

MEXICO FOR THE MEXICANS: *Immigration, National Sovereignty and the Promotion of Mestizaje*

After peace was restored in Mexico following the Revolution of 1910, the country's rulers, like their Porfirian forebears, continued to believe in the need to attract foreign immigrants. However, this view began to shift in the mid-1930s in the face of fears about the arrival of foreigners that were considered undesirable. On matters of immigration, the country did not stray far from the restrictive practices that extended across the Americas from Canada to Argentina, yet in Mexico, unlike anywhere else on the continent, the authorities were forced to confront a dual problem posed by migration in the nation they sought to govern.

At the same time that it was attracting European, Asian, and Middle Eastern immigrants who had no interest in settling in Mexico but were simply passing through on their way to illegal entry into the United States, Mexico in effect forced thousands of its own citizens across its northern border.¹ Thus, the country faced a dilemma. On one hand, the national economy was incapable of guaranteeing even the most minimal level of subsistence to thousands of its

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1. Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Mexico," *Amerasia Journal* 9 (1982), pp. 1-28; Corinne Krauze, *Los judíos en México* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1987); Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, ed., *Simbiosis de cultura. Los inmigrantes y su cultura en México* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica [hereafter FCE], 1993); Alicia Gojman, ed., *Generaciones judías en México*, 7 vols. (Mexico: Comunidad Ashkenazi de México, 1994); Moisés González Navarro, *Extranjeros en México y mexicanos en el extranjero*, Vol. 3 (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1994); María Elena Ota Mishima, ed., *Destino México: un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas a México, siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1997); Jürgen Buchenau, "Small Numbers, Great Impact: Mexico and its Immigrants, 1821-1973," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20:3 (Spring 2001), pp. 23-49; and Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2007).

own citizens. On the other, the restrictive immigration policies implemented in the United States had encouraged a wave of international migration that turned Mexican territory into an unwanted but necessary stop on the road to the American dream. The problem had another more complex side, however: the shared border with the United States stimulated a long-standing trend that grew to great proportions in the early years of the twentieth century—the temporary migration of Mexicans.²

While the border facilitated the flow of migrants toward the United States during times of economic prosperity, the same geographic proximity brought thousands of emigrants back during periods of economic crisis.³ Whether in times of economic expansion or economic retrenchment in the United States, emigration continued to be regarded as a problem. In the former case, it reinforced the image of Mexico as a depopulated country suffering from a constant drain of inhabitants headed for the United States; in the latter, U.S. financial weaknesses sent Mexicans back into an economy that could not provide jobs for them. These situations generated a vicious cycle characterized by both the impossibility of stemming the tides of migration and the immanent fear of massive repatriations.

Mexico's dual nature as both receiver and sender of migrant waves has set its immigration experience apart from that of any other nation on the continent. It is in this dual role that explanations for the government's variety of responses to immigration can be found. However, the country's dual status provides only

2. Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900–1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977); Lawrence A. Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897–1931* (Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1980); Linda Hall, “El refugio: migración mexicana a los Estados Unidos, 1910–1920,” *Historias*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (hereafter INAH) (January–April 1982), pp. 19–34; David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988); Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900–1939* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Moisés González Navarro, *Extranjeros en México y mexicanos en el extranjero*, Vol. 3; and María Isabel Monroy Castillo, “Los rastros de una migración antigua,” in *La emigración de San Luis Potosí a Estados Unidos. Pasado y presente*, ed. Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso (Mexico: El Senado de la República/El Colegio de San Luis, 2001).

3. Neil Betten and Raymond A. Mohl, “From Discrimination to Repatriation: Mexican Life in Gary, Indiana, During the Great Depression,” *Pacific Historical Review* 42 (1973), pp. 370–388; Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929–1939* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1974); Mercedes Carreras de Velasco, *Los mexicanos que nos devolvió la crisis* (Mexico: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores [hereafter SRE], 1974); Daniel Simon, “Mexican Repatriation in East Chicago, Indiana,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 2 (1974), pp. 11–23; Reynolds McKay, *Texas-Mexican Repatriation during the Great Depression*, Ph.D. diss. (Norman: The University of Oklahoma at Norman, 1982); Zaragoza Vargas, *Proletarians of the North. A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917–1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1995); and Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *Que se queden allá. El gobierno de México y la repatriación de mexicanos en Estados Unidos, 1934–1940* (San Luis Potosí: El Colegio de San Luis, 2007).

partial explanations; it is also necessary to take into account that the rhetoric and practices around immigration were concerned with improving the Mexican people biologically. Until the mid-1930s, the revolutionary government supposedly fostered immigration, in an atmosphere steeped in “mestizophilia” and keenness to “civilize” an indigenous population that had recently become a target of government action.⁴ Just as in the nineteenth century, the colonization-immigration formula was employed as a way to promote economic activity and land settlement, but it was also intended to foster the ethnic fusion deemed indispensable for raising the threshold of civilization for indigenous peoples. This “grand dream of an independent Mexico,”⁵ as Moisés González Navarro called it, was echoed repeatedly in the speeches of immigration authorities, but, as in the nineteenth century, the project failed. First, the anticipated numbers of desirable foreigners never arrived. Second, for a nation that had just emerged from a revolution sparked by, among other factors, unsatisfied demands for land, promoting policies of foreign colonization represented a contradiction.

The years immediately following the revolution represent a unique moment when immigration and emigration trends coincided. This moment occurred in a context of broad social mobility and widespread demand for fulfilling the revolution’s political and social agenda. From this perspective, then, this essay explores two questions. What were the political and institutional norms for regulating immigration policy? Second, what were the origins and reasons for defining certain immigrant groups or classes as undesirable?⁶ These concerns are based on a premise: as Mae M. Ngai has observed, immigration policies provide an extraordinary lens for studying the way in which a nation sees itself and, thus, sees and understands its relation to the rest of the world.⁷ Immigration and nation form a dyad that allows for the construction of an “us” that necessarily excludes “them”—those “others” who are judged to be alien to the nation’s identity.⁸

4. Alan Knight, “Racism, Revolution and Indigenism: Mexico, 1910–1940,” in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Agustín Basave Benítez, *México Mestizo* (Mexico: FCE, 1992); and Claudio Lomnitz, “Fissures in Contemporary Mexican Nationalism,” *Public Culture* 9:1 (1996), pp. 55–68.

5. Moisés González Navarro, *La colonización en México, 1877–1910* (Mexico: Talleres de Impresión de Estampillas y Valores, 1960), p. 140.

6. For a description of the legal framework for Mexican immigration policy in the twentieth century, see Mónica Palma, “De la simpatía a la antipatía. La actitud oficial ante la inmigración, 1908–1990,” *Historias* 56 (September–December 2003), pp. 63–76.

7. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 9.

8. These concerns form part of a research project currently in progress that relies on newly opened documentary sources, among them those contained in the Archivo Histórico del Instituto Nacional de Migración (hereafter AHINM) and in the Archivo de Andrés Landa y Piña (hereafter AALyP). The first findings from this project can be found in Pablo Yankelevich, ed. *Nación y Extranjería. La exclusión racial en las políticas migratorias de Argentina, Brasil, Cuba y México* (Mexico: UNAM/Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia [hereafter UNAM-ENAH], 2009).

TARDY LEGISLATION

In contrast to other countries in the Americas, where the ruling elites established legal norms to foster immigration starting in the mid-nineteenth century, Mexico's first immigration law was not passed until 1908. There are several reasons for this delay. In the first place, immigration remained tied to the politics of agrarian colonialism. Thus, every effort "to attract honorable and hardworking foreigners and procure their establishment and settlement on our privileged soil"⁹ relied on legislation developed in the 1880s and 1890s to promote both public and private rural colonization projects.¹⁰

In the second place, Mexico could not compete with the attraction that the United States exercised over the world's migrants. Of the 55 million Europeans who crossed the Atlantic between 1820 and 1924, more than 30 million headed to the United States. In 1907 alone, 1.3 million immigrants entered the United States.¹¹ The total number of foreigners residing in Mexico at the start of the revolution pales in comparison: 116,526 in a nation of slightly more than 15 million Mexicans.¹² In Mexico those European immigrants who arrived during the last few decades of the nineteenth century and were deemed desirable needed no special legislation to become incorporated as productive members of society. In reality, their assimilation was the result of economic growth generated by very liberal foreign investment policies and the construction of a communications system closely tied to the primary export sector.¹³ This immigrant stream, which in 1895 barely exceeded 50,000 people,¹⁴ was protected not only by the different foreign communities in Mexico but also by an evident official xenophilia that facilitated such immigrants' rapid social ascent and consequent integration into the economic and political elite.¹⁵ In an attempt to describe this process with regard to Spanish immigrants, Clara

9. *Boletín del Ministerio de Fomento de la Republica Mexicana* 1 (1878), p. 129

10. Moisés González Navarro, *La colonización en México, 1877–1910*; Blaine Carmon Hardy, *The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: A History, 1885–1912*, Ph.D. diss. (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1963); José Benigno Zilli Manica, *Italianos en México: documentos para la historia de los colonos italianos en México* (Mexico: Ed. San Jose, 1981); Estelle Webb Thomas, *Uncertain Sanctuary: A Story of Mormon Pioneering in Mexico* (Salt Lake City: Westwater, 1980); David Skerritt Gardner, *Colonos franceses y modernización en el Golfo de México* (Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1995); and Alfredo Pureco Ornelas, *Empresarios lombardos en Michoacán. La familia Cusi entre el Porfiriato y la posrevolución, 1884–1938* (Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán/Instituto Mora, 2010).

11. Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2004), p. 5.

