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An Unladylike Strike Fashionably Clothed: Mexicana and Anglo Women Garment Workers Against Tex-Son, 1959–1963

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A conflict that rocked San Antonio from 1959 to 1963, the Tex-Son garment workers' strike was the first International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) struggle led by a Mexican American woman and the first strike in which Mexican-origin and Anglo women picketed together in Texas. Responding to the city press's focus on the violence of the strike, the women of Tex-Son strategically used Cold War-era ideologies of femininity and domesticity to revise public notions of their "unladylike" struggle. By literally refashioning themselves through their physical appearance and emphasizing their dual role as mothers and workers, the mostly Mexicana Tex-Son strikers gained tremendous support in the traditionally anti-union city of San Antonio. Situated between the end of World War II and the Chicano movement, the Tex-Son strike represents an important, transitional form of Mexican and Mexican American women's activism not yet fully explored by historians.

This is not the top-notch girl you take home to mama to marry. These girls were hard-knocks West-siders, you know, cantineras, tough broads. They were not the girls that went to Sunday school. . . . And, you have to respect them, they did good. They were survivors.¹

René Sandoval, Tex-Son employee, on the Tex-Son women strikers

On Friday, February 27, 1959, 1,000 San Antonio residents lined up outside the Tex-Son Garment Manufacturing Company to witness a confrontation between city police and 150 Mexicana

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1. René Sandoval, oral history interview with the author, March 16, 2005. Interview in the author's possession.

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and Anglo women strikers.² It was the fourth day of the strike, and fourteen company-hired taxis stood waiting at the curb to take non-striking workers home. No doubt spectators anticipated chaos equaling that of the previous day, when strikers cursing in both English and Spanish had kicked, scratched, clawed, thrown eggs, swung purses, and pulled the hair of strikebreakers exiting the factory.³ By the end of the evening, one woman had been sent to the hospital with minor head wounds, and six Mexicana strikers had been jailed for disturbing the peace and inciting a riot.⁴

On that Friday afternoon, policemen arrived in droves to keep pickets and onlookers away from the company doors. As the first woman emerged from the Tex-Son factory and was escorted by police to her car, the crowd of strikers yelled, “Hungry rats!” and “Scabs!” in Spanish.⁵ Non-strikers began to rush to cabs as pickets attacked the vehicles, shooting acid from plastic water guns and scratching the doors with knives.⁶ Three police officers struggled to restrain Ofelia Bowers, the sister of striker Lucy Treviño, after she hit a police officer in the face with her purse. Grabbing her arms and legs, police lifted Bowers off the ground, revealing her thighs for eager newspaper photographers. As *San Antonio Express* photographer Bill Goodspeed attempted to get some pictures of the struggle, Bowers screamed, “I’ll have my husband murder you if you take my picture!” Police eventually forced the two sisters into a squad car. Other officers subdued Rudy Hawkins, the husband of one worker, who had already fought off a police captain in an attempt to protect his wife from the surrounding chaos. As officers wrestled Hawkins over the hood of a squad car, a woman in the crowd of spectators shouted, “They’re killing him.” “That’s okay, Rudy,” the strike’s head organizer, Sophie Gonzales, called out as she marched calmly back and forth, holding her picket sign and

2. This study will use the following terminology: “Anglo” for white Americans of European descent, “Mexican American” for U.S.-born citizens of Mexican descent, and “Mexican” for Mexican immigrants. The term “Mexicana” will be used when the citizenship status of a Mexican-origin woman is unknown or to refer to a group composed of both Mexican American and Mexican immigrant women. “Tejana” refers to Mexican-origin women born or living in Texas.

3. “Six Women Arrested Following Strike Riot,” *San Antonio Express*, Feb. 26, 1959, p. 1.

4. “Rocks, Bottle Tossed in Violence at Strike,” in *ibid.*, Feb. 27, 1959, p. 1.

5. “S.A. Strikers Jeer Workers,” *San Antonio Light*, Feb. 27, 1959, p. 1.

6. Sandoval interview.

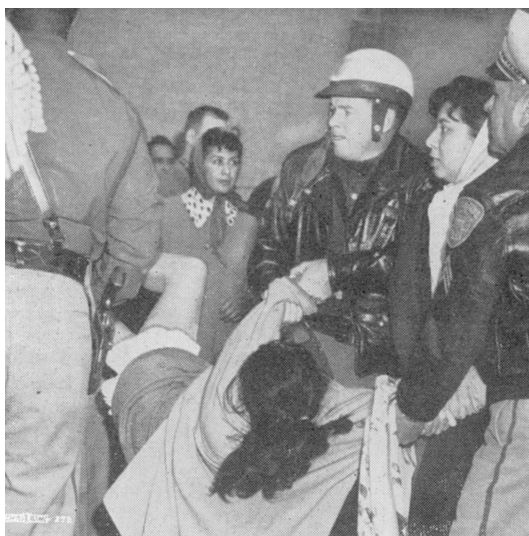


Figure 1. Tex-Son striker Ofelia Bowers being carried by arms and feet by San Antonio police, as printed in a 4-page flyer issued by the San Antonio AFL-CIO Council, *The Weekly Dispatch* [ca. 1959] (first published in the *San Antonio Light*). Courtesy, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Local 180, San Antonio, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington, Texas. Copyright Hearst Corporation. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 2. Tex-Son striker Ofelia Bowers's arrest by San Antonio police [ca. 1959] (first published in the *San Antonio Light*). Courtesy, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Local 180, San Antonio, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington, Texas. Copyright Hearst Corporation. Reprinted with permission.

chewing gum. “*No tengas miedo—don’t be afraid.*”⁷ “Keep moving. Keep off the sidewalk,” policemen grumbled to onlookers as the officers returned to pacing back and forth, rubbing their scratches and bruises. An hour later, the last of the workers had departed the factory, and spectators and police disappeared shortly after.⁸ In only a few days, the Tex-Son action had become the most unlady-like strike San Antonio had ever seen.

The actions of the Tex-Son strikers that afternoon do not fit neatly into existing narratives about gender, labor, and race relations in the 1950s, and they remind us of some critical gaps in Chicana/o historiography. The existing literature on Tejanas’ labor activism is almost exclusively limited to discussing the San Antonio pecaneshellers’ strike of 1938 and the Farah Clothing strike of 1972, with little else in between.⁹ Although historian Rodolfo Rosales once wrote that the answer to the question “Where were all the Chicanas in the 1950s?” was the picket line, the Bayard, New Mexico, “Salt of the Earth” strike remains the primary moment of 1950s Mexican American women’s activism recognized in labor history.¹⁰ A strike that rocked San Antonio

7. “Rocks, Bottle Tossed,” 1.

8. *Ibid.*; “S.A. Strikers Jeer Workers,” 1.

9. Past scholarship has addressed ethnic Mexican and other women garment workers in the Southwest who engaged in union and strike activity but has largely focused on Mexican women in California and the Farah Clothing strike of the 1970s. See Clementina Durón, “Mexican Women and Labor Conflict in Los Angeles: The ILGWU Dressmakers’ Strike of 1933,” *Aztlan*, 15 (1984), 145–161; María Gutierrez de Soldatenko, “ILGWU Labor Organizers: Chicana and Latina Leadership in the Los Angeles Garment Industry,” *Frontiers*, 23 (2002), 46–66; Douglas Monroy, “La Costurera in Los Angeles, 1933–1939: The ILGWU and the Politics of Domination,” in Magdalena Mora and Adelaida R. Del Castillo, eds., *Mexican Women in the United States: Struggles Past and Present* (Los Angeles, 1980); Lisa Schlein, “Los Angeles Garment District Sews a Cloak of Shame,” in *ibid.*; and Laurie Coyle, Gail Hershatter, and Emily Honig, “Women at Farah: An Unfinished Story,” in *ibid.* See also Jennifer Rebecca Mata, “Creating a Critical Chicana Narrative: Writing the Chicanas at Farah into Labor History” (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington State University, 2004), and Emily Honig, “Women at Farah Revisited: Political Mobilization and its Aftermath Among Chicana Workers in El Paso, Texas, 1972–1992,” *Feminist Studies*, 22 (1996), 425–452.

10. Rodolfo Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio* (Austin, Tex., 2000), 125. Some works by an emerging generation of scholars discuss the 1950s, including Ellen R. Baker, *On Strike and On Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007); Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900–1970* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001); David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley, 1995); Gina Marie Pitti, “To ‘hear about God in Spanish’: Ethnicity, Church, and Community Activism in the San

for almost four years, the Tex-Son struggle was the first International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) strike led by a Mexican American woman, and it marked the first time in Texas history that Mexicana and Anglo women workers stood together on a picket line.¹¹ Bridging long-standing cultural divides between these two communities, however, was not the only challenge strikers faced. In the heart of the right-to-work state of Texas, the city of San Antonio had historically been hostile to unions. Demographically Southwestern, San Antonio was still, as historian Richard A. Garcia has put it, "a city of deference and racial differences" and a Southern center of racism and unfair labor relations in the late 1950s.¹²

Along with offering a fresh look at this important moment in labor history, this article argues that the years of the Tex-Son strike, 1959 to 1963, marked an era in which women workers, and Mexican-origin women in particular, won support for their "unladylike" labor protests by creatively using contemporary Cold War ideologies of femininity and domesticity to their advantage. In an era of heightened gender role distinctions, women in San Antonio and elsewhere in the United States were still expected to act within certain boundaries of proper womanhood, and labor protests were deemed particularly "unladylike." However, because of their

Francisco Archdiocese's Mexican American Colonias, 1942–1965" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2003); Stephen Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton, N.J., 2003); and Ana Elizabeth Rosas, "Flexible Families: Bracero Families' Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942–1964" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 2006).

