LULAC, Mexican Americans, and National Policy
Sample Pages
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A League of American Citizens

The story of national Mexican American civil-rights policy has its origins in the years leading up to World War II. The history of Mexican Americans, of course, reaches back much further, but developments that would give shape to Mexican American efforts and policies through the civil rights era can be dated to the 1920s and 1930s. Mining and agriculture in the Southwest, which had been encouraged by technology and the railroads for over a generation by 1920, increased the population of both Anglos and Mexicans and brought big business and capital to the region, realigning any accommodation that had been achieved in the days of *rancheros*. The Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920 also contributed to changes in the region, pushing political refugees across the border and reawakening among Anglos the memory of the Alamo and U.S.-Mexican antagonism.

The nation-building efforts of the Progressive Era promoted America's civic nationalism, the idea of America as a place in which the inalienable rights of every human being is recognized and protected and in which hard work and determination are rewarded. But as Gary Gerstle has written, American civic nationalism "has contended with another potent ideological inheritance, a racial nationalism that conceives of America in ethnoracial terms, as a people held together by common blood and skin color and by an inherited fitness for self-government."[1] The tension between these two "nationalisms" animates much of the story of twentieth-century America; certainly the history of civil rights policy is the story of using the power and authority of the state, increasingly the national government, to mollify the tension. But as Gerstle's history makes clear, the growing federal power used to promote justice during the Progressive Era (or any era) could also deny or ignore justice. Progressive efforts led too easily into the restrictionism and hostility to newcomers and minorities, characteristic of the 1920s. While Mexicans remained free of legal restrictions on immigration, thanks to southwestern employers who desired their labor, anti-immigrant attitudes shaped their reception in American society.

Although they could be found at the many ends of the railroad lines by the start of World War II—especially in the Great Lakes region and the Pacific Northwest—Mexican Americans resided overwhelmingly in the Southwest, isolated from the centers of national power and largely ignored by

national policy and politicians. Through the 1920s, their efforts to improve conditions focused on the local and state level. For Mexican Americans, national efforts would await the consolidation of self-help groups into sizable organizations reaching beyond local origins across state and regional lines. They would also await a national polity responsive to the claims of disadvantaged minorities and with a sufficiently strong executive to spur on or to circumvent the traditionally cumbersome Congress. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was a creation of Tejanos (Texas Mexican Americans) and emerged from the particular history of South Texas; nevertheless, its influence in American national policy came through its reputation as a trans-regional organization that spoke as the voice of Mexican Americans across the Southwest and the nation and that engaged issues of national policy.

Mexican Americans in the Southwest

The history of the West has shifted from the story of the steady occupation of "virgin land" by whites from the East to one of a "legacy of conquest" in which races, cultures, and genders met, negotiated, and struggled.[2] Similarly, the history of the region now known as the American Southwest is far more complex than generally thought. What became the four states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, while sharing common characteristics, has had diverse geographies, populations, and histories.[3] Even within Texas—and of particular importance for the history of LULAC—regional differences between Central, South, and West Texas shaped the Mexican American experience. The story of LULAC begins in South Texas but spreads across the state and region quickly.

For roughly fifty years after the annexation of Texas in 1845, residents of the area maintained what David Montejano has termed a "peace structure."[4] The old Mexican elite families, hoping to defend their long-standing land claims, to some extent accommodated and cooperated with new Anglo authorities. While the influx of Anglos into the new state brought competition and antagonism between the older residents—both Anglo and Mexican—and the newcomers, continued reliance on the open-ranch system allowed for accommodation to the changing social dynamics of the region. The first new settlers followed the established practice of large ranching estates and also maintained the paternalistic rancher-worker relationship. As the number of Anglos increased, Mexican land ownership decreased, and disputed property claims and competition bred conflict between new Anglo residents and Mexican elite families. As the old elite families began to lose their positions and their land, new Anglo settlers took over. For the individual families that lost their position, both Anglo and

Mexican, this proved unfortunate. But for the Anglo population at large, this shift in power represented one Anglo elite being replaced by another. For Mexicans in the region, this shift represented a changing dynamic: as new Anglos gained positions of power, Mexicans lost such positions, and were relegated as a group to the status of sharecropper or laborer.[5]

While this loss of power by Mexican elites was smoothed somewhat by the maintenance of the open-ranch system, the final years of the nineteenth century brought change. For a variety of reasons, the ranching industry began to collapse. However, many of the technological changes of the late nineteenth century, most significantly new irrigation techniques, gave the arid Southwest a new lease on life as an agricultural region, and land-hungry farmers from the Midwest began to move into the Southwest. This infusion of farmers brought with it a focus on new business methods, replacing the largely paternalistic rancher-hand relationship with a wage-based owner-worker relationship. To old prejudices against Mexicans, represented by admonitions to "remember the Alamo," were added new ones that considered the Mexican a wage laborer, largely unskilled, lazy, and dirty. Once Mexican elite families no longer held positions of power, it became easy for Anglos to relegate Mexican Americans, who appeared ignorant of modern business practices, to an inferior social and economic class.[6]

The influx of Anglo farmers eager to make Texas a profitable agricultural region led to political and social changes that aggravated prejudices against Mexicans. In some areas, particularly areas close to the Mexican border, Mexican sojourners had little interest in American politics. However, Anglo politicians realized the potential of the Mexican vote to help secure lasting power, and Mexicans and Mexican Americans in some places became an important political resource. As Mario García has shown for El Paso, "American politicians, representing El Paso's business and professional class, supported through public jobs and patronage certain Mexican American politicos in return for their ability to organize and deliver Mexican votes." In these cases Mexicans were both "economically invaluable" and "a major political resource," although the benefits generally accrued to the Americanized middlemen, who received jobs and some political representation, rather than to the majority of Mexican-heritage residents.[7] Somewhat in contrast to that political picture, however, Mexican Americans, at least in the new agricultural regions of South Texas, tended to support the interests of the ranchers, both Mexican and Anglo, who offered the security of the old paternalistic relationship. In these areas the new class of commercial farmers undertook an effort, largely successful, to disfranchise Mexican Americans in areas of their greatest concentration.[8]

Among the social implications of the changes at the turn of the century was an altered relationship between employer and worker (generally, Anglo

and Mexican). In the new world of wage labor, farmers expected Mexicans to engage in "sojourner pluralism."[9] These cheap laborers were welcomed to the United States with legal sanction (and, in many cases, extralegal sanction) but were expected to return home when the job ended. Increasingly, Anglos considered all workers of Mexican heritage to be temporary laborers. In the Winter Garden area of southwest Texas, where Lyndon Johnson briefly served as principal of a Mexican American school, one local Anglo quipped, "We don't want them to be associated with us, we want them for their labor." Throughout the region, segregation became more prevalent as growers hired more Mexican workers: custom-segregated churches, restaurants, cemeteries, and schools.[10]

