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MEXICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY 1846-1940

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Throughout the period of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was a rather tumultuous regarding relations between the inhabitants of Mexico and that of their northern neighbors, the United States. The entirety of the country, morally and politically, was in a severely sore state due to their loss in the Mexican War against the United States still fresh in their mind. The whole of this turmoil ultimately resulted in an anarchic revolution that sought to overthrow the corrupt government that was in control of Mexico at the time. As beneficial as the revolution was to those participating on the fighting side, it remains still that many innocent civilians were negatively impacted by the revolution as well. It is unfortunate that an abundance of innocent lives was lost all for the sake of implementing a structured government that would work more efficiently towards bettering the country. In addition to these losses, the economic climate of the United States allowed for Mexican immigrants to enter, sometimes through illegal means, and take jobs in sectors that many Americans did not wish to work in.

Reasons for immigrating into the United States primarily lay with the onset of the Mexican Revolution. Political unrest led to an uprising to claim the presidential seat from Porfirio Díaz and give it to Francisco I. Madero who rivaled Porfirio during the election (Gonzales 140). As this uprising progressed, participants of the anti-Porfirio protest promptly escalated to using violence. The political unrest was not the sole instigator of the revolution. Multiple offenses against the lower class piled up and gave them reason to seek change for their poor circumstances. As Manuel Gonzales puts it there was “corruption at all levels of government was rampant, years of weak and ineffectual leadership encouraged the breakdown of law and order, the economy was in shambles, and social problems abounded” (Gonzales 140). The people of Mexico could only allow these issues to continue for so long, so with the anti-

Porfirio protest ablaze they took this as their opportunity to pave the way for the changes they heartily desired.

Díaz kept firm his seat of power and sought to begin fixing the pressing issues while keeping the populace at ease. Díaz' primary focus was to bring authority back to the central government and to get the country's economy back in a stable condition (Gonzales 141).

Although there were promising aspects for the Mexican citizens, after dealing with negative impact after negative impact, the citizens that were fed up with their situation chose to immigrate north to the United States, specifically the southwest. Job opportunities were easily accessible for immigrants at first due to the high demand in the agriculture field, as well as demands in mining and railroads. Notably, these three fields were all fields in which vast technological advancements were taking place.

In Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States" Zinn describes the technological advancements that developed in the United States during this time, as well as companies that dominated the American economy. Everything up to this point had been done by the power of man, but now "steam and electricity replaced human muscle, iron replaced wood, and steel replaced iron" (Zinn 234). Mining precious metals called for the high demand in laborers as "the territories of New Mexico and Arizona, where they discovered a superabundance of mineral wealth—coal, silver, and copper" (Gonzales 148). And as Zinn mentions on page 234, "electrical wire needed copper, of which 30,000 tons were produced in 1880; 500,000 tons by 1910". It is understandable that mining was a prominent way to earn a living for immigrants. In this instance copper was in high demand for the copper in electrical wires, and coal was also in high demand for railroad travel.

Zinn also speaks about companies such as J.P. Morgan and oil tycoons such as John D. Rockefeller got their start and ultimately how immense their fortunes grew. These individuals became poster boys for the term “monopoly”. Zinn quotes on pages 241 and 241 former Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer, “and hence it always has been, and until human nature is remodeled always will be true, that the wealth of a nation is in the hands of a few, while the many subsist upon the proceeds of their daily toil”. The most striking part of the quote is the mention of how “the wealth of a nation is in the hands of a few”. This remains true even in today’s economy; majority of wealth in the United States is held in a minute percentage of the population.

Mexican immigrants worked tirelessly day to day only to end up with little pay due to horrible wages. This is an example of an economic monopoly in that the upper class gains the profits while the lower class, such as the Mexican immigrants, gain none whatsoever. This results in the lower class being forced to survive on what little pay they are given. However, the rich benefit by growing richer and richer because of their embellishment of the lower class’s wages. One commonality that is share between the three major areas where immigrants found work is how intensive the work can be concerning manual labor. Mining, railroad maintenance, and harvesting crops at the end of the farming season all can be described as painful and backbreaking for the ones performing the work. And during this time in history, the ones performing this backbreaking work were mainly immigrants.

Mexican immigrants were not the only ones who envisioned themselves working in America to better their lives and the lives of their families. Immigrants from Japan also experienced working life in America under similar conditions to that of Mexican immigrants. Japanese immigrants ultimately became laborers on farms, fisherman, or became workers in

factories that had the poorest working environments imaginable. Unlike the Mexican immigrants who went out beyond the borders of the American southwest to find work, the Japanese primarily kept to the west coast states to find work. It should be noted however that upon arrival in America, the first Japanese immigrants, or as they came to be referred to as the Issei, farming and agricultural labor was not their first choice in terms of occupations.

The first area of employment that the Issei focused on was fishing. In the Monterey Bay region, the Issei became famous for their impressive feats in abalone fishing. Many individuals envied the Issei for how easily they could obtain abalone unlike any other abalone fishermen. Those who envied the Issei fishermen however aimed to push them out of the profession to free up the jobs for themselves. The Issei were ultimately pushed out of the abalone industry and were forced to find work elsewhere. It is here where they sought after work in the farmlands of the west coast. On page 92 of “The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region: A Brief History” Sandy Lydon writes, “the Issei continued to experiment and expand their niche in the region’s agriculture, while adjusting to a lesser role in fishing”.

Although they were a different ethnicity entirely, the Issei still shared many similar experiences upon immigrating to the United States. Both Japanese and Mexican immigrants had to endure with the anti-immigrant and fundamentally racist mentality that plagued the minds of countless white Americans. This anti-immigrant mentality had made its appearance prior to the Mexican and Japanese immigration during the Irish potato famine of 1845. Despite being of European descent the Irish who came to settle in the United States were looked down upon and treated inhumanely regardless of the unfortunate circumstances they were dealing with. As well as the inhumane treatment, any work that immigrants manage to obtain they were paid such a smaller amount in comparison to their non-immigrant coworkers.

One could argue that life in America was not up to par with what immigrants were expecting it to be like. Despite this, they did not return to their country of origin, because life in their home country was often no longer feasible. Had there been more sustainable opportunities in their country of origin, they would not have left originally. According to Manuel Gonzales, “life in Mexico is even more oppressive than life in the United States” (Gonzales 140). In the case of Japanese immigrants, they had no option to return to Japan even if they desired to do so. They could hardly afford to support themselves financially day to day, there was no way they could afford a boat ride back to Japan after all they sacrificed to get here. Immigrants had no other choices than to remain in the United States.

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