

HYPHENATED CITIZEN:
A BIOGRAPHY OF CLEMENTE IDAR, THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF
LABOR'S FIRST MEXICAN-AMERICAN ORGANIZER, 1918-1934

by
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THESIS APPROVAL

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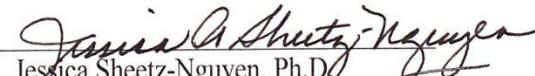
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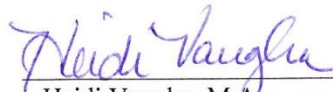
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ABSTRACT

Based on extensive primary research conducted at the University of Texas, as well as a plethora of secondary source material, this thesis explores Clemente Idar's career with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and his tireless work on behalf of Mexican nationals and Mexican-Americans in the borderlands of Texas and Northern Mexico during the early twentieth century. Originally from Laredo, Texas, and fluent in English and Spanish, Idar came from a large family of activists shaped first by the effects of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and again by the social and geographical ramifications of the Mexican Revolution. His father gained regional notoriety for his newspaper, *La Cronica*, and his involvement in the first Mexican congress, El Primer Congreso Mexicanista, in 1911. These activities exemplify the first attempt of Mexican-Americans throughout Texas to seek redress for their treatment at the hand of the Texas Rangers and the oppressive laws of corrupt local officials. As a consequence of his activism, his son gained the attention of Samuel Gompers as a potential general organizer. Gompers, the father of the American labor movement, founded the AFL in 1896 and by the outbreak of World War I, he had determined to form a labor alliance between the US and Mexico. This relationship birthed a new organization: the Pan-American Federation of Labor (PAFL), and it launched Idar's career. His ambition to quickly climb the ladder was consistently thwarted, not only by racism, but by the higher political agendas of between Mexican and American Labor, the Mexican and US governments, and the relationship between the AFL and US government. While he hoped to promote powerful and positive changes in labor and to advance citizenship rights for Mexicans & Mexican-Americans, the agendas of the higher authorities on both sides

undermined Idar's efforts. Nevertheless, Idar is deserving of scholarship, not only as the AFL's first Mexican-American organizer. His story illuminates the previously unstudied world of the everyday labor organizer with all of its triumphs and tragedies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If it takes a village to raise a child, I feel the same can be said of my thesis. Whatever scholarship I have managed to contribute within these pages, it has not been without an army of people encouraging and helping me every step of the way. Firstly, I am indebted to my committee for their advice and suggestions. My chair, Dr. Katrina Lacher, inherited my project and she took it on with great enthusiasm. Through my writing blocks and occasional breakdowns, she remained cool, calm, and encouraging. I can never thank her enough for all her hard work and patience with me. I am also grateful to Dr. Kenny Brown for all of his instruction about the importance of constructing a solid historiography for my project. I thank him for transforming me into a constructive critic of my work. As the representative for the museum studies portion of my degree, and a mentor throughout my time at UCO, I thank Heidi Vaughn for helping with this project. Ms. Vaughn has a great eye for detail and ear for storytelling. She always encouraged me to tell more of Clemente Idar's story and chapter two is the result of her sage advice. As the last member of my committee, I am indebted to Dr. Jessica Sheetz-Nguyen's for her historiography class, which prepared me to tackle this project's many different themes. Her historical research classes (co-taught with Dr. Michael Springer with Mary Vick as teaching assistant), made me a better researcher and writer. Furthermore, the opportunity to help read and edit her book, *Victorian Women, Unwed Mothers and the London Foundling Hospital*, showed me it is possible to combine labor and social history.

This project is the beneficiary of a Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities grant from the Office of Research and Grants at the University of Central Oklahoma. This \$500.00 grant funded my second research trip to the University of Texas in Austin and it also awarded me a tuition waiver of an additional \$500.00 for the fall 2012 and

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For their hospitality and help during my two research trips to the University of Texas, I would like to thank the archivists and staff at that institution's Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection for assisting my research in the Clemente Idar Personal Papers, 1875 to 1938. I would also like to thank the staff at the Briscoe Center for American History for their help in locating some hard to find Spanish language Texas newspapers. I am also indebted to Dr. Emilio Zamora, at the University of Texas, not only for his work, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, but for his correspondence over the last year with suggestions of sources I needed to examine, as well as other helpful hints.

Finally, I could not have survived this project without the love of my family and their unwavering belief in me. I thank my mother and father-in-love, Robert and Elva Diaz, for opening up their lives and hearts to me, for sharing their experiences as

Mexican-American children in Texas and Arizona during the 1950s and 1960s, and for believing I could tell Clemente Idar's story. I thank my mother and father, Steve and Karen Hogue, for learning along with me and listening to countless phone calls about my research, the development of my thesis, as well as the occasional meltdown. Most of all, I have to thank my husband, Samuel Diaz for his presence throughout this process. From going to Austin with me last summer to research in Idar's collection, to carrying dozens of inter library loan books to and from the library, I could not have finished this project without him. He loved me, not only in the good moments, but during the awful ones, too. He is my rock, my biggest fan, and my whole world. Hyphenated Citizen is dedicated to him.

NOTE TO THE READER

This thesis is formatted according to the recent eighth edition of Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*, as well as the sixteenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. For US governmental records, such as census rolls, accessed through www.ancestry.com, the author used the website's preferred citation which is consistent with *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The author consulted the *Texas Handbook Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online>), maintained by the Texas State Historical Association, for articles about the project's more obscure characters, as well as basic reference information. For each of these articles, the author used the website's preferred citation which is consistent with *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

To provide clarity, the author refers to members of the Idar family by their first names when multiple relatives are discussed simultaneously. It is also for the sake of clarity, as well as ethnic sensitivity, the use of the terms "Mexican" and "Mexican-American" appear quite frequently in the text to describe ethnicity, citizenship, and racial identity in south Texas during this period. As is consistent with published secondary sources on similar topics listed in the bibliography, the author has chosen to avoid using other terminology such as "Hispanic," or "Chicano," terms which usually describe Mexican-Americans living in New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The label, "Latino," is also not used (to avoid close word repetition) in order to better show the evolution of the Mexican-American civil rights movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s, resulting in the League of United Latin American Citizens. Where possible, the author provides birth and death dates for each important individual discussed in the thesis.

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INTRODUCTION:

The World of Clemente Idar

To tell the history of the United States is to tell the story of a nation built by immigrants; some came to the country willingly (such as the English-Americans, the first hyphenated citizens) and others did not (such as the African-American slaves). Much scholarship has been devoted to the struggle of Chinese-Americans, Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans in their adopted country during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but for Native and Mexican-Americans, they “didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.”¹ As Laura E. Gomez notes in her book, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*, hyphenated citizenship also denoted an immigrant’s social status as a second-class member of society.²

The Mexican American War (1846-8) resulted in an enormous loss of territory for Mexico, and the US gained states like California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and, most importantly for this work, Texas. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, made the people living in these areas hyphenated citizens of the United States. Although Article IX of the treaty allowed Texans to decide to which country they wished to belong, by 1849, those people who had not yet chosen automatically became US nationals.³ By law they were citizens, but their cultural identification led white Americans to label them second class citizens, and suffer similar maltreatment. The war prompted increased

¹ Laura E. Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 2. Hereafter cited: Gomez, *Manifest Destinies*.

² Gomez, *Manifest Destinies*, 2.

³ Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 66. Hereafter cited: Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*.

Anglo immigration into the area, which exacerbated racial divides.⁴ Residents of Laredo, Texas, a town on the newly defined US/Mexico border, requested guarantees from the state government to protect their property rights, but when the townspeople failed to receive a reply, they petitioned instead to remain a part of Mexico.⁵ An answer came this time: no. Soon, Laredoans found themselves subject to heavy poll taxes and other discriminatory practices designed to disenfranchise them.⁶ To make matters worse, in 1856, the Supreme Court decided in *McKinney v. Saviego*, that Article IX did not apply to Texas since “the Republic of Texas had been many years before acknowledged by the United States as existing separately and independently of Mexico.”⁷ The body also nullified Article VIII, guaranteeing the property rights of the Mexican-Americans in Texas, for the same reason.⁸ Upon its admittance into the union, the state possessed full control over its public lands and its special status precluded state officials from following federal statutes when settling land disputes; rather, local and state courts could decide individual cases. The authorities invalidated numerous land grants and deeds because they had been issued by a foreign government (Mexico), which they claimed nullified their authority. Due to their ambiguous status, Arnolando de Leon and Kenneth Stewart, both historians of Texas, argue in *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict*, most Tejanos lost their land holdings through “a combination of methods

⁴ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 83.

⁵ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 83.

⁶ Richard Griswold de Castillo and Arnolando de Leon, *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 72.

⁷ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 81.

⁸ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 81.

including litigation, chicanery, robbery, fraud, and threat.”⁹ The US Civil War (1860-65) would do little to change this racism; rather the so-called Jim Crow laws passed after Reconstruction enhanced it by codifying prejudice and segregating Mexican-Americans from white society.¹⁰ In the decades following the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, at least 150 Tejano families left their lands and properties and moved with what they could transport to the Mexican side of the new border before the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, creating new towns like Nuevo Laredo (directly across the Rio Grande from Laredo), Guadalupe, Ascension, Matamoros, Guerrero, Mier, Camargo, and Reynosa.¹¹ They would not be the last Tejanos to leave Texas and, although new boundaries could be designated with the stroke of a pen, loyalties, culture, and families would prove harder to divide over the next century.

It is into this world Clemente Idar arrived in 1883 in Laredo, as the eldest son of a Tejano father (born in Corpus Christi, Texas) and a Mexican mother (born in Mexico). Born only thirty-five years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Idar was a Mexican-American in the truest definition of the term and part of a new group of hyphenated citizens. He spent his childhood traveling between Mexico and the US. He learned from his father to organize Mexicans and Tejanos alike into groups to protect the few rights they have. His father also taught him to write about the injustice he saw toward both groups and to make others aware of such issues through the family newspaper, *La*

⁹ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 83.

¹⁰ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Sons: the Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 10. Hereafter cited: Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Sons*.

¹¹ Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 65.

Cronica. For the Idars, Mexicans and Mexican-American were united, not only through blood, but through culture. To fight for the rights of one, was to fight for the rights of all.

By 1910, the deterioration of affairs in Mexico resulted in the Mexican Revolution. Again, the arbitrary demarcation of the border could not absolutely separate US citizens in south Texas from their families and friends across the river. The Idars, like many others, supported the revolutionary cause, but began to realize their activism in Mexico caused Anglos at home to view their actions as suspicious and publicly questioned the loyalty of these Mexican-Americans. This trend only progressed with the eruption of the Great War. True patriots would fight for their country; for which nation would these hyphenated citizens fight? Chapter 1 examines the historiography of Mexican-Americans living and working along the US/Mexico border during this time and analyzes their place within the larger context of the American labor movement.

For Clemente Idar, as an American citizen of Mexican heritage working for an Anglo organization like the American Federation of Labor (AFL), it was impossible to choose sides, so he did not. He was both Mexican and American and he recognized each society would see him as belonging to the other, but he refused to let other people's debates over his identity get in the way of his work; for him, nothing had changed; to fight for one group was to fight for the other. Chapter 2 uncovers Idar's upbringing in Laredo, Texas, and his education in activism. The organizing tactics he learns from his father, Nicasio, shape the foundation of his work with the AFL. In Chapter 3, Idar joins the AFL and learns how to exploit Anglo and Mexican fears of one another to his advantage in order to achieve results beneficial to Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Anglos. To the AFL, Idar used his Mexican credentials to market himself as the perfect

go-between for the organization's efforts in Mexico and along the border, but relied on his credibility as an employee of this Anglo group to play a role in the emerging Mexican-American civil rights movement of the late 1920s and 1930s.

Samuel Gompers (1850-1924), the AFL president and the father of American labor, originally intended to keep him on staff long enough to arrange the Pan American Federation of Labor's conference in Laredo, but he could not have hired a more skillful or better prepared emissary based on his upbringing on the border in Laredo, the civic and political activism of his family, his early experience organizing Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, and his early exposure to the tactics of Mexican *mutualista* societies. His skill in organizing the event prompted Gompers to keep Idar and to use him to attract a new demographic for AFL membership. Occasionally frustrated with his inability to override the agendas of the AFL hierarchy and the US government, Idar persisted in his work. While most Anglo organizations sought to impact minority groups under their jurisdiction, Idar fought to expand the paradigm of the organization in small, but meaningful ways. Although he never received a promotion to a higher position, he maximized the AFL's outreach and utilized his background in journalism to translate and publish propaganda materials. He also advocated for the use of other suitable Spanish-language press articles, thereby promoting Mexican-American businesses, and used his position to help other Mexican-Americans enter labor organizations. When the AFL came under fire for its strict immigration policies and accusations of racism, Idar used his credentials as a respected organizer and the good treatment he received to defend the AFL against its detractors.

Chapter 4 begins with the death of Gompers in December 1924, the succession of William Green as president in 1925. The new leader of the AFL intended to follow a much less involved approach towards Mexico than his predecessor and Idar feared such a drastic change in policy might render his services useless. To keep his job, as well as any chance for advancement within the organization, Idar took advantage of an opportunity to write to Green with suggestions of what could be done with respect to Mexicans working in the United States. His gamble paid off, but not in the way Idar expected. Green, now convinced of Idar's usefulness, sent his organizer further away from the border to other states with large numbers of Mexican laborers, such as Oklahoma. This reassignment expanded Idar's jurisdiction and would limit his involvement in the emerging Mexican-American civil rights movement in Texas.

Chapter 5 examines new civil rights movement mounting in the latter half of Idar's career. As Green increasingly kept Idar away from Mexico and the border by sending him on other missions, notably to Colorado to organize Mexican sugar beet workers, Idar's frustrations began to mount. A younger generation of Mexican-American activists, many veterans of World War I, were now determined to fight for their recognition as US citizens, but refused to champion the rights of Mexicans living and working in the US. This new sentiment directly contradicted the spirit of mutualism instilled in Idar as a child. He could not understand their willingness to abandon the cause of, as Idar saw them, their brothers. This schism between Idar and the emerging movement would all but remove Idar's name from Tejano history. Idar's eventual banishment from the new civil rights group, the League of United Latin American

Citizens, serves as a continual reminder of the importance of understanding hyphenated citizens' identities in shaping American history.

CHAPTER 1

A Hyphenated Historiography

TELLING THE STORY OF CLEMENTE IDAR

To tell the story of Clemente Idar is to tell the story of the average labor organizer, but to capture his life is also to understand the world of Mexican-Americans in south Texas at the turn of the twentieth century and in the following decades. At present, little scholarship exists about the lives of the everyday labor leaders and their work, but the lives of larger figures are well known. For example, Warren Van Tine and Melvyn Dubovsky's 1987 book, *Labor Leaders in America*, features essays profiling highly visible leaders like William H. Sylvis, Terence V. Powderly, Samuel Gompers, William Green, Eugene V. Debs, William D. "Big Bill" Haywood, and, among the ladies, Rose Schneiderman. Mexican-American figures are examined even less, with the exception of Cesar Chavez. Numerous children's books tell his story to a younger audience, while Ilan Steven's 2010 *Cesar Chavez* caters to an adult demographic.

Historians have produced countless books on Anglo labor movements, such as the AFL's efforts to enact the eight hour work day; but the campaigns of Mexican-American workers to fight for fair treatment and working conditions are less chronicled. If such stories are told at all, they are usually not included among American labor histories, and are labeled as ethnic histories. During the 1960s and 1970s, at the height of the Chicano movement, historians began to piece together the stories of previous generations about their experiences as hyphenated citizens in the United States. As the population of America continued to diversify throughout the 1980s and 1990s, this scholarship and,

now in the new millennium, some old topics are being revisited. The historiography of the bracero program benefited from the recent wave of work from a new generation of scholars. Jose-Rodolfo Jacobo's 2004 *Los Braceros: Memories of Bracero Workers, 1942-1964*, Emilio Zamora's 2009 *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II* and Deborah Cohen's 2010 *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* all examine the working life of the average Mexican and Mexican-American worker from the start of World War II forward. Rodolfo F. Acuna's 2007 monograph, *Corridors of Migration: the Odyssey of Mexican Laborers, 1600-1933*, is an excellent survey of the history of Mexican labor in Arizona during this period.

This is the first project to exclusively chronicle the life and work of Clemente Idar and examines his role within the national labor movements of the US and Mexico. Although there are no published works solely about him at present, he is discussed briefly in some historical narratives about Mexican-American labor struggles and civil rights, as well as survey texts about notable figures. He appears, for example, in Matt S. Meier's *Encyclopedia of the Civil Rights Movement*, listed alphabetically, along with his brother Eduardo, sister Jovita, and father Nicasio Idar. Although these prominent family members each have an entry with minimal biographical details, the story of the Idars' activism is only told sporadically throughout the historiographical record.

This project began with a review of the Clemente N. Idar Personal Papers, 1875-1938, housed in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. The collection contains six linear feet of correspondence with various labor groups and representatives, legal documents, photos, and sparse writings by

Idar. His younger brother, Federico, also has personal papers (ranging from before his birth in 1879 until his assassination in Mexico in 1938) at the same repository. At 2.7 feet, this group of materials contains much less information about the Idar family and little personal correspondence. Some of Jovita's letters and writings to her close friend and co-founder of aid organization *La Cruz Blanca* (the White Cross), Leonor Villegas de Magnon, can be found by combing through the latter's materials at the University of Houston.¹

Most of the surviving information about the Idar family comes from Clemente's sister-in-law (the wife of his younger brother, Aquilino) Guadalupe Idar and his niece, Jovita Idar Fuentes de Lopez (the daughter of his younger sister, Elvira).² Lopez explained the fate of the majority of the family's personal papers in an interview on June 22, 1995. Nine years after his death in 1947, a fire destroyed Eduardo Idar's collection of documents, photos, and other materials in 1956. Clemente's house burned to the ground in 1964, thirty years after his passing. While Jovita Idar's widower, Bartolo Juarez, protected his wife's belongings in an old trunk, his second wife destroyed them upon Bartolo's demise.³ Lopez also explained what happened to the editions of the family's newspaper, *La Cronica*; in the 1940s, Jovita decided to place all the remaining issues in her possession with the University of Texas Library at the University of Texas in Austin.

¹ As this project is not exclusively about Jovita Idar, the author did not examine in depth her correspondence with Leonor Villegas de Magnon housed in the latter's collection at the University of Houston.

² Leonor Villegas de Magnon and Clara Lomas, *The Rebel* (Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press, 1994), 265.

³ Antonia Castaneda, ed., *Gender on the Borderlands: The Frontier's Reader* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 72. Hereafter cited: Castaneda, *Gender on the Borderlands*.

Today, they are part of the collection at the Barker History Library and the Briscoe Center for American History, both at the university.⁴

The Clemente N. Idar collection, rarely cited in published works since its 2005 accession into the archives at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, appears in the sporadic use of correspondence in the existing literature about Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. One such example is Arnoldo De Leon's *War Along the Border*. In her contribution to the work, Sonia Hernandez introduces Idar's career, but focuses more on the achievements of his sister, Jovita, with regard to improving education opportunities for minority children in Texas. The notes for the selection highlight the use of several letters from the collection spanning 1920.⁵

These examples are not the only primary sources useful in piecing together Clemente's story. Letters written to, from, or about Idar by Samuel Gompers or Frank Morrison, the president and secretary, respectively, of the AFL, appear in the published volumes of *The Samuel Gompers Papers* edited by Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino and published in 1991. These documents provide insight into how the organization viewed Idar and his efforts, as well as Idar's own periodic frustrations with his work. Leonor Villegas de Magnon's autobiography, *La Rebelde (The Rebel)* is written as third person narrative and characterizes the real political figures of the Mexican Revolution: Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Carranza, and Francisco (Pancho) Villa. She also details the roles of Nicasio's children in *La Cruz Blanca*, the equivalent to the Red Cross, which emerged out of the conflict. Magnon's reflection on Idar's work and his untimely death from diabetes illustrate the Mexican-American perception of their

⁴ Castaneda, *Gender on the Borderlands*, 72.

⁵ Items from the Clemente N. Idar Personal Papers, 1875-1938, appear on pages 200-4.

labor organizer. Until now, few scholars have utilized Magnon's autobiographical work as a historical document; rather, it is usually studied in the field of borderlands literature.

In order to construct the narrative of Clemente Idar's life, a review of secondary source material from several schools of history is necessary to give context to the items within his collection and to piece together a cohesive timeline of events. Basic historiographies of three other subjects are required to accomplish this task: the treatment and lives of Mexican-Americans in the US, the complicated diplomatic relationship between Mexico and the United States, and the American labor movement in the Progressive Era.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MEXICANS AND MEXICAN-AMERICANS IN THE US

To understand the world Idar was born into and grew up in, this project examines the history of Mexican Americans and their living and working conditions along the Mexico/US border. Additionally, it is necessary to define the racial terms used in this thesis in order to avoid confusion of groups and individuals' ethnicity, and to properly separate this ethnicity from the question of citizenship. This practice is consistent with other works about Mexican-Americans. The survey will utilize Arnoldo De Leon's definition of Anglo (a white, English-speaking, not of Mexican birth, extraction, or citizenship), Mexican (persons of Mexican birth, citizenship, and ancestry), Texan (an Anglo resident of Texas and citizen of the United States), and Tejano/a (a Mexican resident of Texas, whether born in Mexico or Texas). The term Mexican-American refers to a US born citizen of Mexican ancestry or heritage.⁶

⁶ Arnoldo De Leon. *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), xiii.

Richard Griswold Del Castillo analyzes the treaty that changed the American/Mexican border for better and for worse in his 1990 contribution, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*. Intended to be a readable account of the treaty's formation, Del Castillo also provides necessary information about the interpretation of the document by Americans, and, particularly, the state of Texas when determining citizenship. Arnolde De Leon and Kenneth L. Stewart's 1989 *Tejanos and the Numbers Game: A Socio-Historical Interpretation of the Federal Census, 1850-1900* surveys fifty years of federal census data to analyze the lives of Mexican Americans, as well as their demographic shifts. This time period begins only two years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and spans most of Nicasio Idar's lifetime. The book provides a statistical view of the world Clemente entered at birth as well as during his formative years.

The authors' follow-up work is the 1993 *Not Room Enough: Mexicans, Anglos, and Socio-Economic Change in Texas, 1850-1900*. In this book, Stewart and De Leon view the same decades through a more socio-economic lens to argue the combination of Anglo-American assertion of authority, immigration from Mexico and other US states, and the rapid shift from rural and frontier conditions to an industrialized society defined Texas by the end of the late nineteenth century and beginning of the early twentieth.⁷ Despite the increased economic opportunities modernization afforded, De Leon and Stewart note the data demonstrates the opportunities appeared to affect groups (both Anglos and Texans of Mexican ancestry) disproportionately. To account for this, the authors hypothesize it is precisely the "differences in such areas as social status,

⁷ Arnolde De Leon and Kenneth L. Stewart, *Not Room Enough: Mexicans, Anglos, and Socio-Economic Change in Texas, 1850-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), ix-x. Hereafter cited: De Leon and Stewart, *Not Room Enough*.

occupations, poverty, and literacy were consequences of the competition rather than explanations for it.”⁸

To explain these differences, Emilio Zamora, Cynthia Orozco, and Rodolfo Rocha’s 2000 submission, *Mexican Americans in Texas History: Selected Essays*, demonstrates how Mexican-Americans competed for economic advancement by working with each other. In his essay, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions of a Political Culture in Texas,” Zamora examines Mexican mutualist societies and their expansion in south Texas between the 1880s and the 1920s. Through his analysis of these organizations, Zamora asserts these *mutualista* groups gave Mexican-Americans a sense of community and collectivist ideals against Anglo racism. They would later also serve as a template for the organization of labor unions.⁹ Roberto R. Calderon’s “Union, Paz y Trabajo: Laredo’s Mexican Mutual Aid Societies, 1890s,” argues *mutualistas* were the first groups of their kind in a position to champion civil rights issues on behalf of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest and Laredo was home to a number of them.¹⁰ Indeed, Calderon’s essay is the first survey of *mutualistas* in Laredo from 1880 to 1900, with the peak of activity taking place in Idar’s formative years during the 1890s.

The authoritative work on *El Congreso Mexicanista* is Jose E. Limon’s “El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911: A Precursor to Contemporary Chicanismo.” The

⁸ De Leon and Stewart, *Not Room Enough*, xii.

⁹ Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions,” Emilio Zamora, Cynthia Orozco, and Rodolfo Rocha, eds., in *Mexican Americans in Texas History: Selected Essays* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000), 83-4. Hereafter cited: Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*.

¹⁰ Roberto R. Calderon, “Union, Paz y Trabajo: Laredo’s Mexican Mutual Aid Societies, 1890s,” in Emilio Zamora, Cynthia Orozco, and Rodolfo Rocha, eds., *Mexican Americans in Texas History: Selected Essays* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000), 63-5. Hereafter cited: Calderon, “Union, Paz y Trabajo,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*.

article appeared in *Aztlan* in 1974.¹¹ Gilberto M. Hinojosa's 1983 work, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo, Texas, 1755-1870*, is an excellent review of the history of Idar's birthplace from its inception in 1755 to 1870, not long before his father, Nicasio, moved to the area.¹² Jose A. Hernandez's essay "The Proliferation of Mutual Aid Societies in the Chicano Community and the Attempt to Integrate Them: The Primer Congreso Mexicanista de Texas," in his 1983 book, *Mutual Aid for Survival: The Case of the Mexican American*, sheds light on the work Nicasio found in organizing mutualistas in Texas, as well as his role in planning El Congreso Mexicanista in 1911. As the first gathering of Mexican-Americans, as well as Mexicans, in Texas to protest their ill treatment by Anglo society, it is necessary to understand the reasons for this event to appreciate the Harlingen Convention held sixteen years later.

Mario Garcia's 1989 book, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*, is "a study of ethnic leadership" and focuses on understanding, what Garcia calls, the Mexican-American generation."¹³ Garcia argues this new and more politically aware generation, influenced by the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War, grew between the 1930s and the 1950s and, ultimately, led to the civil rights (for Mexican-Americans) movements of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴ He models his work on author and political scientist Marvin Rintala who defined political generations as "a

¹¹ Jose E. Limon, "El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911: A Precursor to Contemporary Chicanismo," *Aztlan*, 5 (Spring, Fall, 1974). Due to its availability, the author was unable to read and analyze this source for this project.

¹² Gilberto M. Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo, Texas, 1755-1870* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), ?. Hereafter cited: Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*.

¹³ Mario Garcia, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 1. Hereafter cited: Garcia, *Mexican Americans*.

¹⁴ Garcia, *Mexican Americans*, 1.

group of human beings who have undergone the same basic historical experiences during their formative years.”¹⁵ Each successive political generation, therefore, has little choice but to respond to these influences on their lives in a political manner.¹⁶ Using this method, however, Garcia fails to take into account the first truly Mexican-American generation; the group of young men of Mexican ancestry and American birth who came of age and enlisted in World War I, as well as their wives and sisters. Without this first generation of Mexican-Americans, the generation Garcia speaks of could not have existed. An excellent and recent (2009) work on this subject is *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I* by Jose A. Ramirez. It examines the complicated feelings many Mexican-Americans harbored toward America and its government before, during, and, after the war.

The work of Benjamin Marquez, such as his article “League of United Latin American Citizens and the Politics of Ethnicity,” in Roberto Villarreal’s 1988 *Latino Empowerment*, as well as his full-length 1993 monograph *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization*, the author explains how and why some of these groups came together to form the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Marquez does mention the involvement of an Idar in the league’s foundation, but he refers only to Eduardo Idar, Clemente’s younger brother. Benjamin Haber Johnson’s *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans*, released in 2005, gives credit to both brothers for their contributions. Cynthia Orozco’s 2009 contribution to the LULAC discussion, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights*

¹⁵ Garcia, *Mexican Americans*, 3.

¹⁶ Garcia, *Mexican Americans*, 3.

Movement is a detailed and up to date account of the struggle for civil rights in Texas by Mexican-Americans. Orozco devotes her work to understanding the various groups, such as the Order of the Sons of America, to campaign for better treatment for their members. She also chronicles the fate of those organizations not inclined to join the new league. Orozco, like Johnson, acknowledges Idar's role in helping to create it. Both authors are the only LULAC historians who correctly identify Idar as a founder of the organization.

Although authors like Marquez, Haber, and Orozco chronicle the initial involvement of the Idar brothers Clemente and Eduardo in the movement, the current LULAC narrative ends there. My research on Clemente's role, however, goes beyond the existing record and reveals the frictions arising between two generations of Mexican Americans: the older group with deep ties and connections to Mexico and their Mexican heritage and a younger group born on American soil and with an American identity. Furthermore, it illuminates not only the clash between LULAC's first president Bernardo Garza, the young lawyer Alonso S. Perales and the aging Clemente, but also the aftermath of their disagreement and its resolution.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS OF THE US AND MEXICO

The second survey delves deeply into the diplomatic history between Mexico and the United States, beginning just before the end of the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz and terminating after the end of the Mexican Revolution.¹⁷ As a Mexican-American, the real life implications of the relationship between the US and Mexico affected Idar's life and, later, his career with the AFL. Howard F. Cline's *The United States and Mexico*, released for its first publication in 1953, is an excellent diplomatic history of the two countries.

¹⁷ The dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz is often referred to as the *Porfiriato*. Historians of the Mexican Revolution generally agree the conflict began in 1910 and ended in 1920.

Cline intended the book to be a volume of the American Foreign Policy Library, originally edited by Sumner Welles (1892-1961) and Donald C. McKay. As Crane Brinton, the editor of the re-released tenth anniversary edition explains, the diplomats intended each work in the series to be “something more than popular journalism and something less than specialized monographs” and written by authors “possessed of a discriminating knowledge of the bibliography of [their] subject.”¹⁸ Cline traveled throughout Mexico as a student and resided in the country periodically. As a result, Brinton, states Cline is the perfect candidate to author a book about the country as he “likes Mexico and the Mexicans...[and] has, however, a full measure of objectivity towards his subject; neither of those damning suffixes, ‘phile’ or ‘-phobe.’”¹⁹ Welles and McKay also intended for each book to be revised and updated periodically in order to give its readers accurate information. The book contains an appendix with facts about Mexico (such as population by state, region, and densities) and another with suggested items for further reading about Mexico according to subject (general histories, labor, economic, and international works). A third supplement, a bibliography of sources (both in English and Spanish), surveys US/Mexico relations published in the 1950s and 1960s.

James Cockroft’s 1983 work, *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulations and the State*, deepens the understanding of diplomatic history written by Cline by elaborating on the US’ imperialistic stronghold south of its border. The author illustrates the complex web of interests of Mexican elites, foreign investors in Mexico, and the clash between these two groups, arguing the capitalist system in place in today’s Mexico stems

¹⁸ Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1953), preface. Hereafter cited: Cline, *The United States and Mexico*.

¹⁹ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, preface.

from “a long, uneven historical process of state formulation, changes in the organization of economic production, accumulation by ruling groups of the wealth produced by the toiling masses, and internal and international conflict.”²⁰ Cockcroft divides his monograph into two parts. The first half guides the reader through the accumulation of wealth and class stratification under Spanish rule in colonial, and later, independent Mexico. The latter half develops the intricacies of money and class in the young nation and ends with the uprising of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 through its bloody turmoil and eventual conclusion in 1920. Cockcroft believes his reader cannot possibly hope to understand the late nineteenth century and early twentieth in Mexico, as well as its relations with the United States, without a clear understanding of its path from colony to country.²¹

The Mexican Revolution, the violent expression these growing pains, shaped Idar’s future, as well as those of every person living along the border. In his 1999 book, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest*, Gilbert G. Gonzalez argues the conflict, which ripped the nation apart for over ten years, failed to utterly rid Mexico of the hierarchy or corruption found during the *Porfiriato*. The US continued to protect its southern investments, which continued Mexico’s monetary subjugation written about by Cockcroft. This is not to say change did not occur at all. Gonzalez notes the shifting political alliances, revolving economic interests, and

²⁰ James Cockcroft, *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulations and the State* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 5. Hereafter cited: Cockcroft, *Mexico*.

