There is a tendency for English-speaking Americans to think of non-English speakers as immigrants and aliens. In fact, in the southwestern United States, it was the English speakers, the Anglos, who were the latecomers. Native Americans had lived there for thousands of years and Spanish-speaking people for hundreds when the Anglos began to arrive in Texas and other parts of the Southwest in the 1820s. But when the entire area became part of the United States after the Mexican War, Anglo political control was quickly extended to include economic, social, and cultural dominance as well.

Anglos tended to view those of Mexican ancestry living in the area as an alien minority. But some also saw them as a valuable source of cheap labor for the area's farms and mines. The demand for such labor was met not only by the current residents but also by increased immigration from Mexico, continuing through the late 1800s and into the twentieth century. Like other ethnic minorities, Chicanos (people of Mexican ancestry living in the United States) tended to live in compact communities of their own, partly out of preference and partly because prevailing prejudices forced them to. Like other ethnic minorities, too, they had to face the issue of whether and how to preserve their own culture in the face of the dominant culture's disrespect for it.

The following selection deals with Chicanos living in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. Initially their communities consisted mostly of an interlocked network of small, rural villages, but economic pressures forced them into increased contact with and dependence on the economic and social institutions of the larger society. In the process they encountered economic, social, and cultural dilemmas little different from those faced by Chicanos in other parts of the United States. Like others, they tended to be confined to hard, un-skilled, and low-paying jobs, to suffer from serious health problems, and to lack educational opportunities. The picture was complicated by the tendency of Anglos to lump together all Chicanos, whether immigrants or American citizens, and to regard them all with prejudice.

It was early spring when they began to arrive. In the lingering chill twenty thousand Chicanos settled over the beet fields, five here, ten there. To house them, farmers roused the hens from the chicken coops and took the last of the grain out of the storage shacks. Most of the shacks had only one or two rooms to shelter the large families - families had to be large to make a living working beets - and throughout the twenties, most shacks provided "utterly inadequate" shelter at that. Investigators
continually testified that they found shacks located "with no attention to adequate sanitation, toilet facilities, sleeping room, or water supply." Without shade, the shacks became hotter than the fields; often they had no screens. The surroundings were dirty barnyards and corrals.

If they worked on the western edge of the South Platte Valley, due north of Denver, Spanish Americans could look up from the five miles of rows they tended per acre (each averaged ten acres per season) and, looking across the plain, be soothed by the sun setting over the mountains, a reminder of home. But if they worked in the long stretch of the valley to the east, there was nothing to relieve the eye from the endless rows and level terrain; they were alone on the plain, alone in the Anglo north, with nothing to remind them of the mountains, the villages, the relatives, the gardens, and the churches of home. This frontier demanded from them a new life, a new way of living. To understand their life as it evolved in the 1920s, it is necessary first to set it in the context of the regional community, then to examine the factors that conspired to make the creation of a stable community in the north difficult—including the impact of the migration on Chicanas, the community builders - and finally to analyze new strategies as they emerged in the north.

With spiraling intensity, old and new factors combined in northern New Mexico to deprive Hispanics of land and livelihood, to drive them into increased dependency on the networks and settlements, and the success, of the regional community. Each new disaster of the 1920s, natural or man-made, meant reduced resources to meet the next. Hispanic vigilante groups like the Manos Negras continued to cut fences that blocked access to traditionally communal pasture and to burn barns of Rio Arriba County's Anglo and Hispanic commercial farmers, but such efforts to resist the trend had little impact. There also continued a depressed cattle market; limited access to Anglo-controlled credit; equal division of dwindling holdings among heirs, which left each with smaller and smaller parcels of land; and an average crop failure in some parts of northern New Mexico reaching 59 percent. In addition to these older factors, a 1924 Pueblo Lands Act resulted in the eviction of nearly three thousand Hispanics and Anglos. At the same time, Texans and Oklahomans with enough capital to stake a homestead invaded the region. They disrupted the Hispanic villages and demanded services such as moving a high school from a Hispanic settlement to their own settlement or building expensive irrigation projects that would increase the tax burden on the financially strapped Hispanics just when a 1926 state tax law made land that had been tax-delinquent for three years subject to foreclosure and sale for back taxes.

These events ensured that a rapidly escalating proportion of Hispanic village families increased their reliance on wage labor or, like farm folk all over the country, left the villages altogether. Many headed for such larger towns of New Mexico as Grants and Albuquerque. Others departed for the state's coal-mining areas, Gallup and Raton, and for railroad shops and Colorado's coal mines. But the largest contingent set out for the beet fields, where push and pull came together.

