The Politics of Change, Politics in West Texas 1910-1925

This study shall discuss the political history and social movements of El Paso County during the first quarter of the 20th century. The purpose of this paper is to prove or disprove that El Paso and the surrounding region, due to a number of reasons, most having to do with its geographic location, was resistant to any sort of change brought in by outsiders. Although this period is rich with historical events, many of which are very noteworthy, I shall focus on a few specific issues and evaluate them within a larger historical context. Why did these things happen, were they unique to El Paso, and were these things really of any importance compared to everything else that was occurring back then? If one has ever studied or heard of even a bit of El Paso’s history, they would know that this region has encountered more than its fair share of notable events.

What I aim to prove by writing this paper is that El Paso by way of its ethnic makeup and most importantly its geographic location, gradually formed its own social-political system that was in a way self-sustaining. This in turn would directly lead El Paso turning into a society based on social collectivism. The problem, as most small towns have when experiencing an explosion in population and importance, is that this existing system could not catch up or handle all these changes at once but was in place for such a long time that it naturally set out to fight back to maintain it’s hegemony over the region. The main points to be covered, as I’ll get more into a little later, include the important conflicts of the Mexican Revolution and World War I, which directly led to El
Paso becoming a strategically important city for the military, immigration, and most importantly the late Progressive Era.

Most of the topics mentioned above are relatively well known, some more extensive than others. For example, volumes have been written about the Progressive Era and how many of its principles survived well into the 1920’s and 30’s. It is El Paso, and by direct association, far west Texas that is typically overlooked in regard to this important era. There have been many books written about El Paso’s role during the Mexican Revolution, including its association with notable figures such as Francisco Madero, Francisco “Pancho” Villa and General John Pershing, but very few go in depth to explain how this important war affected El Paso’s way of life. Most importantly, the way that they tend to neglect these events changed the lives of El Paso’s Hispanic Tejanos. Just like the progressive era, relatively little has been written about El Paso’s important role during the First World War, this largely being a footnote or a postscript to its military role during the Mexican Revolution. Furthermore, only one notable book has been written about far West Texas’ experience with the Ku Klux Klan\(^1\).

This paper shall be divided into two main sections to deal with 2 main areas of discussion for this topic. The first being the social-political climate of El Paso County during the period from 1900 to 1925, which includes the late progressive era and coincides with one of the largest population booms El Paso has seen. The second section will cover the events occurring around El Paso that were beyond the control of the local political bosses, such as the Mexican Revolution, World War I, and increasing military and federal presence in El Paso.
The late progressive era, or about 1910 to about 1925, saw a vast array of changes come to borderlands of El Paso. This period was politically charged with the Democratic Party being the dominant, and to a large extant, the sole power broker in the region. It, like most other political parties in urban areas at the time, was controlled by a party boss. At this time, aside from changes beyond its control to be mentioned later, El Paso County experienced a growth in population. With this, El Paso transformed from a frontier town to a somewhat modern city. Modern commodities needed to be added as eastern, urbanized society moved into the region. With them came new ideas that challenged the political status quo. Thus, El Paso was at a crossroads, and it is here were the first true test, against social progressivism, was brought to El Pasoans on the issue of change and movement to a new direction.

To highlight the significance of these changes, I must go back a few years to provide context for the situation. Far west Texas continued to be a collection of small settlements, mostly inhabited by Hispanics. What changed is that the railroad arrived, and with it El Paso’s first population boom in the 1880’s. Soon enough after Reconstruction ended the Democratic Party had regained control of local area politics. By the 1890’s, they had formed themselves into a strong front against the dwindling Republican Party, who would make their last serious challenge in 1899\(^2\). Atop of that, things were changing in El Paso. The era of the “Wild West” had died down, law and order had come to El Paso and with it the values of the east coast middle class began to settle in. Thus belatedly the progressive era arrived in El Paso. The city moved to work towards internal reform and expanding public services such as the water utilities, garbage collection and expanding the police force. Still, as we’re about to see, all this wasn’t
enough, and women and even children began to take an active part in the reformist movement, which ironically came from within the county Democratic Party itself\(^3\).

While the political atmosphere was heating up, El Paso’s ethnic makeup too was rather varied. While Hispanics still made up a large portion of El Paso’s small population, they were already marginalized to the southern portions of the city, and were mostly concentrated in the lower valley townships of Ysleta, Socorro and San Elizario. Then there was a significant Chinese minority, enough to make a lasting mark upon El Paso. All these mixed in, would surely promise to make life in El Paso rather interesting in the coming decades.

