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## CHAPTER XVIII

### CRITIQUE OF THE OFFICIAL STATISTICS OF MEXICAN MIGRATION TO AND FROM THE UNITED STATES.<sup>1</sup>

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[An effort was made to secure a chapter by a Mexican scholar upon Mexican migration statistics, but without success. The following section by an American scholar, which is included as a substitute, shows how inadequate the present statistical basis for such a chapter is and will indicate one reason why the more ambitious attempt failed.

This section is a condensation of a longer critique published in full, with the Editor's cordial approval, in Dr. Taylor's *Mexican Labor in The United States: Migration Statistics* (see Univ. Calif. Publ. Econ., Vol. 6, pp. 237-255, August 1929). With this discussion by Professor Taylor compare Manuel Gamio's *Mexican Migration to the United States* (1930) Chapter I: "Number of Mexican Immigrants in the United States." —Ed.]

The attempt to establish figures measuring the actual movement of Mexicans between Mexico and the United States is beset with difficulties. The following critique aims to analyze the data, to point out how they might be misunderstood, and to indicate of what use they are.

#### *The Racial Background.*

During three centuries of Spanish rule over Mexico only about 300,000 Spanish immigrants arrived and practically no other Europeans. The great majority of these 300,000 were men, many of whom married Indian women. The racial composition of the Mexican population about a century ago is shown in Table 266 (p. 582).

The three estimates show discrepancies too great to be credible. Nevertheless, they do give an approximation to the facts and constitute the best available data. The present racial composition is given in Table 267 (p. 582).

Comparison of the two tables shows that during the nineteenth century the proportion of mestizos increased markedly at the expense of both Indians and whites.<sup>2</sup> Among mestizos as a class, the proportion of Indian blood is greater than the proportion of white blood. Addition to the white stock from outside sources is small;

<sup>1</sup>[Migration statistics for years between 1909 and 1924 will also be found in *International Migrations*, Volume I, pp. 234ff, 271ff, 285, and 501-5.—Ed.]

<sup>2</sup>The number of pure whites probably is even smaller than the census figures indicate. Gruening, in *Mexico and its Heritage*, p. 70, estimates that they do not exceed 500,000.

TABLE 266.

RACIAL COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION OF MEXICO IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY.<sup>1</sup>

Race	1803 <sup>a</sup>		1805 <sup>b</sup>		1810 <sup>c</sup>	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Whites.....	1,095,000	23.7	1,000,000	18	1,097,928	18
Mestizos <sup>d</sup> .....	1,231,000	25.4	2,000,000	38	1,338,706	22
Indians.....	2,500,000	51.7	2,500,000	44	3,676,281	60
Negroes.....	6,100	0.2	.....	..	.....	..
Total.....	4,832,100	100.0	5,500,000	100	6,122,354 <sup>e</sup>	100

<sup>a</sup>A. von Humboldt, *Versuch über den politischen Zustand des Königreichs Neu-Spanien*, Book III, chapter 8, p. 245. On p. 8 of Book III the estimated population is given as 5,837,100. The translator of the English edition (1814) tries to explain this discrepancy but is unable to offer anything entirely satisfactory even to himself; he suggests that the number of mestizos probably is understated.

<sup>b</sup>D. Valentin Gama, quoted by Hajar y Haro, *La colonización rural en Mexico*, p. 142, cited by Gruening, *op. cit.* p. 69.

<sup>c</sup>D. Francisco Navarro y Noriega, *Memoria sobre la población de Nueva-España*, (Mexico, 1814), and *Semanario político y literario de la Nueva-España*, numero 20, p. 94, cited in the Spanish edition of 1836 (Paris), Book II, chapter 4, p. 128, in an addendum.

<sup>d</sup>In this table "Mestizos" includes persons of mixed blood of any races.

<sup>e</sup>Total includes 4,229 secular ecclesiastics, 3,112 regular ecclesiastics, and 2,089 monks.

TABLE 267.

RACIAL COMPOSITION OF THE NATIVE POPULATION OF MEXICO, 1921.<sup>a</sup>

Race	Numbers	Per Cent
Whites.....	1,404,718	9.8
Mestizos.....	8,504,561	59.3
Indian.....	4,179,449	29.2
Others (or unknown).....	144,094	1.0
Foreign-born, without racial distinction.....	101,958	0.7
Total.....	14,334,780	100.0

<sup>a</sup>Department de la Estadística Nacional, *Resumen del censo general de habitantes de 30 de noviembre de 1921* (Mexico, 1928), p. 62.

