including Latinas, though they were not immediately welcomed, along with men and other ethnic groups. Despite the need for more nurses as the war continued, there was reluctance to allow men and women of color to join. As more Black and Hispanic men joined the military and needed medical attention, it became clear that more Black and Hispanic women were needed to care for them, and Latinas had value for their bilingual abilities. Men were still unwelcomed to serve as nurses during this period, though they showed interest.[83] Some Latinas were segregated to their own units, much like Black women. Others could "pass" as Anglos and had no trouble fitting in.

Though nursing was more agreeable as a job for young women, military service was still difficult to accept. As supportive as Esquivel parents were about her nursing career, they were still apprehensive about her volunteering for military service in the Army Nurse Corps. At first, they adamantly disapproved but eventually trusted their daughter to make a good decision. She remembered that her mother would always tell her to "be careful and may God bless you."[84] After the initial shock of their daughter's willingness to join the military, their supportive nature

[81] Tomblin, 5-6.
[82] Tomblin, 8.
[83] Tomblin, 11.
[84] Esquivel.

returned. Esquivel had already broken the traditional boundaries of their community by attending nursing school, so perhaps that impacted their ability to accept her decision to enlist in the military eventually.

Although nurses also served in civilian roles during the war, the nurses who served in the military noticed the differences in nursing civilians compared to nursing soldiers. Soldiers made great patients because they dealt with young, healthy men who were generally in good shape, allowing them to recover quickly. They were also generally respectable, disciplined, and followed orders well. Three-fourths of nurses were surprised that they enjoyed serving in the military hospitals more than the civilian hospitals and saw fewer traumas. Some women even signed up to continue their service in the military once the war was over.[85] For the most part, the differences in nursing civilians versus soldiers were a positive experience.

The young men's quick recoveries also meant that the nurses saw more patients and had fuller days. They treated things that they had not regularly seen, like grenade wounds, bullet wounds, limb amputations, battle fatigue, urinary diseases, and jungle rot. The nurses were treating wounds and learning methods that they would not have been able to learn at most hospitals. Nurses began to specialize and train in previously unopened fields, such as psychiatry and anesthesiology, during the war. Most military nurses felt confident and prepared to work under any circumstances after working under the stresses of war.[86] They learned valuable skills that made them more marketable after the war and would provide them with more economic opportunities.

[85] Campbell, 256.
[86] Campbell, 257.

Though women did not serve in combat during this period, that did not mean that they avoided dangerous situations. Ed Lover described in the article "They Also Served" that nurses in the Army and Navy had come under fire at various points.[87] Throughout the war, two hundred nurses died on active duty, nineteen of whom died from enemy fire, and as many as sixty-seven Army and eleven Navy nurses were held as prisoners of war by the Japanese for three years.[88] The nurses bravely flew in helicopters onto battlefields to load the wounded, treat their wounds and calm their fears. They traveled on ships in Europe to treat the wounded while the ships were dodging German submarines beneath the water. They treated severe wounds near the frontlines, hearing the bombs dropping around them and feeling the blasts of dirt and debris.[89] They were not always safely placed in area hospitals or climate-controlled buildings. They calmly treated patients with chaos around them.

In the Pacific, they were also susceptible to skin disease from the heat and humidity, especially dermatitis, and malaria from mosquitos when they wore short sleeves to battle the heat.[90] Even women who did not serve as nurses experienced dangerous conditions in the Pacific. Stationed overseas, Salazar was hospitalized in Manilla with dysentery, malaria, and hepatitis, while at the same time, she was battling depression and malnutrition. She had to be shipped back to Washington, D.C., when her condition did not improve. Salazar reflected on that time of her life. She stated, "I was strong enough to live with it."[91] Women made significant contributions to the war effort and displayed acts of courage and bravery exposed to the conditions.

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[87] Ed Lover, "They Also Served: Women in World War II," *World and I: News World Communications, Inc.* 19, no. 5, (May 2004): 160.
[88] Lover, 160.
[89] Lover, 160.
[90] Yellin, 128.
[91] Salazar.

Experiencing war was difficult, even if many did not serve on the frontlines. Much like the men who served in combat, some women experienced long-term psychological impacts from their time in the military. One in six women reported that they suffered from what they saw and that some of their experiences were some of their worst memories.[92] Those who reported this mainly were nurses who treated wounded men suffering from burns and other injuries that resulted in things like amputation or death. They saw men who were otherwise young and healthy have their bodies become mutilated by the atrocities of war. In some cases, they helped to rehabilitate young men with combat injuries, only to see them return to combat to face the danger again.[93] It opened their eyes to the reality of war, maturing them in ways they never expected.

As a nurse, Esquivel treated all kinds of patients for severe wounds, including American soldiers, German soldiers, and civilians. Sometimes, she had to treat children as well. She described her twenty-four-hour shifts as "pretty hectic" while stationed in France, and she remembered that she did not bother to change into pajamas to sleep because the nurses awakened to care for the wounded often when "they used to bring them by the loads. Always on the go… Most of the time we were dressed."[94] Unfortunately, some of the patients did not always survive, which was challenging to witness. She remembered one instance where she treated two German soldiers with severe stomach wounds. She explained that doctors had to insert tubes directly into their stomachs to pump out any infections or chemicals. Overnight, one of the soldiers repeatedly got up throughout the night to remove the tubes from his stomach and forcibly removed the tubes

[92] Campbell, 261.
[93] Campbell, 262.
[94] Esquivel.

from the other soldier. Both died within the next day. Esquivel speculated, “I guess he didn’t want to be taken prisoner.”[95] The tragedies of war were difficult to realize.

Nurses saw many of the traumas of war. Hortense Mota Gallardo from San Antonio recalled her experience treating American Prisoners of War (POW). She remembered, “They were very much abused. They were so thin.”[96] She worked with paralyzed patients and those confined to full-body casts. She remembered one man having his cast removed in preparation for surgery. He begged her not to help him because he was ashamed of the smell. She recalled removing the cast and witnessing maggots spilling out. The man began to cry in humiliation, and she hugged him. She recalled, “I told him, ‘You and I can cry together.’ It could have been my brother.”[97] She also treated German POWs who were “just as scared of me as I was of them, but I was never alone.”[98] She was always accompanied by a well-armed sergeant named “Tiny.” Gallardo’s wartime experiences stuck with her, but she never let her fear affect her ability to treat people.

As a Navy nurse, Berta Parra from El Paso remembered her time hearing about the war’s destruction and death counts daily. On top of working as a nurse and dealing with the stress of her job, she also feared for the safety of her brother, who was fighting in the Army. The stress of the period has been difficult for her to push out of her memory. She explained, “You could see the bodies, they threw the bodies everywhere. I wanted to forget all that. Everything is out of my head, thank God. But the bodies, I can’t forget.”[99] The experience remained with her many years

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[95] Esquivel.

[96] Hortense Mota Gallardo, interview by Drs. Joanne Rao and Mario Sanchez, 25 June 2007, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[97] Gallardo.

[98] Gallardo.

[99] Berta Parra, interviewed by Cheryl Smith Kemp, 9 May 2008, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

later. She said, “I don’t want to dream about the dead bodies. I used to dream about dead bodies when I was in the service. And, when I got home, I dreamed about them, the dead people, the bodies.”[100] Her experiences haunted her for a long time.

Elsie Schaffer Martinez from San Antonio recalled her experience working in a high-security photo lab for the Army at a base in Pueblo, Colorado. Though the military restricted her from revealing much about her experience because of her security clearance, she said, “The things we saw, and the people that came back, it was horrible.”[101] Martinez worked to develop aerial photographs taken by Army photographers where she learned to enlarge or shrink film and print it for a range of classified purposes. She also developed a skill by taking professional photographs herself.[102] She was excited to learn a new skill and worked with a close team that allowed her to take on more responsibilities.

Most of the jobs she performed were simple, but others were difficult. In one instance, she remembered that her superior asked her to photograph incoming patients at the area hospital. Some photos she took and many she saw while developing them were gruesome. She recalled, “The Japanese, they were awful, they were mean. They did awful things to the boys and the nurses. I don’t like to remember what I saw in the base, in the hospital.”[103] The traumas she witnessed were difficult for her, and she remembered, “We had no choice, we couldn’t get out.”[104] She added, “I don’t remember that I was trying to get out. Others did. I just took it as it came.”[105] Still haunted by the memory, she said, “You learn to keep things to yourself, and learn

[100] Parra.
[101] Martinez.
[102] Martinez.
[103] Martinez.
[104] Martinez.
[105] Martinez.

to forget about them."[106] Some of the things the women witnessed were unimaginable and impacted them for the rest of their lives.

Though they sacrificed their health, safety, and lives at times and stood in the face of danger, women still faced ridicule from the male members of their military families. While there may be differences that the women had based on ethnicity, culture, or even geography, one way they could discover a sense of belonging was through their gender. By the time the Marines admitted women, the acronym craze had played out, and they were simply called Marines. While the public suggested monikers, Marine officials took the stance that nicknames were unnecessary, and the women were simply called Marines.[107] This action would appear to create no differentiation between male and female Marines. However, the male Marines were often not as accepting as they could have been.

Though the women in the Marines did not have an acronym, male Marines had no issue providing one for the women themselves. Many male Marines often referred to their female counterparts as BAMs, which stood for "Big-Ass Marines." The women had to learn to fire back and would, at times, stick up for other women who found it difficult to stand up for themselves.[108] Unfortunately, women in the military were subjected to harassment by not only civilians but also their fellow servicemen and quickly had to learn to stand up for themselves collectively as women.

Harassment was common, and women's safety was a significant concern for the military. WACs in the Pacific had to be locked in barbed wire compounds, and they were not permitted to

[106] Martinez.
[107] Yellin, 145.
[108] Yellin, 147.

leave unless an armed escort accompanied them. The policy made them inaccessible to men, who far outnumbered women. The women also received no permission to leave, meaning that off-duty women could not have spontaneous dates. They had to comply with an eleven o'clock curfew, and they were also subject to bed checks. Although some of the women protested, claiming their treatment mirrored the treatment of children, the policy for WACs did not change much throughout the war.[109] Women were, perhaps irrationally, protected by the military. However, the criticisms the military faced when they asked women to join likely played a part in the overprotective measures. They could have also faced scrutiny if the military had not required such protections for women.

Still, women overall had a general sentiment that they had new experiences not available before enlistment, even if kept under a watchful eye. Military service allowed both men and women to showcase their allegiance to the country and offered an opportunity to travel. Military service was also a way to provide financial support for many families and their futures. In 1943, Congress passed an equal-pay provision for WACs, where they received equal pay according to rank, regardless of gender or ethnicity, and almost the same benefits.[110] This was a significant advancement for women, considering that women in private industry typically earned only eight percent of what males in the same industry would earn on average.[111] This was yet another way that military service for women was much different from civilian services women provided during the war.

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[109] Yellin, 128.

[110] Alexandra Artiles, Joana Treneska, Kevin Fahey, and Douglas B. Atkinson, "Rosie the Riveter, Vera the Volunteer: Sexism, Racism, and Female Enlistment in World War II," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 56, no. 3 (2023): 383–89, 385.

[111] Artiles, 386.

This provision provided an opportunity for women that was previously unimaginable. A study on female enlistment in World War II published on behalf of the American Political Science Association found that lower levels of racial segregation and wages were associated with increased female volunteerism in the armed forces at a time when female recruitment was essential. Counties with less observable racial roadblocks had higher rates of female volunteerism.[112] Women were aware of the benefits that serving would provide in ways other options could not. The changes in military requirements provided increased opportunities for people who needed them, and they were also a source of recruitment for military service at a time when they were necessary.

The United States faced an economic crisis during the Great Depression in the 1930s, but often, Mexican Americans faced even harsher economic situations than their Anglo counterparts. Mexican Americans lost their jobs at a higher rate, usually at a rate twenty-five percent higher than the national average, and the federal government avoided providing financial assistance to people of color for any reason as well.[113] Mexican Americans who grew up in the 1920s and 1930s grew up experiencing poverty, hunger, and rejection, but learned to survive. The youth emerged from the hard times that parents had suffered and used their patriotic sacrifice in the 1940s war era to redefine themselves in society.[114] They expected fair treatment and impartial judgment because they deserved it.

Concepcion Alvarado Escobedo remembered that her father, Paz Alvardo, had once had a steady and dependable job. However, during the Great Depression, he lost his job and took odd

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[112] Artiles, 388.

[113] Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*: *Theories of Representation and Difference*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 95.

[114] Castillo, 12.

jobs to make ends meet that could provide for his family. She explained that her family had lost everything, including their home and furniture. The family moved a few times and eventually had no choice but to forgo the comforts of indoor plumbing and a gas stove.[115] This was a common occurrence during the era for many families, particularly when welfare services were not available to help.

She also was forced to attend public school when her parents could no longer afford her private Catholic school. In public school, she made the best of her situation and competed for high grades, and this is where she met an ROTC officer who exposed her to the idea of military life. She said she liked the idea of organization, uniforms, and drills, and she enlisted in April 1944. She explained the financial benefits of the Army as a reason to enlist, stating that she would often send her mother "$5 or $10 a month. That was another reason why I joined."[116] Reflecting on her experiences, Escobedo stated, "There is opportunity everywhere, you just have to go for it."[117] Military service was a chance for Escobedo to explore and expand her interests and develop a more secure future for herself and her family. She once had stability and looked for that again for herself.

Discipline is what drew Escobedo into the military. She recalled how, in basic training, the women would wake up at 5:30 every morning, and the sergeants expected them to make their beds. She mentioned that her superiors would come by to ensure she had made her bed correctly by bouncing a quarter off her bed to see if it was tight enough. The sergeants also expected them to perform outdoor drills and exercise, along with chores, such as "clean latrines, sweep, mop,

[115] Escobedo.
[116] Escobedo.
[117] Escobedo.

kitchen patrol…"[118] The inspections made her nervous because she recalled that if anything she did fell below their standards, "They would yell at you as if you can't hear."[119] Though she remembered the stress, she remembered it fondly.

Martinez also recalled her experience with inspections in the military. She described the hassle of the inspections in the women's barracks, as she also explained that the sergeants would sometimes test the tightness of the sheets on the women's beds by dropping a quarter on them to see if it would bounce. Though the inspections were a hassle, she said that she learned a lot from the discipline, and she also added that she learned other skills in her training, such as punctuality, helping others, and knowing what the right thing to do is in civilian life.[120] Hernandez echoed the sentiment. She reflected on what she learned and stated, "The most important thing that I learned I have kept with me, and I will have it with me until I die, discipline that I learned there. You cannot get that anywhere else but there. And it's given me many things to think about."[121] Military training had a lasting impact on their characters and daily life outside the military. The women received training in lifelong skills that went beyond the war.

Military service provided ample opportunity for women to develop helpful job skills. Nursing was a typical job for women in the military, and demand for nurses was so prominent during the war that even more nurses were needed as the war continued. In Sweetwater, Texas, the local newspaper reported that the Nolan County Red Cross chapter would begin a home nursing class for the first time "for women of the Mexican settlement in Sweetwater."[122]

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[118] Escobedo.
[119] Escobedo.
[120] Martinez.
[121] Hernandez.
[122] "Mexican Women to take Red Cross Home Nursing Course," *Sweetwater Reporter* (Sweetwater, Tex.), Vol. 47, No. 55, Ed. 1, Portal to Texas History, UNT Library, Sunday, March 5, 1944, 5.

Mexican American women were eager to jump at the newfound opportunity to expand their skills.

Only two weeks later, the *Sweetwater Reporter* newspaper reported that the class headquarters had to move to a larger location to "take care of the increased enrollment of Mexican women" in the program.[123] Many young Tejanas were eager to help. Elena De Peña and her sister Rosa from San Benito said they wanted to be nurses after graduating high school, and their mother encouraged them to follow their dreams. She said, "We were the first Spanish-speaking students in nurses training."[124] The American Red Cross traditionally acted as a reserve for the military services. They began a recruitment campaign when they realized the significant need for nurses. Nursing programs expanded during World War II to include more women than ever.[125] Nursing provided Mexican American women an opportunity that was not always available, and they were willing to take on the task.

Most women in the military held clerical or technical jobs. While women who took on civilian jobs were filling positions that had previously been available exclusively to men, women in the military typically held sex-stereotyped jobs. Three out of eight women who had jobs not in the nursing field claimed they had gained valuable skills, especially in administration. They acquired these skills in addition to the self-understanding, discipline, and confidence that the military had instilled in the women.[126] Escobedo served as a file clerk but eventually moved to kitchen duty when she began suffering from headaches.[127] Cerda Flores worked a clerical job for

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[123] "Home Nursing Class Grows; Moves to Welfare Building," *Sweetwater Reporter* (Sweetwater, Tex.), Vol. 47, No. 69, Ed. 1, Portal to Texas History, UNT Library, Tuesday, March 21, 1944, 3.

[124] Elena De Peña, interviewed by Erika Martinez, 18 August 2001, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[125] Tomblin, 9.

[126] Campbell, 257.

[127] Escobedo.

the quartermaster.[128] Martinez logged air flight hours for planes that arrived from Central and South America.[129] They had learned skills that they could use outside of the military in more traditional settings. At the same time, they also learned to stand up for themselves and had confidence as they matured.