²¹ Cockcroft, *Mexico*, 5.

the transformation of national history into factional propaganda as a consequence of the Revolution.²²

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF LABOR IN THE US AND MEXICO

A look at the history of the American labor movement, Samuel Gompers, and the American Federation of Labor complete the final historiography essential in deciphering Idar's career as a general organizer for the AFL from 1918 until his death in 1934. James R. Green's *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America*, published in 1980, marked a different approach from traditional American labor histories which usually focused primarily on its leaders such as Samuel Gompers and John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers. Green does not ignore these men, rather he focuses more on examining and analyzing the relationship of these leaders and their masses of working Americans. He argues most of the historical breakthroughs of the 1910s through the 1930s began at the bottom, but debates about labor leadership, or lack thereof, obscured such movements. This new social view of labor history, Green claims, provides a more rounded view of the subject, as well as an increasingly three dimensional view of these individuals.²³ This project also uses a combination of labor and social histories, while incorporating pieces of social and diplomatic history, to chronicle Idar's life.

This thesis relies on Marxist US labor historian Phillip S. Foner's significant multi-volume work (ten books in all) on the history of the American labor movement. Published in separate installments throughout the 1980s, this epic chronicle of the rise of

²² Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 13. Hereafter cited: Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*.

²³ Philip Dray, *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), xi. Hereafter cited: Dray, *There is Power in a Union*.

the AFL, the International Workers of the World (IWW), and the struggle between unions and big business from the end of the nineteenth century well into the twentieth. Although his is not the first series of works published on the subject, Foner's is certainly the first by a single scholar. He draws on a rich array of source material, including access to the AFL-CIO collection in the basement of the old AFL building in Washington, DC, as well as the letter books of Samuel Gompers.²⁴ Foner, and his works, are not without controversy. Acclaimed US labor historian Melvyn Dubofsky accused the author of the scholarly sin of plagiarism, arguing several passages of Foner's fourth volume came directly from Dubofsky's then unpublished dissertation.²⁵ Other historians claim Foner's citations are misleading or blatantly inaccurate. Foner, unfortunately, died in 1994 and is unable to refute these allegations.²⁶ Despite these detractors, his volumes are an excellent survey of their subject matter and provide adequate background material on the American labor movement to understand the later developments of the AFL and its Pan-American Federation of Labor (PAFL).

While Foner's first two books pre-date the period of interest (1900-24), his third, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth installments describe, in detail, the condition of American labor when Idar joined the AFL as a general organizer. In his third volume, *The Policies and Practices of the American Federation of Labor, 1900-1909*, Foner argues this decade is one of the most important periods of American labor history. During this time, the AFL forged its core values and policies and began to champion them. Simultaneously, the

²⁴ The first such work by John R. Commons and Associates in 1918 and 1932. Phillip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, vol. 7, Labor and World War I, 1914-1918* (International Publisher Co., Inc.: 1987), ix. Hereafter cited: Foner, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918*.

²⁵ Garcia, *Mexican Americans*, 1.

²⁶ Lawrence Van Gelder, "Obituaries: Philip S. Foner, Labor Historian and Professor, 84," *The New York Times*, December 15, 1994 [Accessed April 4, 2013].

Socialist Party emerged, and began to compete with the AFL for the allegiance of the working classes. Foner followed this effort with *The AFL in the Progressive Era, 1910-1915*, which explores the struggle of workers belonging to trade unions, their efforts to organize unorganized laborers, and the ability of the unions to ingratiate themselves with the working classes. During this period, tensions grew between the ruling capitalist elite and their exploited workforce and Foner brilliantly illustrates how such strain quickly translated into political actions on both sides.

As Europe became engulfed in the Great War in 1914, workers in the United States kept a watchful eye on events across the Atlantic, even as their own nation continued to manufacture war materials. In *On the Eve of America's Entrance into World War I, 1915-1916*, Foner expands on the developing conflicts of the previous volume. By 1915 and 1916, it appeared the US would likely enter the European conflict, but, public opinion on the subject remained heavily divided. Labor advocates, as Foner writes, continued to win battles at home, such as the eight hour day. Henry Ford further stirred excitement among workers with his new vehicle, the Model T, and a salary of five dollars a day. Progress in the movement was not without setbacks and workers endured arduous strikes (and, often, violence) at the steel plants of East Youngstown, the Standard Oil Strikes in Bayonne, New Jersey, and the New York Transit Strike. Pro-labor parties argued the absence of any reason to engage in a conflict on another continent when big business and its interests needed to be fought and curbed at home.

Labor and World War I, 1914-1918, the seventh installment of the series, continues with labor's debate over the US' entrance into the war. Foner begins with an analysis of the Socialist Party of America, the AFL, the IWW, and the Railroad

Brotherhoods from 1914 to 1917 and ends with the condition of American labor at the cessation of hostilities in 1918. As with the other volumes, Foner includes under-represented groups, such as African-Americans and women. Most importantly for this project, he also enumerates the importance of labor's outreach to Mexican immigrants along the US/Mexico border. Finally, Foner chronicles the efforts of the AFL from the war's end in 1918 until the death of Samuel Gompers in his ninth installment, *The T.U.E.L. to The End of the Gompers Era*. The passing of Gompers marks a turning point in the history of the American Federation of Labor and in Clemente Idar's organizing career. After businessman William Green's election as president of the AFL, the organization's attitude toward fostering labor relations between the US and Mexico transitioned into a series of polite, but ineffectual, policies. In an effort to extricate the AFL from Mexican affairs, Green redirects Idar's efforts in the United States to organize workers already in the country. He also enlisted his organizer's help with repatriating Mexican nationals back to their country of origin.

Philip Dray's more recent 2011 addition to American labor history, *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*, explores the tensions in American labor stemming from immigration and how these discussions affected skilled and unskilled labor.²⁷ He revisits the subjects covered in Foner's work and also contributes analysis for the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Although the book is 674 pages, it is inherently readable for an audience with little or no prior knowledge of the American labor movement and easily differentiates the doctrines and practices of the AFL from the IWW. Like Foner, Dray also includes immigrants from Mexico working in the Southwestern states in his discussion. He provides an in-depth examination of the ill

²⁷ Dray, *There is Power in a Union*, 4-5.

treatment of Mexican workers in Bisbee, Arizona, and, although the incident takes place before Idar begins working for the AFL, Dray's account is important to place the organizer's work in context.

Foner's and Dray's discussion of the immigration of Mexican nationals into the United States is a welcome update to the historiography of American labor. An under-represented minority, traditional labor histories chronicled only the role of Italian, German, Polish, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants in the labor market, but largely ignored the influx of newcomers from the US' southern border. The existing historiography of American labor does little to fully integrate the competition for Mexican labor between the AFL and the IWW into the larger labor narrative. Few works exist on the topic and they begin to appear in the 1960s and 1970s during the Chicano civil rights movement. Even less appear on Samuel Gompers' Pan American Federation of Labor (PAFL).

Sinclair Snow's 1964 *Pan American Federation of Labor* is the only existing monograph on the history of the PAFL. In his introduction, Snow lamented the obscurity of works on the matter. Published in Moscow in 1929, only two years after what would be the last PAFL conference, Soviet author, Ya. Vilenkin, wrote a one hundred page pamphlet entitled *Panamerikanskaya federatsiya truda*, which dissected the organization from the Soviet point of view and condemned it as an instrument of US imperialism and capitalism to destabilize or control Latin America. Interestingly, Vilenkin predicted the PAFL would not survive and based his findings on the published proceedings of PAFL congresses from 1918 to 1927.²⁸ For his study, Snow does not dissect Gompers'

²⁸ Sinclair Snow, *The Pan American Federation of Labor* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1964), v. Hereafter cited: Snow, *The Pan American Federation of Labor*.

motivations in the group's formation, but concludes its outcome pales in relation to Gompers' "sincere effort to aid the people of Latin America."²⁹ He also argues the lack of published works on the history of labor relations between the US and Latin America is the result of a lack of available research materials on the topic. Snow is not wrong in this opinion. He relied on proceedings of the PAFL conferences, the papers of notable AFL leaders such as Samuel Gompers, William Green, John Murray, and Santiago Iglesias to write his work. These holdings are housed at the Bancroft Library, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the files of the AFL-CIO. He also examined the collections of Woodrow Wilson and George Creel, as well as State Department records. Other useful materials, as the author notes, may be found further afield in Puerto Rico or in other repositories in Mexico.³⁰ Personal accounts of the PAFL, such as Idar's, were unavailable when Snow published his work, but humanize this alliance between the US and its Latin American neighbors.

In 1965, one year after Snow's groundbreaking study, Charles Toth published "The Pan American Federation of Labor: Its Political Nature," in *The Western Political Quarterly*. Taking a more positive view of Gompers in his article, Toth argues the primary purpose for the formation of the PAFL was to develop Latin America's trade union movement, but became a secondary motivation only when political problems arose between countries with opposing views of the role of labor in government. Toth argues the PAFL was "only in a sense" the product of the Great War.³¹ Harvey Levenstein's

²⁹ Snow, *Pan American Federation of Labor*, vi-vii.

³⁰ Snow, *The Pan American Federation of Labor*, vi-vii.

³¹ Charles Toth, "The Pan American Federation of Labor: Its Political Nature," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (September 1965), 615. Hereafter cited: "The Pan American Federation of Labor: Its Political Nature."

“The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s: An Experiment in Labor Diplomacy,” published in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* in 1968, takes a far more critical view of Gompers and his machinations in forming the PAFL, arguing the aging labor leader meant the organization only as a means to ease, or hopefully completely halt, the immigration of unskilled Mexicans into the US labor market after the end of the Great War.³²

Gregg Andrews’ *Shoulder to Shoulder?: The American Federation of Labor, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1924*, released in 1991, not only examines the PAFL, but the AFL’s role throughout the Mexican Revolution until the death of Samuel Gompers in 1924. Andrews gives an impressive historiography of US involvement in the affairs of Mexican labor in his introduction, including a review of both Snow and Foner. He argues Snow is critical of the AFL’s role in Mexican affairs and directly attributes the US government’s secret funding of the PAFL to sway Mexico from neutrality to the side of the Allies in the Great War. The conflict’s end “made [it] possible [to] return to the original goal of a federation of Pan-American labor organizations which would counteract organized capital in the Western Hemisphere.”³³ While Andrews labels Snow’s thesis critical of Gompers and the AFL, a number of other scholars share the same opinion.³⁴ Snow’s thesis, therefore, is perhaps more realistic of the options facing the aging labor leader and his organization than Andrews allows.

³² Harvey Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s: An Experiment in Labor Diplomacy,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 48, No. 2 (May 1968), 207. Hereafter cited: Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s: An Experiment in Labor Diplomacy.”

³³ Gregg Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder? The American Federation of Labor, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution, 1910 – 1924* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 7. Hereafter cited: Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?*

³⁴ Andrews references the work of Jack Scott and Eric R. Wolf. Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?* 9-10.

Andrews views Foner's depiction of Gompers, in his study of the American labor movement in Latin America, as completely committed to keeping Mexico within the reach and influence of the United States. This goal, Andrews surmises, explains the American Federation of Labor's response to the Mexican Revolution.³⁵

Andrews does not say whether he agrees with Foner. The monograph has an impressive selection of secondary materials, such as books, articles, and theses. Unfortunately, the bibliography lacks an equally impressive supply of primary sources. Andrews, like other historians, utilizes the AFL and State Department records, as well as English language newspapers. For a book about the relationship between the AFL and Mexican labor, Andrews' failure to utilize any collections in Mexican repositories or any Spanish language newspapers, even those based along the US/Mexican border, is regrettable. This oversight, however, does not render the work unusable; on the contrary, Andrews' US-centric efforts provide a larger context for this project.

Emilio Zamora's *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, published in 1993, is perhaps the most detailed secondary work on Clemente Idar's career. Inspired by a lack of scholarship on the self-organization of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans during the early 1900s in Texas, Zamora closes this gap in the historiography. He argues a blending of social necessity (like civil rights issues) and cultural traditions (such as *mutalista* groups) created communities of displaced Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans who actively participated in bettering their situations.³⁶ He criticizes the labor history of the state conducted by Ruth Allen for its characterization of Mexican labor as impossible

³⁵ Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?* 9.

³⁶ Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 4-5. Hereafter cited: Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*.

to organize, prone to breaking strikes, and the sole cause of “disunity among the working class in the state.”³⁷ Allen’s emphasis on Anglo unions, without analyzing existing minority efforts for representation, such as *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, also renders her survey fatally flawed. Zamora suggests several possible reasons for such omissions by scholars, including their failure to criticize biased source material (records left by employers in favor of cheap labor from Mexico), their lack of Spanish language materials in their research, and the presupposed notion immigrant Mexicans “were generally content with their relatively improved condition in the United States and were disinterested in the more modern ways of industrial struggle.”³⁸ The findings of this author’s research support Zamora’s thesis.

For Zamora, overlooking valuable archival material in repositories around Texas directly contributes to a lack of understanding about the world in which Mexican-Americans found themselves at the turn of the twentieth century.³⁹ His monograph, consequently, is full of primary sources. He utilizes the papers of Ruth Allen (held at the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas in Austin), the Carl B. Brannin Papers (the Labor Archives in the University of Texas at Arlington), Ricardo Flores Magon Papers (Department of State Records held at the Federal Records Center in Fort Worth, Texas and the Silvestre Terrazas Collection at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley), and the Simon E. Dominguez Letter Press, 1904-25 (the Barker Texas History Center at the University of Texas in Austin). Zamora, like Foner and other authors, uses the archives of the AFL-CIO (the Samuel Gompers Papers

³⁷ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, 3.

³⁸ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, 4.

³⁹ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, 4.

and the William Green Papers) in Washington, DC. Unlike Andrews, he includes collections in Mexican institutions, such as the Venustiano Carranza Papers at the Centro de Estudios de Historia de Mexico in Mexico City, and relies on information in Spanish language newspapers.

Zamora's work is invaluable to this study precisely because he *does not* use the Clemente Idar Personal Papers, 1875-1938. His information about Idar's career comes from Laredo newspapers (*The Borderland of Two Republics*, 1906; *La Cronica*, 1910-15; *El Defensor del Obrero*, 1905-7; *El Democrata Fronterizo*, 1910-15; *Evolucion*, 1918; and the *Laredo Times*, 1905-10), as well as periodicals from Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Dallas, and Mexico City. He also isolates material about or by Idar in the Texas State Federation of Labor (TSFL) records. As well as these valuable primary sources, Zamora surveys a lengthy selection of theses, dissertations, books, and articles. Such a loft bibliography would require more time to find, read, and analyze than this project allows. He notes that more research is required to determine whether Idar's "involvement in labor politics represented yet another strategy to incorporate Mexicans as voters" with regard to Idar's participation in the politics of the Texas State Federation of Labor (TSFL), as well as his role in helping to organize local elections.⁴⁰

Zaragoza Vargas' 2005 work, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America*, is a valuable contribution to the history of Mexican-American labor. Vargas illuminates, firstly, the struggles of the minority group to attain political, social, and economic rights during the years between the start of the Great Depression and World War II. He asserts this initial foundation, as well as the grievances of the postwar years, contributed to the potency of the 1960s' Chicano

⁴⁰ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, 180.

movement. As the author notes, scholars largely ignored the subject of Mexican-American workers and the beginning of their initial labor movement in the 1930s. Like other labor historians studying “labor upheavals” with Anglos, African-Americans, and women, Vargas attempts to find answers to similar questions.⁴¹ What are these workers’ grievances? Do these change over time? What strategies do they use? In particular, he asks “What was the significance of racial, ethnic, and national identity as a social and cultural force in mobilizing class consciousness and in establishing organizing tactics among Mexican workers?”⁴² Existing works such as *Cannery Workers, Cannery Lives* by Vicki Ruiz, *Bitter Harvest* by Cletus Daniel, and *Dark Sweat, White Gold* by Devra Weber explore unionization among these workers only in California. Vargas’ book, instead, surveys Mexican-Americans living in multiple states, such as Texas, Arizona, California, New Mexico, Wyoming, and Nebraska.⁴³ Most critically for this study, Vargas devotes a copious amount of space to the organizing efforts of Clemente Idar with beet workers in Colorado at the behest of the American Federation of Labor from 1930 to 1934. These years are the last of Idar’s career and are scarcely documented in secondary literature. The Clemente Idar Personal Papers at the Benson Latin American Collection encompass a great deal of primary material from this last assignment, such as weekly reports to his superiors, and Vargas’ monograph provides context for these documents.

CONCLUSION

⁴¹ Vargas references Robin D.G. Kelley, Elizabeth Faue, Dolores Janiewski, Lizabeth Cohen, Gary Gerstle, Michael Honey, and Robert Korstadt. Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6. Hereafter cited: Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*.

⁴² Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, 6.

⁴³ Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, 6.

The rationale for this thesis is based on a thorough historiographical review of the literature and available primary sources. By consulting his collection, as well as Samuel Gompers' published documents, and newspaper articles, it is possible to construct the basic timeline of Clemente Idar's life. Examining historiographies about the lives and treatment of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the US, the diplomatic relations between the Mexico and the US, as well as the labor movements in both countries, add another layer to the narrative. Although further future work is needed on the subject, this thesis serves as a map to achieve such a goal.

CHAPTER 2

“The Mexican in Blue Overalls”: Railroads, Racism, & Revolution

Between 1850 and 1880, Laredo’s population rose slowly from 1,173 to 3,811 inhabitants. With the arrival of the railroads, between 1880 and 1890, the population exploded to 11,319 people. Other border towns with railroads experienced similar growth; meanwhile, deeper into Texas, the number of San Antonio’s citizens almost doubled.¹ Four railroads from Mexico and the US met in Laredo. The *Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico*, an American-built line, reached into central Mexico as part of Porfirio Diaz’s program to modernize his country. The Rio Grande and Eagle Pass joined Laredo with northern Mexico. While the Texas-Mexican began in Corpus Christi, the International and Great Northern connected Laredo with cities like San Antonio and St. Louis. The meeting of the Texas-Mexican and Mexican National lines in November 1881 diverted goods from Matamoros and Brownsville and, instead, sparked flourishing trade between Laredo and Corpus Christi. The International and Great Northern lines arrived in Laredo in December and, in 1882, the Rio Grande and Eagle Pass came to town.²

Besides locomotives, Laredo’s other attributes brought more new arrivals. In the 1890s, the discovery of small coal deposits attracted the unemployed. A steel bridge connecting Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, the US and Mexico, replaced the existing ferry and facilitated commerce. Electric trams downtown eased the hustle and bustle of

¹ This increase in population also occurred in other cities, such as Los Angeles, where the number of inhabitants almost quadrupled due to the arrival of the railroads. Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 98.

² Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 118.

everyday life.³ The San Agustin Plaza formed the center of town, immediately surrounded by the homes of Laredo's most prominent and influential citizens and Spanish-speaking barrios formed the outskirts.⁴ Despite the identification of seventy-five percent of the population as Mexican in 1890, residential segregation dominated the town by 1900.⁵ Two spheres developed, Anglo and Mexican-American, and the population continued to climb to 14,855 residents in 1910.⁶

The railroads brought Nicasio Idar to Laredo in 1880.⁷ Born in Point Isabel, Texas, on December 11 or 14, 1855, to Manuel and Eleuteria Espinoza Idar, he received an education in Corpus Christi, before traveling to San Luis Potosi and Nuevo Laredo. There, Nicasio worked laying new tracks and, later, travelled across the border organizing unions for railroad workers.⁸ While organizing in Mexico, Nicasio met and married Jovita Vivero in 1882.⁹ Nicasio continued to travel throughout Mexico and Texas as a union organizer with his teenaged bride accompanying him. By spring 1883, Jovita

³ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 119.

⁴ Gibson, *Jovita Idar* (Bear, DE: Mitchell Lane, 2002), 39. Hereafter cited: Gibson, *Jovita Idar*. In her article, "IDAR, NICASIO," in the *Handbook of Texas Online*, Teresa Palomo Acosta also notes Idar's occupations as an assistant city marshal and justice of the peace in Laredo.

⁵ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 67-8.

⁶ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 119.

⁷ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 11.

⁸ Teresa Palomo Acosta, "IDAR, NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fig02>), accessed February 10, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Acosta, "IDAR, NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas History Online*; Finding Aid, Federico Idar and Family Papers, 1879-1938, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

⁹ United States Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900. The author accessed this information on March 3, 2013 courtesy of www.ancestry.com. This website provides further information for locating the physical copy of the census record: Census Place: Laredo, Ward 3, Webb, Texas; Roll 1678; Page 1A; Enumeration District: 0110; FHL microfilm.

became pregnant with their first child and the couple returned to Laredo.¹⁰ In addition to his work with railroad unions, Nicasio found employment as an assistant city marshal, as well as a justice of the peace.¹¹ On November 11, 1893, Nicasio and Jovita welcomed their first child, Clemente Nicasio Idar.¹² More children quickly followed. Clemente's sister Jovita, named for their mother, followed in 1885, Eduardo on July 27, 1887, and Elvira in 1892.¹³ Their only child born in Mexico, Federico Idar, was born in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon on May 2, 1893.¹⁴ Jose followed in 1896, as did Moises in 1901, Juvencio in 1903, Lola in 1904, and, lastly, Aquilino in 1905.¹⁵

Both Nicasio and Jovita emphasized the importance of their children's education. Their daughters, as well as their sons, learned to read, write, and to discuss the political issues and current events of the day.¹⁶ Clemente attended Laredo's Lydia Patterson Institute through the fifth grade. Afterwards, he continued to learn by reading and

¹⁰ Juan Gonzalez and Joseph Torres, *News for all the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American People* (London: Verso, 2011), 221. Hereafter cited: Gonzalez and Torres, *News for all the People*.

¹¹ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 11.

¹² Cynthia E. Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffd04>), accessed February 12, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹³ Nancy Baker Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffd03>), accessed February 12, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online*; Orozco, "IDAR, EDUARDO," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffd05>), accessed February 12, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Orozco, "IDAR, EDUARDO," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 265.

¹⁴ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 263-4.

¹⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910. The author accessed this information on March 3, 2013, courtesy of www.ancestry.com. This website provides further information for locating the physical copy of the census record: Census Place: Laredo Ward 3, Webb, Texas; Roll: T624_1599; Page 3B; Enumeration District: 0148; FHL Microfilm: 1375612.

¹⁶ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 14.

studying newspapers.¹⁷ Jovita attended the Methodist Holding Institute in Laredo and earned her teaching certificate in 1903, before leaving for the town of Ojuelos to teach at a small school.¹⁸ She also worked as a census taker in Laredo during the 1910 census to make sure all Tejanos were accurately counted and recorded.¹⁹

The majority of Mexicans living across the Rio Grande in Laredo came from the agricultural, urban, and industrial working classes; many inhabitants sought only seasonal work, moving with the harvest.²⁰ Along with Mexican-American Tejanos, they formed mutual aid societies, or *mutualistas*, to band together from the racial discrimination and maltreatment of Anglo Texans. These organizations resulted from a mix of Catholic groups, called *cofradías*, and Mexican trade guilds.²¹ Each trade or profession established its own group with officers and, often, a constitution. The dues of each member served as a sort of “spiritual insurance,” serving as payment for funeral expenses, last rites, and mass. Membership, furthermore, denoted respectability and piety in the local community.²² Mexico’s 1857 constitution, adopted on its independence from Spain, also gave workers the right to associate and, by the 1860s, numerous groups emerged.²³ As Mexico entered the Industrial Revolution, many of the hand crafting trades disappeared and newly unemployed artisans sought to protect their remaining social standing and

¹⁷ Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹⁸ Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹⁹ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 13. Gibson also notes Idar continued to work as a census taker after her marriage and move to San Antonio. She worked in four census counts from 1910 to 1940.

²⁰ Calderon, “Union, Paz y Trabajo,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 68.

²¹ Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 31. Hereafter cited: Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*.

²² Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*, 30-1.

²³ Calderon, “Union, Paz y Trabajo,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 65.

economic interests.²⁴ The economy continued to develop and by the latter half of the nineteenth century (1870s and 1880s), mutual aid groups began championing the needs and grievances of laborers involved in mining and railroad construction.²⁵ It is this version of the *mutualistas* which survived and expanded across the border into Texas.²⁶

Thirteen Mexican mutual aid societies established themselves in Laredo between 1880 and 1900 for the benefit of Mexicans and Tejanos of Mexican ancestry and American citizenship.²⁷ The *Sociedad Union Mejicana*, the *Club Azul Independiente Mejico-Tejano*, as well as the *Sociedad Union Democratica* were the first *mutualista* societies in Laredo, Texas. The *Sociedad de Obreros Igualdad y Progreso*, the only organization that continued its existence into the 1890s, claimed thirty-two charter members (all Mexican citizens). These founders established ties with sister groups in Mexico and promoted the interests of the working-class. The activities of the *mutualistas* were not limited only to men. Women could choose membership in four clubs with both married and single members and, therefore, could voice their political opinions more freely than most of their Anglo counterparts.²⁸ Whatever the individual group, the core values of the whole remained the same: reciprocity, fraternity, loyalty, and altruism. These organizations offered their members economic benefits in time of crisis, such as death or prolonged illness. They could act as an employment agency or provide legal aid.

²⁴ Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 84.

²⁵ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 67.

²⁶ Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 84.

²⁷ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 68. Calderon also notes on pages 69-70 the emergence of other *mutualistas* in San Antonio (*Sociedad Benevolencia Mexicana*, 1875) and Corpus Christi (*Club Reciprico*, 1873). Nicasio Idar, a native of the latter city, would have been aware of these organizations.

²⁸ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 68-9.

Education proved essential to these clubs and they offered their constituents night classes at schools for working adults, newspapers, and libraries. They even established private primary schools for members' children.²⁹ The *mutualistas* of San Benito decided, for the good of their community, to admit all school aged children, regardless of a family's inability to pay the necessary fees.³⁰ These groups' emphasis on ensuring the survival and prosperity of whole communities, as well as avoiding a "narrow self-help outlook" would later inform Clemente's organizing abilities during his work for the AFL.³¹

About 1894, Nicasio Idar joined the Independent Club, or *el Club Independiente*, which brought together 1,350 Republicans and Democrats in ten months.³² Membership was not easy to obtain. Each group insisted a potential candidate meet rigid eligibility requirements, such as a reputation for being an upstanding citizenship in the local town. Engaging in irresponsible behavior, such as neglecting one's family responsibilities, would prohibit admittance. The applicant required a character reference from an existing member, who acted as a sponsor. A committee reviewed the application before placing the matter before the membership. Without a unanimous vote, there could be no entrance. Once a member, these standards still applied and members could be thrown out for slander or defamation against another member or the group as a whole. A formal grievance process, including a jury of five to ten members, existed to mediate between feuding brothers. To prevent such disputes, mutual aid societies barred any use of foul

²⁹ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 66.

³⁰ Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 93.

³¹ Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 84.

³² Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 71-2.

language and placed time limits on debates or presentations made before the membership.³³

Little information about the *mutualistas* specific contributions to Mexican-American communities survives, but Spanish-language newspaper sources verify these groups hosted a variety of activities for their communities, such as plays, music recitals, as well as celebrations on patriotic holidays. They also took part in the political process by endorsing the candidates of local races and urging their members to vote for their preferred choice. Tejanos, furthermore, urged Mexican nationals to become American citizens in order to vote.³⁴ Cooperation between Mexican and US *mutualistas*, like those in Nuevo Laredo and Laredo, made it possible to jointly sponsor celebrations such as *fiestas patrias*.³⁵ These Laredoan groups' power came to a climax in the 1890s, however, it is probable Idar's early exposure to these clubs through his father, as well as their tactics and ideology, shaped his ability to organize Mexicans and Mexican-Americans and to understand their grievances.³⁶ Indeed, the AFL attempted to open the *Sociedad de Conductores y Obreros Unidos* under its direction in Laredo, but the group broke away and operated autonomously among the other *mutualistas*.³⁷ The *Sociedad Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez* participated in celebrations for the first anniversary of Laredo's *Union Obrera Federada* (Federal Labor Union for railroad workers) No. 11,953, also affiliated

³³ Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 93-4.

³⁴ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 66.

³⁵ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 75.

³⁶ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 63 and 77. On page 74, Calderon lists recruitment of new members among the many tactics of the *mutualistas*. The benefits of "mutual support" resonated with poor workers, in particular.

³⁷ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 69.

with the AFL, in 1906.³⁸ Jose Maria Mora, a local labor leader, a socialist, and a member of the No. 11,953, wrote extensively urging unity among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in local publications and helped to organize railroad strikes between 1905 and 1907.³⁹ By the 1920s and 1930s, more of these organizations existed in Texas than Mexico.⁴⁰

By the mid-1890s, the Idar family became permanent residents of Laredo, Texas, once again.⁴¹ With a minority white population, the town was home to a plethora of Spanish-language newspapers such as *El Coreo de Laredo (The Laredo Mail)* and *El Democrata Fronterizo (The Frontier Democrat)* both published by Justo Cardenas, a local figure.⁴² In 1895, Nicasio Idar decided to open his own newspaper, *La Cronica*. He enlisted the help of his son, Clemente, as well as his daughter, Jovita, who had grown frustrated with her teaching career because of the lack of necessary materials and terrible conditions.⁴³ After his initial apprenticeship with his family's business (1897-1902), Eduardo also joined the staff of the *San Benito Light* (1911-12) and Brownsville's *Herald* (1912-13), although he continued to write editorials for *La Cronica* until his father's death in 1914.⁴⁴ Clemente and Jovita edited the newspaper under their father's direction,

³⁸ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 72.

³⁹ Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 98.

⁴⁰ Calderon, "Union, Paz y Trabajo," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 69.

⁴¹ Gonzalez and Torres, *News for all the People*, 221-4.

⁴² Gonzalez and Torres, *News for all the People*, 221-4.

⁴³ Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁴⁴ Orozco, "IDAR, EDUARDO," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

while Eduardo traveled the lower Rio Grande Valley as a correspondent.⁴⁵ Jovita often wrote under the pseudonym “A.V. Negra,” which phonetically translated in Spanish to “black bird.”⁴⁶

In 1910, Nicasio became the owner and publisher, as well as the editor, of his newspaper.⁴⁷ As other periodicals covered the emerging crisis in Mexico that would be known to history as the Mexican Revolution, *La Cronica* also kept its readership informed of events on both sides of the border and invited contributors, such as Sara Estela Ramirez, the most popular female writer in south Texas and a close friend of the exiled Mexican revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magon, to write for the paper. Ramirez would go on to join Magon’s Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) and author two periodicals of her own: *La Corregidora* (*The Corrector*) and *Aurora* (*Dawn*).⁴⁸ *La Cronica* devoted itself to speaking against the cruel treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in south Texas and chronicling abuses as they occurred. In the summer of 1910, Jovita wrote a scathing editorial denouncing the torture and murder of a young Mexican named Antonio Rodriguez. Rodriguez stood accused of killing a white American woman on a ranch near Rocksprings, Texas, and awaited his trial in the local jail until an angry mob of white men dragged him from his cell. The men then tied the youth to a tree and set him aflame. The editors of *La Cronica* splashed the horrific story, entitled “Barbarism,” across the front page denouncing both the sheriff’s deputies and the mob for their roles in the incident and recalling the awful scene, “The crowd cheered when the flames engulfed

⁴⁵ Gonzalez and Torres, *News for all the People*, 221-4.

⁴⁶ Castaneda, *Gender on the Borderlands*, 63.

