

THE UNITED STATES – MEXICAN  
BORDER :  
Historical, Political, and Cultural Perspectives

*Linda B. Hall*  
*Trinity University*

- BOSS RULE IN SOUTH TEXAS: THE PROGRESSIVE ERA.* By EVAN A. ANDERS. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982. Pp. 319. \$19.95.)
- IN DEFENSE OF LA RAZA: THE LOS ANGELES MEXICAN CONSULATE AND THE MEXICAN COMMUNITY, 1929 TO 1936.* By FRANCISCO BALDE-RRAMA. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1983. Pp. 137. \$14.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper.)
- RACE AND CLASS IN THE SOUTHWEST: A THEORY OF RACIAL INEQUALITY.* By MARIO BARRERA. (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979. Pp. 261. \$13.95.)
- HISPANIC CULTURE IN THE SOUTHWEST.* By ARTHUR L. CAMPA. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979. Pp. 316. \$25.00.)
- SOUTHWESTERN AGRICULTURE: PRE-COLUMBIAN TO MODERN.* Edited by HENRY C. DETHLOFF and IRVIN M. MAY, JR. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press for the Agricultural History Society, 1982. Pp. 307. \$23.75.)
- AMERICAN LABOR IN THE SOUTHWEST: THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED YEARS.* Edited by JAMES C. FOSTER. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982. Pp. 236. \$18.50 cloth, \$9.85 paper.)
- THE POLITICS OF SAN ANTONIO: COMMUNITY, PROGRESS, AND POWER.* Edited by DAVID R. JOHNSON, JOHN A. BOOTH, and RICHARD J. HARRIS. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Pp. 248. \$24.50 cloth, \$10.95 paper.)
- CHICANO INTERMARRIAGE: A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL STUDY.* By EDWARD MURGUIA. (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1982. Pp. 175. \$15.00 cloth, \$9.00 paper.)
- THE MEXICANS IN OKLAHOMA.* By MICHAEL M. SMITH. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Pp. 78. \$3.95 paper.)

In the last decade, much attention has been focused on the U.S.–Mexican border. The vision of the border as a barrier between cultures has waned with the increased understanding that the area is a con-

tinuum of various mixtures of at least two cultures. Current studies of the region have emphasized the interaction and interpenetration of these cultures. The rich literature now emerging on the border and the U.S. Southwest ranges from highly detailed work on specific problems and interactions to more general work on the theoretical dimensions of historical, political, and cultural trends in the area. Further, the impact of *mexicano* presence and migration into the southwestern states has been highlighted in a number of recent studies, a marked contrast to the time period when Manuel Gamio and Carey McWilliams furnished virtually the only sources recognizing this contribution.

One of the most interesting books to appear in recent years is Mario Barrera's *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. Barrera's study discusses the interaction of the Mexican and Anglo populations from the time of the first Anglo penetration in the early part of the nineteenth century up to the present. He sees the Anglo conquest of the Southwest as part of the "dynamic and expansive American capitalism" that was "itself part of a broader historical current that propelled European societies into what is now called the Third World" (p. 5). Indeed, the situation was even more complicated than that described by Barrera because of the fact that the Southwest was originally taken from Native American groups by the Spanish. Thus the Anglos constituted a second wave of colonization into an area that already contained a mixture of various kinds of political, cultural, and racial domination. This social picture was greatly changed by the arrival of the Anglos and by their developing political and economic hegemony. Barrera goes on to point out that through the alienation of the Chicano population from the land and water resources of the West as well as the political effects of the Mexican-American War, Chicanos became the subordinate element in a labor system dominated by Anglos. The author calls this a "colonial labor system," which he defines as one in which "the labor force is segmented along ethnic and/or racial lines, and one or more of the segments is systematically maintained in a subordinate position" (p. 39). This labor system in the Southwest was characterized by repression, dual wages, and occupational stratification, all structured along racial lines. The subordinate group, in this case the Chicanos, furnished a reserve labor force that was useful for seasonal labor in an agricultural setting, and they also served as buffers or shock absorbers as they were subject to expulsion from the United States in times of economic recession.

Barrera further points out that this colonial labor force was fostered by large employers rather than by Anglo workers and small farmers. The subordinate position in which all workers were held, subject to large economic interests, led not to an identification of interests between workers of both races, but to competition between them, thus

displacing the resentment of Anglo laborers from the large employers to their fellow workers who were Mexican and Chicano.

Barrera describes a number of changes throughout the twentieth century, based largely on the three factors of migration, urbanization, and industrialization. He observes in recent decades significant changes in the labor relationships between Anglos and Hispanics: the colonial sector of the labor force has declined, the integrated sector of Chicano labor has grown, and a marginal sector has developed in which Chicanos figure largely in the ranks of the unemployed. Labor segmentation has become weaker over time as a result of such factors as urbanization, labor shortages at various historical stages (for example, World War II), the interpenetration of government and the economy, the growth of educational opportunities, assimilation, and occupational upgrading.