To keep that source of labor, farmers cooperated to enact laws or to follow policies that limited competition, such as restrictive labor contracts or laws to keep non-Texans from recruiting farm workers in Texas. With their mobility limited with regard to farm jobs, some Mexicans migrated to cities to escape the harsh working conditions and limited options of Texas agriculture. The industrialization of southwestern cities, encouraged by the railroads, provided sufficient jobs to encourage Mexicans and Mexican Americans to move to growing urban areas. For example, in the 1900 El Paso city directory, 29 of 834 railroad employees had a Spanish surname, compared with 1,010 of 2,753 employees in 1920. Furthermore, shops, factories, construction companies, and other urban enterprises employed Mexicans and Mexican Americans through the first decades of the twentieth century. In San Antonio, Mexicans and Mexican Americans made up 25 percent of the city's population in 1900, 30 percent in 1910, and 37 percent in 1920 and worked in a variety of the city's growing industries. In Houston, the Mexican-heritage population grew from six thousand to fifteen thousand between 1920 and 1930. That increase of 150 percent was greater than the city's population growth as a whole during that boom decade. By 1940, Houston had twenty thousand Mexican and Mexican American residents.[11]

Even though workers of Mexican descent provided much of the labor that built the urban centers of the Southwest, the large numbers of new residents led some communities to plan the separation of Mexican residential areas. In others, agencies and individuals simply refused to rent or sell housing in new suburbs to the Spanish surnamed. The Mexican neighborhoods resulting from this form of discrimination suffered more than their share of health problems.[12] Because they depended more on local circumstances, with no state laws requiring separate facilities for people of Mexican heritage, the restrictions facing Mexicans and Mexican Americans were not as rigid as those for blacks in the Deep South. For example, one study noted that segregated schools were "desirable, but not absolutely essential," resulting (in general) in a less rabid racism than that aimed at blacks in Mississippi or

Georgia. But those restrictions could be oppressive nonetheless, and in fact the local, less institutionalized source of discrimination could be more difficult to identify and combat.[13]

In that environment, education became a growing concern. State educators in Texas sought to use the public schools to socialize Mexicans to become good Americans. They hoped to instill the English language along with the values of patriotism, hard work, and personal hygiene. That effort emphasized a wholesale exchange: Mexicans must give up their native language and culture and adopt "American" traits. As state superintendent of public instruction Annie Webb Blanton stated in 1923, addressing those Texas Mexicans born in the United States, "If you desire to be one with us, stay, and we welcome you; but if you wish to preserve, in our state, the language and customs of another land, you have no right to do this." To accelerate the Americanization of students, the state adopted an English-only provision, which stipulated that English would be the only language of instruction in the public schools (other states having passed such laws against German and Italian). Through the early 1920s the state also worked out a policy to reach into private and parochial schools by holding their students to public-school standards, except when the student attended "a private or parochial school which shall include in its course a study of good citizenship, and shall make the English language the basis of instruction in all subjects."[14] Anglo private schools had nothing to fear from the legislation.

With the passage of the English-only law, state officials apparently thought their job complete. When combined with the Texas compulsory education law, the English-only provision meant that, in theory, all school children in Texas would be educated in English and would learn to be good citizens. The attitude of state school officials toward Mexican and Mexican American schoolchildren was patronizing, but they at least sought to educate all Texas schoolchildren. At the local level, however, problems facing Mexican American children proved more serious. Even though no laws prohibited Hispanic children from attending public schools, and in fact the compulsory education law required it, many local school districts managed to circumvent the laws and refused to educate Mexicans.

Historian Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., has found three main ways that local school officials offered Mexican American children inadequate education. First, they either refused to enforce the compulsory education laws or were lax about them. This practice was most evident in rural areas, where a stable work force proved more desirable than an educated citizenry. Second, they misappropriated state education funds. Local school administrators counted Mexican American children among their school age population because the number of school age children in a district determined state funding for schools, regardless of enrollment. They would include in their

count children of migrant farming families who for much of the school year would be living elsewhere. School officials then made little or no effort to enroll the Mexican and Mexican American children, or provided meager funds for a Mexican school, thus increasing available funds for the Anglo schools. Finally, local school officials overtly segregated Mexican American children from Anglo children. Some argued that the irregular attendance of children of migrant farm laborers disrupted classes for regularly attending children; Mexican American children were therefore taught in separate classrooms. Others insisted that poor knowledge of English among Mexican American schoolchildren made educating them together with Anglo children a disadvantage for all involved. The hypocrisy of this last argument was apparent when Hispanic students fluent in English were placed in segregated classes with Spanish-speaking children, but these justifications proved sufficient to keep the state at bay.[15] As Gilbert González suggests, although "there were no laws that mandated the practice of segregation, educators did invoke the state power granted to school administrators to adapt educational programs to the special needs of a linguistically and culturally distinct community." The result, in many cases, was segregation of students in Mexican schools or Mexican classrooms.[16]

Local and state circumstances were most significant for the Mexican American experience during the early twentieth century, but national and international developments had important implications as well. The industrial and technological change that reshaped the Southwest along with the rest of the country has already been considered. Furthermore, quick victory in the Spainish-American War at the turn of the century ushered in an era of nation building that continued through the 1910s and generally included Americanization efforts. Political cartoonists drew Uncle Sam coming to the rescue of Latin America and portrayed Latin Americans as children needing to be cleaned up with American help. Jane Addams's Hull House, the settlement house that ministered so importantly to the needs of poor immigrant families at the turn of the century, also assumed neighbors should gradually adopt American middle-class values and tastes and offered cultural programs to that end. Israel Zangwell popularized the notion of America as a melting pot in his famous play. Americanization and nativism peaked during World War I, as sauerkraut became "Liberty Cabbage" and dissenting voices became suspect (and illegal). The culmination of this trend came after the war, as Congress saw fit to restrict immigration through legislation.[17]

The National Origins Act of 1924 limited new arrivals to the United States to 2 percent of the foreign-born of a given nationality based on the 1890 census. That act favored "old immigrants" from northern and western Europe at the expense of "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe. The law also excluded migrants from Asia, reinforcing existing limits

to Chinese and Japanese immigration. But the demand of southwestern farmers for cheap agricultural labor proved strong enough to convince Congress to place no restrictions on arrivals from the Western Hemisphere. The demand for workers pulled, and the lingering effects of the Mexican Revolution pushed, many thousands of Mexicans to the United States. Immigration from Mexico peaked during the 1920s, when almost five hundred thousand documented immigrants crossed the boarder. In 1924, alone, eighty-nine thousand documented immigrants arrived from Mexico. Latin Americans (primarily Mexican Americans, but also including Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and others) were the fastest growing ethnic minority in the United States.[18]

