

PACHUCOS IN THE MAKING

GEORGE I. SANCHEZ

WIDESPREAD attention has been drawn to the Los Angeles, California, gangs of zoot-suited, socially maladjusted, "Mexican" youngsters known as "pachucos." Mixed with the intelligent efforts and genuine concern of some public officials and laymen over the disgraceful situation which has been allowed to develop in the Los Angeles area, there is also much sanctimonious "locking of barn doors after the horses have been stolen" sort of expression and action by those whose past lack of interest and whose official negligence bred the juvenile delinquency which now plagues that city's officialdom, hinders the program of the armed forces, and embarrasses the United States before Latin America and the world.

The seed for the pachucos was sown a decade or more ago by unintelligent educational measures, by discriminatory social and economic practices, by provincial smugness and self-assigned "racial" superiority. Today we reap the whirlwind in youth whose greatest crime was to be born into an environment which, through various kinds and degrees of social ostracism and prejudicial economic subjugation, made them a caste apart, fair prey to the cancer of gangsterism. The crimes of these youths should be appropriately punished, yes. But what of the society which is an accessory before and after the fact?

Almost ten years ago, I raised this issue in an article in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*: "The frequent prostitution

of democratic ideals to the cause of expediency, politics, vested interests, ignorance, class and 'race' prejudice, and to indifference and inefficiency is a sad commentary on the intelligence and justice of a society that makes claims to those very progressive democratic ideals. The dual system of education presented in 'Mexican' and 'white' schools, the family system of contract labor, social and economic discrimination, educational negligence on the part of local and state authorities, 'homogeneous grouping' to mask professional inefficiency—all point to the need for greater insight into a problem which is inherent in a 'melting pot' society. The progress of our country is dependent upon the most efficient utilization of the heterogeneous masses which constitute its population—the degree to which the 2,000,000 or more Spanish-speaking people, and their increment, are permitted to develop is the extent to which the nation should expect returns from that section of its public."

When the pachuco "crime wave" broke last year, I communicated with the Office of War Information: "I understand that a grand jury is looking into the 'Mexican' problem in Los Angeles and that there seems to be considerable misunderstanding as to the causes of the gang activities of Mexican youth in that area. I hear also that much ado is being made about 'Aztec forebears,' 'blood lust,' and similar claptrap in interpreting the behavior of these citizens. It

COMMON GROUND

would be indeed unfortunate if this grand jury investigation were to go off on a tangent, witchhunting in anthropological antecedents for causes which, in reality, lie right under the noses of the public service agencies in Los Angeles County."

Subsequent developments have borne out the fears implied above. And still, in June of this year, the Los Angeles City Council could think of no better answer to the deep-rooted negligence of public service agencies than to deliberate over an ordinance outlawing zoot suits! The segregatory attitudes and practices, and the vicious economic exploitation directed against the "Mexican" in California in the past—not zoot suits—are responsible for the pachucos of today.

The pseudo-science of the Los Angeles official who is quoted as reporting to the Grand Jury on the Sleepy Lagoon murder case that "Mexican" youths are motivated to crime by certain biological or "racial" characteristics would be laughable if it were not so tragic, so dangerous, and, worse still, so typical of biased attitudes and misguided thinking which are reflected in the practices not only of California communities but also elsewhere in this country.

The genesis of pachuquismo is an open book to those who care to look into the situations facing Spanish-speaking people in many parts of the Southwest. Arizona, Colorado, Texas, and, to a much lesser degree, even New Mexico have conditions analogous to those which have nurtured the California riots. In some communities in each of these states, "Mexican" is a term of opprobrium applied to anyone with a Spanish name—citizen and alien alike, of mestizo blood or of "pure white" Spanish colonial antecedents. In many places these people are denied service in restaurants, barber

shops, and stores. Public parks and swimming pools, some of which were built by federal funds, are often closed to them. Some churches, court houses, and public hospitals have been known to segregate them from "whites." Separate, and usually shockingly inferior, segregated "Mexican" schools have been set up for their children. Discriminatory employment practices and wage scales, even in war industries (the President's Executive Order 8802 and his Committee on Fair Employment Practice to the contrary notwithstanding), are still used to "keep the 'Mexican' in his place."

