

RINGSIDE SEAT TO A

REVOLUTION!

An Underground Cultural History
of El Paso and Juárez: 1893-1923



DAVID DORADO ROMO

THE BATH RIOTS: REVOLT OF THE MEXICAN AMAZONS AT THE SANTA FE BRIDGE

MY INTEREST IN the El Paso-Juárez Bath Riots didn't start with something I read in any history book. Most historians have forgotten about this obscure incident that took place on the border in 1917.⁹⁹ I first heard of the U.S. government's policy that provoked these riots while I was still in high school. One evening, during a family dinner, my great-aunt Adela Dorado shared her memories with us about her experiences as a young woman during the Mexican Revolution. She recalled that American authorities regularly forced her and all other working-class Mexicans to take a bath and be sprayed with pesticides at the Santa Fe Bridge whenever they needed to cross into the United States. My great-aunt, who worked as a maid in El Paso during the revolution, told us she felt humiliated for being treated as a "dirty Mexican." She related how on one occasion the U.S. customs officials put her clothes and shoes through a large *secadora* (dryer) and her shoes melted.

I remember having trouble fully believing my great-aunt's disturbing story the first time I heard it. I thought that my *tía* Adela's memory was probably failing her. I was sure machines for drying clothes were a modern invention. If she was wrong about this detail, I reasoned, maybe the rest of her story wasn't exactly as she remembered it either. If her recollections were completely accurate, why hadn't I read anything about this in any history textbook? The experience my great-aunt was describing was a little too raw for me—a bit too shameful. My skepticism at the time was probably a kind of defense mechanism against this uncomfortable piece of information.

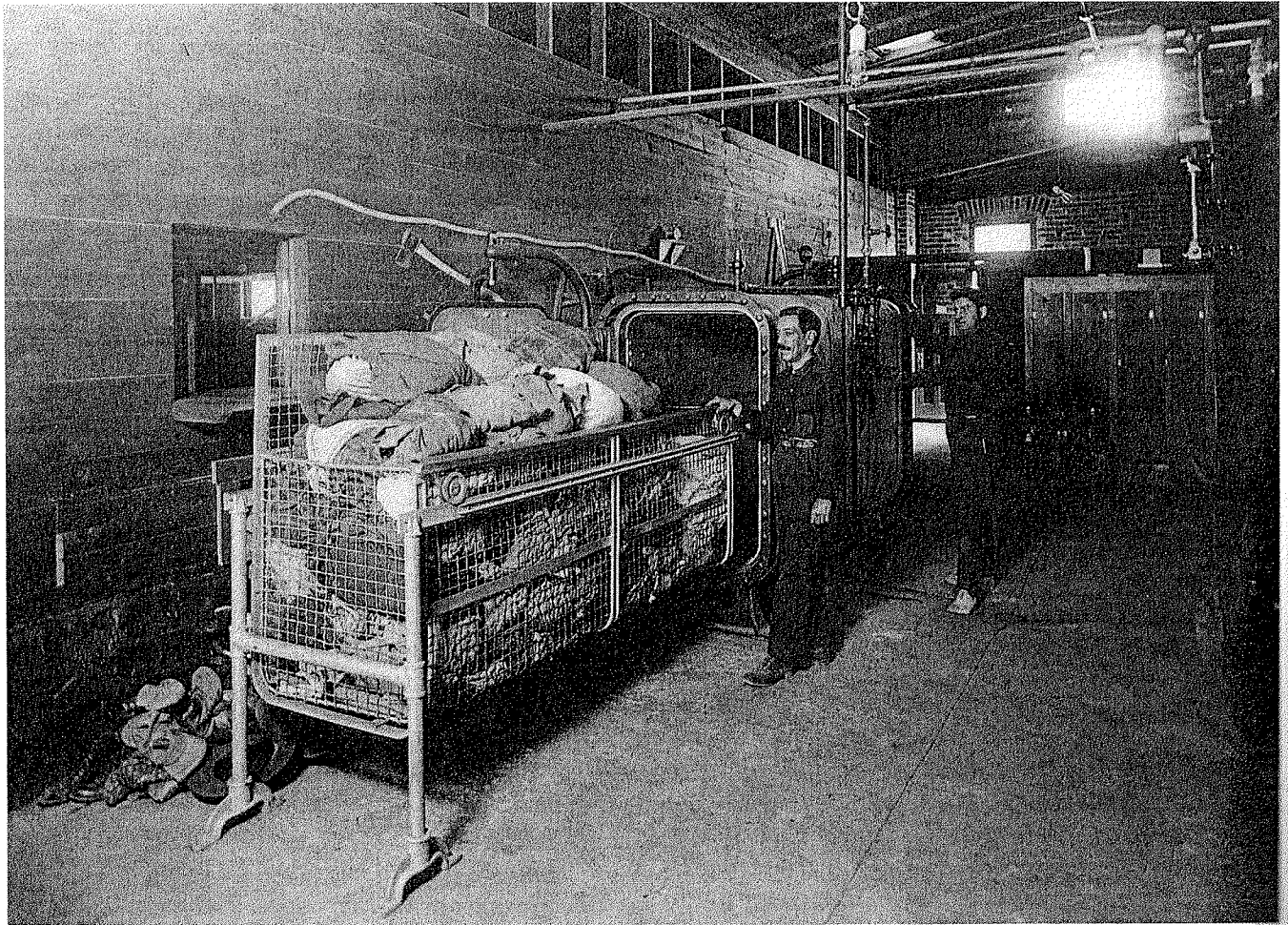
Many years later, as part of my research for this book at the National Archives in the Washington, D.C. area, I came upon some photographs taken in 1917 in El Paso. The pictures, which were part of the U.S. Public Health records, showed large steam dryers used to disinfect the clothes of border crossers at the Santa Fe Bridge. Here it was. My great-aunt's memory hadn't failed her after all.

But I also unexpectedly uncovered other information at the National Archives that took my great-aunt's personal recollections beyond family lore or microhistory. These records point to the connection between the U.S. Customs disinfection facilities in El Paso-Juárez in the 20s and the *Desinfektionskammern* (disinfection chambers) in Nazi Germany. The documents show that beginning in the 1920s, U.S. officials at the Santa Fe Bridge deloused and sprayed the clothes of Mexicans crossing into the U.S. with Zyklon B. The fumigation was carried out in an area of the building that American officials called, ominously enough, "the gas chambers." I discovered an article written in a German scientific journal written in 1938, which specifically praised the El Paso method of fumigating Mexican immigrants with Zyklon B. At the start of WWII, the Nazis adopted Zyklon B as a fumigation agent at German border crossings and concentration camps. Later, when the Final Solution was put into effect, the Germans found more sinister uses for this extremely lethal pesticide. They used Zyklon B pellets in their own gas chambers not just to kill lice but to exterminate millions of human beings. But that's another story.

Our story, instead, begins with the account of the 1917 Bath Riots at the Santa Fe Bridge. It is the story of a traumatic separation, an event that perhaps best epitomizes the year that the border between El Paso and Juárez, in the memories of many of its citizens, shut down for good.



⁹⁹ Recently this has begun to change. See Alexandra Mina Stern's "Buildings, Boundaries and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910-1930." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 79.1 (1999): pg. 41-81 and Yolanda Chávez Leyva's "There is Great Good in Returning." *Frontiers* 23.2-3 (2003): pg. 1-9.



*The steam dryer for the sterilization of clothing at the Santa Fe Bridge, 1917.
(USPHS, National Archives.)*

THE *EL PASO TIMES* described the leader of the Bath Riots as “an auburn-haired Amazon.”¹⁰⁰ She sparked an uprising against a policy that would change the course of the history in El Paso and Juárez for decades. Some even consider her a *fronteriza* Rosa Parks, yet her name has been mostly forgotten. The “Amazon” was Carmelita Torres, a 17-year old Juárez maid who crossed the Santa Fe International Bridge into El Paso every morning to clean American homes. At 7:30 a.m. on January 28, 1917, when Carmelita was asked by the customs officials at the bridge to get off the trolley, take a bath and be disinfected with gasoline, she refused. Instead, Carmelita got off the electric streetcar and convinced 30 other female passengers to get off with her and demonstrate their opposition to this humiliating process. By 8:30 a.m., more than 200 Mexican women had joined her and blocked all traffic into El Paso. By noon, the press estimated their number as “several thousand.”¹⁰¹

The demonstrators marched as a group toward the disinfection camp to call out those who were submitting themselves to the humiliation of the delousing process. When immigration and public health service officers tried to disperse the crowd, the protesters hurled bottles, rocks and insults at the Americans. A customs inspector was hit in the head. Fort Bliss commander General Bell ordered his soldiers to the scene, but the women jeered at them and continued their street battle. The “Amazons,” the newspapers reported, struck Sergeant J.M. Peck in the face with a rock and cut his cheek.¹⁰²

The protesters laid down on the tracks in front of the trolley cars to prevent them from moving. When the street cars were immobilized, the women wrenched the motor controllers from the hands of the motormen. One of the motormen tried to run back to the American side of the bridge. Three or four female

rioters clung to him while he tried to escape. They pummeled him with all their might and gave him a black eye. Another motorman preferred to hide from the Mexican women by running into a Chinese restaurant on Avenida Juárez.

Carrancista General Francisco Murguía showed up with his death troops to quell the female riot. Murguía’s cavalry, known as “el esquadron de la muerte,” was rather intimidating. They wore insignia bearing a skull and crossbones and were known for taking no prisoners. General Murguía’s nickname was “Pancho Mecates” for his habit of hanging hundreds of Villista prisoners from mecate ropes along the telephone lines leading to Juárez.