11. Irene Ledesma and Toni Marie Nelson-Herrera produced the only two theses that have addressed the Tex-Son strike in greater depth than passing mention. See Irene Ledesma, "Unlikely Strikers: Mexican American Women in Strike Activity in Texas, 1919–1974" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1992); Ledesma, "Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers' Activism, 1919–1974," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 26 (1995), 309–331; and Toni-Marie Nelson Herrera, "Constructed and Contested Meanings of the Tex-Son Garment Strike in San Antonio, Texas, 1959: Representing Mexican Women Workers" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1997). For briefer mentions of the Tex-Son strike, see Marta Cotera, *Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* (Austin, Tex., 1976), and George N. Green, "ILGWU in Texas, 1930–1970," *Journal of Mexican American History*, 1 (1971), 144–169.

12. Richard A. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929–1941* (College Station, Tex., 1991), 314. For recent scholarship on right-to-work states and campaigns, see Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, "Counter-Organizing the Sunbelt: Right-to-Work Campaigns and Anti-Union Conservatism, 1943–1958," *Pacific Historical Review*, 78 (2009), 81–118.

still inferior racial and socioeconomic status in Texas, Mexicana working-class women were hardly seen as “ladylike” to begin with by San Antonio’s Anglo community. These women strategically used their dual roles as mothers and workers to refashion their public image from that of violent Mexicanas to respectable women concerned only with the economic well-being of their families.

While the use of the theme of motherhood in social protests is nothing new to twentieth-century women’s history, this article argues that the Tex-Son strike offers a much-needed window onto Mexican American women’s experiences and labor activism in the Cold War era.¹³ Social histories of the period, including the work of Elaine Tyler May, have documented the effects of “domestic containment” and “return to the home” ideology upon white middle-class women, but they have largely neglected the lives of racialized working-class women.¹⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz’s anthology *Not June Cleaver* attempts to correct this oversight but similarly overlooks the activism of working-class Mexican-origin women.¹⁵ Although they did not fit the mold of the traditional 1950s woman—racially or economically—the Mexicana strikers of Tex-Son attempted to gain favor with the San Antonio public by wearing conservative feminine clothing, employing motherhood-focused strike rhetoric, and forming alliances with Anglo women, male unionists, and the Catholic Church. Through this “ladylike” refashioning of an initially violent strike, the Mexican-origin women who comprised the majority of ILGWU Local 180 forced San Antonio residents to rethink their original perceptions of the strike and the strikers

13. See, for example, Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque, 1987); Ruiz, “Obreras y Madres: Labor Activism Among Mexican Women,” in Adelaida R. Del Castillo, ed., *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History* (Mountain View, Calif., 1990); Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago, 1993); and Dee Garrison, “‘Our Skirts Gave Them Courage’: The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955–1961,” in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia, 1994), 201–228.

14. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988).

15. This anthology includes a chapter on Mexican American women’s involvement in the Community Service Organization (CSO) in California, but the article largely focuses on middle-class politics and concerns. Margaret Rose, “Gender and Civic Activism in Mexican American Barrios in California,” in Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver*, 177–200.

themselves. Thus, they successfully countered stereotypes of “violent Mexicans” that the mainstream city press continued to highlight for the strike’s duration.

Taking place between the end of World War II and the emergence of the Chicano movement in Texas, the Tex-Son strike also helps to bridge a historiographical gap in Chicana/o history by connecting the labor militancy of the 1930s with the later activism of the Chicana/o movements during the 1960s and 1970s. This article builds upon previous work, notably Zaragosa Vargas’s *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, to demonstrate continued connections between labor struggles and the Mexican American civil rights movement after World War II.¹⁶ By creatively balancing 1950s gendered expectations with their own labor protests, the Mexicana workers of Tex-Son staked their claim as visible members of, and contributors to, San Antonio’s civic life. It is noteworthy, however, that race and ethnicity did not play the same roles at Tex-Son that they would in Chicano movement-inspired labor struggles ten years later. Mexican-origin women strikers made no effort to highlight their racial identity during their four-year strike. Rather, with the help of ILGWU leadership, they and their Anglo co-strikers used their common identity as hard-working mothers as their strongest weapon in the fight against the Tex-Son company. Both groups of strikers were driven by economic necessity and household obligations, not by feminist ideologies current by the late 1960s. With its central theme of motherhood, Tex-Son was very much a strike of the 1950s and thus represents a different, transitional kind of post-war Mexican American activism that has yet to be fully explored.

16. Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J., 2005). For more on twentieth-century Mexican American labor history, see, for example, Mario T. Garcia, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880–1920* (New Haven, Conn., 1981); Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*; Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1998); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin, Tex., 1987); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station, Tex., 1993); Juan Gómez-Quinones, *Mexican American Labor, 1790–1990* (Albuquerque, 1994); Gilbert González, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900–1950* (Urbana, Ill., 1994); Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley, 1994); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, 1997); Garcia, *A World of Its Own*; Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*; and José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880–1960* (Urbana, Ill., 2006).

The ILGWU's move to Texas

Founded in 1900 by eleven representatives of women's garment locals in Baltimore, Newark, and New York, the ILGWU, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), first gained widespread recognition from Eastern manufacturers soon after the 1909 strike of shirtwaist makers dubbed the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand." As thousands of black and Puerto Rican women joined the union during the 1930s, the ILGWU became mostly female in membership but remained dominated by Jewish and Italian male leadership.¹⁷ The organization flirted briefly with membership in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) from 1937 to 1940 but returned to the AFL fold by the early postwar period until the eventual AFL-CIO merger in 1955.¹⁸

More than ideological conflicts within the labor movement challenged the ILGWU's structure and success. Union shops often closed and relocated to new communities. As Sol "Chick" Chaiken, the ILGWU's president from 1975 to 1986, recalled, "relocating the garment industry was not difficult since it is an industry on wheels."¹⁹ By the mid-1930s U.S. garment manufacturers realized that the Southwest offered an abundance of black and Mexicana women employable for wages lower than those paid to garment workers in the Northeast. The lack of unions—and, in some cases, intense hostility toward unions—also attracted manufacturers to the region. The ILGWU experienced a more difficult transition into the Southwest than the industry, partly because the national leadership continued sending white, male, English-speaking representatives to organize Mexican-origin, Spanish-speaking women garment workers in states like Texas.

17. This abbreviated history of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) is compiled from the North American Congress on Latin America (an independent, non-profit organization), known as NACLA, Report on the Americas, "Capital's Flight: The Apparel Industry Moves South," in Mora and Del Castillo, eds., *Mexican Women in the United States*, 95–104; Nelson-Herrera, "Constructed and Contested Meanings"; and John H. M. Laslett and Mary Tyler, *The ILGWU in Los Angeles, 1907–1988* (Inglewood, Calif., 1989), 3–4, 10–14, 17–19. For more on the ILGWU in Los Angeles, see Rose Pesotta, *Bread Upon the Waters* (New York, 1944).

18. Laslett and Tyler, *The ILGWU in Los Angeles*, 42–43.

19. Kenneth C. Wolensky, Nicole H. Wolensky, and Robert P. Wolensky, *Fighting for the Union Label: The Women's Garment Industry and the ILGWU in Pennsylvania* (University Park, Pa., 2002), 25.

Nevertheless, in the 1930s the ILGWU set down roots in Dallas, Houston, Laredo, and San Antonio, the major centers for garment work in Texas. In the spring of 1937 the union enjoyed its first success in San Antonio when Local 180, the Infants' and Children's Wear Workers, conducted its first strike against the Shirlee Frocks Company and won a twenty-cent minimum hourly wage, up from twelve to fifteen cents an hour. That victory was soon followed by contracts with the Texas Infants' Dress Company and the Juvenile Manufacturing Company.²⁰ The strikes that led to these contracts, however, stood out for their unprecedented violence between strikers and strikebreakers. Alongside the pecanshellers' strike led by Emma Tenayuca in 1938, these moments of labor militancy defined a period of intense union activity in San Antonio.²¹ ILGWU membership in Texas decreased in the 1940s, largely because of the combination of conservative national measures like the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, the red-baiting of unions, strong right-to-work laws in Texas, and a large surplus of Mexican immigrant labor. The 1950s seemed to hold more promise as organizers revived ILGWU locals in Laredo, Houston, and San Antonio and gradually recruited more members throughout the decade.²²

Next to Los Angeles, San Antonio claimed the largest Mexican American population in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.²³ World War II, the Bracero Program, and the establishment of military bases in the city drew thousands more, and by 1960 there were 243,627 Mexicans and Mexican Americans in San Antonio, making up 41.5 percent of the city's total

20. Harold Shapiro, "Workers of San Antonio, Texas, 1900–1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1952), 321–325, especially 324.

21. For more on Emma Tenayuca, see Zaragosa Vargas, "Tejana Radical: Emma Tenayuca and the San Antonio Labor Movement during the Great Depression," *Pacific Historical Review*, 66 (1997), 553–580.

