

to pick cotton (probably in 1925); the following year they had gone to Montana to work in sugar beets, having previously worked in sugar beets in Wyoming; from Montana they had come to Bethlehem. Another child reported previous employment in the beet fields of the same two states. A third had gone from Chicago with his mother to the beet fields of Minnesota prior to coming to Bethlehem. A fourth had come via New York from residence in Cuba. Some had come directly from Mexico; one was a native of Bethlehem, born in 1919. No statistics are available concerning the origin in Mexico of the Mexicans of Bethlehem; an estimate by a Mexican, probably correct, places the origin of the majority in central Mexico, principally Jalisco and Michoacan.

II

LABOR RELATIONS

Mexicans come to Bethlehem seeking employment because they learn of the large steel mills located there; if they find employment they remain, if not, they naturally go elsewhere. Many have come to Bethlehem because of the presence there of relatives already employed. Often money has been sent to Texas or Mexico to bring them. A notable instance is that of a member of the group transported from Texas in 1923, who has been instrumental in bringing after him seven brothers and three sisters, all but one married, together with their families, a total of over thirty.

No sooner did the Mexicans imported in 1923 reach Bethlehem than they began to disperse in search of more attractive employment. The maximum number on the payroll any month of those originally transported from Texas was 790 in May 1923. By midsummer the number had dropped 24 per cent, by November it had fallen 53 per cent below the maximum, and by the end of the year, 71 per cent. The decline month by month for the first year was as follows:

April.....624	August.....603	December.....347	April.....272
May.....790	September.....522	January.....286	May.....232
June.....748	October.....452	February.....283	Average.....464
July.....670	November.....374	March.....292	

Except for the winter months January to April 1924, when there was stability, the number on the payroll of those brought by the company from Texas declined with uniform rapidity. In the spring of 1930, forty-six Mexicans known to have been members of the original group

were still on the rolls. Estimates of the total number of Mexican employees at that time varied from ninety to one hundred fifty. Including American-born Mexicans, one hundred twenty-five is a conservative approximation.

Upon arrival in Bethlehem the original contingents of Mexicans were concentrated in bunkhouses in a labor camp. In a little over a year, however, the scattering of Mexicans to other localities in the East, their return to the Southwest or Mexico, and their dispersion to other domiciles in Bethlehem depopulated the camp. The company then ceased to provide special arrangements for boarding Mexicans. Some of the *solos* were already boarding with Mexican families; now they are found boarding with Polish, Wendish, Slovak, Spanish, and Mexican families. Some of them live in groups, renting and house-keeping for themselves, each man buying his own food and doing his own cooking. Most of the Mexicans live in town houses, but a number, both of families and *solos* still live in company-owned houses at the coke plant.

The majority of the Mexicans of Bethlehem live scattered along the southern front of the works. This distribution is indicated best by the numbers of Mexican children in each of the public schools of this strip. At the Lindbergh school near the coke works there were thirteen Mexicans in the spring of 1929; in the Washington, Donigan, and Quinn schools situated in a row along Fourth Street, a block south of the plant, there were twelve, four, and twenty Mexican children respectively, a total of forty-nine. Three Mexicans were said to be in high school in early 1930. There are clusters of Mexicans, as at the coke works and from the 1500 to 1800 blocks on East Third Street, but no such clearly defined areas of Mexican colonization as are characteristic of the Southwest. In the vicinity of the coke works in early 1929 lived one hundred twenty-four Mexican men, women, and children, according to the mental enumeration of two Mexicans. They comprised seventeen families with fifty-six children, and thirty-four *solos*.

There is also a very slight diffusion into employments other than those of the steel company. Four Mexicans have become machinists, and three, machinists' helpers in the adjoining town of Allentown. But in Bethlehem itself, there were probably not more than two or three Mexican men employed outside of the steel company. Seven or eight Mexican girls are employed in a cigar factory, two boys and some girls in a silk factory, a clerk in a five-and-ten cent store, and a boy employed part time by the steward of a hotel.