The death troops brought their own military band. It was the same band that had played Verdi’s “Aida” during a previous execution of three men caught selling ammunition to the Villistas. The cavalrymen drew their sabers and pointed them at the crowd. But the women were not frightened. They jeered, hooted and attacked the soldiers. “The soldiers were powerless,” the *El Paso Herald* reported.¹⁰³

“The scene reminded one of bees swarming,” the *El Paso Times* wrote. “The hands of the feminine mob would claw and tear at the tops of the passing cars. The glass rear windows of the autos were torn out, the tops torn to pieces and parts of the fittings such as lamps and horns were torn away.”¹⁰⁴

The newspapers reported that Villista sympathizers were thought to be behind the protest. Pancho Villa, despite six months of Pershing’s troops chasing after him, was still on the loose, waging guerilla warfare not too far from Juárez. When a Mexican laborer, José Marta Sánchez, cheered the protesters on by shouting, “¡Viva Villa!” he was immediately taken to the Juárez cemetery and executed by Murguía’s men.¹⁰⁵

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—*El Paso Times*, January 29, 1917

¹⁰⁰ “Auburn-Haired Amazon at Santa Fe Street Bridge Leads Feminine Outbreak,” *El Paso Times*, January 29, 1917.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *El Paso Herald*, January 29, 1917.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *El Paso Times*, January 29, 1917.

¹⁰⁵ *El Paso Herald*, January 19, 1917.

THE EL PASO JAIL HOLOCAUST

ALL THIS COMMOTION just because a bunch of Mexicans didn't want to take a bath?

The *El Paso Times* never lost its sense of humor throughout the whole affair. They thought the Bath Riots were quite a riot. "Many laughable incidents were reported by the health officers, quoting their conversations with Mexicans ordered to the baths. One argued eloquently that he had bathed well in July," the *Times* wrote.¹⁰⁶

The riots were due not only to the "natural predisposition" of Mexicans to avoid baths, the newspapers stated, but because of "certain misunderstandings." "Stories that Mexican women were burned to death in the gasoline baths and that American soldiers had photographed the women when they were stripped for their baths were said to have been circulated among the ignorant class in Juárez," the *El Paso Times* reported.¹⁰⁷

But the "ignorant class" didn't have it all wrong. Confidential letters sent by El Paso Public Health Service officials to their superiors in Washington, D.C. reveal that they too had heard rumors that photographs of naked Mexican women being bathed and physically examined at the bridge were passed around at a local saloon. The information was deemed credible enough by these officials to hire a detective to investigate the matter.¹⁰⁸

The women's fears of being burned to death in the gasoline baths weren't completely irrational either. It had happened before.

ON MONDAY MARCH 5, 1916, the city health department filled up two tubs with disinfection solution to delouse the prisoners in the old cell room of the El Paso city jail. It was part of El Paso Mayor Tom Lea's citywide disinfection campaign.¹⁰⁹ A group of prisoners, most of them of Mexican origin, were ordered to strip naked. They were first to soak their clothes in one of the tubs which was filled with a mixture of gasoline, creosote and formaldehyde. Then the inmates themselves had to step inside the other tub filled with "a bucket of gasoline, a bucket of coal oil and a bucket of vinegar."

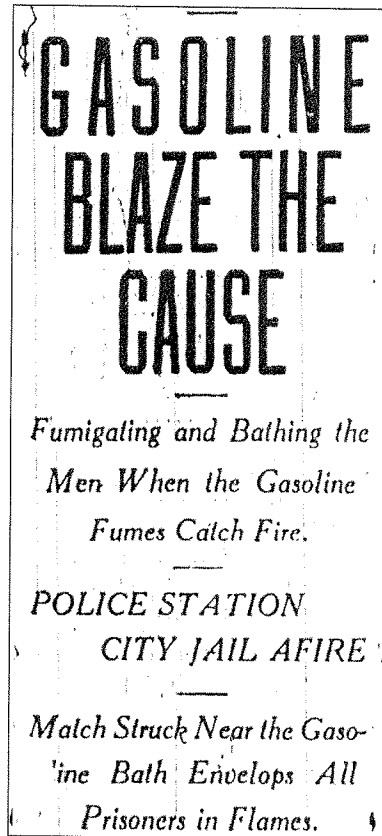
At about 3:30 p.m., someone struck a match. "The air was so heavily impregnated with the explosive vapor that the flash of the match set the whole jail in a blaze instantly," the *El Paso Herald* reported. "The washtub in which the kerosene and gasoline were contained exploded."

About 50 "naked prisoners from whose bodies the fumes of gasoline were arising" caught fire as well.¹¹⁰ Many of the inmates were locked inside their cells. The floors of the steel cells were so hot that it burned off the soles of their feet.

"Screaming in pain, Ernesto Molina, age 17 years, the youngest prisoner in the jail, who was within a few feet of

the tub when the explosion occurred, ran across the courtroom, leaving blood stained footprints until he leaped out of a window," the *El Paso Herald* wrote.

Firemen tried to put the fire out, but the metal floors burned off their heavy-soled shoes as well. "The odor of the burning human flesh filled the air and almost stifled the firemen at work inside the jail."¹¹¹



(El Paso Herald, March 6, 1916.)

¹⁰⁶ *El Paso Times*, January 29, 1917.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Senior Surgeon Clyde Pierce to Surgeon General, February 16, 1917. "It has been reported that pictures of nude women are displayed in a saloon in El Paso, with the inscription below that they were taken at the Service disinfecting plant. A detective is now investigating this report and if possible legal proceedings will be brought against this dive keeper."

¹⁰⁹ In early 1916, Lea, who was also the president of the El Paso Board of Health, ordered the gasoline baths at the international bridges.

¹¹⁰ *El Paso Herald*, March 7, 1916.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Daniel Urias, "a Mexican with a wooden leg," saved himself by drawing himself out of the wall of flame, then standing on his prosthetic limb with one hand firmly grasping the iron supports of the cell. Diego Aceves, who had been arrested for selling empty bottles in the streets, escaped from jail and ran nude through the river to Juárez.

The alley outside the jail was strewn with badly burned prisoners. "Their skin burnt to a light brown and falling from their bodies many of the men gritted their teeth to keep from crying out, but the majority shrieked in pain." One Anglo man jumped upon his feet and ran around in a circle, crying, "Shoot me first, shoot me first, God, how I suffer."¹¹²

Twenty-seven prisoners were dead. Nineteen were Mexican, one was African American, and the rest were either homeless Anglos or unidentified.

When the Carrancista troops in Juárez heard that American Mexicans were being burned in El Paso jails, many of them agitated to cross into El Paso to defend their compatriots. Some of them had already crossed over to defend the Segundo Barrio population against Anglo violence during the race riot on January 13, 1916. This time, their superiors prevented them from doing so.

Only a few hours after the fire on Monday, however, a man stepped into a street car by the Juárez race track. He drew out an automatic pistol and fired four times at the trolley driver—an American by the name of C.E. Phelps—wounding him in the jaw and shoulder. The authorities on both sides immediately suspected that it was an act of revenge for the deaths in the El Paso jail.¹¹³ Streetcar service between the two cities was stopped and all Americans were barred from crossing over into Juárez for their own protection.

The American authorities stated that the fire was an accident. A prison guard claimed H.C. Cross—a "hop head" from Davenport, Iowa arrested for stealing a baseball mitt—had lit the match that started the fire. Cross had died in the fire and couldn't give his side of the story.

Many on both sides of the border were skeptical of the official explanation. The Latin-American News Association published a pamphlet by Dr. A. Margo, who wrote sarcastically: "The mayor of the city of El Paso announced that the whole thing was an unavoidable accident and that nobody was to blame. These kinds of accidents happen pretty often to Mexicans in Texas."¹¹⁴

A grand jury was summoned to determine whether the catastrophe was due to criminal negligence. Although Mayor Lea was out of town attending a convention in Albuquerque, Alderman O'Conner presented the City's position arguing that the "police department was in no way responsible, if there was any responsibility." Furthermore, he added, there was "no legal liability on the part of the city for the reason, that even if there was negligence, it was negligence in the performance of a government function."¹¹⁵ When one of the Mexican victims of the fire tried to sue the City, he could find no El Paso lawyer to represent him. On March 24, the *El Paso Herald* published an article under the headline "Fire in City Jail Ignored." It reported that a grand jury completed its sessions without either returning indictments or reporting upon its findings. Apparently no one could be found willing to fix the blame on the city for the death of 19 Mexicans, a few white transients and a "negro."

PANCHO VILLA WAS on his way to Columbus, New Mexico when, according to the account of an American hostage, he heard about the El Paso jail fire. Maud Wright, who had been taken captive by Villistas before the raid, "heard Villa continually reminding his men of the burning of the El Paso jail in which fire some of Villa's Mexican friends had lost their lives," writes John Wright in a biographical essay about his mother.¹¹⁶ "He accused the Americans of deliberately starting this fire."

Villa had reason to believe this.¹¹⁷ In the preceding weeks, scores of Mexicans had been murdered by

¹¹² Ibid.

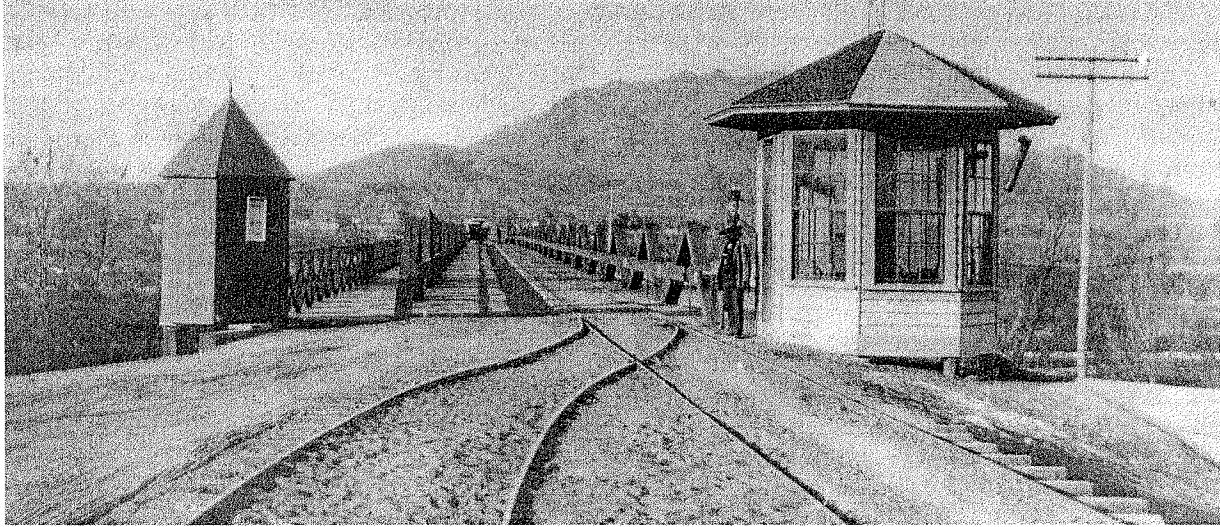
¹¹³ *El Paso Herald*, March 6, 1916.