12. Delia Salazar Anaya, *La población extranjera en México, 1995–1990. Un recuento con base en los censos generales de población* (Mexico: INAH, 1996), p. 99.

13. Stephen Harber and Jeffrey Bortz, eds., *The Mexican Economy, 1870–1930. Essays on the Economic History of Institutions, 1870–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002); Sandra Kuntz, *Las exportaciones mexicanas durante la primera globalización, 1870–1929* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2010).

14. Salazar Anaya, *La población extranjera en México*, p. 100.

15. Moisés González Navarro, "Xenofobia y xenofilia en la Revolución Mexicana" *Historia Mexicana* 72 (April–June 1969), pp. 569–614.

E. Lida coined the phrase, “privileged immigration,”¹⁶ but the situation was similar in the case of the English, French, and Germans.¹⁷

Third, the belated legislation came in response to a succession of strong waves of immigration that affected the whole continent. Between 1880 and the start of World War I, the Americas received the greatest flow of immigrants recorded up to that time. Seventy percent of those headed to the United States, Argentina received a little over four million, nearly three million went to Brazil, and two and a half million went to Canada.¹⁸ Although to a far lesser degree, this flood of migrants also had an impact on Mexico. Between 1895 and 1910 the foreign population more than doubled, but it grew in different proportions.¹⁹ Whereas the European presence in Mexico diminished from 45 percent in 1895 to 39 percent in 1910, migration from Asia in the same period increased from 2 percent to 11 percent of the total volume of immigrants.²⁰ In reality, the 1908 law came in response to this spectacular growth.²¹ Bubonic plague, detected five years earlier aboard a Japanese ship anchored at Mazatlán, provoked a health alarm that led to the establishment of a makeshift system in Pacific ports to carry out medical exams on recent arrivals. Almost immediately, an inspector was sent to Hong Kong to check the health of Chinese migrants before they embarked for Mexican ports. José Valenzuela, a pioneer in Mexican public health, was quick to report that the businesses in charge of transporting these workers “were trying to send the veritable dregs of humanity to Mexico.” And, once settled on the Pacific coast, they “very quickly took possession of lands and united with women of the region, creating prolific homes that have produced an abundant generation of mixed races, which has not been particularly advantageous for national identity.”²²

16. Clara E. Lida, comp., *Una inmigración privilegiada: comerciantes, empresarios y profesionales españoles en México en los siglos XIX y XX* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994).

17. Brígida von Mentz, et al., *Los pioneros del imperialismo alemán en México* (Mexico: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social [hereafter CIESAS], 1982); Javier Pérez Siller, ed., *México-Francia. Memoria de una sensibilidad común. Siglos XIX–XX*, 2 vols. (Mexico: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla [hereafter BUAP]/El Colegio de San Luis-Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos [hereafter CEMCA], 1998, 2004); Rosa María Meyer and Delia Salazar, eds., *Los inmigrantes en el mundo de los negocios, siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico: Plaza y Valdés Editores/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes [hereafter CONACULTA]/INAH, 2003); Jürgen Buchenau, *Tools of Progress. A German Merchant Family in Mexico City, 1865–Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); and Walter Bernecker, *Alemania y México en el siglo XIX* (Mexico: UNAM/El Colegio de México, 2005).

18. Herbert Klein, “Migração Internacional na História das Américas,” in *Fazer a América. A Migração em Massa para a América Latina*, ed. Boris Fausto (Sao Paulo: Editora da Universidade de Sao Paulo, 1999), pp. 24–25.

19. The population went from 54,737 in 1895 to 116,526 in 1910. Salazar Anaya, *La población extranjera en México, 1995–1990*, p. 99.

20. Sergio Campos Ortega Cruz, “Análisis demográfico de las corrientes migratorias a México desde finales del siglo XIX,” in *Destino México*, pp. 39–40.

21. The population of Asian origin grew from 1,504 in 1895 to 20,194 in 1910. Delia Salazar Anaya, *La población extranjera en México, 1995–1990*, p. 100.

22. Quoted by Andrés Landa y Piña, *El servicio de migración en México* (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, 1931), p. 7.

Massive contingents of Europeans never arrived. On the contrary, what began to spread in Mexico was the kind of foreign colony of which Juan B. Alberdi had warned: immigrants who, rather than “civilize,” threatened to “infect, corrupt, degenerate and poison a country.”²³ Like their peers in Brazil and Cuba, the men of the Porfirian regime, faced with an unsatisfied demand for manual labor for handling agricultural work and construction, opted to promote the hiring of Asian workers.²⁴ From the mid-1880s, a stream of contracted day laborers began to arrive. As Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz notes about all of Spanish America, these laborers came to replace the earlier African slave traffic in more ways than one, through a system of supposedly free recruitment that was actually plagued by abuse and deception.²⁵ On top of this official policy promoting Asian immigration, the first U.S. legislation prohibiting entry to the Chinese was passed in 1882. This law significantly affected Mexico by generating illegal traffic of those migrants who were trying to move to the United States or who, expelled from there, headed toward northwestern Mexico.²⁶ While Mexico was busy approving the most liberal immigration laws in its history, the United States as well as Cuba, Brazil, and Peru had already translated into protectionist legislation the supposedly scientific knowledge intent on demonstrating the biological peril represented by the Chinese presence. By contrast, Mexican legislation established “the most complete equality of all nations and all races, not articulating a single special precept for citizens of any nation, or for individuals of any specific race.”²⁷

In addition to being late in coming, the first immigration legislation became caught up in notions of liberalism that were out of step with the scientific convictions of the time. Were the Mexicans perhaps free of prejudice toward the Chinese? Quite the contrary. In fact, owing to the outbreak of the bubonic

23. Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Plus Ultra, 1974), p. 21; Ma. Luiza Tucci Carneiro, “Inmigración en Brasil: racismo y racistas,” in *Nación y extranjería*; and Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and Armando García González, *Racismo e inmigración en Cuba en el siglo XIX* (Madrid: Doce Calles Ed., 1996).

24. Evelyn Hu-Dehart, “Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875–1932” *The Journal of Arizona History* (Fall 1985), pp. 275–312; Rosario Cardiel Marín, “La migración china en Baja California, 1877–1949,” M.A. thesis (Mexico: ENAH, 1993); Raymond B. Craib, “Chinese Immigrants in Porfirian México: A Preliminary Study of Settlement, Economic Activity, and Anti-Chinese Sentiment” *Research Paper Series* 28 (1996); Roberto Ham Chande, “La migración china hacia México a través del Registro Nacional de Extranjeros” in *Destino México*, pp. 167–188; and Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in México, 1882–1940* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010).

25. Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz, *La población de América Latina* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1977), p. 124.

26. Chan Sucheng, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882–1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000).

27. “Exposición de motivos, Ley de Inmigración de 1909,” in *Compilación histórica de la legislación migratoria en México, 1821–2002* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Migración [hereafter INM], 2002), p. 109.

plague in 1903, a commission of experts was convened to determine whether Asian immigration was advisable. In some of their reports they expressed the dangers posed by “a race that does not meld with modern peoples of European origin and is not assimilable in western civilization.” For that reason, concluded Mexican immigration officer José María Romero, they represent “a harmful element due to their low status and repulsive customs.”²⁸

Nevertheless, pragmatic reasons led to the passage of liberal immigration policy. “We have reached the conclusion that Chinese and Western peoples are fundamentally different,” wrote José Covarrubias, “but we need their cooperation as an indispensable condition for progress.” Their presumed inability to assimilate made the Chinese an undesirable group. However, high demand for workers justified a presence that, despite being unassimilable, did not imply any danger “that our people might change their customs in an unfavorable manner.”²⁹ Nonetheless, the law of 1908, despite its lax criteria, expressly forbade entry into the country by foreigners who were carriers of diseases directly associated with Asian migration (bubonic plague, cholera, yellow fever, trachoma, beriberi, etc.). At the same time, the law regulated all procedures for the arrival and documentation of foreign workers aboard ships that were specifically contracted to convey them. In other words, the legislation of 1908, in spite of its liberalism, was a consequence of the first concerns over undesirable immigrants.

Protected by an open-door policy, the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed an expansion of foreign presence unprecedented in the history of Mexico. In absolute numbers the volume is significant although its proportion as part of the total Mexican population was less than 1 percent, a figure that pales in comparison to the 15-percent foreign-born population in the United States at the time or the 30 percent of foreigners in the Argentine population of 1910.³⁰ Here, as in other comparisons, the dynamics of migratory movements in Mexico since the end of the nineteenth century appear inextricably linked to its proximity to the United States. The figures produced from a 1927 study by the Department of Immigration are revealing. Between 1910 and 1926, the yearly average of documented foreigners who entered Mexico as immigrants was 26,600, but the number of those who actually settled in the country reached an annual average of just 7,200. Why did less than a third of

28. José María Romero, *Comisión de inmigración, dictamen del encargado de estudiar la influencia social y económica de la inmigración asiática en México* (México: Imprenta A. Carranza e Hijos, 1911), p. 56.

29. Quoted by José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México, 1871–1934* (Mexico: INAH, 1991), pp. 69–70.