The resulting status for Mexican Americans—owing to limits on immigration from Europe and Asia and to the increasing demand for labor in the Southwest—made this minority the focus of those Americans especially concerned about foreign influence in America. As Carey McWilliams noted in his path-breaking study *North from Mexico,* during the 1920s American scholars and writers flooded their books and journals with concerns about “the Mexican problem.” McWilliams saw much of this focus encouraged by “the whole apparatus of immigrant-aid social work,” involving social agencies and Americanization organizations that had to identify a target population after the National Origins Act of 1924 eliminated much of their “clientele.”[19] The Latin American exemption from the restrictive immigration legislation resulted from the influence of southwestern employers rather than from a more favorable view of Mexicans, as compared with eastern Europeans and Asians, among white Americans. Indeed, during debate over the proposed 1924 act, nativists and labor unions (for different reasons) opposed the exemption for Latin American immigrants, sometimes with forecasts of the collapse of the American way of life should the exemption be approved.[20] As Clare Sheridan has argued, both restrictionists and immigration advocates proffered negative views of Mexican Americans to justify their positions:

> Pro-immigration groups considered Mexican workers a “safe” source of labor because they were docile, they could easily be deported, and because few of them desired naturalization. Anti-immigrant forces argued that the very characteristics that made Mexicans desirable laborers were liabilities for citizenship. They raised the specter of a permanent Mexican presence in the United States not as citizens, but as a peon caste injurious to national character.[21]

Included in the national discussion of immigration and American culture, Mexicans and Mexican Americans continued to enjoy the welcome of

southwestern employers (although to placate some critics Congress criminalized illegal entry for immigrants from the Western Hemisphere a few years later) while they also continued to face an ambivalent or hostile American civic culture.

Middle-Class Mexican Americans and the Rise of LULAC

Rural Mexicans and Mexican Americans through the 1920s remained dependent on local farmers for employment and income and faced a national culture indifferent or hostile to their presence. They had no means, certainly little political influence, by which to improve their working conditions and their children's education or to achieve desegregated public facilities. As Mexican Americans moved into the cities, however, a young middle class of Mexican American businessmen and professionals emerged to serve the growing Mexican American population.

The importance of a developing middle class in this context cannot be underestimated. In his synthesis of the immigrant experience in America, historian John Bodnar discusses the rise of an urban middle class among ethnic groups in the early twentieth century. Urban immigrant communities, rather than being homogeneous ethnic enclaves, were often as diverse as the country from which they came. "While most immigrants remained ordinary workers, the world of the urban immigrant was not only a working class world but one which included self-employed shopkeepers, fraternal officials, and other businessmen who fostered fragmentation by separating themselves from their humble moorings or mobilizing separate aggregations of newcomers to sustain their own power and prosperity."[22] Most often, the sectors of the economy open to ethnics included small artisan shops, family groceries, and the like. These businessmen relied on kinship ties and mutual assistance as much as on a drive for profit. Nevertheless, Bodnar concludes that a social distance often emerged in ethnic communities between workers and entrepreneurs, who were the first to move to new neighborhoods, often expanding their client base to decrease their dependence on the ethnic community.

These middle-class ethnics were often torn between their ties to community and their frustration with other ethnics who did not exhibit the progressive ideals with which they associated their own advance. Bodnar posits a community that struggled with the desire for mutual assistance and cooperation on one hand, and with the business class mentality of growing American cities on the other. According to historian Richard García, the Mexican American middle class in San Antonio developed "a sense of a status-consciousness as well as of its Mexican American ethnicity—a consciousness that reflected its dual Mexican and American historical and ideological

reality, but that was not class conscious in a Marxist sense."[23] Because opportunities for ethnics were limited, and government services still largely nonexistent, ethnic groups such as Mexican Americans relied on internal group protection against unemployment, sickness, and death. Fraternal and mutual aid organizations developed, usually led by middle-class members of the group. These businessmen generally did not abandon those in the working class but maintained the ties of ethnic solidarity while promoting the value of Americanization, strengthening both their position as leaders of the ethnic community and, they hoped, the standing of the group as a whole in the new urban American setting.

This pattern of middle-class mobility and community affiliation fits with that identified by Alan Knight in post-revolutionary Mexico, where reformers invoked and celebrated *indigenismo,* the cultural and social world of the Indian peasants in Mexico, even while working to "civilize" them for the good of the whole. As Knight observes, many of the Mexican Americans arriving in U.S. cities around 1920 were political refugees from the Mexican Revolution and as newcomers might have had more reason to invoke ethnic heritage and culture while trying to shape the Mexican American community to fit (Mexican and American) middle-class standards.[24]

The influx of immigrants from Mexico and the heightened nativism of Anglos created a delicate situation for Mexican Americans, particularly those of the middle class. They were not sojourners, but citizens and residents who had achieved at least a modestly successful business in the urban areas of the Southwest and who intended to stay in the United States. As Bodnar suggests, they had benefited from the new business environment of American cities. Yet they also continued to face discrimination. By the 1920s this contradiction encouraged a generation of middle-class Mexican Americans toward calling for full inclusion in American society. Mexican American mutual aid societies (*mutualistas*), which had existed in local communities for decades, had called for an end to discrimination but never combined that call with efforts at integration into American political and social institutions. The older generations tended to identify more with Mexico than with the United States and had little desire to enter the mainstream of American life. For example, *mutualistas* often named themselves after Mexican heroes or Mexico itself, as in Houston's Benito Jaurez *mutualista* and its Mexico Bello (Beautiful Mexico) social club. Such groups kept ties with Mexican officials, receiving them when on business in Houston, and celebrated Mexican holidays.[25] George J. Sánchez also finds a relationship between Mexican leaders and the older Mexican American organizations. He notes the attention that reformers in Mexico paid to the Mexican-heritage community in Los Angeles. Elites in Mexico, who promoted nationalism after the Mexican Revolution in an attempt to control the mestizo

and Indian populations, also explicitly targeted the Los Angeles Mexican-heritage community to create a Mexican national identity across national boundaries.[26] Up to the 1920s, such organizations focused on issues of work, sickness and death, and social affairs and encouraged members to cling to their primary identity as Mexican—at times a political identity but more often an ethnic or cultural one.[27]