¹¹⁴ Dr. A. Margo, "Who, Where, and Why is Villa?" quoted in David Jordan's *David Starr Jordan: The Days of Man*, p. 819.

¹¹⁵ *El Paso Times*, March 8, 1916.

¹¹⁶ John Wright, "My Mother, Maud Hawk Wright," p. 8. This biographical essay was donated by John Wright to the History Museum in Columbus, New Mexico in the early 1990s. The fascinating document contains information that can shed light on Villa's motives for the raid that are not found in any other primary sources, as far as I am aware. The information provided by the document does not suggest that revenge for the death of Villa's friends was the only, or even main, motive for the raid on Columbus. Spies had come into the Villista columns to inform Villa about Columbus even before the jail holocaust had occurred. Furthermore, Maud learned during her captivity that the Columbus raid was timed to coincide with the arrival in Columbus of a large shipment of arms and ammunition.

¹¹⁷ In June 1916, Stanford University President David Starr Jordan arrived in El Paso to participate in a conference with several antivivax activists from both the United States and Mexico. He specifically investigated the connection between the jail fire and Villa's raid on Columbus and included the documentation he gathered in the index of his autobiography *The Days of Man*. Stanford journalist Herbert Thompson wrote Jordan in 1916: "The belief that the holocaust inspired the raid is widespread in El Paso." A federal officer stationed in El Paso agreed and added that other indignities suffered by the Mexicans in El Paso also helped to provoke retaliation by Villa. "The ill-treatment of the Mexicans here and the indignities they suffered at the International Bridge by being kicked and cuffed back into Mexico by the El Paso police," the federal agent wrote, "was enough to anger any people on earth. That went on for months."



The Stanton Street International Bridge, ca. 1910. Before 1917, Mexican citizens could freely cross back and forth between Juárez and El Paso without a passport. (El Paso Public Library.)

the Texas Rangers along the Rio Grande Valley.¹¹⁸ Pancho Villa promised his troops that he was going to show Anglos how it feels to burn. He threatened to “make torches” of every American he found.¹¹⁹

Four days after the El Paso jail fire, Villa’s troops attacked Columbus, torched its main buildings, and killed 17 Americans.¹²⁰

THE YEAR THE BORDER SHUT DOWN

“Everyone was happy, coming and going without any customs restrictions, any immigration restrictions, any health department restrictions. We were a happy lot.”

—Cleofas Calleros, on crossing the Juárez-El Paso bridge before 1917¹²¹

UNTIL JANUARY 1917, El Paso and Juárez citizens could freely cross back and forth between the two countries without need of a passport. Mike Romo, a resident of El Paso at the turn of the century, recalled how easy it was to cross the border. “Coming from Juárez across the Stanton Bridge they never asked you for any identification. They didn’t ask you for anything. In fact, there wasn’t but one old man and he was half asleep at a soapbox back there. You could go and come back and nobody ever bothered you. You could bring in whatever you wanted and they never said anything at all.”¹²²

El Pasoans also recalled that before 1917, Mexicans were legal. “There weren’t any wetbacks then,” explained Elizabeth Kelly, the daughter of El Paso Mayor Charles Kelly. “Everybody just went back and forth. All of us together built El Paso and Juárez.”¹²³

But by 1917 all that had changed. The upheavals in Mexico greatly altered the demographics of El Paso.

¹¹⁸ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Herbert Johnson to David Jordan, in *The Days of Man*, p. 818.

¹²⁰ Brigadier General S.L. Marshall, who was stationed in Fort Bliss, recalled years later that “when the raid hit, we in El Paso thought that this was a reprisal for what happened in the jail.” Gerald Raun, in “Pancho Villa, the Columbus Raid, and the El Paso Jail Fire: A Critical Review.” *Alpine, Texas: The Journal of Big Bend Studies* (Vol. 15), 2003, argues that Pancho Villa could not have known about the El Paso fire before the Columbus raid. Raun bases his claim mostly on the testimony given by Villista prisoners after the raid who were arrested by the American military. These prisoners never mentioned Villa’s knowledge about the El Paso fire. The Villista prisoners, however, who were under the threat of the death penalty, had every reason to give their American captors false information or hide certain details. Part of their defense strategy was to claim ignorance of the fact that they had attacked an American town. If Pancho Villa had in fact talked to his fellow officers about the El Paso fire and his desire for vengeance, this would undermine their own defense. On the other hand, it’s difficult to see what ulterior motives Maud Wright would have to fabricate Villa’s reaction to the El Paso jail fire. Raun does not include Wright’s testimony in his bibliography although she was the only American who could provide firsthand testimony about Pancho Villa’s activities before the attack on American territory. Apparently he was not familiar with the Wright document when he wrote his essay.

¹²¹ Cleofas Calleros, interviewed by Oscar Martínez, September 14, 1972, Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.

¹²² Mike Romo, Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.

¹²³ Ann and Elizabeth Kelly, interviewed by David Salazar and Mildred Torok, March 26, 1973. Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.

Everything was much more tense. Almost every day there was some kind of scuffle between Anglos and Mexicans. The Americans were frustrated because they couldn't catch Pancho Villa. The Mexican Revolution even played a part in the 1915 El Paso mayoral elections. The incumbent, Charles Kelly, had good relations with Pancho Villa while the challenger, Tom Lea, Sr.—perhaps the one person who did the most to shut down the border between El Paso and Juárez—was rabidly anti-Villa.

America's entrance into WWI made sure that the international bridges at the U.S.-Mexico border were no longer the carefree gateways between friendly nations they once were. The war, as wars always do, stirred deep feelings of paranoia and antforeigner patriotism in this country. As a protest against Germany, patriotic Americans changed the name of frankfurters to hot dogs, and sauerkraut to "liberty cabbage." Americans were afraid that German spies and anarchists would invade this country through its southern border. The paranoia got so bad there were actually neighborhood self-defense squads in El Paso watching out for German air attacks from Mexico.

The war made sugar smuggling a serious problem along the border. Strict food rations in El Paso created a great demand for illegal Mexican sugar. (In January 1918 alone, four Juárez sugar smugglers trying to cross the Rio Grande were shot to death by American soldiers.)¹²⁴ U.S. government officials also wanted to prevent the free movement of American "slackers" (draft resisters) who crossed into Juárez to avoid the war.

The Immigration Law of 1917 was passed the same year the U.S. entered the war. It required that immigrants at all points of entry have a passport, take a literacy test and pay an \$8 head tax.

That same year the United States Public Health Service also published the *Manual for the Physical Inspection of Aliens* which outlined the "classes of aliens that shall be excluded from admission into the United States." The leading medical scientists, progressive reformers and eugenicists of the country came up with what to a modern reader sounds like a rather arcane and poetic list of excludable outsiders:

- imbeciles
- idiots
- feeble-minded persons
- persons of constitutional psychopathic inferiority [homosexuals]
- vagrants
- physical defectives

- chronic alcoholics
- polygamists
- anarchists
- persons afflicted with loathsome or dangerous contagious diseases
- prostitutes
- contract laborers
- all aliens over 16 years old who cannot read

1917 was a bad year for the border. It was the year that the U.S. Public Health Service agents bathed and deloused 127,173 Mexicans at the Santa Fe International Bridge.¹²⁵ It was the year that Carmelita Torres started the Bath Riots.

After 1917, crossing the border was never again free and unrestricted. From that point on, El Paso and Juárez became two separate communities.



El Paso Mayor Tom Lea, Sr. probably did more than anyone else to shut down the border between El Paso and Juárez during his administration. (Tom Lea Papers [MS 476], Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.)

THE MAYOR'S SILK UNDERWEAR

EL PASO MAYOR Tom Lea, Sr. used to wear silk underwear. This bit of privy information was passed on many years later by his son Tom Lea, Jr. to Adair Margo during an interview that is now at the Institute

¹²⁴ *El Paso Herald*, January 29, 1918.

¹²⁵ *El Paso Herald*, March 7, 1918. It cost the U.S. 14 cents per person for bathing and sterilization at the Santa Fe Bridge cleaning station according to Harry Ellis, engineer at the sanitation plant.

MORE BUSINESS LESS POLITICS



J. P. O'CONNOR
For Alderman

Vote the TOM LEA Ticket
If You Want

MUNICIPAL EFFICIENCY



RICHARD B. STEVENS
For Alderman



W. G. JOLLY
For Alderman

A SQUARE DEAL TO ALL



TOM LEA—For Mayor



JOHN W. FISHER
For Alderman



CHARLES A. KINNE
For Treasurer

Your Schools FREE From Politics

No Municipal Monarchy



PAUL D. THOMAS
For Corporation Judge



BILLY MCSAIN
For Assessor and Collector

Real Progress For A Real City

EL PASO COUNTY AND CITY
DEMOCRATIC CLUB



JOHN M. WYATT
For Chairman City Dem. Committee

*"More Business, Less Politics." Lea's mayoral campaign slogan was reminiscent of the motto Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz claimed to guide his own regime: "Less Politics, More Administration."
(Tom Lea Papers [MS 476], Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.)*

of Oral History at UT El Paso.¹²⁶ The reason for the mayor's peculiar choice of lingerie was not extravagant dandyism, but rather, his deeply rooted fear of contracting typhus from Mexican immigrants. The mayor's good friend, Dr. Kluttz, had informed him that the typhus lice does not stick to silk.

Tom Lea Sr.—silk underwear and all—represented the new type of Anglo politician during the “Progressive Era.” Progressive didn't necessarily mean liberal back then. In Lea's case, “progress” meant he would clean up the city.

