Wyoming's First Spanish-Language Newspaper: *La Página en Español* (1927) of the *Powell Tribune*

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At the turn of the 20th century, the Great Plains region found itself the hub of a new booming industry: sugar beet production. Responding to the availability of massive plots of cheap land with ideal climatic and soil conditions, improvements in irrigation systems, and an increased demand for sugar in the American diet, investors built more than one hundred sugar beet factories in the United States by the mid-1920s. The Great Plains states quickly led the nation in sugar beet production, with fields and processing plants scattered throughout Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, and Wyoming. However, at that time, this region was very sparsely populated and there were not enough workers to complete the arduous labor required of blocking, thinning, hoeing, and topping the sugar beets. As a result, sugar beet corporations devised labor recruitment strategies to entice more workers to the region. German Russians, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans from California, Texas, and New Mexico responded to this call, arriving to the Great Plains by the thousands.[1] Spanish-speaking sugar beet workers were referred to as *Betabeleros*, from the Mexican Spanish word for *beet*, *betabel*, and the suffix *-ero*, meaning *worker of*. In Wyoming, the Betabeleros mainly settled in the Big Horn Basin (Powell, Lovell, Worland) and the North Platte Valley (Wheatland, Torrington). The number of Mexicans in Wyoming grew from 2,051 in 1920 to 7,174 in 1930, making Wyoming the state with the seventh highest percentage of Mexicans in the

[1] Valdés, "Settlers, Sojourners, and Proletarians," 110–23; Arrington, "Science, Government and Enterprise in Economic Development," 4–8; California Bureau of Labor Statistics, 48–51; "The Story of Beet Sugar and the American Crystal Sugar Company"; U.S. Beet Sugar Association (USBSA), "Data Relating to Mexican Immigration, 1927."

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United States at that time.[2]

In their communities, the Betabeleros were met with both support and opposition. As part of the recruitment strategy, sugar beet corporations offered housing incentives, whereby workers could pay rent through lower wages in exchange for company-owned housing, or purchase construction supplies on credit through the company to build modest homes. However, this housing was located in a neighborhood, or *colonia,* outside of town, segregated from other residents, and without typical amenities. The sugar beet corporations sponsored community events such as baseball games, dances, and picnics for their workers, but the Betabeleros were often banned from public swimming pools, segregated in theaters, and not allowed in certain stores and restaurants.[3] Throughout the 1920s, the children of Mexican beet workers generally attended Wyoming's public schools alongside White and German Russian classmates. Company and community leaders encouraged this integration as part of broader efforts to settle Mexican families permanently and maintain a stable labor force. By the early 1930s, however—amid the economic turmoil of the Great Depression, the racialization of Mexican labor, and the implementation of New Deal agricultural programs—some towns established separate classrooms or entire schools for Mexican children. These "Mexican" or "Spanish" schools marked the institutionalization of segregation that had not existed a decade earlier.[4]

Although our knowledge of the Wyoming Betabeleros of the 1920s and 1930s is limited, one artifact that remains is a powerful resource that allows a glimpse into the lives of Mexican and Mexican American communities in the state's early history. In 1927, the *Powell Tribune* published *La Página en Español*, a Spanish-language page that ran from May 26

[2] Broadbent, "The Distribution of Mexican Populations in the U.S." In its count of the number of Mexicans that migrated to Wyoming, it is unclear if this source refers to only Mexican nationals or also to Mexican Americans that were already living in the United States. At that time, these groups were often conflated into the same category.

[3] Davis, "Betabeleros."

[4] Guzmán, "Things Change You Know," 392–422.

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through October 27, 1927, for a total of 23 editions.[5] It is one of the only Spanish-language newspapers of the region of that period and the only one that we know about in Wyoming.[6] *La Página en Español* includes stories of the Betabeleros—the main consumers of the newspaper—, local, national, and international news stories, birth, marriage, and death announcements, sports news, announcements of community events, recipes, and advertisements for local businesses. As one of the only literary and/or journalistic primary resources we have of the Wyoming Betabeleros, this newspaper serves a unique purpose in allowing readers a glimpse into the lives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in Wyoming nearly a century ago.

