

A PURE SPACE TO BE MEXICAN: ETHNIC MEXICANS AND THE  
MEXICO-U.S. SOCCER RIVALRY, 1990-2002

by

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For Nito, you will always be my favorite soccer player.  
For Vale, one more reason to finish.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the soccer rivalry between Mexico and the United States that has been evolving since the early 1990s. Neither Mexico nor the United States are soccer powerhouse nations, yet their rivalry is arguably one of the most passionate contests in the world. For the Mexican National team the rivalry has become a struggle to maintain dominance and power in one of the few arenas where Mexico traditionally has had an advantage. The ability of the United States to challenge Mexican hegemony has intensified the rivalry. Although the United States has been able to score some victories inside the field, acceptance in their home venues has been elusive. When playing against Mexico, even as the host team, the United States is consistently treated as the visiting team by the ethnic Mexicans living in the United States who compose the majority of the spectators. The rivalry has increased as a result of ethnic Mexicans' overt preference for the Mexican National team.

In the U.S. public sphere, ethnic Mexicans have been segregated, discriminated against, economically marginalized and considered invisible. Outside of the stadium, ethnic Mexicans in general have been sidelined by U.S. society. Inside the stadium, they have made their presence known and have become highly visible. By chanting for the Mexican team, wearing the colors of *El Tri*, and carrying the Mexican flag, the fans have asserted their identity and heritage.

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## PROLOGUE

Although I was born and raised in Puerto Rico and I have lived most of my adult life in the United States, from 1996 to 1998 I resided in vibrant Mexico City. It was there that I took my first steps towards what is now a full blown love affair with *fútbol*-soccer. It was April 13 of 1997 that forever sealed my fate. That day I had the opportunity of attending one of the world's largest stadiums, the *Azteca*, for the classification game in which Mexico played Jamaica on the road to the 1998 World Cup in France. The final score was 6-0. I will never forget the feeling of being in that sea of red, white and green; of losing my voice because I yelled "goal", so loud, so many times. Every time the Mexican national team, affectionately known as "El Tri", scored; the *Azteca* roared.

Driving up the street *La Calzada de Tlalpan* with my stepfather, who is a Mexican national, I kept wondering what to expect. This was not my first soccer game, but it was the first time I was going to watch the Mexican National team. The closer we got to the *Azteca* the more obvious it became that El Tri was going to play. The streets were crowded with people, wearing red or green or white or all of the colors together. Mexican flags were everywhere. I displayed mine from the window of the car. My stepfather honked every time a passing car had a Mexican flag; he honked his horn often. When we finally arrived, the outside of the stadium was in an uproar. Vendors were everywhere. They sold flags, horns, large noise makers called *matracas*, hats, jerseys, scarves, key chains, towels, soccer balls, and every conceivable object that could be emblazoned with the colors of the flag or the national emblem. Other vendors sold food: *tacos*, *tortas*, *pozole*, *tamales*, *elotes con crema*, *chicharron con chile*, and even hot dogs and

hamburgers, Mexican style of course.<sup>1</sup> As we walked up to the entrance we were accosted by vendors selling souvenirs, food, offering to have our faces painted and even “scalped” tickets. I finally succumbed to one of the vendors and bought a horn, even though I knew I would not be able to play it.

Once inside the stadium, the festive ambiance was palpable. People chatter, yell, sing, and discuss the forthcoming game, always attempting to guess the score. The now traditional wave around the stadium made its way around a couple of times to pass the time until the initial whistle.<sup>2</sup> We goodheartedly participated as well joining in the traditional *porras* (chants), “chiquiti-boom, a-la-bin-boom-bam, chitiqui-boom, a-la-bin-boom-bam, a-la-vio, a-la-vao, Mexico, Mexico, ra-ra-ra!” Even to this day, the enormity of the stadium never ceases to astound me. I remember thinking that in a few hours I will be part of the 114,000 souls that will fill the stadium. The gargantuan amount of people the Azteca can seat plus the altitude of Mexico City make this venue one of the most difficult stadiums in the world for visiting teams to play in. But it also allows for the drama of soccer to be multiplied and intensified, as the vociferous crowd “oles” the opponent, harasses the visiting goalie and adulates their beloved Tri.<sup>3</sup> Once the game started and the goals started coming, the *fiesta* began. It was an unbelievable experience, one that left a long lasting impression.

I don’t know any Puerto Ricans that like soccer as much as me, except maybe my dad, and he was also a late bloomer. I do know that like the thousands of Mexicans that cross the border into the United States, when I returned to the United States I brought my passion of the

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<sup>1</sup> These foods are traditionally sold in metro and bus stops all over Mexico City. Vendors usually setup with large tarps creating tunnels over the sidewalks that lead to metro entrances and large multiple bus stops.

<sup>2</sup> The “wave”, a maneuver in which various sections of the crowd stand and sit alternatively, was actually “invented” in Mexico. It was in the Azteca during the Mexico 1986 World Cup that the wave made its debut.

<sup>3</sup> Crowds at soccer games will usually shout “Ole” when the visiting team is unable to retrieve the ball from the home team. The expression references the actions of a bullfighter baiting the bull during the bullfight.



game back with me. I know that for many *Latinos*, also like me, who were born with a U.S. passport, the love of soccer is a way to reconnect and maintain those cultural markers of identity. So in a way, even though I have never held Mexican citizenship nor can claim Mexican ancestry, through soccer I live the transnational experience. Soccer, then, helps me negotiate the space between the culture in which I live and the culture to which I feel I belong. Soccer games help me maintain and reaffirm my *Latino* identity. The love of soccer does that and much more. My love of soccer was the inspiration for this project.



Figure 1, Author in Azteca Stadium prior to a match

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**“THIS IS THE BIGGEST GAME THAT HAS EVER TAKEN PLACE**  
**BETWEEN THESE TWO COUNTRIES”<sup>4</sup>**  
**INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOCCER IN MEXICO**  
**AND THE UNITED STATES**

In February of 1998 the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum was filled to the brim with approximately 91,000 screaming fans, a rare occurrence for a soccer game in the United States. According to reports the crowd booed “The Star-Spangled Banner” and instead of supporting the “home team” the crowd showered them with beer and pelted them with rocks.<sup>5</sup> This was not a reaction against the team’s unsatisfactory performance, although they did lose the match 0-1, but was an unequivocal show of support for the “visiting team”; the Mexican National Team. The pro-Mexican crowd at this game was not an isolated occurrence, the Mexico v. United States matches, particularly those played in states with high Latino populations like California or Texas, had consistently attracted large crowds and considerable media attention.<sup>6</sup> Controversy developed because the majority of spectators were waving the “wrong flag”; instead of pledging allegiance to the red, white and blue of the United States, the fans vociferously supported the red, white and green of Mexico. The bitter soccer rivalry that has grown between the United States and Mexico is due in part to this phenomenon. For Anglos, both players and fans, it was an

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Sampson quoted in John Wilken, “U.S. or Mexico? Many Houses Divided,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 16 June 2002, A1.

<sup>5</sup> John J. Miller, “Becoming An American,” *The New York Times*, 26 May 1998, 21. Rigoberto Cervantez, “Extremos del Fanatismo,” *La Opinion*, 18 February 1998, 1C.

<sup>6</sup> Recent examples include the game between the United States and Denmark played January 21<sup>st</sup> in Carson, California in front of crowd of 10,000. The United States against Guatemala game played in Frisco, Texas on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007 only drew a crowd of 10,000. In comparison, when the United States played Mexico in Glendale, Arizona on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, there was a crowd of 62,000. According to Univision (one of the largest Spanish language television broadcasting companies), this game also was the second most watched television event by Hispanics in the United States. The first was Mexico v. Argentina in the 2006 World Cup.

affront to be treated as visitors when playing at home. For ethnic Mexicans<sup>7</sup> living in the United States, these matches have been a safe space in which they could assert their cultural heritage and become visible to the society at large.<sup>8</sup>

In the U. S. public sphere, ethnic Mexicans have been segregated, discriminated against, economically dominated, and invisible.<sup>9</sup> Outside the stadium, ethnic Mexicans in general have been marginalized by U.S. society. Inside the stadium, they have made their presence felt and been highly visible. Sports, soccer in particular, has served as a vehicle for ethnic Mexicans, either as participants or spectators, to mitigate the invisibility that they experience in other areas of their lives. It has also served to reaffirm their identity and cultural heritage within a society that generally tends to disparage them. By rooting for the Mexican team, carrying the Mexican flag, and wearing the national colors of red, white and green, the fans have asserted their identity and heritage. These displays do not necessarily evoke any political loyalties to the Mexican state. They do not necessarily mean that ethnic Mexicans want to return to or live in Mexico. They also reveal that not all ethnic Mexicans, whether born in the United States or immigrants, aspire to complete cultural assimilation into U.S. society. Rather, going to the stadium and showing support for the Mexican National team becomes a rallying point, a place for ethnic Mexicans to come together and affirm a collective identity. This collective ethnic Mexican identity defies national borders, geographic location or migratory status in the United States. These displays of

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<sup>7</sup> I will use the term ethnic Mexicans to refer to all the different migratory-status groups of Mexicans living in the United States. Although it is imperative not to ignore the importance of legal/illegal categories within the Mexican community, it is precisely my argument that these differences recede inside the soccer stadium.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Arreola, ed., *Hispanic Places, Latino Spaces* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Enrique C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa, eds., *Latino LA: Transformations, Communities and Activism* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press: 2005); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Ernesto Chavez, “*Mi Raza Primero!*” (*My People First!*): *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

fervent devotion and loyalty towards the Mexican National Team emphasize that the team is a symbol not only of cultural and ethnic pride but is what allows ethnic Mexicans in the United States to publicly demonstrate it.

### **Historiography**

It has only been since the late 1960s, with the wide-spread usage and acceptance of social history approaches, that sports in the United States have been explored within academia for their social function or political potential.<sup>10</sup> Popular sports like baseball and football have been the subject of insightful correlations between sport and society. For example, baseball is often the lens through which the singularity of U.S. society and history has been examined. Soccer does not have the mass appeal of baseball, nor American football. Generally, the writings about American soccer have concentrated on explaining the basics of the game, putting forth coaching manuals, and providing a few quantitative histories of the U.S. national teams or the various professional leagues.<sup>11</sup> The historiography that goes beyond the statistics addresses almost exclusively the levels of popularity and the demographic distribution of the sport's interest.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Richard C. Crepeau, *Baseball: America's Diamond Mind* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); Allen Guttman, *From ritual to record: the nature of modern sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Benjamin G. Rader, *In its own image: how television transformed sports* (New York: Free Press, 1984); Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: the role of boxing in American society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); John T. Talamini and Charles H. Page, eds., *Sport and Society: An Anthology* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973); David Voigt, *America through baseball* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976); David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997), these are only a few of the historians that have made and continue to make substantial contributions to the field of American sport history.

<sup>11</sup> For the most part journalists, not historians, have written about soccer in the United States. Among these Paul Gardner is probably the journalist with more major contributions and lengthier career. His work includes, *Nice Guys Finish Last: Sport and the American Life* (St. Martins Press, 1975); *The Simplest Game: The Intelligent fan's guide to the world of soccer* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1996) and a collection of his columns entitled *Soccertalk: Life under the spell of the round ball* (Chicago: Masters Press, 1999). Colin Jose, the official historian of the National Soccer Hall of Fame, has contributed two volumes of statistical data on American soccer, *American Soccer League, 1921-1931: The golden years of American Soccer* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998) and *The United States and World Cup Competition: an encyclopedic history of the United States in international competition* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> David L. Andrews et al., "Soccer, Race and Suburban Space," in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meaning of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Peter Bodo, *Soccer: America's New Game* (Walker Publishing, Co., 1978); Francisco Delgado, "Major League Soccer, Constitution and (the) Latino Audience(s)," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 23, no. 1 (February 1999) : 41-54;

In the United States, soccer has had a long history, if not a consistent record of popularity. The Boston Oneida Club played some form of soccer in the city's Commons from 1862 to 1865. The 1869 match between Princeton and Rutgers, the first intercollegiate encounter, was played according to the British Association Football rules. There was a professional league established in the U.S. during the 1920s but it only lasted about a decade. In the 1950 World Cup, the U.S. national team delivered what was arguably the biggest upset in soccer history by defeating England 1-0. It was not until the 1970s that soccer developed a respectable following in the United States. When the North American Soccer League's (NASL) New York Cosmos signed Brazilian super star Pelé, soccer's popularity surged. But signing Pelé was not enough and the league, due to economic troubles, collapsed in 1984.

At the same time that soccer was popular, many books were published concerning the sport. Many, as mentioned before, were coaching guides and nothing more than the basic explanation of the rules. Some predicted a bright and long future for soccer in the United States.<sup>13</sup> It was argued that the key to soccer success was continued support from the television media, contracts that would financially help the league and expose the sport to the American public.<sup>14</sup> The thousands of boys and girls then playing soccer would continue to support the sport as adults both as players and spectators.<sup>15</sup> Kyle Rote, Jr.'s *Complete Book of Soccer* for example, offered an equally cheery prediction of success. Rote, who is probably the most recognized American NASL player, believed that the long-term success of soccer would be predicated on

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Andrew Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Len Oliver, "The Ethnic Legacy in American Soccer," *SASH Historical Quarterly* (1996); Kyle Rote, Jr., *Kyle Rote, Jr.'s Complete Book of Soccer* with Basil Kane (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Ted Smits, *The Game of Soccer* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968); Jerry Trecker, *The Magic of Soccer* (New York: Atheneum, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Ted Smits, *The Game of Soccer* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968); Peter Bodo, *Soccer: America's New Game* (Walker Publishing, Co., 1978); Kyle Rote, Jr., *Kyle Rote, Jr.'s Complete Book of Soccer* with Basil Kane (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Ted Smits, *The Game of Soccer* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Bodo, *Soccer: America's New Game* (Walker Publishing, Co., 1978).

the support the United States Soccer Federation could give the men's national team. Rote maintained that international success would help make the sport a permanent fixture in the American sports landscape. He also emphasized the physical benefits of soccer; how it taught teamwork, and the need for players to let coaches guide them.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, there were others who focused on the major obstacles soccer faced in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Some criticized the way the NASL promoted the game, arguing that sale tactics were too flashy for the real beauty of the game to be appreciated. In *The Simplest Game*, journalist Paul Garner argued that there was no "soccer culture" in suburban America to nurture the love of the game. Furthermore, Garner strongly criticized the emphasis on the physical and tactical aspect of the American style, as well as the tendency to over coach players. He contended that it produced dull soccer that would further alienate potential fans.<sup>18</sup> In the end, time proved the skeptics right. With the collapse of the NASL in 1984, soccer all but disappeared from the national sports scene.

The next time soccer made big headlines was a decade later with the United States hosting the 1994 World Cup, the formation of Major League Soccer (MLS) in 1996, and the Women's national team winning the second World Cup title in 1999. Despite all the headlines, soccer once again failed to take root as a major sport. At this point the historiography of soccer shifted to the question of "why", despite the success of the Women's team and the 1994 World Cup, soccer was still not a major sport in the United States. As is customary in each World Cup year, reference guides introduce newly participating countries or cover a special theme about a return participant and the 1994 U.S. World Cup was no exception. *Hosts and Champions:*

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<sup>16</sup> Kyle Rote, Jr., *Kyle Rote, Jr.'s Complete Book of Soccer* with Basil Kane (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> Jerry Trecker, *The Magic of Soccer* (New York: Atheneum, 1982); Paul Garner, *The Simplest Game* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Paul Garner, *The Simplest Game* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976).

*Soccer Cultures, National identities and the USA World Cup* is a collection of essays from across disciplines discussing ten participating countries. In the essay “USA and the World Cup: American Nativism and the Rejection of the People’s Game”, John Sugden offered both a brief recollection of soccer in the United States and reasons for the game’s lack of popularity even in the advent of hosting a World Cup. For Sugden, soccer in the United States would always lose out to the corporate interests of the big three: baseball, American football and basketball. He argued that the “conspiracy theory” is made feasible by a largely apathetic public that seemingly had no interest in soccer.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Sugden argued that during the turn of the nineteenth century when British “interests” spread soccer around the world, the United States was experiencing a peak time of nativism and xenophobia. Whereas other countries’ merchants and middle management successfully introduced soccer to the working classes, in the United States soccer became permanently associated with immigrants.<sup>20</sup> It did not help, according to Sugden, that a small contingency of socialist and communist organizations adopted the game as a rejection of the capitalist elements represented in baseball. Consequently, soccer not only became associated with immigrants but was also labeled a “communist sport.” Ultimately, what sealed the coffin for soccer was its abandonment by the second generation of immigrants who preferred the more American sport of baseball.<sup>21</sup> For Sugden this allowed the initial “crowding out” of soccer from the American sporting landscape and accounted for the continued failure of soccer in the United States.

Following the argument of soccer’s continual perception as a foreign sport, Andrew Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman have expanded on the issue of soccer’s unpopularity with

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<sup>19</sup> John Sugden, “USA and the World Cup: American nativism and the rejection of the people’s game,” in *Hosts and Champions: Soccer cultures, national identities and the USA World Cup* (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1994), 221.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

American audiences. In *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*, published in 2001, the authors argue that the same characteristics that make the United States unique in politics and economy also affect its sports culture.<sup>22</sup> To the authors, the United States is exceptional because, in contrast to the rest of the world, baseball is the hegemonic sport. For immigrants, baseball served as an “Americanizing” agent; a way to express assimilation. While other sports, such as American football and basketball, have been able to challenge and share baseball’s premiership, soccer has not had success “crossing over” despite multiple attempts at establishing the sport. According to the authors, it is soccer’s perceived “foreignness” that greatly impedes the sport’s success and American exceptionalism has not fostered an environment in which a “foreign” sport can grow.<sup>23</sup>

Others have found that soccer has enjoyed recognition in some segments of society even though it has not achieved national mass acceptance. In the essay entitled “Soccer, Race and Suburban Space,” David L. Andrews, Robert Pitter, Detlev Zwick, and Darren Ambrose argued that soccer in the United States has become a marker of white middle class identity.<sup>24</sup> To the authors, soccer gave suburbanites an alternative to sports such as basketball in which they would be in direct contact with African Americans and Latinos. In other words, just like residential white flight created a homogenous suburban space for whites to escape from racialized urban space, youth soccer leagues provided a place for whites to separate themselves. In addition, soccer did not have a long tradition and entrenched cultural values like American football with its hyper-masculinity. For middle-class Americans, soccer thus represented a sport that could be

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> David L. Andrews et al., “Soccer, Race and Suburban Space,” in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meaning of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).



molded to display their values: fun, exercise, teamwork, gender-equality, non-competitiveness, non-violence, and fair play.

Len Oliver, in his essay “The Ethnic Legacy in American Soccer” published in 1996, argued that American soccer has both benefited and has been damaged by its overtly ethnic and foreign association.<sup>25</sup> For Oliver, the ethnic or foreign influence over soccer has had benefits. For example, teaching Americans how to play the game beyond the basic rules has fallen almost exclusively to immigrants. The author states that immigrants have taught Americans how to “speak” soccer and to be passionate about the game. Yet it has also been this ethnic influence which has contributed to soccer’s marginalization in the United States. According to Oliver, the persistent association of soccer with ethnic and/or immigrant groups has directly led to the majority of American sports fans to view soccer as a foreign sport.<sup>26</sup> At a local level especially, the majority of adult soccer clubs have been overwhelmingly ethnic, such as the Chicago Latin American Soccer Association, which has organized soccer clubs in the greater Chicago area since 1967.<sup>27</sup> Although the author acknowledged that this factor has enabled soccer to “survive” in the United States, it has also hampered soccer’s potential for crossing into the mainstream.

Soccer has “survived” in the United States mostly thanks to the millions of Latino residents who follow the sport.<sup>28</sup> Yet little academic research has been dedicated to soccer participation and the spectatorship of Latinos. Indeed, the very recent publication of the

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<sup>25</sup> Len Oliver, “The Ethnic Legacy in American Soccer,” *SASH Historical Quarterly* (1996).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Juan Javier Pescador “Vamos Taximaroa! Mexican/Chicano Soccer Associations and Transnational/Translocal Communities, 1967-2002,” *Latino Studies Journal* 2, no. 3 (December 2004) : 352-376. Pescador argues that the soccer clubs do more than recreate traditional culture from the home countries. Beyond this, the clubs aid in the immigration and acculturation process by providing civic, educational, social and networking activities. The clubs also help negotiate the use of public space. He states that most leagues are created in response to discriminatory practices in the predominantly white leagues. He also argues that soccer is a fairly new and urban sport, especially in comparison to baseball.

<sup>28</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are approximately forty-four million Hispanic residents in the United States. U.S. Census Bureau, “Hispanic or Latino Origin By Specific Origin.” 2006 American Community Survey. [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en) .

anthology *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life*, has added to a small body of literature which has predominantly focused on baseball.<sup>29</sup> Baseball historian Samuel O. Regalado in his essay (included in the aforementioned anthology) “Invisible Identity: Mexican American Sport and Chicano Historiography” complains of how Chicano scholars who have explored every possible aspect of Mexicans in the United States have consistently ignored sports in the “barrio”.<sup>30</sup> Regalado argues for the primacy of sports in a community which was often galvanized by sporting events and in which sports helped fight negative stereotypes. Regalado writes, “Throughout their history as a people Mexican Americans have proudly displayed their contributions and achievements in sports. Their love of and involvement in athletic competition has been universal.”<sup>31</sup> In the same way as baseball, soccer has helped fight negative stereotypes and served as a spring board for both the individual player and community pride. As spectators and participants, Mexican Americans have made noteworthy contributions to sports in the United States.

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<sup>29</sup> Jose M. Alamillo, “Masculinity, Racial Struggle, and Labor Politics in Southern California 1930-1950,” in *Sports Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture*. (New York: New York University Press, 2002). Alamillo presents baseball in the southern California Mexican American community as a vehicle for social status, escaping poor economic conditions and as a buffer against racial discrimination. William H. Beezley, “The Rise of Baseball in Mexico and the first Valenzuela,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 4, (1985): 3-13. Beezley traces the history of baseball in Mexico which is rooted in the Porfirian dictatorship’s emphasis on foreign incursion into Mexican society. Alan M. Klein, *Baseball on the Border: The Tale of Two Laredos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). The author uses ethnography and anthropological research to explore the relationship of baseball to nationalism and “invented tradition” in two border towns, Laredo (US) and Nuevo Laredo (Mex). Michael M. Oleksak, *Baseball: Latin Americans and the Grand Old Game*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Masters Press, 1991). Combining first hand experience and observations with research the author presents a history of baseball in Latin America and Latin American players within US baseball. Samuel O. Regalado, *Viva Beisbol! : Latin Major Leaguers and Their Special Hunger* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). This seminal work in baseball history focuses on the ‘special hunger’ of Latin American baseball players. The phrase, borrowed from Cuban Octavio “Cookie” Rojas, reflects the huge difficulties of Latin players to “make it” and the drive that allows them to do it. Richard Santillan, “Mexican Baseball Teams in the Midwest, 1916-1965: The Politics of Cultural Survival and Civil Rights,” *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies*, no. 7 (2002): 131-151. Santillan shows how baseball was encouraged by parents to learn leadership skills and survival tactics.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel O. Regalado, “Invisible Identity: Mexican American Sport and Chicano Historiography,” in *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life*, ed. Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 233-245.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

Francisco Delgado, in his essay “Major League Soccer, Constitution and (the) Latino Audience(s),”<sup>32</sup> argued for the importance of the Latino audience to the establishing of MLS. More significantly, he showed how the MLS worked to positively change the image of Latinos, especially in Los Angeles, against the political backdrop of the increasingly hostile supporters of California’s anti-immigrant policy “Proposition 187”<sup>33</sup>. According to Delgado, against this climate of Latino “Othering” and hostility, the MLS still decided to embrace the Latino community and established in Los Angeles one of the most successful teams of the league, the L.A. Galaxy. The MLS recognized the potential of Latino consumers and actively pursued them as a fan base. For Delgado, this was an instance in which even a smaller sport like soccer could positively influence or change a politically hostile environment for Latinos.