And Tom Lea was definitely obsessive about cleanliness. He would get rid of the old “Ring” of “dirty and corrupt” politicians, like the Irish Catholic incumbent mayor Charles Kelly and his Mexican supporters, who illegally paid the poll taxes for large numbers of both El Paso Mexicans and Juarenses. (The poll taxes were used to insure that most working-class Mexican Americans were excluded from the electoral process.) With the help of Pershing's troops, he would demolish hundreds of “germ-infested” adobe homes in Chihuahuita and replace them with American-made brick buildings. Under Lea's administration, El Paso passed the first ordinance in the U.S. against Mexican hemp, or marijuana—a drug associated in the popular mind then with Mexican revolutionaries.¹²⁷

Shawn Lay, author of *War, Revolution and the Ku Klux Klan*, has found evidence that Lea was a member of the Frontier Klan No. 100 in the early twenties.¹²⁸ “Tom Lea didn't last but one term as mayor because he didn't like the Mexican people,” said turn-of-the-century El Paso resident Rodolfo

Candelaria.¹²⁹ The mayor's atavistic fear of being contaminated by the Mexicans—both bacteriologically and socially—seemed to have been an underlying motif of many of his administration's policies.

But Tom Lea didn't hate all Mexicans. Lea was the official attorney for ex-president Victoriano Huerta when the deposed right-wing dictator landed in an El Paso jail for neutrality law violations. The mayor also favored President Carranza because “he was a little more for law and order.”¹³⁰ Yet toward the Villistas, who represented the “lower classes” of the Mexican Revolution, the mayor was ruthless. Immediately after the Columbus raid, he ordered all Villistas residing in El Paso arrested and gave them 24 hours to get out of town. In March 1916, Tom Lea passed a city ordinance that “Mexican” newspapers in El Paso were prohibited from publishing “anything of a political nature.”¹³¹

But sometimes the Mayor's repressiveness turned against fellow Anglo Americans as well. On June 28, 1916, Lea gave David Starr Jordan the boot. Jordan, a nationally renowned pacifist, founder of the Anti-Imperialist League and former Stanford University president, was in town to meet with a group who opposed armed American intervention in Mexico. War was in the air the week Jordan was in town. The *El Paso Times* reported that Fort Bliss soldiers were preparing to invade Juárez.¹³² The Carrancistas had just whipped American cavalry troops at Carrizal and American artillery guns were set up in Sunset Heights aiming toward Mexico.

“I ordered my captain of police to tell Dr. Jordan to drift and drift damn quick out of El Paso,” Lea told

The Latin Will Overcome the Anglo-Saxon in this Country in a Few Years—

unless you wake up. About one million Southern Europeans are coming here every year. Our birth rate decreases. The foreigners' birth rate increases. A big proportion of the immigrants are undesirable—very undesirable. These soon become voters. Men who need votes see to that. Mark this. If we don't begin to really exclude undesirable immigration, the Anglo-Saxon in this Government will be submerged. What we can do about it is told in Pearson's Magazine, now on sale, by Mary Grace Quackenbos. She suggests a simple plan for excluding undesirables. Only public opinion can make it effective. Nothing is more important to your prosperity. Read this article. It shows also what may be done in properly distributing desirable immigrants.

“A simple plan for excluding undesirables.” (*El Paso Times*, January 3, 1911.)

¹²⁶ Tom Lea Jr., interviewed by Adair Margo, May 1993, Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.

¹²⁷ *El Paso Herald*, June 3, 1915.

¹²⁸ Lay, *War and the KKK*, p. 144.

¹²⁹ Rodolfo Candelaria, interviewed by Oscar Martínez, August 5, 1976, Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.

¹³⁰ Tom Lea Jr., Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.

¹³¹ “Mexican Editors Must Stay out of Politics,” *El Paso Herald*, March 13, 1916.

¹³² “U.S. Plans to Take Juárez Soon,” *El Paso Herald*, June 23, 1916.

a cheering crowd of El Pasoans. "I have no use for pacifists in these perplexing times. I would describe a pacifist as one who wears the yellow robe of cowardice."¹³³

Lea didn't have to be so hard on Jordan, who, despite his pacifism, shared some basic tenets about Mexicans with the Mayor. Jordan, who authored *The Blood of the Nation: a Study of the Decay of the Races*, wasn't against American imperialism out of cowardice or because he felt a sentimental solidarity with the Mexican people. Rather, he thought enlarging the bounds of the U.S. meant the mongrelization and defilement of the "Saxon and Goth blood of the nation."

Jordan was a major proponent of eugenics, a movement calling for the creation of a master race through human breeding, sterilization, I.Q. tests, birth control and immigration reform. At the turn of the century, many leading Anglo intellectuals in the United States called for the purification of the nation's blood. In some quarters, eugenics was also called "racial hygiene," or *Rassenhygiene* as the Nazis would later call it. Dr. Harvey Kellogg, the inventor of the cornflake;¹³⁴ Margaret Sanger, founder of the Birth Control League;¹³⁵ Lothrop Stoddard, who wrote *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*; and President Woodrow Wilson all wanted to reduce interbreeding between the "fit" and the "unfit."

The El Paso Printing Company published a book in 1908 by eugenicist C.S. Babbitt dedicated to Dr. Jordan and his ideas. In *The Remedy for the Decadence of the Latin Race*, Babbitt explained:

The Spaniards and later the Mexicans, have, by disregarding the ancient laws and customs [of eugenics], become degenerate. The Spaniards, mixed to an extent with the Moors and intermixed with the brown natives, Indians and negro slaves, exhibit an example of breeding downward on a gigantic scale.¹³⁶

If things continued as they were at the border, Babbitt feared, the United States would soon have a huge problem on its hands:

The peon from Mexico is crossing the borders of fifteen hundred miles in length, and asserting his right through the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to vote. The Chinaman, in spite of laxly executed prohibitory laws, is slipping through Mexico and crossing the Rio Grande daily. And so we see that America, the abiding place of the highest type of the Caucasian race, has become a vast cesspool and dumping ground for the most degraded classes of the whole earth.¹³⁷

In order to prevent further degeneration of America's "Aryan stock," the El Paso racial hygienist proposed major immigration reforms.¹³⁸ "The peon Mexican, whom we wish to guard against," wrote Babbitt:

although classed as a man, is one like Joseph's coat of many colors, and of diverse races. He is the fellow who is crossing the border in numbers. We don't want him, only his labor in gathering the fruit and cotton, and at times to build and repair the railroads, and to whom, if he would leave his wives behind and go back when his work was done, we would cordially say "come on." But he goes back and comes again, bringing his family and his relatives. It seems our treaty with Mexico might be so amended as to admit only males, of this class, and under bond to return when their particular job was finished. In fact, if their females were not admitted, they would voluntarily return in any event. In this manner they might be confined strictly to the Southwest, and would cease to be a menace to the bulk of the country.¹³⁹

But regardless of what David Starr Jordan and his local followers thought about the Mexican race, Tom Lea found their pacifism totally unacceptable. "This situation," Lea added, "can never be settled until this

¹³³ *El Paso Herald*, July 5, 1916.

¹³⁴ He organized several "Race Betterment Conferences" that called for turning America into a "great stock farm breeding for human efficiency." The January 11, 1914, issue of the *New York Times* quoted him: "It only takes four generations to make a thoroughbred when the principles of eugenics have a fair chance to operate. Nowhere on earth, as far as I know, is there to be found a registry for human thoroughbreds. The hope is that one of the results of the meeting may be the establishment of such a registry...in which may be recorded the names of infants who are born under eugenic conditions."

¹³⁵ Sanger wrote: "Birth control is thus the entering wedge for the Eugenic educator...the unbalance between the birth rate of the 'unfit' and the 'fit' is admittedly the greatest present menace to civilization." Margaret Sanger, *Birth Control Review*, October 1921, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Babbitt, *Remedy for the Decadence of the Latin Race*, p. 13. El Paso County Historical Society.

¹³⁷ Babbitt, *Remedy for the Decadence of the Latin Race*, pp. 42-43. El Paso County Historical Society.

¹³⁸ Babbitt's immigration reform proposals were very similar to those that would actually be adopted during the Bracero program in 1942.

¹³⁹ Babbitt, *Remedy for the Decadence of the Latin Race*, pp. 45-46. El Paso County Historical Society.

Day Message	
Day Letter	Blue
Night Message	Nite
Night Letter	N L

If none of these three symbols appears after the check (number of words) this is a day message. Otherwise its character is indicated by the symbol appearing after the check.

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
Day Message	
Day Letter	Blue
Night Message	Nite
Night Letter	N L

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EL PASO TEX 523 P JUNE 17TH

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SURGEON GENERAL WASHINGTON DC

HUNDREDS DIRTY LOUSEY DESTITUTE MEXICANS ARRIVING AT EL PASO DAILY/
WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BRING AND SPREAD TYPHUS UNLESS A QUARANTINE IS
PLACED AT ONCE/THE CITY OF ELPASO BACKED BY ITS
MEDICAL BOARD AND STATE FEDERAL AND MILITIA OFFICIALS HERE FEEL
THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PUT ON A QUARANTINE/PLEASE INVESTIGATE
AND ADVISE ME THIS IS NECESSARY TO AVOID TYPHUS EPIDEMIC.

TOM LEA

MAYOR 803 P

Telegram from El Paso Mayor Tom Lea, Sr., to the U.S. Surgeon General calling for a full quarantine against Mexican border crossers. (USPHS, National Archives.)

fine little United States Army marches over the border and there settles it with bayonet and rifle ball."¹⁴⁰ The best solution for the Mexican problem, Tom Lea, Sr. asserted, was war.

THE WAR AT HOME

"Hundreds of dirty lousey (sic) destitute Mexicans arriving at El Paso daily. Will undoubtedly bring and spread typhus unless a quarantine is placed at once."

—Telegram sent by Mayor Tom Lea Sr. to Surgeon General in Washington, D.C.