⁴⁷ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 19; Acosta, “IDAR, NICASIO,” *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁴⁸ Gonzalez and Torres, *News for all the People*, 221-4.

his contorted body...they did not even turn away at the smell of his burning flesh.”⁴⁹

Such horrific violence was not unique to the Mexican-American community and Jovita’s African-American friend and activist, Ida Wells Barnett, also protested the mistreatment of Americans of Mexican and African heritage.⁵⁰

For many Anglos, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans ranked racially below Indians and only slightly higher than blacks in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁵¹ Whites, furthermore, neglected to educate themselves about the sociological or historical reasons for the living and working conditions of most immigrants from Mexico. A report issued by the United States Immigration Commission in 1911 attributed them to the newcomers’ lack of “ambition and thrift.”⁵² The findings also indicated they “tend to require public charity, are of low intelligence, do not value education, are criminally inclined, and do not assimilate as other ethnic groups.”⁵³ In short, the average Mexican was “less desirable as a citizen than as a laborer.”⁵⁴ The term “Mexican,” widely referred not only to immigrants, but also to American citizens of Mexican ancestry. Between 1900 and 1910, the combined population of both groups grew from 400,000 to 640,000. Sixty thousand additional Mexicans crossed the border every year at El Paso, Texas, from 1902

⁴⁹ Gonzalez and Torres, *News for all the People*, 221-4.

⁵⁰ Sonia Hernandez, “Women’s Labor and Activism in the Greater Mexican Borderlands, 1910-1930,” in Arnoldo De Leon, ed., *War Along the Border: The Mexican Revolution and Tejano Communities* (Houston: University of Houston – Center for Mexican American Studies, 2012), 182. Hereafter cited: Hernandez, “Women’s Labor and Activism,” in *War Along the Border*.

⁵¹ David J. Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 224. Hereafter cited: Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land*.

⁵² Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land*, 224.

⁵³ Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land*, 224.

⁵⁴ Weber, *Foreigners in their Native Land*, 224.

to 1907. Other border towns witnessed similar patterns.⁵⁵ In an attempt to curb climbing numbers, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1907, which forced all immigrants to the US to pass through established ports of entry and to submit to bodily inspections. Only after an individual endured this process would they receive legal permission to enter the country.⁵⁶

One Mexican immigrant, Carlos Ruiz, recalled his humiliating experience of forcible fumigation at the border and described the horrific and embarrassing ordeal to John Murray, an AFL official. Ruiz claimed Mexico would never treat its guests in such a discourteous manner. To illustrate his point, he took Murray to a local store in the Anglo part of town and bought him a postcard depicting triumphant Texas Rangers on horseback with lariats tied to three dead Mexicans. Such a souvenir clearly placed no value in the life of a Mexican. Next, Ruiz took Murray to a bookstore in the Mexican neighborhood. To his amazement, Murray found works by Poe, Spencer, Darwin, Kropotkin, and Marx at accommodating prices. Ruiz noticed his companion's surprise, saying:

It is the Mexican in blue overalls, the labor leader, as you call him, that supports these libraries of world-wide knowledge and passes all that he learns to his brothers who may not be able to read. And more, those are the books read not only by Mexicans, but by organized labor throughout Latin America.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Paul Hart, "Beyond Borders: Causes and Consequences of the Mexican Revolution," in Arnolfo De Leon, *War Along the Border: The Mexican Revolution and Tejano Communities* (Houston, TX: University of Houston – Center for Mexican American Studies, 2012), 15. Hereafter cited: Hart, "Beyond Borders: Causes and Consequences of the Mexican Revolution," in *War Along the Border*.

⁵⁶ Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 1. Hereafter cited: Hernandez, *Migra!*

⁵⁷ Quoted in Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions of a Political Culture in Texas," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 87. No date is provided for the conversation; however, it is likely the conversation took place after 1918 and the official founding of the Pan American Federation of Labor.

This description is likely how Nicasio and, later Clemente, saw himself in his work with *mutualistas*, as well as his role as a father to children who would become productive citizens. If the larger white society in Texas thought little of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, Nicasio would do his utmost to alleviate this stereotype by educating his children and his people on both sides of the border.

Like his sister, Clemente wrote scathing editorials about the lynchings of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans and discrimination towards them in the workplace and schoolhouse. In the February 2, 1911, issue of *La Cronica* Idar called his compatriots to stand up and to band together in the First Mexican Congress, or *El Congreso Mexicanista*.⁵⁸ He reminded his readership that “Texas Mexicans have produced with the sweat of their brow the bountiful agricultural wealth known throughout the country, and in recompense for this they have been put to work as *peones* on the land of their forefathers.”⁵⁹ Although a proud US citizen, Idar could not abandon his “Mexicanist identity.”⁶⁰ He urged others like him to aid Mexican newcomers to the country for “We are in the same situation,” and reminded his less sympathetic readers the exploitation resulting from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo affected them all equally in the eyes of the Anglos.⁶¹ The first such meeting in Mexican-American history, and fifty years before

⁵⁸ Jose A. Hernandez, “The Proliferation of Mutual Aid Societies in the Chicano Community and the Attempt to Integrate Them: The Primer Congreso Mexicanista de Texas,” in Jose A. Hernandez, ed., *Mutual Aid for Survival: The Case of the Mexican American* (Malabar, Fla: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1983), 61.

⁵⁹ Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 88.

⁶⁰ Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 88.

⁶¹ Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 88.

the Chicano movement in the 1960s, groups from across Texas met to discuss how best to come together to fight for their civil rights.⁶²

El Congreso Mexicanista met in Laredo from September 14-22, 1911.⁶³ The Idars timed the start of the congress to coincide with the festivities of el Diez y Seis de Septiembre, Mexican Independence Day.⁶⁴ Nicasio greeted the delegates as, “the apostles of goodness, the propagandists of unity, the workers of culture, the soldiers of progress, the defenders of the right and justice of our people.”⁶⁵ This hopeful tone soon subsided into anger at the loss of land, the exploitation of laborers, as well as rampant violence against those in legal custody.⁶⁶ Forty-three years before the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregated American schools on May 17, 1954, promoting equal and inclusive education for Hispanic students also proved to be an important issue for the delegates, who argued the current system destroyed Tejano culture and language, as well as perpetrated systematic discrimination from an early age.⁶⁷ The congress included women and championed the need for women’s groups to expand the movement.⁶⁸ This

⁶² Calderon, “Union, Paz y Trabajo,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 77. Acosta, “LA CRONICA,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eel06>), accessed February 12, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Acosta, “LA CRONICA,” *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁶³ Acosta, “IDAR, NICASIO,” *Handbook of Texas History Online*.

⁶⁴ Acosta, “CONGRESO MEXICANISTA,” *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁶⁵ Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 89.

⁶⁶ Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 89.

⁶⁷ Acosta, “LA CRONICA,” *Handbook of Texas History Online*.

⁶⁸ Acosta, “IDAR, NICASIO,” *Handbook of Texas History Online*.

included women from across the border in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.⁶⁹ For many ladies, this meeting was their first political involvement.⁷⁰ A month after the conference, Jovita led the formation of the first Hispanic feminist civil rights group in the United States, *La Liga Femenil* (the League of Mexican Women) on October 15, 1911.⁷¹ The members elected her their president and voted to devote their primary attentions to improving the education of impoverished children.⁷² Nicasio headed the male equivalent, *el Gran Liga* (the Great League). Both the men and women took “Por la Raza y Para la Raza” (“for the race and by the race”) for their organizations’ mottos.⁷³ He appealed to both groups saying:

We that have been born in this country understand our responsibilities as citizens, but we also feel a profound love for and the most exalted interest in our mother race because we are by destiny her progeny. This nationality and this deep love for the Mexican race runs like blood through our veins.⁷⁴

After the congress, Idar encouraged the two groups to foster partnerships between Tejanos and Mexican immigrants to fight mistreatment and discrimination.

The Mexican Revolution had a tremendous impact on Laredo. The fighting was so close the townspeople stood on their rooftops to watch the battles in Nuevo Laredo,

⁶⁹ Teresa Palomo Acosta, "CONGRESO MEXICANISTA," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vecyk>), accessed February 12, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Acosta, "CONGRESO MEXICANISTA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁷⁰ Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁷¹ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 43.

⁷² Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁷³ Acosta, "CONGRESO MEXICANISTA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁷⁴ Zamora, "Mutualist and Mexicanist Expressions," in *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 88-9.

just across the Rio Grande.⁷⁵ Like many Laredoans, the Idars, including Clemente, fervently supported Constitutionalism and the “First Chief,” Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920).⁷⁶ *La Cruz Blanca* (the White Cross), the equivalent of the Red Cross, emerged out of the chaos caused by the Mexican Revolution and is an accurate representation of the loyalties held by people on both sides of the border, regardless of political boundaries. Its founder, Leonor Villegas de Magnon, a close friend of the Idar family, was born in Nuevo Laredo to Helosia and Joaquin Villegas in 1876. She received her formal education in the US and married Adolpho Magnon, an American citizen, in 1901. The newlyweds had three children and continued to live in Nuevo Leon. The violent outbursts of the revolution forced Magnon’s father to move to Nuevo Laredo, where he died in 1910. His daughter and her family crossed into the US for the funeral; however, the full outbreak of war forced them to remain in the city and Magnon opened a kindergarten in her new home. The attack on Nuevo Laredo in March 1913, compelled Magnon, also a sometime contributor to *La Cronica*, crossed the Rio Grande with her friend, Jovita Idar, to nurse the wounded.⁷⁷ After this initial effort, Magnon sought out medical supplies and organized help and officially formed La Cruz Blanca on May 18, 1913.⁷⁸

After a second attack, on January 1, 1914, Magnon converted her home into a makeshift hospital for soldiers who could make it to her doorstep and quickly recruited

⁷⁵ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 121.

⁷⁶ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, xl.

⁷⁷ Nancy Baker Jones, "VILLEGAS DE MAGNON, LEONOR," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fvi19>), accessed February 12, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Jones, "VILLEGAS DE MAGNON, LEONOR," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁷⁸ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 239.

over ten doctors and fifty nurses.⁷⁹ The organization supported the revolutionaries, Carranza's troops, but its mission was to care for the wounded or homeless soldiers and civilians on each side of the political and geographical divide.⁸⁰ La Cruz Blanca treated over one hundred members of Carranza's army that January alone.⁸¹ Each member wore a black armband with a white cross on their upper left arm to denote their affiliation on the battlefield.⁸²

American officials, however, did not support her efforts. When army officers attempted to remove her Mexican patients from her home, Magnon arranged visitors to bring them clean clothes and helped them escape. Forty of these revolutionaries were not so lucky. The army arrested and interred them at Fort McIntosh, but she organized an attorney to petition for their release. The Hague maintained the right for soldiers to flee to neutral soil (in this case, Mexican soldiers seeking amnesty in the United States), so long as the individuals agreed to surrender their arms and agree to spend the duration of the conflict in US custody (jail). This policy would protect the men from their country's retaliation, but it also sought to reassure Americans citizens. The US imprisoned hundreds of Mexicans fleeing the revolution under this policy.⁸³ Texas governor, Oscar B. Colquitt, refused to let the men go, but Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan later

⁷⁹ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 238-9.

⁸⁰ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 28.

⁸¹ Jones, "VILLEGAS DE MAGNON, LEONOR," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁸² Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 28.

⁸³ No author, "Review of American Events: Public Sentiment Is Recognized by Financiers New Haven Road Offers to..." *Christian Science Monitor*, January 10, 1914, 4.

agreed to their release.⁸⁴ Magnon earned the nickname, *La Rebelde* (the rebel), for her actions and, later in 1914, she took twenty-five nurses to join Carranza's army at Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and traveled with them to Mexico City. She received five medals from the First Chief for her bravery and service.⁸⁵

Jovita worked tirelessly with her friend for their cause and continued to contribute to *La Cronica* when she could.⁸⁶ The rest of the Idar family volunteered their services.⁸⁷ Elvira signed up as a nurse and eventually became the vice president of the group's first brigade and the second brigade's director of hospitals.⁸⁸ Federico became the staff secretary of La Cruz Blanca and traveled from Laredo to El Paso, Texas, and then from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, to Mexico City, Mexico.⁸⁹ Clemente, a supporter of the revolution and feminism, advised Magnon on organizing La Cruz Blanca into a national and international medical group. In a letter dated May 8, 1914, almost a year after its foundation, he urged her to reply to Carranza and to "mak[e] it clear that you are one of the future ladies of the Republic."⁹⁰ He also counseled her to get the First Chief's permission to create branches of La Cruz Blanca throughout Mexico in order to create "a charitable institution as a vivid testimony of your revolutionary work."⁹¹ In her memoir, *La Rebelde*, Magnon also recalled a speech Clemente made at a banquet given later by

⁸⁴ Jones, "VILLEGAS DE MAGNON, LEONOR," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁸⁵ Jones, "VILLEGAS DE MAGNON, LEONOR," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁸⁶ Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁸⁷ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 28.

⁸⁸ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 265.

⁸⁹ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 263-4.

⁹⁰ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 263.

⁹¹ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 263.

the, now, National White Cross at its new headquarters in Monterrey, Mexico, held in honor of Carranza on July 7, 1914:

The supper was a magnificent success. As the last glasses of wine were being sipped, Clemente Idar arose and made a brilliant speech. He could sway the multitudes in English or Spanish. He spoke of the friendship between Mexico and the United States, lamenting the conduct of Huerta. He referred to the current policy of the United States of not wanting to acquire Mexican territory, and of President Wilson, who scorned the very suggestion of the violation of Mexico's sovereignty. Idar quoted Professor Hale, who had wisely remarked that it would be a fool's act, indeed, to barter the confidence of a hemisphere for what could be gained by open interference in Mexico's internal problems.⁹²

Indeed, Wilson, a pacifist, kept a watchful eye on events unfolding south of the US border. He had no intention to start a war at home when it appeared one would erupt in Europe at any moment.

As the family's activism increased, the children's individual personal lives also began to emerge. Clemente, now thirty years old, married twenty-two year old Maria Lorenzo "Laura" Davila on November 13, 1913.⁹³ Over one hundred guests attended the evening ceremony held at the home of the bride's parents in Corpus Christi, Texas, and the Reverend T. F. Sessions, pastor of the First Methodist Church, presided at the "social event of the season among members of the Mexican colony. The newlyweds and their guests munched on chocolates and cake, while an orchestra played. A few days after the wedding, Clemente returned to Laredo with Laura, where, in addition to his other occupations, he worked as a Spanish language translator for the district court of Webb

⁹² Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 174-5.

⁹³ Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Laura's age at the time of their wedding can be determined by US census records.

County.⁹⁴ The couple welcomed several children in quick succession: Carlota (Charlotte) in 1915, Roberto (Robert) in 1917, and Clemente (Clarence) in 1918.⁹⁵

The following year proved difficult for the Idar family. Jovita, back in Laredo after aiding La Cruz Blanca, went to work for *El Progreso*, another paper in town and owned by Leo Walker and Emeterio Flores.⁹⁶ There, she wrote an editorial criticizing President Woodrow Wilson's decision to send US troops to the border. Texas Rangers, not known for their kindness or civility toward Mexicans or Mexican-Americans, soon arrived to shut the presses down. Jovita stood her ground successfully and refused to let them in; unfortunately, she could not repel them for long.⁹⁷ After this defeat, Jovita returned to work for her father, but on April 7, 1914, Nicasio succumbed to intestinal problems and died at his home.⁹⁸ To memorialize her father, Jovita penned his obituary for *La Revista*, his Masonic publication. After his death, she continued to run *La Cronica* with her brothers, Clemente and Eduardo. Their younger sister, Elvira, and their mother became its bookkeepers, Jose worked in the print shop, and the youngest Idar children, Moises, Juvencio, and Aquilino sold issues in the street.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ No author, "Idar-Davila Nuptuals," unknown newspaper, unknown date, Folder 1, Box 12, Clemente N. Idar Personal Papers, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin, Texas. Hereafter all documents from the Clemente N. Idar Personal Papers, 1875-1938 are abbreviated: CNIPP.

⁹⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940. The author accessed this information on March 3, 2013, courtesy of www.ancestry.com. This website provides further information for locating the physical copy of the census record: Census Place: San Antonio, Bexar, Texas; Roll: 7627_4204; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 259-101.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Haber Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 145. Hereafter cited: Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*.

⁹⁷ Jones, "IDAR, JOVITA," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁹⁸ Acosta, "IDAR, NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas History Online*.

⁹⁹ Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 35.

Federico also worked in *La Cronica*'s print shop, but renounced his US citizenship and moved back to Monterrey, the city of his birth, in 1914.¹⁰⁰ Writing from Torreon, Mexico, almost two months after his father's death, Federico wrote to his oldest brother Clemente, or Tete, as he called him, in a letter dated May 31, 1914, detailing his work there on behalf of la Cruz Blanca. He volunteered his services to Carranza as a train driver, as did other drivers from the organization. They would work merely for enough money to maintain their existence. Carranza would be arriving in three or four days' time and wanted the young men to move his train to the center of Mexico. If this employment fell through, he would continue to work for the railroad unions. Carranza, Federico wrote, offered to give anyone working for la Cruz a job, as long as they met the requirements. He intended to study to drive the First Chief's trains, but he had also become even more enthralled with Mexican politics and mentioned attending the speeches of several liberal leaders. Federico was happy with his new life, but he worried what his brothers thought of him.¹⁰¹ He complained of Eduardo's last letter, chastising him. He did not say what his brother complained of, however, Federico provides some insight into the feud when he instructs Clemente to tell their younger brother "Don Jose" to work hard:

[Do] not get used to the life that I got used to, because in that lifestyle there is nothing good at the end since you get used to laziness, thinking that one must never work and that there is nothing to work for in life...he must not break our father's wishes in seeing us succeed in life.¹⁰²

More research is needed to locate other family correspondence to determine the exact nature of the rift between Eduardo and Federico, but it is clear from this excerpt that

¹⁰⁰ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, 263-4.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Federico Idar to Clemente Idar, May 31, 1914, Folder 16, Box 1, CNIPP.

¹⁰² Letter from Federico Idar to Clemente Idar, May 31, 1914, Folder 16, Box 1, CNIPP.

Nicasio Idar installed a definitive work ethic into his children's lives as they would have to work harder to prove themselves and overcome discrimination in white society.

Although Federico supported Carranza's crusade to restore order to Mexico, little is known about his thoughts on the First Chief's efforts to inspire fighting across the border in 1915. US officers detained Mexican agent Basilio Ramos and upon searching him found the Plan de San Diego. The manifesto called for Mexican-Americans, Native-Americans, and African-Americans to revolt against the United States and to establish independent republics for themselves in the Southwest.¹⁰³ Although the larger plan failed, the subsequent Tejano Revolt of 1915 inspired Tejano guerilla groups to rise up against inequality and discrimination and to fight for better conditions. The violence was mainly in the Rio Grande Valley, including raids in Big Bend, Laredo, San Ygnacio, and San Benito.¹⁰⁴ Some figures estimate the death of one hundred and seventy-six Tejanos and twenty-five Anglos from August to October 1916. These numbers are likely much smaller than the actual number, due to the frequent killings of Mexicans which went unreported.¹⁰⁵ The state assigned Texas Rangers to the area to curb the violence, yet their notorious disdain for Mexicans and carte blanche authority actually made matters worse.¹⁰⁶

In response, about fifty percent of the Tejano population left the Valley beginning in mid-August 1916. They left jobs, abandoned homes and items they could not carry

¹⁰³ Rodolfo Rocha, "The Tejano Revolt of 1915," in Emilio Zamora, Cynthia Orozco, and Rodolfo Rocha, eds., *Mexican Americans in Texas History: Selected Essays* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000), 104. Hereafter cited: Rocha, "The Tejano Revolt of 1915," *Mexican Americans in Texas History*.

¹⁰⁴ Rocha, "The Tejano Revolt of 1915," *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 103-5.

¹⁰⁵ Rocha, "The Tejano Revolt of 1915," *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 116.

¹⁰⁶ Rocha, "The Tejano Revolt of 1915," *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 107.

with them in a cart or wagon. Others, desperate for some money to start over somewhere else, sold their goods and valuables and often at a loss. After the fighting ended, ranching families fled the area or set about picking up the pieces of their lives. The movement reached its peak in mid-September and continued despite the Army's guarantees of protection.¹⁰⁷ Along with dislocation, economic uncertainty also became a reality. The circulation of newspapers to keep Mexican Texans involved in current affairs now proved difficult to accomplish. The Idar family, now missing Nicasio, did what they could to protect their community. Jovita continued *La Cronica's* work at *El Progreso*. Clemente served as a translator for local and federal authorities when dealing with Mexican raiders in custody. Court documents also showed his involvement as a witness for the statements of three such men.¹⁰⁸

Tensions between the US and Mexico continued to escalate. Villa, furious with Wilson's recognition of Carranza's government instead of Villa's claim to power, promised to devote 1916 to inflaming tensions between the US and Mexico, hoping a new war would break out and Villa could overthrow his nemesis. On March 9, 1916, he sent four hundred of his raiders across the border into Columbus, New Mexico. This daylight attack sparred with an Army cavalry patrol and adapted a shoot-on-sight policy toward all US civilians before vanishing back into the Chihuahua hills. Public outrage forced Wilson to announce an expedition into Mexico to capture the villainous Villa, however, he waited for Carranza's consent before actually sending them. The First Chief replied his troops would fire on any American soldiers who violated Mexican sovereignty. Wilson assured Carranza of this sovereignty and promised to revisit and

¹⁰⁷ Rocha, "The Tejano Revolt of 1915," *Mexican Americans in Texas History*, 118.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 145-6.

widen the old boundary agreement at a later date. Carranza finally gave his approval and, on March 16, 1916, Wilson dispatched General John J. Pershing and his 6,000 men south. The president ordered Pershing merely to disrupt the Villistas and to scatter them if possible, without crossing the Rio Grande, and made no mention of capturing their “bandit leader.”¹⁰⁹ In the week between the Columbus raid and Wilson’s dispatch of his general, Villa continued to execute incursions across the Texas border.¹¹⁰

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the Crown Prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Sarajevo, Serbia, on June 28, 1914, suddenly brought more conflict to south Texas. After the murder, Austria-Hungary issued ultimatums to Russia and readied its military. It declared war on Serbia a month later, and through a string of complicated obligations guaranteed by various treaties, all the countries in Europe found themselves engaged in the global conflict on August 4, 1914. Across the Atlantic, US officials remained divided on what course to pursue. Proponents of readying the US for engagement, such as Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), Elihu Root, and Henry Cabot Lodge (1850-1924), urged the need to expand the military and defenses in case of an attack on US soil or interests. Business leaders, and their corporate lawyers, formed the National Security League (NSL) to impress this position on President Wilson, who dismissed preparedness initially.¹¹¹

The sinking of the *Lusitania* (and the deaths of 1,198 people, including 124 American citizens) on May 7, 1915, by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland finally forced the President’s hand. On November 4, 1915, Wilson officially stated the

¹⁰⁹ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 175-7.

¹¹⁰ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 177.

¹¹¹ Foner, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918*, 13.

need to increase funding for the military. Helen Keller, a Socialist known for overcoming her blindness and deafness, condemned the government's reversal at a Labor Forum in New York City arguing, "Congress is not preparing to defend the people of the United States. It is preparing to protect the capital of American speculators and investors in Mexico, South America, China and the Philippine Islands."¹¹² Germany's policy of submarine warfare beginning in April 1916 resulted in the loss of two more American lives on the unarmed French steamer *Sussex*. An angry Wilson sent a strongly worded note to the German government to abandon this strategy immediately. If they refused, he threatened to cut diplomatic ties.¹¹³ William Jennings Bryan resigned as Secretary of State, refusing to "take responsibility" for the message of protest sent by Wilson to German officials.¹¹⁴

Despite pleas from the pacifists, the US declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. In *The United States and Mexico*, historian Howard F. Cline notes the effect of the country's entrance into the global fray on its relations with Mexico, arguing the war monopolized the president's attention and caused him to neglect affairs with Mexico. He left those cares to the State Department and ordered, "no use of force under any circumstances or provocation. Threats, yes; force, no."¹¹⁵ News of the Zimmerman note, exposing an approach by Germany to encourage Mexico to begin a war with the United States, published in *The New York Times* on March 1, 1917, complicated matters between the US and Mexico. While the article praised Carranza's rejection of Germany's offer, a

¹¹² Foner, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918*, 11 and 13-4.

¹¹³ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 178-9.

¹¹⁴ Foner, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 185.

German presence in the country sparked national suspicion of Mexico and Mexican subversives (namely, cheap Mexican laborers and Mexican-Americans) intent on sabotaging the war effort. Wilson's government kept a watchful eye to the southern border and monitored the activities of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. This surveillance extended to Tejano communities because of their proximity to the border, as well as their ancestry.¹¹⁶ The international crisis spurred Tejanos to actively seek ways to prove their American-ness and their loyalty. Laredo, like many other towns, hosted a Loyalty Day on April 19, 1917, to commemorate the patriotic events of the Battle of Lexington and Paul Revere's midnight ride. At four o'clock in the afternoon, a five thousand person procession waving the Stars and Stripes, including the various *mutualistas*, processed to the town's federal building to hear the rest of the program. Clemente, now working at his brother Eduardo's paper *Evolucion*, delivered a rousing speech – in Spanish.¹¹⁷

Congress passed the Selective Service Act on May 19, 1917. Towards the end of the month, Laredo officials reported the daily arrests of between twenty and twenty-five Anglo draft dodgers from states as far away as Maine and New Hampshire. The young men denied attempting to flee and cited business (mining and petroleum) interests in Mexico.¹¹⁸ Wilson appointed General Enoch Herbert Crowder to implement the draft. General Crowder emphasized conscription, not as a form of bondage, but as the greatest

¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, there are no details about the content of the speech and further research is needed. Jose A. Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire: Mexican Texans and World War I* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 39. Hereafter cited: Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*.

¹¹⁷ Orozco, "IDAR, EDUARDO," *Handbook of Texas Online*; Gibson, *Jovita Idar*, 35. In her article, "IDAR, NICASIO," in the *Handbook of Texas Online*, Acosta notes the international distribution of *La Revista*; Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 57-8.

¹¹⁸ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 21.

civic duty a citizen could perform. He involved state and local governments, as well as civilians, to help establish draft boards in preparation for the first registration day on June 5, 1917. An article in *La Prensa* the following day announced “To the Line of Fire, Mexican Texans!” and encouraged the participation of “wives, children, and mothers with gray, sacred manes” in the war effort.¹¹⁹

Mexican nationals reacted to conscription in a variety of ways. Some, eager to prove their patriotism and gain US citizenship through military service, voluntarily enlisted; others obeyed the Selective Service Act only if called to duty. A faction working deep into the state fled back across the border and did so using the bridge at Laredo.¹²⁰ Mexicans taunted the refugees as cowards and, in the face of few economic opportunities, many, like Bernardo de la Garza Jr. of Laredo, decided to return home and ship out overseas.¹²¹ While the draft required all aliens to sign up, only a few were actually subjected to it.¹²² The fear of conscription, and dying on behalf of another country was enough to drive some to desperate measures. This was the case in the small town of Kyle, twenty miles south of Austin, where Mexican citizen Tomas Ramos committed suicide by shooting himself in the head on June 24, 1917, to avoid separation from his wife and children.¹²³ In 1917, the military only conscripted those who had previously applied for US citizenship and by July 1918, Congress decided to exempt these so-called declarants from neutral countries like Mexico. In all, the government drafted twenty-four million

¹¹⁹ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 22-3.

¹²⁰ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 19.

¹²¹ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 37.

¹²² Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 22.

¹²³ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 34.

men, citizens and non-citizens alike. Texas contributed 197,000 troops; five thousand of them with Spanish surnames.¹²⁴

Clemente saw no military action during the war as a result of an accident with a printing press, which left him with two missing fingers on his left hand.¹²⁵ Despite his ineligibility for the draft, he continued to work to further the Allied cause. On June 3, 1917, after an introduction from Judge Jones of Del Rio, he wrote to Texas Governor, James Ferguson to offer his services to organize other loyal, patriotic Mexican-American men, including himself, as rangers traveling around Webb and the surrounding counties to hold meetings explaining the registration laws and answering questions from the public. He argued the benefit of such a task force could provide a public service, but would also stop the exodus of Mexican citizens laboring in Texas back to Mexico, thereby preventing a labor shortage in a time of war. Clemente continued to persuade the governor with an account of his own efforts in the Santo Tomas coal mining camp near Laredo. He addressed the crowd and introduced Woodleaf Thomas, the registrar for the precinct and officials of the Santo Tomas Coal Company.¹²⁶ He believed, he told the governor, their work did much to calm many fears, adding:

It is true there is some fear of State rangers. Instinctively, Mexicans would feel much satisfaction in finding rangers of their own extraction in the

¹²⁴ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 22.

¹²⁵ Clemente's draft card verifies his missing fingers. Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online*; United States Selective Service System, *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1918). The author accessed this information on March 3, 2013 courtesy of www.ancestry.com. This website also provides the following information for locating the physical record: Registration State: Texas, Registration County: Webb, Roll: 1983774.

¹²⁶ Letter from Clemente Idar to the Hon. J. F. Ferguson, Governor of the State, June 3, 1917, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP.

service, and I can assure you that the State could fully trust upon the loyalty of all Mexican-Americans serving it as indicated.¹²⁷

It is not known how Governor Ferguson responded to Clemente's idea, however, no further mention of the rangers exists in his collection. Instead, he became a member of the Committee on Public Information (CPI), Wilson's propaganda machine. Led by muckraker George Creel, the CPI sought out filmmakers, journalists, and artists to garner public support for the Allied cause. An emerging Hollywood contributed such stars as comic Charlie Chaplin, heartthrob Douglas Fairbanks, and the nation's angelic sweetheart, Mary Pickford. The CPI also recruited upstanding members of communities across the country to help spread its message at the local and state level. Its oratorical group, the Four Minute Men, numbered over seventy-five thousand members.

The Four Minute Men delivered talks (no more than four minutes) to whatever audiences they could find in schools, theaters, and union halls. Several Tejanos joined its ranks, including Clemente Idar. Indeed, the Laredo branch of the Four Minute Men included fourteen participants, with Clemente as its only Tejano representative. With strict orders to be brief, bilingual, and entertaining, this wartime occupation is a testament to his public speaking skills in both English and Spanish; the directors of the CPI considered terrible speakers "worse than none."¹²⁸ The organization eventually developed "Alien Squads" and integrated this new program into the existing routine to help combat racism against American servicemen of non-Anglo ethnicities. A short speech by a Four Minute Man opened the event, after which the speaker introduced eight

¹²⁷ Letter from Clemente Idar to the Hon. J. F. Ferguson, Governor of the State, June 3, 1917, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP.

¹²⁸ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 60-1.

to sixteen of these soldiers. In many instances, the crowd erupted into applause as each man declared his origins.¹²⁹ In addition to his talent for addressing audiences, Clemente could also recognize such talent in others and sought to promote it where he could. On May 28, 1918, at a meeting of a local fraternal group the *Sociedad Hijos de Juarez*, he heard Mexican poet Oswald Sanchez's optimistic hope for the world after the war.¹³⁰ Idar immediately wrote to CPI headquarters asking for permission to invite Sanchez to a Four Minute Man meeting:

To the United States, [Sanchez] gave credit: 'Latin-America, particularly our own unfortunate country, owes more to the modern civilization of the United States than to any other country of Europe, with the exception of Spain, to whom we owe our lofty doctrinarian sentiments and the incomparable language of Cervantes.'¹³¹

Although the CPI leadership denied the request, Idar would continue to push for the inclusion of Mexican and Mexican-American speakers to address similar audiences. He would later do this in his work for the AFL.

Clemente also used his journalistic skills working with his brother Eduardo to promote the war. Their new publication, *Evolucion*, first viewed the war in March 1917 as merely a squabble for power between European countries.¹³² In the wake of the Zimmerman note, the paper urged the US and Mexico to strengthen their friendship.¹³³ It declared its fervent support for the Allies and published propaganda in favor of their

¹²⁹ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 61.

¹³⁰ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 72-3.

¹³¹ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 72-3. It is not known what the response was to Idar's letter.

¹³² Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 43.