22. In 1949 Andrea Martínez revived the Laredo ILGWU Local 350, which had 159 members—mostly Spanish-surnamed—as of 1956. Houston's Local 214 was comprised of a mostly Anglo membership; see folder 1, box 16, AR 127 (George and Latane Lambert Papers, 1935–1974), University of Texas Labor Archives, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas (hereafter Texas Labor Archives). See also folder 2, box 2, AR 29 (International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Local 214, Houston, Texas), in *ibid.*

23. Ledesma, "Unlikely Strikers," 27, 43; Victor B. Nelson-Cisneros, "La clase trabajadora en Tejas, 1920–1940," *Aztlán*, 6 (1975), 251; Richard A. Garcia, "Class, Consciousness, and Ideology: The Mexican Community of San Antonio, Texas, 1930–1940," *Aztlán*, 9 (1978), 28.

population.²⁴ Disenfranchised economically and politically since the nineteenth century, most Mexican-origin residents of San Antonio occupied lower-echelon industrial, domestic, service, and agricultural jobs and were largely segregated to the city's dilapidated West Side district.²⁵ Mexican American women, some of whom had been able to obtain defense industry jobs for the first time during World War II, dominated factory work forces upon reconversion.

By 1959 Mexicanas made up 90 percent of the work force at the Tex-Son Garment Manufacturing Company, a firm that produced children's clothing for distribution nationwide and was "one of the most rabidly anti-union employers in San Antonio," according to the city's AFL-CIO council secretary George Eichler.²⁶ Of the 184 employees listed on the company payroll in January 1959, 163 had Spanish surnames and 177 were women. Anglo women made up the remaining small percentage of workers in production, while approximately ten Mexican-origin men served in the shipping department.²⁷ As Southwestern states like California and Texas continued to absorb an endless stream of Mexican immigrant labor, the women of Tex-Son were both U.S. citizens and non-citizens; they ranged from teenagers supplementing their parents' wages, to single mothers, to several pairs of sisters, to married and elderly women supporting an ill or injured husband. Working conditions at Tex-Son were substandard, with poor lighting and ventilation, dirty work spaces, and below-average wages. According to a 1959 government survey, the average wage for garment

24. "Table 7.3, San Antonio's Mexican Population, 1900–2000," in Daniel D. Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin, Tex., 2002), 145.

25. Along with other cities in Texas like Dallas, Houston, and Austin, San Antonio was rigidly divided along ethnic lines. Mexican Americans, a group that complicated the black-white divide, were considered nonwhite and subjected to similar discrimination and segregation as blacks. See David Montejano, "The Demise of 'Jim Crow' for Texas Mexicans, 1940–1970," *Aztlán*, 16 (1985), 59, and Robert A. Goldberg, "Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960–1965," *Journal of Southern History*, 49 (1983), 350, 352. For a discussion of the economic and political disenfranchisement of Mexican Americans in Texas during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, and Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1920–1939* (College Station, Tex., 1984).

26. George Eichler, Secretary of San Antonio AFL-CIO Council, to all AFL-CIO locals, lodges, and auxiliaries, Dec. 23, 1960, folder 7, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives; Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, 145; Ledesma, "Unlikely Strikers," 45; Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion*, 11.

27. Sandoval interview.

workers in San Antonio was \$1.61 an hour. The women of Tex-Son, however, earned \$1.05 an hour—only slightly more than the federal minimum wage of \$1.00—for stitching, cleaning, and examining children's clothing.²⁸ Patterns of gender discrimination also defined the women's workdays; some company foremen played "favorites" and gave certain women less work, easier-to-handle fabrics, or better sewing machines.²⁹ Furthermore, male employees made an hourly wage while women were paid on a piece-rate system, which often made conditions dangerous on the factory floor.³⁰ Jesús Cantú recalled his mother, Herminia "Minnie" Cantú, a Tex-Son striker, coming home with puncture wounds from sewing machine needles running through her fingers as she rushed to finish pieces of clothing.³¹ Finally, a bottomless pool of cheap Mexican immigrant labor could easily replace any "undesirable" employees, a fact that contributed to worker instability and proved a barrier to union recruitment and growth.³²

While women may have dominated the Tex-Son factory's work force, men such as the ILGWU's president, David Dubinsky, and its Texas director, George Lambert, remained the key authority figures in the AFL-CIO union that shaped the Tex-Son struggle.³³ A Jewish immigrant from Czarist Russia, Dubinsky was known for his "powerful and obsessive personality" and employed a paternalistic style of leadership to micromanage union activity across the country.³⁴ The son of a postal worker, George Lambert had organized

28. Ledesma, "Unlikely Strikers," 54; payroll document, Jan. 1959, folder 8, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

29. John H. M. Laslett, "Gender, Class, or Ethno-Cultural Struggle? The Problematic Relationship Between Rose Pesotta and the ILGWU," *California History*, 72 (Spring 1993), 24.

30. *Ibid.*, 24.

31. Jesús Cantú, oral history interview with the author, March 17, 2005. Interview in the author's possession.

32. Nelson-Cisneros, "La clase trabajadora," 251; Garcia, "Class, Consciousness, and Ideology," 28.

33. For more on David Dubinsky, see David Dubinsky and A. H. Raskin, *A Life With Labor* (New York, 1977).

34. Wolensky, Wolensky, and Wolensky, *Fighting for the Union Label*, 22; James Isaias McCaffery, "Organizing Las Costureras: Life, Labor and Unionization Among Mexicana Garment Workers in Two Borderlands Cities, Los Angeles and San Antonio, 1933–1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1999), 81; Leyla F. Vural, "Unionism as a Way of Life: The Community Orientation of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1994), 171.

for the United Mine Workers in Bluefield, West Virginia, the Textile Workers of America in Nashville, Tennessee, and the Texas Pecan Shelling Workers' Union in San Antonio before accepting the position of Texas director of the ILGWU. Along with his wife Latane, deemed in her youth "one of North Carolina's most attractive and popular girls," George Lambert soon became an important leader and friend to the women of Tex-Son.³⁵

By January 1959 tensions at the Tex-Son factory were running high. Harold and Emanuel Franzel, the two brothers who owned the company, were well aware that women employees already in ILGWU's Local 180 wanted a new union contract. George Lambert and the Tex-Son Negotiating Committee, a group consisting of ten Mexicana and four Anglo women and headed by Local 180 president Gregoria Montalbo, had already started to recruit additional members.³⁶ Since the previous fall, the Franzels had rejected the committee's every demand and circulated a series of letters, written in both Spanish and English, warning Tex-Son employees not to join the union.³⁷ "Don't make somebody your agent who will lead you down the hard and rocky road of a strike," the first letter read, while the second one claimed, "you will give the Union a lot of power over you, your welfare, and the welfare of your family."³⁸ The negotiating committee responded with its own letter to Harold Franzel demanding higher pay, the stoppage of outsourcing to the Deep South, and benefits, including seniority and clinic services.³⁹

After a series of unsuccessful meetings with the Franzels, George Lambert and Local 180 realized that a strike would have to be the answer and continued recruiting more Tex-Son employees to the cause. Mexicana and Anglo women workers decided to

35. "North Carolina Girl Bride of Popular Bluefield Man," *Bluefield [West Virginia] Daily Telegraph* clipping, and "Longtime Labor Leader George Lambert Dies," *The Dallas Craftsman*, Aug. 23, 1974 clipping, both in folder 3, box 2, AR 30 (International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Local 180, San Antonio, Texas), Texas Labor Archives; "Oral History with George Lambert," conducted by George N. Green, Nov. 9, 1971, Dallas, Texas, OH19 (University of Texas at Arlington Oral History Collection), in *ibid.*

36. It is not clear whether the Tex-Son Negotiating Committee existed before George Lambert began organizing Local 180 or whether he helped to form it.

37. "Garment Union Strikes Here," *San Antonio Express*, Feb. 24, 1959, p. 1.

38. Emanuel Franzel to workers of Tex-Son, Jan. 30, 1959, and Harold Franzel to workers of Tex-Son, Feb. 13, 1959, both in folder 2, box 1, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives.

39. "KEEP THE WORK AT HOME!!" Open letter from the Tex-Son Negotiating Committee to Harold Franzel, Feb. 9, 1959, in *ibid.*

join or not join the strike for various reasons. Some were furious that the Franzels had become pioneers in outsourcing, sending work to Tupelo, Mississippi, where a predominantly black female work force finished clothing pieces at a cheaper rate.⁴⁰ Others were afraid or unwilling to unionize, not wanting to jeopardize their jobs and financial security. Many Mexican immigrant Tex-Son employees, fearing deportation, avoided any political activity. Very often, however, women went on strike after being encouraged by friends or family. Marcelina, who asked to be identified only by her first name, began working at Tex-Son as a teenager to support her Mexican immigrant parents and eight-member family; she followed her friends Alicia Bazan, Felipa Gonzalez, Eugenia Ortiz, and Helen Bruni onto the picket line, where she stayed for a year.⁴¹ Mary Alvarez, on the other hand, felt coerced to join by the women in Local 180, who used peer pressure and threats against those still working in the factory. "I went out [on strike] because I was afraid of them. They were mean!" Alvarez said.⁴² She was, however, drawn to Local 180 president Gregoria Montalbo, who was sensitive to some Mexicanas' lack of experience with union organizing. Known to her fellow strikers as "Goyita," Montalbo had come to Texas from a highly organized garment plant in Chicago.⁴³ Her main job became explaining the strike's purpose and the benefits of organizing to Alvarez and other workers. The 150 women recruited to ILGWU Local 180 voted unanimously to strike at 6 a.m. on February 24, 1959.⁴⁴

The strikers were not the only ones heavily invested in the struggle against Tex-Son. Since the ILGWU had already lost contracts with several other San Antonio garment firms, George Lambert knew that winning Tex-Son would be the union's last chance

40. "Workers Jeer Strikers at S.A. Plant," 3-A.