<sup>1</sup>These figures are for New Spain; but the population estimated by Humboldt in 1803 to be living in territory outside of present Mexico amounted to less than one per cent.

only 0.75 per cent of the population in 1921 was foreign born, and one-fifth of those were Asiatics. In the nineteenth century the population of Mexico became racially less European and more Indian. Of the persons of foreign birth and presumably of the white race only about 30 per cent were females. This low proportion diminishes the chances of maintaining a pure white stock.

The number of Negroes in Mexico probably never was large. Humboldt estimated them in 1803 as only 6,100, and from one of his statements it may be inferred that they were intermingled in perhaps 150,000 of those listed in Table 266 as mestizos. The Negroes are mainly the descendants of slaves imported prior to emancipation in 1821. Most of them live in the hot lands on the east coast, a region from which few Mexicans come to the United States. Some, however, have migrated to the interior of Mexico, and even to the mines of Sonora in the northwest. Through their intermixture with the Indians, Negroes in Mexico have almost disappeared as a separate group.

*Official Statistics of the Twentieth Century.*

Official statistics of migration between the United States and Mexico have been published by both countries since 1910,<sup>1</sup> and are often used erroneously to indicate the amount of the movement of Mexicans between the United States and Mexico, and the number of Mexicans in the United States in inter-censal or post-censal years. These figures are reproduced in Table 268 (p. 584).

*The American figures.*<sup>2</sup> The rules of statistical classification of the American Bureau of Immigration were developed to record migration through seaports. Mexican migration is mainly overland. There are administrative difficulties which make it impossible to record migration overland as completely as migration through seaports; there are antiquated rules, some of which exclude from the statistics a type of migrant overland who would be included if he passed through a seaport; fiscal or other technical considerations are given weight; there have been changes in the rules, a lack of uniformity in the practice at different posts, and rules which place in the same statistical group classes which do not belong together.

<sup>1</sup>Complete United States data are available since 1908. [See Volume I, p. 384-393, Tables II and III, and following tables.—Ed.]

<sup>2</sup>[The adjective "American" is used here, as throughout this volume, sometimes to mean relating to the "United States of America" and at other times to mean relating to the "Western Hemisphere." Which meaning is intended will appear from the context.—Ed.]

All these difficulties make it impossible to interpret the figures, whatever their fiscal or administrative justification may be, as a satisfactory measure of migration.

The Bureau of Immigration presents statistics of aliens admitted and departed, classified in two ways, first, according to country of last or intended future residence and secondly according to race or people. The classification by residence includes all residents of Mexico whether Mexican by race or not. No court decisions or departmental regulations define Mexican race, but in the practice of immigrant inspectors Mexican race generally means mixed European and Indian ancestry, although, as a matter

TABLE 268.

AMERICAN AND MEXICAN OFFICIAL STATISTICS OF THE MIGRATION OF MEXICANS TO AND FROM THE UNITED STATES, 1910 TO 1929.<sup>1</sup>  
North-bound migration.

Fiscal Year ended June 30	American figures			Mexican figures	
	Immigrants	Non- immigrants	Total	Calendar year	Citizens via <i>Zona del Norte</i>
1910	17,760	3,237	20,997	1910	24,203
1911	18,784	3,581	22,365	1911	33,384
1912	22,001	3,701	25,702	1912	55,745
1913	10,954	4,541	15,495	1913	32,826
1914	13,089	3,990	17,079	1914	7,295
1915	10,993	7,649	18,642	1915	6,113
1916	17,198	7,963	25,161	1916	40,859
1917	16,438	9,442	25,880	1917	18,089
1918	17,602	14,147	31,749	1918	33,672
1919	28,844	15,932	44,776	1919	46,080
1920	51,042	17,350	68,392	1920	50,569
1921	29,603	17,191	46,794	1921	9,165
1922	18,246	12,049	30,295	1922	33,180
1923	62,709	13,279	75,988	1923	80,793
1924	87,648	18,139	105,787	1924	57,269
1925	32,378	17,351	49,729	1925	41,759
1926	42,638	17,147	59,785	1926	56,534
1927	66,766	13,873	80,638	1927	76,398
1928	57,765	3,857	61,622	1928	65,180
1929	38,980	3,405	42,385	1929	19,123 <sup>a</sup>
Total 1910-29	661,438	207,824	869,262	....	788,236
Total Jan.1920- June 30, 1929 <sup>b</sup>	465,484	124,929	590,413	....	489,970

<sup>1</sup>American statistics are taken from the annual reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration and include persons admitted and departed who are of Mexican race. Mexican statistics are taken from Departamento de migración, *Boletín*, July 1927; data subsequent to the most recent publications were furnished by letter. The Mexican statistics include Mexicans who pass through the *Zona del Norte*.