An affidavit from California before me says that when a Spanish-name citizen of this country, in response to a public advertisement by a national railroad company, applied for a job, "he was told by the foreman, 'I have orders from the general foreman not to hire Mexican help.' On inquiry as to why Mexicans were not being employed, this foreman states as follows: that the Mexicans got drunk on the job, did not keep up with their work, caused trouble, and that the shops were open only to white labor; that if Mexicans wanted to work with the company they could work on the section gangs." Apparently drunkenness, laziness, etc. were tolerated on the section gangs!

A Texas friend says that the Mexicans in her town had been ordered out of the parks and that Mexicans were mistreated there. Another report tells of a group of school children of Mexican and Latin American origin who went to a neighboring town "to spend the day and to attend a celebration. . . . They decided to go swimming in a public swimming pool and they were denied entrance thereto because they were of Latin American and Mexican origin, although they permitted two Japanese children . . . to enter said swimming pool." The Chancellor of a Mexican Consulate "was expelled with

his wife and children from the —— swimming pool in the town of ——, Texas; the only reason given for the expulsion was that they were Mexicans.” In another town “the teacher took the Latin American school children to a park . . . she was told by the keeper of the park to get out as this park was not for the use of the Mexicans.”

In the course of a hike, a Scoutmaster and his troop of Boy Scouts, all in uniform, were ordered out of a public park where they had stopped to rest, because they were “Mexicans.” A group of American citizens of Mexican descent, on the verge of joining the Army, “were denied entrance to the swimming pools because they were ‘Latin Americans.’” Soldiers in the uniform of the United States Army have been refused service in public places because they were “Mexicans,” several of them having been ejected when they insisted on buying a cup of coffee, a hamburger, or a bottle of beer.

A newspaper from a West Texas city states: “City Police Chief —— today issued a request that all persons except negroes [sic] and Latin Americans stay out of the swimming hole at the —— Street crossing on the —— (river). ‘This portion of the river was fixed by the city especially as a swimming pool for negroes [sic] and Latin Americans. Many other people, not knowing this, are using it also. We’d appreciate their quitting the pool and leaving it to the persons for whom it was planned,’ Chief —— said.”

A pathetic letter from a descendant of the colonial settlers of Texas states: “Do you think there is any hope of getting our problems solved? We wish you would do something to help us. We are being mistreated here every time we turn around. We are not allowed in cafes, movies, restaurants. Even Latin Americans in United States Army uniforms are

sometimes told they can’t see a show because the Mexican side is full. In the public schools our children are segregated. They are given only half a day’s school because of the teacher shortage, while the others have full-time classes. There is no teacher shortage for them. Please tell us if there is anything to do about it. We wrote a letter to the Office of Civilian Defense, Washington, D.C. But we haven’t heard from them. We don’t know if that is the right place to write to or not.”

A Mexican Consul reports that “there were signs posted by the —— County authorities as follows: ‘For Colored and Mexicans,’ and in the Church named the —— was this sign: ‘For Whites’ and another ‘For Mexicans.’ Mexicans are not permitted to attend this church on Sundays.” Not only in civic affairs and in Christian worship but even after death, the “Mexican” is segregated. It is reported: “in many cemeteries, whether owned by county authorities, by private individuals or corporations, or by religious organizations . . . the bodies of ‘Mexicans’ are denied the right to burial. . . .” In those cemeteries where such bodies are received “they are assigned a separate plot of land, far enough from the plot destined for the so-called ‘whites’ so as to be sure that the bodies of the so-called ‘whites’ will not be contaminated by the presence of the bodies of the ‘Mexicans’.”

