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PELOTEROS IN PARADISE: MEXICAN AMERICAN BASEBALL AND OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, 1930–1950

JOSÉ M. ALAMILLO

Throughout Southern California, Mexican Americans participated in baseball clubs, encouraged by employers and social reformers intent on controlling the immigrant population. Mexican American ballplayers, however, used baseball clubs for cultural pride, masculine expression, and political opposition against company authority that also reinforced unequal gender relations on and off the playing field.

En el sur de California mexicano-americanos formaron parte de los distintos clubes de béisbol auspiciados por los patronos y reformadores sociales en su intento de controlar ésta población de inmigrantes. Sin embargo, los jugadores mexicano-americanos utilizaron estos clubes de béisbol para mostrar su orgullo cultural, expresar su masculinidad, oponerse políticamente a las compañías y reforzar la desigualdad en las relaciones sexos dentro y fuera del parque de pelota.

“**I**’VE BEEN IN BASEBALL SINCE I WAS THIRTEEN years old. I’ve been playing all sports and the only problem that kept me from making the majors was my color,” bitterly complained Jess Guerrero. Before 1947, American baseball’s deeply entrenched colorline kept African Americans, black Latinos, and dark-skinned Mexican Americans like Guerrero from playing in the major leagues. Despite racial segregation in baseball, Mexican American *peloteros* (ballplayers) took to the diamond fields every weekend afternoon to play independent sandlot and semi-professional baseball. Community-based baseball clubs sprung up during the interwar

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years in Southern California's barrios and *colonias*, introducing immigrant children to America's national pastime at a time when Mexican sport heroes were few and far between. In the context of economic exploitation, racial discrimination, and resurgent nativist attacks aimed at the Mexican population, second generation Mexican Americans used baseball to proclaim their equality through athletic competition, without fear of reprisal, and to publicly demonstrate community solidarity and strength.¹

This essay examines the multiple meanings and uses of baseball clubs among Mexican Americans in Southern California during the 1930s and 1940s. First, it analyzes how employers and social reformers sought to use baseball clubs to Americanize and socially control the Mexican immigrant population. Second, this essay focuses on community-based semipro baseball clubs throughout Southern California to examine the attitudes and motivations of Mexican American ballplayers towards the game. One of these clubs was the Corona Athletics Baseball Club, which boasted a lineup of Mexican American male ballplayers that claimed several championship pennants and earned a reputation for producing major league players. In the face of racial discrimination and limited economic opportunities that afflicted the Mexican population in this agricultural-industrial town, baseball took on a symbolic and real social significance. Drawing upon C. L. R. James's idea on the political significance of cricket contests, this essay shows how Mexican Americans viewed baseball matches as mirroring larger racial and class struggles that transcended the playing field.² Mexican Americans used baseball clubs to promote ethnic consciousness, build community solidarity, display masculine behavior, and sharpen their organizing and leadership skills. In this regard, Mexican American ballplayers transformed baseball clubs into a political forum to launch wider forms of collective action. In arguing for viewing baseball clubs as sites of resistance, however, one must consider how sporting venues reinforced gender hierarchies. Baseball players re-created a masculine culture in sports clubs that extended into labor unions, effectively reproducing male domination and exclusion of women from leadership positions in the labor movement.

Baseball arrived in Latin America during the mid-nineteenth century. American sailors and returning Cuban emigres first introduced baseball in Cuba; the game then spread throughout the Caribbean region. In Mexico, Cuban workers introduced the game to the remote southeastern Yucatán peninsula in 1860s, but it was not until the Porfirian era (1876–1910) that baseball's popularity extended to the northern parts of Mexico. With the influx of American capital into remote areas of central and western Mexico, railroad and mining company personnel treated workers to their first baseball game. American investors and Porfirian liberals recognized the game's potential of introducing modern industrial values such as teamwork and self-discipline to the Mexican lower classes. Wallace Thompson, mining journal editor and author of five books

¹ Jess Guerrero, interview by Pat Flores and Jerry Alexander, in *Personal Stories from Pico Rivera*, ed. Susan S. Obler (Whittier, CA, 1976), 30 (hereafter Guerrero interview).

² C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963; reprint, Durham, NC, 1993), 66.

on Mexico, observed the growing popularity of baseball with paternalistic approval: "A magnificent beginning has thus been made in the training of Mexican boys both in teamwork and in athletic development. . . . It seems that these features are being developed by baseball, which there, as elsewhere, has stimulated the sense of play and is certainly as near a 'national sport' as Mexico has so far attained."³

North of the Rio Grande, American companies subsidized sport teams to increase worker productivity and foster company loyalty. As militant labor unions made inroads among immigrant workers during the First World War, industrial and agricultural companies stepped up efforts to counter labor unions by offering recreation programs. One of the leading producers of agricultural fruit in the country, the California Fruit Growers Exchange (CFGF, also known by its trademark, Sunkist), organized a sophisticated corporate welfare system that included Americanization classes, a housing program, recreational facilities, and sport clubs. Sunkist officials encouraged growers to organize baseball clubs to improve workers' physical health and mental preparedness for the arduous backbreaking field work. Sunkist's Industrial Relations Department director, G. B. Hodgkin, advised growers how to best "handle" Mexicans. He wrote: "In order to produce the desired workers, they have to become a member of a local society or baseball team . . . to increase their physical and mental capacity for doing more work."⁴

Sunkist's baseball proposal persuaded citrus growers to form baseball clubs and build ballparks on ranch property. For example, Keith Spalding, son of sporting giant A. G. Spalding Sporting Goods Corporation and author of *America's National Game*, owned and operated Rancho Sespe, a four-thousand-acre citrus ranch near Fillmore in eastern Ventura County. Spalding transformed this old Californio *rancho* into a "model scientific farm" complete with modern packinghouses, office buildings, worker "model" housing, recreation facilities, a musical group, and a baseball field. In northern Orange County, the La Habra Citrus Association sponsored "Los Juveniles" comprised of Mexican citrus workers. The association formed this baseball club to replace the popular sport of cockfighting conducted undercover inside citrus orchards. "The entire [Mexican] colony has become baseball conscious in a short time," observed one researcher, "and the interest exhibited in this great American sport has seemingly supplanted the former Sunday diversion of cock-fighting, which is common to many Mexican

³ Wallace Thompson, *The Mexican Mind: A Study of National Psychology* (Boston, 1922), 97, 100. On the rise of baseball in Mexico, see William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln, NE, 1987); Gilbert M. Joseph, "Forging the Regional Pastime: Baseball and Class in Yucatán," in *Sport and Society in Latin America: Diffusion, Dependency, and the Rise of Mass Culture*, ed. Joseph Arbena (New York, 1988), 29–61.

