Mexican Americans & World War II

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"The Queen Mary carried 800,000 service people during World War II . . . and a record 16,683 in one 1943 crossing."

32. M. Hamlin Cannon, *The War in the Pacific: Leyte: The Return to the Philippines* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1954), 40–41.

33. Ibid., 41.

34. "Leyte Operations Report," *G3 Journal*, NARA, Washington, D.C.

35. Love, *The Hourglass*, 208, 212.

36. Cannon, *The War in the Pacific*, 41.

37. Albert E. Cowdrey, *Fighting for Life: American Military Medicine in World War II* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 128.

38. Les Habegger, "274th Regiment Medic," 70th Infantry Division Website: www.trailblazersww2.org.

39. See Cowdrey, *Fighting for Life.*

40. Fred Capp, First Lieutenant, Commanding Officer, Company E, 32nd Infantry, personal letter to Leo N. Sanchez, February 13, 1945.

41. Love, *The Hourglass*, 463.

42. General Douglas MacArthur, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific, condolence letter to Leo N. Sanchez, Washington, D.C., May 22, 1945. Personal papers of the Sanchez family.

43. "There'll Be Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover," 1942 pop classic by Nat Burton.

44. Charles B. Macdonald, *U.S. Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations: The Last Offensive* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1973), 212–217.

45. Information from the papers giving honorable discharges from the U.S. Army to Jimmie Sanchez Elmer Sanchez, October 1945; and John Edward Sanchez, U.S. Navy, November 1945. The Sanchez family papers are in the possession of Josephine Zanone, Cathy Sanchez Bates, Carol Ann Fare, Randall Mehl, James Arthur Sanchez, and Helen Tapia Sanchez, and also NARA, Personnel Records, St. Louis, Missouri.

46. John "Bud" Lyons, interview by author, Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 2001.

CHAPTER 2

The Beating of Private Aguirre

A Story about West Texas during World War II

DAVID MONTEJANO

> This gang of white rednecks beat up Ben Aguirre while [he was] in uniform. They left him for dead. The Mexican community got upset. The community started a collection but the white businesses refused to donate. They put up signs that said "Aguirre is Mexican. Ask Mexicans for help." Many years later a tornado was going to hit the colonia but at the last moment, it veered away and jumped the Concho River. It swept away the Anglo neighborhood. They started a collection but the Mexican businesses put up signs, "Remember Ben Aguirre. The tornado was an act of God. Ask God for help."

So went one of the stories that my uncle, Fred (Lico) Enriquez, would relate about life in San Angelo, Texas, in the 1940s. He told me that Ben Aguirre was still walking around with a metal plate in his head. A few summers ago, I finally responded and said, "Let's go find Ben Aguirre and talk to him." The result was a fascinating trip to West Texas that led to the recovery of an episode of San Angelo history and of personal family history as well. This account is a sketch of that trip.[1]

Starting Out

We leave San Antonio early and head west on U.S. 90 toward Del Rio. Although my brothers, sister, and I have grown up in San Antonio, we have always regarded Del Rio as our family home. The families of our parents settled there; or better put, they used this desert oasis as a base for frequent migrations. My paternal grandfather was a sheep shearer (or *trasquilador*) who followed a well-worn migratory route. The Mexican sheep shearers would begin their annual trek in the Del Rio area and work their way northward, through San Angelo and up into Montana. I recall seeing a photo of "Papi" standing next to railroad tracks in Montana. I have memories of myself as a child trying to hold his heavy shears. I also remember that he was proud of his skill.

On my mother's side, the grandfather I knew, "Papá Telésforo," was a storyteller, a violinist, and a master domino player. Over the years, I came to understand that he had been the head of a large extended family of migrant workers. My grandfather's family followed the crops to Colorado and Idaho, and to Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. As the children became adults and started their own families, they added to the family labor pool. As a result of these migrations, today we have cousins in places like Conesville, Iowa, and Pierceton, Indiana. But in the 1940s, when my mother, her four sisters, and her only surviving brother, Lico, were teenagers, San Angelo, with its cotton fields, and only 150 miles from Del Rio, was a frequent second home. Thus it makes sense that our trip from San Antonio to San Angelo should take us through Del Rio. We intend to retrace the route that Papá Telésforo's family followed between Del Rio and San Angelo.

In my family, the art of storytelling was passed from Papá to my mother and my Uncle Lico. As children, we heard stories about life *en las piscas* (picking cotton). I remember one story about how my mother, as the lightest-complected of her siblings, would be sent to buy food because she could pass as white; and another about the need to travel in West Texas with two spare tires, so as not to be stranded in a hostile place. These family stories were part of my experience growing up, and in a fashion they raised some of the questions

that moved me to examine Anglo-Mexican relations in my previous work.[2] In some sense, that work was an effort to provide a general historical context for the many stories and jokes I had heard as a child and teenager. Now, in the search for Ben Aguirre, I was attempting to document a specific family story.

The general context for the 1940s can be outlined here only in the barest terms. In the Texas farm areas, segregation remained virtually unaffected by the war against Hitler and race supremacy. This created complications of all sorts. At the highest diplomatic level, the harsh treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans prompted Mexico to exclude Texas from its binational agreement regarding the guest worker (bracero) program. In response to Mexico's blacklisting, Governor Coke Stevenson had the legislature approve, in 1943, the "Caucasian Race Resolution," which forbade discrimination against "Caucasians." But since the definition of *Caucasian* (or "whiteness") was based on local practice, the resolution was meaningless, even as a symbolic gesture.[3] Nothing, of course, changed on the ground. On occasion, the excesses of Jim Crow moved Texas Mexican laborers to avoid entire counties. To provide one West Texas example: In October 1944, the farmers of the Big Spring area experienced great difficulty in harvesting their crops because a local constable had flagged down all migrant-filled trucks on the highway, instructing them not to stop in town under threat of arrest.[4] In spite of these conditions, World War II was a watershed period for the Texas Mexican community. Servicemen and their families, citing their loyalty and sacrifice for the country in wartime, began to challenge Jim Crow segregation aggressively.[5] They would lay the basis for the civil rights movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s. This in brief, then, suggests the Texas world of my grandparents and parents back in the 1940s. It also provides the backdrop for my uncle's story about Ben Aguirre.

I had prepared for the trip by rereading two books from the period. Both served as reference guides to Texas in the 1940s. The first book was a 1940 travelogue titled *Texas: A Guide to the Lone Star State*.[6] Compiled by the Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration, this New Deal project contained descriptive tours of the major routes in the state. Considerable attention was paid to the

animal and plant life as well as to the "social landscape" that one might see along the road. Read sixty years later, these descriptive tours provide not just road maps; they provide revealing observations and sentiments of that time, especially when they focus on the "racial elements" of the state.