Their willingness to serve despite their challenges in society and their communities showed that patriotism and bravery have no gender roles. Even years after their service, the Tejanas were humble and did not recognize the tremendous impact they had made. Hernandez stated, "I didn't do anything to help the war. I don't feel like I did anything except be in the service. But I learned a lot."[130] Martinez suggested that the people who stayed home should be recognized for their efforts because "we got the best of food. We got the best of everything. And they have to buy with their stamps to have enough for them to eat."[131] Esquivel also described her embarrassment when someone told her she should be proud of herself. She said, "sometimes my sister says that I should feel proud, but I never thought about it that way. I just thought it was something I wanted to do, and I did," and then added, "And then when someone starts talking about it, I kind of feel embarrassed."[132] Their service and recognition of others are qualities that have made them even more exceptional than they could ever realize. Their impact is far greater than they could know.

All the women who served in the military during World War II started a path to more options for women in the United States. They experienced a new sense of independence that was only meant to last throughout the war but had a much longer-lasting impact than intended. Only

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[128] Cerda Flores.
[129] Martinez.
[130] Hernandez.
[131] Martinez.
[132] Esquivel.

meant to be a temporary sacrifice and contribution to the war effort, women's service unexpectedly reorganized gender roles in a post-war society. Though unintentional, the reality was that servicewomen had increased access to jobs, comparable wages to men in the service based on rank, opportunity to travel, and less parental control.[133] It would be difficult to return to a traditional lifestyle with limited opportunity once they had seen for themselves their own capabilities. No matter how much society wanted women to return to the gender roles assigned to them, they were different, and their experiences would always remain with them. Rather than separated by the racial lines they had experienced at home, women bonded over their experiences based on their gender. They finally experienced a life outside parental control, although still limited by military policy. They saw how their gender had placed more limits on them than their ethnic identity.

Mexican Americans also experienced equality, many for the first time. They did not experience segregation in the military as they had at home. Though Mexican Americans had the legal classification as “White,” it meant little in public spaces. However, ethnicity no longer mattered in the military as they were all experiencing new challenges together. They leaned on each other for support and forged a pan-ethnic identity that allowed them to face their experiences together. Gender quickly became a way for them to discover a sense of belonging and collectivity. The idea that their service made them better and stronger as men fueled them to serve. Most male Mexican American soldiers cultivated a military brotherhood based on masculine behavior that transcended ethnicity.[134] Military service was a unique opportunity to draw different classes of people from various locations and differing backgrounds together to

[133] Hampf, 16.
[134] Alvarez, 79.

expose them to new ways of life and challenge their way of thought. Although they had similar experiences, gender became the dividing difference in military service rather than ethnic and cultural identity.

Even further, the Tejanas who served willingly sacrificed themselves for a country that did not always value them. They displayed their patriotism and courage openly, accepting ridicule on multiple fronts while simultaneously experiencing a newfound sense of freedom of which men and White women had more experience.[135] Their military service opened doors for them by exposing them to experiences that they had not had before, and meeting people they otherwise would never have known. They learned skills that transferred into their civilian lives and impacted them for the rest of their lives. They experienced relative equality for the first time and gained the confidence they needed to take on the following steps to fulfill an equitable life in the years that followed. Whether it was conscious or subconscious, the Tejanas who served in the military during World War II opened the doors for activism and change that spanned decades and generations.

[135] Rivas-Rodrigues, 3.

## Chapter 5

## The Tejana on the Home Front

America went to war, and women went with it. Women were active in the workforce and the military but were most active at home, metaphorically, holding down the fort. Women contributed to the war effort in many ways that often coincided with their traditional roles. They took charge of the home, shopping, rationing, buying war bonds, writing letters to soldiers, and providing comfort. Women also had to learn to take on tasks they had not had to do on their own before and lean on each other for support. They experienced loneliness and struggle, but they also learned to become more independent along the way. All women had to make sacrifices in even the most minor ways because the entire country was needed "to speed our boys' home."[1] The war effort was everyone's responsibility, and Americans did what was necessary to be successful.

Mexican American women at home also maintained many traditional roles during the era. However, their experiences still impacted them in ways that contributed to a shift in their identity. Like everyone else, they experienced loss, sacrifice, and fear unique to wartime. Still, they also gained some independence and confidence as they navigated their lives without a significant male presence and confronted some of the racial tension that many of their parents attempted to shield them from. With fewer males around to escort them in public spaces, they navigated the public sphere alone, which exposed them to new things.[2] The sheltered Tejanas were confronted with emotions and involvement that they may not have encountered without the

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[1] War Food Administration, *66865*, Poster, 1943, Gugler Lithographic Company records, 1878-1984.

[2] Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America,* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 63.

war. This chapter will evaluate the various traditional ways Tejanas contributed to the war effort at home and how their experiences forced them to evolve.

During the war, the American public had to learn its proper role in the conflict and how it was best suited to contribute effectively to the war effort. Gerd Horton explained in the book *Radio Goes to War* that the Office of War Information (OWI) tasked themselves with altering perspectives on a woman's place during the war, even temporarily.[3] The OWI decided to use soap operas to ease women and the public into the new roles for women during wartime. They successfully reversed the traditional notion that employed, married women were abnormal and a threat to the family. Instead, women eventually felt the pressure to take a war job to assist in the country's success at war, and women who did not enter the labor force bore the burden of proof that what they did instead was useful to the war effort. Radio shows such as *Lonely Women* featured the lives of young women who came to Manhattan to find work that would bring their loved ones back sooner.[4] The OWI's womanpower campaign created pressure on women to take a defense job. However, many women did not have enough support to do it.

A worker shortage was a major issue of the time, and women taking on defense jobs was a significant way women could contribute. As explained by Sherna Berger Gluck in the book *Rosie the Riveter Revisited,* Patriotic and glamorous themes were used to attract young women to the workforce, but soon, they realized that young women alone could not fill the shortage of needed workers.[5] Recruitment campaigns then targeted homemakers. They played upon their patriotism as well as their domestic and nurturing roles. The propaganda used to attract "Mrs.

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[3] Gerd Horton, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II*, (Berkely: University of California, 2002), 156.

[4] Horton, 157.

[5] Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Chang*e, (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 12.

Stay-at-Home" to war work was successful in breaking through the initial resistance of taking war jobs.[6] Married women were pressured into taking on jobs while also maintaining their own responsibilities, and the women who could not maintain both of those time-consuming tasks had to justify their choice.

The campaign to drive women to the workforce led many to envision women leaving their homes to enter the defense plants while their husbands fought on the battlefront. In reality, only one in ten new women workers had husbands in the service, and only eight percent of all women were married to servicemen. Only one-third of all women in the defense industry were former full-time homemakers because women had difficulty managing their many responsibilities, with childcare as the top issue.[7] Many mothers were the children's only caretakers, and figuring out how they would hold down full-time employment while also caring for their children, taking them to doctor's appointments, and caring for them while sick was not a feasible option. Though some tried, they ended up leaving the workforce because they could not manage all the tasks asked of them. Women's commitment to their domestic responsibilities caused a good amount of absenteeism and a high job turnover rate.[8] Women had to find other ways support for the war effort while also managing their regular responsibilities.

On top of taking on additional responsibilities, women were also learning to live independently without their husbands for the first time. They had to build a community of support with each other. Women had to rely on the support of their mothers or relatives to come to live with them. Sometimes, neighbors and older children had to chip in.[9] Theresa Casarez

[6] Gluck, 13.
[7] Gluck, 13.
[8] Gluck, 13-14.
[9] Gluck, 14.

from Austin recalled how her mother helped her community by sewing clothing.[10] She would sew clothing for her children but also offered to help anyone else in need. She explained, "My mother never, never sent anyone away without giving them the little bit that we had. She was always sewing things and mending."[11] Women gave whatever they could to help each other out at a critical time in their lives when some were simply surviving, especially if working was not a suitable option for them at the time.

For countless women, taking on a war job was not feasible, but they supported the country in other ways. As explained by James J. Kimble in the article "The Home as Battlefront," the war had not halted the numerous responsibilities left to the homemaker.[12] However, with the millions of men now absent from the home and off to fight the war, they had even more tasks to manage alone. They then had to figure out how to manage the family car, fix plumbing problems, and clean out the gutters, among many other things.[13] All of their new responsibilities piled on top of their already heavy load, and they had to figure out how to manage them all. Even with a community to offer support, these tasks were unmanageable for some.

The war had changed the expectations of gender roles. Women suddenly found themselves tasked with duties that had not traditionally belonged to them, such as vehicle or home maintenance. The popular magazine for women at the time, *Ladies' Home Journal*, made it clear that women were expected to take on these new responsibilities and attempted to show

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[10] Theresa Casarez, interviewed by Drs. Joanne Rao & Mario Sanchez, 11 October 2000, Folder 16, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[11] Casarez.

[12] James J. Kimble, "The Home as Battlefront: Femininity, Gendered Spheres, and the 1943 Women in National Service Campaign," *Women's Studies in Communication* 34 (2011): 84-103, 85.

[13] Kimble, 85.

them that they could manage.[14] On the March 1943 cover of the publication, a drawing featured a woman and her young daughter changing a tire, though still glamourized at not to lose their femininity. The woman and her daughter maintained fixed hairstyles and clean clothing while taking on the masculine task.[15] As explained by Melissa McEuen in the book *Making War, Making Women,* society measured women by the ways they served their partners, bosses, children, soldiers, and their communities during this period. The ideal woman adjusted according to the political culture's needs.[16] These women maintained the home and the responsibilities that had always belonged to them, took on the roles of their husbands who could no longer perform the tasks, and were still expected to maintain their traditional beauty standards. Much was asked of the American woman at the time.

For Tejanas, there were numerous traditional obligations. Their culture expected the family's females to fulfill the maternal role of caring for the younger siblings. For Gloria Araguz Alaniz from McAllen, when her mother died on June 10, 1942, just after American entry into the war, she was obligated to take on the responsibility of caring for her seven siblings at just fifteen years old.[17] She had cared for her dying mother and knew she had to continue as a caretaker after her mother's death. Not long after her mother passed away, Alaniz's infant brother, Arturo, also passed away after suffering a long illness. She recalled caring for the infant child after her mother's death and looking up at the sky to say, "Jesus, please take him. I don't think we can

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[14] Al Parker, ''Mother and Daughter Changing a Tire,'' *Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1943, cover.
[15] Parker.
[16] Melissa McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 179.
[17] Gloria Araguz Alaniz, interviewed by Yvonne Lim, 18 October 2003, Folder 313, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

take care of him. He's very sick. Will you take him?"[18] The young girl had a lot of responsibility and grief placed on her at a young age, but she had no choice but to manage.

She became the mother figure for her remaining siblings as the oldest female of the family. She ensured they were all provided with their basic needs, and she cared for them when they were sick. When her twelve-year-old brother contracted an infectious disease, she decided that she needed to drop out of school to care for him full-time while also attending to her other siblings. She attended St. Genevieve Catholic School in McAllen until the eighth grade.[19] Alaniz selflessly sacrificed her education and life experiences to help her family after their devastating losses. The gendered role expected of her stripped her of opportunity and forced her to grow up at a very young age to a limited domestic existence. For Alaniz, receiving an education was out of reach, and fulfilling the duty of a war job was out of the question.

Some desired the opportunity for education, but it was not always an option. Familial obligations were an obstacle, and sometimes it was too difficult. For Placida Peña Barrera from Guerra, education was important. However, it was also hard thinking about situations at home.[20] She enrolled in Texas A & I University in Kingsville after graduating high school with aspirations to become a nurse or a teacher. College was harder than expected, and she withdrew three weeks later. She recalled that her father also had multiple sclerosis, and she explained, "I cried because I wanted to go to school, but financially we couldn't afford it… I panicked."[21] Though contributing to the war effort was important, and women answered the call to fill

[18] Alaniz.
[19] Alaniz.
[20] Placida Peña Barrera, interviewed by Virgilio Roel, 28 September 2002, Folder 236, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
[21] Barrera.

vacancies at a much-needed time, some women faced barriers that prevented them from doing it. They instead contributed in the other ways that they knew how.

Moreover, women were obliged to make ends meet and care for their families with fewer supplies available. The wartime economy and supply shortage caused women to figure out how to survive while simultaneously rationing materials. In a 1943 article, "Buy War Bonds- and Hold Them," Benjamin L. Masse explained the need for rationing.[22] The number of people in the workforce had expanded and increased national income. The American people were no longer financially struggling as they had in the decade prior during the Great Depression. The issue was that while income increased, the country was not producing enough consumer goods, such as clothing, shoes, food, appliances, and vehicles. Instead, many of the factories were producing war materials. People were paying off their debts, buying what they needed, and still had money to set aside.[23] This would seem like a good economic situation, but it could lead to a financial crisis.

The excess money could cause people to bid against each other for the needed products, leading to a significant price increase. If the price structure got too far out of hand, labor would demand higher wages to keep up with the cost of living. The federal government was obligated to initiate a system of rationing and price control.[24] Families were provided with ration stamp books that were used to purchase rationed goods. The number of stamps allotted depended on the size of the family. Zoila "Sally" Antonia Castillo Castro from San Marcos explained that when the stamps were gone, "you couldn't purchase any more, even if you had the money," but also

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[22] Benjamin L. Masse, "Buy War Bonds- and Hold Them," *America Magazine: The Jesuit Review of Faith and Culture* 69, no. 18 (August 7, 1943): 487-488, 487.

[23] Masse, 487.

[24] Masse, 487.

remembered, "We managed. Mother was very good at managing with what she had."[25] Women had to find ways to feed, clothe, comfort, and provide for their families with limited product availability.

The government also encouraged the purchase of war bonds so that they used money that was already in circulation to fund the war effort. The government used circulating money instead of borrowing money to fund the war. For every "dollar which the Government borrows from the commercial banks is a *new* dollar added to the flood of dollars already threatening price control."[26] Women had more access to money than they had in the previous decade and had to learn how to spend their money that would support the war effort. On top of their other responsibilities, they had to take control of their family finances and make the necessary decisions. For many women, their new workload was so demanding that it was its own war job.

Women took on the task of figuring out how to continue to perform all their duties with the additional barrier of less food and available materials. It became a patriotic duty. Jessica L. Ghilani explained in the article "DeBeers' 'Fighting Diamonds" that advertisements influenced public behavior, and World War II-era advertisements depicted arguments for thrift, patriotism, sacrifice, and civic obligation. [27] People were discouraged from wasteful spending and instructed to ration, manage with less, and conserve. Aurora Estrada Orozco lived in Mercedes during the war and remembered rationing. She said, "You couldn't buy leather shoes. The government wanted people to save their leathers for the soldiers."[28] Orozco described how she and her family

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[25] Zoila Antonia Castillo Castro, interviewed by Nicole Griffith, 1 March 2001, Folder 22, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[26] Masse, 488.

[27] Jessica L. Ghilani, "DeBeers' 'Fighting Diamonds:' Recruiting American Consumers in World War II Advertising," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2012): 222-245.

[28] Aurora Estrada Orozco, interviewed by Desirée Mata, 17 October 2003, Folder 399, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

found ways to provide for themselves while adhering to the restrictions. They would go to Mexico to get sandals, sugar, and other supplies they could not get in the United States.[29] Rationing was difficult, but it was a sacrifice that everyone in the country could make for the war effort.

The ladies of the home took on much of the responsibility of feeding and rationing. The OWI released a video that explained to the public that rationing would allow civilians and the military to get what they need. Food, tin, and other materials were in short supply, which were necessary to win the war. The video used the image of a woman shopping for her family to demonstrate how point rationing worked. She gathered her food for her family and deducted points as she went through the store. Once her shopping was complete, the narrator added, "She's a smart girl."[30] The video implied that women had the responsibility and capability to learn the system. The War Food Administration targeted women in their advertisements to encourage food rationing, knowing they did most of the buying. Women learned to plan and prepare meals ahead of time to save money and so that they did not waste food. The war altered the way people gathered. Women were encouraged to meet with friends to maintain morale but refrain from consuming refreshments.[31] In small ways, people changed their habits of serving food to others.

The OWI video also explained that without rationing, "some people will get more than their fair share. Others would not even get what they need."[32] The system was to ensure fairness for everyone. However, not all families had enough food to feed their children. Serving others was less of a concern for some as providing for their families became more difficult. Like

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[29] Orozco.

[30] US Office of War Information Bureau of Motion Pictures, "Point Rationing of Foods," Posted by U.S. National Parks Service, *The United States Government*, video, 1943.

[31] McEuen, 195.

[32] "Point Rationing of Foods."

Orozco's family, other Mexican Americans also provided by crossing the border. Alaniz remembered how difficult it was to feed the family with food rationing in place. Her father, Juan Araguz, sometimes crossed the border into Mexico to purchase staple items, such as rice and beans.[33] Feeding a family and caring for their needs became more difficult as supplies became limited.

The duty of the home rested on women's shoulders. They were held accountable for producing healthy, happy, well-rested laborers daily. Properly feeding their families was a necessary duty, leading women to grow their own food or can their vegetables as a part of that job.[34] The OWI explained, "The best way to supply our men overseas and our fighting allies with most of the foods they need is in dried form and in cans."[35] The OWI video also pointed out that "Other factors affect our canned food supply. Take tin for example. Our major peacetime sources have been cut off by the enemy."[36] The government encouraged the public to ration all food and supplies where manageable.