⁴ *California Citrograph* (Los Angeles), August 1921, 75. On Southern California's citrus industry's welfare programs see Gilbert G. González, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900–1950*, (Urbana, IL, 1994), 65–74; Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900–1970* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), 87–120.

colonies in Southern California." To become "baseball conscious" however, according to the association, required compliance with manly codes of conduct. The team's "good sportsman" rules consisted of being "dependable, truthful, trustworthy, and never late for baseball practice." The researcher went on to say that the players were "never heard to use bad language at work or at play [and] never display[ed] [their] temper[s]." La Habra's baseball program linked baseball with modernity, manliness, and progress in opposition to the uncivilized, culturally backward, and supposedly unmanly character of cockfighting.⁵

Apart from employer efforts, social reformers sought to redirect immigrants from their own ethnic amusements and into "Americanized" forms of recreation and sports. Play reformers targeted immigrant children in schools, playgrounds, churches, and settlement houses, to mold them into a submissive working class with Anglo Protestant and middle-class values. Cary Goodman has shown how the play reform movement transformed autonomous street play into more controlled and organized play to counteract the perceived moral decay of cities and street life that reformers thought caused so much juvenile delinquency. The head of the Los Angeles Department of Playgrounds and Recreation encouraged mass participation in sports that would "instill ideals of good sportsmanship, fair play, team work, clean living, and plant loyalty . . . bringing about a happy spirit of cooperation between employer and employee." Dr. Emory Bogardus and his sociology students at the University of Southern California produced research studies on the significance of sports and recreational activities in Los Angeles Mexican communities. Bogardus prescribed the use of baseball clubs to counter gambling, bullfighting, and cockfighting. "The Mexican 'takes' well to the national pastime of the United States, namely, baseball. More significant, through games such as baseball, he acquires a new meaning for teamwork."⁶

Employer and Progressive efforts to reform workers' cultural lives were not limited to young men. Women were also introduced to recreation programs and sport teams in schools, churches, YWCAs, playgrounds, and settlement houses. For example, during the early thirties the San Diego Neighborhood House built a baseball diamond to "give girls an opportunity for recreation away from their numerous home responsibilities [and to] instill cooperation among the girls." The Neighborhood House formed an all-Mexican women baseball team that occasionally played against all male teams. Mexican American women also took up softball, organizing and participating

⁵ *La Opinion* (Los Angeles, CA), 16 September 1934, 5; Jessie Hayden, "La Habra Experiment in Mexican Social Education" (master's thesis, Claremont Colleges, 1934), 20.

⁶ Cary Goodman, *Choosing Sides: Playgrounds and Street Life on the Lower East Side* (New York, 1979), 33–58; *Annual Report*, Los Angeles Department of Playgrounds and Recreation, (1926/27), 20; Emory Bogardus, *The City Boy and His Problems: A Survey of Boy Life in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles, 1926), 67–100; Emory Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States* (Los Angeles, 1934), 60; David A. Bridge, "A Study of the Agencies which Promote Americanization in the Los Angeles City Recreation Center District" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1920), 106–8.

in softball league tournaments throughout Southern California, sponsored by companies, schools, and settlement houses. Some examples of team names included: “Los Tomboys” (Orange, CA), “Las Debs” (Corona, CA), “Mexico Libre” and “Four Star Eagles” (Los Angeles, CA). Despite the sport’s popularity, women’s softball was considered a novelty attraction for male spectators and usually scheduled as an exhibition game before men’s baseball. The meaning softball had for women, however, differed from the meaning it held for male spectators and team promoters; it allowed women to form female friendships and gain public visibility outside the home and workplace. As one former softball ballplayer remembered, “We use[d] to love playing softball, even though some [of] us [players] were already married, we still never missed practice.”⁷

The appeal of baseball was not limited to Mexican immigrants; the sport attracted people from all segments of the American working classes. Early commentators hailed baseball as the nation’s “melting pot” sport with the greatest potential of Americanizing foreign-born youngsters and children of immigrants, but the game’s strict racial and gender system shattered this myth. While sport journalists celebrated the substantial influx of players of eastern and southern European descent that entered the major leagues during the mid-thirties, they overlooked more than fifty Latin American and U. S. Latino players that joined the major leagues before 1947, the year Jackie Robinson broke the color line. Those players originating from Mexico included Baldomero (Melo) Almada, Jose Luis (Chile) Gomez, and Jesse Flores. The East Coast bias, major-league focus, and white-black binary framework of much baseball history has virtually ignored the sporting experiences of Mexican Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, and Native Americans in amateur and semiprofessional baseball leagues throughout the American West.⁸

Unlike other racial minority groups that adopted baseball as their favorite sport, Mexican American baseball was uniquely different by its close proximity to the U. S.-Mexico border and interior Mexico. From its inception, Mexican baseball was a transnational phenomenon, straddling both sides of the border to entertain spectator crowds who filled the stands to cheer for their favorite team. Baseball teams from Mexico routinely crossed the border to participate in southwestern tournaments. For example, Mexico’s championship team, San Luis “Mexico,” was invited to participate in several Los Angeles area tournaments during the 1930 season. During these

⁷ Cynthia J. Shelton, “The Neighborhood House of San Diego: Settlement Work in the Mexican Community, 1914–1940” (master’s thesis, San Diego State University, 1975), 105–9; *La Opinion*, 1 May 1932, 3; Alison M. Wrynn, “Women’s Industrial and Recreation League Softball in Southern California, 1930–1950” (master’s thesis, Springfield College, 1989), 40, 66; Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport* (New York, 1994), 142.

⁸ Frederick Lieb, “Baseball—The Nation’s Melting Pot,” *Baseball Magazine* 31 (August 1923), 391–3; Samuel O. Regalado, *Viva Baseball: Latin Major Leaguers and their Special Hunger* (Urbana, IL, 1998), 36, 50–1, 177.