Colorado's sugar-beet industry provided approximately 20,000 jobs each season, while the state's railroads employed only about 5000 Chicanos for maintenance of way,
and its coal mines just over 3000. Moreover, to ensure an ample labor supply, Great Western Sugar Company, Colorado's largest, spent lavishly on recruitment campaigns throughout the decade, as much as ninety dollars per family recruited, or $250,000 in a single year. The company focused with particular intensity on the already vulnerable areas of southern Colorado and New Mexico, until the two states' share of the recruited Chicano labor rose from approximately 65 percent in 1923 to approximately 85 percent in 1927.

According to one ex-villager, recruiters claimed "you'd rake in the money," and they distributed brochures that led Hispanics to expect a garden plot for each family, decent housing, a water supply, and a friendly employer who might provide milk and eggs at cost. While it is true that a few of the Chicano beet-labor houses, more of them toward the end of the decade, were sturdy and weather-proof, that some farm owners and tenants had houses and sanitation little better than their labor did, and that farm labor conditions in other parts of the nation, notably in the South, were little if any better than those in Colorado, nonetheless, for the majority of Chicanos in the 1920s, life in Colorado's beet fields did not fulfill recruiters' promises. A simple description of conditions and attitudes there reads like a harangue against the agricultural system of the time.

Most of the farmers seemed to agree with Americanization teacher Alfred White that "the peon has always lived like a pig and he will continue to do so." National Child Labor Committee investigator Charles Gibbons found that "the local people . . . feel they are giving the Mexican all he deserves; in fact one frequently finds the opinion that they (residents) are performing an act of charity in allowing the Mexican to work for them, and therefore any kind of a house will do for them to live in." Most growers and even investigators were convinced that whatever the conditions in Colorado, they represented an improvement over Hispanic and Mexican villages.

Most Chicanos, on the other hand, saw little if any improvement. They had come north, to the margins of the Hispanic regional community, to better their condition. Though often bitterly disappointed in what they found, many could not afford to turn back. An exasperated Chicana living in a one-room shack with her family of twelve demanded, "How can you expect folks to live decently when given a place like that?" The Chicanas tried desperately to turn these shacks into homes, despite their long hours in the fields and the meager furnishings they could bring with them. The migrants used boxes as tables and cupboards, and often slept on the floor. Mury Vela remembered that her mother stayed up all night to clean when they moved. Another mother made her own paste and pasted a two-room shack with newspapers for decoration and warmth; her daughter remembered, "[W]e would lay there and read all the news there was in the newspapers."

As to the work itself, there were some Anglo school children and a few Anglo women who, not needing to provide their entire support from the beets, contracted small acreages, an amount easily managed in workdays of reasonable length. A local lawyer assured investigators that "children are in much better conditions in the open fields and the open air than they would be in their homes. In general," he asserted, "this summer outing is looked upon by the children as a frolic." But Mary Vela recalled beet
work as "backbreaking and heavy. During the harvest we'd work 18-hours days." At least one Spanish-speaking woman lost two sons to a kidney disease exacerbated by long hours of stooping over the fields. Thinning the beets in the early summer required crawling, and topping them during the harvest required stooping, and it was all, according to investigator Paul Taylor, "disagreeable . . . dirty . . . monotonous and repetitive." Even C. V. Maddux, labor commissioner at Great Western Sugar Company in the 1920s, warned that "a man who is highly-strung could never work beets, because there are five miles of row to every acre. . . . He could not see the end."

Great Western Sugar remained the recruiter and not the direct employer of beet labor, but it taught its agricultural field men Spanish, retained files on each of the laborers it recruited, and mediated in grower-labor disputes. As the roving villagers created new and reinforced old paths connecting the village economy to the large one, Great Western Sugar, by centralizing and expanding its recruiting and labor services, increased its control over the labor and the labor market on the Anglo-Chicano frontier, and so its power in the regional community.

The sugar companies together with the growers set the wages of beet labor, a crucial factor not only for Hispanic life in the north but for the possibilities of the regional community. Yet the laborers' cost of living did not enter into the companies' calculations. They simply promised to procure beet labor at the farmers' agreed rate per acre. Under the set rates, a Chicano beet worker earned only about $250 each season. Meanwhile, the cost of living in Denver for a family, according to the Colorado Industrial Commission, was $1,197.78 per year at minimum comfort. For Chicanos wintering in rural areas, the cost may have been slightly less, but not 75 percent less. Chicanos quickly came to see in the family system of labor not the promise of vastly increased wealth, but simply survival.

