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**THE BUILDING OF AN EAST TEXAS BARRIO:
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CREATION OF A
MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN NORTHEAST TYLER***

By Alexander Mendoza

In September of 1977, Jose Lopez, an employee at a Tyler meatpacking plant, and Humberto Alvarez, a “jack of all trades” who worked in plumbing, carpentry, and electricity loaded up their children and took them to local public schools to enroll them for the new year. On that first day of school, however, Tyler Independent School District (TISD) officials would not allow the Lopez or Alvarez children to enroll. In July, TISD trustees had voted to charge \$1,000 tuition to the children of illegal immigrants. Lopez and Alvarez, both undocumented aliens from Mexico, had come to Tyler in 1969 and 1974, respectively. They came for similar reasons to the East Texas community of 40,000, about 100 miles southeast of Dallas. Conditions in their native land were poor and the opportunities to earn more money and better provide for their families in the United States were undeniable. Alfredo Lopez, eight-years-old at the time, remembers only that “they wouldn’t let us go to school.”

The Tyler School Board was reacting to a 1975 amendment to the Texas Education Code that authorized school districts to exclude undocumented students. Initially, local officials had ignored the law, but with money tight and the district hoping to obtain federal funding, Superintendent James Plyler feared that schools in Tyler, the self-proclaimed “Rose Capitol of America,” might one day become “havens” for illegal immigrants. Thus on July 21, 1977, the board passed an ordinance requiring tuition for every undocumented child. At that time, less than sixty students out of almost 16,000 in the system were classified as “undocumented.” Carry Daves, a Tyler attorney, was contacted by parents about the case, and he, in turn, contacted attorneys from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) for assistance. Ultimately, four families of Mexican descent came together to sue Superintendent Plyler and the school board. The court collectively referred to the families as “Doe” in order to safeguard their identities. By September 11, U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice issued a preliminary injunction to permit the children to attend school free of charge. Eventually, after winding its way through the court system for three years, a Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the Texas law. The case nevertheless still made its way to the Supreme Court in June of 1982 where, in a 5-4 decision, the 1975 Texas law was deemed unconstitutional as a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.¹

To the approximately five dozen children in Tyler schools, the landmark *Plyler* case may have had a significant and immediate impact. Yet the issue did create a modicum sense of friction as longtime Tyler residents of Mexican descent suddenly had to defend their status as citizens or permanent residents. “It was a complete and total chaotic situation,” recalled Michael McAndrew,

a Catholic Ranch Outreach Worker who helped Tyler Hispanics during the ordeal. "If you looked poor you were out of school," McAndrew maintained. The tensions were clearly evident as political cartoons and irate letters filled the pages of the *Tyler Morning Telegraph*. In fact, the suit contended that children with Spanish surnames "or being of Mexican ancestry" had been required to produce "proof of citizenship" in TISD, a problem that lawyers for the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund focused upon when they brought the case to the court systems.²

Yet in an unexpected way, the friction stemming from the court case galvanized the burgeoning Hispanic population of Tyler.³ Within a decade of the *Plyler* ruling, the Mexican American community in Tyler had forged an environment that echoed their homeland. And while Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans might have been an invisible minority in the Rose City prior to the 1970s, they would soon emerge from the shadows to lay claim to their vision of a Mexican American community in East Texas. As such, they banded together and forged a distinct neighborhood, or *barrio*, within the confines of the East Texas city. As historian Arnolde De León noted in his study of Houston's Mexican American community, the broad spectrum of businesspeople and common citizens of Mexican descent banded together to perpetuate a "setting that would reinforce a familiar atmosphere and foster pride in being Mexicano."⁴ While the rise of Mexican American identity spanned decades in the greater Houston area, Tyler's emphasis on supporting and nurturing a "Mexican" identity can be traced to a mere twenty-five years, as a propagation of Spanish-language newspapers, television programs, eating establishments, and other forms of "ethnic entertainment activities" marked the emergence and presence of a population of Mexican descent in the Rose City. Such a development would allow Tyler's Mexican American population to use their *barrio*, or community, located near the heart of Tyler, to carve out their own cultural space within the largely Anglo American majority.⁵