Fig. A. The Corona Athletics baseball team at the Santa Fe Railroad diamond field. Photo courtesy of the Corona Public Library Heritage Room, Corona, California.

international games the Mexican consul official was customarily invited to throw the first pitch.⁹

Baseball, along with boxing, constituted the most popular sport in Southern California's Mexican communities. Mexican baseball teams often sprung up from within the community as a part of sport clubs, mutual-aid organizations, churches, and small businesses. A chief promoter of baseball was the *Asociación Deportiva Hispano Americana*, organized in 1927 by the city's leading Spanish-language newspaper, *La Opinion*, and a board of directors comprised of Mexican consul officials, middle-class professionals, and small business owners. Another big promoter was *La Asociación Atlética Mexicana del Sur de California*, formed on the eve of the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics with the assistance of the city's recreation department. Persuaded by the rising popularity of baseball among second-generation Mexican American youth, *La Asociación* formed a separate baseball league, *Liga Mexicana de Baseball del Sur de California* (Southern California Mexican Baseball League) that fielded over fifteen amateur and semiprofessional teams. Some of the 1933 teams included the El Paso Shoe Store "Zapateros," Oxnard "Aces," La Habra "Juveniles," Carta Blanca "Cerveceros," Hermosa

⁹ Alan M. Klein, *Baseball on the Border: A Tale of Two Laredos* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 32–65; *La Opinion*, 30 June 1930, 6 and 18 June 1933, 5.

Mexican Club “Pescadores,” Santa Paula “Limoneros,” Placentia Merchants, and Corona Athletics.¹⁰

The original Corona Athletics Baseball Club was first organized in 1931 by Mexican American youth who worked in Corona’s citrus industry. (See Figure A.) Many of the original members were introduced to baseball through a network of company-sponsored teams, including the Corona Foothill Lemon Company “Lemoneers” and the American Fruit Growers “Blue Goose.” However, when companies failed to meet player demands for equipment and a diamond field they decided to form their own team. Although freed from strict company control, the Corona Athletics were still dependent on Corona’s business community for financial backing and moral support.¹¹

Of the fifteen Mexican American ballplayers that comprised the Corona Athletics Baseball Club, some resided in the city’s Northside barrio and several others in outlying citrus ranch communities. Within the city’s circular-shaped design, Sixth Street was considered the racial borderline that divided Mexican Northside and the white Southside. The only time white residents crossed Sixth Street into the Mexican barrio was to catch a glimpse of the Corona Athletics. Although ballplayers lived in separate communities, they all attended Washington School, designated as a “Mexican school.” In many parts of the Southwest, Mexican children were segregated into such “Mexican schools,” which offered little academic preparation and stressed vocational training and physical education. Very few continued onto high school because they needed to contribute to the family income—so they followed in their parents’ footsteps, picking and packing citrus fruit.

Facing a bleak future in agricultural work, Mexican American boys turned to baseball. For example, Zeke Mejia decided early on to dedicate himself to school and sports. “I did not want to pick lemons like my father and needed an incentive to stay in school so I started playing sports, especially baseball. It taught me something about myself. I hated to lose then and still hate to lose now.” For those who could not escape agricultural work, it was necessary to learn to endure hard, backbreaking labor. Former Athletics ballplayer, Tito Cortez, explained how agricultural work helped his athletic performance. “Working inside the [citrus] groves, carrying a heavy sack, climbing up and down the ladder, using a quick eye to pick lemons helped with my pitching and [baseball] training.” Cortez related how working six days a week, ten hours per day, did not interfere with his baseball performance. “Everyone used to comment how we would work like a dog all week picking lemons, then [play] baseball all day on Sundays. But

¹⁰ *La Opinion*, 19 July 1927, 1, 4 July 1932, 5, 24 June 1933, 3; Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley, 1999), 45–8; Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848–1930* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 152.

¹¹ José M. Alamillo, “Bitter-Sweet Communities: Mexican Workers and Citrus Growers on the California Landscape, 1880–1941” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 2000), 258–63.

you see that was the only thing to do since there was no television." Cortez's experience supports Steven Gelber's contention that baseball culture reinforced workplace values such as appreciation of rationality, personal accountability, teamwork, and competitiveness between groups.¹²

Compared to their lower-rung position on the agricultural ladder, Mexican individuals potentially could move up as coaches and managers within a baseball team, and thus gain valuable leadership and organization skills. Take, for example, three Mexican American community leaders, Marcelino Barba, Gilbert Enriquez, and Marcus Uribe, who began their careers through participation in baseball teams and sport clubs. Barba worked in the packinghouses as a fruit crate assembler and machine operator at the same time he managed the Athletics Baseball Club during the 1931–1939 period. As manager, Barba spent many hours scheduling ballgames, soliciting sponsors, and organizing tournaments. Gilbert Enriquez worked in a shoe store while he coached the Athletics team and Washington School children after school. Enriquez became the first Mexican American on the city's recreation commission and was founding editor of the Spanish language newspaper, *El Imparcial*. Marcus Uribe worked as a citrus picker until he lost his right arm in a work-related accident; he then became known as "El Mocho" (Spanish nickname meaning "the armless"). Despite his handicap, he replaced Barba as the Athletics manager (1940–1948) and, because of his leadership experience and winning record, became an effective labor organizer.¹³

Apart from gaining leadership skills, baseball allowed players to travel and make new friends outside their immediate surroundings. During the summer months when the lemon harvest ebbed, the Athletics team traveled northward to Santa Barbara, to Coachella Valley in the eastern desert, and southward to the border towns of Mexicali and Tijuana. To offset transportation expenses, the manager sometimes borrowed a hauling truck from a local packinghouse. Former Corona baseball player Zeke Mejia fondly remembered his traveling experiences: "I liked to travel to new places because I liked meeting new friends. I remember traveling to Lake Elsinore, which was a long way in those days. But the only ride we could get was from a friend who hauled fertilizer in his truck. So all the guys crawled inside the truck and tried not to breathe during the ride. By the time we arrived to play we all smelled like fertilized fields. We did it because we loved the game." These sporting networks established during away

¹² Zeke Mejia is quoted in *Riverside Press-Enterprise* (California), 29 June 1996, 2. (This newspaper can be found at the Riverside Public Library, Riverside, CA.); Natividad (Tito) Cortez, interview by author, 20 April 1998, Corona, California, (hereafter Cortez interview); Steven Gelber, "Working At Playing: The Culture of the Workplace and the Rise of Baseball," *Journal of Social History* 5 (1979): 12–5.