30. Cheryl Shanks, *Immigration and the Politics of American Sovereignty, 1890–1990*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 42; Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Sudamericana, 2003), p. 434.

the total number of immigrants who entered each year actually settle in Mexico? Andrés Landa y Piña, head of the statistics section of the Department of Immigration in the late 1920s, explained that the great majority of immigrants “have not intended to settle among us, but rather to stop for a time . . . to take the licit or illicit steps that will allow them to move to the United States of America legally or clandestinely.” The magnitude of this phenomenon was tied to the increasingly restrictive U.S. immigration policies during the first half of the 1920s, policies that instituted entry quotas by nationality. The quotas favored immigrants from northern and western Europe to the detriment of those from the east and the south (1921), and, later, they prohibited all immigration from southeast Asia (1924). Landa y Piña recognized that these prohibitions had increased immigration to Mexico, though he asserted that these foreigners would continue to see the country “as an antechamber, as a bridge” for heading to the United States.³¹

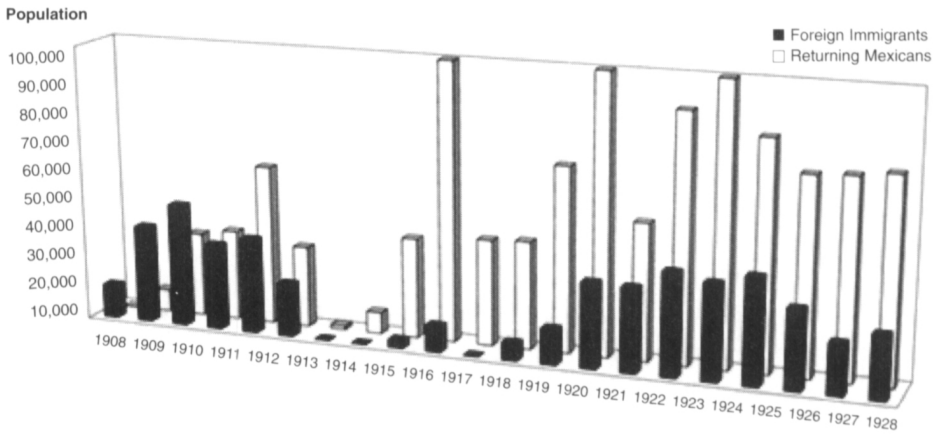
The attraction to the United States exerted influence not only on foreigners but also, and essentially, on the Mexicans themselves. While the authorities were anxious to attract “civilized” immigrants, a growing segment of Mexican workers were heading to the United States, drawn for the same reason as the Europeans and Asians: the existence of strong demand for workers in well-paid jobs created by a fast-growing economy. Consequently, Mexico began to assume a demographic profile that reflected both numerous waves of emigration with high rates of return and scanty immigration by foreigners willing to settle permanently. The figures were conclusive: Andrés Landa y Piña calculated that between 1908 and 1928 the average annual emigration rate of Mexicans was almost 37,000 persons. This figure can be viewed alongside statistics from the Immigration Department regarding the number of foreign immigrants who actually stayed in Mexico. For every five Mexicans who headed to the United States annually, only one foreigner ended up settling in Mexico. The revolutionary changes in immigration during the second decade of the last century altered the volume of arrivals and departures, but not a tendency for the number of Mexican migrants to far exceed that of foreign settlers, as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Landa y Piña accurately described the unique character of Mexican immigration within Latin America:

Our situation is different from that of other American countries; because, while we tend to receive immigrants via the Gulf, the opposite occurs from the places authorized for transit on our northern border: thousands of Mexican workers leave

31. AALyP, “El problema de la migración en México,” Vol. 1, December 26, 1927.

FIGURE 1
Returning Nationals and Foreign Immigrants, 1908–1928



Source: Andrés Landa y Piña, Migration Service, Interior Ministry, Mexico, 1931.

their homeland . . . and it would be paradoxical to make things exceptionally easy for foreigners when it has not yet been possible to provide such ease to our own people so that they are not forced to emigrate.³²

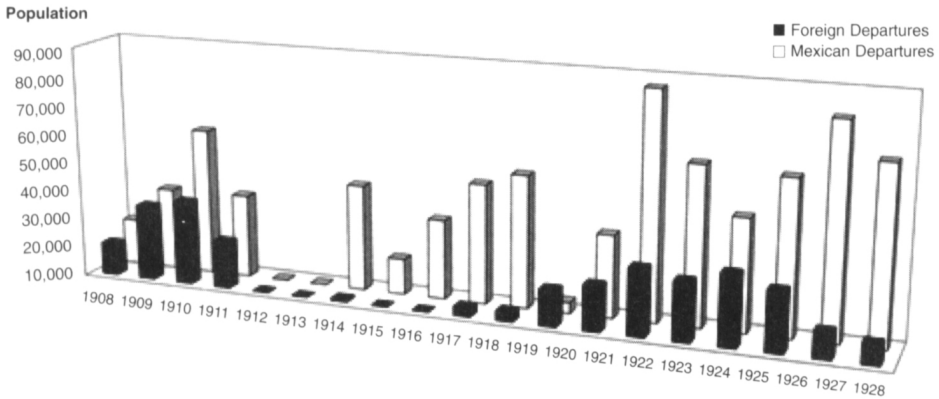
This was part of the dilemma that the postrevolutionary governments were forced to confront. On immigration issues, the revolution raised tensions in trying to reconcile fundamentally irreconcilable problems, particularly after the Constitution of 1917 established the legal framework for relations between the nation and foreigners. One of the tensions revolved around what Landa y Piña observed: that it was not viable to accommodate and offer privileges to foreign settlers without doing the same for Mexican citizens. But the second and definitive tension lay in the political and cultural process that sought to homogenize a society by making the mestizo the icon of national identity.

REVOLUTION AND FOREIGN STATUS

Among the many wrongs that fueled the Revolution of 1910 was resentment of the clearly privileged status of foreign individuals and communities in the social, economic, and political life of the nation. As a result of networks developed during earlier migrations, but thanks also to broad-ranging official favoritism, small clusters of immigrants, particularly Europeans and those

32. Ibid.

FIGURE 2
Departures of Foreigners and Mexicans, 1908–1928



Source: Andrés Landa y Piña, Migration Service, Interior Ministry, Mexico, 1931.

from the United States, enjoyed great social ascendancy during the Porfirian regime. Some were investors who established their businesses in urban and rural areas; others went on to compete directly with Mexicans in various professions and jobs in commerce and industry. Many participated in enterprises where the privileged treatment these immigrants enjoyed made the inequality vis-à-vis Mexican workers obvious.³³ The radically liberal thinking that had nourished the men and ideas of the generation preceding the revolution, was also the first to raise its voice against the power and interference of certain foreign colonies within the country. It was no accident that from 1897 forward, the emblematic opposition newspaper, *El Hijo de Ahuizote*, bore the subtitle “Mexico for the Mexicans.” The anti-Spanish sentiment of this publication, which placed the blame for a large portion of the nation’s ills squarely at the feet of the Spaniards, was quick to equate foreigners with the rich, the powerful, and the landowners.³⁴ In addition, the most radical version of Mexican

33. Clara E. Lida, comp., *Tres aspectos de la presencia española en México durante el Porfiriato* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1981) and *Una inmigración privilegiada: comerciantes, empresarios y profesionales españoles en México en los siglos XIX y XX* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994); Raymonde Antiq-Auvaro, *L’émigration des barcelonnettes au Mexique* (Paris: Ed. Serre, 1992); Luis Alfonso Ramírez, *Secretos de familia. Libaneses y élites empresariales en Yucatán* (Mexico: CONACULTA, 1992); Mario Cerutti, *Empresarios españoles y sociedad capitalista en México, 1840–1920* (Colombes: Archivo de Indianos, 1995); Rosa María Meyer and Delia Salazar, eds., *Los inmigrantes en el mundo de los negocios, siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico: Plaza y Valdés Editores. CONACULTA-INAH, 2003); Camila Pastor de María y Campos, “The Transnational Imagination: Twentieth-Century Networks and Institutions of the Mashreqi Migration to Mexico,” *Palma Journal* 11:1 (2009), pp. 31–72; Carlos Martínez Assad, ed., *De extranjeros a inmigrantes en México* (Mexico: UNAM, 2008) and *La ciudad cosmopolita de los inmigrantes* (Mexico: Gobierno del Distrito Federal, 2010).

34. Tomás Pérez Vejo, “La conspiración gachupina en *El Hijo del Ahuizote*,” *Historia Mexicana* 216 (April–June 2006), pp. 1105–1153.

liberalism, which from 1906 on tended toward anarchism, made no attempt to disguise its ethnic prejudices when, in the plan for the Mexican Liberal Party, it called for the prohibition of Chinese immigration as a means to protect Mexican workers. “The Chinese, who are submissive, stingy in aspirations, and inclined in general to work for the lowest wages, are a great obstacle to the prosperity of other workers. Their competition is fatal and must be avoided in Mexico. In general, Chinese immigration does not benefit Mexico in the least.”³⁵

If indeed the number of foreigners in Mexico was insignificant, the increase in the size of these colonies at the start of the twentieth century, and above all their visibility in more densely populated areas, encouraged social and ethnic hostilities that found expression with the outbreak of revolution in 1910. This situation explains how the revolutionary violence and its warring factions could end up fostering xenophobic reactions, especially against the Spanish and the Chinese. While these reactions were not widespread, they were evident in areas controlled by the different factions that succeeded one another in the revolutionary struggle: Maderistas, Constitutionals, Zapatistas, and Villistas.³⁶ When the revolution ended, delegates to the constitutional congress of 1917 found ways to interpret the popular call for restricting the presence of foreigners in various economic and political arenas. The result was a text shaped by what would soon be called “revolutionary nationalism.” The Constitution of 1917 served as the plan for a revolution particularly intent on restoring national sovereignty, not only over resources and property but also over the process of representation. For that reason, the congress approved a constitution that contained a good number of safeguards for Mexicans but imposed severe restrictions on immigrants. In this sense, Article 33 is emblematic. In addition to prohibiting foreigners from participating in the domestic policy process, it allows the president to expel immigrants without a trial. Article 33 illustrates the limit reached by a legislative body determined to restrict the

35. Graziella Altamirano and Guadalupe Villa, “Programa del Partido Liberal Mexicano,” in *La Revolución Mexicana, Textos de su Historia* 1 (Mexico: Instituto Mora), p. 331. On this topic, see Jacinto Barrera Bassols, “Ricardo Flores Magón, de la xenofobia popular al internacionalismo proletario,” in *Xenofobia y xenofilia en la historia de México, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Delia Salazar (Mexico: INAH-INM, 2006).