TABLE 268 (Concluded)  
South-bound migration.

American figures				Mexican figures	
Fiscal Year ended June 30	Immigrants	Non-immigrants	Total	Calendar year	Citizens via Zona del Norte
1910	210	973	1,183	1910	34,696
1911	319	1,485	1,804	1911	35,305
1912	325	1,820	2,145	1912	55,864
1913	910	1,883	2,793	1913	29,312
1914	1,670	2,497	4,167	1914	8,306
1915	573	2,096	2,669	1915	13,758
1916	559	2,317	2,876	1916	37,612
1917	759	1,938	2,697	1917	92,822
1918	25,084	5,607	30,691	1918	39,563
1919	17,793	8,764	26,557	1919	40,428
1920	6,412	4,742	11,154	1920	64,620
1921	5,519	2,383	7,902	1921	106,242
1922	5,770	1,730	7,500	1922	50,171
1923	2,479	1,422	3,901	1923	85,825
1924	1,878	1,694	3,572	1924	105,834
1925	2,875	1,836	4,711	1925	77,056
1926	3,158	2,179	5,337	1926	67,970
1927	2,774	8,180	10,954	1927	69,604
1928	3,873	9,198	13,071	1928	70,414
1929	7,172	3,328	10,500	1929	29,321 <sup>a</sup>
Total 1910-29	90,112	66,072	156,184	....	1,114,543
Total Jan. 1920- June 30, 1929 <sup>b</sup>	37,414	33,398	70,812	....	727,057

<sup>a</sup>First six months only.

<sup>b</sup>The United States census of 1920 was taken as of January 1. The statistics of the Commissioner General of Immigration are for fiscal years July 1 to June 30. To make possible separate use of figures in Table 268 covering the period since the census of 1920, the American figures for the second half of the fiscal year 1920 and the Mexican figures for the first six months of 1929 were secured by special request. The American figures for the period January 1-June 30, 1920, are as follows: Immigrants 28,751; non-immigrants 8,638; total 37,389.

of fact, pure Mexican Indians who are known to be such, are admitted under that classification.

In Table 268 the figures are for immigrants of Mexican race and so omit a small number of persons of Mexican citizenship. For the present purpose these figures are preferable to those of Mexicans "by residence" which include some who are not Mexicans by either citizenship or race, and exclude some, especially returning migrants, who are Mexicans by both citizenship and race.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The fact that under immigration rules prior to May 1, 1927, a Mexican once legally admitted to the United States, and returning after absence abroad of less than six months, was entered as from the United States, but as of Mexican race, sometimes resulted in showing more Mexican non-immigrants by race, than Mexicans whose country of last residence was Mexico.

The American data distinguish immigrants from non-immigrants, and emigrants from non-emigrants. The principal group of Mexican immigrants consists of aliens relinquishing residence in Mexico and coming to reside in the United States for at least one year. It is estimated that 95 per cent of recorded Mexican immigrants come within this definition. These immigrants constitute approximately the permanent additions to the American population, "permanent" being defined arbitrarily as residing one year or more. In fact, many of these Mexican "permanent" immigrants return frequently to Mexico and come again to the United States, and are very slow to give up the idea that Mexico is their home.

The "non-immigrants" in the statistics constitute a miscellaneous group. Most of them are (1) persons admitted temporarily who failed to present proof of departure within the time limit allotted to them; or (2) persons entering the United States in transit, and departing at a seaport; or (3) persons previously legally admitted and returning after an absence of less than six months, but held for some reason for a board of special inquiry to determine their re-admissibility. It is important to note that prior to May 1, 1927, at most ports the last group—viz., those previously admitted and returning after an absence of less than six months—were entered in statistics regardless of whether they were or were not examined by a board of special inquiry. As this group includes a large number of Mexicans who seasonally re-visit Mexico and then return to the United States, the effect of this change in the rule is very great. It is the chief factor in explaining the sharp drop of non-immigrants of Mexican race from 13,873 in 1927 to 3,857 in 1928.