And even survival was questionable. "Families" under this system sometimes included distant cousins, neighbors from the home village, or even subcontractors. With more than six working members, at least four of them adult men, such a family could contract as many as 60 to 80 acres and make between $1500 and $2100 per season. But there were few such families, fewer, in fact, than 5 percent of the whole. Investigating the South Platte area in 1924, Sara Brown found earnings from beets for over half the contract families with children amounted to less than $900. Forty percent of Brown's families earned less than $700 for the season. In other beet-producing areas of Colorado, beet-labor families earned even less. Having promised to provide cheap labor to the growers, sugar companies had indeed fostered a family system where, according to one pair of investigators, "instead of paying one laborer a bare subsistence wage, the labor of father and several children is secured at this rate." But family earnings of seven hundred dollars did not provide even subsistence, except, perhaps, during the months of labor.

Clearly such low wages demanded some kind of supplement, and it was here that the village strategy of migration and the beet industry's labor strategy intersected. Credit, relief, or the beet laborer's own farm in southern Colorado, New Mexico, or Mexico could supplement beet wages in the absence of winter work. Each of these alternatives informally subsidized the beet industry by making the low wages possible,
but in some ways, perpetual migration seemed the most desirable to all parties. . . . Having at the end of the beet season an average of approximately $150, "plenty to get them out of the country," as one farmer observed, and spending approximately two-thirds of it on returning to the village, a beet-labor family would have fifty dollars to pay taxes on the farm and supply cash needs throughout the winter. In turn, the farm that could not support the family year round might provide the missing six months' subsistence. This semi-autonomous cultural retreat fit the mythological image of the vanishing "Mexican" whose "homing instinct" saved the Southwest from "the terrible mistakes which have been made in the southern states . . . a civilization of masters and servants." In Colorado, growers sent the "servants" home when they were not wanted, in an extended echo of a day work system rather than live-in help. This migratory pattern permitted members of each culture to deny their membership in and responsibility for the other, and allowed farmers to keep the doors to Mexican reserve labor open.

The number of Chicanos who either lacked the farm to which to return or lacked the means to get there belied the comforting myth. Mexican nationals in particular, unlike most Spanish Americans tended to come from landless families. But both groups settled in the north in greater numbers than during the war. The resident Chicano population of northeastern Colorado more than doubled relative to the total population and more than tripled in absolute numbers between 1920 and 1927 alone. Approximately one-third wintered in the open fields and the rest in towns. In Denver their number grew from approximately two thousand to over eight thousand. Expanding earlier settlements in Denver, Spanish Americans clustered west of the city center, in the vicinity of West Colfax between the Platte River and Cherry Creek, and also to the north along the east coast of the river. To the northeast of this latter area were the Mexicans, perhaps a fifth of the total Chicano population in the city. These were poor parts of the city, multi-ethnic, with rooming houses, the unemployed, and the transient. Among these last, Denver's Chicanos fit well. Over three-quarters of the families from each section left Denver each spring for seasonal labor. By 1929, such Chicano clusters, however transient, made it clear that the "Mexicans" disappearing from the fields after harvest had not moved very far. . . .

Hispanics found the traditional agricultural ladder to ownership full of broken rungs. Landowners hesitated to lease farms to Hispanics. One who did complained, "People around here blame me for leasing to Mexicans and so displacing the whites." But even a lease proved at best a rickety, inadequate vehicle. Few Chicanos would follow their predecessors, the German-Russian immigrants, to farm ownership. Chicanos arrived with smaller families than the German-Russians, and with an unwillingness to keep the women and children in the fields for the same long hours. Moreover, they came at a time when land values had escalated while beet-labor wages had not and when the move to ownership had generally dwindled. It was, in fact, only the lack of movement between tenancy and ownership that reconciled Anglos to Chicano lessees at all. As one farmer's wife explained, "There is no danger from the Mexicans. They won't save enough to buy land." Without land ownership it would be difficult for Hispanics to convert the periphery of one Chicano regional community, the outermost
edge of the network system, into the center of another, the node of a new set of networks.