The calls for change came from a more Americanized generation during the 1920s, many of whom had some access to Anglo education and some of whom had fought for the United States in World War I. According to historian Mario García, these middle-class Mexican Americans believed that they "had to learn the culture, language, and political system of the United States in order to effectively wage their political struggles and to integrate into the system." They also hoped to make the Mexican communities into Mexican American communities.[28] As a result of this emphasis in the years during and after World War I, new fraternal organizations rose up alongside the older Mexican American mutual-aid societies. Perhaps the first of these was the Order Sons of America (OSA), founded in 1921 in South Texas. The OSA was a nonpartisan group, but it sought a political agenda that included the right for Mexican Americans to serve on juries, to sue Anglos in court, and to use public facilities. Its efforts to raise the consciousness of Mexican Americans included voter registration drives and citizenship classes, not only to raise the quality of the Mexican American population but also to show Anglos that Mexican Americans were worthy of equality. Political scientist Benjamin Márquez notes that by "stressing American citizenship and the mastery of English, the [OSA] sought to reassure Texas Anglos that Mexican Americans could be trusted to be loyal and upstanding citizens."[29]

Another important early organization was the Sons of America, formed in San Antonio in 1921. The Sons undertook many of the same activities as the OSA and pursued the common goals of raising Mexican Americans' consciousness of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and of gaining equal rights. This group apparently suffered from internal personal rivalries, and several organizations splintered off during the 1920s.[30] By the end of the decade, leaders of several Mexican American organizations recognized the advantages of a united front, and in early 1929 twenty-five delegates and 150 nonvoting members attended a convention in Corpus Christi. The convention agreed to unite the represented groups and form a new statewide Mexican American organization.

In naming the new organization, members searched for a label that would not alienate either Anglos or Mexican Americans and would emphasize their determination that Mexican Americans were Americans first and foremost. They settled on "League of United Latin-American Citizens." A few years later the organization dropped the hyphen to accentuate further

the Americanness of members. According to the organization's newspaper, the *LULAC News,* there existed only one kind of citizen in the United States "and that is the *American citizen,* and all other words used to describe that citizen of the United States are merely descriptive, participating of the qualities of an adjective and not of those of a noun."[31] The name reflected the goals of the organization, which included a commitment to "develop within the members of our race, the best, purest, and more perfect type of true and loyal citizen of the United States of America."[32] In the words of historian Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., LULAC "proposed to integrate the community into the political and social institutions of American life," a change "from self-help and protective to assimilative activities." Rather than retreat into ethnic isolation, the organization sought to encourage Mexican Americans to "practice their citizenship by participating in the dominant political, economic, and social institutions of the land."[33]

The founding generation of LULAC already participated in those dominant institutions. They were members of what political scientist O. Douglas Weeks, an observer of LULAC's forming convention, called a "class of prosperous, educated citizenry whose living conditions and attitudes compare favorably with American standards."[34] The early leadership clearly fits the middle-class model suggested by Bodnar. The founders came from the business and professional classes, and initial members included businessmen, merchants, doctors, and lawyers, many of whom had come to America during the Mexican Revolution or belonged to elite Mexican American families.

The experiences of the first four LULAC presidents, all founding members, serve as examples of the middle-class roots of LULAC. Ben Garza had worked as a waiter and in the shipyards of Corpus Christi, Texas. After World War I he purchased a restaurant with several partners. The restaurant prospered, and Garza and a friend bought out the other partners. He eventually branched out into real estate, became a leader in the Order Sons of America, and was elected LULAC's first president. LULAC's second president, San Antonio native Alonso Perales, was born in 1898 in Alice, Texas. He was educated at a preparatory school in Washington, D.C., George Washington University, and the National University School of Law. After serving in World War I, Perales practiced law in Texas, served as assistant to the U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic in 1922, and was legal advisor to the U.S. electoral mission to Nicaragua in 1928. LULAC's third president, Manuel C. González, was born in Hidalgo, Texas, in 1899. He attended the University of Texas at Austin and became an attorney. González served as the head of the Knights of America and worked as legal advisor to the general counsel of Mexico in San Antonio. Judge J. T. Canales of McAllen, Texas, was a leading educator in South Texas. His LULAC presidency emphasized education for Mexican

American children and developed the LULAC Scholarship Fund to help Mexican American students attend college.[35]

These leaders had a stake in American society. They formed LULAC after personal success in the fields of business, law, and education to help other Mexican Americans achieve the benefits of life in America. In addition, they sought to prove to Anglos that Mexican Americans could be productive citizens and could fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship. This emphasis on citizenship led to one of the most controversial decisions made by the group: LULAC's founders limited membership to United States citizens. This approach differed considerably from past Mexican American organizations, which had sought a united ethnic front and the assistance of the Mexican consulate by combining all people of Mexican heritage under one group. The decision to restrict membership was difficult but seemed the most pragmatic way to aid the entire Hispanic population of the Southwest. LULAC members believed that only as American citizens could they effectively press for reform in politics and society. Additionally, some members feared that the different political goals of Mexican nationals, many of whom expected to return to Mexico, would hamper the organization and confuse Anglos as to the group's intentions. By excluding noncitizens from membership, LULAC fully cast its lot with American society and distanced itself from reliance on the Mexican government for political protection.[36]

As we will see in more detail in later discussion, LULAC's long-term goal was to encourage and assist as many Mexicans as possible to become American citizens and to participate in the political system, thus strengthening the Mexican American voice. But the decision to restrict membership placed LULAC firmly within the American camp and defined the Southwest as primarily a political space. Recent work by David Gutiérrez on the borderlands—the American side of the border, the Mexican side of the border, and the "third space" of the borderlands in which residents do not consider themselves essentially a part of the United States or Mexico—brings into sharper relief the importance of the political statement that LULAC made in identifying and working for American solutions to the problems of the borderlands.[37] Despite the insistence on U.S. citizenship for it members, LULAC leaders did not restrict their activity to issues that affected only citizens (as we will discuss below and in chapter 2), and offered real benefits through the organization. In particular, historian Richard García notes LULAC's role in helping to forge a new mentality, one that could change "the 'homeless mind' of the immigrant generation into a 'Mexican American mind'" that could provide a basis from which to fight for civil rights.[38] LULAC leaders thus accepted Americanism, liberalism, and patriotism and reinforced (although they did not create) a division within the Mexican-heritage community in the United States. Their efforts would be on behalf

of all people of Mexican heritage, but only American citizens would be plotting their course of action.