A traveler on a transcontinental bus stated that “the bus stopped at —— (town) so that the passengers could eat at a restaurant known as Hotel ——. He observed that everyone else was served except him. When he inquired why he was not waited on, he was advised that Mexicans were not served at said place.” Another report points out “that [high school] seniors graduating at —— (town) were segregated at a banquet

COMMON GROUND

given them. The tables for the Latin Americans were placed in a separate locality from that reserved for the Anglo Americans."

A newspaper story tells of the building of a new theater in a west Texas city: "Today the cost already had moved past the \$40,000 mark and the seating capacity had been raised to 1,100 including 250 on the balcony where the colored and Latin American movie fans will be accommodated." The Mexican colony from the city of ——— reports that "the toilets in the courthouse bear a sign which reads 'For Whites—Mexicans Keep Out'."

In another town, on the Fourth of July, "several hundred citizens of the United States of Mexican extraction were told over the loud speaker that they should go home because the dance being held in a public square was for white people only. Among the persons ejected were many wearing United States soldier's uniforms." At still another place, again on the Fourth of July, at an American Legion dance, Spanish-name veterans of World War I were asked to leave because the dance was for "whites" only.

The constitution and by-laws of the so-called "White Man's Union" of a certain county in Texas provide that only "white" citizens shall be eligible for membership. These regulations state: "The term White Citizen, as provided herein, shall not include any Mexican, who is not of full Spanish blood. Only persons who are white citizens . . . shall be permitted to vote at any primary or other election held by this association." These regulations are also enforced in the Democratic primaries, the election machinery of the primaries being in the control of this "White Man's Union." Who, indeed, could prove that he is of "full Spanish blood," assuming, for argument's sake, that a mestizo or Indian, otherwise qualified, can be thus disfranchised! It should be noted that the

primary election is the election in such overwhelmingly Democratic counties as this.

Many communities provide a separate school for children of Spanish name. These "Mexican schools," are established ostensibly for "pedagogical reasons," thinly veiled excuses which do not conform with either the science of education or the facts in the case. Judging from current practice, these pseudo-pedagogical reasons call for short school terms, ramshackle school buildings, poorly paid and untrained teachers, and all varieties of prejudicial discrimination. The "language handicap" reason, so glibly advanced as the chief pedagogical excuse for the segregation of these school children, is extended to apply to all Spanish-name youngsters regardless of the fact that some of them know more English and more about other school subjects than the children from whom they are segregated. In addition, some of these Spanish-name children know no Spanish whatsoever, coming from homes where only English has been spoken for two generations or more.

The community mores suggested in the above illustrations do not reflect simply the attitudes of untutored masses. Equally glaring, un-American practices are carried on by those of privileged social and economic status. The basic real estate contracts in many subdivisions in several Texas cities provide that "neither they, nor their heirs, executors, administrators, or assigns, shall sell or lease any portion of said property to any person of Negro blood, or Mexicans." Another far too common provision in deeds stipulates that: "No lot or part of lot in said addition at any time may be occupied by or used by any person except those of the Caucasian race. . . . This provision shall be so construed as excluding from occupancy in said subdivision Mexicans, Latin

PACHUCOS IN THE MAKING

Americans, Negroes, and people of the yellow race." Wealthy, highly educated, prominent Latin Americans, some citizens of the United States and some citizens of prestige of Mexico and of other Latin American countries, have been refused the right to purchase or occupy property in those subdivisions. A Vice Consul of Mexico was requested to move out of a house in a city in Texas, "on the ground that, in that subdivision, properties could not be sold or rented to 'Mexicans'." A letter from a Mexican Consul to the mayor of a large city, referring to another such "incident," states: "It is with much regret that I am constrained to bring to your attention a matter that has caused a great deal of ill will and disappointment to the Mexican colony in _____ by reason of the fact that one of the most outstanding Mexican families in _____ was refused the right to acquire a place in which to live at _____ [street address] in _____ [subdivision] within the limits of the city of _____, on the sole ground that the purchaser was a Mexican.

"I need not call to your attention the position which Mr. _____ owner of the _____ Company holds in this community. I can point out no other person who stands higher in the estimation of both the Mexican and the American people, who is a prominent civic leader and a successful business man. Certainly, a great injustice has been done in thus humiliating him and his family, which is a matter that reflects the attitude of many people residing in several sections of _____ [the city], where similar obnoxious clauses are included in the deeds."