Women were responsible for rationing food and materials but had to find other ways to care for their family's needs. Casarez remembered that a container had to be brought to stores to purchase toothpaste to utilize the metal containers it came in for the war.[37] They found ways to avoid using tin where they could and recycled tin when necessary. Mary Colunga Carmona Resendez from Austin remembered recycling tin during the war. She explained that her church had a recycling program, and she would "open the cans on both sides and put the lids in the

[33] Alaniz.
[34] McEuen, 180.
[35] "Point Rationing of Foods."
[36] "Point Rationing of Foods."
[37]Casarez.

middle can and then mash it down. They picked them up or we took them to the church in bags, and someone would take them."[38] The country's success depended on the small sacrifices made.

Women learned several ways to save money and support the war. They did not waste food and saved money on their appliances by doing essential maintenance. Advertisements taught them to keep their appliances in working order by keeping them clean, oiling the motor, and checking the seals. They were also encouraged to use the extra money they had to purchase war bonds that would help fund the war.[39] Herlinda Mendoza Buitron Estrada from Bastrop remembered that some of her family members participated in the war effort by collecting scrap metal and then buying savings stamps used to purchase war bonds. She said, "Everyone pitched in."[40] The wartime war effort was for everyone, and people showed their support wherever possible.

Raising funds was an effort many women made for the war. In an interview, Louis Romero, Jr. described how his grandmother collected money for the war in Kerrville, Texas.[41] Delphina Torres established her own restaurant to support herself and her children after the sudden death of her husband. She began by cooking food for people in their homes but was eventually convinced to open her restaurant. Everyone in town knew the Tortilla Factory by World War II, and Torres was very engaged with the community. She was committed to raising funds and hosted fiestas with entertainers from San Antonio. She also taught local children the traditional Mexican dances. She was beloved and used her influence to raise money and help the

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[38] Mary Colunga Carmona Resendez, interviewed by Cliff Despres, 29 March 2001, Folder 84, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[39] McEuen, 195.

[40] Herlinda Mendoza Buitron Estrada, interviewed by Gloria Monita, 19 October 2002, Folder 360, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[41] Louis Romero, Jr., interview by Francelle Robinson Collins, 22 November 2016, *The Kerr County Historical Commission,* Portal to Texas hosted by UNT Libraries.

community. He explained, “At that time we didn’t have as many nonprofits, the main one was the Red Cross.” [42] Women like Torres were community leaders and provided in ways they knew how.

Women were also responsible for morale and encouraged to keep their moods at bay and complaints minimal. Women could sabotage civilian morale, which could affect the soldiers overseas. They were encouraged to refrain from gossiping or spreading bad news. They had to watch what they said and keep the people around them happy.[43] A 1944 poster featured the face of an ordinary woman who looked like she could be anyone’s neighbor with the caption, “Wanted! For murder. Her careless talk costs lives.”[44] Women were expected to take on so many responsibilities but also keep quiet about what they were experiencing. Part of a woman’s duty during wartime was to maintain order at home and boost morale for those who were sacrificing to protect the country. Officials constantly told women what to buy, how to buy, when to share, and how to handle their emotions as wartime changed their households and communities.

Keeping a pleasant outward appearance was difficult at times because wartime brought on a constant state of fear. Regularly, mothers and wives were left to wonder if their sons and husbands would return home safe from war. Ana C. Garner and Karen Slattery explained in the article “The World War II Patriot Mother” that mothers were aware of the sacrifice they were making with their sons off to war.[45] World War II news narratives transformed what would be an unimaginable loss during peacetime to a regrettable but acceptable loss during the war. Mothers marked their sacrifices worthy, and even when faced with the unimaginable, they shared their

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[42] Romero.

[43] McEuen, 180.

[44] Victor Kepler, “Wanted! For Murder,” NWDNS-208-PMP-91, NARA Still Picture Branch, 1944, The National Archives, *Powers of Persuasion.*

[45] Anna C. Garner and Karen Slattery, “The World War II Patriotic Mother: A Cultural Ideal in the U.S. Press,” *Journalism Studies* 11, no. 2 (2010): 143-157, 150.

stories with pride and support for the war.[46] The Houston Public Library featured a picture of six brothers who served in World War II. The caption explained that Mrs. Sara C. Vara of San Antonio "contributes six sons, aged 18-32, to U.S. war effort."[47] Mothers were recognized for sacrificing their sons as part of the war effort.

Sending a family member off to war was frightening, and even if they could not show it, women agonized over the unknown for their soldiers. They showed pride in their sacrifice and patriotism for their country in public. Families often displayed blue star service flags to recognize each of their sons who were serving overseas in their windows.[48] Herminia Guerrero Cadena from Fall City remembered a small flag that was displayed in a window of her family home to symbolize her brother's participation in the war. Her brother was a proud Marine. Only nine at the time, Guerrero said, "I didn't recognize the importance until my brother went in."[49] Even at a young age, it was difficult not to notice the changes happening worldwide and the significance of the sacrifice.

Communities carried a sullen feeling while the men were away. Orozco explained the feelings of sadness realizing that "everybody that we knew in our family, in our friends, our neighbors, somebody had young people, or fathers, and pretty soon they would be going into war."[50] Everyone was aware of the somber feelings but did their best to keep moving forward. Still, the absence of family members and fear for their safety and whereabouts was hard to ignore. Ceremonies and holidays were hard to celebrate, and communities were left figuring out

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[46] Garner and Slattery, 150.

[47] "San Antonio Mom Contributes 6 Sons to U.S. War Effort," *Texas Cultures Online*, Houston Metropolitan Research Center at Houston Public Library, Portal to Texas hosted by UNT Libraries.

[48] Garner and Slattery, 150.

[49] Herminia Guerrero Cadena, interviewed by Erika Martinez, 25 June 2002, Folder 334, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[50] Orozco.

how to continue. Orozco added, "We didn't have fiestas anymore."[51] The feeling of dread was difficult to suppress.

Families constantly worried about their loved ones and read newspapers or waited for letters to ensure their family member was okay. Gregoria Acosta Esquivel from Lockhart had three uncles who served in Europe.[52] She lived with her grandparents, and she recalled reading the English newspapers or translating English radio broadcasts to her grandparents and sometimes neighbors who only spoke Spanish so they could stay informed on the war. She also recalled that one of her uncles received an injury during the war at a battle in Luxembourg. He caught a fragment of shrapnel in his leg and received a Purple Heart and additional military honors for his service. Visiting her uncle in the hospital as a young girl had a lasting impact on Esquivel. She explained, "After I saw my uncle, who spent a lot of time in hospital, that's what got me interested in the nursing field."[53] There was fear for loved ones but pride and inspiration in their service.

Many families often worried for the safety of their loved ones, and some would unfortunately return home wounded. Ascención Ambros Cortez from Loredo said that her husband suffered a severe injury that ultimately led him to lose his right hand.[54] Her husband, Hernan, attempted to throw out an enemy grenade launched in his foxhole. However, it exploded as he released it from his hand. Though her husband was permanently injured, she was glad he came home at all. Unfortunately, Cortez's brother, Enrique Ambros, who also served, paid the

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[51] Orozco.

[52] Gregoria Acosta Esquivel, interviewed by Laura Herrera, 16 November 2002, Folder 254, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[53] Esquivel.

[54] Ascención Ambros Cortez, interviewed by Desirée Mata, 25 October 2003, Folder 346, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

ultimate price for the war. He lost his life.[55] It was a devastating situation that no one hoped to happen.

All family members wanted their loved ones to return safely, but unfortunately, many returned with lifelong injuries that affected their lives. Orozco remembered that when some of the young men came back, "Some of them were crippled, some of them were blind, and some of them would have one arm," but she added that people were glad that their soldiers were coming home alive.[56] Juana Estela Gonzalez Chapa from Rio Grande City had three brothers who served. Her brother, Santiago, was hit in the head with shrapnel and received a metal plate in his head. If he stayed in the sun for an extended period, his head would get too hot.[57] While he had to deal with the injury for the rest of his life, the family knew others were far worse off. Fears and anxieties became an unthinkable reality when families received notification of their loved ones' injuries or deaths.

Learning to live with their injuries was much harder than they could have imagined. The psychological effect of war left a lasting impact, and people had to find new ways of living. After Cortez's husband suffered an injury that left him without a right hand, he attempted suicide while receiving treatment. Hernan tried to jump out of the hospital window. Fortunately, the people around him noticed his behaviors, preventing him from being successful.[58] It was not easy for the injured to return to their everyday lives, especially when faced with a new disability. It was difficult for the returning soldier's families to watch helplessly as their family members suffered the lifelong impact of war.

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[55] Cortez.
[56] Orozco.
[57] Juana Estela Gonzalez Chapa, interviewed by Misty Roberts, 16 March 2000, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
[58] Cortez.

Even with no injuries, the returning soldiers usually never returned unscathed. The soldiers coming home often did not return to remain the person they were when they left. It was hard to adjust the mindset from being in combat to returning to peacetime at home. Castro recalled that her husband suffered from night terrors and woke her up with his screams at times. At one point, a store owner called to notify her that her husband dove under a car after another backfired when he visited the store. He had several reactions that resulted from his time in the war. [59] The war left lasting wounds on the people who sacrificed their lives that were not always visible.

Without physical injuries, it was hard to comprehend how the men's traumatic experiences shaped them. Alaniz had a brother who served in the Pacific, and he came back with stories of the Japanese. She remembered her shock when "he would tell me the Japanese would try and commit suicide."[60] The soldiers carried those traumas with them. Cadena noted that her brother was noticeably different and refused to talk about his experiences. There were only two instances that Cadena remembered her brother talking about what he witnessed, and, in those cases, he had consumed alcohol before he would talk about it.[61] Similarly, Orozco recalled looking at her brother's boots he wore throughout the war. He told her, "Sometimes they were full of blood, sometimes they were full of mud, but he just kept them on."[62] She added that he received a Silver Star for saving another soldier's life. Their family members had witnessed traumatic events, and their war experiences forever changed them. Their stories were unimaginable, and the way they changed them was noticeable.

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[59] Castro.
[60] Alaniz.
[61] Cadena.
[62] Orozco.

As difficult as it was to adjust upon returning home, a soldier who would never return was excruciating. Chapa had three brothers who served, and while one sustained a head injury, her brother Regino lost his life in Normandy. His loss devastated her mother. She also remembered two other young men from her town who served and were lost. She recalled that the entire town mourned as she remembered "a lot of people crying."[63] The loss of soldiers throughout the war affected entire communities. Casarez remembered learning of some of the fallen men in her town as the war went on. She recalled how painful it was for her to realize the loss that some of the mothers were facing. She explained the pain she felt as the bodies of the fallen came home in caskets. She said that wakes typically occurred in family homes, and military services usually took place at the cemetery.[64] With two brothers who were serving overseas, the losses she witnessed hit especially hard, knowing that it could be her family at any time.

Many could offer empathy for the ones who lost loved ones because they knew that it could easily be them in the situation. Estrada, who was only eleven years old then, remembered that she did not fully understand war but knew it was not good. She recalled that at the attack at Pearl Harbor, "we learned that one of my mom's friend's son had been killed."[65] She also explained that her brother served in the war and saw combat in the Philippines and New Guinea.[66] She understood that it was a scary time and she was fearful. Castro remembered, "There was a lot of sadness then because there were a lot of people we all knew who were killed. A lot of them were in prison camps and they came back not themselves."[67] Orozco recalled

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[63] Chapa.
[64] Casarez.
[65] Estrada.
[66] Estrada.
[67] Castro.

learning of the death of Miguel Gonzalez, the first war death of Mercedes, Texas. Gonzalez's funeral was the first military funeral the small town had experienced, which left a lasting impact.[68] When the worst occurred, families were supported and recognized for their loss.

Military funerals were tragic for the families and the communities. Victoria Partida Guerrero from La Feria recalled the funerals of two of her cousins killed in combat.[69] One was killed in a tank explosion, and the other died in a plane crash. The family held both funerals in Brownsville, but she remembered that the government ordered that one of the caskets should always remain closed. She claimed that the casket was continuously guarded, even during the wake at home. The lengths taken to keep the casket closed made Guerrero's aunt, the man's mother, suspicious that her son's body was not even in the casket. The family's minds were never at ease with the thought. She recalled her aunt speculating, "Maybe it's just a casket."[70] The unimaginable grief and denial of a mother who lost her sons likely played a part in the speculation.

In some instances, mothers lived in denial that their sons were dead. Garner and Slattery found several articles in which interviewed mothers hoped their missing son would show up at some point. Mothers who lost their only child struggled over their sons' deaths, and at times, it affected their health. They revealed stories of women who could not stand the grief they were experiencing. One of the stories was of a woman who collapsed and died next to her radio, waiting to hear news about a torpedoed ship carrying her son. Another mother committed suicide

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[68] Orozco.

[69] Victoria Partida Guerrero, interviewed by Elizabeth Aguirre, 19 October 2002, Folder 266, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[70] Guerrero.

after receiving the news of the death of her child.[71] Mothers experienced exceptional grief, and some were not in the correct state of mind to display their expected pleasant outward appearance.

Families who lost loved ones in the war were given support by receiving gold star flags to display in their windows as recognition of their loss or hearing important political figures eulogize their sons. Mothers received praise for their sacrifice in public. Though their loss was regrettable, serving the greater good was also honorable and justifiable. As gracious as mothers presented, they had no alternative. Mothers risked criticism if they displayed any dread or fear.[72] Mothers had to remain strong as they sacrificed their sons and suppressed their anxieties about the war to show their support. Much was asked of a mother in the name of war, even as she agonized over the unknown or the unthinkable.

Receiving letters from their soldiers was the only reassurance for families on the home front. Casarez had two brothers who served overseas. One brother served in the Pacific, while the other served in Europe. She explained that few letters arrived from her brothers, and their families often wondered where they were and if they were all right. She recalled that her mother "and all the mothers waited for the mail every day."[73] Guerrero and her future husband, Luis, wrote back and forth during their courtship. She remembered, "The fear was within you constantly."[74] No matter how much fear a family member had, they were encouraged to suppress it to boost morale. A Mercedes newspaper article advised civilians that their letters should not discuss any sadness or troubles at home because "He has enough of his own."[75] Letters opened a line of communication at the time that was invaluable to the family at home who eagerly awaited

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[71] Garner and Slattery, 152.
[72] Garner and Slattery, 150-151.
[73] Casarez.
[74] Guerrero.
[75] "What to Write Soldiers," *The Enterprise,* (Mercedes, Texas), July 2, 1943, The Portal to Texas History.

news that their loved ones were okay, even if the letters held back some of the genuine emotions of the time.

Receiving a letter from a soldier was comforting, though strict censorship regulated them. Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith explained in the article "Writing is Fighting, Too" that women were careful to follow censorship regulations and often felt that they could not reveal too much of what they were feeling during the time.[76] Though the women felt that they did not disclose much, Litoff and Smith explained that the letters during the time revealed what their actual experiences were. They often reassured family members that they were taking care of their added responsibilities and subtly expressed their loneliness at times.[77] Though the women who wrote the letters may not have known how important they were, the letters now display some of how people were coping with the changes taking place.

The letters relieved family members, even if they could not reveal much. Casarez recalled how censorship regulations often led to a delay in receiving important letters from her brothers. She felt as though it took too long to hear back from them. The government read personal letters to ensure no information disclosed the soldier's location for safety reasons. Any revealing information received a black mark to hide it. She recalled that some of the letters had "words he used in black."[78] She explained that although she never knew if her brothers were in danger, she still "would pray for them."[79] The fear of the unknown was difficult. Not only were families encouraged to sacrifice their loved ones, but they also had to live without knowing their family members' whereabouts throughout the war.

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[76] Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, "Writing Is Fighting, Too:' The World War II Correspondence of Southern Women," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (1992): 436–458, 442.

[77] Litoff and Smith, 442.

[78] Casarez.

[79] Casarez.

Though it was a violation, servicemembers sometimes sent coded messages to their families so that they would know where they were. Santos "Sandy" Acosta Fuentes from Buda received letters from her husband, Tony, who would tell her that he bought her some dishes to indicate that he was in Japan.[80] Fuentes explained her frustration that the letters the couple sent to each other were not private. However, they never missed an opportunity to express their love to one another. She explained, "Everything was censored. All the mail was censored," but he once wrote to her, "If you see that bright star up in the sky, when I get home, I want to put it in your hair."[81] Though censored and monitored, the couple found ways to communicate and freely expressed their love for each other.

Martha Ortega Vidaurri from Austin also revealed a way she got around censorship in letters when communicating with her brothers.[82] Vidaurri had six brothers who served in Europe throughout the war, and the code was something they developed after they went off to war. She explained that one of the first letters she received from a brother said, "Make sure to tell the doctor's youngest daughter I say hello."[83] She explained that the doctor's youngest daughter's name was Virginia, so she confirmed with her brother in her following letter if he meant that he was leaving from Virginia. He confirmed, "yes."[84] Another brother sent her a letter that read, "Tell the boys to save me some Mexican beer."[85] She went through all the beers in the family's refrigerator to figure out that he meant Cartablanca, which revealed to her his station in

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[80] Santos Acosta Fuentes, interviewed by Karla Gonzalez, 13 October 2000, Folder 32, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[81] Fuentes.

[82] Martha Ortega Vidaurri, interviewed by Tammi Grais, 3 October 2001, Folder 161, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[83] Vidaurri.

[84] Vidaurri.

[85] Vidaurri.

Casablanca.[86] Decoding the letters was a way for the family to avoid censorship and keep in touch to let them know where they were. Knowing their whereabouts provided some comfort for their family.