The founders further distanced themselves from Mexico when they made English the official language of the organization. Like the question of citizenship status for members, this step came not simply as a rejection of all things Mexican but as a practical measure. Actually, LULAC leaders called for bilingualism, arguing that Mexican Americans must, without forgetting their Spanish, become competent in the dominant language of the political and social institutions of the land. Speaking English would assist Mexican Americans in gaining equality, as well as in performing the responsibilities and obtaining the rights of citizenship. It was not a rejection of the use of Spanish. In fact, through the 1930s the *LULAC News* published bilingual editions to attract new members and to promote bilingualism. The organization also allowed some chapters to recruit and even conduct meetings in Spanish.[39]

In addition to questions about membership and language, the first LULAC leaders established a structure for the organization. LULAC's central governing body, the Supreme Council, consisted of two elected delegates from each local council. The Supreme Council would elect the president general and vice president general at its annual meeting, while the treasurer and secretary of the president's home council would hold the corresponding national office. The Supreme Council had final say on all matters of policy, including the creation of new local councils. Local councils would elect their own officers, and all officers and members had to subscribe to an oath to be loyal American citizens, to follow the laws of the United States, and to teach their children to be "good, loyal, and true American citizens." The group stirred interest among Mexican Americans, and by the end of 1929 LULAC had eighteen councils, primarily in southern Texas. By the early 1930s the organization began to spread across state borders, appointing organizers in New Mexico.[40]

The 1930s in America: LULAC's First Decade

LULAC's founding coincided with the emerging national awareness of the economic calamity that had been developing since the end of World War I. Farmers had been hit particularly hard and earlier than most other sectors of the economy. Overproduction and lower prices on the world market combined with drought across the "dustbowl" to strike every part of American agriculture. Subsequent crises in industry and other sectors of the economy required innovative responses, and the New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt brought ideas and changes that have had a long life, collectively referred to as "New Deal Liberalism."

Located in Texas and the Southwest through the 1930s, LULAC councils were far from the centers of national political and economic power, but changes in the American system during the decade would have significance for the policy world that LULAC would enter after World War II. Although the Civil War had seen a rise in federal authority, the decades following the war saw many constraints on national public policy. States remained the most active governments, and even at that level many legislatures met infrequently and briefly and state executives had small budgets and small staffs (and some lacked a veto). At the federal level, Congress was the most significant branch but was slow and inefficient. Presidents were weak, with small executive staffs and limited control over departments. Among the most significant changes of the turn of the twentieth century, according to historian Peter Argersinger, was the "creation of nonpartisan commissions and regulatory agencies, staffed by experts committed to an overarching public interest." A concurrent change was the growth of the role of the president, under the exuberance of Theodore Roosevelt and his successors, which resulted in executive control over the processes of administration.[41] These Progressive Era changes resulted from concerns over industrialization and the power of corporations and represented an important, but only initial, aggrandizement of the executive branch.

The crisis of the 1930s further challenged and changed assumptions about the national government's role in society. Amid the freewheeling experimentation of New Deal programs, a common thread or organizing principle, according to historian David Kennedy, was security. "Job security, life-cycle security, financial security, market security—however it might be defined, achieving security was the leitmotif of virtually everything the New Deal attempted."[42] With the government actively seeking to provide security for Americans, the long-term expectations of government regarding security shifted. According to Alan Brinkley, by the late 1930s reformers turned from an older Progressive faith in using regulation to create an ideal society (temporary regulation to make regulation obsolete) toward an expectation that there would be a continuous role for the state to control conflict and create stability. Some continued to focus on regulation, but by the end of the decade a new focus emerged—fiscal policy on the part of the federal government to promote individual consumption rather than to assist production. By the post–World War II era, it was the government's responsibility to maintain full employment and to enhance purchasing power through welfare programs as much as to stabilize the economy through regulation of business.[43] Rather than simply regulate big businesses to ensure fair prices for consumers, as Teddy Roosevelt preferred, or keep businesses small to foster competition, as Woodrow Wilson preferred, the New Deal mixed the older regulation with new programs to protect the security of in-

dividual workers, epitomized by the Social Security Act and the protection of worker's rights to organize and bargain collectively in the National Labor Relations Act (commonly known as the Wagner Act). And to carry out this program Franklin Roosevelt orchestrated a reorganization of the executive branch that, in the words of political scientist Sidney Milkis, "cleared the way for unprecedented political responsibility and policy development to be centralized in the White House."[44] The new Executive Office of the President would become the driving force behind policy development—particularly on civil rights, an issue Roosevelt dealt with only obliquely—until imploding under the double burden of Vietnam and Watergate a full generation later.[45]

The New Deal ushered in the idea of an economic bill of rights, and its focus was not on social change or civil rights. But much of the New Deal did have social implications, including its funding of the arts and conservation programs as well as its small steps toward civil rights, such as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which reversed the policy of forced assimilation of Native Americans. Policies for African Americans faced particularly difficult obstacles, including southern Jim Crow laws, northern ghettos, poll taxes and white primaries limiting their electoral influence. Particularly vexing was the filibuster and seniority system that kept Congress in the control of southern Democrats, whom Roosevelt needed in order to pass his economic programs. Nevertheless, the New Deal did result in important changes or signs of changing times: New Dealers joined with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to gain equal treatment for blacks under New Deal relief and recovery programs; the number of black federal employees tripled; Roosevelt appointed over a hundred blacks to administrative posts; the president met with a "black cabinet" of unofficial advisors; and he created a committee on fair employment practices. Most significantly, the New Deal raised black expectations of the federal government's actions, with important consequences for the future.[46]

In addition to the prevalent concerns it forced on all people on the margins, the Depression presented unique concerns to Mexican Americans, namely whether to repatriate to Mexico or to chance involuntary repatriation. Most repatriation programs, generally run by cities and states with large Mexican-heritage populations and with the cooperation of the Mexican government, were formally voluntary, but "encouragement" to leave could take many forms. America's tendency to fail to distinguish between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans meant that citizens of the United State were among those forced to board a train for Mexico. Children of immigrants—many of them citizens by virtue of birth in the United States—likewise were sent to Mexico, for the first time, with their repatriated parents.[47]