What year-round residences Chicanos could buy consisted of town lots and even these were not easily acquired. "Dealers in real estate," Paul Taylor revealed, "carry out the policy of separating Mexicans in northeastern Colorado." And even a modest $250 mortgage on a lot in a Chicano enclave, with the family paying only twelve dollars a year,, outran beet worker resources. One former beet worker remembered an Anglo realtor in Greeley in the late 1920s who "was working the Spanish real good, he lived off the Spanish," providing loans and repossessing partially paid-up houses. A reluctant Anglo host society joined with the dynamics of the beet industry to keep most Chicanos transient and hovering on the margins of society.

Nor did the Great Western Sugar Company's compromise of company-financed colonies impinge markedly on this system. Faced with increasing recruiting costs, the company, unlike the farmers, wanted a larger resident population. In colonies they provided land lots Chicanos could buy as house sites. While the colonies did allow a number of Chicano families to winter in the north each year, the high turnover and lapsed payments proved them not much more affordable for Chicanos than non-company housing. In addition, the company colonies themselves emblemized the system which kept the Chicanos safely (for the Anglos) marginal and had as its aim the preservation in Chicanos of a perpetual and distinct laboring force. Their one- or two-room distinctive adobe structures stood on lots devoid of shade or farmland, a mile or two outside of Anglo towns or literally across the tracks.

For those Chicanos who did succeed in purchasing such a home, it offered a measure of stability and avoided a winter in the often leaky, overcrowded, and unsanitary farm buildings and Denver shacks. But it offered scant if any aid to gaining subsistence or even acceptance into Anglo society. It had little in common with owning land in the village. For Chicanos, ownership of a home on the periphery of an Anglo community and unaccompanied by ownership of productive land could mark not upward mobility, but confinement to a seasonal laboring class.

When these Chicano colonists and settlers no longer disappeared each winter below some imaginary border, the Anglo townspeople erected their own borders. They used the burning crosses of the Ku Klux Klan, so popular elsewhere in Colorado in the 1920s, to mark the edges of the adobe colonies, and used signs in restaurants, barbershops, and movie theaters bearing such inscriptions as "White Trade Only" and "No Mexican Trade Wanted," which made it impossible for Hispanics in towns like Greeley and Brighton to buy so much as a hamburger. The rhetoric of a "Mexican invasion" continued virtually unabated both in the national popular press and in Colorado. And Hispanic colonists remembered vividly nearly sixty years later the indignity of having an Anglo doctor arrive unannounced to take blood samples for Wasserman tests to detect syphilis. "That's how bad they wanted to get rid of us," recalled one. Spanish Americans had difficulty registering to vote, and local Anglos continued to "wish the Mexicans were not there."

It was ironic that the local growers simultaneously protested the invasion of their neighborhoods by "Mexicans" and petitioned Congress to retain unrestricted Mexican
immigration. It was ironic, also, that at the same time Great Western Sugar was erecting its colonies, its representative vigorously contended that "the Mexican eventually returns south of the Rio Grande," having "ebbed and flowed into agriculture and industry as needed for the past fifteen years, with good results to all interests concerned." Colorado's Congressman, Charles Timberlake, even denied that the company had built any houses for Mexican labor. The public and the private face of the industry, its social and its economic needs, had become increasingly disparate under the strain of reinforcing the myths which perpetuated the labor system. Local Anglos and sugar company officials came up with new myths, or applied old ones, to justify the developments. Although the local Anglos gave the colonies unattractive names - the one in Eaton was called "Ragtown" - the vice president of Holly Sugar Company informed a Senate committee that "Mexicans" were "content to conduct their own community life apart from other races," and Robert Mclean claimed that segregation was "due quite as much to the clannishness of the Mexican, as to the opposition of the American." Mexican segregation, it was implied, was by their own choice. When the Fort Collins hospital relegated its Hispanics to the basement, "there were always some real good reasons why they did it," remembered Arthur Maes, "more at home' . . . 'we can serve them better' . . . 'they can talk to each other in the same language.'"

Many Chicanos - not consumers of the myths - resented the implications of such segregation. Some Hispanics remembered that people were considered "better" if they lived outside the colony, and that the colonies' lack of modern sanitary facilities helped give some colonists the attitude of "If I ever get a chance, I'll move out of this place." But the isolation from Anglo life, the Anglo prejudices, and the low wages reinforced each other and created, as one investigating team expressed it, "a vicious circle." "From this circle," they concluded, "few can escape through their own efforts."

