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TITLE: *Images of America: Mexican Americans of Wichita's North End*

AUTHOR: Anita Mendoza, José Enrique Navarro and Jay M. Price

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AUTHOR OF THE REVIEW: Andrea Faber, Kansas State University

The authors of *Images of America: Mexican Americans of Wichita's North End* tell the history of the city of Wichita, reflecting U.S. historical trends more broadly, through the lens of its Mexican American residents. The book serves in dispelling the myth of Kansas as a monolingual, white space by showing the rich diversity that has existed in Wichita since its founding in 1864. It highlights the ordinariness of Mexican American life in a middle-American town, illustrating the impact of the railroads, highways, industry, and social movements on life from the late 19th century to today. Though the primary language of the text is English, the introduction is presented in English and Spanish. The book is then organized in four chapters that guide readers through the history of Kansas's largest city from the late 19th century to the present.

The first chapter emphasizes the importance of the stockyards that opened in the 1880s on the north side of the city and the subsequent packinghouses, grain elevators, and oil refinery that attracted a diverse workforce and their families. The images of this chapter juxtapose expansive stockyards and towering industrial buildings with quaint residential streets and elegant brick school buildings that accommodated the families of the working class.

In the second chapter, the authors detail the growth of the Mexican American community in Wichita as the result of the

railroads' active recruitment of Mexican laborers and the deteriorating economic conditions in Mexico in the early 20th century. The images in this chapter focus primarily on people and communities of the time: groups of workers, church members, soldiers, sports teams, school children, friends and families pose for the camera among these pages. The authors contextualize the photographs with commentary that speaks to the community structure in place, including the role of the church and especially of the minister, who they note served a plethora of indispensable community functions. The chapter also presents policies and social norms that affected Mexican Americans during this period, such as segregation and deportation. In the Catholic school, children had their hands rapped with rulers for speaking Spanish; those who attended integrated public schools described how speaking Spanish was seen as a learning disability.

Chapter Three highlights the prosperity that characterizes the middle decades of the 20th century in the United States. Mexican American residents in Wichita were able to afford "a modest but comfortable standard of living." With the rise in access to automobiles, families began moving away from the North End, able to put more distance between their homes and the industrial complexes they worked for. The images and captions presented in this chapter exhibit evidence of the internal

conflict that many multicultural communities feel: the pull between cultural assimilation and heritage culture maintenance. This complex identity can often be seen in a photo caption of a single individual: Delfina García anglicizes her name to “Delphine” and is known as the “go-to person for tortillas in the community.” The photographs illustrate a growing diversity of employment opportunities, including the emergence of many family-owned businesses. Additionally, Mexican Americans can be seen participating in stereotypical mid-20th century American life: images reveal children at a birthday party, swimming at a community pool, and riding a tricycle. Teens listen to the jukebox and young athletes pose for team photos. Nevertheless, discrimination continued to be an issue for Mexican Americans, and the authors include images that show the presence of the Chicano and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 70s in Wichita.

The final chapter, *El Pueblo*, portrays the change in the character of Wichita’s North End as the industry jobs dissipated. The area, which had once served as the city’s industrial center, is now recognized as the multicultural district. The images show old homes and buildings that have been renovated and

repurposed since their initial construction in the early 20th century as well as modern businesses that have been established in recent years, including a taco truck, an independent insurance agency, a dress shop, a bakery, and several restaurants. The area now boasts murals and public art displays that celebrate the community’s current and historical connection to Mexican culture.

As one of many “fly-over states,” Kansas is often unjustly overlooked when discussing diversity and multicultural history in the United States. For many, “Spanish in the U.S.” brings to mind the history of the language in the Southwest, its ubiquity on the streets of New York, and its Caribbean connection in Florida. This book, however, provides evidence of Mexican Americans as integral threads in the fabric of the heartland. The images and captions provide excellent didactic material for instructors teaching Spanish in the United States as well as for Spanish language teachers who want to incorporate cultural materials that accentuate Spanish as a *domestic* language, rather than as strictly a foreign one. This book will pique the interest of history aficionados everywhere, particularly those interested in the history of the people.