For Mexican Americans who stayed in the U.S., the New Deal offered somewhat less than it offered blacks, particularly in terms of recognition of problems and a voice in designing solutions. Indeed, scholars of Mexican American history are divided over the results of the New Deal. George Sánchez finds increased union activity among Mexican Americans during the 1930s, particularly a dressmakers' strike of 1933, a result of efforts to achieve the New Deal promises regarding wages and hours and the right to bargain collectively—part of Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Administration. In Sánchez's view, the New Deal encouraged political participation, ethnic cooperation, and involvement with the Democratic party—important changes in attitude for the future struggle for civil rights. Sánchez finds evidence that in Los Angeles the party tried to connect local union advances with Roosevelt's national policies. He also finds an increase in naturalization requests between 1934 and 1936, suggesting that Mexicans perceived a changed atmosphere in the U.S.[48] Other scholars of the Mexican American urban experience, particularly in the cities of the Midwest, tell a similar story. While Mexican Americans often lost jobs first and were replaced by Anglos, they joined and worked for unions through the 1930s, gaining a sense of the possibility for change within the system.[49] For agricultural workers in California, Devra Weber finds far fewer gains. Her study of cotton-farm workers suggests that exemption of agricultural employees from New Deal legislation, such as social security and the National Labor Relations Act, limited workers' expectation for change and that Mexican and Mexican American ambivalence toward the state discouraged much reliance on outside assistance. She concludes that the New Deal actually weakened the position of the cotton-farm workers in California by institutionalizing their position relative to farm owners.[50]

New Deal agencies did provide funds for projects in Mexican American neighborhoods. For example, the National Youth Administration (NYA) awarded a $100,000 grant to restore the old Mexican quarter in San Antonio. The city also received funding from the Federal Housing Authority, as did Austin (a segregated project proposal submitted by Congressman Lyndon Johnson). LULAC petitioned for grants and received funding for projects, in particular a grant from the Works Progress Administration for a new recreation center in Albuquerque. LULAC actually took over sponsorship of the NYA in Albuquerque in 1939. Overall, LULAC became part of the New Deal coalition, supporting its bills and efforts. This is not to say that LULAC leaders accepted blindly everything the New Dealers proposed and set in motion. The organization could support the New Deal and still criticize the exclusion of farm workers from the Social Security and National Labor Relations acts.[51] Still, as Richard García argues, the decade of the 1930s and the New Deal response contributed one important element in LULAC's

emerging Mexican American identity. Members of the organization had chosen American individualism, in the Jeffersonian tradition, but mixed with it "a sensitivity and an affinity to the Rooseveltian New Deal conservative revolution of pragmatic liberalism with its emphasis on pluralism, statism, centralization, and its sense of humanism."[52]

The crisis of the 1930s brought important changes to the American policy system, but those changes focused on the economic bill of rights of urban workers and the middle class. Without significant attention to civil rights or the plight of agricultural workers, the New Deal had a limited impact on Mexican Americans. The changes of the decade would be important for the postwar civil-rights struggle, but through the 1930s Mexican Americans as a whole had an ambivalent relationship to the U.S. government and the New Deal. Help could come in the form of grants, if groups had the information and resources necessary to apply, or in the right to bargain collectively, if one could join a union. In most cases, Mexican Americans continued to work at the state and local level if they hoped to improve their circumstances. For the newly created League of United Latin American Citizens, part of that work included forming its identity and ideology.

LULAC: Early Ideology and Activity

LULAC spent its first decade, in the words of Benjamin Márquez, "consolidating the group, engaging in political and community activities, and debating the fine points of the group's philosophy."[53] The major thrust of that philosophy was to create good, active American citizens. But Mexican Americans would never be productive citizens as long as they faced discrimination that limited the opportunities of individuals. According to LULAC, discrimination had two sources. First, many Anglos considered Mexican Americans to be second class citizens, at best, and throughout Texas kept Mexican Americans in subservient positions. Second, LULAC leaders placed some blame on Mexican Americans for failing to deserve equality. As beneficiaries, to some extent, of the American free enterprise system, many LULAC leaders and members believed in and promoted the qualities of an "American character" that they believed were partly responsible for their success, including individualism, a strong work ethic, and faith in progress. The organization held up successful middle-class Mexican Americans as models of the good American citizen. Mario García identifies a composite picture of such models: "American born, rising from poor backgrounds to achieve education, veterans of World War I or World War II, high school or college graduates, and professionally either a lawyer, teacher, physician, or government employee. In all, LULAC equated Americanism with middle-class success and believed that true leadership could emanate only from the middle class."[54]

To some Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans, as well as to some scholars, LULAC essentially adopted Anglo conceptions of respectability. David Montejano suggests that the "standards that the league expected of its exclusive membership were the highest standards of respectability—speak English, dress well, encourage education, and be polite in race relations. . . . In other words, the race ideas of Anglos—ideas of cleanliness, of beauty, of respectability—constituted much of the cultural ground on which segregationist policies were discussed and debated."[55] LULAC leaders would not have disagreed with such an assessment but would have objected to the pejorative tone that many such arguments assume (and perhaps to the argument that all such characteristics were simply Anglo). They reasoned that as members of the larger American society, a certain amount of acculturation was necessary and acceptable. Despite the complaints, then and now, that LULAC sold out, the organization was clear in its appreciation for its Mexican heritage and culture. Alonso Perales, founding member of LULAC, wrote in June 1929 that members of the new organization "solemnly declare once and for all to maintain a sincere and respectful reverence for our social origin of which we are proud" and that "our efforts to be rightfully recognized as citizens of this country do not imply that we wish to become scattered nor much less abominate our Latin heritage, but rather on the contrary, we will always feel for it the most tender love and the most respectful veneration."[56] Mario García argues that "LULACers, despite the insistence of later Chicano scholars to the contrary, hoped to achieve some functional balance between mainstream Anglo-American culture and the culture derived from their Mexican roots."[57] Their idea resembled not so much the melting pot of assimilation into American society as another idea gaining currency through the 1920s, a cultural pluralism such as that advocated by Horace Kallen.[58]

Efforts at Americanization, if not simply a rejection of ethnic identity, do reveal an awareness of class interests among LULAC leaders. The accommodation strategy offered by LULAC reinforced the virtues of middle-class status. LULAC sought not to revolutionize the American system, but rather to fine tune it to be more accessible to people of all backgrounds. In fact, they argued that discrimination was ultimately un-American, in that it worked against the functioning of a free-enterprise system. In the same vein, LULAC defended American capitalism against its foreign enemies during the 1930s, denouncing both fascism and Communism as antithetical to Americanism. As Márquez notes, "Because of their privileged yet precarious position, LULAC's membership had a stake in reforming rather than remaking American society. As a consequence they would be found proclaiming loyalty to the United States and its government even at a time when racism against Mexican Americans was rampant."[59]

