Lebanese-Mexicans in McAllen, Texas

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Accepted: Fall 2025 / Published online: Spring 2026
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*Sincere thanks for help to Shannon Sturm and Erin Johnson, two trusted assistants and researchers/historians at the West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas

1 Introduction

The scholarship on Lebanese-descent people who have immigrated to Texas, or who have long-lived in the state, remains embryonic. Sparse are academic publications committed to recovering the history of the Lebanese; here and there one finds reference to Texan figures of Lebanese origin,[1] but no large-scale studies exist on the group as a population. Sources chronicling the lives of Texans of Lebanese-Mexican descent are as rare, even as ethnic Lebanese-Mexican communities are found in various places across the state.[2] This work on the Lebanese-Mexican community in one particular city, that of McAllen, Texas, seeks to fill that lacuna.

From Lebanon to the New World

The country of Lebanon was for centuries a part of Syria, a province under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, a massive kingdom that from the 14th and early 20th century controlled areas sprawling across Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa.[3] But beginning in the early eighteenth century, the Ottoman realm experienced territorial losses to the expanding Austrian Empire and over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the westward moving Russian Empire. Having sided with Germany during World War I, it suffered complete dissolution when the Allies defeated the Central Powers. Not until 1946 did Syria become an independent nation.[4]

Historians have sketched out a broad narrative describing the general movements of Lebanese people to the New World. The base of departure for the immigrants was Mount Lebanon (one of three districts in Syria, the other two being Syria and Palestine), described by one historian as "approximately 2,000 square miles, about half the size of the modern country of Lebanon, and included the port cities of Beirut and Sidon together with their agricultural hinterlands."[5] Out migration from Mount Lebanon began in the 1880s, but it abated in the early twentieth century due to World War I and to U.S. immigration restrictions placed on select Old War countries during the 1920s.[6]

People departed the homeland, scholars indicate, for several reasons: demographic and economic forces present in Mount Lebanon—over population, poverty, and unemployment—forced them to look elsewhere for new beginnings.[7] Emigrants in those decades sailed into Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and the United States, but by the 1920s, deterred by the anti-immigration sentiment in the U.S., their destination increasingly became the nations of Latin America. Those determined on settlement in the U.S., however, entered clandestinely through Mexico. Like other immigrants worldwide, the Lebanese viewed the U.S. as a land of opportunity.[8]

As natives of Mount Lebanon, the majority of the Arabic-speaking immigrants, who chose designating

Published by Texas A&M University-Kingsville
with support from the office of the Provost

Editor: Dr. Veronica Duran

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY KINGSVILLE

themselves as "Syrians," were Christians, with Maronite Catholics predominating—they derived their name after John Maron, who from southern Turkey during the fourth century, had aided in spreading Christianity into Lebanon. Maron's disciples, early in the early fifth century, migrated to Mount Lebanon and undertook the further conversion of the population. Proselytizing by missionaries in the nineteenth century strengthen Christianity in the region. Catholicism thus became the doctrine to which Maronites in Mount Lebanon adhered (although retaining rituals of their own); contemporaneously, most of Syria remained majority Muslim.[9]

The pattern of migration, scholars perceive, had the Syrians arriving in the Western Hemisphere as single males, establishing themselves in whatever area (and country) of their choosing and then either sending for their families or returning to Lebanon to retrieve their wives and children. If unmarried, some traveled back to Lebanon to find a wife, or to wed someone already selected for them through arranged marriages. Disadvantaged by language and cultural issues, as well as little education, life in the New World for most male immigrants (if not whole families), began at a hardscrabble level, many of them starting as itinerant merchants, that is peddlers.[10]

The Lebanese in McAllen:

People of Lebanese descent began arriving in McAllen during the late 1910s and increasingly during the 1920s. The federal census of 1920 lists two "Syrian" (the federal census takers labeled those from Lebanon as Syrians, and the scholarship notes that people identified themselves as such) families as residing in the city: those were the Diego Trad and Antonio Calife [sic, Califa] families. The Trads would go on to become successful merchants in town and in Edinburg.[11] The Califa clan, which included Antonio and his brother Elías, remained productive members of McAllen society (other brothers went on to take residence in places such as Falfurrias) well into the twenty-first century.[12] As of 1920, Lebanese in McAllen numbered about fourteen persons, a combination of the Trad and Califa families. No doubt they were invisible among some 5,500 town inhabitants, 75.0% of whom were of Mexican-origin residing in an easily recognizable ethnic enclave, wherein the Trads and Califas also lived.[13]

