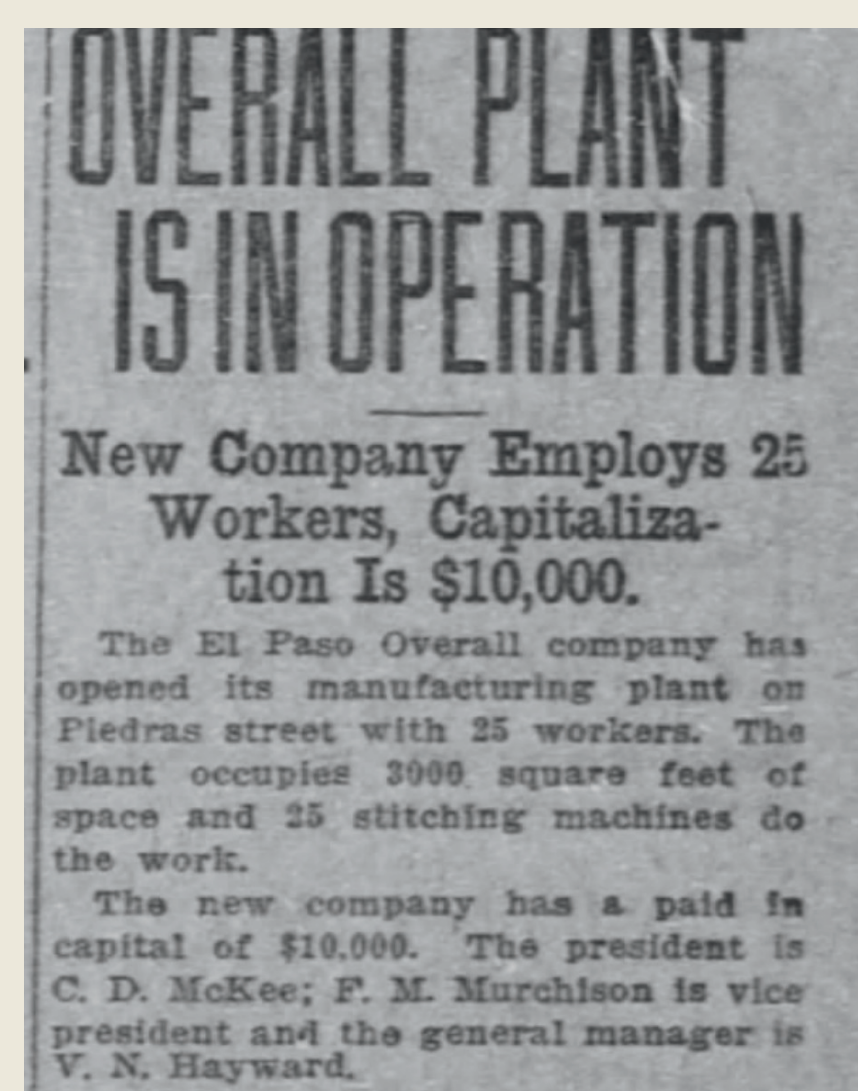


Mexican and Mexican American Women in the El Paso Garment Industry, 1919-1974

What were the labor experiences of Mexican and Mexican American garment workers in El Paso, Texas? How did Mexican and Mexican American women navigate challenges of race, gender, class, and immigration status in the El Paso garment industry?