The second reference book, titled *Are We Good Neighbors?*, was a compilation by civil rights lawyer Alonso Perales of affidavits, letters, telegrams, articles, editorials, congressional testimony, and government reports regarding the ill-treatment of Mexican Americans.[7] This was my sociological map of Anglo-Mexican relations for the World War II period. In March 1945, Perales had testified before a U.S. Senate committee that the three million "Americans of Mexican extraction" in Texas and the Southwest "are more discriminated against more widely today than 25 years ago."[8] He introduced a list of 150 towns and cities in Texas "where Mexicans are denied service, or entrance" in public places of business or amusement. In nearly every town and city, Perales noted, Mexican Americans were segregated in schools and neighborhoods. In Perales's words, "American citizens of Mexican extraction, whether in uniform or in civilian attire, are not allowed in public places, cannot buy food or clothes except in certain designated areas, cannot secure employment in any industry except as common or semi-skilled labor, cannot receive the same wages as other Americans in the same area."[9]

Perales provided detailed affidavits of uniformed Latin American servicemen being refused service in cafés, barbershops, theaters, and so on. In one instance (in Ozona), the complainant, Private Arturo Ramirez, had died in action a few months after filing his affidavit. In another, Sergeant Macario Garcia, who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, had been chased from a restaurant (in Richmond) that did not serve "Mexicans." Servicemen were not the only ones to file sworn complaints of discrimination. A good number of affidavits (25 of 116) were filed by mothers, wives, and sisters of servicemen. Virtually all cases made reference to service to the country in time of war.[10]

As I look at the road map, I see that all the major towns on our trip—Hondo, Uvalde, Bracketville, Del Rio, Sonora, and San Angelo—are mentioned in the affidavits collected by Perales.

On the Road

The topography of the route from San Antonio to Del Rio has not changed significantly from the travelogue description given in 1940: "San Antonio to Del Rio; 154 m. U.S. 90 enters the wooded hills of the Edwards Plateau, passes through the brush country, then over alkaline plains and low mesas dotted with chaparral."[11] Forty miles from San Antonio, we reach the small town of Hondo, a nineteenth-century German settlement best known to motorists today for its prominent sign: "This Is God's Country. Don't Drive Thru It Like Hell." In the 1940s, according to several affidavits, the cafés and theaters of "God's Country" were off-limits to Mexicans. We cruise through the town.

The old travel guide offers an interesting observation of the surrounding countryside: "Throughout the area, tiny jacales with accompanying patches of chili peppers and beans bespeak the presence of Latin Americans."[12] As my uncle and I drive past roadside shacks in hamlets called Knippa and D'Hanis, I wonder how much has really changed.

We reach Uvalde, the midway point between San Antonio and Del Rio. Uvalde's claim to fame is that it is the hometown of movie star Dale Evans (wife of Roy Rogers) and former governor Dolph Briscoe. In 1940, Uvalde had a population of 5,286 and one hundred businesses.[13] At that time, most of these businesses, or those belonging to Anglos, did not serve Mexicans. According to Perales's 1945 testimony, Mexicans, including "American soldiers of Mexican descent," were denied service at all Anglo-American barber shops and at the following Anglo-American business establishments: "Dinette Café. Newport Café . . . Shadowland Café and Beer Parlors . . . Walgreen's Drug Store . . . Hanger Six Café. Palace Drug Store. Uvalde Candy Shoppe. Manhattan Café. Casey Jones Café and Beer Parlors . . . Casal Cave."[14] Had Lico and I been traveling in the 1940s, it would not have been advisable to stop here.

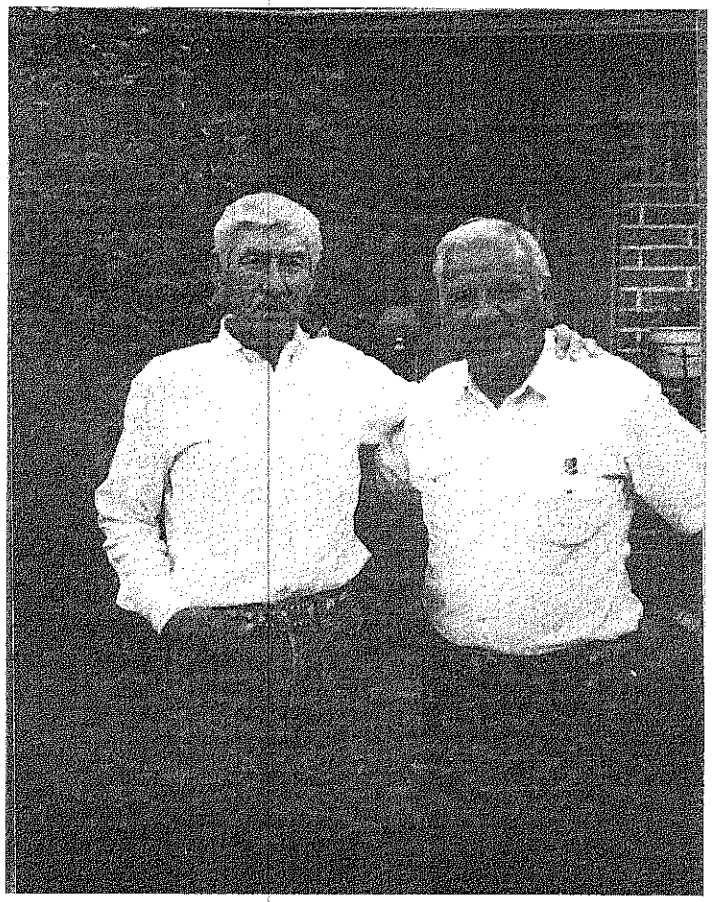
Among Texas Mexicans, Uvalde had long acquired fame as a stronghold of the old segregated order. In the 1950s and 1960s, as I was gaining consciousness of these things, I recall that my parents were always careful to stop on the Mexican side of town. In the 1970s, Uvalde was a major site of Anglo reaction to the Chicano civil

rights movement that was then challenging segregation and discrimination throughout the region. Rancher-businessman Dolph Briscoe was governor of Texas at the time. Worried in particular by the Chicano electoral victories in nearby Crystal City, Governor Briscoe denounced Crystal City as a "little Cuba." At the time, those of us in the *movimiento*—I was a college student then—took that as a compliment. As we pass near the First State Bank, where the Briscoe art collection—"from Rembrandt to western American artists," reads the promotional brochure—is proudly exhibited, these events seem to belong to some blurry past.

Seven miles outside of Uvalde we cross over the dry Nueces River—dry probably because of irrigation as well as drought. The scenery looks pretty much like it did in 1940: "The route now winds around and over brush- and timber-covered hills. Cenizo, greasewood, huajillo, catclaw, and Spanish dagger are abundant. . . . This is chiefly goat ranching country."[15] Looking at the scrubland that surrounds us, which can only sustain goats, I find it difficult to understand how the boundary dispute over the Nueces could have been the immediate cause of the Mexican American War a century and a half ago. The thought reminds me that we are following an old frontier line of defense—Ft. Inge in Uvalde, Ft. Clark in Bracketville, and Camp Del Rio. These U.S. Cavalry posts were built to guard the border and protect the San Antonio–San Diego stagecoach road. All are now historical museums or parks.