Diego Trad, as historians note of the general Lebanese immigrant experience of that time period,[14] had emigrated from Syria to the New World in 1914, the same year as the start of World War I. From what may be gleaned from the contents of the 1920 census, Trad was an un-naturalized (alien) resident as would have been other Lebanese contemporaries. Beyond that, he did not exactly exemplify the representation scholars give of the Lebanese during that early wave of immigration. He was an older man, age 39, and headed an extended household of wife (named Rasa), two children, and his uncle José Caliel (age 46). Trad was a literate man (his native tongue being Syrian), and spoke English—whether he learned it in Texas or elsewhere cannot be determined. As was the case with that early generation of Lebanese immigrants, he made his living as a "peddler," identified in the census as "merchant, dry goods."[15]

The Antonio Califa family's coming to the New World also abides, yet contrasts (as does that of Diego Trad's), with the account historians reconstructing Lebanese-American history offer about the Lebanese movement abroad. Antonio was born in Barhalioun (Mount Lebanon), Syria, Turkey, on June 10, 1880. According to his Declaration of Intention (1916), he immigrated to Mexico in the early years of the twentieth century, then rode the Mexican Central Railway from Parral, Mexico, to the United States, specifically to El Paso, Texas, where he arrived on June 23, 1907. He apparently came to the Western Hemisphere as a single individual, but in the West Texas County of Jeff Davis, married Catarina Musse Alem/Alam (also from Lebanon) on July 1, 1907. In 1913, Antonio and his family resided in San Antonio, Texas, where he made a living as a *comerciante/ ambulante*, that is peddler.[16] From there, the Califas ostensibly moved to McAllen, as per the 1920 federal census, which lists Antonio there as head of household of nine, three of whom were extended members of the family. In opposition to the state of the scholarship that finds many of the Lebanese immigrants as lacking in education, Antonio spoke his native Syrian (Arabic) as well as Spanish and English. He continued his livelihood as a peddler (the census takers identified peddlers as "merchant, dry goods").[17]

First Generation, 1920-1930

A discernible influx of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants (the census listed them as Syrians) into McAllen occurred during the 1920s. Enumerated in the 1930 census for Hidalgo County (city of McAllen) were fifteen families (among them those of Diego Trad and Antonio Califa) headed by Toney Allen, Katarin M. Jopeph, Elías Karam, Jesús Karam, José Karam, Juan O. Karam, Juan Karam, Amin Mery, Kalil J. Mery, Joe Palil, Aziz (Albert) Showery, N. (Nassiff) Showery, and Marcos Trach (Trad).[18] Most certainly, the census takers missed some of the immigrant families, but a diligent scrutiny of the census entry designated as "Place of Birth" yielded only the above family heads as Syrian-born. Whatever the shortcomings of the census might be, the data show that by the end of the 1920s, Lebanese immigrants had implanted a permanent community in McAllen, Texas, a city as of 1930 containing some 9,074 denizens. Similar to a decade earlier, ethnic Mexicans comprised the majority population, but now at a lesser 60.0% instead of the 75.0% of 1920.[19] The Lebanese as a group resided within the Mexican quarter located south of the railroad tracks which ran on Highway 83. McAllen was then very much segregated demographically and geographically, with the railway dividing the town into north and south. Anglos lived north of the tracks, Mexicans and Lebanese to the south.[20]

From what can be deduced from the 1930 census for McAllen, all fifteen of the heads of Lebanese households (and several family members) were born in Syria/Lebanon and were denominated (with perhaps exempting one or two cases) as "aliens." All but three of the fifteen heads of families had immigrated to the New World before World War I, with eight of the fifteen coming in the years between 1913 and 1914.[21] According to family stories, many sailed to Mexico and from there entered the United States, settling in McAllen.[22] Additionally, and in consistency with scholarly findings, almost all of them earned their livelihood as merchants/dry goods, or peddlers.

Family heads in 1930 were mostly in their mid-thirties but ranging in years up to age fifty (family tradition does maintain that some sent for their families after their arrival in the New World). They headed households of five to six members, a few of the units being extended arrangements. Countering the generalization that the Lebanese immigrants were poorly educated, most of the family heads could write and possessed a working grasp of the English language (in addition to their native tongue).[23]

Illustrative of the Lebanese immigrants' preliminary travel to Mexico before migrating to the U.S. are the examples of the aforementioned Aziz Showery and Elías Karam. Aziz (named in the 1930 census as Albert) arrived in the New World in 1914; while the census does not reveal the name of the receiving country, his wife Matilde Karam was Mexico born (Chihuahua) to Lebanese parents in 1908. As told in one study, the Karams fled to McAllen during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and there as an adult Matilde married Aziz. By the 1920s, the couple was the successful owners of what became Showery Dry Goods, located on 17th St., known popularly in *el pueblo mexicano as La Calle Diez y Siete.*[24]