Not only were family members comforted by the letters, but sending letters to soldiers became another way to show support. The letters sent to troops were among the many ways women volunteered their time during the war to boost morale. Women wrote letters and organized letter-writing campaigns for school children, businesses, and churches. Ordinary Americans wrote letters to other ordinary Americans to keep them in their thoughts. However, some letters were also written to high-ranking officials such as General Douglas MacArthur as well.[87] Vidaurri spent much time writing not only to her five brothers stationed around the world but also to all the soldiers she knew from her church.[88] Many ways were found to boost morale and support the war effort. Letters were a small way to make a significant impact.

It was hard to find a family around the country who was not directly affected by the war, but some families did not face the same hardships that others had in their communities. They, too, found ways to support the war. Castro explained that her family consisted of five daughters, so there were no sons to draft. She recalled, "I had several cousins that were in the service. But we didn't have any boys, so I guess we lucked out in that way."[89] She still had the heart to do what she could and decided to write letters. Castro and her friends started a club called "Blue Horizon," where they got together and wrote letters to servicemen. The girls exchanged names of friends and family members they knew overseas.[90] Castro knew that her family did not face the

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[86] Vidaurri.
[87] Litoff and Smith, 442-443.
[88] Vidaurri.
[89] Castro.
[90] Castro.

same hardships other families faced and did what she could to help servicemen through difficult times.

Letters were a common and effective way for women to boost morale during the war, but they also volunteered in other ways. In the book *Our Mother's War,* Emily Yellin described how the United Service Organization (USO) was formed in February 1941 to provide a connection to civilian life for soldiers.[91] The USO handled recreation for the men in the armed forces. Many of the volunteers in these services were women charged with providing friendly diversions for the troops. The USO operated centers across the United States and in the theaters of war. Female volunteers were needed to serve donuts, dance, and talk to the troops. In 1941, the USO created an affiliated organization called Camp Shows to provide live entertainment for soldiers. The camp shows took place around the country and expanded to larger shows that traveled around the world.[92] This was another way for civilians to get involved in providing comfort and showing care for the young soldiers serving in wartime.

Most often, performers traveled to local bases to perform for the soldiers. Casarez loved to dance and joined a dance group when she was sixteen. The group usually performed at Zaragosa Park near her home when she lived in Austin. In 1944, she and her friend, Connie Cantu, were asked to join another group of singers and dancers from the University of Texas to entertain in various places throughout the area. She recalled that she used to go to "Camp Swift or to the USO to entertain. We did the typical dances, the jarabe tapatio, the zandunga, just about any dance that was typical at that time. For every different dance we did, we had a different

[91] Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II,* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 86.

[92] Yellin, 86.

costume," and her older sister, Frances, often handmade her costumes.[93] It was a small way for her to volunteer her time for the entertainment of the servicemen. It was also something that she enjoyed doing.

Young girls were encouraged to regularly contribute to the war effort in their classes. Chapa remembered that several of her classes incorporated efforts to boost the troops' morale. She said her Glee Club visited nearby Fort Ringgold to sing to the soldiers, and her English class wrote letters. She said, "We just talked about what we were doing, like going to our ranch and horseback riding, just to make them feel good."[94] She also said that in her homemaking class, she was part of an assembly line of girls that stitched sweaters together for the men overseas. The class only used one color, and she recalled, "I was so tired of that army green."[95] It was a way for the young girls to help the young men.

The war was challenging, and people did their best to keep their spirits elevated. Orozco explained that people in Mercedes sometimes went to the train station to say goodbye to the soldiers leaving.[96] Restaurant owner, Torres, sent tamales overseas to soldiers. During fundraising functions, people would tell her how great it would be if their sons could receive her tamales. That is when she decided to start canning and ship her tamales to soldiers during the war. She did not limit her generosity to only the young men from her area. Her grandson explained, "I am talking about anybody who had been drafted, who was overseas, during the war years, fighting in Germany or wherever it was. All of the information was gathered, and they were shipped to every person in the Armed Forces… It was an incredible feat."[97] Tejanas

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[93] Casarez.
[94] Chapa.
[95] Chapa.
[96] Orozco.
[97] Romero.

contributed in several ways to boost morale when it was hard to be away from family members facing the unknown.

Wartime was a unique experience that changed the course of many lives. No one knew what the future would hold. Young couples rushed down the aisle to wed as men enlisted or drafted. Parents, newspapers, magazines, and radio programs attempted to warn young people not to jump into a hasty war marriage. There was no way to know how the war would change them or if their husbands would suffer life-altering injuries or even death. Young people did not heed the warning because 1.8 million couples married in 1942, which was a sharp increase in the number of marriages just the year prior.[98] Though warned of the risks, the young couples determined that the chaos of war and the state of uncertainty was more of a reason to wed rather than postpone.

The young couples often wed quickly without much fanfare or family present, just before the groom shipped off for war. Quick marriages likely lacked the essentials of an enduring marriage and did not have the proper adjustment time to overcome the separation. Instead of sharing new experiences as most newlyweds would, they had new and overwhelming experiences alone. Before the war, the young women often shouldered most of the emotional burdens in the marriage as the ones who had a greater responsibility in a new relationship. However, war marriages had the added wartime obligations.[99] No amount of preparation could have braced them for the challenges they would face in the years to come.

American entry into war led to many young people rushing to the alter as they faced the unknown. Frances Correa Reyes from San Antonio married her husband, Christopher, in 1941,

[98] Yellin, 5.
[99] Yellin, 7.

the same year the United States entered the war. She explained, "He married me because, number one, he didn't know if he would make it back, and then, two, he knew that if he didn't do it now, he probably wouldn't do it."[100] Similarly, Vidaurri said that her husband, Edelmiro, courted her while stationed in Fort Sam Houston and the Randolph Air Force Base. The couple only saw each other on weekends, and the couple married six months after the war began in the United States. They had known each other for some time but decided to wed once the war started.[101] For Fuentes, it was much quicker. She met her husband, Toby, at a nightclub when she was twenty-eight years old. She had considered herself older and thought that maybe she would never marry. He was a sailor visiting from Houston when he met her, and it took her by surprise when he wanted to marry her so quickly. She recalled, "He bought my dress, and he bought my ring, and then in three days we got married."[102] Soon after the wedding, Toby went overseas. All the couples quickly became separated by war.

Traditionally, young Tejanas learned how to care for others from a young age in preparation for marriage, but no one could have prepared them to endure a new marriage that included geographical separation and trauma. Elizabeth Ruiz Garcia from Austin learned her traditional role as a wife when she attended Catholic school as a child. Traditionalism received reinforcement at home, where her mother taught her how to cook and clean. Additionally, she was responsible for making breakfast for her family and doing the dishes afterward.[103] Garcia learned to care for others from a young age. When her husband returned home from war

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[100] Frances Correa Reyes, interview by Elvia O. Perez, 4 August 2007, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[101] Vidaurri.

[102] Fuentes.

[103] Elizabeth Ruiz Garcia, interviewed by Hannah McIntyre, 2 February 2000, Folder 38, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

wounded, she had unknowingly prepared to care for him, though she could have never known how much additional care he would need.

War brides were common but faced uncertain times that altered their outlook on the future. Rather than making a home with their new husbands and starting a life of their own, many had to continue to live with their parents to gather support during the difficult time. When Garcia married her husband, she was excited to start her life outside her parents' control. However, she lived in her parents' home after marrying Willie as he went off to war. The two had met in 1944 after being introduced by friends. They dated for about three months before Willie asked her to marry him. She was hesitant, knowing he would leave for war two days later, but he was insistent. He revealed that he was afraid she would marry someone else while he was gone.[104] They did not know each other very long but decided to take a leap of faith and get married before he left to fight in the war.

Learning of the quick engagement, Garcia's mother sent her to pick a white dress for the ceremony, and the two were married at her Catholic church. All her family attended, and her mother arranged a party afterward. She remembered, "It was very nice."[105] Unfortunately, just six months after Willie Garcia went overseas, he returned home disabled and suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome. The couple lived with her parents for five years upon his return home to help with his care. She explained, "The stress was so bad he couldn't eat, he couldn't walk, he used to scratch himself and he used to hear voices."[106] She had to adjust to a new life after the war with a husband who was different from the man she married. She relied on the support of her

[104] Garcia.
[105] Garcia.
[106] Garcia.

family more than ever during that time, although when she married, Garcia thought she would be out on her own.

Even for women who had been married for some time before the war, having their husbands away was more challenging than they imagined. At first, men with families were exempt from the draft, but as the war escalated, the government called for most able-bodied men to serve. Married women had to put their married lives on hold while caring for their children simultaneously. The mothers experienced loneliness and stress without the comfort of their husbands. Most wives had not gone through anything as drastic as war without their partners alongside them.[107] When Juana D. Flores of El Paso's husband shipped out, she was pregnant. While she was proud of her husband and the women around her talked about how proud they were of their husbands, she could not help but cry. She explained, "I felt sad because I was pregnant and alone."[108] The couples at this time were experiencing two different lives throughout the war period, and that was a difficult thing to realize. Many women found themselves learning to cope independently, which contributed to women gaining a new sense of autonomy.

Some women opted to be "camp followers." Rebelling against the idea that they had to live in exile from their husbands, they decided to spend as much time with them as they could in the United States. In previous wars, the term referred to women who traveled around military camps, but in World War II, the term referred to military wives. They found whatever housing they could to be near their husbands and took as much time as their husbands had left after the military got what time they needed from him.[109] The loneliness of the period caused some to take

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[107] Yellin, 9-10.

[108] Juana D. Flores, interviewed by Armando Segouia, 1 September 200, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[109] Yellin, 16.

drastic measures to have the needed connection that they were lacking. They took matters into their own hands and learned to adjust to their needs.

When Alaniz married her husband, Rodolfo, she moved several times to wherever her husband became stationed. He had a lengthy career in the military that extended beyond the war. While families could not travel abroad during wartime, travel in the States was possible. Alaniz moved wherever her husband needed to for the duration of his career. The family had even lived in Germany at one point after the war was over. As their family grew to include four children eventually, they could live comfortably on his military income while she cared for the family at home. She said that military housing was not as nice in the United States, "But we were happy."[110] The Alaniz family had a long experience with military living but made it work and kept their family together as much as possible.

Men and women at home resented the camp followers during wartime who were making sacrifices to be apart from their loved ones. The public criticized the camp followers for not being strong enough to make the adjustments necessary for times of war. Their presence was unwelcome on the already overloaded trains or in housing already in short supply. Many believed that camp followers were selfish and should stick close to home to do something more useful.[111] The wives had their justifications for following their husbands throughout the United States. However, the overall perception of the camp followers was negative during the war.

Though traveling to follow their husbands was discouraged by the public, the women who traveled were also learning to become more self-sufficient. While women did not usually travel alone before the war, they had no choice as men were away. They learned to become more

[110] Alaniz.
[111] Yellin, 17.

independent and self-reliant by making reservations and visiting distant places to see their husbands. They found that they could survive by themselves, contributing to more self-confidence.[112] The war taught women that they were more capable of relying on themselves than they ever knew before. They still faced loneliness, but self-reliance grew from it.

As difficult as it was for married women during the war, single women also longed for interaction with men. The young women who wanted to find companionship noticed the shortage of dates. Orozco said that she and her sisters were allowed to date during the war, but no men could take them out. She also recalled that a store owner joked that girls would go to her business to gaze at the male manikins because they had forgotten what men looked like.[113] Young women were unashamedly missing out on interactions with young men during the lengthy war years.

Before the war, parents restricted young ladies from spending time alone with boys. Mexican American parents tended to be strict with their daughters and required a chaperone to always be with them. Before they were married, Vidaurri remembered that she could only spend time with her future husband under the supervision of her brothers. She laughed when she said, "Maybe they knew what kind of guy he was."[114] Before the war, it was common for young Tejanas to be escorted to dances by their mother and strictly disciplined for any perceived improper behavior such as talking to a young man in broad daylight, or walking home with a boy.[115] It was inappropriate for young women to go out in public alone.

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[112] Litoff and Smith, 445-446.
[113] Orozco.
[114] Vidaurri.
[115] Ruiz, 59.

Wartime required some adjustment to this rule as it took all the men away, leaving the young girls to require less supervision and fewer family members available to keep their eyes on them. Garcia's mother only allowed her daughter to meet with her friends at the local church because she disapproved of Garcia roaming the streets. It was an inappropriate place for a girl. Though Garcia married during the war, she lived with her parents, who kept a strict eye on her for safety.[116] The church was a place of refuge that allowed the girls to experience some sense of freedom outside parental control. With young men away, mothers worried less about their daughters.

Dating was not altogether absent during the war. Sometimes women had courtships that occurred over distance. For some, writing letters to soldiers was the only method of communication with young men. Barrera met her future husband while visiting her aunt in Mission, but he was drafted shortly after. The couple decided to send each other letters to continue their relationship. Barrera had known Raymundo when she was younger but recalled that she never spoke to him much. She explained, "He was too quiet."[117] Their relationship blossomed during that time as they got to know each other through their letters, and Raymundo eventually asked her to marry him. She said, "He proposed to me by mail, our courtship was by mail, and he even sent the rings by mail."[118] The war made it difficult for traditional courtships, but people found a way to manage.

In many ways, the war changed the way that people interacted with each other. While society previously expected people to speak only with those in their community, the war exposed them to those outside their usual circles. Cadena had a sister who served in the military during

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[116] Garcia.
[117] Barrera.
[118] Barrera.

the war, and her sister came home to announce that she was getting married. To the family's surprise, her fiancé was an Anglo man. Cadena recalled that the situation had taken her aback. She explained that she was upset about her sister marrying a "gringo," and that people should marry their own kind. She admitted that people saw Mexican Americans as inferior, and she bought into that notion. It took time and the help of her priest for her to become accepting of the situation eventually.[119] While those who served in the military exposed themselves to people of various backgrounds, those at home were not as racially mixed, especially those outside of the workforce. Marrying someone of a different race or ethnicity was a drastic change.

Not only were military personnel introduced to other Americans of various backgrounds, but they also met people who were citizens of their stationed countries. Cross-cultural marriages became more common during and after the war than before. Between 1945 and 1949, a total of 114,691 women, 333 men, and 4669 children entered the United States under the War Brides Act of 1945 and the GI Fiancée's Act of 1946. Angela Wanhalla and Erica Buxton explained in the article "Pacific Brides" that the people entering the country under these provisions were not subject to immigration quotas, and the government expedited their entry into the country under a post-war family reunification policy.[120] This did not mean that everyone was accepting of the inter-cultural marriages.

The process of bringing a war bride back to the United States could be a lengthy one and required the applicants to state their race when requesting a visa. Most war brides who entered the United States under the 1945 Act were White or White-passing. The racially inadmissible

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[119] Cadena.

[120] Angela Wanhalla and Erica Buxton, "Pacific Brides: US Forces and Interracial Marriage during the Pacific War," *Journal of New Zealand Studies,* no. 14 (2013): 138-151, 138-139.

took the risk of being deported.[121] This process reflected the racial tension that was still present in World War II. Segregation was still a common occurrence in the United States, and there was still a racial division that prevented people from accepting intercultural relationships. Vidaurri had two brothers return home with a bride from other countries. One of the brothers' wives was German, and the other was Japanese. [122] This was difficult for the family to accept, not only because the wives were racially different from their husbands but because, throughout the war, Americans regarded German and Japanese people as the enemy of the country. There was much tension.

At home, Mexican Americans were still facing discrimination in a way that people in the military were not. Cadena recalled her time in school, where she faced segregation. Many of the schools with a Mexican American population had mostly Anglo teachers and administrators, and she recalled the disruptions when she frequently had to spell her name out. The teachers had difficulty pronouncing Herminia's name and eventually nicknamed her "Minnie." She also remembered that she was not allowed to speak Spanish at school. When any of the children spoke Spanish, they were punished and forced to sit out during recess.[123] Speaking a language other than English was discouraged, and teachers did not bother learning the name Herminia's parents had given her. These instances can create an atmosphere of inferiority or insignificance for a young child.

Segregation was not only in schools. In public, racial tension was maintained throughout the war, as well. Estrada explained that in the local Bastrop restaurants, minorities could only enter the establishments through the back door to place a to-go order. Signs in the storefront

[121] Wanhalla and Buxton, 145.
[122] Vidaurri.
[123] Cadena.

indicated that minorities could not sit and eat at the restaurant. Despite the signage, Estrada recalled that she would enter through the front door multiple times. She said, “A lot of times I played dumb. I would say to myself, ‘Well, I don't know how to read your sign,' so I'd go through the front door. And I got waited on for the simple reason that I knew how to speak English.”[124] Mexican Americans were not given the privilege of walking freely into an establishment for a meal.

Segregation at restaurants was a common occurrence. Castro remembered when Woolworths forced her and her friends to stand and eat their meals by the door. She said they received their food and sat down to eat, but management promptly told them they had to stand by the door. Years later, Castro's friend revealed that she did not remember experiencing segregation that way. Castro responded to her, “You were standing by my side eating a hotdog and drinking a coke. So, if that's the way you want to remember it...I don't hate anyone, but I do remember what happened. And I won't put it aside or lie about it.”[125] Discrimination was a common experience that affected people differently. Castro vividly remembered the way she was treated and the way it made her feel.

