

THE SPANISH-MEXICAN BORDERLANDS AND CHICANO HISTORY

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- INHERIT THE ALAMO: MYTH AND RITUAL AT AN AMERICAN SHRINE.* By Holly Beachley Brear. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 184. \$19.95 cloth.)
- TEJANO RELIGION AND ETHNICITY: SAN ANTONIO, 1821–1860.* By Timothy M. Matovina. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 168. \$24.95 cloth.)
- THE ALAMO REMEMBERED: TEJANO ACCOUNTS AND PERSPECTIVES.* By Timothy M. Matovina. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 146. \$25.00 cloth, \$10.95 paper.)
- TEJANO JOURNEY, 1770–1850.* Edited by Gerald E. Poyo. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. Pp. 186. \$24.95 cloth.)
- MY HISTORY, NOT YOURS: THE FORMATION OF MEXICAN AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.* By Genaro M. Padilla. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993. Pp. 280. \$40.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)
- TEJANOS AND TEXAS UNDER THE MEXICAN FLAG, 1821–1836.* By Andrés Tijerina. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1994. Pp. 172. \$29.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)
- RACIAL FAULT LINES: THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN CALIFORNIA.* By Thomas Almaguer. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. Pp. 281. \$40.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper.)
- TELLING IDENTITIES: THE CALIFORNIO TESTIMONIOS.* By Rosaura Sánchez. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995. Pp. 337. \$19.95 cloth.)

The 1990s have witnessed a proliferation of writing on Chicano history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Earlier Chicano historians had trod lightly and with little conviction on subjects antedating the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which was often portrayed as a tragic moment of creation. More recent works further complicate and challenge older Anglo-dominated interpretations of Western history and individual states, particularly Texas and California. These newer works also engage an established literature on the Spanish-Mexican borderlands and Mexican history. In

sum, they demonstrate that Mexico's far north was not backward, archaic, or monolithic but an integral part of Mexican society. These studies also reveal how race, class, and gender relations were not mutually exclusive but historically specific.

The rapid growth of the field can be attributed in part to growing interest among scholars of the Mexican experience in the far north. Increasing sophistication and complexity also reflect the interests, training, and contributions of practitioners in several subfields of history and in related areas in the humanities and the social sciences, including politics, geography, society, literature, and culture. Consistent with Chicano historical literature on the twentieth century, recent works are heavily weighted toward Texas and California.

Andrés Tijerina's *Tejanos and Texas under the Mexican Flag, 1821–1836* focuses on the formation of Tejano culture and community awareness. Largely an institutional and political history, it accepts a long-dominant paradigm of the United States representing modern capitalism and Mexico as backward and oppressive. Under the Mexican flag, Tejanos had to deal with competing pressures from both countries while trying to protect their own economic interests as independent farmers and ranchers.

Anthropologist Holly Beachley Brear has written an ethnography entitled *Inherit the Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine*. She adopts symbolic analysis and focuses on the struggle over images and words surrounding the narrative of the Alamo. Dominant interests have long portrayed the site as "the cradle of Texas liberty," a profoundly anti-Mexican symbol that has been increasingly challenged and debated by the growing Hispanic population. Brear's primary subject is the annual Fiesta in San Antonio, originally a celebration of the Anglo victory over Mexicans in April 1836 that confirmed the birth of the Texas Republic. She examines the history of the event as a series of struggles over representations, mythology, and local cultural institutions originally created by Anglos to maintain and justify Anglo hegemony. Brear views the Alamo ultimately as a cultural battleground between Anglos and Mexicans over control of spaces and the symbols attached to them. She argues that Anglo domination of the Alamo has served to divide and control Hispanics.

Timothy Matovina offers an institutional approach to the Alamo and related facets of Tejano history. *The Alamo Remembered: Tejano Accounts and Perspectives* examines seventy-five published and unpublished Tejano accounts of the event composed between 1836 and the early 1900s. They reveal a range of opinions and sympathies among those who participated in the siege or simply witnessed events. These accounts disproportionately represent Tejanos who sided with Anglos, for many of the accounts were recorded to sustain individual claims to land under the governments of the Texas Republic and the United States. Like Brear, Matovina demonstrates that Anglo popular culture maintains "an amazingly persistent" perception

of barbaric Mexican savages and heroic Anglo martyrs despite its inaccuracy (p. 121). Matovina also agrees with Tjerina that local Tejanos found themselves caught between two opposing armies and pressured by both Anglo Texans and Mexicans for their support. Some cast their lot with Texas, others with Santa Anna, while a third group fled both armies to avoid the violence. Matovina argues that the Tejanos maintained their strongest allegiance to their neighbors. His assessment contradicts that in *Tejano Journey* by Stephen Hardin, who argues that most Tejanos opposed Texas independence and were sympathetic to Santa Anna. Later events back Hardin in that almost no Tejanos supported the United States when it declared war with Mexico, which they considered an act of aggression.