¹³³ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 17-8.

cause.¹³⁴ Clemente authored articles to persuade Mexicans to not abandon Texas for fear of the draft.¹³⁵ *Evolucion* (Evolution), as well as other Spanish language press, also ran updates from the Food Administration advising readers about changes in rationing policies. Where such changes affected restaurants, bakeries, groceries, and hotels, and penalized offenders with steep fines, these newspapers ran the amendments on the front page. In so doing, they saved many Mexican-American owned businesses and, in turn, their local economies.¹³⁶ As a member of the CPI, Clemente also used *Evolucion* to promote the sale of war bonds, as did many similar papers in the area. He encouraged squeamish citizens to think of the bonds in another manner, saying:

If a sentimentalist were to say that he wished not to give money to send the younger generation to a foreign death, we could in all honesty remind him that every American dollar he donates signifies the shedding of one less drop of blood. These current times hold the test of loyalty for the American people.¹³⁷

By tapping into this fear held by Mexican-Americans that their ethnicity was tied to their citizenship, Idar was able to raise significant funds; this, ironically, reaffirmed his own patriotism.

To this end, Clemente also kept a watchful eye on his competitors and, in 1916, became an active informant for the Justice Department. As 1917 drew to a close, he wrote letters to a local Bureau of Investigation agent, Texas Senator Morris Sheppard, and Joseph P. Tumulty, President Wilson's private secretary, to inform them of *La Prensa* and *La Revista Mexicana*'s seditious writings against Carranza's administration, a

¹³⁴ Orozco, "IDAR, EDUARDO," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹³⁵ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 35.

¹³⁶ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 60.

¹³⁷ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 62.

regime “officially recognized by us and entitled to all the considerations of our friendship.”¹³⁸ Urging the overthrow of this leader, he continued, incited Mexicans to rise up once more and return to violence along the border at a time when the US could not afford such risky behavior and expenditure of munitions. These San Antonio publications, run by Mexican exiles of the Revolution, also happened to be Clemente’s main competitors. Clemente’s actions, however, were not an attempt to take an unfair advantage of a rival. As someone familiar with the region’s political situation, as well as the horrors of the Mexican Revolution, it is likely he acted to protect the integrity of Mexican Texans. Ignacio E. Lozano, the owner of *La Prensa*, was himself an exile as a result of the conflict and had a vested interest in events south of the border. In 1918, Clemente also criticized Justo Cardenas, a Mexican exile and the owner of the Laredo paper, *El Democrata Fronterizo*, for publishing an article criticizing the governments Work or Fight Laws. He also charged Cardenas with ingratitude toward his adopted country. The Trading-with-the-Enemy Act provided certain exemptions on translation requirements for all foreign language papers demonstrably loyal to the US government. The Idars and *Evolucion* received this waiver and it is possible Clemente assumed an added responsibility of policing periodicals to his extensive list of wartime duties. After the letter to the authorities, Lozano also sought this same protection. It is unknown whether they granted his request, but San Antonio Postmaster George D. Armistead wrote a strong letter of recommendation on his behalf.¹³⁹

The war effort changed the course of Idar’s life and career forever when he received a letter from the American Federation of Labor’s new, Latin-America oriented

¹³⁸ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 44-5.

¹³⁹ Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 44-5.

organization, the Pan-American Federation of Labor (PAFL). In the summer of 1918, he wrote a letter to the AFL's secretary, Frank Morrison (1859-1949), informing him workers in Laredo desired to organize and further explained the labor conditions of the area. Morrison passed along Clemente's letter to the PAFL's secretary, John Murray. Eager for information on how to organize Mexican-Americans and Mexicans, as well as labor conditions in Mexico, Murray wrote to Idar on August 22, 1918. The PAFL was to hold its first annual conference in Laredo in the fall and on September 28, 1918, Murray wrote to Idar, with Morrison's approval, officially hiring him as an organizer to help arrange the conference.¹⁴⁰ On October 18, 1918, the Chairman of Webb County also appointed him the Chairman of Mexican Work to spearhead the United War Campaign drive from November 11-18.¹⁴¹ Clemente Idar was now the official representative of Mexican and Mexican-American labor in Laredo, a general organizer for the AFL, and a colleague of Samuel Gompers himself.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from John Murray to Clemente Idar, August 22, 1918, Folder 11, Box 5, CNIPP; Letter from John Murray to Clemente Idar, September 28, 1918, Folder 11, Box 5, CNIPP.

¹⁴¹ Letter from Charles Deutz to Clemente Idar, October 18, 1918, Folder 7, Box 1, CNIPP.

CHAPTER 3

“Fraternally Yours”: The AFL, PAFL, and Samuel Gompers

Clemente Idar’s appointment as the AFL’s first Mexican-American organizer in 1918, although a perceived victory for minority inclusion, did not necessarily reflect a suddenly progressive racial attitude for Gompers. The AFL had, even before Idar’s appointment, already established a complicated and contradictory record on ethnic prejudicial practices. During the Mexican Revolution, Gompers and his AFL showed little concern about conditions, labor and otherwise, across the border. In March 1911, Gompers received a letter from revolutionary leader Ricardo Flores Magon, the head of the Mexican Liberal Party, from his exile in Los Angeles, begging Gompers to stand up for Mexican workers and to publicly protest their mistreatment. Gompers replied he could not acquiesce to this request. His first inclination was to speak privately to the Executive Council of the AFL for its advice, but, regrettably, he could not do even this with scant information about the revolution to present to them. Although he asked Magon to supply this missing information, Gompers’ responded with ambivalence:

If the present regime is to be supplanted by another the present revolutionary party, without fundamentally changing the conditions which shall make for the improvement of the workers’ opportunities, and a greater regard for their rights and their interests, then the American labor movement can look upon such a change with entire indifference.¹

Gompers cared about Mexicans, but only when they affected labor in the United States. In 1912, he sent an irritated letter to Charles Nagel, the Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Labor, questioning him about reports that railroads in the southwest used

¹ Samuel Gompers with Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino, eds., *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 8, *Progress and Reaction in the Age of Reform* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 192. Hereafter cited: Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 8.

large numbers of Mexican laborers in violation of the immigration laws' contract labor provisions "without any apparent hindrance from the inspectors...connected with your department."² These statutes allowed Mexicans already in the United States to participate in contracts, but forbade hiring Mexicans on Mexican soil and then transporting them across the border. Nagel responded that he investigated the matter thoroughly and could find no evidence of wrongdoing, as the workers in question had been hired in El Paso and Laredo.³

The AFL's desire to forge a relationship with Mexican labor began before the US entered the Great War. Gompers, furthermore, promoted labor relations between the US and Mexico as a way to nullify the threat of a two front war. As early as May 1916, Gompers wrote to the secretary of the *Casa Del Obrero Mundial* (House of the Workers of the World) inviting delegates to meet at El Paso "to propose a practical method of mutual cooperation between organized labor in Mexico and the United States" and subsequently made the letter public knowledge.⁴ Gompers began a careful newspaper campaign, commenting directly when appropriate and indirectly when not.⁵ In his autobiography, Gompers would recall the Mexican workers, to his great surprise, "simply elected delegates, sent them to Eagle Pass, there to wait the coming [the] delegation [from St. Louis]."⁶

² Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 8, 429.

³ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 8, 430.

⁴ No author, "American Labor and Mexican to Confer," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 25, 1916, 1.

⁵ No author, "Mexican Trades Union," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1916, 4.

⁶ Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: an Autobiography* (New York: American Book-Stratford Press, Inc., 1948), 313. Hereafter cited: Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*.

By November, as the European conflict continued to divide hawks and doves alike, the question of US/Mexican labor relations became touted as the only, or most effective, way to maintain a peace often threatened by the events of the Mexican Revolution.⁷ Emphasis on labor relations reshaped the US/Mexico discussion away from politics and racism to a class-based international solidarity. Carlos Loveira, a delegate from the Yucatan explained this shift at the 1916 AFL convention in Baltimore:

If war between Mexico and the United States should come through the machinations of capitalists, many of our workers would not know what to do. We realize we would not meet the oil kings or the railroad kings or other exploiters, but that we would meet brother workers.⁸

Although these initial overtures by the Mexican government pleased Gompers, he was not satisfied and sought a more formal alliance. Loveira's statement gave him an idea.

During the Great War, European immigration ceased and employers imported hordes of Mexican laborers to fill their shortages.⁹ Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson suspended the usual requirements of a head tax, contract labor, and literacy test during the conflict on May 23, 1917.¹⁰ After the war's end, this surplus of workers would need encouragement to return home and to rescind their jobs to returning American soldiers. Gompers needed a stable Mexico for this plan to work, but he needed a cover to maintain labor relations with the Carranza government. He decided to revive the defunct Pan-American Conference, originally created in 1823 after the US adopted the Monroe

⁷ No author, "Mexican Trades Union," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1916, 4.

⁸ No author, "Mexican Trades Union," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1916, 4.

⁹ James Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1980), 99. Hereafter cited: Green, *The World of the Worker*.

¹⁰ Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 341; Samuel Gompers with Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino, eds., *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 10, *The American Federation of Labor and the Great War, 1917-1918* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 166.

Doctrine.¹¹ As Latin American countries broke away from the Spanish Empire in the early nineteenth century, US diplomats used the alliance to join these new republics with the United States to promote free trade and freedom from European intervention.¹² Although headquartered in Washington, DC, each country sent their delegates to participate in periodic conferences in various host nations.¹³ Washington, DC hosted in 1889, as did Rio de Janeiro in 1906, Buenos Aires in 1910, and Santiago in 1914.¹⁴

On May 14, 1918, Gompers appointed a commission of James Lord, John Murray, and Santiago Iglesias to travel to Mexico to see if their government and labor factions might be favorable towards the formation of a new pan-American organization.¹⁵ This new group, the Pan-American Federation of Labor (PAFL), comprised of members of all Latin American countries, as well as members of the AFL, would discuss ways to bring the US closer to those countries through labor.¹⁶ The PAFL would have no authority to force its members to adhere to policies. The organization and delegates could propose suggestions or recommendations, but the respective governments would make the ultimate decision. The only commitment that counted was a labor movement's

¹¹ No author, "Week's Review of American Events: Party Division Shows Old Democratic Differences Mexicans Battle..." *Christian Science Monitor*, March 28, 1914, 14.

¹² John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, third edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011), 208. Hereafter cited: Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*.

¹³ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 208.

¹⁴ No author, "Week's Review of American Events: Party Division Shows Old Democratic Differences Mexican Battle..." *Christian Science Monitor*, March 28, 1914, 14.

¹⁵ No author, "Labor Mission to Mexico: Gompers' Appointees Will Seek to Form Pan-American Federation," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 15, 1918, 6.

¹⁶ No author, "Labor Conference to Meet in South: Meeting at Laredo, Tex., in November Expected," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 14, 1918, 7.

adherence to the PAFL's founding principles.¹⁷ Because of these limitations, the PAFL had little actual power and countries which endured US occupations, like Nicaragua and Haiti, had even less regard for Gompers' agenda.¹⁸

Gompers, alarmed about the spread of socialistic and anarchistic influences penetrating Latin America, tasked the commission to also evaluate this threat.¹⁹ Mexico particularly concerned him. Under the Mexican constitution adopted in 1917, Carranza granted laborers provisions Gompers identified with: an eight hour day, the right to organize, overtime pay, minimum wage, and a six day working week. The new *Confederacion Regional Obrera Mexicana* (CROM, Mexico's equivalent of the AFL), based on Porfirio Diaz' government controlled labor machine, reinforced its labor policies.²⁰ In keeping with the *porfiriato*, CROM used violence to enforce its dominance and agenda.²¹ Although the structure of the Mexican labor movement mirrored the conservative AFL, its ideology and leadership aligned more closely with the leftist IWW.²² By 1915, reports of IWW activity flourished in revolutionary Mexico. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 amplified these fears and Gompers worried this radical disease would, given enough time, infect the American labor movement.²³ He also had another reason to fear the spread of radicalism. Gompers' ability to squash Wobbly war dissenters and to persuade labor to support the war at home won him great influence in

¹⁷ Toth, "The Pan American Federation of Labor," 620.

¹⁸ Toth, "The Pan American Federation of Labor," 618.

¹⁹ Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 317-8.

²⁰ Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 17.

²¹ Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 19.

²² No author, "Gompers Offers Program," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1918, 2.

²³ Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 20.

the Wilson administration and the most political power any American labor leader enjoyed thus far. His inability to control Mexican labor and the rhetoric of the revolution could lead to catastrophic consequences for US businesses and investments in Mexico. He could not afford to have such powerful enemies.²⁴

Fostering ties with Mexico was Gompers' immediate concern, but for the alliance to really work to his advantage, he needed outward appearance of the support of the other Latin American countries. He tasked the commission to continue south after the conclusion of their meetings in Mexico. The mission succeeded and, on August 14, 1918, the *Christian Science Monitor* announced a meeting between the AFL and Mexican labor, the new Pan American Federation of Labor, to take place at Laredo, Texas, on November 13.²⁵ Laredo was the perfect location for the conference. The town was familiar with the AFL, which chartered the Texas Trades Council in 1907.²⁶ As a border town, it provided the Mexican delegates easy access into the United States, but its geographical location also highlighted the complicated nature of labor between the two countries, such as the crossing of illegal workers to find employment on the railroads or constructing the Medina Dam.²⁷

²⁴ Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 20.

²⁵ No author, "Labor Conference to Meet in South: Meeting at Laredo, Tex., in November Expected," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 14, 1918, 7. The death of Gompers' beloved daughter, Sadie, in October 1918 in the ongoing influenza epidemic prompted frantic discussions between John Alpine, the acting president of the AFL while Gompers remained overseas, and Frank Morrison, AFL secretary, about whether to postpone the Laredo conference due to Gompers' grief. Ultimately, with the advice of Gompers' doctor, they decided to keep to their original plans. Sadie's funeral took place on November 5, 1918 in New York City. Afterwards, Gompers traveled to Laredo to open the conference on November 13. This information is found in *The Samuel Gompers Papers, vol. 10, The American Federation of Labor and the Great War, 1917-1918* on pages 546-7.

²⁶ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 8, 47.

²⁷ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 8, 316 and 429-30.

With so much at stake, Gompers needed a native of the area to ensure the success of the first PAFL conference. Through his secretary, Frank Morrison, and other AFL organizers, he discovered Idar and charged him with all the arrangements. As a native Laredoan, a bilingual speaker, a journalist, and a sometimes organizer, Idar was a natural candidate for the job and, possibly, as a fully-fledged AFL general organizer. As a Mexican-American, he could silence critics on the issue of the AFL's inclusiveness. Idar, on the other hand, viewed the conference as a test. If he could make it a success, he passed and a new career awaited him. If the event failed, the door to opportunity closed. Idar began by advertising and publishing articles about the upcoming event in both English and Spanish newspapers in town, which then most likely circulated beyond Laredo.²⁸ He also began unionizing workers and informed Morrison of five locals by October 10, 1918. To organize railroad clerks, Idar wrote to W.V.H. Wright in Cincinnati, Ohio asking him to contact his counterparts in Laredo, M. Matson and Louis F. Ochoa, and to send them literature to help them organize their clerks.²⁹

Laredo's Mexican population, Idar informed the secretary, exhibited more enthusiasm about the upcoming conference than their Anglo counterparts. Across the river in Nuevo Leon, the Mexican citizens grew increasingly excited and formed seven new unions.³⁰ On October 19, he took between 4 and 5 thousand newspapers to the

²⁸ Letter from Frank Morrison to Clemente Idar, August 15, 1918, Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP.

²⁹ Letter from Clemente Idar to W. V. H. Wright, October 21, 1918, Folder 11, Box 2, CNIPP.

³⁰ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, October 10, 1918, Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP.

border for distribution; among these was most likely the *Pan-American Labor Press*.³¹ Before he could legally take the literature into Mexico, he needed the approval of the local censor, Mr. Wiggins, a supporter of anti-labor sentiment. He refused to allow their release and kept them in his office. On October 27, 1918, still unable to liberate the periodicals, Idar wrote a letter to the PAFL secretary, John Murray, to inform him of the impossible situation and begged him to wire San Antonio's local censor, who could force Wiggins to relinquish the material. From now on, he wrote, all material had to be sent by way of San Antonio in order to drum up enough publicity for the conference.³²

Besides these difficulties, organizing the Laredo conference provided Idar the opportunity to build his own network of valuable contacts. He began corresponding with Luis N. Morones (1890-1964), the chief Mexican delegate serving as the head of CROM, who informed Idar he had hired a band for the labor summit.³³ Seventy-two delegates

³¹ President Wilson agreed to fund a bilingual newspaper for the conference, The Pan-American Labor Press, through the Committee on Public Information (CPI). John Murray of the PAFL headed the periodical, which began publishing on August 28, 1918. The CPI also gave \$25,000 to fund the conference at Laredo. This information is found in Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 10, *The American Federation of Labor and the Great War, 1917-1918*, 499.

³² Wiggins' first name is not given in the letter. Letter from Clemente Idar to John Murray, October 27, 1918, Folder 1, Box 2, CNIPP.

³³ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, October 10, 1918, Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP. Morones rose to power in 1916 when he allied himself with Carranza and the Constitutionalists. He subdued anarchistic labor forces for the First Chief and, in return, Carranza appointed him to lead CROM in 1918. With the full weight of the president behind him, Morones quashed all Marxist sympathies and shaped the Mexican labor movement to mirror the AFL's conservative trade unions and began corresponding with Gompers to inform him of their progress to better the lives of the Mexican working man. In reality, CROM created a monopoly on all labor groups. It demolished all opposing movements and violently oppressed any unsanctioned strikes against the government. Morones and his captains amassed sizable fortunes through these tactics, while laborers grew more impoverished and sought other means to provide for their families. Morones' power would continue to grow steadily throughout the 1920s. This information is found in Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 17-20.

attended the Laredo conference. Sixty-seven of these were American and Mexican.³⁴ Idar served as a Spanish translator and arranged fifteen rooms with a bed and private bath for each American delegate in local hotels.³⁵ The US government, ironically, later refused the representatives of South American nations because of quarantine restrictions.³⁶ Matters of state kept President Carranza, who had previously accepted the invitation, away from the conference.³⁷

Morones, made his position clear: Mexican labor would not submit itself to the AFL, but would work as partners.³⁸ Another faction, the Confederacion Obrera Pan Americana (COPA) called for the AFL to promote better treatment of Mexican nationals working in the United States, and to raise their wages to the level of American workers.³⁹ Mexican-Americans in the US delegation argued Mexicans owned some blame for their treatment. They came to the US to break strikes, benefitted from hard-fought victories won by Mexican-Americans, and then refused to follow their unions' rules. The Mexican delegation countered that the establishment of locals in their country would solve this

³⁴ Toth, "The Pan American Federation of Labor," 618. As further proof the PAFL was constructed mainly to support US/Mexico relations, all participating countries were asked to contribute to paying for the following conference in 1919. The US' share was \$5,000 and the Mexican was \$1,250. The other countries did not pay nearly as much: Peru, \$625; Ecuador, \$375; Honduras, \$250; El Salvador, \$250; and Nicaragua, \$250. This information is found in *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 11, *The Postwar Years, 1918-1921* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 139-40. Hereafter cited: Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 11.

³⁵ Letter from Frank Morrison to Clemente Idar, October 21, 1918, Folder 6, Box 3, CNIPP.

³⁶ No author, "Gompers Offers Program: Wilson Peace Aims Backed at Pan-American Labor Conference," *New York Times*, November 15, 1918, 2.

³⁷ No Author, "Samuel Gompers Leaves for Meeting In Laredo," *El Paso Herald*, November 9, 1918, 18.

³⁸ Toth, "The Pan American Federation of Labor," 618.

³⁹ Hernandez, "Women's Labor and Activism," in *War Along the Border*, 192.

problem.⁴⁰ Morones pushed further for a resolution to “fin[d] honorable means to exert influence so that justice and protection will be imparted to those workingmen who for various reasons are deprived of their liberty in the jails of the United States.”⁴¹ Gompers, furious with Morones’ insinuations, jumped to his feet and demanded to know to which persons he referred. Morones’ fellow delegate, Perez Ruiz, defended the statement, and demanded the release of all Wobblies and leftists. Daniel Tobin, AFL treasurer, leapt to Gompers’ side, bellowing, “The [IWW] are not a bona fide labor organization of the United States. They have done everything in their power to destroy union labor... They are FALSE, LYING PROPAGANDISTS!”⁴² The Mexican delegation relented and apologized for their comments. They admitted to being influenced by the IWW and thought the two groups merely to be rivals. Morones concluded the argument by pleading for leniency toward the Wobblies, that they may be released and allowed to work to complete their penance.⁴³ On November 11, 1918, news of the armistice reached the conference. The Great War was over. Gompers quickly dispatched a telegram of congratulations to President Wilson from the AFL’s Executive Council.⁴⁴

After the conference’s conclusion, Idar continued to organize locals in Laredo for the AFL. In a letter to PAFL Spanish secretary, Santiago Iglesias, dated November 29,

⁴⁰ No author, “Labor Meeting Ends Saturday: Mexican Plan to Aid I.W.W. Defeated; Mexican Labor Alleges Ill Treatment,” *El Paso Herald*, November 16-17, 1918, 16.

⁴¹ No author, “Labor Conference Here Will Finish Work Today,” *Laredo Daily Times*, November 16, 1918, unknown page number. Folder 3, Box 12, CNIPP.

⁴² No author, “Labor Conference Here Will Finish Work Today,” *Laredo Daily Times*, November 16, 1918, unknown page number. Folder 3, Box 12, CNIPP.

⁴³ No author, “Labor Conference Here Will Finish Work Today,” *Laredo Daily Times*, November 16, 1918, unknown page number. Folder 3, Box 12, CNIPP.

⁴⁴ Telegram from Samuel Gompers to President Woodrow Wilson, November 11, 1918, Folder 6, Box 3, CNIPP.

Idar asked for assistance in his work, which he expected to take him through several southwestern states. He recommended Juan J. Gomez, an acquaintance with an excellent reputation along the border. Gomez, Idar wrote, would work for \$25 a week, or \$100 a month.⁴⁵ Idar justified this audacious request of his new employer, writing, “I merely aim to accumulate greater strength and efficiency for you know how deeply interested we all are in promoting the welfare of the Spanish-people...of our country.”⁴⁶ Idar also asked for further specificity about the conference’s accomplishments, which may have also seemed impertinent.⁴⁷

Balancing family life with his new career, often working evenings and weekends, proved difficult for Idar. He earned a starting salary of \$45.00 a week based on a weekly report of his activities, but received less if he could not fulfill all of his obligations. During the week of January 12, 1919, he attended meetings of the Bricklayers and Carpenters; Hod Carriers and Common Laborers; Plumbers, Gas and Steam Fitters Local; and the Blacksmiths’ Local from Sunday to Thursday. His wife and children fell ill with the influenza epidemic and Idar nursed them on Friday and Saturday. For this week, Idar’s paycheck totaled \$42.00.⁴⁸ By the following month, he established seventeen locals in Laredo and requests for his expertise flooded in from other parts of the state, dramatically increasing his workload. He petitioned Morrison and received permission to

⁴⁵ Letter from Clemente Idar to Santiago Iglesias, November 29, 1918, Folder 11, Box 2, CNIPP.

⁴⁶ Letter from Clemente Idar to Santiago Iglesias, November 29, 1918, Folder 11, Box 2, CNIPP.

⁴⁷ Letter from Clemente Idar to Santiago Iglesias, November 29, 1918, Folder 11, Box 2, CNIPP. It is not known what Iglesias’ response was to the letter, however Juan J. Gomez does not appear in any more personal correspondence. It is likely, therefore, Iglesias denied the request.

⁴⁸ Weekly Report from Laredo, Texas, January 18, 1919, Folder 9, Box 10, CNIPP.

travel to El Paso, Eagle Pass, Brownsville and Corpus Christi to organize more unions.⁴⁹ He also expanded the AFL's reading materials in Spanish by placing *La Cronica's* former competition San Antonio's *La Prensa* on the mailing list of the AFL Weekly News Letter. He also ensured the circulation of *Evolucion*, his brother, Eduardo's paper.⁵⁰

The Idars, including Clemente's mother-in-law, moved to San Antonio in February or March 1919.⁵¹ It was a logical move. The city's railroads connected to lines in central Mexico and Laredo, as well as the central and eastern routes in the United States. The majority of Idar's life would now be spent riding the rails, going from town to town to organize workers. His jurisdiction, in addition to Texas, also included Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Mexico.⁵² As a Mexican-American, Jim Crow laws forced Idar to carefully plan his travels, as individual towns along the US/Mexico could be more northern or southern in their racial sympathies and in their implementation of segregation.⁵³ San Antonio, for example, did not require Mexicans to ride in segregated streetcars like blacks, but it segregated both groups in regards to housing.⁵⁴ Idar's traveling schedule was grueling, like many other labor organizers, but he could take

⁴⁹ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, February 6, 1919, Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁵⁰ Letter from Frank Morrison to Clemente Idar, March 6, 1919, Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁵¹ The last letter from Laredo is dated February 6, 1919 (Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP) and the earliest from San Antonio is dated March 6, 1919 (Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP).

⁵² Zamora, *World of the Mexican Worker*, 253.

⁵³ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Sons: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 200-1. Hereafter cited: Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Sons*.

⁵⁴ Julie Leininger Pycior, "La Raza Organizes: Mexican American Life in San Antonio, 1915-1930 as Reflected in Mutualista Activities," Ph.D. diss., Notre Dame University, 1979, 96. Hereafter cited: Pycior, "La Raza Organizes."

comfort knowing his sister, Jovita, lived nearby and could check on his family.⁵⁵ With the birth of another child, daughter Maria Louisa in 1919, Laura Idar needed her sister-in-law's help.⁵⁶

San Antonio boasted a significant Mexican and Mexican-American population for Idar to champion. Between 1900 and 1910, 25,000 Mexican emigrants sought refuge in the city from the Mexican Revolution.⁵⁷ He set to work organizing laundry, leather, and cigar workers in April.⁵⁸ In particular, he helped women working in laundries to form unions to petition for higher wages. The AFL began accepting charters for unions with female members the previous year. They paid fifty cents for their monthly memberships and men paid eighty-five. On average, these women earned between \$4.00 and \$6.56 a week, much less than their male counterparts, and the dues deducted a significant portion of their paychecks.⁵⁹

Idar quickly realized, however, the *mutualista* organizing tactics he learned in his youth clashed with AFL policies and earned the anger of its secretary, Frank Morrison. After submitting a weekly report, Idar received an irritated reply from Morrison, who reprimanded Idar for spending \$13.50 to employ a Mauricio Canales to assist him

⁵⁵ In 1918, Jovita met and married Bartolo Juarez and the couple soon relocated to San Antonio. There, she established a free kindergarten for Mexican-American children, edited *El Heraldo Cristiano*, and worked in a county hospital as an interpreter for its Spanish-speaking patients. This information is found in Jones, "JOVITA IDAR," *Texas Handbook Online*.

⁵⁶ United States Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940). The author accessed this information on March 3, 2013 through www.ancestry.com. This website also provides further information for locating the physical source. Census Place: San Antonio, Bexar, Texas; Roll: 7627_4204; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 259-101.

⁵⁷ Daniel D. Arreola, "The Mexican American Cultural Capital," *Geographical Review* Vol. 77, no. 1 (January 1987), 25. Hereafter cited: Arreola, "The Mexican American Cultural Capital."

⁵⁸ Weekly Report, April 5, 1919, Folder 9, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁵⁹ Hernandez, "Women's Labor and Activism," in *War Along the Border*, 186.

without prior permission. Morrison also railed against another charge for \$27.50 to provide a band at a workers' meeting. The AFL paid their organizers salaries, hotel bills, railroad fare, telegrams, and other necessary incidental expenses but such costs required previous authorization.⁶⁰ Idar had little choice but to pay these costs himself. It was an expensive lesson, but it would not be the last time he conflicted with Morrison over his expenses. The secretary continued to chide him for, as he saw it, unnecessary spending, saying, "A very wide latitude has been given to you in regard to expenses, I think more than the English speaking organizers."⁶¹

By the end of 1919, Gompers instructed Idar to hold a conference for the International Association of Machinists in Mexico City on January 11, 1920. Idar travelled from San Antonio to Laredo, where he obtained his passport on December 30 and met the Dominican delegation, before continuing his journey on the night train. In the morning, CROM officials welcomed Idar and his party.⁶² From his room at the St. Francis Hotel, Idar, in light of his scolding, sent a letter the following day to Morrison to notify him Mexico City's expensive living conditions would be reflected in his next weekly report.⁶³

By 1920, the Mexican Revolution ended when General Alvaro Obregon (1880-1928) ousted President Carranza, who struggled to maintain his hold over his country after the Great War. To many Mexicans, Carranza's domestic policies, particularly contrasted with his impressive international prowess, failed to live up to his promises and

⁶⁰ Letter from Frank Morrison to Clemente Idar, April 16, 1919, Folder 7, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁶¹ Letter from Frank Morrison to C.N. Idar, February 6, 1923, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁶² Weekly Report, January 1, 1920, Folder 9, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁶³ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, January 2, 1920, Folder 9, Box 10, CNIPP.

counterrevolutions emerged. Some of these assembled across the border in Texas and as far away as New York. An overworked State Department ignored Carranza's plea for help.⁶⁴ In a desperate attempt to save himself, the president assumed an anti-US stance, but it was too late. In May, he fled Mexico City, taking as much of the treasury as he could carry. While hiding in a mud hut, Obregon's forces machine-gunned Carranza down. Adolfo de la Huerta succeeded him as the interim president until a national election could be held and Obregon officially inaugurated.⁶⁵

In July 1920, Idar travelled to Arizona, where he met with General Obregon at Nogales to discuss his attitude towards labor. Idar reported to Canuto Vargas, the Spanish language secretary of the PAFL, the agenda of the general. He, in turn, relayed the message to Gompers:

I wish that one of the very first efforts of my government be to benefit the workers. I authorize you to say to the [AFL] that I will be pleased, in the case of my election to the Presidency of Mexico, to receive a delegation of labor representatives of Mexico and the [US] to discuss with them any labor problems which they may wish me to take into consideration.⁶⁶

Idar recorded the dismal conditions of these Mexican laborers. He met a man with a family of ten working in Arizona. He was a contract laborer and when he asked for a wage increase, his employer not only fired him, but also refused to pay for his return transportation home, a stipulation guaranteed in his contract. Several federal unions around the Salt River Valley brought the man to the Mexican Consul for repatriation.⁶⁷ Although Arizona adopted several pro-labor provisions

⁶⁴ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 190.

⁶⁵ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 192.

⁶⁶ Gompers, *Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 11, 340-1.