36. Moisés González Navarro, “Xenofobia y xenofilia en la Revolución Mexicana,” pp. 569–614; Alan Knight, *Nationalism, Xenophobia and Revolution: The Place of Foreigners and Foreign Interest in Mexico, 1910–1915*, Ph.D. diss. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Carlos Illades, *Presencia española en la Revolución Mexicana, 1910–1915* (Mexico: UNAM/Instituto Mora, 1991); Juan Puig, *Entre el Río Perla y el Nazas. La China decimonónica y sus braceros emigrantes, la colonia china de Torreón y la matanza de 1911* (Mexico: CONACULTA, 1992); Josefina MacGregor, *Revolución y diplomacia: México y España, 1913–1917* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México [hereafter INEHRM], 2002); *Xenofobia y Xenofilia en la Historia de México*, ed. Delia Salazar; and Pablo Yankelevich, “Hispanofobia y revolución. La política de expulsión de españoles en México, 1911–1940,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86 (2006), pp. 29–59.

activities of foreigners, but in reality it is just one among several constitutional precepts that very precisely articulate a variety of prohibitions. Article 8 denies foreigners the right to petition on political matters; Article 9 does the same with respect to the rights of association and assembly; Article 11 describes the restrictions on freedom of movement resulting from immigration laws; the first section of Article 27 limits the rights to property; and Article 32 establishes a preferential legal framework in favor of Mexicans.

Similarly, in the realm of political rights, the constitution clearly distinguished between citizens' rights for native-born Mexicans as opposed to naturalized citizens. The latter cannot occupy any popularly elected position in the legislature, nor hold positions of authority in the executive or judicial branches. The reason for this distinction was laid out very clearly by José Natividad Macías, a delegate to the 1917 constitutional congress and then president of the University of Mexico: "When it comes to national interests, the heart of the Mexican rises up . . . and he comes to view with repugnance, with hatred, everything that brings the sons of foreigners to occupy our public offices."³⁷ To explain this repugnance, Macías refers to the networks through which power was transferred during the Porfirian period, and, above all, to the presence and influence of the individuals who made up Porfirio Díaz's inner circle. Macías himself frequently mentions by name the influential treasury secretary of the Díaz government, José Yves Limantour, who by virtue of his French ancestry was for Macías an example of a "foreigner lacking in affection for the Republic."³⁸ In addition, the wrongs committed by foreigners or the children of foreigners awakened so much fury because they reignited a debate that started in the nineteenth century and continues into the present.

In fact, the Revolution did no more than stir up arguments around the meaning of the conquest and colonization in shaping the Mexican nation. Therefore, the Porfirian regime and its most conspicuous representatives were subjected to historical, moral, and political scrutiny that ultimately equated their actions with those of the Spanish conquistadors and colonists three centuries earlier.³⁹ The Constitution of 1917 was a result of this judgment against the Porfirian government and was thus a vehicle for historical vindication, restricting some rights and eliminating others that the Constitution of 1857 had

37. *Diario de debates del Congreso Constituyente, January 19, 1917*, Vol. 2 (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, INEHRM, 1960), p. 491.

38. *Ibid.* A very suggestive analysis of the meaning of attacks against Limantour and the group known as the "científicos" has been carried out by Claudio Lomnitz in *El antisemitismo y la ideología de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico: FCE, 2010).

39. Tomás Pérez Vejo, "La extranjería en la construcción nacional mexicana," in *Nación y extranjería. La exclusión racial en las políticas migratorias de Argentina, Brasil, Cuba y México*, ed. Pablo Yankelevich (Mexico: UNAM-ENAH, 2009).

extended to foreigners.⁴⁰ These constitutional prohibitions lay the foundation for highly restrictive immigration laws that would be used to proscribe the activity of foreigners seeking residence in the country.

Upon this foundation, Mexico forged a policy that would help secure a protective barrier around its people and in doing so turned immigration policy into fertile ground for ambiguity and restrictions. What was the sense in restricting immigration when population totals, at least since 1908, showed that emigration was on the rise? In a country that had never received large numbers of immigrants, the restrictions and prohibitions can be understood as a way for Mexicans to process their own history and construct their own identity. In postrevolutionary Mexico, the foreign presence was viewed as both a real and potential threat. Thus, national identity was created on the basis of resistance to foreign invasion. And the defense of this identity depended on resisting the danger posed not only by foreigners, but also by Mexico's ethnically diverse and marginalized indigenous populations, which remained mired in poverty.

EXCLUSIONARY AND UNEQUAL MESTIZAJE

Mexico's protective barrier rested on a dual platform. In the first place, the government imposed a series of labor and administrative restrictions that set limits on the kinds of work that foreigners could do. In other words, potential immigrants would be subject to certain requirements and procedures that would prevent them from competing with or displacing Mexicans from their jobs. Second, immigration policy took on a clear racial edge. During the apotheosis of mestizophilia, any foreign presence that implied an assault on the dream of ethnic unity was restricted and even prohibited. This leads then to one of the greatest ambiguities of revolutionary Mexico. As part of a rhetoric aimed at addressing social injustice and celebrating the supposedly essential values that the Mexican mestizo was presumed to possess, Mexico nurtured an exclusionary ethnic consciousness in which intolerance to indigenous diversity was projected onto certain foreign communities.⁴¹

Manuel Gamio, the father of Mexican *indigenismo*, was a bureaucrat committed to the population control policies that began to be implemented in the mid-1920s. Though his contributions to understanding Mexican emigration

40. Paola Chenillo Alazraki, *Entre la igualdad y la seguridad. La expulsión de extranjeros en México a la luz del liberalismo decimonónico, 1821–1876*, M.A. thesis (Mexico: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UNAM, 2009).

41. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo. Una civilización negada* (Mexico: CIESAS, 1987); Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution and Indigenism: Mexico, 1910–1940."

to the United States are better known, his voice also made itself heard in the discussions and development of immigration policy.⁴² Gamio, a disciple of Franz Boas at Columbia University, maintained that, in contrast to the United States, racism did not exist in Mexico: “One does not see racial hatred between whites and Indians but rather economic and social inequality.” Exclusion was a response to social conditions that needed to be—and could be—reversed: “In Mexico,” he stated, “the Indian is rejected because of his poverty and ignorance, not because of his race.” Such a situation of inequality “between oppressed indigenous majorities and ruling white minorities” could be remedied by two strategies. The first, of an “economic nature,” should consider “generous land grants and efficient industrial education that would permit the Indian ample use of natural resources, which guarantee a comfortable existence.” Gamio called the second strategy “the eugenic path.” This involved setting up a system based on a “rapid and complete racial blending of the population” and capable of creating a “racially homogeneous” society. Having reached this point, he asked himself, “Would it be advisable to create a *mestizo* population by mixing the indigenous majority with the white minority?” The answer was categorical: “We sincerely believe it would not:”

If this mix or crossbreeding were to be carried out immediately, the white population would be racially absorbed by the Indian, given their respective numerical ratios, and if perhaps this is not deplorable in itself, given that their anatomical and physiological characteristics are not inferior to those of whites, on the other hand, the racial absorption would inevitably carry with it a cultural absorption. In other words, the modern civilization of white minorities would regress in its evolution by blending with the indigenous population, which represents several centuries of backwardness, and this naturally would be highly prejudicial and therefore unacceptable.⁴³

“The eugenic path” was nothing more than the promotion of immigration by whites, who would ideally arrive in Mexico in the same or greater numbers than the indigenous population. This immigration ought to be the goal of an “extravagant selection,” that is, the immigration plan demanded determining the physical regions and “climatic as well as anatomical, psychological and physiological conditions of Europeans so that fusion with the indigenous races would be fertile and harmonious.”⁴⁴

42. Manuel Gamio, “La futura población de la América Latina” (Mexico: AALyP, April 1921). Among other works by Gamio, see *Número, procedencia y distribución geográfica de los inmigrantes mexicanos en los Estados Unidos* (Mexico: Talleres Gráficos Editorial y Diario Oficial, 1930); *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971); and Manuel Gamio, *El inmigrante mexicano. La historia de su vida: entrevistas completas, 1926–1927* (Mexico: University of California, Institute for Mexico and the United States, CIESAS, 2002).