41. Marcelina, oral history interview with the author, Jan. 30, 2005. Interview in the author's possession. This interviewee requested that only her first name be used in this study.

42. Mary Alvarez, oral history interview with the author, Jan. 13, 2005. Interview in the author's possession.

43. Ledesma, "Unlikely Strikers," 159.

44. Fred Schmidt, Secretary Treasurer of the Texas State AFL-CIO, to George Lambert, folder 2, box 1, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives; "Huelga de Costureras Declarada en Esta Cd," *La Prensa*, Feb. 26, 1959, p. 24; "No Strike Violence Repeated at Tex-Son," *San Antonio Express*, Feb. 28, 1959, p. 1A.

to survive in Texas.⁴⁵ National ILGWU leadership agreed to spend more money on the strike than it had for others in the past, knowing that the Tex-Son strike had to be a victory for the sake of its workers and the union itself. To that end, the ILGWU fought hard to recruit prominent supporters like B  xar County Commissioner Albert Pe  a, Jr., who became one of the union’s staunchest advocates in 1959. “The most intense political activist throughout this period,” according to one historian, Pe  a had collaborated with the American G.I. Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) on Texas school desegregation cases and worked on behalf of San Antonio’s working-class Mexican Americans.⁴⁶ Confident that a victory against Tex-Son would result in the “rebirth of the labor movement in San Antonio,” Albert Pe  a hired his brother Richard Pe  a to serve as Local 180’s attorney.⁴⁷ Harold and Emanuel Franzel responded by hiring lawyer Theo Weiss, the president of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, who had represented several garment firms that had defeated earlier ILGWU campaigns. “[Theo Weiss] was considered the strike-breaker in Texas,” Tex-Son employee and strike supporter Ren   S  ndoval recalled, adding, “in those days . . . *Judios* [Jews] were the power structure then, and they ruled hard. . . . They were exploiting the people . . . the Mexicanos, and getting away with it.” This perceived unequal power relationship between the ethnic Mexican and Jewish populations of San Antonio would be one line of difference drawn by some pickets against the Tex-Son factory throughout the strike.⁴⁸

45. Ledesma, “Unlikely Strikers,” 160.

46. Albert Pe  a, Jr., oral history interview conducted by Jos   Angel Gutierrez, July 2, 1996, Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) 15, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Library. Records show that neither the American G.I. Forum nor the League of United Latin American Citizens became involved in or lent support to the Tex-Son strike.

47. “Striking Alamo City Union Solicits Funds in Area,” *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, March 30, 1959, in “Clippings, Tex-Son Strike—Feb.–July, 1959,” folder 1, box 2, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives; “Unionists Parade Demonstrates Support to Tex-Son Workers,” *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, March 20, 1959, p. 1.

48. Jewish and Lebanese immigrants ran many small manufacturing plants in Texas, but a history of Jewish activism on behalf of labor in San Antonio does exist for the 1930s. In response to accusations of outsourcing, the Franzels used Dubinsky’s and George Lambert’s association with the Socialist Party to portray the Tex-Son strikers as subversives in the McCarthy era.

On the Tex-Son line: Conflict, cooperation, and creativity

As the first Texas labor strike in which Mexicana and Anglo women picketed together, the Tex-Son strike raised long-standing racial issues in San Antonio at the same time that it seemed to erase them.⁴⁹ Unlike Chicano movement strikes of the late 1960s and 1970s, race and ethnicity were not necessarily the most salient identities on the Tex-Son picket line. In fact, new friendships, kinship networks, and signs of trust appeared as Mexicana and Anglo women shared picket duties, rides to and from the factory, meals, and gossip. “We never had any problems,” Marcelina said. “There was *buen amistad* and *intima amistad* [good and close friendship] between the Anglo and Mexican American women strikers.”⁵⁰ As one of several young girls involved in the strike, Marcelina remembered older women in the group shielding her from much of the strike’s initial violence.⁵¹ Mary Alvarez remembered, “Everybody was like family, the whites and the Mexicans.”⁵²

This interethnic cooperation, however, formed in contrast to intraethnic conflicts that erupted between Mexicana strikers and strikebreakers, whom unionists termed scabs. Anything but homogeneous in the late 1950s, San Antonio’s Mexican-origin community was divided along lines of class, nativity, citizenship, and political outlook. Both Mexican immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican American women made up the group of strikebreakers at Tex-Son, but the former were most explicitly targeted by strikers for accepting lower wages than the company already paid. Disappointed by their strikebreaking co-ethnics, Mexicana Tex-Son strikers physically lashed out and became victims of violence themselves. On January 24, 1960, almost one year after the strike had begun, picket Janie Lozano was struck on the head with an iron bar by a Mexicana strikebreaker. The local press captured Lozano holding her bandaged forehead, squinting through the blood streaming over her eyes, down her face, and onto her clothing. Along with Janie Lozano, police arrested three strikers and three non-strikers—all Mexicana—for disturbing the peace.⁵³ Beyond the factory doors,

49. Ledesma, “Unlikely Strikers.”

50. Marcelina interview.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Alvarez interview.

53. “Violence Erupts In Tex-Son Strike,” *San Antonio Express*, Jan. 24, 1960, p. 1.

non-strikers reported threats of bodily harm and attacks on their homes. One Tex-Son employee reported receiving anonymous telephone threats before his house was set on fire. Julia Criado received similar calls, warning that “she’d end up in a hospital and her house would be burned down” if she crossed the picket line. Shotgun blasts shattered windows in the home of Jacob Flores, a long-time worker at Tex-Son.⁵⁴ While rumors spread that the Tex-Son Company was the real culprit behind the attacks, these incidents widened the class, citizenship, and political divides that already characterized San Antonio’s Mexican and Mexican American community.⁵⁵ Individual reasons for striking or not striking—financial security, fear of deportation, a family’s strong union tradition, or simply following the lead of friends or relatives—often overrode ethnic ties.

Soon, San Antonio’s English-language press began to single out the Mexicana strikers of Tex-Son as a violent class that needed to be “contained” by authorities. The two largest papers, the *San Antonio Express* and *San Antonio Light*, suggested that the women had not only transgressed their prescribed gender roles through violence but had also reaffirmed the Anglo community’s long-standing racial stereotypes and expectations of the city’s Mexican population.⁵⁶ Ignacio Lozano’s newspaper *La Prensa* [The Press] served much of San Antonio’s Spanish-speaking community, but it did not allow the Tex-Son women to speak for themselves, focusing instead on the strike’s violent incidents. The city’s Catholic newspaper, *The Alamo Messenger*, published no articles covering the Tex-Son strike.

George Lambert and Local 180 quickly realized they had to take action to spread their message and remedy their public image. Through the city’s labor paper, the *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*,

54. “Rocks, Bottle Tossed,” 2A; “Threat in Strike Claimed,” *San Antonio Light*, Feb. 26, 1959, p. 1; “Shotguns Blast Strikers’ Homes,” *San Antonio Express*, March 8, 1959, p. 8A.

55. Cantú interview; Richard A. Garcia, “The Making of the Mexican American Mind, San Antonio, Texas, 1929–1941: A Social and Intellectual History of an Ethnic Community” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Irvine, 1980), 159. No Anglo women responded to my requests for interviews, and I was thus not able to discuss intraethnic conflicts within San Antonio’s Anglo community during the Tex-Son strike.

56. Nelson-Herrera, “Constructed and Contested Meanings,” 41–42. For further explanation of the historical roots behind such notions about Mexican Americans, see Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, and Arnolfo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821–1900* (Austin, Tex., 1983).



Figure 3. Tex-Son striker Janie Lozano with head wound in San Antonio [1960] (photograph first published in *La Prensa*). Courtesy, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Local 180, San Antonio, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington, Texas. Copyright Hearst Corporation. Reprinted with permission.

the Tex-Son strikers responded to press representations of themselves and their struggle.⁵⁷ “A victory in our strike at Tex-Son will not only help us. . . . Our strike victory will also help you and every other citizen of San Antonio by making our City more prosperous,”

57. For more, see Nelson-Herrera, “Constructed and Contested Meanings,” and Ledesma, “Unlikely Strikers,” 10–12.

one announcement read.⁵⁸ By not centering their arguments around race or gender, but rather on the desire to better working conditions for the larger community, the Tex-Son strikers sought to show that theirs was a civic struggle that could be supported by all San Antonio residents. By making their strike about the wider community, and not just garment workers, Local 180 hoped to legitimate itself and gain essential popular support in a traditionally anti-union city.

In addition to fighting back through the labor press, Local 180 used dress and physical appearance to send a message of respectability to the public and to counter any accusations that the strike had transgressed acceptable gender boundaries. As the strike's most visible leader, ILGWU organizer Sophie Gonzales played a major role in reconstructing public notions of the labor protest and its Mexican American participants. Born in 1920 in Von Orme, Texas, Gonzales had moved to San Antonio as a teenager and found work in a sweater factory, where she became aware of the difficult conditions confronting women garment workers. In 1949 her brother, a member of the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butchers of America Union, encouraged her acceptance of an organizer's position with the Texas ILGWU, making her the first Mexican American woman to be hired for the job.⁵⁹ Unlike her white predecessors in the ILGWU, Gonzales's gender and ethnicity positively influenced her interactions with Tex-Son's predominantly Mexicana work force.⁶⁰ With ten years of labor organizing under her belt, Gonzales proved ready to counter any doubts that San Antonio had about the striking women, especially those who

58. "A Message from Local International Ladies Garment Workers," *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, Feb. 27, 1959, p. 1.