On passing Bracketville and Ft. Clark, Lico recounts a story of a good experience with *gabachos*, or Anglos, in the late 1940s. He was working as a carpenter's helper with some young vets on a roofing job at a restaurant. When they took the lunch break, the guys asked him to join them for a hamburger. "Sure enough, the restaurant owner refused to serve me inside. I said 'I could eat outside,' but the guys insisted that we all eat together or not at all." So they got up and left the restaurant, and they never returned. They left the unfinished roofing job behind. "That was something," Lico says, smiling. "We left a big gaping hole in the roof. And you know how out here," Lico gestures to the land around us, "storms can come up easily."

Of course, I have heard this story many times before. Usually it is a prelude to other stories, none of which have any cheery element. The "hamburger story" establishes the premise that some *gabachos* were okay in their relations with Mexicans. With that taken care of, my uncle would generally proceed to the darker stories about race relations.



Benigno Aguirre (left) and Fred Enriquez (right), in a photo taken in July 1995 outside of Aguirre's home in San Angelo, Texas.

Three hours into the trip, we reach Laughlin Air Force Base on the outskirts of Del Rio. Created in the 1940s for the purpose of pilot training, Laughlin Field was once the home base for a squadron of U2 spy planes. Today, with the end of cold-war tensions and the development of satellite spy technology, the base seems like an aging fort, defending a twentieth-century frontier that no longer exists. We enter Del Rio and pass San Felipe Springs, the key to life in this semi-desert. As the family home place, Del Rio and its sister city on the Mexican side, Ciudad Acuña, are associated in my mind with many warm childhood memories. But I also remember, without understanding at the time, the odd mixture of "Texas country" and northern Mexican ranch life. The WPA travel guide of 1940 suggested

such contrasts, describing Del Rio, population 11,693, as a "blend of modern hotels and aged adobe jacales, of Americano ranchmen and copper-colored peones, of sleek automobiles and plodding burros—a city on the Rio Grande."[16] But the strangeness of border life that I sensed—I realize in retrospect—came not from straightforward cultural contact, but from the exaggerated and distorted expressions of this contact. I understand now: the border has historically accommodated eccentric or deviant personalities and practices, or what some would explain as "frontier" behavior. Prominent examples from the Del Rio section of the border would include Judge Roy Bean or the "Law West of the Pecos," the red-light district known as "Boys' Town" in Ciudad Acuña, and Wolfman Jack with his "border-blasting" music from Acuña. I recall, as a child, playing with my grandparents' radio (what is now called "surfing"), listening first to Baptist fundamentalist preaching, then to Wolfman Jack, and then to Mexican rancheras, after which I would start the whole cycle again. I recall seeing the drunk cowboys in Acuña with their Mexican "girlfriends." In my child's mind, Del Rio and Ciudad Acuña at times took on a surreal setting. Orson Welles in *Touch of Evil* (1958) had a memorable line about border towns bringing out "the worst in a country." This was dramatic exaggeration, but as a child I probably would have agreed.

West of Del Rio, U.S. 90 "winds up into barren hills. The long blue ridge of mountains low on the horizon to the left is in northern Mexico, across the Rio Grande."[17] Five miles outside of Del Rio, we turn right, northward, onto U.S. 277, which will take us to San Angelo. The harshness of this arid land of cactus, chaparral, and mesquite dominates the senses. Even goats may find it difficult to survive here. The old travel guide notes, "In these western solitudes, the ranchman who drives 50 miles for his mail or a loaf of bread is the rule rather than the exception."[18] In 1940, this particular section of the road was dangerous. The paving stopped ten miles after the turnoff to San Angelo. "This section of the route is hazardous in wet weather and local inquiry should be made before attempting to travel it," warned the travel guide.[19] Even in dry weather, this desolate stretch of some seventy miles involved some risk.

As we drive through the desert, Lico and I talk about San Angelo

during World War II. The city had a well-established racial order.[20] School segregation, residential segregation, public displays of racism, and police brutality were all part of the everyday experience of Mexicans. Mexicanos were routinely denied service at cafés and drugstores; nor were they allowed to use the city swimming pool or the gymnasium. Even when in military uniform, they were denied service in most downtown restaurants during the war years. Lico, noting that hazing by Anglo teenagers was commonplace, tells me the story about "Shorty," a slightly built Mexican teenager who knifed an Anglo football player when cornered by the team in the high school boys' room. Shorty, who disappeared after the incident, became an instant hero for the Mexican youth of San Angelo. "Conditions were bad," Lico adds as a summary note.

In 1940, the paving on U.S. 277 resumed at mile 65, some twenty miles before Sonora, a small sheep- and goat-ranching center. In Sonora my uncle unexpectedly pulls over to look at vacant land next to the creek (the "dry fork of the Devil's River"). He tells me that there used to be a one-room house on the site, and that the family—all eight of them, including my mother—used to live there. I know that in the 1930s and 1940s Sonora and its neighbor city of Ozona were inhospitable places for Mexican workers. I want to tell my uncle that Sonora had a standing school policy of not allowing Mexicans beyond the sixth grade, but I silence myself.[21] He lived through this period. At age thirteen, Lico had dropped out of Sam Houston Elementary in San Angelo in order to help the family in the fields.

North of Sonora, U.S. 277 follows the winding course of the South Concho River past some of the "finest ranching land" in Texas.[22] Six hours into our trip, we approach the San Angelo area, one of the largest primary wool markets in the country. Irrigated farming is fairly extensive, but ranching is the largest industry. In 1940, San Angelo had a population of 25,308; about a quarter of the population was Mexican American. The travel guide poetically described the Mexican presence of that time as follows: "Here the Mexican vaquero, half Indian and half Spanish in origin, has a folklore rich in religious symbolism and pagan superstition. He tells how the paisano, once a proud and haughty bird, was punished . . . for his vanity, being condemned to walk instead of fly; thus was the lowly 'road-runner' created."[23]

As I read and react to this archaic description of Mexican ranch hands, I am chagrined to think that I may be engaged in folkloric study. After all, I am checking out a story that has been circulating for fifty years. There are intriguing elements of protest, collective memory, and religious symbolism in the narrative that call for an assessment. All popular oral histories run the risk of becoming "folklore," in the sense that exaggerations, half-truths, and even "superstition" become part of the narrative as the story is told and retold. My uncle understands this difference between oral folklore and written history—that is why he has brought his nephew the historian to find Ben Aguirre. This trip is clearly meant to ground the narrative in details. But one thing is already clear: there are no meek "road-runners" in my uncle's story. Indeed, this story suggests a galvanized Mexican community with a long memory.

"Conditions were bad," Lico says again, picking up the loose ends of the past hour. But the soldiers who came back weren't afraid of the *gabachos*. "We're not afraid anymore," said Lico. "We were in a war over there, and now we're in a war over here. *Qué siga la guerra.* [Let the war continue.]"