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

Gamio made these proposals in the early 1920s, just when the increasing volume of foreign arrivals as a result of new restrictions in the United States sounded the first alarms. Selection was at the time the hallmark of the new immigration policy, and under its umbrella the most divergent viewpoints were expressed. These included the most xenophobic and ethnophobic perspectives, as well as the argument that restrictions were due to problems of the moment that would soon be resolved. Among the xenophobes, the anti-Chinese campaigns, centered primarily though not exclusively in the north-west of the country, occupied a prominent place. The ethnophobic group embraced the opinions of Andrés Landa y Piña, who would soon become the head of the Immigration Department in the Interior Ministry. "Our nation," he wrote in 1927, "requires a strong immigration tide, which should be calculated not in hundreds of thousands but rather in millions of individuals."⁴⁵ While it was rife with ambiguity, in this debate there was always basic agreement about the indispensable need to expand *mestizaje* by increasing the white presence. This mixture would be the "mold in which national identity is formed and the Nation takes shape," according to what Gamio had predicted in the mid-1920s.⁴⁶

The 1920s witnessed the rapid rise of a cult of the mestizo that went on to become pivotal in discourses about the redemption of the most vulnerable sectors of Mexican society. *Mestizaje* was the model that promised liberation to an indigenous population mired in poverty and illiteracy. Meanwhile, the descendants of the traditional creoles, symbolically represented in the desired white immigration, would contribute the benefits of European culture. This vision of *mestizaje* was exclusionary in considering only two segments, but it was also unequal because it proceeded from the assumption that one segment was less civilized than the other. This irreconcilable tension between the components of *mestizaje* could not help inserting itself into the heart of immigration politics. Consequently, whereas the postrevolutionary government set out to take care of indigenous peoples and meet their basic needs, it also hoped to expand *mestizaje* by attracting white and European immigrants who would take an interest in developing agricultural projects in sparsely populated areas. That is, whites and Europeans were favored for two purposes: to work and invest their capital in rescuing "the lands in the desert, the virgin forests and the now sterile mountains," and to establish "blood ties with farmers, to thus expand our *mestizaje*, homogenizer of the people." In sum, the proponents of *mestizaje* wanted to attract white Europeans who, inserted into the rural envi-

45. AALyP, "El problema de la migración en México," Vol. 1.

46. Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria* (Mexico: Ed. Porrúa, 1960), p. 5.

ronment, “will not form colonies isolated from our people.”⁴⁷ Rather, these immigrants would be capable “of exploiting our natural resources but not our men,” and in this way “assimilate to our race and our spirit.”⁴⁸

The leadership began once again to insist on the advantages of agricultural colonization, but now with a strong concern for selecting a group capable of guaranteeing the racial future of the country. For Mexican authorities, the restrictions and prohibitions in North American legislation began to serve as a model. Therefore, while the boundaries of white preference were being fortified in both Mexico and the United States, in Mexico the rhetoric for implementing the process promoted mestizaje as the whitening agent.⁴⁹ The paradox was that, whereas the United States was designing measures that expressly excluded Mexican mestizos, in Mexico the same measures were ostensibly being used to strengthen mestizaje.⁵⁰

CLOSING DOORS

A high level of arbitrariness characterized the actions of the agencies in charge of immigration policy. They were charged with responding to problems resulting from the ethnic makeup of the Mexican people but also with heeding the demands of sectors of society that claimed to be affected by the presence of immigrants. All of this took place in an atmosphere where the government agents themselves were not free from prejudices, though these were disguised as supposed scientific truths aimed at justifying and opening up a tide of white immigration. The earliest concerns about selecting immigrant tides were inserted in the Immigration Law of 1926, the first legislation of its kind passed during the postrevolutionary period. These concerns appeared in the context of arguments designed to prevent the risk of a social, cultural, and political breakdown, or of racial degeneration among the Mexican people:

It is undeniable that foreign immigration onto our soil can constitute an enormously powerful force for progress in the nation; however, for this to occur, it is essential that the authorities be able to select the immigrants and to exclude individuals who, by their moral character, nature, customs and other personal circum-

47. Ricardo Rivera, *La heterogeneidad étnica y espiritual de México* (Mexico: A. Mijares y Hermano Impresores, 1931), pp. 144–149.

48. Ibid.

49. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 23

50. Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and The Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra! A History of the Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

stances, are undesirable or constitute a threat of physical degeneracy for our race, of moral depression for our people or of dissolution for our political institutions.⁵¹

This legislation established for the first time the legal obligation to register and document immigrants. At the same time, it sought to reduce the volume of immigrants by stating that on the moment of arrival into the country foreigners seeking to become permanent residents would have to present a letter showing they had been offered employment for a period of no less than one year. Failing that, they must have sufficient financial resources to cover the costs of personal or family needs for a period of 90 days. In addition, immigration authorities reserved the right to prohibit temporarily the entrance of immigrant laborers when, in their judgment, there was a job shortage. However, with regard to this, the government “will retain the right to make the selection that it deems advisable.”⁵² This law, after enumerating all of the conditions under which entry into Mexico would be forbidden, stated in a subsection of Article 29 that the executive power reserved the right to determine all other cases that, while not provided for in the law, might warrant impeding entry by a foreigner.⁵³ It is worth noting also that this legislation provided for the granting of tourist visas for the first time. The creation of these visas reflected a clear intention to promote economic activity, although, as will be seen later, foreigners took advantage of the tourist category as a way to enter the country and remain there illegally on a permanent basis.

The Law of 1926 replaced that of 1908 and established the framework for what would in time become the agency responsible for managing immigration policy: the Immigration Department, accountable to the Interior Ministry. In contrast to Porfirian laws, which had organized an immigration service only to monitor ports of entry and inspect the passengers and crew of ships, in 1926 the Immigration Department broadened its role in light of all the procedures that foreigners had to follow to become legal residents. That is, at the very time that immigration policy was being regularized, the institutional foundations were laid for exerting control over the identity and activities that foreigners could undertake.

51. “Exposición de motivos, Ley de Migración de 1926,” in *Compilación histórica de la legislación migratoria de México*, p. 129.

52. “Ley de Migración de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos,” *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, March 13, 1926), p. 6.

53. Among these general measures, a body of restrictions based on public health norms related to contagious diseases was instituted. Second, they established prohibitions of the moral type aimed at children, women under 25, prostitutes, and beggars, etc. Third, there were political considerations impeding the admission of those who belonged to anarchist societies or maintained doctrines aimed at the violent destruction of governments or the assassination of public officials. Finally, the law specified the need for adult males to know how to read and write. “Ley de Migración de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos,” *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (Mexico: March 13, 1926).

From the early 1920s Mexico saw an increase in immigrant arrivals, and a majority of these new immigrants were deemed undesirable. The economic crisis in the United States at the start of the decade caused a first wave of “repatriated” Mexican workers who needed employment. According to official figures, more than 150,000 Mexicans returned to the country between 1921 and 1924, and their arrival made Mexican authorities view the presence of thousands of new foreign immigrants as a threat.⁵⁴ While the new immigrants constituted a relatively small portion of the population as a whole, the fact that they represented a substantial increase over the trends of the previous decade increased concern among Mexican authorities. The statement explaining the reasons for the 1926 law made explicit reference to the problem by pointing out that the executive branch lacked a legal instrument of control.

[It has no way] to impede or stop, even if only temporarily, the entrance of manual laborers onto national territory; for which reason our workers are exposed to suffering the consequences of an excess of supply, and competition with persons who, due to their particular situation, offer their work in exchange for very poor wages, preventing the improvement of our laboring classes and causing the constant emigration of workers who seek better conditions abroad.⁵⁵

The process of repatriation, much diminished by 1926, had sounded an alarm that never thereafter ceased to worry the officials in charge of managing immigration policy. Hence, the new law, despite viewing immigration as “a very powerful force for the progress of the nation,” was basically aimed at limiting the admission of immigrants. In fact, it did not establish any mechanism for promoting immigration; on the contrary, it took special care to specify the penalties for foreigners whose behavior did not conform to the new legislation.

Although in the 1920s Mexico joined in the discussions and restrictive practices that spread across the entire continent, the nation’s immigration legislation nonetheless surprised observers from countries with already strong immigrant traditions. It was difficult to understand how, while pursuing goals that favored immigration, Mexico could approve a law that actually set forth prohibitions instead. An Argentine newspaper articulated the following question: “In the interest of promoting immigration, is it possible to demand higher standards of immigrants than those that hold for the majority of citizens?”⁵⁶ However, what seemed inappropriate for a country with a strong immigrant tradition was not

54. Andrés Landa y Piña, *El servicio de migración en México*, p. 23.

55. “Exposición de motivos, Ley de Migración de 1926” in *Compilación histórica de la legislación migratoria*, p. 123.

56. F. Cid. “Restricciones a la inmigración. El Caso México” in *La Tierra* [Buenos Aires] (May 1928) p. 12.

so for Mexico. The new law stipulated that to enter the country as an immigrant one had to be literate, and, in addition, required a work contract prior to arrival in the country or, failing that, evidence of having the financial resources to support oneself and one's family. "I believe," said the journalist, "that any European worker who has such resources would not venture to emigrate. People emigrate for reasons of dire necessity."⁵⁷ In reality, the restrictions had begun a couple of years earlier when the Interior Ministry initiated a practice of issuing "confidential circulars" in which they defined the parameters of undesirability. These orders, which were sent to immigration agents and the Mexican consular service, clearly depict the Interior Ministry's phobias and justifications. They also allow us to see the degree of freedom that members of the ministry exercised in implementing rules outside of public view.

On May 13, 1924, the Interior Ministry published Circular 33, which restricted the "immigration of individuals who are black."⁵⁸ When Mexican consuls began denying visas to Afro-Cubans and African Americans, complaints from the consular service itself were not long in coming. In October of 1926, Manuel Álvarez, consul in Havana, was reprimanded for having authorized visas for Afro-Cubans, who were detained in the port of Tampico and then returned to Cuba. Immediately, the Interior Ministry exhorted the Mexican foreign ministry to instruct this consul not to extend visas "to individuals of the Negro race, because this immigration to our country is not advisable."⁵⁹ Álvarez took note of the rule, but immediately communicated his opinion to the Mexican foreign minister:

This nation has in its population a very high percentage of blacks, who are considered citizens in the full exercise of their civil rights, and who even constitute part of the current presidential cabinet as Secretaries of State. I take the liberty to beg you, with all due respect and attention, to enlighten me as to the form and reasons that, to avoid resentment on denying them the aforesaid document, I should offer explanation to all interested parties, especially if the case concerns someone with governmental responsibility.⁶⁰

The official responses showed that the prohibitions referred exclusively to "individuals of a colored race who are part of the working class, given the fact that the government wants to protect our manual laborers, who face great competition in their jobs from the influx of such individuals."⁶¹ The same pleas for

57. Ibid.

58. AHINM, exp. 4/362.1/76

59. Archivo Histórico Diplomático de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter AHDSRE), exp. NC 1192-10.

60. AHDSRE, exp. NC 1192-10.

61. AHINM, exp. 4/350/127.

explanation were heard from various Mexican consulates in the southern United States, as well as from African American associations in the United States. The rule was applied in a completely arbitrary fashion. "I am an American citizen of mixed race, white, black and Indian; that is, what is commonly called a mulatto," wrote S. B. W. May to the Secretary of the Interior of Mexico, explaining that he had no intention of settling in Mexico. Despite that, he explained, simply because of the color of his skin, the Mexican consular authorities were denying him permission to enter. The official replies reiterated the argument that this was a measure designed to protect the Mexican labor market.