THE WAR THAT stirred Tom Lea's blood the most was the war against the germs brought into this city

by, what he termed, the "dirty, lousey (sic), destitute Mexicans." Tom Lea sent letters and telegrams to Washington officials for months asking for a full quarantine against Mexicans at the border. He wanted a "quarantine camp" to hold all Mexican immigrants for a period of 10 to 14 days to make sure that they were free of typhus before being allowed to cross into the United States.¹⁴¹ The local Public Health Service officials viewed the mayor's request as extreme.

"Mayor Lee (sic) wants an absolute quarantine against Mexico. When Mayor Lee gets excited he always wires someone in Washington. The last time this occurred he sent a message to the President," complained Dr. B. J. Lloyd, the public health service official stationed in El Paso.¹⁴²

"Typhus fever is not now and probably never will be, a serious menace to our civilian population in

¹⁴⁰ *El Paso Herald*, July 5, 1916.

¹⁴¹ Tom Lea to Senator Morris Shepherd, September 2, 1916. National Archives at College Park (hereafter NACP), Maryland, United States Public Health Service (hereafter USPHS), Record Group 90 (hereafter RG 90), Central File, 1897-1923, File 1248; *El Paso Herald*, June 5, 1916.

¹⁴² B. Lloyd to Rupert Blue, Surgeon General, June 18, 1916. NACP, USPHS, RG 90, File 1248.



Mexicans waiting to be bathed and deloused at the Santa Fe Bridge quarantine plant, 1917.
(USPHS, National Archives.)

the United States,” Lloyd explained to the U.S. Surgeon General. “We probably have typhus fever in many of our large cities now. I am opposed to the idea [of quarantine camps] for the reason that the game is not worth the candle.”¹⁴³

Instead of quarantine camps, Lloyd suggested setting up delousing plants. Echoing the El Paso mayor’s racist language, Lloyd told his superiors he was “cheerfully” willing to “bathe and disinfect all the dirty, lousy people who are coming into this country from Mexico.” Lloyd added prophetically that “we shall probably continue the work of killing lice...for many years to come, certainly not less than ten years, and probably twenty-five years or more.”¹⁴⁴ (If anything, Lloyd underestimated things. The sterilization of human beings on the border would continue for more than 40 years.)

By mid-1916, the U.S. Customs finally did accept Lloyd’s suggestion and granted \$6,000 for the construction of a disinfection plant at the Santa Fe Bridge. The building would include a hot steam dryer for killing lice, bath stalls for both men and women, separate dressing and undressing rooms, a vaccination area, a “gas chamber” for fumigation with cyanide-based pesticides, and separate rooms for “1st and 2nd class primary inspection.”¹⁴⁵

But long before the fumigation plant was ready, Tom Lea had already taken the fight against typhus into his own hands. He began by sending city health inspectors to Chihuahuita, the “Mexican quarter” of town. “Where lice are found,” the *El Paso Herald* wrote in March 2, 1916, “the occupants are forced to take the vinegar and kerosene bath, have their heads shaved and their clothing burned.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Ibid.

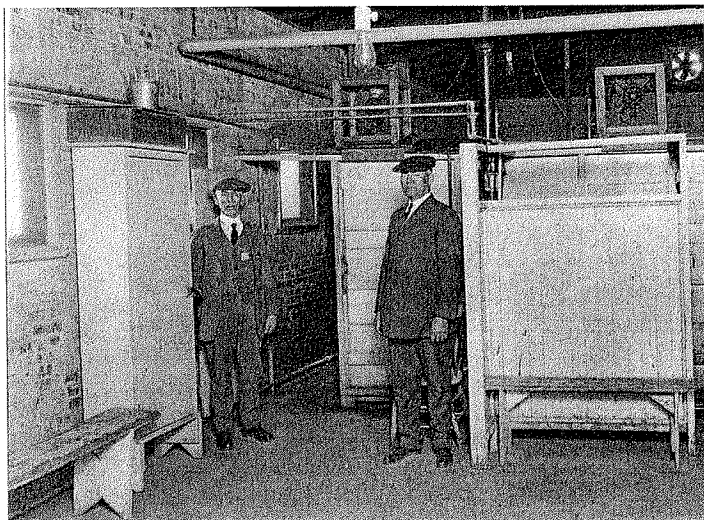
¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Photographs and blueprints of El Paso Disinfection Plant, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, File 1248.

¹⁴⁶ *El Paso Herald*, March 2, 1916.

It didn't matter much to the mayor that the El Paso County Medical Society published a report in its monthly journal, *The Bulletin*, that indicated that his fears were grossly exaggerated. "Over 5,000 rooms in the worst part of Chihuahuita were visited by the medical inspectors of the Health Department during the last week of February," the *Bulletin* disclosed in March 1916:

They found two cases of typhus, one case of measles, one case of rheumatism, one case of tuberculosis and one case of chicken pox. That was all of the sickness discovered. This report, if exact, would indicate that Chihuahuita is not the festering plague spot that it is pictured to be.¹⁴⁷



Bath stalls at the Santa Fe Bridge disinfection plant, 1917. (USPHS, National Archives.)

Tom Lea was not a man given to self-doubt. Despite the medical report that would have called for less extreme measures, he ordered demolition squads to go into the Segundo Barrio hand-in-hand with the health inspectors. The local newspapers had been calling for the destruction of "adobe mud hovels" in South El Paso for aesthetic and hygienic reasons for decades. The current buildup of troops at the border made the moment just right to finally get it done. "If Chihuahuita could be turned over to the Army as Cuba and the Philippines were, it would soon be changed," wrote

the *El Paso Herald*. "Those places were cleaned up and disease stamped out."¹⁴⁸ In the minds of white Americans, not only was U.S. colonialism making the world "safe for democracy," it was also—in a figurative and literal sense—ridding the world of dirt.

Hundreds of Mexican adobe homes facing the Rio Grande were destroyed—mostly along South Santa Fe, South Oregon, Ninth Street and the Guerrero Alley. Photographs in the *El Paso Times* of the Second Ward in 1916 show city blocks that seemed to have suffered bombardments or the devastation of war. In a sense, they had.

When Chihuahuita snipers began shooting at the demolition squads in June 1916, Tom Lea ordered city health inspectors to carry rifles. Some of the snipers hid themselves across the Rio Grande. The Mayor's orders were "to shoot to kill."¹⁴⁹

THE PHYSICAL INSPECTION OF ALIENS

THE DISINFECTION PLANT was ready by January 1917. That same month Dr. Klutz, Lea's friend and one of the health officials who had been overseeing the delousing actions in Chihuahuita, died of typhus contracted while performing his duties. His death, plus three other fatalities due to typhus in the prior two months, jump-started the baths and delousing process at the bridge. On January 23, 1917, an "iron-clad quarantine" was put into effect. Dr. Clyde Pierce, the U.S. Public Health Service officer in charge of the fumigation plant, declared that for medical reasons the International Bridge would be closed to regular traffic from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.¹⁵⁰

From then on, every immigrant from the interior of Mexico and every "2nd class" Juárez citizen was to strip completely, turn in their clothes and baggage to be steam dried and fumigated with hydrocyanic acid and stand before a customs inspector who would check his or her "hairy parts"—the scalp, armpits, chest, pubic area and anus—for lice. Those found to have lice would be required to shave their head and body hair with No. 00 clippers and apply a mix of kerosene and vinegar on his body. Each time the "ster-

¹⁴⁷ *The Bulletin*, March 1916, Volume 8, Number 3. p. 137.

¹⁴⁸ *El Paso Herald*, November 30, 1915.

¹⁴⁹ *El Paso Herald*, June 16, 1916.

¹⁵⁰ *El Paso Herald*, January 24, 1917.



U.S. Public Health Service agents check Mexican border crossers for physical or psychological maladies. According to the 1917 Manual for the Physical Inspection of Aliens, anything from trachoma to a low I.Q. to homosexuality could be used by the agents to exclude someone as an "undesirable alien." (USPHS, National Archives.)

pages 238 & 239: Braceros undergo medical inspection before being sprayed with pesticides, ca. 1942. The disinfections along the U.S.-México border continued until the late 50s. (Courtesy of Carlos Marentes, Proyecto Bracero Archives, Centro de Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos, El Paso.)

ization” process was performed, the Mexicans would receive a ticket certifying that they had been bathed and deloused, and had their clothes and baggage disinfected. (Some entrepreneurial spirits figured out a way to make money by taking repeated baths and selling their tickets to those who didn’t want to go through the whole ordeal.)¹⁵¹ This disinfection ritual needed to be repeated every eight days in order for Mexican workers to be readmitted to the United States.

But the process was not complete for immigrants from the interior. These Mexicans had to undergo a further medical and mental examination. The immigrant’s upper eyelids were everted to check for trachoma and conjunctivitis. Their hands were inspected for clubbed fingers, incurved nails and “other deformities.” The list of abnormalities the bridge physicians checked for included some seemingly innocuous ones—asthma, bunions, arthritis, varicose veins, hernias and flat feet.¹⁵² Sometimes the border crossers would be asked to put together a children’s puzzle, solve a couple of “simple addition sums” or write a few sentences to make sure the alien was not an idiot, imbecile or feeble minded. “Pathological

liars, vagrants, cranks and persons with abnormal sexual instincts” (i.e. homosexuals) who were medically certified as “persons with constitutional psychopathic inferiority” by the health officials could be sent back to Mexico.

The Manual for the Physical Inspection of Aliens, published by the U.S. Public Health Department, gave the bridge officials other things to be on the lookout for. “Any suggestion, no matter how trivial, that would point to abnormal mentality is sufficient cause for detaining the alien for a thorough examination,” the manual explained. “Active or maniacal psychoses might be suggested by the following signs and symp-

toms: striking peculiarities in dress, talkativeness, witicism, facetiousness, excitement, smiling, eroticism, and uncommon activity.”¹⁵³

Border crossers were damned if they did, and damned if they didn’t. An expression of mirth could get you kicked out of the country, but so could signs of depression. “Psychoses of a depressive nature,” continued the government manual, “might be indicated by slow speech, low voice, sad faces, tearful eyes, perplexity, difficulty in thinking, and delayed responses.”¹⁵⁴

But baths and mental examinations were not all the border crossers had to endure. Many of them were sprayed with insecticides. José Cruz Burciaga—father of the late Chicano author Antonio Burciaga—recalled the fumigations as a young man. “At the customs bath by the bridge...they would spray some stuff on you, it was all white and would run down your body. How horrible! And then I remember something else about it: they would shave everyone’s head...men, women...everybody. They would bathe you and after the bath they would bathe you again with cryolite. That was an extreme measure. The substance was very strong.”¹⁵⁵

“An immigration agent with a fumigation pump would spray our whole body with insecticide, especially our rear and our *partes nobles*. Some of us ran away from the spray and began to cough. Some even vomited from the stench of those chemical pesticides... the agent would laugh at the grimacing faces we would make. He had a gas mask on, but we didn’t.”