Historians previously examined the concepts of *barrios* and community-building in the American Southwest during the 1980s and 1990s. Studies such as George I. Sanchez's *Becoming Mexican American* (1995) have argued that Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States shaped their native traditions into the cultural fabric of their Anglo-American landscape at the turn of the twentieth century. In Texas, De León traces the preservation of "generations-old customs and beliefs" within Houston's Mexican American barrios, arguing that Tejanos preserved the cultural elements of their native land within the "culture of the host country." Yet the creation of these Mexican American communities occurred in the early 1900s, a time when Mexican immigration into the United States peaked. As Sanchez points out, the critical events of the 1930s—deportation and the Great Depression—galvanized the cultural identity of Mexicans into a "new identity as ethnic Americans."⁶ In the case of Tyler, the creation of a Mexican American community did not occur until after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. But as historians and social scientists have recently learned, even in areas that have not been traditional destinations for Mexican immigrants, a cultural amalgamation is taking place, pre-

dominantly in rural and small town America. Accordingly, Tyler's Mexican American barrio serves as the nexus for the rapidly increasing population of Mexican descent that both desires to maintain to their ties to their native land and assimilate into their new surroundings. While periods of tension and friction marked the establishment of the Hispanic community, the central tenets of a dual cultural identity were also present in the east Texas city.⁷

Tyler's Hispanic population boom in the last three decades of the twentieth century was truly dramatic. According to Smith County historian James Smallwood, Tyler did not really have a strong Mexican American population at the turn of the twentieth century. "Most were construction workers whose stay was temporary, lasting only as long as the work did," Smallwood writes. According to U.S. Census tallies, Tyler had only one person with a Spanish surname by 1910. A decade later, Pete and Suzie Sanchez and their twelve children added to the Latino presence, and, in the words of Smallwood, "the county's Hispanic heritage was born." Yet as businesses blossomed in Tyler during the 1940s and 1950s, the Mexican American population remained steady and barely increased. As late as 1960, only about two hundred Hispanics lived in the city, a number that reached approximately 1,800 the following decade, the same decade that saw TISD officials apply the ordinance banning undocumented children in their public schools. During the time the case was on track to the Supreme Court Tyler's official Hispanic population had grown to 4,037, but in the midst of such growth, Tyler—like other parts in East Texas—remained committed to its southern past, not the Southwest identity forged by state leaders by the middle of the twentieth century. As the title to Smallwood's study suggests, the city was "Born in Dixie."⁸

The growth in Mexican migration north at the turn of the twentieth century had generally dispersed Mexican immigrants to their traditional strongholds in South and West Texas. But the burgeoning oil and gas industries, and the accompanying industrialization of the state, lured many Mexican immigrants toward less traditional locales in the Lone Star State, particularly Houston, in eastern Texas. Houston's Mexican population had swelled to more than 15,000 during the first two decades of the 1900s. In North Texas, similar patterns occurred as greater numbers of Mexican immigrants moved to the Dallas-Fort Worth region. The U.S. Census reported in 1930 that more than 10,000 Hispanics resided in the two cities. While the Mexican-born population did not compare to other traditionally strong Hispanic enclaves in the state, particularly those along the border and South Texas, Mexican American communities throughout Texas took on a foreign quality, as *barrios* such as "Indiana Alley" and "Los Altos de Juarez" took shape in Dallas. In Houston, barrios like "El Alacran" and "El Segundo" marked the Space City.⁹

In Tyler, the arrival of a Mexican working class population began much later, flourishing only after 1980 as the incoming waves of immigrants and migrants from other parts of Texas gravitated towards jobs at Tyler Pipe and Foundry, the Tyler Mattress Company, and the General Electric plant.¹⁰ Prior to that, the situation was "tough," according to Martín Martínez, a native of San Luis Potosí, Mexico who immigrated to Tyler in 1973 to work at a nurs-

cry. Martinez remembers that in the seventies, the Mexican American community did not have any of the amenities that reminded them of home, such as food, drink, and culture. "At that time there were two Mexican restaurants, Gilbert's El Charro and Cholo's, a small private place that sold *menudo* on the weekends," he recalled. The situation proved so dire, according to Martinez, that the Mexican working class would have to wait for a woman to drive to Tyler from Dallas each weekend with tortillas to sell. "If you wanted fresh tortillas, you had to make your own flour tortillas because no one sold fresh corn tortillas here [in Tyler] back then," he joked.¹¹