The goal of this article is multifaceted. First and foremost, we hope to draw attention to this unique, primary, and publicly available resource in an effort to raise awareness of the impact the Betabeleros had in shaping the linguistic, cultural, and economic history of Wyoming. While the Betabeleros undoubtedly contributed to the prosperity enjoyed by small towns such as Powell, Lovell, and Torrington in the 1920s, their presence and impact in Wyoming is often overlooked and undervalued. By sharing *La Página en Español* with readers, we hope to increase the visibility of the history of the Betabeleros and encourage increased scholarship and community engagement programming centered around them. In addition to sharing the newspaper with readers, in this article, we critically engage with the publication, exploring two themes within it. First, we discuss the complexities around how to accurately label this newspaper—as an immigrant or ethnic newspaper. Labeling the newspaper as "immigrant" positions it within a framework of transition and assimilation, often focusing on its role in helping newcomers navigate life in a new country. This label, however, risks erasing the experiences of readers—particularly Mexican Americans—who were not immigrants but were incorporated into the United States through territorial annexation. On the other hand, identifying the publication as an "ethnic newspaper" emphasizes the persistence of cultural identity and collective memory within a marginalized group, highlighting the negotiation of belonging and exclusion within the socio-political landscape of the United States. Secondly, we discuss how the stylistic and typesetting choices apparent

[5] All twenty-three issues of *La Página en Español* are digitized in the Gonzalo Guzmán Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, ah12782_0001. *La Página en Español* was first studied by Gonzalo Guzmán, who, at the time, was gathering information for his doctoral dissertation on schools for the sons and daughters of Mexican and Mexican American beet workers. Guzmán reported the page to the American Heritage Center in December 2020, was processed in 2021, and named the Gonzalo Guzmán Collection in appreciation of his findings.

[6] The only other Spanish-language newspaper of the Great Plains region that we know of was *El Cosmopolita* of Kansas City, which ran for five years, from 1914-1919. Nearly all other Spanish-language newspapers printed in the U.S. during that time period were concentrated in the southwest region of the country (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California). For additional information, please see Kent and Huntz, "Spanish-Language Newspapers in the United States."

in *La Página en Español* mirror the power dynamics of the community; just as Spanish remains subordinate to English in the stylistic choices of the publication, the content of the paper also reveals the subordinate nature of the Betabeleros as compared to other residents of Powell.

A Newspaper of Hispanic Migrant Workers: Wyoming *en Español*

It is common to classify American newspapers in languages other than English into two categories: immigrant newspapers and ethnic newspapers.[7] To define immigrant newspapers, we use Park's explanation, "[it] is not merely a medium for the communication of news thus initiating the immigrant into the American environment, but is likewise a means of translating and transmitting to him American ways and American ideals."[8] In contrast, ethnic newspapers were "published for and about an audience identified as interested in the social, cultural, religious, economic, education, geographic and political information associated with people who align themselves with a specific ethnic group."[9] Nicolás Kanellos maintains the same classification—immigrant newspapers and ethnic newspapers—for these publications written in Spanish in the United States, and adds that the two types of newspapers should not be confused since ethnic newspapers "may include immigrants in its readership and among its interest; it may cover news and commentary of various 'homelands' . . . but its fundamental reason for existence and its point of reference is its audience's life and conditions in the United States."[10] However, the history of the Spanish-language press in the United States differs from the history of the press written in other languages, such as German, French, or Japanese, among others, because many of the readers of these newspapers from the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah should not be considered immigrants; rather, they were annexed or incorporated—along with the territory in which they lived—to the United States after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). Consequently, America Rodriguez describes early Latino media as "somewhat anomalous" within the framework of what is often referred to as the "immigrant press."[11] People living in these annexed territories became United States citizens; however, they were often considered socially, culturally, and politically foreign citizens and, above all, second-class citizens because they spoke a language that no longer

[7] For more information on immigrant newspapers and ethnic newspapers, see Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* and Rhoades, *The Ethnic Press: Shaping the American Dream*.