Mexico, the arch rival of the United States and the ethnic Mexicans preferred team of choice, has a surprisingly limited soccer historiography as well. Although soccer is presently considered Mexico’s national sport, this is a relatively new phenomenon in the country’s sporting history.<sup>34</sup> Some historians argue that the true consolidation of soccer as a national sport did not occur until the country hosted the 1970 World Cup.<sup>35</sup> Until then soccer was strictly a capital city endeavor with a few peripheral teams based in the cities of Guadalajara, Toluca and Pachuca. Soccer had its start in the city of Pachuca when a group of English miners formed the

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<sup>32</sup> Francisco Delgado, “Major League Soccer, Constitution and (the) Latino Audience(s),” *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 23, no. 1 (February 1999) : 41-54.

<sup>33</sup> Proposition 187 was a ballot initiative intended to deny illegal immigrants access to social services such as health care and food stamps. For a full version of Proposition 187 see <http://www.americanpatrol.com/REFERENCE/prop187text.html>

<sup>34</sup> During the Porfirian dictatorship sports and leisure were still activities confined to the small high and middle classes, most of which focused in on golf, polo, rugby and cycling. See William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and other episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1987).

<sup>35</sup> Juan Javier Pescador, “Los Heroes del Domingo: Soccer, Borders, Social Spaces in Great Lakes Mexican Communities, 1940-1970,” in *Mexican Americans and Sport: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life*, ed. Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 80.

Pachuca Athletic Club in 1900.<sup>36</sup> The first championship was played in 1902 with teams that were comprised of British players. After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, a second phase of Mexican soccer conceded the foreign dominance of teams and players from the British to the Spanish.<sup>37</sup> Only the capital city team, America, formed by a group of students in 1916, had the distinction of being the sole team composed of all Mexican players. This distinction was later passed to Club Guadalajara which has maintained this tradition since its inception in the professional league.<sup>38</sup> The Federation of Mexican Soccer (Federación Mexicana de Fútbol, “Femexfut”) was founded in 1927 but it was not until 1943 that a professional league was established. Soccer’s popularity in Mexico grew exponentially in the second half of the twentieth century. Such much so, that during a soccer Panamerican Tournament in 1956, government officials had to convince the television network *Telesistema* Mexico (later *Televisa*, one of the largest media conglomerates in Latin America) to televise the matches because there was no venue large enough to hold all the spectators wanting to watch the games live.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it is a testament to soccer’s popularity in Mexico that one of biggest soccer stadiums in the world is located here; the 114,000-seater Aztec stadium, popularly known as the “Colossus of Santa Ursula.”

Yet for all its popularity, little scholarly work has focused on Mexican soccer, either at the club or national level. Akin to the United States, journalists have mostly chronicled the evolution of soccer in Mexico.<sup>40</sup> Carlos Calderon Cardoso, in *El Estadio Azteca: Historia del*

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.pachucaenlinea.com/tuzos/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=3>

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.femexfut.org.mx/portav2/\(isocxeqecm55eo2xbtf54s45\)/default.aspx](http://www.femexfut.org.mx/portav2/(isocxeqecm55eo2xbtf54s45)/default.aspx)

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.chivascampeon.com/paginas/historia\\_origenes.php](http://www.chivascampeon.com/paginas/historia_origenes.php)  
<http://www.esmas.com/clubamerica/homenuevo/>

<sup>39</sup> Carlos Calderon Cardoso, *El Estadio Azteca: Historia del Coloso de Santa Ursula* (México D.F.: Editorial Clio, 2001), 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> Editorial Clio published a serial entitled *Crónicas del Fútbol Mexicano* (Mexican Soccer Chronicles) that encompassed the history of Mexican soccer from 1896 until 2001. Divided in four tomes, various journalists wrote a narrative of Mexican soccer, peppered with legends, anecdotes and great pictures.

*Coloso de Santa Ursula*, details the history of Mexican soccer through a study of its venues. He initially describes the first venue for a Spanish team, Club España, as little more than a field enclosed by a wooden fence of forty centimeters in height.<sup>41</sup> Next were concrete stadiums with seating and other amenities such as bathrooms. These stadiums were built after the institution of a professional league in Mexico, and represented the consolidation of soccer in the country; no longer were teams in their majority composed of foreign players nor were they owned by foreign entities, thus allowing Mexicans to pursue and develop their own brand and style of soccer. The construction of the monumental Aztec Stadium was pursued for two main reasons: *Televisa* owner Emiliano Azcarraga wanted to give his recently acquired team, Club America, a new home and both Azcarraga and Femexfut president Guillermo Cañedo wanted to bring the 1970 World Cup to Mexico.<sup>42</sup> The stadium was the main venue for the 1970 and 1986 World Cups and is currently utilized for numerous sporting and entertainment events, including American football games. According to Cardoso, the Aztec stadium is the cathedral of soccer in Mexico, the maximum symbol of the country's devotion to the world's sport. Being one of the best soccer venues in the world, it is also a monument to what Mexicans can achieve.<sup>43</sup> Although Cardoso uses the venues to tell the story of Mexican soccer, he does not go beyond the basic narrative. His rendering of the evolution of stadiums reads more like a tribute to the late Emiliano Azcarraga than a comprehensive history of Mexican soccer. It would have been an important contribution to the understanding of soccer to Mexicans if Cardoso had gone beyond the architectural magnitude of the stadium and showed why the Colossus of Santa Ursula represents such a special place in the hearts of Mexicans.

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<sup>41</sup> Carlos Calderon Cardoso, *El Estadio Azteca*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-20.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89. This is not only the opinion of Cardoso, but many others within the sporting world, El Azteca is counted along with other top soccer stadiums such as Maracanã in Brazil, and Wembley in England. See *Soccer's Most Wanted: the top 10 book of clumsy keepers, clever crosses, and outlandish oddities* by John Snyder.

Surface accounts of the sport concentrate on the Mexican National Team, popularly known as *El Tri*. Of these, the more comprehensive is *Triunfos y Tristezas del Equipo Tricolor: Historia de la Selección Mexicana de Fútbol (1923-1995)* compiled by journalist Roberto García Pimentel. This volume includes all line-ups, scores, and venues of all the games played by the National team from 1923 until 1995. Additionally, the author includes small synopses of the games, anecdotes and facts of interest of particular matches.<sup>44</sup> The photographic essay, *Toda una Selección: Mexico* with texts by Igancio Matus and the photography of David Leah, concentrates on the eras of Cesar Menotti and Miguel Mejia Baron as the head coaches. Again, the text does not extend beyond simple narrative but the photographs are truly impressive. The photographs of the players and games show the various ways soccer helps to reaffirm Mexican nationalism and identity. For example, the colorful clothes of superstar goalie Jorge Campos made the Mexican National Team a recognizable entity to the international soccer community.

The small quantity of scholarly examination of Mexican soccer has concentrated on club soccer. Anthropologist Roger Magazine explores the idea that most club teams in the Mexican *Primera División* (First Division) have social associations or a set of values that identifies each team. In his text, *Golden and Blue like my Heart: Masculinity, Youth, and Power among Soccer Fans in Mexico City*, he studies the behavior of the *porras* or organized fans that cheer for the UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico) team, Pumas. Whereas Club America represents wealth and power, Club Guadalajara are protectors of “authentic” Mexican identity and Club Cruz Azul is associated with the working class, Pumas represents youth culture, uncorrupted by the social and political *clientelism* present in Mexican society.<sup>45</sup> He argues that

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<sup>44</sup> Roberto Garcia Pimentel, *Triunfos y Tristezas del Equipo Tricolor: Historia de la Selección Mexicana de Fútbol (1923-1995)* (México, D.F.: Edamex, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> Roger Magazine, *Golden and Blue like my Heart: Masculinity, Youth, and Power among Soccer Fans in Mexico City* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007), 3-43.

the distinctive manner of cheering that Pumas' *porras* have "guided by something internal, by emotions and not dependence on others, as in *clientelism*, nor by external objective rules or logic as in democracy or the free market."<sup>46</sup> Magazine contends that this is a product of the current instability of Mexican economy and political climate.

The fragmentation of the political hegemony that the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) has exercised in Mexico for over eighty years and the fragmentation of the Mexican economic neo-liberal experiment well under way gives room for what Magazine calls "competing social projects" or visions of what the future of Mexican society could and should be. In other words, the PRI's declining ability to define the nation allows room for other groups to present models for contemporary Mexican political and civil society. The Pumas gives these youths a place to negotiate their particular vision of society and how to take it from theory into practical daily exercise. Soccer in Mexico allows this flexibility because unlike other Latin American countries such as Argentina, the game neither has a long traditional association with a particular set of values nor does it have a long tradition of State intervention or state-assigned values to the sport.<sup>47</sup> Although it is true that Mexico's soccer tradition and popularity does not extend beyond the second half of the twentieth century, the claim of no intervention or vested interests in soccer on behalf of the Mexican state seems a little stretched if not properly developed. After all, Mexico has had the distinction of hosting two World Cups and the 1968 Olympic games, in which the National team placed fourth, one the highest placements for the team in international competition. That is not to say that Magazine's arguments regarding Pumas fans' distinctive identity and soccer as a place to negotiate this identity are completely unfounded. Rather, in the context of the PRI's declining hegemony over Mexican political and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 17.

social climate soccer provides such a visible space precisely because it is such an important part of the national project and vision. Moreover, it can be argued that soccer is such an essential symbol of the nation that ethnic Mexicans living in the United States appropriate it to express their distinctive ethnic and cultural identity.

### **Theoretical Approach**

For ethnic Mexicans in the United States soccer has been an important way to express their chosen cultural identity both as individuals and as a community. Juan Javier Pescador advances a similar argument in his recent essay, “*Los Heroes Del Domingo: Soccer, Borders, Social Spaces in Great Lakes Mexican Communities, 1940-1970.*” For Pescador, soccer aided the community at various levels: the physical occupation of space, solidification of community along social and economic ties, and provided a platform for teams to compete on equal footing with other ethnic teams.<sup>48</sup> The ability of soccer leagues to procure fields, according to the author, “manifested their right to public facilities.”<sup>49</sup> The Sunday game not only brought ninety minutes of entertainment, but this time also opened up a physical place in which Mexican American families could gather, socialize, and eat outside of their homes and/or barrios; public space that would often be restricted to them in any other context. Soccer also facilitated the solidifying of the community by providing a public forum for economic exchange and socialization. For example, Pescador describes the Sunday games as a place where food vendors would sell their products to the families gathered to watch the games and small merchants would sponsor teams as a manner of advertising their particular business or product.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Juan Javier Pescador, “Los Heroes del Domingo: Soccer, Borders, Social Spaces in Great Lakes Mexican Communities, 1940-1970,” in *Mexican Americans and Sport: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life*, ed. Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 73-88.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



Oftentimes the teams would compete against all Anglo teams or other ethnicities which gave Mexican Americans a chance to disprove disparaging stereotypes and obtain the respect of their opponents, thus providing a positive and rewarding experience for the individual and the community.<sup>51</sup> It can be argued that soccer allowed for this “equal footing” which was not existent in hegemonic sports such as baseball, precisely because soccer has always been a minor sport in the United States. Thus, soccer has historically been a space in which ethnic Mexicans have been able to compete and be visible. Soccer was not only a great equalizer in the field, but equivalence in participation was also present within the teams. Pescador writes, “U.S. born Mexicans, long time and economically stable Mexican immigrants and recent arrivals could participate in clubs equally.” Soccer has then represented a space of equal access to all members of the community. The ninety minutes of game time and all activities surrounding the game help to unify the community, and mitigate other divisional factors such as socioeconomic status or legal status.

Soccer also has the potential to connect people across geographical spaces. Pescador’s focus away from the traditional Southwest (Los Angeles) to the Midwest (Chicago-Detroit) shows that the Mexican American soccer “experience” is not confined to a specific location, but that it is an experience that can be replicated. I will thus argue that this enables the Mexican National team to play for large crowds in Los Angeles, and find significant support in other regions of the United States. French anthropologist Christian Bromberger in a lecture given at the University of Buenos Aires entitled “Meanings of the Popular Passion for Soccer Clubs” explained why soccer was such a popular sport around the world and argues that soccer is an

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

example of how globalization functions.<sup>52</sup> He highlights mega events such as the World Cup, the trade of players from every corner of the world, and the similitude of the “hincha” or soccer fan across national and regional boundaries as examples of how soccer, at least in the last thirty-five years, has a global impact both socially and economically.<sup>53</sup> This is congruent with my conclusion that soccer’s flexibility allows crowds to recreate an experience without having to return to a specific geographic location, or have been there in the first place. When the Mexican National Team plays in Los Angeles, the crowd is able to recreate an environment similar to when the El Tri plays at its home venue, the Azteca Stadium.

Bromberger’s central argument states, “This sport appears like a theatrical version under the genre of illusionist realism that reflect the values that constitute the contemporary world and without a doubt it is this caricatured force, this quality of profound acting of meta social commentary to what this sport owes its great popularity.”<sup>54</sup> For the author, soccer reunites many of the essential qualities and values of our contemporary society. For example, the appearance of social mobility is reflected in the majority of professional league’s relegation system. This system allows for the possibility of smaller clubs to “ascend” to that particular league’s top ring of competition while “descending” the teams that do not accumulate a stipulated average of points in one or various seasons. Bromberger claims that this process demonstrates the over-emphatic attention contemporary society gives achievement and merit.<sup>55</sup> Under this system, any club theoretically has a chance at mobility, thus ascending to the top tier of competition and even having the opportunity of winning. In reality, a few of the smaller clubs can achieve this and even if they do their stay is usually a fleeting one. Larger clubs have both the money and

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<sup>52</sup> Christian Bromberger, *Significación de la Pasión Popular por los Clubes de Fútbol* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Libros del Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2001), 19.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

influence to permanently keep afloat in the leagues even if confronted with a few bad seasons. It could be argued that soccer, like contemporary society, alludes to an achievable social mobility that in reality is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, it can be said that for ethnic Mexicans living in the United States, soccer provides a parallel to what they undergo in their daily lives. The illusion of the “American Dream” like soccer’s relegation system hides the harsh socioeconomic realities confronted by many ethnic Mexicans. Yet, like the smaller clubs who fight relegation against infinite odds, the draw of a better life fans the flames of hope in hundred of thousands of Mexican immigrants and those who already live in the United States.

Bromberger also focuses on the soccer fan. He insists that the soccer fan is a “modern” person, very much aware of the constant media attention that surrounds soccer. The modern fans know they are active participants in the stands and outside the arena because they can have “space” in front of the camera before, during, and after games and television shows exists that focus just on them.<sup>56</sup> For Bromberger the extreme example of this awareness is the professional fan or the hackneyed categories of hooligans, *ultras*, or *barra bravas*.<sup>57</sup> As Bromberger rightly points out, these groups are not just violent gangs, although they are prone to violent encounters. These highly organized institutions are in charge of guarding the patrimony of the club. In completing that function whether by designing and displaying huge flags and singing songs, they pass from invisible and passive spectators to forming part of the main attraction.<sup>58</sup> They occupy a space within the soccer theater that allows them to act and interact with the other actors on the field. Although fans of the Mexican National Team are neither organized nor characterized by

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<sup>56</sup> A good example of this would be the Argentine show “El Aguante” televised weekly in that country’s sports channel TYC Sports. For an examination of how this show presents and stereotypes distinct types of fans or “hinchas” see Daniel Salerno “Apología, estigma y repression: los hinchas televisados del fútbol,” in *Hinchadas*, ed. Pablo Alabarces, (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Prometeo Libros, 2005), 129-160.

<sup>57</sup> The term hooligan is used in England, Ultras in Italy and Barras Bravas in most of Latin America. These terms are used to describe groups of fans who are fanatical in their following of a club or National Team.

<sup>58</sup> Christian Bromberger, *significación de la pasión popular por los clubes de fútbol* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Libros del Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2001), 31.

violent outbursts, they too pass from invisible and passive spectators to form part of the main attraction. It is precisely their visibility that underpins the rivalry between the U.S. and Mexican National Teams. Not only do they simply support their favorite team, but the crowd serves as a way to “remind” Anglos that they exist, live, work, and are an integral social and economic segment of U.S. society. As Bromerger argues modern soccer fans are conscious of their surroundings when attending soccer games. This is also true of the ethnic Mexicans that support en mass *El Tri*'s soccer games.

In his seminal work, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game*, sociologist Richard Giulianotti argues that “football in any setting provides us with a kind of cultural map, a metaphorical representation, which enhances our understanding of that society.”<sup>59</sup> To this end, he examines soccer in all its facets; he looks at the history of the game, ‘spectator cultures’, the business of soccer, grounds or stadia, even styles of play using examples from clubs, national teams and countries from around the world. Giulianotti contends that in societies where soccer is central, the games carry strong “symbolic and political significance,” and the binary opposition inherent in soccer aids both the games adaptability and popularity and facilitates the symbolic rivalries present in football.<sup>60</sup> In other words, rivalries in soccer are shaped, molded and nurtured from the cues of the society in which the rivalry develops. According to Giulianotti, local chauvinism, ethnicity/race, class, civil, political or international conflicts, or religious dimensions attached to soccer provide context and fuel these rivalries.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the cultural map to a particular community can be traced by looking at what fuels these rivalries. The enduring racial and class conflict present in the Fla-Flu club rivalry of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is an example of how soccer rivalries highlight tensions existent in other areas of a particular society.

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), xii.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

Flamengo represents the poor and black of the *favelas* and Fluminense the white and rich of Rio.<sup>62</sup> The socio-economic and racial tensions present in the city of Rio, in fact in all Brazil, can be “felt” through the soccer rivalry of these two teams.<sup>63</sup>

Giulianotti also argues against the idea that soccer is a means for the rich and powerful to keep social order or that the game functions as a “safety valve” for the poor masses. Instead, he suggests that soccer enables the powerless to protest, and that soccer often provides the only venue for protest. He gives the examples of apartheid in South Africa, where “football [soccer] provided one of the few legal avenues through which Africans could organize to debate and contest their marginal status” and the celebrations of Romanian fans at the country’s qualification to the 1990 World Cup that “rapidly developed into anti-government protests and rioting.”<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Giulianotti contends that in the super-globalized and hyper-commodified context of modern soccer, the game serves a purpose to myriad interests, not to just one homogenous group. From the powerful club owners, to ruling bodies, to governments, to the passing fan, to the staunchest supporter, everyone has a personal or collective stake in the game. Finally, the author argues that there is intrinsic value in the game, more than just as a tool to quiet the masses. He points to the ability of soccer to foster social solidarity. He writes, “the clubs therefore help to promote deeper forms of shared identity or ‘solidarity’ at the local, civic and national levels.”<sup>65</sup> Even when clubs are becoming more “global” sharing fandom in all corners of the world, Giulianotti contends that the clubs are still associated with a particular locality and have a home venue and audience to which they usually perform better. Thus, soccer can be used to examine the dynamics that divide, as in the case of the traditional rivalries, or

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<sup>62</sup> *Favelas* are shantytowns endemic to the large metropolises of Brazil. Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro is famously represented in the movie, *City of God*.

<sup>63</sup> See, Janet Lever’s *Soccer Madness*.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

unite, as in the case of organized supporters or faithful fans, a particular locality, community or country.

This dual quality of soccer to divide and unite can be taken from the club level to the national level with relative ease. Giulianotti writes, “nationalism within the game encapsulates the strength of national identification of specific peoples, so that particular kinds of identity are celebrated while ‘others’ are categorically excluded.”<sup>66</sup> The author does touch, albeit superficially, on how soccer can incite divergent nationalistic feelings within the same country. He writes, “internally, one ‘nation’ may house many conflicting senses of national identity.”<sup>67</sup> He concedes that this is most common in countries where soccer is not a major sport, like Australia or the United States. In the United States for example, soccer does not unify but rather fragments nationalistic feelings. He contends that this occurs in the United States in particular because soccer is supported mainly by hyphenated Americans. Thus, nationalistic feelings are not necessarily defined by geo-political boundaries.<sup>68</sup> This is particularly true for ethnic Mexicans who were born in the United States and in many cases have never even been to Mexico, yet they will still cheer for the Mexican National Team. For them, soccer is not a vehicle to unite under American patriotic fervor, but a way they can separate and distinguish themselves from or even challenge American society.

Sociologist Anthony King, in his text *The End of the Terraces: The Transformation of English Football in the 1990s* explains the political, social and economic forces that led to the dissipation of the famed terraces in English stadiums. The author uses the theories of Clifford Geertz and Antonio Gramsci as foundation to argue that soccer is indeed a ritual. He writes, “The transformation of football in the 1990s can be usefully viewed and analyzed in terms of this

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

struggle over social meanings, wherein dominant and subordinate groups have contested the values which are expressed through football.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, the social and political negotiations present in a society are reflected in how that society participates in the ritual of soccer. Soccer can then be used as a mirror of social relations and as a way to examine distributions of power. Moreover, he argues “the point is that the excitement which is induced by football intensifies the political debates or the meta-social commentary as Geertz would call it, which goes on around the game, intensifying negotiations about power and domination.”<sup>70</sup> Soccer makes visible the overt or covert tensions present in other social contexts. Although King does not explicitly argue this, it can be said that this quality of soccer can be best viewed in the context of rivalries. When clubs or national teams engage and invest in fomenting and nurturing rivalries with certain teams they are often based upon social, political or economic tensions between the two contestants. The rivalry between Mexico and the United States can be understood in this context. Soccer “intensifies” the continued negotiations of power and domination present between these two neighbors. For ethnic Mexicans, soccer provides a way to directly impact these negotiations of power. Once they step into the stadium, they become a collective entity or as they are referred to in soccer, “the twelfth player.” Inside the stadium, they transform into an influential element of the rivalry and become visible to the society around them.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided a brief historiography of soccer in general and the major writings produced about the sport in the United States and Mexico. I have also presented

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<sup>69</sup> Anthony King, *The End of the Terraces: The Transformation of English Football in the 1990s* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

theories that will bolster my arguments concerning the rivalry between Mexico and the United States. In chapter two, I will briefly provide the political and historical context for the rivalry, a context that is riddled with instances where ethnic Mexicans within the United States constantly have to negotiate space in a society that continually tries to circumscribe their civil and political life. The pro-Mexican nationalism exhibited by ethnic Mexicans within the United States is one of the key aspects that foment the rivalry. I will also argue at ways in which sports had served as an arena to express pro-Mexican nationalism as a way to protest the current socio-economic status of ethnic Mexicans. In chapter three, I will reconstruct pivotal games played in 1991, 1998 and 2002 to demonstrate the evolution of the rivalry. Although Mexico (the team, the fans, the country) has had high expectations of winning, the United States has proven to be a worthy adversary continually challenged the Mexican soccer hegemony over the region. Additionally, in this chapter I will examine the rivalry from the perspective of both the U.S. and Mexican players, and both the U.S. and Mexican media. I will argue that the political, social and cultural tensions existent between the United States and Mexico are expressed through their soccer rivalry.