¹³ Fred Eldridge and Stanley Reynolds, "Corona's Mexican Leaders," in *Corona, California Commentaries* (Los Angeles, 1986), 44–8; Cynthia Alvitre, *Hispanic Centennial Review, 1886–1986* (Corona, CA, 1986), 1–5; *Corona Independent*, 4 January 1933, 3 (this newspaper can be found at Corona Public Library, Corona, CA); *El Imparcial*, 13 August 1949, 1 (this newspaper can be found at Corona Public Library, Corona, CA).



Fig. B. *Las Debs de Corona* or Corona Debs softball team comprised of Mexican American women and coached by Anglo males and sponsored by American Dry Cleaners. Photo courtesy of the Corona Public Library Heritage Room, Corona, California.

games and tournament matches became important for community organizing and labor solidarity.¹⁴

While baseball tours helped weld informal social networks and alliances, they also provided masculinized forms of sociability. Apart from the game's competitive machismo, post-game drinking parties became a popular pastime among ballplayers. Following each team victory the manager would purchase food and beer for the team. Former Athletics pitcher, Natividad "Tito" Cortez remembered, "After the game the managers would buy us *cerveza* (beer) and *tacos*. Sometimes we had a barbeque out there, roasted goat and made tacos." These post-game celebrations, however, were contingent on how much money they collected during the game. When they were short of funds, they visited their main sponsor, the Jalisco Bar, where they received free drinks. This popular male drinking establishment was jokingly referred to as "El Resbalador" (slippery place) because of the high number of inebriated ballplayers who accidentally slid into imaginary bases.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, 29 June 1996, 3.

¹⁵ Cortez interview.

Baseball's masculine culture on and off the playing field often excluded women from participation and spectatorship. Nevertheless, Mexican women attended Corona baseball matches and helped fundraise by selling Mexican food at the game. Some Mexican American women also played in all-women softball teams that became popular during World War II. Following his tenure as the Athletics manager, Marcus Uribe helped organize an all Mexican American women's softball team called "Las Debs de Corona" (See Figure B). The team was sponsored by the American Dry Cleaners and coached by two Anglo Americans, and dressed in blue and gold uniforms with the sponsor's name emblazoned on their backs.¹⁶

Because of racial segregation in city parks and recreation facilities, before World War II, Mexicans had to look elsewhere for recreational resources. Like other southwestern cities Corona maintained a racial segregationist policy that barred Mexicans from using the city park's field and swimming pool. In 1926, for example, the Corona City Council passed the following resolution: "It was moved that students, except foreigners, of the city have the freedom of the city [pool] on Tuesdays of each week until further notice." One city resident defended the city's racist practices by claiming: "So little can a Mexican appreciate a park." Mexican ballplayers thus gravitated towards empty lots or agricultural fields, which became overnight makeshift diamonds. The Athletics team transformed an empty railroad yard, located in the Northside Mexican barrio, into a diamond field with bleachers and a concession stand. Because the managers of the Santa Fe Railroad were baseball fans, they allowed the Athletics to lease the land for a dollar per month. Another reason the Athletics preferred the railroad yard was to avoid city regulations on alcohol consumption and food sales.¹⁷

For Corona's Mexican working-class community, the Athletics' baseball field represented an important cultural space. The ballpark's free admission policy was appealing to families, children, youth, and elders with limited discretionary incomes. Apart from watching their favorite team, ballpark spaces offered families an opportunity to reunite with extended relatives and friends. This Sunday afternoon ritual fostered cultural pride among Mexican residents regardless of class, gender, generation, and citizenship status. Following the baseball games, Mexicanist-oriented organizations, aimed at preserving a Mexican national identity, occasionally staged patriotic celebrations complete with Mariachi music, food, and public speeches. Baseball historian Samuel Regalado has suggested that "[b]aseball in the barrios did more than help to preserve a strong sense of Mexican heritage within these communities, it wielded a sense of unity amongst the people—especially for those who had been in the

¹⁶ Margaret Zarate, interview by author, 7 January 2000, Corona, CA (interview in author's possession). See also Joan Sangster, "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923–60" *Labour/Le Travail* 32 (Fall 1993): 189–93.

¹⁷ Corona City Council Minutes, 1 June 1926, Clerk's Office, Corona City Hall, Corona, CA; *Corona Independent*, 5 January 1927, 4.

United States only a few years." Children of Mexican immigrants, either born or raised in the United States also gravitated towards America's national pastime sport.¹⁸

During the thirties, second-generation Mexican American youth filled the stands every Sunday afternoon hoping to realize their own "field of dreams." One recreation director surveyed Mexican American youth in Los Angeles and Phoenix about their favorite American sports, and found respondents preferred baseball, followed by softball, boxing, basketball, and football. Mexican American organizations frequently attended Athletics ball games to support their friends and peers. Emphasizing both their Mexican heritage and American citizenship among ballplayers, however, was neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive, but as historian George Sánchez has suggested, involved a complex and ambiguous process contingent on historical circumstances. The ballplayers' bilingual and bicultural skills were necessary to solicit sponsors, negotiate contracts, and organize tournaments with sport promoters.¹⁹

To cover team expenses, managers passed a baseball hat around the bleachers for those that could contribute. They also sought financial support from local Mexican and Anglo businesses. Former Athletics coach, Jess Uribe, explained the fundraising process: "From all the people that came to watch us we would pass around a basket to collect money to support the team but it was never enough. Only coins you would see because people were so poor. But still many people helped us cover the costs. For fifteen expensive uniforms we had to find support from the local businesses." He added, "We used to get sponsors from the Mexican businesses, especially bars. Each business would buy a baseball uniform and placed their name on the back." The Athletics club also held fundraising dances at the American Legion Hall to help offset transportation costs. These dances, announced in *El Imparcial* and the local Spanish language radio station, featured traditional Mexican ballads by Al Lopez's band and swing music performed by the Mexican American band. According to one newspaper announcement, "[t]he purpose of the dance [was] to raise money to cover necessary expenses, since passing the hat at each game [was] not enough." Apart from these fundraising efforts, baseball managers also enlisted the support of Anglo business establishments like Corona Hardware, American Dry Cleaners, and Western Auto Supply.²⁰

While some parents encouraged sporting activities among their children, others were suspicious of the national pastime sport because it competed with family obligations. Former Detroit Tigers pitcher and San Gabriel Valley native Hank Aguirre,

¹⁸ Samuel Regalado, "Baseball in the Barrios: The Scene in East Los Angeles Since World War II," *Baseball History* 1 (Summer 1986): 57.