Esquivel also recalled an experience at a restaurant that denied her access to the best part of the establishment, the basement. However, she was less willing to make waves over the situation. She remembered feeling upset that she was denied access to her preferred section but accepted the rules and sat at the back of the restaurant. She explained, “At the time, segregation didn’t bother me. I felt like that’s the way it was supposed to be.”[126] Orozco was less understanding as she recalled segregated movie theaters. She said, “My money is as good as their

[124] Estrada.
[125] Castro.
[126] Esquivel.

money."[127] The discrimination was something Mexican Americans were used to at home, and though wartime brought hope of bringing the country together, that was much more difficult to achieve than what they realized.

Even going to a dance was troublesome at times. Casarez volunteered to dance as entertainment for troops and loved being a part of the community. However, she remembered an instance in Barton Springs where a dance establishment denied her and a friend entrance. She was devastated.[128] Castro was also part of a dance club but remembered how she and other dancers began to resent the club. They began to feel exploited for the entertainment of Anglos. She eventually left the club and began to feel isolated. She said, "It stays with you for the rest of your life."[129] There was a constant feeling of inferiority for the young women at home.

Tejanas were painfully aware that society saw them differently. All the hopes of the country coming together during a crucial time seemed to be pointless. Emilio Zamora explained in the book *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas* that though Mexican Americans had made some gains during the war, bigotry in Texas continued as usual once the war was over, despite the efforts of many showing their worth.[130] Though much had been done to expose the discrimination and bring attention to minority rights during the war, the prevailing focus was on African Americans, but even then, not much had changed once the war was over.[131] Though Texas saw economic growth and opportunity after the war, they typically did not extend to Mexican Americans. This group had significantly helped the United States in the chaos of the

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[127] Orozco.
[128] Casarez.
[129] Castro.
[130] Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 23.
[131] Zamora, 23.

war years.[132] Mexican Americans were tired of sitting back and waiting to feel included in a society that they belonged in. They were tired of living in state where they were not socially accepted as Americans though they often held little cultural ties to Mexico.

Wartime experience had changed them in many ways. Mexican Americans had faced much of what other Americans had faced while also being subjected to discrimination despite their sacrifices. The war was a unique experience for the young Tejanas, altering their lives in numerous ways. They learned about heartache and fear, but they also learned about their own resilience and ways to cope with life altering effects. The young women had to adjust their lives to fit the social needs of the time. Even if they could not serve in the military, or take on a war job, their contributions to the war were significant. They volunteered their time, rationed materials, and found ways to keep the country moving forward even as they faced the devastation of war for themselves. Though they contributed so much and still faced discrimination at home, their experiences helped them to understand their strengths, which would lead them to the next era of their lives.

[132] Zamora, 24.

## Chapter 6

## The Tejana After the War

"The respect came after the war."[1] Maria Cristina Parra from San Antonio shared her perspective on how World War II was a turning point for Latinos. Mexican American veterans returned home after World War II expecting to continue experiencing the relative equality they had encountered during their service. That would not be the case. Instead, they found that despite their service and sacrifice, they still faced segregation and treatment as second-class citizens. The difference at that point was that they were no longer willing to accept that they were not worthy of citizenship. They had honorably served for the protection of the United States and expected treatment with the dignity they deserved. They were unwilling to revert to the conditions they assumed before their wartime experiences because they had changed.

Women were not the same, either. Before the war, they were sheltered and lacked much experience in the wider world, but the war had changed them. As previous chapters have shown, whether they served in the military, held wartime jobs, or stayed at home, women were not the same passive creatures they were before the war began. Tejanas learned to tackle responsibilities and how to speak up for themselves. Parra explained, "There is more respect shown to Latinas now than at [the time of the war] because now Latinas speak up and listen."[2] The war had prepared them for lives as widows or to tackle issues independently. They were no longer oblivious to their strengths. This chapter will show how Tejana's wartime experiences prepared them for the period after the war. They were more confident and willing to stand up for themselves and their community than ever.

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[1] Maria Cristina Parra, interviewed by Elvia O. Perez, 4 August 2007, *VOCES OHPA online archive*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[2] Parra.

It was difficult to know how much the war had changed people until it ended. As Richard Griswold de Castillo explained in the book *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, families back home did not know of the experiences their soldiers had faced until after the war was over due to the strict censorship of mail. Even when they returned home, veterans were less than forthcoming about their experiences, and their families only received from them brief descriptions of their time in the service, their realities, and their contributions.[3] While families anxiously waited for the return of their soldier, the person who returned was not the person who left. They did not always know what exactly had changed, but one thing was sure: they were different.

Mexican Americans had experienced relative equality in the service because they had not served in segregated units as African Americans had. Because of this, many Latinos lived amongst Anglos and saw their service as an opportunity to prove themselves as equal to Anglo Americans. Many Latinos had been willing to serve and felt that their sacrifice had made them genuine Americans. People like Victoria Morales explained that they had felt a patriotic duty to serve their country. She said, "I say our country because I was born here. My generation went proudly to war because this country, despite the discrimination, had provided my family a better life than my relatives had in Mexico."[4] Juana D. Flores of El Paso explained that when her husband returned home from the war, "He didn't feel Mexican. He said he was like all the others."[5] They felt like real Americans and expected that treatment to continue when they got home.

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[3] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 51.

[4] Griswold del Castillo, 52.

[5] Juana D. Flores, interviewed by Armando Segouia, 1 September 200, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

During the war, Latinos in the military had a very different experience from those at home. They served alongside each other in stressful situations that no one else could ever really understand. In times of war, soldiers had to learn to lean on one another for support and trust each other with no question. In a 1945 LULAC newsletter, Star Castillo in Loredo explained that the Mexican American soldiers were "coming home with a feeling of equality tinged with fraternity which they have learned in the training camps, in the far-flung outposts, and on the battlefronts throughout the world. They have learned equality through the uniformity in uniforms, pay, food, and housing."[6] It was clear that the military experience was much different from civilian life.

Soldiers had no choice but to adjust to the world around them. Only one enemy was on the battlefront, and they had to learn to work together. Zoila "Sally" Antonia Castillo Castro from San Marcos also believed that change happened after the war because of the connection that the soldiers had with each other. She said, "I mean if you needed to jump in a foxhole, I imagine you didn't question who was in it, or what color they were. They basically learned to deal with it. And then through them, we did."[7] The people at home had a more difficult adjustment to equal treatment for Latinos than those who served. What they experienced in war changed them in many ways, and the people at home did not have such a rapid realization. Latinos understood they were worthy of equality and needed to demand the respect they deserved.

The organization of the Mexican American population reached new heights after the war. As soldiers returned home, they found that their status in society had changed very little, which was unacceptable. That was blatantly clear to Macario Garcia. On September 10, 1945, after

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[6] Star Castillo, "Editorial," *LULAC News*, Volume 12, no. 1 (July 1945):5.

[7] Zoila Antonia Castillo Castro, interviewed by Nicole Griffith, 1 March 2001, Folder 22, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

returning home to Richmond, Texas, Garcia attempted to go to a restaurant to celebrate with his friends and family. Upon entering the establishment, he requested a table for his party, but the restaurant refused service. An argument ensued between the owner and Garcia, and police arrested him on charges of aggravating assault. Garcia was a war hero and resented the fact that he was refused service after all his sacrifice.[8] Veterans like Garcia had served the United States in the war and risked their lives only to find that they still maintained second-class citizenship.

Incidents of racial hostility led to an increased participation in organizations such as LULAC. The organization was established before the war but had more members and involvement later. As Latinos faced discrimination at home, even after they had proven their worth, they committed to organizing. Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr. also explained in the article "The Struggle Against Separate and Unequal Schools" that after the war, LULAC was different.[9] It shifted its focus to a more patriotic platform. While the organization of the past had welcomed Mexican immigrants and Mexican American citizens all the same, after the war, they limited their membership to U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry. The shift was because the organization thought that focusing on their rights as citizens would solve the socioeconomic problems of all Mexicans in the United States.[10] LULAC chose to focus on the political and ideological institutions of the United States with their rights as American citizens first.

A month after the Macario Garcia incident, Star Castillo wrote in another LULAC newsletter, "We do not serve Mexicans here'… These, and many other stronger worded ones, are

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[8] "Veteran Hero Resents Being Refused Service," *Borger Daily Herald*, October 18, 1945, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries.

[9] Guadalupe San Miguel, "The Struggle Against Separate and Unequal Schools: Middle Class Mexican Americans and the Desegregation Campaign in Texas, 1929-1957," *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1983): 343–59, 345.

[10] San Miguel, 345.

the embarrassing and humiliating retorts given to our returning veteran of Latin American descent and their families."[11] He later pointed out the irony of appreciating servicemembers for fighting against tyranny. At the same time, Americans at home continued discriminating against non-Anglos who also served. He explained, "This situation is ironic indeed, in view of the fact that these same 'Mexicans' have just finished helping this country to defeat countries to the east and west who impose upon the world a superior people, a superior culture."[12] It did not make sense to fight against the ideology of racial superiority implemented in Europe during the war, while also maintaining those standards at home.

Historian Benjamin Marquez explained that Mexican American veterans believed that through their bravery, they had proven themselves and had the right to consider themselves equal in American society. LULAC decided to use their rights as citizens to act in the legal system. To combat the injustices they were facing, they filed various lawsuits that would clarify constitutional issues such as segregation.[13] Mexican Americans used the justice system as an attempt to relieve the contradiction they felt within themselves. They had an unwavering love for their country but unjustly faced widespread racism in that country simultaneously.

While the later Chicano movement embraced a Mexican American identity as unique and valuable, much of the activism after the war centered on the argument that Mexican Americans were legally considered Caucasian and should have the same rights as Anglo Americans. This was a long-standing argument that Mexican Americans had been considered "Caucasian" in the United States since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. However, they had also faced

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[11] Star Castillo, "Editorial," LULAC News, Volume 12, no. 4 (October 1945): 5.
[12] Star Castillo, (October 1945), 5.
[13] Benjamin Marquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 87.

discrimination and were never honestly treated the same as the Caucasian race.[14] Star Castillo continued to explain in the October 1945 LULAC newsletter, "There is no difference in race. Latin Americans, or so-called 'Mexicans,' are Caucasian, or White. There are only three races, the Caucasian, the Negroid, and the Mongoloid. Racial characteristics place the Latin American among the White."[15] Mexican American activists used the argument of their Caucasian classification to demand equal rights.

Texas had set the precedent that Mexican Americans were legally "Caucasian" with various legislation throughout the war, and Tejanos wanted that to be honored.[16] During the war, Texas needed Mexican migrant workers to fill agricultural positions, but Texas had a reputation for treating Mexican workers poorly. At one point, Bracero workers refused to work in Texas, and the Mexican government refused to send them. To challenge the reputation that Texas had formed for the mistreatment of Mexican workers, Governor Coke Stevenson passed the "Caucasian Race" resolution on May 6, 1943. This piece of legislation affirmed the rights of Caucasians in Texas to equal treatment in public places, which included Mexicans who had been considered Caucasian since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.[17] The legislation's purpose was to classify Mexican migrant workers and Mexican Americans together as equal to Anglos. Tejano activists intended to take advantage of that.

The Tejano acceptability as part of the Caucasian race is complicated. As explained by Thomas A. Guglielmo in the article "Fighting for Caucasian Rights," on the one hand, Texas laws accepted people of Mexican descent as Whites who were entitled to the same rights, such as

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[14] Otey M. Scruggs, "Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947," *Pacific Historical Review* 32, no. 4, (August 1963): 251-264, 255.
[15] Star Castillo, (October 1945), 5.
[16] Scruggs, 254.
[17] Scruggs, 255-256.

attending White schools, marrying White partners, and traveling on White railroad cars.[18] This was true sometimes in practice, but other times only in theory. On the other hand, in comparison to Anglos, Mexicans and Mexican Americans received lower wages, attended separate and poorly funded schools, and lived in less desirable neighborhoods. This was largely due to systemic procedure rather than law. They also often experienced racial violence and were subject to segregation and exclusion regularly.[19] The relative state of being somewhere in-between left them looking for ways to pull themselves out of an inferior status to the equality they deserved as legally Caucasian.

American society after World War II created more opportunities for activism for Mexican Americans than obstacles, especially in Texas. The prior legislation passed in Texas was only one factor in the equity argument. Tejanos had also served in the war in higher proportions than Anglos, and propaganda during the war had promoted democracy over totalitarianism. Civil rights groups took complete advantage of the situation to organize and pass legislation ensuring equal access to public spaces. While the various organizations across Texas did not always agree or act in perfect unison, they worked together to obtain greater rights for Mexican Americans in various ways.[20] Activists established organizations before the war. However, more Tejanos than ever were ready to maintain the value they developed during wartime, and even more organizations formed.

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[18] Thomas A. Guglielmo, "Fighting For Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas," *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 4, (2006): 1212–37, 1215.

[19] Guglielmo, 1216.

[20] Guglielmo, 1218.

The acceptability of Mexican Americans as equal to Anglos was complicated, and the 1954 Supreme Court case *Hernandez v. Texas* was a clear example of this complication.[21] Pedro "Pete" Hernandez was convicted of murder by an all-White jury. Whether Hernandez was guilty of murder was secondary to the argument of fairness. His lawyer, John Herrera, was set to appeal based on the claim that Hernandez experienced racial discrimination because none of the jurors were of Mexican descent. [22] At that time, Texas courts had excluded Mexican Americans and Blacks from serving on juries. This argument stemmed from an earlier case. It was brought to Herrera's attention when he received a letter from Attorney Percy Forman about a similar murder case in 1944, explaining that he needed a list of names of citizens of Mexican descent who were qualified voters in Harris County. He needed them to testify "to the fact that no member of their race has served as a Grand Juror within their recollection."[23] They were set to prove that Mexican Americans did not receive proper representation on juries of their Anglo peers.

In the *Hernandez* case, Herrera looked to LULAC for help. LULAC wanted to determine that discrimination against Mexicans should not exist because Mexicans were racially Caucasian, and they attempted to challenge the idea that Latinos were in the same category as Blacks. The argument was that Mexican Americans should be permitted to serve on juries, and Hernandez was entitled to have Mexican American jurors in his case. Historian Ian Haney-Lopez explained that LULAC's lawyers, Gus Garcia and Carlos Cadena, documented the oppression of Mexican Americans in Jackson County, which is where the case stemmed from, to prove that Latinos faced unlawful segregation.[24] They also pointed out the segregated bathrooms on the courthouse

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[21] Ian Haney-Lopez, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 51.

[22] Haney-Lopez, 52.

[23] Percy Foreman, Letter to John J. Herrera, May 5, 1944, *The Portal to Texas History,* UNT Libraries.

[24] Haney-Lopez, 76.

grounds at the time of the hearing. One bathroom for men was unmarked, while the other was marked "Colored Men" and "Hombres Aqui" ("Men here" in Spanish). [25] The goal was not to prove that segregation was wrong but to argue that Latino's rights were violated by excluding them as "White." In the *Hernandez* case, the State of Texas agreed with LULAC that Mexicans were legally White, but only for its own benefit. The state agreed with the argument only so that it could claim that Mexicans were adequately represented on juries because Caucasians sat on Texas juries. Therefore, Mexicans were represented correctly on juries and did not suffer from discrimination by being excluded.[26] Anglo acceptance of Mexican Whiteness usually only served Anglo self-interest. The official treatment of Mexicans as Caucasians was rarely meaningful and typically unenforced.

Just a few years prior, Texans contested the acceptance of anyone other than Anglo males to serve on juries. In 1949, Texas legislatures proposed an amendment to allow women to serve on juries but met with strong opposition. People feared that jurors of all races and genders would eventually have to serve together. Former State Senator T.H. McGregor sent a letter to the *Brenham Banner-Press* stating that in cases where juries would have to remain together, "Texas must provide two separate quarters… or perhaps four sets of quarters. If a jury has men, Mexican women, colored women and White women on it, there will have to be provided quarters for the men, for the Mexican women, for the colored women and for the White women."[27] His concern was that "If they do this it will destroy our ideas of segregation and acknowledge the doctrine of

[25] Haney-Lopez, 77.
[26] Haney-Lopez, 83.
[27] T.H. McGregor, "Letter to the Editor," *Brenham Banner-Press* (Brenham, Texas), August 8, 1949, 3.

racial equality."[28] The resistance to allowing women to serve on juries was also resistance to accepting racial equality.

While LULAC did not set out to obtain equality for women, they did not exclude Latinas from their efforts. To push for legislation, a South Texas lawyer and co-founder of LULAC, Alonso S. Perales, published a collection of affidavits from Latinos who had faced discrimination.[29] In one incident on April 15, 1945, Adolfo Salomon explained that his daughters and their friends were at a bus station in Seguin waiting for their bus in route to San Antonio in the waiting room reserved for Anglos. At some point, an employee asked them to move to the waiting room reserved for "Colored People." The girls protested but opted to move anyway to avoid further conflict. Salomon also mentioned in the affidavit, "The husbands of the following four ladies are in the United States Army: Margarita Sifuentes, Juanita Salomon, Maria Ochoa and Lupe Guillen. The husbands of Margarita Sifuentes and Maria Ochoa are serving overseas."[30] The mention of the husbands serving in the Army and overseas shows that Mexican Americans saw their sacrifice as a patriotic duty that entitled them and their family members to equality. The fact that a high proportion of Mexican Americans had served in the military during the war created even greater opportunities for them and created a path for further progress as the basis of their argument for equality.