The Mexican community of San Angelo was quite active in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1930, a local chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was formed in order to promote Americanism and first-class citizenship among "Latin Americans." Over the next two decades, LULAC, allied with other social and cultural organizations, protested segregation at movie houses and public events, the classification of Mexicans as "non-white," and so on. When World War II broke out, LULAC led the way in expressing support for the military draft. The sons of many local families saw combat and were killed in action.[24]

Such sacrifice and loyalty to the country intensified the campaign of the Mexican American community for changes in local conditions. One eloquent letter to the *San Angelo Standard-Times* voiced the sentiment of many "Latin-American citizens," noting that "our Latin-American boys are not segregated at the front line. They are fighting right beside the Anglo American boys. They are dying beside the Anglo boys for a most worthy cause—that democracy may live and so that people may have all the privileges of a democracy."[25]

The letter-writer then asked some pointed rhetorical questions:

after their service, how will the Latin American soldiers react when they return home and "find that they are not considered good enough to go into a café because they happen to be of Mexican origin . . . ?" Moreover, how do the mothers and wives of these soldiers feel about these humiliations? "The mothers and wives who have sacrificed the lives of their loved ones to win the war—how do they feel when they are refused a glass of water in a café? Their children are not good enough to enjoy the rights of American citizens, but they are good enough to die defending their country. The Latins will feel just like the Jews in Germany."

The letter-writer concluded by noting that "if Latin-Americans in Texas are not to be 'The Jews of Germany' then discrimination should be completely abolished and Latin-American citizens should be allowed to exercise all their privileges as given to all citizens by the Constitution of America."

As I read this letter, I wonder whether this striking comparison to "Jews in Germany" is a not-so-subtle reference to the sizable Texas German community among West Texas Anglos. The Texas German towns were infamous for their segregationist practices. Mexican Americans in their sworn testimonies about discrimination often identified the offenders as Germans.[26] An implied irony in these documents was the suggestion that Texas Mexicans were fighting Germans abroad and at home. The way Lico put it was, "Anglos are the children of Germans. Their parents taught them to hate Mexicans."

The author of the remarkable letter was Aurora García (Jáquez), whose brother, brother-in-law, and husband were at the time stationed in South Asia. The letter of Mrs. García, a well-known community activist, suggests the type of informed and critical commentary then circulating in the barrios of San Angelo.[27] The letter was written July 27, 1945, only a month before the beating of Benigno Aguirre.

The Benigno Aguirre Beating

It is mid-afternoon when we pull into San Angelo. We stop at a relative's house. We look through the San Angelo telephone directory, find the listing for Benigno Aguirre, and call. I briefly explain the purpose of my call, and Mr. Aguirre immediately invites us over to talk.

I review my notes of the newspaper articles I had previously surveyed.[28] I realize that without these articles my uncle's story could have remained largely unverifiable; it could have remained an interesting "folktale." For the incident almost went unnoticed outside the Mexican barrios of San Angelo. The *San Angelo Standard-Times* and its companion newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, reported on the beating and hospitalization a week after it had happened, and only because Mrs. Aurora García, the eloquent letter writer and activist, had insisted that the editors look into the matter. The editors found Benigno Aguirre, comatose and in critical condition, in a basement room of the San Angelo hospital. Then they found that the police had apparently made no attempts to investigate the incident. Although the police had filed a report, they had never asked Aguirre's companions about the assailants. Police Chief Lowe said he never saw the police report on the beating; the desk sergeant said "he didn't know how it had missed being brought to Lowe's attention."[29] However, the initial story of September 9—with the headline "Ex-Soldier Still Unconscious Week after Assault; None of Assailants Apprehended"—provoked a storm of protest, and within days the city police had charged twelve boys, most of them sixteen and seventeen years old, with the assault. The newspaper reporting on the beating and subsequent legal proceedings suggests that the Aguirre incident shook the old racial order of San Angelo.

Solely on the basis of the newspaper articles, I had reconstructed the history of the Aguirre incident as follows. On Saturday night (September 1, 1945), according to court testimony by several of the Anglo teenagers, policeman Bill White had "carried a bunch of the boys out" to a local nightclub where they drank until 1 a.m. Later, while driving down Washington Drive, the group decided to "Go over into Mexican town and beat up some Mexicans." They saw two near Ben Ficklin Road, but those two disappeared while they turned the pickup around. They "piled out of the pick-up" when they saw two more on Avenue K, but those two also "got away." At Washington Drive and South Chadbourne, "the boys" confronted Benigno Aguirre, twenty, Pete Gonzales, sixteen, and Rudy Salazar, nineteen. They claimed that the trio had cursed and thrown something at them as they drove by. But Pete Gonzales was emphatic in noting that "we sure didn't start it." In his statement, Gonzales said that he, Ben, and

Rudy were returning from a Latin American club where "some television thing with recordings" was being demonstrated. On the way home, some "white boys" saw them and shouted "There are three Mexicans!" "Ben and I were going down Chadbourne, trying to get away, when they drove up in a pick-up and piled out." There is agreement on what happened next. Gonzales and Salazar got away, but Aguirre was caught after a short chase. Aguirre, 115 pounds, was beaten unconscious.[30]

When the *Standard-Times* broke the story a week later, Aguirre, with "both eyes blackened and bloody, and with a cut inches long X-ed above his left ear," was semiconscious and in critical condition at the hospital: "His lips moved without speaking, as his eyes opened without seeing. His quiet-spoken father, Manuel J. Aguirre . . . could [speak]. Not without bitterness. 'No, I don't know who beat my boy. It is bad.'" Speaking "in broken sentences," his father said that "Ben had a medical discharge [from the Army] . . . he was not a strong boy. He never drank. He never had a fight before in his life that I know of. He was a good boy."[31]

The Mexican community of San Angelo, which had long complained of hazing and other acts of provocation by Anglo teenagers, was outraged by the assault. Community leaders noted that the Anglo boys were out "hunting greasers" in the barrio just for fun, and that the beating was unprovoked. The incident further demonstrated that these Anglo gangs were encouraged, and sometimes escorted, by the Anglo police as they harassed Mexican youth. Within a few days of the first published report, a group of prominent community members had joined together and sent telegrams to Governor Coke Stevenson, the Mexican Consul in Austin, and the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs, asking for some redress, since local authorities had ignored the situation. The telegram read in part: "For some months past there has been an organized gang operating in San Angelo, Texas, composed of Anglo-Americans who have been and continue to threaten, abuse, beat, maltreat and waylay Latin-Americans."[32] Of the governor, they asked that Texas Rangers be dispatched forthwith to "put a stop to this practice." As an indication of the tension in the city, they warned that "delay in bringing this condition under control will undoubtedly be fatally serious." Cursing and fights between Anglo and Latin American youths had already

taken place outside a downtown theater and the Standard-Times Building the day before.[33]

The signatories of the telegram were three pastors—Reverend G. C. Rodríguez of the Mexican Baptist Church, Reverend Antonio Guillen of the Mexican Methodist Church, and Reverend Raymond Soper of St. Mary's Catholic Church—and three prominent businesspeople, J. M. Jáquez of the Mexican Grill, José Figueroa of Figueroa's Grocery, and Albert Cano of the Little Mexico Café. These pastors and businessmen constituted the leadership of the ad hoc committee that formed in response to the Aguirre beating. They also provided the network for the Ben Aguirre hospital fund. Two days after the first report, José Figueroa had collected nearly $200, mostly in small donations of a few dollars, at his store. By the following day, nearly $400 had been collected. The last published reference to the fund, eleven days after the first report, notes that nearly $500 had been collected, and that groceryman José Figueroa had been "officially designated as treasurer of the hospital expense fund."[34] Through these bits and pieces spliced from various newspaper articles, one captures the sense of an angry, mobilized community.