For during winter it was not only the housing situation that created an unstable life for Hispanics. As a rule, the majority of beet-work families who wintered in the north found no work at all between beet seasons. And those whose family members did find jobs, including mothers who did laundry and domestic service, averaged less than $300 in earnings for the winter. Most earned less than $200. The sugar company itself admitted that in northern Colorado "the growers, generally speaking, have been less inclined with the Mexican than with the German-Russian to afford opportunities for extra work." As with those reluctant to lease land to Chicanos, these growers hesitated to displace regular Anglo winter farm labor. In the area's small industrial sector, too, it seemed to some Chicanos that unless jobs were so temporary or so bad that Anglos did not want them, Hispanics could not get them. The Mexican Welfare Committee of the Colorado State Council of the Knights of Columbus concurred, reporting in 1928 that only about 150 of the 7,000 men in northern Colorado employed in industry outside the mines and railroads were "Mexicans," and these, the Committee revealed, "were on rock piles and at work no other laborer [would] do." Some Chicanos left their families in the north and migrated for winter work, becoming shepherders in Colorado or Wyoming or going to coal mines or to Pueblo's steel mill. But in this way, they were not replicating the migrant patterns and village systems as much as extending them, since
their life in the north centered not on a stable village core, but on a transient migrant settlement, marginal to both Anglo and Hispanic worlds.

Even the number of summer field-labor jobs fluctuated, offering no security for the resident laborer. The beet acreage harvested in a single sugar factory district could go up or down by as much as 75 percent from one year to the next. The Beet grower a Chicano family had worked for one summer may not have been in beets the next. And even if the grower stayed in beets, he might choose newly recruited labor over resident labor, or Mexican over Spanish-American. Mexican immigration provided only one quarter of beet field labor, but it provided the valve which allowed sporadic large increases in beet acreage, and thus in demand for labor without commensurately increased wages.

The use of Mexican labor affected Hispanic community-building in the north even beyond the lowered wage rates. According to Taylor, the sugar company often brought the labor north a month early to avoid the increasingly strident competition among recruiters as summer approached, and tried to place the recruits on spring railroad work to allow them to support themselves until beet-work began. This employment service brought the two groups, resident and migrant Chicanos, into direct competition even before the beet season. With Mexicans posing the most immediate and visible threat to the Spanish Americans, the latter did all in their power to dissociate themselves from the former and to assert their prior claims to services and employment as citizens and particularly as veterans. One Spanish American told investigator B. F. Coen that Mexicans "aren't any good. You'll only find one out of every 100 that's a 'sitter' [citizen] and I don't think it's right." Spanish Americans also blamed the Mexicans for the new restrictions posted in barber and other shops. Living under the same conditions, Spanish Americans and Mexicans usually resided in separate colonies, rejected each other's company, and fought when mixed. Enrique Lopez recalled of his youth in Denver, "the bitterest race riots' I have ever witnessed - and engaged in - were between the look-alike, talk-alike surumatos [Mexicans] and manitos [Spanish Americans]."

Even a few Anglos made distinctions between the two groups, endowing Mexicans with a character more docile and less educated, and allowing Spanish Americans "more fiery blood in their veins" and more Anglo habits which made them "less passive in their attitudes toward social and civil rights." On the whole, those who made such distinctions placed the Spanish Americans above the Mexicans, and the Spanish Americans certainly placed themselves there. Some of the children of Mexican immigrants began to adopt the term "Spanish American" to describe themselves as well, but most of them heartily resented the condescending attitude of the Spanish-speaking from Colorado and New Mexico and labeled them "comprado," or "bought," for having remained in the United States after 1848 instead of leaving for Mexico. They taunted them with Anglo discriminations, calling them people without a country.

Infuriatingly, most Anglos continued in daily practice to make no distinction among them at all. "During the war," complained one citizen of Anglo attitudes, "we were Spanish Americans; now we are just Mexicans." Anglos referred to the "Mexican, or his cousin the Spanish American" as people "who easily merge" on United States soil,
and in one area officials expressed their chagrin that not one of the local "Mexicans" had showed up at citizenship classes, apparently unaware that the majority of local Hispanic residents were already citizens, by birth. To most Anglos, as one investigation team discovered, both groups "are called 'Mexes' or 'Greasers' and are regarded as foreigners." This amalgamation continued the trend begun at least during World War I of excluding Chicanos from the United States polity both as foreigners and as a separate "race." . . .