Martinez's lamentations of a paucity of authentic Mexican foods is central to what historian De León calls the transitional period of Mexican immigration, when Mexican immigrants who had planned to stay in Texas only as long as they could make enough money to return to their homeland, begins to shift to a more permanent situation.¹² The recently arrived Mexican immigrants in Tyler during the 1970s and early 1980s did not have the cultural spaces and geographic locales that contained traditional Hispanic elements found along the border and in South Texas. Instead, Tyler—like many other cities in East Texas—was comprised of a predominantly white and black population. The challenge for newly arriving Mexican immigrants was to integrate themselves in a community that was distinctly different from what they knew. In South Texas, Mexican American communities had carved their own place alongside Anglo communities, and in doing so had created three areas that paid homage to their Mexican traditions: the rancho, the plaza, and the barrio. While South Texas Hispanics may have developed such spaces through time, East Texas and Tyler afforded no such luxuries. Instead, East Texas Mexican Americans would have to create their own cultural niche in the Rose City much like other Mexican immigrants had constructed their own communities in the Great Plains and upper South in the late 1990s.¹³ In doing so, the Tyler Hispanic population would lay the groundwork for a *barrio*, an ethnic enclave that would serve as a source of food, culture, labor, and, education through various small businesses that cater to the needs of the ethnic community.¹⁴

According to urban geographer and historian, David D. Arreola, in Mexico, residential space in towns and cities is defined as a *barrio*, meaning neighborhood. In his study of South Texas, Arreola found that barrios of Mexican Texans had distinctive characteristics that allowed residents to recognize the general boundaries of their neighborhood, but without a specific delineation that was obvious to the naked or untrained eye. Across the Southwest, the landscapes forged by a strong Mexican presence also had a few shared features. Most *barrios* were located next to an industrial quarter and adjacent to a "railroad alignment," and in most typical configurations family-run businesses dominated the neighborhood, which focused primarily on serving *barrio* residents and the Mexican American community.¹⁵ In Tyler, there was no specific catalyst that sparked the creation of a Mexican-oriented community, or *barrio*. But the Hispanic population in Tyler, many of who had arrived in the 1970s, all seemed to agree that it was during the late 1980s that a distinctive Mexican quality reached the Rose City. Martín Ambriz, a native

of Mexico's state of Michoacán who makes his living in the carpentry business, noted that when he arrived in 1984 from California, there was no sense of community in Tyler. Yet by the end of the decade, he could tell that things were changing. "Since I left Mexico, I have not had the chance to return, but after several years, I could meet people from my country and buy things that were previously unavailable when I first arrived."¹⁶

Mexican-owned businesses were not entirely new to Tyler during the latter part of the twentieth century. The city's history is well aware of the story behind Gilbert's El Charro Restaurant, which began operations during World War II. While Mexican-themed food sellers were present in Tyler since the turn of the century, they made no permanent presence in the Rose City until Gilbert Ramirez took a chance at creating a permanent eating establishment in 1943. Ramirez, a native of Reynosa, Mexico, bought out his partner and launched what would ultimately become a Tyler landmark. The Ramirez family opened their doors on East Erwin Street, less than a mile east of downtown, before moving their restaurant further east in 1952.¹⁷ Erwin Street, which runs east-west, straight into the heart of downtown Tyler, would ultimately become the nexus of what some citizens refer to as "Little Mexico," in the late twentieth century.¹⁸ That area of town also was close to the rail lines from the St. Louis-Southwestern Railroad, which ultimately became the Union Pacific. By the 1970s, the railroad focused on freight transport, but mass transportation into the city stood less than a half a mile to the west via the bus depot, along the northern fringes of the downtown area.¹⁹ According to Ramon San Miguel, who immigrated to Tyler from Guanajuato, Mexico in 1981, when he first arrived in the Rose City, he walked out of the bus station and walked east towards the Erwin-Beckham Street intersections, towards a home where he heard he could rent a room. San Miguel had already visited Tyler once before, as part of a work gang that was driven in from Dallas to work in the construction field. "Back then," he recalls, "we just stayed inside the homes we were renting and just watched the people pass by." "There was nothing to do besides work, anyhow," San Miguel concludes.²⁰