These acts by otherwise intelligent people cannot be excused simply on the basis that they are motivated by commercial considerations. The same kind of acts are committed by public officials. During the second registration for the Selective

Service in a large city in Texas, the officer in charge gave a story to the press in which he announced that arrangements had been made to register Negroes, Latin Americans, and "whites" in separate rooms of the County Courthouse. Fortunately, vigorous protest brought about a satisfactory correction. The Selective Service procedure in certain places has forced American citizens of Spanish name to be classified as "Mexican" in the questionnaire which states: "3. My race is _____ White; _____ Negro; _____ Oriental; _____ Indian; _____ Filipino. Other (Specify) _____." An attorney in a border city writes: "It appears that the persons in charge of filling out the blanks at the reception center are guided only by the sound of the name. If the name is Spanish, then they classify the selectee as 'Mexican'; if it is 'American' then the classification is, of course, 'White.' One of the latest cases is that of a son of _____. His name is _____ [Spanish]; the mother is an Anglo American. . . . He was classified 'Mexican' because of the name _____; yet, in the same group, another young boy, with an American or English name was classified 'White' even though he has Mexican and perhaps even Negro blood." [The mother in the latter case is "Mexican" and the father "Anglo."] It is to be noted that, through the intervention of national offices, orders have recently gone out calling for the cessation of such classification.

Applicants for positions listed by the United States Employment Service are frequently told their applications cannot be received because they are "Mexican" and would not be eligible. Insult is added to injury when, after the employers have subjected the "Mexican" to discriminatory wage scales, the other employees bring about their segregation. A report on oil workers points out that two refineries, "notwithstanding the fact that they have

COMMON GROUND

Government war contracts, pay from 10 to 13 cents an hour less to the 'Mexican' workers than the salary paid to Anglo-Saxon workers for the same kind of work. They keep separate toilet-rooms, separate drinking water faucets, and separate bath-rooms for the 'Mexicans'. . . ."

One of my assistants reports the situation in a border community, which "has contributed to the limit in manpower. Many of its young men enlisted in various branches of the service before they were drafted. As a result, Latin American boys from ——— [town] are at present all over the world. . . . A short time ago, a group of young Latin American girls . . . (all of them having brothers and sweethearts in the service) called Mr. ———, manager of the uso, by phone, and asked how they went about becoming uso hostesses." They were told just to come down and register, but when the spokesman said "there was a group of twelve Latin American girls who wished to offer their services, he said 'Oh, wait a minute. In that case you will have to see Father ——— (priest at ——— Church) who is organizing a Latin American uso.' The girls didn't like the sound of it, but they contacted the priest who told them he knew nothing about uso activities, and confirmed their belief that a Latin American uso, if established, would only be another form of segregation to which they should not subscribe."

Upon investigating the above matter, we were informed, in effect, that the local uso itself had no jurisdiction in the matter since it was entirely up to the Girls Service Organization as to whom they would admit for membership. My assistant states: "It is understandable that the sisters and sweethearts of these boys should feel not only a keen disappointment but a deep humiliation at what is to them a refusal of the opportunity to do their rightful part, as American citizens, in furthering

the war effort to which their loved ones are daily dedicating their lives."

Two years ago six friends wrote me as follows: "The undersigned write you so that, if you find it possible, you will make for us before the appropriate department an energetic protest for the humiliating treatment which we received. It happens that we were named by the Selective Service committee to undergo the examination for soldiers, and an employee of the draft board took us to eat at ——— Cafe. We were refused service solely because we were of Mexican descent. After that we were taken to Hotel ——— where we were served in an empty room. . . . As you will see this is not in accord with reason and justice and we fear that this is probably the work of fifth columnists who handicap the efforts of the government."