—Raul Delgado

The border disinfections would continue for another four decades. Oral history interviews at the Proyecto Bracero Archives reveal that in other parts of the Texas-Mexico border the braceros were bathed and fumigated until the late 50s.

Raul Delgado, who came to the U.S. as a bracero in 1958, described being deloused by U.S. customs agents at the Eagle Pass border. “They put me and other braceros in a room and made us take off our clothes. An immigration agent with a fumigation pump would spray our whole body with insecticide, especially our rear and our *partes nobles* [genitals]. Some of us ran away from the spray and began to

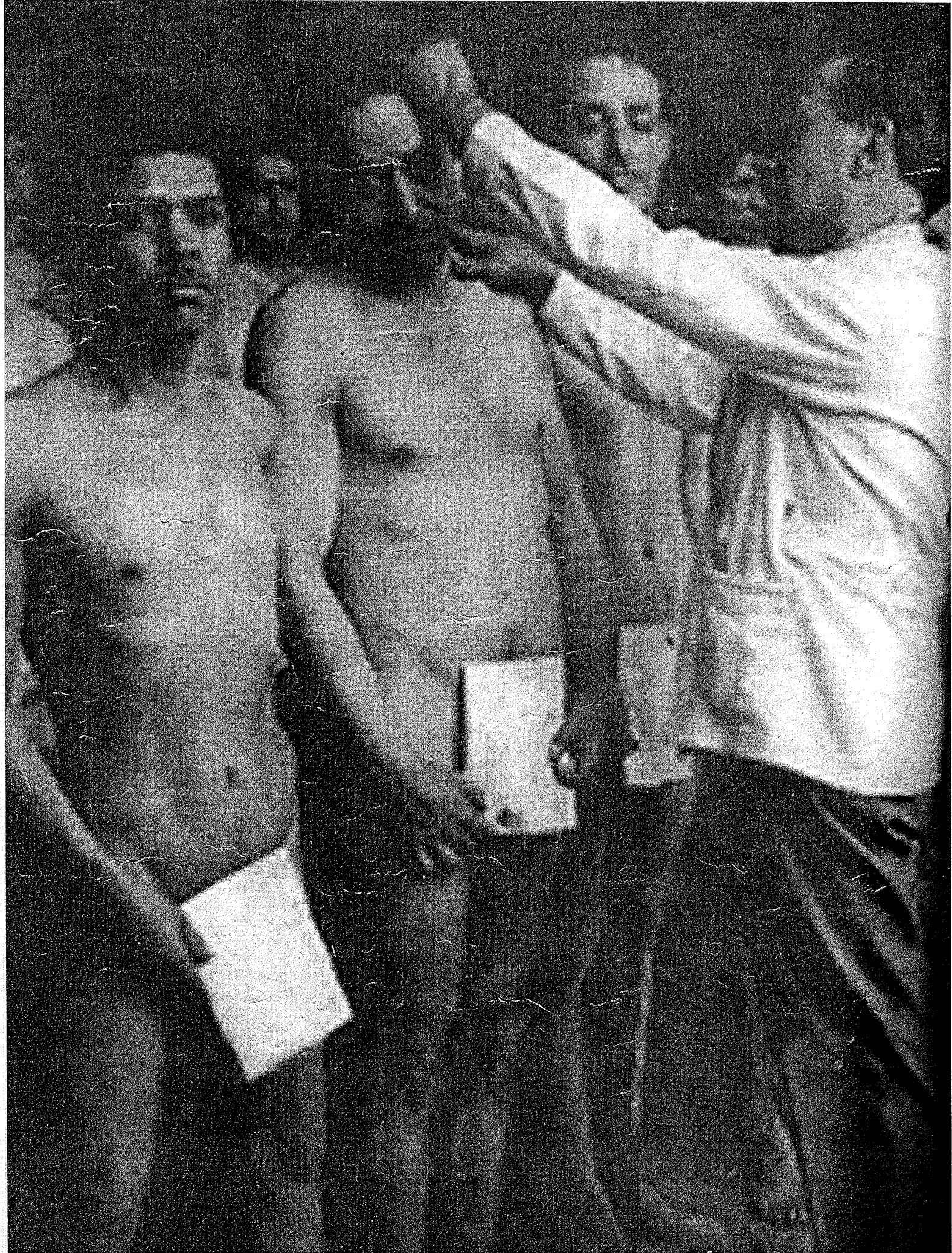
¹⁵¹ *El Paso Times*, January 29, 1917. “At least one ‘professional bather’ has already been developed by the quarantine. A man of about 60 years was found to be taking his fifth cleansing of the day, with the object of selling the certificates to his countrymen.”

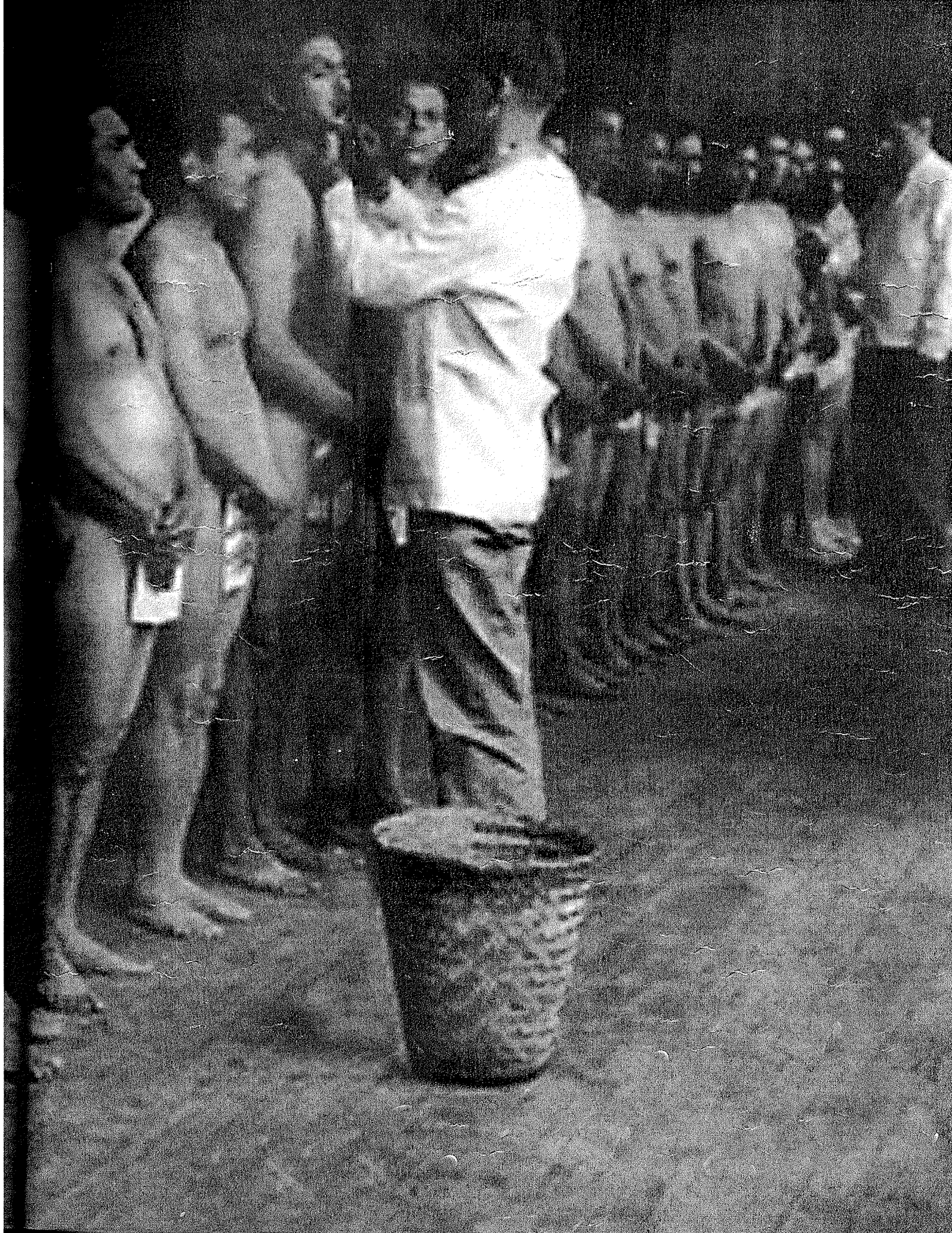
¹⁵² Surgeon General, *Manual for the Physical Inspection of Aliens*, p. 19.