Denunciation of the Aguirre beating also came from some quarters on the Anglo side of town. (This may have been the first sign of disagreement among Anglo Americans about the nature of race relations in San Angelo.) The local newspapers, the *Standard-Times* and the *Evening Standard*, took the lead in criticizing and investigating the police. A few days after the initial reporting, the *Evening Standard* editorialized that the incident was a "blot" on the image of San Angelo and that it was "more than passing strange" that the police chief and the sheriff had initially known nothing of the attack on Aguirre.[35] The San Angelo Ministerial Association, representing the major churches in the city, passed a strongly worded resolution deploring "this un-American and despicable act by a gang of Anglo American youths." The Goodfellow Post of the American Legion unanimously condemned the "gangsterism" and offered support in "bringing to justice the guilty persons." Several speakers mentioned the part that Latin Americans have played "in behalf of this country in wartime." One Legionnaire, a former paratrooper, related that "of a group of more than 30 Mexican soldiers at the front most of them had been wounded and they were still in there battling. They commanded his utmost respect."[36] The resolution condemned "the beating of an ex-soldier, a Latin American, who served his country honorably . . . as entirely un-American, as contrary to the principles for which this Latin-American swore to serve his country." The veterans then contributed $21 to the Aguirre hospital fund.

Such reaction and pressure from both Mexican and Anglo sides of town apparently surprised the local police, and they moved, somewhat belatedly, to curtail the activities of Anglo gangs. Chief of Police Lowe joined Sheriff J. F. Bryson in an ultimatum to the teenage gangs to "break it up."[37] Within a few days of the first *Standard-Times* article, eleven of the twelve boys, ages sixteen and older, had been identified and arrested. Initially all were charged with assault with intent to murder. All the boys, including the twelfth, who turned himself in a week later, posted bond or were released to their parents. Some of the boys were sons of prominent ranchers and attorneys. All twelve defendants were represented by the father of one of the boys, attorney William C. McDonald, Sr.[38]

The seven youths who were sixteen years of age were arraigned as juveniles before County Judge I. J. Curtsinger on September 19. Although Judge Curtsinger said he understood the Latin American "still is at the point of death," and that "his condition is doubtful even if he lives," he placed all seven on probation for five years and paroled them to their parents. At the sentencing, he took into account that none of them was involved in "the final close-up attack . . . although all were participants in some degree." He set a curfew hour of 10:30 p.m. and warned them to stay away from intoxicants. A violation of probation would land them in the Gatesville training school without further hearing. Finally, he admonished the youths to improve their school grades and to "have plenty of honest fun—for example, in different forms of athletics—but stay off the streets at night."[39]

There was, of course, a strong current of support in the Anglo community for the twelve boys. During the juvenile hearing, McDonald, the boys' attorney, suggested that the Aguirre incident was in retaliation for an earlier assault by Mexicans. He asked one of the boys if he "knew about George Beaty being beat up and put in the hospital by some Mexicans." The boy replied that he had known about it.[40] In a letter to the *Standard-Times*, George Beaty's mother

accused the paper of "crucifying 12 little boys in order to gain a few votes against public officials whom it dislikes." Mrs. Beaty wanted to know why the *Standard-Times* had neglected to mention that her son had been beaten up last July by "a bunch of Mexicans" near the Mexican Grill.[41] Along these lines, City Manager Sam Lawhon expressed regret that "a Latin-American boy was injured," but he personally believed that "this is not a one-sided affair" and that some Latin Americans "have started their share of the fights."[42]

Perhaps this sentiment explains what happened with the five older boys—Leon Hunter, Jr., seventeen; Pat Carnes, seventeen; Bill McDonald, Jr., seventeen; Leland Brashers, seventeen; and E. A. Chapman, twenty—whose cases were brought up before the District Court grand jury on charges of assault with intent to murder. The grand jury no-billed four of the boys, and indicted only Leon Hunter of a reduced misdemeanor charge of aggravated assault. As a misdemeanor, Hunter's case was transferred from the District Court back to the jurisdiction of County Court Judge Curtsinger. There, as a result of a settlement agreement, Hunter pleaded guilty and received a fine of $125. Thus ended the legal proceedings in the Aguirre case, or, as the *Standard-Times* put it, "Finis Written in Attack Case."[43]

The Mexicano community was angered and embittered by the outcome. "The whole affair was just a farce, a whitewash job," Aurora García commented. "These boys were from some very prominent families."[44] The beating had left Aguirre near death. He had been unconscious for a month and had required brain surgery. The doctors were not hopeful about a recovery. But after the legal proceedings ended, the *San Angelo Standard-Times* ceased reporting on the Aguirre incident. The only record we have of further community reaction involving Ben Aguirre is that voiced through my uncle's story.

Benigno Aguirre, at sixty-nine years, looks healthy. He is a slender man, about 5 feet 9 inches tall, with silver-gray thinning hair. He greets us and immediately begins to talk about the beating. We have not yet sat down, nor have I turned on the tape recorder, before he describes the general situation, that whites would drive through the Mexican neighborhoods looking for Mexicans to harass and beat up. Mr. Aguirre is eager to tell his story.[45]

> The mayor and most of the police force didn't like Mexicans—*para mí eran del* Klan [to me, they were from the Klan]. The police would escort the Anglo boys to the barrio as if this was a sport. The white boys admitted that the police had them doing this kind of stuff. The police would step in if the Mexicans tried to fight back. When they beat me up, the police were nearby—White and another cop whose name I can't remember were around there.

Aguirre relates that after the beating, the cops took the boys to a ranch to let things cool off.

Aguirre is still upset, fifty years later, at the newspaper reporting of the incident. He feels that the coverage had made him look like a gang member or troublemaker. They hadn't yelled or thrown things at the whites as reported in the newspapers. "The whites were in our part of town and they came looking to cause trouble. Who caused the assault should not be a question."[46] Aguirre continues: "There were fifteen guys. They left me for dead. They broke my skull. After the deputies took me to the hospital I blacked out, so I only know what the others told me and what came out in the papers. I was unconscious for thirty-two days. I revived on the twentieth day for a while."

