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## Americanization

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HENRY A. J. RAMOS

**AMERICANIZATION.** By the end of World War I, the United States had indisputably become a global power. The country's growth was driven by a history of territorial conquest and massive immigration. After defeating Mexico militarily in the United States–Mexican War, the United States forced the Mexican government to relinquish almost half of its land in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Those Mexicans who remained in U.S. territory were quickly relegated to a second-class citizenship. A half-century later, the United States defeated Spain and forced it to cede Puerto Rico and the Philippines and to relinquish its control of Cuba. In the 1898 Treaty of Paris, the United States acquired the authority to determine the political future and citizenship status of millions of people in the former Spanish colonies.

After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Mexican presence in the United States increased dramatically. Between 1910 and 1930, over one million Mexicans migrated north. Most left to escape a war that had devastated their country. They came to the United States in the hope of finding security and employment. Like the millions of Europeans who immigrated during the 1880s and 1890s, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans were popularly depicted as indolent foreigners who undermined the country's fabled Anglo-Saxon racial composition. However, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were also racialized, and, like African Americans and Native Americans, were portrayed as biologically inferior to the white Europeans. This racism was justified by a warlike Anglo-Saxon ideology that defined nationhood as a male-centric and racially exclusive notion that blended patriotism, whiteness, and xenophobia.

Although Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were portrayed as incapable of completely assimilating because of their presumed racial inferiority, their conversion into loyal English-speaking citizens and obedient workers was an important part of the nation-building process in the early twentieth century. According to the authors of a 1928 Americanization study, assimilating Spanish-speaking peoples from Mexico was one of the great problems confronting the Southwest. Through aggressive Americanization, the distinctive cultural identity of the immigrants and their patriotic ties to their countries of origin would be eradicated. The purpose of Americanization was to unify a culturally diverse people by obliterating ethnic identities and forcing the immigrants to rapidly divest

themselves of values that were portrayed as antiquated and antidemocratic. The acquisition of the English language, familiarity with U.S. political beliefs and institutions, and manual training for a rapidly expanding industrial economy were seen as the core of Americanization.

The United States employed various approaches in its attempts to Americanize Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. Puerto Rico was seen as a social laboratory in which to test radical Americanization approaches. The goal was not to prepare Puerto Ricans for citizenship, but to effect the complete transformation of their institutions and culture and to displace their language. The legal and political institutions established by the Spanish during four centuries of rule were replaced by a new colonial government that undertook Puerto Rico's transformation. Educational reform, with English-language immersion training, was the centerpiece of the Americanization effort. The school system was used to instill civic values and patriotism toward the United States, to train Puerto Ricans for civil service jobs, and to socialize and train young girls in hygiene, nutrition, cooking, sewing, and gardening. Boys were taught manual and industrial trades, and girls took classes in needlework and domestic service. The educational system was a vast enterprise that absorbed most of the colonial government's budget. But in the end the hoped-for goals were only partially achieved, and English never became the dominant language. Puerto Rican cultural institutions remain vibrant into the early twenty-first century, and the island's culture, art, music, and literature are consumed in the United States.

As was the case in Puerto Rico, the customs and traditions of Mexican immigrants were seen as impediments to thorough integration into the U.S. social and political order. The governments of states with large Mexican populations, primarily California, Texas, and Arizona, used the schools to conduct Americanization campaigns. Between 1915 and 1929, the California state government targeted Mexican women for Americanization in the belief that they were more amenable to cultural transformation and more likely, given their roles as homemakers and mothers, to transmit new values to their children. Moreover, job training was important since Mexican women were targeted for eventual employment in the Southwest as domestic and service workers, as well as seamstresses and laundresses. Programs to instruct Mexican women on hygiene and diet and to control fertility were remarkably similar to those in Puerto Rico. The Americanization campaigns had limited success and were uniformly abandoned during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Latinas and Latinos have negotiated their own terms of integration into U.S. culture and society.



AMERICANIZATION. Migrant school children saying the Pledge of Allegiance in school in Moreno Valley, Calif. (©Jimmy Dorantes/Latin Focus.com)

See also Education; Mexican Revolution; and Puerto Ricans.

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PEDRO CABÁN

**AMNESTY MOVEMENT.** The early-twenty-first-century movement to regularize the status of undocumented immigrants brought together various immigrant groups across the United States not only to bring the undocumented "out of the shadows of the law," but also to publicly identify the major contribution that immigrants make to the economy and to society. In many ways movement leaders, in their calls for blanket (or total) amnesty, were following the lead of a previous generation that saw some of their aims and goals partially realized in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).

#### Initial Projects for Immigrants' Rights (1951–1986)

The notion that undocumented workers should qualify for legal status runs counter to many popular notions and carefully crafted representations of "illegal aliens" by anti-immigrant special interest groups and lobbies. According to Chicano activist Bert Corona (1918–2001) this belief system is what informed much of the debate on immigration restrictions. He saw part of his life's work as countering "anti-immigrant legislation, which portrays undocumented immigrants as economic and social threats to American society" (Garcia, p. 300). In *Memories of Chicano History*, his personal narrative or *testimonio*, Corona credits La Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, a San Diego-based *mutualista* or mutual aid society, for the initial attempts at undocumented immigrant advocacy work.

As early as 1951, Mexican labor organizers Phil and Albert Usquiano in San Diego were challenging Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) deportations of Mexican workers who had been given visas (and permanent residency status) to work in the United States during World War II but who, because of housing shortages, lived in Tijuana. When the INS attempted to revoke the visas and deport the workers, La Hermandad provided representation and successfully filed suit in many cases. Bert Corona's often-recognized Centers for Autonomous Social Action (Centros de Acción Social Autónomo; CASA) in Los Angeles grew out of the structure of La Hermandad and were instrumental in providing housing and economic, legal, and medical assistance for undocumented workers from Mexico and Central America. The CASAs disintegrated as a result of internal strife and a failed attempt at radical political