In *Tejano Religion and Ethnicity: San Antonio, 1821–1860*, Matovina demonstrates that culture and public rituals continued to be dynamic throughout the Spanish, Mexican, Texan, and U.S. periods. By the eighteenth century, a distinct Tejano regional identity was developing. By the 1820s and 1830s, the community of Bexar was distinctly Mexican and Catholic, despite influences from the United States. During the era of the Texas Republic (1836–1845), Tejanos faced the dilemma of political alliance with Mexico and likely expulsion versus fighting against Mexicans, with whom they shared the same Catholic cultural heritage. As Tejano political influence in the region declined during the 1830s and 1840s, Tejanos quickly discovered that Anglos did not trust even Tejanos who had supported the Texas Republic and risked their lives for it. Tejano influence also declined in the Catholic Church when foreign-born priests supplanted local ones and suppressed many Mexican practices. Tejano losses were economic and occupational as well. In 1830 nearly all Tejanos owned small farms, but by 1860 the majority were working as laborers without landed property. During this period of material decline, Tejano regional identity intensified, as evidenced in cultural expressions, more substantial festivals on religious and national holidays, and greater ethnic isolation. Matovina argues that Anglo interpretations of the period prior to the 1830s were generally negative, while those of Tejanos were typically positive. Furthermore, Tejanos did not consider Anglo culture or civilization to be superior, and they abhorred slavery, Know-Nothings, and other popular features emphasized in the dominant version of Texas history.

The contributors to Gerald Poyo's compilation, *Tejano Journey, 1770–1850*, demonstrate distinct trajectories for Tejano communities from the late eighteenth century to the time of U.S. conquest. As these communities changed constantly, their residents were deeply immersed in Mexican politics of the period, which enhanced their own local and regional autonomy. The contributions show that being a Tejano and being a Mexican were neither mutually exclusive nor incompatible.

The studies of California by sociologist Thomas Almaguer and literary critics Genaro Padilla and Rosaura Sánchez suggest various nuances in

nineteenth-century Chicano historiography. In *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, Almaguer retreats from his earlier Marxism to argue that “race served as the central organizing principle of group life in California during the last half of the 19th century” (p. 7). Anglo attitudes were uneven toward nonwhite races and further complicated by class and gender. Almaguer asserts that Anglos held Mexicans in an intermediary position compared with their non-European counterparts due to Mexicans’ mixed ancestry, European cultural background, and the entrenched landed elite that partially buffered and whitened some Mexicans. In the late nineteenth century, Anglo racism against Asians, blacks, Indians, and Mexicans arose from a complex range of material and cultural considerations that created several racial fault lines. By the 1920s and 1930s, Almaguer suggests, a “darkening” of Mexicans occurred in dominant Anglo culture stemming from accelerated Mexican immigration, greater contact with Anglos, and growing white unemployment. Almaguer’s emphasis on race and de-emphasis of class is consistent with current trends in ethnic studies that stress culture and race. This phenomenon has become evident internationally since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography*, Genaro Padilla examines Mexican American autobiography in the late nineteenth century. He suggests that the development of the subgenre represented personal and communitarian efforts to avoid being silenced or even erased by dominant Anglo society following the Bear Flag Revolt and the U.S. invasions of California and New Mexico. Padilla interprets the narratives as oppositional responses to threats of displacement, although they were written in a language of accommodation. His view that individuals were expressing nostalgia for an earlier cultural configuration (with the exception of some working-class writings) is consistent with Matovina’s portrayal of Texas. While the autobiographies reflect great diversity, they share a general sense of individual and communal disjuncture. Padilla believes that the discourse of women demonstrates agency that was lacking in Anglo or male Mexican accounts. He also concludes that Mexicanas in California did not distinguish between public and private spaces.

Unlike Almaguer, Rosaura Sánchez has not abandoned Marxism in *Telling Identities: The California Testimonios*, her examination of cultural politics in the texts, testimonios, and other narratives of the Californio elite in its struggle for inclusion. Although the Californios contested the dominant historiography, they excluded the nonpropertied and small ranchero classes as well as Indians, seeking thus to maintain the sharp caste and class distinctions of Spanish and Mexican California. Sánchez argues that their expressions of shared identity reflect an incipient stage in the evolution of an identity of ethnic nationalism. As the offspring of landless presidio soldiers who had served as the coercive arm of the missionaries, the Californios became a class whose power was based on semifeudal property re-

lations, an emergent aristocracy. Sánchez contends that their loss of power, status, and land in the 1840s resulted from deep internal divisions and the lack of military power to resist. She also suggests that Californio confusion and resentment following conquest resulted from a loss of political and economic power, a reflection of proletarianization and segregation. The Californios expressed a collective sense of *la raza* for the first time, and in a relational sense, they indicate the roots of resistance to Anglo victors who represented Latin Americans, Mexicans, and Californios as undifferentiated “greasers.” Contradicting more romanticized accounts, Sánchez outlines the decline of the Californios as a story of rather pathetic men who created a myth and clung to an intolerable past.

The recent literature on Chicano history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offers a great range of methodological and interpretive frameworks. Even less than in its formative years, the field lacks a dominant or agreed-on interpretive framework. In general these studies expose the flaws and misconceptions perpetrated in the dominant literature and change the focus from a few great events, such as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as the critical moment in the formation of a distinct population and cultural group in the Southwest. A notable drawback in the current literature, however, is the continuing emphasis on regional and local exceptionalism. Because many authors have adopted a comparative framework for examining different races, they could benefit from a comparative geographic framework. The continued dominance of California and Texas, partly reflecting current demographics and the location of major research institutions, as well as the tendency to focus on a single setting are simultaneously strengths and weaknesses.