Chilling is the story of Elías Karam, whose family after much sacrifice in McAllen, became prominent and distinguished members of the city and neighboring Donna. As told both in the family's history and in written scholarly accounts, Ramón (father of Elías) left Barhalioun, Lebanon, for Mexico sometime around 1900, after which he sent for his wife María. In Parral, Chihuahua, the couple started a family; two children were born there. From Chihuahua the Karams moved to West Texas because of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) where they continued adding to their family and making their living (as they had in Mexico) as peddlers. According to the 1920 federal census for Presidio County, the Karams lived in the small mining town of Shafter. María was by then a widow, having lost her husband to terrible circumstances two years earlier. Reportedly, he alongside his oldest son Salvador, was murdered by bandits in El Indio (Presidio County). At the invitation of Diego Trad (mentioned above), María moved her family to McAllen at the start of the 1920s, among her children being Elías, who was himself Lebanese-born (circa 1907) as his mother had then returned to their home country temporarily.[25]

The Trad and Karam families would providentially converge in McAllen again. On May 26, 1923, the local newspaper Diogenes, made public:

> Himeneo – El día veinte de actual unieron para siempre sus destinos el conocido comerciante ambulante señor Marcos Trad y la simpática señorita Luz Karam, ambos miembros de la colonia sirio libanesa de esta ciudad. Una luna de miel sin menguante deseamos a los nuevos esposos.[26]

Becoming Lebanese-Mexican, 1920s-1940s

The transformation of the Lebanese into ethnic Mexicans (and Mexican Americans) occurred upon the arrival of the immigrants in Mexico before they traversed into the U.S (and to McAllen) in the 1920s. In Mexico, the immigrants became acquainted with the ways of the New World, learning to speak Spanish and otherwise incorporating the heritage and customs of Mexico into their homeland culture.

The stay in Mexico eased adjustment to Mexican American barrio life in McAllen. First, several heads of families already spoke Spanish; the 1930 census listed "Syrian" (that is, Arabic) as their native tongue, but as per family stories, the arrivals ably conversed in Spanish and also had (and developed further), a working command of English.[27] Second, several of Syrian-born heads of households arrived in McAllen with spouses native to Mexico—a useful asset for starting anew in Mexican McAllen. Not surprisingly, parents gave children names popular in Mexico; although a few by 1930 had opted for correlates in English, such as George and Tony (however, the change may have been due to the arbitrariness of the census taker).[28]

Between the decades of the 1920s and 1940s, there would take form among the Lebanese-descent population in McAllen a tri-cultural identity, that of Lebanese-Mexican-American. The children of the immigrants, that is, the generation born in Texas during the 1920s-1930s, as would their grandchildren (born post-World War II), came to consider themselves culturally as "Mexican American," although seldom negating their Lebanese connection.

lo libanés

Home for the immigrants and their children (second generation) was el pueblo mexicano, located on 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th Streets.[29] With some time spent in Mexico, adjustment to the barrio in McAllen's south side thus did not cause the immigrants and their offspring much culture shock. As to the latter cohort, some 90.0% were U.S. born (primarily Texas), according to the 1930 census. Several of María Karam's children, for instance, were from West Texas (Presidio County) and some of Antonio Califa's children had likely been born in San Antonio where Antonio and Catarina lived before their move to McAllen. These and other youngsters by 1930 were thus being raised in el pueblo mexicano (with some 40.0% of them reared by mothers born in Mexico) in segregated McAllen.[30]

Hostility from locals was not an issue for the Lebanese. Neighbors did not have much of a problem with "foreigners" who spoke Spanish as a second language, resembled them physically, adhered to Catholicism, and posed no particular threat. With ease, therefore, the Lebanese found a home among Mexicans, settling themselves up close to where others Lebanese lived.[31] Because the number of families remained somewhat small through the years (fourteen in 1930 according to the census of that year), no prominent "Little Lebanon" took root in McAllen (in other parts of the United States, there could be found what were called "Little Syrias"). Nonetheless, a Lebanese community was clearly discernible in town, distinguishable by people's physical attributes, their names, their "foreign" culture, heritage, and values and the way in which they celebrated them, their entertainment forms and leisure activities, the manner in which they made their living, and the better quality of their homes. With profits from the peddling trade, money borrowed from one another, and even donations received from kinfolks in Lebanon, some Lebanese owned noticeably middle-class status homes.[32]

To earn a livelihood for their families, Lebanese peddlers sallied into the wide expanse of South Texas, as well as into Mexico. Ambulantes/comerciantes—most of them assured in their independence (as they were their own bosses) and by an ability to speak Spanish—traversed their routes in wagons (and as time passed, in cars if