As for immigrant groups and minorities elsewhere, education was supposed to provide the compensating factor. The Great Western Sugar Company touted educational benefits as lending "a humanitarian impulse" to their proposals that beet-workers remain over the winter. Even economist Paul Taylor believed that "despite interrupted attendance, as good or better education advantages are offered in the beet area than in the places from which the workers came." Certainly public education in Hispanic northern New Mexico continued in the 1920s to be plagued by lack of funds, short school terms, and under-qualified teachers. Of the Spanish American parents who moved north, approximately one-quarter were illiterate in any language, one-half in English, and one-third had had no schooling. For their children, they wanted more. They kept fewer of their school-age children in the fields than the German-Russians did, though it meant they made less money, and when Hispanic mothers worked beets it was often so children could attend school. "They want me to go to school so that I won't have to work beets," explained a Spanish American boy, and one girl's parents promised her a better job if she went to college.

Hispanic children, however, often remained skeptical of their future possibilities, "because," as the college-bound girl put it, "the Americans won't give me a chance." They had some reason for doubt. Teachers who said, "Oh, why don't you go back to the god-damned beet fields," did not instill confidence. A more sympathetic teacher reported that the Anglo children, also, "feel as hostile to the Mexican children on the playground as they do toward Negroes in Gary, Indiana." And so did their parents. A school superintendent of Weld County insisted that "the respectable white people of Weld County do not want their children to sit alongside of dirty, filthy, disease-infested Mexicans in schools." Chicano school children found that, indeed, Anglos would not sit next to them, taunted them with phrases like "dirty Mexicans" and "greaser, greaser, sitting on an ice-cream freezer," "wouldn't want us ever to touch them," and made fun of their food until the Hispanic children hid away to eat. The state's constitution, written within recent memory of the Civil War, forbade segregation, but de facto segregation, particularly with the erection of company colonies at some distance from town and with the mid-term entrance and departure of beet-working children, was relatively easily achieved. Northern schools may have been better equipped than those in Hispanic villages, but the atmosphere was definitely more hostile, and the degree to which Hispanics would benefit remained in doubt.

Even when schools welcomed Chicano children, or were at least neutral, the necessity of family labor kept many children from attending. The work of children under sixteen, according to one 1925 study, contributed nearly one-third of the total contract labor's seasonal beet earnings. Most children working in beets were between ten and
fourteen years old, but even six-year-olds sometimes spent their days thinning beets. Schooling for these children represented a substantial and sometimes impossible sacrifice for the whole family. A few Hispanic children managed to get through grammar school by asking for advance work each March and doing extra work all winter, but even for these children, high school, which demanded a set number of credits, was impossible. Almost universally, Parents cared about education, but sometimes the alternative to child labor was starvation; Margarita Garcia remembered of her parents, "There was not much they could do. I guess we were so close to them, we didn't insist."

Missing approximately one-third of each school year, though regular in attendance once they enrolled, four-fifths of the Chicano children fell behind in school, almost two-thirds of them, by 1925, three years behind. Often they had lost interest in school activities and had little in common with their classmates. As a result, Chicanos in the north stayed in school little longer than those who remained in Hispanic villages. Most left school before sixth grade, and while the number of more advanced students rose in the 1920s, still only a handful enrolled in high school.

Faced with economic pressures and hostile neighbors, many Chicano families simply did not enroll their children in school. To many Anglos, this seemed the best solution to the educational dilemma, better than segregated schools or special classes. A former school board member asserted. "They're needed in the fields and the school don't do them any good anyway." Officials in the South Platte Valley granted illegal school exemptions to Chicano beet-working children and tended to turn a blind eye to those not applying. One confessed, "[W]e never try to enforce the compulsory attendance laws on the Mexicans. We just wink at the law." And Great Western Sugar, despite its claims for education, perpetrated myths that justified this denial of duty. The company claimed that "while beet children may be absent for several weeks each year from their classes in geography and spelling," they learned not only "industry and thrift," but "the craft of their fathers," a blessing for "people whose social and intellectual state may be below the standards of our ideals."