In conclusion, Barrera posits a model of internal colonialism, which he defines carefully: "Colonialism is a structured relationship of domination and subordination, where the dominant and subordinate groups are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines, and where the relationship is established and maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group" (p. 193). He asserts that "formal political domination" and "geographical separation of metropolis and colony" are not necessary for colonialism, and he proceeds to define internal colonialism as "a form of colonialism in which the dominant and subordinate populations are intermingled, so that there is no geographically distinct 'metropolis' separate from the 'colony'" (p. 194). This internal colonialism leads to racial or ethnic inequality or both, in this case the subordination of the Mexicano-Chicano population of the U.S. Southwest.

Although I have no difficulty in accepting Barrera's definition of colonialism as excluding "formal political domination" and "geographical separation of metropolis and colony," this model seems to me much more useful for understanding the historical dynamics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than it is for recent decades. In the study of the earlier time period, this model provides a suggestive and profitable line of exploration. In particular, it would seem to fit the period during and just after the Mexican-American War very well. As Barrera points out and other studies under review here have indicated, this period of time led to the political and economic subordination of the Mexicano-Chicano population in the Southwest as they were confronted with an expansive Anglo state. Barrera correctly indicates that "Manifest Destiny was essentially a manipulated appeal and an attempt to secure broad support for an expansionist policy of particular benefit to certain political and economic interests" (p. 13). Barrera details the means by which the Hispanic population of the Southwest was alien-

ated from the land during this period, through legal manipulations and taxation policies favorable to encroaching Anglos, and the way in which this dispossession led to the establishment of a colonial labor system, particularly in the areas of agriculture, railroads, and mining.

The subject Barrera discusses, particularly in the areas of agriculture and mining, is also addressed by *American Labor in the Southwest*, edited by James C. Foster. This book focuses on Mexican and Mexican-American labor on the U.S. side of the line. A collection of essays that were first presented at a 1977 conference on the subject of the western labor movement, this volume by no means confines itself to ethnic questions, although many of its essays include such a perspective. A particularly valuable contribution is the section entitled "Mexican Labor, North and South of the Border," which includes essays by John M. Hart, Rodney Anderson, and David Maciel comparing the organization of Mexican labor on both sides of the border. Hart provides a brief overview of the attempt to establish independent unions in Mexico between 1854 and 1931, an attempt that failed when a strong and highly centralized Mexican government was established. Anderson reverses the usual historical view in emphasizing that the Mexican labor movement was a major influence on the intellectuals of the Partido Liberal Mexicano. He further argues that the actions of Mexicans in asserting their rights as workers evolved from within the laboring classes themselves, and he denies that they "needed middle-class intellectuals writing from St. Louis or Los Angeles" to make them aware of the misery of their condition (p. 181). Instead, laborers brought their difficulties to the attention of these intellectuals through their own activities. David Maciel has developed an excellent historical overview for the period from 1880 to the present on Mexican migrant workers in the United States. A particularly valuable part of his essay discusses the period between 1965 and the present as one of "institutionalized crisis" (p. 195). In another section, D. H. Dinwoodie's "Rise of the Mine-Mill" details the cross-border links that developed between Mexican and Mexican-American farm laborers and smelter workers along the border, particularly at Laredo and El Paso. Other essays attest to the importance of Mexicano-Chicano labor in the Southwest and detail the ambivalence of organized labor toward migrant labor, particularly this ethnic group.

*Southwestern Agriculture: Pre-Columbian to Modern*, edited by Henry C. Dethloff and Irvin M. May, Jr., scarcely touches on the Hispanic impact. The result of a symposium held at Texas A & M University in 1980, this book focuses on the historical development of the cattle industry and secondarily on the crop agriculture associated with cattle raising. The largely scientific thrust of this interesting work is directed toward the crops, the cattle, and the developing technology

that has produced them. Sections on farmers' movements and the politics of agriculture add the human element, which inevitably is mostly the Anglo human element. Only one very good article by Manuel A. Machado on the cattle industry acknowledges the Mexican impact on the U.S. Southwest.

In contrast, Francisco Balderrama's specialized book, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929 to 1936*, studies the efforts made by Mexican consuls in Los Angeles on behalf of the resident Mexican community. About one-half of the district's *colonia mexicana* were actually Mexican nationals, and the problems that they faced ranged from poor working conditions to attempts to segregate local schools. Balderrama's detailing of the repatriation drives directed at Mexicans during these seven years bears out Barrera's thesis that this group furnished a reserve labor force that was available during good economic times but could be sent back to Mexico when times got harder. Indeed, the deportation of Mexicans was seen as a direct way to increase job possibilities for "Americans" (p. 161) in much the same way that the Reagan administration has viewed the situation in recent years. Balderrama demonstrates that the degree of action taken on behalf of the *colonia mexicana* depended on the personalities of the consul and his staff as well as the official attitude of the Mexican national government. Sonoran Ricardo Hill was particularly active on behalf of Mexican citizens, going so far as to become involved in local labor disputes. Significantly, Hill was recalled following a dispute with the Los Angeles Police Department. His activities were apparently regarded as problematic because they took place during a period when the Mexican government was attempting to improve relations with the United States. After March 1936, all Mexican consuls were enjoined to refrain from "social-political activities" (p. 115). Thus it seems that even the Mexican government was willing to cooperate with the U.S. government in the use of Mexican labor as a reserve force.