In a May 2000 supplement in the *Tyler Morning Telegraph* on the Mexican American community's heritage within the city, a central feature of the piece was the significance of Mexican food. "Something for which the Hispanic culture is widely known for is its food," the article reads, "but Mexican items were not always available in Tyler."²¹ Guadalupe Correa, an immigrant to Tyler, decided he would not have to wait for Dallas-area entrepreneurs to arrive with their Mexican wares. Instead, he chose to travel the hundred miles on weekends and purchase food and other items and return to Tyler to sell the Mexican commodities. The success of Correa's weekly trips soon convinced him to launch his own business catering to community needs. In 1976, the Correa family opened the Tyler Tortilla Factory in north Tyler, along Border Street. The store, which catered to the burgeoning Mexican population in the city, was so popular that it eventually served other food items such as *barbacoa* and *menudo* on the weekends. *Barbacoa*, which originated in the Mexican and South Texas ranches generations ago, remains an urban

staple well into the twenty-first century, according to Mexican American historians.²² The Tyler Tortilla Factory, which served a basic need for the Mexican American population of Tyler, became a cultural beacon for the Hispanic community as families became regulars, according to Correa's daughter, Ana Bonner.²³

The Tyler Tortilla Factory stood a mere half a mile away from the bus station and a few blocks north of the railroad tracks. At the time, city records revealed a paucity of businesses owned by Spanish surnamed individuals. In addition to Gilbert's El Charro, the 1975 City Directory listed only six Spanish-named businesses in the food industry. El Chico Restaurant on North Beckham, along with La Mejor Bakery and Reynosa Restaurant on East Erwin Street, marked the only Hispanic owned businesses at the time, with the latter businesses congregated near Gilbert's El Charro's original location on Erwin²⁴. The foundation for such businesses revealed the areas of Mexican concentration in the north and northeastern part of Tyler. As city officials touted the growth and development of South Tyler, the northern fringes of the city, the location of public transportation hubs and the industrial jobs, received the influx of Mexican immigrants and Mexican American migrants. Accordingly, La Mejor and Reynosa were two blocks from some of the earliest employers of Mexican descent Tylerites.²⁵ The rapid influx of the people of Mexican descent was evident by 1980, as northeastern Tyler witnessed the birth and development of more than a dozen new Mexican-themed businesses within a half mile radius along the Erwin-Beckham Street intersections. In addition to the usual food-related restaurants and taco stands, the burgeoning Mexican community also boasted gift shops and grocery stores, as well as Artega's Tortilla Factory, a competing *torilleria* of The Tyler Tortilla Factory.²⁶ Even the area north of the railroad tracks proliferated with increased numbers of Hispanic residents. The 600 block of Border Street—just north of the Tyler Tortilla Factory—exemplified the newfound growth as eight families with Spanish-surnames lived in that one block.²⁷

While eating establishments and grocery stores proved to be an integral part in the development of a Mexican community in northeast Tyler, the rapidly growing population demanded other goods and services, and local churches and religious leaders interested in helping the Mexican American community soon met such needs. As historian Kenneth Hopkins has shown in his study of the growth of a Hispanic community in Fort Worth and Tarrant County during the early twentieth century, a booming Mexican American population immediately had problems with language barriers, access to public services, and an educational disparity that placed additional stress on the predominantly working class citizenry.²⁸ The sudden influx of new immigrants prompted Tyler's Catholic Church, the Church of the Immaculate Conception, to provide services to the Mexican American community beyond traditional religious support. According to Deacon Ramiro Martinez, the Catholic Church made a concerted effort to help the new migrants and immigrants settle into the area by helping with "basic necessities," such as English classes, financial tutorials, and even finding jobs for those in dire straits.²⁹ Yet the Catholic

Church did not have a monopoly in terms of aid. A Hispanic Ministerial Association began in 2000, boasting a membership of more than forty Spanish-speaking Protestant ministers that catered to the Mexican and Mexican American community. One member was Pedro Garcia, a native of Jalisco, Mexico who immigrated to Tyler in 1980. Mr. Garcia came to the United States to earn a better living for him and his family before turning to the ministry. As he witnessed the growth of his tree-cutting business in the late eighties and early nineties, Garcia soon saw a higher calling to attend to the needs of *mi gente*, or “his people,” as he refers to them. Now a minister at *Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal* in north Tyler, Garcia worked to counsel immigrants on American laws and customs, providing shelter, and helping others find employment.⁴⁰