¹⁹ Ed Horner, "A Recreation Director in a Mexican-American Community" (master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1945), 41–2; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles* (New York, 1993), 253–69.

²⁰ Jess Uribe, interview by author, 20 February 1998, Corona, CA (tape recording of interview located at Corona Public Library, Corona, CA), (hereafter Uribe interview); *Corona Independent*, 10 July 1936, 1.

nicknamed the "Tall Mexican," disclosed to his biographer his father's disapproval. Because the Aguirre family owned and operated a family grocery store, and Aguirre's father wanted his son to work in it, he had little patience with his son's budding baseball career. However, when Aguirre received his first bonus for signing with the Detroit Tigers in 1951, his father "put behind forever his lack of interest in baseball and his scathing views of the game as a waste of time." Major league pitcher Jesse Flores, nicknamed "El Guero," also encountered family resistance. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Jesse Flores migrated to La Habra with his family and later dropped out of school to work in the citrus orchards with his father. When Flores joined the Chicago Cubs in 1942, his mother was not pleased. "She didn't really like the idea. She used to go to church and pray for me when I was pitching. She thought I was going to get hit in the head with the ball." Unlike his mother, Flores's father and brothers attended all his games and supported his career choice. Flores played for seven seasons on three different teams, and after retirement in 1950, he became a successful scout for the Minnesota Twins. Reflecting on his major league pitching career, Flores concluded, "I think without baseball I would have been just another worker."²¹

Even with family obligations, Mexican American ballplayers still took a chance at making it big in the major leagues. The Corona Athletics played in semiprofessional leagues, not associated with the professional leagues and its minor league appendages. After achieving a winning average of .700 during the 1936 season, they were invited to participate in the California State Championship Semipro Tournament at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles. Although they lost the tournament, the Athletics demonstrated they had potential to play in the major leagues. Not until Jackie Robinson broke the color line in 1947, however, did scouts begin to pay attention to the Athletics. Between 1947 and 1949, major league teams recruited three Athletics players, Tito Cortez, Ray Delgadillo, and Remi Chagnon, and later in the early 1950s, Bobby Perez and Louis Uribe signed contracts with the Brooklyn Dodgers. Although no Athletics player achieved major league star status, simply belonging to one of the most fiercely competitive baseball teams in the region was enough for some. Some ballplayers showed off their athletic prowess in photographs taken by a local photo studio. These photos were occasionally distributed at tournament games like baseball cards. (See Figure C.)

Before 1947, major league scouts recruited two semipro players of Mexican descent from Southern California. In 1933, Melo Almada became the first Mexican American to play in the major leagues for seven seasons; first playing for the Boston Red Sox, then with the Washington Senators, and finally with the 1939 Brooklyn Dodgers. Born in Huatabampo, Sonora, Mexico, to a wealthy landowning family,

²¹ Robert E. Copley, *The Tall Mexican: The Life of Hank Aguirre, All Star Pitcher, Businessman, and Humanitarian* (Houston, 1998), 11; Cynthia J. Wilber, *For the Love of the Game: Baseball Memories from the Men Who Were There* (New York, 1992), 125–31; González, *Labor and Community*, 112–4.

Almada moved to Los Angeles and played sports in the city's public school system during the twenties. As the star pitcher for the Los Angeles High School and the El Paso Shoe teams, Almada became an instant celebrity in the English and Spanish language print media. The English print media constructed an image of Almada as an assimilated "American" athlete often referred to as "Mel" and occasionally mistaken for an Italian American. One sport journalist's account read, "Although proud of his Mexican lineage and completely loyal to it, he doesn't even look like a Mexican, being taller, broader and considerably fairer than most of the citizens of our sister republic." In contrast, *La Opinion* and the Mexico City newspaper *El Excelsior* proclaimed Almada a "Mexican national hero." Although lighter-skinned Latin American and Latino major league players, including Almada and Flores, partially benefited from "whiteness" they still faced ethnic stereotypes and subtle forms of discrimination.²²

Mexican American semipro players became optimistic about their major league prospects when Jackie Robinson broke the color line. Tito Cortez was one of these players with major league dreams. Between 1937–1947, Cortez pitched five no-hitters for the Athletics. In 1947, the Cleveland Indians recruited Cortez to play for their farm team in Tucson, Arizona. As a starting pitcher for the Tucson Cowboys, he helped the team reach the minor league playoffs. Cortez described his Tucson experience:



Fig. C. Corona Athletics ballplayer Ralph Rodriguez in front of the Santa Fe Railroad depot. Photo courtesy of the Corona Public Library Heritage Room, Corona, California.

²² Bill Cunningham, "Grandstand Grandee," *Colliers*, 24 August 1935, 16, 30; *El Excelsior* (Mexico City, Mexico), 25 November 1933, n.p.; *La Opinion*, 4 July 1933, n.p.; Daniel Frio and Marc Onigman, "'Good Field, No Hit': The Image of Latin American Baseball Player in the American Press, 1871–1946" *Revista/Review Interamericana* 2 (Summer 1977): 199–208; Regalado, *Viva Baseball*, 134–46.