01. Introduction

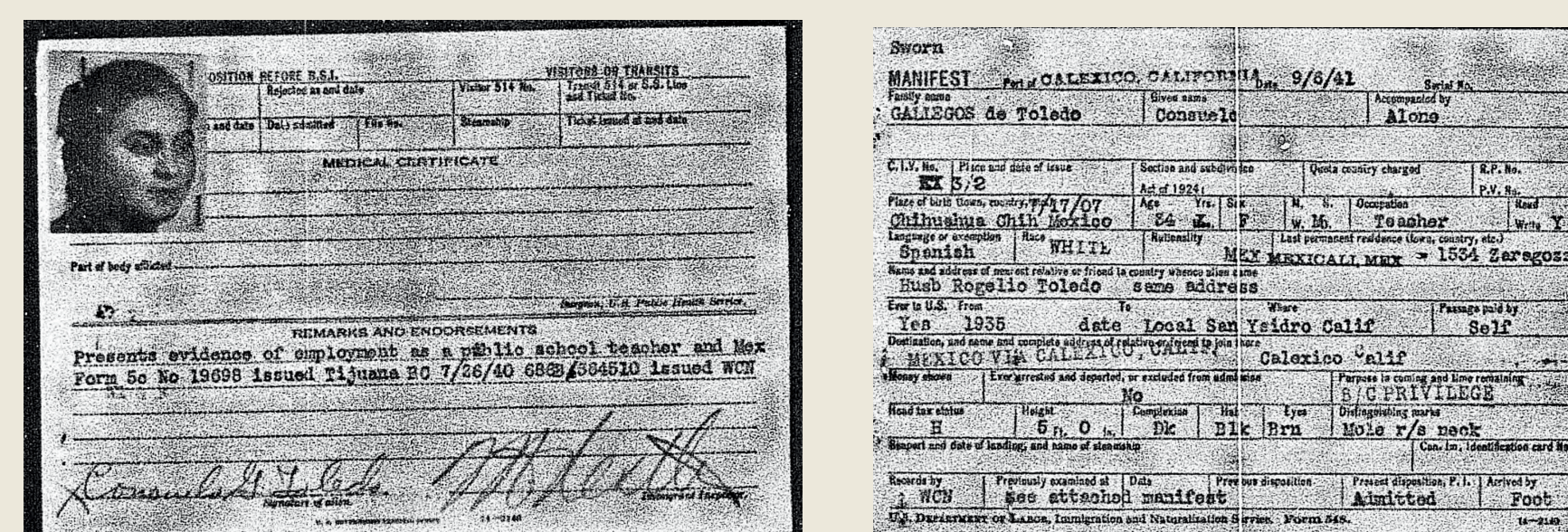
This poster examines the labor experiences of Mexican and Mexican American garment workers in El Paso, Texas, and how women navigated challenges of race, gender, class, and immigration status. From 1919 to 1974, El Paso's location across the Rio Grande provided businesses with access to cheap cross-border labor, drawing ethnically Mexican women into factories and shaping the city's garment industry. Despite their central role, little is known about these women's working lives, their strategies of resistance, or the social networks that sustained them. This study highlights their contributions, labor struggles, and the broader significance of their work in the region's industrial and social history.



El Paso Herald, June 21, 1919

02. Sources & Methodology

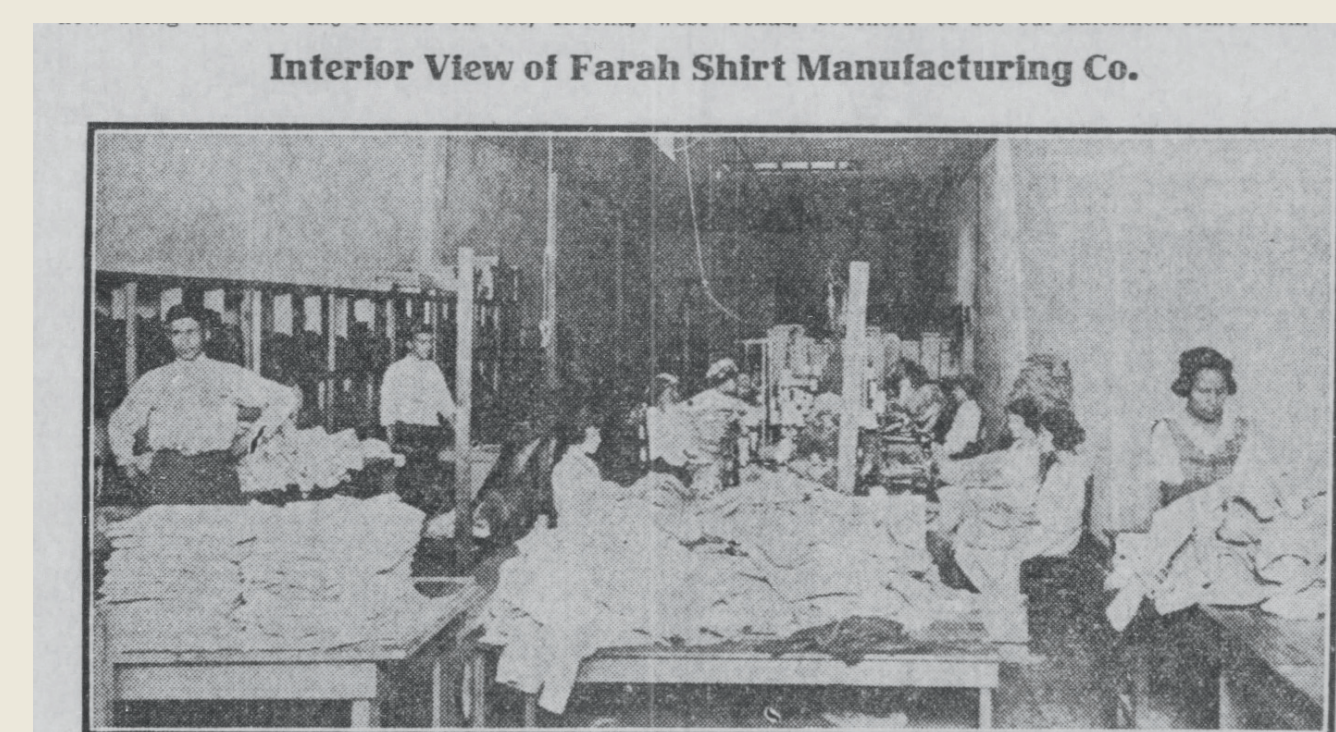
- Newspapers
- Oral Histories
- Migration Records
- Census Material
- Labor Reports
- Court Cases
- Newsletters