Humanitarian groups also surfaced in the last two decades of the twentieth century to meet the growing demands of the rapidly growing population. Clearly the language barrier was a central concern to the many individuals that gravitated towards charitable work. Lisa Massar, for example, worked with the First Baptist Church in Tyler, to create *Ninos de Promesa* (Children of Promise), a pre-school program. “We help teach them English so that they can enter kindergarten and be successful,” she said. “They have the language experiences that they need and the developmental experiences that they need to make them a success.”⁴¹ The Hispanic Service Center commenced operations in 1990 in East Tyler. Later renamed as the Hispanic American Association of East Texas (HAAET), the organization operated out of in what Director Ana Fuggins, called the “heart of the Hispanic community.” Fuggins, a Mexican American native of Laredo, Texas, had grown up along the border, and was intimately familiar with her cultural heritage and with a firm grasp on both the Spanish and English languages. Upon her arrival in East Texas, she recognized how “desperate” the Hispanic community was for help. Fuggins was largely behind the Hispanic American Association’s commitment to provide assistance in tax information, English as a second language courses, and computer instruction. The organization received accreditation in 1998 from the Board of Immigration Appeals to assist low-income immigrants in becoming legal U.S. citizens. By the early 2000s, the HAAET had expanded its services to nearby towns in Longview and Marshall,⁴² the organization did however maintain its original location on Erwin Street because as President Mitzi Arrellano pointed out, it was beneficial to those who “lived in that area.”⁴³

Tyler’s Hispanic American Association’s emphasis on serving as a liaison between recent immigrants and the community at large was similar to Mexican immigration patterns in other non-traditional destination areas in the United States. Andrew I. Schoenholtz’s study of Hispanic immigrants in Rogers, Arkansas illustrated how the rapid influx of Mexican immigrants forced long-standing residents and foreign-born newcomers to confront “actual and perceived problems” through civic activism. Accordingly, political and business leaders in Rogers sought ways to respect the rights of the Hispanics while at the same time reconciling their own cultural differences.⁴⁴ In Tyler, the Hispanic American Association assisted recent immigrants to make the transi-

tion towards assimilation, focusing on teaching the newcomers about local ordinances and normal utility purchases. "Many come to the association asking basic questions as to where they can find the utility company and/or to acquire their first American [identification] card (ID)," according to Arrellano. "The Hispanic Association provides many immigrants a picture ID that is usually recognized by the local Tyler Police department. The picture ID was a joint effort between the local police department and the Hispanic Association in the event that if something were to happen to the immigrants they could easily be identified."³⁵

With such economic circumstances more stabilized, the Mexican American population in Tyler eventually turned to needs to reinforce their cultural heritage in the 1900s. While the Mexican immigrant press had been present in Texas since the turn of the nineteenth century, in East Texas, the scant Hispanic population had delayed the development of Spanish-language newspapers until 1988, with the start of *La Opinion*. Based out of nearby Jacksonville, approximately, 15 miles south of Tyler, *La Opinion* focuses on local, national, and international stories of interest to the Mexican American community. As historian Robert R. Trevino suggested, *La Opinion* was similar to other early twentieth century Spanish-language newspapers in that it praised the efforts of Mexican Americans while denouncing social injustices against Hispanics.³⁶ The East Texas newspaper, which uses *Noti-Mex, Agencia de Noticias Del Estado Mexicano* (The News Agency of the Mexican State), similar to the American news agency, The Associated Press, publishes many stories focusing on Mexico and the people of Mexican ancestry in the United States. Local and area news, as well as public opinion pieces, are translated by a retired Mexican American Spanish instructor at a local college.³⁷

The extensive coverage of Mexican news and events naturally led to the process of preserving the old country's culture and heritage residing in East Texas. In 1987, for instance, the Mexican American community began to celebrate the *Cinco de Mayo* (5th of May), a celebration which commemorates the Mexican victory over French forces in the Battle of Puebla, 1862. Tyler's first annual *Dieciseis de Septiembre*, the Mexican Independence Day festival, occurred in 1992 and brought more than six hundred people to the grounds of Tyler Junior College to see the crowning of Jo Ann Garcia as festival queen. "What we are doing is attempting to bring our traditions, our hopes, and expectations to the knowledge of the people of Tyler," Tyler City Councilman Gus Ramirez said. Ramirez, who had won a seat on the city council in 1987, applauded the efforts of the Hispanic American Association to provide a cultural niche for the residents of Mexican ancestry in the Rose City.³⁸ As Daniel Arreola has argued, when customs and traditions are celebrated annually, they become festivals. While Tyler may have lagged behind South Texas in its annual celebrations, it did demonstrate a need to preserve Mexico's cultural heritage.³⁹ By the 1990s, as the Hispanic population had doubled to 8,986 since the previous decade, the Mexican presence in Tyler could no longer be denied. The population had increased to more than 13,000 in 2000, approximately 15 percent of the total population.⁴⁰