I ask him about the metal plate in his head. Aguirre replies sharply, "The doctors didn't even put a plate in my head; they just pulled my skin over this hole in my skull." He adds, "I still feel pain."

Aguirre credits his salvation to Aurora Jáquez (Mrs. Aurora García): "If Aurora Jáquez had not caused a commotion at the hospital, the doctors would not have operated on me. If it weren't for Aurora, they would have left me for dead. Everything would have been silenced." I am struck by the reference to silence. Had Aurora not intervened, his death would have been recorded as the result of an attack by unknown assailants. The police would never have investigated. There would have been no incident. Everything would have been silenced.

Aguirre recounts that when he came out of the coma, he could not remember what had happened. His father initially told him that he had been operated on because of his appendix, but that didn't make sense since it was his head that was bandaged. His doctor would only say that he had been in an accident. His friends were afraid to tell

him because they were concerned that his health would worsen with the truth. Finally, his dad gave him the newspaper clippings, and he read about his beating.

Aguirre brings out the newspaper clippings to show me. These yellowed clippings, many of them torn or incomplete, had been collected in two over-sized laminated pages. What stands out in the collage of clippings are the repeated references in the headlines to "attack case" or "Aguirre beating."

Aguirre still maintains, as his companions did fifty years ago, that there were fifteen boys. Aguirre notes that Hunter, who weighed two hundred pounds, was the one who got the blame. The other guys said they didn't take part in the beating. These were the sons of lawyers and ranchers; one was the son of a city commissioner, while another was the son of McDonald, the attorney who defended the boys. Hunter was the poorest of the group, and he was made the scapegoat. "Hunter was given a $125 fine! And the others were let go!" Aguirre is still upset.

My uncle points out, as if to remind Ben, that his beating aroused and unified the Mexicano community of San Angelo. "*La gente se juntó* [the people came together]," recalls my uncle, who was sixteen at the time. The people carried out a door-to-door campaign, raising funds for Aguirre's medical expenses: "When they began to ask for support in the barrio americano, the white people put signs on their doors that said, 'Ask Mexicans for help' and 'We don't help Mexicans.'"

Aguirre nods in agreement: "*Estaba carajo en esos días.* [It was terrible in those days.] Ray Garza knifed a white man while I was in the hospital, because of my situation. He stabbed him at school." Aguirre adds that some Mexicanos blamed him for their troubles at work, because of all the publicity. He pauses and then says, "A lot of people don't believe how bad it was then. We had to suffer a lot for things to be better now."

Ben and Lico agree that conditions improved after the assault. Ben continues: "Things changed after the incident. They took down the signs ["No Mexicans Allowed"] and let people into restaurants—not everywhere but in a lot of places. *Sabes qué, la gente se levantó bien duro* [you know what, the community rose up real strong]."

Aguirre himself became a charged symbol of the changes. Years

after the incident, his presence would still upset some Anglos. Before he went on disability, Aguirre notes that he had trouble finding and keeping work. After two or three months, the Anglos "would find out it was me and then they would fire me." His horses were killed and his goats were stolen. I ask him if he had ever run into any of the twelve Anglos again. "Once when I was in town," Aguirre replies, "these two Anglos came by and pushed me. Then my friend went after them and they apologized." In sharp contrast, for the Mexican community Ben was the young man whom they had saved. I ask rhetorically, "Do people today remember?" Aguirre responds without hesitation, "There are still many who see me and ask about my health. For the people from here, they will never forget." "He is history," adds my uncle.

That there has been considerable change over the last fifty years is evident on the living-room mantel, where photos of Aguirre's three sons and their wives are prominently displayed. One of the wives is an Anglo blonde. Two of his sons, he tells me, are store managers in Dallas; the other became a cop and is now a narcotics agent. The narcotics agent is married to the blonde.

"What would you advise your children?" I ask Ben. He replies, "I would advise them to forget the past. I don't talk to them about it. We lived in a different system. They can become better."

"Do they all know the story?" I ask.

"Yes," Ben responds, "but I didn't want them to resent whites. San Angelo has changed a lot."

Aguirre does not want to stir malice or ill feelings with his story. But he is eager to correct the historical record. Oral histories circulate among family and friends, and Aguirre's extended circle is already familiar with the corrected version. This is for a different audience.

Benigno, perhaps in a sign that he is tiring, says, "I can't tell you much more; I was in the hospital a long time. You should talk to Aurora Jáquez. She called for the Texas Rangers." I know my history of this event is incomplete without the recollections of Aurora Jáquez, the articulate young organizer who directed much of the civil rights strategy of the Mexicano community. In a paradoxical sense, I realize, she and not Benigno Aguirre is the central person in the story of the "Aguirre beating."[47]

Aguirre is instead the living icon of an incident that exposed the

ugly face of the old segregated order, an incident that local "old-timers"—Anglos and Mexicans—still remember well, even if few like to talk about it. I know that I have barely scratched the surface of an important chapter in the history of San Angelo. Yet somehow, as incomplete as the story remains, I feel a sense of closure. My uncle and I have found Ben Aguirre.

AN Avenging TORNado?

After two hours of conversation, we thank Mr. Aguirre for the visit and leave. By this time the humidity of a hot July afternoon has given way to lightning, thunder, and a heavy shower. "Is this tornado weather?" I ask Lico, half-jokingly. My uncle points in a northwesterly direction, toward the river, and recalls again that in 1952 or 1953 "*un tornado venía por el barrio mexicano, y parecía que era el fin del mundo. Pero al último momento hizo un* 'U-turn,' *brincó el río, y limpió todo el barrio gabacho* [a tornado was coming toward the Mexican neighborhood, and it looked as if this was the end of the world. But at the last minute it made a U-turn, jumped across the river, and cleared the entire Anglo neighborhood away]. The Anglos came and asked for help, and the Mexicanos put up signs, 'Remember Ben Aguirre. This was an act of God. Ask God for help.'"

A tornado sent by a vengeful God—is there a more perfect ending for this kind of Texas "folk story"? Again I am impressed by the tenacity of community memory implied by the story: eight years after the incident of waiting for some justice, a tornado provides divine retribution. Bitter memories sink deep roots in small towns. When I first heard the Ben Aguirre story, the memory was nearly fifty years old. Some of the details had become frayed over the years as the story was retold over and over. Contrary to my uncle's version of the incident, Aguirre had not been in uniform when he was nearly beaten to death. Nor did he have a metal plate in his head. Nonetheless, Lico's story, by highlighting the treatment of Mexican Americans, uniformed or not, unambiguously captured the truth of the incident.

And the avenging tornado? My uncle, it turns out, did not exaggerate in describing a catastrophic event. Extremely intense tornadic activity devastated parts of San Angelo and Waco on May 11, 1953. It also sparked "the first thoroughly documented investigation" of major cities following catastrophic disaster.[48] A team of social scientists, organized by the Hogg Foundation and the Sociology Department of the University of Texas, studied San Angelo and Waco for over a year, investigating "everything they could lay their hands on," from economics to emotions.[49] Thus, again, ample documentation surfaces to confirm critical elements of my uncle's narrative.