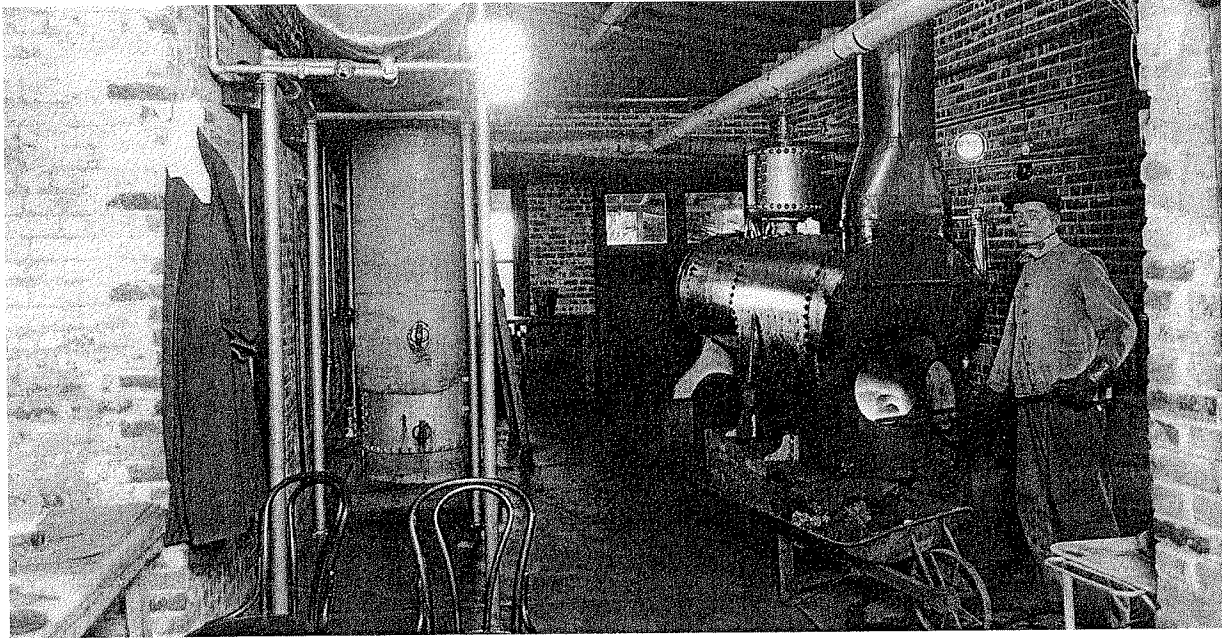
¹⁵³ Surgeon General, *Manual*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ José Cruz Burciaga, interviewed by Oscar Martínez, February 16, 1974. Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.







Disinfection plant boiler room, 1917. (USPHS, National Archives.)

cough. Some even vomited from the stench of those chemical pesticides being sprayed on us and the agent would laugh at the grimacing faces we would make. He had a gas mask on, but we didn't. Supposedly it was to disinfect us, but I think more than anything, they damaged our health."¹⁵⁶

ZYKLON B ON THE BORDER

"Compared to old Europe, which had lost an infinite amount of its best blood through war and emigration, the American nation appears as a young and racially select people. The American union itself, motivated by the theories of its own racial researchers, [has] established specific criteria for immigration...making an immigrant's ability to set foot on American soil dependent on specific racial requirements on the one hand as well as a certain level of physical health of the individual himself."

—Adolf Hitler, praising the
U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 ¹⁵⁷

ON JANUARY 19, 1929, J. R. Hurley, the medical officer in charge of the El Paso delousing station, put in a requisition for \$25 worth of Zyklon B as the fumigation agent of choice.¹⁵⁸ Other chemical agents had been used to disinfect *fronterizos* including gasoline, kerosene, sodium cyanide, cyanogen, sulfuric acid and, later, DDT as well. But Zyklon B, a commercial form of hydrocyanic acid (HCN), has a history all its own.

Zyklon B became available in the United States in the early 20s. It's extremely poisonous to humans when inhaled. It's also fatal when absorbed through the skin in concentrations over 50 ppm. "Hydrocyanic acid gas, the most poisonous known, more deadly even than that used on the battlefields of Europe, is employed in the fumigation process," the *El Paso Herald* informed its readers on August 20, 1920.¹⁵⁹ The use of Zyklon B as a pesticide on the U.S.-Mexico border inspired Dr. Gerhard Peters to call for its use in German *Desinfektionskammern*. In 1938, Peters wrote an article for a German pest science journal, *Anzeiger für Schädlingkunde*, which included two photographs of El Paso delousing chambers.¹⁶⁰ Dr. Peters used the El Paso example to demonstrate how effective hydro-

¹⁵⁶ Raul Delgado File. Proyecto Bracero Archives, Centro de Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos, El Paso.

¹⁵⁷ Gerhard Weinberg, ed. *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler*, (New York: Enigma Books, 203) p. 109.

¹⁵⁸ Surgeon J. R. Hurley to Surgeon General, January 19, 1929. NACP, USPHS, RG 90, File 1960, (245-184), Box 249.

¹⁵⁹ "Fumigation on Border; Gas is Very Powerful," *El Paso Herald*, August 20, 1920. The article described plans to use hydrocyanic acid gas in an El Paso "fumigation house" for trains that had not been constructed yet at the time. At this time it appears that it was intended primarily as a pesticide to fumigate agricultural shipments from Mexico.

¹⁶⁰ Gerhard Peters, "Durchgasung von Eisenbahnwagen mit Bläusare [Fumigation of Railroad Cars with Hydrocyanic Acid]," *Anzeiger für Schädlingkunde*, Vol. 13, Heft 3, pp. 35-41. 1937.

formmethode und die Anwendung von Cyan- calcium aus, weil nur die hochprozentige flüssige Blausäure in reiner oder aufgesaugter Form sich in den erforderlichen Mengen rasch genug ver- gasen läßt.

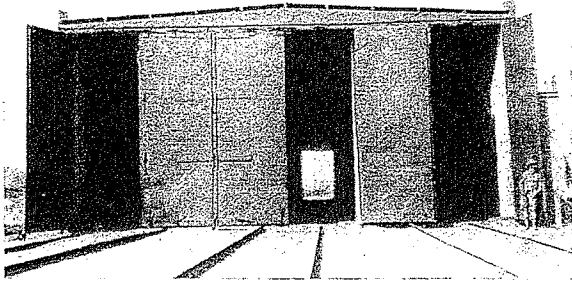


Abb. 11. Begasungstunnel in El Paso.

Abb. 11. Begasungstunnel in El Paso.

Durchgasung von Eisenbahnwagen mit Blausäure.

von Cyan- calcium flüssige Blausäure in reiner oder aufgesaugter Form sich rasch genug ver-

[15. 3. 1937
Heft 2]



Abb. 13. Zyklongenerator für Kreislaufanordnung.

Im allgemeinen ist auch hier wieder das deutsche Zyklon-Verfahren bevorzugt worden. Die Dosen werden nach verschiedenen Methoden Gasentwicklung mittels besonderer „Vergaser“ und eine Vereinfachung der Lüftung mit sich bringt (Abb. 13.)¹⁾

German pest science magazine, Anzeiger für Schädlinkunde, shows an El Paso fumigation tunnel where train cargo is disinfected with the use of Zyklon B. (Anzeiger für Schädlinkunde, Vol. 13, 1937.)

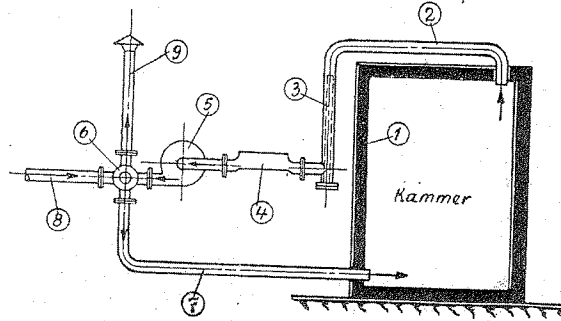
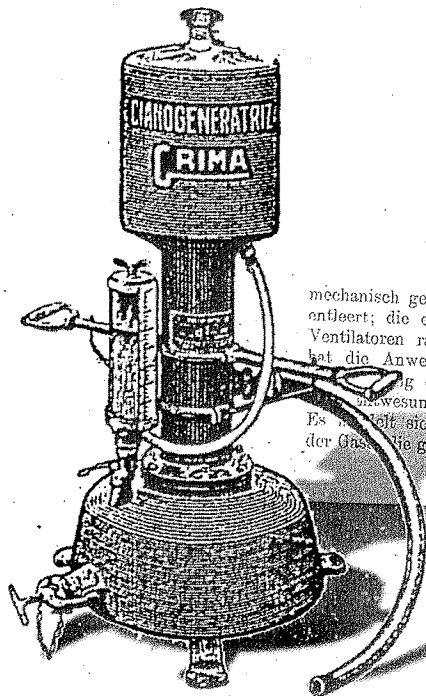


Abb. 12. Kreislaufentwesungskammer (für Zyklon).

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 Gasdichte Kammer, | 6 Vierweghahn, |
| 2 Ansaugleitung, | 7 Druckleitung, |
| 3 Heizpatrone (nicht unbedingt erforderlich), | 8 Frischluft-Ansaugstelle, |
| 4 Zyklongenerator (Vergaser), | 9 Ausblasleitung für Lüftung, |
| 5 Ventilator bezw. Gebläse, | |

Der Einbau eines Vierweghahnes (6) ermöglicht auf einfachste Weise die Umstellung von „Kreislauf“ auf „Lüftung“ und vermeidet Fehlschaltungen. Dies wird durch die nachfolgende Skizzierung der beiden Einstellmöglichkeiten des doppelt geböhrten Hahnkükens verdeutlicht.



méchanisch geöffnet und im Inneren des Tunnels entleert; die entweichenden Gase können durch Ventilatoren rasch verteilt werden. Neuerdings hat die Anwendung von Zyklon eine weitere Anwendung erfahren, die auch auf die Eisenbahnentwesungsanlagen Anwendung finden kann. Es handelt sich dabei um eine Kreisführung der Gase, die gleichzeitig eine Beschleunigung der

Schließlich ist noch eine besondere Ausführung von Durchgasungskammern zu erwähnen, die ebenfalls der Verkürzung der Einwirkungszeit und Beschleunigung des Gasausgleiches dient, zu-

¹⁾ G. Peters. Ein neues Verfahren zur Kammerdurchgasung. Zeitschrift für Hygienische Zoologie u. Schädlingsbekämpfung Nr. 8, 1936

Zyklon B fumigation pump, 1937.
(Anzeiger für Schädlinkunde, Vol. 13, 1937.)

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zugleich Nachrichtenblatt der Deutschen Gesellschaft für angewandte Entomologie e. V.

Für Zoologen, Landwirte, Forstwirte, Gärtnerei- und Mühlenbetriebe usw.