The power of the Spanish-language media continued its imposing presence as the Hispanic population in Tyler boomed into the twenty-first century. Local Spanish-news organs, both radio and print, galvanized the Mexican American community in the wake of anti-immigration rhetoric the spring of 2006. The national media had consistently focused on the perceived problem of illegal immigration and the results found its way to Tyler. To face such a challenge, on April 6, Jose Sanchez, an attorney in nearby Longview, applied for a parade permit in observance of The National Day of Action for Immigrant Justice, and called on the Hispanic community via Spanish-language radio and print to support the cause. Sanchez hoped to capitalize on the momentum of the Hispanic community to have their voices heard, particularly since the previous week, dozens of Mexican American students at John Tyler High School had walked out of their classes to protest HB4437, an immigration reform bill under debate in the U.S. Congress that contained some significant anti-immigrant provisions. Clearly tension between both pro-immigration and anti-immigration forces was high as the march made its way from the Super S Food store through the heart of "Little Mexico," and ultimately toward the downtown area. The following month, hundreds of Mexican Americans in Tyler gathered once again to participate as part of the Day Without an Immigrant in hopes they could urge lawmakers to help an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants settle legally in the United States, and also in response to what the *Tyler Morning Telegraph* called "rumors" that Immigration and Naturalization Service agents in Tyler "were in the area snatching illegal immigrants off the streets." Disc jockeys from a local radio station, 96.7 FM, *La Invasora*, promoted the event weeks in advance and did a live broadcast from the heart of the Rose City, urging Hispanic residents to participate. The protesters marched through "Little Mexico" and toward T. B. Butler Fountain Square, at the heart of downtown Tyler, shouting "*Si Se Puede*" (Yes we can) while some onlookers shouted "Go back to Mexico!" Lorenzo Flores, a Tyler native who participated in the march highlighted the significance of the rally. "I am an American citizen and my family has served in the military to defend this country. I was waving the Mexican flag because it is my heritage even though I was born here and my parents were born here," he said.⁴¹

As the Mexican American population in Tyler continued to grow in the twenty-first century, the characteristics of a *barrio* were evident. While there was no segregation of Hispanics like the African American population experienced at the turn of the twentieth century, the Hispanic presence in the north-eastern part of the city was delineated more by geographic lines and recent traditions rather than *de jure* or *de facto* demarcations. The term "Little Mexico" may not be definitive to describe the Hispanic community in northeast Tyler, but it does conjure up images of a strong Mexican presence. Many residents consider the intersection of Beckham and Erwin to be the heart of this nascent barrio. A mere four blocks to the east, along East Erwin, a proliferation of Mexican-themed businesses, ranging from *taquerias* to jewelry stores, surround a soccer field that hosts weekly games for the *Jaguares* (Jaguars) Soccer League of Tyler.⁴² Additional clubs and organizations, such as Wicked Toys

and *Los Unicos* Lowrider Car Clubs, also mark the Mexican American presence in north Tyler with their shows and gatherings.⁴³ Yet as Kenneth Hopkins has argued, *barrios* are not always pejorative terms analogous to a ghetto; a *barrio* can also have positive contributions to its residents. In the case of Fort Worth, Hopkins maintains that *barrios* offered the Mexican American population spaces for business, religion, and recreational activities.⁴⁴ Tyler's "Little Mexico," sustains such criteria and more. As the Hispanic presence expands upon other areas of the city, the heart of the Mexican American community remains entrenched along the Erwin-Beckham Street lines.⁴⁵

The creation of a Mexican American *barrio* in Tyler is still a work in progress as educational gaps and socioeconomic disparity hinder the political voice and economic power of the city's Hispanic population. Hopefully, this cursory study of the growth of the Mexican American community in Tyler can serve as a catalyst for further examination into the various subjects that require additional scholarly attention. For instance, as first and second generation Mexican Americans develop deeper roots in Tyler, they will likely one day play a larger role in the political arena. Scholars must seize the opportunity to develop oral histories and interdisciplinary studies in order to chronicle the changes. Certainly the ability to read or speak Spanish will assist in further studying the present Mexican American population, most of who currently consider themselves as newcomers or first generation Americans of Mexican descent. Meanwhile, additional questions as to what Tyler's "Little Mexico" will provide for future generations of Tejanos remain pertinent. Nevertheless, in Tyler, a stronger presence has given the Mexican American community an opportunity to pay homage to the land of their cultural birth while incorporating themselves, in varying degrees, to the social, cultural, and economic processes of the city and its outlying areas, which will allow Tyler's residents of Mexican descent to not feel like strangers in a strange land. While Mexican American integration into the outlying neighborhoods and business districts is occurring in Tyler, so does the possibility that new *barrios* may emerge in other parts of the city.⁴⁶