As mentioned before, El Paso politics by 1910 was dominated clearly and definitively by the Democratic Party. The county’s party itself was led by a group of notable El Paso party bosses collectively known as the “Ring”. They controlled every political office within the city and the county, as they believed in coordinating their government rule throughout the entire valley\(^4\). At this time, its party boss was none other than the Mayor of El Paso, Joseph Sweeney. While as Mayor, from 1907 to 1910, he had to contend with a quickly growing city. Now that the law had firmly been established in this town known for having its fair share of gunslingers, the railroads brought in more people from the east. Also, many still continued arriving to El Paso from Mexico. They were escaping the political turmoil, and still yet more were to come once the Mexican Revolution began. Thus, with a population around 39,000, modern commodities were demanded of the city, so roads began to be paved, sidewalks were made, water pipes were laid and garbage collection services are made available. Still, despite this progress there were some downsides. Although to satisfy the reformers within the city, Mayor
Sweeney had tried to satisfy them by making bar’s close on Sunday’s and have the gambler’s cease their activities⁶. None of these issues actually went into practice. Furthermore, it was these very same people who greatly supported the ring in every way possible. Soon, the reformers would have enough and ultimately ally with other coalitions to combat and eradicate the “Ring” and all its vices from the borderland.

Before I continue, I will talk about whom and more importantly what ideas formed the opposition against the “Ring”. As I have stated earlier, the Republican Party had been defeated not only in El Paso County but largely across the entire south-western region due to the after effects of the end of Reconstruction. So the only thing these political bosses had to fear were reformist movements within their own party⁶. In fact, they were the ones to first demand that the laws against gambling be enforced back in 1905, which they were⁷. To them that was their first major victory. The reform movement too had even gained popularity amongst the women, but it would be another 10 years before they effectively organized themselves into a strong coalition. Still, being at the height of the Progressive movement, many of its social ideals applied to what was going on in El Paso County.

To best describe it, during the progressive era personal values, political ideas and group identities were being transformed with the times as urban reformers believed that the excesses of the Gilded Age needed to be curved⁸. The vices of gambling, prostitution and alcoholism needed to be curved and eliminated, and they saw the best way in achieving this reform was through governmental initiatives⁹. Thus, as throughout the United States at this time, this policy of achieving societal and political reforms through government action came to Texas, and by virtue El Paso. In Texas, the movement took
on many similarities as would eventually be mirrored in El Paso. Protestant ministers led this call of social reform from the pulpit, and in many times got involved with politics. In turn, those politicians attending these church services used them to the best of their advantage to get elected and maintain power in the legislature to be able to make and maintain their policies.

Up until 1915, El Paso politics were pretty stable. The new “Ring” boss, Mayor C.E. Kelley had been re-elected twice without any problems and was hoping for another term with the election of 1915\(^\text{10}\). What stopped him was the formation of a strong anti-Ring, and most importantly, a reformist coalition. Up until now, to win elections the “Ring” had used all their supporters, from the gamblers to the bar owners, along with the always important Hispanic vote to make sure they always won an election. This time, the reformists made sure they had organization on their side. Among these were the newly created feminists (who were also pressing for the right to vote at the same time), to other new Anglo arrivals who were middle class and Protestant in belief. To them, El Paso’s government taxed too much and gave little in return. They saw their city (and to a degree rightfully so) as filled with corrupt officials.

So, the reformist Thomas Lea was nominated to challenge Mayor Kelley in the 1915 mayoral election. He himself was a veteran of the Spanish-American war, as well as a practicing lawyer. The platforms for both sides were rather interesting. In a pamphlet called “The Record”, the pro-Ring side of the Democratic Party touted social services done by Kelley’s administration since 1910. These included increased parks, garbage services, lower and more equal taxes, etc\(^{11}\). The one peculiar issue was that of the water services. Ever since the city purchased the City Water Works in 1910, the city council
was the board of directors for the Water Works, and thus was charged with expanding water services to make sure clean water reached the citizens of the valley and beyond. Kelley’s administration touted cleaner, safer water and 110 miles of pipelines laid. To slander Lea’s candidacy, the charge was raised that he’d raise taxes. One other issue to note, that I believe is central to the theme of outside influence, was the fact that two of the candidates on Kelley’s Democratic ticket are touted as “Made in El Paso”\(^\text{12}\). Perhaps done to convince the citizens that they knew how El Paso worked, and could be trusted to keep things running to their liking. To oppose them, Lea’s platform offered a simple, yet solid slogan of “More business, less politics”\(^\text{13}\). He touted largely the same issues, public health and the expansion of water services, but he distinguished himself by promising to remove public schools out of the political sphere. So with this in mind, and after heavy campaigning, the reformists finally, on February 16, 1915 scored a total victory. From Kelley on down the “Ring” ticket was defeated and it seemed El Paso had a firm mindset for a new direction\(^\text{14}\).