Underneath the justification ran other concerns. "If every child has a high school education," sugar company representatives demanded, "who will labor?" If the Anglo farmer was to keep his own children in school, he had to hire someone else to do the work. "[I]t is believed that a cheap labor supply is necessary for this industry," reported investigators in the Arkansas Valley, "and that the Spanish American or Mexican is the one to furnish it. Too regular school attendance would not be compatible with this." The marginalization of Chicanos was no haphazard social development. Great Western Sugar's C. V. Maddux explained, "We no longer want settlers to occupy vacant land. . . . What we want is workers to work for the settlers who came before." Fred Cummings, a beet grower from Fort Collins, elucidated, "[N]o man can accumulate anything in this world until by some means or device he is enabled to enjoy the benefit of some other man's labor." That Anglo farmers well understood the developing situation was revealed even further by one South Platte school official who feared, "[W]e are building up a caste system that inside of two generations will be worse than India ever dreamed of." Far from liberating the next generation of Chicanos from their back-breaking toil, the educational system of the north, better endowed than that of the Hispanic villages,
seemed for the majority geared only to perpetuate the Chicanos as marginal agricultural labor. . . .

With Chicanas unable to recreate the stable village core that sustained social harmony in the villages, and with Chicanos marginal economically and socially to the Anglo community, it was unclear what sort of community Hispanics could create on the northern Colorado frontier. Indeed, Anglos tended to be pessimistic about the ability of Chicanos to adjust to life in northern Colorado at all. Inheriting a legacy of disdain for seasonal workers and migrant laborers, which labeled their relationship to farm labor as "excrecences upon its fair face," Anglos were disposed to agree with a Weld County sheriff that "a Mexican is a 'natural born liar, thief, and gambler.' "Visions of lawless and irresponsible hordes, visions unanchored by statistics, floated in the public imagination. The colonies were seen as potential dens of iniquity, where "the dancing girt and the wine-cup are star attractions." Their inhabitants appeared in local papers almost solely in criminal context, with their ethnicity prominently featured.

Chicanos did commit some crimes. Most involved petty theft-stealing from coal bins - or revolved around prohibition: moonshining and drinking and selling liquor, activities popular among Chicanos in both New Mexico and Colorado, but hardly peculiar to them. Anglos, however, even those with the most direct contact with Hispanics, consistently and greatly distorted the scale of lawbreaking. The official line held that prosecution of Chicanos accounted for three-quarters of Weld County court cases. An investigation in 1924 revealed instead that even including appearances as plaintiffs, Chicanos accounted for only 6 percent of the total county court cases and 10 percent of the justice of the peace cases, a figure not disproportionate to their number in the county's population. Conspicuous in their "otherness" and their poverty, Chicanos found themselves subject to these myths and to arrest, according to contemporary investigators, "without a clearly defined case or cause against them." Where a fee system ruled, constables and other officers whose income depended on fines and costs advised their victims to plead guilty.

In terms of relief and family stability, fears had also exaggerated the reality. Hispanic divorces in Weld County occurred at a lower rate than either Anglo divorces in that county or Hispanic divorces in southern Colorado or New Mexico. Few Hispanic children spent time in either the state home for dependent children or the state Industrial School for Girls. And the proportion of relief accounted for by Hispanics, while slightly greater than their proportion of the population at large, remained well under 20 percent, less than the proportion of Hispanics among the lowest-income groups. On the whole, concluded one investigator, impoverished Anglos in northern Colorado "indicated a much poorer social adjustment proportionately than did the Spanish-speaking Soup." It is possible that, after northern trauma, divorcees, single and deserted mothers, and delinquent children all fled back to the Hispanic homeland. It seems more consistent with the evidence, however, that despite frequent migration, low income, and severe discrimination, solidarity and not disorganization characterized Chicano families in the Anglo north. These families proved stronger than the forces which buffeted them on the edge of the regional community. . . .
As the Hispanic presence became more established, the coal camps, the Hispanic section of Denver, and the beet colonies all became foci of Chicano communities whose inhabitants' social needs were met from within rather than from the villages of the regional community. Of these, the Chicano enclaves in Denver, growing in size and becoming more stable during the 1920s, were among the largest and most articulated. When Arthur Maes's father died in 1927, the second winter after the family had come from New Mexico to northern Colorado to work beets, his mother was unable to survive in Fort Lupton. She took the family to Denver where they had spent the previous winter, as she "knew the community in the Bottoms," and it was the only place she had any friends. Whereas other towns in the area had at most one Hispanic realtor or cleaner to represent the community in the business world, Denver had tamale shops, some family stores, and the occasional scion of an upper-class New Mexican, southern Colorado, or Mexican family. Yet even Denver hardly compared in the scale of its Hispanic community to Trinidad, and the majority of its Hispanic residents were seasonal laborers.