NOTES

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¹The account of *Plyler v. Doe* and its aftermath is taken from, Barbara Belejack, "A Lesson in Equal Protection: The Texas Cases that Opened the Schoolhouse Door to Undocumented Immigrant Children," *The Texas Observer* July 13, 2007; *Dallas Morning News*, June 11, 2007; Tyler Morning Telegraph, September 1, 4, 10, 12, 13, 14, 1977; Marín Martínez, interview by the author, Tyler, Texas. May 16, 2008.

²*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, September 1, 4, 10, 14, 1977 (quotes from September 14 article). In one political cartoon, for instance, a large Mexican sombrero looms over the state of Texas.

³While the term "Hispanic" is a product of the U.S. Census Bureau in the post Civil Rights era and the term "Mexican American" is self-referent, I use the terms "Hispanic" and "Mexican American" interchangeably throughout the study because some of the interview subjects describe themselves as "Hispanic" and because some of the businesses and organizations mentioned in this essay use the term as well.

⁴Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Mexican Americans in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1998), ix.

⁵Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Mexican Americans in Houston*, ix.

⁶George I. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1995), 9-10, 12-13; Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt*, ix, 231.

⁷Ann V. Millard and Jorge Chapa, eds., *Apple Pie and Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers in the Rural Midwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 26-40, 47-73, 172-195; Elzbieta M. Goźdiak and Susan F. Martin, eds., *Beyond the Gateway: Immigrants in a Changing America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 82-84, 167-171, 219-222, 241-273; Victor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León, eds., *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005), 43-46, 70-73, 113-128, 260-265.

⁸James Smallwood, *Born in Dixie: Smith County From 1875 to its Centennial Year, The History of Smith County, Texas*, vol. 2 (Austin: Eakin Press, 1999), 781. Robert Brown Cross, ed., *Tyler and Smith County Texas: An Historical Survey* (Tyler: American Bicentennial Committee of Tyler-Smith County, 1976). For examinations on the interpretations of East Texas' southern past, see Walter Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2001), xvi-xxii.

⁹Arnoldo De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A Brief History* 3rd ed. (Wheeling: Harlan Press, 2009), 71-74; Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt*, 10-12, 55-56, 98-99, 151.

¹⁰P. J. Furse. "Culture in Transition: Hispanics in Tyler, Smith County," *Tyler Today Magazine* (September 1993), 4.

¹¹Martín Martínez, interview by the author, Tyler, Texas, May 16, 2008.

¹²Arnoldo De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 72.

¹³Lourdes Gouveia, Miguel A. Carranza, and Jasney Cogúa, "The Great Plains Migration: Mexicanos and Latinos in Nebraska," and David C. Griffith, "Rural Industry and Mexican Immigration and Settlement in North Carolina," in Victor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León, eds., *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005), 28-29, 32-33, 53-55, 59-60.

¹⁴Daniel D. Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 63-64.

¹⁵Daniel D. Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province*, 86.

¹⁶Martín Ambriz, interview by the author, Tyler, Texas, August 1, 2008.

¹⁷James Smallwood, *Born in Dixie*, 666; *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, May 5, 2000.

¹⁸The use of term "Little Mexico" to refer to northeast Tyler is not static. It has been used informally for years, according to several longtime residents. Its first official description can be traced to 2003, when former Tyler City Councilman, Gus Ramirez, translating for the owner of *La Michoacana* Grocery Store, referred to the area as "Little Mexico" where the new store was to be located. See *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, September 20, 2003.

¹⁹*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, "Railroad Officials Look Back on 100 Historic Years," September 25, 1977.

²⁰Ramon San Miguel, interview by the author, Tyler, Texas, July 24, 2008.

²¹*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, May 5, 2000.

²²Marió Montano, "The History of Mexican Folk Foodways of South Texas: Street Vendors, Offal Foods, and *Barbacoa de Cabeza*." Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992.

²³*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, May 5, 2000.

²⁴1975 *Tyler City Directory*.