acquired)[33] braving danger and selling their goods to what was mainly a Mexican laboring clientele. Along their itinerary, they dealt with elements of the outdoors (for shelter or sleep they used their wagons or cars), hunger and thirst, animal life, farm dogs, and robbers.[34] Yet, they pressed on carrying merchandise that included food, work essentials (pants, shirts, shoes, work boots, and gloves), everyday clothing, sewing fabrics and materials, jewelry, perfumes, soaps, kitchen wares and cooking provisions (salt, etc.), and incidentals particularly requested by Mexican buyers, such as religious objects (santitos). Because Mexican working people living out in farms and ranches, and in barrios of neighboring towns, had very little money, peddlers devised creative marketing plans, among them convenient payment arrangements. In a cartera (ledger), they kept track of inventory, of sales made, and of the names of buyers,[35] perhaps asking their clientele for una peseta (25 cents) as part of installment buying.[36] Commerce in the industry became a Lebanese trademark, and according to those who today recall the business, remained a steady, reliable, and frequently a successful form of livelihood, persisting into the latter years of the twentieth century. Peddling most times allowed the Lebanese to establish themselves as merchants of dry goods and grocery stores, their investment derived from revenue they accumulated from their peripatetic trade.[37]

Inside the Mexican *colonia*, the Lebanese minority sought to retain some connection to the old country, all the while, of course, undergoing cultural change. Immigrants could not forget their Old World ties, and some kept up with events in Lebanon by ordering Arabic newspapers, in the process retaining their native language (all the while speaking Spanish and English).[38] Many longed for home, remembering a country they still visualized as beautifully landscaped by mountains "with lots of breezes and pine trees."[39] Others stayed in touch with loved ones and with friends by letter, and some even returned on occasion (as has been the pattern among immigrants coming to the United States) to reconnect with their native country and reunite with relatives left at home.[40] For the most part, however, the majority—having sunk roots in McAllen—minimized the idea of returning permanently to the land of their birth.[41] The generation born in Texas might identify with Lebanon, but more or less vicariously, for their only home for them was McAllen and the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Social relations and associations with fellow *libaneses* (both among the foreign born and their Texas-born offspring) within *el pueblo mexicano* perpetuated the far away culture. Despite increasing exposure to both the Mexican and American way of life, people still preserved cultural elements traditional in the homeland. The immigrants attended the Catholic Church dutifully (and contributed faithfully), honored family values (while women observed traditional gender roles, they nonetheless took an active part outside the home, such as accompanying the men folks in the peddling sojourns and helping out at the dry goods stores),[42] followed norms practiced in Lebanon, and abided by longstanding standards of morality, passing on conventions to their Texas-born children.[43] Family get-togethers and social gatherings in McAllen were occasions for the immigrants to renew old relations, remember growing up in Lebanon, and celebrate heritage.[44] Delicious Lebanese foods, speeches in the old tongue, and Lebanese motifs decorating the meeting place (perhaps a rented hall), acted to reinforce ties to Lebanon and also to pass on *lo libanés* to the young.[45] The perpetuation of the old did not escape the Mexican community who referred to them either derisively or politely (depending on context) as *siriano*, *árabe*, or *libanés*.[46]

Social differentiation existed, albeit in a relaxed state. Certainly respected were the peddlers, some of whom gained status by advancing materially to own dry goods and grocery stores.[47] Entrepreneurship certainly identified one with status, but over time, the children of the immigrants pursued other careers.[48]

lo mexicano

The barrio in McAllen was much a replica of places in Mexico where the immigrant Lebanese had previously lived. The city in the pre-World War II years was still very much "Mexican" (unlike after the War when it was becoming increasingly bicultural) as many of those in the barrio were refugees or exiles from the

Mexican Revolution. The influx from Mexico, augmented by the presence of native-born Mexican Americans, gave the barrio a decidedly Mexican milieu.[49] So did people's awareness that *el pueblo mexicano* existed in part because of prejudice and discrimination: Anglos considered Mexicans and Lebanese as foreigners and aliens and should remain in that part of McAllen south or the railroad along Highway 83.

The barrio was poor (like others in Texas at that time), and so was it for many of its Lebanese inhabitants during the years of the Depression and World War II. Poverty had pushed the Lebanese out of Lebanon, and they had encountered it further in Mexico (part of their reason for migrating to McAllen). To deal with life improvement, the Lebanese either borrowed survival mechanism in use by local Mexicans or relied on what they had imported from the old country. Like their neighbors, Lebanese families planted backyard gardens, cultivating vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumber, and squash, and grew grape, olive, and fig plants. Austerity forced them to sew articles of wear, mostly for home use (among them children's clothing) but perhaps for sale in the retail market. Notwithstanding poverty's constraints, they cooked creative (and delicious) meals (some made from the most basic food ingredients, perhaps vegetable produce), many preserving the flavor and taste of Mediterranean cuisine as Lebanon abuts the Mediterranean Sea on its western border. To deal with illnesses, Lebanese relied on traditional modern medicine but those unable to afford professional attention, turned to the local Mexican *curandera/o* (folk healer) who expectedly applied time-tested Mexican treatments. For maladies such as *mal de ojo* (the evil eye), the *curandera/o* ritually recited the Apostle Creed, cracked eggs in a bowl, and blessed the patient with three holy palm crosses.[50]

Other aspects of barrio life engendered ethnic change. Residential proximity led to close relationships. In *el pueblo mexicano*, Mexicans lived on 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th streets, just as did most Lebanese.[51] Associations of every sort thus became common, coalescing a network of friends, kinsfolks, co-workers, compadres, classmates, and more. Friendly ties with people immediately across the border further fused the Lebanese with "*lo mexicano*."[52] Almost everyone in the colonia spoke Spanish, as well as its slang derivation. Public or private socials, functions, and celebrations diffused mutuality among attendees.