LULAC used circumstances such as this to demand equal treatment. The organization also pushed for Mexican Americans to receive equal education opportunities and promoted higher learning. They saw equity in education as a pathway to more success in their communities. Ladies LULAC typically took on issues that pertained to their traditional roles,

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[28] McGregor.
[29] Alonso S. Perales, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections, 1948.
[30] Perales.

such as children and education.[31] Theresa Herrera Casarez from Austin remembered that Ladies LULAC had awarded her a scholarship to attend Nixon Clay Business School. She was active in Ladies LULAC Council 85 from 1945-1952. She said it "helped me to open another door."[32] Education had been challenging for some Mexican Americans to obtain but was a way to help Tejanos move forward.

Tejanas commonly shared the viewpoint that education was the key to success. Josephine Kelly Ledesma Walker from Kyle explained her belief that education was the only thing Mexican Americans could do to fight against discrimination. She said, "I really would like for the Mexican American girls and boys of today to get an education. We are not going to get anywhere unless we are educated."[33] Some women went back to school after many years. Antonia Medina Guerrero from Seguin returned to school after raising her children. Though she was encouraged to get a GED, she insisted on completing each grade level she had missed. Guerrero dropped out in eighth grade, so she went through an entire high school curriculum and completed it. She wanted to learn everything she had missed out on because she felt deprived of the opportunity to learn. She advises young people, "I always say study hard, because I didn't get to go to school."[34] Tejanas saw value in education and encouraged it for their communities.

Education opportunities were part of the many benefits for veterans after World War II. Steven Rosales explained in the article "Fighting the Peace at Home" that in the era of New Deal programs, World War I veteran organizations who fought for veteran rights, along with fears of a

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[31] Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 197.

[32] Theresa Casarez, interviewed by Drs. Joanne Rao & Mario Sanchez, 11 October 2000, Folder 16, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[33] Josephine Kelly Ledesma Walker, interviewed by Monica Rivera, 17 February 2001, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[34] Antonia Medina Guerrero, interviewed by Juan Marinez, 19 October 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

possible recession upon demobilization, provoked a stimulus package for individual servicemen in the form of the GI Bill of Rights.[35] Returning servicemen had access to a wide variety of entitlements such as low-interest loans for homes or businesses, unemployment compensation, job assistance, and education assistance. The color-blind GI Bill was available to all returning veterans released from active duty with a discharge other than dishonorable.[36] The GI Bill placed particular attention on education and training benefits, and many veterans took full advantage.

Education offered an opportunity for Mexican Americans to become more confident in their abilities and taken more seriously. María Elisa Reyes Rodríguez from Waco explained that the lack of education was why many Latino veterans were apprehensive about speaking up for themselves. She said, "A lot of poor people back then weren't educated. They were afraid of stuttering, getting laughed at. They couldn't express themselves clearly and they were timid. That's why I was glad to do it. Even if it was a hardship."[37] Reyes Rodríguez worked at Bergstrum Airforce Base as a secretary and advocated for the Latino vets that worked there. She said that several non-veteran Anglos were not in danger of losing their jobs, but many minority veterans told her that they were about to get laid off. She believed the veterans should be a priority. She said, "All I cared about were those Vets. They go to war; they fight for you, and they get nothing but a reduction in force?"[38] She was proud of herself for advocating for them and took pride in her sacrifice.

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[35] Steven Rosales, "Fighting the Peace at Home: Mexican American Veterans and the 1944 GI Bill of Rights," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 4, (2011): 597-627, 603.

[36] Rosales, 603.

[37] María Elisa Reyes Rodríguez, interviewed by Ryan Bauer, 10 May 1999, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[38] Reyes Rodríguez.

Mexican Americans recognized the value of the opportunities offered by the GI Bill and intended to take full advantage of the circumstances. Gregoria Acosta Esquivel of Lockhart explained that her grandfather instilled in her the importance of education, and saw that others wanted the chance to become educated as well.[39] While she understood the importance, she also recognized that for Latinos, education "was hard, a lot of people did finally continue, but some of their parents just didn't have the necessary things to get them to school, and a lot of the time they had to go to work. They had to quit school and go to work."[40] After the war, she saw more significant opportunities for the people of her community and was happy to see their situations improving.

She recalled, "I did notice that when the soldiers came back from World War II, there was a lot of education in the families- like they were inspired while they were in the military when they came back. They talked about their GI Bills, and they were all into education and into a better living environment."[41] Overall, she felt that the war had brought positive changes for Latinos. Education opened the door for many to achieve financial security and social improvement. She explained, "If you have an education, people will respect you. That has a lot to do with it. Go to school as much as you can and educate yourself."[42] Education opportunities benefitted many Latino families, and the military benefits effectively achieved their goals in ways they had not had the chance to do before. Their military service earned them more than respect and social improvement.

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[39] Gregoria Acosta Esquivel, interviewed by Laura Herrera, 16 November 2002, Folder 254, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[40] Esquivel.

[41] Esquivel.

[42] Esquivel.

More young Latinos found themselves looking to expand their education than ever before. Mary Martinez Olvera Murillo from Austin explained, "There was more talk about the boys wanting to educate themselves, and you know, thinking about going to the university, going to college."[43] She remembered that her cousin and brothers used the GI Bill to go to college. She said that fighting alongside the Anglos may have inspired their attitudes. One of her brothers told her, "They are not better than us, we are the same."[44] They came home thinking of themselves as equals and believed they had just as much ability as anyone else in the country. Their years alongside young men, just like them, showed them their differences were not as numerous as their similarities.

Higher education was not the only change for Mexican Americans. In the years that followed the war, education for schoolchildren also became a priority for Mexican American organizations. The next generation would eventually lead the mission to incorporate people of Mexican ancestry into mainstream American life. It was just as important, if not more, to advocate for their education. In 1948, LULAC and the American GI Forum, another activist organization with similar interests, pursued legal action to establish the unconstitutionality of segregation practices in schools. In *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District,* the Mexican American parents of school-aged children claimed that Texas was segregating Mexican children contrary to the law. The court ruled in favor of the students, explaining that placing students of Mexican descent in different buildings separate from Anglo students was discriminatory and

[43] Mary Martinez Olvera Murillo, interview by Ana Acosta, 15 October 1999, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[44] Murillo.

illegal except when the child did not speak the English language.[45] This was a significant step forward to provide equitable education for Mexican American children across Texas.

While predominantly male organizations took credit for these actions, women typically advocated for these issues, mainly regarding their children. Tejanas may not have been in the spotlight for this political action, but they contributed in their own ways. Ernestine Mojica Kidder from Taylor explained how her husband, Charley, was active in the American GI Forum and a founding member and first president of the Alba Club.[46] Kidder was not part of the political activism like her husband was. Instead, she chose to promote change by educating herself and others. She explained that she had an epiphany about what role she would play in changing the racial structure of society. She said, "I was just then beginning to get the idea that- Wow! We are supposed to think for ourselves? We are supposed to do things? What can I do? What kind of role can I do?"[47] She decided to attend school and receive a degree to become a teacher which allowed her to play a part in the larger society for many years.

Equity in education had long-term implications for the Mexican American community. Elena Tamez De Peña from San Benito noticed that after the war, there were more Spanish-speaking teachers and other professionals.[48] She became a registered nurse during the war and earned a master's degree later. She explained that her children "had advantages growing up that we didn't have. We were able to give them an education and they can achieve their goals."[49] Felicitas Joyce Cerda Flores from Houston went as far as to volunteer and work at her children's

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[45] San Miguel, 350.

[46] Ernestine Mojica Kidder, interviewed by Taylor Peterson, 20 July 2010, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[47] Kidder.

[48] Elena Tamez De Peña, interviewed by Erika Martinez, 18 August 2001, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[49] Tamez De Peña.

schools to ensure they all graduated. She eventually held administrative positions at DeZavala Elementary and Edison Junior High in Houston.[50] Education was the way to improve the lives of their children and future generations. These mothers did everything they could to ensure that their children had even greater opportunities than they had.

Tejanas were usually behind the scenes, pulling the strings for change as their husbands took a more outward role. Elena Peña Gallego from Ft. Stockton advocated for students when she moved her family to Alpine.[51] She noticed that the local school system was unwelcoming to Latino students, which forced many of them to drop out before completing high school. She convinced her husband, Pete, to join the school board to help improve the situation. Elena and Pete pushed for school integration, knowing there could be negative repercussions. They decided to do it anyway because it was the right thing to do. The family was so committed to improving education for young Latinos that even their children recruited their friends to push for reform.[52] Tejanas contributed in their own ways to the continuous growth of the next generation, which had a lasting impact.

The long-term impact of promoting education was noticeable. In the coming decades, Mexican Americans showed an improved socioeconomic status for veterans compared to non-veterans. While the numbers were a vast improvement for them, they highlighted the racial inequities further. A 1973 study showed a difference of $711 in the average annual gross income of Mexican American veterans compared to Mexican American non-veterans. In contrast, for

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[50] Felicitas Joyce Cerda Flores, interviewed by Paul Rodriguez Zepeda, 2 February 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[51] Elena Peña Gallego, interviewed by Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, 9 March 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[52] Gallego.

their Anglo counterparts, the difference was only $122.[53] After World War II, Mexican Americans were only catching up on opportunities restricted from them in the first place. Their situations were only beginning to improve.

Military service had made a significant impact on Mexican Americans, but those who did not serve in the military still faced significant barriers. Herlinda Mendoza Buitron Estrada from Bastrop remembered that her father had a good job working with the railroad system during the war but suddenly found himself unemployed at the war's end.[54] The GI Bill offered job placement assistance for veterans, which meant that it was common for employers to free jobs for returning service members after the end of the war. Usually, this caused women and minorities to lose their wartime positions first. This was an excellent assistance for veterans, but inequities still needed to be faced.

While job placement for veterans offered more significant opportunities for Mexican Americans than non-veterans, racial inequities still played a role in job placement. Reyes Rodríguez remembered seeing Mexican Americans applying for jobs at the Air Force base she worked for, but she constantly saw them rejected for positions. She recalled, “And that’s why I couldn’t ever understand that they’d see these boys go and fight for this country and they’d come back, and they couldn’t get a job.”[55] It made no sense to her. She continued, “That’s the only thing I felt bad about. That they didn’t give us the opportunity. Because our boys went out and died on the battlefront, and I thought they were entitled to everything. But as it was, we weren’t.

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[53] Harley L. Browning, Sally C. Lopreato, and Dudley L. Poston, Jr., “Income and Veteran Status: Variations among Mexican Americans, Blacks, and Anglos,” *American Sociological Review*, 38 (1973): 74–85, 80.

[54] Herlinda Mendoza Buitron Estrada, interviewed by Gloria Monita, 19 October 2002, Folder 360, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[55] Reyes Rodríguez.

Discrimination still existed."[56] Though Mexican Americans had proven their worth, and veterans had earned their benefits and respect, they still faced racial discrimination that prevented them from excelling in the same ways that Anglos were.

While the GI Bill helped to provide many opportunities to returning veterans, it did not solve all the social inequities of the period. Discriminatory practices still made it difficult for people of color to get some of the benefits they were entitled to in the GI Bill. The GI Bill offered home loans for veterans, but the process was more difficult than necessary. For example, red-lining practices made it nearly impossible for anyone other than Anglos to purchase homes in desirable neighborhoods. Even when a Mexican American family found themselves with the opportunity to purchase a home in predominantly Anglo areas, they were not welcomed by their neighbors and faced seclusion.[57] Though the GI Bill was technically color-blind, veterans still had to deal with discriminatory practices. American society still found people of color as a threat to their property values.

Finding a home as a Mexican American was an unnecessary obstacle. On April 17, 1945, Ofelia B. Martinez claimed that she and her husband, Fred, made a $500 initial payment on a house in San Antonio that they were to purchase for $8,000 in cash.[58] On April 19, the seller informed them they could not sell the house to them. The couple discovered it was because the neighbors called the current homeowners and warned them not to sell to Spanish people. Martinez mentioned in an affidavit that they wanted to purchase the home for themselves and their daughter, whose husband, Pvt. Alfonso Cadena, was serving overseas. She also explained,

[56] Reyes Rodríguez.
[57] Rosales, 611.
[58] Perales.

"My husband and I and my daughter and her husband are all native-born American citizens."[59] Martinez felt it was important to mention their qualifications as patriots and natural-born Americans in her discriminatory interaction. Their skin color seemed to overshadow their citizenship, service, and patriotism.

A similar instance happened to Juana Estela Gonzalez Chapa from Rio Grande City.[60] Chapa, her husband, Robert, and his brother attempted to rent an apartment to finish their studies at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos. At first, the light-skinned couple had no problem finding a place to rent. That changed when the leasing agent saw Robert's darker-skinned brother arrive to sign the paperwork. She suddenly had an issue renting to them. Chapa explained, "The lady was willing to rent the apartment… and then he beckoned his brother to come over to sign the lease, and when the lady saw his brother, she said, 'I'm sorry, but we don't rent to Mexicans."[61] The University eventually provided accommodations for the Chapas, but the experience left them understandably bitter.

The GI Bill also provided medical assistance for veterans. For Mexican Americans, receiving that benefit was another obstacle made difficult by social practices. Murillo recalled an instance where her brother, Edward Olvera, a veteran who returned from the Pacific, got sick and went to a veteran's hospital for treatment. He tried to get medical treatment on several occasions, and sometimes, they would not help him. The incident made the veteran and his sister angry. She said, "He fought for his rights. He would write and talk to senators and tell them that he had served his country and now it was time that his country helped him."[62] Her brother, father, and

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[59] Perales.

[60] Juana Estela Gonzalez Chapa, interviewed by Misty Roberts, 16 March 2000, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[61] Chapa.

[62] Murillo.

other family members joined LULAC and other organizations to work toward social and economic changes for Latinos, especially those who had sacrificed their lives in service of the country. Getting the benefits they earned should not have been complicated.

Healthcare was an obstacle for many Mexican Americans, whether they were veterans or not. Thankfully, that began to change with the help of Dr. Hector Garcia. Dr. Garcia was a World War II veteran who became known as the "doctor of the barrios" when he opened a practice that offered low- and no-cost treatments in Corpus Christi.[63] Seeing the poverty that many Mexican American veterans faced in Texas brought home the reality of their post-war experiences. Their declining health was the result of the terrible conditions they lived in, and outside forces caused many of their unfortunate circumstances. Though the public blamed Mexican Americans themselves for their situations, they lived in segregated areas that city officials routinely ignored, and employers discriminated against them for jobs. He eventually led his local LULAC chapter as president. He attempted to teach the community about hygiene practices and social reform methods.[64] The problems that Mexican American veterans and their families faced were much greater than he could have imagined.

Mexican Americans faced decades of poverty and ignorance in South Texas. Dr. Garcia quickly realized the impact of years of neglect, poverty, and disease in the Mexican barrios that went beyond Corpus Christi. He enlisted the help of the local Navy hospital to treat the high cases of tuberculosis among Mexican Americans, but the base commanders were reluctant. They only agreed to a small number of hospital beds.[65] The reluctance was not only troubling, but Dr. Garcia also saw this as a disservice to those who had served their country. He then discovered

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[63] Ignacio M Garcia, *Hector P. Garcia: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice*, (Arte Público Press, 2001), 77.
[64] Garcia, 78-80.
[65] Garcia, 81.

that the nearest Veterans hospital was more than 100 miles from South Texas. The cost of travel and time away from home meant many were reluctant to get treatment.[66] He quickly realized that the illnesses among the veterans he treated were the result of their life experiences in the barrios. No matter how much he taught them about hygiene practices, he knew he had to do more.

The cost of medical treatment was another obstacle for many Latinos. The Gallegos not only advocated for educational opportunities for children but also got involved in operating an ailing credit union that helped the disenfranchised. After a call from a local Catholic priest, the Gallegos decided to restore the credit union from their living room. Without assistance, Latinos in Alpine had to "sign their house away if they needed to go to the hospital."[67] The Gallegos ran Our Lady of Peace credit union out of their home for twelve years, and neither collected a salary for their work for the first fifteen years of operation. They held other jobs in the meantime to support themselves. After volunteering for fifteen years, Gallego received $300 a month once the credit union finally achieved profitability.[68] Without people like the Gallegos, many Latinos could not afford medical treatment for their illnesses in Texas.

The availability of healthcare had to change. Dr. Garica organized a meeting with veterans in Corpus Christi at Lamar Elementary School to discuss their issues. While Dr. Garica focused on Latino representation on draft boards, he quickly saw that the community was more concerned about their education benefits and medical treatment. Dozens of veterans explained how their education stipends and medical treatments remained in limbo. They discussed how their ethnicity remained an obstacle to getting the services they deserved as veterans. This meeting led to the establishment of the American GI Forum with Dr. Garcia as the organization's

[66] Garcia, 81.
[67] Gallego.
[68] Gallego.

president to represent Latino veterans and their right to benefits.[69] He was determined to alleviate the obstacles Latino veterans faced in a system obligated to respect them.

Racial tensions and activism for the American GI Forum reached an even higher level just a few months after the initial meeting with the recovery of Felix Longoria's remains from the Philippines. Private Felix Longoria from Three Rivers had been killed on a volunteer mission a few years prior. In 1948, his remains were shipped home to the cemetery in Three River for burial, where there was a "Mexican" section separated from the Anglo section by barbed wire. When Longoria's widow, Beatrice, decided to hold a service for her husband in the chapel, she spoke with the funeral home's director. He told her he would not allow the use of the chapel to hold services for Private Longoria. He said that the use of the chapel for Mexican American services was never permitted, even for a war hero.[70] He feared that it might upset the Anglos in town.