²⁵P.J. Furse, "Culture in Transition," 5; "Tyler Pushes South," and "Tyler Industrial Park Attracts New Businesses." *Smith County Chronicles* (September 2000), 25.

²⁶1980 *Tyler City Directory*.

²⁷1985 *Tyler City Directory*.

²⁸Kenneth Hopkins, "The Early Developments of the Hispanic Community in Fort Worth and

Tarrant County, Texas, 1849-1949," *East Texas Historical Journal* (Fall 2000), 58-59. See also Carlos Cuellar. *Stories From the Barrio: A History of Mexican Fort Worth* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

²⁴*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, May 5, 2000.

²⁵Pedro García, interview by the author, Tyler, Texas, June 28, 2008. See also *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, July 26, 2008. Pastor Juan De Dios Acuña, of the *Iglesia Nueva Vida* (Church of New Life), describes his congregation's efforts to teach English and provide additional tutorials to the Latino population of Tyler.

²⁶*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, September 14, 2007.

²⁷*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, March 13, 2004.

²⁸Mitzi Arrellano to Author, February 28, 2009. Letter in Author's possession.

²⁹Andrew I. Schoenholtz, "Newcomers in Rural America: Hispanic Immigrants in Rogers, Arkansas." in Goźdiak and Martin, *Beyond the Gateway*. 213-237 (quote on page 236).

³⁰Mitzi Arrellano to Author, February 28, 2009.

³¹See for example. *La Opinion*, August 27, 2008 and February 25, 2009. Robert R. Trevino, "Prensa y Patria: The Spanish Language Press and the Biculturalization of the Tejano Middle Class, 1920-1940." *Western Historical Quarterly*, XXII (November 1991). 451-472.

³²Dr. Ramirez teaches at Texas College, a predominantly black college in North Tyler. See *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, September 1, 2007; *La Opinion*, July 16, 2008.

³³*Tyler Courier Times Telegraph*, September 13, 1992.

³⁴Daniel D. Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 183-184.

³⁵1990 U.S. Census; 2000 U.S. Census.

³⁶Arnoldo De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 172-173; *Tyler Morning Telegram*, April 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, May 1, 2006. Tyler's rally paled in comparison to the thousands that rallied in Houston the following month. See *Houston Chronicle*, May 2, 2006. For a sample of the tension, the Tyler paper carried a story of a girl from nearby Athens who claimed that an anti-immigration sign she made for a U.S. history class led to an assault by her Hispanic classmates. Her assault claims later proved to be false.

³⁷2005 *Tyler City Directory*; Marcos Martinez, interview by the author, Tyler, Texas, August 8, 2008; Diego Padilla, interview by the author, Tyler, Texas, February 16, 2009.

³⁸*Lowrider Magazine*. National Club Registry, http://www.lowridermagazine.com/clubregistry/0710_lmhp_national_lowrider_club_registry/index.html, accessed February 3, 2009. *Los Unicos* Car Club was organized in Tyler in 1998 by brothers Ivan "P" Alvarado and Edgar "Low" Alvarado, and family friend Ramiro "Mijo" Olivarez. An additional chapter was created in Longview and is currently operated by Norman "Big Pit" Pitman. According to the founders, they "created the chapters to try and extend our movement to show that the Lowriding . . . is not a crime but a lifestyle, in which we work hard for and invest a lot of time, effort, and passion into." See *Los Unicos* Car Club Official Page, <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewProfile&friendID=418402422>, accessed February 27, 2009.

³⁹Kenneth Hopkins, "The Early Developments of the Hispanic Community," 60-62. For a sample of North Tyler's growing Latino presence, see the 2005 *Tyler City Directory* which highlights a dominant trend of businesses with Spanish names along the 1000 block of East Erwin.

⁴⁰John Logan, Wenguan Zhang, Richard D. Alba, "Immigrant Enclaves and Ethnic Communities in New York and Los Angeles," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), 299-322.

⁴¹Christian Zolniski, "Etnografía de trabajadores informales en un barrio de inmigrantes mexicanos en el Silicon Valley," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* Vol. 62, No. 2 (April-June 2000), 66. Terrence Haverluk's study of Hereford, Texas argues that the city, which was founded by Anglo Americans in the mid twentieth century, has undergone a "Hispanization" of sorts. In 2000, Hereford's Hispanic community grew to more than 61 percent of the city's population and estimates are projected that the city will be comprised of 90 percent Hispanics within twenty years. See Daniel Arreola, *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 11.