One particular occasion reported by *La Prensa* of San Antonio illustrates such togetherness. At the home of *la señora* Catarina D. de Califa, *señoritas* Alicia González and Noemita Califa in late 1936 hosted an "*agasajo*" (an entertainment get-together) celebrating the visit (seemingly from San Antonio) of cousins Clotilde González García and Victoria Allen. The crème de la crème of Lebanese and Mexican society from *el pueblo mexicano* was present: prominent among Lebanese names were Califa, Karam, Mery, and Allen. About seventy three persons attended the *concurrencia/convivalidad* (gathering): fifty-nine being youths, the remainder adults (presumably parents and chaperones). Some fifty-six of the guests were of Spanish-surname and the rest of Syrian/Lebanese last names. Certainly, Lebanese in McAllen assented to the Mexican culture around them, an acceptance that in time gently converted them from Lebanese to Lebanese-Mexican. Manifestly absent at this event were Anglo American girls.[53]

Consumer demands, the buying habits of Mexicans, and the overall entrepreneurial aura of the lower border further prompted cultural transformation. As Mexicans called for goods traditional to their households, Lebanese business persons gradually blended into a Mexican environ, having to negotiate with fellow Mexican American dealers or with their commercial counterparts in Mexico to obtain the kind of merchandise Mexicans preferred. Vendors in daily interchange with fellow Mexicanos (most of them poor) buying clothing, children's wear, food provisions, ingredients for folk medicines, reading materials from Mexico and other commodities, yielded to life as it existed around them,[54] altering their identity and making ethnicity more Lebanese-Mexican. Seventeenth Street, or La Calle Diez y Siete (later known as Guerra Street), was a heavily trafficked business strip. There Mexican *tienditas* (small conveniences stores), cafes, restaurants, barber shops, garages and other establishments did business next to Lebanese stores (since the early 1920s, immigrant families such as the Califa and Allen had therein set up their retail outlets).[55] On 20 January 1923, the newspaper *Diogenes* of McAllen, reported:

People's Café: El Mejor Restaurante Donde Mejor se Atiende a los mexicanos

Comidas Redondas 35¢ Visite el restaurante cuando venga a McAllen – Muse y Califa, Props. 1448 Avenida 17th.[56]

Later that year, on September 29 (1923), *Diogenes* announced the closing of the J. y T. Allen store:

Los señores J. y T. Allen, comerciantes sirio-libaneses establesidos hace algún tiempo en la casa No. 1444 de la Avenida 17 de esta ciudad, ofrecen en vento toda su tienda por tener que retirarse de los negocios durante el próximo mes de Octubre.

Los señores Allen, según el anuncio respetivo que publicamos en la cuarta plana, ofrecen vender al costo y aun a menos del costo.[57]

Persisting into the late twentieth century in that commercial district was Califa Dry Goods, Paul Califa Dry Goods, E. Karam Dept. Store, and Showery Dry Goods.[58]

Mexicanizing the Lebanese further was Catholicism. As Maronites, the Lebanese and their children found a receptive home in the barrio's Sacred Heart Catholic Church under the ministry of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate priests.[59] After all, the Maronite Rite, having its origins in Lebanon, differed from the Roman Catholic Rite only by ecclesiastical tradition (e.g, the celebration of ritual). Maronites thus accepted the sacraments and honored the same faith as did Catholics universally. Worshipping and attending services alongside a majority Mexican congregation, and then living daily with Catholics in *el pueblo mexicano*, accelerated the ongoing process of conversion of the immigrants and their families from Lebanese to Lebanese-Mexican. However, some still preferred the old Maronite Rite, and to that end traveled as far as to San Antonio to attend services at St. George Maronite Catholic Church founded in 1925.[60]

Family connections advanced the process of assimilation. It is impossible at this moment to determine with exactitude (sans family genealogy sleuthing) the extent of intercultural marriages that took place before the late 1940s among the second generation Lebanese. But certainly such interethnic unions became commonplace, as revealed by the 1950 federal census.[61]

lo americano

Cultural pressures other than Mexican weighed on those of Lebanese descent, among them forces of Americanization (as they did on Mexicans in the barrio). Compulsion to learn the English language pressed on all, a need that some of the immigrants acquired out of sheer necessity and the younger generation (raised during the 1920s through the 1940s) learned at school, should they attend it. Educational institutions in fact not only rested on an English-language curriculum but acted as veritable Americanizing agents, converting Lebanese-Mexicans into Lebanese-Mexican-Americans.