"I received 125 dollars a month plus 20 dollars a month for rent. I stayed in a dormitory. When they signed me up I began as a relief pitcher, then a starter pitcher. I was the only Mexican American in the team." Cortez's promising career, however, was cut short when a hit on the left eye by a ball left him partially blind. Cortez remembered breaking the news to the Tucson Cowboys. "When I told them I had an accident, they did not believe me. They sent me a contract and then another one. Finally I just tore it up." After ignoring their letters, he discovered later that he was blacklisted from playing in the major league farm teams. The Cowboys suspected that Cortez was one of a dozen American ballplayers recruited by the Mexican League, who offered higher salaries and bonuses. In response, the baseball commissioner A. B. Chandler blacklisted all players who joined the Mexican League for five years. Although Cortez and other Mexican American ballplayers did not achieve major league status, they demonstrated a capacity for athletic ability, leadership, and organization capabilities that extended far beyond the realm of sports.²³

In the racially charged climate of the thirties and forties that was characterized by segregation, discrimination, and nativism, baseball took on a broad social significance within Mexican communities. A University of Chicago sociologist long ago observed, "The whole [Mexican] colony is always keenly interested in the baseball games especially when they play against outsiders. It is as though the honor and status of the colony were at stake." This observation underscores how Mexican American struggles to gain acceptance on the playing field involved symbolic, and real, racial contestation. Corona Athletics' victories against all-white baseball teams challenged notions of white superiority and stereotypical notions of Mexicans as "peons," "docile," and culturally inferior. Semipro player Frank Ruiz explained the wider racial significance of Mexican-Anglo matches:

They all wanted to beat us. If they couldn't beat us with the runs, they would try to beat us with the umpire, because we were a little better than they were. I guess they didn't want the Mexican kids to beat them, you know, the Anglos over there. We had a little rough time sometimes, but then we'd score more runs. There's no way they could say they won without enough runs.

Mexican American ball players like Frank Ruiz also demanded respect and equal opportunity beyond the playing field. Ruiz's bitter memories of "No Mexicans Allowed" signs posted on the local swimming pool and city park made him question whether equality really existed in America's national pastime. Ruiz said, "Being a Mexican,

²³ Cortez interview. On the Mexican Baseball League, see Alan Klein, "Baseball Wars: The Mexican Baseball League and Nationalism in 1946," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 13 (1994), 33–56.

well, you might say you had two strikes against you," he added, "and we had good players. They could have made the big leagues."²⁴

Racial and class differences were visible on the baseball diamond, especially when the all Mexican American Corona Athletics played their main rival, an all-white company team sponsored by the Exchange Lemon By-Products. The Exchange Lemon By-Product's plant employed predominantly white workers and did not hire Mexican workers until after World War II. During one of their highly competitive matches, the *Corona Independent* reported: "The Exchange Lemon Products team evidently felt they could make a better showing and win more games if they altered their appearance. They appeared on the diamond Friday night with a brand new outfit consisting of flashy yellow and black jerseys, black caps and white trousers, and did they look snappy!" Their flashy clothes and pretentiousness, however, did nothing to improve their game. The Corona Athletics beat them by a score of eleven to two.²⁵

For male players, identification with the game's highly charged hit-and-run plays, aggressive batting, or game brawls became part of the appeal and served to publicly demonstrate their "manhood." The competition between Mexican and white men represented a struggle over racial, class, and masculine pride. As Michael Messner has suggested, "subordinated groups of men often used sport to resist racist, colonial, and class domination, and their resistance most often took the form of a claim to 'manhood.'" In the highly masculinized arena of baseball, Mexican American men attempted to reassert their racial and masculine identity. In this sense, players became heavily invested in winning because it was one of the ways they could challenge racism and class oppression, and, at the same time, maintain their masculine pride, honor, and respectability. In some cases, verbal and physical threats to ballplayers' masculinity and racial pride led to fights on and off the playing field. Tito Cortez remembered one particular incident during a game between the Athletics and the Los Angeles Colored Giants:

One time the Athletics was playing a black team from Los Angeles and one of the guys playing shortstop was batting and made a "sissy" remark to the pitcher. Something about pitching like a girl, but the catcher heard what he said. He got up and took off his mask, chest protector and ran after him. You could only see his spikes kicking dirt behind.

Altercations between black players and Mexican American players sometimes bristled with racial tension, but other times both groups developed friendly relations. Former semipro player Jess Guerrero played for the Los Angeles Colored Giants and fondly

²⁴ Edward Jackson Baur, "Delinquency among Mexican Boys in South Chicago" (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1938), 131. Frank Ruiz, interview by Gilbert Rivera and Patti Berry, in *Personal Stories from El Monte Communities*, ed. Susan S. Obler (Whittier, CA, 1976), 93.

²⁵ *Corona Independent*, 22 June 1938, 5.

remembered playing alongside the famous Negro league pitcher: "I couldn't play with no white team but I played with the colored teams, I played with Satchel Paige." In the culturally diverse region of Southern California, the Corona Athletics played against other racial and ethnic teams such as the Los Angeles Nippons (Japanese American), Sherman Institute (Native American), Torrance Blues (white American), and the Colored Giants (African American).²⁶

The Athletics club served as a gendered space from which Mexican American ballplayers reproduced a collective masculine culture and identity. Displays of masculine behavior were built around excessive drinking, gambling away hard-earned money, abusive language, competitive behavior, and physical prowess. In some cases this aggressive behavior led to domestic violence. Former sister-in-law of one Athletics ballplayer, Irene Contreras, complained about the player's excessive drinking, which interfered with family obligations and domestic relations. The disruptive, exuberant, and wildly aggressive working-class masculine behavior of Athletics players overlapped with a more middle-class masculine behavior that stressed self-discipline, obedience, and acceptance of hierarchy. Athletic players displayed both sorts of conduct on and off the playing field. On the one hand, an aggressive and combative masculine behavior celebrated on the diamond contributed to winning a game, but on the other hand, this disruptive behavior could threaten efforts to build a disciplined team. These competing forms of masculine behavior, however, still maintained a rigid gender hierarchy.²⁷

Baseball helped establish strong bonds of male solidarity and companionship that provided the basis for teamwork on and off the field, but ballplayer's rebellious behavior also led to divisions within the team. For example, when one Athletics player missed several practices and behaved "aggressively rowdy" during a match, the team manager benched him for several games. After his father protested to the manager, a verbal fight ensued. After several attempts at reconciliation, the disgruntled player left the team altogether and convinced several other players to join him in forming a rival baseball club, the Corona Cubs. Organized in 1946, the Cubs played at the city park diamond wearing uniforms donated by Pancho's Garage. (See Figure D.) A bitter rivalry ensued between both teams during the late forties, especially over determining who was the best "Mexican" team in the city.²⁸

Despite divisions within the team, the Athletics club supported community struggles against the established order. During the early 1940s, Athletics transcended

²⁶ Michael A. Messner, *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity* (Boston, 1992), 19; Cortez interview; Guerrero interview, 30. On Japanese American baseball in Los Angeles see Yoichi Nagata, "The Pride of Lil' Tokyo: The Los Angeles Nippons Baseball Club, 1926–1941," in *More Than a Game: Sport in the Japanese American Community*, ed. Brian Niiya (Los Angeles, 2000), 100–9.