⁶⁷ Gompers, *Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 11, 339-40.

in its constitution upon gaining statehood in 1912, anti-labor and anti-Mexican sentiment ran high with Anglo employers, often resulting in strikes and violence. Perhaps no better incident typified these relations than Bisbee.⁶⁸ Idar notified the AFL leadership of the Labor Department's new allowance of importation of Mexican labor (including contract labor) and the policy's immediate impact in Arizona on Mexican-American citizens.⁶⁹

Such appalling conditions were not isolated and the AFL's best chance to curb immigration rested with the Mexican government restricting movement of labor. CROM opposed this and advocated workers' ability to travel to seek

⁶⁸ The town of Bisbee, once an empty desert, developed quickly due to its copper mines. Phelps, Dodge & Company moved to the area, establishing boomtowns for workers. By 1908, eight thousand miners, Slavs, Finns, and Mexicans, as well as their families called Bisbee home and the company built schools, hospitals, churches, a library, and a YMCA. In 1911, however, a change in management and company philosophy triggered tragic events. Walter Douglas assumed control of the company as from his father, Dr. James Douglas, who maintained a policy of paternal and corporate welfare toward his employees. The new general manager spoke out against unionization and toughened his workers' conditions. At the end of June 1917, two months after the US' entry into the war, anti-IWW rhetoric escalated. Pancho Villa's raids and the Zimmerman note also inflamed this atmosphere. When Wobblies from Bisbee's International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers went on strike to raise their wages to \$6 a day and to demand more laborers specifically assigned to operating equipment. The workers also requested Phelps Dodge amend their practice of automatically deducting money for water, rent, and electricity from their paychecks. The Copper Company, the Shannon Copper Company, and the Detroit Copper Company, a subsidiary of the Phelps Dodge & Company, employed about five thousand miners. Two-thirds of these workers were Mexican and Mexican-Americans. Although the copper companies consistently paid Anglo workers more, they made no monetary distinction between workers of Mexican extraction and Mexican-American citizens. Both groups received half of their wages in money and the other half in goods at the local company store, which profited the copper companies between one and three hundred percent. As the sun rose on July 12, Sheriff Harry Wheeler, with the support and aid of officers from Phelps Dodge and a group of two thousand vigilantes, cut off all access to Bisbee; no phones, telegraphs, or rail service. He provided arms to members of the League and commanded them to patrol the town "until the last IWW is run out." Two men died in a firefight and Wheeler detained thirteen hundred miners for deportation on the baseball field of the nearby town of Warren. He forced the men into twenty-four boxcars of a train destined for Hermanas, New Mexico. One across the state line, Wheeler warned the men they would be shot if they attempted to return and left them without food, water, or any way to notify their families 180 miles away. A US Army camp in Columbus, New Mexico, later gave them refuge. In response, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans working in Arizona's copper mines expanded their protests for better wages and conditions for themselves and their families. Local *mutualista* chapters of the *Alianza Hispano-Americana* (Hispanic-American Alliance) and *La Liga Protectora Latina* (Latin Protection League) assisted in their struggle. Dray, *There Is Power in a Union*, 356-8.

⁶⁹ Snow, *The Pan-American Federation of Labor*, 106.

employment.⁷⁰ Politics and labor south of the border remained convoluted, but Obregon maintained the government's support of CROM and appointed Morones his Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and, later, Labor Director of Federal Military Factories.⁷¹ For Gompers, Idar's working relationship with Mexico's new president, as well as his ongoing communications with Morones about events in Mexico, was indispensable.

Amid the tumultuous events in Mexico and life on the rails, Idar remained devoted to his family. Letters to his wife, Laura, illuminate the strains placed on their marriage by his career. In one letter, Idar chided his beloved for not writing to him for a month, when he wrote several long letters to her. He received her last letter with all the news of home. Her mother was unwell at present and the weather in San Antonio was unseasonably cold; a severe frost destroyed all her flowers in the front garden. In his letter, Idar begged Laura for news of his "little babies," particularly with regard to his youngest child, his "Marie Louise."⁷² His mother-in-law wrote previously to say the child was teething and suffered some sickness because of it. He pleaded with his wife to write when the children fell ill, "very especially about [his] fat little girl."⁷³ He regretted there was no one in their home to read the little storybooks he bought and sent to the children.⁷⁴

Idar's letter also reveals conflict between himself and his mother-in-law about how to run the household in his absence. When he sent her a few suggestions, she

⁷⁰ Snow, *The Pan-American Federation of Labor*, 104.

⁷¹ Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 170; Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 18.

⁷² Letter from Clemente Idar to Laura D. Idar, March 12, 1920, Folder 18, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷³ Letter from Clemente Idar to Laura D. Idar, March 12, 1920, Folder 18, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁴ Letter from Clemente Idar to Laura D. Idar, March 12, 1920, Folder 18, Box 1, CNIPP.

“scolded” him for interfering.⁷⁵ He resolved, he told Laura, “not to have anything to say about my own home affairs, because she is always ready to sass me back with remarks that are not in line with the purpose of my letters.”⁷⁶ Most of their arguments revolved around finances. Idar sent his paychecks home to Laura to support the family, but his mother-in-law appeared to find new ways to spend it. She wrote her daughter went about the house naked because she could afford no new clothes. Idar told his wife to buy what she needed for herself, the children, and her mother “because if she is naked on the streets that would make me feel ashamed and she might get arrested.”⁷⁷ The long absences from his wife and children took their toll on Idar, but his mother-in-law’s letters made him depressed and frustrated:

I just feel that I would like my absences from home to produce something good for the family. You cannot imagine how I long to be at home all the time, instead of being away, but I just simply find that if we want to pay for our home I will have to stay away now and then in order to foot the bill...The more I work and the more I make the more I get criticized by your mother. She does not seem [sic] to have any regard for me at all, and even after she has been with us...she is always running me down. She knows that I am not a millionaire and that I honestly do the best I can. By hearing such remarks at all times I do not see how the best man on earth could live satisfied. I get more reproaches from her than I do my own wife and I do not believe that is fair. Please tell her not to write anymore letters to me, if insults is [sic] all that she knows how to write.⁷⁸

He also received letters from his brothers and sisters. Elvira kept him apprised of their progress in selling *La Cronica*’s printing presses and other machinery. She

⁷⁵ Letter from Clemente Idar to Laura D. Idar, March 12, 1920, Folder 18, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁶ Letter from Clemente Idar to Laura D. Idar, March 12, 1920, Folder 18, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁷ Letter from Clemente Idar to Laura D. Idar, March 12, 1920, Folder 18, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁸ Letter from Clemente Idar to Laura D. Idar, March 12, 1920, Folder 18, Box 1, CNIPP.

proposed to act on behalf of all her siblings to pay any of the paper's remaining debts and to split the left over money evenly among them.⁷⁹

A letter from Frank Morrison disputing Idar's status with the AFL slowing his work in April and May 1920. Morrison, could not understand why Idar referred to himself in official communications as a general organizer when he was merely employed as a non-commissioned translator for the organization.⁸⁰ Idar responded in exasperation. The initial telegram from Morrison in 1918 defined his employment with the AFL as a general organizer. Adding to his confusion, Idar received a commission as a volunteer general organizer from Gompers. He demanded Morrison determine his status once and for all and reminded Morrison that Morrison himself addressed all communication to Idar as "C.N. Idar, General Organizer, American Federation of Labor."⁸¹ After all his traveling and organizing, Idar noted, he made many contributions to the AFL, but if he had to leave, his work for Gompers also earned him many enemies and could make finding other employment difficult.⁸² As an organizer with an extensive knowledge of the labor laws in post-revolutionary Mexico, Idar proved essential to Gompers' plans to stabilize labor conditions in Mexico, thereby crushing any residual influence of the IWW in the country.⁸³ Obviously, it was not advisable to lose him, and although no correspondence exists in the Clemente Idar Personal Papers to detail Morrison's exact

⁷⁹ Letter from Elvira Idar to Clemente Idar, May 2, 1920, Folder 20, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁸⁰ Letter from Frank Morrison to Clemente Idar, April 26, 1920, Folder 8, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸¹ Letter from Frank Morrison to Clemente Idar, April 26, 1920, Folder 8, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸² Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, May 5, 1920, Folder 8, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸³ Hernandez, "Women's Labor and Activism," in *War Along the Border*, 192.

response, Idar continued working for the AFL and all further correspondence from or to him list his official position as a general organizer.

Whether such an oversight of Idar's title was a reflection of the AFL's racist tendencies is a matter for further study. The incident does reveal how Idar saw himself within the larger Anglo organization – an important emissary bringing many positive connections and attributes to his work – compared to how the AFL initially saw Idar – another set of useful boots on the ground. By September, Idar proved himself one of the most sought-after organizers in his jurisdiction.⁸⁴ Not all of his assignments were happy ones and discrimination often overshadowed labor's triumph:

In spite of the fact that I am a native citizen of the United States there are places in the towns mentioned where I can not [sic] enter a hotel, get a shave or a meal because being of Mexican extraction I am a Mexican forever. My citizenship in that section is not recognized. You have no idea under what conditions I have struggled while traveling in that section.⁸⁵

On November 23, Idar wrote to Morrison about an attack on the Farm Laborers' Local he organized on a recent trip to Fentress, near Austin, Texas. The group opened a school for their members' children, but also used this building to hold Catholic masses. In response, an Anglo man named Harris, accompanied by the town's sheriff, pulled a pistol and threatened to kill Miguel Pavia, a member, and tried to punch Francisco Becerra, the vice-president. Members wrote Idar to inform him many of them no longer had employment contracts and that they would continue to suffer as long as they remained affiliated with the AFL. Although not personally present, the assault devastated Idar and he resolved to leave immediately to visit the Mexican Consul, the Bishop of the diocese,

⁸⁴ Letter from Frank Morrison to Henry T. Dehart, September 28, 1920, Folder 8, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸⁵ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, November 23, 1920, Folder 8, Box 3, CNIPP.

the sheriff, the Superintendent of Public Schools and the District Judge for Lockhart, Texas.⁸⁶

Gompers' agenda soon demanded Idar's attention once more. On December 11, he received telegraphed orders to travel to Mexico City to serve again as an interpreter at the PAFL annual conference.⁸⁷ He left San Antonio on December 29 and arrived in January 1921 at the Hotel St. Francis. Obregon's government had already begun to assume control of various resources, such as banks like the Paris-Mexico Bank, and Idar could not cash any of his paychecks. Without attributing this chaos directly to the Mexican president, Idar wrote to Morrison about the conditions and advised him to make whatever arrangements necessary to avoid the embarrassment of Gompers and the US delegation's inability to access funds.⁸⁸ While attending the conference, Idar continued to network and began to lay the foundation to expand his contacts beyond Mexico, into Latin America. After his return home to San Antonio at the end of January, Idar maintained his correspondence with Jacinto Albarracin, a delegate from Bogota, Colombia, about the state of labor in that country and how Idar's expertise could help mobilize their movement.⁸⁹ He also wrote similar letters to Carlos Estrada, the delegate for El Salvador, who begged Idar to recommend his services to the AFL as a general organizer to represent the organization directly in Central America.⁹⁰ For whatever

⁸⁶ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, November 23, 1920, Folder 8, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸⁷ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, December 11, 1920, Folder 8, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸⁸ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, January 8, 1921, Folder 9, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁸⁹ Letter from Clemente Idar to Jose Almanza, February 15, 1921, Folder 1, Box 1, CNIPP; Letter from Clemente Idar to Jacinto Albarracin, February 16, 1921, Folder 1, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁹⁰ Letter from Carlos Estrada to Clemente Idar, March 1, 1921, Folder 7, Box 1, CNIPP.

reason, these conversations soon lapsed and Idar was fully occupied with his efforts in the United States once more.

Morrison began receiving requests in March 1921 from John F. Hart, the president of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters (AMC) for Idar's help. Hart's district president, Malone, of Fort Worth, Texas, reported a large migration of Mexican workers acting as strikebreakers. These scabs contributed to worsening labor conditions in the state, already in a recession. By breaking through the picket lines, Mexican immigrants exacerbated tensions with white laborers. To avoid possible violence, the depreciation of wages, or the elimination of jobs altogether, Idar helped to spearhead a repatriation program for 50,000 of these workers.⁹¹ Juan J. Gomez, the man he tried to get the AFL to hire to help him in his work in 1918, now worked for Antonio Villareal, Obregon's Secretary of Agriculture and Development and Gomez recommended Idar as an ideal agent to facilitate the return of their citizens.⁹² The AFL knew of Idar's commission and supported his work, as it coincided with its own interests. He sent letters to the AFL leadership and President Obregon to inform them of the barbarous, slave-like conditions facing Mexican workers in areas across Texas.⁹³ He recommended the establishment of "Bureaus of Employment and Information" along the American border to assist workers in finding fair employment and to give them information to prepare them for their time in America. Such services were to be under the control of the Mexican authorities and free to all workers needing them.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁹² Letter from A.I. Villareal to Clemente N. Idar, April 13, 1921, Folder 10, Box 2, CNIPP.

⁹³ Letter from Clemente Idar to Don Alvaro Obregon, June 13, 1921, Folder 2, Box 2, CNIPP.

⁹⁴ Letter from Clemente Idar to Samuel Gompers, July 16, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

Gompers ordered Idar to leave immediately for Fort Worth to assess the situation.⁹⁵ Upon his arrival, Idar met with Malone and talked to him about the situation in the meat packing houses before meeting with the business agent, president, vice-president, and the secretary-treasurer of the union for their perspectives. There were, they said, about 2000 unemployed Mexican men living in deplorable conditions and suffering from hunger. The Welfare Association of Fort Worth had stepped in to take care of them, but did not know how long they could continue to do so. Idar decided to call a meeting of the Mexican laborers at the weekend and designed and ordered Spanish handbills to be distributed to advertise the meeting. The next day, Idar took the business agent, Jim Bartlett, and the secretary-treasurer, Freeman, with him to Dallas to notify the Mexican Consul of the problem, who promised to notify their Department of State.⁹⁶

The AMC's union in Oklahoma City, also under Malone's control, noticed a similar influx, and Gompers requested Idar proceed there after concluding his work in Fort Worth.⁹⁷ Before he could leave for Oklahoma, he had to return to San Antonio to finish some of his previous assignments.⁹⁸ Oklahoma did not have a favorable history with labor organizing. Previously, in February 1910, Gompers had replied to a complaint made by C. H. Hogan, the secretary of the Laborers' Protective Union #12,821, against including non-Anglo (Mexican, Asian, or African-American) members and making such exclusion part of the group's constitution. Hogan argued this provision would be

⁹⁵ Letter from Samuel Gompers to C.N. Idar, March 23, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹⁶ Weekly Report from C. N. Idar, April 2, 1921, Folder 9, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁹⁷ Letter from John F. Hart to Frank Morrison, March 21, 1921, Folder 1, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹⁸ Letter from John Malone to Clemente Idar, June 9, 1921, Folder 1, Box 3, CNIPP.

consistent with the state's Jim Crow law. Gompers, defended the AFL's sometimes contradictory policies regarding racial inclusion and refused his request saying:

You people in Oklahoma should recall that these people are your industrial competitors and unless they are organized and their hours, wages and conditions brought up to the level or nearly to the level of those which your members gradually be brought down to the level that these unorganized workers are compelled to labor under.⁹⁹

These race and labor tensions violently exploded in the Tulsa Race Riot, on May 31 to June 1.¹⁰⁰ Malone wrote to Idar a week later begging for his assistance with the ACM in Oklahoma City.¹⁰¹ Idar arrived in Oklahoma City to begin working with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters (AMC) in August 1921, barely two months after the Tulsa Race Riot and wrote to Gompers of the existing situation:

I have just read statements in the leading dailies of Oklahoma City showing that American unemployed workers resent the opportunity being given there to many Mexicans to work at wages much lower than what the average American workers... We must be very clear in stating that these are not race riots. They are hunger riots. They arise from the deplorable industrial condition in which our country finds itself today.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 8, 46.

¹⁰⁰ In its aftermath, police officers had difficulty in identifying the Knights of Liberty's masked culprits. Thorstein Veblen, an economist and sociologist, attributed their failure, instead, to corruption. At this time, oil companies controlled Tulsa and Veblen directly charged them with recruiting vigilantes in the race war. After all, he argued, they had done the same against the Wobblies across the Midwest, especially in Oklahoma and Kansas. He was not wrong. On January 1, 1917, the IWW established the Oil Workers Union No. 450 in Tulsa. As it continued to recruit members, the *Tulsa World* published against the IWW arguing "the first step in the whipping of Germany is to strangle" them. Months later on November 5, police arrested eleven Wobblies with vagrancy as they went about organizing for their oil union. The police court convicted the men and fined them each \$100.00. That evening, around ten o'clock, the men were taken from their cells on the assumption they were being returned to IWW headquarters so they could, in turn, leave Tulsa. Their cars, however, were stopped by the familiar black hoods of the heavily armed Knights, who took the men beyond the city limits to the Osage Hill. There, they stripped the Wobblies to the waist, whipped their backs, brushed hot tar across their wounds, and coated them with feathers. They set their clothes aflame and fired shots at the Wobblies as they fled westward down the road. Signs appeared after the incident: "Warning Posted. Notice to the IWW's: Don't let the sun set on you in Tulsa! – Vigilance Committee." Foner, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918*, 294-5.

¹⁰¹ Letter from John Malone to Clemente Idar, June 9, 1921, Folder 1, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹⁰² Letter from Clemente Idar to Samuel Gompers, August 5, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

During the war, the ACM unions in Oklahoma City and Fort Worth prospered under federal mediation, but afterwards suffered with the return of international competition. To continue seeing profits achieved in wartime, the packing companies imposed their own unions and cut wages. The workers were now on strike and Idar reemployed the tactics he used in Fort Worth.¹⁰³ With the approval of Gompers, Idar remained in Oklahoma City to deliver a Labor Day address for the workers.¹⁰⁴ Despite all of his efforts, the ACM's strike ended in 1922 when the companies brought in large numbers of unskilled and unemployed men. Many of the scabs were African-American, which did little to soothe racial tensions.¹⁰⁵

Idar's Labor Day speech in Oklahoma City is one of the most interesting documents in his collection. He was no stranger to public speaking and gave countless orations over the course of his career with the AFL, but this is the first speech (and only one found so far) that he felt so compelled to deliver as to specifically ask the organization's leadership for permission to do so. It is also the clearest statement of his own labor philosophy. Entitled "The Machine Age," he railed against what he saw as the excesses of machinery in an industrialized world:

A struggle is now being waged between the energy that lies in the arm, hand and brain of Man and the power that lies in the fly-wheel of Machines. The difference is found in the quantity of power provided, and thanks to this, the Machine is substituting man-power with greater advantage, therein being found an expression of concrete progress.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Eric Arnesen, ed., *Encyclopedia of United States Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 1, A-F (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 1305-6. Hereafter cited: Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of United States Labor and Working-Class History*.

¹⁰⁴ Telegram from Samuel Gompers to Ed Garfenton, August 20, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹⁰⁵ Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of United States Labor and Working-Class History*, 1305-6.

¹⁰⁶ Machine Age written by C.N. Idar, no date (c.1925), Folder 22, Box 8, CNIPP.

The 1920s were a decade of great social and technological change and the Ford Motor Company had spent the decade perfecting its assembly line. It seemed a new machine, designed to be faster and cheaper than a human, appeared every day and Idar feared what this development would mean for workers across the country if the pattern continued or escalated. He worried what it said about the culture of American capitalism that efficiency and maximized profits were so highly prized, even above the basic health, safety, and poverty of American workers:

As long as Humanity, in one word, conserves money as the limit of activities, a very grave injury is committed against Evolution and the felicity of Human Society. While there remains in existence the social organization that compels men to exploit their fellow-beings to live and profit, an error will be committed; but an error for which neither the rich nor the poor are responsible, but the development of this viciated [sic] civilization. The capitalistic regime, with all its inevitable miseries, is a precise condition of adaptation to the erroneous concept of property, and as a consequence, and absurd civilization has been created.¹⁰⁷

This passage is a far cry from the more conservative rhetoric espoused by the AFL. At first glance, it is possible Idar tailored his remarks to his audience and to compete with any IWW influence in the area, but since Morrison requested a copy of Idar's remarks based on the success of his speech, it likely the contents express the organizer's own opinions and fears.¹⁰⁸ From the various drafts of the text found among his papers, each with words scribbled out or penciled in, it is clear the topic occupied much of his time.

A drop in membership dues (thanks largely to the ongoing recession) forced the AFL to place its organizers on month-long furloughs in the fall of 1921. Gompers

¹⁰⁷ Machine Age written by C.N. Idar, no date (c.1925), Folder 22, Box 8, CNIPP.

¹⁰⁸ Telegram from Samuel Gompers to Ed Garfenton, August 20, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

notified Idar of his unemployment beginning October 9.¹⁰⁹ Clemente and Laura welcomed another daughter, Anna Louisa, earlier that year and, with five children, a mother-in-law, and a wife, the loss of a month's wages was a devastating loss.¹¹⁰ Another furlough from April to May 1922 once again placed an economic burden on his family.¹¹¹ To make money until he could resume work on May 1st, he contracted himself out to the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, who sent him to organize a local in Torreon, Mexico.¹¹² He also established locals for tailors, as well as unskilled laborers. Idar used the opportunity to spend time with his family and brought them to Mexico for the month and received permission from Gompers to remain in Torreon after his reinstatement to organize for the AFL.¹¹³

Gompers sent Idar to El Paso on July 2, 1922, to aid striking Mexican railroad clerks. Local unions catered only to Anglos and refused entrance to other ethnicities. A lack of Mexican-American workers forced Idar to rethink his strategy. He decided there was little use organizing in El Paso, if there were no unions across the river in Ciudad Juarez to foster relations between the two sides.¹¹⁴ On July 27, 1922, Idar sent a letter to

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Samuel Gompers to Clemente Idar, September 29, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹¹⁰ United States Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940). The author accessed this information on March 3, 2013, courtesy of www.ancestry.com. This website also provided the following information for locating the physical record: Census Place: San Antonio, Bexar, Texas; Roll: 7627_4204; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 259-101; Letter from Clemente Idar to Samuel Gompers, November 2, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹¹¹ Letter from Clemente Idar to the Bakery and Confectionary Workers' International, April 30, 1922, Folder 5, Box 4, CNIPP.

¹¹² Letter from Clemente Idar to the Bakery and Confectionary Workers' International, April 30, 1922, Folder 5, Box 4, CNIPP.

¹¹³ Telegram from Clemente Idar to G. H. Davila, March 27, 1922, Folder 7, Box 1, CNIPP; Letter from Samuel Gompers to C. N. Idar, April 24, 1922, Folder 10, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹¹⁴ Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, 164.

Samuel Gompers to inform him about the situation in El Paso. He had been keeping in touch with Mexican officials and labor groups by telegraph. In particular, he praised the efforts of Plutarco Eliaz Calles (1877-1945), the governor of Sonora (1917-19) and Obregon's right hand man, who prohibited a train of Mexican strikebreakers from crossing into the US at Laredo. Idar urged Gompers to officially state his appreciation of Calles' efforts at the first available opportunity.¹¹⁵

Idar continued to publish and circulate Spanish language materials "with very little expense to the Federation," expressing the aims of the strike and the role of the AFL in supporting workers.¹¹⁶ He also aided in raising funds for the Finance Committee. Although the strikers, as well as himself, were happy with his effort, Idar stressed the financial impact the strike was beginning to make. Furthermore, the failure of other railroad groups to join the strike lowered the men's morale. He did not think this pressure would force them to abandon the cause, as El Paso was "a very important geographical point and we are endeavoring to keep it tightly closed against imported strikebreakers."¹¹⁷ At the end of August, Idar reinforced this new solidarity by helping the city council plan a Labor Day parade. He invited the new unions in Juarez to attend and to march along the route. US workers met one thousand members representing nineteen

¹¹⁵ Samuel Gompers with Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino, eds., *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, *The Last Years, 1922-24* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 120-1. Hereafter cited: Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12.

¹¹⁶ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 120-1.

¹¹⁷ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 120-1.

locals and a municipal band at the International Bridge. Idar and other city officials walked beside them.¹¹⁸

Gompers had heard Mexico intended to host a contingent of European labor officials in January 1924. In October 1923, on his way back to Washington, DC, via California, Gompers, with the PAFL's Executive Committee (Santiago Iglesias, W.C. Roberts, and J.W. Kelley), stopped in El Paso following the AFL's annual convention in Portland. With the presidential election growing closer and desperate for the AFL's approval of his hand-picked successor, Calles, Obregon called for meetings to be held October 25-27.¹¹⁹ He sent Samuel O. Yudico, Reynaldo Cervantes Torres, and Fernando Rodarte to represent CROM. At the meetings, CROM insisted the Europeans (representatives from Spain, Italy, France, and England in the International Federation of Trade Unions) would be merely observing labor conditions in Mexico and had no interest in making any pacts with Mexican unions not affiliated with the AFL. Furthermore, they would make no European alliances without the approval of the AFL. Gompers, was not convinced, saying, "It is not an everyday matter for a half dozen of the most important and busy officials of the European labor movement to gather on the American continent."¹²⁰ Nevertheless, Gompers endorsed Calles and urged CROM to do all it could to ensure his election. The endorsement served the AFL's needs as much as Obregon's. Although elected in 1920, the US government did not officially recognize Obregon as

¹¹⁸ No author, "Labor Parade is Arranged," *El Paso Post*, August 31, 1922, no page; the author also found this article in Folder 3, Box 12, CIPP.

¹¹⁹ Snow, *The Pan-American Federation of Labor*, 115.

¹²⁰ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 356-7.

head of state until September 1923 and, after all his efforts, Gompers' feared what a possible snub of Calles would do to destabilize labor and US/Mexico relations.¹²¹

Addressing the Executive Council of the AFL in Washington, DC, on November 19, 1923, Gompers proposed a strategy to gather information and to ensure CROM kept the AFL involved— he would send his own delegation to Mexico to coincide with the European visit under the existing guise of the PAFL. He proposed sending Iglesias, Kelley, and Idar to Mexico City in January. Each man could speak English and Spanish fluently and possessed extensive organizing expertise. Although Iglesias is described as being “intimately familiar with the entire Latin-American situation,” only Idar’s ethnicity (and “unusual ability and understanding”) is specifically listed as a useful quality in Gompers’ address.¹²²

Idar, now forty and diabetic, began to notice his career’s toll on his body.¹²³ While addressing a labor meeting in Houston in November, he noticed excruciating pain on the right side of his abdomen. He had a hernia and a doctor advised him to remain in town to rest for a few days to avoid surgery, which he did.¹²⁴ In December, Idar’s family came down with an illness which lasted all month. To make matters worse, an outbreak of diphtheria in San Antonio afflicted Laura and Clemente’s eldest daughter, Charlotte. Idar wrote to Morrison in his weekly report that his household was now quarantined. Medical bills, including vaccinations, claimed a large portion of his income, but he

¹²¹ Snow, *The Pan-American Federation of Labor*, 115.

¹²² Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 358.

¹²³ Although this study does not examine Idar’s diabetes and related illnesses in depth, Robert Tattersall’s *Diabetes: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) is an excellent study of the condition and its treatments during Idar’s lifetime.

¹²⁴ Letter from C.N. Idar to Frank Morrison, November 24, 1923, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

remained optimistic. His children had not been seriously ill in five years and “it was about time for us to turn over our salary income to the physician.”¹²⁵ As soon as he recovered, he traveled to Mexico with the rest of the delegation.

Bouts of illness, starting in May, marked the beginning of the end of Samuel Gompers. Determined to attend the AFL’s forty-fifth convention, and his last, in El Paso, he presided over every session, from November 17-25, but left reading his opening speech to his vice president, William Green.¹²⁶ After the Convention concluded, the ailing labor leader made his way across the International Bridge to Juarez for CROM’s annual meeting and for joint sessions with the AFL.¹²⁷ At the first joint session of the AFL and CROM in El Paso on November 19, 1924, Idar served as a translator for a rapidly deteriorating Gompers. Representatives from Canada, England, and Germany, as well as one thousand emissaries from Mexico, dressed to represent their type of work, came to participate in the celebration. Farmers wore straw sombreros, sandals, white cotton suits, and pink and orange scarfs. Industrial workers came clad in overalls and white collar workers came dressed in business suits. Gompers won applause from the audience for praising the work of President Obregon, and Calles, his successor.¹²⁸

Gompers also praised Morones, who managed to attend despite being shot earlier that week during a dispute with agrarian leader Jose Maria Sanchez at a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies in Mexico City and labeled the attack as “blow aimed at the

¹²⁵ Weekly Report, January 2, 1924, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

¹²⁶ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. 9, *The T.U.E.L. to The End of the Gompers Era* (New York: International Publisher Co., Inc.: 1991), 361. Hereafter cited: Foner, *The T.U.E.L. to The End of the Gompers Era*.

¹²⁷ Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 541.

¹²⁸ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 525.

democratic Republic of Mexico.”¹²⁹ Mexican delegate Trevino agreed and made it known to the congregation that “many men in the labor ranks would be happy to lose their lives in the struggle for liberty.”¹³⁰ From there, the Mexican delegates provided a special train to take Gompers and his party to Mexico City for the inauguration of president-elect Calles and the PAFL’s annual meeting.¹³¹ Gompers’s secretary, Florence Calvert Thorne, recalled his participation in the ceremony:

Delegations from all parts of Mexico arrived at the stations and marched to the stadium. Many were bare-footed, others in sandals, and the majority in picturesque native dress with serapes and blankets. There were bands and military groups. Into the stadium they marched in groups; the political organizations with banners; the colors and banners of the Mexican Labor Party everywhere mingled with the colors of the Mexican Republic. . . . Just before twelve began official arrivals – the two houses of Parliament; ambassadors and labor representatives curiously mingled and equally acclaimed; then Gompers, then Morones, the new Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor. . . . then a marshaling of the American delegates to the Pan-American Federation of Labor.¹³²

Gompers took part in the festivities as best as he was able, but it was clear to his colleagues, he would not recover from this illness.

On December 6, Gompers’ condition worsened and by December 10, his prognosis was so dire Morrison and the other AFL officials feared he would die on Mexican soil and decided to get him back to the US as soon as possible, in accordance with the old man’s last wishes. The party’s train reached Laredo on December 12 and quickly set off for San Antonio. According to Gompers’ secretary, Florence Calvert Thorne, Idar witnessed Gompers’ passing on December 13, at the St. Anthony Hotel around 4:00 A.M., along with

¹²⁹ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 525-6.

¹³⁰ Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 525.

¹³¹ Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 544-5.

¹³² Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 546-7.

Morrison and other confidants.¹³³ His death signaled the demise of the PAFL, as well as the end of an era for the AFL.¹³⁴ The event also marked a turning point in Idar's career. The man who had given him his big break was gone. He had no idea whether Gompers' successor would continue to see a role for the Mexican-American organizer to play.

¹³³ Because Gompers died before the completion of his autobiography, it is Calvert's voice that tells the story of the Mexican inauguration, Gompers' illness, and his subsequent death in San Antonio. She lists all the persons in the room when the labor leader breathed his last. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 551-3; Foner, *The T.U.E.L. to The End of the Gompers Era*, 362; Gompers, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 12, 541.

¹³⁴ Toth, "The Pan American Federation of Labor," 616.

CHAPTER 4

“An Optimist and a Fighter”: Texas, Mexico, and William Green

Idar would not have to worry long about his job security – or his new role in the AFL. Gompers’ death left the AFL and his new successor, William Green, to solve immigration from Mexico, and its consequences.¹ Although Gompers claimed to “have no desire to interfere with the affairs of Mexico,” and reportedly only offered advice to Mexican officials at their request, Green had little knowledge of Gompers’ affairs in Mexico. Gompers, resentful of his own mortality and anxious to cement his legacy as a tireless advocate for labor at home and abroad, failed to include Green in his plans for Mexico and to prepare him to take up the cause after his death. Consequently, Green had little desire to be involved in affairs south of the border, although he unquestioningly accepted Gompers’ legacy at home.² Green was realistic. He knew he had little choice but to deal with CROM and Mexican immigration. He needed someone with expertise in this area, someone with a more intimate knowledge of Gompers’ existing policies and contacts. He needed Idar and it was up to Idar to prove his usefulness.

Green came from the ranks of the United Mine Workers (UMW).³ Mild-mannered and heavysset, he appeared every inch the conservative businessman in his suit, metal-rimmed glasses, and gold pocket watch, despite the blue spots under his skin from his years working in the mines.⁴ He favored industrialism and frequently succumbed to the

¹ Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 210.

² Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 319-20; Green, *The World of the Worker*, 123 and 129.

³ Green, *The World of the Worker*, 123.