Ethnic Mexican fans understand their role within the soccer spectacle, and will use this role to be seen and heard within the larger society. Whereas outside of the stadium, the geographical, social and economic space that ethnic Mexicans can occupy has been limited and restricted, as soccer fans for the Mexican National team, ethnic Mexicans become part of a spectacle that almost always gets local and national attention. In chapter four, I will look at how ethnic Mexicans use this attention to make themselves visible in a society that tries to ignore them and a country that finds their collective presence uncomfortable at best. I will also argue that ethnic Mexicans use soccer as a way to create a home space in which they can display and maintain their cultural and ethnic heritage.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**“DOESN’T ANYONE WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE US BECAUSE WE  
ARE MEXICAN?”<sup>71</sup>**  
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF ETHNIC MEXICANS AND SPORTS IN THE  
UNITED STATES**

Ethnic Mexicans are the primary Hispanic minority in the United States both in numbers and their long history as a community.<sup>72</sup> Their story often plays at the margins of the larger U. S. narrative and is usually tied to issues of immigration. From the Anglo perspective ethnic Mexicans seem a homogenous group, generically labeled “Mexican-American.” Yet their history reveals that there has been an internal struggle to define what it meant to be a Mexican or Mexican-American in the United States. Ethnic Mexicans have used immigration status, regional background, history or descent, legal status, and degree of assimilation as well as social markers, economic and racial class to categorize, include, exclude and otherwise define the ethnic Mexican community in the United States.

In this evolution of self-definition sports have also played an important role, as historian Samuel O. Regalado writes, “Sport fueled notoriety and bridged important gaps between people of Mexican heritage and the U.S. mainstream. Of equal importance, however, sport also played an instrumental role in shaping the identities of people living in rural colonias and urban barrios.”<sup>73</sup> Either as spectators or participants, ethnic Mexicans have used sports to solidify communal bonds, strengthen ethnic ties, and identify themselves as a community and

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<sup>71</sup> Natalie Ramirez, quoted in Don Normark, *Chavez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), 127.

<sup>72</sup> According to the 2000 Census a total of 37.4 million Hispanic/Latinos live in the United States, of these 66% claimed Mexican ethnic origin. see, U.S. Census Bureau, “The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 2002,” Current Population Reports, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-545.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> Samuel O. Regalado, “Invisible Identity: Mexican American Sport and Chicano Historiography”, in *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life*, ed. Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 234.

individuals. Even when the community has separated itself according to degree of assimilation or social markers, sports have traditionally been able to bridge or temporarily suspend these divisions. Ethnic Mexicans have traditionally participated in a myriad of sports like gridiron football<sup>74</sup>, basketball, *charreada* (rodeo), and even polo. It has been baseball, boxing and soccer that have captured the most attention within the Mexican community.<sup>75</sup> Of these, soccer has most recently been the sport ethnic Mexicans utilize to publicly make their presence felt and define their identity as a community.

The history of Mexicans within the United States begins with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ratified in 1848. Under this treaty Mexico ceded the geographical region now considered the U.S. Southwest. The treaty made provisions for those Mexicans who subsequently found themselves living under the political and geographical jurisdiction of the United States by allowing them to return to Mexico or accept US citizenship. For those who chose U.S. citizenship, their prior political and economic situation quickly changed. White settlement, shifts in economic structures, disenfranchisement, and racial prejudice, contributed to the marginalization of this newly created ethnic Mexican enclave from society. In California a Court of Land Claims was set up in 1851 to settle disputes concerning the legality of land titles under the regulations of the U.S. government. Although the court usually sided with the ethnic Mexican claims, the process gradually became cost prohibitive for them. For the landed elite, the financial burden of keeping their lands increased especially in light of the gradual but steady disappearance of the *hacienda* (ranch) economy. The disappearance of the haciendas not only

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<sup>74</sup> More commonly know as American football. The term gridiron refers to the lines in the field of play.

<sup>75</sup> William Beezley and Mary Lou LeCompte, "Any Sunday in April: The Rise of Sports in San Antonio and the Hispanic Borderlands", *Journal of Sport History* 13, no.2 (1986): 128-146.; Mary Lou LeCompte, "The Hispanic Influence on the History of Rodeo, 1823-1922," *Journal of Sport History* 12, no. 1 (1985): 21-38.; Mario Longoria, *Athletes Remembered: Mexicano/Latino Professional Football Players, 1929-1970*, (Tempe, Arizona: Bilingual Press, 1997); Bianca Premo, "Recreating Identity: Recreation on the Arizona-Sonora Border, 1880-1930," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 16 (1997): 31-53.

affected the people who owned them, but their workers as well. Increasingly, the ethnic Mexican labor force was displaced out of the haciendas and found difficulty securing jobs at the same skill level of their previous work.<sup>76</sup>

The Gold Rush years, 1848 to 1855, brought a shift in California's economy and with it, the numbers of white settlers. One of the means for the political disenfranchisement of ethnic Mexicans was their small numbers compared to the avalanche of white immigrants in the area. Anglos in California deliberately tried to marginalize Mexicans by using tactics such as gerrymandering and poll taxes. David Gutierrez, in *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, argues that the increasing number of Anglos created "voluntary" segregation. Whites settled in areas away from the Mexican communities or pushed them out of the area and Mexicans also proved willing to segregate themselves from the Anglos. Although Mexicans were openly discouraged from settling in the white areas, Gutierrez argues that many favored staying close to other ethnic Mexicans to preserve their cultural practices and heritage.<sup>77</sup>

Through the rest of the late nineteenth century Mexicans became a small minority in the geographical space they once ruled. Largely forgotten in the wake of the Civil War and the post-war industrial revolution, ethnic Mexicans kept "quietly" carving their own social and cultural space while making labor contributions principally in agriculture, mining and railroad building. The 1910 Mexican Revolution and the mass exodus it produced into the United States once again brought this "forgotten" minority into the national forefront. It is estimated that at least 500,000 Mexicans immigrated to the United States between 1910 and 1920, the bloodiest years of the

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<sup>76</sup> David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 22-24.

<sup>77</sup> David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 22.

Revolution. In 1917 the Immigration Act passed in an attempt to reduce the number of Mexicans crossing the border. Nativist and xenophobic sentiments lurked behind the public justification of immigrant restriction. The public discourse maintained that Mexican immigrants “posed health problems and represented a bad moral influence on American citizens.”<sup>78</sup> Yet by 1918 business owners that relied on immigrant Mexican labor pressured the U.S. government to reverse the act with respect to Mexicans. Their labor contribution was simply too important.

Although business owners recognized the importance of immigrant labor enough to repeal the 1917 Immigration Act, it did not mean that Mexicans, immigrant or otherwise, were treated fairly. Alma M. Garcia, in her text *The Mexican Americans* argues that continued discrimination and marginalization created conditions that maintained the already restricted ethnic Mexican community from economic upward mobility. Furthermore, it has contributed to the poverty and poverty related problems existing in Mexican barrios today.<sup>79</sup> Although employers recognized the need for labor, the opportunities offered to Mexicans consisted on of the lowest paid, lowest skilled jobs with little opportunities for advancement.

The economic limitations and hard conditions experienced by ethnic Mexicans did not deter them from participating, at least at the community level, in the nation’s most popular sport: baseball. There are various reasons baseball was chosen by ethnic Mexicans to “proclaim their equality through athletic competition, without fear of reprisal and to publicly demonstrate community solidarity and strength.”<sup>80</sup> Baseball was a popular sport on both sides of the border. According to historian Gilbert M. Joseph, Cubans brought the game of baseball to the Yucatán

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<sup>78</sup> Alma M. Garcia, *The Mexican Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 20.

<sup>79</sup> Alma M. Garcia, *The Mexican Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

<sup>80</sup> Jose M. Alamillo, “Peloteros in Paradise: Mexican American Baseball and Oppositional Politics in Southern California, 1930-1950,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Summer 2003), 192.

peninsula as early as the 1860s.<sup>81</sup> The early development of the game was guided by the existing oligarchies and moneyed classes. They sponsored teams and strictly dictated the player's conducts. Falling in line with the rest of the country's *Porfirian Persuasion*<sup>82</sup> "baseball fit nicely into the oligarch's roseate turn of the century vision of grander, more modern Yucatan founded upon the virtues of physical vigor and competition..."<sup>83</sup> Baseball was expression of the Mexican desire to imitate other modern nations at the time when progress and modernity was defined by Porfirio Diaz in U.S. terms. Even the Revolution of 1910, with its nationalistic rhetoric, was not able to break this yearning. On the contrary, the Revolution democratized and spread sports in general across the country. In the early 1920s, Minister of Education Jose Vasconcelos argued that "exercise and sports would teach team work, a spirit of sacrifice, loyalty, an appreciation for beauty, and the Christian virtue, which results from sport conquering sensuality."<sup>84</sup> The Mexican League was established to great success in 1925 and it is currently an AAA affiliate of Major League baseball.

Gilbert M. Joseph recounts the effort of Yucatán Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto to use baseball as vehicle of mobilization for the revolutionary government. Baseball was chosen because its popularity had spread beyond the upper classes, making it a viable route for Carrillo Puerto to reach the masses. Baseball was also appealing because it "preserved elements of personal accountability and enabled the individual to achieve recognition, but inevitably it was a

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<sup>81</sup> For an explanation of why baseball was popular in Cuba see, Louis A. Perez Jr. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*.

<sup>82</sup> This term was coined by historian William H. Beezley in his seminal work, *Judas at the Jockey Club And Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*. Beezley defines *Porfirian Persuasion* as the subtle but firm guidance of the State in cultural matters during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz in Mexico. It was part of the State's technocratic push to make Mexico a "modern" country, often adopting many civic organizations and recreational activities from the United States.

<sup>83</sup> Gilbert M. Joseph, "Documenting a Regional Pastime: Baseball in Yucatan" in *Windows on Latin America: Understanding Society Through Photographs* ed. Robert M. Levine, (Miami: North-South Center, University of Miami, 1987), 81.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph L. Arbena, "Sport, Development, and Mexican Nationalism, 1920-1970" *Journal of Sport History* 18, no. 3 (Winter, 1991), 353.

team game that subsumed the individual into the collective.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the thousands of Mexicans that crossed the border fleeing the violence of the Revolution would be at least mildly familiar with the game already being played in the Mexican neighborhoods of Los Angeles or Chicago. Moreover, baseball’s popularity among ethnic Mexicans can be evidenced by the many teams from the Mexican League that crossed the border to participate in various tournaments throughout the U.S. Southwest.<sup>86</sup>

Once in the United States, Mexican immigrants discovered that baseball was experiencing its “Golden Age” and was solidified as the National Pastime. Everybody played, read, or at least heard, about baseball. Additionally, Progressive politicians, reformers and many employers pushed for the organization of teams among immigrants. Baseball was the perfect “Americanizing” agent, a vehicle to teach the virtues of individualism, self-reliance, and the Protestant work ethic.<sup>87</sup> For employers, baseball was a way to mold workers into docile laborers, capable of working long hours under the harshest conditions without protest. Various growers in California, for example, sponsored baseball teams and cleared fields for play. According to the Sunkist Corporation’s Industrial Relations Department director, G.B. Hodgkin, “in order to produce the desired workers, they have to become a member of a local society or baseball team...to increase their physical and mental capacity for doing more work.”<sup>88</sup>

Although there was a great thrust for baseball to “help” assimilate immigrants, ethnic Mexicans instead used it to strengthen their cultural ties and build stronger communities.

Sunday was baseball day in most ethnic Mexican communities. After church many would gather

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<sup>85</sup> Joseph, 84.

<sup>86</sup> Alamillo, 195-196.

<sup>87</sup> Gary Ross Mormino, “The Playing Fields of St. Louis: Italian Immigrants and Sports, 1925-1941,” *Journal of Sport History*, 9 no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 225-237. This is a study of the Italian community of The Hill in the outskirts of St. Louis. It gives numerous examples of how sports were used to acculturate young second generation Italians through organizations such as the YMCA.

<sup>88</sup> G.B. Hodgkin, quoted in Jose M. Alamillo, “Peloteros in Paradise: Mexican American Baseball and Oppositional Politics in Southern California, 1930-1950,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Summer 2003), 193.

at the fields in their Sunday best to support their teams and socialize with their friends. While ethnic Mexicans enthusiastically embraced the American game, the teams were also a way of expressing pride in their heritage. By choosing team names such as *Aztecas*, *Mayans*, *Cuauhtemocs*, *Guadalupanos*, or *Mexico Libre* the community acknowledged their straddled reality; they wanted to play the American game but were not ready to completely let go of their cultural heritage.<sup>89</sup> Lack of access to city parks and fields also mirrored their present reality. Racial segregation if not by law at least in custom restricted the access to public venues. Although ethnic Mexicans loved the national pastime they were often barred from playing in public parks and fields. Not to be deterred, ethnic Mexican communities made their own fields in vacant lots, pastures or abandoned agricultural land. They transformed them into spaces of sport and spaces away from watchful employers and city authorities.<sup>90</sup> Thus, there is a historical tradition of sports fields being places where ethnic Mexicans comfortably expressed their heritage, even when practicing the host nation's game. The fields were another community "institution" where they could reaffirm their identity even in times of acute hardship.

The Great Depression was a time of enormous duress for all Americans. For the ethnic Mexican community, it brought about the first major attempts at deportation. Repatriation consisted of a complex process of governmental, economic and social pressures that forced many Mexicans to return home. As the Great Depression quickly dried up employment for all Americans, ethnic Mexicans were one of the firsts to feel its effects, both in the agricultural and urban sector. The first groups of migrants to return home to Mexico usually returned with substantial economic means to start over. Yet for those who remained, the economic situation became increasingly precarious. They continually faced discrimination in obtaining what little

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<sup>89</sup> Richard Santillan, "Mexican Baseball Teams in the Midwest, 1916-1965: The Politics of Cultural Survival and Civil Rights," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 7 (2000), 134.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

relief was available. For example, The Catholic Welfare Bureau cut its allocations for Mexican families by twenty-five percent compared to a ten percent reduction to allocations for “American” families. These disparities prevailed even when the Catholic Welfare Bureau was the private agency most sought after by Mexican families who were denied relief elsewhere.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, as the nation as a whole despaired over the economic depression, many blamed ethnic Mexicans for the troubles. For example, President Herbert Hoover stated that “they took jobs away from American citizens” and proposed plans to deport them.<sup>92</sup>

The vast majority of ethnic Mexicans that left during this period migrated under economic duress and social pressure rather than immigration raids or forcible deportation. But the government did deport ethnic Mexicans indiscriminately regardless of citizenship status, and used scare tactics to pressure ethnic Mexicans to leave on their own. For example, local officials in the City of Los Angeles circulated announcements of upcoming raids, and plans for deportation with the express purpose to scare and bully the ethnic Mexican population. Those that could return to Mexico left the United States. Many that remained were employed in the lowest paid blue collar jobs and they were effectively silenced and further marginalized. George J. Sanchez, in his work *Becoming Mexican American* argues that one of the more significant consequences of repatriation was the change of demographics and identity within the Mexican community. He argues that the previous influx of Mexican immigrants had maintained the Mexican community’s strong ethnic and cultural ties to Mexico. Immigrant Mexicans, mostly single working-age men, were the majority of the population in the Mexican community before the Great Depression. But repatriation shifted the population majority to second generation, U.S. born Mexicans. According to Sanchez, it was these Mexicans that would try to carve out a space

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<sup>91</sup> George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 212.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.



within the U.S. political and social system. Yet, it is also the case that repatriation created a source of distrust and disgust toward the United States. Many felt that the arbitrary deportations were unjust. Despite many years of hard work, the deportees were to be unceremoniously dismissed and scapegoated. Repatriation added to a long list of grievances of a Mexican community that had strong yet unrecognized ties to the United States.<sup>93</sup>

The advent of World War II provided many U.S. born Mexicans with the opportunity to serve in the army and the opportunity to gain some economic viability. The need for labor, once again, brought minorities opportunities for better work and pay. As young white men left for service, it opened the door for Mexican Americans, African Americans, and women to occupy the many skilled positions within the wartime industry. The war also created a mass rural to urban migration that left many growers in need of seasonal farm workers.<sup>94</sup> This vacuum provided the setting for the next mass immigration of Mexicans into the United States. The *Bracero* program started in 1942 and it lasted until 1965, bringing Mexican nationals to work in agricultural and low skilled work. It consisted of a bilateral agreement between the Mexican and U.S. governments for employment in U.S. farms and railroad projects of almost five million Mexican migrant workers.<sup>95</sup> Although at the end of the war, the railroad component was immediately ceased, farmers collectively pushed for maintaining the migrant worker program. It is important to note that although the Bracero program legally imported hundreds of thousands of Mexican laborers, the majority of immigrants, especially those who came to stay, were undocumented.<sup>96</sup> The Bracero program and the resurgence of large scale illegal immigration

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 223-226.

<sup>94</sup> Wayne A. Gove, "The Mexican Farm Labor Program, 1942-1964: Government-administered Labor Market Insurance for Farmers," *Agricultural History* 70, no. 2, (Spring, 1996), 308-309.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>96</sup> Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 141-143.

brought to the forefront the divisive identity issues currently present within the Mexican community.

The already established ethnic Mexican community had varied responses to the new influx of Mexican immigrants. For citizens of Mexican descent, the Bracero program represented a set back in what little gains had been made through the gaining of jobs in industrial work and returning veterans who demanded equal rights on the basis of their service. Organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) vehemently opposed new immigration that would take what little jobs opened for those who were citizens. Their political and social strategy had always based itself on integration efforts. For example, the organization supported and promoted complete assimilation and programs for the Americanization of Mexican “aliens.” LULAC organizers and others, such as the G.I. Forum, argued that the use of immigrants hurt citizens of Mexican descent because they displaced them from their jobs, accepted less pay, were strike breakers, and because of their lack of citizenship they were not able to contribute to the efforts of integration. In short, as George Sanchez, a prominent LULAC activist, explained “from a cultural standpoint, the influx of a million or more wetbacks a year transforms the Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest from an ethnic group which might be assimilated with reasonable facility into what I call a culturally indigestible peninsula of Mexico. The ‘wet’ migration tends to nullify processes of social integration...the present time has set the whole assimilation process back at least twenty years”<sup>97</sup>

Not all the ethnic Mexican leadership felt the issue was this clear cut. Labor leaders in particular felt somewhat sympathetic to the new immigrant laborers. Abuses of undocumented and Bracero workers in some ways cemented common ground with labor leaders and immigrant labor. Although their positions were ambiguous at best, labor leaders felt the need to include

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<sup>97</sup> Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 145.

undocumented workers in their efforts to gain a better working conditions and wages and assisted many in labor contract disputes.

Although LULAC and other organizations pushed for the integration of ethnic Mexicans into the mainstream of American culture, many resisted full citizenship and social integration. For example the 1940 census “indicates that more than 86 percent of the 377,000 Mexican nationals enumerated—many of whom had lived in the United States for decades—had made no attempt to become naturalized American citizens.”<sup>98</sup> The cultural division beyond citizenship status was also evident at this time. For example, Gutierrez cites *corridos*<sup>99</sup> and popular folklore that delineate the confrontation of Mexican and American identities within the family household. The *pachuco*<sup>100</sup> gang culture and the Zoot Zuit Riots<sup>101</sup> of 1942-1943, demonstrated the attempts of second generation of Mexican youths trying to carve out an identity of two polar opposites.<sup>102</sup> Coupled with the issues of renewed immigration, the Mexican American community experienced a crisis of identity.

During this turbulent time of self-definition sports once again became another arena in which to contest and negotiate identities. Baseball continued to be a source of pride for many within the community. Some Mexican players even managed to get recognition within the Major League, starting with Baldomero “Mel” Almada of the Boston Red Sox who in 1933 became the first Mexican national to play professional baseball. Other Latino players, like

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>99</sup> *Corridos* are traditional Mexican ballads used to communicate news or to retell the exploits of famous heroes.

<sup>100</sup> Pachuco refers to the Mexican American youths that rebelled against both Mexican and North American norms and mores, subscribing to a hybrid one of their own creation. For a profound and eloquent description of Pachucos see “El Pachuco y Otros Extemos” in *El Laberinto de la Soledad y Otras Obras* by Literature Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz.

<sup>101</sup> The Zoot Zuit is a particular style of pant (**pants**) and over coat at first used by African American youths and later co-opted by Mexican American youths. During war time rations of fabric and other materials, it was viewed as rebellious and unpatriotic to wear Zoot Zuits because the clothing required large amounts of fabric. The riots is **are** not one single event, but a series of clashes between Zoot Zuiters and the police, Los Angeles police department in particular.

<sup>102</sup> Gutierrez, *Wall and Mirrors*, 119.

Roberto Ortiz of the Washington Senators, Rene Monteagudo of the Philadelphia Phillies, and Luis Olmo of the Brooklyn Dodgers, after gaining some fame in the professional league, did the unthinkable. They left U.S. Major League baseball to play in the Mexican League. Jorge Pasquel, a rich entrepreneur from the state of Veracruz, assumed the presidency of the Mexican League in the early 1940s. He then raided the American league in search of players to fill his expansion teams. About twenty-three players left the U.S. league in total and many returned after one season. Their early return was due both to blacklisting threats from the American commissioner Happy Chandler, and Pasquel's inability to keep up with promised salaries. Eventually Pasquel's bankruptcy would force him to give up control of the Mexican League and his club, The Veracruz. But his legacy would live on. Under Pasquel's tutelage the Mexican League was the only league to successfully raid U.S. Major League baseball. As baseball historians Michael and Mary Olesak state, "like Pancho Villa, he was not afraid to stand up to the giant nation to the north. These victories may be symbolic at best, but they remain important victories to the Mexican people."<sup>103</sup> For ethnic Mexicans in the United States, these events represented a way of "fighting back." The Pasquel raid showed that even baseball could be used as way for ethnic Mexicans to preserve their heritage against the pressures from outside and from within the community to assimilate and become more "American."

But baseball was not the only sport where ethnic Mexicans could come together. At this time soccer was beginning to make inroads both in Mexico and in the Mexican American community. In October of 1943, the Mexican professional soccer league *Primera División* made its debut. At this time only ten teams participated: *América, Asturias, Atlante, Atlas, Asociación*

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<sup>103</sup> Michael M. Olesak and Mary Adams Olesak, *Beisbol: Latin Americans and the Grand Old Game*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Masters Press, 1991), 52.

*Deportiva Orizabena, Guadalajara, Espania, Marte, Moctezuma, and Veracruz.*<sup>104</sup> Although the team distribution concentrated in the large urban cities of Mexico City and Guadalajara, it would not take long for the game to find fans and aficionados around the country. Within fifteen years, soccer's televised broadcasts would begin. Additionally, construction plans would be devised for the country's two most important soccer stadiums, *Estadio Jalisco* in Guadalajara and *Estadio Azteca* in Mexico City. While the domestic popularity of soccer rose, international triumph proved elusive. The Mexican National team, *El Tri*, made its international debut in 1923 in a friendly<sup>105</sup> against Guatemala.<sup>106</sup> It played in the 1930 World Cup, but lost every game and it did not make another World Cup appearance until the 1950 Cup played in Brazil.<sup>107</sup> It would take another twelve years for the *El Tri* to win a game in World Cup competition.