²⁷ Irene Contreras, interview by author, 4 December 1999 (interview in author's possession).

²⁸ Uribe interview; *Corona Independent*, 21 August 1946, n.p.



Fig. D. The Corona Cubs baseball team at the Corona city park diamond. The team was sponsored by Poncho's Garage. Photo courtesy of the Corona Public Library Heritage Room, Corona, California.

its sporting function and became politically involved in the labor movement. Ballplayers who had first learned lessons about fundraising, organizational work, and collective action in the Athletics club, became dedicated labor organizers for the United Cannery Agricultural Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), an affiliate of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

In the agricultural-industry town of Corona, citrus companies exercised undue influence in city government, schools, churches, and community clubs, making city residents politically and economically dependent upon the citrus industry. For example, the city's largest citrus companies, Jameson and Corona Foothill Lemon, maintained a foothold on city and county politics and used their influence to keep labor unions outside of Corona. In spite of the citrus industry's dominance in this racially segregated city, Mexican residents created their own leisure spaces and formed their own sport clubs, which assumed a heightened political role during times of labor-management conflict.²⁹

²⁹ Diann Marsh, *Corona: The Circle City* (Encinitas, CA, 1998), 102; Alamillo, "Bitter-Sweet Communities," 209–26.

From 1937 to 1940, UCAPAWA made great inroads among agricultural workers by establishing thirty-nine locals and securing some wage increases and improvement in working and living conditions. Although a majority of farm-worker locals were centered in the San Joaquin valley, UCAPAWA also gained some support among Mexican citrus workers in Southern California. As part of their labor organizing strategy, UCAPAWA formed baseball teams throughout Southern California. In Orange, for example, the UCAPAWA Local 120 formed a baseball team that toured Southern California winning semipro baseball tournaments and discussing with others the values of unionization. According to the *UCAPAWA News*, "This local has [distinguished] itself in continuous struggle, without fear of any sort, raising high its banner against the winds."³⁰

Upon arriving in Corona in the summer of 1940, UCAPAWA organizers turned to the Athletics club for assistance in their organizing efforts. Led by CIO organizer, Alfonso Ortiz, the union distributed flyers printed in English and Spanish, announcing several meetings with employees of the Jameson Company and the Corona Foothill Company. Not only did Athletics ballplayers assist in organizing efforts, they also offered their diamond field as a meeting site for the new union. During one of their meetings, workers formulated a list of demands to present to their employers. These demands included a wage increase, full union recognition, and an eight-hour work day, with double pay on Sundays and holidays, free equipment, and transportation to the groves. Union organizers argued that Sundays and holidays were reserved for workers to attend baseball games and other leisure activities. Because spaces for union organizing were limited in this citrus-dominated town, the Athletics baseball diamond became an important meeting site for the newly formed UCAPAWA union. "The C.I.O. came into Corona to organize the workers and of course the ranchers did not want us to organize," explained former union member, Rudy Ramos. However, according to Ramos: "We used to meet on Sheridan and Grand Blvd. There used to be a baseball field where the famous Athletics played. On this ballpark is where we used to meet because it was hidden from view and away from the police."³¹

Within months of forming the Corona union, workers decided to go on strike in the early morning of 27 February 1941. Over eight hundred workers gathered at the ballpark to coordinate plans for picket line duty and to plan their next move. Once the picketing began around the packinghouses and citrus ranches, citrus growers launched a public campaign to discredit the CIO organizers as "communist agitators"

³⁰ Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque, 1987), 41–57; *UCAPAWA News*, September 1939, 10. (This newspaper can be found at Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.)

³¹ Rudy Ramos, interview by author, 5 February 1998, Corona, CA (tape recording of interview at Corona Public Library, Corona, CA), (hereafter Ramos interview); *Citrus Worker News*, June 1940 (this newspaper can be found at Corona Public Library, Corona, CA); *Corona Independent*, 22 July 1940, 5.

and called upon law enforcement officials to intervene and patrol the ballpark. The *Riverside Daily Press* reported several fights that ensued after a mass meeting: "The meeting began at the ballpark, but the crowd gathered [at] another open field due to interference by police and stool pigeons." To prevent union meetings at the ballpark, the city council passed a resolution to give more power to the police so they could designate the baseball field's surrounding areas as a "no parking zone." In response, labor organizer and Athletics manager, Marcus Uribe, led a group of workers to the city hall to protest these city council actions. Uribe presented a petition to the city council that read: "We petition the council to reconsider their undemocratic action of Tuesday last in order to prevent the office of chief of police from becoming that of a virtual dictator. . . . We ask this in order to allow the citizens of Corona, as a free people, the opportunity and the unabridged right of liberty." Although they failed to convince the city council to rescind the resolution, baseball players and union supporters joined together to publicly challenge the undue influence of citrus companies and city government on community life.³²

After the union moved their meeting site to the outskirts of town, organizer Heliodoro Medina visited *La Opinión* headquarters to urge readers to prevent Mexican strikebreakers from undermining Corona's labor movement. After several strikebreakers from the Casa Blanca barrio were detected, Medina recruited several Athletics players to contact Casa Blanca's baseball team managers to warn their players not to interfere. A few days later, Casa Blanca's workers walked out in solidarity with Corona workers. In addition, Athletics ballplayers Tony Balderas and Charles Uribe visited ballparks in Placentia, Ontario, Santa Ana, Oxnard, and San Fernando to solicit support from baseball teams. These social networks established during baseball tournament games helped spread last-minute information about the strike and cultivate working-class solidarity.³³

Corona Athletics sporting networks helped gain support among other union-sponsored baseball teams. For example, the UCAPAWA Local 120 in Orange, California, sent several members from their CIO baseball team to assist Corona organizers. While established regional networks were activated during the two-month Corona strike, it was not enough to counter the police repression and company divide-and-conquer tactics. In an effort to break the strike, citrus companies provided recreational activities for workers living in outlying ranches to prevent them from joining the picket lines. Former ranch resident Manuel Cruz remembered: "The company did not want us to come downtown because they were afraid that the [strikers] might gang up on us, so they bought us some ping pong tables, checkers, cards and entertainment, because

³² Minutes, Corona City Council, 25 February 1941, City Clerk Department, Corona City Hall, Corona, CA; *Corona Independent*, 17 February 1941, 6; *Riverside Daily Press*, 22 March 1941, 10. (This newspaper can be found at Riverside Public Library, Riverside, CA.)