The Catholic Church in the barrio acted further to refashion culture. Priests generally tended to be *Americanos* or European immigrants (perhaps Irish) answerable to an Anglo-Catholic hierarchy, symbolizing therefore American authority. Local parochial schools in McAllen, among them Our Lady of Guadalupe School, which existed since 1917, and Saint Genevieve's High School, built in 1924, which some of the Lebanese children attended, subscribed to an Anglo-American curriculum. Like the public schools, Catholic education rested on an analogous assimilationist pedagogy; it stressed substituting English for a foreign language, and placed emphasis on aspects of conduct, attitudes, habits, and comportment that would permit their charges to function adequately

as "Americans."[62]

Various other institutional forces converged upon the Lebanese way of life and modified it. Mainstream trends in the most recent cultural styles persuaded barrio inhabitants, especially impressionable youths, to adopt the latest fashion trends, hairstyles, and in the case of girls, beauty enhancement products. Radio, in both Spanish and English languages, disseminated news and information of happenings outside the barrio, updating people's understandings of world events and in the process shaping character and personality beyond being Lebanese and Mexican. Newspapers, both in Spanish and English, further shaped ethnicity: the Spanish-language print media carried advertisements highlighting the value of cosmetics, the superiority of clothing "made in America," the convenience of labor-saving appliances, and much more. Then there were the American movies of the 1930s and 1940s, generally shown at the local Mexican theater.

The syncretism of cultures was manifest in the character of barrio residents of Lebanese descent, some of whom functioned ably in a tri-cultural society. As Lebanese-Mexican-Americans, sons of Antonio and Catarina Califa saw military service, for instance.[63] An exemplary case was that of Jorge (George) Karam of World War II prominence who proudly proclaimed his background as an American of Lebanese-Mexican descent. George came from the María Karam family of Shafter which had moved to McAllen in the early 1920s following the death of the family head, that being Ramón Karam, George's father. George received his early education at the aforementioned Our Lady of Guadalupe School, then transferred to McAllen High School, and upon graduation, received a football scholarship to attend St. Edwards University. During World War II George joined the Marine Corps, earning promotion to the officer ranks. Following his discharge he pursued a career as a merchant, operating for years Karam's Department Store in Donna, Texas (Hidalgo County).[64] Upon his retirement in June 1979, the city of Donna observed "Karam Day," gratefully acknowledging his importance as a businessman and philanthropist. George had served the community in a multitude of ways, and along with his sisters Vivian and Frances Karam, had for some forty years "helped clothe many needy school children" and donated to many worthy causes.[65]

The Third Generation

The federal census of 1950 does not indicate any Lebanese-born people living in McAllen other than ones listed in the 1930 census. Surnames included are those of the Califa, Karam, Mery, and Showery clans. Their presence indicate the continuation of a robust Lebanese community in town, consisting of immigrants still living in 1950 as well as their children and new grandchildren. When on Karam Day in June 1979 the master of ceremonies asked the audience in the high school football stadium (where the festivity was held) to stand up if they were related to George, Vivian, and Frances Karam, numbers of them responded. George commented to those next to him: "And that's just a few of them." Among those attending was Monsignor John Trad (who had journeyed form Salt Lake City, Utah), whose relatives during the beginning of the 1920s had helped María Karam and her small ones relocated from Shafter to McAllen.[66]

Most present at the stadium were likely U.S. born. The older ones were part of that second generation that had grown up in the 1920s through the 1940s and considered themselves as *méxico-americano-libanés*. By the late 1940s and into the 1950s, this cohort had entered into marriage and started raising families. Several had necessarily reached across cultures to marry Mexicans and Mexican Americans, as well as Anglos, given the shortage of marriage partners among the Lebanese population.[67]

Due to the circumstances of the Cold War era, the third generation would learn of their Lebanese heritage vicariously, for few knew the old country first hand. Time for them had diluted the imported culture of their grandparents (many of the first generation still lived, some into the 1970s), of their parents (the children of immigrants, 1920s to 1940s) who had mostly be raised in McAllen, and of their own as the new Americanizing forces had transformed them into *méxico-americano-libaneses*.[68]

Still, as informed by contemporaries of that era, Lebanese-descent people in McAllen continued to celebrate links to the old heritage.[69] Into the years past World War II the Lebanese would invite to the city their relatives from Mexico, rent a large center there in *el pueblo mexicano*, and host a reunion celebrating their relationship to Lebanon and its culture.[70]

In more modern times, the ties to descendants of those Lebanese who arrived in the Rio Grande Valley in the 1920s and 1930s is evident in a number of forms. During family gathering, hosts and guests share stories of their forbears' lives and experiences. Lebanese foods are prepared during holidays, if not on just any occasion. Pride in being of Lebanese descent is taken in the knowledge that so many children and grandchildren profited from the strong work ethic, kindness, morality, and faith that Lebanese immigrants willed to their progeny. That legacy of determination and family values is manifest today in the success of many Lebanese-Mexican-Americans who contribute to the general welfare as doctors, businessmen, lawyers, educators, psychologists, and more.[71]

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4. Spielvogel, Western Civilization, II, pp. 623, 624, 594, 725-726, 757, 824 plus map; Gilbert, et al., The Norton History of Modern Europe, pp. 464, 897-901,1208, 1210-1211, 1369.

5. Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, p. 5.

6. Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, pp. 3, 26; Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, The Growth of the American Republic (2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), II, p. 118.

7. Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, pp. 5, 17, 27; https://urldefense.com/v3/__https://lebanesestudies.ncsu.edu/news/2017/11/15/why-did-they-leave-reasons-for-early-lebanese-migration/__;!!KGfBWX4!v9Bmg6LZ-HDDBI8u7hx2VgOCeG7mtBBNoqR_mEAWvZrB4FUOgAB4H_IDpn4XL0OifeBNp0E3fqyHdl583ziwk-gex_hfSd$. Akram Khater, "Why did they leave? Reasons for early Lebanese migration," Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies (Raleigh, NC.: North Carolina State University), November 15, 2017, section titled: "Latest Scholarship."

8. Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, pp. 6, 26, 109; Khater, "Why did they leave? Reasons for early Lebanese migration." See further, Perales, Smeltertown, p. 51; Taylor, "The Arabic Tombstone at El Indio," p.254.

9. "Maronites," in Wikipedia, accessed August 10, 2023; Alixa Naff, Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), pp. 2, 27-28, 41, 50; Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, pp. 4-5. Antoine Khoury Harb, The Maronites: History and Constants (Beirut, Lebanon: The Maronite Heritage, 2001), pp. 42-44, 48-50.

10. Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, pp. 22-23, 106-109; Naff, Becoming American, pp. 4, 128, 169-171, 227-228.

11. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District 77, pp.

7B and 8A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1920), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com; Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23, p. 27A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com; Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-38, p. 45B (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1940), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. Also, newspaper article announcing the marriage between Marcos Trad and Luz Karam, Diogenes, McAllen, Hidalgo County, 26 de Mayo 1923, p. 1.

12. Undated memoir of Lidza Califa Contreras (1924-2013), provided courtesy of Dr. José Antonio Contreras, grandson of Antonio Califa. Originally from McAllen, Dr. Contreras presently resides in San Angelo, Texas. On Elías Califa, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-19, p. 4A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1940), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. About Jacobo Califa, another of Antonio's brothers, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Brooks County, Enumeration District No. 24-2, p. 2A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.

13. According to the Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1941-1942 (Dallas: A.H. Belo Corporation, 1941), pp. 4, 99, 109, and 840, the total population for the city of McAllen in 1920 was 5,531. My own hand count added up to 4,826, with 3,592 of these being Mexicanos. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population, Hidalgo County, Enumeration Districts Nos. 77, 78, 79, and 80 (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1920), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. That Enumeration District 77 corresponded to the location of el pueblo mexicano was confirmed by Dr. José Antonio Contreras. Almost every Mexican-origin resident of McAllen lived in this barrio, as did the Lebanese.

14. John, "Arabic-Speaking Immigration to the El Paso Area," in Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, p. 106; Dewey, Pesos and Dollars, p. 131; Taylor, "The Arabic Tombstone at El Indio," p. 254.

15. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population, Hidalgo County, Enumeration Districts No. p. 8A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1920), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com; Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

16. His family's genealogy chart (titled "Antonio Abdala Khalife Nouseir Califa"), as does his death certificate, list Antonio as born in Mount Lebanon on June 10, 1880. Genealogy chart provided courtesy of Dr. José Antonio Contreras; death certificate in Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23, p. 30A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. Comparatively, his Declaration of Intention, dated December 30, 1916, Western District of Texas at San Antonio, gives his date of birth as November 28, 1886.

See further Certificate of Birth, Pablo Califa, born on March 6, 1913, document courtesy of Dr. José Antonio Contreras, and Marriage Certificate, July 1, 1907, in Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23, p. 30A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.

17. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District 77, p. 7B (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1920), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com; undated memoir of Lidza Califa Contreras (1924-2013), provided courtesy of Dr. José

Antonio Contreras.

18. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23 (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.

19. According to the Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1941-1942 (Dallas: A.H. Belo Corporation, 1941), pp. 9, 99, 109, and 111, the total population for the city of McAllen in 1930 was 9,074. My own hand count of the 1930 census figured to 9,022 total inhabitants, with 5,320 of these being of Mexican-descent and 91 of Lebanese origin. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23 (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. The Texas Almanac, op cit., p. 101, reported Hidalgo County's population at 77,004, of which 41,522 were of Mexican descent.