Similar to their counterparts south of the border, soccer was starting to ensnare the attention of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. This was possible because many Mexican immigrants usually spent some time in the large urban cities of Mexico before crossing the border, thus becoming familiar with the sport.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, soccer in the United States was already practiced in the ethnic enclaves of immigrants of European descent.<sup>109</sup> In the late 1930s club *Necaxa*, an ethnic Mexican team, joined the European dominated amateur Chicago National Soccer League (CNSL). The club also provided other activities such as dances, Christmas

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<sup>104</sup> [www.esmas.com/clubamerica/homenuevo](http://www.esmas.com/clubamerica/homenuevo) ; [www.chivasdecorazon.com](http://www.chivasdecorazon.com)

<sup>105</sup> In soccer, a "friendly" game is a match up that is sanctioned by FIFA, but does not count towards any competition. They are usually scheduled as practice games before World Cup elimination games and/or an opportunity to earn gate receipts.

<sup>106</sup> Roberto García Pimentel, *Triunfos y Tristezas del Equipo Tricolor: Historia de la Selección Mexicana de Fútbol (1923-1995)*, (México, D.F.: Edamex, 1995).

<sup>107</sup> [http://www.femexfut.org.mx/portalv2/\(5ac2ks55ip0xddupjld2t2ak\)/default.aspx#top](http://www.femexfut.org.mx/portalv2/(5ac2ks55ip0xddupjld2t2ak)/default.aspx#top) ; The National Team did not qualify for Italia 1934 and did not participate in France 1938. Due to WWII there were no World Cups celebrated from 1938 until 1950.

<sup>108</sup> Juan Javier Pescador, "Los Heroes del Domingo: Soccer, Borders, and Social Spaces in Great Lakes Mexican Communities, 1940-1970" in *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life*, ed. Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 76.

<sup>109</sup> In St. Louis, Irish immigrants first brought the sport to the city. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the city was the premiere metropolitan area for soccer in the United States. see, *The Encyclopedia of American Soccer History* ed. Roger Allaway, Colin Jose and David Litterer, (Lanham Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), 251-254.

celebrations (*posadas*), and participated in the Mexican parades and activities of Chicago. Club *Necaxa* was sponsored by local businesses such as the Casino Monte Carlo, which envisioned itself as the ideal place for the working-class worker, complete with live music provided by groups like Jesse Martinez and his Troubadours. Places like this catered to workers looking for a combination of Mexican flavor and all the conveniences and advances offered in the United States. Additionally, the club provided English as a Second Language classes. According to Juan Javier Pescador, club *Necaxa*'s efforts to teach English demonstrated the club's position as an agent of assimilation instead of preservers of traditional Mexican culture. Pescador writes, "These activities were intended to familiarize Mexicans with a new industrial environment and to facilitate their assimilation into American standards or leisure...The club's activities clearly reflect a decision to articulate a social life for Mexicans in Chicago on a permanent basis while cultivating Mexican cultural features more in accordance with the urban setting in the United States."<sup>110</sup> The club's support of business like the Casino Monte Carlo also fell in line with the club's vision because, according to Pescador, these businesses molded Mexicans into American consumers.<sup>111</sup>

The assertions presented by Pescador precisely show the tension between assimilation and preserving heritage present in the ethnic Mexican community. The controversies over the Bracero program, LULAC's push for assimilation and the many individual's resistance to become citizens are exemplified in club *Necaxa*'s policies and activities. The choice of Mexican soccer over American baseball manifests a growing wish in the ethnic Mexican community to shift their focus and organizing efforts away from the American game. This shift indicates a rising yearning within the community for a more meaningful connection with their heritage and a

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<sup>110</sup> Pescador, *Heroes del Domingo*, 80-81.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

growing dissatisfaction with a sport that did not allow them to participate fully. For example, while many local Chicago baseball leagues would exclude ethnic Mexican teams from participating, club *Necaxa* was able to sign up in the CNSL.<sup>112</sup> Yet the club's extra-curricular activities, such as the English language classes, also demonstrate a desire for "progress" in their new home. Thus, the dynamics of the soccer club *Necaxa* pointed to tensions that would later become explosive in politics and social issues.

Ethnic Mexicans and Mexican immigrants were once again forcefully reminded of their precarious status in the United States when *Operation Wetback* was implemented in 1954. Although LULAC and other organizations had supported restrictions on immigration, they soon realized that Mexican Americans were not immune to anti-immigration hysteria. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, among other provisions, widened the standards under which Mexicans could be deported. Because many ethnic Mexicans had not yet become naturalized citizens, they too were vulnerable under the new statute. *Operation Wetback*, in which the Immigration and Naturalization Services Bureau (INS) deported over 1 million immigrants, in suspect raids and sweeps, raised concerns especially over the break up of families.<sup>113</sup> But it also brought home the reality that to the Anglo community, Mexicans were indistinguishable regardless of citizenship status. Mexican leaders then began to publicly acknowledge some relationship between the "legal" community advancement and the status and politics of immigrants. LULAC questioned their previous emphasis on Americanization and tried to recapture their heritage and cultural ties to Mexico. For example, president Albert Armendáriz issued a public statement to all members of the organization in which he argued that assimilation was not worth forgetting about cultural roots. He wrote, "our culture and

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>113</sup> Gutierrez, *Wall and Mirrors*, 166.

background are equally virtuous than the culture and background of our European or any other neighbors, [and] we can't and mustn't feel ashamed of it..."<sup>114</sup>

Other organizations also took a more proactive approach to include immigrants. The Community Service Organization (CSO) founded in 1947 under the leadership of Edward Roybal, for example, pushed for the naturalization of immigrants. Their reasoning behind naturalization was that to fully contribute to the ethnic Mexican community, immigrants should be in the position to act as full-fledged citizens. CSO services were offered in Spanish and concentrated primarily on voter education, voter registration, and assistance to those wishing to acquire citizenship. As Gutierrez explains, "the CSO had no citizenship requirements for membership and actively encouraged non-citizens to join. The fundamental assumption underlying much of the CSO's immigration activities was that resident aliens should become naturalized American citizens, if only to provide themselves with some protection under American law." Moreover, just as LULAC began to affirm the cultural and ethnic heritage of the ethnic Mexican communities, the CSO emphasized the ethnic and cultural ties between U.S. born Mexicans and immigrants. The transition toward a stronger identification with Mexican cultural identity was not complete and absolute, and in many ways remains ambivalent to the present day, but "these developments presaged the emergence of even more militant declarations of ethnic solidarity among Mexican Americans in subsequent years."<sup>115</sup>

That militant expression would flourish during the late 1960s. The Chicano Movement is the broad term given to various organizations' political activities and agendas whose ultimate goal was to protest and present to the public the grievances of both rural and urban ethnic Mexicans. The leadership of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta of the United Farmers Workers

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 178.



Union in California prominently brought the plight of rural ethnic Mexican workers national attention. This era brought unprecedented public protest and political participation from the ethnic Mexican community. Riding on this new mass political consciousness in the ethnic Mexican community, many ethnic Mexicans were elected to office including Henry Gonzales as a Texas Representative. With the efforts of Gonzalez in Congress and Chavez on the grass roots level, the Bracero program was finally terminated. Gonzalez shows the shift in focus with the opposition to the Bracero program. No longer articulated as an issue of immigrants taking jobs away from U.S. born Mexicans, “Gonzalez’s campaign to end the Bracero program was a result of his criticism regarding its sustained violation of the civil rights of the hundreds of Mexican immigrant workers who had been brought to the United States to deal with high rates of unemployment in the agricultural fields.”<sup>116</sup>

The Chicano Movement became a “renaissance” of Mexican heritage, culture and identity. For example in 1969 in the First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference presented the Plan of *Aztlan*. “Aztlan” was a reference to the mythological origin of the Aztecs, believed to geographically encompass the areas of the former northern territories of Mexico. In other words, this was an assertion that the territories acquired by the United States in the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848) “belong” in cultural tradition and heritage to ethnic Mexicans. Furthermore, by asserting a nationalistic posturing, members of the Chicano Movement cemented their ties with immigrants along ethnic lines. As Gutierrez states, “ongoing efforts to refine their conception of a collective Chicano identity [led to] building a political program based on that identity...in doing so they also dismissed traditional notions of Americanization and assimilation as nothing more than *gabacho*<sup>117</sup> attempts to maintain hegemony over Chicanos by

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<sup>116</sup> Garcia, *The Mexican Americans*, 146.

<sup>117</sup> Individuals of white European descent

destroying their culture.”<sup>118</sup> From the 1960s on, Mexican Americans found themselves strongly identified with their Mexican roots, and politicized to defend the Mexican immigrant because of a new understanding of their identity; an identity reconfigured by the Chicano Movement.

In sports, Fernando Valenzuela was one such immigrant whose superstardom reflected U.S. born Mexicans embrace of their Mexican identity. “Fernandomania” began in 1980 when the rookie sealed his debut in American baseball with the Los Angeles Dodgers with a record no earned runs for 69 1/3 innings.<sup>119</sup> From the beginning of Valenzuela’s career in Los Angeles, ethnic Mexicans championed him as one of their own who had achieved international success. Journalist Jaime Jarrin reminisced, “The Mexicans, particularly in Southern California, were dying for a hero. The community really took Fernando in as their son.”<sup>120</sup> The player’s meteoric rise however, was not without obstacles. As in the case with many other Latino ballplayers, such as Puerto Rican Roberto Clemente, language became an issue with the American press. But unlike other decades, this time American journalists and their newspapers made an effort to bridge the language barrier, mostly by providing interpreters to aid during interviews.

The press was not so willing to accommodate, during the following year’s contract negotiations with the Dodgers. Controversy ensued when Valenzuela asked for a substantial pay rise. The press immediately began to publish disparaging and stereotypical images of Mexicans to attack Valenzuela’s position. As historian Samuel Regalado describes, “Mexicans fumed at depictions of Valenzuela as a ‘roly-poly, beer-drinking, taco-eating, dumb and poor Indian from some godforsaken Mexican pueblo where people still sleep against cantina walls with their

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<sup>118</sup> Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 185.

<sup>119</sup> Samuel O. Regalado, *Viva Baseball!: Latin Major Leaguers and Their Special Hunger*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 178.

<sup>120</sup> Jaime Jarrin quoted in Samuel O. Regalado, *Viva Baseball! Latin Major Leaguers and their Special Hunger*, (Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2001), 179. This quote comes from a personal interview by the author.

sombreros pulled down over their eyes’.”<sup>121</sup> LULAC even came to the rescue by threatening to organize boycotts of Dodger games and sending a telegram to the Department of Labor and the Immigration and Naturalization Services, warning them not to rescind Valenzuela’s work visa.<sup>122</sup>

Valenzuela’s immediate popularity in the 1980s within the ethnic Mexican community in the United States and LULAC’s very public defense was the fruition of a shift within the community itself over the divisive issues of immigration.<sup>123</sup> Valenzuela helped bring together all Mexicans regardless of immigration status. Regalado writes, “Valenzuela epitomized, to many, Latin success without having abandoned his culture...for many in the Mexican American community, Valenzuela’s fame catapulted their identity into the national limelight as never before and in a manner that captured the essence of their culture.”<sup>124</sup> Moreover, it was the nationalistic and cultural ideas of the Chicano movement that paved the way for the complete acceptance of Valenzuela in the Mexican American community. Although the movement has faded as a political force, its ability to group individuals around cultural symbols, such as the vision of *Aztlan*, remains alive in the sports field. In the 1980s this vision of the Chicano Movement surfaced as Fernando Valenzuela, a Mexican national, “beating the gringos” at their own game. Valenzuela’s success was a symbolic reward for all Mexicans that for decades have supported, followed and loved the American game.

It can also be argued that Valenzuela’s dominance in the pitching mound, particularly at the home field of Dodger Stadium was seen as poetic justice by many Los Angeles residents of Mexican descent. The grounds, on which Dodger Stadium stands, have had a special significance to many in the Mexican American community. The land that eventually became

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<sup>121</sup> Regalado, *Viva Baseball!*, 185.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 189,

Dodger Stadium had previously been the predominantly ethnic Mexican community of Chavez Ravine.<sup>125</sup> In the 1950s the close knit community was forcibly demolished in order to make room for public housing. Former Chavez Ravine resident Natalie Ramirez expressed the significance and importance of Chavez Ravine in a 1988 letter addressed to the Dodger Organization:

Last night, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1988, I watched your special on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dodgers and KTTV, and I must tell you it made me very angry! This is not the first time that Chavez Ravine has been referred to as a dump or wasteland. Every time anyone talks about Chavez Ravine before the Dodgers came along they seem to forget that many families made their homes there! No one wants to acknowledge the fact that people lived there. Maybe it wasn't Beverly Hills, but it was home to a lot of people, my family included. Doesn't anyone want to acknowledge us because we are Mexicans? Or is it because we were told that our home would be destroyed to make room for low rent housing? But, please don't keep referring to it as a dump or wasteland. The people all loved their homes. Once a year the people who once lived in Chavez Ravine all get together for a picnic at Elysian playground, right next to Dodger Stadium. They could let you know when the next picnic will take place and you could come around and meet the people whose home you call a wasteland.<sup>126</sup>

Financial backing from the federal National Housing Act of 1949 gave city officials the means to construct the Elysian Park Housing Complex, a project of new affordable housing. Eviction letters were sent to the residents of Chavez Ravine with the promise of compensation for their properties and promises of first choice once the new homes were constructed. Most residents moved away even when payments received for their "condemned" properties were not enough to buy elsewhere, and those that remained were labeled "squatters." Promises of the new housing project vanished; the new Eysian Park Housing Complex was never constructed. Furthermore, in the anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy era, the housing project was labeled as "creeping socialism" and was cancelled in 1953 by the newly elected mayor of Los Angeles Norris

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<sup>125</sup> Don Normark, *Chavez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), 12.

<sup>126</sup> Natalie Ramirez, quoted in Don Normark, *Chavez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), 127.

Poulson. The federal government subsequently sold the land back to the City of Los Angeles, with the stipulation that the land would only be used for public purposes.<sup>127</sup>

After much political maneuvering, court cases and appeals and public referendums, the City of Los Angeles, led by Mayor Paulson, reached an agreement with Dodger's owner Walter O'Malley in June of 1959. Los Angeles would get a Major League franchise, and Walter O'Malley would finally get his own stadium, something he was not able to obtain from the City of New York, where the Dodgers previously resided.<sup>128</sup> The last residents of Chavez Ravine, the Arechiga family, continually refused efforts to be relocated. Television reports showed the embattled family forcibly removed from the premises, with the older Mrs. Arechiga throwing rocks at authorities and her daughter being carried out amidst her crying children.<sup>129</sup> The family's plight caused some headlines, but after it was made known that the family had other properties and was not completely destitute, the media lost interest. Still, longtime activist and U.S. congressman Edward Roybal maintained that, "the episode [had] left a residue of bad feeling among his [Roybal's] constituents in the Hispanic community of Los Angeles."<sup>130</sup>

Chavez Ravine was another example of the complete disregard by the City of Los Angeles of the ethnic Mexican community. Although it cannot be said that the proposed housing project was a smoke screen for other business interests in the area, even the intentions of the project were not altogether altruistic. For example, the leading architect Richard Neutra "felt compelled to keep repeating the word 'slum' to counter his otherwise euphoric approval [of the project] and he described the inhabitants not as Mexicans but as 'Aztecs'."<sup>131</sup> While the

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas S. Hines, "Housing, Baseball and Creeping Socialism: The Battle of Chavez Ravine, Los Angeles, 1949-1959," *Journal of Urban History* 8, no. 2 (February 1982): 123-143.

<sup>128</sup> Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>131</sup> Hines, "Housing, Baseball and Creeping Socialism", 131.

community was praised for its quaint charm and its inhabitants “well-adjusted”, it remained a “plum” area that was falling short of its development potential and aesthetic appearance. Regardless of whether Chavez Ravine had ended up as the Elysian Park Housing Project or as it did, the grounds of the Dodgers, the ethnic Mexican neighborhood was destroyed despite providing a sense of home and community to its inhabitants. Former resident Carmen Torres Roldan reminisces, “As we grew up it was really a nice feeling because everybody was like a community. We were all like brothers and sisters, and the mothers were all *comadres* (god mothers) you know, they baptized each other’s children. And what was really, really special was that on Saturday, five o’clock in the morning when the sun was just coming out, the boys used to play the guitar and serenade everybody, and it was so beautiful to hear the music in Spanish.”<sup>132</sup> Chavez Ravine disappeared forever but perhaps it was of some consolation to its former residents to see Fernando Valenzuela “do good” in the same place where their beloved community once stood.

While Los Angeles was in the throes of “Fernandomania” soccer had made giant strides in popularity both in Mexico and in the ethnic Mexican community in the United States. By this time, soccer had been completely solidified as the national sport in Mexico and it now belonged to the cultural symbols that represented the nation. In 1986, Mexico hosted its second World Cup event and *El Tri* had its best performance to date, reaching the semi-finals. The Mexican National Team had an inconsistent record against soccer powerhouses such as Argentina, Brazil, Italy and Germany. It did not win its first World Cup match until the 1962 competition celebrated in Chile. But within its conference, the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), it reigned supreme. *El Tri* was proving to be especially adept at winning against its richer, more politically powerful neighbor to the north, the

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<sup>132</sup> Normark, *Chavez Ravine*, 28.

United States. In the twelve matches played between 1970 and 1989, *El Tri* won ten, to scores that averaged a two goal advantage. The scoring average exception was the game played in 1980 in the Azteca Stadium, where Mexico delivered a feast of goals, beating the United States 5-1. Four of the matches were played in the United States, two at the Memorial Coliseum in Los Angeles, one at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, and one at Lockhart Stadium in Fort Lauderdale. Because soccer was the national sport in Mexico, and because between 1980 and 1989 approximately two million legal Mexicans immigrated to the United States, it can be safely assumed that the matches played between the Mexico and the United States were avidly followed at least by ethnic Mexicans.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, the U.S. challenge to the continued Mexican dominance in the region starting in the 1990s would spark the heated rivalry that continues to the present day.

### **Conclusion**

Soccer's prominence in the ethnic Mexican community slowly emerged from a nationalistic political climate and the declining influence of baseball within this community. Throughout the various historical/political periods, sports have provided a space where individuals could negotiate their identity. For a long time, baseball was the choice sport of Mexicans on both sides of the border. For Mexicans in the United States, baseball represented both the push for assimilation and the struggle to maintain community identity. Although baseball was supposed to aid in the integration of immigrants to United States society, ethnic Mexicans used it, instead, to maintain community ties and cultural heritage. As soccer solidified itself as the national sport in Mexico, concurrently soccer's popularity increased within the

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<sup>133</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Nativity, Citizenship, Year of Entry, and Region of Birth:2000," Table FBP-1 Profile Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics: 2000. <http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/stp-159/STP-159-Mexico.pdf>

ethnic Mexican community living in the United States. Again, immigration helped in this transition as immigrants thoroughly acquainted with soccer would bring their enthusiasm across the border. Advances in technology such as the broadcast of matches by international television chains would also help in the diffusion of soccer across the border. Soccer helped ethnic Mexicans maintain a more direct connection to their heritage and culture than baseball. Whereas baseball provided the opportunity for ethnic Mexicans to outperform Anglos at their own game, they did it as individuals within “the American system.” Baseball’s eventual concession to soccer however, would represent the need of ethnic Mexicans to associate with a sport that more closely reflected their identity. In other words, in professional baseball there was no Mexican team or an Anglo team that aligned itself strictly with the ethnic Mexican community. In contrast, once soccer became the national sport of Mexico, the ethnic Mexican community acquired eleven players (twenty-two with the bench) that represent a collective identity they can connect with. Moreover, the recent soccer rivalry between the United States and Mexico allows ethnic Mexicans in the United States to make their presence felt, both by using *El Tri* as proxy and as active spectators inside stadiums.

The history of Mexicans within the United States characterizes itself by the tension between ethnic Mexicans and their host society. Even though many were born in the United States, to Anglos immigrant status historically has not mattered and stereotypes were applied to all indiscriminately. As a result, the Mexican American community politicized and embraced immigrant issues as a way to fight for equal rights. Concurrently, this politicization brought a flowering of cultural consciousness unlike any seen before. Although ethnic Mexicans had always fought to preserve their culture, nothing previous resembled the Chicano Movement’s expressly nationalistic and at times separatist rhetoric. In the aftermath of the Chicano



Movement, the public displays of political demand have for the most part disappeared, but the cultural consciousness remains.<sup>134</sup> The Mexican-United States soccer rivalry taps into the ever present tension between ethnic Mexicans and the society that surrounds them and awakens the cultural consciousness present in the community. Thus, it has not mattered if one was a third generation Mexican American, if one was a freshly arrived “illegal”, if you spoke only Spanish or only English, when *El Tri* is in town, all of these identities have receded into the sea of red, white, and green that chanted just like the United Farm Workers led by Chavez, “Si Se Puede! Me-xi-co!”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Most contemporary public mass political displays surround immigration law and reform. In recent years, again ethnic Mexicans, along with other Latinos, have been seen marching in many cities across the United States, demanding the right of immigrants to work and live with dignity and not be criminalized.

<sup>135</sup> “Yes, it can be done!”

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**IF SPEEDY GONZALES WAS REALLY MEXICAN HE WOULD KNOW**  
**HOW TO PLAY FUTBOL:**  
**THE RIVALRY IN CONTEXT**

On June 4, 1994, the United States defeated Mexico 1-0 in a “friendly” match played at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California. Yet, the 91,123 spectators that attended overwhelmingly rooted for Mexico. The U.S. side was repeatedly and loudly booed every time they touched the ball. After scoring the winning goal the U.S. mid-fielder, Eric Wynalda, celebrated by racing around the field. Of his actions, he explained, “That was a little bit for my teammates, a little bit for the lack of fan support, and a little bit for the Mexican Americans who were here today...I wanted to show them I was having a better time than them today.”<sup>136</sup> This has been a scene that has been repeated time and time again in many different stadiums but almost always with the same animosity, tension, and results. When the United States and the Mexican national teams, El Tri, have confronted each other, the word rivalry has always been at hand.

The Mexican and the United States national teams have faced each other approximately forty-seven times between 1934 and 2002. Of these Mexico has had twenty-eight wins, eight ties and eleven loses. Since the early 1990s, Mexico has had a difficult time retaining this advantage, as the United States has stepped up the pressure and competition. Not only has the U.S. increasingly performed better in these matches, but the English-language media has increasingly been paying more attention to soccer in general and these matches in particular.

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<sup>136</sup> Ronald Blum, “U.S. wins World Cup warm up; Crowd cheers for Mexicans,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 5 June 1994, 2D.

Headlines that read, “US-Mexico: Thin Line Between Love and Hate,”<sup>137</sup> “U.S. Tie Is A High Point: Cup Qualifier Leaves Mexico In Mourning,”<sup>138</sup> “Mexico’s Defeat Deflates Supporters In L.A. Area,”<sup>139</sup> “From Mexico With Grudge...Bad Blood Flows Freely South Of The Border”<sup>140</sup> and “For Mexican Soccer Fans, Facing U.S. Is More Than Just A Rivalry”<sup>141</sup> indicate the tone and seriousness of these matches. Soccer matches do not incite the less than polite exchange of words, either from the players or the press or between the U.S. and other nations. This fact supports the contention that the Mexican-U.S. rivalry is more than just a simple soccer match. The player’s exchanges through the press and on the field continually fan the flames of their intense rivalry. Moreover, while coverage of other U.S. soccer matches concentrate on the game itself, when it comes to Mexico the coverage extends beyond soccer to the complex political and social relationship of the two countries.