In LULAC's view, the most able members of every ethnic group, in a society free of discrimination, would rise to high levels of achievement, while those lacking the proper qualities would remain near the bottom of the scale. The problem for Mexican Americans, in LULAC's opinion, was that they were held back by discrimination against the group as well as by a lack of initiative within the group. This belief led LULAC both to encourage Mexican Americans to prove the stereotypes false and to reform society so that it offered all individuals an equal opportunity to achieve, based on individual merit. Councils undertook programs as local circumstances warranted, but several standard practices emerged. Among the wide array of specific efforts undertaken by LULAC councils ran three main thrusts of activity: community education and encouragement, desegregation of public facilities, and improved education for Mexican American children. First and foremost, LULAC leaders concerned themselves with spreading the word. Because their ideology relied heavily on individual initiative, LULAC leaders refused to claim that Anglo prejudice was the exclusive cause of Mexican American disadvantage. Instead, they encouraged Mexican Americans to take advantage of what opportunities they had and to make themselves into citizens that the rest of society would have to respect. To this end, they traveled around Texas in groups called Flying Squadrons to organize new chapters and to promote the organization and its goals. They offered citizenship and English-language classes, held food and clothing drives, and worked with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Through a combination of education and community service LULAC sought to promote the organization and to turn Mexican communities into Mexican American ones.[60]

LULAC also advocated participation in the political process. To avoid being labeled political agitators, the organization specifically avoided any overtly partisan activity. The group's founders repeatedly denied that LULAC was a political organization, and any LULAC member elected to public office became a "passive" member to prevent LULAC from becoming a political club.[61] The organization did, however, encourage its members to become active in politics on an individual basis. The goal was to replace the old machine politics—in which the Mexican American vote was, as they saw it, largely a commodity to be purchased—with a new, more democratic politics in which Mexican Americans voted as good citizens rather than as dutiful servants. LULAC went so far as to organize poll tax committees to encourage and help citizens pay the required taxes rather than lose the power of the ballot.[62]

While socializing the Mexican American population in the ways of mainstream America, LULAC also challenged the discrimination that society imposed on Mexican Americans. Custom and local practice, without the official imprimatur of state laws, determined segregation of public fa-

cilities for Mexican Americans, a civil rights challenge different from that faced by African Americans in the South. If segregation and discrimination were less systematic against Mexican Americans, offering perhaps more room to maneuver based on local circumstances, they also could be more difficult to pin down. Mexican Americans had no *Plessy v. Ferguson* court case or state Jim Crow laws to target at the regional and national level, to rally around, to draw to national attention, to use in making claims on society at large. For Mexican Americans living in areas of particularly harsh discrimination, the lack of national or state laws could make fighting for change more difficult, even if it allowed those living in other areas more opportunities than blacks had in the South.

Local LULAC councils worked to end discrimination based on local circumstances. As O. Douglas Weeks of the University of Texas noted in 1929, "The general status of the Mexican-American in each community is different, and the method of attack [against segregation] must, on that account, be altered to suit each situation."[63] The LULAC approach to desegregation was consistent: while willing to use legal action in the courts if necessary, LULAC leaders preferred to negotiate face-to-face to bring about change. William Flores, LULAC national president in 1944–45, remembered of the El Paso LULAC method of fighting discrimination:

> Now when we knew that we were on the right track and we knew that we had a good complaint, whether it was school or anything else, we then would see the big shots—they were actually politicians, that's what they were. And we went to them, a committee went to see them, and presented our facts and said, "We can prove our charges;" and they could fix it up just as easy as that. . . . We threatened many times, "We'll go to the papers with this charge here if you won't listen to us. But I know that you can correct it." And they promised to correct it and they did so; and we were satisfied.[64]

Throughout the 1930s LULAC used this preferred method to desegregate public facilities, such as theaters, swimming pools, restaurants, and hospitals.[65]

In these desegregation efforts, LULAC emphasized that Mexican Americans were not a racial minority but were in fact white. This insistence resulted in part from self-identity and in part from pragmatism. Texas law segregated blacks and whites but did not specify segregation of Mexicans. LULAC lobbied for a white classification so Mexican Americans could vote in the Democratic primary elections. The organization did not lobby Congressman Lyndon Johnson in support of repealing the poll tax (Johnson was going to vote against repeal in any event) out of fear that they might lose that classification.[66] In several Texas cities the LULAC councils objected to

any attempt to label Mexican Americans as "colored." Thus, in Wharton County, LULAC protested when officials returned poll tax receipts marked "colored" to Mexican Americans; in Corpus Christi LULAC fought the designations "American" (AM), "Mexicans" (M), "English-speaking Mexicans" (EM), and "Coloreds" (C) in the city directory. These objections did not question segregation itself, only the segregation of (white) Mexican Americans based on race status. LULAC did not necessarily protest the segregation of Mexican Americans who did not live up to an "American" standard, but rather opposed efforts to lump all Mexican Americans into an inferior category, particularly a "colored" category, based only on Mexican heritage. They bought into the racial nationalism identified by Gerstle, accepting the racial hierarchy that placed whites at the top and thus contributing to the subjugation of nonwhites in society.[67]

Educating Mexican American Children

Education, of all issues of discrimination and equal opportunity, was the most important issue for LULAC during its first decades. A number of obstacles impeded the education of Mexican American children. First, many children worked to contribute to the family's income. In particular, migrant farming families traveled seasonally, and children missed large portions of the school year. School facilities in agricultural areas operated according to farmers' needs for cheap labor, and farm children received only sporadic schooling. Furthermore, several studies during the 1920s found that Texas Mexicans, and agricultural workers in particular, remained indifferent to public education. By the late 1920s, however, particularly in small towns and cities, Mexican Americans began to complain about the poor education afforded their children. Most children of Mexican heritage faced at least some form of school segregation, and parents began to seek enforcement of compulsory school laws and equal educational facilities for their children.[68]

LULAC leaders saw education as a key to an active citizenry and took the lead in working for equal education for Mexican Americans. They started at home, working to increase the faith and interest in education among the Mexican American population. LULAC hoped to increase local Mexican American pressure on school authorities to provide better education, rather than to attack local schools directly and be viewed as an agency of outside agitation. To this end, members undertook public information campaigns to change what they viewed as the Mexican American community's problematic characteristics: an absence of education and a lethargic attitude. Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., quotes one early LULAC member who suggested that some of the inadequate educational opportunity for Mexican Americans "is the result of the Latin American, who does not demand his

rights nor does he try to find solutions to these problems which serve as obstacles for his children." LULAC members considered mastery of English as vital both in obtaining and in fulfilling the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. As one suggested, "If you talk English, you will think and act like Americans." By speaking to parent groups, starting parent-teacher associations, and establishing a scholarship fund for promising Mexican American students, LULAC promoted the use of English in the home and the value of education for Mexican American children. In addition, LULAC rejected the view that Mexican Americans were passive victims in the face of Anglo oppression. As one LULAC leader asserted, "If we, the Mexican American and the Mexican citizens raised in the United States, are to occupy the honorable place that we merit, it is indispensable to educate ourselves."[69]