⁴ Green, *The World of the Worker*, 129.

pressures of craft unionists. Where Samuel Gompers had dominated his Executive Council, Green could not; his council consisted of conservative business unionists, like William Hutcheson of the Carpenters. This weakness in Green's leadership, journalist Benjamin Stolberg argued, was also his key to maintaining power. If he proved no threat to the council, the council would leave him be.⁵ Green seemed so unremarkable, his onetime coworker in the UMW, John Lewis, said of him, "Explore the mind of Bill Green? Why, Bill and I had offices next door to each other for ten years...I have done a lot of exploring in Bill's mind and I give you my word there is nothing there."⁶

This perception of the dull businessman extended to Green and the AFL's policies toward Mexico. Green lacked Gompers' familiarity with the country, as well as his flamboyancy, and took a somewhat ambivalent view on the importance of US/Mexico labor relations, but he did not rejoice at their deterioration since his predecessor's death. CROM, now anxious to ingratiate itself with the newly inaugurated President Calles, needed to maintain good working relations with the AFL; it could defend CROM against charges of Bolshevism levied by the Calles administration. This insistence on a good working relationship with Mexico required little effort from Green but to accept these overtures of friendship.⁷

Green possessed a head for business, and his ego required less flattery than Gompers, who spent the 1910s and the early part of the 1920s cultivating relationships in Mexico with little perceivable gain for the AFL. Green now intended to see a return on the AFL's investment. No longer content to "pla[y] the defender of the Mexican

⁵ Green, *The World of the Worker*, 123.

⁶ Green, *The World of the Worker*, 129.

⁷ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 210.

Revolution in the [US]” or to “receiv[e]...continual paeans from gratitude of those he defended,” Green’s new policy used pan-Americanism (the relationship with CROM) to force Calles’ government to curb the flow of illegal Mexican immigration to the US to a small trickle.⁸ CROM’s control over labor impressed him when he accompanied Gompers to Mexico to attend Calles’ inauguration.⁹ Unlike Gompers, Green would not wait for Congress to fix Mexican immigration. He would force Mexico to get its affairs in order.

For all of Gompers’ outwardly idealistic notions of the PAFL, the old man consistently lobbied Congress to amend the quota immigration system. The Immigration and Naturalization Service recorded the entry of at least 220,000 Mexicans into the United States between 1911 and 1920, and he feared what such an influx of cheap labor would do to American workers and the economy.¹⁰ After the Great War’s end, steel companies imported Mexican strikebreakers during the Steel Strike of 1919.¹¹ By 1920, Mexican-born Texans outnumbered native Mexican-American Tejanos living and working in Texas.¹² These overwhelming demographics further spurred Gompers into action; but he failed to convince Congress of the impending threat to American labor. Consequently, Mexico was not included in the 1921 postwar immigration law.¹³

⁸ Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 209.

⁹ Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 211.

¹⁰ Hart, “Beyond Borders” in *War Along the Border*, 27.

¹¹ Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 208.

¹² The population of Mexican born Texans increased from 125,000 in 1910 to 252,000 in 1920. Ramirez, *To the Line of Fire*, 2-3.

¹³ The 1921 law placed quotas on immigration from European countries based on three percent of those respective nationalities born in the US as of 1910. Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 208.

Subjecting only Mexico to the new restrictions would jeopardize relations with Mexico and Latin America as a whole. It would also open the US and the AFL to new charges of discrimination.¹⁴ Employers, such as agribusiness in the southwest and mining companies in the midwest, relied on cheap, migrant labor because white Americans would not fill those jobs and would not support the new quota law.¹⁵ African Americans were also unwilling to work the kinds of jobs Mexicans fulfilled.¹⁶ In March 1924, Gompers reluctantly begged the House Immigration Committee to include Canada, as well as Mexico, on the list of countries subject to the quota. Chairman and Representative Albert Johnson refused, telling Gompers he could not pass a bill including the two nations.¹⁷ The National Origins Act of 1924, consequently, did nothing to restrict immigration from Canada or Mexico.¹⁸

Idar, for his part, was not sure what role he would play in Green's new policy towards Mexico. Although he spent time with Green when the two men travelled to Mexico with Gompers at the end of 1924, Idar could not be sure this new leader would listen to his opinions or advice.¹⁹ On March 19, 1925, he received a letter from Green addressed to all AFL organizers that "actually brought the entire future of the American

¹⁴ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 209.

¹⁵ Green, *The World of the Worker*, 124.

¹⁶ In her book, Isabel Wilkerson explains the mass migration of over six million southern blacks, to the northeast in search of better employment and living opportunities. Beginning during World War I and lasting into the 1970s, Wilkerson notes the reaction by whites to this African American migration mirrored their reaction to Mexicans. There was no ocean to keep blacks and Mexicans from taking white American jobs and resources and the migrations came in successive waves. This had not been the case with immigration from Europe and Asia. Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Sons*, 8-9 and 419.

¹⁷ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 209.

¹⁸ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 209.

¹⁹ It is unknown when Idar met Green for the first time or how often the two men saw each other before Green succeeded Gompers as president of the AFL.

trades-union movement face to face with the organizing staff,” allowing them to “send in all kinds of suggestions” and input on current policies.²⁰ Idar saw the letter as his opportunity to prove his necessity to Green. Although the new president wished to lesson his involvement in Mexican affairs, migrants from Mexico still affected US labor and he would need someone like Idar to navigate precarious situations along the border. In his April 21 response, he took full advantage of the invitation in a six page submission. In it, he provided three steps to increasing the organization’s membership. First, he reminded Green of the 1,500 miners in Gallup, New Mexico.²¹ Once affiliated with the UMW, they asked for help in their reorganization. Second, Idar advocated increased activity in Arizona, where the AFL had not been a significant presence since 1917. Idar’s sources in the state informed him of 16,000 men who could be organized. Above all, he maintained the importance of continuing a relationship with CROM to insist on the organization of unskilled laborers in Mexico and particularly along the border. Once they held union cards, they could be issued AFL equivalents if they decided to work in the US. He recommended his longtime colleague, Canuto Vargas, for the task.²²

Two problems existed in organizing unaffiliated workers: racism and the influence of big business. Idar estimated of the twenty million wage earners in the US, two million were Mexican and nine million were African-American. These eleven million people “practically have no contact with the organized labor movement.”²³ To attract African-American membership, Idar recommended forming an alliance with the

²⁰ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, April 21, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

²¹ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, April 21, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

²² Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, April 21, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

²³ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, April 21, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for “negroes...don’t believe the white man sincerely aims to help them.”²⁴ Furthermore, American businessmen fought to eliminate any restrictions on daily entries from and returns to Mexico. With so many workers living in Mexico, but working in the US, the AFL needed to force the Department of Labor to make it illegal to obtain permits for successive daily crossings. The AFL could not hope to tailor its outreach efforts to such a situation; workers had to live and work in one country and join the union available to them on either side. Idar despaired any legislative action could be taken at all as “practically every branch of the government in the United States is controlled and influenced by capital...seiz[ing] every opportunity to increase its power and control over the destinies of the nation.”²⁵ He closed his remarks reminding the new businessman-like president the effect of big business on the AFL’s membership:

Everywhere one can see the conviction displayed by the business man that he is supported by the vast machinery of American government. The workers also see and know this. And instead of becoming stauncher supporters of the labor movement they cross the line over to the ranks of reaction. They generally display an air of indifference and they shun the need of battling for better conditions, for better government and for democracy. One not born an optimist and a fighter would indeed feel disheartened by the horrible apathy of the workers. Thank God for those we have in our ranks!²⁶

Idar sent additional letters to Green asking for updates on the AFL’s current position and received a reply that the AFL had not yet decided officially and specifically what to do.²⁷

²⁴ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, April 21, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

²⁵ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, April 21, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

²⁶ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, April 21, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

²⁷ Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 211.

In May, reports reached Green from Arizona about the deterioration of American labor based on the influx of Mexican immigration. Idar had been right and his frank, lengthy advice earned the president's trust. Green wrote to him with the decision to call a conference between AFL and CROM to discuss the issue and to find a solution.²⁸ After all, the US and Japanese governments curbed immigration from Japan in 1907 with the signing of the Gentleman's Agreement during Theodore Roosevelt's administration.²⁹ In addition to the conference, Green decided to simultaneously push a major membership drive in the southwest, particularly in Arizona and New Mexico, and appointed Idar its director. Idar feared constant immigration would undermine his efforts, but Green assured him he would continue to push Congress to expand the quota system while Idar conducted the drive.³⁰ Idar continued to send word to Green about how immigration hampered his organizational efforts.³¹

In addition to this assignment, Green asked Idar to represent him and the AFL at the annual Texas State Federation of Labor (TSFL) conference to be held May 23-27, 1925 in Amarillo.³² The TSFL asked for the AFL's assistance in combatting Mexican immigration as early as 1911.³³ With the longest stretch of border and a popular destination for the majority of immigrants, Gompers viewed Texas as an integral part of his strategy to combat the problem. The state also suffered directly from the "sharp ethnic

²⁸ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 211.

²⁹ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 207.

³⁰ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 211.

³¹ Snow, *The Pan American Federation of Labor*, 129.

³² Weekly Report, May 30, 1925, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

³³ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 173.

conflict characterized by charges of unfair immigrant competition and countercharges of widespread discrimination.”³⁴ Gompers appointed Idar to mediate relations with the TSFL and CROM and to work with the TSFL to develop a way to appease Anglo labor’s fears of immigration in a manner that did not worsen CROM’s fear of discrimination against Mexicans. To do this, he unionized Mexican workers in Texas by chartering their existing organizations in Mexico and orchestrated repatriation campaigns of unemployed (and unskilled) agricultural workers in urban areas.³⁵ As one of his most trusted representatives in Texas, Gompers instructed Idar to coordinate parts of labor’s (nonpartisan) political campaigns around the state, which required extensive traveling to raise funds.³⁶ Here, Idar most likely drew on his experience of selling war bonds during the Great War to rally as much money as possible. He was particularly successful in encouraging Mexican voters to turn out for the San Antonio elections in 1924.³⁷

Idar continued this work for Green at the Amarillo conference in 1925. The convention, like the AFL itself, decided to tackle immigration from Mexico and put a decisive policy in place. The delegation voted to include US-born Mexicans and Tejanos in the TSFL, as the immigration of Mexican nationals directly undermined their working and living conditions. The TSFL also recommended the AFL hold an international labor conference with representatives from CROM, the AFL, and the state federations of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and California. Idar did not challenge the idea of this new limited inclusion, but he continued to challenge the persistent racial stereotypes

³⁴ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 179.

³⁵ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 179.

³⁶ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 180.

³⁷ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 180.

held by Anglos against Mexicans.³⁸ Idar quietly connected with labor union officers from parts of Texas in desperate need of his expertise and helped to establish a State Label and Shop Cards Department, under the auspices of the TSFL, to translate Mexican union cards to the TSFL's equivalent.³⁹ Furthermore, Idar defended the Mexican government, arguing it alone was not to blame for the large number of immigrants flooding across the border. It previously prohibited about 30,000 Mexicans from crossing at the behest of the AFL. Mexican consuls, he argued, also discouraged workers from leaving home where they could.⁴⁰ By defending the Mexican authorities and touting their efforts, Idar implied the blame for immigration lay at someone else's door; possibly, the businesses, farmers, and other employers desperate to maximize their profits by acquiring cheap labor.

Where Idar's letters and weekly reports to Frank Morrison, now secretary to Green, once assumed a slightly bombastic tone, Idar's reports from the conference "in reference to the problem of Mexican immigration [were] discreet, quiet and tactful," under "the better judgment of President Green."⁴¹ He could not, however, contain his personal feelings when he encountered blatant racism and he did not shy away from expressing them. At the 1925 conference, Amarillo's mayor and Texas gubernatorial candidate Ernest O. Thompson welcomed the TSFL to the city. After his initial remarks, Thompson continued speaking and praised his citizens as "100 percent Americans."⁴²

They are all native-born, none of those...Mexicans or negroes. All upstanding folks. Now down there in San Antonio, when they say

³⁸ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 182-3.

³⁹ Weekly Report, May 30, 1925, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁴⁰ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 183.

⁴¹ Weekly Report, May 30, 1925, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁴² Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 185.

100,000 population, 40,000 of them are Mexicans, red-blooded, some of them red-headed (Laughter – the speaker being red-headed). But that doesn't hurt any. (Laughter).⁴³

Enraged by such blatant prejudice, Idar leapt to his feet and proceeded to chastise Thompson for his insults towards Mexico, a friendly neighbor who had answered Gompers' call to work together, and for his racist, derogatory comments towards people of his skin color and ancestry. Thompson's assertion that people like Idar were not loyal US citizens had no place in the federation.⁴⁴ After all, Idar continued, no intelligent labor man should use race or religion to divide workers:

Those of us who happen to be of Mexican ancestry, and thank God, by force of destiny, born in this country, are just as loyal to our American civilization, just as loyal to the American flag, just as loyal to the American government, just as loyal to the American historical traditions as any one, and just as fundamentally American as any of you in this audience or any of you in this section may feel that they are.⁴⁵

The TSFL, and the AFL by extension, could restrict their members based on citizenship, but not on the basis of race without contradicting the labor's sacred principle of solidarity. Without solidarity, he wondered, what was the point of organizing at all? The delegates applauded Idar throughout his impromptu speech.

In *The World of the Mexican Worker*, historian Emilio Zamora equates this applause as an “indica[tion] that [Idar] had articulated the new governing set of ideas in the federation regarding the Mexican worker.”⁴⁶ It also signified that Idar had the approval of TSFL president, George Slater, whom he had known for years. They met in 1921, while Idar worked with the Laredo Central Labor Union.

⁴³ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 185.

⁴⁴ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 184-5.

⁴⁵ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 185.

⁴⁶ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 185.

Its secretary, Rafael Garcia, had previously submitted a resolution to the TSFL's 1921 annual conference requesting a Spanish-speaking organizer to "maintain the existence of the labor movement" in Laredo. The city's boom in construction caused employers to hire Mexican immigrants, which forced the Union's American born members to move elsewhere to find jobs. As a result, Garcia reported a lack of money from the loss of membership dues. The Union could not afford to send a delegate to personally request help and Garcia feared the local would soon collapse altogether.⁴⁷

After the convention, Idar brought Slater to his hometown for a twelve day visit. During this time, the pair visited all of Laredo's locals. They participated in the new affiliation of the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union and the Painters' Union and also helped to reorganize the Central Labor Union. Slater, like many unionists of his day, derided Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as incapable of properly participating in labor politics, but this experience caused Slater to reverse his prejudices and praise Idar at the following year's TSFL annual gathering, calling him "an earnest, sincere and untiring worker."⁴⁸ Furthermore, his visit with Idar to Laredo helped to improve his perception of Mexican labor as a whole: "I was under the impression that I was going to be able to be of some service to the representatives of the labor movement in Mexico, and after hours of conference I discovered I was being taught what the labor movement could do."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 181.

⁴⁸ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 181.

⁴⁹ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 181.

Green called a joint meeting of the AFL and CROM at El Paso in 1925. Although Idar was not present at the meetings, Green kept him apprised of any new developments by letter.⁵⁰ Neither group possessed the power to change immigration policy in their respective countries, but Green intended the meeting to generate measures “which might be recommended to our governments.”⁵¹ Representatives on both sides ultimately decided to advocate voluntary self-restraint, which allowed workers to travel in pursuit of employment, but held each country responsible for restraining large numbers of its citizens from migrating to protect the economic welfare of its neighbor.⁵² To ease Mexican fears over maltreatment in the US, Green agreed to accept migrants into AFL locals and to recognize their home union cards. His Executive Council balked at the measure and refuted the effectiveness of self-restraint, but Green assured them it would help curb immigration.⁵³ As an added assurance of CROM’s compliance in enforcing self-restraint, Green told the Mexican delegates it would instruct Congress to apply the quota laws to their country if they failed to follow the agreements.⁵⁴ Green was bluffing, he had no such power or influence to force Congress to do anything, but Frank Kellogg (1856-1937), Secretary of State for President Coolidge, was not. He threatened to stop enforcing the US’ arms embargo on Mexico, thus aiding anti-Calles revolutionaries in the country.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ These letters are in Green’s collection at the AFL-CIO archives in Washington, DC.

⁵¹ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 175.

⁵² Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 175.

⁵³ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 175.

⁵⁴ Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 216.

⁵⁵ Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 212.

As a gesture of goodwill to CROM, Green agreed to work to free *Los Martires de Texas* (the Martyrs of Texas). General Jose M. Rangel, American Charles Cline, Abraham Cisneros, Jesus Gonzalez, Leonardo M. Vazquez, and Pedro Perales, long imprisoned since the early days of the Mexican Revolution for violating the US neutrality, were now to have a public hearing.⁵⁶ Rangel and his men stood accused of assaulting Sherriff Gardner and City Marshal White of Corrizo Springs and murdering Deputy Sheriff Candelario Ortiz of Dimmit County while attempting to cross into Mexico to join an anti-Huerta revolution in 1913.⁵⁷ Green instructed Idar to personally negotiate with the Governor Miriam “Ma” Ferguson (1875-1961) to secure their release.⁵⁸ Green, ever the businessman, followed protocol and wrote a letter notifying the governor of the AFL’s recommendation saying, “an act of mercy always constitutes a greater assurance of international peace than insistence upon the letter of the law.”⁵⁹ Augustus McCloskey, the judge for Bexar county (which includes the city of San Antonio), also wrote a letter to Governor James Ferguson to recommend Idar’s services and to advocate the release of

⁵⁶ Letter from William Green to Governor Miriam Ferguson, June 20, 1925, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP; Letter from Augustus McCloskey to Governor James Ferguson, June 23, 1925, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁵⁷ No author, “Rangel and Band To Be Re-arrested,” *The Houston Post Dispatch*, August 22, 1926, no page number. The author found this article in Folder 3, Box 12, CNIPP.

⁵⁸ The first female executive in Texas’ history and only the second female governor in US history, Miriam Amanda “Ma” Ferguson served as first lady to her husband, James Edward Ferguson (1871-1944), who was governor from 1915 to 1917, when he was impeached during his second administration. After he failed to get on the ballot in 1924, she herself ran for the position. A wife and mother of two daughters, Ma (emphasizing her femininity by abbreviating the first letters of her given and middle names) vowed, if elected, to follow her husband’s guidance, thereby giving the people of Texas “two governors for the price of one.” “Ma” ran on extensive cuts to state appropriations and opposed new liquor legislation. Perhaps her most controversial stance during this time was her condemnation of the Klu Klux Klan. She passed an anti-mask law against the group, but the courts later overturned it. John D. Huddleston, “FERGUSON, MIRIAM AMANDA WALLACE [MA],” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffe06>), accessed May 26, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Hereafter cited: Huddleston, “FERGUSON, MIRIAM AMANDA WALLACE [MA],” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Levenstein, “The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s,” 212.

⁵⁹ Letter from William Green to Governor Miriam Ferguson, June 20, 1925, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP.

the six men based on their excellent behavior while in custody. Idar and McCloskey were soon to travel to Austin to petition the governors for pardons for the five men; however, the death of Judge Osceola left McCloskey unable to make the journey.⁶⁰ Idar alone left San Antonio for Austin to make his initial petitions to the governors, but soon departed to attend to his other assignments.

On August 3, 1925, tragedy struck the Idar family. Clemente, now back in Miami, Arizona, to continue supervision the AFL's membership drive, received news of his sister, Elvira's death at her home in San Antonio at the age of thirty-three.⁶¹ One of his younger brothers, Juvencio, wrote to tell him the news. His letter does not list a cause of death, but he does mention how suddenly his sister faded and what a blow her passing dealt the family. As Elvira lay dying, she called the names of her brothers and her sisters. In addition to Juvencio, their little brother, Aquilino, and their mother were there to say goodbye. Clemente could not make it home in time to see his sister, nor could he return home quickly enough to attend the funeral, although his brother Eduardo came from Laredo and Federico traveled up from Mexico. The funeral, Juvencio wrote, was "very pretty," with "lots of flowers, friends."⁶² Their mother, having buried one of her children, "proved to be of very true steel," but Elvira's husband, Beto, was "inconsolable."⁶³ Now a widower and unable to work and care for a child, Beto later sent their two year-old daughter Jovita, named for Clemente's elder sister and mother, to live with his sister

⁶⁰ Letter from Augustus McCloskey to Governor James Ferguson, June 23, 1925, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁶¹ Villegas de Magnon, *The Rebel*, 265.

⁶² Letter from Juvencio Idar to C.N. Idar, August 3, 1925, Folder 20, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁶³ Letter from Juvencio Idar to C.N. Idar, August 3, 1925, Folder 20, Box 1, CNIPP.

Jovita, and her husband.⁶⁴ The couple had no children of their own.⁶⁵ No record exists in Idar's collection listing his exact feelings at the passing of his sister, but it is reasonable to assume, based on the pain he expressed at constantly being away from his own wife and children, the loss of his younger sister was a devastating loss.

Idar could not dwell on his sadness for long. By the end of the year, Mexico had done little to implement self-restraint and Green began to doubt Morones' sincerity about the agreement. Idar wrote to Green about Morones' various magazine interviews in which he made statements unfavorable to the AFL.⁶⁶ Idar knew Morones quite well by this point in his career and he knew "Morones hardly ever talke[d] of his most well defined purposes," rather, it was the "unsaid things that have greater value in Morones."⁶⁷ At the 1924 PAFL conference in Mexico City, the delegations re-elected Gompers as president and Morones as his vice-president. Upon Gompers' death days later, Morones felt sure leadership of the PAFL would be his. There was, however, no provision in the organization's constitution for succession in case of the president's death and the office went to Green, as the new leader of the AFL.⁶⁸ It is possible Morones intended to make dealing with immigration as difficult as he could for Green to frustrate him, as a sort of passive aggressive retribution, while carefully expanding his own authority over CROM.

In November, Idar also informed Green of attempts by various chambers of commerce along the Texan border to petition President Calles for less restriction on

⁶⁴ Letter from Juvencio Idar to C.N. Idar, August 3, 1925, Folder 20, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁶⁵ Villegas de Magnon, *The Rebel*, 265.

⁶⁶ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 212.

⁶⁷ Letter from Clemente Idar to Samuel Gompers, April 5, 1921, Folder 9, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁶⁸ Snow, *The Pan American Federation of Labor*, 128.

Mexican immigration. Green thanked Idar for this new information and sent letters to Governor Ferguson (he does not specify which), the US Chamber of Commerce, as well as the chambers of commerce along the border, and the TSFL president, George Slattery. As the Secretary of Industry, Commerce and Labor of Mexico, Green also wrote to Morones to ask for his help in bringing the matter to Calles' attention.⁶⁹ No letter in Clemente's collection details Morones' response, but it is likely he answered in a satisfactory manner; at least for the moment.

Idar and Morones soon resumed their working relationship in December and Idar once more turned his efforts towards CROM and Mexico. The AFL had recently implemented the Union Life Insurance Company, consisting of accounts with six or seven individual companies throughout the US, to provide its employees with an affordable means to purchase life insurance. The AFL also had grown to operate thirty-five banks for the use of union members.⁷⁰ If CROM could learn from these practices and model their own efforts upon them, perhaps Mexican workers would not cross the border as readily. Idar wrote to Morones asking for a report about Calles' creation of the Insurance Department Secretary, which Morones was now to head. After receiving it, Idar wrote to Morones, "The problem is easy to solve. All we need now is to exchange opinions and for you to allow me to provide you with facts and to make some recommendations."⁷¹ He offered, furthermore, to furnish Morones with copies of the insurance laws of several states as examples of ways to proceed.⁷² The Annual

⁶⁹ Letter from William Green to C. N. Idar, November 23, 1925, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁷⁰ Letter from Clemente Idar to Louis N. Morones, December 4, 1925, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷¹ Letter from Clemente Idar to Louis N. Morones, December 4, 1925, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷² Letter from Clemente Idar to Louis N. Morones, December 4, 1925, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

Convention of the National Association of Insurance and Bank Commissioners and the heads of the Fire Department from forty-eight states that month gave Idar pause to think about the situation further. The Mexican constitution Carranza signed in 1917 provided for labor insurance under article 123. Another law, adopted in 1892 under the Porfiriato, provided for an account in the National Treasury containing 20,000 pesos expressly reserved for compensation of workers injured in accidents resulting from their place of employment. While the fund had long since been mismanaged and depleted, Idar begged Morones, as Secretary of Industry, Commerce and Labor, to reinstate the fund and to administer it either through a company established by CROM or a private company.⁷³ Morones' response, once again, is not included in Idar's correspondence.

The new year, 1926, began happily for Idar and his wife, Laura. They welcomed the birth of their sixth and final child, a son named John Murray Idar, after Idar's friend and PAFL English language secretary, John Murray.⁷⁴ By March, however, Laura's health worsened drastically. She had been ill for about two months and, as Idar wrote to Morrison in one of his weekly reports, would have to have her left breast amputated soon on the advice of her doctors.⁷⁵ She would require his attention for a few days after the operation. As always, duty soon called Idar back to the road. At the instruction of the

⁷³ Letter from Clemente Idar to Louis N. Morones, December 18, 1925, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁴ The census information does not specify what month or day John Murray Idar was born. For the sake of moving the narrative along in a clear manner, I have chosen to discuss the event at the beginning of 1926. United States Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940). The author accessed this information on March 3, 2013 courtesy of www.ancestry.com. This website also provides the following information for finding the physical record: Census Place: San Antonio, Bexar, Texas; Roll: 7627_4204; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 259-101.

⁷⁵ Idar does not say what his wife's illness was, nor does he mention the date of her operation. Weekly Report, March 6, 1926, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

AFL, Idar spent the year in and out of Mexico working with Calles' administration and local labor groups to organize workers and curb immigration.⁷⁶

In January, Idar received an invitation from a friend of the Fergusons to come and stay in Austin to again petition for the freedom of the six Mexican detainees. He wrote to Morrison in his weekly report of January 23, 1926, of the invitation, but insisted on returning to Laredo to finish organizing several locals first.⁷⁷ He also did not think Mrs. Ferguson would do much to settle the matter, until after the primaries in July.⁷⁸ She was running for governor again and could not risk the publicity of releasing Mexican prisoners. Among other charges of corruption and bribery, her opponents already criticized the number of gubernatorial pardons; Ma released, on average, one hundred convicts a month.⁷⁹ Idar's instinct proved accurate.

Green, pleased with Idar's efforts so far in the matter, urged him to secure the freedom of as many of the men as possible, if he could not free them all.⁸⁰ Once back in the state's capital, sometime during early August, Idar succeeded in securing the pardons, leaving the men free to return home.⁸¹ Ma Ferguson released the men on August 21, 1926, after eleven years of detention.⁸² The Mexican Foreign Office asked Green to allow Idar to escort the men on their way. Afraid of overstepping any legal boundaries, Green

⁷⁶ No records or correspondence about this assignment exist in Clemente Idar's collection. Orozco, "IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁷⁷ Weekly Report, January 23, 1926, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁷⁸ Weekly Report, January 30, 1926, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

⁷⁹ Huddleston, "FERGUSON, MIRIAM AMANDA WALLACE [MA]," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁸⁰ Letter from William Green to C.N. Idar, January 25, 1926, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸¹ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 180.

⁸² No author, "Rangel and Band To Be Re-arrested," *The Houston Post Dispatch*, August 22, 1926, no page number. The author found this article in Folder 3, Box 12, CNIPP.

refused his permission, but allowed Idar to accompany the men from Huntsville to San Antonio.⁸³ This assignment definitively demonstrated Idar's close associations with the AFL and PAFL hierarchy and generated great credibility for his career in Texas.⁸⁴ James Ferguson later wrote to urge Idar to continue to be "active among your people and [to] explain to them the issue in this campaign."⁸⁵

Your people above all others must understand that this is a Ku Klux fight and the Ku Klux are bragging now all over the state that they are going to elect Moody and if he is elected, he says he will issue no pardons to anybody and the Ku Klux will again terrorize and intimidate not only the Mexican people but every body [sic] else they can. We are getting very favorable information as to the situation in the border counties that the people now understand that this is a Ku Klux issue pure and simple.⁸⁶

Ferguson, anxious to spin criticisms of his wife's pardons, essentially reframed the issue as a battle against good and evil. To hedge their bets, the Fergusons now decided to tap into a newly politically aware demographic and court the Mexican-American vote, long acquainted with the atrocities of the Klu Klux Klan and the equally unpalatable Texas Rangers, for the upcoming election in November. Since Governor Ma Ferguson persuaded the state legislature to make wearing a hood in public an illegal act in 1926, Klan membership decreased. At its height in 1920, it had 450,000 participants (with more than 500 living in San Antonio), but dropped to 80,000 in 1926.⁸⁷ This trend was a good start, but the Klan still possessed considerable power.

⁸³ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 180; Letter from William Green to C.N. Idar, August 26, 1926, Folder 11, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸⁴ No date is given for Idar's return to Austin to speak with the governor. Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 180.

⁸⁵ Letter from James E. Ferguson to C.N. Idar, August 10, 1926, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁸⁶ Letter from James E. Ferguson to C.N. Idar, August 10, 1926, Folder 8, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁸⁷ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 28.

The following year, 1927, brought the death of Idar's beloved PAFL. Mexico City hosted the 1926 conference and the proceedings devolved into Mexican politics. Calles refused to grant the Catholic Church in Mexico the provisions accorded it under Carranza's constitution of 1917 and, consequently, closed all of the nation's churches. Stories of abuses and violence towards priests and their flock even reached publications in the US. American Catholic organizations demanded their government's intervention with Calles.⁸⁸ At the conference, Calles made a speech in which he asserted he had the support of the AFL, which Green had not actually given. Green tried to keep American labor out of Mexico's internal affairs, but the deterioration of relations between church and state eventually forced him to make a statement that the conflict had nothing to do with the labor movement and the relationship of the AFL and CROM through the PAFL was purely economic.⁸⁹ The situation in Mexico continued to worsen and Green held the fifth conference July 18-23, 1927, in Washington, DC. Green welcomed delegates, saying, "the PAFL is really the child of President Gompers."⁹⁰ These remarks denoted a certain amount of finality for Green and the PAFL. Gompers had indeed begun the organization, but US foreign policy, as well as the internal disputes of the Latin American countries themselves, began to seem a bad investment for American labor.

The impact of US imperialistic policies in South America, without Gompers to spin the current administration's foreign policies, irrevocably damaged the continent's opinion of the United States. No longer the benevolent neighbor, if it ever truly was,

⁸⁸ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 210.

⁸⁹ Snow, *The Pan American Federation of Labor*, 131.

⁹⁰ It is not clear from Idar's collection whether he attended the 1926 and 1927 PAFL conferences. It is the author's educated opinion Idar likely attended the 1926 convention in Mexico City, as he spent a large amount of time in Mexico working with Calles' administration on behalf of the AFL. Toth, "The Pan American Federation of Labor," 615-16.

these countries saw America as a violent bully. By the end of the 1920s, marines continued to fight Nicaraguan guerilla leader Augusto Sandino. The United States had a history of intervention with earlier incursions into Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Panama. After invading Nicaragua in 1912, however, the US adopted the same policy with Haiti in 1915 and the Dominican Republic the following year. Although US forces left the latter in 1924, they would not leave Nicaragua until 1933 or Haiti in 1934. By 1928, tensions over these actions spurred Latin American diplomats held their own conference in Havana to protest US foreign policy in the area.⁹¹ Had the PAFL and the AFL sponsored this conference, Green would most certainly have spent its duration defending the State Department and foreign policy, instead of discussing ongoing labor issues. Without Gompers' charm and existing connections, he would have had little chance of smoothing ruffled feathers.

The murder of Mexico's president-elect Alvaro Obregon in March 1928 by a young Roman Catholic fanatic represented the climax of frustrations between the Mexican government (the Calles administration) and the Catholic Church. It was also the end for Idar's longtime associate, Morones. Under his leadership, CROM grew more openly violent, employing strong-arm tactics to suppress dissention among members and detractors alike. Morones frequently ordered the assassinations of rival labor leaders and protected himself by riding around Mexico City in a bulletproof Cadillac.⁹² He clashed with Obregon, his rival for the presidency, at a meeting of trade unionists in Saltillo in

⁹¹ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 208.

⁹² Cockcroft, *Mexico*, 118.