1991 turned out to be a pivotal year for the rivalry as the United States beat Mexico twice and tied them once. It was the first time in the history of both national teams that the United States side so consistently challenged Mexico’s soccer dominance in the region. The first encounter came at the semi-final game of the first Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football’s (CONCACAF) Gold Cup. The United States marked two against Mexico for a final score of 2-0. The first goal came from the feet of John Doyle with an assist from Marcelo Balboa three minutes into the second half. The second goal came seventeen minutes later when defender John Vermes kicked the ball from 20 yards out into the Mexican

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<sup>137</sup>Steven Goff, “US-Mexico: Thin Line Between Love and Hate; Intense Rivals to Battle in Crucial Qualifier,” *Washington Post*, 20 April 1997, D08.

<sup>138</sup> Steven Goff, “U.S. Tie is a High Point; Cup Qualifier Leaves Mexico in Mourning,” *Washington Post*, 4 November 1997, D04.

<sup>139</sup> David Leon Moore, “Mexico’s defeat deflates supporters in L. A. area,” *USA Today*, 18 June 2002, 12C.

<sup>140</sup> Filip Bondy, “From Mexico with Grudge: As US and Mexican National Team face off in Cup Qualifier; bad blood flows freely south of the border,” *Daily News*, 27 March 2005, 74.

<sup>141</sup> Brian Forbes, “For Mexican Soccer Fans, Facing U.S. is more than just a Rivalry,” *Denver Post*, 27 March 2005, B01.

goal. With this victory the United States eliminated Mexico from the competition and went on to win the Gold Cup by beating Honduras at the penalty line. The response of players and coaches from Mexico and the United States foreshadowed the intense rivalry that was just beginning. Mexican coach Manuel Lapuente resigned in shame immediately after the loss and headlines in many Mexican newspapers reported of the “failure” and “disaster.”<sup>142</sup> To the Mexican national press, Mexican midfielder Jose Manuel de la Torre stated, “against the United States, I can only say we were obligated to win.”<sup>143</sup> The United States had not won a game against Mexico in eleven years, a meaningless victory in a World Cup qualifying match. But eliminating them from the region’s top competition garnered some attention. U.S. defender John Vermes explained the significance of the victory, “I think we showed Mexico that they’re going to have to show us some respect in the region. We came here to win the Gold Cup, but to get to the final is a big step for us, a real big step.”<sup>144</sup>

For the United States, getting that respect would not be an easy task. In August, after the United States won a 2-1 victory over Mexico in the finals of the Pan American Games, a brawl broke out that left benched goalkeeper Kasey Keller with a bloody nose: “I got punched in the stomach and then number six punched me flat in the face.”<sup>145</sup> U.S. coach Lothar Osiander observed of the match, “There was a lot of tension on both sides. I know they were very disappointed.”<sup>146</sup> The game was a tense tie 1 to 1 until Joe Max Moore, who had substituted an injured Claudio Reyna in the second half, scored the winning goal in extra time. For the United States this triumph meant a gold medal, a first in soccer at the Pan American Games. These

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<sup>142</sup> Steve Repsher, “While U.S. Team celebrates victory, Mexicans left searching for answers” *The Washington Times*, 12 July 1991, D3.

<sup>143</sup> Steve Repsher, “While U.S. Team celebrates victory, Mexicans left searching for answers” *The Washington Times*, 12 July 1991, D3.

<sup>144</sup> Mike Barnes, “United States 2, Mexico 0,” *United Press International*, 6 July 1991, Sportnews.

<sup>145</sup> Christie Brennan, “US Soccer Team Shocks Mexico,” *Washington Post*, 14 August 1991, D1.

<sup>146</sup> Richard Luna, “A big victory for U.S. Soccer” *United Press International*, 14 August 1991, Sportnews.

victories were marked by better play by the U.S. team, and increased violence on the field. They also set the stage for future friction. For the United States, Mexico will always be the team to beat. As Harry Keough former member of the historic 1950 U.S. World Cup team observed, “Getting by Mexico has always been tough for us. Mexico has been technically superior to us for a long time.”<sup>147</sup> Since 1991 the United States has been able to improve their play and in the late 1990s has proven to be a dominant force, but Mexico has not given up without a fight.

In 1997 in an interview for the *Washington Post*, Eric Wynalda said: “When you look at us and Mexico, I have no problem at all with saying that I hate them, I hate and love to play them. Mexico has always been our biggest rival...Once I step on the field, I hate ‘em.”<sup>148</sup> In just the three previous encounters there had been 107 fouls, 20 yellow cards and 1 ejection; statistics that indicates a high level of physical contact in the field.<sup>149</sup> One of the injured players was U.S. defender Alexi Lalas, who was kicked in the groin by Mexican player Ramon Ramirez, in the Mexican defeat of the U.S. at the January 19, 1997 encounter in Pasadena, California. Lalas said of the match, “It was a full-on attack on my manhood. I’ll remember this. I cannot wait to face Mexico again. There is such an incredible rivalry, mixed with respect, mixed with loathing.”<sup>150</sup> In matches played in April and November of that same year, Jeff Agoos and Luis Hernandez each received a red card. In the two matches played in 2000, there were six yellow cards and Ramon Ramirez received a red card. In just one match played in April of 2002 the players

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<sup>147</sup> Keith Schildroth, “Local Fans Say U.S. Soccer is Finally on the Road to Respect” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 9 July 1991, 2B.

<sup>148</sup> Steven Goff, “US-Mexico Thin Line Between Love and Hate,” D08.

<sup>149</sup> Association Football or soccer has three escalating tiers of punishment for unsportsmanlike conduct in the field: the foul, the yellow card, and the red card. In a foul the team loses possession of the ball to the other team, with a yellow card, the team loses possession of the ball and the player is offered a warning, with a second yellow card, the team loses possession of the ball and the player is sent off (the referee will show the yellow first and then a red card), with the red card, the team again loses possession of the ball and the player is ejected from the game without warning. The main referee is the ultimate authority in deciding what punishment to apply according to the rules. For complete rules see, International Football Association Board rules.

<http://www.fifa.com/worldfootball/lawsofthegame.html>

<sup>150</sup> Mark Zeigler, “10 most memorable matches,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 16 June 2002.

accumulated 40 fouls, four yellow cards and two red cards; one for U.S. player Frankie Hejduk and the other for Mexican midfielder Alberto Garcia Aspe. That same year, during the World Cup, Mexican defender Rafael Marquez was given a red card after slamming his head into the side of Cobi Jones' head. The usually more diplomatic Jones reacted by stating this way, "I don't know why they feel they have to take their aggressions out on me... We beat them in the World Cup. Goodbye."<sup>151</sup>

Violence during soccer matches is unfortunately common. Since 1986 the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA), the world's soccer governing body, began its "Fair Play" campaign. Instituted after the most famous illegal play in soccer history, Diego Armando Maradona's "Hand of God," the campaign aims to minimize violence on the field.<sup>152</sup> Its code of conduct, applicable to all FIFA matches (virtually all professional soccer games fall under the jurisdiction of FIFA), stipulates: "Reject corruption, drugs, racism, violence, gambling and other dangers to our sport; show that football does not want violence, even from your own fans. Football is sport, and sport is peace."<sup>153</sup> Yet for all its well intentioned language, there have been many occasions when soccer has not meant or promoted peace. In fact, there have been numerous instances when soccer has promoted quite the opposite. For instance, in 1969 El Salvador and Honduras engaged in four days of hostilities leaving 6,000 dead and 12,000 wounded over two 1970 World Cup qualifying matches.<sup>154</sup>

The frequency of violence or strong play displayed by the players in most matches between the United States and Mexico fortunately has not escalated into war but it has exceeded

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<sup>151</sup> Grahame L. Jones, "2002 World Cup United States 2, Mexico 0," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 June 2002.

<sup>152</sup> Maradona's Hand of God refers to Argentine forward Diego Armando Maradona scoring a goal with his hand in the 1986 World Cup match against England. Argentina went on not only to win this game, but to win the Cup as well. When asked about the goal Maradona responded that it was scored "un poco con la cabeza de Maradona y un poco con la mano de Dios." (A little bit with Maradona's head and a little bit with the hand of God)

<sup>153</sup> FIFA Fair Play Code; <http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/worldwideprograms/footballforhope/fairplay/code.html>

<sup>154</sup> Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Soccer War*, 1st Vintage International Ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 157-187.

the anger and frustration present during a tense game. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the political, economic and social relationship of Mexico and United States has been a long and complicated one. The excessive aggression displayed on the field reflects the strained coexistence of the two neighboring nations. As anthropologist Christian Bromberger argues, “football can also be a privileged terrain of collective identities, of national loyalties, of local and regional antagonisms, and even of nationalistic re-vindications.”<sup>155</sup> Applying Bromberger’s argument, soccer was the privileged terrain for Mexico to impose their dominance as a collective football/national identity not only over the United States but over the entire CONCACAF region. The frequency of violence present during the games reflects the recent ability of the United States to dispute Mexican soccer hegemony. The aggression derived from the U.S. challenge to that dominance and thus a challenge to the Mexican football/national identity.

Not all the hostility has been physical. The language used by the players also points to the intense distaste shared by both National teams. U. S. player DaMarcus Beasley declared to the press before an Olympic qualifying game played in the Mexican city of Guadalajara, “We don’t like them, and they don’t like us. It’s not secret. That’s just how it is. They hate us. I could have told you that before we got here.”<sup>156</sup> Recently, U.S. striker Landon Donovan remarked of Mexican striker Cuahutemoc Blanco, “He’s just an idiot.”<sup>157</sup> Of the Mexican National team Donovan said, “They’re dirty, they’re nasty, they’ll spit on you, they’ll cough on you, they’ll grab you where you (*sic*) shouldn’t. They want to get any little advantage that they can that’s not soccer-related.”<sup>158</sup> After the 2002 World Cup match Cobi Jones stated, “As far as I’m

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<sup>155</sup> Christian Bromberger, *significación de la pasión popular por los clubes de fútbol* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Libros del Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2001), 47.

<sup>156</sup> Grahame L. Jones, “There’s no Love Lost in Rivalry,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 February 2004.

<sup>157</sup> Filip Bondy, “The Giant has not died: Mexico runs U.S. ragged” *Daily News* (New York), 28 March 2005, 67.

<sup>158</sup> Grahame L. Jones, “There’s No Love Lost in Rivalry,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 February 2004.

concerned, they're a bunch of dirty players and they're going home."<sup>159</sup> Mid-fielder Eric Wynalda who has always been vocal about the rivalry also made derogatory declarations concerning El Tri, "I would be lying if I didn't say that wasn't the Mexican style of play, to be somewhat dirty."<sup>160</sup> The constant reference by U.S. players to their Mexican counterparts as "dirty" connotes the racial tensions between Anglos and Mexicans in the United States.

Racism in soccer, as in many other sports, manifests itself at many levels of the game.<sup>161</sup> It tinges the relationships among players, management and spectators. Like reoccurring violence, the problem has turned so virulent that FIFA has addressed it in its Fair Play code as well as ordering the display of "Say No To Racism" banners during professional matches. There have been blatant incidents such as throwing bananas on the field at the presence of a black player, and away fans chanting "Niggerpool! Niggerpool!" at a Liverpool home game.<sup>162</sup> Yet most incidents occur in a more subtle, quiet manner.

Colin King in his essay, "Race and Cultural Identity: Playing the Race Game Inside Football" examines how black players in the English Premier League react, negotiate and contend with racism from fellow players, management and fans.<sup>163</sup> Black players consistently have had to deal with incidents involving racist language and how white players have used it in the soccer field. For example, soccer player Tony Davis describes how white players would address him as "you black bastard" in the field, but later at a bar or another more relaxed social

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<sup>159</sup> Grahame L. Jones, "2002 World Cup United States 2, Mexico 0," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 June 2002.

<sup>160</sup> Brian Forbes, "For Mexican Soccer Fans, Facing U.S. is More than just a Rivalry: Putting it All on the Line," *The Denver Post*, 27 March 2005, B-01.

<sup>161</sup> There is a wide scholarly and non-scholarly body of work on the topic of racism and soccer. Most notably are the works of Colin King, *Offside Racism: Playing the White Man*, (New York: Berg Publishing, 2004); Grant Jarvie, *Sport, Racism and Ethnicity*, (London: Falmer Press, 1991); Jon Garland and Michael Rowe, *Racism and anti-racism in football*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Les Back et al., *The Changing Face of Football: racism, identity and multicultural in the English game*, (New York: Berg Publishing, 2001)

<sup>162</sup> The English Premier League is notoriously known for its virulent racism, frequently expressed openly by fans. The first incident involved Arsenal player John Barnes, the second was at a Liverpool v. Everton game. Both incidents are recounted in Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1992), 188-191.

<sup>163</sup> Colin King, "Race and Cultural Identity: Playing the Race Game Inside Football," *Leisure Studies*, 23 no. 1 (January 2004), 19-30.



setting would apologize for the epithets. King argues that using racist language in the field is almost always justified, at least by the white players, as part of the game or else classified as an innocuous attempt at disturbing the black player's concentration. As King writes, "Black players may find it difficult to identify racism and to hold white men accountable, when racist 'industrial language' is seen as a legitimate form of competition between men, and as a normal part of being a professional soccer player."<sup>164</sup> In other words, terms that in any other setting would be considered offensive and disrespectful, are completely justified if uttered in the context of soccer.

Phrases do not have to be overtly racist for them to carry a racial connotation. King analyzed the use of the seemingly innocent phrase "a chip on their shoulder" as it is applied to black soccer players. White managers and coaches use the phrase strictly to refer to black players that do not meet their standard of proper behavior. As Kings further explains, "the use of this term becomes rigidly fixed in the white imagination of white coaches in relation to black players. The notion of the 'chip on the shoulder' thus becomes a means by which black players are judged in relation to their ability to adapt to these implicit judgments."<sup>165</sup> In other words, if a black player is unable to fulfill a particular definition of a properly behaved soccer player, he is immediately categorized as having a 'chip on his shoulder.' More importantly, although the phrasing alone does not have any inherent racial overtones, when taken in consideration its usage and context the intended racial connotation becomes apparent.

King's conclusions about interpreting language in a racialized soccer context can be applied to the political dynamics between U.S. and Mexican players. In the soccer world, the word dirty has referred to players not following the rules or trying to fool the referee. But the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 27.

U.S. players' frequent and specific use of the word dirty to refer to their Mexican counterparts merits a more profound reading. The accusations of "dirty" by Donovan and other U.S. players have to be framed in the historical conception of the "dirty Mexican" in the American imagination. Thus, the word becomes "rigidly fixed" in the imagination of the U.S. players in relation to Mexican players. It is only then that dirty becomes an appropriate and effective insult.

Mexicans on both sides of the border have been historically stereotyped as "lazy" and "dirty," particularly in U.S. popular culture. It has been widely accepted that the motion picture industry has had a profound effect in the way images of "others" are viewed, produced and reproduced in U.S. society. *Birth of a Nation*, D.W. Griffith's cinematic rendition of the Civil War and Reconstruction, is a powerful example of how motion pictures can both tap into the latent racism existent at the time of filming and production and reinforce or reproduce the stereotype of the "other," in this case of African Americans.<sup>166</sup> When Mexican characters have been included in U.S. films, they also have been stereotypically and derogatorily portrayed. Representations of Mexicans in film have gone through at least three stages, the earliest being the dirty "greaser" bandit, then the "Latin Lover," and finally a return to the bandit, this time not as a menacing enemy but more likely as an ignorant peasant or comic sidekick.<sup>167</sup> The early rendition of the bandit, in such "greaser" films as *Licking the Greasers* (1910), *Guns and Greasers* (1918), *Aztec Treasure* (1914) and *Broncho Billy's Mexican Wife* (1915) were produced in the context of the Mexican Revolution and the U.S. military interventions. As Chicano scholar Chon Noriega argues, "in the treatment of the concurrent Mexican Revolution, these films initiated, indirectly, the immigration narrative...in this manner, the 'greaser' genre

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<sup>166</sup> *Birth of a Nation* was released in 1915 at the height of the Ku Klux Klan revival and Jim Crow segregation in the South. It is based on Thomas Dixon's novels *The Clansmen* and *The Leopard's Spots*.

<sup>167</sup> Bradley S. Greenberg, et al., "Mass Communications and Mexican Americans" in *Mexican Americans and the Mass Media*, Bradley S. Greenberg ed., (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1986), 31.

resolved the southwest's political unconsciousness, which returns or reemerges under the impetus of increased Mexican immigration and, in 1912, statehood for Arizona and New Mexico (exceptional for their Mexican majorities)."<sup>168</sup> In other words, the images reproduced in these films have to be contextualized in the Anglo response to the social and political disruptions caused by the Mexican Revolution and the mass immigration of Mexicans into the United States discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, the term "greaser" demonstrates the early association of Mexican and "dirty" or "greasy" in the American imagination. For example, the 1934 film *Viva Villa!* portrayed Mexican revolutionary hero Pancho Villa as sloppy and unshaven when in fact "Pancho Villa was clean and orderly, no matter how much he chased after women."<sup>169</sup> Although these films were produced and distributed during the early twentieth century, contemporary derogatory depictions of ethnic Mexicans have tapped into the same reservoir of the conflict-filled relations of these two nations.

"Arriba! Arriba! Andale! Andale! Heee-aaaaa!" is the recognizable calling card of one of television's most memorable cartoon characters: Speedy Gonzales. The fastest mouse in Mexico has been running around television since his debut in the late 1950s and has lasted in re-runs until 2001 when the cable television channel Cartoon Network finally ceased to air his shorts.<sup>170</sup> This seemingly innocuous mouse has for decades revived the Mexican bandito persona, reconfigured with a less menacing and more amicable personality but just as lazy and dirty as its first incarnation. Again, the character of Speedy Gonzales was created in the context of the relationship between Mexico and the United States. For example, Speedy's attire is not that of

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<sup>168</sup> Chon Noriega, "Citizen Chicano" in *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media*, Clara E. Rodriguez ed., (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 91.

<sup>169</sup> Chon Noriega, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 34.

<sup>170</sup> William Anthony Nericcio, *Tex{t}-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 125.

the typical Mexican peasant; instead his dress resembles the regional dress of the port city of Veracruz. Veracruz has been the traditional entry point for many invasions of Mexico from Hernán Cortes to the American incursions in 1846 and 1914. As critic William Anthony Nerccio, in his scathing deconstruction of Speedy Gonzales, writes:

No surprise, then, that Warner Brothers animators, faced with the challenge of crafting a decidedly Mexican space, for a decidedly Mexican animal hero call on the collective memory of American adventurism in Mexico. Not for nothing are Speedy and his crew often found hanging out around the docks—as in *Here Today, Gone Tamale* (dir. Friz Freleng, 1959)—lolling about in the trash sporting the garb of Mexican *veracruzanos*. And this coincidence of film, photography, border conflicts, and stereotypes is no accident. What are stereotypes but “bloodstains,” the socially conserved oral and textual remnants of communities in conflicts?<sup>171</sup>

Speedy’s adventures represent the bloodstains left by the conflicts of Mexico-U.S. relations, and have reinforced the stereotypes derived of those relations. In the cartoon short *Cannery Woe* (1961), the opening scenes showed a pair of lazy Mexican mice waking from a *siesta* in a sardine can labeled, “El Steenko Sardinias.” In the short, Speedy played the hero for stealing cheese from his eternal foe, Sylvester the cat, for a Mexican light skinned mayoral candidate. For his actions, Speedy was rewarded with the post of “Chick Inspector.” The stereotypes reinforced here were numerous, “Mexicans are dirty, never far from trash; “Mexicans” are politically illiterate, impoverished, if clever, thieves out for large volumes of free food and booze in the never-ending search for libidinal recompense.”<sup>172</sup> Thus, through the image of the “funny” and “cute” Speedy Gonzales, Mexican stereotypes have been continuously reinforced in popular culture.

These images have been disseminated, run and re-run to millions of television viewers in the past four decades that have consumed and “innocently” laughed at Speedy’s exploits and adventures. Thus, when a player like Landon Donovan made the assertion that Mexican soccer

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 131.

players were dirty, he was appealing to the popular image that Speedy Gonzales and his ilk represented. The association had resonance because it drew on a long tradition in the United States of associating Mexicans with uncleanness. It is precisely because of these stereotypes that the words of the U.S. team members published for all to read have escalated the rivalry between the teams. Moreover, the frequency of the use of the word dirty in soccer does not erase the racial tensions present between Americans and Mexicans that contextualize the rivalry between U.S. and Mexican soccer players. On the contrary, it allows for “dirty” to be justified in the soccer context while still evoking the “dirty Mexican” stereotype. Thus, U.S. players can “get away with” calling Mexican players dirty and leave any player who raises an objection vulnerable to being labeled ‘over-sensitive.’<sup>173</sup>

For their part, Mexican players have limited their declarations to flashy showings of overconfidence regarding their position as the “Giant of the CONCACAF.” In 1997, before a match against the United States, striker Luís García assured that there was nothing wrong with affirming that Mexico was the “giant” in the region, he stressed, “It has been for a long time and it will continue to be. Mexico has a big advantage over other countries in the CONCACAF...we have to play in this region because of geography, we can’t play anywhere else...I do think we are going to win, Mexico is superior to the United States.”<sup>174</sup> In the same year striker Luis Hernandez, affirmed that when it came to the United States squad, “We are superior to them.”<sup>175</sup> These boastful pronouncements by Mexican players, although innocent of racist overtones, convey their need to publicly reassert their dominance in the soccer field. Because of the

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<sup>173</sup> King, “Race and Cultural Identity”, 25.

<sup>174</sup> Jorge Luis Macias, “México-EU, mas que un clásico: la creciente rivalidad deportiva de los colosos del norte se pondrá de manifiesto hoy en el Cañedo,” *Los Angeles La Opinión*, 2 Novemeber 1997, 1E. (quote translated by author)

<sup>175</sup> Martin Alvarado, “Sentenciaron los Tricolores: A Estados Unidos le daremos su calaverita!,” *Mexico D.F. Ovaciones*, 2 November 1997, 2. (quote translated by author)

inequitable political dynamic between Mexico and the United States, for Mexico it is imperative to maintain power or the semblance of power in the one arena it has traditionally demonstrated superiority; the soccer field. Moreover, the public comments served to irritate their opponents and have been partly responsible for the strong U.S. response in the press. Mexicans have not been oblivious to the U.S. player's statements about them, but as interim national coach Hugo Sanchez declared in 2000, "It doesn't bother me or anger me. They can say what they want; I imagine that they said it in English trusting nobody would understand them. In any case, the national team will play with much character, determination and 'claw' on Sunday to win the USA cup as visitors."<sup>176</sup> Sanchez's indifferent response was made in the context of a much more humbled Mexican National team. From 1991 to 2000, in sixteen games played, Mexico had only beaten the United States in five occasions, tying them six times and losing five matches. During this same period, there was a marked in the difference between Mexican player's assertions regarding the U.S. National team. Whereas in 1997 it was all confidence and swagger, as noted above by 2001, even after a victory at home, coach Javier Aguirre said, "we didn't give a brilliant game...the United States were (sic) the better team, they were undefeated and it was going to be difficult to score on them."<sup>177</sup>

Whereas Mexican players toned down their declarations to the press, the press itself did nothing to reconcile the rivals. Instead, the press has contributed to the rivalry by printing incendiary headlines at every opportunity. The headlines that surrounded the February 2001 World Cup eliminatory game to be played in Columbus, Ohio were no exception. The Spanish language U.S. newspaper *La Opinion* identified this game as "The Cold War." The Mexican paper *Ovaciones* printed headlines along similar lines: "With Everything Against The United

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<sup>176</sup> Martin Alvarado, "Me tiene sin cuidado la prensa norteamericana," *Mexico D.F. Ovaciones*, 10 June 2000, 7. (quote translated by author)

<sup>177</sup> Javier Contreras, "Estamos Vivos!," *Mexico D.F. Ovaciones*, 2 July 2001, 4. (quote translated by author)

States; Mexico, To Win The Cold War.”<sup>178</sup> Another Mexican newspaper, *Reforma* printed in its pre-game edition, “The United States Hopes For War With El Tri.”<sup>179</sup> The American English-language press was not exempt from printing headlines that augmented the already heated encounters. Prior to the Columbus game the *Los Angeles Times* headline read, “Qualifier is Served Ice Cold.” The *Chicago Sun-Times* headline read, “Cold field Advantage; U.S. Team Looks For Any Edge Against Mexico,” and The *San Diego Union Tribune* headline read, “U.S. relishing its home-ice advantage.”<sup>180</sup> Emboldened by the U.S. victory, newspapers printed headlines such as “Mexico Afraid Of Big, Bad Wolff,” referring to U.S. forward Josh Wolff who made significant contributions to the victory and other headlines read “Mexico Cries ‘Caramba!’” after loss to U.S.”<sup>181</sup> These headlines may have reflected the newspapers’ wish to increase circulation but it cannot be denied that their publications increased the amount of tension present between the two sides. Yet these headlines have also given printed expression to the persistently controversial matches.