The 1930 census lists Consuelo Gallegos as a seamstress in a garment factory. Her border-crossing card shows she was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1907, illustrating the transnational character of El Paso's garment workforce.

03. Origins of Mexican Women's Labor, 1919-1930

- Physically demanding and unsafe working conditions such as long hours without breaks, exposure to industrial hazards, and job insecurity.
- **Kinship and community networks** were central survival strategies, with women working alongside relatives, sharing housing, and circulating job information.
- **Collective resistance:** They exercised labor agency through strikes and walkouts, including the 1919 laundress strike and the 1928 cotton mill walkout.
- Workers testified before the Texas Industrial Welfare Commission.



El Paso Herald, August 5, 1922

04. Mexican Women's Garment Labor and the New Deal Programs, 1930-1940

- New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Civil Works Administration (CWA) weakened collective organizing.
- **Mexican American and naturalized women accessed more stable employment in WPA sewing rooms**, where they produced garments, received training, and selected job assignments.
- Mexican immigrant women and daily border crossers remained concentrated in privately owned factories, facing exploitative wages and unsafe conditions.

05. Rise of the Garment Labor Unions in El Paso, 1940-1970

- November 3, 1944, Army and Navy officials visited El Paso to award Farah Manufacturing with the Army-Navy "E" Award for "excellence" in outstanding production output and quality.
- November 12, 1948, 160 workers at Hick's Hayward Company went on strike; **many women's first experience with national union organizing.**
- February 1963, Bertha Madrid, elected president of the United Garment Women's Association (UGWA) at Top-Notch Manufacturing, led efforts to establish an independent union—the Union of Independent Garment Workers (UIGW).

06. Chicana Labor and Resistance at Farah Manufacturing

- **1972-1974 Farah Strike:** Predominantly Chicana workers struck for higher wages and improved working conditions with support from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (ACWU).
- Race and gender shaped workplace hierarchies, yet shared labor and strike experiences forged solidarity among Mexicana and Chicana workers.



Farah striker, *El Mestizo*, Vol. 3 No. 6, August 1976

07. Conclusion

- El Paso's women garment workers navigated divisions shaped by citizenship, race, and economic need, yet they built solidarity and collective action when employers and mainstream unions failed to represent them.
- Their efforts challenged structural inequalities and helped establish new forms of labor organizing along the border.
- By centering the experiences of Mexicanas in El Paso's garment industry, this research **contributes to the growing scholarship on Texas borderlands history and the work of Chicana historians.**
- This study further addresses that gap and illuminates the historical significance of these women's labor and activism.

Sew For Needy In Smelter District



This is the GWA sewing room in the Smelter district, which furnishes employment for 25 seamstresses, besides providing clothing for needy families. The project is sponsored by the Smelter district school board and operated with the co-operation of the Red Cross and the CWA.

El Paso Times, January 14, 1934