1927 over ways to diminish CROM's authority.⁹³ After the murder, many accused Morones of orchestrating the act. He and his supporters went into hiding to avoid retaliation from Obregon's supporters. Calles questioned the assassin, who had no connection with the disgraced labor boss, and assured himself Morones was not to blame.⁹⁴ The rumors did not cease, however, and Morones had little choice but to resign four days after the assassination, which triggered the destruction of CROM. In August, Mexico City's newspapers openly criticized CROM for the first time and, by December, the organization's syndicates and their labor leaders left.⁹⁵ CROM was now officially broken. Mexican labor devolved into smaller groups all fighting one another for power, leaving the labor movement no official or national representation.⁹⁶ For the average Mexican worker, this event proved disastrous. By the end of the 1920s, foreign investors and businessmen owned one hundred percent of bananas and other fruits, ninety-eight percent of all mining operations, ninety-five percent of refined sugar, ninety-four percent of petroleum refineries, and eighty-six percent of all cotton production, as well as two thirds of the country's coffee plantations.⁹⁷

For Idar, this disintegration south of the border must have been a blow. He had known Morones for ten years; for his entire career with the AFL. The two men worked tirelessly, as Idar certainly saw it, for the advancement of the Mexican worker. Now, it seemed that hard work slipped away in an instant. His brother, Federico, living in Mexico

⁹³ Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 174.

⁹⁴ Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s," 217-18.

⁹⁵ Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 174-5.

⁹⁶ Cline, *The United States and Mexico*, 197.

⁹⁷ Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 16.

City during this time, wrote Clemente a letter in which he begged his brother to “never stop fighting” and to keep moving forward in his work:

The person who, while walking forward, has his head the other way, will trip and die. The past itself kills him. The memories of things that are gone slow the spirit and obstruct intelligence. There is no fighter who in the middle of danger, the time of his death remembers that he should look back, that he should remember the past, instead, he sees his present.⁹⁸

Federico acquainted his brother with the details of Obregon’s candidacy, but told him Obregon was always doomed to suffer the same fate. Federico did not condone Leon Toral’s (Obregon’s assassin) actions, but the nature of Mexican politics, with which Federico was familiar as a senator, meant Obregon would have been poisoned, suffered an illness, or died in a car accident. He was about as popular with the people as Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who lost Texas in the Mexican American War almost a century before:

His public appearance, his crazy actions, his ungainly statements, his blusters in public, his habitual way of making jokes out of everything, his disgusting pride that was identified by everybody, his contempt towards the masses, the habit of surrounding himself with lackeys such as Aaron Saenz, so he can get him food, and clowns like Manrique and thieves like Soto and Gama, etc. Obregon was an empty man, without personal moral, without social ethics, without principles, without shame in his hands, in which Mexico would have not had a great future.⁹⁹

Federico also laid some blame for the murder at Calles’ feet. He argued the president did not want Obregon to climb higher; he was not a worthy successor. Calles was indifferent to the crime and he bore some responsibility for that inaction alone. Morones, too, would have crushed Obregon if presented the opportunity. Obregon wanted to weaken CROM, to bend it to his will and Morones had a vested interest in not letting him succeed. For all

⁹⁸ Letter from Federico Idar to Clemente Idar, September 8, 1928, Folder 16, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁹⁹ Letter from Federico Idar to Clemente Idar, September 8, 1928, Folder 16, Box 1, CNIPP.

of CROM's defects, Federico argued, "it can live...CROM...can be useful to fix much of what can be fixed that has our labor movement."¹⁰⁰

Idar's response to his brother's letter is not recorded, but it is doubtful Federico's sentiments cheered him. CROM was dead, Obregon, whom he had met over the years, was, too. It was clear Green did not intend to save the labor movement in Mexico, and neither could he. As always, Idar turned his attentions back home. Besides the terror spread throughout the country by the Ku Klux Klan, who continued to persecute blacks, Jews, Catholics, and immigrants, the AFL continued to suffer financially at the end of the decade. Slumps in the nation's economy and the success of open-shop campaigns caused its membership to drop to 27,000 members in 1927.¹⁰¹ In an effort to gain more recruits, particularly Mexican-Americans, Idar traveled to California in March 1927. Green originally sent him westward for a month, but allowed him to stay longer due to the success of his work, before re-assigning him to Corpus Christi, Texas. Idar, still the newspaperman, used his background to his advantage. He gave interviews to the *Los Angeles Citizen* and the *Southern California Labor Press*, which explained his personal background, as well as his work with the AFL, to Anglos and Mexican-Americans alike.¹⁰² By 1928, the Texas commissioner of labor attributed seventy-five percent of unskilled construction labor to Mexicans.¹⁰³ Other states mirrored similar statistics and Green expanded Idar's jurisdiction to Colorado to organize Mexicans employed in the

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Federico Idar to Clemente Idar, September 8, 1928, Folder 16, Box 1, CNIPP.

¹⁰¹ Dray, *There Is Power in a Union*, 407; Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 165-6.

¹⁰² No author, "Organizer C.N. Idar to Leave," *Los Angeles Citizen*, Folder 1, Box 12, CNIPP; No author, "Organizer of Mexicans is Unusually Capable," *Southern California Labor Press*, no date, no page number. The author found this article in Folder 1, Box 12, CNIPP.

¹⁰³ Arreola, "The Mexican American Cultural Capital," 24.

state's beet fields. By September 1928, Idar traveled to Colorado to begin the work which would dominate the last years of his career with the AFL and, indeed, his life.

CHAPTER 5

“In Some Way, You Were Overlooked”: LULAC, Labor, & a New Generation

In his study of the southwest United States during the 1920s, Mexican sociologist Mario Garcia referred to the coming of age for American citizens of Mexican ancestry/ethnicity as the first truly Mexican-American generation and described their new emerging identity as hyphenated citizens. These young men and women, shaped by the struggles of their parents and grandparents, as well as the Great War, now demanded recognition of their American citizenship:

They realized Mexican-Americans would not thrive in the larger Anglo society by remaining in the marginal ethnic enclaves of the Southwest that had survived the nineteenth century or in the immigrant culture superimposed after 1900 as thousands of Mexicans crossed the border seeking work and political asylum. Instead, [these men and women] sought to advance from their past and to see themselves as permanent citizens of the United States with all the rights and privileges of American citizenship. They sought to synthesize their experience based on their relationship to their Mexican roots, and their search for an American future.¹

For Idar’s generation, the issue of civil rights had been a local matter, with *mutualista* groups to defend their members against corrupt local officials.² But for a younger generation who had fought, bled, and watched their brothers die in the Great War; civil rights were now, and forevermore, a political issue and demanded national attention.

While Idar received little formal education and learned his trades at the printing press and on the road, these younger men already benefited from the efforts of activists, like Jovita Idar, who reformed and improved the education available to Mexican-Americans.

¹ Garcia, *Mexican Americans*, 25.

² Pycior, “La Raza Organizes,” 96.

Although Clemente traveled extensively through Mexico and Texas, as well as throughout the American Southwest, these young war veterans served their country and ventured further afield than their parents or grandparents had ever thought possible. For them, the *Rio Grande* was no longer the *Rio Grande*. They were educated, well-traveled, and battle-hardened and not willing to wait for a slow change in society to accept their demand for civil rights. Jose de la Luz Saenz (1888-1953), a veteran of the Great War, kept a diary of his experiences and summarized his generation's feelings:

For centuries generations of our ancestors lived here watering this land with the sweat of their honest toil contributing to the development of which today it is so proud...And now not only in peace but in war we have taken up arms in its defense, and when we have returned with the scar or wound or the grief of having left in the fields over there across the sea hundreds of our dead brothers, we have met with the fact that all our forces were lost in the abyss or innocuous racial prejudice, and we continue being the same.³

This new push for civil rights, as well as the decline of CROM and the PAFL, forced Clemente to re-focus his efforts. He argued it was citizenship alone, not race, which should decide a man or woman's inclusion into the TSFL at the organization's annual conferences and thought the same framework would allow Mexican-Americans to form a new movement to achieve progress free from the charge of discrimination. His brother, Eduardo, already involved in the struggle, established another Spanish-language and widely circulating newspaper, *Las Noticias*, in 1926 and, the following year, he

³ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 161. Saenz kept the only surviving diary of a Mexican-American soldier to record his service and his surroundings. After World War I, Saenz became a teacher and was active in the Mexican-American civil rights movement of the 1920s. His collection, the Jose de la Luz Saenz Papers, 1908-1998, are housed in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas.

volunteered to spearhead the dissemination of literature to Mexican-Americans supporting civil rights.⁴

The Mexican-American civil rights movement of the 1920s began at the Harlingen Convention, held at Harlingen, Texas, beginning on August 14, 1927.⁵ Not since *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, held in Laredo in 1911, had there been such a large statewide gathering of Mexican-American civil rights activists. The conference's organizers determined the event to be a way for all pro-*la raza* (the race) groups to come together and unite around a codified set of principles in a future organization. As early as 1921, groups like the Order of the Sons of America (OSA), the Order Sons of Texas, and the Order Knights of America sprang up in Clemente's adopted hometown of San Antonio and soon established chapters throughout the rest of the state. But communication between the branches proved difficult and no statewide meeting occurred. The Harlingen Convention, with any luck, would broker a merger.⁶

Five hundred men, including Clemente and Eduardo Idar, traveled from all over Texas to the meeting in Harlingen, as well as delegates from Mexico. Their wives, sisters, mothers, or daughters were not invited to attend. Indeed, no women were allowed to attend the event and could only read about it in their local Spanish-language newspapers.⁷ Such a blatant exclusion must have irked Clemente, as well as his sister, Jovita, who staunchly advocated the organization of ladies' unions, as their wages were less for the same work as a man. Women working outside the home could not abdicate their

⁴ Orozco, "IDAR, EDUARDO," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁵ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 124.

⁶ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 120-1.

⁷ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 124-5.

responsibility to their families and often returned from a full day's work to begin cooking, cleaning, and caretaking at home. How could these men argue about the civil rights denied them by Anglos, but so easily deny those same rights to their women? The time honored tradition of *machismo* was still alive and well, it seemed, during the second decade of the twentieth century.

As its first order of business, the convention elected Alonso Perales as its presiding officer. Although Perales was fifteen years his junior, he rivaled Clemente Idar in ambition. Born in 1898, in Alice, Texas, and orphaned at the age of six, Perales worked to support himself, graduating from high school and, later, Draughn's Business College in Corpus Christi. After his service in the Great War, and subsequent honorable discharge from the Army in 1920, he passed the civil service exam and moved to Washington, DC. He worked at the US Bureau of Standards in the Department of Commerce for a year and a half before getting a law degree from George Washington University in 1926. The young lawyer also had a passionate interest in debating the condition of Mexican-Americans in the US and his employment as a diplomat in the US State Department only fueled his cause; he made thirteen missions to Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, as well as other Latin American countries.⁸ At the tender age of twenty-nine, Perales brought all this experience with him to Harlingen and Idar imagined he had found a protégé.

The central issue of contention at the convention, was the question of inclusion or exclusion in a future group based on a person's citizenship. The delegates in attendance split on the issue. One faction proposed ONLY the inclusion of US citizens of Mexican heritage, ancestry, or extraction; the other demanded inclusion of Mexican citizens

⁸ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 111-12.

(usually immigrants) living and working in Texas.⁹ Clemente, Eduardo, as well as Perales, all voted to base membership in the new group on citizenship. The Mexicans, as they pointed out, could not form their own group. They need the Tejanos' citizenship and English-language proficiency to have any kind of relationship with the dominant Anglo society.¹⁰ Eduardo enumerated the Mexican-Americans' reasons for exclusion. First, US citizens, whatever their race, would not allow Mexican nationals to speak for them or to represent them to the larger Anglo population. Second, as foreign nationals living on US soil, they had ample representation through the Mexican consulates along the border, as well as other groups affiliated with them. Lastly, the new movement could not afford the anger or retribution of the US or Mexican governments and any group trying to represent two groups of citizens, often with conflicting interests, would ultimately make the group a target of one administration or the other.¹¹ It is possible Clemente echoed these reasons for exclusion, but as a labor organizer, he knew extending and encouraging Mexican membership would encourage more immigrants to cross the border.¹² As discussed in the previous chapter, the policy of self-restraint agreed to by Green and Morones on behalf of the AFL and CROM had done little to curb the influx of cheap labor and the lure of a new, statewide network of Tejanos with resources and influence could only make the situation worse. For all his optimism, Idar was a realist, too. Arguments escalated on both

⁹ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 120-1.

¹⁰ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 126.

¹¹ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 126.

¹² Orozco uses primary sources to relate Eduardo Idar's reasons for exclusion. Clemente, however, is mentioned less often than his brother in the primary and secondary materials discussing, first, the Harlingen Convention of 1927 and the later emergence of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

sides until the Mexicans, seventy-five percent of the attendees, walked out and the convention fell apart.¹³

For the Mexican delegation, a shared racial and cultural heritage was more than enough common ground to forge an alliance with their US counterparts. What they overlooked, either by omission or choice, was the evolution of the Mexican-American identity. They now, first and foremost, identified as US citizens and were determined to demonstrate that however they could. As an older generation with direct ties to Mexico, this identity shift must have been uncomfortable in some ways for the Idar family. Only thirty-three years after the end of the Mexican American War, their father had married a Mexican wife and brought her to live in the United States and their brother, Federico, had long since renounced his US citizenship in order to live, work, and raise a family in Mexico. Nicasio, a staunch supporter of preparing Tejano children to live in an Anglo society while simultaneously educating them about their heritage, wrote about the importance of maintaining hybridity in an article for *La Cronica* in 1911:

With the deepest sorrow, we have seen Mexican professors teaching English to children of his race, without taking into consideration the mother language, that with each passing day, if forgotten and, with each day, suffers [sic] alterations and changes that materially hurt the eardrum of any Mexican, even those with a limited knowledge of Cervantes. If, in the American school that our children attend, they learn Washington's biography instead of Hidalgo's and instead of Juarez' glorious acts, Lincoln's feats, although noble and just, are taught, this child will not know the glories of his native country, nor will he love it, and he will look at this father's countrymen with indifference.¹⁴

With the vote for exclusion at Harlingen, Nicasio's prediction came to pass. Tejanos, and Mexican-Americans in other US states, walked between two worlds; they were neither

¹³ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 126; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 186.

¹⁴ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 145.

Mexican, nor American, but they were both. Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio discussed this conundrum in his work, “Relaciones entre mexicanos, mexicano-texanos y americanos,” (Relations between Mexicans, Mexican-Texans, and Americans). Based on his extensive research in Texas during the 1920s, Gamio described the Texas Mexican as having “Mexican blood and American sentiment.”¹⁵

In an essay written to help other Tejanos come to terms with Harlingen’s policy of exclusion, Adolph A. Garza of San Antonio acknowledged this “peculiar position.”¹⁶ If national origin were to be obeyed, he argued, then Mexicans should actually refer to themselves as Spanish citizens and Americans should still belong to England:

You don’t belong to Mexico, and the Anglo-Saxon will not accept you socially, politically. We are proud of being a member of that race which reached the heighth [sic] of civilization amid the jungles of the Western Hemisphere, [but] we have different customs, different methods. We will fight, if necessary, if any one dares to say anything about the ‘Mescan,’ and will be as eager to protest if some people will talk of our beloved country [possibly referring to Mexico].¹⁷

Garza finished his essay by reminding his reader that Tejanos fought for Texas’ independence because of Mexico’s oppression.¹⁸ The new civil rights movement was about progress, which could not be achieved by looking backwards and Mexican-Americans continued to suffer as a direct result of the antiquated Anglo perception of Mexican nationals. In a 1928 letter to Congressman John Box, the Roddis Lumber and Veneer Company expressed their dissatisfaction with continued immigration from Mexico, arguing:

¹⁵ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 144.

¹⁶ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 144.

¹⁷ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 144.

¹⁸ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 144.

All of south Texas is now overrun with a low caliber of Mexican emigrants who are a decided blight to the American people...they are not only a racial problem but a social and economic problem as well. Their ideas are entirely un-American. They refuse to learn and speak the English language and never will become American citizens. They are just the same old Aztec Indians now that they were 100 years ago. Worthless—despicable. Socially, they are impudent, sullen and obnoxious. The white people of San Antonio have not a single park or place of amusement where they can go and enjoy themselves without the obnoxious presence of a horde of Aztec Indians calling themselves Mexicans. They have lowered the standard of wages to such an extent that a white man cannot meet their standards and compete with them any more than he could with a Chinese or Jap. Every day, the City papers are full of sensational accounts of thefts, felonious crimes, knife stabbings, automobile wrecks, etc. by Mexicans.¹⁹

Another concerned member of Box's constituency, H.W. Baylor of San Antonio, doubted the ability of Mexicans to become productive and acclimatized US citizens. During the war, he noted, "every Mexican who could left for Mexico."²⁰ Arthur E. Knolle, also of San Antonio, wrote to Box that Mexicans would reclaim the United States, not with force or arms, but by the "process of infiltration."²¹ Box himself echoed these racist sentiments, calling Mexicans "a mixture of Mediterranean-blooded Spanish peasants with low-grade Indians who did not fight extinction but submitted and multiplied as serfs."²² For Mexican-Americans, the choice was clear. Anglo Texans could not racially separate Tejanos from Mexican nationals and their loyalty to their country was now in question. The further creation of the US Border Patrol and the inclusion of Mexico in immigration quotas in 1924, as well as the scientific racism of Charles Davenport's eugenics,

¹⁹ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 60.

²⁰ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 51.

²¹ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 59-60.

²² David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican American, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 54.

reinforced these racial perceptions.²³ Exclusion based on citizenship, therefore, was the only way to improve their lives and improve the opportunities available to their children.

The Harlingen Convention's failure to unite the Order Sons of America, the Order Sons of Texas, and the Order Knights of America, resulted in the emergence of a new group: the League of Latin American Citizens (LLAC).²⁴ Headed by Alonso Perales, and aided by Eduardo Idar, J.T. Canales and Jose de la Luz Saenz, LLAC set to work to persuade the other groups to join.²⁵ Perales and Clemente Idar soon formed a close business relationship. Idar saw the young lawyer as someone he could guide and mentor and, at first, Perales gladly accepted his advice and his help. On October 9, 1927, he wrote to Idar to inform him of a LLAC meeting he scheduled to be held in the Brownsville Court House in ten days to convince the Order Sons of America to join forces and begged Idar to attend and to "deliver a Demosthenean oration."²⁶ Idar gladly obliged.²⁷

The day after the meeting, Perales wrote to his mentor to assure him their meeting was "the talk of the town" and "a complete success;" so much so the Order Sons of America decided unite with LLAC, saying, "I feel very much encouraged and more firmly than ever to do all within my power to bring about the organization in Texas of

²³ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 58-9.

²⁴ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 151, 160.

²⁵ Jose Tomas Canales was born in 1877 and, although he and Clemente Idar were close in age, their class distinctions separated their philosophies. Canales, through his mother's family's Spanish land grants, owned extensive land holdings. By the turn of the twentieth century, his family owned four thousand head of cattle and possessed considerable interests in banking, cotton, and commerce by 1930. That year, their land holdings totaled thirty thousand acres. In contrast, Idar came from a working class background with little money. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 94.

²⁶ Letter from Alonso Perales to Clemente Idar, October 9, 1927, Folder 2, Box 3, CNIPP.

²⁷ Handbill: "The League of Latin American Citizens of the Valley," October 19, 1929, Folder 12, Box 3, CNIPP.

American citizens of latin descent.”²⁸ Idar praised his protégé’s statement, saying “That is just the way I wanted to see you write. Organize and Educate! Don’t let any man stand in your way if such is your policy. No man is big enough to stop your activities if your goal is to achieve human betterment.”²⁹ He further recommended Perales and Canales to seek out the assistance of Benardo Garza in developing the organization.³⁰ Garza was indeed a good man to know. Born in Brownsville in 1892, he received little formal education (only completing the sixth grade) due to the early death of his father in 1908, which required him to help his mother support the family of seven. In addition to other odd jobs, he waited tables and learned the restaurant business. In the early 1920s, he moved to Corpus Christi and became a successful restaurateur, opening the Metropolitan Café (with seating capacity for seven hundred) in a fashionable and respectable Anglo section of the town. The Metropolitan Café became a hotspot for influential businessmen and city leaders, as well as other notable members of the white middle-class and Garza knew them all.³¹

The LLAC officially became the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in February 1929 at a convention held in Corpus Christi, Texas.³² Garza became its president, at Perales’ insistence.³³ Idar informed Green of LULAC’s creation and its progress. The AFL president praised Idar for “continually tak[ing] advantage of

²⁸ Letter from Alonso Perales to Clemente Idar, October 20, 1927, Folder 2, Box 3, CNIPP.

²⁹ Ironically, the letterhead Idar used to type the letter to Perales is that of the Metropolitan Café, itself. Letter from Clemente Idar to Alonso Perales, October 21, 1927, Folder 23, Box 4, Alonso S. Perales Papers, 1898-1991, Special Collections, University of Houston, Houston, Texas.

³⁰ Letter from Clemente Idar to Alonso Perales, October 21, 1927, Folder 23, Box 4, Alonso S. Perales Papers, 1898-1991, Special Collections, University of Houston, Houston, Texas.

³¹ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 116-7.

³² Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 151 and 160.

³³ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 116-7.

every opportunity to inform and help to guide Latin Americans who have become naturalized citizens of this country so that they may loyally and patriotically discharge their duties and obligations as citizens.”³⁴ The group met again from May 16-18 in Corpus Christi to vote on LULAC’s constitution and by-laws.³⁵ The new group aimed their efforts at fighting five kinds of discrimination faced by all Tejanos: the segregation of Mexican-American children in public schools, the racial division of public places (like movie theaters, restaurants, and swimming pools), the prevalence of so-called white men’s primaries (intended to prevent citizens of color from voting), discrimination against Mexican-Americans in purchasing or renting houses in certain sections of towns and cities, and, finally, the prohibition of Mexican-Americans to serve on juries based solely on race.³⁶

To emphasize their patriotism toward the United States, LULAC developed an initiation oath in which members pledged their loyalty. The group modeled its constitution on its eighteenth century predecessor and adopted the George Washington prayer as its official prayer. It decided on “America” as its representative song and English as its official language. Perhaps the organization’s most American attribute was its exaltation of capitalism and the free market. Even after the collapse of Wall Street and the throes of the Great Depression, LULAC continued to promote these ideals. This was as much for its protection, as its promotion.³⁷

³⁴ Letter from William Green to Clemente Idar, March 29, 1929, Folder 12, Box 3, CNIPP.

³⁵ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 163.

³⁶ Garcia, *Mexican Americans*, 27.

³⁷ Benjamin Marquez, “League of United Latin American Citizens and the Politics of Ethnicity,” in Roberto E. Villarreal, et al., *Latino Empowerment: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 15.

Idar's ongoing assignment to organize Mexicans working in the sugar beet fields of Colorado, beginning in September 1928, prevented him from being as involved with the foundation of LULAC as he would have wished, but Green allowed him to rearrange his schedule as to attend the convention and to submit a report about the proceedings.³⁸ Idar also helped the group develop its constitution, by-laws, and other policies.³⁹ As an organizer, it was his job to help locals across his jurisdiction to develop their own governing documents and, perhaps somewhat optimistically, he felt the other founders would be only too happy to avail themselves of this expertise.⁴⁰ The measures LULAC ultimately adopted in its constitution reflected a significant shift from the ideology of earlier Mexican-American groups; instead of targeting the working classes, it appealed to the middle class. It replaced the tenants of community-wide *mutulismo*, with an association of Mexican-American professionals (such as businessmen) and reinforced the Mexican-American political and national identity. For the Idar brothers, this shift would complicate their working relationship. Eduardo favored the change, but Clemente could not agree with the constitution's low regard for labor and the working-class.⁴¹

Given the contents of his Labor Day speech in Oklahoma City (discussed in chapter 3), it is not surprising Idar was concerned about LULAC leaving the working masses to fend for themselves. For those with money to spare, the Roaring Twenties had,

³⁸ Letter from William Green to Clemente Idar, March 29, 1929, Folder 12, Box 3, CNIPP.

³⁹ This absence, as well as his brother's involvement, led many LULAC scholars to diminish Clemente Idar's role in the group's development. Cynthia Orozco's work, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement*, recognizes Clemente as a LULAC founder.

⁴⁰ Idar's copy of a draft of LULAC's constitution and by-laws in his collection have his handwritten notes throughout the document. He most likely summarized or showed these corrections to Perales and the rest of the leadership. Constitution and By-Laws, June 6, 1929, Folder 13, Box 7, CNIPP.

⁴¹ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 171.

thus far, been a decade of change and decadence. It began by celebrating the end of the Great War and showed no signs of slowing down. The United States was changing rapidly. Idar, always a proponent of female inclusion, most likely welcomed the passage of women's suffrage, which Congress signed into law in the 19th amendment on August 18, 1920. Even respectable ladies now cut their hair short, as a symbol of their liberation, and embraced rapidly available cosmetics. They also began to embrace the ability to control their fertility with the help of Margaret Sanger. For many Americans, although perhaps not as frequently for an AFL general organizer riding the rails from city to city, the decade brought the country music like jazz and the Charleston, as well as new entertainment like silent movies and radio. In sports, Babe Ruth hit one homerun after another and Charles Lindbergh pushed the boundaries of aviation by flying across the Atlantic. Consumerism began to dominate households from coast to coast, with the help of radio advertising. Although most working class families worked six days a week and only earned several thousand dollars a year, a small down payment, and a line of credit to finance the rest of the cost, was all they needed to be able to afford every outward sign of affluence; from electric washing machines and refrigerators to a Henry Ford vehicle or a house in the suburbs, it could all be theirs. Investing in stocks and shares on Wall Street, even a less-than-average Joe could feel like a Rockefeller with the chance to strike it rich one day.

Idar's Labor Day speech condemning "the capitalist regime, with all its inevitable miseries," indirectly predicted the devastation caused by the collapse of the stock market on October 29, 1929.⁴² Known as Black Tuesday, the Wall Street debacle triggered the

⁴² Machine Age written by Clemente Idar, no date (c. 1922), Folder 22, Box 8, CNIPP.

worst depression in US history.⁴³ For many Americans, the crash literally destroyed their lives. Brokers and speculators collapsed from shock; but some, with no money to pay their debtors and no chance of employment, took their own lives.⁴⁴ The economic downturn affected both the affluent and the poor. The urban populations across the country, and most likely to invest, suffered first. With no jobs and no money to spend on material items, production slowed and companies laid off workers in an attempt to keep their businesses solvent. The devastation soon spread to rural areas.⁴⁵ By 1930, thousands of families relied on the goodwill and strained resources of friends and loved ones. Those with no support system had little choice but to live on the streets in shantytowns, dubbed “Hooverilles” after President Herbert Hoover (1874-1964), who appeared to do little to alleviate the situation.⁴⁶ The Great Depression, in addition to the open-shop drives of the decade and the increasingly anti-labor position of the courts, resulted in the AFL’s loss of over a million members.⁴⁷

Such a drastic increase in poverty for so many workers prompted Idar to keep abreast of the “monumental mess” unfolding, both at home and around the world.⁴⁸ Economics, he knew, translated directly into keeping jobs in America, which became the chief concern of William Green and the AFL. The Chinese and Indian markets were

⁴³ The crash of 1929 lasted well over a decade and ended with America’s entrance into World War II. Karen Blumenthal, *Six Days in October: The Stock Market Crash of 1929; a Wall Street Journal Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 2-3, 10. Hereafter cited: Blumenthal, *Six Days in October*.

⁴⁴ Blumenthal, *Six Days in October*, 14.

⁴⁵ Brenda Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929: The End of Prosperity* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 4. Hereafter cited: Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*.

⁴⁶ Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, 5-6.

⁴⁷ Green, *The World of the Worker*, 123.

⁴⁸ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, NCIPP.

completely gone, and the US could not sell any of its goods to the population six hundred million strong. The Russian and many of the South American markets were at the mercy of ongoing civil wars. As a protest against US imperialistic policies, as well as the crash, other Latin American countries, like Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo organized a boycott against American-made goods. In a letter to his old comrade, the disgraced leader of CROM, Luis Morones, Idar attributed other causes to the crash than simply the overabundance of credit. The availability of machinery to do an increasing variety of tasks and replaced American workers leaving them with no job; machinery was too efficient and could produce too many goods. In a climate where consumers could purchase items using credit, they consumed more; however, in an economy with no jobs and no credit, no one could afford to buy anything anymore.⁴⁹ An increasing number of the population even struggled to feed their families.

In response to the downturn in the US economy, Idar estimated at least a million Mexican nationals returned to Mexico, although farm laborers continued to flood into the United States.⁵⁰ Farmers, still languishing under the agricultural depression of the 1920s (which saw prices drop as overemployment rose), needed this cheap influx to keep their costs down and to stay in business.⁵¹ Larger corporations, however, also took advantage of the opportunity to create greater profits. The Great Western Sugar Company cornered the market on sugar production in Colorado, producing eighty percent of the state's supply of the commodity (nearly half of the country's supply) by 1930. To do this, the

⁴⁹ Idar's statements in his letter to Morones are a reiteration of his Labor Day speech given in Oklahoma City, OK, for the Mexican members of the Amalgamated Meat Cutter's Association. Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁵⁰ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁵¹ Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, 4.

company relied on the labor of 20,000 workers, three-fourths of whom were Mexican nationals or Mexican-American US citizens. They produced \$12 million worth of the crop by harvesting over 110,000 acres.⁵²

With so much money to be made from such an easily controlled workforce, Idar's arrival in Colorado was not welcomed by the sugar beet factories and their owners. In his work, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth Century America*, historian Zaragosa Vargas chronicles "the full dimensions of the Mexican beet workers' tragic story unfolded in Colorado," and provides a detailed account of the organizer's struggle to campaign for better working and living conditions.⁵³ Great Western Sugar recruited its workers in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico and, to prevent competition stealing its labor force, the company made arrangements for all field employees to work in coal mines nearby. As the sugar processing factories consumed one of the largest amounts of coal in the state per year, they gained influence over the hiring practices of the coal mining companies.⁵⁴ Each employee had a labor contract. The Mountain States Beet Growers Marketing Association represented forty percent of the growers in the region and, consequently printed a majority of the contracts, which were written in English and Spanish. The hiring company retained the right to fix the final price of collected beets and labor costs (wages) and was also the sole mediator in all labor disputes. Perhaps the most heinous demand, contracts stipulated that all able-bodied members of a family were eligible for work.⁵⁵ From northern Colorado through

⁵² Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 28.

⁵³ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 27-8.

⁵⁴ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 28.

⁵⁵ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 28.

parts of Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana, families made up between seventy and ninety percent of the sugar beet laborers.⁵⁶ Because harvesting the crop required intense hand labor, many chose to harvest, row by row, on their knees. This practice of “crawling” was most often performed by young children and, as the beets left in the ground the longest had the greatest sugar, toddlers crawled through dirt and mud until it turned hard and frozen by the Colorado winter.⁵⁷ Women performed this backbreaking work while pregnant and soon after childbirth. They had no access to medical care and were still expected to perform all the duties associated with caring for their families.⁵⁸

By the time Idar found himself speaking to Mexicans in Colorado’s sugar beet fields in September 1928, he was a seasoned organizer with a decade of experience with the American Federation of Labor behind him. During those ten years, he worked tirelessly in the belief that bettering their labor and overall economic conditions would translate into greater civil rights for Mexican-Americans in the US. Now, with the PAFL inoperative for the foreseeable future, Idar had little choice but to rely on the AFL to fight for the rights of the beleaguered Mexicans working in the beet fields of Colorado. Idar held the first organizational meeting to form the National Beetworker’s Association (NBA) on September 1, 1928, in Fort Lupton, Colorado, about thirty miles outside of Denver. In addition to beet workers, the NBA also accepted workers engaged in all manner of agricultural employment for a variety of crops, including cantaloupes, onions, potatoes, beans, wheat, cucumbers, apples, peaches, cherries, and strawberries. By February 1, 1929, the date of the first annual convention for the NBA, also held in Fort

⁵⁶ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 28-9.

⁵⁷ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 30.

⁵⁸ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 30.