Practically all the Mexicans employed by the steel company are laborers. A very few are rated as semi-skilled, and a very few others as skilled mechanics; there were two carpenters and one bricklayer, and perhaps others in early 1930. A Mexican offered the mild plaint heard not infrequently in other parts of the United States as well, that "There are artisans among the Mexican laborers—carpenters and machinists—but they are not asked to work as such." But he added in the next sentence a partial and characteristic explanation: "Most of them don't speak English."

The comments of various executives on the industrial qualities of the Mexicans were on the whole favorable, although not always in entire agreement. Three weeks after the first Mexicans had reached Bethlehem, President Grace was reported as stating that they "were doing satisfactory work; in fact," he added, "they were doing better than expected. . . . Most of them were in the unskilled labor class," he said, "but some have done so well that they have been advanced"¹³ Two executives who compared Mexican laborers with the few Negroes who have been employed in Bethlehem both gave the advantage to the Mexicans. Said one, "The Mexicans are better, more dependable workers than the Negroes. The Negroes aren't there when you want them; they go south with the cold weather." The other placed the Mexicans above the Negroes, but below the Hungarians; "We have had a more favorable experience with the Mexicans than with the Negroes, but not so favorable as, say with the Hungarians, who are more stable and dependable than the Mexicans." A third executive, subordinate to the man just quoted, gave a similar judgment: "The Mexicans are not on a par with the Europeans. The latter grasp things quicker and are more aggressive than the Mexicans." But a fourth executive rated the Mexicans as the equals or possibly the superior of the two important groups of Europeans available for the same work: "The Mexicans are a good class of men as a whole; the majority are good steady workers. As a class their intelligence is above the Slavish [Slovaks] and Wendish. They are a bright, keen race, and good workers." And in response to my observation that in other localities some persons regard Mexicans as possessing low intelligence, he added, "If some people think the Mexicans are dumb, they should see some of our Irish. The Mexicans on the whole are absolutely on a par with the Slavish [Slovaks] and Wendish."

¹³ *New York Times*, April 27, 1923, p. 25.

A fifth executive, whose direct experience with Mexican labor was probably more extensive than that of the others quoted, described his method of handling them, and, temperately, set up no hierarchy of nationalities.

I don't think that the Mexicans are inherently different from other people. They are very easy to handle if they are given just treatment and are greeted with a smile. We rule them, but we are just. We tell them what to do and expect them to do it; but we don't worry them with what not to do. I take a personal interest in each Mexican, and have obtained their confidence. If they are sick or in trouble of any sort, they usually come and tell me. If they are sick, we send them to the hospital.

He went on to point out the difficult adjustment to modern industry which faces the man from a pre-industrial society.

The main thing in handling Mexicans is patience. How would you feel if you were a young, non-English speaking Mexican about 27 years old, who had never seen a piece of machinery, and were suddenly to obtain a job here? It takes the native of Mexico quite a time to get used to the idea that he must arrive at a certain time and remain on the job all day long.

He corroborated the judgment of the preceding speaker concerning the intelligence of the Mexicans.

Just twenty miles from here I can find native Americans who are just as ignorant and dumb as our worst Mexicans. It is an individual matter; some are dumb and some are bright.

The Mexicans were said to endure heat well. "The Mexicans are best in hot work on the open hearth or blast furnacés. They are not much good as laborers out in all kinds of weather. The Mexicans don't stand cold as well as other nationalities, but they do stand the heat as well." The rapid dispersion to other employments of the Mexicans transported from Texas has been noted. It occasioned the remark, "The Mexicans we brought up here were unreliable. As soon as pay day came they drifted away to stone quarries and elsewhere." Their "steadiness" was said to have increased; probably this observation was the result of the elimination of the less "steady" employees as much as to the increasing adaptation of the Mexicans to the regularity of industrial demands.

Consistent with the comment of the minor executive just quoted were the illuminating remarks of a Mexican: "The foremen like the Mexicans. The American people don't like to work; the Mexicans do anything. The family men are steady and like steady work. The single men say, 'Let the married fellow work. To hell with the work,

we are going to have a good time'." As indicated earlier, the proportion of families is greater now than at first.