The tenure of Mayor Lea of 1915 to 1917 was filled with many activities. Aside from events across the Rio Grande and WWI which will be explained with further detail later, much of what Lea did was to benefit the rapid urban development that was occurring\(^\text{15}\). He managed to curb the power of the gamblers and the bar owners, and was generally known for curbing all types of vice. His other noted accomplishment was that of taxes, equaling them out and making the city more economically efficient. Unfortunately the rule of the progressives did not last, as WWI broke out and instead of running for re-election Tom Lea decided to join up to serve his country once again. Thus, in 1917, the next Mayor who got himself elected was Charles Davis. Although, it
is during this era that other progressive movements blossomed in El Paso and the most prominent of these was the League of Women’s voters who would come to wield a strong influence on El Paso’s politics.

The first meeting of women activists was on January 12, 1915 at the Hotel Orndorff. It was from here that women began to slowly rally for voting rights, writing to politicians and attending larger rallies at the state and national level. Prominent among these women was D. A. Chritchett who at various times during the 1910’s and 1920’s served as this organization’s secretary and president, as well as a representative to other women’s organizations. Its main attack was not against the “Ring” itself, but of the way El Paso had been doing things for years. They detested the vice of the city, gambling halls, prostitution, alcoholism as well as other odd things. Before the enfranchisement of the vote for women, there was the El Paso Federation of Women, which surpassed their successors in that they were quite active in the community, and not just doing acts of social good, but in political activities as well. In fact, their first fight was prohibition of alcohol. In May of 1918 members formed a “feminine purity squad” to monitor conditions within the city. They largely participated on an optional county-wide prohibition election, which failed by some 200 votes in the county. They turned to the state legislature, which increased pressure and passed a state-wide prohibition in 2 successive laws. When women gained the right to vote in 1919, they changed their name to the now famous League of Women’s Voters. From here they tried to promote increased women involvement in politics and elections. It appears they did succeed in getting enough women out, as by 1922, 49% of El Paso women voters went out to the polls. In 1920 in continuing to help rid El Paso of vice, they established a detention
house for wayward girls and were personally thanked by then city Police Chief J.R. Montgomery. In fact their dedication for the improvement of how the city and county functioned was proven by their goals they stated upon forming in 1919 in that they pushed for an improvement in the election laws, social hygiene and child welfare. They appeared to target the root cause of not only social problems, but government corruption as well.

Prohibition, it seemed, was to be the final blow to the “Ring”. Although, unlike the political fights of the decade before, it now had to deal with many other factors, such as an increased military presence, thousands of Mexican refugees in the lower valley, and finally a population more than double the size it was in 1910. Yet despite all this, the showdown came mainly through a letter of Secretary of War Newton Baker explaining way Fort Bliss was not to expand any further. The reason, El Paso’s association with shady activities. Mayor Davis did not want to seem like a reformer, and thus did not act upon this grave news for El Paso. As a result, the women and protestant clergy, who spearheaded reform movements in other regions of the US, joined up to “clean up” El Paso. Several different organizations popped up to keep El Paso vice down. Finally, the vote for prohibition within the county came up. Taking up the banner for the “wets” as anti-prohibitionists were called was former Mayor Joseph Sweeney, who in turn represented the interests of the “Ring”. Since it was such a touchy subject, most politicians avoided the issues, while those who did say something did so in opposition of it. These mainly consisted of a few judges (who either way were known to be fond of the drink) and every Hispanic elected official within the county, openly proclaiming they
were “wets”. When it came down to it, the vote failed. In all, 2,668 were against prohibition compared to 2,497 for.