It did not take long for the vagueness of the criteria to become a motive for conflict among government agencies themselves. In 1928, the Ministry of Public Education hired the English teacher Miguel Menbhardt, a specialist in tropical agriculture, "to serve in the public schools." A resident of Belize, Profesor Menbhardt tried to enter Mexico through the border with Quintana Roo, but was arrested in the town of Payo Obispo "in view of being of the negro race." Thanks to an arrangement by the Mexican Secretary of Education, he obtained "a special permit" to be admitted to the country "for a period of six months and with a deposit of 1,000 pesos."⁶² In fact, on Mexico's southern border there were cases where teams of black laborers, contracted by English, U.S., and Mexican businessmen, came in to do seasonal forestry work. These operations were carried out through agreements with the Ministry of Agriculture which stipulated that, in the absence of Mexican workers willing to advance deep into jungle regions, businessmen were authorized to hire workers from Belize. Beginning in 1924, when the prohibition against the admission of blacks took effect, a conflict arose which, for the most part, was resolved in favor of the businessmen. Prior to that, however, a complicated lobbying system developed whereby legal representatives of companies could go directly to the office of the president of Mexico to obtain permission for the temporary admission of hundreds of day laborers. In this context of clashes between authorities in different government agencies, the Immigration Department explained in confidential documents the real reasons behind the prohibition: "The general criterion of the government in recent years has been coming out in marked opposition to immigration by the Ethiopian and Mongoloid races who, for well-known ethnological reasons, constitute a threat to our fledgling national identity." This was the central motive; it had to do with races that "because of their own inferiority, accept being hired in slavish conditions . . . while throughout the Republic we see an abundance of idle day laborers who, in search of work, keep struggling to emigrate to the United States."⁶³

62. AHINM, exp. 4/362.1/1929/306.

63. AHINM, exp. 4/350/32.

The need for selective immigration responded to an examination of the qualities of the Mexican people, who were still far from having a true national identity. In 1917, during the plenary meeting of the constitutional assembly, delegate Paulino Machorro Narváez wondered: “Do the Mexican people currently form a real nationality?” His reply reflects the strength of a belief that held sway in Mexico for decades:

There are currently many elements that are contrary to the constitution of a national identity: the different races that derive from the Conquest and that still have not completely merged . . . We are a combination of races and each of them has its own outlook, . . . that diversity is what has made us appear to the civilized world to be a weak nation that lacks national unity. We are diverse groups who still cannot collaborate fully for a common end. We still have not blended to form the national character.⁶⁴

The belief in this fundamental weakness lay at the source of immigration policies. In essence, these regulations were about protecting Mexicans from the dangers of certain mixtures “that, it has come to be proven scientifically, cause degeneracy in their descendants.”⁶⁵ However, the policies also sought to protect Mexicans from “other races” that, because of their resistance to mixing, were incapable of blending to form the melting pot of *mestizaje*. The term “unassimilable” came into use around 1917, and from about 1925 on was employed to refer to a wide range of nationalities and ethnic groups.

On immigration matters, legislation came late and haphazardly. The decade of civil war and the stumbling efforts of the new regime to become institutionalized delayed careful attention to problems resulting from population flows. The law of 1926 was replaced by a new one in 1930. At the start of 1926, Primo Villa Michel, a legal consultant in the Interior Ministry, expressed serious criticism of the plan that was ultimately approved. His observations were based on the principle that Mexico was suffering a “large invasion of harmful foreigners,” a situation for which the law that was about to be passed did not provide any specific remedies.⁶⁶ There were two sources of this invasion. The first was “people of color, whose abundance creates depressing ethnological phenomena in our race.” The second was the immigrants who, liberated “from their race or nationality,” come to Mexico without any intention of “contributing to the forces of production, but rather to weigh them down.” Villa Michel illustrated the problem with examples of three groups. The first was

64. *Diario de Debates del Congreso Constituyente*, January 17, 1917, Vol. 2 (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, INEHRM, 1960), Vol.p. 134.

65. Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *Memoria de Labores* (Mexico: SRE, 1927), p. 512.

66. AHINM, exp. 4/350-1929/426.

made up of Spaniards who “come to learn about business by providing their own labor in exchange for ridiculous wages, to such an extent that they have excluded our own young people from all commercial activity, in spite of the latter’s superior education.” The second was comprised of Arabs, Armenians, Turks, Syrian-Lebanese, Poles, and Czechoslovakians who “without trade or profession, come to work in some paltry business, wandering through cities and towns . . . carrying their capital in their arms in the form of stockings, ties and other cheap goods.” Such immigration, devoted to “consuming without producing,” did nothing more than exacerbate the economic situation in urban areas, limiting Mexican operations and the development of serious business enterprises, and excluding “from every commercial effort the lower classes who make a living from small businesses.”⁶⁷ Finally, the third contingent of harmful immigrants were those who used Mexican territory to enter the United States illegally. This was a “very numerous group made up of Italians, Poles and many other nationalities.” According to Villa Michel, the law of 1926, by not establishing clear mechanisms for impeding “this bad immigration,” left no alternative other than issuing “arbitrary agreements,” as the Interior Ministry had been doing by means of the confidential circulars.

These opinions went unheeded, and a few years later a process of negotiation began again with the aim of passing legislation on the matter. The procedures for selecting immigrants were refined in the law of 1930, which stipulated that permissions for admission to the country would be evaluated on the basis of defense of *mestizaje*. Despite the fact that immigration was still considered to be of public benefit, it remained restricted to those “belonging to races that by their condition can assimilate easily in our environment, to the benefit of the species and the economic status of the country.” The first regulations to temporarily limit the entry of workers of Syrian, Lebanese, Armenian, Palestinian, Arab, and Turkish origin appeared during this period. Soon after, Russians, Poles, and Chinese were added to this list of nationalities. At the same time, the crisis of 1930 and the resulting increase in repatriations of Mexican workers intensified restrictive policies. By April of 1929, the Interior Ministry, via Circular 37, prohibited “the entry of immigrant workers.” A couple of months later, in a new circular, it announced that it was lifting the ban, but only to allow entry to European workers.⁶⁸ However, when the crisis worsened, a new agreement, this time published in the *Diario Oficial*, set forth in detail the terms of a new temporary ban on the admission of immigrant workers. The government would no longer allow entry to any foreigner intending to do any kind of physical labor in exchange for a salary or daily wage. In addition, entry was prohib-

67. *Ibid.*

68. AHDSRE, exp. IV-294-41.

ited to foreigners who did not have at least 10,000 pesos (\$3,000 at the time) in capital, and, if they had it, were not willing to invest it for six months in some agricultural, industrial, or commercial enterprise.⁶⁹

Even as the most restrictive views prevailed in the country, officials within the Interior Ministry itself were clashing over a generous immigration plan. In 1929, Andrés Landa y Piña, on the point of becoming director of the Immigration Department, recommended a policy that would foster not only voluntary immigration, but also immigration resulting from campaigns carried out by government agents on foreign soil. Landa y Piña detailed in a lengthy report that it was a question of developing, together with local governments, a vast plan capable “of producing a wave of immigration comprised of working and farm families.” The hope was to promote a far-reaching policy of colonization, through the appropriation of unsettled lands, the development of cooperatives, and financing from agricultural lending banks.⁷⁰ The rhetoric ran counter to practice. Some civil servants still considered immigration to be part of a modernizing utopia tied to the nineteenth century. Convinced that the prohibitions were a response to the current context and conditions, they never realized that all these mechanisms for selection and prohibition not only corresponded to economic factors but also reflected the components of a national identity shaped by a long history of battles against armies, businesses, communities, and foreign figures. Therefore, while Landa y Piña recommended putting in place a broad plan of agricultural colonization, higher-ranking authorities and consultants spent their time rejecting various proposals by foreign collectives wishing to develop agricultural colonization projects. Such was the fate of many proposals, including a plan presented in 1930 by the American Slavic Colonization Trust Inc. for settling regions of the Mexican countryside with Russian families who had “emigrated as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution and the civil war that followed.”⁷¹

Even communities like the Mennonites, one of the few who managed to settle in lands acquired in the northern part of Mexico in 1921, and who enjoyed generous perks throughout the 1920s, now faced restrictions.⁷² This is evident in the Interior Ministry’s reply to an immigration application from new groups. “For the moment the country has found it necessary to suspend all

69. *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, July 17, 1931), p. 1.

70. Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Salud y Asistencia (hereafter AHSSA), Fondo Salubridad Pública, Sección Servicio Jurídico, caja 16, exp. 26, 1929.