Emigrants, if aliens, are such as have resided in the United States for at least one year and report their departure for a stay abroad of one year or more. Non-emigrants are reported only when departing at seaports; no record of them is kept at those land ports of entry through which most Mexicans pass and at which non-immigrants are registered. Any attempt to compare Mexican non-immigrants with American non-emigrants is thereby rendered futile.

The Mexican figures in Table 268 (p.584-5) are of Mexican citizens entering and leaving Mexico via the *Zona del Norte*, or northern border. The great majority of Mexicans migrating to and from the United States pass through this zone and for practical purposes these figures may be assumed to measure the reported movement

between the two countries. But there are several differences between the bases upon which the Mexican and the American data are compiled. The most important are as follows:

The Mexican figures include each entry and each departure of a Mexican citizen without regard to the nature of the migration, as, for example, whether it is temporary or permanent, and whether the individual has or has not previously been recorded. Practically the only exceptions to this rule are Mexicans passing through the United States in transit to another part of Mexico, and border residents who habitually make local crossings and re-crossings. The numerical differences from American practice in this respect, and in reporting immigrants "by race," are probably not very important.

But Mexicans previously admitted to the United States and returning to that country after an absence of less than 6 months have not been entered in the American statistics since May 1, 1927, unless they have been held for a board of special inquiry in which case they were entered as non-immigrants. Prior to this change of rule they were entered as non-immigrants, whether held for a board of special inquiry or not—except such as entered at some port which had followed the present practice beginning at an unknown date not earlier than January 1, 1923. These returning Mexicans, now seldom counted by the United States as non-immigrants and never as immigrants, form a considerable proportion of those leaving Mexico and counted by the Mexican authorities.

Visitors to the United States also, who stay less than 6 months, are counted by the Mexican authorities at both crossings of the border, while at neither are they entered in the American statistics.

The Mexican figures, then, seek to record all border crossings in either direction (except those of Mexicans in transit or of local residents at the border.) The American figures, on the other hand, classify north-bound migrants, and do not record them all in statistics, particularly since the change of rules in 1927. With reference to south-bound Mexicans, the differences are even more marked. The American authorities seek to record as emigrant aliens only those leaving for a year or more; and as non-emigrant aliens, only certain classes departing at seaports; Mexico seeks to record *all* south-bound migrants.

This analysis shows that the different bases upon which the Mexican and the American statistics are compiled render comparison impossible. A further complication is the fact that Mexican figures



are for calendar years, while American statistics are for fiscal years ending June 30.

*The Statistics and Attempts to Estimate Migrations*

The Mexican statistics have been used to estimate the net immigration into the United States from Mexico and so the Mexican population in the United States since 1920.<sup>1</sup> In none of the cases cited in the footnote is an adequate attempt made to evaluate the figures used, but no one has been bold enough to assert that the United States has "exported" Mexicans into Mexico to the number of over 237,000 during the period January 1, 1920-June 30, 1929, which is the *prima facie* conclusion from the figures. Such a conclusion is too obviously contrary to the facts to be expressed even by those who present the figures. The seasonal flow between the two countries is heavy, but there can be no doubt as to the direction of the net movement.

For the purpose in mind it is impossible to rely on the Mexican figures or on combining them with American statistics. (1) The Mexican total for north-bound Mexicans, January 1, 1920 to June 30, 1929, despite the fact that it covers all classes of migrants, is smaller by 100,443 than the corresponding American figures including both *immigrants* and *non-immigrants*. The American total for these two classes of migrants falls short of the border crossings recorded by the immigration officials since not all are entered in the statistics; *e. g.* Mexicans legally admitted to the United States and returning after an absence of less than 6 months abroad as already explained and visitors intending to stay less than 6 months. When one adds to these classes not entered in the statistics, the large number of illegal entrants, the American figures are shown to be still less complete and the smaller Mexican figures even more unsatisfactory.