Traditionally, families held services in their homes for Mexican Americans, but it was because families usually could not afford the use of a chapel. However, Beatriz's work during the war allowed her to pay for this service. She also had a more American experiences during the war, leading her to want something different for her husband. [71] She could afford it, and her husband deserved the same treatment as any other war hero. Beatrice was a Tejana war widow who raised their daughter alone while her husband went off to fight in the war. She then experienced the excruciating pain of the loss of her husband. She was not willing to passively

[69] Garcia, 86-88.
[70] Garcia, 106-107.
[71] Garcia, 108.

accept this rejection on behalf of her husband, who lost his life in service to his country. She was determined to find a solution.

Beatrice's sister, Sara Moreno, had worked with Dr. Garcia on issues surrounding the American GI Forum and offered to initiate contact with him to help the situation. Moreno spoke with Dr. Garcia on January 7, 1949. Dr. Garcia attempted to resolve the issue peacefully and chose to speak with the funeral director to solve the problem, emphasizing that Longoria was a war hero. The funeral director still refused to budge, citing that Latinos regularly drink and become violent. He explained he did not want problems at the chapel or with the Anglos in town. The director's statements disheartened Dr. Garcia, who decided that private discussion would not be enough. He made the choice that the American GI Forum would hold a public protest for a resolution to Private Longoria's funeral arrangements.[72] Mexican American veterans deserved the same treatment as any other veteran.

In addition to the protest, Dr. Garcia sent several telegrams to public officials requesting assistance with discrimination against a veteran. Texas Senator Lyndon B. Johnson immediately verified the story and responded to Dr. Garcia.[73] In a response telegram, Senator Johnson expressed his condolences and regret for the prejudice faced by Private Longoria's family. While the federal government had no authority over funeral homes, he explained that he had "made arrangements to have Felix Longoria reburied with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery here at Washington where the honored dead of our nation's wars rest."[74] Senator Johnson continued to express his displeasure of the situation by stating, "This injustice and prejudice is deplorable. I am happy to have a part in seeing that this Texas hero is laid to rest

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[72] Garcia, 110-111.
[73] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Telegram Response to Hector P. Garcia," *LBJ Presidential Library,* 1949.
[74] Johnson.

with the honor and dignity his service deserves."[75] This was a significant victory for the newly established American GI Forum and Mexican American veterans.

Organizations such as the American GI Forum were an excellent resource for veterans, but not all Latino veterans received equal treatment. Concepcion Alvarado Escobedo from Southton joined the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in April 1944.[76] She served at Randolph Field in San Antonio until after the war. She was honored with the WWII Victory Medal, Good Conduct Medal, and American Theater Campaign Medal. As decorated as she was, it took time for the people of her town to accept her accomplishments. She explained, "Several of the women in the Army had a wild reputation, so people didn't think well of women in the service. I kind of had to prove that I was a good person, that I was not a wild person."[77] Respect for Latino veterans was an issue that Mexican American activists took seriously. However, a Tejana veteran like Escobedo had to prove herself to her community because it was more difficult for a female veteran to get respect.

Women also found it challenging to use veterans' benefits after the war. Jerri Bell and Tracy Crow discussed in *It's My Country Too* that society expected women to return to their homes and release jobs to men.[78] The League of Women Voters declined to support female veteran claims to veterans' benefits, arguing that their use of benefits would result in discrimination against disabled male veterans and women who remained in the civilian sector.[79] Female veterans were experiencing the same issues of readjustment after war, but also dealing

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[75] Johnson.

[76] Concepcion Alvarado Escobedo, interviewed by Sandra Freyberg, 13 September 2003, *VOCES OHPA,* Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[77] Escobedo.

[78] Jerri Bell and Tracy Crow, *It's My Country Too: Women's Military Stories from the American Revolution to Afghanistan,* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 96.

[79] Bell and Crow, 96.

with the bias against women in the military and their worthiness of the same benefits that men received.

The public also disregarded women who worked during the war. Upon men's return home, women found themselves forced to revert to old standards. Elizabeth Escobedo explained in the book *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits* that the employment opportunities that were available to women declined drastically after the war, especially for women of color. As men returned home, women had to give up their higher-paying jobs. Black women and Latinas were among the first fired from wartime jobs, even in lower-paying occupations, to make room for the returning men.[80] Women were expected to retreat to their homes to free up jobs for veterans looking for work. Their desire to keep working was never a consideration.

Returning soldiers expected their wives to be home, and their jobs would be available upon their return. In the EM 31 edition of the *GI Roundtable Series* in 1944, men were asked, "Do you want your wife to work after the war?"[81] In response, a soldier in the South Pacific wrote to the publication, "There are two things I want to be sure of after the war. I want my wife waiting for me and I want my job waiting for me. I don't want to find my wife busy with a job that some returning soldier needs, and I don't want to find that some other man's wife has my job."[82] The war had changed many things, but those changes could not be accepted permanently. Women were obligated to return to life as it was before the war, even if some women wanted more.

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[80] Elizabeth R. Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 126.

[81] Clifford Kirkpatrick, "Do You Want Your Wife to Work After the War?," *GI Roundtable Series* EM 31, (June 1944).

[82] Kirkpatrick.

Although meant to be temporary, not all women wanted to return to their lives before the war. Wilhelmina Cooremans Vasquez from San Antonio explained, "They expected women to go back to their rightful place. Go back to the kitchen, go back to whatever."[83] Women usually had no choice but to return to their old ways, but they were now different. Vasquez's sister, Delfina Cooremans Baladez, said her work experience during the war "made me more independent. When we got back home, we didn't expect anything from our parents. I mean, we helped our parents, not expecting them to help us."[84] They entered the workforce together and were more independent after their newfound freedom. They were less willing to conform.

Other women did not fight traditionalism and returned to everyday life. Walker worked as an airplane mechanic and enjoyed it. However, "After the war there was not anything like that. You had to put your mind to work at something else."[85] She was more accepting than others that her job had to go to a man. She knew she could not keep her job in that industry but still believed she could work. She wanted to return to work as a salesclerk, a job she had before the war. Some jobs were off-limits to Mexican Americans, but a store owner said he would give her a job if she used her maiden name, Kelly. She refused and said, "You don't want to hear what I told him. But I didn't get the job."[86] She decided to continue her role as a homemaker. She explained, "This had been a job and that was all with it. So, you went back to your own job- housekeeping and raising kids. I had my children to give me a full life."[87] She realized that her role in the workforce was temporary, and she was happy to go home and care for her family.

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[83] Wihemina Cooresman Vasquez, interviewed by Brenda Sendejo, 28 July 2005, Folder 488, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[84] Delfina Cooresman Baladez, interviewed by Brenda Sendejo, 28 July 2005, Folder 489, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[85] Walker.

[86] Walker.

[87] Walker.

Though women faced obstacles, Latinas focused more on fighting injustices for their people. Political activism for Mexican Americans took off after the war years, and while male political leaders made significant strides to call attention to injustices, women participated as well. The civil rights movement was gendered, especially in earlier years. In the beginning, LULAC had a policy and subtext that stated women were not allowed at its establishment in 1929. While women were permitted to join as early as 1933, men exerted little effort to organize them and typically discriminated against them.[88] LULAC permitted men to join the organization, and women had separate auxiliaries that took on their own issues. Some women preferred it that way.

Ladies LULAC was connected to the men's organization but had independent agendas. They signified a reevaluation of women's capacity for self-governance. Women had different approaches to politics, a step toward women's political empowerment. They collected poll taxes, helped register voters, and were especially concerned with children, the poor, and the elderly. Women were separated because men found them to be less than desirable members. Women were usually less educated, and the men generally believed that Anglos would take Mexican American women less seriously. Men believed in women's proper roles and encouraged them to teach girls how to be successful wives. [89] Society rested on the foundation of the home, where women were the most valuable to them.

Still, women were active in political engagement in various ways. While Tejanas may not have been entirely ready to stand up to the patriarchal system in their communities, they were willing to help men stand up against racial prejudice in ways that they were permitted.

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[88] Orozco, 197.
[89] Orozco, 210.

Situational restraints typically hindered Tejana's involvement and usually dismissed them from achieving the same platforms that men have had. They had to manage marriage, motherhood, and housework. They were less mobile than men and often less likely to drive or own a car. Many women feared sexual harassment, or their jealous husbands or protective fathers and brothers held them back.[90] Traditionalism kept them organized along patriarchal lines, but that did not mean that they were invisible.

Mexican American women were the backbone of their households. They were encouraging and pushed those around them to do more. Pedro "Pete" and Jessie Mendez from Amarillo explained their experience after the war.[91] Pete served in the Marine Corps. When he returned, he became more active in the American GI Forum and attended parent meetings in the school district. He said that his wife, Jessie, would "see to it that I attended PTAs, and she was really encouraging in me participating in civil rights and things. She was a big influence in my life."[92] Jessie explained that she knew her husband was assertive and could get things done. He had good ideas, and she gave him ideas even if he did not. She said she could not participate very much because "we started our family right away. And we had five kids, you know, just one right after the other. So, it was a little bit busy, and he didn't do that. He didn't do taking care of kids or anything."[93] She accepted her place in the home, encouraging her husband to do more in the community. Her place was in the household, caring for the children and being on the sidelines for her husband.

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[90] Orozco, 198.

[91] Pedro and Jessie Mendez, "Oral History Interview with Pete and Jessie Mendez," interview by Karen Wisely and Joel Zapata, 6 June 2016, *Portal to Texas History,* UNT Libraries.

[92] Mendez.

[93] Mendez.

Tejanas held their place as the women behind the men and could receive recognition for it. The December 1947 issue of *LULAC News* produced a page dedicated to Adelaida Carriles Garza, referring to her as Mrs. Ben Garza, widow of the first President General of LULAC.[94] She was recognized for "always being a strong believer in the ideals of her husband and in the principles of LULAC. She has always been willing to contribute both time and money to the activities of Council No. 1."[95] The organization admired her for performing her duties as a wife and what she contributed to her husband's work. Instead of referring to her by name, the article recognized her by her husband's name and his activism.

While LULAC and the American GI Forum had similar goals, their methods differed. Dr. Garcia committed himself in the postwar years to allowing women to participate in the struggle to liberate their people. From early in its establishment, women influenced the American GI Forum's activities throughout the various stages of growth. He advised leaders of American GI Forum chapters to make appropriate changes to include women and young people on their boards. Women's causes aligned with Dr. Garcia and were quick responders to his crusades. They wanted their children in school and medical attention for their families. They understood the burden of low salaries. The American GI Forum naturally involved women because of its stress on the value of the Mexican American family.[96] Dr. Garcia recognized the value women brought to activism and had no qualms about having them fully participate.

Dr. Garcia was close to his sister, Dr. Clotilde "Cleo" Garcia, who became an example of women leading American GI Forum activities. She graduated from medical school in 1954. In an acceptance speech when inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame in 1984, Dr. Cleo Garcia

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[94] "Mrs. Ben Garza," *LULAC News,* Volume 14, no. 6, December 1947, 7.
[95] "Mrs. Ben Garza."
[96] Garcia, 185-186.

talked about her experience. She explained that she was only one of five women accepted into medical school, and program directors told her, "We do not want women in medicine. You are taking a man's job… You are going to get married and all the money the government has invested in an education is gone down the drain."[97] She said of the time, "A woman's place was at home. We had no business going to college."[98] Dr. Garcia supported his sister and the improvement of society for women like his sister and all Latinos.

In most instances during this early movement, women did not have a feminist consciousness or a strategy for women's empowerment. They were interested in equalizing opportunities for Latinos rather than advancing a feminist agenda. Dr. Cleo Garcia gave her speech after Latinas recognized their feminist consciousness and gathered support for themselves. In the 1950s, Latinas put more effort into opportunities for their communities rather than for feminists' rights. They were women and pushed for rights, but they were women first with their traditional boundaries and obligations.[99] Latinas interfaced with the movement as individuals. They recognized LULAC's worth even if men had not recognized their worth. People have perceived the women's auxiliaries as a method for women to serve men, but the women in these organizations were fighting against racism as well. The organization's men failed to realize that women were half of La Raza and could organize and vote.[100] Instead, Latinas functioned individually in ways they knew how.

Women became involved within the limits they were assigned. LULAC council members asked Casarez to work at a poll center located at Palm Elementary School, and she agreed. She

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[97] Clotilde Garcia, "Texas Women's Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony," September 13, 1984, *Dr. Hector P. Garcia Digital Exhibit,* Texas A&M University Corpus Christi, Mary and Jeff Bell Library.

[98] Clotilde Garcia.

[99] Griswold del Castillo, 70.

[100] Orozco, 218.

explained that the opportunity to have Latinos work at the polls was limited because "You had to be a high school graduate… There had never been a Hispanic working there before."[101] She was warned that they did not know what to expect, but she said everything went well until around four in the afternoon. She recalled, "This little lady came in dressed with her little old hat and her little gloves, and she said, 'What is this world coming to? A Mexican American working at the polls!' I said, 'Yes, Ma'am. I hope many more will follow me."[102] Discrimination was not new to Casarez, but she felt she was doing her part to change how others treated Latinos. Her agenda was not to call attention to the fact that she was a woman but that she was Mexican American.

Latinas knew that they needed to help improve the circumstances of their communities to improve their own circumstances. Mary Espiritu De Leon from San Antonio was a stenographer at Kelly Field during the war. She said, "I always wanted better for myself than just being a mother and a housewife. I wanted a good job, to move ahead and improve myself, regardless of whether I was a Latina."[103] She started forming women's clubs and addressing the issue of equal employment opportunities for Latinos in federal government jobs. Her work at Kelly earned her the nickname "la madrina de Kelly" (the Kelly godmother).[104] She advocated for federal Latino workers.

She advanced her advocacy for Latinas as they began recognizing their individual needs as women to speak up for themselves in the later Chicana movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Her focus became the betterment of Hispanic women, and she became one of the founders of The Mexican American Business and Professional Women's Association. She explained, "I wanted to

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[101] Casarez.
[102] Casarez.
[103] Mary Espiritu, interview by Stephen Casanova, 14 October 2008, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
[104] Espiritu.

show everyone that Mexican American women are out there working. The biggest issue was that these women weren't being recognized for their work, and they didn't have the tools to confront this, or to fight and accomplish things."[105] She believed that Latinas had a place in the movement, and she had earned her spot with others saying, "Whatever I learned along the way, I shared it with the rest of the women around me. There are so many things that we can do to improve the lives of those around us, and I really believe that there is room at the top for us all."[106] By the emergence of the Chicano movement, Mexican American women were done being in the background.

The Chicano movement that emerged around the late 1960s began to embrace a unique Mexican American identity that was not reliant on the recognition of being Caucasian. It was also when Latinas recognized that they were just as powerful and necessary. They deserved recognition for their work. Mirta Vidal explained in the book *Feminism and Socialism* that Latinos had been "taught by observation that the Chicanas are only useful in areas of clerical and sexual activities. When something must be done there is always a Chicana there to do the work."[107] Latinas had been part of the civil rights movement of La Raza for years at that point and learned how to organize and speak up for themselves. Even if women had not directly participated in activities, the atmosphere they created, and their interactions expanded the boundaries of their world. Women regularly sheltered had the opportunity to spread their wings and become more socially involved. By being pulled into previously unwelcome areas, they

[105] Espiritu.
[106] Espiritu.
[107] Mirta Vidal, "Chicanas Speak Out- New Voice of La Raza," *Feminism and Socialism,* Linda Jenness, ed., (New York: Pathfinder, 1971), 48.

became participants in the process of progress.[108] An unintended consequence of the war was a transformation in their concepts of themselves, first as Latinos, then as women.

Mothers who experienced the changes of war and participated in activism afterward had high expectations of their daughters. They guided them toward getting an education and being more independent. Wartime women were the mothers of the women who participated in the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Olga Delgado Flores from El Paso recognized what the Latinos of her generation did for their children. She said, "We're taken more serious now. Because of their parents, they have more confidence. They feel like they can do stuff."[109] The wartime generation advocated for their children, and their children could push further than their parents could.

Latinas participated in social movements in various ways, such as participation in auxiliaries or as wives who gave husbands the luxury of time for political activism. They put the needs of their communities before their needs as women. They created a better environment for their children to learn and grow, and the next generation had the power to push for more. Without their contributions as wives and mothers, morally supporting their families, and providing the support they needed to prosper, there could not have been the successes that came later. Elena Gallego said that women today "are not worried about making it on their own because I think they realize they can."[110] Tejanas today owe tremendous gratitude to the Tejanas from the World War II generation.

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[108] Gluck, 264.

[109] Olga Delgado Flores, interview by Edna Amador, 1 September 2007, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[110] Gallego.

# Chapter 7

## Conclusion

Many historians recognize the rise of the Chicano movement in the late 1960s as the civil rights movement's start for Mexican Americans. While this event was an essential milestone in the progression of racial relationships in the United States, it was the result of all the work that began prior. Steps were taken gradually for decades that would lead to that level of activism for this minority group, much of which occurred in Texas. While activism took place across the country, Texas witnessed the complexity of the Tejano relationship with Anglos. The complicated relationship has led to readjustments and reevaluations of what their identity means to them. Tejanos had occupied the land before any Anglos. Yet, they categorized them as invaders.[1] While political organization took place before the war to combat the discrimination they faced, World War II provided an opportunity for Mexican Americans to display their pride and patriotism for the country they knew and loved.