Among those who voted overwhelmingly against prohibition were Mexicans, long proven to be a true ally of the “Ring” in keeping reform out of the region. This victory did not last long for the “Ring”, for frustrated with the local politicians, the reformists took their fight to Austin, and with the help of their El Paso’s state representatives who were sympathetic with their cause, Texas ended up passing a state wide prohibition law on June 26, 1918\(^\text{19}\). El Paso’s bars were closed for good. The reformists, who had viewed alcoholism as the greatest vice, had finally won their largest victory. Still, another outside influence was coming into El Paso, and it would result in far worse consequences if it were to succeed.

Race in El Paso, for a long time since the surrounding areas exchanged hands from Mexico to the USA, had been an issue that flared up every now and then, more prominently during the Salt War. Since El Paso was still a rather isolated town and ties to Mexico were still quite strong, those Anglo-Americans that came to the Pass usually married into local families, if not adopted local customs and were fluent in Spanish. This all changed by the 1880’s when railroads came to the pass. The first wave of mass immigration into the region caused the Anglo population to grow that the power and influence of the Hispanic community was marginalized, and the need to accommodate themselves within the local culture ceased to be an issue. Then of course there were other’s brought in by railroads, notably the Chinese and in fewer numbers African-Americans. Due to the increasing hostility of the border due to the Mexican Revolution, a special census was held in El Paso in 1916\(^\text{20}\). Of this census, it was given that 32,737
people were of Mexican descent, 27,359 were White, 1,514 were Black and there were
5,554 Mexican refugees living in the city. Naturally the numbers might be a bit higher
than that, seeing that refugees came and went, but the point is with Mexicans
outnumbering Anglo’s either way, the stage was set for tensions to grow. This was
somewhat alleviated by the fact that the railroad had cut across the city a few decades
earlier, and thus El Paso was divided between the Anglo north-side of the town, and the
Mexican dominated south side. Even more notable, El Paso’s leadership began to
change, as for the short time he was Mayor, Tom Lea was well known to openly detest
Mexicans, and held biases (nearly all racially motivated) against them.

Thus the stage was set for something or someone to exploit such a divide, and this
came about in 1921 when Frontier Klan number 100 arrived to El Paso. Cloaked in the
guise of protecting from what they claimed were “un-American sentiments”, the Klan
would quickly grow in popularity. Helped by this surge was the fact that the local
protestant ministers of the Baptist and Methodist churches welcomed these organizations,
and some pastors went out of their way to allow the prominent Klansmen their pulpit
from which to speak to the public. Their first chance to make a public impact came with
the school board election of 1922. The Pro-Klan ticket ran three of its own members,
while the “Ring” submitted 3 of its own candidates, among them the prominent William
Burgess. The Pro-Klan establishment was essentially backed by the Good Government
League, whose members consisted of either Klansman or those who sympathized with
them, and was led by George Oliver a premier Klansman. The reason they were also
popular is because they didn’t bring with them the connotations of being an overtly racist,
terrorist organization, but one which is based upon American principles and reform.
When push came to shove, this school board election was a quite nasty one, with accusations flung back and forth. It was the GGL’s candidates who began turning the race into a religious one, that between White Protestants and Irish and Mexican Catholics, and thus the latter were turned into those whom held ideals that were un-American. Thus, when it came down to it, the GGL’s candidates won and they gained a majority within the school board by the end of the summer.

This was not the end of the GGL’s victories, for in the Democratic Primary in July, this time the “Ring” was fully committed in battling it out with the pro-Klan wing of the Democratic Party. The GGL, whom had many women in support of it and for a time the Women’s League of El Paso and the El Paso Herald, worked hard to make sure the Democratic machine could not get its illegal voters out to the polls, or do anything which was un-ethical. Although, this did not stop the GGL from attempting to keep those voters south of the railroad tracks from voting, claiming some weren’t eligible or because they did not know English or Spanish enough. When it came down to it, once again the pro-Klan won a majority, mostly with north side votes, while those in the south went heavily for the “Ring” candidates. Catholic priests themselves mustered their congregations into a fury due to all this anti-Catholic sentiment, urging their flocks to drive the menace out of town.