(2) The American data on the southward movement are valueless for that purpose because: (a) the United States Immigration Service does not record some important classes; (b) aliens often depart surreptitiously in order to facilitate re-entry; (c) little attention is paid to Mexicans leaving the United States. But this

<sup>1</sup>For example, *Memoria de la secretaria de relaciones exteriores de agosto de 1927 a julio de 1928*, Mexico, 1928, pp. 818 ff., p. 820; R. H. Smith, testimony in *Hearings before the Committee on immigration and naturalization*, House of Representatives, 70th Congress, 1st Sess., on H. R. 6465, H. R. 7358, H. R., 10955, H. R. 11687, pp. 373, 374; C. V. Maddux, *ibid.*, p. 617; Secretary Kellogg, testimony in *Hearings before the Senate Committee on Immigration*, 70th Congress, 1 Sess., on S. 1296, S. 1437, S. 3019, pp. 159, 172.

difficulty cannot be solved by any attempt to compare Mexican south-bound with American north-bound figures.

(3) The Mexican statistics, like those of the United States, are not of equal value for all years. The present Mexican law went into effect in November 1926, and the accompanying improvements in administration make later data of more value than the earlier. Surreptitious entry into the United States, often involving also surreptitious departure from Mexico, has been made harder. As a result of these changes the later Mexican data unlike the earlier show more Mexicans north-bound than south-bound.<sup>1</sup>

The net additions to the permanent Mexican population in the United States have been estimated by subtracting from the sum of the non-immigrants and immigrants, the sum of the non-emigrants and emigrants, as reported by the United States.<sup>2</sup> This is incorrect for several reasons, principally because there is a large number of Mexicans who upon their first entry to the United States were counted as immigrants and when returning to the United States after a brief visit to Mexico were counted again as non-immigrants, but under American practice were not counted as emigrants or non-emigrants when leaving the United States for these same visits abroad.

The only basis for estimating the additions to the Mexican population in the United States since 1920 which the American statistics furnish is the excess of immigrants over emigrants. But this method is subject to serious limitations.

The reported number of immigrants understates the actual numbers. The success of the Immigration Service in preventing surreptitious entry has varied greatly, but the recent trend has been to increase the difficulty of such entrance. While the number reported is less than the actual number, the discrepancy in earlier post-war years was much greater than later. To be sure many who first came surreptitiously have been obliged, upon recent re-entry to register. The recent increase in effectiveness of the Immigration Service is further shown by the fact that many who had succeeded in entering the United States surreptitiously and were living there, have sought or been obliged to make their residence secure by compliance with the immigration law. The Department of State reports for the period July-October 1929, inclusive, that of 6,265

<sup>1</sup>In 1921, as the Mexican statistics indicate, more Mexicans returned to Mexico than entered the United States. This was because of the business depression in that year.

<sup>2</sup>This is done, for example, in one of the estimates presented in *Memoria de la secretaria de relaciones exteriores*, p. 819.

visas granted Mexicans 1300, or 20 per cent, were of this class.<sup>1</sup> Estimates of the number of illegal entries are little more than guesses; for the entire period since 1920, however, the balance of unreported entries must be large.

On the other hand, departing aliens are very inadequately reported. For present purposes, however, it is only the unreported Mexicans departing permanently who are important.

An additional source of error lies in the fact that even in the classification of *immigrants*, there is double counting. That this may reach serious proportions is indicated by a study of admissions at El Paso during the months of December 1927 and April 1928 which revealed that 14.9 per cent of those listed as *immigrants* during these two months had previously been listed as *immigrants*.

The illegal entries tend to make an estimate of Mexican population in the United States based upon the excess of immigrants over emigrants too low. The inadequate reporting of Mexican emigrants departing permanently, and the double counting of persons admitted as immigrants tend to make such an estimate too high. The two defects are compensating. However, judging from observation and inquiries at the Mexican border and in the interior of the United States, the writer believes that the number of illegal entries since 1920 very much exceeds the total of the number of immigrants counted twice and the number of unreported permanent departures. Estimating the Mexican population of the United States on June 30, 1929, upon the basis of the census of 1920, and the excess of immigrants over emigrants, as annually reported by the Commissioner General of Immigration, we have the following figures:

Immigrants, January 1, 1920 to June 30, 1929,	465,484
Emigrants, same period,	37,414
	<hr/>
Excess of immigrants,	428,070
Persons in United States on January 1, 1920, who were born in Mexico,	486,418
	<hr/>
Estimated number of persons in United States on June 30, 1929, who were born in Mexico,	914,488

The writer believes this estimate to be well within the truth, but just how much below the truth it is he has no means of ascertaining.

<sup>1</sup>*United States Daily*, December 11, 1929.