On July 12, 1941, before the pachuco question had become a matter of general interest, a Spanish American from California summarized the situation this way: "The so-called 'Mexican Problem' is not in fact a Mexican problem. It is a problem foisted by American mercenary interests upon the American people. It is an American problem made in the U.S.A." He was protesting the movement then on foot to permit the indiscriminate and wholesale importation of laborers from Mexico. In response to such protests steps were taken by the governments of the United States and of Mexico to protect both the imported alien and the residents of this area from the evils inherent in such letting down of the bars, evils of which ample evidence was furnished during World War I under similar circumstances. Today, however, the pressure of vested interests is finding loopholes in that enlightened policy and, again, the bars are rapidly being let down.

Si Casady of McAllen, Texas, in an editorial in the Valley Evening Monitor

hits the nail on the head when he says: ". . . there is a type of individual who does not understand and appreciate the very real dangers inherent in racial discrimination. This type of individual does not understand that his own right to enjoy life, his own liberty, the very existence of this nation and all the other free nations of the world depend utterly and completely on the fundamental principle that no man, because of race, has any right to put his foot upon the neck of any other man. The racial discrimination problem has been kept daintily out of sight for so long in the [Rio Grande] Valley that it cannot now be solved overnight. Instead of dragging it out into the sunlight where it could be left lying until all the nauseous fumes of hypocrisy and bigotry had dissipated, we have shoved the problem down into the cellar like an idiot child, hoping the neighbors would not notice its existence."

In two illuminating articles, Carey McWilliams, earlier in this magazine, has made a brilliant and forceful presentation of the "Mexican problem." Before him, Dr. Paul S. Taylor of the University of California and Dr. H. T. Manuel of the University of Texas had also clearly pointed out the evils inherent in the mistreatment of Spanish-speaking people. This writer and other students of the problem have, over the past twenty years, repeatedly pointed out the dangers and have continuously insisted on adequate remedial measures. Neglect on the part of public service agencies lies at the root of the disturbances which we observe today. Those disturbances, serious as they are, simply presage even worse effects in the future unless adequate remedial measures are undertaken immediately.

What would be the nature of these remedial measures? The malady suggests the cure. Where negative and un-Ameri-

can practices now prevail, undertake positive, equitable, American action. This is not as difficult as it appears at first blush. While unfavorable popular attitudes and community customs are difficult to correct and though there are many elusive factors back of the prejudicial situations I have referred to, the people involved are susceptible to sound guidance and leadership—particularly to that of their duly selected officials and of well-established civic organizations. Furthermore, I am sure that much of the mistreatment of Spanish-speaking people would not take place were it not for the fact that the common people take their cue from the discriminatory acts (of commission or omission) of their public officials.

The establishment of segregated schools for "Mexicans" lays the foundation for most of the prejudice and discrimination. Local and state educational authorities have the power to institute satisfactory remedies. There is no legal requirement in any state calling for the organization of such schools. There are all sorts of legal mandates to the contrary. Fortright action by school authorities could remove these blots on American education in a very brief period of time. As an illustration of how this may be done in Texas, consider this provision adopted by the State Legislature in 1943: "The State Board of Education with the approval of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction shall have the authority to withhold the per capita apportionment to any school district at any time that a discrimination between groups of white scholastics exists."

The exclusion of "Mexicans" from public places, solely on the basis of "race" (legally, they are "white"), can be stopped through the enforcement of such provisions as that embodied in the legislative Concurrent Resolution adopted in Texas a few months ago: "1. All persons

COMMON GROUND

of the Caucasian Race within the jurisdiction of this State are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of all public places of business or amusement, subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law, and rules and regulations applicable alike to all persons of the Caucasian Race. 2. Whoever denies to any person the full advantages, facilities, and privileges enumerated in the preceding paragraph or who aids or incites such denial or whoever makes any discrimination, distinction, or restriction except for good cause applicable alike to all persons of the Caucasian Race, respecting accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of all public places of business, or whoever aids or incites such discrimination, distinction, or restriction shall be considered as violating the good neighbor policy of our State." Vigorous action by public officials in enforcing this mandate in Texas, and similar legal provisions in other states, would go far in solving this fundamental phase of the whole "Mexican" question.