What the El Paso anti-Klan faction needed, and what it got, was a sense of unison. Even those against the “Ring” who couldn’t stomach the policies of the GGL, fully knowing it was under the control of the Klan, sided with them anyways. The Women’s League itself was split between pro-Klan and anti-Klan factions, with the non-partisan league becoming so involved to a point that its President decided to step down. There
was one man who was willing, through some personal hatred as well towards one prominent Klan member, to bring the Klan down at any cost. This man was William Fryer, not only a well known attorney, but also a prominent Catholic. Thus after the Klan’s two victories in the summer of 1922, he decided to “un-mask” the Klansmen in hoping to get the public opinion against them. Thankfully, he wasn’t the only one. The El Paso Times, long known to be a voice piece for the “Ring”, took it upon themselves too to find out who where attending these Klan meetings that occurred in the outskirts of the town, and actually succeeded in taking some names down and revealing them to the public\textsuperscript{28}. Soon, the Secretary of Frontier Klan no. 100, Clifford Sirmas, was subpoenaed to bring in the list of members of his organization. It was soon revealed that a number of city employees were members included 14 police officers. This enraged Mayor Davis, who promptly fired every one of them, while some were allowed to keep their jobs after admitting on their own that they had been members beforehand. The Protestant ministers themselves didn’t take this very well, and saw it as the city cracking down on free speech. Still, William Fryer wasn’t done, and with the help of the Times further prominent citizens were “unmasked”, to the point where Klan members began turning in their resignations for fear of being outed to the public, and thus leading to some sort of public disgrace\textsuperscript{29}.

The main factors though for the fall apart of the Klan were because the need for strong social reformers weren’t needed anymore. By 1922 the city population began to shrink, and with it crime began to decrease. Also, Mayor Davis in late 1922 decided he would not seek re-election, thus taking the “Ring” out of the municipal elections the next year, so many who were opposed to the Klan flocked to the banner of the popular State
Senator Dudley who ran for Mayor in 1923. Opposing him was Preston Gardner, who should be noted aside from being a Klansman was a relative newcomer to El Paso, residing in the city for only 12 years. The 4 alderman who ran under his ticket were similar to his story. This time though, the anti-Klan faction won out, not because of the Democratic machine being put to work but because of pure apathy on the side of the north side residents. They had grown tired of the Klan and the GGL, while some had grown to detest their policies outright. Businessmen too were worried of alienating their Mexican customers as the GGL and many other Anglo’s wanted to cease border crossings into Mexico, believing Ciudad Juarez a “highly immoral place” which would only serve to corrupt El Paso’s way of life. Thus, by the end of 1923 the Frontier Klan no. 100 ceased to be an influence in El Paso government, and so too did its puppet organizations.

As mentioned before, what happened in El Paso during this time period was largely influenced by events beyond the control of its politicians. These were two very notable occurrences, the Mexican Revolution, which was immediately followed by America’s entrance into World War I. Both had profound impacts upon the city and region in general, and led to escalating racial tensions. Not to mention, both were also very divisive amongst community members of the same race and ethnicity. Nationalism also reared its head during these times, which as history tells us sometimes nationalism can lead to certain extremes. El Paso, as a border town, would gain increasing importance as a strategic military location as the years went by and the times became more volatile. Soon, Fort Bliss was expanding and it seemed El Paso had another new group to contend with, the military.
The Mexican Revolution had a profound impact on El Paso’s history, one which would ultimately change life in El Paso in a variety of ways. We are reminded of it through certain names of streets or places, or even through a number of art work and images around the city portraying the leaders of the Revolution, Francisco “Pancho” Villa prominent among them. Even before 1910, Mexican revolutionaries and anarchists plotted out their plans in El Paso. The most prominent of these was the Terresita rebellion that took place in 1896 and was led by Lauro Aguirre and Victor Ochoa. Both were Mexican-Americans and both used the American power of the press to push their claims of injustice on both sides of the border. At first, many El Pasoans treated the Mexican revolution as entertainment, and when the time came for Francisco Madero to build up his army to assault Ciudad Juarez, many Americans joined while still many more El Pasoans watched from the rooftops across the river as the battle unfolded. Many businessmen were eager to keep good relations with the Mexicans, as both revolutionaries and *federales* needed supplies which could be easily bought in El Paso stores. As far as most long time residents of El Paso were concerned, this was yet another example of how closely tied the border communities were. Mayor Kelly, being rather sympathetic to the revolutionaries and well known for being an associate of Pancho Villa, allowed for these men to come into town, stay in the local hotels and do their shopping at the local stores. Things would change dramatically as the war dragged on, but for the first few years of the war those who opposed open association with the revolutionaries were a minority and were kept quiet. It is here probably which Mayor Kelly, and Mayor Sweeney before him could claim a victory, the peace was kept in El Paso despite all the upheaval around it.
What might have turned El Paso into a more volatile place, in terms of suddenly turning Anglo-Americans against Mexican and Mexican-Americans is in large part due to the situation in Mexico. By 1914, yet another revolution had concluded with the ousting of another dictator, this time Victoriano Huerta, and the victors turned on one another. Villa led the attack from the north, but this time he turned his attention to foreigners within his country. This culminated with the US declaring its support for Villa’s enemy, President Carranza, and imprisoning many Villista’s in El Paso, while beginning a crackdown on the number of Mexicans crossing the border into El Paso. Nothing though would compare to when Villista’s invaded Columbus, New Mexico, which made people in the US and more locally El Pasoans, whip themselves into a national fervor. Fort Bliss suddenly saw an increase of troops. By 1916 troop strength at the base peaked at 70,000 men and at the time it was the highest concentration of soldiers in the entire country. The point of these troops was to prevent further invasions on American soil and to monitor the escalating unrest in Mexico.