Tejanas had their own experiences that categorized them on their own. While they were separated from society by ethnicity, they also faced restrictions by gender. In some ways, their gender provided them with greater opportunities than their male counterparts, but in others, it forced them into stereotypical roles that were difficult to break. Their status may have shifted at times, but society and their communities would always restrain them with boundaries. They were always the backbone of their families, and their families expected them to put them first.[2] World War II provided another shift in their obligations to show that they could do their part. They were just as deserving of citizenship as anyone else. They had to show how worthy Mexican

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[1] Rudolfo A. Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos,* Ninth Edition, (Boston: Pearson, 2020).

[2] Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten, *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

Americans were of a place in society. This time, their experiences made them realize their strengths and broke them from the sheltered boundaries intended to keep them safe. They found themselves in the workforce and the military, and they participated in the home front in significant ways. They were more aware of their capabilities, opening the door for future generations.

The Tejana identity shifted several times. Though it was their home first, Anglos slowly took Texas from them. Texas once had boundaries under the jurisdiction of Mexico and Spain before her. There were people of Spanish and Native American origin in Texas before there were Anglos. While the Anglos had permission to occupy the land in a mutually beneficial agreement, they began taking more control of the territory at some point. With Tejanos' support, Texas initially became its own republic, separate from Mexico, but eventually, Anglos began to see Tejanos as the enemy. The Anglos could no longer separate the Tejanos, who had fought with them in the war against Mexico, from the Mexicans they were fighting against.[3] This shifted the relationship the Anglos and Tejanos had with each other. Where they once got along and forged a uniquely Texan identity with each other, that had all changed. This was the beginning of a pattern where the Tejanos were accepted when needed and then discarded when not.

Tejanas received better treatment than their male counterparts after Texas' independence. Anglos saw them as the less aggressive gender that could adapt to Anglo society better. Tejanas were even worthy of marriage to Anglo partners, which led to Anglos having control over Texas lands that had belonged to Tejano families for generations. Anglos also gained political support

[3] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Treaty of Conflict,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

from Tejano families with their marriages to Tejanas.[4] At some point, that relationship shifted again, and Anglos grouped Tejanas with all other Mexican descent. They lost their value as society became segregated between Anglos and all other people. Just like the Tejanos, the Tejanas were discarded by Anglos when they no longer served a purpose.

The proximity to Mexico created a complicated dynamic. On the one hand, Texas was separated from Mexico by a boundary. However, on the other hand, their inhabitants had cultural ties to one another, especially in the southern Texas region, where boundaries sometimes blurred. When the Revolution formed in Mexico, many Mexican citizens fled the violence, seeking refuge in their neighbors. At first, the United States welcomed the newcomers as it was involved in World War I and needed additional labor.[5] The relationship between Anglos and people of Mexican ancestry shifted again after the war. Anglos became concerned about the Revolution that was taking place and associated the Mexican people with violence. Anglos grouped Tejanos and the recent migrants from Mexico in the same way. Anglos associated all people of Mexican descent as dangerous. The Texas Rangers began targeting them and killing them like trophies, even posing for pictures with their bodies.[6] Many fled the violence in Mexico only to find themselves targeted and met with more violence in Texas. Again, the relationship between Anglos and people of Mexican descent hinged on the Anglos' need for them.

While Anglos may have grouped them all the same, Tejanos and the new Mexican arrivals knew they differed as they associated more with each other. Tejanos had been more

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[4] Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 41.

[5] Brian Gratton and Emily Klancher Merchant, "An Immigrant's Tale: The Mexican American Southwest 1850 to 1950," *Social Science History* 39, no. 4 (2015): 521–50, 528.

[6] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022).

Americanized in the view of the newcomers, and Tejanos did not appreciate the disregard for their history of occupation of Texas lands. Some had no ties to Mexico City and saw Texas as their only home. The newcomers were less willing to give up their cultural identity from Mexico, and they separated themselves from the Tejanos, who they felt were more American. At the same time, Anglos did not consider the Tejanos as American as they were, and that left them in an in-between category that was all their own.[7] Even if the Tejanos felt and identified as American, they were also separated from that category as well.

During the Great Depression, it became even more apparent that Mexicans and Tejanos were considered the same in the eyes of the Anglos. As the country faced an economic crisis, Anglos blamed Mexicans in the United States for using resources needed by other Americans and targeted them in deportation raids. Unfortunately, it did not matter if they were born in the United States. Officials could target anyone of Mexican descent for removal from the country.[8] Repatriation efforts removed people from the United States based on their ancestral origin rather than citizenship status. Tejanos did not have the same citizenship rights as Anglos.

The relationship between Tejanos and the American government shifted again during the outbreak of World War II. In the face of war, the United States needed troops to serve, and Mexican Americans saw this as an opportunity to display their loyalty to their country. They pursued the politics of worthiness and stepped up when the country needed them.[9] Mexican American leaders encouraged their youth to enlist as a credit to their honor. The United States

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[7] Carlos Kevin Blanton, “The Citizenship Sacrifice: Mexican Americans, the Saunders- Leonard Report, and the Politics of Immigration, 1951-1952,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2009): 299–320, 300.

[8] Marla A. Ramírez, "Gendered Banishment: Rewriting Mexican Repatriation through a Transgenerational Oral History Methodology," *Latino Studies* 20, no. 3 (09, 2022): 306-33, 311-12.

[9] Luis Alvarez, “Transnational Latino Soldiering: Military Service and Ethnic Politics During World War II,” *Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, and Ideology*, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and B.V. Olguin, eds., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 76.

gave them a better life than their families in Mexico. They wanted to show their appreciation and worthiness of citizenship.[10] As Estela Fernandez said, "What other contributions could we give to this country but the lives of those poor young men?"[11] They served in higher proportions than Anglos. They attempted to challenge their acceptability in American society.

Tejanos and Tejanas showed up to aid in victory for the United States, a country they loved and considered their home. American society once more welcomed their contributions as they, again, found themselves in need of their labor and sacrifice. Not only were the Tejanos ready to show their support, but the United States also sought support from Mexico. The United States and Mexico arranged the Bracero program to help with the need for agricultural labor. However, the United States needed labor in many categories.[12] Aurora Estrada Orozco explained that people from Mexico began crossing the border looking for jobs, and "they let them stay anyway because there was so much work and there was nobody to do it."[13] Shortages caused a change in social acceptability. Mexican labor served a purpose during wartime, but that would shift again once the war ended. The difference was that the Mexican citizens could return home while Tejanos had a home in the United States.

The need for a labor force caused changes across the country, and people had to adjust. Like other American women, Tejanas worked in wartime industries that had previously been closed to them. They saw an opportunity to serve where needed and make more money than they

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[10] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 50.

[11] Estela Fernandez, interviewed by Delia Esparza, 1 September 2007, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[12] Otey M. Scruggs, "Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947," *Pacific Historical Review* 32, no. 4, (August 1963): 251-264, 255.

[13] Aurora Estrada Orozco, interviewed by Desirée Mata, 17 October 2003, Folder 399, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

ever could have before the war.[14] Additionally, they pushed traditional boundaries and served in the military. Society questioned their femininity, but their support was much needed to fill clerical and nursing positions.[15] They also served in other ways at home to fill the needs of those around them by boosting morale, volunteering, and adjusting to all the political-cultural needs of the period.[16] Without them, and all women at the time, a victory would not have been possible.

Before the war, parents sheltered them from the outside world. Their parents shielded them from experiencing the racial tension that they had encountered and prevented them from improperly interacting with young men. Young Tejanas were typically chaperoned out in public spaces by a parent or another relative. As the war began, they took on war jobs, went to school, or went into public unchaperoned because no one was available to accompany them. This led them to experience the world differently.[17] They interacted with people of different races and ethnicities, which is something they would not have done prior. Tejanas experienced very different ways of life and different types of people, which changed how they saw themselves.

Mexican American experiences during the war changed them. When the war was over, American society intended to discard them again, but this time, it was different. They were no longer willing to accept their place in society or treatment as second-class citizens. Ester Arredondo Perez recognized that some may wonder why Mexican Americans allowed themselves to feel inferior in the first place. She said, "My sons say that it was our fault. We

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[14] Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change,* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 10.

[15] Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II,* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

[16] Melissa McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

[17] Joanne Rao Sanchez, "The Latinas of World War II: From Familial Shelter to Expanding Horizons," In *Beyond the Latino World War II Hero,* Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez and Emilio Zamora, eds., (University of Texas Press, 2009): 63–89, 65.

brought it on ourselves, which is true. But you let it go. You shouldn't let people do that to you."[18] Mary Martinez Olvera Murillo explained, "We were used to being in our place you know, we weren't very demanding."[19] After the war, that had changed. They had proven their worthiness as citizens, and when they returned, they began to question the system. They demanded more rights. After the war, they had more than just themselves to consider. Morillo said, "We owed it to our children."[20] As they built their lives, they did not want their children to face the same struggles that they had.

The Tejanos in the military witnessed the most change. They experienced relative equality during the war as they did not serve in segregated units, and they bonded with the other men who faced the same tragedies of war with them. They were proud of their service and wanted recognition for their sacrifice. They advocated for their entitlements to the American GI Bill of Rights. They wanted education, medical benefits, and home loans like anyone else. They wanted to improve their status and opportunities, and they deserved it.[21] After the war, Mexican Americans were more willing to use their voices than ever. They had a new patriotic view of themselves and their mission.[22] They were determined to speak out against their socioeconomic status. The Tejanos who served advocated for themselves and everyone around them.

In contrast, Tejanos would have seen the least change at this time if they had not served in the military. They had continued to live life and work. They were used to the needed shifts and

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[18] Ester Arredondo Perez, interviewed by Erika Martinez, 23 May 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[19] Mary Martinez Olvera Murrillo, interviewed by Ana Acosta, 15 October 1999, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[20] Murrillo.

[21] Steven Rosales, "Fighting the Peace at Home: Mexican American Veterans and the 1944 GI Bill of Rights," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 4, (2011): 597-627, 603.

[22] Guadalupe San Miguel, "The Struggle against Separate and Unequal Schools: Middle Class Mexican Americans and the Desegregation Campaign in Texas, 1929-1957," *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1983): 343–59, 345.

were acutely aware that their status change was not permanent. Still, they used the need for their labor to advocate for more pay and benefits, though not to the extent seen after the war.[23] Their experience was also different from women's as they were not as heavily tasked with providing rationed materials for their family, and keeping up morale by keeping a happy, healthy home.[24] Tejanas had seen more change at home and learned to be more confident. They learned their capabilities. All Latinos saw the world differently but needed the opportunity to come together and advocate for real change.

Activists looked to prove through legal cases that not only were they Americans, but they were legally Caucasian and deserved the same respect. After the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo acknowledged the former Mexicans living in what was then to become part of the United States as citizens. Only Caucasians could obtain American citizenship at the time.[25] Further, Texas governor Coke Stevenson passed the "Caucasian Race" resolution during World War II that declared equal treatment for Mexicans in public places.[26] By that logic, Mexican Americans were entitled to equal treatment by Anglos, and they were demanding it.

Activism became more widespread than ever, and various groups formed to advocate for their people. Most acknowledgments of activist activities credit men, but women also played significant roles in this period. While men could not entirely see the Tejana's value as half of the voting Mexican American population, women were willing to do what they could within the

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[23] Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 166.

[24] Melissa McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 180.

[25] Scruggs, 255.

[26] Scruggs, 256.

boundaries placed on them. They started their own auxiliaries that took on specific issues that pertained to their feminine boundaries, such as education for their children.[27] They were happy to maintain their traditional feminine boundaries. However, they wanted to do what they could for their people. Mexican Americans together deserved respect.

As much as Mexican Americans changed, Tejanas saw a considerable change in themselves. Tejanas who served in the military broke barriers simply by enlisting. Those who took on war jobs exposed themselves to the society from which their parents had shielded them. The Tejanas who stayed on the home front learned to be more independent and realized their capabilities. After the war, Lita De Los Santos explained, "We all went looking for the American Dream… to live better lives, to have more, demand more."[28] A feminine consciousness had not yet formed in them. They all came together as Mexican Americans to elevate themselves in society.

The most significant contribution that Tejanas could make during this time was to their families. Women managed their homes, marriages, and children, allowing their husbands to run for school board positions, manage political organizations, or be part of legal teams advocating for civil rights legislation. Their rights as women could only have happened with the acknowledgment of the rights of their people. Virginia Nuñez explained that the rights of her people were important to her. She said, "There used to be something of rejection that you'd feel because you weren't Anglo. Now I don't feel that anymore."[29] They had to take a stand together

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[27] Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 218.

[28] Lita De Los Santos, interview by Raquel C. Garza, 20 February 2008, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[29] Virginia Nuñez, interview by Jennifer Lindgren, 13 September 2003, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

as a community to get the accomplishments they needed to move further into a more progressive society.

They knew their advocation for education opportunities for their children would have a lasting impact on their cause. The World War II generation raised the generation that launched the Chicano movement in the United States. With a more educated society came more confidence and opportunity. Mothers like Theresa Herrera Casarez were actively involved in their children's schools. She was active in the Parent Teacher's Association, band, and booster clubs at her children's schools. Theresa and her husband, Pete, raised four children, and they often reminded them of the importance of education. She said, "We really pushed for them to have a good education. They got educated to where… they have good jobs."[30] She is proud of her children and has encouraged future generations to participate actively in elevating their people.

The children of the World War II generation made even more waves with the encouragement of their parents and the opportunities they afforded them. In the 1960s, the Chicano movement had an even greater impact on the Mexican American community. Maylei Blackwell did a significant job of highlighting the powerful story of the Chicana movement and the strides they made to empower Latinas in the book *Chicana Power.*[31] As she explained, the Chicano movement did a good job of confronting the discrimination they faced. In particular, she discussed the Chicano student movement that advocated for social equality in universities as they entered higher education in significant numbers. While Chicano issues were at the forefront of

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[30] Theresa Herrera Casarez, interview by Drs. Joanne Rao and Mario Sanchez, 10 November 2000, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[31] Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 43.

the problems, Chicanas were ready to face issues that were unique to them, such as sexual politics and the lack of reproductive healthcare.[32] While their mothers may not have been ready to tackle gender issues, they laid the groundwork for their daughters to fight for more, and for their granddaughters to continue to push boundaries even further.

The Chicano movement pushed to have their stories told, and progress has occurred to include Latinos in the American narrative. Further, Latinas are increasingly recognized for their part. Future projects could further give a voice to the Tejanas who contributed to the necessary changes for future generations to move forward or compare the Texas experience to Latinas in other parts of the country. While the primary sources of this project mostly came from Texas archives, some recorded experiences from outside of Texas could contribute to a more extensive experience. Much of this project relies on the oral histories of the Tejanas who went through the period for themselves and then took the time to share it many years later. The *VOCES Oral History Project,* supported by the University of Texas, has been a significant resource in the project, and the work done to preserve the voices of the time made it possible.[33] Without their voices, their contributions could have never been told. Another important archive has been *The Portal to Texas History,* supported by the University of North Texas.[34] This archive stores not only significant oral histories but also documents that are essential to the understanding of various times in Texas history.

The interviews show that Tejanos of the World War II generation saw rapid changes throughout their lifetime. Where many of them grew up with little opportunity, they saw their children succeed in ways they never imagined. Herminia Guerrero Cadena reflected on the

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[32] Blackwell, 43.
[33] *VOCES Oral History Project*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas.
[34] *The Portal to Texas History*, University of North Texas.

changes that took place within her lifetime. She admired how "We went from living in houses with dirt floors, no indoor facilities of any kind, to our children having $250,000 homes… from my parents never going to school to [our children] having college degrees."[35] Her advice to younger generations of Latinos is to "Educate yourself. It can be so much more. Have faith in self, others and God."[36] Tejanos recognized the value of education and advocating for yourself. The progress of a community has benefited from it.

Not only has Cadena seen the education and economic advancement of Latinos in her lifetime, but she has seen improvements in race relations and acceptability. While she once thought cross-cultural marriages were improper, and she was upset with her sister for marrying a "gringo," she proudly announced that she has sons-in-law who are not Latino "but embrace all things Mexican."[37] Society significantly shifted within their lifetime. It shows how quickly change is possible.

Mexican Americans have displayed their duty to their country and deserve to call it home. Zoila Antonia Castillo Castro, known as "Sallie," married Ladislao, a World War II veteran who also served in the Korean War. Their son, Jimmy, fought in the Vietnam conflict, and their grandson served in the Gulf War. They are proud of their country, and though they faced their own struggles to get what they deserved, she said that she is glad her sons did not have to face the prejudice she had to endure. She believed in American progress and explained, "I would give my all for my country, because it's not the country that's the fortune, it's the people in it. Believe me, this is the best country in the whole world. I wouldn't want my children

[35] Herminia Guerrero Cadena, interview by Erika Martinez, 25 June 2002, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
[36] Cadena.
[37] Cadena.

to grow up anywhere else."[38] Despite frustrations and the need for further improvement, equality for Latinos has come a long way.

While war is drastic and devastating, World War II allowed for much-needed changes to take place. Lita De Los Santos said, "War is bad. I hate to hear of it. I've been there- done that, and I hurt for the wives and children. But I feel we are better for having survived, even if we had to change. We grew stronger as life went on."[39] Something as drastic as war pushed a minority group forward and the effects continue for generations.

[38] Zoila Antonia Castillo Castro, interview by Nicole Griffith, 1 March 2001, *VOCES OHPA*, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.

[39] De Los Santos.

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