71. AHINM, exp. 4/350/438.

72. Harry Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971); Luis Aboites, *Norte precario. Poblamiento y colonización en México. 1760–1940* (Mexico: CIESAS, 1995).

colonization activity.”⁷³ These restrictions, fed by fears of a massive return of Mexicans from the United States, became tied to the question of undesirability that was used in evaluating the suitability of other immigrant communities. In 1930, a group of Islamic associations in the United States began exploring the possibility that Muslim families from East India and Malaysia might settle in Mexico under the protection of an agricultural colonization plan. The response was immediate: “the immigration of these foreigners is not desirable.”⁷⁴ Another plan, this time aimed at agricultural colonization by Jewish immigrants in Baja California, suffered the same fate. The opinion of the consultation department of the Interior Ministry was blunt:

Not only in this moment of crisis, but in any normal period, we should by preference seek immigrants who are capable of assimilating in our environment and of adopting our culture and laws, and it is clear that Jewish immigration does not fit in this category . . . their arrogance and racial pride are universally well known.⁷⁵

Confidential orders issued during the thirties used “ethnic reasons” to ratify immigration prohibitions for individuals from “undesirable races,” at the same time that political and economic motives justified new limits on immigration. Among all these orders, two stood out. One was from October 1933 (Circular 250), which for “ethnic” reasons forbade entry to “black, yellow, Malaysian and Hindu” races. Similarly, because of “their bad customs” it also prohibited immigration by gypsies. In the case of Poles, Lithuanians, Czechoslovakians, Syrian-Lebanese, Palestinians, Arabs, and Turks, and owing to the “type of work in which they are engaged,” immigration was also soon deemed “undesirable.” For political reasons, visas for Soviet citizens and clergy were canceled, and, finally, limits were placed on work visas for foreign doctors and teachers.⁷⁶ The second and broadest order was issued in April of 1934 (Circular 157). Using the argument of “ethnic, economic, political and demographic conditions,” the regulation specified the terms of prohibitions to “African, Australian, yellow, Hindustani and Malayan races.” Groups of nationalities or ethnicities associated with itinerant sales or peddling went from the category of “restricted” to “prohibited” (Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Czechoslovakians, Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Armenians, Arabs, Turks, Bulgarians, Romani-

73. AHINM, exp. 4/350/477.

74. AHINM, exp. 4/350/444.

75. AHINM, exp. 4/350/1931-459.

76. AHINM, exp. 4/350.2.33/54. In a context of fierce confrontations with Catholic clergy, the restrictions on admission of Catholic priests are not surprising. From the mid-1920s, Mexican consuls had orders to deny visas to priests and nuns who wanted to move to Mexico. Once the Law of 1926 was passed, the argument for impeding entry was protected under the ninth section of its Article 29, which established that foreigners with a profession whose exercise was not permitted in the country could not enter, “which is the case for priests,” as the Mexican Treasury Department explained to its ambassadors and consuls. AHDSRE, exp. NC 1439-20.

ans, Persians, Yugoslavians, and Greeks). The law forbade the immigration of individuals whose “race, cultural level, habits, customs, etc. make them exotic beings for our psychology” (Albanians, Afghans, Abyssinians, Algerians, Egyptians, and Moroccans). In addition to ratifying restrictions based on political reasons, a special section was dedicated to the immigration of Jews “who, more than any others, due to their psychological and moral character, and the kind of work they do . . . are undesirable.”⁷⁷ With the circulation of this bylaw, protectionism reached one of its highest levels, given that the undesirability of foreigners was now based on the most diverse criteria: skin color, nationality, occupation, profession, customs, habits, and religion.

A PARADIGM SHIFT

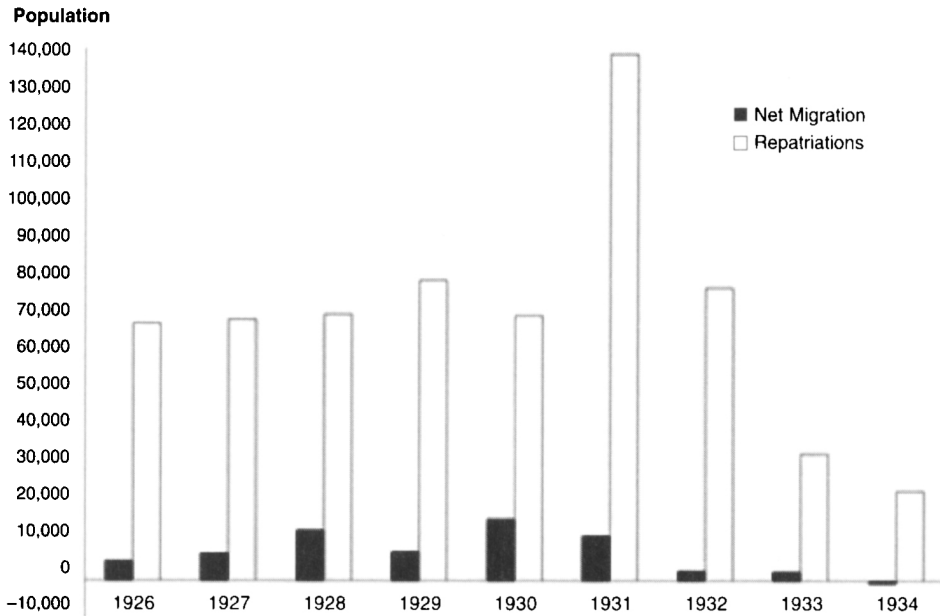
If at the end of the 1920s attitudes favoring immigration still coexisted with those that opposed it, the 1930s were characterized by fierce opposition to the contributions of exogenous members of the national population. No doubt the impact of the economic crash was of such magnitude that the mere arrival of thousands of repatriated Mexicans promptly eliminated any plan that insisted on the advantages of attracting immigrants. It mattered little that the numbers of foreigners residing in Mexico were significantly reduced (see Figure 3). Their mere presence, coupled with the economic difficulties and political tensions during those years, bred a cult of exclusion masked in a revolutionary nationalism that displayed its most xenophobic edge. An angry campaign against undesirable foreigners erupted throughout the nation. The old anti-Chinese factions broadened their phobias in founding the National Anti-Chinese and Anti-Jewish League. This organization, under the leadership of veterans of the Revolution, expressed complaints from middle-class sectors, particularly those with ties to business:

It is a secret to no one—as stated in a manifesto from 1934—that the Jews (Russians, Poles, Czechoslovakians, and Lithuanians), who lack the most basic principles of morality and hygiene, have responded to the hospitality they have been given by slapping us in the face, creating a brutal and unequal competition for our compatriots in all business activities. They intend to take over our businesses, and will do so unless we put up a strong dike to defend against their bastardly, ungrateful ambitions.⁷⁸

77. AHINM, exp. 4/350.2.33/54. Regarding prohibiting entry to Jews, see Judit Bokser Liwerant, “Alteridad en la historia y en la memoria: México y los refugiados judíos” in *Encuentro y alteridad. Vida y cultura judía en América Latina*, eds. Judit Bokser Liwerant and Alicia Gojman de Backal (Mexico: FCE, 1999); and Daniela Gleizer Salzman, *México frente a la inmigración de refugiados judíos, 1934–1940* (Mexico: INAH-Fundación Eduardo Cohen, 2000).

78. AHINM, exp. 4/350.264. Regarding these organizations, see Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Por la patria y por la raza. La derecha secular en el sexenio de Lázaro Cárdenas* (Mexico: UNAM, 1993); and Alicia Gojman de Backal, *Camisas, escudos y desfiles militares. Los Dorados y el antisemitismo en México, 1934–1940* (Mexico: FCE, 2000).

FIGURE 3
*Mexicans Repatriated from the United States
 and Net Foreign Immigrations, 1926–1934*



Sources: Fernando Sául Enciso, “No cuenten conmigo. La política de repatriación del gobierno mexicano y sus nacionales en Estados Unidos, 1910–1928,” in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 19:2 (2003); *Que se queden allá: el gobierno de México y la repatriación de mexicanos en Estados Unidos, 1934–1940* (San Luis Potosí, El Colegio de San Luis, 2007); and Ignacio García Téllez, “Problemas de población,” in *Migración, población y turismo* 1:2 (September 1940).

These xenophobic campaigns enjoyed the support of the authorities and official institutions. In February of 1935, the top brass of the National Revolutionary Party demanded that the Interior Minister “resolve the problem of immigration by undesirable foreigners, Chinese and Jews, who are a burden on the Mexican people.”⁷⁹ Since its founding in 1929, *El Nacional*, the official newspaper of the postrevolutionary government, had been the spokesman of these campaigns. As the paper proudly noted in an editorial of 1931, the new immigration policies “have earned the approval of all social classes in the country.”⁸⁰ During the economic crisis of 1930, *El Nacional* published news stories, editorials, and cartoons reflecting the furious opposition to the presence of foreign immigrants.

79. AHINM, exp. 4/350.215.

80. *El Nacional*, March 9, 1931.

FIGURE 4
Cartoon: "Our Participation in the Shop Window Contest"



Source: *El Nacional*, March 4, 1931.

The dilemma of confronting a massive return of Mexicans heightened the tensions around immigration policy. As a result of restrictions, the legal flow of foreigners dropped, but the distribution of new immigrants by place of origin caused alarm. Nothing was further from the ideal type of immigrant than Syrians, Arabs, Turks, Lebanese, and Palestinians, whose numbers increased by more than 170 percent between 1910 and 1930. The same held for the Jews from Central and Eastern Europe, who began arriving in Mexico in the 1920s and by the beginning of the 1930s exceeded 6,000. These foreigners were all deemed unassimilable, not only because of their linguistic differences, but for their religion in the case of Jews, and for the occupations of street vendor and peddler (see Figure 4). All these immigrants provoked a xenophobic fury fueled by a campaign of nationalist propaganda out of all proportion to the meager number of foreigners residing in Mexico.⁸¹

81. The 1930 census indicates that at that time about 8,000 persons of Middle Eastern origin and nearly 6,000 from Central and Eastern Europe were living in Mexico. Departamento de Estadística Nacional, *Censo de Población 1930* (Mexico: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1932).