As would be repeated throughout El Paso’s history, change was forced upon El Paso because of the military presence. Prohibition was forced upon El Pasoans before the 19th amendment was passed. Gambling and prostitution houses were forcibly closed. Worse yet, military patrols began occurring in the Segundo barrio and Chihuahuita districts to monitor the growing Mexican populations there. Things in El Paso were becoming increasingly dire.

Perhaps the most anti-Mexican administration in El Paso was that of Tom Lea’s. He himself increased funding to the health and sanitation department due to a rather paranoid fear that these Mexicans were bringing over certain diseases such as typhoid.
By 1917, the U.S. Public Health Service began delousing Mexican immigrants, which would lead to the Bath Riots. All this occurred, as stated, because tens of thousands of Mexicans were leaving Mexico for the safety of the United States. In 1914, after the first two periods of the Mexican revolution ended, there were 15,000 refugees, most of them residing in Chihuahuita or shanty towns along the valley outside of the city. To show how many Mexicans continued to enter the US, by 1927 their numbers stood at 72,000. With this many newcomers, a growing tension naturally occurred, as already mentioned. Still, amongst Mexicans themselves there was a divide, which the Anglo newspapers could not entirely comprehend. Segundo Barrio was were most long time Hispanic residents of El Paso lived, while Chihuahuita was usually reserved for those newcomers. Even amongst the refugees, the wealthy who escaped Mexico managed to find some acceptance among the Anglo’s, especially when they could afford to live in the affluent Sunset Heights district. Thus, with this added increase in population, tougher immigration laws were forced upon El Paso and the border in general. When Pancho Villa attacked Cuidad Juarez for the last time in 1919, instead of letting all the refugees into El Paso as was the case in 1910, many were turned away because they lacked proper documents. Whereas once the border was very open and easy to cross, it was now more restrictive, and strongly watched by the military and customs officers. One final lasting result which most El Pasoans of Hispanic descent can claim to, is that although some of these refugee’s either went back to Mexico or onto other places in the US, most stayed and built up lives here. Thus a good portion of El Paso’s Hispanics can claim a descent to this large wave of immigrants.
As it has been proven repeatedly, nothing whips up El Pasoans (especially Anglo El Pasoans) more than a war. The First World War was El Paso’s first experience with a mass outpouring of patriotism and nationalism. El Paso newspapers were quick to turn the opinions of their readers against Germany even before war was declared. Like elsewhere across the nation, when war was declared on, Germany became an “evil place” and Germans (even those born in the US) became the enemy. The fact that there weren’t that many Germans in El Paso didn’t prevent it’s more nationalistic citizens from forming vigilante squads hoping to weed out alleged spies. The city was on edge, and once again as it had and would occur; Mexican citizens were the target of negative Anglo attention. Initiatives to either drive illegal aliens out of El Paso, and making sure all of its citizens spoke and read English were widely supported by nationalistic Anglos. Not to mention, actions targeting the Mexicans grew even more with the release of the Zimmerman telegram. Thus, this gave another reason for Fort Bliss to gain importance, and another reason why El Paso’s tensions grew. Fort Bliss commander, General Pershing, even sent out his military patrols to parts of the city that lay south of the tracks to keep an eye on the Mexicans, while at other times he offered the services of military engineers and medical officers to contain the spread of diseases in the crowded regions of the city. Just one of the many ways the military would influence the city, or directly participate in its many events of the time.