Michael M. Smith's slender study, *The Mexicans in Oklahoma*, substantiates the problems and suffering during the Depression that are suggested by Balderrama. This volume in the Oklahoma Image series serves as a fascinating introduction to the twentieth-century history of Mexicans in that state. It indicates briefly that the experiences of Mexican labor in Oklahoma may have been even more difficult than in areas closer to the border.

Two very recent books bear on another problem that was introduced by Barrera—the displacement during the nineteenth century of local Mexican elites by encroaching Anglos. Evan Anders's *Boss Rule in South Texas: The Progressive Era* brilliantly documents the course of local politics in South Texas counties and communities around the turn of the century. The first development involved the takeover of local political

power by Anglos who used the poor Mexican and Mexican-American population as their constituency. At least initially, this takeover frequently involved collusion with local Hispanics. Techniques included paying for votes, using physical intimidation (occasionally even murder), and generally instituting a Latin American style patron-client system in the area. Notable during this phase of the endeavor were two bosses: Jim Wells, who dominated several counties and took a leading role in Texas state politics, and Archie Parr, who founded the sturdiest of the South Texas political machines in Duval County. In a second phase that affected Wells more than Parr, other Anglos moved in during the early twentieth century and employed techniques such as the poll tax to destroy the power of most of the bosses and simultaneously disenfranchise the Mexicano-Chicano population.

The second book on this problem is *The Politics of San Antonio: Community, Progress, and Power*, edited by David R. Johnson, John A. Booth, and Richard J. Harris. Although located more than one hundred miles from the border, San Antonio is in spirit and substance closely related to Mexico, which makes its experience significant in this context. Although this book focuses principally on the twentieth century, the historical essay by Booth and Johnson documents the way in which Anglo, German, and French newcomers squeezed out the Mexican Americans from their previously dominant positions on the board of aldermen within eight years after Texas independence and then quickly replaced them in other positions of political and economic power. The succeeding essays show that this situation has been modified significantly only since 1975.

Edward Murguía's *Chicano Inter-marriage: A Theoretical and Empirical Study* also sheds light on a problem discussed in Barrera's *Race and Class in the Southwest*. Barrera indicated that during the twentieth century the labor force has become less segmented for a number of reasons, including the increased assimilation of the Mexicano-Chicano population. Assuming that intermarriage is the primary indicator of assimilation, Murguía demonstrates that a number of factors account for a slowly increasing exogamy among Mexican-American males and females. He agrees with Barrera that in the latter part of the nineteenth century, labor segmentation separated Mexican Americans from Anglos, and he adds that this situation led to a decrease in intermarriage, which had not been uncommon in the Southwest before the Mexican-American War began in 1845. In the twentieth century, however, schools have taken Mexican-American children out of the Hispanic home and placed them in an English-speaking environment; the Catholic Church, which generally has not encouraged ethnic parishes, has likewise facilitated assimilation; upward mobility has increasingly associated Chicanos with members of the majority; and geographic mobility

has taken Mexican Americans out of their established community, exposed them more directly to the majority culture, and weakened family ties. These factors have led to increasing assimilation and intermarriage with the majority group. Although Murguía mentions the debate between Chicano scholars who support the colonial model of racial subjugation versus the class model of exploitation, he does not take a definite stand on either side. His work, however, would indicate that the latter is a more useful guide to understanding the relationship between the Chicano and Anglo communities in recent years.

The final book under review is Arthur L. Campa's fascinating work, *Hispanic Culture in the Southwest*. Campa surveys cultural change from the time of the first sixteenth-century contacts between the Spanish and the Indians in this region, showing how change evolved out of the mixture of these several cultures. The results varied from region to region, and these differences are beautifully portrayed, albeit in a highly generalized manner. Campa describes the survival of the intermixed Spanish-Indian customs in discussions ranging from superstition and witchcraft to Spanish folk drama. Campa tends to focus on the successes of Mexican Americans in the United States, as is shown in the photographs of Governor Jerry Apodaca and Senator Dennis Chávez of New Mexico, among others. *Hispanic Culture in the Southwest* celebrates Hispanic-Indian culture and its contributions to North American society. Designed for the general reader rather than the specialist, Campa's book is sure to be widely enjoyed.

Thus recent work on the U.S. Southwest has been both rich and varied. The available theoretical works, particularly in the areas of race and class, should inspire much discussion and continuing empirical study. As more and more works combining careful historical investigation with other social science perspectives appear, the theoretical debate will continue and will be refined. The works reviewed here should illuminate and enhance that discussion.