The Columbus, Ohio match that was dubbed “The Cold War” by Spanish language newspapers was a double entendre: it referred to the cold weather prognosticated for the match (six degrees below zero) and the cold fans’ reception the U.S. press predicted for the Mexican National team. The match had been purposely organized in Columbus, Ohio because it was demographically deemed a more “U.S. friendly” venue. According to the 2000 Census, of the

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<sup>178</sup> Staff writer, “Contra todo ante Estados Unidos; Mexico, a ganar la guerra fria,” *Mexico D.F. Ovaciones*, 28 February 2001, 8. (translated by author)

<sup>179</sup> Alejandro Garza, “Esperan en EU guerra con Tri-Los medios locales empiezan a darle importancia al juego,” *Mexico D.F. Reforma*, 27 February 2001, 5. (translated by author)

<sup>180</sup> Grahame L. Jones, “Qualifier is Served ice cold” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 2001, D1. Len Ziehm “Cold-field advantage; U.S. team looks for any edge against Mexico,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 25 February 2001, 137. Mark Zeigler, “U.S. relishing its home-ice advantage,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, 28 February 2001, Sports.

<sup>181</sup> Scout M. Reid, “Mexico afraid of big, bad Wolff—The U.S. forward, who nearly didn’t play Wednesday, scores one goal and sets up another in the 2-0 victory in a World Cup 2002 qualifier.” *Los Angeles The Orange County Register*, 1 March 2001, Sports Cover. Staff writer, “Mexico cries ‘Caramba!’ after loss to U.S.” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 2 March 2001, 2C.

711, 470 inhabitants of Columbus only 2.5 percent or 17,000 claimed to be of Hispanic ancestry, in fact of the total inhabitants of the state of Ohio only 2.3 percent claimed to be Hispanic.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, all subsequent qualifying matches scheduled between the U.S. National team and Latino teams were relocated from high Latino population cities, such as Los Angeles or Houston; instead the venues considered were Foxboro, Massachusetts and Seattle, Washington.<sup>183</sup> This predicament of the U.S. national team is unique in the world. No other country's national team has to worry about the fans' loyalties regardless of venue or city. Mexico is distinctive in that it can play with a home-field advantage in both countries. As *Riverside* journalist Luis Bueno wrote, "When Mexico plays on its soil, the stands are filled with red-white-and-green-clad supporters. But when El Tricolor plays on American turf, the stands are also filled with a similarly frenzied pro-Mexican crowd."<sup>184</sup> El Tri has had a decisively home-field advantage when playing in the United States at least for the crowd if not in actual game victories. The sheer numbers are astounding: 92,000 fans at the Rose Bowl in 1994; 92,000 at the Rose Bowl in 1996; 92,000 at the Memorial Coliseum in 1998; 50,000 at San Diego in 1999, stadiums filled to capacity. However, the crowd overwhelmingly rooted for the Mexican National team. For the United States, it has been a constant struggle to find a venue that truly offered home-field advantage. As U.S. coach Bruce Arena stressed, "The weather will not be the difference in the game. But we believe that playing the game in Columbus will give us real home-field advantage."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>183</sup> Jack Bell, "U.S. Schedules Chilly Reception for Mexico in Cup Qualifier," *The New York Times*, 6 December 2000, 8.

<sup>184</sup> Luis Bueno, "The Mexican National Team's games on U.S. soil feel like home thanks to the crowds," *Riverside (California) Press Enterprise*, 19 May 2002, C01.

<sup>185</sup> Jack Bell, "U.S. Schedules Chilly Reception for Mexico in Cup Qualifier"



The intention of the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) to provide a venue where the National Team would feel at home was not at all unreasonable. Home-field advantage has a great importance in the sports world. Social psychologist John Edwards presented empirical evidence of the phenomenon in his essay “The Home-Field Advantage”. For example, in statistical data the author showed a significant number of wins at home over wins on the road. He also demonstrated a larger margin of points in victories by teams playing at home than as visitors.<sup>186</sup> He attributed this small but real advantage to several factors including ‘territoriality.’ The author referred to the concept of territoriality as the places where people chose for a certain function, such as a home for shelter, and personalize them to show it as their territory. Furthermore, once the territory was chosen and marked it would be defended from ‘intrusion’ whether real or perceived. For Edwards there are three types of territory; private territory such as a home, semi-public territory that was attended by regulars such as a neighborhood bar, and completely public territory such as municipal parks.<sup>187</sup> Sports stadiums fall under the second category; public spaces that are attended regularly by a home crowd that would display territoriality. Stadiums could be temporarily decorated with the team’s colors, banners of support or permanently decorated with displays of trophies or statues commemorating an outstanding player or coach. These particular touches would make a public venue feel like home. For Edwards this home feeling has another advantage. He argued that people feel more at liberty to display certain kinds of behavior at home than in any other public places.<sup>188</sup> Thus, a sporting crowd would feel more comfortable making more flagrant shows of support, such as louder

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<sup>186</sup> John Edwards, “The Home-Field Advantage”, in *Sports, Games and Play*, ed., Jeffrey H. Goldstein, (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1979). Edwards examines both college football and professional football over a three year period.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 420-421.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

singing or yelling, than the visiting crowd, because they would feel that they are in an environment which they control or is “theirs.”

Edwards’ arguments regarding crowd behavior can also serve to explain why the USSF attempted to control to whom the tickets were sold, as well as choosing Columbus as the host city. The USSF intended to make the Mexican National team feel as visitors in terms of venue and crowd composition. They also offered the opportunity for pro-U.S. crowds to demonstrate their support without being drowned out by the usual pro-Mexican crowd. For players it was also important to have the majority of fan support, as U.S. defender Jeff Agoos asserts of games played against Mexico, “I’ve been playing with the national team for fifteen years, and I think I can count on one hand the number of times we’ve had a pro-American crowd at home. So anytime you have sometime like that, it’s an exponential boost for us.”<sup>189</sup> Of the approximately 22,000 seats available, 9,000 would be reserved for the season ticket holders of Columbus’ MLS team the Crew, members of *Sam’s Army*<sup>190</sup> and others part of the U.S. soccer “family.”<sup>191</sup> The rest of the tickets would only be accessible through waiting lists.<sup>192</sup> The deliberate effort to control the ethnic composition of the crowd raised some objections, and added yet another point of contention between the two national teams. USSF spokesperson Jim Moorehouse tried to clarify the matter, “Those tickets were offered to the community of Columbus and they were never denied to anyone because of their name or because the color of their skin (sic). The only thing needed was enough money to buy the ticket.”<sup>193</sup> Apparently only two thousand pro-Mexico fans had the money to purchase tickets.

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<sup>189</sup>Mark Zeigler, “U.S. relishing its home-ice advantage,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 28 February 2001, Sports.

<sup>190</sup>Sam’s Army is the official U.S. National team fan’s association. see, <http://www.sams-army.com/>

<sup>191</sup>Jack Bell, “U.S. Schedules Chilly Reception for Mexico in Cup Qualifier”

<sup>192</sup>Rigoberto Cervantes, “Boletos De Oro,” *Los Angeles La Opinión*, 16 December 2000, 1C.

<sup>193</sup>Miguel Gonzalez, “Cita en Columbus: Ante la aproximacion de la ‘guerra fria,’” *Los Angeles La Opinión*, 11 February 2001, 4C. (quote translated by author)

The embattled Mexican National team arrived in Columbus, Ohio under a barrage of criticisms from the Mexican national press. For months the team had vetoed their national press; the players refused to grant any interviews or make any comments. Coach Enrique Meza excused the players by stating, “In spite of everything that has been said I do think that they [the players] have been offended and feel annoyed because now with a little black book anything can be said without any proof.”<sup>194</sup> Added to this was the team’s knowledge that this time they would not play in front of a receptive crowd and that the weather conditions were not in the least bit favorable for them. In the first half of the match Mexico played defensively and aggressively, trying to make its way slowly up the field without giving to the United States room to gain possession of the ball and counterattack. The first half for the U.S. was plagued with injuries. In the fifteenth minute, midfielder Brian McBride was replaced by forward Josh Wolff. McBride had to leave the field because his right eye was completely shut due to a collision with an opponent’s elbow. In the twenty-eight minute midfielder Claudio Reyna was already limping from a pulled left groin, and defender Tony Sanneh played the entire game with an injured foot. Despite the injuries, the United States was able to secure the victory in the second half, with an early goal (in the second minute of the second half) by Josh Wolff and an assist on goal by Ernie Stewart in the eighty-seventh minute. As now customary the game ended with a shoving match between Mexican and American players, instigated by a heated discussion between Mexican player Pavel Pardo and U.S. player Clint Mathis.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Jorge Jaramillo, “Segun Enrique Meza Los Tricolores estan ofendidos y vejados” *Mexico D.F. Ovaciones*, 28 February 2001, 4. (quote translated by author)

<sup>195</sup> Alejandro Garza, “Entumidos!”, *Monterrey, Mexico El Norte*, 1 March 2001, Sports. Jorge Jaramillo, “Estados Unidos vencio a Mexico...Dos bajo cero!”, *Mexico D.F. Ovaciones*, 1 March 2001, 2-4. Scott Reid, “Mexico afraid of big, bad Wolf—The U.S. forward, who nearly didn’t play Wednesday, scores one goal and sets up another in the 2-0 victory in a World Cup 2002 qualifier,” *Los Angeles Orange County Register*, 1 March 2001, Sports cover.

The Mexican national press again strongly criticized El Tri. The post-match *Ovaciones* cover read, “Mexico Lost Against The United States 2-0; The Players Are...Vetoed For Soccer”<sup>196</sup> The use of the word “vetoed” was a brutal insult for the National team; the word connotes the idea that the players were inadequate, ineffectual and incompetent at playing soccer. It is not unusual for the Mexican press to criticize El Tri. But because El Tri is always expected to be superior to the U.S. National team, a loss provokes blatant disparagement from the press. Yet, the Columbus match was not the Mexican National team’s most humiliating upset. One and half years later the United States’ World Cup round-of-sixteen victory would bring the regional rivalry to the world stage.

By all indications the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup was supposed to be Mexico’s chance to shine on the world stage. Although the road to classification had been a difficult one, once they arrived in Korea the team’s performance significantly improved. They beat Croatia 1-0, Ecuador 2-1, and tied powerhouse Italy 1-1 for a first-place classification in their group (G). On the other hand, the United States had a difficult time in their group, they defeated Portugal 3-2, but only managed to tie host Korea 1-1 and lost atrociously to Poland 3-1. These results classified them in second place in their group (D), barely missing elimination. As luck would have it, the first-place winner of Group G was matched up against the second-place winner of Group D for their pass into the quarter finals. That meant that Mexico and the United States had to confront each other once again. For this match the stakes were much higher. For Mexico it was a chance to pass into a quarter final round away from home.<sup>197</sup> For the United States it was a chance to erase their disastrous performance in the last World Cup and set new record for the

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<sup>196</sup> *Ovaciones*, 1 March 2001, Cover page.

<sup>197</sup> Mexico had been able to participate in the quarter finals only in the two occasions it was the host country, in 1970 and 1986.

National team.<sup>198</sup> For both teams it was a chance to humiliate the other and send the loser home in front of the whole soccer viewing world.

“It’s hardly a friendly...We’ll see what kind of statements come out in the next few days. I’m sure they won’t be lighthearted,” Landon Donovan declared to the press a few days before the Sunday June 16<sup>th</sup> match up. The political implications of the rivalry immediately were conjured in the press. For example, the Mexican regional paper *Palabra* published this headline, “We are going to win and we will not give them water.”<sup>199</sup> The headline corresponds to an editorial in which the author, Gerardo Segura, questions where the United States would be as a country without the contributions of Jews, African Americans, Japanese, and of course Latinos and the “eleven thousand pounds of harvest they produce annually.”<sup>200</sup> He concluded that the morning after the match up the United States would be a “thirsty” country because Mexico would have denied them the soccer victory. Although he does not reference it directly, what the article alluded to was the brewing political controversy over water rights between Mexico and the United States. Mexican National team fans also hoped that soccer could alleviate the crisis, as Roberto Magaña stated, “It is personal, we have a border and we always fight. We will pay that water debt with a soccer match.”<sup>201</sup> This illustrates how from the Mexican perspective soccer is intricately tied to the political dynamics between Mexico and the United States. In Mexico, the political context of the rivalry is always just beneath the surface.

The history of the water controversy begins in 1944 when Mexico and the United States signed a treaty to share the waters of the Rio Grande. Under the treaty, Mexico was supposed to

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<sup>198</sup> In the 98 France World Cup, the United States finished last, losing all three first round games. As host of the 94 World Cup the United States made it to the last sixteen and lost to Brazil, 1-0.

<sup>199</sup> Gerardo Segura, “Les Vamos a ganar! Y no les daremos agua,” *Saltillo, Mexico Palabra* 16 June 2002, Etcétera. (translated by author)

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Dane Schiller, “Mexico wants to kick U.S.—In Monday’s second-round World Cup game, that is,” *San Antonio Express-News*, 15 June 2002, 1A.

release 350,000 acre-feet of water per year to the Rio Grande from its dammed tributaries. By 1997 Mexico had fallen behind, owing almost 1.5 million acre-feet in water to the United States. Rick Perry governor of Texas, the state most immediately affected, demanded that Mexico pay the water debt. Governor Perry cited a loss of 1 billion dollars in the state's economy and a loss of 30,000 jobs.<sup>202</sup> The problem was compounded by years of drought and exponential growth in the area, as the population had jumped from 200,000 when the treaty was signed to nearly 20 million. Mexico alleged that because of the drought Mexican farmers were also under duress. According to Alberto Szelekely, the Mexican Ambassador for Water Border Affairs, Mexico simply did not have the water to meet U.S. demands, "The truth of the matter is that our dams are practically empty. No water treaty can demand a country to deliver water that doesn't exist."<sup>203</sup> The regional conflict escalated to an international stand-off when the United States argued that according to satellite pictures, Mexico did have the water, it just did not want to share. Mexico retaliated with accusations of the United States spying illegally.<sup>204</sup> To further complicate the issue the reservoirs in question were located in the state of Chihuahua. The governor of that state, an opponent of then Mexican President Vicente Fox's American-friendly political policy, made it clear he would not cooperate. Instead, he responded that what little water they did have belonged to them and that Texan farmers should "pray for rain."<sup>205</sup> After several conversations between the two countries' Presidents in late June of 2002, a deal was agreed on that eased the crisis. Mexico would give the United States approximately 30 billion gallons of water and the United States promised approximately 100 million dollars in efficient-water-use programs.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Mary Jordan and Paul Duggan, "Water Dispute Divides Texas and Mexico," *The Washington Post*, 25 May 2002, A3.

<sup>203</sup> Jim Yardley, "Water Rights War Rages on Faltering Rio Grande," *The New York Times*, 19 April 2002, 16.

<sup>204</sup> Mary Jordan and Paul Duggan, "Water Dispute Divides Texas and Mexico," *The Washington Post*, 25 May 2002, A3.

<sup>205</sup> Richard Boudreaux, "U.S. Mexico Reach a Deal to End Water Dispute," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 June 2002, A5.

<sup>206</sup> Tim Weiner, "U.S. Reaches Partial Deal with Mexico Over Water," *The New York Times*, 5 July 2002, 14.

The water agreement was reached soon after the Mexican defeat at the hands of the United States in the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup, a fact that was clearly not lost on many fans of El Tri, some of whom expressed concern that Mexico had negotiated the loss. The preoccupation was evident even prior to the game as a cartoon published in the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*, showed “A sombrero-clad Mexican prays on his knees, Little Virgin, we’ve already given them California, our water, our petroleum, our economy, our sovereignty. At least don’t let them take Monday’s game!”<sup>207</sup> After the loss many pro-Mexico fans searched for explanations. Mexican student Francisco Valenzuela expressed, “The Mexican team sold out, President George Bush must have called up his pal Vicente and told him how it had to be.”<sup>208</sup> Another student Isaac Pinzon spoke along similar lines, “It’s a shame politics intervenes in sports, I don’t doubt that something was negotiated because Mexico gives up a lot of things.”<sup>209</sup> Taking into account the context of the Mexico-U.S. political relationship the veracity of President Bush demanding the Mexican loss from then President Fox could seem plausible to many Mexicans. Fans attempted to rationalize how a “stronger” and “better” team like Mexico lost to the United States in a World Cup. For Mexicans the loss was rationalized in terms of the political, racial and social history that frames the perception they have of the United States.

Numerous explanations to the loss were offered from the conspiracy theory mentioned above, to a psychological block experienced by Mexican players when playing the United States, to a flawed Mexican character. As a would-be celebrant stated, “Mexico lacked the strength of character to win. I’m crushed. There is this intense rivalry with the United States and what with the problems we have with them on the border, and with migrants, and this loss is going to affect the country a lot. There would have been

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<sup>207</sup> Richard Bourdeaux, “World Cup: U.S. vs. Mexico” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 2002.

<sup>208</sup> Susan Ferris, “Joy in the U.S. Dejection in Mexico,” *Texas The Austin American Statesman*, 18 June 2002, A1.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

this great wave of pride had we won.”<sup>210</sup> A surge of pride was what many fans of the Mexican National team expected to feel on the Monday morning after the game. Instead they had to face yet another challenge to their team’s already suspect soccer hegemony in the CONCACAF region and over the United States. As Benjamin De Buen Kalman eloquently wrote in an editorial piece published a year later:

Soccer defended our culture, our identity; we could lift our head above the most powerful nation in the world that turned English “football” into an inexplicable word like soccer. In ninety minutes we knew there was a pure space to be Mexican without having to go through customs or show proper documentation. The goals from the U.S. are more painful every time. Not only because it means defeat by the country that inevitably we have to compare ourselves but because it makes us dream about a time when we were better than them in the world’s most popular sport. To beat the United States also means to resist hegemony.<sup>211</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup served as stage for the world to see a regional rivalry that has been evolving for more than a decade. The United States and Mexico have forged a classic rivalry in which the strained social, political and economic relationship of these two neighbors provides the context. The mounting friction between the two National teams has appeared both inside and outside the field. The games have been increasingly peppered with violence, with each team successively receiving more sanctions. More troubling, however, were the statements made by players to the press, particularly the U.S. players, who made repeated derogatory statements of their Mexican counterparts. The press itself also contributed to the rivalry by printing provocative headlines every time the teams played. Politics also influenced the fans’ responses to the matches. For example, in 2002 when Mexico lost to the United States in the World Cup, the pro-Mexico’s fans deduced that akin to numerous other occasions Mexico

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<sup>210</sup> Tim Weiner, “Mexico City Journal: For Mexico’s soccer fans, the end of the world,” *The New York Times*, 18 June 2002, A4.

<sup>211</sup> Benjamín De Buen Kalman, “Estados Unidos; Un Nuevo Rival,” *Los Angeles La Opinión*, 10 May 2003, 2C.



had conceded to the United States another piece of its autonomy. Precisely because soccer has historically represented an uncontested arena of Mexican dominance, a defeat by the United States is painful reminder of Mexico's unequal relationship with its rival. Ultimately, the Mexico-U.S. rivalry stems from the recent U.S. challenge to Mexican hegemony in the CONCACAF region. A challenge that continues as Mexico loses ground in yet another contest with its richer, more politically powerful neighbor to the north.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FROM THE STANDS: GAMES, STADIUMS AND USES OF SPACE

Hours before the February 1998 CONCACAF Gold Cup game, thousands of fans approached the entrance of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum carrying Mexican flags and wearing the green, white and red of the Mexican National Team, *El Tri*. The Mexican American newspaper *La Opinion* observed that the display looked like “a protest against Proposition 187.”<sup>212</sup> Once inside, the crowd’s favorite team was clearly and unequivocally adulated, while the “other” team received jeers, mock and ridicule. Players of the “other” team, the United States National squad, were showered with liquids when taking corner kicks, booed incessantly when in possession of the ball, and at the end of the game were sent off amidst another shower of water, beer, cups and plastic bottles. The 1-0 victory in favor of Mexico marked a third consecutive Gold Cup championship for *El Tri*. For the U.S. National Team, it was yet another occasion when they played at home in front of an unfriendly crowd.

The crowd’s behavior, however, was a source of controversy, particularly the booing of the U.S. National anthem. Several editorials in the next few days questioned why ethnic Mexicans would so enthusiastically disparage the United States.<sup>213</sup> U.S. National Team defender Alexei Lalas encapsulated the complaints when he stated to the press, “I’m all for roots and understanding where you come from and having respect for you homeland, but tomorrow morning all those people are going to get up and work in the United States and live in the United States and have all the benefits of living in the United States. I would never be caught dead

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<sup>212</sup> Rigoberto Cervantez, “Mexico gana la IV Copa de Oro: Habia tantas banderas tricolor que parecia una manifestacion contra la Proposicion 187,” *Los Angeles La Opinion*, 15 February 1998, 1A.

<sup>213</sup> Frank Dell’Apa, “Losing their footing at end; U.S. soccer made strides in Cup, but last slip shows work remains,” *The Boston Globe*, 17 February 1998, D11; Grahame L. Jones, “Mexico Right at Home in Win; U.S., playing in front of an unfriendly crowd of 91,255 at the Coliseum, losses in Gold Cup Championship, 1-0,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1998, 1; Bill Plaschke, “U.S.-Based Players should not be pelted with debris by U.S.-based fans,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 February 1998, 1.

cheering for any other team than the United States, because I know what it's given me."<sup>214</sup> The media response to the Anglo outcry was a mixture of apologies for the behavior of a few and a dismissal of the crowd's behavior as standard of soccer mobs. As journalist Sergio Muñoz wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Without condoning the mob's uncivilized behavior, I would submit to you, Alexi Lalas, that such conduct is, unfortunately a typical mob behavior."<sup>215</sup> While the apologies may have been necessary in order not to perturb the "xenophobic, nativist, protectionist and isolationist undercurrents that are alive and well in California," as Muñoz in the same article clarifies, disregarding the crowd's behavior as "mobbish" robs it of any agency. Instead, it can be argued that "soccer fans are not cultural idiots incapable of critical distance and blinded by their passion."<sup>216</sup> In other words, the anti-U.S. demonstrations of that February afternoon at the Memorial Coliseum were not a display of senseless passion or scorn, but a result of the complex social, political and economic system existent outside of the stadium.