The San Angelo event unfolded as follows. In the early afternoon of May 11, 1953, two patrolmen of the Texas Department of Public Safety reported sighting a funnel over Sterling City, forty miles to the northwest of San Angelo. They followed the funnel down the valley of the North Concho River, with a forward speed of about ten to fifteen miles per hour. As the tornado approached the city, it changed direction, "cutting across the highway less than a block behind the patrol car." The officers turned around and followed the tornado into the Lake View area, where it lowered and "wrought such intense damage." The damage was concentrated in a trail of approximately two and a half miles through the Lake View neighborhood.[50]

The tornado obliterated Lake View. It claimed 11 lives, injured 66 people seriously, and left 1,700 homeless in the few minutes it took to sweep across Lake View. About 430 homes, or nearly 80 percent of the homes in the tornado area, were totally destroyed or rendered uninhabitable.[51] The emotional impact was also severe, resulting in "intense feelings of desolation, of depression, of loss, or of apathy."[52] Four out of ten families had members who experienced serious emotional disturbance, and eight out of ten families had members who had developed "undue fear of bad weather." Wayne Holtzman, research director for the Hogg Foundation, drew an analogy to war conditions, noting that "striking similarities are apparent between the traumatic neuroses in bombed cities in the Second World War and the emotional disturbances manifested by some victims of the tornadoes."[53]

But my uncle's story would suggest that another comparison, of the bitter "eye for an eye" sort, be drawn with the situation of the Mexican barrios of that time. There is no question that the crises of these two communities were set off by categorically distinct threats—storm clouds for one, teenage gangs for the other. Yet each underwent a similar experience of being under siege. It is difficult for me to read that fear had become "the constant companion of many people in Lake View"[54] and not think immediately of everyday life for Mexicans in San Angelo during the war years. It is difficult not to think of

Ben Aguirre in reading about the terror and the resulting fear experienced by one Lake View woman: "I was terrified. I was like a trapped animal that didn't know what way to run. . . . I just—when those storms come up, I just—just feel like for sure this may be the end. That it could be a cloud that could swoop down before you could get to protection. They are murderous things. There's—there's a fear you can't conquer."[55] Storm clouds and teenage gangs are threats of very different character, but the persistent anxiety and fear of Lake View residents must have been familiar emotions in the San Angelo barrios before the Aguirre beating. The Aguirre incident, my uncle's narrative suggests, transformed fear into anger and defiance. What else could the tornado in his story represent?

A good number of Angeleños on both sides of the Concho River thought that the 1953 tornado represented God's will. The social scientists from the University of Texas, wanting to understand the meanings that the victims had attributed to this disaster, asked Lake View families, "Why do you think this storm hit Lake View?" Almost half had no explanation. But of those who offered reasons, "the greatest number, by far, were couched in religious terms—the storm was God's will, His punishment for sins committed, or some other motive attributed to Him. The belief in a divinity actively interested in, and interfering with, terrestrial affairs is evident."[56] For many Lake View victims, the tornado was general punishment for a sinful life. For many in the Mexicano community, the tornado that made a "U-turn" was "an act of God" meant to redress long-outstanding grievances.

The team of social scientists, in San Angelo for a year, did not perceive the symbolic importance of the Lake View tornado in the context of local San Angelo society. They failed to see any signs of racial tension because the Lake View neighborhood was strictly a "whites only" area; the Mexican barrios that had been miraculously spared were on the other side of the Concho River. They thus missed some of the most important signs of stress and conflict, signs that literally and figuratively said "Remember Ben Aguirre."

It is still raining when we drive to a covered icehouse for some beer. As we drink and talk about the rather long day, I comment on the irony that the Aguirre incident took place at the end of World War II.

"Ben was beaten on the same day that Japan formally surrendered," I note.[57] The war overseas had ended. Thinking of the much-publicized meetings of former Japanese and American soldiers taking place today, I ask Lico if he thinks that something similar could happen between Mexicans and Anglos who had fought each other back then.

"Do you think that some of those twelve *gabachos* who assaulted Ben fifty years ago would be willing to shake hands with Ben and exchange good wishes?"

"I think so," replies Lico. "Are you going to organize it?"

I laugh nervously and take another swallow of beer. Outside the rain has let up.

The trip to find Ben Aguirre took place on July 15, 1995. Nine months later, on April 27, 1996, Ben G. Aguirre passed away.

Notes

1. I want to thank Patricia Martínez, Veronica Martínez, Emilio Zamora, Jaime Mejía, and Arnoldo De León for their assistance and comments on earlier drafts.

2. David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

3. For instances of Mexican Americans being refused service because they were not accepted as white or Caucasian, see Alonso Perales, *Are We Good Neighbors?* (San Antonio: Artes Gráficas, 1948), 139–212.

4. See Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 268, 272–273. The reaction of the workers must have been similar to that of a truck driver who was taking seasonal workers to West Texas in October 1947. After being denied service at a café, the truck driver had appealed to the city marshal, noting that he had fought and been wounded in the war. The marshal said he could do nothing but he, too, was sorry because they were having difficulty obtaining Mexican labor. The truck driver responded that, as far as he was concerned, the marshal and the café's proprietor "could both start picking the cotton and we would be glad to remain away from his community." See Perales, *Are We Good Neighbors?*, 141–142.

5. As important, during the war and immediately afterward, there was a significant migration of Texas Mexicans from the rural areas to the cities, where veterans' benefits and federal jobs could be secured. My family was part of that migration. My father, a World War II veteran, moved the family from Del Rio to San Antonio in 1950 and began work at the Post Office while attending college on the G.I. Bill. My uncle Lico, a Korean veteran, would follow a few years later, lured by work at Kelly Air Force Base.

6. *Texas: A Guide to the Lone Star State* (New York: Hastings House, 1940), hereafter referred to as *Texas*. This travel guide was one of the first compendiums of its type about Texas, with several printings after 1940.

7. Perales, *Are We Good Neighbors?*

8. Perales testified on behalf of Senate Bill S101, which would have established a permanent Fair Employment Practice Commission. Perales was Chairman, Committee of One Hundred, and Director General, League of Loyal Americans, San Antonio, Texas. See ibid., 114–133.

9. Ibid., 130–131.

10. Ibid., 121, 123, 139–213, esp. 156.

11. *Texas*, 604.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 610.

14. Perales, *Are We Good Neighbors?* 222.

15. *Texas*, 610.

16. Ibid., 611.

17. Ibid., 612.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 475.

20. For a well-documented history, see Arnoldo De León, *San Angeleños: Mexican Americans in San Angelo, Texas* (San Angelo: Fort Concho Museum Press, 1985).

21. See Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 192; Perales, *Are We Good Neighbors?* 290.

22. *Texas*, 475.