59. Ledesma, "Unlikely Strikers," 168–169; Irene Ledesma, "Confronting Class: Comment on Honig," *Journal of Women's History*, 9 (1997), 160. It is necessary to place Sophie Gonzales in history as the first Latina organizer of the ILGWU. Scholars have only acknowledged the first Latina ILGWU organizer in Los Angeles, Christina Vasquez, who was hired in 1977. Laslett, "Gender, Class, or Ethno-Cultural Struggle?" 39.

60. The ILGWU organizers who were sent to the Southwest were initially mostly white, male, and spoke only English. During the 1930s the ILGWU began placing Spanish-speaking Anglo women organizers in Texas, but their relationships with Mexicana unionists remained tenuous. One ILGWU organizer, Rebecca Taylor, had great difficulty in recruiting and keeping Tejana members in her locals due to her "openly expressed . . . contempt for Mexicans" and eventually left the ILGWU to take a job with Tex-Son management. See Blackwelder, *Women of the Depression*, 146, and Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, 129.

were Mexicana and already deemed “unladylike” because of their race.⁶¹

Attractive and professional, Gonzales immediately captured the attention of San Antonio reporters. A few weeks after the strike began, the *Express* published an article about Gonzales’s organizing abilities that focused heavily on her physical appearance. “At 37 she has a son, 13, and looks like she just broke her thirtieth birthday,” reporter Marco Gilliam wrote. He continued, “A large but well proportioned woman with tight black hair and high school girl eyes, ‘Sophie’ gets along great with all the policemen.... But, she doesn’t hesitate to stick up for the strike or a striker.”⁶² Using standards of beauty to her advantage when making the case for the Tex-Son workers, Sophie Gonzales came across favorably to *Express* readers as a strong defender of the union but also a peacekeeper in the conflict. The San Antonio press also took an interest in her home life and in how her family had been affected by her work. “I’m keeping up at home with my husband’s help,” Gonzales told the *Express*. “He’s all for my work. He says, ‘Get in there and give ‘em h—.’”⁶³ With a husband and young son who supported her activism outside the home, Sophie Gonzales offered reassurance to the San Antonio public that women unionists could remain capable wives and mothers and that the strikers’ use of violence had been necessary to protect their homes and their families.

Recognizing the important role of physical appearance in the strike, Gonzales led the Tex-Son picket line every day in high heels, a conservative blouse, and a fashionably long skirt, modeling common understandings of proper 1950s womanhood for the press, police, and San Antonio public.⁶⁴ Following her lead, other strikers dressed similarly, refashioning public meanings of the strike and

61. Works that discuss the relationship between racialization and Anglo American perceptions of Mexican American womanhood include De Leon, *They Called Them Greasers*; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*; Ledesma, “Texas Newspapers and Chicana Workers’ Activism”; Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); and Elizabeth Escobedo, “The Pachuca Panic: Sexual and Cultural Battlegrounds in World War II Los Angeles,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 38 (2007), 133–156.

62. “Started As Sweater Girl: S.A. Strikers Take Cues From Sophie, Organized Organizer,” *San Antonio Express*, March 14, 1959, p. 2A.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Clothing has been shown to have played a part in other women’s labor protests. See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South,” *Journal of American History*, 78 (1986), 354–382, and Deirdre

of themselves.⁶⁵ Rather than challenge traditional forms of dress and gender norms, the Tex-Son strikers used them to their advantage, showing the San Antonio public that they were anything but threats to the social order. Whether or not they intended to de-emphasize their ethnic identity through their clothing, Mexicana pickets showed themselves to be women first, not members of a specific racial community.

Over the next few months, Sophie Gonzales continued to serve as a cultural mediator between the mostly Mexicana Tex-Son strikers and San Antonio's larger Anglo community. For example, aware of rumors that some Mexicana sewing machine operators working on Tex-Son's third floor believed in voodoo, Sophie Gonzales showed no concern when a glass bottle filled with a flour-like substance suddenly crashed at strikers' feet, leaving a four-inch doll that pickets concluded was an effigy of her because of its signature black skirt, white blouse, sunglasses, and parasol. A few days later, another "Sophie" doll fell from the third floor with several long strings drawn tightly around its neck. The San Antonio press soon seized on the story, but she laughed it off, telling reporters, "Voodoo is for the birds."⁶⁶ Her quick public dismissal of the incident was a clever move. By presenting an unconcerned and even amused attitude to the San Antonio press, she discouraged Anglo readers from stereotyping all Mexican-origin women as superstitious.

Meanwhile, Local 180 president Gregoria Montalbo was attempting to gain religious support for the Tex-Son strike by issuing a plea in the form of a letter to all clergy members of San Antonio. Affirming the strikers' religiosity and sense of mission, she wrote, "this unnecessary and deplorable strike at Tex-Son . . . is poisoning labor-management relations in San Antonio to the detriment of all the people, including those who make up your congregation."⁶⁷ By

Clemente, "Striking Ensembles: The Importance of Clothing on the Picket Line," *Labor Studies Journal*, 30 (2006), 1–15.

65. Nelson-Herrera, "Constructed and Contested Meanings," 90.

66. "Sophie Says Hex For Birds," *San Antonio Light*, July 19, 1959. Behind the scenes, Gonzales and Gregoria Montalbo did take frightened strikers to a *curandero*, or faith healer, for comfort. On a humorous note, it was later found that the *curandero* was actually union member Carmen Browne's plumber. Among other things, Browne had coached him to tell the women, "Don't break the strike." Green, "ILGWU in Texas," 148.

67. Gregoria Montalbo to the Clergy of San Antonio, "To All Members of the Clergy, San Antonio, Texas," March 11, 1959, folder 2, box 1, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives.



SOPHIE GONZLES AND DOLL
Union organizer won't let voodoo get her down.

Figure 4. Tex-Son strike leader Sophie Gonzales with voodoo doll; newspaper clipping from the *San Antonio Light*, July 19, 1959. Courtesy, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, Local 180, San Antonio, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington, Texas. Copyright Hearst Corporation. Reprinted with permission.

describing the strikers as “children of God” who had suffered being “pushed, manhandled, thrown into jail and otherwise abused, although all they seek is fair dealing and justice from their employer,” Montalbo presented the larger argument that the Tex-Son struggle was one that, if lost, would harm the larger San Antonio community. One clergyman, thirty-seven-year-old Father Sherrill Smith, was already convinced this was true.⁶⁸ Born in Chicago, Smith had been living in San Antonio for ten years and had just started serving Mission Espada and its Mexican American constituency when the Tex-Son strike began. “I was the first priest in the street . . . for the garment workers. . . . [They] were astounded . . . [since] they never, never heard of a priest out on the street with them,” he remembered. Along with the fact that liberal Archbishop Robert E. Lucey supported the garment workers’ cause—a reaction very different from that of the Catholic Church to Emma Tenayuca’s pecaneshellers’ strike twenty years before—Smith sided with Local 180 because he recognized San Antonio’s “unrelenting” hostility toward unions.⁶⁹ “‘Union’ was a bad word [in San Antonio],” he said, and suggested that the Franzels did not negotiate with the ILGWU because other employers would “have razed another employer if he had had to give in to the union.” Although Smith received letters from some city residents complaining that his proper place was in the pulpit and not the street, Smith visited Tex-Son workers’ homes and persuaded some to join the strike.⁷⁰

Father Smith also made it clear in public demonstrations that the Catholic Church supported Local 180. In March 1959 labor leaders from across San Antonio held a parade in support of the Tex-Son strikers; it began at the Labor Temple, where the ILGWU offices were located, and ended in front of the Alamo.⁷¹ Smith and eighty-six men, including communications workers, machinists, butchers, painters, electricians, brewery workers, and firefighters, marched in step with the Tex-Son women.⁷² Although the strikers themselves had not chosen the Alamo as the site for their demonstration, it may

68. Sherrill Smith, oral history interview with the author, March 18, 2008. Interview in the author’s possession.

69. Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights*, 124.

70. Sherrill Smith, “A priest remembers: San Antonio’s ‘Lace Mantilla,’” *Alamo Messenger*, undated, p. 2; Smith interview.

71. “Union Parade,” *San Antonio Express*, March 5, 1959, p. 1A.

72. Eichler to Dubinsky, undated, folder 2, box 1, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives.

have done them good in the eyes of many San Antonio residents who viewed the famed fortress as the ultimate symbol of Texan courage. Today, it seems highly ironic that the mostly Mexicana Local 180 would link its labor struggle with a prominent symbol of Anglo Texan valor and mythmaking. At the time, however, the labor leaders' plan to pause at the monument allowed the strikers, consciously or not, to continue fashioning a positive image for their strike and ingratiating themselves with the city's Anglo community. Unlike their more militant counterparts who might have asserted the actual Mexican victory at the Alamo, the Mexicana strikers of Tex-Son provided further evidence that they were "safe" Mexicans without an explicit racial message.⁷³ In front of the Alamo, Smith hopped on the back of a pickup truck to address the crowd of strikers and supporters. "Remember, the fighting is to be done over the bargaining table, not here in the streets," he said, urging the strikers to be "peaceful and quiet" in their demonstrations.⁷⁴ The *San Antonio Light* covered the parade, commenting that "the priest had a tranquilizing effect on the strikers. . . . [I]t was the quietest day since the strike started."⁷⁵ Despite their support from organized labor, the Tex-Son strikers still had to contend with a city press that viewed them as inherently raucous and improper women.