In commenting on their employment the Mexicans indicated both favorable and unfavorable aspects. Complaint of discrimination was general; significantly, it was directed against the bosses, usually of European birth, with whom the laborers have immediate contact. It is noteworthy that the charge of discrimination does not attach, in the minds of the Mexicans, to the Americans, who generally occupy higher positions. A group of Mexicans offered these observations:

There is no discrimination in movies, restaurants, barber shops, but there is in the work. The bosses give protection to their own race. They give the most dangerous work and the lowest paid jobs to Mexicans. The Mexicans get less. Yes, if they are doing the same work they get equal pay. The Americans do not make distinctions. The Americans are superintendents.

Another Mexican implied that "the company" and its employment department were to be distinguished from the bosses:

There is no discrimination in the work made by the company or the employment department. The *mayordomos* discriminate. If they have fifteen of their own nationality and five Mexicans, and are told to lay off three men, they tell three Mexicans to go.

Similarly, another said:

The *mayordomos* give preference to their own race, but the company is fair.

Interesting evidence of the success among Mexicans of the company's practice of selling stock to their employees, as well as further confirmation of the separate identification of "company" and "bosses," was the interjection of the last speaker's nephew: "He is part of the company himself—he has stock."¹⁴

It was at least in part to avoid discrimination of one nationality against another, a practice which antedated the coming of the Mexicans, that led to the action reported by executives:

Some years ago we scattered out our nationalities and placed a neutral, if possible an American, over them.

We try to keep them split up pretty well; we think we have a little better control over them then. If we have a Slavish foreman on one shift, we put a Wendish foreman on another. The Slavish foreman would put most of the work on the Wendish, and vice versa.

¹⁴ "Managers are realizing that a company's labor policy is no sounder than the actual working policy of each of its foremen. For it is literally true that in the eyes of the workers, the foreman is the company."—Tead and Metcalf, *Personnel Administration* . . . , (edition 2, 1926), p. 167. Without invalidating the first sentence, it may be pointed out that the second sentence was not fully applicable to the attitude of Mexicans in Bethlehem at the time of this study.

The intensity and the disagreeable character of work were mentioned by two Mexicans, but each also intimated compensating advantages. The first, in San Antonio en route to Mexico in December 1928, said that he "had made good money" but "had been worked to death," and that "if he comes again, he will bring his family because he will be able to do better work and eat his wife's cooking."¹⁵ The other offset the disadvantage that "the Mexicans do dirty work" with freedom from petty interference and subserviency: "They have no bosses and do what they want." "In El Paso you have to tip the boss—give him presents of cigars; but you don't have to do it here. There you talk to your boss with your hat in your hand; here you talk with your hat on."

The Mexicans transported from Texas ranged in physical type from almost pure Spanish to almost pure Indian. No tendency to regard either type as industrially superior to the other was observed; indeed, the contrary was stated: "I haven't observed any relation between color and working qualities." In one department, color of skin appeared to hamper opportunity for promotion, even though the executive who reported this, apparently attached no significance to color as in indication of fitness: "If it were not for the color of their skins I don't see why some Mexicans could not rise to positions of responsibility." In another department, however, color seemed to be no bar, at least in a lower grade. The executive in charge reported:

I often work the Mexicans as keepers of furnaces. The Mexican keeper is responsible for the furnace as well as for three or four men. He may have any or all of these nationalities under him. I have an Indian type Mexican keeper now over a Mexican, an Italian, a Slav, and a Wend.

III

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Prejudice against Mexicans associated with their darker color, appeared to be weak and occasional, if it existed at all. In response to my inquiry, two immigrant European track laborers replied, "Every nationality all same." The admissibility of a candidate for membership in an American fraternal lodge who obviously was a *mestizo* was questioned on the ground that he was "not white"; but upon the assurance of his sponsor that the candidate was "white" he was admitted.

¹⁵ Reported by the International Institute, San Antonio.