Like many of the coal camps, the Chicano sections of Denver were distinctly unlovely. Robert Mclean and Charles Thomson described one in 1924 as "a district which looks as if both God and Denver had forgotten it... the mongrel offspring of a deserted village and a city slum" with "no paving, sidewalks, no sewers." Nevertheless, the concentration of Chicanos made possible some early attempts at organization on ethnic lines, including not only the Anglo sponsored missions such as Jerome Park Mission and the First Spanish Methodist Church, but the Sociedad Protectora, a mutualista [mutual aid society] in the Lawrence Street area originating in 1921, the Cruz Azul for Mexicans, the Spanish American Club - a cultural association whose president was a former Mexican consul – and the Spanish American Citizens Association, the latest of these organizations and one which in 1931 intended to organize the estimated 15,000 Spanish American citizens in Denver and the vicinity for industrial, political, and social justice in all public affairs.

Denver was not unique. Larger than other enclaves, its Hispanic communities garnered more elites and Anglo attention, but they shared many of the same strategies and problems as the colonies and barrios across northeastern Colorado. The nascent Chicano community in the north was not yet entirely centered on a single site, despite the hostility of the environs. And while many Hispanics in northern Colorado wintered in Denver, more lived outside it, and many moved from winter to winter among the towns, the company colonies, and the city and had, by the late 1920s, relatives scattered across the area.

First erected in 1924, the Great Western Sugar Company's beet-labor colonies soon became not only the more stable clusters the company desired, but, like Denver, centers of Hispanic community organizing. Unlike Colorado Fuel and Iron, the sugar company allowed its control to lie loosely on these colonies. It retained the right to dispossess undesirables as long as it held the leases, and it contributed to church and community buildings, but the colonies were not closed camps, not located at the workplace, and not polyglot. Within them, colonists bought not just houses, but the land
on which they stood. And ironically, their very isolation from Anglo society helped foster their development as something more than transient labor camps.

As with racial and immigrant enclaves elsewhere, the colonies' homogeneity relieved some of the pressure to assimilate. Residents had, as one investigator found, "their own favorite dishes," and no one encouraged them "to abandon their native language for American." Though economically dependent on the Anglo world, they retained, as had the villages, some social and cultural autonomy. Here, perhaps, those who did remain year after year could re-create the regional community in truncated and more vulnerable form. The barrio could be a new core.

By the late 1920s, some colonies increasingly resembled the interrelated villages. Chicano couples met and courted there, among the "meticulously tended lawns, and the watered and swept earthen patios," that one colonist remembered. They held dances and even fiestas in the colonies. The women, recalled one early settler, "had their own clubs," and sewing, cooking, mutual aid, and church groups, and in January 1930, it was their efforts, in part, which culminated in a new Pentecostal Assembly of God Church built by colonists in the Greeley colony.

From this more cohesive base, colonists and other settlers began to shift to more aggressive strategies in intercultural matters. The regional community, with its migrant patterns, was in some sense a strategy of retreat, as was the high turnover that embodied Chicano protest at conditions in beer work. In the same vein, Mexicans consciously decided against citizenship, rejecting the second-class status they believed it would bring. A Mexican in the South Platte Valley declared, "To hell with the United States. We don't have to be slaves in Mexico." But as retreat to the villages became increasingly impracticable and more stable communities evolved, direct protests occurred. At least one Chicano in Weld County filed a civil rights case in 1927 against Greeley restaurant proprietors who ejected him on the grounds that he was a Mexican. World War I veterans among the colonists also early asserted the colonists' rights in the community at large in regard to voting and discrimination. Their membership in local American Legion branches provided virtually the only organized non-charitable social link between ethnic groups and bolstered their legitimacy as spokesmen in each.

As the sense of neighborhood in the colonies grew, resistance began to take more collective forms. Chicano boycotts in Greeley and Johnstown led to the removal of discriminatory signs from the shop windows, at least temporarily, in 1927. Though less successful, a committee of Chicanos also protested the establishment of separate school rooms for Chicano children. By the end of the decade, like Denver, the colonies and mining towns had their own Hispanic groups and mutualistas. Some accepted both Mexican and Spanish Americans, others only one or the other. Some of the colonies even organized into self-governing bodies under commissioners of their own choosing. In 1928 the Greeley colony, for example, drew up "articles of association for the management of colony affairs," including police and sanitary regulations, and filed them with the county police. This was, perhaps, the ultimate declaration of an autonomous community on the Anglo-Hispanic frontier. These Hispanics created room for themselves and committed themselves to permanent residence without committing themselves to assimilation.