Mother Is On Strike: Local 180's use of maternal rhetoric and strategy

While they continued dressing and speaking about their strike as respectable 1950s women, the Tex-Son strikers did not hesitate to perform highly visual acts to get San Antonio's attention. Dressed in homemade red jackets, the women began passing out leaflets in front of San Antonio stores, initiating a consumer and merchant boycott against Tex-Son.⁷⁶ The Franzels had continued

73. A major tourist attraction of San Antonio, the Alamo continues to perpetuate the myth of Anglo victory and superiority while profoundly neglecting the contributions of native Tejanos to the battle, many of whose names are absent from plaques inside the building.

74. "Other Unions Join Strikers in Parade," *San Antonio Light*, March 2, 1959, p. 1; "Church Support: Strikers Peaceful," in *ibid.*, March 2, 1959, p. 1.

75. *Ibid.*

76. "Garment Workers Give Tex-Son Horse Laugh," *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, Oct. 2, 1959, p. 1; George Lambert to Fred Siems (memo), "Tex-Son Strike—Store Program," June 12, 1960, folder 7, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives. In later

outsourcing work, not only to Mississippi but also to Alabama and other cities in Texas.⁷⁷ The strikers advertised this fact to convince the San Antonio public that Tex-Son and other anti-union employers were threatening the entire city's economic well-being. Across the country—in a “tiny-tot” shop in the state of Washington, a department store in Nebraska, a dry-goods merchant in Illinois, and a Sears Roebuck store in Indiana—other Tex-Son buyers were agreeing not to re-order goods.⁷⁸ Donations poured in from male union members all over Texas, which, along with additional money raised by the strikers themselves, totaled more than \$10,000. An embarrassed ILGWU responded by beginning to pay strikers benefits of twenty dollars per week.⁷⁹

In addition, although Local 180 was made up of women of all ages, the strike team soon began framing its struggle specifically around the theme of motherhood to gain popular support.⁸⁰ An extremely effective piece of strike propaganda was a five-minute film titled *Mother Is On Strike*. It featured footage of strikers, their children, and union staff members in action while a narrator described the unsatisfactory work conditions at Tex-Son. Set to music from the movie *The Ten Commandments*, the film was screened in and around San Antonio and was recognized at the International Labor Film Festival in Stockholm, Sweden, for being one of the most graphic labor films ever made.⁸¹ The strikers also took advantage of the recent rise of television. For instance, on July 20, 1959, when San Antonio police arrested twenty-one strikers and George

decades the United Farm Workers would make the boycott a centerpiece in their union strategy of engaging consumers on matters of rural poverty.

77. Montalbo and the Tex-Son Strike Committee to fellow workers, Sept. 22, 1959, folder 7, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

78. “Labor All Over U.S. Rallies to Support Strikers at Tex-Son,” *Justice/Justicia*, May 1, 1959.

79. List of Contributors to Emergency Strike Relief Fund, April 1, 1959–April 18, 1959, folder 2, box 1, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives; Green, “ILGWU in Texas,” 149.

80. Nelson-Herrera, “Constructed and Contested Meanings,” 73, and Ledesma, “Unlikely Strikers,” 160.

81. Note describing film, folder 8, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives; “Tears, Cheers, Cake Cutting, Mark ILGWU Strike 2nd Anniversary,” *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, March 3, 1961, p. 4; Peter Nadash, Director of Local 180's Retailer and Consumer Information Committee to all local unions and lodges (memo), folder 7, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives; memo describing *Mother Is On Strike* film, folder 8, in *ibid*. The film is listed as being housed in the University of Texas at Arlington's Texas Labor Archive, but neither I nor the staff was able to find a copy of the film in the archive's holdings.

Lambert in front of Joske's Department Store for violating the Landrum-Griffin Act, the arrested unionists argued their cause in front of nearby television cameras.⁸² In a letter written to her friend Rosalind Chaiken, the wife of future ILGWU president Sol Chaiken, Latane Lambert marveled at the strikers' flair for public relations:

The morale of what I call [George] Lambert's little television stars has never been higher. Some of the strikers seem to have a sixth sense about the impending arrival of the cameras. I bet there has been more column inches in the newspapers and more time on radio and TV about this strike than any other strike in history in San Antonio.⁸³

Print media proved equally important. After the first week of the strike, the ILGWU printed nearly 100,000 copies of a pamphlet titled "OUTRAGE" to publicize the Tex-Son strike nationwide.⁸⁴ The front page read, "Throwback To Terrible Thirties—OUTRAGE in San Antonio: Defenseless Women Manhandled on Garment Workers Picket Line at Tex-Son Factory." Pictures of Ofelia Bowers being restrained by police accompanied the headline, and a copy of striker Helen Martínez's weekly paycheck of \$9.12 appeared on the third page. With these wages, read the article, Martínez could barely support her four young children.⁸⁵

The pamphlet certainly generated outrage among many men, but not for the same reasons. First, not all husbands, fathers, or brothers approved of the Tex-Son women's actions on the picket line. Mary Alvarez remembered that her husband, a postal worker, disliked her working outside the home and "didn't support me or not support me [in the strike]. He said to be careful." When asked how her fiancé felt about her strike involvement, Marcelina

82. "Police Here Arrest 21 Women Strikers," *San Antonio Express*, July 20, 1959, and "S.A. Handbill Ban Declared Invalid," *San Antonio Light*, July 21, 1959, both in folder 1, box 2, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives. The Landrum-Griffin Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1959, attempted to regulate internal union affairs but also restricted particular activities like secondary boycotting, of which the Tex-Son strikers were accused when they picketed department stores selling Tex-Son clothing in addition to the Tex-Son Garment Manufacturing Company itself.

83. Latane Lambert to Rosalind Chaiken, July 21, 1959, folder 4, box 6, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

84. "Tex-Son Garment Factory Workers Strikers Determined To Win," *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, May 29, 1959, p. 1.

85. Article in *Justice/Justicia*, April 1, 1959, folder 1, box 2, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

replied, “*No le gustaba muy bien* [He did not like it very much] . . . he told me ‘*Deja la huelga*’ [Leave the strike].” Once she married, Marcelina left the picket line after a year of striking.⁸⁶ Sophie Gonzales herself recalled that her second husband “started getting jealous because I [had] to work with a lot of men. . . . [O]ne day he just came up and he said, ‘Well it’s either me or your job.’”⁸⁷ Some strikers, however, became models for younger female relatives. Thirteen-year-old Maria Tijerina admired her aunt Trinidad Rodriguez’s decision to join the Tex-Son strike, an unexpected act considering that Rodriguez was the sole breadwinner for herself and her ill husband.⁸⁸

On the other hand, Local 180’s motherhood propaganda galvanized a noticeable amount of male support locally and across the border. A Mexican paper described the violence against the Tex-Son strikers as “savagery against women” and called for public support of the struggle.⁸⁹ The Nuevo Laredo local of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos, an international labor union that operated in Mexico and the Southwestern United States, hung a banner at the Texas-Mexico border asking Mexicans not to buy Tex-Son clothing on the other side.⁹⁰ At the Tex-Son factory itself, René Sandoval and the other men of the shipping department joined the picket line for a few hours per day on a regular basis. “They were the real heroes, the women. Us guys, we were all there, but . . . it was strictly a women’s thing,” Sandoval remarked.⁹¹ In March 1959 a group of bus drivers, firefighters, and male representatives from the International Union of Brewery Workers joined the 125 Tex-Son strikers in marching and jeering at strikebreakers.

86. Marcelina interview.

87. Ledesma, “Comment on Honig,” 161. Interestingly, the two Tejana leaders of Tex-Son did not fit the mold of the traditional housewife or nuclear family. Sophie Gonzales finally divorced her husband because he could not accept her constant association with male unionists. Gregoria Montalbo was married but had no children. Ledesma, “Unlikely Strikers,” 257–258.

88. Maria Tijerina, e-mail correspondence to the author, Feb. 22, 2005.

89. Ledesma, “Unlikely Strikers,” 177.

90. Folder 59148, box 2, AR 278, Series 15 (Texas AFL-CIO Photographs, 1958–1972), Texas Labor Archives. While many Mexicans supported the 150 strikers of Tex-Son, one Mexican paper criticized Confederación Trabajadores Mexicanos leader Pedro Perez Ibarra for being a “troublemaker” and embarrassing Mexican officials at a time when non-intervention seemed the best international policy. Ledesma, “Unlikely Strikers,” 174.

91. Sandoval interview.

“They were showing support, it made us feel good,” Mary Alvarez recalled.⁹² In a way, Local 180’s propaganda found an effective middle ground, affirming the power of its women members but still encouraging men to enter as their supporters and, to some extent, their defenders.

The Tex-Son strike team members continued to use their social identities as women and mothers to gain support for their cause.⁹³ Since most, if not all, of the women worked out of economic necessity rather than a desire for personal empowerment or liberation, motherhood explained both why they worked and why they struck. Soon, strikers like Helen Martínez began to bring their children to the picket line to underscore their economic struggle to care for their families properly. Carrying signs reading “If You Help Mom to Win Our Strike, You’ll Win the Thanks of This Union Tyke!” and “Low Pay and Layoffs, Jimminy Cricket! That’s Why I’m Helping My Mama Picket,” Martínez’s four children and others softened the strikers’ image.⁹⁴ At the same time the signs’ use of colloquialisms worked to neutralize, and even negate, Mexican women’s ethnicity by using the language of the Anglo world to gain onlookers’ sympathy. Along with allowing Tex-Son workers to emphasize that they struck in the interest of establishing more stable homes, the presence of children counteracted impressions that union women, particularly Mexicanas, were guilty of neglecting their families and proper gender roles.