23. Ibid., 474.

24. De León, *San Angeleños*, 51–54, 58.

25. "Writer Says Latin Americans in This City Discrimination Victims," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, July 27, 1945, 2.

26. See Perales, *Are We Good Neighbors?* 170, 179, 202, 209.

27. See discussion in De León, *San Angeleños*, 70–71.

28. *San Angelo Standard-Times*, July–October 1945; also De León, *San Angeleños*, 72–73.

29. "Ex-Soldier Still Unconscious Week after Assault; None of Assailants Apprehended," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 9, 1945, 1, 22; "Latin War Vet Beaten by Gang," *San Angelo Evening Standard*, September 9, 1945, 1.

30. "Seven Boys Put on Probation by County Judge," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 20, 1945, 1, 16.

31. "Ex-Soldier Still Unconscious," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 9, 1945.

32. "11 Youth Identified in Aguirre Attack," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 11, 1945, 1, 2.

33. "11 Youth Identified," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 11, 1945; "Four Post Bond on Assault Case against Aguirre," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 12, 1945, 1, 13; "Ministers Deplore Aguirre Attack; Two Suspects Held," *San Angelo Evening Standard*, September 10, 1945, 1. As an indication of the racial climate of the time, a "Latin-American youth" was charged with carrying a deadly weapon and taken to the Gatesville School for Boys. The county probation officer said that the sixteen-year-old carried a long knife on his person and had intimidated children of the San Angelo Junior High School. The boy declared that he wasn't looking for trouble but was ready to accommodate any "white boy" who wanted it. "16-Year-Old Boy to Gatesville Today," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, October 11, 1945, 1.

34. Calculating from the reported listings, the average contribution was about $2.50. This would suggest that close to two hundred people contributed to the Aguirre hospital fund. See "11 Youth Identified," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 11, 1945; "Four Post Bond," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 12, 1945; "Seven Boys Put on Probation by County Judge," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 20, 1945, 1, 16.

35. The editorial added:

> This isn't the first time that these gangster tactics have been adopted by San Angelo hoodlums. In fact, there is reason to believe that yet a fourth Latin-American was injured by another group of "white boys," or the same group, in another part of South Angelo at about the same hour of the night of Sept. 1. There were several previous cases, which weren't so well-reported.

See "It Happens in San Angelo," *San Angelo Evening Standard*, September 10, 1945, 4.

36. "11 Youth Identified," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 11, 1945; "Resolution by Legion Assails Aguirre Attack," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 11, 1945, 2.

37. "Ex-Soldier Still Unconscious," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 9, 1945.

38. "7 Juveniles to be Arraigned in Aguirre Attack," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 13, 1; "12th Youth Charged in Aguirre Beating Posts Bond Friday," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 15, 22.

39. "Seven Boys Put on Probation," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 20, 1945, 1, 16.

40. Ibid.

41. The *Standard-Times* interviewed George Beaty and uncovered a pattern similar to that of the Aguirre case: Anglo boys cruising through the Mexican neighborhood until "provoked" by Mexican boys. The difference in this instance was that "maybe three carloads" of Latin American youth showed up unexpectedly, outnumbering Beaty and his companions. "Standard Is Charged with Skipping Attack on Beaty," *San Angelo Standard-Times*, September 21, 1945.

42. "Aguirre Rallies; Five Make Bail in Assault Case," *San Angelo Evening Standard*, September 12, 1945, 1, 13.

43. "Finis Written in Attack Case; Hunter Fined," *San Angelo Evening Standard*, circa October–November 1945. Ben Aguirre's collection of newspaper articles had no dates, and I have not been able to locate this particular article.

44. Letter from Aurora García to Arnoldo De León, May 2, 1984.

45. Interview with Benigno Aguirre, July 15, 1995. Mr. Aguirre spoke mainly in Spanish. The English translations are mine.

46. Aguirre was also upset with the description of the incident given by Arnoldo De León in his history of San Angelo. See De León, *San Angeleños*, 72–73.

47. Aurora García (Jáquez) moved with her husband to Dallas in 1946. In a 1984 letter to Arnoldo De León, Mrs. García recalled:

> During my involvement in the years 1945–46 I was just 23 years old and I was lacking in maturity, in the know-how of what channels one must go through to try to get things done. I was unhappy to see the deplorable condi-

> tions under which we lived in our barrio, but the main motivating force that really made me decide to do something was anger and sadness at the atrocious crime committed against one of my race. Fortunately, I think that after the war conditions turned for the better. Our ex-soldier population and their families had learned to be more tolerant to the different cultures, to realize that we can and must co-exist.

Letter from Aurora García to Arnoldo De León, May 2, 1984.

48. The findings were published in Harry Estill Moore, *Tornadoes over Texas: A Study of Waco and San Angelo in Disaster* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958).

49. Ibid., vii.

50. Ibid., 27.

51. Ibid., 25, 90, 91, 92.

52. Ibid., 265.

53. According to Holtzman, the research director for the Hogg Foundation,

> Of all the natural calamities confronting man, the tornado is most like the man-made disaster of bombing civilian populations. The lack of forewarning, the complete helplessness of a community when disaster strikes and the wake of desolation and destruction which follow, the sudden, explosive fury of winds, and the brief duration of onslaught so characteristic of a tornado are also characteristic of bombing in war.

Ibid., viii–ix.

54. Ibid., 256.

55. Ibid., 257.

56. Almost half (47 percent) ventured no explanation. Of those who answered, 16 percent divided their responses between "atom bombs," "fatalistic acceptance," and "in pathway of storms," another 16 percent said it was due to "natural causes," and 21 percent said that it was the "Lord's will or punishment." Ibid., 219–220.

57. There was no apparent connection between Japan's surrender and the adventure of the "white boys" on the weekend of September 12. The Mexican community, of course, was well aware of the irony of fighting for democracy abroad and at home.

CHAPTER 3

On the West Side

A Portrait of Lanier High School during World War II

JULIO NOBOA

The Second World War's effect on American schooling was felt throughout urban public schools in a variety of ways. Myriad responses from educational leaders, the federal government, and local districts exerted influences on a wide range of educational aspects, from the curriculum itself to extracurricular activities. These included specialized courses or changes in content as well as patriotic assemblies and drives to collect scrap materials for the war effort.

Not long after the official declaration of war on December 8, 1941, the Office of Education established a Wartime Commission to promote war-related activities at all educational levels. Leading educators and national organizations joined in, exhorting public schools to promote democratic values and freedoms.[1]

School administrators responded to the war in various ways, according to the district's own local conditions and attitudes. New programs were created and existing ones were expanded; some districts emphasized math and science, while others stressed more immediate practical skills such as food preparation, clothing design, conservation, or nutrition.

There was also an increased interest in providing vocational education, and, to a lesser extent, social studies and foreign languages. New courses were added, such as aeronautics, and war-related content permeated all subject areas. This was especially evident in the