Many reports of the match were correct in pointing out that collectively denigrating an opponent has been frequent in soccer matches. Police protection for players taking corner kicks is noticeable in any South American soccer match. Intense and violent rivalries between local club teams are fairly commonplace in every corner of the soccer world. What is unique about soccer in the United States is that the majority of U.S.-based fans have preferred to give support to foreign teams. As sociologist Richard Giulianotti argues soccer in the U.S. does not unify but fragment nationalistic feelings because it is a sport supported mainly by hyphenated Americans.<sup>217</sup> Thus, soccer provides an opportunity for individuals to collectively support the

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<sup>214</sup> Grahame L. Jones, "This is much worse than trash talking," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1998, 7.

<sup>215</sup> Sergio Muñoz, "Star-Spangled Banter; Fan's unruly behavior was nothing out of ordinary for any sport," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 February 1998, 1.

<sup>216</sup> Christian Bromberger, *Significación de la pasión popular por los clubes de fútbol* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Libros del Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2001), 27.

<sup>217</sup> Richard Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 38.

team of their country of origin or ancestry. Such is the case of “Santiago”<sup>218</sup>, a young Colombian male who immigrated to the United States seven years ago. In many respects, Santiago’s experience in the United States resembles that of many ethnic Mexicans. He is an undocumented immigrant; he speaks a limited amount English and has found it difficult to adjust to life in the United States. Akin to many ethnic Mexicans, almost every weekend Santiago plays soccer with a couple of different teams in his hometown area in Florida. He has even traveled to Plant City, a town sixty miles south of his hometown to play. If he is not playing, he watches two or three games at home. For Santiago, soccer represents a way to maintain his culture and his identity, which he refuses to abandon. As he explains, “I love soccer because in Colombia soccer is king, also because soccer is everything for me. Soccer is part of my Colombian identity like *cumbia* and *arepas*.”<sup>219</sup>

Santiago had the opportunity to see the Colombian National team play in the United States, although not against the host nation but against Switzerland. For him the whole experience was completely different than to what he was accustomed in his native country. The insufficient support in the stands made it difficult for the festive environment to be recreated. When he attended games in Colombia, the stadiums were usually filled to capacity. “There is nothing like it,” he reminisces about a particular game in which each spectator received a flag coming in to the stadium, “imagine fifty-two thousand flags waving in the night...One fills up with emotion, and you start singing and jumping around.”<sup>220</sup> In the United States however, the crowd seemed passionless and the environment subdued.<sup>221</sup> Still, he maintains that if the Colombian National team would play against the U.S. he would try to attend the game to cheer

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<sup>218</sup> Name has been changed to protect interviewee’s identity.

<sup>219</sup> “Santiago”, interview by author, 4 February 2008, Orlando, Florida. *Cumbia* is a tropical rhythm similar to Salsa. *Arepas* is a traditional Colombian dish. It is a patty cake made of corn and usually has assorted fillings.

<sup>220</sup> “Santiago”, interview by author, 4 February 2008, Orlando, Florida.

<sup>221</sup> “Santiago”, interview by author, 4 February 2008, Orlando, Florida.

for Colombia. Santiago affirms with conviction that, “If I could watch Colombia against the U.S. without hesitation I would cheer for Columbia, all my songs would go to my adored mother country.”<sup>222</sup>

Santiago is one of millions of immigrants that through soccer stay connected to their culture, history, and heritage. Santiago’s overall experience as a Latino in the United States is similar to many ethnic Mexicans particularly in sharing soccer as a strong marker of identity. But unlike Santiago and other Colombians, ethnic Mexicans are able to recreate the stadium experience in the United States; their ability to fill stadiums to capacity aid in appropriating the venues for their own purposes. Furthermore, the singularity of the ethnic Mexican community in the United States is also a contributing factor. In other words, Colombians, Argentines, and even other Central American communities do not share the extensive history of the ethnic Mexican community in the United States. This makes the stadium experience of ethnic Mexicans unique and the rivalry that Mexico shares with the United States exceptional.

For the ethnic Mexican community living in the United States, cheering for *El Tri* has multiple meanings. Loudly booing the U.S. National anthem represented a collective action of resistance from a community that has continually faced marginalization from mainstream U.S. culture and society. Choosing to cheer for Mexico instead of the “home” team, individuals have the ability to forge a collective resistant identity.<sup>223</sup> Blatantly antagonizing the U.S. National Team can thus be interpreted as the rejection of a society that constantly pushes for “Americanization” and assimilation at the cost of culture.

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<sup>222</sup> “Santiago”, interview by author, 4 February 2008, Orlando, Florida. .

<sup>223</sup> Sociologists Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong define resistant identity as “constructed by those individuals and groups who are at the wrong end of social domination, in the sense that they are socially excluded or stigmatized within the existing power framework.” in Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong, “Constructing Social Identities: Exploring the Structured Relations of Football Rivalries,” in *Fear and Loathing in World Football*, ed. by Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 270.

Additionally, Ethnic Mexicans support the team because, as Chicano scholar Gregory Rodriguez states, “More than anything else, spectators waving the Mexican flag are demonstrating an emotional connection to their place of birth, a pride of culture, and yes a cheer for a team they’ve rooted since childhood.”<sup>224</sup> Regardless of whether the individual was born in Mexico or not, this emotional connection and cultural pride has been passed on from one generation to the next. Attending soccer games thus provides a place where cultural pride can be transmitted and the emotional connection reaffirmed. The behavior inside the stadium, which many Anglos find rude and inappropriate, also contributes to making the venue feel like “home”. In other words, ethnic Mexicans re-create traditional Mexican activities and seek to convert the venues, even if temporarily, as their own home space. By engaging in this behavior, ethnic Mexicans also gain visibility in a society that has historically restricted their political, social and economic access. Furthermore, the stadium becomes a place where ethnic Mexicans can uphold a collective identity and build ties that cement their community beyond internal differences.

### **Creating “Homespace”, Displaying Cultural Pride**

Crowd behavior during the Mexico v. United States games has not always been so flagrantly anti-U.S., but it has consistently succeeded at making the U.S. National team feel unwelcome. The ethnic Mexicans’ support for *El Tri* does not necessarily translate into disloyalty or ungratefulness to the United States. Many ethnic Mexicans acknowledge the economic advantages they have in the United States in comparison to Mexico or, as Alexei Lalas articulated they “know what it [the U.S.] has given them”.<sup>225</sup> Yet awareness of their economic reality does not equate to an abandonment of tradition, culture and heritage pride. As Jorge Magdaleno, resident of the U.S. for twenty years said, “We’re U.S. fans but we’re Mexican fans

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<sup>224</sup> Gregory Rodriguez, “Don’t Equate Rudeness With Disloyalty; Soccer: Fans Of Mexico’s Team Were Merely Making A Cultural Statement,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February 1998.

<sup>225</sup> Grahame L. Jones, “This Is Much Worse Than Trash Talking,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1998, 7.

first. We've got to stay true to the homeland. The U.S. pays the bills, but our true roots are still in Mexico."<sup>226</sup> Cheering for the Mexican National team thus becomes a vehicle to tangibly reaffirm Mexican culture and heritage.

Honoring your heritage has a long tradition in the ethnic Mexican community in the United States. For example, in the Los Angeles area there are ethnic Mexican families who have for generations practiced *charrería* or Mexican style rodeo. For them, it has not only been a family endeavor but a palpable way to practice tradition. Leonardo Lopez, Los Angeles regional champion explains, "It's the action, the speed, knowing that I am part of a Mexican cultural tradition that is what pulls me again and again towards Charrería."<sup>227</sup> Similarly, attending games, carrying flags, chanting, and cheering during soccer games offers the opportunity for tradition to be palpable within the ethnic Mexican community. Juan Rubio of Albuquerque felt that "national pride leads recent immigrants to cheer for their home country. They pass their loyalties on to their children, first and second-generation Mexican Americans who see it as a chance to honor their heritage."<sup>228</sup>

Passing on cultural pride through soccer has been a tradition brought to the United States from Mexico. In Mexico, soccer transmits and disseminates tradition and culture. Anthropologist Andres Fabregas Puig, in his text *Lo Sagrado del Rebaño: El Futbol como Integrador de Identidades*, argues that a soccer club can serve as a symbol of national identity. In this case, he identifies Club Guadalajara, nicknamed *Las Chivas* (the Goats), as a symbol of a nation that dreams of equality among its people beyond tributes to mythical indigenous pasts. To Fabregas Puig, Las Chivas is the team of the people; a "tangible symbol of national

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<sup>226</sup> Daisy Nguyen, "U. S.-Mexico Soccer Match: An Identity Crisis for Immigrant Fans," *Associated Press*, 15 June 2002.

<sup>227</sup> Guillermo Garcia-Duarte, "El Orgullo De Ser Charro: Familias Radicadas En Los Estados Unidos Practican y Difunden Una De Las Tradiciones Mas Mexicanas," *Los Angeles La Opinión*, 21 October 1998, 1D.

<sup>228</sup> Iliana Kim, "Mexico Fans Passionate on Both Sides of the Border," *Albuquerque Tribune*, 2 June 2006, 4.

brotherhood.”<sup>229</sup> The author first establishes the connection of the city of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco with the national psyche. Most symbols classically associated with the country of Mexico are not indigenous to the capital city but from the state of Jalisco. It is here where the *Ranchera* singing Mariachi resides, drinking Tequila, the national drink exclusively grown in the area.<sup>230</sup> As the second largest city in Mexico, Guadalajara competes with the capital as the repository of cultural nationhood. In this context then, it is significant that Guadalajara has the only club in Mexico that utilizes Mexican-born players exclusively to fill its ranks. To Fabregas Puig, Las Chivas represent Mexican self love and pride which is in stark contrast to other teams, such Mexico City’s Club America that embodies wealth, foreign influence, class divisions and central control.<sup>231</sup>

The author offers a complete ethnographical description of game day at the *Estadio Jalisco* (Jalisco Stadium) the home venue of Club Guadalajara. He describes in detail the grounds, the food, the vendors, the people, the colors, the *porras* (organized fans), and of course, the game. According to the author, the whole spectacle is a Sunday to Sunday re-affirmation of national pride and identity. Furthermore, the author argues that this regional/national fervor spills over across the Mexico-U.S. border; Club Guadalajara shirts are conspicuously present at all games the National team plays in the United States. Fabregas Puig argues that this is possible because the team represents brotherhood across regions and borders, a brotherhood cemented in pride of “lo nuestro” or what is “authentic” and “Mexican”.<sup>232</sup> The conclusions of Fabregas Puig can be extrapolated to the ethnic Mexican community in the United States. The Mexican

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<sup>229</sup> Andrés Fabregas Puig, *Lo Sagrado del Rebaño: El Fútbol como integrador de identidades* (Jalisco, México: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2001), 69.

<sup>230</sup> By law, Agave (the plant used to produce Tequila), can only be grown in the state of Jalisco and parts of the states of Guanajuato, Tamaulipas and Michoacán.

<sup>231</sup> Andrés Fabregas Puig, *Lo Sagrado del Rebaño: El Fútbol como integrador de identidades* (Jalisco, México: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2001), 71-73.

<sup>232</sup> Andrés Fabregas Puig, *Lo Sagrado del Rebaño: El Fútbol como integrador de identidades* (Jalisco, México: El Colegio de Jalisco, 2001), 101-108.



National team, comparable to Las Chivas, becomes a symbol of Mexican culture. By cheering for *El Tri* individuals can publicly acknowledge their identity as Mexican and reaffirm the authenticity of that identity.

The festive environment found in soccer games attended by a large number of ethnic Mexicans in the United States can also be attributed to a need to re-create the same ambiance found in soccer games in Mexico. As Fabregas Puig describes the activities surrounding the soccer games, such as the consumption of traditional foods or the sale of team memorabilia form part of the rites of the Mexican soccer tradition. When ethnic Mexicans reconstruct that environment in an American venue they have engaged in what sports geographer John Bale calls “sport topophilia.”<sup>233</sup> Bale interprets topophilia in sports to be a “potent source of affection. Different senses--mainly sight but also smell, sound and nostalgia--contribute to a positive sense of place.”<sup>234</sup> This love of place, not only can evoke nostalgia or attachment for a particular stadium or physical locality, but in the case of international competitions, a soccer team, for example, can invoke a sense of place to millions of expatriates. The sights, colors, sounds and smells of the stadium thus create a sense of “home”. Additionally, by actively participating in creating this “home” in the soccer venue, ethnic Mexicans can tangibly exercise tradition and culture.

Soccer venues are not the only places where Mexican environments have been re-created. Cultural anthropologist Alejandra Castañeda in her study *The Politics of Citizenship of Migrant Mexicans*, tells the story of “Jose” a business-man who owns a small store in Redwood, California that sells clothes, and other articles such as music and household items. Not only is

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<sup>233</sup> The term topophilia was coined by human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in his work *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974). John Bale adapts the term to sports in his work, Bale, *Sport Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>234</sup> John Bale, *Sport Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 19.

the store organized to physically resemble a Mexican country store, but the items sold are meant to appeal to Mexican tastes. Castañeda argues that Jose's store "creates and re-creates familiar images, material memory practices through which a sense of citizenship and of belonging to a community is also constructed."<sup>235</sup> While inside the store notions of being *there* can be nurtured. The sights, sounds, smells, and even the manner in which business is conducted inside the store create and re-create a home space. Once they step outside, the world of *here* (geographical boundaries within the United States) comes barging in.

"Outside the stadium it felt like I was in the United States, but inside the stadium it was like I was in Mexico," reminisced "Aldo Luis"<sup>236</sup> of the one chance he has had to watch the Mexican National team play in the United States, "I liked it because the majority of the people [in the crowd] were Mexican."<sup>237</sup> Aldo Luis has lived in the United States for only eight years. For him, the transition has been difficult. An electrician by trade in his native Mexico, he has not been able to find comparable employment in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the area where he now lives. Aldo Luis finds life in the United States different and sometimes monotonous, especially when it comes to soccer, he states "soccer here [the United States] is difficult to follow because it is not that popular, I have to watch it on t.v."<sup>238</sup> Still, for Aldo Luis who has played soccer since he was seven years old, soccer provides a way to stay closely associated to his culture. Aldo Luis explains, "I follow soccer because it makes me feel connected, because the players are Latino, because I feel closer to my language and customs."<sup>239</sup> Thus, for Aldo Luis like many other ethnic Mexicans living in the United States, attending a soccer game allows

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<sup>235</sup> Alejandra Castañeda, *The Politics of Citizenship of Mexican Migrants* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2006), 46.

<sup>236</sup> The name has been changed to protect the interviewee's identity.

<sup>237</sup> Aldo Luis, interview by author, 3 March 2008, Orlando, Florida.

<sup>238</sup> Aldo Luis, interview by author, 3 March 2008, Orlando, Florida.

<sup>239</sup> Aldo Luis, interview by author, 3 March 2008, Orlando, Florida.

him the opportunity to be in an environment in which he feels comfortable. The stadium becomes an environment in which he feels like he can practice his customs and speak his language.

Ethnic Mexicans who attend games convert the venue into a place where, similar to Jose's store, they can practice their tradition even if temporarily. By attending in large numbers, carrying flags, wearing the jerseys, playing music, cheering and chanting the crowds convert the soccer stadium into a space they can call their own. But unlike Jose's store, the soccer stadium offers a much more public experience where their active participation in tradition is exposed beyond the confines of their community.

### **The Crowd Gets Noticed**

Playing in Los Angeles has not been easy for the U.S. National team. Days prior to the February 1998 Gold Cup final, U.S. coach Steve Sampson acknowledged that the pro-Mexican crowd would be a challenge. He stated, "I wouldn't be telling the truth if I said [the crowd support] doesn't matter, because it does matter. Unfortunately, that is the reality of things in the United States and especially in Southern California."<sup>240</sup> U.S. National team supporters, organized as *Sam's Army*, also issued warnings to the pro-U.S. attendees of the February game. They advised fans to "keep quiet about rooting for the U.S. until you get into a large group of *Sammers* [members of Sam's Army]. Once you start shouting 'USA! USA!' expect to get stuff thrown at you and lots of angry stares. Hopefully we can get together a big enough group that we can deter any further nastiness."<sup>241</sup> The picture painted by these reports was of a huge crowd of ethnic Mexicans intimidating and actually dictating the conditions of the match. Although

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<sup>240</sup> Steven Goff, "Mexico heads off rival U.S. for title; In CONCACAF Gold Cup Final, One goal does it," *Washington Post*, 16 February 1998, C03.

<sup>241</sup> John M. Glionna, "Army' rallies U.S. soccer team fans; Sports: With red shirts, blue wigs and cow bells, they'd do anything to back players," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1998, B1.

this was a probability during match day, in reality it was a temporary condition of empowerment. The large numbers of ethnic Mexicans living in Los Angeles tended to be among the most economically, socially and politically disadvantaged. Moreover, many live, work and play within the confines of their communities. This happens because Los Angeles, while being one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the United States, has not been conducive to the “melting pot” experience. Rather, life in Los Angeles tends to resemble a jigsaw puzzle of sectioned ethnicities, or as journalist Bill Plaschke described, “This city [Los Angeles] likes to think itself as a melting pot. But as Sunday proved, is more like an ice tray, the nationalities divided into little compartments, living side by side.”<sup>242</sup> For ethnic Mexicans this has meant a continual encroachment, forced or voluntary, into their compartment of the ice tray when previously they had owned the “whole tray.”

The city of Los Angeles, originally named La Ciudadad de Nuestra Señora Reina de los Ángeles sobre El Río Porciúncula, was founded 1781 as a small Mexican outpost. Today, Los Angeles houses the largest population of Mexicans outside of Mexico and is the center of Mexican American culture in the United States.<sup>243</sup> Los Angeles has seen the most rapid and ethnically varied growth of any U.S. city. After the turn of the twentieth century, political and economic power shifted in Los Angeles from the Mexican elite, many calling themselves *Californios*, to Anglo middle-class mid-westerners who flooded the area. Los Angeles was also the destination for the constant stream of Mexican migration, many of whom were only sojourners, as the city was only a temporary spot in the circuitous migratory patterns of Mexican

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<sup>242</sup> Bill Plaschke, “U.S. based players should not be pelted with debris by U.S. based fans,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 February 1998, C1.

<sup>243</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are approximately 5 million Latinos/Hispanics living in Los Angeles County, of these 3 million claim Mexican descent. Los Angeles is by far the city with the largest ethnic Mexican population in the United States. Other cities with large Mexican populations include: Houston (662,224), Dallas (757,455), Chicago (566,801) and New York (260, 622). see, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

farm laborers. As immigration policies became more restrictive and continued social and economic upheaval plagued the country of Mexico, many migrants settled permanently in Los Angeles. Still, wages were low and the living conditions of ethnic Mexicans in Los Angeles were less than propitious. Segregated housing also contributed to the poor living conditions for Mexicans in Los Angeles. Earlier Anglo settlers segregated themselves from the Mexican communities but increasingly racially restrictive covenants were used to keep Mexicans and other ethnic groups from white neighborhoods.<sup>244</sup> In short, this process created the ethnically segregated East Los Angeles as an enclave of ethnic Mexicans where they continued to carve a space in which they could practice and maintain their cultural and ethnic customs.

Although city officials have paid passing tributes to Los Angeles' Mexican/Hispanic past and roots, they actively have continued to segregate, silence and hide the contemporary ethnic Mexican community. Urban historian Mike Davis, in his work *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, thoroughly examines the various ways city officials and Anglo inhabitants have compartmentalized the city. For example, Davis looks at the powerful Home Owner Associations (HOA) that has exercised a great deal of power and mobilized a great deal of resources in the pursuit of economically and racially homogenous, insular suburban communities. Despite the loss of acreage to highways and other developments within the non-Anglo communities, HOA has been able to keep out these prospective residents from their communities. HOA worked assiduously to restrict or prohibit low housing income projects, apartment complexes and fought for low density zoning laws within their communities.<sup>245</sup> Thus, the combination of city officials' continued appropriation of ethnic communities' lands for public use and the housing restrictions implemented by HOA have resulted in the concealment of

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<sup>244</sup> George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 77.

<sup>245</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (London: Plimco, 1988), 165-180.

the ethnic inhabitants of Los Angeles in small ethnic enclaves away from the affluent, predominantly white, “Hollywood L.A.”

Keeping the “undesirables” away from public view has also been a concern for the Los Angeles affluent. In the name of safety, public space around the city has been eliminated, redeveloped or strictly controlled. Davis writes, “Today’s upscale, pseudo public spaces, sumptuary malls, office centers, culture acropolises, and so on are full of invisible signs warning off the underclass ‘other’.”<sup>246</sup> Those signs have taken the shape of security officers and cameras, architecture that resembles forts, and malls surrounded by staked metal fences.<sup>247</sup> Additionally, the city has severely reduced the amount of public toilets, has changed the shape of public benches (to make them uncomfortable to sleep on) and has installed sprinkler systems set to turn on at various times in the middle of the night (not for irrigation purposes, but to prevent sleeping in public parks).<sup>248</sup> The reduction of public space diminished common areas where the various ethnicities and classes could have contact. Furthermore, it severely restricts the access to leisure and space for working class Los Angeles residents. As Davis writes, “In a city of several million yearning immigrants public amenities are radically shrinking, parks are becoming derelict and beaches more segregated, libraries and playgrounds are closing, youth congregations of ordinary kinds are banned and the streets are becoming more desolate and dangerous.”<sup>249</sup> The reduction of public space thus puts a heightened premium on alternative spaces where individuals can socially congregate without restrictions. Consequently the soccer venue becomes an important focal point within the community because it is one of the few remaining spaces they can still appropriate and re-create a familiar setting. When ethnic Mexicans go to the stadium to watch

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 232-236.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 227.

the Mexican National team they are thus able to transform the soccer stadium into a “homespace.” Amidst the reality of the shrinking physical space ethnic Mexicans can occupy, the stadium is literally an open venue in terms of architecture and social space in which they, as a community, can utilize for their own purposes.

Given the restriction and controls regarding the usage of public space placed upon Los Angeles’ non-Anglo inhabitants, large crowds of ethnic Mexicans congregated would cause a furor regardless of the occasion. Just the expectation of large ethnic Mexican crowds at soccer games caused groups like Sam’s Army to issue warnings regarding the safety of pro-U.S. fans, despite the fact that there has never been any major violent incident in any of the games, regardless of how much the pro-Mexican crowd engaged in anti-U.S. behavior. But it has been precisely the attention given to the crowd that made the games an important occasion for ethnic Mexicans to emerge in the public eye. As the rivalry has intensified, more and more media attention has been given to the games. Ethnic Mexicans have been aware of this factor, thus making the stadium an accessible venue to make their presence known in the community and the nation. The soccer stadium remains one of the few open spaces in Los Angeles where they can make their presence palpable. When in many areas of their daily lives, ethnic Mexicans have been removed or have been severely restricted from public view, the approximate four hours spent in the stadium, Los Angeles and the nation are aware of their presence.

Cheering, chanting, screaming and otherwise displaying physical affection for the Mexican national team was for many ethnic Mexicans one of the few ways they became visible to the rest of the Anglo community. Chicano/a Studies scholar Maria A. Gutierrez de Soldatenko in her studies involving the Justice for Janitors organizations has observed similar displays of singing, chanting and raucous behavior during protests and pickets. By virtue of their

occupations, janitors have been one of the less visible of the service sector jobs. Moreover, most janitors in Los Angeles have tended to be women. Because of gender hierarchies both in the workplace and in the culture it causes them to be even more invisible and powerless. They clean offices in the middle of the night, coming and going when they are less intrusive to the secretaries and executives that work during the day. This arrangement rendered them faceless and invisible, passively and quietly doing their jobs. But Soldatenko shows the organized janitors as successfully transgressing their gender boundaries and racial hierarchies to fight for better wages and working conditions. She writes, “By appearing there during the day, demanding higher wages at places they are not welcome, these Latinos symbolically subvert the space.”<sup>250</sup> When they did appear, they chanted, held signs and sang in Spanish. They also had carnivals and fiestas to recruit members and socialize. In this way they exercised what Soldatenko calls “cultural repertoire”. In other words, they used familiar techniques from their culture to negotiate their economic and working needs.