While spreading the word to the Mexican American community, LULAC members also worked on a second approach to equal education—to change the prevailing practices of discrimination that resulted in inferior education for Mexican Americans. Some Mexican Americans in the early years of the century had favored separate schools for their children as advantageous both to learning English and to maintaining their Mexican culture. The newer generation of Mexican American leaders, however, viewed segregation as an impediment to education and to the self-respect of Mexican American children. Through a variety of means they sought to convince local school officials to educate Mexican American children with other white children. First, LULAC leaders used their standard practice of negotiation with local leaders to bring change. If negotiation failed, they encouraged community pressure, investigated and documented charges brought by parents, brought evidence to the attention of higher authorities, and publicized the differences between facilities for Mexicans and those for Anglos.

LULAC took these actions against the most egregious cases of discrimination and realized that good pedagogy might require the teaching of Mexican-heritage children separately from others for a time. Students who could not understand English, for example, could gain from separate English instruction through the second or third grade. When such practices continued well beyond the early grades, when schools assigned Mexican-heritage students to separate classes without regard for their English capability, or when schools treated Mexican-heritage students in ways different from their treatment of other white groups, then LULAC took action. As one parent noted, segregation "may be all right, on account of language. But the Bohemian and German and other non-English-speaking children go to the American school, and some Mexicans want their children to go there." LULAC agreed, and could not abide by segregation based only on Mexican heritage. Such segregation implied a racial distinction that LULAC refused to recognize. R. de la Garza, a founding member of LULAC, best expressed this view in an editorial in the *LULAC News* in 1931: "Let them segregate our

children in the first grades until they have learned enough English to hold their own with other whites. If some of them are unclean, let them be placed in different schools until they have learned to be clean. *But we must battle segregation because of race prejudices*" (emphasis in original).[70]

When negotiation and local pressure proved insufficient to convince school districts to allow Mexican-heritage children to attend the same school as Anglos, LULAC took legal action. Its first legal challenge to segregation came in 1930, only one year after the founding of the organization. In *Independent School District v. Salvatierra,* LULAC lawyers helped Jesús Salvatierra and several parents who sought an injunction to prevent the Del Rio, Texas, school district from using bond monies to build new school facilities.[71] The parents argued that the new buildings would perpetuate the segregation of Mexican American children, who attended their own school through the third grade. They claimed that the school separated the children based on race, in violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The local superintendent of schools argued that the school district separated the Mexican American children for instructional purposes. Migrant children, he suggested, arrived at school late in the fall, after the harvest. These children would be at a disadvantage if placed in classes already in progress. Similarly, he insisted that non-English-speaking children, regardless of age, benefited from their own school, where they could learn English at their own pace and develop their "innate talents."[72] His arguments did not convince the local trial court, which found the school district guilty of discrimination.

The Texas court of appeals, however, overturned the decision. The appeals court agreed that school districts could not segregate Mexican American children because of their heritage, but decided that the Del Rio school district segregated the children for educational reasons. The state supreme court refused to hear the case on appeal, but the decision retained at least some aspects of a moral victory. The Texas courts considered segregation of Mexican Americans illegal, but only if such segregation resulted from prejudice rather than pedagogy. This half-victory in the courts was time consuming and expensive. The young organization, which was founded in the opening year of the Great Depression, had insufficient funds to litigate consistently, and LULAC did not undertake another court case for over fifteen years. LULAC would most often return to its local, negotiation-based struggle against discrimination.[73]

Conclusion

LULAC's first decade, filled with depression and the coming of war, provided a difficult environment in which to develop an ideology and method for a new Mexican American organization. Nevertheless, during the 1930s

LULAC experienced rapid growth. From nineteen councils located primarily in South Texas in 1929, the organization grew to thirty-seven by 1932 and on the eve of World War II had over eighty councils located in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Kansas. After the war, the organization would experience a surge both in membership and activity and would extend its reach beyond Texas and the Southwest to engage national policy issues. The philosophy and tactics LULAC developed in its first decade foreshadowed the approach it would develop to deal with issues of federal policy. This middle-class organization would continue in its loyalty to the American free-enterprise system and in its emphasis on the responsibility of the individual, even while insisting that Mexican Americans received unfair treatment in the mainstream of American society. At its inception, LULAC was somewhat ambivalent in placing blame for Mexican Americans' second-class status. Anglos treated Mexican Americans as inferior, but from their middle-class perspective LULAC leaders believed that many Mexican Americans were behaviorally inferior as well.

LULAC also articulated its opposition to characterizing Mexican Americans as anything other than white. Leaders founded their early efforts at desegregation on the lack of statutory grounds for segregation of (white) Mexican Americans, and this insistence would continue throughout the postwar period. While resistance to racial classification persisted, however, the group's leaders never demanded a complete rejection of Mexican heritage. They nevertheless implored Mexican Americans, already steeped in their Mexican heritage, to learn the language, customs, and norms of the larger American society. The group's leaders never claimed that all Mexican Americans were equally worthy of inclusion in the American mainstream. Worthiness had to be earned by the individual, and for LULAC the criteria remained distinctly middle-class. Without rejecting Mexican heritage, LULAC during its first decade leaned away from that heritage and toward Anglo middle-class values as a prerequisite to joining the American mainstream.

LULAC had relatively few opportunities to express its views on national issues. During its first decade it remained a regional, and primarily Texas, organization. Furthermore, the national policy environment did not fix its gaze on Mexican Americans or the Southwest. In its general approach to the economic crisis, however, the New Deal did attract the allegiance of Mexican Americans. Much like blacks, Mexican Americans received little specifically from the New Deal but expressed gratitude for efforts to help the poor, a large number of whom in the Southwest were of Mexican heritage. LULAC received funds to carry out New Deal projects, and Mexican Americans became Democratic voters. And, perhaps most significant, the American political system shifted in a way that would last through the 1960s. The rise of Franklin Roosevelt, and the increased power residing in the executive

office of the president, had little impact on civil rights during the 1930s. But the policy initiative had shifted to the presidency, and future chief executives would wield that power in support of American civic nationalism, and at the expense of American racial nationalism. Those who gained the ear of the president and his advisors would gain important advantages in the policy stream.