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München Geisenheim a. Rh.

unter Mitarbeit von Prof. Dr. H. Blunck, Bonn; Prof. Dr. M. Eldmann, Hannövr.-Münden; Prof. Dr. Flury, Würzburg; Dr. H. W. Frickhinger, München; Prof. Dr. K. Friederichs, Rostock; Prof. Dr. E. Martini, Hamburg; Prof. Dr. G. Peters, Frankfurt a. M.; Präsident Dr. E. Riehm, Berlin-Dahlem; Prof. Dr.-Ing. E. Schmitzschek, Bahkoby-Türkel; Dr. L. Sprengel, München; Hofrat Dr. B. Wahl, Wien; Prof. Dr. E. Zander, Erlangen; Prof. Dr. W. Zwölfer, Freiburg i. Br.

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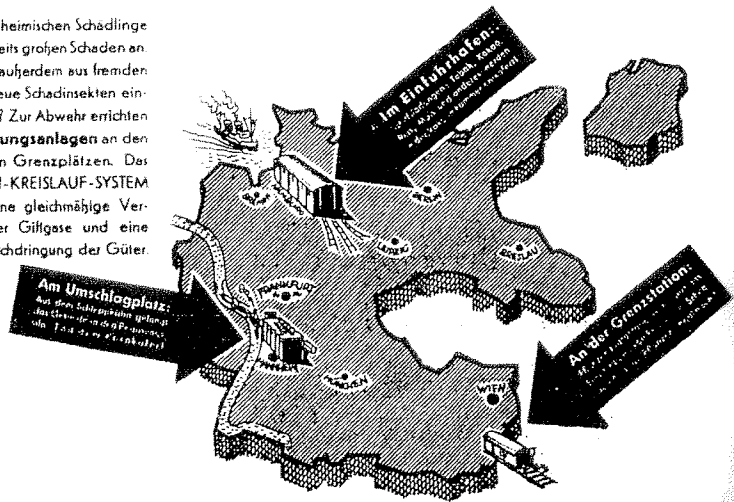
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Front and back cover of a 1939 issue of Anzeiger für Schädlingkunde. An ad (right) for Degesch—"a German corporation for the war against pests"—read: "WE ARE CLOSING THE BORDERS TO THE IMMIGRATION OF HARMFUL PESTS—Our domestic pests already are causing great damage. Should we leave ourselves open to dragging in new harmful insects from foreign countries as well? To repulse this threat, Disinfection Camps should be erected at every important border crossing. The Degesch-Kreislauf System produces an even and steady stream of poisonous gas which penetrates through the entire freight train quickly." (Author's translation, Anzeiger für Schädlingkunde, Vol. 15, 1939.)

Wie sperren die Einwanderung schädlicher Insekten

Unsere einheimischen Schädlinge richten bereits großen Schaden an. Sollen wir außerdem aus fremden Ländern neue Schadinsekten einschleppen? Zur Abwehr errichten wir **Begasungsanlagen** an den wichtigsten Grenzplätzen. Das **DEGESCH-KREISLAUF-SYSTEM** bewirkt eine gleichmäßige Verteilung der Giftgase und eine rasche Durchdringung der Güter.



Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schädlingsbekämpfung m. b. H. Frankfurt a. M.

Hierzu 1 Beilage der Verlagsbuchhandlung Paul Parey in Berlin SW 11, betr. „Handbuch der Pflanzenkrankheiten“
Sämtliche angezeigten und besprochenen Bücher können durch jede Buchhandlung bezogen werden.
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Printed in Germany

cyanic acid, or Zyklon B, was as an agent for killing unwanted pests. He became the managing director of Degesch, one of two German firms which acquired the patent to mass-produce Zyklon B in 1940. During WWII, the Germans would use Zyklon B in concentrated doses in the gas chambers to exterminate nine million Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, communists and other human "pests." In 1946, Gerhard Peters would be tried and convicted at Nuremberg for his role in this.¹⁶¹

Of course, in Nazi Germany, the use of Zyklon B was for premeditated mass murder, while in El Paso it wasn't. But there are some subtle and not-so-subtle connections between the immigration policies and practices at the U.S.-Mexico border during WWI and some of the historical processes which led to Nazi Germany.

Before Zyklon B was used as a chemical weapon of mass destruction by the Germans, it was used as a pesticide against lice in the concentration camps during WWII. (This is documented by Raul Hilberg's classic history of the holocaust, *The Destruction of the European Jews*.) The wall and quarantine placed around the Warsaw Ghetto, the forced strippings, the shaving of heads for both men and women, and some of the other humiliating measures the camp inmates were subjected to were often done under the official pretext of typhus prevention.

The Germans, according to accounts published by British epidemiologist E. W. Goodall, set up "de-lousing stations" at the Warsaw Ghetto as early as 1918 and "forced the inhabitants to be de-loused at the point of the bayonet." This was necessary because the Jewish community showed "great resistance to the baths," Goodall claimed.¹⁶²

The resistance by both Jews and the Mexican immigrants to enforced bathing was dismissed by both German and American observers at the time as proof of their physical and cultural uncleanness. But their resistance was not only against the baths themselves. Carmelita Torres and the "ignorant class of Mexicans" didn't need a doctorate in sociology to understand that the gasoline baths were more than just baths.

The racist terms "dirty Mexican" and "greaser" had been common along the frontier before the turn of the century. But the "Progressive Era" with its recent developments in germ theory and its well-organized racial hygiene movement for the betterment of the Saxon and Goth races in the U.S. gave a medical and scientific rationale for xenophobia. This new scientific racism was much more pernicious and difficult to combat than the old, "ignorant type" of bigotry. The historical developments of World War I insured that 20th century racism was more industrialized, systematized and efficiently woven into the institutional fabric of the country. After the delousing facility was set up in El Paso in 1917, immediate construction began on disinfection plants at Brownsville, Nogales, Eagle Pass and Del Rio.

American eugenicists using scientific arguments against the defilement of blood in the American nation were influential in helping to draft the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924. One enterprising U.S. Public Health inspector in El Paso wrote Washington requesting an intelligence test which he wanted to administer to Mexican children at the Santa Fe Bridge.¹⁶³ A year later, an Anglo professor in Denver concluded scientifically that the average I.Q. of the Mexican race was 78.1.¹⁶⁴ This objective proof of the feeble-mindedness of the Mexicans would bolster arguments for further immigration quotas. (A similar test administered at Ellis Island put 83 percent of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe within the imbecile and feeble-minded categories as well.)¹⁶⁵ These scientific tests were used to bolster the arguments for legislation establishing the first U.S. Border Patrol to keep inferior aliens out of the country.

The enforced baths and delousing stations were not only about the elimination of sickness and disease. If so, they wouldn't have continued for decades after the typhus scare was over. Instead, the U.S. Customs sterilization plants were mostly about what sociologists call "the medicalization of power"—about border agents armed with medical degrees taking over where the military had left off. The job of these petty bureaucrat doctors was to protect America from the dirty, the dumb, the destitute and the defective.

¹⁶¹ "Poison Gas Maker Convicted," *New York Times*, March 29, 1949.

¹⁶² Edward W. Goodall, "Typhus Fever in Poland, 1916 to 1919," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Vol. 13 (1920) Section of Epidemiology and State Medicine, pp. 265-73.

¹⁶³ J.G. Wilson to Surgeon General, January 20, 1927. NACP, USPHS, RG 90, File 1960. "I have the honor to request that I be supplied with a good up-to-date hand book on the subject of feeble-mindedness. There is an opportunity at this station to study the mentality of Mexican immigrant children and I would like to do some work along this line."

¹⁶⁴ Stern, "Eugenics Beyond Borders" p. 159.

¹⁶⁵ Henry Goddard, PH.D., "Mental Tests and the Immigrant." *The Journal of Delinquency*, Volume II, Number 5, September, 1917, pp. 243-277.

PROTECTING THE WRONG BORDER

IN OCTOBER 1918, less than two years after the typhus quarantine was put in place at the Santa Fe Bridge, El Paso and Juárez were hit by the most devastating epidemic in its history—the Spanish flu, which didn't come from Mexico. It came from the United States. Although no one knows with absolute certainty exactly where the pandemic originated, the strongest evidence suggests that it began in Haskell County, Kansas.¹⁶⁶ The epidemic was spread throughout the globe thanks to the most technologically advanced and destructive war the world had ever seen. It was brought to El Paso and the border by American soldiers stationed at Fort Bliss.

Between 1915 and 1917, less than 10 El Pasoans had died from the typhus lice that had so terrified Mayor Tom Lea in his silk underwear. Yet the Mayor and the media had milked the typhus scare for all it was worth with sensational headlines. Then, in the first week of October 1918, when 1,300 Fort Bliss soldiers contracted the Spanish influenza, El Paso Mayor Charles Davis, who took over Lea's job, had nothing

but optimistic reports: "I have been informed by city physicians that the situation is not one to cause any alarm. We have gripe in the city, but we have that every fall. There is no danger whatever (sic)."¹⁶⁷

It was not in Mayor Davis' political interest to tell the truth. On November 28, 1918, Dr. John Tappan—who had disinfected thousands of Mexicans at the bridge but had completely ignored the Spanish flu until then—wrote his friend overseas that in two months there had been more than "10,000 cases in El Paso and the Mexicans died like sheep. Whole families were exterminated."¹⁶⁸ In one day alone, the influenza killed 37 Segundo Barrio residents (who had never even vaguely considered the notion that they were the ones who should have been protecting themselves from American-borne germs).¹⁶⁹ Taxis and sanitation trucks would come pick up the bodies and take them to the cemetery.¹⁷⁰ Sometimes they would make several trips to the same house. People would start coughing blood in the morning; by the afternoon, they were dead.

While the nation was obsessively protecting itself from its southern border, its real threat came from within. But that's an old story at the El Paso-Juárez International Bridge.

¹⁶⁶ John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History*.

¹⁶⁷ *El Paso Herald*, October 3, 1918.

¹⁶⁸ Dr. John W. Tappan to "Mac," November 28, 1928. El Paso Historical Society.

¹⁶⁹ Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants*, p. 146.

¹⁷⁰ Mike Limon, interviewed by Virgilio Sánchez, July 27, 1978. Institute of Oral History, Special Collections Department, UT El Paso.