Thus, to recap, it was with the increase of the military that unwillingly forced changes upon El Paso. It spurred the progressives into a nationalist fervor, that perhaps could be said also gave the Ku Klux Klan it’s necessary fuel, and thus gave rise to the successive victories gained by the progressives and reformists during this time period.
As would be the case, to fit in those who supported the status quo of the city’s politics supported the continual military increase through some sort of patriotism, yet were not always happy to accommodate it in every way deemed necessary. Due to these reformist groups within El Paso who did manage to accommodate and gladly accept the military into El Paso society, Fort Bliss would not only continue to grow in El Paso, but other military bases would grow around the region. What clearly didn’t stick was the anti-Mexican sentiment, as El Paso had already proven time and time again that it’s ties with it’s sister city could not be broken by anyone, a fact that continued to baffle many newcomers to El Paso.

As the reforming movement petered out with the final downfall of not only the “Ring” but also the Ku Klux Klan and its evangelical pastors, the Progressive movement finally passed into the history books. El Pasoans would continue going to Juarez to drink and gamble and have fun in general until alcohol was finally legalized with the repeal of the 18th amendment in the 1930’s. It seemed that ultimately, the progressives and the reformers couldn’t keep American society which they were trying to protect away from the vices they so detested. The only victory the reformers could claim was the ousting of the “Ring” which had dominated politics for so long, although for a time they managed to increasingly marginalize the Hispanic population. On the contrary, the Klan itself would never grow to popularity in El Paso County again after experiencing such a backlash of public opinion as it received in 1923.

To revisit the thesis of this paper, there was indeed a backlash amongst the people of El Paso against certain changes; probably the most common was against prohibition, and later with an attempt to highly regulate the flow of traffic on the international bridge.
Also, the “Ring” found itself incapable of fending off the reformers and progressives all on its own. The times were changing, and along with them their inability to do things as they once did, such as rely on voter fraud using ineligible voters. To a degree El Paso was changed, aside from more government scrutinizing and greater public interest on what was occurring, it increased significantly in population and it’s importance grew not only with the increase in Fort Bliss, but world events around it. In these respects, change was forced upon El Paso, to which its inhabitants had to work around and sometimes accommodate. To other movements, such as the Ku Klux Klan and Protestant reformers, El Pasoans fought back, claiming these ideals were not compatible with the long standing traditions of the border. Indeed faith’s clashed alongside that of culture. To sum up, El Paso, having been untouched by a large wave of Anglo settlers up till now, had built up a natural buffer, a way of doing things, that made it nearly impossible for white Americans to impose the way things were done back east upon them. Ties with Mexico were never severed; on the contrary they were continually strengthened as more Mexicans themselves moved into El Paso.

The implications of my research serve to teach El Pasoans of an era bygone, and furthermore to establish a strong precedence of a time where multiple changes were occurring yet through varied coalitions El Paso’s society persevered. Instead of one ethnicity or race dominating over the other, the Pass managed to incorporate these newcomers within their society, and through economic, social or political bonds managed to keep the peace within the city. El Paso is a changing place, with newcomers arriving every year, and a need to accommodate them arises, and so the long established people here should work to help this happen while at the same time being sure not to impose too
much of their own ideas onto them. For in El Paso, one’s own personal identity to a
certain group is all too important. As for further research, there should be more research
done over the topic of Asians coming to settle in the border regions, not just in El Paso
but in Juarez too. Also more research should be done in English to know how Juarez and
other Mexican border towns fared during this time, and they thought of the Americans
rushing to escape prohibition and other restrictive American laws during this time period.
Did reform ever spread into these areas as well? These are all questions relating to this
topic that would serve well to be answered.


3 Ibid., 119.


5 Ibid., El Paso Herald, May 16, 1907.

6 In the 1901 election, although the Republicans field a candidate, the Socialist Party of El Paso had a full ticket headed by H. Feisst running for Mayor. Vowell, 121. Also the El Paso Times, April 2, 1901.

7 Vowell, 121.


10 Vowell, 137.

11 The Record, El Paso Texas, 1915. (Border Heritage Center, El Paso Public Library).

12 Ibid. The two candidates who were touted as “made in El Paso” were Dave Sullivan, candidate for Assessor and Collector of El Paso, and Ballard Coldwell for corporate judge.