Lupton, he organized five hundred workers, two hundred of which could afford to pay dues. A year later, at the second convention, he had organized forty local unions, with over eight thousand possible members, including parents and their children.⁵⁹

Idar returned to Denver at the end of May 1930. Years spent living with diabetes began to take even more of a toll on his body and he developed an infection in his right foot upon his arrival. Unable to walk for a day, he postponed his work, but was soon recovered enough to meet with the presidents of the state labor federations of Wyoming and Nebraska, who also wanted his help to affiliate their mining unions with the AFL. Idar and the presidents felt it was the right time to affiliate with the AFL, but Green refused to accept a national charter for the group. Rather, they were to remain separate local unions. Confused, Idar wrote asking for clarification.⁶⁰ It is not clear what Green's response was, but, as Idar continued his work, it is likely he did so on his boss' orders.

Idar also met with the consul of Mexico stationed in Colorado, a man by the name Vasquez. Vasquez, irritated by what he saw as the NBA's interference with Mexican workers (and, therefore, his jurisdiction), discouraged his countrymen from unionizing, which decreased the NBA's membership. Idar felt sure he was the only man who could heal the rift.⁶¹ In addition to feuds over jurisdiction, Idar also faced local communist uprisings. A Colombian, known only as Paz or "peace", and an Argentinian, named Manuel Aldenis, took to the streets of Denver and held a public meeting for the Spanish-speaking people. Aldenis, a local Anglo from nearby Lafayette, named, opened an office

⁵⁹ Report from Clemente Idar on Beetworkers Association, no date (circa 1931), Folder 10, Box 4, CNIPP.

⁶⁰ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, June 17, 1930, Folder 13, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁶¹ Weekly Report, May 30, 1930, Folder 10, Box 10, CNIPP.

downtown to distribute red literature and to organize other demonstrations. Idar lamented their success among the Mexican beet workers, who struggled to make a living and to endure the abuses of their employers.⁶²

Eight months after LULAC's creation, the stock market crash complicated matters, once again, for its members. The group, which already excluded membership to Mexican nationals, found themselves fighting even harder to prove their loyalty whilst fighting racism. In 1930, Congress, anxious to limit Mexican immigration as much as possible to prevent the loss of what jobs remained to Americans, proposed hearings on the Box and Johnson bills. In his proposed legislation, Representative John Box of Texas wished to add Mexico and Canada to the quota system, which Gompers also advocated. As the law stood, Mexicans and Canadians paid a \$8.00 head tax and a \$10.00 visa fee (to be paid per person) to enter the US, with no limit to how many citizens of those countries could enter per year. Under Box's plan, there would now be a limit in place (to reduce the social and economic burden) and the fees would continue.⁶³

The LULAC leadership, Perales, Canales, and Garza, travelled to Washington, DC, to testify before the House Committee on Immigration. The men argued such drastic legislation placed the Mexican citizen below the American and would, perhaps unwittingly, reinforce discriminatory practices towards Mexican-Americans, as well as Mexicans. Idar was outraged. He supported the new measure's attempt to protect Mexican-American jobs in a terrible job market and to reduce immigration. Although he fervently resented the bill's language classifying Mexican immigrants "in the same

⁶² Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, May 29, 1930, Folder 13, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁶³ No author, "Mexican Labor Restriction is Asked by Texan: John C. Box, Representative, Wants Quota Law Applied to Prevent Influx," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 25, 1926, 4A.

category as Asians” and regarded this as “an insult,” the legislation’s language could be amended and not altogether scrapped.⁶⁴ To make matters worse, the LULAC members had neither debated the bill nor decided an official position on it. Fellow member, Manuel C. Gonzalez agreed with Idar and the two men sent a telegram on January 30 to the committee informing them Garza, Canales, and Perales could not speak for LULAC, as the organization had no official position yet.⁶⁵ On February 4, 1930, Idar notified President Green of the LULAC leadership’s testimony, as well as his telegraph.⁶⁶ Garza, Canales, and Perales were furious. LULAC was only a year old, but Mexican-Americans had finally achieved some representation in the political process at the national level. Idar and Gonzales, not content with circumventing the group’s leadership, appeared to undermine LULAC’s authority. Idar, they fumed, had betrayed *la raza* for the “virus of the American Federation of Labor.”⁶⁷

Whether or not he really did sacrifice LULAC for the ambitions of the AFL (although he most certainly knew Green would attend the hearings), Idar knew he would suffer the wrath of the LULAC membership. He had acted in the organization’s best interest, but he was no coward and so, he prepared to defend his actions. On February 15, 1930, Idar asked AFL secretary Frank Morrison to allow him time from his work to travel

⁶⁴ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁶⁵ M.C. Gonzalez (1900-86) had much in common with Idar. Although born in 1900, and seventeen years younger than Idar, Gonzalez also had a Mexican parent (his father) and worked for the betterment of Mexican workers in Texas. In 1917, he founded *La Liga Protectora Mexicana* (The Mexican Protection League) to protect Mexican nationals in the US. The early death of Gonzalez’ father in 1912 forced him to work a variety of jobs to help support his family. Among these, he became a delivery boy for Chapa’s Drugstore in San Antonio at the age of thirteen or fourteen. Francisco Chapa, the owner of the store and Gonzalez’ mentor, was an activist of Idar’s generation with a keen interest in politics and numerous connections to several Texan governors, as well as the state’s Democratic Party.

⁶⁶ Letter from William Green to C.N. Idar, February 13, 1930, Folder 13, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 193.

to the next general meeting LULAC delegates in San Diego, Texas, saying “I feel it is my duty to be there on account of a telegram of protest I sent to the House Committee on Immigration relative to the activities of three prominent officials of that same league.”⁶⁸ Canales addressed the large crowd, containing over a thousand members. He railed against Idar’s betrayal, in particular, but also reprimanded Gonzalez for his part in the affair.⁶⁹ Retribution against Idar and Gonzalez was swift. On February 16, 1930, LULAC formally voted to censure both Idar and Gonzalez for their “disloyal unwarranted and unpatriotic act” of attempting to “embarrass the good work intended to be done by...Perales and Canales.”⁷⁰ The telegram Idar sent to the House Committee on Immigration was now part of the Congressional record and “cas[t] a reflection upon the good name and standing not only of...Perales and Canales but also of the League in general.”⁷¹ The LULAC membership immediately recommended steps be taken to expunge the offending telegram from the official proceedings with letter of protest to be sent to the chairman of the committee, Representative Albert Johnson of Washington (republican, 1869-1957).⁷²

The offending members had until February 26 (ten days) to repudiate their own actions to the House Committee on Immigration by letter (or, ironically, a telegram), and

⁶⁸ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, February 15, 1930, Folder 13, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁶⁹ Johnson’s work is the only scholarly publication the author has been able to find which details this early LULAC conflict and Idar’s role in it. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 193.

⁷⁰ To the best of the author’s knowledge, this document in Idar’s collection has never been included in LULAC scholarship. Untitled [LULAC’s censure of Clemente Idar and M.C. Gonzalez], March 2, 1930, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁷¹ Untitled [LULAC’s censure of Clemente Idar and M.C. Gonzalez], March 2, 1930, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁷² Untitled [LULAC’s censure of Clemente Idar and M.C. Gonzalez], March 2, 1930, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

to formally petition the body to cleanse their previous submission from the record. They also had to submit a written apology to Perales, which was then to be published in both the English and Spanish press. If the men refused to complete these actions, or did not do so by the appointed deadline, the men were to present themselves for trial at the Alice Council Hall, in Alice, Texas, on March 16. Each individual city's council was to send two delegates to the proceedings to determine guilt or innocence. Bernardo Garza, as President General of the league, would deliver the verdict. If either man failed to appear or send representation on his behalf, the council could recommend whatever punishment it saw fit.⁷³ It is not clear whether Idar showed up to his hearing and lost, or whether he ignored the whole affair. Regardless of what he decided to do, however, the delegates voted for Idar's complete expulsion from the group.⁷⁴

Idar's banishment wounded him deeply. He spent his whole life working for the advancement of his people, as well as the Mexican descendants of his ancestors, and he had done it the only way he knew how; his father's way. It was clear to him by now, he would not be a major player in this civil rights movement and it was also clear he would never rise higher in the AFL than a general organizer. With Gompers, "it was always possible to dominate [his] attention," but the old man never promoted him and now he was gone and, despite his initial 1925 letter asking his organizers for suggestions, "president Green would not give the same attentions that [he] could always get," from Gompers.⁷⁵ It is also likely Idar partially blamed Green for his problems with LULAC,

⁷³ Untitled [LULAC's censure of Clemente Idar and M.C. Gonzalez], March 2, 1930, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁷⁴ Letter from M.C. Gonzalez to Clemente Idar, May 3, 1932, Folder 9, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁵ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

for “if the [PAFL] had mediated or participated in the [immigration committee hearing], it is possible that the word ‘Box Bill’ would have never been mentioned.”⁷⁶ He had spent his adult life sacrificing time with his beloved wife and children to crisscross two countries on the same continent and he had been willing to do it to make a difference. As Idar reached his forty-seventh birthday in November 1930, he stopped to survey the progress he had been able to effect and he was disappointed. Two weeks after his birthday, and once more returned to Colorado, he turned to Morones to commiserate and to revive the glory of his early career:

I want to tell you, esteemed comrade, that given the preparation that I fortunately obtained through the organized labor movement of this country, my past struggles and sufferings and the way I have expressed my ideals of world labor, my soul and spirit feel impatient before the enormous pressure that goes with the contemporary issues that darkened the peace and economic wellbeing of almost all towns that today exist on earth... In the presence of such a horrific situation, I want to serve, I want to step out of the darkness, and I want to reconstruct my spirit of service to humanity... the idea of living my last days in Mexico takes over me, there, where you, John Murray and I, created our first ideals of international an approach.⁷⁷

Idar begged his friend not to give up the cause, even though he had already given “all of [his] soul and matter” for Mexico’s workers.⁷⁸ They could revive CROM; Morones could lead the organization again and Idar could represent CROM, in addition to the AFL, on the PAFL executive council. They still had work to do and, ever the optimist, he urged Morones to continue fighting, “since there are still documented evidence that someday would turn into exuberant flowers with such a great smell that would always make

⁷⁶ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁷ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁷⁸ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

memory of you.”⁷⁹ No response from Morones exists in Idar’s collection, but in the wake of his downfall and the disintegration of CROM, a renaissance most likely seemed more improbable from his side of the border.

Depressed, Idar wrote to Morrison to request permission to leave Colorado and return to San Antonio for Christmas, reminding him “I have six children, a wife, and a fairly good mother-in-law that I would like to be with in the closing days of the year.” The reply came: he could not leave.⁸⁰ To add insult to injury, Manuel Gonzalez, his fellow LULAC telegram sender, wrote to say that he could not repay a loan of \$550 and that it would take longer to repay his friend. With such a large family to feed and Christmas fast approaching, Idar could ill afford to miss such a large sum of money.⁸¹ His mood most likely improved when his wife, Laura (it is not sure whether she brought the children with her), came to visit him in Colorado at the end of 1930, most likely near Christmas and New Year. He took her to Denver to see notable Mexican composer Miguel Lerdo de Tejada (1869-1941) lead *La Orquesta Tipica* (The Typical Orquesta) in concert.⁸² Lerdo de Tejada was famous for introducing the *charro* (horseman) costume for his musicians in 1901, which blended elements of Spanish eighteenth century dress: tightly fitting trousers with short-waisted jackets, boots, sombreros, and white shirts with

⁷⁹ Letter from Clemente Idar to Luis Morones, November 24, 1928, Folder 24, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁸⁰ Letter from Clemente Idar to Frank Morrison, November 29, 1930, Folder 13, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁸¹ Letter from M.C. Gonzalez to Clemente Idar, November 29, 1930, Folder 9, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁸² Letter from Clemente Idar to C. Reynaldo Cervantes Torres, January 2, 1931, Folder 15, Box 4, CNIPP.

ribbons tied as bows.⁸³ The Idars enjoyed the Denver concert and Clemente hoped this Mexican folk music would act as a sort of cultural ambassador and one day spread throughout the United States:

If the musical spirit of Mexico would spread in this country, that would result from collaboration with the Mexican soul for the growth of friendly relations that nothing or no one would top. Mexico would create a... beautiful art in the minds of the North Americans.⁸⁴

By 1931, the membership of the forty Colorado locals grew to ten thousand, with half of those members struggling to pay their yearly dues of six dollars. An individual could pay with an annual promissory note for the amount, or a monthly deposit of fifty cents. Idar estimated as few as 3,700 members paid dues regularly, with two thousand more only paying a one-time initiation fee of one dollar. Idar also organized female workers who were as active as their male counterparts, even holding offices.⁸⁵

⁸³ By the 1930s, the Mexican government also required Mariachi groups to wear *charro* costumes for their performances. Rafaela Castro, *Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals, and Religious Practices of Mexican-Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152.

⁸⁴ *Orquestas tipicas*, began as a poor man's orchestra. With a smattering of instruments (variation of instruments depended on the ability of the musicians from one town to another) assembled in a hodge-podge manner, peasants and the working-class could enjoy a bourgeois pastime. Popular in Mexico since the mid-nineteenth century, Carlos Curti, a composer at the Mexico City Conservatory in Mexico City, organized an *orquesta tipica* to promote nationalism in 1884. Curti's group was a success and soon other composers, like Miguel Lerdo de Tejada and Juan Torre Blanca, began to tour with their own *orquestas* in the US. They also began to record their music. Mexican immigrants also brought this music with them into Texas and Tejanos began to appreciate the music in their own way. For example, Gamio, in his anthropologic studies of Mexican-Americans, noticed a blending of "American fox-trots alternating with the singing of Mexican ballads to the accompaniment of guitars." Manuel Pena, *Musica Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (Houston: University of Houston, Center for Mexican American Studies, 1999), 125 and 128; Letter from Clemente Idar to C. Reynaldo Cervantes Torres, January 2, 1931, Folder 15, Box 4, CNIPP.

⁸⁵ Report from Clemente Idar on Beetworkers Association, no date (circa 1931), Folder 10, Box 4, CNIPP.

Outside of Colorado, Idar travelled to Nebraska, where he organized two local unions in 1931.⁸⁶ Idar organized two local unions in Wyoming and two in Kansas during 1931. In Kansas, members also struggled to pay dues, causing one union to be in arrears.⁸⁷ As he traveled, Idar frequently gave interviews with local papers and made public speeches to publicize the AFL's efforts to help workers. In Wyoming, the *Thermopolis Independent Record* called his speech at a local high school "an interesting portrayal of the effect on man of the present mass production."⁸⁸ For all his efforts to educate the people in this new area of his jurisdiction, another breed of hyphenated American citizens taught Idar how Mexican-American Tejanos might achieve the acceptance and social standing they so badly desired, without sacrificing their identity or heritage. Minnesota's community of Swedish-Americans, although unfamiliar with the pain of racial discrimination, also struggled to maintain their separate cultural identity. This experience showed Idar other ethnicities faced the same debates and concerns, for "In this country, from its founding, even when all lived loyally under the national flag and as American citizens, its inhabitants have always divided themselves into peaceful factions along lines of racial origin."⁸⁹

On May 3, 1932, Idar received some happy news. Manuel C. Gonzales, still a LULAC member in good standing, Joe Stillman, and E.E. Pena introduced a measure to the LULAC body to expunge Idar's 1930 expulsion and the measure passed with a

⁸⁶ Report from Clemente Idar on Beetworkers Association, no date (circa 1931), Folder 10, Box 4, CNIPP.

⁸⁷ Report from Clemente Idar on Beetworkers Association, no date (circa 1931), Folder 10, Box 4, CNIPP.

⁸⁸ No author, "C.N. Idar Gives an Interesting Portrayal of the Effect on Man of the Present Mass Production," *Thermopolis Independent Record*, June 30, 1930, Folder 1, Box 12, CNIPP.

⁸⁹ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 50.

majority vote. Canales was not present and only Perales and Robert Austin opposed his reinstatement as a member.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, bad news soon followed. As the Great Depression worsened, the AFL lost the revenue it earned from wage-workers' dues. As a result, Green wrote to Idar on May 28 to notify him of another furlough to begin June 1; except, this time, he would be laid off for a two month stretch. Idar wrote to Morrison to protest. With such a large family to maintain, this furlough would be more damaging to his family than any of the ones before. Morrison responded, "The same claim can be made by any of those laid off."⁹¹ Idar regretted the decision, as he "was engaged in one of the most constructive phases of all my service to the Federation, and had to drop it all abruptly."⁹²

Before his furlough, Idar and his old friend George Slater, the president of the TSFL, and the Building Trades Council worked together to construct federal buildings in Houston, Galveston, and Texas City. Now, Slater wrote to Green charging Idar with rendering poor service and accused him of interfering in the TSFL elections. Idar immediately wrote to Green to defend himself, as well as his conduct with all members of the TSFL. He attributed Slater's anger to his loss of his last election for Executive Secretary of the State Federation, which he blamed on Slater's overindulgence in spirits, "Mr. Slater overlooks the fact that many outstanding leaders of American labor have

⁹⁰ Although no item details the outcome of Gonzalez' censure, because he continues to be a member of LULAC two years after the incident, it is likely he acquiesced to the demands listed in the censure. Further research is needed to determine exactly what happened. Letter from M.C. Gonzalez to Clemente Idar, May 3, 1932, Folder 9, Box 1, CNIPP.

⁹¹ Letter from Frank Morrison to Clemente Idar, June 1, 1932, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹² Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, June 7, 1932, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

undone themselves by the liquor habit.”⁹³ He did not condemn his former friend for his vice, “that is within his province to do.”⁹⁴ Jack Flynn, the secretary of the Building Trades Council, also wrote to Green denouncing Slater’s charges:

From the very day that C.N. Idar arrived here until the day he was called off the road he has been rendering very valuable service to the labor movement as a whole, while he was in Houston I was with C.N. Idar personally every night, at which time we went before the different building crafts addressing their meetings along the lines of resisting Wage reductions and ‘sniping on Wages,’ during this time never was there anything said by C.N. Idar of Mr. Geo. Slater. If it is necessary I can have my statements verified by every member of every Building Craft, who I can assure you hold C.N. Idar in their highest esteem.⁹⁵

Flynn also confirmed Slater’s alcoholism. He and Idar were to meet Slater in Austin in the lobby of the Driscoll Hotel from 6:00 ^{PM} to 10:00 ^{PM}. When Slater finally appeared:

He was so drunk that he could hardly stand. Houston [delegation of the TSFL] decided to place a candidate in the field for Executive Secretary of the State Federation, believing as we do that drunkenness has no place in the activities of labor officials, especially during these distressing times...Chief...I know that C.N. Idar has the highest regard and respect for you, and the entire labor movement, and would not do...any one thing that would cause you embarrassment.⁹⁶

Flynn ended his letter by begging Green to find the money as soon as possible to reinstate Idar. With only one Mexican-American organizer with superb Spanish and English speaking and writing skills, and no other similar individuals to replace him, the movement could ill afford to be without Idar for long.⁹⁷ J.C. Cullen, the President of the Home Workers Association, also wrote to Green in support of Idar. Cullen also ran for

⁹³ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, June 16, 1932, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹⁴ Letter from Clemente Idar to William Green, June 16, 1932, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹⁵ Letter from Jack Flynn to William Green, June 14, 1932, Folder 6, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹⁶ Letter from Jack Flynn to William Green, June 14, 1932, Folder 6, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹⁷ Letter from Jack Flynn to William Green, June 14, 1932, Folder 6, Box 3, CNIPP.

the Executive Secretary of the State Federation, in opposition of Slater. The Building Trades Council's representatives, in both north and south Texas, suggested his candidacy early in the year and Cullen. At first, he refused to stand for the election, but changed his mind in April due to "Mr. Slater's insobriety and general neglect of the duties of his office" which the Building Trades Council discussed in an open meeting, which Idar did not attend.⁹⁸ With this information in hand, Green dismissed all the accusations against his loyal employee and hoped he would continue his work at the end of his furlough.⁹⁹

In August, Idar returned to work for the AFL, but by October 1932, the organization's financial woes grew worse and required all employees (organizers in the field, as well as administrative staff) to take three days leave without pay each month to take effect in November, which also saw Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) win the presidential election.¹⁰⁰ With twenty-five percent (thirteen million people) of the population unemployed, he signed the Cullen-Harrison Act in March 1933, amending the Volstead Act to permit the sale and manufacture of beer and wine less than 3.2 percent.¹⁰¹ Green instructed Idar to help workers in copper shops and barrel-makers, many out of work and the AFL since the ratification of Prohibition, to organize once more. Unemployed men wished to join the trade, but feared the repeal of FDR's new act.¹⁰² Without the protection of Cullen-Harrison, they could soon be out of work once again.

⁹⁸ Letter from J.C. Cullen to William Green, June 16, 1932, Folder 6, Box 3, CNIPP.

⁹⁹ Letter from William Green to Clemente Idar, June 22, 1932, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from William Green to Clemente Idar, October 29, 1932, Folder 6, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹⁰¹ Lange, *The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, 4; Jeffrey H. Wallenfeidt, *A New World Power: American from 1920 to 1945* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2013), 14.

¹⁰² Letter from William Green to Clemente Idar, June 5, 1933, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

Illness continued to plague Idar during this period of his life. In April 1933, an attack of appendicitis forced him to spend some time in hospital.¹⁰³ Although he recovered, before Idar could begin organizing the barrel-makers, his lungs and his heart began to fail.¹⁰⁴ He continued to work, as he was able, throughout the summer, but, by August he was “very sick, suffering from a combination of ailments few would have been able to withstand.” Jack Flynn (TSFL Commissioner of Labor) and Charles. H. Poe (TSFL Chief Deputy Labor Commissioner), alarmed at the condition of their friend, wrote to Green to beg him to keep Idar on the AFL’s payroll for the sake of his wife and children. Idar had been a loyal employee for many years, they pointed out, and if Green would agree to “car[e] for our faithful and untiring Brother during the agonizing hours of his suffering,” the membership, as well as the Idars, would be grateful.¹⁰⁵ Green responded that it was the AFL’s policy to continue to pay their organizers, even during times of weakness. He thanked the men for their letter, as Idar’s condition worried him.¹⁰⁶ Green was right to be worried. Idar’s health continued to worsen during the remainder of 1933 from complications of his diabetes and, on January 27, 1934, Clemente Idar died at the age of fifty-one at his home in San Antonio.¹⁰⁷ Little information exists in his collection about the last few months of his life, but his old

¹⁰³ Letter from William Green to Clemente Idar, April 3, 1933, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Frank Morrison to William Green, June 16, 1933, Folder 14, Box 3, CNIPP.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Charles H. Poe and Jack Flynn to William Green, August 16, 1933, Folder 8, Box 8, CNIPP.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from William Green to Charles H. Poe, August 24, 1933, Folder 8, Box 8, CNIPP.

¹⁰⁷ Orozco attributes Idar’s death to an ulcer which developed as a result of a grapefruit diet in conjunction with his diabetes. More research is needed on this subject to verify this information. Orozco, “IDAR, CLEMENTE NICASIO,” *Texas Handbook Online*.

friend, Leonor Villegas de Magnon, records Idar's final moments and funeral at the end of her work, *La Rebelde (The Rebel)*:

[Clemente's] enthusiasm was so extreme that his last words – while he was suffering great pain – reiterated his doctrine of citizenship, union and progress. Thousands of laborers saluted him upon his death, passing his coffin with their heads bowed. With tears overflowing, they said goodbye to their leader and champion.¹⁰⁸

In the wake of Clemente's death, Federico, carried on his brother's work in Mexico and traveled widely throughout Latin America to promote the interests of railroad workers.

He later became a senator in the Mexican congress representing Monterrey, but was assassinated in Mexico City in 1938.¹⁰⁹ That year, Clemente's daughter, Maria Louisa, graduated from high school and received a letter of congratulations from her local representative, Maury Maverick (1895-1954, Democrat), of Texas' 20th district. He enclosed in the letter a copy of the US constitution and Bill of Rights. Maverick most likely sent letters like this to all of his district's high school graduates, but Maria Louisa's letter bears a handwritten note at the bottom: "I know your father and uncles – or possibly you are the daughter of the Idar who died. They are all good men, and good Americans."¹¹⁰

Such a testimony would likely have pleased Idar. Certainly, in the wake of all the discrimination (based on race) and suspicion (based on hyphenated citizenship) he faced during his lifetime, to be called a good man and a good American by Anglo society was all he had ever fought for. It was still what LULAC strived for, but Idar achieved it on his own terms by refusing to deny either part of his own identity.

¹⁰⁸ Magnon and Lomas, *The Rebel*, xl-xli.

¹⁰⁹ Villegas de Magnon, *The Rebel*, xl-xli.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Maury Maverick to Maria Louisa Idar, May 21, 1938, Folder 20, Box 1, CNIPP.

In the years following Idar's death, the United States implemented the Bracero Program to import labor from Mexico during World War II. Signed in August 1942, the agreement would originally only last until the end of the war, however the scheme was so successful, American employers requested extensions, which were approved until 1964. The program exemplified the evils of labor exploitation Idar spent his life working against. Contracts and abject working conditions, similar to the ones he encountered in Colorado with the sugar beet workers, continued unchecked thanks to little communication or oversight between governments. The program also inspired more, and larger, waves of illegal immigration than Idar saw during his career, but caused more of the same discrimination he himself experienced. In response to these events, a new Mexican-American civil rights protest began, with notable figures like Cesar Chavez, in the 1960s and 1970s. It is the success of these hyphenated citizens that American history remembers, but their victories would not have been possible without the work of men like Idar beginning in the 1910s with *El Primer Congreso* and culminating in the 1930s with the formation of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Idar's legacy continues to be relevant today. His concerns for the treatment of Mexican immigrants working in the United States and his desire to implement a fair system of entry into the US which does not discriminate based on race are issues this country still debates. Racial profiling policies permitted in Arizona, most notably, have come under fire for precisely these reasons. What Idar's story demonstrates is America's long and shared history with Mexico is still an ever present force in shaping the lives of all Mexican-Americans, but especially those living along the border. Although no materials in his collection suggest the AFL organizer developed a concrete plan to curb

the influx of cheap labor from the across the *Rio Grande*, it is clear he thought the best course of action would be to maintain a good working relationship with, not only the Mexican government, but also its labor unions to educate and empower workers to create better lives for themselves in their own country. It is also evident Idar supported limiting the power of big business to force employers to pay decent wages and to provide healthy living and working environments to their workers. These two solutions, together, were the only humane way to approach the problem. As his 1925 Labor Day speech in Oklahoma City reminds his audience, preserving humanity through such complex issues is the only way to solve them.

APPENDIX

“The Sound of the Bell”: The History of Laredo, Texas

On September 16, 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo (1752-1811) climbed the church tower. The sound of the bells rang out, announcing Mexico’s separation from Spain; the beginning of the Mexican War of Independence. The news reached even the remote borderland frontier of New Spain, where tensions also ran high. Years of neglect, excess, and abuse by the Crown and upper-class *criollos* caused resentment and discontent among the racially and ethnically lower-classes.¹ By August 1811, the loyalist forces defrocked and executed the insurrectionist priest and brought the fight for independence to Laredo.² The town’s *cabildo*, or council, debated whose side to join.³

Founded on May 15, 1755 by the arrival of three families in the province of Nuevo Santander, Laredo grew quickly. The population doubled within a decade, from eighty-five residents to one hundred.⁴ Although a census taken two years later did not record the ethnicity of the initial inhabitants, the 1789 rolls show various racial divisions, such as *mestizos* (mixed persons of Spanish and Indian parentage, 17.2%) and *mulattoes* (mixed persons of Spanish and African parentage, 17.2%). Indians, or *indios*, comprised a separate survey with a population of 15.6% and *espanoles*, white Spaniards, dominated

¹ *Criollos* is the term assigned to white Spaniards born in the New World. Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 25.

² Christon I. Archer, “Fashioning a New Nation,” in William H. Beezley and Michael C. Meyer, eds. *The Oxford History of Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 276. Hereafter cited: Archer, “Fashioning a New Nation,” in *The Oxford History of Mexico*.

³ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 26.

⁴ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 9.

the population with 45.3%.⁵ Only the last group had a voice in 1811, when the council ultimately decided to ally itself with the Crown. Laredo's richest landowning residents relied on the King's garrisons to protect them, and their property, against Indian raids. But the garrisons would not stay for long. Instead, the Crown sent them back to the center of the empire to maintain control of the government. This withdrawal caused Laredo a decade of economic and social hardship.⁶

Mexico finally secured its independence in 1821, when General Agustin de Iturbide, representing the revolutionary forces, and representatives of the Spanish Crown signed the Treaty of Cordoba.⁷ Peace and stability returned to Laredo and by 1824, the town again enjoyed prosperity. By the 1830s, however, the US's expansion westward put pressure on the town. The American government, who forced the removal of tribes from east of the Mississippi into the area as early as the 1810s, now displaced more tribes into the region. American trading presence in the area armed these native groups with new and greater numbers of weapons. Attacks on the town by Apaches and Comanches increased, as did the level of violence with which they were carried out. Furthermore, the newly created Mexico's encouragement of immigration by US settlers into its Texas territory contributed to deteriorating conditions.⁸ In 1835, the powder keg blew. These new Texans, as well as those already living there, revolted against Mexico.⁹ The Texas Declaration of Independence written at the March Convention of 1836, similar in

⁵ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 17.

⁶ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 26.

⁷ Archer, "Fashioning a New Nation," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, 285.

⁸ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 27.

⁹ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 47.

language to the 1776 US Declaration of Independence from Britain, charged Mexico with failure to protect the people's lives, liberty, and property from increasing Indian raids. The document also chastised the Mexican government for ignoring their grievances in prior petitions.¹⁰

The resulting Republic of Texas lasted from 1836 to 1845. In 1836, Texans voted for their annexation into the United States, but President Martin Van Buren refused to discuss the proposition, fearing a war with Mexico. The question of slavery also influenced the decision and Texas President Mirabeau B. Lamar (1798-1859) withdrew the resolution in 1838. By 1843, British trade with the smaller republic, and fears of Texas's absorption into a foreign empire, forced the US to reexamine the question. Britain did not want Texas, but it neither did it desire America to benefit (commercially, territorially) from such expansion. President John Tyler proposed an annexation treaty in 1844, but the Senate defeated it. As the presidential election loomed, the matter of what to do with Texas became a major campaign issue and helped elect James K. Polk, who favored the acquisition of Texas. The Congress passed his treaty on February 28, 1845, granting statehood. Britain, anxious to defeat the design, approached Mexico, who agreed to recognize the Republic of Texas, provided Texas remain its own country. Ratified by a majority vote in October 1845, the Texan Congress agreed to join the US. Texas entered the union officially on December 29, 1845.¹¹

¹⁰ Ralph W. Steen, "TEXAS DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mjtce>), accessed April 21, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

¹¹ C.T. Neu, "ANNEXATION," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mga02>), accessed April 21, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

The Mexican government was furious. To add insult to injury, President Polk insisted buying northern California and setting a new national boundary for both countries at the Rio Grande. He ordered General Zachary Taylor (1784-1850) to march his army south from Corpus Christi to enforce the new border. Outraged by this perceived act of war, Mexico ordered its soldiers garrisoned at Matamoros on April 25, 1846 to cross the river and ambush the invader. Polk took the spilling of “American blood upon American soil” as an act of war and issued an official declaration on May 13.¹²

During the first months of the Mexican War, Laredo remained under Mexican control. Texas volunteer soldiers, raised the Stars and Stripes in the town for the first time in July 1846 on their way to Camargo under Captain Richard A. Gillespie. The following month, former Texan president, and now general, Mirabeau Lamar and his seventy-three men brought the town under American jurisdiction.¹³ While Mexico and the US ratified a treaty to end the war in the spring of 1848, Laredo’s leaders petitioned both sides to allow it to remain part of Mexico, to no avail. With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in Mexico City on May 30, 1848, Laredo became an American town.¹⁴

¹² K. Jack Bauer, "MEXICAN WAR," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qdm02>), accessed April 21, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

¹³ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 55-6.

¹⁴ Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo*, 58-9.

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