[8] Park, *The Ethnic Press,* 87.

On immigrant newspapers and Park's definition of these publications, see Hickerson and Gustafson, "Revisiting the Immigrant Press."

[9] Jones Ireland, *Ethnic Periodicals in Contemporary America*.

[10] Kanellos, *Hispanic Periodicals in the United States,* 32.

[11] Rodriguez, *Making Latino News: Race, Language, Class*, 13.

belonged to the territory in which they now found themselves. This second-class citizenship is evident in the words of Filigonio Arellano, who does not describe his own identity but rather how he is identified according to the situation in which he found himself: "'During wartime and when they need votes, white people call me an American; if I need a loan, I am Spanish; and if I am applying for a job, they call me Mexican.' Arellano's ancestors, of course, became citizens at the end of the Mexican War in 1848."[12]

Although *La Página en Español* (1927) of the *Powell Tribune* exhibits some characteristics of immigrant newspapers—given its readership included Mexicans as well as United States citizens, specifically Mexican Americans—it is better understood as an ethnic publication. This distinction is significant because, while immigrant newspapers typically serve newly arrived communities seeking to navigate life in a new country, *La Página en Español* reflects a readership that included Mexican Americans who, despite being U.S. citizens, were often conceptualized by the public as immigrants due to their ethnicity, language, and status as migrant laborers. By labeling it an ethnic publication, we acknowledge its role in providing a space where Mexicans and Mexican Americans negotiated their identities and sought integration into a new socio-political and geographic context, such as Wyoming. This classification underscores the complex dual identity of its audience and the paper's function in fostering a sense of belonging while navigating exclusionary societal perceptions.

Parallel Segregation and Subordination: A Spanish-Language Newspaper Without *Eñes* and Accent Marks

In examining the different editions of *La Página en Español*, the typesetting practices used in its printing, and the content that was published, we observe an interconnected power dynamic. First, we notice that although the newspaper is printed in Spanish, English mechanics and the overall journalistic style of English still dominate the publication. We argue that the dominant nature of English and subordinate status of Spanish in determining the stylistic outcomes of the Spanish newspaper is symbolic of and parallel to the same power dynamics alive in the Powell community between Anglos and Mexican and Mexican Americans.

A quick glance at the newspaper and readers will notice the complete absence of Spanish-specific symbols such as the letter *ñ* (written and pronounced *eñe* in Spanish) and Spanish diacritics used to denote marked intonational patterns. This Spanish-language paper was created using an English typewriter and printing press, so characters specific to Spanish were likely unavailable. However, in Spanish, it is often the case that a word completely changes meaning if it is written with or without an accent mark (for example, *compro* means *I buy* but *compró* means *he bought*) or with or without the diacritic over the letter *n* (for example,

[12] Aguayo, "Los Betabeleros," 287.

sonar means *to sound* but *soñar* means *to dream*). Due to the absence of these characters and the fact that Spanish pronunciation is very faithful to its spelling, when diacritics and special characters are excluded, ambiguity can arise. In such cases, readers were left to decipher the meaning of the ambiguous forms on their own. The complete absence of Spanish-specific characters was probably unavoidable—as the *Powell Tribune* office likely did not have access to a completely new printing system—but it does still symbolize the dominant position that English maintained, even in a Spanish-language newspaper.

Similarly, the newspaper follows the journalistic style present in English language press—capitalizing all of the words of a title with the exception of short connector words such as *a*, *and*, *but*, *the*, *of*, etc. This style contrasts with the typical journalistic style of Spanish, which capitalizes only the first word of a title and proper nouns within it. Additionally, nationalities and languages are not capitalized in Spanish. Thus, in a typical Spanish-language setting, it would be much more common for the title to be published as *La página en español* (all lowercase after the first word and "Spanish" not capitalized) rather than how it was published: *La Página en Español*.[13] The original publication's title, again, exhibits the domination of English stylistic choices even though it was printed for a Spanish-speaking audience.