20. Email correspondence of Dr. José Antonio Contreras, October 10, 2023.

21. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23 (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.

22. Interview of September 2023 with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, granddaughter of José Karam. Originally from McAllen, Mrs. Contreras presently resides in San Angelo, Texas. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023; and, undated memoir of Lidza Califa Contreras (1924-2013), provided courtesy of Dr. José Antonio Contreras. See further, John, "Arabic-Speaking Immigration to the El Paso Area," in Hooglund, Crossing the Waters, p. 106; Dewey, Pesos and Dollars, pp. 132-133; Perales, Smeltertown, p. 51; Taylor, "The Arabic Tombstone at El Indio," p. 254.

23. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23, p. 27A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

24. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23, p. 26B (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com; Dewey, Pesos and Dollars, p. 133.

25. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population, Presidio County, Enumeration District 166, p. 4A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1920), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. This chilling story is told in Taylor, "The Arabic Tombstone at El Indio," pp. 253-256; and in YouTube Video by Raymond Karam (in author's files).

26. Diogenes, McAllen, Hidalgo County, 26 de Mayo 1923, p. 1, column 4.

27. Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras notes that her grandfather, José Karam, spoke all three languages, and subscribed to Lebanese newspapers into the 1960s, reading orally to her in Arabic. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

28. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District

No. 108-23, pp. 26B, 30A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.

29. Email correspondence of Dr. José Antonio Contreras, October 10, 2023.

30. A hand count of the Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, determined that 40.0% of all mothers married to Lebanese men (fathers) in 1930 were from Mexico. The remainder (60.0%) were born in Syria (Lebanon).

31. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023.

32. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

33. After Antonio Califa died in 1943, his wife Catarina replaced him. Relying on an automobile, she and her daughter Lidza, made one-day trips to the many farms and ranches of the Rio Grande Valley, continuing to do so into the 1960s. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

34. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

35. Conversation with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

36. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023.

37. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023; and interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023. The federal censuses consistently (up to 1950) listed the occupation of Lebanese-surnamed individuals as merchants of dry goods and groceries.

38. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023.

39. Taylor, Marfa for the Perplexed, p. 255; interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

40. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

41. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

42. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

43. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

44. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023.

45. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

46. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, and interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023.

47. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

48. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

49. Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-23 (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1930), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com; Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940—Population Schedule, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District Nos. 108-18 and 108-19 (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1940), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.

50. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

51. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

52. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

53. La Prensa, San Antonio, Texas, December 4, 1936.

54. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023; and interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023.

55. Email correspondence of Dr. José Antonio Contreras, October 10, 2023; Dewey, Pesos and Dollars, p. 133.

56. Diogenes, McAllen, Hidalgo County, 20 enero 1923, p. 3.

57 Diogenes, McAllen, Hidalgo County, 29 de septiembre 1923, p. 1-2.

58. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023; Harlingen Valley Morning Star, April 20, 1956, p. B6.

59. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

60. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023; Harb, The Maronites: History and Constants. Sacred Heart Church in McAllen had its origins as a Chapel in 1911 and then as a Parish in 1917. Letter of the Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, S.T.D. to Rev. Thomas Luczak, OFM & Sacred Heart Parish Community, dated February 10, 2011, in author's files. St. George Maronite Catholic Church in San Antonio was the closest Maronite Church to the Rio Grande Valley in those days. "Parish History" in http://www.stgeorgesa.org

61. 1950—Census of Population and Housing, Hidalgo County, Enumeration District No. 108-41, Sheet No. 78 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1950).

62.YouTube Video by J. Raymond Karam (in author's files); Taylor, "The Arabic Tombstone at El Indio," p.

255; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023. Our Lady of Guadalupe School and St. Genevieve merged in 1957. Sacred Heart School replaced them. Letter of the Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, S.T.D. to Rev. Thomas Luczak, OFM & Sacred Heart Parish Community, dated February 10, 2011, in author's files.

63. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

64. The 1920 census shows George's name to have been Jorge. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population, Presidio County, Enumeration District 166, p. 4A (Washington D.C.: Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census, 1920), accessed through https://www.ancestrylibrary.com. YouTube Video by J. Raymond Karam (in author's files); and, Taylor, "The Arabic Tombstone at El Indio," p. 255.

65. Harlingen Valley Morning Star, May 12, 1979, p. 12, and June 24, 1979, p. 16.

66. Harlingen Valley Morning Star, May 12, 1979, p. 12, and June 24, 1979, p. 16.

67. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

68. Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

69. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; Interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

70. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Contreras, December 5, 2023.

71. Interview with Mrs. Irma Karam Contreras, September 2023; interview with Dr. José Antonio Con treras, December 5, 2023.