These illustrations of specific remedial action could be multiplied by reference to legal mandates as to suffrage, jury service, practices in war industries, etc. Public officials—local, state, and federal—have in their hands the power to correct the discriminatory practices which lie at the root of prejudicial attitudes and actions on the part of some sectors of the public. I have the fullest confidence that the great majority of Americans would applaud the enforcement of those legal mandates.

The Spanish-speaking people of the United States need to be incorporated into, and made fully participating members of, the American way of life. The "Mexican" needs education, he needs vocational training and placement in American industry on an American basis,

he needs active encouragement to participate in civic affairs and to discharge his civic obligations, and he needs constant protection by public officials from the pitfalls into which his cultural differences may lead him or into which he may be forced by unthinking sectors of the public.

The record, briefly reported here, of oppressive self-righteousness and the "incidents" to which it has led is an appalling one. Even more frightening are the prospects of a future when such cheaply hatched social attitudes and practices come home to roost as the full-fledged and expensive spectres of crime, disease, ignorance, internal discord, and international enmity. One generation's sins of "racial" oppression on the part of a majority sector of the population are indeed visited upon its progeny, many fold. The fruits of "racial" discrimination are boomerangs—seeds which breed, in the majority group, fascism and tolerance of the concentration camp for "inferior races." The vicious practices referred to above do harm to the "Mexican," yes. However, infinitely more harm is done to the group which perpetrates or tolerates the practices. The pachuco is a symbol not of the guilt of an oppressed "Mexican" minority but of a cancerous growth within the majority group which is gnawing at the vitals of democracy and the American way of life. The pachuco and his feminine counterpart, the "cholita," are spawn of a neglectful society—not the products of an humble minority people who are defenseless before their enforced humiliation.

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PRELUDE TO DISASTER: DETROIT

LOUIS MARTIN

FOR MORE than a year before the Detroit riot of June 20-21, 1943, the worst America has seen in 25 years, journalists, government investigators, and thousands of citizens of this bustling war center were convinced that serious racial clashes were inevitable. Indeed, now that the riot has occurred in Detroit, city officials state they feared such disaster all along, despite previous denials. Why they should have denied it and kept their own quiet counsel is a strange story, one that may never be told.

In some respects the riot which cost the lives of 34 citizens began in World War I when labor agents scoured the South luring a vast army of Negro workers to Detroit, "the industrial Paradise where a man could be free." Here in the "arsenal of democracy" in World War II, are gathered important segments of all the racial and national groupings that make up America. Here one finds big and little islands of Americans of various descents—Polish, Negro, Italian, Hungarian, Jewish, Armenian—"hillbillies," and a few boulevards of bluebloods.

In 1910 there were only 5,741 Negroes in the city of Detroit. By 1917 this figure had risen to 23,000, and today this city of nearly two millions has a Negro population close to 200,000. For a ten-year period almost a hundred thousand in-migrants a year answered the call of the growing auto industries for cheap labor. These laboring armies which included a cross section of practically all mankind

came to help create the industrial miracle of mass production.

The boom-town character of Detroit's growth is an important key to much that seems baffling in the present picture. Detroit fluctuates between two extremes: either the people are up to their necks in prosperity or completely stranded in bitter depressions. In this city of recurrent booms and recurrent crises, the Negro has clung to the tail of the economic kite in conformity with American color proscriptions.

Today Detroit is prosperous, and almost a half million in-migrants have swelled the ranks of the working class. Most of these newcomers are 105 per cent Americans who have come from the hill country of Kentucky and Tennessee. They have moved in with their cousins who came in the last boom, or have pitched tents with strangers.

II

From the beginning of the First World War when Negroes began arriving in large numbers to work in the foundries of the motor industry, there appear to have been two major areas of Negro-white tension and conflict: one housing and the other jobs.

It must be stated first that both whites and Negroes have been in desperate need of housing. Nevertheless, two well-established methods have been employed in Detroit to control the space within which