We also notice that the editors seemed to test different versions of the title over the course of the publication season, tenuous about which journalistic rules they should follow. The title of the newspaper was changed three times in just one sugar beet season. In the first issue, we find the English title at the top and, just below it, the Spanish title in square brackets. The English title, in a larger font than the Spanish title, reads "Tribune's Page in Spanish." It is followed by the Spanish title "[La Pagina Espanol De La TRIBUNE]." We suggest that this choice to include the English title first and in a larger font than the Spanish title, even on the Spanish page, may have been motivated by the editors' desire to emphasize that English was the dominant language of the Powell Tribune, or alternatively, their desire to have the English-speaking readers understand what they were looking at when they encountered the Spanish page. After four issues, the editors eliminate the English title and only include the Spanish title, "La Pagina Espanol de La TRIBUNE." However, this title still does not follow the grammatical patterns of Spanish, because in Spanish, the word *español* in the phrase "La Pagina Espanol" would be understood to play the role of an adjective. In this case, *español* is a masculine adjective describing *La Página*, in reference to either the Spanish language or the nationality. In either case, *La Página* is a feminine noun, so using the masculine adjective *español* with a feminine noun creates a situation of grammatical disagreement that is typically not permitted in Spanish. We assume that the editors wanted to emphasize that they were talking about the language of publication and not emphasizing a connection to the

[13] Throughout this essay, when we refer to the publication, we add in the *ñ* and the accent marks to avoid confusion in pronunciation.

country of Spain, but in doing so they ignored the tendency of Spanish to maintain gender and number agreement. In the fifteenth and sixteenth issue, the editors decide to return to including the English title first, with the Spanish title in a smaller font and placed underneath. Then, in the last and penultimate issues, the English title disappears once again, and in Spanish, the adjective *Espanol* changes to *Espanola*. Although now we do witness gender and number agreement in the title, we still face the lack of the *eñe*, which, due to the phonemic and graphemic distinction of *n* and *ñ* in Spanish, does not align with typical Spanish writing conventions.

Similar to the dominant position of English and subordinate status of Spanish in determining the stylistic outcomes of the Spanish newspaper, we also see similar power differences alive in the Powell community in the content of the articles printed in *La Página en Español*. This dynamic can be seen as early as the first issue of the newspaper, when the editors, in their description of the purpose of the newspaper, state, "we bring these beet workers into closer contact with our way of life,"[14] distinguishing between "beet workers" and "our way of life," or between *we* and *you*, "*we* know of no better way than to bring out a page of the *Tribune* in *your* own language" (emphasis added), or between you and our community, "*We* want *you* to take an interest in this community, in *our* beautiful valley, in *our* schools and churches" (emphasis added). The message is clear: Powell belongs to us, not you. Previous research about Wyoming's sugar beet industry has suggested that "Migrant laborers were almost exclusively perceived as 'outsiders,' people different from the typical hired hands in the family farm system due to the work they performed and ethnic or cultural differences".[15] Thus, the permanent English-speaking inhabitants provide Mexicans and American citizens with a page in their language, in Spanish, so that they understand well how they should live and behave in the Powell Valley.

The power dynamics present between Spanish and English in the newspaper itself is also presented in the activities announced in the news. For example, there were two 4th of July celebrations, one for the English-speaking people and another for the Spanish-speaking: "at 1:30, when the program in the Spanish language will take place. Next Monday will be the 151st anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. English-speaking people will have their program before noon." This segregation is also seen in the several lists found in the paper. Of particular note is the list of the "Sixty Betabelero Families Who Have Paid for Their *Tribune*." The names of the Betabeleros who have paid the dollar—the price of *La Página en Español*—are written next to the rancher to whom they appear to "belong":

[14] Unless otherwise noted, all translations and transcriptions in *La Página en Español* are our own. You can find the original in Spanish at https://digitalcollections.uwyo.edu/luna/servlet/uwydbuwy~187~187.

[15] Waggener, "Dirty and Difficult."