The first seeds of Mexican demographic analysis were planted in this environment. Gilberto Loyo, a disciple of the Italian demographer Conrado Gini, established a new way of approaching population studies. An enemy of neo-Malthusianism, Loyo's populationism proceeded from the assumption that scarcity rather than heterogeneity in the population was the principal obstacle to modernization in the country. Mexico had eight inhabitants per square kilometer, and with this very low density, "it is impossible to work the land properly, to have modern industry, to create modern social and political institutions, and to attain a middle class culture and lifestyle corresponding to a truly modern society. With eight inhabitants per square kilometer, even if they are of the most progressive race, it is impossible to organize a modern type of society."⁸² The alternative was to favor the natural growth of the population by lowering the high mortality rate. To do so, plans should be developed for providing medical and legal insurance coverage to women and children, together with improvements in nutrition and hygiene in homes, schools, and the workplace. At the same time, it was essential to implement plans for redistributing the population, which would help lower concentrations in high-density areas and establish settlers in areas of low density, particularly along the borders.

Loyo's proposals represented a radical shift. Their point of departure was a recognition of the failure of all previous efforts, because they had used immigration as a lever for modernizing the country. Loyo reached outrageously offensive conclusions. A mestizo country like Mexico, "of [a] very backward cultural level," should not aspire to increase its populations through immigration. "[A]s experience has shown," he continued, "mestizo countries attract, above all, mercenary types, the dregs of society, corrupt individuals who will be bad citizens in any country, and in countries such as ours, will be awful." In spite of these opinions, he still saw the advantages of developing "good immigration," although his conclusion was categorical: Mexico should increase its own human capital, by means of policies that fostered social and economic integration in the country. "As the material and moral conditions of the great backward masses improve, the immigration of foreigners can be better and more abundant, but that will be far from happening in the next few decades."⁸³

All of these concerns became crystallized in the General Population Law of 1936, whose basic criteria remained in force over the next four decades. This legislation was designed to respond to what were understood to be the fundamental demographic problems:

82. Gilberto Loyo, *Las deficiencias cuantitativas de la población de México y una política demográfica nacional* (Roma: Tipografía del Senado, 1932), pp. 5 and 6.

83. Gilberto Loyo, *La política demográfica de México* (Mexico: Partido Nacional Revolucionario, 1935), pp. 373–376.

Population growth, the racial distribution within its territory, the ethnic fusion of national groups among themselves; the protection of Mexican nationals in their economic, professional, artistic and intellectual activities through immigration regulations; the preparation of indigenous groups to become better physical, economic and social contributors from a demographic standpoint; [and] general protection, preservation and improvement of the species within the limits and by means of procedures indicated in this law.⁸⁴

This was the first legislation that tried to address population issues in a comprehensive way, discarding any strategy that relied on foreign immigration. Instead, the law opted for increasing the population with the aid of programs for repatriating emigrants and by the exercise of a highly controlled immigration policy conditioned on the potential for assimilation.

The central role occupied by the state during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) affected the design and implementation of a population policy founded on the most restrictive immigration legislation Mexico had ever known. For example, the Law of 1936 prohibited foreigners from practicing their professions (Article 31). With the goal of assuring Mexican nationals control over the economic life of the nation, it limited the commercial and industrial activity of foreigners in the different regions of the country (Article 32). To guarantee the distribution of foreigners across national territory, the government reserved the right to determine their places of residence (Article 7). To protect Mexican jobs, legislation placed limits on remuneration for foreigners engaged in intellectual or artistic activity (Article 33). In addition, the law forbade, for an indefinite period, the entry of immigrant laborers and of foreigners who worked in business, with the exception of the export business (Articles 84 and 87). Finally, it described the limits for entry by foreign technicians (Article 86).⁸⁵

Rounding out this combination of restrictions related to labor was a system of differential quotas, by means of which the Interior Ministry would make known the maximum number of foreigners who would be admitted annually. The law stated that these quotas for immigrants would be established “bearing in mind the level of national interest, their capacity for racial and cultural assimilation, and their suitability for admission, so that they do not become destabilizing forces.”⁸⁶ Finally, the law of 1936, after listing all the requirements that foreigners would have to fulfill in order to enter the country, con-

84. Ley General de Población, in *Diario Oficial* (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, August 29, 1936), p. 1.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

cluded with the following provision: “Even if they meet all the requirements, the Interior Ministry can order that admission be denied to certain undesirable foreigners” (Article 74). In contrast to all previous legislation, this law for the first time established standards to guarantee immigration to “foreigners who come from their country to flee political persecution” (Article 58).⁸⁷ This provision set the precedent that allowed the country to provide refuge a few years later to thousands of Spanish Republicans, a humanitarian response that played out in the midst of the most protectionist environment Mexico had ever known.

The restrictions set forth in the law of 1936 led the authorities to realize that it made no sense to maintain a policy of prohibitions and limitations based on the idiosyncratic orders that the Interior Ministry issued on an annual basis. It was thought that the time had come to trust the rationalism of a legal norm and to abandon decision-making based on personal discretion. Thus, in May of 1937, via Circular 930, restrictions “on the basis of race, nationality and religion mentioned in confidential circulars 250 and 157” were repealed.⁸⁸ In other words, it was left up to the consular service to act freely in issuing tourist visas without setting any limit, since the law itself established the selection criteria for those who sought to reside permanently in the country. However, in March 1938, this measure itself was revoked. A study by the State Office of Statistics (*Dirección General de Estadística*) showed that of the total number of tourists who entered the country in the previous five-year period (1933–1937), more than 20,000 foreigners still remained, there being no evidence of their having left. Consequently, entry permits remained subject to prior authorization by officials of the Interior Ministry, with the sole exception of tourists from the United States.⁸⁹

This reinforcement of restrictive practices gained strength with the approval of the first immigration quotas. Mexico differed from the United States and Brazil, where immigration quotas in effect at the time were set at a percentage of the total number of immigrants by national origin as registered in the population census. In Mexico, by contrast, ethnic preferences and the absence of reliable statistical records were evident in the numbers of immigrants that the quotas authorized. There were never any limits set on immigrants coming from the United States or Spain, and in the worst moments not more than 100 citizens of each of the remaining countries were authorized entry into Mexico.⁹⁰

87. *Ibid.*, p. 3, 6.

88. AHINM, exp. 4/350.2.34/54.

89. AHINM, exp. 4/350.2.33/54.

90. AHINM, exp. 4/350.42/948.

CONCLUSION

Mexico's protective barrier against foreign threats displayed its most exclusionary character in legislation promulgated at the height of nationalist revolutionary fervor. The Law of 1936 finally set aside a debate that had begun with the outbreak of the Revolution in 1910, and which the Constitution of 1917 had expressed in its general rules for the political and institutional organization of the republic. Founding the new postrevolutionary republic necessitated reimagining the nation, and in this task it was important to contend with a basic question: how to define the limits between Mexicans and foreigners? This was an unavoidable part of the enterprise of extending national control over fundamental aspects of economic and political life. Therefore, Mexicans became convinced that the more restrictions they placed on foreign presence, the more likely it was that the nation would be able to fulfill the revolution's demands for freedom and social justice.

Compared with other nations in the Americas, Mexico's behavior with regard to immigration was not exceptional but simply late. The decade of the revolution interrupted the upward mobility of foreigners and increased Mexican emigration to the United States. From the end of the revolution, Mexico witnessed the constant departure of her own citizens, with a high rate of return. That, together with the arrival of foreigners to Mexico, more as a result of American prohibitions than of an effective immigration policy, made its mark on the evolution of immigration practices in Mexico. That nation, like all of Latin America, promoted restrictive policies. What was unique in the case of Mexico was the meaning and the manner in which these regulations were implemented.

The nineteenth-century paradigm, which focused all of the virtues of a modern social order on immigration, continued to show remarkable vitality during the first years following the revolution. However, it was conjoined in an ambiguous way to pro-Indian rhetoric attentive to the needs of broad swaths of the Mexican population. The proposal of Manuel Gamio to "forge a nation" through the promotion of *mestizaje*, which turned white Europeans into guarantors of civilization, created tensions that played out in immigration policies. Therefore, the policies, steeped in nationalist assumptions, began to concern themselves not only with protecting the social and labor rights of Mexicans but also with insuring Mexicans' biological makeup against threats of inadvisable crossbreeding or resistance to assimilation. From this foundation, confidential and arbitrary systems of selection were put into practice in a country that registered one of the lowest rates of immigration on the continent. Though eager to attract immigrants, Mexican policies discouraged immigration by means of

the most diverse arguments, at the same time that the exodus of Mexicans to the United States was on the rise. Each economic crisis forced thousands of Mexicans back, creating a vicious cycle characterized by the impossibility of stopping emigration and the inability to attract the ideal immigrants.

The solution lay in abandoning definitively a model favoring immigration, paving the way for a plan focused on the natural growth of the population. That model was defeated by legal rules that unabashedly promised to protect Mexicans from an age-old foreign danger. In this way, in postrevolutionary Mexico, immigration ceased to be considered a vehicle for modernization. Instead, the idea emerged that only by modernizing the country would it be possible to attract good immigrants. The corollary to this new formula was that during the rest of the twentieth century, Mexico had one of the most restrictive immigration laws on the continent, at the same time that it honed its image as an emigrant nation that forced its citizens out in search of opportunity across the border to the north.

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