Seeking to present themselves in culturally acceptable ways, the Tex-Son strikers made clear attempts to cross over the Anglo-Mexican racial divide and emphasize that their fight was one to be won by, and for, all San Antonio families. One flyer, printed in both English and Spanish, featured a picture of a Mexicana striker and her son. “For OUR children’s sake, please don’t buy Tex-Son clothing for YOUR children until our strike is settled on fair terms,” it read. On the reverse side was a letter written to the children of San Antonio from Helen Martínez’s youngest son, Raymond, pleading,

92. Alvarez interview.

93. During the Cold War period, other groups of women used motifs of motherhood and womanhood as they overtly challenged authority. See May, *Homeward Bound*, 218–219; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*; Garrison, ““Our Skirts Gave Them Courage””; and *Salt of the Earth* (film, directed by Herbert J. Biberman, 1954).

94. Photograph of Helen Martínez and her children on the picket line; in folder 8, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.



Figure 5. Tex-Son striker Helen Martínez and her four children. San Antonio. Courtesy, George and Latane Lambert Papers, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Library, Arlington, Texas. Copyright Texas AFL-CIO.

“Please ask your mama not to buy tex son [sic] clothes for you till we win the strike.”⁹⁵ Children became an even greater focus around the holidays. In December 1959 the Houston ILGWU Local 214, having seen the film *Mother Is On Strike* the month before, “adopted” a Tex-Son striker’s child for Christmas and purchased gifts for the six-year-old boy.⁹⁶ Such representations of working-class motherhood allowed the Tex-Son strikers to emphasize their dual struggle for labor and civil rights in San Antonio, while appearing non-threatening in their desire to provide for their families. By bringing the separate spheres of home and work together, the strikers seemed to suggest that the boundaries between these two worlds—public and private, work and home, male and female—could be negotiated despite contemporary notions of femininity and domesticity. In fact, they appropriated these notions and used them creatively to their advantage.

The Tex-Son strike continued sporadically to make the front pages of the *San Antonio Express* and *San Antonio Light* throughout the summer of 1959, but most articles continued to link the strikers with incidents of violence. When Frank Cortez, a seventeen-year-old Tex-Son employee, was shot in the neck as he walked along West Commerce Street, city police did not directly accuse any Tex-Son pickets, but the *Express* played up the possibility.⁹⁷ Later, a nineteen-year-old white woman told police and reporters that several strikers struck her in the chest with an unknown object, inflicting a bruise, when she attempted to enter Tex-Son in hopes of finding a job.⁹⁸ What the local press chose not to cover was the daily grind of the strike. Most days proved uneventful and monotonous as strikers walked the picket line from early morning to late evening. The unbearable heat of San Antonio’s summers did not help the strikers’ morale, and neither did their small weekly benefit checks from the ILGWU. As time passed, individual women had no choice but to seek out other jobs, and most ended up waiting tables at beer joints and drive-ins, baby-sitting, or selling products

95. Flyer, “Letter to Your Children,” folder 2, box 1, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives.

96. “Minutes, 1958–1963,” folder 9, box 2, AR 29, in *ibid.*; “ILGWU Locals To Be Santas,” *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, Dec. 11, 1959, p. 1.

97. “Tex-Son Aide Shot,” *San Antonio Express*, Aug. 17, 1959, folder 2, box 2, AR 30, Texas Labor Archives.

98. “Woman Attacked at Struck Plant,” *San Antonio News*, June 2, 1959, p. 7A.

door-to-door. A few managed to evade the blacklist and obtain jobs at other garment shops, but these one-dollar-an-hour positions seldom lasted over two weeks. Two Anglo women, Blanche Grant and Adelia Fine, even attempted returning to work at Tex-Son but were run out by those inside the factory.⁹⁹ Despite the fact that the strikers' boycott of Tex-Son goods had resulted in lower orders and shipments, the Franzels continued to outsource work and hire Mexican women from across the border at even lower wages than the company originally paid.

Tensions between strikers and union leadership also influenced the strike's strength and direction. By September 1960 the women of Local 180 were beginning to suspect George Lambert and Sophie Gonzales of hiding information. In a letter to ILGWU President David Dubinsky, the strikers wrote:

it is very clear to us that our Union officials here are . . . not letting us know what is going on in this strike and are very cold and disinterested towards us. . . . [M]any of the members are becoming disillusioned [*sic*] with the bleak prospects of a victory, which seem to be very far off. . . . [W]e are completely and absolutely confused, and we donot [*sic*] know whether to remain in the Union or not, any longer.¹⁰⁰

In truth, George Lambert, Gonzales, and the ILGWU had begun to lose faith in the Tex-Son strike. Weekly benefit checks were beginning to seem too costly for a locale so far removed from union strongholds in New York and the Northeast. By late November 1960 the ILGWU had pulled its weekly strike benefits and abandoned the struggle.¹⁰¹ Angered, County Commissioner Albert Peña, Jr., urged Dubinsky to reconsider financing the strike, and he used his editorial column in the *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch* to discuss the eighty remaining strikers and the significance of their efforts: "I have known many men with less courage and few men with more courage. If the Tex-Son strike dies, it will die hard—to the last agonizing breath. And if the Tex-Son strike dies, every man and woman in the labor

99. The anti-union climate of San Antonio and the collusion between local garment manufacturers resulted in Tex-Son strikers being refused work at other garment factories or being fired once employers learned of their strike activity. Sandoval interview; "About Tex-Son," George Lambert to Siems (memo), Oct. 2, 1960, folder 5, box 15, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

100. Local 180 to Dubinsky, Sept. 20, 1960, folder 7, box 25, in *ibid.*

101. Folder 2, box 21, in *ibid.*

movement in San Antonio will die a little too.”¹⁰² Franz Daniels, the assistant organizing director of the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C., agreed, affirming that the Tex-Son women “cannot afford to lose their battle because thousands of unorganized workers throughout the country were looking to them for guidance.”¹⁰³ The second anniversary of the strike came and went, with the Tex-Son strike team traveling across Texas and Oklahoma, speaking at meetings and asking for contributions. “That’s when we started going downhill. . . . We felt like we were really just begging for money,” remembered René Sandoval.¹⁰⁴ Donations continued to arrive from loyal supporters, including other ILGWU locals, railway workers, motion picture operators, and the United Sugar Workers, but dismayed workers began to leave the picket line.¹⁰⁵

Other challenges faced Local 180 that spring. To the extent that Sophie Gonzales’s strong personality had attracted support for the strike, her leadership style had nevertheless rubbed some picketers the wrong way. In a letter to Dubinsky and Fred Siems, striker Gertrude Hartung accused Gonzales of being self-interested, divisive, and controlling. She wrote:

As you know most of our people are Latin American. These people need to be taught and need a leader who is interested in their problems and in teaching them unity. . . . [Miss Gonzales] is always pitting one member against another. . . . [She] doesn’t have the vagueist [*sic*] idea what the union represents or what it stands for. . . . [Her] small success in organizing can be credited, I feel, to her good looks and figure.¹⁰⁶

Implying the presence of a racial divide between Anglo strikers, including herself, and their Mexicana counterparts who still “need[ed] to be taught” certain organizing skills, Hartung revealed a tension within the seemingly unified Local 180. While no Mexican-origin women interviewed expressed negative feelings about Sophie Gonzales, René Sandoval admitted having mixed feelings about her leadership. “She was no César Chávez, let’s put it that way,” he said. “She

102. Albert Peña, Jr., “If Tex-Son Strike Dies, Every San Antonio Man Dies a Little Too,” *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, Dec. 9, 1960, p. 1.

103. “Striking Alamo City Union Solicits Funds in Area.”

104. Sandoval interview.

105. “Locals Send Help to Tex-Son Pickets,” *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, Jan. 20, 1961, p. 4.

106. Gertrude Hartung to Dubinsky, March 9, 1961, folder 7, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

was an opportunist, a typical union opportunist.”¹⁰⁷ On the one hand, Sophie Gonzales can be seen as a cultural “go-between,” who successfully communicated the strike’s aims to the San Antonio public and helped the Tex-Son women transgress certain boundaries of 1950s womanhood. On the other, while Hartung’s letter may simply reflect bad blood between her and Gonzales, it provides a more nuanced idea of some strikers’ view of their popular leader.

By the end of July 1961 the Tex-Son strike team had suffered through 300 arrests and jailings, and it was finding it increasingly difficult to stay optimistic as tragedy hit some of its strongest members.¹⁰⁸ A man recently released from a mental institution approached the picket line and punched pregnant striker Eva Gomez in the face and stomach. The same day her baby was born dead.¹⁰⁹ Eunice Burkett fell into a coma for seven days after being severely injured in a car accident and needed over 100 stitches to repair her mangled face. “Tell them I won’t be on the picket line tomorrow” were Burkett’s first words to doctors when she finally woke.¹¹⁰ Tired and discouraged, more women left the strike with each passing week. “The Tex-Son strike continues to be unusually hard to bury, but I believe the remaining 18 girls will give up soon,” George Lambert wrote to Siems on October 21, 1962, and he confided to Congressman Henry Gonzalez that “prospects of continued ILGWU activity in San Antonio are not good.”¹¹¹ One month later, Sophie Gonzales left the strike. At the end of October, when Gregoria Montalbo finally stopped coming to the picket line, Eva Gomez took over as strike leader. Without their original leadership or financial assistance, the remaining Tex-Son strikers were disheartened but determined to fight the company on their own. “Their courage defies explanation,” remarked Albert Peña, Jr.¹¹²

107. Sandoval interview.

108. George Lambert to AFL-CIO Convention in Galveston, July 30, 1960, folder 7, box 25, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

109. “Woman Striker Against Tex-Son Slugged, Loses Unborn Infant,” *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, May 19, 1961, p. 1.