Worker	Rancher
Abadón Maestas	K. Kawano
Tony Perea	J. H. Higgins
José Lara	
Anastasio Olivas	
M. M. Guardado	O. E. Good
F. Rodríguez	R. G. Gillison
Santiago Díaz	Lucy Wallace
C. Vega	Biesemeier rancho…[16]

The fact that the Betabeleros are listed next to the rancher for whom they work suggests that they were not considered fully autonomous individuals, but rather as a person dependent upon or belonging to another.

While the use of the word *mexicano*—or rather, *mejicano*, as it is written in *La Página en Español*—is consistent, the term or terms used for Mexican Americans in the periodical vary, and the most repeated ones are *ciudadanos americanos* or *hispanos americanos*. Although Mexicans and Mexican Americans are mentioned very frequently, no clear distinction is made between them. Moreover, it seems that the terms Mexican and Hispanic American are used interchangeably. Let's take, for example, the June 9 column titled "North Side of Lyric Theater Reserved for Hispanic Americans." While in the headline it appears that the theater is reserved for Mexican Americans, in the article it changes to all "Spanish-speaking people," that is, it is reserved for both Mexicans and Mexican Americans, "Mr. Fuikerson, manager of the Lyric Theater, has prepared a place in his theater for Spanish-speaking people." It should be noted that in this news article, segregation is clearly observed with the use of the north side: the north side is where "Hispanic Americans" must sit. In addition to "Hispanic Americans," Mexican Americans and Mexicans are often called "Spanish-speaking workers" or "Spanish-speaking people." These Spanish-speaking people, Mexicans and Mexican Americans who settled—often temporarily—in Wyoming are the readers of *La*

[16] The list appears in the July 21 issue, and on July 27 under the heading "His Name Did Not Appear on the List, However, He Already Paid" rectifies an error that a person has paid for *La Página en Español*, but his name is not on the list: "Mr. A. J. Álvarez showed up one of these days at the *Tribune* and asked why his name had not appeared on the list of those who had already paid his subscription when he had already paid it as well. To which we replied that perhaps we had missed his name. He has his receipt, and there is no question beyond that. If any name is overlooked and they have a receipt for their subscription, this is enough . . . will not be charged a penny more."

Página en Español and the protagonists of this newspaper. Some of these people are named in a list of honor, "people who have been doing a painstaking and excellent job as well," which appears in two issues of the page, in the June 16 and 23 issues: Emilio Abeyta, Benito Chávez, Pedro Chávez, José de la Cruz, Cruz Jaramillo, José Lara, Pablo Lechuga, Ernesto Leyva, J. J. Lucero, Concepción Martínez, Andrés Ojeda, A. Palomar, Tony Perea, Francisco Rodríguez, and C. Vega, among others. Along with the names of the Betabeleros are the names of the ranchers for whom they work: Friedlan, Gillison, Heltland, Higgins, K. Kagi, K. Kawano, Kimmett, Kreps, F. Martin, Nielson, Shaulls, M. J. Smith, Bert Steck, Stutzman, and Townsley, among others. Once again, writing the name of the rancher to whom they "belong" suggests that the Betabeleros were seen to as property of, or at least dependent upon, their rancher.

Honoring the Voices of the Past: Lessons from *La Página en Español*

In revisiting the history of the Betabeleros and their unique contributions to Wyoming's cultural and economic landscape, *La Página en Español* emerges as more than a newspaper—it is a testament to resilience, identity, and community. The pages of this publication bridge the gap between marginalized voices and a society that often rendered them invisible, highlighting the complexities of belonging and exclusion in 1920s Wyoming. By exploring the linguistic struggles, power dynamics, and dual identities that shaped both the newspaper and its readers, we gain invaluable insight into the experiences of the Betabeleros.

The historical relevance of *La Página en Español* extends beyond its archival value; it challenges us to reflect on the narratives often omitted from mainstream histories. In sharing this story, we honor the perseverance of Wyoming's early Mexican and Mexican American communities, whose cultural imprints continue to influence the state today. This article calls for a broader acknowledgment and preservation of such narratives to ensure that the voices of the past inform a more inclusive understanding of our shared history.

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