Ethnic Mexicans’ behavior inside the stadium could be similarly understood. In order to make themselves visible to the Anglo community, they too relied on cultural repertoire; soccer and El Tri. Supporting the “foreign” team, waving the flag of Mexico and chanting in Spanish inside the stadium allowed ethnic Mexicans to create a space where they were visible. Inside the stadium, ethnic Mexican fans challenged the socio-economic and political forces that ruled their lives outside of it. They challenged an Anglo culture, institutions and private organizations that constantly have tried to limit the space they could occupy. Particularly in the city of Los Angeles, the presence of large groups of ethnic Mexicans in public spaces can be interpreted as a public statement of “proof of life.”

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<sup>250</sup> Maria A. Gutierrez de Soldatenko, “Justice for Janitors Latinizing Los Angeles: Mobilizing Latina(o) Cultural Repertoire,” in *Latino L.A.: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*. ed by Enrique C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 225.



Soccer provides the opportunity for ethnic Mexicans to use their culture for their own purposes. Much of Mexican culture in Los Angeles has been appropriated by the Anglo population, diluted and re-labeled as *Hispanic* or *Southwestern*. The most noticeable has been Mexican cuisine. As Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres argue in their work, *Latino Metropolis*, “this city’s elites have tried to remarket Los Angeles as a ‘multicultural’ metropolis by simultaneously incorporating and marginalizing Latino cuisine and low wage culinary workers.”<sup>251</sup> The authors explain the transformation of Mexican cuisine in the Los Angeles elite imaginary, from dangerous, “dirty” food to exotic “other” cuisine. In the process the actual authenticity of the dishes had to be diluted and made palatable to a non Mexican/Latino palate. Thus, tamales would be filled with salmon or caviar and re-labeled *Southwestern* in order to evoke “the Hispanic fantasy legacy and de-emphasized overtly Mexican influences.”<sup>252</sup> Ironically, as the authors point out, it has been a non diluted ethnic Mexican immigrant labor force that makes the service sector and particular restaurants a viable economic enterprise in Los Angeles. In other words, the cheap labor that immigrants provided allowed these restaurants to remain open and profitable. Moreover, the same restaurants that supposedly promoted Mexican/Latino cuisine, the ethnic Mexican labor force has been completely invisible. Ethnic Mexicans are not the waiters, hosts, chefs or even line cooks if the line is visible to the public. Instead, they are the bus boys, the dishwashers, the prep-cooks hidden in kitchens toiling long hours for sub-minimal wages.<sup>253</sup> This appropriation and exclusion from their own culinary culture explains, as authors Valle and Torres write, “why the Latino flavor of Los Angeles--a city with a Mexican population second only to Mexico City, with more than thirty thousand

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<sup>251</sup> Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Latino Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 72.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-94.

restaurants where Latino cooks prepare myriad cuisines, and with a Latino workforce large enough to shut down the city's restaurants if it stayed home--remains marginalized in the city's culture wars."<sup>254</sup> Thus, when ethnic Mexicans literally come out of the kitchens and into the daylight (as in the case of the janitors) to support the Mexican National team they challenge the marginalized, invisible spaces assigned to them. Moreover, by "booing" the U.S. National Anthem or throwing water at U.S. national players, ethnic Mexicans practice soccer culture for their own purposes. They challenged the adulteration and appropriation of their culture by engaging in behavior that simultaneously affirmed their heritage and gave them visibility to the society around them.

### **Soccer and Identity**

In May of 2002 journalist Luis Bueno observed, "When Mexico plays on its soil, the stands are filled with red-white-and-green-clad supporters. But when El Tricolor plays on American turf, the stands are also filled with a similarly frenzied pro-Mexican crowd."<sup>255</sup> The Mexican National team is distinctive in that it has been able to play for home crowds in both Mexico and the United States. But the seemingly homogenous crowd present in games played in Los Angeles or other U.S. cities with large Latino populations does not signify that this rivalry did not cause ethnic Mexicans to question their loyalties. Los Angeles resident Roque Tristain expressed how a Mexico/United States confrontation divided his feelings, "Cheez, like the *Tigres Del Norte* [Norteña music band] song says, 'My heart is divided in two', I was born in Mexico but my children were born here."<sup>256</sup> San Antonio, Texas resident and business owner Jorge Orduna also expresses similar feelings, "I'm in between, I live here and love the U.S., but my

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>255</sup> Luis Bueno, "The Mexican National Team's games on U.S. soil feel like home thanks to the crowds," *Riverside (California) Press Enterprise*, 19 May 2002, C01.

<sup>256</sup> Jorge Luis Macias, "Fanaticos Sufren Crisis de Identidad por partido Mexico-Estados Unidos" *Los Angeles La Opinión*, 16 June 2002, 3A. (Quote translated by author)

heart's always been with Mexico where soccer is concerned. It's a rough situation. I like both teams and I don't want either to lose."<sup>257</sup> Some even dare to cheer for the United States, as San Diego born Jaime Cardenas states, "Everybody will give me a hard time, but that's my team. There are places I can think of where it would be fun to wear the jersey, watch the U.S. win and then say, 'I told you so!' But I'd probably get some beer poured on me."<sup>258</sup> Los Angeles resident Rafael Dominguez also cheers for the United States, "I want the United States to win, because this is my country now, and this is the country of my children."<sup>259</sup> Maria Maldonado from Brownsville, Texas opined, "I hate this match. My whole family is from Mexico, but then again, I live here."<sup>260</sup> The variety of opinions and feelings expressed demonstrate that the ethnic Mexican community is not a monolithic, static construction. Instead, ethnic Mexican identity as it is lived and experienced in the United States has been a continual negotiation between the culture in which they live and the culture to which many they feel they belong.

At the crux of the dual identity of ethnic Mexicans will always be citizenship status, access to formal political structures and the sense of belonging. Cultural anthropologist Alejandra Castañeda examines the meanings of citizenship within ethnic Mexican communities and how they negotiate their own identity in their everyday lives. Although her work focuses on the community of Redwood, California, many of her findings and conclusions can be applied to Los Angeles. In her study, Castañeda explores the formation of transnational communities. Castañeda's study focuses on the intrusion (perceived or real) of Anglo culture and governmental institutions in the migrant/immigrant family. She relates the concerns of parents about raising

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<sup>257</sup> Dan McCarney, "An empty cup; Local Mexican fans disheartened by 2-0 loss to rival U.S." *San Antonio Express-News*, 18 June 2002, 1C.

<sup>258</sup> John Wilkens, "U.S. or Mexico? Many houses divided" *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 16 June 2002, A1.

<sup>259</sup> Susan Abram, "L.A. Fans Sleepless over Soccer" *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, 16 June 2002, N1.

<sup>260</sup> Daisy Nguyen, "U.S.-Mexico Soccer Match an Identity Crisis for Immigrant Fans," *Associated Press*, 15 June 2002.

their children in the United States. Migrants, in her study, showed consternation in their inability to educate their children according to their customs. Migrant/immigrant Mexican families lose their power to individually determine their family's own structures; they in essence lose "privacy." Castañeda explains "Marked as Mexican within the racist U.S. political economy, individual migrants no longer possess any individual or private persona that might be protected by law. Indeed more often than not, the law's interventions in their lives signify a loss of power rather than a protection or a benefit."<sup>261</sup> Frequently, the last recourse to gain this individuality means to formally apply for citizenship. This could turn into a complex process, both because the renunciation of Mexican citizenship could be interpreted as a renunciation of Mexican cultural identity and because the immigration policies and anti-immigrant hysteria can make it nearly impossible.

Castañeda also looks at the reasons and the complexities of migrants becoming U. S. citizens. Many in her study only applied for citizenship under the threat of stricter immigration policies and California's own anti-immigrant climate during the debates over Proposition 187. Proposition 187 and subsequent propositions 209 and 227 were a series of ballot initiatives proposed during the 1990's which aimed at curtailing immigrant access to social services (Proposition 187), terminating affirmative action (Proposition 209) as well as ending bilingual education in California's public schools (Proposition 227). Although the propositions themselves were aimed at undocumented immigrants, the debate surrounding them turned into typical "us v. them" categories. This stratification unilaterally collapsed Mexican identity irrespective of legal citizenship or actual place of birth (United States or Mexico).<sup>262</sup> Presidential contender Pat Buchanan's various speeches contributed to the negative connotations ascribed to

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<sup>261</sup> Castañeda, *The Politics of Citizenship*, 55.

<sup>262</sup> Delgado "Major League Soccer," 43.

Mexican identity. Additionally, California Coalition for Immigration Reform<sup>263</sup> founder, Barbara Coe, stated “these people do not come to assimilate or contribute to society” and Stop Immigration Now<sup>264</sup> founder Ruth Coffey stated, “I have not intention of being the object of ‘conquest’ peaceful or otherwise, by Latinos, Asians, Blacks, Arabs, or any other group of individuals who have claimed my country.”<sup>265</sup>

The real threat of being deported from the country pushed many migrants to cross that final border and become U.S. citizens. Yet many, as in the case of Doña Carmen, expressed that a change in citizenship does not mean a complete assimilation into U.S. society. Doña Carmen stated, “I became a citizen so that I wouldn’t loose right (sic)...well in reality they are forcing one to change citizenship, but I don’t feel less Mexican for that, that doesn’t make me less Mexican, I am still in Mexico.”<sup>266</sup> Castañeda’s study concentrates on migrant decisions over U.S. citizenship within the divisive context of California’s Propositions. Political activity and decisions surrounding opposition or support for the Propositions reflected the multiplicity of identities within the ethnic Mexican community.

Political scientist Lisa Garcia Bedolla also examined ethnic Mexican identity and conflicts in the context of political activism in East Los Angeles. Part of her study concentrates on the responses of ethnic Mexicans to California’s Propositions 187, 209, and 227. The contentious and negative environment surrounding the Propositions would lead one to believe that all ethnic Mexicans (and other Latinos) would unanimously show opposition to the Propositions. Bedolla’s study shows that the supra imposed group cohesiveness at times may not

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<sup>263</sup> California Coalition for Immigration Reform is a small grass roots organization that works to ban “illegal” immigration in the state of California. The organization was one of the main proponents and supporters of Proposition 187. They are also responsible for various billboards one of which reads, “Welcome to California: The Illegal Immigrant State.” See, <http://ccir.net/>

<sup>264</sup> Stop Immigration Now is a grass roots organization that aims to stop illegal immigration in to the United States.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>266</sup> Castañeda, *The Politics of Citizenship*, 93.

surpass individual identity. She demarks collective and individual identity in the complexities at the intersections of race, gender and class.<sup>267</sup> Bedolla does not negate the stigmatization of ethnic Mexicans within the cultural, social, economic and political landscape of the U.S., but she does make the argument that issues of language or citizenship status are often at odds with perceived or real ethnic ties within Mexican enclaves. She places this in the context of Mexican voting patterns and opinions on Proposition 187.<sup>268</sup>

Historian David G. Gutierrez conceptualizes yet another view of ethnic Mexican identity. He argues that Mexicans in Los Angeles represent “a deeply complicated evolution of popular nationalist sentiments and political orientations in a region that for nearly four hundred years has been situated at the intersection of clashing systems of imperial competition, capitalistic economic expansion and national consolidation”<sup>269</sup> He presents the various processes in which the Mexican community has shaped or has been shaped by the political and cultural changes since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Gutierrez proposes that ethnic Mexicans have created this “third space” in which they have politically ceased to be Mexican, but have alternatively chosen either to keep their cultural heritage and/or integrate into the surrounding “mainstream” Anglo society. Thus, an ethnic Mexican in Los Angeles may vote and publicly support an Anglo political candidate or initiative as in the case of California’s various

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<sup>267</sup> Lisa Garcia Bedolla, *Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 7-8.

<sup>268</sup> Bedolla shows that approximately 25 percent of East L.A. residents voted *in favor* of the Propositions. Whether it is heritage, familial relationships, the experience of crossing the border, or legal status, they all inform the complexities behind the theoretical homogenous and conflated Mexican collective. Bedolla concluded that despite other factors political participation of Latinos in general will always be situated within the context of racialization and the stigma attached to their group. Her study shows that “only by understanding the complexity and multiple layers of internal and external border crossings underlying the Latino experience can we understand how, why, and when Latinos incorporate themselves in the political system.”

<sup>269</sup> David G. Gutierrez, “Migration, Emergent Ethnicity and the ‘Third Space’: The shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico” *The Journal of American History* (September 1999) : 483.

Propositions but at home he or she reads in Spanish, listens to Mexican music and watches *novelas* (soap operas) on television.

Following *El Tri*, like listening to Mexican music or watching *novelas*, is also a means through which ethnic Mexicans choose to preserve their culture. Antonio feels proud of the Mexican National team no matter how badly they perform, he affirms, “I feel proud of them even if they are bad players or a bad National team, because they are from my country.”<sup>270</sup> For him, residing in the United States has not and will never change his team affiliation. According to Antonio living in the United States does not change the fact that he is Mexican. He will always be proud of his ethnicity no matter where he lives. Antonio considers that *El Tri* forms an intricate part of his identity as a Mexican, “I will always support my National team because I am familiar with the players, but also because soccer is part of Mexican culture and it is part of our identity.”<sup>271</sup>

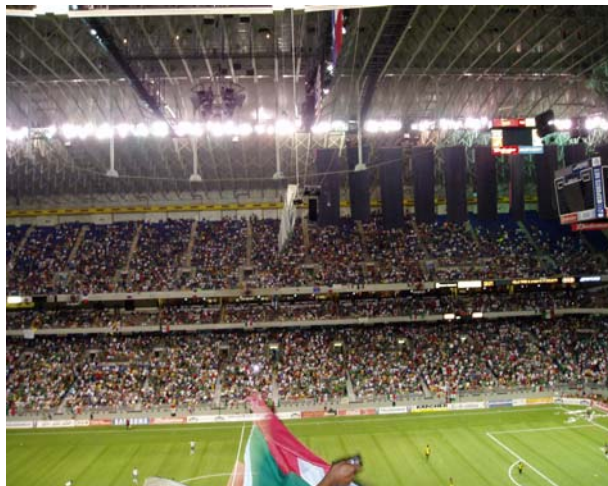


Figure 2, El Tri plays to a full house in San Antonio, Texas

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<sup>270</sup> Antonio Hernandez Cortez, interview by author, 3 March 2008, Orlando, Florida.

<sup>271</sup> Antonio Hernandez Cortez, interview by author, 3 March 2008, Orlando, Florida.

## Conclusion

Although ethnic Mexicans do not unilaterally aspire to the same levels of integration, nor aspire to an identity defined by one homogenous construction, soccer is a cultural unifier that yields considerable power. As Castañeda, Bedolla and Gutierrez show, an ethnic Mexican has multiple choices at their disposal in order to construct and define their Mexican identity. Some of these choices may be limited or molded by immigrant status (Castañeda), political beliefs (Bedolla) or cultural preference (Gutierrez), but following soccer has been a constant attribute of Mexican identity for the ethnic Mexican community in the United States. Moreover, the appearance of soccer in public parks and venues seems to be the first visible sign that there is a growing Mexican/Latino population in any given city. For example, Atlanta has had a strong youth soccer program for a number of years, yet it has been the increase in the Latino community that has made soccer more visible in the city. In 2005, for the very first time, the Mexican professional soccer teams, Club America and Club Atlante had a “friendly” match in front of an audience of 35,000. Increased demand for soccer fields have led city officials to replace baseball fields with soccer ones.<sup>272</sup> Post-Katrina New Orleans also felt 2006 World Cup “soccer fever” because of the recent influx of ethnic Mexicans into the area. As a local newspaper reported, “The excitement, it seems, also has taken root across the New Orleans area, where Hispanic workers now make up nearly half of the hurricane-repair work force and almost six percent of the metro area population, an uptick from the pre-storm tally, according to recent surveys by the U.S. census Bureau and Tulane University.”<sup>273</sup> The report went on to describe how local businesses have felt the impact of the 2006 World Cup, “At *Taquera Jalisco*, the crowd for

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<sup>272</sup> Bill Sanders, “Soccer stirs new melting-pot Atlanta; immigrants bring their love of game to region, changing sports landscape,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 10 July 2005, 1D.

<sup>273</sup> Michelle Krupa, “Are you ready for some futbol? Far From Home, city’s Hispanic arrivals have found something to cheer about in Soccer’s World Cup,” *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 22 June 2006, 1.



Friday's game was so large that Robert Andrede, the owner's brother-in-law, locked the front door even as patrons still lined up outside. It's not often that the café turns away customers, but Andrede said opening the door would only cause problems."<sup>274</sup> An increase of Latino populations in cities across the United States might lead to an increase of various business that cater to a specifically to that population, yet soccer is also a marker of the growth of Latino communities.

A soccer confrontation between Mexico and United States might cause an introspective evaluation of loyalties or, as Los Angeles based newspaper *La Opinion* stated, "Fans Suffer Identity Crisis Over Mexico-United States Match."<sup>275</sup> As the quotes at the beginning of this section illustrate, not all ethnic Mexicans cheered for the Mexican National team, although the overwhelming majority did. Yet, most in the ethnic Mexican community were aware of the matches and understood the political and social implications of the rivalry. As Houston resident and day laborer Jose Hernandez stated, "The United States is the neighbor country, it's the world power, the economic power, and all that. So at least we can win in soccer, which is sort of a revenge (sic)."<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Michelle Krupa, "Are you ready for some futbol? Far From Home, city's Hispanic arrivals have found something to cheer about in Soccer's World Cup," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 22 June 2006, 1.

<sup>275</sup> Jorge Luis Macias, "Fanaticos Sufren Crisis de Identidad por Partido Mexico-Estados Unidos," *Los Angeles La Opinion*, 16 June 2002, 3A.

<sup>276</sup> Edward Hegstrom, "Houston's Mexicans favoring homeland in match with U.S." *The Houston Chronicle*, 16 June 2002, A37.

## **EPILOGUE**

The rivalry between the Mexican and the United States National teams has been intense and exciting to watch. It has brought intense competition to the CONCACAF, a conference internationally known as a weak soccer region. Despite this, it has been closely followed by the thousands of ethnic Mexicans that fill the stadiums anytime the Mexican National Team plays in cities such as Los Angeles, San Diego, Houston, or Dallas. For ethnic Mexicans, El Tri represents more than a political or economic alliance to the country of Mexico. The Mexican National team represents cultural pride and a symbol of Mexican identity. Historically, ethnic Mexicans residing in the United States have endured cycles of varying acceptance into U.S. society. While always wanted or needed as a pliant, silent and inexpensive labor force, ethnic Mexicans have experienced continued resistance to access political and economic power. They constantly have had to guard their communities against racism, discrimination, encroachment and forced assimilation from the surrounding Anglo community. One of the ways ethnic Mexicans shield their families and communities is by using their culture, heritage and traditions as a foundation to their identity and to provide a positive individual and collective self-image.

To the chagrin of Anglos many ethnic Mexicans, regardless of immigrant status or birthplace, prefer to cheer for the Mexican National team. U.S. players and the media have explicitly expressed their sense of disgust with the ethnic Mexican fans. Some U.S. players have even expressed their anger in less than conciliatory terms. Their sensitivity is ironic in the face of the constant marginalization of ethnic Mexicans in U.S. society. Even for a segment of the population which is not completely integrated or accepted, demands are made for unquestioned loyalty. In other words, ethnic Mexicans' loyalty to the United States is supposed to override the

political, economic and social implications of the rivalry. Yet, for the ethnic Mexican community it is difficult to ignore a legacy of territorial conquest, economic and political bullying and denigration of their identity and heritage in popular culture.

Sports have traditionally formed part of the cultural landscape utilized by ethnic Mexicans to solidify their communities. Initially, ethnic Mexicans chose baseball as their primary recreational sport and to negotiate and mediate between the ethnic Mexican and Anglo communities. Baseball was also chosen because it was popular on both sides of the border; for Mexicans in Mexico it signified a way to subscribe to a modern world, for ethnic Mexicans it meant molding the “American” game to their needs. Ethnic Mexicans played the American national pastime but gave their teams Mexican names such as *Aztecas*, *Mayans*, or *Cuauhtemocs*, and in some cases used the baseball fields to stage political and labor rallies. Still, because baseball was an American game, its ability to fulfill the community’s needs was limited. Ethnic Mexicans, after the Chicano Movement in particular, searched for a sport that exuded stronger cultural symbolism. Soccer, which by this time was the national sport of Mexico, satisfied the ethnic Mexican community’s search for a distinctive Mexican sport. Thus, the Mexican National team became that ultimate symbol of cultural heritage and pride. Attending games in large numbers, chanting, cheering, carrying Mexican flags and even booing the U.S. National team gave ethnic Mexicans the opportunity to tangibly express their identity. They are not being blatantly disloyal to the United States, nor do they ignore their better living conditions as compared to residing in Mexico. They are refusing to completely let go of their Mexican identity and making themselves visible to a society that has tried to persistently silence them.

Recently, the United States has been able to challenge Mexico’s reign in the soccer field. This has caused the rivalry to increase in seriousness and intensity. For the Mexican National

team, the rivalry has become a struggle to maintain power and dominance in one of the few arenas in which Mexico traditionally has had the advantage. Players' continual reference to Mexican soccer superiority is an attempt at maintaining their hegemony if only in appearance and not actual game results. For their part, many U.S. players have evoked racial and ethnic stereotypes to challenge Mexican hegemony inside the field. For the United States, the ability to win games has justified the usage of the language. Additionally, the racial dichotomy present in soccer (what is inappropriate outside the field is "acceptable" inside of it) enables U.S. players to attack their Mexican counterparts in this fashion. What the U.S. National team has not been able to do is to win over the most avid soccer fans in the United States; Ethnic Mexicans. They have unquestionably given their support to the "other" team; the Mexican National team. For ethnic Mexicans El Tri represents their identity, as former Mexican National team head coach Javier Aguirre stated, "All they have is the flag, Our Lady of Guadalupe, the beer and the national team."<sup>277</sup>



Figure 1, Mexican National team fan outside the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas

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<sup>277</sup> John Wilkens, "U.S. or Mexico? Many Houses Divided," *The San Diego-Tribune*, 16 June 2002, A1.

## **APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL**



Office of Research & Commercialization

March 24, 2008

Paola A. Rodriguez  
Master's student  
Department of History  
University of Central Florida  
CNH 551  
Orlando, FL 32816-1350

Dear Ms. Rodriguez,

RE: History Master's Thesis, "A Pure Space to be Mexican: Ethnic Mexicans and the Mexico-U.S. Soccer Rivalry, 1990-2002"

Thank you for submitting the interview questions and other information regarding your research, as requested by the IRB office. As you know, the IRB cannot approve your research because it was already completed prior to IRB review.

However, Dr. Tracy Dietz, IRB Chair, reviewed your explanatory e-mail and materials and determined that if this proposal had been submitted to the IRB prior to conducting the research, it would have met the criteria for expedited review and likely would have been approved.

If you have questions, please phone the IRB office at 407-823-2901.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joanne Muratori".

Joanne Muratori  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

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