14 It is also worth noting that R.E. Thomason, Texas legislator representing El Paso, ran for governor in 1920 touting the same principles that Lea ran on. He believed in more business and less politics, and also declared the biggest problems lay within the public schools. R.E. Thomason Papers, 1863-1978, (MS 140. C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department. The University of Texas at El Paso Library.)

15 Vowell, 143.

16 Critchett, (Belle Christie), (MS 386 C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.), Box 5.

17 Critchett, Box 5.

18 Ibid., Box 1.

19 Romo, 145.
20 Ibid., 197.


22 Romo recounts an interview done with Tom Lea jr. in that his father, Mayor Lea, would wear only silk underwear as he had been informed by his doctor that typhus lice, which he believed was carried over by Mexicans, would not stick to silk. Romo, 231.


24 Ibid., 189.

25 Lay, 187.

26 Critchett, Box 5.

27 Lay, 188.

28 Ibid., 208. The El Paso Times had gone so far as to label the GGL as operating as an invisible government.

29 Ibid., 213. It was even found out that El Paso’s state representative at the time, John Quaid was a Klansman.

30 Frontier Klansman, Vol. 1, August 10, 1923.

31 Romo, 39.

32 Romo, 229.

33 Timmons Papers. (C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department. The University of Texas at El Paso Library.)

34 Romo, 225.

35 Ibid., 214.
Bibliography/References

Primary Resources

Critchett, (Belle Christie), MS 386  C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.  
[Critchett, early feminist leader in El Paso, kept in correspondence with many political leaders of El Paso and the state of Texas. As head of the Women’s League of El Paso, she also helped forge some civic policies at the time.]


R.E. Thomason Papers, 1863-1978, MS 140, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department.  The University of Texas at El Paso Library.  
[Thomason was a key political figure for the city, state and the national government. In his correspondences and newspaper clippings, many of his stances and those of his opponents are noted.]

[This is a political pamphlet produced by the “Ring” element of the Democratic Party in El Paso.]

Timmons Papers.  C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department.  The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

Wilbert H. Timmons Papers, MS 041, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.  
[Timmons, a former history professor at UTEP, had several documents and files over El Paso’s long history. Also included are sections over the history of other settlements in El Paso county as well as of Ciudad Juarez. Several visual materials are also present.]
Secondary Sources


[This dissertation by Fahy covers the Chinese immigrant experience into the south-West and explains their experience as members of the El Paso community. The time period covered ranged from the 1880’s up to the present.]


[This is a collection of documents and essays covering the period of the Progressive era. Filled with both primary and secondary sources, it provides the reader with an overall good context over this entire period and what was occurring.]


[Lay takes a look into the background of El Paso at a socially and politically tense period in its history, the late 1910’s-early 1920’s. He describes the factors that lead to the formation and rise of the Ku Klux Klan along with it’s political power. Lay also explains why the Klan’s experiment in operating in west Texas ultimately failed. El Paso Public Library.]


[This book provides a survey of the period of American history known as the Progressive era. This provides a thorough look into every angle of this era and who were the main movers of this movement.]


[McCarty in this special southwestern studies issue talks about the heavy Protestant influence within the Prohibition movement, not just in the US but in Texas especially. Elections and laws are also explained, as well as the after effects of the era.]


[In this book, Metz gives a timeline of many of the important events in El Paso’s history. All the way from pre-Colombian times up to the present.]


[Leon Metz, an El Paso historian, takes a look into the key points of El Paso history. From the arrival to The Pass of the Spaniards to the Americans under Colonel]
Doniphan, to the Mexican Revolution. He explains in relative brevity the turning points in El Paso. El Paso Public Library.]

[In this book, Romo puts together numerous pictures in telling the story of the key actions and characters in both El Paso and Ciudad Juarez during a span of thirty years. His main topic is of the Mexican Revolution and key players, but he also takes up the Mexican-American way of life in El Paso. The Bath Riots is just one of a few subjects that is covered highlighting the racial tensions that sometimes came to surface in the border region.]

[Sonnichsen chronicles the history of El Paso as it was known in Spanish times as the Pass of the North. He covers the parts of it’s history from the war’s it witnessed to life in this region.]

http://0proquest.umi.com.lib.utep.edu:80/pqdweb?did=813823541&sid=3&Fmt=1&clientldtId=2515&RQT=309&VName=PQD
[In his dissertation, Vowell examines in part the early history of El Paso and the establishment of a political system from the period of 1850-1920. He covers key figures as well as the key political issues that have shaped El Paso’s history.]