110. “Facing Death, Tex-Son Striker Worries Only About Union,” in *ibid.*, Nov. 25, 1960, pp. 1, 3; “Tex-Son Strikers Offer Blood To Save Injured Picket’s Life,” in *ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1960, pp. 1, 3.

111. George Lambert to Siems, Oct. 21, 1962, folder 3, box 12, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives; George Lambert to Congressman Henry Gonzalez, undated, folder 6, box 6, in *ibid.*

112. “Tex-Son Strikers Continuing Battle; Don’t Know How Long,” *AFL-CIO Weekly Dispatch*, Nov. 2, 1962, p. 2.

As 1962 drew to a close, so did the ILGWU's operations in San Antonio. A July 31, 1959, letter written by Latane Lambert to Rosalind Chaiken had predicted some reasons for the strike's collapse:

If this strike is finally won, there will be a lesson to be learned from it. And that is that in areas where the labor movement and the particular International is weak...the decision to strike one of these outlying and isolated plants ought to be made with the probable high cost in mind....I wish the labor movement would seriously examine the problems of organizing light industry in the South and other areas....The national office supplies so few tools.¹¹³

The union's investment in Tex-Son, an "outlying and isolated plant," had been a tremendous one in terms of money and effort, but Texas's position as a Southern-oriented, right-to-work state proved too difficult for the ILGWU to overcome. Despite overwhelming support from other labor unions, Tex-Son's ability to hire replacement workers and a lack of adequate financial backing from the ILGWU forced Local 180 to abandon its picket line on January 25, 1963, one month short of a four-year strike. Eva Gomez, Benita Renterias, Theresa Moran, Antonia Garza, Anastasia Garcia, Crescencia Saucedo, Felipa Gonzalez, Helen Bruni, Trinidad Rodriguez, Estela Soto, and Janie Lozano were the eleven women left on the last day. After the ILGWU lost a representational election by twenty-three votes at the Bernhard Altmann factory, another San Antonio garment plant, the union officially abandoned the city. In Dallas, ILGWU locals continued to exist into the 1960s, but endemic anti-union sentiment prevented them from winning any more battles. Houston's Local 214 dissipated by the late 1960s because of union plant shutdowns, while Laredo's Local 350 struggled with a continued influx of Mexican immigrant labor and eventually expired in the late 1970s.¹¹⁴

The ILGWU's stay in San Antonio had ended badly, despite its early successes in the 1930s, and strikers and union organizers went their separate ways. George Lambert was transferred to Dallas, and

113. Latane Lambert to Rosalind Chaiken, July 21, 1959, folder 4, box 6, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

114. Green, "ILGWU in Texas," 150; Sherilyn Brandenstein, "International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union," *Handbook of Texas Online*, at <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/II/oci2.html>, accessed July 10, 2005; Jesusa Hernandez, Laredo worker, to Dubinsky, Jan. 7, 1962, folder 3, box 12, AR 127, Texas Labor Archives.

Gregoria Montalbo never returned to work after the strike's end. Sophie Gonzales, however, used her organizing experience at Tex-Son in her later work with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in El Paso, where she led the Hortex strike of 1965 and the Levi-Strauss strike of 1971, and where she helped to organize the Farah Clothing strike in 1972 before retiring in 1983.¹¹⁵ While some strikers like Mary Alvarez and Minnie Cantú eventually found jobs as garment workers elsewhere in San Antonio, others like Trinidad Rodriguez were blackballed from the industry altogether. Harold and Emanuel Franzel refused to say how much the strike had cost their company, but it was certainly more than would have been required to settle with the union in January 1959. The Tex-Son factory went bankrupt from the strikers' boycott in San Antonio and later moved operations to Dallas, another anti-union city.

Remembering Tex-Son

For the women of the Tex-Son strike, walking the picket line was a decision made out of economic necessity and familial obligations rather than from feminist ideology. When asked how she felt about her strike activity, Marcelina said, "I was there because I was helping my parents. . . . To me [striking] was just like I was doing my job."¹¹⁶ In material terms, the four-year Tex-Son strike had been a failure, but women like Mary Alvarez would later affirm it was a moment of victory: "I would say that we didn't lose. . . . [Tex-Son] eventually went bankrupt . . . so they lost. . . . We had a right to ask for more money. We were fighting for what was right. . . . I don't regret it."¹¹⁷

As she recalled the experiences of her sister, Tex-Son striker Trinidad Rodriguez, Guadalupe Garza concluded, "Only the ones that suffered are the ones who remember. It's always like that."¹¹⁸ Despite the media attention paid to the strike at the time, every former

115. Nelson-Herrera, "Constructed and Contested Meanings," 35; Ledesma, "Comment on Honig," 160. After 1963 the ILGWU national leadership failed to meet the needs of its black, Puerto Rican, and Mexican members during the next thirty years and lost legitimacy in the eyes of many workers. In 1995 the ILGWU merged with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union to create UNITE, the Union of Needle Trades, Industrial and Textile Employees. Wolensky, Wolensky, and Wolensky, *Fighting for the Union Label*, 227.

116. Marcelina interview.

117. Alvarez interview.

118. Guadalupe Garza, oral history interview with the author, March 16, 2005. Interview in the author's possession.

striker interviewed revealed that she had never before been asked about her Tex-Son strike experiences in the past fifty years. In the past half-century, San Antonio has erased the Tex-Son strike from its local historical memory. “You can write romantically of San Antonio’s lace mantilla, but the face she wears under it has two sides,” Father Sherrill Smith mused. “The one is lovely: the old Cathedral, the historic Alamo, the downtown river . . . the side the tourists see. The other is scarred . . . and economic malnutrition wrinkles it. Only those of us who lift her mantilla see this side.”¹¹⁹ Lifting this “mantilla” and bringing the Tex-Son strike to brighter light reveals much about the labor and ethnic histories of mid-twentieth-century San Antonio and Texas. Tex-Son was a “first” for Mexicana and Anglo women’s cooperation on the picket line, and the first ILGWU struggle led by a Mexican American woman. It was also, however, a “last” for the ILGWU and marked the end of an era for Texas labor. The ILGWU’s pull-out no doubt structured the absence of strong, progressive unionism after 1963, which hurt working-class and often women’s interests. In addition, the Franzels’ practice of sending out work to Mississippi foreshadowed other companies’ outsourcing to the Deep South, and then to more distant locations, including Mexico and Central America by the 1980s. In a sense, the Tex-Son strike was a lost opportunity, a moment that could have been handled differently by the ILGWU but was not, to the disadvantage of garment workers and Mexican American women in particular.

Along with providing a fresh reading of an important episode in Southwestern labor history, this study illuminates a little-known history of how Mexican-origin working-class women inventively used Cold War gender roles and ideologies to their advantage in labor protests. Tex-Son was very much a strike of the 1950s, in that its participants employed an ideology of motherhood that garnered tremendous public support, locally and across borders. While the majority of the Tex-Son strikers did not fit the stereotype of the proper 1950s woman, racially or economically, they were able to appropriate contemporary notions and symbols of femininity and domesticity, and to use them in creative ways to their advantage. Rather than threaten traditional gender norms, the women of Tex-Son argued that their actions in the public sphere were directly connected to the private sphere—both stemmed from their desire

119. Smith, “A priest remembers,” 1.

to better provide for their families. Through this “ladylike” refashioning of an “unladylike” strike, the Mexicana and Anglo members of Local 180 made the residents of San Antonio rethink their ideas about women, work, and activism. The Tex-Son strike also helps us to reconsider the women we have neglected in histories of the Cold War period. As racial minorities and low-wage workers, Mexicanas at times fought against entirely different things than their middle-class white counterparts, including organized labor’s retreat and anti-union sentiment.

Finally, the Tex-Son strike is important for what it reveals about San Antonio’s postwar Mexican-origin community, race, and identity in labor struggles. Long-standing public racial bias against Mexicans and Mexican Americans in San Antonio certainly compelled Local 180 to utilize a protest strategy that would minimize race as a central factor in its fight for better working conditions. This is not to say that the Mexicana strikers of Tex-Son considered race to be irrelevant, but they made no explicit arguments based on a common racial identity. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these women downplayed—if not completely negated—their ethnicity in making their case against the factory. Deciding instead to highlight their identities as hard-working mothers, members of Local 180 presented their struggle as one that would affect larger city and family issues. In this sense, Tex-Son represents an important transitional struggle on the cusp of the Chicano movement’s emergence in Texas. By the time of the Farah Clothing strike of 1972, Chicana workers were continuing to frame their struggle around motherhood and family, but they were also calling significantly more attention to their ethnic identity and to the racism of their employer. While the Farah strike has been given much credit for improving the plight of Chicana workers in the Southwest, the Tex-Son strike must be recognized in labor, gender, and ethnic history as an important moment of Mexican American labor activism between the Tenayuca period of the 1930s and the Chicano/a movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Although larger structural factors prevented the Tex-Son women from winning their fight, their clever use of gender symbols and ideologies successfully—and fashionably—clothed a fight for civil and labor rights that would only grow stronger in the coming decades.