³³ *La Opinión*, 13 March 1941, n.p.; *Arlington Times*, 14 March 1941 (this newspaper can be found at the Riverside Public Library, Riverside, CA); Ramos interview.

we could not go to the show." Afraid of losing their homes and jobs, ranch residents opted to stay out of the labor conflict, thus exacerbating divisions within the Mexican community.³⁴

During the strike, Mexican American women participated in the picket lines, cooked food for strikers, raised money for the strike fund, and solicited support from local businesses. According to the *Corona Independent*, "[t]hree women representing the CIO were circulating [around] city business establishments to learn whether or not they were employing union labor." A beauty parlor even was asked whether or not it was giving service to "scabs." Despite occupying the majority packinghouse positions (graders, packers, and sorters), Mexican American women were denied leadership positions within the union structure and some were discouraged by boyfriends and husbands from joining the picket lines. Alice Rodriguez remarked, "My husband did not want me to join the [picket] line so I stayed home, so when the foremen came to the house to convince me to go back to work I told him that I did not want to go against my friends." In spite of her husband's reluctance, Alice Rodriguez supported the strikers by printing flyers at home, babysitting, and providing moral support.³⁵

In front of the Jameson packinghouse, during the afternoon of 21 March, a barrage of rocks were thrown at passing police cars. The assailants broke a car window and hit a police officer on the head. Police responded by throwing gas cans into the picket line and arresting the suspected offenders. From the sidelines, Rudy Ramos, recalled the chaotic scene: "The police threw tear gas at the strikers, but they picked it up and threw it back until [the police] decided to use their stick[s] against them . . . then the people dispersed and others got arrested." The police escorted forty-nine Mexican male strikers to jail and booked them on charges of disturbing the peace, inciting a riot, unlawful assembly, and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. Those arrested included a few former Athletics baseball players. Following the arrests, the strike ended and of the several court trials, one resulted with a prison sentence. By the end of 1941, the union movement had suffered a big defeat.³⁶

Despite their participation in the labor movement, Mexican American women were excluded from union leadership positions. In effect, the union's marginalization of women reproduced male domination in the labor movement that contributed to the strike's defeat. Although intense police suppression and worker divisions orchestrated by the citrus companies played an important role, union organizers failed to incorporate women as integral leaders of the union and seemed insensitive to women's issues. Part of the difficulty in mounting a sustained challenge to racial and class oppression was the male player-workers' uncritical adoption of the central precepts of the company's definition of masculinity, which stressed acceptance of hierarchy in the home, at work, and on the playing field. Baseball clubs

³⁴ *Corona Independent*, 1 March 1941, 5; Manuel Cruz, interview by author, 14 January 1998, Corona, CA (tape recording of interview located at Corona Public Library, Corona, CA).

³⁵ *Corona Independent*, 27 February 1941, 5; Alice Rodriguez, interview by author, 27 January 1997, Corona, CA (tape recording of interview located at Corona Public Library, Corona, CA); See also Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 69–85.

³⁶ *Corona Independent*, 21 March 1941.

created a collective masculine identity that played a contradictory role in the militant labor movement.³⁷

Despite the increased popularity of baseball among second generation Mexican Americans, employers and social reformers were rarely successful in their efforts. From the perspective of employers and reformers, baseball offered an alternative to the perilous thrills of cheap amusements such as gambling, drinking, cockfighting, and other perceived antisocial activities. In their view, immigrant workers could potentially become “baseball conscious” and adopt American middle-class values of sobriety, thrift, and discipline both on and off the playing field. While some adopted some aspects of Americanism, bicultural Mexican Americans imposed multiple meanings on this national pastime sport, and transformed baseball clubs into masculine, cultural, and political spaces. Like the Cuban baseball players in Louis Pérez’s pathbreaking essay, Mexican American *peloteros* became “conscious of new meanings and mindful of [the] new possibilities” of baseball and began “to reinvent themselves self-consciously as agents of change.”³⁸

Baseball brought the Mexican community together on Sunday afternoons, at a time when companies and play reformers sought to organize and control the community’s sporting life. In the early decades of the twentieth century, American companies organized baseball clubs to potentially increase the discipline, obedience, and productivity of its immigrant workforce. Social reformers also believed that baseball would insure the ultimate assimilation and Americanization of immigrant populations. Even as some ballplayers accommodated baseball’s promotion of capitalist values and middle-class notions of masculinity that stressed discipline, aggressive independence, and acceptance of hierarchy, others resisted and imposed their own meanings on these games. For Mexican American *peloteros*, baseball matches represented more than mere athletic competitions, but within the context of unequal Mexican-white relations, they provided a venue for symbolic and real confrontations between the races. Apart from competitive sporting events, Mexican Americans politicized baseball clubs into social spaces that provided the basis for wider forms of collective action. As the case of the Corona Athletics Baseball Club demonstrates, members learned valuable leadership, networking, and organization skills that transcended the playing field and moved into the political arena. Thus, when labor relations in Corona’s citrus industry deteriorated in 1941, Corona Athletic members, turned labor organizers, activated their sporting networks and honed their organizing and leadership skills in an attempt to challenge the power of agricultural companies. Although the ballplayers’ competitive masculine behavior and leadership capabilities displayed in the playing fields and picket lines helped mount a militant challenge, they also reproduced male domination by excluding women from leadership positions, thus highlighting the limits of working-class resistance on and off the playing field.

³⁷ See Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America* (New York, 1998), 72–98.

³⁸ Louis Pérez, Jr., “Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868–1898,” *Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 500.